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Things to see & do around Cairns

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Here are some suggested itineraries along with my favourite places that I take guests whenever they visit my local area. I hope you find this useful. Don't hesitate to [contact me](#) if you would like more information about any of these activities or if I can help make arrangements for you.

1. Paronella Park

Journey back in time with a nostalgic visit to the fascinating [Paronella Park](#) located approximately 1.5 hours drive south from Cairns.

José Paronella built his Spanish castle on 5 hectares of lush tropical landscape. His dream was to design & build a place where the public could come for entertainment. It included a theatre restaurant / ballroom, a shop that sold homemade ice-cream, a picnic area by the Mena Creek Falls, bathing pavilions, beautiful tropical gardens, tennis courts, bridges, a tunnel, man-made creeks, and an outdoor area where musicians performed.



Paronella Park



Paronella Park



Paronella Park

During the build phase, Paronella installed the 1st privately owned hydroelectric plant in Queensland. He purchased an ex-army stock DC generator and powered it directly from an aqueduct at the top of the falls into an inlet pit. Engineers from South Johnstone Sugar Mill helped design & install the system.

The business opened in 1935 & proved immensely popular.

Today the park is privately owned & the upkeep of the property is funded through visitor entrance fees & donations.

"Cafe on the Deck" is open daily for lunch, or a morning or afternoon tea, or you can bring your own picnic and enjoy it in the beautiful grounds. There is a caravan and camping ground available for overnight accommodation, as well as cabins. The nearby Mena Creek Hotel serves meals from 12.00pm - 8.00pm.

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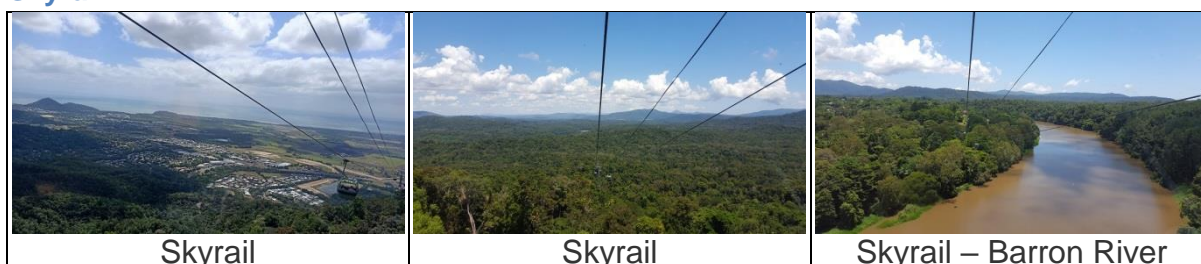
On the way back, explore some of the art-deco architecture in the Innisfail town centre. Click [here](#) for more information.

2. Skyrail & Kuranda Scenic Railway

Spend a full day enjoying this visual treat. Start by riding in a gondola above the canopy of Australia's Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.

Book your day such that you take the [Skyrail](#) up to Kuranda early. This will allow you time to stop at Red Peak for a complimentary Ranger guided tour of the rainforest boardwalk and at the Edge Lookout at Barron Falls providing panoramic gorge & waterfall views.

Skyrail



Enjoy lunch in Kuranda and make sure you take the time to visit the [Australian Butterfly Sanctuary](#) or [Birdworld Kuranda](#).

Kuranda Birdworld



Australian Butterfly Sanctuary



End the day by taking the [Kuranda Scenic Railway](#) back to Cairns. I recommend travelling Gold Class so that you can enjoy canapés and drinks served to your seat while watching the passing scenery. The train will drop you at Freshwater where buses will take you back to your car at the Skyrail terminal or stay onboard for the final leg into Cairns Central.

Kuranda Railway



Kuranda Railway



Gold Class



Kuranda Railway

3. Fitzroy Island

Another day tour is to catch the ferry out to Fitzroy Island, or you can book to stay on the Island.



Fitzroy Island



Fitzroy Island



Fitzroy Island

4. Atherton Tablelands

A full day of activities is available on the Atherton tablelands. Make sure you leave early so that you have plenty of time to enjoy all that the region has to offer.

Head south from Cairns and turn off at Gordonvale onto the Gillies Highway. Be warned, this road twists & turns as you climb the range, often with steep slopes on one side and rock walls on the other. There are hundreds of bends and some great lookouts over the Mulgrave and Goldsborough valleys. Take your time & drive with caution.

Once you reach the top of the range, head for Lake Barrine teahouse. It is the perfect spot to stop & revive.

Lake Barrine



The Teahouse was built in the 1930's as a dance hall, but has also been used as an aquatic centre, guest house, school and a military convalescent home. Today the Tea House provides breakfasts, lunches, and Devonshire teas. There are two specially built cruise boats offering tours around the lake as well as nature walks on well-maintained tracks where you can view the 1,000 year old giant twin Kauri Pines.

From here, drive the short distance to view the Cathedral Fig Tree.

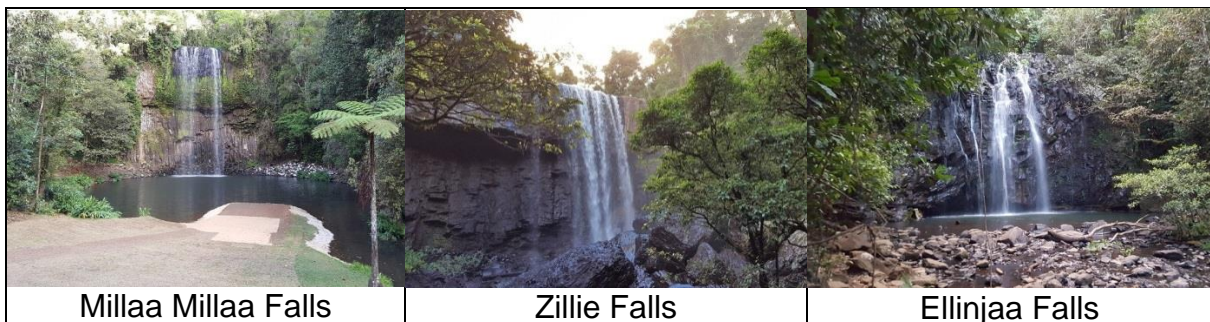
Cathedral Fig Tree



This huge 500-year-old strangler tree has many far reaching branches that support staghorns, birds-nest ferns and elkhorns. The tangled roots that cover the host tree fall majestically to the ground creating nooks that appear similar to the inside of a cathedral.

After this photo stop head to [Yungaburra](#) for a quick visit. It offers an alfresco café culture, boutique shopping, a range of B&B's, and hosts the famous Yungaburra Markets. Continue on from here to Millaa Millaa and the waterfall circuit.

Waterfall circuit



This circuit route will take a couple of hours to complete, so if you're feeling hungry I would recommend you stop for something to eat in Millaa Millaa before you proceed. While here take a moment to view the display of giant Kauri Pine logs in Lions Park.

Millaa Millaa Falls are approximately 18.3 metres in height and are formed from volcanic basalt. There is a large pool below the falls that is surrounded by rainforest. It has a grassed viewing area facing the falls with a concrete block pad on the water's edge.

From here make your way to Zillie Falls, located 7.5 km from the Millaa Millaa Falls. There is a path from the car park to a viewing platform. It is not possible to swim at these falls. There is a path leading to the bottom of the falls, however it is not paved nor well maintained so only attempt this if you are fit & agile.

The final stop is Ellinjaa Falls, located 3 km from the Zillie Falls. There are viewing platforms at both the top and bottom of the falls. In the pool at the bottom you may be lucky to spot turtles and platypus.

Other places of interest

If time permits, go on to explore any of these places on the drive back to Cairns via the Kennedy Highway:

- [Tarzali Lakes Platypus Park](#)
- [Atherton Hotel](#) - provides a great meal
- [Crystal Caves](#) - take this self-guided walk through the man-made cave containing a collection of natural crystals & prehistoric fossils
- [Mt Uncle Distillery](#) – produces award-winning premium spirits and liqueurs still an emphasis on local and national Australian ingredients
- [Jacques Coffee Plantation](#)
- [Emerald Creek Icecreamery](#)

5. Port Douglas, Mossman & Daintree

Port Douglas is about an hour's drive north from Cairns. The road mostly hugs the coastline and provides some fantastic views along the way. Stop at Rex's Lookout on the way for a perfect photo opportunity overlooking Trinity Bay. You may even want to try your hand at tandem hang gliding!



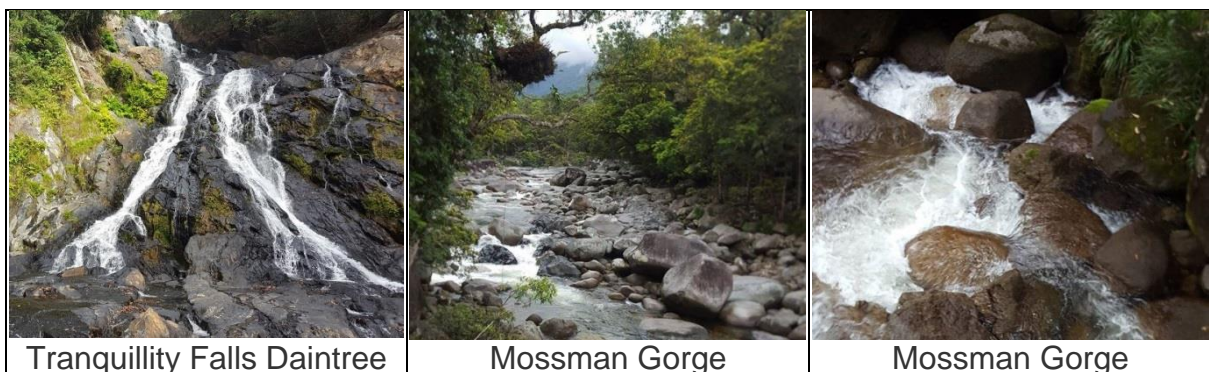
Rex's Lookout

Port Douglas

Proceed past Port Douglas to Mossman Gorge (20mins further north) or Daintree Village (45mins).

At [Mossman Gorge](#) embark on your own adventure through the Gorge with a self-guided walk through the rainforest. There is the lower river track (300m 5–10 mins), Rex Creek bridge (460m 10 mins), or the Rainforest Circuit Track (2.4 km return from Rex Creek bridge 45 mins). The tracks are clearly signposted and maps are also provided upon entry.

[Daintree River Cruises](#) offer a one-hour cruise departing at regular intervals during the day. The cruise provides bird watchers & nature enthusiasts an opportunity to observe this unique wildlife habitat, including spotting many species of birds, crocodiles and tree snakes.



Drop in at Port Douglas on the way back for a late lunch or refreshment. If time permits, stay overnight so that you can take a Great Barrier Reef cruise. There are many operators offering snorkelling, diving, sailing, sportfishing, and other tours. See [this link](#) for more details.

Consider taking an alternative route back to Cairns on the Mt Molloy Road. The turn off is halfway between Port Douglas & Mossman. The drive will take you up onto the Tablelands providing a great view back towards the coast from Lyon's Lookout. At Mareeba join the Kennedy Highway back through Kuranda to Cairns. The trip will take approximately 2.5 - 3 hours allowing for stops along the way.



Lyon's Lookout - Mt Molloy Road

6. Cairns Surrounds

If you're looking for something to do that is close to Cairns then take a short drive to Crystal Cascades for a walk &/or swim or to Lake Placid.



You may also enjoy a drive to the Northern beaches, stopping for lunch at [Chill Café](#) in Palm Cove, lunch or dinner at the [Trinity Beach Tavern](#) overlooking the water, or at [Yorkey's Knob Boat Club](#). When you get back into Cairns take the lift up to [Rocco at the Riley](#), the city's highest rooftop bar & restaurant with 270 degree views over the Esplanade, Cairns City and the Coral Sea. Afterwards make your way to the waterfront precinct at the Marina for a superb meal at one of the many restaurants, including [Ochre](#), [Dundeels](#), or [Salt House](#).

The perfect end to a perfect holiday!



I hope you have enjoyed learning about some of my favourite places to take visitors to Cairns. If you'd like to find out more information, or need help arranging your stay in Cairns, please don't hesitate to [contact me](#).