

GO

Paddle the Whitsundays in a kayak

Whether you wake up in the Whitsundays as an outdoor adventurer keen to explore or a dusty partygoer keen to recover, a good dose of salt air will serve you well.

I have decided to get my salt-air fix via a half-day tour with Salty Dog Sea Kayaking. I'm picked up at 8:30am sharp in Airlie Beach by company owner, Neill, and am joined by a young couple on their honeymoon.

When we arrive at the Shute Harbour jetty, a 10-minute drive away, we lock our bags in the Salty Dog office and German guide, Lion, gives a quick safety briefing.

"Now, if you fall out, there's no crocs, so you can just chill, yeah?" he says with arms extended, eyes closed and head tipped back. Despite only moving to Australia two weeks ago, he's got the laid-back Aussie style nailed.

With an eager clap of his hands, Lion checks our paddle grip then pushes our kayaks into the clear water, which sparkles like a giant blue disco ball in the sun. Around us, yacht masts sway like metronomes keeping time in a place where time doesn't matter.

Then we hit the open water.

"And there's our northerly, ladies and gentlemen!" announces Lion. Away from the protection of the harbour we're reminded that we are in fact sea kayaking, and if we wanted to take the lazy option we would have caught a boat.

Cranking up the pace, we head to Repair Island, 500 metres offshore and one of 74 islands in the Whitsundays.

As we gaze up at pines that have peppered this patch for the best part of 100 million years, a flatback turtle pops up to see what we're looking at.

"You know, in Germany it's an exciting day if you see a deer," says Lion matter-of-factly. "But here, you're so lucky – there are just so many cool animals."

He's absolutely right, but along with the cool animals are those pesky little buggers, perhaps emasculated by their size, intent on zapping the odd tourist between November and May to prove who's king of the water: the jellyfish. So after dragging our kayaks onto the rough sand of White Rock Island for a snorkel, we slip into sexy black full-body lycra suits and flippers

WORDS BY NITTY WAGLIFE



Post-kayaking refuel stops



VILLAGE CAFE RESTAURANT & BAR
Ideal stop for an all-day breakfast.
366 Shute Harbour Road,
Airlie Beach;
villagecafe.com.au

FISH 'N' VINE
For a great seafood meal, or a flaming tiki drink, this is the spot.
303 Shute Harbour Road,
Airlie Beach;
fishnvine.com.au

BOHEMIAN RAW
If you like your dinner with a side order of amazing views.
Shingley Drive, Airlie Beach,
bohemianraw.com.au

MR BONES
For Airlie Beach's best pizza.
263 Shute Harbour Road,
Airlie Beach

BREEZE BAR
If you like your refuelling to be a little more liquid, grab a cocktail.
1a/293 Airlie Esplanade,
Airlie Beach;
facebook.com/breezebarairlie

before waddling towards the water like a blundering group of aquatic ninjas.

In the silent underwater world, schools of silver fish dart before us with perfect choreography, and a stingray thumps its wings on the seabed. When we emerge from the water we find a seagull closely monitoring cheese and crackers on a picnic rug. Famished, and to the disappointment of our onlooker, we honour the company's policy to 'leave no trace' by demolishing every last crumb before making for our final stop at Cane Cockies Beach on the mainland; a local secret around 2.5km north-west.

As we approach the secluded stretch of sand, the shadows of our kayaks glide along the ocean floor and it seems like we've paddled into a postcard. Given the beach's restricted boat and vehicle access, thanks to its shallow waters and thick bushland, we're reminded why we didn't take the lazy option.

For more information visit saltydog.com.au.

TIGERAIR FLIES

to the Whitsunday Coast from Sydney
tigerair.com.au