

The Great Barrier Reef with a difference

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Queensland's Great Barrier Reef is the largest coral reef system in the world and extends around 2,300km down from the northern tip of the State. There are numerous ways to experience the reef, here's a sample of some of the best.

Breakfast on the Reef - This very special tour features a morning flight over the Great Barrier Reef to a private, and pristine, coral cay which is yours for two full hours. After touch down, enjoy a delicious tropical brunch with Australian sparkling wine and juices and then relax in splendid isolation before you reboard the helicopter for the return scenic flight. <http://gbrhelicopters.com.au/specialty.html>

Seaplane over Heart Reef - Share the natural wonder that is Heart Reef with a loved one on a very special seaplane scenic flight. Heart Reef is a unique composition of coral which has naturally formed into the shape of a heart, and it can only be properly appreciated from the air. This is the perfect Valentine's Day, anniversary or romantic surprise for a loved one. www.airwhitsunday.com.au

Cruising the Whitsundays in style - Visit this world-class destination on a luxury boating experience for a maximum of nine passengers with Descarada Charters in the Whitsundays. Guest facilities include private cabin accommodation, chef-prepared culinary creations and a variety of activities designed to entice even the most reluctant of travellers out from under the bimini covers on the top deck. Two day/two night, three day/three night and private charters are available and include a crew of three, accommodation, all meals, non-alcoholic beverages, marine park and island fees. www.descarada.com.au

Sprint to the reef - A new snorkelling adventure tour has its guests on the reef just 15 minutes after they leave Port Douglas. Reef Sprinter offers 14 guests the perfect reef snorkelling experience for the time poor on a two-and-a-half hour tour to the vast coral gardens and abundant fish life of the Low Isles. Getting there is half the fun aboard the 500 horse power enviro speed boat reaching speeds of more than 40 knots. Reef Sprinter tours operate three times a day from the Port Douglas Slipway jetty. www.reefsprinter.com.au

Diving delights - Mike Ball has been a pioneer in the Australian dive industry since he started his dive school in Townsville in 1969. Visitors with Mike Ball Dive Expeditions can still expect to find an extra special experience on tours including in-water encounters with friendly Minke whales in waters between Cooktown and Lizard Island and dives at the famous Cod Hall off Lizard Island with the giant potato cod and huge Queensland groupers. Divers can also join special research expeditions including a Coral Sea safari and reef shark tag and track. www.mikeball.com

Sleep with the fish - Reefsleeper is a once in a lifetime opportunity to experience the solitude of spending the night right on the reef. Located at the Reefworld pontoon at Hardy Reef, 40 nautical miles from the mainland, the experience includes overnight accommodation (maximum six people), alfresco dinner including wine, full breakfast, buffet lunches, sunset cocktails, two scuba dives or guided snorkelling safari, and use of facilities including the underwater viewing chamber, semi-submersible and waterslide. Visitors travel to Reefworld with the visitors. They remain when the tour departs at 2.30pm, returning at 10.30am the following day. www.fantasea.com.au/page/reefsleep/index.html

Winning ways to explore the reef - Nationally-awarded Passions of Paradise and Quicksilver offer travellers a range of Great Barrier Reef day tours.

- The 2009 Australian Tourism Award winner is a 25 metre custom designed sailing catamaran that travels daily from Cairns to Michaelamas Cay and Paradise Reef. Guests spend the day soaking up the sun, snorkelling with the fish, scuba diving or checking out the beauty of the reef on a glass bottom boat ride. www.passions.com.au
- Australian Tourism Hall of Fame member, The Quicksilver Group runs daily Outer Reef Cruises out of Port Douglas to Agincourt Reef aboard a state of the art, wavepiercer catamarans, and sailing cruises to the Low Isles, a coral cay located 15km north east of Port Douglas. www.quicksilver-cruises.com Quicksilver also operates Great Adventures cruises out of Cairns offering day trips to Green Island and the Outer Reef. www.greatadventures.com.au

And just a few others...

Day trip to Lady Elliot - View one of the most pristine parts of the Great Barrier Reef from above and below on a day trip to Lady Elliot island from Brisbane or the Gold and Sunshine Coasts. Join a guided tour on a glass bottom boat, snorkel amongst the most amazing coral formations and marine creatures, hand feed fish in the lagoon or take a guided reef walk. Come face to face with turtles, colourful coral and schools of reef fish. Guests enjoy the best the reef has to offer and a delicious buffet lunch. www.seairpacific.com.au

Green Island - Lying just 27km off Cairns, Green Island is the only coral cay on the Great Barrier Reef with a rainforest – making it a one stop tropical experience. Take a 45 minute journey across the Coral Sea to the 15 hectare island which is home to 126 native plant species, colourful birdlife and magnificent coral gardens. Explore the rainforest and other wonders of the islands on a self-guided eco walk, then cool off with a swim, dive or snorkel amongst the tropical fish and coral gardens. www.greatadventures.com.au

Seaplane to Orpheus – The view from the seaplane ride to reef-fringed Orpheus Island is a scenic delight and the water landing a great way to arrive at the 1,368 hectare island which has been a National Park since 1960. The island is also home to the James Cook Research Centre and a guided tour provides a great introduction to the quality of marine life found in the surrounding waters. The island has just one luxury resort with individual villas overlooking the Coral Sea, and is accessible only by seaplane from Townsville. www.orpheus.com.au

Spectacular Reef Encounter – View the spectacular seascape of the Great Barrier Reef on a scenic heli-flight to a floating boutique hotel. Skysafari takes guests from Port Douglas and Cairns on a tropical coastline and reef scenic heli-flight before touching down on Reef Encounter’s exclusive helipad. Reef Encounter is a luxury catamaran and floating hotel that offers 21 state rooms, gourmet meals, air-conditioning, dining room and bar, sundeck and spa. On Skysafari’s Reef Explorer day trip guests can enjoy a private stateroom for the day, embark on a snorkelling adventure, learn how to scuba dive or simply relax on the sundeck. There’s also the opportunity to extend your stay with an overnight reef encounter on the luxury live-aboard vessel. www.skysafari.com.au
www.reefencounter.com.au