What you can do to help keep the Great Barrier Reef great

Escape Writers

Find out how to make a trip to the Great Barrier Reef just as good for the Reef as it is for you.
DO YOUR RESEARCH BEFORE YOU GO

If you can see it from space, it’s probably worth getting to know this whopping great environment before dipping in your toe. Knowing exactly what you’re preserving is one of the simplest ways to understand why protecting and conserving the Reef is so important. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) is a great place to start. Also check out Citizens of the Great Barrier Reef – a social movement designed to unite people from around the world to learn and care about the reef.
VISIT

Contrary to popular belief, visiting the Great Barrier Reef is a good thing. Every visit to the Reef contributes financially to its protection and management, including monies raised from the Environmental Management Charge – a ‘reef tax’ that helps pay for the day-to-day management and conservation. Plus, after seeing the Reef up close in all its glory, you’ll be more inspired to help protect it. Picture: Queensland Tourism
CHOOSE AN ECO-FRIENDLY REEF TOUR

Before you book your tour, choose an eco-operator. Look for Eco-tourism Australia’s Advanced Accreditation, EarthCheck or Green Leaders logos and/or Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority branding. Eco-tourism Australia has also developed a Green Travel Guide of operators who are following or setting best practice in climate change and eco- or nature based tourism practices. Picture: Tourism and Events Queensland
SIGN UP AS A ‘VOLUN-TOUR’

During peak holiday periods, Queensland National Parks offers visitors to North West and Lady Musgrave islands in the Southern Great Barrier Reef the chance to camp for free in exchange for volunteering as campground hosts, providing island interpretation with a conservation message. You can also join ordinary folk like Nev and Bev McLachlan who make the trek each December to Deepwater National Park, near the twin towns of Agnes Water and 1770, to help nesting loggerhead turtles and to record vital information about their migration and nesting patterns. Picture: Tourism and Events Queensland
BE A CITIZEN SCIENTIST

There are several citizen science projects that you can contribute to. Sign up for ReefSearch and you’ll be sent a field guide to show you how to contribute valuable data to scientists studying the Reef’s health. Spend 10 minutes of each dive, snorkel or reef walk looking for key species, checking coral condition, and making note of any rubbish found. Coral Watch is focused on bleaching events, managed by the University of Queensland. Your Coral Watch kit comes with a colour-coded slate that helps you identify and record coral colours. You can then upload via an app to add to a global database. Eye on the Reef is managed by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GRMPA). Download the Eye on the Reef app or log in online to report your sightings directly to them. A sighting can be anything a Reef user feels important enough to report and can include incidents like a bleaching event, crown-of-thorns starfish, stranded or sick wildlife and coral damage. Picture: Tourism and Events Queensland
STAY ON THE PATH

It’s great to get out and see the Great Barrier Reef region’s natural beauty, both under the sea and on land, but stick to designated areas and paths. Going off-road can result in damaging endangered plants and additional erosion.
TURN OFF THE LIGHTS

Aside from saving electricity, turning off the lights when you find yourself beachside could help save a few lives. Newly-hatched turtles make their way from nest to sea by following the brightest light they see, which is traditionally the moon. Unfortunately in built-up areas, hatchlings can become easily disoriented and move towards street lights and hotels instead. Next coastal retreat, be mindful of your lights, switching off the unnecessary and using only a small torch (three volts or less) if you’re trawling the beach at dark. You’ll find ample inspiration at Mon Repos, which has long championed the Cut the Glow to help the Turtles Go campaign. Picture: Tourism and Events Queensland
STAY AT AN ECO RESORT

While visiting the Great Barrier Reef, opt to stay at one of the eco resorts in the area. These resorts are dedicated to minimising their carbon footprint on the Reef, as well as that of their guests. Lady Elliot Island (pictured) is a world-leading eco-tourism destination that stopped selling single-use plastic back in 2012, and offsets 100% of carbon emissions from flights to and from the island. Elysian Retreat, a secluded off-the-grid adults-only resort at the southern tip of Long Island in the Whitsundays, has numerous eco initiatives in place, including composting food waste, growing their own fruit and vegetables, and minimising the use of plastic and avoiding single-use plastic. Elysian’s sister venue, Pumpkin Island, is a low-impact resort run on 100% wind and solar power. It uses only biodegradable cleaning products and organic certified guest amenities manufactured in Byron Bay, Australia. Picture: Tourism and Events Queensland
ASK QUESTIONS

Knowledge is power. Most boats that take you to the outer reef have a marine experts on board. Take advantage of the opportunity and ask as many questions as you like. Another way to learn about the Reef is to attend Reef Teach – a two-hour evening presentation where you’ll learn everything about the Reef from how coral reefs form, the difference between soft and hard corals and how to identify fish. Possibly the best way to learn more about the Reef is to visit Reef HQ (pictured) in Townsville. In this aquarium and research centre, you’ll find the world’s largest living coral reef in an aquarium (it even has an annual spawning event). It’s positively bursting at the seams with information on how this complicated and biodiverse habitat works, the various threats to the Reef, and what scientists are doing to save it. Picture: Zak Simmonds
LEARN FROM A MASTER

Master Reef Guides is a gold standard visitor service that allows travellers to the Reef to see it pretty much the same way that a marine biologist does. To date, more than 60 Master Reef Guides are adding value to any snorkel or dive trip by providing visitors with up-to-date information on what’s happening to the Reef, how it happened and what you can do about it (no matter where in the world you are). Picture: Tourism and Events Queensland
CARBON OFFSET YOUR TRAVELS

Climate change is the greatest threat to the Great Barrier Reef. The rapid increase in greenhouse gas emissions is causing the ocean to warm up, which is killing coral and marine life. Carbon offsetting your trip helps balance out the impact of carbon emissions that result from travel – be it by car, bus, plane or any means of transport. Carbon offset programs like Greenfleet plant native biodiverse forests to capture carbon emissions and future-proof the environment against climate change. Picture: Getty
JOIN AN EXPEDITION

International environmental charity, Earthwatch is offering citizen scientists the chance to be part of an important reef restoration project. In October this year and April and July 2021, volunteers can dive right in and join a 5-day expedition to help researchers at the forefront of active reef restoration science. Based on Magnetic Island, volunteers will help researchers on experiments to develop best practice methods for removing macro algae and allowing coral to regrow. From $795pp.

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