**Country Drives**

When was the last time you packed up the picnic basket, rolled up a rug, put on your sunglasses and headed for the hills? Brisbane boasts plenty of green spaces (parks, reserves and playing fields) for leisure activities, but for city dwellers, there’s nothing like a country sojourn - even for a day - to refresh the mind and broaden the horizons.

Brisbane’s wider surrounds feature patchwork fields, the smell of eucalyptus, the sound of whip birds, crackling wood fires and the refreshment of clean, cool, crisp country air. Visit a winery and sample some of the prize-winning vintages, browse local shops for high-quality arts and crafts, go horse-riding, stock up on just-picked local produce at a variety of country markets and roadside stalls or enjoy farm-fresh food, cooked to perfection, at a range of out-of-town eateries.

### Take a drive on the wild side

If the closest you come to wildlife encounters is observing the daily dusk flight of bats headed for their feeding grounds, or the occasional bush turkey wandering through your garden, it’s time to get better acquainted with a greater range of our native fauna - large and small. Take a drive 90 minutes north of Brisbane and check out the remarkable array of wildlife - including endangered species - residing at Australia Zoo.

### Best of the West

Discover the charms of Boonah Shire in the heart of the Scenic Rim and one of Brisbane’s most in-demand regional destinations.

The 90-minute drive south-west from downtown Brisbane to Boonah is a scenic pleasure, featuring rolling hills dotted with classic old Queenslander homes.

If you want to see one of the world’s richest agricultural valleys and visit quaint country towns then a day trip to the Lockyer Valley, approximately an hour’s drive west of Brisbane, is a perfect way to spend the day. Nestled between Ipswich and Toowoomba, the valley has many natural offerings and scenic drives.

Head off on a leisurely hour-long drive south-west of Brisbane to the Valley of the Lakes in Esk Shire, and explore the area’s characterful townships, rustic country charm, genuine hospitality, magnificent dams and panoramic views, and relaxing scenic drives.

### Head to the hinterland

Not far from Brisbane is a hidden pocket of rural countryside, undisturbed rainforest, quaint villages and gourmet restaurants. For a relaxing day trip north of the city and suburbs, take some time to explore the Hinterland region of Samford, Dayboro and Mt Mee. (Approximately 45 minutes north-west from Brisbane city.)

Escape the city and head for the hills - and the lofty heights of Mt Glorious, Mt Nebo and Mt Mee. At the very edge of Brisbane, in Pine Rivers Shire lie beautiful villages, rainforest walks, stunning lookouts and cosy places to eat and drink. Travel time to Pine Rivers from the city is 25 minutes.

The towns of Maleny, Montville and Mapleton, about an hour’s drive north of Brisbane in the Sunshine Hinterland are perched amongst lush green fields and pockets of rainforest on the Blackall Range. Rural charm and a wonderful variety of galleries, gourmet eateries and small shops make this drive a trip to remember. Aside from the built attractions, the views to the Sunshine Coast beaches are spectacular.

And if you like a theme to flavour your rural drives, try the wineries tour suggested by popular television show, The Great South East. Beginning and ending in downtown Brisbane, the trip covers some 200km and includes award-winning wineries, charming townships and the Scenic Rim’s spectacular scenery. (Be sure to stop for melt-in-your-mouth scones at Myra and Maurice Toombs’ Mackaways Café, and grab homemade crafts and condiments across the street at Mrs P’s Country Cottage & Crafts).

### Country markets

Enjoy the lively atmosphere, handicrafts and just-picked freshness of local produce at a variety of country markets.

* Visit the Pickle Pot with its excellent range of jams, chutneys and pickles - and check out the resident farm animals - at the North Pine Country Market, held every Sunday at Petrie, 8am-noon.
* The Boonah Country Markets are held at Springleigh Park, a beautiful park setting, on the 2nd and 4th Saturday each month, 8am-12.30pm.
* Loved by locals and visitors alike, the Fernvale Markets, in Esk Shire, are held every Sunday from 6am until noon. Stall offerings include lots of plants and second-hand goods, fruit and vegetables direct from the farmer, books, and handmade soap. Don’t forget to taste test the local olives!
* Pick up fresh, local vegetables and salad ingredients from Gatton’s country markets:  
  1st Sunday of the month at Gatton Rotary Park, 7am-noon   
  2nd Saturday of the month at Gatton State School, 6am-noon
* The Laidley Village Markets are held every Friday in Patrick Street, 7am-1pm.
* With more than 200 stalls, the Tamborine Mountain Country Markets, held at the Tamborine Mountain Showground on the 2nd Sunday of the month, 8am-2pm, feature homegrown, handcrafted and home-baked goods for sale.
* Crafts, plants, food, produce in season, woodwork, jewellery and second-hand goods can be found at the Woodford Country Markets, held on the 3rd Sunday of the month, 6am-1pm.