


retreat

# state of trust

On a remote island off Australia's east coast, visitors will find the yogic principle of trust well intact. By Sue White



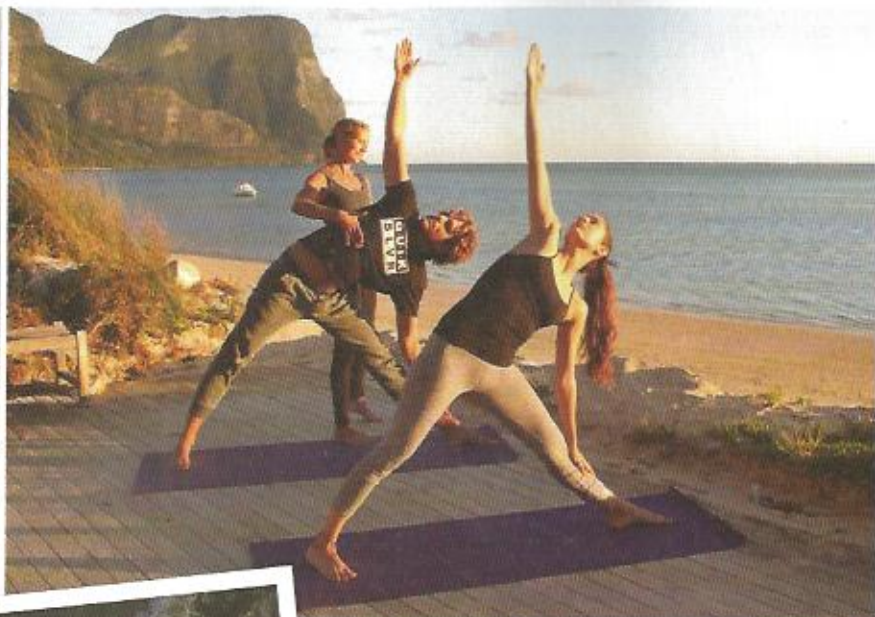
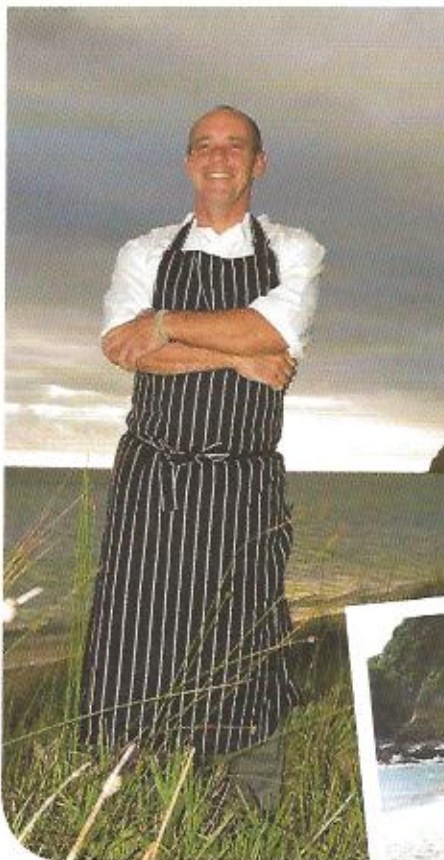


**Standing outside the single airstrip** that comprises the Lord Howe Island airport, our group of mainlanders appear perplexed. "What do you mean, don't worry about our bags? How will you know which is which?"

"Trust us, we know," laughs Luke Hanson, from the Island's longest-running accommodation, Pinetrees Lodge, which is hosting our upcoming week of wellness 600km off Australia's east coast.

Trust sounds like a simple concept, but for a group of city slickers, it's hard won. Instead of taking his word for it, our group of yogis-to-be make murmurs of general disbelief, eventually quizzing Hanson so intently, "How? How do you know?" that he divulges his secret: there is in fact a system that involves matching baggage tags to rooms.





Clockwise, from top left: Chef Paul Brown; a class with Charlotte Dodson on the boat shed's deck; Luke Hanson teaches veggie gardening during wellness week; cycling is a great way to see the island's sights.

So how does one embrace a more trusting way of life? A wellness week on an island of around 350 people must surely be a good start. For six generations the McFadyen and Rourke families have run Pinetrees Lodge as a place where visitors can escape from television, email and mobile phones, while embracing island time. As a result, generations of Australians have grown up viewing this rustic, remote lodge as a cherished annual escape; some guests trust the place so much they have returned every year for decades.

But while trust has always been big on Lord Howe (Pinetrees has no keys for the doors; bicycles don't come with locks, and even snorkel gear on the island is rented via an honesty system), the focus on wellbeing is new.

There's no reason why it needs to be. With world-renowned walks, plenty of empty, white sandy beaches, and a backdrop typecast straight from an idyllic island movie set, Lord Howe has plenty to attract visitors looking for

a relaxing escape. However, this formal wellness week is a new addition: when Hanson and his wife Dani Rourke moved here a few years ago, after Rourke's mother, island stalwart Pixie, passed away, they decided to add it to Pinetrees' annual calendar. Now, several weeks each year lodge visitors can fill their days with yoga, fitness, cooking and gardening classes, in addition to the massage, cycling and beach hopping enjoyed by all guests, year-round.

#### DAILY YOGA

Although technically part of New South Wales, Lord Howe is 30 minutes' ahead of eastern standard time, so it feels wildly early at 6.55 a.m. on morning one as I amble my way along a sandy path to the

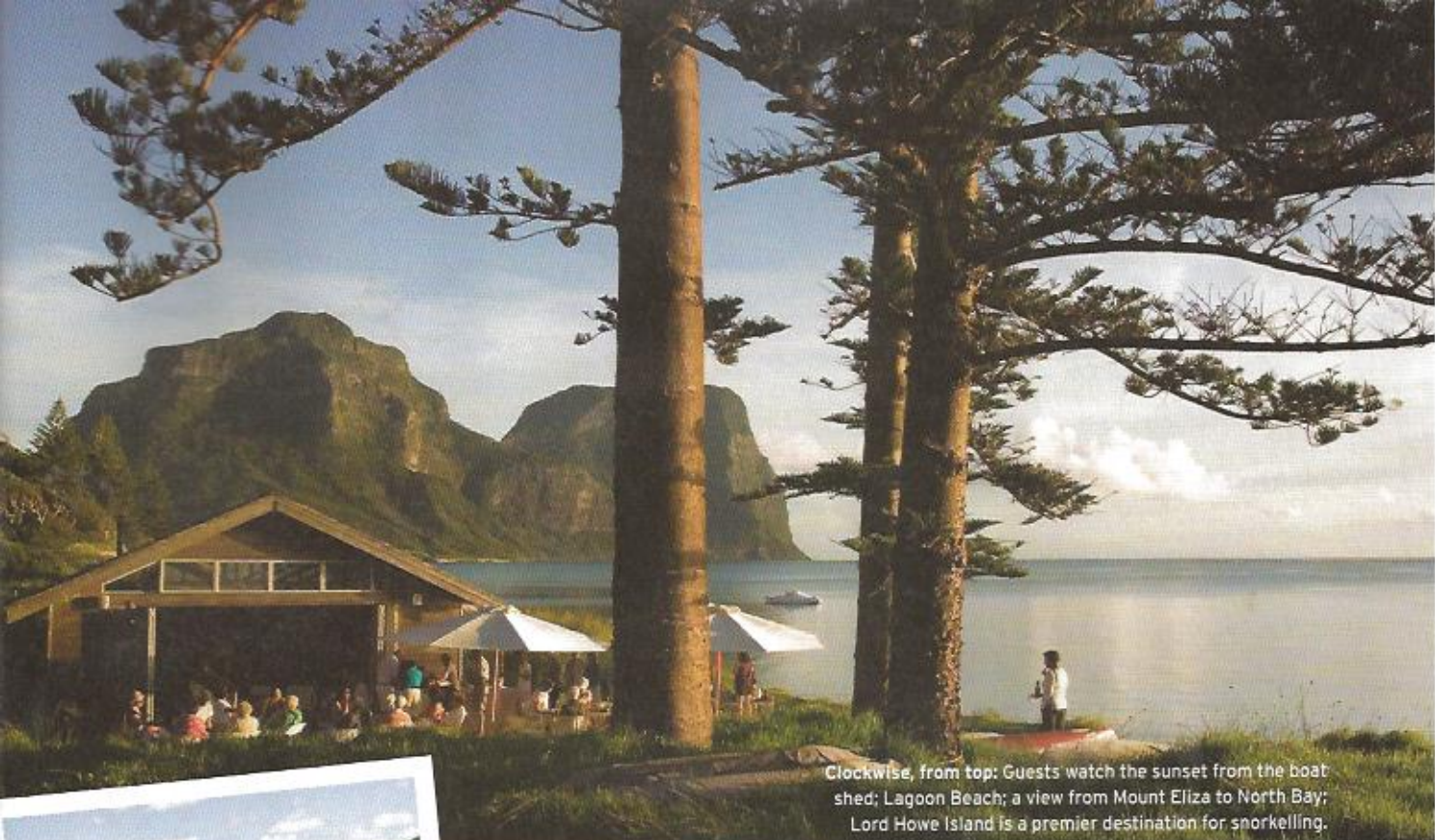
boat house where twice daily yoga classes are being held.

Our teacher, Charlotte Dodson, is already there and seems surprisingly unperturbed by the early hour. It turns out that she often rises at 4 a.m. to squeeze in a couple of hours of practice before teaching, a habit I admire but can't actually envisage for myself.

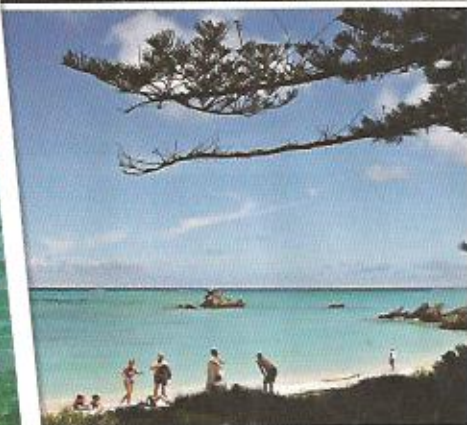
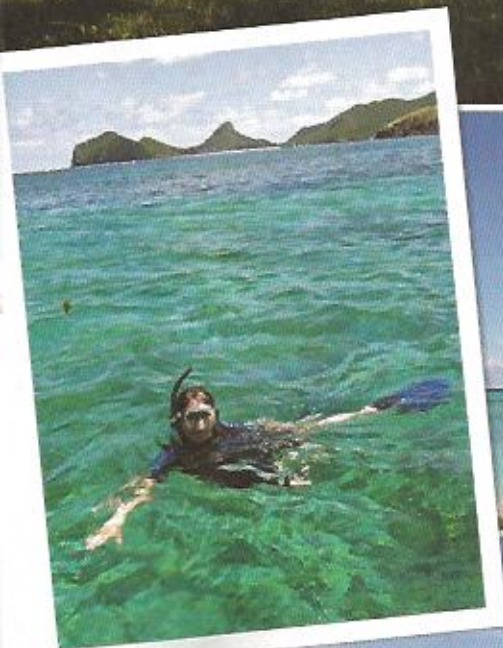
Unrolling one of the provided mats, I lie down in Reclining Bound Angle Pose (Supta Baddha Konasana) and ease myself through a well-oiled, flowing vinyasa class. Dodson's yoga background is diverse, but it was contact with one of her teachers, well-known Ashtanga teacher Eileen Hall, which helped her onto her present path.

"I used to be rushing all the time," she says of her pre-teaching life in advertising,





Clockwise, from top: Guests watch the sunset from the boat shed; Lagoon Beach; a view from Mount Eliza to North Bay; Lord Howe Island is a premier destination for snorkelling.



more than a decade ago. "But then Eileen said, 'What's all the hurry?'. I realised she was right," she says.

Now, Dodson is the trusted yoga teacher of numerous high-flyers, most notably model Miranda Kerr, who Dodson has taught for years. This week, I'm trusting Dodson with my own wellbeing, and it pays off. Classes are smoothly-run, and Dodson constantly roams the boat house classroom making adjustments to every student. She also walks the wellness talk all week by taking it easy, heading to bed early and eating moderately at the sociable mealtimes.

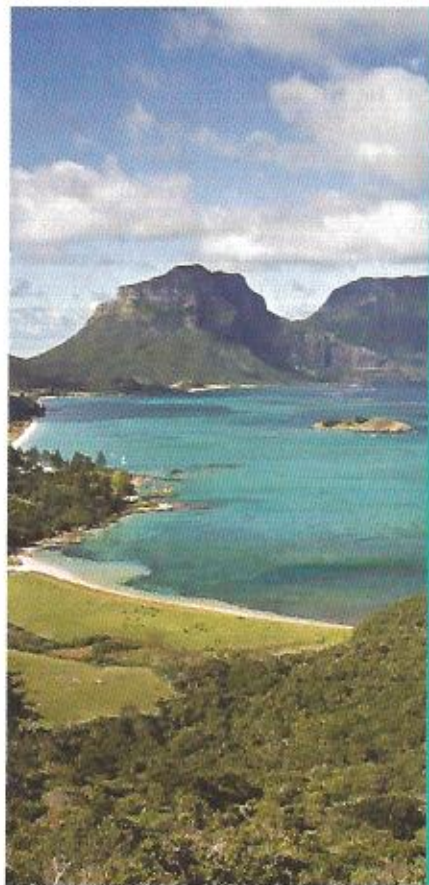
I, on the other hand, eat a lot of food. There are various options for dining out on Lord Howe Island, but food is expensive, as most food on Lord Howe is shipped in. The situation means the full-board package, which is part of every Pinetrees Lodge experience, makes good sense, especially since the food got a revamp two years ago when chef Paul Brown came onboard.

For this week, healthy options are part of the package, but given that breakfast includes cereal, toast and a choice of a hot meal; lunch involves two courses (or a pre-packed picnic or BBQ, delivered to one of the island's many picturesque





From top: Charlotte Dodson in Crane Pose; a view of Old Settlement Beach from Kim's Lookout.



## Fact File

**GETTING THERE:** QantasLink flies to Lord Howe Island most days of the week (from Sydney, or less frequently, Brisbane. Both flights are under two hours long). Schedules vary (there are always more flights on weekends and during peak periods); specials start from \$890 return. Remember: there are only 400 tourist beds on Lord Howe, so don't book flights without a bed secured and vice versa. If you're staying at Pinetrees Lodge, flights and accommodation can be booked simultaneously through its own travel agency.

**STAYING THERE:** Pinetrees Lodge is open year-round and runs on a full-board basis. Packages include clean but simple accommodation, filling meals, airport transfers on Lord Howe Island, and the friendliest hosts you're likely to come across in your travels.

Wellness week in 2013 is scheduled for 6-10 May, 2-6 September and 18-22 November. The package is priced from \$1330 twin-share, including all meals, accommodation and activities. [pinetrees.com.au](http://pinetrees.com.au).

**GETTING AROUND:** Cycling is the main form of transport on the Island. Rent bicycles (no locks, deposit or ID required) from Wilson's Hire Service, a short walk from Pinetrees Lodge, for \$40/week.

spots); and four-course dinners follow an organic wine tasting with former agricultural ecologist Luke, it's almost impossible not to indulge.

## FITNESS & WELLNESS

While the morning and afternoon classes with Dodson help me make a valiant attempt at working off all of this food, I decide to trust lodge co-host Jim McFadyen to take things a step further. Although his current day job is co-running Pinetrees Lodge, his skills as a former NSW policeman and trainer of recruits for the NSW Police Tactical Response Team (yes, seriously!) help me tone up during his daily boot-camp-like fitness sessions.

With McFadyen's encouragement, I end up spending an hour every day carrying buckets of water up



and down the steps to picturesque Middle Beach, holding Plank Pose on the top of Transit Hill, or lifting rocks into press-up position on Blinky Beach, where Lord Howe's clear-blue ocean laps tantalisingly just metres away.

McFadyen's roving classes prove to be such a good "tour", it's tempting to veg out until afternoon yoga once I'm done. But wellness week offers too many good choices to pass up. While Hanson's afternoon gardening classes prove popular with many of my peers, I also love the cooking classes from Paul and his team. Although, I confess it's not just for the chance to learn how to make homemade pasta or see how beetroot spherification works: students also get to eat some of the results.

#### EXPLORING THE ISLAND

On the days I opt for more solitary pursuits, I find myself using the time to make daily explorations on my rented bicycle (the main form of transport on

Lord Howe for visitors and islanders alike). Lord Howe is notoriously windy, but learning about the prevailing winds helps me narrow down my adventures each day. On a westerly I head to Neds Beach, where fish wait to be fed, and snorkel gear is rented from an unmanned booth on an honour system. On the easterly, it's a 15-minute cycle and 20-minute stroll to remote Little Island, which chef Paul informs me lies at the spiritual end of the island.

Little Island hovers under the watchful eye of Mount Gower; an eight-hour slog which is recognised by many as one of the top day walks in the world. If I was serious about walking, I'd climb it; but I trust my body has had enough. Well, except for one last wellness indulgence to seal all my hard work: a massage with the lodge's new masseuse, Natasha Krupitza.

As I sit in the serenely decorated cottage room, Krupitza explains there's a choice to be made between three oils. "Just close your eyes, and smell them one

by one. Trust your body to know what it needs," she says, before proceeding to deliver one of the best massages I've ever had (a statement which, given my penchant for both travel and massage, is no small claim).

On departure morning, back in Dodson's class, I contemplate a life where there are no locked doors or bike locks; and an existence where I take enough time every day to simply trust my body to decide what it needs.

While island life by its nature relies on us trusting one another, I'm keen to take the learning home. As Dodson closes her final class, I realise how. "Raise your thumbs to touch the point between your eyebrows for living your dreams and inspiration; bring your thumbs to touch your lips, for meaning every word; and then to your heart for always being true to yourself." ❖

*Sue White is a Sydney-based writer and author of smartphone app Yoga Holidays Worldwide.*

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