

### What to avoid

Of the thousands of intriguing organisms on the Great Barrier Reef only a few need be avoided. Do not touch the long, black spines of the sea urchin because they may penetrate the skin and break off in hands and feet.

Fern-like brown and white hydroids, also called 'Fireweed', should not be touched with bare hands. Any bristly or 'fuzzy-looking' worms, commonly found under rocks, should not be handled as the bristles may cause skin irritation. The poisonous cone shell is characterised by its conical shape and brilliant colouring. The butterfly cod is beautiful and docile but is also poisonous and must be avoided, along with the stonefish. Toadfish have been known to nip bare feet.

### The future of the Great Barrier Reef

Because the Great Barrier Reef is a fragile and delicate environment, it may suffer damage and harm from uncontrolled human usage. Concern at this prospect led to Commonwealth legislation to provide for the creation of a marine park within the Great Barrier Reef Region. The establishment, development, care and control of the marine park is the responsibility of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. As a result of arrangements between the Commonwealth and the Queensland Governments arising from their mutual desire to conserve the Great Barrier Reef, processes have been developed under which parts of the marine park are declared and zoned allowing reasonable human activities to continue, balanced against the need to protect the Great Barrier Reef.

Public submissions and comments are sought on zoning plans so that final management decisions reflect as closely as possible people's wishes to use and enjoy the Great Barrier Reef without causing damage or harm.

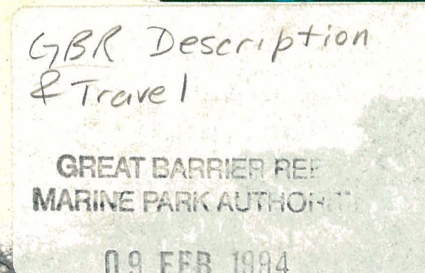


Further information:  
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(This leaflet is one of a series produced by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority in the interests of promoting awareness and understanding of the Great Barrier Reef Region.)

# VISITING THE GREAT BARRIER REEF



THE GREAT BARRIER REEF extends 2000 kilometres along Queensland's continental shelf from near Bundaberg in the south to the Torres Strait in the north, the biggest structure of its type in the world.

It is not a continuous 'barrier', but a broken maze of coral reefs and islands, varying in distance from the mainland. Considered a barrier to navigation by early explorers, it is less a barrier today with modern navigational aids, although there are still uncharted areas of the Reef.

The reefs are ramparts composed of the skeletons of countless coral animals built up slowly over about 18 million years. While parts of a reef may grow or be destroyed, the general character of the Great Barrier Reef has been relatively unchanged over the past 10 000 years. Its structure is the result of coral colonies growing steadily upward on the slowly submerging continental shelf.

### Making a visit

Accommodation is available at resorts on several islands in reef waters. Two resorts, Green Island and Heron Island, are true coral cays. Other resorts are established on continental islands between the Reef and the mainland. Many of these islands have their own fringing reefs to be seen and explored.

Access to the islands is from adjacent coastal centres by launch, helicopter, or light plane, depending on facilities.

Many resorts have trips to islands and to the Reef when weather and tides permit. Cruise holidays visiting the Reef operate from some coastal centres. Where islands are in close proximity to the mainland, day trips are also available. A daily launch service operates to Green Island from Cairns and there are cruises to the Whitsunday Islands from Shute Harbour near Proserpine. Charter flights, available from some islands and coastal centres, give visitors a spectacular view of the immensity of the Reef

Travel agents and Queensland Government Tourist offices will assist with arrangements.

### When to go

The Great Barrier Reef may be visited all year round but there are special attractions at certain times. Large breeding populations of sea birds can be observed from September to November. Important sea bird rookeries include Heron Island near Gladstone and Michaelmas Cay near Cairns. There are also visits by sea-turtles which come to the islands to lay their eggs during the early summer. Hatchings of turtles appear in late summer and Heron Island, which is within the Capricornia Section of the Marine Park is an important turtle nesting area.

At other times, sedentary sea bird populations, as well as examples of mainland birds, can be observed.

### Reef activities

Snorkelling, scuba diving, viewing corals and fish through glass-bottom boats, and reef walking, are enjoyable ways to experience the Great Barrier Reef, while island walks open up nature's display of tropical vegetation and birdlife. Fishing trips and gear are available at some resorts for those eager to try their hand at reef fishing. Green Island and Hook Island provide opportunities to view the marine world from underwater observatories.



Many resorts have snorkelling and scuba-diving instruction and organised diving trips. A beginner's confidence is increased by snorkelling first in the shallow water near the beach at high tide. When moving into scuba diving, it is advisable for safety and greater enjoyment to be in the company of another person.

Those who do not wish to dive or snorkel can gain their experience of the reefs by reef walking at low tide. At these times it is possible to walk out on the reef and observe marine animals. It is important to know tide times to avoid being too far from shore when the tide begins to rise.

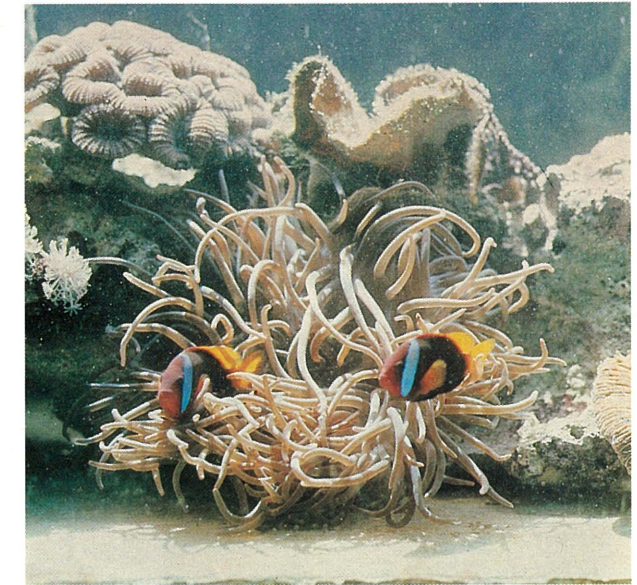


Sandshoes and a hat are essential protective clothing for reef walking, and sticks to help balance are available at some resorts. Reef walkers should avoid stepping on living coral in the interests of safety and conservation.

Glass-bottomed boats are available for visitors at several resorts. These have the advantage of being less dependent on the state of the tide although they may not be able to operate in rough seas.

### The living things

During reef walks, examining the underside of coral boulders reveals many vividly coloured and fascinating organisms such as sponges, molluscs, crabs and brittle stars. It is important that the boulders be returned quickly to their original positions to ensure the survival and shelter of these animals from the sun.



Many other animals are evident on coral reefs; for example, hard and soft corals, starfish, sea cucumbers (beche-de-mer) and molluscs (sea shells) in sandy areas between coral clumps. Brilliantly coloured giant clams may also be found. Anemones, tubeworms, and a variety of colourful fish including butterfly fish with their flattened bodies, damselfish, and wrasses, can be seen in shallow reef areas. Coral trout and other large edible fish inhabit deeper water.