

Eco-friendly holidays in Queensland

March 2011

Travelling with an eco-conscience is easy in the Sunshine State, with a myriad of tours and hotels doing their bit to help save the fragile natural surrounds. Not only does Queensland boast Australia's first carbon neutral tourism business, but it is also home to many other operators that are raising the bar for 'green' getaways. Read on to find out how some of Queensland's best eco-certified companies are committed to conservation and sustainability.

Discovering the Daintree

The Daintree Discovery Centre is an award-winning interpretive facility where visitors can explore this World Heritage-listed environment via boardwalks, a 23 metre high canopy tower, an aerial walkway within the rainforest canopy and a comprehensive display centre. The centre is widely recognised as a leader in the field of eco-tourism and provides an excellent introduction to the wonders of the rainforest. The Daintree Discovery Centre runs a range of programmes and activities to ensure it does not leave a carbon footprint. For example, it developed a Bio-sequestration community project known as the Tree Planting Initiative, which is designed to restore a nearby degraded rainforest habitat to protect the endangered species located in the Daintree. A percentage of every entry ticket to the centre is also dedicated to the preservation of rainforests, and the centre also works closely with local community groups to educate visitors to the Daintree and raise awareness. The Daintree Discovery Centre is an easy 2 hour drive north of Cairns along one of the most beautiful coastal roads in the world.

www.daintree-rec.com.au/carbon.html

Red Mill House in the Daintree

Situated in the World Heritage-listed Daintree Rainforest, Red Mill House offers deluxe accommodation for travellers interested in nature, wildlife and conservation. Their philosophy of 'rethink, reduce, reuse, repair, recycle' helps Red Mill House identify, manage and reduce their environmental footprint in this stunning part of Tropical North Queensland. Red Mill House has a strong relationship with the local Daintree State School, helping local students calculate their environmental footprint and reduce energy and waste levels, taking the students on interpretative walks and donating nature books to the library. The property itself undertakes a number of best practice activities in water, electricity and waste management areas and is a fantastic base for exploring the stunning natural surrounds. www.redmillhouse.com.au

Undersea Explorer, eco-style!

Combine adventure diving with marine research on Undersea Explorer's live-aboard scuba diving operation on the Great Barrier Reef. Operating since the 1980s, Undersea Explorer's goal is to provide a stimulating environmental experience for divers, to care for the environment, and to conduct research projects that contribute to marine conservation. Each week, two complimentary berth spaces are provided for marine scientists, in addition to the biologist employed as a crewmember. This enables Undersea Explorer to carry out valuable research on a regular basis on remote coral reefs. In turn, guests are able to learn from the marine scientists and enjoy new and different dive experiences such as shark attraction dives, in-water encounters with whales, and night plankton dives. The research activities fit around the diving program, adding a stimulating atmosphere of discovery to all expeditions while contributing to the knowledge and conservation of marine ecosystems. www.undersea.com.au

A Green Globe for Skyrail

Tropical North Queensland's award-winning Skyrail rainforest cableway is much more than a spectacular way to experience the wonders of World Heritage-listed rainforest. In recognition of its excellent environmental performance, in 2007 the interpretive rainforest attraction received the prestigious Green Globe Gold Certification. Only 18 groups in the world have achieved this and Skyrail is the only one in Australia. Green Globe Gold is awarded to companies who have achieved Green Globe Certification for five consecutive years, demonstrating outstanding, continuous commitment to environmental performance and improvement. Green Globe is the worldwide Benchmarking, Certification and improvement system assisting the international travel and tourism industry to attain and maintain sustainability. Skyrail also launched the Skyrail Rainforest Foundation to reinforce its commitment to increasing awareness and protecting the rainforest environment. The foundation's primary objective is to raise funds to support tropical rainforest research and education. Skyrail is open every day except Christmas Day and departs regularly from the Caravonica Terminal, which is 15 minutes from Cairns. The experience travels through two rainforest mid-stations before arriving at the charming village of Kuranda.

www.skyrail.com.au

Surfing in the jungle

Set on a 45 hectare private reserve in Cape Tribulation, Jungle Surfing Canopy Tours offer a unique and exhilarating way to experience the world-renowned Daintree – the oldest continuously surviving tropical rainforest in the world. The company's primary focus has always been protecting and showcasing the spectacular and fragile surrounding environment and every aspect of the operation reflects a commitment to ecological sustainability. Their series of flying fox cables and tree platforms were constructed entirely by hand after nine years research and development. The innovative design allows each platform to sit securely around the tree without a single nail or bolt penetrating the trunk, ensuring 'jungle surfers' have a minimal environmental footprint while still enjoying unprecedented access to all levels of the forest canopy. Paths in and out of the forest follow fauna trails, boardwalks and buildings utilize recycled materials, and waste products are recycled. The property uses an Environflow tertiary sewerage treatment system and as part of Australia's largest sustainable energy community, the entire operation runs on renewable solar and hydro power, with fossil fuels used only in the transfer vehicles. Jungle Surfing Canopy Tours was a finalist for the 2008 Queensland Tourism Steve Irwin Ecotourism Award.

www.junglesurfing.com.au

A hidden carbon-neutral holiday

Hidden Valley Cabins and Tours are Australia's first carbon neutral accommodation and tour company operating on renewable energy. Situated a 90 minute drive from Townsville in north Queensland, this award-winning eco-friendly resort operates 100 per cent on solar power. Guests at Hidden Valley can sleep easy in the comfortable cabins, knowing they are helping save up to 78 tonnes of CO2 emissions. Activities at the resort include bush walks, solar energy tours, night safaris, gorge and platypus tours, bird watching, or visiting the nearby town of Paluma. Visit the resort's interpretive centre to explore the operational aspect of renewable energy, timelines on the development of the project and suggested ideas on how you can help the fight against climate change.

www.hiddenvalleycabins.com.au

Capricorn Caves leading the way

Management of the environment is a "way of life" at Capricorn Caves in Central Queensland, which won the Steve Irwin Ecotourism Award at the 2008 Queensland Tourism Awards. Situated just north of Rockhampton, the spectacular Capricorn Caves is a system of above-ground caves in a limestone ridge. Cave tours range from easy walking, wheelchair accessible caves to wild caving adventure tours. Protection of the natural resource of the limestone caves, the remnant vegetation and the dependent native fauna including bats, has always been non-negotiable for Capricorn Caves. They have implemented a number of strategies to protect the environment including revegetation programmes, weed eradication, best water and energy management practices, natural lighting, and a Threatened Species Recovery programme in conjunction with Greening Australia to save the fern *tectaria devexa*, the sole survivor of its species, from extinction. Cave tour guides also present the evidence of past climate change as seen in the geological, faunal and vegetation changes, which leads to community appreciation of sustainable practices. Their objective is to fine tune their sustainable practices to reach a carbon neutral position.

www.capricorncaves.com.au

Mt Barney Lodge Country Retreat

Recharge your batteries at the Mt Barney Lodge Country Retreat, a 90 minute drive from both Brisbane and the Gold Coast. A finalist of the 2008 Steve Irwin Ecotourism Award at the Queensland Tourism Awards, the country retreat features comfortable cabins, Queenslander homesteads and comfortable grassed camping sites near the creek. Mt Barney Lodge is a proud member of Wildlife Tourism Australia and also a founding member of the Rainforest Way drive linking 14 World Heritage-listed National Parks. Its philosophy of living in harmony with people and nature is projected to guests through a variety of initiatives. Many of the activities at the lodge focus on the surrounding environment. CREATE (Children's Recreational and Environmental Activities That Educate) is the lodge's holiday programme for kids with activities including exploring the bush, lantern making, wild bush tucker walks, natural paper making, bush adventures, natural treasure hunts and basket weaving. For the adults, there's also a range of activities on offer from bushwalks and swimming in creeks, to abseiling, rock climbing, orienteering and guided eco and interpretive walks. www.mtbarneylodge.com.au

Wildlife matters at Australia Zoo

'Conservation through exciting education' has always been part of Australia Zoo's philosophy. Run by the Irwin family on the Sunshine Coast, Queensland's multi-award winning zoo is committed to raising awareness and protecting the world's environment and has established a number of organisations and programs to help achieve this. Wildlife Warriors is one of these initiatives, which aims to protect and enhance the natural environment; provide information and educate the public; raise awareness of wildlife issues; undertake biological research; and research, recommend and act in the protection of threatened or endangered species. The Australian Wildlife Zoo, Endangered Species Breeding, Priority Species Breeding, Field Study, Habitat Acquisition, Rescue and Documentaries are also all separate conservation programs run by The Australia Zoo. www.australiazoo.com.au/conservation/ and www.wildlifewarriors.org.au

Eco-friendly wheels around Queensland

Two Australian hire vehicle companies, KEA Campers and Europcar are doing their bit to combat climate change so travellers can enjoy the freedom of campervan, motorhome, or hire car holiday while minimising their carbon footprint. KEA has some of the newest and most environmentally-friendly campers on offer, with every vehicle featuring solar panelling, renewable materials, the most advanced emission control standards, bestpractice waste management systems and the lowest fuel consumption rates of any campervan rental company across Australia, New Zealand and Southern Africa. In Australia, KEA is the only campervan rental company to have achieved the Leave No Trace certification of the Campervan Motorhome Club of Australia (CMCA). If a car is all you need on your travels around Queensland, consider Europcar where you can offset your rental's carbon emissions. Europcar Australia has partnered with Greenfleet, to offset the carbon emissions of every new vehicle that is added to its fleet by planting 17 native trees per car. These trees will help to create a forest, and as they grow will absorb the greenhouse gases that the car produces in one year (based on 4.3 tonnes of CO₂ for the average car). www.keacampers.com and www.europcar.com.au

Going green in the Great Barrier Reef

In a first amongst Great Barrier Reef cruise operators, Big Cat Green Island Reef Cruises has achieved the highest level of certification under Eco Tourism Australia's inaugural Climate Action Certification Program and has gone carbon neutral. The award-winning company, which runs half and full day cruises to Green Island, has implemented numerous emission reduction actions and is offsetting its remaining emissions through Greenfleet Australia who plant native trees as part of a Federal Government certified offsetting program. It is hoped that the trees will be planted within the local Great Barrier Reef water catchment area in an attempt to directly improve the water quality of Far North Queensland reefs. Passengers on Big Cat Green Island Reef Cruises will also be invited to offset their own carbon footprint at cruise check-in. www.bigcat-cruises.com.au