

Tinny to the Top the ultimate boating and fishing adventure

Tour itinerary – Cooktown to Weipa

Day 1 – Lizard Island

We depart Cooktown early and set the compass (or GPS these days) for the amazingly beautiful Lizard Island. Set among a labyrinth of coral reefs the Island is home to Queensland's northern most luxury holiday resort; the exclusive retreat for the rich and famous, the Lizard Island Resort.

We anchor in Watson Bay (and come ashore on one of the Island's 24 magnificent powder-white beaches). Tonight we camp in the Lizard Island camping ground, but there is plenty of daylight left for exploring, fishing and maybe a dip in the crystal clear waters.

Lizard Island is completely surrounded by coral gardens and reefs, and therefore offers spectacular fishing and snorkelling opportunities. It's a great place to get the light-game fishing gear out and chase some pelagics such as Mackerel, Tuna, Wahoo and Trevally.

History buffs can make the trek up the hill to visit Cook's Lookout, and as Captain James Cook did in 1770, use the Island's magnificent views to plot our path through the reefs to our next destination. You can also visit Mrs Watson's house and ponder her fate as she, her baby and the Chinese servant set sail in a water tank in 1881 to escape from marauding aboriginals. Later in our journey we will cruise past Watson Island where all three perished from thirst.

Tonight, those of you who spent the day fishing will no doubt be sitting down to fish for dinner. All in all, Lizard Island has been an amazing place to spend day one.

Accommodation: Camp; toilet facilities; limited showering facilities; drinking water available

Day 2 – Bathurst Bay

We get going early today as it is one of our longer day trips. We're heading to a fishing mecca so we need to get the 120km cruise to Bathurst Bay over nice and early, leaving the rest of the day to fish and explore.

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Tour itinerary – Cooktown to Weipa

Bathurst Bay found international fame in October 2004, when 60-year old grandmother Alicia Sorahan saved Andrew Kerr from a 4.2 metre crocodile which attacked him while he was sleeping in his tent. Ms Sorahan jumped on the croc's back, which promptly let go of its first victim and started dragging 'granny' toward the water. Another camper shot the crocodile before it made it to the water with Ms Sorahan in its jaws. Needless to say, our camping site at Bathurst Bay is selected carefully.

Bathurst Bay is 'Barra country'. The Bay offers what must be considered some of the most abundant beach fishing in Australia. You can catch huge Grunter off the beach until your arms won't take any more. Most importantly, Bathurst Bay signifies the point at which the Barramundi anglers can start stalking their quarry. The only problem is trying to get to the barra through all the other fish.

Now that we're back on the coastline we might also find a place to drop a crab pot in, and if we're lucky it'll be sweet chilli mud crab and Barra for dinner.

Accommodation: *Bush camp.*

Day 3 – Flinders Island

A short trip today, because there are a multitude of islands and fishing locations to explore. We cross Bathurst Bay and head north to the Flinders group of Islands. We make our way down the Owen Channel to our camp site at Flinders Island. The Owen Channel is a renowned all-weather 'anchorage' and a top place to set up base for the day.

The Flinders Island group offers a range of beautiful beaches and bays to explore and Stanley Island has walking tracks leading to Aboriginal cave paintings.

There is not much to add here, except.....get your fishing gear and go explore!

Accommodation: *Bush camp.*

Tinny to the Top the ultimate boating and fishing adventure

Tour itinerary – Cooktown to Weipa

Day 4 – Portland Roads

Rise and shine - another early departure as we head back to the mainland for Portland Roads. Tonight we stay in civilised accommodation and even sleep in a bed (albeit in bunk-house style accommodation).

Portland Roads is located in a palm-fringed bay and was formerly an export port and a naval base during World War 2 and the remains of the once impressive jetty can still be seen.

Once again you have a variety of options on how to spend your day. The fishing is of course there (as always) and our guide can point you in the direction of some exceptional Mackerel and Queenfish grounds. Closer to the shore you can chase the elusive Barramundi. The waters are also plentiful with painted Cray-fish, but perhaps we'll wait till we're a little further offshore before we start diving for Crays.

For those who want to spend a few hours on land, we highly recommend the local oysters. Low tide provides a perfect opportunity for oyster catching, beach combing and investigating the many rock pools.

Accommodation: *Bunk-house; shower and toilet facilities; drinking water available.*

Day 5 – Sir Charles Hardy Island

Today we truly follow in Captain Bligh's footsteps as we follow the path from Restoration Island north. Restoration Island was where Captain Bligh and the crew members who remained loyal to him first set foot on Australian shores, after Fletcher Christian and his mutineers set their boss adrift after the 'Mutiny on the Bounty'.

The Hardy's group of islands, which are predominately granite, rise steeply out of the crystal blue sea and are quite stark. We however, have quite a nice, secluded campsite picked out for you.

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Tour itinerary – Cooktown to Weipa

The waters around the islands have numerous deep water drop-offs and underwater cliffs, so provide the perfect environment for those of you ready to take a break from the light tackle sport fishing gear, and get down and dirty with some hard-core bottom-bashing bait-fishing.

If you ask nicely our guide will throw the cast net a few times and set you on your way with a tank full of live bait. A strong rod, strong braid and strong forearms are recommended if you intend to bounce a few 'livies' over the bommies.

We can't tell you what you'll catch, it's truly likely to be anything. Huge Cod, Sharks, Cobia and Trevally provide the most fun, but if its quality you're after, ask your guide and we'll point you in the direction of a 'bommy' or drop-off where you can target Red Emperor, Large-mouth Nannygai, Sweetlip and Coral Trout.

Over dinner (which is probably fish) we can get the map out and our guide will tell you the complete story of the 'Mutiny on the Bounty'. It is amazing what Captain Bligh achieved in his 17 foot row boat, with nothing more than a sextant for navigation - no GPS in those days!

Oh, before I forget, we're now far enough out from the mainland for a swim.

Remember those Crays I mentioned earlier!

Accommodation: *Bush camp.*

Day 6 – Morris Island

We leave the granite formed Hardy Island group and head north, where the Islands are now predominately flat, with powder-white sandy bays to come ashore on.

Morris Island is home to a lone grave of a not-so-cautious pearl diver. It has become custom (and some say good luck for those who are superstitious), for the island's visitors to leave behind a small trinket in remembrance of the diver. But given the grave is not tended and we're eco-friendly, we recommend something bio-degradable, perhaps one of the island's wildflowers.

Tinny to the Top the ultimate boating and fishing adventure

Tour itinerary – Cooktown to Weipa

Surrounding the islands are some interesting current lines and this area is Mackerel land. The 'Mack' chasers in the group should get their spoons and halcos out and hit the water.....because I smell Spanish!

Those who started with a full tackle box, will be pleased to know that Morris Island is also a great place to lose a few surface poppers. If you want a fishing challenge, I give you the shallow, razor sharp reefs around the island. 'Popping' the shallow waters provides for high-adrenalin action and hook-ups are spectacular. A warning though; the Coral Trout and Cod don't fight fair and they will have you reloading another popper quicker than you can say "piscatorial paradise" – unless you're quick off the mark to get them out of the reef. The Trevally fight a little fairer, but on light surface popping gear – I wish you luck.

The crystal water and sandy inlets provide an irresistible opportunity for a swim and watching the sunset from the western beach is a magnificent sight.

Accommodation: *Bush camp.*

Day 7 – York Island or Thursday Island

For those that haven't been there before, we're getting near the top. We've had a couple of nights camping, but today we head for a civilised stop over. York Island is home to a remote settlement so tonight we should have showers and toilets again. Or perhaps weather permitting we will continue on and spend the night at Thursday Island and relive the pearling days!

Tomorrow we round the most northerly point of Australia, Cape York. For those of you following Captain Bligh's travels, we're not far from the HMS Pandora, which sunk when returning to Britain with some of those dastardly mutineers from the Bounty.

Accommodation: *We have options tonight and the accommodation standard depends on where we end up, but our aim is to have a bed, shower and toilet facilities, drinking water available.*

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Tour itinerary – Cooktown to Weipa

Day 8 and 9 – The tip of Cape York – Bamaga

Around we go! Congratulations, you have made it to the northern most tip of Australia.

This morning we cruise around the tip of Australia and into our northern most mainland town, Bamaga. Now's the time to get on the telephone and skite to all your mates stuck back at home working. You can now officially boast (for the rest of your life) that you have travelled up the east coast and around the tip of Australia – in your boat.

Don't forget to get a photo at the "tip of Australia sign" on the point.

Ahhh....Bamaga provides the opportunity to catch our breath. It's been a tough six to eight days (depending on weather and fishing) and we've covered more than 750 kilometres. It's been action packed and we hope you've ticked off all the species on your 'to catch' list.

It's a good time to spend two nights relaxing at the Siesa Caravan Park, right on the beach. You are free to explore the waters of the Torres Strait, perhaps a day trip over to Thursday Island (if we didn't make it the night before) to visit the Green Hill Fort which has a series of abandoned WW2 bunkers, which are now home to a museum.

Regardless of your preference, our guide will have limitless options for you.

And, if your arms aren't spent yet there's always a spot of Mackerel and Tuna chasing to be done. Just follow the birds 'working' the bait boils – birds in Bamaga mean big Macks.

Oh, something not to forget; you can't go to Bamaga and not do a spot of night fishing off the jetty with the friendly local kids.

Accommodation: *Seisa Caravan Park, Cabins or camp sites (depending on availability).*

Shower and toilet facilities, drinking water available. Cold Beer!

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Tour itinerary – Cooktown to Weipa

Day 10 – Vrilya Point

Ok, so you're nice and rested and probably ready for more adventure. Let's go then.

We travel around the point at Siesa and we're now in the Gulf of Carpentaria. If we weren't before, we are now well and truly in sport fishing heaven. The water around Vrilya Point is almost always boiling with palegics chasing their poor quarry.

Long-tail Tuna, every kind of Mackerel, Queenfish and Trevally are just a few of the species you're likely to encounter here. And small Blue Marlin and Sailfish are not uncommon. Alternatively you can head down to the river mouth and chase the mighty Barramundi.

Tonight we camp on Vrilya Point. It is a beautiful spot to mark our first camp in the Gulf of Carpentaria. The only bad news is.....we're nearing Weipa.

Accommodation: *Bush camp.*

Day 11 – Pennefather Beach

Travelling south in the unprotected Gulf might be a little more difficult than Island hopping on the east coast, but a short trip away is Pennefather beach.

Pennefather beach is simply magnificent and has previously been listed among Queensland's best beaches. The sunset is truly awe-inspiring.

Yep, you guessed it, time to reload the rods and reels and get amongst it. After yesterday you should be sick of palegic action, so let's go chasing Barramundi. The area offers some fantastic sight fishing and is a real favourite among the fly-fishers.

A successful day will mean it is Barra for dinner, and maybe a big juicy 'Muddy' for entrée.

Unfortunately, it has to end somewhere and tonight is your last night on your *Tinny to the Top* tour. When we land at Weipa tomorrow you will have travelled some 950 kilometres.

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Day 12-14 – Weipa

Well we made it. Well done and congratulations on being one of the very few Australians to have ever driven their boat from Cooktown to Weipa.

Alas, all great things come to an end. We said 12 days, but it is more likely we've taken 14 days because we went a little slower on the east coast due to a spot of bad weather or we found some fishing action we just couldn't leave.

You are tired, you're worn out, but there is little doubt that this has been the boating and fishing adventure of a lifetime.

Thanks for coming on the journey. We've helped you make arrangements for your car to be here in Weipa, and now we can all head home for a well earned rest!

See you next time, on our *Tinny to the Top* tour.