



Highlights

- Lookouts
- Historic Towns
- Waterfalls
- Dairy Farms

The Waterfall Circuit



Distance
100km (one way)



How
Car or Camper



Where
Cairns to Atherton
Tablelands



Date
All year round

Tropical North Queensland's annual wet season produces a spectacular side-effect. All that rain trickles into creeks and rivers, some of which spill spectacularly over the jagged landscape into waterholes and rock pools. Happily for visitors, it's easy to soak up the sight of these photogenic waterfalls – and perhaps enjoy a refreshing swim or even a few mist-fuelled rainbows – on a languid day-trip around the region.

9AM – Cairns

It's time to hit the road, heading up the Gillies Highway from Cairns into the Atherton Tablelands and towards today's destination ... a trio of magnificent waterfalls.

10AM – Lake Barrine

10km , 10mins

First stop is The Teahouse on Lake Barrine, part of the Crater Lakes National Park. The heritage building has lovely views over the lake, which is, in fact, a water-filled crater left behind after a volcanic eruption some 10,000 years ago. Ruminant on that as you enjoy one of the award-winning Devonshire teas.

10:30AM – Yungaburra

41km, 30min

Ten minutes down the highway is the village of Yungaburra. Take the Peterson Creek Wildlife & Botanical Walking Track, where you might spot a platypus or rare Lumholtz tree kangaroo. Or discover Yungaburra's many heritage buildings on the Old Town Loop walk. If platypuses are a priority, make sure to stop at the viewing area just before you hit town.

11AM – Millaa Millaa Falls

8km, 10mins

Head back east on the highway then take the Lake Barrine Road and head to the tiny outpost of Millaa Millaa. Just past town, turn left on Theresa Creek Road and follow the signs to Millaa Millaa Falls. It's easy to see why they're Australia's most photographed cascades. The heritage-listed 18m plunge waterfall, which tumbles into an inviting waterhole fringed by tall gums and tree ferns, is the centrepiece of what's known as the Waterfall Circuit. Keep your eyes peeled as you slip into the refreshing waters – you might spot an electric-blue Ulysses butterfly fluttering about. And if you love Instagram, this is the spot to dip your hair into the water and whip it out to produce an aquatic arc that competes with the waterfall for attention.

1PM – Zillie Falls

Now it's time to drive over to Zillie Falls to take in the tumbling waters from a viewing platform that's a short stroll from the car park. Those with a sense of adventure might also be able to track down an outdoor rock pool in an elevated spot that provides another unusual angle on these falls. This is also a great place to unpack your picnic lunch. There's a shelter and barbecue in the car park, also home to a colony of flying foxes.

3PM – Ellinjaa Falls

2.5km , 5mins

To complete your trio of waterfalls, it's a short hop from Zillie Falls to Ellinjaa Falls. These waters tumble over a series of lava columns – a relic from the region's volcanic history. A 200m-long walkway leads to the base of the falls, where freshwater turtles and platypuses can sometimes be spotted. This place is also an Instagram favourite: you might see visitors striking a pose in their swimmers. Venture into the water and you might find a ledge hidden behind the falls where you can sit and enjoy nature in all its glory.

4PM – Cairns or Yungaburra

Your Waterfall Circuit drive is now complete ... now, you've got two options. Turn the car around and head back to Cairns, or spend the night in the cool of the Tablelands. A good option in Yungaburra is Eden House Retreat, or if you want to stick around a little longer, Allumbah Pocket Cottages offers quaint cottages for 5-night minimum stays.

Optional Detour – Mungalli Creek Dairy Farmhouse Cafe or Nerada Tea Plantation

The biodynamic Mungalli Creek Dairy is just a short drive from Ellinjaa Falls, off the Palmerston Highway. Run by the same family for four decades, the dairy produces milk, yoghurt, cheese and eggs, and is home to a lovely cafe, situated in the property's original farm house. Cheese features heavily on the menu – there's a hearty ploughman's lunch – and the cheesecakes shouldn't be missed. If tea is more to your taste, visit the Nerada Tea Factory, off the Malanda Millaa Millaa Road, where you can see how tea is grown and processed. And, of course, enjoy a very decent cuppa.