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 **Reef and Rainforest**
Cape Tribulation, where
the Great Barrier Reef
meets Daintree National
Park, Queensland

LOUIS DE BERNIERES OUT WEST **DARCEY BUSSELL IN SYDNEY** **SIMON BATES ON WINE & WILDLIFE**

South Australia



Southern comfort The sundowner deck at Southern Ocean Lodge on Kangaroo Island, built on a dramatic escarpment overlooking the surf. Inset: food as art at Appellation restaurant; a resident kangaroo; and the author in relaxed mood



MAKING TRACKS DOWN UNDER

When broadcaster **Simon Bates** (inset) did a series of live radio shows from Adelaide, the Barossa and beyond, he discovered a laid-back world of fine wine, good food and decent values where even the wildlife seemed civilised





It is 30 years since I first visited Australia, so you could say we have a long-standing relationship. In fact, everything I know about radio I learned on that vast continent – and to a lesser extent in New Zealand, where I also worked for a while. I like the can-do approach Down Under and the general lack of stuffiness. I still hate anyone calling me “Sir”, and that is a legacy of my time working in Sydney. Australians are doers not talkers.

These days my daughter lives in Melbourne and has a marvellous time there. When she finishes work, she goes kayaking on the ocean near her home. It couldn't be more of a contrast with London.

So when it was suggested that I spend a week doing a series of live shows from Adelaide, the Barossa Valley, Kangaroo Island and the Flinders Ranges, my only question was: “When do we leave?” Aussies are naturally hospitable, so I knew my producer and I would be well looked after, but I had no idea how different South Australia is from Sydney and New South Wales – the only part of the country I know well. To paraphrase one of my hosts, South Australia is a microcosm of all the great things Australia has to offer – wine, wild landscape, stunning beaches, exotic animals and endless sunshine – all within a single destination.

One of our first appointments in Adelaide was at the fabulous Central Market. The variety of fresh produce available is staggering. You'll find everything from freshly pressed olive oil to traditional smoked meats, sourdough bread and farmhouse cheeses. I love the fact that it's a living, breathing market with a history, not just a tourist spot. People have been selling produce here for 142 years.

Our guide was local foodie Mark Gleeson, a former chef who conducts walking tours of the market and has his own pastry stall there. His early-morning tours are a great way to absorb some of the culinary history of South Australia. “It's all about diversity and getting to know the stories of the people who work here,” Gleeson said. “I like to show people what the market is really about.”

After that, we were off to the Adelaide Oval where some great contests have taken place between England and Australia over the years. Since I'm a keen cricket fan, this is holy ground to me. It's the place where, during the infamous Bodyline series of the 1930s, the English team received a rather hostile reception from the home crowd, according to an Aussie friend of mine. It was here, too, that Sir Donald Bradman notched up some of his most memorable innings. Beneath the stands, there is a museum dedicated to Adelaide's most famous (adopted) son, housing his collection of cricket memorabilia.

From Adelaide we drove – or, more correctly, were driven – north to the Barossa Valley, Australia's most famous wine-growing district and its most productive: South Australia accounts for half of the country's entire wine production, some 700,000 litres. Luckily, a few litres have made it into the magnificent walk-in wine cellar at The Louise, the immaculate country house hotel in Marananga where we spent the night. The chef's tasting menu at Appellation, its award-winning restaurant, provided an introduction to the Barossa's superb riesling, chardonnay, grenache, cabernet and shiraz varieties. Executive chef Mark McNamara is passionate about what he calls indigenous “Barossan” cuisine and his dishes showcase beautiful local produce, from ham cured on the



Sweetness and light Clockwise, from top left: checking the bouquet and acidity of a riesling in a Barossa Valley vineyard; horse-riding at a cattle station near

premises to Hutton Vale lamb and delicate prawns from the Spencer Gulf. The Barossa's first European settlers came mostly from Eastern Germany and England, and a strong Cornish legacy is evident in the agriculture. “Apart from grapes, we grow Australia's best carrots and poultry,” McNamara said, “and our yabbies [freshwater crayfish] and game birds are outstanding.” A “Ten Pound Pom” (or post-War migrant) whose parents came out from London in the 1950s, he is a good example of the hard work, enterprise and passion that has shaped the Barossa.

Food, wine and cricket aside, what makes South Australia special? Sitting there surrounded by vines and listening to Mark McNamara, I was beginning to get the picture. First, South Australians have managed to hold on to the old values; they still know how to make great wine and produce perfect prosciutto. Second, the region's cities are small enough to encourage civilised behaviour. In Adelaide, I walked the streets at rush hour and didn't have to keep my head down or look at anyone and say, “Yes, do you have a problem?” The weather has a mellowing effect, too. It was early spring when I went, but still sunny and pleasantly warm. I'm convinced that clear blue skies lift one's spirits – that, and breathing good country air.

Early one morning, we piled into a big white Toyota 4WD for Breakfast with the Kangaroos – one of The Louise's most popular excursions. I was sceptical that any of these fine-looking Eastern Grey kangaroos would turn up to see a couple of Pommie broadcasters, but to my surprise the national park was like a Trafalgar Square for marsupials. They were everywhere – and because they have never been hunted, you can get very close. We even saw a young female carrying a joey in her pouch. Call me an old softie, but it made my day, as did the poached pears and handmade Bircher muesli we had for breakfast.

For our broadcast that day, we headed to Peter

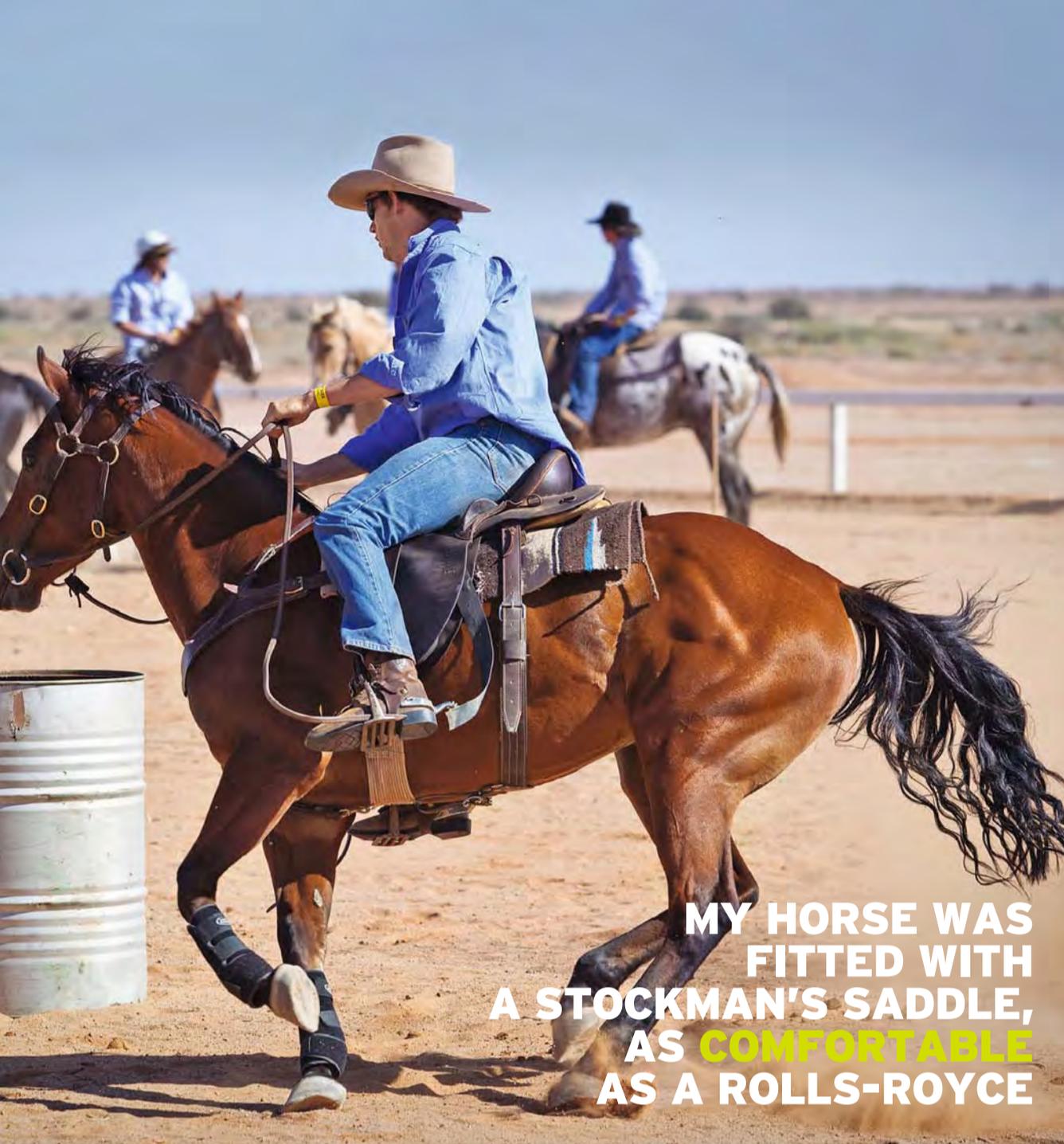
Lehmann Wines in Tanunda, in the heart of the Barossa. Less well known than Jacob's Creek, Penfolds and Wolf Blass, it is nevertheless a respected winery, producing beautifully structured reds (shiraz, grenache and merlot) and a range of contemporary whites and rosés. We set up our broadcasting deck on the lawns beneath the towering gum trees, and were even provided with a kookaburra which occupied a branch above my head. We couldn't get a squeak out of him – let alone a full-throated song.

Over the next four hours, I chatted to some of the region's best grape growers, winemakers and viticulturalists – try saying that after a few glasses of shiraz. These blokes are like the horse-breeders I know in England, with the same passion and single-mindedness. They are not just making a product, but living the life they want to lead, and money is only part of the equation.

I also noticed how multi-talented everybody was. Most people I met had a couple of jobs and spent their spare time fishing, yachting, cycling or restoring classic cars.

After a blissful day among the vines, we were whisked back to Adelaide for our early-morning flight to Kangaroo Island, the next major destination on our whirlwind journey. Just 30 minutes by air from the mainland, Kangaroo Island (or KI) is like a separate world, with an independent spirit, lots of untamed wilderness and an abundance of wildlife. Visitors come from all over the world to see the sea lions, kangaroos and koalas for which the island is famous. My favourite was a spiky little creature called an echidna. When approached, it buries its head in the sand to avoid eye contact.

Our guide on the island was Craig Wickham who runs a tour company called Exceptional Kangaroo Island. He has lived on KI for 40 years – almost long enough to be considered a local – and he told me a lovely story about the English explorer Matthew Flinders who first came



MY HORSE WAS
FITTED WITH
A STOCKMAN'S SADDLE,
AS COMFORTABLE
AS A ROLLS-ROYCE

William Creek, in the Flinders Ranges; and the panoramic view from The Great Room at Southern Ocean Lodge, dramatically located on Kangaroo Island

here in 1798. "He and his crew had been at sea for several months and hadn't any fresh tucker," said Wickham, "so the kangaroos were a welcome change in diet. Flinders wrote in his ship's log: 'In gratitude for such a seasonable supply I name this southern land Kangaroo Island'. He added that there had been enough meat to feed not only the officers but also the men!"

The island's isolation (increasingly rare in the modern world) and its lack of predators have turned it into a kind of Noah's ark for native species. We stopped for morning coffee at Bales Beach, a magnificent stretch of white sand flanked by dunes, and there wasn't another person in sight. Walking along the shoreline for an hour, with just the sound of the surf in my ears, was my idea of heaven.

Next stop was Southern Ocean Lodge, a stunning property built on a dramatic escarpment overlooking the surf, where we had a delicious lunch of grilled whiting (locally caught of course) and a glass of KI chardonnay. There are 28 vineyards on the island, as well as oyster and lobster fisheries, cheese-makers, honey producers and farmers growing delicious "saltbush" lamb – low in fat and high in vitamin E, because the animals have grazed on a nutritious diet of desert and seashore plants.

Despite its tiny population (around 4,500), KI also supports a thriving artists' colony; after all, somewhere as wild and beautiful as this is bound to ignite the creative imagination. Sadly, our stay on the island was short-lived because an entirely different kind of wilderness beckoned on the mainland.

The final leg of our odyssey took us to Parachilna, a one-horse town deep in the South Australian Outback. Our pilot, Ryan, had flown down from Adelaide to take us north. When we landed on the town's dirt strip, there was no one around to greet us. Then we spotted our rental vehicle parked next to a tin shed. Inside was

a hand-written note. "Here's the ute, drop off the paperwork when you've got time," it read. Somehow I knew I was going to like this place.

Horses are my great passion, so I was delighted to have the chance to go for a trot in the middle of the Outback. My horse was fitted with a stockman's saddle, which was extremely comfortable – the equestrian equivalent of a Rolls-Royce. Best of all, it was almost impossible to fall out of – an important consideration when you are an Englishman trying to impress the locals. That night, we would be sleeping at the legendary Prairie Hotel in Parachilna, renowned for its "feral feasts" of wild kangaroo, emu, goat and other bush meats. It seemed that my adventure was only just beginning.

THE DETAILS

The Louise (00 618 8562 2722, thelouise.com.au). Secluded culinary retreat in the heart of the Barossa wine region. Two-night packages from A\$995 (£617) for two, including breakfast and a five-course chef's tasting menu dinner for two at Appellation restaurant.

Peter Lehmann Wines (00 618 8565 9500, peterlehmannwines.com). Respected Barossa winery; tastings from A\$10 (about £6.20).

Southern Ocean Lodge (00 618 8559 7347, southernoceanlodge.com.au). Sophisticated cliff-top sanctuary on rugged stretch of Kangaroo Island coast. Suites from A\$990 (£614) per night, based on two sharing, including all dining, "open" bar and guided tours.

Exceptional Kangaroo Island (00 618 8553 9119, exceptionalkangarooisland.com). "Good wine, good food and wildlife in the wild", on a range of 4WD tours.

Prairie Hotel (00 618 8648 4844, prairiehotel.com.au). Historic hotel in the Outback, famous for its "native Australian" cuisine and offering outings on horseback. Doubles from A\$175 (£109) per night, b&b.

To find out more about why there's nothing like wine and wildlife in Australia, visit Australia.com/southaustralia

5 OTHER DESTINATIONS FOR WINE AND WILDLIFE

MARGARET RIVER, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

"See more, taste more, do more" is the mantra of Bushtucker River and Winery Tours, whose itineraries range from the adventurous (canoeing, caving and river swimming) to the ethnological (Aboriginal herbalism) and the quirkily hedonistic. On a canoe safari, guests can paddle past kangaroo habitats then stop, if conscience allows, for a lunch of emu with nut pesto followed by wild turkey with rosella chutney. For the more sedate, there are coach tours into the wine regions (Swan Valley, Ferguson Valley, Margaret River) and visits to boutique breweries, chocolate factories and artisan cheese-makers, all with tastings. bushtuckertours.com



DARWIN, NORTHERN TERRITORY

In the balmy, tropical "Top End" of Australia, get a taste for Asian-Pacific cuisine at Darwin's Mindil Beach Sunset Markets, held every Thursday and Sunday evening during the dry season (May to October). The flavours of Japan, Thailand, Timor, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia will be set up nicely by a chilled riesling, while beer is the natural partner to more traditional options (chips and burgers). From Darwin, it is a three-hour drive to Kakadu National Park with its haunting Aboriginal culture and opportunities to see buffalo, crocodiles and more than 290 species of bird. mindil.com.au and kakadu.com.au



COAL VALLEY, TASMANIA

On Tassie, enjoy first-class pinot noirs, then set off in search of endangered Tasmanian Devils: carnivorous marsupials the size of a small

dog, unique to this island 400 miles south of Melbourne. Just a 20-minute drive from Hobart, the Coal Valley is Tasmania's fastest-growing wine region. As well as pinot noirs, it produces cool-climate wines including chardonnays, rieslings and sauvignons blancs. The Coal River Valley Wine Route makes an ideal half- or full-day tour, with tastings and lunch at a vineyard restaurant. Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary is the place to see Tasmanian Devils, plus emus, wombats, echidnas and other injured and orphaned animals. puretasmania.com.au and bonorong.com.au

HUNTER VALLEY, NEW SOUTH WALES

Stock up on the wines of the region (notably its semillons, described by Jancis Robinson as "Australia's great gift to the wine world"), then relax on a boat trip down the Hawkesbury River – abundant with green and golden bell frogs, blue-tongue skinks (a type of lizard), pelicans, parrots, kookaburras, black swans, white-breasted sea eagles and dozens of species of fish, all within a 45-minute drive of Sydney. The Hunter Valley has a well-developed programme of wine tours and cellar-door tastings, with the chance to eat well at some excellent vineyard restaurants. winecountry.com.au and hawkesburyriver.org.au



YARRA VALLEY, VICTORIA

Close to Melbourne, stop off at Anglesea Golf Course to play a round among the kangaroos before heading to De Bortoli's, Domaine Chandon and the other wineries of the Yarra Valley. The Anglesea club has a world-renowned 18-hole course and a bistro open for lunch and dinner. Its lush fairways are home to a resident population of Eastern Grey Kangaroos. The Yarra Valley's progressive young winemakers have harnessed the diversity of the terroir to create elegant pinot noirs, chardonnays and sparkling wines. visityarrravalle.com.au and angleseagolfclub.com.au