

BEAUTY AND BOUNTY

Creature comforts on Kangaroo Island

SUSAN KUROSAWA

The residents of Hanson Bay Wildlife Sanctuary are bundled in sleep, snug and content in the crooks of eucalypt branches. I know how those koalas feel. South Australia's Kangaroo Island, southwest of Adelaide, can be a wild and woolly place in winter, with smashing waves and blustery winds.

My cosy and agreeable perch comes with an unparalleled view of Mother Nature in her finest fury. At Southern Ocean Lodge, all the accommodation and communal spaces are angled towards heathland, cliff and shoreline views. On the last morning of my three-night stay, the hitherto sunny skies turn to gun-metal grey and the long, long reach of the Southern Ocean is flecked with whitecaps. Through wall-sized windows, watching the changing colours and enveloping mists, it's like being tuned in to an IMAX screening.

Australia's third-largest island has had a tormented history, of whaling and seal slaughters and shipwrecks. The guest suites at Southern Ocean Lodge, aside from the top-tier Osprey Pavilion, are named for such tragic groundings of coastal traders and mail steamers, particularly in the 1800s, with many on board lost to the swells.

Each chamber has a sign with the name of the vessel and the date of its demise, such as *Fides*, wrecked on May 22, 1860, at the pleasant-sounding Snug Cove. *Kona* met its match on January 3, 1917, at a place with the prophetic name of *Scrapers Shoal*.

The 21 guest habitats are oases of style and comfort, with complimentary mini-bars stocked with South Australian produce, and bathroom amenities by indigenous brand *Lit'ya*, also the choice for brilliant treatments by *Ainslie* and *Cassia* at Southern Spa in an ocean-facing pavilion up a timber boardwalk from the lodge proper. You will emerge glowing, lightly untethered and scented with *quandong* and *macadamia*, *lemon myrtle* and *Kakadu plum*.

The soft comforts and pleasures of Southern Ocean Lodge, owned by the visionary James and Hayley Baillie of Baillie Lodges,



SUSAN KUROSAWA

Clockwise from above: Remarkable Rocks; Southern Ocean Lodge; Seal Bay sealions

have seen it recently voted best hotel in Australia, and in the world's top 50, by readers of US publication *Travel + Leisure*. The accolade is timely as the property has just clocked up a very successful 10 years, marking the milestone with a mild refresh of interiors and no doubt a celebratory bottle or two of excellent local wine from Jacques Lurton's *The Islander* range.

The property sits in supreme isolation on the southwest coast of the island, overlooking Hanson Bay, roughly in the embrasure of Cape du Couedic and Cape Bouguer, designed in a low and sinuous form by South Australian architect Max Pritchard. The lodge occupies just 1 per cent of the 100ha private site and is an acknowledged model of sustainable development. The wing of suites is reached by an undulating corridor, and the main Great Room facilities of lounge, bar and restaurant are housed in a curved pavilion wrapped with panoramic windows. At night, ceiling downlights sparkle like a firmament of stars.

A decade on, the look is still resolutely contemporary. The surrounding heathland and mallee scrub has been left untamed, peppered with plant species that include native lilac and silver wattle plus the wondrously named cushion fanflower and creeping bookweed. Against this backdrop, from certain angles the buildings all but merge into tufty vegetation, the serpentine swoop of the rooflines resembling something still but alive, like a crouched goanna.

And so to dine on abundant treats from



IN THE KNOW

Accommodation at Southern Ocean Lodge, in five suite categories, starts at \$1200 a person a night, twin-share, with a minimum two-night stay. Includes all dining, open bar with premium wines and spirits (cellarmaster's list at additional cost), in-suite bar, signature touring experiences and island airport transfers. Tariff savings and extras such as Southern Spa credits apply to stays of three nights or more. Sealink operates ferries between Cape Jervis and Penneshaw with connecting shuttles to and from Adelaide and Kingscote; Qantas and Rex fly from Adelaide.

■ baillielodges.com.au
■ southernoceanlodge.com.au
■ southaustralia.com

executive chef Asher Blackford's bustling kitchen. Give us our daily bread, and make it cumin sourdough or fennel seed and herb loaf. Assistant lodge manager Lucky, late of South Africa's Singita safari lodge, bustles about and supervises service. "Have you had your lamingtons and Anzac biscuits yet?" she inquires. I confess that the arrival treats have not yet been touched. "Eat up, Susan!" she insists, "and leave space for Sunday lunch!"

Come the Sabbath, I see what she means.

What appears to be at least half the pastéis de nata ever made in Lisbon are displayed on trays and their custardy fillings seem to dissolve into thin air.

Just as the Baillies have unified the interiors with stylish accessories and works by leading artisans, Blackford points out that the tableware by ceramicist Malcolm Greenwood has been designed to mimic the island's natural features. I look anew at irregular-shaped bowls and off-kilter plates and can see pared-down boulders and cliff-faces. Or is the house-branded Baillies 9 gin talking? The tippie, made in small batches by parish producer KI Distillery, is zesty with caraway and native juniper, ginger and citrus.

Across Blackford's daily-changing menus, island produce predominates, from Southrack lamb and John Kersley's partridges and pheasants to American River oysters from Nepean Bay and Ligurian honey from local hives. Fryar's free-range eggs come from "stress-free hens" and sheep's milk products from Island Pure. Even the salt is a local hero, hand-harvested at the Bay of Shoals. Blackford admits he is a "forager" and loves a multi-faceted "location dish" such as King George Whiting nabbed at American River served with sea-fresh samphire. "Flavour over fluff," he declares of his cooking style.

But while Kangaroo Island has successfully emerged as a culinary destination, it's nature that eclipses all else. Surely no one could visit here and not be astonished by the 500 million-year-old granite formations

GREAT SNOW ESCAPES

FALLS CREEK, VICTORIA Top-shelf Canadian instructor Norman Kreutz, from Silver Star resort in British Columbia, will impart his wisdom in an Academy Masters program for skiers aged 50 and older next weekend and the following (August 25 and 26). With the help of other instructors, Kreutz will offer in-depth coaching with video reviews plus the chance to try out Rossignol gear. Online bookings 14 days in advance attract a 15 per cent discount; \$579 a person (plus lift ticket). Falls also hosts the Mim Sodergren Women's Ski Program from Friday to Sunday next weekend, a women-only instruction initiative. From \$1540 a person, twin-share.
■ skifalls.com.au

MOUNT HOTHAM, VICTORIA Along with Falls Creek, this alpine resort has announced it is extending the season until October 7, thanks to above-average snow conditions kickstarted with a record-breaking June. And in a deal revealed this week, spring skiers and boarders can enjoy unlimited access to both

Mount Hotham and Falls Creek for as little as \$14 a day from September 1. The Spring Pass means visitors can make the most of the season for up to 37 days; \$499 for adults, \$299 for seniors and children. Hotham celebrates 30 years of snowboarding in Australia with the Banked Slalom event on August 25.
■ mthotham.com.au

MOUNT BULLER, VICTORIA Six-day lift passes are on sale at this resort, with skiers 65 and over offered the best deal, at \$329. Children aged five to 18 pay the same price while the adult pass is \$599. Holders of these passes can ski any six days in the season, non-consecutive days included. The resort also has a special Thursday deal that sees adults ski for \$90 while kids and over-65s pay \$50.
■ mtbuller.com.au

THREDBO, NSW Snow lovers seeking a mid-week getaway can stay three nights at the Thredbo Alpine Hotel and get a free day of skiing or boarding until the end of this month.



The package includes a three-day lift pass and daily breakfast; \$1806 for two adults, twin-share. The NSW resort (pictured) also has a First Timer spring package featuring three nights at Candlelight Lodge, a three-day lift pass, daily group lesson and ski or snowboard hire. From \$209 a person a night; valid for stays September 3-22.
■ thredbo.com.au

PERISHER, NSW The ski-in, ski-out Perisher Valley Hotel is offering savings of 20 per cent on stays of five nights from Sundays in family rooms. The hotel is 100m from the Village 8 Express chairlift on Front Valley, and facilities include a spa and sauna, cocktail bar and children's games room. Epic Australia Pass holders get up to 15 per cent off at Perisher's restaurants and bars. The resort also has savings of up to 30 per cent on lift tickets, lessons and gear hire for online bookings made seven days or more in advance.
■ perisher.com.au

GUTHEGA, NSW The Guthega Inn, a cosy lodge on the western edge of the Perisher range, has a mid-season family deal from August 26 to September 8. Families of four (children aged 12 years and younger) can stay five nights for \$3286 in a family room, including breakfast and dinner, over-snow transfers plus use of snowshoes and toboggans.
■ guthega.com

PENNY HUNTER



MORE TO THE STORY

Southern Ocean Lodge's guests might find it easier to tear themselves away, thanks to the recent opening of a private departure lounge at Kingscote airport (pictured) with decor and design in harmony with the lodge. With a well-stocked bar, plenty of natural light, magazines, toilets and clusters of stylish seating, it's a fine spot in which to tarry after flight check-in. Walls are adorned with works by Kangaroo Island's award-winning "assemblage artist" Janine Mackintosh, whose wonderfully textured pieces in gouache, linen thread and native



botanicals such as banksia and gum leaves also feature across the lodge proper. Many look like mandalas, rich in meaning, clearly expressing her love affair with the South Australian landscape.
 ■ janinemackintosh.com.au

known as the Remarkable Rocks in the Flinders Chase National Park. "Domed inselbergs" say the signs, or islands of rock, but their weathered and wind-gouged forms look, from some angles, like works by Henry Moore or Sculptures by the Sea installations. Only a bit of squinting is required to imagine dinosaurs on the prowl and eagles poised to pounce. All you need are stout walking shoes, a windbreaker and a sense of imagination.

Southern Ocean Lodge has complimentary morning tours that take in the Remarkable Rocks and key sights such as the lonely red-crowned sentinel of Cape du Couedic Lighthouse and the colony of basking seals at Admiral's Arch plus those dozing koalas at Hanson Bay Wildlife Sanctuary. The names of settlements and natural features reflect British and French navigational history. Explorers Matthew Flinders and Nicholas Baudin met off the coast of South Australia in 1802 and, in an accord at odds with the warring history of their homelands, agreed that the island had been jointly discovered.

Drives down long, well-maintained roads reveal Cape Barren geese waddling in profusion, thickets of eucalyptus, and velvety fields this winter that look uplifted from the folded moors of southwest England, save for the hardy grass trees. There's every green ever seen, as Mother said on our long-ago motoring trips through Cornwall and Devon.

Another recommended excursion is the lodge's Kangas and Kanapes late-afternoon gathering beside the heritage Edwards Cottage on the Grassdale bush estate. Guests graze on savouries and sip wine as the local wildlife hip-hops in the dusk and nibbles, too, on verdant pastures. The Kangaroo Island macropod population is a subspecies of the western grey and is sooty-coated and rather stocky. I see tamar wallabies in the gloaming, too, their short ears on high alert as they sense our presence.

Also on offer to Southern Ocean Lodge guests are self-guided clifftop walks and coastal loops or escorted hikes. But the touring piece de resistance is the new Seal

Bay Sunrise "bespoke experience" at Seal Bay Conservation Park. Before the visitor centre opens to the general public, Southern Ocean Lodge guests and their assigned ranger have private access to the boardwalks and the beach. It means an early start but it feels like the most enormous privilege to be the only humans on the surf-pounded beach as the sealions crest the waves to shore, waddle about and jostle each other for the warmest spots on the sand as the sun heightens and fish-hunting ospreys circle.

Then lodge ranger Phil drives for a few minutes past the visitor centre to Bales Beach for our breakfast. I had imagined a simple picnic with thermos tea and pastries but instead, under a tin-roofed park shelter, the irrepressible Blackford is at a barbecue grill cooking up a spread that would feed, well, a colony of sealions. His "froached eggs" are a triumph. He packs them ready-poached and then fries at the barbecue spot. They hold their shape like little buns and here come mushrooms, bacon, tomatoes, bread, croissants, strawberries and plunger coffee.

When I say it seems like a miracle at the end of the world, Blackford tells me how two European backpackers, down to their last rasher of bacon and one egg, turned up at the barbecue spot recently and waited politely, just under the shelter, to fry their meagre supplies. Asher's lodge guests that morning had eaten less than half their rations so he waved over the hungry pair and froached and fried and piled toast upon them.

Apparently overwhelmed, the backpackers made a little speech. "This Kangaroo Island," they declared, "is a place that answers prayers." Such bounty, so much beauty. Who could argue with that.

Susan Kurosawa was a guest of Southern Ocean Lodge.



SUSAN KUROSAWA

22-DAY LANDFALLS OF CAPTAIN COOK
 Auckland to Sydney
 19 Nov 2018
 From **\$10,299*** pp twin share

16-DAY SOUTHERN COAST CHRISTMAS
 Sydney to Perth
 11 Dec 2018
 From **\$7,999*** pp twin share

16-DAY AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND CHRISTMAS
 Sydney to Auckland
 21 Dec 2018
 From **\$8,999*** pp twin share

LIMITED TIME OFFER!
BOOK BY 23 AUGUST 2018

SPECIAL OFFERS INCLUDE:

- Complimentary Three Veranda Suite Category Upgrade*
- Complimentary 300 minute Internet Package per person*
- Book a Penthouse or Premium Suite and receive \$1000USD per suite Shipboard Credit and Unlimited Internet Package.

To begin your journey on the World's Finest Ultra-Luxury Cruise Line, see your Travel Professional, call 13 24 02 or visit Seabourn.com

*Fares are based on 6 Jan 2019 departure. *Limited Time Offers expire August 23, 2018. ALL PRICES STATED ARE CRUISE ONLY, PER PERSON, DOUBLE OCCUPANCY AND INCLUDE TAXES, FEES & PORT EXPENSES and discounts. Fares listed are in Australian dollars. Offers are available for new bookings only, are not combinable with any other discounts and are not transferable or refundable. Offers are applicable on select departures. Veranda Upgrade Offer: Complimentary veranda for ocean-view on select sailings and complimentary three veranda suite category upgrade on select sailings are subject to availability at time of booking. Upgrade will be reflected in fare paid for selected suite category. Wi-Fi Offer: Complimentary Wi-Fi package offer is available on new bookings only, on select voyages: Includes 300 minutes of internet access per guest for 1st & 2nd guest booking in Ocean View and Veranda categories or (1) unlimited internet access package per suite in PH, PS, OW, SS, WG & GR categories. Wi-Fi service is not guaranteed. Seabourn is not responsible if Wi-Fi service is unavailable. No credit or other compensation will be provided should Wi-Fi service not be available. Shipboard Credit Offer: Premium Suite Shipboard credit offer of \$1,000USD per suite (\$500USD/person) available only for guests booked in PH, PS, OW, SS, WG and GR suite categories. All shipboard credit offers are in U.S. dollars and are non-refundable, non-transferable, not for cash value, expires at the end of the cruise, may not be used in the casino and are not combinable with any other shipboard credit offer. Offers are capacity controlled, and may be modified or withdrawn without prior notice. Other restrictions may apply. All savings amounts are included in fares shown. Seabourn reserves the right to correct errors. Ships' registry: Bahamas. ©2018 Seabourn.