

Terrific Houseboat Family Holidays @ Hinchinbrook !

Report & Pics by
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A telephone call from Ros, at Hinchinbrook Rent A Yacht in Cardwell, with an invitation to cruise the Hinchinbrook Island waterways was met with a resounding “YES, please!”

Their Port Hinchinbrook fleet has now been increased to include *Intrepid*, a luxurious 12.70m tri-hulled home cruiser. Following another telephone call to friends, Jeanette and Alan Candlett, we were set for a few days R & R in one of the most beautiful ‘still water’ cruising grounds in the world.

After a briefing from Bruce on skippering and general use of the boat we motored out of Port Hinchinbrook Marina and headed north towards the resort at Cape Richards. The weather was less than impressive, but *Intrepid* motored cleanly through the shallow chop with the occupants hardly knowing they were on water.

The early morning departure meant we were in Missionary Bay in time to see the dugongs feeding on the sea grass beds. These shy creatures disappeared quickly, but not before our South Australian friends had a good look at them.

Under the lee of Cape Richards we found the smooth blue water we were looking for. The resort and Orchid Beach in Shephard’s Bay, bathed in bright sunlight, looked very welcoming. We anchored with the press of a button on the helm, and using the rubber duck we had tied to the stern, motored into Orchid Beach.

A quick swim in the crystal clear



Leaving Port Hinchinbrook, and crossing one of the hottest fishing spots in North Queensland, the Marina entrance!

After lunch, we set off for Number 3 Creek.

Number 3 and Number 7 Creeks are both deep creeks with plenty of

water, a walk along the beach and a rest under the tropical pandanus trees - then it was back to *Intrepid*. The large landing platform at the stern of the boat, made access to and from the rubber duck hassle free.

Swimming, snorkeling and scuba diving from this platform is a breeze. We had our snorkeling gear with us, but the weather wasn’t kind enough to allow us to snorkel the usually clear waters of the Brook Islands just to our north, so we had to content ourselves with the rocky reef headlands around Orchid Beach. Driving from the top deck provided a magnificent 360 degree view as we steamed the cruiser around to Macushla Beach in Missionary Bay.

Intrepid is definitely on the upper end of the market. The teak interior, separate double bedrooms and a bathroom you can turn around in, make living aboard this vessel a slice of heaven on the water.

A leisurely lunch was prepared in the full size kitchen – and yes, it’s more truly described as a “kitchen” than a galley. A top of the range gas stove (including a normal sized oven) makes cooking easy. Mod cons like the ‘fridge and the large freezer are set into the bench area. Several people can work in the kitchen at one time without getting under each other’s feet.

water in all tides. Larger boats can safely negotiate their way several hundred metres inside them. They make an excellent anchorage in rough weather. The colour sounder kept us in deep water all the way and found us a few good spots to drop a line in after we had anchored for the night.

Number 7 Creek gives you access to the famous boardwalk across to Ramsay Bay on high tide. It is an easy walk above the mangroves to a long expanse of sandy beach on the ocean side of the Island. The creek is sign posted and the cruiser can go a fair way in. The last leg, up to the actual boardwalk, is done in the dinghy.

After looking at the mangrove lined banks and the rock walls which are a feature of Number 3, we motored about 50 metres outside the creek mouth to drop the anchor for the night. This distance from the mouth ensured that we had a sandfly and mosquito free night (stay anchored in the creek and you’ll see what I mean!).

Back To Base All the vessels hired out by Ros and Bruce Walker are carefully monitored. Every morning and night, Bruce calls the boats and



checks that you are in one of the safe anchorages.

If there are any problems Bruce comes out to you and fixes your problem. They are always just a radio call away.

We were anchored well before the 5.00 p.m. sked. By the time Bruce called us, the ladies were sipping wine on the top deck watching the sun sink below the mountains behind Cardwell. The men had a few fishing lines over the back in an attempt to catch a few grunter (javelin fish). This time of year the grunter is very active and usually a pretty good size.

However, the spectacular sunset and the Crown lager put the men off their game, and unfortunately, the grunter won that round, 25-nil.

After dark, Bruce and Ros and partners Maryann and Barry motored out to see how *Intrepid* was going on her maiden voyage.

We toasted her future and sat down to a meal of coral trout, baked on the barbecue on the back deck, fresh prawns and oysters, natural and kilpatrick (grilled in the normal size oven on the boat). The eight of us sat easily around the dining room table. We brought two of the deck chairs down from the upper deck so we could sit evenly around the table.

The built in bar with its own bar fridge kept all our drinks cold. It also has a built in television and video. For us on that weekend, it was a bonus - we got to watch Ian Thorpe and the Aussie relay team win gold medals.

The top deck was great for watching the moon come up over the towering, jagged mountains of Hinchinbrook Island. The teak outdoor table and proper deck chairs saw us toast the moon in comfort. The six stacker CD player kept the background music up all night.

The four of us were really comfortable on the boat, and when the weather decreed it was more sensible for our visitors to stay overnight, than struggle home against rising winds, there was plenty of room for eight. Everyone had a bed. There were two complete double rooms. Each had a full sized double bed, made up with

sheets, doonas and comfortable pillows just like home.

Our visitors slept on the two bunk-and-a-half beds each side of the helm. If you want to take three couples really comfortably the table folds down partway into the hull to make a really big double bed. Staying the night gave Bruce and Ros first hand knowledge of their new boat.

Morning saw our visitors depart and we showered before we left the anchorage. The bathroom was beautiful. If you've never been on a boat before (or at least, one this size!) you won't be expecting this. It is twice the normal size.

There is plenty of water in the hull,



Top: Progress in paradise - the Port Hinchinbrook Marina is really coming on quickly now. Above: F&B contributor Heather Hamilton, with a nice 'Channel barra.

but just remember if you are on a fairly long trip you still have to watch how much water you use. (No half hour showers!) The toilet has a *state-of-the-art* flushing system and works just like the one at home, too - but no effluent goes into the water as it is all kept in a holding tank in the hull.

We upped anchor (another push of a button) and cruised along the northern end of Hinchinbrook Island and into the channel. Here we ran into an unusually stiff breeze. The cruiser made her way along the island easily with no discomfort to her passengers. A pod of dolphins surfed off our bow wave for some of the time.

We anchored in Gayundah Creek. This is another all weather anchorage. A deep hole where one of the smaller creeks met the main creek was where we put the anchor down. We used the rubber duck to throw the cast net in a few drains for live bait. Lines down again and this time we were able to catch a few grunter, though none of them were of any size.

And so the pattern for the rest of the weekend was set. Despite the sometimes windy weather, we fished, explored, and relaxed with icy cold ales whilst sharing each other's company long into the night. It's an odd sort of feeling to be watching the Olympics half a world away, whilst having a drink with friends and having to regularly rush out to change the baits or check the crab pots! But it doesn't get any better, does it ?

Conclusion The cruiser was a wonderful way to see the sights of the Hinchinbrook region. It had all the comforts of home. All you need to bring is your food and clothes.

Intrepid is the definitive "mothership", and is an ideal base for (say) two or three families to share, while bringing their own small boats along to fish Hinchinbrook.

Not only does this break down the costs into manageable proportions, it also provides a real incentive for the Mums who might otherwise be deservedly hesitant about heading off into the wilderness. It's usually the Mums who have to face the

reality of having to feed Dad and the kids, and keep the family organised in terms of bathing facilities, toilets, dry clothes, etc.

For people who aren't campers but would like to see what eco-tourism is all about, without the backpack, this is an excellent way to do it.

As our South Aussie friends said, "This place is magnificent. How do you keep it such a secret?"

For further information, talk with Ros or Bruce Walker at Hinchinbrook Rent A Yacht, Port Hinchinbrook, phone (07) 4066 8007 or fax (07) 4066 8003
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