

## **World Class Sportsfishing in Tropical North Queensland, Australia**

The waters of Tropical North Queensland, and in particular along the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) are one of the best sports-fisheries in the world. This part of the GBR consistently produces more recorded numbers of grander black marlin (1000lb+ black marlin) annually than anywhere else in the world.

The Ribbon Reefs are part of a string of coral reefs spanning over a 120km stretch from Cairns and Port Douglas north to Lizard Island. They are vast and remote with an astonishing array of species and set themselves apart from other regions due to the sheer size of the fish that infiltrate. It is aptly nicknamed 'Jurassic Park' by captain Casey Dent (Beluga Expeditions), and is a dream location for any angler.

The Ribbon Reefs are a live aboard vessel's playground. Mostly inaccessible on day trips, the region is best explored over a number of days. Fishing by day on the drop off on the eastern side of the hard edge of reef. Anchoring by night just minutes away in the calm water lagoons created by these breaking reefs, most of which run north to north west providing the perfect protection from our typical south east winds.

Much of the appeal comes from the variety of fishing on offer here. Aside from the big black marlin, the reef system is home to a vast array of other fish species. Troll for black and blue marlin, sailfish, and many other pelagics including yellowfin tuna and wahoo, in the deeper water off the reef edge. For popper and jigging anglers, giant trevally, dogtooth tuna and coral trout hunt in the reef breakers. And there are lots of opportunities for more relaxing styles of fishing such as bottom fishing for coral trout, job fish, red emperors and nannygai.

World-class fishing in a very beautiful and special part of the world where two world heritage sites meet is the point of difference in Tropical North Queensland. A day on the reef can encompass much more than fishing, including snorkelling and diving and any number of water sports from stand up paddle boarding in the lagoons through to kite surfing!

### **The Season**

July through to December is the ideal timing for sports-fishing in Tropical North Queensland. Early in the season it is the juvenile black marlin (up to 50kg) that abound. These fish grow to size here in our winter months and are a great to target on light tackle July to September.

Popper fishing and jigging on the outer reefs is great most of the year round but is more favourable during the cooler months also.

Heavy tackle fishing for giant black marlin (up to 550kg) and other large pelagic species is ideal from late September through mid-December. Wider off the edge as the water warms later in the season, big congregations of yellowfin and big eye tuna as well as blue marlin also show up.

At this time of year, the Ribbons Reefs are alive with activity. Vessels utilise the reefs as barriers to protect from weather and unfavourable conditions, and there are comfortable anchorages behind the majority of these reefs. Lizard Island is a stunning location and a good base position for fishing activities. In terms of fishing areas, it is hard to go wrong as there's such a vast variety of fishing options, however a favourite is trolling along Ribbon Reef #10, the largest of these reefs which spans almost 30kms, as well as popper fishing its outer edge.

### **Ideal Anchorages for Superyachts**

The Ribbon Reefs provide a number of both spectacular and comfortable anchorages close to the fishing. Some favourites with deeper water lagoon anchorages for the larger super yachts include Numbers 3, 5 and 9 Ribbon Reefs. Of course, Lizard Island itself is also a must visit destination close to the fishing and the word-famous "Cod Hole" dive spot at the top of Number 10 Ribbon Reef. Lizard Island is a marine park in its entirety and as such the marine life in the bay is something to behold. The simple act of dropping anchor can be the signal to a host of fish to visit your vessel for a hello and feed in the lights at night.

Lizard Island's Watson's Bay provides a very comfortable anchorage in the lee of the island. It is also beach access to the start of the 4km hike up to 'Cook's Look' which provides panoramic views south along the Ribbon Reefs and was used by Captain Cook and his crew to navigate out of the reef back in 1770 when he had become trapped.

In this region bottom fishing for reef species such as coral trout, nannygai and red emperor is great, or troll for Spanish mackerel and marlin/sailfish. Jig for dogtooth tuna, popper fish for giant trevally and deep sea fish for rosy job fish and other tasty delights.

### **History**

Former American para-trooper Captain George Bransford made history on September 25, 1966 when he and deckhand Richard Obach landed a 1064-pound (482kg) black marlin off of Cairns, the first of this size in Australian waters. Since then Australia, and in particular the Great Barrier Reef, has been on the bucket list for many international anglers and is regarded as the 'mecca of marlin fishing' worldwide.

In 2016 the 50th anniversary of the fishery was celebrated and 50 vessels took part in the Anniversary Tournament including members of the world-wide super yacht fleet.

The Great Barrier Reef is also a prime example of how a world-class fishery is managed. From the early days the very special nature of the fishery was recognised and conservation was a priority of the fleet lead by the Cairns Professional Game Fishing Association (CPGFA). These days well over 90% of these giant fish are "tagged" and released, the tagging program providing valuable information to both scientists and fishers alike.

---

Beluga Expeditions have a 35M motoryacht in their own fleet and their charter itineraries include the use of one or more of their sports-fishing vessels. They specialise in accommodating the needs of superyacht clientele and have a thorough understanding of the procedures involved in operating superyachts and their crew. Beluga Expeditions have three custom built game boats ranging in size from 12M to 16.5M which are all available to charter individually or as an addition to any superyacht visiting the area who want the expertise and local knowledge that our captains and crewman can deliver to ensure their owners and/or guests are treated to everything our region has to offer.

Kekoa Sports Fishing Charters have often worked with members of the super yacht fleet as a comfortable gamefishing add-on option. At 56 foot and custom built for fishing in this region, KEKOA provides a perfect fishing platform to compliment your home on the reef. Skipper Capt. Luke Fallon has more than 30 years of experience fishing here.

Daniel McCarthy of private charter sportsfisher, Moana III works alongside superyachts on a regular basis from Cairns and understands all the required etiquette and needs of the superyacht guests.

*Thank you to Beluga Expeditions, Kekoa Sportsfishing Charters & Moana Fishing Charters for their input into this article. Information on history thanks to Cairns Professional Gamefishing Association.*

*The Super Yacht Group Great Barrier Reef are a complimentary service providing superyachts with all information on itineraries, recommended guides, charter vessels, plus more to superyachts interested in visiting the GBR region. Photo Credit: Kekoa- Kelly Fallon*



