

The Lizard EXPERIENCE



Lizard Island, at the northern end of Australia's Great Barrier Reef, is justifiably famous as the comfortable staging post for daily excursions chasing the world's biggest black marlin. But many do not realise just how much a stay at the island's resort can enhance your luxurious 'get away from it all' fishing holiday. At the beginning of this year's marlin season, Kelly Fallon set forth to discover the island's charms.

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To experience the largest billfish in the world, the giant black marlin grounds off Lizard Island, at the top of the Ribbon Reefs, are unrivalled. Every year in September, enormous black marlin return to these warm waters from all over the Pacific. The biggest of them are females, which can weigh substantially more than 1000lb. They are joined by a multitude of smaller males that range to 350lb. More black marlin have been released by recreational anglers in this area of the Australian

coast than anywhere else in the world.

Number 10 Ribbon Reef is just 12 nautical miles from Lizard. It is the northernmost and largest of all the Ribbon Reefs, and some will say it is the most consistent for the giant marlin. With close to 18 miles of hard edge, this reef does not suffer fluctuations in water clarity due to tidal outflows, as can occur between the breaks in the shorter reefs.

In foul weather, island guests also have the option of fishing at Day Reef to the north. This reef, being

north-west facing, forms a natural weather break from the relentless south-easters of the marlin season.

To fish this prolific region, anglers have the options of chartering large live-aboard gameboats, smaller gameboats with an attendant mothership, or based on land at Lizard Island. As I found to my delight at the beginning of this year's season, the latter option is certainly one of the best. Anglers based – on land – at the Lizard Island lodge can combine the best that a trip to the GBR can offer.

You can enjoy full days fishing the nearby outer reef and then, after a quick run home at the end of the day, enjoy a candlelit dinner on the veranda of Ospreys Restaurant with your loved one. Following a restful night's sleep and a gourmet breakfast, you'll be ready to do it all again the next day.

During my recent stay, the island's resident gameboat, *Fascination III*, as well as other members of the seasonal charter fleet, was day-tripping from the island. It had been another windy September and the boats were enjoying the relative calm of the anchorage in the lee of the island. And once again this stretch of reef was delivering the big black marlin!

Even before the end of September *Fascination III* had released seven big blacks in only 16 hours of fishing. Their guests had been combining fishing with a morning dive on the reef. The Gold Coast-based team aboard *Cjig* also released a fish around the 1000-pound mark while I was there!

THE LIZARD EXPERIENCE

Your Lizard Island experience begins the moment your flight departs from Cairns. Lizard Island is located 240km north of Cairns and 27km from the coast of tropical North Queensland. The view from the plane throughout the 60-minute journey over turquoise reefs is nothing less than spectacular.

As you circle around the island to land you'll get a view of most of the 24 beaches and coral gardens that you'll be able to enjoy. You'll also spot the resort itself, set deep into the lush tropical surrounds along Anchor Bay on the north-western edge of the island.

Aside from fishing, there is plenty to see and do here. For the energetic, there are a number of historic hikes that give you a wonderful vantage over the island, whose name was given to it by Captain Cook on 12 August, 1770. That day, he wrote in his journal: "The only land animals we saw here were Lizards, and these seemed'd to be pretty plenty, which occasioned my naming the island Lizard Island."

One of the longer paths is a three-to four-hour trek, 258 metres above sea level to 'Cook's Look'. This is the same spot that members of Captain Cook's *Endeavour* climbed in 1770 to assist in navigating safe passage through the reef. It gives you fabulous views over the entire island, right down to the Ribbon Reefs in the south.



If you prefer the gentler, accompanied options, you can choose from a range of tours, including paddle-ski tours, tours of the marine-research station located on the other side of the island, nature presentations, as well as champagne excursion cruises at sunset. The resort also has tennis courts and a full-feature gym.

The resort is situated on 1013 hectares of national park, hosting a marine reserve (protected environment), and is completely surrounded by fringing reefs. There are plenty of ways to explore the island and the reefs and bays – we travelled by motorised dinghy for a secluded picnic lunch at Mermaid Cove, and snorkelled in complete

solitude along coral gardens alive with many colourful species of fish.

The resort also offers beach 'drop offs' for those less confident in charge of their own vessel, complete with an individually catered picnic lunch, umbrella and snorkelling equipment. You can also explore the island via paddle skis or catamaran, or another of the island's substantial watercraft fleet.

If you're not feeling quite so energetic, you can relax in front of the resort and swim in the crystal-clear waters off the sandy beach, or in the resort pool. One of the best snorkelling spots on the entire island is right there in front of the resort. You'll see a number of enormous 100-year-old clams in

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the coral gardens. If you are not a competent snorkeller lessons are offered, or you can enjoy the view from the island's glass-bottom boat.

LUXURIOUS

The resort offers luxurious accommodation in just 40 rooms, suites and villas, and with so many different activities to choose from, we didn't see many of the other guests outside of meal-times.

We were pampered throughout our stay and especially enjoyed the three-course meals prepared by highly acclaimed executive chef Mark Jensen, at the island's Osprey Restaurant. Here we were treated to some of Australia's best contemporary cuisine, as well as complementary fine wines and Champagne. And for the ultimate private dining treat, you simply can't miss their seven-course degustation menu served at one of two beautiful beach locations.

We also enjoyed the resort's day spa Azure, which offers a range of treatments combining ancient Indigenous medicines and massage techniques with aromatherapy, colour therapy, sound therapy and herbalism.

Internet access is available in the departure lounge, but there is no mobile phone coverage on the island, which lends well to the experience of getting away from it all.

LIZARD HISTORY

The Lizard Island resort began as a fisherman's retreat. From September to December each year the island was home to the professional charter fleet that worked day trips from the island and enjoyed all their meals prepared by the resort. Back then, the boats were not equipped to operate overnight – no watermakers, guest accommodation or storage for supplies. The resort was often closed throughout the wet season and visiting anglers occupied its rooms for the rest of the year.

In its heyday, hundreds of grander black marlin were weighed on the island's gantry, including the pictured 1239lb black. It was weighed in 1993 for angler Jeff Creary and Capt Greg 'Muddy' Edwards on *Assegai* with a young Capt Luke Fallon (now my husband) on deck.

The last black marlin was weighed on the Lizard Island gantry in 2004 (1068lb). In 2006, the gantry was demolished – a sign of the times. It demonstrated the fleet's commitment to releasing these giant creatures to ensure sustainability for future generations. The Lizard Island Game Fishing Club then instituted a 1000lb Tag & Release Club, which has welcomed 17 new members in recent years. Even today, more grander black marlin are released in these waters than anywhere else in the world.

On their rare nights off during the marlin season, the professional fleet will gather at the island's 'Marlin Bar', an inviting structure beside the beach that has been the site for the telling of many exciting stories. This detached building is the only part of the resort that is open to non-guest visitors.

Capt Craig 'Brutus' Newbold skips the island's luxury 51-foot Riviera Platinum Model flybridge cruiser *Fascination III*. Having spent the past five years on Lizard, he is very familiar with all that the island has to offer. "I have been lucky enough to catch 1000lb fish every season," he proudly reports. "But what makes it so special for me is when we take someone who has never fished before and catch them a fish of a lifetime. For me, marlin season is the Formula One of fishing, and it doesn't get much better than up here at Lizard Island." Even at the very beginning of this year's spectacular season, the giant marlin fishing off Lizard Island was, once again, heating up to confirm his point. 🐟



"It doesn't get much better than up here at Lizard Island." – Capt Craig Newbold

BOOKING YOUR TRIP

Fascination III is available for hire to resort guests all year round, although bookings for the marlin season should be made well in advance to secure dates. Should *Fascination III* be pre-booked, other boats from the Cairns fleet will be based at the island during the marlin season. Some boats will have occasional days available at short notice, but it is wise to book well in advance of the start of the season in September.

Regular flights to Lizard Island are available from all Australian capital cities via Cairns. Hinterland Aviation operates the connecting flight between Cairns and Lizard Island up to twice a day.

For more information, or to book your visit to Lizard Island lodge, phone 1300 863 248, or visit: www.lizardisland.com.au