

North Queensland Coast



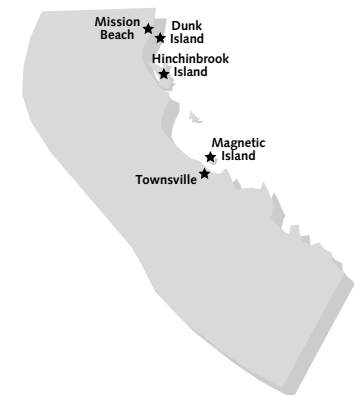
You've spent the morning hiking in a nearby rainforest. After a hearty brunch and a delicious coffee, you decide to work on your tan at a gorgeous stretch of palm-shaded beach. By midafternoon you're ready to browse the shops or take in a museum or cultural performance. As the sun decides to set, you enjoy a cold beer beside the pool and then wander the streets in search of a seafood meal over a bottle of wine. Grilled barramundi or Spanish mackerel? Or maybe fresh mud crab would go better with that sav blanc? After dinner, it's time to hit the pubs and meet up with friends.

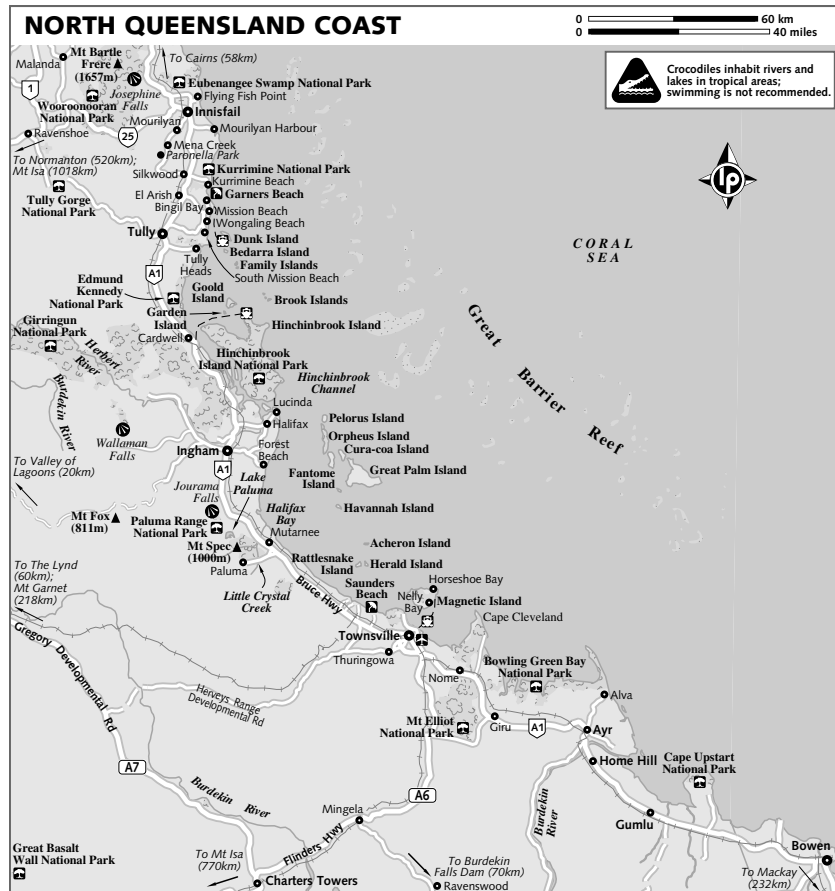
This could be a typical day off for any north Queensland local. You may as well jump in and join them.

Of course, there's ample opportunity to play tourist as well. Buzz around Magnetic Island on a moped, search for an elusive cassowary at Mission Beach, speed around the waters of Dunk Island on a jet ski or hike the gruelling Thorsborne Trail on gorgeous Hinchinbrook Island.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Joining the full-moon party or lazing about in one of the pretty little villages on **Magnetic Island** (p430)
- Cheering on the Cowboys or partying in down-to-earth **Townsville** (p424)
- Spotting a cassowary in the rainforest behind **Mission Beach** (p440)
- Searching for a secluded beach all to yourself on **Dunk Island** (p443)
- Walking the **Thorsborne Trail** (p438) on stunning Hinchinbrook Island





Dangers & Annoyances

Swimming in coastal waters is inadvisable from October to April due to the possible presence of marine stingers; see the boxed text, p381.

Saltwater crocodiles inhabit the mangroves, estuaries and open water in parts of north Queensland. Warning signs are posted around waterways where crocs may be present.

BOWEN TO TOWNSVILLE

BOWEN

☎ 07 / pop 7880

Bowen's 15 minutes of fame came in May 2007 when the cast and crew of Baz Luhrmann's epic movie *Australia* set-up

shop here. Filming began in May/June 2007 (see boxed text, opposite), and the cast and crew were impressed with Bowen's low-key, unhurried atmosphere. You'll notice the sign 'Bowenwood' up on a hill as you approach town – quaint, in a cheesy sort of way. Although the town itself holds little of interest for travellers (except those here for fruit-picking work between April and November), there are some stunning beaches and bays northeast of the town centre.

Information

Tourism Bowen (☎ 4786 4222; www.tourismbowen.com.au; Bruce Hwy; ☎; 8.30am-5pm) The usual trove of information, plus maps depicting the streets in which the movie *Australia* was filmed.

THERESE SAAD

Therese Saad was an extra on Baz Luhrmann's epic film *Australia*. The movie was filmed mostly in Bowen, between May and June 2007. The town was used in the film as a stand-in for Darwin in the 1930s. Starring Nicole Kidman, Hugh Jackman, Jack Thompson, Bryan Brown, David Gulpilil, Ben Mendelsohn and David Wenham, the cast reads like a who's-who of Australian cinema and TV. **Who did you play in the film?** I played the part of an uptown girl...a high-society lady if you like. It was an amazing, once-in-a-lifetime experience.

What were the cast and crew like? Did they keep to themselves a lot? No, not at all – they were just normal Aussie people. Not one of them had a star's ego. They were lovely, all of them, and they loved Bowen. They were left to themselves, and weren't mobbed in the slightest. You could walk into the local supermarket and bump into Hugh or Nicole; they weren't precious at all.

Is Hugh Jackman as charming and good-looking in real life as he appears on screen? Yes, yes, yes! Hugh joined the local gym and a lot of the young girls in town decided it was time they joined as well!

What did the production do for the town? We called it 'Bazmania.' We couldn't believe what it did for the town: on every level it was beneficial, and it's something we'll cash-in on for years to come. Around 25,000 people visited Bowen in the six- to eight-week period when the cast and crew were here.

A lot of locals were used as extras in the film. What a great experience! It was funny because the film is set in the 1930s, and people were a lot smaller back then. They had to cast for short people! The production atmosphere started to rub off on the locals: people were looking after themselves; they dressed properly; they started treating each other a lot better. Young people's mannerisms, especially, started to change – it was an education for them.

Why do you think the cast and crew enjoyed filming in Bowen? It's a community with a lot of soul. It's a very stable place – definitely the best-kept secret of the Whitsundays!

As related to author Justin Flynn.

Sleeping & Eating

Bowen Backpackers (☎ 4786 3433; fax 4786 1073; cnr Herbert & Dalrymple Sts; dm with fan/air-con \$25/26.50, d with air-con \$53; ☎) Has beds in four- and eight-bed dorms, with cheaper weekly rates available. The hostel can help find fruit-picking work in season.

Rose Bay Resort (☎ 4786 9000; www.rosebayresort.com.au; 2 Pandanus St, Rose Bay; r \$130-230; ☎ ☎ ☎) You'll be happy here whether you choose the spacious studio units or the plush suites. Rooms are clean, stylish and modern, and with your own private beach there may be no need to leave the resort.

Horseshoe Bay Café (☎ 4786 2565; Horseshoe Bay; mains \$14-25; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) If you walk away hungry from this busy, foreshore eatery, then it's your own fault. The huge all-day breakfasts are popular and the simple, yet substantial, lunches include big burgers and hearty pizzas. The extensive menu also includes mango chicken burgers, garlic prawns and a range of vegetarian meals.

360 on the Hill (☎ 4786 6360; Flagstaff Hill; mains \$13-30; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Browse through the small interpretive centre then take a seat out-

side at this brilliant café-restaurant, perched proudly on top of Flagstaff Hill. Amazing views accompany the excellent seafood mains, including the wildly popular coconut king prawns.

Getting There & Away

The long-distance bus stop is outside **Bowen Travel** (☎ 4786 2835; 40 Williams St), between Herbert and Gregory Sts. **Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) and **Premier** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) have a number of daily bus services along the coast stopping at destinations including Airlie Beach (\$24, two hours) and Townsville (\$40, four hours).

Queensland Rail (☎ 1300 131 722; www.traveltrain.com.au) operates the *Sunlander*, which runs four times a week between Brisbane and Cairns. It stops at Bootooloo Siding, 3km south of the centre.

AYR

☎ 07 / pop 8500

Ayr is on the delta of one of the biggest rivers in Queensland, the Burdekin, and is the major commercial centre for the rich farmlands of

the Burdekin Valley. The local towns and territory are devoted to the production and harvesting of sugarcane, melons and mangos.

The **Burdekin visitors centre** (☎ 4783 5988; www.burdekin tourism.com.au; Plantation Park, Bruce Hwy; ☎ 9am-4pm) is on the southern side of town.

The **Billabong Sanctuary** (☎ 4778 8344; www.billabongsanctuary.com.au; Bruce Hwy; adult/child/family \$27/16/84; ☎ 8am-5pm), 17km south of Townsville, should not be underestimated. This 10-hectare wildlife park is definitely worth visiting. It's all about close-up and personal encounters with Australian wildlife, with shows and talks every 15 minutes or so. There's a café and a swimming pool, too.

TOWNSVILLE

☎ 07 / pop 143,330

Townsville might just be Australia's most underrated city. Don't believe us? Consider this: abundant sunshine, world-class diving, a lively restaurant and bar scene, two major sporting teams, a huge aquarium, excellent museums and a waterfront esplanade to rival that of any coastal paradise. That's a pretty impressive list for a capital city, let alone a regional hub.

With a large university and a strong military presence, Townsville knows how to let its hair down. Bars line bustling Flinders St, enticing thirsty locals and travellers with cheap drinks and nightly entertainment. The spruced-up Strand, Townsville's wonderful waterfront promenade, offers safe, year-round swimming and an excellent (free!) water park – the kids won't want to leave! The city is also home to the North Queensland Cowboys, the adored rugby league team, which dominates nearly every conversation on the streets.

ORIENTATION

Townville and its sister-city Thuringowa (a large suburb 15km southwest of central Townsville) are often referred to as the 'Twin Cities.' Dairy Farmers Stadium is in Thuringowa.

The arrival and departure point for long-distance buses is the Townsville Transit Centre on the corner of Palmer and Plume Sts – just south of Ross Creek. This is not to be confused with the Transit Mall on Stokes St (between Sturt St and Flinders St Mall), which is the departure point for local buses and taxis.

INFORMATION

Flinders Mall visitors centre (☎ 4721 3660; www.townsvilleonline.com.au; Flinders St Mall, btwn Stokes & Denham Sts; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat & Sun) Two desks: one provides general information, the other specialises in diving and reef tours (www.diver cruise travel.com).

Internet Den (☎ 4721 4500; 265 Flinders St Mall; per hr \$5; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat & Sun) Friendly management and lots of computers.

Jim's Book Exchange (☎ 4771 6020; Shaw's Arcade) Wide range of secondhand books; off Flinders St Mall.

Mary Who? Bookshop (☎ 4771 3824; 414 Flinders St) Small but bountiful range of books and music.

Post office (☎ 13 13 18; www.australiapost.com.au; Post Office Plaza, Sturt St) Has a poste-restante window.

Townsville City Library (☎ 4727 9666; 272-278 Flinders St Mall; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat & Sun) Free Internet access, but you'll need to book hours in advance.

Townsville Enterprises visitors centre (☎ 4726 2700; www.townsvilleonline.com.au; 6 The Strand; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) HQ for the booth in Flinders St Mall.

SIGHTS

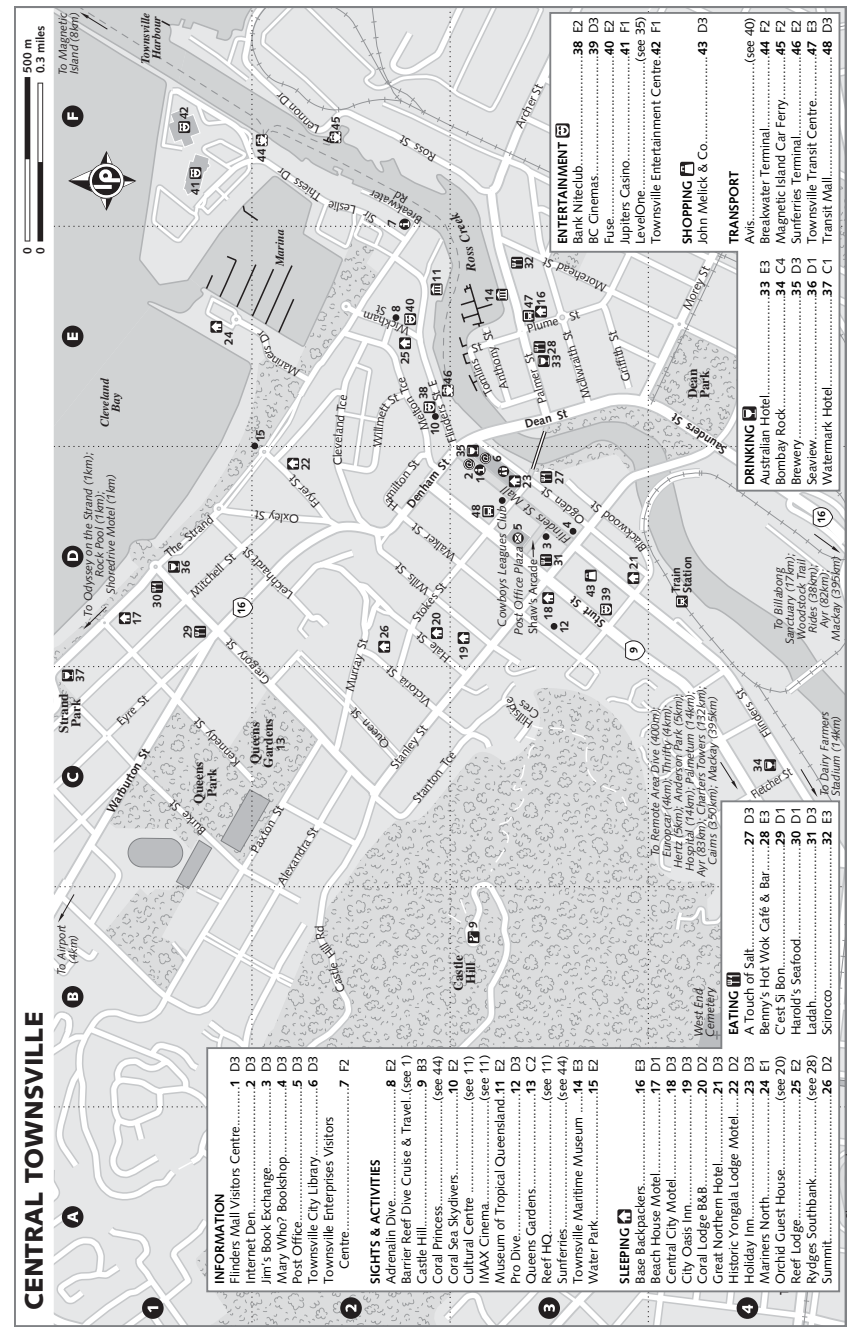
It's no surprise that Townsville bills itself as an outdoors city. Undercover seating at Dairy Farmers Stadium was considered unnecessary because of the minimal rainfall during the rugby league season. The city boasts an average of 320 days of sunshine per year.

The Strand

Townsville's vibrant waterfront promenade, the Strand, flaunts a number of parks, pools, cafés and playgrounds. It's a busy place at any time of day or night. Walkers and joggers take to the paths from first light; beachgoers take over by midmorning; evening strollers are at it by late afternoon. The long stretch of beach is patrolled and protected by two stinger-proof enclosures in the danger months (November to May).

At the northeast tip is the **rock pool** (admission free; ☎ 24hr), an enormous artificial swimming pool surrounded by lawns and sandy beaches. A huge filtration system keeps it clean and stinger-free.

Kids will revel in the brilliant little **water park** (admission free; ☎ 10am-8pm Dec-Mar, to 6pm Sep-Nov, Apr & May, to 5pm Jun-Aug). Water is pumped through all sorts of tubes, culminating in a big bucket that fills up with water then dumps its load onto the squealing little ones below.



NORTH QUEENSLAND COAST

NORTH QUEENSLAND COAST

Castle Hill

The big, red mound of Castle Hill dominates Townsville's skyline and offers wonderful views of the city and Cleveland Bay. A walk to the top of the 300m hill should be high on your list of things to do. Access the **goat track** (2km, 30 minutes) from Hillside Cres; or if walking sounds too energetic, you can drive up via Gregory St then Castle Hill Rd.

Reef HQ

This well-stocked **aquarium** (☎ 4750 0800; www.reefhq.com.au; Flinders St E; adult/child \$21.50/10.50; ☎ 9.30am-5pm) proudly boasts a living coral reef on dry land. It's worth taking one (or a few) of the guided tours, which focus on different aspects of the reef and the aquarium. The fish-feeding display will excite younger guests, particularly seeing the sea snakes and the rather shy eels (impeccable table manners those guys!).

You can continue to experience life underwater without getting wet at the **IMAX cinema** (☎ 4721 1481; Flinders St E; adult/child/concession \$13/8; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm) next door.

Museum of Tropical Queensland

Not your ordinary, everyday **museum** (☎ 4726 0606; www.mtq.qld.gov.au; 70-102 Flinders St E; adult/child/student \$9/5/6.50; ☎ 9.30am-5pm), this place attempts to reconstruct scenes by using detailed models with interactive displays. The wreck of the *Pandora* is showcased at the museum, including some fascinating artefacts from the ship. Other galleries include the kid-friendly MindZone science centre, and displays on North Queensland's history from the dinosaurs to the rainforest and the reef.

Cultural Centre

The interactive Aboriginal dance and interpretive **centre** (☎ 4772 7679; www.ctownsville.com.au; 2/68 Flinders St E; adult/child \$16.50/9; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm) hosts a loud, entertaining session in which indigenous people perform traditional dance and music. There are some impressive art works and artefacts housed in the gallery, and the interpretive centre can be seen up close with a guided tour.

Townsville Maritime Museum

The highlight of a visit to this **museum** (☎ 4721 5251; www.townsvillemaritimemuseum.org.au; 42-68 Palmer St; adult/child/concession \$6/3/5; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, noon-4pm Sat & Sun) is the gallery dedicated to the wreck of the *SS Yongala*, which went down in

a cyclone in 1911 with 125 passengers aboard, and wasn't located until 1958. Still, there's enough here to entertain more than just naval buffs, with historical exhibits on northern Queensland's maritime heritage.

Botanical Gardens

Townsville's Botanical Gardens are spread across three locations: each has its own character, but all have tropical plants and are abundantly green. They're open daily from sunrise to sunset, with free admission.

The **Queens Gardens** (nr Gregory & Paxton Sts) is 1km northwest of the town centre. These are the town's original gardens, first planted in 1870 with trial plants (including mango and coffee) to potentially boost the local economy. They were thoroughly redesigned after 100,000 US soldiers squatted on them during WWII. They're now formal, ornamental gardens at the base of Castle Hill, with a children's playground and herb garden.

Anderson Park (Gulliver St, Mundingburra), established in 1932, is 6km southwest of the centre. The large gardens cover a 20-hectare site and were originally planted in taxonomic lots. They feature plants and palms from northern Queensland and Cape York Peninsula, lotus ponds and a tropical-fruit orchard. Don't be tempted to eat the fruits of the garden – no matter how enticing that Miracle Fruit sounds.

The **Palmetum** (University Rd), about 15km southwest of the centre, is a 17-hectare garden devoted to just one plant family – the humble palm. More than 300 species are represented here, including around 60 that are native to Australia.

ACTIVITIES

Well worth doing is a trail ride or cattle muster with **Woodstock Trail Rides** (☎ 4778 8888; www.woodstocktrailrides.com.au; Rowes Rd, Woodstock; half-/full-day rides \$80/150; ☎ Apr-Nov). The trail rides take you deep into the huge farmstead where you stop for a barbecue lunch along Ross Creek. All riding abilities are catered for. Cattle musters (\$150) include herding cattle on horseback, a camp-oven lunch, and learning to crack a whip and shear a sheep. The price includes transfers from/to Townsville.

Hurl yourself from a perfectly good aeroplane with **Coral Sea Skydivers** (☎ 4772 4889; www.coralseaskydivers.com.au; 181 Flinders St E; tandem jumps \$315-415). Tandem jumps require no prior experience, just

a lot of guts (but not too much: there's a weight limit of 95kg). The price gets more expensive the higher the plane takes you up.

Dive Courses

Two operators based in Townsville offer PADI-certified courses, where you'll learn to dive with two-days' training in the pool, plus three days and three nights living aboard the boat. Dive sites include a number of reefs, as well as the *SS Yongala* wreck and Wheeler Reef. In addition to the operator costs you'll need to obtain a dive medical and provide passport photos. Operators include the following:

Adrenalin Dive (☎ 4724 0600; www.adrenalindive.com.au; 9 Wickham St)

Pro Dive (☎ 4721 1760; www.prodive.com.au; 252 Walker St)

Great Barrier Reef

The booking agent **Barrier Reef Dive Cruise & Travel** (☎ 4772 5800; www.divecruisetravel.com) is part of the Flinders Mall visitors centre (p424), and has a comprehensive list of operators and offers. Most trips travel to the Great Barrier Reef as well as the famous *SS Yongala*.

The following operators run trips to the Reef; trips include lunch and snorkelling. If you want to just snorkel, take a day-trip that just goes to the Reef (the *SS Yongala* is for diving only). Multiday live-aboards are the best option for divers, with some operators offering advanced courses.

Adrenalin Dive (☎ 4724 0600; www.adrenalindive.com.au; 121 Flinders St E) *SS Yongala* day-trips including two dives (from \$185). Also offers advanced diving certification courses and a snorkelling trip to Wheeler Reef (\$155).

Coral Princess (☎ 4721 1673; www.coralprincess.com.au; Breakwater Terminal; ☎ 12.30pm Tue) Offers a four-day, three-night cruise between Townsville and Cairns, via Hinchinbrook and Dunk Islands (per person from \$1500), departing from Breakwater Terminal.

Remote Area Dive (☎ 4721 4424; www.remotearadive.com; 25 Ingham Rd) Diving (\$195) and snorkelling (\$150) trips to Orpheus and Pelorus Islands.

Sunferries (☎ 1800 447 333; www.sunferries.com.au; Breakwater Terminal) Day-trips to the Reef (adult/child \$145/90) and certified dives (\$70).

SLEEPING Budget

Reef Lodge (☎ 4721 1112; www.reeflodge.com.au; 4 Wickham St; dm \$21-23, tw & d with/without TV \$57/54, motel \$72; ☎ ☎) The punters seem happy here and

are content to bask in Reef Lodge's unhurried and cruisy atmosphere. There's a sizeable kitchen, and people enjoy sitting in the courtyard area and meeting other travellers. The motel-style units are superb value, and there's a female-only dorm available.

Base Backpackers (☎ 1800 628 836, 4721 2322; www.basebackpackers.com; Townsville Transit Centre, 21 Plume St; dm/d \$21/60; ☎ ☎) Base has fairly basic rooms and facilities, but includes the all-important one – the in-house bar. After sipping on a bright, alcoholic fizzy-drink, you could get lost in the maze of corridors here. Base is above the Townsville Transit Centre, close to both bus and ferry terminals.

our pick **Orchid Guest House** (☎ 4771 6683; 34 Hale St; dm \$25, s with/without bathroom \$60/45, d with bathroom \$80; ☎ ☎) A guest house in every sense of the word. Fran will welcome you with free pick-up from anywhere in the city. The dorms are a surprise – hardly your everyday dorm rooms – with TV, fridge and air-con. The doubles are even better value. There's free laundry. Peace, quiet and value for money are guaranteed here.

Great Northern Hotel (☎ 4771 6191; fax 4771 6190; 496 Flinders St; s/d \$50/65; ☎ ☎) A Townsville institution, this old pub has loads of character. The guest rooms upstairs are nothing special, but are clean and functional and all have access to the gorgeous old veranda overlooking Flinders St. If you're after something a bit different to backpackers hostels, this is a real, down-to-earth Aussie pub.

Coral Lodge B&B (☎ 1800 614 613, 4771 5512; www.coralodge.com.au; 32 Hale St; downstairs s/d \$65/75, upstairs s/d \$80/95; ☎ ☎) The upstairs self-contained units are as homy as you can get, while the downstairs guest rooms share male and female bathrooms. If staying in a safe, friendly, old-fashioned Aussie home appeals, then you've hit the spot.

Midrange

Shoredrive Motel (☎ 4771 6851; fax 4772 6311; 117 The Strand; s/d \$85/95; ☎ ☎) The rooms here are functional and a little threadbare, but the location, right on the Strand's doorstep, is brilliant. The rooms are large and everything works fine, although the place lacks a bit of character.

Central City Motel (☎ 4724 0233; www.centralcitymotel.com; 164 Stanley St; s/d \$95/105; ☎ ☎) The name doesn't tell fibs: it's the most central of Townsville's motels. While the rooms won't

win any awards, they're functional and perfectly acceptable (if you're the type who reckons motel rooms are for sleeping only).

Beach House Motel (☎ 4721 1333; www.beachhousemotel.com.au; 66 The Strand; r \$107-120; ☺ ☹) A good option for those who just want a comfortable, decent and clean room without all the trimmings. Rooms are equipped with all the modern conveniences, such as a bar fridge, phone and TV, and the pool out the front is in an unusual location, allowing you to gawk at passers-by.

Historic Yongala Lodge Motel (☎ 4772 4633; www.historicyongala.com.au; 11 Fryer St; motel r \$100-110, units from \$115; ☺ ☹) Comfortable as you can get and in a quiet, residential location (just a short stroll to the Strand and city), the Yongala has eight motel rooms and 10 self-contained, one- and two-bedroom apartments. The heritage restaurant is open daily for dinner.

Summit (☎ 4721 2122; www.summitmotel.com.au; 6-8 Victoria St; r \$110-120; ☺ ☹) There's not a lot of difference between the standard and executive rooms here, so save yourself \$10 and go for the cheaper version. The rooms are standard, motel-style affairs, but are clean and comfortable.

Holiday Inn (☎ 4772 2477; www.townsville.holiday-inn.com; 334 Flinders St Mall; r \$116-128; ☺ ☹) The 'sugar shaker' is a prominent fixture of Townsville's skyline – a 20-storey circular building in the city's mall, housing 199 rooms. Guests have free use of a gym, located a short stroll away. There's a cool rooftop pool and the hotel is in a terrific part of town, smack-bang in the middle.

Rydges Southbank (☎ 4726 5265; www.rydges.com/townsville; 17-29 Palmer St; r from \$135; ☺ ☹) The handsome rooms at this hotel cater mostly to business travellers, with practical, unfussy interiors; there are also separate meeting rooms available. Those on holiday will also appreciate the hotel's facilities, and whatever your reason for visiting, you'll love the opulent executive rooms with lounge areas and ocean views.

Top End

City Oasis Inn (☎ 1800 809 515, 4771 6048; www.cityoasis.com.au; 143 Wills St; r \$170-200; ☺ ☹; wi-fi) There are so many sparkling, white surfaces here that you'll have to allow time for your eyes to adjust upon entering. The fabulous loft apartments here have an upstairs bedroom separate from the downstairs kitchen, or opt for even more space between you and the kids in a two-bedroom apartment.

Mariners North (☎ 4722 0777; www.marinersnorth.com.au; 7 Mariners Dr; apt from \$195; ☺ ☹) Very nice, thank you very much. These large, self-contained apartments have brilliant balconies overlooking Cleveland Bay and big, clean bathrooms. The living areas are generously sized, and there's a big saltwater pool to frolic in.

EATING

Townsville is a superb place if you like your food. Seafood rules, but all palates will be satisfied.

Restaurants

Benny's Hot Wok Café & Bar (☎ 4724 3243; 17-21 Palmer St; mains \$15-20; ☺ lunch Thu, Fri & Sun, dinner daily) A little bit of everything Asian awaits at Benny's, which has fabulous outdoor seating and a good wine list. Whether your tastebuds fancy a quick trip to Japan, Thailand or China, Benny's will take you there for a fraction of the cost of an airline ticket.

Scirocco (☎ 4724 4508; 61 Palmer St; mains \$16-30; ☺ lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sat) Mediterranean dining with a Greek twist greets you as you peruse the menu at Scirocco. Elegant and refined, the Greek-style lamb rack won't disappoint (that's if you can pass on the mud-crab lasagne).

our pick A Touch of Salt (☎ 4724 4441; cnr Stokes & Ogden St; mains \$23-34; ☺ lunch Fri, dinner Tue-Sat) A classy, family-run, riverside establishment serving delectable seafood accompanied by an extensive wine list and genuinely good service. If the price of evening waterside dining puts you off, try the Friday lunch (mains \$15 to \$17). A nice meal of Moreton Bay bugs for two and a bottle of wine shouldn't set you back much more than \$60.

Cafés & Quick Eats

Harold's Seafood (☎ 4724 1322; cnr The Strand & Gregory St; meals \$4-10; ☺ lunch & dinner) More than your average fish-and-chip joint, Harold's also serves 'bug burgers' (of the Moreton Bay variety). Order at the counter, then pull up a seat outside and watch the goings-on along the Strand across the road.

Ladah (☎ 4724 0402; cnr Sturt & Stanley Sts; meals \$10-16; ☺ breakfast & lunch) The meals at this licensed café are sublime, and the energy radiating from the busy kitchen gives you every confidence in the food. Try the French toast with bacon and maple syrup for breakfast, or the smoked-cod and potato pie for lunch.

C'est Si Bon (☎ 4772 5828; 48 Gregory St; meals \$11-23; ☺ breakfast & lunch) Snappy, attentive serv-

RIDE 'EM COWBOY

You won't leave Townsville without hearing about Jonathon Thurston or Matt Bowen, the adored stars of the **North Queensland Cowboys** (☎ 4773 0700; www.cowboys.com.au) National Rugby League team. While the club represents the whole of North Queensland, its home is **Dairy Farmers Stadium** on Townsville's outskirts. The stadium was originally a harness-racing track, but was converted into a rugby league venue for the Cowboys' inaugural season in 1995. The stadium is a bit antiquated, but holds 26,500 people and the atmosphere is brilliant, especially if you score tickets to a game against hated rivals the Brisbane Broncos. It's worth seeing a game if you're here during the season, which runs from March to September. If you find yourself in a conversation with a local, you'll earn serious brownie points if you ask if JT is finally over his injury worries.

Courtesy buses to Dairy Farmers Stadium leave from the Cowboys Leagues Club on Flinders Mall and various other points throughout town. See the website for details.

Townsville's other major sporting team, the **Townsville Crocodiles** (☎ 4778 4222; www.crocodiles.com.au), competes in the National Basketball League and plays home games at Townsville Entertainment Centre.

ice greets you at this buzzing, licensed café-restaurant. It's a big, kitchen-like place where the friendly, energetic staff ensure that you'll enjoy the fresh produce on the Middle-Eastern influenced menu. For a light meal, you can't go past the roast butternut-pumpkin salad, while the authentic Israeli couscous will satisfy the fussiest of eaters.

Odyssey on the Strand (☎ 4724 1400; 120 The Strand; meals \$12-30; ☺ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Thu-Sat) The generously sized meals here have a Greek bias, but there's enough variety to keep everyone happy. Breakfasts are large enough to ward off the hunger pains until well after lunchtime. There's a good kids' menu and reasonable wine list. Our recommendation? The salt-and-pepper calamari and a glass of Marlborough sav blanc.

DRINKING

It must be the sunny climate, because Townsville sure loves a sip. There are bars spread out along Flinders St (where most of the action is), although Palmer St and the Strand also offer a few low-key spots.

Brewery (☎ 4724 2999; 252 Flinders St E; ☺ 10am-late) Drifting effortlessly between stylish and unpretentious, the Brewery is in the old post-office building and offers a little bit of everything, from casual dining, to outdoors drinking, a sports bar and nightclub. Try one of the award-winning, house-brewed beers: the Ned's Red Ale is delicious, but we were disappointed with the Belgian blonde.

Australian Hotel (☎ 4722 6999; 11 Palmer St; ☺ 11am-2am) A welcome addition to Townsville's rejuvenated and revamped Palmer St, the

Australian boasts a stylish front bar with a good range of draught beers, while the big beer garden out the back is the place to knock back a few on a Sunday afternoon.

Watermark Hotel (☎ 4724 4281; 72-74 The Strand; ☺ noon-midnight) The place to be seen in Townsville (if it's good enough for Missy Higgins and silverchair, then it's good enough for the rest of us). Some serious Sunday sessions take place in the tavern bar, while there's also a more-upmarket bar and an excellent restaurant.

Seaview (☎ 4771 5005; cnr The Strand & Gregory Sts; ☺ 11am-midnight) Renowned for its Sunday sessions in the huge concrete beer 'garden', the Seaview serves ice-cold schooners and has live music and entertainment.

ENTERTAINMENT Cinemas & Casinos

BC Cinemas (☎ 4771 4101; cnr Sturt & Blackwood Sts) If you fancy a flick, this place screens mainstream films.

Jupiters Casino (☎ 4722 2333; www.jupitertownsville.com.au; Sir Leslie Thies Dr) For a flutter head to this casino, flashing for your attention with its neon faux-fireworks.

Nightclubs

Bank Niteclub (☎ 4771 6148; 169 Flinders St E; admission \$5; ☺ closed Mon) House and dance beats; slinky surrounds.

Bombay Rock (☎ 4724 2800; www.bombayrock.com.au; 719 Flinders St W; admission \$6 after 10pm; ☺ 8pm-late Fri & Sat, 3pm-late Sun) Multilevel place with regular gigs and four bars.

Fuse (☎ 4771 3428; 87 Flinders St E; ☺ Fri & Sat) Get your fill of Guinness at Molly Malone's pub then slip around the back to this late-night club. Cover charge varies.

LevelOne (☎ 4724 2999; 252 Flinders St E; 🍷 Fri & Sat) Resident DJ spins dance and progressive house, as well as beats and breaks. Cover charge varies.

SHOPPING

Cotters Market (☎ 4727 9678; Flinders St Mall; 🍷 8.30am-1pm Sun) Cotters has about 200 craft and food stalls, as well as live entertainment. It's wheelchair-accessible.

John Melick & Co (☎ 4771 2292; 481 Flinders St) The place to go for a good range of camping and bushwalking gear, Driz-a-Bone oilskins, Akubra hats, boots and workwear.

Strand Night Market (☎ 4727 9678; The Strand; 🍷 5-9.30pm 1st Fri of month) Browse the stalls around the Strand Night Market for all sorts of curios, crafts and knick-knacks.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Virgin Blue (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com.au), **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au) and **Jetstar** (☎ 13 15 38; www.jetstar.com) fly from Townsville to Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, with connections to other major cities.

Bus

The long-distance bus station is the **Townsville Transit Centre** (☎ 4721 3082; cnr Palmer & Plume Sts). You'll find agents for the major companies here, including:

Transit Centre Backpackers (☎ 4721 2322) Booking agents for Premier Motor Service.

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 20 30, 4772 5100; www.greyhound.com.au) Services at least daily to Brisbane (\$216, 23 hours), Rockhampton (\$120, 12 hours), Airlie Beach (\$58, 4½ hours), Mission Beach (\$52, 3¾ hours) and Cairns (\$67, six hours).

Car

The larger car-rental agencies are all represented in Townsville:

Avis (☎ 1300 137 498, 4721 2688; www.avis.com.au; 81 Flinders St) Also has an airport counter.

Europcar (☎ 1300 131 390, 4762 7050; www.deltaeuropcar.com.au; 305 Ingham Rd, Garbutt) Also has an airport counter and rents 4WDs.

Hertz (☎ 13 30 30, 4775 5950; www.hertz.com; Stinson Ave, Garbutt)

Thrifty (☎ 4725 4600; www.thrifty.com.au; 289 Ingham Rd, Garbutt)

Train

The train station is about 1km south of the centre.

The Brisbane-to-Cairns **Sunlander** (☎ 1800 872 467; www.railaustralia.com.au) travels through Townsville three times a week en route to Brisbane (economy seat/sleeper \$180/238, 1st-class sleeper \$368, 24 hours), Proserpine (economy seat \$28, four hours), Rockhampton (economy seat \$61, 11 hours) and Cairns (economy seat \$32, 7½ hours). Prices quoted here are for one-way adult fares. The more luxurious Queenslander class, which includes a sleeper and meals, is available on two services per week.

The **Inlander** (☎ 1800 872 467; www.railaustralia.com.au) heads from Townsville to Mt Isa (economy seat/sleeper \$121/180, 1st-class sleeper \$280, 21 hours, Thursday and Sunday) via Charters Towers (economy seat \$26, three hours).

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

Townsville Airport (☎ 4727 3211; www.townsvilleairport.com.au; cnr Halifax St & Stinson Ave, Garbutt) is 5km north-west of the city centre at Garbutt. A taxi to the centre costs about \$15. The **Airport Shuttle** (☎ 4775 5544; one way/return \$8/14) services all arrivals and departures, and will drop-off/pick-up anywhere within the central business district.

Bus

Sunbus (☎ 4725 8482; www.sunbus.com.au) runs local bus services around Townsville. Route maps and timetables are available from the Flinders Mall visitors centre (p424).

Taxi

Taxis congregate outside the Transit Mall near the corner of Sturt and Stokes Sts, or call **Townsville Taxis** (☎ 13 10 08, 4778 9555).

MAGNETIC ISLAND

☎ 07 / pop 2110

Magnetic Island's most attractive feature is that it doesn't pretend to be all glitz-and-glamour to draw you in. No spruced-up resorts here people, although five-star luxury is available if that's what you want.

'Maggie' is a 'real' island. People live and work here, and some even make the daily commute to Townsville. It's completely unpretentious, but staggeringly gorgeous at the same time (if Magnetic Island was a Hollywood film star, it'd probably be someone like Cate Blanchett...).

Captain Cook named Magnetic Island in 1770, when his ship's compass went peculiar as he sailed by. Nowadays, the ferries make

MAGNETIC ISLAND

INFORMATION		
Post Office.....	1 C3	Brooke Haven Holiday Units..... (see 12)
QPWS.....	2 C3	Bungalow Bay YHA.....
		11 D2
		12 D3
		13 C3
		14 C4
		15 C3
		16 D2
		17 C1
		18 D3
		19 C4
		20 C4
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		39 C3
		40 C3

a beeline to this spectacular holiday haven. Captain Cook missed out big-time!

Orientation & Information

The island is roughly triangular in shape. A sealed road follows the east coast for 10km from Picnic Bay, on the island's southern point, to Horseshoe Bay in the north. A local

bus plies the route regularly. All ferries dock at Nelly Bay.

Post office (☎ 4778 5118; www.australiapost.com.au; Sooning St, Nelly Bay; 🍷 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 11am Sat) With an ATM.

Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS; ☎ 4778 5378; www.epa.qld.gov.au; Hurst St, Picnic Bay; 🍷 7.30am-4pm)

Sights & Activities

PICNIC BAY

Since the ferry terminal was moved to Nelly Bay, Picnic Bay now has become something of a ghost town. Shopfronts were abandoned as businesses suffered from the decreased tourist traffic. Still, the twinkling night views of Townsville from the esplanade here are magical. It's a lovely stroll along the jetty, and there's a stinger-free enclosure for safe **swimming** on the beach.

To the west of town is **Cockle Bay**, with the wreck of HMS *City of Adelaide* languishing on the ocean floor. Heading east round the coast is **Rocky Bay**, where there's a short, steep walk down to a beautiful, sheltered beach.

Open to the public, the **Magnetic Island Country Club** (☎ 4778 5188; www.users.bigpond.net.au/migolf; Hurst St, Picnic Bay; 9/18 holes \$15/20; 🏌️ from 8am) rents golf clubs, buggies and all equipment.

NELLY BAY

People swarm off the ferry and onto the marina at the newly developed Nelly Bay terminal. It's a rush to buy bus tickets, and the queue for taxis waits forlornly for a cab that never seems to show up. This is where your holiday on Magnetic will begin. It's a hectic place – the total opposite of what you'll probably experience during the rest of your stay here.

That said, there's a huge range of accommodation and eating options in Nelly Bay and some terrific **beaches**. There's a children's playground towards the northern end of the beach, and there's good **snorkelling** on the fringing coral reef.

ARCADIA

Arcadia village has the pretty and sedate **Alma Bay** cove, with a grassy hill and sheltered beach. There's plenty of shade here, plus picnic tables and a children's playground. The main beach, **Geoffrey Bay**, is less appealing but has a reef at its southern end (QPWS discourages reef walking at low tide). It's a very low-key place.

Learn to dive with **Pleasure Divers** (☎ 1800 797 797, 4778 5788; www.magnetic-island.com.au/pls-divers; 10 Marine Pde; 3-/4-day PADI open-water courses from \$299/799), which also offers advanced courses and dive trips to the SS *Yongala*.

RADICAL BAY & THE FORTS

Townsville was a supply base for the Pacific during WWII, and the **forts** on Magnetic Island were strategically designed to protect

the town from naval attack. It's well worth walking to the forts from the junction of Radical and Horseshoe Bay Rds, about 2km north of Alma Bay. The views from the forts are spectacular, and you'll almost certainly spot the odd koala or two lazing about in the treetops. You can also head north to Radical Bay via a rough vehicle track, leading off of which are walking tracks to secluded **Arthur Bay** and **Florence Bay** (both of which are great for snorkelling), and the old **searchlight station** on the headland between the two bays.

HORSESHOE BAY

On the north coast, Horseshoe Bay is the water-sports capital of the island, with jet skis blasting about and the odd parasailer gliding above the ocean. The beach is popular, and there are some excellent cafés and a good pub here too. The forts walk (left) starts about 2km north of the village; the bus stops at the start of the trail.

Experience the thrill of scooting about on Horseshoe Bay by hiring a **jet ski** (☎ 4758 1100; Horseshoe Bay Beach; per 15/30/60mins \$45/80/150; 🏄 Fri-Wed). You'll find the makeshift 'office' on the beach near the stinger net.

Bluey's Horseshoe Ranch (☎ 4778 5109; www.blueys-horseshoe.com; 38 Gifford St; rides per person \$90) has been around for ages and offers very popular two-hour horse rides (9am and 3pm) taking you through the bush to the beach, where you can swim your horse. There's also a 3½-hour ride (per person \$120, 9am) if two hours doesn't seem like long enough.

Tours

See p427 for tour operators running trips to the outer Great Barrier Reef.

Barnade Bill (☎ 4758 1837; Horseshoe Bay; tours per person \$85) Bill uses his 30 years of experience to ensure you'll end up with a healthy catch at the completion of his two-hour fishing tour. Tours depart Horseshoe Bay on Bill's 7m sport-fishing vessel; all gear is provided.

Jazza Sailing Tours (☎ 0404 875 530; www.jazza.com.au; day-trips \$100) Offers a snorkelling day-trip on a 42ft yacht, including boom-netting and a pizza lunch. There's also a sunset cruise where you can bring your own alcohol.

Magnetic Island Sea Kayaks (☎ 4778 5424; www.seakayak.com.au; 93 Horseshoe Bay Rd, Horseshoe Bay; tours from \$69) Has four-hour tours departing Horseshoe Bay, paddling to Balding Bay and back; includes breakfast and reef tax. Another option is to rent your own kayak (per day \$55).

Reef EcoTours (☎ 0419-712 579; www.reefecotours.com; adult/child \$70/60) A one-hour guided snorkelling tour, suitable for families.

Tropicana Tours (☎ 4758 1800; www.tropicana-tours.com.au; full-day tours adult/child \$198/99) If you're time-poor, this full-day tour with well-informed guides takes in the island's best spots in a stretch 4WD. Enjoy close encounters with wildlife, lunch at a local café and a sunset cocktail (all included in the price). Shorter tours are available if a full day sounds like too much effort.

Sleeping

Every budget is catered for on the island. It's especially popular with families and couples, but seniors and backpackers are also catered for.

First National Real Estate (☎ 4778 5077; 21 Marine Pde, Arcadia) and **Smith & Elliott** (☎ 4778 5570; 4/5 Bright Ave, Arcadia) can help with holiday rentals.

BUDGET

Picnic Bay

Travellers Hideaway (☎ 1800 000 290, 4778 5314; www.travellersbackpackers.com; 32 Picnic St; dm \$22, d \$55; 🏠 🚿 🚿) If full-moon parties don't rock your boat and peace and quiet is more your go, then this basic backpackers moves to a very slow beat. Dorms hold a maximum of four, and while the whole place gives off a rustic, bare-bones feel, the pool area is better than average.

Nelly Bay

Base Backpackers (☎ 1800 242 273, 4778 5777; www.stayatbase.com; 1 Nelly Bay Rd; unpowered sites \$12-20, dm \$26-28, d with/without bathroom \$110/95; 🏠 🚿 🚿) You can feel the energy pumping through this huge backpackers resort the moment you enter the big, open-air foyer. It's a young, happening place with a massive deck overlooking the ocean. Base is famous for its wild full-moon parties and great-value package deals.

Arcadia

Magnums on Magnetic (☎ 1800 663 666, 4778 5177; www.magnums.com.au; 7 Marine Pde; dm \$18-22, d & tw \$65; 🏠 🚿 🚿) A little worn around the edges, Magnums no doubt tries its best to trade off the success of its namesake at Airlie Beach. All dorms have their own bathroom – make sure you ask for one with an ocean view. The doubles are great value and have a small fridge and TV.

Horseshoe Bay

our pick **Bungalow Bay YHA** (☎ 1800 285 577, 4778 5577; www.bungalowbay.com.au; 40 Horseshoe Bay Rd; unpowered sites \$12.50, dm \$27, d \$64; 🏠 🚿 🚿) It's almost worth coming to the island to stay at this

magical, award-winning resort-style hostel and nature wonderland. Set among spacious grounds backing onto national park, A-frame bungalows house dorm rooms and simple doubles. Take a guided nature-walk and hold a koala at the mini wildlife sanctuary. There are also two doubles with private bathrooms (\$80; minimum two-night stay).

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Picnic Bay

Tropical Palms Inn (☎ 4778 5076; www.tropicalpalmsinn.com.au; 34 Picnic St; s/d \$95/105; 🏠 🚿) Self-contained motel units are the go here, with a terrific little swimming pool right outside your front door. The rooms are bright and comfortable and you can hire a 4WD from reception (\$75 to \$85 per day).

Magnetic Island Holiday Units (☎ 4778 5246; www.magnetic-island.com.au/mi-units.htm; 16 Yule St; 1-/2-bedroom units \$170/220; 🏠 🚿) These self-contained units are in a secluded part of the island, set amid leafy gardens and nicely manicured lawns.

Nelly Bay

Magnetic Island Tropical Resort (☎ 1800 069 122, 4778 5955; www.magneticislandresort.com; 56 Yates St; d \$110; 🏠 🚿) A-frame cabins with bathrooms, fridge and TV encircle large, bird-filled gardens here. This secluded resort often plays host to wedding parties (if this is the first place you visit, don't think taffeta and tuxes are Magnetic Island's dress code).

Island Leisure Resort (☎ 4778 5000; www.islandleisure.com.au; 4 Kelly St; d \$155, extra person \$10; 🏠 🚿) A block back from the bay, and with palm trees sprouting up all over the place, Island Leisure Resort is well situated. The self-contained rooms are spacious, and the pool is large enough for a swim team to train in.

Arcadia

Brooke Haven Holiday Units (☎ 4778 5262; www.brookehavenholidayunits.com; 5 Horden Ave; r \$130; 🏠 🚿) Set among tropical gardens, these units sleep up to six people and are unbelievable value. The only catch is they're not right on the beach, but it's only a five-minute stroll to find some sand, and at these prices, who really cares?

Horseshoe Bay

Sails on Horseshoe (☎ 4778 5117; www.sailsonhorseshoe.com.au; 13-15 Pacific Dr; 1-bedroom apt \$225, 2-bedroom apt

\$285-300; ☎ ☎; wi-fi) Indulge in these beautiful self-contained apartments only metres from the beach. The rooms are spacious and have that lived-in, tropical feel. The undercover pool and barbecue area at the back is great for families. Try and snag one of the two-bedroom units at the front, with their own balconies overlooking the beach.

Eating

PICNIC BAY

Picnic Bay Hotel (☎ 4778 5166; Picnic Bay Mall; mains \$14-26; ☎ lunch & dinner) Settle in for an evening feed and a cold drink with Townsville's city lights sparkling just across the bay. It's a big, friendly pub where locals take great delight in sinking a few pots and enjoying a punt on the horses.

Antonio Moran Family Restaurant (☎ 4778 5018; 10 The Esplanade; mains \$15-23; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) There's a little bit of everything at this sprawling cornerside eatery. Seafood is the norm (try the garlic mornay bugs), but huge serves of pasta and good pizzas and steaks are also on the menu. The coffee here is excellent, making breakfast an appealing option.

NELLY BAY

Fat Possum Café (☎ 4778 5409; 55 Sooning St; dishes \$4-10; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Names are not always accurate. Although the Fat Possum is a café, it serves its food with a twist, far from standard burger and chips staples. Try the grilled fish on a bed of salad, or the vegetarian and gluten-free options and you'll know what we mean.

Man Friday (☎ 4778 5658; 37 Warboy St; mains \$14-35; ☎ dinner Wed-Mon) Man Friday is the genuine article. Content locals and happy tourists leave here filled with delicious Mexican food, while the international menu is also deservedly popular. Bring your own wine and go for the Thai green curry.

Le Paradis (☎ 4778 5044; 8/98-100 Sooning St; mains \$22-36; ☎ lunch Sat & Sun, dinner daily) Mediterranean-inspired dishes dominate the extensive menu at this polished restaurant. Take a seat at the smart outside area on the corner of the street, settle in with a glass of wine and order the set lunch menu (\$25).

ARCADIA

Banister's Seafood (☎ 4778 5700; 22 McCabe Cres; mains \$10-30; ☎ lunch & dinner) You can do the whole sit-down thing at this BYO joint, or grab some takeaways (\$5 to \$10) and scurry off to a

nearby beach. Whichever option you choose, the seafood here is fresh and hearty.

HORSESHOE BAY

Marlin Bar (☎ 4758 1588; 3 Pacific Dr; mains \$10-24; ☎ lunch & dinner) You can't leave Magnetic without at least enjoying a cold drink by the window of this busy, seaside pub and watching the sun sets across the bay. The meals are on the large side and (surprise!) revolve around seafood. The scallops with salad and the grilled mackerel are both brilliant value.

Noodles (☎ 4778 5786; 2/6 Pacific Dr; mains \$14-25; ☎ breakfast Sat & Sun, lunch & dinner Fri-Wed) While others have come and gone, Noodles has stood the test of time and has emerged in remarkably good shape. Mexican food dominates the menu, but you're welcome to enjoy a drink or maybe a breakfast burrito on weekends. Take home a souvenir Noodles beer to remember your meal.

our pick Swenson's (☎ 44778 5577; 40 Horseshoe Bay Rd; mains \$16-30; ☎ lunch & dinner) The restaurant at Bungalow Bay YHA hostel is renowned among Maggie's permanent residents, and travellers cotton-on pretty quickly that this is one of the best places to eat on the island. Pizzas and stir-fries are popular, but the curries are also worth coming for. We recommend the yellowfish curry with steaming jasmine rice, or there's a good selection of veg dishes to choose from.

Entertainment

Stage Door (☎ 4778 5448; www.stagedoortheatre.com.au; 5 Hayles Ave, Arcadia; dinner & show \$60; ☎ Fri & Sat) Comedy and cabaret while enjoying a sumptuous three-course dinner anyone? This theatre restaurant is popular, made so by its wonderful performing duo – Bernadette and Phill – who sing, dance and impersonate their way through a busy, entertaining show.

Getting There & Away

Sunferries (☎ 4771 3855; www.sunferries.com.au; return adult/child \$27/13.50) operates a frequent passenger ferry between Townsville and Magnetic Island, which takes about 20 minutes each way. Ferries depart from the Breakwater terminal and pull-in at Nelly Bay on the island. Parking is available at the terminal.

Fantasea (☎ 4772 5422; www.magneticislandferry.com.au; Ross St, South Townsville; return car & 3 people \$149, passenger only adult/child \$23/14) operates a car ferry crossing to Magnetic Island eight times daily

(seven on weekends) from the south side of Ross Creek.

Getting Around

BICYCLE
Magnetic Island is ideal for cycling, although some of the hills can be hard work. Most places to stay rent-out bikes for around \$15 a day; some even offer them free to guests.

BUS

The **Magnetic Island Bus Service** (☎ 4778 5130; fares \$3) ploughs between Picnic Bay and Horseshoe Bay at least 18 times a day, meeting all ferries and stopping at all major accommodation places. To book a wheelchair-accessible bus, call during office hours (8am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday, 8am to noon weekends).

MOKE & SCOOTER

Expect to pay around \$50 per day (plus extras such as petrol and a per-kilometre fee) for a Moke. You'll need to be over 21 and carrying a current international (or Australian) driver's license. A credit-card deposit is required. Scooter hire starts at around \$30 per day.

Road Runner Scooter Hire (☎ 4778 5222; 3/64 Kelly St, Nelly Bay) Also rents trailbikes.

Sails on Horseshoe (p433) Hires scooters.

Tropical Topless Car Rentals (☎ 4758 1111; Nelly Bay)

TOWNSVILLE TO MISSION BEACH

PALUMA RANGE NATIONAL PARK

Part of the **Wet Tropics World Heritage Area**, Paluma National Park and its teeny village provide a secluded respite from the drone of the Bruce Hwy.

Mt Spec Section

It's not uncommon for the lofty rainforest in this section of the park to be shrouded in mist or capped by cloud. Straddling the summit and escarpment of the Paluma Range, the Mt Spec Section stands over the Big Crystal Creek flood plain below.

There are two roads into this section of the park, both leading off a bypassed section of the Bruce Hwy: either 60km north of Townsville or 40km south of Ingham.

Take the northern access route to **Big Crystal Creek**. Goannas scamper away from

your approaching footsteps as you walk the few hundred metres from the picnic area to the popular **Paradise Waterhole**. The self-registration **QPWS camping ground** (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au; per person/family \$4.50/18) here is equipped with toilets, gas barbecues and drinking water. Access to Big Crystal Creek is via a 4km road, 2km north of Mt Spec Rd.

The southern access route, Mt Spec Rd, was built during the 1930s Depression. It's a dramatic, narrow road (with lose-your-lunch twists), weaving its way up the mountains to the village of **Paluma**. After 7km you come to **Little Crystal Creek**, where a pretty stone bridge (built in 1932) arches across the creek. This is a great swimming spot, with waterfalls and a couple of deep rock pools, and there's a small picnic area opposite the car park. From here it's another (steep) 11km up to Paluma.

PALUMA

Chimneys billow smoke in winter at the cosy little mountain-top village of Paluma – it can get chilly here in July and August. The town was founded in 1875 when tin was discovered in the area.

A number of walks lead through the surrounding rainforest. If not cushioned in cloud, **McClelland's Lookout**, 100m before Paluma village, provides humbling views. From the car park here a trail leads to **Witts Lookouts** (1.5km, 45 minutes return) and the steep **Cloudy Creek Falls** (3.5km, two hours return). Otherwise take the **H Track** (1.3km, 45 minutes) circuit walk, which leads from the rear of Lennox Cres along a former logging road.

Paluma Rainforest Inn (☎ 4770 8688; www.rainforestinpaluma.com; 1 Mt Spec Rd; r \$125-145; ☎) boasts large, stylish rooms with comfy beds. There are disabled-access facilities here, and an excellent bar-restaurant (mains \$11 to \$28, open for breakfast, lunch and dinner daily). The gardens contain more than 50 rhododendrons, which bloom throughout the year.

Approximately 11km beyond Paluma is **Lake Paluma**, a drinking-water storage dam with a dedicated foreshore area for swimming and picnicking. You can camp here with permission from **NQ Water** (☎ 4770 8526; www.nqwater.com.au) or stay in out-of-the-way log cabins at **Hidden Valley Cabins** (☎ 4770 8088; www.hiddenvalleycabins.com.au; backpacker s/d \$30/40, s/d \$55/75), which also has motel-style backpacker rooms and a licensed restaurant.

Jourama Falls Section

Jourama Falls and a series of cascades and rapids tumble along Waterview Creek, enclosed by palms and umbrella trees. It's a small but well-developed area, with a few lookouts, picnic areas and a **QPWS camping ground** (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au; per person/family \$4.50/18) with drinking water, toilets and showers.

INGHAM

☎ 07 / pop 4610

Kick up your heels and get ready to party-on in wild Ingham! Well...no, not quite. Nowhere near it in fact. Sorry. Ingham is sleepy at the best of times, but positively comatose on weekends. Don't expect much to be going on from about 2pm on Saturday until Monday morning.

Ingham finds it difficult to awake from its seemingly perpetual slumber, but it's a nice enough town. It services the surrounding sugar-cane district where cane farms were established in the 1880s. There's a large population of Italian immigrants here, and for three days each May the **Australian-Italian Festival** (www.acecomp.com.au/Italian) gets the pasta flying with cooking displays, street markets, children's rides, fireworks and a troubadour competition.

Information

QPWS (☎ 4776 1700; www.epa.qld.gov.au; 49 Cassady St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) Handle permits for camping in the area.

PUB WITHOUT BEER

Probably Ingham's best-known local is Dan Sheahan (1882-1977): a cane cutter, horseman and poet. Dan's poems carried on the Australian literary tradition, started by Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson, of investigating Australian bush identity through verse. Sheahan's focus, though, was on examining the Australian identity during WWII. The **Ingham Library** (☎ 4776 4683; 25 Lannercost St; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon, 8.30am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) stocks a few titles of his collected works.

Though Sheahan enjoyed mild success from his poetry, one of his poems was to become wildly popular as a song. Sheahan penned *Pub Without Beer* (over a glass of wine) at Ingham's Day Dawn Hotel, after arriving to find that US troops had just been there and drained it dry of beer. The weekly *North Queensland Register* published the poem in 1944, but the Day Dawn was demolished in 1960. Lees Hotel (above) now stands in its place.

It wasn't until 1956 that Gordon Parsons used Sheahan's poem as inspiration to compose the song *Pub With No Beer* (over a whisky) at a pub in Taylors Arms, New South Wales (p251). The song was then immortalised by the late Australian country-music icon Slim Dusty, who went on to record *Duncan* ('I love to have a beer with...') in 1980, and whose album *Beer Drinking Songs* (1986) went gold within three weeks of its release.

All this goes a fair way towards proving that the humble beer is an integral part of the Australian identity.

Tyto Wetlands visitors centre (☎ 4776 5211; www.hinchinbrooknq.com.au; Bruce Hwy; ☎ 8.45am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat & Sun)

Sights

The Ingham **cemetery**, about 3km out of town via Forrest Beach Rd, is unique for its sprawl of ornate Italianate mausoleums, adorned with flamboyant statuary and tiles and shuttered with Venetian blinds.

The **Tyto Wetlands Nature Walk** starts close to the town centre and encompasses 90 hectares of carefully preserved natural environment. Spot a grass owl if you can!

Under an hour's drive west from Ingham (about 50km) are the dazzling heights of **Wallaman Falls** – the longest single-drop waterfall in Australia. The falls plunge around 300m off Seaview Range in the **Girringun National Park**, and have much more oomph in the wet season, after rains.

Further in to Girringun National Park is the dormant volcanic peak of **Mt Fox**, with its well-formed crater. A short scramble will allow you to peer over the edge; the 160m-long path is neither marked nor maintained, and so is reserved only for fit and experienced walkers (allow an hour).

Sleeping & Eating

Lees Hotel (☎ 4776 1577; info@leeshotel.com.au; 58 Lannercost St; s/d \$55/65; ☎) Don't be put off by the dingy corridors. The rooms here, while not flash, are perfectly acceptable. The moulded

horseman on the roof and talking dog out the front make it hard to miss Lees. On the same site as the Day Dawn Hotel, of *Pub Without Beer* fame (see boxed text, opposite), this is a good-old Aussie pub. Lees does decent counter meals in the bar and excellent sit-down meals in the bistro out the back.

Herbert Valley Motel (☎ 4776 1777; fax 4776 3646; 37 Townsville Rd; r \$68-90; ☎) Undergoing a much-needed facelift at the time of research, this motel has functional rooms, but lousy air-con (made to work very hard in the heat of the day, but not too bad at night). Still, the beds are comfortable and management is friendly.

Elda's (☎ 4776 2039; 78 Lannercost St; sandwiches \$4-5; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Don't miss the chance to sample the delectable sandwiches at this mysterious deli-cum-fruit-shop. Walk past the imported Italian dry goods and fresh fruit and veg to the deli section, where your take away sandwich will be lovingly prepared.

Ingham Chinese Restaurant (☎ 4776 3522; 60 Lannercost St; meals \$10-16; ☎ lunch & dinner) Definitely the place to go if you eat to live, rather than live to eat. This restaurant with an unremarkable name serves unremarkable (but OK) food, including a \$10 lunch smorgasbord (Monday to Friday).

Getting There & Away

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) buses run between Townsville and Ingham (\$34, 1½ hours), stopping in the centre of town on Townsville Rd, close to the corner of Lannercost St.

Ingham is on the **Queensland Rail** (☎ 1300 131722; www.traveltrain.com.au) Brisbane-to-Cairns line. Trains run to/from Townsville (economy seat \$29, 1¾ hours).

LUCINDA

☎ 07 / pop 450

Pretty little Lucinda draws in camera-wielding tourists eager to grab a snap of the 6km-long jetty. It's the world's longest bulk sugar-loading jetty, allowing enormous carrier ships to dock. It's certainly an impressive sight. With Hinchinbrook Island seemingly within touching distance, Lucinda boasts excellent fishing and a quiet, relaxed mood that only a small seaside village can produce.

Hinchinbrook Wilderness Safaris (☎ 4777 8307; www.hinchinbrookwildernesssafaris.com.au; 4 Waring St) runs four-hour tours down the Deluge Inlet (per person \$60) and 2½-hour tours along the

channel (per person \$30). Transfers to/from Hinchinbrook are available (one way/return from \$46/57).

Wanderer's Holiday Village (☎ 4777 8213; www.wanderers-lucinda.com.au; Bruce Pde; unpowered/powered sites \$22/26, cabins \$80-95; ☎) is a sprawling, well-equipped camping ground with a children's play area. It's a relaxed place (as is Lucinda).

Even if you're not staying at the **Lucinda Point Hotel-Motel** (☎ 4777 8103; cmusso@bigpond.com.au; cnr Halifax & Dungeness Rds; r with/without bathroom \$95/60; ☎), it's worth being here for the Sunday afternoon (adult/child \$14.50/5.50) or Saturday night (adult \$23.50) barbecue smorgasbord. You get to use the pool, and the shaded beer garden is a perfect place to while away your time with a drink in hand. The motel rooms are comfortable and clean.

ORPHEUS ISLAND

Secluded Orpheus Island lies about 25km off the coast of Ingham. It's mostly national park, protecting macaranga trees (with huge, heart-shaped leaves), and eucalypts standing on a foundation of volcanic rocks. However it's the magnificent fringing reef that is the main attraction here.

Established in the 1940s, the luxurious **Orpheus Island Resort** (☎ 1800 077 167, 4777 7377; www.orpheus.com.au; d \$1450-1700; ☎) trades on its isolation from the outside world: no interlopers, no phones, no TVs. Everything is included in the price: meals, snacks, snorkelling and tennis. The resort also runs diving trips and courses for guests. Children under 15 years of age aren't welcome.

There's **bush camping** at Yank's Jetty, South Beach and Pioneer Bay. There are toilets at Yanks Jetty and Pioneer Bay, and picnic tables at all sites, but you'll need to bring your own drinking water and a fuel stove. Permits can be obtained from **QPWS** (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au; per person/family \$4.50/18).

The resort has a seaplane that handles transfers from Townsville (\$450 return, 30 minutes) and Cairns (\$780, one hour) to Orpheus.

CARDWELL

☎ 07 / pop 1250

Cardwell seems to suffer from an identity crisis: it can't quite work out whether it wants to be a bustling seaside resort town, or an idling, unhurried village. The truth lies somewhere

in between, and to be honest, it's probably better-off this way – enjoying the best of both worlds.

The area offers superb **fishing** and the **beaches** are clean. It's also the stopping-off point for magnificent Hinchinbrook Island (right), and the new marina precinct has evolved from an unfinished conglomerate into a thriving, picturesque minivillage.

The **Cardwell Forest Drive** starts from the centre of town. It's a scenic, 26km round-trip, with excellent lookouts, walking tracks and picnic areas signposted along the way. There are super swimming opportunities at Attie and Dead Horse Creek, as well as Spa Pool.

Information

QPWS Reef & Rainforest Centre (☎ 4066 8601; www.epa.qld.gov.au; Main Jetty; ☎ 8am–4.30pm) Has an interactive rainforest display and information about Hinchinbrook Island and the nearby state and national parks.

Sleeping & Eating

Kookaburra Holiday Park (☎ 4066 8648; www.kookaburraholidaypark.com.au; 175 Bruce Hwy; unpowered/power sites \$22/26, dm/s/d \$20/40/45, cabins without bathroom \$60, units \$105; ☎ ☎) More like a sprawling village than a caravan park, the Kookaburra's 1.2 hectares are green and tree-lined, and there's backpackers accommodation in a large Queenslander house out the back. You can borrow fishing rods, prawn nets and crab pots and attempt to catch dinner.

Mudbrick Manor (☎ 4066 2299; www.mudbrickmanor.com.au; Lot 13 Stony Creek Rd; d \$120; ☎ ☎) This hand-built, mud-brick home is outstanding. You'll spend lazy days on the veranda overlooking the sprawling courtyard, soaking up the casual country finesse. The huge indoor lounge area has activities aplenty, or you can occupy yourself poking around the decorative interiors. Breakfast is included, but ask about the three-course dinners; they may entice you to stay another night.

Port Hinchinbrook Resort Hotel (☎ 4066 2000; www.porthinchinbrook.com.au; Bruce Hwy; d from \$195; ☎ ☎); wi-fi Located at the marina, the cabins here are more like luxury, open-plan villas. The front doors slide wide open to catch the cool breezes sliding off the marina waterfront, and there's a warm, earthy tone to the walls.

Annie's Kitchen (☎ 4066 8818; 107 Victoria St; mains \$9–17; ☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner) Aside from the usual culprits like burgers and sandwiches, there are some wonderful main-

meal choices at this ultra-busy café-diner. Homemade rissoles, roast meats, mixed grills and big seafood plates all feature on the slightly-different-to-the-norm menu.

Muddy's (☎ 4066 8133; 221 Victoria St; mains \$23–35; ☎) lunch & dinner Tue–Sun) For a slap-up meal, head to Muddy's for some of the best seafood in the north. It's not cheap, but at least you get what you pay for. Muddy's, not surprisingly, specialises in mud crab and has a pleasant decking area out the front.

Getting There & Away

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 20 30; www.greyhound.com.au) buses stop at Cardwell en route to/from Townsville (\$40, 2¼ hours) and Cairns (\$38, 3¼ hours).

Cardwell is also on the Brisbane-to-Cairns train line; contact **Queensland Rail** (☎ 1300 131 722; www.traveltrain.com.au) for details.

HINCHINBROOK ISLAND

Hinchinbrook Island lives up to the hype. Australia's largest island national park, Hinchinbrook is somewhat of a holy grail for walkers. Indeed, hope that you're one of the fortunate 40 who are allowed to traverse the Thorsborne Trail at any one time. If not, there's a range of other ways to explore this stunning and unspoiled wilderness. Hinchinbrook's granite mountains rise dramatically from the sea. All 399 sq km of the island is national park, and rugged **Mt Bowen** (1121m) is its highest peak.

Walking opportunities here are excellent; however, some trails may close between November and March. The highlight is the **Thorsborne Trail**, a 32km coastal track from Ramsay Bay to Zoe Bay (with its beautiful waterfall) and on to George Point at the southern tip. It's recommended that you spend three nights to complete the trail. Return walks of individual sections are also possible. You'll need to wear a layer of insect repellent, protect your food from ravenous rats, draw water from creeks as you go and be alert to the possibility of crocs being present. The trail is ungraded and at times rough, including challenging creek crossings. You should carry a map, drinking water, fuel stove and trowel.

Bookings for the Thorsborne Trail need to be made in advance: for a place during the dry season, **QPWS** (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au; per person/family \$4.50/18) recommends booking a year ahead (six months ahead for other dates). In

Cardwell the QPWS Reef & Rainforest Centre (opposite) stocks the imperative *Thorsborne Trail* brochure and screens the 15-minute *Without a Trace* video, which walkers are required to view.

Apart from the Thorsborne Trail, camping and short walks are available at **Macushla** (5km to 8km, 1½ to two hours), and the **Haven Circuit** (1km, 15 minutes).

Hinchinbrook Island Ferries (below) runs day tours (per person \$85) to Hinchinbrook Island, departing from Cardwell's Hinchinbrook Marina. The tour includes exploration of mangroves, visiting the long stretch of beach at Ramsay Bay and the option of walking through the rainforest at Macushla.

Sleeping

QPWS camping grounds (☎ 13 13 40; www.epa.qld.gov.au; per person \$4.50) There are six QPWS camping grounds along the Thorsborne Trail, plus the one at Macushla Bay and another at the Haven in the north.

Hinchinbrook Island Wilderness Lodge & Resort (☎ 4066 8270; www.hinchinbrookresort.com.au; Orchid Beach; beach cabins \$275, tree houses \$445; ☎) Built into the steep hillside behind Orchid Beach in the island's north, these elevated tree houses feature floor-to-ceiling windows, a balcony, kitchenette and bathroom. Guests are free to use the resort's canoes, surf-skis and snorkelling gear, or just laze in the hammocks strung along the beach. All meals are available from the licensed restaurant and are not included in the accommodation rates (although full-board packages are available).

Getting There & Away

Hinchinbrook Island Ferries (☎ 4066 85 85; www.hinchinbrookferries.com.au) operates daily services (return \$125, 50 minutes each way) between Cardwell's Port Hinchinbrook Marina and dock at the Hinchinbrook Resort. If you're walking the Thorsborne Trail, a one-way transfer costs \$80. Walkers usually pick up the **Hinchinbrook Wilderness Safaris** (☎ 4777 8307; www.hinchinbrookwildernesssafaris.com.au; one way/return \$46/57) service at the southern end of the trail.

GOOLD & GARDEN ISLANDS

These uninhabited islands provide the perfect setting for you to play castaway. Both are national parks and off the everyday tourist radar, so you could find you have the islands to yourself.

Goold Island, just 17km northeast of Cardwell, supports open forest, mangroves and sandy beaches on both its western and southern sides. There's a **QPWS camping ground** (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au; per person/family \$4.50/18) on the island's west, with toilets, picnic tables and a gas barbecue. Bring drinking water.

Just south of Goold Island is tiny **Garden Island**, with a recreation reserve controlled by the local council. Permits to camp are required and available from the **Cardwell Newsagency** (☎ 4066 8622; 83 Victoria St; per person \$3.85). The island has a good sandy beach but no fresh water; kids under six aren't permitted.

Hinchinbrook Island Ferries (☎ 4066 8270; www.hinchinbrookferries.com.au; return transfers \$90) can ferry campers to/from Cardwell on request.

TULLY

☎ 07 / op 2460

Tully is proud of its reputation as the wettest place in Australia. Rather than cover it all up and deny it, the big 7.9m gumboot at the entrance to town announces to all that Tully received 7.9m of rain in 1950! Nothing like getting things out in the open straight away.

Tully is a sugar town with a big mill chimney. The surrounding banana plantations provide seasonal employment, attracting droves of young backpackers on working holidays. But really, it's the rapids that people are here for. The nearby Tully River provides thrilling **white-water rafting** year-round, thanks to the daily floodgate release by the local hydro-electricity company. Rafting trips are timed to coincide with the release of the floodgates.

Information

Tully visitors centre (☎ 4068 2288; Bruce Hwy; ☎) 8.30am–4.45pm Mon–Fri, 9.30am–2.30pm Sat & Sun) On the highway just south of the Tully turn-off.

Sights & Activities

Book at the visitors centre for **Tully Sugar Mill Tours** (adult/child \$12/8; ☎) 10am, 11am & 1.30pm Mon–Fri & 11am Sat & Sun Jun–Nov). During the crushing season (June to November) the mill operates 24/7 and processes around two million tonnes of cane. The mill generates its own power by burning fibre residue. The 1½-hour tours must be booked at least 30 minutes before departure (as minimum numbers are required); wear closed-toe shoes and a shirt with sleeves.

There are good walking opportunities in the **Tully Gorge National Park**, located 40km from Tully along Cardstone Rd. There are picnic facilities here, as well as river access for swimming at **Tully Gorge** (though you may be converged upon by pumped-up, paddle-wheeling kayakers, and the gentle burble of the Tully River can turn suddenly into a rapid when the hydro-electricity company opens its floodgates).

There's excellent swimming at the unfortunately named **Alligator's Nest**, 7km north of town via Murray St. The visitors centre can provide leaflets detailing walks to the top of **Mt Tyson** (640m).

White-water rafting day-trips cost about \$180 per person and include a barbecue lunch and transfers from Mission Beach, Cairns or Port Douglas. Operators include the following: **Raging Thunder Adventures** (☎ 4030 7990; www.ragingthunder.com.au/rafting.asp) **R'n'R White Water Rafting** (☎ 4051 7777; www.raft.com.au)

Sleeping & Eating

Banana Barracks (☎ 4068 0455; www.banana.barracks.com; 50 Butler St; dm with/without bathroom \$26/24, bungalows \$60; ☎) Often full of fruit-picking backpackers, this busy hostel has a fantastic public bar that serves icy-cold schooners of draught beer.

Tully Motel (☎ 4068 2233; tullymotel@bigpond.com; Bruce Hwy; r \$75-87; ☎) The superior rooms are worth the extra \$12 at this good-value motel on the main highway.

Kanga Jacks (☎ 4068 2118; 51 Bryant St; meals \$6-15; ☎) breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) One for early birds (it opens at 5am), Kanga Jacks serves hearty meals (lasagne, pork chops, steak, fish) with a crispy salad and hot chips. Look for the big red roller door at the entrance.

Getting There & Away

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) has services from Tully to Townsville (\$46, 3¼ hours) and Cairns (\$33, 2½ hours). Tully is also on the Brisbane-Cairns train line; contact **Queensland Rail** (☎ 1300 131 722; www.traveltrain.com.au) for details.

MISSION BEACH

☎ 07 / pop 2600

Mission Beach and its sister villages Wongaling Beach, Bingil Bay and South Mission Beach are like a big, happy family: four

siblings who are similar in character and style, but live separate lives without being jealous of each other in the slightest. Each has a distinct vibe, but you can tell they're from the same pod.

Where rainforest meets the sea, Mission Beach has superb walking tracks and around 40 resident cassowaries that roam the rainforest on the town's back doorstep. The **beaches** here are world-class, there's a busy café and eating scene, and while it's primarily a tourist hub, the town effortlessly manages to stay low-key. Dunk Island (p443) is a mere 20-minute ferry ride away.

Information

Mission Beach has comprehensive services: internet access is available at a number of places on the main strip, ATMs are located in the newsagent and supermarket, and the post office is in the main group of shops.

Community for Cassowary & Coastal Conservation (C4; ☎ 4068 7197; www.cassowaryconservation.asn.au) **Intermission @ the Beach** (☎ 4068 7117; David St) Internet access per 20 minutes/hour \$2/5.

Mission Beach visitors centre (☎ 4068 7099; www.missionbeachtourism.com; Porters Promenade; ☎) 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun) Has a wall of pamphlets (in a number of languages).

Wet Tropics Environment Centre (☎ 4068 7179; www.wettropics.gov.au) In the visitors centre. Rainforest and cassowary conservation displays are curated by volunteers from the Community for Cassowary & Coastal Conservation. Proceeds from purchases go towards buying cassowary habitat, which is being depleted by development and threatens the survival of the species.

Sights & Activities

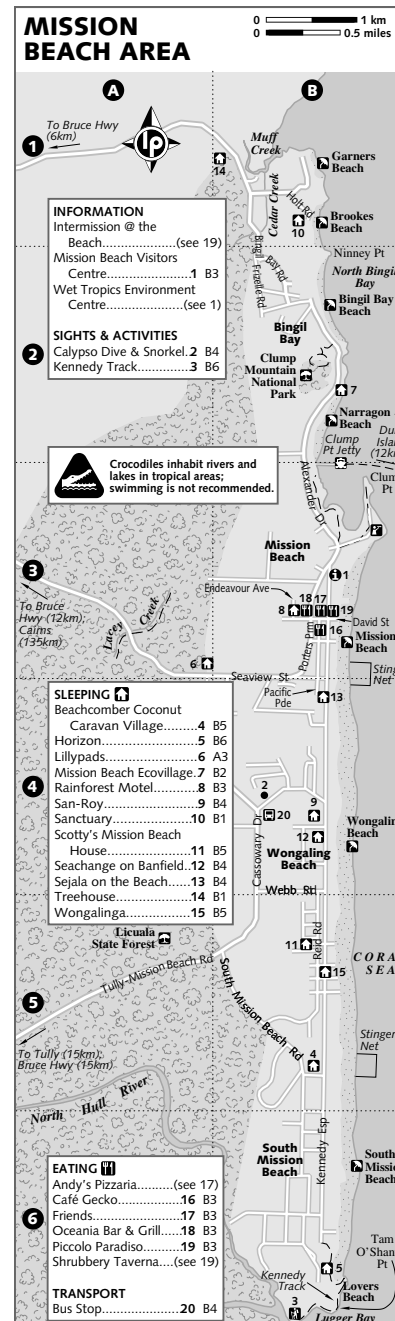
Dunk Island (p443) is a popular day-trip from Mission Beach. The **Great Barrier Reef** is just an hour away, and **rainforest walks** are extra exciting if you come across a cassowary!

DIVING & SNORKELLING

All boats depart from busy little Clump Point Jetty.

Day cruises to the outer reef with **Quick Cat** (☎ 4068 7289; www.quickcatscuba.com) include a 45-minute stop at Dunk Island, snorkelling, lunch and a glass-bottom boat jaunt (\$140). Add \$80 for an introductory dive; \$55 for a certified dive. A return ferry to Dunk Island is also available (\$40).

Calypso Dive & Snorkel (☎ 4068 8432; www.calypsodive.com; 20 Wongaling Beach Rd, Wongaling Beach)



dives the *Lady Bowen* wreck with packages from \$250. Introductory dives are from \$65. Alternatively, there are trips out to the reef (per person \$120) and jet-ski tours of Dunk Island (\$195).

WALKING

Walkers should pick up the *Walking Guide* (40c) from the visitors centre, detailing the many trails in the area. Among them is the superb coastal **Kennedy Track** (7km, three hours return), which leads past secluded Lovers Beach and the Lugger Bay lookout. The inland walks through state park pass through tropical rainforest, where you're most likely to see a cassowary. **Licuala State Forest** has a number of rainforest walks, including a **children's walk** (10 minutes) marked with cassowary footprints, and the **Lacey Creek Track** (1.2km, 45 minutes) with interpretive signage and a cassowary display.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Paddle over to Dunk Island for the day with **Coral Sea Kayaking** (☎ 4068 9154; www.coralseakayaking.com; half-/full-day tours \$70/120) or juts bob around the coastline for half a day. Trips depart South Mission Beach.

Fancy a skydive? **Jump the Beach** (☎ 4031 1822; www.jumpthebeach.com; 9000/11,000/14,000ft tandem dives \$210/244/295) uses the sand of Mission Beach to cushion your landing. There's a 100kg weight limit.

See opposite for details of white-water rafting trips on the Tully River, departing Mission Beach.

Tours

Informative wildlife-spotting tours along the Hull River (around four hours, including a light meal) are run by the following operators: **Hinchinbrook Explorer** (☎ 4088 6154; www.hexplorer.com.au; adult/child \$50/25) **River Rat Eco Cruises** (☎ 4068 8018; www.riverratcruises.com; adult/child \$50/25)

Sleeping BUDGET

Treehouse (☎ 4068 7137; www.yha.com.au; Frizelle Rd, Bingil Bay; unpowered sites \$12, dm/d \$23/55; ☎) You'll be impressed by the big, eaned-framed timber building here that merges effortlessly with the surrounding rainforest. The generous balcony space is dotted with heavy, wooden tables strewn with board games, international newspapers and books. Relaxed travellers

veg-out on sun lounges or hammocks under the shaded veranda.

Scotty's Mission Beach House (☎ 1800 665 567; 4068 8676; www.scottysbeachhouse.com.au; 167 Reid Rd, Wongaling Beach; 4-/6-/12-bed dm \$21/23/26, d & tw with/without bath-room \$59/49; 🏠 🚿) Scotty's is perpetually abuzz with like-minded travellers catching some rays beside the well-grassed pool area, or eagerly tapping away at keyboards in the internet room. The dorms are clean and comfortable. The four-bed dorms have a bathroom, and the 12-bed ones are partitioned so they don't feel claustrophobic. All beds have new mattresses, making Scotty's a great place to stay.

our pick Sanctuary (☎ 1800 777 012, 4088 6064; www.sanctuaryatmission.com; 72 Holt Rd, Bingil Bay; dm \$33, huts s/d \$61/65, cabins s/d \$131/150; 🏠 🚿) Wow! If you want to sleep with nature on a platform within a real rainforest, surrounded only by flyscreen, then the huts here will fulfil your wish. If you prefer comfort, the cabins are exquisite, and even the shower cubicles provide floor-to-ceiling rainforest views. About 95% of the land here is set aside for conservation (the other 5% being the actual complex). Take one of the excellent yoga classes (one/five/10 classes \$12/50/95), wander around the rainforest on the interpretive walk, or take refuge in the superb pool area. Sanctuary has its own sewage system, uses only rainwater throughout, flushes grey water down the toilet, uses biodegradable detergents and has no air-con (trust us, you won't need it – the breezes here are sublime).

Beachcomber Coconut Caravan Village (☎ 1800 008 129, 4068 8129; www.beachcombercoconut.com; Kennedy Esp, South Mission Beach; unpowered/powered sites \$34/38, cabins with/without bathroom from \$95/70, villas \$160-170; 🏠 🚿) Book early if you want to stay at this fabulous holiday park during school holidays. The Beachcomber has well-grassed camp sites and wonderful beachfront cabins overlooking Dunk Island. It's an excellent option for families, with a big swimming pool and a well-equipped playground.

MIDRANGE

Rainforest Motel (☎ 4068 7556; www.missionbeachrainforestmotel.com; 9 Endeavour Ave, Mission Beach; s/d \$85/99; 🏠 🚿) If only all motels could be like this! Each tidy, separate unit is surrounded by gorgeous faux-rainforest, and there's a path leading from the car park to the main street, 150m away.

San-Roy (☎ 4088 6699; 79 Banfield Pde, Wongaling Beach; unit \$90; 🏠 🚿) It's not flash, but it's perfectly

acceptable for a small family on a budget holiday. This cosy unit has a double bed in one bedroom, and three singles in the other.

Seachange on Banfield (☎ 4088 6699; 43 Banfield Pde, Wongaling Beach; house \$130-150; 🏠 🚿) This cute, two-bedroom 1970s holiday house sports a big backyard and a sunroom overlooking the beach and Dunk Island. There's a big bench in the kitchen on which to prepare your own meals, with bar stools for those who want to prop themselves up and offer advice. It's a real home-away-from-home.

Mission Beach Ecovillage (☎ 4068 7534; www.ecovillage.com.au; Clump Point Rd, Mission Beach; d \$178-190; 🏠 🚿) With its own banana trees scattered around wonderful tropical gardens (including some spectacular cycads), the self-contained bungalows here are huge. The more-expensive rooms have a spa, and the brilliant free-form pool is perfect for all ages.

Sejala on the Beach (☎ 4088 6699; www.missionbeachholidays.com.au/sejala; 26 Pacific Pde, Mission Beach; d \$240; 🏠 🚿) Your first tentative steps down into the cocoon-like bathrooms here will reveal shutter doors that you can open to shower with nature. These huts have loads of character, each with a kitchenette and a private barbecue on the front deck.

Lilypads (☎ 4088 6133; www.lilypads.com.au; 1375 Cassowary Dr, Mission Beach; house \$300-350; 🏠 🚿) You soon realise what the owners had in mind when they named this place – there's a beautiful lilypond out the front near the pool area. These two self-contained houses are the epitome of luxury, with a huge spa deck, polished floorboards throughout, plasma TV and open shower in the bathroom. There's a small rainforest 'body temple' a short walk away – relax in a hammock surrounded by mosquito netting and listen to the bubbling stream nearby.

TOP END

Wongalinga (☎ 4068 8221; www.wongalinga.com.au; 64 Reid Rd, Wongaling Beach; 1-/2-/3-bedroom apt \$230/270/300; 🏠 🚿) The three-bedroom apartments are so massive, you may need to take a whistle in case you get lost. The apartments have excellent air-con, but try opening up the shutters and letting the cool breezes waft through before you press any buttons.

Horizon (☎ 4068 8154; www.thehorizon.com.au; 1 Explorer Dr, South Mission Beach; std r \$240, ste \$285-460; 🏠 🚿) The new owners (from Byron Bay) decided to revamp this secluded piece of

paradise, and the results are impressive. The whole vibe is very contemporary, without compromising the natural beauty of the surroundings. Dunk Island looks like it's within touching distance of the huge, decked pool area.

Eating

Whether it's a quick bite on a romantic, candlelit dinner, Mission Beach exists for you, the traveller. There's pretty much nothing you can't have here! There are supermarkets for self-caterers at Mission Beach and Wongaling Beach.

Café Gecko (☎ 4068 7390; cnr Porters Promenade & Campbell Sts, Mission Beach; light meals \$5-12; 🍷 breakfast & lunch) The pies here are absolutely awesome – real chunks of steak and nothing artificial. The sandwiches are made fresh right in front of you at the hole-in-the-wall where you place your order. The bacon, eggs, tomato, toast and coffee breakfast goes down a treat after an early-morning swim.

Andy's Pizzeria (☎ 4088 6866; 2/45 Porter Promenade, Mission Beach; pizzas \$7-15; 🍷 dinner) Hole-in-the-wall pizza joint that's as simple as it is good. It's great for a quick meal, but accepts cash only.

Piccolo Paradiso (☎ 4068 7008; David St, Mission Beach; pizza from \$12, pasta mains \$12-17; 🍷 lunch & dinner) There's a nice little bar area here – imbibe a beer while waiting for your pizza to cook. If you choose to eat-in, you'll do so in casual, relaxed surroundings.

Shrubbery Taverna (☎ 4068 7803; David St, Mission Beach; mains \$18-30; 🍷 lunch Fri-Sun, dinner Wed-Sun, bar open from 4.30pm Wed-Sun) Even if you're not interested in eating at this superb tavern, it's a great place to catch some live music on Sunday nights. Pull up a seat outside, order a drink and some Spanish mackerel and listen to the melody.

our pick Oceania Bar & Grill (☎ 4088 6222; 52 Porter Promenade, Mission Beach; mains \$21-34; 🍷 lunch & dinner Sat-Mon, dinner Thu & Fri) Grab a draught beer or have a browse through the lengthy wine list before choosing your meal, which will inevitably consist of steak or seafood. The chilled seafood plate goes well with a sav blanc, or maybe the T-bone with a Stella or Barossa shiraz may be more to your liking.

Friends (☎ 4068 7107; Porter Promenade, Mission Beach; mains \$26-33; 🍷 dinner Tue-Sun) OK, so the menu may be limited, but with seafood-oriented starters and sumptuous dishes such

as pork-belly and duck, we think you'll like Friends. The atmosphere is elegant, but you won't need to wear your best frock or suit to dinner. Vegetarians may struggle here, although the seaweed option had good reviews from at least one traveller we met.

Getting There & Away

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 20 30; www.greyhound.com.au) and **Premier** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premierms.com.au) buses stop in Wongaling Beach, and travel to/from Cairns (\$31, two hours) and Townsville (\$52, 3¼ hours).

The **Trans North** (☎ 4068 7400; www.transnorthbus.com; tickets from \$3; 🍷 Mon-Sat) local bus runs almost every hour between Bingil Bay and South Mission Beach; the visitors centre has timetables.

DUNK ISLAND

The water surrounding Dunk Island seems too blue to be true. It's the first thing you'll notice as you step off the ferry and onto the long jetty. As you make your way to terra firma and peer over the edge of the old wooden structure, myriad fish swarm below, taking it upon themselves to be the island's unofficial welcoming party. Whether you're a resort guest or a day-tripper, Dunk has heaps to offer.

Dunk's abundant species of birds (more than 100), butterflies, coral gardens and marine life were the inspiration for the transcendentalist EJ Banfield, who wrote four novels while living on the island between 1897 and 1923. Of them, *The Confessions of a Beachcomber* is probably the best known. **Banfield's grave** is a short walk from the jetty towards Muggy Muggy.

You can almost circumnavigate the island using the park's well-marked **walking trails** (9km, three hours). Otherwise, a walk to the top of **Mt Kootaloo** (271m, 5.6km, 1½ hours return) allows you to look back to the mainland and see Hinchinbrook Channel fanning out before you. There's good **snorkelling** over bommies at Muggy Muggy and great **swimming** at Coconut Beach.

Otherwise, day-trippers can utilise a limited number of the resort's facilities by purchasing a Resort Experience Pass (adult/child \$40/20) available from the Watersports Centre just south of the jetty. This entitles you to lunch at one of the resort's cafés and an hour's use of a paddle ski.

Sleeping & Eating

Dunk Island Resort (☎ 1800 737 678, 4068 8199; www.dunk-island.com; s \$311-551, d \$366-628; 🍷 🍴) Rates vary depending on the standard of your room, and here's a tip: the standard beachfront rooms are just as nice as the more expensive beachfront suites. Stroll out your sliding door to the beautiful blue water only steps away. While-away your day in a sun lounge, then pack up and head to the bar and pool at dusk. There's a year-round kids' club (open 9am to noon and 5pm to 9pm; per child per session \$30) for those aged between three and 12.

QPWS camping ground (☎ 4068 8199; www.epa.qld.gov.au; per person/family \$4.50/18) QPWS has nine sites on a gravel patch just back from the jetty; there are toilets and showers.

Jetty Café (Dunk Island Jetty, meals \$14-23) Day-trippers can buy decent meals like barramundi spring rolls, chicken burgers and steak sandwiches from this café on the end of the jetty.

Getting There & Away

Hinterland Air Transfer (☎ 1300 134 044, 8296 8010) runs return flights to/from Cairns (per adult/child from \$198/100, 45 minutes, three daily).

Mission Beach Dunk Island Connections (☎ 4059 2709; www.missionbeachdunkconnections.com.au) runs combination bus-and-boat transfers between

Dunk and Cairns (return per adult/child \$128/80, 2½ hours).

Dunk Island Express Water Taxi (☎ 4068 8310; Banfield Pde, Wongaling Beach; return adult/child \$35/17.50) and **Dunk Island Ferry & Cruises** (☎ 4068 7211; www.dunkferry.com.au; Clump Point Jetty, Mission Beach; return adult/child \$48/24) make the short trip from Mission Beach to Dunk Island.

BEDARRA ISLAND

Exclusive Bedarra Island is the sort of place you go whenever a 'who cares, it's only money' attitude grabs you. Yes, it's expensive, but they don't cut any corners here. It's worth it.

The 16 beachfront villas at **Bedarra Island Resort** (☎ 4068 8233; www.bedarraisland.com; 2-night packages \$2792-5732, d \$3300-6240; 🍷 🍴 📶; wi-fi) are the very essence of luxury and seclusion. Indeed, the resort boasts that there are often more beaches here than guests! Each stunning, split-level villa overlooks Wedgerock Bay, has its own private plunge-pool and outdoor area with a day bed (to which a bucket of ice and plate of canapés are delivered daily). There's a bar open 24/7, and all meals are included. This is not a family resort – kids under 12 are not catered for. Access is via Dunk Island; contact Dunk Island Resort (p443) for details.