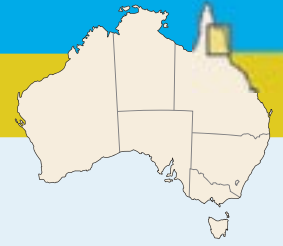


Your great Australian journey starts here

GREAT TROPICAL DRIVE



Length: 8–14 days Fly/drive option: Townsville, Cairns

Slow your pace to tropical speed as you explore the northern coast and hinterland between Townsville and Cooktown. With World Heritage rainforest, raging rivers, lava tubes, the country's highest single-drop waterfall and the Great Barrier Reef to explore, there's enough here to justify that restful afternoon or three on a palm-fringed beach.

Travel tip

The Bloomfield Track linking Cooktown and Cape Tribulation is accessible to 4WDs only, and is impassable after rain – check conditions at the visitor centre in Cooktown or Cairns before setting out. If travelling in a 2WD you will need to backtrack from Cooktown, reaching Mossman and Daintree from the south.

April–September is the main tourist season, with temperatures ranging from 15°C to 29°C. Summers can be uncomfortably hot and wet. Cairns averages more than 400 mm of rain a month in January, February and March, but every rain cloud has a silver lining, and this rain creates torrential flows at Wallaman Falls and the waterfalls of the Atherton Tableland.



Great Tropical Drive – Travel Times		
Route	Distance	Duration
Townsville – Charters Towers	133 km	1hrs 45mins
Charters Towers – Mareeba	456 km	6hrs
Mareeba – Cooktown	269 km	3hrs 40mins
Mareeba – Cairns	51 km	45mins
Cairns – Innisfail	86 km	1hr 10mins
Innisfail – Townsville	258 km	3hrs 30mins

Websites

- www.greattropicaldrive.com.au
- www.queenslandholidays.com.au
- www.tropicalaustralia.com.au

A to B Townsville to Charters Towers

Begin in Townsville (www.townsvilleholidays.info) and give yourself some time to enjoy this great city. Check out the world's largest living coral-reef aquarium at Reef HQ (www.reefhq.com.au), enjoy a sunrise view from Castle Hill, **dive** the wreck of the SS *Yongala*, one of Australia's great dive sites; or spend some restful time on Magnetic Island.

Take the Flinders Highway south out of the city, getting a taste for the gold rush by detouring further south to Ravenswood where, at White Blow Conservation Park, you can view the quartz outcrop.

Immerse yourself entirely in the golden days at Charters Towers (www.charterstowers.qld.gov.au). During the heady gold rush of the late 19th century, this was Queensland's second-largest town. Its history is still alive within the wealth of buildings and

attractions. At the former stock exchange you can relive the 'calling of the card' method of selling stocks and shares, while the climb to Towers Hill will reveal both the site of the town's first gold find and a **fantastic view** over the town.

In the open-air amphitheatre atop Towers Hill you can watch the nightly screening of the film *Ghosts after Dark*.

B to C Charters Towers to Undara Volcanic National Park

Turn north onto the Gregory Developmental Road from Charters Towers and head out through eucalypt woodlands to **Dalrymple National Park** (www.epa.qld.gov.au), set along the Burdekin River. Here you can view ancient lava flows or the scattered remnants of the Dalrymple township, one of Australia's first interior settlements.

Past Greenvale, the drive turns onto the Kennedy Highway where, about an hour north, you can head towards **Undara Volcanic National Park** (www.epa.qld.gov.au) and the world's longest system of lava tubes, eroded from ancient lava flows. A variety of tours are available into the lava tubes, visiting the rainforest pockets that have formed in sections where the roof has collapsed. **Accommodation** and **camping** are available at Undara Lava Lodge (www.undara.com.au).

Rejoin the Kennedy Highway as it bends north through Mount Garnet to **Innot Hot Springs**, where 78°C water seeps up through the earth. Pools around town allow you to enjoy the water at more tolerable temperatures.

A short distance ahead is Millstream Falls, which in the wet season is believed to be the widest waterfall in the country.

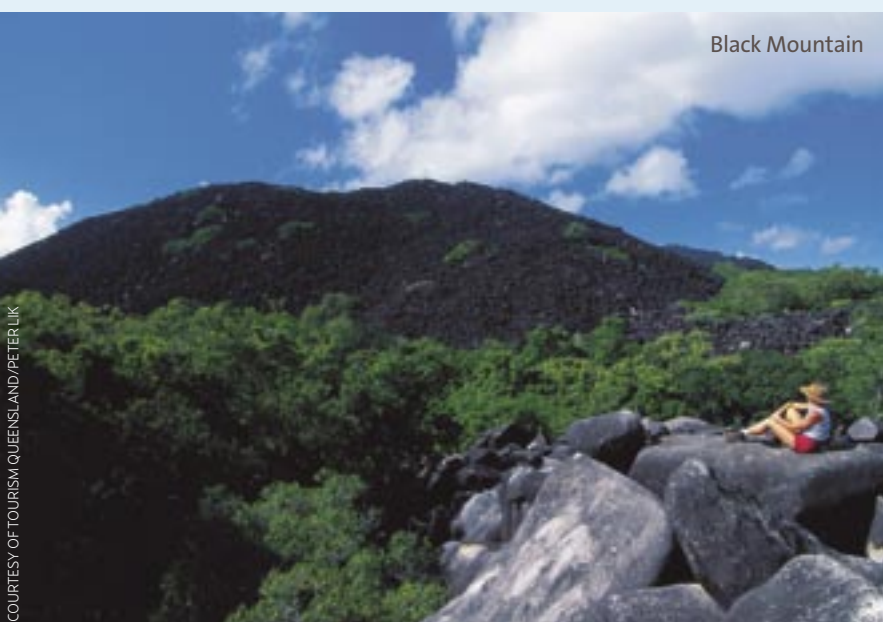
D Atherton Tableland

Climb to Ravenshoe (www.ravenshoevisitorcentre.com.au), Queensland's highest town (930 m above sea level) where, at Windy Hill Wind Farm, 20 hilltop wind turbines provide a spectacular sight. As the outback savanna yields to forests and farmlands, you'll realise you've climbed onto the Atherton Tableland (www.athertontableland.com). Wander through the towns of Millaa Millaa, Malanda and Yungaburra; discover Atherton's Chinatown; check out the 800-year-old Curtain Fig Tree; and picnic, **swim** or cruise at the crater lakes of Lake Barrine and Lake Eacham. A good **short drive** is the Waterfall Circuit out of Millaa Millaa, linking Millaa Millaa, Zillie and Elinjaa falls, while **anglers** will be drawn to Lake Tinaroo, which is stocked with barramundi. The world's largest recorded barra (38 kg) was landed from this lake.



COURTESY OF TOURISM QUEENSLAND/PAUL LEWART

Curtain Fig Tree



Black Mountain

COURTESY OF TOURISM QUEENSLAND/PETER LIK

E to F Mareeba to Cooktown

Mareeba is the place to satisfy a caffeine urge, with most of Australia's **coffee** grown around this town. **Tasting tours** are available at The Coffee Works (www.arabicas.com.au/tcw.html) and Tichum Creek Coffee Farm (www.mareebacoffee.com.au).

If you have a spare day, it's worth venturing out from Mareeba to the tiny former mining town of Chillagoe (www.chillagoehub.com.au). Tour the copper smelter ruins, visit **rock-art** sites at Mungana and explore the limestone caves in **Chillagoe-Mungana Caves National Park** (www.epa.qld.gov.au). Tours operate through three caves, while another three caves are open for self-guided exploration.

Back at Mareeba, continue north to Mount Molloy, once named by *National Geographic* as having one of the most perfect climates in the world. From here, follow the Peninsula Developmental Road, which ultimately runs all the way to Weipa, high on Cape York Peninsula. Follow this road as it rolls north, past Mount Carbine and over Bobs Lookout to Lakeland.

Detour to Quinkan Reserve, often listed among the top-10 **rock art** sites in the world. The Split Rock and Gugu Yalanji galleries, about 50 km north-west of Lakeland, are open to the public, and guided tours can also be organised (www.quinkancc.com.au) to these and other galleries around the Laura area.

Turn east towards Cooktown, passing by Black Mountain (Kalkajaka) National Park (www.epa.qld.gov.au), with its remarkable mountain range composed entirely of dark granite boulders.

F to G Cooktown to Cape Tribulation

From here, it's just a short drive into Cooktown (www.cook.qld.gov.au) where, in the James Cook Historical Museum, you can see the anchor and a cannon from Cook's *Endeavour*. Cruise the Endeavour River, or follow literally in Cook's footsteps to **Grassy Hill Lookout** for a view across the town. The **Great Barrier Reef** runs relatively close to shore at Cooktown, making it a great base for **sportfishing** and **diving**; the Cod Hole dive site, at the northern end of Ribbon reefs, is world famous.

If you're travelling by 4WD and heading south along the coastal Bloomfield Track, it's just a few minutes along the track to Helenvale and the **Lions Den Hotel** (www.lionsdenhotel.com.au), one of the oldest pubs in Queensland, clad in corrugated iron and an assortment of Australiana.

About 75 km south along the bumpy, hilly track you reach the quiet paradise of Cape Tribulation (www.daintreecoast.com), smothered in forest and framed by beach. Mostly it's a place to laze but you can also visit the **Bat House** (www.austrop.org.au), which is home to fruit bat orphans, or wander through mangroves and rainforest on the Dubuji Boardwalk. If feeling more active, saddle up for a **horse ride**, **kayak the coast** (www.capetribseakayaking.com.au; www.tropicalparadise.com.au/kayaking.htm), or **crruise** out to the reef on a catamaran (www.rumrunner.com.au).

G to H Cape Tribulation to Cairns

The road now skips from beach to beach – Noah, Thornton, Cow Bay, Cape Kimberley – before reaching the ferry across the **Daintree River**. Stop at Daintree village (www.daintreevillage.asn.au) for a **croc-spotting cruise**. If your timing is right you might catch a performance at the outdoor Karnak Playhouse & Rainforest Sanctuary (www.karnakplayhouse.com.au), south of Daintree. Further south is the magnificent **Mossman Gorge**. Wander the tracks through thick rainforest and swim the waters or, for a cultural perspective, take a **guided walk** with Kuku-Yalanji Dreamtime Walks (www.yalanji.com.au).

At Port Douglas, one of the prime resort towns on the Queensland coast, you can take it easy on Four Mile Beach, or enjoy a tropical breakfast with the birds in the natural setting of The Rainforest Habitat Wildlife Sanctuary (www.rainforesthabitat.com.au). Port Douglas is also a major gateway to the Great Barrier Reef, with an array of **snorkelling**, **diving** and sightseeing **cruiises** out to the reef (www.pddt.com.au).

Shortly after leaving Port Douglas you'll begin to pass the string of beaches that mark Cairns' northern outskirts. Explore Ellis Beach, Palm Cove or Trinity Beach, among others, before arriving in Cairns itself.



Cape Tribulation

A city as famous as any of Australia's capitals, Cairns can keep you busy for days or weeks, offering everything from reefs to rivers, forest to flights, bungy to boutique. A popular outing is to ride the **Skyrail cableway** (www.skyrail.com.au) to Kuranda, skimming across the canopy of the rainforest, and returning on the **Kuranda Scenic Railway** (www.traveltrain.com.au), or vice versa. Cruise to the Great Barrier Reef or, for something a little closer, Green or Fitzroy islands. **Raft** the Barron River (www.raft.com.au/barron.html; www.ragingthunder.com.au/rafting.asp) or simply tuck into a barra in Cairns' wealth of restaurants. For an overview of what's on offer in this welcoming city, visit www.tropicalaustralia.com.au.

H to A Cairns to Townsville

South from Cairns, the Bruce Highway skirts Queensland's highest peaks, and at their base you'll find great **swimming holes** at The Boulders west of Babinda and Josephine Falls.

The Art Deco architecture of likeable Innisfail (www.innisfailtourism.com.au) makes for a pleasant stop before you veer inland to unique **Paronella Park** (www.paronellapark.com.au), a virtual castle in the rainforest that is an enduring monument to the passion of its creator.

Swing across the highway to palm-backed Mission Beach (www.missionbeachtourism.com), a thin settlement wedged between the ocean and a blanket of forest. If you've ever just wanted to roll out a hammock between palm trees, this is the spot, or you can venture out to Dunk Island (www.dunk-island.com) for some good **walking** and **snorkelling**. Exclusive Bedarra Island (www.bedarraisland.com) is just south of Dunk Island.

Just off the highway, the town of Tully is noted as Australia's wettest town, and it's this that makes the Tully River one of the country's premier **white-water rafting** destinations. Test your paddling skills in its grade-four rapids (www.raft.com.au/tully.html; www.ragingthunder.com.au/rafting.asp).

At Cardwell, the Bruce Highway kisses the coast, affording a glimpse of **Hinchinbrook Island** (www.epa.qld.gov.au). Hinchinbrook's treasure is the **Thorsborne Trail** (www.hinchinbrooknq.com.au/tourism.htm), a 32 km bushwalking track along the island's east coast. Permits for this walk are limited and highly prized, so plan ahead. If you haven't the three or four days required to complete the Thorsborne, you can also take a **day trip** out to this stunning island with Hinchinbrook ferries (www.hinchinbrookferries.com.au). Watch for turtles and **dugong** on the crossings.

Continuing south, you'll arrive at the sugar town of Ingham (www.hinchinbrooknq.com.au/tourism.htm), which bears all the stamps of its **Italian heritage**. Be sure to check out the remarkable mausoleums in the cemetery, and consider a side trip out to **Wallaman Falls**, the country's highest waterfall, about 50 km west of town. Continue the large theme with a short detour out to Lucinda (www.hinchinbrooknq.com.au/tourism.htm), home to a sugar-loading jetty nearly 6 km long.

From Ingham it's a direct drive along the Bruce Highway back to Townsville, little more than an hour away. Diversions along the way include the fresh mountain air of Paluma village (www.palumarainforest.com.au) and the mango treats at Frosty Mango (www.frostymango.com.au). ■

Mission Beach

