

The guide Whitsunday Islands

Deliverance country

If the thought of winter has you praying for mercy, head north, **Briar Jensen** writes.



YING off the Queensland coast and protected by the Great Barrier Reef, the Whitsundays offer an enormous variety of holiday options, whether you're there for a day or a week, looking for adventure or relaxation. Here are just a few of the possibilities available.

Sailing

Day sails

If you yearn for the thrill of sailing but don't have much time, try a day sail. To experience life on an ocean racer, without the hardships, step aboard the 24-metre Ragamuffin, a Sydney to Hobart line honours winner. Sail to Whitehaven Beach for a picnic or Blue Pearl Bay for snorkelling. Adults \$134, children aged 5-14 \$48, families (two adults, two children) \$299. Phone 1800 454 777, see www.maxiaction.com.au.

Don't fancy a monohull? Then take the spacious purple cat Camira, one of the world's fastest catamarans, for a sail to Whitehaven Beach. Adults

Phone 1800 075 000, see www.rentayacht.com.au.

Crewed charters

If you're not confident sailing yourself then join a professionally crewed adventure on a huge range of vessels, from ex-racing yachts to tall ships. Southern Cross Sailing Adventures has two- and three-day trips on a variety of yachts from a 16-metre Admiral's Cup contender to a 25-metre Whitbread racer. Prices from \$239 per person. Phone 1800 675 790, see www.soxsail.com.au.

Australian Tall Ship Cruises has two-, three- and six-day voyages. Their fleet includes a 110-year-old tall ship, a traditional square-rigger and a three-masted Mediterranean schooner. Prices from \$279 per person. Phone 1800 355 377, see www.australiantallships.com.

Sail and stay

For a great budget option take a sail and stay adventure package that combines three days' sail with two nights on South Molle Island. A



\$140, children 5-15 \$80, families (two adults, up to three children) \$399. Phone (07) 4946 4662, see www.cruisewhitsundays.com.

Self charters

The short island hops and easy visual navigation of the Whitsundays makes it the ideal spot to charter a boat. Explore uninhabited islands or visit the seven resorts that welcome boaters. Sunsail at Hamilton Island has yachts from 10 to 15 metres for two to 12 people.

Prices from \$390 per yacht per night. Phone 1800 803 988, see www.sunsail.com.au.

Whitsunday Rent A Yacht at Shute Harbour has monohulls, catamarans and motorboats from eight to 15 metres for two to 12 people. Prices from \$385 per boat per night.

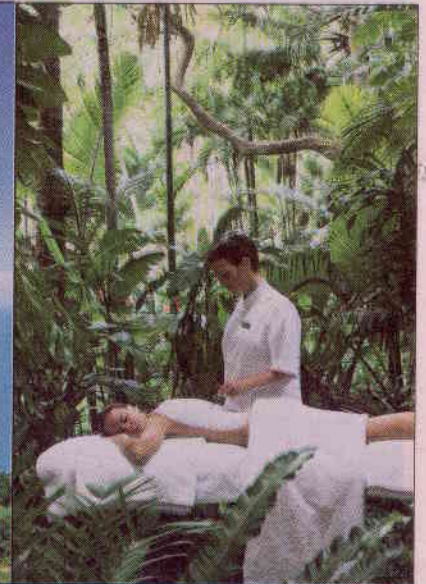
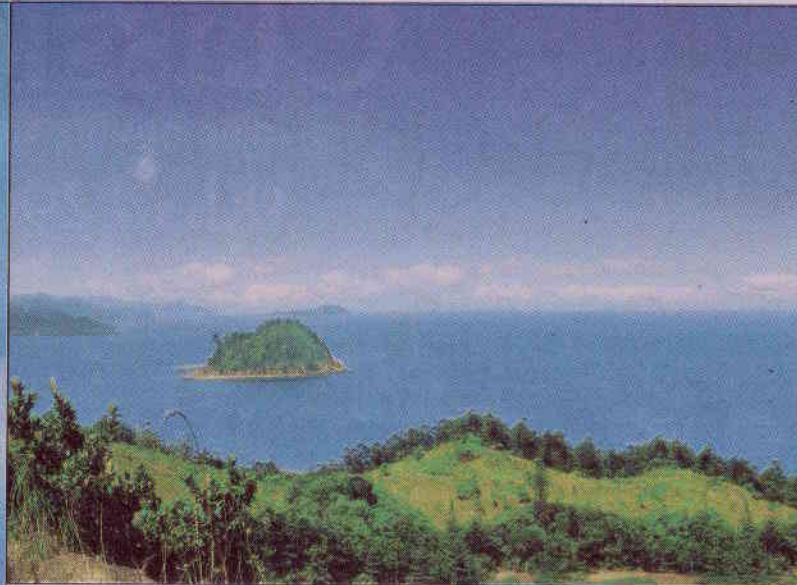
snorkelling trip to Blue Pearl Bay and sail to Whitehaven Beach is included. Cost, including all meals and accommodation, is \$299 plus \$27 reef tax. Upgrade to single/twin room for \$65. Phone 1800 046 462, see www.studentflights.com.au.

Reef adventures

The easiest way to explore the Great Barrier Reef is from a pontoon. Take a guided snorkel with a marine biologist or go on a fully escorted introductory or certified dive. If you don't want to get wet, watch the parade of kaleidoscopic fish from an underwater viewing station, glass bottom boat or semi-submersible. If you fancy a lofty view of the reef, take a scenic helicopter flight.



The Cruise Whitsundays pontoon at Knuckle Reef offers Seawalker, a modern version of the old diver's



available. Phone (07) 4946 4662, see www.cruisewhitsundays.com or www.daydreamisland.com.

South Molle Island

Walk the well-marked tracks through the national park for spectacular views of the Whitsundays and access to beautiful beaches – request a packed lunch and make it a picnic. Play a round of golf on the nine-hole course or get wet tackling some water sports. Alternatively, just relax on the beach or by the pool and enjoy the resort facilities. A daytripper VIP card offers free use of non-motorised water sports and discounts on charged activities. Full-day trip including lunch, adults \$80, children \$45. Phone (07) 4946 4662, see www.cruisewhitsundays.com or www.southmolleisland.com.au.

Three-Island Discovery

Sample three islands on an escorted island discovery cruise. Catch some action on Hamilton, relax and unwind



PUT YOUR FEET UP: (opposite page) Cruising in the Whitsundays; (this page, clockwise from above) the islands offer scuba diving, parasailing, destinations such as Long Island and even rainforest massages on Hayman.

atmosphere with its bustling marina and waterfront shops. There is plenty to do on the island,