

AUSTRALIA FAMILY ADVENTURE

Sydney · Cairns · Port Douglas · Daintree
A Travel with Autism Family Trip

Three home bases. Ten days. Paced for nervous systems, not highlights reels.

We kept it simple on purpose. Sydney first — harbor, zoo, beaches, room to land. Then one domestic flight to Cairns for the reef. Then north to Port Douglas for the rainforest and outer reef. Three home bases, no moving every night. The kids had real places to settle into, and that made everything else possible.

WHERE WE STAYED

LOCATION	AIRBNB
Sydney	airbnb.com/rooms/983571691914909288
Cairns	airbnb.com/rooms/1432195697908964448
Port Douglas	airbnb.com/rooms/848886821106859079
Sydney (near airport)	airbnb.com/rooms/1470746716944853824

TOUR QUICK REFERENCE

All tours rated by our family. Star ratings reflect our experience — weather and conditions are always a wildcard on the reef.

DAY	TOUR	WHAT TO EXPECT	OUR RATING
Day 6	<u>Frankland Islands</u>	Snorkeling off a private island beach in the Great Barrier Reef. Staff and organization were outstanding — went above and beyond for both kids individually. Water was murky during our visit but that's weather, not them.	★★★★★ 5/5
Day 7	<u>Fitzroy Island</u>	Island ferry + private snorkeling led by a marine biologist — just our family of four. Saw beautiful coral. Water was murky (out of their control). Felt slightly rushed and the package was a little piecemeal. A don't-miss, but go in with realistic expectations.	★★★★☆ 3.5/5
Day 11	<u>Wavelength Reef Snorkeling</u>	Open ocean Great Barrier Reef — smallest group option outside of private. Every person on board is a marine biologist. Staff were patient, knowledgeable, and went above and beyond with equipment. One guide spent 10 minutes connecting with our son before we entered the water. Saw sharks, a sea turtle, and had the best on-boat lunch we've ever had. Do not skip this one.	★★★★★ 5/5

Day 12	<u>Backcountry Bliss River Drift</u>	Calm drift down a freshwater jungle river — not white water, not snorkeling (a recent cyclone took out the fish). Super cool and unique experience. Just know you'll carry your own float (and your kids') up to the starting point. Not hard, just unexpected.	★★★★☆ 4/5
Day 10	<u>Daintree Experience</u>	All-day guided hike through the oldest rainforest on Earth. Tour guide was fantastic, patient with the kids, and genuinely passionate. Food was so-so and the bugs are real — wear long sleeves and bring repellent. Absolutely worth every minute.	★★★★★ 5/5

GETTING AROUND

SYDNEY	CAIRNS + PORT DOUGLAS
Ubers throughout. No rental needed — keeps transitions low-friction and one less thing to manage.	Rental car essential. Daintree, Mossman, and the coastal drive all need your own wheels.

PART 1 — SYDNEY

Sydney is the soft landing. Big harbor, open parks, ferry rides. We came in slow and let everyone settle before we started doing things.

Day 1 — Arrival

- Land in Sydney — ease in, no rushing
- [Darling Harbor Playground](#)
- [Pirrama Park, Pyrmont](#) — water fountains, shaded picnic, low-key
- First look at the Opera House — at your own pace

Day 2 — Harbor + Beaches

- [Darling Harbor & Luna Park](#)
- [Bondi Beach](#)
- [Manly Beach & Shelly Beach](#) — protected cove, calmer swimming
- [Royal Botanic Garden](#)

Day 3 — Zoo + Museums

- [Taronga Zoo](#) — Sky Safari cable car, koalas, harbor views
- [Australian National Maritime Museum](#) — real submarines to climb
- [Darling Quarter Playground](#) — massive free water play area

Day 4 — Travel to Cairns

- Morning: pack up, explore, grab supplies
- Afternoon flight to Cairns
- Transportation in Sydney: Ubers throughout

PART 2 — CAIRNS

The gateway to the reef. Warm water, island day trips, and snorkeling that doesn't require being a strong swimmer.

Day 5 — Settle In + Explore

- Arrive Cairns, get oriented
- Esplanade Lagoon — outdoor saltwater pool, relaxed start
- Explore the waterfront, grab dinner in town

Day 6 — Frankland Islands ★★★★★

- [Frankland Islands Day Tour](#) — snorkeling off a private island beach in the Great Barrier Reef
- Early pickup from Cairns Esplanade — full day on the reef
- Staff exceptional — individually attentive to both kids

Day 7 — Fitzroy Island ★★★★★ ☆

- [Fitzroy Island Ferry](#) — private snorkeling with a marine biologist
- Just your family + guide — saw great coral, murky water on our visit
- A don't-miss, but pace can feel a little rushed

Day 8 — Travel Day to Port Douglas

- Relaxed morning in Cairns
- Optional stop: Barron Falls — 30 min west, worth the detour
- Drive north — scenic coastal road to Port Douglas

PART 3 — PORT DOUGLAS

Small town. Four Mile Beach at your doorstep. Daintree rainforest 30 minutes north. This is the stretch where the trip really breathes.

Day 9 — Markets + Fishing

- [Port Douglas Sunday Markets](#) — local produce, crafts, easy morning pace
- [Hookabarra Fishing](#) — guided fishing 30 min north of town

Day 10 — Daintree Rainforest ★★★★★

- [Daintree Experience](#) — all-day guided hike through the oldest rainforest on Earth
- Bring: hat, long sleeves, insect repellent, swim gear, towel, walking shoes, water bottle, raincoat
- Tour guide was exceptional — patient with the kids and deeply knowledgeable
- Food is so-so. Bugs are real. Still 100% worth it.

Day 11 — Great Barrier Reef ★★★★★

- [Wavelength Reef Snorkeling](#) — open ocean Great Barrier Reef, small group boat tour
- Every guide on board is a marine biologist — saw sharks, a sea turtle, stunning coral
- Staff connected individually with our son before we entered the water
- Best on-boat lunch we've ever had. Do not skip this one.

Day 12 — Open Day (Choose Your Own)

- Four Mile Beach morning — no agenda, just show up
- [Backcountry Bliss River Drift](#) — calm float down a freshwater jungle river ★★★★★ ☆

- No snorkeling (cyclone took out the fish) but a genuinely cool experience
- Heads up: you carry the floats up yourself — plan for it
- [Daintree Discovery Centre — aerial walkway, audio guides for kids](#)
- [Hartley's Crocodile Adventures](#)
- [Mossman Gorge — swimming holes, Indigenous Dreamtime walks](#)

| Day 13 — Travel Back to Sydney

- Relaxed morning in Port Douglas — last swim, pack up
- Drive back to Cairns for afternoon flight
- Overnight near Sydney airport — makes early departure easy

Created by Stephanie Fluger · travelwithautism.net · Real trips. Real families. Real pacing.