

FINANCIAL REVIEW

The perfect Christmas gift: an escape for the whole clan

With accommodation booked out months in advance, play the long game and give the family an experience everyone can look forward to.



Capella Lodge is the place to stay on subtropical Lord Howe Island, home to forests, beaches, fields and the twin peaks of Mount Gower and Mount Lidgbird.

Ute Junker

Nov 27, 2020 – 11.56am

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Add it to the long list of COVID-19 changes: the last-minute escape is officially a thing of the past. If you want to get the gang together, these days you need to plan ahead. With [overseas travel still off the cards](#), we have thrown ourselves into [holidaying at home](#) so enthusiastically that across the country, accommodation is booked out months in advance. So this Christmas, give the family something to look forward to: the chance to get the whole clan together next year in your own private patch of paradise. Whether you want to escape to the country or fall asleep watching the waves roll in, these retreats provide the perfect setting for a joyous family reunion.

Injidup Bay House

Yallingup, Western Australia



Enjoy endless water views at Injidup Bay House in Yallingup in Western Australia's Margaret River region.

Looking for a holiday as Australian as smashed avocado on toast and lorikeets squabbling noisily in a tree? Memories filled with the scent of sea air and eucalypt, early-morning surfs and evening barbecues? Then welcome to Injidup Bay House, a six-bedder with endless water views perched on one of Margaret River's most scenic bays.

If you are feeling energetic, you can fill your days with the best the area has to offer: not just the [region's famous wineries](#), but also beaches to swim and surf at and some fantastic hikes (the Cape To Cape Track winds its way virtually past your door). However, we are fairly confident you will end up spending quite a bit of time exploring closer to home. This sprawling beach compound contains plenty of delights – have fun finding the hidden door that leads to the poker room and temperature-controlled wine cellar.

TO BOOK From \$7895 for a three-night stay. See privateproperties.com.au

The Thomas

St Kilda, Melbourne



The roof deck of The Thomas in St Kilda offers magnificent city views.

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Let's be honest: sometimes, a little bit of space goes a long way. Spending time with your loved ones is a wonderful thing, to be sure, but being thrown together like puppies piled into a basket is rarely a recipe for harmony. Give yourself the gift of space – and room for the occasional strategic retreat – at The Thomas, a spectacular seven-bedroom holiday home in St Kilda comprising three apartments, including a three-storey penthouse.

In fact, if you're looking for a Together Alone holiday, this converted menswear store hits the spot. With the joys of St Kilda – not to mention the rest of the city – spread at your feet, there are plenty of ways to while away the day. After a morning dip in the pool, you might choose a mix of laneway wandering and gallery hopping, beach strolls and cafe stops. Head back in the evening to share the day's adventures in the courtyard, on the terrace or – most spectacularly – on the roof deck with its magnificent city views.

TO BOOK From \$3485 a night. See luxico.com.au

Capella Lodge

Lord Howe Island



Beach-shack chic meets impeccable food and service at Lord Howe Island's Capella Lodge. **Julian Kingma**

Welcome to life in the slow lane – literally. The speed limit on Lord Howe Island is 25 km/h, not that you will find many vehicles reaching that velocity. On this laid-back island 700 kilometres off Australia's east coast, most of the 300 residents get around by bicycle – which is also one of the best ways to appreciate the many charms of this subtropical island with its forests, beaches, fields and twin peaks of Mount Gower and Mount Lidgbird.

The place to stay is [Capella Lodge](#), a nine-room haven run by Baillie Lodges, which also runs Longitude 131° at Uluru. The natural textures and neutral tones deliver beach-shack chic while, as with all Baillie properties, the food and service are impeccable. Depending on your mood, the day's adventures could include a hike up Mount Gower, a picnic on Ned's Beach, a snorkel trip out to Comet's Hole – Lord Howe is home to the world's most southerly coral reef – or a spot of beachcombing.

TO BOOK Indicative rates for a buyout are \$69,000 for up to 20 people for a minimum three nights. Includes breakfast, sunset drinks and canapes, dinner and open bar from 6pm daily. See capellalodge.com.au

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Mahu Whenua

Wanaka, New Zealand



Mahu Whenua boasts million-dollar mountain and lake views.

The kitchen at Mahu Whenua is the kitchen of your dreams. It is not just the rustic stone walls, the open fireplace, the jaw-dropping views – or even the jar of freshly baked biscuits that sits on the counter. The best thing about this kitchen is that you never need to use it: there is always someone standing by to make you a coffee or rustle up some eggs.

Built as a home for pop star Shania Twain and her then-husband, record producer Robert “Mutt” Lange, this five-room luxury lodge sitting high above Wanaka is wonderfully indulgent and utterly home-y. Service is attentive but relaxed, and there is always something to do. Take the horses out for a ride, book a chopper flight to a nearby mountain peak, pack a picnic to enjoy at one of the many scenic spots on the 55,000-hectare property – or simply laze around in the inviting living area, where more of those million-dollar mountain and lake views unfurl in front of you. If you do head out, don’t be late for dinner – the three-course meals are superb.

TO BOOK From \$NZ10,500 (\$9900) a night for exclusive use (based on 10 guests). Includes all meals prepared by in-house chef, pre-dinner canapes, non-alcoholic beverages and Wi-Fi. See mahuwhenua.co.nz/

Tidemark

Mermaid Beach, Queensland



The beach is on your doorstep at Tidemark and almost every room has views of the water.

If you appreciate a touch of drama, you are going to love arriving at Tidemark. Step past the sandstone feature wall and you are greeted by dramatic stone columns and a double staircase, beyond which unfurls a cathedral-like two-storey atrium opening onto views of the ocean beyond.

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It's not just the arrival that is impressive at this six-bedroom holiday house. The generous design gives every bedroom an en suite and maximises those water views – you can even watch the water sparkle on the waves from the billiards room. Just about the only time you won't be able to savour the view is once you have dimmed the lights in the home theatre – but then, life can be full of difficult choices.

The beach is on your doorstep and there are plenty of shops and restaurants within strolling distance, but the true joy of Tidemark is staying in and letting the days unfold freeform. Enjoy a sauna and steam after a session in the gym, relax poolside, or perhaps plan a slap-up meal for the whole group: with two kitchens and a beachfront Teppanyaki pavilion to take advantage of, there is plenty of fun to be had.

TO BOOK From \$8000 a night, see luxico.com.au

Ooralba Estate

Kangaroo Valley, NSW



Ooralba is the perfect base for exploring Jervis Bay and the Southern Highlands. Or you could just soak up that view.

Dinner in the garden? Don't mind if we do. Ooralba Estate's 80 hectares include plenty of places to picnic – choose a perch overlooking orchards and olive groves, the topiary mazes or the tea house – but when it's time for a sit-down meal, head for the edible garden, where a wrought-iron table has been set up near the terracotta pizza oven. Pick a handful of basil or oregano leaves to sprinkle on top of your pizza and get set for a memorable meal under the stars.

It's not just the al fresco experience that is special at Ooralba. Design fans will be seduced by the clean lines of this seven-room homestead, its heated concrete floors teamed with weathered roof beams salvaged from Sydney wharves, and panoramic windows inviting the outside in. Staff can organise a range of activities on-site or in the area; Ooralba is the perfect base for exploring popular destinations such as Jervis Bay and the Southern Highlands.

No matter how far you roam, it's always a thrill to return, greeted perhaps with one of the homestead's signature cocktails such as the strawberry jalapeno cooler – its ingredients plucked straight from the garden, of course.

TO BOOK From \$12,500 a night for up to 14 people. Includes meals, beverages and staff (private chef, housekeeping, concierge). [See ooralba.com](http://www.ooralba.com)

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The Bolthole

Pirates Bay, Tasmania



How's the serenity? Enjoy the blissful solitude on the deck of The Bolthole.

Ready to leave the rest of the world behind? Then this five-bedroom holiday house on a quiet corner of the Tasman Peninsula is for you. Set amid 6 hectares of bush, fronting onto a tranquil bay, this is one of those pockets of the world where isolation is repackaged as luxury. How you make the most of it is up to you. You might follow the path that leads to the shoreline and wander for hours watching the waves dance along the coast. Or you might opt for blissful solitude on your deck, a glass of Tasmanian pinot in your hand.

Want to get active? Tackle some of the area's superb hikes (the Three Capes Track is nearby), pay a visit to the World Heritage-listed Port Arthur or grab a snorkel and explore the kelp forests just offshore. Prefer to focus on the food? Spend several hours cooking up a gourmet feast in the kitchen accompanied by a soundtrack of birdsong, or keep it simple with fish and chips by the water.

TO BOOK From \$990 a night for up to six adults (two-night minimum).
See theboltholepiratesbay.com/