



SCOTTSDALE TOURS

CAPE YORK TOUR 2011

They call this the final frontier and I guess it is the last place people tend to visit as there are so many other interesting things to see in Australia. Certainly it is a rare occasion to find any Kiwi's up this way which is a shame as it is a fantastic trip.

We flew out of Auckland on the Saturday night on a direct flight to Cairns. We were an hour late leaving but arrived 10 minutes ahead of schedule so the pilots must have had their pedals to the metal all the way. We arrived at around 10pm and made our way straight to our accommodation and laid down our weary heads.

Next morning we boarded Andrew's local scenic tour bus for a look around Cairns, a visit to the gorgeous botanical gardens and a morning tea of scones with jam and cream and a latte or tea. Monday was a free day and some of us took the opportunity to do the train trip to Kuranda and take the sky rail back to Cairns.

It was an early start next morning as our driver Steve, from Heritage Tours arrived to pick us up at 7am in the 4wd Isuzu truck to take us to the Cape. We caught the Daintree Ferry across to Cape Tribulation and had morning tea in the Daintree forest. We meandered through the Bloomfield track on the east coast to Woodatta Creek and set up the tables and chairs while Steve prepared a lunch of meat and salad for us. We eventually arrived in Cooktown and settled into our very comfortable seaside accommodation at Sovereign Resort for the night after a lovely dinner.

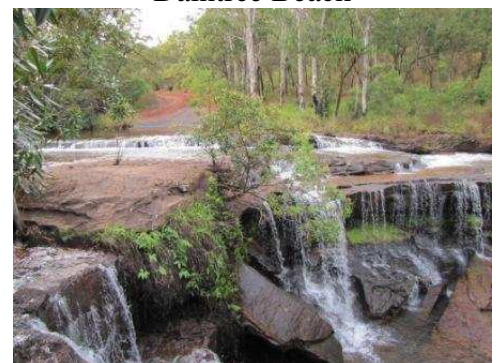
From here on out we ventured inland predominantly on 4wd roads rather than take the bitumen highway by-passes. We hit the corrugated Battlecamp Road and bounced our way long to our morning tea stop at Isabella Falls then called in to have a look around the old Laura Homestead. After another sumptuous meat and salad lunch out in the wilds we headed off through the Kalpower Crossing, and crossed the Hann and Morehead Rivers arriving at our next overnight stop at the iconic Musgrave Telegraph Station. As this was school holiday time, the campground was full and the air was alive with excitement as Queensland was playing NSW in the State of Origin. Queensland won so there was great jubilation amongst the campers watching on the big screen at the 'watering hole'. Our accommodation was comfortable cabins with shared ablutions. We dined outdoors on a pork chop barbeque dinner cooked by Steve.



'Izzy', our transport for the trip



Daintree Beach



Isabella Falls



One of many river crossings

Thursday presented us with a gorgeous sunrise so it was out with the cameras. We made our way over more corrugations and 4wd territory to the wee town of Coen where surprise surprise we had telephone reception. We had morning tea on the side of the road then made our way on up to the Archer River for lunch. We arrived in Weipa in the early afternoon giving us time to visit the local shopping centre and enjoy the stunning sunset over the Gulf of Carpentaria. Accommodation this night was at a motel where we dined in house. As the motel is Asian owned, dinner was an interesting mix of cuisine including the European offerings of Mud crab, whole barramundi or a huge T-bone steak.

We did the Weipa bauxite mine tour next morning which was most interesting then re-boarded our bus/truck and followed the old telegraph Track to Bramwell Station. So many interesting things to see along the way, fabulous country. We arrived at the station to find that the Bramwell Station roading gang had created a road for us to drive on to go and find the Brahman cattle being farmed there. We were lucky enough to spot a very large wild pig as well as a small herd of cows, calves and bulls. Brahman are beautiful animals, the farmed ones are quite friendly. Back at camp we threw our luggage into our wee cabins and dined outside again on Steve's barbecued steaks. Surprisingly throughout the whole trip we did not need to use our insect repellent and there were no flies which made life much more pleasant.

Seisia (pronounced say-sha) was our next overnight stop. The name is made up of the first letters of the names of the original settlers. This proved to be the most exciting day of the tour. It was real 4wd country, in fact some of the roads we were on were maintained by the local 4wd clubs. The roads around these parts have to be 're-built' each year after the wet season as most of them are under water for a period of time. We were maneuvering our way through one of these 4wd roads when a passenger from another Heritage Tour bus ahead of us flagged us down. There was a 4wd ute with a trailer on behind bellied up to its axles in a mud hole. The driver of the other Heritage Tour bus was endeavoring to pull him out. There was a lot of mud digging and pulling and pushing going on much to the amusement and entertainment of the bus passengers who were all out with their cameras taking plenty of photos. The ute was finally pulled out and taking a by-pass track, we carried on up the road to the notorious Cockatoo Creek. Everyone, including the drivers got off the buses while the drivers discussed the best way to get down the rather steep, slippery clay bank to the river. A plan finally in place the first lot of passengers made their way gingerly down to the bottom of the hill and waited there for their bus. The bus made its way very very slowly down the hill, picked up its passengers then made its way, also very slowly, across the crocodile infested creek, wheels dipping into large holes on occasions. Then it was our turn. It was all very exciting and we decided to stop on the other side of the river and have a cup of tea.



Sunrise, Mulgrave Telegraph Station



Weipa Bauxite Mine



Weipa, sunset over Gulf of Carpentaria



Bramwell Station 'watering hole'



Brahman Cattle Bramwell Station

After more excursions through the outback we arrived and Fruitbat Falls, named after the man who discovered them. He loved fruit so much they called him 'fruitbat', nothing to do with the fruit bat animals. Here we found some children jumping off the falls into the river below, much to the delight of onlookers. We set up the picnic tables again and enjoyed another meat and salad sammy lunch. We crossed the Jardine river on the extremely expensive

Aboriginal owned Jardine Ferry, a distance of about 50 metres and the only option available. Price was \$88 each way for a private vehicle. We then headed up through the Aboriginal settlements of Injino, Umagico and Bamaga to our accommodation at Seisia where we set ourselves up in our very comfortable beach side cabins at the camping ground for the next two nights. Some of us visited the local market and bought some gifts and souvenirs. We also enjoyed another gorgeous sunset this time over the Torres Strait. Steve cooked us a delicious barramundi meal then most of us decided to forego the Queensland vs Crusaders game and head for our beds instead. It had been an exciting but tiring day.

Today was D-Day, we were finally going to reach the tip of Australia. we headed out at 6am for breakfast on the beach at Pajinka. After breakfast most of us took the gamble and headed up the rocky slopes hoping to reach the 'tip' and we weren't disappointed. It had been windy and overcast for the past 3 days and although the clouds had cleared it was still very windy, especially up on the point. However, this did not dampen our spirits and we were thrilled to finally get our photos taken under the sign at the 'tip' of Australia. What a buzz. We walked back across the ridge to the beach, packed up the truck and headed through gorgeous rain forest to Sommerset Beach where we had morning tea. Of course we had to stop at the 'Crocodile Hut' on the way back and we made this our lunch stop. The Crocodile Hut is a tent full of souvenirs which does a roaring trade with all the buses and independent travelers coming through to the 'tip'. We headed back to Seisia for a free afternoon then it was a sad evening, our last dinner with Steve. He cooked a barbecue dinner of sausages and veges and handed out our certificates which read:

In recognition of your spirit of adventure, unfailing good humour and bravery in enduring the bone jarring trek from Cairns with five million corrugations, pot holes, washouts, bull dust traps and sand bogs and, in spite of crocodiles, mozzies, sand flies, green ants, snakes, wasps, blow flies and wild pigs, actually reached the northern most tip of mainland Australia. Congratulations!

Another early start next morning. After breakfast we headed for the ferry to take us across to Thursday Island. We said our goodbyes to Steve and sat back to enjoy the 1.5 hour ferry crossing. Liberty, a born and bred local, took us on a ticky tour around the island regaling us with its interesting war time history. We had lunch in town then made our way down to the wharf again to catch the much smaller ferry across the short stretch of water to Horn Island. Brigit, a Huntly girl, met us at the wharf and took us



Crossing Cockatoo Creek



Lunch at Woodatta Creek



Jardine River barge crossing



The group who made it to the 'TIP'



The northernmost tip of mainland Australia and York Island - left

to our accommodation. We were well fed the whole time we were on the island with breakfast, cooked lunch and dinners. Liberty's wife Vanessa took us on a guided tour of the island which is steeped in war time history and boasts a large airport runway built during the war and used extensively now for tourism and local travelers hopping about the islands. Vanessa is an avid historian and is doing a wonderful job of restoring and bringing alive the forgotten history of the island.

It was from Horn Island that we boarded our plane to begin our final journey home. We set down in Cairns at 5.30pm, went out for a smorgasbord dinner, offloaded four of our passengers and made our way back out to the airport to catch our flight to Auckland. It was at this point that we had to ferret around in our luggage to get the woolies out as we would be arriving home in much cooler temperatures at 5.30 in the morning.

This was a fantastic trip enjoyed by everyone. Thank you all for making it so special, you were a great group to travel with. Look forward to catching up with you again soon.

Many thanks, Susy



Termite mound around tree



Thursday Island

