

ORPHEUS ISLAND

IT'S HARD TO KNOW WHERE TO LOOK AS YOUR helicopter approaches the white beaches of Orpheus Island. First there are the blue hues of the Coral Sea underscored by shadows, indicating where the reef lies below. Then there's the palm-fringed buildings of the resort and its long wooden jetty reaching into Hazard Bay. And finally, the myriad coves dotted along the island's coastline, each guarding its own secluded beach.

Whichever way you look, this is paradise. Accessible only by helicopter, the island sits on the edge of the World Heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef, 80 kilometres north of Townsville, and is about as far from the 'real world' as you can get. Just 11km from end-to-end, Orpheus is a true island getaway, covered by 1368 hectares of pristine national park.

Walking from the helipad across the lush lawns and past the infinity pool to the resort's main pavilion, you feel the worries of everyday life fall away. The architecture of the open lounge and dining areas epitomises tropical chic, with vaulted ceilings, vintage fans and cane furniture providing the perfect surrounds for a cheese platter and a glass of champagne on arrival. The gardens are rich with ferns, frangipani and coconut palms, creating a subtle feng shui. Hammocks sway between palms on the beach, and coconuts hang in clumps on slender trunks above.

Starting as a collection of huts on the beach in the 1930s, Orpheus was purchased by its current owner, Chris Morris, in 2011. A \$15 million revamp created a prime example of laid-back Australian luxe. "It's just a beautiful, unique part of the world," Chris says. "It's not something I got into to make a lot of money – it's more of a passion."

A hammock swings in the breeze outside one of the beachside villas.





That relaxed style is also reflected in the service, which aims to ensure guests enjoy their luxurious surrounds without feeling the need to impress. “We want our guests to feel relaxed at all times,” says manager Jennifer Fitzmaurice. “For example, guests don’t feel like they need to dress up to come to dinner.”

Perhaps the island’s greatest feature is the potential to explore one of the Seven Wonders of the World without the crowds that congregate on the main reef sites accessible from Cairns and Townsville. Jennifer says guests have secluded access to a number of Great Barrier Reef locations with incredible coral and marine life. “And our west-facing location, towards the south end of the island, means amazing sunsets every evening.”

Indeed, as the sun sets, palm trees glow in the last rays of golden light and guests take gins and tonic by the infinity pool as they decide whether to dine in or out. ‘In’ being the alfresco restaurant and ‘out’ the signature Dining with the Tides, a flare-lit experience on the pier resting over the Coral Sea. Whichever venue you choose, the changing menu is a highlight of your stay. Head chef Daniel Main, no stranger to destination dining with previous stints at Australia’s Longitude 131° and Cape Lodge and New Zealand’s Blanket Bay, says his daily offerings are influenced by freshness and provenance. “Our food is seafood-based, because we have the best seafood in the world right here,” he says, pointing towards the sea. “Every morning you can see prawn trawlers going past.”

While the cuisine changes as often as the sun rises, there’s a strong Asian influence to match the tropical climate. Lunch is a tapas-style affair, which might have you tucking into a Thai-influenced banquet with crab fried rice, garlic chicken, son-in-law eggs, Thai beef salad, and a rambutan sorbet.

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: A perfect day is reflected in the beachside infinity pool; guests dine on the flare-lit pier; the restaurant in the open-air main pavilion; outdoor bathrooms add a touch of tropical luxe. ABOVE: All rooms and villas feature sea views.



Degustation menus feature elaborate offerings, such as house-smoked trout with cucumber gelée, avocado panna cotta, crème fraîche and radish; grilled octopus served with a cuttlefish ink sauce, miso emulsion and edamame beans; and a salad of artichoke, zucchini, sherry asparagus jus, mustard seeds and potato fondant.

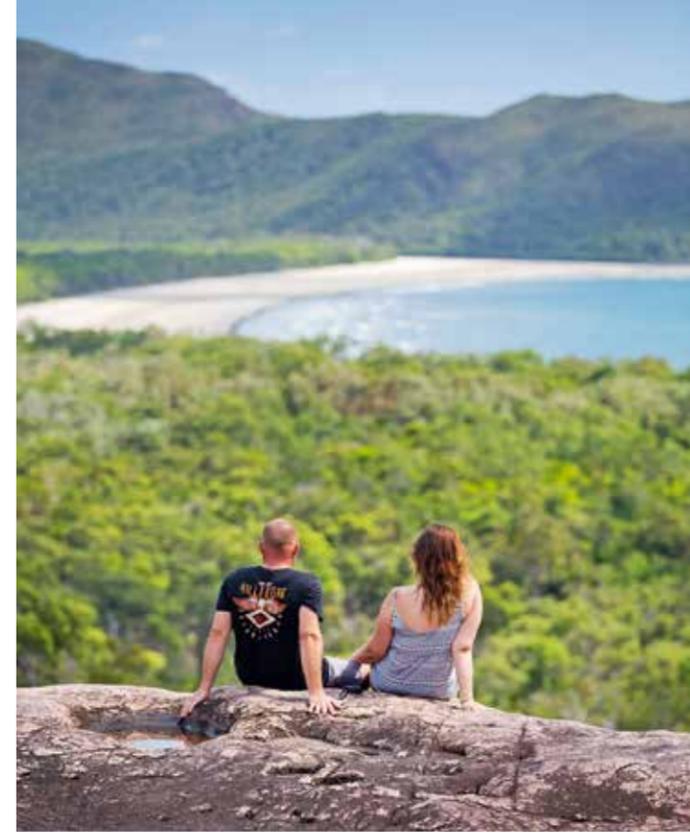
The island's sustainability focus is highlighted in the kitchen, with fruits of the resort's garden – including herbs, beetroot, tomatoes, mangoes, passionfruit and an array of other seasonal fruit and vegetables – put to regular use. All eggs are sourced from the resort's own chickens. "Sometimes the gardener will come in with something I've never even seen before, so we figure out a way to use it," Daniel says. "At the end of the day, I want guests to have a memorable dinner, and maybe something they've never had before."

Spread along a pristine ribbon of the island's western shore, the resort's beachside accommodation caters for a maximum of just 28 guests. Designed with the island's laid-back ambiance in mind, all rooms, suites and villas feature modern interiors with timber furniture, ceiling fans and private terraces with beach views. LED TVs, iPod docks, coffee machines and LITYA guest amenities round out the luxe experience. The newly renovated southern suites also feature outdoor bathrooms.

The activity list on Orpheus extends far beyond the island itself, with the reef and surrounding islands practically begging to be explored. You might take a boat journey on the five-metre tender *Swift* to Hinchinbrook Island, Australia's largest island national park, where you can walk through ancient rainforest to the mystical Zoe Falls, then climb through jungle to the rock lookout over Zoe Bay and Mount Bowen.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Flares light up the timber pier at night; guests enjoy fireside drinks on the beach; head chef Daniel Main puts the finishing touches to a dish; the island's landscaped tropical gardens create an irresistible feng shui; the menu features strong seafood and Asian influences to match the tropical climate.





LOCATION

The resort is on the western side of Orpheus Island, which is 80km north of Townsville.

GETTING THERE

Access is by helicopter, either a 30-minute journey from Townsville, or a 1.5-hour journey from Cairns. Passengers are restricted to one small bag weighing no more than 15kg.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

Accommodation, all meals, selected beverages, light fishing tackle, water sports and snorkelling equipment, and unlimited use of motorised dinghies.

WHAT TO BRING

Sun protection, swimwear and good walking shoes for exploring the island. Smart casual for evenings (if you feel like it).

WHEN TO COME

Orpheus Island's climate is mild all year, with daytime summer temperatures ranging from 24–31°C, while winter daytime temperatures range from 13–25°C. The majority of the island's average annual rainfall of 1680mm falls between January and March.

CONTACT

*Orpheus Island
PO Box 549, Garbutt East
Queensland 4814
Phone: 61 7 4777 7377
Email: reservations@orpheus.com.au
orpheus.com.au*

*The Tailor
33 Queen Street, Thebarton
South Australia 5031
Phone: 61 8 8354 4405
Email: info@thetailor.com
www.thetailor.com*

Or you can charter one of the resort's larger vessels and spend a full or half-day diving and snorkelling on the Great Barrier Reef. The island's principal dive site boasts more than 1000 species of reef fish and hundreds of species of hard and soft corals. Anglers can choose to target such species as coral trout, sweetlip, red emperor and giant trevally in the waters surrounding the island, or venture to the outer reef to chase pelagics the likes of dogtooth tuna, Spanish mackerel and wahoo. When you're successful, have your catch prepared by the island's chefs and served for dinner.

Back on Orpheus, take a dinghy, a picnic hamper and a bottle of chilled champagne and make the short trip to Sandy Beach, where a rocky promontory secludes you from the resort, allowing you to imagine you've got the whole place to yourself. Another must-see is the giant clam nursery located in Pioneer Bay, with 300 molluscs, each weighing between 150 and 200 kilograms.

If you don't feel like going far from home, a flotilla of stand-up paddleboards, kayaks, and Hobie sailboats provide the perfect way to explore sheltered Hazard Bay. For landlubbers, there's a 20-minute walk to Picnic Bay. Enjoy the view across to Palm and Fantome islands before making your way down to the secluded cove where the reef comes right up to the shore.

Taking its name from the word for "rest and peace" in the local Aboriginal language, the Gwandalan Day Spa offers guests a unique suite of therapies. Using the exquisite LITYA spa product range, therapists deliver a variety of signature treatments inspired by modern and Indigenous herbalism, aromatherapy and touch therapy.

When you've done all of the above, grab a gin and tonic, lie back in a hammock and let the warm sea breeze lull you to sleep.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Kayaks, Hobie sailboats and stand-up paddleboards are provided to explore sheltered Hazard Bay; a helicopter delivers guests to the island from Cairns; guests take in the view on nearby Hinchinbrook Island; a picnic hamper on secluded Sandy Beach.