

Wisdom of Lord Howe



When WF editorial coordinator Jaymie Hooper landed on Lord Howe Island, she never imagined she'd walk away with so many life lessons

I STEP OFF MY MAT, plant one heel onto the grass and lift my face to the sky. I expect to see the flawless blue canvas that's been my companion for the past three days, but instead the sky is punctuated by hundreds of soaring Providence Petrels (one of the rarest seabirds on the planet). I should focus my gaze and steady my wavering tree pose, but my eyes drift from the swirling birds to Mount Gower, the island's highest point. So I stumble, just as our instructor, yoga guru Charlotte Dodson, coaxes us into a forward bend.

Today the Pinetrees Wellness Week group has migrated from our usual studio at the boathouse to Little Island, where we ease our way in and out of side twists and backbends until we rest in Savasana. As I lay here, my hands facing the shadowed petrels and my feet pointing to the sunset-stained lagoon, I think I've finally learnt that those who say "Silence is golden" are mistaken. Because it's here, with the rush of the waves against the cliffs, the rustle of the wind through the palms and the soothing calls of an endangered seabird that I feel the greatest peace I've ever known.

* Lesson 1: It's okay to fall off the grid

I sit on a heap of discarded volcanic rocks at Blinky Beach, spread out my map to eye off the trail walks and munch down on a triple-decker sandwich. Today

I skipped the buffet at Pinetrees in favour of their famous packed lunch and declined the offer of a picnic delivery, because I wasn't quite sure where they'd deliver it to.

For a girl who hates being lost and plans everything – including when to be spontaneous – this is a big deal. But there's a magic at work on the island that erodes your fears. Plus, although it takes two hours to reach this 11km-long paradise from Sydney or Brisbane, wireless internet and mobile phone service don't make the journey. You fall off the grid into an adventure playground. You borrow wheels and snorkel gear from Wilson's Bike Hire, trek up Transit Hill for the 360 degree island views and then cycle to Ned's Beach to dive into the smooth waves and float back to shore on the sea foam. Although I do all of this alone, rarely spotting another person along the way, I never feel lost or lonely – because I've found a friend in myself and in the island that's challenging me.

* Lesson 2: You're stronger than you think

If conquering your addiction to social media isn't enough to get your heart pumping, then the



"This is Little Island, where we ease our way in and out of side twists and backbends"



Hiking, post-yoga sesh, to Goat House Cave



Yoga teacher Charlotte Dodson

PHOTOGRAPHY LUKE HANSON/PINETREES

platter of adventure fitness offered during the Pinetrees Wellness Week is bound to rock your boat. Weaving my way through the skinny trees, fallen logs and unsteady stones of Mount Lidgbird to reach Goat House Cave with the rest of the group, I'm having second thoughts about my newfound explorer spirit. Sure, I love a good hike, but I have a suspicion I'm getting ahead of myself as I cling on to the safety rope and hurl myself up another stretch of this 500m vertical climb.

Stopping to wipe the sweat from my face and down the contents of my water bottle, I'm almost ready to turn around. But then, as if on cue, someone in our gang of downward-dogs-turned-mountain-climbers catches up and says we're almost there. So I push on, ignoring the burning in my glutes from our 7am yoga sesh, hurl myself upwards and shuffle along the narrow ledge until it opens up into a stony overhang. For a moment nobody speaks because the view is louder than words. Perched up here on the mountainside we see into the heart

of the island – the trails that weave in and out of the forest like veins and the small inlets and bays that carve into the coast. And to think, it's not even lunchtime, but look how far we've come.

* Lesson 3: Have a little faith

On my last morning I sit outside the boatshed and wait for yoga to start, skimming the sand with my toes. Wearing shoes is optional on Lord Howe (but practically discouraged), and I trust this place enough to abandon my sneakers and experience the island without barriers. It almost sounds like blasphemy to a city girl, but I also trust the island's people enough (all 350 of them) to wander down the roads, concealed by palms and banyan trees, and not feel afraid. It didn't take me long to accept the 'no lock' policy (that means no room keys or locks for your bikes), especially when everyone you walk by smiles and waves hello. The Wellness

HOW TO BOOK:
Want to hit up Lord Howe Island for five days of Zen? Pinetrees Wellness Week packages start from \$1,365 and run between May and November of each year. Check out pinetrees.com.au for more info.

Week, Charlotte says, gives us all "enough time to listen to what our spirit needs". We've been listening and we've been growing – believing that our bodies can stretch into new positions, relying on Charlotte to guide us safely into a headstand, and trusting Kev and Dean from Lord Howe Island Environmental Tours to lead us on a drift snorkel along the world's most southern fringing coral reef.

At the end of class, my Wellness Week experience coming to an end, Charlotte closes the practice with a chant: "Fingers to your forehead, live every hope and dream. Fingers to your lips, live every word. Fingers to your heart, live every single moment," and I promise myself that I'll take these lessons with me across the water.