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PRIVATE PARTY

From your personal yacht to your own island, Kara Murphy explores two of the most exclusive resorts on the Great Barrier Reef.

The World Heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef, which stretches for a staggering 1,430 miles along the Queensland coastline, is a fetching destination to explore by yacht, but it's also alluring if you base yourself on one of its 300 coral cays or 600 continental islands. And there's no better place to be land-based than on your own island, such as Orpheus and Hayman Islands. Each has just one incredibly luxurious resort; rent them out in entirety and have the whole island to yourself.

PHOTOGRAPHS: KARA MURPHY (MAIN); ISTOCK/ALANTOBEY (TOP RIGHT)

SIX OF THE BEST

Above-ground adventures on the Great Barrier Reef

Think of the Great Barrier Reef and, understandably, your mind probably dives underwater. After all, this natural icon, visible from space, is the world's largest coral reef ecosystem, comprising around 3,000 individual reefs and a staggering array of endearing marine creatures. However, with hundreds of continental islands and coral cays also contributing to this living structure's magnitude, you can enjoy memorable experiences on land, as well.



1 Witness a wonder

Six of the world's seven species of sea turtles are present on the Great Barrier Reef, with four – green, loggerhead, hawksbill and flatback – using island beaches to nest. One of the

best places to observe this laborious act is Heron Island, a 44-acre coral cay on the southern Great Barrier Reef, which, from about November until March, receives hundreds of nesting loggerhead and green turtles.

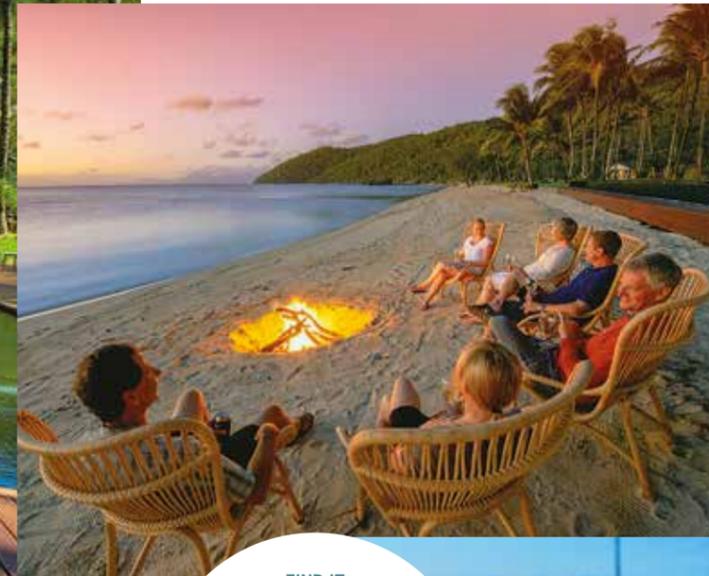
To see this natural wonder, walk around the island one or two hours after the evening high tide, listening for shifting sand while scouting for three-foot-wide tracks. To nest, the female slowly moves up the beach; after finding a suitable spot above the high-tide mark, she uses her flippers to dig a body pit and then a two-foot-deep egg chamber. After laying her clutch of up to 120 eggs, she covers them and returns to the water. In all, the exercise takes between one and three hours. Observing hatchlings, which emerge between December and April, is more difficult. They, too, favor the evening high tide; however, once they've abandoned their nest, their journey to the ocean takes but a few minutes. heronisland.com



2 Get a whiff of guano

Lady Elliot Island, a 110-acre coral cay on the southernmost Great Barrier Reef, has the reef's second-highest diversity of bird species – up to 95 different species of

seabirds, landbirds and shorebirds. Some live here year-round, while others only visit to breed. During breeding season (September to March), you'll definitely detect the salty (and not unpleasant) scent of *guano* (seabird excrement) as you wander around Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort, the island's sole accommodations, where thousands of black noddies nest in trees. Later, take a 40-minute walk around the island and observe more nesting birds – common noddies on the ground, crested terns in the short grass near the weather station and bridled terns among the coral rubble – as white-bellied sea eagles pluck fish from the sea and lesser frigate birds swoop through the sky, stealing food from other birds by scaring them and causing them to regurgitate. ladyelliott.com.au



BY BOAT
 Hazard Bay provides a sheltered anchorage for yachts, and the resort is accessible via tender. The closest marina is Breakwater Marina in Townsville (breakwatermarina.com.au). Berths can take yachts up to 144 feet. The marina offers deep-water access, metered power, high-flow refueling, freshwater and more.



FIND IT
 Orpheus Island is 43 nautical miles north of Townsville, Queensland. Access is via a 30-minute helicopter journey with Nautilus Aviation (nautilusaviation.com.au) from Townsville or a 1.5-hour ride from Cairns. www.orpheus.com.au

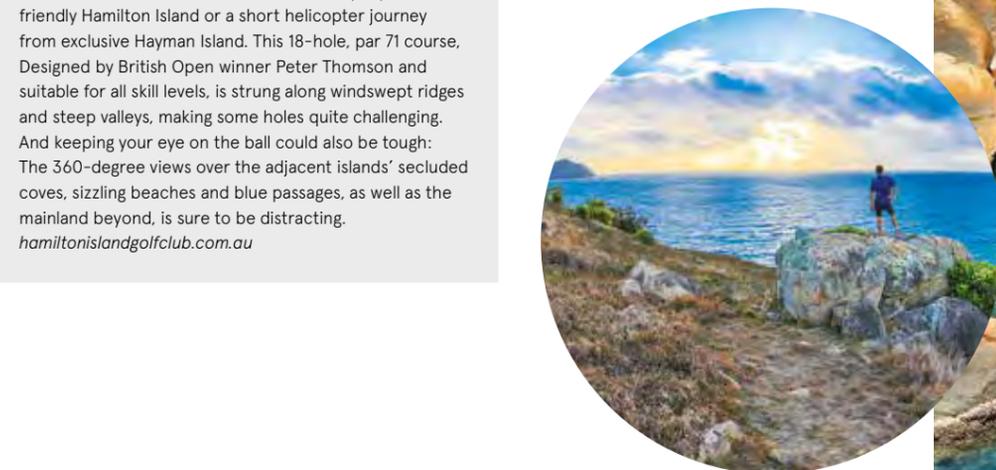
3 Rub shoulders with scientists
 Heron, Orpheus and Lizard Islands are home to research stations, where scientists, students and volunteers study marine fauna and

coral reefs. The oldest and largest, the University of Queensland's Heron Island Research Station, welcomes up to 150 visitors and is renowned for coral reef research and student training in marine science. Orpheus Island Research Station, on Orpheus' western side, is a marine biology research and education facility owned and operated by James Cook University, and the Australian Museum's Lizard Island Research Station, 168 miles north of Cairns on Lizard Island's southwestern side, is also a coral reef research facility.

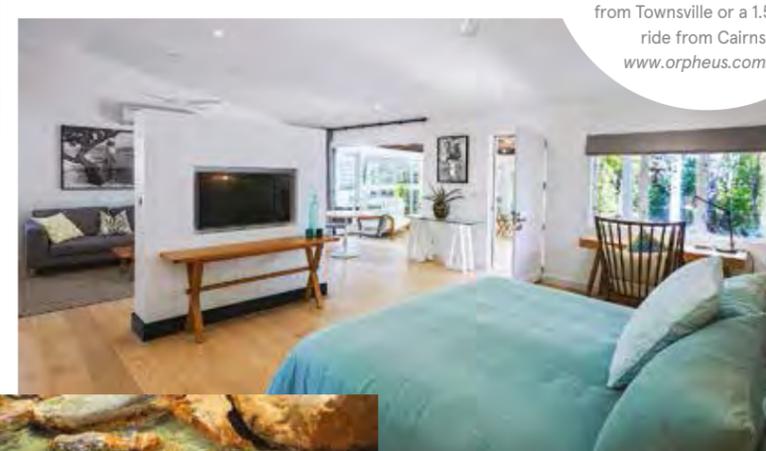
Nearby resorts — Heron, Orpheus and Lizard — run station tours for guests. On the one-hour Heron Island tour, for example, you can view the facilities (which include wet and dry laboratories and indoor/outdoor aquaria) and check out the ongoing experiment that seeks to forecast the impact of climate change on the reef. And if you run out of time for questions, the researchers will come to the resort to discuss their projects in greater detail.

4 Putt and drive with distraction
 The only golf course in Australia on its own island (Dent), the Whitsundays' Hamilton Island Golf Club, is just a 10-minute tender ride from superyacht-

friendly Hamilton Island or a short helicopter journey from exclusive Hayman Island. This 18-hole, par 71 course, Designed by British Open winner Peter Thomson and suitable for all skill levels, is strung along windswept ridges and steep valleys, making some holes quite challenging. And keeping your eye on the ball could also be tough: The 360-degree views over the adjacent islands' secluded coves, sizzling beaches and blue passages, as well as the mainland beyond, is sure to be distracting. hamiltonislandgolfclub.com.au



ORPHEUS ISLAND RESORT
 Remain alert as you travel to Orpheus Island Resort, on the western side of Orpheus Island National Park. In season, a manta ray or humpback whale may appear, cruising the Coral Sea near other islands in the Palm group. If the wildlife gazing gods are grinning, you may face a dilemma when your helicopter settles alongside the slender sandy beach rimming secluded Hazard Bay. Do you relax beside the infinity pool until dinner, perhaps squeezing in a short walk to one of two lookouts, or venture to a nearby bay to seek out more marine life?
 Difficult decisions can wait until you and your guests have sipped sparkling wine and chatted with Arie Prabowo, the resort's head chef, about your upcoming custom culinary adventures. For breakfast, he says, you can expect fresh fruit and pastries, followed by a second



Room tips:
 For an endearing mix of privacy, space and style, opt for the 732-square-foot South Suite, in a tropical garden setting and just a few steps from the water. Photos from Orpheus' early days accent the bright open-plan living and king sleeping area. Spa amenities with native scents — cherry alder, blue cypress and quandong — and a jar of damson plum and lemon myrtle salts may inspire you to try out the outdoor stone bathtub for two. However, if you're traveling with children, you'll probably be most comfortable in the 963-square-foot North Beachfront Villa, which has two bedrooms and two bathrooms and enjoys views over the Coral Sea.

course featuring, perhaps, fresh eggs from the resident hens; for lunch, tapas incorporating produce from the veggie patch; and for dinner, a four-course personalized menu of locally sourced fusion cuisine.

This small resort accommodates just 32 guests (including children) in its 14 rooms and suites. Low numbers contribute to an unhurried vibe, and the set-up is casually elegant, with five styles of accommodation flowing from either side of the open-air bar, al fresco daytime dining area, evening restaurant and reading/pool room.

Although something in the air (or possibly from the bar) may lull you into a horizontal position in one of the double hammocks or in the Gwandalan Day Spa (which means "rest and peace" in the Aboriginal language), try to spend at least a couple daylight hours adopting that stance in the water. The best underwater experiences are on the outer reef, about a 75-minute private charter away. However, a section of Hazard Bay holds more than a hundred giant clams, and you and your guests can easily explore nearby fringing reefs — home to hard and soft corals and 1,100 species of fish — via a self-guided motorized dinghy excursion or guided outing.

With no other resorts on this lush seven-mile-long island, the only people you and your guests might encounter while here would be Orpheus Island Research Station staff or scientists. Otherwise, the island and its best facilities are all yours.

PHOTOGRAPHS: KARA MURPHY (INSET TOP, CIRCLE), STOCKX/KAJA (INSET BOTTOM)

PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF ORPHEUS ISLAND RESORT

ONE&ONLY HAYMAN ISLAND

Arrivals don't get much better than this: Touching down at Hamilton Island's Great Barrier Reef Airport, you and your guests are led to a luxury yacht, where sparkling wine and canapés await. Bidding farewell to busy Hamilton and nearby Dent Island, famous for its golf course, you cruise north around the western side of lofty, uninhabited Whitsunday Island, the largest in the Whitsunday archipelago, as well as Hook Island, passing slivers of sand and sheltered anchorages. After about 50 minutes, you'll reach your destination, 726-acre Hayman Island, the most northerly in the 74-strong Whitsunday group.

Hayman, a private island, is home to just one resort, One&Only Hayman Island, which was rebranded and reopened in 2013 after a \$60 million refurbishment. Today, it features 160 rooms, suites, villas and penthouses in three distinct areas: the Hayman, Beach and Pool wings. The latter boasts the most impressive transformation, with one or two-bedroom suites that overlook one of the largest swimming pools in the Southern Hemisphere.

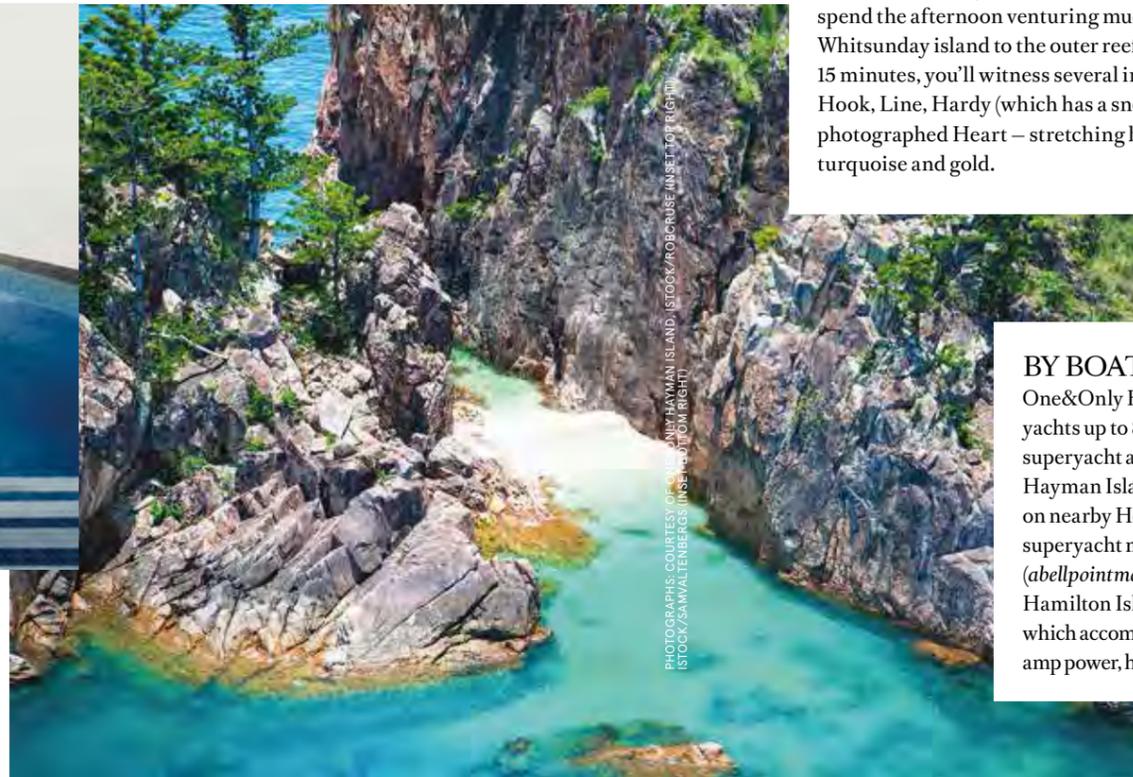
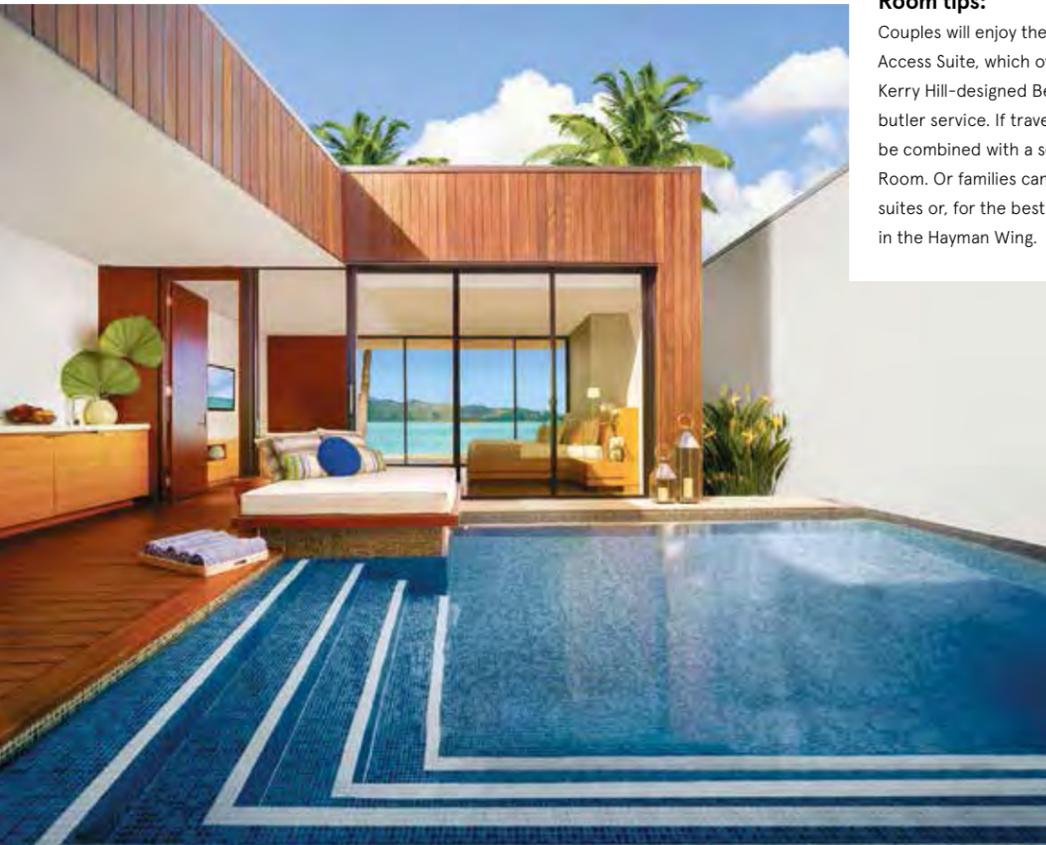
While some areas aren't suitable for children younger than age 12 (for example, the aforementioned pool and the suites that directly access it), the resort is, overall, family-friendly, with a shallower pool near the Hayman wing and a complimentary KidsOnly Club for



FIND IT
One&Only Hayman Island is 20 nautical miles north of Hamilton Island and 18 nautical miles northeast of Airlie Beach, Queensland. Access is via yacht or helicopter from Hamilton Island's Great Barrier Reef Airport. hayman.oneandonlyresorts.com

Room tips:

Couples will enjoy the 807-square-foot One-Bedroom Direct Pool Access Suite, which overlooks the main pool, or a 1,292-square-foot Kerry Hill-designed Beach Villa with Pool – both include personalized butler service. If traveling with children and a nanny, the latter can be combined with a separate and nearby 409-square-foot Retreat Room. Or families can choose one of the family rooms, two-bedroom suites or, for the best views, the two- or three-bedroom penthouses in the Hayman Wing.



PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF ONE&ONLY HAYMAN ISLAND; ISTOCK/ROBERUSE (INSET, TOP RIGHT); ISTOCK/SANVALEBERG (INSET, BOTTOM RIGHT)

BY BOAT

One&Only Hayman Island's marina can take private yachts up to 80 feet. The closest recommended superyacht anchorages are Blue Pearl Bay, near Hayman Island's northern tip, and Stonehaven on nearby Hook Island's western side. The closest superyacht marinas are Abell Point Marina (abellpointmarina.com.au) in Airlie Beach and Hamilton Island Marina (hamiltonisland.com.au), which accommodate yachts up to 196 feet and offer 125-amp power, high-flow fuel, concierge services and more.



5 Get winded in the Whitsundays

Whitsundays Islands National Park protects 32 islands, including several with walking tracks that will help you reclaim your land-legs (and fitness) after extended periods on your yacht. On Whitsunday Island, aim for 1,427-foot Whitsunday Peak, a challenging 3.1-mile-return walk that begins at Sawmill Beach in Cid Harbor and travels through rain forest gullies and windswept heaths to reach uninterrupted views of the surrounding islands. If you're after something a little less demanding, try the three-quarter-mile Solway Circuit that begins at Whitehaven Beach and climbs through grass trees, cycads and rock fern to a natural rock platform, or the 4.5-mile-return Chance Bay walk, which branches off the Solway and leads through a lonely forest. npsr.qld.gov.au/parks/whitsunday-islands



6 Follow in Captain Cook's footsteps

In August 1770, while charting the Australian east coast aboard the 109-foot HMB *Endeavour*, Lieutenant James Cook found himself caught in a labyrinth of reefs near a group of continental islands and was unsure how to make his way out. Coming ashore on Lizard Island (which he named after the prevalent reptiles), he climbed to the highest point (now known as Cook's Look) and noticed, to the northeast, a narrow break in the reefs leading to open sea. Contemplate Cook's plight as you tackle the steep, 1.4-mile return trail from Watsons Bay beach to the exposed summit of 1,178-foot Cook's Look. You may have fewer worries than Cook did during this climb, but don't be overly confident; the descent can be tricky. npsr.qld.gov.au/parks/lizard-island