

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Five great family holiday destinations

By Ashleigh Mills

Nothing was more exciting growing up than the great Australian holiday. Usually taken in the car, the journey began with arguments about who was going to sit where and ended with "I Spy" games and long days by the beach. In recent times, domestic family travel has been replaced by cheap flights and package holidays to places like Bali, Fiji and Hawaii. But recent trends suggest the tables may turn. With the Australian dollar continuing to fall, Tourism Research Australia suggests that domestic travel is on the rise for families and singles alike. Taking the family on an in-country holiday not only benefits our economy but also gives the little ones an opportunity to learn about our culture, environment and history.

Here are five great picks for families for your next Australian holiday.

Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

Our nation's capital puts a lot on the table where families can learn and have fun. A day can slip away at Questacon, The National Science and Technology Centre. Only the brave will attempt to battle the crowds on weekends, but those that swing by midweek are in for a treat. The centre has over 200 exhibits (the hands on kind) and a spectacular science show.

No Canberra trip is complete without a visit to the Australian War Memorial. This interactive environment is a great way to introduce young ones to



Australian wartime history. Visit the Discovery Zone to see inside a trench and listen to wartime stories of home and abroad.

With the sun out, seize the moment and head to Tidbinbulla Nature Reserve. This nature park, a fifty-

minute drive out of Canberra, covers an area of 54 square kilometers. The park includes a series of well-trodden trails, a discovery park and an animal sanctuary. Complete the trip back to the city by stopping to send a message into outer space from the Deep Space Communications complex.



How about a home swap?

Home swapping is on the rise as a cheap and comfortable way for families to travel, both in Australia and overseas. Companies such as Love Home Swap have seen a rise in recent years of the number of Australians registering their homes for exchange. The system works by trading your home for a holiday in someone else's. Families not only enjoy more space and save on the cost of accommodation, but can benefit from the additions thrown in like the family car and bikes, (not to mention, a built in pet sitter.)

Tony Bradford, from Kensington in Sydney, is a client of Love Home Swap, and is a huge fan. "We get to stay in real family homes and experience living in communities like a local...it saves us money and is so much more comfortable than traditional accommodation. This is the only way we travel now as a family", he says.

The Blue Mountains, NSW

Stunning in summer, cosy in winter, The Blue Mountains are a great pick for families all year round. A rite of passage in the mountains for everyone is a trip to Scenic World (as kitsch as it seems). Here, take a trip on the world's steepest railway, ride the cable car or walk the skywalk above Jamieson Valley. Plan ahead, as weekends around these parts can get crowded.

Fun for all ages, the Jenolan Caves, is found at the foothills of the mountains. Children under the age of six can enter the

world's oldest cave system for free and those between the ages of 6 to 12 will love the 'Stones and Bones' tour. Held every weekend this children's only tour is an imaginative treasure hunt through the caves. But this attraction is not just for the little ones. Jenolan also runs school holiday adventure camps for teenagers, which promote confidence, teamwork and fun.

With stunning walks and picnic spots, there's plenty to do without reaching for the wallet. Before leaving, a visit to the famous Leura Toy Shop with its floor to ceiling displays is a must (and will bring out the child in everyone!).

Litchfield National Park, NT

Just an hour and a half from Darwin, Litchfield National Park is a great introduction to the Top End without having to drive for hours. Covering an area of 1500 square kilometers the park is home to a number of cascading rivers and waterfalls, Aboriginal sacred sites and homesteads.

The most popular swimming holes, Buley Rockhole, Wangi and Florence Falls have picnic facilities and are easily accessible by sealed roads. While one-day tours from Darwin are possible, this will feel a little rushed. Staying in one of the campsites in the park itself will add to the experience. The nearby town of Batchelor is also a popular base with a number of holiday parks to choose from.

Stopping by the Adelaide River on the way back to Darwin for a Jumping Crocodile cruise is a must. The trip is suitable for the whole family, with safe and knowledgeable guides, (and lots of crocs of course!). For a swimming hole where the crocs aren't an issue, Leanyer Recreation Park in Darwin is a free and fun way to cool off.

The Gold Coast, QLD

Who could ever complain about a holiday that includes a roller coaster ride? Easily accessible from Brisbane or Coolangatta airport, The Gold Coast is home to Australia's biggest theme parks; Sea World, Wet n Wild, Dreamworld, Magic Mountain and Movie World. Every Aussie kid should go at least once! Save and plan ahead by looking for online specials and group deals for tickets. There's plenty here to mix it up with too.

For nature lovers, beautiful Burleigh Heads National Park is just a twenty-minute drive from the Gold Coast. The park is home to rainforests, eucalyptus, nature trails and whale watching. Organise a walking tour with the Yugambah people through Jellurgal Cultural Centre to learn about this



park's significance in Aboriginal history. To cuddle up with a feathered friend, head north of Coolangatta to Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary. This sanctuary includes a high ropes course where the kids can burn off some energy and watch vets in action in the sanctuary hospital.

If this all sounds a little exhausting, there is plenty of opportunity for down time at one of the many patrolled beaches.

Perth, WA

For those of us living on the eastern seaboard, Perth is often considered a little out of reach. But with a number of airlines now offering deals, a trip to the west is now much more affordable.

The number one plan for most visitors to Western Australia is to take a ferry ride to Rottnest Island. This turquoise playground has more than fifty beaches and plenty of activities to keep families occupied. Snorkelling, fishing, cycling and walking are just some of the ways to explore.

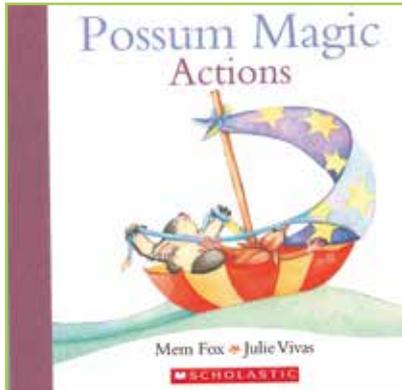
Perth city has plenty on offer as well. Rio Tinto Naturescape Park is free to enter and provides hours of outdoor fun. Not designed for a quiet picnic, the aim of this park is to reconnect families with nature and encourage safe risk taking. Here the kids can wade through creeks, get dirty and build their own cubbies. For something a little cleaner, head to the city centre to take a tour of Perth Mint. Highlights include the chance to watch gold pouring and engrave your own coin. For animal lovers, the small but well run Perth Zoo is worth a look before the journey home.

So plan your next family adventure in Australia, because there's no place like home. **af**



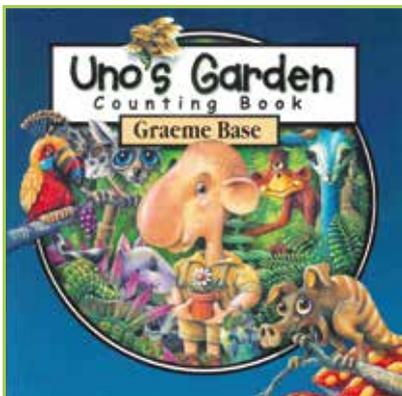
kidstuff

POSSUM MAGIC - ACTIONS
by Mem Fox, Julie Vivas,
Omnibus \$9.99



For the younger fry, the famous story is pared back to all of the favourite characters engaged in simple action words.

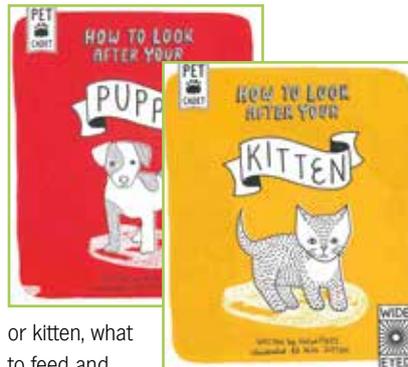
UNO'S GARDEN COUNTING BOOK
by Graeme Base, Penguin
\$14.99



A lift-the-flap version of the weird and wonderful creatures in Uno's garden for the very young, which also encourages learning to count from one to 10. Each illustration contains progressively more detail for children to seek out!

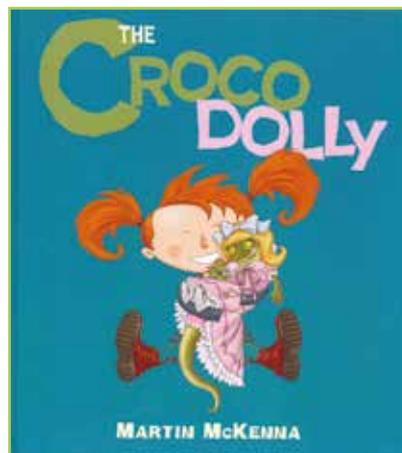
PET CADET: HOW TO LOOK AFTER YOUR PUPPY, HOW TO LOOK AFTER YOUR KITTEN by Helen Piers, illustrated by Kate Sutton, Allen & Unwin, \$12.99

Pet Cadet handbooks provide young animal owners with all the information they need to look after their new pet. Illustrated with cute black and white cartoon drawings, information includes how to choose a puppy



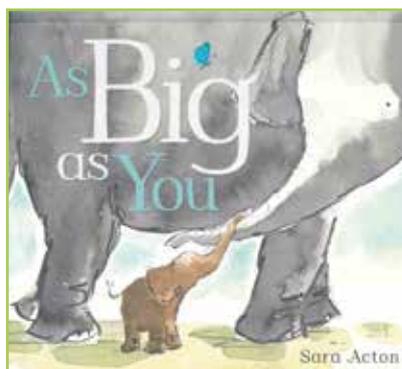
or kitten, what to feed and how to care for them; as well as training tips and even cat language meanings and puppy tricks to teach.

THE CROCO DOLLY by Martin McKenna, Omnibus \$24.95



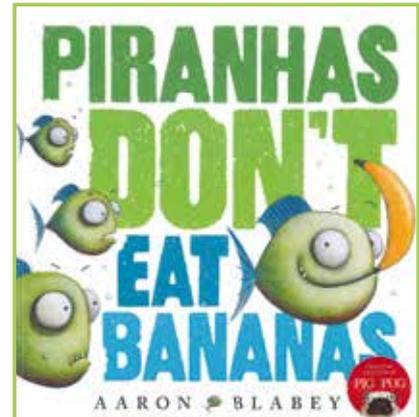
Delightful story of feisty Adelaide, who doesn't have a good track record with pets – but wants one of course. So when Ozzy the Crocodile emerges one day from the egg carton, she makes up her mind to disguise and keep him – with amusing consequences!

AS BIG AS YOU by Sara Acton,
Scholastic Press, 24.99



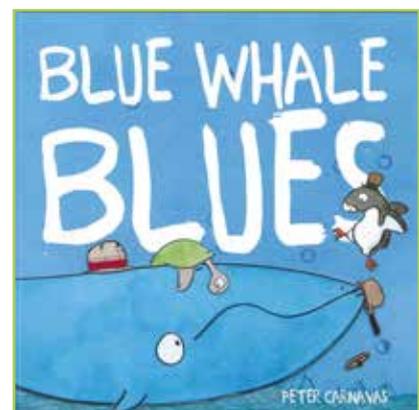
Here's a book with a difference – it opens vertically! That's because this is the story of Claude – a very large elephant! But this is also the story of Finlay – who is not so big and in a hurry to grow up.

PIRANHAS DON'T EAT BANANAS
by Aaron Blabey,
Scholastic Press, \$16.99



A very "cheeky" take on what piranhas will and won't eat. Brian the piranha loves his fruit – the other piranhas point out that they don't! Still they grudgingly give fruit a go; a funny story that might encourage more fruit eating in your house from the author of Pig the Pug.

BLUE WHALE BLUE by Peter Carnavas,
New Frontier Publishing, \$24.99



To the sea this time and Whale is singing the blues – because he can't get his bike (a dumped shopping trolley) and his helmet (an old saucepan) to work. Subtle message about human junk that ends up in water habitats but told with a twist!