

THE WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN

TRAVEL + INDULGENCE

SEPTEMBER 19-20, 2020

- Spring into summer's accessories
- In praise of Hobart's maritime links

ONE OF A KIND

THE RISE OF THE DESTINATION B&B Page 4



James Halliday
presents his
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Annual Dozen

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James Halliday



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CLAUDINE THORNTON

PRIDE OF PLACE

Lodgings increasingly trump location in the accommodation game

ALEX CARLTON

Marlon Law is a pioneer in the accommodation stakes. He knows that sometimes it's not the destination that draws visitors to a property but the property itself. It's a phenomenon gaining momentum in a landscape dominated by social media and pretty pictures, but it's backed up by carefully considered personal touches, one-of-a-kind interior design and hands-on guest interaction by hosts. This is the era of the Destination B&B, self-contained properties free from doilies and floral bedspreads. The latest hosted homes look so appealing online we just have to stay there, regardless of where they may be.

Forget the likes of Booking.com; these lodgings most likely have their own website,

reflecting their distinctive identity and personality. You might also find them on Law's accommodation platform, Riparide, but more on that later. Let's go back to the beginning.

As the son of Quiksilver co-founder John Law, Marlon had snow, surf and the vast Australian outdoors in his blood from day one. So when he moved from his family property near Bells Beach on Victoria's Great Ocean Road to make a life in Melbourne in his 20s, he found himself stifled by the claus-



SALTY DINGO

What if there were other overworked city folk daydreaming about getting back to nature the way he was? Could he sell this lifestyle, this sense of escape?

He decided to erect a 4m high teepee on the property, in a picturesque spot with a roaring fire pit, overlooking the ocean and surrounded by mobs of kangaroos. The idea

was he could rent it out to other stressed urbanites yearning for the kind of fulfilment that comes with going back to basics. "But I thought rather than just selling the teepee as accommodation, what if I brought the whole teepee experience to life, using a photographer and a local storyteller?"

Experience is a powerful thing, as he knew from his time working as a designer with Quiksilver. The short film *Tipi Dreaming* was born, and the teepee was booked solid from the moment it launched.

This was 2017, and the beginning of what is now Riparide, a hub for more than 1200 "soul-fulfilling" getaway properties in regional Victoria and NSW. Plenty are a cut above the original Bells Beach teepee in terms of comfort, and they include wooden cabins, tiny



MORE TO THE STORY

A selection of other fabulous hosted homes.

THE LITTLE BLACK SHACK, GREAT MACKEREL BEACH, NSW

"No cars, no roads and no shops" is the deliciously isolationist promise of this absolute-waterfront 1930s fisherman's cottage on the NSW Central Coast, a 10-minute ferry ride across Pittwater from Palm Beach. Owners Jamie and Ingrid Kwong have filled their low-impact hideaway with rustic treasures such as cabinetry and bedframes made from salvaged timber, a hand-built stone fireplace and furnishings of soft leather and linen. The couple suggest guests make the most of the tranquillity and spend days lazing in the hammock, cooking in the wood-fired oven or simply gazing at the sea and the stars.

■ thelittleblackshack.com.au

COLDWATER CABIN, CENTRAL HIGHLANDS, TASMANIA

In the remote Tasmanian Central Highlands on the edge of the Great Lake sits this moody one-bedroom cabin, painted in pine-forest green and filled with offbeat details such as thylacine sculptures, original tapware and old timber floorboards that owner Jennifer Hillhouse says gives it an "Aussie shearing shed" feel. Hillhouse and her French husband, Jean-Charles "JC" Lehubey, bought the tumbledown cottage in 2018 because he wanted a cool-climate escape from their Brisbane home. It's a wish that is granted when snow and winds whip across the lake in



Dune House, above; The Seamstress and The Sailor, above right

winter. Every room has views across the water, giving guests the sense they're in the depths of a true wilderness, and if you can drag yourself away from the cabin's cosy walls, the region is known for birdwatching, bushwalking and trout fishing.

■ coldwatercabin.com

THE COTTAGE AT CONONDALE STATION, CONONDALE, QUEENSLAND

The beige and white cattle are practically part of the decor on this 930ha working beef farm in the Sunshine Coast hinterland. But it's not just the setting that's pretty. Inside you'll find a wood-fired heater, dried native flower arrangements, neutral linens and even matching Conondale Cottage robes. Families are welcome; little kids will love the tyre swing in the yard. If requested in advance, owner Maree Duncombe can stock you up with nearly all the provisions you'll need, including

fresh eggs, sourdough from Maleny Hot Bread and platters of regional produce.

■ conondalestation.com.au

GRAYLING'S GIFT, GOLDFIELDS, VICTORIA

Husband-and-wife team Shane and Annie Brereton have converted this 140-year-old church in Victoria's Pyrenees region into a storybook-pretty, beautifully styled couples' getaway using mostly recycled materials. Guests are encouraged to switch the city off altogether; in fact the poor mobile reception is seen as a feature rather than a disadvantage because it encourages full immersion in a good book, birdwatching or a long soak in the claw-foot bath.

■ graylingsgift.com.au

DUNE HOUSE, KANGAROO ISLAND, SA

Kangaroo Island is layered with generations

of meaning for Richard Young and wife Emily, as both spent happy childhood summer holidays here, fishing, snorkelling and making friends with wildlife such as kangaroos and seals. Like sister property Hamilton House, Dune House sleeps six and overlooks the dramatically beautiful Emu Bay. It's the perfect place to get all the generations together; book both to begin a family ritual.

■ hamiltondune.com.au

THE SEAMSTRESS AND THE SAILOR, GERALDTON, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

This 75-year-old, three-bedroom beach cottage on WA's rugged coastline is filled with indoor and outdoor treasures, including salvaged antiques, hammocks, yoga mats and bikes with cane baskets attached, perfect for two-wheeled foraging excursions. Your host is owner Anne-Maree Hopkinson.

■ theseamstressandthesailor.com



RACHEL CLAIRE



CORMAC HANRAHAN



MARNIE HAWSON



Clockwise from top left, The Stables, The Old School House Milton, NSW; Marlon Law from Riparide; Captains Rest, Strahan, Tasmania; Shackpalace in Noosa, Queensland; Jenny Paul and friends; below, Sarah Andrews

houses, converted churches and disused railway carriages. Unlike the bigger and more mainstream B&B booking sites such as Airbnb and HomeAway (formerly Stayz), the properties that make it on to Riparide's list fill definite criteria, such as natural beauty — perhaps a waterfall or mountain view — thoughtful, handcrafted amenities, outdoor attractions such as fire pits or al fresco baths, and maybe an alpaca or two. Like the Bells Beach teepee, many are brought to life with videos and written stories, imbuing a greater authenticity.

"Our properties are like a big, deep yoga breath," Law says. "We want people to arrive and think: 'Ah, that's better.'"

Today's holiday-makers are looking for much more than a roof over their heads, run-down furniture and mismatched Ikea cutlery in a crowded tourist spot. Australia's most desirable hosted homes are, in essence, becoming destinations in their own right — not necessarily because they're the most grand, expensive or luxurious, but because their unique aesthetic and atmosphere help guests feel a million miles from their ordinary lives.

The cocoon-like Shackpalace on a cliff-side overlooking Noosa was created by local designer Frank Macchia, with the aim of building a space where guests felt nurtured and relaxed.

"The dark tones and warm lighting throughout the house play a significant role in achieving this," says Macchia's daughter Samara, who helped to conceptualise the property's features, including its outdoor bath and indoor meditation space. "Most people say they feel calmer as they enter the home as it has a sense of serenity, security and privacy."

With a westerly aspect, Shackpalace comes to life in the early evening as the sun sinks over Noosa Junction, a time best enjoyed with the record player on and a glass of wine in hand.

Jenny Paul owns and runs The Old School House in Milton on the NSW south coast, two separate rustic country accommodations

surrounded by veggie gardens and apple orchards, with chickens, border collies and poddy lambs roaming freely. A former Sydney advertising executive, Paul is aware she offers people not just a place to stay but an experience and sense of connection.

"If my guests want to go to Cupitt's Winery I'll ring ahead and make sure they're looked after; the owner might sit down and share a glass of wine with them," she says. "Or they love it when I take them to the orchard and we snap off a piece of asparagus or a wild strawberry and we eat it raw. I think of it like a very personal concierge service that I do, not because I have to but because I care."

Paul even makes her own muesli, raw honey from her beehives, and jams, all of which she covers with handmade labels. "I want everyone who stays with me to feel nurtured," she says.

Properties such as Jenny's that go this extra mile are set to become the rule, not the exception, as we emerge from the COVID-19

reset, says Sarah Andrews. She transformed a rundown one-bedroom cottage into the exquisitely pretty Captains Rest in Strahan, Tasmania, using little more than her own know-how and a keen eye for beauty and comfort. The place is routinely booked out months in advance, and Andrews says most guests choose to stay with her for the accommodation first and foremost, rather than its location.

She also runs a business called The Hosting Masterclass in which she teaches hosts how to maximise the appeal of their B&Bs through design, and by telling their personal stories effectively online.

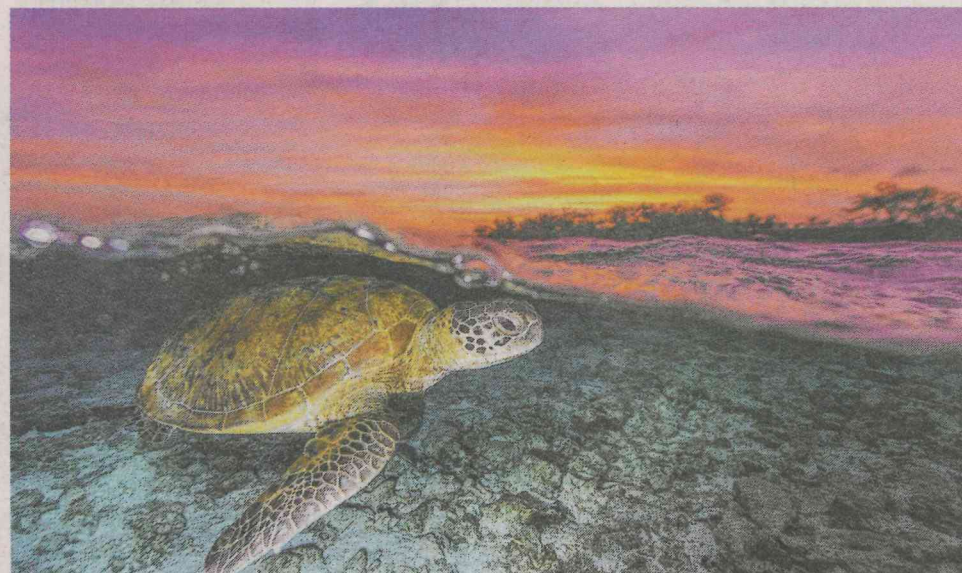
"Once upon a time hosted homes were great because they were cheap. Now they're great because they're great," she says. "Post 2020, people will be motivated to look for even more meaning and connection with where they stay. The era of 'any old house will do' is done. And that's a good thing."

■ riparide.com
■ shackpalacerituals.com
■ oldschoolhousemilton.com.au
■ captainsrest.com



EVAN BAILEY

Best-laid plans come to fruition on the reef



Queensland is home to six of the world's seven marine turtle species

JEREMY BOURKE

A maternity ward experience can be loaded with emotion, and this is no exception. There's a great sense of anticipation. A false alarm, too. But finally it's the announcement we've been hanging on: "Group Two, please gather by the door and follow your guides onto the beach."

The Mon Repos Turtle Centre in Bundaberg opened late last year to educate and entertain us in the grandeur of these fated creatures. In November-December, an almost nightly ritual plays out, when turtles crawl up the beach to lay their eggs. Come the new year and the hatchlings break free to head for the briny. We are here, in nature's moshpit, to see it unfold.

Nestings aren't guaranteed on any given night, so while rangers watch for signs of action, we wait inside, absorbing all things turtle. Queensland supports the largest concentration of nesting marine turtles on this side of the continent, boasting six of the world's seven species. Each is either threatened, endangered or vulnerable.

Due to higher air temperatures, warmer sands are a problem because if the nest is too snug, predominantly females are born, and male numbers are declining. Another threat is urban sprawl. Turtles rely on subtle natural light sources to navigate the beach, and ambient light from coastal development can draw hatchlings inland rather than into the water.

Tonight, Group One has already gone out, and we in Group Two expect to follow soon. Just as we're called, our turtle apparently changes her mind and retreats, so we settle in to watch a turtle documentary until we're summoned again, this time for real.

The light restrictions mean our group stumbles along the beach behind a ranger's weak torch beam to where a loggerhead turtle is dropping up to 120 eggs the size, shape and colour of pingpong balls into the hole she's dug.

Once she's finished, brighter torches shine upon this magnificent creature as she starts burying the eggs with robust flicks of

her flippers. Rangers record everything from her shell size to the nest's location. And they're quick about it, because Mum will shortly hightail it back to the water.

"Does she come back to the nest?" asks a child. "Oh no," says a ranger. "She's the worst mother in the world. Once the hatchlings break out of the nest, they're on their own."

That's usually after a few months, so in January the Mon Repos experience involves watching these tots crawling down the beach. It's a hard world they're headed into, and only one in a thousand survives to sexual maturity. A turtle hatched here might spend its first 15 to 30 years of life at sea before coming home to mate.

Fast-forward those years, but only 25 minutes from Bundaberg by air, and we're in turtle central on Lady Elliot Island, the southernmost cay of the Great Barrier Reef. It's favoured by the green turtle variety although it also gets loggerheads and hawksbills.

The variety is of no consequence during a snorkel in the lagoon next to the island's low-key resort.

My wife surfaces and states with a seriousness at odds with her usual joy at being waterborne: "I. Have. Just. Seen. Seven. Huge. Turtles." I duck below but spy only one, resting on the bottom of the lagoon as black-and-white fish peck at its shell.

In reef life this is a win-win, explains Jess Blackmore, a Master Reef Guide tasked with helping casual and professional users understand this glorious environment. Certain fish such as wrasse feed on parasites found on other sea creatures, so while the fish gets a meal, the turtle gets detoxed.

Jess's message today is that the southern end of the 2300km reef is doing really well. There have been no cyclones in 10 years, no mass bleaching; coral cover is high, as is the diversity of animals.

This means beautiful manta-rays, but also birds aplenty. Particularly pirate birds, which nest at eye level all around the island's resort — get too close and they swoop.

Jeremy Bourke was a guest of Tourism and Events Queensland and Bundaberg Tourism.



IN THE KNOW

The Mon Repos Turtle Centre is open daily year-round and offers evening encounters that deliver either nestings (November-December) or hatchlings (January-March).

■ parks.des.qld.gov.au/parks/mon-repos
■ ladyelliott.com.au
■ bundabergregion.org

