



Island adventures

The tooth wobbles its last on the night before we catch the boat to Fitzroy Island - and yes, the Fairy manages to track us down - leaving Ivy with a functioning (albeit depleted) set of pearly whites. I'm delighted, as Fitzroy is even better equipped than the Low Isles as a place to teach children how to snorkel.

For starters you can stay overnight on the island, in beautifully appointed self-contained apartments that directly overlook the sea. Secondly, the main beach is carpeted in bits of coral, which tinkle like glass as the waves lick them and prevent sand from kicking up and ruining the visibility. Fitzroy doesn't get the day-tripping crowds that flock to nearby Green Island either, so it's possible to get entire sections of the beach to yourself.

Here colourful coral gardens sprout in waist-deep water just metres from land, and kids can observe scores of vivid fish simply by dipping their faces beneath the surface. Turtles are numerous but even if you don't spot one in the ocean, you can visit the new turtle hospital that's recently opened on the island, where the kids can see these amazing animals up close and learn all about them. The island has a PADI dive centre too, offering courses to children eight years and older.

There are a number of bushwalks around the island, including an adventurous hike to the highest point via the lighthouse, and another to the Secret Garden and Nudey Beach, which is



Kayak kid

Opposite page: Humpy shelter at Mossman Gorge.
Above: Ivy gets her face-painted at Mossman Gorge.



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best avoided, unless you want to see more than you bargained for.

Alternating between snorkelling, wandering and bouncing around on the floating trampoline in the bay, our days pass quickly. My mission to engage Ivy's interest in the underwater world is boosted by the fact that our visit coincides with a conference of marine biologists, who are there with their families. Among their ranks is a girl Ivy's age, who has been snorkelling as long as she's been walking, and instantly they become friends.

On the last day we hire some glass-bottomed kayaks, which have been custom-made for the island. It's all going well until a huge fin breaks the water a few feet away.

"What was that dad?" enquires Ivy calmly, as Steph goes into full fear meltdown. "Er, maybe it was a dolphin?" I suggest, trying to convince myself as much as anyone else. "Shall we go and have a look?" "No! Let's just paddle in!" orders Steph.

The fin appears again, followed by another, equally as large. We beat a hasty retreat to the beach, where the biologists listen to our story about a pair of epic-sized sharks with amusement. "That's the local manta ray," they explain. "It lives around here - those were the tips of its wings you saw, not fins."

FAST FACTS

WHEN TO TRAVEL

Far North Queensland is best enjoyed June-September

GETTING THERE

Cairns Airport is the gateway to Tropical North Queensland with flights available from all major Australian cities. To get from Cairns to Port Douglas and Palm Cove simply hire a car, grab a taxi or take the shuttle bus.

WHERE TO STAY

Rendezvous Reef Resort,
Port Douglas
www.rendezvoushotels.com/portdouglas

The Reef Retreat, Palm Cove
www.reefretreat.com.au

Novotel, Palm Cove
www.novotelpalmcove.com.au

Fitzroy Island
www.fitzroyisland.com/accommodation

MORE INFORMATION

Tourism Tropical North Queensland
www.cairnsgreatbarrierreef.org.au

For more great ideas to help plan your perfect holiday, visit
www.outandaboutwithkids.com.au