

An aerial photograph of a rugged coastline. The water is a vibrant turquoise color, with white foam from waves crashing against dark, jagged rock formations. Several large, flat-topped rock islands are scattered in the sea. To the right, a steep, rocky cliffside is covered in lush green vegetation, including tall trees and dense shrubs. The overall scene is one of natural beauty and dramatic landscape.

ROCK STAR

Norfolk Island is a rock star. And, as Susan Elliott writes, this tiny South Pacific performer knows how to stage a world-class show.

Norfolk is the Mick Jagger of islands. Craggy, jagged, rugged, tough, intriguing, alluring, fabulous and confidently strutting its stuff.

Flying in for my 10th visit must make me a groupie. Fifty shades of green crowd my aircraft window – thousands of towering Norfolk Pines tickle low-cruising clouds and, between them, plantations of Kentia palms, pastures dotted with fat cattle and hectares of gardens growing greens for the 1,750 locals and additional fortunate visitors.



01 Norfolk's ruggedly beautiful coastline 02 Views of Cascade Bay from Tintoela © Zach Sanders 03 Heritage-listed Kingston © Ian Wilkinson 04 Hiking the island © Rian Cope 05 Norfolk Island Golf Course © Rian Cope



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Complete satisfaction

Barely an hour after landing I'm gasping for breath at Forrester Court, premium Norfolk accommodation. Gasping not for lack of air – but thanks to an oversupply of views. Lush lawns that appear to have been hand-clipped with a fairy's scissors slope to a plunging cliff – a dramatic reminder this tiny Australian territory has only crumbling columns of basalt barricading it from a pounding South Pacific Ocean.

Ariane Forrester walks me across broken glass to my cottage. A harsh welcome? No, it's as smooth as silica. The driveway is made from finely crushed bottles from Norfolk's Waste Management Centre, the sparkling path dubbed 'The Diamond Highway' by regular guests.

In fact, the whole property is a celebration of sustainability, with rainwater harvested from rooftops, solar power – of course – and not a plastic *anything* in sight.

My room, the Clifftop Cottage, is where Jagger would stay. Complete satisfaction. Seen from every room, the ocean is both a gleaming performer and attentive audience. There is a welcome platter of local cheeses that you cannot enjoy anywhere else in the world, a stocked

wine bar and, on that fairy-clipped lawn, Ariane's famous 'High Tea by the Sea' calls like a siren. It's a Norfolk Island food experience remembered long after the delicate savouries and cakes have passed your lips.

Norfolk's bounty

To have such exquisite food and accommodation on an island only five kilometres by eight is an extraordinary feat. Everything on Norfolk is a labour of love. And survival. There's the tease of being surrounded by the world's biggest ocean, yet not see a raincloud for months. And there is the head-dipping deflation of watching a packed cargo ship sail away, unable to offload because of a monstrous swell. Food and supplies are hard won.

But, when you have mutineer's blood in your veins, as many Norfolk Islanders do, there is stubborn determination to make things work. Hunky Evans is one such islander. He's a descendent of the HMS *Bounty* seamen who, in 1789, set their commanding lieutenant, William Bligh, adrift on the ship's launch... then sailed to Tahiti. There, they claimed wives, settled on the Pitcairn Islands and later moved to Norfolk Island. The Mutiny on the *Bounty* is one of the

world's most loved nautical tales and a big part of Norfolk's history.

Back to Hunky. If you have ever hugged a tree – imagine the opposite. Hunky's Homestead hugs you. It's one of three lodgings on the Tintoela estate, built from Norfolk Pines harvested from Hunky's family's land – the milled timber is used for cladding, floors, ceilings, panelling, cabinetry, mouldings, dining tables, chairs and doors. Outside, convict-cut stone from Norfolk's old jail in Kingston forms the paths and garden walls through a 1.6-hectare tropical garden. But you won't be looking down. Here, Cascade Bay is centre stage. And, you have platinum seats for the 24-hour show.

Tasty foray

Next level. That's Kurt Menghetti. I'm at Homestead Restaurant watching Norfolk's top chef spoon coconut-turmeric broth over flametail snapper, line-caught just hours earlier. Sizzling beside Kurt in the kitchen are local meats and vegetables charring over the coals of a traditional Argentinian *parrilla* grill, hand-made by his dad. And – wait for it – Kurt made the charcoal as well, from olive tree wood off his property. Next level, yes? He also wood-fires Norfolk's only naturally fermented

sourdough and bakes a crème caramel that sells out before it's left the fridge.

My final night on 'The Rock' is at Watermill Beach House Estate in the World Heritage area of Kingston. A cottage, built in the early 1900s, Watermill is living a new life as a stunning beach 'shack' with fabulous furnishings and comforts that early settlers could not have imagined – this part of the island was, after all, one of Australia's first, and harshest, penal colonies. The home is on nine hectares of Norfolk Pine forest, filled with lush, secret valleys and creeks. Beyond the convict stone fence are Kingston's magnificent Georgian homes, museums bursting with priceless treasures, Government House, a fascinating convict cemetery and one of the few golf courses in the world on a World Heritage Site. All are embraced by Emily Bay, among the most beautiful beaches in Australia.

The pleasure of leisure is exhausting, and I can't wait for the day to end. I'm in a little convoy of locals and clued-up visitors driving to Sunset Bar at Puppy's Point. It's the home of *Bounty* descendent, Les Quintal, an island tour guide who loves visitors so much he opens his home for sunset drinks. There's tapas-style food, like fresh trumpeter and Les' own home-reared beef. Meanwhile, barefoot and brilliant local musician Anson King sets a bluesy mood while the sun and sky put on their nightly light show, framed by hundreds of Norfolk pines.

I order Mick Jagger's favourite drink. What could be more perfect than a tequila sunrise at sunset? You *can* always get what you want, Mick. ♦

Travel file

Accommodation
forrestercourt.com tintoela.com
watermillbeachhousenorfolkisland.com
Dining
thehomesteadrestaurant.com.au
Getting There
qantas.com
Information
norfolkisland.com.au



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A 1,600-kilometre hop from Sydney on the east coast of Australia, Norfolk Island is relishing its new appeal as the 'overseas' holiday travellers can have without officially leaving the country.

From Sydney or Brisbane, there is just enough time in the air to savour the in-flight meal and watch half a movie before 'The Rock', as Norfolk locals fondly call it, appears below, all jagged cliffs and South Pacific swells.