



# Cairns & the Daintree Rainforest

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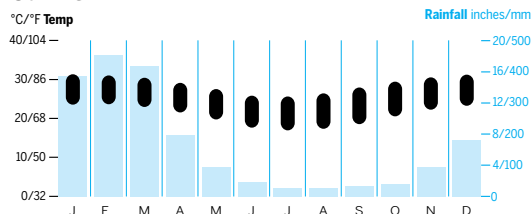
## Why Go?

Tropical, touristy Cairns is an unmissable stop on any east coast traveller's itinerary. Experienced divers and first-time toe-dippers swarm to the steamy city for its easy access to the Great Barrier Reef, while those more interested in submerging themselves in boozy good times are well served by a barrage of bars and clubs. The Atherton Tablelands – home to cooler climes, volcanic craters, jungly waterfalls and gourmet food producers – are a short, scenic drive inland.

The winding road north of Cairns hugs ludicrously scenic sections of shoreline en route to ritzy Port Douglas; keep going and you'll meet the mighty Daintree River's vehicular ferry. From here, profuse, protected rainforest stretches up to Cape Tribulation and beyond, tumbling on to long swaths of white-sand beaches; don't be so awestruck that you forget to keep an eye out for crocs!

## When to Go

### Cairns



**May** Port Douglas pizzazz at Carnivale. Stinger season ends.

**Aug** Milder temps and the Cairns Festival make this an ideal time to visit.

**Nov** Divers delight in the reef's annual coral spawning.



## CAIRNS

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Cairns (pronounced 'cans') has come a long way since its beginnings as a boggy swamp and rollicking goldfields port. Heaving under the weight of countless resorts, tour agencies, souvenir shops and a million reminders of its proximity to the Great Barrier Reef, Cairns is unabashedly geared towards tourism.

Old salts claim Cairns has lost its soul, but it does have an infectious holiday vibe. The city centre is more boardshorts than briefcases, and you'll find yourself throwing away all notions of speed and schedules here, thanks to heady humidity and a hearty hospitality that can turn a short stroll into an impromptu social event. Fittingly, Cairns is awash with bars, clubs, eateries and cafes suiting all budgets. There's no beach in town, but the magnificent Esplanade Lagoon more than makes up for it; otherwise, the northern beaches are but a local bus ride or short drive away.

### Sights

Cairns' newest attraction, the state-of-the-art **Cairns Aquarium** ( 07-4044 7300; [www.cairnsaquarium.com.au](http://www.cairnsaquarium.com.au); 163 Abbott St; adult/child/family \$42/28/126;  9am-5.30pm), was due to open in mid-2017.



### ★ **Cairns Esplanade, Boardwalk & Lagoon**

**WATERFRONT**  
([www.cairns.qld.gov.au/esplanade](http://www.cairns.qld.gov.au/esplanade);  lagoon 6am-9pm Thu-Tue, noon-9pm Wed;  **FREE** Sunseekers and fun-lovers flock to Cairns Esplanade's spectacular swimming lagoon on the city's reclaimed foreshore. The artificial, sandy-edged, 4800-sq-metre saltwater pool is life-guard patrolled and illuminated nightly. The

adjacent 3km foreshore boardwalk has picnic areas, birdwatching vantage points, free barbecues and fitness equipment. Follow the signposts for the excellent **Muddy's** ([www.cairns.qld.gov.au/esplanade/facilities/playgrounds/muddys](http://www.cairns.qld.gov.au/esplanade/facilities/playgrounds/muddys)) **FREE**, which has playgrounds and water fun for little kids, and the skate ramp, beach volleyball courts, bouldering park and Fun Ship playground.

### ★ **Flecker Botanic Gardens**



**GARDENS**

( 07-4032 6650; [www.cairns.qld.gov.au/cbg](http://www.cairns.qld.gov.au/cbg); 64 Collins Ave;  grounds 7.30am-5.30pm, visitor centre 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2.30pm Sat & Sun) **FREE** These gorgeous gardens are an explosion of greenery and rainforest plants. Highlights include a section devoted to Aboriginal plant use, the Gondwana Heritage Garden, and an excellent conservatory filled with butterflies and exotic flowers. Staff at the made-of-mirrors visitor centre can advise on free guided garden walks (daily from 10am).



Follow the Rainforest Boardwalk to Saltwater Creek and Centenary Lakes, a bird-watcher's delight. Uphill from the gardens, **Mt Whitfield Conservation Park** ([www.cairns.qld.gov.au/facilities-sport-leisure/sport-and-recreation/active-living/red-and-green-arrow-walking-tracks](http://www.cairns.qld.gov.au/facilities-sport-leisure/sport-and-recreation/active-living/red-and-green-arrow-walking-tracks); Edge Hill) has walking tracks through the rainforest to city viewpoints.



### ★ **Reef Teach**



**CULTURAL CENTRE**


( 07-4031 7794; [www.reefteach.com.au](http://www.reefteach.com.au); 2nd fl, Mainstreet Arcade, 85 Lake St; adult/child/family \$23/14/60;  lectures 6.30-8.30pm Tue-Sat) Take your knowledge to new depths at this fun, informative centre, where marine experts explain how to identify specific species of fish and coral, and how to approach the reef respectfully.

## CAIRNS GALLERIES

**Cairns Regional Gallery** ( 07-4046 4800; [www.cairnsregionalgallery.com.au](http://www.cairnsregionalgallery.com.au); cnr Abbott & Shields Sts; adult/child \$5/free;  9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) The permanent collection of this acclaimed gallery has an emphasis on local and Indigenous work.

**Canopy Art Centre** ( 07-4041 4678; [www.canopyartcentre.com](http://www.canopyartcentre.com); 124 Grafton St;  10am-5pm Tue-Sat) Showcases prints, paintings, sculptures and weavings of Indigenous artists from Cairns and communities as far north as the Torres Strait.

**Tanks Arts Centre** ( 07-4032 6600; [www.tanksartscentre.com](http://www.tanksartscentre.com); 46 Collins Ave;  9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Three gigantic, ex-WWII fuel-storage tanks have been transformed into art galleries; it's also an inspired performing-arts venue.

**KickArts** ([www.kickarts.org.au](http://www.kickarts.org.au); CoCA, 96 Abbott St;  10am-5pm Mon-Sat) **FREE** Showcases cutting-edge local and regional artworks, plus touring exhibitions.