

BLOG POST

12 FAMOUS RESIDENTS OF THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

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Only 12 residents? There's probably a gazillion of them, but let's start things slowly shall we. It's not easy to keep track of every single one of the Great Barrier Reef's inhabitants but here are some of the most famous ones in Tropical North Queensland.

Legendary naturalist David Attenborough gave the Great Barrier Reef the big tick of approval when he called it the 'most exciting natural history experience' of his life. You know that if David says so, well, it must be pretty EPIC. Who are we to argue?

Unless you've been calling planet Pluto home for the last millennium, you probably already know that the Great Barrier Reef is pretty damn extraordinary. It is as fascinating as it is mystical. As wonderful as it is wild. Who, exactly, calls the Great Barrier Reef home you're probably wondering? We're glad you asked!

Like any self-respecting community, all the usual suspects are represented: the oddballs, the show ponies, the quiet achievers and the unsavoury, they're all here. Not all of them are obliging when the cameras come out, however. Here are just a few residents whose postal address is c/o the Coral Sea, Great Barrier Reef, Tropical North Queensland.

Nautilus

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Nautilus

Mostly seen as a highly prized shell washed up on the beach, the nautilus is a pelagic mollusc. They hunt for food using strong tentacles that stick to prey like mud to a picnic blanket. Nautilus have a parrot-like beak that crushes crustaceans before devouring. To swim, and we use that term loosely, the nautilus draws water in to its internal chambers creating a jet propulsion. How clever!

Potato Cod



Potato Cod

Potato cods have the kind of speckled, big-mouthed face only a mother could love. But don't let their less than supermodel looks put you off. Docile, gentle giants that can reach hefty weights of 100kg or more, these inquisitive creatures like to hang out at places like the Cod Hole and the Ribbon Reefs. Scuba divers like to tick these guys off their must see lists much like twitchers (birders) tick off Jabirus or the like.

Rainbow coloured coral & fish



The Great Barrier Reef is no shrinking violet when it comes to showing off every conceivable colour of the spectrum. Duck your head below the surface and enjoy nature's kick-butt cabaret of colour. Many residents of the Great Barrier Reef drape themselves in a blazing glory of colour to attract a mate or to threaten an enemy, to evade predators, catch prey or to camouflage themselves while resting. Colour is king!

Maori Wrasse

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Maori Wrasse

If there was ever an iconic hero of the Great Barrier Reef, the humphead or Maori wrasse would be the Super Hero – someone pass this guy a red cape and a pair of underpants please! These guys are huge. Fellas grow up to 2m long (ladies are of more petite proportions), and are easily recognisable by the sort of fleshy lips that would give Donnatella Versace a run for her money. Celebrity wrasse tend to hang out at permanently moored pontoons on the Great Barrier Reef waiting for visitors and their cameras.

Minke Whale



Minke Whale

The jury's still out on where mysterious minke whales spend their time most of the year. What is known is that they love to visit the Great Barrier Reef each year for up to a month mid-year. Probably like most Victorians they're escaping the southern winter for a little tropical getaway. Who can blame them? If you're lucky enough to be visiting the Great Barrier Reef at the same time you just might find yourself swimming with these magnificent creatures. Now that would be awesome!

Sea Cucumber



Sea Cucumber

No Miss World in the beauty stakes, sea cucumbers compensate their lack of good looks with one of the cleverest tricks in the animal world. James Bond, aka 007, eat your heart out. Sea cucumbers can liquefy themselves, pouring their body into a tight crevice or space before firming themselves up again. Now you seem them, now you don't! It's not a bad trick to evade prey. Can you imagine how much fun we could have if humans had this capability?

Humpback Whale

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Whale

These spectacular creatures need no introduction so we'll leave you to enjoy this photo of a magnificent breaching display. If you're visiting the Great Barrier Reef around June to August, get yourself out on a boat to have the best chance of seeing something similar. Trust us, you won't regret the dollars spent.

Giant Clam

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Clam

If you've done any beach combing on Great Barrier Reef beaches you've likely seen a clam shell washed up on the beach, bleached white with a smooth inner and rough outer shell. It's not their best look by far. When alive and in situ, attached to a coral reef giant clams are seriously impressive. Colourful mantles extend beyond the shell to capture nutrients and sunlight. Don't get too close though as they can snap shut swiftly! Giant clams can be spotted in coral gardens across the Great Barrier Reef – most famously in Watsons Bay at Lizard Island.

Manta Ray

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Manta Ray

The Starship Enterprise of the marine world, manta rays have serious street cred when it comes to gliding. Wing spans can reach an extraordinary 7 metres! Or, to put that into perspective, that's about the distance between an adult giraffe's hooves and ears. Manta's are spectacularly graceful, almost acrobatic in the way they seem to fly underwater. On the flip side, baby mantas, known as pups, look a little like rolled up burritos.

Coral Trout

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Coral Trout

Did you spot him hiding there amongst the coral? Curiously, all coral trout start out as females, changing sex later in life. Scientists are still trying to figure out what triggers the sex change though they believe it happens immediately after spawning. Spawning is thought to be related to water temperatures. Whatever. The real question on most of our lips is coral trout on the menu and how will it be cooked? (apologies to those who didn't realise this was a commercially fished species).

Green Sea Turtle

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Turtle

Another creature who needs little introduction, the Great Barrier Reef is home to six of the world's seven species of turtle (notable by their absence are Kemp's Ridley turtles). Snorkellers, divers, kayakers, swimmers and sailors are all likely to spot a turtle somewhere on the Great Barrier Reef. Green, hawksbill and loggerheads are the most common. They come ashore to lay their eggs any time between November onwards with hatchlings taking life by the flipper and full speed ahead to safe waters from around February onwards. The temperature of the sand determines the sex of hatchlings. Cool sand is for boys and warm sand produces girls.

Clownfish

With so many other famous residents on the Great Barrier Reef, you thought we were going to ignore these loveable little guys didn't you? Not a chance. Cutesy clownfish are the poster child for the tropical marine world globally. Though truth be known, they're not quite as friendly as Pixar executives would have us believe. There's a strict hierarchy of dominance within a clownfish habitat with Top Dog status awarded to the most aggressive female. Unlike coral trout, clownfish are born as males with the largest male changing sex to keep the species reproducing.

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