

Our series on fly-away destinations continues. Loads of our readers have asked for ideas on where to choose for their fly-aways – whether it be for a long weekend or an annual trek. So we invite readers to write to us with suggested destinations, providing contacts for the guidance of our travel writers. Great getaway secrets need to be shared so if you've flown into somewhere that worked for you, let us know. Email to johnspiers@yaffa.com.au or post to Australian Flying, GPO Box 606, Sydney 2001.

Cairns Skyrail



A taste of the Tropics

By Shelley Ross

“One hundred and ninety thousand years ago the earth trembled, the sky darkened and flaming fountains of lava bathed the land in a fiery glow. Undara had awoken.”

This place we call home never ceases to amaze. Who has even heard of Undara? Certainly not me before a few months ago. So let's get you on location first, line you up with the airstrip, check you into some memorable accommodation, book you on the afternoon tour, feed you beautifully

then put you out under the stars around the campfire before bed. That should sort you out. The main attraction that will draw you to Undara is the Undara Lava Tubes, a geological jaw-dropper located on the eastern edge of the Gulf Savannah region of Far North Queensland, about an hour's flight in your Cherokee north-west of Townsville and around a half-hour flight south-west of the smaller Mareeba airport.

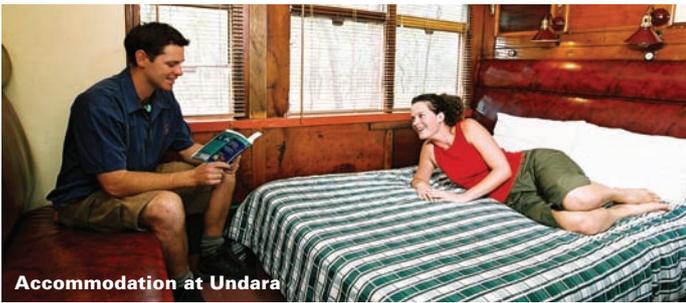
An overnight stay at the Undara

Experience can easily be woven into a week of activities centred around this area of Far North Queensland, including access to Cairns and its plethora of tableland and reef-based attractions. There is a dedicated airstrip at Undara, details of which you'll find below, and on their website www.undara.com.au along with everything else you'll want to know. The strip is easy to find and has no nasty surprises for you on late final as long as you've checked for stray

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Accommodation at Undara



Cairns scenic railway

wildlife and have called ahead to confirm your pick-up.

The nearby Lava Lodge is an experience. One central vast open-air courtyard, known as Undara Central, houses the beautiful first-class restaurant, fully-stocked bar, visitor's shop and the casual Fettle's Iron Pot Bistro. Your accommodation snakes through the bush in the form of 100 year-old beautifully restored Queensland railway carriages, now at rest under tall shady gum trees. They are an easy walk from the main lodge and you will find your room with its ornate polished timber hat rack and bed head exactly as the ladies at the turn of last century left them.

Do not miss the afternoon guided tour to the Lava tubes – they are simply amazing. Your fully-trained Savannah guide will give you a full history of the dramatic effect the Undara Volcano eruption had on this whole area and will explain how the massive underground tunnels came to be. Our guide was Steve O'Callaghan – at 21 y.o. the highlight of our stay – thoroughly familiar with the geology, helpful, attentive and absolutely hilarious.

You can walk deep down into a couple of the larger tubes; all now very stable, and under the shadow of a happily extinct and lazy volcano. Arrange your requests with reception and they will accommodate your group on one of the mini buses that leave from the lodge several times a day. The tour has received all sorts of awards.

The food at Undara is superb, plentiful and served in the unique ambience of Undara Central.

After dinner, it is good fun to join in the campfire activities which can be bush poetry, music or nature talks. We scored a great country singer/guitarist the night we were there and, despite inviting some very suspect crowd participation, he kept everyone happily entertained much longer than planned.

Wake up next morning and its breakfast with a difference. Off to the Ringer's Camp, a five minute stroll from the lodge, where young and friendly staff have a billy of tea and hot breakfast waiting for you around the campfires. You will successfully cremate your own toast over the open fire and I challenge anyone to come up with a more quintessential Australian outback experience.

It was too cold to swim while we were there but there is a pool for guests and a couple of different choices of accommodation, should you prefer the more budget-conscious options of either the Swags Tent Village or Wilderness Lodge.

If you have decided on a couple of days in nearby Cairns while you are in the area, here is an idea. Rather than landing in Class C Airspace at Cairns International Airport, an easy alternative is to leave your aircraft at the GA-friendly Mareeba airport for a few days while you explore. Investigate transport before you go, but the road trip from Mareeba airport to the tiny town of Kuranda takes about an hour, and deposits you at the top of both the Scenic Railway and the famous Skyrail Rainforest Cableway which connect Kuranda to Cairns.



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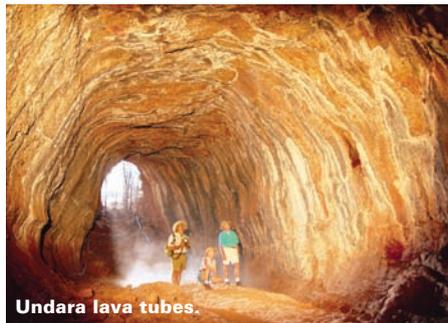
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The quality art galleries and craft shopping in this charming little hill-top town will keep you well amused for a morning, (plus there are great counter meals and cappuccinos at the pub) before you wander over to the old-world railway station for your trip down the mountain to Cairns on the Scenic Railway. You may choose to travel down on the train and back on Skyrail – a 7.5km ride in a modern six-person gondola cabin often gliding along just metres above the rainforest canopy. Both it and the railway offer endless photo opportunities and incredible views of the Barron Falls, river, gorges and way out to the reef once you clear the hills.

Once in Cairns you have naturally got oodles of choices of accommodation. If the weather is good, you may like to investigate a boat trip out to the reef. We copped some strong winds on our lay day so opted to hire a car for the day and headed up the gorgeous scenic coast road to Port Douglas, via Ellis Beach etc. Well into the throes of an Australia-wide



Undara lava tubes.

chocolate milkshake survey, we found a clear winner here on the very trendy Macrossan Street whilst watching well-heeled tourists strolling by enjoying the mild winter sunshine.

Where to from here? How about flying, as we did, up over the Daintree Wilderness area then coastal, overflying Lockhart River to the tip of Cape York? Then it's only a quick 16 nm nip across to Horn Island, and you've made this an international flight! We'd better stop now or we'll have you in Bali before we know it. Happy planning! ■

— Shelley Ross

TRAVEL TIPS

Undara Airstrip (YUDA): Private and Charter aircraft welcome. No landing charges.

Length 1900 metres

R/W 11/29; unsealed, gravel

Lat/Long S18.11 E 144.37

Altitude 2500 AMSL

WAC 3218

Please advise ETA to arrange pick-up with Undara Experience on 07 4097 1900.

More info: www.undara.com.au

Transport Mareeba-Kuranda:

Bill Bale 0417 755 680.

Mareeba Airport (YMBA)

R/W 10/28, sealed

Length 1505m

Details in ERSA

Skyrail Rainforest Cableway:

One way 90 minutes: \$40/Adult

One way Skyrail and one way Kuranda

Scenic Railway: \$80/Adult

More info: www.skyrail.com.au;

www.queenslandholidays.com.au

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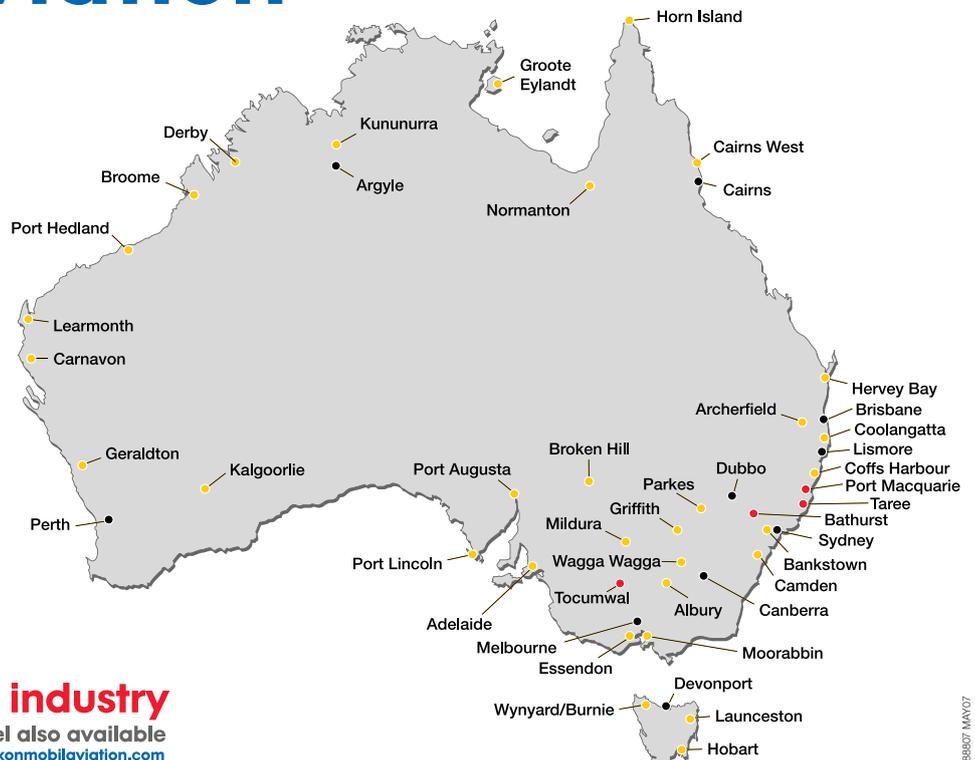
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Aviation Refuelling Guide

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