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## Escape and Indulge at Orpheus Island

by Fiona Harper



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Orpheus Island is the kind of place that welcomes you with open arms, daring you to not fall in love with her beguiling sun-drenched charms.

Exuding a laid back Aussie warmth thanks to passionate staff who happen to work in drop-dead gorgeous surroundings, there's an easy conviviality at Orpheus Island from the moment your helicopter lands on the beach.

### Eat

Food is serious business at Orpheus Island. No real surprise given its tropical island location within the fertile waters of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Gardening, even for the horticulturally challenged, is a piece of cake in tropical climes: poke a stick in the ground and there's a good chance shoots will sprout. Which means that Jen Truasheim is Orpheus Island's resident horticulturalist, finds herself residing in her own private Nirvana. Jen manages the fruit orchard, veggie patch and herb garden along with the resort gardens and landscaping. She's also chief chook handler, whom she fondly calls 'the girls'. The girls happily produce around 20 golden-yoked eggs daily from their free ranging habitat. Guests are the real winners though from Jen's passion. Head Chef Arie Prabowo (who honed his skills at Botanical restaurant in Melbourne) leads a culinary team encouraged to take full advantage of Jen's green thumbs. He's pretty skilled himself, having fulfilled a lifelong passion after 14 years working his way up the culinary food chain to take up the coveted position as Head Chef in 2011.

The menu changes daily depending on the seasons and Arie's particular inspiration. Expect to find delights such as 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. If you're lucky, you'll be served undoubtedly the best barramundi this writer has ever tasted: lightly charred (sweetly succulent, moist with a sliver of crisp, delicately spiced skin – the best!), served with crunchy asparagus, potato, goji berry, sorrel and coy crème fraiche. Then there is the deserts. Let's not even go there. Unless you want to find yourself salivating on your computer screen. Suffice to say, leave some room.

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. Don't like coriander? Don't worry your tastebuds won't be assaulted. Have a penchant for caramelised bananas dipped in chocolate? There's a pretty good chance they'll make an appearance. At least once. Probably more, each time prepared and served in a different guise. There's a good reason that Maggie Beer chooses to hold an annual Foodie Revolution Series at Orpheus – which is always sold out as soon as dates are announced.



### Stay

But it can't be all about the food. Can it? Any self-respecting island retreat should provide pretty comfortable lodgings and Orpheus delivers here too. Though admittedly not all rooms are equal. South Suites opened in July 2014 and are enormous. Kitted out in a modern beach house style, with whitewashed walls, plantation shutters, timber floors and a divine bathroom with double shower and a bathtub open to the skies. Perfect for romantic indulgence.

North Wing rooms all open onto vast grass shaded by coconut palms, connected by timber boardwalks. Rooms or suites can be booked individually or together making them a good choice for families or couples travelling together.

Such is the friendliness of Orpheus (guest name recognition is extraordinary) that it's likely that the people you met at dinner the previous night feel comfortable enough to pop by and say hi if you're lazing around your deck. It's a little bit like those beach house holidays of old, where neighbours chatted easily, lingering long enough to be friendly but not so much that they drank all your wine. Not that it really matters about the wine at Orpheus, as the mini bar comes fully stocked with beer and wine (included in the all-inclusive price)



### Play

Given the lazy sort of ambience that drifts comfortably over Orpheus Island as readily as a giant clam resting on the seabed (of which there are plenty thanks to a former clam research project), it would be easy to slip into a beachside hammock strung between coconut palms and curl up with a good book. Or just as enticing is a sun lounge on the deck beside an infinity edge pool that easily melds fresh and salt water playground. But I wouldn't recommend it. At least not for the entire day.

Orpheus Island stretches around 11 km in an elongated peanut in a shell kind of 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, brushed by gentle breezes. Beachcombers are unlikely to find a better beach for poking around on the windward side where flotsam and jetsam washed ashore from who knows where terminate their voyages in a crescent shaped cove facing Palm Island.

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 of your choice and head 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 (the word Gwandalan is derived from the original inhabitants the Manbarra people). It delivers. Using wild-harvested Australian and organic ingredients formulated into L'ITYA products, a former guest cottage has been converted into a sanctuary of total relaxation within a whisper of the beach.

It rarely gets more tranquil than this.

More information: Orpheus Island [www.orpheus.com.au](http://www.orpheus.com.au)

Getting there: By helicopter from Cairns or Townsville



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