



Whitsunday Coast

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Best Places to Sleep

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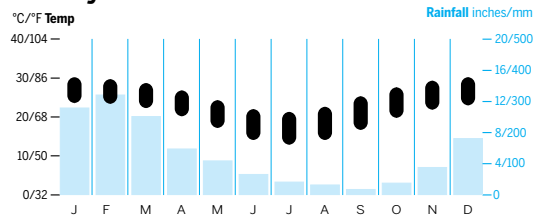
Why Go?

Many travellers to Australia, especially those with a sailing pedigree, head straight for the Whitsunday Islands and barely leave. This white-fringed archipelago, a stunning feature of the Coral Sea coast, can be easily seen from shore. 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 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. North of Airlie Beach is cute little Bowen, a low-key alternative for backpackers working through their holiday.

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 Whitsunday Islands National Park (p191) Camping under the stars and making like an island castaway.

2 Whitsunday Islands (p189) Sailing through magnificent aquamarine waters.

3 Eungella National Park (p187) Waiting patiently for a

glimpse of a shy platypus and walking in the misty rainforest.

4 Airlie Beach (p191) Swilling beer and partying hard in fun-lovin' Airlie Beach.

5 Great Barrier Reef (p189) Diving and snorkelling the outer fringing reefs.

6 Hamilton Island (p198) Hiking the steep forest trails.

7 Whitehaven Beach (p199) Being dazzled by the bright-white silica sand.

8 Bowen (p200) Picking fruit or swimming in empty coves in this laid-back town.

9 Cape Hillsborough National Park (p188) Exploring where bush meets the beach at this semi-remote spot.