

# Where reef

With winter now upon us, ELLE MATULA heads north for the weekend to luxuriate with the family in a land of year-round sunshine, sand and surf.



# meets rainforest

**C**ruising along the Great Barrier Reef Drive, I find myself at the epicentre of some of the most spectacular scenery in Australia I have ever seen. Stretching from the shores of Cairns, through trendy Port Douglas and up to the rainforests of Cape Tribulation, we are passing through the only region in the world where two World Heritage sites collide: the Great Barrier Reef hugging close on the coastline, and the 140-million-year-old Daintree Rainforest bursting from the mountains. Yep, I can't help feeling that the Amazon doesn't even come close. To keep the little ones entertained, we take advantage of the secluded beaches, spot hidden waterfalls along the way and stop at Rex Lookout for a family selfie, our backdrop the magnificent blue ocean of Trinity Bay stretching out into a seemingly endless horizon.

## Tropical tranquillity

Cradling the picturesque Four Mile Beach, Port Douglas' atmosphere is a vibrant mix of barefoot beach ambience and tropical resorts. Family holidaymakers have long relished the natural beauty and year-round warm climates, and mine is no different.

We soak up the sunshine as we stroll between Macrossan Street's boutique shops towards the Reef Marina for brunch. Surprisingly, in such a small town, we are absolutely spoiled for dining choice. **Lure Restaurant & Bar** ends up being a wise choice for both our holiday budget and its delicious menu. Overlooking the sailboats casually floating in and out of the wharf, our locally sourced seafood is served outside on the large deck, with enough room for the kids to safely wander, play and meet new friends.

## In search of Nemo

Swimmers on, we sail away for an afternoon of underwater exploration with **Quicksilver Cruises**, which offers child-friendly reef tours fit for toddlers through to teens. We choose the Outer Reef Tour, a popular choice with its underwater observatory, snorkelling platforms and introductory scuba dive areas with lessons offered for children aged 12 and over. The open water doesn't scare the kids as they dive in head-first in search of Dory, Nemo and – fingers crossed – a few Squirrels! Using the swimming noodle to float above the colourful corals, I bask in a moment of pure bliss. Alternatively, Low Isles is perfect for families that prefer to feel the sand between their toes while splashing about in more shallow waters.

## Locals already

After an afternoon in the sun and three turtle sightings, we escort our rumbling tummies back to our rooms at the beachfront **Mandalay Luxury Apartments** for a delicious dinner.

01 A coral wonderland 02 Rainforest wildlife  
03 Finding Nemo © Tourism & Events Queensland.  
Images 1 and 2 © Tourism Port Douglas & Daintree







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Later on, our private patio proves to be a relaxing night-time retreat after the kids are tucked away in bed.

An early-morning start takes us shopping at the Mossman Markets. Shaded under towering rainforests, we stop to chat with the local farmers and sample their exotic fruits. We make a day out of our visit to the small town and enjoy lunch at **The Junction Cafe**. I have since tried desperately to replicate its coconut and mango quinoa porridge (tried being the key word).

### Daintree dreaming

Our early start also means we get to experience the Daintree Rainforest as it should be... with no one else around. Driving onto the Daintree Ferry and crossing over the river en

04 Daintree exploring 05 Local Indigenous culture 06 Great Barrier Reef Drive.  
Images 4, 5 & 6 © Tourism Port Douglas & Daintree

route to Cape Tribulation, we make a quick stop at the Alexandra Range Lookout.

Driving deeper into the forest, we keep an eye out for cassowaries while our littlies begin their unique **Jungle Surfing Canopy Tours** experience. There's nothing quite like ziplining nearly 20 metres in the air and looking down on the world's oldest rainforest. The guides have a PhD in encouragement and with a Masters in rainforest ecology, they will hit you with more interesting facts than Wikipedia, but with way more panache!

For daring of a different kind, stop and dine at the local **Mason's Café** for a delicious crocodile, kangaroo or emu burger before a refreshing swim in Mason's Waterhole. Before returning back to Cairns, a stop at **Hartley's Crocodile Adventures** simply can't be missed. Home to over 2100 metres of boardwalks leading you through an array of tropical birds, reptiles and other native fauna, it is also one of the best places to see crocodiles in Tropical North Queensland.

Coasting once again along the Great Barrier Reef Drive, with the Coral Sea now glistening on my left-hand side, the weekend has ended all too soon. As I listen to the kids energetically practising their reenactments of jumping crocodiles for the next show and tell at school, I mentally start planning my next coconut and mango quinoa porridge. ●

## PORT DOUGLAS REPORT CARD



### Information

[www.visitportdouglasdaintree.com.au](http://www.visitportdouglasdaintree.com.au)  
[www.tropicalnorthqueensland.org.au](http://www.tropicalnorthqueensland.org.au)

### Getting there

Qantas flies daily from Sydney and Melbourne. [www.qantas.com.au](http://www.qantas.com.au)

### Stay

[www.mandalay.com.au](http://www.mandalay.com.au)

### Eat

[www.lurerestaurant.com.au](http://www.lurerestaurant.com.au)

### Do

[www.quicksilver-cruises.com](http://www.quicksilver-cruises.com)  
[www.junglesurfing.com.au](http://www.junglesurfing.com.au)  
[www.crocodileadventures.com](http://www.crocodileadventures.com)



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