

FORGET THE FAST PACE...

ON LORD HOWE ISLAND

Toni Krasicki takes time out from the fast lane to discover a laid back subtropical island paradise.

**TONI KRASICKI, BHMS (Ex Sc)
PGDipHlthProm**

Toni has 22 years' experience in the fitness industry and has been dragging her backpack to many corners of the world for just as long. She is a freelance writer and can be contacted at tkrasicki@hotmail.com or visit www.adventuregirlwrites.com

WE'VE ASCENDED and descended 875m Mt Gower in record time, which is rather ludicrous considering the Islanders are so chilled and the only thing you really need to be on time for is your flight home.

You'll recognise a local by their footwear; they'll be wearing very little or none at all. Even my guide today, Mista (Malcolm Schick), tells me that he's wearing heavy work boots because he doesn't own a pair of hiking boots! Such is the ethos on Lord Howe Island – it's not a place to sweat the small stuff.

Before leaving for Lord Howe, when I tell people where I am off to, the unanimous reply is – 'where's that?' The place is a hidden gem! Lying 600km due east of Port Macquarie (NSW), the 11km long and 2km wide island, surrounded by a swirl of lagoons, pristine turquoise waters and coral reefs, is hardly close by.

It is UNESCO World Heritage Listed and has been since 1982 because of the spectacular landscape and the large number of native plants and colonies of endangered sea birds found here. I quickly discover it's a well-kept secret from mainstream

tourism, which is just the way the Islanders like it!

Lord Howe Island is to Australia what Okinawa is to Japan: a subtropical wonderland far enough away from the rest of the country to develop its own distinct character, but without the inconvenience of needing a passport to get there.

Ask any of its 300 residents and they're happy to admit that they prefer cycling to driving and live their life quite efficiently without mobile phone coverage. There are no ATMs and if you happen to drive one of the few cars or hitch a ride on a motorbike, the speed limit is a conservative 25km per hour.

Up until 1974, when the airstrip was constructed, tourists arrived by flying boat from Sydney's Rose Bay. Nowadays you may not arrive by seaplane, but flying in is still a sight to behold. You can feel the energy in the plane change when passengers first glimpse the island. It's an amazing sight; fantastic towering volcanic peaks rising out of the ocean and fringed with white sandy beaches that spill in to crystal clear lagoons.

Catering for only up to 400 visitors

per day enables the place to retain its laid back and slower paced vibe. Finding a patch of sand to call your own is not an issue. The only dilemma is to decide which unspoilt and uncrowded beach to visit. My favourite turns out to be Ned's Beach; powdery white sand, great scenery, crystal clear water and doubles as a natural aquarium. If you are a landlubber, it's a great chance to hand-feed the local marine life and watch fish dart in and around your feet without having to don mask and snorkel or take to the seas by boat.

Getting fidgety or maybe suffering from mobile phone withdrawal symptoms? Don't worry – there are myriad daytime activities to keep you distracted to the point where you'll find yourself collapsing into bed when the lights go out.

Boasting one of Australia's top ten day-walks, the demanding Mt Gower walk generally takes about eight hours to complete. It's a guided hike that passes through lowland palm forests and an enchanted mist forest just before the summit where you get incredible views. It's not for the faint-hearted, on the track there are

some fixed ropes to help you climb or prevent you from going over the edge as some sections are just a little bit steep and hairy.

Be prepared to share your lunch with the local Woodhens. These endangered birds, endemic to the island, make friends easily and aren't shy about asking for a crumb or two! Hikers and twitchers will think they are in heaven with so many varied hikes and prolific birdlife.

Water babies will love all manner of aquatic activities especially those fascinated with what lies beneath. The world's most southern coral reef is thriving! Although the water temperature when I visit during spring time is on the chilly side, my snorkel in the lagoon makes up for it with 30m visibility and an endless stream of turtles, sting rays, harmless sharks, tropical fish and an abundance of cold latitude living coral (more brown than colourful). World listed dive sites and clean pristine waters make it a popular dive destination.

I stay at Arajilla Retreat, a boutique resort nestled amongst Kentia palms and Banyan trees with timber



boardwalks linking 12 suites to the restaurant and an open common living area. Dining options on the island are fairly limited, but Arajilla's restaurant is a popular choice and the place is buzzing with non-guests. Serving contemporary Australian cuisine you'll always find the local kingfish, which is a big hit, on the menu.

Take time out at Arajilla's Ayurvedic Wellness Spa. The treatments are based on Indian Ayurvedic techniques, which not only address relaxation, but also healing. You can drop by for a massage or facial when you feel the need for some healing hands or sign up for one of the several Wellness Packages: Sleep Easy, De-stress, Back Management or Lifestyle.

Do yourself a favour and take a break from the fast lane and reconnect with a simpler way of life. Don't forget to pack hiking boots, mask and snorkel, a good book and get ready to slow down!

ACTIVITIES:

- + Sailing – Gosford to Lord Howe Island yacht race in October
- + Golfing
- + Hiking trails
- + SCUBA diving
- + Snorkelling
- + Glass bottom boat tours
- + Kayaking
- + Fishing
- + Windsurfing
- + Kite surfing
- + Stand-up paddle boarding
- + Surfing
- + Bike riding
- + Tennis.

For more information go to www.lordhoweisland.info and www.arajilla.com.au

The writer flew courtesy of QANTAS Link and was a guest at Arajilla Retreat