



Whitsunday Coast

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Best Places to Eat

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Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Qualia (p380)
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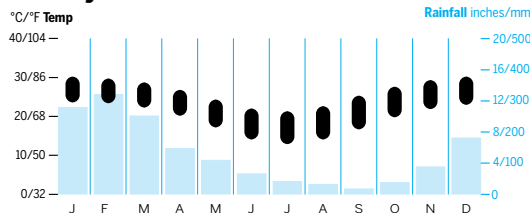
Why Go?

Speckling the calm waters of the Coral Sea, the superlative Whitsunday Islands are one of Australia's best-known natural attractions. Opal-jade waters and pure-white beaches fringe the forested isles; around them, tropical fish swarm through the world's largest coral garden in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The best way to visit the islands is by sailing boat; however you visit, this is not a budget destination. The gateway to the islands, Airlie Beach, is a backpacker hub with a parade of tanned faces zinging between boats, beaches and nightclubs. This is as close to the islands as some budget travellers will get.

South of Airlie, Mackay is a typical coastal Queensland town with palm-lined streets framed by a jumble of art deco buildings. It's a handy base for trips to Eungella National Park – a lush hinterland oasis where platypuses cavort in the wild.

When to Go

Mackay



Jun–Oct The perfect time to enjoy sunny skies, calm days, mild weather and stinger-free seas.

Aug Sailing boats skim across the water and parties are held during Airlie Beach Race Week.

Sep & Oct Optimal conditions for kayaking around the islands.



Whitsunday Coast Highlights

- 1 Sailing through the magnificent aquamarine waters of the **Whitsunday Islands** (p377).
- 2 Being dazzled by the bright-white silica sand at stunning **Whitehaven Beach** (p381).
- 3 Waiting patiently for a glimpse of a shy platypus and

walking in the misty rainforest at **Eungella National Park** (p374).

- 4 Camping under the stars and making like an island castaway in the **Whitsunday Islands National Park** (p380).

- 5 Diving and snorkelling the fringing reefs of the outer **Great Barrier Reef** (p374).
- 6 Hiking the steep forest trails of **Hamilton Island** (p380).
- 7 Swilling beer and partying hard in fun-lovin' **Airlie Beach** (p372).