

Queensland's Rainforests & Great Barrier Reef

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1/2	Depart London/in flight
Day 3/5	Cairns and Great Barrier Reef
Day 6/7	Atherton Tablelands
Day 8/11	Julatten and Daintree
Day 12	Fly Brisbane and transfer to Lamington National Park
Day 13/14	Lamington National Park
Day 15	Depart Brisbane
Day 16	Arrive London

Departs
August

Focus
Queensland's natural heritage and wildlife, especially birds and mammals

Grading
A. Gentle birdwatching walks at most sites; all easy and optional

Dates & Prices
See website (tour code AUS02) or brochure



Images (from top to bottom)
Australian Pelican, Regent Bowerbird & Back Noddy



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NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

London

We depart Heathrow on a scheduled flight bound for Brisbane, the capital of Queensland. Departures from some regional airports may be organised on request, availability permitting and additional costs possible.

Day 2

In Flight

In flight.

Day 3

Cairns

Arriving in Brisbane early this morning we will transfer from the international to the domestic terminal for our flight to Cairns. Arriving in Cairns we will be met by our Australian guide and transferred to the hotel. Prior to an optional afternoon wildlife excursion, (which will be on foot) you will be free to recover from the long flight, stretch your legs, or enjoy your first Australian birds in the immediate surroundings. You will find plenty of interest on your first day, should you have the energy to begin your explorations straight away!

Established as a seaport in 1876 to serve the Hodgkinson goldfield, Cairns was named after Governor William Wellington Cairns. The city's prospects dived with that of the goldfields in the 1880's before the sugar and banana plantations became major contributors to the economy. Today the city is a delightful blend of architectural classics, from the early British-built public buildings to the rambling Australian country pubs; a handsome and interesting place, rich in history, character and charm. Once a quiet backwater of Australia's tropical north, Cairns now has a population of 120,000 and is a bustling cosmopolitan community, rivalling Townsville as the landing point for visitors to the country's fastest growing tourist area.

Cairns lies tucked between lush green mountain rainforests and the northern shore of Trinity Inlet, discovered by Captain Cook on Trinity Sunday in 1770. The mangrove-lined shores of the inlet attract a wealth of waterbirds, including pelicans, cormorants, egrets, spoonbills, ibises, waders, terns and other wetland birds. As our hotel is conveniently located not far from the inlet you may well choose to enjoy your first day on Australian soil by taking an easy stroll along the 'Esplanade' (the walkway alongside the inlet). You may also find time to walk in the Botanical Gardens, getting a feel for the region's tropical vegetation, and looking for such colourful bird specialities as the Double-eyed Fig Parrot. Your guide/s will be available to those wishing to visit the Esplanade and/or Botanical Gardens during the afternoon. Then, as a tropical dusk descends on the leafy city, the air fills with flying foxes bound for their favourite fruit trees!

We will all meet up again early evening for a welcome hotel dinner with your guide.

Day 4

Great Barrier Reef – Michaelmas Cay

Today we will focus on the outer reef, taking a full-day trip by catamaran to Michaelmas Cay. A cay is a small sandy island that has formed on top of the reef, and on Michaelmas Cay some low scrub has grown from the seabird guano on the island, and this area now holds large numbers of breeding and resting seabirds. Thousands of terns swarm above the island, predominantly ground-nesting Sooty Terns and Brown Noddies (the Black Noddies being confined to forested islands), but also Bridled, Black-naped, Crested and Lesser Crested Terns, plus smaller numbers of visiting Brown Boobies, Great and even Least Frigatebirds. The cay also attracts a variety of migrant waders, though very few passerines, being so small and sparsely vegetated. Some two hours out to sea from Cairns, Michaelmas Cay offers all the pristine beauty of the outer reef, being surrounded by fabulous coral reefs, and clear, warm turquoise seas full of colourful reef fish which you may choose to enjoy either the semi-submersible boat, or by snorkelling from the boat or the beach. On returning to the mainland you will spend your second night in Cairns, having dinner at the hotel.

Day 5

Great Barrier Reef – Frankland Islands cruise

After breakfast we will drive through World Heritage Rainforest Mountains and fields of sugar cane for our second day on the Great Barrier Reef. We will begin with a leisurely cruise down the magnificent Mulgrave River where we will be surrounded by rainforest clad hills. Keep an eye out for the resident crocodiles along the edges of the mangroves. At the mouth of the river, the Frankland Islands Archipelago slowly comes into view and it is only a short open water crossing to our destination for the day – Normanby Island. After disembarking, the day will be spent snorkeling over the amazing variety of corals and marine life that inhabit the area, including an abundance of colourful fish, sea turtles and octopus. The guided snorkeling tour offers a chance to discover and interact with the reef under the guidance of the marine naturalists, equipment is provided, along with tuition to get you comfortably using your mask, fins and snorkel. For those of us that prefer to stay on dry land the guided 'Island Discovery Walk' is a must, joining naturalists for an informative and fascinating exploration of the island's coral cay forest, sandy beaches and the reef's nursery – the rock pools. Sightings here may include Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers, Sacred Kingfishers, Eastern Ospreys and the Beach Stone-curlew. A coral viewing tour from a semi-submersible or glass bottom boat is also on offer. For an optional extra there is the opportunity to explore the Great Barrier Reef with a certified or introductory dive on Normanby Reef.

After a tropical buffet lunch on the island, possibly accompanied by Honeyeaters and Buff-banded Rails, we will depart in the afternoon and enjoy tea and cake on board before returning to our hotel this evening, where we can relax for a few hours before dinner.

Day 6

Atherton Tablelands

Today we will travel inland to the Atherton Tablelands, an area of attractive upland dairy farming country, broken by pockets of high altitude rainforest (that hold some massive strangler fig trees), deep volcanic lakes and wetlands. Staying close to the beautiful crater lakes of Eacham, Barrine and Tinaroo, we will look for some of the region's endemic birds and mammals in nearby rainforest and at the famous 'Cathedral' and 'Curtain' Fig trees. Orange-

footed Scubfowl, Wompoo Fruit Dove, Chowchilla, Fernwren, Atherton Scrubwren, Victoria's Riflebird (one of Australia's birds-of-paradise), Grey-headed Robin, Bower's Shrike-thrush, plus the diurnal forest-dwelling Musky Rat Kangaroo (the smallest and most primitive of all the kangaroos), may be amongst the highlights.

In order to reach the Tablelands, we travel south of Cairns on the Gilles Highway, through the Mulgrave Valley, then continue on to Lake Barrine where we will spend time birdwatching at the lake. Arriving at our accommodation, Kookaburra Lodge, a simple country motel, at Yungaburra, our base for the next two nights, we will have lunch and settle in. After lunch you will be at leisure, prior to a late afternoon excursion to the western edge of the Tablelands for good opportunities of finding species such as Brolga, Saurus Cranes, Little lorikeets and Crested Pigeons. We will then enjoy a picnic dinner in the Crater National Park before dusk, to soak in the atmosphere of the rainforest, and as darkness falls, we will enter the high altitude rainforests, for spot-lighting. The forests are the special habitat of unusual animals such as Common and Coppery Brushtail Possum, Green Ringtail Possum, Brown Lemuroid Ringtail Possum, Red-legged Pademelon, and, if we are lucky, Lumholtz's Tree-kangaroo, amongst others. There is also a good chance of encountering some of the region's owls, and other nocturnal birds.

Day 7

Atherton Tablelands

This morning will provide an opportunity for a dawn chorus to be remembered, then early morning birding, followed by breakfast on the verandah of the teahouse overlooking the crater lake of Barrine. After a short boat cruise on Lake Barrine, we still have a full day exploring the variety of habitats to be found in the Tablelands. We will stop for a picnic lunch, and following the afternoon's exploration we will finish with an excursion to one of the area's many streams to search for Duck-billed Platypus. We will return to Yungaburra for dinner at a local restaurant, followed by an optional opportunity to go spot-lighting.

Days 8 - 9

Julatten & Daintree

Not far to the north of the Tablelands lies Julatten, a village situated in well forested farming country just south of the Daintree National Park. Surrounded by rainforest and farmland, and close to the dry bushland of interior Queensland and the magnificent Mount Lewis, the variety of birds in this area is exceptional. En route to Kingfisher Park Lodge, we will spend time exploring the dry, inland areas, looking for such birds as Collared Sparrowhawk, Sarus Crane, Australian Bustard, Squatter Pigeon, Red-winged Parrot, Blue-winged Kookaburra, Red-backed Fairywren, Little Friarbird, Double-barred Finch, Apostlebird and Great Bowerbird. We may also encounter rock wallabies in this area. Kingfisher Park Lodge is a comfortable lodge established specifically for visitors with an interest in birds and wildlife, the surrounding rainforest and wetlands being an absolute paradise for birders especially. Species you may see here include Spectacle Monarch, Wompoo Fruit-Dove, Noisy Pitta, Buff-banded Rail and Lesser Sooty Owl. Mammal species include the Green Ring-tailed Possum, Striped Possum, Red-legged Pademelon, Northern Brown Bandicoot and Long-nosed Bandicoot, whilst, floating between the trees, spectacular Birdwing and Ulysses butterflies may be seen.

By way of contrast, an early visit to Mount Lewis (subject to road conditions), a true rainforest wilderness region. This large area of rugged mountains and mysterious valleys is often shrouded in mist, and much research is yet to be done on the flora and fauna of the region. It is, however, home to many mammals and birds such as the Topknot

Pigeon, White-throated Treecreeper, Fernwren, White-cheeked Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill, Golden Bowerbird and Mountain Thornbill. The late afternoon is also a good time for diurnal birds since, as the temperature cools, the birds emerge from their afternoon siesta, and are both active and vocal prior to darkness.

Days 10 - 11

Daintree

After breakfast we will take a last look around the grounds of the Kingfisher Park Lodge before leaving for the lowland rainforests of Daintree, with lunch and birding stops along the way. Crossing the Daintree River by barge, then a scenic drive over the range to our accommodation, Daintree Heritage Lodge, where you will stay in rainforest cabins nestled within the rainforest for two nights. Enjoy the tropical surrounds and watch for the tiny Musky Rat-Kangaroo and various birds as you wander the trail alongside the crystal clear Cooper Creek. We are based here for two nights.

In 1770 Captain James Cook ran aground upon a coral reef off the wild rainforest coastline. Looking ashore he named the most prominent headland "Cape Tribulation – because here began all our troubles." The Daintree River was named after George Daintree, a Queensland Government geologist of the 1800's.

Positioned on a point of the globe that has escaped the wrath of successive ice ages, volcanic upheavals and climatic changes, the Daintree/Cape Tribulation coastline remains a refuge for a collection of flora and fauna little changed since the dinosaurs roamed the earth. This area of primeval forest, occupying only a tiny fraction of Australia, is home to a disproportionately high percentage of native mammals, birds and butterflies. The area is also rich in the history and culture of the Aboriginal people who have lived in these rainforests for tens of thousands of years. There is amongst the oldest surviving oral culture on earth with kinship structures and spiritual beliefs bound closely to the rainforest environment.

Although cattle grazing and arable farming have been tried over the years, no large or permanent farming businesses have succeeded; the wet tropical climate and rugged terrain have saved it from the full impact of European settlement. In the early 1980's the subdivisions created in the Daintree/Cape Tribulation rainforest and the bulldozing of a track between Cape Tribulation and Bloomfield attracted world attention and debate about the future of the rainforests in the area. Today the area is protected under World Heritage listing, and managed by the Wet Tropics Management Authority in association with local and state authorities.

After breakfast at the Daintree Heritage Lodge we will depart for a day of discovery in Daintree National Park, which offers a good opportunity of sighting Southern Cassowary, particularly, where there is a good quantity of fruit on the ground. Then spend the day exploring these lowland forests, a refuge for many rare and primitive plants, and we will stop for lunch at a local café at Cape Tribulation. Spend time in the afternoon and a walk at the Jindalpa section of the Daintree National Park which offers a good opportunity of sighting Southern Cassowary, particularly, when there is a good quantity of fruit on the ground. Then spend the day exploring these lowland forests, a refuge for many rare and primitive plants, we will stop for lunch at a local café at Cape Tribulation.

Spend time in the afternoon in the Daintree Discovery centre, an accredited World Heritage Centre. Nestled amongst the rainforest, it provides well illustrated information on the flora and fauna of the rainforest. It also

offers the opportunity to climb a four storey tower amongst the rainforest canopy for birds such as the Mistletoe Bird and Double-eyed Fig Parrot.

Days 12 – 14

Lamington National Park

An early departure from the Daintree Heritage Lodge this morning, taking our packed breakfast with us. Re-cross the Daintree River by ferry and at Daintree Village join a cruise on the Daintree River. An excellent area to look for some of the more elusive species such as the Great-billed Heron, Black Bittern, Papuan Frogmouth and Little Kingfisher, as well as many resident species such as the Darter, Little Pied Cormorant, Large-billed Gerygone, Shining Flycatcher, Yellow Oriole and Azure Kingfisher. You may also see tree snakes, flying foxes and estuarine crocodiles. Continue south on the Captain Cook Highway to Cairns Airport where you will check in for your early afternoon flight to Brisbane.

Leaving the Daintree region behind, we will spend the rest of the day travelling in order to reach the Lamington National Park. We must first drive south, along the scenic Captain Cook Highway, back to Cairns for our early afternoon flight to Brisbane. Arriving in Brisbane we have a drive of a couple of hours or so to O'Reilly's Guest House in Lamington National Park, our base for the next three nights.

The drive from Brisbane to Lamington takes us initially through open farmland and eucalyptus woodland, then up into south-east Queensland's coastal mountain range where the magnificent Lamington National Park encompasses Australia's most extensive remaining tract of sub-tropical rainforest and one of its richest wildlife areas. Sitting on a plateau at 1,000 metres, amongst mountain peaks, cliffs and gorges, lies O'Reilly's Rainforest retreat, a family-run guesthouse which has grown over the years without losing its character or family connections. We will explore the park, with one of O'Reilly's expert guides, four hours on the first day, and eight hours on the second. Leaving any free time to either explore by oneself or join in one of the many activities. You will have discussed some of the available options with your activities guide on the first night.

During our time in O'Reilly's we will look for King Parrots, Satin and Regent Bowerbirds, Noisy Pittas, Green Catbird, Paradise Riflebird, Albert's Lyrebird and Logrunners amongst the dense subtropical rainforests and eucalyptus woodlands, and will encounter gaudy flocks of Crimson Rosellas. We will also explore the magnificent higher altitude forests of ancient Antarctic Beech, with their own numerous bird specialities. Mammals are again one of the attractions, and can be as readily observed here as in any other part of Australia. Grasslands are grazed, even during daylight hours, by Whiptail Wallabies and Red-necked Pademelons (a small wallaby species). Northern Brown Bandicoot and Feather-tailed Glider are just some of the fascinating marsupials that we may see during our walks here, whilst Sugar Gliders and Mountain Brushtail Possums may be seen coming to the guesthouse feeders.

Day 15

Depart Brisbane

Having seen some of the very best of Australia's wonderful habitats and wildlife, and enjoyed standards of accommodation, fine wines and delicious seafood that are not normally associated with rainforest exploration, the prospect of a return home may not be relished! The range of possibilities for a holiday extension, however, are

mouth-watering, contact us if you would like further details! However, for those of you having to return to London, today will involve the early afternoon drive back to Brisbane airport prior to your evening flight home.

Day 16

Arrive London for those flying directly back.

Extensions

Gladly arranged, on request, to all parts of Australia. Some of our suggestions include:

- Wild Flower season in Western Australia
- Fraser Island & whale watching in Hervey Bay
- Sydney & Blue Mountains / Capertee Valley
- Uluru & Alice Springs

Group Size and Tour Cost

Please note that the tour cost is calculated on a minimum group size of 6 individuals. If we fail to reach the necessary group size to run this tour, we will contact you 70 days before the holiday to discuss various options which may be available to you. This might include making some changes which would still enable us to operate the holiday but with an altered itinerary.

Tour grading

This is a birdwatching and wildlife tour that covers the very best of Queensland's fine selection of habitats (indeed, some of the very best that Australia has to offer) with – especially by Australian standards – minimal travelling. We will be driving largely on good, metalled roads and enjoying generally short wildlife walks at a gentle pace, the relaxed pace and itinerary of this tour making it suitable for most ages and levels of fitness.

Weather

The month of September lies in the dry season in Queensland, and the rest of northern Australia, so plenty of warm sunny weather should be expected. Daytime temperatures are likely to range from 18 to 28°C, whilst at night it can become very cool in the higher regions of the hills and Tablelands, though it will remain warm at sea-level.

Food & accommodation

Accommodation will be in a variety of comfortable hotels, lodges and chalets, all rooms with private facilities. All meals during tour are included in the cost. Additional drinks during meals and stops whilst on tour will be at one's own expense.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main

Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.



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