





# Party time in *Port*

Port Douglas plays its trump card for Carnivale. Lulu Roseman reports.



**THE PORT DOUGLAS REEF** and Rainforest Carnivale is an annual celebration that pays homage to tropical life by rejoicing in what is unique about living in tropical North Queensland.

Held in late May, the event attracts thousands of locals and visitors, including style setters, sports people, anglers, poker players, yachties and fun seekers who embrace the chance to “frock up in the tropics”.

During the 10-day festival, there’s plenty of activities for participants including: an art exhibition and prize; golf tournaments; tennis clinics with Wimbledon legend, Evonne Cawley; footy clinics; a triathlon; a beach sports day; a poker tournament; a fishing competition, a sailing regatta; long lunches; a fashion parade; masquerade ball; the Food, Wine and A Taste of Port gala; and the sight of the town’s best chefs as they rattle their pans for supremacy in the ever popular Gourmet Gladiators.

The laidback charm of Port hasn’t changed much from how the town was depicted in the 1986 film *Travelling North* starring Leo McKern and Graham Kennedy.

After the late Christopher Skase created his landmark Mirage Resort and Marina, Port reinvented itself as an international tourist destination. The marina’s modern facilities allowed the larger charter operators to capitalise on the reef.

For people-watching, the passing parade of joggers, cyclists and beachcombers on Four Mile beach each morning and afternoon is a must. For a chance to burn off some of that barramundi, try kite surfing, where the warm, flatter conditions make it ideal for taking a course. Many of the surf-starved locals say it’s one of the best east coast locations for the sport.



While there's always a few stray celebrities, movie stars, ex-US Presidents and other high-profile types hanging out, Port Douglas is free of pretence. The locals are down-to-earth, friendly and tolerant of all types of visitors who come to chill out. The perennially shirtless Matthew McConaughey, Kate Hudson and Donald Sutherland spent extended time in the area filming *Fools Gold*. Tom Hanks popped in briefly

to check on the production of *The Pacific*, the mini-series joint venture with Stephen Spielberg.

Port Douglas was discovered by Captain Cook in 1770, while passing the coastline on his way north. His boat *The Endeavour* struck the reef and was beached near Cooktown while repairs were undertaken.

The discovery of gold in 1873 at Palmer River saw Port Douglas become a bustling gold-



rush town with 14 pubs. Then, a sugar mill was built at Mossman and a railway line linking it to Cairns, leaving Port to wallow and the population dropped from 6000 people in 1901 to just 250 in 1914. The township reverted to a sleepy fishing village and became one of the forgotten gems of the deep north.

The Daintree Rainforest to the north and the Atherton Tablelands to the west provide a

stunning backdrop for the Great Barrier Reef. The local fresh seafood and tropical fruits are abundant and the absence of traffic lights and fast food joints has seen Port retain its unique village atmosphere.

The climate is comfortably tropical all year round, with maximum temperatures reaching 31°C in the summer and up to 26°C in the winter.

If you are a boating, diving, sailing, or fishing enthusiast; single, or hooked up with a brood, it's nothing short of heaven on a stick and there's also a plethora of landlubber pursuits to while away your days.

With the region's incredible support, the Reef and Rainforest Carnivale event has become a highlight of the year. It attracts thousands of people from all over the world who come to indulge their tropical passions and marine pursuits in the mild autumn climate, where every demographic is catered for.

A street parade fuelled by pyrotechnics kicks off festivities to the delight of thousands of spectators who line the street to watch the colourful and creative floats meander along Macrossan Street. The best vantage points are from the balconies of watering holes, The Courthouse and The Central Hotel, or any of the alfresco cafes and restaurants dotted along the main drag.

On the nautical front, the Audi Clipper Cup, a six-race regatta held over the two-consecutive weekends of Carnivale, attracts a growing flotilla of local yachts. Last year, conditions ranged from breezy 15-20 knot south easterlies for the first round of races to under one knot that almost becalmed the fleet on the second weekend.



This year Rod Jones is set to race *Bluewater*, his Beneteau 45 and Tim Preuss will again campaign his Hanse 37e, *Ann Sea*, which impressed in 2008, during her maiden regatta. The youth crew on board *Douglas Sailing*, an etchell skippered by Ian Crossman, excelled in the lighter conditions.

Last year's overall winner, Port Douglas Daintree Tourism Chief, Doug Ryan, on board his trusty Farr 1104, *Magic*, is set to defend his title that includes a booty of cash and prizes courtesy of the local Audi dealer in Cairns.

The highlight of the last year's regatta for Taurian Litchfield was beating *Magic* over the

line in the final race to finish second overall. Litchfield, a local sail maker does the foredeck on John Jamieson's Southern Ocean 32, *Southern Hustler*.

"We lost our handicap advantage to Doug in the lighter air. It was very disappointing as we watched the conditions deteriorate. We floated about 500m to the finish line in less than half a knot of breeze," Litchfield said.

Scott Carse, from Audi Centre Cairns, said he is delighted to continue supporting such a great local event.

"I love being involved in this regatta and the momentum can only grow as the event attracts



more yachts. All the winners enjoy the bonus prizes of a four-day spin in one of the latest model Audis," he added.

The pinnacle event of this social week is the ever-popular Quicksilver Food, Wine and a Taste of Port knees up, held on the final Saturday night. It attracts over 2000 people and is held right on the waterfront at Rex Smeal Park reserve overlooking Dickson's Inlet, where the area is transformed by a massive marquee set among the swaying palm trees.

Each year a special Carnivale theme is adopted for this event. In 2008, "Bringing the Country to the Coast" was embraced by guests

with gusto from the innovatively decorated tables to the fashion kit outs that twisted the dress code and united the ocean with the countryside. Many went down that country and western fashion path decked out as saloon wenches, Indians, rhinestone cowboys, or just plain glammed up with glitter and sequins galore.

The live entertainment line up as always was top notch. Golden Guitar winners and country music's glamorama sisters, The McClymonts, whipped the crowd into a boot scootin' frenzy into the wee hours.

On the final night, Lorna Luft entertained a sophisticated crowd at Diane Cilento's (Sean Connery's ex and local identity) Karnack Playhouse Theatre, where she performed songs from her career and latest album that celebrates the musical legacy of her mother, Judy Garland. It was a fitting end to a fantastic fiesta.



What about the fishing? More than 100 of the best anglers in the far north cast their lines out during the Carnivale Fishing Bonanza. Competitors lined the banks of Dickson's Inlet, cruised down the Daintree River, or headed out to the reef to try their luck. And with \$10,000 up for grabs for a barramundi, it was on for young and old.

The great thing about this contest is it's a "catch and release" event.

Peter Glasson won the contest for snaring an 8.75kg barramundi and received a \$5000 cheque for his efforts.

No visit to Port Douglas is complete without visiting the Great Barrier Reef. You can take a morning tea cruise on board an old paddle steamer, try a twilight sunset champagne cruise, spend the night fishing the reef from a charter boat, sail out to Low Isles, or take an extended charter on board a luxury motorboat.

Whatever way you look at it, Port Douglas is the perfect winter escape for water loving types. Visit for Carnivale 2009, or simply find any other excuse to head north to this breathtaking part of the world.



Port has it all, gorgeous weather, sumptuous food, pristine beaches, a lively nightlife, heritage listed rainforest, coral reefs and waterways. A slice of heaven you won't want to leave in a hurry and that's why some rarely do.

