

Whales of the Whitsundays

Welcome to the Whitsundays, a Whale Heritage Site within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

The Whitsundays are officially recognised as a Whale Heritage Site, a title that celebrates its global significance as a vital calving ground for humpback whales. If you're visiting from June to October, you're in luck... it's whale season! During this special time of year, migrating humpbacks often make an appearance, so keep your eyes peeled. You might spot a misty blow, a mighty tail slap, or even a playful breach! If you are fortunate enough to encounter whales while you are travelling through the Whitsunday Islands, your captain will switch off the engines to give them space and give you the chance to soak in the magic. It's an unforgettable sight, so sit back, relax, and enjoy the show!

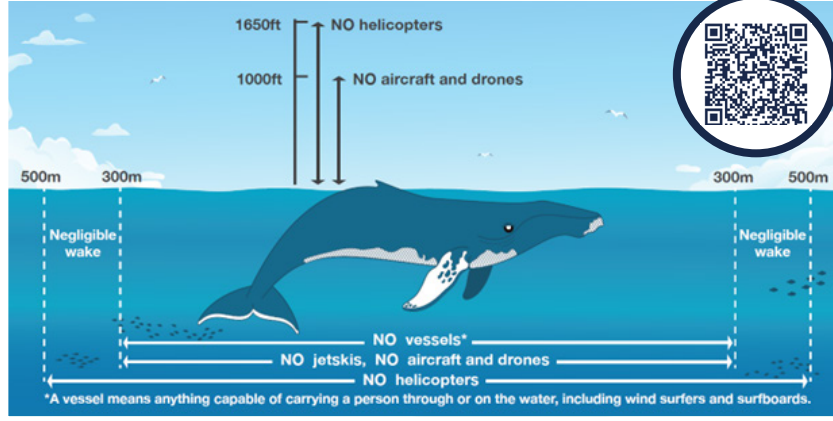


Learn more about the Whales of the Whitsundays



Download the Eye on the Reef App

WHITSUNDAYS WHALE PROTECTION AREA



Join the Whales of the Whitsundays Facebook Group



Discover how the Whitsundays has become a designated Whale Heritage Area



Meet Whitsunday Marine Conservation Inc.

LEARN TO SPEAK WHALE

BLOW

- Condensed breath when the whale comes to the surface to breathe and exhale.

TAIL SLAP

- Slaps tail on surface of water hard and fast.
- Used for **communication**, **scaring fish** or as a sign of **aggression**.

HEAD SLAP

- Head comes up first and is smashed forcefully on the water.
- Less than 40% of the whale is above the surface.
- Function is relatively unknown.

FLUKING

- Fluke (tail) is raised above water surface in an arch like movement.
- Normally indicates a deeper dive.

SPY HOP

- Whale brings head above water surface and is vertical in the water.
- Often performed to visually inspect the environment above the water line.

PEC SLAP

- Whale is on side and hits surface with one or both flippers.
- Various possible functions including feeding, playing, communicating and mating.

PENDUNCLE THROW / SLAP

- Fluke and peduncle are thrown out of the water with great force.
- Possible aggressive connotation, dominance behaviour.

BREACH

- Whale leaps out of water. More than 40% is above the surface
- Many different meanings that include communication, playing, dominance, dislodging parasites, courting and stunning prey.





Whitsundays: A Living Cultural and Natural Heritage

The Whitsundays has a rich cultural heritage. Our traditional owners have watched over our whales for thousands of years.

Welcome to the Whitsundays, a place of stunning natural beauty and deep cultural significance. As you cruise through these turquoise waters and island landscapes, you're also travelling through the sea Country of the Ngaro people, the Traditional Owners of this region.

The Ngaro, often referred to as the Sea People, have lived in close connection with these islands and oceans for over 9,000 years. The Whitsundays were the heart of their life and culture. Using handcrafted three-piece canoes made of ironbark, called winta, they navigated these waters for fishing, gathering, and community journeys. Their deep understanding of the marine environment enabled them to sustainably hunt sea creatures, including dugongs, turtles, and even small whales, using barbed harpoons that allowed for humane, controlled hunting.

One of the oldest known archaeological sites in the Great Barrier Reef is here at Nara Inlet on Hook Island. Rock art and cultural markings tell us that the Ngaro have long held a spiritual connection to this land and sea, a connection that continues today.

The Dreaming, a spiritual worldview of creation and connection, lives in stories passed down through generations. One such story from Ngaro Elder Aunty Sue, tells of the Rainbow Serpent who moved through the sea, laying her eggs as she went. Those eggs became the islands you see today, giving us sacred reminders of the past in the present landscape.

While colonisation caused great disruption to Ngaro life, including the loss of language, traditions, and sacred songs, the spirit of the people remains strong. Today, Traditional Owners are working to revive these stories and songs. The Ngaro people's connection to whales continues with the annual arrival of whales, signifying the start of women's business.

The Whitsundays are now a recognised Whale Heritage Site and is one of the few places in the world acknowledged for its cultural and ecological importance to whales. Locals and visitors alike help keep that connection alive by watching, respecting, and reporting sightings of whales as they migrate and calve in these waters.

Indigenous rangers, like Leo Gabey of Ngaro descent, now help manage and protect the Great Barrier Reef. As part of a nationally recognised ranger program, they combine traditional knowledge with modern science to care for the marine park, educate visitors, and monitor impacts on sacred Country.

As you enjoy your time here whether it's sailing, snorkelling, or simply soaking in the views, remember that these waters hold more than beauty. They hold thousands of years of knowledge, culture, and connection.

You are not just visiting paradise, you are travelling through living heritage.



Watch out for our *Whales*

DID YOU KNOW...

The Whitsundays is a vitally important breeding ground for the humpback whales and we all have a responsibility to help protect them by keeping a safe distance.

DO I NEED TO OPERATE MY BOAT DIFFERENTLY DURING WHALE SEASON?

Remember - go slow for those below!

Go slower during whale season (June - October) and keep a watch out for whales when cruising. Consider not driving your boat at night when you are unable to see them. **Never** actively approach a whale (within 300 metres).

WHAT DO I DO IF A WHALE APPROACHES?

Take all precautions to avoid a collision! Either slow down and steer away from the whale or place the engines in neutral and let the whale pass.

WHAT DO I DO IF I HIT A WHALE?

If you accidentally strike a whale or dolphin you must report it! Visit www.gbrmpa.gov.au/help/report-an-incident



... Report an incident

I HAVE SOME GREAT WHALE PHOTOS - WHO CAN I SHARE THESE WITH?

Become an Citizen Scientist and share your photos by either:

- Creating a 'sighting' in the **Eye on the Reef App**
- If you capture a whale fluke (underside of tail), upload your photo on happywhale.com so you can track your whale around the globe!

CAN I SWIM WITH WHALES?

No. Swimming with whales is not permitted in the Whale Protection Area. If you see anyone swimming with whales you can report it via the Eye on the Reef App.

Love whales?

Join our pod!

Join our online community via the **Whales of the Whitsundays** Facebook Group!

Share your whale photos and sightings, learn more from other users and keep up to date with local news.

