

Far North Queensland



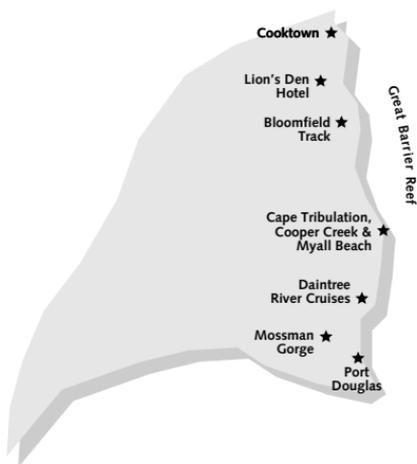
From the five-star flash of Port Douglas to the hard-bitten frontier of Cooktown, Far North Queensland is the state's most intriguing coastal corner, teeming with diverse natural environments. Dominating it all is a rainforest and a reef. The dramatic coastal drive from Cairns to Port Douglas is the start of the far north experience, but it's once you get past Mossman and the Daintree River that the adventure really begins. There's always a comfortable place to spend the night, but the air of a frontier wilderness on the way up to Cape Tribulation is palpable.

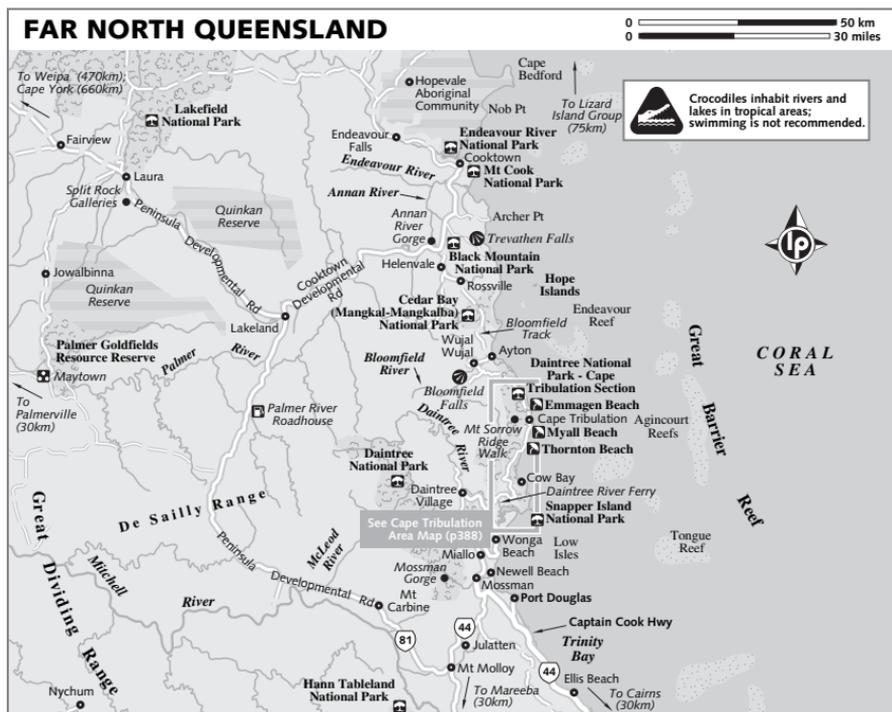
The magnificent World Heritage-listed Daintree National Park stretches up the coast, tumbling right down to the beach in places. And the beaches, especially from Cape Kimberley to Cape Trib, are sublime stretches of white sand. The Great Barrier Reef lies only a short distance offshore and is much less visited here than from Port Douglas or Cairns. Further north, the 4WD Bloomfield Track from Cape Trib to Cooktown is a true adventure. Indigenous culture is still strong here: the region has two significant Aboriginal communities, with tracts of land shared between the traditional custodians and nonindigenous settlers.

Port Douglas is the holiday hub – a sleek resort town from where visitors can head out to the reef, and where a stellar range of restaurants and accommodation attracts leisure seekers from around the globe. Further north the road is peppered with small village communities, from where you can take rainforest walks, croc-spotting river tours, go sea-kayaking or just beachcomb. The far north is the most rewarding corner of tropical Queensland. Enjoy it.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Snorkelling or diving on the stunning Great Barrier Reef from **Port Douglas** (p377) or **Cape Tribulation** (p392)
- Taking an Aboriginal guided walk, then swimming in the clear water of **Mossman Gorge** (p382)
- Scanning the riverbanks for saltwater croc on cruises on the **Daintree River** (p384) or **Cooper Creek** (p390)
- Kayaking along the shoreline in search of turtles off **Myall Beach** (p391)
- Tackling the 4WD **Bloomfield Track** (p394) from Cape Trib to Cooktown and stopping for a beer at the **Lion's Den Hotel** (p395)
- Joining the locals fishing from the wharf at laid-back **Cooktown** (p396)
- Dining in style at one of the exquisite eateries at **Port Douglas** (p380)





Dangers & Annoyances

From late October to May swimming in coastal waters is inadvisable due to the presence of box jellyfish, Irukandji and other marine stingers (see boxed text, p251).

Saltwater crocodiles inhabit the mangroves, estuaries and open water of the far north, so avoid swimming or wading in these places. Warning signs are posted around waterways where crocs may be present, or on beaches where recent sightings have occurred.

PORT DOUGLAS

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Port Douglas is the flashy playground of tropical northern Queensland. Like a spoilt child it thumbs its nose at its Cairns by being more sophisticated, more intimate and (perhaps most of all) by having a beautiful white-sand beach.

There's no question; this is a purpose-built holiday town, so there's a happy, relaxed vibe and clearly plenty of money floating

around. While those swish seafood restaurants, boutique clothing stores and four-star apartments soften the edges of the far-north frontier image, Port Douglas retains an endearing character with all the comforts of a big city condensed into a surprisingly small town. The town centre is built on a spit of land jutting out into the Coral Sea with Dickson Inlet and the gleaming marina on the west side and Four Mile Beach on the east. The Great Barrier Reef is less than an hour away and getting there is as easy as choosing which boat to hop on. Eat well, sleep well – but don't forget there's more to explore further north!

HISTORY

Port Douglas has a history of infamy, influence and affluence. What you see today was largely developed by Christopher Skase, the archetype of the flashy 1980s. Among other ventures, his company backed what was to be the genesis of Port Douglas: its first luxury resort, the Mirage. Within a few years, the Port attracted a great deal of investment, which resulted in multimillion-