



experience fraser island

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Islands In The Sun... Rediscovering Lady Elliot and Fraser Islands

QUEENSLAND: All too often we are so preoccupied with the end destination, that we forget the journey.

On the trip to Lady Elliot Island, the 35-minute, 8.10am scenic flight from Hervey Bay is every bit as fascinating as the final destination - the graduating colours of the Great Sandy Strait, peppered with golden sand bars; the white caps of the open ocean; the closeness of our pilot and his sophisticated gadgetry; and the anticipation that you just might see a gigantic sea creature going about its business in the ocean below.

Then, finally, this speck on the horizon that grows bigger and bigger (but not that big!) - a coral cay, at the southern tip of the Great Barrier Reef, complete with red and white striped light house. And as I see this first hand, I'm glad I've left my mobile telephone reception and my cares behind on the mainland so I can savour this digital detox.

The arrival at the Lady Elliot airstrip - which also doubles as the island's cricket pitch - is an intimate affair. Friendly staff members meet and greet and take me on a short island orientation, before leaving me to my own devices. It's off to the dive shop for me. I'm squeezing myself into a wetsuit that feels like it is five sizes too small, grabbing my snorkel, flippers and mask and heading out to explore the lagoon and coral gardens.

I've got a cheap underwater camera and a hankering to snare a photo of a turtle that's worthy of National Geographic. Time flies and all too soon my underwater exploration is over and it's time to head to the Dining Room for a buffet dinner and the chance to mingle with the staff. This evening will be filled with chatter, night walks and presentations in the Education Centre and, wait for it, no TV. I couldn't be happier!

As the new day dawns on Lady Elliot, I opt to take an early morning walk around the island before heading in for a hearty breakfast and planning my day's activities. I've forgotten some old shoes, but pick a pair of bright blue crocs off the 'oops other people also forgot their shoes and have left some behind' racks and head out with a staffer on a Reef Walking Tour.

Who would've thought there was so much life in just a small amount of water? I'm fascinated by the Sea Cucumbers, the coral, the little fish darting and the possibility of eye-balling a big turtle. I'm equally as fascinated by the solar panels I spotted on my morning's walk and pencil in a Discovery Tour to find out more.



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Phew! Is this supposed to be a relaxing holiday?

I've checked my watch and it's time to join the glass bottom boat tour and head out snorkelling in the aptly named, Coral Garden. The wind has whipped up slightly, but I'm buoyed by the fact that I might just see my first Manta in close quarters, so I pretend not to notice.

And I'm not disappointed... this island visit is my first snorkelling experience on the reef and I am instantly captivated by the colours; the little reef shark that comes in for a sniff; the lumbering turtles who transform gracefully in the water; and the Clown Fish - is that you, Nemo?

This is heaven!

I'm not a water baby, but I could be converted. A staffer tells me that there is a PADI Dive Shop and if I can just get over my fear of taking my regulator out under water, I could be a regular visitor to this watery wonderland.

There's plenty to do here - or plenty not to do if the mood takes you. All too soon the sun sets; dinner is eaten; the sun rises and it's time to begin the next leg of my island adventure as I catch the 1100 flight back to Hervey Bay.

From the airport I'm picked up and whisked to Kingfisher Bay Resort's Mainland Reception and to River Heads to catch the 1230 ferry. The 45-minute journey to World Heritage-listed Fraser Island is equally as fascinating.

All too often we rush about in our daily chores, that we forget about this wonderful waterway we have in our own backyard; the excitement when a Dugong or turtle surfaces on the water; or a dolphin playfully skims alongside the boat; or the smell of the sea; as we travel to this ecological anomaly - a green, sandy oasis - which is looming in the distance. It takes an international tourist with a video camera to remind me - this is a pretty special place.

From beginning to building to being, Kingfisher Bay Resort had to measure up as a place fit for this extraordinary location... and as we slide in to the jetty - guests would be hard pressed to know there are two hotel wings, self-contained villas and holiday houses here - they're so hidden well in the dunes.

After check in, we make our way along wide, wooden veranda to our hotel room, which is set upon stilts and allows Fraser's little critters to continue about their business uninterrupted. I've booked myself in for a free dingo presentation and a guided night walk (the activities change daily) leaving me time to explore during the 'golden' hour in late afternoon.

I'm keen to wander along the western beach and take in one of those famous mango-coloured sunsets over the Great Sandy Strait - and I'm told the Jetty Hut is the place to catch it. Dinner tonight will be a relaxed affair in The Sand Bar, before I retire ready for my day's touring.



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The khaki uniform and Akubra hat is a dead giveaway that I've found my tour guide at the Village Store the next morning - he's also the fellow holding a big tub of Anzac cookies that make my stomach rumble, even after the big buffet breakfast I've just scoffed in The Maheno restaurant.

Today's tour takes in Lake McKenzie - and I have to say the place is unrecognisable from previous visits - not only are there new picnic facilities, new boardwalks and, after the wet season, a lot of water in the lake... but the colours are magnificent and the white clouds drifting overhead make perfect pictures. The water is warm - even at this time of year - and I dip my toe in and get to work on exfoliating as I've heard I'll leave this place looking younger.

I'm immersing myself in Fraser - literally and figuratively - the sun, the sand, the ambience and the sheer beauty of this place and I'm loving it.

We journey on from the sublime to the ridiculous - into the historical heart of the island - Central Station and Wanggoolba Creek. As we walk through Pile Valley, an Eastern Whip bird calls out to its mate, and it stuns me how such lush rainforest can grow in sand and how those Giant King Ferns really add to the Jurassic feel of the place.

With a generous buffet lunch under our belts (courtesy of Eurong Beach Resort) we reluctantly leave the lakes and rainforest for Seventy-Five Mile Beach. I can well understand why the Butchulla people called this place K'Gari - which loosely translates to mean paradise. It is simply stunning and clearly being enjoyed by fisher folk and four-wheel-drivers. We make our way to the Coloured Sand cliffs of The Pinnacles, then down the beach to the Maheno shipwreck for the postcard shots, to the cool fresh waters of Eli Creek and then on the homeward journey.

Back at the resort I check the What's On Guide, but decide to treat myself with a dinner in Seabelle Restaurant - I'm keen to see how the Chef's incorporate Aussie Bush Tucker into their meals and I'm not disappointed.

This journey of rediscovery has whipped by quickly and we ponder the highlights over brekkie the next morning. Kingfisher Bay's check out is at 10am, but we've opted to stow our bags and spend a little more time on Fraser - I'm keen to check out McKenzies Jetty and the Z-Force walk before heading back to the rat race.

From Reef to Rainforest it's been a pretty unforgettable trip. And now I've dipped my toe, I won't leave it so long to return.

'Rediscover Lady Elliot and Fraser Island' for just \$1357AUD* (Euro 961.18) per adult, twin share including: 2 nights' accommodation in Reef View Room, return scenic 35 minute flight ex Hervey Bay, 1 glass bottom boat trip with snorkel, snorkel equipment and lesson, all island tours, environmental management charge, daily buffet breakfast and dinner. PLUS 2 nights' hotel accommodation at Kingfisher Bay Resort, return passenger ferry transfers, daily buffet breakfast, full day 4WD Beauty Spots tour of Fraser Island (including refreshments, lunch and National Park fees), return airport pick up from Fraser Coast airport (if required). Some conditions apply.



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Accommodation upgrades are also available at both resorts. To book email Reservations@ladyelliott.com.au or phone 1800 072 200.

*Some conditions apply. Offer valid from 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016 (excludes 3-18 April 2015; 12 December 2015 - 12 January 2016 and 25-31 March 2016).

Ends.

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