



Queensland CRUISING

Make the most of the journey from Brisbane to Fraser Island by taking your time, writes **Stephanie Williams**.

There are some pretty famous drives around Australia – the Great Ocean Road, the Gibb River Road, the Nullarbor Plain – but sometimes a lesser-known drive turns out to be one worth savouring. Road-tripping from the glittering lights of Brisbane to the great outdoors of Fraser Island can be done in as little as four hours, but if you put the pedal to the metal you'll miss out on an incredible journey of food, fun and four-wheel driving adventures.

BEERWAH AND BUDERIM

Our Fraser Island road trip begins on a clear blue Brisbane day. We load up our four-wheel drive, affectionately known as 'The Troopy', and hit the road through the Glasshouse Mountains. First stop is Beerwah, home of Australia Zoo and The Big Mower. Beginning life in 1970 as the two-acre Beerwah Reptile and Fauna Park, Australia Zoo was

transformed by the late 'Crocodile Hunter' Steve Irwin and his family into a 1,500-acre (607-hectare) attraction with live shows, hands-on exhibits and, of course, crocodiles.

After exploring the zoo, we jump back into The Troopy to knock off a few more kilometres. The road is lined with expansive sugarcane crops, mango stalls and avocado sellers and we roll down the windows as the air becomes more tropical. Before we know it, we're at The Ginger Factory in Buderim.

Ginger has been grown in this area since World War I and began to really flourish when the ginger supply from China was cut off during World War II. Today, Buderim Ginger exports to 17 countries. As a ginger lover, I'm quite excited by the prospect of a shop dedicated solely to ginger, so I stock up. We don't have time, but you can book ahead for a factory tour that includes tastings. ☺

NOOSA NIGHTS

Noosa Heads is where we lay our heads for the night, at a small, charming bed and breakfast, Noosa Valley Manor. Our hosts, Kathleen and Murray, and their West Highland white terriers welcome us with port and nougat and, after a wonderful rest, farewell us the next day with eggs Benedict for breakfast.

For those keen to explore Noosa, Hastings Street is the hub, and the gorgeous beach is perfect all year round for a dip. Berardo's is the pick for a chic dinner. Off the beaten track, try Thomas Corner Eatery, a favourite among chefs visiting for the Noosa Food & Wine Festival every May, or Wasabi for top Japanese cuisine.

Noosa is where the real four-wheel driving fun begins. There are two ways to drive from Noosa to Fraser Island. The first route is sealed road all the way and takes you to River Heads (10 kilometres south-west of Hervey Bay, famed for its whale-watching tours), where you jump on the car ferry to Wanggoolba Creek on Fraser Island. The other way, to Rainbow Beach, takes in a stretch of sand driving, which, depending on the tides, can be challenging. Never ones to shy away from a challenge, we choose the four-wheel driving option.

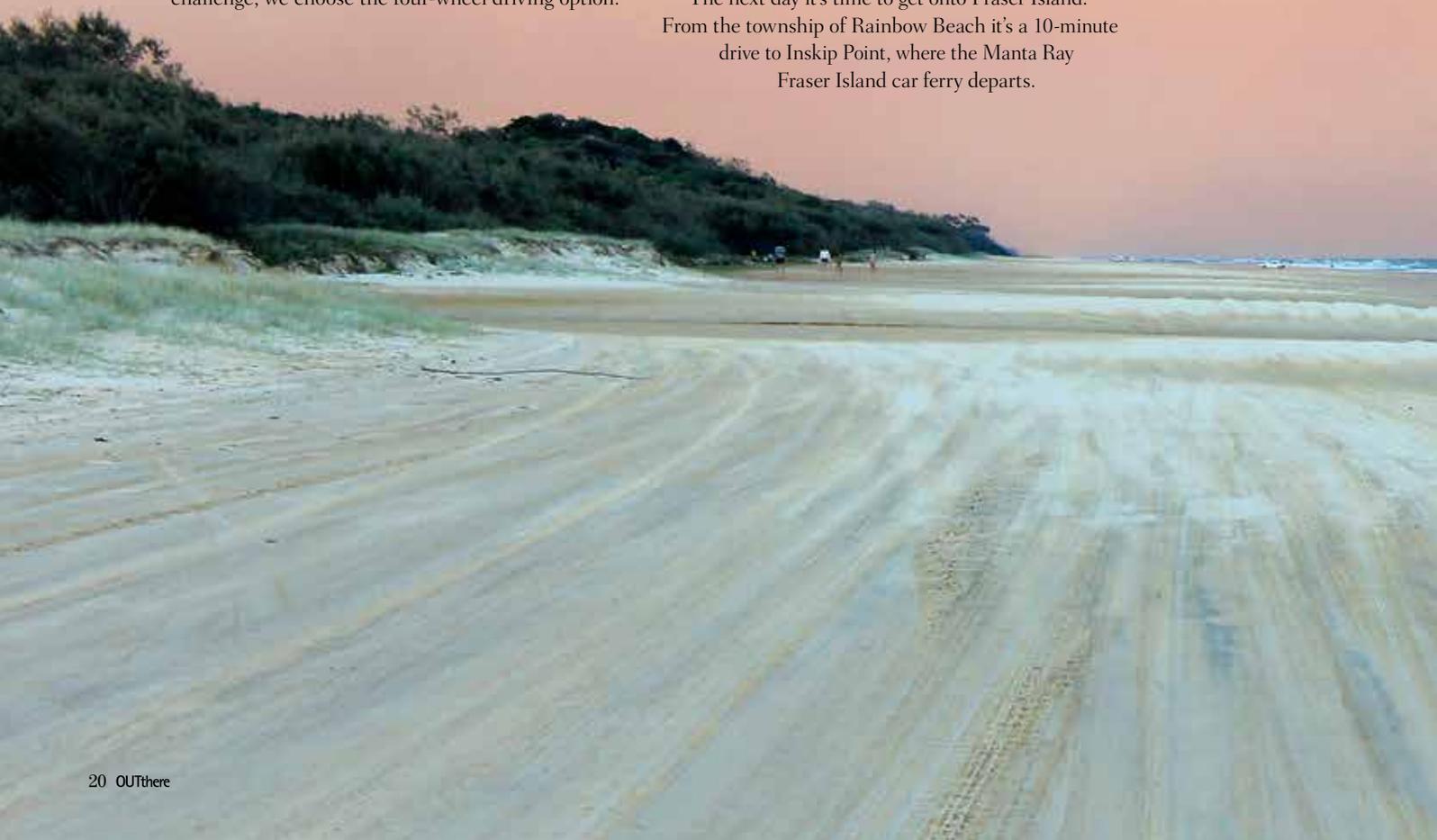
LIFE'S A BEACH

Beach driving requires a permit from the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service – we bought ours earlier in the day from its shopfront at Tewantin, outside Noosa. Permit in hand, we catch the ferry across the Noosa River to the north shore for our first taste of sand driving. Before hitting the sand, we let air out of our tyres so they can handle the terrain, then hit the sand highway for some real fun.

The track to Rainbow Beach is a mix of beach driving and skinny, sandy tracks that wind through the trees. The journey should be attempted three hours either side of low tide to avoid getting bogged and ending up on the rescue noticeboard at the local surf club with the other few hundred vehicles that have encountered trouble.

After a few hours of fun we leave the track at Rainbow Beach, our base for the night. We check into the Plantation Resort at Rainbow and head to the Rainbow Beach Hotel for dinner. This recently renovated pub has everything you could want: a gorgeous tropical-style interior, great pub food and sports screens everywhere. It's one of only two Queensland pubs that still serve beer from the traditional wooden keg.

The next day it's time to get onto Fraser Island. From the township of Rainbow Beach it's a 10-minute drive to Inskip Point, where the Manta Ray Fraser Island car ferry departs.



The ferry trip (\$100 return) takes only five minutes and lands us at the southernmost point on Fraser Island. Again, tides play a part and every journey you take needs to be carefully planned to avoid being caught by the high tide.

FRASER ISLAND

It's easy to see why Fraser Island is on UNESCO's World Heritage List. Incredibly beautiful with long, white beaches hugged by colourful sand cliffs, Fraser is the largest sand island in the world. It stretches 123 kilometres long by 22 kilometres wide and is crisscrossed by sandy four-wheel drive tracks ranging from beginner to advanced. Known to the traditional owners as K'gari (meaning 'paradise'),

the island has been inhabited for more than 5,000 years and takes its English name from Eliza Fraser, a sea captain's wife who was shipwrecked off the Queensland coast and managed to make it to the island with another survivor, a convict.

There are various accommodation options on the island and we opt for a few nights of camping, followed by a stay at Kingfisher Bay Resort. Camp sites need to be booked in advance and range from fully serviced, with shower blocks and toilets, through to remote sites on the beach with no facilities. We decide on the quieter option of beach

camping and head to the farthest point at the north end of Fraser, Sandy Cape, via the sand highway.

Driving on the sand highway is not like driving on a normal road. Deep tyre tracks can throw your vehicle about if you're unprepared. Unlike normal highways, seaplanes land on it, people fish from it and dingoes roam along it – it's a busy place.

After a scenic beach drive we arrive at the breathtakingly beautiful tip of the island, taking in the calm blue waters as we set up camp among the trees. Watching the sunset from the sand dunes, we see amazing colours dance across the sky while we tuck into our camp stove dinner and a well-deserved glass of red.

DRIVING HIGHLIGHTS

Four-wheel driving on Fraser

Island is exciting, but challenging

for the uninitiated. Add tidal waters to the mix and you have a potential recipe for disaster. We planned our days carefully to maximise sand driving time and tackled the northern four-wheel drive track first, with its amazing brush box forests, Lake Allom turtle viewing platform and Boomerang Lake.

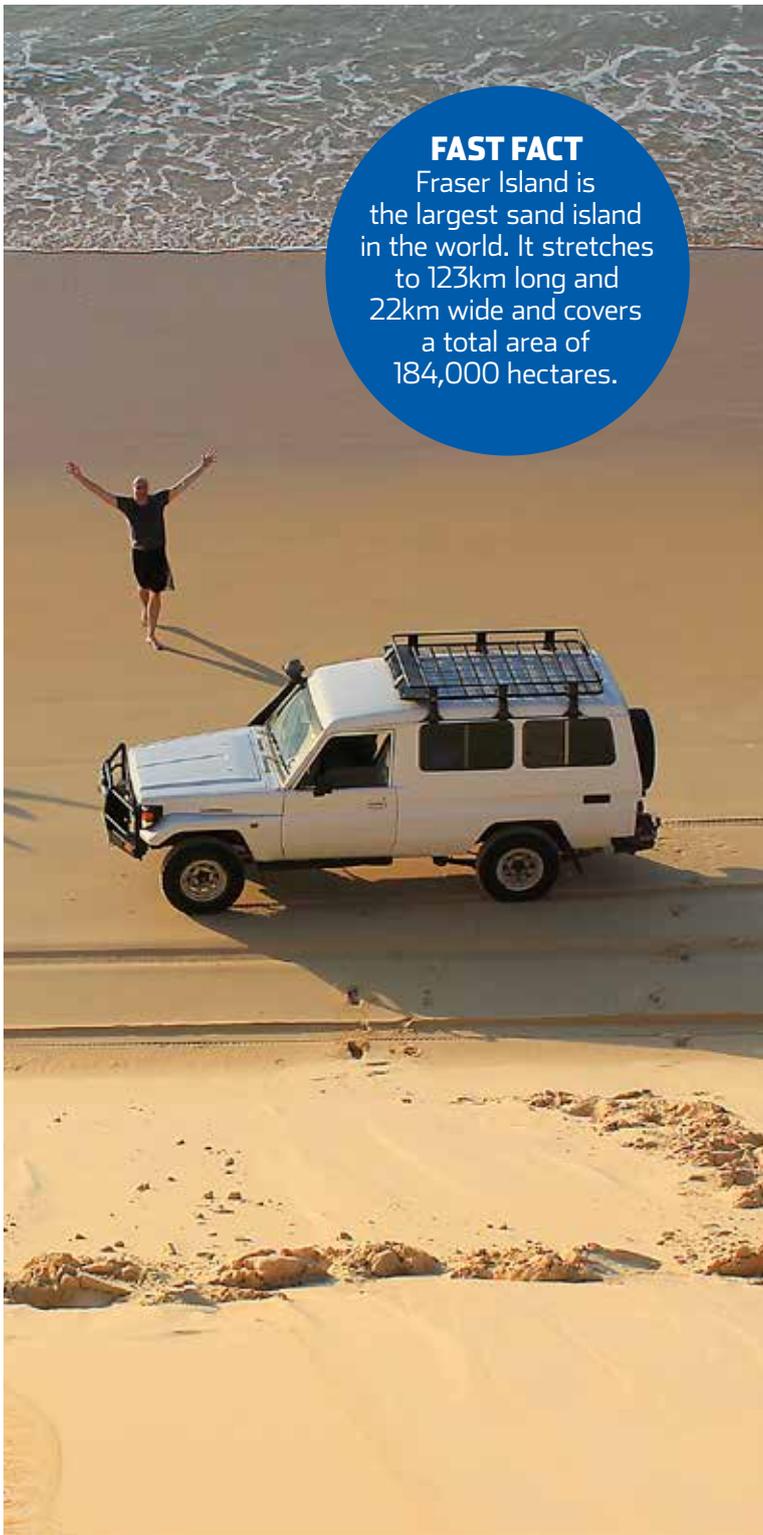
Make sure you journey inland to Central Station to see the remarkable satinay rainforest. These trees are biological wonders, having managed to grow in the sand. It's also well worth driving to the top of the island to see Sandy Cape lighthouse, do some whale watching and have some fun on the 🐾



Previous page, inset (left and right) and below:

The lush greenery by the road near Noosa; a snack at Kingfisher Bay Resort; on Fraser, dingoes roam in the shallows off the beach; the sand on Fraser is perfect for a stretch of four-wheel driving.





FAST FACT
Fraser Island is the largest sand island in the world. It stretches to 123km long and 22km wide and covers a total area of 184,000 hectares.

Photo graphy: Stephanie Williams

sand dunes. A joy flight from the beach will give you perspective on the scale of the island and show you some secret lakes only visible from the air.

Fraser Island can be enjoyed all year round by everyone, from drivers and campers to anglers and resort lovers. Enjoy the drive to Fraser Island to extend the holiday, and with so much to do, you can't possibly leave disappointed. [O]

Above and right:

The speed limit is 80km/h on Fraser's 75 Mile Beach highway, but why rush?; sunset from Sandy Cape.

Round-up

GET THERE

Noosa North Shore Ferries runs the Noosa River crossing service approximately every six minutes daily. Cars are \$6 one way. www.noosacarferries.com
Depending on where you're leaving from the mainland, book your Fraser Island ferry crossing with

Manta Ray Fraser Island Barges
www.mantarayfraserislandbarge.com.au

Fraser Island Ferries
www.fraserislandferry.com.au

STAY

Noosa Valley Manor rates start at \$220 per room, per night, including breakfast. Rooms are 4 1/2 star and the property has a pool and tropical gardens. www.noosavalleymanor.com.au

Kingfisher Bay Resort rates start at \$135 per night.
www.kingfisherbay.com

Plantation Resort and **Rainbow Beach Hotel** are part of the same complex. Accommodation in a one-bedroom apartment starts from \$173 per night. Main meals at Rainbow Beach Hotel start at \$20. www.plantationresortatrainbow.com.au or www.rainbowhotel.com.au.

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service on Moorindil Street, Tewantin, is open daily from 8am to 4pm. Camping and vehicle permits are required, from approximately \$10 per night. www.derm.qld.gov.au/parks/fraser/camping.html

EXPLORE

Australia Zoo is open seven days a week (except Christmas day). Tickets from \$35. www.australiazoo.com.au

The Ginger Factory in Buderim is open seven days a week. Admission is free, but ticket prices apply for behind-the-scenes tours. www.gingerfactory.com.au

MORE INFO

There are warnings on Fraser Island to secure all food in eskies to avoid dingo visitors in the night. Our food was locked away but was outside, so our camp site had a canine visitor or two in the night, making visiting our outdoor bathroom seem very unappealing! The answer is to secure your food in your vehicle.

