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beyond the border

VENTURE INTO BLUES TERRITORY FOR A FAMILY HOLIDAY TO REMEMBER.

STORY DEB ECCLESTON

AS A CHILD, my parents were avid fans of the family drive holiday. Dad always said you missed out on seeing so much when travelling by air.

Sitting for hours on end in a hot XY Falcon, squeezed in between my brother and sister, I really struggled to share his point of view. But now, as an adult with three children of my own, I think I finally understand the old man's sentiment.

But for my family's sojourn south, I did things a little differently, with a six-berth Apollo Motorhome (apollocamper.com) to accommodate the five of us. The plan was to drive from Brisbane to Sydney and back along the legendary Pacific Coast, with overnight stops at Nambucca Heads and Budgewoi on the way there, and Port Macquarie and Iluka on the way back. While each of these coastal spots are holiday destinations in their own right, it was the hidden gems in between that made this a family holiday to remember.

Our first stop was Tropical Fruit World in Duranbah, just over an hour's drive south of Brisbane. Our youngest son – who has a serious aversion to fruit – wasn't thrilled about the visit, but it wasn't long before his mindset changed. Despite the name, there is much more to Tropical Fruit World than just fruit.

The guided plantation tractor tour of the orchards was an



adventure in itself, showcasing some of the 500 plus varieties of tropical fruits grown on the site, some I'd never heard of. As a parent, you don't realise how removed city kids can be from how the food they eat is produced. My three – even the youngest one – were enthralled by the tour and you could almost see the dots between paddock-to-plate connecting inside their sponge-like minds.

The Island recreation area, complete with mini-golf, flying fox and play equipment, was the perfect spot for the kids to run off steam. The tour also included a wildlife boat cruise, miniature train ride and visit to the Fauna Park, where we could feed and pat the animals to our heart's content.

Enjoying the fruits of nature was a recurrent theme throughout this trip and it's a message Anna and Andrew Campbell of Honeycomb Valley Farm are passionate about. Located in the heart of Nambiac, between Nambucca and Budgewoi, the farm is Australia's version of *The Good Life*.

Determined to lead a fully sustainable existence, Andrew, Anna and their three children left their city existence for the simplicity of country life on 35 hectares in the heart of New South Wales.

If ever you needed proof that a sustainable life is possible, this is it. Gorgeous animals virtually roam free on the property, and are considered part of the family. That includes the bees, who are 'invited' to lodge in a series of colourful hives known as The Bee Motel. Even the chickens have unique accommodation in the form of old caravans recycled into



MAIN IMAGE: TOWN BEACH PORT MACQUARIE. IMAGES LEFT TO RIGHT: TROPICAL FRUIT WORLD; PRODUCE FROM HONEYCOMB VALLEY FARM; THE GIRAFFES' VIEW AT TARONGA PARK ZOO; MOTORHOME ON THE OPEN ROAD.

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coops. Nothing goes to waste on Honeycomb Valley Farm.

Seeing this level of sustainability in action was inspirational, and a timely reminder to all of us of what really matters in life. Most importantly though, it was fun – being immersed in farm life was a hoot for the kids and adults alike.

The next leg of the journey took us from one extreme to another – the calm serenity of Nabiac to the noisy hyperactivity of Sydney. How do you navigate a 7m long motorhome through Sydney? You don't – we based ourselves at Lane Cove River Tourist Park, just 12km from the CBD, and caught public transport. Despite its proximity to the city, the tourist park overlooks the vast Lane Cove National Park, which makes you feel as though you are miles from anywhere.

The stark contrast left us all a little dazed as we walked through the crowds in the CBD towards the iconic Sydney Tower. Our children clung to us like barnacles, mouths agape at their surrounds. I soon realised this was the first time they had been exposed to the extreme highs and lows of city life – the well-suited business people racing past homeless people begging for a dollar.

The dichotomy didn't go un-noticed by my 11-year-old daughter, and after a deep discussion about social dynamics on the ferry past the legendary Harbour Bridge and Opera House, it was a relief to arrive at a zoo of a different kind – Taronga. With more than 4000 animals to see, we had our

work cut out for us visiting all of them in an afternoon.

Taronga Zoo is a full-day adventure at least, and a must-see during a Sydney stopover.

On the road again, we were off to Port Macquarie with a stop at the Timbertown Heritage Theme Park, Wauchope, along the way. Wauchope (pronounced 'War-hope') was home to Australia's pioneer timber cutters from 1880 to 1930, and this unique tourist spot was built in 1976 as a tribute to them. Set in 35 hectares of natural forest, Timbertown is the recreation of an authentic heritage township, complete with Clydesdale horse and carriage rides, sawmill, blacksmith, steam train and bullock team demonstrations. I think I learned more about Australian history in one afternoon than I did at school, but seeing history come to life beats a textbook any day.

We spent the night in Port Macquarie, where the rainforest meets the sea. Here our eco-tourism experience continued with a visit to Sea Acres Rainforest Centre, where we explored one of the largest coastal rainforests in New South Wales via a 1.3km elevated walkway.

Then it was on to some good, old-fashioned fun at The Big Banana – the pride of Coffs Harbour. Toboggan rides, water slides, ice-skating and movie theatre provide fun for all the family, although for me the highlight was the laser tag. After almost a week travelling in close quarters with my husband and children, I had some serious frustration to relieve.

Chakras re-aligned, we made our way to the last stop on our journey – Iluka. A guided tour of the Clarence River by kayak (aaakayaktoursiluka.com) was a fitting way to end our trip, and the perfect vantage point from which to explore the idyllic coastal community.

As any parent will know, holidaying with kids can be hard work, no matter what your mode of travel. But for an adventure quite unlike any other, exploring off-the-beaten-track places by motorhome is the way to go. And while home (Queensland) is where my heart is, I can't deny I have a new appreciation for what our southern rivals have to offer when it comes to drive travel.

For more information about drive holidays in New South Wales, visit pacificcoast.com.au.



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