



# Lord Howe

## A WEEK OF ZEN

YOU KNOW YOU'RE ONTO A GOOD THING WHEN, JUST TWO DAYS INTO A HOLIDAY  
YOU'RE ALREADY PLANNING WHEN YOU'LL BE ABLE TO RETURN AGAIN.  
SUCH IS THE POWER OF LORD HOWE ISLAND.

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A coral reef and rich aquatic life makes diving and snorkelling favourite pastimes on Lord Howe Island.



Just 600 km and a two-hour flight from the east coast of Australia, Lord Howe Island is a small island born of volcanic rock jutting from azure oceans and beholding more than its quota of Zen. I was there for Wellness Week; five days of yoga, adventure fitness (read: walks, swims and kayaking in amazing scenery), healthy cooking classes, organic gardening classes, organic wine tasting and four-course whole-food dinners.

The week is hosted by Pinetrees Lodge, a 120-year-old piece of paradise that has been passed down through generations of one family. It's currently run by sixth-generation islander Dani Rourke and agricultural ecologist and all-round multitasker Luke Hanson, who both moved back to the island from Sydney when Dani's mum passed away in 2011.

Pinetrees Lodge was built on land acquired more than 160 years ago in exchange for two tonnes of potatoes. Such is the simplicity of Lord Howe. Its 350 residents even declined the option of having mobile phone reception. They allow only 400 visitors at a time. They wave and smile with each passing. They also display the finest human examples of trust and friendliness, leaving everything from bikes and cars to house doors unlocked. All Pinetrees Lodge accommodation comes without any door locks, something that takes a little getting used to for us pent-up, paranoid city folk.

This idyllic isle gives you the distinct feeling that this is how the world really should be. It seems to have missed the

modern-day facets of other societies of theft and distrust, and instead remains a place that old-fashioned movies, dreams and ultimately weeks of Zen are made of.

On the middle section of UNESCO World Heritage-listed Lord Howe, minimal cars grace minimal roads, with cyclists and walkers maintaining right of way. Two thirds of the island remain off limits to anyone not on foot as a permanent park preserve. The southern end is fringed with two lush subtropical mountains – Mt Lidgbird and Mt Gower – whose heads seem never to emerge from the clouds. At 875 m, Mt Gower is the tallest vertical climb in Australia and a renowned and picturesque guided day walk. >>

STUNNING VIEWS AT EVERY TURN HELP WEARY TRAVELLERS RELAX AND RECHARGE.



Our Wellness Week kicks off with a bleary-eyed 7am meander to the lodge's scenic boatshed. Two yoga sessions are taught daily by one of Australia's best-known yoga teachers, softly spoken and always smiling Charlotte Dodson. With a group varying in age and skill level, Dodson helps us stretch and contort our tight morning muscles. As the waves of the island's large beach lagoon lap up near the deck, leading your mind into a meditative state doesn't get much easier. The class is taught on an open grassy area named Small Island, nestled by the mountains and ocean.

Flanking the other side of a delicious buffet and à la carte breakfast is a morning of adventure fitness, for those who choose it. Lord Howe Island punches above its weight in the activity stakes, with countless walks of varying degrees of difficulty, ocean swims through the warm and calm waters of the sheltered lagoon, kayaking or world-class snorkelling in the abundant marine park waterways, plus mountain climbing, cycling, golfing, surfing and diving.

Lunch at Pinetrees can be taken as you please – à la carte and buffet at the lodge, a packed lunch of salads and sandwiches, or a BBQ pack with everything you need, hand delivered in an esky to one of the many classic wood-fired barbecues that dot the island to await your arrival by bike or foot.



COOKING CLASSES, RELAXING BIKE RIDES AND SCENIC WALKS ARE FOOD FOR THE STOMACH AND SOUL.

In the afternoon, there are healthy cooking classes with Pinetrees' clever chefs, who give the lowdown on spices, salads, pastas and desserts. Other options include a nutrition class on eating clean, a massage with the on-site therapist or, my favourite, an organic gardening class. Hanson, who had a successful career as an agricultural ecologist prior to committing to island life, takes us to his home to share his wealth of knowledge in the plentiful edible backyard garden. (I'm also rather jealous of Lord Howe's rich volcanic soils.)

After another visit to Dodson and the magical boathouse of Zen, Hanson breaks out his agricultural knowledge again with a round of organic wine tasting. At sunset, overlooking the ocean, life is good.

At the four-course dinners, options range from the regular menu to whole food choices for Wellness Week, including fantastic meals for the token vegan (me). What starts out as scattered tables of twos and fours slowly merge into one long table through the week as everyone makes friends. That's one of the brilliant things about Lord Howe, everyone is just so darn nice.

As for my plotted return to Lord Howe Island? Well, Pinetrees is running four of these Wellness Weeks next year – hopefully I'll see you down at the boatshed.



#### THE ESSENTIALS

► **Getting there:** Qantas Link flies daily from Sydney and weekly from Brisbane. [www.qantas.com.au](http://www.qantas.com.au). It is part of NSW, so no passport is needed.

► **Wellness Week:** Pinetrees Lodge is running its Wellness Week in May, September, October and November 2014. Prices include accommodation, meals, and activities and start from \$1330 per person twin share, excluding airfares.

[www.pinetrees.com.au](http://www.pinetrees.com.au)

► **Weather:** Lord Howe Island has a mild subtropical climate, with winter averages of 14-20°C and summer averaging 20-26°C.

► **More information:** [www.lordhoweisland.info](http://www.lordhoweisland.info)