

Pacific **Family Time**

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QUEENSLAND

QUEENSLAND

An island to suit
everyone's tastes

TANGALOOMA ISLAND RESORT



Holidays in the Pacific are all about the beach. We love to swim, snorkel, sail and surf, or sunbathe. So when you tell the kids you're going to fly on a floatplane or take a boat to a beach with lots of really white sand, they may well mutter, "Whatever." But when they see Whitehaven Beach in the Whitsunday Islands they will marvel at its pure, white sand. It feels like talcum powder, as it's made of silica, not coral or shell. Even better, the area behind the beach is untouched. Climb up to the Hill Inlet lookout to view the swirling patterns of sand and turquoise water and the surrounding islands.



Queensland has lots of fabulous beaches on the islands that lie just off the coast. They regularly score on top ten lists, and you can rely on the weather being warm and almost always sunny, and up north, there's easy access to the magnificent tropical underworld of the Great Barrier Reef.

It's close to New Zealand, and there are heaps of economical flights-and-accommodation deals, as well as options for those who can afford to splash out. And then there's the stretch of beaches of the Gold Coast itself, with legendary Surfers Paradise leading the way.



THE WHITSUNDAYS

You and your family will be amazed at the palate of brilliant colours of The Whitsundays. The sea is so blue because the fine sediment in the water scatters the sunlight. Then there's the lush green rainforest, the enticing beaches and the clear blue skies. Your smartphone camera may not do it all justice, as you'll want a wide-angle lens to get it all in.

There are 74 islands in the Whitsunday Group, and together they form the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. Airlie Beach on the mainland is the vibrant hub and departure point.

Several islands have large resorts, offering a wide variety of accommodation and activities.

There's diving to suit every level, from snorkellers happy to paddle on the surface and look down on the amazing spectrum of marine life, to challenging swim-throughs and caves for experienced scuba divers, who should bring their certificates with them.

Want something more active to do together? Book to go on the Ngaro Sea Trail Great Walk, crossing the South Molle, Hook and Whitsunday Islands on foot, and the narrow sea channels on a kayak you can hire at Shute Harbour. You will all need to have had some sea kayaking experience and be fit. Camping is available at eight areas on the three islands.

Hamilton Island

The first thing everyone will want to do is get out onto the Great Barrier Reef to experience the eye-opening tropical underwater life passing right under your noses. There are half or one-day trips for snorkellers and scuba divers, some of them to isolated parts of the reef where few people venture to look.

There's heaps to do on the island as well. Hire a couple of golf buggies and stop off wherever you like. The Resort Centre is the island's focal point, with its restaurants, shops, cafés and a swimming pool. If it's raining, take an art class, even if you've only ever picked up a paintbrush to paint your house. If that sounds too quiet, go-kart racing and offroad adventure tours will satisfy the motor enthusiasts in the family. There are tennis courts and a wildlife reserve, and youngsters can hang out at their own Clownfish Club.

With all the restaurants, cafés and takeaways, Dad and Mum will have to make some executive decisions on where to eat. And look out for kid's eat free deals for children up to the age of 12. Or stock up at the IGA, the local supermarket.

Daydream Island

There's always a safe, sheltered swimming spot on Daydream Island where everyone can just relax. You don't have to go anywhere, as there are all the watersports you could wish for, including sailboarding, jetskiing, and parasailing for those with a head for heights.

When the Daydream Island Resort opens early next year following a major rebuild it will be a new tropical haven for families.

The Living Reef and education centre will teach everyone about the Great Barrier Reef and what they can do to help. There will also be a four-metre deep underwater viewing area and a turtle rehabilitation centre.

There's also a rainforest walk with a viewing platform. Children can escape to the Kids Club and their own playground, and those aged up to 12 can stay and eat free.



TROPICAL NORTH QUEENSLAND ISLANDS

Lizard Island

Take the kids for a climb to the top of Lizard Island and you can tell them this is exactly the scene that Captain James Cook surveyed to plan a safe passage out to open sea. Yes, it's that kind of place. And the lizards that the good ol' captain named the island after are still there, mainly yellow spotted monitors.

There's a coral research station and the luxurious Lizard Island Resort is literally on the reef.

As well as all the usual great Barrier Reef activities, the island is very close to Cod Hole, one of the best-known diving sites in the world. Divers can watch huge potato cod fish weighing 25 kilos and more being fed.

Magnetic Islands

Just over the horizon from Townsville are the Magnetic Islands, which draws families who want to spend their holiday doing something different from the usual beach activities. The locals call them the Maggie Islands.

There's a national park and bird sanctuary, and kids who are keen on war relics will enjoy clambering over the remains of the Second World War gun battery and observation posts.

The island is also a great fishing spot, and the anglers in the family will love spending an afternoon catching decent-sized giant trevally, coral trout and red emperors.



HAMILTON ISLAND



HAMILTON ISLAND



DAYDREAM ISLAND



SOUTHERN GREAT BARRIER

Heron Island

Nature-lovers should flock to Heron Island. It's a World Heritage marine national park, so all the plants and animals are protected. Herons are only one of the species that make up the rich bird life here. Look out for the terns and shearwaters.

January to March is a great time to visit, as the bird season is at its peak, and you can see young turtles scuttling furiously across the sand toward the sea just after they've hatched.

There are lots of great spots for divers and snorkellers, several of which are just a short 15-minute boat ride away.

The resort has been built so nothing is higher than the palm trees, and you have to be a guest there in order to experience the reef.

Lady Elliott Island

If your family vacation doesn't allow time to stay on an island, Lady Elliott Island is a great option for families who at least want to say they've visited the reef. The day will include a scenic flight, all your gear, a buffet lunch and time to snorkel straight off the beach. Novices will love the lagoon, as they can follow an underwater trail, while more experienced divers will find manta rays, dolphins and whales on the western coast.

Parents can use the visit to teach children to be part of the Be Pest Free programme by encouraging them to check all their belongings for seeds, soil, ants and other insects. For those who stay over at the eco-resort, everyone can do their part to help keep the island pristine.



FAMILY FAVOURITES

Hamilton Island heaven.

Family travel is a big part of life for Australian based travel blogger Sarah Knight. Her blog www.bytheseawiththree.com has taken her and family around the world, but in this case they stayed closer to home – and loved every minute of it.

Why did you choose this destination for your family holiday?

Hamilton Island has always been on my must-see list but other destinations seemed to take pride of place. I can't believe at 40 I have just visited for the first time. It is absolutely beautiful. So easy to get to as well; a short flight from Melbourne followed by a five-minute shuttle bus ride and we were at our hotel! Too easy.

How many times has your family been there?

This was my first visit. However, hubby worked on Hayman Island about 20 years ago so had been many times before. He really noticed the changes since then, though; leaps and bounds ahead!

Where did you stay, and why?

We chose to stay at the Reef View Hotel, mainly for its location directly across from Catseye Beach, and the interconnecting family rooms, which were ideal for our clan of five!

How old are your children?

We have three active boys aged three, seven and nine years old.

What did they love most about Hamilton Island?

The boys absolutely loved all the pools! Guests of the Reef View have access to four different pool options - one at the resort and three along the beach. They loved pool-hopping to practise their dives/bombs in each one. Secondly, Catseye Beach was a hit. We had complimentary access to everything from snorkel sets to catamarans. So many options and so much to do! Plus, as the tide went out each day we'd hunt for hermit crabs - loads of fun!

What did you love most about the island?

My favourite day was the morning I gave my hubby "Dad duty" and tackled the Passage Peak hike. It's 45 minutes uphill, with plenty of steps (and hydration stops!) But the reward at the top was utter bliss ... 360 degree views across the Whitsunday Islands! What a sight, and a day to remember.

What are your top tips for taking a family away here?

1. Pre-book your day tours early, especially during peak season.
2. Utilise the Kids Eat Free policy for dinner to save some serious holiday spending! The hotels will advise which ones offer the free meals.
3. The Clownfish Club and Babysitting services will come in handy if you want to tackle a hike, or enjoy a romantic dinner.
4. On rainy days, the Resort Centre has many activities available, including tenpin bowling and free movies.



Sarah and the family



What were your top three family activities?

1. The day tour with Cruise Whitsundays over to Whitehaven Beach. It's only 30 minutes from Hamilton Island Marina and the crew are thoroughly entertaining. You'll enjoy the clearest, sparkling water you've ever seen and the whitest sand you'll ever walk on, like talcum powder underfoot. It's incredibly breathtaking.
2. If you've got time, take another day trip to Hardy Reef for some Great Barrier Reef action! It's well organised, and you can do everything from spotting fish to deep-sea diving. They also offer overnight camps on the pontoon for families with children aged 15 years and over.
3. Hire a golf buggy and explore the island. They are less expensive if you hire them for 24 hours. Visit One Tree Hill at sunset to enjoy the burnt orange and bright pink sky behind the silhouette of the Whitsunday islands. Magic!



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