



LIVING HISTORY

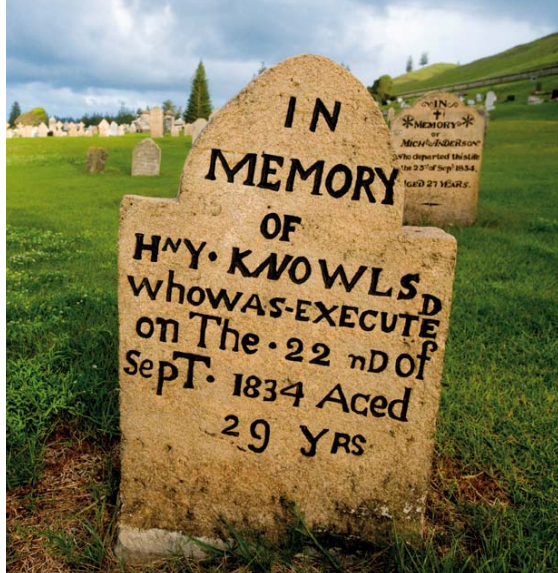
It's our closest neighbour and one of the smallest South Pacific islands, but DENNIS and ROSAMUND KNILL soon discover Norfolk Island is full of surprises and well worth a visit.

“**AND** coming up on your right is the convict cemetery, not only a famous tourist attraction but also a sobering testament to the islands bloody history. Should you die unexpectedly while on holiday we only charge \$30 to bury you here, the same as our departure tax so either way the cost is the same,” said Rick our tour guide jokingly.

Wandering among the crumbling graves and sand blasted headstones from the blustery sea was like walking through a timeline. Even today Norfolk Islanders are buried just meters from their ancestors.

Ask anyone who's been to Norfolk Island what they liked best and you're bound to get a different answer every time. Unhurried, uncrowded, unspoiled, no graffiti, no litter and the perfect place for some serious R&R are the common responses.

With the ability to charm and inspire the most blasé of tourists, the locals have not succumbed to hard sell tourism and retain a strong sense of community, family dedication and cultural pride with a bit



of quirkiness thrown in for good measure. Quirkiness like residents who proudly name their homes as Hip Roof, Leekie Roof, Rusty Roof or Silver Roof. And with so many folks sharing the same surname, the telephone directory lists a section of nicknames. A quick scan unveils such pseudonyms as Pinky, Moose, Knuckles, Coon, Skeeters and Bugs.

Our desire for escape began almost 30 years ago when, on a whim, we came here to purchase a restaurant. On our arrival documents, we had omitted to fill in where we were staying. Dutifully an official took us to one side refusing to process our visas until we had arranged some accommodation.

So what's changed? Well nothing really and should you miss your homeward flight they know exactly where to find you, not altogether a travesty as the island has no overstayers. And if you think living in paradise is easy, think again; to emigrate here there are just two options, marry into a local family or buy an existing business.

Nobody locks their doors or cars so it's easy to spot the tourists. Even the rental car companies tell you to leave the keys in the ignition, after all it's unlikely you'll make it off the island with one of their vehicles.

Norfolk Island is only eight by five kilometres, the speed limit is 50kph and navigating the only roundabout on the island or avoiding wandering cows is about as stressful as it gets. You soon get to grips with the "Norfolk wave" – one finger for locals, two (sideways of course) for tourists.

Because of the islands isolation and absence of a safe harbour, freighters often weigh anchor for days on end to unload their cargo onto smaller boats. Many a time the locals have had more than a few anxious moments as their new car or horses are rowed ashore.

Despite the accommodation being scattered all over the island you will never be more than a ten minute drive to Burnt Pine and the opportunity for some cafe culture, a bit of duty free shopping or provisions from the islands only supermarket.

Norfolk Island is full of knee-deep history, history as intriguing as it is horrifying.

The first European settlers arrived in 1788 to establish a penal colony only to be later abandoned in 1814. In 1825 a second settlement was built for the worst type of convicts; hardened criminals and murderers commonplace. Officially described as "a place of the extremist punishment, short of death" so shocking that many of the convicts craved death as a form of escape.

A year after the second settlement was shut down, a third wave of settlers arrived from Pitcairn Island. Pitcairn was previously home to the Bounty mutineers and having faced starvation and overcrowding, the Pitcairners wrote to Queen Victoria begging

for help. In one of the most generous gestures in the history of the British Empire she gave the entire Pitcairn community a new haven to live and thus a new chapter had begun.

Gradually, the 194 Pitcairn refugees adapted and 180 years on the descendants today constitute the very backbone of the island's population with surnames like Christian, Evans, Quintal, McCoy, Buffett, Adams, Nobbs and Young. Many of the descendants play their own ancestors in various re-enactments and shows among the eerily quiet stone buildings and Victorian homesteads around Kingston.

The make-up of Norfolk Island is spectacular. There are so many seascapes, often with little more than a handful of tourists visiting at the same time. Emily Bay is a calm lagoon protected by a reef and is the only safe beach on the island. Its perfectly formed crescent shaped golden sand beach and iridescent blue water ringed by groves of mature Norfolk pines is the jewel in the crown.

For outdoor lovers there are numerous walking tracks and our guided walk through the National Park to the lookout at Cook Monument was simply stunning. Our guide kept us entertained and educated through the ecologically unspoiled rainforest, until the →

HOT SPOTS

← forest canopy gave way to stands of Norfolk pines climbing the steep cliff face. The walking tracks offer extraordinary vistas of the endless blue ocean pounding the treacherous and rocky coastline below ending with a hearty breakfast on the cliff top on Anson Bay Reserve.

Arriving at Cyclorama we couldn't help but wonder whether this was a building one made a dash for in the event of a cyclone or whether it was a bicycle history tour. As it happened, it's one continuous 360 degree painting that cleverly illustrates the story of Fletcher Christian and the Mutiny on the Bounty in one easy lesson.

And eating out we hear you ask? The island has some excellent restaurants with the progressive dinners a must do experience. Your driver will escort you to four different homesteads for a four course meal. These dinners provide the perfect opportunity to learn about the families history in relaxed and unique surroundings.

It's hard to imagine a more perfect ending to our last night on Norfolk Island; we're standing on the cliff top, the Pacific Ocean stretches out forever. "Listen what you can hear," asked John our co-host at Forrester's Cottages. We strain to listen but there was only the sound of the waves lurching on the rocky coastline below and the odd bird chattering, and well - nothing else.

Dennis and Rosamund Knill were assisted by Air New Zealand, Norfolk Island Tourism, PeadPR & Southern Cross Travel Insurance ◀

NEED TO KNOW

Getting There: Air New Zealand fly direct each Sunday.

Contact Air New Zealand Holidays on 0800 747 222 or log onto www.airnewzealand.co.nz

Where to Stay: Accommodation to suit all budgets. Most include a rental car with the tariff

Best Eats: Hilli Restaurant and Bar, Garrison, Dino's, The Golden Orb Café, Branka House, Fish Fry

Tours: Pinetree Tours provide the most comprehensive tours on the island. Log onto www.info@pinetreetours.com

Other Places of Interest: Two Chimneys Winery, Norfolk Island Liqueurs, Trial of the Fifteen, Convicts Ruins, Kingston Museum, St Barnabas Chapel, National Parks Visitors Centre, Cook's Landing Monument, Rocky Point Reserve, Iwii Paradise, Mount Pitt, Philip Island, Farmers Market, Mount Bates, Kingston Pier, Sound and Light Show, Bounty Folks Museum

Mobile phones: There are no external facilities so leave yours at home

Background Reading: Hell and Paradise by Peter Clarke, The Pitcairners by Robert Nicolson

Travel Smart