

Part 3 Of A Special Four Part Series

Entering Gulnare Inlet - one of the safest anchorages in the Whitsundays. It's a tidal estuary, and winds back into the hills for kilometres.



The Whitsunday Challenge

Introducing a fascinating, timely assessment a family had to make about the boat they loved: whether to sell it and upgrade to a new slicker model; keep it, renovate and refurbish what has been an excellent craft - or whether the time had come to move on, altogether. After much debate, a deal was done within the family - and the renovation began. In F&B #160, we learned how *"Reel Appeal"* was refurbished. In #161, the rig was repositioned in the Whitsundays - and in Parts 3 (now) and 4 (F&B March #163), join author/photographer Peter Pedersen as he fulfills his dream: *Cruising the Magic Whitsundays*.

Part 3 The "Central" Islands

The Whitsundays is one of those rare places that actually does live up to the postcards and tourist bump. The place does have its fair share of crook weather and sometimes strong winds can settle in for many days (good for the sailboats, troublesome for others), but when it's good in the Whitsundays - it's absolutely magic!

Most anchorages are only a short hop away from each other, and when the weather is coming in from one way, it is usually only a short hop to a more

snug location.

Even with the amount of boating activity, and a few favourite anchorages that can be a little crowded, mostly there is no overwhelming feeling of being crammed into small harbours. There is generally room for all, and if you really crave some solitude, there are plenty of options just slightly outside the regular haunts. For those who do like to get away, the trip north to Bowen or south to Mackay will provide excellent, secure and private hidey-holes. These will be explored in the fourth part of this series.

For now though, the following will hopefully provide a good general overview of the "main" locations of the Whitsundays....

Glorious Nara Inlet.

Only about 12nm from Airlie beach is Nara Inlet - a huge narrow slot in the southern end of Hook Island. More like a North American fjord than what many might expect of a tropical location, with large majestic pines sweeping down from the lofty heights of the inlet and meeting the beautiful clear calm water's edge.

Nara is the perfect first night anchorage for most departing Airlie Beach at the start of their adventure. It is an all-weather, secure and beautiful place to drop the pick and while popular, does not seem too crowded even with 50 odd vessels parked up.

Part way up the inlet is a National Parks boardwalk showcasing the Indigenous aspects of the region. It is a very well thought out and constructed interpretive site. The boardwalk also provides one of the classic vistas in the region, with a great view looking back towards the mouth of the inlet.

The end of the inlet is completely protected and there is a fresh water stream that runs after some rain. Refuge Bay is a short arm of the inlet that provides another very cosy and protected anchoring option.

There are some small beaches to stretch the legs, but the inlet is probably best enjoyed by cracking a cold drink on deck, taking in the view and getting the boat legs in order. It is a great, iconic spot and would be a shame if it does not form at least part of any itinerary.

Marvellous Macona

Right next door to Nara and of

similar shape, is Macona Inlet. A little more "estuarine" than Nara, it offers similar views and feel to next door, with smaller crowds. With good holding and secure from winds from all points of the compass it is also a great hide out when the weather sets in. There are a few small beaches as well as reasonable oyster grounds on the foreshore. Curlew Beach at the entrance is especially pleasant.

Around Hook and Hayman

The trip north around the western side of Hook provides a calm passage if winds set in from the east. The reefs in this part of the region can be a bit of a navigation hazard for the unwary. They tend to extend beyond the markers and some are not marked at all, so extra care is needed. The first major stopping off point when heading north is Stonehaven. There are numerous public moorings along this part of the coast, again with nice little beaches to lay down a towel and soak up the sun, or just stretch the legs. These moorings can be a little rolly, even when winds are from the east. It seems a common occurrence in the region, with swell "refracting around corners" seemingly contrary to what would be expected.

It is said that "Whitsunday" is an ancient phrase meaning - "Place of the bloody roly anchorage" or, "Land of the catamaran".

Certainly, when encountered on a beach walk, multi-hull skippers do seem to have a certain strut to their step and an "I told you so" expression on their face. If there is one aspect of the region that some may find annoying, certainly unexpected swell in seemingly protected overnight anchorages would be it. Locals also warn of sudden wind changes that occur in the middle of the night, especially during the trade wind season. So a perfect anchorage at sundown may see your boat pitching and rolling in the early hours.

At Stonehaven, it may be the influence of the strong currents passing through the passage between Hook and Hayman that causes this effect. In any case, the moorings tucked in behind the headlands will provide a more comfortable night's sleep than those further along the shore.

Again, a very pretty spot.

Just west of Stonehaven, and a great spot to take an early morning swim