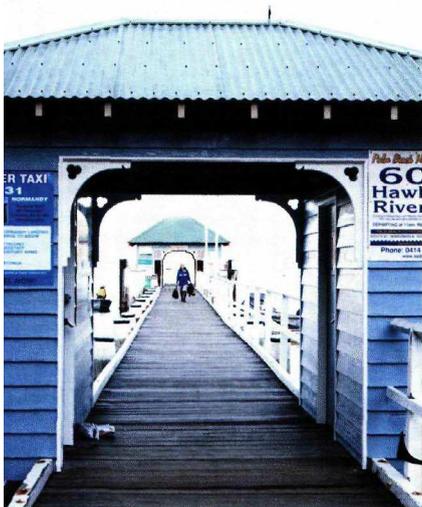




Sailing about in a LUXURY YACHT may be something only the rich and famous do, but sometimes us mere mortals just need to *TREAT OURSELVES*, says MEGAN ARKINSTALL.



# SMOOTH SAILING

A HANDSOME MAN dressed in a perfectly pressed suit with immaculate hair steps out of a white van and approaches us. He looks like a secret service agent amid the boat-shoed weekenders, except he's holding a blue and white striped cabana bag and he's smiling our way. He swaps our luggage for the bag of towels and bottled water and hands my husband and I over to Brendan from Taylor Made Escapes who ushers us into a small dinghy moored off Palm Beach wharf.

We're here in this paradisiacal little pocket of bays and bushland just an hour north of Sydney for an indulgent weekend at the inimitable Jonah's at Whale Beach. When asked if we are celebrating a special occasion, I shrug... We're not. But sometimes, you just need to treat yourself, right? (I mean, *reecally* treat yourself.)

"You chose the perfect day for it," Brendan smiles as he starts up the tiny vessel for the short ride to *TME2*, a skippered yacht that will be our own private vessel for the next few hours. He's right: the sun is gloriously shining down on us

today. As he navigates us through the sea of luxury boats bobbing up and down in the bay, I shut my eyes and breathe the sea air in deeply; there's just something about being on the water that is liberating.

Moments later we arrive at our yacht and are welcomed by our ruby-red-haired skipper, Bridget: "The youngest skipper in Pittwater!" Brendan tells us. Soon enough we're cruising out of the marina past waterside mansions; I wonder who wakes up to this coveted view every morning.

As though reading my mind, Brendan points to a mammoth dwelling on a headland: "That was Bob Oatley's." Apparently the billionaire winemaker and yachtsman had such a strong desire to purchase this particular house that he offered the owner, who was adamant it wasn't for sale, more than double what it was worth. It seems a princely sum of \$20 million can change anyone's mind. Of course, we are millions away from becoming proud owners of a Pittwater mansion, but sitting comfortably aboard the *TME2* on this beautiful day, we feel far removed from our comparatively humble life.

Switching up positions for the bow of the yacht, we recline on a cushioned day bed and

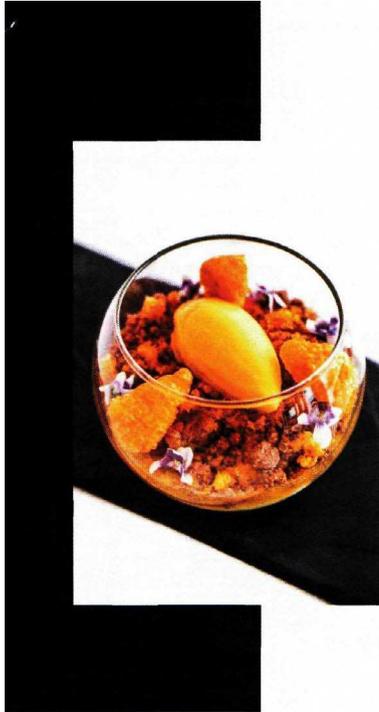
## DETAILS

### Getting there

Jonah's Boutique Hotel is located at Whale Beach, just an hour north of Sydney by car. If you're coming from the north you can take a ferry from Ettalong (on the Central Coast) to Palm Beach wharf, from where Jonah's can pick you up.

### Playing there

The Stay & Play package includes an overnight stay in an Ocean Retreat Room with breakfast, a three-course dinner, a boat cruise on Pittwater with Taylor Made Escapes and a picnic hamper with Champagne; \$774 per person (black-out dates apply). [jonahs.com.au](http://jonahs.com.au)



WEEKENDS | *Do something different*

soak up the morning sun. We eclipse a bevy of smaller sailing vessels in a casual Sunday race as we head into Morning Bay, a peaceful nook and the perfect spot for a swim in the iridescent water. "Yikes!" I shriek at the suggestion. It's too early in the season for this summer baby to take a dip.

"In the warmer months, we usually leave our guests here for a picnic," says Bridget. "We have so many engagements at this spot," she smiles. "The sail back is a happy bubble of romance." I feel a slight twinge of guilt for being here on this yacht, sipping Champagne before noon for no apparent reason... but it quickly passes.

We are meant to sail back to Palm Beach but the wind is not on our side so we cruise back via The Basin where happy campers are lazily pottering around the shore; kids are bravely splashing about in the water, feeding pelicans and spotting fish; other boaters wave to us as we pass. I wave back to our comrades, as though this is our usual Sunday outing, too.

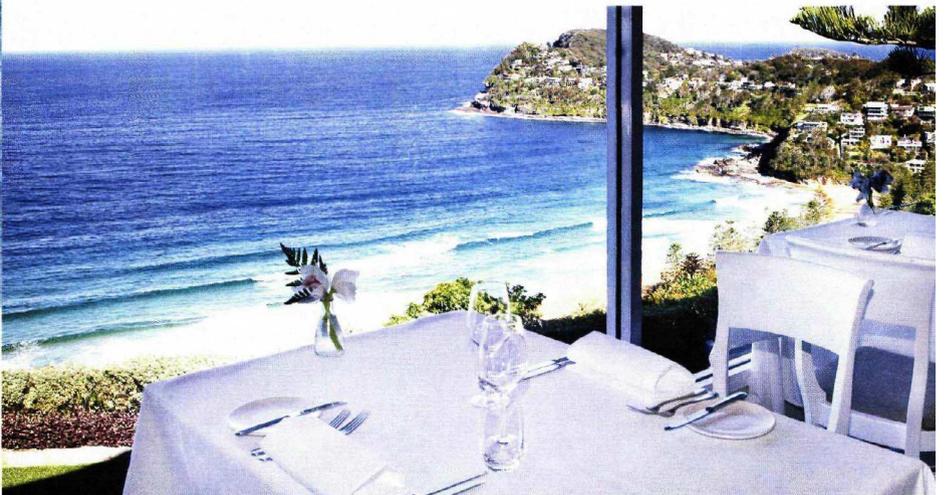
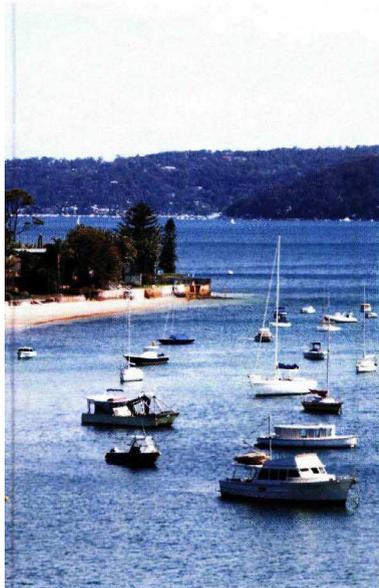
But we are soon back on dry land where our secret service agent drives us to our next locale, North Palm Beach. He hands us the most moreish picnic hamper I've ever seen and leaves us to slowly pick our way through the goods: sourdough sandwiches with fresh deli meats; bowls of gourmet salad; decadent mini chocolate puddings; bottles of San Pellegrino water – still and sparkling; and a bottle of Taittinger.

My husband and I cosy up together on the picnic table overlooking the beach where surfers ride in on the sparkling blue-green waves. Picnics are so romantic, I resolve, cosseted in a Champagne haze. We hear *oobs* and *abbs* coming from a nearby crowd where several camera lenses are pointing off into the distance; our picnic is topped off in spectacular fashion by a humpback whale frolicking close to shore.

Right on time, our driver arrives to whisk us away to our final destination – our luxurious abode for the evening. In its 87-year history, Jonah's has been the lodging of choice for many legendary guests, from Sir Anthony Hopkins to Lord Laurence Olivier to Dame Shirley Bassey. Indeed, we don't have fancy honorifics but it doesn't take long to feel right at home: I spend the afternoon soaking in our spa bath – curiously, something I only take the time to enjoy when on a holiday – before heading down to the hatted restaurant for an exquisite four-course meal; one of the best we've had.

While spooning the last morsels of dessert into my very spoilt mouth, I spy a young couple in the corner. Champagne is flowing, their eyes only for each other, hand-holding between courses – I wonder if a certain question was asked today. We may not be celebrating anything in particular ourselves, but there's no special occasion like the present to treat yourself. ☺

*I feel a slight twinge of guilt for being here on this yacht, sipping Champagne before noon for no apparent reason.*



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:  
*An artful dish from Jonah's restaurant. One of Sydney's best views: The cruisy life at Palm Beach. OPPOSITE (from left): Palm Beach wharf, where this indulgent adventure begins; Relax on a private luxury yacht.*