

Reefs of the Coral Sea

remote, rare and remarkable

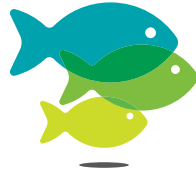
"The animal and plant species we found were like nowhere else in Australia. We were amazed by the numbers of sea snakes and reef sharks that regularly accompanied us during our dives."

Professor Graham Edgar, Reef Life Survey

Photographer: Gary Cranitch, Queensland Museum

The reefs of Australia's Coral Sea Marine Park are unique and extraordinarily diverse. Home to a colourful array of corals, fish and other wildlife, they are a rare example of a thriving wild marine environment protected by isolation from direct human impacts.

Did you know?



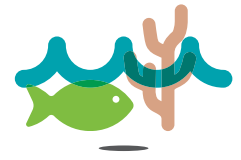
Nearly 600 fish species

were recently identified during the first ever comprehensive surveys of the reefs.



34 isolated reefs

are scattered throughout the almost 1 million km² reserve.



Only 1%

of the entire Coral Sea Marine Park is made up of reefs, but this still amounts to 15,024 km² (threetimes the size of Bali).



Photographer: Gary Cranitch, Queensland Museum



Photographer: Matt Cuest



Image: © Mike Ball Dive Expeditions
Photographer: Howard Wormsley

A world of diversity

home to extraordinary creatures

Located far offshore from Queensland, the line of Coral Sea reefs stretches from near Papua New Guinea down to just north of Fraser Island.

There are distinct habitat differences from north to south, and also a lot of variation from reef to reef.

The north has the richest collection of different reef fish. Further south the reefs have denser coral cover, including delicate branching corals, and more coral-dependent species such as butterfly fish.



A rich place for reef research and discovery

The reefs were first comprehensively explored in 2012 and 2013, when dive teams from Reef Life Survey studied and recorded species and reef communities at 17 reefs.

They found that Coral Sea reefs are the only locations in Australia with fish, crustaceans and clams typical of those found on oceanic Pacific islands. Although only a few hundred km from the Great Barrier Reef, Coral Sea reef animal communities are more similar to those of the oceanic islands and atolls of Tonga and Samoa, more than 2500 km away.

Reef dwellers

The marine park contains hundreds of different species of hard and soft corals. Encrusting corals are the most widespread and there are also spectacular displays of massive boulder-shaped corals.

A globally significant hotspot for reef sharks, the marine park is also populated by reef fish in every imaginable size, shape and colour, as well as sponges, sea snakes, urchins, sea snails, starfish and clams.

Reef visitors

Predator fish like tuna, broadbill swordfish, marlin and sharks patrol the area.

The reefs are also important mating and feeding grounds for tiger sharks and are used by sea turtles for migration stopovers and nesting on islands and cays.

Explore it for yourself

A journey to the reefs of the Coral Sea provides visitors with an experience like no other, with excellent visibility and different reef structures and species to the neighbouring Great Barrier Reef.

Because the area is so remote, Coral Sea live-aboard expeditions are the main way to visit. Many expeditions also stop in the Great Barrier Reef along the way. Without a doubt it's worth the long journey. The reefs have a wild, pristine beauty you won't find anywhere else, along with extraordinary marine life and unparalleled diving, sailing and fishing.

Diving

With crystal-clear waters providing exceptional visibility (30–60 m) the Coral Sea offers some of the most amazing diving in the world. Standout destinations include:

- **Osprey Reef** for spectacular shark sightings and all-round stunning diving on coral walls
- **Holmes Reef** for huge, colourful plate corals
- **Bougainville Reef** for spectacular walls, drop-offs, close encounters with potato cod and fish species rarely seen elsewhere in Australia.

Fishing

Fishing in the pristine waters of the Coral Sea is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Most charter fishing is around the more inshore reefs and cays. Fishing isn't allowed in marine national park zones or sanctuary zones, so be sure to check the details of the reefs you plan to visit.

Learn more

About the Coral Sea Marine Park, including its reefs:

parksaustralia.gov.au/coralsea

About the Reef Life Survey: reeflifesurvey.com

About Osprey Reef: attenboroughsreef.com

About visiting the Coral Sea: tropicalnorthqueensland.org.au

The Coral Sea Marine Park is managed by Parks Australia.



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