



ISLANDS
OF THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

Islands of the Great Barrier Reef

Nature and Wildlife Experiences

Go totally turtle

Every year, between October and March, green and loggerhead turtles lumber up the same beach on which they were born more than 50 years ago. The purpose of their “home” visit is to mate and nest, and the two best places to observe this activity are Lady Elliot and Heron islands – the latter being one of the world’s major breeding grounds for the two species of turtle. These gentle giants nest up to nine times in a season, laying between 80 and 120 eggs per clutch. Under the careful guidance of Turtle Rangers (Lady Elliot) and Naturalist Guides (Heron), guests of all ages can observe this amazing event. At the end of the nesting season, thousands of baby turtles push through their sand nest on their way to the sea. www.ladyelliott.com.au; or www.heronisland.com

Awesome whales in the wild

From July to September, majestic humpback whales migrate north up the Queensland coast to breed in the calm, warm waters of the Whitsundays before returning with their calves to Antarctica. Aerial and boat whale-watching tours are available from a number of operators. Whales can be spotted right along the islands of the Great Barrier Reef.

Meet Manta Rays

Famous for a resident population of 40 manta rays, Lady Elliot Island is a coral cay with a multitude of marine life. With exceptionally clear water year round, the island offers abundant opportunities for encounters with turtles, dolphins and a large variety of coral, fish and giant manta rays. If you visit in the right season you may see birds nesting, green and loggerhead turtle hatchlings emerging from the sand or migrating humpback whales blow and breach. A declared “Marine National Park Zone”, Lady Elliot is one of the few islands where you will see live coral and abundant bird and marine life at every level. www.ladyelliott.com.au

Natural beauty

Heron Island is a true coral cay right on the World Heritage listed Great Barrier Reef. Here you can swim straight off the beach to an endless garden of coral where the waters are literally teeming with beautifully coloured fish and marine





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life. The island is renowned for its abundance of birdlife with dense pisonia forests providing nesting habitat for many thousands of migrant and resident birds. Between October and March each year, green turtles laying their eggs and hatching baby turtles are joined by up to 100,000 terns and mutton birds nesting and raising their young. www.heronisland.com

Pristine reef

Enjoy the Great Barrier Reef as nature intended on Wilson Island. This tiny coral cay allows a maximum of 12 guests to access pristine reef and beach environments, including rare turtle and bird breeding grounds. Experience the wonder of watching green and loggerhead turtles laying their eggs or their baby hatchlings emerging from their nests. Guests on Wilson Island are also able to enjoy exceptional snorkelling, bird watching, humpback whale sightings (in season), island and reef walks or simply relaxing within the peaceful natural setting, enjoying the stunning views. (NB: Wilson Island is closed during the month of February for the bird nesting season.) www.wilsonisland.com

Go green

Experience the natural wonders of a true coral cay covered in tropical vine forest, within cooee of Cairns. Amble along Green Island's boardwalks to see forest birds and insects. Wander along the beach and look for seabirds, and, on the water's surface, green and hawksbill turtles and dugong. View the reef, either by snorkelling or from the comfort of a glass-bottomed boat, and see a myriad of tropical fish, corals and clams. With more than 35 species of seabird, 28 species of forest bird and a surrounding reef rich with a diversity of marine life, Green Island ensures you will truly feel close to nature. www.greenislandresort.com.au.

Brilliant butterflies

Explore Australia's most beautiful rainforest island. Home to more than 100 bird species, Dunk Island also harbours a more fragile beauty: the Ulysses butterfly. Metallic blue and black wings make this beautiful butterfly impossible to miss against the rainforest backdrop. Offshore, sea turtles and dugongs can sometimes be seen feeding in seagrass meadows in shallow waters, while the island's fringing reefs provide abundant opportunities for viewing brilliant corals and tropical fish. www.dunk-island.com

Cuddle a koala

– Magnetic Island National Park, particularly the Forts walk, is the best place to spot a koala in the wild. (Nature lovers take note: the park also features





spectacular natural landscapes and seascapes, including boulder-strewn headlands, hoop pines, sandy beaches and fringing coral reefs.) www.epa.qld.gov.au

– Get up close and personal with koalas, crocodiles and snakes at Bungalow Bay Koala Village on Magnetic Island. There are three daily interactive tours, which also include a guided bush walk in the surrounding habitats of wetlands, pandanus and melaleuca forest. www.bungalowbay.com.au

– Hamilton Island’s Koala Gallery Wildlife Experience, located in the heart of the resort, offers a delicious breakfast and afterwards, you can cuddle a koala. The sanctuary also features a large collection of other Australian native animals, such as kangaroos, wallabies, crocodiles, wombats, Tasmanian devils, frilled necked lizards and various reptiles. www.hamiltonisland.com.au

Giant potato cods...

Go diving at the world-famous Cod Hole, renowned for its huge, but friendly, potato cods. Watch your dive master feed groups of large (150 kilogram-plus) potato cod with fresh pilchards. www.undersea.com.au; www.lizardisland.com.au

...and gargantuan clams

Don snorkel and mask to glide over the world’s largest population of giant clams at Orpheus Island. But that’s not all you’ll find in the waters surrounding this exclusive national park destination. The island's fringing reefs, best explored by snorkelling or diving, are home to 1,100 species of fish and 340 of the 350 known species of reef coral. On shore, you can explore pristine beaches and tropical rainforests – by yourself or with a resort guide. (The resort offers a variety of nature interpretive activities on the local flora, fauna and wildlife.) www.orpheus.com.au

Melaleuca Forest Experience

Discover the ancient beauty, serenity and majesty of a magical melaleuca forest near Brampton Island. The two-hour tour begins with a relaxing boat ride to Carlisle Island followed by a walk through the forest, the canopy forming a natural cathedral overhead, while the thick leaf litter under foot feels like you’re literally walking on clouds. The inhabitants of this special place are a sight to be seen too, from the thousands of migrating blue tiger butterflies flitting about from April to December, to the delicate green tree frogs on the hop from January to June. www.brampton-island.com





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Aquatic wonderland

Enjoy back-to-basics natural beauty at Lady Musgrave Island, a World Heritage-listed marine national park. The southern-most island in the Capricorn Cays National Park – and a true coral cay – Lady Musgrave rests on the edge of a coral-fringed lagoon measuring 8 kilometres in circumference. After immersing yourself in this aquatic wonderland, which boasts a huge variety of colourful marine life – including manta rays, turtles, dolphins and seasonal visit from majestic humpback whales – explore the island on a guided nature walk. In-season you can watch turtles and birds nesting and the birth of hatchlings. www.lmcruises.com.au

Reef within the Reef

Toddlers to teenagers will love exploring the Daydream Island's Outdoor Aquarium – a man-made living coral reef lagoon boasting over 40 marine fish species and more than 50 coral varieties. www.daydreamisland.com

