

# ESCAPE

Edited by  
ELIZA O'HARE

## THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN WEEKEND

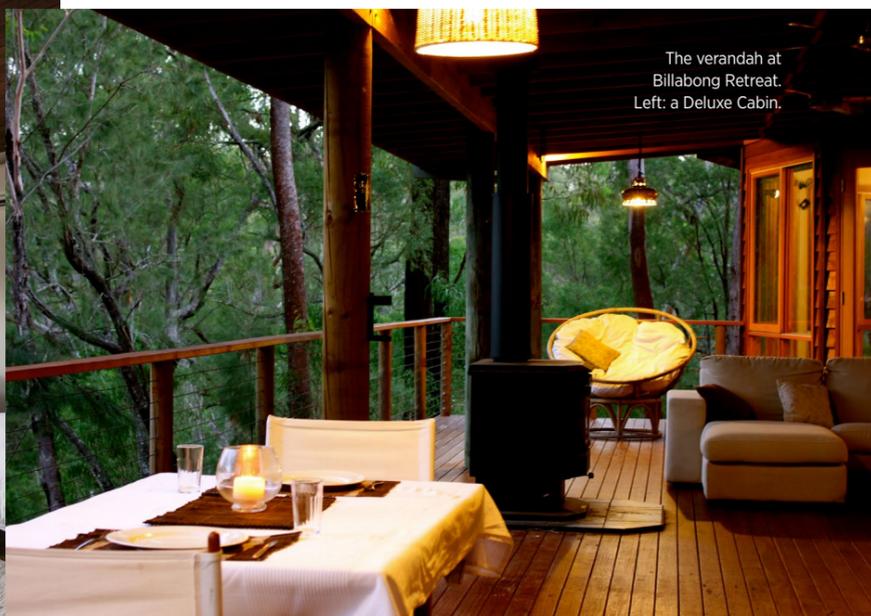
*BAZAAR explores  
the country's most  
luxurious getaways*

COURTESY OF PRETTY BEACH HOUSE

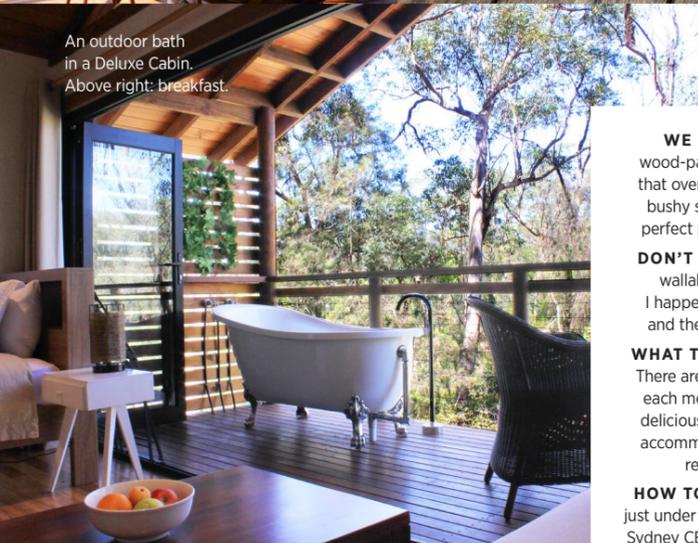
Pretty Beach House on the  
New South Wales Central Coast.



The verandah at Billabong Retreat. Left: a Deluxe Cabin.



An outdoor bath in a Deluxe Cabin. Above right: breakfast.



## Billabong Retreat

Six hours before I head to Billabong Retreat, I accidentally smash my iPhone on the unforgiving concrete platform at Clovelly beach. After 10 seconds of therapeutic swearing, I decide to take this as a sign, book my device into an Apple store for repair and leave it there, banished, for the weekend. It's not as if the staff at the yoga retreat, an eco resort in Maraylya near the Hawkesbury River, about an hour's drive from Sydney CBD, exactly encourage the use of phones anyway. Pre-arrival notes tell you devices aren't allowed in public areas, there's no Wi-Fi, alcohol is "strongly discouraged", and if you want to smoke you'll be doing it in the car park. But that's about as bossy as it gets (read: not very, compared with other, more hardcore detox retreats). Everything here is gentle

**WE LOVE** the airy, wood-panelled yoga room that overlooks the retreat's bushy surrounds. It's the perfect place to de-stress.

**DON'T MISS** the resident wallaby and echidna. I happened to spot both, and they were adorable.

**WHAT TO EAT** Everything. There are limited options at each mealtime, but it's all delicious and the staff can accommodate any dietary requirements.

**HOW TO GET THERE** It's just under an hour's drive from Sydney CBD. They also offer a subsidised taxi pick-up from Vineyard station at 2pm. Trains depart Central on the Western Richmond line at 12.55pm; guests are returned to Vineyard station for the 1.15pm train weekdays (1.35pm on Sundays). Station pick-ups must be booked and cost \$10 each way.

Billabong Retreat, 41 McClymonts Road, Maraylya, New South Wales, (02) 4573 6080, billabongretreat.com.au.

and nourishing, from the yoga classes (the instructors are very experienced, but the skill level is fine for beginners), to the magnesium aqua-therapy outdoor swimming pool, to the seasonal vegetarian comfort food. And rest assured, no one will bang on your cabin door to make sure you're at 7am yoga, although given that your evenings will likely consist of a relaxing stroll by the billabong (yes, there is an actual billabong, scattered with picturesque lotus flowers, no less) followed by an outdoor bath in the tub on your deck, getting up for some easy flow in the morning won't be a problem.

The days here follow a reassuring rhythm: morning yoga, followed by breakfast (think chia porridge or frittata and, yes, coffee if you want), and a themed workshop starting at 9am (in my case it was mindfulness). At 11am there's personal time (now's the moment to swim in the pool, get a facial or massage at the spa, or read in the relaxation hut by the billabong), followed by lunch (vegetable bake and delicious salads), more yoga at 3.30pm (only if you want to), dinner at 6pm (ratatouille and a salad with avocado and mint dressing), and then either meditation or a movie at 7.30pm. I am living proof that once you follow two days of this schedule you won't know yourself. And you certainly won't care about your smartphone. — Clare Maclean

STEVE BACK; ALISON IZZO; COURTESY OF LIZARD ISLAND; ANDY SOLO

## Lizard Island

Some might say if you've seen one tropical island paradise you've seen them all, but Lizard Island in far, far north Queensland defies comparison. The resort may have taken its time to reopen after an extensive refurbishment post-Cyclone Ita in 2014, but after calling this place home for just three nights, I think it's safe to say it was worth the wait.

Comprising 10 square kilometres on the northern end of the Great Barrier Reef, Lizard Island is closer to Port Moresby than it is to Brisbane. Such is the remoteness of this five-star resort that staff regularly ignore the weather forecasts for (relatively) nearby Cooktown, happily (or is that smugly?) noting that regardless of what the weatherman says, it's usually nothing but blue skies and sunshine.

An all-inclusive accommodation package can often equate to sub-par food and drink, but every meal at Salt Water restaurant was fresh, perfectly prepared and delicious — without falling into clichéd hotel comfort-food territory. Wine snobs needn't worry, either: the extensive international list, by sommelier and wine critic Jeremy Oliver, makes for exciting reading and drinking.

If you want to walk off all the gluttony, I recommend getting up early (read: before 6am) to tackle the two-kilometre walk/hike across Lizard Island's grasslands and mangroves to Cook's Look. It's a high-pumping 359-metre ascent up often sheer



The Pavilion, Lizard Island.

**WE LOVE** the seclusion. There are virtually zero day visitors to the island, and service is attentive but discreet, so it's perfect for those who like their privacy. The small number of guests and the policy of no children under 10 (except during July and September school holidays, when 6-12-year-olds are catered for) ensures you'll always have at least one of the island's 20-odd beaches to yourself, all of which feature countless #nofilter 'gram opportunities.

**DON'T MISS** the sea critters. Snorkellers and scuba divers equally will get up close with the otherworldly coral and fish at Ribbon No. 10 Reef, thanks to the crystal-clear waters of the Coral Sea. However, it was the Cod Hole — home to a family of disconcertingly large potato cod — that proved the most impressive dive spot.

**WHAT TO EAT** Degustation dinners are ubiquitous at most five-star resorts, but Lizard's offering is unique thanks to an unparalleled level of personalisation. A seven-course menu with matching wines is designed from scratch to accommodate your every culinary desire by the restaurant's executive chef, Mark Jensen, guaranteeing that every course is a winner.

**HOW TO GET THERE** A 60-minute flight northwest from Cairns provides postcard-perfect views over the Great Barrier Reef. Keep your camera close so you can snap the Island's Blue Lagoon on approach.

Lizard Island, Queensland, lizardisland.com.au.

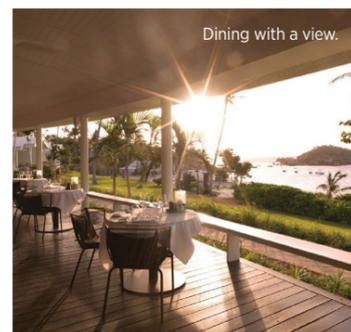


One of several pristine beaches on the island.

pink-granite rock faces to the top, the very spot to which Captain Cook climbed in 1770 to navigate safe passage through the treacherous reef. A hit of history and serious cardio burn, all before breakfast.

To kick-start your weekend of relaxation, I strongly suggest making an early visit to the Essentia Day Spa, which exclusively uses Parisian La Bioesthetique products. There are myriad treatments to choose from, but I can vouch for the Island Essence — a head-to-toe treatment that starts with a moisturising foot mask, continues to a deep-tissue back massage and finishes with a hair treatment/scalp massage combo that almost sent me to sleep (in a good way).

Each of the 40 rooms on Lizard Island has been decorated in the same cortisol-busting blend of Scandi-meets-beach-chic style, but The Pavilion suite is the one you want to book. Sitting atop a cliff overlooking the resort, the one-bedroom loft-style apartment offers 270-degree views that will impress even the most seasoned island-hopper. Look west to Sunset Beach for the perfect sunset-over-water vista, straight ahead to nearby Osprey Island, or spin east to take in the boat-spotted turquoise expanse of Anchor Bay. Whichever way you look at it, it's all good. — Alison Izzo



Dining with a view.



The Mirage Villa at Sheraton Grand Mirage Resort, and below.



Gold Coast



The main pool area at Pretty Beach House.



Pol Roger champagne and (below) Italian cuisine.



Sometimes, life calls for a lazy seaside holiday with all the trimmings, and when it does, you can count on the Gold Coast's Sheraton Grand Mirage Resort to deliver. The city's only five-star beachfront establishment doesn't muck about. From the moment you enter the gleaming white lobby — replete with ocean views and an indoor waterfall — it's clear this place epitomises a certain kind of Gold Coast glamour: one that has less to do with understatement than, say, six hectares of manicured tropical gardens, Grecian-style sculptures ("Is that Poseidon?" my husband asks) and turquoise 'lagoon' pools. If it sounds a touch over the top, that's the point. Just try feeling stressed when you're knocking back piña colodas in these surrounds. The picture-perfect landscape offers exactly what we're after: pure escapism. (And, of course, a swim-up bar.)

**WE LOVE** long walks along Main Beach, and lazing by the pool.

**DON'T MISS** afternoon drinks and ocean views at Pearls Bar.

**WHAT TO EAT** Broadbeach has some of the city's best restaurants, including Mamasan, Moo Moo and Social Eating House. At the resort, try seafood at Terraces restaurant.

**HOW TO GET THERE** Direct flights to the Gold Coast depart from most Australian capital cities.

*Sheraton Grand Mirage Resort, 71 Sea World Drive, Main Beach, Gold Coast, sheratongrandmiragegoldcoast.com.*

Constructed in the 1980s, the hotel, located on the Southport Spit, has recently undergone a multimillion-dollar facelift. We're staying in one of the new Mirage Villas, with two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a spacious lounge, balcony and kitchen. Cool blue and grey fabrics, combined with pale timber, give the suite a light, airy feel. The beach is just metres from our door.

The resort has several dining options (Pearls Bar is the spot for drinks served with a spectacular water vista), but really, it's all about the seafood buffet. We've been told the spread at Terraces, the main restaurant, is "iconic" on the Gold Coast, and discover a crowd of locals and tourists has descended on a Friday evening to taste their way through every oyster/octopus/ocean thing on the menu. It's not a task for the faint of heart — or palate — but if you have the stamina to devour plate after plate of aquatic fare (oh, and some Asian- and Western-style dishes), the rewards are rich. (Sometimes a little too rich for those who lose all sense of portion-control/decorum; it turns out there is such a thing as too many prawns.)

The next night, we head to Broadbeach — a 15-minute drive from the resort — for dinner at Mamasan. Chef Ray Choi (previously at Sydney's China Doll) has crafted the Southeast Asian-inspired menu, with must-try dishes including crab ravioli dumplings and crispy Mamasan KFC (Korean Fried Chicken) wings served with "almond snow". Around us, chatty diners fill the moody, low-lit space, which features Wishbone chairs, concrete floors and industrial lighting. The atmosphere is polished, approachable and a whole lot of fun. Just like the Gold Coast itself. — *Jessica Matthews*

ANDREW KRUCKO

## Pretty Beach House

From the moment we enter this luxurious home away from home and are greeted at the front door with a glass of Pol Roger champagne, all of life's stresses recede. This intimate and relaxing kid-free zone, nestled among bushland on the Bouddi Peninsula, epitomises laidback luxury.

The main mud-brick and sandstone building wraps around a central infinity pool and a dramatically gnarled eucalypt. We are welcomed into the open-plan kitchen, from which waft aromas of the most delicious lunch being prepared for our arrival by chef Dean Jones. We take advantage of the well-stocked open bar and wine cellar, and move into the dining room to eat. Little do we know, this is only the beginning of our never-ending culinary feast over our weekend stay. To start, we are treated to homemade panini and our choice of wine, which never runs dry, followed by a share plate of local fish with a citrus salad. Somehow we manage to squeeze in the most decadent orange cake for dessert. Works by Sidney Nolan and John Olsen look down on us.

There are only four guesthouses at Pretty Beach House, and we are lucky enough to stay in the penthouse, Treetops Pavilion. After lunch, and a delivery of more champagne and a cheeseboard to our suite, we decide to test the oversized copper bath, with its breathtaking view of the treetops and bay, and the balcony and fire pit. We hold off on collapsing onto the world's comfiest bed to explore the grounds, taking in the Aboriginal rock engravings dating back more than 8000 years.

The main attraction here, however, is dinner. Downstairs in the library, we are treated to freshly shucked oysters to start, a martini and a dreamy sunset backdrop before we even sit down to the five-course degustation with matching wines.

Throughout our stay we are spoilt for choice with what to do, eat and drink, and how to relax next. This is an idyllic escape, and one weekend is not enough. — *Alexandra Rushton*

ANSON SMART

**WE LOVE** that it's all-inclusive — but chic.

**DON'T MISS** the bushwalk through Bouddi National Park to Tallow Beach. The team organises everything you need, including a picnic.

**WHAT TO EAT** Everything you can, from the homemade pastries and granola at breakfast to the degustation dinner with matched wines. Head to nearby sister property Bells at Killcare to savour its culinary delights (transfers are included in your stay).

**GETTING THERE** Pretty Beach is a 90-minute drive from Sydney. You can also travel via seaplane or helicopter.

*Pretty Beach House, 83 High View Road, Pretty Beach, New South Wales, (02) 4360 1933, prettybeachhouse.com.*



The dining room. Above: the lounge.

