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5 Must-Dos: Cairns

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December 1, 2013

The essential quick guide for discerning travellers
BY FIONA HARPER

1. LUXURIOUS STAYS



Slow down at eco-friendly wilderness resort, [Thala Beach Lodge](#), an hour's drive away from the city. Hole up in its freestanding bungalows, mostly concealed behind eucalypts that offer privacy without impeding views of the Coral Sea. Take in the sounds and smells of the Australian bush that waft through their French doors. Join the hotel's unique Coconut Odyssey tour in which you'll get to enjoy the flesh and juice of the coconut; you'll also learn to plait its fibrous husk to make ropes, and intertwine fronds to make a thatched roof.

If you prefer to be by the marina, try [Shangri-La Hotel](#) (above) or [The Pullman Cairns International](#).

2. GOOD GRUB



You can't visit Cairns without trying an Aussie pie. Meldrum's Pies in Paradise (94 Grafton Street, Tel: 61 7 4054 8222) has an extensive menu including several award winners. Try the steak-chilli

<http://www.silverkris.com/destinations/5-must-dos/5-must-dos-cairns>

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A 50-minute drive from the city takes you to [Flames of the Forest](#) (above). Against a dramatically-lit backdrop of towering trees, you'll enjoy a superb dinner that may include kangaroo loin carpaccio. On Tuesday and Thursday nights, two indigenous brothers share stories of cultural traditions and youthful mischief growing up in the surrounding forest.

3. TRADITIONS OF THE RAINFOREST

[Mossman Gorge](#), 77km north of Cairns, is located in the World-Heritage-listed Daintree Rainforest – the oldest surviving rainforest on the planet. Draped in moss in every hue of green, the gorge plunges into the gin clear waters of the Mossman River. Join a guide from the Kuku Yalanji tribe – indigenous inhabitants who have lived in the forest for 50,000 years. The tour includes a dance performance on sacred ground, and a traditional smoking ceremony – a spiritual cleansing ritual in which eucalypt branches are held over an open fire before being lightly slapped across visitors' shoulders.

This is followed by billy tea (tea boiled in a pot over an open fire that absorbs burning wood aromas) and a damper (similar to a scone) served in the forest. Bring along your swimmers for a dip in the river.

4. DIVE IN



No visit to Cairns would be complete without seeing the Great Barrier Reef. [Green Island](#) (above) is the closest base from Cairns to view the reef, which also means it can get a little crowded. Avoid other groups by diving or snorkelling with a company like [Ocean Free](#) that has a reef mooring only its guests can use. You'll also get to sail on its traditional schooner. For the most pristine coral and extraordinary marine life, you'll need to venture well offshore. [Coral Princess Cruises](#) takes small groups of divers to the outer reef on liveaboards.

If you can't swim – or don't want to get your hair wet – explore the reef with [Seawalker](#). You'll don a helmet attached to an air source, and have a guide to assist you.

5. BALLOONING AT DAWN

The best way to see the [Atherton Tablelands](#), also known as the Cairns Highlands, is to float silently above the Mareeba Valley in a [hot air balloon](#). You'll need to rise well before dawn, but a tropical sunrise seen aloft, with views of islands and the Great Barrier Reef, is one you're unlikely to forget. Drifting low enough to hear roosters crow, you're also likely to see kangaroos thumping through the bush below. After that aerial introduction, take time to visit the area's dairy farms, exotic fruit orchards, coffee plantations and Australia's only cocoa grower [Daintree Estates](#).

Fast facts

- CURRENCY

Australian Dollar

- VISA

Requirements vary. Visit immi.gov.au/visawizard for more information.

- BEST TIME TO VISIT

During the drier (winter) season from May to October, daytime temperatures average in the mid 20s. The wet (summer) season from December to March sees hot and humid weather with frequent rain and cyclones.

- HOW TO GET THERE

Singapore Airlines flies 3 times daily from Singapore to Brisbane, from where you can catch a connecting flight to Cairns.

- MORE INFORMATION

www.cairns-greatbarrierreef.org.au

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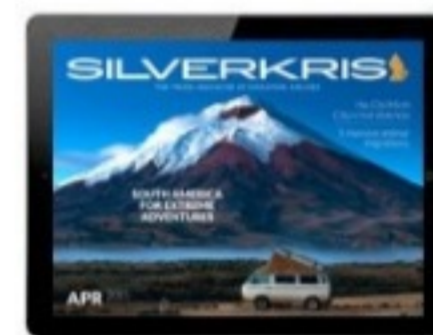


Myanmar by Angie Chew

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