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# Weekend Getaway to Magnetic Island, Queensland

by Fiona Harper

Weekend Getaway to Magnetic Island, Queensland



**A 25 minute ferry trip from Townsville in north Queensland, Magnetic Island is a laid back tropical island that invites visitors to chill out and relax.**



Talented British navigator and all round legendary explorer Captain Cook made a rare error of judgement when he named Magnetic Island in the 1770s. Noticing that his compass fluctuated wildly he unfairly blamed it on the pretty boulder-strewn island off the port bow. His observation was later proven wrong as there is no magnetic anomaly, but it was too late, the name remained.

Known affectionately as Maggie, or simply the Rock, by the 3,000-odd residents (trust me, some of them are definitely odd, I lived there for four years!), the little continental island is actually a suburb of Townsville 8 km northeast of the big island of Australia. Maggie seduced me with her laid back old fashioned kind of charm, much as it did for many locals who came for a holiday and never left.

Which is the flipside if you're looking for a weekend getaway of fine dining, late night dancing (even late night dining), or entertainment on tap. Maggie is not that kind of place. At most restaurants if you haven't ordered your meal by 7.30 you're likely to go hungry. Similarly if you're accustomed to snappy, perfectly groomed wait staff, room service, or even a decent coffee, you've probably come to the wrong place.

That's not how Maggie is. While her more famous cousins to the south, like Hamilton or Hayman Island have grown up, graduated and gone on to flourishing careers. Maggie took a

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and admire cobalt blue butterflies, koalas supine in the trees above, wallabies grazing on grass, she leaves her unlocked doors open and invites you in, laying out cold beers and deck chairs for added measure.

She couldn't get any more relaxed if she tried. Though there is some spiffy infrastructure in place to get you there (daily car and passenger ferry) and get you around (buses and hire cars the size of washing machines), after that you're pretty much on your own.



Feeding rock wallabies on the island

Predominantly 'green space' and national park, wildlife rules the road. Oh there are the usual speed signs (max 60 km) but it's mostly wallabies and bush stone curlews who control traffic flow causing minor holdups if they're particularly lethargic. A while back a koala waddled into the Marlin

Bar at the pub on Horseshoe Bay's beachfront (whose shout I wonder?) but usually they keep a pretty low profile. If you take a stroll up to the WW2 ruins on the Forts Walk you'll likely see some asleep in the fork of a eucalypt. If you really can't be bothered lacing up your hiking shoes, visit Bungalow Bay Koala Village for a Champagne Bush Tucker breakfast amongst the koalas, cockatoos, crocodiles and carpet python snakes. Park rangers are on hand to keep the wildlife under control, and if you're feeling brave, you can even handle a snake and crocodile or cuddle a koala.

If reptiles don't get your heart pumping, a guided excursion with Adrenalin Jet ski Tours is sure to. Astride a powerful luxury jet ski, owner/operator Peter Smith knows where turtles and dugongs hang out: it's not all about speed, there is time to stop, wait for wildlife to surface while also admiring the view of Maggie from the sea.

The grass beneath the coconut palms of Horseshoe Bay (with free public BBQ's) is a popular gathering spot at sunset. Pick up fish and chips or bring your own picnic and soak up the balmy tropical vibe. But once the sun disappears, multi award winning Stagedoor Theatre Restaurant is one of the island's most popular attractions. Starring Bernadette Smith and Phil Stephens (also the Executive Chef), Stage Door performs a revolving door of fun-filled song and dance shows throughout the year. It's a bit daggy in a north Queensland kind of way but it's also hysterically funny in a bawdy, disorderly sort of way. A bit like Maggie herself really.



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