

Airlie Beach & Whitsunday Islands

Airlie Beach is a picturesque town overlooking Pioneer Bay, located on a peninsula that reaches out into the Whitsunday Passage. Airlie Beach is a popular tourist destination providing an ideal base and gateway to the Whitsunday Islands and Great Barrier Reef adventures.

Airlie Beach is considered the midway point of Australia's Great Barrier Reef due to its position near the centre of this famous reef that stretches for 2300 kilometres along the coast of Queensland. The Whitsunday region encompasses 74 islands (only 8 of which are inhabited), tourist friendly towns (including Airlie Beach, Shute Harbour, Cannonvale), and the rural town of Proserpine in sugar cane country. Two airports, Hamilton Island and Whitsunday Coast Airport (located on the mainland at Proserpine), service the Whitsunday region with regular flights. There are direct flights to Hamilton Island from many capital cities. Queensland Rail operates regular services each week from Brisbane, Cairns and Townsville to Proserpine. You can catch the fast Tilt Train or the Sunlander service. Greyhound buses also operate a number of services daily to Airlie Beach from Brisbane and Cairns and points in between. From Airlie Beach choose your Whitsunday destination and activity!

Airlie Beach offers visitors a wide range of accommodation from resort

hotels, apartments, bed and breakfast options, motels, camping and caravan parks as well as a host of backpacker hostel accommodation.

Sights & Attractions

Airlie Beach is best known as the embarkation point for visitors wanting to discover the magical beauty of the Whitsunday Islands just off the coast. Despite having a small population of approximately just 2750 permanent residents, Airlie Beach provides many of the essential services for visitors to the Whitsunday region (the town's shopping areas are open 7 days a week). Airlie Beach also has a great party vibe with al fresco cafes, resort style restaurants, bars, and clubs providing entertainment well into the night.

Airlie Beach is small and the sea is inhabited by marine stingers (jellyfish) from November to May. In order to provide safe swimming opportunities for visitors there is a medium sized swimming lagoon on the foreshore. Airlie Lagoon has lifeguard attendants and a children's pool.

The Whitsunday Islands are nestled between the magnificent Great Barrier Reef and the tranquil sapphire waters of the Coral Sea. The Whitsunday Islands boast crystal-clear waters, vibrant coral and marine life, dazzling white sandy beaches, sheltered coves, and 74 islands to explore.

Located midway along the tropical Queensland coast the idyllic Whitsunday Islands are one of the must see places on the East Coast! Many travellers depart on 3 or 4 day sailing trips from Shute Harbour in Airlie Beach for snorkeling, diving, sun baking, bushwalking on pristine islands and swimming off stunning beaches. The Whitsundays are a great holiday destination all year round, however if you want to spot some whales go between July and September. Island and coastal accommodation options range from camp sites in National Parks and backpacker hostels, to luxury resorts. There really is something to cater for all tastes and budgets in the Whitsundays.

Sights & Attractions

The Whitsunday Islands truly are paradise on earth, featuring pristine beaches of fine white sand, picture-perfect islands boasting native bush land teeming with wildlife, a balmy tropical climate, and a famous coral reef on its doorstep. Experience the Whitsundays with your choice of

relaxation or activity from sailing, snorkeling, sunbathing, scuba diving, or bushwalking. Explore one of the world's seven natural wonders, the Great Barrier Reef, with its amazing array of colourful coral and incredible marine life. Please keep in mind that the sea is inhabited by marine stingers (a type of jellyfish) from November to May and stinger-proof wetsuits should be worn if you venture into the warm waters of the Whitsundays at this time.

The adventurous will want to snorkel, scuba dive or take one of the many sailing trips on offer through the Whitsunday Islands and over the Great Barrier Reef. Some of the best dive sites to see the Great Barrier Reef's 400 types of coral and over 1500 species of fish and other marine life are located on the outer reef and include Hook, Hardy and Black Reef. Bait Reef is further northwest and boasts unforgettable dive and snorkelling sites such as Stepping Stones, the Cathedrals, Anemoneville and Manta Ray Bay.

web www.travelforever.com.au **email** info@travelforever.com.au

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Choose between adventure sailing options, fast catamarans or sleek racing yachts, or alternatively gently cruise the waters on a classic and historical timber Tall Ship (with plenty of deck space for sunbathing). Sailing tours are one of the most popular activities in the Whitsundays as they offer visitors a unique overnight experience staying on board your chosen boat in peaceful coves with lovely scenery and spectacular sunsets. There are fantastic snorkeling opportunities right off the boat, relaxation on deck, the chance to hoist a sail, anchorage at isolated and brilliant white beaches, and guided island bushwalks. If you seek breathtaking panoramic views then take a short plane or helicopter flight over the reef and look down on the romantic and unique Heart Reef surrounded by crystal-clear turquoise waters.

Take a stroll along the dazzling white, silica sands of the famous Whitehaven Beach (regarded as one of the best beaches in the world). Stretching for 7 kilometres this beautiful beach is a must see when you visit the Whitsunday Islands.

History

Captain James Cook inspired the name 'Whitsunday' when he sailed safely through its jumble of islands and jagged reefs in 1770. Cook named the islands as he believed that he had passed through the area on the Christian festival day of Whit Sunday. It is now widely accepted that he didn't actually pass through on this date, as he had failed to take into account the yet to be brought into existence International Date Line a lá Phileas Fogg. Each year the people of Airlie Beach celebrate "The Blessing of the Fleet" on Whit Sunday or Pentecost Sunday. The tradition of "The Blessing of the Fleet" was started by Father Keith Felgate.

Climate

Airlie Beach and the nearby Whitsunday Islands enjoy a balmy tropical climate. In the north of Queensland the "Wet" season is between November and May, and is particularly hot in January, February and March when daily temperatures reach around 32°C (Degrees Celsius). During this time of the year cyclones and flooding can occur in the region. In the "Dry" season (June to October) Queensland still enjoys relatively warm temperatures compared to the rest of Australia. Temperatures rarely drop much below 20°C and the nights are still quite warm as well.

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