



# Queensland & the Great Barrier Reef

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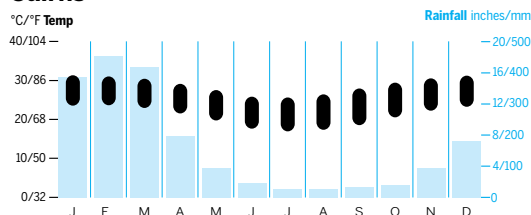
## Why Go?

From the surf-soaked Gold Coast beaches to the tropical Daintree rainforest, this massive state offers a dizzying array of distractions. Queensland's big-ticket lure is the 2000km-long submarine kingdom of the Great Barrier Reef: fish, fish, coral and more fish... Islands are also a Queensland speciality: everything from photogenic coral-fringed beauties to rugged sand isles ripe for adventure.

Speaking of adventure, the 'Sunshine State' really delivers: snorkel or dive under warm ocean waves, go white-water rafting on grade-IV rapids, kayak the coastline, surf a classic point break, or bushwalk through rainforests and gorges. Wildlife-watching is superb here too, with tropical birds, whales, cassowaries and crocs filling your photo album.

When the sun sets, Queensland doesn't go to bed: seafood feasts, cool bars, live bands and pumping clubs await (especially in Brisbane, arguably Australia's hippest city). The hardest part is deciding where to begin...

## When to Go Cairns



**Jan** The Wet brings heavy rains up north, and summer heat and humidity elsewhere.

**Jun–Aug** Peak tourist season in the tropics: mild days, cool nights (bring a jacket).

**Sep** Warm spring days: it's perfect in Brisbane, or beat the crowds to the Gold Coast.

## Places to Stick Around

Sometimes you just need to find that quaint little beach town, put the backpack down and take a break from travelling. After long days on the road, Mission Beach is a perfect place to recharge, with beautiful beaches, rainforest walks and an easygoing vibe. Cairns, Surfers Paradise and Airlie Beach are heaving with backpackers – if you're looking to party, look no further. Just north of Cairns, hip Port Douglas has a long, lovely shoreline and makes a relaxed base for exploring the area. Surf junkies may want to put down temporary roots further south: check out Noosa, which has a little of everything (beaches, surf, national parks, low- and high-end accommodation and restaurants) or Burleigh Heads and Coolangatta – even more laid-back, with plenty of great waves. In Brisbane, unwind in the West End for a few days: bars, bookshops and brilliant coffee (the pillars of civilised society).

### REGIONAL TOURS

Queensland is absolutely humongous: taking an organised tour of the hot-spots (or off-the-beaten-track areas) is a great way to cover some territory.

Plenty of operators offer 4WD tours of Cape York Peninsula – mainland Australia's northern tip – often with the option of driving one way and flying or boating the other.

Tours of Fraser Island from Noosa and Hervey Bay are an easy way to see one of Queensland's natural wonders, especially if you don't feel like tackling the 4WD-ing alone (it's tough going, even for experienced drivers).

For sailing, few places rival the Whitsunday Islands. Many operators based in Airlie Beach offer cruises, or if you want to do your own thing, you can get a group together and charter a yacht.

### DON'T MISS

**Farmers markets** are great opportunities to sample Queensland's culinary riches and support local growers. Our faves are in Brisbane, Noosa and little Eumundi, which has a market almost bigger than the town.

## Fast Facts

- ➔ Population: 4.56 million
- ➔ Area: 1,852,642 sq km (slightly larger than Alaska and Greece combined)
- ➔ Birds: 630 species

## Top Tips

- ➔ Don't swim off northern beaches during the stinger (box jellyfish) season from November to May.
- ➔ If you're a sea-sickness sufferer, don't forget your ginger tablets before boating out to the Great Barrier Reef.

## Best Wildlife Watching

- ➔ **Humpback whales** See them off Hervey Bay during their annual migration (late July to early November).
- ➔ **Koalas** Spot them on Magnetic Island.
- ➔ **Cassowaries** Look for them wandering around Mission Beach and Cape Tribulation.
- ➔ **Platypuses** See them in Eungella National Park.
- ➔ **Sea turtles** From November to March on Mon Repos beach you can see nesting sea turtles lumbering up from the deep, followed weeks later by tiny hatchlings making a dash for the water.
- ➔ **Crocodiles** Saltwater (estuarine) crocodiles – the world's largest crocodile species – live along the tropical north Queensland coast. Snap some photos on a cruise along the Daintree River.

## Resources

- ➔ Lonely Planet ([www.lonelyplanet.com/australia/queensland](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/australia/queensland)) Tours, hotels, history, eating, drinking, getting-around info...the works!
- ➔ Courier Mail ([www.couriermail.com.au](http://www.couriermail.com.au)) Brisbane's daily newspaper online. Who won the rugby?
- ➔ Queensland Holidays ([www.queenslandholidays.com.au](http://www.queenslandholidays.com.au)) Great for trip planning.