

# Townsville & North Coast

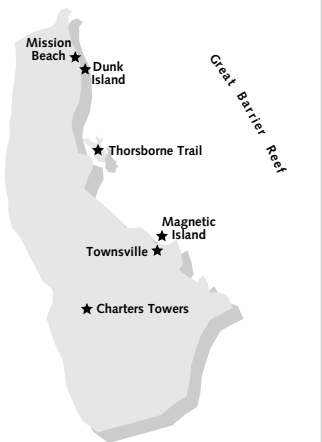


Townsville has finally stood and up said 'I've had enough!' Sick of being pushed into the background by Cairns to the north and Airlie Beach to the south, Townsville has broken free from the shackles of her more domineering cousins and is starting to make her own way in life. For decades the city was content to hide from the crowds and it has taken until now for her to realise what a stunner she is. Townsville is no longer seen as the backwater of North Queensland. This is a real, living, breathing city with a pulse. People live and work here and can't understand why anyone would want to be anywhere else. Townsville doesn't need to turn on the charm. It's already there. You just need to look.

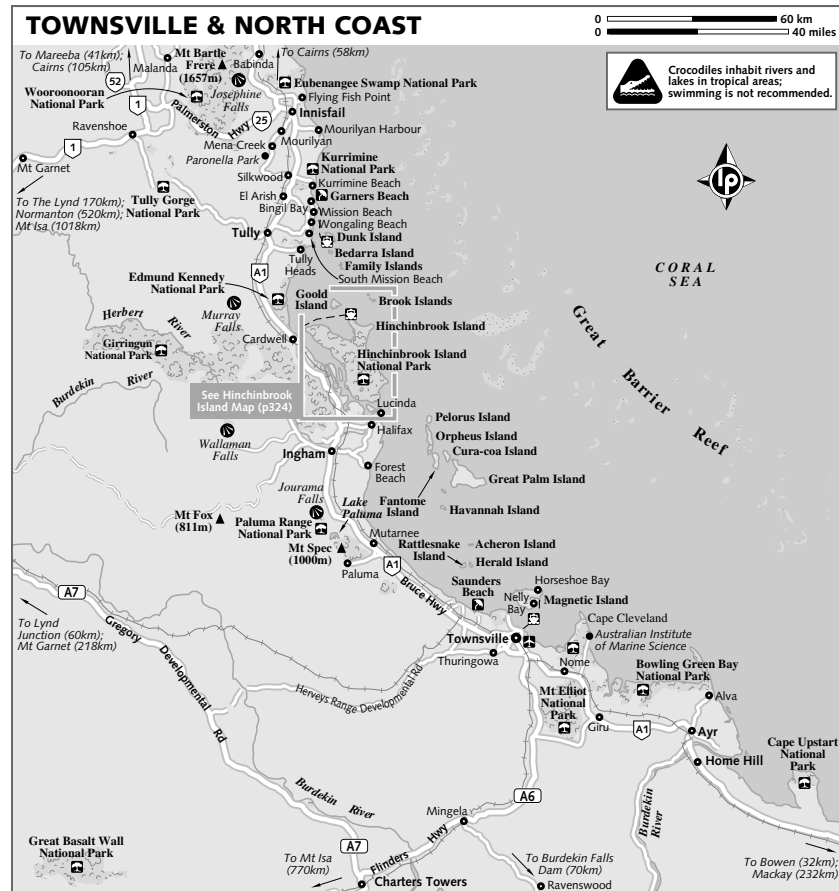
In fact the entire north coast from Townsville to Innisfail dances to the beat of a different drum. It's a slower beat. A beat that makes people stop and listen. Magnetic and Dunk Islands are accessible to all budgets, while Hinchinbrook Island beckons walkers with the world-renowned Thorsborne Trail. Charters Towers and Ravenswood offer a small slice of the outback with a mining twist, without venturing too far into the interior. The small coastal communities around Mission Beach are the perfect place for a low-key getaway and Innisfail is a real-life working town with heaps of spunk.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Joining the full-moon party or lazing about in one of **Magnetic Island's** (p308) pretty little villages
- Cheering on the Cowboys or partying in down-to-earth **Townsville** (p298)
- Spotting a cassowary in the rainforest behind **Mission Beach** (p326)
- Searching for a secluded beach all to yourself on **Dunk Island** (p331)
- Gazing at the superb gold-rush architecture in **Charters Towers** (p315)
- Walking the **Thorsborne Trail** (p323) on stunning Hinchinbrook Island



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## Dangers & Annoyances

Dangerous marine stingers (box jellyfish) are present in the coastal waters during the summer months (November to May; see the boxed text, p251 for more information). Saltwater crocodiles inhabit the mangroves, estuaries and open water north from around Lucinda. Warning signs are posted around the waterways where crocodiles might be present.

## Getting There & Away

**AIR**  
Townsville is the major airport servicing the north coast, with domestic flights and connections to and from all major centres and capital cities.

Dunk Island has its own airport, with regular flights to and from Townsville and Cairns.

## BOAT

The major ferry services along this coast are from Townsville to Magnetic Island, from Cardwell to Hinchinbrook Island and from Mission Beach to Dunk Island.

## BUS

Bus services follow the Bruce Hwy on the main Brisbane–Cairns run, with detours to Mission Beach. Brisbane to Townsville takes 22 hours, Townsville to Cairns around six.

Inland services operate from Townsville to Mt Isa via Charters Towers, continuing on to the Northern Territory.

## CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The Bruce Hwy is the major route up the coast, while the Flinders Hwy from Townsville is the major inland route.

The Gregory Developmental Rd runs parallel to the coast, on the inland side of the Great Dividing Range, passing through Charters Towers and on to Lynd Junction. From here, the Kennedy Hwy continues north to the Atherton Tableland.

## TRAIN

The train line from Brisbane to Cairns runs parallel to the Bruce Hwy, with stops at Ingham, Cardwell and Tully. The Brisbane–Townsville trip takes around 24 hours. The trip from Townsville to Cairns is just under eight hours.

The *Inlander* (p308) runs between Townsville and Mt Isa twice a week (Sunday and Wednesday); the trip from Townsville to Charters Towers takes three hours.

# TOWNSVILLE

☎ 07 / pop 143,328

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.

Nestled between the tourist hotspots of Airlie Beach and Cairns, until recently Townsville hadn't rated highly on most travellers' 'to do' lists. It's a shame, but things are a-changing, and fast: travellers are starting to wake up to Townsville's charm. They like the fact that it's a real city as opposed to the glitz and glamour of Airlie and Cairns. Townsville doesn't have to act, she's the real deal.

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 that kids won't want to leave. The city is also home to the North Queensland Cowboys, the adored rugby-league team that dominates

nearly every conversation on the streets. Don't be surprised if someone asks you how JT's hand injury is coming along.

Townsville somehow manages to keep its feet on the ground while boasting world-class facilities and an awesome climate. Things have changed here...for the better.

## HISTORY

Townsville was founded when a boiling-down works was established in 1864 to process carcasses on the coast. John Black and Robert Towns owned pastoral leases in the highlands and their farms depended on such a facility. Towns wanted it to be a private depot for his stations, but Black saw the chance to make his fortune by founding a settlement and persuaded Towns to fund the project.

Despite a cyclone in 1867, Black persisted and became Townsville's first mayor the same year. Eventually a road linked the port town to Towns' stations, contributing to both their survival and Townsville's, which developed mainly due to Chinese and Kanaka labour (see the boxed text, p308).

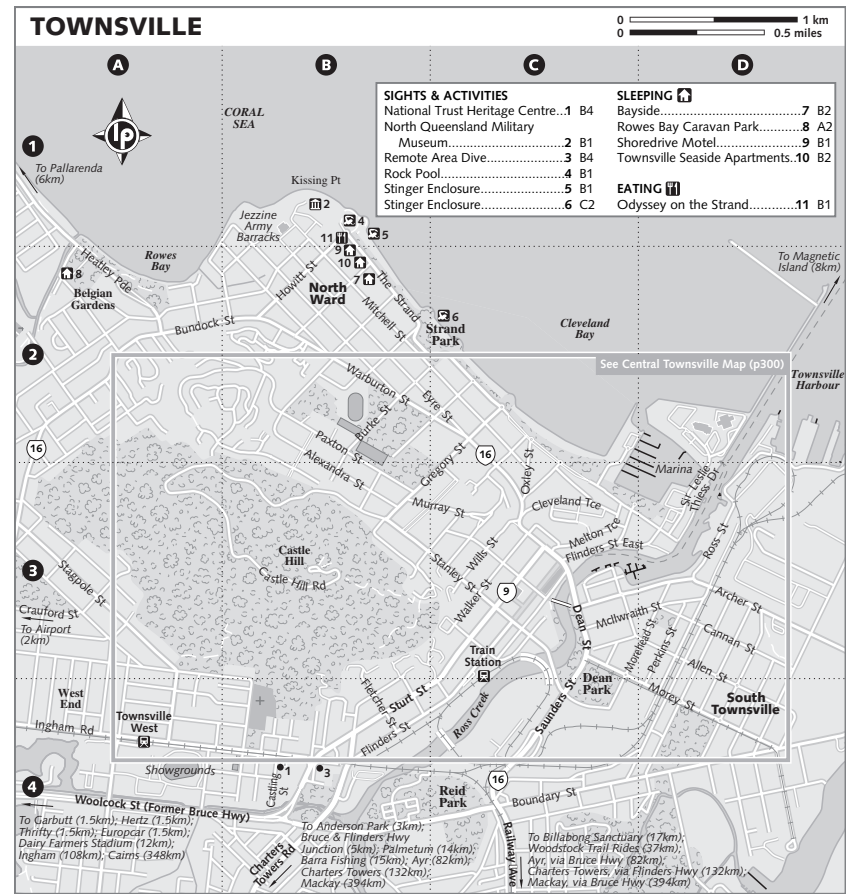
Townsville's location makes it a strategic centre for defence. During WWII its population of 30,000 boomed to more than 100,000 when it became a major base for Australian and US forces.

## ORIENTATION

Townsville is often referred to as the Twin Cities alongside its sister city, Thuringowa, which is really a large suburb, southwest of the CBD. Dairy Farmers Stadium is in Thuringowa, about 15km from the CBD.

Imposing Castle Hill (300m) presides over Townsville. Ross Creek winds about the city centre, which is on the west side of the creek. Townsville's centre is relatively compact and easy to get about on foot. East of the Dean St Bridge or pedestrian-only Victoria Bridge is what is known as South Townsville, where there's the rejuvenated tourist-oriented hub of Palmer St. There's some serious development going on in Palmer St nowadays.

The Strand is the centrepiece of Townsville, and there are several accommodation options, pubs and restaurants stretching the length of its coveted waterfront location. Townsville's shopping precinct stretches south along the Flinders St Mall, which runs from the Dean St Bridge down towards the train station. Flinders St E is lined with many of the town's



oldest buildings, many of which have been repurposed to house a number of eateries, pubs and clubs. The Sunferries terminal for Magnetic Island is also located along here.

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

### Bookshops

**Ancient Wisdom Bookshop** (Map p300; ☎ 4721 2434; Shaw's Arcade) New Age titles; off Flinders St Mall.

**Bumble Bee Bookshop & Music** (Map p300; ☎ 4771 6091; 305 Flinders St Mall) Mainstream titles, with a large travel section.

**Jim's Book Exchange** (Map p300; ☎ 4771 6020; Shaw's Arcade) Wide range of secondhand books; off Flinders St Mall.

**Mary Who? Bookshop** (Map p300; ☎ 4771 3824; 414 Flinders St) Small but bountiful range of books and music.

### Internet Access

All backpackers hostels offer internet access and there are a few internet cafés scattered throughout town.

**Internet Den** (Map p300; ☎ 4721 4500; 265 Flinders St Mall; per hr \$5; ☎ 9am–9pm Mon–Fri, 10am–8pm Sat & Sun) Friendly management, lots of computers and also offers luggage storage.

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**Townsville City Library** (Map p300; ☎ 4727 9666; 272-8 Flinders St Mall; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat & Sun)

**Medical Services**

**Townsville Hospital** (☎ 4796 1111; 100 Angus Smith Dr, Douglas)

**Post**

**Post office** (Map p300; Post Office Plaza, Shop 1, Sturt St) Enter via Sturt St; the poste restante section is a small window around the back.

**Tourist Information**

**Finders Mall visitors centre** (Map p300; ☎ 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 has general information, the other specialises in diving and reef tours (www.divercruisetravel.com).

**Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority** (Map p300; ☎ 4750 0700; www.gbrrmpa.gov.au; Reef HQ, 2-68 Flinders St E; 🕒 9am-5pm) Detailed and technical information on the Reef.

**Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service Northern Region Office** (QPWS; ☎ 4722 5211; Marlow St, Townsville)

**Townsville Enterprises main visitors centre** (Map p300; ☎ 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. It boasts an average of 320 days of sunshine per year.

**The Strand**

Townsville's vibrant waterfront promenade 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 path from first light while beachgoers take over by mid-morning and evening strollers are at it by late afternoon. The long stretch of beach is patrolled and protected by two **stinger enclosures** (Map p299) in the danger months (November to May).

At the northern tip is the **rock pool** (Map p299; admission free; 🕒 24hr), an enormous artificial swimming pool surrounded by lawns and sandy beaches; a huge filtration system keeps it clean and stinger-free. If you want to be

100% sure, head to the safety of the chlorine at the **Tobruk Pool** (Map p300; ☎ /fax 4772 6550; The Strand; adult/child \$2.50/1.50; 🕒 5.30am-7pm Mon-Thu, to 6pm Fri, 7am-4pm Sat, 8am-5pm Sun), an Olympic-sized swimming pool.

Kids will revel at the brilliant little **water playground** (Map p300; admission free; 🕒 10am-8pm Dec-Mar, to 6pm Sep-Nov, Apr & May, to 5pm Jun-Aug), which resembles the Pipeline Plunge at White Water World (p148) on the Gold Coast, albeit on a much smaller scale. Water is pumped through all sorts of tubes and culminates with a big bucket filling and then dumping its load onto the squealing little ones below.

**Castle Hill**

The big red mound that dominates Townsville's skyline offers wonderful views of the city and of Cleveland Bay. A walk to the top of the 300m **hill** (Map p299) should be high on the 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.

**Reef HQ**

This well-stocked **aquarium** (Map p300; ☎ 4750 0800; www.reefhq.com.au; Flinders St E; adult/child \$21.50/10.50; 🕒 9.30am-5pm) proudly boasts that it's a living coral reef on dry land. A staggering 2.5 million litres of water flow through the coral-reef tank, which is home to 130 coral and 120 fish species. It's well worth taking one (or a few) of the guided talks, which focus on different aspects of the reef and the aquarium. The backdrop of the predator exhibit is a replica of the bow of the SS *Yongala*, which sank in 1911 off the coast of Townsville during a wild cyclone. The fish-feeding display will excite younger guests, particularly the sea snakes and the rather shy eels (impeccable table manners, those guys!). To maintain the natural conditions essential for the survival of this complex ecosystem, a wave machine simulates the ebb and flow of the ocean, circular currents keep the water in motion and marine algae are used in the purification system.

You can continue to experience life underwater without getting wet at the **IMAX cinema** (Map p300; ☎ 4721 1481; Flinders St E; adult/child/concession \$13/8; 🕒 10.30am-4.30pm) next door. Its 18m-high screen and surround sound are enough to turn a person into a plankton.

Combined Reef HQ and IMAX admission is \$32.50/17.50 per adult/child.

## Museum of Tropical Queensland

Not your ordinary, everyday museum, the **Museum of Tropical Queensland** (Map p300; ☎ 4726 0606; www.mtq.qld.gov.au; 70-102 Flinders St E; adult/child/student \$9/5/6.50; ☎ 9.30am-5pm) 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

This interactive **Aboriginal dance and interpretive centre** (Map p300; ☎ 4772 7679; www.ctownsville.com.au; 2/68 Flinders St E; adult/child \$16.50/9; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm) hosts a loud but entertaining performance in which indigenous people put on traditional dance and music performances. 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. Contact the centre for performance and tour times.

## Perc Tucker Regional Gallery

This **contemporary art gallery** (Map p300; ☎ 4727 9011; ptrg@townsville.qld.gov.au; cnr Denham St & Flinders St Mall; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat & Sun), in a heritage corner building, has a packed schedule of exhibitions each year. Shows feature work by artists from overseas and interstate, though the focus is on North Queensland artists.

## Other Museums & Galleries

The highlight of a visit to the **Townsville Maritime Museum** (Map p300; ☎ 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 *Yongala*, which went down in a cyclone in 1911 with 125 passengers 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 and naval industries.

**Umbrella Studio** (Map p300; ☎ 4772 7817; www.umbrella.org.au; 482 Flinders St Mall; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sun) has a dynamic calendar of shows that aim to make contemporary visual art accessible and engaging.

North Queensland's proud military history is on display at the **North Queensland Military**

**Museum** (Map p299; ☎ 4771 1043; Jezzine Army Barracks, Kissing Point; admission by donation; ☎ 9am-12.30pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 10am-2pm Sun). Photo ID is required to enter as it's in the grounds of the Jezzine Army Barracks. Apart from the military paraphernalia that's displayed in the old gun stores, there are gorgeous 360-degree views from Kissing Point.

Three historic houses make up the **National Trust Heritage Centre** (Map p299; ☎ 4771 5873; 5-7 Castling St, West End; adult/child/concession \$5/1.50/3; ☎ 10am-2pm Wed, 1-4pm Sat & Sun). The houses provide an insight into life in Townsville in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Castling St is 2km from the city centre along Ingham Rd. A block east is **West End Cemetery**, with graves dating from the 1880s.

## Botanic Gardens

Townsville's botanic gardens are spread across three locations: each has its own character, but all have tropical plants and are abundantly green. They're open seven days a week from sunrise to sunset.

The **Queens Gardens** (Map p300; cnr Gregory & Paxton Sts) is 1km northwest of the town centre. These are the town's original gardens, which were first planted in 1870 with trial plants (including mango and coffee) to potentially boost the economy. They've since been 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 a herb garden.

**Anderson Park** (off Map p299; 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** (off Map p299; 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 at **Woodstock Trail Rides** (☎ 4778 8888; www.

woodstocktrailrides.com.au; Rows 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 transport from Townsville.

Hurl yourself from a perfectly good plane with **Coral Sea Skydivers** (Map p300; ☎ 4772 4889; www.coralseaskydivers.com.au; 181 Flinders St E; tandem jumps \$315-415). The tandem jump requires no prior knowledge, 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.

You're pretty much guaranteed of catching something at **Barra Fishing** (☎ 0419-739 442; www.barrafishing.net; Allambie Lane, Kelso; per hr \$16.50) where you can throw a line in at the fish farm. Rod hire is \$3 and if you want to keep your catch, it costs \$13 per kilogram extra. There are also farm tours (2.30pm, \$11) and minigolf (\$6). Real anglers would shudder at the thought of this place, but it's not a bad option for kids and families.

## Dive Courses

Two operators based in Townsville offer Professional Association of Diving Instructors (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 passport photos.) Try **Adrenaline Dive** (Map p300; ☎ 4724 0600; www.adrenalinedive.com.au; 9 Wickham St) or **Pro Dive** (Map p300; ☎ 4721 1760; www.prodrive.com.au; 252 Walker St).

## Great Barrier Reef

The **Barrier Reef Dive Cruise & Travel** (Map p300; ☎ 4772 5800; www.divecruisetravel.com) booking agent is part of the Flinders St Mall visitors centre; it has a comprehensive list of operators and deals. Most trips travel to the Reef as well as the famous *Yongala*.

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

**Adrenaline Dive** (Map p300; ☎ 4724 0600; www.adrenalinedive.com.au; 9 Wickham St) *Yongala* day trips including two dives (from \$185); also offers advanced diving certification courses. Also does a snorkelling trip to Wheeler Reef for \$155.

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

**Remote Area Dive** (Map p299; ☎ 4721 4424; www.remotearadive.com; 25 Ingham Rd) Dive (\$195) and snorkelling (\$150) trips to Orpheus and Pelorus.

**Sunferries** (Map p300; ☎ 1800 447 333; www.sunferries.com.au; Breakwater Terminal) Day trips to the Reef (adult/child \$145/90) and certified dives for \$70.

## SLEEPING

Accommodation standards are high in Townsville. Backpackers are well catered for, while midrangers will get real value for money. Many of the midrange motels and self-catering units are along the Strand. Backpacker places are in the city centre and along Palmer St, south of the river.

## Budget

**Globetrotters Hostel** (Map p300; ☎ 1800 008 533, 4771 5000; www.globetrottersaustralia.com; 121 Flinders St E; dm \$18-22, r \$70; ☎ ☎ ☎) Globetrotters has packed up its base from across the river and moved to this more central location. It was still a work in progress when we visited and we heard some stories of surly management, but the internet room is *huge* and connection is dirt cheap (per hour \$2). The dorms are basic and the motel-style rooms serviceable.

**Rows Bay Caravan Park** (Map p299; ☎ 4771 3576; www.rowsbaycp.com.au; Heatley Pde, Rows Bay; unpowered/powered sites \$21/27, cabins without/with bathroom \$59/74, villas \$86; ☎ ☎) Nestled snugly on the beachfront, this leafy campground has facilities for travellers with disabilities and a good children's playground. There's a pool and a kiosk onsite along with well-stocked campers' kitchen.

**Reef Lodge** (Map p300; ☎ 4721 1112; www.reeflodge.com.au; 4 Wickham St; dm \$21-23, tw & d without/with TV \$54/57, motel r \$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** (Map p300; ☎ 1800 628 836; 4721 2322; www.basebackpackers.com; 21 Plume St; dm/d \$21/60; 🍷 🍷) Base has fairly basic rooms and facilities, but includes that 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 transit centre and convenient to the bus and ferry terminals.

**Civic Guest House** (Map p300; ☎ 1800 646 619; 4771 5381; www.civicguesthouse.com; 262 Walker St; dm with fan/air-con \$22/24, d & tw with fan/air-con \$55/60, d/tw with air-con & bathroom \$70/75; 🍷 🍷) Behind the palms and bushes bursting out of the cyclone-wire fence is this converted home. Rooms are clean and tidy and the ambience is relaxed.

**Adventurers Resort** (Map p300; ☎ 4721 1522; www.adventurersresort.com; 79 Palmer St; dm/s/d \$22/40/50; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Roomy, multilevel dorms await at this good hostel at the northeastern end of Palmer St. There's a massive kitchen, and bathrooms have plenty of shower cubicles ensuring you won't have to wait long to scrub up. There's a fantastic rooftop pool and barbecue area with views of Magnetic Island and Castle Hill.

**our pick** **Orchid Guest House** (Map p300; ☎ 4771 6683; 34 Hale St; dm \$25, s without/with bathroom \$45/60, 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 room – with TV, fridge and air-con. The doubles are even better value. There's free laundry. Peace and quiet and value for money are guaranteed here.

**Great Northern Hotel** (Map p300; ☎ 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** (Map p300; ☎ 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 homey as you can get while the downstairs guest rooms share male and female bathrooms. If staying in a safe, friendly, good old-fashioned Aussie home appeals, then you've hit the spot.

**Shoredrive Motel** (Map p299; ☎ 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.

### Midrange

**Townsville Seaside Apartments** (Map p299; ☎ 4721 3155; www.townsvilleseaside.com.au; 105 The Strand; studios \$88, 1-1/2-bedroom units \$99/135; 🍷 🍷) In a strip of renovated 1960s apartments, these dowdy units are comfortable and fully equipped with kitchens. Prices vary according to season and number of people, and there's a two-night minimum stay.

**Central City Motel** (Map p300; ☎ 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 and 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.

**Historic Yongala Lodge Motel** (Map p300; ☎ 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, only a short stroll to the Strand and the city, the Yongala has eight motel rooms and 10 self-contained one- and two-bedroom apartments. The heritage restaurant is open daily for dinner.

**Beach House Motel** (Map p300; ☎ 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 well equipped with all the modern conveniences, such as bar fridges, phones and TVs, and the pool out the front is in an unusual location, allowing you to gawk at passers-by.

**Summit** (Map p300; ☎ 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, so save yourself \$10 and go for the cheaper version. The rooms are your standard motel style, but are clean and comfortable.

**Ridgemont** (Map p300; ☎ 1800 804 168; 4771 2164; www.ridgemont.com.au; 15-19 Victoria St; r \$112-142; 🍷 🍷) Take your pick between the standard motel rooms or the impressive one- and two-bedroom self-contained units. The units are popular and it's not hard to see why. Comfy beds, plasma TVs and a great view of Magnetic Island from your balcony adorn these stylish and contemporary rooms.

**Holiday Inn** (Map p300; ☎ 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 small 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.

**Bayside** (Map p299; ☎ 4721 1688; www.baysideapartments.com.au; 102 The Strand; 1-1/2-bedroom apt \$120/130; 🍷 🍷) Tile floors keep the rooms cool in this value-for-money place. The two-bedroom apartments have balconies overlooking the beach, and there's a lovely landscaped pool to dip in. The kitchens are spacious and modern and there's free laundry available.

**Strand Park Hotel** (Map p300; ☎ 4750 7888; www.strandparkhotel.com.au; 59-60 The Strand; r \$120-190; 🍷 🍷) This waterfront complex houses 30 self-contained units. Your standard room is situated on the ground floor, moving up, literally, to the superior and deluxe rooms with ocean views, balconies and perhaps a spa.

**Rydges Southbank** (Map p300; ☎ 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 here on holiday will also appreciate the hotel's facilities and, whatever your reason for visiting, you'll love the opulent executive rooms with lounge rooms and ocean views.

**Quest Townsville** (Map p300; ☎ 4772 6477; www.questapartments.com.au; 30-34 Palmer St; apt from \$140; 🍷 🍷) This high-rise complex houses hundreds of happy holidaymakers in its studio apartments. Rooms are serviced daily and are fully self-contained. Families are also catered for with one- and two-bedroom apartments and a babysitting service.

### Top End

**Aquarius on the Beach** (Map p300; ☎ 1800 622 474; 4772 4255; www.aquariusonthebeach.com.au; 75 The Strand; r \$160-220; 🍷 🍷) The balcony views from the executive deluxe suites will impress almost as much as the size of this place, the tallest building on the Strand. With more than 130 self-contained units, each furnished with style, this is one of the better places around.

**City Oasis Inn** (Map p300; ☎ 1800 809 515; 4771 6048; www.cityoasis.com.au; 143 Wills St; r \$170-200; 🍷 🍷) There are so many sparkling white surfaces

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 you can opt for even more space between you and the kids by going for the two-bedroom apartments. There's a restaurant, a children's playground and laundry facilities on the premises.

**MarinersNorth** (Map p300; ☎ 4722 0777; www.marinersnorth.com.au; 7 Mariners Dr; apt from \$195-20; 🍷 🍷) 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 generous in space 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 here. Flinders and Palmers Sts offer all sorts of cuisine. Just wander along and take your pick. Underrated Gregory St contains some worthy cafés and takeaway joints.

### Restaurants

**Thai International** (Map p300; ☎ 4771 6242; 235 Flinders St E; mains \$12-19; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Head up the stairs and into this quaint but spacious Thai restaurant that specialises in seafood. Friendly hosts add to the intimate charm here, and there's an extensive vegetarian menu. This is a genuine Thai restaurant run by Thai people.

**Benny's Hot Wok Café & Bar** (Map p300; ☎ 4724 3243; 17-21 Palmer St; mains \$15-20; 🍷 lunch Thu, Fri & Sun, dinner daily) A little bit of everything Southeast Asian awaits at Benny's, which has fabulous outdoor seating and a good wine list. Whether your taste buds 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** (Map p300; ☎ 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.

**Rhino Bar** (Map p300; ☎ 4771 6322; 3 Palmer St; tapas \$6-9, mains \$16-26; 🍷 dinner) There's a reasonable selection of mains on the menu, but don't kid yourself – you're here for the famous tapas, aren't you? Graze on the yummy seafood, meat or vegetarian tapas while nurturing a cocktail or a glass of wine to pass time.

**our pick** **A Touch of Salt** (Map p300; ☎ 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** (Map p300; ☎ 4724 1322; cnr The Strand & Gregory St; meals \$4-10; ☎ lunch & dinner) More than your average fish-and-chip joint, Harold's has bug burgers of the Moreton Bay variety. Order at the counter and then pull up a seat outside and watch the goings on at the Strand across the road.

**Royce Roll'z** (Map p300; ☎ 4772 5135; 345 Flinders Mall; light meals \$5-8; ☎ lunch) Quick and wholesome, this hole-in-the-wall stand trades on the passing lunch-goers strolling from their offices. Big rolls, pies, salads, quiches and roast-beef sandwiches are the order of the day.

**Souvlaki Bar** (Map p300; ☎ /fax 4721 1166; Shop 3 & 4, 58 The Strand; meals \$6-12; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) OK, so it's simple, but it's cheap, quick and damn good. Apart from the usual kebabs and *yiros*, you can grab a big Greek breakfast of bacon, eggs, sausage, souvlaki, grilled tomatoes, haloumi and pita bread (\$14).

**Deli on Palmer** (Map p300; ☎ 4724 5298; 30-34 Palmer St; meals \$6-15; ☎ 7am-late) Small, busy and bursting with all sorts of breakfast and lunch treats. Hearty omelettes, scrambled eggs, croissants and fresh fruit salad are served with steaming, strong coffee at breakfast, while lunches include lasagne, pasta and gourmet rolls. Save room for the scrumptious carrot cake afterwards.

**Zolli's Trattoria Café** (Map p300; ☎ /fax 4721 2222; 113 Flinders St E; mains \$8-25; ☎ dinner) With confused, unhappy staff being run off their feet, you could be forgiven for giving this Italian eatery a big miss. But if you turn a blind eye to the disorganised chaos going on around you, you'll find that the food here is worth the pain.

**Ladah** (Map p300; ☎ 4724 0402; cnr Sturt & Stanley Sts; meals \$10-16; ☎ 7am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat & Sun) The meals here are sublime and the energy that radiates from the busy kitchen sends a message that the food is indeed good at this licensed café. Try the French toast with bacon

and maple syrup (\$13.50) for breakfast or the smoked cod and potato pie (\$12) for lunch.

**C'est Si Bon** (Map p300; ☎ 4772 5828; 48 Gregory St; meals \$11-23; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Snappy, attentive service greets you at this buzzing licensed café-restaurant. It's a big, kitchen-like place with friendly staff who will ensure 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 or the authentic Israeli couscous.

**Ooy Thai** (Map p300; ☎ 4724 0544; Shop 1/52 Gregory St, North Ward; mains \$12-18; ☎ lunch & dinner) Prawns are a speciality at this poky little takeaway Thai café that whips up noodle and rice dishes, curries and soups in quick time. The seafood in oyster sauce is delicious.

**Odyssey on The Strand** (Map p299; ☎ 4724 1400; 120 The Strand; meals \$12-30; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Thu-Sat) The generously sized meals here lean towards a Greek bias, but there's enough here to keep anyone happy. Breakfasts are large enough to ward off the hunger pains until well after lunchtime. There's a good kids' menu and a reasonable wine list. Our recommendation? The salt-and-pepper calamari and a glass of Marlborough Sauv Blanc.

### DRINKING

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

**Australian Hotel** (Map p300; ☎ 4722 6999; 11 Palmer St; ☎ 11-2am) 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.

**Brewery** (Map p300; ☎ 4724 2999; 252 Flinders St E; meals \$11-15; ☎ lunch & dinner) Drifting effortlessly between stylish and unpretentious, the Brewery is in an old post-office building and offers a little bit of everything, from casual dining, to outdoors drinking, sports bar and nightclub. Try one of the award-winning house-brewed beers, especially the delicious Ned's Red Ale, although we were disappointed with the Belgian blond.

**Flynns** (Map p300; ☎ 4721 1655; 101 Flinders St E; ☎ Tue-Sun) A jolly Irish pub that doesn't try too hard to be Irish. Wildly popular with backpackers for the \$6 jugs.

**Molly Malones** (Map p300; ☎ 4771 3428; 87 Flinders St E) This good-looking Irish pub serves wrist-snapping plates of food, such as rissoles and mash, and Irish stew. Or consume the equivalent of a week's worth of required iron in the steak accompanied by a Guinness. Molly's has a discreet gaming area, stages live music most nights and has a nightclub out the back called Mantaz.

**Seaview** (Map p300; ☎ 4771 5005; cnr The Strand & Gregory Sts) Renowned for its Sunday sessions in the huge concrete beer 'garden', the Seaview serves ice-cold schooners and has live music and entertainment.

**Mad Cow Tavern** (Map p300; ☎ 4771 5727; 129 Flinders St E) Although it seems there are more bouncers than patrons at the Mad Cow, it does have its supporters – mostly heralding from the military.

**Watermark Hotel** (Map p300; ☎ 4724 4281; 72-74 The Strand; ☎ noon-midnight) *The* place to be seen in Townsville. Well, 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.

### ENTERTAINMENT

If you fancy a flick, **BC Cinemas** (Map p300; ☎ 4771 4101; cnr Sturt & Blackwood Sts) screens mainstream films.

For a flutter head to **Jupiters Casino** (Map p300; ☎ 4722 2333; Sir Leslie Thiess Dr).

### Nightclubs

Licensed until 5am, Townsville's clubs pick up from where the bars leave off.

**Bank Niteclub** (Map p300; ☎ 4771 6148; 169 Flinders St E; admission \$5; ☎ closed Mon) House and dance beats; slick surrounds.

**Bombay Rock** (Map p300; ☎ 4724 2800; www.bombayrock.com.au; 719 Flinders St West; admission after 10pm \$6; ☎ 8pm-late Fri & Sat, 3pm-late Sun) Multilevel place with regular gigs and four bars.

**Fuse** (Map p300; ☎ 4771 3428; 87 Flinders St E; ☎ Fri & Sat) Get your fill of Guinness at Molly Malones and slip around the back to this late-night club.

**LevelOne** (Map p300; ☎ 4724 2999; 252 Flinders St E; Fri & Sat) Resident DJ spins dance and progressive house, as well as beats and breaks.

### Sport

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 in Townsville at Dairy Farmers Stadium on the city'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. 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 **Crocodiles** (Map p300; ☎ 4778 4222; www.crocodiles.com.au) compete in the National Basketball League and play home games at Townsville Entertainment Centre, near the ferry terminal.

### SHOPPING

**Cotters Market** (Map p300; Flinders St Mall; ☎ 8.30am-1pm Sun) has about 200 craft and food stalls, as well as live entertainment; it's wheelchair accessible.

**John Melick & Co** (Map p300; ☎ 4771 2292; 481 Flinders St) is the place to go for a good range of camping and bushwalking gear, Driza-Bone oilskins, Akubra hats, boots and workwear.

**Strand Night Market** (Map p300; ☎ 5-9.30pm 1st Fri of month) Browse the stalls on the Strand 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 at **Townsville Transit Centre** (Map p300; ☎ 4721 3082; transittsv@bigpond.com.au; cnr Palmer & Plume Sts). You'll find agents for the major companies, including **Transit Centre Backpackers** (☎ 4721 2322), which is the agent for Premier Motor Service.

Also in the transit centre is **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 20 30, 4772 5100; www.greyhound.com.au;

### SLAVERY OF SORTS

Queensland's sugar industry boomed between 1863 and 1891. It was during this time that the government brought 46,387 South Pacific Islanders to Australia to work primarily in the cane fields as cheap labour. Known as Kanakas, the men worked 10-hour days for four pence per day, under three-year contracts. There are many stories of men going without pay and working in terrible conditions. Mortality figures of the time reinforce this: for non-Pacific Islanders the mortality rate was 13.03 per 1000, for Pacific Islanders it was 62.89.

Australia introduced its White Australia Policy in 1901 when there were around 9000 Kanakas still working in Queensland's cane fields. By 1914 more than 7000 Islanders had been repatriated.

Townsville Transit Centre, cnr Palmer & Plume Sts, with 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). There's also a daily service to Charters Towers (\$32, 1¾ hours) continuing to the Northern Territory.

### Car

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

**Avis** (Map p300; ☎ 1300 137 498, 4721 2688; www.avis.com.au; 81 Flinders St) Also has an airport counter.

**Europcar** (off Map p299; ☎ 1300 131 390, 4762 7050; www.europcar.com.au; 305 Ingham Rd, Garbutt) Also has an airport counter; rents 4WDs.

**Hertz** (off Map p299; ☎ 13 30 30, 4775 5950; www.hertz.com; Stinson Ave, Garbutt)

**Thrifty** (off Map p299; ☎ 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* travels through Townsville four times a week. Prices quoted here are for one-way adult fares. From Brisbane to Townsville takes 24 hours (economy seat/sleeper \$180/238, 1st-class sleeper \$368). Proserpine is four hours from Townsville (economy seat \$28), Rockhampton is 11 hours (economy seat \$61) and Cairns

is 7½ hours (economy seat \$32). The more luxurious *Queenslander* class, which includes a sleeper and meals, is available on two services per week.

The *Inlander* heads from Townsville to Mt Isa on Thursday and Sunday (economy seat/sleeper \$121/180, 1st-class sleeper \$280, 21 hours) via Charters Towers (economy seat \$26, three hours).

### GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Townsville airport is 5km northwest of the city centre at Garbutt. A taxi to the centre costs about \$15. The **Airport Shuttle** (☎ 4775 5544) services all arrivals and departures. The one-way/return fare is \$8/14, and it 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 at the visitors centre in Flinders St Mall and at the newsagent in the Transit Mall (Map p300).

### Car

Taxis congregate outside the Transit Mall, or call **Townsville Taxis** (☎ 13 10 08, 4778 9555).

## MAGNETIC ISLAND

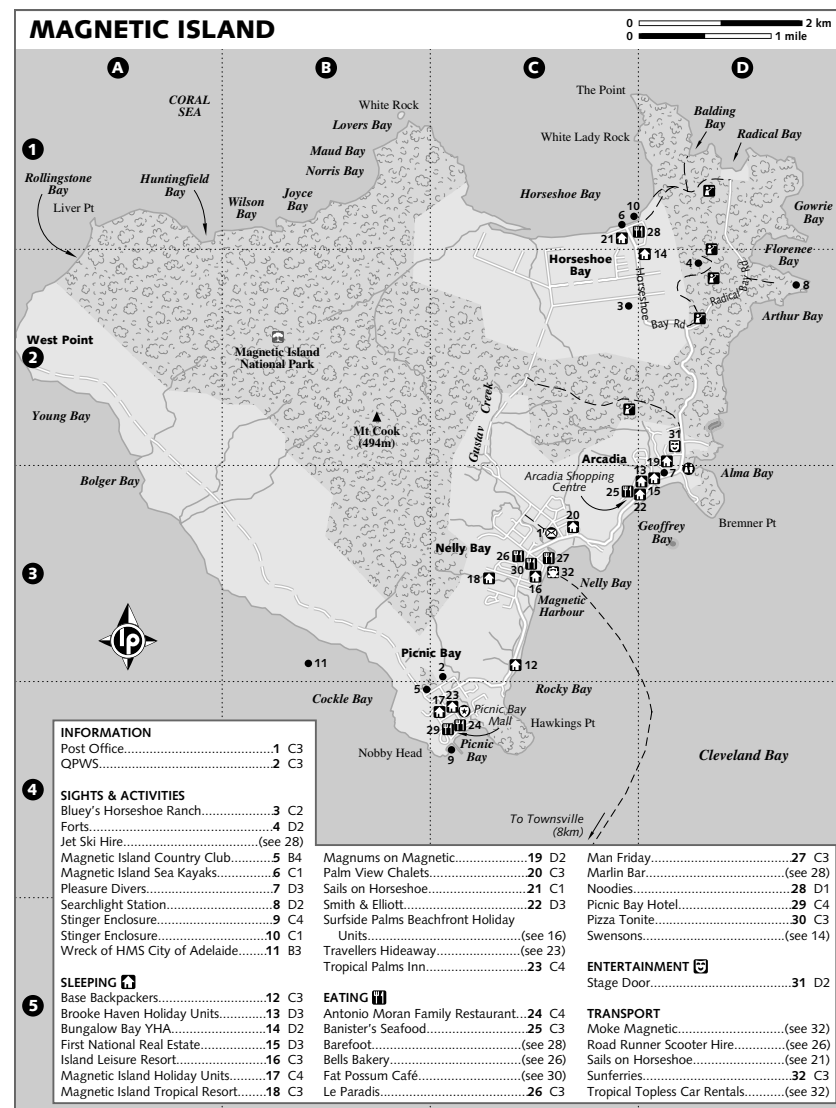
☎ 07 / pop 2107

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

The pace is easy going here. It's a welcome change from the 'big smoke' of Townsville. Abundant wildlife, stunning beaches, great eating, scenic walks and thrilling water sports make the island appealing to everyone.

Couples, families, seniors, schoolies and backpackers will love it here. The island does her best to make sure nobody misses out. The four tiny beach villages each have their own distinct personality. While it's not a green island in that it receives minimal



rainfall, the granite boulders, hoop pines and eucalypts offer something different to your typical tropical paradise.

Captain Cook named Magnetic Island in 1770, when his ship's compass went peculiar as he sailed by. Nowadays, the ferries make a beeline to this spectacular holiday haven. Captain Cook missed out big time.

### ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

Magnetic Island is easy and cheap to get to, being only 8km from Townsville. It's 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 ploughs the route regularly. There's a rough 8km track along

the west coast leading from Picnic Bay to a secluded beach at West Point.

All ferries dock at Nelly Bay. There's an office for the **QPWS** (☎ 4778 5378; Hurst St; ☎ 7.30am-4pm) at Picnic Bay.

Most accommodation options offer internet access and there are ATMs scattered throughout the island, although there are no banks. There's a **post office** (☎ 4778 5118; Sooning St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9-11am Sat) with an ATM in Nelly Bay.

## SIGHTS

### Picnic Bay

Since the ferry terminal was moved to Nelly Bay, Picnic Bay now resembles a ghost town. Shopfronts have been abandoned as businesses suffered from the decreased tourist traffic. Still, the twinkling night views of Townsville from the esplanade are magical. It's a lovely stroll along the jetty and there's a stinger 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. The popular golf course at the Magnetic Island Country Club is open to the public.

### 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 ride that never seems to show up. This is where your holiday on Magnetic will begin. It's a total opposite to what you will probably experience during your stay here. It's mad.

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, picnic tables and a children's playground here. 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.

### Radical Bay & the Forts

Townsville was a supply base for the Pacific during WWII, and the **forts** 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 the rough vehicle track that has walking tracks off it. The tracks lead to secluded Arthur and Florence Bays (which are great for snorkelling) and the old **searchlight station** on the headland between the two.

From Radical Bay you can walk across the headland to beautiful Balding Bay (an unofficial nude-bathing beach) and Horseshoe Bay.

### Horseshoe Bay

Horseshoe Bay, on the north coast of the island, 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. The forts walk starts about 2km north of the village. The bus stops at the start of the trail.

## ACTIVITIES

The QPWS produces a leaflet for Magnetic Island's excellent **bushwalking** tracks. Walks are mainly along the east coast and vary in length from half an hour to half a day. If you're going to do just one walk, then the forts walk (2.8km, 1½ hours return) is a must. It starts near the Radical Bay turn-off, passing lots of ex-military sites, gun emplacements and false 'rocks'. At the top of the walk is the observation tower and command post, which have spectacular views up and down the coast. Instead of returning the same way, you can continue on along the connecting paths, which run past Radical and Balding Bays, eventually depositing you at Horseshoe Bay. You can catch the bus back.

The **Magnetic Island Country Club** (☎ 4778 5188; <http://users.bigpond.net.au/migolf>; Hurst St, Picnic Bay; 9/18 holes \$15/20; ☎ from 8am) rents golf clubs, buggies and all equipment.

### Diving

Learn to dive with **Pleasure Divers** (☎ 1800 797 797, 4778 5788; [www.magnetic-island.com.au/plsr-divers](http://www.magnetic-island.com.au/plsr-divers);

Marine Pde, Arcadia; 3-/4-day PADI open-water courses from \$299/799), which also offers advanced courses and dive trips to the *Yongala*.

### Water Sports

Experience the thrill of blasting about on top of 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. It's open daily during school holidays.

## TOURS

See opposite for dive operators that run trips to the outer reef.

**Barnade Bill** (☎ 4758 1837; 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 out of Horseshoe Bay on his 7m sport-fishing vessel. All gear is provided.

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

**Jazza Sailing Tours** (☎ 0404 875 530; [www.jazza.com.au](http://www.jazza.com.au); day trips \$100) For snorkelling trips; offers a day trip on a 42ft yacht that includes 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](http://www.seakayak.com.au); 93 Horseshoe Bay Rd; tours from \$69) Has four-hour tours departing Horseshoe Bay and 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](http://www.reefecotours.com); adult/child \$70/60) For a one-hour guided snorkelling tour that's suitable for families.

**Tropicana Tours** (☎ 4758 1800; [www.tropicana.com.au](http://www.tropicana.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 its 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. Tours depart from the ferry terminal in Nelly Bay.

## SLEEPING

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

### Picnic Bay

**Travellers Hideaway** (☎ 1800 000 290, 4778 5314; [www.travellersbackpackers.com](http://www.travellersbackpackers.com); 32 Picnic St; dm/d \$22/55; ☎ ☎ ☎) 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, barebones feel, the pool area is better than average.

**Tropical Palms Inn** (☎ 4778 5076; [www.tropicalpalmsinn.com.au](http://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 for around \$75 to \$85 per day.

**Magnetic Island Holiday Units** (☎ 4778 5246; [www.magnetic-island.com.au/mi-units.htm](http://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 and set amid leafy gardens and nicely manicured lawns.

### Nelly Bay

**Base Backpackers** (☎ 1800 242 273, 4778 5777; [www.stayatbase.com](http://www.stayatbase.com); 1 Nelly Bay Rd; camp sites \$12-20, dm \$26-28, d without/bath \$95/110; ☎ ☎) 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 party and great-value package deals, which can include two-nights dorm accommodation, return ferry from Townsville, return bus transfer from Nelly Bay terminal, one hot breakfast and one-hour's kayak hire for \$79.

**Surfside Palms Beachfront Holiday Units** (☎ 4778 5855; [surfside.palm@bigpond.com](mailto:surfside.palm@bigpond.com); 15 The Esplanade; d \$90; ☎ ☎) Low key bordering on sleepy, these older-style units are fully self-contained and can sleep up to five people. The units are uncomplicated but roomy, making them a great option for those who don't want to eat out every night.

**Magnetic Island Tropical Resort** (☎ 1800 069 122, 4778 5955; [www.magneticislandresort.com](http://www.magneticislandresort.com); 56 Yates St; d \$110; ☎ ☎) A-frame cabins with bathrooms, fridges and TVs encircle large bird-filled gardens here. This secluded resort often plays



host to wedding parties, so if this is the first place you visit, don't think taffeta and tuxes are Magnetic Island's dress code.

**Palm View Chalets** (☎ 4778 5596; 114 Sooning St; d \$140; 🍷 🍷) Crunch your way up the gravel driveway to the 13 self-contained A-frames. The shaded outdoor verandas are perfect for enjoying an outside breakfast with lorikeets for company.

**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

**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 bathrooms and make sure you ask for one with an ocean view. The doubles are great value and have a small fridge and TV. The backpackers bar (jugs \$10) has toad races every Wednesday night and serves decent meals.

**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, but there's a small catch – 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

**our pick Bungalow Bay** (☎ 1800 285 577, 4778 5577; www.bungalowbay.com.au; 40 Horseshoe Bay Rd; camp 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. A-frame bungalows house dorm rooms and simple doubles, all set among spacious grounds, backing onto national park. Take a guided nature walk and hold a koala at the mini wildlife sanctuary. There's also a breezy outdoor bar area and a popular restaurant (see opposite). There are two doubles with private bathrooms (\$80), but a minimum two-night stay is needed.

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

apt \$285-300; 🍷 🍷) 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 the front units opening right onto the beach.

## EATING

Nelly Bay and Horseshoe Bay are the most fruitful when it comes to getting a decent feed.

## Picnic Bay

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

**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 Spooning St; dishes \$4-10; 🍷 breakfast & lunch) Names are not always what they seem. Although the Fat Possum is a café, it serves its food with a twist, far from the standard burger-and-chips staple. Try the grilled fish on a bed of salad or the vegetarian and gluten-free options and you'll know what we mean.

**Bells Bakery** (☎ 4758 1870; 4/98-100 Sooning St; pies \$4.50; 🍷 from 6am) Take a place in the queue if you want a delicious pie or pasty from this ultrabusy little bakery.

**Pizza Tonite** (☎ 4758 1400; 53 Sooning St; pizzas \$8-25; 🍷 dinner Tue-Sun) The pizzas here are excellent – not too greasy and liberal on the toppings.

**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. Book ahead or face missing out.

**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 go for 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 takeaway (\$5 to \$10) and scurry off to a nearby beach. Whatever 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 as the sun sets across the bay at this busy seaside pub. The meals are on the large side and (surprise!) revolve around seafood. The scallops and salad and the grilled mackerel (both \$14.50) are 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 (\$5) to remember your meal.

**our pick Swensons** (☎ 4778 5577; 40 Horseshoe Bay Rd; mains \$16-30; 🍷 lunch & dinner) The restaurant at Bungalow Bay hostel is renowned among Maggie's permanent residents; 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 it's the curries that get the gastric juices flowing. We recommend the yellowfish curry, served with steaming jasmine rice, and there's a good selection of veg dishes to choose from.

**Barefoot** (☎ 4758 1170; www.barefootartfoodwine.com.au; 5 Pacific Dr; mains \$27-32; 🍷 lunch & dinner Thu-Mon) This impressive upscale restaurant, set back from the street, also houses a small art gallery. The excellent seafood and steaks are complemented by a good wine list and attentive service.

## 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 – sound good? 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) operates a frequent passenger ferry between Townsville and Magnetic Island (adult/child return \$26.70/13.30), which takes about 20 minutes. Ferries depart from the terminal on Flinders St E in Townsville (Map p300). There is car parking here.

**Fantasea** (Map p300; ☎ 4772 5422; www.magneticislandferry.com.au; Ross St, South Townsville) operates a car ferry crossing eight times daily (seven on weekends) from the south side of Ross Creek. It costs \$149 (return) for a car and three passengers, and \$23/24 (return) for an adult/child foot passenger only.

## GETTING AROUND Bicycle

Magnetic Island is ideal for cycling although some of the hills can be hard work. Most places to stay rent bikes for around \$15 a day and 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 Saturday and Sunday).

## 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 licence, and a credit-card deposit is required. Scooter hire starts at around \$30 per day.

**Moke Magnetic** (☎ 4778 5377; www.mokemagnetic.com; Sooning St, Nelly Bay)

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

**Sails on Horseshoe** (☎ 4778 5117; 13-15 Pacific Dr; Horseshoe Bay) Rents scooters.

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

## AYR TO TOWNSVILLE

Ayr, 90km southeast of Townsville, is on the delta of the Burdekin, one of the biggest rivers in Queensland, and is the major commercial centre for the rich farmlands of the Burdekin Valley. The towns and territory are devoted to the production and harvesting of sugar cane, melons and mangoes.

The **Burdekin visitors centre** (☎ 4783 5988; www.burdekintourism.com.au; Bruce Hwy) is in Plantation Park on the southern side of town.

**Yongala Dive** (☎ 4783 1519; www.yongaladive.com.au) does dive trips (\$215) out to the *Yongala* wreck from Ayr. The advantage of doing the dive from here is that it only takes 30 minutes to get to the wreck, compared with a few hours from Townsville.

If you're interested in marine biology, you can visit the **Australian Institute of Marine Science** (AIMS; ☎ 4753 4444; www.aims.gov.au; ☎ 8am-3pm), a marine-research facility at Cape Ferguson. Free two-hour tours are conducted every Friday at 10am (March to November) covering the institute's research (such as coral bleaching and management of the Great Barrier Reef) and how it relates to the community; advance bookings required. The turn-off to AIMS is on the Bruce Hwy about 53km northwest of Ayr, or 35km southeast of Townsville.

The unique wetlands of **Bowling Green Bay National Park** foster an assortment of wildlife in their mudflats, mangroves and salt marshes. Various species of bird wade through the waters, and the seagrass beds in the bay are home to turtles and dugongs. The turn-off from the Bruce Hwy to the park is at **Alligator Creek**, 28km south of Townsville. Alligator Creek tumbles down between two rugged ranges that rise steeply from the coastal plains. The taller range peaks with Mt Elliot (1234m), whose higher slopes harbour some of Queensland's most southerly tropical rainforest. A sealed road heads 6km inland from the highway to the park entrance, from where a good gravel road leads to pleasant picnic areas. Further on there's a camping ground with toilets, showers and barbecues; the 23 self-registration sites suitable for camping and caravans can be booked with **QPWS** (☎ 4796 7777; www.epa.qld.gov.au; per person/family \$4.50/18). Alligator Creek has some superb **swimming holes**, and there are two **walking trails**: one to Hidden Valley and Alligator Falls (17km, five hours return), the other following Cockatoo Creek (3km, one hour return).

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.

## TOWNSVILLE TO CHARTERS TOWERS

The North Coast's sparse, open hinterland is in stark contrast to the verdant rainforests present along the coast. This is the dry tropics after all, where you can almost always see a horizon cutting across a giant sky.

The Flinders Hwy heads inland from Townsville and runs virtually due west for its entire length – almost 800km from Townsville to Cloncurry. The first section of the highway takes you 135km southwest from Townsville to the gold-mining town of Charters Towers, with a turn-off at the halfway mark to Ravenswood, another gold-mining centre. Both are easily accessible on a day trip from Townsville.

### RAVENSWOOD

☎ 07 / pop 191

To call Ravenswood a ghost town is a bit of an insult. Sure, there's not much here, but that's exactly why it's so charming. And the truth is that Ravenswood is actually thriving, caught in something of a tourism boom. At Mingela, 88km from Townsville, a road leads 40km south to this tiny mining town among scattered red-earth hills, which dates back to gold-rush days. You come here to experience the solitude of mining life. The town is classified by the National Trust and a few historic buildings are preserved as testament to its former gold-mining glory.

Gold was unwittingly discovered here in 1868 by a pastoralist who, while on a cattle muster, dipped his pannikin into the river and found more than he bargained for in his drinking water. And so the rush was on. Ravenswood experienced a number of booms and subsequent busts, reaching its climax between 1900 and 1912, when it brought in 12,500kg of gold and supported a population of around 4000 – with about 50 pubs.

More recently mining operations have again moved in to Ravenswood, which keeps the ghosts away. Hop on a stool at the ornate pubs and chat over a beer; most miners are happy to welcome a fresh face. You could also visit the old **post office** and **mining & historical museum** (☎ 4770 2047; adult/child \$2.50/1.50; ☎ 10am-3pm Wed-Mon) housed in the restored courthouse, police station and lock-up and hosted by the gregarious Woody.

These days there are only two pubs: the grandiose, two-storey **Imperial Hotel** (☎ 4770 2131; 23 Macrossan St; s/d incl breakfast \$35/55) has character for mortar. Its solid red-brick façade and iron-lace-trimmed veranda are features of the architectural style known as 'goldfields brash'. The timber-lined bedrooms upstairs, some with old brass beds and opening out onto the veranda, are clean and well presented. Basic meals are available from the magnificent red-cedar bar.

An imposing, solid, red-brick pub, the **Railway Hotel** (☎ 4770 2144; Barton St; s/d \$38.50/55) was built in 1871. A great ancient staircase leads up to basic bedrooms, mostly opening onto the big front veranda. Evening meals are available here, though the focus is firmly on the beer.

### CHARTERS TOWERS

☎ 07 / pop 7979

You look at a map and there you see it. Charters Towers in the middle of nowhere, inland, hot and dusty, right? Wrong! Charters Towers is somewhat of an oasis, with plentiful water supplying the gardens of homes and public parks.

Yes, Charters Towers is certainly a surprise. The town basked in wealth in the gold rush days between 1872 and 1899. As a result of all this money, some of the town's buildings are grand reminders of society's opulence at that time. Architecture buffs and even those without an eye for glorious façades will be in their element here.

One of the first things you notice about Charters Towers is that the locals don't mind having you around. Tourism is catching on here, but it's not necessarily your money that people are after. People are eager to share the rich history and easy-going ambience of their pretty little town.

There's been a minirevival of the gold-rush days since the 1980s, but there will probably never be another period of the exquisite wealth

that Charters Towers experienced in the late 19th century. At its peak, the town's population hovered around 30,000; it had almost 100 mines, around 50 pubs (although most of them were little more than tents serving alcohol) and a stock exchange.

These days, Charters Towers, 135km inland from Townsville, is quietly busy, if you what we mean.

### Orientation & Information

Gill St, which runs from the train station to Mosman St, is Charters Towers' main street. Towers Hill stands over the town to the south. Lissner Park, a couple of blocks north of the centre, is the town's best park and the swimming pool is at its northern end.

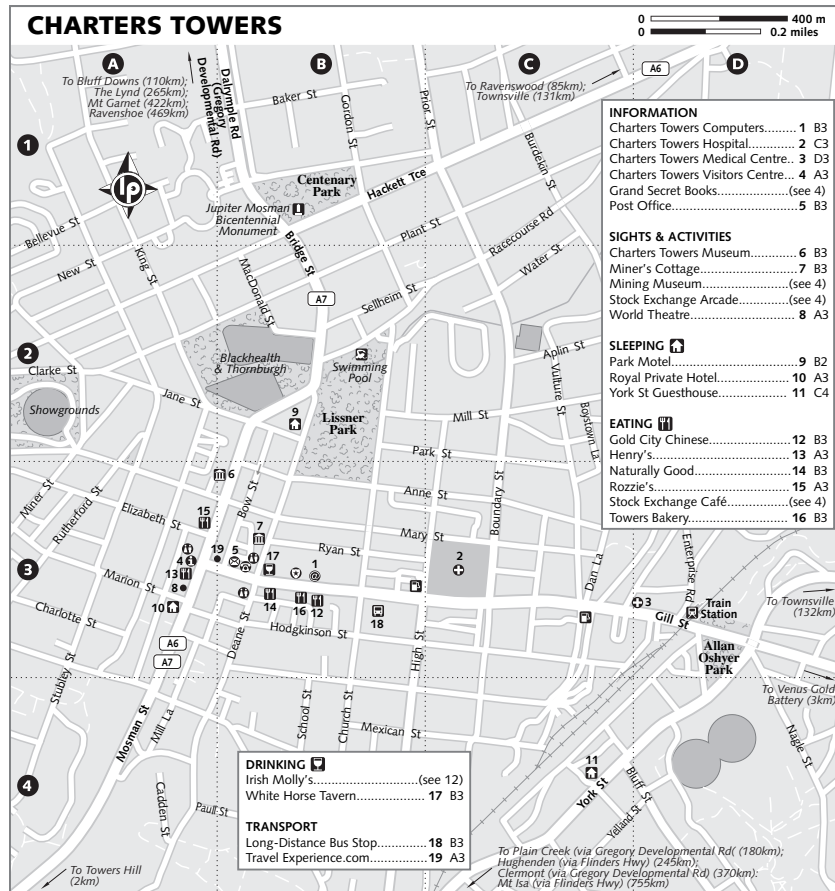
You'll find all services along Gill St, including **Charters Towers Computers** (☎ 4787 2988; 59 Gill St; per 10min/hr \$1/6; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) for internet access, ATMs for a number of major banks, the post office and the **Charters Towers visitors centre** (☎ 4752 0314; www.charterstowers.qld.gov.au; 74 Mosman St; ☎ 9am-5pm) at the top of the street. The centre displays interpretive panels and a video, and runs a number of tours. **Charters Towers Medical Centre** (☎ 4787 7339; 40 Gill St) provides medical services. **Grand Secret Books** (☎ 4787 9900; Stock Exchange Arcade) has new and secondhand books.

### Sights & Activities

A walk down Gill and Mosman Sts will present many of Charters Towers' historically significant buildings. Next to the visitors centre is the absolutely stunning **Stock Exchange Arcade** built in 1888 and now lined with shops. History oozes from the walls of this beautiful little arcade, which housed the stock exchange from 1890. The stock exchange was connected to the 'outside' world via telegraph with three calls per day, six days a week. There's a tiny **mining museum** (admission free) displaying old mining equipment, photos and minerals.

Grab a map from the visitors centre and set off on the **One Square Mile** trail around the town centre where beautifully preserved 19th-century buildings proudly stare you down from their lofty vantage point.

A wonderful place to escape in time is the **Charters Towers Museum** (☎ 4787 4661; 36 Mosman St; adult/child \$4.50/2.20; ☎ 10am-3pm). The clutter of memorabilia, from old photos and farming equipment to period costumes and military items, is fascinating.



## JULIE LOUGHREY

Julie Loughrey bought the Royal Private Hotel in Charters Towers and immediately fell in love with the place, the town and its people.

**How long have you been in Charters Towers and what did you like about the place?** We moved here in 2001 and I was immediately struck by the character of the place, especially the hotel. Some places you walk into and it feels cold. Not here. I had met the people from Charters Towers from when I was living in Mackay. They were friendly, kind and interested in meeting new people.

**The architecture here is certainly stunning, but what else is there to look at and do?** Well, for somebody who visits this town, they don't have to spend a fortune to get the most out of it. There are multiple sports – the Burdekin River is 13km from here. You can go swimming any time of year and not have to worry about stingers. There's kayaking, boating, prospecting for gold. There's a great drive-in theatre. We get people from Townsville coming here for chill-out time.

**What about the permanent residents like yourself? What do you do here?** Well, there's quite a few different strands of income: tourism, there are three private boarding schools, it's a centre for distance education, there's the cattle saleyards, and mining.

**Is there anything bad about Charters Towers?** We lose a lot of skilled workers to Townsville. But not really. You don't run out of things to do here and if you are hungry for the bright lights then Townsville's that way (pointing east). I enjoy living here. People say 'hello'. I've lived in a lot of places and this is the best. People have a great acceptance of others.

**our pick** **Royal Private Hotel** (☎ 4787 8688; fax 4787 8677; 100 Mosman St; s/d without bathroom \$30/40, d with bathroom \$77-88; 🍷) This grand old pub reminds you that the townsfolk back in the gold-rush era were rather well off. Nowadays it's one of the best-value places around. Couples should ask for room 4, with a huge bed, spa and gorgeous old furniture. Room 5 was the pub's bottle shop and can sleep four for around \$27 per person. Julie, the friendly owner, will negotiate on prices.

**York St Guesthouse** (☎ 4787 1028; 58 York St; s/d \$75/95; 🍷 🍷) Built in the 1880s, this comfortable B&B is in a charming old house and sports a lovely veranda and a good swimming pool. Rooms are beautifully decorated and there's a communal country-style kitchen and wheelchair access.

**Park Motel** (☎ 4787 1022; www.parkmotel.com.au; 1 Mosman St; s/d \$85/95; 🍷 🍷) As long as you don't mind sharing with the resident ghost (see p318), this motel is the closest to the town centre and has good rooms and a terrific restaurant.

**Bluff Downs** (☎ 4770 4084; www.bluffdowns.com.au; dm/d \$28/165; 🍷) If you want to glimpse the tough outback life, stay at a cattle station. Bluff Downs, 110km northwest of Charters Towers, has a range of accommodation packages. It's more than comfortable here. You won't be roughing it at all.

## Eating

**Towers Bakery** (☎ /fax 4787 7300; 114 Gill St; pies \$3.50; 🍷 6am-3pm) A venture to Charters Towers is incomplete without scoffing down one of this bakery's award-winning pies. It's just got to be done.

**our pick** **Stock Exchange Café** (☎ 4787 7954; 76 Mosman St; meals \$4-11; 🍷 breakfast & lunch) You could play a game of chess on the chequer-board floor, but the food is a worthy distraction anyway. Just about anything is served at this good old-fashioned café where a friendly smile awaits. Give the salmon patties with chips and salad a go or grab a deliciously strong coffee.

**Naturally Good** (☎ 4787 4211; 58 Gill St; dishes \$6-11; 🍷 breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Fresh, wholesome dishes like chicken curry, gourmet sandwiches and home-made Cornish pasties await at this friendly local café.

**Rozzie's** (☎ 4787 7333; 56 Mosman St; pizzas \$8-17; 🍷 4.30pm-late Wed-Mon) No wonder it takes so bloody long for your pizza to cook. The toppings are piled so high on these babies that we reckon they must need to be passed through the rotating oven twice.

**Gold City Chinese** (☎ 4787 2414; 118 Gill St; mains \$9-16; 🍷 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) You can eat well for very little at this reasonable Chinese place on the main street. The all-you-can-eat buffets (lunch Tuesday to Friday, \$9;

The original Australia Bank of Commerce building, built in 1891, now houses the **World Theatre** (82 Mosman St). It comprises a theatre, cinema, gift shop and restaurant.

Built in 1872, the **Venus Gold Battery** (☎ 4752 0314; Millchester Rd; tours adult/child \$12/6; 🍷 9.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri) was where gold-bearing ore was crushed and processed until as recently as 1973. It's the largest preserved battery in Australia. An imaginative tour tells the story of this huge relic.

**Towers Hill Lookout**, the site where gold was first discovered, has inspiring views over the plain. There are interpretive panels, as well as an open-air theatre screening the *Ghosts of Gold* each evening at around 7pm (\$6, 20 minutes).

The small **Miner's Cottage** (☎ 4787 4021; 26 Deane St; adult/child \$4/2; 🍷 9am-2pm Sat & Sun) has a reasonable

collection of mining tools and you can learn to pan for gold as well as sip on a free cuppa.

## Festivals & Events

**Ten Days in the Towers** (www.charters-towers-country-music.com) in April/May is 10 days of country music (the largest amateur gathering in the country), line dancing, bush poetry and busking. In late January around 100 amateur cricket teams descend on Charters Towers to play for the **Goldfield Ashes**, which runs for three days over the Australia Day long weekend.

## Sleeping

There are some decent motels strung along Dalrymple Rd as you approach the town from Townsville.

### THE STORY OF BRIDGET CLANCY

Bridget Clancy was a love-struck 29-year-old when she took her own life by overdosing on cyanide. The object of her affection? Her brother-in-law, who was killed in a mining accident. What makes Bridget's story compelling is that she is known to still search for her lost love in the Park Motel, where her cries of anguish can be heard in the night. We stayed at the Park Motel and weren't disturbed by Bridget, but the manager swears he's been playfully poked and prodded while asleep. Don't let this put you off staying at the hotel. It's comfortable and we had one of the best night's sleep while we were on the road researching this chapter.

dinner Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, \$14) is popular and the BYO alcohol license means your wallet *and* your tummy will be satisfied.

**Henry's** (☎ 4787 4333; 82-90 Mosman St; lunch mains \$13.50-20, dinner mains \$22-35; ☎ 10am-late) Formerly Lawson's, but still named after the Aussie poet Henry Lawson (obviously his surname wasn't good enough), this classy restaurant has an extensive menu including lamb shanks, seafood and a very good vegetarian pasta. Gaze up at the huge high ceiling and gawk at some of the paintings hanging on the walls.

### Drinking

**Irish Molly's** (☎ 4787 1187; 120 Gill St) At the Courthouse Hotel, Molly's is a popular Irish-theme bar.

**White Horse Tavern** (☎ 4787 1064; 33 Gill St; ☎ 10am Thu-Sat) Friday nights at the White Horse guarantee a good crowd with theme nights (it was Nurse Party night when we were there!), two pool tables and cheap beers.

### Getting There & Away

**Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 20 30; www.greyhound.com.au) has daily services from Townsville to Charters Towers (\$32, 1¼ hours), continuing to the Northern Territory. The long-distance bus stop is outside the Catholic church on Gill St.

The train station is on Enterprise Rd, 1.5km east of the centre. The twice-weekly *Inlander* runs from Townsville to Charters Towers on Sunday and Wednesday (economy seat \$26, three hours).

In town **Travel Experience.com** (☎ 4787 2622; 13 Gill St) is a travel agent that handles travel tickets.

## TOWNSVILLE TO INNISFAIL

As you leave Townsville, so does the Dry Tropics. The landscape slowly starts to change back to the greenery that you expect in this part of the world. The rainforest starts to appear again and you feel like you're returning to a tropical paradise.

Much of the action between Townsville and Innisfail centres around the beaches and offshore islands of Hinchinbrook and Dunk.

### PALUMA RANGE NATIONAL PARK

Part of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, Paluma Range National Park and the teeny village of Paluma 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 floodplain below. As you head up, the landscape changes from eucalypt stands to the closed canopy of the rainforest, containing a range of habitats to support the diverse bird species that live here.

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

The southern access route, Mt Spec Rd, was built by relief labour during the 1930s Depression. It's a dramatic, narrow road (with

lose-your-lunch twists) that weaves 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 village.

### PALUMA VILLAGE

Chimneys billow smoke in winter at the cosy little mountain-top village of Paluma – a reminder that it can get chilly here in July and August. The town was founded in 1875 when tin was discovered in the area. A smattering of places to stay protrude from the rainforest surrounds and there is little activity to disturb the cool, clear mountain air.

A number of walks lead through the rainforest surrounding the village. If not cushioned in cloud, **McClelland's Lookout**, 100m before Paluma village, provides humbling views out to Halifax Bay and the Palm Islands. (This was also the site of a US Army radar station during WWII.) 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 containing evidence of the tin-mining industry.

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

**Heaven's Kitchen** (☎ 4770 8616; 1 Loop Rd; meals \$5-12; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-4.30pm Sun) serves warming dishes like pea-and-ham soup, and scones and jam.

Approximately 11km beyond Paluma is **Lake Paluma**, a drinking-water storage dam, with a dedicated foreshore area for swimming and picnicking. You can camp 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; s/d \$55/75), which also has motel-style backpacker rooms (single/double \$30/40) and a licensed restaurant.

### Jourama Falls Section

Jourama Falls and a series of cascades and rapids tumble along Waterview Creek, which is enclosed by palms and umbrella trees. It's a small area that's well developed, 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.

Access to this part of the park is via a 6km dirt road, 90km north of Townsville and 25km south of Ingham. Access may be restricted during the wet season.

Back on the Bruce Hwy, 65km north of Townsville at Mutarnee, is **Frosty Mango** (☎ 4770 8184; www.frostymango.com.au; Bruce Hwy; light meals \$5-12; ☎ 8am-6pm). It's a roadside restaurant serving everything and anything to do with mangoes – the ice cream is definitely worth a break in your journey.

### INGHAM

☎ 07 / pop 4605

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

But while Ingham finds it difficult to awake from its seemingly perpetual slumber, it's a nice enough town. Ingham services the surrounding sugar-cane district, where the first 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 pasta flying with cooking displays, street markets, children's rides, fireworks and a troubadour competition.

### Information

Your first port of call should be the **Tyto Wetlands Visitors Centre** (☎ 4776 5211; www.hinchinbrooknq.com.au; Bruce Hwy; ☎ 8.45am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat & Sun), which also has a small interpretive centre.

### Sights & Activities

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

### 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 AB '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 through his local and drained it dry of beer. (The Day Dawn was demolished in 1960; Lees Hotel now stands in its place.) The weekly *North Queensland Register* published the poem in 1944.

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

Which all goes a fair way to proving that the humble beer is an integral part of the Australian identity.

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.

Less than 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. There's a walking track to the base of the falls (4km, two hours return) or a shorter track to rock pools (1.2km, 30 minutes return) that leaves from the camping ground. You can swim both at the base of the falls and in the rock pools, if the water level is not too high.

Further into 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). Access is via unsealed roads and a 4WD is recommended in the wet season.

### 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 the 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 the boxed

text, above), 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 crappy air-con that is made to work very hard in the heat of the day (not too bad at night, though). Still, the beds are comfortable and management is friendly.

**Elda's** (☎ 4776 2039; 78 Lannercost St; sandwiches \$4-5; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon–Fri, to 2pm Sat) Don't miss the chance to sample the delectable sandwiches at this mysterious deli-cum-fruit shop. Walk past the Italian imported dry goods and fresh fruit and veg to the deli section, where your sandwich will be lovingly prepared to go.

**Victory Café** (☎ 4776 2108; 92 Cartwright St; meals \$5-20; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue–Sun) You're spoiled for choice at this humble little café. Steaks, pasta, crumbed and battered seafood, sandwiches, burgers, pizzas – it's all here. The Biasi's Speciality pizza is particularly recommended.

**Olive Tree Coffee Lounge** (☎ 4776 5166; 45 Lannercost St; mains \$8-12; ☎ lunch & dinner) If homemade Italian pasta sounds like it might hit the spot, then the Olive Tree will throw in some specially prepared Sicilian sauce for good measure. But wait, there's more. Crumbed steak and other similar fare are available, but really, you should give the pasta a whirl.

**Ingham Chinese Restaurant** (☎ 4776 3522; 60 Lannercost St; meals \$10-16; ☎ lunch & dinner) Definitely a 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) which will keep you going until very late at night.

### Getting There & Away

**Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) buses run between Townsville and Ingham (\$34, 1½ hours), and stop in the centre of town on Townsville Rd, close to the corner of Lannercost St. Ingham is also on the **Queensland Rail** (☎ 1300 131 722; www.traveltrain.com.au; ☎ 6am–9pm) Brisbane–Cairns train line, which stops here. From Townsville to Ingham it's \$29 in an economy seat and takes 1¾ hours.

### LUCINDA

☎ 07 / pop 448

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) and transfers to Hinchinbrook from \$46/57 one way/return.

**Wanderer's Holiday Village** (☎ 4777 8213; www.wanderers-lucinda.com.au; Bruce Pde; unpowered/powerd sites \$22/26, cabins \$80-95; 🍷 🍷) is a sprawling, well-equipped camping ground with a children's play area. It's a relaxed place, but then so 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 without/with bathroom \$60/95; 🍷 🍷) it's worth being here for the Sunday afternoon (adult/child \$14.50/5.50) or Saturday night (adult \$23.50) barbecue smorgasbord. The bonus is that the barbecue is served outside and you get to use the motel pool and shaded beer garden. The motel rooms are comfortable and clean.

**Lucinda Jetty Store & Take-Away** (☎ 4777 8280; 2 Rigby St; meals \$13-18) has surprisingly good meals with barramundi, crumbed steak and schnitzels served with chips and salad. Of course, there's the usual assortment of takeaway options, and fishing gear for sale.

### ORPHEUS ISLAND

The 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.

Large coral bommies may be found in Little Pioneer Bay, Cattle Bay and around the Yank's Jetty area. The snorkelling is best around the island's northeast tip. The beaches at Mangrove Bay, Yank's Bay and Pioneer Bay are simply beautiful, but shallow at low tide.

Apart from national park, with three camping grounds, the island has two leases: one an exclusive resort, the other a marine-research station.

During the early 19th century goats were released on the island as part of a madcap scheme to provide food for possible shipwreck survivors. The goats thrived to the extent that at one stage they numbered more than 4000. A national parks 'control program' significantly reduced numbers.

Only 11km long and about 1km wide, Orpheus is the second-largest of the Palm Islands Group. There are 10 other islands in the group; apart from Orpheus and nearby council-run Pelorus, all of the islands are Aboriginal communities with restricted access.

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, and no phones or TVs in the rooms. Everything is included: 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 are bush camping sites at Yank's Jetty, South Beach and Pioneer Bay. There are toilets at Yank's Jetty and Pioneer Bay, and picnic tables at all sites, but you'll need to be self-sufficient: bring 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 & AROUND

☎ 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; and a new marina precinct has evolved from an unfinished conglomerate into a thriving, picturesque minivillage.

## Information & Orientation

The **QPWS Reef & Rainforest Centre** (☎ 4066 8601; www.epa.qld.gov.au; ☎ 8am-4.30pm), next to the main jetty, has a rainforest interactive display and information about Hinchinbrook Island and the nearby state and national parks.

Port Hinchinbrook Marina, 2km south of town, is where boats depart for Hinchinbrook Island.

## Sights & Activities

The **Cardwell Forest Drive** starts from the centre of town and is 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.

The **Murray Falls State Forest** has pretty falls that tumble into fine rock pools suitable for swimming; take care as the rocks are slippery. There's a boardwalk viewing platform (that's wheelchair accessible) and a rainforest walk (1.8km return, one hour), as well as a barbecue and camping area. Murray Falls are 22km west of the highway, signposted about 27km north of Cardwell.

Just off the Bruce Hwy, about 7km south of Cardwell, the **Five Mile Swimming Hole** is another good swimming spot with picnic facilities that are wheelchair accessible.

The **Dalrymple Gap Walking Track** was originally an Aboriginal foot track made into a road by George Dalrymple in the 1860s as a stock route. The track is 8km long (eight hours return) and passes through Girringun

National Park and an old stone bridge that is registered by the National Trust. The turn-off to the track is off the highway, 15km south of Cardwell.

## Sleeping

**Beachcomber** (☎ 4066 8550; cardwellvillage@bestonparks.com.au; 43 Marine Pde; unpowered/powerd sites \$18/25, motel r \$65-95, villas \$80, studios \$90; ♿ ♿) There's a real happy holiday vibe going on at this large park, which offers a range of accommodation options from camping to budget motel rooms and self-contained villas and studios. Friendly management and an excellent swimming pool ensure your stay is pleasant.

**Kookaburra Holiday Park** (☎ 4066 8648; www.kookaburraholidaypark.com.au; 175 Bruce Hwy; unpowered/powerd 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 backpacker accommodation in a large Queenslander house at the back. You can borrow a fishing rod, prawn nets and crab pots and attempt to catch dinner.

**Beachfront Motel** (☎ 4066 8776; 1 Scott St; motel r \$70-75, self-contained r \$85; ♿ ♿) Right on the beach with a path leading into town, this motel is comfortable, although a little on the small side. Self-contained units have Austar TV.

**our pick 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 all the decorative pieces. Breakfast is included, but ask about the three-course dinners; these may entice you to stay another night.

**Port Hinchinbrook Resort Hotel** (☎ 4066 2000; www.porthinchinbrook.com.au; Bruce Hwy; d from \$195; ♿ ♿) 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.

## Eating

**Marina Restaurant** (☎ 4063 6000; marinarestaurant@bigpond.com; breakfast \$7-17, lunch mains \$12.50-30, dinner mains \$28-35; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This slick new restaurant at the marina sent the old café packing and offers big mains for lunch and dinner,

## IMPERIAL ISLANDS OF THE PIED IMPERIAL-PIGEON

The dense vine forests of the Brook Islands are the imperial lands of the pied imperial-pigeon. These plump birds arrive in their thousands every September, each one laying a single white egg in a scraggly nest.

The four islands in the Brook Islands Group lie about 8km northeast of Cape Richards, to the north of Hinchinbrook Island. The islands support a colony of around 40,000 pigeons, which arrives each September and departs with its offspring in February. Visiting the islands is prohibited during nesting time.

North Island has a sandy beach that you're able to visit from March to September (providing you have a boat). Although the island was used for mustard-gas experiments in 1944, the Environment Protection Agency reports 'virtually no trace of this remains'. North, Middle and Tween Islands have superb fringing corals that are popular with recreational snorkellers, and South Island has a Commonwealth lighthouse. However, it's the trees that the pigeons come for.

The pigeons migrate from New Guinea every summer to breed in Australia. Known by various names, including nutmeg pigeon, Torresian imperial-pigeon and pied imperial-pigeon, they are large, striking birds – pure white with black tail and wing tips. They fly to the mainland each day to feed on fruit trees, before returning to the islands each afternoon. Farmers on the mainland used to consider the birds pests, and regularly shot them in their thousands on the islands. However, thanks to the efforts of Margaret and Arthur Thorsborne (after whom Hinchinbrook's trail is named – see below) in the 1960s and '70s, the birds are now protected and numbers have increased.

The Brook Islands are also a breeding place over summer for a variety of terns, as well as the vulnerable beach stone-curlew, which is believed to lay its eggs directly onto the beaches of North Brook Island.

including tandoori-chicken Caesar salad as well as barramundi, prawns and oysters.

**our pick 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. Home-made rissoles with vegies, roast meats, mixed grills and a big seafood plate all feature on the slightly different-to-the-norm menu.

**Marine Hotel** (☎ 4066 8662; 59 Victoria St; mains around \$15; ☎ lunch & dinner) Grab some basic pub grub at this pleasant hotel.

**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 outside decking area at the front.

## Getting There & Away

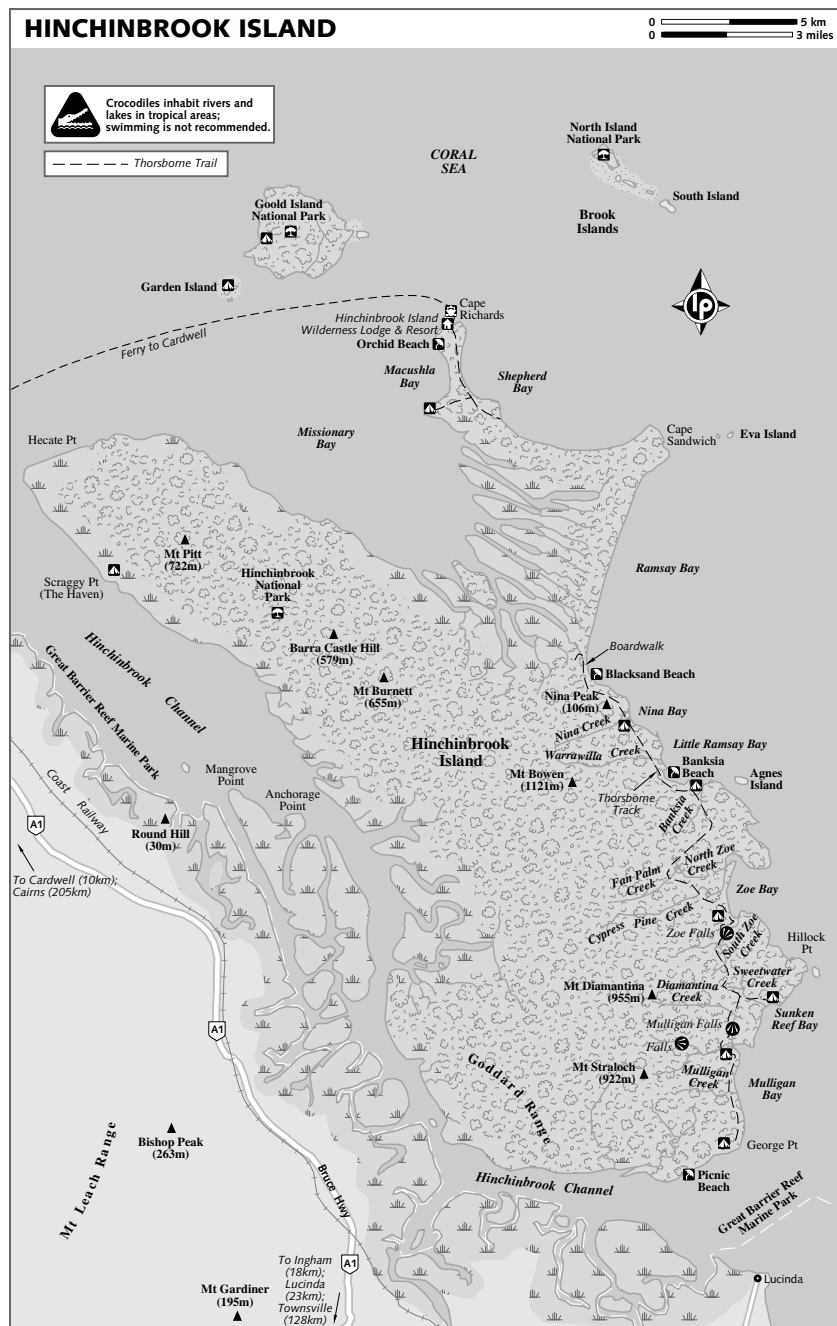
**Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 20 30; www.greyhound.com.au) buses from Townsville (\$40, 2¼ hours) and Cairns (\$38, 3¼ hours) stop at Cardwell.

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

## HINCHINBROOK ISLAND

Hinchinbrook Island lives up to the hype. It's Australia's largest island national park and 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 unspoilt wilderness. Hinchinbrook's granite mountains rise dramatically from the sea. The mainland side is dense with lush tropical vegetation, while long sandy beaches and tangles of mangrove curve around the eastern shore. All 399 sq km of the island is national park, and rugged Mt Bowen (1121m) is its highest peak. There's plenty of wildlife, including the pretty-faced wallaby and the iridescent blue Ulysses butterfly.

Hinchinbrook is well known to bush-walkers and naturalists. Walking opportunities here are excellent, even though some trails may close between November and March due to adverse weather. The highlight is the **Thorsborne Trail** (also known as the East Coast 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 take three nights to



complete the trail, allowing for swimming stops and quiet time. Return walks of individual sections are also possible if you're time poor. This is the real bush experience; you'll need to wear a layer of insect repellent, protect your food from ravenous rats, draw water from creeks as you go (water is reliably available at Nina, Little Ramsay and Zoe Bays), and be alert to the possibility of crocs being present around the mangroves. The trail is ungraded and at times rough, including challenging creek crossings; you should carry a map, drinking water and a fuel stove.

Apart from the Thorsborne Trail, camping and short walks are available at **Macushla Bay** (5km to 8km, 1½-2 hours) and the **Haven circuit** (1km, 15 minutes) at Scraggy Point.

In general, beach fishing is allowed, but be mindful of marine stingers that are present in the sea and waterways from October to April.

Bookings for the Thorsborne Trail need to be made in advance: for a place during the high season, **QPWS** (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au; per person/family \$4.50/18) recommends booking a year ahead and six months ahead for other dates. Its Reef & Rainforest Centre (p322) in Cardwell stocks the imperative *Thorsborne Trail* brochure and screens the 15-minute *Without a Trace* video, which walkers are required to view. Cancellations for places on the trail are not unheard of, so it's worth asking about the possibility of a place if you've arrived without a booking.

**Hinchinbrook Island Ferries** (☎ 4066 8585; www.hinchinbrookferries.com.au) runs daily tours (per person \$125) to Hinchinbrook Island, departing from Cardwell's Port Hinchinbrook Marina. The 5½-hour tour includes exploration of the mangroves, visiting the long stretch of beach at Ramsay Bay and the option of walking through the rainforest at Macushla Bay. There's also a channel cruise (per person \$125, Sunday, Wednesday and Friday) from Cardwell to Lucinda. These trips are also available from Townsville and Cairns with return bus transfers for \$100 extra.

Built into the steep hillside behind Orchid Beach, in the island's north, are the elevated tree houses with floor-to-ceiling windows, a balcony, kitchenette and bathroom at **Hinchinbrook Island Wilderness Lodge & Resort** (☎ 4066 8270; www.hinchinbrookresort.com.au; beach cabins \$275, tree houses \$445; 🏠). The beachfront-cabin price is for up to four people. 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 also available.

There are six **QPWS camping grounds** (☎ 13 13 40; www.epa.qld.gov.au; per person \$4) along the Thorsborne Trail, plus the two at Macushla Bay and the Haven in the north.

**Hinchinbrook Island Ferries** (☎ 4066 85 85; www.hinchinbrookferries.com.au) operates daily services. Boats depart from Cardwell's Port Hinchinbrook Marina and dock at the Hinchinbrook Resort. The journey takes about 50 minutes and costs \$125 return. 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 a sandy beach on both the west and south sides. There's a **QPWS camping site** (☎ 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 are 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; no children under six years are permitted.

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

## TULLY

☎ 07 / pop 2457

Tully is rather 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 and the surrounding banana plantations

provide seasonal employment that attracts 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 all year round thanks to the daily release of the floodgates by the hydro-electricity company. Rafting trips are timed to coincide with the release of the floodgates and it's worth doing – not only for the grade-four rapids, but for the stunning scenery provided by the rainforest backdrop.

The **Tully Visitor & Heritage Centre** (☎ 4068 2288; Bruce Hwy; ☎ 8.30am–4.45pm Mon–Fri, 9.30am–2.30pm Sat & Sun) is on the highway just south of the Tully turn-off. Book here for **Tully Sugar Mill Tours** (adult/child \$12/8; ☎ 10am, 11am & 1.30pm Mon–Fri, 11am Sat & Sun Jun–Nov). During the crushing season 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 half an hour before departure (as minimum numbers are required); wear closed 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, as well as river access for swimming at **Tully Gorge**, but you may be converged upon by pumped and 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. A number of disused logging roads in the area have been revitalised into walking trails; the visitors centre in Tully has a map, as does [www.mistymountains.com.au](http://www.mistymountains.com.au).

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

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

## Sleeping & Eating

**Green Way Caravan Park** (☎ 4068 2055; fax 4068 0681; Murray St; unpowered sites per person \$12, powered sites for 1–2 people \$25, cabins without/with bathroom \$55/70; ♿ ♿) Just a short stroll into town, this good park is often filled with long-termers.

**Banana Barracks** (☎ 4068 0455; [www.bananabarracks.com](http://www.bananabarracks.com); 50 Butler St; dm without/with bathroom \$24/26, 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](http://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.

**Mt Tyson Hotel** (☎ 4068 1088; 23 Butler St; r per week \$110) This busy pub serves huge counter meals and offers basic weekly accommodation for backpackers interested in banana-picking work. The owners will help get you started.

**Kanga Jacks** (☎ 4068 2118; 51 Bryant St; meals \$6–15; ☎ 5am–5pm Mon–Fri, to 2pm Sat) Early birds will appreciate this busy café-diner that serves all 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](http://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.qr.com.au](http://www.traveltrain.qr.com.au)) for details.

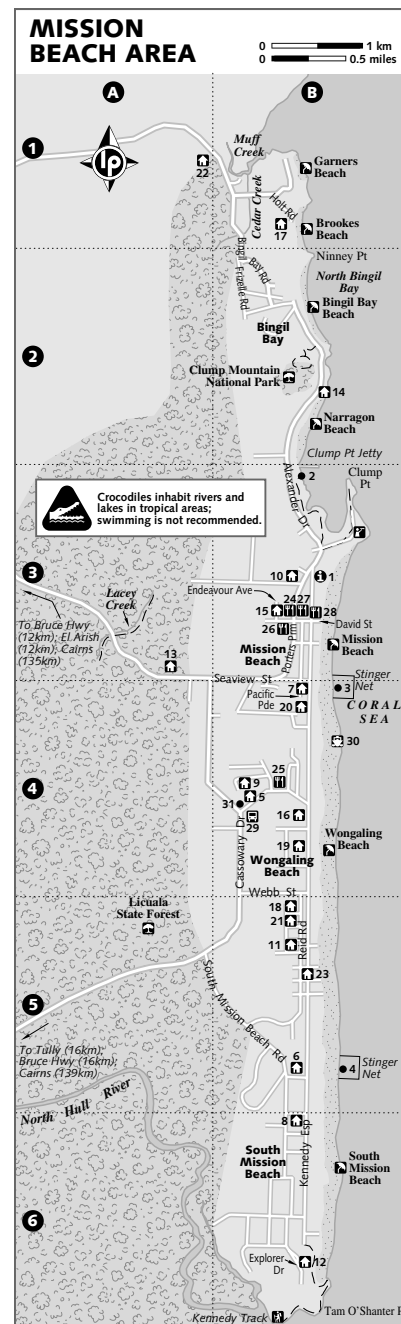
## MISSION BEACH

☎ 07 / pop 2594

Mission Beach and her sister villages of Wongaling Beach, Bingil Bay and South Mission Beach are like four siblings who are all close in character and style, but who all live separate lives and are not jealous of each other in the slightest. Each has its own distinct personality, but you can tell they're all from the same pod.

Yes, the Mission Beach area is often one of those places where travellers umm and ahh and debate whether to make the detour from Tully. Will it be worth it? Let us put your mind at ease. This area has to be one of the most stunning, relaxed places in the whole of North Queensland.

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



If you're after some down time having fled the hubbub of Airlie Beach or Cairns, then you've found it.

## History

Mission Beach's calm repose contrasts with its troubled past. In 1848 early European explorers floundered in the area on an ill-fated search for a path north to Cape York. Assisted by an indigenous man named Jackey Jackey, Edmund Kennedy led 13 men, 28 horses and a flock of sheep north from Tam O'Shanter Point. Before long most of the horses died from exhaustion or had to be destroyed, one

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man was taken ill and another accidentally shot himself. Only Jackey Jackey made it to the ship waiting at Cape York, and guided officials on a number of searches to locate the other members of the expedition. Kennedy had been speared by an Aborigine, seven men had starved to death and the other three were never found. There's a memorial to the expedition at Tam O'Shanter Point.

An Aboriginal mission, set up by the Queensland government at present-day South Mission Beach, had existed for only four years when it was destroyed by one of the state's worst cyclones in 1918. Every building was ruined by the 150km/h winds, giant waves and flooding, and it's estimated that at least 40 people lost their lives.

## Information

Mission Beach village has comprehensive services: internet access is available at a number of places on the main strip, including **Intermission@the Beach** (☎ 4068 7117; David St; per 20min/hr \$2/5). ATMs are located in the newsagency and supermarket; and you'll find the post office in the main group of shops.

The 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). It shares the premises with the **Wet Tropics Environment Centre** (☎ 4068 7179; www.wetropics.gov.au) with rainforest and cassowary conservation displays. It's staffed by volunteers from the **Community for Cassowary & Coastal Conservation** (C4; www.cassowaryconservation.asn.au). Proceeds from purchases of some items available at the centre go towards buying cassowary habitat, which is being depleted by development and threatens the survival of the species (see the boxed text, p391).

## Sights & Activities

Dunk Island (p331) is a popular day trip from Mission Beach. The Great Barrier Reef is around an hour away and rainforest walks can get 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-bottomed boat jaunt (\$140); add \$80 for an introductory dive and \$55 for

a certified dive. A return ferry to Dunk Island is also available (\$40).

**Calypso Dive & Snorkel** (☎ 4068 8432; www.calypso-dive.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, which details 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 a lookout at Lugger Bay. The inland walks through state park are tropical rainforest and where you're most likely to see a cassowary. Licuala State Forest has a number of rainforest walks, including the 10-minute children's walk marked with cassowary footprints, and the Lacey Creek track (1.2km, 45 minutes) with interpretive signage and a cassowary display.

## WATER SPORTS

From Mission Beach, rafting day trips on the Tully River with **R'n'R White Water Rafting** (☎ 1800 079 039; www.raft.com.au) and **Raging Thunder Adventures** (☎ 4030 7990; www.ragingthunder.com.au/rafting.asp) cost \$180, including lunch.

Paddle over to Dunk Island for the day with **Coral Sea Kayaking** (☎ 4068 9154; www.coralseakayaking.com; half-/full-day tours \$70/120) or bob around the coastline for half a day; trips depart South Mission Beach. Courtesy pick up is available. **Mission Beach Adventure Centre** (☎ 0429 469 330; Porter Promenade, Mission Beach) rents kayaks for \$15/30 per single/double kayak per hour, and then costing \$5/10 per extra hour.

Take a day cruise on the 11m catamaran *Theotherside* with **Dunk Island & Sails** (☎ 0429 966 091; Clump Point Jetty, Mission Beach). You can sail to Dunk, Timara, Bedarra and Wheeler Islands (adult/child \$90/65). Shorter tours are also available, including a sunset cruise (\$63/33).

**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 skydive landing. There's a 100kg weight limit.

Anglers should contact **Fishin' Mission** (☎ 4088 6121; www.fishinmission.com.au; half-/full-day tours

\$130/190) for reef and island fishing leaving from Clump Point jetty.

There are two **stinger enclosures** for safe year-round swimming at Mission Beach and South Mission Beach.

## Tours

**River Rat Eco Cruises** (☎ 4068 8018; www.riverrat-cruises.com; adult/child \$49/26) Informed wildlife-spotting tours along the Hull River that last for around four hours and include a light meal. Staff will pick you up.

## Sleeping

There's no shortage of decent accommodation in the Mission Beach area and all budgets are well catered for. Mission Beach and Wongaling Beach are the most popular areas, with South Mission and Bingil Bay being quieter.

## SOUTH MISSION BEACH

**Beachcomber Coconut Caravan Village** (☎ 1800 008 129, 4068 8129; www.beachcombercoconut.com; Kennedy Esplanade; unpowered/powered sites \$34/38, cabins without bathroom \$70-85, with bathroom \$95, villas \$160-170; ☹ ☹ ☹) Book early if you want to stay at this fabulous holiday park during school holidays. The Beachcomber has well-grassed campsites and wonderful beachfront cabins overlooking Dunk Island. It's an excellent option for families, with a big swimming pool and a well-equipped playground.

**Dixon's Beach House** (☎ 4088 6699; 94 Kennedy Esplanade; house \$110-130) Lovingly referred to as the 'granny house' this two-bedroom unit has a huge master bedroom and some seriously blinding tilework in the bathroom. There's no air-con, but the front windows open up to catch any breeze.

**Horizon** (☎ 4068 8154; www.thehorizon.com.au; 1 Explorer Dr; std r \$240, ste \$285-460; ☹ ☹ ☹) The new owners from Byron Bay decided to revamp this secluded piece of paradise and the result is impressive. The whole vibe is very contemporary, but without compromising the natural beauty of the surroundings. Dunk Island looks like it's within touching distance of the huge decked pool area.

## WONGALING BEACH

**Scotty's Mission Beach House** (☎ 1800 665 567, 4068 8676; www.scottysbeachhouse.com.au; 167 Reid Rd; dm \$21-26, d & tw without/with bathroom \$49/59; ☹ ☹ ☹) 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 bathrooms 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.

**Absolute Backpackers** (☎ 4068 8317; www.absolutebackpackers.com.au; 28 Wongaling Beach Rd; dm \$22, d & tw \$50; ☹ ☹ ☹) Check out the pool area festooned with hammocks as you approach the main building here. The refurbished rooms are comfortable and clean, and the whole place is peaceful and relaxed. The travellers we spoke to who were staying here loved the 24-hour kitchen and that they could bring their own drinks onto the premises.

**San-Roy** (☎ 4088 6699; 79 Banfield Pde; 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.

**Hibiscus Lodge B&B** (☎ 4068 9096; www.hibiscuslodge.com.au; 5 Kurrjong Close; r \$95-120; ☹ ☹ ☹) The three rooms in this comfortable Queenslander each feature their own theme and are decorated accordingly. Set in lush tropical gardens, the Hibiscus is for those who prefer to wake to the sound of birds chirping and eat their breakfast in the specially designed area that overlooks the rainforest.

**Honeyeater B&B** (☎ 4068 8741; www.honeyeater.com.au; 53 Reid Rd; s/d \$95/125; ☹ ☹ ☹) Soothing and peaceful with the sound of a gurgling water feature in the background, this lovely B&B is set in tropical gardens and has an inviting swimming pool out the back.

**Seachange on Banfield** (☎ 4088 6699; 43 Banfield Pde; 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 you can 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.

**Shores** (☎ 4068 9716; www.missionbeachshores.com; 137-139 Reid Rd; r \$185; ☹ ☹ ☹) Shores has luxury Balinese-style self-contained beachfront bungalows set in lush tropical gardens. The rooms have a breezy open plan and you can stretch out on your personal patio or lounge beside the big pool.

**Wongalinga** (☎ 4068 8221; www.wongalinga.com.au; 64 Reid Rd; 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. There's excellent air-con but try opening up the shutters and letting the cool breezes waft through before you press any buttons.

### MISSION BEACH

**Hideaway Holiday Village** (☎ 1800 687 104, 4068 7104; hideaway@atustarnet.com.au; 58-60 Porter Promenade; unpowered/powerd sites \$25/37, cabins without/with bathroom \$69/85, 1-1/2-bedroom villas \$96/160; 🏠 🚿) Plenty of shade awaits at this centrally located holiday park. Campers will appreciate the well-grassed sites, while families will find the two-bedroom villas, sleeping five, more than comfortable. There's a 24-hour internet kiosk on site.

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

**Castaways** (☎ 1800 079 002, 4068 7444; www.rydges.com/castaways; Pacific Pde; std r \$159, 1-1/2-bedroom unit \$179/224; 🏠 🚿) Spruced up and ready to entertain, Castaways offers an extensive choice of rooms. The units are comfortable with large rooms and balconies overlooking the beach. The one-bedroom units are good value.

**Mission Beach Ecovillage** (☎ 4068 7534; www.ecovillage.com.au; Clump Point Rd; 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 spas and the brilliant free-form pool is perfect for all ages.

**Sejala on the Beach** (☎ 4088 6699; http://missionbeachholidays.com.au/sejala; 26 Pacific Pde; d \$240; 🏠 🚿) Your first tentative steps down into the cocoon-like bathrooms will reveal shutter doors that open onto rainforest, allowing you to shower with nature. These huts have loads of character, kitchenettes and your own private barbecue on the front deck.

**Lilypads** (☎ 4088 6133; 1375 Cassowary Dr; house \$300-350; 🏠 🚿) You soon realise what the owners had in mind when they named this place – there's a beautiful lilypad pond 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 where you can relax in a hammock surrounded by mosquito netting and listen to the bubbling stream nearby.

### BINGIL BAY

**Treehouse** (☎ 4068 7137; www.yha.com.au; Frizelle Rd; unpowered sites \$12, dm/d \$23/55; 🏠 🚿) You'll be impressed by the big, pole-framed timber building here that merges effortlessly with the surrounding rainforest. The generous balcony space is dotted with heavy wooden tables that are strewn with board games, international newspapers and books. Relaxed travellers veg out on sun lounges or hammocks under the shaded veranda.

**our pick Sanctuary** (☎ 4088 6064, 1800 777 012; www.sanctuaryatmission.com; 72 Holt Rd; dm \$33, s/d huts \$60.50/65, s/d cabins \$130.50/150; 🏠 🚿) Wow! If you want to sleep with nature, surrounded only by flyscreen on a platform within a real rainforest, then the huts here will fulfil your wish. If you prefer comfort, the cabins are exquisite and even the shower cubicle provides 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 sewerage 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 as the breezes here are sublime).

### Eating

Quick bites on the go or a romantic candlelit dinner, Mission Beach exists for you, the traveller, so there's pretty much nothing you can't have.

**Café Gecko** (☎ 4068 7390; cnr Porter Promenade & Campbell Sts, Mission Beach; light meals \$5-12; 🍷 7am-3pm) 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 for \$9 goes down a treat after an early-morning swim.

**Early Birds Café** (☎ 4088 6000; Shop 2, 46 Porter Promenade; light meals \$6-10; 🍷 6am-3pm) The smoked salmon wrap with cream cheese and crisp lettuce here is worthy of at least one try, but then again so are the big breakfasts and awesome coffee.

**100th Monkey** (☎ 4088 6004; Porter Promenade, Mission Beach; meals \$6-14; 🍷 breakfast & lunch) If you can get past the surly reception at the counter, you'll eventually be pleased with what lands on your table. Inventive salads, open grills, soups, big breakfasts, Devonshire tea and good coffee can be found here. Pity about the service.

**Andy's Pizzeria** (☎ 4088 6866; 2/45 Porter Promenade, Mission Beach; pizzas \$7-15; 🍷 dinner) A 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 \$11.50, pasta mains \$12-17; 🍷 lunch & dinner) There's a nice little bar area to 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; 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 idea to catch the live music every Sunday night. 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; mains \$21-34; 🍷 noon-late Sat-Mon, 3pm-late 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 (\$26.50) goes well with a Sauv Blanc or maybe the T-bone (\$25) with a Stella or a Barossa Valley Shiraz may be more to your liking.

**Blarney's by the Beach** (☎ 4068 8472; 10 Wongaling Beach Rd, Wongaling; mains \$24; 🍷 dinner Mon-Sat) Blarney's is blessed with a big backyard in which to serve its hearty dishes. Its bamboo-thatched ceilings and lattice screens contribute to the casual space. The professional service delivers mostly meat dishes, such as beef Wellington and steak-and-kidney pie, from the à la carte menu.

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

There are supermarkets for self-caterers at Mission Beach and Wongalinga.

### Getting There & Around

**Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 20 30; www.greyhound.com.au) and **Premier** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) buses stop in Wongaling Beach. The average bus fare from Cairns is \$31 (two hours) and from 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.

**Sugar Land Car Rentals** (☎ 4068 8272; www.sugarland.com.au; 30 Wongaling Beach Rd, Wongaling Beach; 🍷 8am-5pm) rents small cars from \$55 per day and 4WDs starting at \$115.

### DUNK ISLAND

The water surrounding Dunk Island seems too blue to be true. It's the first thing you notice when 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 as if they take 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.

Part national park, part resort, the island boasts excellent walking, swimming and snorkelling, and has an abundance of water sports – pretty much your ideal tropical island.

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 most well known. **Banfield's grave** is a short walk from the jetty towards Muggy Muggy. Visual artists also use the island as inspiration, staying at the artists' colony established in 1974 by Bruce Arthur – known for his tapestries.

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

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

**Dunk Island Resort** (☎ 4068 8199, reservations 1800 737 678; 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 and while away your day in a sun lounge, only to pack up and head to the bar and pool at dusk. The nine-hole golf course has boardwalks through dense rainforest and 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.

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

### Getting There & Away

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

Combination bus-and-boat transfers to Dunk with **Mission Beach Dunk Island Connections** (☎ 4059 2709; www.missionbeachdunkconnections.com.au) cost \$128/80 per adult/child return from Cairns (2½ hours).

**Dunk Island Express Water Taxi** (☎ 4068 8310; Banfield Pde, Wongaling; adult/child return \$35/17.50) and **Dunk Island Ferry & Cruises** (☎ 4068 7211; www.dunkferry.com.au; Clump Point; adult/child return \$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 the 'who cares, it's only money' attitude sinks in. Yes, it's expensive, but they don't cut any corners here. It's worth it.

What began as a small tourist resort in 1979 blossomed into this exclusive resort, variously owned and renovated by Qantas, P&O and most recently Voyager.

The 16 beachfront villas at **Bedarra Island Resort** (☎ 4068 8233; www.bedarraisland.com; 2-night package s \$2792-5732, d \$3300-6240; 🏠 🚿 🚿) are the very essence of luxury and seclusion. Indeed, the resort often boasts that there are often more beaches than guests. Each stunning split-level villa overlooks Wedgerock Bay, has its own private plunge pool and outdoor area with a day bed – where a bucket of ice and a plate of canapés is 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 (left) for details.

### MISSION BEACH TO INNISFAIL

The road north from Mission Beach rejoins the Bruce Hwy at El Arish. From here you can take the more direct route north by continuing straight along the Bruce Hwy, or you can detour west and take the Old Bruce Hwy.

The Bruce Hwy passes through Mourilyan, about 7km south of Innisfail. Mourilyan is home to the **Australian Sugar Industry Museum** (☎ 4063 2656; www.sugarmuseum.org.au; Bruce Hwy; adult/child \$5/3; 🚿 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, to 3pm Sun), which focuses on the significant influence on Queensland culture that the industry has wielded. In a refurbished old cinema, the museum houses a collection of photographs, artefacts and oral histories, as well as contemporary visual exhibitions.

The Old Bruce Hwy (Japoonvale Rd) is generally the more scenic route north. It runs along banana and sugar-cane plantations, with cane trains intermittently cutting across the road during harvest (the season is officially June to December). Among all this agricultural activity are the enchanting ruins of a once-grand castle at the five-hectare **Paronella Park** (☎ 4065 3225; www.paronellapark.com.au; Japoonvale Rd; adult/child \$28/14; 🚿 9am-9.30pm), located just south of Mena Creek. It reveals an intriguing history of a couple's quest to bring a whimsical entertainment centre to the area's hard-working folk. Built in the 1930s, the rambling mossy Spanish ruins have an almost medieval feel, and a number of walking trails lead through the stunning gardens past a waterfall and a swimming hole. Take the tour that is included in your ticket price to hear the full, fascinating story. It really is worth detouring out here.

### INNISFAIL & AROUND

☎ 07 / pop 8262

Innisfail may come as a surprise to those who expect another ho-hum town that exists purely to serve those who rely on agriculture for a living. Innisfail buzzes, especially on Saturday mornings when locals come to town to browse, shop, drink and eat. It has a real community feel and some gorgeous Art Deco architecture. Innisfail seems to love being just far enough away from the mayhem of Cairns (80km), but close enough if the need arises.

A perfect example of why Innisfail is so charming is the fact that people don't mind in the slightest when outsiders refer to the town as the 'place where Billy Slater comes from'. Slater is one of the National Rugby League's stars and even though he plays full-back for the Melbourne Storm and not the North Queensland Cowboys, locals adore him anyway.

At the confluence of the North and South Johnstone Rivers, a stroll along Fitzgerald Esplanade's waterfront reveals a line of stocky fishing boats to one side and the tops of grand

buildings to the other. You can't help but like Innisfail.

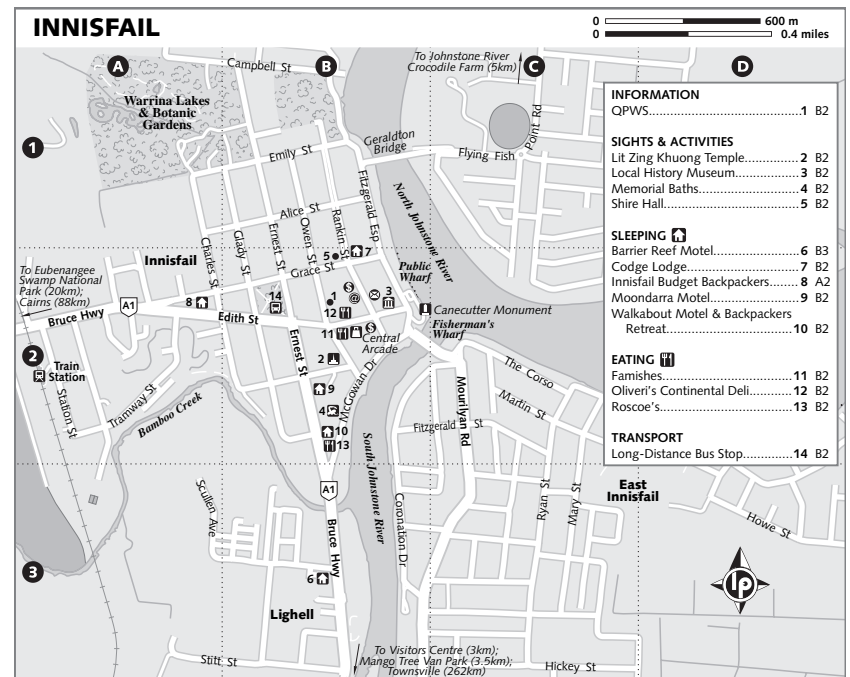
### Information & Orientation

The **visitors centre** (☎ 4061 7422; Bruce Hwy; 🚿 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat & Sun), about 3km south of town, has a town-walk brochure. There's also a **QPWS office** (☎ 4061 5900; Flying Fish Point Rd; 🚿 8.30am-4.30pm) in Innisfail.

### Sights & Activities

The **Local History Museum** (☎ 4061 2731; 11 Edith St; admission \$3; 🚿 10am-noon & 1-3pm Mon-Fri) is in the old School of Arts building and displays various items demonstrating Innisfail's history. Further evidence lies in the red façade of **Lit Zing Khuong** (Temple of the Universal God; Owen St; admission by donation); its puffs of incense are a gentle reminder of the area's Chinese heritage.

Head east over Geraldton Bridge to the **Johnstone River Crocodile Farm** (☎ 4061 1121; www.crocfarm.com; Flying Fish Point Rd; adult/child \$18/9; 🚿 8.30am-4.30pm, feeding times 11am & 3pm) where crocs are bred for handbags and steak. Tours run frequently (from 9.30am) where you can watch one of the guides sit on one-tonne



Gregory – the farm’s fattest reptile. The farm also has several cassowaries and is committed to a breeding program where these endangered birds are then returned to the wild.

You can take a guided **Art Deco Tour** (☎ 4061 9008; artdecotour@bigpond.com; adult/child \$15/7; 🕒 7.30-9am & 10.30am-noon) departing from the stunning **Shire Hall** in the town’s elegant Rankin St (advance bookings required). About 20km north of Innisfail on the Bruce Hwy is the turn-off to the bird-rich wetlands of **Eubenangee Swamp National Park**. During the Wet the water level of the Russell River rises such that it causes the Alice River to flow backwards, which floods the swamp. A 1km walking trail follows the Alice River (a waterway with a healthy croc population) through the mangroves and leads to an elevated grassy knoll overlooking the lily-studded wetlands. From here there are also views over to Mt Bartle Frere in Wooroonooran National Park.

If you fancy a dip in sedate surrounds, head to the **Memorial Baths** (☎ 4061 1267; McGowan Dr; admission \$2.80; 🕒 6am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat, 10am-5pm Sun).

## Sleeping

**Mango Tree Van Park** (☎ 4061 1656; mangotreepark@bigpond.com; unpowered sites \$15, d \$70; 🚻) Just off the Bruce Hwy, about 3.5km south of town, this tidy park has two great cottage-style cabins and camping sites among tropical-fruit gardens on the banks of the South Johnstone River.

**Moondarra Motel** (☎ 4061 7077; fax 4061 3231; 21 Ernest St; s \$70-85, d \$75-90, tw \$90-95, tr \$110; 🚻) Considering the dowdy exterior, the interior is a pleasant surprise. All the usual motel amenities await.

**Barrier Reef Motel** (☎ 4061 4988; www.barrierreef.motel.com.au; Bruce Hwy; s/d \$90/100; 🚻 📺) Probably the best place to stay in Innisfail. This comfortable motel has 41 rooms (two of them self-catering) and a decent bar/restaurant.

The town’s hostels cater to the banana pickers who work the surrounding plantations.

**Walkabout Motel & Backpackers Retreat** (☎ 4061 2311; 20-24 McGowan Dr; dm \$20; 🚻) Guarantees to find banana-picking work year-round and also organises activities and excursions on weekends.

**Codge Lodge** (☎ 4061 8055; 63 Rankin St; dm \$20; 🚻) Housed in an early-20th-century Queenslander.

**Innisfail Budget Backpackers** (☎ 4061 7833; 125 Edith St; dm \$25; 🚻 📺 📺) A rabbit-warren kind of place that offers a free bus to the beach on Sundays.

## Eating

**Famishes** (☎ 4061 3987; 64 Edith St; light meals \$5-9; 🕒 from 5am Mon-Fri, 6am Sat, 7am Sun) Dependable as they come, Famishes serves light meals such as lasagne and salad, and hearty rolls that will tide you over until dinnertime.

**Oliveri’s Continental Deli** (☎ 4061 3354; 41 Edith St; sandwiches \$6; 🕒 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) Step back in time at this (almost) mini-museum. Apart from healthy lunch choices and delicious coffee, this authentic Italian delicatessen has 60 varieties of European cheese, ham and salami, and row upon row of smallgoods and jarred goodies like anti-pasto and olives.

**Roscoe’s** (☎ 4061 6888, 3b Ernest St; mains \$22-30; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Roscoe’s is a popular local haunt, serving pizza and pasta and has a buffet lunch (\$16) daily.

## Getting There & Away

Bus services operate at least daily with **Premier** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premierms.com.au) and **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) from Innisfail to Townsville (\$58, 4½ hours) and Cairns (\$27, 1½ hours), departing from the bus stop opposite King George Sq on Edith St.

Innisfail is on the Cairns–Townsville train line; contact **Queensland Rail** (☎ 1300 131 722; www.traveltrain.com.au; 🕒 6am-9pm) for more information.

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