

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.

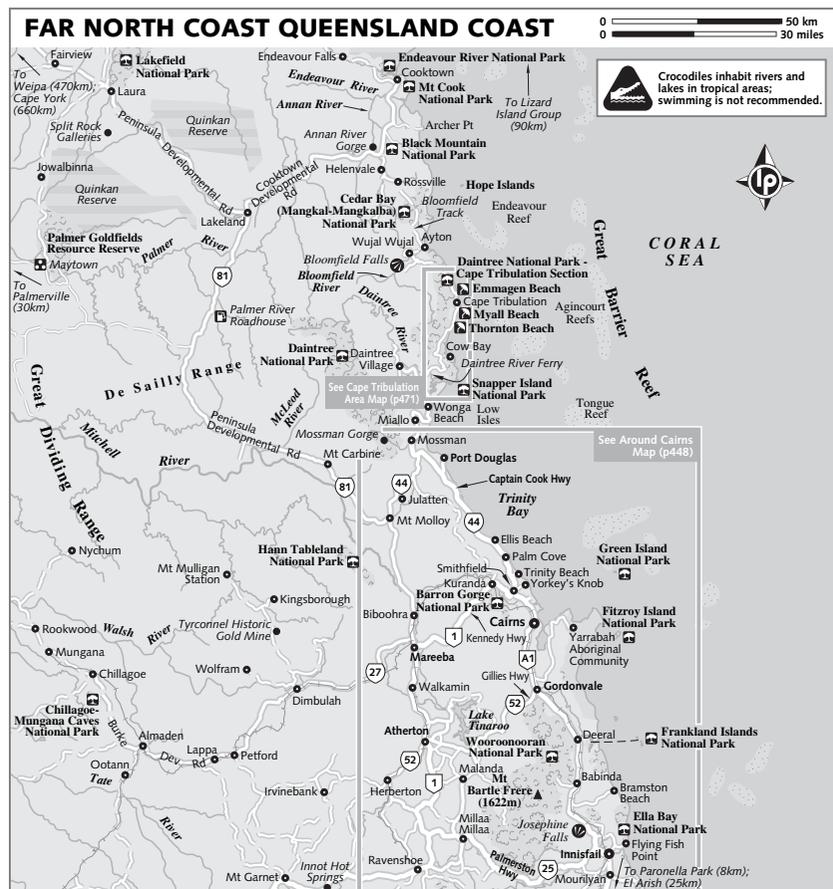
From Innisfail in the south to the frontier northern outpost of Cooktown, Far North Queensland has something for everyone. Cairns is the booming tourist hub, where an armada of boats waits to take you out diving and snorkelling on the reef. Port Douglas is the glitzy holiday playground, where you can 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 bubbling 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

town. Innisfail buzzes, especially on Saturday mornings when outlying locals come to town to browse, shop, drink and eat. It has a real community feel and some gorgeous Art Deco architecture. Innisfail's cosmopolitan past credits Chinese settlers with establishing the area's banana plantations, and Italian immigrants arrived in the early 20th century to work the cane fields (during the 1930s there was even a local branch of the Mafia, called the Black Hand).

The **visitors centre** (☎ 4061 7422; Bruce Hwy; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat & Sun), about 3km south of town, has a town-walk brochure.

The **Local History Museum** (☎ 4061 2731; 11 Edith St; admission \$3; 🕒 10am-noon & 1-3pm Mon-Fri) displays various items evidencing Innisfail's history, while the puffs of incense from the **Lit Zing Khuong** (Temple of the Universal God; Owen St; admission by donation) are a gentle reminder of the area's Chinese heritage.

About 20km north of Innisfail on the Bruce Hwy is the turn-off to the bird-rich wetlands of **Eubenangee Swamp National Park**. During the Wet the water level of the Russell River rises such that it causes the Alice River to flow backwards, which floods the swamp.

Sleeping & Eating

The town's hostels cater to the banana pickers who work the surrounding plantations.

Innisfail Budget Backpackers (☎ 4061 7833; 125 Edith St; dm \$25; 🍷 🍺 🍻) A rabbit-warren kind of place with a free bus to the beach on Sundays.

Barrier Reef Motel (☎ 4061 4988; www.barrierreef.motel.com.au; Bruce Hwy; s/d \$90/100; 🍷 🍺 🍻) The pick of Innisfail's motels, this comfortable place has 41 rooms (two of them self-catering) and a decent bar/restaurant.

Oliveri's Continental Deli (☎ 4061 3354; 41 Edith St; sandwiches \$6; 🕒 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm Sat) Step back in time at this (almost) mini-museum. Apart from healthy lunch choices and delicious coffee, this authentic Italian delicatessen has 60 varieties of European cheese, hams, salamis and row upon row of smallgoods, and jarred goodies like antipasto, olives.

Roscoe's (☎ 4061 6888, 3b Ernest St; mains \$22-30; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Roscoe's is a popular local haunt, serving pizza and pasta and has a buffet lunch (\$16) daily.

Getting There & Around

Bus services operate at least daily with **Premier** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) and **Greyhound**

Australia (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) from Innisfail to Townsville (\$58, 4½ hours) and Cairns (\$27, 1½ hours), departing from the bus stop opposite King George Sq on Edith St.

Innisfail is on the Cairns-Townsville train line; contact **Queensland Rail** (☎ 1300 131 722; www.traveltrain.com.au; 🕒 6am-9pm) for more information.

WOORONOORAN NATIONAL PARK: JOSEPHINE FALLS SECTION

Fed by rain that collects around Queensland's highest mountain, Mt Bartle Frere (1622m), the **Josephine Falls** are a series of stepped clear-water pools fringed by giant tree roots. The turn-off is about 20km north of Innisfail and the falls are 8km inland from the highway. It's on the eastern fringe of Wooroonooran National Park, an enormous reserve of tropical rainforest. The lower swimming hole is a great place for a dip, but be careful after rain as flash flooding can occur. About 1km past the falls turn-off the road ends at **Golden Hole**, a lovely swimming hole with a picnic area and toilets.

Josephine Falls also marks the start of the demanding **Mt Bartle Frere Summit Track**, a two-day return trip for fit, experienced and well-equipped walkers only. The trail rises 1500m in 7.5km; cloud can close in suddenly and you're almost certain to experience rain. The track also branches to **Broken Nose** (962m; 10km return). Get advice on conditions and a copy of the **Mt Bartle Frere Trail Guide** from **QPWS** (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au) before you head off. You'll also need a camping permit (\$4.50 per person), and you can self-register at the start of the walk.

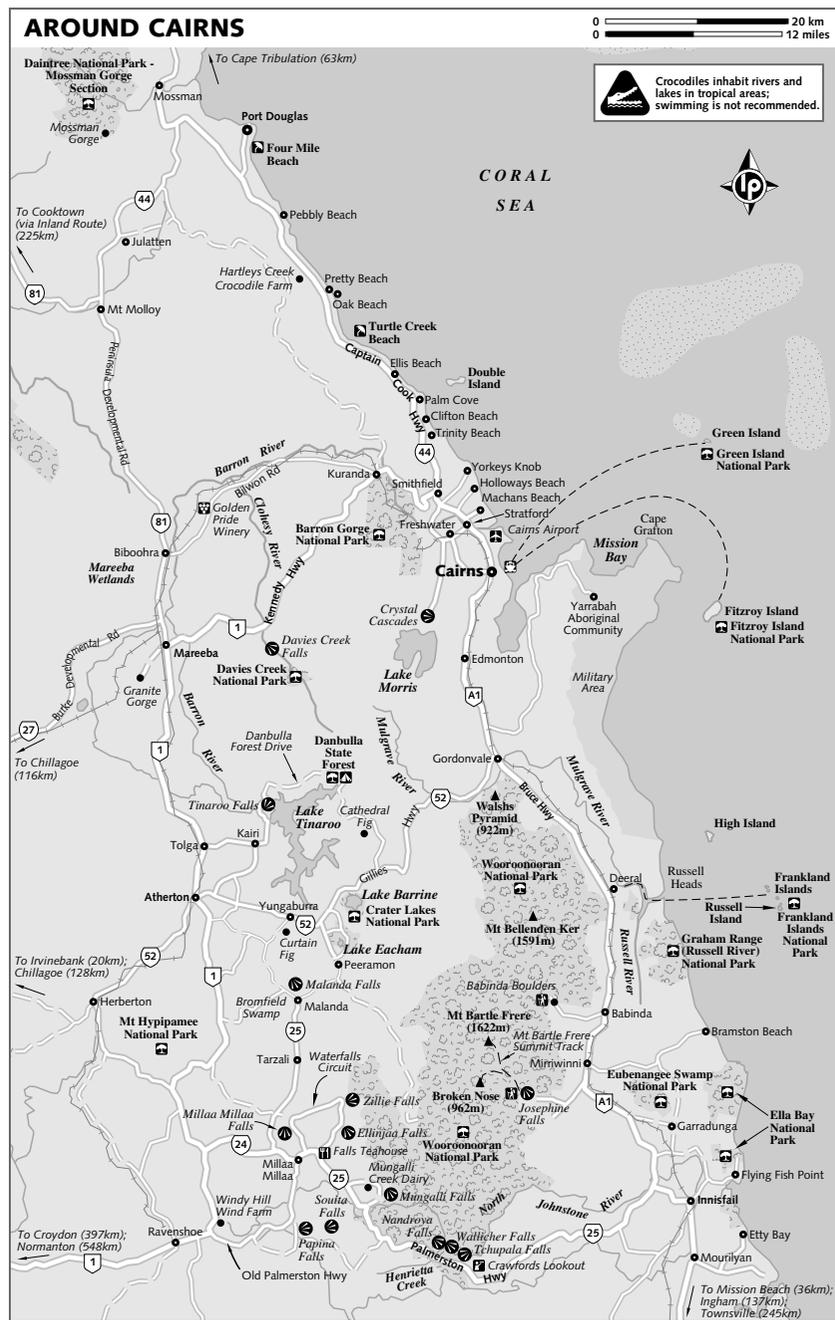
BABINDA

☎ 07 / pop 1170

In the rush north to Cairns, few people stop at little ol' Babinda, but it's worth detouring past the veranda-fronted buildings and old timber pubs on the main street and into the rainforest to the mystical Babinda Boulders.

The **Babinda visitors centre** (☎ 4067 1008; cnr Munro St & Bruce Hwy; 🕒 9am-4pm) has plenty of information on the area, including walking trails.

If you're in town on the weekend, try to catch a film at the timeless **Munro Theatre** (☎ 4067 1032; Munro St; 🕒 7.30pm Fri, Sat & Sun), which dates back to the 1950s. Recline in a hessian-slung seat and enjoy the acoustics of its canvas-covered ceiling.



You can design and create your own didgeridu at the excellent, family-run **Aboriginality** (☎ 4067 1660; 225 Howard Kennedy Hwy; \$165). Start with an authentic, ready-to-use plain didj, come up with a design (you can paint or burn it) and finish with some expert playing lessons before taking it home. The day includes lunch and a trip to the Boulders with Dreamtime stories thrown in. Look for the sign just off the highway.

About 7km west of Babinda, in the Wooroonooran National Park, the **Babinda Boulders** are a stretch of massive granite boulders that have been sculpted by the fast-running creek. At the lower end is a grassy picnic area with a gentle clear-water swimming hole, while walking trails lead upstream to **Devil's Pool Lookout** (470m) and the **Boulders Gorge Lookout** (600m). Swimming is prohibited in the dangerous, fast-flowing upper reaches. If you cross the suspension bridge there's an 850m loop through a pretty section of rainforest.

There's a picnic area at the car park, and just before this is the **Boulders Camping Ground** (free, maximum two nights) with toilets and cold showers.

INNISFAIL TO GORDONVALE VIA THE ATHERTON TABLELAND

The detour west from Innisfail on the Palmerston Hwy is an excellent drive that takes you into the southern reaches of the Atherton Tableland via Wooroonooran National Park. The tableland is the fertile food bowl of the Cairns region, a lush pastoral place elevated from the coast, where lakes and waterfalls are set in pockets of rainforest and punctuated with patchwork fields and quaint villages. Here, altitude does its best to defeat humidity, and the abundant rainfall and rich volcanic soil combine to make this one of the greenest places in Queensland. There are some amazing B&Bs and ecotreatments out here, and a day or two spent detouring away from the coast is well worth the effort.

Wooroonooran National Park: Palmerston Section

Home to some of the oldest continually surviving rainforest in Australia, Wooroonooran's fertile soil and superwet climate (3500mm rainfall annually) make it one of the richest biological regions in the country.

Just inside the park boundary is **Crawfords Lookout**, with fine views of the coast; a 5km (2½-hour) walking track links it with the twin

cascades of **Tchupala Falls**. The highlight of the area is a 7.5km loop walk (three to four hours) through superb high-canopied rainforest to the spectacular **Nandroya Falls**, which crash into a beautiful, deep swimming hole.

Millaa Millaa

☎ 07 / pop 289

Tiny Millaa Millaa is the gateway to the tableland from the south. Surrounded by rolling farmland dotted with black-and-white Friesian cows, this is also the centre of a thriving local dairy industry.

At **Mungalli Creek Dairy** (☎ 4097 2232; 254 Brooks Rd; ☎ 10am-4pm), about 6km southeast of the village, you can sample boutique biodynamic dairy products, including yogurt, cheese and sinfully rich cheesecake.

The **waterfalls circuit**, about 3km before Millaa Millaa, is a 16km loop that takes in three picturesque falls – 12m-high Millaa Millaa Falls are the best for swimming, with a large fenced swimming hole and a grassy picnic area.

Overlooking the rolling tableland where the Millaa Millaa Falls turn-off meets the highway, historic **Falls Tea House** (☎ 4097 2237; www.fallsteahouse.com.au; Palmerston Hwy; s/d \$65/110, meals \$7-16; ☎ 10am-5pm) is a treat – the country-style kitchen serves Devonshire teas, salads, sandwiches made from home-baked bread, and pasta and barramundi dishes. The three guest rooms are individually furnished with period fixtures and fittings.

Tarzali Lakes Fishing Park (☎ 4097 713; www.tarzali lakes.com; adult/child fishing from \$20/10; ☎ 10am-6pm, closed Wed), about halfway between Malanda and Millaa Millaa, is an aquaculture farm with several artificial lakes well stocked with jade perch and barramundi, so you're sure to catch something. There's plenty of bird-life here and the **platypus-spotting tours** (adult/child \$10/5) have a 'no see, no fee' guarantee.

Malanda

☎ 07 / pop 1009

Milk runs through the proverbial veins of Malanda – ever since 500 bedraggled cattle made the arduous overland journey from New South Wales (taking 16 months) in 1908. There's still a working dairy here and a dairy research centre.

The **Malanda Falls visitors centre** (☎ 4096 6957; Atherton Rd; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm) has thoughtful displays on the area's human and geological history, including its volcanic origins and the logging and dairy industry. Guided **rainforest**

WORTH A TRIP: YUNGABURRA

From Lake Eacham it's only 3km west to the chocolate-box quaintness of National Trust-registered village Yungaburra. Stroll along the creek in search of a platypus or simply wander around the heritage buildings. There's a fine old pub and some of the best boutique accommodation and restaurants on the tableland. Yungaburra is locally famous for its markets, held on the fourth Saturday of every month, when the village goes mad. Call in to the **visitors centre** (☎ 4095 2416; www.yungaburra.com; Cedar St; ☎ 10am-6pm) for details.

walks (\$10; ☎ by appointment) led by members of the indigenous Ngadjonji community can be organised here. Next door are the **Malanda Falls**. They don't 'fall' so spectacularly, but the resulting pool, surrounded by lawns and forest, is a popular swimming spot.

CRATER LAKES NATIONAL PARK

Part of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, the two mirrorlike crater lakes of Lake Eacham and Lake Barrine are pleasant, forested areas.

The crystal-clear waters of **Lake Eacham** are great for swimming and spotting turtles. The 3km lake-circuit track is an easy walk and takes less than an hour. Stop in at the **Rainforest Display Centre** (McLeish Rd; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon, Wed, Fri) at the ranger station for information on the area, the history of the timber industry and the rebuilding of the rainforest.

Just off the Gillies Hwy, **Lake Barrine** is cloaked in thick old-growth rainforest; a 5km walking track around the lake takes about 1½ hours. The **Lake Barrine Rainforest Cruise & Tea House** (☎ 4095 3847; www.lakebarrine.com.au; Gillies Hwy; mains \$6-14; ☎ breakfast & lunch) dominates the lakefront; book the 40-minute **lake cruise** (adult/child \$13/6.50; ☎ 10.15am, 11.30am, 1.30pm, 2.30pm & 3.30pm) here. A short stroll from the tea house are two enormous, neck-tilting, 1000-year-old **kauri pines**.

From here it's a winding 35km drive down to Gordonvale where you can rejoin the Bruce Hwy to Cairns.

GORDONVALE & YARRABAH

☎ 07 / pop 5670

The drive back to the coast winds through striking ranges before popping out at **Gordonvale**, a rustic, old-fashioned town with a disproportional

number of timber pubs set around a central park, and with the obligatory sugar mill. It's all backed by the looming presence of Walsh's Pyramid. Gordonvale has the dubious honour of being the first place where cane toads were released in 1935.

Between Gordonvale and Edmonton is a turn-off to the Yarrabah Aboriginal Community, a scenic 37km drive through cane fields and hills. The **Yarrabah Menmny Museum** (☎ 4056 9154; www.indiginet.com.au/yarrabah/museum.htm; Back Beach Rd; adult/child \$6/4; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) recounts Yarrabah's history and has a collection of Aboriginal artefacts and cultural exhibits. The museum also has spear-throwing demonstrations and a guided **boardwalk tour** (adult/child incl museum entry \$14/10).

CAIRNS

☎ 07 / pop 98,981

Cairns is booming. As Queensland's most popular diving destination, a flotilla of cruise boats, catamarans and yachts heads out to the Great Barrier Reef from the marina each day. The compact centre is a miniurban jungle of tour shops, booking agents, car hire, internet cafés, restaurants and hostels, all aimed at wooing the stream of bewildered visitors.

This is unashamedly a tourist town, but it has an infectious holiday vibe and a tropical aura, it has come a long way from struggling cane town to international resort city. The mudflats and mangroves along the Esplanade foreshore have been replaced with a multimillion dollar development of parks and the dazzling saltwater lagoon. Old salts claim Cairns has lost some of its character and sold its soul, but it ticks to the tune of tourism. There's no limit to the activities you can organise here – apart from diving and snorkelling you can go bungee jumping, white-water rafting, ballooning or biking – and tours operate from Cairns to Cooktown, Cape Tribulation and Cape York.

Cairns thrives on its reputation as a party town, too. For many backpackers this is the end of the line on the east coast jaunt from Sydney. They like to hit the town hard and there are bars and nightclubs that seem to exist solely for their pleasure.

ORIENTATION

Cairns has a small centre running from the Esplanade on the waterfront back to Sheridan St, and bordered by Wharf and

Aplin Sts. Although it's referred to as the business district, it's really more boardshorts than briefcases.

Reef Fleet Terminal is the main point of departure for trips to the Reef and the transit centre for long-distance buses. The train station is behind Cairns Central Shopping Centre on McLeod St. The airport is about 7km north of the city centre.

Maps

For an impressive range of quality regional maps, topographic maps and nautical charts, head to **Absells Chart & Map Centre** (☎ 4041 2699; Main Street Arcade, 85 Lake St).

INFORMATION**Bookshops**

Bookshelf (☎ 4051 8569; www.thebookshelfcairns.com.au; 95 Grafton St) Lots of secondhand books – proceeds go to a women's centre.

Exchange Bookshop (☎ 4051 1443; www.exchangebookshop.com; 78 Grafton St) New and secondhand books to buy and swap.

Emergency

Ambulance, Fire & Police (☎ 000; ☎ 24hr)

Cairns Police Station (☎ 4030 7000)

Internet Access

Most tour booking agencies and many accommodation places have internet access; dedicated internet cafés are clustered along Abbott St, between Shields and Aplin Sts. They have fast connections, cheap international phone calls and CD burning, and charge between \$2 and \$5 per hour. Most of the public wi-fi hotspots in Cairns require payment: an exception is the McDonald's restaurant on the corner of Shields and the Esplanade.

Call Station (☎ 4052 1572; 123 Abbott St; ☎ 8.30am-11.30pm; wi-fi)

Global Gossip (☎ 4031 6411; www.globalgossip.com; 125 Abbott St; ☎ 9am-11.30pm; wi-fi)

Medical Services

Cairns Base Hospital (☎ 4050 6333; The Esplanade) Has a 24-hour emergency service.

Cairns City 24 Hour Medical Centre (☎ 4044 0444; cnr Florence & Grafton Sts) General practice and diving examinations.

Cairns Travel Clinic (☎ 4041 1699; 15 Lake St; ☎ Mon-Fri 8.30am-5.30pm, 9am-noon Sat) Vaccinations, medical kits and advice.

Money

All major banks have branches with ATMs throughout central Cairns. Most banks exchange foreign currency; private currency exchange bureaux line the Esplanade and are open longer hours.

American Express (☎ 1300 139 060; 63 Lake St) In Westpac Bank.

Thomas Cook (☎ 4051 6255; 50 Lake St)

Post

Main post office (☎ 13 13 18; www.auspost.com; 13 Grafton St) Handles poste restante. There are branches in Orchid Plaza and in Cairns Central Shopping Centre.

Tourist Information

The glut of tourist information available in Cairns can either inspire you to do something wild, or baffle you with its sheer volume. Dozens of tour-booking agents operating in Cairns call themselves 'information centres' and fraudulently brandish the blue-and-white 'i' symbol; most places to stay also have tour-booking desks. The government-run **Gateway Discovery Centre** (☎ 4051 3588; www.tropicalaustralia.com.au; 51 The Esplanade; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm) offers impartial advice, books tours and houses an interpretive centre. It distributes the *Welcome to Cairns* directory with a map centrefold.

Other useful contacts:

Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS; ☎ 4046 6602; www.epa.qld.gov.au; 5B Sheridan St)

Information on national parks and state forests, walking trails and camping permits.

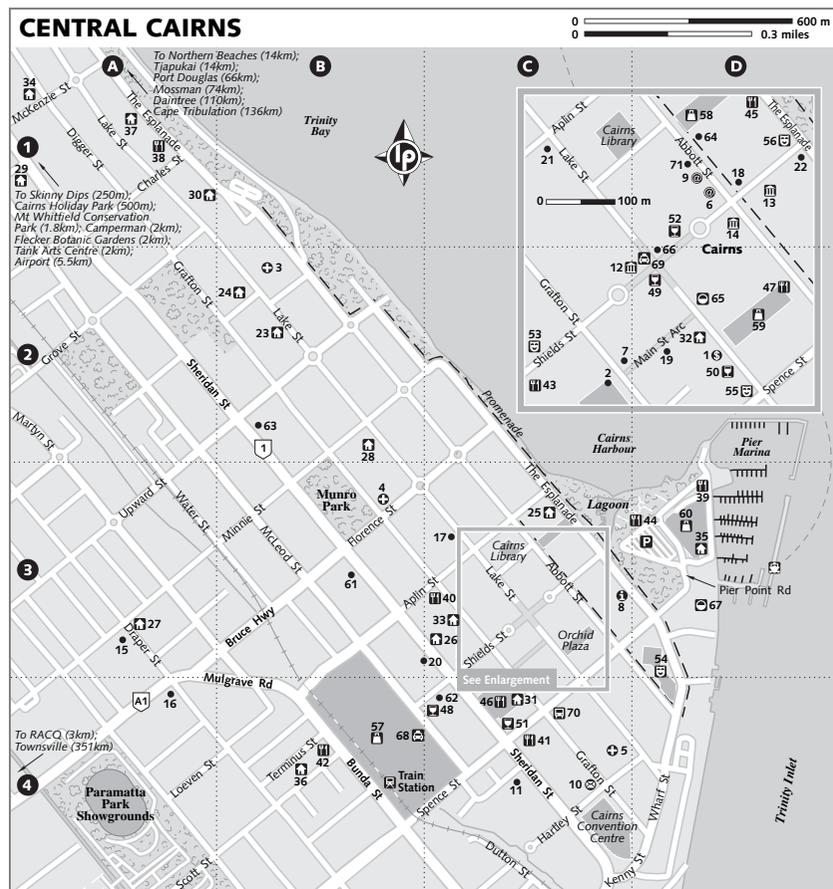
Royal Automobile Club of Queensland (RACQ; ☎ 4033 6433; www.racq.com.au; 537 Mulgrave Rd, Earlville) Maps and information on road conditions up to Cape York.

Wilderness Society (☎ 4051 6666; www.wilderness.org.au; 125 Abbott St) Advocacy organisation with information on local environmental issues; volunteers welcome.

SIGHTS

Hundreds of people flock around the shallow but dazzling 4800-sq-metre saltwater swimming **lagoon** (free; ☎ 6am-10pm), and take up patches of grass right along the city's reclaimed foreshore. The lagoon is patrolled by lifeguards and illuminated at night. Strolling northwest from the lagoon, the 3km boardwalk **promenade** is popular with walkers, joggers and picnickers.

The **Cairns Regional Gallery** (☎ 4031 6865; www.cairnsregionalgallery.com.au; cnr Abbott & Shields Sts; adult/child under 16 \$5/free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun)



has exhibitions reflecting the consciousness of the tropical north region, with an emphasis on local and indigenous works.

For contemporary works, visit the superb **Centre of Contemporary Arts** (☎ 4050 9401; www.coca.org.au; 96 Abbott St; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat), which houses the KickArts (www.kickarts.org.au) galleries of visual art, as well as the Jute theatre company and the End Credits Film Club.

Cairns Museum (☎ 4051 5582; www.cairnsmuseum.org.au; nr Lake & Shields Sts; adult/child \$5/2; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Sat) has displays on topics that have influenced Far North Queensland, including Aboriginal artefacts, construction of the Cairns-Kuranda railway and the contents of a now-demolished Chinese temple. There's an excellent bookshop and a café at street level.

It's worth a trip to the **Flecker Botanic Gardens** (☎ 4044 3398; www.cairns.qld.gov.au; Collins Ave, Edge Hill; 🕒 7.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5.30pm Sat & Sun), 4km northwest of the centre. Wander around these lush tropical gardens, then cross the road to the **Rainforest Boardwalk** leading past Saltwater Creek to the twin **Centenary Lakes**, which showcase Far North Queensland's salt-water and freshwater ecosystems. Next door to the gardens is the stylish community **Tanks Arts Centre** (☎ 4032 2349; www.tanksartscentre.com; 46 Collins Ave, Edge Hill; 🕒 gallery 10am-4pm Mon-Fri), where giant cylindrical WWII naval supply tanks have been transformed into exhibition and performance spaces.

Near the gardens is the entrance to the **Mt Whitfield Conservation Park**, the last remnant of

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Cairns rainforest, with two more demanding walks: the Red Arrow Trail (one hour) and the Blue Arrow Trail (3½ hours), which climbs steeply and opens up to views over the city and coast.

Before heading out to the Reef, join one of the evening lectures at **Reef Teach** (☎ 4031 7794; www.reefteach.com.au; Main Street Arcade, 85 Lake St; adult/child \$13/7; 🕒 10am-9pm Mon-Sat, lecture 6.30-8.30pm Mon-Sat), where marine experts explain how to identify specific types of coral and fish, and how to treat the Reef with respect.

Cairns' indigenous-owned cultural extravaganza **Tjapukai** (☎ 4042 9900; www.tjapukai.com.au; Kamerunga Rd, Smithfield; adult/child \$31/15.50, incl transfers from Cairns & Northern Beaches \$50/25; 🕒 9am-5pm) presents a variety of inspirational and educational performances combining interesting aspects of Aboriginal culture with show biz. It includes the Creation Theatre (which tells the story of creation using giant holograms and actors), the Dance Theatre and a gallery, as well as boomerang- and spear-throwing demonstrations set around an Aboriginal

camp. You can also learn to paint a boomerang or take a canoe ride on the lake. **Tjapukai By Night** (adult/child \$87/43.50, incl transfers \$104/52; 🕒 7.30pm) is a dinner-and-show deal with a fireside corroboree. The park is just off the Captain Cook Hwy near the Skyrail terminal, about 15km north of the centre.

ACTIVITIES

Diving

Cairns is the scuba-diving capital of the Great Barrier Reef and a popular place to attain PADI open-water certification. There's a plethora of courses on offer, from budget four-day courses that combine pool training and reef dives (from \$370) to five-day courses (\$580 to \$700) with two days' pool theory and three days aboard a boat. These live-aboard courses are generally more rewarding as you'll dive less-frequented parts of the Reef. The following outfits also offer live-aboard trips for certified divers lasting from one to three days:

Cairns Dive Centre (☎ 1800 642 591; 4051 0294; www.cairnsdive.com.au; 121 Abbott St)

decorated rooms, some with bay windows or balconies and all with en suites.

Fig Tree Lodge (☎ 4041 0000; www.figtreelodge.com.au; 253 Sheridan St; r \$85-135, apt \$125-155; 🍷 🍴 🚿) This resort-style accommodation is one of the better midrange places around. Rooms have a beachy blue-and-white theme, and self-contained apartments have full kitchens. There's nightly entertainment in the Irish-themed restaurant and bar.

Balinese (☎ 1800 023 331, 4051 9922; www.balinese.com.au; 215 Lake St; r \$100; 🍷 🍴 🚿) Authentic wood furnishings and ceramic pieces bring a touch of Bali to Cairns at this neat, low-rise complex.

Reef Palms (☎ 1800 815 421, 4051 2599; www.reefpalms.com.au; 41-7 Digger St; apt \$105-145; 🍷 🍴 🚿) The crisp white interiors of Reef Palms' apartments will have you wearing your sunglasses inside. All rooms in this traditional Queenslander-style place have kitchen facilities. Good for couples and families.

Cascade Gardens (☎ 1800 503 877, 4047 6300; www.cascadegardens.com.au; 175 Lake St; apt \$135-185; 🍷 🍴 🚿) Cascade aims for the tropical Asian ambience with cane furniture and a palm-filled garden. It's a standard but well-equipped resort with spacious studios and self-contained apartments.

Bay Village (☎ 4051 4622; www.bayvillage.com.au; cnr Lake & Gatton Sts; r \$145-165; 🍷 🍴 🚿) This sprawling resort has smart units encircling a central pool. It's popular with package tours but no worse for that. The pricier rooms are self-contained, with kitchens and lounges; the Bay Leaf Restaurant here serves well-regarded Balinese cuisine.

Inn Cairns (☎ 4041 2350; www.inncairns.com.au; 71 Lake St; apt \$189; 🍷 🍴 🚿) Behind the unassuming facade, this is truly inner-city apartment living. Take the lift up to the 1st-floor pool or to the rooftop garden for a sunowner. The elegant self-contained apartments feature modern furnishings and fittings, and the staff are helpful.

Skinny Dips (☎ 1800 621 824, 4051 4644; www.skinnydips.com.au; 18 James St; s/d \$135/170; 🍷 🍴 🚿) This intimate gay resort and spa is mostly for male guests – the central pool area is clothing-optional and you can meet around the bar or in the stylish restaurant, or in the 'chillout centre' (gym and sauna).

Top End

Waterfront Terraces (☎ 4031 8333; www.cairnsluxury.com; 233 The Esplanade; 1/2-bedroom apt \$195/269; 🍷 🍴 🚿) Right on the Esplanade, this low-rise

group of luxury apartments is set in neat and trim tropical grounds. Handsomely furnished one or two bedroom apartments have separate tiled lounges and kitchen areas and all the trimmings.

Shangri-la (☎ 4031 1411; www.shangri-la.com; Pier Point Rd; r from \$270; 🍷 🍴 🚿; wi-fi) Towering over the marina, Shangri-la is Cairns' top hotel, an elegant five-star that ticks all the boxes for location, views, facilities (a gym, a pool bar and broadband internet) and service. The Horizon Club rooms are top notch.

EATING

Cairns has come a long way on the culinary front in recent years, and its status as an international city is reflected in its multicultural restaurants. Along with the usual seafood and steak, you'll find plenty of Asian restaurants, and cuisines from Indian to Italian. The latest development is the Pier waterfront, where half a dozen restaurants share a boardwalk overlooking the marina – just wander along and take your pick of French, Italian, seafood and Mod Oz.

If you want something cheap and quick, the **Night Markets** (btwn The Esplanade & Abbott St) has a busy Asian-style food court.

Restaurants

Rattle & Hum (☎ 4031 3011; 65-67 The Esplanade; mains \$13-23; 🍷 10am-midnight) From its prime people-watching position on the Esplanade you can watch the wood-fired pizzas being prepared or slip into the rustic 'outback saloon'-style restaurant with timber beams and low-slung lighting. Good, honest food and a laid-back atmosphere.

Pier Bar & Grill (☎ 4031 4677; www.pierbar.com.au; Pier Point Rd; mains \$13-32; 🍷 lunch & dinner) For informal waterfront dining, the Pier is hard to beat. With a big deck overlooking the water and foreshore lagoon, it serves up exotic wood-fired pizzas, noodles, pasta and thick steaks, and is one of the most popular spots in town for a late-afternoon drink.

Green Ant Cantina (☎ 4041 5061; 183 Bunda St; mains \$15-29; 🍷 dinner) This funky little slice of Mexico is tucked away behind the railway station but well worth seeking out for *quesadillas*, fajitas and 'mumbo gumbo'. Great cocktail list, cool tunes (live bands on Saturday) and cheap backpacker meals on Monday.

our pick **Donnini's Ciao Italia** (☎ 4051 1133; Marina Boardwalk; mains \$18-35; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Locals rate

Donnini's as the best Italian in town and with its corner boardwalk location it's hard not to be lured in by the Mediterranean aromas. All delivered with swift service, classic pasta dishes include spaghetti marinara and prawn linguini, but many rate the traditional thin-crust pizzas.

M Yogo (☎ 4051 0522; www.matureyogo.com; Marina Boardwalk; mains \$19-42; 🍷 lunch & dinner) French-inspired cuisine from an award-winning Japanese chef makes M Yogo one of the most interesting dining experiences on the Pier boardwalk. Innovative seafood dishes with rich sauces, sassy young waiters and a breezy location.

Charlie's (☎ 4051 5011; 223-227 The Esplanade; buffet \$28.50; 🍷 6-8.30pm) It's not the fanciest place in town but Charlie's, at the Acacia Court Hotel, is legendary for its nightly all-you-can-eat seafood buffet. Fill your plate (over and over) with prawns, oysters, clams or hot food and eat it out on the terrace by the pool.

Ochre Restaurant (☎ 4051 0100; www.redochregill.com.au; 43 Shields St; mains \$29-34; 🍷 lunch Mon-Fri, dinner nightly) Serving modern Australian cuisine at its best, the Ochre's inventive menu utilises native Australian ingredients, artfully prepared to pioneer its own culinary genre. There are the animals (croc, roo and emu), but Aussie flora also appears on the menu. Try the tasting plates or platters, and finish with the wattleseed pavlova with plum sorbet and macadamia biscotti.

Cafés & Quick Eats

Gaura Nital's (☎ 4031 2255; 55 Spence St; mains \$5.50-10.90; 🍷 11.30am-2pm Mon-Fri, 6-8pm Tue-Sat) Hare Krishna restaurant serving simple but tasty and cheap vegetarian fare such as dhal and rice, soups and koftas. Very Zen.

Fusion Organics (☎ 4051 1388; cnr Grafton & Aplin Sts; dishes \$5-15; 🍷 Mon-Fri 7am-5pm, 7am-2pm Sat) From the wicker chairs in the breezy corner courtyard to the buckwheat waffles and the 'detox' juices, Fusion is inspiring to the core. As you settle in for brekky the choice is between sublime Genovese coffee and a host of pick-me-up juices. The quiches, frittata, corn fritters and filled breads are all organic, allergy-free and delicious.

Perrotta's at the Gallery (☎ 4031 5899; 38 Abbott St; mains \$15-25; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) With its fabulous covered deck and wrought-iron furniture, Perrotta's beckons you off the street for a breakfast of eggs, French toast with

vanilla-roasted pear and superb coffee, but many return for lunch or dinner, when an inventive Mediterranean menu takes over.

Pubs

Serving a hungry but thrifty backpacker market, some of Cairns' pubs dish up amazingly cheap meals, and they're not half bad. For some you need a meal token available at hostels, or just ask about the special. Some of the best are the \$5 evening meals at PJ O'Brien's, and the \$10 meal-and-drink deals at the Woolshed and Shennanigans. See Drinking, below.

Self-Catering

There's a large **Woolworths** (btwn Lake & Abbott Sts; 🍷 8am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5.30pm Sat, 9am-6pm Sun) supermarket in town stocking everything you can think of, and you'll find two supermarkets in **Cairns Central Shopping Centre** (McLeod St).

Cairns' main food market is **Rusty's Markets** (Grafton St, btwn Shields & Spence Sts; 🍷 5am-6pm Fri, 6am-3pm Sat, 6am-2pm Sun); in among the souvenirs, jewellery, crafts and clothing you'll find seafood, fresh fruit and veg, herbs and honey, as well as juice bars and food stalls.

DRINKING

Cairns is undoubtedly the party capital of the north coast and the number of places to go out for a drink is intoxicating. The most popular inner-city bars and clubs are geared towards the lucrative backpacker market – and they party hard! Most places are multipurpose, offering food, alcohol and some form of entertainment, and you can always find a beer garden or terrace to enjoy balmy evenings.

Pier Bar & Grill (☎ 4031 4677; www.pierbar.com.au; Pier Point Rd; 🍷 11.30am-midnight) The Pier is a local institution for its waterfront location; a Sunday session is a must.

Grand Hotel (☎ 4051 1007; 33 McLeod St; 🍷 11am-1am) This laid-back local pub is worth a visit just so that you can rest your beer on the bar – an 11m-long carved crocodile!

Shennanigans (☎ 4051 2490; 48 Spence St) The huge beer garden with barrels for tables, big screens and a music stage is the stand-out at this marginally Irish-themed pub. Variety of entertainment from trivia nights and karaoke to live bands.

PJ O'Briens (☎ 4031 5333; cnr Lake & Shields St) It has sticky carpets and the smell of stale Guinness, but Irish-themed PJ's packs 'em in with party nights, pole dancing and dirt-cheap meals.

Woolshed Char grill & Saloon (☎ 4031 6304; 24 Shields St; meals \$12-16) Another backpacker favourite, a young crowd of travellers and attentive diving instructors get hammered and dance on the tables.

our pick **Sapphire Tapas Bar & Lounge** (☎ 4052 1494; 39 Lake St; tapas \$9-16) Walk through the unassuming street entrance to the cathedral-like back room with funky artworks adorning the walls and couches in the corners. Sapphire is Cairns' most sophisticated lounge-bar – part restaurant, part dance club, with DJs on weekends. Great vibe and gay-friendly.

ENTERTAINMENT

12 Bar Blue (☎ 4041 7388; www.12barblue.com; 62 Shields St; ☎ 5pm-midnight Tue-Sun) The best place in Cairns for lounge live music, this intimate bar grooves to the beat of jazz, blues and swing.

Jute Theatre (☎ 4031 9555; www.jute.com.au; Centre of Contemporary Arts, 96 Abbott St; tickets from \$15) Staging a variety of contemporary Australian works and indie plays, check out what's on at the Jute's sexy venue in the Centre of Contemporary Arts.

Reef Casino (☎ 4030 8888; www.reefcasino.com.au; 35-41 Wharf St; ☎ 10am-3am Sun-Thu, 10am-5am Fri & Sat) Gamble on table games such as blackjack, roulette and baccarat, or feed your coins into one of the 500 bling-bling poker machines. Also five restaurants, a lounge bar and a nightclub at the Velvet Rope.

Nightclubs

Nightclubs come and go in Cairns; ask locally about what's hot and not. Most places close at 3am or 5am, but it pays to get in by 1am. Cover charges usually apply.

Soho (☎ 4051 2666; cnr The Esplanade & Shields St; ☎ Wed-Sun) This Cairns institution – it's been going longer than most – features resident and touring DJs playing house, techno and hip-hop.

Rhino Bar (☎ 4031 2530; cnr Spence & Lake Sts; ☎ from 8pm) A young, high-energy crowd downs cocktails and shots, and spills out onto the enormous 1st-floor balcony overlooking Lake St. Can get messy.

Gilligan's (☎ 4041 6566; 57-89 Grafton St) You're guaranteed a crowd here, with 400-odd backpackers staying in this resort complex, but it's also popular with locals. The huge beer barn downstairs has live bands, and upstairs is Pure, with DJs spinning house tunes.

SHOPPING

Cairns offers the gamut of shopping opportunities, from exclusive boutiques such as Louis Vuitton to garishly kitsch souvenir barns, and everything in between. You'll have no trouble finding a box of macadamia nuts, some emu or crocodile jerky and tropical-fish fridge magnets.

Head to the **Night Markets** (cnr The Esplanade & Abbott St; ☎ 4.30pm-midnight) and **Mud Markets** (Pier Marketplace; ☎ Sat morning) if your supply of 'Cairns Australia' T-shirts is running low, or you need your name on a grain of rice.

Cairns has two multilevel shopping centres where you can peruse a big range of shops in a climate-controlled bubble: **Cairns Central Shopping Centre** (www.cairnscentral.com.au; McLeod St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Wed & Fri & Sat, 9am-9pm Thu, 10am-4.30pm Sun) and **Pier Marketplace** (Pier Point Rd), which was developed as a waterfront shopping mall but at the time of writing many of the shops were vacant.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Departures for international cities leave frequently from **Cairns airport** (code CNS; ☎ 4052 9703; www.cairnsport.com.au/airport), with **Qantas** (www.qantas.com.au) heading to Tokyo and Singapore; **Jetstar** (www.jetstar.com.au) to Nagoya and Osaka; **Cathay Pacific** (www.cathaypacific.com) flying to Hong Kong; and **Air New Zealand** (www.airnewzealand.com) heading to Auckland three times a week.

Jetstar (☎ 13 15 38; www.jetstar.com.au); **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13, 4050 4054; www.qantas.com.au; cnr Lake & Shield Sts) and **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com.au) all fly the main domestic routes including Brisbane (two hours), Sydney (four hours), Melbourne (five hours), Adelaide (four hours) and Darwin (two hours). Perth and Hobart usually require a change in Sydney.

Skytrans (☎ 1800 818 405, 4046 2462; www.skytrans.com.au) services Cape York with regular flights to Cooktown, Coen and Lockhart River, as well as to Karumba in the Gulf and south to Townsville.

Bus

Cairns is the hub for Far North Queensland buses. **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 1300 473 946; www.greyhound.com.au; Reef Fleet Terminal) has four daily services down the coast to Brisbane (\$255, 29 hours), via Townsville (\$67, six hours), Airlie Beach (\$116, 11 hours) and Rockhampton (\$178, 18 hours). Departures are from outside

Reef Fleet Terminal at the southern end of the Esplanade.

Premier (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) also runs one daily service to Brisbane (\$193, 29 hours) via Innisfail (\$16, 1½ hours), Mission Beach (\$16, two hours), Tully (\$23, 2½ hours), Cardwell (\$27, three hours), Townsville (\$50, 5½ hours) and Airlie Beach (\$84, 10 hours). Premier picks up from Stop D on the Lake St Transit Mall.

Sun Palm (☎ 4087 2900; www.sunpalmtransport.com) runs two morning services from Cairns to Cape Tribulation (\$65, three hours) via Port Douglas (\$30, 1½ hours) and Mossman (\$40, 1¾ hours), with additional services direct to Port Douglas.

Country Road Coachlines (☎ 4045 2794; www.countryroadcoachlines.com.au) runs a bus service between Cairns and Cooktown on the coastal route via Port Douglas and Cape Tribulation three times a week (\$72) leaving Cairns Monday, Wednesday and Friday and returning from Cooktown Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday – depending on the condition of the Bloomfield Track. Another service takes the inland route via Mareeba on Monday, Wednesday and Friday (\$72, same day return).

John's Kuranda Bus (☎ 0418-772 953) runs a service between Cairns and Kuranda (\$3) at least twice a day and up to seven times between Wednesday to Friday. Buses depart from Cairns' Lake St Transit Centre. **Whitecar Coaches** (☎ 4091 1855) has regular bus services connecting Cairns with the tableland, departing from 46 Spence St and running to Kuranda (\$4, 30 mins), Mareeba (\$16.80, one hour), Atherton (\$22, 1¾ hours), Herberton (\$26, two hours) and Ravenshoe (\$28.50, 2½ hours).

Car & Motorcycle

Hiring a car or a motorcycle is a good way to travel from Cairns to Far North Queensland. If you want to travel to Cooktown via the unsealed Bloomfield Track, hire a 4WD. Loads of hole-in-the-wall car rental companies can be found on Lake St and Abbott St.

Camperman (☎ 1800 216 223; www.campermanaustralia.com.au; 440 Sheridan St) Good-value campervans from \$75 a day

Choppers Motorcycle Tours & Hire (☎ 0408-066 024; www.choppersmotorcycles.com.au; 150 Sheridan St) Hire a Harley for \$250 a day, or smaller bikes from \$95 a day. Also offers motorcycle tours, from one hour to a full-day ride to Cape Trib.

Europcar (☎ 1300 13 13 90, 4051 4600; www.europcar.com.au; 135 Abbott St) With an airport desk.

Wicked Campers (☎ 1800 24 68 69; www.wickedcampers.com.au; Abbott St) Colourful campers aimed at backpackers.

Train

The *Sunlander* departs Cairns on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday for Brisbane (economy seat/sleeper \$207/265, 31½ hours). It also operates the Scenic Railway to Kuranda. The train station is on the southwest side of the Cairns Central shopping centre. Contact **Queensland Rail** (☎ 1800 872 467; www.traveltrain.com.au).

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

The airport is about 7km from central Cairns. **Australia Coach** (☎ 4040 1000; adult/child \$10/\$5) meets all incoming flights and runs a shuttle bus to the CBD. A taxi will cost around \$18.

Bicycle

You can hire bikes from the following:

Bike Man (☎ 4041 5566; www.bikeman.com.au; 99 Sheridan St; per day/week \$15/\$50) Hire, sales and repairs.
Cairns Bicycle Hire (☎ 4031 3444; www.cairnsbicyclehire.com.au; 47 Shields St; per day/week \$12/\$40, scooters per day from \$35) Groovy bikes and scooters.

Bus

Sunbus (☎ 4057 7411; www.sunbus.com.au) runs regular services in and around Cairns from the Lake St Transit Centre, where schedules for most routes are posted.

Taxi

Black & White Taxis (☎ 131008) has ranks on the corner of Lake and Shields Sts, and on McLeod St in front of Cairns Central Shopping Centre.

ISLANDS OFF CAIRNS

Only a short skim across the water from Cairns, Green Island and Fitzroy Islands make for great day trips; spend the afternoon snorkelling in crystal waters, walking in patches of rainforest or just lazing on the beach. The picturesque Frankland Islands Group is another popular cruise – you can camp here (and on Fitzroy) and really leave the day-trippers behind.

Green Island

With a glamorous resort and stunning beaches, Green Island's long, doglegged jetty heaves

under the weight of boatloads of day-trippers heading for its stunning beaches and offshore snorkelling opportunities. The island and its surrounding waters are protected by their national- and marine-park status. As well as taking gentle walks through the leafy interior, you can walk around the island in around 130 minutes.

The luxurious **Green Island Resort** (☎ 1800 673 366, 4031 3300; www.greenislandresort.com.au; ste \$495-595; ♿ ♿) has stylish split-level suites, each with its own private balcony. Despite the exclusive feel it's partially open to day-trippers, so even if you're not staying you can enjoy the restaurants and water-sports facilities.

Great Adventures (☎ 1800 079 080, 4044 9944; www.greatadventures.com.au) has a fast catamaran (adult/child \$67/33.50), departing Cairns' Reef Fleet Terminal at 8.30am, 10.30am and 1pm and returning at noon, 2.30pm and 4.30pm. Snorkelling gear and use of the resort's swimming pool are included.

Big Cat (☎ 4051 0444; www.bigcat-cruises.com.au; tours from \$66/37) also runs half- and full-day tours departing Cairns' Reef Fleet Terminal at 9am and 1pm.

Fitzroy Island

A steep mountaintop peeping from the sea, Fitzroy Island has coral-strewn beaches, woodlands and walking tracks, camping and a flash refurbished resort.

Fitzroy Island is also known as Gabarra to the indigenous Gungandji people, who have hunted and fished from the island for centuries. Captain Cook named the island Fitzroy after the prime minister of the day when the *Endeavour* left for its Pacific journey. Today the island is national park, with the resort occupying a small portion. The most popular snorkelling spot is around the rocks at **Nudey Beach** (1.2km from the resort).

You can pitch a tent at the **Fitzroy Island Camping Ground** (☎ 4044 3044; camp sites \$26), run by Cairns Regional Council. Bookings must be made in advance (10 sites available).

The Fitzroy Island Resort has been transformed into **Hunt Resort** (☎ 4051 9588; www.huntgroup.com.au; ♿ ♿), which was still under construction at the time of writing.

Raging Thunder (☎ 4030 7900; www.ragingthunder.com.au; adult/child \$42/21) runs island transfers from Reef Fleet Terminal twice a day, leaving Cairns at 8.30am and 10.30am and returning at 3pm and 5pm.

Frankland Islands

If the idea of hanging out on one of five uninhabited coral-fringed islands with excellent snorkelling and stunning white sandy beaches perks your interest – and if not, why not? – cruise out to the Frankland Group National Park. These continental islands consist of High Island to the north and four smaller islands to the south: Normanby, Mabel, Round and Russell.

Campers can be dropped at High or Russell Islands, though numbers are limited on Russell and camping is only permitted on weekdays outside peak season. Permits must be obtained in advance from the Cairns **QPWS** (☎ 4046 6602; www.epa.qld.gov.au; 5B Sheridan St) or you can book online for High Island. You must be fully self-sufficient as there is no water on the islands.

Frankland Islands Cruise & Dive (☎ 4031 6300; www.franklandislands.com.au; adult/child \$109/59) runs excellent day cruises, which include a cruise down the Mulgrave River, snorkelling and lunch.

CAIRNS' NORTHERN BEACHES

Cairns may not have its own beach, but you don't have to go far to find a patch of sand beneath the palms. A string of residential communities clings to the 26km stretch of coast north of Cairns, each separated by the twists and turns of the coastline, and reached by signposted turn-offs from the Captain Cook Hwy. There's a distinctive beach-holiday repose and each has its own feel: Yorkey's is popular with families and sailors, while Palm Cove is the up-market honeymoon haven. There's not much opportunity for camping along the northern beaches these days – only Palm Cove and Ellis Beach have camping grounds.

Holloways Beach

The Coral Sea meets a rough ribbon of sand at low-key Holloways Beach. It's a mostly residential area, with beachside homes making way for a few tourist developments and the odd B&B.

The slick two-bedroom apartments at **Cairns Beach Resort** (☎ 1800 150 208, 4037 0400; www.cairnsbeachresort.com.au; 129 Oleander St; apt \$125-145; ♿ ♿) are pure beachfront.

Coolum's on the Beach (☎ 4055 9200; cnr Hibiscus & Oleander Sts; mains \$22-32; ☺ breakfast Sat & Sun, lunch Fri-Sun, dinner daily) is renowned for its Sunday afternoon jazz sessions, and the beachfront location and Mod Oz menu make Coolum's the hottest spot in Holloway, especially on weekends.

Yorkeys Knob

In many ways the most appealing of the northern beaches, Yorkeys is a sprawling, low-key settlement on a white-sand beach. Nestled within the crescent-shaped Half Moon Bay is the marina, cradling 200 bobbing boats. The 'knob' is the rocky headland that cradles the bay to the north, allowing the wind to whip the water south. This wind is fuel for the many kite-surfers and windsurfers; **Kite Rite** (☎ 4055 7918; www.kiterite.com.au; 471 Varley St; per hr \$79) is a professional outfit offering instruction, including gear hire, and a two-day certificate course (\$499).

A couple of blocks back from the beach and sidled up against a little patch of rain-forest, **Villa Marine** (☎ 4055 7158; www.villamarine.com.au; 8 Rutherford St; studio \$79, units \$119-149) is the best-value spot in Yorkeys.

York Beachfront Apartments (☎ 4055 8733; www.yorkapartments.com.au; 61-63 Sims Esplanade; apt \$149-169; ♿ ♿) is a stylish mid-sized complex offering apartments with fully equipped kitchens and laundries, and separate en suite bedrooms.

Yorkeys Knob Boating Club (☎ 4055 7711; 25 Buckley St; mains \$12-25; ☺ lunch & dinner daily, breakfast Sun) enjoys sea views overlooking the Half Moon Bay Marina and whips up grills, pastas and burgers. It's good for a drink on the deck and the bar is open late on Friday and Saturday nights.

Trinity Beach

Trinity Beach is a long stretch of sheltered white sand. High-rise hotel developments detract from the castaway ambience, but holidaymakers love it – turning their backs to the buildings and focusing on what is one of Cairns' prettiest beaches.

Castaways (☎ 4057 6699; www.castawaystrinitybeach.com.au; cnr Trinity Beach Rd & Moore St; apt \$130; ♿ ♿) has fully self-contained apartments close to the beach. Three pools, spas, tropical gardens and good stand-by rates.

L'unico Trattoria (☎ 4057 8855; 75 Vasey Esplanade; mains \$18-28; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) is a stylish Italian restaurant basking in a stellar corner beachfront location.

Clifton Beach

Local and leisurely, Clifton Beach has a good balance of residential and resort accommodation and services. You can walk north along the beach about 2km to Palm Cove from here.

Clifton Palms (☎ 4055 3839; www.cliftonpalms.com.au; 35-41 Upolu Esplanade; cabins/units from \$70/110, 2-bedroom apt \$145; ♿ ♿) has freestanding single-storey apartments backed by a curtain of green hills. There's a huge range of accommodation options to suit any budget or family group, and stand-by and low-season rates are jaw-droppingly good.

Palm Cove

The Saint Tropez of the northern beaches, Palm Cove is more intimate than Port Douglas and more ritzy than its southern neighbours. The holiday crowd promenades along Williams Esplanade, while the ribbon of white-sand beach lures sun lovers out of their luxury resorts. Of course, it's not all honeymooners and starlets: Palm Cove is for anyone willing to laze about on a decent beach, dine in top-notch restaurants and do some serious people-watching. There's even a camping ground for budget travellers.

Palm Cove Watersports (☎ 0402 861 011; www.palmcovewatersports.com) has 1½-hour early morning sea-kayaking trips (\$42) and half-day paddles to Double Island (adult/child \$60/70).

Just out of Palm Cove on the highway, **Cairns Tropical Zoo** (☎ 4055 3669; www.cairnstropicalzoo.com.au; Captain Cook Hwy; adult/child \$29/14.50; ☺ 8.30am-5pm) is an up-close wildlife experience with crocodiles and snakes, koala photo sessions and kangaroo feeding.

SLEEPING & EATING

Most accommodation and eating are found along Williams Esplanade, so wander along and see where the crowds are congregating.

Palm Cove Camping Ground (☎ 4055 3824; 149 Williams Esplanade; unpowered/powerd sites \$15.50/21) This council-run beachfront camping ground is ensconced among palms at the north end of the Esplanade near the jetty – no cabins but the only way to do Palm Cove on the cheap.

Palm Cove Accommodation (☎ 4055 3797; 19 Veivers Rd; d \$75; ♿) The only other truly budget option in Palm Cove, this small place opposite the tavern has just a few neat, self-contained rooms and a small garden.

Melaleuca Resort (☎ 1800 629 698, 4055 3222; www.melaleucaresort.com.au; 85-93 Williams Esplanade; apt \$185-208; ♿ ♿) Named after the melaleuca trees that line Palm Cove's esplanade, this charming boutique resort has 24 self-contained apartments, all with kitchens, balconies and laundry facilities.

Peppers Beach Club & Spa (☎ 4059 9200; www.peppers.com.au; 123 Williams Esplanade; r from \$322; ♿ ♿) Step through the opulent lobby at Peppers and into a wonderful world of swimming pools (there's a sand-edged lagoon pool and a leafy rainforest pool), tennis courts and all the spa treatments. Even the standard rooms have private balcony spas and the penthouse suites (from \$550) have their own rooftop pool.

Apres Beach Bar & Grill (☎ 4059 2000; 119 Williams Esplanade; dishes \$20-40; ☎ 6.30am-11pm) Halfway along the Esplanade, Apres is the most happening place in Palm Cove, with regular live music and crowds spilling out to the open deck area. The menu runs the gamut of steaks, seafood, Asian and pasta – but it's all pretty pricey given the venue. The zany interior features old motorcycles, racing cars and a biplane hanging from the ceiling!

our pick **Nu Nu** (☎ 4059 1880; www.nunu.com.au; 123 Williams Esplanade; lunch \$18-28, dinner \$36-39; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) With one of the most innovative menus on the coast, retro Nu Nu specialises in 'wild foods' like beet-poached Angus tenderloin or roast chicken with leatherwood-honey grilled figs. Just about everything is intriguing so ask about the tasting menu.

Ellis Beach

Ellis Beach is the last of the northern beaches and the closest to the highway, which runs right past it. The long sheltered bay is a stunner and the view is spectacular as you drive in from the south. This is where the coastal road to Port Douglas really gets interesting.

Ellis Beach Oceanfront Bungalows (☎ 1800 637 036, 4055 3538; www.ellisbeachbungalows.com; Captain Cook Hwy; unpowered sites \$26, powered sites \$30-36, cabins \$80, bungalows \$145-180) is a lovely beachfront park with camping and cabins enjoying wide-screen ocean TV.

One of the best opportunities in the north to see monster saltwater crocs, **Hartley's Crocodile Adventures** (☎ 4055 3576; www.crocodileadventures.com; adult/child \$29/14.50; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) is primarily a crocodile farm based around a large lagoon, but there's plenty of other wildlife here including native birds, koalas and snakes.

CAIRNS TO COOKTOWN

There are two routes to Cooktown from the south and most travellers with a 4WD do a loop, going up one way and back the other.

The most interesting route north is to Cape Tribulation along the Captain Cook Hwy, then continuing up the 4WD Bloomfield Track (known as the 'coast road') to Cooktown. This trip runs through the rainforest of Daintree National Park and past sublime beaches – don't miss it. To reach Cooktown by 2WD, turn inland off the Captain Cook Hwy to Kuranda and take the Kennedy Hwy to the sealed Peninsula and Cooktown Developmental Rds (known as the 'inland route'), which pass through the relatively arid southern reaches of Cape York Peninsula.

Prepare your camera for the coastal road between Palm Cove and Port Douglas, where the highway spectacularly hugs the coastline like a mini-far-north version of Victoria's Great Ocean Road.

KURANDA

☎ 07 / pop 1610

Reached by a winding 30km road, a scenic railway or Australia's longest gondola cableway from Cairns, Kuranda is easily the most popular day-tripping destination on the tableland. By day, this tiny village is crawling with tourists poking through the ever-expanding markets and lining up for various purpose-built nature attractions. Stay overnight to see it transform into the mellow village that made it so popular in the first place. While the markets and marketing can seem a bit tacky, this is a truly beautiful area with refreshing rainforest walks and an alternative feel.

The **Kuranda visitors centre** (☎ 4093 9311; www.kuranda.org; ☎ 10am-4pm) is centrally located in Centenary Park.

Sights & Activities

The original **Kuranda Markets** (☎ 4093 7261; Therwine St; ☎ 9am-3pm) started in 1978 and became famous for imaginative local art and craft products. It's still the place to see artists such as glassblowers at work, pick up hemp products and sample local produce such as honey and fruit wines. Across the road, the **Heritage Markets** (☎ 4093 8060; www.kurandamarkets.com.au; Rob Veivers Dr; ☎ 9am-3pm) are made up of souvenirs and crafts such as ceramics, emu oil, jewellery, clothing, food, and figurines made from pistachio nuts.

Djurri Dadagal Art Enterprises (☎ 0428-645 945; Coondoo St; ☎ 9.30am-3.30pm) is an excellent indigenous art cooperative where the paintings, artefacts, screen prints and textiles are

produced on site by local artists. You can see artists at work most days.

The Kuranda region has half a dozen nature and wildlife parks showing off bats, birds, butterflies, koalas, snakes and spiders that are certain to keep kids amused, but it's just as much fun (and free) to wander off into the surrounding rainforest. There are a number of easy **walking trails** in and around the village. Across the train line by the station a path leads down to the Barron River. Follow the path downstream to the railway bridge (1km, 20 minutes). This bridge marks the start of the Jungle Walk section (800m, 15 minutes), which is a paved track that runs between Barron Gorge Rd meeting the Jumrum Creek Walk (800m, 15 minutes), which starts/finishes on Coondoo St and links to a 2km walk to **Barron Falls**.

Sleeping

Kuranda Rainforest Park (☎ 4093 7316; www.kurandarainforestpark.com.au; Kuranda Heights Rd; unpowered/power sites \$22/26, s/d \$25/45, units \$85-100; ♿ ♿) This excellent park lives up to its name with grassy camping sites enveloped in rainforest. The park is a 10-minute walk from town via a forest trail.

Kuranda Backpackers Hostel (☎ 4093 7355; www.kuradabackpackershostel.com; cnr Arara & Barang Sts; dm/s/d \$19/46/49; ♿) This rambling, semi-falling-apart, double-storey home is surrounded by a large garden. It has an old and slightly bleak feel with creaky floorboards and steel-frame bunks but there are spacious common areas.

our pick **Kuranda Resort & Spa** (☎ 4093 7556; www.kurandaresortandspa.com; 3 Green Hills Rd; dm \$40, d \$129-169; ♿ ♿ ♿) You'll feel as though you've stepped inside a magazine spread when you enter the exotic, stylish apartments on offer here. From Asian-inspired two-storey loft villas to spacious self-contained apartments, the accommodation is top notch, and the eco-friendly resort has a spectacular pool, a tennis court, an in-house theatre, a gym and a superb restaurant. The day spa has the full range of pampering therapies.

Eating

There are dozens of busy cafés along Coondoo and Therwine Sts, and also tucked away in the markets.

Nevermind Cafe (☎ 4093 8448; Shop 1, 24 Coondoo St; meals \$5-12; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Epitomising that slightly hippy vibe that still exists up here,

Nevermind has organic smoothies, herbal teas, toasted sandwiches and great coffee.

Banjo's Bar & Grill (☎ 4093 9399; 17 Therwine St; mains \$10-22; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Thu-Sat; ♿) Kuranda's liveliest restaurant serves up organic mango crepes for brekky, gourmet burgers, focaccias and pizzas with occasional live music.

Getting There & Away

It's about the journey as much as the destination with Kuranda. The Skyrail and Scenic Railway between Kuranda and Cairns are themselves big attractions and most people go up one way and down the other. If that's not for you, it's only a 20-minute drive or a cheap bus ride up from Cairns.

Kuranda Scenic Railway (☎ 4036 9333; www.kurandascenicrailway.com.au; Cairns train station, Bunda St; adult/concession/child one way \$39/31/19.50, return \$56/50/27) winds 34km from Cairns to Kuranda through picturesque mountains and no less than 15 tunnels. The line took five years to build, and was opened in 1891. The trip takes 1½ hours and trains depart Cairns at 8.30am and 9.30am daily, returning from pretty Kuranda station (known for its floral displays) at 2pm and 3.30pm.

Skyrail Rainforest Cableway (☎ 4038 1555; www.skyrail.com.au; adult/child one way \$39/19.50, return \$56/28; ☎ 8.15am-5.15pm) is one of the world's longest gondola cableways at 7.5km. From Smithfield, a northern suburb of Cairns, it includes two stops with boardwalks and interpretive panels. Transfers to/from the terminal and combination (Scenic Railway and Skyrail) deals are available.

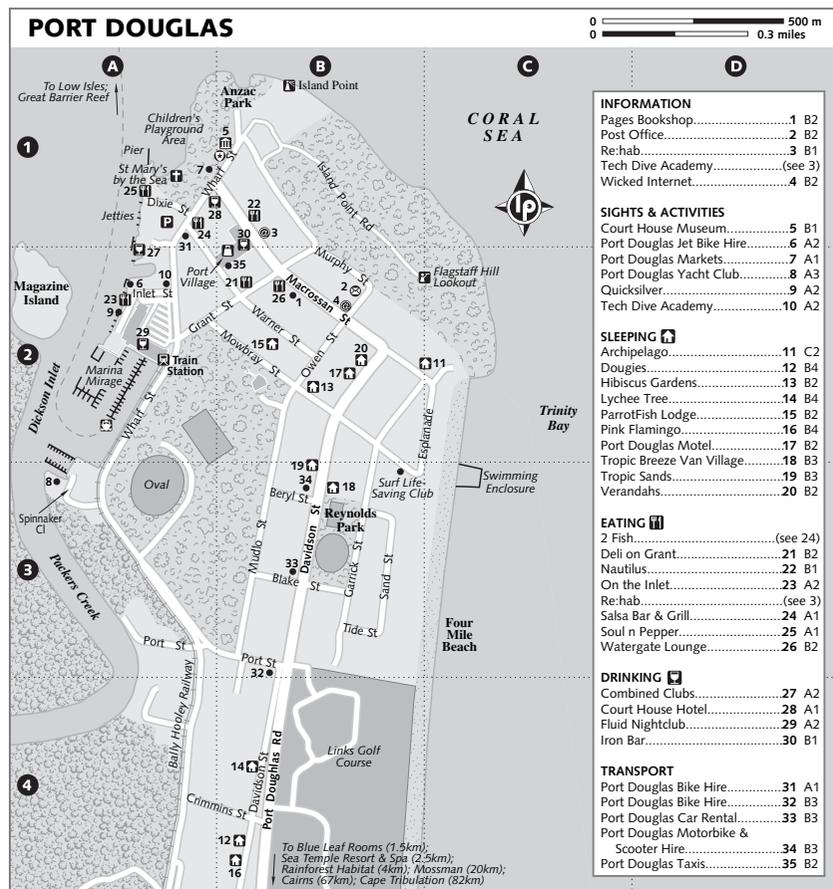
John's Kuranda Bus (☎ 0418-772 953) runs a service to Kuranda (\$3) from Lake St Transit Centre. **Whitacar Coaches** (☎ 4091 1855) has five departures (\$5) from 46 Spence St, Cairns.

PORT DOUGLAS

☎ 07 / pop 948

Port Douglas is the flashy playground of Far North Queensland. Like a spoiled child it thumbs its nose at 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 manicured, 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.

Information

There's no 'official' (ie noncommercial) tourist information centre in Port Douglas. There are lots of signs alerting you to tourist information, but they're all basically booking agencies.

All the major banks have branches with ATMs along Macrossan St. The main post office is on Owen St.

Pages Bookshop (☎ 4099 5094; Shop 3, 35 Macrossan St; ☎ 9am-6pm) Stocks a range of fiction and nonfiction titles.

Rehab (☎ 4099 4677; www.rehabportdouglas.com.au; 3/18 Macrossan St; per hr \$4; wi-fi) Chic internet café.

Wicked Internet (☎ 4099 6900; 48 Macrossan St; per hr \$5) Internet café and ice-cream parlour.

Sights

Most people put in a few hours or days strolling or sunning on delightful **Four Mile Beach**, a broad band of squeaky white-sand beach backed by palms that reaches as far as your squinting eyes can see. For a fine view over the

beach and bay, follow Wharf St and the steep Island Point Rd to **Flagstaff Hill Lookout**.

The **Court House Museum** (☎ 4098 5395; 18 Wharf St; admission \$2; ☎ 10am-1pm Tue, Thu, Sat & Sun) near Anzac Park dates back to 1879 and has an interesting display on the town's early history, including the 1887 trial of Ellen Thomson, the only woman legally hanged in Queensland.

The **Port Douglas Markets** (Anzac Park, bottom of Macrossan St; ☎ 8.30am-1.30pm Sun) make for a leisurely Sunday morning browse along the grassy foreshore of Anzac Park.

There's no shortage of wildlife tourist parks in north Queensland, but **Rainforest Habitat** (☎ 4099 3235; www.rainforesthabitat.com.au; Port Douglas Rd; adult/child/family \$29/14.50/72.50; ☎ 8am-5pm) is up there with the best. The sanctuary endeavours to keep and showcase native animals in enclosures that closely mimic their natural environment – wetlands, grasslands and rainforest – but also allow you to get up close and personal. As well as koalas, kangaroos, crocs and tree kangaroos, Rainforest Habitat is home to parrots, wading birds, kookaburras, flying foxes and the prehistoric-looking cassowary. Take your time as the ticket is valid for three days. Come early for **Breakfast with the Birds** (adult/child incl admission \$39/19.50; ☎ 8-10.30am) or **Lunch with the Lorikeets** (\$39/19.50; ☎ noon-2pm).

Activities

The **Port Douglas Yacht Club** (☎ 4099 4386; www.portdouglasyachtclub.com.au; Spinnaker Close) offers free sailing with club members every Wednesday from 4pm – you might have to do some sweet-talking if places are limited, but it's a great way to get out on the water and meet some locals.

Port Douglas Jet Bike Hire (☎ 4099 3175; www.reefsprinter.com.au; per 30min/hr \$85/140), at the Wharf St jetty, rents jet bikes.

Sea Temple Golf Club (☎ 4087 2222; www.seatemplegolfclub.com.au; Old Port Rd; 18 holes \$115; ☎ 6.30am-4pm), at Sea Temple Resort & Spa, south of town, is a championship links course rated in the top 50 in Australia.

Port Douglas doesn't have the range of dive companies that Cairns has, but a few operators offer PADI open-water courses and advanced dive certificates. **Tech Dive Academy** (☎ 4099 6880; www.tech-dive-academy.com; 3/46 Wharf St; 4-day open-water courses from \$750) has high-quality personalised instruction with limited numbers per class (one to three). **Quicksilver Dive School** (☎ 4055 3255; www.silverseries.com.au/diveschool.htm;

Marina Mirage; 4-day open water courses \$595) is based at the Novotel in Palm Cove where the first two days are held; transfers from Port Douglas included. It also runs cruises and sailing trips (see below).

Tours

Port Douglas is a hub for tours, either out to the Reef or north to the rugged rainforests of Daintree and Cape Tribulation.

GREAT BARRIER REEF

Port Douglas is closer to the outer reef than Cairns is, and the unrelenting surge of visitors has had a similar impact on its condition here. Access to the majority of sites that operators visit is around an hour from Port Douglas. Day tours usually make two to three stops on the outer and ribbon reefs, including St Crispins, Agincourt, Chinaman and Tongue Reefs. Several operators visit the Low Isles: an idyllic little island with a lighthouse and fringing coral just 15km offshore.

Aristocat (☎ 4099 4727; www.aristocat.com.au; adult/child \$159/115) Fast cat to three snorkelling sites. Maximum 45 passengers.

Haba (☎ 4098 5000; www.habadive.com.au; Marina Mirage; adult/child \$155/95) Long-standing local dive company; visits two sites.

Poseidon (☎ 4099 4772; www.poseidon-cruises.com.au; adult/child \$165/125) Luxury catamaran with trips to Agincourt reefs.

Quicksilver (☎ 4087 2100; www.quicksilver-cruises.com) Major operator with fast cruises to Agincourt Reef aboard *Wavepiercer* (adult/child \$186/93) and family-oriented sailing trips to the Low Isles on the *Wavedancer* (adult/child from \$122/61). It also operates a dive school (left).

LOW ISLES

Ragamuffin III (☎ 0415-874 202; snorkelling trip \$135) This well-known ex-racing yacht does day trips to the Low Isles.

Shaolin (☎ 4099 4772; www.shaolinportdouglas.com; adult/child \$150/90) A refitted Chinese junk, the *Shaolin* has snorkelling cruises to the Low Isles.

OTHER TOURS

There are numerous operators offering day trips to Cape Tribulation, some via Mossman Gorge.

Fine Feather Tours (☎ 4094 1199; www.finefeather.com.au; half-/full-day tours \$165/225) Serious ornithologists and amateur twitchers alike will love these bird-watching tours led by an expert guide.

Lady Douglas (☎ 4099 1603; 1½hr cruises adult/child \$25/12; lunch cruise \$45) A paddlewheeler that runs afternoon and sunset croc-spotting cruises down the Dixon Inlet.

Reef and Rainforest Connections (☎ 4099 5333; www.reefandrainforest.com.au) A big range of day-long ecotours that combine a number of attractions. There's a Cape Trib and Bloomfield Falls 4WD safari (adult/child \$159/124), a trip to Kuranda including the Skyrail and the Scenic Railway (adult/child \$125/63) and various wildlife tours to the region's parks and sanctuaries.

Skysafari (☎ 4099 3666; www.skysafari.com.au) Scenic helicopter flights from 10 minutes over Port Douglas (\$95 per person) to an hour taking in the reef and rainforest (\$429). You can also arrange drop-offs to remote waterfalls or islands, which can work out cheaper as a day trip (less flying time).

Sleeping

Befitting a holiday town, Port Douglas is swimming in accommodation, most of it in self-contained apartments or upmarket resorts. There are a few good budget options, but nothing like the scale of that in Cairns, and price brackets here generally move up a notch. Discounts are often available online or as stand-by rates, and prices can drop significantly during the low season.

BUDGET

Tropic Breeze Van Village (☎ /fax 4099 5299; 24 Davidson St; unpowered/power sites \$26/28, cabins \$75; 🚐) The closest van park to Port central, with a path straight through to the beach, Tropic Breeze is a little cramped but has grassy sites and basic cabins (no en suite).

our pick Parrotfish Lodge (☎ 1800 995011, 4099 5011; www.parrotfishlodge.com; 37-39 Warner St; dm \$25-33, d \$85-95; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Mural-sized contemporary art covers the walls in this cheery, central backpackers. The décor is extreme beach, with bright-yellow walls and iridescent-blue swirling floors. The restaurant and bar is a great meeting place.

Dougies (☎ 1800 996 200, 4099 6200; www.dougies.com.au; 111 Davidson St; tent sites per person \$13; dm \$26, d & tw \$75; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Set in spacious grounds south of the centre, Dougies is a backpacker resort where it's easy to hang about the grounds in a hammock by day and move to the bar at night.

Port Douglas Motel (☎ 4099 5248; www.portdouglas.motel.com; 9 Davidson St; d \$95-110; 🍷 🍷) For value and location this little motel is hard to beat and is often full. Rooms are bright and well

furnished (no views); some are self-contained with basic kitchen facilities.

MIDRANGE

Blue Leaf Rooms (☎ 4099 5414; www.blueleafrooms.com.au; 316 Port Douglas Rd; d \$99-109; 🍷 🍷 🍷) These excellent-value rooms are independently owned but part of the Mantra Treetops Resort – you get to use the resort facilities without paying the full whack. It's about 4km south of town and a short walk to Four Mile Beach.

Archipelago (☎ 4099 5387; www.archipelago.com.au; 72 Macrossan St; d \$113-190; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Close to the beach and the town centre, the 12 self-contained rooms spread over three levels – the upper rooms have 'filtered' views to the beach. Rooms are neat and functional, with a balcony and cane furniture.

Pink Flamingo (☎ 4099 6622; www.pinkflamingo.com.au; 115 Davidson St; \$125-185; 🍷 🍷 🍷) The pink-flamingo statue at the entrance to your room holds your 'Do Not Disturb' sign at this gay-friendly resort. The bright primary-coloured interiors are a bit arresting, but the giant beds, oversized spas and heated garden pool are pure relaxation. The resort has a gym and outdoor movie nights.

Lychee Tree (☎ 4099 5811; www.lychee-tree.com.au; 95 Davidson St; apt \$135-160; 🍷 🍷) Families will fit right in at these single-storey self-contained apartments (one or two bedrooms). They're simply decorated and well equipped with kitchens, washing machines and dryers, and balconies overlooking tropical gardens.

our pick Hibiscus Gardens (☎ 1800 995 995, 4099 5315; www.hibiscusportdouglas.com.au; 22 Owen St; r from \$165; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Balinese influences of teak furnishing and fixtures, bi-fold doors and plantation shutters – as well as the occasional Buddha – give this stylish resort an exotic ambience. The in-house day spa specialises in indigenous healing techniques and products.

Tropic Sands (☎ 4099 4533; www.tropicsands.com.au; 21 Davidson St; apt \$175; 🍷 🍷 🍷) The handsome open-plan rooms here are in a beautiful, white, colonial-style building. From your private balcony you can catch a whiff of the sea or whatever's cooking in your fully equipped kitchen.

TOP END

Verandahs (☎ 4099 6650; www.verandahsportdouglas.com.au; 7 Davidson St; r from \$245; 🍷 🍷) These stylish two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartments are serviced daily and come with stainless-

steel kitchens, polished floorboards and modern furnishings. The namesake verandas have barbecues and are great for entertaining.

Sea Temple Resort & Spa (☎ 1800 833 762, 4084 3500; www.mirvac-hotels.com.au; Mitre St; r \$310-608; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Port Douglas' most luxurious five-star is set in lush tropical gardens near the southern end of Four Mile Beach and is part of a superb 18-hole golf course. Take a studio with a spa, a two-bedroom apartment or the opulent 'swim out' penthouse with direct access to the enormous lagoon pool. The day spa has a full range of treatments, including hot stones.

Eating

For a town of its size, Port Douglas has some of the best dining north of Noosa. Chairs and tables spill out of cafés along Macrossan St, candlelit gardens make for romantic evening dinners and fresh seafood highlights many a menu.

RESTAURANTS

our pick On the Inlet (☎ 4099 5255; www.portdouglas-seafood.com; 3 Inlet St; mains \$18-37; 🍷 lunch & dinner) With a sublime location on Dickson Inlet, tables here are spread along a sprawling deck, where you can wave to the passing boats and gather around to await the 5.30pm arrival of near-resident George the grouper, who comes to feed most days (take up the early-dinner deal of a bucket of prawns and a drink for \$19). The menu is big on seafood and you can select live crayfish and mud crabs from a large tank. Great service, cool atmosphere.

2 Fish (☎ 4099 6350; www.2fishrestaurant.com.au; 7/20 Wharf St; mains \$22.50-40; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Seafood dominates many a menu in Port Douglas, but 2 Fish takes it to new levels. More than 15 types of fish, from coral trout to red emperor and wild barramundi, can be prepared in a variety of innovative ways, or you could try a dish of bay bugs, king prawns and yabbies.

Salsa Bar & Grill (☎ 4099 4922; www.salsaportdouglas.com.au; 26 Wharf St; mains \$26-34; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Set in a white Queenslander across from Dickson Inlet, Salsa Bar & Grill is a local favourite, offering an imaginative range of Mediterranean-inspired dishes and a casual vibe. Try the jambalaya, a Cajun concoction of rice with prawns, yabby, crocodile and smoked chicken. Leave room for the soft cheeses that are produced on site.

Watergate Lounge (☎ 4099 6665; www.watergate-lounge.com.au; 31 Macrossan St; mains \$28-36; 🍷 lunch &

dinner) Flashy and fashionable, Watergate is a '70s retro bar-restaurant with squishy white leather couches in the bar opening out to a flame-lit alfresco garden. Worth dropping in for a drink and a plate of tapas in the bar, but the restaurant menu is also enticing.

Nautilus (☎ 4099 5330; www.nautilus-restaurant.com.au; 17 Murphy St; mains \$32-49; 🍷 dinner) Nautilus has been a dining institution in Port Douglas for more than 50 years. Its tables are in two lush outdoor settings amid tall palms, and stiffly dressed in white linen. Seafood is a speciality, such as mud crab with kaffir lime and lemongrass laksa.

CAFÉS & QUICK EATS

Re:hab (☎ 4099 4677; 3/18 Macrossan St; 🍷 8am-10pm) You can smell the fresh-roasted coffee aromas from the street, though most people inside have their noses buried in a computer.

Deli On Grant (☎ 4099 5852; 11 Grant St; meals \$8-12; 🍷 7.30am-5pm) A range of boutique produce and home-cooked meals to take away are on offer here. With three hours' notice the Deli will put together sensational ready-to-go picnic hampers (plates, cutlery and all).

Soul n Pepper (☎ 4099 4499; 2 Dixie St; mains \$16-28; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Right opposite the pier; there's a soulfulness in the sea breeze at this laid-back outdoor café. It's especially popular for breakfast and lunch.

Drinking & Entertainment

Drinking and eating go hand in hand in Port Douglas and the local pubs are as much casual restaurants as they are watering holes.

Iron Bar (☎ 4099 4776; 5 Macrossan St; mains \$18-30; 🍷 lunch & dinner) A bit of whacky outback shearing-shed décor never goes astray in Queensland. It's well done – all rustic iron and aging timber. After polishing off your T-bone or Don Bradman eye fillet (the steaks are named after famous Aussies), head upstairs for a flutter on the cane-toad races (\$5).

Court House Hotel (☎ 4099 5181; cnr Macrossan & Wharf Sts; mains \$15-25; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Commanding a prime corner location, the Court is a bubbling local with cover bands providing entertainment on weekends.

Combined Clubs (☎ 4099 5553; Ashford Ave; 🍷 10am-10pm) It looks a bit like a tin shed from the outside, but locals love this relaxed club for cheap drinks and a sundowner on the waterfront deck. Also serves up good-value bistro meals for lunch and dinner.

Fluid Nightclub (☎ 4099 5200; Shop 54, Marina Mirage; 🕒 10pm-5am) Fluid is the heart of Port's late, late-night scene. The party usually starts at casual Henry's Bar or the lounge bar Mez, then moves upstairs to the dance floor at Fluid. Tuesday night is backpacker night, and there are occasional touring bands and DJs.

Getting There & Away

Sun Palm (☎ 4087 2900; www.sunpalmtransport.com) has frequent daily services between Port Douglas and Cairns (\$30, 1½ hours) via the northern beaches and the airport, and up the coast to Mossman (\$10, 20 minutes), Mossman Gorge (\$15, 30 minutes), Daintree (\$25, one hour) and Cape Tribulation (\$35, three hours).

Airport Connections (☎ 4099 5950; www.tnqshuttle.com; one way \$30; 🕒 3.30am-4.30pm) runs an hourly shuttle-bus service between Port Douglas and Cairns airport, continuing on to Cairns CBD.

Country Road Coachlines (☎ 4045 2794; www.countryroadcoachlines.com.au) has a bus service from Port Douglas to Cooktown on the coastal route via Cape Tribulation three times a week (\$72).

Getting Around

BICYCLE

Port Douglas Bike Hire (www.portdouglassbikehire; per day/week \$19/89; 🕒 9am-5pm) corner Wharf & Warner Sts (☎ 4099 5799); corner Davidson & Port Sts (☎ 4099 4303) has two locations in town; free delivery for multiday hire.

BUS

Sun Palm (☎ 4087 2900; www.sunpalmtransport.com; 🕒 7am-midnight) runs in a continuous loop every half-hour from the Rainforest Habitat (near the Captain Cook Hwy turn-off) to the Marina Mirage, stopping regularly. Flag the driver down at the marked bus stops. Also runs twice-daily service between Port Douglas and Mossman.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Port Douglas has plenty of small local car-hire companies, most lined up on Warner St. One-way rental to Cairns or the airport is no problem. If you're planning to continue north up the Bloomfield Track to Cooktown, Port Douglas is the last place you can hire a 4WD vehicle for the job. With less cutthroat competition, vehicle hire is pricier here than in Cairns. Expect to pay \$60 a day for a small car and \$130 a day for a 4WD, plus insurance.

Port Douglas Car Rental (☎ 4099 4988; www.portdouglasscarrental.com.au; 81 Davidson St)

Port Douglas Motorbike & Scooter Hire (☎ 4099 4000; www.plazaportdouglas.com.au; 37 Davidson St) Based at Plaza Port Douglas, it rents out scooters from \$75 a day and motorbikes from \$155 a day.

Taxi

Port Douglas Taxis (☎ 131 008) offers 24-hour service and has a rank on Warner St.

MOSSMAN

☎ 07 / pop 1740

After the holiday hype of Port Douglas, Mossman – only 20km north – brings you back to earth. It's a pleasant, unpretentious cane town with a working sugar mill and cane trains to prove it. Mossman should be an obligatory stop to visit Mossman Gorge, and it's also a good place to fill up the tank and stock up on supplies if you're heading north. **Mossman Sugar Mill Tours** (☎ 4030 4190; www.mossman.sag.com.au; Mill St; adult/child \$20/15; 🕒 11am & 1.30pm Mon-Fri Jun-Oct) will show you how all that giant tropical grass gets turned into sugar.

Mossman Gorge

Inspiring Mossman Gorge, 5km west of town, is in the southeast corner of Daintree National Park and forms part of the traditional lands of the Kuku Yalanji indigenous people. Walking tracks loop from the car park along the boulder-strewn Mossman river to a swimming hole where you can take a dip with the slow-moving jungle perch (identified by two black spots on their tails) – take care here, particularly after downpours, as the currents can be swift. There's a picnic area here but no camping.

Mossman Gorge Gateway (☎ 4098 2595; www.yal.anji.com.au; 🕒 8.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) is a cultural and visitors centre, 1km before the gorge car park, run by the Kuku Yalanji community. To truly appreciate the cultural significance of Mossman Gorge, join the excellent 1½-hour guided walks run by **Kuku-Yalanji Dreamtime Walks** (adult/child \$27.50/15; 🕒 9am, 11am, 1pm & 3pm Mon-Sat). Indigenous guides lead you through the rainforest pointing out and explaining the significance of rock-art sites, plants and natural features.

DAINTREE VILLAGE

☎ 07 / pop 80

After passing the relaxed beach communities of Newell and Wonga Beach, the road swings towards the Daintree River crossing and the

DAINTREE NATIONAL PARK: THEN & NOW

The greater Daintree rainforest, now protected as part of Daintree National Park, has a controversial history. In 1983 the Bloomfield Track was bulldozed through sensitive lowland rainforest from Cape Tribulation to the Bloomfield River, attracting international attention to the fight to save the lowland rainforests. The conservationists lost that battle, but the publicity generated by the blockade indirectly led to the federal government's moves in 1987 to nominate Queensland's wet tropical rainforests for World Heritage listing.

One of the key outcomes was a total ban on commercial logging in the area, but World Heritage listing doesn't affect land-ownership rights or control. In 1994, the Daintree Rescue Program, a state and federal government buy-back scheme, attempted to consolidate and increase public land ownership in the area, lowering the threat of land clearing and associated species extinction. They spent \$23 million repurchasing large properties, adding them to the Daintree National Park and installing visitor interpretation facilities such as Marrdja and Dubuji boardwalks. Sealing the road to Cape Tribulation (eventually completed in 2002) opened the area to rapid settlement, activating attempts to buy back freehold blocks to reduce settlement pressures.

Coupled with stringent development controls, it looks as though the adage of *Paradise Lost* is being reversed by local and state efforts, and the Daintree just could be *Paradise Regained*. Check out www.austrop.org.au, which welcomes volunteers to assist at the Cape Tribulation Tropical Research Station (Bat House; p472).

What can I do?

When visiting this impossibly beautiful part of the world, *leave only footsteps behind*. That's as easy as taking your rubbish with you, sticking to the designated trails and driving slowly to avoid hitting wildlife. Consider the following:

- Does the tour I'm going on have ecocertification (www.ecotourism.org.au)?
- Are tour participants encouraged to take their rubbish with them when visiting World Heritage sites?
- Are there any volunteer opportunities for me to assist with cleaning up beaches or wildlife monitoring etc?
- Is my accommodation choice encouraging guests to recycle rubbish and reduce water consumption?

route to Cape Trib, but it's worth taking the left-hand (straight ahead) detour to the tiny settlement of Daintree for a croc-spotting tour on the broad Daintree River. Neither Daintree Village nor the surrounding countryside is part of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area – it's mostly cleared farmland – but there are still pockets of untouched rainforest.

Tours

It's all about cruising on the Daintree River here. Sightings of resident saltwater crocodiles are frequent but not guaranteed. Tours can be booked at the two agencies in the village.

Chris Dahlberg's Daintree River Tours (☎ 4098 7997; www.daintreerivertours.com.au; Daintree Village; adult/child \$35/55; 🕒 6.30am Feb-Oct, 6am Nov-Jan) Two-hour tours specialising in bird-watching.

Crocodile Express (☎ 4098 6120; www.daintreeconnection.com.au; Daintree Village; 1hr cruise adult/child

\$22/11) Eight departures from Daintree Village and 12 from the Daintree ferry crossing. Also a lunch cruise (adult/child \$69/34).

Daintree River Experience (☎ 4098 7480; www.daintreerivers.com.au; 2hr cruise adult/child \$50/36; 🕒 6am & 4pm) Serene two-hour sunrise and sunset cruises specialising in bird-watching.

Electric Boat Cruises (☎ 1800 686 103; www.electricboatcruises.com; 1hr cruise adult/child \$20/10; 🕒 7 daily Mar-Jan) Also offers a 1½-hour tour at 8am including muffins and coffee (adult/child \$35/17).

Sleeping & Eating

Daintree boasts some superb B&Bs and boutique accommodation in the village and the surrounding forest and farmland.

Red Mill House (☎ 4098 6233; www.redmillhouse.com.au; 11 Stewart St; s/d \$140/180; 🍷 📺 📶) Bird-watchers will love the Red Mill. The owners of this lovely old cedar home are enthusiastic

birders and the large veranda overlooking the rainforest garden is a great place to enjoy breakfast and observe the resident wildlife.

River Home Cottages (☎ 4098 6225; www.riverhomecottages.com.au; Upper Daintree Rd; d \$140; ☹) Drive 5km down an unsealed road to reach these secluded self-contained cottages. The owners can show you to a secluded waterfall and swimming hole at the back of the property, or just relax in the spa fitted in each cabin.

Daintree Eco Lodge & Spa (☎ 1800 808 010, 4098 6100; www.daintree-ecolodge.com.au; 20 Daintree Rd; s/d from \$510/550; ☹) The 15 boutique villas (10 with private spas) prop on stilts in the rainforest canopy a few kilometres south of Daintree Village. It's a luxurious retreat and the spa here uses its own range of organic products and methods borrowed from the indigenous community. The superb Julaymba Restaurant specialises in dishes of barramundi and steak prepared using local produce, incorporating indigenous berries, nuts, leaves and flowers. Try the Flaming Green Ant cocktail – made with crushed green ants!

Papaya (☎ 4098 6173; 3-5 Stewart St; mains \$7-25; ☹ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) The tempting 'Taste of the Daintree' platter with treats such as crocodile wontons and sugar-cane prawns is a signature dish at this snappy little bar and bistro in the village.

DAINTREE RIVER TO CAPE TRIBULATION

Crossing the Daintree River by the cable ferry gives the feeling that you're about to enter a frontier wilderness. From here the road narrows and winds north for 35km, hugging the coast for most of the way to Cape Tribulation. Along the way are smatterings of tiny hamlets, isolated beaches and attractions that make getting to Cape Trib half the fun.

The indigenous Kuku Yalanji people called the area Kulk; the name Cape Tribulation was given by Captain Cook after his ship ran aground on an outlying reef.

Part of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, this extraordinarily beautiful stretch is one of the few places in the world where the tropical rainforest meets the sea. In recognition of this unique environment, much of the area is protected as the Daintree National Park, which was declared in 1981.

Cow Bay and Cape Tribulation are loosely termed 'villages', but the length of Cape Tribulation Rd is peppered with secluded

places to stay and eat. There's no mains power north of the Daintree River – electricity is supplied by generators or, increasingly, solar power. The only fuel between the Daintree River and Cape Trib is at **Rainforest Village** (☎ 4098 9015; ☹ 7am-7pm).

The lovable **Daintree River ferry** (car/motorcycle/bicycle & pedestrian one way \$10/4/1; ☹ 6am-midnight), a cable ferry, carries you and your vehicle across the river every 15 minutes or so.

Sights & Activities

About 3km beyond the Daintree River crossing, a 5km unsealed road leads to Cape Kimberley Beach, a quiet beach with **Snapper Island** just off shore. The island is national park, with a fringing reef. Access is by private boat; Crocodylus Village takes a sea-kayaking tour there.

On the steep, winding road between Cape Kimberley and Cow Bay is the **Walu Wugirriga (Alexandra Range) lookout**, with an information board and superb views over the Range and the Daintree River inlet.

The **Daintree Discovery Centre** (☎ 4098 9171; www.daintree-rec.com.au; Tulip Oak Rd; adult/child/family \$25/10/58 valid for seven days; ☹ 8.30am-5pm) is an award-winning rainforest interpretive centre. Its aerial walkway takes you high into the forest canopy via a 23m tower. You can spend about an hour meandering along the boardwalks and looking out for wildlife, but if you hire an audio guide (\$5), expect to spend at least a couple of hours. The audio guide also offers an excellent Aboriginal tour, interpreting the rainforest from an indigenous viewpoint.

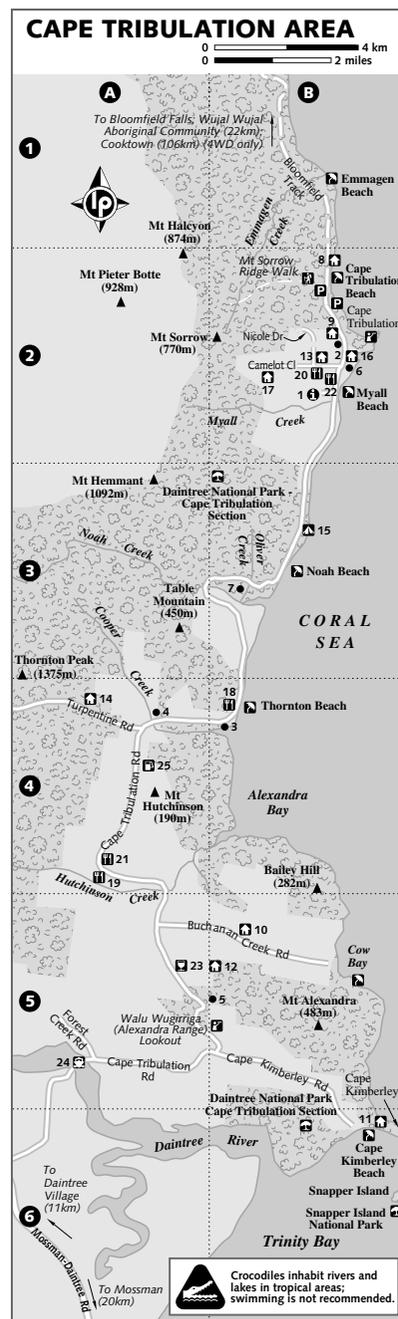
Just past the centre, **Jindalba Boardwalk** is a 700m circuit walk that snakes through the rainforest.

The tiny village of **Cow Bay** clings to the main road, but turn east down a sealed 5km road to the lovely secluded beach.

Book ahead for a place on one of the **Cooper Creek Wilderness** (☎ 4098 9126; www.ccvild.com; Cape Tribulation Rd; guided walks \$40) walks, which take you through Daintree rainforest and include a dip in Cooper Creek. Night walks (departing at 8pm) focus on spotting nocturnal wildlife.

Cape Tribulation Wilderness Cruises (☎ 4033 2052; www.capeTRIBcrises.com; Cape Tribulation Rd; adult/child \$25/17.50) has one-hour mangrove cruises down Cooper Creek in search of crocs.

Marrdja Botanical Walk is a beautiful 540m (30-minute) interpretive boardwalk that follows the creek through a section of rainforest packed with fan palms and past mangroves to a look-



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out over Noah Creek. Wear insect repellent to beat the mildly annoying midges.

Sleeping & Eating

There's basic camping at Snapper Island and Noah Beach – book online through **QPWS** (www.epa.qld.gov.au).

Daintree Koala Beach Resort (☎ 4090 7500; www.koalaadventures.com; Cape Kimberley; unpowered/powered sites per person \$10/13, dm \$25, d \$50-120; ☹) At Cape Kimberley Beach, this is a spacious camping ground with secluded sites among the trees, small 'jungle huts' with bunk beds, air-con cabins, and a bar and restaurant.

Crocodylus Village (☎ 4098 9166; www.crocodyluscapetrib.com; Buchanan Creek Rd; dm/d \$20/75; ☹) Associated with the YHA, it has cramped safari-style tents at Cow Bay and runs adventurous two-day sea-kayaking tours to Snapper Island (\$199).

Epiphyte B&B (☎ 4098 9039; www.rainforestbb.com; 22 Silkwood Rd; s/d/tr/cabin \$70/95/120/140) Set on a lush 3.5-hectare property, spectacularly laid-back Epiphyte has individually styled rooms

of varying sizes. From the front deck of the house you can kick back with views of imposing Thornton's Peak.

Heritage Lodge & Spa (☎ 4098 9138; www.heritage.lodge.net.au; Turpentine Rd; r from \$215; ☹️ 🚿) In a secluded rainforest location, the Heritage Lodge overlooks a beautiful stretch of Cooper Creek – the swimming holes in the 'back yard' are sensational. As well as comfortable individual cabins, spa treatments (www.daintreespa.com) are on offer.

Fan Palm Boardwalk Cafe (☎ 4098 9119; Cape Tribulation Rd, Cow Bay; mains \$5-18; ☹️ 🍳) Alfresco dining on the edge of the rainforest with perky wraps, sandwiches, burgers and breakfast fare.

Daintree Ice Cream Company (☎ 4098 9114; Cape Tribulation Rd; ice cream \$5; ☹️ 11am-5pm) Exotic tropical flavours like wattleseed, black sapote, macadamia, mango, coconut or jackfruit are on offer here.

Cafe on Sea (☎ 4098 9718; mains \$10-15; ☹️ 🍳) Fronting Thornton Beach, this licensed place is a soothing spot for a light lunch or a drink.

Cow Bay Hotel (☎ 4098 9011; Bailey Creek Rd; mains \$10-18; ☹️ 🍷) If you have a hankering for a basic pub counter meal and a pot of beer, this is the only real pub in the whole Daintree region; takeaway alcohol is available.

CAPE TRIBULATION

Walking along beautiful Cape Tribulation Beach in the gathering sunset, it's hard not to wonder what Captain Cook was thinking when he gave this little piece of paradise such a depressing name. Of course, he was too busy weaving his way through (and eventually running around on) the reef to be awed by this dramatic coastline.

Here the rainforest tumbles right down to two magnificent beaches – Myall and Cape

Trib – separated by a knobby cape. The village of Cape Tribulation marks the end of the road, literally, and the beginning of the 4WD-only coastal route along the Bloomfield Track. Discovered by hippies in the '70s, backpackers in the '80s and everyone else in the '90s, Cape Trib retains a frontier quality, with low-key development, road signs alerting drivers to cassowary crossings, and crocodile warnings that make beach strolls that little bit less relaxing.

Stop in at **Mason's Store** (☎ 4098 0070; Cape Tribulation Rd; ☹️ 8am-6pm), about 1.5km south of the cape, for information on the region including the Bloomfield Track. There's internet access here and at PK's Jungle Village and the Dragonfly Cafe. There's an ATM in the IGA supermarket next to PK's Jungle Village.

Sights & Activities

Long walks on the stunning swathes of **Cape Tribulation Beach** or **Myall Beach** are a favourite pastime and you can swim safely in the shallows of the Coral Sea outside stinger season, though you should heed any warning signs and local advice about croc sightings. Just south of PK's Jungle Village is the **Dubuji Boardwalk**, an easy 1.8km wheelchair-accessible loop through mangroves and rainforest.

Bat House (☎ 4098 0063; Cape Tribulation Rd; www.austrop.org.au; admission \$2; ☹️ 10.30am-3.30pm Tue-Sun) is an information and education centre run by volunteers from Austrop, a local conservation organisation. As the name suggests, it's also a nursery for injured or orphaned fruit bats (flying foxes), and there's always one hanging around (sorry) for you to meet.

Serious, fit walkers should lace-up early for the **Mt Sorrow Ridge Walk** (7km, five to six hours return); it's strenuous but worth it. The start of the marked trail is about 150m north of the Kulki picnic area car park, on your left.

Other activities in Cape Trib include horse-riding, sea kayaking, yoga and 'jungle surfing' on a flying fox, all of which can be booked through your accommodation.

Tours

The Great Barrier Reef is just 45 minutes to an hour off shore, but at the time of writing only one outfit was running trips to the reef. The sailing catamaran **Rum Runner** (☎ 1300 556 332, 4098 0016; www.rumrunner.com.au; adult/child \$120/90; ☹️ Apr-Feb) takes a maximum of 40 passengers for snorkelling and diving.

Mason's Tours (☎ 4098 0070; www.masonstours.com.au, Cape Tribulation Rd) offers interpretive walks lasting two hours (adult/child \$38/29) or a half-day (\$45/35), and a croc-spotting night walk (\$38). They also run 4WD tours up the Bloomfield Track (from \$106/66).

Sleeping & Eating

PK's Jungle Village (☎ 4098 0040; www.pksjunglevillage.com; unpowered sites per person \$10, dm \$22-25, budget s/d \$44/66, d \$88-110; ☹️ 🍷 🚿) A short boardwalk back from Myall Beach, PK's is a long-time budget favourite, staffed by overworked backpackers. There's a whole range of accommodation, and its boozy bar and restaurant is the entertainment hub of Cape Trib.

Cape Trib Beach House (☎ 4098 0030; www.cape TRIB beach.com.au; dm \$25, d \$79-189; ☹️ 🍷 🚿) A low-key backpackers' alternative to PK's party house, neat rainforest huts range from air-con dorms to overpriced private timber cabins. Access the beach down some stairs leading from the restaurant.

Ferntree Rainforest Resort (☎ 4098 0033; www.ferntreerainforestlodge.com.au; Camelot Close, Cape Tribulation; dm \$30, d \$138-174; ☹️ 🍷 🚿) This resort combines slick budget dorms (air-con and en suite) with upmarket rooms and timber lodges, the best of which are poolside.

our pick Rainforest Hideaway (☎ 4098 0108; www.rainforesthideaway.com; 19 Camelot Close; d \$95-135) This colourful, rambling B&B was single-handedly built by the owner – even the furniture and the beds are handmade. Best is the self-contained rustic cabin with an outdoor shower open to the rainforest.

Cape Trib Farmstay (☎ 4098 0042; www.cape TRIB farmstay.com; Cape Tribulation Rd; d \$110; ☹️) These neat, private timber cottages are set in a lovely 30-hectare fruit orchard yielding mangosteen, rambutan, breadfruit and bananas – which you might find on your breakfast plate. The

cute stilted cabins (one with wheelchair access) have joyous views of Mt Sorrow from their verandas.

Dragonfly Gallery Cafe (☎ 4098 0121; Lot 9, Camelot Close; mains \$13-28; ☹️ 🍳 lunch & dinner; 🚿) The timber pole-house, lush garden, and turtle-filled lily pond are serene surrounds for afternoon coffee and cakes or an evening meal of jungle lamb curry or barramundi in coconut.

our pick Whet Restaurant (☎ 4098 0007; 1 Cape Tribulation; tapas \$7, mains \$27-32; ☹️ 10am-11pm) Whether you're munching on a plate of tapas with a tropical-fruit cocktail or dining by candlelight on tiger-prawn linguini, louny Whet is Cape Trib's coolest address. Sink into the black leather couches for a late night – this is the only place you can get a meal much after 8pm.

Getting There & Around

See p458 for details of buses between Cape Tribulation, Cairns and Cooktown.

The **Cape Trib Shuttle Bus** (☎ 4098 0121; one way \$5; ☹️ 10am, 11am, noon & 1pm) runs between Coconut Beach Resort and Cape Trib Beach four times a day.

CAPE TRIBULATION TO COOKTOWN: THE COAST ROAD

The Bloomfield Track from Cape Tribulation to Cooktown is the great adventure drive of the far north coast. It's a 4WD-only route that traverses creek crossings, diabolically steep climbs and patchy surfaces. It can be impassable for many weeks on end during the Wet, and even in the Dry you should ask about road conditions locally at Mason's Store (opposite). The Track runs for about 80km before linking up with the sealed Cooktown Developmental Rd 30km south of Cooktown. Although this is a remote region, there are a few accommodation places and attractions along the way – you don't need to do the trip in a single day.

It's 5km from Cape Trib to Emmagen Creek, which is the official start of the Bloomfield Track. Just before you reach Emmagen Creek, you'll see a huge strangler fig. From beside the tree, a walking path leads down to the pretty crescent-shaped **Emmagen Beach**.

A little way beyond the Emmagen Creek crossing, the road climbs and dips steeply and turns sharp corners over fine, slippery bulldust. This is the most challenging section of the drive, especially after rain. The road

THE CASSOWARY'S PRECIOUS POO

Looking like something out of *Jurassic Park*, a flightless bird struts through the rainforest. It's as tall as a grown man, has three razor-sharp clawed toes, a blue-and-purple head, red wattles (the fleshy lobes hanging from its neck), a helmet-like horn and unusual black feathers that look more like ratty hair, much like an emu. Meet the cassowary, the shy native of these northern forests.

The endangered cassowary is considered an important link in the rainforest ecosystem. It is the only animal capable of dispersing the seeds of more than 70 species of trees whose fruit is too large for other rainforest animals to digest and pass. Cassowaries swallow fruit whole and excrete the fruit's seed intact in large piles of dung, which acts as fertiliser encouraging growth of the seed. Without them, the rainforest as we know it would look very different.

then follows the broad tidal Bloomfield River before crossing it 30km north of Cape Trib.

Turn left immediately after the bridge to see the **Bloomfield Falls**. The falls are for looking only: crocs inhabit the river and the site is significant to the indigenous Wujal Wujal community located just north of the river. Residents of Wujal Wujal, the **Walker Family** (☎ 4060 8069; walkerfamilytours@bigpond.com; adult/child \$15/7.50) run recommended half-hour walking tours of the falls and surrounding forest departing daily from the car park, as well as half-day safaris (\$106/66). Bookings are essential.

North of Bloomfield, the road conditions steadily improve and you pass through the tiny hamlets of Ayton, Rossville and finally Helenvale. Nearly everyone stops in at the **Lion's Den Hotel** (☎ 4060 3911; www.lionsdenhotel.com.au; Helenvale; unpowered/poweredsites \$16/22, s/d \$40/50, d safari tents \$66; ♿). This well-known watering hole dates back to 1875 and always attracts a steady stream of travellers and local characters. There's fuel, ice-cold beer and a restaurant, as well as camping and safari-style cabins on stilts.

About 4km north, the Bloomfield Track meets the sealed Cooktown Developmental Rd and from there it's a dust-free 28km to Cooktown.

CAIRNS TO COOKTOWN: THE INLAND ROUTE

The main route between Cairns and Cooktown is sealed all the way, but remains stoically arid whatever the season. It's 332km long (4½ to five hours' drive), winding over a small range before flattening out and passing through half-forgotten mining towns.

After heading north out of Cairns, take the turn-off to Kuranda and climb over the Atherton Tableland. At Mareeba you meet the Peninsula Developmental Rd, which takes you north through the small township of **Mt Molloy** and the former wolfram (tungsten) mining town of **Mt Carbine** before the road climbs through the De Saily Range, where there are surprising panoramic views over the savannah. Stop in for a beer at the **Mt Carbine Hotel** to see the world's longest playable didgeridu.

It's another 115km (passing the Palmer River Roadhouse) to **Lakeland**, a hamlet that produces sugar, grain, coffee and bananas, and sits at the junction of the Peninsula Developmental Rd and the Cooktown Developmental Rd. Turning left takes you

on the road to Cape York, and straight ahead is 80km to Cooktown. Not far past the Bloomfield Track turn-off you pass the jumble of basalt boulders that form the **Black Mountain National Park**. Home to unique species of frogs, skinks and geckoes, it was formed 260 million years ago by a magma intrusion below the surface, which then solidified and was gradually exposed by erosion.

COOKTOWN

☎ 07 / pop 1336

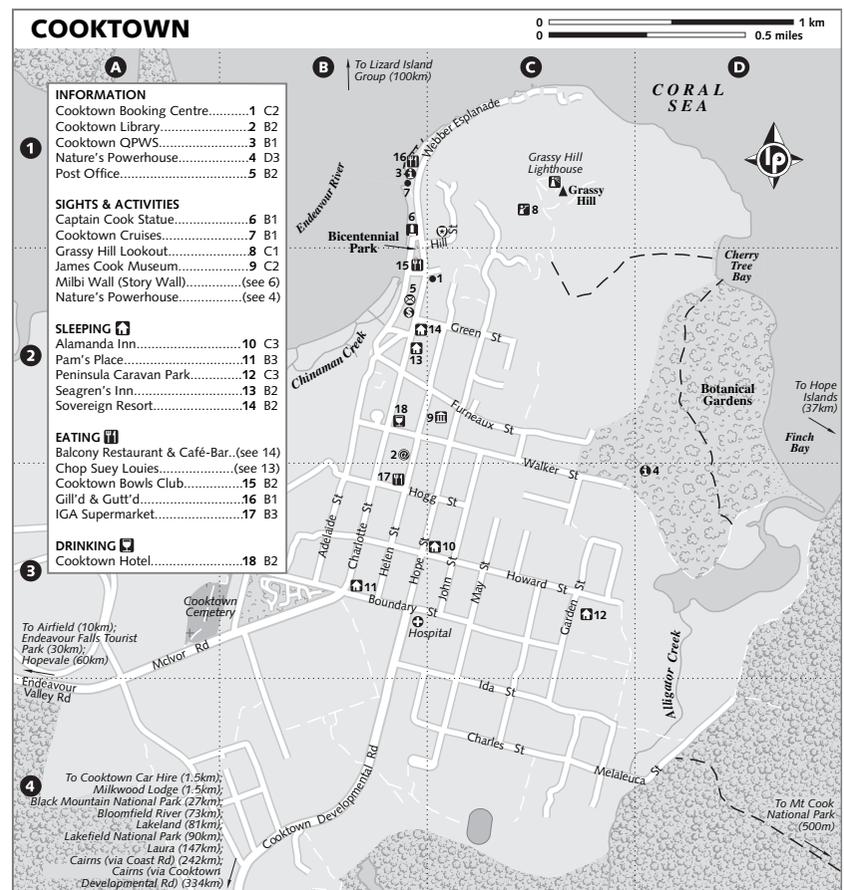
A far-north frontier town with a breezy coastal outlook, Cooktown is a small place with a big history. It was here that Captain Cook first set foot on the Australian continent. Technically on Cape York Peninsula and the biggest town on the Cape, Cooktown has a laid-back, tropical nature where happiness is a fishing rod and an esky full of beer.

The inland route was finally sealed all the way in 2005, and tourism is a growing industry, but the town remains unadorned and unfussed by the attention, and years of isolation and hard living have imbued the locals with a matter-of-fact, laconic character and a great sense of humour. As well as historical sites relating to early European contact, there's increasing recognition for the area's indigenous community and unspoilt natural environment of wetlands, mangroves, rain-forest and long, lonely beaches. From here you can take off by 4WD through Lakefield National Park (p478), or take a trip out to spectacular Lizard Island (p477).

History

On 17 June 1770 Cooktown became the site of Australia's first nonindigenous settlement, however transient, when Captain James Cook beached his barque, the *Endeavour*, on the banks of its estuary. The *Endeavour* had earlier struck a reef off shore from Cape Tribulation, and Cook and his crew spent 48 days here while they repaired the damage.

In 1874 Cooktown became a large and unruly port town at the centre of the Palmer River gold rush. At its peak there were no fewer than 94 pubs and the population was more than 30,000. A large percentage of this population was Chinese, and their industrious presence led to some wild race-related riots. And here, as elsewhere in the country, the indigenous population was overrun and outcast, with much bloodshed.



Orientation & Information

Cooktown is on the inland side of a headland sheltering the mouth of the Endeavour River. The main street is Charlotte St, which runs south from the wharf. Overlooking the town from the northern end of the headland is Grassy Hill, and east of the town centre are Cherry Tree Bay and Finch Bay, the Botanic Gardens and Mt Cook National Park.

Cooktown has a post office, an ATM and internet access. Information services include:

Cooktown Booking Centre (☎ 4069 5381; www.cooktownbookings.com.au; 132 Charlotte St) Information and bookings for tours, transport and accommodation.

Cooktown Library (☎ 4069 5009; Helen St) Internet access per hour \$4.

Cooktown QPWS (☎ 4069 5777; Webber Esplanade; ☒ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) Information and camping permits for national parks, including Lizard Island.

Nature's Powerhouse (☎ 4069 6004; www.naturespowerhouse.info; Walker St; ☒ 9am-5pm) Information centre.

Sights & Activities

For a northern outpost Cooktown has its share of sights, including historical attractions in town, gardens, beaches, waterfalls and natural settings that are worth the legwork or 4WD trip involved to reach them.

Nature's Powerhouse (☎ 4069 6004; www.naturespowerhouse.info; Walker St; galleries adult/child \$3/free; ☒ 9am-5pm) is an environment interpretive and information centre at the entry to Cooktown's public **Botanic**

Gardens. The Powerhouse has an information stand, a bookshop and the Verandah Cafe, plus two excellent galleries – the Charlie Tanner Gallery dedicated to Cooktown’s ‘snake man’, and the Vera Scarth-Johnson Gallery, with a collection of intricate and beautiful botanical illustrations of the region’s native plants. Ask for a copy of the *Cooktown Heritage & Scenic Rim* flyer, which details some of the region’s excellent **walking trails**.

In a former convent building, the impressive **James Cook Museum** (☎ 4069 5386; cnr Helen & Fumeaux Sts; adult/child \$7.50/3; 🕒 9.30am–4pm) houses relics from Cook’s time in the town, including journal entries, and the cannon and anchor from the *Endeavour*, retrieved from the sea floor in 1971. Photographs, artefacts and interpretive panels explain other topics that are influential to the shaping of Cooktown, such as indigenous Guugu Yimithirr Bama culture, the gold rush and the Chinese presence.

The **Grassy Hill Lookout**, reached by a very stiff 15-minute walk or a steep and rough road, has sensational 360-degree views of the town, the river and the ocean. Captain Cook climbed this hill looking for a passage out through the reefs. At the top sits a compact, corrugated, 19th-century iron **lighthouse**. A 1½km **walking trail** (45 minutes) leads from the summit down to the beach at Cherry Tree Bay.

Charlotte St and Bicentennial Park have a number of interesting monuments, including the much-photographed bronze **Captain Cook statue**. There’s also the rock (marking the spot where the *Endeavour* careened) and the Queen’s Steps, built for the 1970 visit of Queen Elizabeth II. Nearby, the **Milbi Wall (Story Wall)** tells the story of European contact from the local Guugard (Guugu Yimithirr) indigenous community’s perspective.

Tours

Some interesting tours operate out of Cooktown daily from May to October, with scaled-back versions in the low season from November to at least April. But this is not Cairns or Port Douglas, and although the reef is not far away, there are no regularly scheduled dive or snorkelling trips.

Ahoy Plane-Sailing (☎ 4069 5232; www.ahoyplane-sailingseaplanes.com.au) Scenic reef flights (from \$140) and an extraordinary Lizard Island tour (\$330), which lands in Watson’s Bay by seaplane.

Barts Bush Adventures (☎ 4069 6229; www.bartsbushadventures.com.au; days tours adult/child \$165/85,

camping tours per day from \$300) Variety of day tours and overnight safaris, including the Bush & Beach, which goes to Coloured Sands and Elim Beach.

Cooktown Cruises (☎ 4069 5712; 2hr cruises adult/child \$40/25) Scenic cruises up the Endeavour River; also hires boats by the hour.

Guurbi Tours (☎ 4069 6259; www.guurbitours.com; 2-/4hr tours \$90/115, self-drive \$60/80) Willie, an elder of the Nugal-warra family, runs two unique tours that use the physical landscape to describe the emotional landscape.

Festivals & Events

The **Cooktown Discovery Festival** is held over the Queen’s Birthday Weekend (early June) to commemorate Captain Cook’s landing in 1770 with a costumed re-enactment.

Sleeping

Cooktown has accommodation in all budgets, including two standard motels and four caravan parks.

Peninsula Caravan Park (☎ 4069 5107; 64 Howard St; unpowered/power sites \$24/27, cabins \$80; 🚰 🚻 🚿) On the eastern edge of town, this simple park has a lovely bush setting with stands of big, old paperbark and gum trees, and resident wildlife including birds and wallabies.

Pam’s Place (☎ 4069 5166; www.cooktownhostel.com; cnr Charlotte & Boundary Sts; dm/s/d \$25/55/60, motel d \$90-100 🚰 🚻 🚿) Cooktown’s YHA-associated hostel is everything a backpackers should be: a welcoming, cosy house with good common areas (lounge, kitchen, laundry etc), a leafy garden and an assortment of neurotic parrots.

Alamanda Inn (☎ 4069 5203; phscott@tpg.com.au; cnr Hope & Howard Sts; guesthouse s/d \$40/50, motel s/d \$50/60, unit s/d \$65/75; 🚰 🚻 🚿) The friendly but unremarkable budget accommodation here ranges from rooms in the guesthouse (share a bathroom and kitchen) to basic motel rooms and units with kitchenettes.

Seagren’s Inn (☎ 4069 5357; seagrens-inn@bigpond.com; Charlotte St; d \$95-140; 🚰 🚻 🚿) Upstairs in a century-old heritage building, Seagren’s is all about old-style atmosphere. The small front rooms open onto the second-level veranda but the pick is room 9, a huge three-room apartment at the rear with private balcony.

our pick Milkwood Lodge (☎ 4069 5007; www.milkwoodlodge.com; Annan Rd; s/d \$110/130; 🚰 🚻 🚿) In a patch of rainforest 2.5km south of town, these six breezy, self-contained, timber-pole cabins are beautifully designed with bushland views opening out from each private balcony. The spacious split-level apartments

have king beds and kitchenette, but are not suitable for kids.

Sovereign Resort (☎ 4043 0500; www.sovereignresort.com.au; cnr Charlotte & Green Sts; d \$165-200; 🚰 🚻 🚿) Cooktown’s top resort hotel is right on the main street and is a warren of comfortable tropical-style rooms with wooden-slat blinds and tile floors. Kick back in the fine garden pool area or the Balcony Restaurant & Bar (mains \$30 to \$34; open for breakfast, lunch and dinner).

Eating & Drinking

It might not be *haute cuisine*, but eating out in Cooktown these days is more than just a counter meal in the local pub (there’s also the bowls club, of course!). Drinking is a favourite pastime here too, and the local pubs and clubs are a good place to mix it with the locals. There’s an IGA supermarket on Hogg St.

Gill’d & Gutt’d (☎ 4069 5863; Fisherman’s Wharf, Webber Esplanade; meals \$4-10; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Fish and chips the way it should be – fresh and right on the waterside wharf.

Cooktown Bowls Club (☎ 4069 5819; Charlotte St; mains \$10-22; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Sign in at the door, and join the club for the night. As well as big servings of bistro meals such as fish or steak, you can revisit the salad bar at will. You can join in social bowls on Wednesday and Saturday afternoon and barefoot bowls on Wednesday evening.

Chop Suey Louies (☎ 4069 5357; Seagren’s Inn, Charlotte St; mains \$17-27; 🕒 lunch & dinner from 5pm Wed-Mon Apr-Sep) With Cooktown’s Chinese heritage it’s only right that you should be able to get a decent chicken chow mein or beef in black-bean sauce. This stylish licensed restaurant with low-cut cream furniture is downstairs from the Seagren’s Inn.

Cooktown Hotel (☎ 4069 5308; 96 Charlotte St; mains \$12.50-22; 🕒 lunch & dinner) The double-storey timber ‘Top Pub’ is hard to miss at the top end of Charlotte St. Plenty of character, plenty of locals and a nice side beer garden to sit in with a beer or counter meal.

Getting There & Around

Cooktown’s airfield is 10km west of town along McIvor Rd. **Skytrans** (☎ 1800 818 405; www.skytrans.com.au) flies twice a day between Cooktown and Cairns (from \$95, 45 minutes).

Country Road Coachlines (☎ 4045 2794; www.countryroadcoachlines.com.au) runs a bus service between

Cairns and Cooktown on the coastal route via Port Douglas and Cape Tribulation three times a week (\$72) leaving Cairns Monday, Wednesday and Friday and returning from Cooktown Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Another service takes the inland route via Mareeba on Monday, Wednesday and Friday (\$72, same day return).

To get to sights outside town, **Cooktown Car Hire** (☎ 4069 5007; www.cooktown-car-hire.com) at Milkwood Rainforest Lodge rents 4WDs.

LIZARD ISLAND GROUP

Famed for their marine life and bird-watching, the spectacular islands of the Lizard Island Group are clustered just 27km off the coast about 100km from Cooktown. Besides Lizard Island there are four smaller islands in the Lizard group: **Osprey Island**, with its nesting birds, **Palfrey Island**, with an automatic lighthouse, **South Island** and **Seabird Islet**, home to a tern colony. The island group is renowned for its diving, in particular the famous Cod Hole and Pixie Bommie sites.

Lizard Island

Lizard Island’s **beaches** are nothing short of sensational, and range from long stretches of white sand to idyllic little rocky bays. The water is crystal clear and magnificent coral surrounds the island – snorkelling here is superb. The island is a national park with good bushwalking – the climb to the top of **Cook’s Look** is a great walk (three hours return) with amazing views. Near the top there are traces of stones marking an Aboriginal ceremonial area.

Sleeping

Accommodation is only available on Lizard Island, and the choice is either bush camping or supreme five-star luxury!

The **QPWS camping ground** (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au; per person/family \$4.50/18) on Watson’s Bay has toilets, gas barbecues and untreated water. Book in advance and bring all supplies as there are no shops on the island.

You really don’t need us to tell you whether **Lizard Island Resort** (☎ 1300 134 044; www.lizardisland.com.au; Anchor Bay; 2 nights s/d from \$2792/3300; 🚰 🚻 🚿) is any good or not. You’ll be one of a maximum of 80 guests in 40 villas on one of the most exclusive and luxurious resorts in Far North Queensland – expect to see someone rich and famous sharing the

DETOUR: LAKEFIELD NATIONAL PARK

With a 4WD and a sense of adventure, the route from Cooktown through Lakefield National Park to Laura (or further north to Musgrave) will give you a taste of remote Cape York Peninsula. It's an isolated route without any facilities or fuel stops along the way; plan ahead and carry enough supplies and water to get you through. This detour skirts the southern end of the park, emerging at Laura on the Peninsula Developmental Rd then heading back south.

Leaving Cooktown on the McIvor Rd, **Endeavour Falls** is 33km down a mostly sealed road. Stop in at the tourist park where there's a grocery store, fuel and a good year-round swimming hole. Further north is the **Hopevale Aboriginal Community**, established as a Lutheran Mission in 1949. The community has an arts centre and a couple of shops. Back on the Cooktown road, turn northwest to continue to **Battle Camp** and **Lakefield National Park**. The 542,000-hectare park encompasses a wide variety of country around the flood plains of the Normanby, Kennedy, Bizant, Morehead and Hann Rivers, and is generally only accessible between June and November. Self-registration bush camp sites are scattered throughout the park but only Kalpowar Crossing and Hann Crossing sites have facilities.

The Laura River is crossed 25km from the park boundary (112km from Cooktown). The abandoned **Old Laura Homestead** is on the far bank. Take the left at the T-junction and it's 28km to Laura on the Peninsula Developmental Rd. From here it's 36km southwest to **Jowalbinna Rock Art Safari Camp** (☎ 4035 4488; www.jowalbinna.com.au; camping \$9, cabins with meals from \$125) with secluded camping and accommodation and guided walks of ancient Quinkan rock-art sites. From Laura it's 60km south to Lakeland and the road back to Cairns.

Osprey Restaurant or indulging in spa treatments. Rates include all meals and a range of activities.

Getting There & Away

Unless you have your own boat or can con someone in Cooktown into an expensive charter, flying is the easiest way to Lizard Island.

Hinterland Aviation has two scheduled flights a day from Cairns to Lizard Island (one way/return \$225/450) that must be booked through **Voyages** (☎ 1300 134 044; www.lizardisland.com.au).

From Cooktown **Ahoy Plane-Sailing** (☎ 4069 5232; www.ahoyplane-sailingseaplanes.com.au) has an exciting day tour (\$330), which lands in Watson's Bay by seaplane; camping drop-off can also be arranged.