

GUIDANCE 'GO 2'

Kate visits Palm Island

During week 5 of this term, I was lucky enough to have the privilege of being invited to immerse myself into both the school and local community of Palm Island. I learnt the history of the Island and of the Bwgcolman people (meaning 'many people').

Palm Island was gazetted as an Aboriginal reserve in 1914; representatives from over 40 tribes were displaced and sent to Palm Island for a variety of reasons.

The Palm Island Group is home to the traditional owners, the Manbarra people – (Munburra) and the indigenous Bwgcolman people and their descendants that were sent to the Palm Island mission from several communities around Queensland.

Palm Island, also known as Great Palm Island, or by the Aboriginal name Bwgcolman, is the largest of twelve tropical Islands in the Palm Island Group. The settlement is named variously Palm Island, the Mission, Palm Island Settlement or Palm Community.

The group of Islands is less than 20 kilometres from the nearest point on the mainland (Lucinda) and is 65 kilometres north of Townsville over sea. The Islands are serviced by a 20 minute plane ride or one-and-a-half-hour ferry ride from Townsville. I was lucky enough to experience both the ferry on the way to the island (seeing whales alongside the boat) and the plane ride off the island getting spoilt by the spectacular views of the Palm Island Cluster Islands flying back towards Townsville.

Palm Island consists of small bays, sandy beaches, fringing reefs, beautiful freshwater streams and steep forested mountains rising to the highest peak of 548 metres at Bentley Ridge. Other Islands in the chain, such as Orpheus and North Palm have globally renowned resorts and marine research stations. Situated in the great barrier Reef Marine Park, the surrounding reefs are as good as any on the outer reef, presenting wonderful fishing and diving opportunities and are used extensively by locals for hunting and gathering and other cultural purposes.

Palm Island is the largest discrete Indigenous community in Australia with approximately 4000 people residing on Palm Island.

In 1993, the school changed its name from Palm Island State School to better reflect the importance the community plays in their children's education. Their motto '2 Way Strong' also reflects the importance of their students being able to participate in their education while remaining strong in Palm Island culture and maintaining their identity.

Bwgcolman Community School has approximately 320 students. They have a heavy focus on literacy and numeracy development. and programs to boost attendance. They aim to

help students maintain a strong cultural identity and recently have moved their learning approach to Project Base Learning which allows learning experiences to take place on the beach or in community. Recently the preppies were learning about special places! They discussed what they could see, hear and feel, and then talked about ways to care for the special places on Palm Island. They then had to finish with building some sandcastles before they walked back to school! So much fun!

Check out some of my cool photos I took while working with the students and their families on Palm Island.



Palm Valley



Stdudents of Bwgcolman Community School



Local cultural event



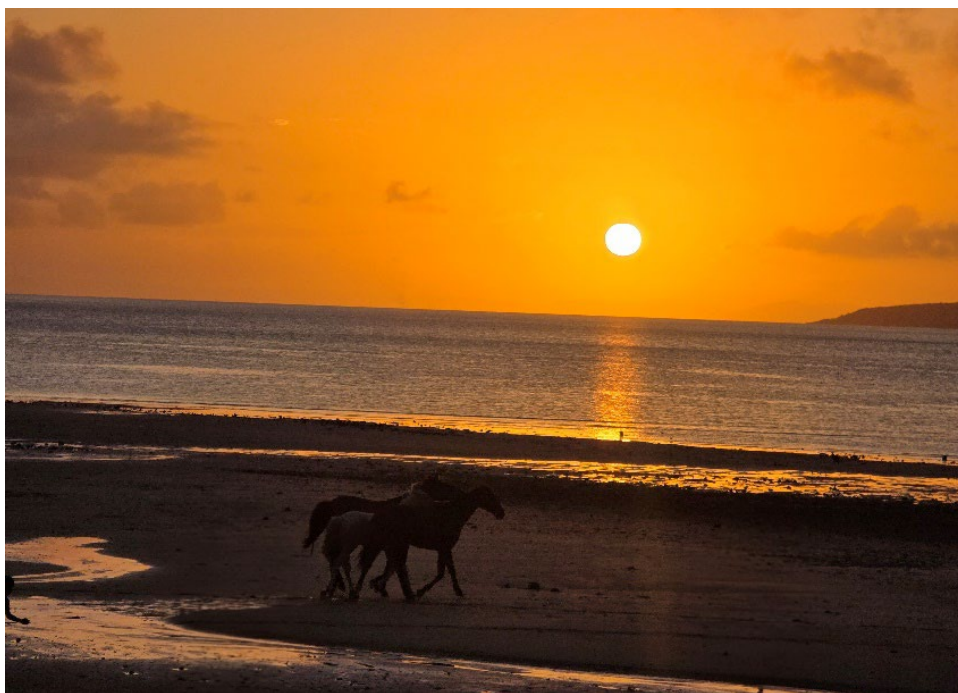
Ferry



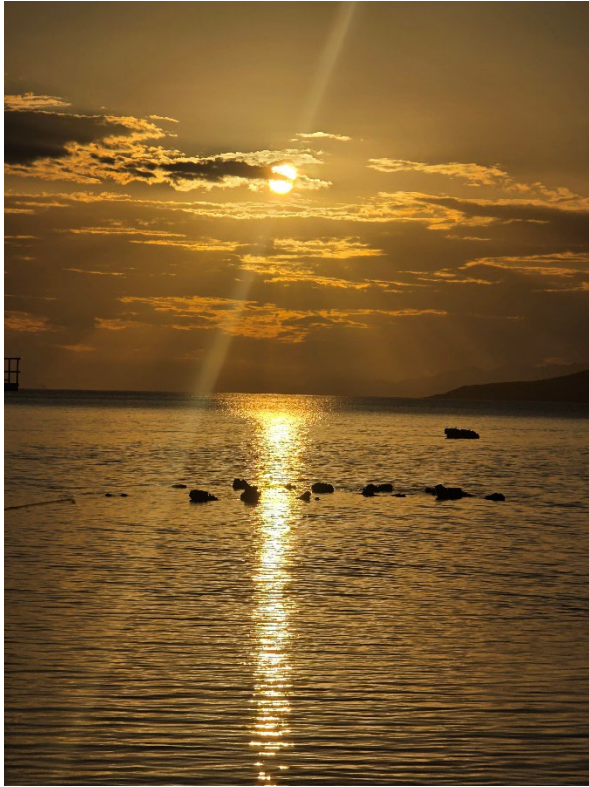
The gorgeous new grounds at Bwgcolman Community School.



Local Lookout



Local Brumby's enjoying the sunset



Sunset



Preppies during their beach lesson.