

5-star luxury on your own desert island

by Jon Connell, Bluntisham, England

How does a tropical island so small that you can walk around it in around 5 minutes sound?

What if you got a cosy and comfortable bed on the edge of the beach?

What if I threw in your own chef?

And snorkelling with turtles just off that beach of yours?

This impossible sounding place is Wilson Island.

It's a small coral cay covering just 5 acres (approximately 2 hectares) located 80km off Australia's Queensland coast.

All life on the cay is brought to it by the wind and the sea: mostly in the droppings from the island's abundant bird-life. It's the reaction between the salt water and the bird guano that results in a firm limestone foundation that is covered in soft, brilliant-white sand.

To get to Wilson Island, you'll first need to get to Heron Island:

a resort island 45 minutes away by boat.

Heron Island can be reached by a regular launch that takes 2 hours from the port of Gladstone or in a thrilling 20-minute helicopter ride.

The sea crossing is usually quite calm and will affect only those with the weakest of sea legs, but 3 to 4 metre swells are not unknown, so a heli-transfer has its attractiveness for more than just the incredible view of the Great Barrier Reef below.

Your helicopter pilot will be happy to point out features of the reef and any wildlife that can be spotted near the surface like mantas and turtles.

Whilst guests don't truly have the island to themselves, the maximum number of guests that can be accommodated on the island is just 12. Depending upon the time of year, you may well have the island to yourselves and in August we found that we had a modest 4 to 6 companions. Despite the island's size though, you can easily lose yourself on your own beach just outside your 'tent'.

Tell anyone that you're staying in a 'tent' and it immediately conjures up images of grim scouting adventures in the pouring rain. It's true that the walls of the tent are made of canvas, but this is a cyclone-proof permanent structure with a king-size bed piled high with soft pillows and blankets.

Every morning you wake up with the view of the beach and the ocean pretty much at the foot of your bed. You'll need to pinch yourself to believe that you're not dreaming it all.

If you can manage to pull yourself out of bed after looking at that marvellous view, there's still a chance to relax in a hammock right there on your veranda.

Living on the island with the small number of guests are the couple that will tend to your every need: a chef and a housekeeper. Accommodation on Wilson Island is always offered as an inclusive package and your chef will cook you whatever you like at any time.

An excellent selection of wine and drinks is yours to choose from at any time too. Meals are all served in a central 'Longhouse' on a table that seats up to 12 people. The hosts eat and drink with the guests when they're not serving and cooking, which really adds to the friendliness of the island. Whilst you're waiting for dinner, there's a chance to get to know the other people after quite possible not seeing them all day!

Food on Wilson is truly outstanding. Given that the island has no permanent source of water or electricity, the achievements of the chef in his kitchen are all the more remarkable. When you arrive in the Longhouse for breakfast, you'll be greeted by your chef, who'll ask you what you'd like for breakfast. Most people will probably respond to that with another question: 'What do you have?' On Wilson Island things are just a little more special and the chef will cook you whatever you like on the spot.

Fancy French toast one morning and some waffles the next? No problem.

At lunchtime, you'll face your next dilemma: lunch in the Longhouse or a champagne picnic next to the ocean on your stretch of the beach? Whilst it's nice to come together at lunch to chat to new people, a picnic alone on a white, sandy beach with a glass of fine wine is not to be missed. If you're really looking for isolation, one of your hosts will bring your picnic right to you.

In the evening as sunset approaches, it's time to head for the beach once again for evening canapés.

With free-running champagne at hand, you spend the final moments of the day looking towards the western horizon as the sky changes from blue to red to green with all possible colours in-between. Then its time for dinner and three delicious courses of tasty food with great wine to accompany it.

Wilson Island is most definitely not a place for the adventure sport enthusiast who must occupy every second of every day with an adrenaline-filled rush.

And that's the point.

Other than eating, drinking and just relaxing with your partner, there is very little else to do. That walk around the island really will only take 5 minutes. Perhaps 15 minutes if you meander a little. The only 'activity' of any sort is snorkelling.

Snorkelling is right from the beach and is outstanding.

On one occasion I spent a blissful 5 minutes swimming with a huge turtle; totally awesome. There's snorkelling equipment on the island in the form of good quality fins, masks and snorkels.

Unless you like to engage in lots of free-diving though, you're most likely going to need a wetsuit. Fortunately, complementary wetsuits are provided by the marine centre on Heron Island before you head over to Wilson.

If you're bringing your own wetsuit, you should look to pack something for water between 20 to 25 Celcius: a 5mm shortie should suffice.

There are a number of bommies reachable directly from the beach and fish life on the coral is quite abundant.

Coral in this area is not the most colourful in the world, but the fish and the frequently sighted mantas and turtles more than make up for it.

The last item of luxury is your own shower that you alone will use. Stacked within are soft towels, beautifully smelling shampoos and the very best Molton & Brown toiletries

Snorkelling twice a day, we spent quite a few moments breathing in the scent of the lavender, mint and rosemary shampoo and I can still smell it now.

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