

FROM ENGLAND TO ISLAND

UK journalist GEORGE DRYDEN shares the highlights of her first visit to beautiful Fraser Island

JUST in case you're not into the whole sport thing, I can assure you that December 2009 was not a great time to be a Brit in Oz.

However, our beautiful performers on the cricket pitch and the ensuing, constant flooding was more than compensated by spending two days on one of the most outstanding and unspoilt tourist attractions in the world.

You know, the one that's right on the

border of Heaven? Yes, it's to be more precise, a 35-minute catamaran ride away - Fraser Island.

The one that many of you have spent a lifetime dreaming to get over and see, but have still not managed it.

It's an easy mistake to make - as a 20-year-old resident of the UK, I've not yet ventured across the Irish Sea to the Emerald Isle, but yet here I was, on the other side of the world, amazed that

many locals have still not ventured over from the mainland. Believe me, you're missing out.

And it doesn't matter if you're the active or decidedly inactive type, with money to burn or not, the world's largest sand island has something for everyone and an experience for every budget, from camping to top-end, ecologically sympathetic hotel accommodation.

In many ways, Fraser Island encapsu-

lates all that I think is wonderful about Australia - an extraordinary range of plants, life, all within a fairly small space, enhanced further by a huge array of wildlife, much of which is exclusive to the island. Our personal tour guide on the first day, Kingfisher Bay ranger Chris Muler, is fairly adamant on this point.

Clearly influenced by his father's career in ornithology, Chris can tell a story about virtually every different crea-



Stunning stay... The award-winning Kingfisher Bay Resort on Fraser Island.

turally we come across.

"There are insects I've discovered here that I've never seen before or since," he says.

It's all new to me and like nothing I've ever seen before - a real delight for the senses - the distinctive, almost clinical sounds of eucalyptus, the sound of a family of koalas making their claim on a particular section of the valley and parrots whose whirr even the most well-travelled would struggle to improve upon.

The start of the day saw us transported by boat, and then walked to Lake Yabby, across the spectacular, but not too easy-to-navigate Hammettstone Sandstone, covering a rare cross-section of plants from start to finish.

With every step, there seemed to be a different type of evidence for Chris to share his knowledge on - I don't know about you, but I'd say that catching close-range sights of a lace monitor, a parrotia wood, a pair of elephant seals, a red-capped squire, several different species of birds and a loggerhead turtle's egg chambers - all within a matter of hours, is pretty quite going.

The ultimate high point for me was our afternoon walk from Cavalry Station to The Valley, light through the middle of the

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scrambled along the edge of Wanggoolba Creek.

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Chris did his best to fitting us up at regular intervals to ensure we kept up with our packed schedule, but the more we walked, the more pictures we snapped.

As with the rest of the island, you want to capture and commit every possible image to memory.

After a few adventures of combined walking, there's nothing quite like a dip in a crystal clear pool here to cool down, so off we headed to Lake McKenzie for a same liquid refreshment.

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After trekking through rainforest, George cools off in crystal-clear Lake McKenzie.

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Sunset makes a perfect ending

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Oh, and the rumours are true – if you've got a little silver that needs brightening up, be sure to take it with you, as the acidity in the water works wonders on shining up certain metals – not to mention conditioning your hair.

Watching the sun set behind the jetty at the Kingfisher Bay Resort was the perfect end to a highly demanding, but nonetheless rewarding day, topped off with a dinner of chill marinara at Seabelle Restaurant. This pasta creation included some delicious Moreton Bay bugs, which I'd been aching to try.

In a place as wildlife-rich as Fraser Island, there's little time for lazing around, particularly if your aim is to top up your natural history knowledge. So on day two, we were, quite literally, up with the lark, or the bar-shouldered dove to be precise, on an early morning bird-watch with ranger Leah Milne.

It would also be Leah who would, later in the afternoon, lead us up a creek – fortunately with a paddle or two – for the low-down in mangrove ecology and a not-so-crash course in oar manoeuvre. She successfully commandeered the unlikely team of five three-man canoes along the island's fringe, up Dundonga Creek, continuing up as far as the point where the salt water turned to fresh.

By the end of day two, I felt as if my feet hadn't touched the ground (apart from an hour and a half of self-indulgence, courtesy of a facial at the award-winning Kingfisher Resort), but in terms of square footage covered, I hadn't even scratched the surface.

And in spite of travelling across Australia since September, I don't feel like I've scratched the surface on a nation-wide level, either.

But one thing was more certain than Britain's defeat in the Ashes – Fraser Island remains, as yet, the most picturesque and breathtaking place I have visited in the southern hemisphere. **E**

Favourite things

LIFE in good old Aussie is a little different to the goings-on in Mother England as UK journo George Dryden found out. Here she shares her favourite things about Australia:

- Fraser Island! More generally, your rich tapestry of contrasting landscapes and the wildlife within it.
- Milo.
- Top quality red wine, without the heavy price tag.
- Moreton Bay bugs.
- The Queensland dawn chorus – amazing, if a little early!
- Post office staff and bus drivers – they never fail to be helpful and always have a smile for you.
- Kangaroos – I could never become blasé about these amazing creatures, no matter how many I have seen.
- The aroma of eucalyptus.
- Being able to wander about in beachwear most of the time and not one batting an eyelid!

Kingfisher Bay

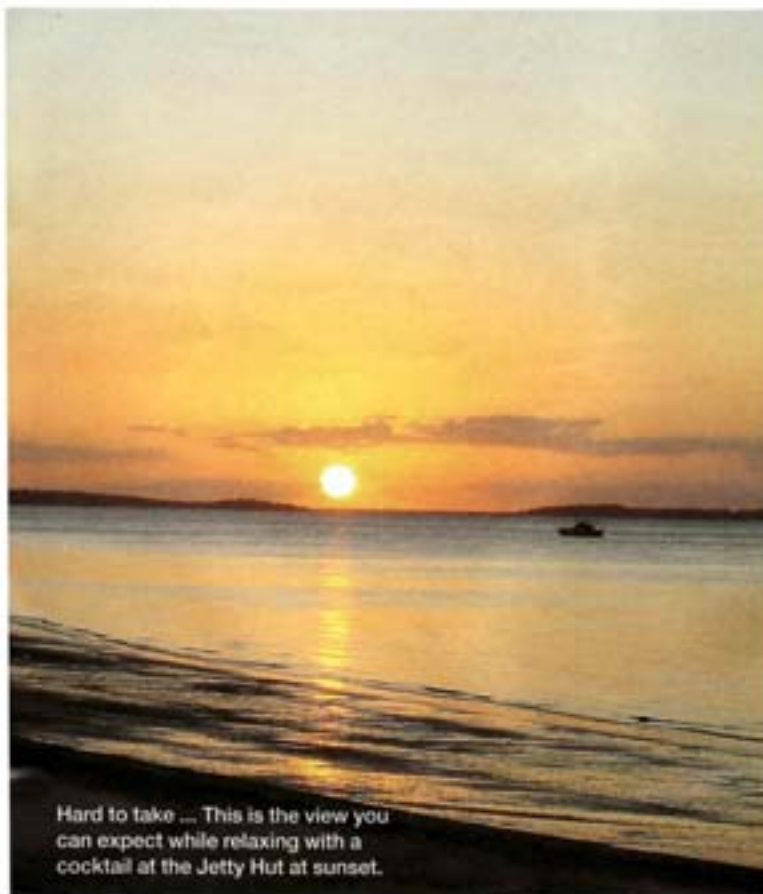
Multi-award-winning ecotourism resort Kingfisher Bay Resort and Village is the place to pamper yourself after a hard day exploring the World Heritage wilderness of Fraser Island.

It is a unique holiday destination providing adventure and excitement but at the same time a casual atmosphere for the ultimate in relaxation.

Nestled among the tree-covered dunes on the edge of the calm blue waters of the Great Sandy Strait, Kingfisher Bay offers all the amenities of a modern resort while blending harmoniously with Fraser Island's sensitive ecological system.

Kingfisher Bay Resort and Village is just a 35 minute trip by fast catamaran from Hervey Bay which is a 45 minute flight or a three-and-a-half hour drive from the Queensland capital of Brisbane. Kingfisher Bay has daily catamaran and barge services from Hervey Bay.

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Hard to take ... This is the view you can expect while relaxing with a cocktail at the Jetty Hut at sunset.

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