

Post



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The Ricochet (and a few beers) - April 24, 2025

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SUMMARY

Day long catamaran trip around the Whitsunday Islands with a very international group of fellow boaters. The islands sit on a continental shelf that's part of Australia's Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. First stop was at Chalkies Beach on Haslewood Island for snorkeling or, in my case, noodle floating. Lunch on board then a stop at Whitehaven Beach for a nice stroll on a long, beautiful stretch of sand that is finer than sugar. Around the point of the island to Tongue Bay where we did the famous Hill Inlet Lookout hike to spectacular views of the Coral Sea and other islands. We were way over-served on the sail home and were

feeling no pain over our yummy pizza
dinner at the marina. - Karen

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DETAIL

Today we're scheduled to "sail" on a catamaran around the Whitsunday Islands. It's supposed to go from 10 am to 6 pm. Eight hours, plenty of time to get sun. We'll be snorkeling, island hopping, hiking, eating, drinking, and sunset watching. The boat is the Ricochet which has a capacity of 14 people. It reportedly has some shade (please, yes) but we're putting on extra sunblock, just in case.

Around here there are all kinds of boating and outing options: huge groups and small charters, sightseeing and snorkel/scuba, there's a ferry to the mainland, there are paddle boards and jet skis for rent, and there are "sunset sail booze cruises". Our eight hour sailing boasts "unlimited beer, wine, and bubbly". Fingers crossed that we can practice moderation.

Today's weather is blue sky with a bit of haze, 74° and a light breeze. It feels lovely. It's high tide and the sailboats, jet ski's and paddle boards are out in force. They make for a very picturesque scene.

We pack our towels, hats, glasses and swim shirts and head out. Over the saddle to the Marina we walk. As always, there are people coming and going. The big hotels are behind us and the big bakery and some of the big eateries are in front of us. All the boat charter businesses are nearby and each is getting their clients lined up to board the boats. Our boat ride's still a ways off so we search for breakfast.

The first place we encounter, The Marina Diner, is always doing a land office business, it must be good, yes? The flat white machine is working nonstop. The coffees are very good but alas to save time the ham and cheese croissants are kept warm under a heat lamp which makes them really dried out. Thankfully this is proving to be the exception rather than the rule. To counteract that Karen goes and gets a chicken and camembert cheese pie with cream gravy. Meat pies are very big in Australia and this one is good.

Eventually we meet Jim (or Jimmy), a tanned 40-something, slender, medium height, true Aussie. He asks who's here for the Ricochet and a bunch of us raise our hands. On a map conveniently behind him he points out where we'll be going and explains what we'll be doing. He apologetically says we won't be going Tongue Bay. "I can get you in there but I won't be able to get you off." There's a joke in there somewhere, though he didn't say it that way to be funny. Alas many of the groups, ours included, intentionally chose this cruise to go into Tongue Bay. There are calls back to the boat owner and some horse trading. Maybe we can go there. We'll have to we move things around.

On the boat we meet the first mate, Allie, or some such spelling thereof. We cast off and motor towards the Whitsunday Islands. It's pretty here but boy is it hazy. Jimmy guesses that there must be a bush fire nearby.

The sun's hot as we motor and before long the seas get choppier. We're seated at the front of the catamaran, facing forward, with other day-trippers. To keep from sliding down, our feet are propped on the 'trampoline' where you can walk and where water can splash up. As the swells get higher we get the occasional big wash up onto the boat. They nearly take us out, but definitely get us completely soaked. Relocate? Hell no, we can't move, it's too rough. So we stay put and just get soaked over and over, laughing nervously each time. Eventually the seas calm down and we wring out our soaked clothes and selves.

At Chalkies Beach on Haslewood Island we snorkel. There are other tour boats and swimmers/snorkelers around. The water's about 81 degrees and it feels great. There's a moderate current that we have to battle or at least account for. It's a tad murky but you can see coral and some fish. I'm happy to report that they both look healthy. It's the end of the season for the stinging man-of-war jellyfish, so we shouldn't see too many of them. Most wear suits just in case but I can't wait to get into the water and go without. I do see (and avoid) one small jellyfish but I do feel the occasional sting on my leg or arm or cheek.

Excitement over, we motor our way across to the long, sandy Whitehaven Beach. We drop anchor and Jim says he'll shuttle us to the beach for a walk. I've missed that behind us we've been dragging an inflatable dinghy, with an electric motor. "Or you can swim" Jimmy says. I've had a beer (or two), so I tell myself "Sure, why not, how hard can THAT be?" Diving in I start swimming for shore. Half-way there I realize I should have paced myself more, perhaps. I relax, calm down and keep going. I see a big manta ray swim below me.

Ashore Karen (who has motored over) hands me a beer, asking "How much do you love me?" (A lot!) Everyone walks up and down the long sandy beach (including me, some). But the sun is blazing and I wearing neither a shirt nor a hat, so I swim back to the boat. How hard can THAT be? Thankfully I make it.

All back aboard, Jimmy motors the Ricochet onwards while Allie prepares lunch. We each make our buffet sandwiches and dine, washing it down with more of the unlimited supply of beer. Everybody's chit chatting and we learn Allie's from Montreal and others onboard are from Austria, Sydney, Brazil, Sweden and other places. It is a fun group.

At Tongue Beach the tide is low, but it's coming in. Poles show Jimmy the way to safely get the dinghy to the beach. We're told there are giant turtles and sure enough I spot a couple coming up for air.

Near the beach we're told we have to exit the dinghy into the water. The boat can't safely go any further ashore. Our feet get wet but we're carrying our shoes and socks to keep them dry. We nearly stumble our way into the water a couple of times, but manage to stay vertical. We shake the water off our feet and brush off most of the sand before putting back on our socks and shoes. One couple opts to do the hike barefoot (are you crazy??) Twenty minutes later we're much higher, and looking out at an expansive view of... the expansive view. I guess it was worth it.

We hike back, do the shoe/sock/water/dinghy thingy again in reverse, and motor back to the boat. For better or worse more beers greet us, and more food.

We're treated with a beautiful sunset as we head back towards Hamilton Island. More beers are hoisted to cheer the setting sun. Our Austrian guy tells us of his trip down to the Antarctic in an Ice Breaker. Wasn't it cold?? No! He learned how not to be cold in the service in the Austrian Special Forces. Where did he serve? Could he tell us but then he'd have to kill us?? He points out where they're staying (way beyond our budget) and where George Harrison's house used to be (way beyond even our Austrian friend's budget).

Docked we say our fond goodbyes and walk unsteadily back on dry land. Time for dinner. We get pizza and no beer (mostly) and try to stop hiccuping (two of us). We hike back to our room and flop into bed. Good day!

Photos



The Richochet, a custom built catamaran and our home for the next eight hours.



The area where we'll be sailing, er, motoring.



Rough sailing early and Tricia is soaked, as are we all.



Snorkeling off Chalkies Beach. Jimmy motors around keeping an eye on his guests.



Tricia and Don back at the boat, having overcome the current.



Captain Jimmy and First Mate Allie.



Tricia and Don dryer, enjoying the sun and breeze.



Whitehaven Beach. I can swim that far (can't I?).



Those who didn't swim (most) motored over and back.



Feeling invincible I contemplate taking the boat for a spin.



Ashore in Tongue Bay, sandy socks and shoes back on.



At the end of the hike (well, at the highest point, we still have to hike back down).



Motoring back to the boat.



More relaxing as we motor back towards Hamilton Island.



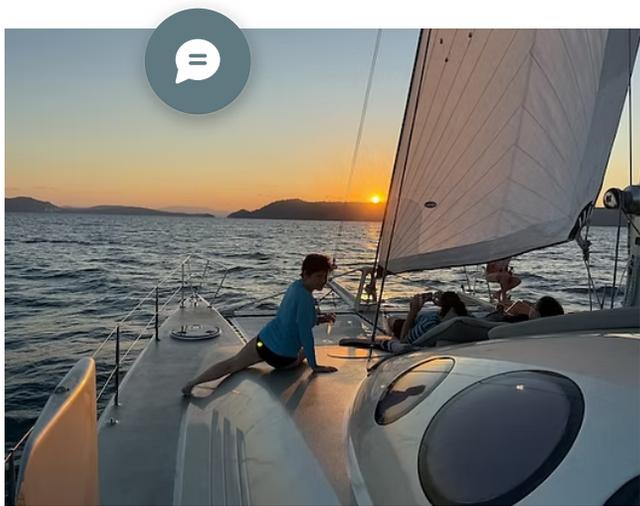
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Tricia and Don join in the relaxing.



Food, round two: parmesan, brie, salami, crackers, hummus, etc.



Karen watching for the sunset.



Almost done, motoring back into the harbor at Hamilton Island.

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