

Travel Facts

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GETTING THERE

Australia is well serviced with international flights. Brisbane and Cairns are the international ports with regular domestic services to all the GBR points. The state of Queensland has many coastal centres with regular commuter air services that serve as jumping-off points to the GBR and Coral Sea. Australia's major domestic airlines will book and supply services to all ports (including services run by subsidiary airlines).

Lady Elliot, Brampton, Hamilton, Dunk, Lizard and Hicks Islands all have their own airstrips, as do many of the Torres Strait Islands. There are feeder airports at Bundaberg, Gladstone, Mackay, Proserpine, Townsville, Cairns and Thursday (Horn) Island. Iron Range has an airstrip, which is often used as a change-over point for Far Northern GBR expedition trips through Portland Roads, serviced from either Cairns or Thursday Island.

Cairns – The GBR's Gateway City

With a population of more than 100,000, Cairns is now firmly established as one of Australia's top travel destinations and is the main jumping-off port to GBR and Coral Sea destinations.

Cairns was once a laid-back country town, but today is a modern, vivacious city that lives and breathes tourism. Cairns Airport is one of the busiest in Australia and the flow of international arrivals continues to swell.

Many divers start or finish their GBR trip in Cairns and, although the city itself only has a small built beach, dozens of operators run daily and hourly trips to nearby beaches and offshore islands and reefs. Cairns is also the centre for a host of other activities including white-water rafting, para-sailing, rainforest excursions, horse-riding, hiking, mountain biking, canoeing and, for the real adrenaline junkies, there's always bungee jumping or sky diving.



Dive training occurs in many GBR locations

GETTING AROUND

In most major centres there are regular bus services (check with the local tourist or information centre for fares and schedules) and taxis are everywhere, but can get expensive if you have a lot of running around to do before your dive trip. Renting a car is a good option if you have a group of people, enjoy driving long distances and have the time. Plan carefully as the distances between cities are deceptively long. Rental cars are available at every centre and airport, while some long-stay visitors even buy a car for the duration of their visit.

Coaches (most with movies), operate regularly between all centres and are the backpacker's choice of transport. The coaches are met by backpacker representatives at most towns. You can take a train from Brisbane to Cairns – an inexpensive and a great way to see the countryside if you have the time. Cruises between Townsville and Cairns, or Cairns and Cooktown are a great travel option, although diving is often

a lower priority to cruising, snorkeling and island visits.

Many dive operators offer a pick-up service from local accommodations. Helicopters, floatplanes and amphibians can also take you directly to islands, boats or reef pontoons. Most are on a charter basis but some have regular services. A great site, listing current opportunities and services, is www.queenslandholidays.com.au.



Dive briefs can be the most important part of your dive

ENTRY

To visit Australia you need a current passport valid for three months after your departure. For visa requirements, visit www.immi.gov.au or check with your local Australian consulate.

DIVING LAWS

International standards apply. To dive in Queensland you need to show your dive certification card and log book. Operators will often want to chat about what diving you have done. You will often be asked to sign a waiver form to protect the operator.

If you wish to undertake a resort or introductory dive you are required to complete a medical questionnaire – ideally you should have a proper medical by a diving doctor as there are particular aspects to diving physiology that diving doctors are trained in.

Current laws governing diving in Queensland are listed on www.dir.qld.gov.au/workplace/subjects/diving.

MONEY

Australia uses Australian dollars and cents only. Generally all other currencies are only acceptable at banks. Traveller's cheques can be used but usually at a poorer rate at retail outlets. The use of credit cards is easy and widespread and there are many 'hole in the wall' ATMs and Eftpos outlets, which will work with most overseas accounts. All dive services and accommodations accept credit cards.

TIME

Australian Eastern Standard Time (GBR) is 10 hours ahead of GMT except on Heron Island Resort, which is 11 hours ahead. Queensland does not observe daylight saving time seen in other Australian states. When it's noon on the GBR, it's 11am in Tokyo, 2am in London and 6pm the day before in San Francisco. World times are listed under 'International Codes' in the local telephone directories.

ELECTRICITY

Three-pin flat-point plugs are standard in Australia. All electricity is on a 240V, 50Hz cycle, available at all resorts and on overnight vessels. As most are on a generator system, fluctuations are common so be careful with sensitive gear. Check ahead if you require 110V as it is rarely available. If you need multiple outlets, bring along a multi-plug 'power board', converter plugs and a transformer. Most duty free, hardware and luggage stores have converter plugs. Under no circumstances should you plug a non-240V unit into any Australian outlet.

WEIGHTS & MEASURES

Australia follows the metric system, although many people still understand imperial systems. In this book, both



Anemonefish are very brave amongst the stinging tentacles of their host anemone
Photo: Michael Aw

imperial and metric measurements are given, except for specific references to depth, which are given in metres. Be careful to plan and undertake your dives in whatever system your gauges use. Dive masters are almost always capable of handling both measurements, but it's good to know what you're using before you head out. Refer to the conversion chart at the back of this book.

WHAT TO BRING

Bring prescription medicines. It's also wise to carry copies of the prescriptions in case you need more, or to subdue an over-enthusiastic customs person. Carry them with you and even carry another set in your luggage in case of loss. Some drugs sold overseas are not available in Australia or are known under different names, so it's important to know what the drug is. Also bring prescription lenses, and their prescriptions and any other hard-to-get items. Other personal items are readily available in major centres along the coast.

It can get cold and windy at sea and on the islands, so a good waterproof windbreaker or spray jacket is useful. A woolen sweater or fleece is advisable during winter in the south. A hat, sunglasses, sunscreen, long-sleeved shirt or rashie for sunburn protection is also important – there are reasons for the famous Aussie hats! Bug repellent is useful on the coast and some islands.

DIVE-RELATED EQUIPMENT

For long periods of diving, you'll find a light wetsuit (3mm) is suitable throughout the north. In the south, in winter to early summer, you'll want a 5mm full wetsuit, hood and boots. A lycra skin is ideal for snorkeling and sun protection. Most operators rent out equipment at prices similar to most international destinations. Wetsuits are usually in good order. With competition and the high standards required by Queensland law, most operators now carry only well-serviced gear and offer computers in the rental package. As each operator is

Aussie Dive Lingo

In addition to the cheery 'g'day' and friendly 'how ya goin' mate?' you'll hear a variety of distinctly Aussie words, even in the universal language of diving. Here are just a few:

- Barra** – barramundi
- Body condom / party frock** – wetsuit
- Bommie** – an isolated coral head
- Bugs** – shovel-nosed lobster
- Cod** – grouper
- Cobia** – kingfish
- Darwin stubby** – one gallon bottle of beer
- FIL0 divers** – first-in-last-out
- Groper** – grouper or over-enthusiastic diver of the opposite sex
- Hot boat** – when a dive boat drops divers off without anchoring or mooring
- Laughing gear** – mouth
- LIFO divers** – last-in-first-out
- Little men in grey suits** – sharks
- Rubber duck** – inflatable boat
- Parachute entry** – this is when divers line up and follow each other into the water, like parachutists out of an aircraft. This is done from a hot boat.
- Port** – suitcase (short for 'portman-teau')
- Shark biscuits** – novice surfers
- Trevally** – jacks
- Stubby** – small bottle of beer
- Tinnie** – can of beer or aluminum boat
- Togs** – swimsuit
- Torch** – flashlight
- Wobby** – wobbegong shark

different, check beforehand (in writing if possible), to ensure you are getting the gear or air mixes you want.

The basic principles of safe diving are enshrined in law. Queensland law says that each diver must dive with a buddy, wear a BC with a whistle, have an alternate air source, gauges, a protection suit, weights with a quick release catch



Careful divers monitor their air usage

and a dive computer. Divers should also use the DCIEM (Defence & Civil Institute of Environmental Medicine) tables and follow the instructions of the Dive master. Be patient with dive staff, as the precautions are for your safety and protection.

Repairs are readily available at coastal centres but generally not on boats or at resorts. Most locations sell all dive equipment, books and videos. Purchasing spare parts here can be risky, as most retail centres cater to a limited range of brands. Batteries are available almost everywhere.

BUSINESS HOURS

Almost everything is open from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, except for banks, which are open to 4pm, and 5pm only on Fridays. Most shops open 9am to noon on Saturdays, with major shopping centres open all day Saturday and some on Sunday. For specialty items, it's best to shop before the weekend, when many specialty shops are closed.

ACCOMMODATION

Stay in a deluxe all-inclusive resort or pitch your tent on a remote reef island – accommodations on the GBR run the full gamut. Four to five star accommodations are available in Port Douglas, Cairns, Townsville and on Heron, Hayman, Dunk, Bedarra and Lizard islands. There are also four-star hotels in Mission Beach, Airlie Beach, Mackay, Yeppoon, Rockhampton, Gladstone and Bundaberg. Motels, hotels, caravan parks, camping areas and backpackers (privately run budget hostels) are available at all centres and many places in between. Most dive operators will be happy to suggest affiliated accommodations or suggest a hotel that has the best deal for your requirements. Keep in mind that June and July are peak tourism months, with school holidays falling at this time, and prices can vary depending on when you go.

Many of the islands are national parks and with a permit from the Environment Protection Agency you can camp at minimal cost. Some islands – such as Great Keppel, Magnetic, Hook and Fitzroy islands – have hostels or other forms of budget accommodations. For details and permits, visit www.epa.qld.gov.au/parks_and_forests. Many operators can organise accommodation for divers as part of a package.

DINING & FOOD

Port Douglas has the reputation for the best dining available on the GBR coast, but there's still a good range of restaurants around Cairns, Townsville and the Whitsundays. Popular seafood dishes include barramundi (found in rivers and estuaries in northern Australia), coral trout, tuna, sweetlip, bream and mangrove jack. Fresh prawns, Moreton Bay bugs, painted crayfish and mud-crab are also popular. Excellent Australian wines are available, as are local beers like VB

and XXXX (four-ex, because it is said they couldn't spell beer!) – a favourite after a hot day on the reef. For dessert try the pavlova – an 'Australian' dessert made of meringue, whipped cream and fruit – it was invented in New Zealand, they say!

THINGS TO BUY

Australia is a signatory to the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) Convention so it is illegal to trade in turtle shell, dugong, many shells, coral, black coral and the like. Treat your time on the reef as a national park experience and limit yourself to souvenirs such as T-shirts, videos, books, your own photos and your dive log. Items made from marine organisms (jewellery, shell etc) that are for sale in shops were probably obtained legally. It's likely that these items were collected in a non-sustainable fashion and to the detriment of their environment – your future dive sites. Sunscreens, clothes, confectionery, film, books, batteries and the like are available at most resort boutiques and on many boats.



Townsville is one of several cosmopolitan centres allowing easy access to the GBR

Anemonefish are always a delight to see as they dash in and out of their host anemone's tentacles



Listings



Small red sea stars are great macro subjects and commonly seen out grazing on the substrate.

To call Australia, dial the international access code for the country you are calling from. From the US it's 011 + 61 (Australia's country code) + 7 (Queensland's area code) + the eight-digit local number.

DIVE SERVICES

We suggest you only use members of Queensland Dive Tourism Association, which shows a commitment to professional activities, safety and services. Visit www.dive-queensland.com.au for operator listings.

Also check that your chosen operator is a member of the Ecotourism Association of Australia (www.ecotourism.org.au/index.asp). The Eco Certification Program was developed to address the need to identify genuine ecotourism and nature tourism operators in Australia.

BUNDABERG

Bundaberg Aqua Scuba

Shop 1/66 Targo St
Bundaberg, QLD 4670
☎ 07 4153 5761
www.aquascuba.com.au

GLADSTONE

Voyagers Mountain & Marine

PO Box 616
Gladstone, QLD 4680
☎ 07 4972 9055
www.voyages.com.au

AIRLIE BEACH

Mantaray Charters

PO Box 140
Airlie Beach, QLD 4802
☎ 07 4948 1511
www.mantaraycharters.com

Oceania Dive

PO Box 1060
Airlie Beach, QLD 4802
☎ 07 4946 7446
www.oceaniadive.net.au

Payne Industries t/a Holiday Pictures

PO BOX 1294
Airlie Beach, QLD 4802
☎ 0417 388 079
email: josh@payneindustries.com

Prosail Whitsunday

PO Box 973
Airlie Beach, QLD 4802
☎ 07 4946 7533
www.prosail.com.au

Reef Safari Dive

PO Box 24
Airlie Beach, QLD 4802
☎ 07 4946 4766
www.reefsafari.com

Tallarook Sail & Dive Charters

16 Commerce Cl
Airlie Beach, QLD 4802
☎ 07 4946 4855
www.tallarookdive.com.au

HAMILTON ISLAND

H2O Sportz

PO Box 19
Hamilton Island, QLD 4803
☎ 07 4946 9888
www.h2osportz.com.au

AYR

Yongala Dive Pty Ltd

Po Box 841
Ayr, QLD 4807
☎ 07 4783 1519
www.yongaladive.com.au

TOWNSVILLE

Adrenalin Dive

PO Box 5429
Townsville, QLD 4810
☎ 07 4724 0600
www.adrenalindive.com.au

Mike Ball Dive Expeditions

143 Lake St
Townsville, QLD 4810
☎ 07 4053 0501
www.mikeball.com

Ocean Dive Australia

3 Jean St
Townsville, QLD 4819
☎ 07 4758 1391
www.oceandive.com.au

Pro Dive Townsville

PO BOX 2126
Townsville, QLD 4810
☎ 07 4721 1760
www.prodivetownsville.com.au

CAIRNS

B.C.C.S. Pty Ltd

9 Quondong Close
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4053 3777
email: bruce_cock@bigpond.com

Big Cat Green Island Reef Cruises

The Reef Terminal, 1 Spence St
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4051 0444
www.bigcat-cruises.com.au

Captain Cook Cruises

PO Box 4927
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4031 4433
www.captaincook.com.au

Coral Princess Cruises

PO Box 2093
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4040 9999
www.coralprincess.com.au

Deep Sea Divers Den

PO Box 5264
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4046 7333
www.divers-den.com

Dive 7 Seas

153 Sheridan Street
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4041 2700
www.dive7s.com

Dive Centre

PO Box 2401
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4051 0294
www.cairnsdive.com

Diversion Dive Travel & Training

PO Box 191
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4039 0200
www.diversionOZ.com

Diving Academy

PO BOX 2365
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4031 9299
www.cairnsda.com

Explorer Ventures Australia

PO Box 6905
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4031 5566
www.explorerventures.com

Hostel Reef Trips

100 Abbott Street
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4031 7217
www.reeftrip.com

Il Mare Pty Ltd

Po Box 861 WA
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4036 3581
email: info@bluekarem.com

Inn the Tropics

141 Sheridan Street
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 0418 783 601
www.innthetropics.com

IRES

PO Box 468
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4081 6600
www.ires.com.au

MCL Australia

PO Box 861
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 0412 200 140
email: don@bluearem.com

Ocean Spirit Cruises/Dive

PO Box 2140
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4031 2920
www.oceanspirit.com.au

PADI Asia Pacific

13 Turner St
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 0417 006 658
www.padi.com

Passions of Paradise

PO Box 2145
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4041 1600
www.passions.com.au

ProDive

PO Box 5551
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4031 5255
www.prodive-cairns.com.au

Reef Magic Cruises

PO Box 905
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4031 1598
www.reefmagiccruises.com

Rum Runner Dive and Sail

PO Box 127
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4098 0061
www.rumrunner.com.au

Santa Maria Yacht Cruises

PO Box 5957
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4031 0558
www.reefcharter.com

Scuba Air

PO Box 1380
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4035 5035
www.cairns-scuba-air.com

Scubapix

PO Box 7470
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4031 7655
www.@scubapix.com

Seastar Cruises

PO Box 835E
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4033 0333
www.seastarcruises.com.au

Seawalker Australia Pty Ltd

PO Box 6785
Cairns, QLD 4868
☎ 07 4045 0791
email: kvksw@yahoo.com.au

Spirit Of Freedom

PO Box 1276
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4031 2490
www.spiritoffreedom.com.au

SSI Australia

PO Box 2454
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4044 4999
www.ssidiving.com

S2 Dive

PO Box 1772
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4031 3921
www.s2club.net

Sunlover Cruises

PO Box 835
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4050 1331
www.sunlover.com.au

Taka Dive Adventures

PO Box 6592
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4051 8722
www.takadive.com.au

The Woolshed Chargrill & Saloon Bar

PO Box 2204
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4031 6304
www.thewoolshed.com.au

Tusa Dive Charters

PO Box 1276
Cairns, QLD 4870
☎ 07 4031 2490
www.tusadive.com

PORT DOUGLAS**Aristocat Reef Cruises**

PO Box 599
Port Douglas, QLD 4871
☎ 03 9836 4466
www.aristocat.com.au

Calypso Reef Charters

PO Box 653
Port Douglas, QLD 4871
☎ 07 4099 6999
www.calypsocharters.com.au

Haba Dive

PO Box 122
Port Douglas, QLD 4871
☎ 07 4099 5254
www.habadive.com.au

Quicksilver Connections

PO Box 171
Port Douglas, QLD 4871
☎ 07 4087 2150
☎ 07 4099 5525
www.quicksilver-cruises.com

Quicksilver Dive/Sable Lake Pty Ltd

PO Box 228
Port Douglas, QLD 4871
☎ 07 4099 5050
gary@quicksilverdive.com.au
www.quicksilverdive.com

Tech Dive Academy

PO Box 436
Port Douglas, QLD 4871
☎ 07 4099 6880
www.tech-dive-academy.com

Undersea Explorer

PO Box 615
Port Douglas, QLD 4871
☎ 07 4099 5911
www.undersea.com.au

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