



10 OF THE Best AUSTRALIAN ISLANDS

Tag on a trip to an island down under, says David Whitley

While Australia's great cities, fabulous coastline and rugged outback tend to garner most of the attention, the country is blessed with some phenomenal islands too.

Whether used as a base for hanging out on the Great Barrier Reef, providing top-drawer wilderness hiking trails or allowing for 4x4 adventures along the beach, these islands can easily be tagged on to a wider Australian holiday. For some of the most interesting options, here's a guide to some of the best Aussie islands.

1 TASMANIA
Australia's largest island is a state in its own right, and it tends to appeal to those looking for lush green, natural wilderness – Tasmania is Australia at its most New Zealand-y, if you will.

That said, main city Hobart is buzzy, and has become an art hotspot since the opening of the arrestingly daring Mona museum, while nearby Port Arthur covers the often dark colonial, convict history.

Elsewhere, there are some marvellous scenic cruises to be had on the Gordon and Tamar rivers, world-class hiking trails in the Cradle Mountain National Park and wildlife sanctuaries such as the Devils@Cradle facility, where Tasmanian devils are looked after in an attempt to fend off the extinction of the species. [discovertasmania.com.au](#)
Book it: Cox & Kings sells a

14-day Tasmania self-drive holiday, including boutique lodges and cottage-style accommodation and car hire, from £1,645. [coxandkingsagents.com](#)

2 PHILLIP ISLAND, VICTORIA
The boardwalks at the Koala Conservation Centre offer an excellent opportunity to see sleepy koalas at eye level, while boat tours around the coastline are great for spotting seals, and the Nobbies Centre is home to a surprisingly good exhibition on Antarctica.

But the main reason people come to Phillip Island is to see the penguins. At dusk every evening, a colony of ultra-cute little penguins emerges from the sea, then waddles up the beach towards home.

The Underground Viewing option lets you into a bunker with windows at path level, so the penguins shuffle past right in front of your eyes. [visitphillipisland.com](#)
Book it: AAT Kings runs an evening trip from Melbourne to Phillip Island to see the penguins, costing from £95 per person. [aatkings.com](#)

3 MORETON ISLAND, QUEENSLAND
Moreton offers plenty of tropical scenery – all sand dunes, lagoons and untouched beaches – with the added bonus of safe snorkelling around 15 shipwrecks just off

the shore. A short ferry hop from Brisbane, Moreton Island is a popular day-trip destination, with sandboarding down the massive dunes almost as popular as the snorkelling or the dolphin-feeding at Tangalooma Island Resort. Here, a pod of friendly bottlenose dolphins comes up to the beach at sunset, and the supervised feeding sessions involve them taking herring from the hands of giddily happy members of the public. [visitmoretonisland.com](#)

Book it: Premier Holidays offers a full-day Moreton Island trip from Brisbane, including dolphin feeding at Tangalooma, starting at £172. [premierholidays.co.uk](#)

4 HAMILTON ISLAND, QUEENSLAND
Of the 74 Whitsunday Islands off the coast from Airlie Beach, Hamilton Island is the most developed base. Accommodation ranges from the comfortably mid-range to the truly exclusive, and while there's a family-friendly air to the island, its strong point is the vast array of facilities and activities on offer. Obviously, there are plenty of reef trip options, but there are also windsurfers, jet skis, golf courses, art classes, tennis courts, all-terrain vehicle tours and koala cuddles in the extensive Things To Do list. Visitors definitely won't be bored. [hamiltonisland.com.au](#)
Book it: The four-star Reef View Hotel offers a 35m heated pool

and free non-motorised water sports equipment, with prices from £638 for three nights during the dry season. APT spends two nights at the resort on its 17-day East Coast Adventure, which travels from Sydney to Cairns via the Gold Coast, Noosa, Fraser Island, Rockhampton and Mission Beach. Prices start at £5,095 based on a January 18 departure, including international and domestic flights, transport, most meals, local guides and the services of a tour director. [aptouring.co.uk](#)

5 LORD HOWE ISLAND, NEW SOUTH WALES
Possibly Australia's best-kept secret, Lord Howe Island sits alone in the Tasman Sea at the point where warm and cold waters meet, creating an enormous marine diversity. This is fabulous for glass-bottomed boat and snorkelling trips, but there's also plenty to see and do on land. The two looming mountains at the end of the island are great spots for hiking, and birdwatchers can keep an eye out for extremely rare birds that are found only on Lord Howe on the way.

The key to the island's specialness, however, is that only about 400 visitors are allowed on it at any one time. This keeps it extremely exclusive, yet beautifully serene and relaxed. [lordhoweisland.info](#)
Book it: Austravel offers a four-night escape staying at the magnificent Capella

PICTURES: AUSTRALIA/ELLENOR ARGYROPOULOS/ADRIAN BROWN; BRISBANE MARKETING; LUXURY LODGES OF AUSTRALIA/NATHAN DYER; TOURISM WESTERN AUSTRALIA/MARK BOSKELL

➔ Lodge, with its big sea-facing balcony terraces and impeccable service, from £2,799 per person. This includes return flights to Lord Howe Island from Sydney. austravel.com

6 KANGAROO ISLAND, SOUTH AUSTRALIA
As the name might well suggest, Kangaroo Island's selling point is its wildlife. But ironically, the kangaroos aren't the main attraction. There are plenty of koalas to be spotted lounging in the trees, while sea lions hang out at Seal Bay, pelicans can be hand-fed at Kingscote and the moody Southern Ocean coastline, packed full of rock formations, is home to gazillions of New Zealand fur seals.

The island is also developing a niche as a gourmet destination, with gins, honeys, wines, olives and cheeses among the goodies being made by small firms. tourkangarooisland.com.au
Book it: First Class Holidays offers a five-day Adelaide and Kangaroo Island Discovery tour, which also

drops in to the Barossa Valley wine region, from £743. fcholidays.com

7 ROTTNEST ISLAND, WESTERN AUSTRALIA
A short ferry ride from Perth or Fremantle, Rottnest does have a bit of Second World War history to explore – well-meaning, volunteer-run tours head out to the giant gun defences. But its real charm is in the beaches, which are world-class, white-sand Indian Ocean beauties. Some are better for surfing, some for snorkelling, but the key point is that you can have one pretty much to yourself. Get the early Rottnest Express ferry over, hire a bike on board, then pedal round to the likes of Little Parakeet Bay. Once you've had your fun in the sun, head back to the main settlement near the ferry terminal, where incredibly cute quokkas hop about outside the cafes and shops, and the Hotel Rottnest is an excellent spot for a late-afternoon beer. rotnestisland.com



ABOVE: Magnetic Island

LEFT: Capella Lodge, Lord Howe Island

BELOW: Kingfisher Bay Resort, Fraser Island



PICTURES: CAPELLA LODGE; TOWNSVILLE ENTERPRISE; EXCEPTIONAL KANGAROO ISLAND/NATHAN DYER

LEFT:
Kangaroo
Island

Book it: Travel2 offers a full-day Rottnest Island by bike trip, including return ferries and lunch, for £85. travel2.com

8 FRASER ISLAND, QUEENSLAND
The world's largest sand island comes with astonishing blue, freshwater lakes, dingoes strutting serenely through sand dune canyons and surprising crops of rainforest in the interior. The main road is the beach on the eastern side of the island, and a drive along it brings you to the Maheno Shipwreck on the shore, plus impressive lookouts and the delightfully plunge-worthy Champagne Pools. It's very popular with campers who explore the island in 4x4s, take on the walking trails and ogle the multicoloured sand cliffs. But it's possible to go

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the other way too, with the Kingfisher Bay Resort offering activities such as whale-watching cruises, bush-tucker talks and guided canoe trips. visitfrasercoast.com
Book it: Wildlife Worldwide offers an 11-day Wildlife of Australia's Nature Coast trip, with three nights on Fraser Island and two nights on Lady Elliot Island at the southern end of the Great Barrier Reef. Prices start

at £2,595 per person, including international flights. wildlifeworldwide.com

9 MAGNETIC ISLAND, QUEENSLAND
Just off the coast of Townsville, and half

covered by national park, Magnetic Island tends to be a bit of a sun trap, and is a great spot for water sports – whether learn-to-dive courses, sea kayaking trips or jetskiing from Horseshoe Bay. It's just busy enough to feel like a real place



rather than a holiday island, and inland there are some marvellous walking trails through the hills and up to the Second World War forts. Keep an eye out for koalas on the way – there's a massive population of them on the island. townsvillenorthqueensland.com.au
Book it: Peppers Blue on Blue, right next to the marina at Nelly Bay, comes with a spa and large outdoor pool. Prices start at about £101 per night. peppers.com.au/blue-on-blue

10 DIRK HARTOG ISLAND, WESTERN AUSTRALIA
History and nature combine on the island that acts as Australia's most westerly point. Conservation programmes have got rid of introduced predators, and brought back native Australian marsupials, while the

gorgeous turquoise-blue waters are home to dugongs.

The history is also fascinating, and it's well worth doing the day tour to Cape Inscription with the Dirk Hartog Island Eco-Lodge to delve in to it. In 1616, this was the site of the first European landing in Australia that had documented proof. Nearby was also the spot where the first collection of Australian plants was made, by English pirate William Dampier. dirkhartogisland.com
Book it: Shark Bay Aviation arranges day tours from Denham by plane for £163 per person. Limited camping – for 4x4 drivers only – is available on the island. The other option is the homely Dirk Hartog Island Eco-Lodge, which costs from £167 a night. sharkbayaviation.com dirkhartogisland.com/eco-lodge **TW**