



#ISLANDLIFE  
#QUEENSLAND

# Secret of the Whitsundays

Done Hamilton, Hayman and Daydream? Here's the private island in the Whitsundays you've never heard of. *By Belinda Jackson*

I

N THE EARLY MORNING LIGHT, our helicopter swings over petite Camp Island and the six small structures that make up its resort. When we land, there's no check-in desk, no formal dining room, no compulsory fun. The 'bar' is around the firepit where G&Ts are sipped at sundown, the restaurant is the table on the wide verandah facing the bay, and the kids' club is the beach, the pool, the kayaks and the bushland tracks, where skinks roam and sprawling trees are waiting to be climbed over or picnicked beneath.

This slip of land in the Coral Sea is three kilometres from Australia's mainland at Guthalungra, halfway between Airlie Beach and Townsville. And despite what its name suggests, there are no tents to be found.

It's a different kind of luxury to the big-name island resorts that surround – you could boat out from the mainland with the island's on-site managers Pete



and Lizzie and self-cater for your stay. Alternatively, for a splash of travel bling, take a helicopter from Townsville (as we do), then go one step further and let the private chef take over the kitchen.

This is a place for those who don't like to share. There are no day-trippers, and when you make a reservation, you're booking the entire island.

#### BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME

Catherine Ball is one of three Brisbane couples who banded together to buy the island in 2017. The day of the inspection, the sun was shining, the sea was sparkling, dolphins leapt in the bay. Then, the whales turned up.

"It was the whales that sealed the deal," Catherine admits, and the group bought the island of their dreams for \$1.35 million, before undertaking a full refit and refurbishment. In 2019, Camp went into a soft opening as the owners tested their island holidays on lucky friends and family; it's now fully open to those who know of its existence.

The centrepiece of the resort is the communal lodge, a timber Queenslander

filled with a dining table, library and deep lounges, the doors opening to wide patios slung with hammocks and tension-dissolving views of Abbot Bay. Nearby, the open-air kitchen's water views and smart styling are a natural hub, and we automatically pull stools up to its benches, mixing long, cool drinks while the barbie heats up to grill the day's catch. Surrounding the lodge are four accommodation villas with ensuites, angled so you don't have to leave bed for a sea view.

The resort, with its tennis court and pool, covers about one-fifth of the island. The remainder is protected wilderness, an offshoot of the Cape Upstart National Park on the mainland. The reserve also lends its name to the resort's sturdy barge, *Little Upstart*, which Pete and Lizzie use to take us fishing, crabbing and visiting the secluded beaches and inlets that surround.

#### ISLAND IDYLL

Despite its name promising visions of cheesy '70s beach clubs, the white-sand Coconut Beach is empty when we arrive, save an army of tiny blue soldier crabs who skitter across the sand at the sound

of our footfalls. Anchoring the barge, it's straight in the water for a cooling dip before unloading our canoes to paddle the bay. The afternoon is spent snorkelling off the island's shore through the coral gardens of Camp Reef, before Pete brings down a bucket and chisel and hands them to me.

If you want to indulge any castaway fantasies, the island will oblige. We chip oysters off the rocks for an entrée, snag a mackerel destined for panko crumbs and a hot pan, and the crab pots we dropped in the fecund, mangrove-lined waters of Elliott River make a mud-crab dinner a certainty.

Late in the afternoon, as the sun is setting over the blunt bluff of Cape Upstart, we walk the island's spine, startling the resident mob of wallabies, who flit away into the shadows. A narrow track takes us down to the island's tail, long and tapered at low tide.

Standing at the very end of the point, the tide turns and the warm waters of the incoming waves begin to cover my feet. My footprints fill with water and dissolve, as does the tip of the island. It's as though the Coral Sea wants to keep Camp Island among its secrets. 🌊

#### TRAVEL FACTS

##### GETTING THERE

Boat transfers from the mainland are included in your stay, departing from Guthalungra – midway between Proserpine and Airlie Beach. Otherwise, Townsville Helicopters offers chopper transfers from \$2,295 one way for up to three people. [townsvillehelicopters.com.au](http://townsvillehelicopters.com.au)

##### STAYING THERE

Camp Island sleeps eight adults in four villas, with up to five children in addition. Stays cost from \$1,800 a night (self-catering), including transfers. [campisland.com.au](http://campisland.com.au)

##### DINING THERE

Self-cater or book Camp's private chef, who specialises in sustainable seafood, to organise all meals.

OPENING SPREAD, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Camp Island's lodge, glimpsed from a chopper © Tourism and Events Queensland; sunset at the lodge © TEQ; arriving in style © Belinda Jackson; a guest bedroom. OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM LEFT: The lodge comes with plenty of perches to enjoy sea views; flying over the island's mangroves; G&T time beside the fire. All images © Belinda Jackson. THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Helicopter flights from Townsville to Camp Island take you over Cape Cleveland © Belinda Jackson; Satellite Island © Tourism Tasmania; Haggerstone Island © TEQ; Gabo Island © Parks Victoria; Bedarra Island © TEQ. ICON: Pro/Symbols/Noun Project



#### FOUR OTHER PRIVATE AUSSIE ISLANDS



##### Satellite Island, TAS

In between Bruny Island and the Tassie mainland, Satellite Island's boathouse whispers of languid afternoons spent dangling toes in cool waters, and evenings spent stargazing from bed. The island can sleep eight in its summer house, boathouse and bell tent. From \$2,420 a night, two guests. [satelliteisland.com.au](http://satelliteisland.com.au)



##### Haggerstone Island, QLD

Impossibly remote, Haggerstone is the most northerly resort in the Great Barrier Reef, closer to Port Moresby than it is to Cairns. It sleeps just 10 guests in Robinson Crusoe-esque hideaways scattered among a coconut forest. From \$7,200 a night. [haggerstoneisland.com.au](http://haggerstoneisland.com.au)



##### Gabo Island, VIC

A 30-minute boat ride from Mallacoota on the VIC-NSW border, the lightkeeper's cottage on Gabo sleeps eight and was built to service the pink granite lighthouse constructed here in the 1850s. Climb to the top of Victoria's last operating island lighthouse to spot whales. From \$352.50 a night. [parks.vic.gov.au](http://parks.vic.gov.au)



##### Bedarra Island, QLD

Twelve villas, 45 hectares of tropical rainforest and a beach for every villa – what's not to love about Bedarra? With a maximum of 24 guests and free-flowing champagne, a total buy-out of the luxury resort off the coast from Mission Beach costs from \$25,000 a night, with a five-night minimum. [bedarra.com.au](http://bedarra.com.au)