Sunsail

Cruising Guide

The Whitsundays, Australia

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CREDITS

Much of the information in this brief guide is taken from the fabulous Whitsundays guide book, "100 Magic Miles" by David Colfelt *Published Windward Publications*. This publication is available for purchase through Sunsail Australia.

DISCLAIMER

The information in this Brief Cruising Guide is correct at the time of producing. We recommend that you use nautical chart 252 accompanied by the guide book "100 Magic Miles" by David Colfelt when boating in the Whitsundays. Distances and recommendations are all weather dependent. This guide is not to be used for navigational purposes.

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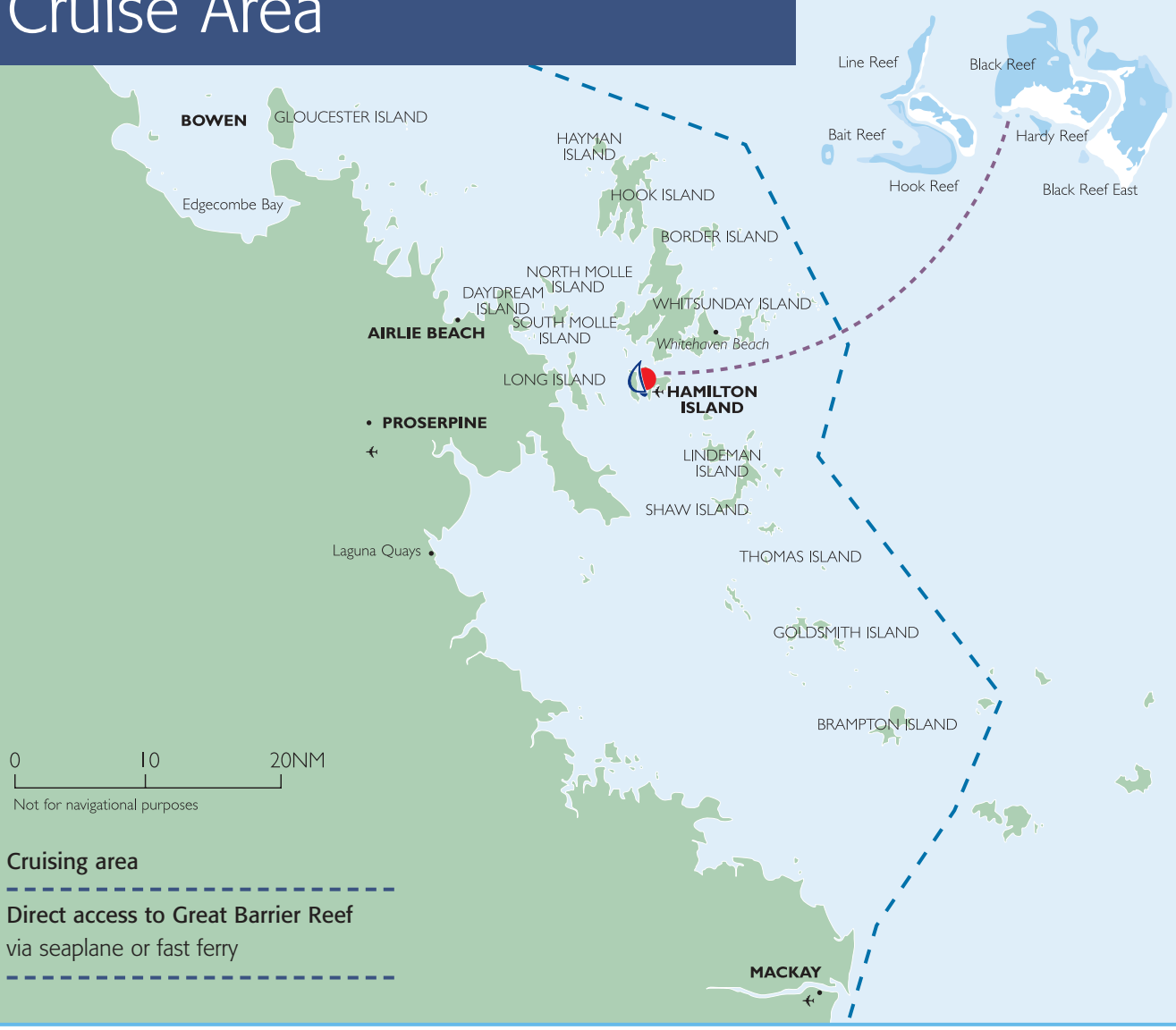
GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

The Whitsundays are situated on the north east coast of Queensland inside the Great Barrier Reef, between latitude 20° and 21° south and longitude 148° 48′ and 148° 30′ east.

Cruise Area



Introduction

Whitehaven Beach, Whitsunday Island.

AREA

The Whitsunday islands were 'discovered' by Europeans in the year 1770 but were a favoured hunting and fishing grounds of Australia's Aboriginal people for many thousands of years before that.

The Whitsunday islands are located in warms waters between 20 and 21 degrees south latitude. The many islands lie off the coast of Queensland on the north east coast of Australia and are sheltered by the magnificent Great Barrier Reef.

Now listed as a World Heritage National Park, there are over 74 stunning islands and hundreds of anchorages and islets to explore when sailing the Whitsundays. The area is a year-round cruising destination with a subtropical climate affording mild winters and warm to very warm summer months. The water temperature varies from 22-27 degrees Celsius year round and the Queensland sun creates a 'shorts and shirt' style of weather most of the time.

The mountainous islands are covered with eucalypt pine with patches of vivid green grassland or the occasional shadowy gully of rainforest and waterfalls. The shores of the islands are skirted by fringing coral reefs making it a mecca for snorkelling and diving enthusiasts. From July to September you can even sail with humpback whales.

Snorkelling The Great Barrier Reef, Australia

Humpback whale, The Whitsundays

Sunsail Base

Hamilton Island

BASE INFORMATION

Sunsail's Whitsundays base is located on Hamilton Island - the heart of the Whitsundays and the gateway to the Great Barrier Reef, which is a World Heritage Listed National Park.

With its own jet airport just 5 minutes from our base, 10 cosmopolitan restaurants, an expansive range of resort and self-contained accommodation and a ton of activities, Hamilton Island is Australia's largest and most popular island holiday destination.
A multitude of activities will keep you entertained before you set your sails, such as

- A golf driving range
- Mini-golf
- Go-karts
- A health club
- A unique Wire Flyer

The Sunsail base is very close to all of the conveniences in the Marina Village. There are shower/toilet facilities for guests and the village also has a grocery store, National Australia Bank, post office, TAB, medical centre, bottle shop, bakery, souvenir store, newsagents and much more!

Hamilton Island Marina

Sunsail Whitsundays Base

Cid Harbour

Cid Harbour

DISTANCE FROM BASE: 8NM

INTRODUCTION TO AREA

Cid Harbour - is a popular first or last night anchorage due to its close proximity to Hamilton Island. It is the largest all-weather anchorage in the Whitsundays and is formed by Cid Island on the west and Whitsundays Island on the east.

A number of sand beaches line the eastern side of Cid Harbour - Dugong Beach, Sawmill Beach immediately to its south and Joe's Beach about 3 km further south. Dugong Inlet gets its name from the fact that in earlier times it was frequented by dugongs, marine mammals that graze on sea grasses and which may still occasionally be observed there. There is also a population of rock-wallaby, which are believed to have been isolated from the mainland 10,000 years ago.

APPROACHES

Watch out for strong currents and gusts of wind when entering Cid Harbour from the south between Cid Island and Loriard Point. Give the point a good berth.

Sawmill Beach
Approach all anchorages with care and be aware of the state of the tide as the beach slopes are fairly gradual.

Dugong Inlet
Approach from Cid Harbour. Stay about 150 metres off the port shore and keep lookout.

ANCHORAGE

Sawmill Beach
Depth: 5 - 8 metres
Bottom: Sand and coral
This is the best of Cid Harbour's anchorages and the beach has an established campsite with tables. A great spot for a picnic!

Dugong Inlet
Depth: 1.5-3 metres
Bottom: Mud & coral
This is a shallow anchorage but one in which the bottom is very soft mud. Very safe in most weather conditions from the NW, N, NE, E and SE.

AMENITIES

National Park with picnic table and amenities block. All rubbish must be taken back onboard with you.

THINGS TO SEE & DO

- Bushwalk from Sawmill Beach to Dugong Inlet
- Turtle watching
- Beach fossicking
- Swimming

Hook Island Nara & Maconna Inlets

Nara Inlet right / Maconna Inlet left

DISTANCE FROM BASE: 12 NM

INTRODUCTION TO AREA

Hook Island is a massive island approximately 13 kilometres long and six kilometres wide with lofty, rugged peaks and deep embayments.

Hook Island - Western side, Nara and Maconna Inlets - These two deep fjord-like inlets on the southern side of Hook Island offer excellent all-weather anchorages. These inlets penetrate the island for a distance of over four kilometres and are flanked both sides by hills that rise over 250 metres. Aboriginal cave shelters can be found at a number of locations in these hills and a track to one shelter in Nara Inlet with rock paintings on its walls has been constructed for the convenience of visitors.

Nara Inlet

APPROACHES

Maconna Inlet

When entering keep to the port side to avoid Proud Rock. A back transit may be used to check your progress; hold Hill Rock to the east of Pine Island.

Nara Inlet

Keep to starboard side on entering to avoid the reef area that extends over much of the entrance.

ANCHORAGE

Maconna Inlet

Depth: 4.5 - 6 metres
Bottom: Mud
Allow sufficient swinging room.

Nara Inlet

Depth: 6 - 9 metres
Bottom: Mud
Great anchorage in most weather conditions.
Allow sufficient swinging room.

AMENITIES

Nil.

THINGS TO SEE & DO

- Waterfalls
- Bush walks
- Aboriginal caves

Langford Island

Langford Island in background, Black Island (Bali Hai) in foreground

DISTANCE FROM BASE: 17NM

INTRODUCTION TO AREA

Langford Island is two nautical miles south of Hayman Island and west of Hook Island. It is a relatively small (about 10 hectares), rocky, wooded island 56 metres high.

It is unique in some respects, being a cross between a continental island and a coral cay. An extensive sand spit spreads out to its south and southeast. This is a great place for picking up a mooring and snorkelling its northern shelf, or having lunch on its beautiful sandy spit.

Langford Island, foreground, Black Island (Bali Hai) in background and Stonehaven Anchorage, Hook Island in distance

APPROACHES

If approaching from the west, keep well outside Bird Island.

Reef protection buoys have been installed along Langford's eastern reef.

Anchor outside an imaginary line straight between these buoys if you cannot find a public mooring.

ANCHORAGE

Depth: 9 - 14 metres
Bottom: Sand and coral

Anchor outside an imaginary line between the white triangle reef marker buoys if you cannot find a public mooring to pick up. Watch out for the scattered bommies lying along the reef margin.

AMENITIES

Nil.

THINGS TO SEE & DO

- White sandy beach
- Snorkelling

Butterfly Bay

Butterfly Bay

DISTANCE FROM BASE: 20NM

INTRODUCTION TO AREA

Butterfly Bay is located on the north eastern side of Hook Island and is tucked in behind the precipitous northeast face of Mt Sydney.

This bay and others (Luncheon Bay, Mantaray Bay, Maureen's Cove) along this north eastern shore offer some of the best snorkelling the region has to offer. Butterfly Bay is shaped somewhat like a butterfly with one underdeveloped wing. Colonies of butterflies may be found at times in the moist shade of trees along the creek beds.

Butterfly Bay moorings

APPROACHES

If approaching from the west, (ie. from Hayman Island and Stonehaven) use caution negotiating the passage between Hook and Hayman as the reef extends a long way off Hayman. If approaching from the east side of Hook Island, be prepared for strong currents and over falls around Pinnacle Point.

ANCHORAGE

Depth: 6 - 9 metres
Bottom: Mud and coral
The western bay gives the best protection particularly from swell in north-easterlies. The bottom is strewn with coral, which has suffered damage over the years. Reef protection buoys have now been installed. There are seven public moorings inshore of these. Pick your way along the left side of the reef which is steep-to and have a lookout posted at all times.

AMENITIES

Nil.

THINGS TO SEE & DO

- Snorkelling
- Beach fossicking

Border Island - Looking north to Hook Island

Border Island

DISTANCE FROM BASE: 22NM

INTRODUCTION TO AREA

Border is a somewhat Y-shaped, rocky island (about 390 hectares) deeply embayed on its northern side by Cataran Bay and with plunging cliffs along its east side.

Moss-Trooper Peak - its highest point - rises 228 metres. Border Island is largely covered in eucalypt forest and woodland with emergent hoop pines and grassland on the eastern side. This is a great place for picking up a mooring and snorkelling its northern shelf or having lunch on its beautiful sandy spit.

Border Island - Cataran Bay anchorage. Looking south - Whitsunday Island in background

APPROACHES

Border Island is one of the outlying island that will truly reward your efforts for going there!

ANCHORAGE

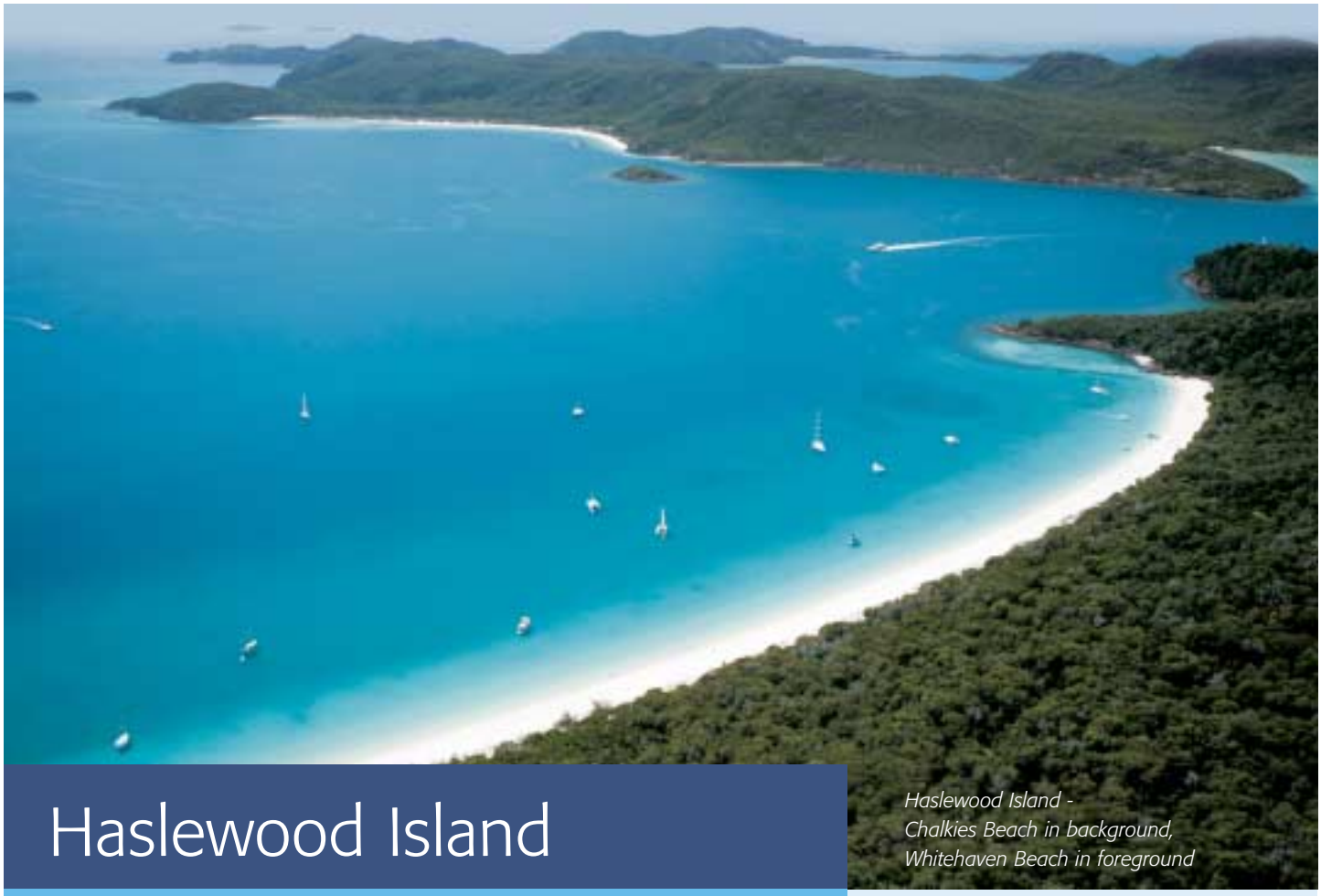
Depth: 6 - 9 metres
Bottom: Sand and coral
Cataran Bay is subject to bullets when the wind is over 20 knots. Border Island can be a delightful anchorage if the wind isn't too brisk.

AMENITIES

Nil.

THINGS TO SEE & DO

The fringing reef in Cataran Bay is well developed and good for snorkelling and scuba diving. A nice moderate bush walk to the highest peak provides awesome views of Whitsunday Island, Haslewood Island, Hook Island and Whitehaven Beach.



Haslewood Island - Chalkies Beach in background, Whitehaven Beach in foreground

Haslewood Island

DISTANCE FROM BASE: 12NM

INTRODUCTION TO AREA

Haslewood Island is located just east of Whitsunday Island and is separated by the sometimes turbulent Solway Passage. Haslewood is approximately 777 hectares of wooded island with many patches of grassland and some sizable acacia forest.

APPROACHES

Stay outside Martin Islets if coming from the south; approach from the southern end of the anchorage closing gradually to pick up the fringing reef.

ANCHORAGE

Depth: 6 - 9 metres
Bottom: Sand and coral
Anchor north of the gap in the reef; further south is deeper water.
This anchorage has a magnificent beach. If Whitehaven Beach is overcrowded it is a good alternative and also has great snorkelling.

AMENITIES

Nil.

THINGS TO SEE & DO

On the western side is the white silica sand of Chalkies Beach, which is great for snorkelling, diving and reef fossicking.

Whitehaven Beach

Whitehaven Beach southern end

DISTANCE FROM BASE: 10NM

INTRODUCTION TO AREA

Voted one the world's top three beaches, Whitehaven Beach is located on Whitsunday Island and boasts a six-kilometre stretch of pure white silica sand. This all-tidal beach is very popular for yachts and cruise boats. The vegetation on and behind the dunes of Whitehaven is unusual for the islands. At the northern end of Whitehaven Beach is Hill Inlet, which is lined with mangroves and penetrates the island profoundly. Hill Inlet is an important area from migratory birds passing on their way south from Siberia and Alaska to their wintering sites in Australia. Some 30 species have been recorded at various times such as Eastern Curlew, Bar Tailed Godwit and Ruddy Turnstone.

Whitehaven Beach, Hill Inlet - northern end

APPROACHES

If coming from Solway Passage watch out for the reef area, which is always covered at the south-east end of Whitehaven Beach. It is marked with a north cardinal mark. Proceed north until you are well clear of the passage before turning to port and heading for the beach.

ANCHORAGE

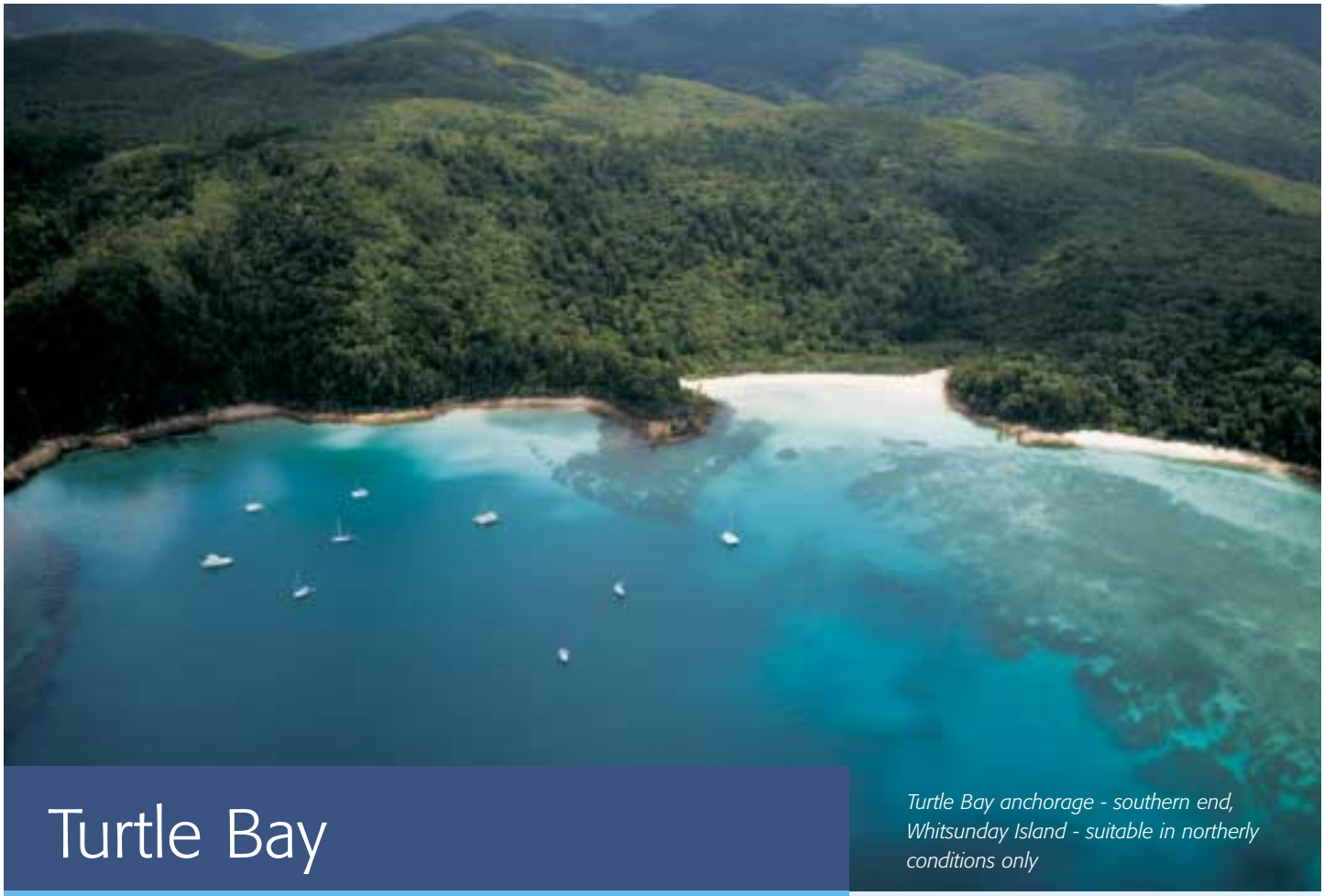
Depth: 5 - 10 metres
Bottom: Sand
A picturesque anchorage. Whitehaven is an incredible expanse of pure white sand, the legacy of a geological era when the sea level was lower. It is a magnificent beach and one that is understandably popular with yachts.

AMENITIES

Toilet block.

THINGS TO SEE & DO

- Beach
- Bush walks
- Lookout at Hill Inlet
- Spotting turtles, mantarays, sting rays and dolphins



Turtle Bay anchorage - southern end, Whitsunday Island - suitable in northerly conditions only

Turtle Bay

DISTANCE FROM BASE: 5NM

INTRODUCTION TO AREA

Located on the southern side of Whitsunday Island, this special bay can only be accessed in winds from a general north, north-east or north-west direction. Turtle Bay consists of a series of beautiful bays just east of Fitzalan Passage. It is a common first or last night anchorage due to its close proximity to Hamilton Island.

APPROACHES

There are no major hazards when entering this bay - just leave about equal distance on both sides. Of ones close to shore the left hand bay tends to offer the best protection.

ANCHORAGE

Depth: 3 - 6 metres
Bottom: Sand and coral
A beautiful anchorage with a waterfall to the left that runs after heavy rains. A lovely white sandy beach and some great snorkelling or scuba diving opportunities with lots of soft corals.

AMENITIES

Nil.

THINGS TO SEE & DO

- Beach
- Bush walk
- Snorkelling

Lindeman Island, Club Med Resort and light aircraft strip

Lindeman Island

DISTANCE FROM BASE: 16NM

INTRODUCTION TO AREA

Lindeman Island is a large 790 hectare island that is mostly covered by eucalypt forests with patches of rainforest on the northern half and large areas of grassland on its southern half. Around its perimeter the island has numerous wide bays, many with pleasant sandy beaches.

Located on the northern side of Lindeman Island is a Club Med Resort. The attractive central resort complex is a large pavilion with a swimming pool, 9-hole golf course, tennis courts, basketball courts, archery, bars, dining room, boutique stores, watersports on the beach and an entertainment centre.

As this is an "all inclusive" resort, the fees to go ashore include all meals and activities.

Lindeman Island, Plantation Bay anchorage

APPROACHES

Tidal currents may reach 2 knots in the passage between Seaforth and Lindeman Islands.

If anchoring in Plantation Bay, stay north of Orion Shoal if coming from the resort side of the island. Anchorages are available on either side of the reef.

ANCHORAGE

Depth: 3 - 6 metres
Bottom: Sand and coral

Plantation Bay
A lovely anchorage with a delightful beach with excellent swimming in the right tide conditions. A track leads inland from the centre of the beach.

Visiting the Resort
Radio reception on VHF Channel 16 or the Watersports Manager on Channel 60.

AMENITIES

Full resort amenities may only be used if paying to go ashore.

THINGS TO SEE & DO

- Beach
- Bush walks
- Resort

Shaw Island, looking south

Shaw Island Billbob Bay

DISTANCE FROM BASE: 20NM

INTRODUCTION TO AREA

Shaw Island is a large (1659 hectares) volcanic, pink granite island with the third highest hill in the Whitsundays (Shaw Peak is 408 metres). It has skeletal granite soils and is covered with sparse open forest. The island is broken into five blocks separated by narrow saddles. There are deep embayments all around the coast, many with mangroves and extensive sand flats. Many of the bays have well-developed fringing reefs.

Shaw Island anchorage

APPROACHES

Billbob Bay

The tide sweeps around Burning Point at a rate of knots. In fresh winds from the south there may be overalls and eddies. Approaching from Burning Point watch out for Platypus Rock, which is now marked. Look out for bommies off the reef, particularly on the eastern side.

ANCHORAGE

Depth: 4 - 6 metres
Bottom: Sand

Billbob Bay

A nice and secluded anchorage with great beaches. As with all southerly exposed anchorages in the Whitsundays, you are potentially on a lee shore. Not recommended for overnight during trade winds season (from April to August).

AMENITIES

Full resort amenities may only be used if paying to go ashore.

THINGS TO SEE & DO

There are beautiful beaches particularly on the southern shore line, some of which are nesting sites for turtles.

Long Island

Long Island

DISTANCE FROM BASE: 6 NM

INTRODUCTION TO AREA

Only four nautical miles from the mainland Long Island, as its name suggests, is an elongated (9km from top to bottom), relatively narrow island separated from the mainland by a deep, narrow channel. It is quite hilly, the east coast with rocky bluffs, except for a few low, sandy saddles about a quarter of the way down where advantage of flat land has been taken to build holiday resorts. The vegetation is quite dense with vine forest and eucalypt forest.

Peppers Palm Bay Lagoon, Long Island

APPROACHES

Happy Bay

The reef from the southern end of the anchorage is deceptive; it extends beyond a line between Base Point at the north of the bay and Humpy Point at the south. Keep a safe distance from the reef to avoid several bommies.

Palm Bay

You must be guided in by resort staff. You will be guided into a man-made lagoon and your yacht will pick up a mooring and tie stern-to to a palm tree. Do not attempt to enter yourself as the entrance is 0m at low tide.

ANCHORAGE

Depth: 6 - 9 metres
Bottom: Sand and coral

Visiting the resort at Happy Bay

Radio ahead on VHF 16 to the Watersports Manager to book a mooring. Fees entitle you to use showers and enjoy all resort facilities including tennis courts, swimming pools and nightly entertainment.

Visiting the resort at Palm Bay

Palm Bay has a dredged channel and lagoon offering another good overnight anchorage. Radio ahead on Channel 16 as it is essential to book.

AMENITIES

Two resorts. Outside of resort areas, there are no amenities.

THINGS TO SEE & DO

Two resorts to experience.

Club Crocodile Long Island is a three-star resort with moorings out the front. They welcome visitors for a minimal fee.

Peppers Palm Bay Resort is about 1 km south of Happy Bay and is an exclusive five-star retreat. It has a great lagoon for mooring and welcomes visitors ashore at certain times of year.

Daydream Island Resort and Spa

Daydream Island

DISTANCE FROM BASE: 20NM

INTRODUCTION TO AREA

Daydream Island is a long narrow island (about one kilometre long and 300 metres wide) that has a resort development on its northern and southern ends, with vine forest and hoop pines covering the hill in the middle.

Spa treatment, Daydream Island

APPROACHES

Approaching from the islands access is via unsafe passage or in-between North and South Molle Islands.

ANCHORAGE

Daydream Island is not a particularly good anchorage as it is subject to swift currents on both sides. There is an opportunity for picking up a mooring or berth alongside their small marina.

AMENITIES

Full spa resort

THINGS TO SEE & DO

- Spa treatments
- Leisure activities
- Dining ashore