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Supermodels were the original influencers | C6



Where rainforest meets reef

Tropical North Queensland offers local delicacies and eco-experiences

Reef Magic, a pontoon moored at Moore Reef, a 1½-hour catamaran ride from Cairns, is a launchpad for oceanic adventures. PHOTO: REEF MAGIC

Denise Lim

CAIRNS, Australia – “No crocodiles?” I ask apprehensively. This is, after all, crocodile country.

My guide assures me that this stretch of the rainforest-lined river, at 17 to 22 deg C, is crocodile-free as the reptiles avoid low temperatures.

Decked in a thermal wetsuit, I dip my head underwater with a snorkel. Jungle perch and a saw-shelled turtle are waiting about the eddies.

After that, I lie on a crimson raft, gazing up at the forest canopy. A cathedral of soaring figs, basket ferns and tangled vines filters the afternoon sun rays.

All is silent, except for a soundscape of trilling cicadas, chirping birds and softly rippling water.

It is a meditative moment, free from cares of the urban world, within the oldest rainforest in the world.

Where exactly is the world’s oldest rainforest, you may ask?

For some, the Amazon rainforest, or perhaps forests of Borneo, may come to mind.

The rainforest of Borneo is 130 million years old, while the Amazon rainforest is said to have formed between 15 million and 55 million years ago.

But the world’s oldest rainforest lies in Australia. The Daintree Rainforest, in North Queensland, stands at a staggering 180 million years old.

Hailed by British natural historian David Attenborough as “the most extraordinary place on earth”, the Daintree is truly forest primaeva and a living biodiversity museum.

Over five days, I take in eco-certified experiences and gastronomy in Tropical North Queensland, a region encompassing, loosely, the top-right pinkie-tip of the Australian map.

Tropical North Queensland is

better known for Cairns, the gateway into the region, and the Great Barrier Reef, a remarkable coral reef system which, at about the size of Japan, is so extensive, it is visible from outer space.

Sometimes overshadowed, but no less extraordinary, is the Wet Tropics Rainforest area, which the Daintree is part of.

Both the Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics Rainforest are Unesco World Heritage Sites, making Queensland the only place in the world where two World Heritage Sites meet.

One morning, I am gawking at luminous giant clams in the world’s largest reef. Mere hours later, I am soaking in the emerald foliage of the world’s oldest rainforest.

However, for all its superlative natural marvels, eco-luxury experiences and a burgeoning gourmet scene teeming with tropical bounty, this region still exudes an understated charm.

THE WORLD’S LARGEST REEF

In an hour, I swim with four turtles, vibrant schools of wrasse, fusiliers and trevally, amid sea cucumbers and endangered giant clams. The molluscs, with fleshy lips of pronounced violets and blues, span an impressive 1.2m in diameter.

Thrilled, I follow in the turtle’s slipstream. The leathery turtle ascends for air, surveying the horizon. Wise, wrinkly eyes meet mine in a surreal moment.

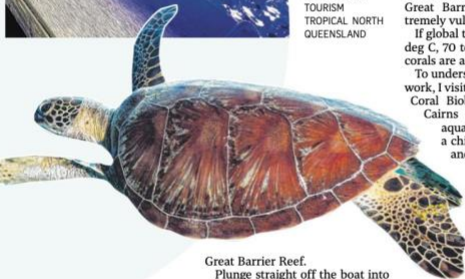
I am at Low Isles, a coral cay, on a tour with Reef Unlimited (str.sg/ITU4; from AS219 or SS190).



(Far left) A river drift snorkelling tour in Mossman River with Back Country Bliss Adventures. PHOTO: BACK COUNTRY BLISS ADVENTURES

(Left) At the world’s first Living Coral Biobank, experts race against time to collect and preserve all coral species. In the event of mass coral wipe-outs, this repository may be invaluable for reef restoration. PHOTO: DENISE LIM

(Below) Swim with turtles at Low Isles. PHOTO: TOURISM TROPICAL NORTH QUEENSLAND



Great Barrier Reef.

Plunge straight off the boat into the deep or visit pontoons (floating platforms) as launchpads for oceanic adventures.

In 2022, Reef Magic (www.reefmagic.com.au; from AS289) – a pontoon moored at the pristine north-eastern Moore Reef – was launched, a 1½-hour catamaran ride from Cairns.

Travellers can snorkel in the sheltered coral lagoon from the pontoon steps, join marine biologists on snorkel safaris or try scuba diving.

Those who wish to keep their

hair dry can visit underwater observatories, ride glass-bottomed boats and even helicopters for aerial views of the reef.

“How is the general health of the Great Barrier Reef?” I ask a marine biologist, considering headlines on mass coral bleaching in the last two decades.

“It’s the best it’s been in over 30 years,” she tells me.

In 2022, the Australian Institute of Marine Science reported the greatest coral cover across two-thirds of the Great Barrier Reef in more than 36 years.

It is worth rejoicing, yet scientists are cautious. With climate change bringing heatwaves, cyclones and more acidic oceans, the Great Barrier Reef remains extremely vulnerable.

If global temperatures rise by 1.5 deg C, 70 to 90 per cent of global corals are at risk, I am told.

To understand reef conservation work, I visit the world’s first Living Coral Biobank, now housed at Cairns Aquarium (cairnsaquarium.com.au; AS30 for a child aged between three and 14; AS52 for an adult).

Stepping in, I seem to have entered a scene from a futuristic sci-fi movie. Rows of luminous coral fragments are neatly lined in shallow tanks under the glow of cobalt-blue light.

A coral “ark” of sorts, the Forever Reef Project (www.foreverreef.org) was spearheaded by Dr Charlie Veron, nicknamed Godfather of Coral.

Here, experts race against time to collect and preserve all coral species globally, starting with 415 species in the Great Barrier Reef.

In the event of mass coral wipe-outs, this precious repository may prove invaluable for global reef restoration.

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THE STRAITS TIMES

Bus, train fares to rise by up to 11 cents for adults from Dec 23

Hike spurred by higher energy prices, inflation, wages: Public Transport Council

Kenneth Cheng
Assistant News Editor

using formulas to set a cap on fare changes. This comprises a 12 per cent in-

less and continue to pay fair wages to their workers". At a media conference on Monday to announce the fare changes, PTC chairwoman Janet Ang said the expectation is that the deferred fare increase would take time to come down gradually.

Fare and travel pass price changes

Adult (card)	▲ 10 cents For 4.2km or less ▲ 11 cents For more than 4.2km	Hybrid (bus and train) monthly concession passes	Up to 10% off pass prices (or ▼ \$4.50 to \$9.50)
Concession (card) (Students, seniors, people with disabilities, low-wage workers)	▲ 4 cents For 4.2km or less ▲ 5 cents For more than 4.2km	New Workfare transport hybrid monthly concession passes (Low-wage workers)	\$96 (\$32 off the price of an adult monthly travel pass)
Adult (cash)	▲ 20 cents	Adult monthly travel passes, and bus or train monthly concession passes	No change
Concession (cash) (Students, seniors, people with disabilities)	▲ 10 cents		

Hybrid monthly concession passes and adult monthly	Card holder	Current price	New price
	Primary school pupil	\$43.50	
	Secondary school student	\$54	

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Japanese actor Ta Sorimachi to repr Onizuka in TV sp GTO

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Where rainforest meets reef: Tropical North Queensland offers local delicacies and eco-experiences


The region is known for two natural wonders – the Great Barrier Reef and Daintree Rainforest.

Former foreign minister George Yeo shares photos taken with singer Wang Leehom in Taipei

Concert review: Robbie Williams and Groove Armada's FI sets bring back the heady days of the 1990s and early 2000s

Japanese actor Takashi Sorimachi to reprise role as Onizuka in TV special of GTO

Cindy, Naomi, Linda and Christy were the 'original influencers', says Super



New Miss Universe Singapore fights human trafficking in Thailand

Priyanka will represent Singapore at the international Miss Universe pageant in El Salvador.

Digital story:

<https://www.straitstimes.com/life/travel/where-rainforest-meets-reef-tropical-north-queensland-offers-local-delicacies-and-eco-experiences>

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