

# A Trip of a Lifetime

These British marine photographers took on a new form of travelling when they motorhomed around the tropics

BY GARY BLAKE  
ADDITIONAL IMAGES SUPPLIED BY  
TOURISM QUEENSLAND





Whitehaven Beach, part of the Whitsunday Islands



We met many Aussie icons in our travels



Whale watching at Hervey Bay, QLD



After a thorough briefing of dos and don'ts with our motorhome, we set off on a 2000km 'trip of a lifetime journey' from Brisbane to Cairns on one of the great coastal roads. We toured past magnificent beaches, enjoyed a 4WD trip to the world's largest sand island, walked through lush rainforests, and then marvelled at the magnificent Great Barrier Reef.

Two months planning with Google Earth from our home in England gave us 17 schedules to cover within our two-week van hire. Thankfully, our KEA four-berth shower and toilet motorhome (4ST) was well equipped for the November temperatures with 94% humidity.

With the air-conditioning on, music blasting, and wearing heavy black sunglasses, we squinted through the tinted windows down the Bruce Highway. Comfortable in our captain seats, we headed towards the Tropic of Capricorn.

With the sat-nav set for Australia Zoo (of the late Steve Irwin's 'Crikey' fame), we drove the 35km to our rendezvous at the Crocoseum and the 3pm feeding time – a not to be missed spectacle.

Our next adventure was the 4x4 Discovery Tour of Fraser Island the next day. This was a 350km daytrip onto the largest sand island in the world (an area of 184,000ha). We drove through a forest shortcut on an unmade road, across the sand dunes to a barge, along beaches and up to the sand hills.

To drive along 50km of long beaches or swim in one of the 200 freshwater lakes with the snowiest of white soft sand are things we are unable to do in Europe, short of going to North Africa.

The next day we were taken by avid travellers of the Australian bush to Noosa's headland on a nature boardwalk – so well organised and typical of the Australian bushwalks. It is here that botany and wildlife lovers would be in their element, spotting crimson rosellas, bush turkeys, pandanus palms, fruit pigeons and possums.

We then continued our journey on to Captain Cook's second point of landing after Botany Bay – a headland now named Seventeen Seventy. It is also a departure point for reef cruises and fishing charters to the outer Great Barrier Reef. We ended a long but exciting day on the beach in the Seventeen Seventy camping ground.

With inroads of only a few inches made on the map, there was a lot more bitumen and country to discover. Our journey took us through typical Australian bush: widely spaced eucalyptus trees stretched off into the hinterland beyond. We were on a very tight schedule and began to realise the distances in Australia are huge, so the sat-nav became an essential tool on the journey up Queensland's Bruce Highway.

Camping at Sarina Beach next to an endless sandy beach under palm trees is what motorhoming is all about to us.

To wake up early and stroll along a deserted beach (or a forest glen) at 5am before the searing sun gets a grip is bliss. Turtles breed on these beaches, their main diet being box jellyfish – loved by turtles, hated by mankind.

For a want of a swim on the Great Barrier islands, we were soon on a Fantasea Cruise to Whitehaven Beach in the Whitsunday Islands, set in a national reserve and supposedly voted the best beach in the world. The stunning white sand is so fine it is guaranteed to wreck cameras. Pristine sandy beaches line these islands with their jungle-clad interiors home to unique flora and fauna.



The beauty that is Fraser Island



Meeting friends in Bowen



Visiting the Cairns Zoo

## OUR JOURNEY TOOK US THROUGH TYPICAL AUSTRALIAN BUSH

Looking the part in our Irukandji and box jellyfish resisting head-to-toe lycra stinger suits, we marched across the cool mica sand (which doesn't absorb heat) and erected our Telly-Tubby sun pods and had a swim.

The days rolled on and the countryside varied with cane fields and mango and banana growing regions. In our travels, we were always looking for the 'old Australia', and suddenly we first came across some interesting old buildings at Prosperine Historical Museum. We strolled around pondering the hardship endured by the early settlers with their non-air-conditioned wooden

houses ripe for the termites to eat.

We moved on to Bowen, the first settlement in Queensland (1861). It was here that Baz Luhrmann shot his film 'Australia' pretending to be Darwin. Darwin was 95% rebuilt as a modern city after Cyclone Tracy tore it apart in 1974. A board in a field read 'Baz, Hugh and Nic loved Bowen, so will you', and so it became our stop for the night. We spent the next day as tourists spotting historical buildings they used in the film.

Sadly, only two more nights were left before handing back our faithful motorhome. It was a perfect roadrunner and the best way to see Australia by far.



Croc feeding at Australia Zoo



Driving around Bowen



Great Barrier Reef

## FAST FACTS

**RV**  
KEA 4 berth shower/toilet motorhome (4ST)  
[www.keacampers.com](http://www.keacampers.com)

**DISTANCE TRAVELLED**  
2236km

**TOURS ON ROUTE**  
Australia Zoo  
Adults \*\$58.00  
[www.australiazoo.com.au](http://www.australiazoo.com.au)

**FRASER ISLAND DISCOVERY**  
[www.fraserislanddiscovery.com.au](http://www.fraserislanddiscovery.com.au)  
Adult \*\$169 per inc. lunch

**FANTASEA CRUISE TO WHITEHAVEN BEACH**  
[www.fantasea.com.au](http://www.fantasea.com.au)  
Adult \*\$140.00 per adult inc. lunch

**PROSERPINE HISTORICAL MUSEUM**  
Adults \*\$7.00  
[www.queenslandholidays.com.au](http://www.queenslandholidays.com.au)  
*\* Prices may have changed since time of print*

## OUR ACTUAL JOURNEY BECAME THE EQUIVALENT OF LONDON TO NAPLES

Boating as a means of transport was now a distant memory as we ate the miles (we had changed the sat-nav to miles so we could get a feel for the vast distances). Even so, our actual journey became the equivalent of London to Naples. The road surfaces approaching Cairns were heaven after the previous road surfaces.

After long days driving in the searing heat, the comforts of town camping became more appealing with the full facilities of washing machines, showers, air-conditioned chalets and ablutions blocks to die for (potted plants and some even with baths). The flat concrete pads for our table and chairs were away from the crawling nasties that seemed to be Queensland's daily topic. I suppose that made a change from the Brits' obsession with the weather.

We made a detour north of Cairns to Cape Tribulation and the Daintree Rainforest – that was the pièce de la résistance. This was a hinterland of ancient palms, buttress vine trees, the scary saltwater crocodiles, cockatoos, cassowaries, the obligatory kangaroo, along with flora and fauna in abundance.

We made a welcome detour up the river to Mossman Gorge, away from

breeding freshwater crocodiles, to have a refreshing dip in the rock pools. Then we continued on a ferry barge across the Daintree River with more 'true' croc stories from the ferryman. Crocodiles are a protected species since 1978, and it comes with a warning how prudent one has to be. Once crossed, we meandered along the sealed road up to the end at Cape Tribulation, where the jungle descends down to white sandy beaches, palms, mangroves and of course a beautiful turquoise sea.

Our last stop was Palm Cove with its cooling sea breezes, before our handover in Kea's Cairns depot. We were surprised with the comfort and ease of driving the large motorhome; this is what helped make the trip so delightful. The fuel was cheap compared with the UK, and the campsites were to die for – the dawn chorus is a delight when camping, and even more so in Australia. We found the truck drivers to be courteous and we always let the road trains overtake us by pulling over on the hard shoulder.

Even though we touched only a fraction of Australia, we still felt the pulse and the excitement of this incredible country. ■



Wendy behind the wheel



Lunch at Fraser Island, QLD

# EarthCruiser

Expedition Campers for Extended Travel Across Australia or Across the World

Comfort can be a part of your adventure.

EarthCruiser EXP comes standard with the comforts of home and sensational off road ability and ride comfort.

For more information please get in touch with a member of our team.

Web: [www.earthcruiser.com.au](http://www.earthcruiser.com.au)  
Email: [sales@earthcruiser.com.au](mailto:sales@earthcruiser.com.au)  
Phone: 07 3358 1011

EarthCruiser EXP and EarthCruiser UTE are manufactured in Australia by EarthCruiser Overland Vehicles Queensland Australia.