

KEPPEL

magic



Views towards Pumpkin and Sloping Islands from the lookout at North Keppel

In this destination article, **CHRISTINE DANGER** shares with us the delights of a beautiful place for a holiday or a stopover: The Keppel Isles.

Whether you are on a yacht doing the yearly pilgrimage north or are looking for a great destination to sail to somewhere warm, the Keppels never fail to spin their magic. They are far enough north to capture the sun, enjoy mild winters and gorgeous springs when most yachties frequent the tropics.

Located 12km off Yeppoon on the Central Queensland Capricorn coast, the Keppel Group consists of two large islands, Great Keppel and North Keppel, around which is a number of smaller islands, rocks and reefs. These are continental islands rather than coral cays, the remnants of drowned mountains and as such share the same geology, flora and fauna as the adjacent mainland. Much of the coastal area here is national park, as are many of the islands. The Keppels is a favoured stopping point for many yachties on their way to the Whitsundays and beyond. Steep heavily forested hills and cliffs plunge into the sea; sheltered bays and quiet sandy beaches provide good anchorages in a variety of wind conditions; there are plenty of walking tracks ashore offering spectacular views, and the fringing reef in crystal clear waters supports fascinating underwater flora and fauna. What else could visitors want?

So let us share with you what we think are the pick of the anchorages, walks and snorkelling sites.

OUR TOP FIVE OVERNIGHT ANCHORAGES

For the definitive reference about anchorages, we recommend Noel Patrick's *Curtis Coast* and Alan Lucas *Cruising the Coral Coast*. These two cruising guides are our bibles. But having spent a bit of time around the Keppels, we have come to favour a few anchorages. Here are our top five.

Long Beach – Great Keppel Island

This is a great anchorage in north to north-easterlies which typically blow in spring and summer. Long walks on the sandy beach, hiking across to Monkey Beach, kayaking and fishing are some of the delights. You can anchor quite close to the beach in 3-5m over sand.

Leeke's Beach – Great Keppel Island

This is a popular spot to hide from southerly winds which are predominant in winter. Tucking yourself in next to the creek entrance in the eastern corner of the beach offers the best protection. But be warned, in strong southeast you might get out of the wind, but you won't avoid the swell – anywhere in the Keppels! Despite this, there is a beautiful sandy beach, and

exploring the creek by dinghy at high tide gives you access to a hidden lagoon where fishing and crabbing can be bountiful.

Svendsen's Beach – Great Keppel Island

Just around the corner from Leeke's is a very popular anchorage. You won't get this spot to yourself but it does offer good protection from southeasterly winds. Beautiful walks take you from the beach to other anchorages on the northern and north-eastern sides of the island, and in winter, you are sure to encounter hundreds of butterflies. It is also a favoured spot for beach sundowners with other yachties.

Wreck Bay – Great Keppel Island

In a northerly wind, you can tuck yourself into the northern most corner which offers good protection and access to wonderful snorkeling. But beware of wind changes or you can find yourself on a lee shore. South-easterlies have a habit of springing up in the middle of the

night! The bay gets its name from the remnants of a wreck on the eastern corner. There is a huge sandy beach, the water is crystal clear, and this is a heavenly spot in the right conditions: we have often had it to ourselves. From there you can walk across to Butterfish bay, a delightful walk we mention in the Best Walks section.

Considine Bay – North Keppel Island

If you don't like crowds this anchorage is perfect in light trade winds. A much more rugged island than Great Keppel, North Keppel has appeal, especially if you seek solitude. Protection in a north-east through to a south-east is good at Considine, although you will

Looking at Great Keppel from Humpy Island's ridge trail





TOP: Sunset at Svendsen in the company of other yachts.

ABOVE L-R: Sarcophyton, a type of soft coral showing its beautiful curvaceous shape.

Anemonefish are always a delight, but very territorial! Don't get too close!

A Bengal Sergeant sheltering among the Acropora coral.

have to anchor a fair distance off the beach as it shoals a long way out, and this might expose you to swell. The holding is excellent though in sand. You will enjoy peace and quiet, a beautiful sandy beach with a creek entrance at the northern end, and access to great walks which give a spectacular view of the Keppel Bay Isles and the mountain range back on the mainland.

THREE GREAT WALKS

The islands of Great Keppel and North Keppel are crisscrossed with tracks which are well maintained. You can download track information from the Keppel Bay Islands National Park www.parks.des.qld.gov.au We have listed our three favourites here.

Butterfish to Wreck Bay – Great Keppel Island

This is a gorgeous walk that links Butterfish Bay to Wreck Bay. You can also join that track from Svendsen's Beach. What makes it attractive is the collection of poems inscribed on pebbles and

decorated with shells which you will find along the sandy path. You climb up the dune from Butterfish Bay, and enjoy a leisurely stroll, plenty of bird life and great views. This is an easy grade which will take you less than an hour each way.

Ridgetop Trail – Humpy Island

Our favourite walk in the Keppel Isles, this is a 2km circuit that takes you to the top of the ridge and affords magnificent views of Keppel Bay. You start from the camping area, climb an initially steep track to reach the ridge line. From there, 360° panoramic views await for the rest of the track. This loop walk offers the best value for effort experience in our opinion. In April/May the grass trees are in flower, in winter and spring the red grevillea cover the hills in red blossoms, and of course the butterflies are omnipresent. It will take you an hour or so, and the grade is easy.

Ko-no-mie Trail Circuit – North Keppel Island

This is another scenic and interesting circuit walk of about 7.8km. The trail takes you right around the island, via two lookouts. You start from the beach, winding through woodland and open grassland, following a dried up creek with interpretive signage. You then climb progressively to a couple of lookouts affording magnificent views of Pumpkin and Sloping Island to the south, and 360° views once you reach the highest point of the island. The track then follows the ridge line back down to the beach. You can do the loop in two to three hours. The track is rough with relatively steep sections to the summit, but again well worth the effort.

FIVE BEAUTIFUL SNORKELLING SPOTS

The coral diversity of the fringing reef in the Keppels is in our view better than in the Whitsundays, with clear water most of the year and abundant marine life. You may only be 12-18km away from the mainland, but surprisingly the reef is in good condition. Some areas are affected by algae, but the sites we list here are excellent. To make life easier, there are also a number of public moorings present at most snorkelling spots, typically one or two at each site. They are mainly yellow (maximum 10m for monohulls, 9m for multihulls), and green (20m for monos and 18m for multis). You can download a location map of all public moorings in the Keppel Isles by going to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park authority website. But whether anchored or moored, you will be able to jump off the back of your boat and paddle to an enthralling underwater world.

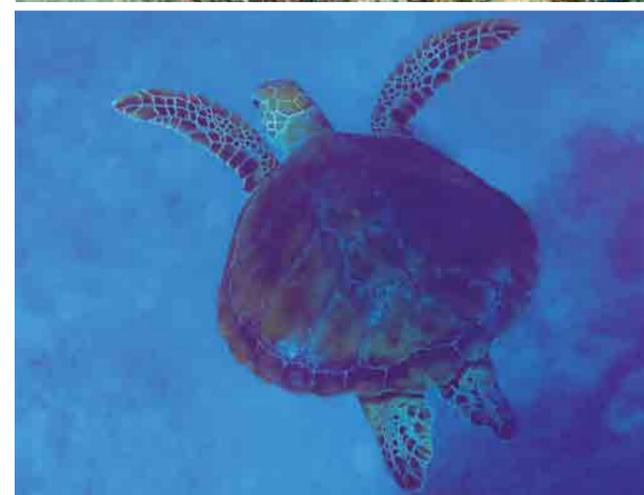
For those who write off reefs that are close to the mainland, put your flippers, mask and snorkel on and have a look under your hulls! We have five favourites:

Monkey Beach – Great Keppel Island

Nowhere else have we seen the quantity and variety of fish in such a compact area. It is popular and attracts tour boats, but so worth a look! You can anchor nearby outside of the Marine Park markers, or grab one of two public mooring buoys. Prepare to be astounded at low tide. The waters are teeming with brilliantly coloured fish. You will float around surrounded by thousands of iridescent pullers, dozens of butterflyfish, wrasses and parrotfish, schools of juvenile barracudas; you will swim with green sea turtles, and be mesmerized by the number of giant clams with their dazzling and patterned mantles. Visiting friends we have taken to Monkey Beach all describe their snorkel as "the most amazing experience of their life". That is saying a lot.

Wreck Bay – Great Keppel Island

If hard corals are your thing, get in the water at the northeast end of Wreck Bay. The Acropora coral in various forms abound: leafy, table, branched ... and

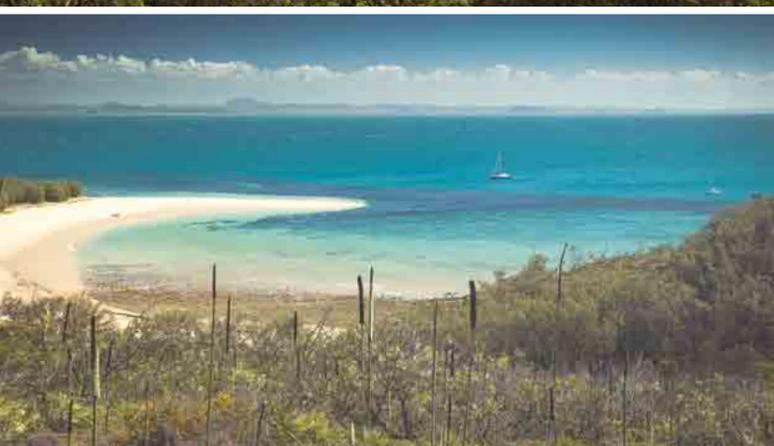


FROM TOP:

The Spanish Dancer, just like a flamenco dancer in her red dress!

Strikingly coloured clams at Monkey Beach.

Green Sea Turtles are plentiful around the Keppels, particularly around Monkey Beach and Shelving Point.



such as the Spanish Dancer, an enthralling type of nudibranch. You are able to anchor in the little cove outside of the Marine Park markers, or pick up the public mooring buoy.

Western shore of Miall Island

Although not as plentiful as Monkey Beach, on a calm day you can enjoy the anchorage and its reef all on your lonesome. No commercial tourist boat here, just you, a snorkel and a sense of adventure. Hard and soft corals, various types of butterfly fish and Angelfish abound and you won't have to dodge other snorkellers for the privilege.

Sloping Island

Just south of North Keppel is this little frequented fringing reef in the shelter of Sloping Island. There is a public mooring buoy to attach to. It is deep and affected by current if you have to anchor outside of the Marine Park markers. It is the best site in our opinion to observe hard and soft corals. Colours, shapes, textures are varied. It is a small yet spectacular reef.

Beyond the main islands, there are also isolated islets such as Barren Island and Man and Wife Rocks which have a public mooring and are mainly frequented by divers but require calm conditions.

You could easily spend a few weeks in Keppel Bay and not get bored. Provisioning is easy at Emu Park just south of Yeppoon by anchoring out in front of town and doing a dinghy run, or if you are not worried about marina costs, you can get Coles On Line to deliver at Keppel Bay Marina or do a quick run to Yeppoon yourself if you manage to get one of two courtesy cars. But be warned, you only have it for two hours, so get your skates on with the food and liquor purchases!

We have made multiple visits to the Keppels and have had friends join us for a sailing interlude there. It is possible to get a bus or a ride from Rockhampton's airport to the Keppel Bay Marina to pick up and drop off crew or visitors.

The Keppels may not have the iconic status of the Whitsundays, but the islands in the group are eminently accessible, safe and offer a relaxed cruising destination which we love returning to time and time again. Go and experience their magic, you won't be disappointed.

FROM TOP:

Anchored in company at Considine Beach, North Keppel.

Moored at Big Peninsular Point in blustery south-east winds.

View from the ridge at Humpy Island, a favourite walk.

with good colour: cream, blue, pink. Clownfish like to shelter in their favourite anemone there too, and of course all sorts of parrotfish. Being on the eastern side of the island, the waters are the clearest we have seen in the group.

Big Peninsular Point – Great Keppel Island

Corals, both hard and soft are a feature of this beautiful site at the northern most point of the island. You will also see schools of damselfish and fusiliers. Not as frequented as other spots, we found this a very pleasing one and saw some striking marine life there,

Chris and her partner Wade Bishop have been sailing on catamarans of various sizes for about 20 years, cruising Bass Strait, Tasmanian waters and Australia's east coast. In July 2017, they finally retired, and are now sea wanderers. After spending many years on Take It Easy, they have just acquired their 'last' catamaran, *Anui*, a 52ft Crowther. Follow their adventures on www.sv-anui.com

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