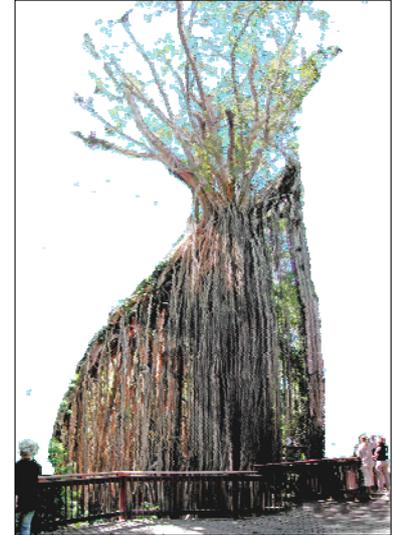




Curtain Fig Tree – The aerial roots of this strangler fig have spread to a 39 m wide and 15 m high water fall like structure.



A gondola cableway brings to a 7.5 km long excursion over the Kuranda rain forest area.



Curtain Fig Tree in her whole beauty with a charming crown like top

On the land of aboriginals, tracking the footprints of James Cook

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Text: Margit Pudas-Timonen
Photos: Maari Timonen
Cairns, Australia

Tropical rain forest and Great Barrier Reef encounter in Cairns. This secondarily popular tourist city of Australia lures visitors from all parts of the world. Some retired people have even immigrated here permanently.

My hotel is in the heart of the city. This hotel, called Hides Cairns, reflects the old British colonial power. I love to stay in the corner room of the uppermost floor. My neighbours, hundreds of parrots, living in the nearby huge canopy of an ape tree, wake me suddenly up at 4 am by terrible racket.

Although noise is deafening, I greet this exotic experience with joy. I just would like to know the reason for their so active "chattering"!

At about 8 pm, as all the parrots already have got peaceful, a new kind of racketing starts: piggy-back travellers enjoy a couple of glasses beer, or more, in the Irish pub of the lower floor. They continue up to the next morning. I love my earplugs blocking most of this mixed human and parrot based noise!

Crocodiles in Cairns

Low tide water has revealed a muddy shoreline full of mangrove bushes. I have entered the famous crocodile zone of the city. Fear of crocodile attacks is real; that is why the city officials have built a separate and safe swimming zone. The swimming zone seems to be very important almost for all the local people. It also seems to control the city view. I feel to be in a tropical island, where I can rest my eyes over a wide sea scenery.

A long wooden footbridge follows the shoreline about four kilometres. It is a great stage for monitoring life of crocodiles and other tropical animals.

I am watching into the darkness of the night. Thick mangrove vegetation covering the seaside bed almost extends the bridge. Suddenly something start shuffling close to me. My heart leaps: a crocodile! ... or was it just wind and my imagination?

A long-billed bird explores gracefully the grassy bed. Suddenly it freezes for catching. Like a statue, it stands a few minutes on one leg. But then it,

amazingly quickly, snatches its catch. Relentlessly following the tension of this spectacle, I realise almost have forgotten even breathe!

Lacking air, I step in the middle of a muddy spot, surrounded by grassy island. I want to observe the pelicans' noisy games with their huge nose bags. They are preparing their territory for settling down over the night.

Skyrail

A gondola lift is moving slowly over the UNESCO World Heritage rainforest. This about 7.5 km long cableway takes tourists over two hills from Caravonica station to Kuranda station.

I am observing the oncoming gondolas full of tourists returning from Kuranda. I wish to have a similar system in our hometown Rovaniemi. It should transport tourists from the city centre to the top of Ounasvaara and also to the world-famous Arctic Circle! This would provide a bird's eye view for travellers to learn about this northern landscape. They could also enjoy various magic Finnish Lapland themes like midnight sun, autumn colours of ruska, midwinter northern lights and the amazing spring lightness caused by sunshine and white snow.

The highest trees of this rain forest verge on our gondola floor on the hilltops. Ground vegetation is really low, because the green carpet-like canopy prevents almost all light from penetrating the ground floor. There exists, in the top layers of the rain forest, a living plant and animal world that never descends to ground. I see here and there orange-coloured floral islands, where birds are feeding their young.

I take pleasure in the scattered Cairns picturesque landscape highlighted with the sparkling Coral Sea (Great Barrier Reef) further away on the horizon. I can see in the north a glimpse of the famous Palm Cove, a shore where Captain James Cook recorded events on his log book during his first voyage in 1768-1771.

On the highest point of the cableway, strong wind suddenly makes my gondola swinging dangerously. I feel to be alone there! A terrifying feeling at hundreds of meters height! Fortunately, Kuranda appears already behind the river. But I got



a new worry: what if the wire breaks above the river? Would I drop into the jaws of crocodiles?

Kuranda, a village of about 650 inhabitants, is located in the middle of the rain forest. Here have the Djabugay aboriginal people lived more than 10 000 years! For the mood, I buy a Dundee that has got familiar from a TV series called "Crocodile Man". It is decorated with a crocodile leather strap and genuine threaded white crocodile teeth in the folds.

Palm Cove

Public transport minibuses provide a pleasant way for getting familiar with the Cairns area. A journey to the north introduces small bays with famous beaches. The northernmost and definitely different from the others is Palm Cove, whose population and hotels are located under gigantic palms. These genus Melaleuca trees belong to the original Australian vegetation.

The thickest part of the palm trees have been used as a part of architecture. They puncture the roofs and the floors of the houses. Abundant foliage offers excellent sun protection.

Dark clouds overcome the sky. Warm wind blows heavily on the beach street and changes the waves to whitecaps. I enjoy my life and run across the sands. A wide strip of the most beautiful beach opens up to the north and

south. But I do not want to touch water because nobody is swimming. Funny to sit on the shoreline and behave like world's largest ocean would not at all exist! I understand the reason as I read a warning about the very dangerous killer-medusas in the local sea water!

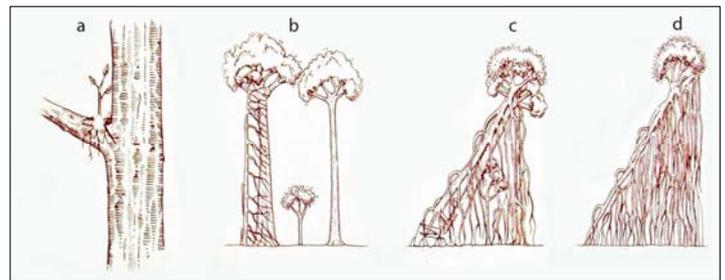
After returning home, I saw a Finnish TV-program, where researchers told about jellyfishes living in the Palm Cove beach waters. Even a small spot of one of their tentacles can kill! The program seriously taught there is no reason to rush into the unknown waters!

Strangler fig forest

Narrow road brings to the Yungaburra rain forest. I am surrounded by a number trees leaning against the neighbouring trees. Many of them are surrounded by strange roots. The information board welcomes to the world of strangler figs. I am wordless to face the king of this forest called "Curtain Fig Tree." Its aerial roots form a nearly 40 m wide and 15 m high wall. It is like a wide waterfall. The crown-like top grows at about 50 m height.

Aerial roots help trees to survive in natural rain forests in cases there is not enough light. Trees need light for regeneration. If a seed finds a branch crook high enough, this uninvited epiphytic guest can reach both soil and tree top level. A seedling captures also its starter nutrients from the host's cambium layer. The victim's sad fate is to gradually rot away and finally die.

These ghostly cannibal trees make this forest horrible; it's like watching a horror movie!



Life of a strangler fig tree. In the beginning a seed attaches epiphytically to a crook of the host tree (a). Then it germinates and grows the first aerial root reaching ground floor (b). Extra nutrition provided by soil and also the host tree grants the tree to grow more aerial roots (b). The weakened host tree finally dies and falls down against a neighbouring tree (c). As the host tree gets rotten and finally vanishes, the strangler fig tree gets more space to grow more aerial roots (d).

Didgeridoo (Didge)

I have entered a store famous for selling authentic Aboriginal made didgeridoo musical instruments (Didges). I want to buy one that is vibrating well. I ask whether the seller can play the instrument. He chooses one from the large Didge collection and blows out the most stunning and mystical tunes! The atmosphere is thrilling like sitting around a campfire together with the aboriginals! The man's appearance get's immediately my admiration and trust.

Asking for his background, he introduces himself as a Didge artist **Marshall Whyler**. He tells to have appeared e.g. with the London philharmonic orchestra. He proudly presents the press cuttings, dozens of articles on his international career. Although a native German, Marshall plays Didge like Aboriginal people in the Tjapukai theater!

A week later I am back in the shop and study with him pitches of the Didges. We finally agree with the same quite dark sounding D-pitch player. He gives me his teaching CD telling how to learn nonstop the circulation breathing techniques. In the background sounds his early 2008 appearing, swinging ethno music CD. I ask him to mail my player to my home.

INQUA and the kangaroos

My mission to Australia was the scientific INQUA congress in Cairns and the many related post-excursions. I went to a short visit to Papua New Guinea and to a one-week excursion to New Zealand.

The Farewell party of the congress was held in the Rainforests Station. A number of kangaroos in our midst made the evening unforgettable. They were jumping here and there like balls, which made us adults rushing primitively behind them in hope for touching, embracing and photographing!

Longing

Cairns and its surroundings im-

Fact box:

- Aboriginals**
 - Original people of Australia
- Didgeridoo (Didge)**
 - Aboriginal's messaging tool and player (wooden trumpet)
 - The oldest player in the world
 - Crafted from Eucalyptus
 - Length 1-3 m and weight several kg
 - More info: <http://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Didgeridoo>
- Strangler Fig**
 - A rainforest tree species that springs up and develops like a parasite exploiting other trees with its aerial roots.
 - The process lasts 500-1000 years and kills the conquered tree.

Curtain Fig Tree

- A massive representative of strangler trees of *Ficus virens* in Yungaburra (Queensland)
- Age: 800 years, height 50 m
- Its aerial roots form a 39 m and 15 m high wall
- More info: <http://maputi.pp.fi>

INQUA 2007

- <http://lustitag.pp.fi/morelinks.htm>

pressed me. I have to go back there! My Didge arrived on the agreed date comforting my Australian longing. After returning home, I contacted Marshall and ordered another Didge player, this time a "kangaroo" Didge (pitch C). When playing the both instruments in the evenings, I recall the journey to familiar areas, to the fascinating world of Aboriginals!

More to read about Marshall and Didges on my website: <http://maputi.pp.fi/Journeys.htm>



The waterfall of Millaa Millaa is a perfect place of nature beauty, Eden of my imagination. The water curtain drops about 50 meters into a idyllic greenish-coloured water, surrounded by trees, bushes and gigantic ferns.