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## Know your district

THURSDAY Island is 39km off the tip of Cape York Peninsula and covers little more than 3sq km.

Despite its size, it's been a northern defence centre, pearling hub, fishing port and is now a major administrative centre for the Torres Strait Islands and the northern tip of Cape York.

With a beautiful harbour, islands in all directions and cultural fusion, it has an air all its own.

Whites might have been poking around Thursday Island since its naming by Lieutenant James Cook, but this intervention appears of little consequence to the Kaurareg, its original inhabitants.

They still refer to the island by its original name — Waibene.

The far-northern outpost is squeezed between much larger islands such as the Prince of Wales, Horn and Hammond.

TI, as it is known, has a good harbour and overlooks a navigable stretch of water in the reef-laden Torres Strait.

This made it of strategic importance and prompted the building of Green Hill Fort in 1893 when there were fears of a Russian invasion. In World War II it also was an important base for Australian and US troops.

All Souls Quetta Memorial Church was built in 1893 in memory of the Quetta shipwreck three years before that killed 133.

You can get to TI by taking a boat from mainland ports such as Seisia or Bamaga, or you can fly in.

Its township is opposite the port and each end of its main street runs down to the water. By the port is an excellent cultural centre.

Its cemetery has elaborate local constructions and includes a Japanese Pearl Memorial dedicated to the hundreds of divers killed from decompression sickness. About 700 divers died.

The Strait was named in 1606 by Spanish navigator Luis Vaes de Torres.

Islanders speak three languages — creole, English and one of two native tongues. Meriam Mir is a Papuan-related language and spoken in the eastern islands, while Kala Lagaw Ya, an Aboriginal family of languages, is spoken elsewhere.



## Queensland in Pictures

THIS is a sight fewer and fewer Australians are getting to see, a cassowary in the wild at Mission Beach in far north Queensland. The Queensland Government's recovery plan for the animals, the largest rainforest native vertebrate, says the primary cause of the species' demise is habitat loss, with more than 80 per cent of the wet tropical lowlands cleared. To make things worse, about 22 per cent of remaining cassowary habitat has no conservation protection.

Picture: Liz Gallie

## Have your say

I FIRST came to Mission Beach in far north Queensland in 1974 and I thought it was the most beautiful place I had seen.

It was a very small community of mostly farmers and beach campers.

The rainforest grew right down to the beach and there were cassowaries everywhere, even on the beach.

It was Mission Beach magic.

More than 30 years later, more than half of the rainforest has been destroyed for development, along with it the cassowaries.

Yet Mission Beach retains the largest block of lowland rainforest south of Daintree and the highest density of cassowaries anywhere in Australia.

Cassowaries are now listed as endangered because there are only 1200 left in Australia.

At least 55 cassowaries have been killed by cars at Mission Beach since 1994.

The best chance of survival for cassowaries at Mission Beach is to retain and enhance the existing habitat and restore their corridors.

A strong, healthy habitat network will enable us to better manage the biggest threats of road kill and dog attack. These are the same threats identified by Premier Anna Bligh for the koalas of southeast Queensland.

Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett recently created Queensland history by declaring a proposed subdivision in cassowary habitat at Mission Beach as unacceptable.

This is the most wonderful thing and has given our community hope. About 40 per cent of cassowary habitat at Mission Beach is still unprotected.

Local conservation group C4 has a habitat buy-back fund to buy cassowary habitat or pay landholders to agree to permanent conservation covenants.

If you would like to contribute to this fund, you can feel proud that you have played a part in saving a spectacular endangered species.

Liz Gallie,  
Bingli Bay