

Pumicestone Passage

Pumicestone Passage is recognised as one of the most important bird and marine habitats on the east coast of Australia. The passage stretches for 35 kilometres, from Caloundra in the north to Deception Bay in the south.

Separating Bribie Island from the Sunshine Coast mainland, the passage is a long, tidal waterway – 80 per cent of which is less than two-metres deep.

The environmental diversity of the area, which includes seagrass meadows, mud flats, sand islands and mangroves, has resulted in many significant animal species using the waterway as a breeding ground. For this reason, the passage has been included in the Moreton Bay Marine Park and protected under an international wetlands treaty known as the Ramsar Convention.

The Pumicestone Passage catchment receives freshwater from a network of streams including Bells, Mellum, Coochin, Coonowrin, Tibrogargan, Hussey and Elimbah Creeks. These drain eastward from the D'Aguilar Range and the spectacular Glasshouse Mountains.

Wildlife

The dugong is the world's only marine mammal herbivore and if you're lucky, you'll get to spot one of these placid creatures popping its nose out of the water in the Pumicestone Passage. Weighing up to 450 kilograms and measuring three-metres long, dugongs can remain underwater for up to six minutes. Their heavy skeletons help them stay submerged while they feed on seagrass.

A mammal that is a little easier to spot in the passage is the Bottlenose Dolphin – particularly at dusk when they like to feed on schools of fish. Green turtles are common in the area. The endangered Loggerhead Turtle has also been sighted in the waters of the passage.

Birdlife

Pumicestone Passage is home to about 1,500 resident shorebirds of 11 species and nearly 20,000 migratory shorebirds of 24 species. Most migratory birds visit the passage in summer, travelling great distances from their breeding grounds in the northern hemisphere. Local shorebirds use the wetlands and shoreline as a place to nest.

During the day, listen out for the loud mournful call of the Eastern Curlew. At night, you will hear the alarm-like sounds of the Australian Pied Oystercatcher. Other bird species found in the area include the Eastern Osprey, White-Bellied Sea Eagle, Brahminy Kite and a variety of egrets and herons.

Activities

The Pumicestone Passage is known as the Sunshine Coast's 'aquatic playground' – where locals and tourists enjoy a range of activities on and

around the water. For families, the waterway provides many safe places for children to swim and play near the water's edge.

Paddling

One of the best ways to take in the beauty of the Pumicestone Passage is to hire a kayak, paddleboard or canoe. The passage is shallow and protected, making it an ideal place for beginners to get out on the water. Guided paddle and jetski tours are also available – or, if you'd prefer more of an adrenalin rush, try your hand at kitesurfing or windsurfing.

Flying

If you'd like a bird's eye view of this breathtaking stretch of water, there are a number of options available including helicopter, glider and small plane flights that can be tailored to suit your desires.

Fishing

Whether you're an expert angler or a first-time fisherman, Pumicestone Passage is a fabulous place to throw in a line. Bream of all sizes are found in the waterway as well as Whiting, Flathead, Trevally and Tailor at various times of the year.

Cruising

For those wishing to be guided through the passage, there are boat tours that provide commentary on the local history and wildlife of the area. Eco tours and ferry cruises leave on a regular basis from both Caloundra and Bribie Island. If you prefer to explore on your own, there are boats for hire.

Learning

If you'd like to know more about the history and ecology of the Pumicestone Passage, be sure to pop into the Bribie Island Seaside Museum which is located at 1 South Esplanade, Bongaree, Bribie Island.

For more information go to: www.visitsunshinecoast.com.au