



# Far North Queensland Coast

Whether this is the beginning or the end of your East Coast journey, welcome to paradise. Basking in a tropical climate that draws travellers ever northwards in the winter months, Far North Queensland is bursting with natural highs. An extraordinary combination of reefs, rivers and rainforests make this one of Australia's most biologically diverse regions, all wrapped up in a neatly accessible corner of Queensland. Rainforest spills out onto stretches of pristine beach, mangroves crowd riverbanks, and coral gardens bloom out on the reefs. And although popular with travellers, this stretch of coast is nowhere near as crowded as places further down the coast, so you can always find a slice of solitude.

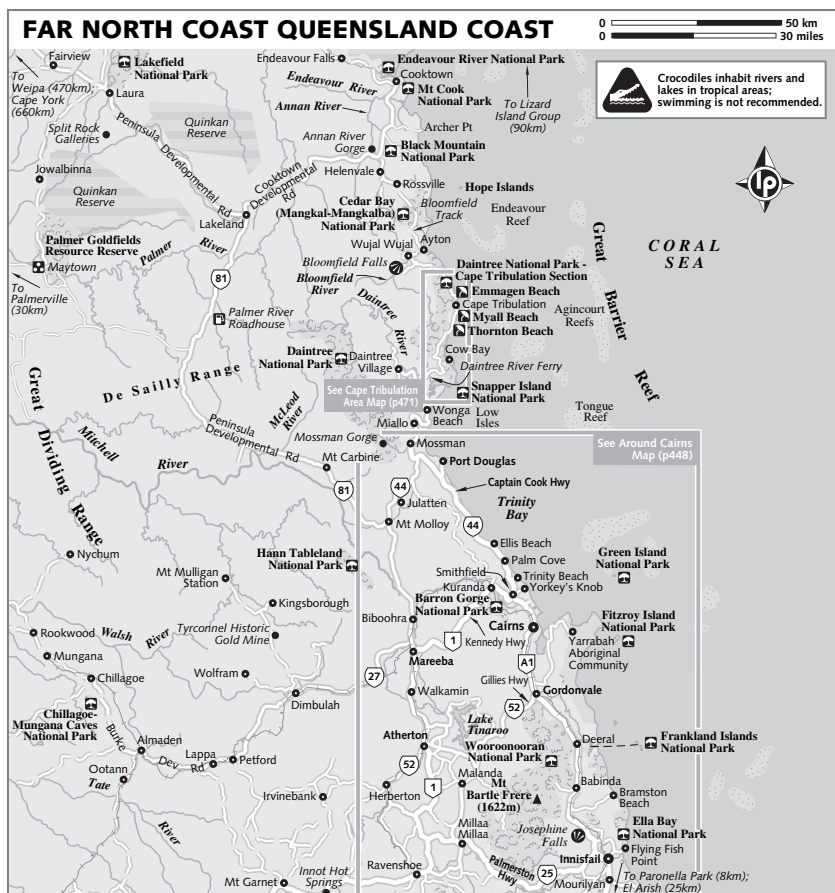
From Innisfail in the south to the frontier northern outpost of Cooktown, Far North Queensland has something for everyone. Cairns is the booming tourist hub, where an armada of boats waits to take you out diving and snorkelling on the reef. Port Douglas is the glitzy holiday playground, where you can swim all day and dine in style at night. But the adventure begins as you head further north through the sublime coastal rainforest of the Daintree National Park to the stunning beaches and alternative lifestyle around Cape Tribulation. Then embark on a 4WD adventure along the Bloomfield Track to Cooktown, where Captain Cook first set foot on Australia's shores.

The area's human landscape is equally diverse: Aboriginal communities, farmers and conservationists all live here, contributing boundless character and depth to this spectacular region.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Snorkelling or diving on the stunning Great Barrier Reef from **Port Douglas** (p465), **Cairns** (p454) or, best of all, **Lizard Island** (p477)
- Taking the Skyrail up to **Kuranda** (p462), and visiting gallery at Djurri Dadagal Art Enterprises
- Taking an Aboriginal guided walk, then swimming in the clear water amid the ancient boulders of **Mossman Gorge** (p468)
- Scanning the riverbanks for saltwater crocs on cruises on the **Daintree River** (p469) or **Cooper Creek** (p470)
- Kayaking along the shoreline in search of turtles off **Myall Beach** (p472) at Cape Tribulation
- Tackling the 4WD **Bloomfield Track** (p473) from Cape Trib to Cooktown and stopping for a well-earned beer at the **Lion's Den Hotel** (p474)
- Join the locals fishing from the wharf at laid-back **Cooktown** (p474)
- Dining in style at one of the exquisite eateries at **Port Douglas** (p467)





## MISSION BEACH TO CAIRNS

From Mission Beach the Bruce Hwy stays 20km or so inland of the coast, leading through a corridor of national parks, with burbling swimming holes and tranquil walking trails.

### MISSION BEACH TO INNISFAIL

Back on the Bruce Hwy and about 5km north of the tiny township of El Arish, the Old Bruce Hwy (Japoonvale Rd) turns west and is a scenic detour on the route north. It runs along banana and sugar-cane plantations, with cane trains intermittently cutting across the road

during harvest (June to December). Among this agricultural activity are the eccentric ruins of **Paronella Park** (☎ 4065 3225; www.paronellapark.com.au; Japoonvale Rd; adult/child \$30/15; 🕒 9am-9.30pm), just south of Mena Creek. The rambling mossy Spanish castle, Lovers Tunnel and stunning gardens are testament to the owners' quest to bring a whimsical entertainment centre to the area's hard-working folk. Admission includes a range of cultural tours or you can wander the walking trails through stunning gardens past a waterfall and a swimming hole.

### INNISFAIL

☎ 07 / pop 8262

Innisfail may come as a surprise to those who expect another ho-hum agricultural