



Coastal Cravings

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, THE DELIGHTS OF THE WHITSUNDAYS ARE NOT ALL TO BE FOUND OFFSHORE. LOUISE GOLDSBURY DISCOVERS PARADISE ON THE MAINLAND.

A JEWEL EMBEDDED BETWEEN forest and sea on Queensland's Whitsunday coastline, beautiful Airlie Beach has played host to Great Barrier Reef and Whitsunday Islands visitors since tourism in the area began.

As travellers are discovering though, this gateway town to some of the world's greatest natural attractions has become a tropical treasure in its own right. Stunning natural beauty, luxury residential developments, world-class resorts, hi-tech marinas and five-star cuisine are just some of the reasons people are flocking to amazing Airlie Beach.

Tucked into a nook where the Conway Ranges meet the Coral Sea, the coastal town was built in a prime position, with hilltop resorts and restaurants overlooking the ocean. While Airlie Beach offers plenty of coastline for its adoring visitors, it also boasts the safest place to swim in the area – a man-made feature that some say is the world's greatest swimming pool!

Airlie Beach Lagoon is a landscaped creation on the seashore which not only





South Molle Island is a short cruise from Airlie Beach.



Taste Airlie's vibrant night-life at Armada's Lounge Bar.

offers safe, supervised swimming but is also a popular shaded spot for barbecues, sunbathing and socialising with fellow travellers. The protected nature of Airlie Beach Lagoon ensures the water remains stinger-free, while a full-body lycra swimsuit for swimming in the open ocean during the warmer months will keep the box jellyfish at bay.

The streets of Airlie Beach have a true summer holiday feel, with a good mix of visitors, including Australian and foreign tourists, families, couples and singles.

The buzz is strongest on weekends. On Saturdays the markets are held on the foreshore parkland, with up to 130 arts, crafts and food stalls under the palm trees. Locals and visitors gather in outdoor beer gardens from midday on weekends, and as the afternoon heat retreats the music begins to pump from numerous bars.

There are nightspots to suit every taste and budget, from backpackers' pubs promoting bargain beers and sweaty, dance-all-night antics to boutique bars and award-winning restaurants.

Head off the main drag and be tempted by tasty treats from the beautiful row of eateries on The Esplanade. Whether you're here for breakfast, brunch, lunch



WHERE TO STAY

Coral Sea Resort

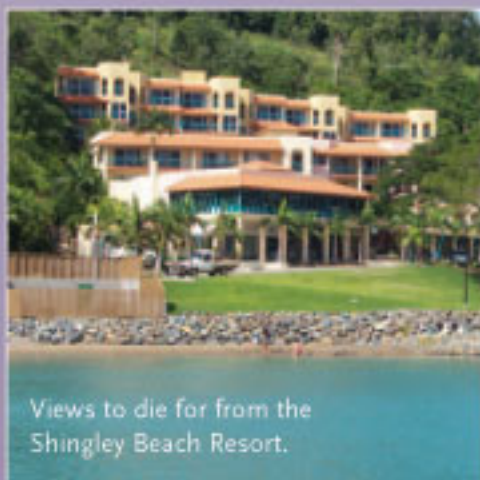
Set on a spit of land just three minutes walk from Airlie Beach village, this luxurious, absolute waterfront, 4.5-star boutique hotel has stunning 280-degree views. Suites feature an outdoor spa and double hammock. The resort also has its own 25-metre pool, gym, a choice of restaurants, a bar, a beauty therapy centre and much more. Its unique position means the Coral Sea Resort is the closest you'll come to feeling as though you're on an island whilst still on the mainland.

25 Oceanview Avenue, Airlie Beach.
Call 1800 075 061 or 07 4946 6458
or visit www.coralsearesort.com.

Grand Mercure Azure Sea Whitsundays

Designed by architects and interior designers, the level of attention that has gone into this new luxury hotel (opened late last month), the first internationally branded hotel in Airlie Beach, is fantastic. The apartment-style accommodation offers one-, two- or three-bedroom layouts, all with spectacular views over the Coral Sea from spacious, private balconies. Curved sail roofs and blue glass create a nautical theme that is continued throughout the rooms and common areas, which include a spa, gym, infinity pool with waterfall and tropical, landscaped gardens.

79 Rain Forest Place, Airlie Beach.
Call 07 4964 1000 or visit
www.accorhotels.com.au.



Views to die for from the Shingley Beach Resort.

Shingley Beach Resort

Less than 50 metres from the water, the Shingley Beach Resort offers self-contained holiday apartments that boast large balconies with dramatic views. The resort has two saltwater pools and the Anchorage Restaurant and Bar is also on site.

1 Shingley Drive, Airlie Beach.
Call (07) 4948 8300.



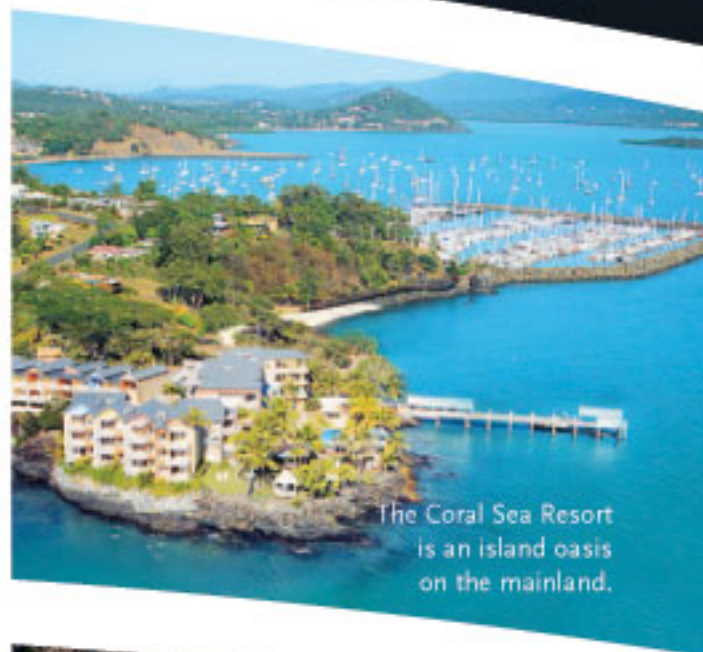
Sail away: adrenaline chasers hit the waves.



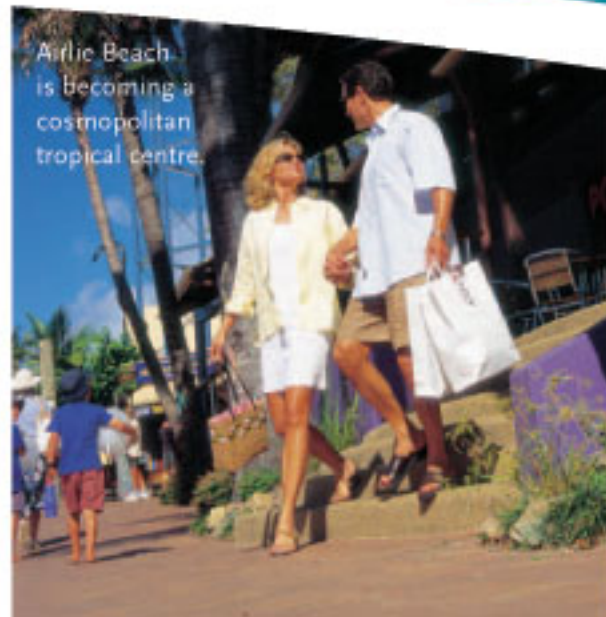
or dinner, anything you could wish for is on offer, from a cappuccino and muffin to a simple pizza, fish and chips or a full seafood feast. When stars pepper the night sky, scatterings of fairy lights along The Esplanade create a dreamy ambience.

The beachfront strip is always bustling without being too busy, and offers more than 50 restaurants and coffee shops. Extreme Bean, the town's first espresso bar, serves seriously great coffee. For an evening drink, Armada's Lounge Bar & Restaurant never fails to deliver a wonderful atmosphere, and with its new zam licence, you may never want to leave. Another hot spot is Jamaica Joe's, a groovy three-in-one American-style diner, bar and cocktail lounge.

One of the finest restaurants in Airlie Beach is OnAqua, which serves modern Australian cuisine and boasts uninterrupted views of the Coral Sea from every table. Owner Damien Orth opened the restaurant the week before Christmas last year. It was always going to be a wonderful dining experience – in the past Orth had won the Restaurant of Champions award three times, as well as the Golden Chef Hat Award and hundreds of medals for his creative cooking style. ▶



The Coral Sea Resort is an island oasis on the mainland.



Airlie Beach is becoming a cosmopolitan tropical centre.

Several developments are bringing a new level of luxury to the town. This is attracting more overseas visitors, as well as a whole new class of holidaymakers.

Airlie Beach's first multinational group hotel, the Grand Mercure Azure Sea Whitsundays, has just opened. On a hill overlooking the beach, it's topped off by curved sail roofs and guests can enjoy an infinity pool with waterfall and spa.

The main preoccupation in Airlie Beach though, is cruising on the water. Whether it's a daytrip to Whitehaven Beach or a week of scuba diving, there's a massive choice of boats for all budgets.

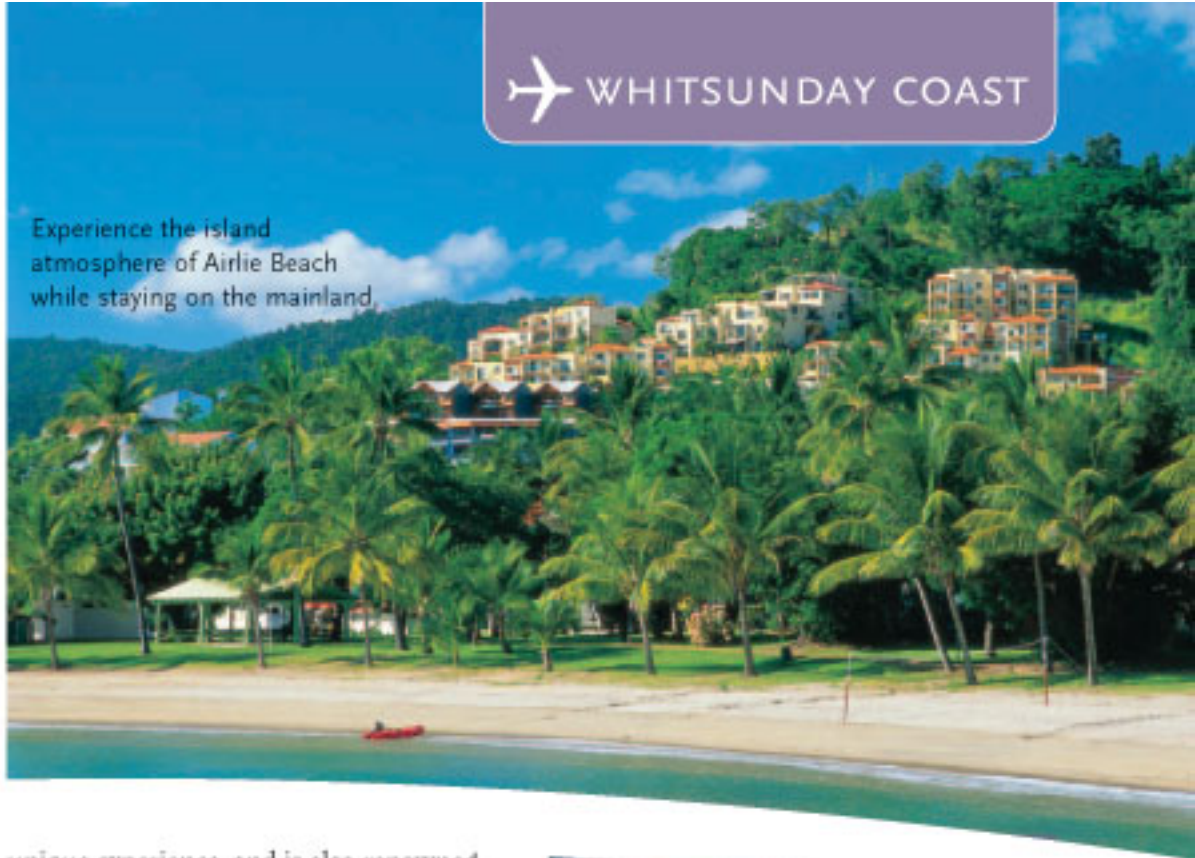
Sundowner Cruises is the latest company to hit the waters, offering sunset cruises, party cruises and full-moon parties, and it's the only boat in the Whitsundays serving draught beer and 'slushie' cocktails.

The 38-metre *Pacific Sunrise*, once a Fijian island trader, has had a multi-million-dollar fitout and now departs twice weekly with a maximum of 17 guests for three-night or six-night sailing holidays around the islands and reef. Each of the eight guest suites is air-conditioned and some have a unique feature – in the Blue Pearl Suite guests can watch the sunset on their own deck, while the Whitehaven Suite has its own private sitting room.

If you'd prefer to go it alone, Whitsunday Private Yacht Charters has a stunning range of yachts, catamarans and motor cruisers on offer, which you can skipper yourself and allow your flexible itinerary to follow the warm, tropical tide.

Fantasea Cruises heads for the award-winning Reefworld, a floating adventure platform 39 nautical miles off the coast. When the daytrippers have departed, a select few stay overnight at Reefsleeper. Floating in the ocean with just a few rooms for two or four people, Reefsleeper is a truly

Experience the island atmosphere of Airlie Beach while staying on the mainland.



unique experience, and is also renowned for its cuisine. Snorkel among the tropical fish while a candlelit dinner is prepared for you to enjoy under the stars.

Enjoy a simple daytrip to Whitehaven Beach. Kookaburra Cruises visits the famous white sand beach, stopping at South Molle Island on the way back.

Most yachts and dive boats depart from Abel Point Marina, which has 300 berths for boats of all shapes and sizes, and is currently being extended to 500 berths. A new luxury development, the Port of Airlie, will comprise another 250 berths as well as a four-star hotel, 365 residential apartments, shops, restaurants and a spa.

It all adds up to somewhere very special, so before you book the first cruise out of town, consider anchoring at Airlie Beach. The islands can wait. ■

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If you can't handle the heat, get out of Armada's kitchen.

JUST GO DO IT

There's only one thing better than exploring the Whitsunday Coast from the water – exploring it from the air! Virgin Blue partner GoDo offers a range of exciting activities, including a scenic flight with lunch on an island of your choice. Or, why not indulge with a Whitehaven Beach Discovery Cruise, where you'll cruise to the iconic silica beach for lunch and a spot of snorkelling or diving. Visit www.virginblue.com.au and click on the Activities icon.



BOOK YOUR FLIGHT

Virgin Blue offers convenient flights to the Whitsunday Coast. For more information or to book, visit www.virginblue.com.au or call 13 6789 (in Australia) or 0800 67 0000 (in New Zealand). For all your travel insurance needs, from as little as \$5, visit www.virginblue.com.au and click on the insurance icon, or call 1800 010 457.

B-Secure  www.virginblue.com.au

BOOK A HOLIDAY

Fly to the Whitsunday Coast and kick back at the luxurious 4.5-star Coral Sea Resort Airlie Beach from just \$358 ex Brisbane, \$438 ex Sydney and \$538 ex Melbourne per person twin share. Book before 31/08/2006 for travel between 01/08/2006-14/09/2006 or 17/10/2006-14/12/2006. Visit www.blueholidays.com.au for more details. [blueholidays.com.au](http://www.blueholidays.com.au)

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