



EUGENE TAN

Lord Howe Island  
— a Tasman gem.  
**Right:** Pontoons  
and the twin peaks  
of Lord Howe's  
Mount Gower.

TRAVEL

# NATURAL HIGH

*Aquabumps photographer Eugene Tan, with his wife Debbie and two boys, captures the contrasting landscapes of New South Wales, from the exclusive volcanic isle of Lord Howe to the desert hues of Broken Hill, in this unique family travel diary.*





# L. LORD HOWE ISLAND

We had been trying to visit Lord Howe for such a long time. Truth be told, it's been hard to get a spot because tourism numbers are capped at 400 guests on the island at any time. But it was well worth the wait.

Lord Howe is a volcanic island with a Jurassic landscape similar to Tahiti and Hawaii. Miles from anywhere, the island is an old volcano that's sunk into the ocean, with big chunks of rock coming out of the middle of the water. When you land (by propeller plane), it has a magical, mystical feel about it – like going back in time and arriving in a utopia.

One side of the island is quite rogue and exposed to the eastern oceans, while the western side is like a massive lagoon – a big blue swimming pool with lots of coral. From everywhere on the island you can see the giant peak of Mount Gower, which at 875 metres is often surrounded by clouds. It's a drawcard for tourists keen enough to take the eight-hour trek to the top.

What makes Lord Howe even more unique is that it is Crown land, which means businesses are only permitted long leases, so developers are few and far between and there are no high-rise buildings to spoil the scenery. In terms of luxury stays, the stunning Baillie Lodges's Capella Lodge is in an incredible location tucked at the base of the mountains away from everything else, while Island House near Neds Beach, is also very private and comes with its own chef. It's where the Hemsworths stay when they're here.

There are few cars on Lord Howe (only six are available to book), so bicycles are the main mode of transport. Locals are focussed on sustainability, composting and recycling is big, and solar and battery microgrids on the island reduce reliance on diesel-generated electricity. Strict rules on where you can fish also apply, and micro-diversity is protected – shoe-cleaning stations on tracks encourage walkers to clean their feet to prevent cross-infecting other areas of the island with any disease. It feels, and operates, like a giant national park.

While it's hard to leave the idyllic seclusion of this place, it's worth taking a boating day trip to Ball's Pyramid, 23 kilometres southeast of the island. Rising half a kilometre high, it's the tallest volcanic sea stack in the world. (Jack, the isle's salty sea dog, will take you. Everybody knows Jack!) We had a swim there – but it was a bit sharky – something later confirmed in photographs, which captured sharks swimming beneath us.

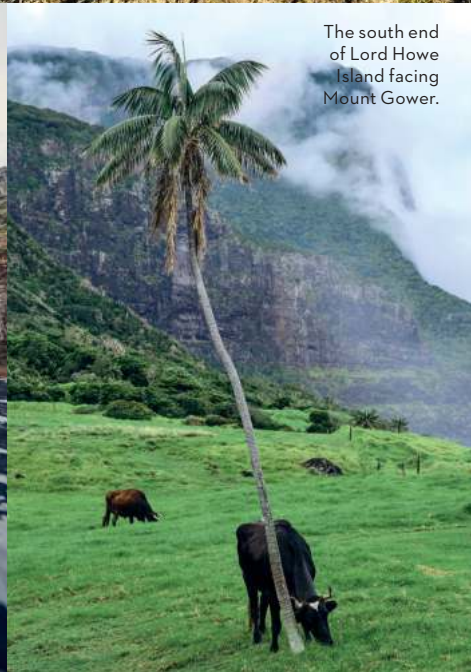
In this part of the world the ocean is clean and iridescent blue, and the air is just as pure. I'm very happy that those who love this place and call it home are determined to keep it that way. →



Deb and I with the view from Malabar Hill, Lord Howe Island.



Ball's Pyramid, the tallest sea stack in the world.



The south end of Lord Howe Island facing Mount Gower.



Snorkelling in the lagoon on Lord Howe.

INTERVIEW: NADIA SALAMINE  
PHOTOGRAPHS: EDGEWELL

# 2. BROKEN HILL

You don't find me venturing from the coast too much – but a short 2.5-hour flight from Sydney landed us in Broken Hill – also known as the Silver City – a remote mining town in the far west of outback New South Wales.

Here, we found good coffee at the Silly Goat cafe and then made our way to Silverton. I'm a big fan of *Mad Max*, so I was keen to see where it was filmed on those long stretches of dusty roads. It's also fun to visit Silverton's Mad Max Museum, the first and only museum dedicated to *Mad Max 2*.

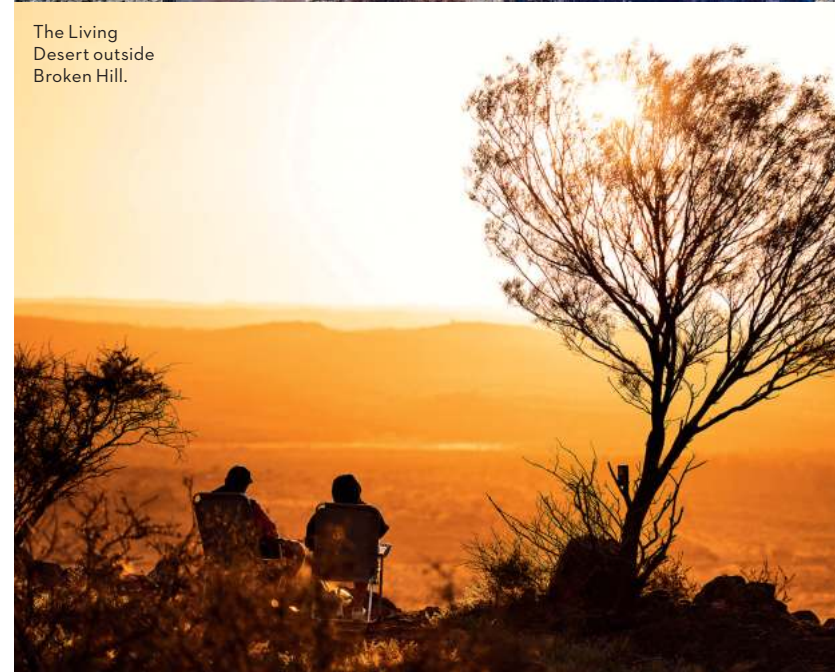
Mundi Mundi plains lookout is well worth a stop – stand on top of the barrier ranges and look across Mundi Mundi Station, which stretches as far as the South Australia border.

Sunset and sunrise are my favourite times of day, and The Living Desert's sculptures are a must at sunset.

There's nothing like the outback to make you feel connected to your roots.



Water tanks against the clear blue sky of Broken Hill.



The Living Desert outside Broken Hill.





### 3. NORTHERN RIVERS

My wife, Deb, is from the Northern Rivers – so it’s a very special place to all of us. We were fortunate to spend quite a bit of time there over the lockdown last year and really experienced the area where she grew up. It is quiet – you can always find a wave – and the hinterland is a wondrous utopia. We explored the coast from Cabarita to Yamba and loved the fresh produce of the markets and there are myriad things to do as a family. Waterfalls, long stretches of empty beaches, warm days in the middle of winter and the nature, fauna and rolling green hills make you feel like you are lost in paradise.

Deb and our son Spike diving at The Wreck in Byron Bay.



Yarrangobilly Caves thermal Pool.



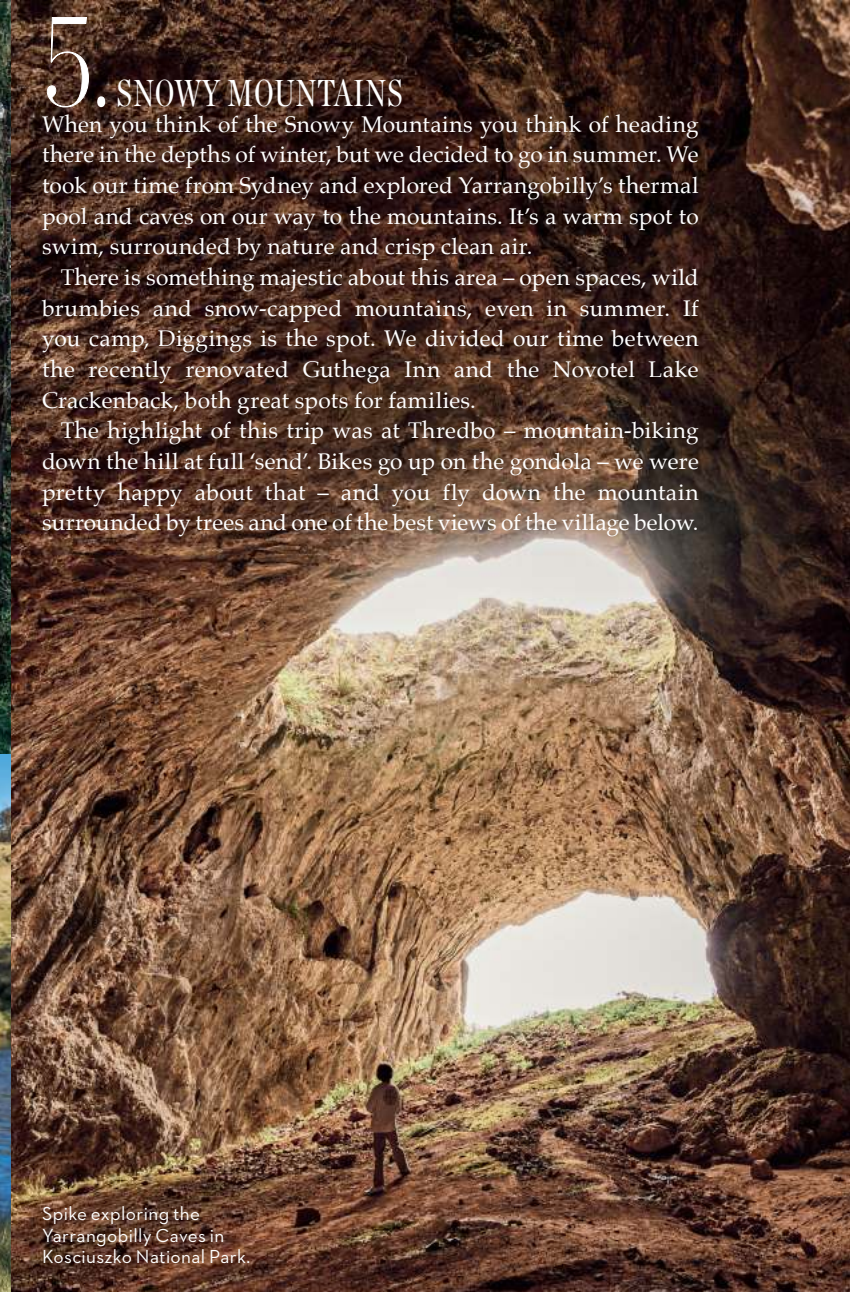
Charlotte Pass, the Snowy Mountains.

### 5. SNOWY MOUNTAINS

When you think of the Snowy Mountains you think of heading there in the depths of winter, but we decided to go in summer. We took our time from Sydney and explored Yarrangobilly’s thermal pool and caves on our way to the mountains. It’s a warm spot to swim, surrounded by nature and crisp clean air.

There is something majestic about this area – open spaces, wild brumbies and snow-capped mountains, even in summer. If you camp, Diggings is the spot. We divided our time between the recently renovated Guthega Inn and the Novotel Lake Crackenback, both great spots for families.

The highlight of this trip was at Thredbo – mountain-biking down the hill at full ‘send’. Bikes go up on the gondola – we were pretty happy about that – and you fly down the mountain surrounded by trees and one of the best views of the village below.



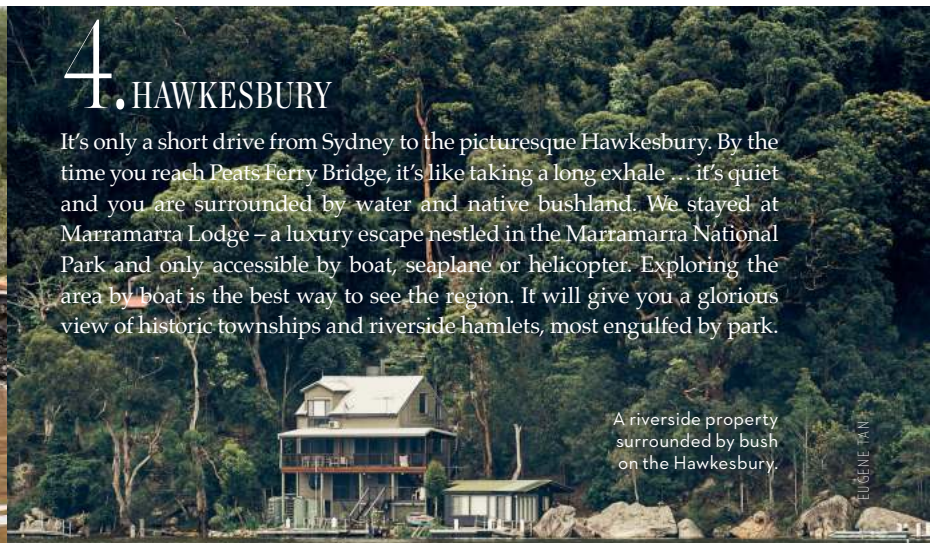
Spike exploring the Yarrangobilly Caves in Kosciuszko National Park.



Marramarra Lodge on the Hawkesbury River offers luxury tents and spacious bungalows nestled in nature.

### 4. HAWKESBURY

It’s only a short drive from Sydney to the picturesque Hawkesbury. By the time you reach Peats Ferry Bridge, it’s like taking a long exhale – it’s quiet and you are surrounded by water and native bushland. We stayed at Marramarra Lodge – a luxury escape nestled in the Marramarra National Park and only accessible by boat, seaplane or helicopter. Exploring the area by boat is the best way to see the region. It will give you a glorious view of historic townships and riverside hamlets, most engulfed by park.



A riverside property surrounded by bush on the Hawkesbury.

EUGÈNE FAY



Fly fishing with Deb on Thredbo River.