

Natural phenomenon in Queensland

With five of Australia's 16 World Heritage-listed areas, Queensland is ideal for experiencing nature at its best. Whether you're exploring the Queensland's coastal waterways, ancient rainforests or red Outback plains, you'll soon discover that natural phenomenon abound in the Sunshine State. Here are some of the highlights...

Queensland Islands and The Great Barrier Reef

- **Hinchinbrook Island** is Australia's largest island National Park that abounds in palm-fringed beaches, mangrove waterways and rugged granite cliffs. Visitors can join a boat cruise across seagrass beds that are home to dugongs (seacows) and marine turtles; or learn about the unique mangrove everglades ecosystem. The island is also home to the famous Thorsborne Trail, a 32km trek over Hinchinbrook's rugged landscape. www.porthinchinbrook.com.au or www.hinchinbrookresort.com.au
- The world's largest sand island, **Fraser Island** is 124km long and is a place of exceptional natural beauty. Here you can swim in one of 40 'perched lakes' with white silica sands (half the number of such lakes in the world), witness barrage lakes being formed, see pure bloodline dingos in their natural environment and enjoy long uninterrupted white beaches flanked by colourful sand cliffs known as The Cathedrals. Fraser Island is the only place in the world where tall rainforests are found growing on sand dunes at elevations of over 200 metres. Access is strictly by four-wheel drive only. www.frasercoastholidays.info
- **Moreton Island**, just off Brisbane, is the second largest sand island in the world (behind Queensland's Fraser Island), and Tangalooma Wild Dolphin Resort is where guests can hand-feed wild dolphins right from the beach every night. Moreton is also home to Mount Tempest, the highest vegetated sand hill in the world, which is a hotspot for sand tobogganing. The walk to the summit of Mt Tempest can be a challenging climb, but once you reach the top the breathtaking views make it all worthwhile. From here you can see the coastline from the Sunshine Coast to the Gold Coast before you sand toboggan your way back to the base. www.moretonbayislands.com.au www.tangalooma.com
- **Reef surfing** - fancy catching a wave out on the Great Barrier Reef? Then hop aboard the MV James Cook for a surfing experience like no other. The charter vessel takes passengers to the Capricorn Bunker Group of islands to surf some of the best waves on offer. The boat leaves from Town of 1770, which is on the Central Queensland coastline. www.1770jamescook.com.au
- **Coral Spawning** – Watch the natural phenomenon of simultaneous mass coral spawning along the entire length of the Great Barrier Reef. This once a year event occurs about four to five days after the full moon in November, but has only been scientifically observed since 1981. www.qbrmpa.gov.au

Outback and fossils

- **Volcano in the Outback** - Take a tour of the world's longest lava tubes formed by a volcanic eruption more than 190,000 years ago at Undara. Situated a four hour drive inland from Cairns, Undara is an Aboriginal word meaning 'long way' and was formed when a major volcano's molten lava flowed down a dry river bed. After walking in the path of a volcano, guests can enjoy camp oven cookouts, night wildlife spotting tours and sleep in restored railway carriages. <http://undara.com.au/>
- **Dinosaur footsteps** - One hundred million years ago, parts of the Queensland Outback lay under ancient inland seas and were alive with marine reptiles, while prehistoric creatures roamed the land. Today visitors can follow in the footsteps of these creatures on Australia's Dinosaur Trail through Winton, Hughenden and Richmond which all have their own unique dinosaur stories to tell.
 - In **Richmond**, visit Kronosaurus Korner Fossil Centre which is primarily dedicated to displaying marine reptile and is also home to Australia's best preserved dinosaur skeleton. After visiting Kronosaurus Korner you may like to try your hand at finding your very own fossil.
 - North of **Hughenden** is the next stop at the Porcupine Gorge National Park. See 500 million years of layers of rock formations in this deep gorge system, known as Australia's 'Little Grand Canyon'. Next up is the Flinders Discovery Centre in Hughenden. Meet Hughie a skeletal Muttaborrasaurus, surrounded by a large fossil and gem display.
 - **Winton** is home to Lark Quarry Dinosaur Trackways, which features thousands of dinosaur footprints recording the events of a few moments in time 95 million years ago. Over 3,000 footprints, made by nearly 200 individual dinosaurs, were found at the site. www.australiasdinosaurtrail.com
- **Fossicking frenzy** - Explore the world of sapphires, gem-cutting and fossicking at the Sapphire Gemfields in the heart of Central Queensland. The Gemfields are home to one of the largest walk-in tourist mines in Australia, where you can take a guided tour, observe the manufacturing process and fossick for your own personal fortune of gems. www.capricornholidays.com.au
- The World Heritage-listed **Riversleigh** fossil deposits are among the richest and most extensive in the world, with some fossils dating back to 25 million years! At the Riversleigh Fossil Centre at Mount Isa in Queensland's north-west, visitors can take a guided tour to experience a reconstructed world as it was millions of years ago and learn from the local palaeontologists. www.outbackatisa.com.au
- Fossick for your personal treasure in the world's largest mine of thundereggs at **Thunderbird Park** in the Gold Coast Hinterland. Stretching over 112 hectares on Tamborine Mountain, Thunderbird Park is an amazing wildlife and geological rich oasis. The mineral rich seam that runs through Mount Tamborine was discovered at Thunderbird Park in 1967, and today the open-cut mine has an endless supply of thundereggs. www.thunderbirdpark.com

Natural mysteries:

- **Mystery Craters, what's your theory** – Believed to be at least 25 million years old, the Mystery Craters near the Central Queensland city of Bundaberg have been baffling geologists since they were discovered in 1971. The 35 craters are formed in a massive slab of sandstone, silt stone and red ochre. Are the craters a result of a meteorite shower, the roof of a Subterranean Lake, or perhaps the aftermath of volcanic activity? No one really knows! Visit the Mystery Craters and come up with a theory of your own. www.bundabergregion.info
- **A glorious morning** - Spectacular, rare, and awesomely powerful, the Morning Glory Cloud in the Gulf of Carpentaria in Northern Australia is a magnet for growing numbers of soaring pilots and scientists. Shrouded in mystery, the Morning Glory arrives regularly each spring and is the only one of its kind in the world. Up to 2km high and more than 1,000km in length, this shockwave in the atmosphere of immense proportions attracts glider and hang glider pilots who ride it just as a surfboard rider does on the ocean. www.tropicalaustralia.com.au
- **Mushrooms light the way** - From December to February each year, visitors to the Springbrook National Park in the Gold Coast Hinterland can see the brightest light generating mushrooms in the world. The luminous mushrooms (*Mycena lampadis*) have been cultivated by The Springbrook Research Centre, which is the only location in Australia that is intentionally growing this species of mushrooms. <http://springbrook.info/research/index.htm> or www.verygc.com.au
- Visit the Outback Queensland town Boulia to witness the unexplained phenomenon of the **Min Min Lights**. The mysterious lights hover elusively out of reach and while there are many theories about how they exist (from Australia's Aboriginal Dreamtime spirits to balls of luminous gases); the real reason is yet to be explained. To hear the stories of the Min Min Light, visit the Min Min Encounter at Boulia for a unique theatrical experience incorporating animatronics, fibre optics and loads of other high tech wizardry. The encounter is a tribute to the long honoured art of the bush yarn, all based around the famed Min Min Light phenomenon. www.boulia.qld.gov.au or www.outbackholidays.info

Animals

- **Purple wallaby** - The Purple-neck Rock Wallaby [*Petrogale Purpureicollis*], inhabits the Mount Isa region in north-west Queensland. The Wallaby secretes a dye that transforms its face and neck into colours ranging from light pink to bright purple.
- **Lungfish** - Queensland is home to the Lungfish, a living fossil from the Triassic period 350 million years ago. Bundaberg region is the only known habitat in the world for the rare *Ceratodus*, or Lungfish.
- **Humpback whales** – Every year from late July to early November, the warm Hervey Bay waters play host to pods of humpback whales who each spend a few days "R&R" in the bay before continuing south on their migration to the Antarctic Ocean. Visitors to the region, which is situated a four hour drive north of Brisbane, can choose from an aerial tour, or one of the many morning, afternoon, or full day whale watching boat cruises, which depart the Urangan Boat Harbour daily. www.frasercoastholidays.info or www.whalesherveybay.com.au

- **Glow worms** - See the tiny green lights of thousands of glow worms at the Springbrook National Park in the Gold Coast Hinterland. Home to the largest colony of glow worms in Australia, this World Heritage-listed region also features beautiful lookouts and lush rainforests. Join an evening tour through the sub-tropical rainforest to learn about plants and animals unique to the area, before entering the Natural Bridge Cave which was created over millions of years and features a cascading waterfall and is home to an amazing colony of glow-worms.
www.ariestours.com or www.epa.qld.gov.au/projects/park/index.cgi?parkid=31

Quirky facts...

- One of Brisbane's most popular inner-city adventures is abseiling down the Kangaroo Point cliffs, which are more than 200 million-year old! www.riverlife.com.au or www.ourbrisbane.com.au
- While many of the plants in the rainforest have been around for millions of years, ferns have been around for much longer than that – and the King Fern is the oldest of them all! One of the best places to see a King Fern in Queensland is on the Lake Eacham Waterfall Walk, which is situated an hour inland from Cairns.
<http://www.tablelands.org/lake-eacham.html>
- The Capricorn Caves at Rockhampton in Central Queensland are a unique system of above-ground caves in a limestone ridge that have been attracting visitors since their discovery in 1882. Every year it hosts an Underground Opera at the Caves, taking advantage of the amazing natural acoustics in the Cathedral Chamber.
www.capricorncaves.com.au