

Queensland

It's sunny, warm and the only state where more people want to come than want to leave! It's the 'Sunshine State' – Australia's great escape and a powerful magnet for southerners creeping northward for less complicated lifestyles and sun-drenched holidays.

Five regions in Queensland are World Heritage-listed and three of them can be explored through walks that are featured in this chapter. Australia's Great Dividing Range begins amid the Wet Tropics region in the far north and here lies Queensland's highest peak – Mt Bartle Frere – where walkers can still experience Jurassic plants from Gondwana days. Also in the Wet Tropics, there's a sense of romance as you roam Hinchinbrook Island's beaches and camp under starry skies. Freshwater lakes and pristine beaches lure walkers to the world's largest sandbar, Fraser Island, with its unique ecosystem and genetically pure dingo population. Queensland's southern doorway leads to the Central Eastern Rainforests Reserves region and Lamington National Park's subtropical rainforests, with Australia's most extensive walking track network (160km).

In the past, Queensland may not have ranked as highly as some southern states as a bush-walking destination, but the secret's out. Come and share the outdoors with the locals.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Cracking a coconut under starry skies at **Hinchinbrook Island** (p349)
- Splashing cool mountain water on your face in **Lamington National Park** (p335)
- Ripping off your boots, running through the sand and plunging into Lake McKenzie on **Fraser Island** (p342)
- Congratulating yourself after hauling up to Queensland's rooftop, **Mt Bartle Frere** (p353)

ENVIRONMENT

Queensland's a land of contrasts, five times bigger than Japan and twice as big as Texas. Hot, wet summers characterise the tropical north, but along the southern highlands snow has been known to fall. Some places get only 150mm of rain a year, while others experience up to 4000mm.

The Great Dividing Range is Queensland's backbone and separates the well-watered coast from the inland's rolling plains. Sun-baked islands and beaches give way to mountainous rainforests and eucalypt glades. Descending westward, taller trees are replaced by stunted mulga and acacia scrub, eventually petering out to the Outback's spinifex grasses.

Queensland's home to Australia's most endangered mammal, the northern hairy-nosed wombat. Once found as far south as Victoria, it now lives only in a small national park in the tropics. Lungfish are unique to Queensland – they can live in water or on land. Queensland has more bird species than any other state or territory. One of the most striking is the large, flightless cassowary, a primitive bird restricted to dense northern rainforests and now endangered even there.

Queensland has been subjected to sustained and government-supported environmental vandalism – 4.5 million hectares of brigalow (eucalypt) scrub was cleared from north Queensland to the New South Wales (NSW) border in one nine-year period. Seventy-five percent of its rainforests were felled and some mangrove nurseries remain threatened by urban development.

Fortunately, there are now 223 national parks protecting its natural areas – havens for adventure seekers.

INFORMATION

When to Walk

Queensland has an undeserved reputation as being 'too hot for walking', but try visiting its rainforests during summer: temperatures are guaranteed to be degrees cooler than lower coastal areas. Rain is common (most falls between January and March, which is also the cyclone season for the northern two-thirds of the state), but the heady perfume of a wet forest enhances your experience. Winter's the time to walk its coastal islands.

Maps

Hema's 1:2,500,000 *Queensland State Map* and its associated regional maps are great for travel planning. Sunmap has a 1:2,500,000 state map, regional maps and a series of 1:25,000 and 1:50,000 topographic maps. Individual maps are listed in the Planning sections for each walk.

Books

Lonely Planet's *Queensland* gives a great overview of the state's jewels, charms, people and peculiarities. Queensland Museum publishes an excellent series of environmental and natural history books including *Wild Places*, *Wild Plants* and *Wildlife*, all with stunning colour photos. *Take A Walk in Queensland's National Parks – Southern Zone*, by John and Lyn Daly, is a comprehensive guide for that region. Townsville to Cooktown is admirably covered by *Tropical Walking Tracks*, a series of five booklets by Kym Dungey and Jane Whytlaw. Paul Curtis' *The Travellers' Guide to North Queensland* has over 50 walks and scenic drives.

Information Sources

Most cities and towns have visitor information centres, often staffed by knowledgeable and helpful volunteers, though don't expect too much info about specific walks.

National Parks Association of Queensland (NPAQ; ☎ 3367 0878; www.npaq.org.au) Leading community voice for conservation since 1930, it organises comprehensive bushwalking and camping programs.

Queensland Federation of Bushwalking Clubs (www.geocities.com/qfbwc) Maintains a list of state-wide affiliated bushwalking clubs.

Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS; ☎ 3227 8185; www.epa.qld.gov.au) Manages national parks.

Queensland Travel Centre (☎ 13 88 33; www.queenslandwalks.com.au) A Tourism Queensland innovation that walks you through the state from the coast to the Outback. Whether you're after a short walk or a multiday hike, the new website has it covered and also provides useful links to other sites.

Permits & Regulations

Permits are necessary for camping in national parks. Contact **QPWS** (☎ 13 13 04; www.qld.gov.au/camping; sites for 2 58). Some parks require contact with local rangers; these are mentioned in the specific walks. Permits for Green Mountains (p335), Great Walk Fraser Island (p342) and the Thorsborne Trail