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LUXURY ISLAND GETAWAYS IN TROPICAL NORTH QUEENSLAND

There are no shortage of tropical islands in **Queensland** with a select few home to exclusive island resorts. In fact there are over 150 islands, not including the odd un-named sand cay and rocky islets whose real estate assets rise and fall with the tide. With so many islands, we've done the legwork for you, narrowing down idyllic island experiences where you can unleash your inner Robinson Crusoe in style. So slip your toes into the sand, sharpen your palette for some of the freshest seafood you're ever likely to taste and slip onto island time as we explore four islands on the Great Barrier Reef.

Pamper your palate on Orpheus Island

Arguably one of Australia's most intimate bespoke island retreats, Orpheus Island welcomes guests with her sun-drenched charms. Exuding a laid back Aussie warmth thanks to passionate staff, there's an easy conviviality from the moment your helicopter lands on the beach.

Food is serious business at Orpheus Island. In fact the culinary team take cuisine so seriously that guests are asked to complete a comprehensive questionnaire before arrival so that menus can be tailored to specific tastes. Indonesian Head Chef Arie Prabowo leads a culinary team that takes full advantage of the island's substantial garden. Resident horticulturalist Jen Truasheim manages the fruit orchard, vegetable patch and herb garden along with the resort gardens and landscaping. She's also chief chicken handler, responsible for egg layers she fondly calls 'the girls'. The girls produce around 20 golden-yoked eggs daily from their free ranging habitat. The menu changes daily depending on the seasons and Prabowo's inspiration. For example, pan seared Hervey Bay scallops on a bed of parsnip puree with Iberico ham and tamarind jam. Or blackened bug tails served with avocado, pineapple and almond salsa with a dash of chilli sauce.

A 2014 makeover added a beachfront infinity pool surrounded by lush grass and coconut palms. Four new South Suites were installed – they're enormous, styled like a modern beach house with lime-washed floors, plantation shutters and indoor/outdoor

bathroom. An all-inclusive tariff extends to the fully stocked mini-bar.

Orpheus Island stretches around 11 km in an elongated shape running north and south. The south east trade winds buffet the east coast much of the year while resort side, the bay is sheltered and calm. Beachcombers will enjoy poking around flotsam and jetsam washed ashore from who knows where on the windward side washed ashore.

Resort-side there's a fleet of craft from stand up paddle boards, a Hobie cat, kayaks and small outboard-powered dinghies. Take a gourmet picnic hamper stocked with food and drinks to any of the secluded coves bookended by granite boulders for an island castaway escapade Robinson Crusoe could only dream of. The crew are on hand to take guests snorkelling (the giant clam garden is extraordinary), for a sunset cruise, to the outer reef for diving or offshore fishing – anything really that floats your boat.

More passive though equally pleasurable, Gwandalan Day Spa is a secluded enclave within an already secluded retreat promising rest and peace



(ORPHEUS ISLAND RESORT AND A BEACHFRONT HORIZON SWIMMING POOL)

(Gwandalan is derived from the original inhabitants the Manbarra people). It delivers. Using wildharvested Australian and organic ingredients formulated into LI'TYA products, the spa is a sanctuary of total relaxation within a whisper of the beach.

Prices start from AUD1200 (South Room) Getting there: Helicopter from Cairns or Townsville orpheus.com.au

Escape to Lizard Island for an outer Great Barrier Reef escapade

Rising 359 metres above the Coral Sea about 250 km north of Cairns, Lizard Island is one of six islands within Lizard Island National Park. The island was named by Lt James Cook during his 1770 voyage on the HMB Endeavour after the yellow spotted monitor lizards he saw. Cook was in a state of despair by the time he reached Lizard, anxious to find a passage of clear water through the barrier reef. The summit he hiked to check out his surroundings is known as Cooks Look. It's a challenging walk but hikers are rewarded with stunning views.

The waters below come in every shade of blue from aquamarine in the shallow lagoon to blue so intense that is almost black in

the deep depths of the Continental Shelf. While the island itself is lovely, the surrounding sea is one of the main attractions for visitors. Divers, snorkelers and game fishermen come here for the extraordinary marine life. The famous Cod Hole on the Ribbon Reefs is easily accessible from Lizard while the annual Black Marlin Classic (October) attracts sports fishermen from across the globe.

Blessed with a number of beaches, north facing Watson Bay has all the essential elements of paradise: gin-clear water concealing colourful coral and a giant clam garden, crescent of dazzling white sand, shady sheoak trees and an endlessly blue sky.

Lizard Island Resort has had a rough couple of years. Damaged in 2014 by Cyclone Ita then in 2015 by Cyclone Nathan, the resort is revamped and reopened. All suites and rooms have been fully refurbished with interiors by leading Australian interior design team Hecker Guthrie.

Anchor Bay Suites are merely a few barefoot steps to the beach while The Pavilion sits high on the point overlooking Sunset Beach with 270 degrees of Anchor Bay. The Villa is a new addition with two bedrooms, expansive deck overlooking Sunset Beach and an infinity plunge pool. Daily sunset and canapes delivered to The Villa are an indulgent precursor to exquisite dinners in Salt Water Restaurant. Simple and relaxed with ocean views of filtered by coconut palms and lush gardens, daily changing menus focus on fresh local produce. Driftwood Bar and Wine Cellar offers a wine list curated by Jeremy Oliver.

Prices start from AUD1699 per night (Beach View Room). Getting there: private charter flight from Cairns. lizardisland.com.au

Ditch the shoes and go barefoot on Bedarra Island

Beguiling barefoot-style Bedarra Island slips under the radar for many. Which is just the way those lucky 16 guests who managed to secure a villa like it. Just 10 km from mainland Australia, most guests stay at bespoke Bedarra Island Resort though there are also a handful of self-contained villas managed by Romantic Retreats.

Recognising the delicate environment within the Great Barrier Marine Park, private and intimate Bedarra Island Resort has a strong eco focus. Energy from the sun is captured in an off-grid hybrid solar system. Low-powered lighting and electrical appliances ensure the system is not overloaded while maintaining guest comfort. Pure cloud juice, otherwise known as rainwater, as well as underground spring water is stored in tanks, heated by the sun for guest bathrooms. An organic vegetable garden and orchard provide fresh produce in the kitchen.

Seclusion, solace and serenity abound at Bedarra where it's not unusual to walk along a beach with no-one else's footprints but your own. Hammocks are strung beachside between coconut palms where guests curl up with a favourite book for hours on end. Kayaks and SUP boards are an interesting way to explore the shoreline or there's dive and snorkel trips further afield. Or take a rainforest walk into the island's interior where birds and butterflies are abundant.

Split level Ocean View Villa is located high on the ridge with ocean views through the forest canopy while the two-storey Beach House is about as close as you can get to the beach without getting your feet wet. In case the azure sea is not inviting enough there's an infinity edge plunge pool on the deck. For ultimate privacy and indulgence check into The Point Villa with panoramic Hernandia Bay views, plunge pool and almost 120 square metres of indoor & outdoor spaces.

Prices start from AUD1090 per night (Ocean View Villa). Getting there: boat from Mission Beach bedarra.com.au

Romantic Retreats for loved up couples

Four luxurious love nests are dotted across Bedarra Island, all with ocean views, some with their own swimming pools (East Bedarra Island Retreat), despite being a few metres from fabulous swimming beaches. Bedarra Beach Villa (which is actually two separate villas) has two acres of private beachfront forest tumbling down to a white-sand beach. If you're hiding from the paparazzi (or the online world), this is the place to do it. Built on stilts atop the hill, Bedarra 360 Degrees captures views from every angle in every room while Bedarra Hideaway reflects the creativity of photographer owner Peter Lik. All reflecting different personalities of their individual owners, each villa is nothing less than fabulous.

Prices start from AUD 450 per night (Bedarra 360 Degrees). Getting there: boat from Mission Beach romanticretreats.com.au



(HELICOPTER EXCURSIONS ORGANISED BY HAGGERSTONE)

Unleash your inner Robinson Crusoe on Haggerstone Island

Daniel Defoe wrote a fictional autobiography based on an English castaway named Robinson Crusoe who spent 28 years on a remote tropical island. He may well have been talking of far-flung, remote Haggerstone Island.

Over 600 km north of Cairns and less than 10 km offshore, Haggerstone is a million miles away from life as most of us know it. The only passing traffic this far north on Cape York are fishing trawlers and the occasional cruising yacht. Here, days revolve around the setting of the sun and the rising of the tide. Idle starry evenings are spent watching clouds skitter across the moon. The only shoes required are reef booties for fossicking among the shallows at low tide.

Created from the jungle with the hands of two passionate adventurers, Haggerstone is an exclusive wilderness retreat that promises a unique castaway experience. Roy Turner was a frustrated shearer in Victoria, with a love of hunting, fishing and playing music before he followed his heart into the Papua New Guinea wilderness, hunting crocodiles and playing the guitar. Anna, an Englishwoman, was an accomplished potter who had visited Haggerstone on an earlier shipwreck hunting voyage with her father. They landed together on the uninhabited island in the mid 1980's with a barge load of building materials and heads full of dreams. Armed with meagre provisions, a few chickens, a tractor and building supplies they set about creating their own island paradise.

These days guests are welcomed to join Roy and Anna and their family in one of four charismatic huts. Each building is a work of abstract art with materials coming from the family's extensive travels or by utilising washed up flotsam and jetsam. It's rustic luxury at its most inventive. Where barefoot style is enhanced with the subtle sophistication of crystal glassware and fresh culinary delights

The Main House forms the central hub with a bar, library, dining area and observation deck. There's also a large stone fireplace

that's a popular spot for guests to congregate around with a glass of wine before or after dinner. Meals are influenced by whatever is ripe in the island garden along with whatever has been caught on daily fishing expeditions. Succulent reef fish, lobster, crab and prawns make regular appearances. Coconut palms provide a never ending source of fresh coconut milk and flesh which is used extensively.

House Mawu is the largest and most luxurious villa sitting on the hillside overlooking the lagoon. A central colossal driftwood centre pole supports a thatched roof. Barefoot, bleached and castaway, the Beach Hut is an open plan hut constructed mostly of driftwood washed up on the beach mere metres away. The Lagoon Hut blends into the forest that tumbled onto the beach. Polished floors and timber shutters open onto a wrap-around deck with ocean views.

Switch your watch onto 'island time', or better still leave it at home, and allow your inner Robinson Crusoe to emerge. Haggerstone Island offers the rare opportunity to cast yourself adrift from civilisation in a natural island playground.

Prices start from AUD1600 per night (Beach Hut) Getting there: Charter flight from Cairns to Hicks Island then by boat.
haggerstoneisland.com.au

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Fiona Harper

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