



72 HOURS IN CAIRNS

BY FIONA HARPER

What to see, where to go and where to stay in the tropical Queensland city.

PICTURES: TOURISM TROPICAL NORTH QUEENSLAND



The tropical city of Cairns is well known as the gateway to splendid World Heritage icons, the Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics Rainforest. But there is so much more to this tropical city, which is one of Air Niugini's major international destinations.

We're talking uber-cool rooftop bars that make the most of balmy tropical evenings, wildlife you won't see anywhere else, hiking and mountain bike trails that rival the world's best, along with Indigenous cultural tours. Did we mention you can tuck into fresh caught seafood on an authentic fishing boat?

DAY ONE EVENING

After arriving at Cairns International Airport, check into your hotel and visit the Cairns Esplanade and adjacent boardwalk for alfresco dining at its best. This popular waterfront area is the city's beating heart, and it underwent a \$AUD28 million upgrade during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Extended dining areas spread out across pavements and are softened with lush vertical gardens to add to the already abundant landscaped parklands interwoven with pedestrian paths. The whole area has a lively vibe from dawn to well after dark.

Choose from elegant restaurants like Dundees on the Waterfront or Boatshed, pub-style eateries like Bavarian Beerhouse, or Rattle 'n Hum, Asian spiciness at Iyara by Sakare, or classic Italian at Villa Romana.

DAY TWO MORNING

Start your day with an early morning visit to Rusty's Markets to pick up road trip supplies like tropical fruits and vegetables, fresh-baked bread or pastries, deli items along with coffee and breakfast at one of the market cafes.

Hire a vehicle and take an Atherton Tablelands road trip circle route, taking the



Seafood dining on the Prawn Star in Cairns (main); the town's Esplanade stretches along the coast (above); fresh-baked treats from Rusty's Market (left).





Gillies Range Highway in one direction and the Kuranda Range Highway in the other to enjoy the very best of the high country west of Cairns.

Rolling hills dotted with dairy farms, orchards and plantations, tropical rainforest, quirky towns and crystal-clear crater lakes are just some of the attractions.

DAY TWO AFTERNOON

Don't miss the town of Yungaburra set on the leafy shores of Lake Tinaroo with its lively weekend markets, an historic hotel and the spectacular Curtain Fig Tree a few minutes out of town.

Look for Lumholtz tree kangaroos along the rainforest walk at Malanda or at Nerada Tea Plantation or spot brolga and magpie geese from the two-storey bird hide at Hasties Swamp. Keep an eye out, too, for southern cassowaries, which inhabit rainforest pockets on the Tablelands.

Hire a mountain bike to ride the Atherton Forest Mountain Bike Park, stretch your legs on lakeside trails at Lake Eacham or the Rainforest Circuit and linger over devonshire tea at Lake Barrine Teahouse.

DAY TWO EVENING

Take in the twilight high above the city at one of Cairns rooftop bars and restaurants. Oak & Vine's rooftop bar is the newest elevated kid on the block, with its views across the lagoon and beyond to the Coral Sea.

Order a cocktail from award-winning bartenders at Whiskey & Wine at Crystalbrook Flynn or claim an alfresco table and dine on tapas-style menus at Rocco at Crystalbrook Riley and savour the ocean and mountain views.

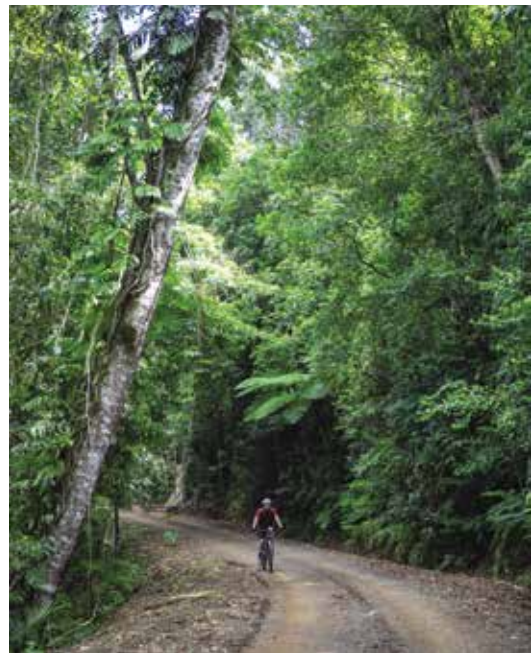
DAY THREE MORNING & AFTERNOON

See the Torres Strait where over 250 islands straddle the sea between Cape York and Papua New Guinea's south coast.

A day tour with Straits Experience has been created by traditional owners to showcase Indigenous people's intrinsic connection to country linking back 60,000 years.

The tour visits both Thursday (Waiben) and Horn (Ngarupai) Islands. A song and dance performance precedes an island-style feast

Outdoor drinks and food at Whiskey & Wine (top left); the Esplanade Lagoon (above); Torres Strait locals (top right); mountain biking through the forest (below).



featuring fresh-caught seafood and local delicacies. Take in the coastal scenery of Cape York Peninsula as you return to Cairns around dusk.

DAY THREE EVENING

After a full day touring the Torres Straits, visit the Cairns Night Markets and pick up souvenirs or gifts to take home, or relax with a massage at one of the pop-up massage stalls.

Sit down for a casual meal in the food court or wander along the waterfront to the city's quirkiest eatery Prawn Star, where you sit down to shared tables on a fishing trawler and dine on fresh-caught local seafood. It's not fine dining, nor is it fancy (in fact it can get quite messy as it's an authentic fishing boat after all), but it is great fun.

DAY FOUR MORNING

Rise early, put on your swimsuit or exercise gear and head to the Esplanade Lagoon for a gentle free exercise class amidst waterfront parklands. Choose from Aqua Zumba classes in the freeform swimming pool, or Zumba Fitness in the park, Sahaja yoga meditation

or pilates (afternoon sessions include rock bouldering and beach volleyball).

DAY FOUR AFTERNOON

Linger over lunch at some of the city's favourite eateries. Try Perrotta's at the Gallery (take time to wander through Cairns Regional Gallery next door), Salthouse for its marina-front location and snappy vibe, Hemingway's for house-brewed beer and a quality pub-style menu, or Ganbaranba if Japanese noodles and ramen take your fancy.

Later, if time permits before returning to Cairns Airport, take a guided walking tour with Cairns Urban Walking Tours. Choose from a Hipster & Street Art tour, which explores Cairns influential hipster culture, street art and vintage stores, or dive into the city's intriguing past on a Cairns History Tour which explores traditional owners' connection to country along with more recent European early settler history.

 **Air Niugini flies from Port Moresby to Cairns three times a week. See airniugini.com.pg.**

PLACES TO STAY

Cairns Colonial Club Resort
Budget resort style hotel – starting from about PGK300 (\$AUD126) per room per night. cairnscolonialclub.com.au

Doubletree by Hilton
Great location close to Esplanade – starting from about PGK460 (\$AUD188) per room per night. hilton.com/en/hotels/cnsdcdi-doubletree-cairns

Novotel Cairns Oasis
Superb lagoon-style swimming pool – starting from about PGK560 (\$AUD230) per room per night. novotelcairnresort.com.au

Crystalbrook Riley
Luxuriously modern with a sustainable ethos – rooms starting from about PGK720 \$AUD293, suites from about PGK1900 \$AUD788. crystalbrookcollection.com/riley

