

TOURISM
**TROPICAL NORTH
QUEENSLAND**
Where rainforest meets the reef

Fishing Cairns and Great Barrier Reef Region

It's Unreel From River to Reef



Natures Nursery

To say that the fishing in Tropical North Queensland is out of this world is an understatement. It's out of two worlds! Only here does the interconnection of two adjoining world heritage listed natural wonders, the Wet Tropics rainforest and the Great Barrier Reef, combine with the flooding monsoonal rains that bring the Gulf Savannah to life, to create the nursery grounds for more fish species than anywhere else in the world. It's a regular fish freeway that anglers from all over the world want to travel.

Nurtured by nature, the variety of world class fishing options from the breath-taking wilderness of the Cape and the Gulf in the north, to the relatively calm waters of the coastal plains to the east, and beyond to the turquoise waters of inshore and offshore reefs is unrivalled.

Tinny, cruiser, charter boat, 4WD, even helicopters will get you amongst a mind-boggling range of massive fish that can be caught all year round regardless of weather or breeding season.

Fly, Drive, Train or Cruise



Tropical North Queensland is a deceptively vast region so planning the ultimate fishing holiday takes some consideration. If you don't have your own boat, flying into Cairns is often the best option regardless of where your fishing adventure takes you.

- Fly direct to Cairns Airport via daily domestic and international flights. Connecting flights to remote fishing spots originate here too www.cairnsairport.com.au ›
- Driving is a relaxed way to explore the region all the way to the Cape but 4WD may be the only way to access many locations. Major drive routes include **Great Inland Way**, **Pacific Coast Way**, **Matilda Way** and **Savannah Way**
- Coach and rail services connections run from major Australian towns and cities www.greyhound.com.au › www.queenslandrailtravel.com.au ›
- Boaties can cruise into **Cairns Marlin Marina**, **Yorkey's Knob Marina**, **Bluewater Marina** and **Crystalbrook Superyacht Marina Port Douglas**

Lure of the North

Tropical North Queensland is not just a dream location for fishing, it's a place where you are spoilt for choice on every front.

An Eventful Destination

Regardless of the fishing season there will be an **arts and culture, sporting, food and wine or music event** being held somewhere in Tropical North Queensland. Most events occur in the cooler months from May to November and this is when the major fishing tournaments can take a fishing holiday to a whole new scale.

August is the month for the **Cairns Blue Water Billfish Tournament** and **Dunk Island Billfish Classic**. October is the month for the **Weipa Billfish Tournament**, **Lizard Island Black Marlin Classic**, **Karumba Fishing Classic**, and **Cardwell Barra Bonanza**. November sees the **Weipa Ladies Gamefish Day**, **Port Douglas Marlin Challenge**, and **Tinaroo Barra Bash** being held.

Stay and Play

The choice of accommodation and things to do in Tropical North Queensland is as varied as the fish species that live here. Live aboard a fishing charter that takes you to prize spots both for fishing and exploring or make your base at one of the many hotels, island holiday resorts, serviced apartments, holiday homes, caravan parks and camping grounds that nestle in the rainforest or open to stunning beaches. They cater perfectly for single travellers, couples, groups and families on all budgets.

The waters in Tropical North Queensland aren't just for fishing. Snorkelling and diving the Great Barrier Reef is on the must do list, then there is white water rafting, kayaking and swimming in crystal clear waterholes or from white sandy beaches.

Stay dry and explore the ancient rainforest, drive the winding coastal highway that hugs the magnificent coastline, the inland roads of the Savannah Way or the 4WD only tracks in the Cape. Take to the mountains for cascading waterfalls, walking and mountain bike trails, fresh produce, quirky arts and crafts and breathtaking scenery.

Every town has its own unique character, and characters, who will welcome you and let you know which of the award-winning tourist attractions or restaurants is their favourite and where the secret spots are that only the locals know. All you need to do is find the time to enjoy them.

Cover image courtesy of Cairns Reef Fishing.





STAYING BATTERIES
BATTERY ISOLATOR

Image courtesy of Cairns Reef Fishing.

Chill or Thrill

Whether it's the laid-back, watch the world go by with a beer variety of fishing, or the get down and dirty battle with a big game fish or a hefty barramundi, there is a Tropical North Queensland fishing experience guaranteed to suit the amateur angler or the diehard fishing tragic, whatever fishing style floats your boat.

Game Fishing

The 450km stretch of the Great Barrier Reef from Cairns and Cooktown east to Lizard Island and the famous Ribbon Reefs in the Coral Sea isn't called the Marlin Coast for nothing! This area has some insane fishing to offer when the female black marlin arrive along the reefs edge in September to mid-December. This is the best time of the year for the novice angler or experienced seasoned game fisher to flex their muscles and put themselves up against giant game fish like marlin, sailfish, dolphin fish, tuna, wahoo and giant trevally. Best months September to January.

Reef Fishing

The huge array of reef fish to be caught down the east coast of northern Queensland, from the tip of Cape York to Mission Beach, is quite staggering. The brilliantly hued corals, shallow lagoons and tropical islands attract a myriad of reef fish species, including some of the best eating fish around. Flick a lure or popper, or bottom bounce, and coral trout, red emperor, spanish mackerel, sweetlip, snapper and nannygai will be on the menu. Best months July to October.

River/Estuary Fishing

The world-renowned Daintree River to the North, the equally impressive but lesser known "twins", the Russell and Mulgrave Rivers, and the Barron River to the south, as well as the North and South Johnson Rivers, meander across the coastal plains before emptying into the Coral Sea.

Cast a lure or a fly and you could be pulling in a feisty jungle perch or a saratoga in the freshwater reaches of the creeks and streams that feed into the mangrove lined estuaries or battling to land the highly prized barramundi, mangrove jack, fingermark, giant trevally, queenfish, blue and threadfin salmon, flathead, grunter and bream in the river system. Best months October to March.

Heli Fishing

Take your fishing adventure to another level as you travel to remote fishing locations only accessible by helicopter or light plane. Departing from Cairns **Nautilus Aviation** will get you to your own floating pontoon on the Barrier Reef or departing from Horn Island they will get you to the Cape for fishing and some of the most amazing scenery in the world. **Bungie Helicopters** has three iconic Cape York helicopter bases to depart from: beautiful Mossman in the Daintree, fishing mecca Weipa and Punsand Bay Resort in Bamaga at the northern most point of Australia. **Weipa Sports Fishing** helifishing tour will see you fish a beach, a billabong, the freshwater reaches of a river and swim in a crystal-clear pool under a remote waterfall all in one day. Best months – all year round!

Traditional Fishing

For a culturally immersive fishing experience, Traditional Owners whose ancestors have fished these waters for thousands of years will teach you to throw a spear, catch mud crabs and identify the food and medicines to be found amongst the ever-changing mudflats and tidal lagoons north of Port Douglas on a **Kuku Yalanji Cultural Habitat Tour**, **Walkabout Cultural Adventure** or a **Culture Connect Daintree Tour**. A traditional coastal survival experience with a backdrop of awe – inspiring ancient rainforest. In the Gulf at Burketown find **Yagurli Tours** where you'll develop an appreciation for traditional fishing practices and the cultural heritage associated with the local river systems.



Image courtesy of Wild River Company Cape York.



Image courtesy of Tourism Tropical North Queensland.

Cairns and Northern Beaches

This is where the legends began! The international fishing spotlight first shone on Cairns when the world realised that as far as game fishing goes, there is nowhere else on earth like the Great Barrier Reef. With Cairns being the closest point to access these fishing grounds, you don't have to go as far to enjoy this experience, or reef fishing.

Marlin Marina is a vital source of energy for the city of Cairns. Here every type of vessel can be seen, from huge cruise liners dropping passengers to explore the natural wonders on shore, to large tour boats, pleasure cruisers, charter boats and tinnies heading offshore to experience the underwater wonders. Restaurants, bars and retail outlets are found here, just a short walk from most accommodation and the city centre where eclectic stores and laneway bars sit side by side with designer brand outlets, fine dining establishments and night markets.

Fishers find the perfect pelagics – marlin, cobia and tuna, attracted to the coral pinnacles and drop offs of the ribbon reefs that fringe the continental shelf, or reel in a dinner of coral trout, snapper, or red emperor in the protected lagoons and inshore reefs.

The banning of commercial fishing and the establishment of an extensive inshore Net Free Zone between the Northern Beaches and Cairns is creating more attention as the fish populations thrive and grow to eye popping sizes. **Public boat ramps**, land based fishing platforms, and jetties that are well signed, will find you in the Barron River. The upstream waters are where fish guaranteed to put up a fight include barramundi, mangrove jack, queenfish, threadfin salmon, giant trevally, grunter, fingermark and mackerel.

Increasing the already high odds of catching a fish in Cairns are the helifish adventures, and the impoundment at Tinaroo Dam, or Copperlode Dam on the Atherton Tablelands behind Cairns, stocked with barramundi. The Tablelands provide another window to the natural beauty and fresh produce on offer in the mountain range towns and this region is worth exploring. It's a little cooler here too!

The Northern beaches of Palm Cove, Trinity Beach, Yorkeys Knob, Holloways Beach and Machans Beach are within 25 minutes' drive of Cairns. Safe access to headland, beach, and jetty based fishing adds more options without the costs, making the northern beaches a perfect family holiday base. For the boat owner the large carparks at the serviced apartments that dominate the accommodation offering here can often provide trailer parking, adding flexibility to where you choose to fish each day. Drop into **Bransford's Tackle Shop** in Clifton Beach for some expert local advice.

Palm Cove is better known for its spas, restaurants, shopping and night life however the ambush predator fish, like barramundi and mangrove jack that hang under the local jetty pylons, find the small fish and crustaceans that shelter here more of an attraction.

Yorkeys Knob Marina and Bluewater Marina are the boating hubs for the northern beach towns. A range of fishing charter operators make this their base to fish the offshore reef waters, or cruise the tidal creeks and rivers to catch powerful barramundi, mangrove jack threadfin, giant trevally and queenfish.

Beach front restaurants and bars, playgrounds, and plenty of shady trees to lie under, add to the allure of these relaxed tropical beaches. Food and wine festivals and local monthly markets complement the diverse retail offering and tour operators make regular stops to pick up visitors to explore the famous reef and rainforest attractions on the doorstep. For holiday inspiration check out **Tourism Palm Cove** and **Trinity Beach Tourism**.



Image courtesy of Cairns Reef Fishing.







Port Douglas

When it comes to fishing, Port Douglas, a scenic one-hour drive north of Cairns is a close rival for fishing capital status. The fishing grounds here are the most productive black marlin grounds in the world while more than 275 recognised sport fish and table fish can be caught from the Great Barrier Reef and local river networks. Best months to fish are June to January.

Crystalbrook Superyacht Marina on the Dickson Inlet not far from the centre of town is home to a raft of hire boat and charter operators offering light and heavy game tackle fishing and reef fishing opportunities to catch blue and black marlin, sailfish, mackerel, wahoo, giant trevally, dogtooth tuna, coral trout, mahi mahi, tuna, red emperor and sea perch. There are some great places to eat and drink and shop here too.

The Dickson Inlet boat ramp will get you to the reef, the Mowbray River, Muddy Creek, Sandfly Creek, and Low Isles to target barramundi, queenfish, mangrove jack, fingermark, trevally, threadfin salmon, tarpon and permit with confidence. Land based anglers can pull in bream, grunter, mangrove jack, fingermark, trevally and barramundi from Shipwreck Wharf, Rex Smeal Park, Marina Road Wall and Southern Four Mile Beach.

Port Douglas known to the locals as "Port" is also famous for food with casual and fine dining available at one of the 50 odd restaurants and cafés that line Macrossan Street in the heart of town. Port loves a party too with plenty of night life and annual events like Port Douglas Carnivale in May and the Food and Wine Festival in August that kick the pace up a notch. Other famous attractions include **Wildlife Habitat**, **Hartley's Crocodile Adventures** and of course the Daintree Rainforest and the Great Barrier Reef.

Accommodation options include exclusive five-star resorts, luxury beachfront holiday homes, practical self-contained apartments and budget conscious hotels and hostels. If you're bringing your own boat look at **Oaks Lagoon Port Douglas** and **Ramada Port Douglas** or holiday homes for trailer parking.

The Daintree Coast

The 95km Daintree region starts at Mossman Gorge, an hour's drive north of Cairns, continues past Daintree Village, across the Daintree River, through the rainforest of Daintree National Park to Cape Tribulation and along the Bloomfield Track towards Cooktown. The region is bounded to the west by the majestic ancient rainforest covered hills of the MacDonnell Range – to the east the coast is fringed by pristine uninhabited beaches on the edge of the Coral Sea, and the clear waters of the Great Barrier Reef.

Through its heart flows the magnificent Daintree River and, a little further north, Coopers Creek. The Daintree River is home to an amazing diversity of life-forms with more than 150 fish species and 100 crustaceans found here. It is perhaps the most species-rich mangrove estuary in the world.

During the "wet" summer months the river flows warm and strong but the pre and post-wet season is the best time of year to fish these tropical waters. Barramundi and mangrove jacks thrive in the warm water, the food supply is plentiful, the fish are hungry in preparation of spawning and the weather conditions more predictable for the visiting angler.

The cooler months, from June to September, see queenfish, giant trevally and grunter at their prime. Flathead, estuary cod and bream are also caught at this time of year. Boat ramps are at Daintree Village and at the Daintree Ferry on the Daintree River, at Rocky Point (just south of Wonga Beach), Newell Beach and Cooya Beach.

The Kuku Yalanji people have fished these waters for 50,000 years and you learn their traditional fishing skills on a tour with a local Indigenous guide. Check out the rainforest from a different perspective on a **Jungle Surfing Canopy Tour** or walk the boardwalk trails in **Mossman Gorge** or **Daintree National Park**. Enjoy the solitude of deserted beaches on horse back or do nothing at all, it's your choice to do as little or as much as you like.

Traditional bed and breakfasts tucked into the rainforest, world-renowned eco-resorts, self-catering accommodation, cool holiday homes by the beach, budget caravan parks, beachside camping in the rainforest or backpackers' accommodation can be booked here. All the local tourist information is available from **Tourism Daintree**.



Image courtesy of Out n About Sportfishing Port Douglas.

Cape York and The Gulf

Cape York Peninsula is a dream location for remote fishing and four-wheel driving exploration. Nowhere else in Australia can you cast a fishing rod into the Coral Sea to the east, the Torres Strait to the north and the Gulf of Carpentaria to the west without moving your feet.

Head offshore and barramundi, mangrove jack, finger mark, giant trevally, jew fish, mackerel, queen fish, coral trout, cod, bream, spangled emperor, red emperor, cobia, Queensland groper, grunter, parrot fish, nannygai and tuna are likely to be on the end of the line.

Stay dry fishing from the wharfs at Seisia and Cooktown, Archer Point near Cooktown, Chili Beach in the Kutini-Payamu National Park, Fly Point near Somerset, the beach at Bathurst Point, the southern bank of the Pennefather River near Weipa, and Evans Landing at Weipa and you will also see good results.

The Gulf town of Karumba is another iconic fishing destination where the population explodes from hundreds to thousands during the winter month as anglers move in. The target species are barramundi, spanish mackerel, giant trevally, queenfish and mangrove jack for those using lures. Bait anglers are usually chasing fingermark, coral trout and emperor. And don't forget the mudcrabs!

If you are driving here, consider the weather as road access is dictated by the annual wet season. You can get to Karumba by car but to get to the Cape you will need a 4WD. Travelling between May and October is the best time to beat the rain.

You can also beat the rain by flying in and out to Bamaga, Normanton and Karumba with **Rex or Skytrans** airlines. For a more remote location, Sweers Island located 50km off Karumba is an anglers' paradise accessible by light plane or private boat.

Accommodation in the Cape and the Gulf is primarily caravan and camping grounds or holiday homes that have fantastic facilities for fishos. In Karumba the **End of the Road Motel** and **Ash's Holiday Units** have trailer parking facilities and front row seats to the spectacular sunsets.

The Cassowary Coast

South of Cairns are the coastal towns that collectively form the Cassowary Coast, named after the elusive cassowary bird, that lives here. Babinda, the Frankland Islands, Innisfail, the Canecutter Way, Kurrimine Beach, Etty Bay, Mission Beach, Dunk Island, Tully, Cardwell, Hinchinbrook Island and Ingham are all within four hours' drive of Cairns.

In all weather conditions, Hinchinbrook is considered one of the best fishing and safest boating areas on the east coast of Australia. It's also one of the few places where catching permit fish, also known as snub nosed dart, is highly likely.

You can chase any number of species on the Cassowary Coast. Barramundi again tops many angler's wish list but there plenty of fish to chase when the barramundi season is closed. Troll for mackerel, tuna or giant trevally out at the reef; line fish for coral trout, nannygai or red emperor; target mangrove jack, fingermark and threadfin salmon in the mangrove creeks; or head to the freshwater reaches for sooty grunter and jungle perch.

From Lucinda to Cardwell, Mission Beach, Innisfail, Bramston and Deeral you'll find charter guides who are as keen as you to get on the water and get fishing. With your own boat, or a hired tinnie, you'll find numerous **boat ramps** along the coast and adjacent inlets and creeks, plus the option of beach launching in many areas. **Trailer friendly accommodation** options are across the region.

While you are here, get active and go white water rafting, skydive onto Mission Beach, mountain bike through rainforest or climb Queensland's tallest mountain Mt Bartle Frere. Enjoy a visit to the award winning **Paronella Park** or sample locally grown produce used in locally made wines, port, ice cream and dried snacks in this tropical food bowl. The ultimate paddock to plate experience is served in local restaurants and the mud crab sandwiches are to die for!



Image courtesy of Tourism and Events Queensland.





Get Hooked Up

Regulations

Permits are not required to fish in Tropical North Queensland. Take note though, size limits, possession limits and closed seasons apply to many reef fish species, while the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park includes closed waters where all fishing is banned. Check out www.daf.qld.gov.au/fisheries/recreational when you're in the planning stage of your fishing trip to find the details you need.

Fishing Operators and Tourist Information

Fishing charters are available throughout the region. Below are some recommended operators that can provide all the fishing gear and bait and get you to wherever the fishing action is on any given day. They also provide pretty good local tourist information when you're on the water and on their websites.

Cairns and Tropical North Queensland

- Tropical North Queensland ›
- Queensland.com ›
- Fishing Cairns ›
- Standby Cairns ›
- Cairns Reef Fishing ›
- Nautilus Aviation ›

Cape York

- Cape York Peninsula Fishing ›
- Cape York Custom Sportsfishing ›
- Wild River Company ›
- Outside Edge Adventures ›
- Weipa Sports Fishing ›
- Yagurli Tours ›

Karumba and the Gulf

- Gulf Savannah ›
- Carpentaria Barra and Sport Fishing Charters ›
- Croc & Crab Cruises ›
- Ferryman River Cruises ›
- Kerry D Fishing Charters ›
- Sweets Island Fishing Adventures ›

Port Douglas and Daintree

- Visit Port Douglas ›
- Fishing Port Douglas ›
- Out n About Sportfishing ›
- Monsoon Port Douglas ›
- Hook Up Charters ›
- M.Y. Flying Fish ›
- Kuku Yalanji Cultural Habitat Tour ›
- Walkabout Cultural Adventures ›
- Culture Connect Daintree Tour ›

Mission Beach

- Tropical Coast Tourism ›
- Hooked Up Fishing Adventures ›
- Mission Beach Charters ›
- Fishin Mission ›

