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### Gold Coast: Sky-high thrills

Seamlessly combining the cosmopolitan lifestyle with the natural haven beyond, the Gold Coast's striking sandy stretches are best seen from the vantage point of its shiny new high-rise buildings. You can't beat SkyPoint, located on the 77th and 78th floors of the iconic 230-metre high Q1 Building.

As part of Australia's tallest residential tower, it has unparalleled 360-degree views from the surf to the hinterland. For a serious adrenaline boost, try the SkyPoint Climb, the country's highest external building climb. For those who prefer their heights a little more subdued, never fear: the cafe comes with an extensive beer and wine menu. But Queensland is thrill-seeker's territory, especially when it comes to its theme parks. Make some time for the Giant Drop at Dreamworld. Proudly known as the 'tallest vertical freefall ride in the world', it'll take you up 119 metres for a fantastic coastal view, before dropping you down — without warning. It's not for the faint-hearted.

Australia's sixth-largest city is also the gateway to some of its most biologically diverse zones, from the lush rainforest-cloaked hills to the treasure troves of the sea. While not technically in town, but worth the detour, the picturesque Tamborine Rainforest Skywalk should make the list for nature lovers. The high-tech steel structure soars 30 metres above the valley with more jaw-dropping views over the rainforest canopies.

# Amsterdam: Culture up there

Like the rest of the Netherlands, Amsterdam is rather flat. Sure, it makes it easier to cycle, but it's tricky in terms of vistas. The historic centre doesn't leave much room for high rises either, but if you know where to go, you can still find those elusive panoramic views. If your knees can handle a steep climb up the rickety stairs, the city's ancient churches will provide the best viewpoints to catch a glimpse of those slender, redroofed Dutch homes ringed by the legendary canals. Take a walk to visit the 85-metrehigh bell tower of the Westerkerk church, built way back in 1638. Or head over to the Oude Kerk, the oldest building in the city that dates back to the 13th century (but is better known for being in the infamous red-light district).

place to soak up the city's history and culture. To celebrate its 225th anniversary this year, the Felix has opened its doors to the public for the first time in 200 years. But be quick, as they'll close again at the end of this month. You can take a peek from the rooftop telescopes as part of the art installation by Joseph Semah. Titled Amsterdam of Above — Amsterdam of Below, it connects the stars and prominent buildings of the city. On a tight budget? The best free skyline views are from the high balcony at the modern

With its impressive colossal Corinthian pilasters, the Felix Meritis centre is another great

Public Library. Splashing out? The Michelin-starred Ciel Bleu on the 23rd floor of the Hotel Okura is the place to celebrate, with gourmet French cuisine and exceptional service. New York: Top-notch cocktails

#### In a city of skyscrapers so high it makes you dizzy, the Empire State Building should be

the number-one item on your 'to do' list. With two observatories, one on the 86th floor and one on the 102nd, it's famous for its unparalleled views that stretch all the way to New Jersey, Connecticut and Massachusetts. It attracts four million visitors a year, so if that queue proves too long, the Rockefeller Center's Top of the Rock deck on the 70th floor is open day and night. There's no better way to get a grasp of the Big Apple than from these high-rises, but if you prefer to see these iconic buildings (rather than view from them), head to the Hotel Metro, just around the corner from the Empire State Building, for drinks on its rooftop terrace. Swankier still is The Rose Bar at the Gramercy Park Hotel, where all the celebrities go to sip champagne. Even more upmarket is the sexy Salon de Ning, an Asian-inspired rooftop bar at the Peninsula hotel. It's the ideal spot for a martini while you gaze out over Fifth Avenue. To combat all those cocktails, take a wander over to Manhattan's West Side, and check out the fantastic High Line public park. The one-time elevated freight-train tracks have become an unexpected oasis of greenery and calm in the chaos, hustle and bustle of the Big Apple. Istanbul: High & Mighty Cuisine

## Straddling two continents, Istanbul is where East literally meets West. With a checkered

past, the one-time Constantinople is a feast for the senses, a buzzing city by the glimmering Bosphorus, and there's nowhere better to see this than from above. For a little history, head up the 66-metre-tall Galata Tower. A striking landmark, the

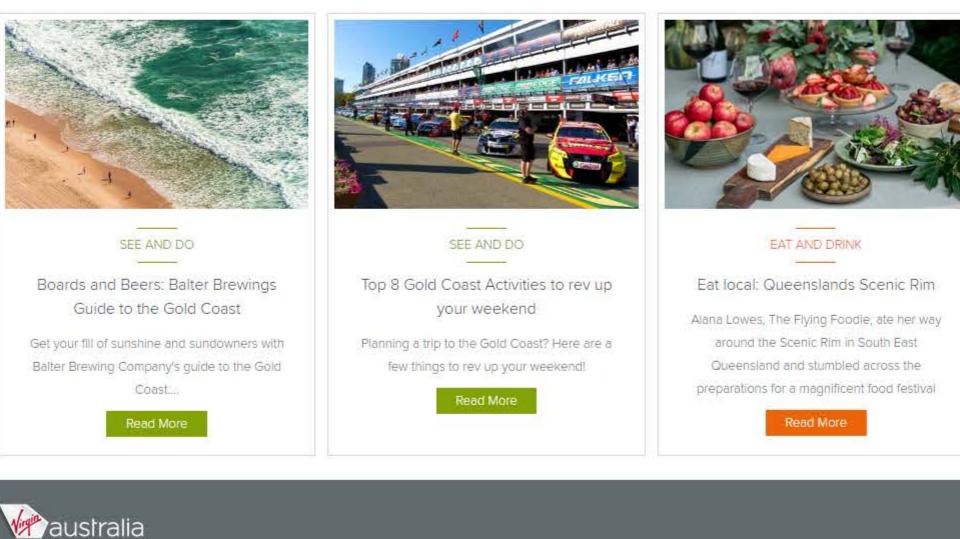
circular tower is said to have been built in 1348 (although no one knows for sure), and offers spectacular views to the Old City and the Sultanahmet district, where the Blue Mosque and Hagia Sofia reign supreme. The restaurant on the top floor showcases the city's eclectic skyline, including the impressive Bosphorus steel suspension bridge, which joins Europe to Asia and rises 65 metres above the water - definitely worth a walk or drive over if you can. The city is also packed with rooftop bars and restaurants, such as the popular 360Istanbul. You'll find an extensive menu and DJs entertaining a buzzing young crowd in Club360. For a real treat, book a table at Mikla restaurant, where chef Mehmet Gürs works his magic on Turkish seafood with a Scandinavian twist. While the food (including a seven-course menu) is delicious, the views are stunning, stretching to the Hagia Sophia and the Topkapi Palace. The bar perched right at the top of the building is another real gem, especially for sundowners - head there for the generous martinis, which are always in high demand. Hong Kong: Aerial relaxation

## In Hong Kong, the International Commerce Centre - the city's tallest skyscraper at 490

city's highest indoor observation deck on the 100th floor, offering sweeping 360-degree views of Victoria Harbour and the territory. The building is home to the five-star Ritz Carlton with its indoor infinity pool on the 118th floor that overlooks the iconic harbour. The hotel also has a spa on level 116, with floor-to-ceiling windows and nine deluxe treatment rooms, so you can enjoy some panoramic views while being pampered. For more cocktails in the sky, try M bar at the Mandarin Oriental. Set on the 25th floor, its cocktail menu is as worth of a visit, as are the glittering skyline views. To get back to nature, visit the Ngong Ping 360 cable car. It's the longest bi-cable ropeway in Asia, and the 25-minute ride will give you a true bird's-eye view of Hong Kong. Words by Rowena Carr-Allinson - Published in Voyeur September 2014

metres - is the logical place to start. It's home to the Sky 100 Observation Deck, the

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