

MEET YOUR PILOT: 3 OF THE COOLEST LADIES ON THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

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Taking a scenic flight over the Great Barrier Reef is one of the most thrilling ways to view this Tropical North Queensland icon. If you ask Sir David Attenborough though, he'll probably tell you that seeing it from underwater is the way to go.

Referring to his first visit to the Great Barrier Reef, Sir David says that “the most exciting natural experience of my life was the first time I dived on a coral reef.”

Returning again last year to film his much-awaited documentary on the Great Barrier Reef, he said “Being on the reef is a revelatory, thrilling, unbeatable experience and with this project, we are going to be able to share it with millions.”

If you ask any of the helicopter pilots at Nautilus Aviation, you'll get a different view. Sorry Sir David, you're outnumbered on this one!



Nautilus Aviation helicopter pilots Jacqui Dunn, Jenna Ryan & Bronwyn Loud

“It’s beautiful up here, especially doing scenic flights over the Great Barrier Reef. It’s like a magic carpet ride. I was never one for sitting in an office. I just love it,” says helicopter pilot Jacqui Dunn, who decided to train as a pilot after being gifted a flight for her 20th birthday.

“I was hooked straight away and decided that was what I wanted to do,” Jacqui said.

“It’s very different from my previous flying work, Jacqui said. ‘My working life began in hospitality and I enjoy connecting with people. I like chatting to them while we fly out to an island where they’ll start their holiday or just when they’re seeing the Great Barrier Reef for the first time – everyone’s in a happy mood up here!’”



Helicopter flight over the Great Barrier Reef with Nautilus Aviation

Jacqui is one of three female pilots at Nautilus Aviation, sharing the skies and passion for the job with Bronwyn Loud and Jenna Ryan.

All three agree that passengers are often surprised to find that the pilot is a woman.

“It’s a happy surprise,” Bronwyn said. “They say, ‘oh, you are flying us – that’s cool’.” Nautilus’ chief pilot Casey MacKenzie said while more women were learning to fly, it was unusual to find three female helicopter pilots employed in the one company.

“It’s a bit of an anomaly,” Mr MacKenzie said. “But if a pilot is competent and has been appropriately trained, it doesn’t matter whether it is a man or a woman. The machine can’t tell the difference.”



Nautilus Aviation helicopter pilots Jacqui Dunn, Jenna Ryan & Bronwyn Loud

Jenna Ryan gave up a primary school teaching career to learn to fly. She attained her commercial helicopter licence five years ago and used her teaching skills to instruct student pilots before joining Nautilus in Cairns last September.

“It’s a brilliant career; it’s fantastic. I love taking people on scenic flights, landing on the pontoon where the big boats go or landing at Middle Cay on a tiny sand strip in

the middle of the Great Barrier Reef where the guests can snorkel – it’s a pretty good office that I get to fly around in every day,” enthuses Jenna.



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Bronwyn Loud joined Nautilus Aviation a year ago after graduating as a commercial pilot more than five years ago. Her experience includes scenic flying in the tourism industry and mining and other commercial sector flying, but it’s Bronwyn whose hand goes up for the heli-fishing flights, for which Nautilus is so well known.



Nautilus Aviation helicopter pilots Bronwyn Loud, Jacqui Dunn & Jenna Ryan

‘I get to go to all the remote places inaccessible by car. That’s the idea of Heli-fishing – you have the luxury of arriving at your fishing spot quickly and easily in a helicopter rather than travelling for miles in a boat,’ she said.

Bronwyn has her ‘secret fishing spots’ along the coast, inland from Cairns and Townsville, as well as in the Gulf and Torres Strait. “I wouldn’t say that I’m a professional fishing guide but I’ve gained a lot of experience over the years on my partner’s fishing charters. I love it,” she said. Sounds like a great way to fish if you ask us!



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Visit www.nautilusaviation.com.au if you'd like to experience the Great Barrier Reef with the amazing team at Nautilus Aviation.

Fiona Harper is Cairns based travel writer. Widely travelled, highly acclaimed and much published, Fiona's articles & images are published across the globe. When she's not writing about TNQ she's probably running a marathon or exploring the world by foot, bike, kayak, camel or boat: whatever mode of transport she can get her hands on!