

GIRLS JUST WANT TO HAVE FUN

COMBINING THE BEST OF BEACH AND CITY ATTRACTIONS, SYDNEY SETS THE SCENE FOR A WHIRLWIND WEEKEND

WORDS AND PHOTOS: JULES INGALL

Most of us have travelled to Sydney, but if you're anything like me, every trip has been for a purpose — work or an event.

The cosmopolitan capital isn't somewhere I would usually go for a holiday, yet there are so many things on my bucket list that I never seem to find the time to tick off.

So, with the help of some friends, I headed off on a girls' weekend to find some hidden gems in a city that has been Instagrammed, photographed and written about countless times. I'm talking about a bunch of girls, leaving husbands, partners, pets and kids behind and taking off on an easy escape. With Sydney just a short and fairly cheap flight away, it's as viable a plan as any road trip.

My favourite thing about Sydney is the beachside suburbs, so our first stop had to be Bondi Beach.

Hotel and Airbnb options abound, but with traffic and parking so hectic, finding somewhere central should be a priority.

My top pick is QT Bondi on Beach Road, with a Woolworths and liquor store beneath high-end hotel apartments. In true QT style, the service is first class and the venue quirky and fun.

From here, you can explore without any need for a car — for extra pedal power, the hotel has bikes.

As for that bucket list I mentioned, I've always wanted to do the iconic Bondi to Bronte walk.

Starting at Bondi Beach, you stroll along tall sandstone clifftops with spectacular panoramic views of the ocean and luxurious homes that fringe the track.

The walk is about 1.5km and takes — very conservatively — about an hour, including plenty of stops to snap photos along the way.

Tamarama Beach is a great coffee stop, with a cute little cafe on the beach.

Bronte is home to one of the most famous beach baths in Sydney, but there are actually 44 in total, so plenty to choose from.



Almost every beach in Sydney has a natural rock pool for those who want a more protected ocean swim and most of them don't cost a thing. While a dip in an ocean pool is a calming experience, the waves crashing over the rock walls make for dramatic images.

Another option for walkers is Hornby Lighthouse. Take the 15 minute drive via the exclusive Sydney suburb of Vaucluse and park at the pretty beach at Camp Cove.

This track is loved by locals but not overrun by tourists. Hornby Lighthouse is

charmingly painted in red and white stripes making it a striking landmark on the entry to Sydney Harbour and Watsons Bay.

After our fill of fresh air, it's time to hit the streets of Bondi for cafes, restaurants and boutique shopping. The markets held at Campbell Parade every Sunday from 10am to 4pm offer fresh flowers, food, fashion and local crafts.

But you shouldn't visit Sydney without a sojourn at the heart of the action.

One of the delights of a city escape is



NOMADS DRIVE TREND

The serviced apartment sector is seeing an increase in road-tripping tribes punctuating their travels with more comfortable stopovers, according to Oaks Hotels & Resorts. Parents are packing up the family home, pulling the kids out of school and setting Google Maps to "explore" in search of an all-Aussie, off-road adventure.

Recent forecasts by the Caravan Industry Association of Australia tip Aussies will take off on 11.9 million domestic caravan and camping trips this year. Hoteliers are recognising the demand for affordable, self-contained accommodation in key stop-off points to break up lengthy expeditions.

"What starts out as a two or three-month stint away from home can often turn into 12 months or longer and subsequently we've noticed a rise in families seeking a brief reprieve from life on the road and the creature comforts a home base can bring," Minor Hotels Australia and New Zealand chief operating officer Craig Hooley says.

"Our properties in road-tripping hot spots such as Broome, Darwin, Port Douglas, Port Stephens and the Sunshine Coast have welcomed nomadic families from all over. With the freedom to travel off-peak, these families can also take advantage of excellent accommodation deals."

Testament to this movement is travelling tribe The Blonde Nomads (pictured).

Recently stopping off at Oaks Cable Beach Sanctuary in Broome as part of their lap of Australia, Tracy, Rob, Marli and Ziggy aim to inspire other families to leave routine and embark on an adventure.