LORD HOWE

Bringing regal adventure to the South Seas

Adventure is where you find it, and on Lord Howe Island, it’s a mantra that continues year-round.
To describe Lord Howe’s inaugural adventure festival with a cliche, saying something like, “it went off with a bang”, would be hopelessly inadequate.

How could anything that occurs deep in the South Pacific go off with a bang? Despite many of the adventures undertaken during the Lord Howe festival being physically challenging, often requiring — excuse the use of a football coach gee-up term applied to flagging players at half time — a degree of constitutional examination, the overriding theme of the week-long event slash festival was bliss.

Bliss trumps everything. Yes, the Three Peaks Adventure Race covered 15km over 750 vertical metres. Yes, most of the route was staged along narrow, winnowy single tracks, but the views and the setting pushed any residual feelings of discomfort way into the background.

Competitors were treated to trails among spectacular volcanic ridges, with 360 degree views out to an endless horizon of deep Pacific blue, where gulls and seabirds cartwheeled and where white pillowy clouds hung delightfully in a connected sky. And of course, post race, the “debrief” set-up must surely be up there in terms of best debrief locations anywhere on Earth.

Adventure is so much more than merely testing physical capability. Yes, there are some extremely experienced, robust, gnarly dudes; the type of dude you see in an Old Spice commercial, standing at the prow of an icebreaking schooner, brass sextant in hand, verdant beard festooned with ice crystals, plotting a way through a seemingly impossible path ahead.

But, realistically, most of us are interested in something more pared back than that. Real adventure is about the journey of the individual. Everyone’s different. Not everyone has had the time or luxury to learn navigation by the stars or has access to a ocean-going schooner, let alone the skill to sail it solo around the world. No, most modern day adventurers are content to train when they can, maybe embark on a few multi-day bushwalks here and there, ride their bike down a few singletrack routes when time allows, attempt, sometimes valiantly, to stick to some form of weekly fitness regime and then, when occasion allows, put things on the line in a race of some sort.

Whatever it is people manage, the part most look forward to is the debrief. The debrief is where the satisfaction of individual effort manifests. Where self-appreciation develops, confidence is consolidated and where, overall, life seems better. Where better than a beautifully relaxed South Seas oceanside setting to let the story of how it was you came to be there, in that exact moment, flourish?

The Pinetrees resort Lord Howe Island adventure festival for 2019 may be done and dusted, but that doesn’t mean the opportunity for a unique adventure set in Pacific paradise is over until the 2020 event. Check out the full spectrum of opportunities, like the Mount Gower Climb, on the Pinetrees Resort website.

— AF

For more information on booking, accommodation options and activities in the offing, go to: Pinetrees.com.au
You may have heard about proximity wingsuit flying, but have you heard about proximity ocean swimming?

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**MOUNT GOWER CLIMB**

Lord Howe’s best guide, and ex-park ranger, Dean Hiscox, will help you ‘enjoy’ one of the hardest days of your life. We’re not joking. Even if you’re fit and experienced in rugged mountain terrain, you’ll still have a tough day. Savvy mountain guides call it ‘type two fun’, which means challenging at the time, but fun in hindsight. The climb from sea level to the summit is 875 vertical metres, but most of the climbing is rope supported on slopes between 40 and 65 degrees. The traverse across the Lower Road is arguably the most spectacular 400 metres of hiking in Australia, but don’t look under your toes — there’s lots of air between you and ocean far below. If you reach the summit (most likely in cloud), you’ll experience the Mt Gower cloud forest – an endemic forest community that’s more like temperate rainforest in Tasmania. It’s an amazingly delicate and beautiful ecosystem for such an unforgiving location. In autumn and winter, you’ll have thousands of Providence petrels around you, literally, defending their burrows and looking for mates. It’s hectic, loud, funny and absolutely relentless. Some of the birds will chase you down the ropes and nibble on your ankles. If you suffer from ornithophobia, go to the beach instead.

On Lord Howe, there’s a myriad of ways in which to dive for starfish and other denizens of rockpool ecosystems.

A typical Lord Howe oceanside trail. Fancy a walk before breakfast? I do.
Hinchinbrook's Thorsborne Trail

Hinchinbrook Island, 53 km long and 10km wide, is the largest island National Park in Australia. It's a pristine, wild and mind-bendingly ancient remnant of Australia's once verdant and widespread north-east tropical rainforest. Walking Hinchinbrook Island's 32km Thorsborne trail is a slingshot ride directly into the heart of a land that time forgot.
An aerial view of Dungeness, looking towards Hinchinbrook Channel. Hinchinbrook Island looms in the distance.

PICTURE CREDIT: Katie Purling
Stories abound about Australia’s ancient past, about how our Great Southern Land was cleaved, millennia ago, from the Gondwana supercontinent and left to drift south, giving Darwin’s Natural Selection the time needed to direct the evolution of unique flora and fauna.

So universally understood is Earth’s ancient history that it’s possible to visualise these epoch-spanning events in fast motion, like a time-lapse cinema screening inside the head. Gondwanaland breaks up, the continents we know today drift across space to eventually settle into the geographic symmetry we recognise in the present age. As this happens, ancient biodiversity comes into existence, flourishes and then fades away. Ancient civilisations appear, thrive, then recede, to be replaced by new ones.

During the chaos of this sped up time warp, elements of history manage to escape into other eras, bringing the ancient into the present. Hinchinbrook Island is one such a throwback. Over most of the island, self-reliant, nature-based and ecologically sustainable recreation is permitted. The majority of the natural environment remains undisturbed and preserved under various acts, legislation and management policies.

Hinchinbrook Island National Park lies within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. Oversight responsibility is shared by government, the Hinchinbrook’s traditional owners, the Biyaygiri people, and the wider local community.

Due to Hinchinbrook’s World Heritage designation, pretty much all of the Thorsborne trail is as nature intended. There is very little trail building, with much of the 32km path following natural undulations and obstacles. There’s a requirement to carry everything in and out on your back — including all fresh water, food and rubbish. As such, it’s a difficult proposition. There’s creeks and rivers to negotiate and large boulders to scramble up and over, oftentimes in hot and humid conditions.

This would be a challenge in its own right, but squeezed into 8 to 10 kilometres sections per day, over soft sand and through sometimes tangled rainforest growth, carrying a 15 to 20 kg pack, it can become an arduous proposition for the unprepared.

Whereas, for those who are prepared, it’s a multi-day trek like no other, a full-blown odyssey into a remarkable and pristine environment. The trail is a straight line walk rather than a loop, winding its way through rainforest, along mangrove-fringed coastlines dotted with unique estuarine flora (watch out for the fauna; saltwater crocodiles can be found in all water courses — both marine and fresh), over sandy beach coves and along narrow, winnowing paths. All the while, Mount Bowen looms, at 1,120m tall, to the east of the trail amid a sea of green in the centre of the island. — AF
GENERAL INFORMATION
The Thorsborne Trail is open 24 hours a day but it can be closed during periods of severe weather (wet and dry) and planned burns. Changes and updates regarding all aspects of the trail are available as park alerts on the QPWS (Queensland Parks and Wildlife) website. The QPWS will ensure all booked hikers are notified of any closures. Please ensure relevant contact details are supplied when booking.

PERMITS AND FEES
Camping permits are required for camping along the Thorsborne trail. Fees apply. Find the booking service at qpws.usedirect.com/qpws/

CLIMATE AND WEATHER
Daytime temperatures and humidity can be high at any time of the year and nights can be very cool. Please carry clothing that is suitable for all temperature extremes.

Heavy rain can fall at any time of the year, causing creek levels to rise and fall rapidly. Conditions may improve after a short wait. Crossing creeks requires extreme care, particularly at Zoe and Diamantina creeks.

April to September are the best months for hiking. This period avoids the times of year that are very wet or very dry.

CAMPING
Seven camping areas are accessible from the Thorsborne Trail. Camping permits are required and fees apply (see above). A maximum stay of two nights is permitted at each camping area, except for Mulligan Falls where the limit is one night. To help minimise impact and to maintain the wilderness setting, permits are issued for a maximum of 40 people on the trail at any one time. The largest group size possible is six.

OTHER INFORMATION
The trail is very popular and often fully booked during peak periods and school holidays. Purchasing a permit well in advance is advised to avoid disappointment. Please notify permit offices of any cancellations so other hikers can obtain places on the trail.

The Thorsborne Trail is not a graded or hardened walking track and in some areas is rough and difficult to traverse. It is recommended, prior to hiking the trail, that all hikers obtain a copy of the QPWS Thorsborne Trail trail guide.

For more information, go to: www.dese.qld.gov.au

THORSBORNE TRAIL, THE LOWDOWN

THORSBORNE TRAIL, THE MAP
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