

Understand Queensland

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The big issues around the Sunshine State: politics, the economy, crazy weather and the Reef. But how are the locals holding up?

HISTORY286

From the early convict hardships to the recent boom times, Queensland's history is a tale of extreme characters and events.

CLIMATE CHANGE & THE GREAT BARRIER REEF296

Australia is hotting up, and the gorgeous Great Barrier Reef off the Queensland coast has noticed the change.

THE ARTS IN QUEENSLAND 301

The sun is shining and the surf is rolling in, but that doesn't mean Queenslanders aren't busy being arty.

Queensland Today

Queensland has always been a land of boom, bust and opportunity, a pattern played out over and over again on economic, political and environmental fronts. Western Australia has taken over as Australia's fastest growing state, but the sun still shines on Queensland: Brisbane can rightly claim its mantle of 'Australia's New World City', and the Great Barrier Reef remains a gorgeous technicolour vision.

Best on Film

Praise (director John Curran; 1998) Two mismatched 20-something lovers in down-and-out Brisbane.

Muriel's Wedding (director PJ Hogan; 1994) Comedic misadventures of socially awkward dreamer Muriel (Toni Collette).

Australia (director Baz Luhrmann; 2008) Sweeping epic filmed around Bowen on the Whitsunday Coast..

Dead Calm (director Phillip Noyce; 1989) Nicole Kidman gets nervous on a yacht in the Great Barrier Reef.

The Coolangatta Gold (director Igor Auzins; 1984) Critically derided '80s Gold Coast surf-lifesaving saga.

Best in Print

It's Raining in Mango (Thea Astley; 1987) Fortunes and failures of a pioneer family in Cooktown.

Carpentaria (Alexis Wright; 2006) Indigenous writer Alexis Wright's tale of the fictional town of Desperence.

Johnno (David Malouf; 1975) Coming-of-age tale set in 1940s Brisbane.

He Died with a Felafel in his Hand (John Birmingham; 1994) Grungy share-house life in Brisbane and beyond.

Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Tom Petrie; 1904) A bushman's story of life with Aboriginal peoples.

The Big Wet Continues

Much of eastern Australia was wracked by drought for the first decade of this century: this ended in 2011 with record rainfalls across Queensland. The drought was over, but floods inundated dozens of towns, affecting one million sq km – roughly the size of France and Germany combined. The Brisbane River broke its banks, flooding vast stretches of Brisbane and destroying the city's prized network of riverside walkways.

Then, in 2013, southeast Queensland was again inundated, this time by the tail-end of Tropical Cyclone Oswald, which immersed Bundaberg and parts of Brisbane in river water again. Residents of low-lying suburbs wrung themselves dry and started rebuilding (again).

Meanwhile, Out on the Reef

Many climatologists believe these floods are yet more evidence of climate change wreaking havoc on Queensland's weather. Climate change remains a hot topic here (no pun intended) – particularly when it comes to Queensland's biggest tourist attraction, the Great Barrier Reef. As sea temperatures rise, marine researchers predict disastrous consequences for the reef. Some estimates place the near-total devastation of the reef within the next 50 years. This destruction is unthinkable on many fronts – not least of which is the catastrophic economic consequences: the Great Barrier Reef generates an estimated \$4 billion in annual tourism revenue.

Good Times, Bad Times

When the 2008 global financial crisis erupted, Queensland was ready to weather the storm. An ongoing economic boom fuelled by tourism and mining was luring about 1000 Aussies per week into southeast Queensland in 2007. But the boom went bust: the global economy stuttered and Queensland's growth slumped to just 0.2% in 2011. A depressed housing market, downturns