

A place in the sun

- *Kendall Hill*
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Avalon, on Tasmania's north-east coast, is perfectly designed for both winter and summer conditions.

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WE really do like to be beside the seaside, global economic crises notwithstanding. Rental agencies from coast to coast are reporting bumper beach-holiday bookings this year. At Byron Bay on the NSW north coast there hasn't been a bed spare the past three weekends, according to Visitor Information Centre manager Katharine Myers.

"Basically, we are still booming," Myers says. "If we didn't read the gloom in the papers every day we could be forgiven for thinking, What economic crisis?"

[GALLERY: A tour of the beach houses](#)

Myers says cashed-up young professionals tend to book out the north coast's most spectacular holiday homes, while families are going back to basics in caravan parks. "There was a huge surge last summer in families putting the kids in a caravan rather than spending money on expensive accommodation. But having said that, Byron Bay is still chock-a-block."

It's a similar story at Margaret River in Western Australia, where family groups and friends who previously may have gone overseas to celebrate special occasions are opting for luxury beach houses in the southwest. "We are just so busy," says Kim Marciano of Inside Holidays, which manages about 40 holiday rentals in the region.

Further proof, if it were needed, that the coast never loses its allure.

Altitude, Separation Creek, Victoria: Up to a dozen friends or family can enjoy spectacular views from this high-flying beach house at Separation Creek, about 130km southwest of Melbourne. The cantilevered castle has four bedrooms and three bathrooms (plus powder room), a gourmet kitchen and two decks, one of which is suspended 8m above the ground. The panoramic views from two of the bathtubs, with picture windows overlooking the Great Otway Forest and a huge sweep of the Pacific, are priceless. The diversions of Lorne are just a winding half-hour drive away. A haven for nature lovers. From \$1410 to \$2050 a weekend for two to 12 guests. Phone (03) 5237 4201; www.altitudebeachhouse.com.au.

Sejala Beach Huts, Mission Beach, Queensland: Two hours' drive south of Cairns at Mission Beach, where the rainforest meets the reef, these three airy beachfront cabins are set back from the palm and sheoak-lined beach. Two of the huts, Beaches and Waves, face the Coral Sea to capture sunrise views while a third has a garden setting. Bathrooms are partly open to the gardens so you can commune with nature while answering its calls. The sea is just metres away and it's a few

minutes' walk to the village at Mission Beach, with shops, galleries and cafes. \$260 a couple a night. Phone (07) 4088 6699; www.sejala.com.

The Sky House, Kangaroo Island, South Australia: Every seaside retreat worth its salt should have a helicopter landing pad, and the Sky House on South Australia's increasingly hip Kangaroo Island does not disappoint. Besides somewhere to park the chopper, this hilltop, rammed-earth villa has been intelligently fitted with floor heating, a fireplace and Villeroy&Boch bathtub. All comfort bases are covered and the house has a telescope for budding astronomers, espresso machine and a record player for lovers of vinyl.

Catering could be an issue given the nearest restaurant is about a 40-minute drive away, but you can call on Lifetime Retreats' resident sibling chefs Nick and Rachel Hannaford to create feasts beneath ancient fig trees, on a clifftop or by the beach, or to simply stock the pantry for you. From \$300 (low season) a couple a night. Phone (08) 8354 2368; www.life-time.com.au.

Wagait Beach Bush Retreat, Northern Territory: The Top End is not blessed with beachfront beauties but Wagait fills the void nicely. Located on the Cox Peninsula, a lazy 15-minute ferry ride across the harbour from Darwin, this two-bedroom sanctuary is surrounded by native bush about a block back from the sea. The vibe is more relaxed than ritzy but the holy trinity of beachside bliss -- a pool, a barbie and a hammock -- is all present and accounted for.

Ferries depart regularly for Darwin during the day; driving from the capital takes 90 minutes but it's a good idea to have a car to explore this semi-remote region. From \$220 a night or \$950 a week, sleeps four; www.takeabreak.com.au.

Alinghi, Agnes Water, Queensland: Wedged into a rise above Honeymoon Bay on Queensland's Discovery Coast, Alinghi is a striking architectural statement in cedar, glass and travertine stone by former Sulman Prize winner James Grose. The house is the showpiece of the gated Rocky Point Estate, which has its own tennis court and 30m saltwater pool. Sleeping is in two king beds, both with ensuites, and two double bunkrooms, and living areas open out to broad decking above bush and beach.

Nearby Agnes Water and its twin town 1770 are popular launching points for the Great Barrier Reef. (Alinghi is being renovated but is due to reopen in time for the summer holidays.) From \$7000 a week, sleeps 12. Phone (07) 4974 9990; www.1770beachaccommodation.com.au.