

Cairns, gateway to the Great Barrier Reef, offers a plethora of activities for a stand-alone holiday, as well as book-ending a Reef experience, whether you're a solo traveller, romantic couple or energetic family. Here are some suggestions to keep you busy for at least three days.

DAY 1

Morning

Rusty's Market Nothing says the tropics like the sweet heady aroma of fresh pineapple so get your fix of fresh tropical fruits at Rusty's Market. Make a breakfast platter of strawberries, pawpaw and lady finger bananas, pick up some fresh bread and an organic coffee too.

Open Fridays-Sundays from 5am,
rustysmarkets.com.au

Cairns ZOOM and Wildlife Dome A ropes course in a wildlife dome atop a casino sounds weird, but it works. Cuddle a koala, pat the pademelons and look a tawny frogmouth in the eye. Then hit the ropes courses – step across suspended chairs, swinging tyres, high wires, cargo nets and dangling beer barrels, as you shoo birds out of the way. Definitely challenging, but the photoshopped souvenir image zip-lining above a jumping crocodile is worth it.

Daily 9am-8pm, cairnszoom.com.au

Afternoon

Dine After the adrenaline rush, take a well-deserved rest over lunch with a view. Head to Dundee's overlooking Trinity Inlet for Aussie fare like crocodile, barramundi, kangaroo and sumptuous seafood platters (there's steaks, pastas and salads too) washed down with a glass of Australian wine.

Harbour Lights, 1 Marlin Parade,
dundeess.com.au

Bad Fishy Guaranteed to put a grin on your face, Bad Fishy is a jet boat with attitude – full-on fun. Perpetually smiling Patrick pumps up the energy along with the music as he heads the boat into Trinity Inlet before he skims the mangroves, slaloms cyclone moorings and spins 360 degree turns. Includes interesting commentary along the way.

Daily 11.30am and 2pm, badfishy.com.au

Evening

Tjapukai by Night Over native-infused canapés guests are welcomed with daubs of face paint and insights into the life of the Aboriginal rainforest people. Dreamtime stories are depicted by hypnotic dances imitating kangaroos and cassowaries. A dramatic fire-making ritual is followed by celebratory singing with guests tapping clap sticks and chanting to the rhythm. The engaging, enlightening and inclusive experience is followed by dinner and a fireside farewell.

Nightly 7pm, tjapukai.com.au

DAY 2

Morning

Blackbird Espresso Kick-start the day with fair-trade organic coffee in this eco-friendly cafe that caters for vegan and gluten-free clients too. The relaxed earthy decor pays homage to timber with furnishing made from recycled timber pallets. Sit at the communal high table while the kids scribble on the blackboard wall.

Weekdays from 7am, weekends from 8.30am 62 Grafton St, facebook.com/blackbirdespresso
blackbirdespresso.com.au

Skysail Rainforest Cableway Celebrate their 20th birthday and float



72 HOURS IN PARADISE

More than just a gateway to the Great Barrier Reef, Cairns is a holiday destination in itself, as **Briar Jensen** discovers.



ON THE GO: (clockwise from main) A gondola of the Skyrail Rainforest Cableway soars over the canopy; the inquiring gaze of a lemur at Cairns Zoom and Wildlife Dome; see the verdant rainforest up close on the Kuranda Scenic Railway; the captivating Tjapukai by Night. **Pictures:** Briar Jensen

above the rainforest in a cable car on the 7.5km journey from Cairns to Kuranda over Barron Gorge National Park. Splash out on a glass-floored Diamond View gondola and see the forest between your feet.

Open daily, skyrail.com.au

Djabugay Aboriginal Guided Rainforest Walk Break the Skyrail journey at Barron Falls Station for a rainforest tour learning about bush foods, medicines, tools and weapons while keeping an eye out for cassowaries. The highlight is sitting in a tranquil glade beside a bubbling creek listening to legends of water fairies and forest spirits.

Daily see website for departure times,
djabugay.org.au

Afternoon

Australian Butterfly Sanctuary There's nothing like the tickle of a butterfly on your skin, so continue on the Skyrail to Kuranda and visit the Australian Butterfly Sanctuary. Learn the butterfly life cycle on the 30-minute guided tour.

Daily 9.45am-4pm,
australianbutterflies.com

Kuranda Village Wander through

the "village in the rainforest" for quirky art, crafts, condiments and collectables, stopping for lunch at Frogs Cafe.

Open daily, kuranda.org;
frogsrestaurant.com.au

Kuranda Scenic Railway At the Federation style Kuranda Station take the Scenic Railway to Freshwater Station (where bus transfers connect to Cairns). Go Gold Class for old-fashioned luxury with wine and canapés in 100-year-old carriages as the train trundles through the forest over 37 bridges and through 15 tunnels, stopping at the Barron Falls viewing area.

Operating daily, ksr.com.au

Evening

Cairns Esplanade Head to the Esplanade and cool off with a swim in the Lagoon pool, pick up some freshly cooked prawns from the Prawn Star trawler in Marlin Marina and enjoy a picnic as the sun sets over the bay and the bats fly overhead. Listen to the buskers, pop into the Night Markets for a foot massage and finish with a nightcap at funky Salt House at Marina Point.

salthouse.com.au

DAY 3

Morning

Shangri-La Hotel Take a leisurely breakfast on the hotel's restaurant veranda overlooking Marlin Marina and watch as it comes to life with crews preparing vessels for trips to the Reef. Then hire a car and head towards Palm Cove.

shangri-la.com/cairns

Cairns Tropical Zoo Book a Zootastic 5 experience for up close and personal encounters like pole-feeding a crocodile, handling a snake, feeding the cassowaries and getting to know the lemurs. Check out Gummy, the 55-year-old croc with a gummy jaw, catch the free-flight bird show, reptile show and feed the kangaroos.

Open daily, cairnstropicalzoo.com

Nu Nu Restaurant Drive on to Palm Cove and mosey around the beachfront village before settling down at a table under the palms overlooking the ocean for a long relaxing lunch. Nibble on taro crisps with citrus salt as you ponder the menu of innovative modern Australian cuisine.

Open daily, nunu.com.au

Allamanda Spa After lunch walk

next door for a signature massage or just enjoy some quiet time in an open air spa pavilion with private plunge pool overlooking the beach for a blissful finale. From here it's only a 25 minute drive to Cairns airport – though dragging yourself away could prove difficult.

Open daily, lancemore.com.au/alamanda

The writer was a guest of Tourism Tropical North Queensland.

TRAVEL MATE

Getting there

Qantas, Virgin, Jetstar and Tigerair fly to Cairns.

Staying there

Shangri-La Hotel, The Marina, has 255 spacious balcony rooms with marina, harbour or city views and complimentary internet. The waterfront location is close to the Esplanade, Trinity Wharf and water view restaurants.

shangri-la.com/cairns

More

cairnsgreatbarrierreef.org.au