



W

is for
wanderlust

Beach villa
at Hayman

COMPILED BY **SUSAN SKELLY**

From the remote rivers of the Kimberley to the regional ritz of Victoria and the flash and dash of Sydney's newest urban turn-downs, Australia delivers luxury accommodation in spades. For the past year, *Qantas The Australian Way* has conducted selfless fieldwork, to bring you an alphabet soup of dreamtime destinations.

APRIL 2013 **QANTAS** 77



Guest lounge,
Arajilla Retreat,
Lord Howe Island

Arajilla Retreat

LORD HOWE ISLAND

550km east of Port Macquarie.

(02) 6563 2002. arajilla.com.au

On the northern end of the island, Arajilla is set in lush rainforest, its 12 chic villas connected by timber boardwalks. The reception area is its nerve centre, with nooks and crannies for lounging, tables and wi-fi for those who refuse to leave work behind, and a seriously good restaurant. They do afternoon tea, cocktails and dinner for guests and daytrippers. Bill and Janne Shead have run Arajilla for 25 years and it is constantly evolving. The spa is an inviting ayurvedic sanctuary with a gold-leaf facial one of its signature treatments.

The retreat sits above Old Settlement Beach, a popular party spot for green turtles.

There are around 80 mutton bird nestings near the retreat, and land snails cavort in the undergrowth after dark. From \$615 per person, twin-share.

Bamurru Plains

TOP END

Swim Creek Station, Mary River
Floodplains, Northern Territory.

(02) 9571 6399.

bamurruplains.com

This luxury bush camp sits on the fringe of the Mary River floodplains near the western boundary of Kakadu National Park. On the edge of wetlands that form part of a 300sq km buffalo farm, the upmarket lodge, with nine tented suites displays a stylish rustic aesthetic and a commitment to minimising environmental footprints. The solar-powered bungalows are wooden-floored, with see-through

shade-cloth walls on three sides. At night there's seemingly nothing between the 500-thread-count sheets and the moonlight-silhouetted pandanus. Large ensuites are safari-meets-Australian outback, with reclaimed corrugated-iron walls, lantern lighting and shower plumbing artistically trained along a tree branch. Daytime downtime can be spent relaxing outside in the open pavilions set either side of an infinity pool, watching a changing cast of birds, brumbies and wallabies. Birdwatchers with binoculars will get their fix year-round on various safaris, but an April airboat ride across the wetlands will blow the mind of even the most bird-blind. Lonely Planet's Richard l'Anson fronts a luxury photographic retreat at Bamurru

May 2-6. Bamurru Plains operates as a dedicated fishing lodge between February and April and as a wilderness lodge from May to October. From \$495 per person, twin-share. Minimum two nights.

Berkeley River Lodge

THE KIMBERLEY

One-hour flight from
Kununurra, WA. (08) 9169 1330.
berkeleyriver.com.au

It took two years for Berkeley River Lodge – the Kimberley's newest remote luxury property, one hour by float plane north-west of Kununurra – to take shape atop a sand dune wedged between the river and the Timor Sea. After barges unloaded machinery and materials, Martin Peirson-Jones and wife Kim – owners of a string of Kimberley properties – started building ➤

ROAD-TESTERS ♦ SUSAN SKELLY ♦ KATRINA LOBLEY ♦ AMRUTA SLEE ♦ MICHAELA WILLIAMS ♦ DAVID
LEVELL ♦ KENDALL HILL ♦ UTE JUNKER ♦ CHRIS ROSEBY ♦ ANITA HEISS ♦ SUE WALLACE ♦ ASHLEY HAY



Berkeley River Lodge, the Kimberley, WA (all images)



LUXURY ACCOMMODATION AUSTRALIA

their 20 villas. Among the many hardships was good news: a water diviner hit upon an underground freshwater supply that permits guests to linger in their outdoor showers. They can also fill a free-standing tub to the brim to scrub off the pindan.

A ribbon of the iconic rust-red Kimberley dirt, laid over white sand, connects the villas to a communal hub where five-star meals are conjured from the kitchen, cocktails are served around the 20m pool and astronomy lessons are given at night. During the day, cruise the Berkeley to waterholes and waterfalls hidden among rugged sandstone escarpments or splash a little cash

for heli-fishing or rock-art excursions aboard the Bell 407 helicopter. Villas come with ocean or river views; villa 20 at the secluded far end boasts the only bathroom with a view. From \$825 per person, twin-share (excludes float plane from Kununurra). Three-night package \$4350 per person, twin-share (includes plane).

The Billi

BROOME

23 Coucal Street, Broome, Western Australia.

(08) 9192 1711. thebilli.com.au

Australia's north-west is home to vast cattle stations so it's apt that retro cowhides sprawl over the floor of The Billi's chic eco tents. The safari tents are the same design as those at

Eco Beach (see page 85) – only these have a spacious ensuite with over-tub shower on one side and, through the other door, a kitchenette with microwave and fridge. Adjoining each tent is a timber deck for all-day lounging. With sheer netted walls to allow the passage of cooling breezes, there isn't much privacy inside during the day. At night, zip the canvas flaps or remember to pack pyjamas – other tents aren't far away. Those who miss air-conditioning can opt for one of The Billi's one- or two-bedroom villas. All lodgings huddle around the stylish pool. The Billi opened only in 2011, but mature poincianas shade the tropical gardens, knitted together with

raised boardwalks and water features. Eco tents from \$125 per night. One-bedroom villas \$165, two-bedroom \$265.

Bloomfield Lodge

FAR NORTH

QUEENSLAND

Bloomfield, Degarra, Cape Tribulation, Queensland.

(07) 4035 9166.

bloomfieldlodge.com.au

A 30-minute chartered flight over the Coral Sea from Cairns then a 15-minute 4WD journey and boat ride from Ayton (55km south-east of Cooktown) across the crocodile-infested Bloomfield River, deposits guests in the heart of a Daintree oasis. Sink into the spa on the deck overlooking Weary Bay (the Hideaway Retreats and Bloomfield suite boast views), feeling just that little less weary. Breathe in the serenity to the sound of starlings – just one of the abundant varieties of bird life – serenading the afternoon breeze. At night, dine on barbecued reef fish or locally caught barra, before polishing off a sublime serving of Bundaberg rum banana crepes with wattle-seed ice-cream. ➤

Cable Beach Club BROOME

Cable Beach Club is the best spot along the Broome coastline to kick back with a cocktail and watch the sun sink over the Indian Ocean. When the lightshow is over, a series of camel trains lope past the Club's Sunset Bar & Grill as they come up off the beach and head to their stables for the night. The family-friendly 250-room resort is built around two lagoon-like swimming pools (one for adults only) and lush gardens that are home to the odd brushtail possum. Stay in a studio, bungalow, villa or one of three artist-themed suites featuring works by Sidney Nolan, Elizabeth Durack and Humphrey Price-Jones. Rooms are clad in Mini Orb (small-ripple corrugated iron) while ruby-red latticework shades verandahs. Studios from \$349.

Cable Beach Road, Cable Beach, Broome, Western Australia. (08) 9192 0400. cablebeachclub.com



CABLE BEACH PHOTOGRAPHY: ANSON SMART/BAUERSYNDCATION.COM.AU

MOST MORTALS WILL BE DELIGHTED BY THE PRODIGAL EXCESSES OF THE CRYSTAL VILLAS

Four-night package \$1750 per person (includes meals, transfers, a rainforest walk and river cruise).

Capella Lodge

LORD HOWE ISLAND

550km east of Port Macquarie.

(02) 9918 4355. capellalodge.com.au

Located at the southern end of Lord Howe Island, Capella has one of the most gobsmacking views in the country. Its verandah faces the imposing double act of Mount Lidgbird and Mount Gower to the south, to the west a 180-degree sweep of ocean. It's the island's premium accommodation, with nine suites. The prize is 2009's two-level Lidgbird

Pavilion, with its plunge pool, private outdoor bathtub, upper and lower decks, Bang & Olufsen sound systems, music library, wines and Champagne. Capella has style and substance, from the granite vanities to the dispensers of designer lotions, and guide and guest books covered in signature-print cloth. The original interiors were put together by Australian artist Bruce Goold and his linocut prints abound. The little spa is an indoor attraction – a rainy day reward has to be the three-hour Dreaming body refurb that includes a pink desert salt exfoliation, yellow ochre mud wrap, cherry elder

moisturiser infusion and Li'tya product facial. From \$650 per person, twin-share.

Crystal Villas

CROWN TOWERS

MELBOURNE

8 Whiteman Street, Southbank, Victoria. (03) 9292 6868.

crowntowers.com.au

Crown's 32 villas are the last word in urban opulence. Occupying floors 30 to 38 of the hotel's glossy riverside tower, and fresh from a \$20m renovation (that's an average makeover cost of \$810,000 each), the leader of this elite pack is the Chairman's Villa, a 1090sq m pleasure palace that eclipses even the four presidential villas. Most mortals will be delighted by the prodigal excesses of the 16 Crystal villas – some with in-room gym, sauna and spa – that have enough space to host a family reunion. The 250sq m eyries, themed after fashionable cities such as Milan,

London and Miami, have been decked in such rich materials as creamy leather, suede wallpaper and quilted velvet. Vast living areas feature marble foyers and private bars, remote-controlled everything – from curtains to karaoke machine – and eagle-eye views of the city through sweeping glass walls. Personal butlers are a given, as is superior service. Villa guests have access to the Crystal Club, an exclusive private lounge, and the run of the Crown complex – from its destination restaurants to the 19 treatment rooms at what is arguably Melbourne's finest spa. Crystal Villas from \$3550.

El Questro

Wilderness Park

THE KIMBERLEY

110km west of Kununurra,

Western Australia.

(03) 9426 7550. elquestro.com.au

Twenty seasons in and El Questro still sets the bar for ➤

Chairman's Villa
Crystal Villas,
Crown Towers

The Darling SYDNEY

What was once a grassy knoll abutting the Star Casino is now The Darling, a slick five-star glass castle that within months of opening boasted George Clooney, Greg Norman, Olivia Newton-John, Seal and Lionel Richie as house guests. With views to the city, the harbour bridge or over the rising-star hood of Pyrmont, the suites mix up edgy design, multiple textures (high-gloss Japanese woods, blond sycamore, marble floors, pearly mosaic wall tiles, stencilled glass bathroom screens), the best pillows in town, and sophisticated throw rugs and towels in a signature "Darling plum" colour. There's a moody, almost gloomy, labyrinthine 16-room spa to massage away the pain of losing your shirt at the blackjack tables in the casino. If you win, though, hit the shops: Salvatore Ferragamo, Bottega Veneta, Gucci and their upmarket buddies are there, waiting. Hot, too, is the fine dining: Sokyo, Momofuku Seibo, Black by Ezard and Balla are all in the zone. It's a hot evening out and much less kitsch than it used to be. Astral Tower (with its wow-factor two-level penthouse) and the refurbished Astral Residences (where Leo DiCaprio stayed while filming *The Great Gatsby*) are polished alternatives. From \$339. 80 Pyrmont Street, Pyrmont, Sydney, New South Wales. (02) 9777 9000. thedarling.com.au



El Questro
cliffside retreat
interior, WA



LUXURY ACCOMMODATION AUSTRALIA

luxury Kimberley escapes. While there are tented cabins, campsites and bungalows on the 605,000ha cattle station turned wilderness park, it's The Homestead that lays it on in impeccably high style. Want a bottle of Louis Roederer to add fizz to the otherwise sedate Chamberlain Gorge cruise? No problem. How about whiling away the afternoon *au naturel* in the warm Zebedee Springs, with rangers posted at the entrance to protect modesty? Sure thing. Dinner with other guests or at a private table overlooking the river teeming with crocs, turtles and barra? Whatever you like. After the devastating floods of 2011 that almost washed the top-end Chamberlain Suite into the swollen river, The Homestead bounced back last season, unveiling three swanky cliffside retreats. Each villa – Pandanus, Woollybutt and Kurrajong – features a free-standing bathtub on the verandah overlooking river and bushland. Subtle variations in decor reflect water, savannah and stone themes. Don't leave without exploring one of the property's alluring

waterholes, located at the end of the challenging El Questro Gorge trek. The Homestead rooms from \$1949 per night, twin-share. Cliffside retreat from \$2649 per night, twin-share (minimum two nights).

Gaia

NORTHERN NEW
SOUTH WALES

933 Fernleigh Road, Brooklet,
New South Wales. (02) 6687 1216.
gaiaretreat.com.au

Gaia is more an authentic retreat than resort. It's a cocoon far from the big, bad world; a choice retreat where you decide the experience – detox or weight loss, to be pampered, to fine-tune yoga moves, eat healthy food or simply be restored by views across the beautiful Bangalow hinterland to the Pacific.

Gaia general manager and co-owner Gregg Cave, a long-time friend of Olivia Newton-John, one of the property's four investors with Ruth Kalnin and Warwick Evans, has ensured that quality is not just skin-deep. The accommodation is sophisticated without fuss, with elegant furnishing fabrics and bedding, intelligent art work

and floral arrangements making a subtle statement.

The Gaia day spa is a shrine to self-indulgence, offering the finest healers and therapists. Signature dishes include the \$520 Gaia Goddess (or Gaia Man), an epic four-and-a-half-hour pampering involving a body polish with organic raw sugar and a hydrating masque of pink clay with top-to-toe muslin wrap.

Head chef Dan Trewartha devises light, nutritious gourmet meals that draw inspiration from local, seasonal organic ingredients. The 10ha grounds, which include an orchard and herb and vegetable gardens, are as well-tended as the guests. Day beds and meditation decks take full advantage of sunrises and sunsets and views of the lush green hills. There are walking tracks, the Viha fitness centre and a tennis court. A heated pool area with an outdoor sauna and the heavenly hot tub in the Sacred Garden, complete the otherworldly picture. Two-night package \$960 per person (includes all meals, activities, facilities and a selected spa treatment). ➤

Eco Beach Resort THE KIMBERLEY

That Eco Beach Resort exists is testament to the perseverance of owner Karl Plunkett. In 2000, Cyclone Rosita wiped its previous incarnation off the map; then in 2007, Plunkett's partner, Natalie Kimpton, died. Plunkett focused on their dream of a new Eco Beach and, in 2009, unveiled an environmentally friendly, cyclone-proof collection of air-conditioned villas, safari-style tents and beach houses. Green measures include a hybrid power station that runs on Kimberley sunshine and diesel, a kitchen garden lush with organic vegetables, tropical fruit and herbs, chooks gobbling food scraps and elevated boardwalks made from recycled materials. Guests don't have to care about any of this – not when there's a perfectly positioned infinity pool to loll about in, plus excursions to see humpback whales frolicking off Roebuck Bay and migratory birds wheeling and turning along the shoreline. Early risers might see wallabies breakfasting outside their door. Dawn is also a good time to stroll to Cape Villaret to photograph the blood-red cliffs. Eco tents from \$195; villas from \$300. 130km south-west of Broome, WA. (08) 9193 8015. ecobeach.com.au



EL QUESTRO PHOTOGRAPHY: TIMOTHY BURGESS; ECO
BEACH: SHARYN CAIRNS/BAUERSYNDCATION.COM.AU

Hayman: Diane von Furstenberg penthouse; croquet lawn (right)



Hayman

GREAT BARRIER REEF

Hayman Island, Queensland.

(07) 4940 1838. hayman.com.au

Behind a discreetly burbling reflection pool at Hayman is a gallery-style line-up of posters depicting quintessential images of the resort from each decade since the 1950s. They are testament to the Whitsunday island's enduring allure as a holiday destination. While the modern focus is less buff and bouffant and more villa and va-va-voom architecture, the resort has never compromised on glamour.

Compact and contemporary, Hayman, following a \$25m facelift after Cyclone Yasi, is the ant's pants of getaways. Yes, there's a tropical island checklist: improbably turquoise water; an iridescent *Finding Nemo* underworld; Hollywood movie-style beaches; turtle and whale sightings; and an A to Z of

water sports. But add its post-Yasi status as a botanic garden (a makeover directed by Jamie Durie comprising 62,000 plants and 600 plant species), bushwalks through butterfly groves, rainforest and squeaking, squabbling fruit bat colonies, the tennis pro to hone your serve, a golf driving range and the well-equipped gym, and a weekend won't be enough.

Accommodation at Hayman comprises pool or lagoon rooms and suites, beach villas and, behind them (ideal for older children), retreat rooms. Each of the eight beach villas has a heated pool, large bathroom with elegant bath, master bedroom and beachfront verandah with daybeds. A personal butler will set up dining by candlelight on the beach, if you want it, or a boat can drop you and a picnic at Blue Pearl Bay for a couple of hours' snorkelling

FOLLOWING A \$25M FACELIFT, HAYMAN IS THE ANT'S PANTS OF GETAWAYS

and beachcombing among crunchy coral sand. Last year saw the launch of the penthouse designed by fashion icon, Diane von Furstenberg (whose label is in abundance in the resort's boutique along with that of funky Spanish brand Custo, plus Gottex and Hugo Boss).

In-house dining and picnic packs are gourmet. Hayman has its own bakery and a dedicated chocolate room with everything from boxed flights of chocolates to take home and sculptural centrepieces for special occasions.

A his-and-her massage in a cabana on the beach or in the rainforest is mandatory. Rooms from \$590. Includes breakfast and some activities.

Islington

HOBART

321 Davey Street, Hobart, Tasmania. (03) 6220 2123. islingtonhotel.com

The Islington has won a stack of awards, and with good reason. This beautiful home dates back to 1847 (it's part of a dress circle of Hobart Regency homes) and became a hotel in 1986, with glass-roofed pavilion extensions instituted seven years ago. Its 11 bedrooms look out to Mount Wellington across gardens that are a profusion of daisies and rhododendrons. The place is as much an eclectic art gallery as a hotel. There are paintings, etchings, tapestries, rugs, furniture, chandeliers, statues, ceramics and clocks ➤



Atrium at Islington,
Hobart (and right)



from the 11th century to the 21st, and curiosities to amuse and impress. The glazed conservatory abuts an open kitchen offering in-house dinner and a breakfast that includes the best berry muffins around. From \$345 (includes breakfast).

Kimberley Coastal Camp

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

15 minutes by helicopter north-east of Mitchell Plateau. 0417 902 006. kimberleycoastalcamp.com.au
“Getting here is half the experience,” says Jim Braund,

Kimberley Coastal Camp’s fishing guide, as he unloads guests and groceries from the helicopter. Despite the rock star arrival, KCC is unpretentious: six floor-less bungalows built on a white-shell beach, a communal toilet and shower with a rock face for a wall, and a request to shower only once a day to save precious fresh water (not a hard and fast rule). There are luxe touches, too, from the boab-fringed plunge pool to the fine Sheridan sheets. Sip a sundowner on the swinging daybed and watch two “pet” dingoes – Harrison

and Foxy – sneak fish scraps from a rock before a sea eagle beats them to it. Fishing ranks high on the list of activities and Braund knows the waters around here well. Return from the sea with threadfin salmon and barramundi to be cooked *en papillote* for dinner. Guided walks showcase rock art galleries tucked into nearby bushland. Two-night package \$3832 per person (flight ex-Kununurra, includes helicopter transfer from Mitchell Plateau). Ex-Broome \$4132 (minimum passenger numbers apply).

Kingsford Homestead

BAROSSA VALLEY

Kingsford Road, Kingsford, SA.
45-minute drive north-east of Adelaide. (08) 8524 8120.
kingsfordhomestead.com.au

This all-inclusive circa-1856 sheep station – and location for TV’s *McLeod’s Daughters* – mixes fine wine and dining with good old-fashioned country hospitality. Hosts Pat and Sally Kent ensure specialised attention during a stay in one of the seven suites. The wine cellar dining room is the ideal backdrop to one of the kitchen’s specialty five-



**Kingsford
Homestead,
South Australia**

course dinners starring local produce, and for a quick education on the surrounding winemaker's best vintages. For a quirky wind-down, book the hillside clawed bathtub and watch the local kangaroos emerge for an evening's grazing while you soak. From \$890 per night (minimum two nights).

The Lake House

DAYLESFORD

4 King Street, Daylesford,
Victoria. (03) 5348 3329.
lakehouse.com.au

Being led up the garden path is a good thing at Lake House, the landmark restaurant and luxury hotel in Daylesford, the Victorian spa 90 minutes' drive from Melbourne. The buddleia- and rose-scented trail running past the hotel's elegant waterfront suites leads to Lake House's secluded Retreat. An elevated weatherboard cottage with views over 2.5ha of rambling gardens, the

Retreat contains two villas. Each has its attractions; the spa villa's private courtyard encloses a daybed and sunken hot tub beneath the birches; the loft villa's conservatory-style living area has direct access to the lake and a private gazebo that is perfect for daydreaming. Common to both are stylish but relaxed interiors featuring works by ceramicist Bern Emmerichs and local glass artist Don Wreford, and plush, textured finishes in leather, timber and marble. The decor is eclectic. Whimsical side tables with animal feet and a chandelier of moulded birds bring nature indoors and chime well with The Retreat's woodland-inspired interiors of cut-log side tables and lamp stands shaped like tree limbs. Fireplaces, honour bars and a well-thumbed library encourage house guests to idle away the hours until their butler arrives in the evening to

prepare cocktails and grazing platters. The energetic can plot excursions to cellar doors, antique stores and farm gates, or immerse themselves in the vibrant spa culture of the district. Equally, guests can stay put beside Lake Daylesford and while away the hours with tennis, billiards and *bocce* – and a nice glass of Burgundy from the 10,000-bottle cellar. Pilgrimages to sample Alla Wolf-Tasker's superb regional cuisine at the celebrated Lake House restaurant, and to the mineral-springs sanctuary of the split-level spa, are mandatory. Villas from \$742 per person. \$1387 for entire Retreat (minimum two nights at weekends).

Lizard Island

GREAT BARRIER REEF

240km north of Cairns,
Queensland. (03) 9426 7550.
lizardisland.com.au

Like Hayman, Lizard Island had a makeover after Cyclone

Yasi – although the island didn't sustain any damage. The suites were dolled up, menu modernised and the resort's restaurant area remodelled with shiny wood floors, white fans and designer tiles. Even the island's 24 snowy white beaches look freshly vacuumed. The island sits on the outer reaches of the Barrier Reef, some 27km off the coast, and is reached via small plane from Cairns, 240km away. After an hour in the air, you land on a small airstrip and are driven to the resort. With a drink in the bar, gazing out across an expanse of placid sapphire, the will to do much else ebbs away. Try to reclaim it. Lizard is surrounded by spectacular coral reef – around North Direction Island, 15km south, an underwater coral forest populated by fish in all shades of the rainbow is the reward. The world-famous Cod Hole is a spectacular diving site and the marlin fishing ➤



Longitude 131°,
Ayers Rock Resort,
Yulara, NT

attracts visitors from around the globe. Off Watsons Bay, the next beach around from the resort, it's possible to snorkel over huge clam gardens. To help visitors understand the mysteries of the coral reef, the Australian Museum runs tours of its marine research station, and the walk along the granite cliff top delivers a great view. The resort has tennis courts, a gym, water-sports gear and a spa. And a complimentary picnic basket and motorised dinghy will facilitate escape to your own beach elsewhere on the island. From \$1519 per night, twin-share.

Longitude 131°

ULURU

Ayers Rock Resort, Yulara, Northern Territory. (02) 8296 8010. longitude131.com.au
Standing aloof from the rest of Ayers Rock Resort is a huddle of 15 luxury villas with one very spectacular view. Longitude 131° is a child-free zone (12 years and under) where life is all about soaking up those views of The Rock as the light shifts and changes

during the day, lazing about the pool and wondering what might be served for that night's three-course dinner under the stars or four-course dinner inside the Dune House. The earth-toned communal dining area is also home to a round-the-clock bar. The villas, elevated on rust-red dunes, have high tented ceilings and one entirely glass wall that faces Uluru.

Each retreat is decorated with memorabilia that pays tribute to either an Australian pioneer, such as Reverend John Flynn, who was the first to realise "flying doctors" could save outback lives, or explorers such as John McDouall Stuart, the first European to gaze upon the continent's arid red centre.

More recently, one of the villas housed Oprah Winfrey when she toured through Australia in 2010. Stays at Longitude 131° include all meals, sunrise and sunset tours to Uluru and guided walks through Kata Tjuta's dramatic Walpa Gorge. From \$1980 per night (with three-night stay).

The Louise

BAROSSA VALLEY

375 Seppeltsfield Road, Marananga, South Australia. (08) 8562 2722. thelouise.com.au
Hemmed by vineyards that produce some of the Barossa's finest drops, The Louise, named after owner Jim Carreker's feisty grandmother, is a luxe retreat with 15 suites, and home of the much-lauded Appellation restaurant. Chef Ryan Edwards, king of baking, butchering and curing, seeks the cream of local goodies and raids his vegetable patch to create a five-course tasting menu, reinvented daily, and à la carte offerings.

Savour blood-red sunsets on the terrace – Mrs Myrtle's Slipper cocktail in hand – before stepping into candlelit Appellation to make those big choices – there are more than 500 wines on offer.

The roomy top-drawer Seppeltsfield suites come with handpicked art work, indoor and outdoor rain showers, spa tub and a yellow toy duck. Sun worship on your own private terrace with great views or get toasty by the gas log fire.

Foodies can indulge at the nearby Barossa Farmers Market on Saturdays. Vineyard suite from \$490 per night (in-suite breakfast inclusive).

Maitraya Luxury Private Retreat

ALBANY

1320 Nanarup Road, Albany, WA. (08) 9361 9044. allretreats.com.au/maitraya
Someone recently tried to steal Maitraya's guest book, hoping to score Lady Gaga's autograph, which is affixed to a heartfelt thankyou note. It's not hard to see why the singer loved this sprawling retreat, perched on one of the most beautiful headlands in the south-west. The eight-bedroom residence sleeps 16 and has its own cinema and pool, but the main action is outside, with 200ha of bushland to play in, a manmade lake full of trout and sandy beaches to stroll along. Make like a superstar by tinkling the piano on which Gaga composed two songs, or land at the same private airstrip – if you have your own private plane, that is. Private Retreat from ➤



LIZARD ISLAND PHOTOGRAPHY; JULIAN KINGMA; LONGITUDE 131° COURTESY VOYAGES HOTELS & RESORTS



Lizard Island luxury

‘ THE LOBBY OF THE PALAZZO VERSACE IS THE GLAM SLAM OF LOBBIES ’

\$4000 (for up to 16 people). There are two more residences and six chalets also available.

Palazzo Versace

GOLD COAST

94 Seaworld Drive, Main Beach, Gold Coast, Qld. (07) 5509 8000. palazzoversace.com

The lobby of Palazzo Versace is the glam slam of lobbies – acres of marble and mosaics, a turquoise and gold palette, and plenty of lounges for people watching. Floor-to-ceiling glass overlooks a Hollywood movie-style pool best viewed from a Water Salon cabana accompanied by Champagne. That geometric Versace motif is everywhere – from bedheads to bathroom screens to balcony railings. Guests look like they have stepped directly from the catwalk to the cocktail bar. There are high-tea parties with Barbie doll babes and diamond-encrusted glamazons attending functions celebrating everything from fine jewels to luxury cars. It's great fun. There's a 90-berth marina and a helipad next door, cool shops in the Marina Mirage. Executive chef Geoff Haviland is overseeing a series of in-house master-classes this year (this month is Pasta Perfect). The Aurora Spa Retreat has newly taken up residence and its very Zen creator, Lyndall Mitchell,



Lagoon suite at Palazzo Versace on the Gold Coast

knows that even a pedicure should be a bliss-out experience. Factor in a rich, relaxing massage or the signature steam-room coconut and honey exfoliations with hydrating hair treatment known as Guku Cocoon (you'll need the in-house Oscar Oscar hair salon to get photo-shoot ready afterwards). The daytrip for foodies is to Terri Taylor's Tamborine Cooking School, overlooking the Albert Valley at Mount

Tamborine, ideally with a pit stop at Skywalk to see the rainforest and its rare Richmond birdwing butterflies. From \$419 (includes breakfast at Il Barocco restaurant).

Pinctada Cable Beach

BROOME

10 Murray Road, Cable Beach, Broome, WA. (08) 9193 8340. pinctada.com.au

Pinctada maxima is the species of pearl oyster that brought fame and fortune to

the Paspaley family. Little wonder, then, that matriarch Marilynne Paspaley baptised her 72-room spa resort with the name. Pinctada is not chasing the Cable Beach Club family demographic – it is skewed more towards couples seeking a quiet getaway. They can relax here in multiple ways: in the day spa or by draping themselves on lounges around the central pool fringed with bamboo and boab trees. Those staying in ➤

the single-storey Honjin Courtyard suites can take a dip in each cluster's own plunge pool. Shinjin Studio rooms are housed in three double-storey wings, each has a balcony; those on the ground level come attached to a private courtyard. The year-round property, which opened in 2009, champions Broome-style architecture – liberal use of corrugated-iron cladding, louvres and gutterless roofs that make no attempt to capture the downpours of the annual wet season. Pearl-shaped light sculptures in the high-ceilinged reception pavilion echo the property's motif, while low-hanging fans and high-backed rattan chairs signal that this is a romantic tropical destination. The menu at Selene Brasserie is happily influenced by other hot places: North Africa, the Middle East and the Mediterranean. From \$272.

Qualia

HAMILTON ISLAND
20 Whitsunday Boulevard,
Hamilton Island, Queensland.
(02) 9433 3349. qualia.com.au
Since Bob Oatley bought Hamilton Island in 2004, it has become a playground for Australia's who's who, and his \$85m gated resort, Qualia, on the northern tip of the island, a destination for the jet set. Step into one of the 27 Windward Pavilions looking across Fitzalan Passage towards Whitsunday Island and shed stress like snakeskin. These are the epitome of design, with a neat bushland fit despite their dimensions: 120sq m, comprising a king-sized bedroom, a marbled bathroom

that is almost the same size and a spacious living room – all with floor-to-ceiling windows – and, outdoors, a large sundeck with cushioned double daybeds for snoozing and sturdy singles for sun-soaking. Did we mention the plunge pool? And all this in total privacy, the neighbouring villas are almost invisible in the bush surrounds. Apart from an even larger Beach House, there are 33 Leeward Pavilions – 90sq m studios (without the pools) also built among the trees from handsome timbers. Qualia's base camp is the alfresco Long Pavilion, opening to sea breezes, with restaurant, cocktail bar, many secluded spots for private lounging, an infinity swimming pool and an elegant library with computer terminals, the walls lined with books, including rare fashion and art tomes. Down the hill is the exclusive Pebble Beach with yet another pool, dozens of daybeds and cabanas with plenty of distance between them, a more casual restaurant and a gym. From \$975.

QT

GOLD COAST
7 Staghorn Avenue,
Surfers Paradise, Qld.
(07) 5584 1200.
qtgoldcoast.com.au
A cool, funky hotel makeover with wit and class: a sprinkling of Australiana with some Gold Coast retro. Rooms are bright and spacious with beach or hinterland views. QT features a glorified buffet-

HAMILTON ISLAND HAS BECOME A PLAYGROUND FOR AUSTRALIA'S WHO'S WHO



Pinctada Cable Beach, Broome



QT Sydney; Qualia (right)



QUALIA/YACHT CLUB PHOTOGRAPHY: GEORGE FETTING/BAUERSYNDICATION.COM.AU

dining experience at its Bazaar restaurant “market-place” and arguably Surfers’ trendiest bar, Stingray. SpaQ has a modern Scandinavian feel and offers highly regarded treatments. From \$189.

QT

SYDNEY
49 Market Street, Sydney,
New South Wales.
(02) 8262 0000. qtsydney.com.au
With a little 1920s art deco and a touch of *Rocky Horror* the new QT Sydney recalls a time when some hotels were a little more rock’n’roll than strictly business. Our pick of the 200 rooms is the State Suite, the former Union Theatre chairman’s office, complete with original desk and fireplace. Rather like Pandora’s Box, the one-time Gowings department store site is full of secrets such as lurking gargoyles and an intuitive lift that adjusts its soundtrack for passengers, with large groups hearing a

party anthem. Party of one? Expect *All By Myself*, Bridget Jones-style. From \$420.

Saffire Freycinet

TASMANIA EAST COAST
195km north of Hobart. (03) 6256 7888. saffire-freycinet.com.au
Off the beaten track and newly inducted into the Relais & Châteaux portfolio, and with a best hotel design award under its belt, Saffire is a seductive sanctuary and a model of architectural sophistication. Designed by Circa Architecture (formerly Morris Nunn and Associates), its form is commanding, with multi-textured stone, celery top pine ceilings, local wood and large tiles. Its 20 suites are private, and spacious with double showers. There are views to the rugged mountains of the Hazards, top-drawer food by Hugh Whitehouse, an excellent spa and an overall sense of entitlement. But the wonder of Saffire is as much about

CONTINUED PAGE 102

the
big

Snorkelling
over the coral
(and inset)



B I U E

Multihued fish and coral abound as **Amruta Slee** explores what lies beneath at Rowley Shoals off the WA coast.

Sometimes the best thing you can say about a place is that there is nothing there. That's the case with the Rowley Shoals, a triplet of coral atolls lying about 300km off the coast of Broome. If the tide is high, the reef shoals are invisible, just beneath the turquoise ocean. There are often no boats in the vicinity in this remote location, no signs of human life... nothing.

Out here, the real action is underwater. With a reputation for being one of the best snorkelling, fishing and diving spots in Australia, the shoals, part of a vast marine park, host only 200 people a year

during the short season between September and November when the sea and wind is calm, before the cyclone season hits. The water is warm and clean, the fish population healthy and it doesn't hurt that the 12-hour overnight journey out has been conducted aboard a floating five-star hotel, *True North*. Fifty-metres in length, accommodating 36 passengers and almost as many crew, *True North* is large enough for comfort and small enough to reassure passengers who would normally run a mile from the words "cruise ship".

For four days and six nights it will be home, anchored off a

reef as passengers leave on "tinnies" to various designated activity spots, returning to base when it's time for lunch, dinner or a nap.

On offer is a civilised mix of adventure (reef sharks), ecology (onboard marine biologist Andy Lewis can name species in Latin or English), glamour (Jagger-ex Jerry Hall did take one of the cruises) and an away-from-it-all atmosphere (no phone coverage, no TV). Not too *Robinson Crusoe*, of course – on board are such essentials as a well-stocked bar and sunny spots to relax.

This is the new face of cruising, although in *True*

North's case, the evolution has taken 25 years. In 1987, founding director Craig Howson took six guests and two crew members on a converted crayfish boat for a tour through some of the isolated spots he'd seen while fishing around the WA coast. It was enough of a success for him to turn it into a business and, over time, to start adding extras – a helicopter for trips to inaccessible spots, longer itineraries that eventually included circumnavigating Australia and, recently, trips to more unusual destinations in the Indo-Pacific such as Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and West Papua.

PHOTOGRAPHY: DR ANDY LEWIS



Acroporid plate coral



Ornate butterfly fish
and lemon damsel fish

ROWLEY SHOALS BROOME

R



Dolphins out of the blue

The current *True North* is customised for navigating the shallow Kimberley waters for the company's signature cruise and with it Howson and his partners have positioned themselves as unashamedly top-shelf, with plenty of crew to attend to guest's needs and a spotless ship.

But this ship in the middle of the sea is carrying salt-encrusted people in swimmers and snorkels – so the term "barefoot luxury" takes on a real resonance. There are no shoes permitted on board and evening wear, while in the smart-casual range, tilts heavily towards the "casual" end of the spectrum.

THE CORAL Atoll Cruise to the Rowleys is four days of water-based adventure and its passengers have come prepared. There is a smorgas-bord of gear and experience on display, from the full wetsuits with feet and head coverings to swimsuits and a leaking mask. There are *hijab*-like sunhats and astonishingly compact and capable underwater movie cameras. There are veteran divers who have found wrecks and wrestled with great whites, snorkellers who have been in the water only once before, and a pair of very young twins experimenting with throwing their luggage overboard. At times the deck resembles an audition for *Monty Python's Flying Circus*.



True North cruising the Rowley Shoals (left); cabin (below); snorkel style (bottom)

ROWLEY SHOALS BROOME

A HIVE OF 3-D ACTIVITY, THE REEF IS A MASSIVE TRUFFLE OF CORALS, CLAMS AND ANEMONES

Very quickly, it also becomes clear that there is enough going on in the water to keep people entertained. The two marine reserves, Rowley Shoals Marine Park and its neighbour, Mermaid Reef Marine National Nature Reserve, are big enough to offer a different dive and snorkel outing every day. They are crowded with sufficient life (233 species of coral, 688 species of fish) to make each venture feel fresh. Below its flat, calm surface is a hive of multihued 3-D activity. The reef itself, a massive truffle of corals, clams and anemones, creates a playground of channels, caves, bommies and sheer walls dropping away to midnight depths.

In case all that gets boring, the crew have dreamed up

different types of snorkelling. On one day there's an early morning expedition designed to see fish as they wake and start to hunt for food; to glimpse the reef in the dappled light of the sun's first rays. On another, the instructors, satisfied that no-one is in danger of drowning, set up for "drift snorkelling". This will be a free-form, rapid ride down one of the channels where the current runs at up to three or four knots.

IT SOUNDS fun, but it involves just enough peril to change our mild-mannered guide, Andy Lewis, into a military commander. Lewis tells us we should approach this snorkel as if we were Navy SEALs. He tells us as the tinnie approaches the drop-off point he will give us *one minute's* notice, during which we should have all our gear on – and then a signal for everyone to leap in *together* in one fluid motion. In the channel,

the tinnie won't be able to reach us, so we should *stay out of trouble*. Don't bump into the coral walls. Be mindful that at the end the current could wash us right or left, but *don't panic*; if we float off, a tinnie will come out to grab us. Ready?

"Sure you have the right group?" I ask as our motley crew struggles with flippers.

"Once we have you terrified, you'll listen," he replies.

In the channel, caught by the current, the whole group is pulled past surprised schools of fish, washed by the jagged walls (behind me a woman yells, "Watch the coral!" as her son somersaults by) and spat out the other end, bumping into each other; more exhilarated dugong than SEAL.

Fishing and diving yield their adventures; night dives, deep-sea catches, undersea death battles between fish and

predator, a whale sighting. When someone hooks a shark, the instructor must lean into its mouth to disengage the lure. Yesterday's warehouse becomes today's seared fish with mango and crab salad lunch. Today's tuna becomes sashimi. Passengers exchange tall tales of what got away, passing around photos of oddities they have seen.

At dusk on the final day, we have farewell drinks on Bedwell Island, a small stretch of white sand. Sitting on the cay, watching the sun go down while the sea and sky deepen from pastels to primaries to inky black, our presence fades with the going of the light, leaving nothing behind. The world is just as it should be.

✚ For more information about cruising Rowley Shoals visit www.northstarcruises.com.au



Saffire
Freycinet,
Tasmania

ONLINE

THIS MUST BE HEAVEN

For more luxury
accommodation options see
qantas.com/travelinsider

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what you can do there. Wade out to the oyster baskets at Giles and Julie Fisher's Freycinet Marine Oyster Farm; one of Saffire's guides will knife open the shells, set up a table midstream and uncork a bottle of sparkling white. Walk the trails, or indulge in a unique half- or full-day expedition in a 12.5m boat, nudging both pink granite and dolomite cliffs to Schouten Island, with sightings of Australian fur seals, penguins, a white-breasted sea eagle with a nest the size of a small car, Pacific gulls, and an albatross on patrol along the way. Suites from \$1800 (all meals included).

Sails In The Desert

ULURU

Ayers Rock Resort, Yulara,
Northern Territory.

(02) 8296 8010.

ayersrockresort.com.au

Changes at Sails in the Desert run more than skin-deep. Late last year, the five-star, 228-room family-friendly resort unveiled a multimillion-dollar makeover that signalled a

long-overdue new direction. Subtle desert theming now permeates the rooms, with Indigenous prints, throws and cushions, and an aerial view of a dry creek bed meandering across the carpet. The vibe extends through the lobby and restaurants, with a python sculpture in the bar celebrating a creation story about distinctive markings on the face of Uluru. Underpinning Sails' physical makeover is a new philosophy regarding its place in Central Australian tourism. Complaints about the lack of Indigenous faces around the resort are being addressed – today there are 170-plus Indigenous staff, a vast turnaround from having just two in 2011 when ownership changed hands. Guests can also – at long last – find ways of intersecting with Indigenous culture in what is, after all, Australia's spiritual centre. Activities in the resort's Town Square, two minutes' stroll from Sails, include dot-painting workshops with artists from nearby Mutitjulu. Premium under-the-stars

eating is available with the new Tali Wiru ("Beautiful Dune") dining experience. Rooms from \$300 per night (for a two-night stay)

Sal Salis

NINGALOO REEF

North West Cape, WA.

(02) 9571 6399. salsalis.com.au

Immersed in the magnificent isolation of Cape Range National Park, the Sal Salis solar-powered coastal eco-retreat offers the ideal chill-out combination of luxury and simplicity. Civilisation (Exmouth) is an hour's drive away, but Ningaloo Reef is only inches from the pristine beach – the coral and tropical fish begin when the adventurer is about knee-deep. Guests stay in tented pavilions amid the dunes, meeting for convivial communal dinners after the day's snorkelling, kayaking, desert canyon exploration or just lolling about. Despite restricted water usage and no phones, internet or TV, this total respite from the everyday maximises creature comfort in a remote

desert environment. Optional extras include snorkelling with whale sharks (a must-do between April and July) and humpback whale-watching tours (July-November). From \$685 per person, twin-share (minimum two nights).

Silky Oaks Lodge

TROPICAL NORTH
QUEENSLAND

Finlayvale Road, Mossman.

(07) 4098 1666. silkyoaks.com.au

The best thing about Tropical North Queensland is that every stop raises the bar, which leads us to Silky Oaks Lodge. Nestled in the Daintree, if there's a manmade Heaven on Earth, this is it. A swim in the Mossman River will remind you of the healing powers of nature (and don't worry, the water is too cold here for crocodiles). It is a rainforest, so expect rain and the wet season sometimes provides a swollen river to admire from the restaurant, which literally sits within the vines of age-old trees. After you tour the gorge, restore your spirit with a massage ➤

at the hotel's Healing Waters Spa, indulge in crocodile and tarragon cheesecake (really), then nap in a hammock on the deck of an elegant treehouse. From \$1475 twin-share (includes breakfast, dinner, one afternoon tea and the Kuku Yalanji Dreamtime walk at Mossman Gorge).

Southern Ocean Lodge

KANGAROO ISLAND

Hanson Bay, Kangaroo Island, SA.

(02) 9918 4355. southernoceanlodge.com.au

As part of the welcome to this award-winning lodge, the hosts give a spiel about the superb wine cellar and blissful food, the soothing spa, the clifftop walk and the eco credentials. It's likely you'll miss it because the voice in your head is shouting, "My God, look at that view!" The rooms look down the coast and out to sea and there's not another roof in sight. Even among other luxury lodges, it's hard to beat this location. The luxurious six-star initiative, owned by James and Hayley Baillie, is the ultimate in eco-chic, offering a perfect balance between nature and indulgence, and bringing the Australian bush right up close. Nestled along the limestone cliffs of Hanson Bay on a remote stretch of the southern coast, the serpentine-shaped lodge has been created with sensitivity to the environment in mind. Surrounded by a thick olive-green carpet of bush, it is situated between Flinders Chase National Park and Kelly Hill Caves Conservation Park. There are 21 suites with plush king beds, sunken lounges, outdoor terraces and heated limestone floors. Jars of local mineral salts and wild lavender milk augment a deep bath against a backdrop of thundering waves. For more pampering, a stroll along a wooden boardwalk leads to the secluded, stand-alone spa. The wild ocean almost

bursts into the light-filled Great Room, a vast communal space featuring floor-to-ceiling glass, several lounge choices and a restaurant serving contemporary Australian cuisine. From \$990 per night, twin-share (minimum two nights).

Spicers Clovelly Estate

SUNSHINE COAST

68 Balmoral Road, Montville, Qld.

(07) 5452 1111. spicersgroup.com.au

The word "lush" sits well with Spicers Clovelly Estate at Montville, in Queensland's Sunshine Coast hinterland. In part, this is thanks to touches in the suites such as top-drawer bath salts, silken tea bags, and sparkling water in an elegant, medicinal-looking bottle. It's thanks to the pool, with views north-east to Mount Coolumb, and to walks through 22ha of secret pockets and nooks, richly rainforested gullies, and picture-postcard views of Lake Baroon, westward and beyond. It's definitely thanks to the Long Apron restaurant – double-hatted in this year's (and last year's) *Australian Good Food Guide Awards* – where a midsummer menu sparks a gastronomic adventure. The restaurant also hosts a delightfully intimate cooking school (French, Italian, or market garden) and the day spa menu is just as seductive as the culinary one.

In the cooling dusk, the busyness of kookaburras and blue-and-yellow rosellas gives way to the thrum of cicadas and the garden's greens drop through another level of richness on the way to night. To sit beneath a jacaranda set with twinkling lights, sipping a glass of clear, crisp bubbles, is to inhabit a perfect sensory moment.

But a large part of what makes Spicers Clovelly feel special is a combination of location – its setting, high on a ridge, not only delivers a



AWARD-WINNING SLEEPOVERS

Australian accommodation picked up a swag of awards in 2012. Here are some that earned top accolades in luxury, business or design categories.

QUEENSLAND

Bloomfield Lodge (Cairns), Emporium Hotel (Brisbane), Peninsula Boutique Hotel (Port Douglas), Qualia (Hamilton Island), Treasury Casino & Hotel (Brisbane)

NEW SOUTH WALES

Bells at Killcare (Central Coast), The Darling at The Star (Sydney), Emirates Wolgan Valley Resort & Spa (Blue Mountains), Gaia (Bangalow Hinterland), Jonah's (Whale Beach, Sydney), Park Hyatt (Sydney), Shangri-La (Sydney), Sheraton on the Park (Sydney), Tower Lodge (Hunter Valley), Trelawney Farm (Mudgee)

VICTORIA

Citadines on Bourke (Melbourne), Crown Metropolis (Melbourne), InterContinental Melbourne, The Rialto (Melbourne), The Langham Melbourne



Wolgan Valley villa

scenic aspect from each elegantly decorated room, but also the sense that the real world has fallen completely away – and welcome. This luxury lodge (just 10 suites) used to be a private home and a sense of this lingers in the care and attention of its people, adding to lush comfort in the best sense of the words. From \$399.

Terrace Hotel

PERTH

237 St Georges Terrace, Perth, WA. (08) 9214 4444. terraceperth.com.au

Perth's newest hotel may be housed in a heritage building, but it's a very 21st-century lodging: connected, convenient and *très chic*. The decor mashes up king-sized four-poster beds with hand-painted Japanese wardrobes, old-fashioned fireplaces and new black marble bathrooms. Each of the 15 rooms and suites has free wi-fi and an iPad. Stroll to downtown's best bars and

restaurants. Or stay in: with a glamorous watering hole dominated by a three-sided mahogany bar, and delicate dishes such as duck wontons with a cucumber and coriander salad served on the sunny terrace, why would you want to go anywhere else? From \$505.

Tower Estate Lodge

HUNTER VALLEY

6 Halls Road, Pokolbin, NSW. (02) 4998 7022. www.towerlodge.com.au

Tower Lodge sits snugly between the Tower Estate cellar door, Roberts restaurant and Peppers Convent. The five-star Spanish mission-style lodging – lots of tiles and adobe-look finishes (and a sense of towers getting lost on their way to the castle) – opened in May 2001 and has picked up several regional tourism awards since. Enter via 1895 French coach-house doors to an inviting property of 10 rooms and two suites, one of which is the stand-alone building that is the Chairman's

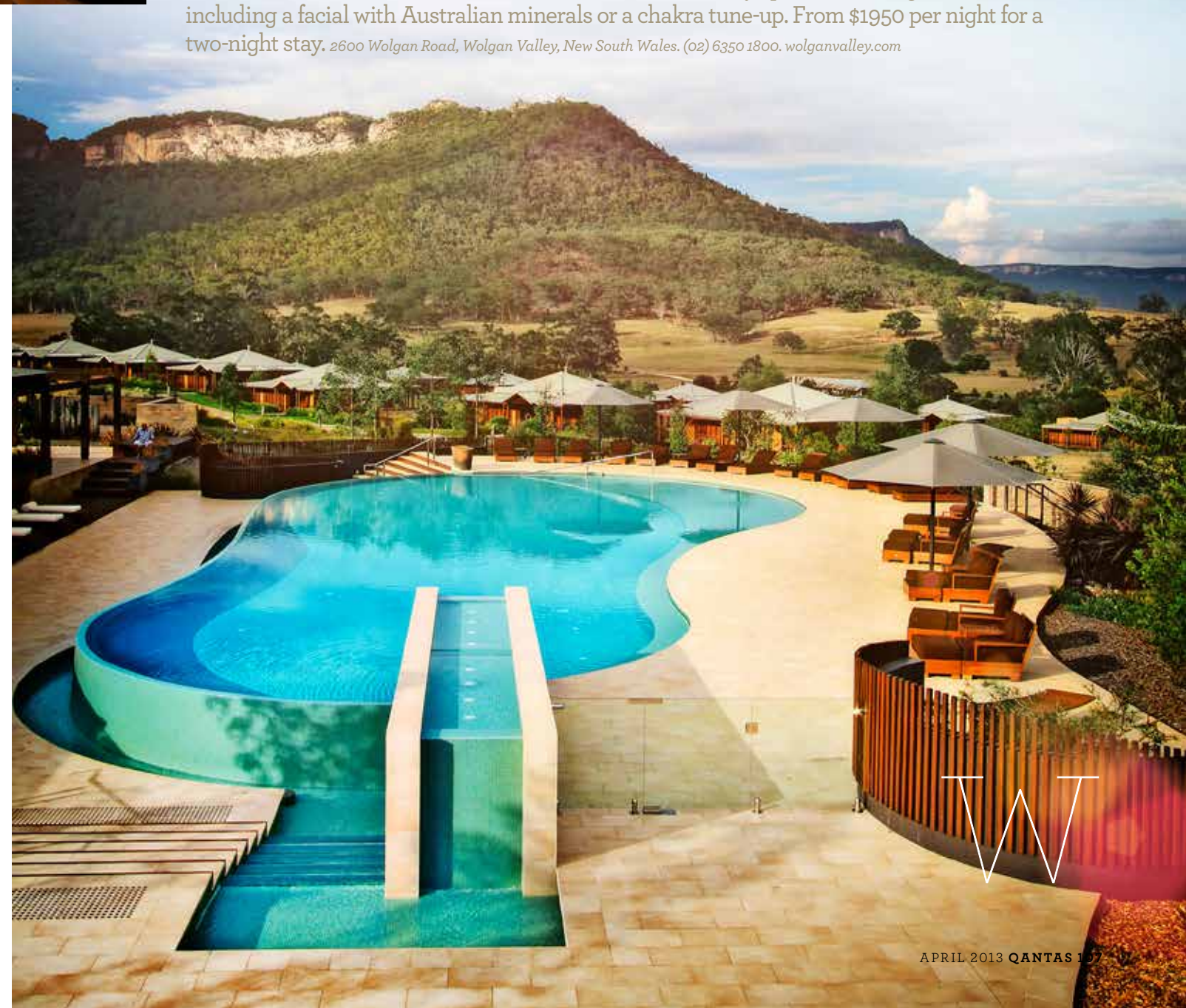
Suite (No.9), with its 300-year-old Rajasthani four-poster bed, plush furnishings, piles of tapestry cushions, a drawing room with fireplace; a dressing room, with more than enough coathangers; spacious bathroom with large spa tub set into marble; and a verandah that conveniently gets plenty of afternoon sun.

The Lodge has a cosy communal lounge room and a dining room that becomes high-tea central on weekends (plus Nine, a tiny cellar for degustation dinners), library, gym and sauna, and a courtyard with bubbling fountain. For the food and wine lover, the executive chef of Roberts, George Francisco, is a big drawcard. He also oversees the food at Nine and other parts of the Lodge. Roberts' fine-dining menu sings with surprises, and the advantage of having the Tower Estate cellar door right next door is that you can easily "rehearse" the wines beforehand. Bed and breakfast from \$450 midweek, \$650 weekends.

WOLGAN VALLEY OUTDOOR POOL PHOTOGRAPHY: CHRIS ROSEBY

Wolgan Valley Resort & Spa BLUE MOUNTAINS

Set in a 1600ha conservation reserve, tucked between two national parks and bordering the Blue Mountains, Wolgan Valley is three hours from Sydney. Drive or be choppered in (there's a helipad). Each of the 40 luxury villas has its own indoor/outdoor swimming pool, private verandah, separate living and sleeping areas, walk-in wardrobes, luxurious ensuite bathrooms and a double-sided fireplace. Take a lunch of crab cakes with spinach pesto and corn salsa in the main homestead's country kitchen and then hang out for an evening degustation that might include scallop carpaccio, cucumber sorbet and beef fillet with shimeji mushrooms. The main pool is set against towering sandstone cliffs, but if swimming isn't strenuous enough, opt for a horseback trail ride from the property's private stables, a stroll around the restored 1832 farmhouse or an escorted four-wheel drive showcasing the ancient Wollemi pine, spectacular natural rock formations and albino wallaroos. An onsite day spa offers a range of treatments, including a facial with Australian minerals or a chakra tune-up. From \$1950 per night for a two-night stay. 2600 Wolgan Road, Wolgan Valley, New South Wales. (02) 6350 1800. wolganvalley.com



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