

# Jump right in!

## – Tropical North Queensland

CARLA GROSSETTI grew up in Tropical North Queensland. When she returns to her hometown of Cairns with her boys there's never a dull moment!



Cairns Esplanade  
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Pebbly Beach, near Thala Beach

“**H**ey mum, watch this,” yells my son Fin, 12, as he zips over the cage of a 4m-long saltwater crocodile under the **Cairns Wildlife Dome**. Sure, he is hooked up to a harness attached to a safety cable and Goliath is contained in a Perspex cage.

But as the mother of a daredevil renowned for innumerable dodgy escapades, I can't help but brace myself when he mutters this seemingly innocuous phrase.

It's mid-afternoon and the sun is filtering through the 20m-high glass dome and lighting up the horny, textured skin of the giant beast. Although estuarine crocodiles are considered to be serious killing machines and very territorial, Goliath is clearly well fed and doesn't take the bait as it floats above his head. The high ropes course that zigzags around the Dome is like string art, looping us around nature-based attractions that, while they slow the pace, are of great interest to my two energetic sons.

### In the wake of our adventure

Whether you're a regular visitor to Tropical North Queensland or it's your first foray, what you'll find is that the region is a haven for active families.

I spent my childhood in Cairns, so to return with my two tween-age sons makes me recall all the thrills and spills I enjoyed at their age.

**Cairns Wake Park** is the second stop on our

itinerary and Fin and Marley, 11, get a good workout doing laps of the cable ski course. The boys' favourite TV show is *Ninja Warrior* and the next item on their agenda is the inflatable obstacle course at **Cairns Aqua Park**, which shares the manmade lagoon. “My Ninja Warrior name is going to be Dogmatix and you can be Cacophonix,” says Marley, who is also obsessed with Asterix & Obelisk.

The course is exhilarating and challenging and the boys bounce about doing what looks like comedic *parkour*, flipping, somersaulting, leaping and face-planting onto the garish floating playground filled with air.

The action-packed excitement leaves us all feeling tuckered out and ready to hit the hot tub at **Pepper's Beach Club & Spa Palm Cove**. After spending the afternoon reviving in our swanky suite, The Husband and I sip cocktails at sundown while the boys play classic catches in the pool.

### Tending turtles

When you're travelling with a child who suffers from motion sickness, it requires a bit more effort to get to the outer reef. That's why a day trip to **Fitzroy Island** – where you can snorkel alongside leatherback turtles and explore coral gardens just metres offshore – was on our bucket-and-spade list.

After leaving Cairns on a fast cat bound for the island, we went straight from the boat to our low-



Left: Apple the Wallaby at  
Thala Beach Lodge  
© Thala Beach Lodge



## STAY

Peppers Beach Club & Spa  
[peppers.com.au](http://peppers.com.au)

Thala Beach Lodge  
[thalabeach.com.au](http://thalabeach.com.au)

Fitzroy Island Resort  
[fitzroyisland.com](http://fitzroyisland.com)

Jabiru Safari Lodge  
[jabirusafarilodge.com.au](http://jabirusafarilodge.com.au)

## PLAY

Cairns Wildlife Dome  
[cairnzoom.com.au](http://cairnzoom.com.au)

Cairns Wake Park and Aqua  
Park  
[cairnswakepark.com](http://cairnswakepark.com)

Save Our Sea Turtles  
[saveourseaturtles.com.au](http://saveourseaturtles.com.au)

Kuranda Scenic Railway and  
Skyrail  
[ksr.com.au](http://ksr.com.au)  
[skyrail.com.au](http://skyrail.com.au)

slung cabin on the sand. A highlight during the island idyll was our visit to the **Save Our Sea Turtles Rehabilitation Centre**, which has helped 300 turtles return to the wild in the past 14 years. "After the floods in 2010 and Cyclone Yasi in 2011, there was an 800 per cent increase in turtles being stranded and the centre was relocated to Fitzroy Island," our volunteer guide Jen Maloney, a marine biologist, tells us. In 2012, the centre took over the infrastructure from a disused prawn farm on Fitzroy Island and in just three years has established itself as the largest volunteer-based turtle rehabilitation centre in Australia.

Jen is clearly very fond of the turtles in her care and we learn a lot of trivia about green sea turtles – "their body fat is green" and "they are known to bear a grudge" – while watching Ella and Margaret do laps of the holding tank. It's like physio for turtles and while it's upsetting to hear firsthand about the injuries they receive from propellers, hooks, plastic and wads of string, it's uplifting to hear of the work done to help rescue, rehabilitate and release them into the wild.

### She'll be apples

Back on the mainland, we enjoy another wildlife encounter at our overnight accommodation at **Thala Beach Lodge** when we meet the only wild wallaby in the world with her own hashtag: *#AppletheWallaby*. It's not just the wildlife that has the wow factor; this place is paradise.

A few days later, we turn our back to the coast and take a jaunt to **Jabiru Safari Lodge** on the Atherton

Tablelands where we spot pygmy geese and pied cormorants and watch a fleet of black swans take off like overloaded cargo planes over the Mareeba wetlands. At dusk, when the sun burns the sky red over Clancy's Lagoon, I ask my son Fin what he most enjoyed about the day. "I liked learning that termite mounds are made of soil, saliva and faeces," he deadpans. After dinner, we dodge a few termite bollards on our way back to our pre-pitched canvas 'glamping' tent and sit around the fire counting the stars that streak across the sky.

### Rainforest bounty

The rainforest is our backdrop again on our final day as we clackety-clack 328m above sea level with **Kuranda Scenic Railways**. "Let's hold our breath through every corner and tunnel," says Fin. Given there are 15 tunnels and 98 curves he needs a lot of puff. There are also 55 bridges, 163 cuttings and an extreme 180-degree turn along the railway line that was carved into the edge of a mountain by hand in 1891. It was while soaring back to Earth on **Skyrail** that I took time to reflect: coming back to Cairns is always a frenzy as the scenery is so compelling, it feels wrong for me not to get amongst it! As well as being a fabulous place to take the kids, it provides endless opportunities to unleash the child within. Now did someone say 'siesta'?

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