

October 23, 2025

Tourism Tropical North Queensland celebrates

The 2026 TNQ Tourism Industry Excellence Awards at The Magazine on October 23 celebrated nine award winners from across Tropical North Queensland.

Tourism Tropical North Queensland (TTNQ) Chief Executive Officer Mark Olsen said 180 tourism industry members gathered to acknowledge excellence stretching from the pioneers who helped to develop the destination to the young innovators who are continuing their legacy.

"The recipients have helped to shape Tropical North Queensland as an internationally renowned destination that enables visitors to see great and leave greater with an understanding of the culture and stories of our World Heritage areas," he said.

"I congratulate the winners and finalists and indeed the entire industry for continuing to deliver a warm welcome and exceptional experience to our visitors."

The winners of the 2026 TNQ Tourism Industry Excellence Awards are:

Chair's Award for Excellence

Savannah Guides

Founded by John Courtenay in 1988, Savannah Guides have been the benchmark for guiding training nationally for decades. They were the inspiration for the now famous Master Reef Guides and are now a network of more than 500 professional tour guides and operators spanning northern Australia dedicated to helping visitors experience and understand their region's natural and cultural history. Operating regular Savannah Guides Schools, online forums, business support and accredited training programs including the national EcoGuide Program and Wet Tropics Guide Program, Savannah Guides has been managed by Russell and Sam Boswell since 2008.

Outstanding Contribution by an Individual

Sponsored by Cairns Regional Council

Maryanne Jacques

Maryanne Jacques has more than 40 years of experience shaping the visitor economy of Tropical North Queensland. As the founder of Adventure North Australia and now the owner of Cairns Discovery Tours, she has built an outstanding reputation for creating immersive, high-quality visitor experiences that celebrate the region's extraordinary natural and cultural heritage. A pioneer of Indigenous tourism, Maryanne forged enduring partnerships with Traditional Owners and Indigenous tourism operators, developing experiences that connected visitors with Country, culture and storytelling while creating economic opportunities for First Nations communities.

Outstanding Commitment to the Industry

Steve and Katrina Edmondson

Steve and Katrina Edmondson have been long-time champions of our destination: pioneers in boutique snorkelling and sailing on the Great Barrier Reef, leaders in eco-tourism, reef conservation and responsible tourism, and long-standing partners who have consistently engaged in trade marketing and showcased the very best of Tropical North Queensland to the world. Founders of Sailaway Port Douglas, the Edmondsons previously managing Poseidon prior to its purchase by the Quicksilver Group, and Shaolin, the Chinese junk that remains in Port Douglas today. Mr Edmondson has been a champion of ecotourism and national

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advocate for tourism during COVID and times of crisis. In 2025 the Edmonsons sold their fleet of four sailing catamarans to Journey Beyond.

TTNQ Life Members

Sponsored by Ports North

Glenda Daly and Brian Hennessy

Glenda Daly is the Business Development Specialist at Cobbold Gorge Tours and has a long history with the property dating back to 2015 with various roles including General Manager. She is a Young Professionals Mentor with the Queensland Tourism Industry Council. Her experience includes managing immersive outback experiences at Outback Pioneers Booking, focusing on regional development initiatives at the Remote Area Planning and Development Board, management positions at Discovery Parks and General Manager at The Great Aussie Resort.

With more than 40 years' experience in the tourism industry, Brian Hennessy has an extensive network of contacts including airlines, wholesalers, agents, hotels, tourism authorities and attractions around the world. His sales and marketing career in Cairns started in 2009 when he joined TTNQ as Director of Sales and Marketing after a 14-year career as Managing Director of Trailfinders. Mr Hennessy's achievements at TTNQ include the Australian Tourism Exchange 2014 in Cairns, the launch of direct Chinese aviation routes and a new brand for the region. After six years he joined Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park and then Sunlover Reef Cruises. Mr Hennessy has just completed a five-year term on the Tourism and Events Queensland Board.

Young Achiever Excellence Award

Sponsored by Cairns Airport

Alexandra Allanson from Cairns Koalas & Creatures

Alexandra Allanson began her tourism career as a wildlife keeper and became the founding General Manager of the CaPTA Group's Cairns Koalas and Creatures. She guided the business through its early-growth phase bridging her wildlife expertise with commercial tourism leadership. Ms Allanson represents a new generation of tourism professionals who understand that long-term success relies on balancing visitor satisfaction, conservation outcomes, operational excellence and people development.

Sustainable Tourism Excellence

Sponsored by Small World Journeys

Rainforestation Nature Park

Founded by Charles and Pip Woodward in 1976, Rainforestation Nature Park celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. The CaPTA Group property has been a leader in ecotourism through its investment in sustainable infrastructure including solar and battery storage, habitat regeneration, workforce development through the CaPTA Careers Training Centre and cultural succession with mentoring enabling multiple generations to work with the Pamagirri experience.

Customer Service Excellence Award

Sponsored by Avis

Will Hancock from Back Country Bliss Adventures

Will Hancock joined Back Country Bliss more than 10 years ago sharing his infectious love for the rainforest with visitors and spending his days off exploring the region and building his knowledge of the environment. Will adapts each tour to the individual taking in different levels of confidence, physical ability and cultural backgrounds and makes sure every guest connects meaningfully with the environment by getting them to slow down and experience the rainforest through sound, touch and stillness rather than passing through it.

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Robbie Bastion Award for Inbound Marketing

Michael Nelson

As the Managing Director of Pinnacle Tourism Marketing, Michael Nelson leads the sales and marketing of more than 30 tourism businesses and helps to establish them in the tourism distribution space. He is a Board Director of the Wet Tropics Management Authority and was Company Director for the Australian Tourism Export Council for six years. He recently developed the Bula Queensland campaign and roadshow targeting 150 retail agents in the US and Canada who were aligned with Fiji Airways. Mr Nelson developed tourism mentoring programs for TTNQ and other tourism organisations to help developing businesses become export ready, resulting in many attending the Australian Tourism Exchange for the first time.

Best of Queensland Experience Excellence Award

Cairns Canyoning by Cairns Waterfalls

The Best of Queensland Experiences Program, delivered by Tourism and Events Queensland in partnership with the Regional Tourism Organisations, the Queensland Tourism Industry Council and the Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport, recognises tourism experiences that best bring the Queensland story to life and consistently deliver an exceptional customer experience. Using independent criteria incorporating online customer reviews it guides the State's tourism industry to deliver exceptional customer experiences and create positive word of mouth, so that together we can help to attract more visitors, grow expenditure, and increase market share.

Cairns Canyoning by Cairns Waterfalls offers life-changing canyoning experiences showcasing spectacular rainforest sites around Cairns. Bazz Goes and the team are not just guides, they are life experience coaches dedicated to challenging boundaries and sharing the raw beauty of Tropical North Queensland.

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