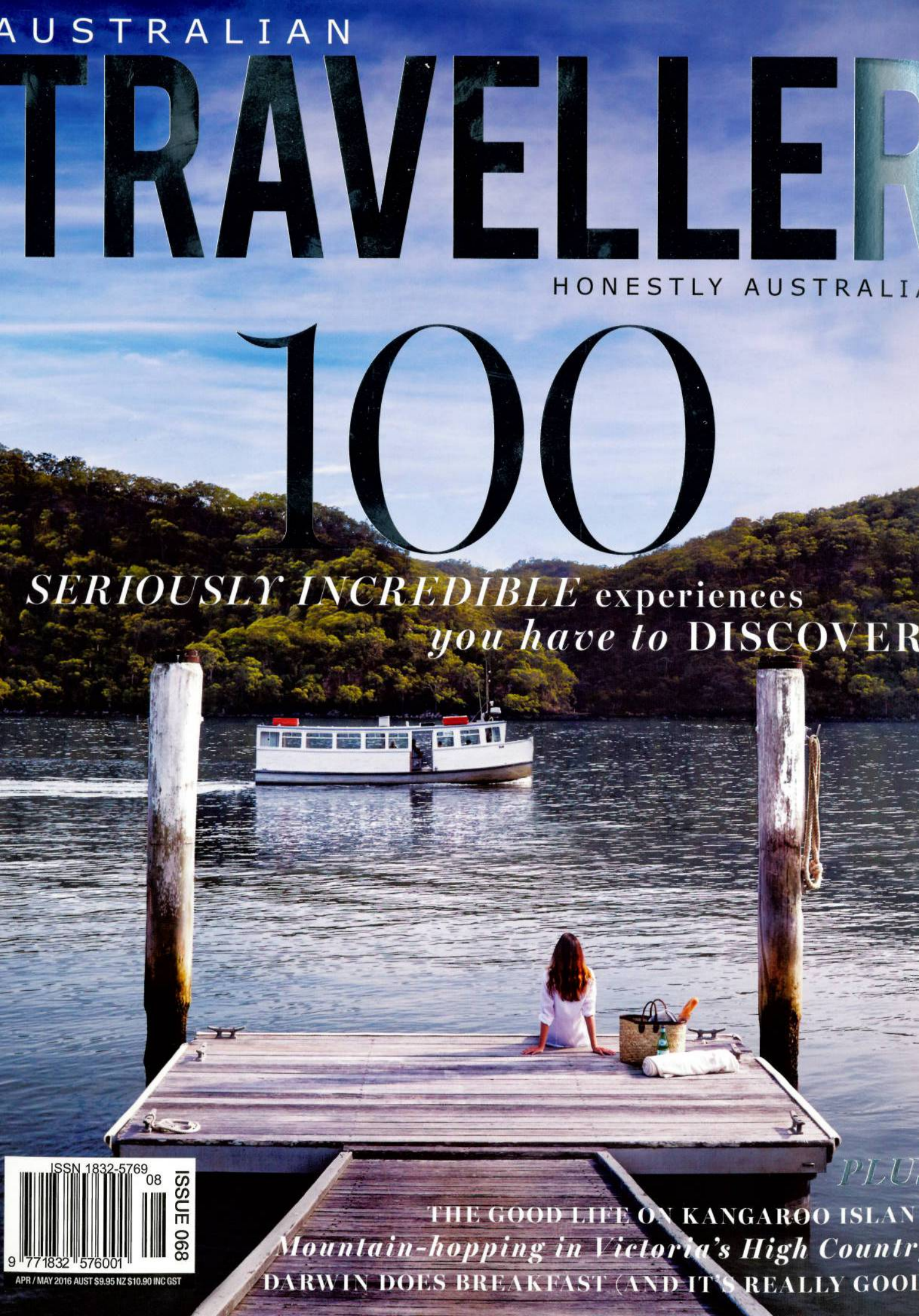


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PLUS
THE GOOD LIFE ON KANGAROO ISLAND
Mountain-hopping in Victoria's High Country
DARWIN DOES BREAKFAST (AND IT'S REALLY GOOD)

LAND OF MILK & HONEY

Its natural riches were decimated by hungry settlers following its discovery, but Kangaroo Island survived and today is as much a feast for the eyes as it is for the stomach.

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY LARA PICONE

It was a ravenous crew aboard the *Investigator* as it chartered the officially dubbed Unknown Coast in 1802. Today, the same coastline is much less excitingly named the South Australian coast, but in the 1800s it was ripe for discovery and adventure. Matthew Flinders had thrown his hat into the ring for the honour of captaining a voyage to this wild stretch of craggy cliffs and treacherous seas, leaving his new wife back in Old Blighty for what would be nine long and lustful years.

It had been a while, though, since his crew had feasted on meat and the gnawing hollowness of hunger was beginning to claw at morale. Not willing to tussle with Aboriginal tribes, Flinders had struggled to find an accessible shoreline to park the *Investigator*. By all accounts a jolly good chap who concerned himself with the health of his men, Flinders was likely close to despair when they eventually sailed into a veritable carnivore's utopia.

Absent of the blue smoke that signalled a local population, the crew descended on the land and were met with uncommonly trusting and perplexingly numerous kangaroos. What followed was much clubbing and feasting, and when all bellies were full of steaks and stew, they salted the leftovers and sailed off again, unimaginatively (and incorrectly, considering there's really only ever been wallabies here) naming the place Kangaroo Island in their wake.

On their way out, they met French explorer Nicolas Baudin's posse in a similar state of starvation at Encounter Bay and, being the kind of bloke he was, Flinders directed the French to the site of the feast. Again the local kangaroos suffered clubbing, stewing and salting, but perhaps with a little more culinary flair this time round.

Following the island's mapping, tales of its bountiful, unoccupied shores would have spread like lantana. It appeared the indigenous population was long gone (by thousands of years, we now know), and the →



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Room with a view at Southern Ocean Lodge · The lodge is sympathetic to the contours of its cliff-top perch · Apiarist Peter Davis of Island Beehive · Catching the sea air around the Southern Ocean Lodge. OPPOSITE: Kangaroo Island's dramatic coastline.



You may find yourself huddled around apiarist Peter Davis of Island Beehive as he casually perches on one of his busy hives cooing to his winged livestock.



Weekends

mainland Aboriginals were less than eager to return, calling it 'Karta', meaning 'Island of the Dead'.

And, ironically, so it became, when the next inhabitants of whalers, sealers and misfits made a life on the remote island by selling skins and other spoils. So prolific and unsustainable was the hunting of the abundant local fauna that the pure-white beaches turned red with the blood of their prey. Accounts of the time speak of a barbarous community of common pirates and escapee convicts who went about snatching aboriginal 'wives' from the mainland, living in bark huts and wearing animal skins. In 1827 Major Lockyer wrote, 'From what I have learnt and witnessed... the great scene of villainy is at Kangaroo Island, where, to use the terms of one of them, a great number of graves are to be seen, and where some desperate characters are, many of them runaways from Sydney and Van Dieman's Land'.

After several more accounts of the same, the South Australian Company eventually evicted the undesirables and installed Australia's first free colony, a community of 'capitalists' who became farmers. But preparing the land was tough and many crops withered, as did the population until only a handful of hardy and proudly independent souls remained. It's these who became the founders of today's Kangaroo Island.

A lot has transpired since Flinders found salvation on the island's shores. A history full of greed, redemption and resilience is locked in the land, but it's difficult to spot among the rolling green pastures, fields of iridescent yellow canola and beyond-white sands. Kangaroo Island is again the cornucopia that Flinders and the following sealers discovered; only now it's full of grain, honey, eggs and dairy.

You can still cross to the island by sea or you can take a flight so short that you barely have time to chew the complimentary Mentos; either way, the beauty that unfolds as you near is resplendent.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Fryar's chicken farm lets chickens run free under the watchful eye of Maremma sheep dogs · The island is ablaze with yellow flowers · Kangaroo Island has a long history of farming · Peter provides a sample of Kangaroo Island honey.

The remote, pristine landscape is what inspired James and Hayley Baillie of Baillie Lodges to create the incredible Southern Ocean Lodge at Hanson Bay in 2008. Creeping along the cliffs, the luxury, eco-designed lodge is sympathetic to its windswept environment and positioned with precise consideration to ensure the showcase scenery focuses guests' attention. Standing in the Great Room and gazing out to the turquoise waters is a daily changing experience. Some days, the ocean is beguiling in her calmness, but on others she thrashes about the cliffs tempestuously, reminding guests of why their rooms are named after shipwrecks. Each changing mood is a feast for the eyes, but a feast for the stomach awaits those who come here for the annual Kangaroo Island Food Safari.

The safari is hosted by Southern Ocean Lodge over seven days and is a smorgasboard of the island's produce. This year, beloved South Australian culinary icon Maggie Beer is making the crossing, as is acclaimed Biota Dining chef James Viles, to guide excursions around the island as Safari leaders. During the course of the Safari, Southern Ocean Lodge chef Jack Ingram, formerly of Vue de Monde and Mister Jennings in Melbourne, joins in to create elegant dinners using the island's fare.

The itinerary changes yearly; among the visits you may find yourself huddled around apiarist Peter Davis of Island Beehive as he casually perches on one of his busy hives cooing to his winged livestock. Peter's lusciously fragrant honey is completely organic and he is more than happy to regale his guests with the history of Ligurian →

Weekends

bees on the island, which began in 1884. The Ligurian bee, which can be distinguished by three golden girdles across its back, is apparently much friendlier than regular European bees, although that's questionable considering Peter is stung three times during our visit. You'd never know it from watching his unchanging wry smile, except for a hand that deftly moves to pick out the sting and softly rub the spot. As the safari group heads off, Peter turns back to his hives, checking the frames of honeycomb heavy with the sticky bounty.

The food safari then swings by Kingscote to visit the friendly ladies of Island Pure dairy. Of the 1200 ewes at the dairy, between 300–400 are milked each day

and are so obliging they happily shepherd themselves into the purpose-built shed to be relieved of their milk while munching on local grains. The rest of the day is spent meandering under gum trees and nibbling grass so sumptuous-looking I'm almost tempted to give it a try myself. There's no need, though, because all that meadow-y goodness goes into the cheese and yoghurt handmade at the dairy. From a mellow feta to punchy kefalotiri and creamy yoghurt sweetened by some aforementioned locals, the island cornucopia is as overflowing as it was back in the 1800s.

Almost as if to subconsciously make good on a bloody, plundering history, cheerful livestock appears to be a theme on the island. The safari makes another stop at the Fryar's chicken farm, where we bounce around paddocks ablaze with yellow in 4WDs to visit plump hens living it up entirely free-range-style. Guarded by Maremma dogs who

form strong bonds with their clucky charges as pups, the hens are free to mooch about at will. And mooch they do. Under the watchful eye of their protectors, they indulge their curiosity and come right up to their visitors. Pecking at boots and posing for lenses, they're completely unafraid. Presumably it's the kind of inquisitive behaviour that landed the local 'roos in the pot at the hands of Flinders's hungry party. But these hens know no such strife and are free to spend their egg-laying days scratching around to their heart's content.

Breakfast at the lodge features the fruits of the hens' leisure, gently cooked at 62-degrees until their yolks are a shade off set.

At Seal Bay Conservation Park you can't help but wonder if the still-diminished colony of sea lions have an inherited memory of the savagery of past settlers. They seem quite happy to allow tourists to observe them from a distance on the same beach. We hang out for a while, watching the pups bossily hunt for their mother's teat, before we jump back on the safari bus headed for The Remarkable Rocks.

If I didn't know better, I would say these rocks had directly influenced Spanish architect Antoni Gaudi's La Pedrera in Barcelona, so similar are the surreal helmet-like formations. We admire the collection of boulders as lodge staff ply us with bubbles and fat, mineral-ly oysters, another treasure of the island. It's a very different situation to Flinders's experience, but Kangaroo Island's bounty lives on, albeit with a much shyer wallaby population. ■

THE DETAILS

Getting there

The SeaLink ferry runs several times a day between Cape Jervis on the Fleurieu Peninsula and Penneshaw on Kangaroo Island. Regional Express (Rex) runs 21 flights per week between Adelaide and Kingscote on Kangaroo Island.

Playing there

The Southern Ocean Lodge Kangaroo Island Food Safari runs from 20–27 August and starts at \$7700 twin share. This includes the itinerary of Food Safari excursions, return flights to Adelaide, and standard rate inclusions. For more information, visit southernoceanlodge.com.au

Staff ply us with bubbles and fat, mineral-ly oysters, another treasure of the island.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Cape du Couedic lighthouse · The bizarre form of the Remarkable Rocks · An island in bloom · Seal Bay is home to the country's largest Australian sea lion colony. **OPPOSITE:** A walk in the Flinders Chase National Park.