

# Queensland, Australia

Want to connect with the world's oldest living culture? Australia's Sunshine State is a great place to start.

Words **Sarah Reid**

It's better known as the home of the Great Barrier Reef, but as the only place in the world where both of Australia's Indigenous cultures meet, Queensland's also one of the most interesting destinations to experience cultural tourism. Seven times the size of Britain, Queensland is today home to around 50 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language groups, with 4% of Queenslanders identifying as Indigenous. Thanks to more than 65,000 years of ancestral knowledge, passed down through generations, the culture continues to run deep in Indigenous communities from the Queensland outback to the tropical isles of the Torres Strait. Now, travel is also playing a role in safeguarding this heritage.

"Sharing our cultural ways with visitors helps to create an understanding of our culture and ensures that we preserve our culture for future generations," says Kuku Yalanji man Juan Walker, owner of Walkabout Cultural Adventures in Tropical North Queensland. Carried over from 2020, the Year of Indigenous Tourism in Queensland campaign has taken on new meaning in the current climate, highlighting the role travellers can play in rebuilding the global tourism industry more sustainably. While there are many cultural differences between Queensland's Indigenous communities, largely shaped by the varied natural settings of their ancestral lands, environmental

stewardship or 'caring for Country' is a shared central theme.

From a cultural tour of Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) on two wheels with Yura Banji Scooters ([yura-banjiscooters.com.au](http://yura-banjiscooters.com.au)), to a private tour of the Whitsundays with Ngaro Indigenous Cultural Tours ([whitsundayparadiseexplorer.com](http://whitsundayparadiseexplorer.com)), Queensland's newer Indigenous touring options continue to challenge perceptions about how Indigenous Australian culture can be consumed. Cultural experiences can also be enjoyed in Queensland where you least expect to find them: in the heart of the Gold Coast, for example, is an ancient midden (a repository of shells and bones) hidden in plain sight that you can visit on a walking tour run by Jellurgal Aboriginal Cultural Centre ([jellurgal.com.au](http://jellurgal.com.au)).

There are also plenty of opportunities to connect with Indigenous culture on your own steam, from embarking on an outback road trip to explore the South West Queensland Indigenous Cultural Trail ([swqict.com](http://swqict.com)), to admiring the incredible collection of Indigenous art at the Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art ([qagoma.qld.gov.au](http://qagoma.qld.gov.au)) in Brisbane. Read on to discover more of Queensland's Indigenous tourism highlights. ▣



**Telling their story** Quandamooka Dancers on North Stradbroke Island teach and retain tribal knowledge through physical performance; (below) taking in a look-out point on-Jarramali Rock Art Tours



## Six places to experience Indigenous culture in Queensland, from north to south...

### 1 Thursday Island

It's an adventure just getting to Thursday Island, the administrative centre of the 274 isles comprising the Torres Strait islands off Australia's northern tip. But it's worth the journey just to visit the Gab Tutui Cultural Centre ([gabtutui.gov.au](http://gabtutui.gov.au)), a contemporary art gallery and keeping place for cultural artefacts that provides a unique insight into the vibrant art and culture of the Torres Strait and the Northern Peninsula Area Region of the mainland.

### 2 Laura

Around 25 Indigenous dance troupes from across Cape York gather biennially in the remote village of Laura in July for the ultimate dance-off at the Laura Quinkan Dance Festival ([lauraquinkanfestival.com.au](http://lauraquinkanfestival.com.au)). This is Quinkan Country, home to one of Australia's most significant collections of rock art, which can be viewed year-round (aim for the May-to-November dry season), some independently and some with guides. To see the Magnificent Gallery, and hear the stories behind the art, book with Jarramali Rock Art Tours ([jarramalirockarttours.com.au](http://jarramalirockarttours.com.au)).

### 3 Daintree Rainforest

No one knows the world's oldest rainforest like its Traditional Custodians, the Kuku Yalanji people.

On a tour with Walkabout Cultural Adventures ([walkaboutadventures.com.au](http://walkaboutadventures.com.au)), your Kuku Yalanji guide will teach you how to use a traditional spear to hunt a mud crab where the Daintree meets the sea. Nearby, in the verdant oasis of Mossman Gorge ([mossmangorge.com.au](http://mossmangorge.com.au)), which is also Indigenous-run, look out for the Boyd's forest dragon, a Kuku Yalanji totem animal. Also in Mossman, you can purchase Aboriginal art or learn how to create your own at Janbal Gallery ([janbalgallery.com.au](http://janbalgallery.com.au)).

### 4 Great Barrier Reef

See the Great Barrier Reef in a whole new way with Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel ([dreamtimedive.com](http://dreamtimedive.com)), which runs snorkelling and scuba diving trips from Cairns led by Indigenous 'sea rangers'. Cruises begin with an Indigenous acknowledgement and an introduction to the Creation story of the reef, followed by a snorkel or dive at two outer reef sites. Back on the boat, you can interact with sea rangers, who will share stories about the culturally significant species you spotted. Designed in collaboration with Traditional Owners, the Coral Greenhouse, part of the Museum of Underwater Art ([moua.com.au](http://moua.com.au)), which opened near Townsville in 2020, is another fantastic cultural diving and snorkelling experience.



### 5 Burketown

Yaliya means 'sky' in the Gangalidda language, and on a Yaliya's Stories stargazing tour run by Yagurli Tours ([yagurlitours.com.au](http://yagurlitours.com.au)) in the outback Queensland town of Burketown, your Gangalidda guide will share Aboriginal Dreaming stories connected to the stars twinkling above Australia's largest aggregate of salt pans. Owned and operated by the Gangalidda and Garawa people, Yagurli Tours offers a range of experiences designed to connect you more deeply to this remote north-west corner of Queensland.

### 6 Sunshine Coast

Slipping through the idyllic canals of Mooloolaba on board a restored century-old traditional timber sailing vessel is already a fantastic way to spend two hours on the Sunshine Coast. But it's just part of the eco-luxe Indigenous Culture Tour run by Saltwater Eco Tours ([saltwaterecotours.com.au](http://saltwaterecotours.com.au)). Launched in 2020, the cruise immerses you in the history and culture of the Gubbi Gubbi (Kabi Kabi) people, the Traditional Owners of these waterways, through storytelling and music as you enjoy a bush tucker-inspired lunch including fresh Mooloolaba prawns and oysters.

**Aboriginal encounter** (clockwise from below) Originally created as a drama and dance program for at-risk youth, the Spirits of the Red Sand experience (just outside of Brisbane) now tell the Aboriginal story through sharing their culture, customs and rituals; Aboriginal rock art experience; Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel



Tourism Tropical North Queensland; Tourism and Events Queensland; Archie Satriasom/Tourism Australia