

Cairns, Islands & Highlands



Basking in a tropical climate that draws southern travellers north for the winter, the Cairns region has a heady reputation as Australia's reef-diving capital and the gateway to the enigmatic far north. But it's not until you get here that you realise how diverse the experience can be. Sure, Cairns itself is a booming holiday town and most people are itching to board a boat and get out among the coral of the Great Barrier Reef, but there are idyllic beach communities to the north, national parks to the south, coral-fringed islands a short ride offshore and the absorbing highlands of the Atherton Tableland looming as a backdrop.

With pockets of reef, rainforest, coast and pastoral land, this is like a 'best of' northern Queensland – and it would be criminal not to go exploring beyond the city limits. Interested in exotic wildlife? Animal sanctuaries abound and coming face to face with a saltwater crocodile or a cuddly koala is likely. Like fishing? The lakes and rivers of the highlands are barramundi heaven. Walks in the rainforest? Trails and boardwalks take you through forests to rivers, waterfalls, volcanic-crater lakes and giant strangled fig trees. And there are so many ways to experience the region – tour operators are an art form in themselves: you can dive, snorkel, cruise, kayak, skydive, fish, bird-watch, hot-air balloon, golf or take a scenic flight. The only limitations are your budget and your imagination.

HIGHLIGHTS

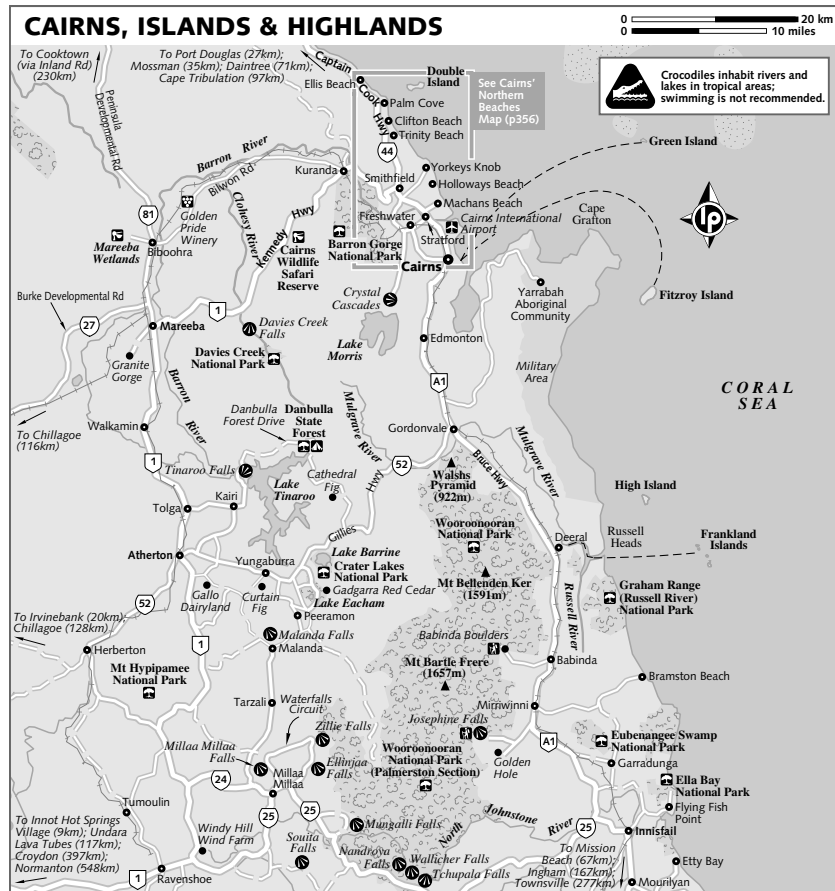
- Diving, snorkelling and simply being a guest of the many fish, turtles and anemones that live among the colourful corals of the **Great Barrier Reef** (p343)
- Going platypus-spotting along the creek in picturesque **Yungaburra** (p370)
- Dining at a swish marina waterfront restaurants at the Pier Complex in **Cairns** (p349)
- Taking the Skyrail up to **Kuranda** (p361) and visiting the indigenous Djurri Dadagal Art Gallery
- Making like a castaway and camping on the secluded **Frankland Islands** (p360)
- Exploring and swimming in the idyllic **waterfalls** (p369) and lakes of the lofty Atherton Tableland
- Joining the throngs strolling on Cairns' **foreshore promenade** and cooling off in the **salt-water lagoon** (p339)
- Donning the shades and people-watching from a café on the Esplanade at **Palm Cove** (p357)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 07

■ www.tropicalaustralia.com.au

■ www.athertontableland.com



Getting There & Away

Cairns is the main link for transport services to Far North Queensland.

AIR

The major international airport servicing north Queensland is in Cairns, with flights from Asia and New Zealand stopping here. There are also frequent domestic flights to/from all Australian capital cities with Qantas, Jetstar and Virgin Blue.

BUS

Cairns is the end of the line for long-distance bus services travelling the Bruce Hwy from Brisbane, and the starting point

for services north to Port Douglas, Mossman, Cape Tribulation and Cooktown.

TRAIN

There are at least four services a week from Brisbane to Cairns on Queensland Rail's *Sunlander* (p476).

CAIRNS

☎ 07 / pop 122,700

Cairns is booming. Its popularity as a diving destination is global and shows little sign of waning as a flotilla of cruise boats, catamarans and yachts heads out to the Great Barrier Reef from the marina each day. The central area is a mini urban jungle of tour

shops, booking agents, car-hire agents, internet cafés, restaurants and hostels, all aimed at wooing the stream of bewildered visitors.

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

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

The city is awash with comfortable accommodation, good places to eat and drink, and it's only a short hop to the northern beaches. It's a great place to meet other travellers and the obvious place to kick off your far-north experience.

ORIENTATION

Cairns' business district runs from the Esplanade on the waterfront back to Sheridan St, and is bordered by Wharf and Aplin Sts. It's referred to as the CBD, but it's more boardshorts than briefcases.

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

Maps

A usable map of central Cairns is available from all booking agents and information centres, but for an impressive range of quality regional maps, topographic maps and nautical charts, head to **Absells Chart & Map Centre** (Map p340; ☎ 4041 2699; Main Street Arcade, 85 Lake St).

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Angus & Robertson (Map p340; ☎ 4041 0591; Shop 141, Cairns Central Shopping Centre, McLeod St) A chain store carrying titles from most categories.

Bookshelf (Map p340; ☎ 4051 8569; www.thebookshelfcairns.com.au; 95 Grafton St) Lots of secondhand books – proceeds go to a women's centre

Exchange Bookshop (Map p340; ☎ 4051 1443; www.exchangebookshop.com; 78 Grafton St) New and secondhand books to buy and swap.

Emergency

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

Cairns Police Station (☎ 4030 7000)

Internet Access

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

Call Station (Map p340; ☎ 4052 1572; 123 Abbott St; 📶 8.30am-11.30pm)

Escape Internet (Map p340; Cairns Central Shopping Centre; per hr \$5) Self-serve coin-operated internet terminals.

Global Gossip (Map p340; ☎ 4031 6411; www.globalgossip.com; 125 Abbott St; 📶 9am-11.30pm) Wi-fi available

Medical Services

Cairns Base Hospital (Map p340; ☎ 4050 6333; The Esplanade) Has a 24-hour emergency service.

Cairns City 24 Hour Medical Centre (Map p340; ☎ 4044 0444; cnr Florence & Grafton Sts) General practice and diving examinations

Cairns Travel Clinic (Map p340; ☎ 4041 1699; 15 Lake St; 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Vaccinations, medical kits and advice.

Money

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

American Express (Map p340; ☎ 1300 139 060; 63 Lake St) In Westpac Bank.

Thomas Cook (Map p340; ☎ 4051 6255; 50 Lake St)



Post

Main post office (Map p340; ☎ 13 13 18; www.auspost.com; 13 Grafton St) Handles poste restante. There are branches in Orchid Plaza and in Cairns Central Shopping Centre.

Tourist Information

The glut of tourist information available in Cairns can either inspire you to do something wild, or baffle you with its sheer volume. Dozens of tour-booking agents operating in Cairns call themselves 'information centres' and fraudulently brandish the blue-and-white 'i' symbol; most places to stay also have tour-booking desks. The government-run **Gateway Discovery Centre** (Map p340; ☎ 4051 3588; www.tropicalaustralia.com.au; 51 The Esplanade; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm) offers impartial advice, books tours and houses an interpretive centre. It distributes the *Welcome to Cairns* directory with a map centrefold.

Other useful contacts:

Far North Queensland Volunteers (Map p340; ☎ 4041 7400; www.fnqvvolunteers.org; Virginia House, 68 Abbott St) Arranges volunteer positions with nonprofit community groups.
Gulf Savannah Development (Map p340; ☎ 4031 1631; www.gulf-savannah.com.au; 212 McLeod St) Information on this outback region west of Cairns.

Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS; Map p340; ☎ 4046 6602; www.epa.qld.gov.au; 5B Sheridan St) Information on national parks and state forests, walking trails and camping permits.

Royal Automobile Club of Queensland (RACQ; ☎ 4033 6433; www.racq.com.au; 537 Mulgrave Rd, Earlville) Maps and information on road conditions up to Cape York. It also has a 24-hour recorded road-report service (☎ 1300 130 595).

Wilderness Society (Map p340; ☎ 4051 6666; www.wilderness.org.au; 125 Abbott St) Advocacy organisation with information on local environmental issues; volunteers welcome.

Travel Agencies

Flight Centre (Map p340; ☎ 4031 6766; www.flightcentre.com.au; Shop 19 Cairns Central) Flight bookings
Navi Tour (Map p340; ☎ 4031 6776; www.navitour.com.au in Japanese; Shop 38, 1st fl, Orchid Plaza, 58 Lake St) Caters to Japanese travellers.

STA Travel (Map p340; ☎ 4041 3798; 125 Abbott St) Student travel agency

Trailfinders (Map p340; ☎ 4050 9600; www.trailfinders.com.au; Hides Corner, Lake St) Worldwide travel agency.

SIGHTS

Cairns Foreshore & Lagoon

Hundreds of people flock around the shallow but spectacular 4800-sq-metre saltwater

swimming **lagoon** (Map p340; admission free; ☎ 6am-10pm), and take up patches of grass right along the city's reclaimed foreshore. The lagoon is patrolled by lifeguards and illuminated at night. Strolling northwest from the lagoon, the boardwalk **promenade** is popular with walkers and joggers and stretches for almost 3km. Interpretive boards along the way explain some of the history of Cairns and the local ecosystem. Pelicans and other waterbirds hang out on the mudflats at low tide. There are picnic areas, free barbecues and playgrounds all along the foreshore, so there's always plenty of action here.

Further north up the coast, past Saltwater Creek and halfway along the airport road (Airport Ave) is the **Mangrove Boardwalk** (off Map p338). It's an easy 2km circuit walk, which is also wheelchair accessible and includes a viewing tower and observation platforms above the mangroves.

Flecker Botanic Gardens & Centenary Lakes

These beautiful tropical **gardens** (Map p338; ☎ 4044 3398; www.cairns.qld.gov.au; Collins Ave, Edge Hill; ☎ 7.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5.30pm Sat & Sun) are an explosion of greenery and rainforest plants. Sections include an area for bush-tucker plants and the Gondwanan Evolutionary Trail, which traces the 415-million-year heritage of tropical plants. From the **information centre** (☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri) there are free guided walks on Tuesday and Thursday at 10am and 1pm, or pick up a map and a self-guided-walks brochure. There's a pleasant restaurant-café inside the main gate.

Across the road, the excellent Rainforest Boardwalk leads from the botanic gardens through lowland swamp forest to the **Centenary Lakes**. The area covers 38 hectares and includes a freshwater lake and a saltwater lake leading off from Saltwater Creek (which has been known to harbour crocs). There are barbecues, picnic areas and children's play areas at both lakes, which can also be accessed by car and local bus from Greenslopes St in the south.

Just behind the botanic gardens is the **Mt Whitfield Conservation Park**. Its two walking tracks lead through rainforest with patches of eucalyptus and grasslands, climbing to viewpoints over the city; follow the Red Arrow circuit (1.3km, one hour) or the more demanding Blue Arrow circuit (5.4km, three hours).

Palmer River and Hodgkinson River goldfields. There's an excellent bookshop and café here.

Cairns Wildlife Dome

If it's a rainy day in Cairns, or if you're not heading to one of the wildlife parks out of town, **Cairns Wildlife Dome** (Map p340; ☎ 4031 7250; www.cairnsdome.com.au; 35-41 Wharf St; adult/child \$22/11; ☎ 8am-6pm) might merit a visit. This minizoo is oddly perched in the glass atrium on top of the Reef Casino. In a simulated rainforest environment are free-flying birds, wallabies, koalas, snakes, lizards and freshwater crocs. Take the lift from the casino foyer (wheelchair accessible).

Royal Flying Doctor Service

The **RFDS** (off Map p338; ☎ 4053 5687; www.flyingdoctorqueensland.net; 1 Junction St; adult/child \$5.50/2.75; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Sat), founded at Cloncurry in 1928, attends to remote medical emergencies and health clinics. The Cairns base services an outback region the size of England. The visitors centre at Edge Hill offers an insight into the service's origins and modern-day operations.

Lake Morris & Crystal Cascades

A spectacular drive along the Lake Morris Rd (off Reservoir Rd, Kanimbla) takes you on a narrow 16km winding road high above Cairns to **Lake Morris** (☎ 8am-6pm). Also known as the Copperlode Dam, this is the city's fresh water supply. There are a few short walks around the dam and a **café** (☎ 4055 7414; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sun) overlooking the lake.

Another popular drive is to **Crystal Cascades**, about 20km from Cairns and reached by a turn-off south along Redlynch Intake Rd (just past the Skyrail Rainforest Cableway). Locals flock to this series of waterfalls and pools, especially in summer when the stingers arrive at the beaches. The area is accessed by a 1.2km (30 minutes) pathway (suitable for wheelchairs). You can walk between Crystal Cascades and Lake Morris (about three hours return) along a steep rainforest path. It starts near the picnic area at Crystal Cascades and climbs steadily uphill, coming out on Lake Morris Rd, about 300m from Copperlode Dam (turn right).

ACTIVITIES

Diving & Snorkelling

Take your knowledge of the Reef to greater depths at **Reef Teach** (Map p340; ☎ 4031 7794; www.reefteach.com.au; Main Street Arcade, 85 Lake St; adult/child \$13/7; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Sat, lecture 6.30-8.30pm Mon-Sat)

where marine experts explain how to identify specific types of coral and fish, and how to treat the Reef with respect.

White-Water Rafting

There's white-water rafting down the Barron, Tully, Russell and North Johnstone Rivers. The excitement level is hitched to the season: obviously the wetter the weather, the whiter your water. Trips on the Tully River are timed to coincide with when the nearby hydro-electric power company opens its floodgates, so there are rapids year-round.

Tours are graded according to the degree of difficulty, from armchair rafting (Grade 1) to white knuckle (Grade 5). For tours leaving Cairns, expect to pay about \$155 for a full day to Tully, \$100 for a half-day to the Barron River, \$650 for a two-day North Johnstone River trip (\$1300 for a four-day heli-rafting trip) and \$130 for a full-day trip to the Russell River; check whether wetsuit hire and national-park fees are included.

Major rafting companies in Cairns: **Foaming Fury** (☎ 1800 801 540, 4031 3460; www.foamingfury.com.au) Full-day trips on the Russell; half-day on the Barron

Raging Thunder (Map p340; ☎ 4030 7990; www.ragingthunder.com.au) Full-day Tully and half-day Barron trips.

R'n'R White Water Rafting (☎ 4035 3555; www.raft.com.au) Full-day Tully and half-day Barron trips

Ballooning & Skydiving

The dawn skies above Cairns and the highlands are a pretty sight with a multitude of colourful balloons hanging in the air. If you want to see the view from up there, set your alarm for a 5am start. Most flights take off from the Mareeba region on the Atherton Tablelands with free transfers from Cairns, and include champagne breakfast afterwards.

Hot Air Cairns (☎ 4039 9900; www.hotair.com.au; 30/-60-min flights \$180/280)

Raging Thunder (Map p340; ☎ 4030 7990; www.ragingthunder.com.au; adult/child 30min flight \$165/90, 60min flight \$270/150)

Skydive Cairns (Map p340; ☎ 1800 444 568; 4031 5466; www.skydive Cairns.com.au; 59 Sheridan St; tandem jumps from 9000ft \$210) The higher you go (up to 14,000ft \$295) the higher the price; it's a free-fall thing. Licensed skydivers can jump solo for \$45.

Other Activities

Not up for scuba diving but want to get down with the fishes? With helmet diving, hoses

DIVE COURSES

Cairns is the scuba-diving capital of the Great Barrier Reef and a popular place to attain Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) open-water certification. There's a plethora of courses on offer, from budget four-day courses that combine pool training and reef dives (from \$370), to four-day open-water courses (\$470). Five-day courses (\$580 to \$700) include two days' pool theory and three days' living aboard a boat. These live-aboard courses are generally more rewarding as you'll dive less-frequented parts of the Reef.

Dive-school standards are first-rate, and there is little to differentiate between them. All operators require you to have a dive medical certificate, which they can arrange (around \$50). Many operators also offer advanced courses for certified divers. Following is a selection of reputable dive schools (in alphabetical order):

Cairns Dive Centre (Map p340; ☎ 1800 642 591; 4051 0294; www.cairnsdive.com.au; 121 Abbott St) One of the cheapest operators with live-aboard tours (two/three days \$340/450) and day tours (\$120).

Deep Sea Divers Den (Map p340; ☎ 1800 612223, 4046 7333; www.diversden.com.au; 319 Draper St) Multiday live-aboard courses and trips offered from \$500.

Down Under Dive (Map p340; ☎ 1800 079 099, 4052 8300; www.downunderdive.com.au; 287 Draper St) Multilingual instructors. Live-aboard trips from four to six days.

Pro-Dive (Map p340; ☎ 1800 353 213; 4031 5255; www.prodiv Cairns.com; cnr Abbot & Shields Sts) One of Cairns' most experienced operators has a range of courses and four- to five-day live-aboard trips.

Tusa Dive (Map p340; ☎ 4031 1248; www.tusadive.com; cnr Shields St & The Esplanade) German course available, as well as day trips (two dives \$205).

attached to the helmet deliver air so you can breathe normally. Because you're 'walking' on a submerged platform, it's recommended for nonswimmers, kids over 12 and anyone who doesn't like to get their hair wet. A number of the dive boats offer this offbeat activity, including **Sunlover Cruises** (☎ 4050 1313; www.sunlover.com.au; dives \$135) and **Quicksilver** (☎ 4087 2100; www.quicksilver-cruises.com; dives \$134).

Some other activities:

AJ Hackett Bungee & Minjin (☎ 4057 7188; www.ajhackett.com; bungee jumps \$99, minjin swing per person \$45, bungee & minjin swing combo \$140; ☎ 10am-5pm) Bungee from the purpose-built tower or swing from the trees on the minjin (a harness swing).

Cable Ski (Map p356; ☎ 4038 1304; www.cableski Cairns.com.au; Captain Cook Hwy, Smithfield; 1-hr adult/child \$34/29; 1-day \$59/68) Learn to waterski, wakeboard or kneeboard without the boat at this watersports park near the Skyrail.

Cairns Golf Club (off Map p340; ☎ 4054 1494; www.cairnsgolfclub.com.au; Bruce Hwy, Woree; per person 9/18 holes \$23/35) Nice 18-hole course just south of the city centre. Hires out equipment.

Fishing Cairns (☎ 4041 1196; www.fishing Cairns.com.au) Can arrange river, reef and game fishing trips.

CAIRNS FOR KIDS

Kids love the lagoon on the Esplanade, and it's patrolled by lifeguards during the day. A little

further west on the foreshore, **Muddy's playground** (Map p340; The Esplanade, btwn Minnie & Upward Sts) is suitable for all ages, with climbing nets, water-play and story-telling areas, as well as classic slides and swings.

In Cairns Central Shopping Centre (Map p340), **Central Games Station** and **Maze Mania 4 Kids** are side-by-side havens of arcade games for teens and a play centre for toddlers.

TOURS

More than 600 tours bus, boat, fly and drive out of Cairns each day.

Great Barrier Reef

Most of the innumerable operators working on the Reef include transport, lunch and snorkelling gear in their tour prices. When choosing a tour, consider the vessel (catamaran or sailing ship), its capacity (ranging from six to 300 people), what extras are offered and the destination. Generally, the outer reefs are more pristine; the inner reef areas can be patchy – showing signs of damage from humans, coral bleaching and crown-of-thorns starfish. Of course, companies that are only licensed to visit the inner reef have cheaper tours; in most cases you pay for what you get. Some operators offer the option of a trip in a glass-bottomed boat or semisubmersible.

CHRYSTAL MANTYKA

Chrystal Mantyka is a marine biologist and director at Reef Teach Great Barrier Reef Educational Centre in Cairns. Who better to ask about life on the reef? Chrystal studied at the James Cook University in Townsville and moved to Cairns in 2006.

How often to you get out on the reef? In peak times, I go diving and snorkelling five days a week, either with uni groups or tourists. I do research on herbivorous fish for James Cook University.

What's your favourite part of the reef? The Ribbon Reefs. They're the oldest types of reef and least degraded, especially around Lizard Island and Osprey Reef.

What's the strangest/scariest thing you've seen below the surface? During a dive off Loloata Island, Papua New Guinea, I came upon a pair of banded sea snakes. The best thing to do in this situation is to remain calm, but sea snakes' persistent curiosity can be very unnerving, even for a marine biologist, especially if you know how venomous they are!

What about sharks? Sharks are a natural predator, vital to the health of the reef, but we statistically have a greater chance of being injured or killed from a mosquito bite (contracting malaria) or from a car accident than we do by any shark – especially on the Great Barrier Reef where there are no Great White Sharks.

Best thing to do when you're not diving or teaching about the reef? As locals we go out to Mossman Gorge, the Crystal Cascades, fishing and weekends on the tablelands. The northern beaches are great too.

How can travellers minimise impact on the reef? We're encouraging people to cover up (rashie or wetsuit) rather than wear sunscreen to minimise the amount of sunscreen getting into the water. Also, people should be aware not to litter on the land because it ends up washing into the sea, especially cigarette butts.

The majority of cruise boats depart from the Pier Marina and Reef Fleet Terminal at about 8am, returning around 6pm. As well as the popular day trips, a number of operators also offer multiday live-aboard trips, which include specialised dive opportunities such as night diving. Companies that run dive courses (see p343) also offer tours. For trips to the islands surrounding Cairns, see p359.

Following is a list (in alphabetical order) of operators worth considering.

Coral Princess (☎ 1800 079 545; 4040 9999; www.coralprincess.com.au; 🕒 11am Sat) *Coral Princess* does three-night cruises (from \$1496) between Cairns and Townsville, and four-night Cairns to Lizard Island return (from \$1896).

Great Adventures (Map p340; ☎ 1800 079 080, 4044 9944; www.greatadventures.com.au; adult/child from \$174/87) This company has a range of combination day cruises on its fast catamaran. There's a day trip to its floating pontoon, with the option of a stopover on Green Island, as well as semisubmersibles and a glass-bottomed boat.

Passions of Paradise (☎ 1800 111 346; 4041 1600; www.passions.com.au; adult/child \$119/70) Sexy sailing catamaran takes you to Michaelmas Cay and Paradise Reef for snorkelling or diving.

Sunlover (☎ 1800 810 512, 4050 1333; www.sunlover.com.au; adult/child \$175/90) Sunlover's fast catamaran takes day cruises to a pontoon on the outer Moore Reef. Options include semisubmersible trips and helmet diving. Good for families.

Vagabond (☎ 4059 0744; www.vagabond-dive.com; 2-day tours from \$290) This luxury yacht has a maximum of 11 guests.

COD HOLE & CORAL SEA

Cod Hole, near Lizard Island, is one of Australia's premier diving locations, so these extended live-aboard trips are mainly for keen certified divers.

Explorer Ventures (☎ 4031 5566; www.explorer-ventures.com) The *Nimrod Explorer* organises 4- to 8-day live-aboard trips diving the Ribbon Reef and the Cod Hole.

Mike Ball Dive Expeditions (Map p340; ☎ 4053 0500; www.mikeball.com; 143 Lake St) These three-day live-aboard expeditions (from \$1385) head to the Cod Hole; four- and seven-day options also available.

Spirit of Freedom (☎ 4047 9150; www.spiritoffreedom.com.au; 3-7-day tours from \$1250/2550) This three-deck vessel runs live-aboard dive trips to the Cod Hole and Ribbon Reefs.

Taka Dive (Map p340; ☎ 4051 8722; www.takadive.com.au; 131 Lake St; 4-5-day tours from \$1100/1300)

Dives the Cod Hole and the Coral Sea. Also does speciality courses such as underwater photography.

Scenic Flights

Cairns Heliscenic (☎ 4031 5999; www.cairns-heli-scenic.com.au; Pier Marketplace; 10-/30-min flight from per person \$125/295) Big range of helicopter and reef flights including 30-minute flight over Green Island (\$330).

Cairns Seaplanes (☎ 4031 4307; www.cairnssea-planes.com; Cairns Airport; adult/child from \$250/187) Scenic seaplane flights to Green Island and other parts of the reef.

Atherton Tableland

Most visitors take a trip on the Kuranda Scenic Railway and Skyrail, but there is a range of speciality tours to the highlands above Cairns.

Bandicoot Bicycle Tours (☎ 4055 0155; full-day tours \$99; 🕒 Mon-Fri) Based at Holloways Beach, this outfit offers mountain-bike tours of the Atherton Tableland.

Food Trail Tours (☎ 4032 0322; www.foodtrailtours.com.au; adult/child from \$139/65; 🕒 8am-5pm) Munch your way around the Highlands and Mareeba area visiting

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO THE REEF *Alan Murphy*

The Great Barrier Reef is incredibly fragile and it's worth taking some time to educate yourself on responsible practices while you're here. The following are a few of the more important sustainable practices, but this is by no means an exhaustive list – see the websites below for more comprehensive information.

- Whether on an island or in a boat, take all litter with you – even biodegradable material like apple cores – and dispose of it back on the mainland.
- Remember that it is a legal offence to damage or remove coral in the marine park.
- Don't touch or harass marine animals and be aware that if you touch or walk on coral you'll damage it (it can also create some nasty cuts). Never rest or stand on coral.
- If you have a boat be aware of the rules in relation to anchoring around the reef, including 'no anchoring areas'. Be very careful not to damage coral when you let down the anchor.
- If you're diving, check that you are weighted correctly before entering the water and get your buoyancy control well away from the reef. Ensure that equipment such as secondary regulators and gauges aren't dragging over the reef.
- If you're snorkelling (and especially if you are a beginner) practice your technique away from coral until you've mastered control in the water.
- Watch where your fins are – try not to stir up sediment or disturb coral.
- Do not enter the water near a dugong, including when swimming or diving.
- Note that there are limits on the amount and types of shells that you can collect.

If you're a regular user of the reef you can be part of a program that makes a positive contribution towards its future survival. BleachWatch is a community initiative of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and involves regular users of the reef monitoring and reporting signs of coral bleaching. If you'd like to get involved, email bleachwatch@gbmpa.gov.au.

If you want a deeper understanding of the issues facing the Reef, as well as information on minimising your impact, try clicking on the following sites:

- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (www.gbmpa.gov.au)
- Reef Teach (www.reefteach.com.au)
- Cooperative Research Centre for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (www.reef.crc.org.au)
- Australian Conservation Foundation (www.acfonline.org.au)
- Coral Reef Alliance (www.coralreefalliance.org)
- Australian Research Centre (ARC) Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies (www.coralcoe.org.au)

farms producing macadamias, tropical-fruit wine, ice cream and coffee. Includes lunch.

On the Wallaby (☎ 4050 0650; www.onthewallaby.com; day/overnight tours \$95/165) Excellent activity-based tours around the Yungaburra area including cycling, hiking and canoeing.

Tropical Horizons Day Tours (☎ 4058 1244; www.tropicalhorizonstours.com.au) Day trips to Kuranda from \$87 (coach tour) to \$159 (with scenic railway and Skyrail).

Uncle Brian's Tours (☎ 4050 0615; www.unclebrian.com.au; tour \$109; ☞ 7.45am-8.30pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat) Popular small-group tours covering forests, waterfalls and lakes.

Cape Tribulation & the Daintree

After the Great Barrier Reef, Cape Trib is the next most popular day trip – usually taking in a cruise on the Daintree River. Cape Tribulation is accessed via a well-signposted, sealed road, so don't discount hiring your own vehicle for the trip, especially if you want to take your time.

Adventure Tours (☎ 1300 654 604; www.adventuretours.com.au; day tours \$115; ☞ 7.30am-5pm) Budget-oriented small-group tours include lunch, Mossman Gorge and a cruise on the Daintree River.

Billy Tea Bush Safaris (☎ 4032 0077; www.billytea.com.au; day trips adult/child \$147/97; ☞ 7am-6.30pm) Exciting ecotours that go beyond Cape Trib along the 4WD Bloomfield Track to Emmagen Creek.

Cape Trib Connections (☎ 4041 7447; www.capeconnexions.com; day trips \$119; ☞ 7.30am-6.30pm) Includes Mossman Gorge, Cape Tribulation Beach and Port Douglas. Also overnight tours.

Trek North Safaris (☎ 4033 2600; www.treknorth.com.au; Cape Tribulation tours adult/child \$145/95, Daintree Village tours \$125/75; ☞ daily) Full day tours include Mossman Gorge, a river cruise and lunch.

Cooktown & Cape York

Several companies run trips up to Cooktown, usually travelling up via Cape Tribulation and returning via the inland route. For detail of tours through Cape York Peninsula, see p406.

Adventure North Australia (☎ 4053 7001; www.adventurenorthaustralia.com; 1-day tour adult/child \$199/159) 4WD day trips to Cooktown via the coastal route, returning via inland route. Also 2- and 3-day tours, and fly-drive tours.

Wilderness Challenge (☎ 4055 4488; www.wilderness-challenge.com.au; 3-day tours from \$845; ☞ Mon & Fri May-Nov) This 4WD tour goes to Cooktown via Cape Tribulation and the Bloomfield Track, returning via Cape York rock-art sites.

Undara Lava Tubes

For an inland adventure, **Undara Experience** (☎ 4097 1411; www.undara.com.au; 2-day tours adult/child \$454/229; ☞ daily Jun-Aug, Thu & Fri Apr-May & Sep-Mar) runs coach tours to the Undara Lava Tubes – part of the longest lava flow from a single volcanic crater (see p418). Day trips are also available (\$150/75) but are a bit rushed.

City Tours

Cairns Discovery Tours (☎ 4053 5259; cairnsdiscoverytours.com; adult/child \$59/29; ☞ 12.45-6.30pm) Run by horticulturalists and includes Palm Cove and the botanic gardens.

My Town (☎ 4033 2095; www.mytown.net.au; 2½-hr tours \$35; ☞ 10am & 2pm) Runs city tours that include a trip to the botanic gardens and the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The **Cairns Festival** (www.festivalcairns.com.au) is held annually for three weeks in September. This regional festival features a stellar program of performing arts, music, visual arts and family events such as sand sculpting.

SLEEPING

Cairns has an excellent range of accommodation for all budgets. Prices peak from 1 June to 31 October; prices quoted here are high-season rates. Even during this time, you may find reduced walk-in or stand-by rates for midrange and top-end places that otherwise advertise a higher 'corporate rate'. In the shoulder and low seasons (1 November to 31 May) prices can drop dramatically, especially in the midrange. Lower weekly rates are par for the course.

Accommodation agencies have up-to-date listings and can help with locating suitable places to stay. The **Accommodation Centre** (Map p340; ☎ 1800 807 730, 4051 4066; www.cairnsaccommodation.com.au; 36 Aplin St) has tourist information and is wheelchair accessible. **Accom Cairns** (Map p340; ☎ 1800 079 031, 4051 3200; www.accomcairns.com.au; 127 Sheridan St) gives advice on midrange and top-end options, as well as short-term rental studio apartments.

If you're planning on sticking around for a while to work or study (a minimum of four weeks), **Cairns Sharehouse** (Map p340; ☎ 4041 1875; www.cairns-sharehouse.com; cnr Draper & Minnie Sts; s/d from per week \$100/200) has a range of budget share accommodation around the city. The properties have single and double rooms, share bathrooms, kitchens, lounge areas and usually a swimming pool and a garden.

Budget

There are literally dozens of backpacker hostels in Cairns, from intimate house-sized places to hangar-sized resorts. Behind the train station, on and around Bunda St, is a group of colourful low-key backpacker hostels with a laid-back, almost hippie vibe – great for travellers wanting to hang out while avoiding the party scene. They all have similar facilities and prices.

Serpent Hostel (Map p338; ☎ 1800 737 736, 4040 7777; www.serpenthostel.com; 341 Lake St; dm \$14-25, d \$60-80; ☞ ☑ ☒ ☓) This spiffing Nomads resort is a bit away from the centre but it's a backpacker bubble with a huge pool, beach volleyball, sports bar, free evening meals and a free shuttle bus. Impressive. Big range of rooms from four- to 10-share dorms.

Cairns Girls Hostel (Map p340; ☎ 4051 2767; www.cairnsgirls hostel.com.au; 147 Lake St; dm/tw \$20/48; ☑ ☒ ☓) The girls can feel very relaxed in this spotless female-only hostel. With shades of pink and mauve, two well-equipped kitchens, spacious lounge areas (free DVDs) and a manager who looks after you as if you were a guest in her own home, it's one of the most accommodating stays in Cairns.

Gecko's Backpackers (Map p340; ☎ 4031 1344; www.geckosbackpackers.com.au; 187 Bunda St; dm/s/d \$2131/45; ☞ ☑ ☒ ☓) In a big old Queenslander home, Gecko's is a quiet, well-equipped and friendly place.

Bellview (Map p340; ☎ 4031 4377; www.bellview.com.au; 85-87 The Esplanade; dm/s/d \$22/35/54, motel units \$55-75; ☞ ☑ ☒ ☓) Smack in the middle of the Esplanade, the family-run Bellview is a longstanding place that's part hostel, part budget guesthouse – perfect if you're not into the rowdy backpacker scene. Budget rooms are pokey (it's worth paying extra for a motel unit) but overall this is a good-value, secure choice.

Gilligan's (Map p340; ☎ 4041 6566; www.gilligansbackpackers.com.au; 57-89 Grafton St; dm \$22-28, r \$110-180) This enormous, upmarket backpackers deserves a mention for its size and ritzy facilities but (apart from the dorms), it's pricey, impersonal and very loud when the nightclub below is pumping. All rooms have en suites and most have a balcony. The pool area is good for meeting other travellers. Facilities include a 1000-capacity beer hall and a gym to work off all that beer.

Bohemia Central (Map p340; ☎ 1800 558 589; 4052 1818; 100 Sheridan St; www.bohemiacentral.com.au; dm \$23-25, s/d \$49/69; ☞ ☑ ☒ ☓) One of the newest of the

central backpackers in a renovated two-storey timber building, Bohemia has spotless rooms, friendly staff and a cool pool and bar area at the back.

Travellers Oasis (Map p340; ☎ 4052 1377; www.travellersoasis.com.au; 8 Scott St; dm/s/d \$24/40/55; ☞ ☑ ☒ ☓) Boutique backpackers with a maximum of 50 guests. It has all the usual facilities (kitchen and laundry) painted primary cartoon colours.

Ourpick Northern Greenhouse (Map p340; ☎ 1800 000 541, 4047 7200; www.friendlygroup.com.au; 117 Grafton St; dm, tw, apt \$25/95/120; ☞ ☑ ☒ ☓) It fits into the budget category with dorm accommodation and a laid-back vibe, but this place is a cut above the backpackers. Neat studio-style apartments with kitchens and balconies are a great deal. The central deck, pool and games room is a good place to meet people. Friendly staff and lots of free facilities such as internet, luggage storage and even hairdryers.

Cairns Holiday Park (Map p338; ☎ 1800 259 977; 4051 1467; www.cairnscamping.com.au; 12-30 Little St; unpowered/powered sites \$26/32, cabins \$59; ☞ ☑ ☒ ☓) Closest park to the city centre with good facilities including backpacker cabins and free wi-fi.

Global Palace (Map p340; ☎ 1800 819 024; 4031 7921; www.globalpalace.com.au; City Place, cnr Lake & Shields Sts; dm/tw/d \$26/54/56; ☞ ☑ ☒ ☓) If you like big, central backpacker accommodation, this refurbished cinema building is a good choice. There are no bunks in the dorm rooms (three to five beds), there's a small rooftop pool and a classic double veranda overlooking the street.

Cairns Central YHA (Map p340; ☎ 4051 0772; www.yha.com.au; 20-26 McLeod St; dm \$26-31.50, tw & d \$67-85; ☞ ☑ ☒ ☓) Bright, spotless and professionally staffed, the YHA will suit travellers who like YHAs. Private rooms are better value elsewhere.

Cairns Coconut Caravan Resort (off Map p340; ☎ 4054 6644; www.coconut.com.au; cnr Bruce Hwy & Anderson Rd; unpowered/powered sites \$36/40, cabins \$75-95, villas \$155-255; ☞ ☑ ☒ ☓) The last word in five-star caravan-park luxury. Spas, minigolf, an outdoor cinema and flashy accommodation, this is a self-contained oasis.

Midrange

Cairns has plenty of comfortable self-contained accommodation that works well for groups or families; there are dozens of virtually identical motels lined up along Sheridan St with stand-by rates from as little as \$75 for a standard room.

Floriana (Map p340; ☎ 4051 7886; www.floriana.guesthouse.com; 183 The Esplanade; d \$75-110; 🏠 🚿) Not interested in hostels or flashy self-contained apartments? Floriana is a charismatic family-run guesthouse oozing old-fashioned charm, with polished boards and original Art Deco fittings. The swirling staircase leads to individually decorated rooms, some with bay windows or balconies and all with en suites. The Fawley Towers-style lady owner is all part of the charm.

Costa Blanca (Map p340; ☎ 4051 3114; costablanca@bigpond.com.au; 239-41 The Esplanade; apt \$80-120; 🏠 🚿) Although it looks a bit tatty, this family-run Spanish-style villa at the bottom end of mid-range is a bargain for its coveted location on the Esplanade. The eight ageing self-contained apartments are of varying sizes.

Fig Tree Lodge (Map p340; ☎ 4041 0000; www.figtreelodge.com.au; 253 Sheridan St; r \$85-135, apt \$125-155; 🏠 🚿) This resort-style accommodation is one of the better midrange places around. Rooms have a beachy blue-and-white theme, and self-contained apartments have full kitchens. There's nightly entertainment in the Irish-themed restaurant and bar. Wheelchair-friendly rooms are available.

Balinese (Map p340; ☎ 1800 023 331, 4051 9922; www.balinese.com.au; 215 Lake St; r \$100; 🏠 🚿) This neat, low-rise complex brings a touch of Bali to Cairns: when you wake up among the authentic wood furnishings and ceramic pieces you may be taken with the sudden urge to have your hair beaded.

Tropical Queenslander (Map p340; ☎ 4051 0122; www.queenslanderhotels.com.au; 287 Lake St; apt from \$105; 🏠 🚿) Double dip here in the Tropical Queenslander resort's two pools, and relax in the neat self-contained apartments with kitchenettes, bathrooms and balconies.

Reef Palms (Map p340; ☎ 1800 815 421, 4051 2599; www.reefpalms.com.au; 41-7 Digger St; apt \$105-145; 🏠 🚿) The crisp white interiors of Reef Palms' apartments will have you wearing your sunglasses inside. All rooms in this traditional Queenslander-style place have kitchen facilities and come in a range of sizes – the larger ones include a lounge area and a spa. Good for couples and families.

Coral Tree Inn (Map p340; ☎ 4031 3744; www.coraltreeinn.com.au; 166-172 Grafton St; r \$120, 1-bed room ste \$148; 🏠 🚿) The studio and self-contained rooms here are spacious and have their own private balcony. Décor has a touch of retro (without an iota of irony): think plush

emerald-green bed quilts and matching easy chairs.

Skinny Dips (Map p338; ☎ 1800 621 824, 4051 4644; www.skinnydips.com.au; 18 James St; s/d \$135/170; 🏠 🚿) This intimate gay resort and spa is mostly for male guests – the central pool area is clothing-optional and you can meet around the bar or at the stylish restaurant, or in the 'chillout centre' (gym and sauna). The handsome boutique rooms include breakfast.

Cascade Gardens (Map p340; ☎ 1800 503 877, 4047 6300; www.cascadegardens.com.au; 175 Lake St; apt \$135-185; 🏠 🚿) Cascade aims for the tropical 'Bali' ambience with cane furniture and a palm-filled garden. It's a standard but well-equipped resort with spacious studios and self-contained apartments.

Bay Village (Map p340; ☎ 4051 4622; www.bayvillage.com.au; cnr Lake & Gaton Sts; r \$145-165; 🏠 🚿) This sprawling resort has smart units encircling a central pool. It's popular with package tours but no worse for that. The pricier rooms are self-contained, with kitchen and lounge; the Bay Leaf Restaurant here serves well-regarded Balinese cuisine.

Mid City (Map p340; ☎ 4051 5050; www.midcity.com.au; 6 McLeod St; s/d apt \$155/175; 🏠 🚿) Another excellent inner-city apartment. The spotless rooms here, with wrought-iron furnishings and terracotta tiled floors, are truly self-contained, each with superb kitchen, washing machine and dryer. Each room also has its own balcony, so try to get a room with a view.

Villa Vauduse (Map p340; ☎ 1800 623 263, 4051 8566; www.villavauduse.com.au; 141-3 Grafton St; 1-bed apt \$175; 🏠 🚿) There's a dash of the Mediterranean here: a tropical central atrium, secluded swimming pool and sumptuous self-contained apartments.

Inn Cairns (Map p340; ☎ 4041 2350; www.inncairns.com.au; 71 Lake St; apt \$189; 🏠 🚿) Behind the unassuming facade, this is truly inner-city apartment living. Take the lift up to the level-one pool or to the rooftop garden for a sundowner. The elegant self-contained apartments feature modern furnishings and fittings, and the staff are helpful.

Hotel Cairns (Map p340; ☎ 4051 6188; www.thehotelcairns.com; cnr Abbott & Florence Sts; d \$195-265; 🏠 🚿) There's a real tropical charm to this sprawling bone-white hotel, built in a traditional Queenslander 'plantation' style. Rooms have an understated elegance and the huge 'tower rooms' offer luxury touches.

Top End

Il Palazzo (Map p340; ☎ 1800 813 222, 4041 2155; www.ilpalazzo.com.au; 62 Abbott St; r from \$185; 🏠 🚿) With a replica of Michelangelo's *David* greeting you in the foyer, this charming boutique high-rise hotel is quietly stylish: in a soft-focus, terracotta-urns Mediterranean kind of way. The welcome and service are intimate compared with the big hotels. Opulent apartments feature balconies, laundries and full kitchens, and it's right in the centre of town.

Break Free Royal Harbour (Map p340; ☎ 1300 987 600, 4080 8888; www.breakfree.com.au; 73-5 The Esplanade; r from \$185; 🏠 🚿) With a great position overlooking the Esplanade – above the night markets – the one-bedroom apartments here are compact but classy, and all have ocean views, balcony and spa.

Waterfront Terraces (Map p340; ☎ 4031 8333; www.cairnsluxury.com; 233 The Esplanade; 1-2-bedroom apt \$195/269; 🏠 🚿) Right on the Esplanade, this low-rise group of luxury apartments is set in neat and trim tropical grounds. Handsomely furnished one- or two-bedroom apartments have separate tiled lounges and kitchen areas and all the trimmings.

Cairns International Hotel (Map p340; ☎ 4031 1300; www.cairnsinternational.com.au; 17 Abbott St; r \$256-316; 🏠 🚿) The granddaddy of Cairns' five-stars, the International is a little dated but has a fine location, a colonial charm and well-appointed rooms with city, mountain or harbour views.

Shangri-la (Map p340; ☎ 4031 1411; www.shangri-la.com; Pierpoint Rd; r from \$270; 🏠 🚿) Towering over the marina, Shangri-la is Cairns' top hotel, an elegant five-star that ticks all the boxes for location, views, facilities (gym, pool bar, broadband internet) and service. The Horizon Club rooms are top notch.

EATING

Cairns has come a long way on the culinary front in recent years, and its status as an international city is reflected in its multi-cultural restaurants. Along with the usual seafood and steak, you'll plenty of Asian restaurants and cuisines from Indian to Italian, often with a tropical Aussie twist. The latest development is the Pier waterfront, where half a dozen restaurants share a boardwalk overlooking the marina – just wander along and take your pick of French, Italian, seafood and Mod Oz. Restaurants and cafés are spread throughout town, though the

Esplanade and Shields St are good places to start looking.

If you want something cheap and quick, the Night Markets, between the Esplanade and Abbott St, have a busy Asian-style food court.

Also serving the hungry (but thrifty) backpacker market, some of Cairns' pubs dish up amazingly cheap meals and they're not half bad. For some you need a meal token, available at hostels or from the free *Backpacker Xpress* magazine, or just ask about the special. Some of the best are the \$5 evening meals at PJ O'Brien's, and the \$10 meal-and-drink deals at the Woolshed and Shennanigans. See Drinking (p351).

Restaurants

Khin Khao Thai Restaurant (Map p340; ☎ 4031 8581; 3/135 Grafton St; dishes \$13-15; 🍴 lunch Mon-Fri, dinner nightly from 5pm) This breezy Thai restaurant is a cut above most, with authentic chilli aromas wafting from the kitchen, and a range of seafood dishes such as basil stir-fried prawns accompanying the classic coconut curries. Khin Khao is licensed and BYO (wine only).

Rattle & Hum (Map p340; ☎ 4031 3011; 65-67 The Esplanade; mains \$13-23; 🍴 10am-midnight) From its prime people-watching position on the Esplanade you can watch the wood-fired pizzas being prepared or slip into the rustic 'outback saloon'-style restaurant with timber beams and low-slung lighting. Good, honest food and laid-back atmosphere.

Pier Bar & Grill (Map p340; ☎ 4031 4677; www.pierbar.com.au; Pier Point Rd; mains \$13-32; 🍴 lunch & dinner) For informal waterfront dining, the Pier is hard to beat. With a big deck overlooking the water and foreshore lagoon, it serves up exotic wood-fired pizzas, noodles, pasta and thick steaks, and is one of the most popular spots in town for a late-afternoon drink.

Green Ant Cantina (Map p340; ☎ 4041 5061; 183 Bunda St; mains \$15-29; 🍴 dinner) This funky little slice of Mexico is tucked away behind the railway station but well worth seeking out for quesadillas, fajitas and 'mumbo gumbo'. Great cocktail list, cool tunes (live bands on Saturday) and cheap backpacker meals on Monday.

M Yogo (Map p340; ☎ 4051 0522; www.matureyogo.com; Marina Boardwalk; mains \$19-42; 🍴 lunch & dinner) French-inspired cuisine from an award-winning Japanese chef makes M Yogo one of the most interesting dining experiences on the Pier boardwalk. Innovative seafood

dishes with rich sauces, sassy young waiters and a breezy location.

Cherry Blossom (Map p340; ☎ 4052 1050; cnr Spence & Lake Sts; mains \$20-35; ☺ lunch Wed-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) This upstairs Japanese restaurant is reminiscent of an *Iron Chef* cook-off, with two chefs working at opposite ends of the restaurant floor. Sushi, teppanyaki and plenty of theatre.

our pick **Donnini's Ciao Italia** (Map p340; ☎ 4051 1133; Marina Boardwalk; mains \$18-35; ☺ lunch & dinner) Locals rate Donnini's as the best Italian in town and with its corner boardwalk location it's hard not to be lured in by the Mediterranean aromas. Imaginative pasta dishes and swift service.

Mangostin's (Map p340; ☎ 4031 9888; 65 The Esplanade; mains around \$23-35; ☺ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner nightly) Enjoying a prime location on the Esplanade, Mangostin's is popular and sets a high standard for steak and seafood. There's an early-dining discount of you're seated by 5pm and out by 7pm.

Charlie's (Map p340; ☎ 4051 5011; 223-227 The Esplanade; buffet \$28.50; ☺ 6-8.30pm) It's not the fanciest seafood place in town but Charlie's, at the Acacia Court Hotel, is legendary for its nightly all-you-can-eat seafood buffet. Fill your plate (over and over) with prawns, oysters, clams or hot food and eat it out on the terrace by the pool.

Ochre Restaurant (Map p340; ☎ 4051 0100; www.redochregrill.com.au; 43 Shields St; mains \$29-34; ☺ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner nightly) Serving modern Australian cuisine at its best, the Ochre's inventive menu utilises native Australian ingredients, artfully prepared to pioneer its own culinary genre. There are the animals (croc, roo and emu), but Aussie flora also appears on the menu. Try the tasting plates or platters, and finish with the wattle-seed pavlova with plum sorbet and macadamia *biscotti*.

Also recommended:

La Fettuccina (Map p340; ☎ 4031 5959; 41 Shields St; mains \$18-24; ☺ dinner) Homemade sauces are a speciality at this small, atmospheric Italian restaurant. Licensed and BYO.

Adelphia Greek Taverna (Map p340; ☎ 4041 1500; cnr Aplin & Grafton Sts; mains \$21-30; ☺ dinner) Authentic Greek cuisine and belly-dancing on Friday and Saturday nights.

Cafés & Quick Eats

Vanilla Gelateria (Map p340; cnr Esplanade & Aplin Sts; cone or cup \$3.80-5.80; ☺ 10am-midnight) Cairns has

several hole-in-the-wall gelaterias like this one, with mouthwatering concoctions like cherry ripple, apple pie, roasted macadamia – even Red Bull!

Meldrum's Pies in Paradise (Map p340; ☎ 4051 8333; 97 Grafton St; pies \$4-5) The humble Aussie pie never look this good – 40 inventive varieties from chicken and avocado to tuna mornay. Also coffee, cakes and focaccias.

Beethoven Cafe (Map p340; ☎ 4051 0292; 105 Grafton St; dishes \$5-7; ☺ breakfast Mon-Sat, lunch Mon-Fri) Continental open-face rolls and sandwiches the size of doormats are the signature at this busy bakery-café. Choose from the 30-odd combinations suggested – like *Buendnerfleisch* (air-dried beef, Swiss cheese and gherkin) – or invent your own. Leave room for homemade strudel or cheesecake.

Edge (Map p338; ☎ 4053 2966; 1/138 Collins Ave, Edge Hill; mains \$5-8; ☺ 7am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Up the road from the botanic gardens in the boutique shopping strip of Edge Hill, this gourmet fruit-and-veggie grocer doubles as a perky café serving great coffee, focaccias and locally produced sauces, jams and chocolate.

Tiny's Juice Bar (Map p340; ☎ 4031 4331; 45 Grafton St; meals \$5-8; ☺ breakfast & lunch Mon-Fri) This teeny café cheerily serves up veggie-focused fare such as tofu burgers, and some of the best toasted sandwiches and smoothies around.

Fusion Organics (Map p340; ☎ 4051 1388; cnr Grafton & Aplin Sts; dishes \$5-15; ☺ Mon-Fri 7am-5pm, to 2pm Sat) From the wicker chairs in the breezy corner courtyard to the buckwheat waffles and 'detox' juices, Fusion is inspiring to the core. As you settle in for brekky the choice is between sublime Genovese coffee and a host of pick-me-up juices. The quiches, frittata, corn fritters and filled breads are all organic, allergy-free and delicious.

Gaura Nitai's (Map p340; ☎ 4031 2255; 55 Spence St; mains \$5.50-10.90; ☺ 11.30am-2pm Mon-Fri, 6-8pm Tue-Sat) Hare Krishna restaurant serving simple but tasty and cheap vegetarian fare such as dhal and rice, soups and koftas. Very Zen.

Sushi Zipang (Map p340; ☎ 4051 3328; 39 Shields St; sushi \$2-6, meals \$10-16; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) There are a few sushi places in Cairns but the novelty of a conveyor belt wending its way around the bar carrying your sushi just never wears off, does it? Zipang also serves traditional noodle and rice dishes.

Perrotta's at the Gallery (Map p340; ☎ 4031 5899; 38 Abbott St; mains around \$15-25; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) With its fabulous covered deck and wrought-

iron furniture, Perrotta's beckons you off the street for a breakfast of eggs, French toast with vanilla-roasted pear and superb coffee. Many return for lunch or dinner, when an inventive Mediterranean menu takes over.

Self-Catering

There's a large **Woolworths supermarket** (Map p340; btwn Lake & Abbott Sts; ☺ 8am-9pm Mon-Fri, to 5.30pm Sat, 9am-6pm Sun) in town stocking everything you can think of, and you'll find two supermarkets in Cairns Central Shopping Centre. Cairns' main food market is **Rusty's Markets** (Map p340; Grafton St, btwn Shields & Spence Sts; ☺ 5am-6pm Fri, 6am-3pm Sat, 6am-2pm Sun); in among the souvenirs, jewellery, crafts and clothing you'll find seafood, fresh fruit and veg, herbs and honey, as well as juice bars and food stalls.

Asian Foods Australia (Map p340; ☎ 4052 1510; 101-5 Grafton St) sells food products from all over Asia.

DRINKING

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

Pier Bar & Grill (Map p340; ☎ 4031 4677; www.pierbar.com.au, Pier Point Rd; ☺ 11.30am-midnight) The Pier (see p349) is a local institution for its waterfront location; Sunday session is a must.

Court House Hotel (Map p340; ☎ 4031 4166; 38 Abbott St) In the gleaming white former courthouse building (dating from 1921), the Court House is an impressive pub with its polished timber island bar and Scales of Justice statue.

Grand Hotel (Map p340; ☎ 4051 1007; 33 McLeod St; ☺ 11am-1am) This laid-back local pub is worth a visit just so that you can rest your beer on the bar – an 11m-long carved crocodile!

Shenannigans (Map p340; ☎ 4051 2490; 48 Spence St) The huge beer garden with barrels for tables, big screens and a music stage is the stand-out at this marginally Irish-themed pub. Variety of entertainment from trivia nights and karaoke to live bands.

PJ O'Briens (Map p340; ☎ 4031 5333; cnr Lake & Shields St) Sticky carpets and the smell of stale Guinness with Irish-themed PJ's packs

'em in with party nights, pole dancing and dirt-cheap meals.

Woolshed Char grill & Saloon (Map p340; ☎ 4031 6304; 24 Shields St; meals \$12-16) Another backpacker favourite, a young crowd of travellers and attentive diving instructors gets hammered and dances on the tables.

our pick **Sapphire Tapas Bar & Lounge** (Map p340; ☎ 4052 1494; 39 Lake St; tapas \$9-16) Walk through the unassuming street entrance to the cathedral-like back room with funky artworks adorning the walls and couches in the corners. Sapphire is Cairns' most sophisticated lounge bar – part restaurant, part dance club, with DJs on weekends. Great vibe and gay-friendly.

ENTERTAINMENT

Starry Night Cinema (Map p338; Flecker Botanic Gardens, Collins Ave, Edge Hill; admission \$10; ☺ May-Nov) Every third Wednesday of the month, classic films screen in the tropical outdoors of the botanic gardens. Gates open at 6.30pm, shorts start at 7.30pm.

12 Bar Blues (Map p340; ☎ 4041 7388; www.12barblue.com; 62 Shields St; ☺ 5pm-midnight Tue-Sun) The best place in Cairns for loungy live music, this intimate bar grooves to the beat of jazz, blues and swing.

Jute Theatre (Map p340; ☎ 4031 9555; www.jute.com.au; CoCA, 96 Abbott St; tickets from \$15) Stages a variety of contemporary Australian works and indie plays; check out what's on at the Jute's sexy venue in the Centre of Contemporary Arts.

Rondo Theatre (Map p338; ☎ 4031 9555; www.cairnslittletheatre.com; Greenslopes St) The Cairns Little Theatre Co puts on a season of community plays and musicals at this venue opposite Centenary Lakes.

Reef Casino (Map p340; ☎ 4030 8888; www.reefcasino.com.au; 35-41 Wharf St; ☺ 10am-3am Sun-Thu, to 5am Fri & Sat) Gamble on table games such as blackjack, roulette and baccarat, or feed your coins into one of the 500 bling-bling poker machines. Also five restaurants, a lounge bar and a cabaret show at the Velvet Rope.

Cairns City Cinemas (Map p340; ☎ 4031 1077; 108 Grafton St) and **BCC Cinemas** (Map p340; ☎ 4052 1166; Cairns Central Shopping Centre) screen mainstream flicks.

Nightclubs

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

Soho (Map p340; ☎ 4051 2666; cnr The Esplanade & Shields St; ☹ Wed-Sun) This Cairns institution – it's been going longer than most – features resident and touring DJs playing house, techno and hip-hop.

Velvet Rope (Map p340; ☎ 4031 3383; Cairns Casino) Another long-running dance venue, this place is downstairs at the casino.

Rhino Bar (Map p340; ☎ 4031 2530; cnr Spence & Lake Sts; ☹ from 8pm) A young, high-energy crowd downs cocktails and shots and spills out onto the enormous first-floor balcony overlooking Lake St. Can get messy.

Gilligan's (Map p340; ☎ 4041 6566; 57-89 Grafton St) You're guaranteed a crowd here, with 400-odd backpackers staying in this resort complex, but it's also popular with locals. The huge beer barn downstairs has live bands, and upstairs is Pure, with DJs spinning house tunes.

SHOPPING

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

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

Cairns has two multilevel shopping centres, where you can peruse a big range of shops in a climate-controlled bubble: **Cairns Central Shopping Centre** (Map p340; www.cairnscentral.com.au; McLeod St; ☹ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Wed & Fri & Sat, to 9pm Thu, 10am-4.30pm Sun), and **Pier Marketplace** (Map p340; Pierpoint Rd), which was developed as a waterfront shopping mall but at the time of writing many of the shops were vacant. For food-related shopping, see p351.

City Place Disposals (Map p340; ☎ 4051 6040; 46 Shields Sts) stocks camping and outdoor gear, including tents, sleeping bags and cooking equipment.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air Departures for international cities leave Cairns frequently, with **Qantas** (Map p340; www.qantas.com.au) heading to Tokyo and Singapore; **Jetstar** (www.jetstar.com.au) to Nagoya and Osaka; **Cathay Pacific** (www.cathaypacific.com) flying to Hong

Kong; and **Air New Zealand** (www.airnewzealand.com) heading to Auckland three times a week.

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

Macair (☎ 1300 622 247; www.macair.com.au) flies to the outback and the Gulf, including Mt Isa, Normanton and Longreach.

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

Aero Tropics (☎ 1300 656 110; www.aero-tropics.com.au) is the main carrier for northern Cape York and the Torres Strait Islands, with regular flights to Bamaga, Horn Island and further afield.

Bus

Cairns is the hub for Far North Queensland buses.

Greyhound Australia (Map p340; ☎ 1300 473 946; www.greyhound.com.au; Reef Fleet Terminal) has four daily services down the coast to Brisbane (\$253, 29 hours), via Townsville (\$67, six hours), Airlie Beach (\$116, 11 hours) and Rockhampton (\$178, 18 hours). You can stop over at any point along the way as long as you hop back on within six days. Departs from outside Reef Fleet Terminal at the southern end of the Esplanade.

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

TransNorth (☎ 4061 7944; www.transnorthbus.com) has a service from Cairns to Karumba (\$125, 12 hours) three times a week.

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

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

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

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

Desert Venturer (☎ 1300 858 099, 4035 5566; www.desertventurer.com) is a three-day bus trip from Cairns to Alice Springs via Hughenden, Winton and Boulia. As an alternative to flying it offers a real taste of the remote outback, and the \$437 fare includes meals and accommodation. It departs Cairns on Saturday and Alice Springs on Tuesday.

Car & Motorcycle

Hiring a car or a motorcycle is a good way to travel from Cairns to Far North Queensland. Most rental companies restrict the driving of conventional vehicles to sealed roads; if you want to travel to Cooktown via the unsealed Bloomfield Track (or the coastal route), hire a 4WD. If you're in for the long haul, consider buying a vehicle; check out the noticeboard on Abbott St for used campervans and ex-backpackers' cars.

A number of rental companies are located on Lake St and Abbott St. Try one of the following:

Britz Australia (Map p338; ☎ 1800 331 454, 4032 2611; www.britz.com.au; 411 Sheridan St) Campervans and 4WDs.

Choppers Motorcycle Tours & Hire (Map p340; ☎ 0408-066 024; www.choppersmotorcycles.com.au; 150 Sheridan St) Hire a Harley for \$250 a day, or smaller bikes from \$95 a day. Also offers motorcycle tours, from one hour to a full day ride to Cape Trib.

Europcar (Map p340; ☎ 1300 13 13 90, 4051 4600; www.europcar.com.au; 135 Abbott St) With an airport desk.

Thrifty (Map p340; ☎ 1300 367 277; www.thrifty.com.au; cnr Sheridan & Aplin Sts) Also at the airport

Travellers Auto Barn (Map p340; ☎ 1800 674 374, 4041 3722; www.travellers-autobarn.com.au; 125 Bunda St) Campervans.

Wicked Campers (Map p340; ☎ 1800 24 68 69; www.wickedcampers.com.au; Abbott St) Colourful campers aimed at backpackers.

Train

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

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

The airport is about 7km north of central Cairns. **Australia Coach** (☎ 4040 1000; adult/child \$10/5) meets all incoming flights and runs a shuttle bus to the CBD. **Black & White Taxis** (☎ 131008) charges around \$18.

Bicycle

You can hire bikes from the following:

Bike Man (Map p340; ☎ 4041 5566; www.bikeman.com.au; 99 Sheridan St; \$15/50 per day/week) Hire, sales and repairs.

Cairns Bicycle Hire (Map p340; ☎ 4031 3444; www.cairnsbicyclehire.com.au; 47 Shields St; per day/week \$12/40, scooters from \$35 per day) Groovy bikes and scooters.

Bus

Sunbus (☎ 4057 7411; www.sunbus.com.au) runs regular services in and around Cairns that leave from the Lake St Transit Centre (Map p340), where schedules for most routes are posted. Useful routes include: Flecker Botanic Gardens and Machans Beach (bus 7), Holloways Beach and Yorkeys Knob (buses 1c, 1d and 1h), Trinity Beach, Clifton Beach and Palm Cove (buses 1N, 1X, 2, 2A). Most buses heading north go to Smithfield. All are served by the (almost) 24-hour night service (N) on Friday and Saturday. Heading south, bus 1 goes as far as Gordonvale.

Taxi

Black & White Taxis (☎ 131 008) has a rank near the corner of Lake and Shields Sts, and one on McLeod St, outside Cairns Central Shopping Centre.

DETOUR: YARRABAH

Between Gordonvale and Edmonton is a turn-off to the Yarrabah Aboriginal community. It's a scenic 37km drive through cane fields and mountains to Yarrabah, founded by missionary Rev Ernest Gribble in 1892 and set on Mission Bay, a pretty cove backed by palm trees. The **Yarrabah Menmny Museum** (☎ 4056 9154; www.indiginet.com.au/yarrabah/museum.htm; Back Beach Rd; adult/child \$6/4; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) recounts Yarrabah's history and has a collection of Aboriginal artefacts and cultural exhibits. The museum also has spear-throwing demonstrations and a guided board-walk tour (adult/child \$14/10, including museum admission). There's a pottery and craft centre in town displaying works by local artists.

SOUTH OF CAIRNS

South of Cairns lies a lush pocket of rainforest that makes a rewarding trip for walkers and wildlife watchers. The surrounding towns and settlements also provide fascinating windows into the area's heritage.

The first town south of Cairns is **Gordonvale**, a delightfully old-fashioned community with a disproportionate number of timber pubs set around its central park, plus an enormous sugar mill – all backed by the looming presence of Walsh's Pyramid. Gordonvale has the dubious honour of being the first place where cane toads were released in 1935. The Gillies Hwy heads southwest from here through the ranges to Yungaburra and the southern Atherton Tableland. Continue south on the Bruce Hwy through the tiny town of Deeral and on to Babinda.

BABINDA

☎ 07 / pop 1170

Tucked behind an enormous sugar mill fronting the Bruce Hwy, Babinda is a small working-class town that leads into mythical rainforest and some notorious boulders. The Yidinyji tribe occupied the land before white settlement, and the town's name is said to come from the Aboriginal *bunna binda*, loosely meaning 'water fall'.

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

If you're in town on the weekend, try to catch a film at the timeless **Munro Theatre** (☎ 4067 1032; Munro St; ☎ 7.30pm Fri, Sat & Sun), which dates back to the 1950s. Recline in a hessian-slung seat and enjoy the acoustics of its canvas-covered ceiling. The **Babinda State Hotel** (☎ 4067 1202; 73 Munro St) was built in 1917 by the government – Queensland's only state-

owned pub. It controlled the sale of alcohol, which was otherwise prohibited within the Babinda Sugar Works Area. Not surprisingly, it was regularly flooded with cane cutters at the end of a shift.

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

Babinda's main attraction is 7km inland. The **Boulders** is an enchanting spot where a fast-running creek rushes between 4m-high granite rocks. The point where swimming is out of bounds – downstream from Devil's Pool – is clearly signposted, but in any case take care on the slippery rocks. Numerous drownings have occurred here over the years. According to Aboriginal legend, the boulders were formed when a tremendous upheaval shook the local tribe. A young couple, whose love was forbidden, was discovered and forcibly separated at this spot. Rather than go back to her tribe without her lover, the young woman threw herself into the creek. The moment she did so, calling for her lover, rushing water flooded the area and the land shuddered, throwing up the giant boulders. It is said that her spirit still guards the rocks, and that her cries can sometimes be heard, luring young men into the dangerous waters.

Walking trails lead to **Devil's Pool Lookout** (470m) and the **Boulders Gorge Lookout** (600m), and a suspension bridge takes you across the river to an 850m circuit through the rainforest.

There's a picnic area at the car park, and just before this is the free **Boulders Camping**

Ground (two night maximum) with toilets and cold showers.

Bramston Beach

About 5km south of Babinda, turn east at tiny Mirriwinni and drive 17km down a winding road through rolling cane fields and patches of rainforest to peaceful Bramston Beach. Overlooked by most tourists, this long, coarse stretch of sand is practically deserted and undeveloped compared to beaches north of Cairns. It's a great spot to get away for a while.

Bramston Beach Camping Ground (☎ 4055 3824; Esplanade; unpowered sites \$15.50) is basic (no power yet), but is right on the foreshore and has showers, gas barbecues and a laundry.

Bramston Beach Motor Inn (☎ 4067 4139; 1-3 Dawson St; s/d \$69/79; ☎ ☎), also close to the beach, is a slick little motel with self-contained units, a restaurant and a bar.

WOORNOORAN NATIONAL PARK

Part of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, Wooroonooran National Park is a veritable *Who's Who* of natural spectacles: it has the state's highest peak, dramatic falls and everything in between.

Josephine Falls

The rugged tropical rainforest in this section of the park covers the foothills and creeps to the peak of Queensland's highest mountain, Mt Bartle Frere (1657m). It provides a shielded and exclusive environment for a number of plant and animal species. The car park for Josephine Falls is 6km off the Bruce Hwy and the falls themselves are a 600m walk through the rainforest and along a mossy creek. At the bottom pool you can swim in a circle of natural clear pools fringed by the massive roots of towering trees, and scamper up the rock face to a natural water slide – kids love it. The smooth rocks connecting the pools are slippery and can be treacherous, and the flow can be powerful after rain, so be extremely careful. The car park to the falls is signposted from the Bruce Hwy, about 20km north of Innisfail. About 1km past the falls turn-off the road ends at **Golden Hole**, a lovely swimming hole with a picnic area and toilets.

The falls are at the foot of the Bellenden Ker Range. The **Mt Bartle Frere Summit Track** (15km, two days return) leads from the Josephine Falls car park to the summit. Don't underestimate

this walk: the ascent is for fit, experienced and well-equipped walkers only; rain and cloud can close in suddenly. There's also an alternative 10km (eight hours) return walk to Broken Nose. Pick up a trail guide from the nearest visitors centre or contact the **QPWS** (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au). Camping is permitted along the trail (per person \$4); there are self-registration boxes at both ends of the trail.

Palmerston Section

More than 500 types of tree, waterfalls and walks are good reasons to visit the Palmerston Section of Wooroonooran National Park, home to some of the oldest continually surviving rainforest in Australia.

Leaving the Bruce Hwy 4km northwest of Innisfail, the Palmerston Hwy follows the original route taken in 1882 by the bushman, gold prospector and explorer Christie Palmerston. Assisted by Aboriginal guides, the group made the passage in a mere 12 days.

While traversing one of the park's numerous trails, you may cross paths with a few creatures, including Boyd's forest dragons or the double-eyed fig-parrot. There are a number of marked platypus-viewing areas, with first or last light of day the best viewing times.

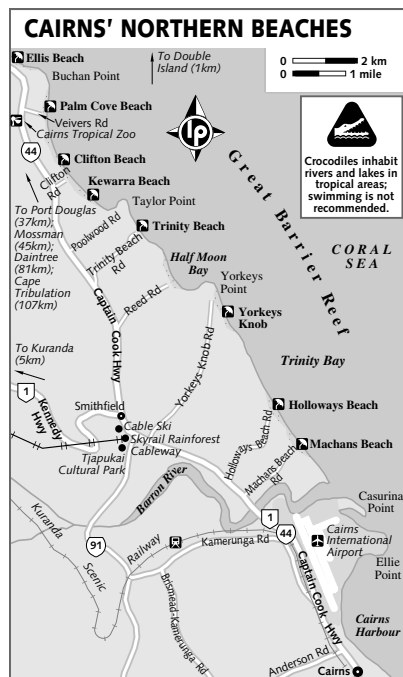
At the southeast corner of the park, **Crawford's Lookout** has views of the white water of the North Johnstone River, but it's worth the walk down to view it at a closer distance. Among the walks in the park is the lovely **Nandroya Falls Circuit** (7.2km, three to four hours), which crosses a swimming hole.

There are also picnic areas throughout the park, and at **Henrietta Creek**, just off the highway, is a self-registration **QPWS camping ground** (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au; per person \$4) with composting toilets and coin-operated barbecues. Water is available from the creek (boil before drinking).

The Palmerston Hwy continues west to Millaa Millaa, passing the entrance to the Waterfalls Circuit just before the town (see the boxed text on p369).

CAIRNS' NORTHERN BEACHES

Cairns may not have its own beach, but you don't have to go far to find a patch of sand beneath the palms. A string of independent



communities cling to the 26km stretch of coast north of Cairns, each separated by the twists and turns of the coastline and reached by sign-posted turn-offs from the Captain Cook Hwy. Closer to Cairns – and in places where the water is too shallow to swim – residential neighbourhoods enjoy the quiet life on the city's hem. Where the beach becomes more inviting, you'll find sunbeds, resorts and restaurants bunched along the waterfront esplanade. There's a distinctive beach-holiday repose and each one has its own feel: Yorkeys is popular with families and sailors, while Palm Cove is the upmarket honeymoon haven. There's not much opportunity for camping along the northern beaches these days – only Palm Cove and Ellis Beach have camp sites.

HOLLOWAYS BEACH

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

Pacific Sands (☎ 4055 0277; www.pacificsandscairns.com; 1-19 Poinciana St; apt \$125; 🚽 🚿) is a complex of bright self-contained two-bedroom

apartments stretching one block back from the beach.

The two-bedroom apartments at **Cairns Beach Resort** (☎ 1800 150 208; 4037 0400; www.cairnsbeachresort.com.au; 129 Oleander St; apt \$125-145; 🚽 🚿) are pure beachfront – the sea-view ones are slightly more expensive than the garden view. The resort has a flash tropical ambience with a partially covered pool.

Strait on the Beach (☎ 4055 9616; 100 Oleander St; meals \$4-20; 🕒 7.30am-7.30pm) has a fine setting, with a chunky timber deck overlooking the beach. It's also a small shop where you can stock up on the basics, or just read the morning paper over a coffee or breakfast. The café carries the beach theme through to its driftwood-inspired seating.

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

YORKEYS KNOB

In many ways the most appealing of the northern beaches, Yorkeys is a sprawling, low-key settlement on a white-sand beach. Nestled within the crescent-shaped Half Moon Bay is the marina, supporting 200 bobbing boats. 'Yorkey' was the nickname of a fisherman who originally hailed from Yorkshire and worked here in the 1880s. He was apparently known for his gumption and dogged nature: he attempted to grow pumpkins on the top of the knob and established a béche-de-mer curing station over on Green Island. Yorkeys Knob is the rocky headland that cradles the bay to the north, allowing the wind to whip the water south. This wind is fuel for the many kitesurfers and windsurfers; **Kite Rite** (☎ 4055 7918; www.kiterite.com.au; 471 Varley St; per hr \$79) is a professional outfit offering instruction, including gear hire, and a two-day certificate course (\$499).

Half Moon Bay Golf Club (4055 7933; www.halfmoonbaygolfclub.com.au; 66 Wattle St; 18 holes \$30) is a lovely lush course with sea views; welcomes green-fee players.

On the road to the beach, the Yorkeys Knob shopping centre has an IGA supermarket, bottleshops and takeaway food shops.

A couple of blocks back from the beach and sidled up against a little patch of rainforest,

Villa Marine (☎ 4055 7158; www.villamarine.com.au; 8 Rutherford St; studio \$79, units \$119-149) is the best-value spot in Yorkeys. The friendly owner makes you feel at home in the single-storey self-contained apartments, arranged around a pool.

York Beachfront Apartments (☎ 4055 8733; www.yorkapartments.com.au; 61-63 Sims Esplanade; apt \$149-169; 🚽 🚿) is a stylish midsize complex offering apartments with fully equipped kitchens and laundries, and separate bedrooms with en suite. Throw open those sliding doors to your own balcony and breathe in the sea views.

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

TRINITY BEACH

Trinity Beach is a long stretch of sheltered white sand. High-rise developments detract from the castaway ambience, but holiday-makers love it – turning their backs to the buildings and focusing on what is one of Cairns' prettiest beaches. Around the next bay is **Kewarra Beach**, a residential area with a large resort.

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

From its lofty position atop the headland, **Amaroo** (☎ 4055 6066; www.amarooresort.com; 92 Moore St; apt \$140-150 2-night min; 🚽 🚿) is a high-rise with commanding views of the beach below. It has its own steps leading down to the beach, a tennis court and tasteful self-contained apartments.

Roydon (☎ 4057 6512; www.roydon.com.au; 83-7 Vasey Esplanade; apt \$210-285; 🚽 🚿) has capacious one- or two-bedroom apartments overlooking the beach or pool area from your private balcony. The snazzy white décor is fresh and modern and there are enticing off-season rates.

L'unico Trattoria (☎ 4057 8855; 75 Vasey Esplanade; mains \$18-28; 🕒 breakfast, lunch & dinner) basks in a stellar corner beachfront location. Stylish Italian restaurant with professional service.

CLIFTON BEACH

Local and leisurely, Clifton Beach has a good balance of residential and resort accommoda-

tion and services. You can walk north along the beach about 2km to Palm Cove from here.

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

Opposite Clifton Palms, **Clifton Capers Bar & Grill** (☎ 4059 2311; 14 Clifton Rd; mains \$17-25; 🕒 breakfast, lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) is highly rated among locals with a range of international dishes and pizza. Casual service in a pleasant, relaxed setting.

PALM COVE

The St-Tropez of the northern beaches, Palm Cove is all about glamour, indulgence and, naturally, honeymooners. More intimate than Port Douglas and more ritzy than its southern neighbours, Palm Cove is one big promenade along Williams Esplanade, with a gorgeous stretch of white-sand beach luring sunlovers out of their luxury resorts. Of course, it's not all swank and starlets: Palm Cove is for anyone willing to laze about on a decent beach, dine in top-notch restaurants and do some serious people-watching. There's even a camp ground for budget travellers.

Information & Orientation

From the Captain Cook Hwy, turn off at Veivers Rd and follow it to Williams Esplanade, which extends the length of the beach as far as the jetty. At **Paradise Village Shopping Centre** (113 Williams Esplanade) there's a post office, a newsagent, a moneychanger and internet access.

Sights & Activities

Beach strolls, shopping and leisurely swims will be your chief activities here but there's no excuse for not getting out on the water. **Palm Cove Watersports** (☎ 0402 861 011; www.palmcovewatersports.com) has 1½-hour early-morning sea-kayaking trips (\$42) and half-day paddles to Double Island (adult/child \$60/70). **Beach Fun & Co** (☎ 0411-848 580) hires catamarans (\$50 per hour), surf skis (\$25), paddle boats (\$25) and boogie boards (\$10).

Just out of Palm Cove on the highway, **Cairns Tropical Zoo** (☎ 4055 3669; www.cairnstropicalzoo.com.au;

Captain Cook Hwy; adult/child \$29/14.50; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) is an up-close wildlife experience with crocodiles and snakes, koala photo sessions and kangaroo feeding. You can even wed at the Wildlife Wedding Chapel, which dispatches two newly wed couples a day at peak times. Wheelchair accessible. Also here is the **Cairns Night Zoo** (adult/child \$89/44.50; ☎ 7pm), which includes a barbecue dinner, a guided tour of the zoo's nocturnal creatures, a spot of stargazing and campfire entertainment.

Visible from the beach, privately owned **Double Island** (☎ 1300 301 992; www.doubleisland.com.au) is a luxury retreat with accommodation for up to 40 people, but only one group at a time can rent the whole island. For \$35,700 up to 10 people can have a private paradise for three days.

Sleeping

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

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

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

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

Sebel Reef House (☎ 4055 3633; www.sebel.com.au; 99 Williams Esplanade; r from \$450; ☎) The Sebel is more intimate and understated than most of Palm Cove's resorts – more like an old British Empire tropical mansion. Hardly surprising since it was once the private residence of an army brigadier. The whitewashed walls, wicker furniture and big beds romanti-

cally draped in muslin all add to the air of refinement, but the luxury touches are still there. The Brigadier's Bar works on a quaint honesty system.

Also recommended: **Silvester Palms** (☎ 4055 3831; www.silvesterpalms.com; 32 Veivers Rd; apt \$95-170; ☎) Bright self-contained apartments (one, two and three bedrooms) are an affordable alternative to Palm Cove's luxurious city-sized resorts. Good option for families.

Villa Paradiso (☎ 4059 8800; www.villaparadiso.com.au; 111-13 Williams Esplanade; 1-/2-bedroom apt \$250/330; ☎) Polished timber floors and Mediterranean flourishes make for slick self-contained waterfront apartments.

Eating & Drinking

Palm Cove has some fine restaurants and cafés strung along the Esplanade – all of the resort hotels have swish dining options open to nonguests.

Stingers Beach Bar & Grill (☎ 4059 0055; Williams Esplanade; mains \$7-24; ☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner) The pick of the numerous cafés on the Esplanade, Stingers is licensed and has a good range of sandwiches, pizzas and seafood. Live music Friday nights in season.

Cairns SLSC (☎ 4059 1244; 135 Williams Esplanade; meals \$14-24; ☎) dinner) Locals hang out at the Surf Life Saving Club, a great place for a drink in the sunny garden bar. Open for dinner but you can get a bucket of prawns (\$20) any time of day.

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

Colonies Bar & Grill (☎ 4055 3058; 117 Williams Esplanade; mains \$20-38; ☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner) Alfresco Colonies is a popular Mediterranean and Mod Oz-style restaurant with a few Asian dishes spicing up the menu. It's licensed and BYO, with an enjoyable casual ambience.

Apres Beach Bar & Grill (☎ 4059 2000; 119 Williams Esplanade; dishes \$20-40; ☎) 6.30am-11pm) Halfway along the Esplanade, Apres is the most happening place in Palm Cove, with regular live music and crowds spilling out to the open deck area. The menu runs the gauntlet of everything – steaks, seafood, Asian, pasta – but it's all pretty pricey for the venue. The

zany interior features old motorcycles, racing cars and a biplane hanging from the ceiling!

ELLIS BEACH

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

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

Across the road, **Ellis Beach Bar 'n' Grill** (☎ 4055 3534; Captain Cook Hwy; meals \$8-24; ☎) lunch & dinner) is the place for a feed and some evening entertainment; there's live music every Sunday.

One of the best opportunities in the north to see monster saltwater crocs, **Hartley's Crocodile Adventures** (☎ 4055 3576; www.crocodileadventures.com; adult/child \$29/14.50; ☎) 8.30am-5pm) is primarily a crocodile farm based around a large lagoon, but there's plenty of other wildlife here including native birds, koalas and snakes. Tours of the farm run at 10am and there are crocodile-feeding demonstrations at 11am and 3pm (the latter is the 'crocodile attack' show). Boat cruises on the lagoon run five times a day.

ISLANDS OFF CAIRNS

Only a short skim across the water from Cairns, Green and Fitzroy Islands make for great day trips; spend the afternoon snorkelling in crystal waters, walking in patches of rainforest or just lazing on the beach. Each has a resort, so you can play five-star castaway for a few days, and there's a camping ground on Fitzroy Island. The picturesque Frankland Islands Group is another popular cruise – you can camp here too and really leave the day-trippers behind.

GREEN ISLAND

With a glamour resort and stunning beaches, Green Island's long, doglegged jetty heaves under the weight of boatloads of day-trippers. It's hardly surprising since this beautiful coral cay is only 45 minutes

from Cairns and has a rainforest interior with interpretive walks, a fringing white-sand beach and snorkelling just offshore. As well as gentle walks through the leafy interior, you can walk around the island in about 30 minutes.

Before Green Island was named after the astronomer on Cook's *Endeavour*, the Gungandji people used it as a retreat to perform initiation ceremonies for the young men of their group. Commercial activity began around 1857 when the waters around Green Island were heavily fished for bêche-de-mer (see the boxed text, p360). The animals were cured here before export, and many of the island's trees were logged in the process. The resultant traffic around the island and reports of people going missing inspired the government to plant coconut palms on the island – thinking that shipwreck survivors could live on coconut meat and milk until they were found.

Today the island and its surrounding waters are protected by their national- and marine-park status. **Marineland Melanesia** (☎ 4051 4032; adult/child \$12.50/5.50) has an aquarium with fish, turtles, stingrays and crocodiles, as well as a collection of Melanesian artefacts.

The luxurious **Green Island Resort** (☎ 1800 673 366; 4031 3300; www.greenislandresort.com.au; ste \$495-595; ☎) has stylish split-level suites, each with its own private balcony. Island transfers are included. The resort has an exclusive feel but it's partially open to day-trippers, so even if you're not staying you can enjoy the restaurants and watersports facilities. There's an à la carte and buffet restaurant.

Great Adventures (☎ 1800 079 080; 4044 9944; www.greatadventures.com.au; 1 Spence St, Cairns) has Green Island transfers by fast catamaran (adult/child \$67/33.50), departing Cairns' Reef Fleet terminal (Map p340) at 8.30am, 10.30am and 1pm and returning at noon, 2.30pm and 4.30pm. Snorkelling gear and use of the resort's swimming pool are included in the price.

Big Cat (Map p340; ☎ 4051 0444; www.bigcat-cruises.com.au; tours from \$66/37) also runs half- and full-day tours departing Cairns' Reef Fleet terminal at 9am and 1pm. Prices include use of snorkelling gear or a glass-bottomed boat tour.

You can sail to the island with **Ocean Free** (☎ 4041 1118; www.oceanfree.com.au; adult/child \$109/70), which spends most of the day offshore at Pinnacle Reef, with a short stop on the island. It departs Cairns' Marlin Wharf at 7.30am,

returning around 6pm, and includes snorkelling equipment, a snorkel tour and lunch, with optional extras such as scuba diving.

FITZROY ISLAND

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

Fitzroy Island is also known as Gabarra to the indigenous Gungandji people, who have hunted and fished from the island for centuries. Captain Cook named the island Fitzroy after the prime minister of the day when the *Endeavour* left for its Pacific journey. In 1877 the island was used to quarantine Chinese immigrants bound for the goldfields. Thousands were compulsorily detained for 16 days and observed for signs of smallpox. Squalid conditions contributed to the deaths of hundreds of Chinese, and a number of unmarked graves remain from that period.

Today the island is national park, with the resort occupying a small portion. There are a number of places to snorkel; the most popular spot is around the rocks at **Nudey Beach** (1.2km from the resort).

There are two walking tracks on the island where you should spot some of the island's resident birds and butterflies. The 20-minute **Secret Garden Walk** is a leisurely stroll through rainforest that returns along the same path. The hour-long **Lighthouse & Summit Trail** leaves from the northern end of Welcome Bay and heads steeply up to the lighthouse, which was the last staffed lighthouse in Australia. From here there are views to Little Fitzroy Island below.

You can pitch a tent at the recently reopened **Fitzroy Island Camping Ground** (☎ 4044 3044), run by Cairns Regional Council. Bookings must

be made in advance (10 sites available); rates weren't fixed at the time of writing but should be around \$17 per person.

The Fitzroy Island Resort has been transformed into **Hunt Resort** (☎ 4051 9588; www.huntgroup.com.au; ♿ ♿), which was still under construction at the time of writing. It will have luxury apartments, restaurants and a cheaper wing of budget rooms.

Raging Thunder (☎ 4030 7900; www.ragingthunder.com.au; adult/child \$42/21; Reef Fleet terminal, Cairns) runs island transfers twice a day, leaving Cairns at 8.30am and 10.30am and returning at 3pm and 5pm. There are also full- (adult/child \$71/37) and half-day (\$65/32) trips including lunch and a glass-bottomed boat tour.

FRANKLAND ISLANDS

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

Campers can be dropped at High or Russell Islands, though numbers are limited on Russell and camping is only permitted on weekdays outside peak season. Both feature rainforest areas. Permits must be obtained in advance from the Cairns **QPWS** (☎ 4046 6602; www.epa.qld.gov.au; 2-4 McLeod St) or you can book online for High Island. You must be fully self-sufficient as there is no water on the islands, and you'd be wise to book in advance during the high season. There's a four-night maximum stay at this time – in case you were getting any ideas about dropping out of life for a while.

BÊCHE-DE-MER

Those black sluglike creatures languishing on the ocean floor are variously known as bêche-de-mer, sea cucumbers, and *hai shen* to the Chinese, who consider them a delicacy.

Hai shen (which roughly translates as 'sea ginseng') is dried and subsequently used in soup. *Hai shen* soup is up there with shark's fin and bird's nest in the delicacy stakes, and considered a longevity tonic and disease preventive. And, of course, there are the aphrodisiac claims. Far from causing sudden amorous bursts as soon as you put down the spoon, bêche-de-mer is believed to aid impotence that is caused by kidney problems.

There are hundreds of species of bêche-de-mer. What they all have in common, however, are extraordinary physiological characteristics, which enable them to breathe through their anus and purge their innards. If sufficiently irritated, the bêche-de-mer's defence is to eject most of its internal organs, which it quickly regenerates.

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

ATHERTON TABLELAND

The beauty of the Cairns region doesn't end at the reef and the beaches. Climbing back from the coast between Innisfail and Cairns are the highlands known as the Atherton Tableland. It's the fertile food bowl of the region, where altitude does its best to defeat humidity and quaint rural towns are sprinkled between patchwork fields, pockets of rainforest, and spectacular natural areas of lakes, waterfalls and Queensland's highest mountains: Bartle Frere (1657m) and Bellenden Ker (1591m).

Nonindigenous Australians and other migrants first came to the tableland in the 1870s in search of gold. Mining spurred the development of roads and railways, though farming soon became the chief commercial activity. European occupation of the country severely impacted on the original inhabitants (from the Djirbal language group), who were displaced from their lands, trade routes and ceremonial areas. Today, efforts are being made to protect areas of cultural significance through education and site management.

You could easily spend a few days or a week exploring the tableland, preferably with your own wheels. There's some great accommodation in eco wilderness lodges and luxurious B&Bs; you can tour fruit wineries and coffee farms and go lake fishing, swimming and hiking. Three main roads lead in from the coast: the Palmerston Hwy from Innisfail, the Gillies Hwy from Gordonvale and the Kennedy Hwy. This section follows the Kennedy Hwy from Cairns and heads south before looping up along the Gillies Hwy back to Cairns.

Getting There & Around

There are bus services to the main towns from Cairns, but not to all the interesting areas around the towns, so a hire car is the best way to get around if you want to do some serious exploration.

Whitecar Coaches (☎ 4091 1855) has regular bus services connecting Cairns with the tableland, departing from 46 Spence St and running to

Kuranda (\$4, 30 mins), Mareeba (\$16.80, one hour), Atherton (\$22, 1¼ hours), Herberton (\$26, two hours) and Ravenshoe (\$28.50, 2½ hours). There are generally three to four services on weekdays, two on Saturday and one on Sunday.

KURANDA

☎ 07 / pop 1610

Reached by a winding 30km road, a scenic railway or Australia's longest gondola cableway from Cairns, Kuranda is easily the most popular day-tripping destination on the tableland. Between about 10am and 4pm, this tiny village is crawling with tourists poking through the ever-expanding markets and lining up for various purpose-built attractions. While the markets and marketing can seem a bit tacky, this is a truly beautiful area with refreshing rainforest walks and if you stay overnight you'll see it transform into the mellow village that made it so popular in the first place.

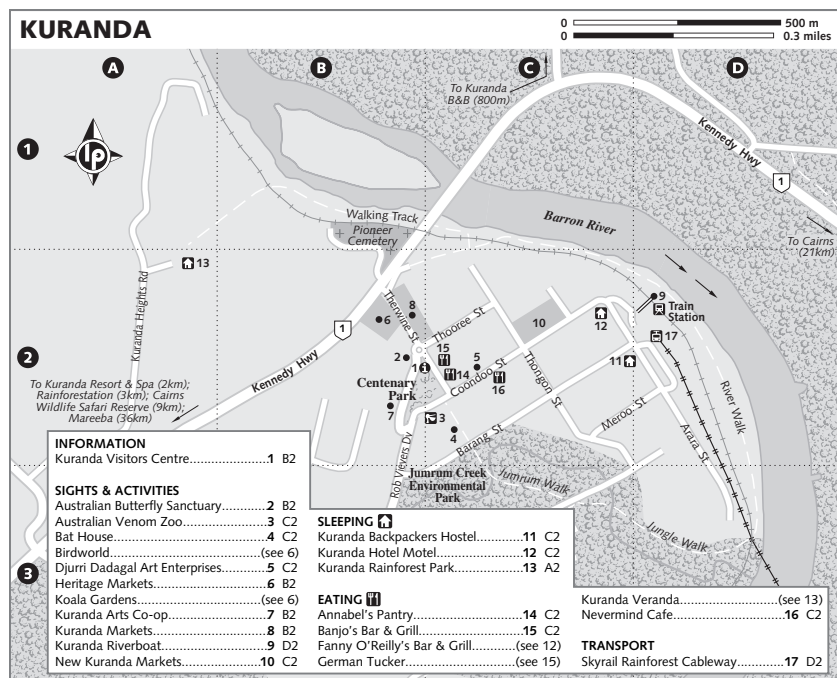
Kuranda became popular with the hippie subculture in the late 1960s and despite the tourist hordes it retains a colourful, alternative feel.

Information

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

Sights & Activities

Most people come to Kuranda to browse through the markets, which are getting bigger but not necessarily better. The original **Kuranda Markets** (☎ 4093 7261; Therwine St; ☎ 9am-3pm) started in 1978 and became famous for imaginative local art and craft products. It's still the place to see artists such as glassblowers at work, pick up hemp products and sample local produce such as honey and fruit wines. Across the road, the **Heritage Markets** (☎ 4093 8060; www.kurandamarkets.com.au; Rob Veivers Dr; ☎ 9am-3pm) are made up of souvenirs and crafts such as ceramics, emu oil, jewellery, clothing, food and figurines made from pistachio nuts. For genuine crafts produced by professional artists using a wide range of media, check out the **Kuranda Arts Co-op** (☎ 4093 9026; www.artskuranda.asn.au; Kuranda Settlement Village, 12 Rob Veivers Dr; ☎ 10am-4pm). The **New Kuranda Markets** (☎ 40939736 21-23 Coondoo St; ☎ 9am-4pm), the first one you come to if walking up from the train station, have little



out of the ordinary; there's a **theatre** (adult/child \$18.50/14.50; ☎ 11am, noon, 1 & 2pm) here screening cultural and environmental shows.

Djurri Dadagal Art Enterprises (☎ 0428 645 945; Coondoo St; ☎ 9.30am-3.30pm) is an excellent indigenous art cooperative where the paintings, artefacts, screen prints and textiles are produced on site by local artists. You can see artists at work most days.

There are a number of easy **walking trails** in and around the village. Many are the traditional pathways of the indigenous Djabagny; some paths later became pack routes linking the gold-fields with the coast. Across the train line by the station a path leads down to the Barron River. Follow the path downstream to the railway bridge (1km, 20 minutes). This bridge marks the start of the Jungle Walk section (0.8km, 15 minutes), which is a paved track that runs between Barron Gorge Rd meeting the Jumrum Creek Walk (0.8km, 15 minutes), which starts/finishes on Coondoo St and links to a 2km walk to Barron Falls. You can walk the 2.6km loop or take one section as a short return walk.

Also behind the train station, over the footbridge, **Kuranda Riverboat** (☎ 4093 7476;

www.kurandariverboat.com.au; adult/child \$14/7; ☎ hourly 10.30am-2.30pm) runs sedate 45-minute cruises along the Barron River.

There's loads of wildlife to see in Kuranda – albeit in zoos and sanctuaries. **Bat Reach** (☎ 4093 8858; www.batreach.cairns.tc; Jungle Walk; admission by donation; ☎ 10.30am-2.30pm Tue-Fri & Sun) is a rescue and rehabilitation centre for troubled fruit bats (flying foxes). Visitors are welcome to see the volunteer work being done here. If you've ever worried about the creepies and crawlies outside your tent, the **Australian Venom Zoo** (☎ 4093 8905; www.tarantulas.com.au; 8 Coondoo St; adult/child \$16/10; ☎ 10am-4pm) will either ease your mind or scare the crap out of you. A close-up look at Australian tarantulas, scorpions and venomous snakes – the zoo breeds creatures for venom extraction and – believe it or not – pets.

Rainforestation (☎ 4085 5008; www.rainforest.com.au; Kennedy Hwy; adult/child \$39/19.50; ☎ 8.30am-4pm) is an enormous tourist nature park divided into three sections: native wildlife, river cruises and an Aboriginal show with boomerang- and spear-throwing. There's a lot to see here and you can choose to do a particular section at

a reduced cost. At the back of the Heritage Markets is a trio of hits for kids: if you wake 'em from their gum-lea coma, cuddle a koala (there are wombats and wallabies too) at the **Koala Gardens** (☎ 4093 9953; adult/child \$15/7.50; ☎ 9am-4pm); the **Australian Butterfly Sanctuary** (☎ 4093 7575; www.australianbutterflies.com; 8 Rob Veivers Dr; adult/child \$15/7.50; ☎ 10am-4pm) is a colourful butterfly aviary; and **Birdworld** (☎ 4093 9188; www.birdworldkuranda.com; adult/child \$15/7.50; ☎ 9am-4pm) is an expansive aviary displaying free-flying native and exotic birds, including the cassowary.

Cairns Wildlife Safari Reserve (☎ 4093 7777; www.cairnswildlifesafarireserve.com.au; Kennedy Hwy; adult/child \$28/14; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) is as close as you'll get to an African safari in Queensland – a free-range zoo with lions, cheetahs, hippos, rhinos and the odd tiger and bear. **African Nights** (adult/child \$79/45; ☎ 6.30-9.30pm Wed & Sat) is a night safari at the zoo with dinner included.

Sleeping

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

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

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

Kuranda Hotel Motel (☎ 4093 7206; www.kurandahotel.com.au; cnr Coondoo & Arara Sts; d \$75; ☎) Out

the back of Kuranda's local hotel, the basic motel-style rooms here are tidy enough, with en suites, fridges and TVs.

Kuranda B&B (☎ 4093 7151; http://users.tpg.com.au/users/ausavsup; 28 Black Mountain Rd; s/family \$80/140; ☎ ☎) This homely B&B is a good 20 minutes' walk from town, in a quiet spot on Ripple Creek. Two large rooms, each with its own bathroom and veranda overlooking a lovingly tended garden.

Eating

Annabel's Pantry (☎ 4093 7605; Therwine St; pies \$3.50-4.50; ☎ breakfast & lunch) With around 25 pie varieties, from kangaroo to curry, Annabel's is great for lunch on the run.

German Tucker (☎ 4057 9688; Therwine St; dishes \$5-10; ☎ 10am-2.30pm) Fat kransky sausages with sauerkraut or kangaroo sausage with potato salad? German Tucker serves extreme Australiana and traditional German fare, and stocks German beer.

Nevermind Cafe (☎ 4093 8448; Shop 1, 24 Coondoo St; meals \$5-12; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Epitomising the slightly hippie vibe that still exists up here, Nevermind is organic smoothies, herbal teas, toasted sandwiches and great coffee.

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

Fanny O'Reilly's Bar & Grill (☎ 4093 7206; cnr Coondoo & Arara Sts; mains \$10-25; ☎ lunch daily, dinner Mon-Sat) The corner deck of the Kuranda Hotel Motel is a great place to watch the passing parade and the Irish-style bar has a certain charm. Good pub food – the Guinness pot pie is the speciality.

Kuranda Veranda (☎ 4093 9320; Kuranda Heights Rd; mains \$15-28; ☎ dinner) It's worth a stroll up to the Rainforest Park to indulge in Asian specialities like Malaysian jungle curry and the yum cha platter. Live jazz on Sunday afternoons and movies on Monday night.

Getting There & Away

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

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

Skyrail Rainforest Cableway (☎ 4038 1555; www.skyrail.com.au; adult/child one way \$39/19.50, return \$56/28; ☎ 8.15am-5.15pm), at 7.5km is one of the world's longest gondola cableways. The Skyrail runs from the corner of Kemerunga Rd and the Cook Hwy in Smithfield, a northern suburb of Cairns, to Kuranda (Arara St), taking 90 minutes. It includes two stops along the way with boardwalks and interpretive panels. The last departure from Cairns and Kuranda is at 3.30pm; transfers to/from the terminal (15 minutes' drive north of Cairns) and combination (Scenic Railway and Skyrail) deals are also available. As space is limited, only daypacks are allowed on board Skyrail.

John's Kuranda Bus (☎ 0418-772 953; tickets \$3) runs a service between Cairns and Kuranda at least twice a day and up to seven times between Wednesday to Friday. Buses depart from Cairns' Lake St Transit Centre. **Whitecar Coaches** (☎ 4091 1855; tickets \$5) has five departures from 46 Spence St, Cairns.

MAREEBA

☎ 07 / pop 6800

At the centre of industrious cattle, coffee and sugar enterprises, Mareeba is essentially an administrative and supply town for the northern tablelands and parts of Cape York Peninsula. The area was once a major producer of tobacco, but that has been gradually phased out in favour of sugar cane and fruit crops. Today, Mareeba's main street boasts some quaint old façades, and a growing number of Mareeba's food producers – particularly boutique coffee-makers – have opened their doors for tours. The region's natural beauty is typified by the expansive wetlands to the north.

Continue through town to the Cooktown Developmental Rd, known as the inland route to Cooktown.

Sights & Activities

Mareeba Heritage Museum & Tourist Information Centre (☎ 4092 5674; www.mareebaheritagecentre.com

.au; Centenary Park, 345 Byrnes St; museum adult/child \$5/2.50; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat & Sun) is the local tourist office and a museum, with displays on the area's past and present commercial industries, as well as its natural surrounds.

Mareeba Wetlands (☎ 1800 788 755, 093 2514; www.mareebawetlands.com; adult/child \$10/5; ☎ 10am-4pm Wed-Sun Apr-Dec), a 20-sq-km reserve featuring wood- and grasslands, swamps and the expansive Clancy's Lagoon, is a birdwatchers' nirvana. A huge range of bird species flock here, and you might see other animals such as kangaroos and freshwater crocs. The Wetlands' visitors centre has information on self-guided walks around the reserve. From here you can join a guided boat or walking tour (\$10/5), or a two-hour sunset safari (\$55/27.50); you can also hire a canoe (\$15 per hour). You can stay overnight here at the Jabiru Safari Lodge. To reach the wetlands, take the Pickford Rd turn-off from Biboohra, 7km north of Mareeba.

Granite Gorge Nature Park (☎ 4093 2259; www.granitegorge.com.au; adult/child \$7.50/2) is a volcanic region of huge granite boulders populated by rock wallabies, walking tracks and waterfalls tumbling into a swimming hole. There are picnic areas and a camp site (\$12, includes park entry). Granite Gorge is 12km southwest of Mareeba. Follow Chewko Rd out of Mareeba for 7km; there's a turn-off to your right from there. It's an unsealed road, but fine for conventional vehicles.

Coffee is one of the region's specialties: **Coffee Works** (☎ 4092 4101; www.arabicas.com.au; 136 Mason St; tours \$5; ☎ 9am-4pm) is a roaster with daily tasting tours at 10am, noon and 2pm; or at **Tichum Creek Coffee Farm** (☎ 4093 3092; www.mareebacoffee.com.au; 3576 Kennedy Hwy; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sun), between Mareeba and Kuranda, you can tour the family farm and view the coffee-making process. For a tropical tippie, **Golden Drop Mango** (☎ 4093 2750; www.goldendrop.com.au; 227 Billwon Rd, Billwon; ☎ 8am-6.30pm), 2km off the highway north of Mareeba, offers tastings of its sweet mango wine, while **Mt Unde Distillery** (☎ 4086 8008; www.mtunde.com; 1819 Chewko Rd, Walkamin; ☎ 10am-5pm) produces divine seasonal liqueurs using local bananas, coffee, mulberries and lemons.

Aviation and military buffs should check out the **Beck Museum** (☎ 4092 3979; Kennedy Hwy; adult/child \$13/7; ☎ 10am-4pm). It's the biggest collection in Queensland and includes American fighter planes used over the Coral Sea during WWII. If you like that, you'll love **Warbird Adventures** (☎ 4092 7391; www.warbirdadventures.com

.au; Mareeba Airport; museum adult/child \$7.50/4; ☎ 10am-4pm Wed-Sun) where you can see restored vintage planes and take a half-hour joy flight (\$250-550) in a Nanchang, Harvard or Kittyhawk.

Festivals & Events

The **cattle saleyards**, just north of town on the road to Mt Molloy, provide a genuine taste of country Australia; there are sales every Tuesday morning at the crack of dawn.

Mareeba's **rodeo**, held annually in July, is one of Australia's biggest. There's bull and bronco riding, and 'cowboy protection' provided by clowns.

Sleeping & Eating

Riverside Caravan Park (☎ 4092 2309; 13 Egan St; camping per person \$8, unpowered/powerd sites for 2 people \$18/22) Nudging up against the steep-sided Barron River, this is the closest camping to town.

Jackaroo Motel (☎ 4092 2677; www.jackaroomotel.com; 340 Byrnes St; r \$85; ☎ ☎) This modern motel has a great range of facilities, including a saltwater swimming pool, barbecue and laundry.

Nastasi's (☎ 4092 2321; 10 Byrnes St; meals \$4-10; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner; ☎ ☎) Fried everything, burgers, pizzas and sandwiches, Nastasi's doubles as the local internet café.

Ant Hill Hotel & Steakhouse (☎ 4092 2147; 79 Byrnes St; mains \$12-22; ☎ lunch & dinner) The steakhouse has good-value specials with all the pub favourites – steak, barra and burgers.

ATHERTON

☎ 07 / pop 6250

Unofficial 'capital' of the tableland, Atherton is a commercial hub surrounded by a patchwork of farmland. The town takes its name from one of the first white settlers to find tin, and later farm in the region, John Atherton.

The **Atherton Tableland Information Centre** (☎ 4091 4222; www.athertontablelands.com.au; cnr Robert & Herberton Sts; ☎ 9am-5pm) has loads of useful information on the region, including brochures outlining the network of heritage trails.

Hallorans Hill is a panoramic lookout, from where the surrounding farmland looks like an earthy-coloured patchwork quilt. The hill features an outdoor sculpture park and is adjacent to an interpretive rainforest trail. To get there, head up Robert St from the information centre and follow the easily visible signs.

To see the life's work of a collector of geodes, thunder eggs and assorted minerals,

head to **Crystal Caves** (☎ 4091 2365; www.crystalcaves.com.au; 69 Main St; adult/child \$20/10; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun). This impressive mineralogical wonderland descends into an artificial fairy-cave setting. Don a hard hat and check out the *pièce de resistance* – the world's large amethyst geode, a 3.25m, 2.7 tonne giant excavated from Uruguay. It's worth just browsing the display cases in the shop for free.

More than 500 Chinese migrants came to the region in search of gold in the late 1800s and **Atherton Chinatown** (☎ 4091 6945; www.houwang.org.au; 86 Herberton Rd; adult/concession/child \$10/7.50/5; ☎ 10am-4pm) gives an insight into those heady days. The site includes a museum and a guided tour of the only remaining building, the historic **Hou Wang Temple**, which features a handcrafted altar panel. Also on the site is **Atherton Birds of Prey** (www.birdsofprey.com.au; adult/child \$13/6.50; ☎ 11am & 2pm Wed-Sun, closed Feb). Wedge-tailed eagles, falcons and owls are on show.

Less than 100m north of Chinatown is the Platypus Park where, with luck, you might spot a monotreme along Piebald Creek.

Tolga Woodworks Gallery & Cafe (☎ 4095 4488; www.tolgawoodworks.com.au; Kennedy Hwy, Tolga; ☎ 9am-5pm), 5km north of Atherton, has amazingly crafted wood pieces for sale or just to stare at. The skill of the local artisans also extends to ceramics, leatherwork and glassware.

All the sweet smells are indoors at **Gallo Dairyland** (☎ 4095 2388; www.galldairyland.com.au; Malanda Rd; ☎ 9.30am-5pm), a working dairy farm that doubles as a cheese and chocolate factory (great combination!). At various times of day you can see the production process, or just taste your way through some of the superb 30-plus types of chocolate and gourmet cheese. There's also a café here. It's about 5km southeast of Atherton.

Sleeping & Eating

Atherton Woodlands (☎ 4091 1407; www.woodlands.com.au; 141 Herberton Rd; unpowered/powerd sites \$22/29, d cabins \$75-110; ☎ ☎) The best of Atherton's three van parks, Woodlands is 1.5km south of the centre and has a range of accommodation, including en suite cabins, family villas and a saltwater pool.

Barron Valley Hotel (☎ 4091 1222; www.bvhotel.com.au; 53 Main St; s/d \$35/55, en suite s/d \$55/75; ☎ ☎) The grand Art Deco 'BV' has tidy budget pub rooms upstairs. The **restaurant** (mains \$12-26)

serves hearty meals, including giant steaks, but some of the best-value food in town is found in the back bar.

Atherton Blue Gum B&B (☎ 4091 5149; www.athertonbluegum.com; 36 Twelfth Ave; d \$115-180; 🍷 🚗) Perched on Hallorans Hill, you can enjoy breakfast with superb views from the veranda of this double-storey B&B. There's a range of rooms with pine panelling and big windows, and a heated pool and spa.

HERBERTON

☎ 07 / pop 974

Peaceful Herberton is nestled in the crease of one of the area's rolling hills. It was founded on the Wild River after the discovery of a tin

lode in 1880. Dozens of mines opened in the area, and by the early 1900s Herberton had rapidly developed, producing two newspapers and sporting 17 pubs. The establishment of the town decimated the indigenous Bar Barrum community – members of the now extinct Mbabaram language group. The shire has reinstated Native Title to Herberton and acknowledged the cultural significance of certain areas to the Bar Barrum. Today Herberton is crisscrossed by many interesting walking trails through old mining areas and pioneer routes.

The **Herberton Mining & Information Centre** (☎ 4096 3473; www.herbertonvisitorcentre.com.au; Great Northern Mining Centre, 1 Jacks Rd; 🕒 9am-4pm; closed Feb), on the site of an old tin mine, has an informative

DETOUR: CHILLAGOE

The charismatic former mining town of Chillagoe, about 140km west of Mareeba, can fulfil any romantic notion you may have of the outback, even on a day trip. With a raw, unhurried quality, it's at the centre of an area imbued with impressive limestone caves, indigenous rock-art sites, and ruins of an early-20th-century smelting plant.

Leaving the tableland, the landscape gradually changes from fertile farmland to dry woodland savannah. The road is sealed most of the way, save for about 20km of the final 30km into Chillagoe. After passing through Dimbulah, a regional centre that developed in the 1930s around tobacco, you cross Eureka Creek. It's here that the terrain becomes characteristic of the outback, with rugged rusty plains supporting spindly vegetation, termite hills and hump-backed Brahman cattle. About 25km past Petford – population 10 – is Almaden, a stop on the *Savannahlander* train. Soon you'll start to see the limestone bluffs for which Chillagoe is known, and the giant marble pits that are dotted around the region.

First stop should be the excellent visitors centre, the **Hub** (☎ 4094 7111; www.chillagoehub.com.au; Queen St; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 3.30pm Sat & Sun), which has some interesting historical displays, and where you can book tours of the surrounding caves. The staff can direct you to rock-art sites at Balancing Rock and Mungana (15km northwest), the local swimming hole, the old smelter site and an eccentric local with a collection of old Fords.

The main attractions are the **limestone caves**. There are over 500 in the cave system here but three – Donna, Trezkin and Royal Arch caves – can be visited on ranger-guided **tours** (\$11-13.75; 🕒 9am, 11am & 1.30pm).

A good time to visit Chillagoe is mid-May when the annual **Chillagoe Rodeo** is followed a week later by the **Great Wheelbarrow Race**, where runners (solo and in teams) push a wheelbarrow all the way from Mareeba to Chillagoe!

While Chillagoe is accessible on a day trip, it's worth staying overnight, and there are a couple of terrific places to stay, along with a small caravan park and pub rooms.

Chillagoe Observatory & Eco Lodge (☎ 4094 7155; www.coel.com.au; Hospital Ave; unpowered/powerd sites \$16/25, s/tw \$30/45, en suite d \$75-95; 🍷 🚗) has a range of camping and cabin accommodation, a licensed restaurant and an observatory where you can scan the southern night sky (March to October). The owner is a keen stargazer.

Chillagoe Cabins (☎ 4094 7206; www.chillagoe.com; Queen St; d \$125-140; 🍷 🚗) are modern and tastefully decorated self-contained cabins set in pleasant gardens, where the owners have a small wildlife-rescue menagerie. It also offers 'wild' caving and town tours from \$20 an hour. There's a camp kitchen, a barbecue and a bar area, or you can order home-cooked meals.

The **Chillagoe Bus Service** (☎ 4094 7155; adult/child \$33/16.50) departs from Mareeba on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, returning from Chillagoe on the same days.

ON A WING & A PRAYER

If you want to get involved in wildlife conservation – particularly sickly working with or injured birds and flying foxes – the tableland has some good opportunities. In all cases, it's generally best if you contact the organisations in advance to find out their needs and what may be required of you as a volunteer. In Kuranda, **Bat Reach** (☎ 4093 8858; www.batreach.cairns.tc) is a rescue and rehabilitation centre for troubled fruit bats (flying foxes). Visitors are welcome to see the volunteer work being done here and you can offer to help out.

Just south of Atherton, **Tolga Bat Hospital** (☎ 4091 2683; www.tolgabathospital.org; 134 Carrington Rd) was set up to save fruit bats threatened by ticks and loss of habitat. Volunteers are especially needed during tick paralysis season (Oct-Jan) but also throughout the year.

In Ravenshoe, **Eagle's Nest Wildlife Hospital** (☎ 4097 6098; www.wildlife-sanctuary.info) looks after sick and injured wildlife, particularly birds. Volunteers, including WWOOFERS (Willing Workers on Organic Farms), are welcome to apply.

display (\$5) on the region's mining history and geology, including a gallery of minerals. It's the starting point for a number of historic walking trails and stocks trail guides and brochures.

You can let someone else do most of the work and get a donkey to carry your gear on a guided trek with **Wilderness Expeditions** (☎ 4096 2266; www.wildex.com.au; day treks adult/child \$125); overnight treks are also available.

Spy & Camera Museum (☎ 4096 2092; 49 Grace St; admission \$3; 🕒 9.30am-5pm) is a photographer's dream, with rare 19th-century cameras, tiny spy cameras and Russian KGB models – the original owner was reputed to be a secret agent.

Herberton's original post office is now the **Herberton Heritage Cottage B&B** (☎ 4096 2032; www.herbertoncottage.com; 2 Perkins St; s/d \$170/180; 🍷 🚗), with charming heritage-style rooms and modern features like the spa baths, TVs and DVD players. Expect lots of polished-wood surfaces, potbelly heating and high, comfy beds.

MT HYPIPAMEE NATIONAL PARK

Between Atherton and Ravenshoe, the Kennedy Hwy passes the eerie Mt Hypipamee **crater**. It's anomalous due to the granitic rock it's cut from, which is not associated with volcanic activity. It's over 120m deep, which makes for one giant wishing well. It's an easy 800m (return) walk from the car park to the crater. A separate path forks off the trail taking you past **Dinner Falls** (which ultimately becomes the Barron River) to a rock pool and a swimming hole.

RAVENSHOE

☎ 07 / pop 910

At the peak of the southern tablelands, Ravenshoe is Queensland highest town at a

modest 930m – it gets chilly up here in winter! Founded on the timber industry, it's known these days for providing more sustainable resources, with a hilltop wind farm designed to catch those prevailing winds. If you're on your way to or from the outback Savannah Way, this may be your first or last taste of the tableland and there are a few reasons to pause here, including an old steam-train ride.

Ravenshoe visitors centre (☎ 4097 7700; www.ravenshoevisitorcentre.com.au; 24 Moore St; 🕒 9am-4pm) supplies local maps and houses the **Ngayaji Interpretive Centre**, which explains the Jirrbal people's traditional lifestyle.

Windy Hill wind farm is Australia's largest, with 20 turbines producing a clean, green energy supply. It's quite a sight to see the huge turbines standing sentinel from a viewpoint signposted off the Kennedy Hwy from Ravenshoe, or along the scenic Old Palmerston Hwy from Millaa Millaa.

There is a number of **waterfalls** nearby. Little Millstream Falls are 2km south of Ravenshoe, on the Tully Gorge Rd, and Tully Falls are 24km south. About 6km past Ravenshoe, southwest on the road to Innot Hot Springs, then south on Millstream Fall Rd, and 1km off the road are the 13m-high Millstream Falls; in flood they're said to be the widest in Australia.

Train enthusiasts and kids will love a ride on the restored steam train *Capella* with the **Ravenshoe Railway Co** (☎ 4097 6005; www.steamloco.nq.nu; Grigg St; adult/child \$15/7.50; 🕒 departs 1.30pm Sun Apr-Jan), which chugs 7km north to Tumoulin – Queensland's highest railway station – and back.

Hotel Tully Falls (☎ 4097 6136; 34 Grigg St; s/d \$30/40), located at the top end of Main St, is a grand hotel

DETOUR: INNOT HOT SPRINGS

Who can resist a dip in thermal hot springs? This inland detour chases the warm waters that spring up from the volcanic ground west of Ravenshoe. Take the Kennedy Hwy about 32km west to the tiny township of **Innot Hot Springs**, where a hot spring measuring 73°C heats up the cool waters of the town's Nettle Creek. The spring water is said to be therapeutic, and after a steaming soak you'll probably agree. You can 'take the waters' at **Innot Hot Springs Village** (off Map p336; ☎ 4097 0136; www.innothotspringspark.com; unpowered/powered sites \$20/25, budget cabins \$60, en suite cabins \$100; ♿ ♿ ♿). Visitors have free use of the park's seven indoor and outdoor **thermal pools** (nonguests adult/child \$7/5; ☎ 8am-6pm) of varying temperatures. It's even possible to dig a hole in the sand and soak in Nettle Creek itself.

Have a beer or stay the night in the **Innot Hotel** (☎ 4097 0203; Kennedy Hwy; s/d \$45/55), a friendly country pub with five motel units and home-cooked meals. The owners are a mine of local information.

with a reasonable claim to being Queensland's highest hotel. Rooms are basic pub style with shared bathrooms but you can sleep knowing you're a notch above everyone else.

There are a number of boutique B&B-type options in the area; the visitors centre has a full list.

High ceilings, polished floors, period furniture, fireplaces and shared bathrooms all enhance the historic charm of the **Old Convent** (☎ 4097 6454; www.theoldconvent.com.au; 23 Moore St; s/d \$75/95). Parts of the building are over 100 years old but it served in its present form as a convent from 1950.

Turn off the Kennedy Hwy, down a 4.5km unsealed road, and you'll find two cottages clinging to the fringe of World Heritage-listed rainforest. **Possum Valley B&B** (☎ 4097 8177; www.bnbq.com.au/possumvalley; Evelyn Central, via Ravenshoe; s/d \$60/75) has fully self-contained rooms that are green in both senses of the word: surrounded by rainforest and using solar and hydroelectricity and tank water. You can camp at **Tall Timbers** (☎ 4097 6325; Kennedy Hwy; unpowered/powered sites \$12/18).

MILLAA MILLAA

☎ 07 / pop 289

Tiny Millaa Millaa is the gateway to the tablelands from the south (Innisfail) and the closest village to the Waterfalls Circuit (see the boxed text, opposite). Surrounded by rolling farmland dotted with black-and-white Friesian cows, this is also the centre of a thriving local dairy industry. At **Mungalli Creek Dairy** (☎ 4097 2232; 254 Brooks Rd; ☎ 10am-4pm), about 6km southeast of the village, you can sample boutique biodynamic dairy products, including yoghurt, cheese and sinfully rich cheesecake.

Millaa Millaa Tourist Park (☎ 4097 2290; www.millaa park.com; cnr Malanda Rd & Lodge Ave; unpowered/powered sites \$17/20, dm/s \$15/30, d \$50-75) has a range of cabins and rooms set on large grounds.

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

MALANDA & AROUND

☎ 07 / pop 1009

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

The **Malanda Falls visitors centre** (☎ 4096 6957; Atherton Rd; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm) has thoughtful displays on the area's human and geological history, including volcanic origins and the logging and dairy industry. Guided rainforest walks (\$10, by appointment) led by members of the Ngadjonji community can be organised here.

On the Atherton Rd on the outskirts of town are the **Malanda Falls**. They don't 'fall' so spectacularly, but the resulting pool, surrounded by lawns and forest, is a popular swimming spot.

Malanda's key industry is dairy – 120 million litres of milk is produced here each year.

The **Malanda Dairy Centre** (☎ 4095 1234; 8 James St; ☎ 9.30am-4pm) can tell you more than you ever wanted to know about cows and dairy, with **factory tours** (\$10.50/6; ☎ 10.30 & 11.30am Mon-Fri), the 'Udder Experience' with historical exhibits and lots of costumed dummies, and a gift shop with all sorts of black-and-white cow-related souvenirs.

If you're staying in the town on a weekend, try to catch a film at the **Majestic Theatre** (☎ 4096 5726; www.majestictheatre.com.au; Eacham Place). Built in 1927, with traditional oak-framed and lay-back canvas bleachers, it screens mainstream movies on Friday and Saturday nights and Sundays.

A couple of kilometres west of Malanda is **Bromfield Swamp**, an important waterbird sanctuary best visited late in the afternoon. A viewing area beside the road overlooks an eroded volcanic crater.

Australia's largest tea plantation is a short drive southeast of Malanda. **Nerada Tea** (☎ 4096 8328; www.neradatea.com.au; Glen Allyn Rd; ☎ 9am-4pm) has a visitors centre, a tea-tasting house and factory tours.

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

Sleeping & Eating

There is plenty of quality B&B accommodation tucked away in the forests and farms around Malanda.

Malanda Falls Caravan Park (☎ 4096 5314; www.malandafalls.com.au; 38 Park Ave; unpowered/powered sites \$16/22, dm \$35, en suite cabins \$65-75) Right next to Malanda Falls, this site has tidy cabins

and camp sites where you can hear the water flowing.

Travellers Rest (☎ 4096 6077; www.travrest.com.au; Millaa Millaa Rd; s/d inc breakfast \$50/90) An English-style country house on a small family-run farm, this guesthouse is a friendly budget place and perfect for kids, with highland cows and alpacas among the resident animals. There's a cosy lounge, a billiard room and a formal dining room. Popular murder-mystery nights are hosted here every Saturday. It's on the highway at Tarzali, 5km south of Malanda.

Malanda Lodge Motel (☎ 4096 5555; www.malanda lodgemotel.com.au; Millaa Millaa Rd; s/d \$83/95; ♿ ♿ ♿) Set in pretty gardens on the edge of town, this is a good-value motel with a restaurant, a pool and a spa.

Jumholtz Lodge (☎ 4095 0292; www.jumholtzlodge.com.au; Upper Barron Rd; d incl breakfast \$180, full-board d \$300; ♿) Enveloped in foliage, this B&B is a wonderful place to watch the surrounding wildlife. Guests have free reign of the lodge, which includes shelves stocked with books about nature and a spa.

Fur 'n' Feathers (☎ 4096 5364; www.rainforesttreeshouses.com.au; Hogan Rd, Tarzali via Malanda; d \$206-319, q \$438). A pristine patch of old-growth rainforest is the stunning setting for this superbly designed group of all-timber pole houses. The riverfront treehouses are self-contained, private and perfect for spotting wildlife (including the resident cassowary). Boutique B&B accommodation doesn't get much better. There's a minimum two-night stay.

our pick **Rivers Edge Rainforest Retreat** (☎ 4095 2369; www.riversedgeretreat.com.au; d from \$270; ♿ ♿) Wow: this is a staggeringly beautiful retreat on the Johnstone River. Surrounded by forest and blending seamlessly with the environment are two secluded, luxury timber lodges. You'll marvel not only at nature, but the lavish

WATERFALLS CIRCUIT

Passing by some of the most picturesque waterfalls on the tableland, this 15km circuit makes for a leisurely drive or cycle. Enter the circuit by taking Theresa Creek Rd, 1km east of Millaa Millaa on the Palmerston Hwy. **Millaa Millaa Falls**, 1.5km along, are easily the best for swimming, with a large fenced swimming hole and a grassy picnic area. The spectacular 12m falls are surrounded by tree ferns and flowers.

Zillie Falls, 8km further on, are reached by a short walking trail that leads to a lookout peering down on the falls from above. Further on you come to **Ellinjaa Falls**, with a 200m walking trail down to a rocky swimming hole at the base of the falls. A further 5.5km down the Palmerston Hwy there's a turn-off to **Mungalli Falls**.

touches such as the sliding glass wall in the spa bathroom, the huge beds and the wood fire. Minimum two-night stay.

Tree Kangaroo Cafe (☎ 4096 6658; meals \$6-8; ☺ breakfast & lunch) Next door to the visitors centre, this is a fine little café with Devonshire teas and reasonably priced light lunches.

Dairy Centre Cafe (☎ 4095 1234; 8 James St; mains \$6-14.50; ☺ 9.30am-4pm) This is a surprisingly good licensed café in the Malanda Dairy Centre. Apart from focaccias and light meals the emphasis is on local produce such as cheese, milkshakes, coffee and tea.

Other recommended accommodation:

Sharlynn B&B (☎ 4096 5884; www.sharlynn.com.au; Croft Rd; d \$170; ☺) Private country-style self-contained apartment overlooking North Johnstone River.

Grand View Country Accommodation (☎ 4095 1266; www.grandviewcountry.com.au; 122L Hogan Rd, Tarzali; d \$195-235; ☺) Three bright and cosy, self-contained apartments attached to a family home bordering rainforest. Hydrotherapy spa, games room and tennis court.

YUNGABURRA

☎ 07 / pop 930

Home to a shy colony of platypus (the jury is still out on the plural – some experts say platypode!), tiny Yungaburra is one of the unassuming gems of the tableland. The quaint chocolate-box prettiness of its historic timber buildings and superb boutique accommodation has made it a popular weekend retreat for people in the know, and the town chapel hosts plenty of weddings. The village makes a good base or starting point for exploring the southern tableland.

The **Yungaburra Folk Festival** (www.yungaburrafolkfestival.org) is a fabulous community event held annually over a late-October weekend; it features music, workshops, poetry readings and kids' activities.

Information

The **visitors centre** (☎ 4095 2416; www.yungaburra.com; Cedar St; ☺ 10am-6pm; ☒) is staffed by friendly local volunteers. **Spencer & Murphy Booksellers** (☎ 4095 2123; 9 Cedar St; ☺ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat & Sun; ☒) is a very browse-worthy place with a wide range of new and secondhand books and internet access.

Sights & Activities

Yungaburra has two **platypus-viewing platforms** on Peterson Creek – one by the bridge on the Gillies Hwy and another at a spot known as

Allumbah Pocket (the town's original name) further west. The two are joined by a **walking trail** along the creek which continues east to Railway Bridge. End to end the walk takes less than an hour.

Wild Mountain Cellars (☎ 4095 3000; www.wildmountain.com.au; 23 Eacham Rd) has tastings of its tropical-fruit wines, ports and a mind-blowing coffee liqueur.

The vibrant **Yungaburra Markets** (☎ 4095 2111; Gillies Hwy; ☺ 7.30am-noon) are held in town on the fourth Saturday of every month, when the village is besieged by day-trippers hunting through craft and food products.

The magnificent **Curtain Fig**, about 3km out of town, is a must-see. Like a prop from *The Lord of the Rings*, this 500-year-old strangler fig has aerial roots that hang down to create a feathery curtain. A wheelchair-accessible viewing platform snakes around the tree, and brush turkeys forage in the leaf litter below.

Sleeping

Our pick On the **Wallaby** (☎ 4095 2031; www.onthewallaby.com; 34 Eacham Rd; camping \$10, dm/d \$20/50) Some hostels just feel like home and this one gets it right. With its timber interiors, attentive welcome and mountain-chalet feel, On the Wallaby is both well equipped and warming. Recommended nature-based tours run from here daily, and packages that include transfers from Cairns and trips to the falls. Camping is in the backyard.

Lake Eacham Hotel (☎ 4095 3515; www.yungaburrapub.com.au; 6-8 Kehoe Pl; d \$55-85) Better known as the 'Yungaburra Pub', the downstairs dining room and the swirling wooden staircase of this grand old hotel are inspirational, the circular pool table is unconventional and the pub rooms are functional, all with en suites.

Gables B&B (☎ 4095 2373; thegables1@bigpond.com; 5 Eacham Rd; s/d \$65/88) The room downstairs at this historic Queenslander has its own upstairs bathroom with a spa, and there's a lovely self-contained flat. Rates include self-serve breakfast.

Kookaburra Lodge (☎ 4095 3222; www.kookaburralodge.com; cnr Oak St & Eacham Rd; s/d \$75/80; ☺ ☒) With so much pricey boutique accommodation around, Kookaburra stands out for its affordability, with stylish little rooms opening out to an inviting pale-blue pool and a tropical garden.

Williams Lodge (☎ 4095 3449; www.williamslodge.com; Cedar St; d \$160-220; ☺ ☒ ☒) This heritage

Queenslander home has a real touch of class. The enormous suites are fitted with original period furniture and four-poster beds but with modern luxury touches like spa baths. A piano lounge, wine bar and pool table complete the effect.

Allumbah Pocket Cottages (☎ 4095 3023; www.allumbahpocketcottages.com.au; 24-6 Gillies Hwy; cottages incl breakfast \$165; ☺ ☒ ☒) These six smart, self-contained cottages are individually designed but all have a spa and fireplace, and come with a breakfast hamper.

Gumtree on Gillies (☎ 4095 3105; www.gumtreon.gillies.com.au; Gillies Hwy; d \$175; ☒) Individually themed cabins skirt the globe, with Australian-, African-, Moroccan- and Egyptian-inspired fittings. A few things they all have in common: open fireplaces, spa baths, king beds and breakfast included. Tailor-made for romantic couples.

Eden House Retreat & Mountain Spa (☎ 4095 3355; www.edenhouse.com.au; 20 Gillies Hwy; d \$215-235; ☺ ☒) Eden House is justifiably popular with honeymooners – behind the historic 1921 homestead are romantic cottages with large spa baths and expansive raised beds. Other villas sleep up to five and are suitable for families. It's all set in a gorgeous garden and there's a full-service day spa.

Mt Quincan Crater Retreat (☺ 4095 2255; www.mtquincan.com.au; Peeramon Rd; d \$230-320; ☺) Double spas, king-sized beds, open fireplaces, a secluded forest location – you get the picture. These luxurious, self-contained pole cabins have been built for sheer countryside indulgence. Follow the road between Yungaburra and Peeramon to the signposted turn-off.

Eating

Whistlestop Cafe (☎ 4095 3913; cnr Cedar St & Gillies Hwy; mains \$6-12.50; ☺ 7.30am-5pm Wed-Mon) Enjoy a coffee or a home-cooked meal in the shady tea garden here.

Nick's Restaurant & Yodeller's Bar (☎ 4095 3330; 33 Gillies Hwy; mains \$20-36; ☺ lunch Wed-Sun, dinner Tue-Sun) This Swiss chalet-style number makes for a fun night out with costumed staff, beer steins, a piano-accordion serenade and possibly some impromptu yodelling. The food is a mix of Swiss-Italian and modern Australian.

Eden House (☎ 4095 3355; 20 Gillies Hwy; mains around \$28; ☺ dinner Fri-Wed) Dine in the historic homestead or in the lovely tropical gardens at this highly-regarded restaurant. Try the

slow-roasted rump of beef or the local red-claw yabbie.

Our pick **Flynn's** (☎ 4095 2235; 17 Eacham Rd; mains \$28-31; ☺ lunch Sun, dinner Fri-Wed) The continental aromas wafting out of Flynn's will guide you inside to some authentic French and Italian dishes served in a cosy provincial-style restaurant. You can dine street-side or on the terrace out the back. Flynn's is licensed with a good range of wines.

LAKE TINAROO

Picturesque Lake Tinaroo is an idyllic spot for families and anglers. The enormous artificial lake and dam were originally created for the Barron River hydroelectric power scheme. Barramundi fishing is legendary here and is permitted year-round. Fishing permits (per week/year \$7/35; children free) are readily available from local businesses and accommodation places, or order online at **Queensland's Department of Primary Industries** (☎ 13 13 04; www.dpi.qld.gov.au/fishweb). The **Barra Bash** fishing competition is held annually at the end of October; it's a great event attracting loads of people, but avoid it if you're after a quiet escape.

The main settlement is Tinaroo Falls village (pop 260) on the northwestern side of the lake, where you'll find accommodation, shops, picnic areas, and canoe and boat hire. From the dam wall, the **Danbulla Forest Drive** winds its way through rainforest and softwood plantations along the north side of the lake. It's 28km of unsealed but well-maintained road passing a number of picnic areas and attractions, including pretty **Lake Euramoo** and the **Cathedral Fig** – a gigantic strangler fig tree shouldering epiphytes nestling in its branches. There are five **QPWS campsites** (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au) in the Danbulla State Forest, all with water, barbecues and toilets. You'll need to book ahead for Platypus, School Point, Downfall Creek and Kauri Creek. Fong-On Bay has self-registration sites.

Lake Tinaroo Holiday Park (☎ 4095 8232; www.ltholiadaypark.com.au; 12 Tinaroo Falls Dam Rd; unpowered/power sites \$20/27, cabins \$65-90, units \$80-170; ☺ ☒ ☒), across from the lake foreshore in Tinaroo Falls, is a modern, well-equipped and shady camping ground.

Lake Tinaroo Terraces (☎ 4095 8555; www.laketinarooterraces.com.au; cnr Church & Russel Sts; r \$89, lodge \$109-160; ☺ ☒) has great value one- and two-bedroom self-contained lodges with a prime

lakefront location. There are also cheaper en suite rooms.

There's no better way to explore the lake and completely get away from it all than on a houseboat. **Tinaroo Tropical Houseboats** (☎ 4095 8322; www.laketinaroo.com; 2 nights from \$590) has small economy houseboats sleeping a couple or a small family, while the deluxe boats sleep up to six.

Colourful **Pensini's Cafe & Restaurant** (☎ 4095 8242; 12 Church St; mains \$24-29; ☎ 10am-4pm Fri-Wed, 10am-late Sat, 8.30am-4pm Sun) overlooks Tinaroo Dam wall, and comes as something of a surprise out here – a quality restaurant serving up the freshest local tableland produce (including barramundi of course).

CRATER LAKES NATIONAL PARK

Part of the Wet Tropics World Heritage area, the two mirrorlike crater lakes of Lake Eacham and Lake Barrine are pleasant, forested areas. Walking tracks fringe both lakes and they are easily reached by sealed roads off the Gillies Hwy; camping is not permitted.

Accessible from either lake and 12km from Yungaburra is what's left of a 500-year-old native **Gadgarra Red Cedar**. Saved from logging over the years, it was finally felled by Cyclone Larry in 2006. The fallen tree and stump poignantly remains where it fell, a 600m walk from the car park on Gadgarra Rd (off Wrights Creek Rd).

Lake Barrine

The larger of the two lakes, Lake Barrine is cloaked in thick old-growth rainforest; a 5km walking track around the lake takes about 1½ hours. The **Lake Barrine Rainforest Cruise & Tea House** (☎ 4095 3847; www.lakebarrine.com.au; Gillies Hwy; mains \$6-14; ☎ breakfast & lunch) dominates the lakefront. Upstairs at the tea house you can take Devonshire tea or sandwiches. Downstairs is a small shop and booking desk for a 40-minute **lake cruise** (adult/child \$13/6.50; ☎ 10.15am, 11.30am, 1.30pm, 2.30pm & 3.30pm).

A short stroll from the tea house are two enormous, neck-tilting, 1000-year-old **kauri pines**.

Lake Eacham

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

Lake Eacham Caravan Park (☎ 4095 3730; www.lakeeachamtouristpark.com; 71 Lakes Dr; unpowered/powered sites \$16/19, cabins \$72-80; ☎), less than 2km down the Malanda road from Lake Eacham, is a pretty camping ground with cosy self-contained cabins.

Embedded in the national park, **Chambers Wildlife Rainforest Lodge** (☎ 4095 3754; http://rainforest-australia.com; Eacham Close; 1-/5-bedroom lodge \$120/200; ☎) has wonderfully rustic self-contained lodges that cater to bird-watchers and nature groups. They sleep from four to eight people, and there are landing platforms about the place for the real celebrity guests – visiting birds.

Crater Lakes Rainforest Cottages (☎ 4095 2322; www.craterlakes.com.au; Eacham Close, off Lakes Dr; d \$220; ☎) boasts individually themed timber cottages with wood-burner heating, spa baths, fully fitted kitchens and a breakfast hamper to greet you on the first morning. Cabins are well spaced so you can enjoy your own patch of rainforest.

Sleeping in a rainforest 'treehouse' is a novel thought, but **Rose Gums** (☎ 4096 8360; www.rosegums.com.au; Land Rd, Butcher's Creek; d from \$265) has truly luxurious pole and timber treetop pads with spas, wood-burning heaters and king-sized beds. Great for couples and families, these ecofriendly lodges are private and can sleep up to six, with lots of opportunities for wildlife-watching and walking.

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