

Eco Warrior

Emily Smart, Fantasea Adventure Cruising

With climate change listed as one of the biggest challenges for Queensland's Great Barrier Reef, it is comforting to know people like Emily Smart are working on and around the reef, collecting data, researching coral health and spreading the word on global warming.

Emily truly deserves the moniker Eco Warrior because, as a Marine Research Coordinator at Whitsunday-based Fantasea Adventure Cruising she is at the coal face working on behalf of the environment to protect it.

Emily's role includes two days of conducting snorkelling tours on Hardy Reef for tourists from Fantasea's Reefworld Pontoon and two days researching the reef on behalf of the Fantasea Foundation. "The Fantasea Foundation was set up to facilitate marine research and conservation," Emily explains.

"We are major participants in the Great Barrier Reef's Marine Park Authority's Eye on the Reef program. Every time I enter the water, I use a data slate to fill in coral health information, note any coral disease and record the presence of sharks, whales, turtles and other marine life.

"It's exciting because this is the world's largest coral reef monitoring program. The data collected is used by the Authority to track the reef's overall health, which can then help formulate management strategies. We are also involved in the Bleach Watch program which acts as an early warning signal for coral bleaching. If there is an increase in coral bleaching the Authority can send a team to investigate as it happens."

This capable and high achieving woman has also recently trained to be a voluntary Climate Change presenter for Al Gore's environmental movement The Climate Project - Australia.

"I have been given a slide show to spread the word on climate change and now have the information to educate people on how they can reduce their greenhouse gas emissions," Emily said. "I'm doing my first presentation for some international visitors at the English Language School and will do another presentation shortly at the Fantasea shop front in Airlie Beach."

After completing a Bachelor of Science and honours in marine ecology, Emily worked with Greenforce internationally before returning to Australia and working for award-winning Fantasea Adventure Cruising.

Emily's role with Fantasea combines her twin passions of conducting snorkelling tours of the reef with research into the marine environment.

"I take the Fantasea guests into the water, give them snorkelling tours and provide an interpretive service for tourists and travelers," Emily explains. "It's a great job because I can show them first-hand the diversity of marine life and explain how the marine ecology works."

At the end of November to early December last year, Emily witnessed a sight that few get to see in their lifetime, the annual spawning of the Great Barrier Reef.

"We stayed at Reefworld, Fantasea's pontoon on the outer reef, and saw the one opportunity the reef has to reproduce sexually," she said.

"The coral releases eggs and sperm en masse. So much is released and the water was thick with matter and protein strands. It was like an upside down underwater snow storm with so much activity," she says.

"Seeing this made me even more determined to keep working to educate people about the reef and to help protect the reef, it is unique and well worth our care and concern. "By taking people to the reef, by showing them first-hand this 'alien' environment, people can understand why the reef is unique and why it needs our protection and nurturing.

"It is very difficult for people to be passionate about looking after the reef without seeing it for themselves, so in many ways tourism provides a vital education platform for its protection."

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