



# Irresistible lure of a family playground

From fishing to fine dining - a Central Coast experience is as varied as the landscape, writes **Mike Smith**

**C**HOOSING how best to spend a holiday on the NSW Central Coast is child's play. While youngsters can debate whether to build sand castles or cuddle koalas, adults also have a wide range of activities to choose from that will keep them busy from dawn until after dusk.

If they want to be active, that is.

To charge the batteries of a morning there is kayaking across Brisbane Water and Broken Bay, riding a horse in Glenworth Valley or testing the surfing conditions off Avoca Beach.

Dine on locally caught fish for lunch and the afternoon will present a few more outdoor options, from exploring the walking trails of coastal Bouddi National Park to spotting humpback whales from the top of Crackneck Lookout near Bateau Bay.

A popular daily attraction, particularly for children, is the 3pm pelican-feeding session at The Entrance.

Judging by the variety and number of natural and man-made attractions on the Central Coast, visitors will need to set aside more than a couple of days to enjoy all that the area, which caters for all ages, budgets and tastes, has to offer.

"Because we are so close to Sydney, the Central Coast is Sydney's playground. And during a recent meeting we have banned sharks," jokes Terrigal local Bob Lloyd. "We have great beaches, top restaurants and the weather is generally milder than in Sydney."

To plant one's toes in the sand is to be immersed in

a beach culture far more relaxed than that of Sydney, a one-hour to 90-minute drive to the south.

When children tire of the surf, sun and sand, they can get up close and friendly with wildlife at one of the Central Coast's handful of sanctuaries.

Adults can make themselves just as much at home, with secluded luxury retreats and a wide selection of outdoor and indoor restaurants to choose from.

A Central Coast experience is a picture of diversity, one to match its landscape of lakes, sandy beaches, soaring headland cliffs and lush green valleys.

From the Hawkesbury River in the south, where seafood lovers can hop on board a Crab & Oyster Cruise departing Kangaroo Point near fishing village Brooklyn, to Budgewoi in the north and the hinterland west of the F3, there is much to see and do.

Not far from the freeway that links Sydney with Newcastle (and beyond) is Ourimbah State Forest and the new TreeTop Adventure Park, where visitors, young and young-at-heart, can swing along on a flying fox and walk across suspension bridges, strung up to 15m above the forest floor.

A long-time family favourite is the multi-award-winning Australian Reptile Park at Somersby, again inland but very much a part of a Central Coast break.

The park's Lost World of Reptiles exhibit has one of the largest collection of reptiles in Australia, with saltwater crocodiles, American alligators, giant tortoises and fat pythons on display. >>



Hooked: (clockwise from top) an early morning on a jetty overlooking Brisbane Water; some froggy friends at the Australian Beach in the Munmorah State Recreation Reserve; and a family enjoying a walk on a suspension bridge. Main picture: Grenville Turner

