



# TOURS OF THE DAINTREE FOREST & ATHERTON TABLELANDS IN FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND

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Whenever you travel to Far North Queensland, whether it's to Port Douglass, Palm Cove, Innisfail, Cairns, Karunda, The Atherton Tablelands or just cruising through.

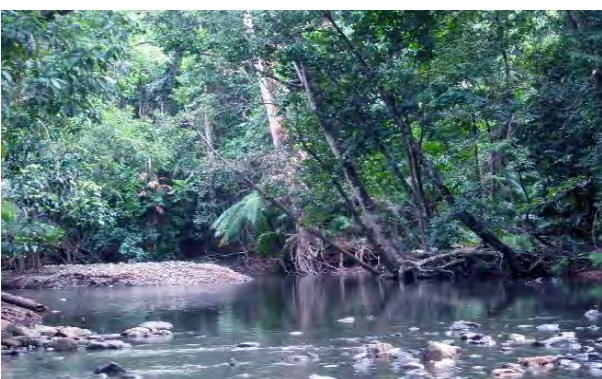
A visit to the Daintree forest is a must see for all. there are a number of tour operators that are willing to give the tourist a look see at the Daintree, but in our opinion, D'Arcy tours gave us a the personal touch that we need for a tour of the Daintree Forest amongst other visits that were surrounded the Daintree forest. Lunch was part of the tour, a visit to the Daintree Discovery Environmental Centre, Pebble Beach, stop or drive though Port Douglass, Palm Cove at an number of exotic places where a coffee and tea was available.



The Daintree however was the best part of the tour with Mike D'Arcy the tour guide providing us with a history of the area and the sights to see. Mike was even gracious enough to allow us into visit him at his homestead tucked away in the Daintree Forest and amongst the jungle setting.

Our tour began at Cairns where we were picked up from the hotel and then taken for a drive along the seaside highway, stopping at look outs and towns along the way.

We came across numerous banana, tea, and sugar cane plantations that stretched as far the eye could see. The drive took approximately two to reach the Daintree forest and it was with much anticipation to go over the crocodile infested waters with the ferry. Although we were assured that we were safe at all times, we had heard tales of dogs and young children being taken when they had wandered away from the safety of their homes and into known crocodile habitats.



In any case if we were looking for crocodiles, we were sadly disappointed. Those wishing to view crocodiles in their natural habitat may ask their tour operators or they may visit a crocodile farm where they may be viewed with safety. Crossing over the river by ferry took us deep into the forest and suddenly were in the thick of it. the scenery was fabulous and Mike our tour guide was providing us with an brief all along the track.

During our trip up North we took the opportunity to visit an old military friend "Warrie" George Mansford who lives just outside of Cairns up on a hill overlooking the Cairns city skyline. He has a magnificent view of the bay and at our last meeting early in April, George advised us that a 2 metre crocodile had somehow managed to crawl up to near his home. Upon further investigation by the wild life rangers who came to the property, it appeared that the crocodile had used a dried stream bed to make his way towards George's home.



This was interesting because we had seen young aboriginal lads fishing at the edges of the shoreline near the mouth of the stream, but they were not bothered by the presence of crocodiles. I guess when you grow up in an area infested with crocodiles all your senses are razor sharp. Still we did not stick round to see if they had caught any fish. George has his home located near an aboriginal reserve and often visits the community when he gets the opportunity to venture out from home.

On our first trip we took a nostalgic drive through the Atherton Tablelands and visited some old training grounds when I was posted to the First Battalion The Royal Australian Regiment back in 1972. We had conducted numerous exercises in the tablelands in preparation for training in Papua New Guinea. It brought back many memories and I wish that we were able to stay longer and appreciate the raw beauty of the jungle and the surrounding environment.



We stopped off at one particular town to visit the local RSL where we had marched past in Battalion order in August 1972, but found that the RSL had changed hands due to mismanagement. Something which was difficult to take in as it had a very proud and long history associated with the area. We also stopped off at another small town where just so that I can say that I had a beer in the RSL.

If you are travelling alone it is recommended that you use a four wheeled drive as only these type of vehicles are able to ford the rivers and streams that visitors to the Daintree forest and/or the Atherton Tablelands. There was much to see and the wild life was alive and well living in the dense jungle and amongst the rooftop of the trees that covered the landscape with their canopy.



While the Atherton Tablelands are awesome in nature, the Daintree forest is spectacular and a must visit. A place that takes you back to the Jurassic age where nature is allowed to take its natural course. Each plant thriving under its own environment and in each case struggling with its neighbour for their allocation of sunlight. Crossing rivers and streams in the four wheeled drive is an experience in its self and driving along the track beneath the overhead canopy is just an amazing.

During this year's trip to the far North, we were unfortunately stuck within the confines of our hotel due to the severe weather warning of a major cyclone. The cyclone upset our travel plans of revisiting the Daintree Forest and that of the Atherton Tablelands and I had to return home early due to domestic reasons beyond my control. My lovely wife Yovanna remained in Cairns with her two American visitors who were our guests and waited out the storm in order to have another shot at visiting the Great Barrier reef. Suffice to say they had much better luck a few days later and were able to visit the wonders of the barrier reef.



I would like to return the Atherton Tablelands again and spend time in the jungle alone in order to rekindle the memories of my youth. I would also like to revisit the memorials set up on the side the highway that travels through the tablelands and spend more time researching all of the various plaques of the units that were stationed there. There must have been thousands of troops during WW2 undergoing training in preparation for Papua New Guinea and the Pacific campaigns.

The plaques are silent guardians of men and women who toiled throughout those difficult years in order to be battle ready for future conflicts. It's a great pity that not more visitors come to the place. Although I am fortunate that in all of my 30 years military service not to have been involved in any two way range scenarios, I shudder to think that I too may have been in the company of my dear friends who are currently sitting around the big jungle campfires amongst the heavenly stars. Still I guess my destiny is to record and write about the past and of those who I have had the pleasure of serving with throughout my life.



Having digressed from the main topic, I have to admit that both of our trips to the far North have been worthwhile and I encourage every Australian to pluck up the courage and venture North for a holiday. It is an experience that one cannot describe adequately in words and readers must experience it themselves. Taking photographs is a must otherwise your memories will fade with time and be forgotten.

One last reminder to visitors is to take along a raincoat in the event of any showers and should their visit be a lengthy one, a thermos with coffee or tea is also advisable as well as their mobiles, cameras and a first aid kit. If you fail to do this, the alternative is to hire a reputable tour guide who will have everything planned on your behalf. The Daintree forest and the Atherton Tablelands are a treasure trove for the environmentalist, survivalist, nature lover, photographer and for tourists whether they are locals, interstate or from overseas.



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