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THE AUSTRALIAN
Financial Review Magazine

Life And Luxury Travel

You too can picnic on a deserted island beach (for \$4450)

When the extreme luxury of far north Queensland's Lizard Island Resort isn't enough, just add an exclusive fantasy island experience. Our new Travel magazine is out on Friday, June 25.



Explore Lizard's remote beaches by resort dinghy or book a whole-day charter for a private island picnic. **Louie Douvis**

Carolyn Beasley

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The unnamed sand cay is barely 100 metres long, a strip of white interrupting the aqua shallows. Born of the reef, the islet is composed of sand and cowrie shells tossed onto the northern end of MacGillivray Reef.

As the tender vessel gently slides up the beach, a flock of black noddy terns seems to stare at us in disbelief. They don't receive visitors often.

Picnic essentials are ferried ashore: a cheery blue-and-white striped beach umbrella, picnic hamper, snorkelling gear, and a transparent double kayak, ideal for viewing the vibrant coral.



Book a whole-day charter for a private island picnic. **Louie Douvis**

Reclining in a beach chair, it's time to breathe, bathing in this luxurious isolation where the only footprints are in a short trail behind us.

Several chunky islands are visible on the horizon. Closest of all, cloaked in prehistoric forest and rock, is the uninhabited side of Lizard Island. It sounds like a fantasy, but if you're prepared to pay, this picnic is all yours during a stay at [Lizard Island Resort](#).

Owned by US company Delaware North, the resort sits plumb in the Coral Sea, 250 kilometres north of Cairns, and has long been a favourite for its fly-in boutique luxury, fine dining and unrivalled access to [the Great Barrier Reef](#).

And the “picnic on a deserted island” experience (\$4450 for a full day) takes it all next level. The adventure starts with a private charter of the resort’s new launch, Duyfken, a 51-foot open flybridge Riviera, gleaming in spotless white leather and dark wood interiors.

It takes us just 30 minutes to reach our picnic island. Once ashore, the chilled hamper reveals fresh sashimi, oversized king prawns, and the makings of a killer mezze platter featuring cold cuts, homemade bread with roasted pepper and pesto dips, and crisp pastries.

Champagne is included of course, but Greg Magi, Delaware North’s executive director Australian parks and resorts, suggests trying something from the top shelf, perhaps a Krug Clos d’Ambonnay? The surroundings might be priceless, but the Krug comes in at \$4250 a bottle.

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As we get stuck into the picnic, Magi explains many of the guests here are repeat visitors. Being restricted to Australian shores for now means money is available for something special, such as [personalised experiences like this one](#).

Take the boat for the entire day, and there are several nearby deserted islands you can explore. Although this experience is entirely individual, it doesn't mean there are crowds you need to avoid. The resort has just 40 suites, so activities on and around Lizard Island are inherently intimate.



Guests can snorkel beside majestic sea turtles in crystal-clear water. **Louie Douvis**

Access to nature is one of the island's main drawcards, and guests may join a three-hour guided snorkelling tour (\$130 a person), discovering coral gardens, giant clams in turquoise and blue and even the odd harmless reef shark.

Another popular excursion is the turtle tour (\$85 a person) with marine biologist Matt Rutledge. Donning masks and snorkels, a total of five awestruck guests can hover beside an unfazed green sea turtle as it munches on seagrass.

But it's a big island, and there are other ways to escape. Energetic visitors can tread in the footsteps of Captain James Cook, hiking up Cooks Look to survey the surrounding reef systems. For something less ambitious, the walk over Chinamans Ridge to Watsons Bay features interpretive signage, and early in the morning you'll be rewarded with thriving birdlife.



The Pavilion house has views galore and its own private pool.

If you fancy being your own sea captain, borrow a resort dinghy, discovering deserted beaches and marine life in a choose-your-own adventure for grown-ups.

Magi says the resort has had an adventure of its own navigating the pandemic. But things are looking rosy now, and occupancy is averaging about 85 per cent for the foreseeable future.

This year, Delaware North [sold all tourism properties in its Australian portfolio](#) except for Lizard Island; Magi says the owners love it too much to part with it. “It’s a real trophy property,” he says.

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The resort has several updates ahead, such as the installation of solar power. “I personally hope the solar panels are going to be in the shape of a lizard,” Magi laughs.



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For those keen to return and experience something new, the resort will soon unveil an exclusive use, three-bedroom residence and one-bedroom cottage. To be known as The House, this accommodation is located atop Hibiscus Beach, a 10-minute walk from the resort. It’s due to open early next year.

The writer and photographer were guests of Tourism Australia.

Need to know

Stay Gardenview rooms start from \$1969 a night, all inclusive. For more information, go to lizardisland.com.au

Getting there Fly to Cairns and transfer to the resort's Cessna Caravan for the spectacular one-hour flight over the reef, \$770 a person return.

For more information See queensland.com to plan a visit to the Great Barrier Reef. For more information on Lizard Island Research Station, see australian.museum/get-involved/amri/lirs/



Vibrant marine life on the island's reefs.

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Discover Lizard's reef ecosystem

Sharing the island with the resort is the Australian Museum's [Lizard Island Research Station](#), which hosts Australian and international coral reef researchers.

Resort guests are invited to learn here too, by joining a guided tour (\$90 a person). Director Dr Anne Hoggett says the tours provide vital education. "It's an important ecosystem facing a lot of threats," she says. "We need to get the word out there."



Research station co-directors Lyle Vail and Anne Hoggett. **Alex Vail**

COVID-19 has presented challenges. Foreign researchers are unable to visit and international scientists based in Australia have returned home. “Our usage is well below half at the moment,” Hoggett says.

Much of the research is funded by the Lizard Island Reef Research Foundation, backed by wealthy benefactors. The foundation supports capital developments and researchers, and Hoggett says science has benefited from having a luxury resort next door, with many resort visitors deciding to become involved.

“There’s a big cross-pollination between the resort and the station,” Hoggett says.

The July issue of [AFR Magazine](#) – plus the Travel special – is out on Friday, June 25 inside [The Australian Financial Review](#). Follow AFR Mag on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

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