

THE INSIDERS BRISBANE

FRANCIS HARTNETT
FOUNDER, INSIDER TOURS**STAY:** The Emporium

A standout boutique luxury hotel with beautiful, modern rooms and impressive service. It has a patisserie with eclairs to die for, and the adjoining modern Italian restaurant, Tartufo, has a brilliant bar. Set in its own retail precinct, there are myriad shopping and dining opportunities right on the doorstep; emporiumhotels.com.au.

FUN: CityCat

CityCat ferries are the most fun you'll have on public transport. Speed along the river to Hamilton Wharf for the Eat Street Markets between Friday and Sunday — more than 60 Asian-inspired pop-up restaurants and live music make a great night out; visitbrisbane.com.au; eatstreetmarkets.com.

SHOP: Winn Lane

This rejuvenated Fortitude Valley lane is now home to eclectic shops including old faves such as The Outpost, boutiques from emerging young designers and vintage gems. A perfect little oasis in the heart of The Valley; winnlane.com.au.

EXPLORE: Convicts and Crime Tour

Immerse yourself in Brisbane's underbelly, from its convict history to contemporary criminals, during our three-hour Convicts and Crime Tour. Held every Saturday in the inner-city area, this walk back in time is guided by university lecturers and academics; insidertours.com.au.

HISTORY: The Museum of Brisbane

A charming space on the top floor of the newly refurbished City Hall. Catch the hauntingly beautiful exhibition *Captured*, a collection of images of Aborigines by early Brisbane photographers. Until June 22; museumofbrisbane.com.au.

INDULGE: Cowch

A dessert and cocktail bar with attitude that serves everything from gourmet pizzas with toppings such as chocolate, marshmallow, cornflakes and crumble to Naked Pop ice-creams, dipped in chocolate and served with three toppings. Try the Cow Punch — seasonal fruits with vodka or whisky — which will blow your socks off; cowch.com.au.

Insider Tours offers historical walks and culinary activities in Brisbane.

BEST
DEALS

BEYOND Travel has discounted its nine-day Grand Russia rail itinerary from St Petersburg to Moscow by up to \$550 a couple, departures August to October, from \$2805 a person twin-share; beyondtravel.com.au.

GREEN
PIECES

KHIRI Travel has partnered with Andaman Discoveries to train 17 tour leaders in the increasingly popular Khao Sok national park area of southern Thailand; the guides are being instructed in botany, English and safety standards; khiri.com.

APT
APP

AUSTRALIA Post's Prepaid TravelSIM app is compatible with iPhone iOS 7+ and Android v4.1+ phones and features 24/7 support and offline maps plus call charge previews. \$49.95; auspost.com.au/travelsim.

WEB
WISE

MSC Cruises has an online brochure with details of departures from October to April 2016; included is a program of deals such as a seven-night Mediterranean cruise from \$679 a person twin-share; msccruises.com.au.

HOME AND AWAY



A VISIT to the lyrically named Land of the Thunder Dragon, the Kingdom of Bhutan high in the Himalayas, once meant rather basic accommodation and no television or internet access. Not any more — the luxurious Zhiwa Ling Hotel at Paro, the only five-star property owned and operated by Bhutanese, is a magnificent example of traditional architecture with all modern amenities as well as a private temple featuring ancient woodwork. The 45-room Zhiwa Ling is nestled near the famous Takshang Monastery (Tiger's Nest), firmly on many a bucket list as one of the world's must-see sites, and just a stone's throw from Mount Jhomolhari, Bhutan's second-highest peak. The resort offers a range of accommodation, including suites, plus two restaurants, a cosy tea house with a wood fire, and a greenhouse. The Menlha Spa promises "a sanctuary where the mind, body and spirits are at ease with the elements", just the shot in a nation that closely values its Gross National Happiness Index. More: zhiwaling.com.

SUZANNE CARAGIANIS, VANESSA HOLOHAN

Zhiwa Ling recently supported the work of Adelaide-based Suzanne Caragianis and Vanessa Holohan during their volunteer mission as upper-limb therapists in Bhutan.

T&I LOVES



IT sounds like the ultimate overnight escape, with exotic sports cars, an idyllic wine region, boutique accommodation and gourmet meals. Prancing Horse's Experience the Yarra Valley by Ferrari packages offer wannabe Formula One stars the chance to drive the new Ferrari 458 Italia, plus other supercars including Porsches, Maseratis, Aston Martins, Lamborghinis and Jaguars. Amateur drivers will test-drive every vehicle on the route from Victoria's Yarra Valley wine region northeast along the picturesque Black Spur Drive through Marysville to Lake Mountain. The 140km return trip will be punctuated with an overnight stay at the luxury Chateau Yering homestead, a three-course dinner at its award-winning restaurant and a gourmet lunch at a Yarra Valley vineyard. A post-drive wine-tasting session at Yering Station Winery will complete the experience. From \$2690 a couple (drivers must be between 30 and 75 years of age); available on selected dates in September and October. Prancing Horse also offers luxury car drives in NSW. More: prancinghorse.com.au.

MICHELLE ROWE

ACCESSORY

CHARLI BIRD
PONCHO, \$249.95

STAY snug on long flights or winter walks in this super-soft poncho from Charli Bird. Handmade in Nepal using locally sourced cashmere and wool, the poncho can be worn three ways (boat neck, cowl neck or V neck) and folds to a fraction of its size, making it perfect to pop in your hand luggage.

Choose from seven colours; free shipping Australia-wide. More: charlibird.com.au.

SHARON
FOWLER



ON THE BENCH

LODGE LOGIC DUTCH
OVEN, \$129

WHO doesn't love the smell of freshly baked bread, particularly as the cold winter months set in? Lodge Logic's 4.7-litre cast iron Dutch oven is perfect for turning out a homemade loaf. The 26cm skillet can be used on all cooktops (its sturdy construction makes it an excellent option for campfires too). It's also handy for whipping up nourishing soups, stews and casseroles. More: kitchenwarehouse.com.au.

MICHELLE ROWE



ON THE ROAD

ESSENZZA NATURAL
FACIAL CLEANSING
WIPES, \$6.95

FACE wipes are essential for holidays of all sorts, whether near or far, and these new grime-busters have a dual function with one side featuring small "raised bumps" to properly penetrate the skin's surface and remove make-up with ease while the reverse is completely smooth, designed to hydrate and soften. Essenza Natural Facial Cleansing Wipes are available in packs of 25 in three varieties — Cleanse + Exfoliate (green packet), Cleanse + Moisturise (blue) and Cleanse + Refresh (pink). Available at leading pharmacies, including Priceline, Terry White and Chemist Warehouse, health food stores and online. More: essenzzahealth.com.

SUSAN KUROSAWA



Cabinets and curiosities in downtown Amman

DOMINIC DUNNE

I HAVE heard about an old stone building in downtown Amman, capital of Jordan, amid cafes, spice markets and clothing shops. Located at 12 King Faisal Street, it's billed as "a laid-back place for writer and artist meetings as well as passers-by interested in art and curiosities".

On my visit I find no writers or artists, and precious little in the way of art and curiosities. It is definitely laid-back. A man at the entrance is reading a newspaper but springs into action as I approach. He turns out to be Abu, the curator, although of what I remain unsure. He enthusiastically shows me a colonial apartment of five rooms ranged around a central salon.

The two-storey building was built in 1922 and rented to the government as the central post office before becoming a hotel for 50 years. In 2001, it was leased to local businessman Mamdouh Bisharat who goes by the title of Duke, claiming the late King Hussein gave him

THE
INCIDENTAL
TOURIST

the honour. He opened it to the public, calling it "Duke of Mukheibeh's Cultural Residence".

While its previous uses might be clear, it's the present that has me beat. I can't work out what exactly it is — maybe a cross between an aged-care home and a second-hand shop — but the rooms do recall an era long past with high ceilings, wonderfully huge arched windows and green-and-white ceramic-tiled floors.

The assortment of stuff in these rooms, however, is intriguing if not bizarre. There are large rag dolls, old books, china cabinets and a 1950s radio. Random oil paintings hang alongside photos just pinned to the walls, including one of the Duke in a spa bath. I walk on to the balcony, which affords an excellent view of the bustling street, and then say goodbye to the curator, who hands me a brochure that says the place "will go into the city's books as a hub for cultural interaction".

After Arabic coffee and sweets in an annoyingly smoke-filled cafe downstairs, I head a short distance to the spectacular ancient site of Jabal al-Qal'a, the Hill of the Citadel, and its adjoining Roman theatre, built to

hold 5000 spectators. Here I find excellent curiosities, including the Jordan Museum of Popular Traditions, in one of the rooms off the side of the Roman theatre. It is full of colourful costumes, jewellery and headwear.

Across the road I see two men on the footpath selling old coins and other collectibles. Among my purchases is a 1937 Australian crown piece I imagine belonged to an Australian Digger sent to the Middle East in World War II. The vendor is wearing well-worn crocodile leather boots that apparently are a novelty. While I'm there a group of youths ask if they can photograph them. He tells me he is the "father of all light" and explains he has lived 1000 years. He wears a string of beads and large silver and stone rings on the fingers of both hands and various medals pinned to his jacket.

He tries to sell me what he insists is a meteorite but for all I know could be a lump of dried camel dung. When I decline, he suggests I come back to visit again so he can tell me about his past lives.

• dukesdiwan.com
• visitjordan.com