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“IT’S ONE OF THE LAST REMAINING PLACES WHERE AUSTRALIA’S FRONTIER SPIRIT IS STILL A PART OF EVERYDAY LIFE.”



SOUTHERN WILDERNESS

Cathy Wagstaff immerses herself in the rugged, salt-sprayed beauty of Kangaroo Island from the refined sanctuary of Southern Ocean Lodge.

The full extent of Southern Ocean Lodge’s dramatic position above the Antarctic waters is only revealed when the enormous rusted-steel doors swing open. The Great Room is at once warm and welcoming, flames crackling in the fireplace suspended from the ceiling, and starkly beautiful in its isolation, the ocean stretching to the horizon and beyond while waves crash against the

limestone cliffs. Beyond the floor-to-ceiling windows, Kangaroo Island is at its wildest and most untamed. The lodge itself seems to float at its edge, cantilevered over the mallee scrub, its 21 suites rippling down a single boardwalk from the Great Room and the lodge’s hub.

The design of South Australian architect Max Pritchard treads lightly on the delicate coastal ecosystem, and incorporates materials that reflect the raw landscape: recycled timber, white limestone and a kangaroo mascot, ‘Sunshine’, created by local sculptor Indiana James with scraps of metal found on the island.



Island shipwrecks

Each of the rooms is named for one of the more than 80 ships that have been wrecked off the island’s coast – a stark reminder that here, the ocean rules. My Flinders Suite is named for *Eva*, a wooden steam tug built in 1876 that was beached at Antechamber Bay in September 1903. Her story is carefully detailed in a bookmarked page of ‘Kangaroo Island Shipwrecks’, a tome found in all rooms.

There’s a sense of connection between the contemporary interiors and the coastal wilderness outside. Limestone is used inside, heated underfoot in the bathroom with its glass wall, and outside on the terrace with its inviting daybed. Soft furnishings, incorporating many a kangaroo motif, and custom-designed furniture in a sunken lounge reflect the curve and colours of the land.

Australia had never seen anything like Southern Ocean Lodge when it opened

01 The Flinders Suite 02 The Great Room 03 Osprey Bathroom 04 Sunset at the Lodge 05 The Lodge restaurant 06 The fireplace in the Great Room 07 Osprey Pavilion Lounge 08 Local wildlife © Greg Snell – South Australia’s Wildlife Caretaker/SATC 09 The Remarkable Rocks © Julie Fletcher/SATC. Images 01 to 07 courtesy Southern Ocean Lodge



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in 2008, and Baillie Lodges' flagship property remains the pinnacle of frontier refinement. In its sensitive design, rarefied isolation and curated island adventures, it continues to lead the way for boutique Australiana experiences.

Exquisite food

A large part of this is the divine food: four-course dinners, three-course lunches and hearty breakfasts are all included in the rate. Glaswegian executive chef Alistair Waddell was drawn to Kangaroo Island by the indivisible connection between seasons and produce, and the ability to work closely with local – surprisingly multi-talented – suppliers. General manager John Hird points to the rough-cut limestone feature wall in the restaurant that took 18 months to construct; the stonemason responsible for it also supplies the restaurant's marron.

We sample Kangaroo Island's marron served with abalone and quandong at one of three exceptional dinners. Waddell changes the menu daily, and we're treated to ocean-fresh fish at every meal, alongside tender lamb served with sheep's yoghurt and charred leek; KI pheasant with roast broccolini and muntries; and Mayura Station wagyu with Jerusalem artichoke and smoked bone marrow. Luscious desserts – one night a blackberry and white chocolate bombe Alaska, another an orange cake with buttermilk ice-cream – are accompanied by miniaturised ice-cream cones, macaroons or chocolate-



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coated ice-creams. A trio of South Australian cheeses rounds out every meal alongside decadent dessert wines like Henschke's Noble Rot Semillon. Guests are invited to help themselves to wines and cocktails from the long bar in the Great Room throughout their stay, and I highly recommend settling in with a book, a view and a drink near the fire.

Stroll among sea lions

By day, we explore the island with a personalised itinerary of guided experiences. In a country renowned for

places of wild beauty, Kangaroo Island is surely the most rugged of them all. It's one of the last remaining places where Australia's frontier spirit is still a part of everyday life and the local wildlife hasn't yet learned to fear humanity, including the endangered Australian sea lions lolling along their protected stretch of sand at the Seal Bay Conservation Park. We stroll among them, entranced by their elaborate mating rituals and marvelling at just how close we can get.

At the historic property of Grassdale, we sample the island's early settler

history with 'Kangaroos & Kanapés', sipping on premium South Australian wines in the early twilight while roos and wallabies graze around us, utterly unfazed by our presence.

Guided walks and hikes, discoveries of wineries and other local producers, and exploration around the aptly named Remarkable Rocks and the fur seal colony at Admirals Arch quickly fill the few short days I have. After being buffeted by the Antarctic winds, I retreat to Southern Spa, a satellite at the end of its own lodge boardwalk. I've selected an Island Essence Massage from the extensive menu on offer, and it's a soothing combination of firm techniques, acupressure, stretches and calming Emu Bay lavender balm. One of the spa's more interesting features, however, is a one-way glass-encased corner shower, looking out over the sea beyond. It's a weird and wonderful sensation to see people out on their walks while showering, and it allows me to soak up the restorative nature of the landscape. This is an idea I will take home with me for my bathroom renovation along with limestone tiles.

On our final evening, we walk along the boardwalk to sit at a table perched on the cliff's edge, between the lodge and the pounding ocean. We come prepared, our bags laden with South Australian delicacies and Croser sparkling wine from the complimentary in-suite bar and a selection of cheeses. The sun sets behind the lodge, silhouetting it against a golden glow until its lights flicker on, illuminating the ridge with welcoming warmth.

Kangaroo Island has been the most extraordinary wildlife experience, but the real blessing is being able to enjoy it all from the refinement of Southern Ocean Lodge. ♦

Travel file

Accommodation
www.southernoceanlodge.com.au
Getting there
 Regional Express (Rex) flies from Adelaide to Kangaroo Island – Kingscote. www.rex.com.au



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