



Epicurean adventures

IT SEEMS THAT THE REST OF THE WORLD IS BEGINNING TO APPRECIATE WHAT WE HAVE ALWAYS KNOWN; THAT AUSTRALIAN FOOD AND WINE IS AMONG THE BEST IN THE WORLD. TOURISM AUSTRALIA FOUND RECENTLY THAT INTERNATIONAL VISITORS RANKED AUSTRALIA SECOND IN THE WORLD AS A GOURMET DESTINATION, BEHIND ONLY THE CULINARY POWERHOUSE OF FRANCE. *Luxury Travel* MAGAZINE HAS CHOSEN SOME OF THE BEST EPICUREAN EXPERIENCES IN AUSTRALIA FOR YOU TO EXPLORE.



Gourmet Destination
01



KELLY JANE GABRIEL



SOUTHERN
OCEAN LODGE
Kangaroo
Island
South Australia

WORDS BY GARY ALLEN

PHOTOGRAPH BY KELLY JANE GABRIEL



“WHAT IF THE SEAL KEEPS ON CRAWLING TOWARDS me?”, I ask as our small group stands on the sand. The young pup waddles a little closer to get its own up close and personal view of us. The cameras continue snapping away. We all back up some steps. The seals, large and small, mums and dads, families laying there sleeping, along with some teenagers chasing each other near the water. We can see mothers nursing their pups. Our guide knows many of these animals by sight so we learn who is who. A young pup skitters across the sand. It doesn't look as healthy as the others. We learn that its mother has not come back from her last venture out to sea a few weeks ago. You can't see them but they are there. The great white sharks' staple food here are these seals. It's sad as we hear this pup won't last much longer unless another seal adopts it.

We were on the seal-viewing excursion offered by Southern Ocean Lodge, a spectacular luxury lodge off the coast of South Australia. Next up was the guided cliff walk where, in between jaw dropping views down the coast and out to sea, we encountered an indifferent echidna preoccupied with finding his next ant meal. He allowed plenty of very close up photography, as long as we didn't get in the way of his lunch. Along the walk our guide had us smelling and feeling plants I had never heard of before.

Of course the views from the lodge itself are incredible: wild coastline with waves smashing into the cliff faces and the never-ending draw of the magnificent ocean. The rooms are ultra comfortable with heated bathroom floors and bathtubs with views out to sea. All day long, the chefs are creating masterpiece meals using fresh local ingredients, and the food is amazingly good for every meal. The hospitality staff is absolutely special too. They seem to be around just like they are friends staying at the same house as

you, but are forever ready to grab you a glass of wine or a plate of cheese and crackers, a smile always included. Great food, great staff and amazing natural beauty are the big reasons Southern Ocean Lodge is so incredible.

It also offers a menu of amazing activities and experiences on Kangaroo Island – a wild place and a true jewel in the Australian necklace of natural wonders. Another excursion took us further away from the lodge to the southwest part of the island. Scott, a fourth generation local guide, took us in the comfort of a big four wheel drive to see the Remarkable Rocks and search for seals, snakes, echidnas and wild koalas. With him, we found them all with plenty of interesting stories along the way. Refreshments were presented at the Rocks in a picnic basket loaded with coffee, tea, fresh fruit and biscuits to enjoy while we stood and gazed at the incredible scenery some more.

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In keeping with Kangaroo Island's reputation as one of Australia's epicurean hotspots, there are a range of foodie tours on offer as well. Meet some of the local wildlife with the Kangaroos & Kanapes tour, taking guests to the nearby historic settlement of Grassdale for some of South Australia's best wines and snacks from the lodge alongside the 'roos. You

can also customise a half- or full-day tour of the island, visiting passionate local producers and sampling their wares.

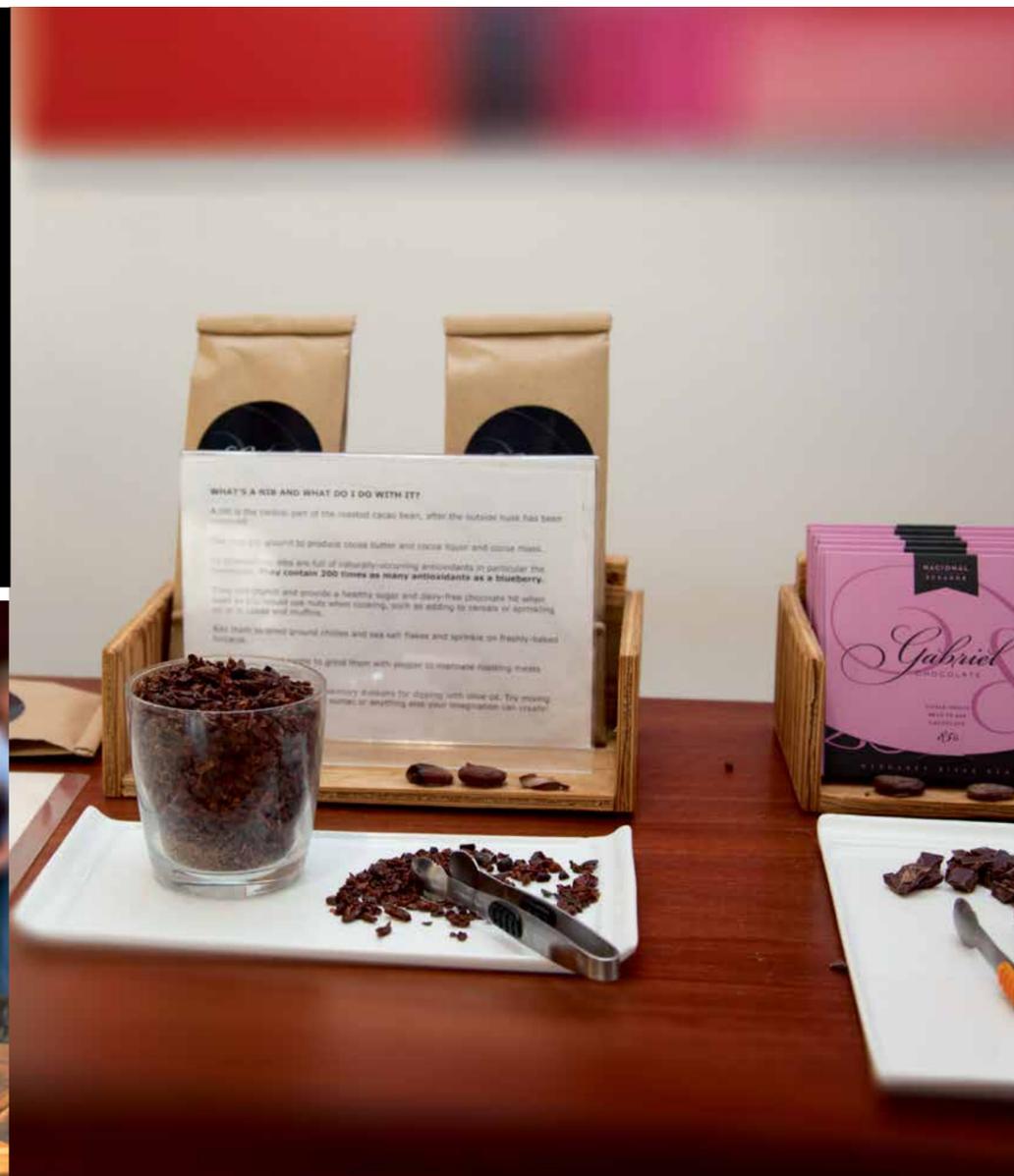
At a certain point in the stay, a spa treatment is just the thing. Using Li'tya products, based purely on indigenous Australian plants, the talented therapists will rub away any cares and troubles, though it's hard to imagine having any when you're staying here.

STAYING THERE

Suites are priced from A\$1,050-1,950 per person per night including all meals, open bar, in-suite mini bar, signature experiences and transfers, with a minimum two-night stay. southernoceanlodge.com.au



MARGARET RIVER GOURMET ESCAPE
Western Australia
WORDS BY SUE WILLIAMS
IMAGES BY OLIVER MARILL



THE WOMAN'S HOWL IS AS VISCERAL AS ANYTHING heard in an episode of *Game of Thrones*. “Noooo!” she wails, as celebrity chef Heston Blumenthal tells a group assembled on the terrace of the elegant mansion of the Fraser Gallop Estate in the rolling vine-striped hills of the Margaret River region that you should never put cream in a carbonara sauce.

There are clearly some concepts that are just too confronting for the mortal mind to accept, even in the most idyllic of settings. But when you're exploring one of the most delicious regions of Western Australia over the three-day Margaret River Gourmet Escape in the company of such men as molecular gastronomist Blumenthal, seafood tsar Rick Stein and charismatic Brazilian chef Alex Atala, then simply nothing can be taken for granted.

Bacon-flavoured ice cream? Salt cod fritters? Fried lemongrass ants? Along with the regular fine food and drink of the area, they're now all the stars of this annual event in one of Australia's most successful wine-growing regions, three hours south of Perth, and home to more than 150 cellar doors. It's a meeting of great produce with some of the country's most stunning scenery that has made this such a stellar success.

While the final touches for this year's program for November 21-23 are still being made, to give you a flavour, the 2013 event kicked off with an evening beach barbecue on the white sands of Castle Bay Beach in Cape Naturaliste, the northernmost part of the region, near the town of Dunsborough. As the sun slipped below the water in a glorious purple haze, everyone grazed on gourmet twists on barbie standards from venison pies to prawns, tiny chunks of whiting in batter, and freshly shucked and garlic-grilled scallops.

Other special events included a pop-up Rockpool Bar & Grill restaurant in a cavernous tin shed transformed for the night into a beautiful restaurant, long tables set among the vines, talks and dinners in picturesque wineries, masterclasses and, the regular centrepiece of the whole shebang, the Gourmet Village held in the grounds of the Leeuwin Estate just >>