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Marine Magic Presentation Times

Shows & Presentations	Morning Session	Afternoon Session	NSW Summer School Holidays ONLY
Dolphin & Seal Kissing	9:30am	12:30pm	3:30pm
Marine Magic Presentation	10:00am	1:00pm	4:00pm
Penguin, Turtle & Fish Feeding	10:45am	1:45pm	4:45pm
REPTILE WORLD * Only In School Holidays	11:15am	2:15pm	-

During the School Holidays, the 'Steve McEwan's Reptile World' at 11:15am and 2:15pm*

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Discovering The Legendary Pacific Coast

Road trips covering familiar territory are about creating new memories, as **CARLA GROSSETTI** discovers along The Legendary Pacific Coast.

Road trips are about seeing the country's broad strokes up close, as if you've zoomed in on a Google view of the Earth and found yourself part of the image. There's something very special about slowing down for long enough to enjoy the raw, wild beauty of the countryside and to appreciate the sheer magnitude of the nation. A road trip hammering along the Pacific Highway toward the Big Banana is also a total nostalgia fest and my two sons Fin, 12, and Marley, 11, beg me to repeat my own childhood stories, which they like to label 'fiascos'.

The Legendary Pacific Coast road trip is our chance to forge our very own fiascos on a classic journey steering us some 550km up the highway to the Coffs

Coast in NSW. Despite undertaking an abridged version of The Legendary Pacific Coast, we still cover a lot of ground including the **Manning Valley, Greater Port Macquarie, the Macleay Valley, Nambucca Heads** and **Coffs Coast**. With surfboards strapped to the roof, kids jabbering in the back, it's onward and upward as we are drawn this way and that for long enough to lose ourselves in the blue seas, emerald fields and vast skies.

The Manning Valley

The **Honeycomb Valley Farm**, in the Manning Valley, is where we first stray from the ribbon of the Pacific Highway. Here, just three hours north of Sydney, the scenery in and around the verdant valley is

© The Legendary Pacific Coast/ Carla Grossetti





first-rate and the farm a working example of how to make a difference. A pleasing patchwork of rich farmland and small towns are rimmed by the beautiful monolithic hills known as the **Bucketts**. After seeing a solar oven in action, petting alpacas, collecting eggs and learning about the bees and trees, the boys conduct time trials on a Ninja Warrior-style obstacle course, to well and truly get their ya-yas out, before cramming back into the car. While in the Valley, we also kick off on a kayaking escapade with our guide Tristan Lever from **Barrington Tops Adventure Centre**, who leads us down the river as it snakes through the deep valley. My sons are in synch with the erratic current, pinballing wildly down the river as our kayaks hiss through the tea-coloured water. "The limbs of the trees look like they are cheering us on," says Fin, taking a moment to admire the landscape. The backdrop of the Bucketts is stunning and Tristan points out wildlife such as eagles and echidnas. Although there are plenty of pretty picnicking spots and roadside stalls, we instead plot a path to **Bent on Food** in Wingham for an inspired seasonal feast. We also immerse ourselves in the bush experience that night while glamping in a luxurious *tipi* at **Kings Creek Retreat**. The next day, we hit the brakes for lunch at **Harrigan's Irish Pub** before checking out the **Crowdy Head Lighthouse** where the boys practise their very best 'coooooeeeee's'.

Greater Port Macquarie

To look at the state-of-the-art computerised greenhouses at **Ricardoes' Tomatoes & Strawberries** on the outskirts of Port Macquarie, you'd never guess the burgeoning business started life as an honesty box. Over the past decade or so, the environmentally friendly farm has mushroomed to include 30,000 plants across almost one hectare

that act as a natural pantry for the produce. Apart from the joy of watching my sons pluck heart-shaped strawberries from the vine – "that is the best strawberry I have ever eaten in my life," declares Marley – the co-owner of the farm, Tony Sarkis, reminds visitors of the simple pleasures to be gained from growing your own food and making preserves. When we roll back onto the highway, we head to **Sea Acres Rainforest Centre** in the green heart of Greater Port Macquarie. At this stage the kids resemble contortionists in the back seat, and we are all happy to stretch our legs. The reserve contains one of the largest and most outstanding remnants of coastal rainforest in NSW and what my observant son Fin notices is that rather than looking down at their screens, those exploring the 1.3km elevated walkway 'are all looking up at the trees'. From our viewpoint some 7m above the forest floor, the Pacific Ocean reveals itself while Marley (aka 'hawk-eye') spots scarlet robins nesting in a tree branch and a goanna basking in the sun. After learning about the area's indigenous history and how the rainforest was a rich resource for the local *Bipai* people, we drive further north to Macksville, where we bags an outdoor table at the **Star Hotel** for some fine pub fare, before clattering pool cues. All that fresh air and wholesome fun guarantees a good night's sleep in our waterfront apartment at **Marcel Towers**.

Macleay Valley

After fanging it up the highway from Sydney for about five hours, we check into the conveniently located Costa Rica Motel in **South West Rocks** before tottering into the Sea Breeze Hotel for dinner. Here, there are couples lolling on the balcony, clots of men watching Friday night footy, and talk tangling with laughter as friendly locals walk in off the street. The

“The limbs of the trees look like they are cheering us on...”

pub grub is fabulous - lovely rustling salads and big old-school burgers - and there is a real joyful uproar in the air. The boys get some hot tips about the local breaks and, after a dawn surf at Gap Beach the next day, we hire hybrid bikes from **South West Rocks Bike and Skate** and hug the path to **Trial Bay Gaol**. The Heritage-listed 1886-built jail clings tenaciously to the cliffs and stands as a testament to those who lived and died here. Our guide, Cath Ireland, was a walking compendium of 'Orrible Histories, and my youngest, Marley, 10, was captivated, absorbing all the grisly details about torture, sentencing and solitary confinement. He was also impressed with the black-and-white photographs of the bearded prisoners. "Mum, they look like olden-day hipsters."

Nambucca and the Coffs Coast

My sons burst into our room like disoriented animals before dawn the next day, frothing at the thought of surfing **Main Beach** and adding another break to their repertoire. Nambucca Heads has an unfussy small town feel, and after they've wriggled into their wetsuits and bravely paddled out through the keyhole to surf the beachie, the Husband and I explore the breakwall, where we enjoy meeting friendly locals, read the messages painted on the rocks and spot the silvery flash of dolphins breaking the satin surface of the sea.

When we arrive at **The Big Banana** mid-morning, it's to the tune of the sex-ed-inspired song "Pineapple,



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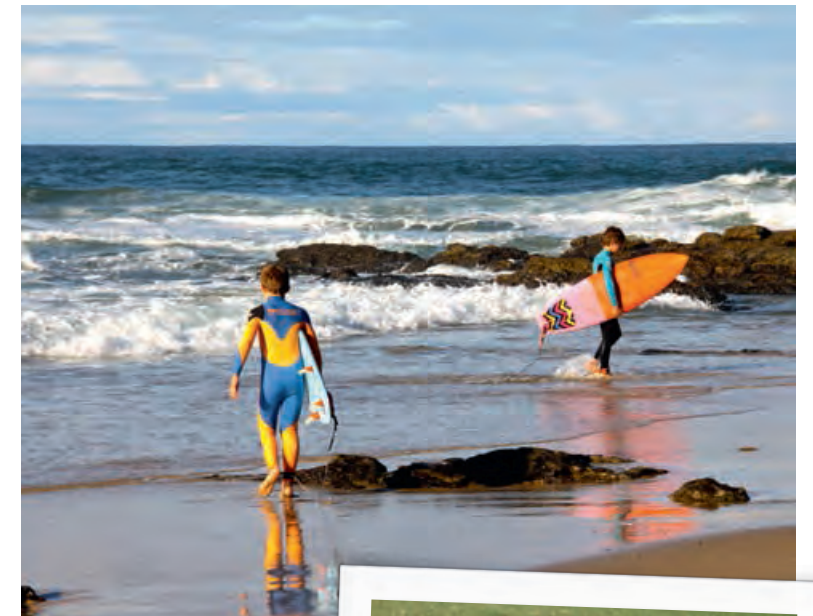


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coconuts, big banana". Thankfully, B1 and B2 in the back are not using the corresponding hand gestures as we pull into the car park of Australia's very first Big Thing. It's been years since I stopped off at the Big Banana and it's clear from the get-go that it has grown up, along with its clientele. While my husband and I romanticise about such retro roadside attractions, it's also clear that Coffs still captures the flavours of our childhood. We line up to take the **Big Banana Toboggan Run**, play an 18-hole round of mini golf and watch an informative theatre experience that details the discovery of bananas and their advance through history to the modern day. What's particularly compelling is the story of the migrants who toiled over the land, the interactive memorabilia and the packing shed, where the bananas are presented on a conveyer belt, like fingers of a splayed hand. When we finally make it to the café, the boys' agree: "A banana smoothie should be compulsory." After challenging them to a pop quiz about bananas, the patriarch of the family apologises that he 'has slipped up' before rolling out a few Dad jokes. "This smoothie is very a-peeling." Fueled by the nutritious low-GI fruit and a few banana puns, we head to the **Coffs Harbour Butterfly House** where we learn about the life cycle of the class of insects in the order Lepidoptera as they flit and fly, mate and multiply. We then wind up at the Pacific Bay Resort where we spend the remnants of the day unravelling in the pool, playing golf and channelling summer. We also reflect on the fact that, as well as the warmth of the people, the diversity of attractions and convenient, affordable accommodation there are now more reasons than ever to pull off the fast lane and chase the sun along The Legendary Pacific Coast. As far as fiascos go, it doesn't get much better.

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More Information

The Legendary Pacific Coast
pacificcoast.com.au

Trial Bay Gaol
nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/venues/trial-bay-gaol

Honeycomb Valley Farm
honeycombvalley.com.au

Barrington Outdoor Adventure Centre
boac.com.au

Kings Creek Retreat, Krumbach
kingscreekretreat.com.au

Bent on Food, Wingham
bentonfood.com.au

Ricardoes Tomatoes & Strawberries
ricardoes.com

Sea Acres Rainforest Centre
nationalparks.nsw.gov.au

The Big Banana
bigbanana.com

Butterfly House
butterflyhouse.com.au

Star Hotel, Macksville
starhotelmacksville.com.au

Marcel Towers
marceltowers.com.au

Novotel Coffs Harbour, Pacific Bay Resort
pacificbayresort.com.au