

(clockwise
from this image)
Palm Cove jetty;
hammocks at
Palm Cove;
Captain Cook
Highway.

HIGHWAY TO HEAVEN

Hugging the pristine coast of Far North Queensland, the scenic Captain Cook Highway promises spectacular views, fascinating wildlife and one-dollar oysters.





KNOWN FOR
The Great Barrier Reef and sublime beaches.

BEST TIME TO GO
The dry season (May to October), although the wet season offers ideal water conditions for snorkelling.

Although it's just 75 kilometres long, the Captain Cook Highway, which runs from Cairns to Mossman (near Port Douglas) in Far North Queensland, takes road trippers along one of Australia's most stunning sections of coastline. Also known as the Great Barrier Reef Drive, this road winds its way past palm-lined beaches and a horizon of forest-clad mountains.

The dry season (May to October) is the best time to tackle this highway, which skirts national treasures such as the World Heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef and Daintree Rainforest. Starting in Cairns, this tyre-turning journey to Port Douglas might just become your most memorable road trip ever.

1 TROPICAL TIME-OUT

About 20 minutes north-west of Cairns on the Captain Cook Highway, pull into Trinity Beach. Park and take a short stroll to this white sandy haven, which is located between two headlands and attracts a mix of both locals and tourists. Wiggle your toes in the mounds of glistening

— PALM GROWER

In 1918, the land that is presently Palm Cove was bought by Albert Veivers. He and his wife, Elizabeth Matthison, were instrumental in establishing a road into Palm Cove on the assumption that if you build it, not only would it allow more people to come, it would also increase property prices. This was, of course, the case, and gradually brought about the town's prosperity.

granules, go for a wander or slide into the sea. You could stop for the night at **Bellevue at Trinity Beach** (88 Moore St, Trinity Beach; 07 4057 8822; bellevuetrinitybeach.com.au), which offers the ultimate in luxe oceanfront accommodation. A further 10 minutes drive along this paradisiacal stretch of highway lies the coconut-palmed wonder of Palm Cove. Here you can jog, walk or cycle along the township's tree-lined paths. Palm Cove is virtually surrounded by forest and is an ideal launch pad to attractions such as the secluded **Double Island**, just 1.5 kilometres offshore, which now offers accommodation (Double Island Australia, Palm Cove; 07 4058 4000; doubleisland.com.au). Or, you could indulge in a massage and spa at **The Reef House** (99 Williams Esplanade, Palm Cove; 07 4080 2600; reefhouse.com.au). Palm Cove has previously won the accolade of Far North Queensland's cleanest beach. When you're ready to peel yourself off the squeaky-clean sand, drive further north-west to Ellis Beach, roughly halfway between Cairns and Port Douglas. Pull into **Ellis Beach Bar & Grill** ▶



(Captain Cook Highway, Ellis Beach; ellisbeachbarandgrill.com.au), which owner and executive chef Andrew Saville says is popular among locals and self-drive tourists as it has direct views over the Coral Sea to Double Island. Here you'll find delights such as the legendary Ellis Beach Burger and the Passion on the Beach cocktail — the latter a heavenly blend of passionfruit, pineapple, lime and 42 Below vodka. Weekends are often abuzz at this roadside bar and grill, especially on Sundays when oysters are just \$1; live entertainment kicks in from 1pm. Stop the night at **Ellis Beach Oceanfront Bungalows** (Captain Cook Highway, Ellis Beach; 1800 637 036; ellisbeach.com) for your very own oceanfront bungalow (from \$175 per night).

2 ROAD TO EXPLORATION

The drive north-west of Ellis Beach is remarkable, as sections of the sea-lined highway had to be carved out of the mountain it winds through. Hop off Captain Cook Highway by turning left at Wangetti and you'll soon come to **Hartley's Crocodile Adventures** (07 4055 3576; crocodileadventures.com), one of the few wildlife parks in the world bordered by a World Heritage forest.

Park the car and take a boat cruise along Hartley's Lagoon, where you can see the world's largest reptile — the saltwater crocodile — snap, leap and roll during a feeding session. You can also spot tree snakes, sea eagles and kingfishers on the lagoon. Should your sensibilities allow you, Lilies Restaurant (part of the adventure park) serves up tasty salt and pepper crocodile.

Get back onto the highway until you reach Rex Lookout. The view is an immense stretch of the Coral Sea flanked by Ellis Beach, Double Island and a succession of forested mountains that loom impressively in the background. Rex Lookout is also a regular hang-gliding spot, so make sure you look up to see these daredevils soar high above this breathtaking part of the world.



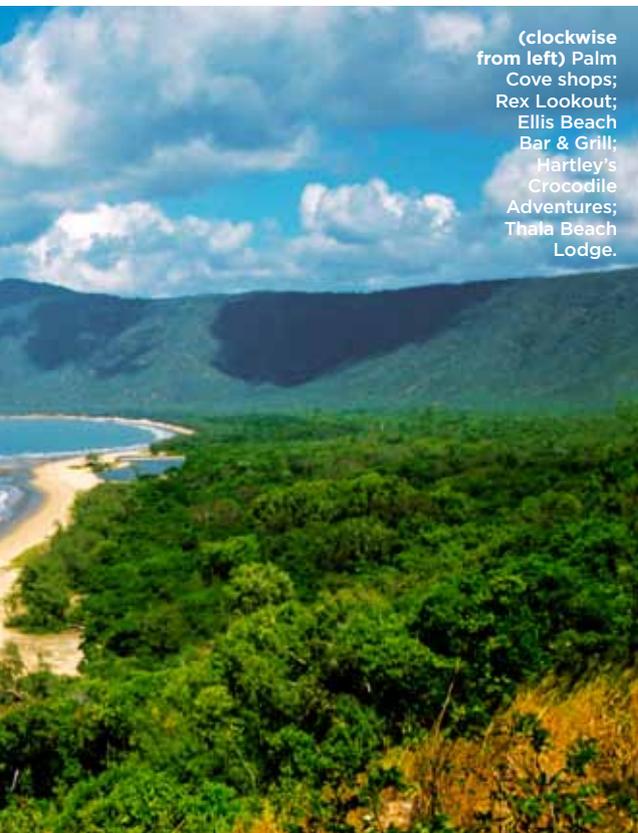
NAMING RIGHTS

According to The Cairns Historical Society, Ellis Beach was named after Dick Ellis, a shotfirer (a person who assembles and detonates explosives) who worked for the then-called Queensland Department of Main Roads in the 1930s. After he lost a hand at work, the government constructed a house for him on what is now Ellis Beach, on the very spot where Ellis Beach Bar & Grill stands.

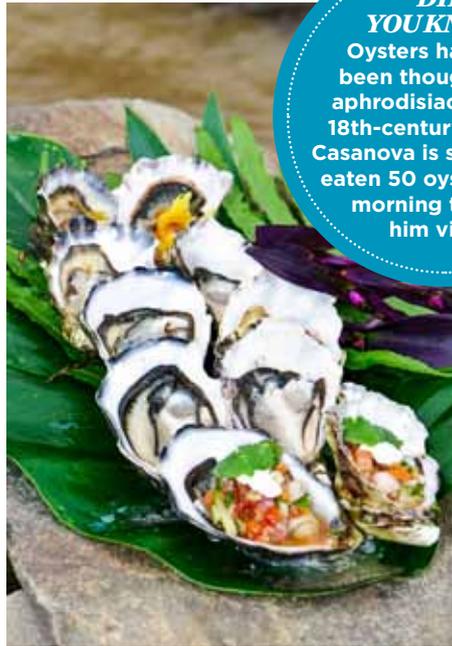


TOP TIP

Driving for extended periods at highway speeds requires your car's lubricants and components to be operating at their peak. Toyota Genuine Servicing is carried out by Toyota trained technicians, using specialist diagnostic equipment. By using only Toyota Genuine Parts you can be assured that your vehicle will run the way its designers intended. For more information, ask your Toyota Service Advisor or visit toyota.com.au



(clockwise from left) Palm Cove shops; Rex Lookout; Ellis Beach Bar & Grill; Hartley's Crocodile Adventures; Thala Beach Lodge.



DID YOU KNOW?
Oysters have long been thought to be aphrodisiacs. In fact, 18th-century charmer Casanova is said to have eaten 50 oysters every morning to make him virile.

FORESTED MOUNTAINS LOOM IMPRESSIVELY IN THE BACKGROUND AT REX LOOKOUT.

3 NATURAL TALENT

Ten minutes drive north-west will take you to **Thala Beach Lodge** (Private Rd, Oak Beach; 07 4098 5700; thalabeach.com.au), a deluxe eco-resort situated on a private headland with its own beach and hectares of coastal rainforest. Located just off the Captain Cook Highway, the lodge offers plenty of comfort. If you want to pamper yourself in style, this is the place to do it. Besides the luxury cabins, there are pools, cascades, a restaurant, a bar, the ultimate viewing deck and heaps of on-site activities to keep you occupied.

Armed with a telescope and her flashing-green pointer, astronomy enthusiast Rose Wyattte takes guests on a memorable tour of the southern constellations at Thala's on-site observatory. And coconut expert Carl Johanson runs his 'coconut odyssey' tour among the lodge's coconut plantation, where guests can learn about the fruit's history and myths... and why Carl firmly believes coconuts are "the best-quality food left on the planet".

Before leaving the road, it's worth having a snorkel at Oak Beach, where it's not uncommon to spot a turtle. When you can pull yourself away, head back towards Thala's Osprey's Restaurant, where you'll literally dine in the treetops as lorikeets, sunbirds and honeyeaters flutter in the adjacent canopies. The restaurant dishes up uninterrupted views of the Coral Sea, as well as local fare such as pan-seared baby barramundi fillet with black mussels tossed in a bush tomato, kaffir lime and wild ginger sauce, butter herb polenta and kale.

— CAIRNS INDIGENOUS ART FAIR

Held at the Cairns Cruise Liner Terminal (from 24-27 July), the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair is a must-see for arts and culture enthusiasts. Visitors have the opportunity to buy work, see exhibitions and performances and partake in workshops and discussions. Visit cairns-greatbarrierreef.org.au/events.

4 BONUS PRIZE

About 15 kilometres further north, the journey to Port Douglas veers off the Captain Cook Highway onto Port Douglas Road. The picturesque township of about 3200 people is at the end of the road, but two kilometres before the turn-off, there's a worthy detour.

Turn left off the highway down Mowbray River Road and venture onwards to Connolly Road, following this hinterland route for 3.5 kilometres to the Bump Track. This track was originally an Aboriginal trail before it was used by early settlers to travel between Port Douglas and the hinterland.

Park the car and try to do the entire walk (12 kilometres return) or just a section (as it's fairly steep in places), passing through rainforest and a eucalypt forest while savouring striking views to the sea and of Mowbray Falls. In Far North Queensland, it doesn't get much better than this. **GP**

EXPERT ADVICE

"Port Douglas has amazing restaurants such as Salsa Bar & Grill (26 Wharf Street; (07) 4099 4922; salsaportdouglas.com.au) and Nautilus (17 Murphy Street; (07) 4099 5330; nautilus-restaurant.com.au), the latter of which is a romantic restaurant in a rainforest-like setting. Also head down to the spectacular Four Mile Beach, where former US president Bill Clinton has enjoyed walking along."

Greg Eastment, Dealer Principal — Pacific Toyota; 235-245 Mulgrave Road, Cairns, QLD 4870; (07) 4030 7444; pacifictoyota.com.au

