Lady Elliot Island 2010

“All you need to bring is the desire to explore, touch and experience the Great Barrier Reef.”

At 5.50 in the morning the moment had finally arrived for the Sunshine Beach High Year 12 Marine and Biology Students to start their exciting 5-day journey to Lady Elliot Island, which is located on a coral cay, North of Fraser Island and a short flight from Hervey Bay. Though it was a long trip to Hervey Bay airport every single student and teacher sat in the coach with a big smile and great excitement.

Just after the arrival at Hervey Bay Airport the first group left in 4 little planes, which already fascinated the students. The second group made their way to Hervey Bay for a walk at the Beach and some lunch, getting nervous and excited for their flight.

Finally everyone had arrived safely on the Island, after such a long waiting period. Already in the first seconds they touched the ground of the Island students as well as teachers fell in love with the beautiful and amazing nature and the resort, which is the only one on the little Island.

Obviously nobody could wait to go down to the beach and have a first look at the reef and the environment, so the rooms got sorted really fast and the happiness was even greater when everyone went on the guided reef walk.

![The guided reef walk, while the sun was setting on the other side of the island. Students made their first encounter with the reef and its animals.](image)

Students had a look at starfish, seacucumbers, coral and other marine animals. This was especially for International Students really exciting. Everywhere you heard students, “Wow this is so amazing, I’ve never seen or even touched starfish before.”

After the first impression everyone was allowed to discover the island and the stunning nature alone. People were walking around, having a look at the coral, collecting Data for their research projects and watching the beautiful sun setting while the whole Island was basked in brilliant orange, red and yellow lights.
Even on the first day everyone was sure they loved Lady Elliot, the resort and the environment. “The food is awesome and I love relaxing and coming down to the beach and looking at the coral. I would love to come back to Lady Elliot again.”

Of course the main reason of going to Lady Elliot was to take the great opportunity of being surrounded by amazing marine animals to work on the Biology and Marine Studies assignments. Students worked on interesting projects about oysters, chitons, seastars, seacucumbers, coral, muttin birds and other fascinating animals living on beautiful Lady Elliot island.

They had the great opportunity to use equipment, spend time outside, see the nature and experience it with all its beauty, while working and collecting data. “Lady Elliot is a great place, it makes it so easy to combine fun and work”, that’s what Sarah, a Year 12 Marine student said. She was working on a project about starfish and came up with great and surprising results.

“I turned the seastars over and looked how fast they turned back again by stopping the time. Then I took their size with a simple measuring tape. I found it very interesting that the blue seastars needed 9 minutes to turn, while others are much faster.”

These surprising and absorbing results made students as well as teachers happy. Overall the atmosphere between students and teachers was just fabulous. Mr. Armstrong, Marine Studies teacher said, “Students seem to be doing what they should do. We, as teachers are happy that students are making the most of their opportunity.”

A lot of students even exceeded themselves with their projects. Dylan, Year 12 Marine Student found out by measuring temperature, moisture and light intensity that Muttin Bird nests always face the sun, as they can grow quicker then.

The trip gave students room to use equipment rather than sitting at school and doing book or computer research, which is great and Mrs. Everson’s opinion who quotes. “It is a fantastic experience. If I were a student, this trip would make me do Marine or Biology for sure.”

Beside their projects students obviously had the biggest enjoyment going snorkeling. Students got split into small snorkeling groups which one of the teachers always took care of.
One day they went on a boat snorkel at the reef in front of the old lighthouse. Students experienced a completely different and new world underwater with amazing colors and stunning animals like sharks; Manta rays; great, big and cute, little turtles; stingrays; coral and many different varieties of gorgeous and impressing little fish, as well as big ones.

“The colors and animals were just amazing, though people took photographs, they can never really show the whole beauty of the underwater world. This was just the best thing I’ve ever done in my life”, said Maddi, Year 12 student.

Particularly for International Students, who came it was a unique experience they will never forget as they will probably never have the opportunity again to dive and snorkel at the Great Barrier Reef.

“It was just the most amazing thing I’ve ever experienced in my life when I was sitting on the ground, having that massive manta ray in front of me, staring at me. Something like this is just overwhelming. This was one of the moments that make you hold your breath because you just can’t believe it is happening to you”, said Sarah, International Student from Germany who had the one-time opportunity to go SCUBA-diving.

A photograph of a Manta Ray taken by students on Lady Elliot.

Manta Rays are the largest species of rays and can grow up to 7m (25ft) long and can reach a weight of about 2300kg.

Other than the boat snorkel students went snorkeling at the Coral Gardens where they
encountered many large fish schools making their way through the ocean along the beautiful reef. It was possible to swim between the fish and watch them doing amazing moves, as if they were one big organism.

“I swam right in the middle of a fish school, it was so overwhelming, I almost felt like a part of the underwater world. This was just so beautiful how the fish sparkled, reflecting in the sunlight, which came through the water.”

Considering these experiences the students made while snorkeling it is obvious that this was the part they enjoyed most and of course everyone knew that was just possible because of the teachers, who ensured the safety of everyone. While people were snorkeling there was always one of the teachers in a kayak providing snorkeling vests if needed and communicating with the students on the beach by radio. Before snorkeling it was made sure everyone had a buddy to look after and signed in on a board, the dive leaders took care of.

In most instances everyone got home without any harm, just some students made out by coral while reef walking or going to touch swim-holes. Still everyone would rather prefer getting out then missing the experience underwater. If something had happened students and teachers helped each other which created a great atmosphere and happiness of even single person during the whole trip.

“IT is always nice to watch students viewing coral with a big smile in their face, seeing something new, they'll never forget”, said Mr. Fife commenting on the whole atmosphere and success of the trip.

The trip was a social success as well due to the sensibility of students and teachers. New friends were made and everyone got along great with each other. People played games together in the evening like table tennis or table soccer and Volleyball during the day. There was a treasure hunt organized by Mrs. Caldwell and a Lady Elliot Island Trivia on the last day. The first evening some people watched “Avatar” together while others just had conversations and laughed a lot. Some went even
for a little night walk around the Island when Mr. Fitz and a group of students jumped out of the
darkness, screaming and frightening the peaceful nightwalkers to death.

In fact all students took advantage of the great natural environment on Lady Elliot. A big group of
people got up every morning at 5.30 and watched the beautiful sunrise down at the beach on the
chairs provided by the Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort where everyone stayed in nice, little cabins in
groups of 4-6 people.

Of course, those people, who made the effort to get up that early did not miss the beautiful sunset in
the evening, that immersed the whole island in a golden light, consisting of many beautiful colors.

All in all, the trip to Lady Elliot was a great success of a high social value as well as a high intellectual
value and finally all students brought what they needed to:

“The desire to explore, touch and experience the Great Barrier Reef.”

Written by Maria Heuger
Different varieties of little fish at the Reef taken on Lady Elliot.

International Students 2010 on Lady Elliot Island with Sharon Forbes.