

Marine Encounters

LADY ELLIOT ISLAND IS A HOTSPOT FOR MARINE MEGAFAUNA INCLUDING MANTA RAYS, TURTLES AND MIGRATING HUMPBACK WHALES.

While it is amazing to see these animals in their natural habitat, it is important not to disturb and interrupt behaviours essential to their survival including: courting and mating; feeding, cleaning, giving birth; and raising their young.



LADY ELLIOT ISLAND AND THE SURROUNDING REEF IS HIGHLY PROTECTED AS A NO TAKE/GREEN ZONE MARINE NATIONAL PARK.

This high level of protection creates a sanctuary for our marine life. It is NOT permitted to take, touch or interfere with any marine species.

To ensure your safety and the wellbeing of the marine life we ask you follow these Eco Guidelines.

LET MARINE LIFE BE

- Never chase, corner or disturb marine life or cause them to change direction which interrupts their natural behaviour
- Do not touch or hold onto marine life, including coral
- Only approach marine life from the side, giving them a clear path ahead
- If a marine animal shows signs of disturbance (e.g. acting in an evasive or aggressive manner), move away slowly and quietly



SIGNS A MARINE ANIMAL IS DISTURBED BY A HUMAN INTERACTION

Evasive behaviour: Changes direction, speeds up/swims away

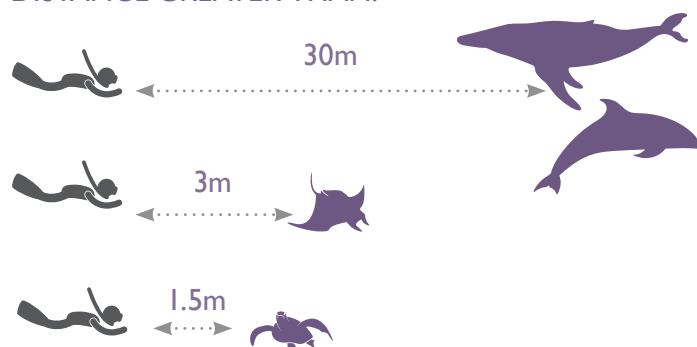
Stopping their activity, such as:

- **Foraging** – A turtle stops feeding and swims away
- **Cleaning** – A manta ray moves off a cleaning station
- **Resting** – A stingray resting on the bottom swims away

KEEP YOUR DISTANCE

Manta Rays, Whales, Dolphins, and Sea Turtles are protected species in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

YOU ARE REQUIRED BY LAW TO KEEP YOUR DISTANCE GREATER THAN:



If a whale or dolphin approaches you while you are in the water, move slowly to avoid startling the animal and do not touch or swim towards it.

Pregnant females or mothers with young are particularly vulnerable – please take extra care.

TAKE CARE

WITH SNORKEL / DIVE EQUIPMENT AND CAMERAS

- Take care to never hold on to, rest or stand on coral.
- Be extra cautious with your fins and equipment such as dive gear to not damage coral or marine life or stir up sediment.
- When taking photos – do not interfere with or touch marine life.
- Practice buoyancy control before diving with a camera.



Corals are sensitive & fragile living animals that can be easily damaged when touched or kicked.



Manta Ray Encounters

Manta rays can be found all year round on Lady Elliot Island, with numbers peaking during the winter season (mid-May to mid-August). These gentle giants are commonly encountered near the surface when feeding, or around coral 'cleaning stations'.

FREEDIVING

ON A CLEANING STATION

'Cleaning stations' are critical to manta ray health. Manta rays visit them to have dead skin and parasites removed by specialised cleaner fish. There are many cleaning stations at Lady Elliot Island, most notably the 'Lighthouse Bommies.'

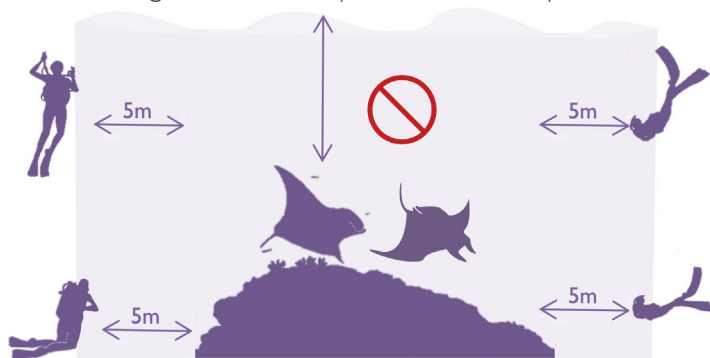
Please follow the below Eco Guidelines when encountering a manta ray on a cleaning station:

- When freediving always keep a 5m radius from the cleaning station, and do not freedive directly above or onto the main cleaning area.
- When on the ocean floor, keep a 5m radius from the cleaning station and stay low and as still as possible.
- Do not crowd or chase manta rays.
- Be mindful of other scuba divers or other resort guided activities.
- When photographing manta rays be mindful of the manta ray's behaviour and keep a safe distance.

SCUBA DIVING

ON A CLEANING STATION

- Always keep a 5m radius from the cleaning station, including when descending.
- Do not swim above or onto the main cleaning area.
- Stay low and as still as possible.
- When kneeling on the ocean floor, keep a 5m radius from the cleaning station and only kneel on a clear patch of sand.



FREEDIVERS AND SCUBA DIVERS MUST REMAIN OUTSIDE THE PURPLE 'NO APPROACH ZONE'

SNORKELLING

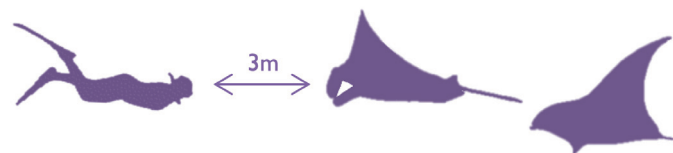


WITH MANTA RAYS AT THE SURFACE

Manta rays swimming at the surface are usually either feeding or courting – which are critical behaviours.

This is the ultimate experience for snorkellers! If you are lucky enough to be in the water with manta rays at the surface, to avoid disturbing them:

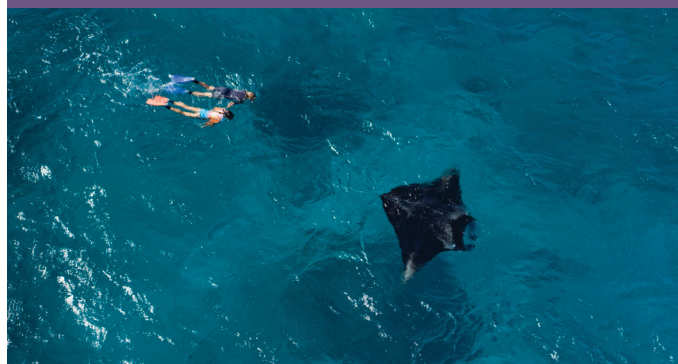
- Always approach slowly and calmly.
- Keep a distance of 3m.
- Avoid kicking and splashing as this will scare them away!
- Never chase or touch a manta ray.
- Do not swim down or change their directional path.



Master Reef Guide Jacinta Shackleton's Top 3 Tips on how to photograph a manta ray:

1. If you encounter feeding manta rays, start your video early as manta rays can pop up from any direction! Stop any movement and float in the water - this often results in them coming straight towards you, mouth wide open!
2. If scuba diving, kneel on the sand and watch as manta rays can pass overhead while cleaning. Point your camera upwards to capture a belly shot.
3. If freediving, give the manta ray plenty of space, you can then capture the animal performing natural behaviours.

RELAXED AND CALM ENCOUNTERS MAKE FOR THE BEST IMAGES AND FOOTAGE.



These Eco Guidelines were developed in consultation with Project Manta.

The principles are derived from decades of research to ensure the best outcome for people and the environment.