

Queensland's Best Road Trip – Gold Coast to Cairns | Skyscanner Australia

Looking for a sun-kissed Queensland road trip that's high on fun-filled adventure and low on big city stress? Drive from the Gold Coast to Cairns via Brisbane and the Whitsunday Islands: this route is blessed with year round sunshine, Great Barrier Reef islands, mountain ranges and World Heritage tropical rainforest (yes Daintree we're looking at you!). Hire a car and drive from Brisbane to Cairns, arguably Australia's best road trip, with [Skyscanner Australia's Queensland road trip guide](#).



Road trip destination: Gold Coast

Famous for its sun-kissed surf beach that starts at Coolangatta and ends at the southern tip of South Stradbroke Island, the Gold Coast is all about sun, sand and sea. Once you've topped up your suntan and had your beach fix, head inland to the hinterland where you'll find national parks along with high country hippy-style hamlets like Tambourine Mountain.

But don't leave the Gold Coast without visiting at least one of the city's world famous theme parks. SeaWorld is great for animal lovers, Movie World is for film buffs and thrill seekers while Dream World offers maximum adrenalin rushes for thrill seekers. Then there's WetnWild Water World, WhiteWater World and the Australian Outback Spectacular for an entertaining insight into Australia's outback history.

Read More: [10 Must Take Gold Coast Photos](#)

Where to stay at the Gold Coast

Budget: [Main Beach Tourist Park](#) has a fabulous location with shady sites with ensuite and villas sleeping up to six people. Enjoy the soundtrack of ocean waves rolling onto Main Beach just across the road.

Mid Range: The first thing you'll notice long before you arrive at the Gold Coast are its towering apartment buildings – there's a gazillion of them! [Alpha Sovereign Hotel](#) is a reliable good choice for central location near the beach, light rail transport and easy walking distance to Surfers Paradise, Tedder Ave and the Broadwater.

Luxury: The Gold Coast has no shortage of luxury hotels for rest and rejuvenation: try [Soul Surfers Paradise](#) or [Palazzo Versace](#) for guaranteed elegance



Where to eat at the Gold Coast

Tedder Avenue, Main Beach is one of the Gold Coast's prettiest dining strips with restaurants, cafes, bakeries and bars lining both sides of the street. If you can't find something to suit your fancy here you're really not trying. Domani's is a casual Italian eatery with some terrific seafood delights while Thai Eatery does a roaring trade in Asian cuisine (it's kid-friendly too).

Southport Yacht Club is great for people watching amongst the boating fraternity while Southport Surf Life Saving Club has one of the best locations on the coast – the bistro style menu is pretty good too!

Hot tips for the Gold Coast

Visit Cedar Creek Falls on Tambourine Mountain to see a waterfall inside a cave

and Lamington National Park for its tall timbered forest and network of walking trails.

Party goers head to Surfers Paradise for its lively club, bar and restaurant scene, or for a more sophisticated night out try Burleigh Heads for its beachfront entertainment strip.

Road trip destination: Brisbane

The Sunshine State's capital city, Brisbane was once considered the unsophisticated cousin of Sydney and Melbourne. No longer. Brisbane has well and truly grown up into a cultured capital who wears who sunny personality proudly. Get your cultural fix at the Queensland Art Gallery & Gallery of Modern Art, known simply as GoMa, walk or ride the pathways along the Brisbane River or take a day trip to North Stradbroke Island.

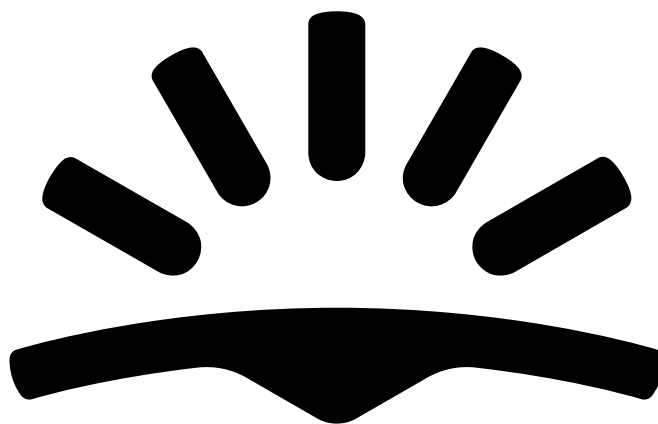
Read More: [Top 10 free things to do in Brisbane](#)

Where to Stay in Brisbane

Budget: [Ibis Styles Elizabeth Street](#) is a budget hotel that looks anything but cheap. Quirky design and inventive use of colour make the Ibis a great choice in a central downtown location

Mid Range: [Spicers Balfour Hotel](#) is a gorgeous boutique hotel that proudly showcases its 1800's workers cottage roots, located in inner-city New Farm,

Luxury: [W Hotel Brisbane](#) is Brisbane's newest luxury hotel, incorporating Queensland style (think Aussie BBQ beside the pool) with a chic, elegant vibe.



Where to eat in Brisbane

E'cco Bistro has been a poorly kept secret amongst Brisbanites for 20 years – go there for delicious indoor/outdoor dining in Newstead. Want to spoil yourself?

Stokehouse Q on the Brisbane River at South Bank won't disappoint!

Hot tips for Brisbane

Brisbane offers loads of daytrips within an easy drive an hour or two north, south or west of the city. Visit Mt Tamborine for national park hiking trails followed by wineries and gourmet providers for relaxed sustenance after outdoor adventures. Maleny and Montville in the Blackhall Ranges are great for picking up unique hand-crafted gifts and souvenirs or for brushing up on culinary skills in the many cooking schools.

Road trip destination: the Whitsundays

With over 70 islands to explore, Airlie Beach is the jumping off point for the Whitsunday Islands. A longtime backpacker hotspot, these days Airlie caters to travellers from budget through to luxury and everything in between.

Head out to the outer Great Barrier Reef with the crew from Explore Group for a terrific opportunity to explore two pristine reef sites – if you're visiting during humpback whale season you might see these magnificent creatures up close!

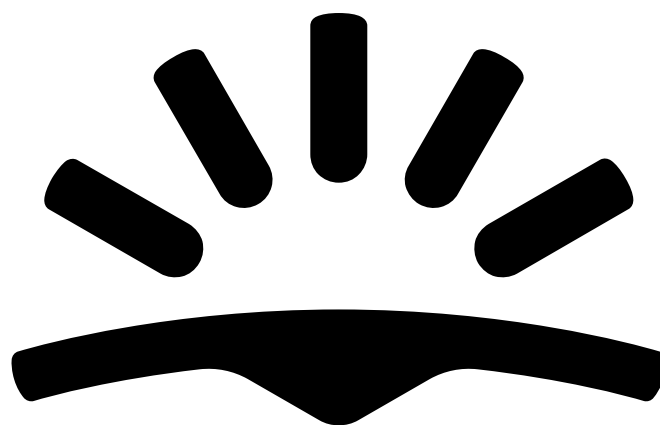
Read More: [Whitsunday Island for first timers](#)

Where to Stay in the Whitsundays

Budget: [Cape Hillsborough Tourist Park](#) near Mackay is on the beach at Cape Hillsborough. The beach is famous for the wallabies and kangaroos that visit the beach each morning at sunrise. Join a Sunrise with the Wallabies Tour to beat the crowds and get guaranteed front row position to photograph wild wallabies on the beach.

Mid range: High on the hill overlooking Airlie Beach, Pioneer Bay and the Whitsunday Islands, [Whitsundays Rainforest Retreat](#) is an affordable modern lodge-style hotel with ensuite rooms leading off central communal lounge/kitchen/dining areas – a splendid option for social travellers!

Luxury: Take a Ride to Paradise two night tour with [Red Cat Adventures](#) to enjoy a decadent stay at Paradise Cove Resort, a bespoke retreat on the beachfront in a secluded bay north of Airlie Beach.



Where to Eat in the Whitsundays

After visiting Cape Hillsborough to view the wallabies at sunrise pop into the Old Station Tea House for a divine breakfast on the shady deck adjacent to the hundred-year-old classic timber-cladded railway station.

In Airlie Beach, Fish Divine lives it up to its name with divine seafood, plus their Rum Bar is famous for its mojitos. A short drive north west of Airlie Beach, Northerlies Bar and Grill is a fabulous new kid on the block with enviable view looking across the ocean towards Airlie.

Hot Tips for the Whitsundays

A perennial favourite family island resort, Daydream Island is set to re-open by the end of 2018 after a massive rebuild and revamp. Their star attraction Living Reef has been totally rebuilt and looks set to be a game-changer for visitors keen to learn about coral reefs and marine creatures that inhabit the Great Barrier Reef.

Road trip destination: Cairns

The relaxed coastal city of Cairns in Tropical North Queensland is the end of the line for your Queensland road trip. From Cairns you can explore the Great Barrier Reef, Fitzroy and Green Islands, the Daintree Rainforest and the 'food bowl' high country of the Atherton Tablelands.

Read More: [Fitzroy Island – rainforest to reef on a budget](#)

Where to Stay in Cairns

Budget: [Cairns Coconut Holiday Resort](#) is a caravan and camping park on steroids. With a fabulous water park playground, lagoon swimming pool, campers kitchen, spa villas and cabins, Coconuts caters equally well for families

as it does for budget road tripper couples.

Mid Range: [Paradise Palms](#) is a resort style hotel at the base of forest-clad ranges adjacent to the 18 hole Paradise Palms Golf Club in the northern beaches suburbs – great for active families and couples!

Luxury: A longtime staple in the Cairns luxury hotel market, [Pullman Cairns International Hotel](#) evokes the classic style of Raffles Singapore – it's all white with towering walls of timber framed glass. Crystalbrook Collection is opening new luxury hotel Riley in late 2018 with another two, Bailey and Flynn opening in 2019.



Rated as Australia's Best Beach in 2017 by 101 Best Beaches, it's hard to argue. This is Nudey Beach on Fitzroy Island, just off the Queensland coast from Cairns.

Where to Eat in Cairns

Cairns waterfront has a gazillion restaurants, bars and cafes -noteworthy choices are Salthouse and Dundees and the Raw Prawn. For simple, delicious seafood in a quirky setting, head to the Prawn Star, a fishing trawler permanently moored at Cairns Marlin Marina

Hot tips for Cairns

The Esplanade Lagoon is Cairns best free hangout joint with is lagoon pool, shady parklands and free daily activities like Zumba, and aqua aerobic classes, rock climbing, beach volleyball and skate park.

Palm Cove is home to Cairns best beaches and it's beachfront alfresco restaurants are a terrific spot for a leisurely breakfast or lunch too!

Is the tropical heat too much for you? Drive one hour west to the Atherton Tablelands where, at almost 1,000m above sea level, rainforest, waterfalls, hiking trails (combine all three on the Windin Falls Hike!) and cute country towns amidst rolling hills and dairy country await.