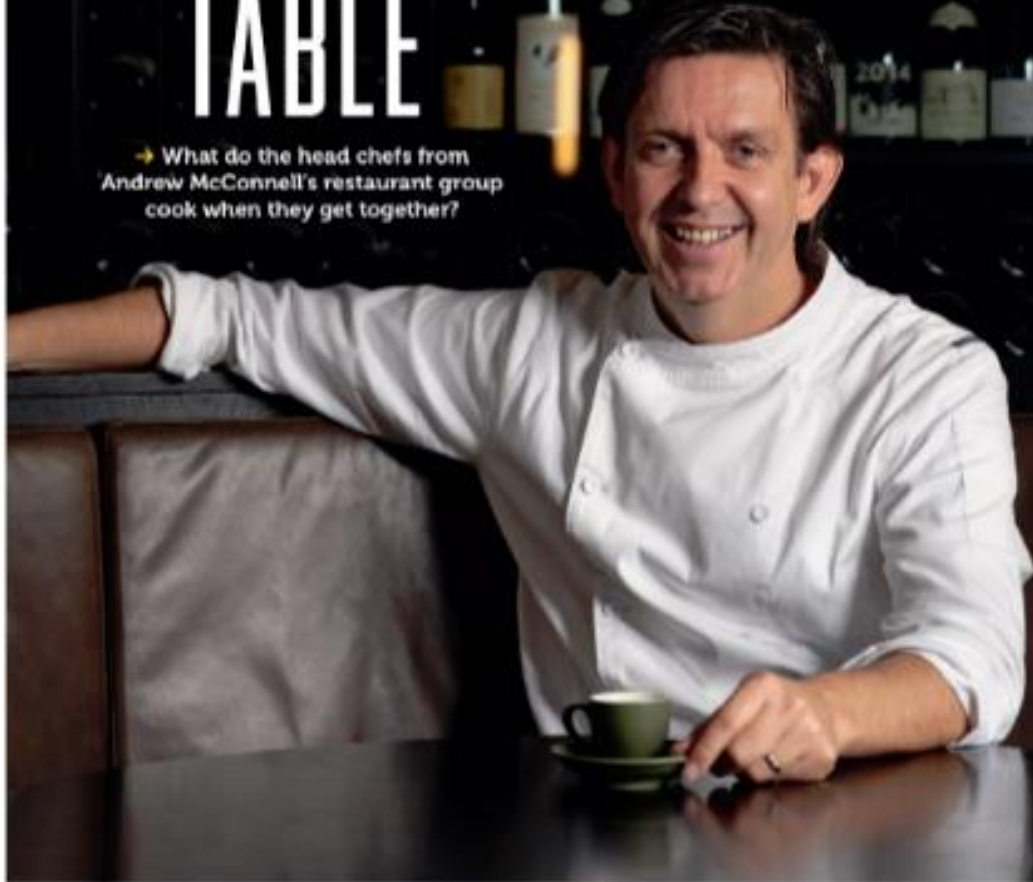


CHEFS' TABLE

→ What do the head chefs from Andrew McConnell's restaurant group cook when they get together?



SHINE A LIGHT
A road trip staying at Victoria's historic lighthouses

WEEKEND WARRIORS
Two different travellers take on Cairns

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL
The new trend for off-grid, unplugged holidays



DESTINATION CAIRNS



FIONA
is a Cairns-based travel writer who is on a fitness bent in her North Queensland home



WEEKEND WARRIORS

ONE DESTINATION, TWO DIFFERENT ADVENTURES
FUN VS FITNESS



LISA
is Fiona's friend who is foregoing the fitness for some fun in the sun





HIKING THE RED ARROW TRAIL

Starting the weekend with some foot-powered elevation, I step it out on the Red Arrow trail on Mount Whitfield, one of four well-known hiking trails a few minutes from downtown Cairns. It takes about an hour to complete the circuit, and I finish my walk with a wander down the boardwalk at nearby Centenary Lakes.



FIONA
starts with a hike, grabs lunch in nature and does some laps



ELLIS BEACH SWIM

Driving north, I dive into the Coral Sea at Ellis Beach, tasting the salt on my lips from tropical waters that wash over the Great Barrier Reef, savouring North Queensland's laidback vibe on this perfect palm-fringed beach. With the top down and the wind in our hair we leave the city behind after Ellis Beach and unleash the throbbing, guttural grunt of our Ruby Red GT V8 Mustang Convertible.



LUNCH AT THALA BEACH

The Mustang's tyres grip the asphalt as we twist and turn through the gracious curves of the Great Barrier Reef Drive, bound for Thala Beach Nature Reserve and lunch high among the treetops at Osprey's Restaurant (thalabeach.com.au).



SWIMMING LAPS AT RILEY HOTEL

Returning to Cairns and the city's newest five-star hotel, Riley by Crystalbrook Collection (crystalbrookcollection.com), the first thing I do is knock out a dozen laps in the 25-metre lap pool section of the gigantic lagoon-style swimming pool. The alluring pool forms the focal point of the U-shaped hotel and is dotted with sun lounges shaded by palm trees. I find one with my name on it and settle in for some sun worshipping.



CYCLING THE ESPLANADE

Tossing some tights over my still-wet bikini, I grab one of the pedal-powered cruiser-style bicycles and cycle The Esplanade, dodging fitness junkies working up a sweat at exercise stations, beach volleyball, a rock-climbing wall and some tennis courts. Others are cooling down in The Lagoon while kids clamber over public artworks paying homage to the Great Barrier Reef.



DINNER AT PAPER CRANE

After taking in the sunset at rooftop bar Rocco, we take a table on the patio at Paper Crane. As chefs whip up an Asian-fusion storm in the open kitchen we feast on share plates of sizzling Korean beef, Indian chicken curry, spicy Isaan calamari and vegetable gyoza.



FRIDAY

10:00

12:00

13:00

15:00

17:00

19:00



LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL

And the fun begins. The fabulous folk from Cairns Luxury Car Hire (cairnsluxurycarhire.com.au) drop our car off at Riley, the hotel we'll be checking into later today. And what a beauty she is! Ruby is her name, but she ain't no kitten. This GT V8 Mustang Convertible has the roar of a lion and turns heads wherever it goes.



PARAGLIDERS AT REX LOOKOUT

There's no better feeling than having the top down and the wind in your hair as we wind our way north along the stunning ocean road, Great Barrier Reef to our right, World Heritage-listed rainforest to our left. En route, we make a stop at Rex Lookout to take in the stunning coastal views and paragliders whooshing above.



THALA LUNCH

Only 10 minutes from Port Douglas we arrive at the stunning Thala Beach Nature Reserve. Nestled in the bush, Thala is a unique eco resort with a private beach, and is listed by *National Geographic* as one of the Unique Lodges of the World. It's an equally fabulous place to just drop in and enjoy lunch, dinner, or a cocktail or two.



A LITTLE SLICE OF LUXURY

If walking into Cairns' newest five-star resort and receiving a very warm welcome wasn't impressive enough, then the view on checking into our room would definitely do the trick. With a balcony overlooking the impressive 1,000-square-metre swimming lagoon and man-made beach below, and views out to the Coral Sea, I find myself asking: can we stay another night?



SUNSET COCKTAILS AT ROCCO

As amazing as our room view is, an even better one awaits upstairs – sunset cocktails at Rocco, Cairns' highest rooftop bar and restaurant. There's a range of cocktails to choose from, but "Puckerup" is the winner: Tablelands honey, freshly squeezed citrus, 666 Pure Vodka and pomegranate garnished with an aromatic rose blossom spritz and a dehydrated rose petal.



DINNER AT PAPER CRANE

As soon as I walk into the restaurant, the aromas drifting out of the kitchen hit me and I know it's going to be a difficult choice as to what to eat. I'm not disappointed. The menu is Asian-inspired, but takes advantage of tropical Queensland's fresh produce.

LISA
hires a Mustang, hits a five-star resort and has sunset cocktails

**PARADISE AROUND THE ESPLANADE**

Hundreds of thousands of runners hit the pavement every Sunday morning at Plateau Squares.com.au in 20 countries, and I join the 300-odd Cairns Plateauers for a casual five-kilometre race around The Esplanade. The sun runs over Henry Day causing palm-frond shadows. Keeping things raw and simple, I build my two-smoothie-a-Cairns diet: mango, lime, coconut milk and banana.



FRAN
hits the pavement,
hits the road
and grabs
Devonshire tea.

**WILSON WILLIAMS
EATS UP**

The lush rolling hills of Atherton tablelands are known as the food bowl of North Queensland. With a dairy industry at the top of its game, decadently rich milk comes with a dense layer of cream on top; biodynamic yoghurts are chemical-free and chocolates are hand-made from locally grown cacao. Forget the diet – this stuff is so good not to gurgle.

**REVERENDS: SEA AT LAGO BARBON**

Lake-Barbone Tishuan Lakebarbone.com.au on the edge of a crater lake is famous for Devonshire Tea and scones topped with dollops of local cream (eggs) and house-made jam. It'd be rude not to drop into the 10-year-old restaurant before driving the winding switchbacks of the Gillies Highway, descending 800 metres to sea level as we reach Cairns.

**CONQUERING THE FLETCHER ISLAND**

Replacing the convertible with a boat, now we head to Fletcher Island (fletcherisland.com), a lush, mountainous tropical island a half-hour boat ride away and check into a beachfront cabin. Surrounded by coral reef, the island offers a sunbathing space to the Great Barrier Reef, and we're right in it. As it's marine sangee sunrise, I dip into a stringer suit before snorkelling around Shark Fin Bay (as scary as it sounds – it's named after a fin-shaped boulder on the beach).

**CONQUERING AN UNCLE'S BOAT**

Foley's Bar is a state-of-the-art flashback to the 80s, with its pub food menu, bar-style service and a dancefloor taking centre stage as an ageing rocker thumps his electric guitar. But we're not here to dance – we're here to kick back and enjoy the view. Foley's is all about its dreamy beachfront location with ocean and mainland mountain views, framed by palm trees.

**BURGER AT JAPANESE**

By the time we sit down for dinner on the patio at waterfront Apple Restaurant, the rain has been a spritz of citrus soufflé and scallop croquette for me. It's up for the soufflé followed by North Queensland lamb Shank on a bed of creamy smoked eggplant. A glass of beer saw washes it down nicely as darkness descends over the tropics.



SATURDAY

08:00

10:30

12:00

14:00

17:30

20:00

**ELITE DAY SPA**

The perfect start to a day – after a delicious breakfast – think fresh locally sourced produce with wholesome options that soothe the sun-baked, it's a very short walk to Henry Day Spa, where I experience one of the most amazing manicures – a pamper session like no other! I lay down, relaxing with soothing eye-covers and listening to soft music while my arms, hands and nails were musician-hissed.

**GRANITE GRUB**

Pamper session finished and feeling like a queen, it's road-rapping time. You can't have a set of wheels like Ruby and not hit the open roads to truly enjoy that sexy V8 power! Our stop, Granite Garage (granitegarage.com.au), a privately owned motor park, about 12 kilometres from Mareeba and a short drive off the main highway. There are few places where you can get up close and personal with super-rare rock wallabies in the wild and hand-feeding them.

**HISTORIC PLEASANTON HOTEL**

First stop is the historic Pleasonton Hotel, a short drive from the quiet country town of Yungaburra, a tranquil and picturesque village situated 170 metres above sea level. The rustic hotel was nearly destroyed during Cyclone Larry, but fortunately it was able to be restored.

**GRANDY BOAT, WILD ISLAND**

Just a quick road trip today as we make our way down the winding Gillies mountain range and back to Cairns. All good things must come to an end, and it's now time to say goodbye to our Ruby Red Mustang and enjoy the wind-in-hair, sun-on-skin 45-minute boat ride to Fletcher Island.

**CRUISE TIME**

A tropical island stay isn't quite complete without relaxing by the ocean pool and a refreshing dip (included for most guests) while enjoying a refreshing cocktail from the turn-up pool bar.

**CONQUERING**

With so many activities available on Fletcher Island, you have the choice of being super active or chilled out and relaxed. Regardless of which option you choose, the perfect way to endary day on a tropical island is with bubbles in hand while watching the sunset over the glittering Coral Sea and the mountains on the mainland.

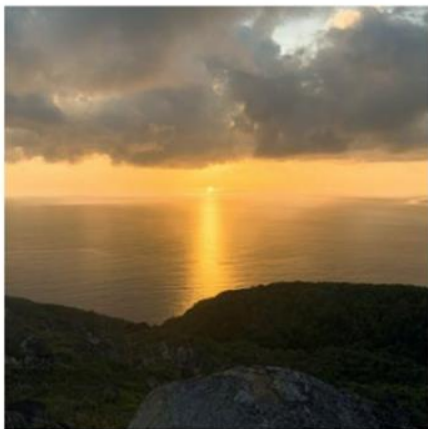
LESA

starts with a spa treatment, takes in some history and goes to Fletcher Island.



FITZROY ISLAND SUMMIT HIKE

Fitzroy Island has a network of hiking trails, and the best one for viewing the sunrise is the Summit Trail, which takes about 30 minutes from our cabin to the lookout on the island's highest point. The reward for the sweat is a spectacular 360-degree view of the sea and mountains surrounding Cairns. I arrive in time to see a big ball of orange rising above the horizon, casting a warm glow across the Coral Sea.



FIONA
watches sunrise, heads to one of the country's best beaches and has dinner at an aquarium



NUDEY BEACH SNORKEL

A serial overachiever on Australia's best beaches lists, Nudey Beach is bookended by granite boulders that create intimate coves. I don a snorkel and mask, poke around the rocks and watch the crabs scurry for cover as I invade their territory. Don't be confused by the name – Nudey Beach is not "clothing optional". Swimmers are definitely required!



PUBLIC ART WALK AROUND CAIRNS

Returning to Cairns with a sun-kissed glow, I lace up my walking shoes for a self-guided tour of the Sea Walls Artists for Oceans project that sees carparks and bland concrete walls transformed across the city. My favourite is the beguiling multi-coloured *Enigmatic Emanations* oversized mural by artist Vans The Omega (@vanstheomega), inspired by scuba diving adventures on the Great Barrier Reef.



ROPES CHALLENGE AND ZIPLINING AT CAIRNS ZOOM

For a thrill, I strap myself into a harness and clamber through a challenging ropes course before ziplining over the snapping chops of star attraction Goliath, a 4.5-metre saltwater crocodile at Cairns ZOOM & Wildlife Dome (cairnszoom.com.au). I'm relieved to swing past to solid ground.



CAIRNS AQUARIUM TURTLE REHAB HOSPITAL

The pace is a little more serene at the Cairns Aquarium (cairnsaquarium.com.au) and I'm mesmerised by jellyfish that seem to dance in the currents, clownfish that dart in and out of anemones and iridescent spotted rays that glide gracefully across the sand. The Turtle Rehab Centre is home to green sea turtle Midori, who was brought in suffering from starvation.



DINNER AT DUNDEE'S AT THE CAIRNS AQUARIUM

With the tropical aquarium casting a deep, sea-tinged glow over our table, it seems a little unfair to be tucking into cider-battered prawns along with a sand crab and avocado tart as marine critters look on. Dining at Cairns' newest restaurant, Dundee's at the Cairns Aquarium, I guiltily avoid eye contact with a lonesome adorable teeny pink snapper eyeballing me and wolf it all down eagerly.



SUNDAY

09:00

11:00

12:00

14:00

16:00

19:00



TURTLE HUNTING

Not far from the shoreline turtles pop their little heads up and many swim among the snorkellers, so I hire a kayak and go for a paddle to see if I can spot one up close. Just as awesome as spotting a little turtle popping its head up out of the water is glancing back to shore at the tropical, palm-tree-lined beach.



CAIRNS TURTLE REHABILITATION CENTRE

I drop into the Cairns Turtle Rehabilitation Centre (cairnsturtlehab.org.au) to see first-hand the amazing work the volunteers are doing rehabilitating sea turtles that have been found sick or injured. The Great Barrier Reef is home to six of the world's seven species of marine turtles, and this non-for-profit organisation is dedicated not only to their rehabilitation and release, but also public education on man-created threats the turtles face.



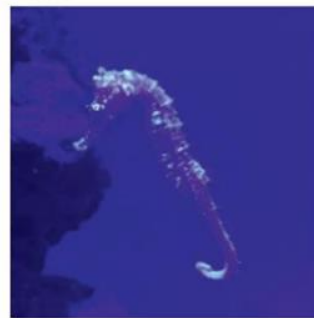
FROM THE WATER TO THE AIR

When I get the opportunity to squeeze a quick 30-minute scenic helicopter ride into my itinerary with Nautilus Aviation (nautilusaviation.com.au) after returning from Fitzroy Island, I jump at the chance. There's nothing like a front-seat aerial view over the Great Barrier Reef.



ZOOM ZOOM

An ATV mightn't be as fast as a helicopter, but boy oh boy, it's just as much fun. What a thrill to zoom around the rainforest, by a billabong and through the cane fields with fabulous mountain views ahead! Blazing Saddles (blazingsaddles.com.au) has it all, and if ATV-ing isn't your thing, you can jump on a horse instead.



HORSING ABOUT

Not having had the opportunity to dive while at Fitzroy Island, I wanted to visit the Cairns Aquarium to check out all the amazing critters that live beneath the waves on the Great Barrier Reef. Imagine my surprise when I come across a horse bobbing around in the water...



CROCODILE DUNDEE

With a name like Dundee's, it just seems fitting to order an entrée of crocodile spring rolls. Dundee's is well-known in Cairns, and we were excited to be one of the first to dine at their newly opened restaurant, Dundee's at the Cairns Aquarium.



LISA

checks in with some turtles, takes a helicopter ride and ends with dinner at Dundee's

FANCY AN ADVENTURE?
If you want to be one of our Weekend Warriors, get in touch.
tigertales@citrusmedia.com.au