

A WEEKEND ON...

Lord Howe Island

This speck in the Tasman Sea hosts a remarkable rollcall of life forms found nowhere else, writes **Liani Solari**.

“IN 200,000 years’ time, Lord Howe Island will no longer exist,” announces Capella Lodge’s naturalist, Caitlin Woods. It’s a sobering thought – but not enough to give anyone the hurry-up on this island where the speed limit is 25 kilometres an hour. The idea that this remnant of a seven-million-year-old shield volcano will be reclaimed by the ocean seems too incredible to fathom as we emerge from an arbour of banyan trees and kentia palms onto the rocky beach at Little Island, virtually the only breeding place in the world for the providence petrel.

About 600 kilometres east of the Australian mainland, Lord Howe Island was unknown to humans until its discovery by British colonialists in 1788, with First Fleet surgeon Arthur Bowes Smyth comparing the biodiversity hotspot to Ovid’s Golden Age.

It’s easy to get twitchy on this World Heritage-listed isle with a profusion of birdlife. We summon the flightless woodhen on the Little Island walking track by simply clapping our hands. Near Lagoon Beach, we crane our necks to see if a pair of white terns is doing the unthinkable: precariously balancing their sole egg on the branch of a Norfolk Island pine. And then there’s our Hitchcockian moment on Blinky Beach, where sooty terns could well outnumber the island’s 380 permanent human residents.

Touring the lagoon in a glass-bottom boat, we ooh and aah at the world’s southernmost coral reef, where tropical and temperate marine life rendezvous in luxuriant coral gardens. Our skipper, Ken Hiscox, dives in to entice the fantastically beastly doubleheader wrasse with sea urchins, its seafood of choice. Watching these spectacular scenes unfold like a showreel, we’re reminded why nature gets top billing here.



Mounts Lidgbird and Gower dominate the view from Capella Lodge's terrace



Stay

Capella Lodge (capellalodge.com.au) is the place to wake up and smell the sea spray, as it's the only luxury boutique accommodation with views of the coast and twin mountains Lidgbird and Gower. Through the floor-to-ceiling windows of the airy communal area, you can chart the mood swings of these ever-present peaks – from brooding basalt megaliths shrouded in cloud to kindly shade providers for happy cows that are merely exotic props in this coastal idyll.

The lodge has a usual capacity of 18 guests, who all mingle at sunset over cocktails and canapés in the stylishly informal open-plan area encompassing a lounge, dining room, bar and terrace with a plunge pool. Ceramic accent pieces mirror the ocean's ever-changing colours, while timber floors, basalt-stone ensembles and teak deck furniture in the nine guest suites add to the sophisticated beach-house vibe.

On this island, life is a throwback to the '50s and no-one at Capella locks their guestroom door. Bicycles are parked out the front for getting around like a local; if you're out of practice, revive weary muscles with a massage at the on-site spa.



co-op, general store and a couple of boutiques, Anchorage Restaurant (02 6563 2287) is a one-stop shop for breakfast, lunch, dinner and evening drinks. At lunchtime, the housemade pies sell like hot cakes.

- Nothing beats arriving at Neds Beach to find a picnic hamper containing the ingredients for a DIY seafood barbie, courtesy of Capella. The only catch? You'll need to lift a finger to activate the electric barbecue.

Eat

- The seasonal menus at Capella Lodge feature island and mainland ingredients. Time your stay for the Tuesday-night six-course dégustation matched with Australian wines, which may include local kingfish ceviche with tomato, lime, coriander and coconut granita served with a Clare Valley riesling. And be sure to pair the housemade sourdough and caraway bread with some local honey.

- In town, among a compact cluster of buildings housing a cinema/community hall,

Play

- If you take your trekking seriously, head to the primeval cloud forest at the summit of Mount Gower (875 metres) on an eight-hour guided walk.
- Join the Hiscox family, of Lord Howe Environmental Tours (lordhoweislandtours.com), on a snorkelling trip to renowned dive sites Ercott's Hole and Comets Hole.
- Visit Lord Howe Island Museum (lhimuseum.com) for fascinating insights into the biodiversity and settlement of this ancient volcanic island. ●



Flight path

LDH

Qantas flies to Lord Howe Island from Brisbane, Port Macquarie and Sydney, with connections from other Australian cities. qantas.com