

Ocean Quest Cairns Dive Sites:

Norman Reef Dive Sites

Caves

The “Caves” dive site is a fascinating microhabitat. Look for **anemone fish**, **blue-spotted stingrays**, and **cardinalfish** thriving among coral formations. More experienced divers can explore the deep walls that flank the bay, home to **blue and yellow devilfish** under coral ledges. Note: The actual cave is now restricted to protect its delicate ecosystem.

Clipper & Super Cat

These interconnected dive sites demonstrate how underwater landscapes vary with depth and topography. **Parrotfish**, **angelfish**, and **surgeonfish** inhabit the swim-throughs, which are better suited to experienced divers. Beginners can explore the shallower canyon, while an old glass-bottom wreck adds historical intrigue to the site.

Plate Top

An excellent example of coral geomorphology, this site features a mountain range of coral formations surrounded by sandy pathways. Species like **barracudas**, **reef sharks**, and **anemone fish** create a dynamic food web. Low tide reveals congregation points, highlighting how tidal patterns influence marine life distribution.

Playground

This site, with its valleys and coral bommies, is a haven for **lionfish**, **pipefish**, and **leafy scorpionfish**. It's an ideal location to observe symbiotic relationships, such as those between **cleaner shrimp** and their host fish. The sheltered sandy bottom is perfect for scientific studies of benthic organisms.

Sandra's

Sandra's is a biodiversity hotspot, offering shallow coral habitats for snorkellers and deeper walls for divers. Schools of **damsel fish** and **humphead parrotfish** showcase how fish schooling behaviors provide protection against predators. Divers can study coral bommies as ecological niches supporting a wide range of marine species.

Shark Mountain

Named for its frequent **grey reef shark** sightings, Shark Mountain is a perfect site to observe predator-prey dynamics in action. Seasonal visitors like **bumphead parrotfish** add to the diversity, while the inner valley supports healthy coral and feather star populations. The strong tidal currents here are a reminder of the reef's connection to oceanographic processes.



Tropo's

This dive site is a treasure trove of **nudibranchs**, **pipefish**, and **razorfish**. It's ideal for studying camouflage and mimicry, as these species adapt their appearance to blend into the reef. The shallow mooring bay offers easy access for novice divers and snorkellers to learn about reef ecosystems.

Turtle Bay

True to its name, this sandy-bottomed bay is a feeding ground for **green sea turtles**. The presence of **blennies**, **hairy spider crabs**, and **anemone shrimp** highlights the importance of interspecies interactions. Observation of these species provides insight into the roles of smaller organisms in reef health.

Wild Side Central & East

The walls and bays of this site house hard corals and **macro life** like **nudibranchs**. Seasonal events, such as the arrival of juvenile **Harlequin sweet lips**, underscore the importance of coral habitats as nurseries for marine life. This site also offers glimpses of larger pelagic species passing through.

Saxon Reef Dive Sites

Coral Garden/Fishbowl

This site illustrates the reef's vertical stratification, with sloping coral banks transitioning to sandy bottoms. Species like **garden eels**, **pygmy seahorses**, and **cuttlefish** demonstrate how varying habitats support different organisms. Snorkellers can observe gobies and soft corals in shallower zones, making it an inclusive educational experience.

Reef Magic (Magic Wall)

This site showcases the complexity of reef ecosystems. The sheltered bay is home to species like **cleaner shrimp**, **nudibranchs**, and **anemone fish**, while the outer reef edge attracts larger fish like **giant trevally**. Observing these species highlights how different habitats meet diverse ecological needs.

Twin Peaks

This site offers the chance to study coral bommies—isolated towers of coral that act as mini-ecosystems. The tidal currents bring nutrients that sustain **fusiliers**, **nudibranchs**, and other species. Rare finds like **pygmy seahorses** show the importance of conservation for preserving unique marine biodiversity.

Wild Side

The steep banks and deep walls here provide a stark contrast to the shallower reefs, demonstrating how depth influences marine life. **Wobbegong sharks** and **nudibranchs** thrive in crevices, showcasing the adaptive strategies species use to survive in varying reef zones.



Hastings Reef: A Lesson in Coral Diversity

Stretching over 10 square kilometers, Hastings Reef is a prime example of coral abundance. Its shallow reefs are ideal for snorkellers, while its caves and bommies provide fascinating opportunities for advanced divers. Species like **butterflyfish**, **clams**, and **small reef sharks** illustrate the interconnectedness of the reef's food web. Seasonal variations in marine life behaviors add dynamic elements to this incredible ecosystem.

Angel Bommie

Neighboring **Blue Lagoon**, Angel Bommie features a shallow sandy bay surrounded by **staghorn coral**, a vital reef-building species. Scattered **sea stars** dot the seabed, showcasing the biodiversity of reef invertebrates. A smaller bommie to the south offers a deeper edge for advanced exploration, while the area is frequented by **banded angelfish** and **anthias**, illustrating the reef's role as a hub for vibrant fish life.

Blue Lagoon

Located on Hastings Reef's southern side, Blue Lagoon is a coral shelf that transitions to deeper waters. **Elephant ear coral**, known for harboring shrimp, is a great example of mutualistic relationships within the reef ecosystem. Surrounding **table coral** provides shelter for many fish species, emphasizing the structural complexity needed to support marine biodiversity.

Turtle Bommie

A cluster of smaller bommies extending into deeper waters, Turtle Bommie is aptly named for its frequent sightings of **green sea turtles**. It also features **batfish**, **stonefish**, **anthias**, and **fusiliers**, offering a rich tapestry of marine life. Coral formations like **sea fans** and **whip corals** thrive in the current, demonstrating how coral morphology adapts to environmental conditions.