Australia's Mammals

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 – 2	Outbound flights
Day 3	Atherton Tablelands
Day 4 – 5	Atherton Tablelands
Day 6	Mareeba
Day 7	Etty Bay – Brisbane
Day 8 – 9	Lamington NP
Day 10	Hobart, Tasmania
Day 11	Bruny Island
Day 12 – 13	Central Plateau
Day 14	Cradle Mountain
Day 15 – 16	Inbound flights

Departs
October

Focus
Mammals

Grading
Grade B

Dates and Prices
Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code AUS09)

Highlights
- Incredible monotremes including Platypus and Short-beaked Echidna
- Tasmanian Devil and Koala
- Many gliders and possums after dark
- Lumholtz's Tree Kangaroo, bandicoots, wallabies, kangaroos and wombats
- A rich variety of Australian birdlife







From Top: Platypus, Koala, Tasmanian Devil

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Introduction

Australia's distinctive wildlife is inseparable from its remarkable geological and ecological history. Separated from the ancient supercontinent Gondwana around 50 million years ago, Australia drifted in isolation through the southern oceans, allowing its ecosystems to evolve in extraordinary ways. Today, it stands as a living laboratory of evolutionary marvels, where ancient species thrive in landscapes both harsh and beautiful. The continent's geology is among the oldest on Earth, dominated by vast, ancient rock formations and low-lying mountain ranges that have been worn down over millions of years. The arid interior, known as the Outback, is a vast expanse of desert, scrub and dry grasslands, punctuated by rugged ranges and weathered gorges. In contrast, Australia's coasts and uplands host lush forests, wetlands and heathlands, nurtured by more temperate climates.

This diversity of habitats has given rise to one of the world's most unusual mammal faunas. Marsupials dominate, filling ecological niches that elsewhere are occupied by placental mammals. Kangaroos, wallabies and their relatives range from tropical rainforests to dry woodlands and open plains, each species superbly adapted to its environment. Tree-dwelling marsupials, such as gliders and possums, thrive in forested regions, while iconic species like the Koala rely on specialised diets, feeding almost exclusively on eucalyptus leaves.

Perhaps nowhere is Australia's evolutionary uniqueness better illustrated than in its monotremes – the egg-laying mammals. The Platypus, with its duck-like bill and webbed feet, inhabits cool, clear streams, while the Short-beaked Echidna roams a variety of habitats, from forests to arid plains.

Carnivorous marsupials, including quolls and Tasmanian Devil, add further intrigue, while other unusual mammals such as wombats, nature's stout, burrowing herbivores are uniquely Australian. The continent's mammal diversity is complemented by a dazzling array of reptiles, amphibians, and birds.

Australia's fragile ecosystems, shaped by fire, climate extremes, and millennia of isolation, make it a truly special destination for wildlife enthusiasts, where each day reveals species and landscapes found nowhere else on Earth.



Cradle Mountain–Lake St Clair National Park, Tasmania

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.

Itinerary

Day 1 – (28 Sept) Fly London – Cairns

For those taking the group flights, this morning we will depart London Heathrow on an overnight flight bound for Cairns.

Day 2 – (29 Sept) Arrival in Cairns

Upon arrival in Cairns, we will be transferred to a comfortable hotel on the coast. The remainder of the afternoon will be at leisure, providing an opportunity to relax, recover from the journey and enjoy your first taste of tropical north Queensland. We will enjoy a welcome evening meal, providing the first chance to get to know each other and meet your local naturalist guide.

Overnight: Cairns

Day 3 – (30 Sept) Cairns to Atherton Tablelands

Today, after a casual breakfast, we will travel inland towards the Atherton Tablelands. Our base for the next four nights is the delightful Chambers Wildlife Lodge, nestled on 20 private acres of lush highland rainforest in the heart of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. This eco-friendly retreat offers ten spacious lodgings, each featuring a king-size bed, an en-suite bathroom, a fully equipped kitchen, and a cosy lounge area complete with a television, an electric fireplace, and a covered veranda. We'll also have access to a refreshing swimming pool, an expansive rainforest deck with comfortable lounge chairs, and a communal relaxation area fitted with a pool table and a wildlife library.


Striped Possum

You'll have time to unwind following your long-haul flight from the UK. However, some guests may wish to join the pre-tour extension in Cairns, designed to help you acclimatise while enjoying visits to the Great Barrier Reef and the Daintree Rainforest.

After dinner, there may be an opportunity for a short introductory spotlighting outing. The lodge boasts a specially designed nocturnal viewing area, gently illuminated each evening to enhance the observation of nocturnal mammals. This can facilitate excellent views of such species as Krefft's Glider, Northern Long-nosed Bandicoot, Yellow-footed Antechinus, Fawn-footed Melomys, and, if fortunate, the beautiful Striped Possum. Though all mammals mentioned are possibilities, please do not expect to see all species listed in this tour description. As with all wildlife, guarantees can never be made.

Overnight: Chambers Wildlife Lodge

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Days 4 – 5 – (01 - 02 Oct) Atherton Tablelands

We have two full days exploring a variety of productive localities as we seek out North Queensland's special mammals and other native wildlife. Please note that the exact order of our itinerary may vary depending on the weather, the latest sightings, and the advice of our local naturalist guide. A major target of this leg of the tour is undoubtedly Lumholtz's Tree-kangaroo – one of only two species of tree-kangaroo found in Australia, and restricted to the rainforests of northeastern Queensland. Unlike its ground-dwelling relatives, this stocky, bear-like arboreal marsupial has powerful limbs, a long tail for balance, and flexible ankles that allow it to move effortlessly through the treetops. By day, it rests among dense foliage, but as dusk falls, it becomes more active, clambering through the canopy in search of leaves, fruit, and flowers. We stand a good chance of an encounter.

Another interesting diurnal macropod we'll hope to find is the Musky Rat-kangaroo – the smallest and most primitive of all macropods. These fascinating little critters are also restricted to the rainforests of north-east Queensland and can be found foraging through the leaf litter in search of fruit, fungi, and insects. Red-legged Pademelon can be quite common, while we'll also check for Platypus in one of the many streams that surround Yungaburra. While mammals will be our focus, in a broader sense, this area of Far North Queensland is quite simply one of the finest wildlife destinations on the planet, boasting a bewildering array of flora and fauna. The more than 110 species of bird that have been recorded around your lodge will no doubt be hard to ignore. These include such beauties as Double-eyed Fig-Parrot, Wompoo Fruit Dove, Scarlet Honeyeater and the iconic Victoria's Riflebird – a bird-of-paradise endemic to the Atherton Tablelands. The huge compost mounds of the Australian Brushturkey – nature's own gardener – should be in evidence, too.


Lumholtz's Tree Kangaroo


Musky Rat-kangaroo

After dark, we'll be spotlighting for a variety of gliders and possums, including Green, Herbert River, Lemuroid and Daintree River Ring-tailed Possums, as well as Coppery and Common Brush-tailed Possums, and Striped Possum. Other interesting nocturnal denizens may include Krefft's, Yellow-bellied and Greater Glider, and the impressive Giant White-tailed Rat, among others. The area north of Yungaburra also hosts Northern Brown Bandicoot, Rufous Bettong and Northern Quoll. To further whet the appetites, this area of Queensland boasts one of the most impressive herpetofaunal diversities in the world, with possible highlights including the cryptic Northern Leaf-tailed Gecko, the highly endemic Boyd's Forest Dragon, a selection of iconic snakes and a large number of frogs.

Overnight: Chambers Wildlife Lodge

Day 6 – (03 Oct) Mareeba


Mareeba Rock Wallaby

This morning, we'll head to Mareeba to look for the smaller form of the Eastern Grey Kangaroo found at this latitude. A stop at Granite Gorge offers the opportunity to see the highly endemic Mareeba Rock Wallaby. These small, nocturnal wallabies typically forage on herbs and grasses in the areas surrounding their rocky retreats. However, at this popular tourist site, they have become accustomed to human presence over generations, and some may even eat from your hand. As dusk approaches, while enjoying dinner at the wetlands, we may spot one or two of the crepuscular or nocturnal mammals that inhabit the area.

To conclude the evening, we'll enjoy a spotlighting session in a habitat unlike any explored so far. This landscape is home to a variety of species, including Eastern Grey Kangaroo, Agile Wallaby, Northern Bettong, and even the elusive Northern Quoll - a native marsupial predator. While sightings are never guaranteed, there's a good chance of encountering one or two of these fascinating creatures before returning to our lodge.

Overnight: Chambers Wildlife Lodge

Day 7 – (04 Oct) Etty Bay & Transfer to Brisbane

Early this morning, we'll depart our lodge and make a detour to Etty Bay, south of Cairns, for the chance to see the majestic Southern Cassowary – surely, an honorary mammal! Standing up to 1.8 metres tall and weighing over 70kg, this extraordinary bird is one of the heaviest birds on the planet – a true living dinosaur. While a sighting isn't guaranteed, we'll hope that any fallen fruit on the forest floor lures these impressive creatures into view. We may also see the spectacular Ulysses and Cairns Birdwing butterflies. Later, we'll return to Cairns Airport for a short domestic flight south to Brisbane. Upon arrival, we'll transfer to our city hotel for check in.

This evening, we'll visit a local area in suburban Brisbane holding a population of the elusive Southern Greater Glider. These gliders are notoriously tricky to see, but with luck we may find them in tall eucalypt forest. Other nocturnal species more commonly seen here include Common Ring-tailed and Common Brushtail Possum, Sugar Glider and Tawny Frogmouth.

Overnight: Brisbane

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Days 8 – 9 – (05 – 06 Oct) Lamington National Park

Before leaving Brisbane, we'll check in at a local bushland reserve to search for Australia's most loved mammal – the Koala.

Then, leaving the bustle of Brisbane behind, we travel westward through a patchwork of farmland and dry woodland before ascending into the dramatic mountain ranges of southeast Queensland. At higher elevations, the landscape transforms into lush subtropical rainforest, home to an astonishing diversity of flora and fauna. Within this ancient wilderness lies O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat, a long-established, family-run lodge perched at 1,000 metres above sea level, surrounded by rugged peaks, escarpments, and deep valleys. Despite its growth over the years, the retreat has retained its warm hospitality and strong connection to the land.


Whiptail Wallaby


Koala

Lamington National Park boasts an exceptional diversity of mammals. The area surrounding O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat is particularly productive, with the lodge itself being well-attuned to the region's wildlife. The surrounding forests and grasslands support species including Red-legged and Red-necked Pademelons, Yellow-footed Antechinus, Northern and Long-nosed Bandicoots, Short-eared Brushtail and Common Ringtail Possums. On the lower slopes, Whiptail Wallaby, Eastern Grey Kangaroo, and Red-necked Wallaby are all possible. However, as with all wildlife experiences, patience and persistence are key. While expert guidance will undoubtedly increase our chances of seeing many of these species, there are no guarantees in nature – the excitement lies in the search as much as in the sightings themselves.

The birdlife here is also outstanding. We'll also keep an eye out for such striking species as Regent and Satin Bowerbirds, King Parrots, Noisy Pittas, Logrunners, Paradise Riflebirds, and the elusive Albert's Lyrebird, whose rich, complex song echoes through the understorey. Flocks of brilliantly coloured Crimson Rosellas are a common sight, while the towering Antarctic Beech forests at higher elevations provide habitat for their own specialist bird species.

Overnight: O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat

Day 10 – (07 Oct) Transfer to Tasmania

This morning we'll transfer to the airport for our flights to Hobart, on the island of Tasmania. Initially established as a British penal colony in 1804, Hobart is Australia's second oldest city after Sydney, and much of the original colonial architecture has been preserved.

As a remnant of the ancient supercontinent Gondwana, Tasmania's landscapes are a living museum of evolutionary history. Separated from mainland Australia approximately 12,000 years ago due to rising sea levels, the island has nurtured a unique array of flora and fauna, many species of which are found nowhere else on Earth. Time permitting, we may explore the diverse habitats of Kunanyi / Mount Wellington this afternoon. This area is home to several of Tasmania's twelve endemic bird species, including Yellow Wattlebird and Black Currawong. The mountain also offers spectacular views of the Derwent Estuary and the city.


Tasmanian Betong


Eastern Barred Bandicoot

This evening, we plan to do some spotlighting in the nearby Waterworks Reserve. Bennett's Wallaby and Tasmanian Pademelon, both unique to the island, are possible, while this is also one of the best locations on the island to find the elusive Tasmanian Bettong – which can be notoriously tricky to locate. Common Brushtail and Common Ringtail Possums may turn up, alongside the attractive Eastern Barred Bandicoot.

Overnight: Hobart

Day 11 – (08 Oct) Bruny Island

This morning we'll take the ferry to Bruny Island and head to Adventure Bay to join a 3-hour cruise on the water in search of seabirds and cetaceans. At this time of year, both Humpback and Southern Right Whales are migrating southward to their Antarctic feeding grounds, offering prime whale-watching opportunities. We may also encounter Common and Bottlenose Dolphins, as well as Australian and Long-nosed Fur Seals. The skies and seas are alive with pelagic bird species, including Wandering, Shy, Black-browed, and Yellow-nosed Albatrosses; White-faced and Great-winged Petrels; Fluttering and Short-tailed Shearwaters; and Australasian Gannets.

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Southern Right Whale

On land, we'll search for the rare albino form of Bennett's Wallabies – affectionately known as the 'white wallaby'. After dark, we'll explore the northern regions of Bruny Island, focusing on locating Eastern Quolls, which are present here in both black and cinnamon colourations. These predatory marsupials have been extirpated from mainland Australia, though reintroduction programs, bolstered by wild populations in Tasmania, offer hope for their future. Another threatened species we'll keep our fingers crossed for is the elusive Long-nosed Potoroo, while occasionally, the rare 'golden possum' – a golden colour variant of the Common Brushtail Possum – has been seen.

Overnight: Bruny Island

Day 12 – (09 Oct) Central Plateau Conservation Area

After breakfast, we return to the mainland and journey north through Tasmania's Central Highlands to the remote Central Plateau Conservation Area, known as the "Land of a Thousand Lakes". Our accommodation, the Thousand Lakes Lodge, is perched amidst this wild and rugged landscape of glacial tarns, subalpine heath, and moorlands.
This afternoon, we settle into the lodge and, weather permitting, head out at dusk to search for Tasmania's iconic carnivores, Tasmanian Devil and Spot-tailed Quoll. With its remote location and clear night skies, the plateau also offers superb stargazing opportunities, and we may even catch a glimpse of the Southern Lights.

Overnight: Thousand Lakes Lodge

Day 13 – (10 Oct) Central Plateau Conservation Area

We have a full day to explore the Central Plateau today – truly one of the world's great wildernesses.

The Bare-nosed (or Common) Wombat is a familiar face in Tasmania's highlands, and these sturdy, burrowing marsupials are often seen grazing at dusk. We'll hope to encounter these loveable mammals in daylight, alongside thick-furred Bennett's Wallabies and perhaps even a Short-beaked Echidna. Keep an eye to the sky too, as noisy Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos and the impressive Tasmanian subspecies of Wedge-tailed Eagle are often overhead.


Short-beaked Echidna


Common Wombat

The heathlands here are also home to a variety of reptiles, including several skink species, snakes, and the charismatic Mountain Dragon. There will be down time during the day to rest and recharge.

As night falls, we'll head out spotlighting once more, searching for some of Tasmania's most sought-after wildlife – particularly its marsupial carnivores. Chief among these is Tasmanian Devil, the world's largest surviving marsupial carnivore, known for its muscular build, dark fur, and haunting screeches. Once widespread on mainland Australia, Devils are now found only in the wilds of Tasmania. Nocturnal by nature, they primarily scavenge but will opportunistically hunt small prey. The remoteness and quiet of the Central Plateau offer one of the best chances to encounter them in their natural environment.

Overnight: Thousand Lakes Lodge

Day 14 – (11 Oct) Cradle Mountain

We bid farewell to our lodge and drive north towards the Tasmanian Arboretum – a botanical park largely dedicated to the conservation of Gondwanan flora. The wide variety of native trees here attracts a diverse avifauna, including the colourful Tasmanian endemic Green Rosella. However, the main draw is that Lake Eugenana – a central feature of the arboretum – offers one of the best places in Australia to see Platypus in the wild.

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Following our visit, we loop back south to Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park, where we will spend the final night of our tour. Part of the expansive Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, this national park offers a striking mosaic of landscapes – ranging from jagged mountain peaks and glacially-carved lakes to ancient rainforest, wet sclerophyll forest, alpine heathlands, and moorlands rich in endemic plant species such as Huon Pine, Pandani, and King Billy Pine.

Cradle Mountain is an excellent location for mammal watching, and we have chances to encounter Short-beaked Echidna, Common Wombat, Bennett's Wallaby, Tasmanian Pademelon, and Long-nosed Potoroo, among others. Birds may include Yellow Wattlebird, Yellow-throated Honeyeater, Tasmanian Thornbill, and Southern Emu-wren, alongside the unmistakable Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo.

After dark, we'll visit the 'Devils@Cradle' sanctuary, where we'll gain valuable insights into the conservation of Tasmania's most iconic carnivorous marsupial – Tasmanian Devil – and we have the exciting opportunity to witness their voracious feeding habits up close.


Tasmanian Devil

Overnight: Cradle Mountain

Days 15 – 16 – (12 – 13 Oct) Inbound flights from Launceston

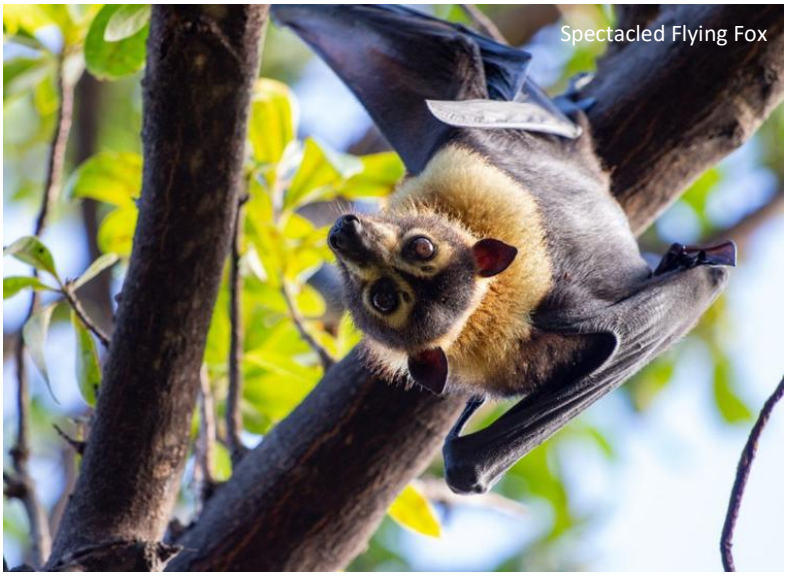
On our final morning, we may enjoy a leisurely walk or some last wildlife encounters amidst the stunning scenery of Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park. Following breakfast, we transfer to Launceston for our onward flights, bringing this unforgettable journey through Australia's diverse mammal habitats to a close.

Optional Pre-tour Extension

Extension Day 1 – (27 Sept) Arrive Cairns

Upon arrival in Cairns, you'll be met for your transfer to the hotel, where the remainder of the day is free for you to relax and recover from your long flights. Cairns, sandwiched between the lush rainforests of the Wet Tropics and the glimmering waters of the Coral Sea, is the gateway to one of Australia's finest wildlife destinations. The area's history dates back tens of thousands of years, with the Gimuy Walubara Yidinji people among the Indigenous groups maintaining a profound connection to the land and sea. Although Captain James Cook charted the coastline in 1770, European settlement didn't gain momentum until the late 19th century, when gold was discovered near the Palmer River. Cairns was established as a port in 1876 to support the booming mining industry, later expanding into a centre for agriculture, especially sugarcane, which remains vital to the local economy.

Those eager to explore on their first day might take a leisurely stroll along the Esplanade, where mangrove-fringed shores and tidal flats draw pelicans, cormorants, egrets, spoonbills, ibises, waders, terns, and other waterbirds in impressive numbers. A visit to the Botanical Gardens offers a chance to get to grips with the native tropical flora, while a glance skyward during the early evening is likely to reveal a spectacular sight, as Spectacled Flying Foxes emerge en masse to feast on fruiting trees.


Spectacled Flying Fox

Overnight: Cairns

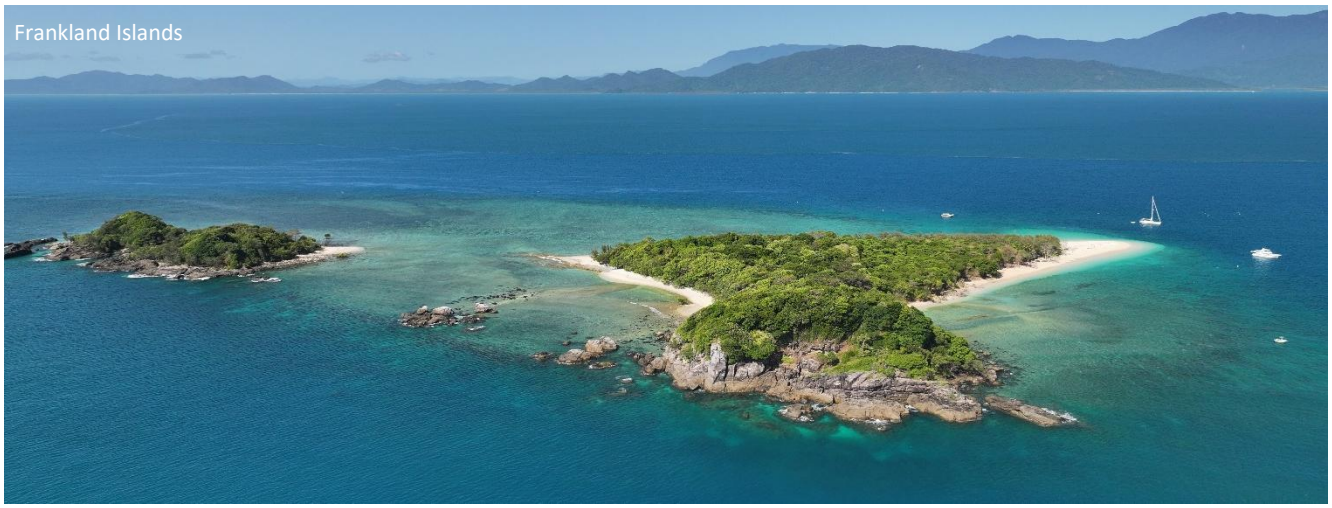
Extension Day 2 – (28 Sept) Frankland Islands Cruise

Today we'll be collected by coach, heading south from Cairns through stunning UNESCO World Heritage-listed rainforest and vast sugar cane fields. We'll pass Walsh's Pyramid, the tallest natural freestanding pyramid in the world, before arriving at Deeral, just 45-minutes from Cairns.

From Deeral, we'll board the Turtle Islander vessel for a peaceful 30-minute cruise along the Mulgrave River, surrounded by lush rainforest and mangroves teeming with birdlife. This is also the realm of Australia's most formidable predator – Saltwater Crocodile. The boat then ventures on to Normanby Island, just 10 kilometres offshore, where the day will be spent snorkeling amongst a remarkable variety of corals and marine life, including an abundance of colourful fish, sea turtles, and octopus. A guided snorkeling tour offers the opportunity to explore and interact with the reef under the expert guidance of marine naturalists, with all equipment provided and tuition available to ensure you are comfortable using your mask, fins, and snorkel.

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For those who prefer to remain on dry land, the guided 'Island Discovery Walk' is a must. Joining the naturalists for an informative and fascinating exploration of the island's coral cay forest, sandy beaches, and the reef's nursery – the rock pools – where we hope to find Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers, Sacred Kingfisher, Eastern Osprey and the Beach Stone-curlew. A coral-viewing tour from a semi-submersible or glass-bottom boat is also available, and as an optional extra, there is the chance to explore the Great Barrier Reef with a certified or introductory dive on Normanby Reef.


Frankland Islands

After a tropical buffet lunch on the island, we will depart in the afternoon and enjoy tea and cake onboard before returning to our hotel this evening, where we can relax for a few hours before dinner.

Overnight: Cairns

Extension Day 3 – (29 Sept) Daintree Excursion

This morning is yours to enjoy at your leisure – perhaps taking a stroll along the Esplanade to watch the local birdlife. By mid-afternoon, your Australian naturalist guide will arrive to escort you north along the Great Barrier Reef Drive, widely regarded as the most scenic coastal highway in the region. We'll be heading for the Daintree Tropical Rainforest – one of the oldest rainforest ecosystems in the world. Our first port of call is the Daintree River, where we'll board a solar-powered boat. This eco-friendly cruise allows us to venture quietly into the habitat, free from the noise and emissions of a standard vessel, as we look out for crocodiles, birds, snakes, and other wildlife. Afternoon tea is provided before we set off.

From here, it's on to Cape Tribulation, a World Heritage area featuring pristine beaches set against the backdrop of rainforest-clad mountains. We'll spend an hour or so exploring this dramatic coastline – where the rainforest truly meets the reef – followed by a delicious dinner in the heart of the jungle. While the Daintree is home to one of Australia's rarest mammals – Bennett's Tree Kangaroo - sightings of these near-mythical creatures are exceedingly rare. We're more likely to encounter such species as Northern Brown Bandicoot, White-tailed Giant Rat, or the striking Striped Possum during our evening exploration. We'll hope to cross paths with the more approachable Lumholtz's Tree Kangaroo later in the trip.

Overnight: Cairns

Extra expenses

All food and accommodation are included in the price of this holiday, starting with dinner on Day 3 and ending with breakfast on Day 15. with the exception only of lunch on our travel Day 10. Please note that we do not include the following in the cost of this holiday:

- Entry visa – this can be applied for online in advance
- All items of a personal nature such as drinks, laundry, souvenirs
- Tips

Tour grading

This is a mammal tour that covers the very best of the Queensland's and Tasmania's fine selection of habitats. There will inevitably be some long drives during the tour, but they will mainly be on good, metalled roads with plenty to view. Equally, however, there will be ample opportunities for walking through the great variety of habitats, at a gentle pace, allowing the relaxed pace and itinerary of this tour to be suitable for most ages and levels of fitness.

Tour focus

This tour focuses on the best of Australia's mammals. You will appreciate that most of Australia's native mammals are nocturnal. As a result, successful mammal watching often requires patience, good fieldcraft and a willingness to spend time in the field after dark. On some evenings we may be out for several hours, occasionally until 11pm or later. The advantage, however, is that very early starts are generally less necessary than on a typical birdwatching tour.

Other wildlife of interest, including birds, will, of course, be enjoyed, but mammals will remain the strong focus. Landscapes will be rich and varied and photographic opportunities will be plentiful.

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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