

CARPENTARIA SHIRE
Outback by the Sea®

THE GULF OF VISITOR INFORMATION GUIDE CARPENTARIA

discover
Carpentaria

People talk about the real Australia.

What it is. How it is. Who it is.

But where is it?

Well, if they're going to send out a search party to find it, starting here in the Gulf of Carpentaria might save everyone a lot of time.

It's as real as Australia gets.

Known as the place 'where the Outback meets the sea', the Gulf is a land of contrasts. It's where nature is alive and time is still. Where everyone knows the secret fishing spot. Where people come for a stopover and stay for a week.

Welcome to the Gulf. Settle in.



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Acknowledgement of Country

Carpentaria Shire is the traditional country of many Indigenous groups and the townships of Normanton and Karumba are the traditional land of the Gkuthaarn, Kukatj and Kurtijar people. Carpentaria Shire Council would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands and waters that form the region. Council pays its respect to Elders past, present and emerging and welcomes the ongoing role that Indigenous people play within the Carpentaria community.

The Savannah Way

TO THE GULF

Intrepid travellers, and even the not so intrepid, are promised a journey like no other when they embark on the Savannah Way.

Travelling westwards from Cairns, sealed roads all the way will deliver you to the magic of the Gulf Country.

It's an ideal way for visitors in all kinds of vehicles to take the time to come and explore one of the most unique regions of Australia.

AND BEYOND



📍 **UNDARA LAVA TUBES**

When you set out on the Savannah Way to the Gulf Country, you'll bear witness to a brilliant fusion of rainforest, Outback and sea. Epic scenic wonders, endless outlooks and abundant wildlife are all part of the journey. Along the way, you can stop at historic towns like **MT SURPRISE, GEORGETOWN** and **CROYDON** before you arrive in the Gulf, featuring true character towns such as **NORMANTON** and **KARUMBA**.



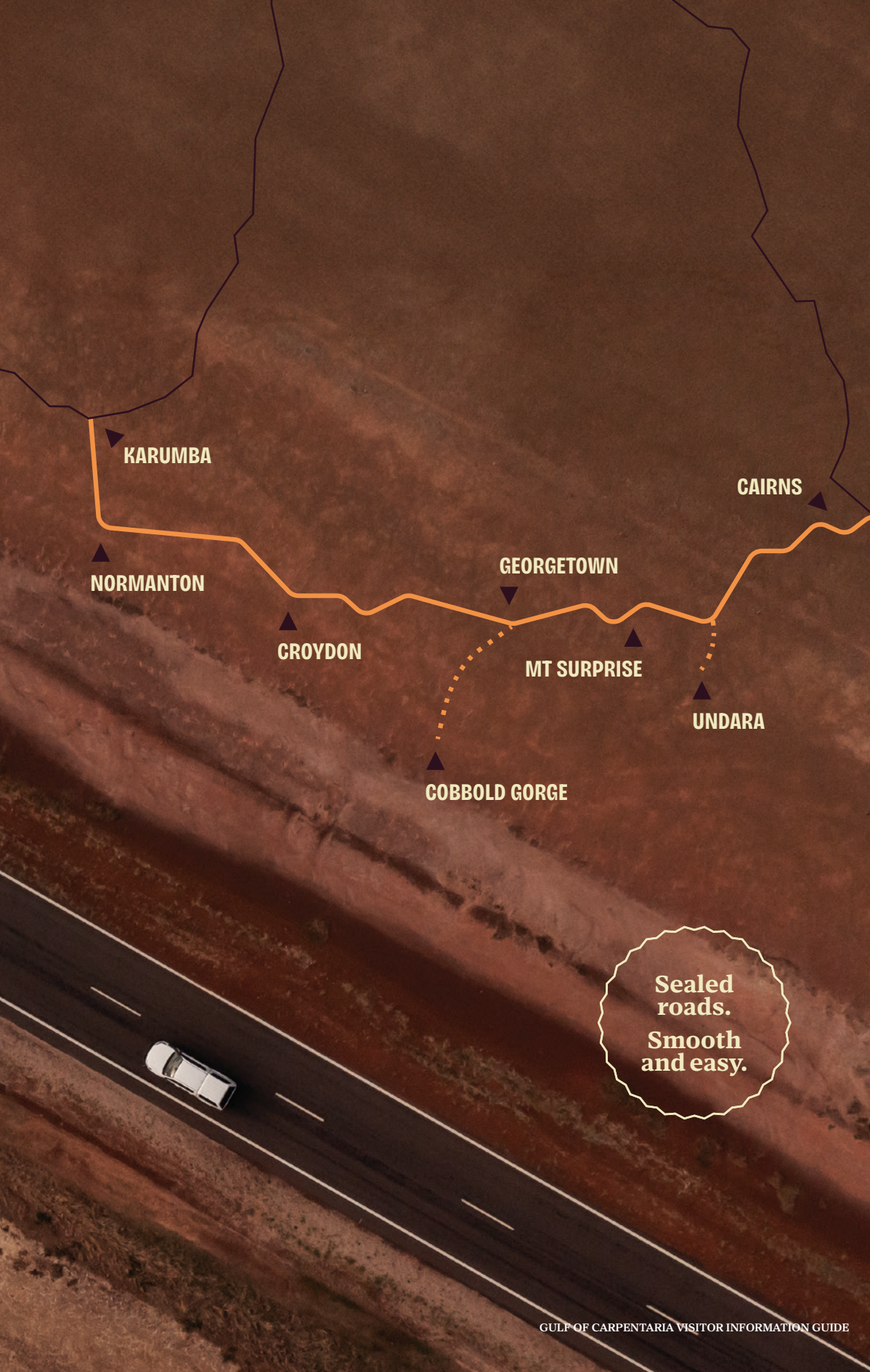
📍 **CROYDON HISTORIC VILLAGE**

While the Savannah Way is an immersive driving experience, there are attractions along the way guaranteed to pique the interest of every driver and passenger. Like the **UNDARA LAVA TUBES**, where you can explore the inner workings of an erupted volcano from 190,000 years ago. Just spectacular, and one of the reasons this route to the Gulf Country remains one of Australia's great driving journeys.



📍 **COBBOLD GORGE**

Once you've taken in the incredible sights and activities of the Gulf Country, spelled out further in this guide, you can continue along the Savannah Way all the way to Broome in the north region of Western Australia. A mere 3700km trip from Cairns and the ultimate coast-to-coast driving experience.



KARUMBA

NORMANTON

CROYDON

GEORGETOWN

MT SURPRISE

UNDARA

CAIRNS

COBBOLD GORGE

Sealed
roads.
Smooth
and easy.

THE SAVANNAH WAY

The Matilda Way

EXPLORE
YOUR
SENSES

Shhhh ... hear that?
You can't hear it? Exactly.
It's the sound of silence.

The sound of an endless sky. A crimson sunset over Gulf waters.

Outback plains that stretch beyond every horizon.

Yep, it is quiet up here. Probably because the sights say it all.

Sights that you take in as you travel The Matilda Way.

Spanning over 1800km from Queensland's southern border with NSW to right up here in the Gulf, The Matilda Way is every bit as epic as it sounds (or is that *doesn't sound?*).





📍 LEICHARDT FALLS

At its most northern reach, The Matilda Way is bookended by the iconic townships of **NORMANTON** and **KARUMBA**. Within these Outback communities, life runs at a gentle pace. Locals are friendly. Travel tips are free. Sunset drinks by the ocean every day.



📍 KARUMBA POINT BEACH

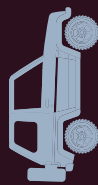
And as you travel around, the rugged beauty of the Gulf with her unspoiled landscapes and generous vistas are always on show. Try some of the world's best bird watching at **MUTTONHOLE WETLANDS**. Or witness one of Mother Nature's most incredible phenomena ... the spectacular **MORNING GLORY CLOUDS**.



📍 MUTTONHOLE WETLANDS

And not far from **KARUMBA** are the **LEICHARDT FALLS**. Depending on the season, they can feature a raging torrent or a gentle trickle—and what they lack in height, they make up for in breadth and aesthetic beauty.

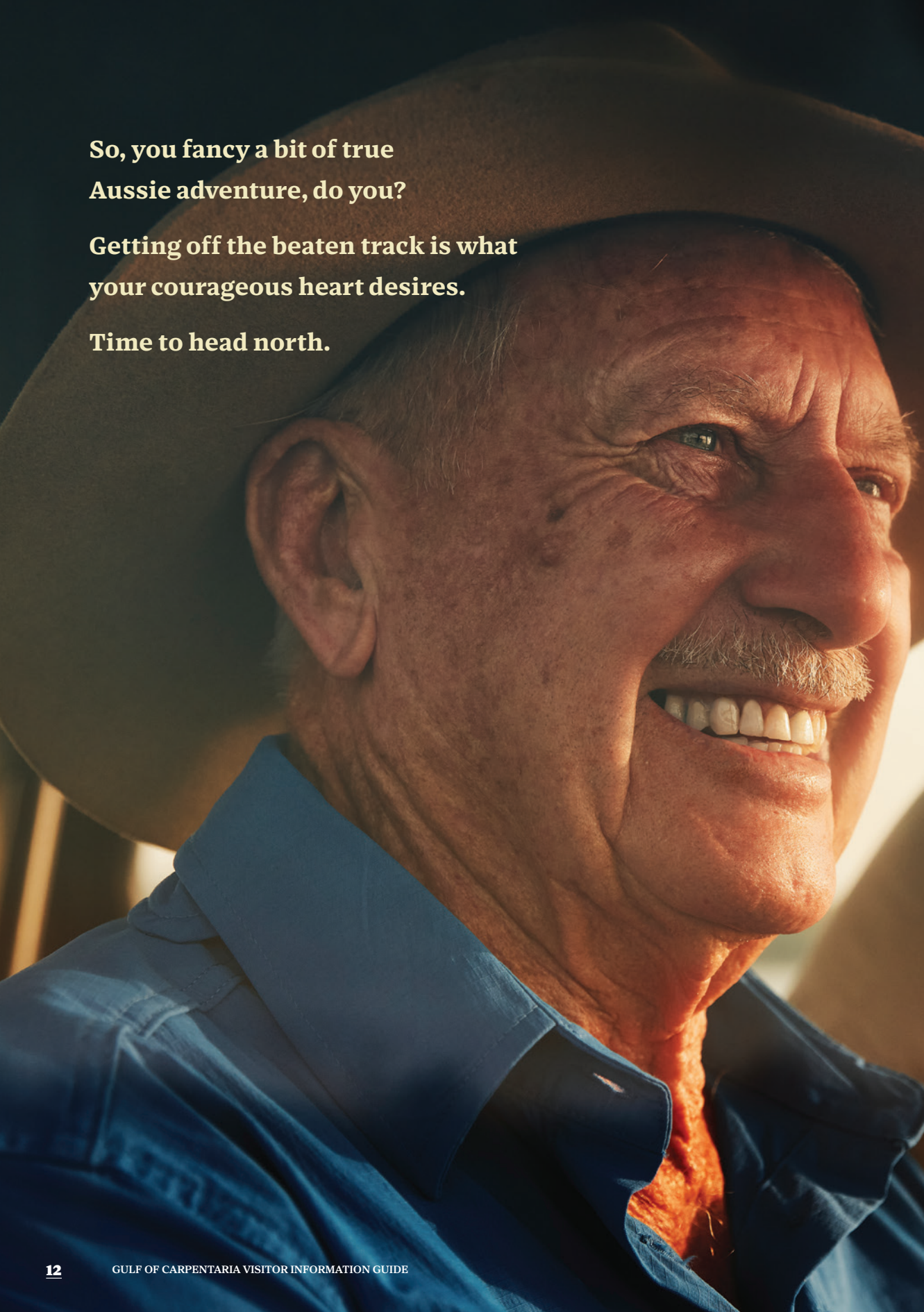
Make no mistake. Taking a trip on The Matilda Way truly is an experience for the senses. A time for quiet thoughts. Relaxation. Decompression for your soul. But in its own way, completely eye-opening and exhilarating. It has all the feels.



Steeped in history

The northern stretch of The Matilda Way is on lands once inhabited by up to seven Aboriginal tribes, including the Kukatj, Gkuthaarn and Kurtijar peoples.

A short-lived gold rush in the 1880s was followed by the advent of pastoralism. Many Aboriginal peoples worked successfully on stations, where they could retain their culture and languages. Eventually, Indigenous pastoral companies were introduced and to this day operate on their traditional lands.



**So, you fancy a bit of true
Aussie adventure, do you?**

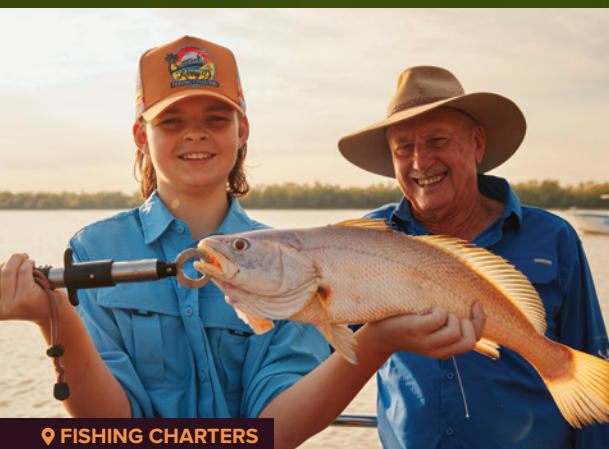
**Getting off the beaten track is what
your courageous heart desires.**

Time to head north.

A man wearing a brown hat and sunglasses is smiling and looking out over a body of water. The background is a bright, hazy sky and water, suggesting a sunny day on a boat.

NORTH TO THE CAPE

ADVENTURE LIVES HERE



📍 FISHING CHARTERS

“Some of the biggest crocodiles on the planet”



📍 CROC & CRAB TOURS

Gulf Country offers a multitude of experiences. Relaxed. Soulful. Rugged. Peaceful. But up here on the way to the Cape is where you can live a little extreme, and a lot off-grid.

If you're a keen angler, you'll discover some amazing jump-off points for exhilarating fishing adventures.



📍 NORMAN RIVER

You really can't go wrong up here; our fishing and crabbing charter operators have access to the greatest shallow deep-water fishing on offer.

The Norman River and weir is a great haven for the famous barramundi, cherabin (freshwater prawns) and red claw crayfish.

**The grins
are bigger
up here.**



If you just love the idea of taking the 4WD to where the “Outback meets the sea”, anywhere north of **KARUMBA** is a great place to map out some escapades and do some serious camping.

EUPHORIC ESCAPADES





It's 34 degrees. And you've got chills.

That's the kind of effect the awe-inspiring natural beauty of the Gulf can have on a visitor. Locals might be used to it but our travelling friends are often overwhelmed by the sheer wonders of our natural environment.



The image shows two Red-tailed Tropicbirds in flight over a vast field of tall, dry, golden-brown grass. The birds are captured in mid-flight, with their wings spread wide, showing dark feathers on the upper wings and lighter feathers on the lower wings. They have long, thin legs trailing behind them. The sky is a clear, pale blue. The overall scene is a naturalistic depiction of wildlife in its habitat.

NEST WORK

Bird watchers (please ... let's call them by their real name ... twitchers) could hardly find a better place to spend a few days, particularly if you come at the right time of the year for the migrations.

Jabirus, brolgas, pelicans, waterbirds, parrots, egrets, cranes, kingfishers, finches and eagles are among the hundreds of species you can spot here.

Birding is popular in the Gulf's many wetlands, including mangroves, saltpans, billabongs, creeks or coastlines.

These areas are not just for the binocular crowd but also for those who love hiking in beautiful surrounds, enjoying all the flora and fauna on show. And, of course, the fishing is world class, especially for those who love to chase the big barramundi and the king salmon.

While Mother Nature has certainly left her mark up here, you don't have to be a full-on naturalist to appreciate it. Rather, you will find the endless skies, lands and sea will envelope you in their warmth and soothe your soul.

“It’s the best
free therapy
in the world”





STEP

BACK

IN TIME



Bygone eras live and breathe in Normanton. Everywhere you look there's a reminder of a storied historical legacy, when this once-thriving town was an epicentre of Australia's rich cultural heritage.

Australia's most famous explorer duo Burke and Wills made it up this far not long before reaching their ultimate demise. There were the gold rush times, with Normanton and Croydon hosting many optimistic prospectors. Or the colonial merchant era, evidenced now by the famous Burns Philp building in the centre of town. Even the old Normanton Gaol tells secrets of the Gulf's penal past.

History and stories abound in this unassuming rustic town, and as a visitor, it's all there for you to soak up at your leisure.



CLICK TO
SCAN & PLAN

Normanton Station & Gulflander Train

Still regarded as an architectural marvel to this day, the town's railway station boasts historic significance. An on-site museum is worth a tour, or you can even take an overnight trip to Croydon on the incredible Gulflander train.

Connecting Croydon and Normanton, The Gulflander is a train journey that can take you back in time and infuse you with the spirit of our pioneers.

Affectionately known as the "Tin Hare" that rolls along from "nowhere to nowhere", The Gulflander is a nostalgic way to meander through parts of the Gulf, spotting wildlife and rugged sights along the way.

A range of different experiences and options are on offer to make your journey one to remember forever. The Gulflander train runs from Croydon to Normanton from May to October.





Krys, The Savannah King Croc

Normanton's most iconic landmark is a replica of the largest crocodile ever killed or captured in Australia.

Polish immigrant Krystyna 'Krys' Pawlowski shot and killed an 8.63m monster croc on the banks of the Norman River in 1957.



Heritage town walk & The Purple Pub

Normanton's heritage walk takes visitors on a journey through the town's rich history, from the gold rush era to its role as a gateway to the Gulf. Afterward, stop by The Purple Pub, a local icon with its vibrant exterior, the perfect spot to unwind with a drink and hear tales from friendly locals.



Burns Philp Building

Built in 1884, this colonial masterpiece is heritage listed and the oldest surviving outpost of the shipping and merchant company.

It now houses the Visitor Information Centre (come and say hi), library, and the Indigenous Stock Workers and Rodeo Riders displays.



The Big Barramundi

Standing proudly in the heart of Normanton, the Big Barramundi statue is a tribute to the town's rich fishing heritage. This impressive sculpture offers visitors not only a fantastic photo opportunity but also a chance to connect with the spirit of the region and the icon that is the barramundi.



Best spots for birdwatching

During the monsoonal period of November to April, few places in the world can match the **MUTTONHOLE WETLANDS** for migratory birdlife as it comes alive with hundreds of species.

Beyond the wetlands, twitchers can take a walk from their accommodation in Normanton to the **SCHOOL DAM** precinct.

For bike riders, this wetland precinct includes a range of walk and cycleways as well as a pump track for the young at heart. Take a BBQ or picnic lunch and enjoy the migratory bird life from one of the secret bird hides or banks of the dam.



Burke and Wills Camp 119

The famous settler explorer duo Burke and Wills reached the Gulf in 1861.

Just 30km outside Normanton on the Savannah Way lies the site of a campground, known as Camp 119, made famous by the intrepid explorers.

Their well-known fate was met not long after turning back south.

This historic spot continues to attract history enthusiasts and adventurers retracing the steps of Australia's early pioneers.



Festivals, shows, events and more

Normanton has an annual calendar of events including fishing competitions, rodeos, street parades, sprint and spring races, markets and more.

SCAN & PLAN

Check out the latest calendar of what's on at the [Discover Carpentaria website](#).

KEY ATTRACTIONS



FISHING



DINING



TWITCHING



PETROL



BOAT RAMP



SHOPS



AIRPORT



INFORMATION

TOWN WALK HIGHLIGHTS

Discover all 30 sights when you visit Normanton

1 COUNCIL CHAMBERS

15 TOWN WELL

24 ARTESIAN BORE

2 KRYS THE CROC

16 LAMP STANDARD

25 HITCHING RAIL

4 BURNS PHILP BUILDING

18 NORMANTON RAILWAY STATION

28 OLD GAOL

9 ALBION HOTEL

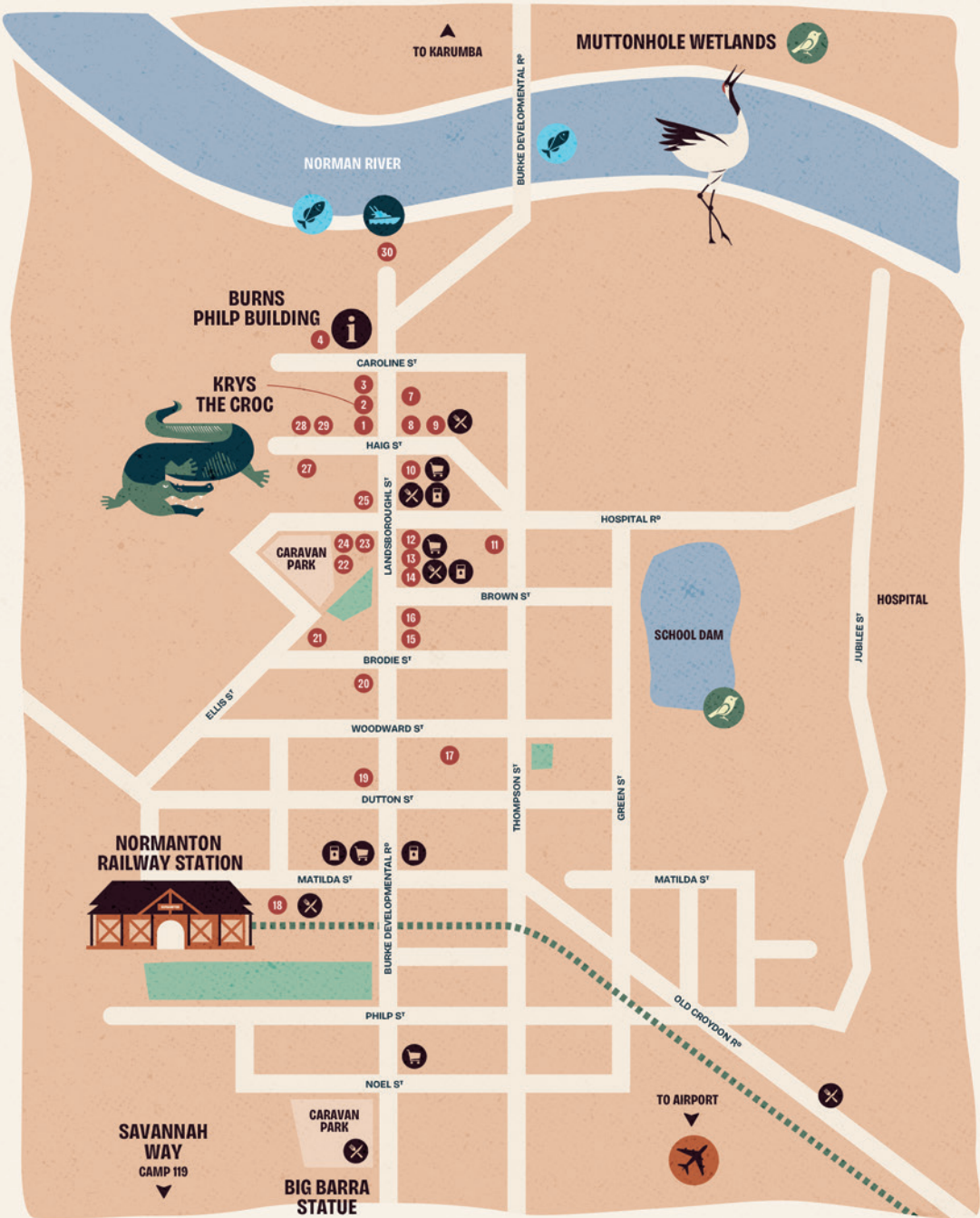
20 OLD POWER HOUSE

29 ABORIGINAL TRACKER'S QUARTERS

12 PURPLE PUB

22 SHIRE HALL

30 NORMAN RIVER HISTORIC SITES



STILLNESS

NEVER FELT

SO MOVING





**Some places you just sink into. Karumba is like that.
You can just lose yourself in your thoughts here.
The quietness actually speaks loudly and tells you
so much. That you can wind down. Decompress. Chill.**

That's the beauty of an untouched, unspoiled fishing village like Karumba. Everything runs at a gentle pace, like the Gulf sunset slowly falling over the ocean horizon. As watched by you from Karumba Point, with your favourite beverage in hand.

For a place that is built on just a few simple pleasures, it's amazing how long you'll want to stay here to sample them all. But then it takes a whole lot of time to do a whole lot of nothing.





CLICK TO
SCAN & PLAN



Les Wilson Barramundi Discovery Centre

Visit the only hatchery in the world that breeds the genetically distinct Southern Gulf Barramundi, the Les Wilson Barramundi Discovery Centre & Hatchery.

The Barra Centre contributes toward sustainable barramundi fishing in the Gulf by breeding thousands of fingerlings for release into the wild every year. From humble beginnings, it started life in the hands of professional fishers who set out to secure the future of the fishing industry.

Visitors are invited to experience the story of Australia's most-loved sport and eating fish in a world-class, architecturally designed building that reflects the barramundi form.

Want to get closer? You can!

Hand-feed 'Norma' and her friends during an informative session on the lifecycle of the barramundi and learn some quirky facts about the species, as well as best-practice recreational fishing tips.





Boat cruises

Embark on a tour with one of the many operators offering recreational fishing, crabbing, crocodile spotting and bird watching.

A must-do experience is a twilight cruise to Sand Island where you can savour fresh Gulf prawns paired with your favourite drink—a serene way to end the day!



Heritage walk

Explore the Karumba heritage walk, a picturesque 4km path that weaves through the town's rich heritage, offering scenic vistas and close encounters with wildlife.

Along the way, interpretive signs bring the region's past to life, making it a journey of discovery for nature and history enthusiasts alike.



Karumba Point Beach

The only beach in the Gulf of Carpentaria accessible by bitumen road. It's the perfect spot to watch the sunset, enjoy a picnic or cast out a line ... it's a little bit of magic.



Sunsets to behold

The sun setting over the water is a sight to behold. Matched only by the stunning star show that lights up the night skies here in the Gulf. Drink it in, with a drink in hand at the famous Sunset Tavern.

Festivals, shows, events, competitions and more

Karumba comes alive with a thrilling line-up of annual events, from fishing competitions to golf tournaments! Plus if you're in town at the right time, you'll get to experience the legendary Outback By the Sea Festival or the Outback By the Sea Film Festival.



SCAN & PLAN



Check out the latest calendar of what's on at the [Discover Carpentaria website](#).

KEY ATTRACTIONS



FISHING



DINING



BOAT RAMP



PETROL



WATER PARK



SHOPS



AIRPORT



INFORMATION

HERITAGE WALK HIGHLIGHTS


Discover all 30 sights when you visit Karumba

- | | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
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| 4 R.A.F SLIPWAY | 13 ARTESIAN BORE | 22 THE MERINO |
| 6 1974 FLOODS | 14 KATH ALEXANDER | 25 PRAWN FACTORY |
| 7 COMMERCIAL FISHING | 15 LIVESTOCK EXPORTS | 26 TIDES |
| 8 MEATWORKS | 16 BARRAMUNDI FARM | 29 NORMAN RIVER |





EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED



We all have certain expectations of what we'll see when we visit a new place. But it's discovering the little hidden gems within a region that often live longer in memory and give travellers that extra sense of satisfaction.

While you might want to tick off some of the classic sights and experiences when you get to “the Outback by the sea”, there are some lesser-known attractions definitely worth your time.



**BEST TIME
TO VISIT**

**September to
November**

© Barry Slade

Morning Glory natural phenomena

It's hard to describe. But then, it would be, considering this is one of the rarest natural phenomena in the world. Spectacular would be one word.

The Morning Glory clouds are the little-known cousins of the Arcus Cloud family. There are only a few isolated places around the world where you can see the Morning Glory clouds, and here in the Gulf is the only place in Australia where they can be observed.

When conditions are right, what you'll witness is a massive band of cloud that stretches across the horizon.

Some say it looks like a massive roll of cotton wool moving across the low sky. All we can say is that it has to be seen to be believed.

September to November is generally the most likely time for the Morning Glory clouds to appear, when two different sea breezes collide.

Viewing is best between Karumba and Burketown, although nothing really beats getting airborne in a chopper, glider or light plane to see this magnificent natural phenomenon up close.



Leichhardt Falls

“Where the Outback meets the sea” may not sound like a place where you’ll find waterfalls, but like we say, the Gulf is full of surprises.

Not far from Karumba and south of Burketown are these lovely falls about 50km from the mouth of the Leichhardt River.

Throughout the year, a visit to the Leichhardt Falls is always worth your while. Whether they’re gushing or gurgling, these falls are truly a lovely spot.

A terrific place to camp, but no matter what anyone says, don’t go swimming here. Saltwater crocs live here and a reminder ... they have legs so they can get to the top of waterfalls as well!

BEST TIME TO VISIT

Wet season: **November – April**



Muttonhole Wetlands

During the monsoonal period of November to April, few places in the world can match this area for migratory birdlife as it comes alive with hundreds of species.

See jabirus, brolgas, pelicans, cranes and more gather, breed and feed in a truly spectacular landscape.

The sight and sound of these birds in such abundance is nothing short of breathtaking.

A mix of mangrove and grasslands creates a vibrant environment for the birds and other wildlife.

Be warned that crocs are attracted to other wildlife so all precautions need to be taken.

BEST TIME TO VISIT

Wet season: **November – April**



Drive

Several well-established roadways make their way to the Gulf, including the **SAVANNAH WAY** from Cairns and the **MATILDA WAY** that traverses through Queensland from south to north (and vice-versa).

Most roads are sealed all the way, but there are some unsealed roads around **KARUMBA** and **NORMANTON** if you choose to get off the beaten track. Roadways generally have phone reception in and around towns.

FOR UP-TO-DATE ROAD INFORMATION

Visit mainroads.qld.gov.au or call 13 19 40



Bus

Taking a bus journey is a great way to take a road trip without the burden of being behind the wheel. Regular services to the Gulf are available, particularly from Far North Queensland places such as Cairns.

Travelling by bus is an ideal way to enjoy the scenery, spot wildlife and meet some like-minded friends along the way.

PLAN YOUR BUS TRIP

Visit transnorthbus.com.au/bus-services



Train

THE GULFLANDER, affectionately known as the “Tin Hare”, is one of Queensland’s most iconic train journeys.

Many will argue there is no better way to travel through Savannah Country than aboard this legendary tribute to our pioneering days.

There are various trips available, including the full journey from **CROYDON** to **NORMANTON**, along with other tourist trips.

PLAN YOUR TRAIN TRIP

Visit gulflander.com.au



Plane

NORMANTON boasts an airport serviced by **REX AIRLINES** with connections to and from a number of towns and cities.

For those who may not have the luxury of time to travel by road or rail, plane travel is the perfect choice to ensure you experience the wonders of the Gulf.

PLAN YOUR FLIGHT

Visit rexairlines.com.au

Great Queensland Drives



LEGEND	
Adventure Way	
Australia's Country Way	
Capricorn Way	
Great Inland Way	
Leichhardt Way	
Matilda Way	
Overlander's Way	
Pacific Coast Way	
Savannah Way	
Warrego Way	

Find your accredited Visitor Information Centre as you drive in Queensland

Queensland
AUSTRALIA

RACQ
It pays to belong

This map is for promotional use only. For gazetted road names and accurate detail, please refer to a quality touring map. This map only contains strategic touring routes and does not include any regional routes or local drives. For more information on these routes and driving holidays in Queensland please visit queensland.com/drive

GETTING TO THE GULF



Road safety tips

If you're travelling by road, all the commonsense tips apply. These include:

- Service your vehicle
- Plot and map your itinerary and familiarise yourself with Outback landscapes and roads
- Pack essentials and emergency gear
- Check travel and road conditions
- Be aware of road trains and wide loads
- Avoid dawn, dusk and night driving when wildlife graze by roadsides



Wildlife safety tips

When in the Gulf, extra consideration for wildlife is important. For example, brolgas are very slow to take off from approaching vehicles so **slow down as much as possible**.

Council runs coordinated 1080 (chemical poison) baiting programs between June and October each year for wild dogs and feral pigs, so always **keep your dog on a leash** if out on rural lands.

Don't swim in the wetlands, rivers or beaches – the crocs like people.



Visitor information

When you want this guide in human form ... We get it. Sometimes you just want to get the good oil from someone in the know.

If that's the case, head to a Visitor Information Centre. You'll find them in both Normanton and Karumba, and a veritable font of information awaits you.

NORMANTON VISITOR CENTRE

Landsborough & Caroline Street,
Normanton
Call: (07) 4747 8444

KARUMBA VISITOR CENTRE

Les Wilson Barramundi Discovery Centre
149 Yappar Street,
Karumba
Call: (07) 4745 9359

Travel tips

Telstra is the only provider with mobile reception in Normanton and Karumba. Phone reception is limited when travelling out of the townships.

Emergencies

In the case of an emergency, **dial 000** or find the specific service at the [Carpentaria Shire Council website](#).



Best time to come

Hope you like it warm, because we're lucky enough to enjoy balmy temperatures all year round.

A bigger consideration may be the Gulf rains in summer.

From November to April, monsoonal rains can cause roads and access points to flood.

CLICK TO VISIT
VISITOR
INFORMATION



We're not going anywhere ... but you should.

You really need to get up here.

Take as long as you want. We'll wait.

A PLACE LIKE



Images in this guide are courtesy of Carpentaria Shire Council, Tourism & Events Queensland, Outback Queensland Masters and Barry Slade.

E NO OTHER

Discover more at: discovercarpentaria.com.au



WAVE CARPENTARIA

Discover more at: discovercarpentaria.com.au