



YOU CAN'T MAKE THE REEF

I became the poster child for Murphy's Law at Australia's Great Barrier Reef. I assumed the world's largest living thing would be easy to visit.

I assumed wrong. Four of my five planned dive days were canceled.

Though the GBR is about half the size of Texas, its remote location off the coast of Far North Queensland makes it tough to get to during a short vacation. In fact, many visitors just don't devote enough time to getting there and back. It's a day's round-trip journey by a fleet of boats from Cairns or Port Douglas. And it's over 1,200 air miles from Sydney.

Here are a few options I discovered for divers who just can't get under the waves because of bad weather, bad timing or a badly-planned travel budget. Starting in Cairns and moving south, you can:

- Cruise daily from Cairns or Port Douglas to Fitzroy Island, Green Island, Moore Reef and Outer Reef.
 - Take a 4-wheel-drive safari through the Daintree World Heritage — the world's oldest tropical rainforest — 30 miles north of Port Douglas.
 - Experience a Daintree River Cruise to view crocodiles and mangrove swamps.
 - Stroll through Port Douglas's Rainforest Habitat, with elevated walkways to view 66 species of tropical birds, kangaroos and crocodiles.
 - Ride the sugar cane train from Kuranda, just north of Cairns, shop at an Aboriginal artifacts store, and view a Noctarium to see Australia's animals in a nocturnal rainforest setting.
 - From Sydney, journey 50 miles east to the Blue Mountains — "Australia's Grand Canyon with trees."
 - Pet kangaroos and cuddle koalas in the Australian Wildlife Park, Wonderland Sydney.
 - Visit Sydney Harbor Oceanarium and the open ocean tank (sharks and rays).
 - Or see some of Australia's 150 million sheep on a farm in the Outback. ▀
- Gil Zeimer

Home for Gil Zeimer is San Rafael, California. He and his wife's most recent production was their daughter Sara, born in March, 1994.