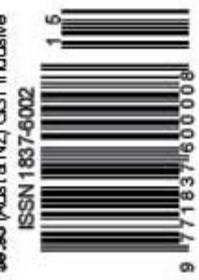
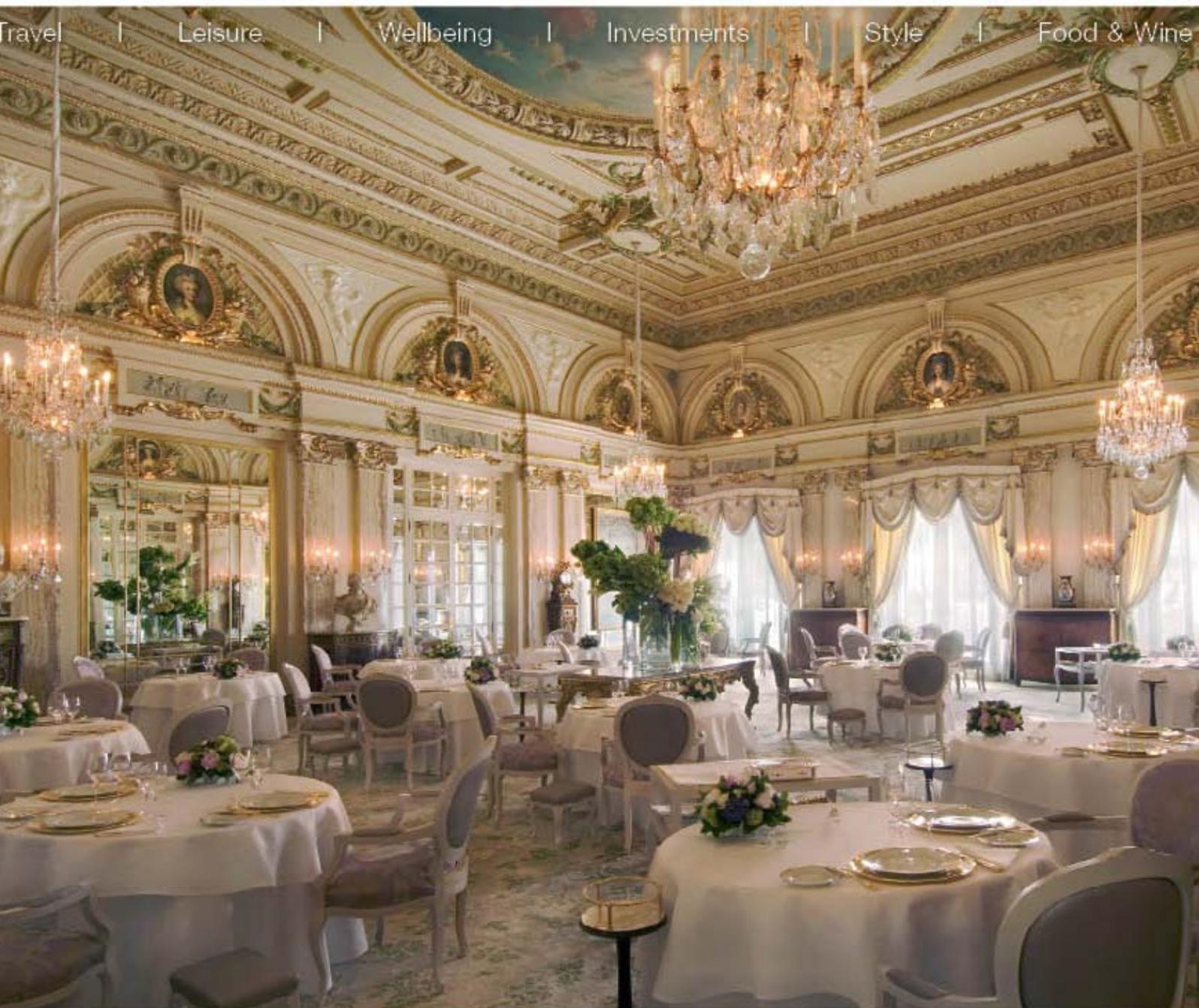


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UNTOUCHED PARADISE

Left in splendid isolation for millions of years, Lord Howe Island is a thrilling landscape of coral reefs and soaring forest-covered peaks where Cathy Wagstaff finds nature and luxury in perfect balance.



02



03

01 The Lidgbird Pavilion
02 A picturesque retreat
03 Space to relax in Makambo



01

Nature is alive and well on Lord Howe Island – in fact, it’s thriving. Just a two-hour flight from Sydney, this remote island has really had a seven-million-year lucky streak where nature has played its hand totally uninterrupted, and from the moment you arrive you can feel it. The air is fresh, the water is crystal clear, the sky a striking blue – and the only noise is birds squawking high over the sheer sentinel-like cliffs that greet you.

Lord Howe erupted from the floor of the Tasman Sea eons ago and, isolated and alone, it has been left to its own devices for millions of years, virtually creating its own natural wonderland. So wondrous, in fact, it has been granted World Heritage status in order to protect its rare birds, plants and marine life.

Ocean depths and jungle peaks

Within hours of landing, I am on my first excursion into this untouched Eden, surrounded by colourful fish in the crystal waters of Neds Beach which lays claim to the much sought-after title of Australia’s cleanest beach. Encouraged by regular feeding from visitors, an abundance of fish appear – long silver-drummers, spangled emperors, metre-long kingfish, garfish, mullet, wrasse – creating an aquarium as they swarm

around my legs, gobbling up their food. This should be no surprise; there are over 500 species of fish that thrive on the pristine surrounding coral reef of the Lord Howe Island Marine Park, the world’s southern-most reef, home to 90 species of coral.

The glass bottom of our boat is a mass of colour – neon pinks, blues, yellows and crimsons of all shades – as we pass vast forests of coral with luminous fish darting through. The water is so clear you feel you can reach out and touch the bottom. Schools of colour shoot past as I snorkel peacefully above some of the world’s best-preserved coral.

From the island’s clear waters, we head to the hills. Lord Howe is a dramatic island to explore, with two thirds covered by natural forest. We follow the spine of the island’s mountain ridge north, taking in sweeping views over the lagoon as we pass through dense native kentia palm groves to Malabar Hill, which plunges into the ocean below. From Kims Lookout, the blue-edged reef stretches out below with Mt Gower looming in the distance. It is a majestic, awe-inspiring view.



right out to Balls Pyramid – the tallest rock in the world – 16 kilometres out to sea. The ocean stretches out endlessly before me, and I feel on top of the world. For nature lovers, Lord Howe is a breath of fresh air; for luxury seekers, it offers the best of both worlds. Should Capella Lodge be at full capacity, visitors will also find outstanding service and accommodation at Arajilla Retreat, renowned for its Ayurvedic Spa and specialised wellness programmes. ♦

Travel file

Accommodation
www.capellalodge.com.au
www.arajilla.com.au

Getting there
 Qantas and QantasLink fly to Lord Howe Island from Sydney, Brisbane and Port Macquarie (via Sydney)
www.qantas.com.au

Retreat to Capella

That evening, I relax at the boutique Capella Lodge, located at the foot of the twin peaks of Mounts Gower and Lidgbird, overlooking the vast lagoon and beyond to the Tasman Sea. As one of the Baillie Lodges group of boutique properties and a founding member of Luxury Lodges of Australia, it caters for those seeking both luxury and a memorable travel experience. Capella makes for a sophisticated island escape, combining the best of nature with an intimate style of accommodation.

I am staying in one of the nine contemporary suites that have all been inspired by the openness of Australian beach houses, designed to let nature in with spacious light-filled interiors and wide open decks. The island's ubiquitous kentia palms wave in the breeze as I eschew the myriad activities on offer – bike riding, hiking, swimming with fish, kayaking, snorkelling, diving – to relax on the deck and take time

“THE ISLAND’S UBIQUITOUS KENTIA PALMS WAVE IN THE BREEZE AS I TAKE TIME TO SIMPLY ABSORB THE VIEW”

to simply absorb the view laid out so spectacularly before me.

The crowning jewel of Capella's accommodation is the expansive Lidgbird Pavilion, a 120sqm retreat fitted out with luxe features and wraparound decks designed for relaxed outdoor living; bathing with panoramas of the mountains under the frangipani trees in the freestanding Lotus bath, admiring the view from a day bed, or cooling off in the private plunge pool.

Nature's feast

Dining is another great pleasure at Capella Lodge. Lord Howe Island is renowned for its produce, with fish – yellowfin tuna, yellowtail kingfish, silver trevally and emperor – fresh from the sea; avocado, sweet potato, pawpaw, juicy tomato and rock melon flourishing chemical-free in rich volcanic soil; and the fragrant local honey, harvested only once a year. With all these ingredients at

the hands of Capella's chefs, we are in for some memorable meals.

Guests come together each evening for cocktails and canapés, basking in the day's adventure. At the Lodge Restaurant, overlooking the lagoon below, we dine on such treats as kingfish sashimi, poached king prawns, mushroom fricassee, tender grilled fish, goat curd with fig and local honeycomb, and white chocolate parfait with cayenne pepper meringue. It is a fine dining feast, showcasing fresh local ingredients, commodities Lord Howe Island has in abundance.

The next day we walk. Lord Howe is only a small island – a diminutive two kilometres at its widest point and 11 kilometres long – making it perfect to explore by bike or foot. We head south, from the steep base of Mt Lidgbird climbing through the wet rainforest then along the slope of the mountain, finally reaching the cliffs for a panoramic view

04 A kaleidoscope of colours
 05 Sunset at the restaurant

Lord Howe Island Luxury

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