

Far North Queensland



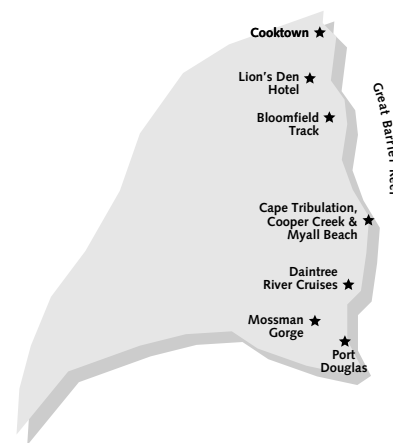
From the five-star flash of Port Douglas to the hard-bitten frontier of Cooktown, Far North Queensland is the state's most intriguing coastal corner, teeming with diverse natural environments. Dominating it all is a rainforest and a reef. The dramatic coastal drive from Cairns to Port Douglas is the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

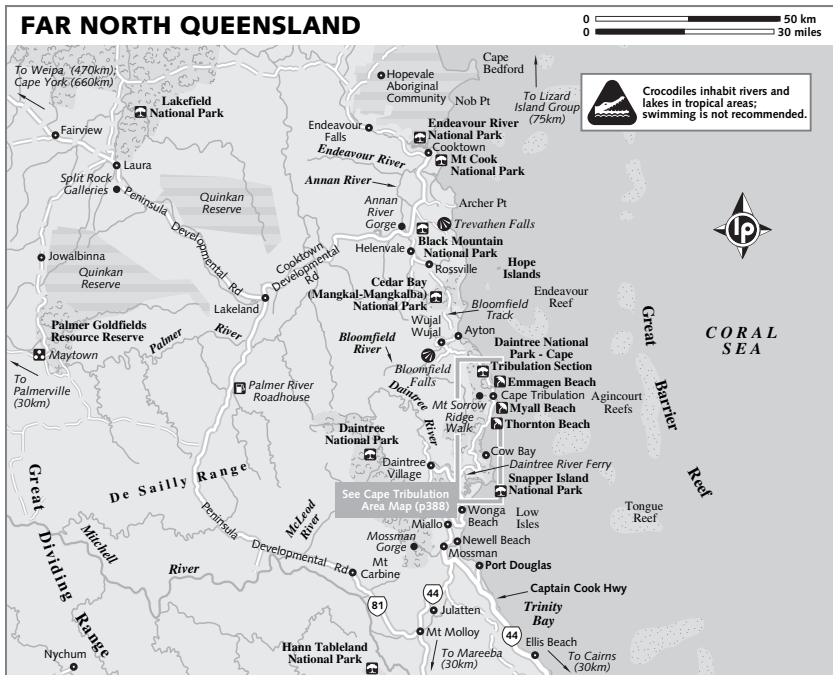
The magnificent World Heritage-listed Daintree National Park stretches up the coast, tumbling right down to the beach in places. And the beaches, especially from Cape Kimberley to Cape Trib, are sublime stretches of white sand. The Great Barrier Reef lies only a short distance offshore and is much less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

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

HIGHLIGHTS

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





Dangers & Annoyances

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

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

PORT DOUGLAS

☎ 07 / pop 948

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

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

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

HISTORY

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

dollar resorts, a golf course, heliport, marina, shopping complex, and an avenue of palms lining the road from the highway to Port Douglas. In 1991, Skase's company filed for bankruptcy and he fled to Spain, kicking off a decade-long battle with the Australian government, which attempted to bring Skase back to Australia to repay a reputed \$172 million in debts. Skase died in 2001 without ever returning to Australia.

Before Skase, Port Douglas was a sleepy village founded, in 1877 as the port town for the Hodgkinson River goldfields. The town flourished at the outset, but its prosperity came to a grinding halt in the mid-1880s when Cairns was chosen ahead of it as the terminal for the new rail line from Kuranda

and Mareeba. Port was largely destroyed by a cyclone in 1911.

ORIENTATION

From the Captain Cook Hwy it's 6km along a low spit of land, past swanky village-sized resorts and golf courses, to the small township of Port Douglas. The main entry road, Davidson St, ends in a T-intersection with Macrossan St. To the left is the town centre with most of the shops and restaurants; the beach is to the right. Marina Mirage, on Dickson Inlet, is the departure point for most of the reef trips.

INFORMATION

There's no 'official' (ie noncommercial) tourist information centre in Port Douglas. There are

INFORMATION

- Pages Bookshop.....1 B2
- Post Office.....2 B2
- Re:hab.....3 B1
- Wicked Internet.....4 B2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

- Court House Museum.....5 B1
- Port Douglas Boat Hire... (see 44)
- Port Douglas Jet Bike Hire... (see 9)
- Port Douglas Markets.....6 A1
- Port Douglas Yacht Club.....7 A3
- Quickcliver.....8 A2
- Reef Sprinter.....9 A2
- St Mary's by the Sea.....10 A1
- Surf Life-Saving Club.....11 B3
- Tech Dive Academy.....12 A2

SLEEPING

- Accommodation Port Douglas.....13 B2
- Archipelago.....14 C2
- Dougies.....15 B4
- Hibiscus Gardens.....16 B2

DRINKING

- Combined Clubs.....42 A2
- Court House Hotel.....43 A1
- Fluid Nightclub.....44 A2
- Gone Bananas.....45 B4
- Iron Bar.....46 B1
- Port Douglas Yacht Club... (see 7)
- Network Car Rentals.....47 A2
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DRINKING

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DRINKING

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- Lychee Tree.....18 B4
- Pandanus Caravan Park.....19 B4
- ParrotFish Lodge.....20 B2
- Pavilions... (see 1)
- Peninsula Boutique Hotel.....21 C2
- Pink Flamingo.....22 B4
- Port Central.....23 B2
- Port Douglas Motel.....24 B2
- Port Douglas Queenslander.....25 B2
- Port Douglas Retreat.....26 B2
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- Tropic Breeze Van Village.....28 B3
- Tropic Sands.....29 B3
- Verandahs.....30 B2
- Villa San Michele.....31 B2

DRINKING

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- Dixie.....10
- Myrtle.....32
- Port Douglas Markets.....6
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lots of signs alerting you to tourist information, but they're all basically booking agencies. Still, the staff are eager to help, there are mountains of brochures and maps to collect and, of course, they can book any tours.

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) Has a range of fiction and nonfiction titles.

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

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

SIGHTS

Unlike Cairns, Port Douglas has its very own beach. Most people put in a few hours or days strolling or sunning on delightful **Four Mile Beach**, a broad band of squeaky white sand backed by palms, which reaches as far as your squinting eyes can see. At the northern end is a **surf life-saving club**, in front of which is a swimming enclosure patrolled and protected with a stinger net during summer. Water-based activities are offered from a hut on the beachfront. If you're hungry (and lazy) look out for the Munch Buggy that combs the beach and dispenses food, drinks and ice cream.

For a fine view over Four Mile Beach, follow Wharf St and the steep Island Point Rd to **Flagstaff Hill Lookout**.

If you can drag yourself away from the beach, 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.

St Mary's by the Sea is a quaint, nondenominational, white timber church originally built in 1911 and relocated to its seaside position in 1989. It's worth a peek inside when it's not overflowing with wedding parties.

The **Port Douglas Markets** (Anzac Park, end of Macrossan St; ☎ 8.30am-1.30pm Sun) make for a leisurely Sunday-morning browse along the grassy foreshore of Anzac Park. Bring a bag and an appetite for arts, crafts and local food products such as tropical fruits, ice creams and coconut milk.

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). The sanctuary also operates a wildlife care centre for sick or injured animals.

ACTIVITIES

Already been to the reef? There are other ways to have fun on the water. 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 Boat Hire** (☎ 4099 6277; pdboathire@bigpond.com; Marina Mirage) hires a range of boats (per half-day from \$300) for use on the inlet including some suitable for children.

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

Kids will get a kick out of the **Ballyhooley Steam Railway** (☎ 0417-949 354; www.ballyhooley.com.au; adult/child day pass \$6/3), a miniature steam train that runs from the little station at Marina Mirage to St Crispins station at 11am, 1pm and 2.30pm, stopping at Dougies (p378), Mirage Country Club (below) and Rydges. A round trip takes about an hour.

Golf

Port Douglas boasts two of northern Queensland's finest public-access golf courses. They're not cheap, but if you're a keen golfer it's an opportunity too good to miss. If the green fees are too steep, try the nearby Mossman Golf Club (p382).

Tropical Golf Tours (☎ 4098 4929; troppgolf@bigpond.com) Allows you to join a group and play with an experienced local. The \$30 packages (on top of green fees) include transport and golf cart.

Mirage Country Club (☎ 4099 5537; www.miragecountryclub.com.au; Port Douglas Rd; 18 holes \$100) Peter

Thomson–designed resort course, part of the Sheraton Mirage Resort.

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

Dive Courses

The following offer Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) open-water courses as well as advanced dive certificates:

Quicksilver Dive School (☎ 4055 3255; www.silverseries.com.au/diveschool.htm; Marina Mirage; 4-day open water courses \$595) Based at the Novotel in Palm Cove where the first two days are held; transfers from Port Douglas included. Also operates boat cruises (right).

Tech Dive Academy (☎ 4099 6880; www.tech-dive-academy.com; 3/46 Wharf St; 4-day open-water courses from \$750) High-quality personalised instruction with limited numbers per class (one to three). Also advanced and technical diving-certificate courses.

TOURS

Port Douglas is a hub for tours. The number-one destination is the Reef, with the rugged rainforests of Cape Tribulation the next most popular stop on the tour circuits.

Fishing

Reef-, river- and land-based fishing charters operate regularly out of Port Douglas. Prices range from \$90 for a half-day group tour on the Daintree up to anywhere between \$1850 and \$7000 per day to charter a large boat for up to 11 people. Fishing gear and bait is included.

Dragon Lady (☎ 0429-372 466; www.gamefishingportdouglas.com; Marina Mirage) Reef fishing \$215 per day; game fishing from \$475 (share charter).

Fishing Norseman (☎ 4099 6668; www.mvnorseman.com.au; Closehaven Marina) Full-day reef fishing for \$195.

Fishing Port Douglas (☎ 4099 4058; www.fishingportdouglas.com.au) River and reef fishing; share and sole charters.

Tropical Fishing & Eco Tours (☎ 4099 4272; www.fishingecotours.com) Half-day trips from \$80; wildlife-spotting boat tours from \$30.

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. You'll still see colourful corals and marine life, but it is patchy in parts. Access to the majority of spots that operators visit is around an

hour from Port Douglas. Day tours, generally departing from Marina Mirage, usually make two to three stops on the outer and ribbon reefs, including St Crispins, Agincourt, Chinaman and Tongue Reefs.

Tour prices include reef tax, snorkelling, transfers from your accommodation, lunch and refreshments. To include an introductory dive – a controlled scuba dive with no certification or experience necessary – add around \$50; certified divers will pay around \$60 to \$70 for two dives with all gear included.

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

Calypso (☎ 4099 6999; www.calypsocharters.com.au; adult/child \$165/115) Large catamaran visiting three outer reefs.

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). Also operates a dive school (see left).

Synergy (☎ 4084 2800; www.synergyreef.com.au; adult/child \$245/175) With a capacity of 12 passengers, the *Synergy* sails to the outer reefs; includes a gourmet lunch.

Tallarook (☎ 4099 4990; www.tallarooksail.com; adult/child \$149) Sails to Tongue Reef in just under two hour (maximum 25 passengers). Also offers scuba trips.

Undersea Explorer (☎ 1800 648 877, 4099 5914; www.undersea.com.au; Princes Wharf; 6-day live-aboard from \$2100) For serious divers, this outfit specialises in live-aboard shark dives to the Osprey Reef and whale expeditions to the ribbon reefs and Cod Hole. Also runs research conservation projects.

Wavelength (☎ 4099 5031; www.wavelength.com.au; adult/child \$175/125) Outer reef snorkelling at three sites. Cruise takes 90 minutes (maximum 30 passengers).

LOW ISLES

Several operators visit the Low Isles: an idyllic little island with a lighthouse and fringing coral just 15km offshore.

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

Reef Sprinter (☎ 4099 3175; www.reefsprinter.com.au; adult/child \$100/80) Superfast trip to the Low Isles for speed snorkelling. Departs from beside On The Inlet restaurant.

Sailaway IV (☎ 4099 4772; www.sailawayportdouglas.com.au; adult/child \$150/90) This sailing and snorkelling trip (maximum 27 passengers) to the Low Isles is great for families.

Shaolin (☎ 4099 4772; www.shaolinportdouglas.com.au; 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. Many of the tours out of Cairns, including rafting and ballooning, also do pickups from Port Douglas.

BTS Tours (☎ 4099 5665; www.bts.com.au; return adult/child \$50/26) Tours to Mossman Gorge and Daintree River.

De Luxe Safaris (☎ 4099 6406; www.deluxesafaris.com.au; adult/child \$165/125) Upmarket tour taking in Cape Trib and 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.

GBR Helicopters (☎ 4099 6030; www.gbrhelicopters.com.au; Port Douglas Rd; flights \$125-500) Scenic helicopter flights from 10 to 45 minutes.

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 Cairns, and price brackets here generally move up a notch. Discounts are often available online or as stand-by rates (it's frustrating when you pay more for booking ahead than walking in off the street!), and prices can drop significantly during the low season. The big five-star resorts are a few kilometres from the centre on

the way into town. All places have a pool and usually off-street parking.

Accommodation Port Douglas (☎ 1800 079 030; 4099 5355; www.accomportdouglas.com.au; 1/48 Macrossan St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) is a useful agent for many holiday rentals.

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 and with a path straight through to the beach. Tropic Breeze is a little cramped but has grassy sites and basic cabins (no en suite).

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. Included is a free miniature-steam-train ride into town. There are camping and safari tents at the back. Free pick-up from Cairns on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday.

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. Dorms have four to eight beds (some with en suites). The restaurant and bar is a great meeting place.

Port o' Call Lodge (☎ 1800 892 800, 4099 5422; www.portocall.com.au; cnr Port St & Craven Close; dm \$26.50-31.50, d \$77-119; ☎ ☎ ☎) What this YHA-associated hostel lacks in spirit it makes up for in services: bar, bistro, communal kitchen and laundry, plus individual lockers. The bunkhouse here sleeps 18, with a premium charged for four-bed dorms.

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.

Also recommended:

Pandanus Caravan Park (☎ 4099 5944; Davidson St; unpowered/power sites \$22/27, cabins \$62-85; ☎ ☎ ☎) Opposite Mirage resort; good range of cabins.

Port Central (☎ 4099 4488; www.portcentral.com.au; 36 Macrossan St; d \$69-89; ☎ ☎) Central is the word. Hole-in-the-wall hotel in the middle of the main street. Tidy, tiny and cheap enough. No reception, just a phone and a keypad.

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 town centre, the 12 self-contained rooms are spread over three levels – the upper rooms have 'filtered' views to the beach. Rooms are neat and functional, with balconies and cane furniture.

Pink Flamingo (☎ 4099 6622; www.pinkflamingo.com.au; 115 Davidson St; r \$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.

Lazy Lizard (☎ 1800 995 950, 4099 5900; www.lazy.lizardinn.com.au; 121 Davidson St; r from \$135-165; ☎ ☎ ☎) South of the centre, this large family-oriented place is more motel-style, although there's a basic kitchenette. Spotless rooms are serviced daily, and some have wheelchair access.

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, TVs, DVDs and balconies overlooking tropical gardens.

Port Douglas Queenslanders (☎ 4099 5199; www.queenslander.com.au; 8-10 Mudlo St; d \$138-205; ☎ ☎ ☎) With a touch of Mediterranean allure, this complex of self-contained units from studio to two-bedroom is well located and great for couples or families. Each has its own balcony, and there's a nice gazebo by the pool.

The Pavilions (☎ 4099 4888; www.thepavilions.com.au; 35 Macrossan St; apt \$155-295; ☎ ☎ ☎) What it lacks in space, it makes up for with location. These boutique apartments are right in the thick of things on the Macrossan St shopping strip. The apartments are smallish (studio to two-bedroom) with spas and balconies, but some are below ground level, and there's only room for a lap pool outside.

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.

Port Douglas Retreat (☎ 4099 5053; www.portdouglasretreat.com.au; 31-33 Mowbray St; apt \$169; ☎ ☎ ☎) Recline on the sun lounge and relax on the wide wooden decking that surrounds the palm-lined swimming pool. The 36 self-contained apartments sprawl over two levels in this traditional Queenslander-style complex.

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

Villa San Michele (☎ 1800 994 088, 4099 4088; www.villasanmichele.com.au; 39-41 Macrossan St; apt \$200-285; ☎ ☎ ☎) These luxurious one- and two-bedroom self-contained apartments are barely visible above street level. Set around a courtyard swimming pool, each apartment has a large balcony and sports Mediterranean-influenced décor – think terracotta-tiled floors and wrought-iron furnishings.

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; ☎ ☎ ☎) This may be Port Douglas' most luxurious five-star, set in lush tropical gardens near the southern end of Four Mile Beach and part of a superb 18-hole golf course. Take a studio with 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.

Peninsula Boutique Hotel (☎ 1800 676 674, 4099 9100; www.penisulahotel.com.au; 9-13 Esplanade; r \$375-430; ☎ ☎ ☎) The beachfront location is hard to beat and the smart self-contained apartments are private and luxurious – squarely aimed at couples and newlyweds.

Sheraton Mirage Port Douglas (☎ 4099 5888; www.starwoodhotels.com; Davidson St; r from \$380; ☎ ☎ ☎) Port Douglas' original luxury resort, Sheraton Mirage is surrounded by five acres of swimmable lagoons – it looks amazing from the air – a golf course, childcare facilities and everything that opens and shuts. There's no doubt the resort is past its prime but it still has its own beachfront, a shuttle service into town, tennis courts and a gym.

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. It doesn't always come cheap – you won't get much change from \$100 for two people – but there are family restaurants and pubs where you can get a hearty, reasonably priced meal. The choices are abundant, the ingredients fresh and the experience unforgettable. Eat well and eat out often.

The main restaurant haunt is Macrossan St and the waterfront, but duck down tiny Grant St for an impressive line-up of cafés and takeaways. The Marina Mirage complex has several restaurants and cafés that are mainly only redeemed by the waterfront location.

For self-caterers there's a large well-stocked **Coles Supermarket** (☎ 4099 5366; 11 Macrossan St; ☎ 8am-9pm Mon-Fri, to 5.30pm Sat, 9am-6pm Sun) in the Port Village shopping centre.

For market-fresh seafood, including prawns, mud crabs and a big range of fish, head to **Seafood House** (☎ 4099 5368; 11 Warner St; ☎ 9am-6pm).

Restaurants

our pick **On the Inlet** (☎ 4099 5255; www.portdouglasseafood.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.

Bistro 13 (☎ 4099 6100; www.bistro13.com; cnr Wharf & Macrossan Sts; tapas \$2.50-8, mains \$19-39; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Holding court on the corner of

Macrossan St, Bistro 13 is a stylish contemporary restaurant with something to suit everyone – inventive tapas plates, gourmet pizzas and an impressive seafood menu headed by the signature Daintree baby barramundi.

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, which opens 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 are stiffly dressed in white linen. Seafood is a speciality, such as mud crab with kaffir lime and lemongrass laksa. The *pièce de résistance* is the six-course chef's tasting menu (\$99 per person). Children under eight are not welcome.

Cafés & Quick Eats

Re:hab (☎ 4099 4677; 3/18 Macrossan St; ☎ 8am-10pm) You can smell the freshly roasted coffee aromas from the street, though most people inside have their noses buried in a computer. A great place to while away the morning hours.

Mocka's Pies (☎ 4099 5295; 9 Grant St; pies \$4-7; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Great selection of gourmet pies, quiches and sweet pastries.

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 is on offer here. With three hours' notice the Deli will

put together sensational ready-to-go picnic hampers (plates, cutlery and all).

Mango Jam Cafe (☎ 4099 4611; 24 Macrossan St; mains \$10-25; ☎ lunch & dinner) This casual licensed family restaurant has a menu that'll keep kids and adults happy. Gourmet wood-fired pizza is a speciality.

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. Even before the cutlery is packed away there are a few inviting places for a drink on Macrossan St and along the waterfront

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 and even the outdoor furniture is old wood and hessian. 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.

Port Douglas Yacht Club (☎ 4099 4386; Spinnaker Close; ☎ from 4pm Mon-Fri, from noon Sat & Sun) Another local favourite, there's a hearty nautical atmosphere at the friendly yacht club. A good night is Wednesday after sailing and there's live music on Sunday afternoon. Inexpensive meals are served nightly.

Gone Bananas (☎ 4099 5400; 87 Davidson St; mains \$24-30; ☎ dinner from 6pm Mon-Sat) For years it was called Going Bananas, now it's gone. The jungle décor, Oriental feel and cushion-covered bar make it a soothing place to peruse the mad cocktail list.

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

For more information on getting to Cairns, see p352.

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

Cycling around Port Douglas is a stress-free way to travel. Some accommodation places hire out bikes; otherwise try **Port Douglas Bike Hire** (www.portdouglasbikehire; per day/week \$19/89; ☎ 9am-5pm) cnr Wharf & Warner Sts (☎ 4099 5799); cnr Davidson & Port Sts (☎ 4099 4303), which 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 on the way. Flag the driver down at the marked bus stops.

Car & Motorcycle

Port Douglas has plenty of small, local car-hire companies, most lined up on Warner St. One-way rentals to Cairns or the airport are usually 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.

Network Car Rental (☎ 4099 5111; www.networkrentals.com.au; 5 Warner St)

Paradise Wheels For Rent (☎ 4099 6625; 7 Warner St)

Port Douglas Car Rental (☎ 4099 4988; www.portdouglasrental.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.

NORTH OF PORT DOUGLAS

Once you drag yourself away from the cushy comforts of Port Douglas, the road north narrows and passes through the mill town of Mossman on the way to Daintree National Park and Cape Tribulation. Along this path you'll pass the quaint beachside hamlets of Wonga and Newell Beach.

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. On the northern fringe of town is a stand of 80-year-old rain trees that are native to Southeast Asia.

Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS; ☎ 4098 2188; www.epa.qld.gov.au; Centenary Bldg, 1 Front St; ☎ 10am–4pm Mon–Fri) has information on the Daintree National Park up to and beyond Cape Tribulation.

With all the cane fields around you might be curious to know how all that giant tropical grass gets turned into sugar. **Mossman Sugar Mill Tours** (☎ 4030 4190; www.mossag.com.au; Mill St; adult/child \$20/15; ☎ 11am & 1.30pm Mon–Fri Jun–Oct) reveals all. Wear closed shoes.

If the prices at the flashy manicured resort golf courses of Port Douglas make your head

spin, do as many of the locals do and play a round in pretty tropical surrounds at the well-kept **Mossman Golf Club** (☎ 4098 1570; www.mossmangolf.com.au; 18 holes \$30), 3km north of town on Newell Beach Rd.

Mossman Gorge

Inspiring Mossman Gorge, 5km west of Mossman town, is in the southeast corner of Daintree National Park and forms part of the traditional lands of the Kuku Yalanji indigenous people. Carved by the Mossman River, the gorge is a boulder-strewn valley where sparkling water washes over ancient rocks. Walking tracks loop from the car park along the river to a refreshing 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. Beyond the swimming hole, the Rex Creek swingbridge takes you across the river to a 2km circuit trail through the lowland rainforest. The easy walk passes interpretive signs and trees dripping with jungle vines. The complete walk back to the car park takes about an hour. There's a picnic area here but no camping.

Mossman Gorge Gateway (☎ 4098 2595; www.yalanji.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. The gallery here displays indigenous art and artefacts by local artists. 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.

Sleeping & Eating

Demi View Motel (☎ 4098 1277; fax 4098 2102; 41 Front St; s/d \$65/85; ☎ ☎) Standard ground-floor motel rooms are on offer at this central place on Mossman's main street. The motel's restaurant, Mojo's (mains \$19 to \$23; open for lunch and dinner Monday to Saturday) has indoor and outdoor seating and a tempting bistro menu.

White Cockatoo (☎ 4098 2222; www.thewhitecockatoo.com; 9 Alchera Dr; s & d \$89–129; ☎ ☎) For something completely different, White Cockatoo is a neat little resort-style place with spacious self-contained 'chalets' that can sleep up to five. But you have to be naked. Actually, only part

DETOUR: JULATTEN

Bird-watchers should take the turn-off just south of Mossman to Julatten, which links up with the inland route to Cooktown. For around 20km the Rex Hwy climbs and winds through pretty, productive tropical-fruit farms and cattle country.

If you've been wanting to catch a barra but haven't had the patience, cast a line at **Barramundi Gardens** (☎ 4094 1293; www.barramundigardens.com.au; 1832 Rex Hwy; adult/child per hr \$25/10; ☎ 10am–4pm Thu–Sun), a sports-fishing park and aquaculture farm.

Kingfisher Park (☎ 4094 1263; www.birdwatchers.com.au; Lot 1, Mt Kooyong Rd; unpowered/powered sites \$25/27, bunkhouse s/d \$44/60, self-contained unit s/d from \$123/137; ☎ ☎) is a bird-watchers' lodge where you can listen for the haunting cry of the wompoo pigeon or try to spot a buff-breasted paradise kingfisher.

Julatten Mountain Retreat & Spa (☎ 4094 1282; www.julattenretreat.com; English Rd, via Euluma Creek Rd; d \$165) is the place to be spoilt with mud baths, massages and meals. Stay the night in one of the three secluded A-frame cottages.

of the property – the part with the pool – operates as a nudist resort from 1 October to 1 May. For the rest of the year clothing is optional and open to all, so take an open mind. It's professionally run and superfriendly. Nude tours of the Reef and Daintree can also be arranged.

Mossman Gorge B&B (☎ 4098 2497; www.bnbq.com.au/mossgorge; Lot 15, Gorge View Cres; s/d from \$90/105; ☎ ☎) Take a left turn on the road to the gorge and immerse yourself in this lovely little timber B&B with uninterrupted veranda views of the national park. It's intimate with just three en suite rooms, the best being the queen-size 'room with a view'.

Silky Oaks Lodge (☎ 1300 134044; www.silkyoakslodge.com.au; Finleyvale Rd; treehouse s/d \$577/600, river house s/d \$777/800; ☎ ☎) The last word in luxury treehouses – spend languorous afternoons in the hammock strung on the veranda of your designer cabin. Or be pampered with the spa treatments on offer. This international resort targets honeymooners and stressed-out execs looking for a retreat – but there are big off-season discounts. Rooms feature huge beds, polished timber floors and balconies with spectacular views. If you want to see without sleeping, the resort's stunning Treehouse Restaurant & Bar (mains \$23 to \$38; open for breakfast, lunch and dinner) is open to interlopers.

Raintrees Cafe (☎ 4098 2139; 6 Front St; dishes \$4–10; ☎ breakfast & lunch) This country-style café with a pleasant outdoor area serves coffee, burgers and sandwiches; it also acts as an informal tourist information centre.

Getting There & Away

Sun Palm (☎ 4087 2900; www.sunpalmtransport.com) has three daily buses between Mossman and

Cairns (\$40, 1¼ hours) and Port Douglas (\$10, 20 minutes) on its run to Cape Trib.

MOSSMAN TO DAINTREE

Travelling north from Mossman, it's 26km through cane fields and farmland before the crossroads to either Daintree Village or the Daintree river ferry. En route are a few worthwhile stops, including peaceful Newell Beach and Wonga Beach – two long stretches of uninterrupted beach where there's little to do but laze, which is precisely their appeal.

About 8km northwest of Mossman, turn off on the road through Miallo, then drive another 6km to the cultural sanctuary that is **Karnak Playhouse** (☎ 4098 8111; www.karnakplayhouse.com.au; Upper Whyanbeel Rd, via Miallo; ☎ May–Nov), a performance amphitheatre in a magical setting: the seats look down onto a timber stage set beside a small lake, with a backdrop of rainforest-covered hills. The brainchild of Diane Cilento – former actress and first wife of 007 Sean Connery – it stages a limited number of musical, theatre and stage performances each year, all by highly acclaimed performers. Even when there are no shows it's worth a visit to the **café & gallery** (☎ 10am–4pm mid-May–mid-Oct) for coffee, cakes and light lunches.

Newell Beach

Five kilometres from Mossman you'll come to the first 2.5km-long palm-fringed stretch of sand known as Newell Beach. It's a small community where lazing around or fishing off the beach are the main activities.

Drop out of life for a while at **Newell Beach Caravan Park** (☎ 4098 1331; www.newellbeachcaravanpark.com.au; 44 Marine Parade; camp sites \$22, d \$70–80; ☎ ☎),

a block back from the beach, with shady powered sites and self-contained cabins.

Wonga Beach

The turn-off to Wonga Beach is 22km north of Mossman. This 7km ribbon of beach backed by palms and *Calophyllum* trees is peaceful – made more so by the absence of sandflies – with three maintained graves of well-known mariners. **Wonga Beach Horse Rides** (☎ 4098 7583; www.beachhorserides.com.au; \$119) offers three-hour morning and afternoon rides along the beach.

Popular with the grey nomads, **Wonga Beach Caravan Park** (☎ 4098 7514; unpowered/powerd sites \$16/17) is a simple, friendly place with absolute beach frontage – you can almost feel the waves lapping at your campervan.

Pinnacle Village Holiday Park (☎ 4098 7566; www.pinnaclevillage.com; Vixies Rd; unpowered/powerd sites \$21/27, cabins \$65-75; ♿ ♻️ 📶) is a huge, family-friendly site with beach frontage, grassy surrounds, a games room, kiosk, camp kitchen and a range of accommodation, including en suite cabins.

The road north continues past ponds for barramundi farming and paddocks for cattle grazing. The turn-off to Cape Tribulation and the Daintree River crossing is to the right (24km from Mossman). Continue straight ahead (past Crossroad Cafe) for another 10km to reach Daintree Village (right).

DAINTREE

The Daintree represents many things: a river, a rainforest national park, a reef and the home of the traditional owners, the Kuku Yalanji people. It encompasses the coastal lowland area between the Daintree and Bloomfield Rivers, where the rainforest nudges up against the coast. It's an ancient but fragile ecosystem, once threatened by logging and development but now largely protected as a World Heritage area. For travellers it's an opportunity to immerse yourself in a sublime natural environment – the fan palms, ferns and mangroves are just some of around 3000 plant species and the forest is alive with a chorus of birds, frogs and insects. This is a place to explore and admire, but leave undisturbed.

The Daintree National Park stretches inland from Mossman Gorge to the Bloomfield River, while tiny Daintree Village sits on

the river about 12km upstream from the ferry crossing.

The Daintree was named after British-born geologist, gold prospector and photographer Richard Daintree, who carried out important work in northern Queensland in the mid-19th century, including geological surveys and collection of plant specimens.

DAINTREE VILLAGE

☎ 07 / pop 80

You may be racing to the beaches of Cape Trib, but it's worth taking the left-hand (ie straight ahead) detour to the tiny settlement of Daintree for a croc-spotting tour on the broad Daintree River. Settlement began in the 1870s when loggers sought the area's red cedars for their strength, versatility and beauty, and the logs were floated down the Daintree River for further transportation. The river is now more commonly used for cruises, with frequent crocodile sightings the main selling point. While neither Daintree Village nor the surrounding countryside is part of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, there are still pockets of untouched rainforest.

Daintree Village itself is a tiny, low-key tourist hub, with plenty of secluded accommodation and a handful of places to eat. The main street is Stewart St, just back from the river, at the end of which is a public-access wharf – the departure point for a number of small tour operators. More tour operators have their own departure points along Daintree Rd between the Daintree River ferry crossing and the village.

There's a **general store** (☎ 4098 6146, 1 Stewart St) and an unofficial **tourist information centre** (☎ 1800 658 833; 5 Stewart St) in the village, but no fuel is available.

Tours

It's all about cruising on the Daintree River. Sightings of resident saltwater crocodiles are frequent though not guaranteed, but there's plenty to see: birds and butterflies in particular. Tours can be booked at the two agencies in the village.

Bruce Belcher's Daintree River Cruises (☎ 4098 7717; www.daintreerivercruises.com; adult/child \$22/10; ☎ seven daily Mar-Jan) One-hour cruises on a covered boat.

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.

DAINTREE NATIONAL PARK: THEN & NOW

The greater Daintree rainforest is protected as part of Daintree National Park. The Daintree area 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.

Despite strenuous resistance by the Queensland timber industry and the state government, the area was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1988 and one of the key outcomes was a total ban on commercial logging in the area. That may not be enough, however. The Cow Bay area that many travellers visit, an area of unique and threatened plant species, is a 1000-block real-estate subdivision on freehold private land – look around and you'll see 'for sale' signs aplenty.

World Heritage listing, unfortunately, 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 the 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; p391).

World Heritage Listing

Far North Queensland's Wet Tropics area has amazing pockets of biodiversity. The Wet Tropics World Heritage Area stretches from Townsville to Cooktown and covers 894,420 hectares of coastal zones and hinterland, diverse swamp and mangrove-forest habitats, eucalypt woodlands and tropical rainforest. It covers only 0.01% of Australia's surface area, but has:

- 36% of all the mammal species
- 50% of the bird species
- around 60% of the butterfly species
- 65% of the fern species.

What can I do?

Increased tourism is undoubtedly having an impact on the Daintree area. 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. When travelling, consider the following questions to try to minimise your 'environmental footprint':

- Does the tour I'm going on have ecocertification (see www.ecotourism.org.au)?
- Are tour participants encouraged to take their rubbish with them when visiting World Heritage sites?
- Am I using natural, chemical-free toiletries while travelling?
- Are there any volunteer opportunities for me to assist with cleaning up beaches or wildlife monitoring etc?
- Is there a not-for-profit environment group I can donate to (eg Austrop, the Wilderness Society or the Australian Conservation Foundation)?
- Is my accommodation choice encouraging guests to recycle rubbish and reduce water consumption?

THE CROCODILE ROCK (& DEATH ROLL)

In 1991 Charlie was awarded the title of 'Queenslander of the Year' for his outstanding contribution to tourism. Charlie was a crocodile who for 65 years entertained thousands of tourists to Hartley's Creek by snapping for dangling chickens and performing the occasional death roll. Even at their least hospitable (these giant beady-eyed predators will attack humans), it seems there's a morbid fascination with crocodiles. Especially if there's a tough, Aussie human element to the story, such as the case of the grandmother who threw herself on the back of a 4.2m croc that was dragging a fellow camper down the beach north of Cooktown. And no one has done more for the international profile of the Australian saltwater crocodile than the late Steve Irwin.

'Salties' are often-aggressive estuarine crocodiles that can grow to 7m (though most are under 5m). They inhabit coastal waters and are mostly seen in the tidal reaches of rivers, though on occasion they're spotted on beaches and in freshwater lagoons. Throughout northern Queensland signs placed at access points to waterways and beaches alert people to the potential presence of estuarine crocs. Use common sense in these areas. If in doubt, seek advice from a local – they generally know where crocs live. Obviously, don't swim in these areas, don't clean fish or prepare food near the water's edge, and camp at least 50m away from waterways. Crocodiles are particularly mobile and dangerous around breeding season (October to March). Crocs are fiercely territorial and even have homing capabilities. Three crocs moved from their homes and tracked in 2007 all made it back, with one swimming right around Cape York Peninsula, covering 400km in 20 days!

Crocodiles have been a protected species in Queensland since 1974. Since it became illegal to harm or kill a wild crocodile, the once-dwindling population has recovered greatly. Some argue that numbers are too high; whenever there's a crocodile encounter in a built-up area, there are cries for controlled culling. Problem (or rogue) crocs – those deemed a threat to landowners – are ideally captured and relocated to commercial crocodile farms.

Crocodile farms (where khaki-clad tough guys who enter the croc's pen take on the risks, while tourists are safely entertained from the bleachers) are extremely popular places to see crocs. A number of crocodile farms, with live animals as a spectacle, also operate as closed-cycle breeding establishments. This is where animals are farmed for use in restaurant dishes or as a handbag, wallet or pair of shoes; they also end up as taxidermied trophies, known as 'stiffies'. Souvenir shops in Cairns sell stuffed crocodile feet fixed to a stick as back-scratchers.

Which one goes to show that there's a fine line between fascination and fetishism.

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.daintreecruises.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).

Solar Whisper (☎ 4098 7131; www.solarwhisper.com; 1¼hr cruise adult/child \$20/10; ☎ 6 daily) Electric boat fitted with croc-cam.

Sleeping

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

Kenadon Homestead Cabins (☎ 4098 6142; www.daintreecabins.com; Dagmar St; s/d \$80/100; ☎ ☎) These self-contained cabins, on the fringe of a 400-acre family cattle farm, are perfect for families as they sleep up to five. Clustered together near the pool, they face out to the vast pastures. Rates include breakfast.

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.

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. There are four well-appointed en suite rooms, a large communal lounge and library, and a two-bedroom family unit (from \$240).

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. As well as the pampering, there are guided rainforest walks led by members of the Kuku Yalanji community.

Also recommended:

Daintree Riverview (☎ 4098 6119; www.daintreeriverview.com; Stewart St; unpowered/powerd sites \$18/21, cabins \$99) Riverside camping and good-value en suite cabins.

Daintree Escape (☎ 4098 6021; www.daintreescape.com.au; 17 Stewart St; d \$135; ☎ ☎ ☎) Cute cabins and pleasant gardens minutes from the village.

Daintree Valley Haven (☎ 4098 6206; www.daintreevalleyhaven.com.au; Stewart Creek Rd; s/d incl breakfast \$130/160; ☎) Secluded and ultrapeaceful farm-style accommodation in neat self-contained cabins. Great for couples (no kids).

Eating

There's a handful of places to eat and a general store in the village.

Big Barramundi (☎ 4098 6186; 12 Stewart St; mains \$5-18; ☎ lunch) Proving that even tiny rainforest towns aren't immune to the Australian propensity for building really big things, a gigantic silver fish welcomes you into the Big Barra. The semi open-air restaurant is an informal place for a barra burger, tropical fruit smoothie or Devonshire tea.

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. Aussie dishes such as fish and chips and beef pies sit alongside nasi goreng and delicately prepared barramundi.

Daintree Tea House Restaurant (☎ 4098 6161; Daintree Rd; meals from \$15; ☎ lunch) Ensnconed in rainforest by Barratt Creek about 3km south of the village, the excellent Tea House specialises in fresh wild barramundi and light meals.

our pick Julaymba Restaurant (☎ 4098 6100; 20 Daintree Rd; mains \$32-34; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) At

Daintree Eco Lodge & Spa, a superb terrace looks out over a lagoon and dense rainforest, and Aboriginal art decorates the walls. You can expect special things to come from the kitchen here – dishes of barramundi and steak are prepared using local produce, incorporating indigenous berries, nuts, leaves and flowers. Try the Flaming Green Ant cocktail – made with crushed green ants! Worth a stop, even for afternoon tea.

DAINTREE RIVER TO CAPE TRIBULATION

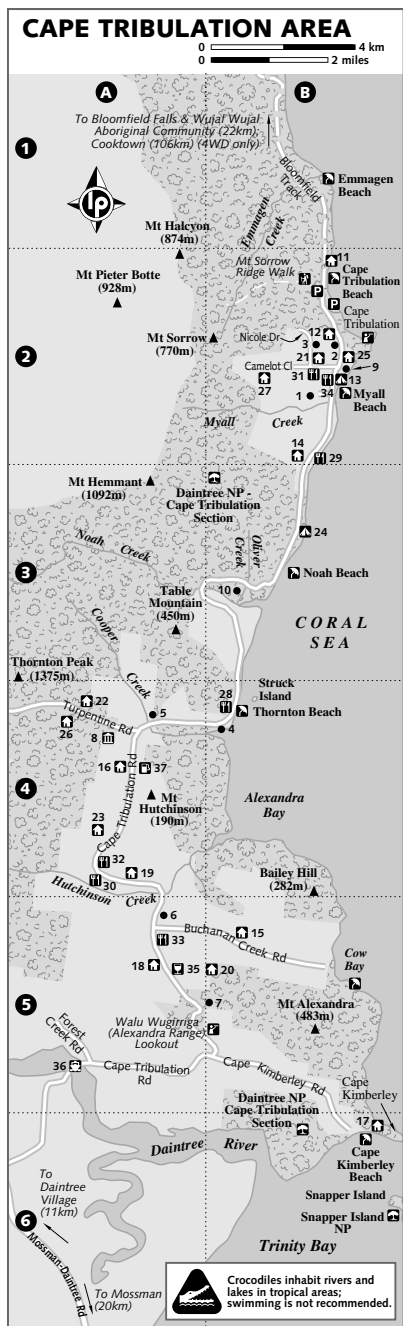
Crossing the Daintree River by the cable ferry gives the feeling that you're about to enter a frontier wilderness. From here the road narrows and winds north for 35km, hugging the coast for most of the way to Cape Tribulation. Along the way are smatterings of tiny hamlets, isolated beaches and attractions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

The indigenous Kuku Yalanji people called the area Kulki; 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, the region from the Daintree River north to Cape Tribulation is extraordinarily beautiful and famed for its ancient rainforest, sandy beaches and rugged mountains, including Thornton Peak (1375m) and Mt Sorrow (770m). Of the tropical lowland rainforest that existed before settlement, 96% has been cleared for cane, cattle and residences. Only north of the Daintree River does the forest remain relatively intact. It's 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. The Cape Tribulation section reaches from the Daintree River to the Bloomfield River, with the mountains of the McDowell Range providing the western boundary. The Cow Bay area is largely privately owned and excluded from the national park, but development is restricted.

Cow Bay and Cape Tribulation are loosely termed 'villages', but the length of Cape Tribulation Rd is scattered with places to stay and eat. There's no mains power north of the Daintree River – electricity is supplied by generators or, increasingly, solar power. As a result, air-con is at a premium. Self-caterers should consider stocking up at Mossman, which also



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has the closest banks, though most places to stay and eat and the general stores have Eftpos and credit-card facilities, and there's an ATM in Cape Trib. The only fuel between the Daintree River and Cape Trib is at Rainforest Village.

Cape Trib is one of the most popular trips from Port Douglas and Cairns, and accommodation can be booked solid in peak periods.

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.

Cape Kimberley Beach

About 3km beyond the Daintree River crossing, a 5km unsealed road leads to Cape Kimberley Beach, a beautiful quiet beach with **Snapper Island** just off shore. The island is national park, with a fringing reef. Access is by private boat; Crocodylus Village (right) takes a sea-kayaking tour there. You'll need to obtain a permit for the **QPWS camping ground** (☎ 4098 2188; www.epa.qld.gov.au; per person \$4) on the southwest side of Snapper Island, where there's a toilet and picnic tables. Take a fuel stove, as fires are not permitted.

Nudging up against the beach, **Daintree Koala Beach Resort** (☎ 4090 7500; www.koalaadventures.com; Cape Kimberley; unpowered/powerd sites per person \$10/13, dm \$25, d \$50-120; ☎ ☎) 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. The practically deserted beach is a 30-second walk away.

Cow Bay

At the end of a sealed 5km road, the beach at Cow Bay is simply beautiful. Trees provide shade, and you can fish or just lie there. On the steep, winding road between Cape Kimberly 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 7 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. There are a few short walks with interpretive panels and a small theatre running films on cassowaries, crocodiles and conservation. 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.

Cow Bay Horse Rides (☎ 4098 9202; \$95; Cape Tribulation Rd) takes very personalised rides – just two people – on its forested property.

A number of green canvas safari-style huts merge with the surrounding trees at the YHA-

associated **Crocodylus Village** (☎ 4098 9166; www.crocodyluscapttrib.com; Buchanan Creek Rd; dm/d \$20/75; ☎ ☎). Dorm rooms pack in 16 to 20 beds and have all the ambience of school camp. There's a restaurant and bar, as well as a range of activities. Crocodylus runs adventurous two-day sea-kayaking tours to Snapper Island (\$199) that leave early in the morning.

Lync Haven Rainforest Retreat (☎ 4098 9155; www.lynhaven.com.au; Cape Tribulation Rd; unpowered/powerd sites \$19/24, dm \$30, d \$140-165) is set on a 16-hectare property on the main road about 5km north of Cow Bay. It's a friendly place with its own walking trails and a pen of hand-reared kangaroos. Spacious cabins (some with bathrooms) and self-contained bungalows sleep up to six.

Spectacularly laid-back **Epiphyte B&B** (☎ 4098 9039; www.rainforestbb.com; 22 Silkwood Rd; s/d/tr/cabin \$70/95/120/140) is set on a lush 3.5-hectare property with individually styled rooms of varying sizes but all with en suite and private veranda. Even better is the spacious private cabin with a patio, kitchenette and beautifully designed sunken bathroom. From the front deck of the house you can kick back with views of imposing Thornton Peak.

Daintree Rainforest Retreat (☎ 4098 9101; www.daintreeretreat.com.au; 336 Cape Tribulation Rd; d \$110-121, family \$165; ☎) is a modern family motel conveniently on the highway and close to the pub in Cow Bay. Bright rooms have flowery bedspreads and some have kitchenettes. The owners have worked on keeping it clean and green.

Curtained by lush rainforest, **Daintree Wilderness Lodge** (☎ 4098 9105; www.daintreewilder nesslodge.com.au; 83 Cape Tribulation Rd; d/tr \$250/290; ☎) has seven timber cabins connected by a series of boardwalks. Each has a ceiling window to watch the rainforest canopy. There's a fine restaurant, and you can end a night-time nature walk with a soak in the 'jungle Jacuzzi'.

Fan Palm Boardwalk Cafe (☎ 4098 9119; Cape Tribulation Rd, Cow Bay; mains \$5-18; ☎ ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) offers alfresco dining on the edge of the rainforest with perky wraps, sandwiches, burgers and breakfast fare. The café takes its name from the wheelchair-accessible boardwalk deck leading through giant palms (\$2 donation).

Enjoy light meals, Asian dishes, tea and smoothies in the thatched huts of **Floravilla** (☎ 4098 9016; Bailey Creek Rd; mains \$10-20; ☎ 10am-midnight), a pleasant tea garden; the attached gallery displays photographs and plants.

Daintree Ice Cream Company (☎ 4098 9114; Cape Tribulation Rd; ice cream \$5; ☎ 11am-5pm) is one of those 'must stop' places. There's no choosing from the menu – you get a cup with four exotic flavours that change daily. It could be wattlesed, black sapote, macadamia, mango, coconut or jackfruit – they're all delicious.

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

Cooper Creek

There's a smattering of sights and accommodation options nestled in the bend of Cooper Creek at the base of dramatic Thornton Peak.

Just south of the creek itself, **Rainforest Village** (☎ 4098 9015; ☎ 7am-7pm) sells groceries, ice and fuel, and has a small camping ground at the side.

Daintree Entomological Museum (☎ 4098 9045; www.daintreemuseum.com.au; Turpentine Rd; adult/child \$10/5; ☎ 10am-4pm) displays a large private collection of local and exotic bugs, butterflies and spiders, delicately pinned and in large glass cases. There are a few live exhibits of giant cockroaches and a small butterfly enclosure.

Book ahead for a place on one of the walks with **Cooper Creek Wilderness** (☎ 4098 9126; www.ccwild.com; Cape Tribulation Rd; guided walks \$40). Bring your swimming costume for the day walks (departing 9am and 2pm), which take you through Daintree rainforest and include a dip in Cooper Creek. Night walks (departing at 8pm) focus on spotting nocturnal wildlife. There's also a full day tour including lunch and a river cruise for \$120.

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.

There are few better settings to practise, or learn, meditation and yoga than the ancient rainforest of the Daintree. **Prema Shanti** (☎ 4098 9006; www.premashanti.com; Turpentine Rd; tw \$140) yoga retreats include meditation every morning and two hours of daily instruction in Iyengar; accommodation includes breakfast and dinner.

Daintree Deep Forest Lodge (☎ 4098 9162; www.daintreedeeppforestlodge.com.au; Cape Tribulation Rd; d \$130-150) has three ground-level self-contained units that are a bargain (the largest sleeps up

to five people). Each has a veranda with a BBQ for alfresco cooking.

In a secluded rainforest location **Heritage Lodge & Spa** (☎ 4098 9138; www.heritagelodge.net.au; Turpentine Rd; r from \$215; ☎ ☎) 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, and there are nature walks, a pool, and an excellent restaurant-bar (mains \$26 to \$30; open for lunch and dinner) with a small but varied menu.

Thornton Beach

A slither of vegetation separates Cape Tribulation Rd from magnificent crescent-shaped Thornton Beach. There's a small, rocky offshore island, and opportunities for a spot of snorkelling. Best of all is the licensed **Cafe on Sea** (☎ 4098 9718; mains \$10-15; ☎ breakfast & lunch), only a towel-length back from the beach.

Noah Beach

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

Noah Beach camping area (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au; Cape Tribulation Rd; per person \$4.50) is a QPWS self-registration camping site (book ahead and obtain a permit by phone or online) set 100m back from the beach. Big red-trunked trees provide shade for the 17 sites. There are toilets but no showers.

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 aground 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,

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 those of an emu. Meet the cassowary, the shy native of these northern forests. The Australian cassowary, also known as the Southern cassowary, is only found in the north of Queensland, but other species are found in Papua New Guinea.

The 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.

The cassowary is an endangered species; its biggest threat is loss of habitat, and eggs and chicks are vulnerable to dogs and wild pigs. Traditional gender roles are reversed, with the male bird incubating the egg and rearing the chicks on his own. A number of birds are also hit by cars: heed road signs warning drivers that cassowaries may be crossing. You're most likely to see cassowaries in the wild around Mission Beach and the Cape Tribulation section of the Daintree National Park. They can be aggressive, particularly if they have chicks. Don't approach them, but if you feel threatened, do not run; give the bird right-of-way and try to keep something solid between you and it – preferably a tree.

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

Emerge from the rainforest and you're on Cape Trib's main attraction – the beach. 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. From the main car park it's a short walk to Cape Trib Beach; also from the car park, a trail leads for 500m over a ridge through rainforest to Myall Beach. You can walk about 1.5km south along the beach (crossing a small creek) and return to the village along the Myall Creek boardwalk. Look out for lace monitors (goannas), bird life and the tiny mud crabs that inhabit the creek beds. Just south

of PK's Jungle Village is another car park, from where the **Dubuji Boardwalk** is 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. The steep climb takes you through a forest of palms, cycads and acacias to a lookout (680m), with awesome views across windswept vegetation over the cape and south along the coast.

There are plenty of activities to get involved in around Cape Trib, and all can be booked through your accommodation. Take a leisurely ride on the beach with **Cape Trib Horse Rides** (☎ 1800 111 124; 4098 0030; per person \$95; ☎ 8am & 1.30pm).

There's no better way to see the coast and rainforest (and the odd turtle) than from a kayak. Two outfits offer organised sea-kayaking trips: **Paddle Trek** (☎ 4098 0040; www.capeTRIBpaddle.trek.com.au; morning 3½hr tours \$69, afternoon 2½hr tours

559) and **Cape Tribulation Kayaks** (☎ 40980077; 2hr tours \$45). Both companies will collect you from your accommodation.

Jungle Surfing (☎ 4098 0043; www.junglesurfing.com.au; \$80; ☎ 7:50, 9:50am, 1:30 & 3:30pm) is an exhilarating zipline flying fox through the rainforest canopy. The same outfit runs guided **night walks** (\$35; ☎ 7:20pm) in which zany biologist-guides help shed light on the dark jungle.

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. Certified dives cost \$50/70 for one/two dives, or you can do an introductory dive without a certificate for \$70.

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 crowd-spotting night walk (\$38). They also run 4WD tours up the Bloomfield Track (from \$106/66).

Cape Trib Exotic Fruit Farm (☎ 4098 0057; www.capetrib.com.au; tastings \$20; ☎ 2pm) runs tours of the tropical orchards and a tasting of 10 of the 100-plus seasonal fruits grown here, including black sapote, mangosteen, durian and jackfruit; bookings essential.

Sleeping

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 longtime budget favourite, staffed by overworked backpackers. There's a whole range of accommodation (the en suite cabins are a bit overpriced), and its boozy bar and restaurant is the entertainment hub of Cape Trib.

Cape Tribulation Camping (☎ 4098 0077; www.capetribcamping.com.au; unpowered/powerd sites \$22/30, d \$55; ☎) Beach frontage and a good range of facilities, including beach showers and a camp kitchen with barbecues (no pool). There's a cluster of five safari-tent cabins with fans and grassy camp sites.

Cape Trib Beach House (☎ 4098 0030; www.capetribbeach.com.au; dm \$25, d \$79-189; ☎ ☎ ☎) A low-key backpackers alternative to PK's party house, this beachfront place is hidden away and reached by a pedestrian-only path from

its car park. Neat rainforest huts range from air-con dorms to overpriced, private timber cabins. There's an untidy communal kitchen and a breezy restaurant-bar with a pool table and games. Access the beach down some stairs leading from the restaurant.

our pick Rainforest Hideaway (☎ 4098 0108; www.rainforesthideaway.com; 19 Camelot Close; d \$95-135) This colourful, rambling B&B is in a homemade home, single-handedly built by the owner – even the furniture and beds are handmade. Best is the self-contained rustic cabin with an outdoor shower open to the rainforest. It's extremely private, if you don't count the cassowary that occasionally pops past.

Cape Trib Farmstay (☎ 4098 0042; www.capetribfarmstay.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. There are also three rooms in the farmhouse and a common kitchen.

Ferntree Rainforest Resort (☎ 4098 0033; www.ferntreerainforestlodge.com.au; Camelot Close; 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. Facilities include two pools and the Cassowary Cafe (mains \$12 to \$25; open for breakfast, lunch and dinner).

Cape Tribulation Resort & Spa (☎ 1800 987 077, 4098 0033; www.capetribulationresort.com.au; Cape Tribulation Rd; r \$288; ☎ ☎) Nestled in the jungle about 2km south of the village, the luxurious individual cottages take full advantage of the lush surrounds. Polished floorboards, rattan furniture and baths with essential-oil burners for ambience. Day-spa treatments are a speciality here.

Eating & Drinking

Jungle Bar (☎ 4098 0040; mains \$8-16; ☎ lunch & dinner) PK's party bar is a hopping place for a drink and reasonably priced meals like steak and schnitzel (kitchen closes at 8pm sharp). Bar is open noon to midnight.

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. The bar is open from 10am till late

our pick Whet Restaurant (☎ 4098 0007; 1 Cape Tribulation Rd; 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.

Cape Restaurant & Bar (☎ 4098 0033; Cape Tribulation Rd; ☎ lunch & dinner) Down the road opposite Cape Tribulation Resort and reached by a candlelit boardwalk, this cathedral-like beachfront restaurant is worth visiting for a drink on the deck after a stroll on Coconut Beach.

There's an **IGA Supermarket** (☎ 7am-8pm) at PK's Jungle Village, and limited groceries, meat and takeaway alcohol at **Mason's Store** (Cape Tribulation Rd; ☎ 8am-6pm). **Myall Takeaway** (meals \$5-10; ☎ 8am-7pm), next to Mason's, is the place for burgers, sandwiches and coffee.

Getting There & Around

See above 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. It also runs an evening service in season between Dragonfly and Coconut Beach Resort (6pm to 10pm).

NORTH TO COOKTOWN

There are two routes to Cooktown from the south: the coastal route from Cape Tribulation via the 4WD-only Bloomfield Track, and the inland route, which is sealed all the way via the Peninsula and Cooktown Developmental Rds.

If you have a 4WD, the best option is to use both, travelling north up the inland route and returning via the coastal route or vice versa.

INLAND ROUTE

The inland route skirts along the western side of the Great Dividing Range and stoically retains its arid, outback character whatever the season. It's 332km (about 4½ hours' drive) from Cairns to Cooktown, past the ghosts of the gold and copper mining boom. Access the Peninsula Developmental Rd from Mareeba, or via the turn-off just before Mossman. The road travels through rugged ironbarks and

cattle-trodden land, and climbs two ranges before joining the Cooktown Developmental Rd at Lakeland. From there it's another 80km to Cooktown.

Mt Molloy to Palmer River

The historical township of **Mt Molloy** marks the start of the Peninsula Developmental Rd, about 40km north of Mareeba. Since its heady gold- and copper-mining days, the town has shrivelled to comprise a pub, bakery, post office and café. James Venture Mulligan is buried in the cemetery just south of town. The Irish prospector was credited with first finding gold in the Palmer and Hodgkinson Rivers, which dominoed into the establishment of Cairns and Port Douglas. He mined copper around Mt Molloy in the 1890s, and bought the town pub where he sustained injuries while breaking up a brawl that eventually killed him.

Despite the unappealing name, **Abattoir Swamp Environment Park**, just out of town, is a wetland area blanketed in lotus flowers and is popular with bird-watchers.

There's a popular rest area about 1km north of town where you can **camp** (free; 2-night maximum). There are toilets but no showers.

The **National Hotel** (☎ 4094 1133; Main St; s/d \$30/60, mains \$7.50-19.50; ☎ lunch & dinner) takes centre stage in this town and it's a welcoming local with spotless rooms upstairs. **Mt Molloy Cafe & Takeaway** (☎ 4094 1187; Main St; mains \$6-15; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner), otherwise known as 'Lobo Loco', serves up homemade burritos, enchiladas and some of Far North Queensland's biggest burgers.

Mt Carbine, 30km northwest of Mt Molloy, is a one-pub town, literally – that's about all there is. The **Mt Carbine Hotel** (☎ 4094 3108; r \$65) was established for wolframite (a mineral used for tungsten) miners in the area, and was well known for an old Brahmin bull that used to come into the bar and drink beer. Sadly the bull is no more, but there are pictures on the wall to prove it! The pub is still well worth a stop to see what's claimed to be the world's longest playable didgeridu hanging on the wall, and there are locally made instruments for sale.

The mine closed in 1986 and the abandoned Brooklyn mining village has been transformed into the **Mt Carbine Village & Caravan Park** (☎ /fax 4094 3160; www.mtcarbine.com; 9806 Peninsula Hwy; unpowered/powerd sites \$14/16, cabins \$55-75). Set on a

DETOUR: PALMER RIVER

The Palmer River's alluvial gold deposits spurred a mighty gold rush, which created thriving, if transitory, townships. The remains of two major townships from the Palmer River rush (1873 to 1883) lie inland from the Palmer River Roadhouse. There's an unmarked turn-off from the Peninsula Developmental Rd, which runs west for 35km to the ghost town of **Maytown**, and **Palmerville** 30km further on. This is rugged 4WD-only territory where the only passing traffic you might see is the odd cow from the neighbouring cattle station. The turn-off is about 17km south of the Palmer River Roadhouse, just before the White's Creek crossing.

The Palmer goldfields are legendary not only for the 46°C days and lack of comforts that prospectors endured but also for the thousands who walked overland to get here. Maytown was the second settlement to be established after Palmerville, and it became the major centre in 1875.

All that remains of Maytown's 12 hotels, three bakeries, three bakeries, butcher and lemonade factory are a few stumps, some plaques and slate roads that the earth is gradually reclaiming. The population of 252 Europeans and 422 Chinese had largely abandoned Maytown by 1945, when the gold dried up. There's a camping spot just beneath the site of Maytown, before you cross the river. Contact **QPWS** (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au) for a permit and an update on the current condition of the track. You'll need to backtrack the same way you came in.

large bush property south of the pub, the park has good facilities, with self-contained cabins. The grounds are visited by birds and other wildlife, and retain evidence of the village's former life with a disused Olympic-sized pool, a playground and a recreation hall.

After crossing the McLeod River, 15km west of Mt Carbine, the road climbs and winds through the De Saille Range, where there are panoramic views over the savannah. The road continues north reaching the **Palmer River**, a further 60km from Mt Carbine, and all that's left of a once thriving mining town. You'll find food and fuel at the **Palmer River Roadhouse** (☎ 4060 2020; powered sites \$16.50, s/d \$32.50/45, mains \$10-22 ☞ breakfast, lunch & dinner). You can also pitch a tent, park your van or stay in the roadhouse's bivouac.

Lakeland to Cooktown

From Palmer River it's another 15km to **Lakeland**, a hamlet at the junction of the Peninsula Developmental Rd and the Cooktown Developmental Rd. Lakeland is in the fertile volcanic basin of the Laura Valley, producing cereal grains, sugar and coffee (almost the full complement for the breakfast table). Head west and you're on your way to Laura and Cape York; continue straight northeast and you've got another 80km to Cooktown.

Lakeland Coffee House (☎ 4060 2040; www.users.bigpond.com/coffeehouse; Sesame St; ☞ 6.30am-6.30pm) serves fabulous Laura Valley coffee, smoothies, sandwiches and burgers. It also has fuel, basic supplies and an ATM.

Lakeland Caravan Park (☎ 4060 2033; lakelandcaravanpark@bigpond.com; Anderson St; unpowered/powerd sites \$18/21, s/d \$30/60; 🚻) is across the road from the Coffee House, with new en suite rooms and backpacker accommodation.

Lakeland Downs Hotel-Motel (☎ 4060 2142; Peninsula Developmental Rd; s/d \$55/75; ☞) has comfortable motel-style rooms. It's also the local **pub** (mains \$10-18; ☞ breakfast, lunch & dinner).

About 50km past Lakeland is the **Annan River Gorge**, which has a natural swimming hole and a picnic area. Downstream the river has carved an impressive gorge through solid rock; the water pools briefly before cascading into impressive falls.

A little further down the road is the turn-off to Helenvale and the coastal route to Cape Tribulation.

Continuing to Cooktown, the road soon passes the staggering **Black Mountain National Park**, with its thousands of stacked, square, black granite boulders that look unnervingly precarious, as though they might tumble down with the slightest movement. The mountain is 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. Black Mountain marks the northern end of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. From here, it's another 30km to Cooktown.

COASTAL ROUTE

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 that can be boggy or bald. This infamous stretch of road 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 (see p391). The Bloomfield 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 quite a few accommodation places and attractions along the way – you certainly don't need to do the trip in a day.

The track was originally forged as far back as 1968 but for many years it was little more than a remote walking track. The road was built in 1983 – two years after the Cape Tribulation National Park was created – despite vociferous opposition from locals. The official justification for the track was to open up the region to tourism and to halt the illegal trade in drugs, wildlife and plants. Local views, supported by scientific reports, expressed concern over the environmental impact of the track on the surrounding rainforest and reef. Cape Trib became the scene of a classic greenies-versus-bulldozers blockade, yet after several months and numerous arrests, it took just three weeks to cut the track through the forest. The debate over the Bloomfield Track continues today, with many locals seeking its staged closure over the next 10 to 15 years.

Cape Tribulation to the Bloomfield River

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 bull dust. This is the most challenging section of the drive, especially after rain. The road then follows the broad Bloomfield River before crossing it 30km north of Cape Trib. The Bloomfield River is a tidal crossing, so you'll need to check with locals about the best times to cross.

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) runs 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.

From Wujal Wujal to the Cooktown Developmental Rd the track is unsealed, but possible to traverse (slowly) with a conventional vehicle in dry conditions.

About 10km beyond Wujal Wujal is the small hamlet of **Ayton** (named after Great Ayton, birthplace of Captain Cook) where the Bloomfield River empties out into the Coral Sea. There's a small shop and café here.

Just north of Ayton, **Haley's Cabins & Camping** (☎ 4060 8207; www.bloomfieldcabins.com; 20 Bloomfield Rd, Ayton; unpowered sites \$10 per person, d \$75) has a great setting, with tall, shady gum trees. A path from the property leads to Weary Bay, where you can walk for 9km (and appreciate its name). There's a bar and casual restaurant; book ahead.

Bloomfield Lodge (☎ 4035 9166; www.bloomfieldlodge.com.au; Weary Bay; 4-night min d \$1533-2055; ☞) Accessible only from the sea, this is remote luxury at its best. Price includes transfers from Cairns (a charter flight, a boat trip and a 4WD journey). The cabins at this luxury resort are spaced well apart, with verandas overlooking the rainforest and/or the sea. All meals are included, and optional extras, such as spa treatments and excursions, are also available. It's favoured by honeymooners, but children over 12 are welcome.

Bloomfield River to Cooktown

North of Bloomfield, the road passes through the **Cedar Bay (Mangkal-Mangkalba) National Park**. Access to the park is either by boat, which is difficult in most conditions, or by a walking trail (17km, seven hours). There's a self-registration camp site at Cedar Bay, and you can obtain a permit from **QPWS** (www.epa.qld.gov.au; per person \$4). This and other walks begin from **Home Rule Rainforest Lodge** (☎ 4060 3925; www.home-rule.com.au; Rossville; unpowered sites \$8 per person, r per person \$18), at the end of a bumpy 3km driveway. The lodge caters to groups, and the grounds and facilities are spotless. There is a communal kitchen and the owners will cook on request. The turn-off is signposted from Rossville, 33km north of the Bloomfield River crossing.

It is only another 9km to the welcoming sight of the **Lion's Den Hotel** (☎ 4060 3911;

www.lionsdenhotel.com.au; Helensvale; unpowered/powerd sites \$16/22, s/d \$40/50, d safari tents \$66; (P)). This well-known watering hole with genuine corrugated, graffiti-covered décor dates all the way back to 1875 and always attracts a steady stream of travellers and local characters. There's fuel and ice-cold beer, and the **restaurant** (mains \$12-18; (P) breakfast, lunch & dinner) serves up excellent pub grub, including burgers, lasagne and famous Lion's Den pizzas. Pitch a tent by the river or sleep on stilts in the ultracool safari-style cabins (they sleep up to eight).

Mungumby Lodge (☎ 4060 3158; www.mungumby.com; Helensvale; s/d \$215/232; (P)) Individual timber en suite bungalows are scattered among the lawns and mango trees at this peaceful, verdant little oasis just off the track. The semi-open communal lounge area overlooks the pool, and meals and nature tours are available.

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

COOKTOWN

☎ 07 / pop 1336

A 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.

Years of isolation and hard living have imbued the locals with a matter-of-fact, laconic character and a great sense of humour. But it's more accessible than ever before: the inland route from Mareeba was finally sealed all the way in 2005 and tourism is a growing industry. It's still remote territory though and getting here is half the fun – most travellers take the 4WD Bloomfield Track from Cape Tribulation at least one way. Still, Cooktown exists despite tourism. It remains unadorned and unfussed by the attention it receives. 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, rainforest and long, lonely beaches. From here you can take off by 4WD through Lakeland National Park (p410), or trip out to spectacular Lizard Island (p400).

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. During this time, Joseph Banks, the chief naturalist, and botanist Daniel Solander kept busy studying the plants and animals along the banks of the Endeavour River, while the artist Sydney Parkinson illustrated their finds. Banks collected 186 plant species and 'observed, described, sketched, shot, ate and named the kangaroo'.

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 blood shed.

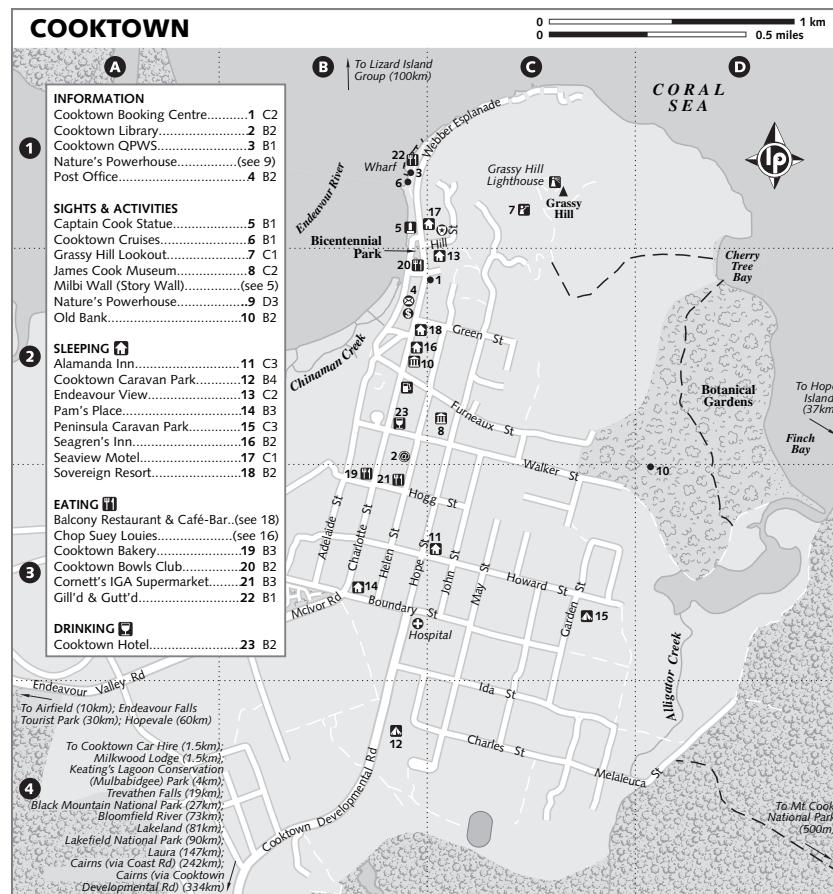
Cooktown's glory was short-lived, and as the gold ran out, the population dwindled. Two cyclones and an evacuation in WWII didn't do much to lift Cooktown's profile. By 1970, just a few hundred people turned up to see Queen Elizabeth II open the James Cook Historical Museum... and a rock. The rock sits just out in the water from Bicentennial Park and marks the spot where Cook ran aground; the Queen's Steps were constructed so Her Majesty could reach it.

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.

Pick up a copy of *Cooktown Rediscovered* brochure (or download it at www.cooktowns.com). Cooktown has a post office, ATM and internet access. Information services:

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; (P) 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) Information and camping permits for national parks, including Lizard Island.

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

Sights & Activities

For a northern outpost Cooktown has its share of attractions, including historical sights 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;

(P) 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** is dedicated to Cooktown's 'snake man' – Charlie's backyard pets included venomous snakes that he milked to make antivenins, and he had a particular passion for the deadly coastal taipan. The gallery displays pickled and preserved exhibits of only-on-the-Cape wildlife (such as the nightmare-inducing bare-backed fruit bat), inspirational stories from taipan-bite survivors, and displays on termites and barramundi. The **Vera Scarth-Johnson Gallery** is 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**.

Cooktown's major formal attraction is the **James Cook Museum** (☎ 4069 5386; cnr Helen & Furneaux Sts; adult/child \$7.50/3; ☎ 9:30am-4pm). Built as a convent in 1889, this historical building houses well-presented 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 were influential to the shaping of Cooktown, such as indigenous Guugu Yimithirr Bama culture, the gold rush and the Chinese presence.

The **Old Bank** (☎ 4069 5888; 122 Charlotte St; admission \$4; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Sat Easter-Oct) houses the Cooktown Historical Society's local history collection from its indigenous inhabitants to the Palmer River gold rush, as well as a family-history database.

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, river and 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 Gungarde (Guugu Yimithirr) indigenous community's perspective. The 12m-long mosaic begins with creation stories and moves through European contact, WWII and recent attempts at reconciliation. Captain Cook's 1770 landing is re-enacted here every June over the Queen's Birthday weekend.

Off Cooktown Developmental Rd, 8km from Cooktown, **Keatings Lagoon Conservation (Mulbabidgee) Park** is a woodland with mela-leuca swamps frequented by birds, particularly in the dry season; there's a bird hide and a 1.5km (30 minutes) walking trail.

Trevathen Falls is a hidden treasure, with a safe, secluded swimming hole under the forest

canopy. With a 4WD vehicle, head south from Cooktown, turning left at Mt Amos Rd. After about 9km you'll see a track to your right; take it for about 1km until you reach a fork. Take the right-hand path for about 2km until you reach a gate. Don't go through the gate; turn left, which will lead you to the falls. Take a picnic and your swimming costume. It's private land, so no camping.

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. All water-based tours depart from the wharf; pickups can be arranged for other tours unless stated otherwise.

Ahoey Plane-Sailing (☎ 4069 5232; www.ahoyplane-sailingseaplanes.com.au) Offers 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; day tours adult/child \$165/85, camping tours per day from \$300) Runs a variety of day tours and overnight safaris, including the Bush & Beach, which goes to Coloured Sands and Elin Beach, and the Miner's Adventure with accredited savannah guides.

Catch-a-Crab (☎ 4069 6289; www.cooktowncatchacrab.com.au; per person from \$95) River tours on the Endeavour and Annan Rivers in search of mud crabs. Also fishing and reef charters. Great for kids.

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

Cooktown Reef Charters (☎ 40695519; www.reefcharters.com.au; from \$185 per person) Game-fishing day trips.

Cooktown Tours (☎ 4069 5406; www.cooktowntours.com) Offers 1½-hour town tours (adult/child \$27.50/16.50) and half-day trips to Black Mountain and the Lion's Den Hotel (adult/child \$55/27.50); also 4WD trips to Hopevale and the Coloured Sands (\$110/75) and Lakefield National Park (\$165/110).

Gone Fishing (☎ 4069 5980; www.fishingcooktown.com; half-/full-day shared charter per person \$100/180, exclusive charter \$350/650) River-fishing tours; price is per person, with a minimum of two people. Private charters are also available to the reef and Lizard Island; the larger group the cheaper the cost per person.

Guurrbi Tours (☎ 4069 6259; www.guurrbitours.com; 2-/4hr tours \$90/115, self-drive \$60/80) Willie, an elder of

his Nugal-warra family, runs a unique tour that uses the physical landscape to describe the emotional landscape. The morning Rainbow Serpent involves a bit of walking, bush Tucker and rock-art sites including a birthing cave. The afternoon Great Emu tour is shorter and visits three rock-art sites. Cooktown pick-ups are from your accommodation; self-drivers meet near the Hopevale Aboriginal Community.

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.

BUDGET

Peninsula Caravan Park (☎ 4069 5107; 64 Howard St; unpowered/power sites \$24/27, cabin s \$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. As well as dorms and standard rooms, there are motel-style self-contained units. Management can provide loads of useful information about the area.

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.

Also recommended:

Cooktown Caravan Park (☎ 4069 5536; www.cooktowncaravanpark.com; 14-16 Hope St; unpowered/power sites \$20/25; ☎) On the main road into town, with friendly bush sites and wi-fi.

Endeavour Falls Tourist Park (☎ 4069 5431; www.endeavourfallstouristpark.com.au; Endeavour Valley Rd; unpowered/power sites \$20/24, self-contained cabins \$88; ☎) Out of town, 30km northwest on the road to Hopevale, this park backs on to the natural swimming hole

at Endeavour Falls. A handy place to stay if you're doing a self-drive Guurrbi tour as it starts nearby, or if you're heading to Lakeland National Park.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Seaview Motel (☎ 4069 5377; seaviewmotel@bigpond.com.au; 178 Charlotte St; r \$90-135, townhouse \$200; ☎ ☎) The location is paramount at this neat low-rise motel overlooking the wharf area. There's a range of tidy rooms and an informal grassy area in front that makes a pleasant gathering place around the pool.

Seagren's Inn (☎ 4069 5357; seagrens-inn@bigpond.com; Charlotte St; d \$95-140; ☎ ☎) Upstairs in a century-old heritage home above Chop Suey Louies (p400), Seagren's is all about the atmosphere. Old-style rooms are individually styled, with lots of wood and high puffy beds. 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 a private balcony.

Endeavour View (☎ 4069 5676; 168 Webber Esplanade; d/apt \$98/150; ☎) These little en suite safari-style cabins are squashed together in the garden but the location near the wharf is fine. The elevated one-bedroom apartment is easily the top choice here.

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 spilt-level apartments have king beds and kitchenettes but are not suitable for kids.

Sovereign Resort (☎ 4043 0500; www.sovereign-resort.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 and the Balcony Restaurant & Café-Bar (p400).

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, and the local pubs and clubs are a good place to mix it with the locals.

Stock up on supplies at **Cornett's IGA supermarket** (☎ 4069 5633; cnr Helen & Hogg Sts; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun).

Cooktown Bakery (☎ 4069 5612; cnr Hogg & Charlotte Sts; items \$2-10; ☎ 6am-9pm) A top spot for breakfast with home-baked bread; you can get pies, sandwiches and pizzas all day.

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 yourself 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.

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 with a beer or counter meal.

Chop Suey Louies (☎ 4069 5357; Seagren 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.

Balcony Restaurant & Café-Bar (☎ 4069 5400; Sovereign Resort, cnr Charlotte & Green Sts; café mains \$12.50-24, restaurant mains \$30-34; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner; ☎) The Sovereign Resort has the formal dining option of the Balcony Restaurant for breakfast and dinner – with views over the river – but you can also get reasonably priced seafood, steaks and pasta in the café-bar, which also has pool tables and free internet access.

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 – 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).

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

For a taxi call ☎ 4069 5387.

LIZARD ISLAND GROUP

The spectacular islands of the Lizard Island Group are clustered just 27km off the coast about 100km from Cooktown. **Lizard Island** is a continental island with a dry, rocky and mountainous terrain; some 20 superb beaches for swimming; and a relatively untouched fringing reef for snorkelling and diving. Bushwalking is another possibility, with great views from Cook's Look (360m), the highest point on the island. Apart from the ground where the luxury resort stands, the entire island is national park, which means it's open to anyone who makes the effort to get here.

There are four other smaller islands in the Lizard group. **Osprey Island**, with its nesting birds, is right in front of the resort and can be waded to. Around the edge of Blue Lagoon, south of the main island, are **Palfrey Island**, with an automatic lighthouse, and **South Island** – both have beaches accessible by dinghy. **Seabird Islet**, further south, is a popular nesting site for terns, and visitors should keep their distance.

History

The traditional custodians, the Dinggaal people, know Lizard Island as Jiigurru. In the Dinggaal creation story, the island group is associated with the stingray – with Jiigurru forming the head and the other islands snaking south forming the tail. Historically, the Dinggaal used the islands as a place for important meetings and initiation ceremonies; they were also used as a base for collecting shellfish, fish, turtles and dugongs.

Captain Cook and his crew were the first nonindigenous people to visit Lizard Island. Having successfully patched up the *Endeavour* in Cooktown, they sailed north and stopped on Lizard Island, where Cook and the botanist Joseph Banks climbed to the top of what's now known as Cook's Look to search for a way through the Barrier Reef maze and out to the open sea. Banks named the island after its large lizards, known as Gould's monitors, which are from the same family as Indonesia's Komodo dragons.

Sights & Activities

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.

Immediately south of the resort are three postcard beaches – Sunset, Pebbly and Hibiscus Beaches. Watson's Bay to the north of the resort is a wonderful stretch of sand with great snorkelling at both ends and a giant-clam garden in between. There are also plenty of other choices right around the island – most of them deserted.

The island group is noted for its **diving**. There are good dives right off the island, and the outer Barrier Reef is less than 20km away, including two of Australia's best-known dive sites – **Cod Hole** and **Pixie Bommie**. The resort offers a full range of diving facilities to its guests, and some live-aboard tours from Cairns dive the Cod Hole.

The climb to the top of **Cook's Look** is a great walk (three hours return). Near the top there are traces of stones marking an Aboriginal ceremonial area. The trail, which starts from the northern end of Watson's Bay near the camp site, is clearly signposted and, although it can be steep and a bit of a clamber at times, it's easy to follow. The views from the top are sensational, and on a clear day you can see the opening in the Reef where Cook made his exit.

The **Lizard Island Research Station** (☎ 4060 3977; www.lizardisland.net.au) is a permanent research facility, which has examined topics as diverse as marine organisms for cancer research, the deaths of giant clams, coral reproductive pro-

cesses, sea-bird ecology, and life patterns of reef fish during their larval stage. The station runs a one-hour tour on Monday at 11am for the island's visitors. It also runs one- to two-week volunteer programmes, which involve helping with maintenance around the station, rather than helping researchers. Accommodation is included but not food or transport to the island. See the website for more information.

Lizard Island has plenty of **wildlife**. There are 11 different species of lizard, including Gould's monitors, which can be up to 1m long. More than 40 species of birds have also been recorded on the island and a dozen or so actually nest here, including the beautiful little sunbirds with their long, hanging nests. Bar-shouldered doves, crested terns, Caspian terns and a variety of other terns, oystercatchers and large sea eagles are other resident species.

Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation is only available on Lizard Island, and the choice couldn't be more extreme – camping or supreme five-star luxury.

The bush camping ground is at the northern end of Watson's Bay; contact **QPWS** (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au; per person/family \$4.50/18) or go online to obtain a permit. There are toilets, gas barbecues, tables and benches, and untreated water (boil first) is available from a pump about 250m from the site. Campers should bring all supplies with them as there are no shops on the island.

Lizard Island Resort (☎ 1300 134 044; www.lizardisland.com.au; Anchor Bay; 2 nights s/d from \$2792/3300; ☎ ☎) If you're thinking of booking a room here, you really don't need us to tell you whether it's any good or not. You'll be one of

HOPE IS A BEAUTIFUL THING....

With an adventurous spirit you really can play Robinson Crusoe out here. Visiting the **Hope Islands** means there's likely just you and nature (and the odd passing boat). **East Hope** and **West Hope Islands** are sand cays 37km southeast of Cooktown. Both are national parks, which protects the hardy mangroves and shrub vegetation. West Hope is an important nesting site for pied-imperial pigeons – access is not permitted during nesting from 1 September to 31 March. Snorkelling is excellent around both islands, but best on the leeward margin of the East Hope Island reef; beware of strong currents. East Hope Island has three camp sites, toilets, tables and fire places. Permits are required and there's a seven-day limit; contact **Cooktown QPWS** (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au; Webber Esplanade; per person \$4.50). Take drinking water, food and a fuel stove.

Getting there won't be cheap: you'll need to charter a boat or take a seaplane. Contact **Cooktown Booking Centre** (☎ 4069 5381; www.cooktownbookings.com.au; 132 Charlotte St) to see what charters are operating at the time of your visit.

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 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), which must be booked through **Voyages** (☎ 1300 134 044; www.lizardisland.com.au).

Daintree Air Services (☎ 1800 246 206; 4034 9300; www.daintreeair.com.au) has full-day tours from Cairns at 8am (\$590 per person). The trip includes lunch, snorkelling gear, transfers and a local guide.

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.