

Lazy days on the headland

From verandah to sand is just a quick skip, yet **Rachel Browne** finds it hard to step outside this Lake Macquarie beach house.

AS BEACHSIDE locations go, Swansea Heads has something for everyone. On its western side is Lake Entrance, where the water is calm and shallow and the sandy beach is perfect for small children.

The eastern side offers uncrowded surf beaches, ideal for board riders and body surfers.

Fins Beach House is in a sublime place in this water world. On the Lake Entrance side of the peninsula, if Fins were any closer to the water you'd need a pair of oars.

Large picture windows in the living area overlook the lake and make the most of the view to the west. The vista is so entrancing that it's tempting to walk straight on to the huge deck and savour it over a cold drink but further explorations of the house reveal that the rest is just as impressive.

A comfortable leather lounge defines the living area, which has the usual mod cons: a television, DVD player and iPod dock. A bookshelf stocks a well-maintained library of popular novels – not the usual 20-year-old dog-eared collection of Jackie Collins and Danielle Steele.

For those looking to explore the region, the owners have thoughtfully left a plastic binder with maps and restaurant recommendations on the coffee table. But Fins Beach House is so lovely that it's hard to drag ourselves away, even though the water is barely 10 metres away.

We decide to have lunch before hitting the water and the kitchen proves to be well equipped with a wall oven, microwave, cooktop and plenty of utensils and cutlery.

The dining table seats six but the table on the deck is better suited to a bigger crowd, with eight comfortable chairs from which to admire the view.

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Later, we explore Catherine Hill Bay, the town that time forgot.

Lunch sorted, it's time to check out who's going to sleep where. The house sleeps nine and there are only four of us so there's plenty of choice.

Three large bedrooms are upstairs, two with built-ins and queen-size beds decorated with gorgeous linen. The third bedroom is the designated child-friendly zone with a bunk bed and a single.

Our girls, aged four and six, are delighted to find a selection of books and toys on the shelves. And, again, the books are not a musty collection of ageing Little Golden Books with the pages torn out. They are all in immaculate condition.

Downstairs is another large



Well placed ... Fins Beach House has space and views.

bedroom with a queen-size bed. Another spacious living area is downstairs and has a second television and beanbags for the kids.

A laundry off this living space has washing and drying facilities and a second toilet. The main bathroom, with a separate shower and bath, toilet and vanity, is upstairs.

In all, Fins Beach House is the total package: a perfect place in the perfect location. While it would be lovely to spend an afternoon lounging on the upstairs deck, or even the downstairs one for that

matter, the beach beckons. A one-minute walk later, we're there with the sand between our toes. Later, we explore nearby Caves Beach and Catherine Hill Bay, the seaside town that time forgot.

All manner of boats and water sports you can think of are available for hire on the lake – from yachts to fishing vessels, kayaks to jetboats.

There are also plenty of good walking trails around Lake Macquarie if you're feeling inclined. But, really, when you're staying in a house this good, it's hard to leave.

Swansea Heads



Where Fins Beach House, 30 Lambton Parade, Swansea Heads, (02) 9665 2113 or 0400 233 873, finsbeachhouse.com.

Getting there Take the F3, turn off at the Motorway Link, continue on the Pacific Highway, at the roundabout, take the third exit on to Bowman Street, turn left at Northcote Avenue, turn left into Lambton Parade.

How much From \$250 to \$400 a night a couple.

Style statement Beach shack with a luxury touch.

Perfect for Families, groups and anyone who loves the water.

Take the kids? They'll love it.

Don't forget Swimmers, sunblock, surfboards, fishing gear and kayaks.

A shame about The child-size gap in the fence around the upstairs deck.

Kudos Unexpected extra touches such as the bowl of fresh fruit, the real coffee, milk in the fridge and chocolate wafers.