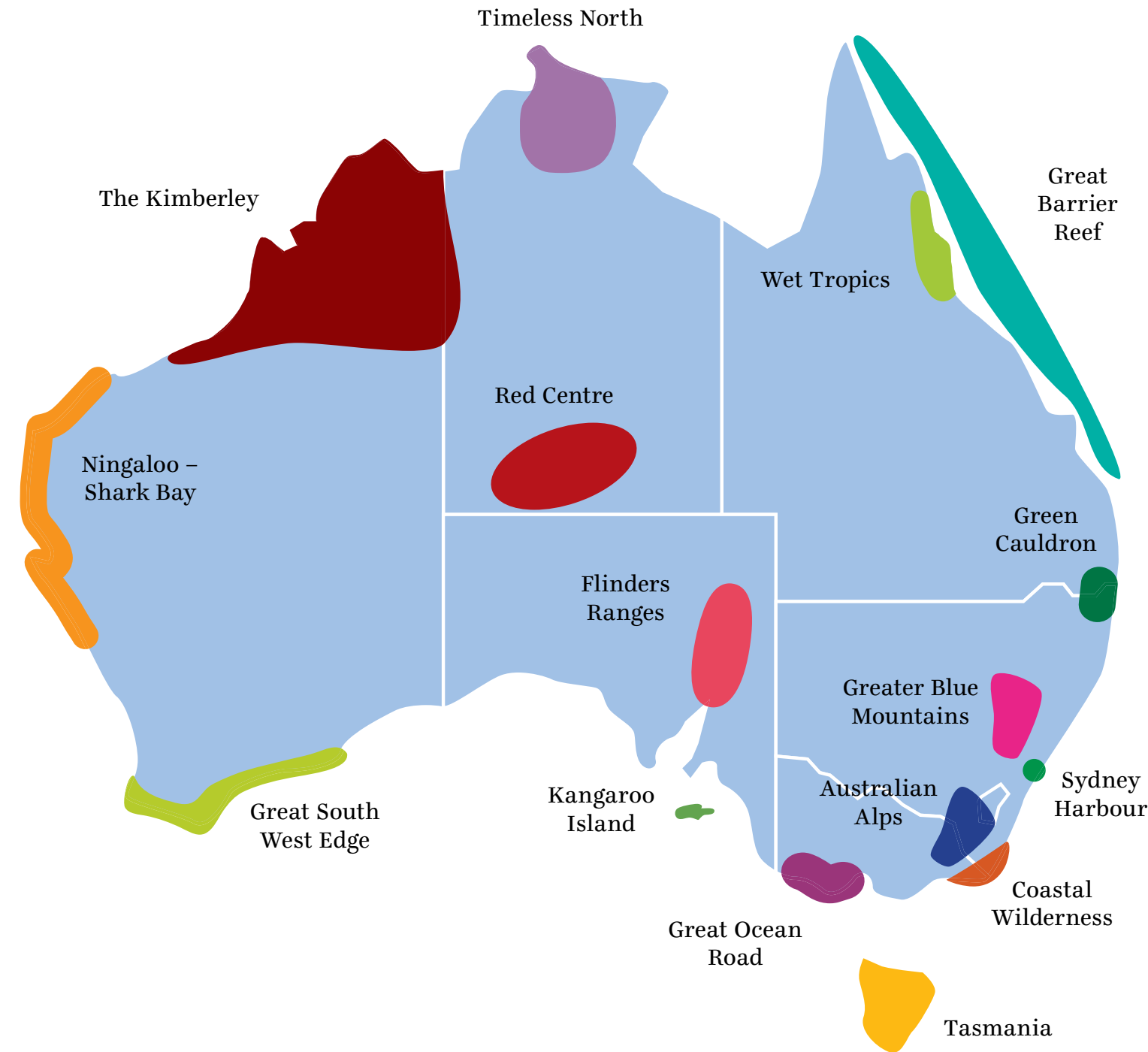


A U S T R A L I A N
TRAVELLER
H O N E S T L Y A U S T R A L I A N

16
**ULTIMATE
ESCAPES**



N a t u r a l A u s t r a l i a



COVER IMAGE: WINEGLASS BAY, FREYCINET NATIONAL PARK, TOURISM TASMANIA & BEN ASHMOLE



Australia is always called the lucky country, and after a flick through this magazine, it's easy to see why. Mother Nature has spoiled us silly with some of her finest work in our own backyard. Inside these pages you will find a guide to 16 of the country's most incredible natural landscapes as identified by Tourism Australia and Parks Australia. Explore wild, remote beaches, ancient rainforests, rugged mountain ranges, cavernous caves and gigantic gorges. Walk, climb, camp, ski, canoe, or connect with the spectacular landscape by seeing it through the eyes of its original inhabitants. Whether you're geared up for a wilderness adventure rafting the wild Franklin River, a luxury weekend getaway in Wolgan Valley, or a boys 'barra fishing trip in the Northern Territory – there is literally something in here for everyone. All the experiences are eco-sensitive, most have eco-accreditation and as for those who like their holidays with a few more creature comforts, let's just say you're in luck! Immersing yourself in nature doesn't mean roughing it. Far from it. These days, many of the country's exquisite luxury lodges can be found in the middle of the wilderness. You can spend the day learning about our ancient landscapes and finish the day with a foot massage and a glass of wine – how amazing does that sound?

Georgia

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IMAGES: TOURISM AUSTRALIA, SAL SALIS NINGALOO REEF, THE BUCKLAND, EMIRATES WOLGAN VALLEY, SOUTH AUSTRALIAN TOURISM COMMISSION, TOURISM WESTERN AUSTRALIA



IMAGE: TOURISM AUSTRALIA

One of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World, “the world’s biggest aquarium”, with its crystal blue waters teeming with colourful marine life, is pure paradise from every angle.

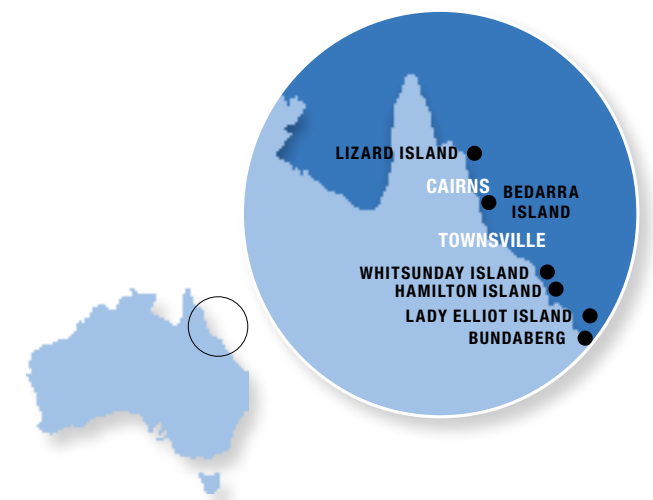
THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

Queensland

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is the largest tropical reef ecosystem in the world. We all know it’s big, but let’s break it down into numbers. Extending 2300 kilometres, from Bundaberg in the south to beyond Cape York in the north, it spans more than 300,000 square kilometres, making it larger than New Zealand. In fact, along with the Great Wall of China, it is one of the few landmarks visible from outer space.

Flying over the immense turquoise skeins of this World Heritage-listed wonderland is the only way to come to terms with its size. It could take a lifetime to explore the reef’s vast swathes and meet all its marine life. Known for its extraordinary marine diversity, the system is home to some 3000 individual reefs, 600 species of coral and an estimated 1625 species of fish. The easiest way to marvel at the vivid coral gardens is through a glass-bottomed boat. For a close-up view, try snorkelling, scuba diving or kayaking around a coral cay, wading offshore among emerald parrot fish; watching clownfish snuggle in anemones or joining manta rays winging through the deep. You can charter a plane or yacht, take a cruise, go bareboating, set off on a wilderness island trail – or simply kick back at an island resort, cocktail in hand.

Speaking of islands, did we mention there are more than 100 to choose from? Take your pick from **Green** and **Fitzroy** near **Cairns**, and **Hinchinbrook** and **Orpheus** islands further south. Then there’s **Magnetic**, **Hamilton** or **Hayman**... With so many options, it really is the ultimate place to escape.



GETTING THERE

Fly to Cairns, Townsville, Bundaberg, Rockhampton, Hervey Bay (for Lady Elliot Island) Proserpine and Mackay or direct to Hamilton Island. Take a ferry, helicopter ride or small plane to your destination or do day trips to the reef from mainland towns.



EATING THERE

Seafood and tropical cuisine abound. Cairns, Port Douglas and Hamilton boast steakhouses, Asian eateries, tapas and pizza. On some islands, choice is restricted to resort restaurants. Most hotels have a restaurant or café, and luxury resorts offer lavish degustation dinners and gourmet experiences.



STAYING THERE

Mainland hubs Cairns, Port Douglas, Mission Beach, Townsville and Airlie Beach have hotels and self-catering options. Camp on Lady Musgrave or Hook islands, glamp on Wilson or live large on others at a luxury resort. Prefer to float? Stay on a live-aboard dive boat or a yacht.

WHEN TO GO

SPRING (SEPT-NOV)

HIGH 30.6°C **LOW** 18.6°C

Trade winds drop, creating glass-like conditions perfect for diving.

SUMMER (DEC-FEB)

HIGH 31.5°C **LOW** 22.2°C

The wet season brings balmy, humid days, refreshing downpours and dramatic electrical storms.

AUTUMN (MARCH-MAY)

HIGH 30.5°C **LOW** 19.9°C

Diving conditions are excellent at this time of year, the reef brimming with juvenile fish.

WINTER (JUNE-AUG)

HIGH 27.8°C **LOW** 17°C

Sunny days with cool, fresh breezes spell peak season. June/July brings the dwarf minke whales.

WILDLIFE MEET MINKE WHALES

Researchers have compared the haunting calls of the dwarf minke whale to the signature chord from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. You can hear this extraordinary sound on a four-day expedition to meet the minkes, led by marine scientists. These fascinating encounters take place during June and July, when pods of minkes congregate on the outer ribbon reefs. The whales are astonishingly curious, gliding and cavorting around snorkellers, hovering at shallow depths and eyeing swimmers intently for hours on end. Unforgettable. marineencounters.com.au; 07 40985417.

FAMILY HERON WILDLIFE DISCOVERIES

Sit in the sand under a canopy of stars and watch as huge turtles lumber up the beach on Heron Island. If they are undisturbed, these ancient animals will laboriously dig holes to lay eggs. It's just one of the wildlife experiences your family can enjoy together on Heron, which is accessible by boat from Gladstone. The island is a Jurassic park of creatures – ray and reef sharks gather in the shallows, mutton birds wail like ghosts from their burrows and, in early summer, the trees are filled with nests containing black noddy tern chicks. During school holidays, kids can sign up to the educational Junior Rangers program to take part in exciting activities like reef walks. heronisland.com; 03 9426 7550.

EXPLORE LOVERS' ESCAPE

It's a Valentine's gift you'll never forget, or a super-stylish way to elope... Flying over the Whitsundays in a seaplane, swooping down to photograph the iconic Heart Reef. This perfectly heart-shaped wonder is one of Mother Nature's most romantic creations, inspiring more marriage proposals than the Eiffel Tower. The plane can then zip you, your beloved, a celebrant and a bottle of top-shelf bubbly over to the powdery sands of world-famous Whitehaven Beach to say, "I do". Or take a Panorama tour, enjoying a flight over the Whitsunday islands, with a stopover at Whitehaven Beach and a glass-bottomed boat tour. airwhitsunday.com.au; 07 4946 9111.

Friendly Dwarf Minke whales can be seen in tropical north Queensland



ADVENTURE INTO THE BLUE

Scuba divers get misty-eyed over the Reef and its marvellous marine life. If you want to dive or snorkel, join a live-aboard vessel along the outer reef or take a day trip on a boat, catamaran or seaplane. The ribbon reefs off Port Douglas are a favourite, while diving the wreck of the *SS Yongala* by Townsville is bucket-list material. An adventurous option is the "sex on the reef" dive, timed to coincide with the annual mass coral spawning, which usually occurs around November. The dive takes place at night – if you're lucky, you will witness the drama of corals spawning simultaneously, allowing you to swim through a salmon-pink, underwater snowstorm. prodive-cairns.com.au; 07 4031 5255.

Snorkel or dive one of many sites like Beaver Reef in Tropical North Queensland

IMAGES: TOURISM AUSTRALIA; TOURISM AND EVENTS QUEENSLAND; SPIRIT OF FREEDOM; LADY ELLIOT ISLAND ECO RESORT



Watch the sun set with a loved one on Lizard Island or take the plunge at ritzy Qualia (below).



IMAGES: TOURISM AUSTRALIA, DELAWARE NORTH COMPANIES, LADY ELLIOT ISLAND ECO RESORT

LUXURY HOLIDAY IN STAR STYLE

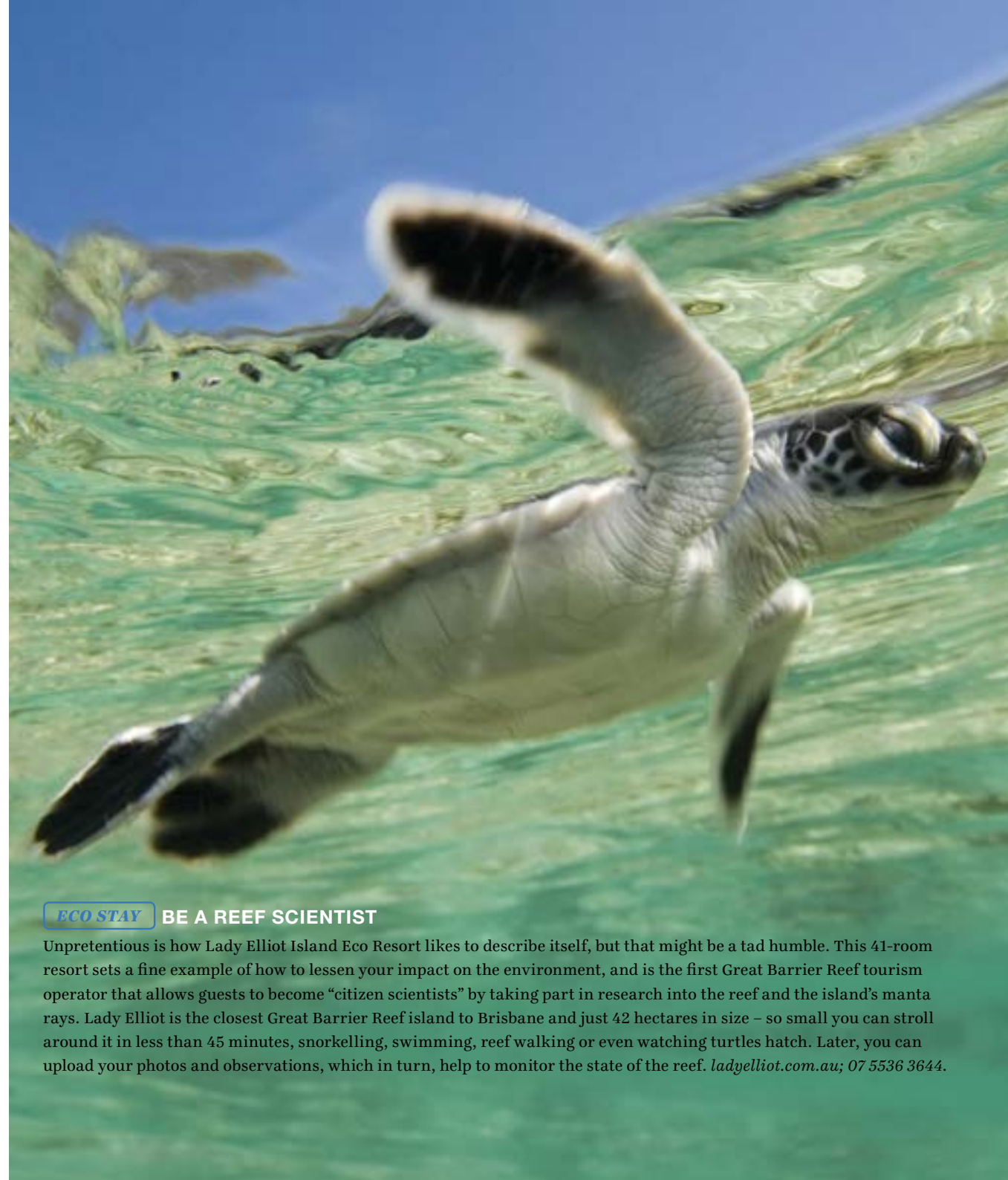
Qualia, on Hamilton Island, is one of those exclusive stays favoured by supermodels and TV stars – a haven of opulence and style. You could be tempted to hang out in your pavilion most of your stay, plunging into your private pool and gazing at the 180-degree view over the Whitsundays, but you won't want to miss the resort's daily activities, which are a notch or two above the norm. Take a luxury cruiser out to the reef or hop on a helicopter and fly to nearby Dent Island for a round of golf. The annual Hamilton Island Race Week brings salted yachties and the glitterati to Qualia, and gourmands relish the Great Barrier Feast weekend – a chance to sample fare from the world's greatest chefs. qualia.com.au; 07 4948 9222.

LUXURY FLAT-OUT ON LIZARD ISLAND

Imagine digging your toes into the sand on a deserted beach, while dining on a bespoke, seven-course degustation meal; the night sky lit by stars and flaming torches. This is just one of the gourmet experiences on offer at Lizard Island. The granite-capped isle, named after the resident goannas, is the ultimate luxury escape on the outer Great Barrier Reef. If you're more of a morning person, the resort will prepare a private picnic basket filled with gourmet and fresh food and deliver it (and you) by dinghy to one of the island's 24 deserted beaches. Bliss! lizardisland.com.au; 03 9426 7550.



The Reef is the ultimate romantic destination.



ECO STAY BE A REEF SCIENTIST

Unpretentious is how Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort likes to describe itself, but that might be a tad humble. This 41-room resort sets a fine example of how to lessen your impact on the environment, and is the first Great Barrier Reef tourism operator that allows guests to become "citizen scientists" by taking part in research into the reef and the island's manta rays. Lady Elliot is the closest Great Barrier Reef island to Brisbane and just 42 hectares in size – so small you can stroll around it in less than 45 minutes, snorkelling, swimming, reef walking or even watching turtles hatch. Later, you can upload your photos and observations, which in turn, help to monitor the state of the reef. ladyelliott.com.au; 07 5536 3644.



IMAGE: TOURISM AUSTRALIA

When it comes to iconic Australian road trips, you can't go past this spectacular coastal drive that winds its way along the windswept Southern Ocean, but don't just drive it – ride it, trek it, taste it.

THE GREAT OCEAN ROAD

Victoria

Taking a trip along the Great Ocean Road is an Australian rite of passage. Opened in 1932, the road – built by returned soldiers and dedicated to those who lost their lives in World War I – winds 243 kilometres along some of the most awe-inspiring coastline in the world.

Taking in rainforests, sunburnt cliffs, shipwrecks and jaw-dropping coastal panoramas, it's one of the world's most scenic drives, so wind down the windows and enjoy the view.

The road trip officially starts in **Torquay**, the hallowed home of Aussie surf culture, and curves past classic surf beaches such as **Bells to Allansford**, just outside of **Warrnambool**. From the balcony of the **Wye River** pub just outside of **Lorne** you can enjoy a drink and see why surfers from all corners of the globe clamour to make the journey here. Witness the waves crash around the **Twelve Apostles** – towering limestone stacks that have survived 20 million years of nature's brutal forces.

Scuba dive the Loch Ard wreck in **Port Campbell National Park**, mountain bike through the **Otway Ranges** or bushwalk among the tall trees and waterfalls of the **Great Otway National Park**, home to koalas, birds and the elusive platypus.

If you're not up to braving the waves at Bells, you can learn how to wrangle a board at a surf school in **Apollo Bay**, take a romantic horse ride along pristine shores, or trek the **Surf Coast Walk** from Torquay to **Aireys Inlet**. Gourmands can wine their way along the road, exploring the region's many hidden cellar doors. There are endless ways to immerse yourself in the many natural treasures along this magnificent route.



GETTING THERE

Torquay, gateway to the Great Ocean Road, is about two hours' drive from Melbourne's city centre and around an hour from Avalon Airport, near Geelong. V/Line runs train services daily to Geelong and Warrnambool. For more details, go to visitvictoria.com



EATING THERE

From the staple road trip diet of bakery food in Anglesea to fine dining and trendy cafes in Lorne and Apollo Bay, you'll find something to satisfy your tastebuds. There is a great range of wineries within striking distance, too, and gourmet experiences.



STAYING THERE

Lorne and Apollo Bay offer the most extensive accommodation choices, from luxury hotels and retreats to cute lodges and B&Bs. There are also camping grounds, caravan parks and backpacker hostels along the way for those on a tighter budget. Head to visitvictoria.com for options to suit all tastes.

WHEN TO GO

SPRING (SEPT-NOV)
HIGH 19°C LOW 8°C

Beat the crowds and take in the sights before holiday season's in full swing.

SUMMER (DEC-FEB)
HIGH 23°C LOW 12°C

Enjoy the coastal lifestyle and balmy weather while sipping a refreshing brew at one of the many pubs.

AUTUMN (MARCH-MAY)
HIGH 21°C LOW 9°C

Easter sees Torquay buzzing as the world-famous Rip Curl Pro kicks off at Bells Beach.

WINTER (JUNE-AUG)
HIGH 14°C LOW 7°C

Summon your inner romantic for B&B season and nestle by a warm fire with someone special.



Get an even more dramatic view of icons like Cape Otway Lighthouse via helicopter.

EXPLORE THE COAST BY COPTER

Don't feel like dealing with traffic? How about ditching it altogether and hovering above the Twelve Apostles in a helicopter? Soar above the iconic sights while enjoying a bird's-eye vista of the magnificent Shipwreck Coast and all its astounding natural phenomena, such as London Bridge and the Arch. Choose from a breezy 15-minute trip taking in the Twelve Apostles to London Bridge; a 25-minute ride over the Bay of Islands or an hour-long journey zipping along the coast to Australia's oldest lighthouse at Cape Otway. 12apostleshelicopters.com.au; 03 5598 8283.

FAMILY PADDLE WITH PLATYPUS

Share some time with the family and Australia's most unique mammal – the platypus. With its duck beak and fur-covered body, this quirky creature baffled early explorers. It's an elusive little critter, and spotting one in its natural habitat can be tricky, but your guide – a trained ecologist – will know exactly where they are hiding. The tour is a fun experience for

the kids and guarantees plenty of photos for the family album. After a short stroll along the shoreline, you hop into a canoe and paddle along Lake Elizabeth, spotting birdlife and enjoying the scenery. A dusk tour offers the added bonus of checking out some of the region's brighter characters – glow worms. platypustours.net.au; 0419 670 985.

FOOD TASTE THE GOURMET TRAIL

Brimming with succulent local produce, like award-winning lamb and beef, fresh raspberries and blueberries, boutique wines, ciders and beers, the Otway Harvest Trail is a palate-pleasing route with plenty of opportunities to try and buy. Explore the trail's many artisan producers, provedores and cellar doors, meeting the makers in person and stocking up the car with gourmet goodies. Sample a gin made from raspberries, try a taste of ostrich (similar to beef) and buy your body weight in extra-virgin olive oil, chutneys and handmade chocolates. Pack a map of the region and download the trail brochure at otwayharvesttrail.org.au.

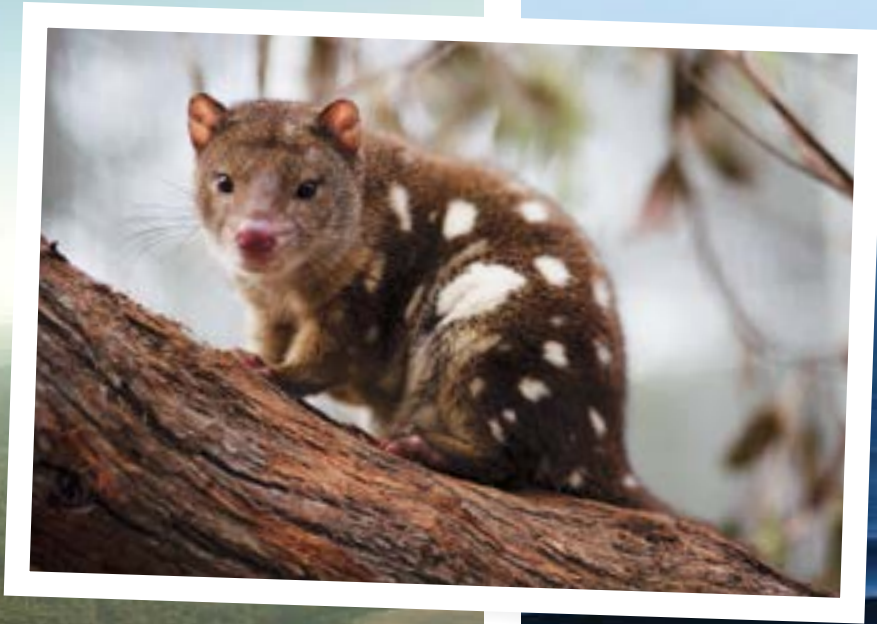


IMAGES: TOURISM AUSTRALIA, BOTH FEET

WALKS TAKE YOUR TIME, TAKE A HIKE

It's most famous as a drive, but the Great Ocean Road is equally impressive on foot. Inhale lungfuls of fresh, salty air as you traverse the wild coastline on a four-day, three-night guided tour. The walk takes in the last half of the trail known as the Great Ocean Walk, passing river flats, sandy beaches and ending at the iconic Twelve Apostles. Each day covers around 12-15 kilometres, but at night you can peel off your hiking boots and enjoy the comforts of an award-winning eco lodge. With hot showers and wi-fi (so you can upload your pics to Facebook) there's even an on-site chef creating low-GI meals to ensure your energy is replenished for the next day's hike. Spoiled, much? bothfeet.com.au; 1300 767 416.





WILDLIFE SAVE THE TIGER QUOLL

Not quite as ferocious as its namesake, the tiger quoll is Australia's largest remaining marsupial carnivore, but sadly, this little tacker is fast heading towards the same fate as its cousin the Tasmanian tiger. The forests, woodlands and coastline of the Otway Ranges are one of the last remaining habitats for this special creature. Staying at the Great Ocean Ecolodge, a beautiful property adjoining the Great Otway National Park, you can make a difference to its plight by helping out at the lodge's wildlife rehabilitation centre. Sign up to a three-day Conservation Insights Program or stay longer for a six-day Conservation Expedition, working alongside dedicated ecologists gathering data and helping to care for the resident tiger quolls. greatoceanecolodge.com; 03 5237 9297.

INDIGENOUS GATEWAY TO THE GRAMPIANS

The Grampians National Park (*Gariwerd*) is internationally renowned for its walks, abundant wildlife, waterfalls, rugged rock formations, spectacular views and stunning spring wildflower displays. It is also a place rich in Dreamtime stories, sacred sites and some good old Aussie bush tucker. Brambuk the National Park and Cultural Centre near Halls Gap is not only a mine of knowledge for the area, but brings to life the history and culture of the Aboriginal people of Western Victoria. Sign up for a fascinating rock art walk, get a taste of genuine bush tucker on a bush food walk, or dine on emu, croc, roo and other local specialties at the on-site cafe. Pop in to the centre's Gariwerd Dreaming Theatre to experience the Dreamtime story of the Grampians. brambuk.com.au; 03 5361 4000.



ADVENTURE SURFING SAFARIS

If you've ever wanted to live out your Kelly Slater fantasies, you've come to the right place. There's certainly no shortage of ripper surf beaches in this region, and the most famous of them all is the internationally renowned Bells Beach, home to the annual Rip Curl Pro surfing competition. To help you navigate other secret surf haunts, Great Ocean Road Surf Tours operate from Torquay and Ocean Grove and offer surfing lessons, with a range of packages to cater for beginners through to the seasoned shredder. Find out more at gorsurftours.com.au; 1800 787 353.



Get hands-on with the region's natural wonders by learning to surf, or sign up for a conservation experience to help preserve native endangered species like the tiger quoll.

IMAGES: TOURISM AUSTRALIA/LUCA BRIGGS; TOURISM VICTORIA

Kakadu National Park is a land of contrasts and vivid colours that leave visitors in awe of nature's power.

From the vast wetlands, mighty gorges and waterfalls in Kakadu and Nitmiluk to the ancient indigenous rock paintings in Arnhem Land, the Top End is the glittering jewel of the north.

TIMELESS NORTH

Northern Territory

Soul-stirring and steeped in spirituality, the Northern Territory is an achingly beautiful part of Australia, home to larger-than-life scenery and six dramatically different seasons. With its ancient Aboriginal connection, the stories of the Dreamtime are shared on cliff-face galleries, creating the greatest and oldest collections of rock art in the world. In national parks like the **Kakadu**, a pristine World Heritage wilderness awaits.

Drift silently through rivers and lily-covered wetlands on a guided cruise, spotting saltwater crocodiles – leathery-skinned, prehistoric predators – peering from the water. Go on a rock art gallery tour, marvelling at 25,000-year-old paintings hidden beneath sheer escarpments and caves, finishing with a swim at the base of a tumbling waterfall. To fully appreciate Kakadu's grandeur, soar over the **Arnhem Land** escarpment and **Gunlom**, **Twin** and **Jim Jim Falls** on a scenic flight.

South of Kakadu, **Nitmiluk National Park (Katherine Gorge)** is another wilderness of surging falls, rainforest and mighty cliffs. Picnic, camp or swim at **Edith Falls**, which flow year round, or cruise along **Katherine River** through **Katherine Gorge** – sandstone gorges carved over millions of years.

During the monsoon, the wetlands swell with water and millions of migratory birds, including jabirus and dancing brolgas swoop across the floodplains. And if you like fishing, you've hit the jackpot. The Territory is famous for barramundi fishing – snare a prized catch in the **Daly** or **Mary River** or catch and cook mud crab or salmon in **Darwin Harbour** and estuaries.



GETTING THERE

Fly into Darwin to join a tour, rent a car or even charter a flight to your destination. Kakadu National Park is a three-hour drive, while Arnhem Land is reached by road in five, or by flying into Gove Airport. A 2WD will access most national parks, but you'll need a 4WD to access gorges and waterfalls.



EATING THERE

Darwin is brimming with great restaurants, cafes and iconic outdoor food markets. Further out of town, classic outback pubs serve steak and barramundi with damper and icy-cold beer. Depending on where you stay, you can barbecue your own fishing haul over a campfire, or dine on a five-star degustation menu.



STAYING THERE

Take your pick from five-star hotels and resorts, motels, B&Bs right through to caravan parks, campgrounds and hostels. Among the more special Territorian stays are eco-resorts, boasting luxury safari-style canvas tents set among nature.

WHEN TO GO

SPRING (SEPT-NOV)

HIGH 34°C LOW 23°C

It's a twitcher's paradise, with up to a third of Australia's bird species converging in the wetlands.

SUMMER (DEC-FEB)

HIGH 33°C LOW 25°C

The big wet creates a dazzling sight – rivers gush, plains flood and waterfalls thunder.

AUTUMN (MARCH-MAY)

HIGH 33°C LOW 23°C

Go fishing! The pre-monsoon brings a barra bonanza to billabongs and estuaries.

WINTER (JUNE-AUG)

HIGH 32°C LOW 19°C

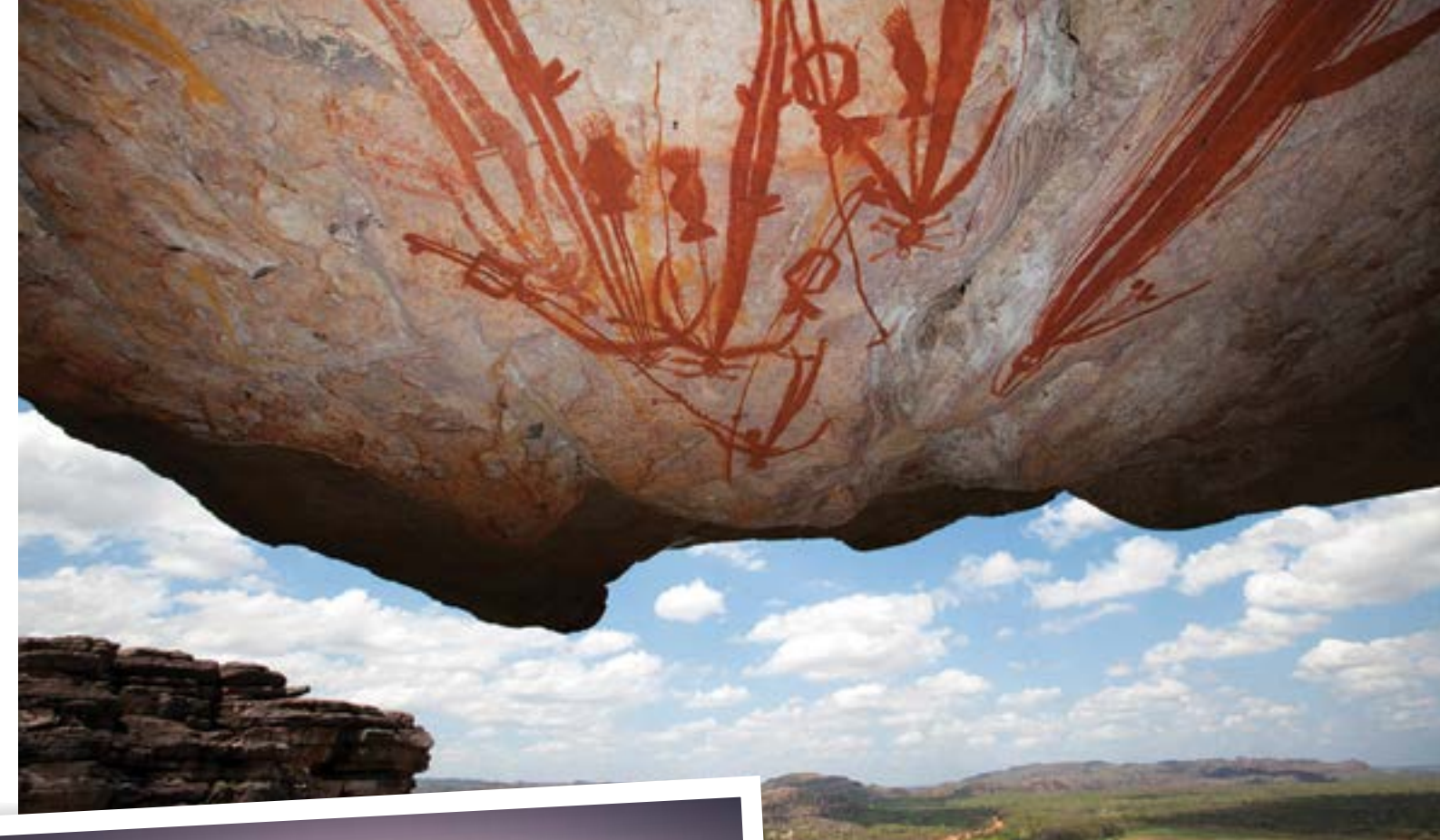
Water recedes and the skies are clear, providing perfect weather for touring.

EXPLORE KAKADU CALLING

Describing Kakadu as a park does not do it justice. This vast swathe of land encompasses more than 20,000 square kilometres. Whether you want to take a four-wheel drive tour through a jaw-dropping landscape of gorges, thunderous waterfalls and floodplains or float along on a river cruise, spotting crocs lurking in the water, Gagudju Dreaming is an indigenous-owned company offering the whole kit and kaboodle of Kakadu tours. To boot, they offer flexible itineraries to suit your travel plans and even a hotel – the Gagudju Crocodile Holiday Inn, which from the air is shaped like a saltwater crocodile. All bases are covered, in other words. gagudju-dreaming.com; 1800 500 401.

IMAGES: TOURISM AUSTRALIA, VENTURE NORTH

Taking a dip in pristine natural pools and taking in Aboriginal rock art are part of the NT experience.



INDIGENOUS ROCK ART AND WILDLIFE

In the northwest corner of Arnhem Land, the sacred site of Mt Borradaile offers culturally sensitive tours to some of the most restricted areas of Australia. Davidson's Arnhemland Safari Lodge, set on 700 square kilometres of sacred land, offers unmissable rock art tours; the ancient paintings depicting the first contact between Aboriginal people and Europeans with remarkable detail – ships and rifles are clearly visible. Wildlife lovers are spoiled here too. When the two billabongs of Cooper Creek flood in the wet season, it's a birdlife bonanza with some 270 species flocking to the region, from the jabiru, with its elongated neck and crimson legs, to brolgas, night herons, kites and kingfishers. arnhemland-safaris.com; 08 8979 0413.





Bamurru Plains deluxe tents are a comfy retreat after a hard day's barra fishing.



Iconic northern experiences include the Cobourg Peninsula, and below left, touring with indigenous guides



ADVENTURE FISH THE BEST BARRA

Big game anglers get a glint in their eye when the word “barramundi” is mentioned, and the warm, shallow waters of the Mary River flood plains are one of the best places in the world to fish for this prized catch. Guests staying at Bamurru Plains have exclusive access to a 100-square kilometre portion of the wetlands, and during the peak barra season of February–April, there’s even a dedicated fishing lodge. The expeditions are loads of fun, speeding along wetlands aboard an aircraft, among water lilies and semi-submerged melaleuca forests. While most ‘mundi are “catch and release”, the occasional fish can be handed over to the camp’s chef and cooked up for dinner. bamurruplains.com; 02 9571 6399.

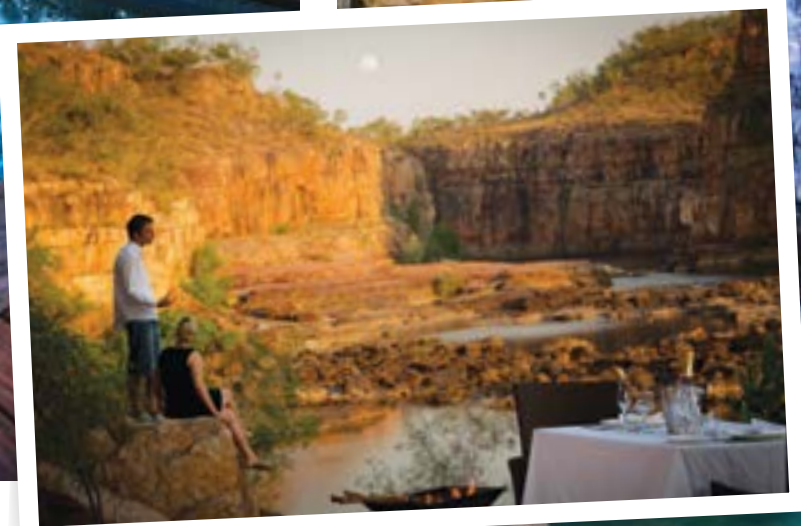
INDIGENOUS LUNCH LIKE A LOCAL

Dip into freshwater pools beneath gushing waterfalls, fish for barramundi in the Daly River, and explore the rugged Litchfield National Park on a guided tour with a local. Your personable Aboriginal guide will take you to meet the riverside community of Nauiyu, and even show you the bush medicine cabinet – pointing out the clever ways indigenous tribes used the region’s plants, shrubs and termite mounds. You’ll splash about in clear, natural pools – far away from crocs, of course. As for lunch, well, let’s just say it’s quite the spread – a feast of wild-caught barramundi, crocodile and kangaroo with salads, fruit, Tasmanian cheeses and fresh breads. ntitours.com.au, 08 8983 1434.

FAMILY TOP END KIDS' ADVENTURES

Venture North’s safari-style camp, set amid the savannah of the Garig Gunak Barlu National Park, is a fine base for exploring all the big-ticket adventures, like the Kakadu and Nitmiluk National Parks, Cobourg Peninsula and Arnhem Land, and tours can be tailored for families. Even the most hyperactive little will be entertained with child-friendly activities like learning how to track animals, hunt for mud crabs, and even how to make a campfire (safely, of course). If you haven’t guessed already, the dominant theme here is fun, with next-to-no chance of hearing the dreaded, “I’m bored”. venturenorth.com.au; 08 8927 5500.





ECO-STAY GLAMP IT UP IN THE WETLANDS

You could bring your own tent and pitch it somewhere, messing about with tent pegs. Or, you could set your GPS and drive to the Wildman Wilderness Lodge, situated in the Mary River Wetlands area halfway between Darwin and Kakadu National Park, where you can glamp (that's glamour camping, for the uninitiated) in an environmentally sensitive, timber-floored safari tent decked out with king-size beds, plump pillows, ceiling fans, ensuites and wide, shaded verandahs. During your stay, you can book an adventure flight or fishing tour, walk or bike through flood plains or boat along billabongs, watching as dragonflies and butterflies skim the water's surface. The resident crocodile, a five-metre beast named Big Arse, means swimming is off-limits, but there's no need to worry – the lodge has its own infinity pool. wildmanwildernesslodge.com.au; 07 5527 6860.



LUXURY SWIM IN PRIVATE POOLS

This stylish Jawoyn-owned lodge, located on the Katherine River in the Nitmiluk National Park has a wealth of luxury spoils (fabulous dining experiences, infinity pool, Bvlgari amenities - the list goes on) but one of its greatest allures is the location. Venture out to explore the sights, some of which are exclusive to guests staying at Cicada Lodge. Among them is a secluded swimming hole only known in the English language as 'the art site'. Accessible only via helicopter, this pristine pocket centres around a surging waterfall, surrounded by a gallery of ancient rock art, painted by the local Jawoyn people. cicalodge.com.au; 1800 242 232.



Australia's fabled red heart is a place rich in indigenous culture, and sun-seared natural icons like Uluru, Kata Tjuta, the West MacDonnell Ranges and Kings Canyon.

RED CENTRE

Northern Territory

Australia's red centre is often referred to as the spiritual heart of Australia, a living landscape of breathtaking beauty that encompasses the World Heritage-listed **Uluru and Kata Tjuta National Park**, **Alice Springs**, the ancient **West MacDonnell Ranges and Watarrka National Park**. The traditional custodians, the Anangu, believe the Central Australian landscape was created at the beginning of time by their ancestors. Their descendants have protected these sacred lands for thousands of generations since.

In its midst, the red rock **Uluru** (Ayers Rock) is one of the world's most recognisable natural icons – a towering sentinel rising proudly from the red earth. No matter how many photographs you've seen, nothing does this majestic rock justice. See it on a motorcycle, from the back of a camel or from above, on a scenic helicopter flight. Uluru is far from the only wondrous site in this region. To the north-east, the mighty **Kings Canyon** cleaves deep into the earth. Trek to the rim for views across the bluffs and gorges of **Watarrka National Park**, or through the **West MacDonnell Ranges**, which stretch for hundreds of kilometres, harbouring gorges and rock pools. Walk around the mysterious red domes of **Kata Tjuta** (The Olgas) sacred under Tjukurpa law, the foundation of Anangu culture. Or from Alice Springs, join a camel trek across the **Simpson Desert**.

Come to the Red Centre to appreciate Australia's metaphoric soul. Walk the **Larapinta Trail** with an Aboriginal guide, sleep in a swag under the stars, swim in refreshingly cool waterholes and discover the ancient culture of Australia's indigenous people.



GETTING THERE

Fly to Ayers Rock Airport from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane (all around three hours) Cairns and Alice Springs. Flights to Darwin from Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane take around 4 – 4.5 hours. The trip from Alice Springs is one hour, or about 4.5 hours if you're driving.



EATING THERE

There's plenty of fare in the outback. Don't miss campfire dinners, classic outback cuisine like camel burgers and roo steak. Grill your own bush tucker at the Pioneer Barbecue; enjoy fine dining at Kuniya inside Sails in the Desert; or dine outdoors, in view of Uluru, at the famous Sounds of Silence dinner.



STAYING THERE

From unpowered camp sites up to the 15 luxury pavilions at Longitude 131°, there's something to suit every budget. Tourist town Yulara has it all – pitch a tent or motorhome or book a room at one of the numerous hotels, hostels, resorts and self-contained apartments with pools.

WHEN TO GO

SPRING (SEPT-NOV)

HIGH 33°C LOW 9°C

Awesome thunderstorms, hail and dust storms and wildflower season. Join a 4WD tour or camel trek across the Simpson Desert.

SUMMER (DEC-FEB)

HIGH 36°C LOW 20°C

Avoid the heat of the day and opt for a sunset or pre-dawn walk around Uluru.

AUTUMN (MARCH-MAY)

HIGH 32°C LOW 8°C

Marked by warm days and cool nights, April and May is ideal for visiting Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park.

WINTER (JUNE-AUG)

HIGH 22°C LOW 4°C

Frosty mornings and pleasant days are great for doing the Larapinta Trail.



LUXURY TENTED LUXURY AT LONGITUDE

If a view of Uluru from your king-sized bed doesn't win you over, something else is bound to at luxury resort Longitude 131°. Fitted with antique trinkets and earthly furnishings, the 15 tented pavilions take the concept of camping to another stratosphere. Guided tours included in the tariff give guests exclusive access to parts of the national park, and your Uluru experience can be as leisurely or intrepid as you like. Gaze at the ochre Rock at sunset with a glass of bubbly, or follow the route of the ancestors on a guided, pre-dawn walk around its base. longitude131.com.au; 02 9918 4355.



FOOD A FINE DESERT FEAST

Fact: food always tastes better outdoors, but when it's eaten beneath a twinkling canopy of stars in the outback, it's truly unforgettable. The Tali Wiru experience will see you feasting on four courses paired with fine Aussie wine, with a magical Uluru and Kata Tjuta domes backdrop. The cuisine is distinctly Australian – think tender Darling Downs wagyu and wattleseed rubbed kangaroo carpaccio. After the meal, diners are treated to tales told by an indigenous storyteller. ayersrockresort.com.au/tali-wiru; 02 8296 8010.



See natural splendour and sacred sites on the Kuniya Walk from Longitude resort.

EXPLORE **TOUR KATA TJUTA DOMES**

The rust-red 36 boulders of Kata Tjuta are a majestic sight. In fact, the largest rock, Mt Olga, is even taller than Uluru. These surreal, dome-like structures have deep cultural significance as a sacred Aboriginal men's ceremonial site, so stick to marked trails. Surrounded by gorges, they offer some of the most rewarding walking opportunities in the park. Explore the 7.4-kilometre Valley of the Winds walk (which has one- to four-hour loops) or the guided one-hour Walpa Gorge trail that follows a path between two of the ancient domes.

seitoutbackaustralia.com.au; 08 8956 3156.

Be inspired and awestruck by the grandeur and rich, shifting hues of Kata Tjuta National Park.

IMAGES: TOURISM AUSTRALIA, TOURISM NT



Kings Canyon, and left, a taste of indigenous culture and gourmet bush tucker with Bob (Penunka) Taylor.

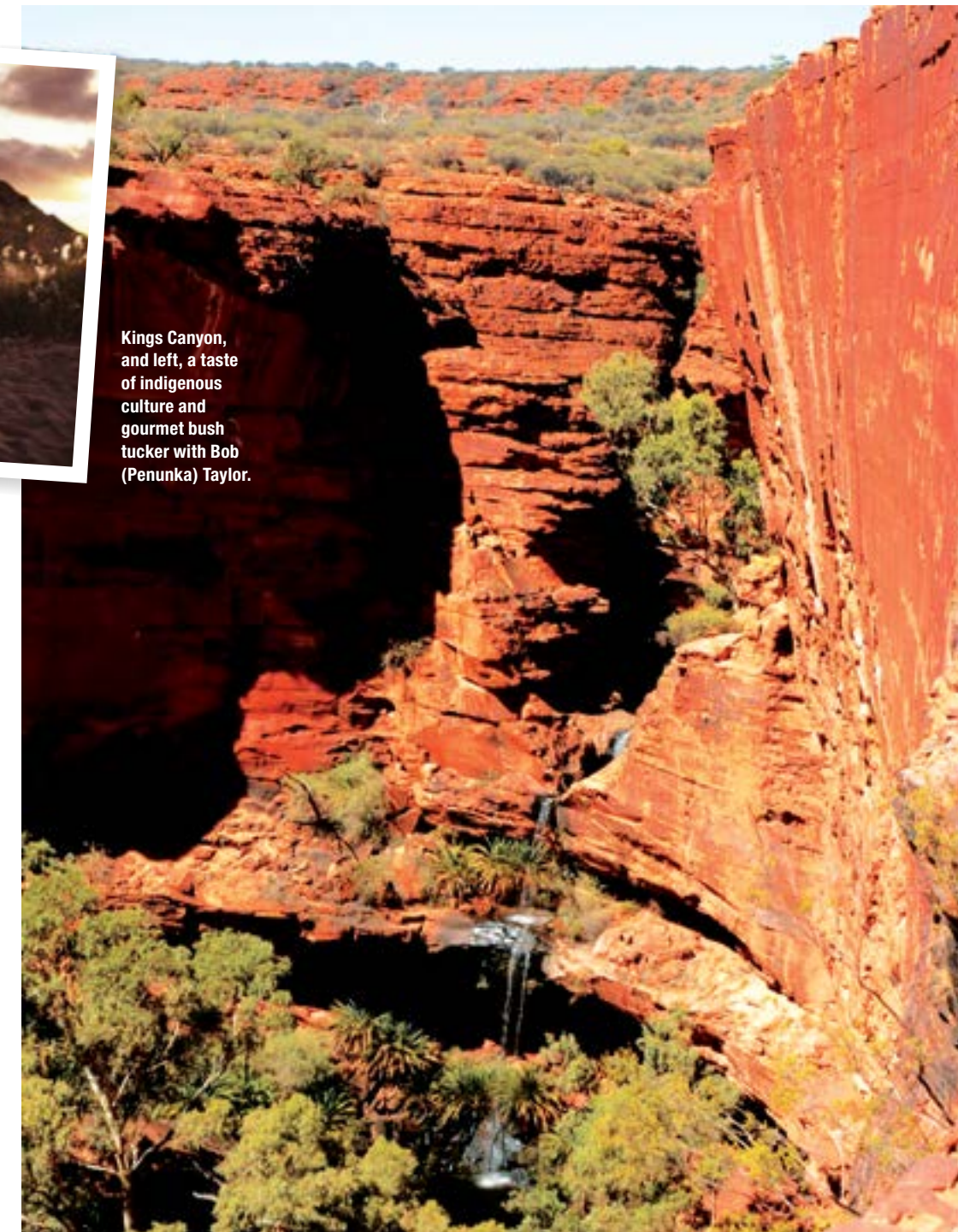
INDIGENOUS **DINNER WITH A BUSH CHEF**

Bush tucker is not all witchety grubs, although Bob (Penunka) Taylor knows a way or two with those. Bob, an Arrernte man, will open your eyes to gourmet bush tucker. A descendant of the traditional owners of the Rainbow Valley and son of a renowned watercolour artist, Bob spent 26 years working as a chef here and abroad. Now running RT Tours, his dinners in the West MacDonnell Ranges combine three-course meals with a convivial chat about Aboriginal culture. His culinary background means you can expect some real bush delicacies. Bob cooks with ingredients like kangaroo, wattleseed and quandong, and fires up the oven with mulga wood, a type of desert acacia widely used in Aboriginal culture.

rttoursaustralia.com.au; 08 8952 0327.

ADVENTURE **DISCOVER THE UNEXPECTED**

The show-stealing Uluru tends to get most of the attention in the Red Centre, but The Rock is just the icing on the outback cake. A three-day Goanna Dreaming 4WD safari unveils some of the lesser-known sights, like working cattle station Kings Creek (don't forget to try the famous camel burger!) and Mt Conner – seen on the road from Alice Springs, it's often mistaken for Uluru because of its similar, flat-topped shape. Or walk through Kings Canyon, with sandstone bluffs, cavernous gorges and a shaded waterhole known as the Garden of Eden. *wayoutback.com.au; 1300 551 510.*





Fall in love with the dusty, arid landscape and the slow-paced desert transport on a camel tour.

IMAGES: TOURISM AUSTRALIA, TOURISM NT



Appreciate the grandeur of the West MacDonnell Ranges by walking the Larapinta Trail.

WALKS TREK THE LARAPINTA TRAIL

The Larapinta Trail, amid the splendid isolation of the West MacDonnell Ranges, is regarded as one of the greatest walks in the country. The 223-kilometre trail follows the high ridge lines of the West Macs, a landscape of deep gorges, dried creek beds and spinifex-covered plains dotted with termite mounds. Highlights include the mighty Simpsons Gap and clambering to the summit of Mt Sonder. On a six-day, fully guided trek, walkers stop to swim in waterholes, and bed down at night at semi-permanent bush camps, where hot showers and fireside meals await. worldexpeditions.com; 1300 720 000.

FAMILY RIDE A CAMEL AT SUNSET

You might not go as far as Robyn Davidson, the *Tracks* writer who rode camels across 2700 kilometres of Aussie desert, but you can lope along the dunes for an hour, watching the sunset blaze across Uluru and Kata Tjuta. With dewy eyes framed by luscious lashes, the camels are gentle, friendly creatures, with an undulating, slow-paced gait. Saddle up at a farm at Voyages Ayers Rock Resort just before sunset or sunrise, enjoy the view and return to the farm to munch on freshly baked beer damper. ulurucameltours.com.au; 08 8956 3333.



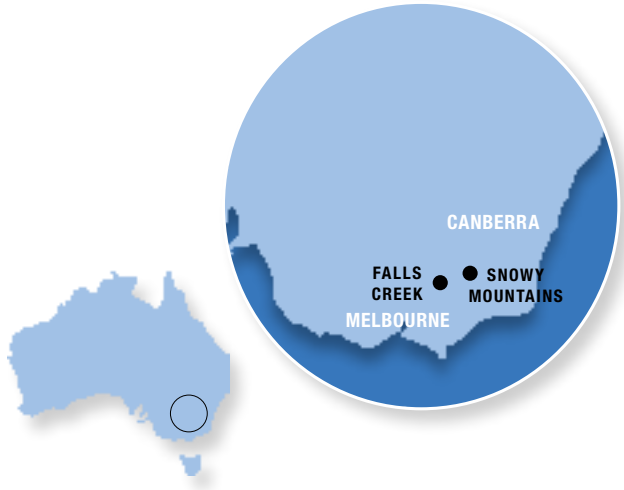


IMAGE: TOURISM VICTORIA

Winter wonderland, summer spectacular... the Alpine peaks and 16 national parks and reserves across three of the country's states offer year-round outdoor adventure.

AUSTRALIAN ALPS

New South Wales, Victoria and ACT



Romantic, wild, and ruggedly beautiful, the Australian Alps will invigorate your senses in a way quite unlike anywhere else in the country. The alpine region spans 16 national parks and reserves, stretching across eastern Victoria, southeastern New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.

It's a different world – where a man from Snowy River galloped into our national psyche on horseback; where whimsically-named wildflowers like the billy button, alpine buttercup and white snow daisy carpet the landscape; where endangered species like the tiny mountain pygmy possum – Australia's only hibernating marsupial – make their home; and gold rush ghost towns provide a glimpse into colonial history.

Winter's the time to strap on your skis, with resorts like **Thredbo**, **Mt Hotham**, **Perisher**, **Mt Baw Baw**, **Mt Buller** and **Falls Creek** catering for everyone from hard-partying snowboarders to families and cross-country skiers. When the snow melts, verdant expanses of alpine heaths emerge, and the peak of the Snowy Mountains' majestic **Mt Kosciuszko** beckons adventurers to the highest point in Australia.

Go for wintry, white adventures and warm, crackling fires. Go to splash icy-cold pure stream water on your face after an energetic hike in the summer sun. Go for horse rides amongst the marbled pink, mauve and teal-green snow gums that evoke that delicious, only-in-Australia feeling. Just make sure you go.



GETTING THERE

The Snowy Mountains (NSW) is six hours' drive from Sydney and Melbourne, or two hours from Canberra; Falls Creek (Vic) is four-and-a-half hours from Melbourne, or three to Mt Buller. Coach services run from each city. Fly into Albury (or Hotham Airport by charter) to reach Victoria's snowfields or Snowy Mountains Airport to connect to Thredbo, Jindabyne and Perisher.



EATING THERE

From fine dining to hearty country meals, you'll easily satiate that hard-earned mountain appetite. The pristine waters and crisp alpine air yield amazing produce – think beautiful rainbow trout from the rivers of the Snowy Mountains, crunchy Batlow apples, sweet berries – not to mention the sparkling proseccos and pinot grigios of the King Valley.



STAYING THERE

The ski fields boast luxe resorts complete with spas and destination dining (don't miss super-cool QT Falls Creek), cosy ski lodges or convenient self-contained apartments. The sub-alpine region is dotted with villages offering historic cottages, farm stays and hotels.

WHEN TO GO

Climate varies between states and mountains. Below-zero winter temperatures bring snow, while summer days peak to the mid 20s. It's not uncommon to see snow in summer and sun in winter.

SPRING (SEPT-NOV)

Snow thaws and alpine heaths emerge. Walk, horse-ride and climb Mt Kosciuszko.

SUMMER (DEC-FEB)

Sail, kayak or fish at Lake Jindabyne and Lake Crackenback.

AUTUMN (MARCH-MAY)

Explore ancient glacial lakes, and spot wild brumbies.

WINTER (JUNE-AUG)

Carve up the slopes – the ski season typically runs June to October, peaking July/August.



Adventure beckons in the national parks; or soak up the charm and history of villages like Beechworth, Victoria.

ADVENTURE TRY SNOWSHOEING

Think you've been there, done that when it comes to extracting maximum fun from the snow? How about trying some snow shoes on for size? Snowshoeing takes you beyond the hustle and bustle of the ski fields into the silence and beauty of the back country. Operating out of Perisher and Kosciuszko, K7 Adventures offer guided half-day or full-day treks through places hard to reach on skis, to reveal stunning new vistas. And pack your camera – whether you've climbed to the top of Kosciuszko or you're looking towards it from the Ramshead Peaks, the views (OK, and perhaps the climb) will leave you breathless. k7adventures.com; 0421 862 354.

FOOD PEDAL TO PRODUCE RIDE

We've found it – the perfect getaway for foodies who want to offset the belly-stretching with a bit of leg-stretching. Based in Milawa, in the gourmand's paradise of the King Valley, the Pedal to Produce self-guided bike tour includes a night at a lovely country house and bikes to wobble your way around no

less than nine gourmet food and wine stop-offs, stocking up on cheeses, mustards, olives, berries, chocolate and the famous Italian varietals of the region. Cycle from cute country village to farm gate to winery – Brown Brothers is across the road from the hotel – before retiring for a well-earned snooze. adventurevictoria.com.au; 0407 841 736.

FAMILY GALLOP THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS

Reynella Rides has been around for over 40 years, so they know this high country like it's their backyard. For a family adventure you'll never forget, join one of their five-day horse-riding safaris through Kosciuszko National Park, camping along the way and keeping an eye out for the wild brumbies that roam the alps. You'll spend the first and last nights at Reynella Homestead, and everything except sleeping bags and oilskin coats (available at extra cost) is included. Depending on experience, treks are best suited to children aged 10-plus. There's also the option to stay at the homestead during school holidays. reynellarides.com.au; 1800 029 909.



WALK WALK THE ROOF OF AUSTRALIA

Auswalk's six-night Roof of Australia walk takes you from one alpine inn to the next and includes accommodation, meals, expert guides, park fees and handy extras like lunch bags and info packs. The breathtaking journey takes in the Snowy Mountains Scheme, traversing Crackenback and Charlotte Pass, across the Snowy River and all the way to the highest point in Australia at the top of Mt Kosciuszko. Oh, and they'll move your luggage for you each day, too (even on the optional self-guided walk), so all you need to worry about is soaking up those incredible views. auswalk.com.au; 03 5356 4971.

INDIGENOUS CAVES AND CULTURE

Led by local Aboriginal discovery rangers, the one-hour Yarrangobilly Caves tour reveals fascinating insights into how the Wolgalu people lived in this mountain environment in the northern precinct of Koscuizsko National Park, using plants, rocks and animals to make tools and weapons, and living by the seasons. You'll also learn about neighbouring tribes and

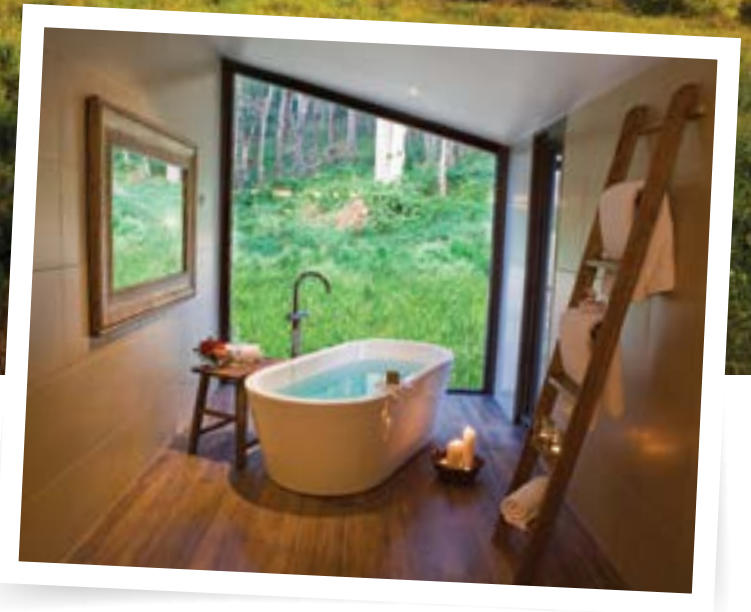
their history in the region. Kids, in particular, will love the hands-on nature of this tour, with the opportunity to have a go at boomerang throwing, weaving or other traditional techniques. The guides are happy to tailor the tours to your interests – just let them know when booking. nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; 02 6947 7025.

WILDLIFE NOCTURNAL ADVENTURE

Get up close and personal with the koalas, platypus, emus and other locals in the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve (a 40-minute drive south of Canberra's city centre) via their overnight stays. Your fee contributes to endangered species programs for the northern corroboree frog and southern brush-tailed rock wallaby, and with 25,000 years of Aboriginal history and more recent colonial heritage, there's some fascinating tales to be told around the campfire. There's also a Tid By Torchlight five-hour spotlight tour, unveiling the animals that emerge at night. conservationvolunteers.com.au; 03 5330 2600.



Stylish and serene, The Buckland is a dream alpine sanctuary.



LUXURY CHIC ALPINE SANCTUARY

Tucked away in the highlands of northeast Victoria lie five cabins of deliciously alpine, country-style luxury. The Buckland, in Bright, is a decidedly grown-up affair, although you may be tempted to dance a little jig upon opening the door to your private retreat. Featuring goosedown bed linen, freestanding baths with forest views and other discreetly decadent touches, the studios provide the opportunity to relax and recharge in the stunning surrounds. Country-style breakfasts (with unlimited barista-style coffees) and L'Occitane toiletries are included, and with in-room massages and picnic hampers on offer, you've got your perfect alpine weekend away sorted. thebuckland.com.au; 0419 133 318.

IMAGES: TOURISM AUSTRALIA, TOURISM VICTORIA, THE BUCKLAND



IMAGE: TOURISM AUSTRALIA

Uncrowded beaches, mist-tinged rainforests and rocky islands teeming with fairy penguins and seals... This stretch from the Sapphire Coast to East Gippsland has it all, and a host of hidden gems.

COASTAL WILDERNESS

New South Wales and Victoria



GETTING THERE

Midway between Sydney and Melbourne, the closest airport is Merimbula, serviced by Rex Airlines. The southern gateway town Orbst is about four hours' drive from Melbourne, while Narooma, in the north, is five hours from Sydney. There are regular coach services from both Sydney and Melbourne.



EATING THERE

Coastal towns are brimming with opportunities to feast on seafood, from fresh fish and chips to prawns. Rent a rod and haul in your own fish, or snack on sustainably grown oysters at Narooma. Drive inland to explore even more organic produce and modern Australian cuisine at wineries and country restaurants.



STAYING THERE

Stay at a five-star lodge overlooking a lake or a cosy B&B with coastal views. The region has plenty of accommodation options, from motels, hotels, campsites to eco-retreats at both Cape Conran Coastal Park and Buchan Caves National Park.

WHEN TO GO

SPRING (SEPT-NOV)

HIGH 21°C LOW 7°C

Admire heathland flowers and spot migrating humpback, baleen and toothed whales.

SUMMER (DEC-FEB)

HIGH 25°C LOW 13°C

Laze on a beach with wild kangaroos, explore the coast via snorkel, or kayak along the shoreline.

AUTUMN (MARCH-MAY)

HIGH 23°C LOW 8°C

The ocean is still pleasantly warm, with fresh coastal air ideal for walks too.

WINTER (JUNE-AUG)

HIGH 17°C LOW 4°C

Cooler days are suited to forest hikes and biking. See Merimbula's Orchid Winter Show in mid August.



FOOD FEAST ON THE FINEST

Bursting with wholesome fresh produce, the region is a paradise for foodies and for chefs like Paul West, the Aussie host of Tilba-based hit TV show *River Cottage*. Try chilli chocolates at Disaster Bay, buy silky olive oil or indigenous finger limes from a Bemboka farm, or visit the monthly farmers markets at Candelo. Take an oyster tour at Wheeler Farm in Merimbula or sample crisp verdelho followed by a locally-sourced meal at Mimosa Winery outside of Bermagui. Cheese lovers can sign up for a cheese-making course at the ABC Cheese Factory in Tilba or discover the area's rich dairy heritage at Bega. sapphirecoast.com.au/local-produce

INDIGENOUS EXPLORE ANCIENT CAVES

Indigenous people avoided the depths of the limestone Buchan Caves, where they believed mischievous, fairy-like creatures lived. But they weren't afraid to venture into others nearby, where they left behind stone tools showing evidence of occupation some 18,000 years ago. These caves, which are among the oldest Ice-Age cave sites in southeast Australia, are on the broader Bataluk Cultural Trail. Follow the trail, which ends in Cape Conran Coastal Park, to witness 30,000 years of Gunaikurnai history and culture. If you want a peek inside the honeycomb formations inside Buchan Caves, join one of the daily tours. batalukculturaltrail.com.au; 03 5152 1891.

EXPLORE SNORKEL WITH SEALS

Go diving or snorkelling with whiskery Australian and New Zealand fur seals who are renowned for their friendliness and aquatic acrobatics. The rocky nature reserve of Montague Island, nine kilometres from Narooma, attracts thousands of seals and migratory birds; and day tours exploring this wildlife haven are organised by charter operators from Narooma. Climb up to the historic lighthouse, with its spiral staircase, or do a dusk tour to spot fairy penguins returning to roost on the island. Better still, take your family on an award-winning, hosted two-night nature escape with Conservation Volunteers Australia and assist NSW National Parks rangers gather data. eurobodalla.com.au/montague-island; 1800 802 528.



IMAGES: TOURISM AUSTRALIA; EUROBODALLA; COAST TOURISM; SAPPHIRE COAST TOURISM; ECHIDNA WALKABOUT



WALK A WALKERS' WONDERLAND

Walkers, you're in for a treat. Whatever your fitness level, there's a trail to suit, from the Light to Light walk in Ben Boyd National Park – one of the top-rated walks on the NSW south coast – to strolls in South East Forest National Park, home to endangered native species such as the smoky mouse. Gippsland High Country Tours offer a dizzying variety of nature walks, exploring the rugged gorges and waterfalls of the Snowy River National Park and heading deep into the mossy, mysterious Errinundra National Park, where scarlet Gippsland waratahs float among the eucalypts. Other trips include a five-day Seashore Life of East Gippsland walk, which allows you to collect marine data for the Museum of Victoria. gippslandhighcountrytours.com.au; 03 5157 5556.



Eden's Twofold Bay is a forested coastal paradise where amazing fauna and flora flourishes.

WILDLIFE SECRET WILDLIFE SPOTS

Armed with torches, expert guides from Echidna Walkabout will lead you on a private tour of the Croajingolong National Park, where you can catch sight of squirrel gliders and furtive wombats fossicking about at night. The four-day tour, held upon request, allows you to see iconic animals in their native bushland habitat, like koalas, wallabies and kangaroos, as well as rarer marsupials. In the banksia woodlands, it's a twitcher's paradise. Listen for the creaky squeals of red-headed Gang-gang cockatoo, while in the eucalypt forests you could be treated to the repertoire of our best mimic, the superb lyrebird. More birdlife can be seen while boating up the Mollacocta inlet to see spoonbills, black swans or sea eagles. echidnawalkabout.com.au; 03 9646 8249.

ADVENTURE CYCLE THE SCENERY

Whizz through banksia woodlands and deserted beaches on a 25-kilometre bike ride to the Point Hicks Lighthouse in Cape Conran Coastal Park. Snowy River Cycling's thrilling five-day Wilderness Cycle Tour is an adventure for keen cyclists, and includes accommodation in comfortable guesthouses and even a stay in a lighthouse keeper's cottage. Along the way, you will explore forest cycling tracks, spot colonies of seals, and hike up Genoa Peak for a panoramic 360-degree view across the mountain hinterland, all the way to Bass Strait. Alternatively, try one of the gentler Snowy River Day Rides around Orbost, which suits all levels of riders, from a 16-kilometre pedal through dairy farm country to the robust 30-kilometre rail trail. snowyrivercycling.com.au; 0428 556 088.



IMAGE: TOURISM NSW

With multimillion-dollar views in every direction, this glittering natural wonder needs no introduction, but there is much more to Sydney Harbour than meets the eye.

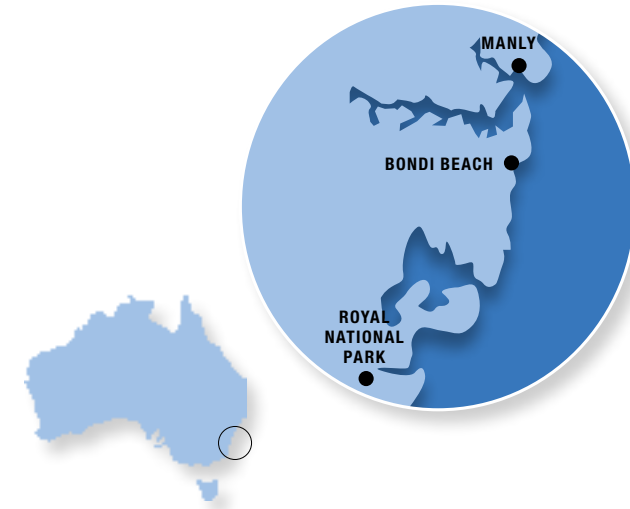
SYDNEY HARBOUR

New South Wales

Hugging the shores of one of the world's most cosmopolitan cities, the beguiling waters of Sydney Harbour are a blue-green wonderland of sparkling, yacht-studded bays, secluded beaches and coastline framed by parks and native bushland. The green heart is the great expanse of **Sydney Harbour National Park**, encircling the headlands and entrance to **Port Jackson**. It is the gateway to a region of natural beauty, rich with Aboriginal and convict history, World Heritage sites and even wildlife on the doorstep. Humpback whales have been known to seek shelter in the harbour's coves, while a colony of little penguins have made themselves at home on **Manly's** foreshore.

Most visitors will get their first glimpse of the harbour while exploring **The Rocks**, parks like the **Royal Botanic Gardens** and coastal walkways that snake around the foreshore. With unmistakable icons like the **Sydney Harbour Bridge** and **Sydney Opera House**, it's an enticing view from any vantage point.

To the east, the **Bondi to Bronte** walk is one of those Sydney must-dos, its coastal contours taking in a sea panorama, golden sands and plenty of sun-kissed locals. Headlands like **South Head** offer a tremendous vista of the wild Tasman Sea from pathways built on precipitous sandstone bluffs. Along the **Palm Beach** peninsula, surf beaches are a living postcard, while the **Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park**, a short drive north, offers a wonderful mix of bush, beach and peaceful waterways. Further south, walk and camp in the **Royal National Park**, with its isolated beaches, rainforest and dramatic clifftop coastal trails.



GETTING THERE

Kingsford Smith Airport, the main international and domestic airport, is only 15 kilometres from the central business district and Sydney Harbour. For information on trains, buses and ferries see transportnsw.info or call 131 500.



EATING THERE

There's no chance of going hungry in Sydney, which has a world-class culinary scene, from edgy laneway cafés to dreamy pop-the-question restaurants. Find eat-street precincts in inner-city suburbs like Newtown; surf spots Manly and Bondi are crammed with restaurants, cafés, fish and chip joints and pubs; and pescetarians should hotfoot it to the famous Sydney Fish Market in Pyrmont.



STAYING THERE

Most major hotel groups have snared a CBD or beachfront location with a smattering of fashionably hip boutique hotels cropping up in recent years. Serviced suites, motels, B&Bs, apartment stays and backpacker hostels abound.

WHEN TO GO

SPRING (SEPT-NOV)

HIGH 24°C LOW 11°C

Make the most of the bright sunny, dry days exploring the coastal bushland and national parks.

SUMMER (DEC-FEB)

HIGH 28°C LOW 15°C

Swim, snorkel, surf – whatever watersport tickles your fancy, the harbour sparkles in summer.

AUTUMN (MARCH-MAY)

HIGH 24°C LOW 11°C

Warm currents mean you can carry on swimming well into autumn.

WINTER (JUNE-AUG)

HIGH 19°C LOW 8°C

Westerly winds create refreshing walking conditions to trek trails in the Royal National Park.



The Spit to Manly trail is one of many walks that makes you forget you're in the big smoke.

WALK A CLASSIC COASTAL RAMBLE

Ambling along a wild coastal track through native eucalypts, it's all too easy to forget you're in the middle of Australia's biggest city, but that's the beauty of Sydney – coastal tracks and pathways encircle much of the harbour foreshore. You can opt for a DIY half-day hike tackling the classic Spit to Manly, a 10-kilometre walk that boasts shockingly beautiful harbour views, coastal coves and vast swathes of bushland. For a longer trek, sign up to a camping trip explore the Coast Track in the Royal National Park. Or spend five days exploring the entire coastline of Sydney with Auswalk, walking 10-20 kilometres a day until you've covered North and South heads, Middle Harbour and a holy trinity of peaceful beaches, Aboriginal sites and panoramic lookouts. auswalk.com.au; 03 5356 4971.

EXPLORE BLUFF TO BEACH

When the sun is out, Sydneysiders make a beeline for the coast – lounging on towels at surf and harbour beaches, picnicking at waterfront parks and drinking icy-cold beer anywhere with a view. A tour of South Head offers the full package: surf beaches, sheltered harbour bays and the three-kilometre Waverley Cliff Walk. Following boardwalks and stairways along precipitous bluffs, this coastal stretch has tremendous views over the Tasman Sea. Feel the saltspray from the surf lashing at the sandstone cliffs, and finish with lunch at Watsons Bay, where you will find a waterfront park, a picturesque beach, a pub and possibly the best fish and chips in town. sydneycoastwalks.com.au; 1300 139 902.

WILDLIFE UNDERWATER WORLD

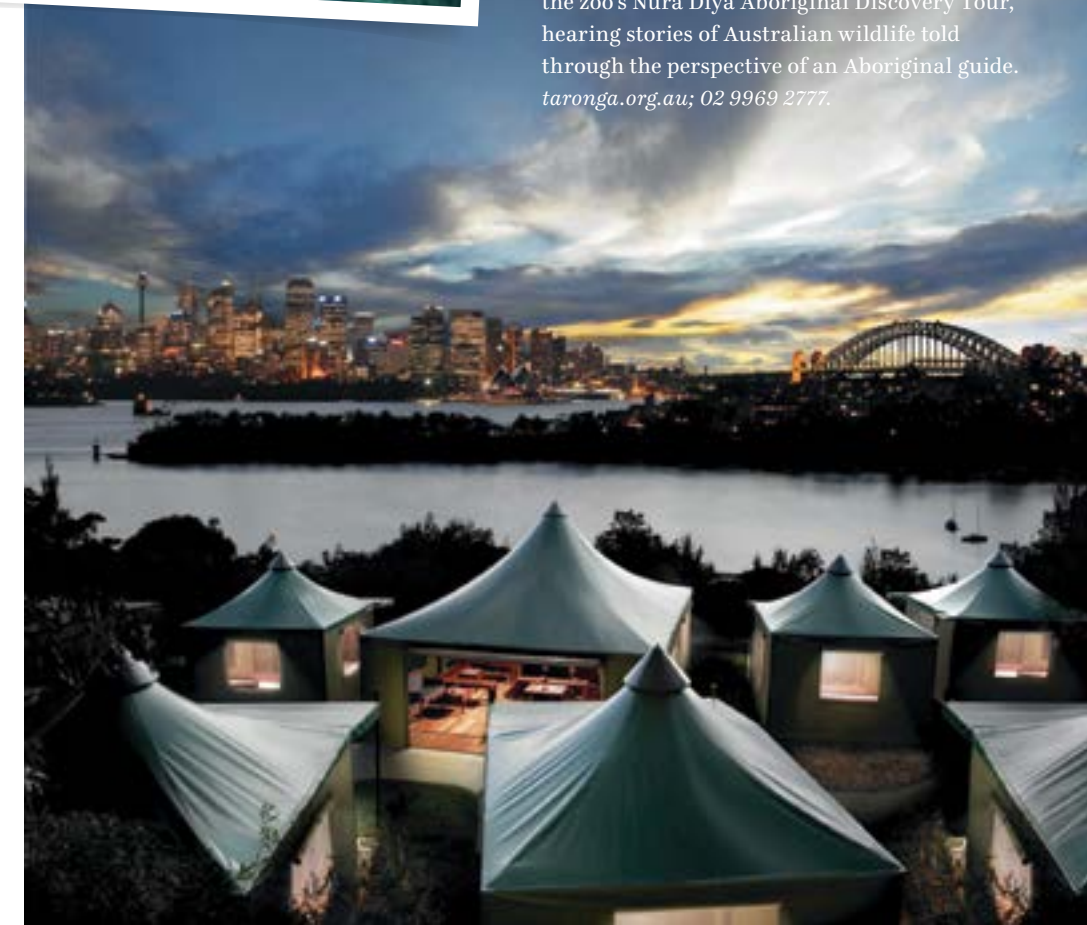
Sydneysiders are a friendly bunch and so are the fish – especially the harbour's resident eastern blue groper. These big-eyed, plump-lipped fish grow up to 1.2 metres in size and are as playful as Labradors, making regular appearances in the harbour's idyllic sheltered bays. Cabbage Tree Bay Aquatic Reserve, accessed at Shelly Beach in Manly, is a protected portion brimming with marine life, from harmless wobbegong sharks to juvenile dusky whaler sharks. Swimmers, divers and snorkellers are regularly befriended by Harry the resident blue groper. ecotreasures.com.au; 0415 121 648.



FAMILY ZOO SLEEPOVER

It's the stuff children's dreams are made of – camping overnight in a zoo, listening to the cacophony of hoots, howls and roars of the animals. Taronga Zoo's Roar & Snore makes that dream come true with a sleepover package in luxury safari-style tents. This extraordinary experience includes behind-the-scenes tours and nocturnal animal encounters. Walking through the zoo with torches, and falling asleep knowing wild beasts are mere metres away will thrill your pint-sized animal lovers. It's good grown-up fun, too. The following day, all the family can enjoy the zoo's Nura Diya Aboriginal Discovery Tour, hearing stories of Australian wildlife told through the perspective of an Aboriginal guide. taronga.org.au; 02 9969 2777.

IMAGES: TOURISM NSW, TOURISM AUSTRALIA, TARONGA ZOO



A two-day hiking
escape to the Royal
National Park
unveils Sydney's
hidden treasures.



INDIGENOUS CITY DREAMING

Before the arrival of the First Fleet, the Gadigal people lived along the shores of Sydney Harbour, and were deeply connected to their environment. Pause for a moment and reflect on the ancient spirituality and saltwater lifestyle of these coastal Aboriginal people on a fascinating 90-minute walking tour. Developed by Margret Campbell, a Dunghutti-Jerrinjah woman, The Rocks Dreaming tour strolls around some of the most prominent indigenous sites like Bligh and Barney Reserve, Dawes Point and Campbell's Cove, exploring the language, customs and medicinal uses of native plants. therocks.com/dreaming; 02 8273 0000.

ADVENTURE A RIGHT ROYAL DISCOVERY

It's hard to believe, but even Sydneysiders feel the need to go day-tripping. Where do they go? South - to the Royal National Park. Nature lovers are spoilt for choice in this bewitching wilderness. Dawdle along the sand at Wattamolla Beach, float around the calm, lagoon bay on a lilo or snorkel the rockpools at Jibbon Beach, Bundeena, where Aboriginal rock carvings are etched into the sandstone. Some of the best bushwalking in the state is found here - including the 26-kilometre Coast Track, a two-day walking and camping odyssey that winds along the coast and beaches from Bundeena to Otford. Or for night owls (and night photography enthusiasts), a moonwalk tour explores the park after dark. udu.com.au; 0448 388 687.





IMAGE: SOUTHERN OCEAN LODGE

Like a zoo without fences, the nation's third-largest island is famous for prolific wildlife, dramatic coastal scenery and the kind of scrumptious fare you'd expect to be served up in South Australia.

KANGAROO ISLAND

South Australia

Nature-lovers are on cloud nine in Kangaroo Island. Surrounded by the crashing surf of the **Southern Ocean**, more than a third of the island is a national park or conservation area, with wildlife roaming freely.

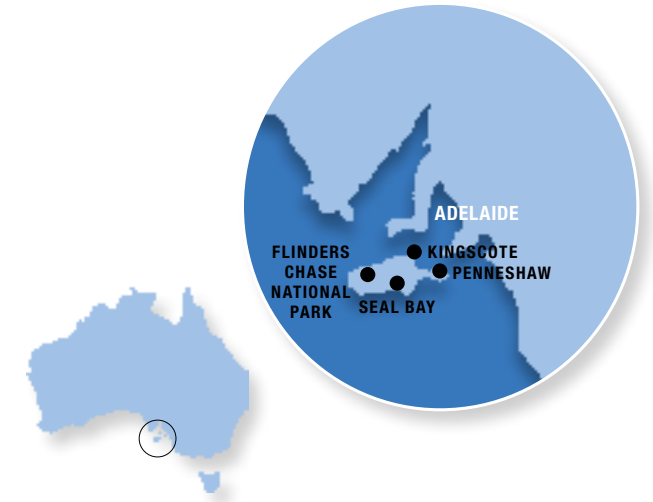
Aside from the ubiquitous roos, wallabies, koalas and some 267 species of birds, coastal trails dotted with platforms offer a vantage point for spying New Zealand fur seals frolicking in the water and sea lions sunning themselves on beaches. No wonder the island is often referred to as Australia's Galapagos.

While much of the 500-kilometre coastline is wild and windswept, **Vivonne Bay**, with its chalk-white sand and turquoise waters, is ideal for swimming, fishing, camping and surfing. More peaceful swimming can be found at **Emu Bay, Island Beach** and **Hog Bay**.

For the explorer, **Flinders Chase National Park** is brimming with wildlife, bushwalking trails and wind-sculpted rock formations such as the **Remarkable Rocks** and **Admirals Arch**.

Beyond its rugged charms, the island has plenty to please the stylish traveller. Kangaroo Island is a gourmand's dream, serving up deliciously different local produce such as honey from pure-strain Ligurian bees, sheep's cheese and seafood caught sustainably from the pristine waters. Marron - a freshwater crayfish - is a local specialty.

The **Southern Ocean Lodge**, a heavenly hideaway tucked into the southwest coast, is the ultimate in luxury lodging, showcasing fine cuisine and hypnotic ocean views. It's one of the gems you'll find on an island fast becoming Australia's hottest holiday spot.



GETTING THERE

Flights to Kangaroo Island depart Adelaide daily and take around 50 minutes, while ferries from Cape Jervis take less than an hour. Hire vehicles from the airport, Kingscote or Penneshaw, or bring your own car across on the ferry.



EATING THERE

Foodies flock to the annual FEASTival; the rest of the year you can find artisan producers, cellar doors and boutique wineries, many with on-site restaurants. In Penneshaw and Kingscote, there's a smattering of casual cafes, general stores and some of the best fish and chips in the country.



STAYING THERE

From camp sites, lighthouse keeper's cottages and self-contained beach houses, you can go rustic or splash out in five-star style on Kangaroo Island. Penneshaw, Kingscote and Parndana are the main townships with general stores and restaurants. Check out the options at tourkangarooisland.com.au

WHEN TO GO

SPRING (SEPT-NOV)

HIGH 21°C LOW 10°C

Walk among wildflowers, watch sea lions bask on the beach in November, or view nesting seabirds from a lighthouse promontory.

SUMMER (DEC-FEB)

HIGH 24°C LOW 13°C

Surf, swim and spot New Zealand fur seals sunbaking on the rocks.

AUTUMN (MARCH-MAY)

HIGH 22°C LOW 11°C

Fairy penguins return for breeding and the Flinders Chase National Park bursts to life with geese.

WINTER (JUNE-AUG)

HIGH 16°C LOW 8°C

Southern right whales make their annual visit to the protected waters.

LUXURY CHIC CLIFFTOP RETREAT

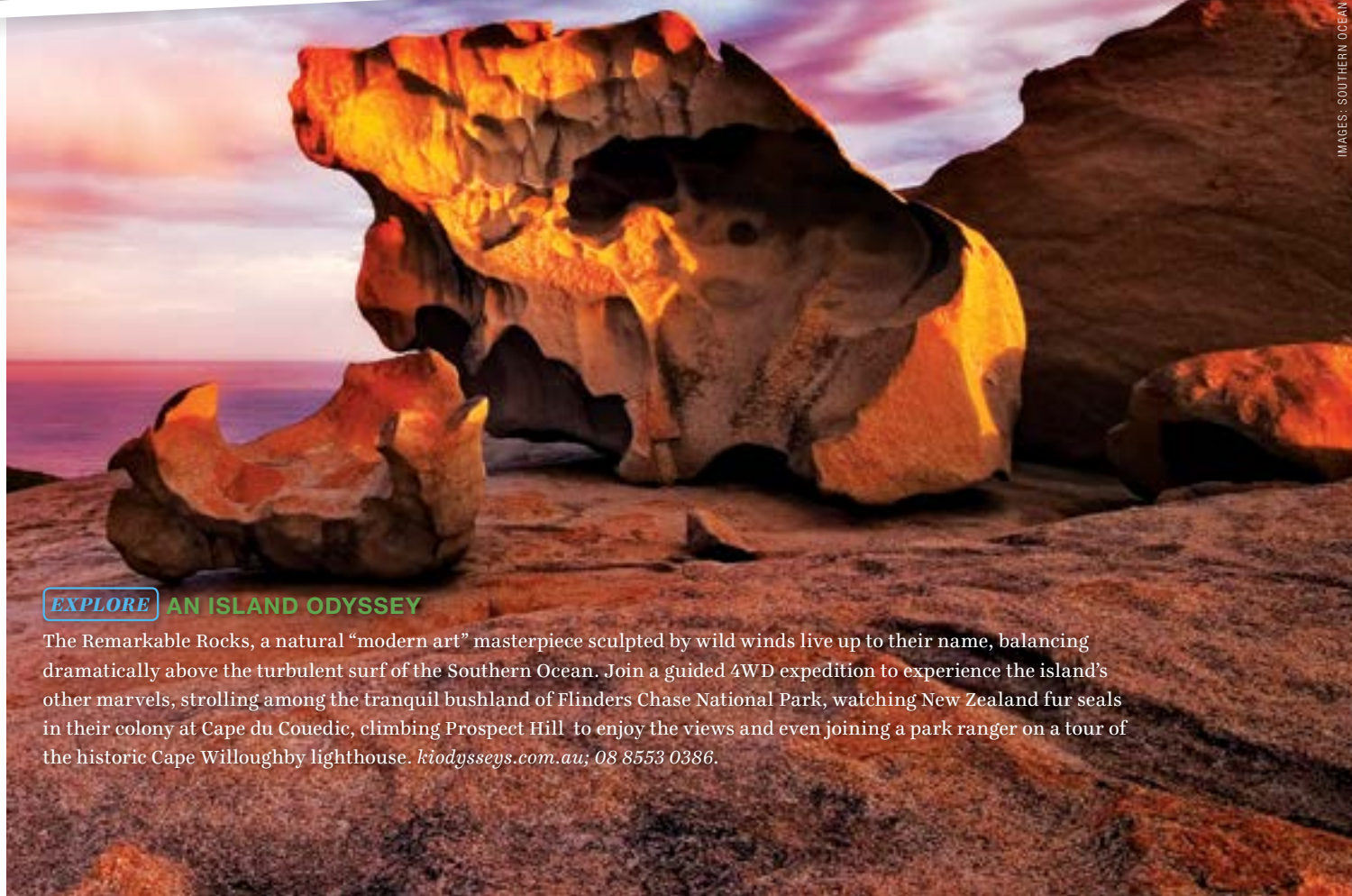
Cantilevered over the rugged coastline of Hanson Bay, with a commanding panorama of the Southern Ocean, Southern Ocean Lodge is all about immersing yourself into the island's natural beauty while indulging in all the creature comforts. Each package offered includes an itinerary of experiences – from naturalist-led sea lion encounters to pamper treatments at The Southern Spa. As the sun sets, nothing is quite as pleasurable as settling in to the sunken lounge with a glass of fine wine and admiring the crashing surf from the floor-to-ceiling windows. southernoceanlodge.com.au; 02 9918 4355.

FOOD FEAST FOR THE ISLE

Food, glorious food! From seafood and artisan cheeses to native spices, yoghurt and wine, Kangaroo Island produces a veritable bonanza of culinary goodies, including specialities like pure Ligurian honey and marron – a freshwater crayfish. Oenophiles will be pleased to learn that KI is home to 18 wine labels, and the drops created at The Islander Estate, owned by Frenchman Jacques Lurton, are among the best. It's easy to eat and drink your way around the island by following the Farm Gate and Cellar Door Trail, or time your visit to coincide with the annual Kangaroo Island FEASTival, a five-day gastronomic celebration. For a guided tour, join a Food Safari and let the experts curate a tailored epicurean journey. exceptionalkangarooisland.com; 08 8553 9119.

ADVENTURE BOARD, BIKE AND PADDLE

After all that leisurely beach strolling and long lunching, how about something to get your adrenaline pumping? If you fancy quad biking through open grassland and rolling sand dunes, an organised quad bike tour will take you through otherwise inaccessible areas of the island, allowing you to glimpse animals in their natural settings. Witness more wildlife while paddling along the Harriet River in a single or double kayak, or for some laughs (and tumbles), hire a sandboard or toboggan and hurtle down the dunes of Little Sahara. kioutdooraction.com.au; 08 8559 4296.



EXPLORE AN ISLAND ODYSSEY

The Remarkable Rocks, a natural “modern art” masterpiece sculpted by wild winds live up to their name, balancing dramatically above the turbulent surf of the Southern Ocean. Join a guided 4WD expedition to experience the island's other marvels, strolling among the tranquil bushland of Flinders Chase National Park, watching New Zealand fur seals in their colony at Cape du Couedic, climbing Prospect Hill to enjoy the views and even joining a park ranger on a tour of the historic Cape Willoughby lighthouse. kiodysseys.com.au; 08 8553 0386.

IMAGES: SOUTHERN OCEAN LODGE, SOUTH AUSTRALIAN TOURISM COMMISSION



Island tours take in sights such as the Remarkable Rocks, left, and the local seal colonies.



WILDLIFE TALK TO THE ANIMALS

Yes, there are kangaroos – in fact, Kangaroo Island even has its own subspecies of roo. But there are plenty of other furry and feathered critters to marvel at. Free of mainland predators, animals flourish on the island, resulting in a Noah's Ark that includes tammar wallabies, echidnas, brushtail possums, sea lions, bottlenose dolphins, Australian and New Zealand fur seals and some 260 seabirds. You can observe these locals via a guided tour from the comfort of a luxury 4WD, which will transport you to the island's best wildlife-spotting sites – from the dense forest of Flinders Chase to Admirals Arch, where you can coo over the colony of New Zealand fur seals, and Seal Bay Conservation Park, home to Australia's third-largest colony of sea lions. wildernesstours.com.au; 08 8559 5033.

FAMILY SWIM WITH DOLPHINS

The island's underwater world is every bit as awe-inspiring as its life on land, and your family will never forget the thrill of swimming with dolphins – the ocean's friendliest creatures. Suited to young marine lovers and adventurous kids, Kangaroo Island Marine Adventures' boat chugs from its HQ in Kingscote to the island's most remote beaches, where you can experience a face-to-face frolic with pods of inquisitive and remarkably friendly bottlenose and common dolphins in their natural habitat. All interactions take place in shallow water and under strict guidelines from the Marine Mammal Interaction Policy. Bring an underwater camera for plenty of mind-blowing snaps of the fascinating underwater creatures and plants you encounter on this fantastic adventure tour. kimarineadventures.com.au; 08 8553 3227.



IMAGES: MT BARNEY LODGE

World Heritage-listed rainforests, bohemian towns, surf beaches and a legendary food and arts scene, you can find the country's best features between Bryon Bay and the Gold Coast.

GREEN CAULDRON

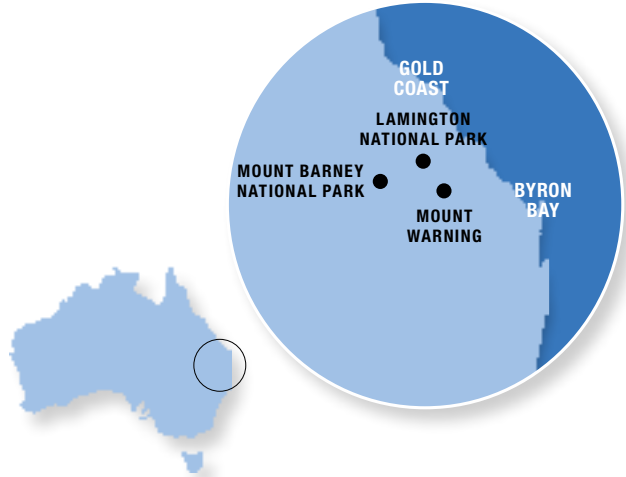
New South Wales and Queensland

Stretching from **Byron Bay** to the **Gold Coast** and west into the hinterland of the **Great Dividing Range**, the Green Cauldron is one of the few places in the country where mountain rainforests meet the ocean. The region encompasses secluded and surf beaches, subtropical rainforest and 12 national parks. Many are found in the Gondwana Rainforest World Heritage Area, a magnificent landscape created from an ancient caldera – the remnants of the world's second-largest shield volcano.

The national parks – **Main Range**, **Lamington**, **Springbrook** and **Mt Barney** – are bursting with nature-based activities. You can find more than 1700 species of flowering plants and countless rare and threatened animal species, from koalas and squirrel gliders to platypus and echidnas. Walk and camp amid the rainforest and rolling, green hills, waking early to witness dawn break over majestic **Wollumbin (Mt Warning)**, the first point on the continent to be lit up by the rays of the morning sun. To the Bundjalung and other local indigenous tribes, it has great cultural and spiritual significance.

Take a treetop walk, mountain-bike, or abseil down a cliff face at **Mt Barney**, indulge in a spa treatment with a lush rainforest backdrop, or visit creative, new-age communities to find spiritual retreats, festivals, artists and character-filled markets stocked with organic produce.

More bohemian vibes can be found at Byron, with blissfully beautiful beaches and a coastline home to whales, dolphins and, of course, some of the world's most famous surf breaks.



GETTING THERE

While regular daily flights take you into Brisbane and the Gold Coast (Coolangatta), you can also fly into Ballina Byron Airport, around 40 minutes from the Gold Coast. By road, Mt Barney is around a 90-minute drive from Brisbane.



EATING THERE

Fine dining in lush rainforest surroundings, beachside breakfasts, traditional southeast Queensland pubs and family-run wineries... the region is a flourishing food bowl and many practise the 100-mile philosophy, sourcing local produce from a 100-mile radius. Look out for farmgate stalls on country roads, growers markets and organic cafes.



STAYING THERE

You can find five-star hotels and luxury resorts on the Gold Coast, and chic eco retreats and beachside hideaways in Byron Bay. More luxury spa retreats are hidden in the mountains and rainforests along with camping grounds, country guesthouses, cabins and treetop lodges.

WHEN TO GO

Hinterland summer days can exceed 30°C; winter nights can drop to less than 10°C, warming to blue-sky days of up to 20°C. On the coast, hot summer days bring refreshing offshore breezes, late afternoon thunderstorms. Winter temperatures are mild.

SPRING (SEPT-NOV)

Walk the trails in the region's national parks.

SUMMER (DEC-FEB)

Hit Byron Bay or the Tweed coast to surf and kayak.

AUTUMN (MARCH-MAY)

Bird spot in Lamington National Park.

WINTER (JUNE-AUG)

Enjoy year-round sunshine and regional food festivals.



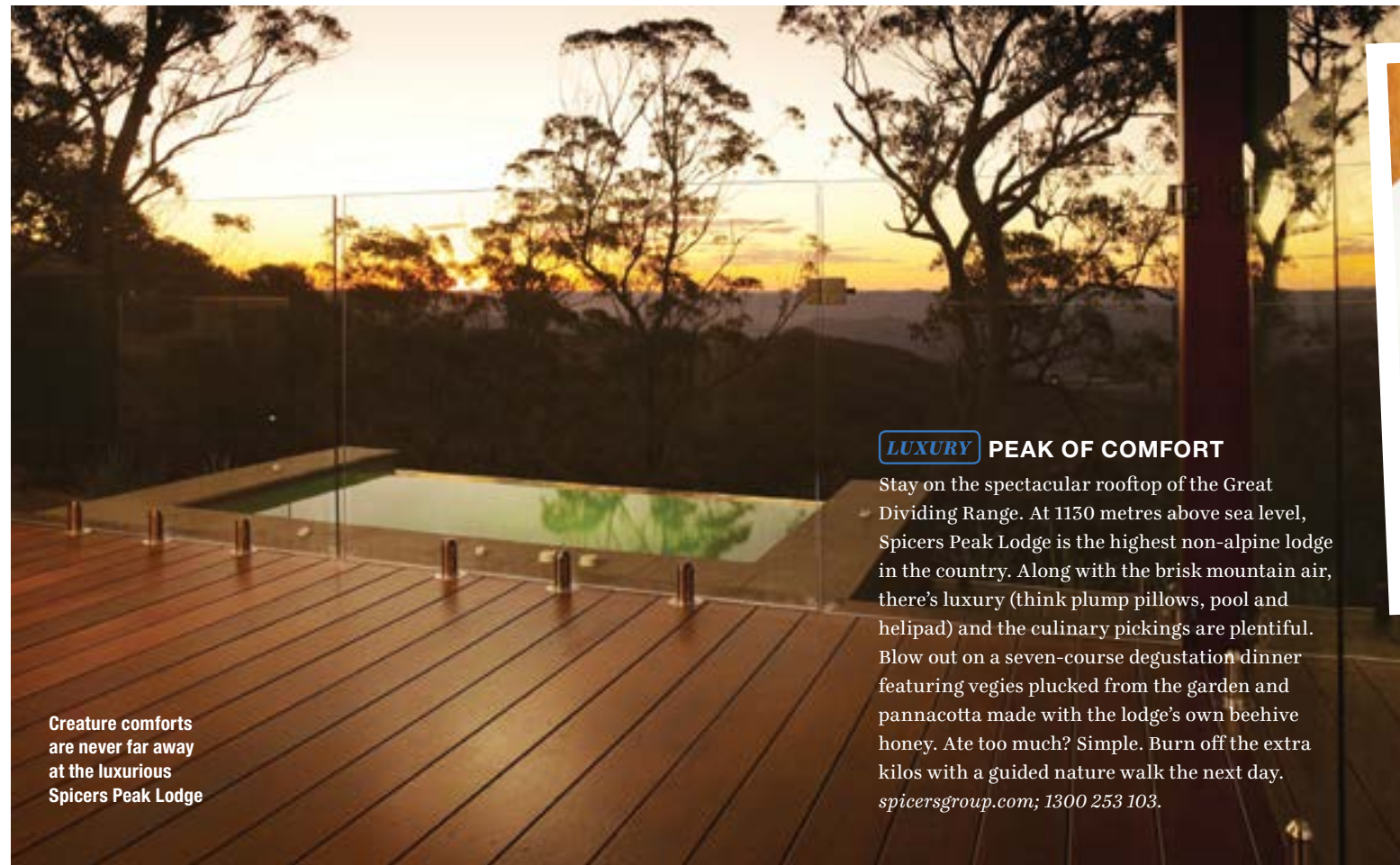
ECO STAY RAINFOREST HIDEAWAY

The subtropical World Heritage Lamington National Park is your home while staying in a mountain hideaway at O'Reilly's, and with 160 kilometres of walking trails and 500 waterfalls at your doorstep, there's plenty to do. Set off on rainforest walks to meet the neighbours – some 250 species of unique Australian wildlife and interesting birds such as spotted quail-thrush, red-browed treecreeper and glossy black cockatoo – zip through the canopy on a flying fox or simply relax and enjoy the serene surroundings with a healing massage at the Lost World Spa. oreillys.com.au; 1800 688 722.



WALKS UNCOVER SCENIC SECRETS

Stroll through subtropical rainforest to misty lookouts and hidden waterfalls. With Mt Warning standing sentinel in the distance, six-day guided walks explore the south side of the caldera traversing the Historic Nightcap Track, visiting creative communities like Uki, Nimbin and Mullumbimby, and staying overnight at spa retreats. Walks in the north explore Main Range National Park, local food, wine and art, and Moogerah Peaks, where vertiginous peaks guarantee great views. Walks take place in the springtime and Autumn. parktours.com.au; 1300 197 201.



Creature comforts are never far away at the luxurious Spicers Peak Lodge

LUXURY PEAK OF COMFORT

Stay on the spectacular rooftop of the Great Dividing Range. At 1150 metres above sea level, Spicers Peak Lodge is the highest non-alpine lodge in the country. Along with the brisk mountain air, there's luxury (think plump pillows, pool and helipad) and the culinary pickings are plentiful. Blow out on a seven-course degustation dinner featuring vegies plucked from the garden and pannacotta made with the lodge's own beehive honey. Ate too much? Simple. Burn off the extra kilos with a guided nature walk the next day. spicersgroup.com; 1300 253 103.



ADVENTURE PADDLE BYRON WATERS

There's an embarrassment of beautiful coastal riches in the Green Cauldron, but the headland at Byron Bay is one of the most picture-perfect portions, famous for rolling waves, photogenic beaches and clear waters home to frolicking marine life. Paddle around Walgun (Cape Byron), the most easterly point of Australia, in a sea kayak, glimpsing whales, playful dolphins and multimillion-dollar properties at Wategos Beach. Many of the tour guides are indigenous, and will share their stories of the Arkawal people. goseakayakbyronbay.com.au; 0416 222 344.



EXPLORE MT BARNEY COUNTRY CHARMS

Camp on creek frontage with spectacular mountain views and enjoy the country charm of Mt Barney, where the family-owned Mt Barney Lodge Country Retreat has cute forest huts, Queensland-style homesteads, camp-sites and glamp-sites. Staying here means the national park is at your fingertips, with bushwalking, wildflowers, birdwatching and cooling waterholes all nearby. Adventurous souls can trek challenging mountain routes or abseil down the 50-metre Golden Staircase Waterfall. mtbarneylodge.com.au; 07 5544 3233.



IMAGES: TOURISM AUSTRALIA; MT BARNEY LODGE, SPICERS GROUP, O'REILLY'S RAINFOREST RETREAT



Ember-red sunsets, silent swimming holes, thunderous waterfalls and cavernous gorges... these classic outback scenes sprawl across one-sixth of Western Australia.

THE KIMBERLEY

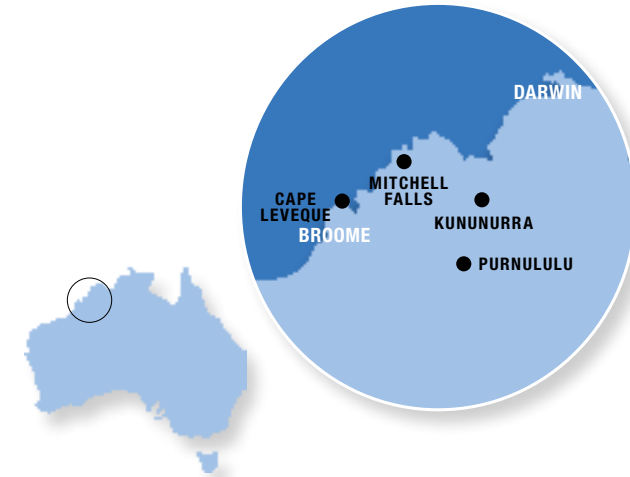
Western Australia

A place of soaring red cliffs, cavernous gorges and cascading waterfalls, The Kimberley is as captivating as it is wild, rugged and immense. Covering nearly 425,000 square kilometres of northwestern Australia, the region is five times the size of Tasmania. It's also one of the most remote corners of the country, where you will encounter some of the most extraordinary outback adventures.

Journey east from **Broome** – with its colourful history, landscape and perfect pearls – into cattle country. As the red sunset blazes against the **Cockburn Ranges**, it's easy to see why this classic outback landscape was the inspiration for Baz Luhrmann's epic film *Australia*.

Rumble along the classic **Gibb River Road** in a four-wheel drive, stopping to marvel at thousand-year-old boab trees and the abstract shapes of termite mounds. Snorkel and dive in **Rowley Shoals Marine Park** or cruise in luxury through the **Buccaneer Archipelago**, home to the **Horizontal Waterfalls** and 1000 islands. Fly over the thundering **Mitchell Falls** or the **Bungle Bungle Ranges** in World Heritage-listed **Purnululu National Park**. Float along in a guided river cruise, spotting freshwater crocodiles and birdlife. Travel to hidden pockets of rainforest or places like the **Berkeley River**, where the only way in or out is by air or sea.

And if lounging on a white-sand beach is more your style, follow the red-earthed road to **Cape Leveque** on the Dampier Peninsula, experiencing the indigenous culture of the Bardi people on beautiful, isolated coastline.



GETTING THERE

Fly to Broome from Sydney and Perth. Indirect flights run from most cities outside of WA. Drivers head out on Derby Road and the unsealed Gibb River Road, or fly east to Kununurra. Flights from Darwin and Perth (three hours) also connect to Kununurra. A 4WD allows more freedom and flexibility to explore the Kimberley's attractions.



EATING THERE

It might be a far-flung corner of the country, but the culinary offerings are rich, particularly on luxury cruises. The region is flush with seafood – barramundi, oysters, prawns and mud crab are highlights. Kununurra has roadhouses, patisseries and riverside restaurants.



STAYING THERE

There's a variety of accommodation from safari eco-tents, comfortable lodge rooms, caravan and camp-sites to luxury retreats in remote destinations. Cruises range from five-star (with their own helipad) to more modest, intimate vessels.

WHEN TO GO

SPRING (SEPT-NOV)

HIGH 39°C LOW 19°C

The heat keeps many tourists away and the land is parched but beautiful.

SUMMER (DEC-FEB)

HIGH 37.5°C LOW 24°C

Sightsee in Broome or make the most of the wet season with a scenic flight.

AUTUMN (MARCH-MAY)

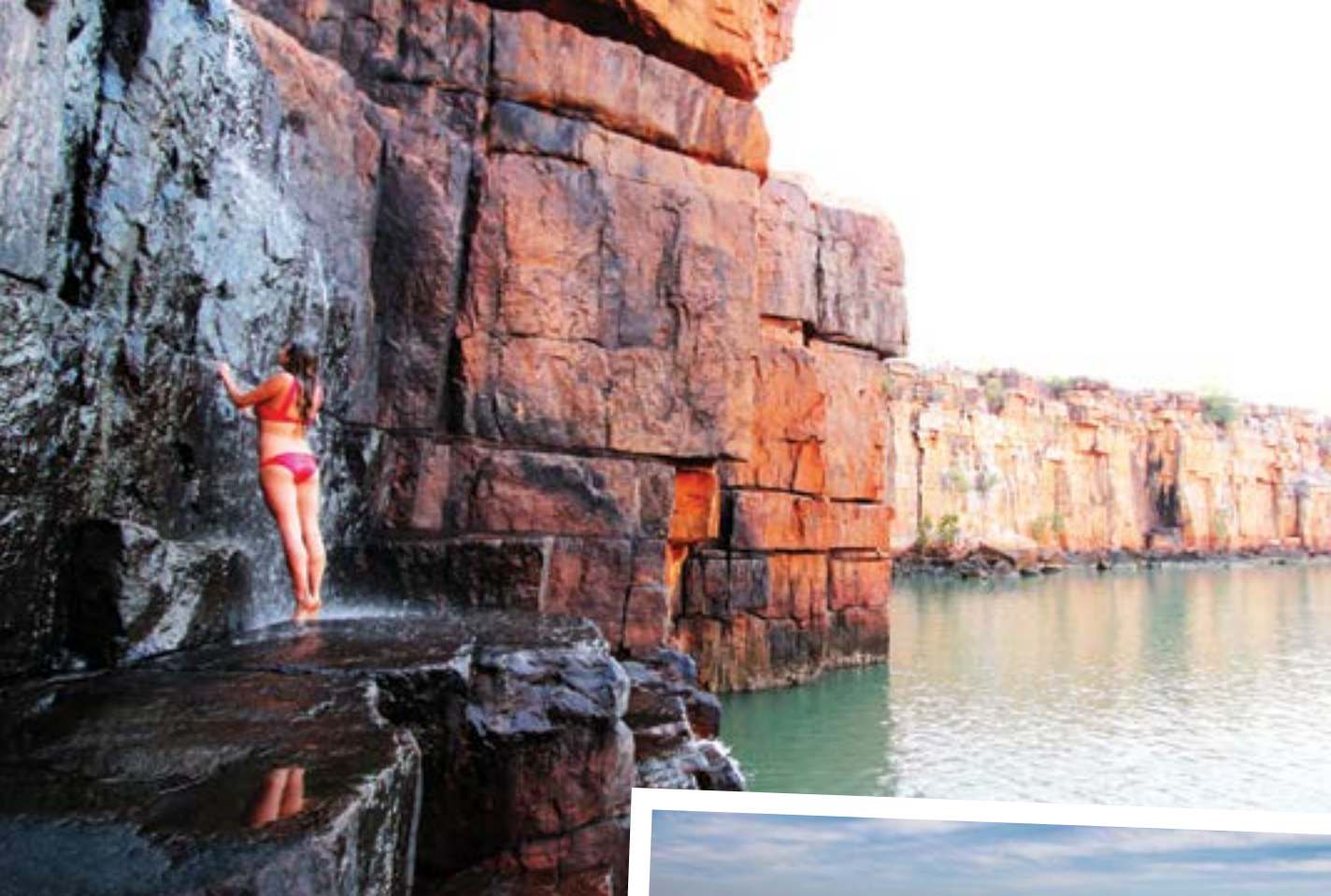
HIGH 35°C LOW 18°C

Post-wet season, the land is lush and the waterfalls put on their best displays. Late May sees the annual Ord Valley Muster festival.

WINTER (JUNE-AUG)

HIGH 33°C LOW 14°C

The dry season signals peak tourist time and clear, blue skies, but at night, temperatures can plunge.



LUXURY REMOTE RIVER RETREAT

Only accessible by air and sea, The Berkeley River Lodge is a destination in itself – a stunning wilderness on the Joseph Bonaparte Gulf on the northern Kimberley coast. Go on a guided hike, picnic by a palm-fringed waterhole or hop aboard a fishing expedition. The creeks and coast are an angler's dream, with species like mangrove jack, threadfin salmon and prized barramundi. Serious sports-fishing nuts can even splash out on a heli-fishing expedition, soaring to remote fishing spots aboard a True North chopper. berkeleyriver.com.au; 08 9169 1330.



INDIGENOUS SPEAR YOUR LUNCH

Two Aboriginal communities, the Djarindjin and One Arm Point, live among the fire-red cliffs, squeaky-white sand and turquoise waters of the Dampier Peninsula. Staying at Kooljaman (Cape Leveque) camp, you can participate in small-scale cultural tours with the local Bardi community – spearing crustaceans, setting fish traps, sampling bush fruits and gaining an insight into bush medicine and the local way of life. Try your hand at making your own spear – or, if you're game, spearing your own lunch. kooljaman.com.au; 08 9192 4970.



IMAGES: TOURISM AUSTRALIA, TOURISM WESTERN AUSTRALIA, BERKELEY RIVER LODGE, ECO BEACH RESORT



Learn the ancient craft of spearing with the Bardi on an indigenous-owned wilderness camp.

ECO STAY WHALE-WATCHING PARADISE

From Eco Beach Resort, just over an hour's drive south of Broome, marvel at the white-sand beaches and crystal-clear waters of the Indian Ocean. Spot roos and wallabies munching on grass in the dunes, stroll the beach to see migratory birds or go on a humpback whale-watching expedition. Facing Roebuck Bay, this remote, peaceful location is so inviting, female flatback turtles come ashore to lay their eggs. Guests can even play a conservation role, monitoring nesting turtles. ecobeach.com; 08 9193 8015.



FOOD FLY TO YOUR FOOD

Dining with a view is one thing, flying to your meal is quite another. A heli-picnic to the summit of a thunderous waterfall is one of those only-in-the-Kimberley experiences. The pilot will take you to one of the many falls in the region, where you can have a refreshing dip and a feast far more extravagant than most picnic basket standards – think freshly caught reef fish, local king prawns and oysters. For less leg-wobbling heights, stay on board the *True North* for chef-led food expeditions like fishing for barra or mud-crab. northstarcruises.com.au; 09 91921 829.

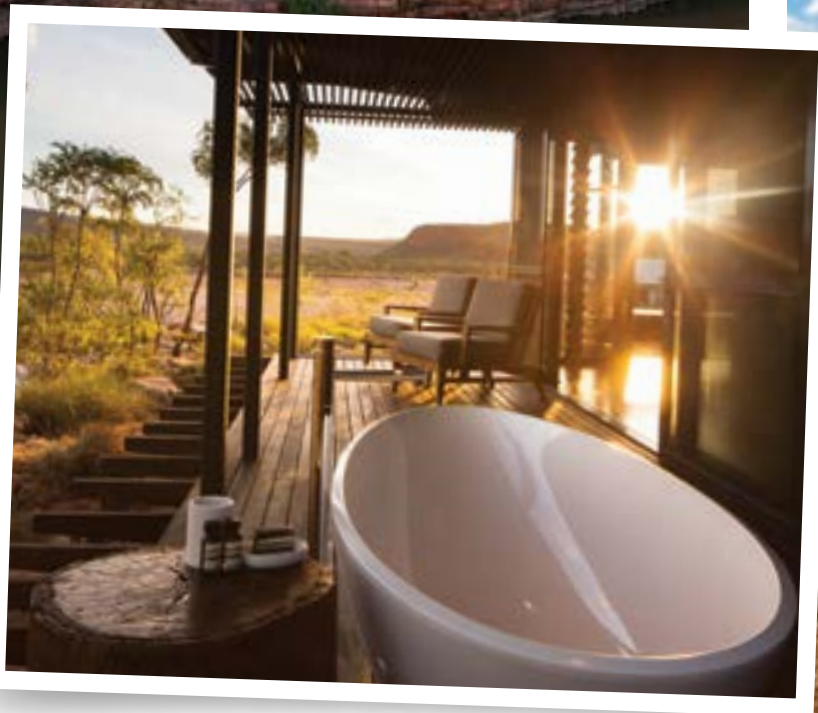


ADVENTURE RIDE THE RANGES

The dramatic landscape of the Cockburn Ranges are so classically Australian, Baz Lurhmann featured the scenery around Home Valley Station in his epic film *Australia*. Stay at the working cattle station and let Aussie stockmen and women (Jackaroos and Jillaroos) teach you how to ride a horse, and gallop the wide, open plains, rocky ridge lines, billabongs and rivers. You can even take part in a traditional cattle muster. Film buffs can keep an eye out for Lurhmann's Lookout, Jackman's Jump Up and Kidman's Crossing. hvstation.com.au; 02 8296 8010.

IMAGES: TOURISM AUSTRALIA, NORTHSTAR CRUISES, HOME VALLEY STATION





LUXURY THE SUITE LIFE AT EL QUESTRO

A Spanish-sounding name in a truly Australian setting, El Questro Wilderness Park, near Kununurra in the east Kimberley, clings to a cliff, jutting out over the Chamberlain Gorge and river. The cattle station's million-acre property has riverside camping grounds, bungalows and tented cabins, but the six exclusive, airconditioned suites perched above the gorge have wrap-around verandahs and bathtubs from which you can enjoy an uninterrupted vista across the rust-coloured Cockburn Ranges. elquestro.com.au; 1300 863 248.



View classic Kimberley landscapes in the Cockburn Ranges, and from your verandah at El Questro.

IMAGES: TOURISM AUSTRALIA, DELAWARE NORTH.COM, GETTY IMAGES, TOURISM WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INDIGENOUS GORGEOUS GORGES

Sheer, rocky escarpments that plunge into rivers – the drama and grandeur of the Geike and Windjana Gorges, a signature landscape in The Kimberley, are best witnessed on a ranger-guided river cruise. Easily explored from Broome, reach the gorges on an overnight four-wheel drive tour, stopping to marvel at some of the other significant sights, such as a 1500-year-old boab tree. Stay the night on the banks of the Fitzroy River and explore Tunnel Creek, a 750-kilometre cave system carved through the Napier Range, the next day. kimberleywild.com.au; 1300 73 88 70.





IMAGE: TOURISM AUSTRALIA

With one million hectares of pristine, protected bushland, this blue-tinged World Heritage wilderness is a playground for nature lovers. Bring hiking shoes, a sense of adventure and a good camera.

THE GREATER BLUE MOUNTAINS

New South Wales



Vast and spectacular, the Greater Blue Mountains is a region that likes to do things in widescreen.

Waterfalls cascade from steep, vertical cliffs, and vistas across a seemingly endless bushland panorama stir the adventurer within.

The region – named after the signature blue-tinged haze arising from the abundance of eucalyptus trees – is famous for its raw, wild beauty. Witness soaring escarpments from **Katoomba's Echo Point** lookout, hike the historic **Six Foot Track**, or explore the mysterious calcite formations of the **Jenolan Caves**. Walk or bike through the **Glow Worm Tunnel** in **Wollemi National Park**, stroll alongside the tall trees of the **Jamison Valley**, scale the grand heights of **Mount Yengo**, or get acquainted with the region's cultural history on a walk with a local indigenous guide. This is a land with rich indigenous history, home to six Aboriginal language groups. Their thousand-year-old stories are painted on the walls of surrounding caves, while Aboriginal legends surround landmarks like the **Three Sisters**.

Along with immersing yourself in the wilderness, don't miss the area's villages. Dotted with homewares, art galleries, antiques, boutiques and cafes, the tree-lined streets of **Leura** mix bohemian chic with country charm, while Katoomba's many heritage hotels and cosy, sandstone pubs have welcomed guests since the early 1800s. Food and wine lovers can also follow the **Greater Blue Mountains Drive** to the Hunter Valley, Mudgee, the Southern Highlands and the Hawkesbury.



GETTING THERE

The region's main town of Katoomba is a two-hour drive west from central Sydney. Trains run regularly from Sydney's Central Station and numerous coach companies offer day trips.



EATING THERE

Gourmands are in luck – feasting opportunities abound from quirky village cafes to slick, fine-dining restaurants serving produce-driven cuisine. Enjoy coffee and a flaky pastry in the villages of Leura or Katoomba, stop for apple pie and cider at Bilpin's orchards or drink mulled wine in front of a log fire at one of the many heritage pubs.



STAYING THERE

Whether you want to pitch up at a campsite or rest your head on quality linen, the region has a vast array of accommodation styles to suit all budgets and tastes, from quaint B&Bs, motels and historic hotels to eco cabins and world-class luxury spa and wellness retreats. Go to visitbluemountains.com.au.

WHEN TO GO

SPRING (SEPT-NOV)

HIGH 20°C LOW 5°C
Walking trails bloom with native wildflowers and private gardens throw open their gates during the Leura Garden Festival.

SUMMER (DEC-FEB)

HIGH 24°C LOW 11°C
Hike in the shaded Grand Canyon or swim in Glenbrook's naturally formed Jellybean pool.

AUTUMN (MARCH-MAY)

HIGH 21°C LOW 6°C
Victoria Falls is particularly impressive after summer rains.

WINTER (JUNE-AUG)

HIGH 12°C LOW 2°C
Crisp, blue-sky days are the backdrop to Yulefest and Winter Magic Festival.

ECO STAYS WHAT'S OLD IS MOO

Sleep with a clear conscience at the Straw Bale House at the Old Leura Dairy eco retreat. An impressive 80 per cent of this quirky house has been constructed with recycled material once destined for the tip – from old fence palings and rusty cast-iron tubs to cream urns and milk pails. Peer inside the “Truth Wall” to take a squizz at the natural insulation – straw, to keep cool in summer and toasty in winter. The house – along with the other five unique cottages on site – is perfectly placed to explore the region. Management will happily arrange all manner of tours from canyoning and trout fishing to classic bushwalks. When you return, a steaming-hot bath under the stars awaits – an old milk vat has been cleverly converted to a jacuzzi. oldleura dairy.com; (02) 4782 0700.

WALKS OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

Bushwalkers, lace up your hiking boots. This World Heritage-listed region features 140 kilometres of trails that meander through gorges and fern gullies, past thunderous waterfalls and vertigo-inducing bluffs. The Ruined Castle walk and Valley of The Waterfalls are among the best, taking in rainforests, panoramic views and stunning rock formations. Whether you choose a two-hour jaunt or a full-day expedition, your guide will know every step of the way, pointing out local flora and fauna and sharing stories about the history of the bush. Craving more legwork? You can spend three days hiking the Six Foot Track, a 44-kilometre trail through state forests and national parks between Katoomba and Jenolan Caves. lifesanadventure.com.au; (02) 9913 8939.

FAMILY GET BACK TO NATURE

Trade in the kids’ iPads for a real bush adventure with an Aussie farmstay. Along with a sleepover at a country farm, you and your family will be shown the bush ropes on a guided tour. Trot through the valleys on horseback and visit historic goldmining towns – the kids can try their hand at bush crafts.



There's nothing like enjoying the great outdoors at the Emirates Wolgan Valley Resort & Spa.



At night, sit around a crackling campfire while poems, songs and yarns about the Aussie bush flow freely. New friends, a fire and a billy brewing tea... what more could you want? aussiebushadventures.com; (02) 9660 3245.

ADVENTURE HIKE BY BIKE

Bushwalking is one idea – how about bush biking? Whizzing along trails exploring the grandeur of the Mountains aboard a mountain bike, your professional guide will teach you all you need to know about handling your bike and, better still, you’ll get to see areas of bushland most walkers never reach, such as Hanging Rock – a massive, 100 metre-tall sandstone block that protrudes over the Grose Valley. For experienced two-wheelers, a tour to Narrow Neck, riding through the plateau dividing the Jamison and Megalong Valley ranges has plenty of gullies and undulating tracks with heart-stopping views. lifesanadventure.com.au; (02) 9913 8939.

EXPLORE HORSEBACK HAVEN

The wide, open plains of the Megalong Valley are a horse-rider’s paradise, and an escorted trail ride takes you past soaring cliffs and deep ravines to breath-snatching canyon views. There are tours to suit every riding ability. Novices can sample a one-hour ride that finishes with a feast in the valley,

known as one of the top picnic spots in the region. Seasoned riders can enjoy a five-hour drover’s experience, galloping through the valley and crossing the Cox’s River. For riding packages, including optional overnight stays, visit megalongcc.com.au; (02) 4787 8188.

INDIGENOUS GO WALKABOUT

A walkabout has long been a rite of passage for male Aborigines – a spiritual journey on foot that traces the paths formed by their ancestors. Gain a deeper understanding of this inspiring ancient quest by going on a walkabout led by a member of the local Darug tribe. Trek along 3.5 kilometres of secluded, sacred bushland, visit ceremonial sites, hear dreamtime stories, and sample bush tucker and body painting. bluemountainwalkabout.com; 0408 443 822.

LUXURY ECO EXTRAVAGANCE

If you’d prefer to marvel at the bush landscape amid the comforts of five-star luxury, Emirates Wolgan Valley Resort & Spa sits snugly between the towering canyons of the Wollemi and Gardens of Stone National Parks. This old-style colonial homestead-turned-lavish retreat has maintained its 1830s-style architecture, painstakingly preserving the property’s historical aspects. Get cosy next to a double-sided fireplace and experience the tranquility of a midnight swim from your own private pool while overlooking the dramatic sandstone mountain ranges. Explore the property’s nature reserve on foot, via a guided 4WD tour - including a nocturnal wildlife and stargazing tour – or by mountain bike as mobs of kangaroos and wallabies bound past. The resort can also arrange transfers via helicopter from Sydney, for a grander view. wolganvalley.com; (02) 6350 1800.

IMAGES: TOURISM AUSTRALIA | EMIRATES WOLGAN VALLEY

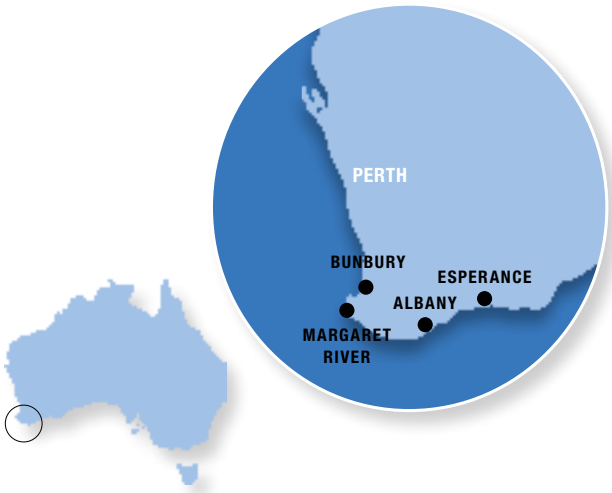


IMAGE: TOURISM WESTERN AUSTRALIA

World-class wineries, white-sand beaches and tranquil wilderness; the edge of paradise along the south-west coast of Western Australia has it all, and more.

THE GREAT SOUTH WEST EDGE

Western Australia



Where else on Earth can you find perfect barrels of both water and wine, staggeringly beautiful beaches, soaring forests, friendly dolphins and whales, and brilliantly-coloured carpets of wildflowers? Do let us know if you happen to find it, but for now, we'll stick with Western Australia's Great South West Edge, perhaps our country's prettiest corner.

Stretching more than 1000 kilometres, from **Bunbury** (around two hours' drive south from Perth) past the idyllic gourmand's heaven of **Margaret River** on the west coast, past the towering karri forests in the **Walpole-Nornalup National Park** and the stunning beaches of **Denmark**; all the way through **Esperance** and the divers' paradise of the **Recherche Archipelago**, to the **Cape Arid National Park**, the region showcases an extraordinary range of landscapes.

For an exhilarating coastal adventure, walk the 135km **Cape to Cape Track** along the **Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park**. More coastal beauty can be found at **Lucky Bay** beach, near Esperance. With blindingly aquamarine waters, it is said to have the the country's whitest sand - so dazzling even the kangaroos like to laze about, basking in the sun. Southern right and humpback whales are most prevalent here too, making it a whale-watchers' dream.

While the region enjoys an idyllic, Mediterranean-style climate, it is unmistakably Australian – rich in Aboriginal cultural and historical significance, and overflowing with gourmet local and produce. Paradise, indeed.



GETTING THERE

Regional flights run from Perth to Busselton, Albany, Ravensthorpe or Esperance; or fly into Perth and pick up a hire car. TransWA and South West Coach Lines buses also connect Perth and major towns in the region, and there's a train service between Perth and Bunbury.



EATING THERE

Margaret River produce + hundreds of kilometres of coastline = foodie heaven. Whether picnicking on local cheeses, cured meats and fruity preserves; wining and dining on regional delicacies like freshly caught marron or hooking your own dinner off a wild stretch of beach, it's guaranteed to be fresh, local and delicious.



STAYING THERE

Think small and bespoke, rather than big hotel chains – camping at some of Australia's most beautiful beaches; cloud-soft beds in a luxury Margaret River vineyard estate or spa resort, or the freedom of renting a family beach house along your favourite stretch of coast.

WHEN TO GO

SPRING (SEPT-NOV)
HIGH 21°C LOW 8°C

Picnic among the vines or watch migrating whales pass by the coast.

SUMMER (DEC-FEB)
HIGH 29°C LOW 12°C

Hit the beach to surf, swim or fish, or climb the Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse and spot seabirds.

AUTUMN (MARCH-MAY)
HIGH 23°C LOW 8°C

Take advantage of the fresh air and trek the famous Bibbulmun Track.

WINTER (JUNE-AUG)
HIGH 18°C LOW 6°C

The winter rain and the angle of the sun to the coast creates days of rainbows on the suitably named Rainbow Coast.



EXPLORE COASTAL INDIGENOUS CULTURE

The sweeping beaches, ocean and granite cliffs of Esperance were the kitchen cupboard for the Noongar people, providing a bounty of fresh seafood and bush food. Learn their hunting and gathering techniques – and some time-honoured fishing techniques – along this spectacular coastal stretch. An eco-culture discovery tour with Kepa Kurl (the Aboriginal name for Esperance) involves 50 kilometres of beach driving and an exploration of the country's most southern Aboriginal rock paintings. Along with a greater appreciation for the Noongar way of life, you will also learn a clever new trick: how to drink water from the sand. kepakurl.com.au; 08 9072 1688.

ADVENTURE THE SOUTHERN EDGE

Witness the might of Mother Nature on the wild and windswept coast of West Cape Howe. An off-road, eco-tour in a four-wheel drive will take you to otherwise inaccessible parts of the national park, which hugs the coastline along the southernmost edge of Western Australia. Accompanied by an expert guide, the journey covers contrasting terrain from hidden, sandy beaches to the granite and dolerite clifftops, where you can lie on your belly and peer over the edge, watching the Southern Ocean unleash its fury. outofsighttours.com; 08 9848 2814.

FAMILY SWIM WITH DOLPHINS

Who doesn't love dolphins? The wild bottlenose beauties of Koombana Bay in Bunbury will delight kids and adults alike, and the fantastic Dolphin Discovery Centre offers a variety of ways to interact with the local stars. Wade into the shallow waters of the interaction zone where, if you're lucky, the dolphins will swim right up to say hello; take an eco cruise to watch them at play; or jump in for a three-hour Swim on the Wild Side, guided by a marine biologist and trained volunteers as you join the dolphins in their natural habitat. dolphindiscovery.com.au; 08 9791 3088.



IMAGES: TOURISM AUSTRALIA; MARGARET RIVER TOURISM; TROY MAYNE, TOURISM WESTERN AUSTRALIA

An eco cruise is not only entertaining, but gets you acquainted with the area's friendly wildlife and natural environment.

WALK TREK THE CAPE TO CAPE

The world-famous Cape to Cape Track – tracing a 135-kilometre, jaw-dropping line of coast from Cape Naturaliste in the north to Cape Leeuwin in the south – boasts dramatic clifftops and stretches of deserted, pristine beach alternating with woodlands and wildflowers. There's enough variation to lull you into the full, seven-day walk, or you can sample the beauty on a half- or full-day tour. Cape to Cape Explorer Tours offer both options with expert guides, well-equipped base camps (hello, hot showers!) or ensuite accommodation and delicious meals on the longer walks; and action-packed, shorter experiences for those with less time on their hands. capetocapetours.com.au/explorer; 0459 452 038.



LUXURY IDYLLIC VINEYARD LODGE

Nestled amongst stunning forest, lake and parkland scenery, yet within (wine) spitting distance of the world-renowned Margaret River surf, elegant Cape Lodge in Yallingup dials up the luxury factor in a beautifully understated way. Venture out on a tour of the surrounding vineyards or stay put, hit the spa and order a seasonal harvest produce platter to your suite. Cap off the day at the lauded lakeside restaurant, secure in the knowledge that your dinner was swimming, roaming or growing nearby not long before making its way to your plate, with items like Pemberton marron, Albany oysters and Margaret River wagyu beef on offer. capelodge.com.au; 08 9755 6311.



INDIGENOUS TASTE REAL BUSH FOOD

Wardandi man Josh Whiteland - his traditional name is Koomal - is a passionate advocate for his culture and land, sharing his connection to country with Australian and international visitors (top Danish chef Rene Redzepi was so impressed after visiting, he invited Josh to speak at a food event in Copenhagen). On his Aboriginal Food, Culture, Cave & Didge Tour at Yallingup, you'll enjoy a bushwalk as Josh shares his insights into traditional plants and bush foods like emu plum and salt bush, before tasting them for yourself. You'll then journey into the Ngilgi Cave to hear Dreamtime legends and a didgeridoo performance, before testing your skills at firemaking. koomaldreaming.com.au; 0413 843 426.

IMAGES: LEEUWIN ESTATE, CAPE LODGE, TOURISM AUSTRALIA

ADVENTURE PADDLE TO YOUR LUNCH

The triple-hitter Cave, Canoe & Bushtucker Tour takes you and your tastebuds on an adventure, with canoeing, caves and an exotic bush tucker lunch packed into one fun-filled day. Setting off from the mouth of the Margaret River, you'll canoe through the calm waters of the river valley, working up an appetite before tucking into a hearty lunch with treats like emu, crocodile, and witchety grubs (all optional!) and loads of local pestos, chutneys and breads. You'll also explore sites rarely seen by other visitors, such as the cave that became home to survivors of an 1872 shipwreck. bushtuckertours.com; 08 9757 9084.

WILDLIFE CRUISE THROUGH WILDERNESS

Explore remote and hard-to-access parts of the Walpole-Nornalup National Park on this two-and-a-half hour eco cruise, which guides and glides you through the marine park and WA's first designated wilderness zone, the Nuyts Wilderness Peninsula. Led by passionate storyteller Gary Muir, you'll be entertained and enthralled by his knowledge of the environment and wildlife, as you keep an eye out for local characters like Fudge the grey roo, and Savage and Shadow (two pied oystercatcher birds who've been an item for 19 years!). The tour includes morning tea overlooking beautiful Bellanger beach. wowwilderness.com.au; 08 9840 1111.

FOOD DELUXE WINE ODYSSEY

So you don't "do" tours, but still want to see the best of the Margaret River in one day? The Margaret River Discovery Co. Best of the Best river wine tour skips the mediocre tastings, dull commentary and crowded minivans. Instead, you'll embark on a luxury 4WD experience that will take you from small boutique vineyards to some of the most renowned in the region - all rated five-star by James Halliday, of course. Add a behind-the-scenes vineyard experience and wine and food-matching degustation lunch at Cape Mentelle, followed by a stroll along the Cape to Cape Track, and your perfect day is sorted. margaretriverdiscovery.com.au; 0439 910 064.



Margaret River wineries like Leeuwin Estate offer gourmet indulgences

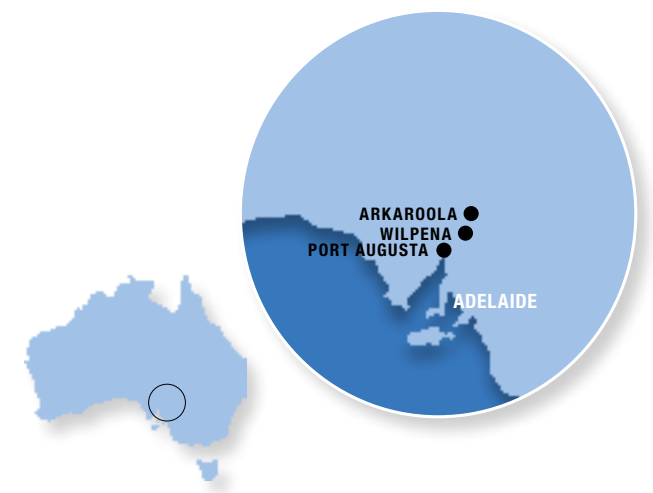


IMAGE: SOUTH AUSTRALIAN TOURISM COMMISSION

Adventure, tranquillity and spirituality co-exist in this sun-seared, spectacular desert region. The majesty of its red ochre vistas make it a drawcard for landscape artists, and a must-see destination.

THE FLINDERS RANGES

South Australia



The Flinders Ranges is an ancient landscape with a quiet power. This majestic, timeworn region, made famous by the paintings of **Sir Hans Heysen**, stretches north from Port Pirie to the South Australian desert, sprawling across three national parks in all its rust-coloured, sunburnt beauty. This is the Australian outback – nature in its rawest and most striking form.

Visitors often speak of the spiritually uplifting energy and sense of peace and serenity they feel when exploring the Flinders, particularly at **Wilpena Pound**. This colossal natural amphitheatre rises from the desert in the shape of a cauldron. Sculpted by thousands of years of rain and sun, its jagged, thousand-metre quartzite peaks beg to be explored.

The Flinders is also known for its indigenous history. The Adnyamathanha people lived in the region for tens of thousands of years, and you can see their weathered rock carvings etched on the walls of **Sacred Canyon**. Other gorges, such as **Bunyeroo** and **Brachina**, are famous for geology, fossils and rare animals, including the yellow-footed rock wallaby.

You can take a 4WD expedition, a thrilling mountain bike ride, or soar above the ranges in a light aircraft, but many like to appreciate this remarkable landscape at a slower pace. Head out on one of the self-guided trails or do the Arkaba Walk, which traverses Wilpena Pound and 16,000 hectares of **Arkaba's** wildlife conservancy. Whichever way you travel, you'll discover old mining towns, charming pubs and ancient stories, all set against the incomparable beauty of the outback.



GETTING THERE

The Ranges are a five-hour drive from Adelaide on a sealed road. Daily one-hour flights depart Adelaide to Port Augusta, and from there, it's just over an hour by road. You can also charter a plane from Adelaide for a 65-minute flight.



EATING THERE

If camping, expect to cook your own meals on barbecues and campfires, although many resorts, motels and lodges have an on-site eatery. Most towns have general stores for takeaway, bakeries and classic Aussie pubs serving fantastic steak or “feral food” – modern bush dishes like roo burgers and emu egg omelette.



STAYING THERE

There's a huge range of options in the Flinders Ranges, from powered camp sites to self-contained cottages, motels and lodges. You'll also find glamping-style safari tents and upscale, refurbished homesteads with five-star touches such as in-house chefs and infinity pools. Visit southaustralia.com

WHEN TO GO

SPRING (SEPT-NOV)

HIGH 29°C LOW 7°C

It's peak walking season, with ranges and valleys carpeted in wildflowers.

SUMMER (DEC-FEB)

HIGH 34°C LOW 16°C

Watch spectacular thunderstorms or party in style at the Wilpena Under the Stars bash in February.

AUTUMN (MARCH-MAY)

HIGH 30°C LOW 7°C

Warm, mild days and chilly nights are perfect for hiking and camping.

WINTER (JUNE-AUG)

HIGH 20°C LOW 4°C

Cooler climes bring wildlife watching opportunities. See yellow-footed rock wallabies sunning themselves on rocks.



The Arkaba Walk offers sumptuous swag, while Arkaba Station, right, blends heritage charm with luxury touches in a grand setting.

WALK WILD BUSH TREK

Soak up the essence of the outback on an exclusive walking safari. The four-day, three-night Wild Bush Luxury journey is a chance to marvel at the landscape with expert naturalists guiding the way. The trek traverses the wondrous Wilpena Pound and 16,000 hectares of Arkaba's private wildlife conservancy, following the famous Heysen Trail. Nights are spent camping in a luxury cocoon – a deluxe swag set atop an elevated timber platform – and at the restored 1850s Arkaba Homestead. As for food, forget camping standards like pot noodles and instant coffee. All meals on this walk are lavish three-course affairs, accompanied by fine wine, stories and star-filled nights. Walks are held from mid-March until the end of October. arkabawalk.com; 1300 790 561.

EXPLORE HIT THE 4WD TRAILS

The Flinders offer some of the greatest desert four-wheel driving in the world, traversing waterholes, historic sites and vast salt lakes. Follow the trails blazed by explorers, stockmen and Afghan camel-drivers, the Overland Telegraph and original Ghan railway. Learn of this ancient area's fascinating geological history, and spot rare yellow-footed rock wallabies. Set off on a self-guided trip or let someone else do the driving on a guided tour. Wilpena Pound Resort offers a number of day- or half-day trips exploring clifftops, gorges, an old mining shaft and a classic outback hotel where you can feast on a platter of "feral food" including delights such as emu pate, camel, quandongs and kangaroo mettwurst. wilpenapound.com.au; 08 8648 0004.



LUXURY HISTORIC HOMESTEAD HIDEAWAY

Steeped in atmosphere, Akarba Homestead is a classic Aussie bush farmhouse. A working sheep property since 1851, it's long been a favourite of landscape artists, including Hans Heysen, with its backdrop of the dramatic ochre ranges. Flanked by wide, shady verandahs with cool stone walls, a corrugated iron roof and five comfy bedrooms, there are plenty of luxury touches, yet it maintains its old-world charm, with the artwork of Rosie Woodford Ganf scattered throughout and plush early-settler designs like bed posts fashioned from old fences. Cool off with a dip in the pool and at night, choose a book from the library, sink into a leather armchair with a glass of Barossa wine and watch the sun set over the Elder Range. arkabastation.com; 02 9571 6399.



IMAGES: TOURISM AUSTRALIA; SOUTH AUSTRALIAN TOURISM COMMISSION



FAMILY GLAMP BENEATH THE STARS

Gazing up at the galaxy, roasting marshmallows around a campfire, sharing stories, singing your favourite songs... camping in the outback will create some of your most magical family memories. The glamp-sites at Wilpena Pound Resort are perfectly placed for exploring the best of the Flinders with your brood, and the good news is, you don't need to rough it or spend time tackling tent pegs. The new, permanent Ikara Safari Tents at the resort boast fluffy king-sized beds, aircon and ensuites. It's like a hotel room in the wilderness, with timber decks set among red gums, native pines and wildlife. Made from sturdy, insulated canvas, the family tents are even bigger, with kids' bunk beds. wilpenapound.com.au; 08 8648 0004.

INDIGENOUS DREAMTIME BUSH FEAST

Discover the ancient culture of the Adnyamathanha peoples of the Flinders Ranges with an unforgettable Yullu Wirru Aboriginal Cultural Experience. Yullu Wirru, which means kingfishers' wing, is the personal totem of Uncle Ken, one of the elder guides who shares his culture through storytelling, song and dance – accompanied by a three-course gourmet bush feast beneath the stars. The setting isn't too shabby, either. Located in the heart of the Ranges, tucked in between the Pichi Richi Pass, Tickle Belly Hill has been designed to resemble an outback woolshed, with majestic views across the mountain ranges. ticklebelly.com.au; 0459 386 284.

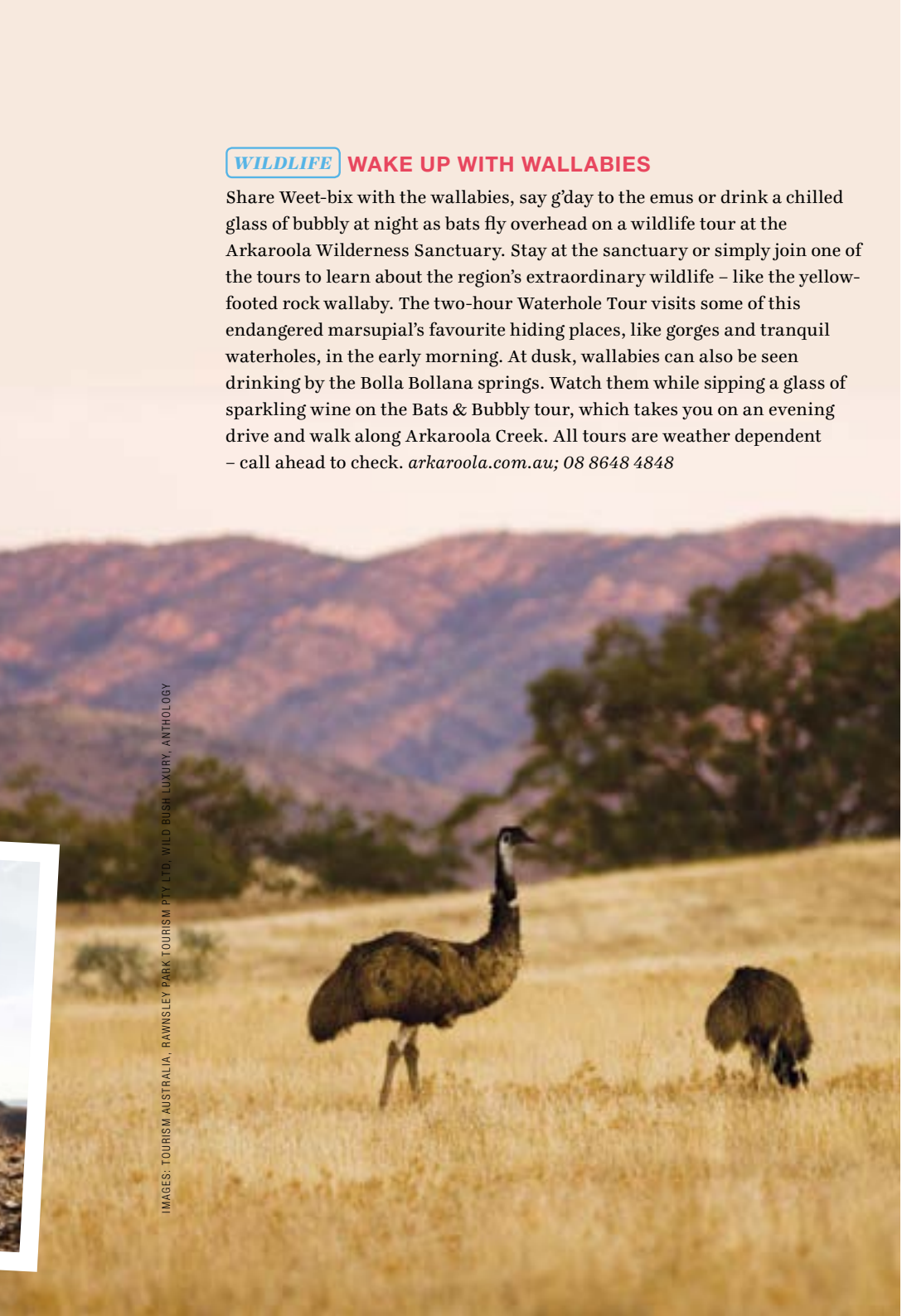
ADVENTURE PEDAL THE PANORAMA

Mountain bikers will be in their element on the Flinders Ranges By Bike (FRBB) cycle trail, a 200 kilometre circuit taking around three-and-a-half days and linking Wilpena Pound in the south to Blinman in the north. For the novice, there are plenty of easier trails to take on in the bushland surrounding Rawnsley Park Station, with mountain bikes and helmets available for hire. Head out in the early morning for a one-to-10 kilometre ride and marvel at spectacular landscapes, emus roaming and roos snoozing beneath trees. Download a route map showing details of the FRBB trail at rawnsleypark.com.au; 08 8648 0030.



WILDLIFE WAKE UP WITH WALLABIES

Share Weet-bix with the wallabies, say g'day to the emus or drink a chilled glass of bubbly at night as bats fly overhead on a wildlife tour at the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary. Stay at the sanctuary or simply join one of the tours to learn about the region's extraordinary wildlife – like the yellow-footed rock wallaby. The two-hour Waterhole Tour visits some of this endangered marsupial's favourite hiding places, like gorges and tranquil waterholes, in the early morning. At dusk, wallabies can also be seen drinking by the Bolla Bollana springs. Watch them while sipping a glass of sparkling wine on the Bats & Bubbly tour, which takes you on an evening drive and walk along Arkaroola Creek. All tours are weather dependent – call ahead to check. arkaroola.com.au; 08 8648 4848



IMAGES: TOURISM AUSTRALIA, RAWNSLEY PARK TOURISM PTY LTD, WILD BUSH LUXURY, ANTHOLOGY



Rawnsley Park Station makes a fine base to explore; while bike and walking trails offer an immersive experience.

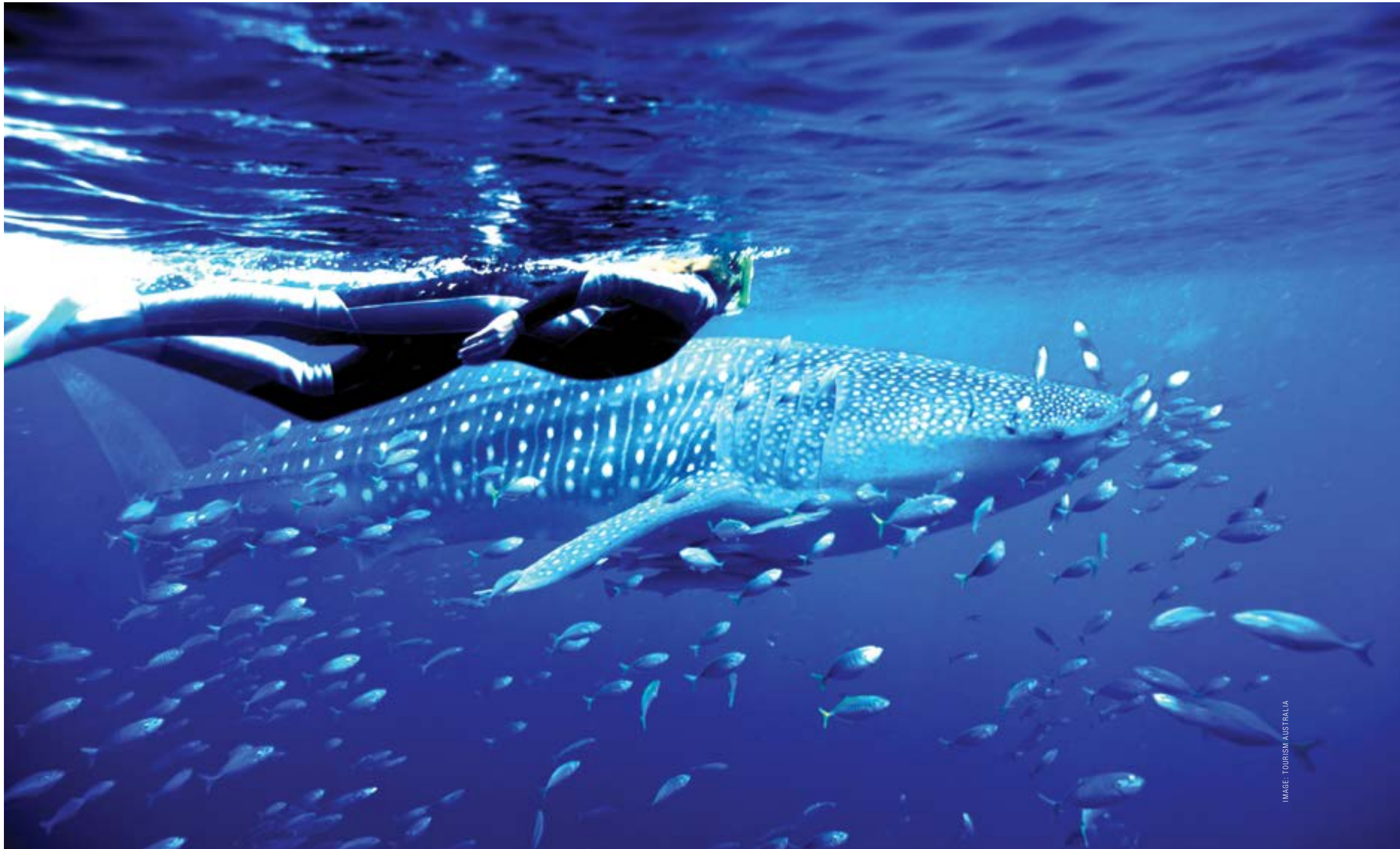


IMAGE: TOURISM AUSTRALIA

Free your spirit on the beautiful Coral Coast, where rolling red desert dunes collide with a turquoise ocean teeming with colourful underwater characters – including the world’s largest fish.

NINGALOO-SHARK BAY

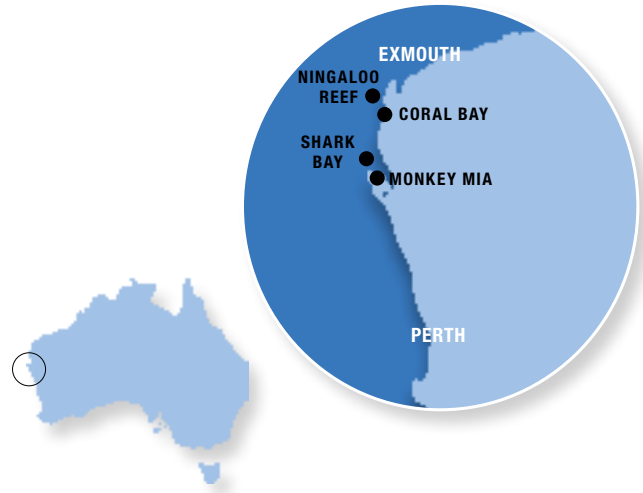
Western Australia

The landscape between Western Australia’s **Shark Bay** World Heritage-listed area and the northern tip of **Ningaloo Reef** is as dramatic as the frontier is remote. Alien-like termite hills dot the horizon in the north and turquoise waters brim with lively fringing reefs that stretch across 260 kilometres of coastline.

Along with exquisite white-sand beaches, this region is most famous for its abundant marine life. Humpback whales breach playfully off **Exmouth** and the currents of **Turquoise Bay** beg to be snorkelled. At **Coral Bay**, an aquatic theatre of characters frolic just metres from shore. Observe juvenile reef sharks or swim with one of the ocean’s most gentle giants – the harmless whale shark – drawn to Ningaloo Reef’s plankton-rich waters between April and July.

Further south, dolphins and dugongs feed at **Monkey Mia** and Shark Bay, and the landscape erupts with drama – the red earth meeting the white sand. Inland, the harsh desert, often carpeted in wild bush flower rainbows, is home to the likes of goannas, kangaroos and emus, while the bay’s crystal-clear tides host “living fossils” in the form of ancient stromatolites, along with starfish and sea turtles.

Though beautiful all year round, the region comes alive in the warmer months, with visitors flocking to the many caravan parks and resorts. Internet and mobile phone services are nearly non-existent, but staying connected to the everyday somehow ceases to matter in this corner of the world where the desert, dunes and sea are your playground.



GETTING THERE

Flights leave from Perth daily to Exmouth (Learmonth Airport). Head north for Exmouth, while Coral Bay is 30 minutes’ drive south. Skippers airline flies between Perth and Monkey Mia several times a week. The 840-kilometre drive from Perth to Shark Bay takes 10 hours, and Exmouth is another four hours north. Coaches run between Perth and Broome.



EATING THERE

Pickings can be slim in this remote region – self-caterers should stock up before arriving. Exmouth and Coral Bay offer decent options for meals, but dining out in Shark Bay is more challenging. Expect local seafood, including rock lobster and fish, at sky-high prices.



STAYING THERE

Accommodation options cater for all budgets and include well-kept and family-friendly caravan parks and camp sites, bare-bones backpackers, remote homesteads, upscale resorts, beachside luxury lodges and live-aboard sailboats.

WHEN TO GO

SPRING (SEPT-NOV)

HIGH 35°C LOW 25°C

Wildflowers are prolific between August and October.

SUMMER (DEC-FEB)

HIGH 39°C LOW 25°C

The warm waters are a marine playground year-round, but watch out for stingers between November and March.

AUTUMN (MARCH-MAY)

HIGH 35°C LOW 30°C

Whale sharks inhabit the coast between April and July/August.

WINTER (JUNE-AUG)

HIGH 30°C LOW 25°C

Humpback whales grace the clear waters from May to December during their annual migration.

FAMILY SPOT DOLPHINS ON A CATAMARAN

Monkey Mia, in the heart of Shark Bay, is famous for its must-do dolphin-feeding experience. But why limit your wildlife-spotting to what's visible from the shore? A three-hour catamaran cruise through Shark Bay greatly improves your chances of seeing not only dolphins but sea turtles, tiger and hammerhead sharks, sea snakes, stingrays and migrating birds. It also offers an alternative vantage point from which to admire the ochre-coloured desert as it meets the sea. While you dangle your legs over the deck's edge, enjoying the sunshine and sea breeze, you might even see a grazing dugong – a primitive-looking marine mammal that inspired the mermaid myth. monkeymiawildsights.com.au; 08 9948 1481.

ADVENTURE CORAL BAY BY QUAD BIKE

If there's one thing more exciting than exploring Coral Bay, it's doing it from a 4x4 all-terrain vehicle. Hurtle up sand dunes, along cliffs and white-sand beaches on a guided quad bike tour, spotting kangaroos and emus along the way. Track and observe graceful turtles swimming in hot shallow waters from a clifftop, or stop off to enjoy pristine snorkelling spots like Oyster Bridge, The Lagoon and Five Fingers Reef. Can't handle the daytime heat? Rev up closer to dusk and reach a remote lookout in time to catch a sigh-worthy Indian Ocean sunset. coralbayecotours.com.au; 08 9942 5885.



IMAGES: TOURISM AUSTRALIA, STUE BURNS, TOURISM WESTERN AUSTRALIA, MARIE LERAY

FOOD REEL IN A BIG ONE

Take advantage of the region's rich, flourishing fishing grounds by casting your own line into the blue waters at the southern end of Ningaloo Reef Marine Park. A bucket-list destination for serious land-based game fishers from all around the world, the 80 kilometres of coastline at Quobba Station north of Carnarvon are an angler's paradise – home to a variety of tuna, mackerel, cobia, bonito, sailfish, norwest and pink snapper, baldchin groper, trevally, and Spanish and spangled emperor. Remote locations along the cliffs and beaches are suitable for both ballooning and beach casting – just one day of fishing in this stunning landscape will have all levels of anglers hooked. Quobba Station is also a hot spot for whale-watching during winter. quobba.com.au, 08 9948 5098.

WILDLIFE SWIM WITH WHALE SHARKS

No trip to Ningaloo would be complete without an encounter with a whale shark. These gentle creatures are the largest fish in the ocean, growing up to 12 metres long. The slow-moving plankton eaters might be huge, but there's nothing to fear. They are as docile as can be, and don't seem to mind humans swimming with them. When they return to Ningaloo in the winter, sign up to take a cruise out from Exmouth or Coral Bay to meet these friendly giants in their natural habitat. Numerous tour companies have spotter planes to ensure encounters with them, while manta rays, humpback whales and dolphins often make appearances too. You can even join marine research scientists on an expedition to better understand these giants. oceanwise.com.au; 0447 089 752.

Quobba Station is an angler's dream, with first-class fishing from the cliffs of a stunning coastline.



Nature, luxury
and fine dining
meet at Sal Salis

LUXURY SEASIDE CAMPING IN STYLE

To experience Ningaloo without sacrificing style, set up camp in a luxury tent at Sal Salis, nestled in the dunes of the remote Cape Range National Park. The eco-friendly bush camp hosts just 18 guests at a time in nine raised platform tents that boast ensuite bathrooms and sea views. While away the days snorkelling deserted sections of Ningaloo Reef just offshore, kayaking, swimming with whale sharks, joining guided gorge walks and taking advantage of the area's diverse fishing grounds. Meals are served up in a sunken dining room overlooking the sea, and a communal lodge hosts a library, board games and a bar. salsalis.com.au; 1300 790 561.

WALK DESERT DREAMING

The Indian Ocean marine creatures might steal the show in this region, but Western Australia's desert landscape has a natural wonder of its own. This red-earth land is home to many species of animals and birds, and exploring it by foot can often lead to goanna and emu sightings. Spend a few hours with an indigenous guide on a Wula Guda Nyinda Eco

Adventure, learning about animal tracking, bush tucker, local Aboriginal history and culture, conservation and medicinal plants in the Gutharraguda (Shark Bay) area. Or take to the bush at night for a campfire and some haunting didgeridoo tunes under the stars. wulaguda.com.au; 0429 708 847.

INDIGENOUS TOUR WITH LOCAL CUSTODIANS

Explore the history of coastal-dwelling indigenous tribes on a small-group guided day- or half-day tour. Tackle Francois Peron National Park in a four-wheel drive vehicle or hop between beautiful Shell Beach, Hamelin Pool's ancient stromatolites and wildlife-laden Eagle Bluff while learning the stories behind the land. Your guide is a Nhanda/Mulgana man with an in-depth knowledge of both indigenous and European history, local flora and fauna, traditional and contemporary Aboriginal culture, wildlife tracking and bush food. Most importantly, your guide knows best about Shark Bay's diverse ecosystem, and will surely deliver a wildlife sighting or two as he shows you exclusive spots. sharkbaycoastaltours.com.au; 08 9948 3001.



IMAGES: TOURISM WESTERN AUSTRALIA, SAL SALIS NINGALOO REEF

Red rolling dunes
and turquoise
waters at Francois
Perron National Park





IMAGE: TOURISM QUEENSLAND

The tropical north of Queensland is a living landscape, home to one of the world's oldest and most enchanting rainforests, along with wetlands, wildlife and indigenous tradition.

WET TROPICS

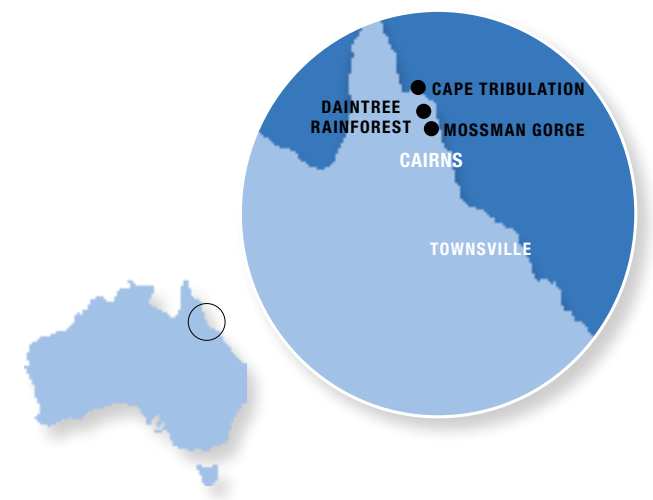
Queensland

Rainforests, reefs, rich culture, tantalising tropical foods and outback adventures – the Wet Tropics packs it all into one unforgettable package.

It's the only place in the world where two World Heritage sites exist side by side, from the turquoise paradise of the **Great Barrier Reef** to the **Daintree National Park**, a steamy, green wilderness of thunderous waterfalls, strange tropical fruit and wildlife species found nowhere else. Ancient cycads and rare butterflies thrive in the forest, estimated to be 160 million years old; the oldest living tropical rainforest on Earth.

The indigenous Kuku Yalanji have a word for rainforest walk – Marrdja – and you can choose from a variety of boardwalk loops that wind through a dense canopy of ferns, fan palms and fig trees, all the while trilling to a buzzing symphony of tropical birds and frogs. A moonlit night tour of the rainforest offers an altogether different experience of this complex ecosystem.

Take a cruise on the **Daintree River**, which teems with saltwater crocodiles. Hop in the car and drive to **Cape Tribulation** – where Lt. James Cook struck the reef in 1770 – looking out for native cassowary birds along the way. Follow a trail into the **Mossman Gorge** and learn about the Kuku Yalanji people, or join the **Bama Way**, between **Port Douglas** and **Cooktown**, which follows ancient Aboriginal storylines through the rainforest. The adventurous can go white-water rafting on the **Tully River**, walkers can stride into the **Misty Mountain** ranges, and wildlife lovers can explore the **Mareeba Wetlands**, a sanctuary for almost every type of waterbird in Australia.



GETTING THERE

Direct flights to Cairns and Townsville – gateways to the Tropical North – run from most Australian cities and regional Queensland centres. The Daintree World Heritage Area is around a two-hour drive from Cairns; Mossman Gorge around 1.5 hours and the Mareeba Wetlands one hour.



EATING THERE

Main towns Cairns, Townsville and Port Douglas have a thriving café and restaurant culture. In the midst of the rainforest and up to Cape Tribulation, friendly cafés and on-site eateries at lodges offer all kinds of cuisine along with some unique eats (crocodile burgers, anyone?). Don't miss the rainforest's tropical fruit, coffee and chocolate.



STAYING THERE

Accommodation options are as diverse as the Daintree's plant life. Within the World Heritage region are cabins, eco lodges, backpacker hostels, B&Bs and luxurious rainforest spa retreats.

WHEN TO GO

SPRING (SEPT-NOV)

HIGH 23.6°C **LOW** 11.1°C

As wet season kicks off mid October, the rivers, creeks and waterfalls come to life.

SUMMER (DEC-FEB)

HIGH 32°C **LOW** 22°C

Expect thunderous, steamy, tropical nights. A great season for exploring the rainforest wildlife.

AUTUMN (MARCH-MAY)

HIGH 30°C **LOW** 19°C

Mareeba Wetlands Reserve officially opens for its April-December season and the Port Douglas Carnivale draws a huge crowd in May.

WINTER (JUNE-AUG)

HIGH 26°C **LOW** 16°C

Humpback whales frolick off the coast of Cairns from July until September.



WILDLIFE WETLANDS WONDERLAND

Wake to a dawn chorus in the wetlands, home to nearly every species of waterbird in Australia. Jabirus, jacanas, cormorants and darters – there are more than 200 species of bird found here. Exploring this 120-square kilometre conservancy by foot, boat, canoe or an open-air safari guarantees spectacular viewing, particularly from the bird-hides at Pandanus Lagoon. The reserve is open April–December, but guests staying at the luxury tented Jabiru Safari Lodge can tour the wetlands outside these hours. mareebawetlands.org; 07 4093 2514.

EXPLORE CROCS AND CASSOWARIES

Cruise the Daintree's waterways, home to an astonishing diversity of life forms. Stroll beneath the canopies with an expert to learn about ancient, brilliantly coloured plants and maybe even catch sight of a cassowary. These flightless birds, with their vivid blue neck and long, drooping red wattles, are found hiding amid the melaleuca scrub and mangrove forests. Finish with a picnic and a swim at Cooper Creek. ccwild.com; 07 4098 9126.

Jabiru Safari Lodge immerses visitors in the tropical wildlife haven of Mareeba Wetlands reserve, home to dancing brolgas, below.



There's no shortage of tropical plants to greet guests at the oh-so-stylish Silky Oaks Lodge.

IMAGE: TOURISM QUEENSLAND; ANDREW WALUSLEY, JABIRU SAFARI LODGE; SILKY OAKS LODGE



LUXURY GO TROPICAL CHIC

Rainforest serenity with a nature-chic vibe... Silky Oaks Lodge in Mossman has all the five-star bells and whistles. Boutique timber cabins are built among the canopy overlooking the rapids of the Mossman River, while candlelit meals are served in a restaurant with 180-degree rainforest views. From your jungle perch, you can watch dragonflies flit about, do some rainforest yoga, read a book in a hammock, or be lulled into a semi-conscious state with a rejuvenating massage at the spa. silkyoakslodge.com.au; 07 4098 1666.

FOOD TRY RAINFOREST TUCKER

Grumichama and soursop are just some of the exotic fruits that grow in the rainforest. Foodies will get a kick tasting the bizarre selection at the Cape Trib Exotic Fruit Farm, and stopping off to sample the treats at the Daintree Ice Cream Company, which churns out homemade ice-cream made with tropical fruits from their own orchid. Choccy lovers should look out for Daintree Estates chocolate – the only chocolate made from Daintree-grown cocoa. capetrib.com.au



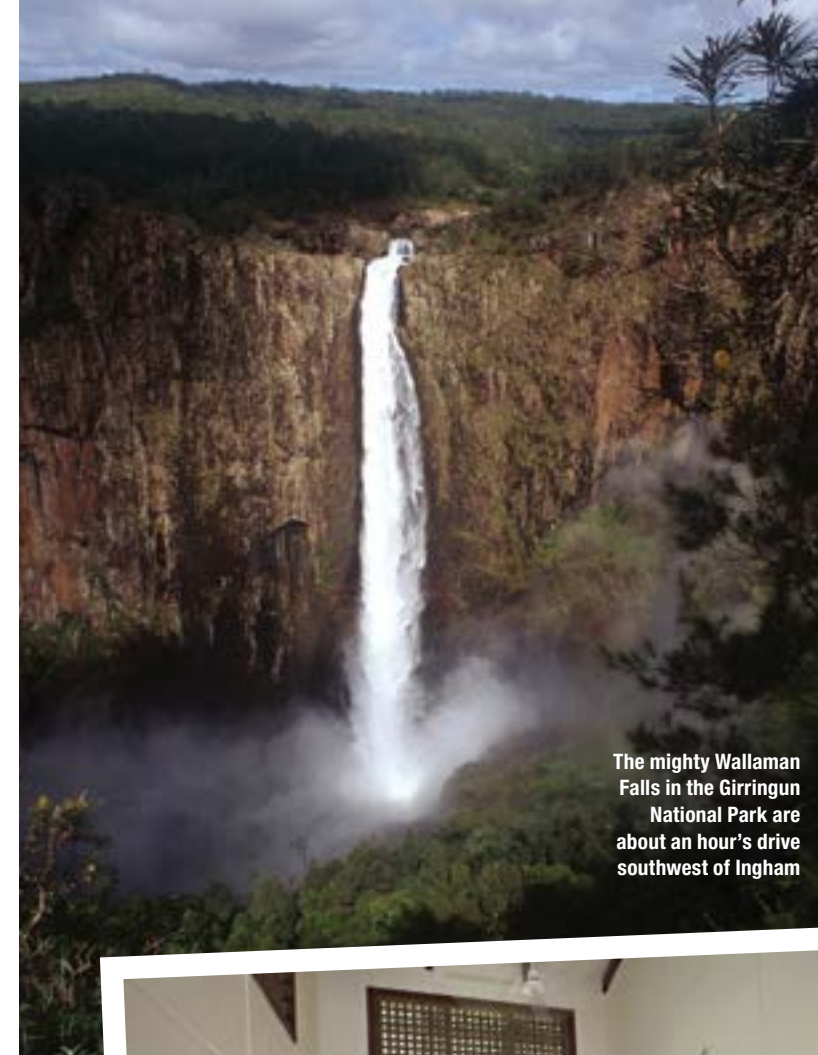
INDIGENOUS LEARN THE WAY OF THE ANCESTORS

The coastal and rainforest-dwelling Aborigines of this region are wonderful storytellers and hunters. Take a journey into the natural wilderness exploring the Bama Way, which combines the tours and insight of three traditional land custodians from Cairns to Cooktown, focusing on the Kuku Yalanji and Guugu Yimithirr language groups. Learn how to throw a spear on the beach or hunt for mud crabs in the mangrove. Try your hand at ancestral fishing techniques, or follow ancient trails into the rainforest, discovering waterfalls, indigenous medicine and tradition along the way. bamaway.com.au; 07 4028 3376.

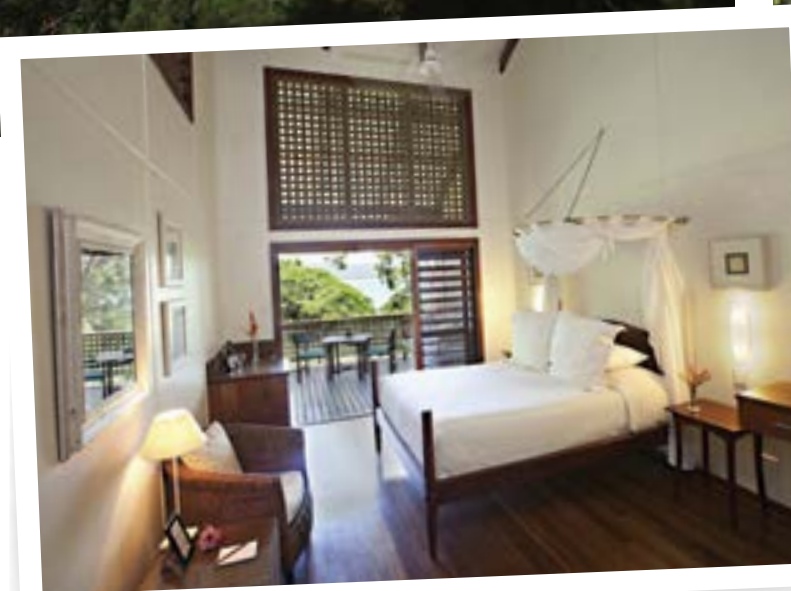


Let local indigenous guides share their insight into the land through their tours and stories.

IMAGES: TOURISM AUSTRALIA, BLOOMFIELD LODGE, TOURISM QUEENSLAND



The mighty Wallaman Falls in the Girringun National Park are about an hour's drive southwest of Ingham



ECO STAY REMOTE LUXURY LODGING

The best places in the world are always in far-flung locations, like the Bloomfield Lodge, ranked number-one for World's Best Remote Hotels by *Forbes* magazine. With water views from every room, and the requisite for any five-star stay – an infinity pool and spa – if you tire of lounging about (though we doubt you will), you can set out on walks through the Daintree, go sport-fishing or cruise up the Bloomfield River. bloomfieldlodge.com.au; 07 4035 9166.

ADVENTURE RAFT THE TULLY RIVER

Hoot with excitement (mixed with a little terror) on the churning rapids of the Tully, a mighty freshwater river famous for some of the best rafting in the country. After a day tackling the white-knuckle ride, take some time to learn about the local indigenous culture – the Raft and Trek allows an additional day to do the Spirit of the Rainforest walk, a fascinating trek into the verdant canopy, accompanied by a Aboriginal guide from the Jabanbarra Jirrbal tribe. ingan.com.au; 1300 728 067.





With vast stretches of pristine, ancient forests, unspoilt coastline and snow-capped mountains, this lush, tranquil island is the ultimate destination for nature lovers.

TASMANIA

Tasmania is proof positive that good things do come in small packages. Framed by white-sand beaches and wildly beautiful headlands, and rising into some of Australia's most spectacular mountain landscapes, the island offers a travel experience like no other.

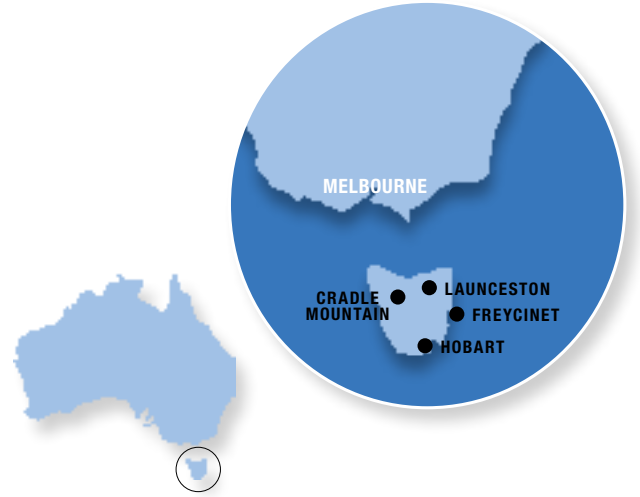
More than 40 per cent of the state is protected by reserves, and almost 20 per cent is World Heritage-listed wilderness – all of it teeming with rare flora and fauna. Accessible mountains offer jaw-dropping vistas, while postcard-perfect, gloriously secluded beaches are everywhere.

The world's second-largest temperate rainforest grows in the island, as do the tallest flowering trees on the planet. In autumn, forested mountain slopes are ablaze with native plants blushing red and gold.

Encounters with iconic Australian wildlife are guaranteed on any trip to Tasmania. Wallabies, quolls, devils, wombats, echidnas, fur seals, sea eagles and platypus are among the amazing creatures you're likely to get acquainted with, whether in the wild or in a conservation sanctuary.

Tasmania is a place that breathes in the freshest air and exhales the freshest produce. Throw in one-of-a-kind cultural experiences like **MONA** and world-famous historic sites such as **Port Arthur**, and you're truly spoilt for choice.

In the space of just a few hours you can travel from the mountains to the coast, passing cellar doors, fine restaurants and rural producers along your journey. And all the while, the lush wilderness is never far away.



GETTING THERE

Tasmania has air and sea links to the mainland. There are frequent direct flights to Hobart and Launceston from most capital cities. The *Spirit of Tasmania* ferry carries passengers and vehicles between Melbourne and Devonport, with day and night sails available.



EATING THERE

Tasmania's fresh produce is legendary, and across the state there are ample opportunities to indulge in the island's finest fare – dine at the many quality restaurants, plough your way between farm gates, indulge at a berry farm, or follow a gourmet trail.



STAYING THERE

In recent years, there's been a surge in quality tourist accommodation across the state, from edgy boutique hotels to historic, convict-built B&Bs. Or get in touch with nature via secluded campsites and farm stays. Tourism Tasmania has a detailed directory of options covering all budgets at discovertasmania.com.au

WHEN TO GO

SPRING (SEPT-NOV)

HIGH 18°C LOW 8°C

Fish for trout and see the countryside and heritage gardens in bloom.

SUMMER (DEC-FEB)

HIGH 23°C LOW 12°C

Tasmania's high season; warm but not stifling days create perfect beach and mountain conditions.

AUTUMN (MARCH-MAY)

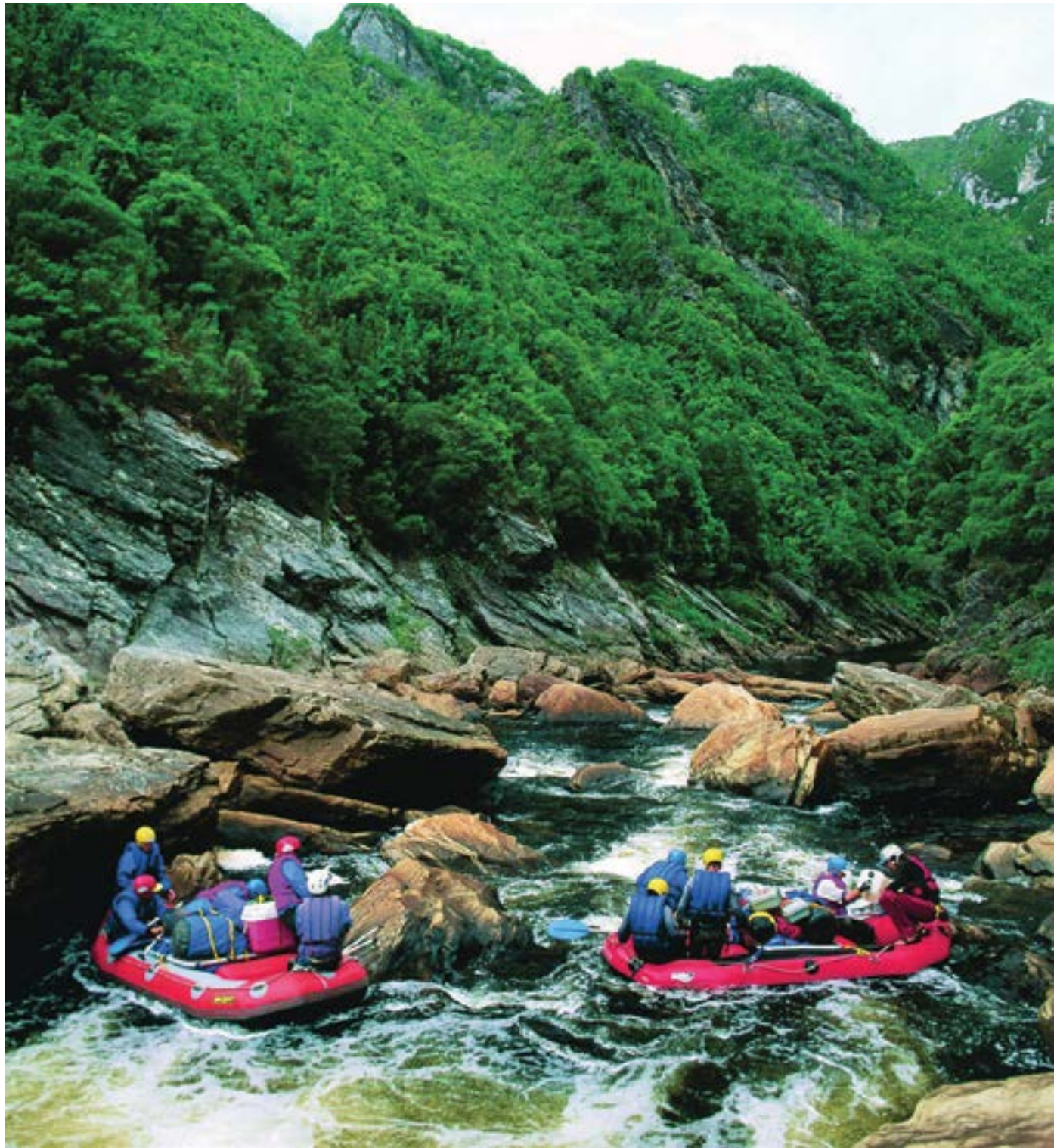
HIGH 18°C LOW 9°C

Light winds and clear days are ideal for walking and sampling gourmet produce at food festivals like Taste of the Huon in March.

WINTER (JUNE-AUG)

HIGH 13°C LOW 3°C

Mountain areas experience snowfall – cosy up in front of a log fire.



ADVENTURE HIGH-OCTANE CANYONING

You can hike around Dove Lake or climb Cradle Mountain, but for a unique perspective of one of Tasmania's most familiar natural sights, how about a spot of canyoning? This heart-thumping adventure explores Cradle Mountain's hidden canyons in ways that will earn you serious bragging rights – climbing, swimming, jumping, sliding and abseiling. Cradle Mountain Canyons' trips, led by professional guides, range from a relaxed experience in the Lost World Canyon to a full-day rope epic through six waterfalls on Machinery Creek. cradlemountaincanyons.com.au; 1300 032 384.

EXPLORE RAFT THE FRANKLIN RIVER

Carve your way through Tasmania's south-west wilderness on the river that stopped the nation in the 1980s during an epic conservation battle that was, fortunately, won. One of Australia's ultimate wilderness adventures, this rafting journey heads deep into areas of wild solitude. Surrounded by thick rainforest that spills down to the banks of the tea-coloured water, the journey traverses a river unspoiled by development. Drift through the silence of the deep Irenabyss gorge, and enter the foaming cauldron of the Great Ravine, where the river roars through gut-dropping rapids. Rafting trips run for five, seven or 10 days – the memories will last a lifetime. franklinrivertasmania.com; 1800 111 142.

FAMILY CRUISE WINEGLASS BAY

Few experiences can match cruising Wineglass Bay, with freshly shucked oysters on hand. Cruises depart daily (September to May) from Coles Bay, rounding the southern tip of Freycinet Peninsula and pausing for lunch in the protected waters of Wineglass Bay. Along the way you will see a host of marine life like whales, seals and dolphins. You'll know there are dolphins about when Rastas, the famous dolphin-spotting dog (and your children's new best friend) starts sprinting up and down the boat. wineglassbaycruises.com; 03 6257 0355.



WALK MARIA ISLAND ADVENTURE

Breathtaking landscapes, unique wildlife, rich history, fine food and wine – it's all there on this tiny island. The Maria Island Walk is one of Australia's most rewarding guided adventures. Over four days you'll walk the length of the island, tracing its shores, spotting rare animals and birds, and enjoying the finest local produce and wine over candlelit dinners each night in the walk's camps. Clamber to the island's highest point – the 711-metre Mt Maria – or simply explore the remarkable natural features of the aptly-named Painted Cliffs and remnants of the Darlington convict station. mariaislandwalk.com.au; 03 6234 2999.

Maria Island, a true Tassie treasure, can be explored on foot via a spectacular four-day walk.



LUXURY A GEM OF A LODGE

Tasmania's byword for luxury is Saffire Freycinet. Set in bushland at the edge of Coles Bay and looking across the sea to the musk-coloured peaks of the Hazards, the design of this magnificent lodge was inspired by the shapes and colours of the Freycinet Peninsula. Fitted with bespoke king beds, private courtyards and Tasmanian timber, the suites offer consummate comfort and luxury, while the range of tailored and personalised guest experiences is vast – from a private visit to an oyster farm to a gourmet picnic on the white sands of a beach in Freycinet National Park. Local flavours get the five-star treatment at the Palate restaurant, which also boasts panoramic views. saffire-freycinet.com.au; 03 6256 7888.



IMAGES: TOURISM AUSTRALIA, TOURISM TASMANIA, BONORONG WILDLIFE SANCTUARY



If you're not up to scaling the coastline's natural features, such as Cape Huay's Totem Pole, walking trails let you enjoy the scenery from a safe distance.



FOOD SEAFOOD SEDUCTION CRUISE

Tasmania is famous for its seafood, and it doesn't come any fresher than on this day-long boat trip. Departing from Hobart's docks and chugging south into the D'Entrecasteaux Channel to the waters surrounding Bruny Island, you can try your hand at hauling in a bounty of fresh oysters, mussels, salmon, abalone and crayfish – caught and cooked up for guests in what is a world-first tourism experience. The boat anchors in a protected bay, and after your delicious seafood feast (which you can even help to prepare), washed down with crisp Tasmanian beer or wine, there's time for a stroll on a beautiful Bruny Island beach before heading back to Hobart. pennicottjourneys.com.au; 03 6234 4270.

WILDLIFE A DEVIL'S PLAYGROUND

Take a private evening tour through the Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary, north of Hobart, for a face-to-face encounter with wildlife now extinct everywhere but Tasmania. Meet a host of unique animals like bettongs, pademelons, tawny frogmouth owls, eastern quolls and golden possums. Wander among a massive mob of Forester kangaroos before meeting (and possibly feeding) the stars of the show – Bonorong's 39 Tasmanian devils. The sanctuary has been breeding devils for more 20 years, and is playing a key role in efforts to save these highly endangered animals from extinction, including building a "retirement home" for devils involved in breeding programs. bonorong.com.au; 03 6268 1184.

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The tranquil and magnificent Yellow Waters in Kakadu National Park.

IMAGE: TOURISM AUSTRALIA

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