



HERVEY BAY WHALE FLEET

WHALE SEASON
JULY-NOV

The Fraser Coast has long traded on its association with World Heritage Listed K'gari-Fraser Island and easy access to the Southern Great Barrier Reef, but now Hervey Bay has added to its appeal after being accredited as the world's first Whale Heritage Site and one of the very best places on the planet to view Eastern humpback whales.



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The world's first Whale Heritage Site

Hervey Bay's status as one of the best whale-watching destinations in the world is underlined by the region's selection in October 2019 as the first Whale Heritage Site, declared by the World Cetacean Alliance.

Hervey Bay pipped Durban in South Africa, which was the second site chosen, in a field of candidate sites, including Vancouver Island in Canada, Marlborough Sounds, New Zealand, Mosaic Jurubatiba, Brazil and Osa Peninsula, Costa Rica.

Visitors who take tours with the Hervey Bay fleet can now be secure in the knowledge they are supporting sustainable whale watching practices judged amongst the best on the planet. The World Heritage Site accreditation scheme for whale-watching destinations was initiated by the World Cetacean Alliance in 2016, to recognise the best global destinations for responsible whale and dolphin watching.

As well as ensuring respectful human-whale interactions, a Whale Heritage Site has to show active engagement by their communities and tourists with

marine life through art, music, science, education and celebratory events.

WHS recognition puts Hervey Bay at the forefront of world's best practice, succinctly summed up in the words of World Cetacean Alliance honorary president, Jean-Michel Cousteau, who said Whale Heritage Sites would become the gold standard for responsible whale watching destinations worldwide "as they have so much more to offer, by interweaving natural and cultural elements and placing communities at their very heart. These sites will become places where people respect, celebrate and protect cetaceans and their habitats long into the future."

Whales are also celebrated annually during Hervey Bay's Whale Festival, with events including the Blessing of the Fleet for a bountiful whale-watching season and the Paddle Out for Whales, rejoicing at the whales' return to the region.



The journey

Thousands of humpback whales pass the Fraser Coast each year during their annual 10,000km return journey from the feeding grounds in the Antarctic to the breeding grounds in tropical waters to our north - the longest mammal migration on earth.

Along the way humpback mothers, pregnant during the previous season, give birth to calves and these juveniles often ride in the slipstream of their parent to keep pace. It is a constant journey, either north or south, depending on the time of the season.

But there is one special place on Australia's east coast where the whales stop to take a break - Hervey Bay, three hours north of Brisbane on Queensland's Fraser Coast.

A natural haven

Like homing pigeons, the whales head to the warm, shallow waters, sheltered in the lee of Fraser Island. It is here humpback mums take the opportunity to feed and bond with their juvenile calves and practise the incredible behaviours whale watchers yearn to see, from breaching and spy hopping to tail slapping. Using fluke identification, the

distinct markings underneath a whales' tail (like a human fingerprint), scientists have proved the same whales return each year, with 10 days the average stopover time.

Milestones

The gestation period for a humpback whale averages 11 months and once born, calves are nursed until their first birthday. The little giants are already five metres long at birth and can weigh up to two tonnes, but they don't stay that size long, rapidly gaining weight from drinking up to 600 litres of milk a day.

The recovery

Eastern Australian humpback whales were nearly wiped out by commercial whaling in the 1960s and while the population is now at sustainable levels, the species is still at risk from a range of threats including entanglement, pollution, habitat degradation and vessel strikes.



Had an amazing encounter with a gentle giant? Share your experience at [#whalesherveybay](#)



Whale encounters like nowhere else on the planet

Because the whales are resting and playing and not migrating, whale-watching experiences in Hervey Bay are exceptional, with a fleet of specially designed vessels offering eco-certified, intimate encounters during the annual season between July and November.

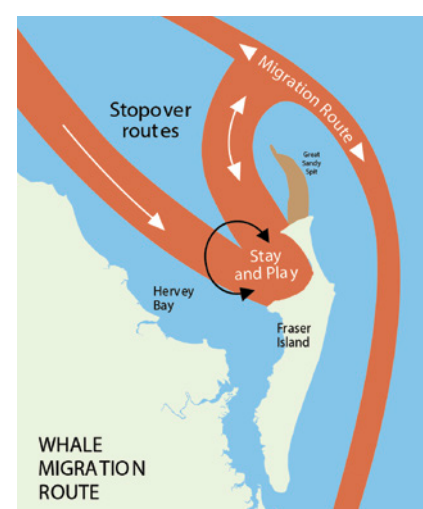
The homing instincts of the whales choosing Hervey Bay as an annual migration stopover is what makes whale watching in these waters so special, because the whales are rested, relaxed and inquisitive. More often than not they come right up to boats in what the locals call 'muggings'.

There are few life-changing experiences more profound than being at arm's length to one of the largest mammals on earth, eyeballing you from a metre's distance.

Of an estimated east coast humpback population in excess of 24,000, between 30 and 40 percent stop at Hervey Bay each year and their numbers are growing about 10 percent annually.

It's on their journey, between late July and early November, that juvenile whales and proud new parents with the cutest calves on earth make Hervey Bay their temporary home.

Ten whale watching vessels operate out of Hervey Bay and Fraser Island each season, offering sightseers everything from a fast three-hour excursion on the water to a half-day or a full-day sojourn in Platypus Bay. Whether you prefer to travel



in a big group on a vessel with multiple decks, use glass viewing platforms or join a small number of passengers on a sailing catamaran, Hervey Bay has it covered.

The earliest departures are at 7am but other vessels allow tourists a bit more of a sleep-in with the latest morning tour leaving at 11am. And for those who don't do mornings, a wide choice of tours leave the harbour after lunch.

Hervey Bay's Whale Fleet



The Hervey Bay whale fleet is the most professional and advanced in Australia, helped by its location in the Great Sandy Marine Park.

Not only was Hervey Bay the first location in the country to offer commercial whale watching from boats, in 1986, but the industry was instrumental with the Queensland Government, conservation organisations and researchers in setting up the then Hervey Bay Marine Park in 1989, to protect the migrating humpback whales.

The cetacean population had diminished because of large-scale whaling and poor conservation practices. Pioneer Hervey Bay whale watch operators were at the forefront of the recovery campaign, working with stakeholders to set up a sustainable code of conduct for whale-human interactions that has stood the test of 30 years of whale watching and been copied by other whale destinations around the globe.

Today's Hervey Bay Fleet operates in the renamed Great Sandy Marine Park under strict regulations, aimed at ensuring the thousands of whales that come into Hervey Bay each year are protected and keep coming back in greater numbers.

The Fraser Coast is identified as one of the most important destinations in Australia for migrating whales, because unlike all other areas of the coast it is a place where whales break their 10,000km migration journey between the tropics and Antarctica and return to rest for up to two weeks, supporting their young calves.

In 2019 this area, covering about 20 percent of the 6000 sq km Great Sandy Marine Park, in a line from Rooney Point to Burrum Heads and south to below Big Woody Island (map right), was declared the world's first Whale Heritage Site.

The marine park, including the new WHS designated area, is managed by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service under the Queensland Government Department of Environment and Science. The marine area is part of the wider Great Sandy Biosphere, awarded reserve status by UNESCO in 2009.

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