

Backpacking in Queensland

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Meet new friends from around the world as you experience the freedom of backpacking around Queensland. Whether you visit the islands of the Great Barrier Reef, a cosmopolitan city, one of the many stunning beaches stretching the length of the State, or heading Outback, it's easy to experience the best of Queensland without breaking the budget. For more information on any of the below destinations visit www.backpackingqueensland.com.au

BRISBANE

Queensland's cruisy capital city Brisbane has everything a backpacker desires – a relaxed vibe, countless hostels, a fantastic pub scene and easy access to the rest of the State. It's the ideal place to start a Queensland adventure with many backpackers staying longer than planned living, working and touring in and around the River City. A great way to experience five of the city's top tourism attractions is with the new 'Five in One' discount card. Perfect for backpackers on a budget, the card offers a saving more than 30 per cent on five of Brisbane's top attractions including the Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary, Story Bridge Adventure Climb, Kookaburra River Queen Cruises, Riverlife Adventure Centre and a XXXX Brewery Tour. The card is valid for five days and is available from the Visitor Information Centre in Brisbane's Queen Street Mall, Brisbane hotels or via the website at www.brisbanefiveinone.com.

As the sun sets on the city, make your way to the buzzing nightlife areas of West End and Fortitude Valley where you can immerse in the smooth rhythm of a chic cocktail lounge or dance the night away in one of the country's best night clubs. And if you're looking for somewhere to spend the night after a night in town, head to the new purpose-built Brisbane City YHA which is situated right in the heart of CBD. www.yha.com.au

THE GOLD COAST

Learn to surf, relax in the hinterlands, party till the sun rises or watch international sporting events... the choice is yours when you visit the always vibrant Gold Coast.

By day, take your pick of miles and miles of beaches where you can laze on golden sands, take a dip in the water, or try your hand at the Aussie tradition of surfing. Conquer the balancing act between wave and surf board as the gentle waves pull you ashore and leave you feeling like you're walking on water. Or to watch some of the surfing pros in action head to the beaches of Burleigh Heads, Snapper Rocks and Kirra, which are renowned for their consistent swells and great vantage points. www.surfingqueensland.com

For a bite to eat, brush off the sand and head to one of the many surf clubs that line Queensland beaches. As you settle back with a plate of fish and chips and a frosty beer, watch the surfers chasing the day's last wave.

Every Wednesday and Saturday night, you can keep the fun going into the early hours of the morning with fellow backpackers on the 'Backpacker's Big Night out in town' tour. Tickets are available from hostels and include entry to four nightclubs, a party bus for transfers, live entertainment, special drink offers, food and drink offers and prizes and giveaways. www.backpackersbignightout.com.au

FRASER COAST

Encompassing the whale watching playground of Hervey Bay and the world's largest sand island of Fraser, the Fraser Coast region is a hot spot for backpackers.

World heritage-listed Fraser Island is a place of incredible natural beauty with more than 100 freshwater lakes, huge sand dunes, stunning rainforests and long stretches of white sandy beaches to explore. Cool Dingo Tours offer adventure travellers fully guided and all-inclusive three day/two night or two day/one night tours exploring Fraser Island. The tours visit the island's main attractions such as Lake McKenzie, Seventy-Five Mile Beach, the coloured sands and the Maheno ship wreck in air-conditioned comfort. Accommodation is provided in comfortable lodge-style accommodation and return catamaran transfers to the mainland are included. www.cooldingotour.com

The island's beautiful sand tracks and the magnificent ocean beach highway are popular spots for four-wheel driving. Seventy-Five Mile Beach is shared with 4WDs and light aircraft stunning scenic aerial tours of the island. You can hire your own 4WD, or join one of the guided 4WD bus tours available.

The calm water situated just offshore from Fraser Island and Hervey Bay is also known as Australia's whale watching capital. Get up close and personal with these giants of the sea on one of the many day tours available from the mainland or the island. www.frasercoastholidays.info

CENTRAL QUEENSLAND

Whether you're lazing on the northernmost surf beaches in Australia, discovering the spectacular Southern Great Barrier Reef, or looking to make a bit of money to stay in Queensland for longer, the Central Queensland region has got backpackers covered. Stretching from Bundaberg in the south to Rockhampton in the north, this part of Queensland has something for everyone.

If you're looking for somewhere to lay your head in Bundaberg, head to Cellblock Backpackers where you can spend the night in a real jail cell without getting arrested! Bundaberg's historic former police station has been transformed to house a total of 155 beds in 27 rooms and seven restored jail cells (including a genuine padded cell). www.cellblock.com.au

Bundaberg and the nearby town of Childers are both known as great stop-over locations for backpackers seeking work. Cellblock Backpackers and many other backpackers have established work programs, which provide jobs such as every day fruit-picking on local farms. VisitOz will also assist with placing backpackers in employment on farms providing they have the right visas. www.visitoz.org

Heading further north, the laidback twin towns of Agnes Water and Town of 1770 are havens for backpackers looking for reef, beach and surfing adventures. As the most northern surf beach on the east coast of Australia, Agnes Water is a mecca for surfers seeking secluded, picturesque spots, while beach combers are also well catered for with some beautiful safe swimming beaches. Just minutes from Agnes Water is the Town of 1770, which is the closest access point in Queensland to the Great Barrier Reef with tours departing daily. www.gladstoneregion.info

WHITSUNDAYS

With picture-perfect pure white sand, blue skies and 74 islands studding the crystal clear waters, it's no wonder the idyllic paradise of the Whitsunday is a hot spot for travellers of all ages and budgets. For backpackers, the mainland hub of Airlie Beach is water sport and party central – the perfect place to base yourself for the trip and meet like-minded travellers.

The Whitsundays region is a world-class sailing playground, so why not learn a new skill while backpacking in Queensland and join an Explore Whitsundays sailing course? With the pristine waters of the Great Barrier Reef as your classroom, learn the difference between a jib and a gybe, a sheet and a spinnaker and experience the exhilaration of trimming the sails and furiously winding the winches with fellow sailing enthusiasts. www.explorewhitsundays.com

If you're already comfortable in the water, charter your own yacht or catamaran and experience the pure freedom of navigating turquoise seas dotted with emerald islands, fringed with pure white sands. Dive off your boat for a swim, lie on the deck under the stars, or anchor at one of the 74 islands of the Whitsundays and camp on a national park island. Companies such as Islandive offer packages for budget travellers combining backpacker accommodation in Airlie Beach and various sailing trips. www.islandive.com

Or to take all of the hard work out of your Whitsundays sailing experience, join one of the many day tour or overnight sails on offer in the region. Whether you board a sleek catamaran, a party yacht, a majestic tall ship, or a cruise boat, there's a backing adventure to suit all ages and budgets. www.thewhitsundays.com.au

MAGNETIC ISLAND

Situated a 20 minute boat ride from the tropical city of Townsville in North Queensland, Magnetic Island has been drawing backpackers to its shores for years.

Once a month the island hosts Australia's premier Full Moon Party where you could be mistaken for thinking you have landed on the beaches at Koh Pha Ngan. BASE Magnetic Island hosts the event at its beachside location with up to 2000 people dancing until the sun comes up to the sounds of internationally renowned DJ's. www.stayatbase.com/basemagnetic-island-hostel/

To discover the island by day, there is a public bus available or you can also hire a brightly coloured mini moke to explore some of island's 23 bays and beaches. www.mokemagnetic.com

'Maggie', affectionately known by locals, is also home to the multi award winning backpacker resort Bungalow Bay Koala Village. As the name suggests, Bungalow Bay is home to with resident koalas and other Aussie wildlife in its boutique wildlife park. Hold a koala or a crocodile, join a tour of the national park surrounds, enjoy a champagne bush tucker breakfast with the animals, or take the short stroll down to Horseshoe Bay – the island's hub of watersports activities. www.bungalowbay.com.au or www.townsvilleholidays.info

MISSION BEACH

Flanked by the Wet Tropics Rainforest, kilometres of golden beaches and the Great Barrier Reef, Mission Beach is a nature lover's paradise. Situated two hours' drive south of Cairns, the region is a popular destination for backpackers looking for everything from a laidback tropical lifestyle to adrenalin pumping thrills.

Mission Beach offers a number of backpacker lodging right on the beachfront, providing an ideal base for exploring the area. If you're into nature there are dozens of fantastic walking tracks through the local National Park rainforest where you can spot the endangered cassowary in its natural environment and enjoy great views of the beaches and islands situated just off shore. Visit Dunk Island for a day trip or overnight stay, or why not get Mission Beach Boat Charters take you to a deserted island and set you up with some camping gear for a night or two?

Diving, snorkelling, swimming, sailing, fishing and sea kayaking on the Great Barrier Reef are all popular activities for travellers in Mission Beach with organised tours and self-hire options available. Or if you feel like getting your heart racing, you will be spoilt for choice. Whether you navigate your way down the mighty Tully River in a white water raft, jump out of a plane and sky dive to a beautiful beach landing, hire a jet ski or a blow kart, or ride a horse along the beach, there are plenty of ways to experience the wild side of Mission Beach. www.missionbeachtourism.com.au

THE GREAT BARRIER REEF AND THE DAINTREE RAINFOREST

The World Heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics Rainforest provide the perfect backdrop for an action packed holiday in the tropics. Whether you base yourself in Cairns, one of the city's northern beaches, the Daintree Rainforest or Cape Tribulation, thrill seekers of all ages can find an adventure to suit them in Tropical North Queensland.

Every day, dozens of boats of all shapes and sizes depart the Cairns and Port Douglas marinas taking visitors out to discover the wonders of the Great Barrier Reef. Whether you snorkel on the surface, dive to the depths of the reef or keep your feet dry with a glass bottom boat tour, the Great Barrier Reef is a must do on any visit to Queensland.

Back on the mainland there are a myriad of other adventures on offer to fill your holiday itinerary. Go bungy jumping at the world's first bungy jumping site in Cairns, take the wheel of an All Terrain Vehicle (ATV), experience the thrills of 'jungle surfing' through a rainforest canopy, join a mountain bike tour, go sky diving, learn to scuba dive, saddle up for a horse ride through the bush, go 4WDing in Cape York, learn how to throw a spear with Aboriginal elders, the list really does go on and on for adventure in the tropics. www.tropicalaustralia.com.au

OUTBACK

Looking to get down and dusty, then head off the beaten path into Queensland's outback where the scenery is diverse and breathtaking and you can share in the country's distinctive history. Stephanie Mills Gallery Outback Tours offer an exciting range of typical Aussie adventures from sheep shearing and farming to fishing, kayaking and boat cruises. Tours have been touted 'as Outback as you can get'. Travellers can choose from a selection of four, five and nine-day tours departing Brisbane specifically targeting the backpacker market, which include some unusual adventures including sand tobogganing and the classic pub crawl. Visit www.stephaniemillsgallery.com.au

How to get around:

Travelling around Queensland is made easy for backpackers with a variety of buses, trains, planes and campervans available that are tailored to travellers on a budget.

- **Oz Experience** is a popular hop on hop off bus pass for travel in Australia dedicated to backpackers and travellers aged between 18 to 35 years. Passengers can hop on and off the bus at the points of interest that your particular pass covers for up to six months and aims to take passengers to the hot spots and the 'off the beaten track' highlights. www.ozexperience.com
- **Jetstar, Virgin Blue** and **Tiger Airways** are Australia's budget airlines. www.jetstar.com.au www.virginblue.com.au and www.tiger.com.au www.tigerairways.com
- For train travel around the State, **QR's Travel Train** offers regular services between Brisbane and Cairns and west to Queensland's Outback. www.traveltrain.com.au
- South-east Queensland's **public transport** system includes bus, train and city cat services. For timetable and pricing information visit www.translink.com.au
- **Wicked Campers** and **Travellers Auto Barn** offer campervans for hire for budget travellers looking for transport and accommodation in one. www.wickedcampers.com.au and www.travellers-autobarn.com.au