

Cairns to Mungumby Lodge Self Drive

Aboriginal Rock Art Laura | James Cook Museum | Cooktown

Day 1 (Cairns | Mungumby Lodge | 305kms)

Driving north from Cairns via Mareeba takes you past Kuranda out into the dry country with expansive views of the Cairns Hinterland. Driving via the coast past Trinity, Palm Cove, Elise Beach and Port Douglas & Mossman offers stunning views of the coast and Coral Sea. Both of these routes eventually travel up hill (West) into the hinterland either at Smithfield or Mossman, then the Mulligan Highway. Mt Carbine, a small mining village where they mine a steel hardener called Wolfram. From here the country opens out to the true Aussie outback. The roads are straight and offer expansive views of the surrounding region.

A quick stop at the Palmer River roadhouse not only offers cool beverages and hot food, memorabilia and information on Maytown and Palmer River gold rush of the 1870's. The road is undulating across the Mitchel watershed until the Byerstown Range where it drops down to the Lakeland volcanic basin. Driving into Lakeland there are public toilets, a road house, a general store and the pub. Lakeland has benefited from the sealing of the roads as it now boasts the far north's fastest growing food bowl. At the general store located behind the pub on the left (traveling north), they offer excellent locally grown Laura coffee, which is roasted on site.

From Lakeland along the Mulligan Highway, it is only 35 minutes until you reach the cool of the rainforest. Travelling at this point it is recommended you watch as there are loads of Wallabies (morning and evening) and prolific bird life. This is due to the large tracks of water that travel through this part of the country in the wet, so at certain times of the year the birds are everywhere. To see these however you will need to slow down open the windows and keep your eyes peeled. There is a large Billabong on the right between West Normanby River and White horse creek which you can see from the road. A stop here enables a view over the Billabong to hundreds and at times thousands of birds. Often there are also large numbers of Agile Wallaby and Jabiru Black Stalks lurking in the distance.

As you drive you will soon see Black Mountain looming in the distance. At the Little Annan River causeway crossing you will see a sign for Mungumby Lodge. The next turn right is for Shiptons Flat Road, where there will be directional signs to Rossville, Bloomfield the Lion's Den and Mungumby Lodge. Turn right into Shiptons Flat Road (sealed) drive until Sandy Creek and onward. At Sandy Creek you will be able to see ahead a large sign with flags and the Mungumby Road turn off. Turn left into Mungumby Road. Mungumby road is 4kms of unsealed road and the lodge is at the very end.

Drive time from- Cairns 3.5 hours | Port Douglas 2.5 hours | Mareeba 3 hours

Overnight: Mungumby Lodge.

Day 2 (Mungumby Lodge | Cooktown | Mungumby Lodge | 60 kms)

Woken by the birds, optional breakfast at Mungumby Lodge is a tranquil affair to yummy fresh fruit, boiled eggs, selection of breads, cereals and juices. Today you can take it easy and enjoy this unique region. Shortly after leaving Mungumby Lodge a stop at



Cairns to Mungumby Lodge Self Drive

Aboriginal Rock Art Laura | James Cook Museum | Cooktown

Black Mountain National Park will reveal the mystic legions and Aboriginal folk lore of the 260 million year old Black Mountains. A short distance further is the turn off to Archer Point (gravel road) which is an amazing wilderness and reef coastline. Further on towards Cooktown a visit to Keating's lagoon offers bird watchers a full selection of migrating birds that frequent this wetland area and bird hide. On to Cooktown and Grassy Hill light house with its expansive 360 degree views over the northern section of Australia's Great Barrier Reef and to the West reaching far into the Quinkan country. A visit to the James Cook Museum opens a history treasure chest showing the pioneering of Cape York and its cultural origins. The Botanic Gardens and Nature's Power House interpretation centre is a good spot for a cafe lunch. Browse the book store, or that of local artistic Vera Scarth-Johnson. The surrounding Botanic gardens is a top presentation of plant species also collected by Joseph Banks and the Endeavour Crew which offer nice shade and loads of birds.

Return back to the lodge in time for a walk to the waterfalls for a cool dip in the jungle or stroll one of the lodge nature trails along the magnificent Mungumby Creek.

Drive time from- Cooktown 35 minutes each way.

Overnight: Mungumby Lodge.

Day 3 (Mungumby Lodge | Laura | Port Douglas | 367 kms)

It is recommended that you start early today to enjoy the wildlife, birds and arrive out at Laura on time. Today you travel to a totally different geographical region along the secondary gold route to the Palmer Goldfields. Here the land is frequently parched dry; the Eucalyptus trees become common; intermingled with termite mounds and sandstone escarpments into the Quinkan country.

Driving via Lakeland, here you turn right onto the Peninsular Development Road, which takes you to the top of Australia. This newly sealed road is a treat to drive as it is very new, void of any traffic and offers views across open country. Watch for road trains. When you pass Crocodile Station the road climbs into the valley of the Quinkans. Marked with stunning escarpments surrounding the Laura River which winds along the valley floor below. Steeped in history and thousands of years of Aboriginal occupation this once remote region has many stories to show & tell.

As you drive across the Laura River Bridge watch your speed as the local Police often wait in hiding with a magic speed camera for those who have not acknowledged the change in speeds zone. Arriving at Laura do not blink or you might miss it. The Quinkan Region Cultural Centre is located on the left hand side, a yellow building next to the camp ground. The story boards within reveal fascinating information on Aboriginal life, the seasons, colonising of Queensland and rural pioneering life on a remote frontier. A welcome to country video or jump into a muster saddle.

At the Quinkan Centre one can take a guided tour for interpretation of stories etched into the rock escarpments over the past 13,000 years of Aboriginal occupation. Learn the life



Cairns to Mungumby Lodge Self Drive

Aboriginal Rock Art Laura | James Cook Museum | Cooktown

of former hunters and gatherers that occupied this sacred area, additionally get a firsthand feeling of what it would have been like for those early pioneers trying to forge a life out here in the bush. Upon returning to Laura enjoy a lunch from the general store or the pub down the road into the main street, or take a picnic table in the park under the Mango Trees to the sound of the Black Cockatoos, Galas, Ravens and Lorikeets. Ensure you take a look in the General Store & Post Office as they don't make them like this anymore. Buy a post card and mail it to family from there with the Laura post mark.

Returning home we drive back over the same route, there are many more things to see. Approach Lakeland again be sure to look out for the Australian Bustard that lives along the road sides or the Black Cockatoos lurking in the eucalypt trees in the fields to either side.

Drive time from- Mungumby Laura 118kms 1 hour 15 mins | Laura – Port Douglas 3 hours.

Overnight: at booked accommodation

Last updated April 2023.

