

AGAINST THE WIND

Explore Kangaroo Island's bountiful natural assets and wildlife while ensconced in the award-winning Southern Ocean Lodge



Remarkable Rocks, a spectacular natural landmark on Kangaroo Island, is the result of 500 million years of rain, pounding waves and wind.

GILLIAN CUMMING

My room's a wreck. A 32-ton shark fishing vessel built in Tasmania in 1966 that went down off Kangaroo Island on January 14, 1973. Hit by a huge wave, the *Amber Star*'s planking sprang loose and she sank, one mile south of Cape Bouguer.

Actually, I'm comfortably ensconced in my suite, named *Amber Star*, at Southern Ocean Lodge, a luxury resort cum sanctuary nestled, almost floating, along the cliffs, above the pounding surf of Hanson Bay on Kangaroo Island's southwest coast, off South Australia.

The lodge adjoins Cape Bouguer, near where the *Amber Star* met her watery demise. So as I look out to a panorama of ocean and rocks and sand, a coastal palette with its own eco-chic style, I'm reading about the shark-catching vessel's untimely end in Gifford Chapman's *Kangaroo Island Shipwrecks*. It's an engrossing account of ships and cutters wrecked around the 4400sq km island – Australia's third-largest – 112km southwest of Adelaide. There's a hardback copy in every room, each bearing the name of a shipwreck.

And there have been a few. For while Kangaroo Island is today popular with visitors who are drawn to it as a sanctuary for wildlife, for its natural, rugged beauty and production of artisan food and wine, history records that it has been a destruc-

tive magnet to many ships, big and small, with many lives lost.

Sealers and whalers plied the coastline here and, unrecorded, many disappeared without trace. It is known that more than 80 ships have been wrecked off Kangaroo Island since the turn of the 19th century when Matthew Flinders was the first recorded European to the island, aboard the HMS *Investigator*.

And yes, there were so many kangaroos observed by Flinders while surveying the island's breadth and length that he naturally named it so.

And the 'roo population on the island remains strong today, with the chocolate brown sooty subspecies of western greys to be observed at close range browsing and grazing at dusk – while we humans enjoy a canape and a glass of wine, organised by Southern Ocean Lodge.

One-third of the island is national park and there are 12 discrete conservation parks, including one where you can walk under trees whose branches carry sleepy but healthy koalas.

Goannas and echidnas inhabit the island and there are more than 250 species of birds – including sea eagles, osprey and wedge-tailed eagles – and more than 50 plant species not found anywhere else on Earth.

In June, southern right and humpback whales begin to arrive for their annual visit to the protected waters around the island, heading back south to the Antarctic in

October. Through spring, hundreds of thousands of migratory birds move past the south coast of the island and are best observed from around its three lighthouses – Cape Willoughby (built in 1852), Cape Du Couedic (1906) and Cape Borda (1858).

Not far from Cape Borda, within Flinders Chase National Park, is another distinct landmark, Remarkable Rocks – the indeed remarkable shape of the granite boulders the result of 500 million years of rain, wind and pounding waves.

Penneshaw is where you will come across hundreds of penguins, called blue, little blue and fairy, returning home to their burrows as night falls after a hard day's fishing.

Kangaroo Island is also the world's only sanctuary for the last genetically pure population of Italy's Ligurian bees, with honey produced on the island since their introduction in the late 1800s.



The kangaroo population on the island remains strong ... and can be observed at close range, grazing at dusk

The island also harbours the endangered Australian sea lion at Seal Bay, and Australian fur seals at Admirals Arch (another impressive natural landmark).

During breeding it's likely you will witness their fierce territorial battles – from the safety of boardwalks.

But most of the time they gather on the beach or along the rocks, enjoying the warm sun, resting after fishing for days on end – as once in the water their lumbering bodies become agile swimmers.

Seal Bay is a national park sanctuary and is the only place in the world where you can walk through the heart of a sea lion colony with experienced guides, along a platform and onto the beach.

It's mesmerising to view these marine mammals up close, the brown-haired bulls weighing up to 350kg, the ash-grey females weighing less than one-third that weight. Hunted to near extinction during the 19th century, today there are about 1000 sea lions at Seal Bay.

I was lucky to observe an attempt to mate play out on the beach, as three bulls fought over one female. The scars from old wounds on many of the bulls hint at the fierce territorial nature of the mating ritual.

After all, females come into season for a window of only one day within 10 days of giving birth to a pup, and the pregnancy gestation lasts a laborious 17.6 months.

New pups, which are born from May onwards each year, are microchipped to monitor long-term population changes.



The Great Room of Southern Ocean Lodge, featuring the Ghost Chairs lining the windows.



Outlook from the Great Room to the distant surf of Hanson Bay.



Visitors can get up close to the namesake kangaroos that populate the island.

The coastal environment's ecological heritage is of foremost importance at Southern Ocean Lodge, which since opening in 2008 has planted more than 4500 native seedlings propagated from its environs. Rainwater is collected on site, solar energy is generated here and there is an organic wastewater system.

A Baillie Lodges property, Southern Ocean Lodge was designed by architect Max Pritchard. Large, sweeping window walls capture the expansive views and a 100m long wall of Kangaroo Island limestone is a striking sculptural element that weaves from the grand rusted steel doors at the entrance to the Great Room lounge with open bar, nestled above the restaurant and walk-in cellar.

Lining the expanse of windows in the Great Room are the wonderful Ghost Chairs, tempting to occupy with a glass of South Australian red and a good book or magazine.

Early this year the lodge was ranked fourth in the world in US magazine *Travel+Leisure's* 2016 World's Best Awards.

In 2009 it was described as Australia's first "super lodge" by UK magazine *Tatler*, which anointed it as its "hotel of the year".

The formula – blending contemporary luxury and nature – seems to be working. The lodge's 21 suites each enjoy breathtaking panoramic views and the fuss-free all-inclusive rates, and first-class dining and service, make for one of those ultimate island experiences. Chef Alastair Waddell

came to Southern Ocean Lodge via qualia on Hamilton Island, where the Scotsman's culinary creativity won him several prestigious awards.

About 75 per cent of fresh produce used for the daily menus is sourced on the island and includes local extra virgin olive oil, Fryar's farm free-range eggs, island sheep milk and cheese, and the intensely flavoured Ligurian honey.

You'll also enjoy lamb from family-run property Southrock, and Pacific oysters and abalone from the largest farmer of abalone in the southern hemisphere.

The lodge's open bar stocks spirits from island distillery Kis, a fledgling family-owned company producing a range of gins in small batches using fresh botanicals including native juniper.

Interest piqued, we visit the distillery's cellar door at Cygnet River to test-taste the range and walk away with the purchase of Kis Wild Gin. Liqueurs and vodka are also in production.

After touring the island, taking in rugged vistas from the cliffside walk and enjoying good wine and food, the next step is to chill under therapeutic hands at Southern Spa, a short stroll along the boardwalk from the lodge.

Here the menu includes signature facial treatment Southern Karmal, which uses wattle, lilly pilly and lemon myrtle – aromas traditionally used in indigenous medicines – and the Island Essence therapeutic massage, with a firm technique,

combining acupressure and Swedish massage, that melts away muscle aches and joint pains in problem areas such as shoulders and backs.

I'm not sure if it was the lavender and eucalyptus aromas in the room, but I found myself drifting off, thinking about cosying up with a book and a Kis Wild Gin back at my Amber Star, still comfortably afloat.

The writer was the guest of Southern Ocean Lodge

TRAVEL MATE

GETTING THERE

Rex has 32 flights each week from Adelaide to Kingscote on Kangaroo Island; rex.com.au

STAYING THERE

All-inclusive rates at Southern Ocean Lodge start at \$1100 per person per night, twin share, for a two-night stay or \$990 per person per night twin share for the three-night (or more) KI Classic. The Remarkable Retreat package (Stay 4 Pay 3) is from \$3600 per person twin share and is valid until September 30, 2017. All rates include all dining, open bar with premium wines and spirits, in-suite bar, signature experiences and island airport transfers.

MORE INFO

southernoceanlodge.com.au



COMING UP

WANDERLUST SUNSHINE COAST October 20-23

Unplug from the ordinary as the Wanderlust experience hits the Sunshine Coast – promoting fitness, fun and mindful living. Staged at Novotel Twin Waters Resort, the holistic event draws together yoga and meditation instructors alongside speakers, artists, chefs and headline music acts such as Xavier Rudd (pictured). Music also powers festival events from yoga classes to acoustic meditations.

See wanderlust.com

For more Queensland events, go to queensland.com

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