

# 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 8/9   | Mossman                       |
| Day 10/11 | Daintree                      |
| Day 12/14 | 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

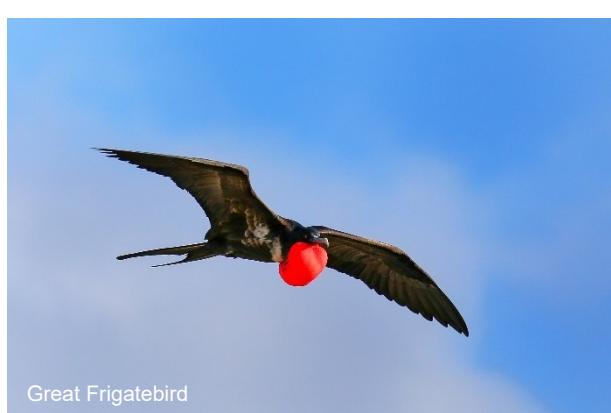
Grade A. (see 'Tour Grading' section for more information)

### Dates & Prices

See website (tour code AUS02) or brochure

### Highlights:

- Explore the world-famous Great Barrier Reef
- Visit the tropical rainforests of the Daintree World Heritage Site – a bird watcher's paradise
- Iconic Australian species such as Duck-billed Platypus, Cassowary & Echidna all possible



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# Itinerary

*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 the best use of the time and weather conditions available.*

## Day 1

## Depart London

We depart Heathrow on a scheduled flight bound for Cairns. Please note there will be at least one transit stop en-route. Departures from some regional airports may be organised on request – availability permitting.

## Day 2

## In flight

In flight.

## Day 3

## 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 exploration 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 nose-dived with that of the goldfields in the 1880s 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 rustic 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 170,000 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 in the 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, 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 from 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 – 7

## 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 to Lake Barrine where we will spend time birdwatching at the lake. Arriving at our accommodation, Chambers Wildlife Rainforest Lodges, a family-owned retreat set in lush, tropical rainforest on the edge of the Lake Eacham National Park and 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 to find such species 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 spotlighting. 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.

This morning will provide an opportunity to enjoy a dawn chorus to be remembered, then early morning birding, followed by a relaxed breakfast on the verandah of the teahouse overlooking the crater lake of Barrine. The lake is home to an incredible variety of wet tropics wildlife, including Victoria's Riflebird, Tooth-billed Bowerbird the ever-vocal Chowchilla and the spectacular Golden Whistler. Boyd's Forest Dragons are sometimes spotted clinging to tree trunks, perfectly camouflaged against their surroundings. After a



short, scenic 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. In the evening, we will return to Yungaburra for dinner at a local restaurant, followed by an optional opportunity to go spotlighting with a good chance of finding the cryptic Northern Leaf-tailed Gecko as well as possums and the spectacular Spectacled Flying Fox.

## Days 8 – 9

## Mossman



The landscape between Yungaburra and Mossman is noticeably drier than the lush rainforests of Yungaburra but gives us the opportunity to find and enjoy a whole new set of species. On our way to Mossman, we'll take a detour to Granite Gorge, home to a well-known colony of range-restricted Mareeba Rock-wallaby. The wallabies here are free-roaming but well accustomed to human visitors and as a result, can be quite inquisitive. The area is also one of the best places in Australia to find Squatter Pigeons, alongside Great Bowerbirds, Blue-faced Honeyeaters and Rainbow Bee-eaters. Possible mammal species include Agile Wallaby and Eastern Grey Kangaroo. Passing through Mareeba, we'll make a brief stop at a small, quiet town park that often proves productive for White-browed Robin, Cryptic Honeyeater, and Sahul Brush Cuckoo, while Black Butcherbirds are usually present too.

Over the next two days, we'll be exploring prime dry-country habitat, giving us a good chance of seeing highly sought-after species like Red-winged Parrots, Red-backed Fairywren, Australian Bustard, Banded Honeyeater, Blue-winged Kookaburra, Little Friarbird, Lemon-bellied Flyrobin, Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, Rufous Whistler, and Chestnut-breasted Mannikin. This drier biome is also home to the iconic Frilled Lizard, though, somewhat ironically, they tend to be more active and visible in wetter conditions. Lace Monitors are more commonly encountered.

Two particularly productive locations - a seemingly unremarkable roadside stop and a 'wetland' just outside Julatten that rarely holds visible water - will keep us busy. Here, we'll have the chance to find Lovely Fairywren, Northern Fantail, Bower's Shrikethrush, Macleay's Honeyeater, White-cheeked and Dusky Honeyeaters, Blue-faced Parrotfinch, Spectacled Monarch, and many more. The beautiful Cairns Birdwing butterfly, a Queensland endemic, may also be seen.

## 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. At Daintree Village we will 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 encounter tree snakes, flying foxes and estuarine crocodiles and, with a little luck, even Bennett's Tree Kangaroo, a species so rarely seen that our group's sighting in September 2025 was truly exceptional. After the cruise we will cross the river before 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 hard 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 1800s.

Positioned at a point 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. Theirs 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 1980s 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, during which we will stop for lunch at a local café at Cape Tribulation. The afternoon will be spent on a walk at the Jindalba section of the Daintree National Park which offers a good opportunity of seeing Southern Cassowary, particularly when there is a good quantity of fruit on the ground.

Spend time in the afternoon at the Daintree Discovery Centre, an accredited World Heritage site. 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 species such as the Mistletoe Bird and Double-eyed Fig Parrot.

## Days 12 – 14

## Lamington National Park

Today will start with an early departure from the Daintree Heritage Lodge this morning, taking our packed breakfast with us. Re-cross the Daintree River by ferry and 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.

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), whilst the eucalyptus trees may even hold a sleeping Koala. Northern Brown Bandicoot and Feather-tailed Glider are just some of the other 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 excellent 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 drive back to Brisbane Airport prior to your evening flight home.

## Day 16

## Arrive London

## Extensions

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

- Wildflower 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 falls 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, and all rooms have private facilities. All meals during the 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](http://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.



Lamington National Park