

AUSTRALIA

Cairns, the jumping-off spot for the Great Barrier Reef, is a youth-oriented, tropical city with plenty of hotels and restaurants as well as an assortment of day boats going to the Reef and overnight trips to Cod Hole. Cairns' "beach" is a mud flat dotted with roseate spoonbills and other tropical birds, and you can visit the reptile farm to gawk at saltwater crocodiles eating chickens or take the Kuranda Railway for a look at a magnificent waterfall. Be sure to order a hamburger "with everything" to see how it's supposed to be done. . . . The best diving, with pristine reefs and oodles of fish, is to the north, reachable only by live-aboards during their summer, roughly November to March. The Ribbon Reefs are known for big sharks — lots of them, including bronze whalers. . . . Pack safety sausages, whistles, strobes, mirrors, and any other safety devices that would make you noticeable if a current carries you too far from the boat. . . . Pricey Lizard Island is the northernmost land-based operation; they have day trips to Cod Hole to pet friendly, refrigerator-sized potato cod. To the south, the wreck of the *Yongala* out from Townsville may be the best fish-covered wreck in the world. . . . Summer weather is sultry and oppressive, with tropical showers. . . . Water temperature is below 80 and colder in their winter, so bring rubber. . . . Moving from

Queensland south, you'll pass from full-on tropics, through temperate water, to chilly water in Sydney, and finally into the really cold stuff when you reach Tasmania. . . . Don't worry about the Great White in the GBR; they hang around south of Sydney. . . .

Heron Island, October 2000, Larry and Joan Eggert, Ogden, UT. Vis: 40-60 ft. Water: 72 F. Birds keep you awake all night. Resort was good, excellent food. Great DAN dive medicine course. Owen, the diver operation manager was unresponsive to requests for change. The group of physicians at the DAN course asked for lights (other than cyalume sticks) on the night dive, and 2 guides per boat of 20 divers. Because of the current you had difficulty finding the mooring to surface at and needed a lead guide and a sweep guide. Because of the current and lack of boat lights people came up on empty tanks or had long surface swims on the night dive and it resulted in one physician getting bent and helicoptered to the chamber. (Ph: 831 335 4954; fax 831 335 5239 or +61 2 9299 2477; e-mail jill.bray@poresorts.com; website www.poresorts.com.au)

Lady Musgrave Island, March 2001, Kirk Faryniasz, Yigo, Guam. Vis: 35-50 ft. Water: 77-80 F. Dives logged: 135. We went to Bundaberg, Australia, the town near the southern tip of the Great Barrier Reef. Went out on the day trip to Lady Musgrave Island. Diving was good. Dive operation very efficient but since boat ride takes 3+ hours, time limited. We

had about 50 minute at 50 feet, out for an hour, and 45 minute at 30 feet. It was a nice tour to be able to say you dove the Great Barrier. Otherwise, a bit hurried. Staff very professional. **(Lady Musgrave Cruises: Ph: 07 4159 4519; fax 07 4159 5085; e-mail webmail@lmcruises.com.au; website www.lmcruises.com.au)**

Port Douglas

Poseidon, Reflections Condos, February 2001, Chuck Atwell (catwell44@yahoo.com) Aurora, IL. Experience: 51-100 dives Vis: 50 to 60 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm no currents. Accommodations at the "Reflections" were great — half block off beach — on main st next to the "Goanna Bar". Picked us up on time. Traveled to outer reef. Boat was large — about 50 divers and snorkelers (mostly snorkelers). Large group but very well organized. Staff was wonderful and gave excellent briefing on both safety and marine life. Many large clams of all colors, small tropical fish. Corals of far greater diversity than Caribbean. This is not the best of the GBR but you need a full week to explore the Coral Sea. Port Douglas is a real kick! Australia is a spectacular country and its people can't be beat. Once you get there the cost is about half the US! Plane ride only 18hr from Chicago; just think of driving to Florida! **(Ph: 07 4099 4772; fax 07 4099 4134; e-mail info@poseidon-cruises.com.au; website www.poseidon-cruises.com.au)**

CHRISTMAS ISLAND (SEE KIRIBATI)

COOK ISLANDS

Tucked between French Polynesia and Tonga, the Cook Islands have from time to time tried to promote themselves as a dive destination. They've never really succeeded — even though the main island of Rarotonga has good food and a wide variety of places to stay. There's a decent dive through a cut into the lagoon that has good sharks and strong current.

Cook Island Divers, June 2001, Bobby D. Perry (bobbyderry@aol.com) Bellaire, TX. Vis: 50-70 ft. Water: 70-74 F, choppy. Logged dives: 700-800. Dive restrictions: 100 ft. We traveled by Zodiac about 5 miles from boat landing 3-4 ft. swells — dive-master threw the anchor, which was a cement block overboard and lodged it in a coral head — removal was by yanking from the surface — corals had considerable bleaching — crown of thorn starfish were in great supply. The water was cold by Caribbean standards and visibility changed during the dive. Lots of small critters. Didn't see large fish on dive but caught mahi mahi, wahuu and tuna 2 days later. **(Ph: (888) 994-2665 or (682) 22 483; fax (682) 22 484; e-mail gwilson@ci-divers.co.ck; website www.cookpages.com/CookIslandDivers)**

Cook Island Divers, Pacific Resort, July 2001, Gill Cruz, Pleasanton, CA. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 75-77 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 3,000+. Dive restrictions: time. A lot like Hawaii, all encrusting corals no