

Reef Time



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- Do Not Feed the Birds

The Henrys International Travel Newspaper

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Paradise Found



We left Melbourne on the Southern end of Australia bound for the Great Barrier Reef not really sure of what we would find. Our destination was the Whitsunday Islands the only place to stay within the marine park and as our plane started descending we could see the wonderful islands and reefs dotted across the ocean.

We stayed at Hayman Island which is a 5 star resort with all the amenities you can imagine. The resort operates 3 large motor yachts that are top of the line to ferry guests in from the airport on the main island so right off the bat you are amazed and impressed. Our room was pool front with direct

access to the 2 acre pool right off our balcony and it is very cool to walk out the door and hop in the pool.

They spared no expense build the resort and have 4 restaurants, 3 pools and a shopping complex that all have to be supplied and maintained from the mainland. They buried an 8 million dollar

submersible cable stretching 30 miles from the coast to supply power to the facility and built a desalinization plant for fresh water.

About a 10 minute boat ride you will find an atoll about 2 acres in size that they will drop you off at with some water and a first aid kit. The place feels like the movie *Castaway* except you have a ride home in a couple of hours and there are no bloody volley balls. Across the lagoon there is a sandbar that is around a 1,000 feet long that submerges a foot under water at high tide so you can walk on water like someone famous once did, what was his name.



Finding Nemo



Giant sea turtle keeping an eye on us.

The first day we took a trip around the island to a local reef to go snorkeling. Right away from the boat you could see the forests of coral through the clear blue water. Once you jump in an armada of small colorful fish converge upon you looking for food and continue to follow you around. The corals are brilliant and come in all colors and types from the brain to the antler corals growing on top of each other like an underwater rain forest. Hidden in between the corals are many types of creatures from slugs to shrimp and moray eels all finding shelter within the eco system. The bright colored butterfly fly and angel fish swim in between the corals like branches of trees showing off their intricate patterns. Large parrot fish and giant sea

turtles swim around the outer parts of the reef munching on the coral and sea grass.

The Great Barrier Reef is the largest living thing on earth covering more than 100,000 square miles and over 1,500 miles long. It is not until you dive in and see how much life there is within a 100 square feet that you realize just how massive the reef is. To put it in comparison is would stretch along the Pacific

Coast from the Mexican border to Vancouver, Canada and go 10 miles out to sea with every inch covered in coral and colorful fish. We did learn however through trial and error that most people wear lightweight wetsuits when they dive or snorkel to protect themselves against the many tiny jellyfish and small underwater biting bug like creatures called sea lice



Sting Rays May Sting

As the tide would recede from the bay in front of the resort the shallow waters would attract many



Sting Rays. They flap there large wing type fins and stir the sand so it falls over them making them hard to see as they hide and wait for prey. When they get frightened they take off revealing their size and color as the sand blows away.

For Maddie and I this time of day was Sting Ray hunting time when we

would go out like the crocodile hunter and sneak up on the strange fish. Making slow steps one after another you try to sneak up on them without being spotted.

The drawback is that you have a hard time seeing them and if you mess up – well you know what happened to the crocodile hunter.

Flying a Classic



On the islands if you need to get somewhere in a hurry the only choice is by air and without room for a runway it only leaves you with a seaplane. We needed to get back to Queensland so we decided to charter a Canadian made De Havilland Beaver seaplane. The plane is a classic vintage aircraft using a Pratt & Whitney radial engine and a set of oversized floats for bounciness and a cockpit made up of gauges similar to the ones used in WWII.

The seaplanes normally go to the boat ramp and roll out onto land to load the passengers but on our pickup a ferry was dropping off a cement mixer and the plane had to do a beach load. After getting our suitcases in and sitting down I looked over my shoulder to see

half the hotel on the beach with their cameras.

The pilot had to idle the plane out to a safe distance from the reef for safety and then opened up the throttle dumping gas into the cylinders. The pontoons cut through the water like a torpedo creating a very smooth ride for such a choppy



sea. The aircraft was heavy and the water creates a lot of drag so it took a good minute to reach enough speed to break free.

We climbed up slow at about 70mph to 1,000 feet and leveled off for a smooth 30 minute flight to the mainland. The view was immaculate with picture perfect puffy clouds floating endlessly over the blue tranquil sea. We started our descent to the small paved airstrip and lowered the small tires that pop out of the pontoons like roller skates. The problem is that I only know how to do a crash landing whenever I put on a pair of roller skates but today thankfully I was not the pilot in command.



"Beach loading the sea plane."

I, I, Captain



“Setting sail on the mighty S.S. Madison.”

What could be more dangers than to take some foreign tourist and send them out to sea in a sailboat with no instructions? I’m asking because I do not know the answer.

The resort had a bunch of small Catamaran sailboats that you could take out on the water free of charge so being opportunist we decided to take advantage of the situation. How hard can it be to sail a boat in the ocean with only two things to control, the rudder and the sail. Do you really need any experience to ride the wind like the Flying Dutchman, well maybe that is a bad example.

Once out at sea we realized that we might of

overlooked some important items like basic knowledge of sailing and boater safety. But today we were embarking on an adventure in our high performance cutter and we were willing to risk it all and test ourselves against the mighty sea or until lunch was ready.

Maddie had quite the time taking control of the rudder as the first mate of the ship and steering us around the bay. There is something special about going fast across the water without a motor harnessing only the power of the wind to move you.



Do Not Feed the Birds

Native to Australia is the cockatoo a large white parrot like bird that is found all over the country. They tend to be very opportunistic and will take advantage of any situation

involving food.

We decided to go eat some potato chips on the balcony and enjoy the air not knowing we were under surveillance from

the local cockatoo colony. Before you know it a single bird lands close by to perform a planned reconnaissance mission for the others and when it looks safe calls in the attack. Then from all directions the cockatoos start coming in for landings and start to squawk for us to share our bounty of chips. I guess that is why it said “do not feed the birds” everywhere in the hotel.



“Looking for a handout.”

