

GET GOING!

It's time to sidestep Cairn's well-worn tourist trail and discover why the city is fast developing a reputation as the Adventure Capital of Australia

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Opening spread:
Kayaking at Palm Cove

Facing page, from top: Up your
mountain biking game along
Atherton Tablelands' diverse
trails; view the forest from top
down and outlying islands from
the Skyrail Rainforest Cableway

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edged between two World Heritage icons, the Great Barrier

Reef and Wet Tropics rainforest, the northern Australian city has natural beauty by the bucket load. Whether its soft adventure in luxurious style or heart-pumping thrills, you'll find something to slake your thirst for adventure in Tropical North Queensland.

#1 Hit the tracks

The word is out amongst the mountain biking fraternity after last year's UCI World Cup teaser: Cairns rocks! Smithfield Regional Park is the venue for the 2016 UCI Mountain Bike World Cup as well as the 2017 World Championships, and mountain bikers are itching to hit the world famous single-track. With 60km of trails 20 minutes north of the Cairns CBD, terrain varies from easy beginner tracks to white-knuckled downhill descents.

The Crocodile Trophy race, touted as a sort of off-road

Tour de France, has legendary status for hard-core mountain bike riders. Over nine days and 770km on different terrains, the numbers speak for themselves. If you prefer to remain on your feet, 3 Marathons in 3 Days is a three-day endurance running event that starts at Kuranda, winds through national park mountains and forest before finishing in Cairns 126.6km later.

Further afield the Atherton Tablelands, mountain bike trails are equally diverse with easy family trails, flowing single-track and scenic back-country roads. The Tablelands themselves are worthy of an extended visit with rolling hills, waterfalls, national parks, pretty towns and scenic cycling routes.

#2 Float above the forest

The classic carriages of the Kuranda Scenic Rail wind through steep terrain, stopping at Barron Falls Station near the top of the range. From the platform there are

spectacular views of Barron Falls, which are particularly impressive during the wet season (December to March).

An alternative way to ascend or descend the Lamb Ranges is by glass-sided gondolas with Skyrail Rainforest Cableway. Gliding across the forest canopy with views to Green Island and the Great Barrier Reef, gondolas stop amongst the forest at Red Peak and Barron Falls Station. For those wanting fresh air, there's the Canopy Glider, an open-air gondola that takes small groups on a personally guided tour above the canopy. Down at ground level the forest takes on a different perspective dominated by rich earthy smells and close encounters with reptiles, birds and butterflies.

South of Cairns, Mamu Tropical Skywalks' elevated walkways weave through one of the largest remaining complex vine forests in the Wet Tropics. National Geographic rates it as one of Australia's five best



TOURISM TROPICAL NORTH QUEENSLAND



This page: Feel the elements as you jungle surf at Daintree National Park

Facing page, clockwise from top: Enjoy the Great Barrier Reef on a helmet dive; go river drift snorkelling and see freshwater marine life; appreciate the Wet Tropics' from an elevated perspective along Mamu Tropical Skywalks

treetop walks. A cantilevered viewing platform overlooks the North Johnstone River gorge and rainforest-clad mountains beyond. Dominating the vista are Queensland's two highest peaks, Mount Bartle Frere and Mount Bellenden Ker.

Up the thrill factor by strapping yourself into a harness tethered to a taut cable and try zip-lining. Fly through the green canopy at Jungle Surfing Canopy Tours at Cape Tribulation in Daintree for a rainforest view you're unlikely to forget. Back in the city, Cairns Adventure Park recently opened a zip-line adventure on Mount Whitfield. Bungy-jumping never really

went out of favour for true adventurers so it's handy to know that you could combine zip-lining with bungy jumping. If that doesn't send your adrenaline in overdrive try combining zip-lining with one of Australia's fiercest reptiles. Goliath is a four-metre saltwater crocodile who inhabits the enclosure beneath the zip-line cable at Cairns Zoom & Wildlife Dome.

#3 Wet and wild There's no shortage of water adventures in North Queensland. Like at Seawalker Green Island, for example. Don a helmet, which looks a little like the old fashioned copper ones

SEAWALKER GREEN ISLAND-BACK COUNTRY BLISS ADVENTURES

but with a 21st-century upgrade, and walk across the Great Barrier Reef seabed. Schools of fish swarm around your head as you gaze at the marine world thriving around the jetty pylons. Keep an eye out for serial photo bomber Gavin, a friendly parrotfish who loves having his mug taken: he's famous for his wide-mouthed toothy grin.

In the cool reaches of Wet Tropics rainforest, the gin-clear water of Mossman River rumbles gently over a riverbed strewn with sun-dappled granite boulders. It's not a bad setting for a spot of freshwater snorkelling. Back Country Bliss Adventures takes adventure seekers downstream

on a tranquil river drift snorkel. Floating gently with the current wearing a wetsuit, mask and snorkel, a guide explains freshwater marine life on an eco-immersion adventure through some of the planet's most ancient rainforests.

West of Cairns, forest-clad mountain ranges conceal waterfalls plunging into enticing freshwater swimming holes. Most are accessible year round and are safe from saltwater crocodiles and box jellyfish. Some, like Crystal Cascades, within a whisper of city pubs and clubs, is where you'll find a series of swimming holes, small waterfalls and shady picnic areas linked by

paths. Behana Gorge is another, less than an hour from the city, and accessible by a concrete path that gradually ascends through forest for about three kilometres. The walk is well worth it as there's a cool deep-water pool amongst towering rock outcrops at the base of the waterfall.

#4 Live like an islander As you'd expect from the hub of the Great Barrier Reef, there is a surplus of islands to explore offshore. Channel your inner Robinson Crusoe at Haggerstone Island where accommodation is 'rustic luxury,' having been handcrafted by the family who have called the island



Facing page: Drift across scenic parkland and see kangaroos bounding through the bush in a hot air balloon

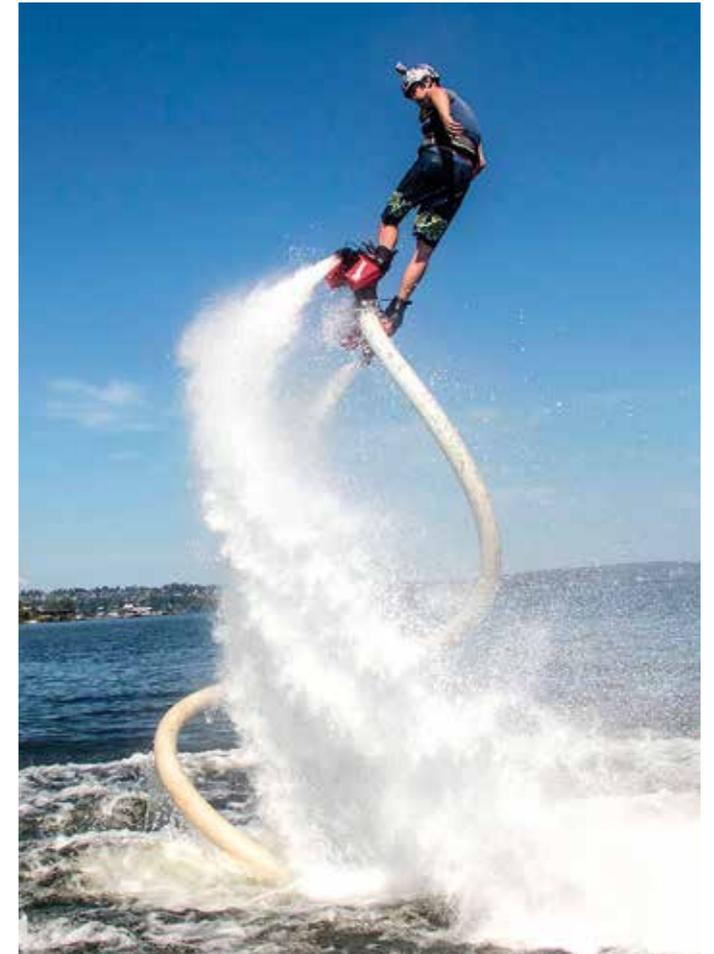
This page: Who says you can't fly over water? With a water jet-powered board on your feet, you can

home since the mid 1980s. Each building is a work of abstract art with materials coming from the family's extensive travels or washed up flotsam and jetsam. If you crave peace and tranquillity, check into Haggerstone for an island-style glamping getaway.

Lizard Island, on the other hand, is luxurious in the conventional sense. At least it will be when it eventually reopens, post-restoration. Located on the outer barrier reef with nothing but open ocean all the way to the horizon, the island is close to some of the best dive sites on the Great Barrier Reef, known as the Ribbon Reefs.

Alternatively, there's a campsite tucked away near the walking track to Cooks Look on the beach at Watsons Bay. Here you can pitch your tent for about the same price as a cup of coffee. In fact, there are a number of islands within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park where campers are welcome to bed down. Dunk Island is one of the better ones, but you could also pitch a tent at Snapper, Fitzroy or the Barnard Islands.

If you're short on time, launch a kayak from the beach at Palm Cove and paddle out to tiny Haystack Island. Separated by shallow reef from Double Island, this is a fabulous place to spot turtles who forage for food on the reef at high tide. If you're feeling particularly energetic you



could paddle all the way around Double Island in less than one hour.

#5 Fly away There are few activities quite as thrilling as getting airborne, particularly if your chosen craft is a hot air balloon. Balloons launch pre-dawn from farmland near Mareeba on the Atherton Tablelands, which are approximately 800m above sea level and are known for their crisp clean air and surprisingly cool temperatures. Drifting across rolling hills and state forests, don't be surprised to see kangaroos bounding through the bush below or locals sitting on their back step taking in the early morning.

Taking off in a helicopter joy ride over the Great Barrier Reef is spectacular even on a bad day, as the jigsaw pieces of the reef stretch out below you. If

you're visiting between June and September you're in for a real treat. Humpback whales migrate north from the Antarctic Ocean and are often spotted in the tropical waters of the Coral Sea.

For something faster paced and absolutely thrilling, how about strapping a water jet-powered board to your feet and launching into flight? Flyboarders elevate themselves up to 15m above the sea surface using the sort of balancing skills akin to that of skate- and- snow-boarding. Flights last from 30 to 60 minutes, with full instruction. So confident are they that anyone can master the technique, Flyboard Cairns offers a money back guarantee to beginners if they're not up and flying on their first attempt.

 SilkAir flies three times weekly between Singapore and Cairns

HOT AIR BALLOON CAIRNS