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Updates

As always in books, the information is current at the time of writing. But as we all know, things change. I make the best efforts I can to update this book as often as I can, but should you find any outdated information, I will be very thankful if you contact me and let me know.

If you want to be notified when I have updated this book, sign up for the FREE newsletters here.

Spread the Word

If you like this book and this website, help other travellers by letting them know :-)

If you find a page on www.capeyorkaustralia.com that you think would help other travellers – you could post a link to that page on Facebook, Tweet about it, add a link to a forum post (if you happen to have a blog, a website, a Facebook Group or Page - consider linking to it, too!)

Give a 'like' to our Facebook Page and be always the first to 'share' our local first hand news from up the Cape :-)

Every link, every 'share' helps other travellers - Thank you!

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FOREWORD

I wrote this free e-book as thanks for your interest in Cape York and my website.

I made it especially for the early planning stage of your trip, and it should help you with basic decisions such as how to get here, how to get around, what kind of accommodation to use, when to go, how long time to take and roughly what places you want to visit.

It is NOT anywhere near a complete travel guide. Compared to the complete Destination Guide - Parts I and III – the general information about the area, and the detailed descriptions about places to visit – are shorter by 90%.

Those parts of the book give you only a very basic idea of the subject. Part II – the planning of your trip, is the longest and most important part of this pocket guide.

If, after reading this book, you decide that an independent trip to Cape York is too much for you and you want to join an organised tour, you can skip the Destination Guide and just enjoy the information in this book and the website. (NB: I strongly recommend you to think twice – there is no reason why you cannot do Cape York on an independent trip!)

But if you decide to self-drive and explore the area without joining an organised tour with a guide, you have a lot to win on getting the Destination Guide with all the locals’ tips on how to make the most of this absolutely amazing trip of a life time! :-)

In addition to the Part II – the planning chapter, it has maps and detailed descriptions of all places in Cape York, big or small – how to get here and get around, what is there to see and do, where to eat and where to stay, where is the local tourist information centre, bank, post and internet, medical centre, pharmacy and hospital, is there a local grocery shop, bottle shop, RACQ and car mechanic – and anything else you need to know about each place.

And on top of that, it has the general information about the history, geology, plants and animals of Cape York and where are the best places to see them; as well as information on fishing, camping in national parks, FREE camping spots, Aboriginal land permits and alcohol restrictions, quarantine restrictions, bushfires, tropical cyclones, dangerous animals and other dangerous things, mobile phone coverage and other means of communication, fuel availability, and of course, how to prepare your vehicle for such trip, as well as how to safely cross creeks and rivers – which you likely will even in the driest time of the Dry Season.

In other words – the Destination Guide gives you invaluable local information and is a very cheap investment to make the most of every dollar that you will pay for this trip :-)

But let’s get to the pocket guide first and do the first steps of the planning.

It is the FREE, small-size preview of the full guide.

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is written in a format of an e-book.

If you are familiar with e-books, you can skip this page.

Firstly, you need to save this book onto your device. It is a one-time newsletter subscription download, so make sure you don't lose your copy of the book!

Once you have saved the book onto your device, you can either print it, or read it on the screen.

There are good things about both. I feel reading a printout is easier to take in, and is easier on my eyes, than reading on the screen. However, reading the book on the screen enables you to click on the links that are embedded in the text – which give you even more information, and photos.

So, you probably get the best use out of this book if you print it, and read it from the printouts, but have it open on the screen as well.

Some people have told me that it costs them lots of money to print an ebook - that is does not need to be correct.

With a home laser printer and generic toners (only an online order away and you are set up to print cheap in all future), it costs me less than $10 (less than ten dollars) to print 300 pages so the 50 pages in this guide cost less than $2 to print.

I didn’t put any photos into this book because they take a lot more ink to print than the text, and they increase the file size and make the downloading much slower. There are enough photos on the website to give you a good idea about what places in Cape York look like, and you can find them through the links in this book and the full Destination Guide.

And finally.. whether you only read this book or website or Destination Guide. I would be really happy to hear from you.

Give me any feedback, good or bad, on the e-books and the website. Good feedback makes me happy, bad feedback helps me to improve my work! Just because this pocket guide is free, doesn't mean it doesn't have to be as good as possible.

And why not let other travellers know how you go, whether during, before or after your trip – ideally all three! Write about your Cape York experience on Cape York forums or make your own page about your adventure – other travellers would love to read it!
PART I: INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL INFORMATION

Queensland is the second largest state in Australia (after Western Australia). It covers 1,730,648 km\(^2\) of land in north-eastern Australia.

Its capital is Brisbane (population about 2 million), which is where you are likely to first touch the ground when you fly from overseas.

North Queensland is a relative term but it usually means everything north of, and including, Townsville. Townsville is the largest city in north Queensland, with a population (181,743) larger than Cairns.

Far North Queensland (FNQ) usually means everything north of, and including, Cairns.

Cairns (population 142,001) is the largest city in the FNQ, and the closest city to Cape York. This is where you will arrive if you fly within Australia, and this is where your flight is transferred to if you first arrive in Brisbane from overseas.

Cape York peninsula covers an area of about 140,000 sq km, which is almost the size of the Australian state of Victoria. However the population size in comparison is about 18 thousand versus six million! Most of the population lives in a handful of communities and small towns such as Cooktown and Weipa.

WHY DO PEOPLE GO TO CAPE YORK?

While the reasons are combined, the most common reason is probably to have a photo taken at the northernmost point of Australia.

But not far behind are the challenging four wheel drive tracks – the Old Telegraph Track, CREB Track, Frenchmans Road and others.

Another very popular reason is fishing – there are plenty of great fishing spots, not only at the famous Fisherman’s Wharf of Cooktown, but also in Seisia, Weipa, and many, many other places – the peninsula is literally full of great spots to fish.

And there is some interesting history. Some of Australia’s best Aboriginal art sites are found in Quinkan country around Laura. Early European history of pioneers can be discovered at Somerset, Lockerbie and Old Laura Homesteads.

Hodgkinson and Palmer River Goldfields have gold rush histories. And in many places on the peninsula there are relics from the Second World War.

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Cairns is such a great city - my favourite one in Australia. It is relaxed, tropical, and surrounded by beautiful mountains covered in lush rainforests.

It is worth spending some time in Cairns, particularly if you are not to return to the area.

Even though you can see the most attractions in the city in a few days, there are some unique places to visit just outside (mentioned later).

And, Cairns is the best city in Australia for a trip to the Great Barrier Reef. Because the GBR is closest to the mainland up north, the trips are shorter and consequently better value than down south.

North of Cairns – you have two options – both roads finally meet in Musgrave.

The first is to follow the COASTAL road north to Cooktown.

On that way, you pass Cairns’ Northern Beaches (nice local communities), the touristy but colourful Port Douglas, the quieter Mossman, and the beautiful Mossman Gorge – a nice rainforest spot in the southern section of Daintree National Park.

Further north you come to the northern section of the same national park, which is much larger than the Mossman Gorge section.

You first cross the Daintree River on a ferry, and then you come to a beautiful section of tropical rainforest through which you’ll drive to Cape Tribulation.

North from there, the Bloomfield Road takes you to Wujal Wujal and further north past Rossville and Helenvale to Cooktown.

North of Cooktown there are unsealed roads to and through Lakefield, Starcke, and Cape Melville National Parks.

The road through Lakefield is a reasonable gravel road, while the ones to and through Starcke and Cape Melville are partly small 4WD tracks.

Lakefield National Park is less remote but the road through it can still be quite bad after rains. In the north-western end of Lakefield National Park, the road takes you to Musgrave.

If you choose the second, INLAND, option from Cairns, you will drive past the touristy rainforest village Kuranda across the Great Dividing Range over northern Atherton Tablelands to Mareeba.

Turn right towards north and the road will take you through the small towns Mount Molloy and Mount Carbine to Lakeland.
Continue north and you come to Laura, past some Aboriginal rock art and the Palmer River Goldfields, and then to Musgrave, where the inland and coastal road meet. This, second option, is shorter and quicker, but both roads are worth doing – why not do one on your way up and the other on your way down.
North of Musgrave, the road takes you to Coen and later Archer River Roadhouse, after the turnoff to Mungkan Kaanju (now Oyala Thumotang) National Park.

North of Archer River Roadhouse there is a turnoff to the tiny community Portland Roads, the Lockhart River Aboriginal Community, and Iron Range National Park – known as the best place in Australia to see some flora and fauna found nowhere except on the Cape York peninsula and Papua New Guinea (full detail in the Destination Guide).

Back on the Peninsula Developmental Road, it is about 15km north to the turnoff to the main road to Weipa. Weipa is the second largest town on Cape York – a bauxite mining town with some great fishing.

On the way back from Weipa you can take a shortcut via Batavia Downs to Telegraph Road.

Following it north, you cross the Wenlock River Bridge and Moreton Telegraph Station before you enter the best part of this trip – the Old Telegraph Track.

This is a fun and adventurous four wheel drive track with many wet creek crossings. There are the longer but quicker Bypass Roads around it if you want to avoid the Old Telegraph Track.

Just after the end of the Southern Bypass Road and the beginning of the Northern Bypass Road, there are the famous Fruit Bat, Eliot and Twin Falls – nice spots to stop for a cool dip in the water.

These are in Jardine River National Park, which, just like Iron Range, can be a good place to see some plants and animals found nowhere else in Australia, such as the carnivorous pitcher plants and many others.

In the northern end of the national park you will cross the Jardine River on a ferry (or if you are really adventurous, at the Old Ford!).

Once you are past the river, you are in the Northern Peninsula Area. The largest township here is Bamaga, surrounded by the smaller communities Seisia, New Mapoon, Umauco and Injinoo.

Further north, past Lockerbie, you come to the tip of Cape York with Punsand Bay, Somerset, and Pajinka – the northernmost point of mainland Australia.

**IT IS NOT ALL RAINFOREST**

Some people expect Cape York to be covered in tropical rainforest. The reality is – it is not. There are pockets of rainforest in Daintree and Iron Range National Parks, but for most of the time you will drive through dry eucalypt woodland.

And there is nothing wrong with that – it’s still fantastic!
HIGHLIGHTS

- **The Tip of Cape York** is the main goal of most trips and it is great to stand on the northernmost point of mainland Australia. It’s not only for the sign and the photo but also for the views over the bright blue ocean – an absolutely magnificent place.

- **Torres Strait Islands** are beautiful, and on a sunny day the waters surrounding them are even brighter blue than those near the mainland. More than that, these islands have a very interesting history and a great mix of cultures.

- **The Old Telegraph Track** is said to be the last of its kind in the world. It is mostly slow going and can be hard in places, but that’s what makes it so special. And it is not maintained thanks to the Bypass Roads. If you decide to do it, it will be the most exciting part of your trip :-)

- **Iron Range National Park** is a great place to discover some of the flora and fauna that Cape York only shares with Papua New Guinea. While palm cockatoos, eclectus parrots, green pythons and cuscuses are also found in other parts of the Cape York peninsula, Iron Range is one of the best places to try to spot them.

- **Lakefield National Park** is huge, remote and adventurous. A great place to camp, fish and watch some excellent birdlife. Watch out for crocodiles too.

- **Daintree National Park** is not only one of the most biologically diverse regions in the world – it contains the world’s oldest living rainforest (yes, it’s true!).

- **Palmer River Goldfield** is the place to discover what’s left from one of the largest gold rushes in Australia’s history. Its main town used to be the capital of Cape York.

- **Hodgkinson Goldfield** is smaller but in many ways even more amazing if you look into it. With the beautifully restored Tyrconnell Mine, and the fascinating Mount Mulligan - not only known for the mining disaster but also for its massive cliff face, and some fantastic ruins of the mine and the town itself.

- **Chillagoe** is not only a great outback town – it has some very interesting geology. Its limestone caves and granite boulders have been left behind from a time when the area was on an ocean bottom and covered by coral reef.
PART II: PLANNING YOUR TRIP

REMTENESS

Is remoteness dangerous?

A lot of people would say yes.

The reason is that people are scared of the unknown. The more used they are to the situation the less scared they are.

The more you travel in remoteness the more you realise how it is not dangerous as long as you are properly prepared.

If you keep common sense with where you go you should not get bogged.

If you have your vehicle mechanically prepared and you carry recovery gear, you have done what you can to avoid getting stuck because of vehicle problems.

You cannot completely avoid them but can minimise the risk, so if it still happens, for that you carry enough food and drinking water so that you can wait for someone to come along.

If you don't want to wait, or you travel extra remote - off the main roads, or out of season, where and when there are not many other people around, you can carry means of communication so that you can get help to arrive.

There are two main kinds of situations – one is mechanical emergencies (above), and the other one is medical emergencies.

If you have health issues of your own you obviously have to carry enough medication, and more than enough medication if you want to cover extra time if you get stuck.

Just like with the mechanical emergencies you can only do so much, but you cannot completely avoid a medical emergency should there be an accident or a snake bite.

That is about the only situation where remoteness is dangerous, and you cannot do anything to help it except carry means of communication – the best and most accurate ones possible, which in a bad situation will be your only life saver.

There is a long chapter in the Destination Guide that outlines the means of communication, which ones are necessary, and which ones are best for each situation (yes, there is a difference that can save your life!).

It also outlines which kinds are best in Australia, northern Australia and Cape York – and which service providers there are and which ones are the best value (I have tested them over the years and some end up many times the price compared to others due to hidden costs).

You can work out which one is the best for you because you also want to use it on your other travels (probably in other parts of Australia or in the world) in the future.

You will be surprised just how affordable the emergency communications are nowadays – not thousands of dollars like it used to be – if you can afford a Cape York trip – you can afford them :-)

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CLIMATE AND THE BEST TIME TO VISIT CAPE YORK

While most people are used to four seasons, in the tropical northern Australia we don’t have spring, summer, autumn and winter. We only have two distinctive seasons – the wet and the dry. They coincide with other parts of the world in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Northern Hemisphere</th>
<th>Southern Hemisphere</th>
<th>Northern Australia</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Europe, the US)</td>
<td>(southern Australia, NZ)</td>
<td>(Cape York)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter</td>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>The Wet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>Winter</td>
<td>The Dry</td>
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While in many parts of the world, including the southernmost parts of Australia, summer is more comfortable than winter, in northern Australia it is the opposite. The best season is the Dry – when it is winter in other parts of Australia.

THE CLIMATE

The Dry Season (roughly May to November)

The temperatures are in the nice 20s or 30s (Celcius), the skies are clear, days are sunny but not too hot, and rains are (UPDATE used to be!) very rare, however in the recent years they have increased somewhat (in some places they have actually increased a lot but not quite that much on Cape York).

The Wet Season (roughly November to May)

The wet season on the other hand brings a whole lot more rain, a lot more humidity, and a lot more uncomfortable temperatures. There are two distinct stages in The Wet, with totally different weather patterns.

The Early Wet – The Build-up (roughly November to January)

The early wet is also called the Troppo Season, because people go crazy from the heat. It starts with rising temperatures that get quite unbearable.

Once it’s hot enough the days start with a lot of sun and scorching temperatures, which by the lunch time have built to the point where the heat starts building tropical storm clouds that grow thick upwards.

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In these clouds, massive thunderstorms build. Often by midday or early afternoon these clouds produce severe electrical storms.

Lightening can last for hours and the rain that follows can last for the rest of the day. But this is still not really the rainy season. It’s the ‘scattered showers’ or ‘storm season’ – the build-up to the real rains.

The Late, “Proper” Wet – Monsoonal Rains (roughly January to May)

Then, quite suddenly, the monsoonal rains (that move seasonally between us and the south eastern Asia), arrive.

These are the kind of all-day-grey-skies rains with no storm activity. Once they arrive, quite soon they cool the temperatures down, which stops the thunderstorms from building.

This part of the Wet season is NOT hot, but it is very WET. Most days the skies are grey and it rains right from the morning, and it rains a lot.

Everything gets wet, mould starts growing, and with constant rains and the lack of sun, the temperatures are so cool that during this part of the Wet, we tend to wear jumpers (oh - and we love this break from the heat! ;-) )

Average Temperatures and Rainfall

Cairns and Around

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<tr>
<th>Temp (°C)</th>
<th>Jan</th>
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<td>42</td>
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Cooktown

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Lockhart River

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Tropical Cyclones (roughly November to May)

Both the early and the late, (but more so the late) Wet Season is also the season for tropical cyclones (also called hurricanes and typhoons in the Northern Hemisphere).

We may have cool temperatures from monsoonal rains here on the peninsula, but out on the ocean the air and the waters are hot - the combination that creates tropical cyclones.

Due to the rotation of the Earth, tropical cyclones mainly move from east to west, so most of our cyclones come from the waters of the Coral Sea (and they are the strongest ones).

Occasionally a cyclone can take a different path, so occasionally we may get a cyclone that has formed in the waters north of Australia, and may approach the Cape York Peninsula from the west, from the waters of Gulf Savannah (but they are usually weaker ones).

A tropical cyclone is a powerful wind system that can seriously threaten life and damage property.

When a cyclone first hits the coast it leaves behind destruction.

Once it moves further inland the winds die off because they don’t get the fuel from the warm ocean waters anymore.

The system turns into what is called a tropical low and it always brings a lot of rain to the area it passes through.

What Should You Do as a Traveller

The roads in Cape York are most often closed this time of the year due to the wet season.

So most people up in Cape York this time of the year are the locals (and people who may work in the mines or elsewhere and fly in and out).

Flying is just about the only way to get up here during this season, and you as a traveller are not likely to find yourself in Cape York this time of the year.

If you do find yourself here - or elsewhere in the cyclone area such as along the coast of north eastern Queensland (also the Top End of Northern Territory or the north western coast of Western Australia), keep checking the BOM website for any cyclones.

They turn up quickly, so it’s worth having a look every day, because if you are on a travelling foot, you may want to know about it in a good time (you might need more time than the locals who have their cyclone plans worked out over the years).

If you see one, think ahead in case you do have to evacuate. Where will you go, how will you go, what time it takes - just plan a bit.

If it hits, it usually hits within a week from when it first appeared on the BOM map.

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If a cyclone does get closer and is a likely threat, it also gets out on the news, so listen to the radio and check the news on TV or internet, whatever is accessible for you.

If a cyclone starts being a threat and you are in the area, you get cyclone warnings through TV and radio. Now you should really listen carefully to all the information and advice about what to do.

It is usually good enough to keep yourself in a solid, preferably concrete or brick building, in a room with no windows (bathroom), and - before the cyclone - stock up food, because shops maybe closed for many days after the cyclone.

Also be aware that you may be without power for a period of time after the cyclone, so depending on your needs, but at least – you should stock up some torch batteries and drinking water, and get some cash out because ATMs may not work for a while.

That’s if you are in a building. I presume you are not camping around this time of the year due to the rains, but if you are, of course you have to find a shelter. Try and get into a motel room and try to get your vehicle parked under a cover.

If you are travelling in a caravan and you are not getting it garaged or under a cover, you may want to leave the area while you still can.

WHEN TO GO TO CAPE YORK

Apart from when you get time off from work, there are two main factors to consider when making the decision when to go to Cape York – the climate and the crowds (UPDATE - there are actually more factors and they are in the Destination Guide).

The Climate

The Late Wet (roughly December to May)

And there is one main thing with it. During the late wet, the roads to and in Cape York can be CLOSED due to floods. So you might technically not be able to travel to and within the peninsula during that time of the year - period.

I strongly recommend you to not to plan your trip earlier than for May, or even early June if you want to be sure.

The exact time of the opening of the peninsula after a wet season is never possible to predict!

Some years you might get away earlier, others not – but it can make it difficult to make definite plans for a trip before early June.
And there is one important difference between the months of April and May.

**April is still cyclone season** – and we have had some very strong cyclones right until late April.

**Something happens when May starts - and the cyclones completely disappear** (or so they have so far - unless it, too, changes one day!).

Because a cyclone can happen quickly enough to close the only road up to the Tip within a week – **May is a better month than April** (although as said above, May is also not completely safe, still).

It would be a pity if you planned to spend your annual leave to do your Cape York trip, and ended up not being able to do it because the roads didn’t open!

**If you make a plan for this time of the year – make a flexible one - with a Plan B in case that Cape York fails.**

**To monitor the roads closer this time of the year** - Destination Guide has a list of all the places where to check road openings (and they are local sources, not JUST the RACQ website).

I also include road openings in the newsletters this time of the year. If you’re reading this book, you should have already subscribed to them (if not you can do it [here](#)).

**The Early Dry (roughly May to June)**

Once the Dry Season starts and the roads have had a chance to dry, they open one by one, wherever the conditions are good enough. So in the early dry it might be that the main road is passable, but the smaller back tracks are still closed.

**Water levels are up in the creeks and rivers, so crossing them is more challenging than in the Late Dry.** The good thing is that the nature is still green and lush, and the wildlife is more active and easier to spot.

**The Height of the Dry (roughly July to August)**

Weather-wise, July-August is the best time to travel on the peninsula. The weather is dry, sunny and relatively cool, and the water in the creek crossings is lower than it was during the Early Dry.

It is easier to cross the creeks although the waters are still higher than they will be in the Late Dry Season.

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The Late Dry (roughly September to November)

In the Late Dry, temperatures start to rise gradually. From September through October to November, it gradually gets hotter and hotter, which makes travelling more uncomfortable, particularly when it is a camping trip.

You can keep cool day time by air conditioning in your vehicle or having dips in swimming holes, but sleeping in the tent night time becomes particularly uncomfortable.

The Early Wet (roughly November to December/January)

By now the temperatures have risen to the point where thunderstorms start building. The roads are still open but you start getting storms in the afternoons. They are spectacular but could also be scary if you happen to be in the middle of it camping in the tent.

It starts gradually raining more and more, and some time around December / January but that can vary, roads start becoming impassable and some get closed for the Wet Season.

The Crowds

Many of us don’t like crowds on a Cape York holiday, but some of us dislike them even more than others. Cape York is a wilderness experience and crowds don’t really belong here.

Then again if you’re travelling during the season when there are a lot of people, it can be safer because should you get stuck or break down, the help is closer.

There are two main factors that affect the crowds in Cape York, and time-wise they overlap each other.

The first is the height of the Dry Season (roughly June – August), when everyone wants to come up here because of the most comfortable weather.

The second is the winter school holidays, which start in the late June and end in the mid or late July.

It does top the already crowded camping grounds up with even more people, and is the time to avoid most, if you don’t like sharing your wilderness experience with lots of other people.

The crowds are smaller during the Early Dry when you see a smaller amount of more adventurous people; and in the Late Dry when you see some people who are happy to put up with the hotter weather in order to avoid crowds.
### Summary – When to Go

#### April - May
- **Weather:** Some years the roads are still closed. If they are open, it is still very wet; **April is still cyclone season** meaning the Cape can close on a short notice; but even in May the water levels are still up in the creeks/rivers and crossing them is more challenging.
- **Crowds:** If the roads are open, there are not many travellers yet, only a smaller amount of more adventurous ones. **If you are planning a trip for these months, your plan should be flexible with extra time, or you should have a Plan B in case the roads close!**

#### June
- **Weather:** All the main roads are usually open by early June, unless it has been an extremely bad Wet Season or there was an exceptionally late cyclone. But even if the weather is dry, the creek and river waters can still be up because it's still early after the Wet Season.
- **Crowds:** By early June, a lot more people start arriving. By mid June, the most crowded time has started, and by the end of the month, the school holidays start, creating the peak time of the year.

#### July - August
- **Weather:** The dry season has usually really kicked in by now, and July is the coolest month, and therefore for most people, the most comfortable month to travel.
- **Crowds:** July is still the most crowded time of the year (peak while it's still school holidays), but August starts dropping.

#### September - October
- **Weather:** Temperatures are gradually rising, and getting gradually more uncomfortable for a camping trip, but it is still sunny and dry – no storms or showers.
- **Crowds:** The big traveller numbers have dropped down. There is still a small peak during the September / October school holidays, but nothing like in June / July, and after that the high season is officially over.

#### November
- **Weather:** The temperatures are now so hot that thunderstorms can build in the afternoons. The scattered but heavy showers they bring make some roads soggy.
- **Crowds:** There are not many travellers left by now. You can enjoy the wilderness without crowds, and on some more remote tracks you are likely not to see a person.

#### December
- **Weather:** There are more and more thunderstorms. In some years, the real wet season (The “late wet” = monsoonal rains) kicks in in December, which means the roads can close.
- **Crowds:** There are almost no travellers that are still around. And you should get out of here too, because the roads can close any time now.
HOW MUCH TIME SHOULD YOU TAKE?

How Quickly You Can Go

The distance between Cairns and the tip of Cape York is roughly **1000km** (actually 1027 and 1150 depending on which way you take). That distance can normally be driven in one long day, **but that is a lot more difficult on Cape York**.

Distances mean little in Cape York when counting the travel time. The roads are often corrugated, can be muddy and sometimes extremely slippery; and you may have to drive very slowly in some parts just to get through if the conditions are bad.

*It is the road conditions that determine the travelling time in Cape York, much more than the distances alone.*

How Quickly You Want to Go

The other question is **in what pace you like to travel**. People are so different when it comes to that. Some people have no patience to camp in the same spot for more than one night. Others don't enjoy moving on every day and enjoy staying in each place longer.

**Also, how much in a day do you like to drive?** The shorter the time you plan for your trip the more of each day you spend behind the wheel. But is it enjoyable? Is it what you want your trip to be all about?

Personally I am a really slow goer. I can spend weeks in places like Iron Range and the Old Telegraph Track. And months in places like Weipa, to discover everything in and around it in detail.

But I know, most people don't have that kind of time, and this is where the main question comes in – **how much time do you actually get off work.**

I really hope that you get four weeks, and use them all for your Cape York trip.

If you really want to do Cape York properly and enjoy your experience without needing to rush, this is the time you need. But I know that a lot of people don't get that much time.

If you have **two weeks**, you still get to go all the way up to the tip, do the Old Telegraph Track, and visit Weipa, Lockhart River and Iron Range National Park. But you are watching your time and moving on quite quickly; and you would be hard pressed to get much more than the above places into your trip (Actually, what you get in is difficult to estimate because it depends on how well you use your time and whether you want to relax or get in as much as possible).

**Shorter than two weeks**, I don't recommend. You can make your way up to the tip and back in a week, but you would not see much except the main road through your windscreen. You
would spend your days mostly behind the wheel, racing through it (and still pay the same expensive fuel price that you'd pay if you took your time to see more).

If that's how little time you have got, it may be worth putting your plans on hold and do it when you have more time.

GETTING HERE

Visa
If you are an overseas traveller (except from New Zealand), you will need a visa to enter Australia. You can apply and pay for it online on DIMIA website.

Flying
Most Australians would pack their 4WD and drive to Cape York, but overseas visitors will have to fly. Cairns has an international airport, however, most often it is cheaper to take an international flight to Brisbane (Sydney, Melbourne..) and then a domestic flight from there to Cairns than to fly to Cairns directly.

You can of course use any airline for your international flight, but within Australia, you can get to Cairns by Qantas 13 13 13; Jetstar 13 15 38 (+61 3 9092 6500 from overseas); or Virgin Blue 13 67 89 (+61 7 3295 2296 from overseas). The latter two are budget options. Booking on the internet is free while over the phone fees may apply.

Train
Train is quite a comfortable option which, as opposed to flying, enables you to see the countryside. The only train trip to Cairns comes from the south, from Brisbane. The most comfortable train is the Tilt Train 1300 131 722. All other Queensland trains are found on Queensland Rail website.

Bus
Long distance buses are a common means of transport for travellers in Australia. They are cheaper than planes and trains, but far less comfortable. You are not even allowed to eat or drink on-board and overnight trips mean you will be sleeping in your seat. You can also get arrival/departure times in the middle of the night which is not fun. This is how long the trips are: Brisbane – Cairns: 29 hrs; Sydney – Cairns: 46 – 47 hrs; Darwin – Cairns (via Townsville): 61 hrs. There used to be two companies, which now have joined into one – Greyhound: 1800 661 8747.

Driving
Driving is by far the best option, as it is flexible and you can stop when and where you choose along the way and stay where you want. If you can take your time, it's a great way to extend
GETTING AROUND

Public Transport?
Although there are some historical railways in Cape York, you cannot travel the peninsula by train. The only places you get to by train are just south of the peninsula, such as Kuranda, Mareeba, Dimbulah, Almaden and Chillagoe. Although long distance buses take you up along the eastern coast of Australia and around the rest of Queensland, you cannot travel Cape York by Greyhound. Your only realistic options are self driving or a tour. And of course – flying, which is the only way to get here during the Wet Season (apart from the barge).

Tours
There are several tours available, starting from Cairns, Port Douglas and other places just south of Cape York. But I really don't recommend you to take a tour, unless you are seriously out of time, happy to pay a lot of money, and happy with seeing very little in a short time. It's so much more fun to do it yourself, including all the challenging drives.

I really cannot see a good excuse why you couldn't do it yourself. Even if you haven't got a four wheel drive – renting one is cheaper than a tour, and buying one doesn't have to cost you an arm and a leg. I did my first Cape York trip in a $3,500 vehicle – which got through everything perfectly. All you need is to make sure it is mechanically sound before you leave.

If you are wondering about your driving skills, let me tell you that the night before I left for my first, solo trip to Cape York, I was shown how to operate a 4WD for the first time in my life. And I did at least half of the Old Telegraph Track on my own before I met some other people and joined in with them. The thing about Cape York is that in a lot of places, four wheel driving is not difficult, and you are not forced into hard four wheel driving. There are different bypass roads around all the hard bits, including the Old Telegraph Track, and parts of it (all detail in the full Destination Guide). If I could do it, you can!

Self Driving – 2WD or 4WD?
I probably shouldn’t say that, but technically you can get to the Tip of Cape York and back in a 2WD. But despite the fact, it is NOT smart to do so.

For the first thing, you'd wreck your 2WD on corrugations – they are not made for those roads. It would also mean paying almost the same money for the fuel (and it’s not cheap up here!), and missing out all the fun. The best parts of Cape York are the adventurous four wheel drive tracks and other places that are off the main roads.
There are some people who don’t care and only want to drive the main roads up and down to have been to the northernmost point of Australia. But they don’t know what they are missing out – Cape York is so much more than just the Tip of Australia!

I really don’t recommend you to do Cape York without a four wheel drive, and not only that – a proper 4WD – with low range gear and high clearance.

**Buying a Four Wheel Drive in Cairns**

A lot of travellers buy and sell vehicles in Cairns (and other Australian cities), so buying one is not difficult and doesn't need to be an expensive option. Like I said just before, my first vehicle (an old Holden Jackaroo) that I took up to Cape York, and that did the trip perfectly fine, costed me $3,500 (a few years later we even tried a $2,000 Pajero and it did all the hardest 4WD tracks). So you don’t need a $50,000 dollar car to do Cape York. Of course, you have to know how to check the mechanics or take it to a car mechanic to have a look at it, like with any other vehicle you buy. There are plenty of options buying and selling travel vehicles in Cairns, and you can also check websites like Gumtree and buy-sell groups on Facebook.

**Renting a Vehicle**

If you rent a vehicle, do rent a four wheel drive, and a proper four wheel drive. Another thing to do is to check if they have restrictions on the roads that you are allowed to do. You may not be allowed to do the Old Telegraph Track, Frenchman’s Road, CREB Track and all the other fun tracks. If you still do them and something happens, you will be paying dearly, so it is worth picking the right company. All the companies that allow you to do the fun tracks, and which ones (as they vary between the companies) – are now in the Destination Guide.

**Caravans and Camper Trailers**

I have met people who have pulled their caravan all the way up to the Tip and back (Update 2017 - that sentence was written so many years ago!). They used to be not many at all, but nowadays they are on the increase. As was said about the two wheel drives above, this means you won’t get to do the off-road stuff (unless, obviously, you put some time and effort into planning around it. FREE places to store your van are in the Destination Guide). And - you will shake your van on corrugations. If you do want to bring a bed along, look into an off road one, or even better a trailer. **UPDATE 2018 – there is now a Caravan Guide found inside the full Destination Cape York :-(** **UPDATE 2019 – there is now a Trailer Guide, too :-(**

**Flying – Wet Season**

Flying is not a common way to do Cape York, but if you don’t care about the drives, haven’t got a 4WD and just want to be to the Tip or any other place, flying is actually not a bad way to do it. It is often the only way, apart from the boat, to get around during the Wet Season.

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WHERE TO STAY

You can nowadays do a Cape York trip relying on resorts, hotels and motel-type accommodation.

There are that type of accommodation in all the bigger towns south of, as well as in many places on Cape York.

All the accommodation is listed in full detail in the Destination Guide.

However (it is a bit the same thing like not having a proper four wheel drive –) there are places you will miss out if you want to rely on accommodation alone - and don’t want to do any camping at all.

There is no other way than camping if you want to stay in areas like Cape Melville and many more. There is no accommodation in places like Port Stewart, Captain Billy Landing, Ussher Point or Vrilya Point (update 2015 closure details updated in the full Destination Guide).

And most importantly, there is no accommodation along the Old Telegraph Track while there are some fantastic camping spots.

You would miss out the whole track if you needed to rush up along the Bypass Roads just to get to the NPA in time to check in to your room.

Even if you are the type of person who likes to rely on accommodation, it would be a good idea to mix in a few camping nights.

The majority of Cape York travellers rely fully on bush camping, and this is by far the best way to do a Cape York trip.

And guess what… there are plenty of FREE camping spots in Cape York, which save you a lot of money!!!

They save you at least $30 per night compared to what you’d pay at camping grounds!

All the FREE camping spots are listed in the Destination Guide.

These spots are not only FREE – most of them are also very, very nice :-)

They are also local knowledge and locally explained, not like the ones out there in sources like Wikicamps and similar (Camps Australia Wide also incorrectly lists some camping sites, despite my attempts to tell them the truth).

Those type of sources have no idea of local knowledge or the ever changing scene with new land ownerships and Native Title laws on Cape York, which are constantly updated in the Destination Guide.

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THINGS TO DO

Four Wheel Driving

Four wheel driving is by far the most popular activity in Cape York. And I am not talking to really experienced four wheel drivers but the average travellers. Of course there are harder four wheel drives in Australia, enjoyed by real 4WD enthusiasts.

But why Cape York is so popular as a four wheel drive destination is that anyone of us can do it! You just take it to your level. If you are less experienced, you can take different bypass roads to all the tracks that are too challenging for you, and only do the bits that suit you.

You can venture into the Old Telegraph Track even if you have never done four wheel driving before (and use common sense, of course!), because if you come to a crossing that is too hard, you can always turn back and take some bypass track. I did it myself, on my own, and I am a girl, so it cannot be that hard!

Fishing

The second most popular activity is fishing. Australians love to fish and fishing in northern Australia is particularly popular because the tropical fish we have up here is BIG!

Bring your gear and bring strong gear – I have seen southerners’ fishing lines break one after another, because they are simply not made for such big fish.

You can catch barramundi both in the salt and fresh water. You can catch mangrove jack, black jewfish, trevally, golden snapper and barramundi in rivers.

In the river mouths, there are giant trevally (GT), barracuda, thread-fin salmon, black jewfish, queenfish, whiting, flathead and grunter.

Or join a tour or take a boat out to the coral reef and catch sweetlip, emperor, snapper, red bass, jewfish, golden snapper and coral trout.

Swimming and Snorkelling

The third most common activity is getting yourself into the water, because by most people’s standards, Cape York is a very hot place!

There are so many good rainforest waterfalls and swimming holes where to have a very nice cool dip. And you will know about them all (and what about crocodiles?!) from the Destination Guide (UPDATE 2015 there is now even a chapter where you can pick free, legal camping spots with swimming holes and do your trip with these only :-)

Snorkelling is also popular - the reef is close to the mainland up here (so the trips are better value), and the reef is also known to be healthier here than down south. If you are not to return to the area, it is worth taking a tour while up here, to discover the beautiful coral reef ecosystem (all tours detailed with prices and contact details in the Destination Guide).

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Bushwalking

Bushwalking is another popular activity in Australia. While Cape York is not exactly known as some of the country’s best places for bushwalking, there are a few walks that are great, and most of them are in the southern parts of the peninsula or just south of it.

Again, they are listed in more detail in the Destination Guide.

When bushwalking, remember to bring enough water, use sunscreen and wear a hat and clothes that protect you from the sun. And it is not a bad idea to wear hiking boots and long pants for protection from snakes.

Wildlife and Bird Watching

Cape York is well known for its bird and animal species that are found nowhere else in Australia, but instead in Papua New Guinea.

Many travellers hope to see palm cockatoos, eclectus parrots, striped possums, cuscus and green tree pythons. Other birds and animals that have a little larger range but are still only found in north Queensland, include sunbirds, cassowaries, metallic starlings, imperial pigeons, spectacled flying foxes, tree kangaroos and amethystine pythons – the largest snake in Australia.

Other popular ones that are only found in the northern Australia include blue winged kookaburras, frill necked lizards, and both of Australia’s two species of crocodiles. Destination Guide has in-depth information about where to see each of the most popular and unique Cape York birds and animals.

Hunting

There are a lot of feral pigs in Cape York, and pig hunting is popular amongst some people. Because most of the peninsula is either national park, private property of indigenous land, you need a permission to go hunting.

Some property owners might have nothing against getting rid of pigs but you have to ask them. Some stations even have hunting safari tours. Contact details are all in the Destination Guide.

Fossicking and Metal Detecting

Australia is well known as a country of mining, precious gemstones and minerals. While there are a few places in Cape York where you can try your luck, the better places are actually just south of Cape York. You can do gold panning in many places (outback creeks are good for it).

Metal detecting is a popular activity in Australia, and yes you can still find gold nuggets that may make you rich.

However bear in mind that metal detecting is banned in many places. Always obey the signs or you can risk heavy fines. The bans on Cape York are mentioned in the Destination Guide.
WHAT DOES IT COST?

If you have read all the previous chapters and made your mind up about
What time of the year to go and how much time to spend on your trip;
How to get here and by what means to get around;
What kind of accommodation to use;
What activities are you interested in;
What do you want to buy, and that includes food as well as everything else.

... - you are ready to count a rough budget for your trip.

The most crucial things when it comes to the budget are of course the way to get here, the
means by which to get around, and accommodation.

And they are all interconnected. If you are living in Australia, you are most likely to bring your
own 4WD, drive to Cape York, get around by your own vehicle and also use it for
accommodation.

And this is, by far, the cheapest option.

If you are from overseas, obviously you have to fly to Australia first, and then it is up to you
whether you want to rent or buy a 4WD, or whether you want to take a tour, or fly to Cape
York.

One main thing that will affect your budget is that if you rent or buy a vehicle, you can camp
and you don’t have to pay for expensive accommodation.

It will also save you money because you don’t have to eat out – you can cook your own meals
in your camper or on a camp fire or gas stove.

So having the opportunity to camp and make your own meals is the single best money saver
on a Cape York trip (and obviously other similar trips in Australia).

Flying to different places in Cape York means you have to stay in hotels. And they are not
cheap compared to camping.

If you take a tour, you will pay dearly too. The trip is organised for you, the accommodation
and all is included, but you pay for it, and it is not cheap.

And finally you have to think about what you want to do and what you want to buy. A simple
snorkelling trip to the Great Barrier Reef for example will cost you about $200.
Zoo parks and larger museums can cost about $30-50. Other, smaller ones are of course cheaper and can even be free.

Bushwalking and wildlife watching are cheap activities, but if you want to go kayaking or canoeing, it means renting gear, and if you want to go fishing off the shore, it means renting a boat or joining a tour unless you have your own boat (which might not be worth dragging up to the Cape – full detail on boat hire in different places is in the Destination Guide).

The rest of it is pure maths. Try to think how much you spend on accommodation, fuel, possible rental vehicle, food, activities and possibly souvenirs and other more unpredictable purchases per day.

Then multiply it by the amount of days that you are planning to be on the road.

You can, at this stage, only get a very rough number because:

Fuel prices change by month (and tend to go up after disasters such as floods and cyclones anywhere in Queensland).

Rental vehicle costs vary between businesses and also the towns you rent them from.

What your accommodation costs depends on what time of the year you travel and it also varies greatly between places (Destination Guide has all prices in detail and updated yearly).

Other things are more predictable:

Cape York is far away from “civilisation”, and there are high costs associated with transporting supplies up here. That means, things are NOT cheap to buy.

Food is relatively expensive in small country grocery shops (as storing also becomes expensive with little space and smaller amounts of buyers than in the south).

If you are on a tight budget you could stock up your food in large supermarkets if you camp and cook your own meals.

Fuel will only get more expensive the further north in Cape York you get. Every year is different, but the price almost doubles once up the top.

And this is where many travellers stuff it up when planning their budget.

If you are on a camping trip and don’t have to pay for accommodation or a rental vehicle, fuel is your main cost.

All in all, it is easy to sit comfortably in an air conditioned room at your desk and count the costs.. it will be a different story on the trip.

If you camp at free camping spots (listed in the Destination Guide) and bath in waterholes, you will sometimes want to make an exception to use power and shower.

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As you plan your trip, remember that no matter how many packets of noodles and tins of tuna you think you can eat, there will be times when you want a change and go to a restaurant. And there will be other unpredictable costs – your vehicle may break down and you may have to buy car parts or something else you did not predict. So, **don’t make your budget too tight**. Make sure you have more money than what your budget requires. Almost any trip will finally turn out more expensive than initially planned.

**OTHER THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW**

**Fuel Availability**
There are enough fuel stations that you should not run out. There is a map with fuel stations and the distances between them in the Destination Guide.

**Banking Facilities**
Yes, there are some ATMs and EFPTOS facilities in Cape York, even though of course not everywhere. Again, the details and a map are in the Destination Guide.

**Aboriginal Land Alcohol Restrictions and Entry Permits**
There are **alcohol restrictions in the Aboriginal communities**, and if you carry alcohol, you have to know what they are and where they apply.

The penalties are super heavy at $75,000 fine, 18 months imprisonment and confiscation of vehicle.

The limits vary between communities. The restrictions apply even outside the communities, and **there are tricky bits, yet you are responsible**.

Full details about all the places are outlined in the Destination Guide.

Also, in some communities you have to apply for **permits to camp and even enter the land**.

Again, the full detail is in the Destination Guide.
PART III: THE GUIDE

This part is the main and the longest part of the complete Cape York Destination Guide, which has all the information you will need about each place in Cape York: what there is to see and do, how to get there and get around, banking facilities, internet access, tourist information centres and all the rest plus comprehensive lists of accommodation, places to eat, tour operators, all with full contact details, opening hours, and prices updated yearly.

The part of the book that takes 10 pages here in this Pocket Guide, takes about 220 pages in the full Destination Guide.

It is not only great in an early planning stage, but also later in the planning, and definitely on your trip.

But for now, in this pocket guide, I kept it short and simple.

I will give you an idea about each place, which will basically help you to make your mind up about whether you want to include the place into your trip or not.

Cairns

Cairns is the largest place in the area, and while it is actually just south of Cape York rather than on the actual peninsula, you are most likely to visit it on your trip whether you fly here or drive.

It is a good place to stock up your groceries and get the final bits of your travel gear if anything is still missing or has gone lost on the trip here. There are plenty of cheap supermarkets and good camping shops.

But Cairns is also worth a few days discovering if you have the time. It is a beautiful city surrounded by green rainforest-covered mountains.

Although its museum scene is not plentiful, there is so much to see and do in the town as well as outside. There are some good museums, art galleries, an aquarium, zoo parks, markets, and lots of good shopping and restaurants, as well as many walks and places to discover nature and wildlife.

There are a lot of different kinds of accommodation like apartments, hotels, motels, backpacker hostels, bed and breakfasts – anything you can ask for.

And there are a lot of different tour operators – to the Great Barrier Reef as well as Daintree Rainforests, Atherton Tablelands and Cape York.

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THE COASTAL WAY TO MUSGRAVE

Cairns to Port Douglas

The coastal way between Cairns and Port Douglas is one of the most beautiful roads in the area, and as opposed to the real Cape York roads, it is an easy, but busy drive.

It first passes the Cairns Northern Beaches before it turns into a scenic coastal drive with a few good lookout points and finally comes to a turnoff to Port Douglas.

There are a few attractions along the road, and unless you want to visit them or stay in some more popular places such as Palm Cove, the road should not take you a long time (Destination Guide lists how long different bits take).

Port Douglas

Port Douglas is a touristy town, which just like Cairns, is not on the real Cape York Peninsula but just south of it.

On your way up or down you will pass by it, and it’s worth knowing what's there.

It's a destination very different from Cape York, it's really a destination on its own for a lot of tourists from overseas as well as the rest of Australia.

As a result it is a fairly lively place, but is still cute and colourful.

Like Cairns, it doesn't have many museums, but the shopping and restaurant scene is excellent.

And despite all the fancy restaurants, Port Douglas still manages to keep its small town feeling.

It also has a huge amount of tour operators, including the ones that take you to the Great Barrier Reef.

Cairns and Port Douglas are known as the best places in Australia for the GBR trips, so you may want to plan an extra day for it.

You will see the touristic things fairly quickly, but you can spend a lot longer to relax, fish and enjoy the shopping and restaurants.

There is a lot of expensive, luxury accommodation, but there are also some cheaper options (all in the Destination Guide).
Mossman and Mossman Gorge

Just north of Port Douglas is Mossman – a much less commercialised town, which is not right on the coast, but surrounded by tropical rainforest.

It used to be a real country town, but is now starting to get a little fancy.

There is not much in the town especially for travellers, but one thing you may want to do is the famous Mossman Gorge in the rainforest just outside.

Daintree

North of Mossman, the drive goes through some sugar cane country past small coastal communities like Newell and Wonga Beach, to the crossroad where you can turn left to Daintree Village or right to Daintree River.

Daintree Village is a small township in the rainforest, a cute little place, even though it’s often raining. There are not many things to do in town, except some tour operators that can take you to croc watching tours on Daintree River.

But, there are others that do it from the river crossing too (all are listed in the Destination Guide with full detail on the tours, and prices updated yearly).

CREB Track

CREB Track starts just north of Daintree Village and goes all the way to the northern end of Bloomfield Road near Wujal Wujal and Ayton.

It is an adventurous four wheel drive track, and it can be done as an alternative instead of Bloomfield Road.

It is slower going, crosses some creeks and rivers, and is steep.

It is also quite remote and you need to be totally self-sufficient.

You need a proper 4WD vehicle with low range gear and high clearance.

Full info in the Destination Guide.
Daintree River to Cape Tribulation

Back in the Daintree Village, Douglas Street takes you back to the Daintree Road where you can turn left towards the Daintree River Ferry Crossing to continue your trip up north through Cape Tribulation.

Not long before the Ferry crossing there is another lot of tour operators offering different kinds of Daintree River wildlife and crocodile tours (listed with prices in the Destination Guide).

After you have crossed the river on a ferry, you come to a section of Daintree National Park that contains some beautiful lush tropical rainforest. Cape Tribulation is quite heavily commercialised with lots of accommodation and other tourism infrastructure.

It is still enjoyable, there are a few rainforest boardwalks, the beach is nice, and tour operators abound. The only thing is – rainforests mean just that – it is often raining.

Cape Tribulation to Cooktown

Just north of Cape Tribulation is the start of the coastal road to Cooktown. It is known as the more challenging road than the inland road, which I will explain below, in the “inland road” section.

The coastal road comes in two different sections. The northern half of it is level and mostly sealed, while the southern half – the so-called Bloomfield Road – is unsealed, steep in places, and crosses a few creeks.

It is always said that this is strictly a four wheel drive road, which makes you think that it is a slow 4WD track like the Old Telegraph Track, CREB Track and similar, but it is not the case. Most of us can drive through it without even using four wheel drive gears. The main reason why you really need a four wheel drive vehicle is that you need some clearance, particularly at the creek crossings.

Bloomfield Road ends near “the Historical Town of Bloomfield” and the Aboriginal Community of Wujal Wujal.

After that you have another 30km to Cooktown along the road from Bloomfield to Rossville, but the road is sealed. It is nice and hilly, and goes past Cedar Bay National Park, the small rainforest village Rossville, and Helenvale – home of the famous Lions Den Hotel.

Not long after Lions Den you come to Mulligan Highway – and join the inland road to Cooktown.

You pass by Black Mountain National Park, the turnoff to Archer Point (great coastal views and great fishing), Annan River with its old and new bridge, and Keatings Lagoon Conservation Park (water birds), before you come to Cooktown.

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Cooktown

**Cooktown** is a great town to visit. It is full of interesting history, has some great walks and views over the blue ocean, nice botanical gardens, great historical buildings along the main street, an interesting old cemetery, good fishing and one of the best museums in Australia.

North of the town is the Aboriginal Community of **Hopevale**, where you can get a permit to visit the famous **Coloured Sands** and the beautiful white-sand **Elim Beach** (full detail in the [Destination Guide](#)).

Lakefield National Park

West of Cooktown is **Lakefield National Park**, and you can drive through it on your way from Cooktown up towards the tip of Cape York.

It is a huge national park, which is closed during the Wet Season.

It does not contain rainforests like Daintree – it is covered in wetlands and grasslands instead. It is great for croc and bird watching, particularly close to the Wet season.

There is not much bushwalking, but there are a few interesting historical homesteads, some great camping grounds, and some good fishing.

It is one of the national parks where fishing is allowed (others are also mentioned in the [Destination Guide](#)). Locals like to go fishing further north, in the more remote **Cape Melville**.

Both Lakefield and Cape Melville are remote and you have to be totally self sufficient, meaning carry all the food and water. And, watch out for crocodiles.

While everyone likes Daintree because of its tropical rainforests, parks like Lakefield may seem less amazing at the first look.

It's well worth a stay, but even if you don't want to camp, you can drive through this national park in a day and still stop in places along the road to get a good glimpse of it.

Starting from Cooktown, you can drive the **Battle Camp Road** west to the Old Laura Homestead, and then the Lakefield road north to **Musgrave**.
THE INLAND WAY TO MUSGRAVE

The inland road between Cairns and Musgrave takes you past Kuranda, Mareeba, Mt Molloy, Mt Carbine, Lakeland, and Laura.

It is much drier than the coastal road, and as opposed to the coastal wet tropical rainforests, you are driving in the dry outback environment.

The only exception is Kuranda, and the road between Cairns and Kuranda, where you cross the Great Dividing Range driving through lush tropical rainforests.

Kuranda

**Kuranda** is a cute rainforest village, mostly known for its markets, which are a bit touristy but colourful. Nowadays there are also a few wildlife parks; and there are a few nice walking trails where you can discover the local tropical rainforest.

Being a touristy place, the village has quite a few nice shops and restaurants, but you can also do some rainforest walks and visit the beautiful Barron Falls.

North of Kuranda is the Black Mountain Road – known as a ‘four wheel drive track’ that connects Kuranda to Julatten.

However it is an easy one and more like Bloomfield Road than CREB Track. But like on the Bloomfield Road, you do need some clearance (detail in the Destination Guide).

You don’t need to do this 50km road to get up to Cape York, but it is an alternative.

Mareeba

The next town inland from Kuranda is **Mareeba**. It is far less touristy than Kuranda, but is also starting to get more and more things to do for travellers.

Nowadays there is an interesting museum, and outside the town are some great wetlands, waterfalls and gorges.
Mareeba – Dimbulah Road

This is not the road up towards the tip of Cape York, but can be done as a side trip inland from Mareeba.

There are some cute small outback townships along this road, such as Tabacum, Mutchilba and Dimbulah.

Tabacum and Mutchilba are small one-shop communities while Dimbulah is a bit bigger, and it is the gateway to the historical Hodgkinson Goldfields – some of the largest goldfields back in the day, and the scene of the Mount Mulligan mining disaster.

You can also drive through to the PDR, all detail in the Destination Guide.

Burke Developmental Road

After Dimbulah the road changes name to Burke Developmental Road and continues through more small communities such as Petford, Lappa, Almaden and Chillagoe, all the way to Normanton and Karumba in the Gulf Savannah – on the western side of the Cape York Peninsula.

It is mostly unsealed, and is a remote road for most of its length. There is no fuel for 560km between Chillagoe and Normanton, and you have to be totally self sufficient.

West of Chillagoe is Wrotham Park – where some tracks go to Palmer River Goldfields.

However, this is not the only, and not the best road to Palmer River – there are better ones from the main road up to Cape York, and they are all in the full detail in the Destination Guide.

Mareeba to Musgrave

Back in Mareeba, the road north towards the tip of Cape York goes past Lake Mitchell and through small townships Mt Molloy and Mt Carbine to Palmer River Roadhouse high up on a mountain range.

Before the Palmer River Roadhouse is a turnoff to the best road to Palmer River Goldfields.

North of Palmer River Roadhouse you pass through the small township of Lakeland Downs, and then Laura – an interesting place when it comes to both Aboriginal and European history.

It is in the middle of some of Australia’s best Aboriginal rock art country, even though only a handful of sites are accessible (detail in the Destination Guide).

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After Laura, the road continues north past Hann River Roadhouse to Musgrave – which consists of a roadhouse and an air strip.

Musgrave is where the inland road and the coastal road (that this and the previous chapter were about) meet.

It is on the crossroads of the Peninsula Developmental Road to the south and to the north, as well as Lakefield National Park to the east and Pormpuraaw to the west.

**Termite Mounds**

Termite mounds are everywhere in northern Australia, and there are some large, impressive ones on Cape York.

But what are termite mounds and why aren’t they in southern Australia – there are termites there!

There are about 70 species of termites, and although called white ants, they are not related to ants at all. Their closest relatives are bees and wasps instead.

They live in colonies similar to both ants and wasps, with workers, soldiers, and a queen.

They eat cellulose which they get from wood, leaves, grass, bark and even cattle droppings.

They live in nests that are under ground. Even the mound building termites have a nest under ground, under the mound.

The mound is built on the top of the nest for ventilation, so it makes sense that the mounds are only built by termites that live in hot, tropical climates.

Inside the mounds, there is an extensive system of tunnels that, together with the shafts that go down to the nest, create ventilation to the nest.

The mounds come in different colours depending on the colour of the soil, which is used in construction.

They also come in different shapes and sizes, and that depends on the species of termites.

Some are large, others are small, some are tall, some are thin, others are short and/or thick.

Some of the tallest ones in Australia, up to six metres high, belong to Cathedral Termites (*Nasutitermes triodiae*) – like the ones at Bramwell Junction.

**Magnetic Termites** (*Amitermes sp*) on the other hand, build shorter, up to about two metres high mounds that are thin and aligned from north to south to avoid sunlight.

They are also seen in many places on the Cape, including Lakefield NP, Oyala Thumotang NP, the road into Iron Range NP, Lockhart River and Portland Roads, also along the PDR in many places.

Although termites can be pests when they attack buildings, in the wild they are an important part of tropical ecosystems, forming soils and recycling nutrients.

*This is an example info box from the full Destination Guide.*
CENTRAL CAPE – MUSGRAVE TO THE OTT

Musgrave to Coen

North of Musgrave the road first climbs across Bamboo Range, and then passes the turn-offs to Kendall River Road (west) and Port Stewart and Silver Plains (east), before it comes to Coen.

Coen is a small town (particularly if you consider its location in the middle of the only road up to the tip of Cape York, and hundreds of kilometres from other towns, you could expect a bigger place!).

The town is on the banks of the river, and there is also a museum and a pub - the Sexchange Hotel.

Coen to Archer River Roadhouse

North of Coen is the Coen Quarantine Information Centre, and not long later is the main turnoff to Mungkan Kaanju (now Oyala Thumotang) National Park.

This is a remote national park with open woodlands and savannah grasslands vegetation – no rainforests.

There are no bushwalking tracks but there are some camping grounds next to rivers and waterholes.

These are a 60km gravel road in from the park entrance, so while there are some great spots for remote camping, fishing and wildlife watching, you need some time to properly enjoy this park.

Back on the Peninsula Developmental Road, it is another 40km to Archer River and Archer River Roadhouse.

And from there, it is another 20km to the turnoff to Lockhart River, Portland Roads and Iron Range National Park.
Lockhart River, Portland Roads and Iron Range National Park

The road into Lockhart River, Portland Roads and Iron Range National Park is a nice road that crosses some hilly country with a few river and creek crossings that can get flooded after rains.

You first come to the turnoff to Lockhart River – an Aboriginal community, which is the largest settlement in this part of Cape York.

Back on the main road in, you can continue to Iron Range National Park.

This is one of the most accessible places to discover the unique Cape York rainforests - which are different from all of the rest of Australian rainforests since they contain both plant and animal species that we share with Papua New Guinea and not the rest of Australia.

And it is obviously also a very good place where to spot some of our unique birds and animals (provided you are prepared to put some time and effort into some early morning bird watching and night time spotlighting, of course).

After a rainforest section the road continues north across some open woodlands (where on one of my trips, a cassowary crossed the road in front of me) and heathlands, to an intersection where you can turn right to Chili Beach and left to Portland Roads – a small community with a beautiful beach but also sandflies and crocodiles.

Back on the Peninsula Developmental Road, another 30km north from the Iron Range turnoff is the turnoff west to Weipa.

PDR to Weipa

It is a good, mostly unsealed road all the way to Weipa, past the turn-offs to Aurukun and Merluna Station.

Weipa is the largest town in central Cape York, but it is not touristy.

While its red soils and blue waters are beautiful - the reason for its existence is its bauxite mine, and more than anything it’s a workers’ town.

Yet people like to stay here, just for relaxing, maybe a few dinners out or some bird watching which is good around town, and if for nothing else – maybe just for the area's excellent fishing :-)

Whatever you think, you have seen it all quite quickly, and it is still worth turning in.

There are also a few things you can do around Weipa, like visit Mapoon; and visit the country around Penefather River and Stones Crossing (permits and alcohol restrictions apply, all detail is in the Destination Guide).
Weipa to Telegraph Road

After Weipa, you don't have to go all the way back along the Peninsula Developmental Road to get to the main road that goes up north.

You can take the shortcut via Batavia Road, and then turn left onto the Telegraph Road (not the Old Telegraph Track quite yet!).

You pass by the start of the Frenchman’s Track - a fun four wheel drive track that crosses two rivers, and ends on the road that goes into Lockhart River and Iron Range National Park.

Note that Frenchman's Track goes through private land - full detail in the Destination Guide.

After the Frenchman's Track's turnoff, the Telegraph Road continues north and will cross Wenlock River and pass by the old Moreton Telegraph Station and Bramwell Station before it comes to Bramwell Junction, where you have the choice to take the Old Telegraph Track north, or skip it (which means missing out the best fun!) and take the Bypass Roads instead.
NORTHERN CAPE YORK

The Old Telegraph Track and Bypass Roads

If you ask me, the Old Telegraph Track is by far the best part of the whole Cape York trip.

And I am far from alone – most Cape York travellers would agree. It is also true that it can easily damage your vehicle at least a bit, no matter how carefully you do it.

If you like a fun four wheel drive track with creek and river crossings, and lots of tilting and climbs, you are going to have the time of your trip!!!

If you don’t, you can choose to take the Bypass Roads. They are much more boring, and in fact often badly corrugated which can be annoying, but they do have the Captain Billy Landing and Vrilya Point – which you cannot access from the OTT (full detail on the OTT, Bypass Roads and Vrilya Point closure is in the Destination Guide).

Jardine River and National Park

In the northern end of the Old Telegraph Track and Bypass Roads is the mighty Jardine River.

It is a broad river and has a thriving population of deadly saltwater crocodiles.

People used to cross the river at the Old Ford – nowadays it is considered dangerous by most travellers, and safer done on Jardine River Ferry.

Jardine River is protected in the huge Jardine River National Park, which you will drive through (there are no bushwalking tracks).

There are no rainforests but it does have green, tropical vegetation even if it’s open forest with lots of forest palms and grass trees (blackboys).
THE TIP OF CAPE YORK

Once you cross Jardine River, you are in the NPA – Northern Peninsula Area. It is a multicultural area with some interesting history, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

There are some historical landmarks to see, but more than anything the area is best for fishing, camping and just relaxing :-)

You first drive through two Aboriginal communities – Injinoo and Umagico. And then you come to Bamaga and Seisia – two Islander communities (between them is New Mapoon).

Bamaga is the largest place, and Seisia is one of the prettiest with its wharf and blue water beaches. Further north is Lockerbie – a historical place and the home for the ‘Croc Tent’.

After Lockerbie, you can turn left which takes you to Punsand Bay – a nice resort and camping ground, or you can turn right which takes you to Somerset – another historical place with a nice beach; and the tip of Cape York - the northernmost point of mainland Australia. The road goes through Lockerbie Scrub – Australia’s northernmost rainforest.

TORRES STRAIT ISLANDS

Another great thing to do while up here is to visit Torres Strait Islands.

The most visited island is Thursday Island – which is also the most inhabited one. There are a few historical things to see and do.

The second most visited is Horn Island, and the third is Friday Island that has a working pearl farm.

Hammond, POW and Goods have a few things to see and do, while Wednesday and Tuesday only have a lighthouse each.

The above are all known as the inner islands, while further north there are the outer ones.

Badu and Moa are the largest ones of these, with the largest communities (the smaller Mabuiag north of them I do not recommend to visit as it is not a visitor-friendly one).

Furthest north are Saibai and Boigu, close to the Papua New Guinea coast and consequently with some PNG cultural influence. Both are low laying mangrove islands while the little Dauan between them is hilly as it is part of the Great Dividing Range.

The eastern group – Erub (Darnley), Ugar (Stephen) and Mer (Murray) - are also hilly – volcanic ones. They have rainforest, and are friendly and spectacular.

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The central ones – Masig, Poruma, Warraber and Yam are very friendly. Out of this group, all but Yam are coral cays that you can walk all the way around by the beach.

Detailed information about what’s on each island, how to go about the permit process and how to get there, where to eat and what kind of accommodation there is (all with prices and full contact detail) - are in the Destination Guide since 2019, as I visited them all in the late 2018.
I hope this short introductory guide to Cape York helped you to make a rough plan for your trip.

At this stage, you should have a rough idea about

* When you want to go
* How long time you are planning to take
* How to get here
* How to get around
* Whether to camp or use other kinds of accommodation
* What you want to do while here, and what places you want to visit
* Roughly how much it is going to cost you

To do the proper planning, there are detailed descriptions and practical information in the full Destination Guide.

There are 300 pages. Roughly two thirds of the book are place descriptions, and one third is all the practical information.

The destination pages include:

* maps to give you a good idea about each town and area
* everything to see and do in every place in full detail, complete with prices (updated yearly), opening hours, street addresses and phone numbers
* the closest tourist information centre, bank, post office and internet in every place, complete with opening hours, street addresses and phone numbers
* the closest pharmacy, medical centre and hospital in every place, complete with opening hours, street addresses and phone numbers
* the closest places to eat, grocery shops and bottle shops in every place, complete with opening hours, street addresses and phone numbers UPDATE now also how much alcohol you can buy in roadhouses (if any) and are there restricted hours
* the closest RACQ, car parts and car mechanics in every place, complete with opening hours, street addresses and phone numbers
* accommodation in full detail, complete with prices (updated yearly), street addresses and phone numbers – including that remote station or roadhouse you cannot find on the internet ;-)*

* tours in each place in full detail, complete with prices (updated yearly) and full contact details including phone numbers (and address if relevant)

**In the beginning of the chapter about each place there is a summary with:**

* the kilometres it takes you to get there from the last place

* roughly how long it takes most people to see each place

* why would you (not) visit it – the guide is realistic rather than praising everything

**In the beginning of (the chapter about) each road or track there is a summary with:**

* why would you (not) do it – again the guide is realistic rather than praising everything

* its length in kilometres

* what conditions to expect

* about how long it will take you; and * if there are any alternative roads or tracks

The practical information includes:

* lists of contact details to national parks offices, indigenous councils, tourist information centres, and how to check weather conditions as well as if a road is open (and I am not just sending you to the RACQ website); and the wet season closures of each national park

* packing, vehicle preparation, and what to check daily on your vehicle during your trip

* getting here – FREE camping spots along the roads from Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Northern Territory

* outback driving and driving in Cape York, including how to safely cross creeks and rivers

* maps with banking and EFPTOS facilities

* maps with fuel stations on the peninsula, with distances between them. UPDATE now also with the latest fuel prices in different locations on the peninsula

* maps with mobile phone reception and payphones

* maps with drinking water, rubbish tips and public toilets

* camping in national parks – the 'new' rules since 2012 - and how to get around them while staying perfectly legal! ;-)

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* camping on Aboriginal land including permits and how to get them

* in some places you even need Aboriginal land entry permits – where and how early you have to apply for them

* FREE camping spots on the whole peninsula – you can do the whole trip without paying a cent for accommodation, and the first night alone has paid for the Guide ;-)  

* Aboriginal land alcohol restrictions and where do they actually apply – each community is different, they also apply outside communities, there are tricky bits and you are still responsible while the penalties are super heavy at $75,000 fine, 18 months’ imprisonment and confiscation of vehicle

* remoteness, dangerous things and dangerous animals, and how to stay safe (including emergency beacons, other satellite communication means and Royal Flying Doctors Service emergency numbers)

* the unique Cape York birds and animals, and a local’s tips on where and how to spot them :-)

All that for only $29 ???

Yes – with your satisfaction guarantee:

I do NOT believe that you will not like the guide. But, in the unlikely event that you would be disappointed with the book, let me know and I refund your money, no questions asked.

In case you get any problems with anything in the process, contact me and I will give you a hand. If you have a question you can submit it here, and if you have a story about your own adventures in Cape York, you can submit it here.

I would love to hear from you with any feedback on the website and the books. If they helped you, I would be thrilled to know. If you found a mistake or any outdated

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information, I am also really thankful if you let me know. And of course, I would also love to hear from you, if you just want to say hello, whether before, during or after your trip!

And once again, if you like the website and the guides, and know other people who may benefit from this information, let them know about the website and the guides! Link to it from your forum post, your blog, your website, Facebook or Tweet about it. Every link helps other travellers!

Thanks and happy travels!!! Katrin.

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