



Make the most of your fitness in...

CAIRNS

Toni Krasicki puts her body and fitness to the test in Cairns, Queensland.

I'M IN CAIRNS, in Queensland's tropical north and am surprised to see no signs of the recent cyclone disaster that whipped the coast earlier this year. Paradise still exists here; and with it, opportunities to challenge your body, mind and fitness in many unique, fun and challenging ways.

The Coral Sea shimmers in the early morning sunshine and the warm waters of Four Mile beach beckon. It's Sunday morning, but rather than sleep in and indulge in a late breakfast back at Thala Beach Lodge just south of Port Douglas, I am struggling through an early morning fitness session. Matt Herman teaches a mean circuit, which feels far too serious for this alleged day of rest!

Matt is an adventure champion and one of the local entrants in the upcoming inaugural Challenge Cairns, which takes place around Cairns and Port Douglas on 5 June. It's the perfect place to host such an event, but I decide I'm far from being race-day-ready. After the session as I collapse on a sun lounge, Matt takes his leave and heads out for some serious training.

Challenge Cairns is headlining the 2011 Cairns Airport Adventure Festival, a week-long event, ideal for fitness enthusiasts of all levels. The festival commences 29 May and also includes the Coral Coast Triathlon in Port Douglas and the Quicksilver Reef Swim at Green Island as well as several other events. The latest addition to the Challenge family of global Iron distance events, Challenge Cairns is set to be world-class, attracting some of the top long distance triathletes on the planet. A prize purse

CAIRNS 2011 AIRPORT ADVENTURE FESTIVAL: 29 MAY TO 5 JUNE 2011

- 29 May:** Cairns Half
(1.9km swim, 90km ride, 21.1km run)
- ✦ Coral Coast Triathlon
- ✦ RRR Mountain Bike Event
(40km/70km)
- ✦ Hekili Great Barrier Reef Ocean Challenge (Outrigger and surf skis)
- 2 June:** Quicksilver Reef Swim – Green Island (1.5km/3km)
- 3 June:** Cairns 5km Fun Run
- 4 June:** Challenge Cairns Junior
- 5 June:** Challenge Cairns
(3.8km swim, 180km ride, 42.2km run)

Find travel deals for the Airport Adventure Festival at www.tropicalholidays.com.au

ADVENTURE ACTIVITIES NOT TO MISS:

- ✦ Whitewater Rafting or River Tubing
www.foamingfury.com.au
- ✦ Sea Kayaking, Mountain Biking, River Drift Snorkelling www.backcountryblissadventures.com.au
- ✦ Jungle Surfing Canopy Tours
www.junglesurfing.com.au
- ✦ Green Island & Outer Barrier Reef Cruise
www.greatadventures.com.au
- ✦ Bungy Jump & Minjin Swing
www.ajhackett.com

of 100,000 Euro (almost \$130,000 AUD) makes it the second richest iron-distance race.

From start to finish, the course is set to impress. If you're up for the test then hit the warm waters off Yorkey's Knob for the 3.8km swim, ride the scenic coastline from Cairns towards Port Douglas on the 180km bike leg, and run the 42.2km from the northern beaches of Cairns to the City Centre.

If competing in triathlons and ocean swims is beyond your physical capabilities or desires then create your own adventure. I hook up with Barney from Back Country Bliss Adventures for a couple of hours of sea kayaking. The south easterly wind has picked up and it's a tad rough, but adds extra excitement to the trip.

Along for the ride is kayaker Karl Gurnick and I quickly find out that he's not your average Tropical North Queenslander. A bit of prying reveals that last year he spent just over three months tackling his own 'Make Yourself Project'; cycling from Gladstone to Cape York, kayaking from Cape York to Papua New Guinea and along its coastline, then trekking the Kokoda Trail to finish. When asked what motivated him to undertake such a colossal adventure, he said 'I did it for myself, because I like a challenge'.

An adventure of that magnitude sounds daunting, so I opt for something easier to tackle.

Tropical North Queensland definitely delivers on this front, especially if you don't want to spend your entire visit chillaxing. For thrills and spills try whitewater rafting or river tubing, and if heights don't bother you, AJ Hackett offers Australia's only bungy jump.

Thala Beach Lodge



Ocean swim



Thala Beach

There are mountain bike trails to challenge all levels of riders. The 'Bump Track', now a popular riding trail, doubles up as a walking and horse riding track. Originally it was used as an Aboriginal trail that linked the coast to the mountain regions, before becoming a crucial link between Port Douglas and the hinterland for settlers and miners. It's not called the 'Bump Track' for nothing; the undulating track can challenge any level of rider and is the perfect way to work up an appetite.

Having explored the ancient rainforest encircling the city, it's time to discover what lies beneath. Before boarding the cruise to Green Island I meet 80-year-old Thelma Bryan who is an annual entrant in the Green Island Swim. She's a spritely senior who could be 20 years younger

and boasts that her secret isn't just the laid back lifestyle in Cairns, but her regular swimming and gym sessions. Her incredible energy is contagious and I power through Green Island's crystalline waters ogling at turtles, schools of trevally and spotting a stingray and reef shark. It's easy to understand why competing in an ocean swim over the Great Barrier Reef is so appealing.

Tourism Tropical North Queensland has great holiday deals available during the Cairns Airport Adventure Festival. One thing's for sure; a visit to this region is guaranteed to involve an abundance of warm hospitality, sumptuous seafood, and adventure tours that are bound to get your heart rate up without even having to run a marathon!

Other 2011 Events in Far North Queensland:

13 to 15 May: The Great Wheelbarrow Race
www.queenslandholidays.com.au/things-to-see-and-do/the-great-wheelbarrow-race/index.cfm
20 August: The Great Pyramid Race
www.pyramidrace.com
28 August: It's Extreme Kuranda to Port Douglas Ultra Trail Marathon
www.roadrunners.org.au
26 June to 2 July: Cairns to Karumba Coast to Coast Bike Ride
www.ridefnq.com

5 September: Great Adventures Green Island Ocean Swim
www.quicksilvergroup.com.au
24 to 27 September: Yellow Pages Cardiac Challenge-Cairns to Cooktown Ride
www.cardiacchallenge.com.au
18 to 27 October: Crocodile Trophy Mountain Bike Race
www.crocodile-trophy.com
12 November: The Great Barrier Reef Marathon Festival Port Douglas
www.greatbarrierreefmarathon.com.au

THALA BEACH LODGE

Family-owned Thala Beach Lodge is a five-star eco-resort, located south of Port Douglas. It sits spectacularly atop a headland with breathtaking views of untouched coastline, and provides the perfect location to explore the Great Barrier Reef and Daintree Rainforest.

Eighty-three deluxe timber bungalows are built high on stilts, and nestle in the forest canopy providing a magical and unobtrusive relationship with the natural world. All bungalows have views either to the ocean or the forested mountains, while the views from the restaurant are panoramic, taking in the sparkling waters of the Great Barrier Reef and the World Heritage forests that cover the coastal ranges.

Complimentary guided onsite tours include a unique coconut odyssey, stargazing, tree planting, nature walks and bird watching.

All over the 145 acres of Thala Beach Lodge, guests find themselves in an unsurpassed enchanting, relaxing environment, where they can dine among the birds in the surrounding treetops, while enjoying fine food with friendly five-star service.

Visit www.thala.com or phone 07 4098 5700 to find out more.

OR to enter to win three nights B&B accommodation for two people at Thala Beach Lodge, valued at \$1,500, email 50 words or less to editor@fitnessfirst.com.au and let us know why you absolutely must win this prize. *Note: The prize is accommodation only and does not include any airfares, transfers, meals or other related expenses.*

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