

A few of my favourite things to do in and around Brisbane and Sydney

By Paul Griffiths

For serious tourism, use the three tourism operators on the conference website and the information at <http://www.visitbrisbane.com.au>. These tourism operators will take you to unforgettable places like the Barrier Reef and Fraser Island, and if you only have a day or so, you can use them to visit Moreton Island, which is great and only just outside the city. Here I merely list a few of my favourite things that you may find will fit in with your travel plans before and after the conference. It's based on what I like personally rather than what's 'best'. If you search on the internet you will easily find information on all the places I mention.

Beach resorts around Brisbane

North of Brisbane is the 'Sunshine Coast', a series of pleasant, small, low rise beach towns, culminating in Noosa Heads which is an upmarket resort town on a spectacular headland. There are shuttle services between most of these places and the city and airport. Noosa is roughly two hours drive.

Brisbane is cut off from the open ocean by the big sand islands in Moreton Bay. As well as Moreton Island National park there are two islands with suburban development on them. Stradbroke Island has a beautiful rocky headland for whale spotting, surf beaches, and places to stay. It can be reached by public transport (suburban train to Cleveland, then ferry, and bus across the island) but the trip will take you a couple of hours.

South of Brisbane down to the NSW border the coastline is heavily developed. This area – the Gold Coast – is one of Australia's most popular tourism destinations. If you want multi-storey hotels to give you shade on the beach and poker machines (slots), then the Gold Coast is not to be missed. But if that's what you are looking for, be careful not to go too far inland, as you will quickly find yourself in beautiful, unspoilt rainforest.

You can get a shuttle from the airport or city to Byron Bay, a great surfing spot and a popular place with the backpacking crowd. It is situated at the most easterly point of the continent, just over the NSW border. Because of the way the freeways connect, the trip to the airport is only 120 minutes. The view from Cape Byron back across the bay to the extinct volcano Mt Warning and the rainforest-covered Tweed Valley caldera is one of the world's great sights.

Driving Sydney-Brisbane

The Pacific Highway route along the coast is about 925 Km (575 miles, 12 hrs), and a lot of it has two lanes each way. There are many lovely little beach towns to stop at, although usually a bit off the actual highway. Avoid the larger towns and stay in motels or caravan parks in the smaller places. The smaller motels often have good

walk-in prices. Australian caravan parks are usually pleasant and have cabins you can rent as well as places to camp. You need to arrive in daylight as their offices often close early. A random selection of favourites – Seal Rocks (8km dirt road to get there, great campsite with tents or cabins opposite the beach, only one small shop), South West Rocks (Trial Bay), Nambucca Heads, Woolgoolga, (I like the Woolgoolga Lake Caravan Park), the wild beachside campsites at Minnie Water and Boorkoom (Diggers Camp) in Yuragir National Park (tents only), Yamba/Angourie, Evans Head, Byron Bay (I like the Clarkes Beach caravan park).

The New England Highway is the inland route. It is longer – 960Km (600miles, 13hrs) – and mostly on single carriageway roads, but many people prefer it when there is heavy traffic. If you go this way you can do wine tasting in the Hunter Valley and spend a night in the Hunter region, and then do the majority of the drive the next day. There is a nice detour through the mountains from Sydney to the Hunter valley. Leave the F3 Freeway (Pacific Highway) at Peats Ridge Road and drive through Peat's Ridge and Wollombi to join the New England Highway at Singleton. An amazing drive, although needing a little care in places, which does not add much time. About 200Km from Brisbane the highway passes near two spectacular national parks in the Granite Belt region, Girraween NP (the Girraween Environmental Lodge is nice) and Bald Rock NP (Bald Rock Bush Retreat is lovely, although a little hard to get to). There is also a small wine growing area around the town of Stanthorpe with several small wineries that do tastings and sales..

A day or two in Sydney?

- Take a ferry on the harbour whenever you get the chance. The ferry system hub is Circular Quay, between the Opera House and the Harbour Bridge. The Manly ferry is the nicest way to get to one of Sydney's famous ocean beaches.
- Or do the Spit to Manly walk through Sydney Harbour National Park and get the ferry home.
- If you don't have Flying Foxes (fruit bats, macrochiroptera) at home, visit the colony sleeping in the Botanic Gardens (along the harbour past the Opera House)
- See the permanent collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art at the Art Gallery of NSW (near the Botanic Gardens)
- Get cheap standing room or restricted view tickets for performances at the Opera House that day (get in the box office queue about 8.30am for 9.00 sales.)
- If you go to Bondi Beach, have a drink at the Icebergs Club, looking almost straight down on the surfers.
- Get to Bondi by taking a bus to Coogee and walking along the cliffs from there, sampling the different feel of the beaches you pass.
- Randomly select a restaurant in Chinatown, or on King St, Newtown.

Bushwalking

It gets cold in the mountains in winter, even in Queensland. The sub-tropical climate of Brisbane and the coastal ranges changes rapidly as you go inland, and by the time you get to 800-1000m elevations on the Great Dividing Range, only a couple of hours drive from the coast, there will be frost at night. So for all the places described here, except perhaps those right on the beach, you need '3 season' gear in July.

A bushwalk on Moreton Island will show you an absolutely unique landscape, and you'd have a good chance of seeing whales from the surfside. There are places to camp on both the bayside and surfside, and a range of accommodation options at Tangalooma Resort.

My favourite bushwalk near Brisbane is Mt Barney. It is 128 km (80 miles, 2 hours) from downtown Brisbane and you need a car. You can camp or stay at Mt Barney Lodge at the bottom of the mountain. You can just about get up and down one peak in a short, winter day if you are really fit and start at first light, but it's better to camp at the top where there is a great campsite with water nestled in the saddle between the two peaks. It's a spectacular landscape.

There is great walking in the string of national parks around the Tweed Valley Caldera, which can be accessed from caldera rim in Queensland, or from the interior of the caldera in NSW. If you don't have a car the easiest way to see this country is with the official conference tour to Springbrook National Park.

If you are in Sydney, the Blue Mountains are readily accessed by suburban train for a few dollars. The trip takes about two hours. After climbing up from Sydney the railway line is up on top of an ancient, dissected plateau and a 15 minute walk from the train stations at Wentworth Falls, Leura, Katoomba, or Blackheath will bring you to the edge of the cliffs (200-400m high) from where you can descend by many different paths into the very large and very beautiful wilderness areas of the Grose, Jamison, and Megalong Valleys. There are also many day walks which stay up on the top and offer great views. The view from Wentworth Falls greatly impressed Darwin on his visit in 1836. Call off your trip if it's raining as you won't see anything but fog.

In Sydney itself there are beautiful harbourside walks in the National Park areas of the harbour. The classic is the Spit to Manly walk (3hrs). Leaflets on this and many other walks are available from tourist information offices.

It would be extremely dangerous – mad, frankly – to attempt a full day or overnight bushwalk in any of the places mentioned above without a topographic map and compass and proper outdoor gear. The easiest way to buy topographic maps in Brisbane is from World Wide Maps and Guides (Anzac Square Arcade, 267 Edward St. This is close to Central Railway Station). In Sydney MapWorld is good (280 Pitt St, use Town Hall Station) although they sometimes run out of the most popular Blue Mountains sheets. Both cities have clusters of competing outdoor gear shops near the city centre (around Kent St in Sydney, and around Wickham St in Brisbane).

For shorter walks you can usually get all the maps and information you need from the Tourist Information Centre in any small town, or from National Park offices.