

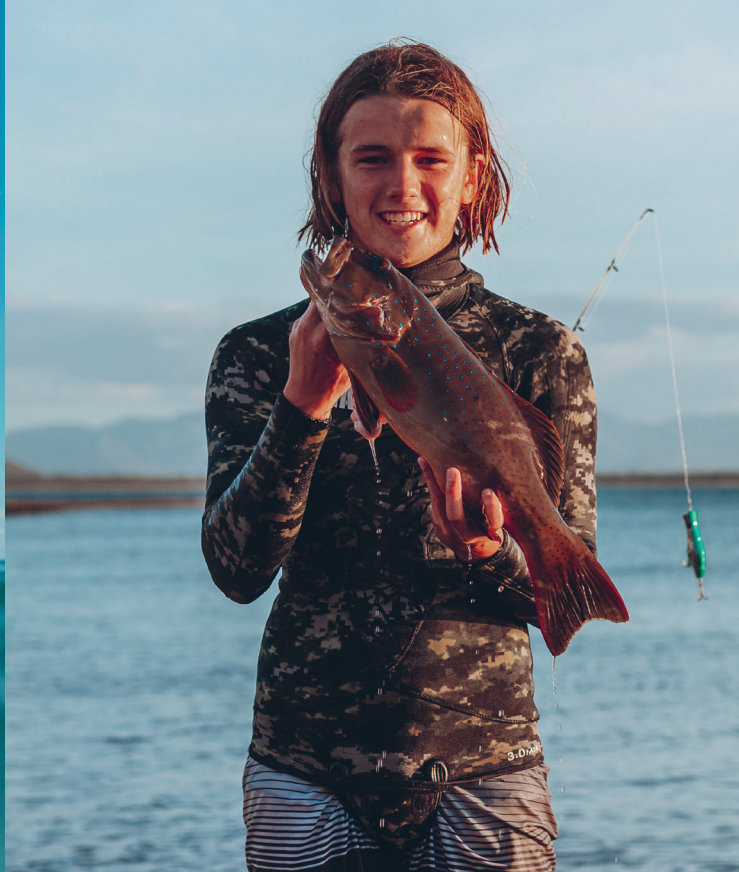
# AN island OF your OWN

*Booking a private  
island in the  
Whitsundays ensures  
an unforgettable  
multi-generation holiday*

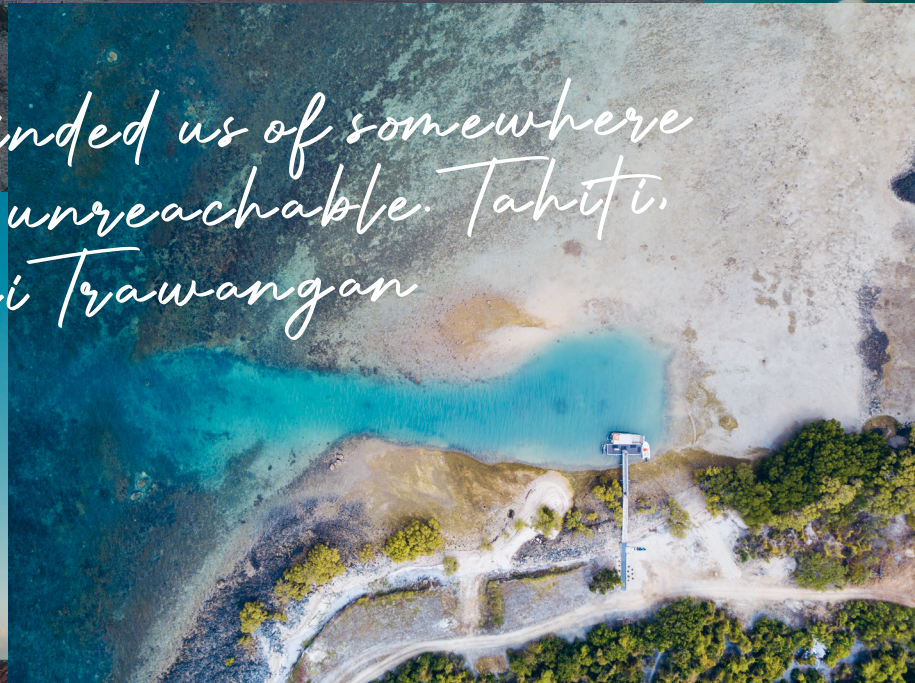
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Camp Island lies at the less touristy northern end of the Whitsundays archipelago.





*The villas reminded us of somewhere glamorous and unreachable. Tahiti, perhaps, or Gili Trawangan*



*We left the island recharged and sun-kissed, familial bonds strengthened*



Family time – relaxing or on the water – is a prized catch of a stay on Camp Island.





Family holidays get tricky when the kids stop being kids. It happens fast. All of a sudden your tottering toddlers have phones and jobs and ideas of their own. One day you wake up and the little butterball who once rode on your shoulders is wearing your shoes and planning to drive across the Nullarbor. You realise family holidays are on a time limit. And the time to take them is now.

Which is how we ended up – nine kin, aged 13-82 – standing on a mangrove tide flat near Bowen with our city luggage and 15 bags of groceries waiting for our hosts or a crocodile to show up. “Absolutely there could be crocs in this area,” our driver assured us before taking off with a cheery wave. Ah, Queensland. It seemed a good time to crack a beer.

None of us were thrown by the unconventional start as my dad had planned the trip and his fondness for surprises and adventure is legendary. The kids assumed we’d be camping and experiencing nature’s splendour up close but thankfully Camp Island is not well named. Instead of air beds and pit toilets, we’d have to make do with award-winning waterfront villas, polished timber floors and a spacious dining area wrapped in decking and strung with hammocks.

We arrived by tender boat at sunset and celebrated our good fortune. The villas, clustered 10 metres from the tide line on the island’s south side, reminded us of somewhere glamorous and currently unreachable. Tahiti, perhaps, or Gili Trawangan. Dad had gone big or become soft, we weren’t sure which but it played well across the ages. We slept like angels that evening aloft in king-sized beds, lulled to sleep by a chorusing Coral Sea.

The Whitsundays can be experienced in many ways but Camp offers a singular combination of remoteness and comfort. The small island – just 17.5 hectares – is mainly national park and the accommodation can only be booked as a complete package. In other words you get the entire island. If you have the bucks you can chopper in and have a chef prepare your meals. Or else arrive by boat and self-cater, which takes a bit more organising, but at around \$225 a head is much better value.

So what’s it like to have an island of your own but not be in charge of its upkeep? Fabulous. You start the day whenever you like and let the weather dictate your movements. High tide and no wind? The water will be magic for snorkelling off Coral Beach. Low tide and south wind? Perfect for hitching the breeze to Sandy Beach on a paddle-board. Afternoon clouds and a hint of rain? Tennis by the pool or an exploratory walk to spot wallabies and add a rock to the cairn on the island’s small summit. And always on every tide and in every wind there is the fishing.

While the Whitsundays may be better known for snorkelling and sailing, it is also a red hot destination for anglers. Prized catches include coral trout, grassy sweetlip, emperor, tuskfish, queenfish and various pelagic in season. Camp Island would be a great place to teach a youngster to cast, but it is even better place to bring teenagers who are already keen and able. During our four day stay, the adults barely fished; while the offspring barely stopped. They fished over rocks, over coral and over sand; from boat, land, jetty or kayak; at dawn, midday, dusk and at night.

By day two we no longer questioned their whereabouts and just assumed they’d turn up on dark with something wet and delicious. Each evening meal became an event which began with sunset drinks at Coral Beach. There was Spanish mackerel we had freshly sushimied and later cooked in lime juice, ceviche-style. The coral trout were filleted and portioned into bite-sized chunks, dusted in flour, flash-fried and paired with roast vegies and a plucky Tasmanian sauvignon blanc. For an afternoon snack oyster lovers could wander down to the rocks with a shucking knife and a cold beer, plonk in the shallows and feast under the winter sun.

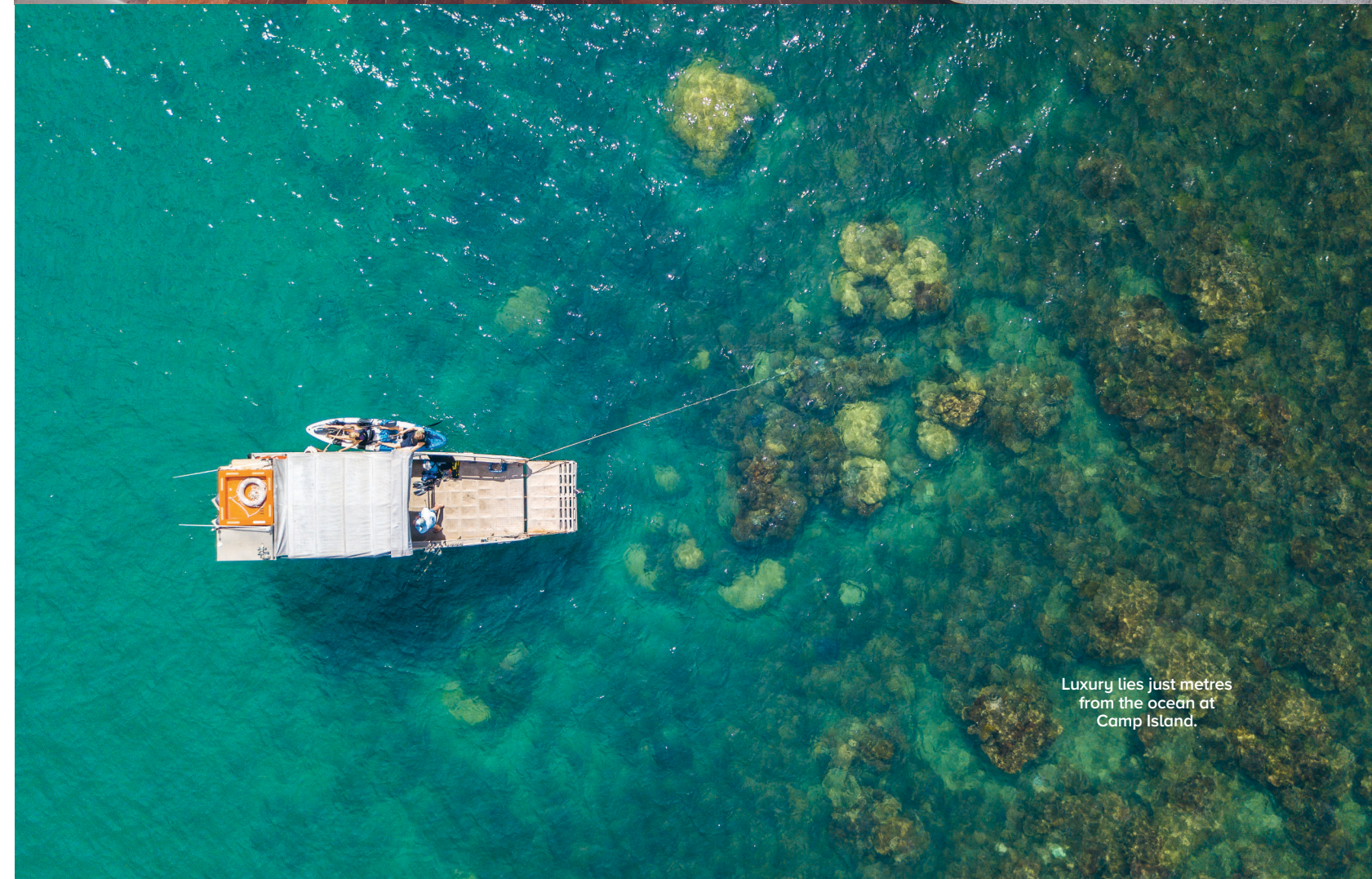
## ESCAPE ROUTE

Camp Island lies like a sleeping manta ray at the northern end of the Whitsundays, roughly halfway between Townsville and Airlie Beach. Rates start at \$1800 a night (for the entire island). To get there fly to Proserpine and take a pre-arranged bus which will also collect your groceries and supplies. The bus drops you at Guthalunga where a complimentary boat takes you across to the island in about 20 minutes. Or else you fly to Townsville and arrive via helicopter. Bring reef boots and adventure sandals (and limes to squeeze over all the fish you catch).

[campisland.com.au](http://campisland.com.au)

There is no souvenir shop on Camp Island but we all left with a full collection of sensory memories. The brittle textures and smashed crockery sound of walking on piles of coral. The tang of fresh fish and lime juice. The explosion of colour as the sun set over the jagged Cape Upstart mountain range. The feel of salt drying and stretching your skin under a fat winter sun. The revelation that 26 degrees is the perfect temperature for human habitation.

There were milestones too. Our youngest caught his first proper fish and whipped me at tennis. I was thrilled to see my dad, who’s been unable to surf since he had both knees replaced with titanium, take to the ocean again on a stand-up paddle board. We learnt to play the Danish throwing game Finska and how to fillet a Spanish mackerel. The TV wasn’t turned on once and phone zombies didn’t appear. We left the island recharged and sun-kissed, familial bonds strengthened, ready for whatever the world would throw at us. Behind us the Great Barrier Reef and a holiday to remember.



Luxury lies just metres from the ocean at Camp Island.