

# CRUISE THE WHITSUNDAYS

There are at least  
74 good reasons to sail Down Under

Think of a sailing paradise and images of white beaches, secluded bays, clear water and lush tropical islands may well spring to mind. Those images probably bear an uncanny resemblance to the Whitsunday Islands off the eastern coast of Queensland in Australia. There are 74 islands in the archipelago with countless bays and inlets to explore.

One of the many things that makes the Whitsundays internationally famous is the colour of the sand. White silica beaches fringe the shore of the islands that were once the peaks of mountains before sea levels rose millions of years ago. To the east lies the Great Barrier Reef which encloses the Whitsundays. The reef, one of the world's greatest natural wonders, protects the islands from the ocean swell of the Pacific, ensuring relaxed sailing in azure waters.

The best known spot on the Whitsunday Islands is Whitehaven Beach, a vast expanse of sand that makes it the most photographed beach in Australia. It's a must-see but is also on the itinerary of every tripper boat in the area. For the adventurous sailor there is so much more to these islands and exploration is well rewarded. Only eight of the 74 islands are inhabited, leaving numerous beaches and bays as natural havens.

The spectacular sea life is not limited to the Great Barrier Reef and masks and snorkels are essential kit for any sailor. Some charter yachts are also equipped with scuba gear and there is plenty to see beneath the sea. Most spectacular are the humpback whales that visit the area every year between June and October and can be seen rocketing out of the water in spectacular breaches. Don't get too close and make sure that you don't come between a mother and her calf or the splash may be replaced with a smash. Another fascinating creature that only the fortunate will see is the dugong. This large marine mammal lives on sea grass and is an endangered species.

The Whitsundays is an area to explore at a gentle pace, stopping at such places as Plum Pudding Island, Hook Island and Butterfly Bay. Few non-Antipodean sailors are able to reach these wonderful waters in their own boats, but there are plenty of charter companies that can provide all sorts of craft, from small yachts that you can skipper yourself to racing catamarans that skim across the water with dozens of backpackers onboard.

However you choose to sail these waters, you can be certain that the memory will stay with you for a very long time.



category  
voyages and  
destinations

location  
Australia

difficulty  
moderate

time  
all year

tempted by this?  
try cruising the islands  
of Halong Bay