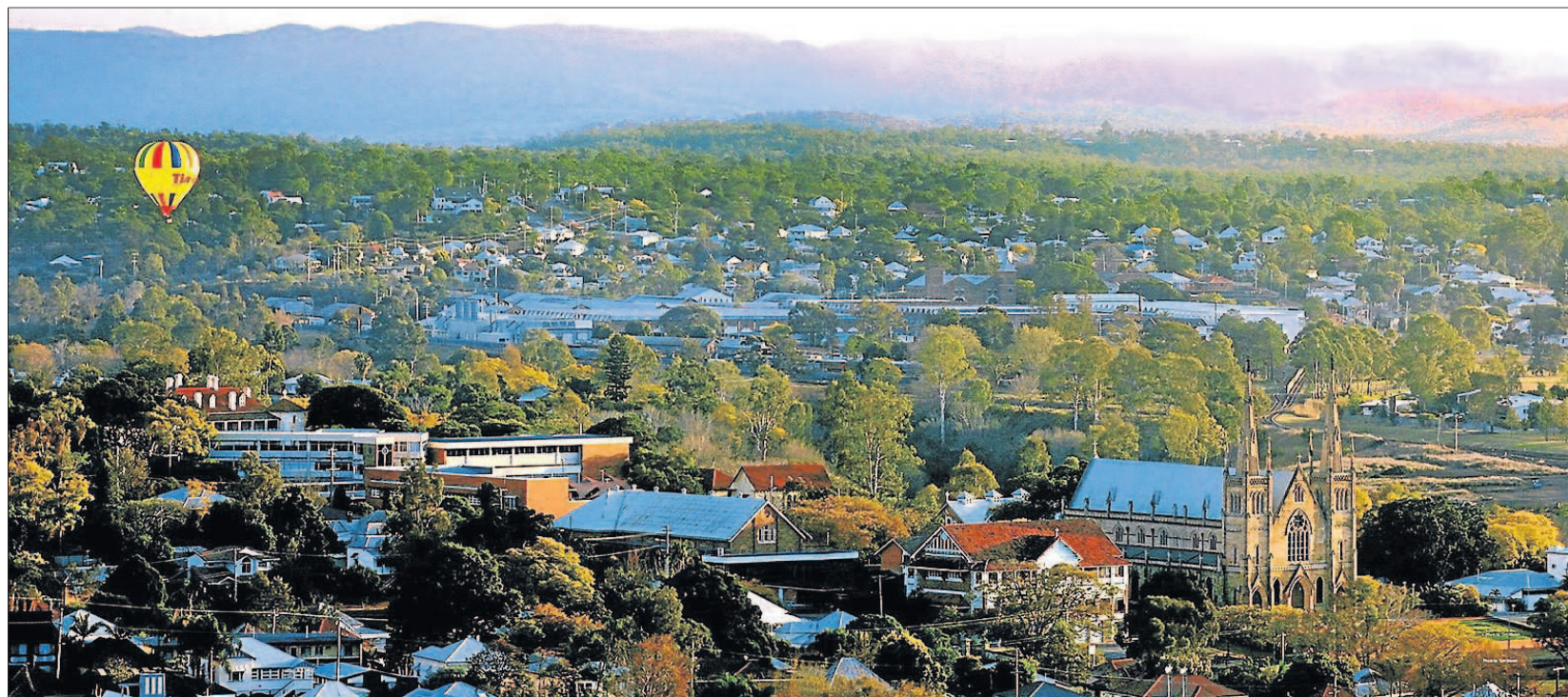


Explore Queensland's picturesque countryside the traditional way

short trips



A hot-air balloon gracefully glides over South-East Queensland countryside. The Ipswich Mountains are in the background. The balloon's pilot learnt to fly in France. Pictures courtesy of Floating Images Hot Air Balloon Flights.

French touch

STAY at the Club Med Opio En Provence in France for seven nights from \$1098 per person, twin share. The price includes superior accommodation (upgrade options are available), all-day dining, open bar and snacking served during the day and night, sports and leisure activities with tuition, supervised activities and child care for kids and live entertainment. Book by November 30 for travel until April 30. Black out dates apply between December 21 and January 1.

■ Details: www.clubmed.com.au or call 1800 258 263.

Celebrate

HOTELS in Bali have joined celebrations across Indonesia following the United Nations recognition of the Indonesian batik as one of the world's most important cultural traditions. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono asked all citizens to wear batik on October 2 to commemorate the news that the traditional Indonesian textile would be added to the Intangible Cultural Heritage list of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

■ Details: www.westpaceshotels.com

Drive away

MOTORING enthusiasts are invited to register interest in Auzrun, a seven-day event that will see 50 luxury, character and super cars travel through South Australia, Victoria, NSW and Queensland. The non-competitive event begins in Adelaide on February 28 and will see Ferraris, Lamborghinis, Maseratis, V8s, V10s and V12s taking scenic routes along Australia's eastern coast. Drivers will have the opportunity to participate in two controlled track events at Historic Sandown in Melbourne and Eastern Creek Raceway in Sydney.

■ Details: www.auzrun.com

High tea

COMBINING gourmet teas, champagne, a delicious mix of sweet and savoury finger foods and views of Sydney Harbour, Captain Cook Cruises' newly launched High Tea at Sea is a good way to spend an afternoon. The cruise is the first high tea cruise on Sydney Harbour and boasts a menu designed by MasterChef series one contestant Lucas Parsons and Captain Cook Cruises head chef Dennis Yang. High tea cruises will operate every Wednesday and Saturday at 2.30pm from Jetty 6, Circular Quay, and return at 3.45pm. The cruise is priced at \$45 per person.

■ Details: www.captaincook.com.au

Surrealism in the sky

BY JESSICA MARSZALEK

AS WE rise higher I feel like Charlie floating away in Willy Wonka's chocolate factory after sneaking one of those fizzy drinks.

But no amount of burping will bring me down.

Not with that massive hot air balloon above my head.

I had wondered how scary it might be to lean over the side of the wicker basket some 610 metres in the air and stare downward as we clambered aboard for our dawn flight across Ipswich, west of Brisbane.

It turns out hot-air ballooning was such a surreal experience I was not one bit scared.

While I peered down at miniature towns and tiny trees, my body seemed to consider the concept of being suspended so high up by just a pocket of air too ridiculous to really take in.

Our pilot, Graeme, explains how he steers the balloon by adjusting our altitude and points out landmarks as we drift west over suburbs and occasional barking dogs.

We check out tiny planes parked at the Amberley RAAF air base before following snaking rivers out to farmlands and the chiselled country on our one-hour flight.

But it's not all about the views, as magnificent as they are.

There's something special about travelling in one of the oldest flying aircraft and experiencing the same awe our ancestors must have felt as far back as the first successful hot-air balloon flight in 1783.



An aerial shot of the Woodlands of Marburg property. The land was bought to relocate a thriving sawmill business in 1870. Pictures courtesy of Woodlands of Marburg.

Pilot Graeme learnt to fly balloons in France and has flown over three continents, including Europe's highest mountain, Mt Blanc.

In 1998 he began Floating Images and says it's one of the few outfits that affords both city and country views — just 40 minutes from Brisbane.

In fact we had started our weekend in Brisbane with a Friday night stay at chic Hotel Urban, at Spring Hill, ahead of a 4am wake-up.

Watching the sun set on the work week, we lounge around on our balcony overlooking peaceful parklands and the night lights of a city.

Down the road was Libertine Restaurant — a French-colonial bordello-style setting dripping with antique chandeliers and bathed in dim lighting.

It's an intimate setting, perfect for its French-Vietnamese cuisine designed to share.

It also serves some of the best hand-crafted cocktails I've tasted.



A basket full of flyers prepare to go up, up and away.

On night two, we stay at the site of a former sawmill at Marburg, now a boutique hotel based around its heritage-listed 1889 plantation-style mansion.

Woodlands of Marburg's history is interesting.

First a sawmill, it later had a sugar mill and rum distillery before a deep financial depression led to its auction in 1905.

In 1946 it became a mission and in 1986 became part of Ipswich Grammar School before it

transformed into a hotel and popular wedding venue in 2002.

A three-course dinner is in the wood-panelled dining room where we select wine from the nearby Warrego Winery.

It turns out to be a great selection, especially because it sports one of the most unusual wine labels we've ever read.

"Many of the German immigrants living in Marburg were very fortunate if they survived the sea journey from



Woodlands of Marburg has a sandstone cellar, which is perfect for intimate functions.

Europe on ships such as the *Wandrahm*," it reads.

"... We guarantee you will not perish from drinking this pleasant fruity Verdelho, rather raise a glass to toast the fact that you are alive and in good health here in sunny Australia."

■ For more information about Floating Images visit www.floatingimages.com.au or call 07 3294 8770.

■ For more information about Woodlands of Marburg visit www.woodlandsofmarburg.com