

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 dance over your skin as the sun warms you on a tropical island. Anticipate the throbbing nightlife and international cuisine at Airlie Beach.

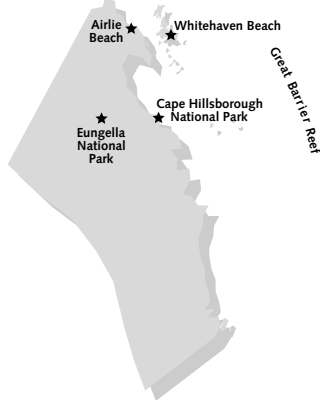
The Whitsundays is not at all overhyped. If you can't enjoy yourself here, you don't have a pulse. And yet, the area is not all about the Whitsunday Islands themselves. What, there's more?

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 Whitsunday Coast and prepare for a jealous response and cries of 'Can I come too?'. You've chosen wisely.

HIGHLIGHTS

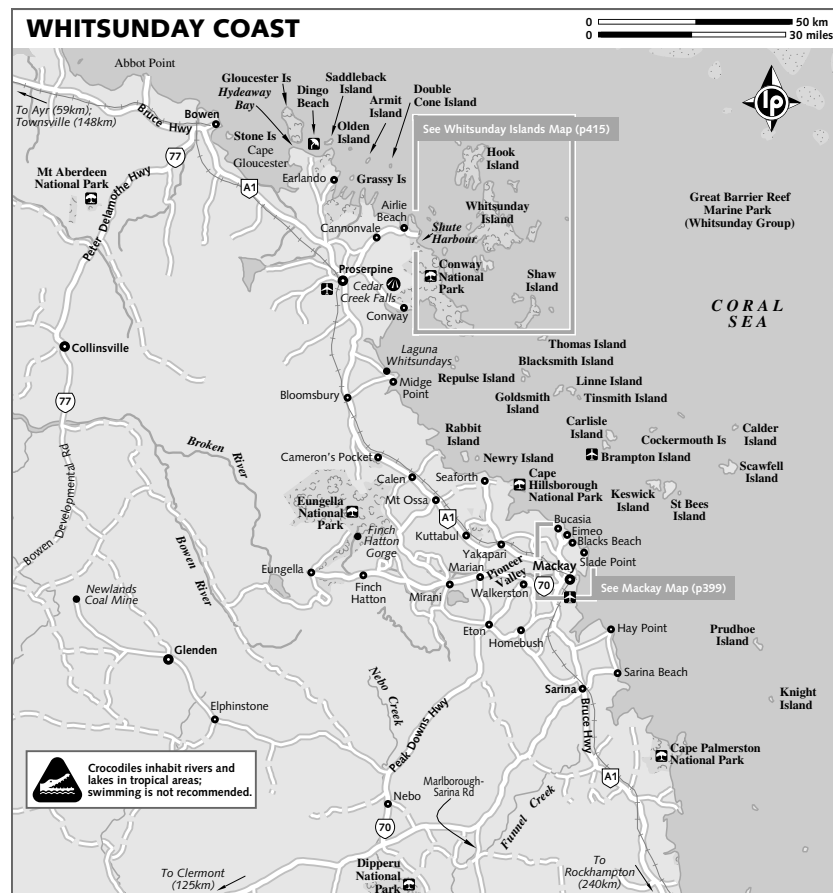
- Being dazzled by the bright-white silicon sand at stunning **Whitehaven Beach** (p420)
- Gliding on top of the bright-blue ocean on a cruise to a secluded snorkelling spot on the **Great Barrier Reef** (p407)
- Waiting patiently for a glimpse of a shy platypus and walking in the misty rainforest at **Eungella National Park** (p404)
- Sharing the beach at dusk with the local kangaroos at ruggedly beautiful **Cape Hillsborough National Park** (p406)
- Hooking up with other travellers and planning a cruise trip over a beer at fun lovin' **Airlie Beach** (p410)



TELEPHONE CODE: 07

www.queenslandholidays.com.au/whitsundays/index.cfm

www.whitsunday.com



Getting There & Away

AIR
Mackay has a major domestic **airport** (www.mackayairport.com.au), and **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) have regular flights to/from the major centres. **Tiger Airways** (☎ 03-9335 3033; www.tigerairways.com.au) flies to Mackay from Melbourne.

Jetstar and Qantas have frequent flights to Hamilton Island, from where there are boat/air transfers to the other islands. All three 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.

BOAT

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

BUS

Greyhound (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) and **Premier** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) have coach services along the Bruce Hwy with stops at the major towns. They detour off the highway from Proserpine to Airlie Beach. For details see the relevant towns and cities.

TRAIN

Queensland Rail (www.traveltrain.com.au) has services between Brisbane and Townsville/Cairns

passing through the region. For details see the relevant towns and cities.

SARINA TO PROSERPINE

SARINA

☎ 07 / pop 3290

In the foothills of the Connors Range, Sarina is a service centre for the surrounding sugarcane farms and home to CSR's Plane Creek sugar mill and ethanol distillery. The **Sarina Tourist Art & Craft Centre** (☎ 4956 2251; Railway Sq, Bruce Hwy; ☎ 9am-5pm) showcases locally made handicrafts and assists with information.

Take a tour of a minisugar mill at **Sarina Sugar Shed** (☎ 4943 2801; www.sarinasugarsshed.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.

The town centre straddles the Bruce Hwy (which becomes Broad St through town) and boasts a couple of pubs and cafés, a bakery and a fruit-and-vegetable shop. The **Tramway Motel** (☎ 4956 2244; fax 4943 1262; 110 Broad St; s/d \$80/95; ☎, ☎), north of the centre, has clean and bright units. For a dining experience with a difference, head to the **Diner** (☎ 4956 1990; 11 Central St; mains \$4-6; ☎ 4am-6pm Mon-Fri, 4-10am Sat), a rustic roadside shack that has served tucker to truckies and cane farmers for decades. 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.

AROUND SARINA

A short drive east from Sarina there are a number of low-key beachside settlements, where the clean, uncrowded beaches and mangrove-lined inlets provide excellent opportunities for relaxing, fishing, beachcombing and spotting wildlife such as nesting marine turtles.

Sarina Beach

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.

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

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

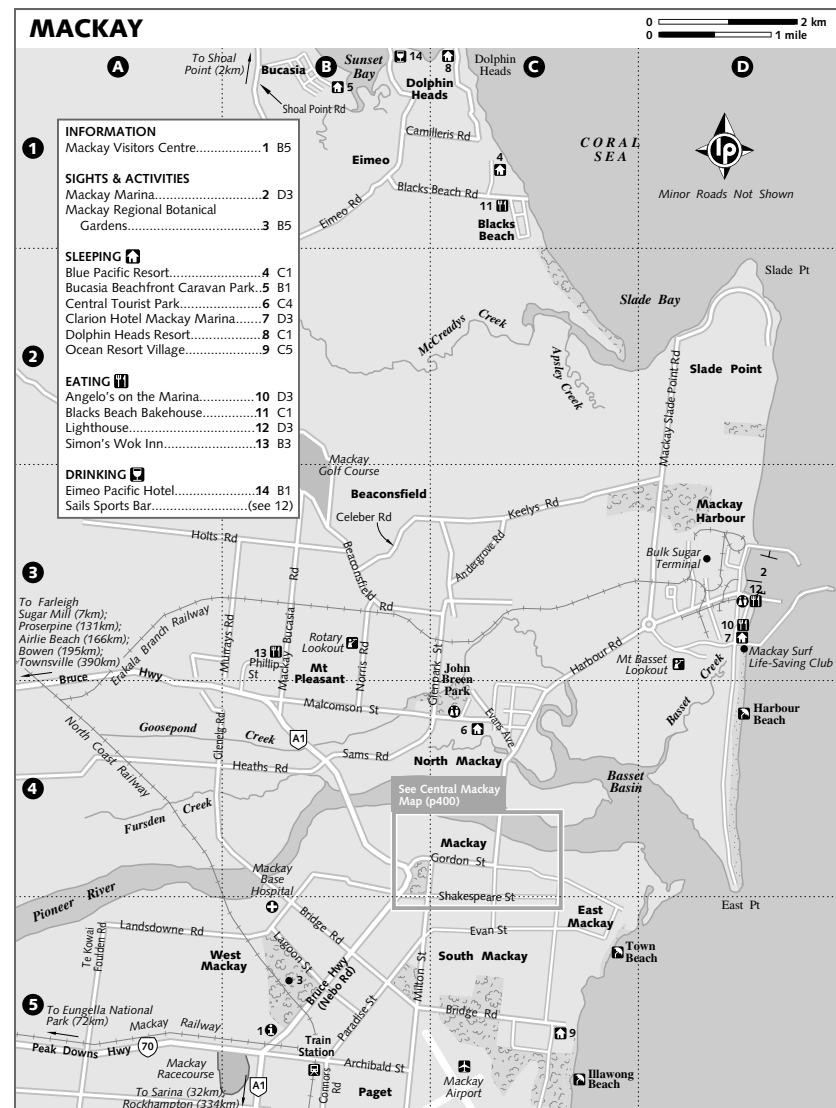
☎ 07 / pop 66,880

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 that drift in and out of town and the backpackers that 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.

But while Mackay is still sleepy enough to play the part of a rural country town, it's big enough to enjoy a solid infrastructure and modern facilities. It's only a 1½-hour drive to the Whitsundays, a short flight to Brampton Island and a scenic drive among the sugarcane 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.

Orientation

Mackay's city centre is compact, with the main streets laid out in a grid south of the broad Pioneer River. Victoria, Wood and Sydney Sts are the places to go for restaurants, bars and pubs. The train station, airport, botanic



gardens and visitors centre are about 3km south of the city centre.

Sydney St takes you across Forgan Bridge to North Mackay, the city's newer suburbs and the northern beaches. Mackay Harbour, 6km northeast of the centre, is dominated by a massive sugar terminal, while the adjacent marina has a select offering of waterfront restaurants.

Information

Mackay City Library (Map p400; ☎ 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 visitors centre (Map p399; ☎ 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.

Post office (Map p400; ☎ 13 13 18; Sydney St) Near the corner of Gordon St.

QPWS (Map p400; ☎ 4944 7800; cnr River & Wood Sts; per person/family \$4.50/18)

Town Hall Visitor Information Centre (Map p400; ☎ 4944 5888; townhall@mackayregion.com; 63 Sydney St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat & Sun)

Sights & Activities

Artspace Mackay (Map p400; ☎ 4957 1722; www.artspacemackay.com.au; Gordon St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) is a regional museum and venue for local and visiting exhibitions and artists.

Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens (Map p399; ☎ 4952 7300; Lagoon St; admission free) is an impressive 'work in progress' 3km south of the city. The 33-hectare site includes a **Tropical Shade Garden** (☎ 8.45am-4.45pm).

Mackay's lovely collection of **Art Deco buildings** owes much to a powerful cyclone in 1918 that flattened many of the town's earlier buildings. Enthusiasts should pick up a copy of *Art Deco Mackay* from the Town Hall Visitors Centre.

There are good views over the harbour from **Mt Basset** (Map p399), and at **Rotary Look-**

out (Map p399) in North Mackay. **Mackay Marina** (Map p399) is a pleasant place to wine and dine with a waterfront view, or to simply picnic in the park and stroll along the breakwater.

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 (see p403 for details).

The best option near town is **Harbour Beach** (Map p399), 6km north of the centre and just south of the Mackay Marina. The beach here is patrolled and there's a foreshore reserve with picnic tables and barbecues.

Mackay has followed in the footsteps of other Queensland towns, such as Airlie Beach and Cairns, with the construction of its own lagoon near Canelands Shopping Centre. **Bluewater Lagoon** (Map p400) was being built at the time of writing and will provide safe, stinger-free swimming.

Each year, the **Wintermoon Festival** (www.wintermoonfestival.com) is held north of Mackay around May/June. It features local and interstate musicians.

RUN FOR COVER

In February 2008 Mackay was hit by lashings of wind and rain that resulted in catastrophic floods. In three hours on 15 February, 625mm of rain was dumped on the city, causing chaos. Homes, schools and businesses were evacuated as the Pioneer River burst its banks and sent people scurrying for cover. Overwhelmed sewage stations overflowed into almost 200 homes. The city centre was the worst affected area. While most businesses were expected to recover, some listed in this section may still be feeling the effects of the damage by the time you read this.

Tours

Farleigh Sugar Mill (off Map p399; ☎ 4959 8360; adult/child/family \$20/12/55; 2hr tours 1pm Mon-Fri Jun-Nov) In the cane-crushing season you can see how the sweet crystals are made. Learn all about the history, production and technology, but dress prepared for a working mill, which means long sleeves, long pants and enclosed shoes. The mill is 10km northwest of Mackay.

Jungle Johno Eco Tours (☎ 1800 611 953, 4951 3728; bookings@larrikinlodge.com.au; tours adult/child \$75/40) The elusive platypus is the pot of gold at end of this rainbow. You'll be taken deep into the national park to spot these shy, amphibious creatures in their natural habitat. The seven-hour day trips, operating from Larrikin Lodge (right), include Finch Hatton Gorge and are a good way to see the best bits of Eungella and surrounds in one day. The popular tour includes pick-up, morning tea and lunch.

Mackay Water Taxi & Adventures (☎ 4942 7372, 0417-073 969; tjpic@mcs.net.au) Offers fishing charters (from \$170 per person), day trips to Keswick and St Bee's Islands (from \$140) and snorkelling and diving trips to the Great Barrier Reef and the Whitsunday and Cumberland Island groups. Trips leave from the marina.

Reeforest Adventure Tours (☎ 1800 500 353; www.reeforest.com) The day-long Platypus & Rainforest Eco safari (per person \$105) explores Finch Hatton Gorge and visits the platypuses of Broken River. It includes lunch at a secluded bush retreat near the gorge and an interpretive walk. The tour also departs from Airlie Beach (\$130).

Sleeping BUDGET

There are plenty of motels strung along busy Nebo Rd, south of the centre. The budget options (around \$50 for a double) post their prices out front and tend to suffer from road noise.

Central Tourist Park (Map p399; ☎ 4957 6141; Malcolms St, North Mackay; unpowered/powered sites \$20/24, cabins \$35-45, villas \$55; ☎) Rows of cabins (many with bathrooms) make this park, about 2km north of the centre, rather boring, but it's an inexpensive option relatively close to the city and accessible by buses 5 and 6. The villas, with bathroom, TV, fridge and air-con, are brilliant value, although this part of town is not anything to get as enthusiastic about.

Larrikin Lodge (Map p400; ☎ 1800 611 953, 4951 3728; www.larrikinlodge.com.au; 32 Peel St; dm \$21, tw with/without air-con \$50/48; ☎) In a wonderfully quiet part of town, but close enough to all the action, this big old house oozes atmosphere. You'll feel like a guest here, not just another face passing through. The owners operate Juggle Johno Eco Tours (left) and will pick you up from the bus terminal if you ring ahead.

Gecko's Rest (Map p400; ☎ 4944 1230; www.geckosrest.com.au; 34 Sydney St; dm/s/d/f \$22/35/50/80; ☎) Bustling and busy, Gecko's almost bursts at the seams with adventurous travellers stopping over on their way up north or down the coast. The four-bed dorms all have a small fridge, the kitchen is clean and modern and there's a huge rooftop balcony area.

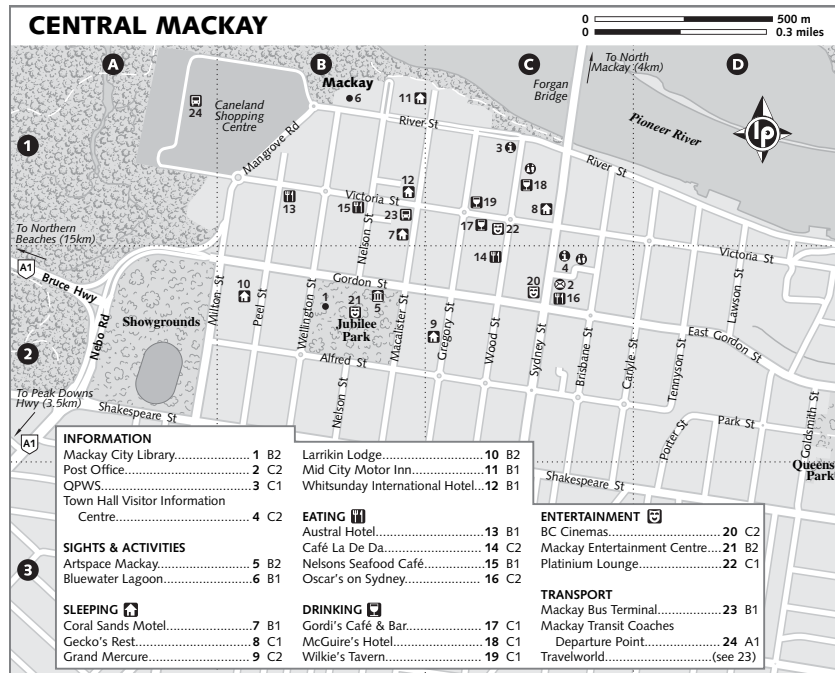
Whitsunday International Hotel (Map p400; ☎ 4957 2811; fax 4951 1785; 176 Victoria St; s/d \$75/90; ☎) The motel-style rooms here are decent enough, central and well priced although a tad on the small side. The bar downstairs facing Victoria St is probably not a place you'd want to linger for too long.

MIDRANGE

Ocean Resort Village (Map p399; ☎ 1800 075 144, 4951 3200; www.oceanresortvillage.com.au; 5 Bridge Rd, Illawong Beach; apt \$85-95, 2-bedroom apt \$130; ☎) This is a good-value beachside resort comprising 34 self-contained apartments (studio, and one- and two-bedroom) set amid lush, tropical gardens in a cool, shady setting with two pools, barbecue areas and half-court tennis.

Coral Sands Motel (Map p400; ☎ 4951 1244; www.coral-sandsmotel.com.au; 44 Macalister St; s/d \$95/105; ☎) One of the better midrange options in Mackay, the Coral Sands boasts ultrafriendly management and large rooms in a central location. 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 p400; ☎ 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.

TOP END

Grand Mercure (Map p400; ☎ 4969 1000; www.mackaygrandmercure.com.au; 9 Gregory St; r \$170, ste \$235; 🍷 🍷 🍷; wi-fi) 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 p399; ☎ 1800 386 386, 4955 9400; www.mackaymarinahotel.com; Mulherin Dr, Mackay Harbour; d \$175-330; 🍷 🍷 🍷; wi-fi) 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.

Eating

RESTAURANTS

Angelo's on the Marina (Map p399; ☎ 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 p400; ☎ 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.

our pick Simon's Wok Inn (Map p399; ☎ 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 p399; ☎ 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

Nelson's Seafood Café (Map p400; ☎ 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 as big as squash balls and the seafood fried rice and assorted salads are mouth-watering.

Oscar's on Sydney (Map p400; ☎ 4944 0173; cnr Sydney & Gordon Sts; mains \$9-16; 🍷 7am-10pm Tue-Sat, to 9.30pm Sun & Mon) The delicious *poffertjes* (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 sweetcorn and capsicum frittata with smoked salmon and grilled asparagus (\$14.50) may just hit the spot.

Café La De Da (Map p400; ☎ 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.

Drinking

Sails Sports Bar (Map p399; ☎ 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.

Gord's Café & Bar (Map p400; ☎ 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 p400; ☎ 4957 7464; 15 Wood St) Originally built in 1882, but demolished in 1938 and rebuilt, this big mustard-coloured building has good outdoor street-side seating.

Wilkie's Tavern (Map p400; ☎ 4957 2241; cnr Victoria & Gregory Sts) Usually has someone strumming a guitar on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights.

Entertainment

Platinum Lounge (Map p400; ☎ 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.

Cinema and theatre options:

BC Cinema (Map p400; ☎ 4957 3515; 30 Gordon St; adult/child \$14.50/10.50) This complex screens all the latest flicks.

Mackay Entertainment Centre (Map p400; ☎ 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.

Getting There & Away

Located at the long-distance bus station, **Travelworld** (Map p400; ☎ 4944 2144; roseh@mkytworld.com.au; cnr Victoria & Macalister Sts; 🍷 7am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat) handles air, bus and train tickets and can help with transport connections.

AIR

The airport is about 3km south of the centre of Mackay.

Jetstar (☎ 13 15 38; www.jetstar.com.au) Flights to/from Brisbane and Sydney.

Qantas (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au) Direct flights most days between Mackay and Brisbane.

Tiger Airways (☎ 03-9335 3033; www.tigerairways.com.au) Direct flights between Mackay and Melbourne.

Virgin Blue (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com.au) To/from Brisbane with flights connecting with services to several major centres.

BUS

Buses stop at Travelworld, where tickets can also be booked.

Greyhound (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au)

Travels up and down the coast. Sample one-way adult fares and journey times are: Airlie Beach (\$33, two hours), Townsville (\$81, 6½ hours), Cairns (\$139, 13 hours), Rockhampton (\$60, 4½ hours), Hervey Bay (\$128, 11 hours) and Brisbane (\$164, 16 hours).

Premier (☎ 13 34 10; www.premierms.com.au) Cheaper but not as many services as Greyhound. Sample fares are: Airlie Beach (\$21), Cairns (\$103), Rockhampton (\$37) and Brisbane (\$120).

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) have counters at the airport. **Mackay Transit Coaches** (Map p400; ☎ 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. 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

Mackay's Northern Beaches

The coastline north of Mackay is made up of a series of headlands and bays sheltering small residential communities with holiday accommodation.

At **Blacks Beach** the beach extends for 6km, so stretch those legs and claim a piece of Coral Sea coast for a day. If you are just passing through, you can grab a quick lunch or coffee at **Blacks Beach Bakehouse** (Map p399; ☎ 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 p399; ☎ 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.

At the north end of Blacks Beach is **Dolphin Heads**, where you can stay at the four-star **Dolphin Heads Resort** (Map p399; ☎ 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.

North of Dolphin Heads is **Eimeo**, where the **Eimeo Pacific Hotel** (Map p399; ☎ 4954 6105; Mango Ave, Eimeo) crowns a headland commanding magnificent Coral Sea views. It's a great place for a beer.

Bucasia is across Sunset Bay from Eimeo and Dolphin Heads, but you have to head all the way back to the main road to get up there. **Bucasia Beachfront Caravan Resort** (Map p399; ☎ 4954 6375; www.bucasiabeach.com.au; 2 The Esplanade; caravan sites \$29-33, cabins without bathroom \$65, with bathroom \$80-90; ♿) has en-suite cabins right on the beach.

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 (right), 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.

About 27km west of Mirani is the turn-off for Finch Hatton Gorge, part of Eungella National Park, and 1.5km past the turn-off is the pretty township of **Finch Hatton**. The historic **train station** (☎ 10am-3pm) doesn't see trains anymore but it has an interesting display on local history, and has internet access (\$2 per half-hour). 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. The last section of this road climbs suddenly and steeply, with several in-

credibly 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. 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/power 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.

In its heyday, the rambling, old **Eungella Chalet** (☎ 4958 4509; fax 4958 4503; s without bathroom \$38, d with/without bathroom \$72/50, 1-/2-bedroom cabins \$88/109; ♿) 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 the views when we visited). Upstairs rooms are clean and simple: 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.

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 and wholesome.

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.

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 them 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.

Getting There & Away

There are no buses to Eungella or Finch Hatton, but Reeforest Adventure Tours and Jungle Johno Tours both run day trips from Mackay and will drop off and pick up those who want to linger (see p401).

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.

Fern Flat Camping Ground (☎ 4958 4552; fax 4958 4501; per person/family \$4.50/18) was undergoing refurbishment at the time of writing 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. The camping ground is about 500m past the information centre and kiosk.

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.

Finch Hatton Gorge

About 27km west of Mirani, just before the town of Finch Hatton, is the turn-off to Finch Hatton Gorge. The last 2km of the 10km drive from the main road are on unsealed roads with several creek crossings that can become impassable after heavy rain. A 1.6km walking trail leads from the picnic area to **Araluen Falls**, with its tumbling waterfalls and swimming

holes, and a further 1km hike takes you to the **Wheel of Fire Falls**, another cascade with a deep swimming hole.

A fun and informative way to explore the rainforest here is to glide through the canopy on a cable with **Forest Flying** (☎ 4958 3359; www.forestflying.com; rides \$45).

The following places are signposted on the road to the gorge.

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 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 home-made. Picnic and barbecue packs are available to take up the road to the national-park picnic ground.

CUMBERLAND ISLANDS

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.

Brampton Island Resort (☎ 1300 134 044, 4951 4499; www.brampton-island.com; s \$275-620, d \$300-650; ♿ ♿ ♿) has four grades of room depending on the view and facilities and, naturally, the rates increase the closer you get to the ocean. 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.

Island transfers by either helicopter or launch from Mackay are organised through the resort when booking accommodation.

Other Cumberland Islands

If you have your own boat, or can afford to charter a boat or seaplane, most other islands

in the Cumberland Group and the Sir James Smith Group to the north are also beautiful national parks.

Camp-site availability, bookings and permits for **Carlisle**, **Scawfell** and **Goldsmith Islands** and others can be made online at www.epa.qld.gov.au or at the Mackay **QPWS** (☎ 4944 7800; cnr River & Wood Sts; per person/family \$4.50/18).

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** (☎ 4952 2677; www.mackayregion.com; 320 Nebo Rd).

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.

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

WHITSUNDAYS AREA

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.

There is an island for every budget and whim from the basic accommodation at Hook Island to the exclusive luxury at Hayman Island. Families will love Lindeman Island while busy, bustling Hamilton Island caters to all. Daydream Island is small but fun, while South Molle and Long Islands will satisfy energetic types.

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 of the day. 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.

Orientation & Information

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** (☎ 4946 7022; fax 4946 7023; cnr Shute Harbour & Mandalay Rds; ☎: 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) 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.

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

MAPS & BOOKS

100 Magic Miles of the Great Barrier Reef – The Whitsunday Islands by David Colfelt is sometimes referred to as the bible to the Whitsundays. It contains an exhaustive collection of charts with descriptions of all boat anchorages around the islands as well as articles on the islands and resorts, and features on diving, sailing, fishing, camping and natural history.

Two of the best maps to this region are the Travelog *Great Barrier Reef* map, which has a *Whitsunday Passage* map on the reverse side, and Sunmap's *Australia's Whitsundays*.

Activities

SAILING

The Whitsundays are a paradise of protected waters and numerous safe and picturesque anchorages. Here you can learn to sail, join an overnight tour on a racing maxi or a graceful tall ship, or charter a yacht and skipper it yourself. Read the boxed text (p408) before checking out what the following companies have on offer.

There are a number of bareboat charter companies around Airlie Beach, including the following:

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 tours 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 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).

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) South-

ern 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 is also one of the best and most popular places to learn how to sail. Should this be your calling, the following are a selection of Airlie Beach sailing schools, each with 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 following dive companies offer a good range of diving trips for certified divers, which combine the reef with the islands. These companies also offer dive courses; open-water courses with several ocean dives start at around \$500.

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

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

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

Apart from these companies, most of the island resorts also have their own dive schools and free snorkelling gear.

KAYAKING

Paddling serenely in search of an island with dolphins and turtles as company is 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 for a single kayak costs \$50/60 for a half-/one day and \$80/90 for a double.

Tours

It can be confusing figuring out the best and most convenient way to see the islands. There

SAILING THE WHITSUNDAYS

Bareboat Charters

These have become enormously popular in the Whitsundays. 'Bareboat' doesn't refer to what you wear on board; it simply means you rent the boat without skipper, crew or provisions. While you don't require formal qualifications to hire a yacht, you will need to prove to the company that at least one person in your group is fully competent in operating the vessel. On the first day you should receive around four hours of briefing and familiarisation with the yacht, during which time your own abilities will be assessed. If necessary you may be required to pay for additional tutoring for around \$200 per day, or it may be necessary for you to hire a skipper for an hourly rate. If you lack experience, it's a good idea to hire an experienced skipper at least for the first day.

The operators usually require a booking deposit of \$500 to \$750 and a security bond of between \$1000 and \$2000 (depending on the kind of boat), payable on arrival and refunded after the boat is returned undamaged. Bedding is usually supplied and provisions can also be provided if you wish. Most companies have a minimum hire period of five days.

There's a wide range of yachts and cruisers available. You'll pay \$500 to \$800 a day in the high season (September, October, December and January) for a yacht that will comfortably sleep four to six passengers. It's worth asking if the company you choose belongs to the Whitsunday Bareboat Operators Association, a self-regulatory body that guarantees certain standards. Also check that the latest edition of David Colfelt's *100 Magic Miles* is stowed on board, and pick up a copy of the *Public Moorings and Anchoring* leaflet from QPWS.

Sailing Tours

These tours, which supply professional crew and catering, are all the rage in Airlie Beach. It can be hard work sorting through the glossy brochures, the stand-by rates and the word of mouth. Price can be a very good indication; we get stacks of letters complaining about the cheaper companies, everything from lengthy delays, boats breaking down, unsanitary conditions, even serious safety concerns. Look out for the tick of approval from the WCBIA (Whitsunday Charter Boat Industry Association) on the brochure. The usual package is three days and two nights, but longer cruises are possible, as are day tours, sailing courses and even ocean racing.

Crewing

A third option is to crew a private vessel by responding to 'Crew Wanted' notices pasted up in backpackers or at the marina and yacht club. Just like hitching a ride in a car, the experience could be life affirming or life threatening. Think about yourself stuck with someone you don't know on 10m of boat, several kilometres from shore, before you actually find yourself there. Be sure to let others know where you are going, with whom and when you expect to return.

are so many operators, but it needn't be too difficult. 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 or 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) This is 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 opportunities.

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.

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 operate from Shute Harbour do coach pick-ups from Airlie Beach and Cannonvale. You can take a public bus to Shute Harbour.

Sleeping RESORTS

The rates quoted in this section are the standard rates, but hardly anyone pays these. Most travel agents can put together a range of discounted package deals that combine air fares, transfers, accommodation and meals.

CAMPING

QPWS (www.epa.qld.gov.au) manages national-park camping grounds on several islands for both independent campers as well as groups on commercial trips. Camping permits are available over the internet and from the Whitsunday QPWS office 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.

There's a national parks leaflet, *Island Camping in the Whitsundays*, which describes the various sites, and provides detailed information on what to take and do. You must be self-sufficient, and are advised to take 5L of water per person per day, plus three days' extra supply in case you get stuck. You should also have a fuel stove; wood fires are banned on all islands.

Get to your island by Blue Ferry or a day-cruise boat; the booking agencies in Airlie

Beach will be able to assist. Or 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.

Getting There & Around

AIR

The two main airports for the Whitsundays are at Hamilton Island (see p419) and Proserpine (see below). The Whitsunday airport, near Airlie Beach, has regular flights from the mainland to the islands by light plane, seaplane and helicopter; see p414 for details. Lindeman Island also has its own airstrip.

BOAT

Fantasea (☎ 4946 5111; www.fantasea.com.au; 11 Shute Harbour Rd, Jubilee Pocket) provides ferry transfers to the islands from Shute Harbour; see the individual islands for transfer details.

BUS

Greyhound (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) and **Premier** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) buses detour off the Bruce Hwy to Airlie Beach. **Whitsunday Transit** (☎ 4946 1800) connects Proserpine, Cannonvale, Abel Point, Airlie Beach and Shute Harbour.

PROSERPINE

☎ 07 / pop 3250

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 surrounding region, is all you'll need.

Proserpine Airport is 14km south of town and is serviced from Brisbane 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) has six scheduled bus services running 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. Shute Harbour, where the island ferries depart from, is about 12km east, and Abel Point Marina, home to many of the cruising yachts, is about 1.5km west.

Information

The main drag is stacked with privately run tour 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. Internet access is widely available; many of the hostels have terminals and there are several dedicated internet cafés.

Airlie Beach Newsagency (☎ 4946 6410; 354 Shute Harbour Rd) Stocks interstate and overseas newspapers.

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

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

Internet Centre (346 Shute Harbour Rd; per hr \$4) The cheapest we found.

Post office (☎ 13 13 18; 372 Shute Harbour Rd;

☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat)

Where? What? How? Whitsundays (☎ 4946 5255; 283 Shute Harbour Rd) Tourist information.

Activities

For details on sailing, diving and kayaking around the islands, see p407.

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 marine stingers 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, wind-surfers and paddle skis.

BUSHWALKS

The Conway Range behind Airlie Beach is part national park (see p415) and part state forest, and provides for some great walking in coastal rainforest. Try the 2.4km climb up Mt Rooper for great views, or 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.

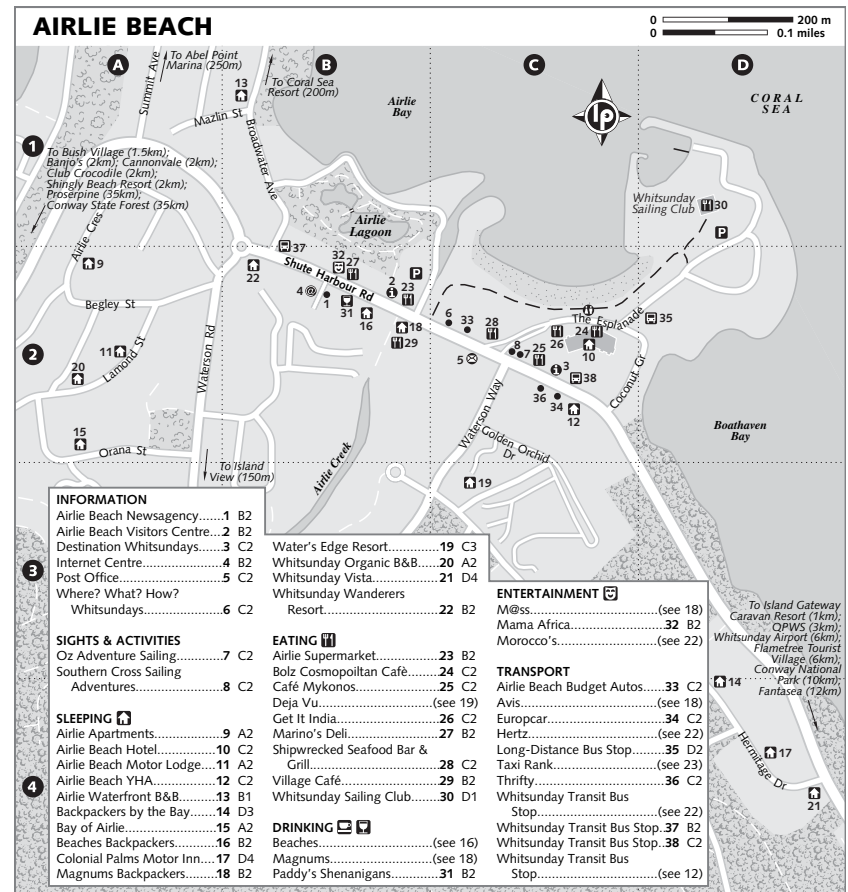
SKYDIVING

Try tandem skydiving with **Tandem Skydive Airlie Beach** (☎ 4946 9115; from \$249).

Tours

ISLAND CRUISES

A huge range of boats offer trips out to the Whitsundays and the Great Barrier Reef from



the Abel Point Marina and Shute Harbour. See p407 for details of sailing tours and p407 for details of tour boats.

RAINFOREST/NATIONAL PARK TOURS

Fawly's 4WD Tropical Tours (☎ 4946 6665) departs at 10.30am daily, 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 (adult/child \$55/40).

Sleeping BUDGET

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.

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.

Flametre Tourist Village (☎ 4946 9388; www.flametre.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.

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.

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.

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 ind 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, pick-up scene will appreciate it here.

Airlie Beach YHA (☎ 1800 247 251, 4946 6312; airliebeach@yhaql.d.org; 394 Shute Harbour Rd; dm \$27.50, d with/without bathroom \$77/71; ☺ ☑ ☒) Central, but just far enough removed from the hub-bub, this good, clean hostel is small and reasonably quiet.

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

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.

Airlie Beach Motor Lodge (☎ 1800 810 925, 4946 6418; www.airliebeachmotorlodge.com.au; 6 Lamond St; d from \$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 swing your cat.

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 Apartments (☎ 4946 6222; www.airlieapartments.com; 22-24 Airlie Cres; 1-bedroom apt \$120, 2-bedroom apt \$125-160; ☺ ☑ ☒) Airlie Apartments is 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, but are good value.

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.

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

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.

TOP END

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

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.

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.

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, DVD and CD players to distract your attention.

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; ☺ ☑ ☒; wi-fi) At the end of a low headland overlooking the water just 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.

Eating

RESTAURANTS

Shute Harbour Rd abounds with restaurants; though also consider some of the resorts if you are after a quiet restaurant with a view.

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.

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.

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.

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, Deja Vu is still one of Airlie's favourites. Try the crispy skin snapper, 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.

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 and settle back for a feast.

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.

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, *gyros* and other Greek faves are made right in front of you in minutes. Try going just once.

Village Café (☎ 4964 1121; 351 Shute Harbour Rd; mains \$10-16; ☎ 8am-5.30pm) Always busy with hun-gover 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.

Get it India (☎ 4948 1879; Shop 9, Beach Plaza, The Esplanade; mains \$16-18; ☎ 11.30am-late) Quick, un-complicated and good. By all means eat on 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 **Airlie Supermarket** (277 Shute Harbour Rd) in the centre of town and a larger one in Cannonvale, about 2km west of town.

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 Proserpine and Hamilton Island.

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, light plane or seaplane out to the islands or the reef. **Air Whitsunday Seaplanes** (☎ 4946 9111; www.airwhitsunday.com.au) flies to Hayman and South Molle. **Helireef** (☎ 4946 9102) and Air Whitsunday Seaplanes offer joy flights over the Reef.

BOAT

Fantasea (☎ 4946 5111; www.fantasea.com.au; 11 Shute Harbour Rd, Jubilee Pocket) provides ferry transfers to/from the islands; see Getting There & Away under the individual islands for details.

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. 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.

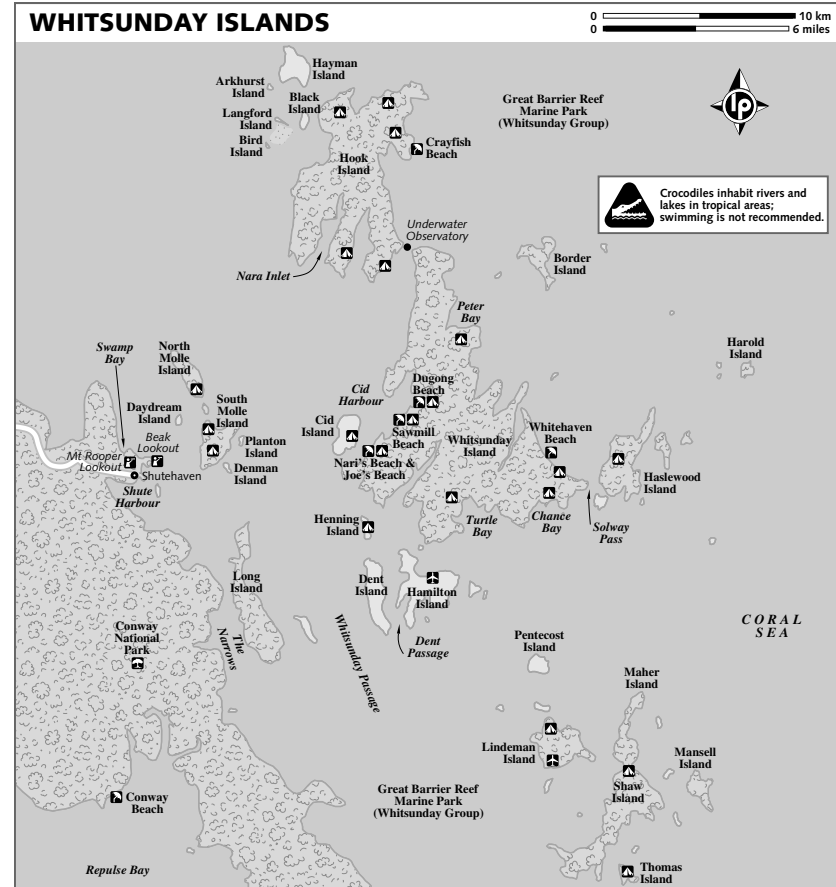
Getting Around

Airlie Beach is small enough to cover by foot, and most 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 Holiday Units.

WHITSUNDAY ISLANDS



Avis (☎ 4946 6318; 366 Shute Harbour Rd)

Europcar (☎ 54946 4133; 398 Shute Harbour Rd)

Hertz (☎ 4946 4687; Whitsunday Wanderers Resort)

Thrifty (☎ 4946 4300; 87 Shute Harbour Rd)

CONWAY NATIONAL PARK

The mountains of this national park and the Whitsunday Islands are part of the same coastal mountain range. Rising sea levels following the last ice age flooded the lower valleys leaving only the highest peaks as islands, now cut off from the mainland.

The road from Airlie Beach to Shute Harbour passes through the northern section of the park. Several **walking trails** start from near the picnic and day-use area. About 1km past the day-use area, 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, towards Coral Point (before Shute Harbour), there's a 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 use plants growing in the area.

To reach the beautiful **Cedar Creek Falls**, turn off the Proserpine to Airlie Beach road on to Conway Rd, 8km north of Proserpine. It's then about 15km to the falls; the roads are well sign-posted. This is a popular picnic and swimming spot – when there's enough water, that is!

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. Day-trippers can use the facilities at the Long Island and Peppers Palm Bay resorts (see below).

Activities

The beaches on Long Island are among the best in the Whitsundays and there are 13km of walking tracks with some fine lookouts. **Long Island Dive & Snorkel** (☎ 0417 161 998) has a range of courses, gear for hire and trips for certified divers.

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, midrange place with three levels of accommodation. There are some fabulous short walks around the island, from the 600m stroll to Humpy Point, to the 4.4km walk to Sandy Bay. There are also 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're better off spending the extra to stay in the beachfront or garden rooms.

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 of Australian hardwood with high cathedral

ceilings; there's 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 – 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's a five-night minimum stay, no day visitors or children, and no motorised water sports, so you're guaranteed peace and tranquillity. The tariff is inclusive of helicopter transfers from Hamilton Island, sailing tours and use of water-sports equipment.

Getting There & Around

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!

There are some wonderful camping opportunities in basic national-park **camping grounds** (per person/family \$4.50/18) 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 \$120/150; 🏠 🚿) 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

facilities anymore, but there's around 60 camp sites with a superb beachfront location.

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; see p409) 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.

SOUTH MOLLE ISLAND

South Molle Island offers an impressive array of short or long walks through gorgeous rain-forest, 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. Apart from the resort area and golf course at Bauer Bay in the north, the island is all national park. The island is crisscrossed by 15km of walking tracks, and has some superb lookout points. The highest point is Mt Jeffreys (198m), but the climb up Spion Kop is also worthwhile.

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). The Discovery Bar is open until late and there's a small **café** (meals \$5-20) 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.cruise.whitsundays.com) has connections to South Molle from Abel Point Marina (adult/child \$26/17).

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.

A steep and 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 Island 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 accommodation and most package deals include a buffet breakfast. There's a club with constant activities to keep children occupied, and they will love the fish-feeding sessions 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.

Breakfast is served buffet style at the Waterfalls Restaurant, which stays open all day, serving snacks, lunch and dinner. The **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 the beachfront.

Fantasea (☎ 49465111; 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.

HAMILTON ISLAND

☎ 07 / pop 1840

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.

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.

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 single bed, and a small patio.

Self-Catering Accommodation (d \$317-1245) 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 found within the resort.

Toucan Tango Café & Bar (☎ 4946 8562; mains \$15-29; 🍳 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Enjoy a casual poolside breakfast or a lazy lunch at this cool café overlooking Catseye 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.

HARBOURSIDE

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.

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 Tavern (☎ 4946 8839; mains \$14-20; 🍳 lunch & dinner) Formerly the yacht club, this busy seaside 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 lasagne, 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.

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 al-

though the salt-and-pepper squid and 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.

There's also a bakery, ice-cream shop and a supermarket/general store for those preparing their own meals.

Entertainment

The bars in the resort and Harbourside offer nightly entertainment. Toucan Tango (opposite) has live entertainment most nights, or you can head to Harbourside's **Boheme's NightClub** (🎷 9pm-late).

Getting There & Away

AIR

Hamilton Island airport is the main arrival centre for the Whitsundays. **Jetstar** (☎ 13 1538; 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 but let's face it, it's the solitude and sheer luxury that you're here for.

It's no wonder that the private **Hayman Great Barrier Reef** (☎ 1800 075 175, 4940 1234; www.hayman.com.au; r\$580-3900; 📶 📺 📺) 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. 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 a glorious balcony furnished with an outdoor teakwood setting. Even the standard rooms in the pool wing are swish.

Guests flying 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.

Club Med (☎ 1800 258 2633, 4946 9333; www.clubmed.com; 3-night full-board packages per 2 people \$1788; 📶 📺) is all hustle and bustle and it's no secret that 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.

All meals and drinks are included in the tariff. The Main Restaurant serves buffet-style breakfasts, lunches and dinners. The food is plentiful and varied.

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. It's corny as hell, but that only adds to the appeal. There's usually a live band from 6.30pm and the 'disco' gets going from 10.30pm.

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

WHITSUNDAY ISLAND

The largest of the Whitsunday group, this island covers 109 sq km and rises to 438m at Whitsunday Peak. There's no resort, but

it has some fine bushwalking, and the 6km-long **Whitehaven Beach** on the southeastern coast is the longest and best beach in the group (some say in the country), with good snorkelling off its southern end. Many of the day-trip boats visit Whitehaven. The pure-white silicon sand can be dazzling on a sunny day, so make sure you wear your sunglasses!

There are national-park camping grounds at Dugong, Sawmill, Nari's and Joe's Beaches in the west; at Turtle Bay and Chance Bay in the south; at the southern end of Whitehaven Beach; and Peter Bay in the north.

OTHER WHITSUNDAY ISLANDS

The northern islands of the Whitsundays group are undeveloped and seldom visited by cruise boats or water taxis. Several of these – Gloucester, Saddleback, Olden and Armit Islands – have national-park camping grounds. The **QPWS office** (☎ 4946 7022; www.epa.qld.gov.au), 3km south of Airlie Beach, can issue camping permits and advise you on which islands to visit and how to get there.