

POSTCARD

Moreton Island



David Whitley heads to Moreton Island in Queensland – a hotbed for adventure and the location for George Clooney movie *Ticket to Paradise*

A face full of sand shouldn't be quite so enjoyable, but after speeding down a giant dune on a waxed board, such endings are forgivable. And Moreton Island has plenty of sand to go around.

One of a series of large sand islands off the Queensland coast, Moreton has become an all-action playground for day-trippers taking the 75-minute ferry ride from Brisbane. Besides a boarding session or a 4x4 truck ride on the dunes, much of the adventure is found around its beaches and in the water.

The island's sun-drenched shores have recently been attracting attention for another reason, appearing this autumn as a 'Balinese' backdrop in the film *Ticket to Paradise*, starring Julia Roberts and George Clooney. It's easy to see why the white sands and cyan waters were chosen as one of several Queensland filming locations for the movie, while beneath the waves there is a wealth of impressive marine life too.

Between the 1960s and 1980s, several old government barges were sunk deliberately to create a protected bay for boats to anchor. However, it's not just boaters who have benefited. A reef has grown up around the vessels, with fast-growing staghorn coral leading the way.

Lots of coral means lots of fish, and the sheer number of black-and-white-striped sergeant majors and yellow-tipped butter bream flitting past makes donning a mask and fins well worth it. Thousands flash by, while parrotfish nip away at the algae and scythe-like Moorish idol fish congregate in the deeper waters.

However, these aren't the creatures Moreton Island is most famous for. Dolphins are its best-known residents (in the film, the cast have their own encounter with them), and in the evenings, a friendly pod of wild dolphins swim up to the beach near the jetty, ready to be hand-fed. On the shore, dozens of people line up behind buckets, awaiting their turn. And cheeky pelicans sneak around the back, trying to steal a fish when nobody's looking.

This Moreton Island experience is the result of more than three decades of building trust with the dolphins. And what started with the owners of the Tangalooma Island Resort throwing a few fish off the jetty, has turned into a heavily regulated nightly gathering, with several generations of dolphins having taught each other that these humans are OK. What they think of the pelicans, however, is another matter... **TW**



BOOK IT

Rooms at the **Tangalooma Island Resort** cost from about £157 a night. Several day tour options, packaging up different activities, are sold by Viator. tangalooma.com



FROM TOP: Moreton Bay and islands; wild dolphins swim up to the beach

PICTURES: Tourism Australia/Jamie MacFadyen, Brisbane Marketing; Tourism Queensland