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Tropical North Queensland tourism helps conservation

Home to one of the world's seven natural wonders, one of the oldest rainforests and the oldest living culture with more than 60,000 years of connection to country, Tropical North Queensland has a long history of tourism-led conservation.

The destination has three World Heritage areas – the Great Barrier Reef, the Wet Tropics rainforest and Riversleigh fossil site – with a fourth, Cape York Peninsula, being considered for its cultural significance. These include some of the world's most at-risk ecosystems – shallow water reefs, ancient rainforest mountains, and one of UNESCO's Top 10 cultural rock art sites.

Tropical North Queensland tourism operators play a key role in the sustainable management of local ecosystems and in educating visitors about conservation. Examples of tourism-led conservation:

Not a drop is wasted

The Cakemaker 5000 is turning 12,000 litres of sewage into 11,000 litres of water for toilet flushing, irrigation and firefighting reserves each fortnight at Green Island Resort where reduce, re-use and recycle is the mantra for the Great Barrier Reef island's operations.

This addition to the Resort's sewage treatment plant has been nicknamed the Cakemaker as once the water is extracted it leaves behind a cubic metre of "cake" that is recycled into compost by a local biosolid recycler.

Other initiatives include a Food Digester recycling machine which reduces food waste by 90% and creates organic fertiliser for the resort's nursery and local farms, while a compacter and baler tackles cans, cardboard and plastic so they can be efficiently delivered to recycling agents.

The Resort's sewage treatment plant is one of the most sophisticated in Australia, processing some 30 million litres of treated wastewater each year. Water is a precious resource on the island, so no rainwater is collected to ensure it all goes to the island aquifer to support the vegetation. Instead, the Resort, which is in Ecotourism Australia's Hall of Fame, has a desalination plant for potable water. The steep roofs of the Resort were designed to help channel the rain to the ground.

Solar generates more than one-quarter of the island's infrastructure energy needs, including power for the navigational aids, research station and Telstra tower, and is supplemented by new technology diesel generators and fuel-efficient operations.

<https://greenislandresort.com.au/sustainable-tourism/>

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Fighting wildlife extinction

Koalas, frogs and bats are among the endangered animals to benefit from funding by the North Queensland Wildlife Trust with \$64,800 donated to research and conservation groups in 2025.

The first doses of the newly approved koala chlamydia vaccines have been manufactured by a University of Sunshine Coast research team led by Professor Peter Timms and delivered to conservation partners for

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targeted vaccination of wild koalas. Chlamydia affects koala fertility and is one of the most significant drivers of koala population decline.

The cause of tumours in tree frogs is under investigation at the world's first frog hospital, Frog Safe in Innisfail, and the Bat and Tree Society of Cairns is being assisted with the running costs of the Kuranda creche for endangered spectacled flying fox pups.

Established by the Freeman family who own and operate Hartley's Crocodile Adventures, Kuranda Koala Gardens and Birdworld Kuranda, the North Queensland Wildlife Trust is focused on grass roots conservation efforts, hands-on wildlife care, critical habitat acquisition, conservation, research and preservation.

Visitors to the Freeman family attractions can actively contribute to the Trust, however, the most money is raised from a small levy on wildlife encounter photos offered at the parks and funding accumulated from the Containers for Change bottle recycling project.

<https://www.wildlifetropicalnorthqueensland.com/north-queensland-wildlife-trust/>

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Electric trailblazer

Tropical North Queensland's oldest coach company is Australia's first to introduce an electric fleet for day tours. They have 14 electric vehicles ranging from coaches for group touring to a Volkswagen I.D. Buzz for exclusive private tours.

Tropic Wings General Manager Colin Anderson said the launch of the Volkswagen I.D. Buzz late in 2025 represented the next step in an ongoing strategy to electrify the local family-owned company's operations.

"Over recent years we've been working hard to grow our electric fleet, with the long-term goal of operating 80% of our vehicles on electric by 2028," Mr Anderson said.

"Tropic Wings Cairns Tours and Charters has 11 advanced charging stations and off-grid operating capability to support the fleet which is used to showcase the Wet Tropics rainforest and surrounds in Tropical North Queensland.

Tropic Wings has notched up accolades including the Bus Industry Confederation's National Environmental and Innovation Award and the Tropical North Queensland Sustainable Tourism Excellence Award and has been ecocertified with Tourism Australia for two decades.

Established in 1981 by the Woodward family, Tropic Wings is part of the CaPTA Group which celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2026.

<https://www.capta.com.au/media/tropic-wings-media/>

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Renewable power

Energy independence is at the heart of Paronella Park's commitment to sustainability and dates back to 1933 when the attraction's founder Jose Paronella installed the north's first river-driven hydro-electric system to harness the power of the property's waterfall.

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Current owners Mark and Judy Evans have added an extensive network of solar and battery systems to run the Park, five properties, accommodation for 15 staff and EV charging infrastructure. Their electric fleet – from cars to a wheelbarrow – is powered by the renewable energy and staff are encouraged to charge their vehicles at work to reduce their costs and emissions.

Guests can also charge their electric vehicles while they visit and make use of the renewable energy when they stay at a powered site in The Paddock Van Park which includes one night at no cost. The renewable power network extends to the Mena Creek Hotel and the cabins at The Park.

Sustainability is not about quick wins for Mark and Judy, instead it is a steady and thoughtful process. "It's evolution, not revolution," Mark says about the philosophy that has shaped more than three decades of action to create a living legacy at Paronella Park.

<https://www.paronellapark.com.au/>

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Ready for the next generation

The Quicksilver Cruises fleet at Port Douglas has transitioned to sustainable fuel-ready engines that have reduced their fuel consumption by 10% and will further minimise emissions when hydrotreated vegetable oil fuels are commercially available.

The company's wavepiercing catamarans Quicksilver VIII and V which travel to Agincourt Reef, dive vessel Poseidon, and dive and snorkel catamaran Silversonic have all undergone the refits as part of Quicksilver's commitment to sustainable marine tourism.

The Great Barrier Reef's first tourism company to gain Advanced Ecotourism and Climate Action Innovator Status, Quicksilver has been certified since 1997 and is in Ecotourism Australia's Hall of Fame.

Quicksilver's Reef Biosearch was founded in 1986 before the word ecotourism was spawned and became the largest employer of marine biologists outside government agencies. The company has the longest logbook database on the Great Barrier Reef and today their work involves reef education in schools, advisory roles with government, university interns, tours and research.

<https://quicksilver-cruises.com/company/eco/>

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ENDS

Images:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/o40w20671xwvj2j6kdfjrj/Ajwa2PJhCEqxyUzT4pKwUnI?rlkey=hmlb80pnzhfc21qhg7dt2se0u&dl=0>

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