

GREAT ESCAPE

Lord Howe Island

Relaxation is a requirement in this pristine paradise – officially one of the cleanest places on earth – where a weekend immersion in nature can be life-changing

WORDS **KARLIE VERKERK**

When was the last time you switched off completely? No phone, no email and no social media. In a world where everything is at our fingertips, it's easy to forget what it feels like to get back to basics – until you step foot on the marine park that is Australia's Lord Howe Island. Located in the Tasman Sea east of Port Macquarie and less than a two-hour flight from Sydney, the UNESCO World-Heritage-listed isle is perfect for romantic getaways and family-friendly escapes, thanks to its sub-tropical climate, spotless beaches, plentiful wildlife and secluded, almost-untapped location. With only 350 local residents calling Lord Howe home and a maximum of 400 visitors allowed at any one time, and zero (yes, zero!) phone reception, it's easy to completely switch off and slip into holiday mode within seconds of arriving.

Relaxing with a good book under the shade of a pine tree is a highly encouraged pastime, as is a dip in the pristine turquoise lagoon, a bike ride from one hidden cove to the next, or a hike up one of the mountains. And if that isn't enough activities to poke a snorkel at, there's also a nine-hole golf course and lawn bowls club, plus an Ayurvedic day spa and a beauty salon for those who'd prefer some serious TLC.

where to stay

Nestled behind Old Settlement Beach at the northern end of the crescent-shaped island is Arajilla, an all-inclusive retreat with a laid-back ambience. The 12 luxurious suites, which are available in three different sizes and styles, are cocooned among a lush garden filled with kentia palms and native Banyan trees.

Magnificent Mount Gower juts out from the south end of the island. Experienced climbers can book a guided trek to its peak.

OPPOSITE PAGE The best way to get around is on a bike – most hotels provide one with your stay.

howe goes it

Sustainable practices at work on the island

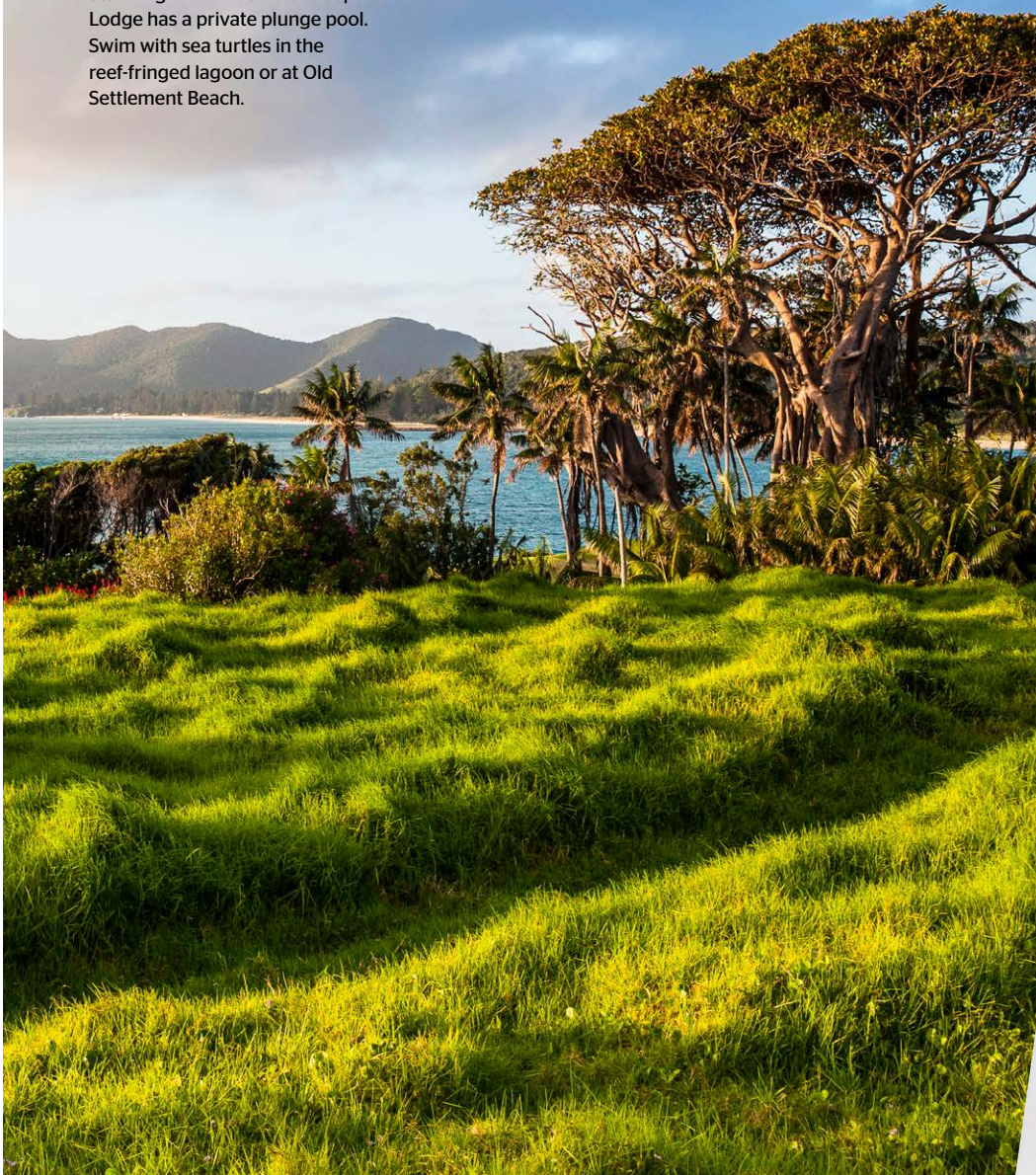
There is zero air and sea pollution and no litter on Lord Howe Island. To help conserve its natural beauty and uphold UNESCO World Heritage values, the community of locals has designed a range of sustainability and conservation initiatives. These include a cap on tourists, recycling and waste-reduction programs, and a world-class waste-management facility that diverts 86% of the island's waste from landfill.

You'll also find that many of the island's hotels and homes have solar panels, vegetable gardens and even their own desalination plants.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SACH SANDERS/DESTINATION.NS.W.

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW

The island's volcanic pinnacles are covered with plant life. You'll find plenty of places to snorkel. Stunning Makambo Loft at Capella Lodge has a private plunge pool. Swim with sea turtles in the reef-fringed lagoon or at Old Settlement Beach.



Towards the island's south side, at the foot of Mount Gower and Mount Lidgbird, is stylish Capella Lodge. The boutique hotel is sophisticated and romantic, boasting views over remote Lovers Bay.

If you're after more of a home-away-from-home vibe, there's also a range of guesthouses and self-contained apartments dotted around, which are ideal for families and larger groups.

what to do

Head down to the lagoon, hire a snorkel and dive straight into the island's underwater oasis. Swim alongside sea turtles and more than 500 species of fish in the marine park and surrounding beaches.

Alternatively, explore the island and hike to Kim's Lookout and Malabar Hill to see Balls Pyramid, an impressive seven-million-year-old stone 'obelisk' that protrudes from the ocean.

In the afternoon, jump on a bike and cruise over to the white sands of Ned's Beach, where you can stand in knee-deep water and feed schools of fish straight from your hand. **10**



the details

What you need to know before you go

Travelling there QantasLink flies direct from Sydney most days.
Getting around The hotels offer transport to most key areas. If you want to hire a car, book in advance.
Where to eat Arajilla restaurant's modern three-course menu changes daily; the locally caught fish is a must-try. Some hotels will organise a picnic for you to enjoy at the beach or park??? during the day.
Other activities Tennis, fishing, surfing, kayaking, paddle boarding, scuba diving and nature-based guided tours (including one on a glass-bottom boat).



PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY (MAIN IMAGE) AND ZACH SANDERS/DESTINATION NSW