

ACTIVE AUSTRALIA

Trip itinerary: *Platypus*

Hiking in Kondalilla & Fraser Island National Parks

Surfing at 1770 • Horse Riding on an Outback Cattle Station

Hiking & Platypus Viewing in Eungella National Park • Caving at Capricorn Caves

Multi-Day option: Scuba Diving & Snorkeling on the Great Barrier Reef or Hiking & Kayaking Whitsunday Islands

13 days: Brisbane to Mackay

Fare: US\$3499 + applicable taxes and fees

Australia is a huge country, the size of the United States, with most of its attractions along the coast – and we'll see the best of it in just 13 days! On our carefully put together and diverse Platypus trip, you'll traverse the tropical east coast of Australia. It's a multi-activity trip, with plenty of options to suit your fancy! We'll visit Australia Zoo – home of the famous "Crocodile Hunter", hike some of Australia's most amazing coastal walks, learn to surf, visit an outback cattle station, go dry-caving, and try our hand at Platypus spotting. You'll also have a choice of two different 3-day options – a diving/snorkeling trip on the Great Barrier Reef or a guided hiking/kayaking trip around the Whitsunday Islands. We maintain plenty of options so we can make sure the trip is tailored for you, and we have two guides to take good care of you. The accommodation style varies – for over half the trip we stay in accommodation of a high standard (B&Bs, lodges, etc.) and for the rest of the trip we have chosen to stay in more rustic accommodations in order to be in the most stunning, isolated, and off-the-beaten-track places in Australia. After two weeks of non-stop adventure within the most beautiful parts of Australia's tropical coast, you won't want to go home!

Monday

Arrive in Brisbane & visit Australia Zoo

We'll pick you up in Brisbane in the morning, if you've already had a chance to settle in, or at the airport if you're arriving on the first day. We always have a gentle first day on our trips to ease the "jetlaggers" into the Aussie pace of doing things! (Depending on where you're coming from, you'll probably find jetlag is no big deal – it's a 13-hour direct overnight flight from Los Angeles to Brisbane, and there's only a 5-hour time difference between Australia and US Pacific time). If you have more time, by all means try to arrive in Australia day or so early. After meeting everyone, we'll start with a short drive north to Beerwah and the Australia Zoo, home of Steve Irwin, the "Crocodile Hunter"! Australia Zoo isn't a traditional zoo, despite what its name implies, it's more like a center for rescued or endangered animals. These guys are the leaders of crocodile rescue so they know a thing or two about crocs, and we'll also meet many of the other curious characters native to Australia. They will keep you well entertained for the afternoon, since they can be hard to spot in the wild. Afterwards we'll drive up to the Blackall Range and head through to the quaint town of Montville, where we'll be serving up a fair dinkum Aussie BBQ!

ACCOMMODATION: Clouds of Montville B&B, Montville

(L,D)

Tuesday

Hiking in Kondalilla National Park & ferry to Fraser Island

This morning we'll be hiking in some of the beautiful sub-tropical rainforests of the Blackall Range. We'll visit Kondalilla National Park and Kondalilla Falls, whose aboriginal name translates as "rushing waters". We'll hike down through the rainforest, past amazingly intricate fig tree formations, to the base of the seasonal 270-foot falls. You'll have a chance to take a cool dip in the rock pools before we head back up for a picnic lunch. After lunch, we'll head north to the whale-watching town of Hervey Bay, where we'll hop on the ferry to Fraser Island. Fraser Island, the world's largest sand island, is an absolutely beautiful place with World Heritage Park status. Its unique position, on the edge of the 2000-foot oceanic continental shelf, means that it attracts an incredibly diverse range of marine and coastal wildlife. You'll see all sorts of birds while you're here – possibly including the electric-blue plumaged kingfisher! We'll be spending two nights on the island amongst the gum trees at the luxurious Kingfisher Bay Eco-Resort.

ACCOMMODATION: Kingfisher Bay Eco-Resort, Fraser Island

(B,L,D)

ACCOMMODATION: Myella Outback Cattle Station

(B,L,D)

Sunday

Horse & Motor Bike Riding at Outback Cattle Ranch

This morning we'll be exploring the ranch on horseback. Myella caters to all riding abilities, so whether you're an experienced rider or have never even seen a horse up close and personal, you'll be well taken care of. After saddling up your horse, or learning if you don't know how, we'll head out across the red-earthed landscape. If you're keen to explore the farm in a different way, you can take a motorbike or four-wheeler lesson from Peter. Once you earn your "Myella Driver License", you can head out on your own across the fields or "paddocks". After lunch we'll bid a fond farewell to Peter, Olive and the crew before a short drive back towards the coast and Capricorn Caves, where we'll have a chance to go dry caving (a.k.a. spelunking)! You have two options here. For the more adventurous, you can explore the "zig-zag" cave, or try and squeeze through the "rebirth" or "superman" caves. You won't need any special gear - just some clothes you don't mind getting dusty! If dry-caving is not really your thing, you can explore the dry rock formations & enjoy the amazing natural acoustics of the Cathedral Chamber in a less challenging manner. Tonight we'll be dining at a true blue Aussie pub, where you'll have a chance to meet some of the locals.

ACCOMMODATION: Capricorn Caves Cabins

(B,L,D)

Monday

Hiking in Eungella National Park

Today we'll head up through sugar cane country to Pioneer Valley, and Eungella National Park. Eungella is a unique rainforest that has been cut off from all other forests for around 30,000 years. As a result, it has at least 6 life forms that exist nowhere else in the world – including many species of birds, lizards, frogs and trees. This afternoon, we'll hike through the lowland parts of Eungella National Park, known as Finch Hatton Gorge, to the stunning waterfalls of Araluen Falls and The Wheel of Fire, which refers to the intensely red flowers of the Firewheel trees that surround the pools at the base of Araluen Falls. The steep climb up the rock steps to the Wheel of Fire should make you more than ready for a refreshing swim in the clear water of the pools. Then we'll drive up into the hinterland of Eungella National Park where we'll be spending the night.

ACCOMMODATION: Broken River Mountain Retreat, Eungella National Park

(B,L,D)

Tuesday

Platypus Watching at Broken River & Start Multi-day Options

This morning we'll have an early start to look for the legendary, but elusive platypus! The platypus is a very shy native mammal that is very rarely seen by humans in the wild, but at dawn and dusk they come out of their underwater burrows to feed and play on the water's surface. Broken River is one of very few areas where, if you stay very quiet and still, you may be lucky enough to see one of these beautiful, playful creatures. From here, we'll set off on a great rainforest hike along the top of the Clarke Range for stunning views out over the coast.

At time of booking, you can choose between a 3-day scuba diving/snorkeling trip to the Great Barrier Reef and a 3-day hiking & sea kayaking trip in Conway & Whitsunday National Parks. The diving/snorkeling trip is on a live-aboard dive boat, while on the hiking & sea kayaking option you'll be staying in motel style accommodations. After lunch, it's a short drive north to Airlie Beach, a picturesque seaside town on the Whitsunday coast, where we'll split up for our chosen activities:

SCUBA AND SNORKELING OPTION ON THE GREAT BARRIER REEF *Tuesday (Continued)*

If you enjoy being on and in the water, we've got just the thing! After arriving in Airlie Beach, you'll have the rest of the afternoon to pick up last minute supplies, and grab a bite to eat, before we board the Anaconda III this evening - a true Maxi designed to make for an unforgettable sailing experience. Overnight Maxi sailing is unique to the Whitsundays, and allows you the opportunity to participate by taking the wheel, hoisting the sails and grinding the winches on one of the most famous yachts in racing history, whilst visiting the very best destinations the Whitsundays have to offer. The Anaconda III is our home for the next three nights, and after a champagne toast, we depart the marina, cruising towards the Hook Island passage. The expert crew will brief you thoroughly on what to expect over the next few days, and if you are not a qualified diver but would like to experience the thrill of SCUBA diving, the expert instructors will be happy to introduce you to the amazing underwater world and its colourful inhabitants. (Optional AUD\$55 per dive). If you prefer, there is some amazing snorkelling to be done in the region instead!

ACCOMMODATION: "Anaconda III" live-aboard mega yacht, (B,L)

Wednesday

SCUBA DIVING or SNORKELING OPTION

This morning you will wake up at Whitehaven Beach, recognised as one of the most beautiful beaches in the world. Stretching over six miles, this pristine expanse of pure white silica sand fringed by brilliant blue water and lush Tropical Island, is one of the jewels of the Whitsundays. There is plenty of time for a game of beach cricket, a stroll along the beach or simply soak up the beauty of our surrounds as those who learn to SCUBA for the first time take their first Introductory dive. After returning to the boat, we lift anchor and it is time for another sumptuous meal as we head towards the protected waters of the Great Barrier Reef, with reef and still water as far as the eye can see. The Great Barrier Reef is the most extensive reef system in existence, with over 2000 individual reefs stretching from Papua New Guinea down the Queensland coast for over 1200 miles. The protected waters between the reef and the coast are home to at least 400 species of coral, 1500 species of fish, 4000 species of mollusks and 500 species of seaweed. There are also hundreds of uninhabited islands that 200 different species of birds call home. Luckily we're going to have time to see and explore a great deal of these islands! Scuba dives will be scheduled to maximize the amount of diving per day. If you decide to snorkel, your crew will let you know where you're going, what and who you might see, and you're away!

ACCOMMODATION: "Anaconda III" live-aboard mega yacht, (B, L, D)

Thursday

SCUBA DIVING or SNORKELING OPTION

Being on a live-aboard boat means we have the flexibility to move whenever we like - so this morning we'll relocate to Bait Reef (weather permitting) ready for you to explore first thing. Bait Reef is located on the Outer Great Barrier Reef near the Whitsunday Island Chain. It is one of the most pristine scuba diving locations in the world and benefits from protection under the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The crew has numerous sites at their fingertips, and will choose the best one depending on the conditions. Scuba divers will also be able to do one or two night dives during the trip if you're keen to see who comes out at night!

ACCOMMODATION: "Anaconda III" live-aboard mega yacht, (B, L, D)

Friday

SCUBA DIVING or SNORKELING OPTION

This morning we cruise back through the Whitsunday Passage, to Blue Pearl Bay on Hayman Island. Whether you choose to snorkel or scuba dive, you will be stunned at the range and diversity of the coral at Blue Pearl. As is typical of fringing reefs, the range of coral is extensive, with all sorts of hard and soft corals waiting for you to explore their fragile beauty -- not to mention the Giant Clam. Watching and being part of the fish feeding at Blue Pearl Bay is an absolute highlight of any trip to the Whitsundays. You will be surrounded by hundreds of fish ranging in size from the smaller Sergeant Majors and brilliantly coloured Fusiliers right up to our own metre long Giant Wrasse, called "Mick Jagger" for obvious reasons!! Here we'll have one last morning of diving and snorkeling. Then it's time to lift the anchor and return to Airlie Beach. After 3 days in the water, you'll appreciate a chance to relax on the deck as we sail through the Whitsunday Islands and back to the mainland. By late afternoon, we'll be on shore again and saying goodbye to the Anaconda III crew. We'll then meet up with the rest of the group for our final dinner together.

ACCOMMODATION: Whitsunday Terraces, Airlie Beach (B, L, D)

ACTIVE AUSTRALIA, you'll have experienced an incredible variety of activities, met a bunch of great people, and enjoyed the best of what Australia has to offer! If you'd like to see more of Australia talk to us about adding on the *Dingo* Ayers Rock extension, or check out our ACTIVE NEW ZEALAND itineraries if you've got more time and want to visit New Zealand, just a short hop across the ditch! (B,L)

Important Information

ACCOMMODATIONS: The *Platypus* is an activity-oriented trip along the Queensland coast. We've chosen interesting and comfortable accommodation throughout. In some places it's quite luxurious. But many of the other places we stay are off-the-beaten-track, and don't have many accommodation options – but are really, really spectacular. Some accommodations have separate bedrooms with ensuite bathrooms, and others have two bedroom apartments with shared bathrooms. Our clients often say a real highlight of the trip is meeting their Aussie hosts, and you'll love the places we stay!

FITNESS: You must have a reasonable level of fitness to enjoy yourself on the *Platypus*. You don't have to be young and extremely fit (although if you are, you won't be bored) but you should be in the habit of doing at least some exercise. Age and experience are not important. We would rather have a person in her 50s who hikes every couple of weeks than a 22-year-old couch potato! If you're concerned about your fitness level, have a chat with us so we can help you choose between the *Platypus* and our other trips.

EXPERIENCE: You don't have to have any outdoor experience at all to take our trips because we help you make the most of Australia's amazing outdoor environment. Our staff are highly trained and very experienced outdoor guides, and we will look after you! You don't need to have ever done any snorkeling, kayaking, surfing, caving or horse riding to enjoy these activities with us. All we ask is that you are energetic, enthusiastic, and in reasonable shape, and we guarantee you'll have an incredible time. We manage the level of commitment to suit your experience, and we have an impeccable safety record. We hold all relevant government licenses.

DIRECTION OF TRAVEL: To keep our group sizes down, we sometimes run the *Platypus* in two different directions – northbound (starting in Brisbane) and southbound (starting in Mackay). This itinerary happens to be written up in the northbound format. Whichever trip you take, you'll do all the activities we've mentioned, just in a different order. The *Platypus* is a product of years of evolution and fine-tuning – it works well whichever way you do it!

RECOMMENDED FLIGHTS: If you're flying in on the first day of the trip, or out on the last day, we recommend arriving in Brisbane by approximately 8 - 9am on Monday, and departing from Mackay after 3pm on Saturday. Other flight times may also be possible - if you are considering alternative flight times please let us know

PICK-UP INFORMATION: On the first day of the trip we can either pick you up from the Holiday Inn Brisbane at 9am, or at the Brisbane International Airport in front of the information desk at 10am.

DROP-OFF INFORMATION: On the last day of the trip we can drop you at Mackay Airport for domestic flights after 4pm. We can also get you back in time for 3pm flights if need be. If you'd prefer to fly out of the Whitsunday Coast Airport at Proserpine then we can help you arrange shuttle transport - please contact us for further details.

FLEXIBILITY: Because of the off-the-beaten-path and non-commercial nature of the places we stay, we may need to change a night stop. We try to make as few changes as possible, but retain the flexibility to make sure your trip is as good as it can be. Some of our activities are weather dependent and if it's a choice between safety and an activity, your safety will always come first. In these cases we'll have a suitable alternate activity. We only recommend walking the *Great Whitsunday Walk* during April-October - at other times of year this walk is not as comfortable, mainly due to high humidity, strong seasonal rainfall and average temperatures of 70°F to 90°F (20°C to 30°C).

INCLUDED: The trip fare is US\$3499 + applicable taxes and fees. We quote all prices in US dollars, so our guests from all over the world can more easily relate prices to their own currencies. You can also join for shorter periods of time, at a pro-rated price. The trip fare includes just about everything, specifically:

- All guiding services. We generally have two guides per trip, a lead guide/driver, and a co-guide who is responsible for meals and accommodations. This means we can really make sure you have a great time! We operate with small groups, and we don't hesitate to offer a second departure when our trips start getting full.
- Comfortable accommodations for the entire period you are with us (see "Accommodations" above). We can organize extra accommodation for you, if you want to arrive earlier or leave later.
- All your meals (as indicated), except where we've found people prefer to check out the wide range of local restaurants. (B,L,D) means breakfast, lunch & dinner included. Alcohol is not generally included, although we do spring for a few drinks here and there!
- All hiking, snorkeling, kayaking, surfing, caving or horse riding activities as described in the itinerary, except optional extra activities, such as the whale watching tour on Fraser Island. We have estimated the rates for optional extra activities run by local operators in US dollars, but these rates may vary according to the USD/AUD exchange rate of the day. There are many optional activities available at extra cost along the way – just ask your guide. None of these activities are compulsory, and nor will your trip seem less awesome if you do the more budget options. Although some people enjoy sampling the optional extras, others prefer to focus more on the hiking, snorkeling, kayaking, surfing, caving or horse riding which is of course the reason you've chosen the *Platypus* in the first place!
- All specialized equipment required for all activities – please refer to our gear list for further details.

We'll see you soon!