DriveNow

Helping travellers since 2003 find the best deals on campervan and car rental

COASTAL ROAD TRIP · 10 DAYS ONE WAY

Brisbane to Cairns 10 Day Self-Drive Itinerary

One of Australia's most popular journeys, Brisbane to Cairns takes in some of Queensland's and the world's most stunning coastline.

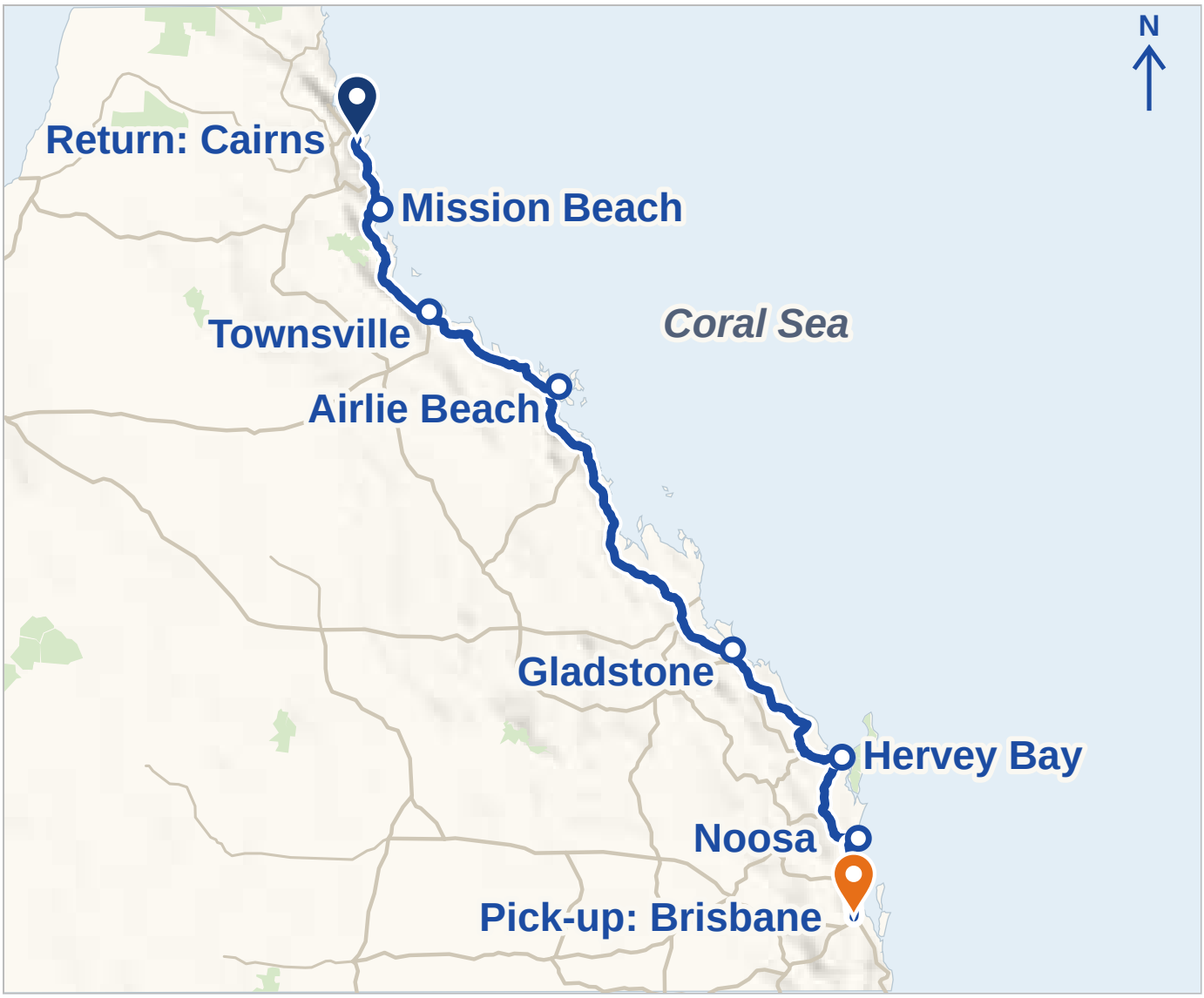
DISTANCE	DAYS	ROUTE	DRIVING TIME
About 1,890 km	10 days, 7 drives	One way, Brisbane to Cairns	About 31 h by campervan

LONGEST DRIVE	VEHICLE
590 km, Gladstone to Airlie Beach	Campervan

This trip crosses the Country of the Jagera, Turrbal, Kabi Kabi, Butchulla, Wulgurukaba, Bindal, Djiru and other First Nations peoples. Traditional Custodians



Hill Inlet and Whitehaven Beach, day 7 · Illustrative image



Outing from a base

Planning overview, not navigation. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors · coastline Natural Earth · relief Terrain Tiles (Geoscience Australia, SRTM).

> Special caution and planning should be taken when travelling in remote areas to ensure sufficient provisions, fuel and prescribed medicines are carried. Weather conditions can make sealed roads impassable particularly during the northern Wet season.

BEFORE YOU BOOK

Hiring a campervan for this trip

One way to Cairns

Apollo, Britz, Maui and Mighty charge a one-way fee between Brisbane and Cairns: $200, or $205 for pick-ups from 1 April 2027. The fee is in the total we quote: compare totals, not daily rates. More on one-way fees.

Your route

All rental vendors in Australia have restrictions on where their vehicles can be taken, so discuss your planned route with the rental company when you pick up. Get the rental company's permission before taking the vehicle somewhere it restricts. If you take it there without permission, you may lose your excess reduction and be fully responsible for any damage. You may also have to pay for towing

and recovery, and for damage to other people's property. See road restrictions and when you are fully responsible.

Picking up in Brisbane

Most Brisbane branches are in the northern suburbs between Northgate and Eagle Farm, close to Brisbane Airport, and Apollo, Britz, Maui, Maui Elite, Mighty and Mighty Lite share one branch on Nudgee Road, Northgate (Brisbane branches). Check-in includes a walkthrough of the vehicle, so allow about an hour, and collect your vehicle at least an hour before the branch closes.

Branches are usually open from about 9am to 3pm and busiest from 9am to 10am, so pick up in the morning to reach your first stop in daylight (choosing a pick-up time). Do the online check-in beforehand, bring the documents you need, and if you're flying in, see picking up after a flight. More on picking up your campervan. Branch addresses and hours: Brisbane branches.

DAYS 1–4

Days 1–4: The Sunshine Coast & Hervey Bay

DRIVE

150 km from Brisbane | **about 2 h 50 min** by campervan | Via **Bruce Highway**

DAY 1

Brisbane to Noosa

PICK-UP

Morning

Pick up your car or campervan in Brisbane. If renting a campervan, allow plenty of time at the branch so the rental company can show you how it works before you leave.

On the way

Before reaching Noosa, just outside of Caloundra is the famous Australia Zoo, which used to be home to the legendary crocodile hunter Steve Irwin.

Afternoon

Depart Brisbane and head north for Noosa. The seaside town offers many boutique shops, white beaches with crystal-clear waters and world class restaurants.

Stay Two nights at Ingenia Holidays Noosa (formerly Noosa Bougainvillia Holiday Park), in Tewantin.

A DAY AROUND NOOSA **2 outings from Noosa**

DAY 2

Noosa

2 NIGHTS

There are many day trips you can do from Noosa. Or if you aren't up for a spot of shopping, Noosa has some amazing beaches!

Side trip: Montville Optional

Montville is a must-see on your campervan travels. Approximately one hour south-west of Noosa, Montville is home to the best fudge in Queensland and offers quaint markets on weekends, amazing walking tracks, a cheese factory and a number of wineries. The fudge shops are on Main Street, and the market runs on the second Saturday of the month; for cheese, Maleny is 15 minutes further on, so check opening days before you go.

Side trip: Eumundi Optional

The small town of Eumundi, south-west of Noosa, hosts one of the largest markets on the Coast. The Eumundi Markets are held every Wednesday and Saturday.

DRIVE

180 km from Noosa | **about 3 h** by campervan | Via **Bruce Highway**

DAY 3

Noosa to Hervey Bay

All day

Today say goodbye to beautiful Noosa and travel to Hervey Bay. If you ever wanted to go whale watching and see the magnificent humpback whales come out to play, then Hervey Bay is the place.

Season Visit Fraser Coast says the whale-watching season usually runs from mid-July to late October. Most cruises leave in the morning, so if you want to go today you'll need to leave Noosa very early, or book a cruise for tomorrow.

Stay Two nights at Discovery Parks – Fraser Street, Hervey Bay (formerly Fraser Lodge Holiday Park).

A DAY IN HERVEY BAY

DAY 4

Hervey Bay and K'gari

2 NIGHTS

If you're looking for a little adventure then you may wish to visit K'gari (Fraser Island), just off the coast from Hervey Bay. K'gari is the largest sand island in the world and is home to long white beaches, freshwater lakes, lush rainforests and an abundance of native animals, including dingoes.

Not in a hire van
Its roads are sand tracks, and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service says only high-clearance 4WDs are suitable; every vehicle also needs a vehicle access permit. Hire campervans and motorhomes can't go there. Apollo, Britz, Maui and Mighty's terms prohibit K'gari even in their 4WDs, Campervan Village, Awesome Campers and Let's Go prohibit it too, and the other rental companies don't allow, or don't cover, beach and sand driving.

Tour Instead, join a guided day tour from Hervey Bay.

DAYS 5–7

Days 5–7: The coast to the Whitsundays

DRIVE

310 km from Hervey Bay | **about 5 h** by campervan | Via **Bruce Highway**

DAY 5

Hervey Bay to Gladstone, via Bundaberg

On the way

Continue your drive up the coast to Gladstone. You can make a pit stop in Bundaberg, home to the ever popular Bundaberg Rum Distillery. You can take a tour through the distillery to see, smell and taste your way through the rum production process. Children are welcome on the tour but there are no on-site children's activities, and the tastings are for adults only.

Afternoon

After spending some time in Bundaberg, make your way up to Gladstone. Gladstone is perfect for snorkelling with the world-famous Great Barrier Reef just off the coast. Or if you prefer fishing, Gladstone

offers a variety of fishing experiences from beach fishing for the novice to ocean fishing for the more experienced fisher.

Stingers	From about November to May, marine stingers are a risk in Queensland's tropical waters as far south as Gladstone. Surf Life Saving Queensland advises wearing a stinger suit and swimming only in stinger net enclosures during the season.
Stay	Gladstone City Caravan Park, Gladstone.

DRIVE

590 km from Gladstone | **about 9 h 15 min** by campervan

Via **Bruce Highway**

DAY 6

Gladstone to Airlie Beach

LONGEST DRIVE

All day

This is the longest drive of the trip, over 9 hours by campervan, so start early and share the driving. If it's too much in one day, break it with a night in Mackay and add a day to your hire.

Prepare for an adventure when you arrive at Airlie Beach, a small town full of life from the locals to the tourists. There is something here for everyone.

Stay	Two nights at Discovery Parks – Airlie Beach (formerly BIG4 Airlie Cove Resort and Van Park).

A FREE DAY IN AIRLIE BEACH

DAY 7

Airlie Beach and the Whitsundays

2 NIGHTS

Free day to explore. Maybe pull up a chair at a local pub or café and relax.

Tour

A must-do is a day cruise to visit the spectacular Whitsunday Islands. You can cruise to the popular Hamilton Island, Daydream Island, Hook Island and Hayman Island. A definite favourite is Whitehaven Beach, which is a stretch of brilliant white silica sand that is great for getting your jewellery sparkling clean! You can sit back, relax and swim in the clear, pristine ocean.

DAYS 8–10

Days 8–10: Townsville to the tropics

DRIVE

285 km from Airlie Beach | **about 4 h 30 min** by campervan | Via **Bruce Highway**

DAY 8

Airlie Beach to Townsville, via Bowen

On the way

On your way to Townsville, stop off at Bowen and check out the view from the local lookout at Flagstaff Hill. From this vantage point, you will see the amazing landscape below made up of rural farms which give the impression of a patchwork quilt. Then it's just a short drive the rest of the way to Townsville.

Afternoon

From Townsville you can take a ferry to the family-friendly Magnetic Island, which sits just off the coast. Many rental companies need their permission before you take the vehicle across, so check your terms and our ferries guide. If history is your thing then 1.5 hours west of Townsville you can visit the old gold mining towns of Ravenswood and Charters Towers and walk in the footsteps of the old miners.

Stay

BIG4 Walkabout Palms, Townsville.

DRIVE

235 km from Townsville | **about 4 h** by campervan | Via **Bruce Highway**

DAY 9

Townsville to Mission Beach, via Tully

On the way

Tully lies north of Townsville in an area of beautiful beaches and charming towns and is the hub of the local sugar industry. Here you can visit the big gumboot or continue north to Paronella Park, a must-see on your trip. Paronella Park is a magical world built from the local rainforest, with castles, bamboo gardens (where movies have been filmed), a secret garden and a tunnel of love. You can easily spend a day at Paronella Park. The detour to Paronella Park adds about 40 km to the day.

Afternoon

Then travel on to Mission Beach. You can snorkel or dive the Great Barrier Reef, Dunk Island or even try your hand at reef fishing. In stinger season, wear a stinger suit in the water.

Stay BIG4 Tasman Holiday Parks – South Mission Beach (formerly Beachcomber Coconut Caravan Village).

DRIVE

140 km from Mission Beach | **about 2 h 20 min** by campervan

Via **Bruce Highway**

DAY 10

Mission Beach to Cairns

RETURN

Morning

Drive up the coast from Mission Beach to Cairns, taking in the views of the towns as you pass them by, and return your campervan by mid-afternoon.

Afternoon

If you're staying on in Cairns, it has a lot to offer every traveller. A popular attraction is the Kuranda Scenic Railway, a historic railway that takes you up the escarpment to the village of Kuranda. You can spend the day exploring the village and then come down via the Skyrail cable car across the tree tops. The views out to the ocean are magnificent. Of course, a visit to Cairns is not complete without a trip to the Great Barrier Reef. There are many day tours or extended tours to let you experience the best of the Reef. If you have time, head up to Port Douglas, about an hour's drive north.

Stay BIG4 Ingenia Holidays Cairns Coconut, Cairns (formerly BIG4 Cairns Coconut Holiday Resort).

Returning in Cairns

Return the van with the toilet cassette and grey-water tank emptied. Apollo, Britz, Maui, Maui Elite, Mighty and Mighty Lite charge $299 a tank if you don't, unless you've bought their Drop and Go Pack, which includes emptying in Cairns. Drop-off times are often earlier than people expect, so check yours. If you have an early flight, returning the van the day before can take the pressure off (returning the van in Cairns).

Most branches take vans back until about 3pm to 3.30pm, so plan your last drive to arrive early (choosing a drop-off time). If you're running late, call the branch (late returns). More on returning your campervan. Branch addresses and hours: Cairns branches.

ANOTHER WAY TO DO IT

Twice the time, with kids

Travelling with children? Our 20-day Brisbane to Cairns family road trip takes the same coast at kid pace, with shorter drives and two-night stops.

Enjoy the drive up the coast.

Traditional Custodians

Brisbane (Meanjin): Jagera and Turrbal peoples (Queensland Government, Office of the Queensland Parliamentary Counsel (https://www.oqpc.qld.gov.au/acknowledgement-country))
The Sunshine Coast: Kabi Kabi and Jinibara peoples (Sunshine Coast Council (https://www.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au/living-and-community/first-nations-partnerships))
Noosa: Kabi Kabi people (Noosa Council (https://www.noosa.qld.gov.au/About-Council/First-Nations-and-Kabi-Kabi-Commitment))
Hervey Bay and the Fraser Coast: Butchulla (Badtjala) to the east and Kabi Kabi (Gubbi Gubbi) to the west (Fraser Coast Regional Council (https://www.frasercoast.qld.gov.au/Site-Footer/Footer-Widgets/Acknowledgement-of-Country))
Bundaberg: Taribelang Bunda, Gooreng Gooreng, Gurang and Bailai peoples (Bundaberg Regional Council (https://www.ourbundabergregion.com.au/acknowledgement-of-country))
Gladstone: Bailai, Gurang, Gooreng Gooreng and Taribelang Bunda peoples (Gladstone Regional Council (https://www.gladstone.qld.gov.au/Site-Footer/Footer-Widgets/Acknowledgement-of-Country))
Airlie Beach and Bowen: Ngaro people around Airlie Beach and the islands, Gia people around Proserpine and Juru people around Bowen (Whitsunday Regional Council (https://yoursay.whitsundayrc.qld.gov.au/australia-day-our-whitsunday-way-stallholders-entertainers))
Townsville: Wulgurukaba of Gurambilbarra and Yunbenun, Bindal, Gugu Badhun and Nywaigi peoples (Townsville City Council (https://www.townsville.qld.gov.au/about-townsville/history-and-heritage/townsville-history/traditional-landowners))
Tully and Mission Beach: Mamu, Djiru, Girramay, Gulngay, Warrgamay, Jirrbal and Bandjin peoples (Cassowary Coast Regional Council (https://yoursay.cassowarycoast.qld.gov.au/eco-destination-certification))
Cairns: Gimuy Walubara Yidinji and Yirrganydji, among the Traditional Custodians of the Cairns region (Cairns Regional Council (https://www.cairns.qld.gov.au/experience-cairns/facts-figures-history/first-peoples-history))

Country boundaries are approximate, and some are shared or contested. These names follow local councils and park managers. The AIATSIS map of Indigenous Australia (https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia) shows the wider picture.

Pay your respects to the Traditional Custodians of the land on which you are travelling, and to their Elders past, present and emerging. The Australian environment is fragile, so tread lightly: take only photos and leave only footprints.

DriveNow Disclaimer

DriveNow receives no money or commission for any holiday park, campground, hotel, restaurant, cafe, pub, tour or attraction named on this page. We include them because they suit a campervan trip, and we check them from time to time.

DriveNow's suggested itineraries help you plan your own trip. Distances and times are from mapped routes and are a guide only; campervan driving times are car times plus about 20%. Road conditions, closures, opening hours and prices change, so check them before you travel. Any reliance on this itinerary is at your own discretion.

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