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REASONS TO VISIT THE

QUEENSLAND OUTBACK

Queensland Rail's Spirit of the Outback travels through some of the state's richest landscapes as it snakes its way between Brisbane and Longreach. While you can stay on board throughout the 26-hour journey, **Carla Grossetti** finds 20 good reasons to hop off along the way.

1 Travel on the Spirit of the Outback

The Spirit of the Outback creaks and clickety-clacks its way along the 1,325 kilometres of track linking Brisbane and Longreach twice a week in each direction. Enjoy dinner in the Tuckerbox Dining Car, then hunker down in your air-conditioned cabin (or economy seat) to watch the scenery whizz by. Queenslandrailtravel.com.au

2 Enjoy the melodies of bush poetry

Outback Queensland is full of colourful characters. Tom Lockie of Artesian Country Tours is one of them. Break up the Spirit of the Outback trip with a bespoke tour in Barcaldine with Tom, a bush poet and president of the Barcaldine Goat Racing Committee, as he spins a few yarns about Captain Starlight and Central West Queensland. Artesiancountrytours.com.au

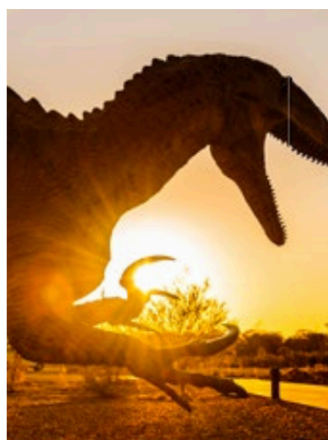
3 Visit the birthplace of the ALP

It's 125 years since striking shearers gathered under a large ghost gum in Barcaldine, which led to the formation of the Australian Labor Party. The multi-million dollar Tree of Knowledge memorial is now a popular spot for political pilgrims, who hop off the train here to pay their respects. treeofknowledge.com.au



4 Have a bath under the stars in Longreach

When you disembark the Spirit of the Outback in Longreach, you can posh it up in a Pioneer Slab Hut that is a lot more luxe than the homes of the early explorers would have been. Pour yourself a bath on a terrace full of tubs and watch the stars pin-cushioned in the night sky. Kinnonandco.com.au



5 Learn to dig it in the 'Dinosaur Capital of Australia'

It's the Disneyland of dinosaurs and it's in the Queensland Outback. Press pause on your Spirit of the Outback adventure in Winton, where you can take a side-trip by coach to the Australian Age of Dinosaurs museum of natural history and Dinosaur Stampede National Monument. Australianageofdinosaurs.com

6 Go for a gallop on a Cobb & Co Coach

Experience the nostalgic romance of transport in the form of a restored stagecoach ride that follows the original Longreach-Windorah mail route along a dirt road stubbled with dry grass. Hang onto your hats as the coach transports you back to our pioneering past before returning to your first-class sleeper. Kinnonandco.com.au

7 Enjoy a cracking outback show in Longreach

Take the opportunity to spend a few extra days in Longreach; there is so much here to see and do. The Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame and Outback Heritage Centre tells the story of the real-life tough-as-old-boots stockmen and women who work the land. Watch award-winning stockman Lachie Cossor as he kicks up puffs of dirt while commanding trick horses and dogs during the Outback Stockman's Show. Outbackheritage.com.au

8 Visit the famous Camden Park Station

Queensland Rail's Outback Getaway includes a guided tour of the Walker family's famous Camden Park Station and 1920s sheep shearing shed, which was visited by Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip in 1970. This component of the tour includes dinner and drinks at the Artesian Pools, which affords panoramic views over this land of sweeping plains. camdenparkstation.com.au

9 Qantas Founders Museum

If you're an aviation anorak, the Qantas Founders Museum is a must. The museum is one of many stop-offs on Queensland Rail's Longreach and Winton Do It All Discovery tour, which commemorates the founders of the Australian company. Get a behind-the-scenes look at a passenger jet, take a walk on a wing and test your skills in the flight simulator. Qfom.com.au

10 Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame

The Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame includes five themed galleries, which celebrate Australia's 'land and people' and pay tribute to everyone from Indigenous Australians to our early explorers. It is also included in the Longreach and Winton Do it All Discovery tour. Outbackheritage.com.au

11 Sunset Dinner Cruise on the MV Explorer

Immerse yourself in the rich outback landscape while



cruising up the Coolabah-lined Thomson River on board the *MV Explorer*, which is part of Queensland Rail's Legendary Longreach and Winton package. Disembark from your cruise at Sunset Bend to enjoy dinner and a few yarns and songs at Smithy's Outback Bar under the stars. Outbackaussietours.com.au

12 Lark Quarry Tour
It's possible to imagine what the world was like when dinosaurs roamed this region when you learn that more than 2,000 of their footprints were discovered at Lark Quarry. Delay your return rail journey back to Brisbane and spend a few days exploring the dramatic red mesa rock formations of Cory's Range and the Williams Valley. Carisbrooketours.com.au

13 Enjoy an amber ale or two at the Artesian Hotel
The Artesian Hotel gets a bit wild and woolly on the weekends, when you could find yourself rubbing elbows with everyone from local politicians to backpackers (who seem to be routinely adopted by the local community). The pub is opposite the railway station platform where you can rejoin the Spirit of the Outback afterwards. facebook.com/artesianhotel

14 Discover an oasis at Lara Station and Wetlands
Lara Wetlands is one of those dots on the map that has become a lure for everyone from photographers to birdwatchers and keen canoeists. Hire a car for the day and head to Lara Station, where you can melt in the healing waters of the Artesian hot springs, which are surrounded by box wood and eucalyptus trees. larastation.com.au



15 Rangelds Sunset Tour
Disembark the Spirit of the Outback at Winton and take a day tour to the jump-up (mesa) region of Rangelds Station - an area in which erosion has created dramatic rifts in the landscape. After wandering around the rugged rifts, enjoy drinks and nibbles while admiring another spectacular outback sunset, presented with painterly precision. reddirtours.com.au

16 Sunday breakfast at the Ridgée Didge Cafe
As owner of the Ridgée Didge Cafe, Cheryl Thompson is known for her home-cooked fare. Thompson is also a community ambassador and mentors young Indigenous students at her family-run hostel. Fuel up on a bacon-and-egg roll and then stretch your legs by joining Thompson on a tour of the town that includes a visit to the Central West Aboriginal Corporation, where you can buy Indigenous art and craft. **Oak St, Barcaldine, 07 4651 1931**



Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame.

17 Linger in Longreach at Iningai Nature Park
Named after the Iningai, the traditional custodians of the land, this nature reserve is located on the Longreach Town Common. Connect the dots around Queensland's outback by following local Indigenous tour guide 'Scotty' on a 1.5-hour trek through the park, during which he will share knowledge about the area from an Indigenous perspective. longreach.qld.gov.au

18 Catch Nostalgia Night at the Royal Theatre
Being on board the Spirit of the Outback allows a lot of time for contemplation. You can also enjoy a nod to nostalgia curled up in a canvas seat under the stars at Winton's Royal Open Air Theatre, which was established in 1918. The theatre is home to the world's largest deckchair as well as a museum that puts the cinema's history in the spotlight. Nostalgia Nights are held every Wednesday from April to September. experiencewinton.com.au

19 Take some time out at the Combo Waterhole

Keep your eyes peeled for jolly swagmen at the Combo Waterhole, which is said to be the swimming spot that inspired the lyrics to Banjo Paterson's 'Waltzing Matilda'. The song was said to be composed in 1895 at the Combo, which is a top spot to take some time out and recharge. Go for the full 'combo' - a fish, a swim and a camp - before rejoining the Spirit of the Outback in Winton. experiencewinton.com.au

20 An eating adventure along the Matilda Way

It's mandatory to stop for a bakery treat while travelling along the Matilda Way, which stretches 1,812 kilometres from the New South Wales border. It's worth hopping on and off the Spirit of the Outback to visit the Merino Bakery in Longreach, which does a beef, mashed potato and mushy pea pie; Longreach's Yeast2West Bakery for a Nutella-filled Danish; and Snow's Bread in Alpha, which is a top spot for 'a dog's eye with dead horse' (pie and sauce). kinnonandco.com.au

Carla Grossetti was a guest of Queensland Rail. This itinerary includes many reasons to explore Outback Queensland with Queensland Rail. To read up about regional rail tours, including the Legendary Longreach & Winton and Outback Getaway packages, visit queenslandrailtravel.com.au