



Cairns & the Daintree Rainforest

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Why Go?

Cairns has a heady reputation as Australia's reef-diving capital, with dazzling marine life and coral-fringed islands a short boat ride offshore, and as tropical North Queensland's party central. Yet lush rainforest, waterfalls, volcanic-crater lakes and beach communities lie just beyond the city limits, as do the Atherton Tableland's gourmet food producers, farms and orchards.

The dramatic coastal drive winding from Cairns to the ritzy resort town of Port Douglas is the start of the Far North experience. But it's past the Daintree River that the adventure really begins. The magnificent Daintree National Park stretches up the coast, its rainforest tumbling right onto white-sand beaches. Further north, the Bloomfield Track from Cape Tribulation to Cooktown is one of Australia's great 4WD journeys.

The entire region is impressively – and at times overwhelmingly – geared for tourism. The only limitations are your budget and your imagination (not necessarily in that order!).

Best Places to Eat

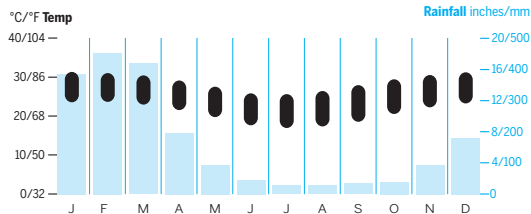
- » Mojo's (p474)
- » Yorkeys Knob Boating Club (p461)
- » Julaymba Restaurant (p480)
- » Zinc (p472)

Best Places to Stay

- » Crater Lakes Rainforest Cottages (p468)
- » Tropic Days (p455)
- » Sebel Reef House (p462)
- » Mungumby Lodge (p482)

When to Go?

Cairns



June A costumed re-enactment of Cook's landing is the centrepiece of the Cooktown Discovery Festival.

September Party-hard Cairns parties even harder during the Cairns Festival.

October Port Douglas' Go Troppo festival embraces the creativity of living in the tropics.

CAIRNS

POP 147,118

Cairns has come a long way from struggling cane town to international resort city. It may not have a beach, but the mudflats and mangroves along the Esplanade foreshore have been replaced with a multimillion-dollar development of parks and the dazzling saltwater lagoon, with top-quality restaurants overlooking the marina. And if you do want some sand, it's a short local bus ride or easy drive to the Cairns' Northern Beaches.

Old salts claim Cairns has sold its soul, but it has an infectious holiday vibe. The CBD (central business district) is more board shorts than briefcases – a mini-urban jungle of tour shops, booking agents, car-hire agents and internet cafes.

For many visitors, this is the end of the line on the East Coast jaunt (or the start for those flying into Cairns' international airport), and the city is awash with bars and nightclubs, as well as accommodation and eateries in all price ranges. It's a perfect place to meet other travellers, and to kick off your Far North experience.

Sights

Cairns Foreshore & Lagoon SWIMMING

In the absence of a beach, sunbathers flock to Cairns' shallow but spectacular saltwater swimming **lagoon** (admission free; ☀6am-10pm Thu-Tue, noon-10pm Wed) on the city's reclaimed foreshore. The artificial 4800-sq-metre lagoon is patrolled by lifeguards and illuminated at night.

Northwest from the lagoon, the boardwalk **promenade**, stretching for almost 3km, has picnic areas, free barbecues and playgrounds lining the foreshore.

Reef Teach

INTERPRETIVE CENTRE

(☎4031 7794; <http://reefteach.wordpress.com>; 2nd fl, Main St Arcade, 85 Lake St; adult/child \$15/8; ☀lectures 6.30-8.30pm Tue-Sat) Before heading out to the reef, take your knowledge to greater depths at this excellent and informative centre, where marine experts explain how to identify specific types of coral and fish and how to treat the reef with respect.

Flecker Botanic Gardens

GARDEN

(☎4044 3398; www.cairns.qld.gov.au; Collins Ave, Edge Hill; admission free; ☀7.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5.30pm Sat & Sun) These beautiful tropical gardens are an explosion of greenery and rainforest plants. Pick up a walks brochure from the **information centre**

(☎8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri) or ask about free guided walks. There's a great cafe here and an **outdoor cinema** (admission \$10; ☀3rd Wed of month May-Nov) screening classic films.

Tanks Arts Centre

GALLERY

(☎4032 2349; www.tanksartscentre.com; 46 Collins Ave, Edge Hill; ☀gallery 10am-4pm Mon-Fri) Three gigantic, ex-WWII fuel-storage tanks have been transformed into studios, galleries, showcasing local artists' work and an inspired performing-arts venue. There's a lively **market day** (last Sun of month Apr-Sep).

Cairns Regional Gallery

GALLERY

(www.cairnsregionalgallery.com.au; cnr Abbott & Shields Sts; adult/child under 16 \$5/free; ☀10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun) In a colonnaded 1936-built heritage building, exhibitions at Cairns' acclaimed regional gallery reflect the consciousness of the tropical north region, with an emphasis on local and Indigenous works. The cafe-restaurant out front is excellent.

Tjapukai Cultural Park

CULTURAL CENTRE

(☎4042 9900; www.tjapukai.com.au; Kamerunga Rd, Smithfield; adult/child \$35/18; ☀9am-5pm) Allow at least three hours at this Indigenous-owned cultural extravaganza. It incorporates the Creation Theatre, which tells the story of creation using giant holograms and actors, a Dance Theatre and a gallery, as well as boomerang- and spear-throwing demonstrations and turtle-spotting during a canoe ride on the lake. A fireside corroboree is the centrepiece of the **Tjapukai by Night** (adult/child \$99/50; ☀7-10pm) dinner-and-show deal.

The park is about 15km north of the city centre, just off the Captain Cook Hwy near the Skyrail terminal; transfers are available (extra charge).

Centre of Contemporary Arts

GALLERY, THEATRE

(CoCA; ☎4050 9401; www.coca.org.au; 96 Abbott St; ☀10am-5pm Tue-Sat) CoCA houses the **KickArts** (www.kickarts.org.au) galleries of local contemporary visual art, as well as the **Jute Theatre** (www.jute.com.au) and the **End Credits Film Club** (www.endcredits.org.au).

Activities

Tour operators run adventure-based activities from Cairns, most offering transfers to/from your accommodation – see p453.

Great Adventures

BOAT TOURS

(☎4044 9944; www.greatadventures.com.au; 1 Spence St; adult/child \$75/37.50) Runs day