

Destination East Coast Australia

It's all about the water. The East Coast of Australia bangs into the Pacific Ocean for some 4000km (almost five times that if you measure every notched crag and every sinuous strand). Or maybe it's the other way around: the Pacific bangs into the coast. Given the number of surfers riding those breaks, it's probably the latter.

Life here revolves around water and so will your trip, often in ways you might not imagine. Take Melbourne: one of its great joys is its café culture, which entices you to nurse a long black for hours. What's key to that coffee you're drinking? Water. Move up the coast a bit along to southeastern Victoria. What's at the heart of those misty, fern-filled temperate rainforests? Water. The same can be said for southern New South Wales, although as the weather becomes warmer, the form of water focused on is the ocean. Like amphibians in an eternal spring, the surfers and divers increasingly shed their wetsuits as you go north.

Sydney and water are inextricably linked. The harbour. The bridge over the harbour. The people taking the bridge over the harbour to get to some of the most beautiful urban beaches in the world. North of Sydney, philosophers at the many beaches can spend a lifetime pondering the question: if a wave breaks on a beach and there's no one there to hear it, does it make a noise?

Astonishingly long stretches of sand are backed by national parks along the north coast of New South Wales. If you're getting sick of being around people, this is the place for you. In the far north, the water isn't just breaking against the land, it's *part* of the land. Mighty rivers such as the Clarence drain inland rainforests and their vast and lacy deltas support fishing and sugar-cane industries, and in and around Byron Bay are some of the most exquisite organic farms in the country.

If the water south of the Queensland border is a bit of a hippy – fertile, shambolic, untamed – then north of the border it's a starlet. The Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast beyond are brash, glitzy and, like many a Hollywood wannabe, possibly over-developed.

As the kilometres click past as you head north from the clean swimming pool-like charms of Brisbane, water simply becomes omnipresent. Hervey Bay is the spring-break home to thousands of humpback whales having a romp before the long slog to Antarctica. North of Rockhampton, water is merely the backdrop for one of the world's natural wonders: the Great Barrier Reef. (Although like any good supporting cast, the water spiffs itself up with an incredible shade of blue.)

By the time you hit Cairns, the water supports a rainforest that cloaks the land with a dripping blanket of green. Up here, whether you go crashing down a vine-strewn path or dive into the brackish depths to discover a living treasure, you're going to get wet and love every minute of it.

And as inescapable an element that water is along the East Coast, you might be surprised to know that the lack of it is what dominates the news year in and year out. Even as people are drawn to the East Coast by its waters they may not have enough once they get there. Droughts of biblical proportions have plagued the region for years, especially Melbourne and parts of Victoria and New South Wales. Watering restrictions, climate change, wildfires, desalination schemes and more have dominated discussions.

FAST FACTS

East Coast population: 15.5 million (75% of Australia's total)

Length of coastline: 17,996km (30% of Australia's total)

Inflation rate: 3%

Unemployment rate: 4%

Victoria's official mammal and fish: Leadbeater's possum, weedy seadragon

NSW's official mammal and fish: platypus, blue groper

Queensland's official mammal and fish: koala, barrier reef anemone fish

Favourite brand of beer in all three states: Victoria Bitter (VB)

Favourite East Coast food: fish & chips

Favourite thing to do on the beach: sit

And even when the skies opened up over some parts of the coast in 2008, it was a case of moving from one extreme to another as places such as Mackay in Queensland experienced the worst floods in 100 years.

There were floods of tears along the coast, and indeed across Australia, when Prime Minister Kevin Rudd stood in parliament and said 'sorry' to the stolen generations (p40). His speech was seen by many as a uniting moment for all Australians; others have reserved their judgement until any action transpires. Either way, the speech and its wider implications are the subject of much discussion.

Like the churning surf on an empty East Coast beach, that simple word 'sorry' carried a clarity and purity that won't wash away the past but may begin a transformation for the future.

Getting Started

If you're undecided about whether or not to bring an item from home, you can probably just leave it at home. It's hard to imagine a more traveller-friendly place than Australia's East Coast. You can get anything you need (including sunscreen to replace the big tube you had that was seized at the airport), prices are not outrageous, it's easy to get around and if you can read this, they speak your language (at least in some form). Plus it's amazingly gorgeous, a whole lot of fun and you'll meet lots of people whose dispositions match the weather: sunny.

WHEN TO GO

Any time is a good time to be *somewhere* along the East Coast. When it's cold down south, it's magnificent in the north, and when it's too hot and sweaty up north, Victoria is at its finest. In Victoria and along the south coast of NSW, summer (December to February) offers warm weather and longer daylight hours tailor-made for swimming and outdoor activities. From Sydney to Brisbane, summer temperatures hover around a balmy 25°C – perfect for any activity (or inactivity). In the far north of Queensland, summer is the wet season, when the heat and humidity can be pretty uncomfortable. To make things worse, swimming in the sea isn't possible due to the deadly 'stingers' (box jellyfish) frequenting the waters at this time (see the boxed text, p381).

Winter in the south is from June to the end of August, with temperatures dropping the further south you travel – not surprisingly it's the time when many travellers head north, where the humidity of the wet season has subsided and the temperature is highly agreeable (the Dry lasts roughly from April to September, and the Wet from October to March, with the heaviest rain falling from January onwards). Autumn (March to May) and spring (September to November) are characterised by a lack of climatic extremes along the entire coast.

The other major consideration is school holidays – the high seasons for domestic travel when prices rise and vacancies plummet in the major destinations. In the south, as with the entire country, the Easter (April) and Christmas (December to January) breaks are considered to be the high season. In Queensland, the main tourist season stretches from April to November, and the official high season is June to September. See p488 for more information on holidays. Also note the dates of schoolies, the weeks in late November or December when Australian teens finish high school and head to the beach and drink themselves into oblivion.

See Climate (p482) for more information.

COSTS & MONEY

Prices in Australia will seem familiar if you're coming from the USA (the days of Oz as a bargain destination will remain a memory until the US dollar shows signs of life). From Britain or continental Europe it will seem quite affordable – which makes up for the airfare. Generally you'll find reasonably

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Sunscreen, sunglasses and a hat to deflect ultra-fierce UV rays (p509)
- A travel insurance policy specifically covering you for any planned high-risk activities (p488)
- Extra-strength insect repellent to fend off merciless flies and mosquitoes (p484)
- An empty hand as there's no reason to overpack – travel light on the East Coast

priced transport and accommodation, and excellent-value food and wine. Like everywhere fuel is soaring and is unlikely to moderate much in price. (Check prices at www.motormouth.com.au.)

Of course, your holiday can be as cheap or as expensive as your tastes demand. A midrange traveller planning to hire a car, see the sights, stay in midrange B&Bs or hotels and indulge in a slap-up restaurant meal in the evening should expect to be out of pocket by at least \$180 per day (\$120 to \$150 per person if travelling as part of a pair or a couple).

At the low-cost end, if you camp or stay in hostels, cook your own meals, avoid big nights out in the pub and catch public transport everywhere, you could probably manage on \$50 per day; for a budget that realistically enables you to have a good time and the occasional splurge, set aside at least \$75.

Travellers with a demanding brood in tow will find there are many ways to keep kids inexpensively satisfied, including beach and park visits, camping grounds and motels equipped with pools and games rooms, restaurants with discounted kids' meals and child/family concessions for attractions. For more information on travelling with children see p482.

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

Since our inception in 1973, Lonely Planet has encouraged our readers to tread lightly, travel responsibly and enjoy the magic independent travel affords. International travel is growing at a jaw-dropping rate, and we still firmly believe in the benefits it can bring – but, as always, we encourage you to consider the impact your visit will have on both the global environment and the local economies, cultures and ecosystems.

Generally, environmental awareness is on the upswing along the East Coast. Some businesses now make it part of their marketing. And you'll find many of these listed in the back of this book in the GreenDex, see p532.

Here's some top tips from the authors of this book on reducing your impact.

- Buy food at the plethora of local markets: you get the best of the region and support local growers.
- Use local transport; tough yes in some rural areas, but the only way to go in cities such as Sydney and Melbourne.
- If a business says they are environmentally friendly, ask them specifically how. There's no points awarded for the 'green' hotel that's sole initiative is not washing towels.
- Fresh water is an issue in much of the East Coast. Try to use as little as possible. But conversely, don't ration yourself as you need to drink a lot of water in the tropical areas. Refill plastic water bottles from taps.
- Properly dispose of your trash, using recycling bins whenever possible.

PREDEPARTURE READING

Before heading up or down the coast, grab a couple of inspiring, thought-provoking or just plain entertaining books to help put you in the picture.

Tim Flannery's *The Birth of Melbourne* (2002) contains first-hand accounts of the city from 1802 to 1903. That the title subject of *The True History of the Kelly Gang* by the incomparable Peter Carey is an icon for many might be insight enough into country Victoria. *Jackson's Track* (2000) by Daryl Tonkin and Carolyn Landon is a powerful reminiscence by a white bush logger of his interactions with Aboriginal people and the rapidly changing environment.

Utterly contemporary, *The Unknown Terrorist* (2006) by Richard Flanagan is a timely thriller set in Sydney's seamy side. For an unvarnished nonfiction look at the same sleaze, try *Leviathan: The Unauthorised Biography of*

HOW MUCH?

Fish & chips \$10

Snorkel gear rental \$30

Night in a hostel dorm
\$25-30

Night at a beachfront
hotel from \$150

Use of Bondi Beach free

Use of Bondi Beach
lifeguard free

TOP 10



FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Aussies love any excuse for a celebration, and flock to the festivals and big sporting events that seem to cram every weekend of the year. These are our top 10 reasons to get festive on the East Coast – more events are listed on p486 and throughout this book.

- 1 Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras (p200) – February
- 2 Moomba Festival, Melbourne (p91) – March
- 3 East Coast Blues & Roots Festival (p274) – Byron Bay, Easter
- 4 Nimbin Mardi Grass (p283) – May
- 5 Cooktown Discovery Festival (p476) – Queen's Birthday weekend.
- 6 Brisbane Riverfestival (p320) – September
- 7 Melbourne Cup (p91) – first Tuesday in November
- 8 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race (p200) – from 26 December
- 9 Boxing Day International Text Match Cricket, Melbourne (p91) – 26 December
- 10 Woodford Folk Festival (p338) – between Christmas and New Year

MUST-SEE MOVIES

One of the best places to do your essential trip preparation (ie daydreaming) is on a comfy sofa with a bowl of popcorn in one hand and a remote in the other. The following picks range from intelligent and thrilling to stupid yet delightful. See p46 for reviews of some of these and many other locally produced films.

- 1 *Australia* (2008) directed by Baz Luhrmann
- 2 *Romper Stomper* (1992) directed by Geoffrey Wright
- 3 *The Home Song Stories* (2007) directed by Tony Ayres
- 4 *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002) directed by Phillip Noyce
- 5 *Beneath Clouds* (2002) directed by Ivan Sen
- 6 *Romulus, My Father* (2007) directed by Richard Roxburgh
- 7 *The Man who Sued God* (2001) directed by Mark Joffe
- 8 *Head On* (1998) directed by Geoffrey Wright
- 9 *Ocean's Deadliest* (2007) directed by John Stainton
- 10 *Ned Kelly* (2003) directed by Gregor Jordan

TOP READS

The following page-turners have won critical acclaim in Australia and abroad, not least because they have something to reveal to the reader about Australia's cultural evolution and contemporary life. See p47 for reviews of some of these and other books.

- 1 *It's Raining Mango* (1987) by Thea Astley
- 2 *The Secret River* (2006) by Kate Grenville
- 3 *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000) by Peter Carey
- 4 *Power Without Glory* (1950) by Frank Hardy
- 5 *Monkey Grip* (1977) by Helen Garner
- 6 *Loaded* (1995) by Christos Tsiolkas
- 7 *Every Move You Make* (2006) by David Malouf
- 8 *The Brush-Off* (1998) by Shane Maloney
- 9 *The Harp in the South* (1948) by Ruth Park
- 10 *My Place* (1987) by Sally Morgan

Sydney (2002) by John Birmingham. Noted novelist Peter Carey gives his own account of his home town in *30 Days in Sydney* (2001). It's quirky, goofy and highly readable.

The Place at the Coast by Jane Hyde is a moving novel looking at a woman's aimless life when she returns to her home in a fading coastal NSW town. It was made into the movie *High Tide* (1987) and filmed in Merimbula and Eden. *Salt Rain* (2004), by Sarah Armstrong, is set in the green hills of the north coast of NSW. It deals with the tough life of a teenage girl who must deal with the strange past life of her mother.

Thea Astley's *It's Raining in Mango* (1987) is an almost tangible taste of Queensland's history. It follows a Sydney family's relocation to Cooktown, and its exposure to the tragic and murderous clash of indigenous and European cultures. David Malouf's 2006 short story collection, *Every Move You Make*, looks at the lives of people from northern Queensland and across the continent.

On a more continental scale, Andrew Bain and wife tackle a circumnavigation by bike with trucks, characters and prevailing headwinds as constant companions in *Headwinds* (2003). Humorist Bill Bryson brings his usual wry voice to the southern nation in *Down Under* (2000), although the pages seem populated by central casting, while *The Fatal Shore* (1987) by Robert Hughes endures as a richly detailed and some say sensationalised tale of England's convicts washing ashore in NSW.

Finally, Tim Flannery writes about the local icon every visitor wants to see in *Chasing Kangaroos: A Continent, a Scientist, and a Search for the World's Most Extraordinary Creature* (2007). The title says it all.

INTERNET RESOURCES

ABC (www.abc.net.au) Australia's public broadcaster has lots of news and information on its website so you can see what's going on before you arrive. Plus there's a full range of great radio shows you can download to your iPod.

Australian Tourist Commission (www.australia.com) Official, federal government-run tourism site with nationwide info for visitors.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Great destination summaries, links to related sites and the Thorn Tree bulletin board.

Queensland Holidays (www.queenslandholidays.com.au) Official tourism site, providing comprehensive information on destinations, accommodation, attractions, tours and more.

Tourism New South Wales (www.visitnsw.com.au) The state's tourism site has vast amounts of information on accommodation, activities and much more.

Tourism Victoria (www.visitvictoria.com) Official state tourism site, with excellent sections on festivals and events, accommodation, restaurants, tours and attractions.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

EASTCOASTER

One Month to a Lifetime/Sydney to Cairns

The East Coast beckons north of **Sydney** (p178) so it may be hard, but put all the joys of the big smoke behind you and hit the road. Enter the central coast of New South Wales, where there are more beaches and more evidence that people like to live near beaches. **Newcastle** (p225) has swapped its blue collar for Mambo casual, and the pleasantly inebriated **Hunter Valley** (p231) lures from upriver. Don't make the mistake of many and think of this as a long day-trip from Sydney; you want to tipple happily and then get tucked right into bed. Back on the coast, reclusive types may find themselves searching out less developed gems such as **Seal Rocks** (p238) and **Myall Lakes** (p238).

That warm tingly feeling you're noticing is the approaching tropics. Northern NSW basks in subtropical glory. Take in the views at **Hat Head** (p251), go diving at **South West Rocks** (p251), which has a fascinating position overlooking the wave-tossed coast to the north. Halfway between Sydney and Brisbane, **Bellingen** (p254) is a charming town at the base of the mountains with its own delightful beat (lots of folk musicians live here). Carry on up the hill on the beautiful **Waterfall Way** (p258), which is lined with what the name suggests. Further north, you pass some sensational, untouched beaches that



You'll cover at least 3000km by the time you sample the best that this route has to offer. Many of the gems are just off the highway, and around every corner is another beach, another food experience, another tempting detour.

stretch to the horizon; check out those near little wild **Wooli** (p263). **Byron Bay** (p271) is inescapable: don't resist this mellow yet groovin' beach town where surfer meets hipster meets hippy. Nearby towns such as **Bangalow** (p278) are alive with the many palette pleasures of the region. Meditating in Byron's verdant hinterland is the once alternative, still delightful **Nimbin** (p283). From here you've got inland options aplenty through the dense green of several national parks on the **Rainforest Way** (p284).

It will feel like you're in a new country when you pop through into Queensland. Not only is it likely that the time has changed (there's no summer time here because they think it's always summer), but you'll also need to remember how you ordered a beer in Victoria. Gold chains (for both sexes) are the uniform for the **Gold Coast** (p288). The kids can go berserk at the **theme parks** (p303) while you grab a long board or bungee cord. **Brisbane** (p307) has gone glitzy – it still surprises even the locals – and yet nature persists, with wild dolphins to feed at **Tangalooma** (p332) on Moreton Island. The coast now picks up a new alluring name – Sunshine – and the cuisine turns to fusion without confusion at style-setting **Noosa** (p345). There are whales to watch in **Hervey Bay** (p363) – they're lounging around getting ready for the long haul down to Antarctica (trust us, that's worse than even some stretches of the Pacific Hwy). And don't leave the world's largest sand thing, **Fraser Island** (p374), without taking some of it home between your toes after a roll in the huge dunes.

You can watch Australia's favourite rum being distilled in **Bundaberg** (p370), and tiny loggerhead turtles hatching at **Mon Repos Beach** (p372). Chill out at **Town of 1770** (p380) and get your board waxed – this is one of the last places you'll be surfing on this trip. You can get a taste of the coral wonders of the big reef at **Lady Musgrave Island** (p372). Wear a big hat, watch someone riding a bull or join them devouring a steak at beef city, **Rockhampton** (p386), which surprises many with a vibrant art culture you'll find beneath the bull. Explore the trails and sample the beaches of **Great Keppel Island** (p393); it's pure tropical beach bliss. Get even more remote slightly further north at **Byfield National Park** (p393) where streams flow with water so clear you don't even realise it's there. Get another dose of art in the tropics at **Mackay** (p398). And it may be the official mammal of NSW, but you'll spot platypuses aplenty at peaceful **Eungella National Park** (p404).

Your next stop is bustling **Airlie Beach** (p410), gateway to the magical **Whitsunday Islands** (p406), where you can party, dive, sail and snorkel to your heart's content, all while bobbing through the azure waters of your holiday dreams. There are islands and reefs galore up this way. **Townsville** (p424) will put a pause in your action. The place bubbles with diver shops offering **Great Barrier Reef** (p427) explorations of every kind; you'll want an expert just to sort out where to begin in this kaleidoscopic, living breakwater and world unto itself. Next up, walkers should not miss the Thorsborne Trail on magnificent **Hinchinbrook Island** (p438). Adrenaline junkies can take to the white water on the mighty Tully River and you may spot a cassowary at **Mission Beach** (p440) before it spots you. When you reach the tourist town of **Cairns** (p450) you can shout yourself a trip to the reef and a slap-up meal. And you'll find no shortage of fellow travellers here who you can one-up with your coastal tales of adventure.

AROUND THE BEND

Two to Three Weeks/Melbourne to Sydney

You've had so many long blacks that you've almost jumped in front of a tram (twice!) in **Melbourne** (p74). It's getting chilly so now's the time to take your jangled nerves and head north. But the kids (of all ages...) want to see a penguin, so you head south to **Phillip Island** (p106), where penguins, seals and wetsuited surfers frolic in the bracing briny. Next stop, **Wilson's Promontory** (p113). Yes, we are still going south, and yes it is...cool. And clean, and wild and beautiful. And there's nowhere further south to go (sorry Tasmania), so suck in that fresh air and head northeast through the forests, farms and **Gippsland lakes district** (p117) to Victoria's first and last seaside town, **Mallacoota** (p137). Now turn that corner. Things, you will have noticed, are heating up.

Time constricts on the south coast of NSW – distances between towns are noticeably shorter. Each town has a river or an estuary, a golf club and three or four or more golden-sand beaches. People have been known to arrive and never leave – you have been warned. Watch a whale at **Eden** (p144), drop a line at **Narooma** (p151) and take a photo (everybody does) of **Tilba** (p150).

Eventually you'll reach blue-collar **Wollongong** (p172) and the sprawling suburbs, followed by the dazzling lights of **Sydney** (p178). How long you need here depends on your love or loathing of heaving metropolises, and your budget. Escapes to the **Blue Mountains** (p216) are *de rigueur* for frazzled Sydneysiders and overwhelmed travellers alike.



This 1500km trip takes you from the multicultural Victorian capital of Melbourne to Australia's biggest showgirl, Sydney. You travel south-east to Wilson's Promontory before heading northeast around the bend into NSW.

COOKTOWN CIRCLE

One to Two Weeks/Cairns to Cooktown to Cairns

There are two routes from lively Cairns to languorous Cooktown, so if you can organize a 4WD you can make this excellent loop through tropical rainforest and dry savannah, with perhaps a look at Lizard Island.

Leaving **Cairns** (p450), wend your way north on the Captain Cook Hwy through several pretty beach communities including **Holloways Beach** (p460), **Yorkeys Knob** (p461) and, perhaps the best of all, **Palm Cove** (p461). You'll be lured in by good food and reef tours and the lazy local lifestyle at **Port Douglas** (p463), just a short drive off the highway. At unassuming **Mossman** (p468) the main attraction is the magnificent gorge and the **Daintree National Park** (p469), which is best seen near **Cape Tribulation** (p455). From Cape Trib the 4WD **Bloomfield Track** (p474) carves its way through dense rainforests and mountains for 80km. It emerges just south of **Cooktown** (p474), a fascinating outpost of civilisation. From here you can organise a tour to **Lizard Island** (p477), the most northerly Great Barrier Reef resort. Return to Cairns via the inland route, passing the Annan River Gorge to **Lakeland** (p474) – turn right here for the tip of Australia, a mere 700-odd kilometres away. Further along this lonely road there's the Palmer River Roadhouse and the former mining town of **Mt Carbine** (p474), before you reach the farming hub of Mareeba. Turn east here towards the very popular mountain village of **Kuranda** (p462) before descending to the steamy coast and Cairns.

This loop combines the lovely coast north of Cairns, the salubrious hamlet of Port Douglas and the rainforest with the frontier aspect of Cooktown. The 280km trip north takes several days as you lap up the sights.



TAILORED TRIPS

INDIGENOUS CULTURE

The East Coast is the most heavily settled and developed region of Australia, so tangible examples of indigenous culture are not immediately obvious to the traveller. Several cultural centres do, however, welcome visitors and provide guided tours and insights into traditional life. In addition, there are numerous middens, bora rings and other cultural sights protected in national parks and reserves.

Krowathunkoolong Keeping Place (p123) in Bairnsdale is a Gunai Aboriginal space that delivers some truths about the white settlement of southeast Victoria. The NSW south coast, near Bermagui, has the excellent **Umbarra Aboriginal Cultural Centre** (p150), where traditional life including bush tucker can be explored with guides. **Canberra** (p157) has large state museums with extensive displays and exhibits on Aboriginal culture and art.

Sydney (p189) is loaded with sights, museums, shops and tours. Just north, **Ku-Ring-Gai Chase National Park** (p222), just north of Sydney, protects an extensive array of engravings.

The most accessible place in Queensland is the **Dreamtime Cultural Centre** (p388) in Rockhampton, which offers guided tours and boomerang throwing. There are excellent self-guided walks, made with help from the indigenous community, at **Cape Hillsborough National Park** (p406) and **Conway National Park** (p415). For more recommended places, see p45.



FOLLOW THE GREEN

Much of the East Coast is already green, but that's nature's work not man's. However in recent years that's changing as humans are beginning to put a green stamp on natural places that for many years were being stamped out.

In southeast Victoria at **Errinundra National Park** (p133), locals are working at a grassroots level to replace logging jobs with positions in the tourism industry. In the south of NSW, you can get a tour focusing on the ecology of **Mimosa Rocks National Park** (p149) and its protected coastline. Wine-making has never been synonymous with ecological practice (all those critters want the grapes) but many vineyards in the **Hunter Valley** (p233) have sustainable practices.

Byron Bay (p271) and its surrounds are home to oodles of organic farms and sustainable food producers. Visit any of the many markets (p277) to see the local philosophy in action.

In Queensland, you can tour the rich forests of the **Sunshine Coast Hinterland** on eco-themed tours (p354). **Fraser Island** is another good place for a tour (p368) with its unique, sandy ecology. Turtles are threatened around the world, but at **Mon Repos** (p372) near Bundaberg, you can see these gentle creatures in their habitat. Finally, in **Cairns** (p450) there are numerous tours and exhibits on the freshwater rivers and the reefs offshore.



NATURE'S BOUNTY

The East Coast is not the Australia of red sand, big rocks and seemingly endless lonely roads across a moonscape. It's the Australia of long golden beaches and verdant rainforests, of the platypus, migrating whales, frolicking dolphins and a plethora of colourful bird life.

Jetting out from the Victorian coast is **Wilson's Promontory** (p113, where wildlife, water and squeaky-clean sand converge on mainland Australia's southern extremity. Further along the coast you can take a multiday coastal hike at **Croajingalong National Park** (p139) before entering the realm of the tall eucalypts of the **Erinundra Plateau** (p133). You can dive with seals, watch whales, point at penguins, and drop a line at **Montague Island** (p152). For a breath of mountain air, discover what all the fuss is about in the popular **Blue Mountains** (p216). There are bottlenose dolphins to hand feed at **Tangalooma** (p332), and migrating whales to gaze upon at **Hervey Bay** (p363). Watch tiny turtles hatch at **Mon Repos Beach** (p372), stroll the metallic beach at **Cape Hillsborough National Park** (p406) with bounding kangaroos, and be astounded by the bright, white arc of **Whitehaven Beach** (p420) on Whitsunday Island. Along the north Queensland coast there are numerous options for getting acquainted with the myriad of colourful denizens of the **Great Barrier Reef National Park** (p387). Take to the classic Thorsborne Trail on mountainous **Hinchinbrook Island** (p438) and be consumed by the dense tropical rainforests of **Cape Tribulation** (p472).



ARE WE THERE YET?

You see the minivan tooling down the road with little windows alive with little faces. Meanwhile outside the windows is a cinematic spectacle. There's much to enthral the kids here. Spoon-feed it to them and plan ahead.

The East Coast has enough diversions to distract the brightest minds, and activities aplenty to soak up the energy of the most boundless youth.

Feed inquiring minds at Melbourne's **Scienceworks** (p90), Sydney's **Powerhouse Museum** (p191) and Brisbane's **Sciencecentre** (p311). These are museums where kids can fiddle and interfere with techno gadgets and learn all about all sorts of things.

Melbourne's **Luna Park** (p90) and Sydney's **Luna Park** (p88) are old-style theme parks of the candyfloss and laughing-clown variety, but for ultimate, screaming, what-mind-would-have-designed-this? rides head for the **Gold Coast theme parks** (p303).



Take them snorkelling (but make sure they can swim first) on the **Great Barrier Reef** (p387) or the **Whitsunday Islands** (p406). Instil a deep appreciation of Australia's unique natural heritage by taking them on a **bushwalk** (p64), and reward (or bribe) their gutsy efforts with American-style junk food – the East Coast has oodles of outlets.

And if there's a whimper from the back seat threaten them with the **Big Banana** (p260) at Coffs Harbour, the awfully bloated potato, the truly frightening fibreglass crayfish and the huge...

And if all that fails, leave them at home with a sitter and the TV.

On the Road



RYAN VER BERKMOES Coordinating author

See that little dot way up there where the sand almost vanishes? That's me. Really. Look harder – I'm there. This is one of the endless beaches at Wooyung Nature Reserve (p279) just up the coast from Byron Bay (p271). This is what the North Coast beaches of New South Wales are about: getting lost so nobody can find you.



PETER DRAGICEVICH Another day, another blissfully deserted, seemingly endless surf beach. One day I spotted a sole dingo wandering a similar beach and another time there were dozens of kangaroos. However on this day, at Middle Beach in Mimosa Rocks National Park (p149), it was just me and a whole lot of nothing.



JUSTIN FLYNN The clouds were coloured like asphalt and the wind and tropical rain strong enough to rip two big branches off the tree next to my room in Mission Beach (p440). 'Just drizzle', the lodge owner said to me as she busily went about removing the branches. I'd hate to see a downpour!



PAUL HARDING Cassowaries, crocs, koalas, stingers...lots of yellow-diamond signs warn you of things to look out for in Far North Queensland. At the entry to Cow Bay (p470) on the beautiful rainforest road to Cape Tribulation (p472) this sign warns of cassowaries crossing. It wasn't long after that I spotted a real one, fortunately not crossing the road.

CATH LANIGAN I'd just finished eating a perfectly cooked salmon fillet and was sitting on the pub deck contemplating the slow revolution there's been in pub food in Gippsland (p107) in the past decade. No more fried everything, the food coming out of some pub bistros is some of the area's best.



ALAN MURPHY With crystal-clear waters lapping against powder-white beaches and stunning bush-land areas that are ideal for walking, boredom on Straddie (p330) is not an option. Here I'm trekking through Blue Lake National Park, which is made up of dense Australian bush, and looking forward to a dip in the deep, cool waters of the lake.



ROWAN MCKINNON This is a special place for me – St Andrews Beach, neighbour to the more famous Gunnamatta (p105). I got my best-ever tube ride here as a young surfer when the swell was big and I was fearless. Now, half a lifetime later, I look on and think I should take up surfing again.



OLIVIA POZZAN Noosa's (p345) deeply ingrained surfing culture lured me onto a board and into the surf. There were no hang-tens or smooth moves, but in the warm sunshine and natural beauty of Little Cove, I found my inner surfer-chick.

For full author biographies see p512.

