

Explorer Wildlife Tour in Queensland



Highlights

Far North Queensland is one of the world's most diverse ecological zones, home to vast swathes of ancient jungle and tropical reefs rich in marine life. Discover the region and its inhabitants on this once in a lifetime wildlife tour!

Home to five UNESCO World Heritage Sites (the Wet Tropics, the Great Barrier Reef, Fraser Island, the Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves and the Australian Fossil Mammal Sites at Riversleigh), as well as cultures spanning several millennia, Queensland is rightly considered one of the world's premier adventure holiday destinations. Australia's 'Sunshine State' is a land of ancient jungles, pristine beaches and warm turquoise waters resplendent with Technicolor corals! All this makes for some awesome exploration, be it sailing and snorkelling on the Great Barrier Reef, rafting down a jungle-draped valley or watching wallabies on a sunrise balloon flight!

Welcome to Cairns, where outback meets jungle meets Great Barrier Reef! This eight-day tour kicks off with a rainforest trek led by a local indigenous guide; in addition to showing you some of the region's extraordinary fauna, from pythons to tree frogs, cockatoos to kookaburras, he'll teach you about traditional plant use, rock and body art, Dreamtime and other cultural practices. It's then on to the magical Mareeba Wetland Reserve, Granite Gorge and the charming treehouses of Rose Gums Eco-Retreat! After another night in the jungle, you'll hike the Waterfalls Circuit via Mission Beach (the quintessential rainforest experience, complete with orchids, swimming holes and the scintillating play of butterflies!). Then, to cap it all off, you'll head out to the Great Barrier Reef for two days of snorkelling and scuba off your private yacht!

Is it for me?

Simply awesome! There are few tours that match this Australian odyssey for sheer scope and scale of spectacle. There's nothing prosaic or pedestrian here; instead, it's an endless stream of breathtaking experiences! We'd recommend this trip to anyone with insatiable curiosity and an appetite for adventure, to those for whom holidays aren't just about putting one's life on pause for a week! There's plenty of time to relax on this tour, but there's also an emphasis on exploration and close encounters (with the landscape, fauna and even the locals!). Rest assured, as long as you're open-minded (and not too scared of creepy-crawlies!), you're sure to adore this wildlife tour!

Accommodation

This tour features an incredible array of accommodation types. You'll spend three nights at the luxurious Hotel Cairns, a tropical oasis in the heart of the city, before a night in a treehouse at the enchanting Rose Gums Eco-Retreat! It's then on to Wooroonooran National Park, where a stylish rainforest eco-lodge awaits, followed by two days on the Reef aboard The Vagabond, your 65-foot private yacht! All accommodation is of the highest standard, combining comfort, mod cons and impeccable service. The food is equally exceptional; Cairns is home to many fine oceanfront restaurants that specialise in local meats and seafood, while you'll also be treated to riverside BBQs, al fresco rainforest dining and leisurely lunches on the deck of your yacht! All ingredients are fresh and organic, and special dietary requirements are very well catered for.

Itinerary

Prices from

2,004 GBP (8 days) per person

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Day 1: Arrival, Welcome Orientation and Sunset Cruise

Welcome to the tropics. You transfer from the Cairns airport to your accommodation at The Hotel Cairns, a breezy, sophisticated 4-star hotel only a block from the ocean. In the afternoon, you are greeted by your guide who will lead you through a welcome orientation over drinks and tapas. Just a short walk from your hotel is Cairns' wharf and your awaiting boat, on which you look for crocs in the mangroves and watch the sun slip below the horizon. Following our cruise, you savour an elegant meal at one of Cairns restaurants in the heart of the city, where you have an opportunity to sample classic Australian cuisine. D

Day 2: Aboriginal-Guided Hike, Animal Refuge and Port Douglas

Powdery beaches and arching palm trees drape the coast heading north from Cairns, considered one of the most scenic drives in Australia. You walk in a protected swath of wilderness important to the native Kuku Yulanji, and the rainforest comes alive in the company of an aboriginal guide. You discover how the Kuku Yulanji found their way through dense rainforest and learn what native plants were used for food, medicine and even soap. Your guide also explains the tribe's rites of passage, the meaning of rock art and body painting and the significance of the boomerang. You leave with a greater understanding of Dreamtime stories and the traditions of this ancient culture. Your next destination, praised for its authentic mixed-immersion exhibits, is home to a mosaic of Australian animals such as forest dragons, emus, koalas and crocs. The refuge's unique design lets you walk freely among the animals, and you can quite easily interact with animals such as wallabies and kangaroos, colourful Eclectus parrots and cockatoos. Your guide will give you insight into the endangered wildlife, such as the giant cassowary and the tree kangaroo, which are unique to Australia's tropical north. You visit Port Douglas in the late afternoon, a seaside town known for its sugary 4-Mile Beach and its status as a preferred holiday destination for the likes of Bill Clinton, Nicole Kidman and Keanu Reeves. You enjoy dinner at an oceanside restaurant before heading back to Cairns. B,L,D

Day 3: Mareeba Wetland Reserve and Granite Gorge

Mareeba Wetland Reserve, located on the East Asian-Australasian flyway, is a rich and diverse sanctuary for almost all of Australia's tropical water birds. A ranger takes you on an electric-powered boat ride and you can expect to see sea eagles, black swans, magpie geese, cranes, whistling ducks in the hundreds, pelicans, pink-eared ducks and even Australia's only stork, the jabiru. In addition, the tropical savannah woodlands boast eastern grey kangaroos, agile and whiptail wallabies, wallaroos, possums and gliders. You learn how staff rescue native wildlife and then facilitate their release into this untouched natural wonderland. In the afternoon, you visit Granite Gorge, where a boulder-filled canyon offers limitless opportunities to explore, and rock wallabies come out to play. You stop in Yungaburra for dinner at Nick's Swiss Restaurant - a local favourite and home of the yodelling accordion player. At sunset you look for the elusive platypus at their preferred swimming hole before heading to Rose Gums Eco-Retreat, a superb set of bungalows designed by our hosts, John and Peta. B,L,D

Day 4: Optional Sunrise Balloon Flight or Crater Lakes National Park, Outback Pioneer Homestead, and The Waterfalls Circuit

Today you rise early for an optional balloon flight over the Cairns Highlands. Peaceful and silent, your balloon glides over the tablelands, affording you a magnificent view of the rising sun and of kangaroos going about their daily routine. For those of you who choose not to balloon, you pay tribute to Yungaburra's high-profile resident - a massive curtain fig tree - and one of the area's ancient crater lakes, tucked away in a national park. Crossing over the Dividing Range, you enter the outback where you are welcome guests at a traditional cattle station and homestead. In the company of your "fair dinkum" cowboy friends - Kate and Peter - you have a quintessential Aussie BBQ, and take a walk back through time to the age of the early pioneers. On the way back down the range, you explore the Waterfalls Circuit: a series of three grand waterfalls under which you can swim. Your guide educates you about Australia's unique rainforest species like the brilliant blue Ulysses Butterfly, the giant tree frog, and the musky rat kangaroo, which you may spot along the way.

Your home tonight is at Mission Beach, host of at least 33 rare and threatened plants, including endangered ferns, orchids and flowering plants. Nestled in the rainforest, your stylish eco-lodge boasts private nature trails, views to the Coral Sea and delicious meals al fresco. B,L,D

Day 5: Hiking to Josephine Falls and Babinda Boulders

Wooroonooran National Park boasts Queensland's highest mountain, Bartle Frere, from which pour countless cascades. Josephine Falls is perhaps the park's most picturesque, and you arrive at the base of the falls by way of a short guided hike through the jungle. Here you can glide down an exhilarating natural waterslide that ends in a perfect, clear swimming hole. You also hike at the enchanting Babinda Boulders, where mysterious giant boulders stand in a swirling river. You learn from your guide about the spiritual significance of this mysterious place and why it has given rise to aboriginal legends. Back in Cairns, the waterfront is atmospheric at twilight, and you have the evening on your own to explore the Esplanade and sample some of the local fare. As a special treat this evening, you are welcome guests at Reef Teach, a fun and dynamic presentation given by a local marine biologist on the fascinating creatures that live at the Great Barrier Reef. B,L

Day 6: Sailing to the Great Barrier Reef, Snorkeling or SCUBA Diving

No trip to Cairns is complete without a visit to the outer Great Barrier Reef, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and easily one of the world's top natural wonders. On this journey, you avoid the crowds and do the reef in style aboard a 65-foot yacht with a crew dedicated solely to your group of 10 guests. Unmatched in personal service, your journey affords you an intimate experience of the outer reef, flexibility of locations, and spontaneity not available on larger boats. Snorkellers will find most of the abundant life and colours exist right beneath the surface at the reef. Within reach are giant clams, angel, butterfly and parrot fish, turtles, sea stars and corals of a thousand hues. Snorkellers can also opt to learn about SCUBA diving one-on-one from the dive instructor - an intro dive is a fantastic way to see the reef without having a certification. SCUBA divers can log up to 8 dives during these two days, diving along bommies and coral walls with mysterious swim-throughs that dance with light. This evening divers can also experience the magic of the reef with a phenomenal night dive. Afterwards you enjoy a sumptuous meal, perhaps a raucous game of Pictionary, and the option to sleep on deck beneath a blanket of stars. Boat accommodation is single beds and shared bathrooms. B,L,D

Day 7: Great Barrier Reef Sailing, Snorkelling and/or SCUBA Diving

Today you can rise early for a fantastic sunrise over the ocean, with a cup of hot coffee in your hands. You spend another day exploring the wonders of the Great Barrier Reef, moving to several sites which offer you exclusivity and pristine environment. Included in the boat's roving marine permit are sites at Elford, Thetford and Briggs reefs, as well as Michaelmas and Upolu cays that only this company visits. Among the 1,800 species of fish and 450 species of coral, you can expect to see "Nemo" clown fish in anemones, Wally the giant wrasse, elusive white-tipped reef sharks, fan corals, sea cucumbers and stag horn coral gardens. On the sail back, the crew is happy to teach you about sailing techniques, and you are welcome to "take the wheel" if you choose. You are likely to see dolphins swimming and playing in your wake, while in the winter season both humpback and minke whales may make an appearance. Tonight you mark the closing of your journey with a celebratory feast at one of Cairns' top restaurants. B,L,D

Day 8: Trip Conclusion or Extension

After breakfast, you prepare for your journey home or enjoy a few optional activities such as the Kuranda Skyrail, a sunrise balloon flight or a scenic helicopter tour. B

Details

Getting there

You can fly into Cairns airport and will need to make your own way to The Hotel Cairns, which is about a 10 minute taxi drive away.

Price includes

Price is per person based on 2 people sharing. Single supplement is AUD\$600.

Accommodation, meals, transfers, activities, guide.

Typical Duration

8 days

Comfort level

Refined (boutique or luxury accommodation and food)

Experience required

A reasonable level of fitness and interest is all that is needed