

Lord Howe Island

A tiny sliver of New South Wales rising from the South Pacific Ocean, Lord Howe Island boasts all the elements of an island paradise – two towering mountains, rich green forests, a surf-fringed coral reef, a brilliant blue lagoon and white sandy beaches lined with palm trees.

Lord Howe, 770 kilometres north-east of Sydney, lays claim to the world's southernmost coral reef, some dramatic volcanic rock formations, many rare native plants and a diversity of land and seabirds. In acknowledgement of these outstanding features, the island was placed on the register of the National Estate in March 1978 and in the United Nations World Heritage list in December 1982.

It's an exciting tourist destination, with many things to see and do, most of them easily accessible. Visitors can walk or cycle to almost every point of interest, or leisurely explore its numerous walking tracks. With a permanent population of just 300 and a limit of 393 tourist beds, the island is never crowded. Human pressure on the environment is minimal and spectacular natural features remain unspoilt.

Lord Howe is 11km long and 2.8 km wide at its widest point. In shape it resembles a boomerang, its concave western side spanned by a 6km reef enclosing a lagoon 1-3 metres deep. Much of the island's 1455 hectare area is taken up by 2 mountains – Lidgbird (777m) and Gower (875m).

The subtropical maritime climate produces mild-to-warm summers with fairly regular rainfall, and wetter, cooler-to-mild winters. Daily temperatures range from about 18°C to 25°C in summer and 13°C to 19°C in winter. Moderate easterlies

blow in summer and fresh-to-strong westerlies in winter.

Rainfall is seasonal – about 180mm in June and July and 120mm a month in summer months. Most arrives as moderate-to-heavy showers rather than continuous rain. The mountains are often in cloud and experience misty rain.

Generally, conditions are good enough for swimming between November and May. Water temperature varies between 17°C in August to 26°C in March, although the lagoon can be warmer on sunny days. Walking and hiking are pleasant all year round.

Administration

The island's first Board of Control was formed in 1953, based on the recommendations of a Royal Commission into the kentia palm seed industry. In 1953, the Lord Howe Island Act brought into being a new Lord Howe Island Board, a statutory authority responsible for all local government services.

While it remains responsible for the palm seed industry and general welfare of the islanders, the board's responsibilities have widened to include road and airstrip maintenance, fire control, health care, power generation and garbage disposal. Its role has been strengthened by various amendments to the Act, as well as several important planning documents, like the Regional Environmental Plan.

Walking Trails

Walking is the best way to explore Lord Howe Island. Numerous tracks criss-cross the island, leading to places of interest and scenic beauty.

Walking is quite safe. There are no snakes, poisonous spiders, or stinging plants. All trails are clearly marked with signs showing distances, while red markers on trees define the trails through the forest. Water is available at North Bay, Blinky Beach and in creeks at Boat Harbour, Rocky Creek and Erskine Creek. On other walks it's advisable to carry water.

Walks are easiest in the gentler central and northern parts of the island. Transit Hill is a good starting point as its central position provides an excellent reference point. Around the settled area, walks to Neds Beach and The Clear Place are strongly recommended.

The thatch palm forest is seen at its best here, the nesting colonies of the flesh-footed shearwater can be visited between September and April. At dusk the birds return from ocean feeding in their thousands.

The Stevens Reserve walk is a short, gentle loop that traverses tall lowland forests of blackbutt, grey bark, maulwood and thatch palm and takes you past some interestingly shaped banyan trees.

The walk to Little Island offers splendid scenery. The track passes through tall lowland rainforest beneath and towering ramparts of Mt Lidgbird. Little Island is merely a large rock on the shore's edge where between March and August, providence petrels mass in the evenings

For more information see the National Parks and Wildlife Service web site: www.npws.nsw.gov.au/parks/north/nor072.html

