

MEDIA RELEASE



CRUISE WHITSUNDAYS
**GREAT BARRIER
REEF FESTIVAL**
WHITSUNDAYS • QUEENSLAND • AUG 4-7 2022

**THE HEART
OF EVENTS**
The Whitsundays

For Immediate Release
14 June 2022

Learn From the Masters **Festival Experience a First for the Great Barrier Reef**

The Whitsundays' annual Great Barrier Reef Festival is renowned for being a family-friendly celebration of life in the Heart of Australia's World-Heritage-Listed wonderland – and this year, there's an added focus on reef experiences.

Throughout its four days of mainland activities, the festival has typically brought the reef to the shore. However, this year, with Cruise Whitsundays taking up the festival naming rights, the Cruise Whitsundays Great Barrier Reef Festival will also be about taking people to the reef.

For the best part of two decades, Festival Chairwoman Margie Murphy and her band of volunteers, have been working on ways to increase The Whitsundays community's connection with the Great Barrier Reef, and are therefore thrilled by the possibilities this partnership creates.

"We're delighted that Cruise Whitsundays, previously a Platinum Sponsor of the festival, has taken up naming rights," Ms Murphy said.

"As The Whitsundays' largest marine operator, Cruise Whitsundays will be working with the region's Master Reef Guides to provide an unparalleled reef experience."

Cruise Whitsundays Sales and Marketing Manager, Renee Branton-Brown, said for festival-goers this would translate to unprecedented access to some of the company's flagship products and ultimately the outer Great Barrier Reef.

"This year's festival will begin on Thursday, August 4, with an exclusive, Cruise Whitsundays and Master Reef Guide-hosted outer Great Barrier Reef experience, the likes of which has never been seen across the entirety of the reef," Ms Branton-Brown said.

"On that day, our Reefworld facility at Hardy Reef will be dedicated to the festival, providing a boutique, intimate reef encounter for those aboard our custom vessel travelling direct from Airlie Beach.

"Throughout this experience, guests will benefit from the knowledge and passion of our global treasure's most ardent ambassadors – with at least 10 Master Reef Guides on board, this is set to be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to truly 'learn from the masters'."

Great Barrier Reef Festival committee member, Master Reef Guide and 'Little Fish Tourism' Director, Crystal Lacey, said this was the first time a group of Master Reef Guides would collaborate for an on-water community engagement event.

"Although Master Reef Guide cohorts continue to meet at different field locations across the reef, we have not yet come together with the specific purpose of delivering an immersive, story-telling experience for the general public," she said.

"From our perspective, this is going to be an invaluable opportunity for us to share knowledge and understanding of one of the world's natural wonders, and for the tourism industry, government bodies, and broader community to unite.

"Collectively we do so much to help protect, monitor and conserve the Great Barrier Reef but it's not often on show, so having this pathway through the festival provides a fantastic opportunity."

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Director Education and Engagement, Fred Nucifora, concurred.

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“Master Reef Guides are striving to be the world’s leading reef guides and interpreters sharing the wonders of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area,” he said.

“As reef ambassadors they provide up-to-date scientific and management information about the reef, explain what people can do to help make a difference and most importantly provide guests with exceptional and memorable reef experiences.”

Tourism Whitsundays Chief Executive Officer, Rick Hamilton said it was fitting for an enterprise of this nature to be pioneered in the region at the geographical and spiritual ‘Heart of the Reef’, and he congratulated all involved.

“Here in The Whitsundays we have world-class reef operators who take their responsibility to our international icon incredibly seriously and this is a shining example of that kind of stewardship,” he said.

“It is also when we see industry, community and government agencies, working together like this that we have the greatest potential to effect positive change and create reef champions whose message resonates globally from our heart to yours.”

Capped at just 200 guests, the vessel will depart Port of Airlie at 9am and return at 5pm, providing a full four hours at the mature platform reef dominated by hard corals, large pelagic species and an abundance of marine life.

Master Reef Guide-led activities on offer throughout the excursion will include snorkel safaris, semi-submersible adventures, Eye On The Reef monitoring experiences and practical, in-water photography and videography sessions.

Tickets cost \$220 per adult and include lunch, morning and afternoon tea, and all activities except scuba diving.

Other festival events to be hosted by Cruise Whitsundays include an all-inclusive sunset and fireworks cruise aboard the 26-metre sailing catamaran Camira on Friday, August 5. Tickets cost \$120 per person, with the cruise running from 5.30-8.30pm.

Children won’t want to miss the unveiling of the new Cruise Whitsundays mascot at the festival’s Saturday Street Parade, or the company’s reef education stall at the Sunday Family Fun Day.

Ms Branton-Brown said she was proud to be at the forefront of such increased investment in edu-tourism, and ever-hopeful of favourable outcomes for the Great Barrier Reef.

“We’re ecstatic that we can be the festival’s gateway to the outer reef – it’s long overdue,” she said.

“We also believe partnering with the festival will assist in broadening the reach of our shared passion for the Great Barrier Reef.”

Ms Murphy meanwhile, said she hoped these opportunities would encourage The Whitsundays and other reef communities to take pride in one of their greatest gifts.

“Our goal is to light a spark and create an emotional connection to our community’s backyard,” she said.

“Our key take-home message from the festival is for people to want to protect and conserve the future of our number-one key, global asset – the Great Barrier Reef.”

The 2022 Cruise Whitsundays Great Barrier Reef Festival will run from August 4-7. For more information or to book tickets, please [click here](#).

This media release is in partnership with the Great Barrier Reef Festival.

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To view a Word Document of this release and supporting images, [click here](#).

To view The Whitsundays destination video, [click here](#).

About Tourism Whitsundays: *Tourism Whitsundays (TW) is the organisation responsible for destination marketing and visitor attraction for the Whitsunday region. It is the lead agency recognised by Tourism and Events Queensland and the Whitsunday Regional Council to lead the promotion of the region as a tourism destination. Tourism Whitsundays markets all aspects of the region including the Great Barrier Reef, Whitsunday Islands and Coast, accommodation, boating and sailing, fishing, touring, recreational activities, adventure, dining, shopping, weddings and honeymoons, conferencing and business events.*

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