

Whitsunday Coast



Just the very word 'Whitsundays' conjures images of everyone's idea of the perfect holiday. Go on, say it out loud. Don't be embarrassed. Whitsundays. Feels good doesn't it?

Now close your eyes and imagine yourself island hopping aboard a luxury yacht. Picture the dazzling white sand of Whitehaven Beach. Think about snorkelling amid pristine coral reefs among countless tropical fish. Feel the cool breeze caress your skin as the sun warms you on a tropical island. Anticipate the throbbing nightlife and international cuisine at Airlie Beach.

Yep, the Whitsundays is not at all overhyped. If you can't enjoy yourself here, you don't have a pulse. And yet, the area is not all about the Whitsunday Islands themselves. What, there's more?

Mackay is a thriving regional city with a real heartbeat and plenty of soul; the Pioneer Valley and Eungella National Park offer cool respite, stunning scenery and cute platypuses; and Cape Hillsborough is rugged and largely untamed.

Tell someone you're heading to the Whitsundays and prepare for a jealous response and cries of 'Can I come too?'. You've chosen wisely.

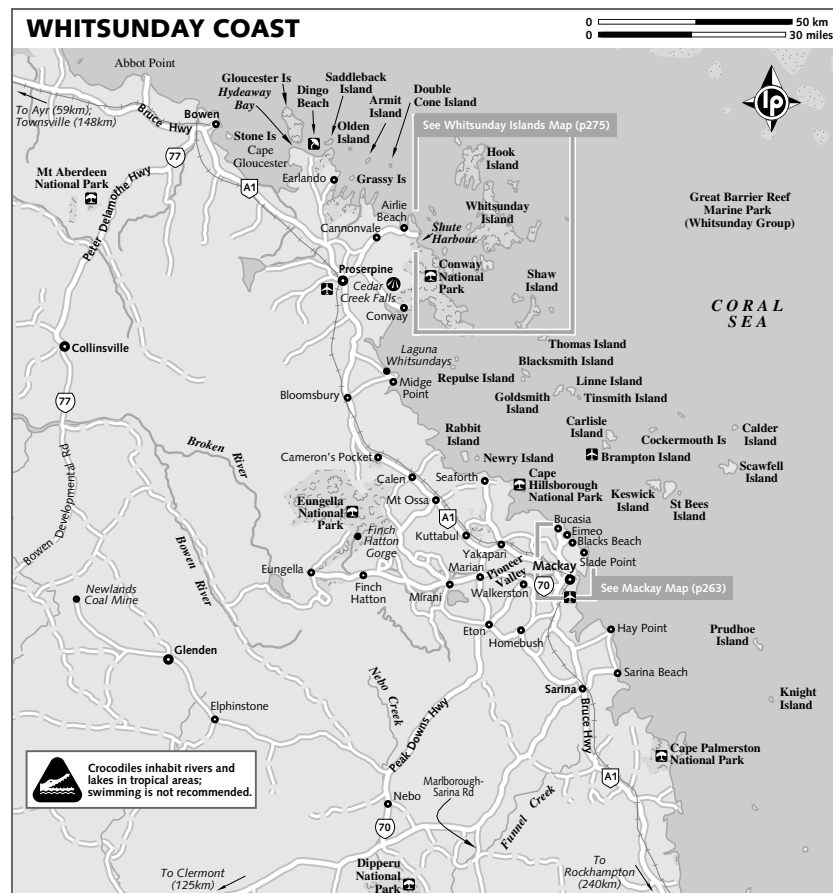
WHITSUNDAY COAST

HIGHLIGHTS

- Being dazzled by the bright-white siliceous sand at stunning **Whitehaven Beach** (p292)
- Gliding on top of the bright-blue ocean on a **cruise** (p277) to a secluded snorkelling spot
- Waiting patiently for a glimpse of a shy platypus and walking in the misty rainforest at **Eungella National Park** (p271)
- Sharing the beach at dusk with the local kangaroos at ruggedly beautiful **Cape Hillsborough National Park** (p274)
- Hooking up with other travellers and planning a cruise trip over a beer at fun-lovin' **Airlie Beach** (p279)



- TELEPHONE CODE: 07
- www.queenslandholidays.com.au/whitsundays/index.cfm
- www.whitsunday.com



WHITSUNDAY COAST

Getting There & Around

AIR

Mackay airport (www.mackayairport.com.au) is a major domestic hub, and **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com), **Jetstar** (☎ 13 15 38; www.jetstar.com.au) and **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com.au) have regular flights to/from the major centres, while **Tiger Airways** (☎ 03-9335 3033; www.tigerairways.com.au) flies to Mackay from Melbourne.

If you're heading for the Whitsundays, Jetstar and Virgin Blue have frequent flights to Hamilton Island, from where there are boat/air transfers to all the other islands. You can also fly into Proserpine (aka Whitsunday Coast) on the mainland. From there you can take a charter flight to the islands or a bus to Airlie Beach or nearby Shute Harbour.

There's also the Whitsunday airport, a small airfield near Airlie Beach, with regular services to the islands.

BOAT

Airlie Beach and Shute Harbour are the main launching pads for boat trips to the Whitsundays; see p278 for details.

BUS

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 20 30; www.greyhound.com.au) and **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) operate regular coach services along the Bruce Hwy with stops at all the major towns. They also detour off the highway from Proserpine to Airlie Beach.

TRAIN

Queensland Rail (☎ 13 22 32, 1300 13 17 22; www.traveltrain.com.au) has frequent services between Brisbane and Townsville/Cairns passing through the region. Choose between the high-speed *Tilt Train* or the more sedate *Sunlander*. For details see the Getting There & Away sections of the relevant towns and cities.

MACKAY TO THE WHITSUNDAYS

MACKAY

☎ 07 / pop 66,880

Mackay's charm is that it doesn't take itself too seriously. It doesn't attempt to be touristy, but embraces outsiders, such as the miners who drift in and out of town and the backpackers who bunk down for a few days to use the city as a base for visiting Eungella National Park. Locals go about their business, but hold their heads up while walking down the street and don't try to avoid visitors. It's that sort of place.

But while Mackay is still sleepy enough to play the part of a country town, it's big enough to enjoy a solid infrastructure and modern facilities. Real estate is starting to skyrocket and investors are only just beginning to realise Mackay's potential. It's only a 1½-hour drive to the Whitsundays, a short flight to Brampton Island and a scenic drive among the sugar-cane fields to Pioneer Valley and Eungella National Park. The new marina precinct is bustling with energy as people stroll the promenade in search of a seafood meal or a relaxing drink at an outdoor bar or café. It's up to you whether you like Mackay or not. The locals won't mind one way or another. They know they're on a good thing.

Orientation

Mackay's compact town centre, with its historic buildings, modern art centre and palm-shaded streets, sits on the southern bank of the Pioneer River. The main thoroughfare of Victoria St is lined with cafés, pubs, restaurants and shops.

Long-distance buses stop at the Mackay Bus Terminal in Macalister St. The train station, airport, Botanic Gardens and visitors centre are all about 3km south of the city centre.

Information

Mackay City Library (Map p265; ☎ 4957 1787; Gordon St; per 30min \$2.50; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 10am-6pm Tue, 10am-8pm Thu, 9am-3pm Sat) Internet access.

Mackay Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS; Map p265; ☎ 4944 7800; cnr River & Wood Sts)

Mackay visitors centre (Map p263; ☎ 4944 5888; www.mackayregion.com; 320 Nebo Rd; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9am-5pm Mon, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun) About 3km south of the centre.

Multitech Computers (Map p265; ☎ 4953 2988; 36 Wood St; per hr \$5; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 1.30pm Sat) Internet access.

Post office (Map p265; ☎ 13 13 18; Sydney St) Near the corner of Gordon St.

Town Hall Visitor Information Centre (Map p265; ☎ 4944 5888; townhall@mackayregion.com; 63 Sydney St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat & Sun)

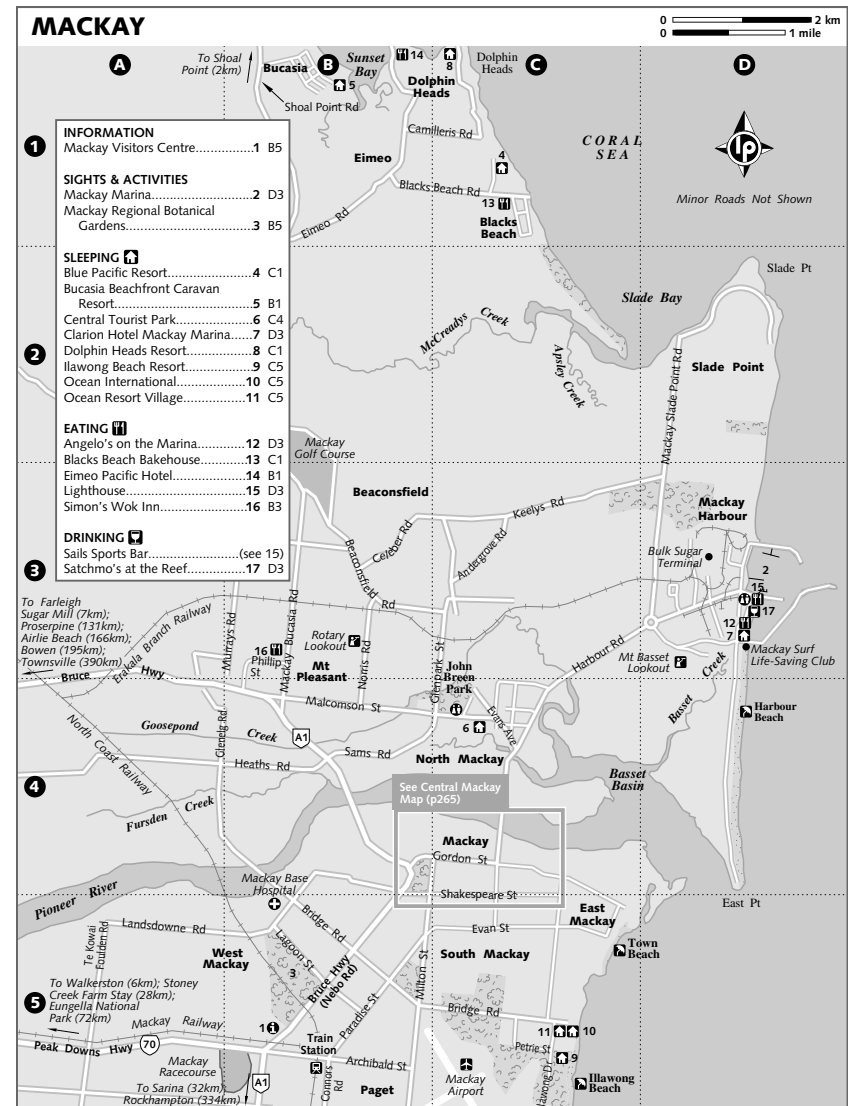
Sights & Activities

Artspace Mackay (Map p265; ☎ 4957 1722; www.artspacemackay.com.au; Gordon St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) is a small regional art gallery, showcasing works from local and visiting artists. Enquire about current events and activities, delve deeper by consulting the extensive collection of art books or browse the art before grazing at **Foodspace** (☎ 4951 7119; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun), the in-house licensed café. Inspiration abounds in Mackay and its surrounds, and the *Mackay Self-Drive Art Gallery, Pottery & Craft Tour* brochure, available at the visitors centres, details several private galleries, exhibition spaces and art cafés.

Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens (Map p263; ☎ 4952 7300; Lagoon St; admission free) is an impressive 'work in progress' located 3km south of the city centre. The 33-hectare site includes several themed gardens, including a **tropical shade garden** (☎ 8.45am-4.45pm).

Mackay's impressive **Art Deco architecture** owes much to a devastating cyclone in 1918, which flattened many of the town's buildings. Enthusiasts should pick up a copy of *Art Deco Mackay* from the Town Hall Visitor Information Centre. History buffs should also grab the brochure *A Heritage Walk in Mackay*, which guides you around 20 of the town's historic sites.

There are good views over the harbour from **Mt Basset Lookout** (Map p263), and at **Rotary Lookout** (Map p263) in North Mackay. **Mackay Marina** (Map p263) is a thriving precinct where locals rub shoulders with inquisitive tourists. It's a pleasant place to wine and dine with a



waterfront view, or to simply picnic in the park and stroll along the breakwater.

BEACHES & SWIMMING

Mackay has plenty of beaches, although not all of them are ideal for swimming. The best ones are about 16km north of Mackay at Blacks Beach, Eimeo and Bucasia (p269).

Town Beach (Map p263) is the closest to the city centre; to get there, follow Gordon St all the way east from the centre. There is a sandy strip, but the water is very shallow and subsides a long way out at low tide, leaving a long stretch of mudflats. **Illawong Beach** (Map p263), 2km further south, is a more attractive proposition. A better option is **Harbour Beach**

The pool looks like it has seen better days, but with the river, shops, pubs and cafés so close to your doorstep, you won't care.

our pick Mid City Motor Inn (Map p265; ☎ 4951 1666; stay@midcitymotel.com.au; 2 Macalister St; r \$105-155; 🏠 🚿) Modern, comfortable and in a superb location beside the river promenade, the Mid City's name is slightly misleading, although it can be forgiven as it's only a short stroll into the town centre. The standard rooms are probably the best value in town.

Illawong Beach Resort (Map p263; ☎ 4957 8427; fax 4957 8460; 73 Illawong Dr, Illawong Beach; www.illawong-beach.com.au; 2-person apt \$125-140, extra person \$17; 🏠 🚿) Choose from a garden or beachside unit in quiet, clean, spacious surroundings. The units are fully self-contained and roomy, but you'll want to spend most of your time enjoying a house cocktail by the poolside gazebo.

Ocean International (Map p263; ☎ 1800 635 104, 4957 2044; www.ocean-international.com.au; 1 Bridge Rd, Illawong Beach; d \$140-235; 🏠 🚿) On the beach, close to the airport and only 3km south of the centre, this four-star, four-storey complex overlooks Sandringham Bay and the Coral Sea. There's an excellent restaurant and cocktail bar, a spa and sauna, a business centre, and a harbour/airport transfer service.

TOP END

Grand Mercure (Map p265; ☎ 4969 1000; www.mackaygrandmercure.com.au; 9 Gregory St; r \$170, ste \$235; 🏠 🚿) Mackay's long awaited addition to the top end of the scale in the city centre doesn't disappoint with its stylish décor and modern amenities. Lash out and try the spa suite (\$280 to \$350) with its huge plasma TV and balcony with panoramic vistas.

Clarion Hotel Mackay Marina (Map p263; ☎ 1800 386 386, 4955 9400; www.mackaymarinahotel.com; Mulherin Dr, Mackay Harbour; d \$175-330; 🏠 🚿) The Clarion is the darling of the rapidly developing marina precinct and it's not hard to see why. All rooms have spacious showers and balconies and all the mod-cons you'd expect of a hotel of international standing. Couples should try the Pamper Package (\$395), which includes sparkling wine and chocolates, a 30-minute massage, hot breakfast and noon checkout in a spa suite. You may not leave your room.

Eating

RESTAURANTS

Montezuma's (Map p265; ☎ 4944 1214; 94 Wood St; mains \$10-19; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Mexican-influenced res-

taurant just around the corner from the cinema, making it an ideal choice for a pre- or after-movie feed. Dim lighting adds to the cosy atmosphere and the snug booths offer some intimacy if that's what you're after.

Angelo's on the Marina (Map p263; ☎ 4955 5600; Mulherin Dr, Mackay Marina; mains \$16-30; 🍷 8am-late) A large, lively restaurant in a delightful marina setting, with an extensive range of pasta and a mouth-watering Mediterranean menu. It's fully licensed and there's a free courtesy bus for parties of six or more people, so join a group and enjoy.

Austral Hotel (Map p265; ☎ 4951 3288; 189 Victoria St; mains \$17-23, steaks \$21-39; 🍷 lunch & dinner) You won't get a better cut of meat in Mackay than at the Austral. Huge plates of prime Aussie beef fill your plate in a genuine pub surrounding with cold draught beer to wash it down. Of course, there's the usual assortment of seafood and chicken dishes if cooked cow doesn't do it for you.

Kevin's Place (Map p265; ☎ 4953 5835; cnr Victoria & Wood Sts; mains \$18-25; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) Sizzling, spicy Singaporean dishes and efficient, revved-up staff combine with the building's colonial ambience and the tropical climate to create a Raffles-esque experience.

our pick Simon's Wok Inn (Map p263; ☎ 4942 0601; Phillips St, Mt Pleasant; mains \$18-30; 🍷 lunch & dinner) We'll let you in on a little secret that only locals know about. Let's just say, you'll be rewarded if you make the effort to get out here. The crispy-skin coral trout is as close to perfection as you can get. Try the banquet (per person \$35) and the genuinely good food just keeps coming until you've had enough. It's located at Mt Pleasant Plaza shopping centre.

Lighthouse (Map p263; ☎ 4955 5022, takeaway 4955 5699; Mulherin Dr, Mackay Harbour; mains \$22-29; 🍷 6am-late) A very popular seafood restaurant in a nautical setting that doubles as a takeaway next door. The generous plates of seafood in the main restaurant looked rather fetching when we were lining up for the cheaper takeaway option.

CAFÉS & QUICK EATS

Mackay Kebab House (Map p265; ☎ 4944 0393; cnr Victoria & Wood Sts; kebabs \$5-7; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) When all else fails, the kebabs here will fill any rumbling tummy without emptying the wallet.

Low-Fat Café (Map p265; ☎ 4957 6136; NAB Plaza, Sydney St; mains \$5-10; 🍷 7am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm

Sat) The name says it all. Wraps, baguettes, sandwiches and salads, for those wanting a guilt-free lunch on the go.

Coffee Club (Map p265; ☎ 4957 8294; 48 Wood St; breakfast \$6-14, mains \$11-22; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This big, relaxed meeting place offers a range of meals and a licensed bar, in addition to the excellent espresso and cakes. Try the tapas before heading around the corner to see a movie.

Fresh 'n Delicious (Map p265; ☎ 4957 4845; cnr Nelson & Victoria Sts; meals \$7-12; 🍷 7.30am-4pm Mon-Sat) We heartily recommend the Mediterranean stack with salad (\$8.50) at this popular little streetside café. A little early in the day for that? Never mind. Try the homemade pies (\$3.30) or sizable breakfasts and deliciously strong coffee.

Nelson's Seafood Café (Map p265; ☎ 4953 5453; cnr Victoria & Nelson Sts; mains \$9-15; 🍷 10am-7.30pm Mon, Wed, Thu & Sun, to 8pm Fri & Sat) To call Nelson's a fish-and-chip shop would be a gross injustice. This is seafood with a twist. The crumbed scallops are nearly as big as tennis balls and the seafood fried rice and assorted salads are mouth-watering. It gets busy here. We wonder why?

Oscar's on Sydney (Map p265; ☎ 4944 0173; cnr Sydney & Gordon Sts; mains \$9-16; 🍷 7am-10pm Tue-Sat, to 9.30pm Sun & Mon) The delicious *poftertjes* (authentic Dutch pancakes with traditional toppings) are still going strong at this corner café, but don't be afraid to give the other dishes a go. The sweet corn and capsicum frittata with smoked salmon and grilled asparagus (\$14.50) may just hit the spot.

Café La De Da (Map p265; ☎ 4944 0203; 70 Wood St; meals \$14-26; 🍷 breakfast & lunch) Always busy, always good. True to its name, La De Da whiles away its time nonchalantly serving generous mains such as seafood, big steaks, curries, salads and the obligatory wraps and sandwiches. The breakfasts won't leave you hungry.

Drinking

Sails Sports Bar (Map p263; ☎ 4955 5022; Mulherin Dr, Mackay Harbour) This outdoors bar with sports memorabilia on the walls can get rowdy at night, but most of the time it's mellow and a good place to knock back a beer or two.

Gordi's Café & Bar (Map p265; ☎ 4951 2611; 85 Victoria St) Order a \$3 schooner and pull up a stool at this big open-air bar overlooking Victoria St's comings and goings.

McGuire's Hotel (Map p265; ☎ 4957 7464; 15 Wood St) Originally built in 1882, but demol-

ished in 1938 and rebuilt, this big mustard-coloured building has good outdoor street-side seating.

Satchmo's at the Reef (Map p263; ☎ 4955 6055; Mulherin Dr, Mackay Harbour) A classy wine-and-tapas bar full of boaties and featuring live music on Sunday afternoon.

Wilkie's Tavern (Map p265; ☎ 4957 2241; cnr Victoria & Gregory Sts) Usually has someone strumming a guitar on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights.

Entertainment

NIGHTCLUBS & LIVE MUSIC

Platinum Lounge (Map p265; ☎ 4944 1877; 83 Victoria St; 🍷 7pm-3am Wed-Sat, 5pm-2am Sun) On the 1st floor above the corner of Victoria and Wood Sts, the Platinum Lounge is a good place to unwind.

Also recommended:

Doors (Map p265; ☎ 4951 2611; 85 Victoria St; 🍷 Tue-Sun) Big, bold, loud and brass.

Main Street (Map p265; ☎ 4957 7737; 148 Victoria St; 🍷 Thu-Sat) Live music, DJs and a bucking mechanical bull.

THEATRE & CINEMA

BC Cinemas (Map p265; ☎ 4957 3515; 30 Gordon St; adult/child \$14.50/10.50) This complex screens all the latest flicks.

Mackay Entertainment Centre (Map p265; ☎ 4957 2255; Gordon St; 🍷 box office 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) The city's main venue for live performances; phone the box office to find out what's on.

Shopping

Paper Chain (Map p265; ☎ 4953 1331; 8a Sydney St; 🍷 8.45am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat & Sun) Large secondhand bookshop and exchange.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The airport is about 3km south of the centre. **Jetstar** (☎ 13 15 38; www.jetstar.com.au) offers flights to/from Brisbane and Sydney while **Tiger Airways** (☎ 03-9335 3033; www.tigerairways.com.au) had just started flying to/from Melbourne at the time of writing, but could have expanded its services by the time you read this. **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au) has direct flights most days between Mackay and Brisbane, Rockhampton and Townsville. **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com.au) operates flights to/from Brisbane, which connect with services to several major centres.

BUS

Buses stop at the **Mackay Bus Terminal** (Map p265; ☎ 4944 2144; cnr Victoria & Macalister Sts; 🕒 7am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat), where tickets can also be booked **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 20 30; www.greyhound.com.au) and **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) travel up and down the coast between Brisbane (\$165, 16½ hours) and Cairns (\$139, 13 hours), stopping in Mackay.

TRAIN

Queensland Rail (☎ 13 22 32, 1300 13 17 22; www.traveltrain.com.au) has several services stopping at Mackay on its way between Brisbane and Townsville/Cairns. The speedy **Tilt Train** departs at 7.25am on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, heading to Cairns (\$162, 12 hours) via Townsville (\$92, 5½ hours), and 8.25pm on Sunday, Wednesday and Friday heading to Brisbane (\$222, 13 hours). Fares shown are adult business class.

The **Sunlander** departs at 2.10am heading to Cairns on Sunday and Tuesday and 5.35am on Thursday. Brisbane-bound, it departs Mackay at 11.10pm on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. There are several classes: sitting, economy berth, 1st-class berth and the luxurious Queensland class. Adult fares between Mackay and Brisbane (17 hours) are \$151/209/615 in sitting/economy berth/Queenslander.

Getting Around

Avis (☎ 4951 1266), **Budget** (☎ 4951 1400), **Europcar** (☎ 4952 6269; www.europcar.com.au) and **Hertz** (☎ 4951 3334) all have counters at the airport. **Mackay Transit Coaches** (Map p265; ☎ 4957 3330) has several services around the city, and also connecting the city with the harbour and the northern beaches; pick up a timetable from one of the visitors centres. Routes begin from Canelands Shopping Centre and there are many signposted bus stops, but you can hail a bus anywhere along the route as long as there is room for it to pull over. There's a free service on Sunday, running to all the major tourist sights including the northern beaches and the botanical gardens. Signal for the driver to pull over anywhere along the route on Gordon St and Nebo Rd. For a taxi, call **Mackay Taxis** (☎ 13 13 08). Count on about \$15 for a taxi from either the train station or the airport to the city centre. **Con-X-ion** (☎ 1300 308718; www.con-x-ion.com) operates an airport service to your accommodation in Mackay for \$10.

AROUND MACKAY
Sarina

☎ 07 / pop 3290

Nestled at the foothills of the Connors Range, Sarina is worth stopping in for half a day at least to visit the mini sugar mill. About 40km south of Mackay, it's chiefly a service centre for the surrounding sugar-cane farms and home to CSR's Plane Creek sugar mill and ethanol distillery. Ethyl alcohol from Sarina may end up in fuel, Philippine gin or Japanese sake. The helpful **Sarina Tourist Art & Craft Centre** (☎ 4956 2251; Railway Sq, Bruce Hwy; 🕒 9am-5pm) showcases local handicrafts and assists with information.

Take a tour of a mini sugar mill at **Sarina Sugar Shed** (☎ 4943 2801; www.sarinassugarshed.com.au; Railway Sq; adult/child/concession \$15/7.50/12; 🕒 tours 9.30am, 10.30am, noon & 2pm), the only miniature sugar-processing mill and distillery of its kind in Australia. After the tour enjoy a complimentary tippie at the distillery.

There's a small **museum** (☎ 4943 1296; adult/child \$4/3; 🕒 9.30am-2pm Tue, Wed & Fri) housing some interesting exhibits from times gone by. It's next to the Sarina Tourist Art & Craft Centre.

Architectural enthusiasts will appreciate the old **National Bank building** on Central St. It was originally established in the mill grounds, but was moved in 1910 to its present location. The gorgeous old **train station** is worth a look, too.

If you do find yourself staying the night, the **Tramway Motel** (☎ 4956 2244; fax 4943 1262; 110 Broad St; s/d \$80/95; 🍷 🚿), off the Bruce Hwy just north of town, has clean, bright units and family rooms (\$150).

The **Diner** (☎ 4956 1990; 111 Central St; mains \$4-6; 🕒 4am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 10am Sat) is an iconic rustic roadside shack and is the oldest eatery in town. Meals are still cooked on a wood stove and if the wind blows in the right direction and you cop a whiff, you'll want to grab something here. The diner has been quelling the appetites of famished mill workers for decades. If it's good enough for them, it'll please you too. To find it, take the turn-off to Clermont in the centre of town and look for the humble building on your left, just before the railway crossing.

The town centre straddles the Bruce Hwy and boasts a couple of pubs and cafés, a bakery, and a fruit and vegetable shop.

Around Sarina

There are a number of low-key beachside settlements a short drive east of Sarina, where the clean, uncrowded beaches and mangrove-

DETOUR: SUGAR COUNTRY

It's 36km from Sarina to Mackay via the Bruce Hwy, but a longer alternative route takes you deep into the cane fields and past several points of interest. Take the turn-off to Homebush, 2km north of Sarina on the Bruce Hwy. The road is narrow and is regularly crossed by cane-train tracks, so drive carefully, particularly during harvest (July to November).

After about 24km you'll see the signpost to one of the area's main attractions: located about 800m off the main road is **Polstone Sugar Cane Farm** (☎ 4959 7298; fax 4959 7344; Masotti's Rd; adult/child/family \$15/7/40; 🕒 tours 1.30pm Mon, Wed & Fri Jun-Oct), where you can take a two-hour tour in a covered wagon to be shown how sugar cane is grown and harvested and how sugar is produced.

Further on, the **General Gordon Hotel** (☎ 4959 7324), an impressive old country pub in a sea of sugar cane, has been serving thirsty locals and travellers for ages. It's a popular stop for lunch, too. Shortly after the pub take the turn-off to the left, cutting north to the Peak Downs Hwy and Walkerston. When you reach the highway you'll have to backtrack a few kilometres to reach historic **Greenmount Homestead** (☎ 4959 2250; adult/child/concession \$5.50/1.50/4.50; 🕒 9.30am-12.30pm Sun-Fri), a classic Queenslander built by the Cook family in 1915 on the property where Mackay's founder, John Mackay, first settled in 1862. It was reopened in 2001 after extensive restorations. To head back to Mackay, return to Walkerston and keep going until you reach the Bruce Hwy.

lined inlets provide excellent opportunities for exploring, fishing, and spotting wildlife such as sea eagles and nesting marine turtles. Nature takes a back seat at Hay Point, which is dominated by the largest coal-exporting facility in the southern hemisphere.

SARINA BEACH

Set on the shores of Sarina Inlet, this laid-back coastal village boasts a long beach, a general store-service station, a surf life-saving club on the beachfront, and a boat ramp at the inlet.

Fernandos Hideaway (☎ 4956 6299; www.sarina-beachbb.com; 26 Captain Blackwood Dr; B&B s/d \$100/125; 🍷 🚿) is a Spanish hacienda perched on a rugged headland offering magnificent coastal views and absolute beachfront. Choose between the panoramic double with a spa in the bathroom, and a double or family room that share a bathroom.

Located at the northern end of the Esplanade, most rooms at the **Sarina Beach Motel** (☎ 4956 6266; fax 4956 6197; The Esplanade; s \$75-95, d \$80-107; 🍷 🚿) have beach frontage. In addition to the pool, there's a children's playground and tennis courts, and the beach is a stone's throw away.

With a veranda overlooking the beach, the **Sarina Surf Life Saving Club** (☎ 4956 6490; The Esplanade; mains \$10-18; 🕒 3pm-late Mon-Thu, 11am-late Fri-Sun) is a good spot for a cheap meal and a drink.

ARMSTRONG BEACH

Only a few kilometres southeast of Sarina, **Armstrong Beach Caravan Park** (☎ 4956 2425; 66

Melba St; unpowered/powered sites \$20/22) is the closest coastal van park to Sarina. Prices are for two people.

MACKAY'S NORTHERN BEACHES

The coastline north of Mackay is made up of a series of headlands and bays. The small residential communities strung along here are virtually outer suburbs of Mackay. There are some reasonably good beaches for swimming and fishing along here, and the prevailing winds keep the kite-surfers happy.

Blacks Beach unfolds for 6km, so stretch those legs and claim a piece of Coral Sea coast for a day. There are several accommodation options, but if you are just passing through, you can grab a quick lunch or coffee at **Blacks Beach Bakehouse** (Map p263; ☎ 4969 5222; Shop 2, Blacks Beach Rd, Blacks Beach; meals \$3-10; 🕒 breakfast & lunch) and tuck into one of the huge rolls or hearty pies and then round it all off with slice of cake. For accommodation try **Blue Pacific Resort** (Map p263; ☎ 1800 808 386, 4954 9090; www.bluepacificresort.com.au; 26 Bourke St, Blacks Beach; studios \$145-170, 1-/2-bedroom units \$165/185; 🍷 🚿), which has self-catering facilities in all rooms. The spa studios are popular and the two-bedroom units are great value.

At the northern end of Blacks Beach is **Dolphin Heads** (named for its distinctive headland), where you can stay at the four-star **Dolphin Heads Resort** (Map p263; ☎ 1800 075 088, 4954 9666; www.dolphinheadsresort.com.au; Beach Rd, Dolphin Heads; d \$150-170; 🍷 🚿). The 80 comfortable motel-style units overlook an attractive (but

rocky) bay. Choose from garden, poolside or oceanfront units.

North of Dolphin Heads is **Eimeo**, where the **Eimeo Pacific Hotel** (Map p263; ☎ 4954 6105; Mango Ave, Eimeo; mains \$13-21) beckons you with magnificent Coral Sea views. It's at least worthy of stopping for a drink although the meals warrant a longer stay. Indeed, lunch at the Eimeo is one thing you should do if you're in the area. It's deservedly popular with locals as well.

Bucasia and **Shoal Point** are across Sunset Bay from Eimeo and Dolphin Heads. The beachfront parks of these holiday towns offer shady barbecue and picnic areas, and Bucasia beach has a safe swimming enclosure. **Bucasia Beachfront Caravan Resort** (Map p263; ☎ 4954 6375; www.bucasiabeach.com.au; 2 The Esplanade; caravan sites \$29-33, cabins without bathroom \$65, with bathroom \$80-90; 🚻) doesn't have camp sites, but has cabins right on the beach and some good van sites.

PIONEER VALLEY

Travelling west, Mackay's urban sprawl gives way to the lush greenness of the beautiful Pioneer Valley. The unmistakable smell of sugar cane wafts through your nostrils, and loaded cane trains busily work their way along the roadside. The first sugar cane was planted here in 1867, and today almost the entire valley floor is planted with the stuff. The route to Eungella National Park (opposite), the Mackay-Eungella Rd, branches off the Peak Downs Hwy about 10km west of Mackay and follows the river through vast fields of cane to link up with the occasional small town or steam-belching sugar mill and the odd local attraction.

Marian is dominated by an enormous sugar mill that crushes much of the valley's cane. **Melba House**, where Dame Nellie Melba and her husband (manager of the mill) lived, is on the right as you approach Marian from Mackay. It operates as a **tourist information centre** (☎ 4954 4299; 🕒 9am-3pm Mon-Sun), gallery and home to Melba memorabilia. At Marion there's a turn-off to **Kinchant Dam** (8km), which is well stocked with sooty grunter, barramundi and even the odd sleepy cod or two.

The next town is **Mirani**, where there's a **local history museum** (☎ 4959 1100; Victoria St; adult/child \$4/1.50; 🕒 9.30am-2.30pm Sun-Fri) behind the library. **Kookaburra's Store** (☎ 4959 1194; Alexandra St; dishes \$5-10; 🕒 5.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 6am-7pm Sat, 7am-4pm Sun) is a busy multipurpose corner store serving hot and cold dishes as well as petrol,

groceries and magazines, and has an ATM if you're short on cash.

About 27km west of Mirani is the turn-off for Finch Hatton Gorge (p272), part of Eungella National Park. About 1.5km past the turn-off is the pretty township of **Finch Hatton**. The historic **railway station** (🕒 10am-3pm) hasn't seen a train for a while now, but it has an interesting collection of photos and brochures on local history. The friendly **Criterion Hotel** (☎ 4958 3252; 9 Eungella Rd; s/d \$35/45; mains \$7-18) has been refurbished and has spotless rooms and hearty, inexpensive counter meals. You'll be on the receiving end of some good, old country hospitality here.

From Finch Hatton it's another 18km to Eungella, a quaint mountain village overlooking the valley, and the gateway to the Broken River section of Eungella National Park (opposite). The last section of this road climbs suddenly and steeply, with several incredibly sharp corners – towing a large caravan up here is not recommended.

EUNGELLA

Pretty little Eungella (*young-gluh*, meaning 'land of clouds') sits perched on the edge of the Pioneer Valley. The cool mountain air is invigorating and there are some good walks in the area. There's a **General Store** (☎ 4958 4520) with snacks, groceries and fuel, and a couple of accommodation and eating options.

Eungella Holiday Park (☎ 4958 4590; unpowered/powered sites \$20/22, cabins \$85-120) is a small, friendly park located just north of the township, right on the edge of the escarpment. Prices are for two people. The owner is happy to shuttle guests to bushwalks in the national park and there's a kiosk with groceries, snacks and an ATM.

Eungella Chalet (☎ 4958 4509; fax 4958 4503; s without bathroom \$38, d with/without bathroom \$72/50, 1-/2-bedroom cabins \$88/109; 🚻) exudes a rustic charm in a once-grand kind of way. In its heyday this rambling old place would have been quite a sight and it still packs a punch today. The chalet is perched on the edge of a mountain and the views on a clear day, we're told, are amazing (it was drizzling and the clouds had hijacked all the views when we visited). Hang-gilding is possible from the backyard here. Upstairs rooms are clean and simple, and there's a lovely but sparse guests' lounge with arresting views. The TVs look like they're on their last legs and the quaint heaters in the rooms are a

reminder that it can get cold at night up here. There's a small bar downstairs, and the dining room serves breakfast (\$7 to \$12), lunch (\$6 to \$15) and dinner (\$19 to \$30).

It's worth stopping in for lunch at the charming **Hideaway Café** (☎ 4958 4533; Broken River Rd; light meals \$4-10; 🕒 9am-4pm). Sit on the picturesque little balcony and enjoy a decent home-cooked dish like Weiner schnitzel and potato salad or lentil vegetable casserole with 'lavish' bread. It's small, uncomplicated, unfussed, wholesome and unhurried. Afterwards take a stroll around the whimsical garden or check out some of the local art and crafts in the attached gallery.

STONEY CREEK

Just south of the town of **Eton**, on the Peak Downs Hwy about 28km southwest of Mackay, is a deservedly popular farm-stay and horse-riding centre. **Stoney Creek Farm Stay** (off Map p263; ☎ 4954 1177; www.stoneycreekfarmstay.com; Peak Downs Hwy; camp sites/d \$20/140) is a working cattle station that offers the chance to hop on a horse and muster cattle, or mosey on down to a secluded swimming hole. You can park your campervan, pitch a tent, or spend the night in a simple cottage. The three-hour horse ride costs \$65 per person. There's a \$250 three-day package that's designed for backpackers and includes budget accommodation, meals and activities. It's possible to get to Stoney Creek by bus, leaving at 1.45pm. Otherwise the farm-stay owners will pick you up if you ring ahead (minimum of two people).

EUNGELLA NATIONAL PARK

Stunning Eungella National Park is 84km west of Mackay, and covers nearly 500 sq km of the Clarke Range, climbing to 1280m at Mt Dalrymple. The mountainous park is largely inaccessible, except for the walking tracks around Broken River and Finch Hatton Gorge. The large tracts of tropical and subtropical vegetation have been isolated from other rainforest areas for thousands of years and now boast several unique species. The Eungella honeyeater is a bit of a Holy Grail for birders, while spotting the Eungella gastric brooding frog, which incubates its eggs in its stomach and then gives birth by spitting out the tadpoles, would be a rare treat. However it's the platypuses that steal the show.

Most days of the year you can be pretty sure of seeing a platypus or two in the Broken

River. The best times to see the creatures are the hours immediately after dawn and before dark; you must remain patiently silent and still. Platypus activity is at its peak from May to August, when the females are fattening themselves up in preparation for gestating their young. Other river life you're sure to see are the large northern snapping turtles and, flitting above the feeding platypuses, brilliant azure kingfishers.

There are no buses to Eungella or Finch Hatton, but Reeforest Adventure Tours and Jungle Johnno (see p264) both run day trips from Mackay and will drop off and pick up those who want to linger.

Broken River

There's a **QPWS information office** (☎ 4958 4552; 🕒 8am-4pm), picnic area and **kiosk** (🕒 10am-5pm) near the bridge over the Broken River, 5km south of Eungella. A **platypus-viewing platform** has been built near the bridge, and bird life is prolific. There are some excellent walking trails between the Broken River picnic ground and Eungella; maps are available from the information office, which is (unfortunately) rarely staffed.

For accommodation, you have the choice of camping or cabins. **Fern Flat Camping Ground** (☎ 4958 4552; fax 4958 4501; per person/family \$4.50/18) was undergoing refurbishment at the time of research and vehicle access was prohibited. Check with the QPWS before deciding to drive here. It's a lovely place to camp, though, with the shady sites adjacent to the river where the platypuses play. Inquisitive brush turkeys and rufous bettongs (small marsupials) watch your every move, and there's the most amazing bird chorus in the morning. Indeed, you really are sharing your bedroom with the wildlife here. The camping ground is about 500m past the information centre and kiosk, and the amenity block can probably claim to have the coldest showers in Queensland. To claim a site you need to self-register, so it's best to arrive in the morning.

If you forgot the tent, **Broken River Mountain Retreat** (☎ 4958 4528; www.brokenrivermr.com.au; d \$105-160; 🚻 🚽) is a very comfortable alternative. Accommodation comprises cedar cabins ranging from small motel-style units to a large self-contained lodge sleeping up to six. There's a large guests lounge with an open fire and the friendly **Platypus Lodge Restaurant & Bar** (mains \$18.50-28.50) with a good selection

of steak, seafood and chicken dishes, and a moderately priced wine list. The meals are seriously good. Bring an appetite. You can also preorder a picnic hamper, which will be ready for you to pick up at 8.30am. The retreat organises several (mostly free) activities for its guests, including spotlighting, canoeing and guided walks.

Finch Hatton Gorge

About 27km west of Mirani, just before the town of Finch Hatton, is the turn-off for the Finch Hatton Gorge. The last 2km of the 10km drive from the main road is unsealed with several creek crossings that can become impassable after heavy rain. At the car park, there's a good picnic area with barbecues, and a couple of small swimming holes where the creek tumbles over huge boulders. A 1.6km walking trail leads from the picnic area to **Araluen Falls**, with its spectacular waterfalls and swimming holes. A further 1km takes you to the **Wheel of Fire Falls**, another tumbling cascade and excellent swimming hole.

Easily the best way to experience the forest from a bird's perspective is to do the ultrafun **Forest Flying** (☎ 4958 3359; www.forestflying.com; rides \$45). Get harnessed to a 350m-long cable suspended up to 25m above the ground and glide through the rainforest canopy to get a whole new angle on forest life. It's deservedly popular and you'll need to book ahead. There's a full safety briefing; the ride is not suitable for those weighing less than 18kg or more than 120kg. There's also a seasonal fruit-bat colony (August to May) to see.

The following accommodation places are signposted on the road to the gorge. **Platypus Bushcamp** (☎ 4958 3204; www.bushcamp.net; Finch Hatton Gorge; camp sites \$15, dm/d \$25/75) is a true bush retreat. The basic huts are a real back-to-nature experience. They are all open-air, allowing the fresh rainforest air to seep in. Mosquito nets are available, but are rarely needed. A creek with platypuses and great swimming holes runs next to the camp, and the big open-air communal kitchen-eating area is the heart of the place. There are wonderful hot showers with a forest view and a cosy stone hot tub. Bring your own food and linen.

The comfortable self-contained cabins at **Finch Hatton Gorge Cabins** (☎ 4958 3281; www.finchhattongorgecabins.com.au; d \$95, extra person \$20; 🚻) sleep up to five, which is perfect if you're travelling with young kids or with a group. There's

a wonderful view of the forest from all the cabins and linen is provided. Although there are no longer any dorm or camping options, WWOOFers (Willing Workers on Organic Farms) get three meals a day and accommodation in exchange for four hours work on the property or the nearby farm.

The friendly **Gorge Kiosk** (☎ 4958 3321) serves excellent ice creams (delicious mango plus other flavours), pies and lemonade – all homemade. Picnic and barbecue packs are available to take up the road to the national-park picnic ground.

BRAMPTON ISLAND

Brampton Island proudly announces that there are no day-trippers to interrupt the peace and solitude. It's a classy resort that's popular with couples, honeymooners and those wanting a relaxed island experience. It's definitely not a party island, and kids (especially those under 12) are not catered for. There's no mobile-phone coverage on the resort side of the island – it's that kind of place.

This mountainous island is a national park and wildlife sanctuary with lush forests surrounded by coral reefs. There are stunning beaches and a couple of good walking trails, as well as all the frills associated with a big resort.

In the 19th century the island was used by the Queensland government as a nursery for palm trees, of which there are still plenty. The Bussutin family, who moved to the island in 1916 to raise goats and horses, established the first resort here in 1932. Brampton is connected to nearby Carlisle Island (opposite), which has a couple of national-park camp sites, by a sand bar that you can sometimes walk across at low tide.

Activities

The resort has two swimming pools: one salt, one fresh. There are tennis courts and a small six-hole golf course, as well as complimentary snorkelling gear, catamarans, windsurfers and surf skis. Motorised water sports cost extra.

There are 12 beaches on the island, seven of them easily accessible via the national-park walking trails. The main beach at Sandy Point is very pleasant. There's good snorkelling over the coral in the channel between Brampton and Carlisle Islands.

There are two excellent walking trails on the island. The 7km walk circumnavigates the

central section of the island, and side tracks lead down to Dinghy and Oak Bays. The 2km steady climb to the top of 219m Brampton Peak takes about two hours, and is rewarded with fine views along the way.

Of course, if being energetic is not your style, the Sea Spa, set among tropical gardens, offers all sorts of remedies for a weary body ranging from massage therapy to spa treatments as well as a special men-only package. All treatments cost extra, ranging from \$90 to \$150, from one to two hours in length.

Sleeping & Eating

Brampton Island Resort (☎ 1300 134 044, 4951 4499; www.brampton-island.com; s \$275-620, d \$300-650; 🚻 📺 📶) There are four grades of room depending on the view and facilities and, naturally, the rates increase the closer you get to the ocean. You'll be comfortable here. The premium ocean-views are stunning, but even the standard rooms are classy. The Bluewater Restaurant serves a buffet breakfast and lunch and a scrumptious à la carte dinner as well as beach barbecues. Prices are often much cheaper if you book a five-night package or wait for stand-by rates.

Getting There & Away

Organise your transfers with the resort when booking accommodation.

AIR

Australasian Jet (☎ 4953 3261; www.ausjet.com.au) departs twice daily from Mackay airport (15 minutes) at 9am and 2pm. It leaves Brampton Island for Mackay airport at 11.30am and 5pm. One-way/return flights cost \$69/138.

BOAT

The resort has its own launch that leaves Mackay Marina daily at 11.30am. The trip takes about 1½ hours. The return voyage to Mackay departs at 1.15pm. There's a courtesy bus connecting passengers to/from the airport. A one-way/return ticket for an adult is \$55/110.

CUMBERLAND ISLANDS

There are about 70 islands in the Cumberland group, which includes Brampton Island and is sometimes referred to as the southern Whitsundays. The islands are all designated national parks except for Keswick, St Bees and part of tiny Farrier Island.

Carlisle Island is connected to Brampton by a narrow sand bar, and at some low tides it's possible to walk or wade from one island to the other. Carlisle is uninhabited and covered in dense eucalypt forests, and there are no walking trails. However, there are national-park camping grounds at Southern Bay, which is directly across from the Brampton Island Resort, and at another site further north at Maryport Bay.

Scawfell Island, 12km east of Brampton, is the largest island in the group. Refuge Bay, on its northern side, has a safe anchorage, a beach, a camping ground with water (but always bring your own supply), barbecues and toilets. In the Sir James Smith Island Group, just northwest of Brampton, **Goldsmith Island** has a safe anchorage on its northwestern side, good beaches and a camping ground with toilets, tables and fireplaces.

Camp site (per person/family \$4.50/18) bookings and permits for Carlisle, Scawfell and Goldsmith Islands, and the more remote islands mentioned in the following sections, can be made at www.epa.qld.gov.au or at the Mackay QPWS (p262).

Keswick Island is a quiet, inhabited island, part national park and part freehold. There are grand plans for future development of this idyllic island, but for now you are unlikely to bump into many people other than the few who already live here, and those also staying at the guesthouse. **Keswick Island Guest House** (☎ 4965 8001; www.keswickislandguesthouse.com.au; 26 Coral Passage Dr; full board s \$240-260, d \$425-445) offers three comfortable double rooms with ocean views and three scrumptious home-cooked meals a day (tomato and fetta tart, anyone?). It's a place to relax and perhaps hit the water for a leisurely swim or snorkel. All rooms have access to the huge deck and there's a library, featuring a collection of some 1000 *Phantom* comics. In addition there's kayaking, fishing or exploring the island's bush tracks and sandy beaches.

Carlisle Island can be reached from Brampton Island via the sand spit at low tide, or by chartering a boat at Brampton resort. Scawfell and Goldsmith Islands are reached by charter boat, which can be organised through the Mackay visitors centre (p262). Transfers out to these islands depend on the weather, how many people are travelling, and so forth. Keswick Island transfers can be arranged for you by the guesthouse.

CAPE HILLSBOROUGH NATIONAL PARK

Despite being so easy to get to, this small coastal park feels like it's at the end of the earth. Ruggedly beautiful, it takes in the rocky, 300m-high Cape Hillsborough, and Andrews Point and Wedge Island, which are joined by a causeway at low tide. The park, 58km north of Mackay, features rough cliffs, a broad beach, rocky headlands, sand dunes, mangroves, hoop pines and rainforest. Kangaroos, wallabies, sugar gliders and turtles are common in the park; the roos are likely to be seen on the beach in the evening and early morning. There are also the remains of Aboriginal middens and stone fish-traps, which can be accessed by good walking tracks. On the approach to the foreshore area there's also an interesting boardwalk leading out through a tidal mangrove forest. If you have a hire car that prevents you from driving off-road, be sure to take the sealed road at Yakapari rather than the bumpy dirt track from Mt Ossa to Seaforth.

Smalleys Beach Campground (per person/family \$4.50/18) is a small, pretty, grassed camping ground hugging the foreshore and jumping with kangaroos. Self-register or pay at the camping ground.

Cape Hillsborough Nature Resort (☎ 4959 0152; www.capehillsboroughresort.com.au; MS 895 Mackay; unpowered/powered sites \$20/25, d \$60-115; ♿ ♿) is so low-key, you may find yourself checking your pulse. There's a huge array of cabin and motel accommodation, but the beach huts (\$95) right on the foreshore steal the show in a rustic, run-down kind of way. Wallabies and lizards roam around the resort enjoying the cool sea breezes. Grab a beer or a bottle of wine and a deck chair, sit on the beach at sunset and watch the kangaroos quietly go about their business. There's a simple bar and restaurant.

NEWRY ISLAND GROUP

The Newry Island Group is a cluster of small islands just off the coast from Seaforth, about 50km northwest of Mackay. They are rocky, wild-looking continental islands with grassy, open forests and small patches of rainforest. From November to January green turtles nest on the beaches.

The largest of the Newry Island Group is **Rabbit Island**. Its camping ground has toilets and a rainwater tank (which can be empty in dry times). It also has the only sandy beaches in the group, although because of its proximity to the mainland, box jellyfish may be present

in summer. **Newry Island** and **Outer Newry Island** each have a camping ground with shelter, water (seasonal) and toilets.

Most of the visitors to these islands are local anglers (with their own boat transport). Camping permits can be obtained online at www.epa.qld.gov.au or at the **Mackay QPWS** (Map p265; ☎ 4944 7800; cnr River & Wood Sts).

THE WHITSUNDAYS

Everyone dreams of a holiday in the Whitsundays. But where to go? There are 74 islands that make up this stunning archipelago and choosing where to spend your time can be confusing. The truth is, no matter where you decide to go, it'll be worth it.

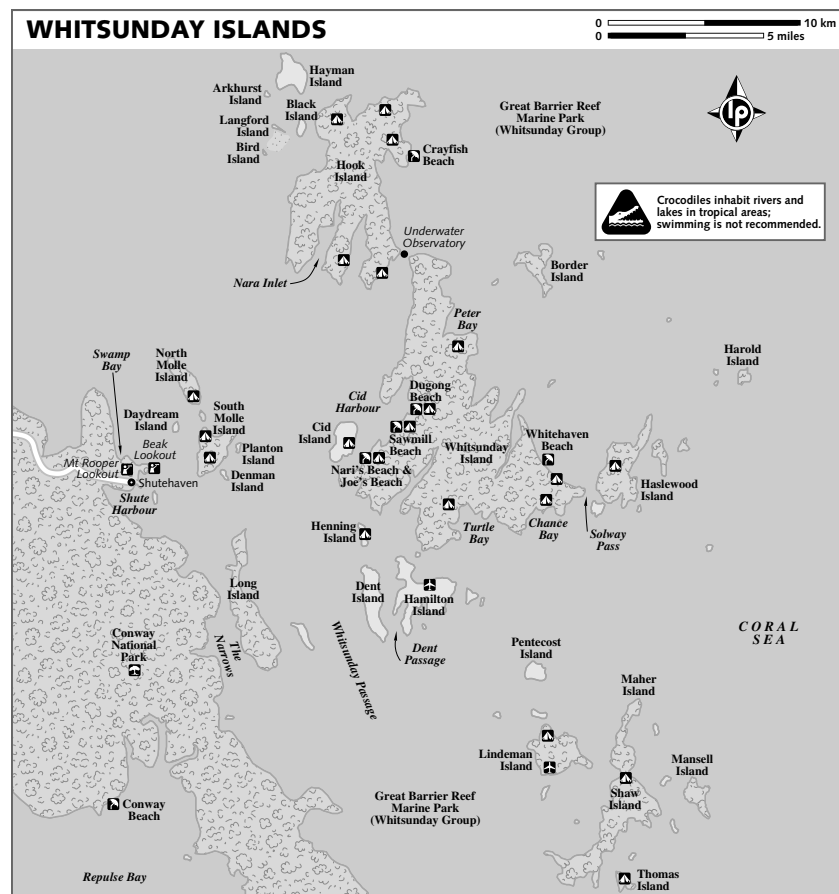
The islands, which are really the tips of mountain tops jutting out from the Coral Sea, are the perfect places to relax and unwind or be energetic, depending on your mood. With several island resorts, from backpackers to five star, and Airlie Beach from which to base yourself, the turquoise waters, palm-fringed beaches and coral gardens beckon from your doorstep. It really is a magical part of the world.

The Whitsunday Passage weaving between the islands and the mainland was named by Lieutenant James Cook, who sailed through here on 3 July 1770. Cook called the islands Cumberlands, but this grouping was later subdivided and the 22 islands scattered around the Whitsunday Passage became the Whitsunday Islands. All are within 50km of Shute Harbour. The Great Barrier Reef proper is at least 60km out from Shute Harbour; Hook Reef is the nearest part of it.

The islands and the waters between them are natural treasures, and while seven are developed with tourist resorts, most are uninhabited and several offer the chance of back-to-nature beach camping and bushwalking. All but four islands – Dent, Hamilton, Daydream and Hayman – are predominantly or completely national park, and the surrounding waters fall within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

Orientation

Airlie Beach is the mainland centre for the Whitsundays, with a bewildering array of accommodation options, travel agents and tour operators. Shute Harbour, about 10km east of



Airlie, is the port for most day-trip cruises and island ferries, while most of the yachts and some cruise companies berth at Abel Point Marina about 1.5km west of Airlie Beach.

The Whitsunday district office of the QPWS (p280) is 3km past Airlie Beach on the road to Shute Harbour. This office deals with camping permits for the islands, and its staff are very helpful and a good source of information on a wide range of topics. This should be your first place to visit if you are interested in exploring the islands independently.

Information

Tourism Whitsundays Information Centre (☎ 1800 801 252, 4945 3711; www.whitsundaytourism.com) On the Bruce Hwy on the southern entry to Proserpine.

Activities

Most activities that take place around the islands, either in, under or on top of the water, attract a Great Barrier Reef Marine Park levy of \$5 per person per day. Check to see if it is included in quoted prices.

SAILING

What could be better than sailing from one island paradise to another?

There are a number of bareboat (boats rented without skipper, crew or provisions) charter companies around Airlie Beach:

Charter Yachts Australia (☎ 1800 639 520; www.cya.com.au; Abel Point Marina)

Cumberland Charter Yachts (☎ 1800 075 101; www.ccy.com.au; Abel Point Marina)

Queensland Yacht Charters (☎ 1800 075 013; www.yachtcharters.com.au; Abel Point Marina)

Sunsail (☎ 1800 803 988; www.sunsail.com.au; Hamilton Island Marina)

Whitsunday Escape (☎ 1800 075 145, 4946 5222; www.whitsundayescape.com; Abel Point Marina)

Whitsunday Rent A Yacht (☎ 1800 075 111; www.rentayacht.com.au; Trinity Jetty, Shute Harbour)

The following are some of the numerous sailing tour companies/vessels that have been recommended by readers:

Oz Adventure Sailing (☎ 1800 359 554; www.ozsailing.com.au; Shute Harbour Rd, Airlie Beach) This company has a range of vessels including three tall ships, four racers and four sail-and-dive boats. There's also a sailing school if you catch the bug. Three-day, two-night packages start from \$460 per person.

Maxi Action Ragamuffin (☎ 1800 454 777; www.maxiaction.com) *Ragamuffin* was a line honours winner in the famous Sydney to Hobart yacht race in 1979. Nowadays she leads a more sedate existence and does two day trips: on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday she visits Hayman Island's beautiful Blue Pearl Bay for snorkelling; on Thursday and Sunday she heads for a Whitehaven Beach picnic cruise. Cruises depart Shute Harbour at 8.45am and return about 4.15pm (adult/child/concession/family \$135/50/125/300). There is also a Two Cruise Special for two separate days.

Maxi Apollo (☎ 1800 635 334; Abel Point Marina) Another Sydney to Hobart winner, the *Apollo* does a three-day, two-night cruise to Whitehaven Beach and Blue Pearl Bay departing at 9.30am on Monday and Friday, returning at 4pm on Wednesday and Sunday for \$460 per person.

Southern Cross Sailing Adventures (☎ 1800 675 790; www.soxsail.com.au; 4 The Esplanade, Airlie Beach) Southern Cross runs adventure sailing cruises on racing yachts such as *Siska* and *Southern Cross*, as well as more sedate cruises aboard the magnificent tall ship *Solway Lass*. You can also combine the racing-yacht and tall-ship experience. Three-day, two-night packages start from \$429 per person.

The Whitsundays are also one of the best and most popular places to learn how to sail. Should you choose this activity, there are numerous courses on offer. The following have several courses:

Whitsunday Marine Academy (☎ 4948 2350; www.whitsundaysailtraining.com; 277 Shute Harbour Rd) Run by Oz Adventure Sailing.

Whitsunday Sailing Club (☎ 4946 6138; Airlie Point)

DIVING

The ultimate diving experience to be had here is on the actual Great Barrier Reef, at places

such as Black, Knuckle and Elizabeth Reefs. Dive boats should leave in the evening so that you wake up at your dive site. The dive companies listed here also offer a good range of diving trips for certified divers (from day trips to overnights) that combine the Reef with the islands.

The Whitsundays are a great place to learn how to dive, and the dive-specific operators offering certificate courses are listed here. Many of the day trips and overnight sailing cruises offer dive instruction or 'introductory dives'. Be sure about what you are paying for. Costs for open-water courses with several ocean dives start at around \$500, and note that any cheaper courses you may dig up will probably have you spending most of your 'dives' in a pool. It is worth paying more so that you do get to enjoy what you have learned and, more importantly, build up invaluable open-water experience. Generally speaking, courses involve two or three days' tuition on the mainland with the rest of the time diving on the Great Barrier Reef; meals and accommodation are usually included in the price. Check that the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park levy and any other additional costs are included in the price.

Dive Time (☎ 4948 1211; www.divetime.com.au; Abel Point Marina)

Reef Dive & Sail (☎ 1800 075 120, 4946 6508; www.reefdive.com.au; 16 Commerce Close, Cannonvale)

Tropical Diving (☎ 1800 776 150, 4948 1029; www.tropicaldiving.com.au)

In addition to these companies, most of the island resorts also have their own dive schools and free snorkelling gear.

SEA KAYAKING

Go where you want, when you want, and leave when you want. No cruise-boat skipper telling you to pack up because it's time to go home. Paddling serenely in search of an island with dolphins and turtles as company would have to be one of the best ways to experience the Whitsundays. **Salty Dog Sea Kayaking** (☎ 4946 1388; www.saltydog.com.au) offers guided tours and kayak rental. Half-/full-day tours from Shute Harbour cost \$70/125. There are also overnight trips (\$365) and a brilliant six-day expedition (\$1500) covering about 15km to 20km per day that's suitable for beginners. Kayak rental costs \$50/60 for a half-/one-day single kayak and \$80/90 for a double.

FISHING

Charter-boat operators provide all-inclusive day trips to the outer Whitsundays. The **Jillian2** (☎ 4946 7982; fishwhitsunday@austamet.com.au) departs Abel Point Marina and charges \$180/140 per adult/child for a full day and the **MV Moruya** (☎ 4946 6665; info@fishingwhitsunday.com.au) departs from Shute Harbour and costs \$130/80. Hiring your own boat is also an option and not all boats require a boating licence. **Harbour Side Boat Hire** (☎ 4946 9330; Ferry Terminal, Shute Harbour) has various runabouts from \$100 to \$250 per day.

Tours

It can be confusing figuring out the best and most convenient way to see the islands. There are so many operators, but it needn't be too difficult.

ISLAND & REEF CRUISES

Not everyone has the time or the money to sail and therefore must rely on the faster catamarans to whisk them to several different islands on a day trip. If snorkelling, laying on the beach or exploring the rainforests of a few of the Whitsunday Islands appeals, then it's just a matter of hunting down the tour that will suit you.

Most day trips include activities such as snorkelling or boom netting, with scuba diving as an optional extra. Children generally pay half fare. Following are some (by no means all) of the day trips on offer, and bookings can be made at any of the tour agents in Airlie Beach:

Big Fury (☎ 4948 2201; Abel Point Marina; adult/child/family \$110/55/310) Small operator with a maximum of 35 passengers that speeds out to Whitehaven Beach on an open-air sports boat followed by lunch and then snorkelling at a secluded reef nearby.

Cruise Whitsundays (☎ 4946 4662; www.cruisewhitsundays.com; Shingley Dr, Abel Point Marina; adult/child/family \$190/90/465) One of the Whitsundays' largest operators, Cruise Whitsundays operates a huge wave-piercing catamaran that speeds out to a pontoon moored at Knuckle Reef Lagoon on the Great Barrier Reef for spectacular snorkelling. There's an underwater observatory, waterslide and children's swimming enclosure, and optional extras such as diving and sea walking. A hefty buffet lunch is included in the price and there's an expensive, but thrilling, option of flying in or out by helicopter.

Fantasea (☎ 4946 5111; www.fantasea.com.au; 11 Shute Harbour Rd, Jubilee Pocket) The largest tour operator in Airlie Beach, and the operator of the island ferries, offers

a number of options. A high-speed catamaran cruises to its Reefworld pontoon on the Great Barrier Reef, where you can snorkel, take a trip in a semisubmersible and check out the underwater viewing chamber (adult/child/family \$197/92/476). An overnight 'Reefsleeper' costs from \$400. There are several options for spending a day at one of the island resorts utilising Fantasea, as well as a Three Island Discovery Cruise that visits Long, Daydream and Hamilton (adult/child/family \$80/44/227).

Mantaray Charters (☎ 1800 816 365; www.mantaraycharters.com; adult/child/family \$130/65/350)

This tour allows you to spend the most time on Whitehaven Beach (about three hours), followed by a visit to Mantaray Bay; includes snorkelling and lunch.

Ocean Rafting (☎ 4946 6848; www.oceanrafting.com; adult/child/family \$103/66/310) Be whisked away in a big yellow speedboat to Whitehaven Beach and Mantaray Bay, off Hook Island.

Tropical Diving (☎ 1800 776 150, 4948 1029; www.tropicaldiving.com.au; adult/child/family \$120/65/340) Cruises out to Whitehaven Beach followed by snorkelling at Mantaray, Cateran or Blue Pearl Bays.

Voyager 3 Island Cruise (☎ 4946 5255; adult/child \$130/65) A good-value day cruise that includes snorkelling at Hook Island, beachcombing and swimming at Whitehaven Beach, and checking out Daydream Island.

Most of the cruise operators that run from Shute Harbour do coach pick-ups from Airlie Beach and Cannonvale. You can take a public bus to Shute Harbour.

SCENIC FLIGHTS

Air Whitsunday Seaplanes (☎ 4946 9111) Flying is the only way to do day trips to exclusive Hayman Island (adult/child \$195/175). Other tours include a three-hour Reef Adventure (\$299/199) and a four-hour Panorama (\$360/245).

Aviation Adventures (☎ 4946 9988; www.av8.com.au) Helicopter flights ranging from scenic island trips (\$99) to picnic rendezvous (\$199) and reef adventures (\$629).

Sleeping CAMPING

QPWS (www.epa.qld.gov.au) manages national-park camping grounds on several islands for both independent and commercial campers (tour companies). There's also a privately run camping ground at Hook Island; see p287 for details.

You must be self-sufficient to camp in the national-park sites. You're advised to take 5L of water per person per day, plus three days' extra supply in case you get stranded. You

should also have a fuel stove – wood fires are banned on all islands.

The national-parks leaflet *Island Camping in the Whitsundays* describes the various sites and provides detailed information on what to take and do. Camping permits are available online and from the Whitsunday QPWS office (see p280) and cost \$4.50 per person (\$18 per family) per night. If you book online, don't forget to pick up your permit/tag from the office.

Get to your island by **Fantasea** (☎ 4946 5111; www.fantasea.com.au; 11 Shute Harbour Rd, Jubilee Pocket) or a day-cruise boat; the booking agencies in Airlie Beach will be able to assist. You can also use an island-camping specialist such as **Island Camping Connections** (☎ 4948 2201), which leaves from Shute Harbour and can drop you at North or South Molle, Planton or Denman Islands (\$40 return); Whitsunday Island or Henning Island (\$99); Whitehaven Beach (\$120); and Hook Island (\$150). **Camping Whitsunday Islands** (☎ 4946 9330) has similar prices and both operations can help with provisions and snorkelling gear.

Northern islands such as Armit, Gloucester, Olden and Saddleback are harder to reach since the water taxi and cruises from Shute Harbour don't usually go there. Gloucester and Saddleback are best reached from Dingo Beach or Bowen.

Independent campers can stay on the islands at all times of the year, provided they have a permit.

RESORTS

There are resorts on seven of the Whitsunday Islands. Each resort is quite different from the next, ranging from Hayman's five-star luxury to the basic cabins on Hook, and from the high-rise development of Hamilton to the beachfront huts of ecofriendly South Long Island Nature Lodge.

The rates quoted in this section are the standard high-season rates, but most travel agents can put together a range of discounted package deals that combine air fares, transfers, accommodation and meals that are much more inexpensive.

It's also worth noting that, unless they're full, almost all resorts offer discounted standby rates. The limiting factor is that you usually have to book less than five days in advance. All the agents in Airlie Beach can provide information on the resorts.

Getting There & Around

AIR

The two main airports for the Whitsundays are Hamilton Island and Proserpine (Whitsunday Coast). See p290 and opposite for details.

The Whitsunday airport also has regular flights from the mainland to the islands – light planes, seaplanes and helicopters. See p285 for details.

BOAT

The services to the islands all operate out of Shute Harbour or Abel Point Marina near Airlie Beach. **Fantasea** (☎ 4946 5111; www.fantasea.com.au; 11 Shute Harbour Rd, Jubilee Pocket) provides ferry transfers to the islands; see the individual islands for details.

The Whitsunday Sailing Club is at the end of Airlie Beach Esplanade; check the noticeboards here and at the Abel Point Marina for possible rides or crewing opportunities on passing yachts.

BUS

Greyhound (☎ 13 20 30; www.greyhound.com.au) and **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premierms.com.au) buses detour off the Bruce Hwy to Airlie Beach. **Whitsunday Transit** (☎ 4946 1800; www.whitsundaytransit.com.au) connects Proserpine, Cannonvale, Abel Point, Airlie Beach and Shute Harbour. Timetables are readily available from your accommodation, travel agencies and are also posted at the bus stops.

MIDGE POINT

Golf is king here. Those with a love of hitting a dimpled white ball around flock here to pursue their one true love. The **Turtle Point golf course** is open to the general public: 18 holes costs \$95, which includes cart hire, and club rental is \$25 to \$45 depending on the quality of the sticks.

Right on the beach, **Travellers Rest Caravan & Camping Park** (☎ 4947 6120; fax 4947 6111; 29 Jackson St; unpowered/powered sites \$21/26, cabins without bathroom \$50-90, with bathroom \$75-105; 🚻) is a deservedly popular park, shaded by plenty of trees with well-manicured grounds.

Laguna Whitsundays (☎ 4947 7777; www.lagunawhitundays.info; Kunapipi Springs Rd; 1-/2-/3-bedroom villa & golf from \$325/357/513; 🚻 🚿) offers restaurants, bars, tennis and pools, but above all golf, golf and more golf. The resort often hosts the **Australian Skins** tournament in January or February. It really is heaven on earth for golfers.

Midge Point is two-thirds of the way from Mackay to Proserpine.

PROSERPINE

Proserpine airport decided on changing its name to Whitsunday Coast, no doubt in an effort to spruce up its image, but there's still no reason to linger in this industrial sugar-mill town, which is the turn-off point for Airlie Beach and the Whitsundays. A quick stop just south of town at the helpful **Whitsunday Information Centre** (☎ 1800 801 252; www.whitsundaytourism.com.au; Bruce Hwy; 🕒 10am-6pm), the main source of information about the Whitsundays and the surrounding region, is all you'll need.

The airport is 14km south of town and is serviced from Brisbane and Sydney as well as some other capitals by **Jetstar** (☎ 13 15 38; www.jetstar.com.au), **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au) and **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com.au).

In addition to meeting all planes and trains, **Whitsunday Transit** (☎ 4946 1800; www.whitsundaytransit.com.au) has seven scheduled bus services daily from Proserpine to Airlie Beach. One way/return from the airport costs \$15/28, and from the train station it's \$8.20/15.20.

AIRLIE BEACH

☎ 07 / pop 6770

For such a small town, Airlie Beach positively hums with energy. You'll notice it as soon as you step onto the streets. Barely an Australian accent in earshot, Airlie bristles with holiday-makers from all corners of the globe. Can't blame them, really.

Airlie itself is the base from which to explore the Whitsunday Islands. The cruise boats leave in the morning, letting the town finally catch up on some sleep. During this time, people meander the streets to shop, eat, sip coffee, make cruise bookings or laze about at the lagoon, and it's then that the town manages to drift between lazy and energetic depending on her mood at the time.

Airlie Beach then awakens from her slumber when the day-trippers start to filter off the boats around late afternoon. It's closing in on party time now. Young travellers discuss the afternoon's snorkelling trip over a jug of beer and make plans to hook up with people they've met on the boat that day. Older travellers start preparing for a slap-up meal at a swish restaurant over a chilled bottle of wine. Families are getting the kids ready for a walk along the lagoon with the obligatory ice cream

in hand. Couples of all ages stroll along Shute Harbour Rd holding hands, undecided on fish and chips, or steak and seafood.

By nightfall, people are roaming the streets in search of food, drink and each other. It's now time to do some serious partying. Never mind about the next boat trip tomorrow and the subsequent hangover. Live for the moment.

Orientation

Nearly everything lies along Shute Harbour Rd, a short, busy strip packed with tour agents, cafés, restaurants and hostels. The Esplanade branches off Shute Harbour Rd and is a shorter version of the town's main artery, brimming with more cafés and restaurants. The hills rise steeply behind the town and numerous top-end resorts boasting picture-perfect views cling to their sides. Shute Harbour, where the island ferries depart, is about 12km east, and Abel Point Marina, home to many of the cruising yachts, is about 1km west along a pleasant boardwalk. The new marina precinct, at the Shute Harbour end of town, was under construction at the time of writing, but by the look of the works going on, it will be big.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet access is widely available; all of the hostels have terminals, and there are several dedicated internet cafés.

Internet Centre (346 Shute Harbour Rd; per hr \$4).

MEDICAL SERVICES

Doctors (☎ 4948 0900; 283 Shute Harbour Rd; 🕒 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat)

POST

Post office (☎ 13 13 18; 372 Shute Harbour Rd; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Shute Harbour Rd is littered with privately run tour-booking and ticket agencies, all able to answer queries on island transport, and book tours and accommodation. Check out their notice boards for stand-by rates on sailing tours and resort accommodation.

Airlie Beach visitors centre (☎ 4946 6665; 277 Shute Harbour Rd)

Destination Whitsundays (☎ 4946 7172; 297 Shute Harbour Rd)

AIRLIE BEACH

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Airlie Apartments.....	8	A2
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Airlie Waterfront Backpackers.....	13	C2
Backpackers by the Bay.....	14	D3
Bay of Airlie.....	15	A2
Beaches Backpackers.....	16	B2
Boathaven Spa Resort.....	17	D4
Colonial Palms Motor Inn.....	18	D4
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QPWS (☎ 4946 7022; fax 4946 7023; cnr Shute Harbour & Mandalay Rds; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) Past Airlie Beach, 3km towards Shute Harbour. It should be your first port of call if you need information and permits for camping in the Conway and the Whitsunday Islands National Parks. The staff here are very helpful and can advise you on which islands to camp on, how to get there, what to take etc. **Where? What? How? Whitsundays** (☎ 4946 5255; 283 Shute Harbour Rd)

Activities

For details on sailing, diving and kayaking around the islands, see p275.

SWIMMING & WATER SPORTS

The gorgeous lagoon on Airlie's foreshore provides year-round safe swimming and is

an attractive, popular public space for those wanting to work on their tan. The beaches at Airlie Beach and Cannonvale are OK for swimming, but the presence of stingers (box jellyfish) means swimming in the sea isn't advisable between October and May. There are (seasonal) operators in front of the Airlie Beach Hotel that hire out jet skis, catamarans, windsurfers and paddle skis.

BUSHWALKS

The Conway Range behind Airlie Beach is part national park (see p286) and part state forest, and provides some great walking in coastal rainforest. With information supplied at the tracks, you can learn about the forest ecology and the traditional life of local indigenous

people. Try the 2.4km climb up Mt Rooper for great views, the short Coral Beach Track at Shute Harbour, or the three-day Whitsunday Great Walk. For advice and track notes on these and other walks visit the QPWS office.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Other active pursuits include tandem skydiving with **Tandem Skydive Airlie Beach** (☎ 4946 9115; www.skydiveoz.com), with prices starting at \$249. For more sedate pastimes you can always drop a line (see p277) or take a scenic flight (see p277). All these activities can easily be booked through your accommodation or one of the agents in Airlie Beach.

Tours

ISLAND CRUISES

Finding an operator to take you out to the Whitsundays and the Great Barrier Reef is a confusing business. While you're spoilt for choice, choosing the right one to suit your needs can be overwhelming. The best plan of attack is to talk to other travellers. Word of mouth is the best research you can do. To get started, see p275 for details of sailing tours and p277 for details of tour boats.

RAINFOREST/NATIONAL PARK TOURS

Fawley's 4WD Tropical Tours (☎ 4946 6665; adult/child \$55/40) departs daily at 10.30am, and returns at 4pm. This tour is a great way to see the beautiful Cedar Creek Falls (when they're running, that is) and some rainforest close up. Lunch and pick-ups are included in the price.

WILDLIFE TOURS

The best way to see crocodiles in their natural habitat is to take a tour with **Whitsunday Crocodile Safari** (☎ 4948 3310; www.crocodilesafari.com.au; adult/child \$98/40). The tours cruise up the Proserpine River and then through the wetlands on an open-air wagon train to view other wildlife. The price includes transfers from your accommodation, morning and afternoon tea and lunch.

Festivals & Events

Whitsunday Fun Race Festival (www.whitsunday sailingclub.com.au) Airlie Beach is the centre of activities during this annual festival each September. Apart from the yacht races, the Miss Figurehead and Mr Six-pack competitions set the tone for the festivities.

Whitsunday Reef Festival (www.whitsundayreef festival.com.au) A 10-day celebration in late October and

early November with food, wine, music, dance, theatre, fireworks and fashion.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Hostels

Airlie Beach is a backpacker haven, but with so many hostels, standards vary. We heard of several reports of bedbugs being a problem here. Don't be afraid to speak up if you're not happy.

Koala Beach Resort (☎ 1800 800 421, 4946 6001; www.koalaadventures.com; Shute Harbour Rd; camp sites per person \$10, dm/d \$27/70; ☎ ☎) The shabby dorms have a small kitchen and a bathroom and are probably only worth staying at if most other places are full. However, doubles with TV, bathroom and fridge are good value for couples.

Magnums Backpackers (☎ 1800 624 634, 4946 6266; www.magnums.com.au; 366 Shute Harbour Rd; camp sites/van sites \$18/20, dm/d \$17/52; ☎ ☎) All backpackers end up at Magnums one way or another. This huge, sprawling conglomerate is party central in more ways than one. Once you get past the hectically busy reception, you'll find simple dorms set away from the main road. The outdoor bar area with its wooden tables and live music is incredibly popular, but the kitchen is tiny.

Beaches Backpackers (☎ 1800 636 630; 4946 6244; www.beaches.com.au; 356 Shute Harbour Rd; dm/d \$25/80; ☎ ☎) You must at least enjoy a drink at the big open-air bar, even if you're not staying here. Although it's busy, Beaches doesn't try to outdo Magnums in the boisterous stakes, but it comes close anyway. There's a good pool, and doubles with TV, fridge and air-con represent great value.

Airlie Waterfront Backpackers (☎ 1800 089 000, 4948 1300; www.airliebackpackers.com.au; 6 The Esplanade; dm \$25-30, d & tw with/without bathroom \$110/60) Up a couple of flights of stairs and tucked under a big A-frame roofline, the rooms can feel a bit closed in. Thank goodness for the great balconies, clean kitchen and lounge. Choose between four- (women only), five-, six- and 10-bed dorms.

Backpackers by the Bay (☎ 1800 646 994, ☎/fax 4946 7267; www.backpackersbythebay.com; 12 Hermitage Dr; dm/d & tw \$26/62; ☎ ☎) Don't be put off by the 10-minute walk to the town centre. The views from the sun lounges out the front will encourage you to stay here for most of the day anyway. The bright walls on the corridors

are painted with a nautical theme and there's a relaxed barbecue area and a small bar that opens at 5.30pm. Dorms contain just four beds and the air-con automatically switches on at 8pm and off at 8am.

Bush Village (☎ 1800 8098 256, 4946 6177; www.bushvillage.com.au; 2 St Martins Rd; dm \$27, d & tw with/without bathroom \$108/78, all incl breakfast; ♿ ♿ ♿) Some interesting history accompanies this sprawling low-key hostel about 1.5km from the town centre. It was once a farm and then a brothel. Nowadays, it's a clean, safe haven with large four-bed dorms with their own bathroom and kitchen. There's a courtesy bus into town. Women travellers not interested in the party and pick-up scene will appreciate it here.

Airlie Beach YHA (☎ 1800 247 251, 4946 6312; airliebeach@yhaql.org; 394 Shute Harbour Rd; dm \$27.50, d with/without bathroom \$77/71; ♿ ♿ ♿) Central, but just far enough removed from the hubbub, this good, clean hostel is small and reasonably quiet. All doubles have a balcony, although the view is nothing special.

Camping & Van Parks

There are no caravan parks in Airlie Beach itself, but in Cannonvale and on the road between Airlie and Shute Harbour there are several parks to choose from (camping prices are for two people).

Flametre Tourist Village (☎ 4946 9388; www.flametreestate.com.au; Shute Harbour Rd; unpowered/powerd sites \$23/29, cabins from \$85; ♿ ♿) Not as glitzy as the other big parks, but the spacious sites are scattered through lovely, bird-filled gardens and there's a good camp kitchen and barbecue area. The park is 6.5km west of Airlie.

Island Gateway Caravan Resort (☎ 4946 6228; www.islandgateway.com.au; Shute Harbour Rd, Jubilee Pocket; unpowered/powerd sites \$30/37, cabins \$78-100, chalets \$135-145, villas \$175; ♿ ♿) This is a big park about 1.5km east of Airlie Beach, making it the closest camping ground to the town centre. The sites are shady and the facilities are excellent and include a camp kitchen, a shop, half-court tennis and minigolf.

MIDRANGE

B&Bs

Our pick Bay of Airlie (☎ 4946 4460; www.bayofairlie.com.au; 11 Orana St; 1-/2-bedroom apt \$130/200; ♿ ♿) You'll be the only guests at this intimate but superb B&B. That means your own pool, your own barbecue, your own balcony decking, pretty much your own everything, unless you

want to share some wine at sunset with the friendly owners. While there is a one- and a two-bedroom apartment, they're only available for members of the same party, so privacy is guaranteed. For example, if a couple stays and only needs one room, the other apartment is left vacant and you pay the lowest rate.

Island View (☎ 4946 4505; www.islandviewbb.com.au; 19 Nara Ave; r from \$130; ♿ ♿) After a comfortable night's sleep in your modern, spacious room, wake up and enjoy breakfast on your balcony. In a quiet part of town, Island View is a good option for those not wanting to spend 24 hours a day on busy Shute Harbour Rd.

Whitsunday Organic B&B (☎ 4946 7151; www.whitsundaybb.com.au; 8 Lamond St; s/d \$145/240) It's great to see that the new owners plan to keep this ecofriendly B&B just the way it was. Rooms are comfortable, but it's the organic garden walk and the orgasmic three-course organic breakfasts that everyone comes here for (nonguests \$22.50). Lavender oil and fresh herbs surround the place to keep insects at bay and there's a 500L rainwater tank with fresh filtered water on offer as well as organic tea and coffee available all day. There are no TVs, ensuring your stay is all about peace and quiet.

Hotels & Motels

Airlie Beach Hotel (☎ 1800 466 233, 4964 1999; www.airliebeachhotel.com.au; cnr The Esplanade & Coconut Grove; s \$119-249, d \$129-249; ♿ ♿) Newly renovated with three-star motel units and four-star apartments, the ABH is now a slick, contemporary addition to the Airlie Beach accommodation scene. With three restaurants on site and a perfect downtown location, you could do far worse than stay here.

Colonial Palms Motor Inn (☎ 4946 7166; www.colonialpalms.bestwestern.com.au; cnr Shute Harbour Rd & Hermitage Dr; d from \$120; ♿ ♿) The little ones will love the kids' pool while mum and dad laze away in the sun lounges. The comfortable rooms have cool tiled floors and a breezy balcony.

Airlie Beach Motor Lodge (☎ 1800 810 925, 4946 6418; www.airliebeachmotorlodge.com.au; 6 Lamond St; d \$120-140, 2-bedroom apt \$140-160; ♿ ♿) Undergoing a face-lift at the time of writing, this neat little place tucked away in a residential area is just a short walk from the Shute Harbour Rd action and the lagoon. The standard motel rooms are small but perfectly adequate, and the two-bedroom apartments offer a bit more room to move.

Coral Point Lodge (☎ 4946 9500; www.coralpointlodge.com.au; 54 Harbour Ave, Shute Harbour; d \$150-185; ♿ ♿) This is the place if you want to be out of the hubbub of Airlie; clinging to the ridge overlooking Shute Harbour, the views here are superb. Some rooms are self-contained and have private balconies.

Resorts & Holiday Apartments

There are some older-style holiday apartments as well as more modern resorts in and around Airlie Beach, and they can be good value, especially for a group of friends or a family. Many have discounts for stays of three days or more and some have minimum stays of two nights.

Whitsunday on the Beach Holiday Units (☎ 4946 6359; fax 4946 7995; 269 Shute Harbour Rd; apt from \$100; ♿ ♿) In the centre of Airlie, with the magnificent lagoon at your doorstep, this block of airy, spacious, self-contained units is convenient to everything.

Whitehaven Beachfront Holiday Units (☎ 4946 5710; fax 4946 5711; 285 Shute Harbour Rd; r \$110-120; ♿ ♿) Smack bang in the centre of Airlie Beach, these six older-style though well-presented studio apartments have balconies and sport a fresh coat of paint.

Downtown Airlie (☎ 4948 0599; www.downtownairlie.com; 346 Shute Harbour Rd; apt \$110-250; ♿ ♿) The only apartments in the main street so close to town, Downtown Airlie boasts six modern one- and two-bedroom units. What the place lacks in character, it makes up for in convenience and location.

Airlie Apartments (☎ 4946 6222; www.airlieapartments.com; 22-24 Airlie Cres; 1-bedroom apt \$120, 2-bedroom apt \$125-160; ♿ ♿) Airlie Apartments are a good-value option that's ideal for families. The apartments are fully self-contained, there are views over Abel Point and the action on Shute Harbour Rd is not far away. There's a three-night minimum stay.

Whitsunday Wanderers Resort (☎ 1800 075 069, 4946 6446; www.whitsundaywanderers.com; Shute Harbour Rd; r \$122-170; ♿ ♿) Resembling a small residential village, Wanderers has decent rooms with tiled floors among shaded gardens. The Melanesian rooms are the cheapest and are good value.

Whitsunday Terraces Resort (☎ 1800 075 062, 4946 6788; www.whitsundayterraces.com.au; Golden Orchid Dr; apt \$135-150; ♿ ♿) With a choice of studios or one-bedroom apartments, this is a no-frills but comfortable option. The kitchens prob-

ably need a spruce up, but with views like this from your balcony, who cares?

Shingly Beach Resort (☎ 4948 8300; www.shinglybeachresort.com; 1 Shingly Dr; apt \$140-240; ♿ ♿) These midrange, self-contained holiday apartments are close to Abel Point Marina and feature good views. There are four different room configurations, a bar and restaurant and two saltwater pools.

TOP END

B&Bs

Airlie Waterfront B&B (☎ 4946 7631; www.airliewaterfrontbnb.com.au; cnr Broadwater Av & Mazlin St; d \$230-299; ♿ ♿) Absolutely gorgeous views and immaculately presented from top to toe, this sumptuously furnished B&B oozes class and is a leisurely five-minute walk into town along the boardwalk. Some rooms have a spa and if you tire of the ocean views (how could you?) there are enough TVs and DVD and CD players to distract your attention.

Resorts

Most of the resorts here have package deals and stand-by rates that are much cheaper than their regular ones.

Club Crocodile (☎ 1800 075 151, 4946 7155; www.clubcroc.com.au; Shute Harbour Rd, Cannonvale; d incl breakfast from \$160; ♿ ♿) Favoured by tour groups and families, Club Croc is a popular midrange resort 2km west of Airlie Beach. Motel-style units are built around an attractive central courtyard featuring fountains, a tennis court, restaurants and a bar.

Whitsunday Vista (☎ 4948 4000; www.wentworthresorts.com.au; cnr Shute Harbour Rd & Hermitage Dr; apt \$170-185; ♿ ♿) The apartments vary here from very good to OK. Room 16S has a glass-enclosed spa bath overlooking the new marina precinct. There's an impressive Thai restaurant on the premises.

Boathaven Spa Resort (☎ 1800 985 856, 4948 4948; www.boathavenresort.com; 440 Shute Harbour Rd; apt \$185-200; ♿ ♿) The very comfortable self-contained rooms here all boast private balconies with spas and great views over Boathaven Bay. Two- (\$345 to \$400) and three-bedroom (\$500) units are also available.

Water's Edge Resort (☎ 4948 2655; fax 4948 2755; www.watersedgewhitsundays.com.au; 4 Golden Orchid Dr; 1-bedroom apt \$200-240, 2-bedroom apt \$270-325; ♿ ♿) The reception area immediately tells you that you're on holiday. Its open-air plan and gently revolving ceiling fans stir the languid, tropical

heat. In the rooms, soft colours, cane headboards and shutters sealing off the bedroom from the living space immediately put your mind at ease. There are wonderful views from the spacious balconies, a huge kitchen space and immaculately tiled floors.

Coral Sea Resort (☎ 1800 075 061, 4946 6458; www.coralsearesort.com; 25 Ocean View Ave; d \$220-370, 1-bedroom apt \$330, 2-bedroom apt \$345-375; ☞☞☞) At the end of a low headland overlooking the water just north of the town centre, Coral Sea Resort has one of the best positions around. There's a huge range of well-appointed rooms that are motel style and self-contained, many with stunning views. The massive swimming pool is flanked by ocean on one side and a bar-restaurant on the other. What more could you want?

High above Airlie Beach, top-end resorts stretch up to grab more of the exquisite Coral Sea views. The luxury and the views can't be questioned, but it's a steep walk home should you find yourself without a car.

Martinique (☎ 4948 0401; fax 4948 0402; www.martiniquewhitsunday.com.au; 18 Golden Orchid Dr; 1-/2-/3-bedroom apt \$210/300/375; ☞☞☞) French Caribbean is the theme. Luxurious pool and glorious views from the breezy balconies.

Pinnacles Resort & Spa (☎ 4948 4800; www.pinnaclesresort.com; 16 Golden Orchid Dr; 1-/2-/3-bedroom apt from \$215/285/350; ☞☞☞) King-sized beds and spa baths round off this luxurious five-star place very nicely.

Eating

RESTAURANTS

Shute Harbour Rd abounds with restaurants, while the Esplanade is starting to carve its own niche.

Bolz Cosmopolitan Café (☎ 4946 7755; 7 Beach Plaza, The Esplanade; mains \$12.50-26; ☞☞☞ breakfast, lunch & dinner) You and everyone else will have the same idea at breakfast time on Sunday. It seems half the population of Airlie Beach pulls up a seat here. That doesn't mean lunch should be ignored either. Bolz has the usual array of dishes, but it's the gourmet pizzas that keep punters coming back.

Sushi Hi! (☎ 4948 0400; 390 Shute Harbour Rd; light meals \$13-25; ☞☞☞ 10am-8pm) Sit at the delightful little round table and enjoy sushi, sashimi and other Japanese delicacies.

Whitsunday Sailing Club (☎ 4946 7894; Airlie Point; mains \$14-32; ☞☞☞ lunch & dinner) The sailing-club terrace is a great place for a meal and a drink. Choose from the usual steak and schnitzel

culprits off the inexpensive bistro blackboard. It's also a good place for a quiet drink.

Deja Vu (☎ 4948 4309; www.dejavurestaurant.com.au; Golden Orchid Dr; lunch mains \$15-21, dinner mains \$27-32; ☞☞☞ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat; ☞☞) In a new location up on the hill, Deja Vu is still one of Airlie's favourites. Try the crispy-skin snapper, the goat curry, or the tiger prawns and Moreton Bay bug *agnolotti*, but it's the famous long Sunday lunch (eight courses per person \$35.50) that's the star of the show.

Mangrove Jack's Café Bar (☎ 4964 1888; 297 Shute Harbour Rd; mains \$15.50-35; ☞☞☞ lunch & dinner) It may be a chain restaurant, but people love sitting outside at this breezy streetside bar and eatery to watch the passing parade on Shute Harbour Rd.

Banjo's (☎ 4946 7220; cnr Shute Harbour Rd & Island Dr, Cannonvale; mains \$16-30; ☞☞☞ lunch & dinner) Order a drink from the bar and pull up a seat outside at this relaxed bar and grill that's popular with locals and tourists. The fare is stock-standard chicken, steak and seafood, but there's plenty to choose from. The public bus stops close to the front door at the Whitsunday Shopping Centre in Cannonvale.

KC's Steak & Seafood (☎ 4946 6320; 282 Shute Harbour Rd; mains \$16-31; ☞☞☞ 3pm-3am) KC's happy hour(s) are followed by dinner, between 6pm and 9pm, and then there's usually live music. It's lively and licensed, and the menu has croc and roo grills, as well as steak and seafood.

Shipwrecked Seafood Bar & Grill (☎ 4946 6713; www.shipwreckedbarandgrill.com.au; cnr Shute Harbour Rd & The Esplanade lunch mains \$18.50-25, dinner mains \$30-44; ☞☞☞ lunch & dinner; ☞☞) One of the places to head if you want to go all-out for a special meal. Have a steak, chicken or duck if you absolutely must, but it would be a shame to miss out on the delectable fresh seafood, such as coral trout, swordfish, barramundi and salmon. Choose one of the 34 wines of offer and settle back for a feast.

Capers (☎ 4946 1777; The Esplanade; mains \$22-39; ☞☞☞ 7am-late Mon-Sun) On the ground floor of the Airlie Hotel complex, this is a big restaurant-bar offering the usual breakfasts and slightly more imaginative lunches and dinners. Elk steak, anyone?

CAFÉS & QUICK EATS

If you're looking for a quick coffee, breakfast or light lunch, Airlie has plenty of places to go.

Marino's Deli (☎ 4946 4207; Shop 3b, 269 Shute Harbour Rd; dishes \$6-15; ☞☞☞ 11am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-

8pm Sat) Takeaway pasta, soup and gourmet rolls with delicious fillings dominate the menu at this unpretentious little deli-café. You can also get antipasto platters.

Extreme Bean (☎ 4948 2283; 346 Shute Harbour Rd; meals \$7-15; ☞☞☞ breakfast & lunch; ☞☞) Endorsed by more than a few travellers during our visit as the place to go for coffee. Try the buttermilk pancakes for breakfast and the chicken burger and salad at lunchtime.

Harry's Corner (☎ 4946 7459; 273 Shute Harbour Rd; mains \$7-15; ☞☞☞ 7am-4pm) This small, popular café cooks up huge, tasty breakfasts, and delivers coffee, cakes and snacks until closing. The fresh fruit pancakes are a great way to start the day in style.

Our pick! Café Mykonos (☎ 4946 5888; Shop 9, Shute Harbour Rd; mains \$8-10; ☞☞☞ 11am-9pm) We stopped by for a quick lunch on the go and ended up coming back no less than three times (no, not on the same day!). Kebabs, *yiros* and other Greek faves are made right in front of you in minutes. Try going just once.

Sidewalk Cantina (☎ 4946 6425; The Esplanade; dishes \$9-25; ☞☞☞ 7am-2pm Mon-Sun, 6pm-late Thu-Mon) The daytime café and takeaway serves breakfasts and light lunches such as pancakes and focaccias. Try a breakfast with a twist like savoury mince on toast with a fried egg (\$9).

Village Café (☎ 4964 1121; 351 Shute Harbour Rd; mains \$10-16; ☞☞☞ 8am-5.30pm) Always busy with hungover backpackers, the breakfasts at this casual café are just the tonic to get the day started, even though it might be nearing lunchtime. If you've already done the brekky thing, the huge slabs of lasagne will do the trick for lunch.

Cappa's Cake & Ale (☎ 4946 5033; Pavilion Arcade, Shute Harbour Rd; mains \$10-21; ☞☞☞ 8am-8pm) In a small arcade off the main drag, this hectic café serves up breakfasts, burgers, pizza and more. If it can be wrapped, sandwiched, toasted or grilled you'll find it here. We heard good reports about the grilled fish.

Get it India (☎ 4948 1879; Shop 9, Beach Plaza, The Esplanade; mains \$16-18; ☞☞☞ 11.30am-late) Quick, uncomplicated and good. By all means eat at one of the plastic tables outside this small takeaway Indian café, but the idea is to grab a feed early, take it back to your room and dig in after you've hit the bars and pubs.

SELF-CATERING

If you're preparing your own food, there's the small and horribly crowded **Airlie Supermarket**

(277 Shute Harbour Rd), which is open daily and in the centre of town, and a larger supermarket in Cannonvale.

Drinking

Airlie Beach is a hard-drinking place, but it's also fun lovin'. People are here for a good time, not to cause trouble.

Paddy's Shenanigans (☎ 4946 5055; 352 Shute Harbour Rd; ☞☞☞ 5pm-3am) Paddy's has live music late at night, but before then it's a mellow place for a pint and a yarn.

The bars at **Magnums** (☎ 4946 6266; 366 Shute Harbour Rd) and **Beaches** (☎ 4946 6244; 356 Shute Harbour Rd), the two big backpackers, are always crowded, and everyone starts their night at one, or both, of them.

Entertainment

M@ss (☎ 4946 6266; 366 Shute Harbour Rd; ☞☞☞ 10pm-5am) The Gothic-inspired nightclub at Magnums plays crowd favourites and hosts foam parties.

Mama Africa (☎ 4948 0438; 263 Shute Harbour Rd; ☞☞☞ 10pm-5am) Huge dance floor and cool dance favourites keep this place rockin' all night.

Morocco's (☎ 4946 6446; Shute Harbour Rd; ☞☞☞ 10pm-late) Next door to, and affiliated with, Koala Beach Resort. There's rowdy dancing on a raised platform and theme nights.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The closest major airports are Hamilton Island (p290) and Proserpine (Whitsunday Coast; p279). **Whitsunday airport** (☎ 4946 9933), a small airfield 6km east of Airlie Beach, is midway between Airlie Beach and Shute Harbour. Half a dozen different operators are based here, and you can take a helicopter, a light plane or a seaplane out to the islands or the Reef.

Air Whitsunday Seaplanes (☎ 4946 9111; www.airwhitsunday.com.au) flies to Hayman and South Molle Islands. **Helireef** (☎ 4946 9102) and Air Whitsunday Seaplanes run joy flights over the Reef.

BOAT

Transfers between Shute Harbour and the islands are provided by **Fantasea** (☎ 4946 5111; www.fantasea.com.au; 11 Shute Harbour Rd, Jubilee Pocket); see the Getting There & Away sections for the individual islands for details. There are notice boards at the Whitsunday Sailing Club and Abel Point Marina showing when rides or crewing are available.

BUS

Greyhound (☎ 13 20 30; www.greyhound.com.au) and **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) buses detour off the Bruce Hwy to Airlie Beach. There are buses between Airlie Beach and all the major centres along the coast, including Brisbane (\$187, 19 hours), Mackay (\$33, 2¼ hours), Townsville (\$58, 4½ hours) and Cairns (\$116, 11 hours).

Long-distance buses stop on the Esplanade, between the sailing club and the Airlie Beach Hotel. Any of the booking agencies along Shute Harbour Rd can make reservations and sell bus tickets.

Whitsunday Transit (☎ 4946 1800) connects Proserpine (Proserpine Airport), Cannonvale, Abel Point, Airlie Beach and Shute Harbour. Buses operate from 6am to 10.30pm. Schedules are readily available from any tour agency or accommodation, and are also posted at the bus stops.

Getting Around

Airlie Beach is small enough to cover by foot, and all the cruise boats have courtesy buses that will pick you up from wherever you're staying and take you to either Shute Harbour or Abel Point Marina. To book a taxi, call **Whitsunday Taxis** (☎ 13 10 08); there's a taxi rank on Shute Harbour Rd, opposite Magnums.

There are several car-rental agencies in town:

Airlie Beach Budget Autos (☎ 4948 0300; www.airliebudgetautos.com; 285 Shute Harbour Rd) In the courtyard of Whitehaven Beachfront Holiday Units.

Avis (☎ 4946 6318; 366 Shute Harbour Rd)

Europcar (☎ 54946 4133; 398 Shute Harbour Rd)

Hertz (☎ 4946 4687; Whitsunday Wanderers Resort, Shute Harbour Rd)

Thrifty (☎ 4946 4300; 87 Shute Harbour Rd)

CONWAY NATIONAL PARK

The mountains of this national park and the Whitsunday Islands were once part of the same coastal mountain range, but rising sea levels after the last ice age flooded the lower valleys and cut off the coastal peaks from the mainland.

The road from Airlie Beach to Shute Harbour passes through the northern section of the national park. Several **walking trails** start from near the picnic and day-use areas, including a 1km-long circuit track to a mangrove creek. About 1km past the day-use area and on the northern side of the road, there's a

2.4km walk up to the **Mt Rooper lookout**, which provides good views of the Whitsunday Passage and Islands. Further along the main road, and up the hill towards Coral Point (before Shute Harbour), there's a pleasant 1km track leading down to Coral Beach and the **Beak lookout**. This track was created with the assistance of the Giru Dala, the traditional custodians of the Whitsunday area; a brochure available at the start of the trail explains how the local Aborigines used plants growing in the area.

There's bush **camping** (per person/family \$4.50/18) on the coast at Swamp Bay; access is only by foot.

Cedar Creek Falls & Conway Beach

To reach the beautiful Cedar Creek Falls, turn off the Proserpine–Airlie Beach road on to Conway Rd, 8km north of Proserpine. It's then about 15km to the falls; the roads are well signposted.

At the end of Conway Rd, 20km from the turn-off, is **Conway Beach**. A small coastal community on the shores of Repulse Bay and at the southern end of the Conway National Park, it consists of a few old houses, pleasant picnic areas along the foreshore and the **Conway Beach Whitsunday Caravan Park** (☎ 4947 3147; www.conwaybeach.com.au; 10 Daniels St, Conway Beach; camp sites \$24, cabins \$70-95; ♿), a friendly van park with a huge new campers' kitchen.

LONG ISLAND

Underrated Long Island has the best of everything. With three resorts, each with a different personality, this rugged island is suitable for everybody. It's about 11km long but not much more than 1.5km wide, and a channel only 500m wide separates it from the mainland. There are 13km of walking tracks and some fine lookouts, and day-trippers can use the facilities at Long Island Resort.

Activities

The **beaches** on Long Island are some of the best in the Whitsundays. The two northern resorts have a range of water-sports equipment. Long Island Resort has a wider selection, hiring out dinghies (per day \$99) and jet skis (per 20 minutes \$65) and offering water-skiing (per 20 minutes \$60) and parasailing (solo/tandem \$65/110). **Long Island Dive & Snorkel** (☎ 0417-161 998) has a range of courses, gear for hire and trips for certified divers.

Sea kayaking is a featured activity at the South Long Island Nature Lodge on the southern side of the island (guests only).

Sleeping & Eating

Long Island Resort (☎ 1800 075 125, 4946 9400; www.oceanhotels.com.au/longisland; d incl all meals \$260-380; ♿ ♿) A resort for everyone and, yep, the kids are more than welcome here. Sitting on Happy Bay at the north of the island, Long Island Resort is a comfortable, mid-range place that offers guests three levels of accommodation. There are some fabulous short walks around the island that take off from here, from the 600m stroll to Humpy Point to the 4.4km walk to Sandy Bay. There are plenty of activities to keep all age groups busy. The lodge units are small and austere, and bathroom facilities are shared; for the price, you are better off spending the extra to stay in the beachfront or garden rooms. Always check the internet or the agents in Airlie Beach for stand-by rates, as they can be significantly cheaper.

Peppers Palm Bay (☎ 1800 095 025, 4946 9233; www.peppers.com.au/palmbay; d \$460-1200; ♿ ♿) No phones, no TVs, no kids: Peppers guarantees relaxation and isolation. This intimate boutique resort houses a maximum of 42 guests in stylish comfort. The cabins, complete with swinging double hammock, sit around the pretty, sandy sweep of Palm Bay. The Platinum Suite has a wraparound deck and all the modern comforts you'd expect from such a hefty price tag. At the heart of the resort is a pool and a large, comfortable building that serves as the main dining area, bar and lounge.

South Long Island Nature Lodge (☎ 3839 7799; www.southlongisland.com; 5-night packages per person \$2950) This secluded lodge on Paradise Bay consists of spacious, waterfront cabins made from Australian hardwood, with high cathedral ceilings. There is no phone, no TV and no air-con, but the cabins are positioned to make the most of the sea breezes and the huge front window opens for magnificent views. The lodge is staffed by a friendly crew of just three – informality is the name of the game here – and the maximum number of guests is just 12. All meals, beer, wine and soft drinks are included in the tariff and served buffet style. There is a five-night minimum stay, no day visitors or children, and no motorised water sports, so you are

guaranteed peace and tranquillity. The tariff is inclusive of helicopter transfers from Hamilton Island, sailing tours and use of water-sports equipment.

Getting There & Away

Fantasea (☎ 4946 5111; www.fantasea.com.au) connects Long Island Resort to Shute Harbour by frequent daily services. The direct trip takes about 15 minutes, and costs \$27/18 per adult/child.

It's 2km between Long Island Resort and Peppers Palm Bay, and you can walk between them in about 25 minutes.

HOOK ISLAND

The second largest of the Whitsundays, the 53-sq-km Hook Island is predominantly national park and rises to 450m at Hook Peak. There are a number of good beaches dotted around the island, and Hook boasts some of the best diving and snorkelling locations in the Whitsundays. The resort itself is a no-frills, budget place. Many travellers come here enticed by the low prices and have left disappointed because it's not what they expected. If you want five-star luxury, don't come to Hook Island...try Hayman instead!

The southern end of the island is indented by two very long fjord-like bays. Beautiful **Nara Inlet** is a popular deep-water anchorage for yachts, and Aboriginal rock paintings have been found there. Hook has an old underwater observatory.

There are some wonderful camping opportunities in basic national-park **camping grounds** (per person/family \$4.50/18), which are located at Maureen Cove, Steen's Beach, Bloodhorn Beach, Curlew Beach and Crayfish Beach.

While it's basic, **Hook Island Wilderness Resort** (☎ 4946 9380; www.hookislandresort.com; camp sites \$45, d with/without bathroom \$150/120; ♿ ♿) is also the cheapest resort in the Whitsundays, and its other advantage is that there's great snorkelling just offshore. The simple, adjoining units each sleep up to six or eight people; the bathrooms are *tiny*. Tea and coffee facilities are supplied in each room, and there's a camp kitchen strictly for the use of campers only, plus a couple of barbecues. There are no dorm facilities anymore, but there are around 60 camp sites with a superb beachfront location.

Food is not a priority at the resort. The licensed **restaurant** (mains \$14-18) serves seafood, steak and pasta, and there is usually a vegetarian option on offer at night; snacks are available during the rest of the day and there is also the Barefoot Bar, which opens at noon.

Transfers to the resort are arranged when you book your accommodation. Return transfers are by regular tour boat. The **Voyager** (☎ 4946 5255) does a daily three-island cruise (Hook Island, Whitehaven Beach and Daydream Island; see p277) as well as return transfers to Hook (adult/child \$50/20). Transfers to other islands can be arranged. **Island Camping Connections** (☎ 4946 5255) or **Camping Whitsunday Islands** (☎ 4946 9330) can organise drop offs to the camping grounds for around \$150.

DAYDREAM ISLAND

Gorgeous little Daydream Island doesn't let her petite frame get her pushed to the back of the queue. At just more than 1km long and 200m wide, she is on the small side, but don't be fooled by her name. Daydream doesn't sit at the back of the class and stare out the window all day.

Daydream Island is a very popular day-trip destination. It's suitable for everybody, but especially couples and families. There is a wide range of water-sports gear (catamarans, kayaks) available for hire (free for resort guests). Daydream also offers a variety of motorised **water sports** for guests, including parasailing (\$65), jet-skiing (per 15/30 minutes \$49/89), and water-skiing (per 15/30 minutes \$49/89), which is big here.

A steep, rocky path, taking about 20 minutes to walk, links the southern and northern ends of the island. There's another short walk to the tiny but lovely **Sunlovers Beach**, and a concreted path leads around the eastern side of the island. And once you've done these walks, you've just about covered Daydream from head to foot.

Surrounded by beautifully landscaped tropical gardens, and with a stingray-, shark- and fish-filled lagoon running through it, the large (296 rooms) **Daydream Island Resort & Spa** (☎ 1800 075 040, 4948 8488; www.daydreamisland.com; 3-night packages \$990-1260; ♿ ♿) has tennis courts, a gym, catamarans, windsurfers and three swimming pools, all of which are included in the tariff. There are five grades of accom-

modation and most package deals include a buffet breakfast. There is a club with constant activities to keep children occupied and they will love the fish-feeding sessions held at the small coral reef pool near the main atrium. This is a large resort on a small island, so it's not the place to head if you're seeking isolation. It's much cheaper in low season, and keep an eye out for stand-by rates from the mainland.

Breakfast is served up buffet style at the Waterfalls Restaurant, which stays open all day, serving snacks, lunch and dinner. **Boathouse bakery** (light meals \$3-10) provides coffee, sandwiches and other lunchtime snacks. The casual **Fishbowl Tavern** (mains \$19-31; ♿ ♿) Mon, Wed & Fri) offers the usual pizza, steak, risotto and salad. More formal is **Mermaids** (mains \$24-35), which is on situated right on the beachfront.

In addition, the resort has three bars: Lagoon, which has nightly entertainment, Splashes Pool and Gilligans.

Fantasea (☎ 4946 5111; www.fantasea.com.au; 11 Shute Harbour Rd, Jubilee Pocket) connects Daydream Island to Shute Harbour by frequent daily services (one way adult/child \$27/18). Fantasea also does a three-island day-trip package (adult/child/family \$80/44/227), which also visits Long and Hamilton Islands.

SOUTH MOLLE ISLAND

South Molle Island offers an impressive array of short or long walks through gorgeous rainforest, making it an ideal destination for those wanting to put their legs to good use. The resort, which is decidedly nonglitzy, also has a nine-hole golf course, a gym, and tennis and squash courts. There is also a wide range of water-sports gear available for day-trippers to hire (nonmotorised water-sports equipment is free for resort guests). Of course, if relaxation is more your style, South Molle doesn't disappoint, with some superb beaches and a huge pool surrounded by inviting sun lounges.

Largest of the Molle group of islands at 4 sq km, South Molle is virtually joined to Mid Molle and North Molle Islands – indeed, you can walk across a causeway to Mid Molle. Apart from the resort area and golf course at Bauer Bay in the north, the island is all designated national park. There is some forest cover around the resort, and the trees

are gradually reclaiming the once overgrazed pastures. The island is crisscrossed by 15km of walking tracks and has some superb look-out points. The highest point is Mt Jeffreys (198m), but the climb up Spion Kop is also worthwhile.

The island is known for its prolific bird life. The most noticeable birds are the dozens of tame, colourful lorikeets and black currawongs. The endangered stone curlews are also common and rather intimidating. The beaches are reasonably good at high tide, but severe tidal shifts mean some time will be spent at the pool.

There are national-park **camping grounds** (per person/family \$4.50/18) located at Sandy Bay in the south and at Paddle Bay near the resort.

Full-board tariffs at **South Molle Island Resort** (☎ 1800 075 080, 4946 9433; www.southmolleisland.com.au; d \$240-360, full board \$360-440; ♿ ♿) include three buffet meals a day, and all tariffs include use of the golf course, tennis courts, nonmotorised water-sports equipment and nightly entertainment. The resort is far from luxurious and the rooms are pretty much your basic motel style, but they're clean, comfortable and functional.

Breakfast and lunch buffets are served in the main **Island Restaurant** (mains \$20-30); bistro-style dinners (steak, chicken and seafood dishes) are also served here. Friday is seafood night, with an extensive spread and live entertainment. The Discovery Bar is open until late and there's a small **café** (meals \$5 to \$20) that serves simple fare.

Backpackers can also get the Molle experience by cruising on the *Pride of Airlie*, which stops at South Molle for two nights on its three-day trip (adult \$329). The journey also includes Whitehaven Beach. Guests stay in upmarket dorm rooms about 500m from the main resort and have exclusive access to their own bar. Book through **Koala Adventures** (☎ 1800 466 444; www.koalaadventures.com) in Airlie Beach.

Cruise Whitsundays (☎ 4946 4662; www.cruisewhitsundays.com) has connections to South Molle from Abel Point Marina (adult/child \$26/17).

HAMILTON ISLAND

Hamilton Island can come as quite a shock for the first-time visitor. Swarms of people and heavy development make Hamilton seem like a busy town rather than a resort island. Although

this is not everyone's idea of a perfect getaway, it's hard not to be impressed by the sheer range of accommodation options, restaurants, bars and activities. The great thing about Hamilton is there's something for everyone here.

Sights & Activities

The sheer size of this resort means there are plenty of entertainment possibilities, which makes Hamilton an interesting day trip from Shute Harbour as you can use some of the resort facilities. The resort has tennis courts, squash courts, a gym, a golf driving range and a minigolf course. From **Catseye Beach**, in front of the resort, you can hire windsurfers, catamarans, jet skis and other equipment, and go parasailing or water-skiing. Among the other options are helicopter joy rides and game fishing.

A few dive shops by the harbour organise dives and certificate courses; you can take a variety of cruises to other islands and the outer reef. Half-day fishing trips cost around \$125 per person, with fishing gear supplied.

There are a few **walking trails** on the island, the best being from behind the Reef View Hotel up to Passage Peak (230m) on the north-eastern corner of the island. Hamilton also has daycare and a Clownfish Club for kids.

Sleeping

Hamilton Island Resort (☎ 137 333, 4946 9999; www.hamiltonisland.com.au; ♿ ♿ ♿) has options ranging from hotel rooms to self-contained apartments to penthouses. Rates listed are for one night although almost everyone stays for at least three nights, when the cheaper package deals come into effect. All bookings need to be made through the central reservations number.

Palm Terraces (d \$290) These rooms are in low-rise complexes with big balconies overlooking the garden.

Palm Bungalows (d \$315) These attractive individual units behind the resort complex are closely packed but buffered by lush gardens. Each has a double and a single bed, and a small patio.

Self-Catering Accommodation (d \$317-1245) There are several types of fully self-contained units, from standard to luxury. There's a four-night minimum stay.

Reef View Hotel (d from \$350-410) The large 20-storey, four-star hotel has 386 spacious rooms, mostly balconied; some have Coral Sea views, others garden views.

Whitsunday Holiday Apartments (d \$350-430) These serviced one- to four-bedroom apartments are on the resort side of the island.

Beach Club (d \$595) Flanking the main resort complex with its reception area, restaurants, bars, shops and pools, these 55 five-star rooms all enjoy absolute beachfront positions.

Eating & Drinking

RESORTSIDE

The following restaurants are within the main resort complex, but it's probably more fun strolling up and down the marina several times before deciding where to dine.

Toucan Tango Café & Bar (☎ 4946 8562; mains \$15-29; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Enjoy a casual pool-side breakfast or a lazy lunch at this cool café overlooking Cateys Beach. Go for dinner, or just settle in for a drink and nibble from the snack menu while listening to live jazz.

Beach House (☎ 4946 8580; mains \$39-49; ☺ lunch & dinner) Modern Australian cuisine forms the basis of the menu at the Beach House, which enjoys absolute beachfront location. It's Hamilton's signature restaurant. Dishes include tuna, eye fillet and spatchcock.

THE MARINA

These restaurants, all along the waterfront in what is known as Marina Village (or simply Harbourside), are independently run. There's also a supermarket—general store for those in apartments preparing their own meals.

Hamilton Island Bakery (☎ 4946 8281; ☺ 7am-4pm) The bakery has cabinets and fridges filled with fresh bread, sandwiches, great-looking pastries and delicious punnets of fresh fruit salad.

Ice Cream Parlour (☎ 4946 8620; ice creams \$4.30-9.50; ☺ 8am-5pm) Responsible for dirty little (and grown-up) faces for years, this busy kiosk serves all kinds of frosty delights.

Marina Deli (☎ 4946 8224; meals \$5.50-12; ☺ 7am-4pm) Simple, filling fare from croissants and muffins for breakfast to gourmet sandwiches, wraps and salads for lunch.

Marina Daze (meals \$8; ☺ from 5.30pm Sun) In a makeshift open-air setting, this very casual waterfront dining option serves just three dishes – swordfish wrap, steak sandwich and tandoori chicken wrap, plus sausage sandwiches (\$4) for the kids. Order your meal, buy a beer or wine and settle in for the live music.

Marina Tavern (☎ 4946 8839; mains \$14-20; ☺ lunch & dinner) Formerly the yacht club, this busy harbourside pub affords wonderful views of the marina. It's a great place for a decent pub feed or a drink. The T-bone steak (\$28.50)

will satisfy those with a hunger while the lagagne, chips and salad (\$19.50) will do the trick for anyone else. There's also a snack menu (\$6 to \$9) if you just feel like grazing over a cold drink.

Steakhouse (☎ 4946 8019; mains \$14-28; ☺ dinner Wed-Sun) Carnivores will be in their element. If it's dead animal, then it's cooked here. You just need to choose between the steak, lamb rump, ribs, lamb shanks or the huge chicken parma. Kids are looked after here with a good range of specially prepared meals, and the desserts are delectable.

Manta Ray Café (☎ 4946 8213; mains \$17-26; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) The food is popular here because it's simple and very tasty. The wood-fired gourmet pizzas are a favourite although the salt-and-pepper squid and the Spanish paella provide worthy competition.

Mariners Seafood Restaurant (☎ 4946 8628; mains \$26-38; ☺ dinner Mon, Tue & Thu-Sat) In a big, enclosed veranda overlooking the harbour, Mariners is both licensed and BYO. While the emphasis is on seafood, grills are also available; it's a stylish restaurant with a menu to match.

Romano's (☎ 4946 8212; mains \$28-35; ☺ dinner Thu-Jue) This is a relaxed Italian restaurant with a large enclosed deck built right out over the water. This is a great option if you're not sure where to go as it caters equally well for groups, couples and families.

Entertainment

Some of the bars in the resort and harbourside offer nightly entertainment and there's always **Boheme's NightClub** (Marina village; ☺ 9pm-late).

Getting There & Away

AIR

Hamilton Island airport is the main arrival centre for the Whitsundays. **Jetstar** (☎ 13 15 38; www.jetstar.com.au) has flights to/from Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com.au) has flights to/from Brisbane. **Island Air Taxis** (☎ 4946 9933) connect Hamilton with Airlie Beach

BOAT

Fantasea (☎ 4946 5111; www.fantasea.com.au) connects Hamilton Island marina (adult/child \$40/22) and airport (\$50/28) to Shute Harbour by frequent daily services. Cruise Whitsundays connects Hamilton Island airport and Abel Point Marina in Airlie Beach (adult/child \$49/27). Hamilton can be visited as part of

a three-island day-trip package (adult/child/family \$80/44/227) with Fantasea.

Getting Around

There's a free shuttle-bus service operating around the island from 7am to 11pm.

Everyone hires a golf buggy (per one/two/three hours \$45/55/60, all day \$70) to whiz around the island. They are available from the office near reception or from the Charter Base near the ferry terminal.

HAYMAN ISLAND

The most northern of the Whitsunday group, Hayman is just 4 sq km in area and rises to 250m above sea level. It has forested hills, valleys and beaches. It also has one of the most luxurious resorts on the Great Barrier Reef. The resort is fronted by a wide, shallow reef, which that emerges from the water at low tide.

Hayman is closer to the outer reef than the other islands, and there is good diving around its northern end and at nearby Hook Island. There are several small, uninhabited islands close to Hayman, and you can walk out to Arkhurst Island at low tide. Langford Island, 2km southwest, has some good coral around it, as do Black and Bird Islands nearby.

Activities

Resort guests have free use of catamarans, windsurfers, paddle skis, and tennis and squash courts. There's also a driving range for golf, a putting green and a well-equipped gym.

Hayman's exclusive spa complex, **Spa Chakra Hayman**, offers all the pampering you could possibly handle.

Hernando's Hideaway is a free kids club and crèche that keeps children and toddlers entertained. The resort has a dive shop and marine centre, and offers a range of diving and snorkelling trips to the Great Barrier Reef. Dinghies can be hired with fishing and snorkelling gear.

Bushwalks include an 8km island circuit, a 4.5km walk to Dolphin Point at the northern tip of the island, and a 1.5km climb up to the Whitsunday Passage lookout.

Tours

Air Whitsundays (☎ 4946 9111) offers several options for seaplane tours for resort guests. Destinations include a three-hour stop at Whitehaven Beach (\$290) and a three-hour reef adventure to Hardy Reef (\$365).

Sleeping

Hayman Great Barrier Reef (☎ 1800 075 175, 4940 1234; www.hayman.com.au; r \$580-3900; ☺ ☑ ☒ ☓) It's no wonder that this is one of the world's best hotels. If you want exclusive five-star comfort then Hayman is for you.

An avenue of stately 9m-high date palms leads to the main entrance, and with its 212 rooms, seven restaurants, four bars, a hectare of swimming pools, landscaped gardens and grounds, an impressive collection of antiques and arts, and exclusive boutiques, Hayman is certainly impressive. The rooms and suites have all the usual five-star facilities. If money is no object, the 11 lagoonside penthouses offer a resort-style relaxed ambience, but with all the luxurious trimmings of an international standard hotel, not to mention glorious balconies furnished with outdoor teakwood settings. Even the standard rooms in the pool wing are swish.

Eating & Drinking

Breakfast is served buffet-style in Azure, a relaxed indoor-outdoor restaurant with a great outlook over the beach.

There are quite a few restaurants, including **La Trattoria** (mains around \$28; ☺ dinner), a casual Mediterranean café with live music; the **Oriental** (mains around \$37; ☺ dinner), in a beautiful Japanese garden; and **La Fontaine** (mains around \$42; ☺ dinner), the most formal of the restaurants, with a Louis XIV-style dining room and classic French cuisine.

Not to be missed is the Chef's Table, a weekly behind-the-scenes look into the main kitchen with the head chef. It's a six-course banquet and costs \$245. Kids are not catered for...dress to impress.

Sunset cocktails are a must at the Beach Pavilion.

The Hayman wine cellar numbers more than 20,000 bottles of Australian and European wine, and La Fontaine has an additional 400 vintages.

Getting There & Away

Guests flying in to Hamilton Island are met by Hayman staff and escorted to one of the resort's fleet of luxury cruisers (one way adult/child \$205/102.50) for a pampered transfer to the resort. **Air Whitsunday Seaplanes** (☎ 4946 9111) provides a seaplane charter service from Hamilton Island (per plane \$725).

Flying is the only way to do day trips to Hayman. Check out **Air Whitsunday Seaplanes** (☎ 4946 9111; adult/child \$195/175).

LINDEMAN ISLAND

Sitting snugly at the southern end of the Whitsundays, pretty little Lindeman Island is far enough away from the hubbub of Hamilton Island and Airlie Beach to be 'remote', but compensates with an energy all its own. Club Med took over the resort in 1992 and while it's a little dated in appearance, a vibrant, youthful atmosphere seems to radiate from everywhere you go. The 8-sq-km island is mostly national park and while the resort will appeal to travellers of all ages, those who don't have, or don't want to share the island with, lots of kids should look elsewhere.

Activities

The resort boasts an archery range, an excellent golf course, tennis and all number of daily classes from power walking to aerobics, dance and stretching.

The usual range of **water-sports** equipment is available, and a **diving school** offers various dive courses and snorkelling trips. Children are also kept busy with all sorts of organised activities.

For a less strenuous experience, the **Club Med Spa** offers body pampering at an extra (hefty!) cost.

There is some excellent **walking** on the 20km of trails. A must is the 3.6km journey to the top of Mt Oldfield (210m) where you will be rewarded with stunning vistas of the Whitsundays.

Sleeping

Club Med (☎ 1800 258 2633, 4946 9333; www.clubmed.com; 3-night full-board packages per 2 people \$1788; ♿ ♿) It's all hustle and bustle at Club Med and it's no secret this resort will appeal to energetic types. However, it's not too difficult to slow the pace down if that's what you prefer. The GOs (that's what the staff call themselves – you're a GM) ensure there are plenty of activities to keep you entertained, and the famous kids club may well ensure you don't see the little ones all day (good news for most parents!). The accommodation serves a purpose, but don't expect luxury. Unless you want to hoof it up a mountain of steps, splash out a bit and ask for a resortside room.

Eating

All meals and drinks (yep, including alcohol – oh, those cocktails!) are included in the tariff. The Main Restaurant serves buffet-style breakfasts, lunches and dinners. The food is plentiful and varied, but the heaping plates of pastas, rice dishes, lasagnes etc can get a bit tiresome. We found the 'healthy' section of salads, vegetables, seafood and lean meat to be the best quality. Try to visit the pleasant Nicholson's restaurant, a smaller à la carte place, only open around two nights per week, at least once.

Entertainment

Every night there's a live show in the main theatre performed by the young and energetic GOs. It's great fun, but put it into perspective. These are not highly paid actors and dancers. They're just young people making a couple of bucks while travelling and it's all very amateur in a fun kind of way. Yep, it's corny, but that only adds to the appeal. You're likely to find yourself singing and dancing along. There's usually a live band from 6.30pm and at the 'disco' gets going from 10.30pm.

Getting There & Away

Club Med has its own launch that connects with flights from Hamilton Island and is included in your package.

WHITSUNDAY ISLAND

A trip to the Whitsundays is incomplete without basking on the pure-white silicon sand of stunning **Whitehaven Beach**. This dazzling 6km-long beach is one of the best beaches in Australia and has excellent snorkelling from its southern end.

Whitsunday Island itself is the largest of the Whitsunday group and covers 109 sq km and rises to 438m at Whitsunday Peak. There's no resort, but it has some fine bushwalking.

There are national-park **camping grounds** (per person/family \$4.50/18) at Dugong, Sawmill, Nari's and Joe's Beaches in the west, and at Turtle Bay and Chance Bay in the south; at the southern end of Whitehaven Beach; and Peter Bay in the north.

DINGO BEACH, HYDEAWAY BAY & CAPE GLOUCESTER

Back on the mainland, north of Airlie Beach, there's a lonely road leading to some lovely coastal retreats, where peace and tranquillity

(and fish) are virtually guaranteed. **Dingo Beach** is a quiet little place with an evocative name, set on a long sandy bay backed by low, forested mountains. True, nothing much happens here outside the odd 'one that got away' yarn, but it's a popular spot with families and the fishing fraternity. There's a pleasant, shady foreshore with picnic tables and barbecues, and a couple of interesting places to stay in the vicinity.

The only facilities are on the foreshore at the **Dingo Beach General Store**, which sells fuel, booze, takeaway meals, a small range of groceries and bait. Next door is the **Dingo Beach Hotel & Units** (☎ 4945 7153; 1 Deicke Cres; d \$95), a modest block of spacious two-bedroom, self-contained units with a very casual dining area replete with pool table and photos of fish.

There are two islands a little way off either end of the bay. **Gloucester Island** is to the north-west and **Saddleback Island** sits to the northeast. Both have small national-park **camping grounds** (per person/family \$4.50/18). **Dingo Beach Escape** (☎ /fax 4945 7215) offers day trips from Airlie Beach to Dingo Beach (\$80), which includes lunch and water sports. It also provides transfers to Saddleback (\$30 return) and Gloucester Islands (\$40), and rents out dinghies (\$15/75 per hour/day including fuel).

At secluded **Hydeaway Bay**, there's the friendly **Hydeaway Bay Caravan Park** (☎ 4945 7170; www.hydeawaybaycaravanpark.com.au; 414 Hydeaway Bay Dr; unpowered/powerd sites \$22/25), where shade is at a premium, but there are plenty of fishy conversations in the shop-kiosk. There's a \$2 per day air-con surcharge for powered sites. Further down the track are a couple of real surprises. **Cape Gloucester Eco-Resort** (☎ 4945 7242; www.capegloucester.com; d \$140-240; ♿ ♿) is an impeccable, modern, comfortable resort with spacious self-contained units (two-bedroom also available) and motel-style rooms facing the sandy beach. A 25m pool fronts the comfortable open-air bar and the **Oar** (mains \$21-24; ♿) lunch & dinner restaurant. You can borrow a glass-bottomed kayak or just swim in the 25m salt-water pool. It's a deservedly popular place and bookings are recommended. Pick-ups can be arranged from Whitsunday Coast (Proserpine) Airport. If you have your own boat, the resort has its own mooring and you can use the resort's facilities for \$20/70 per day/week. Contact the resort beforehand to receive a mooring allocation.

Also along the rough dirt track out to Cape Gloucester is an older, more understated (but

no less enjoyable) resort. **Montes Reef Resort** (☎ 4945 7177; d \$120-190) manages to capture a remote type of atmosphere, but is accessible by all vehicles. The spacious beachfront bungalows are designed to catch the breeze and enjoy brilliant views from the doorstep.

BOWEN

☎ 07 / pop 7850

Bowen's 15 minutes of fame came in May 2007 when the cast and crew of Baz Luhrmann's epic movie *Australia* set up shop here; filming began in May/June 2007 (see the boxed text, p294). The cast and crew were impressed with Bowen's low-key, unhurried atmosphere. You'll notice the sign 'Bowenwood' up on a hill as you approach town. It's quaint in a cheesy sort of way. Although the town itself holds little of interest to travellers (except those who are keen on fruit-picking between April and November), there are some stunning beaches and bays northeast of the town centre.

Information

Post office (nr Powell & Herbert Sts)

Tourism Bowen (☎ /fax 4786 4222; www.tourismbowen.com.au; ♿; 8.30am-5pm) About 7km south of Bowen on the Bruce Hwy. Look for the big mango.

Sights & Activities

Ask at the Tourism Bowen for a map of the streets used to film *Australia*. The movie was due to be released in October 2008.

For a spectacular view of the Coral Sea and the Whitsunday Islands, head up to **Flagstaff Hill**, overlooking Kings Beach and to the east of the town centre. Several walls and buildings around the centre of town are decorated with terrific **murals** depicting the town's history, painted by Queensland artists. There are currently 24 mural sites, most within the block made by Gregory, Powell, Herbert and George Sts. The town's early history is displayed at the **Bowen Historical Museum** (☎ 4786 2035; 22 Gordon St; adult/child \$4/2; ♿) 9.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri May-Sep, 9.30am-3.30pm Tue & Fri Jan & Apr-Dec, 10am-noon Sun year-round).

About 2km north of town are Bowen's **beaches**. At Queens Beach you can catch a movie at the 1948 **Bowen Summer Garden Cinemas** (☎ 4785 1241; Murroona Rd, Queens Beach), where you'll sit in the original canvas seats. Driving east around the sandy sweep of Queens Bay you come across a series of secluded coves and

THERESE SAAD

Therese Saad was an extra on Baz Luhrmann's epic film *Australia*. The movie was filmed mostly in Bowen in May and June 2007. The town was used in the film to portray Darwin in the 1930s. Starring Nicole Kidman, Hugh Jackman, Jack Thompson, Bryan Brown, David Gulpilil, Ben Mendelsohn and David Wenham, the cast reads like a *Who's Who* of Australian cinema and television. We spoke to Therese as she recalled her experience and the effect it had on the town:

So who did you play in the film? I played the part of an uptown girl...a high-society lady, if you like. It was an amazing once-in-a-lifetime experience.

What were the cast and crew like? Did they keep to themselves a lot? No, not at all, they were just normal Aussie people. Not one of them had a star's ego. They were lovely people, all of them. They loved Bowen. They were left to their own and weren't mobbed in the slightest. You could walk into the local supermarket and bump into Hugh or Nicole. They weren't precious at all.

So is Hugh Jackman as charming and good looking in real life as he appears on screen? Yes, yes, yes! Hugh joined the local gym and a lot of the young girls in the town decided it was time they joined as well!

What did the whole thing do for the town? We called it 'Bazmania'. We couldn't believe what it did for the town. On every level it was beneficial. It's something we'll cash in on for years to come. Around 25,000 people visited Bowen in the six- to eight-week period when the cast and crew were here.

A lot of locals were used as extras in the film. What a great experience for you all! It was funny because the film is set in the 1930s and people were a lot smaller back then. People looked after themselves, too. They dressed properly. People started treating each other a lot better – young people especially. Mannerisms started to change and it was an education for them.

Why do you think the cast and crew enjoyed filming in Bowen? It's a community with a lot of soul. It's very stabilised. It's definitely the best-kept secret of the Whitsundays.

bays, including the picturesque **Horseshoe Bay**. There's a stinger net at **Queens Beach**, providing safe year-round swimming. There's an impressive **coastal walking track** linking Horseshoe and Rose Bays.

Sleeping BUDGET

Bowen's hostels specialise in finding seasonal fruit- and vegetable-picking work for travellers. In season, budget accommodation can be full of pickers and any available cheap beds are far from salubrious.

Bowen Village Caravan Park (☎ 4786 1366; www.bvcp.com.au; 18540 Bruce Hwy; camp sites unpowered/powerd \$19/20, cabins \$60; ♿ ♿) About 2km from the town centre, this large park has two swimming pools, one of which is suitable for kids, and good facilities, although the camp kitchen is a little on the basic side.

Bowen Backpackers (☎ 4786 3433; fax 4786 1073; cnr Herbert & Dalrymple Sts; dm with fan/air-con \$25/26.50, d with air-con \$53; ♿) Has beds in four- and eight-bed dorms with cheaper weekly rates available.

Horseshoe Bay Resort (☎ 4786 2564; fax 4786 3460; Horseshoe Bay; powered sites \$26-30, d cabins \$55, self-

contained units \$70-98; ♿) You can hear the small waves lapping at Horseshoe Bay from this decent park, which is nestled among the granite boulders. It has good facilities, including a camp kitchen, and is convenient to the excellent Horseshoe Bay Café.

Coral Coast Caravan Park (☎ 4785 1262; fax 4785 1428; Soldiers Rd; camp sites \$31, 1-1/2-bedroom villas \$115/135; ♿ ♿) A small but delightful beachfront park with excellent amenities, gorgeous gardens and two swimming pools.

MIDRANGE

Bowen's midrange resorts are tucked into the beautiful bays that line the coastline to the northeast and stretch to Cape Edgecumbe. Cheaper weekly rates are available and there's usually a two-night minimum stay.

Whitsunday Sands Resort (☎ 4786 3333; www.whitsundaysandsresort.com; Horseshoe Bay; d \$84-145; ♿ ♿) Out on the headland of Cape Edgecumbe, this resort is in a pleasant setting, with access to several coves and beaches. The complex has motel-style rooms, self-contained units, a bar, a kiosk and a restaurant. Get in quick if you want one of the two spa units.

Rose Bay Resort (☎ 4786 9000; www.rosebayresort.com.au; 2 Pandanus St, Rose Bay; r \$130-230; ♿ ♿ ♿) You'll be happy here whether you choose the spacious studio units or the plush suites. Rooms are clean, stylish and modern, and with your own private beach access there may be no need to leave the resort, except to replenish self-catering supplies, which you can prepare in the large kitchen in your room and then enjoy on your balcony while watching the ocean greet the sand.

Eating

360 on the Hill (☎ 4786 6360; Flagstaff Hill; mains \$13-30; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Browse through the small interpretive centre and then take a seat outside at this brilliant café-restaurant perched proudly on top of Flagstaff Hill. There are amazing views that accompany the excellent seafood mains, including the wildly popular coconut king prawns. Breakfast is a casual, but no less impressive, affair.

Horseshoe Bay Café (☎ 4786 2565; Horseshoe Bay; mains \$14-25; ☺ 10am-10pm) If you walk away hungry from this busy foreshore eatery, then it's your own fault. The huge all-day breakfasts are popular and the simple yet substantial lunches include big burgers and hearty pizzas. The extensive menu also includes mango chicken burgers, garlic prawns and a range of vegetarian meals.

Central Hotel (☎ 4786 1812; 29 Herbert St; mains \$14-26; ☺ lunch & dinner) Bowen's pubs tend to cater to fruit pickers, but a few are worth a visit, including the Central, which delivers substantial meals.

Getting There & Away BUS

Long-distance buses stop outside **Bowen Travel** (☎ 4786 2835; 40 William St), where you can book and purchase bus tickets. **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 20 30; www.greyhound.com.au) and **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premierms.com.au) have frequent services to/from Rockhampton (\$87, eight hours), Airlie Beach (\$24, two hours) and Townsville (\$40, four hours). Premier's prices are cheaper, but services are less frequent.

TRAIN

Queensland Rail (☎ 13 22 32, 1300 13 17 22; www.traveltrain.com.au) runs the *Sunlander* and the *Tilt Train*, which stop at Bootooloo Siding, 3km south of the centre, *not* at the Bowen train station. An economy sleeper/seat on the *Sunlander* from Brisbane costs \$167/350.

Getting Around

Bowen Transit (☎ 4786 4414) runs local buses to Queens Beach, Rose Bay and Horseshoe Bay, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning, from near the post office.

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