

Australia's iconic region the Whitsunday's joins EarthCheck to become a leading destination of the world.

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The Whitsunday's has partnered with EarthCheck to support its Healthy Heart initiative and their ambition to become more climate resilient. The programme will be delivered through the Whitsunday Climate Change Innovation Hub which is an initiative of the Whitsunday Regional Council under the Great Barrier Reef Foundation's Reef Islands Initiative and the only one of its kind in the country. Their focus is to develop innovative, practical solutions to help the Whitsunday region manage the impacts of climate change, both present and future. In doing so, the Hub hopes to act as a think tank to gather and share knowledge with the community to build resilience in the region, and throughout Australia and across the globe.

Renowned for its relaxed lifestyle, the Whitsunday's boasts beautiful beaches, tropical rainforests, swaying cane fields and earthy colours of the historic outback. The destination covers the four main townships of Airlie Beach, Bowen, Collinsville and Proserpine with a number of rural & coastal communities, and residential areas scattered in between.

Fun Facts:

- + The Ngaro Aboriginal people likely lived in the Whitsunday Islands as many as 8,000 years ago.
- + The Great Barrier Reef stretches for over 2,600 km, is comprised of more than 2,900 individual reefs, and can be seen from outer space
- + Whitehaven Beach is consistently rated as Australia's #1 beach and as the 5th best in the world.
- + The Whitsundays is home to over 75 species of animal/plant that are endemic to Queensland.
- + The Whitsundays usually experiences a wet hot summer and a dry mild winter. Daytime and night-time temperatures typically only vary 5-10 degrees Celsius!
- + 40% of all reef visitation comes through the Whitsundays - the "Heart of the Reef".

Lee Hawkins, Project Officer for the Healthy Heart program in the Whitsundays Climate Change Innovation Hub, said that partnering with EarthCheck was an exciting opportunity for the Whitsundays Region. She said, "This is a collaborative four-year project, focussing on marine tourism operators in the first year with plans to expand further in following years."

"We will be working with EarthCheck and other world-leading destinations to share ideas and learn how we can more effectively address key destination challenges associated with development, planning and marketing."

Stewart Moore, Founder and CEO of EarthCheck said great destinations are built on a strong vision and an ability to harness the collective passion of local industry and community.

"EarthCheck has been working with businesses, communities and governments across the globe for the past 30 years to deliver clean, safe, prosperous and health destinations for travellers to visit, live, work and play."

"Leading destinations do not happen without commitment and engagement at all levels – from government and industry to local partners and communities."

The program provides the Whitsunday's with access to a wide range of destination and planning resources which includes access to a rapid destination appraisal, destination certification for 3 years, business toolkits for tourism operators and a tourism carbon footprint tool.

EarthCheck is supported by the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), the APEC International Centre for Sustainable Tourism (AICST), the not-for-profit EarthCheck Research Institute and is aligned with the aims of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). The Reef Islands Initiative is a Great Barrier Reef Foundation program, supported by funding from Lendlease, the Australian Government's Reef Trust, the Queensland Government and the Fitzgerald Family Foundation.

Contacts

Andre Russ

+61 7 3924 4200

mailto: marketing@earthcheck.org