

QUEENSLAND

GUIDE TO THE GRANITE BELT WITH KIDS

FIONA HARPER reveals the best things to do,
places to eat and drink and where to stay in
Queensland's Granite Belt

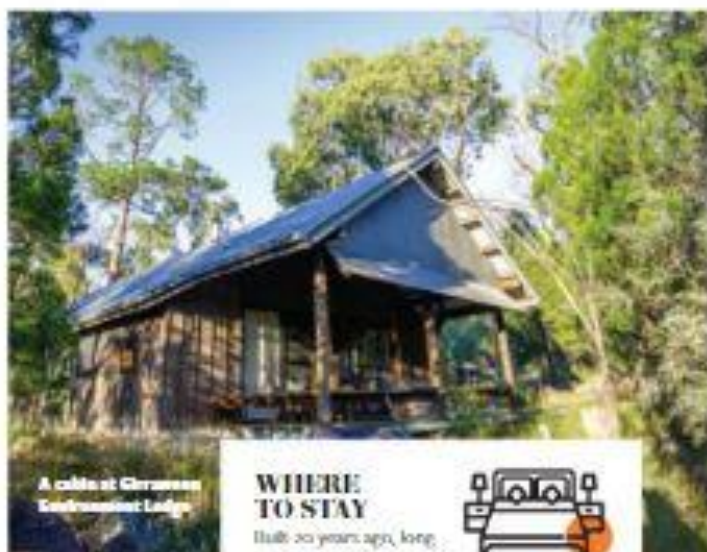
Just 2.5 hours' drive south west of Brisbane near the NSW border, the Granite Belt sits high on a plateau of the Great Dividing Range. The region stretches for 60km, from north to south. The largest town, Stanthorpe, makes a great base to explore the area and its many natural and foodie delights.

Rock formations
in Chrossen
National Park

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THINGS TO DO

Blessed with crisp country air, the Granite Belt has farms, vineyards and orchards for families to discover. Walk the trails of Girraween National Park that wind through macalypt forests, sedgeands and heathlands, keeping an eye out for eastern grey kangaroo, wallabies, echidnas and handkoats. At McMahon Bros Orchard, wander through a well-tended apple orchard with fourth generation orchardist David McMahon, before enjoying the brunch in the Blossoms experience amongst a fruit-laden grove. Back in Stanthorpe, enjoy the exquisite public artworks adorning random buildings, including the quirky interactive murals near the Art Gallery Library that make a great backdrop for a family photo. At 1,200m above sea level, it's not unusual for the landscape to be dusted in snow during particularly brisk winters, reminiscent of northern hemisphere Christmas. So, it's no real surprise that the Granite Belt Christmas Tree Farm, with its exquisite Marlette Stone, Santa's Animal Farm and Rudolph's Ice Cream Bar is a popular destination, no matter the season.



A cabin at Girraween Environmental Lodge

WHERE TO STAY

Built 20 years ago, long before eco-friendly accommodation was a thing, Girraween Environmental Lodge is a low energy wilderness retreat which has minimal impact on the ancient earth it resides upon. The name Girraween means 'place of flowers' and is the traditional home of the Garabul people of the Granite Belt. In spring, the rugged landscape is awash with colourful wildflower displays. Set on 160ha of native bush within a 100km² shrill of Girraween National Park, the lodge is all about getting back to nature. Ten self-contained timber cabins blend effortlessly into their surroundings, providing a comfortable and spacious home away from home. With fully-equipped kitchens, Weber barbecues, bathtubs, wood heaters and timber fire surrounds for warming the nights, snuggly and sound of the bush, the two-bedroom cabins provide spacious accommodation for families and groups travelling together. Take a dip in the freiform rockpool-style pool or soothe legs tired from hiking in the heated spa pool. Wildlife is abundant, with a resident mob of kangaroos that will keep the kids entertained. Alternatively, Straw House Farm Bed & Breakfast at Stanthorpe has friendly highland cattle, miniature goats and alpacas the kids will love. Set on a 6ha property it has two cottages made of straw bales and sisuo, making them warm in winter and cool in summer, with a queen size bed and fold out sofa bed, as well as a tiny house. Take a walk through the apple orchard and sample the fruit in season, visit the chickens and check out the kitchen garden.



Granite Belt Christmas Tree Farm

Image: Tourism and Events Queensland

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WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK

The Granite Belt is a cool-climate premium wine-producing region where produce farmers and winemakers thrive. Cellar doors and restaurants rival Italy for their premium quality. Don't miss vineyards such as Italianelean Estate and its famed Farmil Room Restaurant run by chefs Robbi and Marj Welk, along with Girraween Estate, where owner Steve does everything from tending the vines to manning the cellar door tastings (he's also a keen astronomer with an impressive observatory taking advantage of minimal light pollution). At Balancing Heart Vineyard, 2017 Australian Winemaker of the Year, Mike Hayes, is guiding this Bedding vineyard with aptomb families will love settling upon a picnic rug amongst the vines, where the kids can run free, and parents can soak up the views of the heart-shaped granite rock formation from which the vineyard takes its name. Foodie families should also make time for breakfast on the deck at The Little Larder Stanthorpe, pick up some hand-crafted meats from Zest Pastries and head to Stanthorpe Cheese and Jersey Girls Café for their grand champion Feta in Brine or Blue Lagoon cheese. If the kids are still hungry, pop into historic Wallangarra Railway Station, which straddles the Queensland-NSW border, for afternoon tea on the platform. 96

The writer was a guest of Girraween Environmental Lodge and Granite Belt Wine Country. **MORE INFORMATION:** granitebelt@winecountry.com.au



Assorted cheeses from Italianelean Estate Winery





Fruit farms abound in the Cassia Belt.

Image: Tourism and Events Queensland