

FRASER ISLAND, QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA

After visiting family near Brisbane, we decided to explore Fraser Island. We drove North for about three hours to Hervey Bay and took a short catamaran trip across to the island. We were going to be staying at The Kingfisher Bay Resort.

There are rooms available in the main building, but most guests had ‘cabins’ with balconies overlooking the lake. These cabins were accessed by a succession of raised boardwalks—for obvious reasons. We very soon discovered that our constant companions (both during the day and especially at night) were armies of very large, loud and constantly croaking frogs!

Fraser Island is an Australian World Heritage Area and the world’s largest sand island with ancient rainforest, freshwater lakes, huge sand dunes, fantastic birdlife, dingoes and snakes. There were also opportunities to go whale watching and take a dolphin cruise if the time was right.

The Butchulla Aborigines used to live here and called the island K’Gari. They would fish and hunt before the Europeans arrived to log the giant forest trees.

It was discovered by Captain James Cook and just called the Sand Peninsula. Later a Mr and Mrs Fraser found themselves here and he decided to give it their name. It was



logged extensively, with a settlement of Europeans who lived amongst the aborigines. There was a steam train in the forest to carry the logs to the waiting ships. Ultimately, the logging had to be reduced to avoid complete decimation, and in 1991 it ceased completely. In 1992, the National Forest Trust took over, to conserve the area.

Later, the Kingfisher Bay Resort became involved, and it has done much to help by the most economic use of power

and waste management. Sewage is composted by an on-site worm farm and everything is recycled. The beaches are beautiful, clean and unspoilt, with silvery sands and palm trees.

The forest changes from North to South by different trees flourishing on different qualities of sand. Hence, there are many varieties of birds. On a guided walk we saw the azure kingfisher, sulphur-crested cockatoo, kookaburra, oystercatchers, curlews and sea eagles with a three-metre wing span—and that was just on a leisurely walk of about an hour!

Apart from many different types of eucalypts, there are palms, blackbutts, tallow, hoop-pines, elkhorn and staghorn, pandanus (yellow and similar to an artichoke), sattinay and vines of many sorts.

One of the creeks is called Eli Creek—a twisting, turning downward spiral of

rushing water. We jumped in and were catapulted down between its banks for about three minutes before we exploded into a large pond at the bottom, at the edge of the beach.

At the beach we climbed into what appeared to be an ex-army vehicle driven by Dave, who proceeded to drive over the 'coffee rock' and through the sea at extremely high speed. Very exhilarating!

We arrived at McKenzie Lake where we were hoping to enjoy a leisurely swim, as it was very hot and humid. However, we could see the rain approaching from the far side of the lake and, within a short time, the lightning and heavy rain sent us scurrying back to the shelter of the vehicle. The lake is 100 metres above sea level and is a 'perched dune lake'. It is five metres deep and covers 150 hectares.

On our way back to the hotel via the beach, we stopped to look at 'The Maheno'—a shipwreck left on the sands for many years. Maheno means 'beautiful island' and it had an interesting background. It was built in 1905 by the Union Shipping Line in Scotland. It's job was to travel between New Zealand and Melbourne. It held



400 passengers, and during the first world war it became a hospital ship, travelling between Egypt and England. It was sold to a Japanese company in 1935.

The wreck of the Maheno—www.michaeljohngrist.com

The story of the shipwreck was that the Maheno had lost its propeller and was being towed by the Uno. When they were close to Brisbane, they were hit by a cyclone which broke the towrope. The Japanese crew of the Maheno were unhurt, but the vessel beached on Fraser Island. A Customs Officer supervised it for nine months—during which time he even held his wedding reception there!

Fraser Island also boasts that it has the only uncontaminated colony of dingoes. There are many signs around warning the public NOT to feed them, but some choose to ignore this, and the consequences have been disastrous. Whilst we were sitting around the pool, several dingoes trotted by. We ignored them and they showed no interest in us.

After our meal that evening, we were entertained by the Bach Choir from Austria—all in traditional costume. Then, in contrast, a group of aboriginals entertained us by performing songs and dances with, of course, a didgeridoo or two. As a finale, the two ensembles combined forces to sing to us all. It was a most interesting result!

We didn't experience good weather over the three days we were there, with torrential rain and squally showers. But, when we boarded the catamaran to return to the mainland, the skies cleared, the rain stopped and the sun shone. Typical! Almost like England!

Jennifer Fidler