

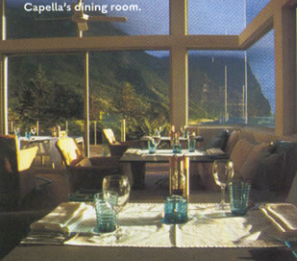
BAZAAR LIFESTYLE

TRAVEL

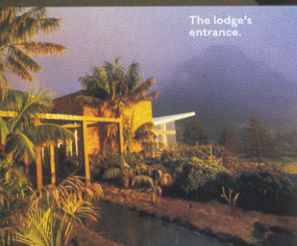


The view of Mount Lidgbird from Capella's deck.

Room with a view: Capella's dining room.



The lodge's entrance.



Luxe Lodgings

For your next holiday, why not stay home? Here, a quartet of the very best boutique accommodation options Australia has to offer.

CAPELLA LODGE

Just in case you have any doubts, Lord Howe Island is paradise, pure and simple. From the moment your aircraft wheels around the headland at the north end of the island, glides low over the opal swirl of the world's most southerly coral lagoon and dumps you down in the shadow of two cloud-hung volcanic peaks, you'll be in no doubt — paradise. Not your limpid, coconut-palm South Seas paradise perhaps, but an Australian version, with decent roads and a bowling club and mannerly traffic that observes the 25 kph speed limit.

But this was paradise unvarnished. For years, Lord Howe felt like the local RSL Club on prawn night, with a clientele to match, but lately things have been hotting up. First to enliven the island's accommodation scene was Trader Nicks, now Arajilla, which underwent a renaissance several years ago to become a sassy synthesis of Thai, barefoot and tropical.

Latest makeover is Capella Lodge, which sits on a ridge in a premier position towards the southern end of the island. Small, sleek and relaxed — all the good adjectives apply here. There are just nine rooms, which come in either one-storey or loft style, with the same beach house-inspired decor as the rest of the lodge, but it's the view that matters. From the deck at the front of the lodge, the ground drops away into pastures that glissade down to the blond beach at Lovers Bay with the massive, cloud-scraping green buttresses of Mount Lidgbird in the foreground.

With scenery like this, it's hard to pay attention to what's on your plate, but Damien Sawyer, Capella's young chef, has made his customers do just that with a menu that brings a light but inspired touch to the local seafood. In particular, Sawyer works wonders with the yellowfin tuna that he gets straight off the back of the local fishing boats.

The engineer behind Capella is the energetic and imaginative James Baillie, who completely reworked Lizard Island while he was managing director of P&O Australian Resorts, transforming it into the finest of all our islands, adored by the international arbiters of resort chic. Like Lizard, the recipe for Capella is essentially simple: take a sensational piece of planet Earth, install stylish and relaxed accommodation that glories in its natural surroundings while intruding as lightly as possible on its natural values, lie back and say aaah!

What to do? Walk, swim, golf, fish, dive — a happy procession of four-letter activities that will leave you sapped of breath on the island's sharp hills, but more often open-mouthed and marvelling at the wonder of it all. Everywhere there are small marvels, whether it's the white terns that arrow through the Norfolk Island pines just down from the wharf, or discovering that the red fruit hanging from the shrubs all over the island is the cherry guava — small, delicious and free for the plucking. The hiking is sensational and varied, the diving is sublime and they say that after a day out fishing on Lord Howe Island, you might as well hang up your rod because nowhere else will ever come close.

MICHAEL GEBICKI

One of the lodge's bedrooms.



Stuffed squid.



One of the single-storey rooms.



TRAVEL NOTES

PO Box 596, Avalon NSW 2107,
phone (02) 9918 4355;
capella@lordhowe.com;
www.lordhowe.com.au