

The guide Whitsunday Islands

Deliverance country

If the thought of winter has you praying for mercy, head north, **Briar Jensen** writes.



YING off the Queensland coast and protected by the Great Barrier Reef, the Whitsundays offer an enormous variety of holiday options, whether you're there for a day or a week, looking for adventure or relaxation. Here are just a few of the possibilities available.

Sailing

Day sails

If you yearn for the thrill of sailing but don't have much time, try a day sail. To experience life on an ocean racer, without the hardships, step aboard the 24-metre Ragamuffin, a Sydney to Hobart line honours winner. Sail to Whitehaven Beach for a picnic or Blue Pearl Bay for snorkelling. Adults \$134, children aged 5-14 \$48, families (two adults, two children) \$299. Phone 1800 454 777, see www.maxiaction.com.au.

Don't fancy a monohull? Then take the spacious purple cat Camira, one of the world's fastest catamarans, for a sail to Whitehaven Beach. Adults

Phone 1800 075 000, see www.rentayacht.com.au.

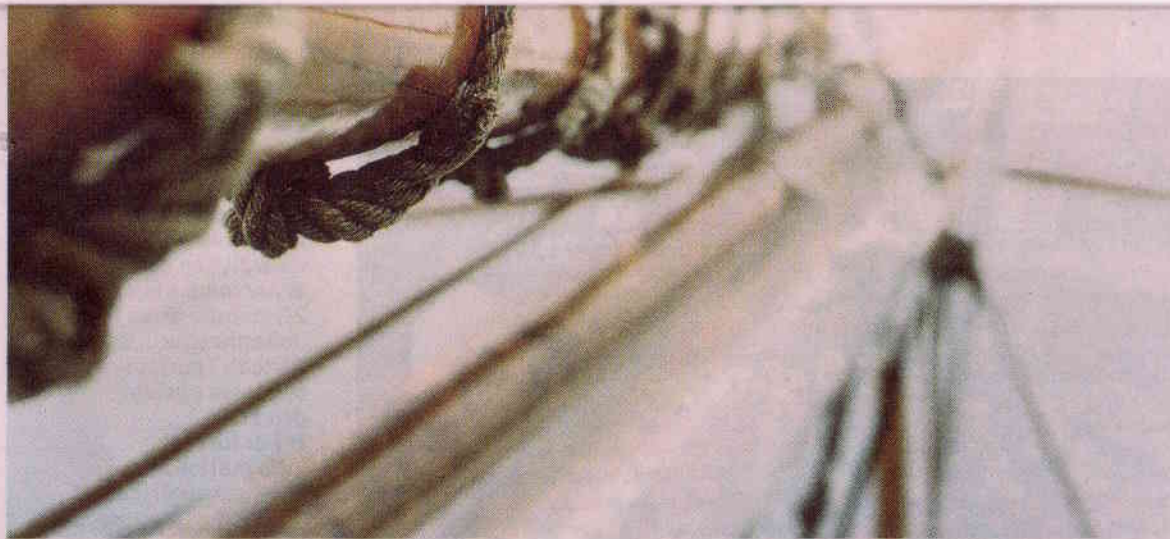
Crewed charters

If you're not confident sailing yourself then join a professionally crewed adventure on a huge range of vessels, from ex-racing yachts to tall ships. Southern Cross Sailing Adventures has two- and three-day trips on a variety of yachts from a 16-metre Admiral's Cup contender to a 25-metre Whitbread racer. Prices from \$239 per person. Phone 1800 675 790, see www.soxsail.com.au.

Australian Tall Ship Cruises has two-, three- and six-day voyages. Their fleet includes a 110-year-old tall ship, a traditional square-rigger and a three-masted Mediterranean schooner. Prices from \$279 per person. Phone 1800 355 377, see www.australiantallships.com.

Sail and stay

For a great budget option take a sail and stay adventure package that combines three days' sail with two nights on South Molle Island. A



\$140, children 5-15 \$80, families (two adults, up to three children) \$399. Phone (07) 4946 4662, see www.cruisewhitsundays.com.

Self charters

The short island hops and easy visual navigation of the Whitsundays makes it the ideal spot to charter a boat. Explore uninhabited islands or visit the seven resorts that welcome boaters. Sunsail at Hamilton Island has yachts from 10 to 15 metres for two to 12 people.

Prices from \$390 per yacht per night. Phone 1800 803 988, see www.sunsail.com.au.

Whitsunday Rent A Yacht at Shute Harbour has monohulls, catamarans and motorboats from eight to 15 metres for two to 12 people. Prices from \$385 per boat per night.

snorkelling trip to Blue Pearl Bay and sail to Whitehaven Beach is included. Cost, including all meals and accommodation, is \$299 plus \$27 reef tax. Upgrade to single/twin room for \$65. Phone 1800 046 462, see www.studentflights.com.au.

Reef adventures

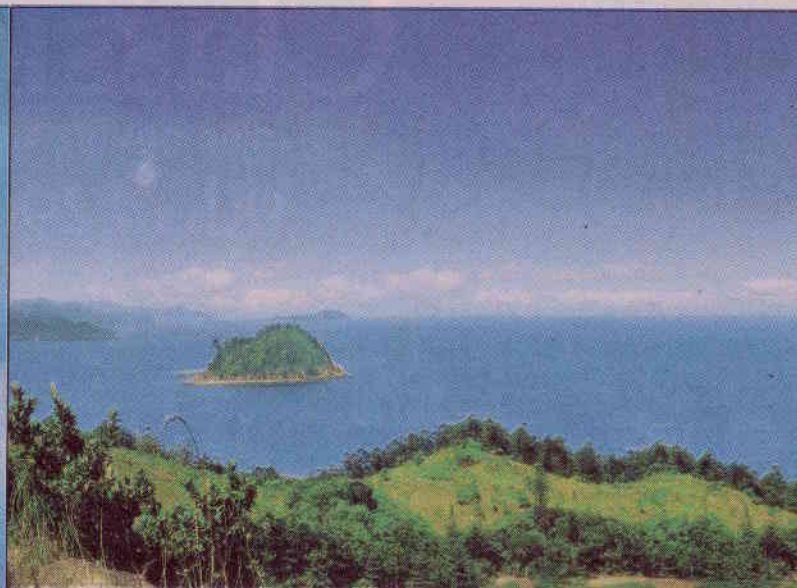
The easiest way to explore the Great Barrier Reef is from a pontoon. Take a guided snorkel with a marine biologist or go on a fully escorted introductory or certified dive. If you don't want to get wet, watch the parade of kaleidoscopic fish from an underwater viewing station, glass bottom boat or semi-submersible. If you fancy a lofty view of the reef, take a scenic helicopter flight.



The Cruise Whitsundays pontoon at Knuckle Reef offers Seawalker, a modern version of the old diver's

atmosphere with its bustling marina and waterfront shops.

There is plenty to do on the island,



available. Phone (07) 4946 4662, see www.cruisewhitsundays.com or www.daydreamisland.com.

South Molle Island

Walk the well-marked tracks through the national park for spectacular views of the Whitsundays and access to beautiful beaches – request a packed lunch and make it a picnic. Play a round of golf on the nine-hole course or get wet tackling some water sports. Alternatively, just relax on the beach or by the pool and enjoy the resort facilities. A daytripper VIP card offers free use of non-motorised water sports and discounts on charged activities. Full-day trip including lunch, adults \$80, children \$45. Phone (07) 4946 4662, see www.cruisewhitsundays.com or www.southmolleisland.com.au.

Three-Island Discovery

Sample three islands on an escorted island discovery cruise. Catch some action on Hamilton, relax and unwind



PUT YOUR FEET UP: (opposite page) Cruising in the Whitsundays; (this page, clockwise from above) the islands offer scuba diving, parasailing, destinations such as Long Island and even rainforest massages on Hayman.

helmet, which allows you to breath underwater.

Massages are available on the pontoon or during launch transfers. Full-day cruise, adults \$189, children 5-15 \$90, families (two adults, up to three children) \$465. Phone (07) 4946 4662, see www.cruisewhitsundays.com.

Reefworld pontoon is at Hardy Reef and offers fun-filled childcare (six months to 14 years) so you can snorkel or dive without worrying about the children. You can even spend a night on the pontoon with their Reefsleeper package. Full-day cruise, adults \$195, children 5-15 \$90. Phone 1800 650 851, see www.fantasea.com.au.

Island daytrips

Hamilton Island

The largest inhabited Whitsunday island, Hamilton has a village

including target shooting, go-carting, water sports and the wire-flyer (a sort of hang-glider on a wire), as well as the pools and beaches when you fancy a dip. Hire a golf buggy for the day and explore the whole island. There are regular ferry services. Full-day trip including lunch and discount vouchers, adults \$99, children 5-15 \$57. Phone 1800 650 851, see www.fantasea.com.au.

Daydream Island

Daydream Village has been specifically designed for the island's day guests. There are tennis courts, a pool, children's playground and "living reef" outdoor aquarium. Walk through the rainforest, play mini-golf on the Around Australia course, enjoy some water sports or have a rejuvenating treatment at the spa. Half-day trips from \$75 for adults, \$40 for children 5-15. Full-day escapes including lunch are also

on Daydream, then commune with nature on Long Island. Adults \$78, children 5-15 \$42, families (two adults, two children) \$219. Phone 1800 650 851, see www.fantasea.com.au.

Resort retreats

Long Island

From tots to teens, singles to newlyweds, parents to grandparents, the 3½-star Long Island Resort is a playground for the whole family. In aptly named Happy Bay, water sports include fishing, water-skiing and parasailing. Twenty kilometres of walking tracks weave through the surrounding national park, though nature comes to the resort with daily visits by wallabies and flightless curlews. Watch the sun set from a hammock, then unwind even further with a cocktail at the Sand Bar.

Prices from \$165 per person per night twin share, including all meals. Phone 1800 075 125, see www.oceanhotels.com.au.

Brampton Island

Ideally suited to couples wanting a relaxing getaway or romantic escape, Voyages Brampton Island is surrounded by national park. With seven easily accessible beaches and no daytrippers, it is easy to find a secluded spot on the island.

The island caters for all tastes: fast and furious water sports, eco-friendly nature trips, relaxing spa treatments and an entertaining nightlife.

Take a guided tour of the magical melaleuca forest on adjacent Carlisle Island, where you can see masses of blue tiger butterflies, wiggling tadpoles or tiny green tree frogs. Prices from \$124 per person per

night. Phone 1300 134 044, see www.voyages.com.au.

Hayman Island

The multi-award-winning Hayman Island resort is a member of the prestigious organisation, the Leading Hotels of the World. Located on a pristine sandy beach, the resort is built around a magnificent pool, surrounded by 14 hectares of landscaped tropical gardens.

The usual array of water sports is complemented by optional private charters.

Fine dining is available in a choice of restaurants and luxurious Guerlain Methode therapies are offered in Spa Chakra. Three-night packages from \$998 per person twin share, including breakfast and launch transfers. Phone 1800 075 175, see www.hayman.com.au.