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24 beaches and surrounding  
waters have remained  
beautifully pristine.*

# THE CALM BEFORE

HOW DOES one prepare for the arrival of their *FIRST CHILD*? By jumping on board the *BABYMOON* bandwagon with a to-die-for ISLAND ESCAPE.

WORDS MEGAN ARKINSTALL



*The only sound to be heard  
is the lapping of water  
against our boat.*

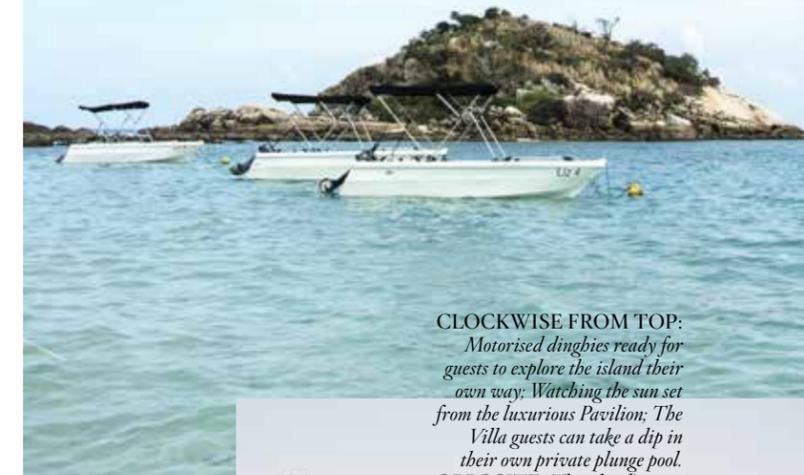
UNLIKE THE HONEYMOON, which dates back to the fifth century when a honey-based aphrodisiac was consumed by newlyweds during their first moon of marriage, the babymoon is a relatively new concept. Just 10 years ago British author Sheila Kitzinger coined the term in her book *The Year After Childbirth*, in which she encourages new parents to take time off together after the baby is born, a period she refers to as the 'babymoon'.

In 2016 parents-to-be have redefined the babymoon by omitting said baby from the equation altogether. The babymoon is now all about taking time off together before the baby arrives, for one last romantic and relaxing sojourn. The prospect of forgoing this kind of holiday for a while is terrifying to my husband and I (cue soundtrack to *Psycho*), so with just 14 weeks until D-Day, we jet off to experience this new and happily received tradition in a place we had dreamed of going for many moons, but hadn't until this particular moon: Lizard Island.

Accessible only by private charter from Cairns (sounds exotically amazing already, doesn't it?), at the northern end of the Great Barrier Reef, Lizard Island ticks all of our babymoon boxes: luxurious and relaxing with a little bit of fun/adventure thrown in for good measure. And it all begins with waking at a reasonable hour without an alarm. Bliss! (We're told to soak this up as much as possible before our human alarm clock arrives...)

To explore this little patch of paradise, we've hired a private dinghy for the day. At a lazy 10:30am we hop aboard our vessel *Liz 2*, which has been loaded with an esky full of water, soft drinks and a gourmet picnic spread, and set off to explore the island.

It's a balmy 27 degrees with barely a cloud in the sky, nor a whisper of wind. As we approach Mermaid Cove, we spot *Liz 1* moored close to shore and two tiny figures sitting under an umbrella. They have the entire beach to themselves – and who →



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:  
*Motorised dinghies ready for  
guests to explore the island their  
own way; Watching the sun set  
from the luxurious Pavilion; The  
Villa guests can take a dip in  
their own private plunge pool.  
OPPOSITE: The island's main  
beach looking out to Anchor Bay.*

PHOTOGRAPHY: MEGAN ARKINSTALL (BOATS AND SUNSET)





*The rocky landscape of the utterly private Sunset Beach. OPPOSITE: An Oceanview Plunge Pool Villa.*

are we to interrupt their serenity? – so my husband turns the dinghy around and we make a beeline for Watsons Bay around the corner. There's not a soul here, so we drop anchor. Once our little six-horsepower engine is cut, the only sound to be heard is the lapping of water against our boat; water that is a brilliant tie-dye of blues from indigo to cerulean to aqua to crystal-clear; the beach, a stretch of pristine white sand. It's one of those moments where I have to pinch myself.

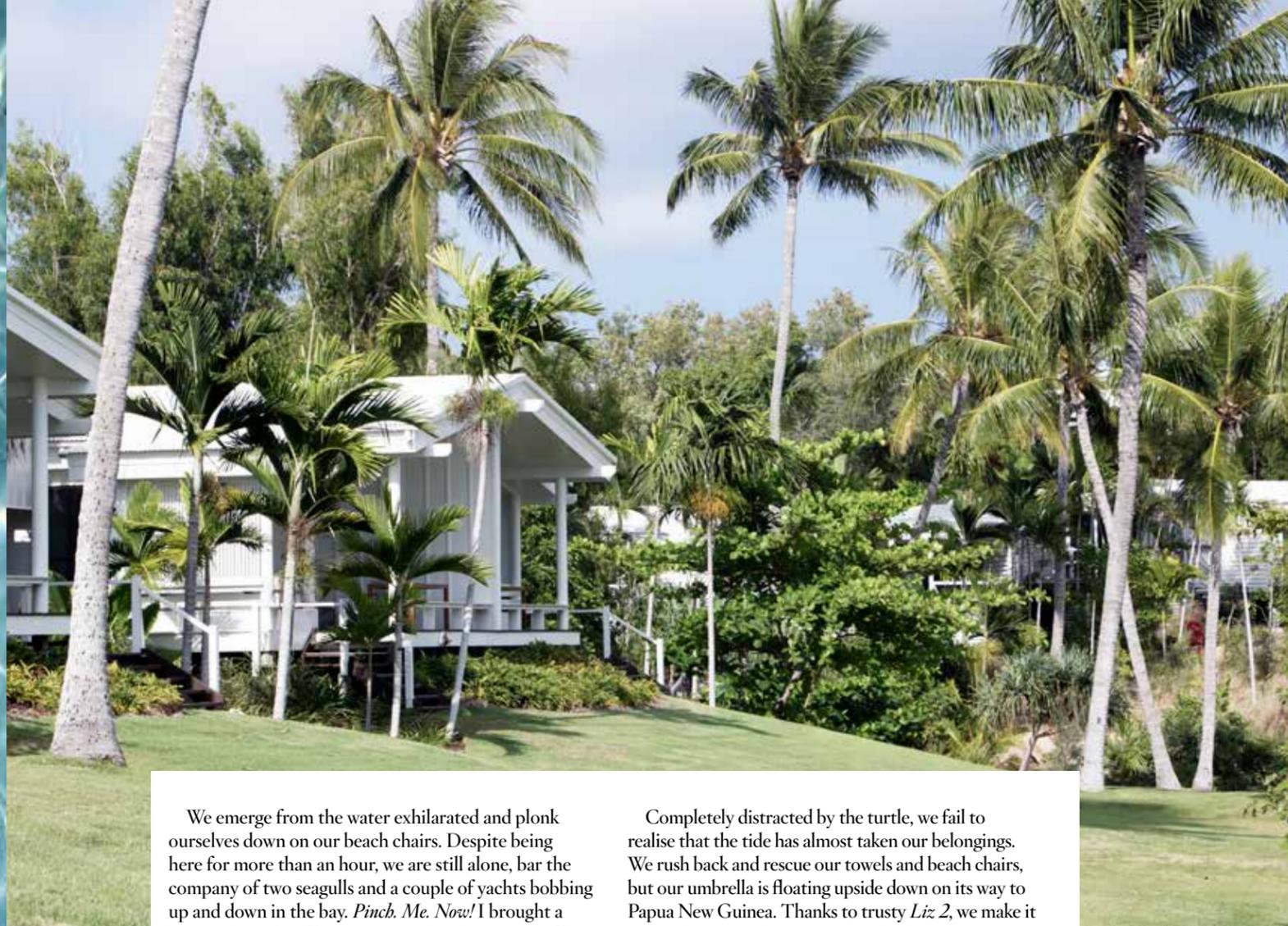
Lizard Island was declared a national park in 1937 and its surrounding waters a marine park in 1974. The island, named in 1770 by Lieutenant James Cook after the yellow-spotted monitor that calls the island home, is surprisingly rugged, covered in grasslands, heath, eucalypt and acacia woodlands; a complete (and uniquely Australian) contrast to the tropical colour and beauty found in the surrounding iridescent waters.

With 24 beaches and its Blue Lagoon, the island is a magical place for exploring the Great Barrier Reef. I have been snorkelling in the Reef twice before – once on Green Island and another time on an outer reef – and both were unforgettable experiences, but nothing could prepare me for Lizard Island's Clam Gardens. Incredibly, these bivalve molluscs that thrive here can be up to two metres in length, weigh more than 200 kilograms and have a lifespan of 100 or so years. Without another snorkel in sight, we glide above the giant clams admiring their mantles, some neon blue and royal purple in colour, past schools of vibrant skittish fish, and unique seascapes of coral. We spot a number of different sea cucumbers lying on the ocean floor, bright blue starfish clinging to rocks, a large spotted fish (apparently named the 'spotted sweetlips'), a fast-moving stingray, and, yes, we found Nemo. →



PHOTOGRAPHY: MEGAN ARKINSTALL (SUNSET BEACH)

*We glide above the giant clams admiring their mantles, some neon blue and royal purple in colour...*



We emerge from the water exhilarated and plonk ourselves down on our beach chairs. Despite being here for more than an hour, we are still alone, bar the company of two seagulls and a couple of yachts bobbing up and down in the bay. *Pinch. Me. Now!* I brought a book with me but I'm not even inclined to open it, I'm so mesmerised by this deserted island scene (though, I probably should – you'll be too busy to read any books on maternity leave, they warn). Hungry, we head back to our boat to tuck into our lunch. The two friendly seagulls get wind of the delicious goodies on board and perch themselves on the bow of our dinghy hoping, unsuccessfully, for some scraps.

Farewelling our new feathered friends, we putt away in our dinghy to Casuarina Beach, near the world-class Lizard Island Research Station (see p119), and arrive in time for an afternoon siesta (another pastime we'll have to learn to live without for a while). I've no idea how long I've been napping when my husband wakes me urgently; the incoming tide is lapping at his toes! After we drag our stuff up the sand, my husband heads down the other end of the beach to explore and minutes later signals for me to join him. Begrudgingly I pull my six-month-pregnant belly up from my towel and slowly make my way toward him, but when I hear that he's yelling "Turtle!" I pick up my pace.

Merely a metre from where we stand, a dark figure is moving underwater. We wait patiently for a few moments and then, one of the most breathtaking sights I've ever encountered – a green sea turtle emerges, its mottled markings shimmering in the sun, and goes back under.

Completely distracted by the turtle, we fail to realise that the tide has almost taken our belongings. We rush back and rescue our towels and beach chairs, but our umbrella is floating upside down on its way to Papua New Guinea. Thanks to trusty *Liz 2*, we make it to our blue-and-white striped sunshade just as it tips over and slowly submerges, *Titanic*-style. Luckily the water is shallow and clear enough that with a bit of grit my husband saves it.

Later that afternoon, back in the comfort of our divine white-on-white suite (and admittedly a little sunkissed) we sink into a couple of chairs on the deck to watch the sunset; my husband with a Corona and slice of lime, me with a specially made strawberry mocktail hand-delivered to our door.

One of the most blissful things about Lizard Island is that there's no mobile reception and wi-fi is patchy, meaning we actually have real conversations (remember those?). Like many parents-to-be, the topic of conversation could easily turn to baby names, or nursery furniture, or classes on childbirth. But, although we're incredibly excited for our impending arrival, we talk about our day instead; it's a rare occasion that we can describe as 'the best day' and truly mean it. Indeed, a babymoon is all about making special memories for two, and Lizard Island is the perfect place for the occasion; a bucket-list item that has lived up to all expectations and more.

As the sun sets and this perfect day turns into an array of pastel colours, I have another pinch-me moment, until my husband wryly says: "We're flat out like lizards on Lizard." Sigh... the dad jokes have officially begun. 🍷

PHOTOGRAPHY: MEGAN ARKINSTALL (PAVILION, ANCHOR BAY, RESTAURANT AND CITRUS PIE)



CLOCKWISE FROM THIS IMAGE: *The Pavilion's infinity pool and sun lounges have views of the Coral Sea; Dining with a view at Salt Water Restaurant; The Beachfront Suites are a stone's throw from pure white sand; A delicious citrus pie dessert served at lunch. OPPOSITE: Beachfront Suites are set among tropical foliage.*



## DETAILS

### Getting there

Lizard Island is 240 kilometres north of Cairns via a one-hour scenic flight; guests are met at Cairns airport and transferred to the East Air terminal. A return flight is \$670 per person.

### Staying there

The resort has 40 exquisite rooms and suites, a restaurant and bar, beach club, tennis court, day spa and pool. Rates start from \$1800 per night (garden view) to \$5800 per night (four-person villa) including a fully stocked mini bar, meals, non-alcoholic and selected alcoholic beverages, picnic hampers, non-motorised watersports and motorised dinghy hire.

The Babymoon Package is \$675 per couple and includes mocktails and chocolate-dipped strawberries on arrival, a sunset cruise with wine/soft drink and cheeses, a one-hour massage for two, and a beachside degustation experience. [lizardisland.com.au](http://lizardisland.com.au)

### Lizard Island Research Station

The island is home to a world-class research station owned and operated by the Australian Museum. Attracting coral reef researchers from all over the world, all work conducted at the station assists in the conservation of the Great Barrier Reef and other reefs around the world. Tours of the station are available at an additional cost.