

Thrills around Cairns

The natural wonders of Australia's Tropical North Queensland and Great Barrier Reef offer superb backdrops for group bonding in the wild. *Fiona Harper* shares her adventure tips



1 Zipline

Originally used for transporting goods or messages across impenetrable mountainous terrain, these days ziplines are a popular way of building trust and encouragement between team members.

What's it like? Very fast and not for the vertically challenged. Flying Leap Mega Zip at Cairns Adventure Park is the new kid on the adventure scene with dual ziplines running from Mount Whitfield over the forest down to sea level. Cairns ZOOM, in the Wildlife Dome atop the Reef Casino, offers the thrill of ziplining over a crocodile called Goliath while Jungle Surfing Canopy Tours has a network of lines through the Daintree Rainforest.

Why do it? The adrenaline rush of being hurled from the launch pad with nothing more than a wire cable preventing freefall is a thrill that will have groups hankering for more.

cairnzoom.com.au



3 White-water rafting

Thanks to a wet season that brings plentiful rain between December and April, Tropical North Queensland is blessed with rivers just itching to be rafted.

What's it like? Rafting can be extreme with plenty of spills, thrills and excitement: it really depends on how much white water is involved. The Barron River runs through the Cairns suburbs and is perfect for first timers. For something a little wilder, the Tully River includes swimming through rapids, cliff jumping and raft surfing.

Why do it? White-water rafting is not for the faint-hearted as there is action aplenty interspersed with tranquility. Those helmets are worn for a reason: expect to be equally terrified and exhilarated.

cairnrafting.com.au

2 Hot-air ballooning

There are few activities that combine absolute serenity with breathtaking thrills – hot-air ballooning is one of them.

What's it like? You'll need to start very early (balloons launch before sunrise) and it's likely to be cold once elevated above the Atherton Tablelands. Those two minor inconveniences aside, hot-air ballooning is the best fun to be had involving a wicker basket and a naked flame.

Why do it? It's silent, peaceful and thrilling in equal measures. Gliding gently in a basket dangling beneath a captured pocket of hot air offers a voyeuristic view of the world below. Except for the occasional whoosh as the pilot adjusts the flame, hot-air ballooning is like watching a movie with the sound on mute.

ragingthunder.com.au



4 Walk the seabed

Yes, that's right, walk! Seawalking is the perfect way for swimmers and non-swimmers alike to get up close and personal with the critters and coral that live on the Great Barrier Reef surrounding Green Island.

What's it like? Unlike snorkelling, your hair and face stay completely dry. Accompanied by a scuba-wearing guide at all times, walkers don a large glass-fronted helmet that resembles an astronaut's.

Why do it? A visit to tropical North Queensland is incomplete until groups have experienced the Great Barrier Reef in all its kaleidoscopic colour. Keep an eye out for photo-bombing buck-toothed parrotfish Gavin – he's famous!

seawalker.com.au

5 Mountain biking

North Queensland's mountain-bike trails are legendary. Glen Jacobs, one of the world's first professional trail builders, honed his craft here. Today the region is world famous, attracting riders from newbies to pros.

What's it like? With an annual rainfall that can be as high as six metres, the ranges and forest can be very damp so expect to get wet and dirty. Tracks and fire trails pass through beautiful rainforest, eucalypt forest and rolling farmlands of the Atherton Tablelands. Expect waterfalls, creeks and a landscape so extraordinary that team members will need a wide-angle lens to come close to capturing panoramic views.

Why do it? Bragging rights come with conquering the famous Bump Track or completing the RRR Mountain Bike Challenge held annually in June. Less experienced riders are well accommodated too, as bikes can be hired for groups to explore the easier forest trails.

ridecairns.com



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