

Poster: Cocos Keeling Islands

Region

Indian Ocean Territories

Summary

The Cocos (Keeling) Islands are 2950 kilometres north-west of Perth, Western Australia and are part of the Indian Ocean Territories (IOTs).

COCOS (KEELING) ISLANDS

Cocos (Keeling) Islands are 2,450 km north-west of Perth, Western Australia and are part of the Indian Ocean Territories (IOT's). The marine environment is classified as tropical, with water temperatures varying from 25-30°C. A total of 533 species of fish have been recorded at the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.



HOME ISLAND SETTLEMENT

The eastern-most island in the atoll is home to 460 Cocos Malay residents. The Cocos Malay people speak Cocos Malay, with English as a second language, and are a devout Islamic community. Fishing is the most popular past-time for locals and is an important part of the local history. Fish such as the humphead Maori wrasse (or greenfish) play a significant role in important religious ceremonies on the island.



NORTH KEELING ISLAND

Also known as Pulu Keeling, this island is the only one in the atoll that is a designated National Park. The atoll lies approximately 27 km north of the southern atoll and is a World Heritage Reserve (under the control of Parks Australia). The island is a vitally important habitat for several species of seabirds and has the largest breeding colony of the red-footed booby in the world! There is also a wide variety of marine life with turtles, dolphins, manta rays and many species of fish.



WEST ISLAND SETTLEMENT

The western-most island in the atoll is home to 140 residents of European descent. Most of the island's residents are Government or contracted employees. Fishing, diving, snorkelling and surfing are all important pursuits for West Island residents.



COCONUT PLANTATIONS

Rows of coconut trees are a common sight on the larger of the islands. Copra, the dried flesh of the coconut, was once harvested and exported from the islands, providing the only source of income for residents.



THE RIP

A strong moving current flows between Direction and Prison islands, from the outer reef into the lagoon. The Rip is a favourite for snorkellers, who are pulled down the channel and "flushed" out into the lagoon. The shallows of the Rip showcase many types of reef fish and corals, with the deeper mid-channel home to reef sharks, greenfish and schooling fish.



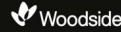
LAGOON

The lagoon lays at the centre of the coral atoll that is the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. Over recent years, there have been concerns that the lagoon is "sitting up", a natural process which decreases the available habitat for the gong gong, or spider shell, that is such an important part of the Cocos Malay culture. Gong gong has been heavily harvested over the years for use in celebratory ceremonies on Home Island.



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