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A GUIDE FOR THE SOPHISTICATED TRAVELER HERE & ABROAD | Edited by Jeffries Blackerby

OFF THE BEATEN PATH

Splendor Down Under

Capella Lodge on Australia's Lord Howe Island

FOR A FEW DECADES NOW, Lord Howe Island—a tiny slip of land 300 miles off Australia's east coast—has been a hideaway for smart Sydneysiders who've built houses here. Having come since childhood, they arrive by private plane on weekends (it's less than two hours from Sydney and Brisbane). Many Australians, however, have still never heard of Lord Howe. It has 300 residents, a small airstrip, one road, and, until recently, a few basic family-run lodges. That was before James Baillie showed up. The man behind some of the country's best resorts—including Lizard and Bedarra islands, both along the Great Barrier Reef—has opened **Capella Lodge**, a nine-suite teak-and-glass hotel overlooking Lover's Bay. In addition to luxe rooms and expert service, Capella has introduced the island's first spa, with a menu based on local basalt stones and native flora (the pepperberry foot mask is superb). It has also brought in Sydney chef

Tim Bourke to replace the usual barbecued snags (Australian for sausage) with dishes such as yellowtail kingfish dressed in pine nuts, tomato, and lemon. But Baillie has been careful not to leave too big a footprint on a place that has only recently replaced its lone espresso machine with a handful of small cafés. On Lord Howe, this is progress.

To Baillie, the island—still unspoiled thanks to minimal development—may be Australia's last paradise (it is designated a World Heritage site). It's the antidote to the trampled Great Barrier Reef, where boatloads of sunburned tourists come in from Cairns. Lord Howe's coral reef is inhabited by fish that rival their Queensland cousins in variety and color. And the geography is similar to that of Bora-Bora: an extinct volcano, craggy peaks (Mount Lidgbird and Mount Gower are climbers' favorites), a lagoon, and crystalline blue water in which you can snorkel, right off the beach. There are few cars here;

most visitors travel by foot or by bike, sharing the pathways with masked boobies, those fluffy white birds that poke their heads from bushes as hikers make their way to the top of the island's peaks. Says Baillie, "We've gone for the anti-resort experience." *From \$700 to \$1,100; 800-441-6880; lordhowe.com.*

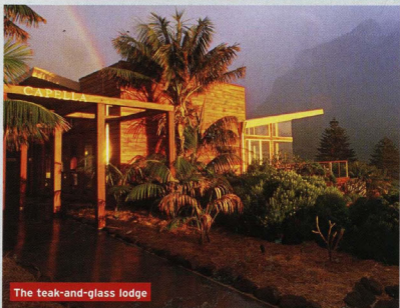
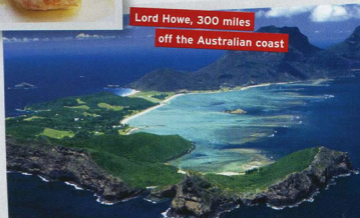
—JULIE EARLE LEVINE

From the Capella dining room



Lord Howe, 300 miles

off the Australian coast



The teak-and-glass lodge