

# Island delights

BRIMMING WITH NATURAL WONDERS, THE ISLANDS OF QUEENSLAND'S MORETON BAY ARE FAMOUS FOR THEIR WHITE SANDY BEACHES, SHIMMERING LAKES AND VAST ARRAY OF FAMILY-FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES...

WORDS: Karen Bleakley

How long will it take to get to Fraser Island?" I overhear someone ask the Tourist Information assistant, as I browse through brochures on Brisbane's islands. I've been in my new home for less than a year and still have so much to explore. Clustered in Brisbane's spectacular Moreton Bay lies the world's second, third and fourth largest sand islands. Although only a short trip from the city, the islands are often overlooked in favour of the world's largest sand island: Fraser Island. Like their famous rival, Brisbane's >>

Main image, Moreton Island, with its sunken wrecks and white sandy beaches



The kids get ready to try bodyboarding



Moreton is the third largest sand island in the world

The Tangalooma Wrecks is a popular dive and snorkel site



Moreton Island's sandy dunes are ideal for sandboarding



The deliberately sunk Tangalooma Wrecks



Kayaking off Bribie Island



Dolphins are a familiar sight at Moreton island

islands are also blessed with turquoise waters, dazzling sand and shimmering lakes.

### BRIBIE ISLAND

As we drive over the bridge to Bribie, I feel the pace of life slow down. Woorim on the ocean-facing side of the island has a real holiday vibe about it.

An hour from Brisbane, Bribie is the smallest and most northerly of the Bay's islands. The 34 kilometre-long island is mostly uninhabited national park, with the bulk of the population based on the southern end of the island near the bridge that connects it to the mainland.

As we park, I see some small shops and cafés, but the main sight is the patrolled surf beach. The waters are sheltered by Moreton Island, making the waves gentler, but still suitable for surfing and body boarding.

Getting from the car park to the beach is a challenge as we end up at the great beach park. The kids make friends and I get chatting to another mum. "We really are lucky to live here. I don't think there are many spots this perfect for families in the world," she tells me. I have to agree that she is very lucky.

I prise the kids off the climbing frame and we head onto the warm sand to catch some waves. We spend a fun couple of hours falling off our boards.

The kids can't get the hang of it, instead preferring to be pulled around the shallows while attempting to stand on their body boards. I watch as the locals rush past with their surfboards, probably taking a dip during their lunch

break. When exhaustion, and hunger, set in we hop back in the car and drive to Bongaree on the south-western end of the island.

After a hearty lunch of freshly caught snapper and chips wrapped in paper, we walk off our food on the almost deserted beach. The calm waters are a perfect spot to relax, and we spend time building sandcastles and laying in the water.

Our final stop is on the western shore overlooking the Pumicestone Passage. It's apparently a great spot to see dolphins and turtles, but we don't see any, even with our binoculars. Instead, we find another park to burn off the final bit of energy the kids have left, and watch someone sailing by in a 'barbeque boat' they've hired.

I can see their fishing gear poking out of the boat, along with their Esky of food and drink. We'll give that a try next time.

As the sun fades, we throw a few sausages on one of the many barbeques and enjoy a sausage sizzle

as dusk settles. The kids are asleep before we've even left the bridge.

### MORETON ISLAND

We jump aboard the catamaran for our 75-minute transfer to Moreton island. The kids lead us outside to look for dolphins and dugongs, until rain drives us indoors to watch the rest of the journey huddled around a window seat.

Moreton Island is the third largest sand island in the world. Made up of 10 per cent volcanic rock and 90 per cent sand, the island offers picturesque beaches fringed with swaying palms, enormous dunes and clear lakes.

There are three townships on the island in addition to the Tangalooma Island Resort, which is where we're staying. At Bulwer, Cowan Cowan and Koorinal you can choose from camping, glamping, bed and breakfast or holiday home rentals.

Upon arrival, we kick off the afternoon with a Desert Safari. We

clamber aboard the four-wheel-drive bus which takes us along bumpy tracks to the island's sand dunes.

Due to the morning's rain, sand tobogganing is off the cards; instead we haul ourselves up the wall of sand to the top of the biggest dune I've ever seen, and then run down it. One of my five-year-old twins

**"MORETON ISLAND OFFERS PICTURESQUE BEACHES FRINGED WITH SWAYING PALMS"**

masters it, but the other keeps face-planting himself into the sand on his descent and giggling. It's an incredible feeling standing on top of the dune and looking at the golden landscape around us. Just a few hours earlier I was in the city, now here I am in the desert.

The Tangalooma Wrecks were deliberately sunk to create a

break-wall for small boats. The line of 15 vessels has created an awesome dive and snorkel site.

Although close enough to be accessed from the beach, I opt for a guided snorkel as I'd heard there can be strong currents. At the first wreck, the guide taps my arm and points down. I see a snoozing wobbegong (also known as a carpet

shark) lying on the sandy floor beneath me. As we make our way down the line, we are treated to trevally, parrot fish, yellowtail and more types of colourful fish. The crystal clear visibility allows us to see right to the ocean floor.

Back on dry land, I leave the rest of the family playing on the beach while I hop aboard a luxury >>>





Dolphin feeding at Tangalooma Wild Dolphin Resort



A couple enjoy the unspoilt beaches of North Stradbroke Island



vessel for a whale watching trip. I enjoy the comfortable cruise before noticing the boat is being tailed by a pod of dolphins. They're jumping in the surf behind the boat.

WHALE WATCHING

I hear gasps and look to my right in time to see a fin waving out of the water. It looks like the whale is putting on a display as it slaps water towards the boat.

There are three humpback whales in the pod and we are treated to breaches and pec waves. Next they go under the front of the boat to the other side (much to the excitement of those standing at the bow) before showing off for the observers on the other side of the boat.

The boat takes us from pod to pod, spending lots of time idle as we observe the incredible behaviour. The whales seem happy with our presence, and stay alongside us for a long time.

We are lucky enough to see the whole range of behaviours, including tail slaps, tail lobbs and plenty of breaches.

Whaling was prolific on Moreton in the '50s and '60s. The industry came to a stop in 1962 when the number of whales became too low to make it viable. As numbers bounced back, it was, thankfully, never restarted. Now up to 20,000 whales migrate past this coastline each year.

I think back to something one of the tour guides said to me yesterday: "If Moreton Island's whaling industry was still in action today it would bring in A\$1 billion a year. The whale watching industry brings in A\$8 billion."

Having watched the elegant and inspiring creatures for an afternoon, I couldn't imagine anybody wanting to hurt them.

I start chatting to one of the crew and ask if today's viewing is typical. "We always see a lot of

action but today we've been lucky to see such a range of behaviours. On my first shift in this job, I was lucky to see one jump right out of the water and its fin almost touched the boat!"

On the way back to the resort, I see another pod of dolphins and lots of birds as we skirt the coast. Unfortunately Moreton Bay's large population of dugongs stay out of sight but it leaves me something to look forward to next time.

DOLPHIN FEEDING

A big draw for visitors to Moreton is the nightly visit by a group of wild dolphins, which began at Tangalooma informally back in 1989 and became a structured activity from 1992. As we wait in line to meet the dolphin who would take the fish from our hands, my sons jump around in anticipation. I thought they'd complain about walking into the water with their clothes on in the

"A BIG DRAW FOR VISITORS TO MORETON IS THE NIGHTLY VISIT BY A GROUP OF WILD DOLPHINS"

cool evening air, but the excitement takes their mind off it.

We hold out our fish in the water and the dolphin gently takes them before swimming a loop in front of us. My kids beam from ear to ear, although they're disappointed they can't pat the dolphin.

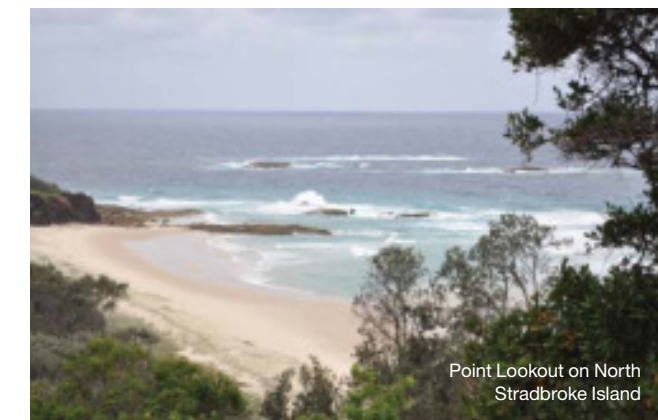
They cheer up when I remind them that it's a wild dolphin, not a pet, and they skip all the way off the beach. My two-year-old daughter enters the water with my husband and throws her fish at the dolphin in excitement – even she gets that it's a treat to be here.

Unlike many other dolphin experiences, this is a place to see wild dolphins that are choosing to interact with humans. It's

something I know we'll all remember for a long time to come.

NORTH STRADBROKE

Stradbroke is the second largest sand island in the world. North >>>



Point Lookout on North Stradbroke Island





A popular swimming beach on North Stradbroke Island



Beach life on Straddie

Stradbroke and South Stradbroke were once one island but they were separated by a fierce storm in 1896.

When locals refer to ‘Straddie’ they’re usually talking about the more populated North Stradbroke, which is home to unspoilt beaches, lush plant life and impressive marine life.

You can access Straddie by ferry with your car or on foot. The roads here are mostly sealed, so you don’t need a four-wheel drive to pop over for a day, and there are plenty of accommodation options if you want to stay longer.

Like Moreton and Bribie, it’s a place to enjoy the outdoors. It’s also one of the best land-based sites to

## USEFUL CONTACTS

### Bribie Island

Our Bribie: [www.ourbribie.com.au](http://www.ourbribie.com.au)

BBQ boat hire: [www.bbqboathire.com.au](http://www.bbqboathire.com.au)

Bribie Surf School: [www.scsurfschools.com.au](http://www.scsurfschools.com.au)

### Moreton Island

Visit Moreton Island: [www.visitmoretonisland.com](http://www.visitmoretonisland.com)

Tangalooma Island Resort: [www.tangalooma.com](http://www.tangalooma.com)

Micat Ferry: [moretonislandadventures.com.au](http://moretonislandadventures.com.au)

### North Stradbroke Island

Visit Stradbroke Island: [stradbrokeisland.com](http://stradbrokeisland.com)

Stradbroke Ferries: [www.stradbrokeferries.com.au](http://www.stradbrokeferries.com.au)

Straddie Kingfisher Tours: [www.straddiekingfishertours.com.au](http://www.straddiekingfishertours.com.au)



A couple enjoy the ocean views at Point Lookout

“NORTH STRADBROKE IS HOME TO UNSPOILT BEACHES, LUSH PLANT LIFE AND IMPRESSIVE MARINE LIFE”

enjoy whale watching – perfect for my husband who suffers with seasickness so had opted out of the whale watching cruise. From June

until November, the best vantage point is the stunning 1.5 kilometre North Gorge Walk at Point Lookout. We’re lucky to see plenty of sprays and breaches through our binoculars.

The walk takes in Straddie’s impressive headland via a rough path that turns to an easy wooden boardwalk with plenty of rest stops along the way so you can stop to take in the panoramic views while you wait for more movement in the water.

The sunrise and sunsets are apparently spectacular from this vantage point, but we enjoy the afternoon sun and blue skies during our stroll.

When visiting, be sure to look out for the chalk board outside The

Green Room store and Drift Gallery. Local, Jennie Truman, has been recording the number of whales she’s seen each season for over 20 years, and now, along with her husband John, she marks how many they have spotted so far this season.

Whale watching is a natural part of life on Straddie, and I can see how addictive it becomes as we don’t want to tear ourselves away from the view.

The island offers lots of activities including four-wheel drive tours and eco kayak tours, so on the ferry back we start plotting a longer trip for more adventures.

Although promoted with the tagline ‘where Brisbane unwinds’, I think it’s fair to say Moreton Bay’s islands should also be known as ‘where Brisbane comes out to play.’ But shhh, don’t tell too many people, because I like seeing the tourists making their way north to Fraser so my local islands stay as hidden gems. 🇺🇸



Frenchman’s Beach at Point Lookout