



Australian Government

Great Barrier Reef
Marine Park Authority

Tourism in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park

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The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is the largest, most complex and diverse coral reef system in the world. It is made up of coral reefs, coral cays and islands, stretching along the Queensland coast from Cape York to Bundaberg.

The Marine Park also includes seagrass, mangroves, sand, algal and sponge gardens, inter-reefal communities and other habitats, and many rare and endangered species. It is a multiple use area managed by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

Tourism is the largest commercial activity in the Marine Park, generating over \$5 billion each year and contributing significantly to local and national economies. The Great Barrier Reef is a World Heritage Area that attracts about 1.9 million

visitors each year, making it one of Australia's most internationally-renowned tourism attractions.

Who visits the Marine Park?

Tourists to the Marine Park range from locals and interstate visitors to international backpackers and luxury tourists. About half of all the tourists to the Marine Park are from overseas, and about one-third are from interstate.

Where do they go?

Although tourist destinations are scattered along the length of the Marine Park, 85 per cent of visitors access the area from Cairns, Port Douglas or the Whitsundays (which make up less than 10 per cent of the Marine Park's area). Tourists in the Cairns and Port Douglas

area mainly participate in day visits to pontoons, diving and fishing charters. The Whitsundays is home to Australia's largest bareboat (self-sail) yacht fleet and a range of day boat operations.

How has tourism changed?

The earliest instance of organised tourism in the Marine Park was in the 1890s when Green Island became a destination for pleasure cruises off Cairns. During the first half of the twentieth century, most tourist activity was inshore and close to regional centres due to limited vessel technology and poor transport links to southern capitals.

During the 1960s and 1970s there was a steady increase in tourism, and by the end of the 1970s new faster vessels had extended the range of a day trip to 20 nautical miles. In the early 1980s tourism in the Marine Park grew by about 30 per cent each year. The capacity, range and diversity of products offered expanded to meet this increased demand. Over the past 10 years, there has been a gradual increase in the number of tourists visiting the Marine Park.

our great barrier reef
let's keep it great



A closer look at tourism

For many visitors to the Marine Park, a trip on a commercial vessel is the best way to experience the area and learn about its World Heritage values. Tourism operators, regardless of style, size and destination, provide customers with a range of activities and experiences such as swimming, diving, snorkelling or viewing coral from a glass bottom boat. Tourists are given an opportunity for an up-close encounter with a natural living system and to learn about the reef environment. The natural environment is fundamental to almost all tourism in the Marine Park.

Tourism operators can make an important contribution to the Marine Park and its surrounding communities through:

- Increasing community understanding about the marine environment and management for sustainable use
- Taking an interest in the areas they operate in by participating in monitoring, helping researchers and reporting incidents
- Contributing to management of the Marine Park through payment of the Environmental Management Charge
- Benefiting local, regional and national economies.

There are over 820 permitted tourism operators in the Marine Park, allowing around 1500 vessels and aircraft to operate within the area and offering a diverse range of activities.



Day tours are the most popular way for tourists to experience the Marine Park, with about 30 per cent of all tourists accessing the area on one of the five biggest day tour operations. Day tours are typically conducted in large capacity, high-speed catamarans that access pontoons located in sheltered areas close to the reef.

Overnight and extended tours typically extend over three or four days and provide access to the more remote areas of the Marine Park. The group sizes are smaller and often itineraries are tailored to individual clients.

Aircraft or helicopter tours are conducted over the Marine Park and in some areas tourists are able to access the Marine Park by sea plane or helicopter.

Bareboat operations cater for those who wish to sail independently in the Marine Park. This type of operation is particularly suited to the Whitsundays where there is spectacular island scenery and many reefs and bays to access.

Cruise ships are increasingly

accessing the Marine Park, primarily in Cairns and Whitsundays. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority has identified a series of cruise ship anchorages in the Marine Park to enable these large vessels to safely access a range of reefs and islands.

Beach hire and watersports operations are focused close to resort areas and regional centres. The craft and equipment usually hired includes motorised vessels such as dinghies and personal watercraft, plus non-motorised vessels such as kayaks, sailboards and surf skis.

Managing tourism

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is the Australian Government agency responsible for ensuring the Marine Park is used sustainably and protected for future generations. It is also the lead agency responsible for ensuring that Australia's obligations to the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area are met under the World Heritage Convention.

Within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, the Tourism and Recreation Group is committed to fostering a sustainable, diverse and world-class marine tourism industry by addressing priority tourism and recreation matters in cooperation with the tourism industry and other stakeholders.

The emphasis is on ensuring that tourism and recreation use of the Marine Park is sustainable. The group's key objectives are:

- Ensuring we have and communicate appropriate management arrangements
- Encouraging best practice use
- Ensuring a range of sustainable tourism and recreation opportunities
- Achieving a thorough understanding of tourism and recreation in the Marine Park
- Increasing understanding of Marine Park values
- Developing and maintaining strong partnerships within the tourism industry, recreational bodies and government

- Ensuring we have motivated, trained and supported staff to deliver the vision.

In managing tourism use of the Marine Park, particular attention is given to:

- Protecting coral reefs and other habitats
- Protecting whales, turtles, sea birds and dugongs especially during breeding times
- Respecting the cultural importance of the Marine Park to Indigenous Australians
- Minimising conflicts in access within this multiple use Marine Park
- Encouraging high standards in all tourism activities.

Tourism on the Great Barrier Reef is managed within a framework of protection, wise-use, understanding and enjoyment.

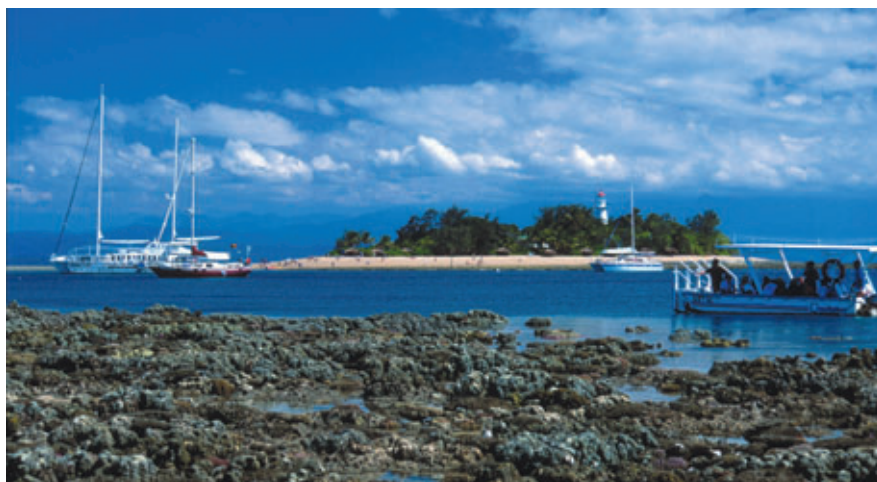
The Zoning Plan defines in broad terms a set of management objectives for each zone and describes the activities that are allowed, including those, such as tourism operations, that need a permit.

Plans of Management provide sustainable opportunities for tourism while managing issues such as environmental protection of high-use sites, separation of different uses, resolution of conflicting use and limiting use where necessary. Plans of Management have been prepared for areas that are heavily used or vulnerable, and have specific issues that need to be managed. Tourism management is one of the focuses of the Plans of Management for the Cairns Area, the Hinchinbrook Area and the Whitsundays.

Site Management Arrangements describe specific management initiatives for popular reefs or bays. Here, the focus is on localised issues and the arrangements are developed in close consultation with local users.

Permits are jointly issued by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and are required for all commercial tourism activities. Permits usually contain some conditions that further ensure that tourism operations are sustainable.

Responsible Reef Practices are guidelines for tourism operators and their staff outlining environmentally responsible ways to behave when operating in the Marine Park. In addition, many of the tourism associations have developed voluntary codes of conduct to encourage sustainable operations. The tourism industry adopting high standards in all aspects of their operations results in a better



protected Marine Park and high quality tourism products for its visitors.

Certification is a voluntary programme that allows tourism operations to demonstrate the high standards achieved. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority encourages operators to become certified with a recognised scheme and provides a range of benefits to certified high standard operations (including long-term permits).

Education and training is also extremely important in management of the Marine Park. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority communicates information about the special values of the Marine Park, management requirements for tourism operations, and how operators can work in partnership through a range of quality information products and training programmes.

Industry and community involvement

Cooperative initiatives between managing agencies and the tourism industry are an important component of marine tourism management. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority works with the tourism industry to:

- Develop improved management policies and strategies
- Become involved as a partner in Marine Park management, for example through reporting incidents and monitoring environmental conditions
- Develop further information and education products
- Encourage high standards by adopting Responsible Reef Practices and complying with industry codes of conduct.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority also established a Tourism and Recreation Reef Advisory Committee (TRRAC) to provide advice on the management of tourism and recreation use in the Marine Park. Local communities and members of the tourism industry can also be involved in management of the Marine Park through a series of Local Marine

Advisory Committees based in regional centres along the coast.

The future

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority recognises the important role the marine tourism industry plays in presenting the area to the general public and its potential to work in cooperation with managers to achieve best practice sustainable use of the Marine Park. Through working cooperatively with the marine tourism industry, the aim is to ensure a sustainable and vibrant future for tourism in the Marine Park.

Want more information?

Go to 'Onboard – The Tourism Operator's Handbook for the Great Barrier Reef' available on our website and view up-to-date Responsible Reef Practices for tourism.

For Further Information

Visit the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's website:
www.gbrmpa.gov.au

Visit or write to us:
2-68 Flinders Street
PO Box 1379 Townsville Qld 4810
Australia

Send an email: info@gbrmpa.gov.au

Call or send us a fax:
Phone: +61 7 4750 0700
Fax: +61 7 4772 6093

