



# EXPLORE WHITSUNDAY

– *the traditional home of the Ngāro people*

By Nathan Fa'avae

**In early 2011 my wife Jodie and I decided on a break during the NZ winter. With our family we would paddle the Ngāro Sea Trail of the Aborigine People to Whitsunday Island, Australia.**

We were concerned that it would be difficult for two adults to move two fibreglass doubles on land, especially given the large tidal ranges in the area. Additionally, renting local kayaks had in the past constricted what we wanted to do.

We therefore thought that inflatable sea kayaks (made in NZ by Incept) would probably serve our needs best. They are lightweight and would give us freedom when paddling with three children, aged 4, 6 and 8. Moreover, if the trip was not going well, it would be very easy to deflate, package the kayaks and get picked up by a power boat, not easily done with two hard shell kayaks.

We trialled the kayaks for two days in Pelorus Sound to learn how they handled and what their storage capacity was like. We became confident that they would suit us across the Tasman. Jodie would paddle a single with all our food and most of the camping gear while I paddled with the kids and remaining gear. Given there is no fresh water on the island beaches, our food and water rations would be substantial, but we now knew how to stow everything.

Departure from Shute Harbour coincided with a small cyclone. Wind was gusting to 40 knots, but the small islands and campsites nearby encouraged us to take our chances. We managed to cross Molle Channel,

reached our first camp, and waited for the storm to pass. Thankfully South Molle Island has 20 km of hiking trails on which we enjoyed walks and wildlife encounters, snakes being the highlight. In a few days the sun came to the party, the weather cleared and we had the calm, idyllic seas we had hoped to experience.

Close to the Great Barrier Reef there are 70 islands in the six national parks of the Cumberland Island group. Whitsunday and Hook Islands, the major ones, were the focus of our trip. They have 26 campsites evenly spaced, mainly on secluded, dazzling, sandy beaches. The landscape is rainforest, sweeping grassland and in some places an impressively rugged rocky coast fringed with coral reefs.

It has ancient, indigenous art, visible in places we reached by kayak. Snorkelling, especially off the northern end of Hook Island, is excellent. The kids enjoyed excellent turtle swims. On our final day we saw dolphins and a humpback whale with a baby passed less than a metre below our kayaks.

Our days tended to start with a sleep in, then a leisurely breakfast on the beach. We'd break camp, load up and spend 3-4 hours paddling, stopping about every hour for a swim, a snack, to explore an inviting beach, or to grab a coconut.

Daytime temperatures climbed to 26° followed by pleasant cool nights at 16°. At 22°, the water was refreshing. Our food rations were bland but improved one night with fresh tuna. We took account of tidal currents and streams which made for dynamic paddling and planned paddling times accordingly.

Plenty of time to explore - here at Whitehaven



Main picture: Nathan paddled with the kids. With the soft skin of the inflatable, you can be creative with seating arrangements.

Jodie paddled a single with all our food and most of the camping gear



OVERVIEW OF WHITSUNDAY TRIP		
Day 1	Shute Harbour to South Molle Island	6 km
Day 2	No Paddling / Poor Weather	
Day 3	No Paddling / Poor Weather	
Day 4	South Molle Island to Chance Bay	27 km
Day 5	Chance Bay to Whitehaven	8 km
Day 6	Whitehaven to Peter Bay	16 km
Day 7	Peter Bay to Crayfish Bay	14 km
Day 8	Crayfish Bay to Steens Beach	13 km
Day 9	Steens Beach to Joes Beach	21 km
Day 10	Joes Beach to Denman Island	10 km
Day 11	Denman Island to North Molle Island	9 km
Day 12	North Molle Island to Airlie Beach	16 km
TOTAL		140 km

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Plenty of time for some great snorkelling.



There are resorts where beaches can be crowded. Whitehaven is the maddest. After 4 pm all-day trippers have returned to clean sheets and the buffet, leaving the park to a few kayakers, sail boats ... kookaburras and bats.

We paddled to Airlie Beach, a colourful, fun, vibrant seaside town with great restaurants, accommodation and ice creams, perfect after 12 days on the islands. The kids liked the playgrounds too.

But we reflected that an alternative sea kayak trip could have been out from and back to Hamilton Island, which is easily served by daily flights.

The inflatable kayaks proved themselves. While they lose performance to a quality hard shell kayak, the trade off for versatility and flexibility puts them in a class of their own. The paddling places which an inflatable sea kayak opens up are as extensive as the seas they can be paddled on. Being able to roll them up and toss them into the boot of a car or hold of an aeroplane is a huge bonus. A keen hiker can even carry one! Where kayaks cannot be rented an inflatable provides unlimited opportunities.

For us Incept Inflatable Sea Kayaks were the perfect choice for the right trip.

Whitsundays is sea kayak touring at its best.

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Some of the beaches were crowded, but not this one.

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