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# Water safety

Staying safe around water in north Queensland's national parks

## Fact sheets for tourism operators

These fact sheets are 'best practice briefings' for tourism operators to assist in keeping visitors safe in and around inland rivers, creeks and waterholes in Queensland's national parks and forests. It is intended that tourism operators—bus drivers, tour desk staff, hostel staff and tour guides—use this information to provide briefings to their guests before they visit specific national park and forest sites.

Many international and domestic tourists are unaware of the potential hazards of visiting natural areas, in particular, swimming in uncontrolled natural ('wild') environments.

One of the highest risk categories of visitors are males, and increasingly females, aged 16–35 years.

The aim is to minimise the risks associated with visiting these sites by educating visitors about the hazards so they can make informed decisions about their actions.

Visitors need this information BEFORE they arrive at the national park or forest.

Fact sheets have been developed for these sites:

- Mossman Gorge, Daintree National Park
- Josephine Falls, Wooroonooran National Park
- Murray Falls, Girramay National Park
- Little Crystal and Big Crystal creeks, Paluma Range National Park
- Davies Creek, Davies Creek National Park and Emerald Creek, Dinden West Forest Reserve.



Photo: Maxime Coquard © Old Govt

## Mossman Gorge, Daintree National Park

### Staying safe around water in north Queensland's national parks

#### Background

Mossman Gorge is a popular place to visit but many visitors, in particular international tourists, are not aware of the hidden hazards and associated risks with swimming in rivers and waterholes.

Deaths and serious permanent injuries have occurred here. A visitor drowned here in 2014 due to swift currents; he was fit and a strong swimmer. A visitor also drowned here in 2009.

Visitors need to know how to stay safe around water in our parks. This is especially important at sites where deaths and injuries have occurred. We strongly encourage you to use the messages below when briefing your visitors about entering the water during their visit.

#### Briefing for visitors

- Fit and strong swimmers have died at Mossman Gorge.
- Mossman River looks calm and inviting but there are hidden hazards:
  - Rocks along the river's edge are very slippery, even when they look dry.
  - Deep cold water flows around boulders creating strong currents below the surface, even when the surface looks calm.
  - Submerged boulders are hidden from view beneath the water's surface.
  - Water conditions are unpredictable. River levels can rise quickly and currents strengthen, caused by rain hundreds of kilometres away, even when it's sunny here.
- Mobile phone reception is unreliable and help can be several hours away.
- Mossman River is not a 'controlled environment' like a swimming pool. It is a 'wild' water system with natural hazards and conditions that change quickly.
- Under normal conditions there is a standard swimming risk but at times when river levels are higher than usual there is an elevated risk when entering the water. This is due to the changed conditions—very swift currents and deep cold water. You are strongly advised not to enter the water at these times.
- Look for signs at the Visitor Centre with advice about river conditions on the day.
- If you do decide to enter the water (on days of standard risk) be aware of the following:
  - You enter the water at your own risk; your safety is your responsibility.
  - Do not jump or dive into the water.
  - Be mindful of slippery rocks.
  - Supervise children closely at all times.
  - Stay close to the bank—never swim into the middle of the river or to the far shore.
  - Do not swim under the influence of alcohol or drugs.



Photo: © Greg Watson

# Josephine Falls, Wooroonooran National Park

## Staying safe around water in north Queensland's national parks

### Background

Josephine Falls is a popular swimming destination but many visitors, in particular international tourists, are not aware of the hazards and associated risks with swimming in creeks and near waterfalls. For the safety of visitors, Josephine Falls has a Restricted Access Area at the top of the falls.

Many deaths and serious/permanent injuries have occurred at Josephine Falls. A visitor drowned here in January 2018 after being swept downstream and pinned under the water.

In 2019, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service installed an 'early warning system' at Josephine Falls. It includes:

#### 1. Flashing light alarm system

- The light alarm system flashes when water conditions are unsafe, or likely to become unsafe in the near future.
- Everyone in the water should pay attention to this warning and immediately leave the water. This is very important as water levels can be at a stable level for an extended period and then rapidly rise, creating higher risks for people in the water.

#### 2. Water gauge markers

The different colours on the water gauge markers reflect different levels of risk at different water heights.



- **Red section: extreme risk.** When water levels are in the red. DO NOT enter the water. At this point, the risk is too high for all persons to enter the water.
- **Yellow section: high risk.** When water levels are in the yellow, children and anyone who is not a strong swimmer should not enter the water.
- **White section: medium risk.** Up to this level there is a medium level risk to all people who enter the water.



Photo: © Michael Gilsenan © Qld Govt

## Briefing for visitors

Visitors need to be made aware of the Restricted Access Area and know how to stay safe around water in our parks. This is especially important at sites where deaths and injuries have occurred.

We strongly encourage you to use the messages below when briefing your visitors about entering the water during their visit.

- Fit and strong swimmers have recently died at Josephine Falls.
- Do not enter the Restricted Access Area. Sheer cliffs, slippery rocks, submerged objects and water of variable depths have caused serious injuries and deaths here. Entry to the sign-posted Restricted Access Area is prohibited; you can be fined if you ignore this requirement.
- Remember this is not a ‘controlled environment’ like a swimming pool. It is a ‘wild’ water system with natural hazards and conditions that can change quickly and become dangerous.
- Josephine Creek’s lower rock pool is the designated swimming area, but be aware, it has hidden hazards:
  - Slippery rocks along the creek edge.
  - Submerged rocks, logs and debris beneath the water surface.
  - Strong water currents beneath the water surface.
  - Rapidly rising water levels occur creating strong currents (flash flooding), caused by rain many kilometres away.
- Only enter the water if you are an experienced swimmer and the water level gauge is in the white or yellow.
  - You enter the water at your own risk; your safety is your responsibility.
  - Do not jump or dive into the creek.
  - Take care on slippery rocks at the creek edge.
  - Do not climb the rock faces or go beyond the ‘no access’ symbols.
  - Leave the water immediately if it changes colour, if the light alarm system starts flashing or the water levels rise—these are signs of flash flooding.
  - Do not enter the water if you are under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Mobile phone reception is unreliable and help can be several hours away.
- Do not enter the water if it is in the red zone.



Photo: © Tourism Tropical North Queensland

## Murray Falls, Girramay National Park

### Staying safe around water in north Queensland's national parks

#### Background

Murray Falls is a popular swimming destination but many visitors, in particular international tourists, are not aware of the hazards and associated risks with swimming in rivers and near waterfalls. For the safety of visitors, Murray Falls has a Restricted Access Area.

An estimated 12 deaths, as well as several serious injuries and rescues, have occurred here in the last 25 years. In December 2015 a tourist died after falling from the top of the falls, after illegally entering the Restricted Access Area. The recent increase in incidents may result from visitors sharing images and information on social media about how to access the falls (ignoring the Restricted Access Area).

Visitors need to be made aware of the Restricted Access Area and know how to stay safe around water in our parks. This is especially important at sites where deaths and injuries have occurred. We strongly encourage you to please use the messages below when briefing your visitors about entering the water during their visit.

#### Briefing for visitors

- Fit and strong swimmers have died at Murray Falls.
- Do not enter the Restricted Access Area that extends above and below the falls. Do not enter any fenced off areas and obey safety signage in the area. Natural hazards including sheer cliffs, slippery rocks, submerged rocks and water of variable depths have caused serious injuries and deaths.
- People have fallen to their deaths from these falls after underestimating the danger entering the area.

You can be fined if you enter the Restricted Access Area.

- Murray Falls is one of the prettiest waterfalls to visit in this area. The best social media shots can be taken from the viewing platforms. Don't risk your life for a photo, always remain behind the barriers.
- Remember this is not a 'controlled environment' like a swimming pool. It is a 'wild' water system with natural hazards and conditions that are potentially dangerous.
- There is no mobile phone reception.
- The lower section of the Murray River can be accessed from the day-use area. But be aware it has natural hazards:
  - Slippery rocks along the river edge.
  - Submerged rocks, logs and debris beneath the water surface.
  - Fast-flowing water and variable water levels.
- If you decide to enter the water at the lower section of the Murray River, accessed from the day-use area:
  - You enter the water at your own risk; your safety is your responsibility.
  - Do not jump or dive into the river.
  - Take care on slippery rocks at the river's edge.
  - Do not climb the rock faces or go beyond the 'no access' symbols.
  - Do not enter the water under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Enjoy your visit to delightful Murray Falls and make sure you stay safe to play another day.



Photo: © Tourism and Events Queensland

# Little Crystal and Big Crystal creeks, Paluma Range National Park

## Staying safe around water in north Queensland's national parks

### Background

Little Crystal and Big Crystal creeks are popular swimming destinations for locals and tourists but many visitors, in particular international tourists, are not aware of the hazards and associated risks with jumping into and swimming in creeks.

Risky behaviour is common at these sites, resulting in several injuries.

- In December 2015, an international visitor who could not swim died at Little Crystal Creek.
- In December 2018, after heavy rainfall, a young male died at Big Crystal Creek.

Visitors need to know how to stay safe around water in our parks. This is especially important at sites where deaths and injuries have occurred. We strongly encourage you to please use the messages below when briefing your visitors about swimming during their visit.

### Briefing for visitors

- Swimmers have died at Little Crystal and Big Crystal creeks.
- Little Crystal and Big Crystal creeks are popular places to cool off and enjoy creek-side scenery—but they are also potentially dangerous.
- Remember this is not a 'controlled environment' like a swimming pool. It is a 'wild' water system with natural hazards and conditions that are potentially dangerous.

- Little Crystal and Big Crystal creeks look inviting but have hidden hazards:
  - Extremely slippery rocks along the creek edge.
  - Submerged rocks and logs hidden beneath the surface.
  - Deep water and water of variable depths.
  - Broken glass.
  - Bullrouths (freshwater stonefish) are found in the area and possess a painful sting.
- Only enter the water if you are a strong swimmer:
  - You enter the water at your own risk; your safety is your responsibility.
  - Do not jump or dive into the creeks.
  - Take care on slippery rocks at the creek's edge.
  - Wear sandshoes or similar footwear to protect from bullrouths and broken glass.
  - Do not enter the water if you are under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Don't take glass into these areas.



Photo: © Queensland Government

# Davies Creek, Davies Creek National Park and Emerald Creek, Dinden West Forest Reserve

## Staying safe around water in north Queensland's national parks

### Background

Davies and Emerald creeks are popular swimming destinations for locals, and many visitors, both domestic and international, visit the park to view the spectacular falls.

One death occurred at Davies Creek when an intoxicated visitor attempted to climb the falls. Several injuries have resulted from risky behaviour (ignoring safety barriers) around the top of the falls.

Visitors need to know how to stay safe around water and waterfalls in our parks. This is especially important at sites where deaths and injuries have occurred. We strongly encourage you to please use the messages below when briefing your visitors before their visit.

### Briefing for visitors

- Visitors have died or been injured at Davies Creek and Emerald Creek.
- Davies Creek Falls are spectacular but are potentially dangerous. Stay behind the safety barriers at the lookout at all times. The fence is here to protect you.
- The view from the top of Davies Creek Falls might be awesome but the area has hidden hazards:
  - steep sheer cliffs
  - extremely slippery rocks
  - fast-flowing water across the rock face.
- Look after friends or family members. Don't let them put themselves and others in danger.
- Enjoy the beautiful view safely. The best social media shots can be taken from the lookout. Don't risk your life for a photo. Remain on the formed track and stay behind the fence at all times. You can be fined if you ignore this requirement.
- Take note of weather and creek conditions before deciding whether to swim. Remember this is not a 'controlled environment' like a swimming pool. It is a 'wild' water system area with natural hazards and conditions that are potentially dangerous.
- You can swim in the sandy, creek-side day-use and swimming area located along Davies Creek circuit track and in the lower sections of Emerald Creek. But be aware of the hidden hazards:
  - Extremely slippery rocks along the creek edge.
  - Submerged rocks and logs hidden beneath the surface.
  - Shallow water or cold deep fast-flowing water, depending upon the season.
  - Unpredictable conditions and variable water depths.
- Only enter the water if you are a strong swimmer:
  - You enter the water at your own risk; your safety is your responsibility.
  - Do not dive or jump into the creek.
  - Take care on slippery rocks at the creek's edge.
  - Do not enter the water if you are under the influence of alcohol or drugs.