

The Howe factor

WORDS **CARL ROE** PHOTOGRAPHY **CAROLINE WEST**

Kayaking, diving, spectacular hiking – remote and pristine Lord Howe Island is only as laid-back as you want it to be.



From Mount Eliza, looking towards North Beach and Mount Lidgbird (left) and Mount Gower

FOR THE INTREPID TRAVELLER, Lord Howe Island is more likely to evoke images of genteel conversation and dignified strolls than of high adventure. It's a destination where sprawling resorts are banned and visitor numbers limited, a place with a 25km/h speed limit, no mobile phones and no nightlife after 9pm. But do not be deceived. Lurking behind its sleepy facade is a world-class outdoor playground, guaranteed to revive (or kick-start) a love of exploring – and it's less than two hours' flight from Brisbane or Sydney.

Walking is the best way to explore the 11km length of this World Heritage listed gem. Even a short stroll can provide big rewards. Take an hour to climb Malabar Hill. Atop the vertigo-inducing sea cliffs, red-tailed tropicbirds scud by so close they almost smudge your camera lens. Or perhaps a

stroll to the wreck site of the RAAF Catalina flying boat that crashed in 1948. There are more options to stretch your legs than you can poke a walking stick at, including one of Australia's best day walks, the ascent of Mount Gower.

THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY to the 875m-high summit of Mount Gower – the hard way. The Everest of Lord Howe challenges all who make the eight-hour pilgrimage. A guide is required and the king of the mountain is Jack Shick, a fifth-generation islander with more than 1000 climbs. Traversing a fearsome cliff along a precarious path above a 100m drop is not in the brochure, nor is hauling yourself up near-vertical slopes with a rope, so bring an adventurous spirit. Between March and September enjoy the comedy stylings of providence petrels, soaring noisily on updrafts >