

# Short break [Atherton Tableland](#)

## A northern road trip in divine hands

**Alison Cotes** finds a campervan is nothing to be afraid of, even on the twisting roads of the Tableland

I SPENT five blissful nights in the arms of Apollo, pampered in a way I never expected, sunk deep in dreamless sleep and waking up refreshed and satisfied every morning.

I was terrified at first, this big beautiful beast looking way too big for me to cope with, but after just an hour in each other's company, we discovered that we were twin souls and were meant to travel the wide brown land together. So I'm really glad that it wasn't me who sliced a huge chunk out of his temple at Cairns airport, because by the end of the journey I was almost in love with him.

It was, of course, not the beautiful

beardless youth of Greek mythology who had embraced me, but a huge campervan from Apollo, the biggest privately owned recreational vehicle operator in the country, who certainly knows how to make a cranky travel writer happy.

I'd never driven one of these great beasts before, and its sheer length struck terror into my heart because it was a six-sleeper, and there were only three of us. But my companions demanded I take the wheel first, and so my first experience was to back the monster out of the carpark at the Apollo depot, and once I'd managed that, it was a breeze.



**ALL ABOARD:** An Apollo campervan is popular with family travellers.

We chose a campervan this time because we wanted to travel to several places and I'm getting tired of lugging suitcases into a new bedroom every night. As we wanted more leisure time than a two-night trip would allow, we set aside five nights, which was, I decided, long enough to test the campervan, but not so long that it would have us screaming up the walls.

It saves money, too, because you take all your own tucker (Apollo offers a grocery delivery service, where you order your supplies from Coles in advance, and it's all waiting for you when you pick up the van), and the van is equipped with every cooking facility and gadget you can think of.

There are two ways up to the Atherton Tableland from Cairns, and they are both killers, so we drove very carefully. We took the (slightly) easier one first, driving up the Kennedy Highway north of Cairns, through Kuranda (whatever else you miss, you must see the Australian Butterfly Sanctuary, where you can be clothed in a multi-coloured shimmering robe like the princess in Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*).

But it was time for coffee, as we had taken the red-eye special from Brisbane, and the coffee plantations of Mareeba, home of Australia's best coffee, beckoned. Jaques was the first one we reached, so we lingered there a little, and then continued to Tolga. If you're at all interested in wood carving, stop at Tolga Woodworks for finely crafted articles in local timber (the website, [tolgawoodworks.com.au](http://tolgawoodworks.com.au), will have you drooling with envy).