

# Forged by *Nature*

Shaped by erosion and weathering over eons, Cape York and the rest of north Queensland are accustomed to big weather events. Life-giving rains enable the World Heritage-listed Wet Tropics Rainforest to flourish as cascading waterfalls and pristine rivers carve through mountains to shape a dramatic landscape.

WORDS Fiona Harper



North Queenslanders are a resilient bunch. They're accustomed to dealing with weather-generated challenges, then dusting themselves off and getting back to work. Cyclones and floods are part of life for residents of Cape York and north Queensland and if truth be known, this often-times challenging weather is part of the attraction for both residents and visitors. After all, the magnificent landscape that lures visitors – tropical rainforests fed by sparkling rivers and tumbling waterfalls carving gorges through mountains – was shaped by the force of nature over tens of thousands of years.

The most recent wet season, known locally as waterfall or green season, lived up to its name with plenty of life-giving rain. Tropical Cyclone Jasper triggered heavy rains and Cape York tour operators felt the impact when roads were closed, and visitors stayed away. But it didn't take long for the community to rally around and local councils jumped into action to repair damaged infrastructure.

You might think that this could have an impact to any travels in the region – and well it might – but the thing to remember is that Cape York is about 25 kilometres long and 19

Ron Haynes is a driver and tour guide for Outback Spirit and he is looking forward to guiding the first tours of the season in May. Despite uncertainty around some of the routes, he's confident that guests will have the adventure of a lifetime. "We're used to this," Haynes says, when asked if wet season weather may impact tours this year. "In a normal year, you might get some heavy rain and the Bloomfield Track may become difficult for a vehicle our size. It's not a dangerous road, but when it's wet you've got to know what you're doing. The drivers are all about keeping guests safe so they enjoy their experience."

Outback Spirit utilises custom-built 'go anywhere' 4WD Mercedes Benz coaches that are designed to go off-road in safety and comfort. The first section of the Bloomfield Track (Wujal Wujal) from Cape Tribulation to Emmagen Creek is usually accessible to 2WD vehicles, but it is strictly 4WD-only after the creek.

Traversing the Bloomfield Track is one of those legendary 'bucket-list' type adventures that lures travellers to Cape York. The route passes through the heart of World Heritage-listed Wet Tropics Rainforest with a visit to Bloomfield Falls, the Aboriginal community of Wujal Wujal, and the historic Lion's Den Hotel before reaching Cooktown (Gungahdie). Closed at the time of time of writing (which is usual during the wet season), works are underway to reopen the iconic coastal route as soon as

Other Cape York and north Queensland iconic attractions, such as Mossman Gorge (Manjal Dimbi) Cultural Centre and Daintree Village, reopened swiftly. In the worst case of timing imaginable, Che and Trent Mulley took over the restaurant lease at the riverside Daintree Village Hotel the same day that TC Jasper lobbed into town and dumped torrential rain on the rainforest village. But locals pitched in, helped clean up and the new restaurateurs fired up the grill and were soon feeding hordes of hungry locals.

Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre is an Indigenous owned eco-tourism centre on the banks of Mossman River, shaded by lush Daintree Rainforest. The centre reopened soon after the floods, opening up the southern section of Daintree National Park (Kaba Kada) to visitors. The centre is a drawcard, providing the opportunity for visitors to get up close and personal with the world's oldest rainforests on a Ngadiku Dreamtime Walk escorted by a Kuku Yalanji guide from the world's oldest living culture. If anyone knows how to bounce back from big weather events, it's the people who have walked this land for tens of thousands of years. It's this connection to country that is an integral part of all Outback Spirit adventures.

