



## travel feature

### TWEED VALLEY: THE OTHER SIDE OF PARADISE

Lush rainforests. Rambling rivers. Rustic roadside stalls selling the freshest of local produce. Quaint art and craft villages centred around historic pubs ...

It's not exactly the sort of holiday experience people normally associate with the glitzy Gold Coast but, just south of the Queensland border within a short drive of the Gold Coast Airport, the Tweed Valley presents a very different side of paradise.

Sheltered within the eroded caldera of an ancient shield volcano, the Valley and its surrounding escarpment has recently been classified as one of Australia's National Landscapes – one of only eight areas selected by Tourism Australia as “a must-see destination for travellers who want to get off the beaten track to experience the real Australia”.

This listing puts the Tweed Valley – or, more correctly, the Mt Warning *Wollumbin* Caldera – on a par with the Red Centre, Kakadu, Sydney's Blue Mountains and Victoria's Great Ocean Road.

Its proximity to the airport makes this the most accessible of all the National Landscapes for international visitors and yet, most Australian travellers – and even some south-east Queensland locals – are unaware of its treasures.

One of the best places to appreciate the scope and extraordinary geography of this vast green cauldron is from Springbrook's Best of All Lookout in the Gold Coast hinterland.

A short walk through lush Gondwanan rainforest and past a stand of 2000-year-old Antarctic beech trees brings you out onto the rim of the caldera. From here you can clearly see the rugged escarpment cliffs, streaked by sheer waterfalls, curving east to the coast and west towards the Border Ranges.

Down in the bowl of the valley, the rich volcanic soils nurture a patchwork of canefields, organic market gardens and plantations quilted with tea, coffee, macadamias, bananas and lemon myrtle, all circling around the majestic peak of Mt Warning.

There's so much to see and do in this Garden of Eden that you could easily spend a week or more exploring every nook and cranny, following the loops and trails of the Rainforest Way touring route that links the 14 World Heritage National Parks in and around the caldera.

As such, the most logical place to start is at the World Heritage Rainforest Centre in Murwillumbah where a diorama shows the physical layout of the volcanic shield and various displays highlight the incredible biodiversity of flora and fauna found in the valley.

For a spectacular view of the real thing, you can then go to the Tweed River Regional Art Gallery where the panorama of the valley and Mt Warning seen from the verandah almost overshadows the exceptional collection of portrait and exhibition artwork inside.

As the commercial hub of the valley, Murwillumbah has plenty of great cafes and restaurants to try, the historic Imperial Hotel that dates back to 1928, specialty food stores like the Modern Grocer and more wonderful local art at the Escape Gallery.

Heading out of town on the Numinbah Road takes you through tranquil rolling pastures to Crystal Creek where you can visit the pint-sized horses, cows and donkeys bred at Crystal Creek Miniatures and stop for a snack at the Parrot Garden Café, home to a menagerie of pet llamas, alpacas and miniature goats.

A detour along Upper Crystal Creek Road into the base of the escarpment leads you to Crystal Creek Rainforest Retreat, a beautiful hideaway offering uber-deluxe cabin accommodation.

Back on the Numinbah Road, continue the journey to Chillingham and the rustic Banana Cabana roadside stall. With a little forward notice, farmer Buck Buchanan will take you on a tour of his bush tucker garden where you can sample unique Tweed fruits like native fingerlimes and exotic Buddha's Hands fruit picked straight from the trees. At Chillingham, you can also buy local pottery at the Old Butcher Shop Gallery and hand-made soaps from the soap factory.

The road through Limpinwood to Tyalgum follows the western wall of the caldera. Stay overnight at the luxurious Limpinwood Lodge and you can soak in the breathtaking views from an outdoor spa!

Tyalgum village is famous for the acoustics of its town hall which attracts some of Australia's finest musicians to the annual Tyalgum Festival of Classical Music each September but at any time of the year, Flutterbies Café and their luscious Flutterbie Cake make Tyalgum a popular stop-over. On Sundays, the crowds flock in for the organic chocolate menu prepared by local chocolatier, Grayle Harlequin.

Depending on the time you have available, you can take the road less travelled, circling around the back of Mt Warning through Brays Creek, Byrill Creek and into Uki via Clarrie Hall Dam; or cut across through Eungella to Mt Warning.

The Mt Warning Road is lined with great places to eat and/or stop overnight, such as Mavis' Kitchen and Cabins, Mt Warning Lodge, Amazing Wollumbin Palms Retreat, the Buddha's Belly and the Mt Warning Caravan Park.

Continuing along this road into the National Park itself will give you a sense of why this mountain is regarded as such a sacred site by the local Aboriginal tribes of the Bundjalung nation. Thick jungle-like rainforest interwoven with babbling streams and waterfalls after a downpour create a mystical timelessness that has inspired countless dreamtime legends over the millennia.

The 200m Lyrebird Track gives you a taste of the magic before you drive onto the nearby village of Uki where you'll get a great view of the mountain from the verandah of the historic Mt Warning Hotel. And if you're still in the mood for bushwalking, there's another short track here behind the craft shops in the Old Buttery that takes you along the river for a little platypus spotting.

There are also a number of retreats and B&B in the Uki area, ranging from the contemporary cabins at EcOasis through to a quirky Italian renaissance-style chateau – Castle on the Hill B&B – that offers art workshops, cooking classes and even a medieval banquet in Lord Todonai's Hall.

The rambling country road from Uki to Stokers Siding offers one picture postcard view after another enroute to Bob Connery's renowned Stokers Siding Pottery and on through the Burringbar Range to Mooball.

You'll know you're getting close to this quirky township when you start seeing spots – on the telegraph poles, the petrol station, the local café and even the wheelie bins. The residents here have painted black and white cow patches on pretty much anything that doesn't moo-ve and the collection of cow-inspired arts, crafts and souvenirs in the gift shop has to be seen to be believed.

To complete the circuit – and the Tweed experience – you can return to your starting point via Tweed Coast Way through the seaside settlements and uncrowded beaches of Pottsville, Hastings Point, Cabarita, Casuarina, Salt Village and Kingscliff.

With so many fantastic places to stay along the coast, it may take several days as you choose between the luxury of Peppers Salt Resort and Spa, Mantra on Salt Beach, Santai Resort, The Beach at Cabarita, Domain Casuarina Resort and a host of Domain apartments; or you may prefer the laid-back style of a beachfront caravan park or a budget-priced motel.

There are also plenty of attractions to distract you such as Tropical Fruit World, Madura Tea and the small boat whale watching and snorkelling charters that operate from Fingal out to the Cook Island Marine Reserve turtle sanctuary just off shore.

Heading back to Murwillumbah from the coast gives you one last chance to feel the serenity at Tumbulgum where you can watch the sun set against the backdrop of the river and ranges from the historic Tumbulgum Hotel.

Tweed Tourism can provide details on what's available and make all your reservations, as well as sending you a free copy of their Tweed Coolangatta Visitor Guide. Phone tollfree on 1800 674 414 or go to [www.tweedtourism.com.au](http://www.tweedtourism.com.au).

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**Released by Verve Consulting on behalf of Tweed Tourism**

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