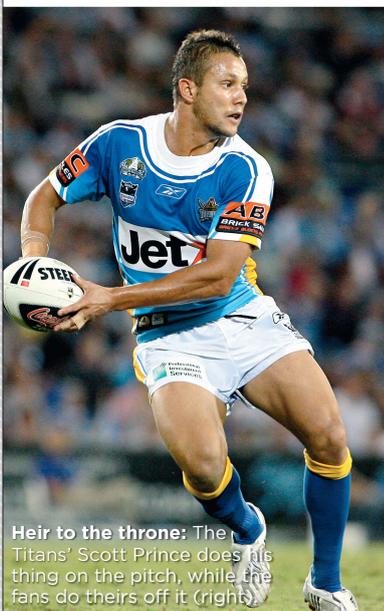




What a sight: The Gold Coast, perfect from the air one day (above), made more beautiful by Alpha's man the next.



Heir to the throne: The Titans' Scott Prince does his thing on the pitch, while the fans do theirs off it (right).



# GOING FOR GOLD

How much fun can you fit in one day? Try a footy weekend on the Gold Coast and you won't stop for a minute

Words Ivan Smith

**For the fun-seeking visitor, a proper weekend on the Gold Coast needs a cunning plan,**

a watch (so you stay on track) and a map so you know where to go next. I have the plan, the watch and a GPS instead of a map. Within 10 minutes of arriving, the GPS starts lying to me.

## FRIDAY

**4.30pm**

I can feel the numbers of the clock hovering big and red over my head. Within 2½ hours, I have to find my hotel, "freshen up" (take a piss) and get to the footy. I leave the airport and drive straight into some freeway redevelopments the satellite hasn't been told about yet. "Route recalculation," says the smooth American voice. "Turn left in 500m," I'm told. Problem is, I can't turn left. "Turn back," says the GPS.

"I'm going 80km/h," I snap back. "Turn back, turn back," the GPS repeatedly tells me.

I eventually get off the freeway to phone the hotel for directions, and then set off again. "Take next left, then sharp left," says the GPS. At the junction it changes its mind and says, "Turn right." I decide to turn the thing off.

**7pm**

Skilled Park, the NRL's newest stadium and host to the league's newest side, the Gold Coast Titans, glows in the dark. Locals call it the "big pillow" but it doesn't give the Bulldogs a soft landing on this Friday night. Scott Prince, fresh from his Origin 1 snub, tears through Sonny Bill's side in a blistering first-half performance, and the 23,000 fans go crazy. Most of them seem to be kids, which is a good thing for a team building for the future. This is footy for the 21st century and, for me, it's a great start to the weekend.

## SATURDAY

**9.30am**

I'm due at the Marina Mirage Farmers Markets, so – already running late – I get in the car, plug the GPS into the cigarette lighter and turn it on, hoping its directions will get me there double-quick. The screen flashes up an "insufficient battery" message, and then goes blank. I didn't even know it needed a battery. Why do I plug it in, then?

I don't have time for this. I can see those big red numbers again, ticking over. The hotel gives me a tourist map, with cartoon graphics of Seaworld and the beaches, but not much other detail.

After a quick scan of the map, I finally set off.

**10.15am**

I throw the car into a space and rush to the markets. In half an hour I'm due on a jet boat, so I've only limited time to enjoy the markets – and there's some delicious-looking stuff here: giant muffins, several thousand

cupcakes, tubs of Italian food and pasta sauce in bags. The New Age gets a look-in too, with crystal deodorants and raw honey for use as a cold cure. There are even things I don't understand, like jars of curried onions and... "What in the hell is that?" I enquire of the storeowner.

"Chocolate sardines," he says.

"What do they taste like?" I ask.

"They taste like chocolate. With a bit of sardine," he replies.

"You're kidding me?" I say.

I could go a nice coffee and a cupcake instead, but there's no time.

**11am**

According to the internet, movie star Chuck Norris drives an "ice-cream truck covered in human skulls". It's difficult to say how the other zillionaire residents of exclusive Sovereign Island feel about this – my feeling is they're just grateful for the ice-cream.

