

DEPARTURE LOUNGE

Fast forward in a Queensland gambit

PENNY HUNTER



Travel + Indulgence returns from holidays inspired with an idea for a Netflix miniseries. It would be called *The Queensland Gambit* and it could be the next big hit.

Set in these pandemic times, the plot would centre around a family of four that has hoped for months to drive north from Sydney to Queensland to celebrate Christmas with relatives. So optimistic are they that travel restrictions will allow them to cross the border, they buy a new car so they can ride in comfort, that is, in a vehicle that has functioning airconditioning, won't leak when it rains and doesn't smell like a wet dog. Months out, they book a hotel in Brisbane, paying extra for a flexible cancellation policy.

Things are looking good but as departure day looms, a coronavirus cluster emerges on

the northern beaches. Then cases start popping up in Croydon and southwest Sydney. Suddenly their trip is in jeopardy. Should they leave early and make a run for it? Decisive action is required. However, one family member wakes with a sore throat and must queue for hours at a drive-through testing clinic. After an anxious wait, the results come through late that night — negative. With the closure of Queensland's border imminent, they are now in a race against time.

The housesitter is summoned early; the car is loaded in a rush. They hit the freeway north, aiming for Wallangarra where, according to the latest news bulletins, the "gates" will close at 1am. One hour in, the teenagers demand fast food. The parents acquiesce, but the place is crowded and they are greeted by

masked staff wielding sanitiser and QR codes; fresh cases have been reported in Newcastle. It feels like the net is closing in. They vow there will be no more fast food.

On a steep ascent along Thunderbolts Way, 45 minutes out of Gloucester, a warning flashes up on the new car's dashboard. Apparently they have engine trouble and should return the vehicle to the dealer immediately. The parents employ their extensive mechanical knowledge and decide the motor sounds fine. "It's probably just an electrical error." They push on.

They stop for dinner in Armidale, eschewing the Golden Arches and other such outlets for takeaway Korean from an eatery that appears to be part of the slow-food movement. It takes an hour. The clock is ticking.

Back on the road, the car passes ominous neon boards warning of Queensland border restrictions. Each family member has applied for and received a border declaration pass on their phone. Will that be enough to satisfy the bureaucrats at the boundary?

The ending for *The Queensland Gambit* may need work, as it's all a bit of an anticlimax. Our quartet crosses the border with three hours to spare, not a police officer in sight. They submit to the required COVID tests and get the all-clear. The reunion with relatives is filled with hugs and relief.

The closing scene would depict the family zooming back into NSW at the Tweed seven days later, gawping in horror at the enormous tailback inching towards Queensland in the opposite direction.

OUT + ABOUT

Heide Museum of Modern Art on the outskirts of Melbourne is hosting a nine-week summer festival aimed at supporting artists and performers impacted by COVID-19. The event kicks off on Sunday with live jazz in the museum's sculpture park, followed by a series of free and ticketed programs of music, dance, storytelling and Indigenous culture that runs until March 7.

■ heide.com.au



River cruise operator **Pandaw** is launching spacious luxury suites (pictured) on a number of its vessels sailing in Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar. The cabins run the full width of the ships and feature a private balcony and lounge, butler service, espresso machine and minibar. Available from August.

■ pandaw.com

Conservation group **Aussie Ark** has succeeded in its bid to buy the 250ha Curricabark property after a month of fundraising that raised more than \$50,000. The land, in the NSW Barrington Tops, is home to 30 threatened native species and will be used to provide habitat for animals cared for by the not-for-profit organisation.

■ aussieark.org.au

Safari company **Asilia Africa** is assisting young Kenyan and Tanzanian employees obtain more hospitality skills to help to weather the economic fallout of COVID-19. The \$US100,000 project, in which all participants receive a diploma, is supported by a Danish investment fund.

■ asiliaafrica.com

TRAVEL + INDULGENCE

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WISH WE WERE HERE



GETTY IMAGES



San Sebastian's cacophonous La Tamborrada festival is said to recall the Spanish city's occupation by Napoleonic forces. Legend has it feisty locals would mock the soldiers as they marched about town in time to military drums. Cooks, milk maids and women collecting water took to banging on whatever vessels they had to hand as a way to thumb their noses at their oppressors. These days, the annual celebration of their patron saint sees thousands of people converge on Constitution Square for the parade's start at midnight on January 19, and the drumming doesn't let up for 24 hours. As seen here, children also get their chance to be seen — and heard. Not surprisingly, 2021's event has been cancelled.

■ sanebastianaturismoa.eus

PENNY HUNTER

GREAT ESCAPES

SAND AND SAVE Enjoy discounts of up to \$375 a person on three-night stays at the newly revamped JW Marriott Gold Coast Resort & Spa. The Flight Centre deal, available on select travel dates to December 16, features accommodation in a Mountain View King room, daily breakfast, welcome bottle of wine, valet parking, Wi-Fi, cocktails and late checkout. From \$599 a person.

■ flightcentre.com.au

CABIN CLASS Ultimate Cruising has savings of \$6000 a cabin on select departures of Ponant's 10-night Kimberley cruises from Darwin to Broome. Also included are two nights' accommodation in Darwin prior to setting sail on either *Le Laperouse* or *Le Bellot*, and return luxury airport transfers.



JW Marriott Gold Coast Resort & Spa

Applies to departures from May to August; from \$11,120 a person, twin-share.

■ ultimatecruising.com.au

EUROPEAN VACATION Viking's 23-day cruises between Amsterdam and Bucharest attract savings of \$2000 a couple plus flight credits for two of up to \$3600. The sailings, which venture from The Netherlands to Romania on the Rhine, Main and Danube rivers, are scheduled for April to October up to 2023. Highlights include the medieval city of Regensburg, and Golubac fortress in Serbia. From \$10,995 a person, twin-share; book by March 31.

■ vikingrivercruises.com.au

STEAMING AHEAD Couples save up to \$530 on four-night Winter Sun sailings on the charming Emmylou paddlesteamer, which plies the Murray River from Echuca. Book by January 31 to enjoy a 10 per cent discount on itineraries that visit wineries, Indigenous sites, farms and a World Heritage-listed river red gum forest. From \$1935 a person, twin-share, including meals, excursions, covered parking, and from April 1, select beer and wine with dinner.

■ cruisetraveller.com.au

SUITE LIFE Penthouse suites with personal butler service are included in Regent Seven Seas' latest cabin-upgrade offer, which applies to bookings by March 1. The Upgrade Your Horizon campaign gives guests the



Le Laperouse in the Kimberley

chance to elevate their stateroom by two categories at no extra cost. Those who upgrade to a Concierge suite will receive one night's pre-cruise accommodation. Cancellations are available up to 15 days before departure, with a 100 per cent future cruise credit.

■ rsc.com

INN LIKE FLYNN The recently opened Flynn hotel in Cairns has complimentary upgrades to Harbour View rooms with two-night stays until March 31. Also included in the offer is a \$75 food and drink credit for use at any of the three Crystalbrook Collection properties in the Queensland city. From \$380 a room.

■ crystalbrookcollection.com

Send Great Escapes to travel@theaustralian.com.au.