MEDIA MONITORS

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MTWTF--

Lots to smile about on Norfolk Island

There's an island perched out in the South Pacific where nothing much matters . . . nothing but great food, impressive vistas, friendly locals and extreme relaxation as ANDREW DRUMMOND discovers.

Cattle graze roadside as cars with weathered and unreadable number plates mosey along a twisted network of potholed bitumen, drivers casually raising a finger from the steering wheel to wave as is local tradition.

Welcome to Norfolk Island, or "Welkum to Norfuk Ailen" as the native tongue would have it.

Don't expect to leave the plane by airbridge into an air-conditioned terminal, the humidity on the tarmac provides a warm enough welcome.

During the quick passage through Customs all the staff are smiling as though party to a great joke that no one's bothered to tell the newcomers.

It's no joke, Norfolk Island is a land of smiles where the happiness of locals is infectious.

Long known as a dream destination for bargain hunters with low-tax goods available in shops, Norfolk Island has regularly slipped off the radar for holidaymakers with a love for the outdoors or taste for fine fare.

Here are some suggestions for whiling away time on Norfolk Island:

Take to the water

Sea kayaking is a great way to explore some of Norfolk Island's rugged, pine-topped coastline while getting a dose of exercise.

Or get up close and personal with the island's friendly marine life and impressive coral by taking a plunge into the clear waters with a snorkel and mask or even a tank for a scuba dive at one of 30 popular sites.

Locals will be happy to point out the hot spots to drop a fishing line or look for a few waves with a surf board.

For those people interested in a sea adventure without a physical challenge, board a glass-bottomed boat from the beach and sit back while a guide provides a running commentary on various species.

Of course a dip at one of the island's beaches is a must during a visit to Norfolk with warm Pacific currents providing a refreshing break from the humidity.

The great outdoors

Emerging from the waters of one of Norfolk's most popular swimming beaches, Emily Bay, don't ignore those glimpses of green in the distance, which is one of the most visually impressive golf courses.

The nine-hole course on the southern side of the island is speckled with Norfolk pines and while not a long or difficult course, can provide a good test for players in breezy conditions.

A cheap rental car is a great way to get around the 8 km by 5 km island, but for a bit of a challenge why not hire a mountain bike or even saddle a horse?

Road rules are relaxed, with a maximum speed limit of 50 kmh throughout the island.

Seatbelts are not compulsory and 15-year-olds are allowed to hold motorcycle licenses, so don't be put off by the youthful age of other road users.

Focus your attention instead on the impressive scenery, including keeping an eye out for the island's two endangered birds — the Norfolk Island green parrot and the boobook owl.

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Impressive sight: Norfolk Island's penal colony, which dates back to the 1700s. Picture: AAP/Norfolk Island Tourism

Peaceful: Cattle by the side of the road. Cattle have right of way on Norfolk Island and road rules stipulate that anyone who kills or injures stock with their vehicle must pay the owner the market value of the beast. Pictures: AAP/ Andrew Drummond

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Above: A car on the streets of Norfolk Island. Road rules are relaxed on Norfolk Island; there is a 50 kmh speed limit, seatbelts are not compulsory, cattle wander the streets and many of the island's cars have unreadable number plates.
Left: Julian Cameron from Norfolk Island Coffee Plantations guides a tour of his operation.

Fancy a game? Norfolk Island's nine-hole golf course

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History made interesting

Norfolk has a fascinating history, which islanders have adapted to retell in a range of methods, assured to keep visitors of all ages intrigued.

Captain James Cook was the first European to discover Norfolk Island in 1774.

It went on to become a penal colony between 1788 and 1854 and the remains of various prisons and administration buildings can still be found today at the island's picturesque Kingston village.

In 1856 the British government allowed the inhabitants of the overpopulated Pitcairn Island to move to Norfolk, with almost one-third of today's population still being direct descendants of the Pitcairn arrivals.

The history of Norfolk can be traced by visiting Cyclorama — a 360-degree artwork with commentary, detailing the island's history.

At the Kingston historic site, a number of buildings have been restored and are now run as a museum, containing historical artifacts including items retrieved from British ships sunk in the area.

For those with a sense of adventure, night-time ghost tours are run at the historic site, at times stretching the island's history into the realms of fiction.

A taste sensation

There are more than 35 restaurants and cafes on Norfolk offering a range of traditional and modern cuisine, many made with produce sourced from the island.

Typically for a South Pacific island, Norfolk's traditional fare often uses seafood and banana is also a popular ingredient.

Be sure to give the local flavours a try. Mudda, with a slice-like consistency, is made with green bananas as an accompaniment for meat dishes and provides a sweet break from the many spice-rich flavours of Norfolk.

Norfolk's Two Chimney's Wines is keenly awaiting its first crush in 2009 and plans to produce two reds and three whites from the first harvest.

Visitors can already taste some of the boutique winery's creations, made with fruit sourced from NSW.

Norfolk Island Liqueurs also offer visitors the opportunity to taste their range of 15 unique and tasty blends from the hearty Convicts Curse through to the Pitcairn Passion — a mix of banana and strawberry.

The island also grows coffee and Julian Cameron from Norfolk Island Coffee Plantations is more than happy to take visitors through his operations and provide samples of the local product.

Banana treat: A traditional Norfolk Island dish. mudda

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Indulge yourself: A platter of food at Two Chimneys Winery on Norfolk Island.

IF YOU GO

Norfolk Air flies once a week from Melbourne and Newcastle, twice a week from Sydney and three times a week from Brisbane.
Governor's Lodge Resort is a short stroll from Norfolk's main shopping strip on Queen Elizabeth Ave.

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