



# TRAVEL BRIEFS

## Lizard Island

Paradise on the Great Barrier Reef

By Capt. Damon Olsen

For big-game anglers, Australia represents the holy grail of fishing — giant marlin, top crews and beautiful water. If chasing monster black marlin on the Great Barrier Reef is the ultimate angler dessert, then fishing famed Lizard Island is the icing on the cake.

Fringed by spectacular white beaches and circled by miles of wondrous coral reefs, this remote tropical island in the Coral Sea sits just a few miles from one of the best black marlin bites in the world. If you've always dreamed of tangling with a huge black marlin, then mark Lizard Island as the place to visit. Situated approximately 120 nautical miles to the north of the well-known port of Cairns in Queensland, Australia, Lizard Island, most would agree, is undoubtedly one of the best locations in the world from which to base yourself to catch a 1,000-pound black marlin.

Many boats that fish the Cairns season each year actually spend quite a bit of time trolling around or

not more, grander blacks than any other single location in the world. Now, this is a big call to make, but over 40 years of evidence from the Cairns fishing fleet backs up the claim. Year after year and season after season the big blacks keep coming to this stretch of reef between Cairns and Lizard Island to spawn.

As with any other location, the fishing varies from year to year. While one season may be prolific, the next may be relatively slow. But even when the bite wanes a bit, a black marlin the size of a tank could easily appear behind the left rigger at any moment and smash that 25-pound skipping mackerel like it was a jelly bean. Lizard Island is one of very few places in

followed by a bait-catching session for the day's fishing or a snorkel dive in the crystal-clear waters of the outer barrier reef. The big fish often won't bite until after lunch, allowing anglers and crew ample time to prepare for the bite. The baits go into the water around 11 a.m., depending on weather and the captain's preference. Now this afternoon bite is not merely some myth perpetuated by the Cairns fishing industry to get more time in bed as some would have you believe. The number of times that nearly every boat on No. 10 Ribbon hooks up just as the clock strikes 3:30 p.m. is uncanny. There's no sense getting into why this happens since there is no proven or probable theory



BRETT MATTHEWS

Every September the Great Barrier Reef comes alive with big black marlin, and Lizard Island sits smack-dab in the middle of the action with quick access to some of the world's best grander grounds.

based out of Lizard Island. Using the island as a base camp puts crews close to the edge of the Great Barrier Reef. Boats running out of Lizard Island need to travel only 8 nautical miles to access No. 10 Ribbon Reef, which has seen as many, if

the world where you can reasonably expect this to happen at any given time on any given day.

### On the Water

A typical day's fishing around Lizard Island starts with a leisurely breakfast

— it just happens. Most boats will fish as late as possible in the afternoon, but still allow just enough light to sneak back into the reef passage and get back to Lizard Island.

Many anglers choose to stay at the luxurious Lizard

Island Resort and charter a boat to fish during the day. For the true fishaholic, however, there's the mothership option, which gives more flexibility as to the fishing location. Anglers who charter a mothership and a game boat stay aboard the mothership right in the lagoon so you can move to a different reef if the bite decides to swim north or south during your stay. Both options provide wonderful fishing experiences, but a mothership keeps you closer to the action and you can also fish for various reef fish and sharks at night.

Lizard Island offers crews a calm anchorage in the predominantly southeast trade winds, which abound during the marlin season (August through November). When you add the luxurious resort at Lizard Island to the beautiful anchorage, beaches and fishing, it's easy to see why the place is so popular. The famous Marlin Bar just off the beach provides the perfect place to come ashore and swap stories after a big day on the water.

The facilities at Lizard Island, however, are rather limited for vessels. There is no jetty or marina, and even the boat operated by Lizard Island Resort must make a run to fuel up. The nearest fueling station is in Cooktown, 65 nautical miles to the south. Not all boats can carry enough fuel to stay at Lizard Island and fish an extended charter. Again, this is where the advantage of a mothership comes in.

The fishing scene at Lizard Island comes alive during tournament time. The Lizard Island Game-fishing Club holds its annual tournament in mid-October. The dates vary a bit, depending on the moon phase, but the

tournament draws vessels from all over Australia. The 2004 tournament attracted more than 40 boats. This may not sound

like a lot, but given the logistical issues with accessing the island and its extremely remote location from the rest of Australia,



The island provides a safe, picturesque anchorage for visiting boats, but you won't find a full-service marina.

this is a significant turnout. Australia's big-game angling crowd views this tournament as one of the year's premier events — a must-fish tourney. Over last year's seven-day event, the *Corcorane*, Lizard Island Resort's 43-foot charter vessel, tagged and released 14 black marlin to win first place. And this was in what many consider an average year.

Lizard Island is undoubtedly one of my favorite places in Australia to stay and fish. There is simply no better location on Earth to connect to a grander black marlin, and this, coupled with the island's spectacular scenery and beautiful reefs and beaches, makes it a must-visit for all serious big-game fishermen. 

## Getting There

Getting to Lizard Island involves a few flights within Australia. From the United States fly to either Sydney or Brisbane international airports as your first stop. Several carriers such as Air New Zealand, Qantas and American Airlines offer flights from Los Angeles for around \$1,000. Once in Australia, catch a connecting flight to Cairns. From Cairns you can charter a small 4- to 6-seat floatplane for you and your group; you'll enjoy a wonderful scenic flight to Lizard Island, landing in the lagoon to board your game boat or mothership. You can also purchase a flight on one of Macair's 12-seat Cessna Caravans ([www.macair.com.au](http://www.macair.com.au)). These flights touch down on the island's modern landing strip. Some boat operators can also arrange private flights on other aircraft to Lizard Island. The advantage of going with a smaller, private operator is that you are more likely to get a scenic tour along the edge of the reef, which can be quite a memorable experience. Once you land, make sure to give yourself ample time to explore the island's 24 powdery-white beaches, and you'll want to bring a pair of fins and snorkel to dive the reef.



**Lizard Island Resort**  
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