



## First look: Southern Ocean Lodge opens its doors

The Kangaroo Island property, destroyed in the Black Summer fires, finally reopens on Wednesday in the most hotly anticipated tourism reveal of the year

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[The fully restored Great Room of Southern Ocean Lodge, Kangaroo Island.](#) Picture: [George Apostolidis](#)

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Almost four years after Southern Ocean Lodge on Kangaroo Island was razed by the devastating Black Summer bushfires, the luxury property has been reborn, rising with renewed beauty from the ashes.

The doors will swing open on Wednesday to the rebuilt lodge's Great Room, hovering above the limestone cliffs of the island's wild southwest coast.

Dubbed SOL 2.0, the [\\$55m property](#) has lost none of its wow factor, with an [all-inclusive price tag](#) to match – \$3400 a night for two.



[The spectacular outlook of Southern Ocean Lodge, Kangaroo Island. Picture: George Apostolidis](#)

Baillie Lodges' founders and creative directors, and SOL's parents, James and Hayley Baillie, and resort managers John Hird and Alison Heath, have been overseeing the final touches as a slew of tradies race to the finish line before opening day. Everyone is weary but elated.

"It's not often you get to do something twice," said James Baillie, "to be able to tweak and massage and work on what could have been done better...(this) lodge will be a significantly better product.

"But it's been a huge slog ... even though we'd done it before it's not easy building in such a remote location with trades and the availability of materials and we did it right through Covid."

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The impressive Great Room is eerily identical to the destroyed original, right down to Khai Liew's beautiful bespoke furniture, remade again, and two fire survivors: the sleek suspended fireplace, back from France after restoration, and Sunshine the kangaroo sculpture and unofficial lodge mascot.

Many will remember seeing photos of Sunshine, a work created by local artist Indiana James from combine harvester parts, standing alone in the burnt-out shell of the lodge. Now Sunshine is back, standing proud and tall.

The lodge has a similar footprint to the original but many new features. Working with original architect Max Pritchard, who grew up on the island, the 23 guest suites easing down the coast have been cleverly reoriented to provide even better ocean and coastal views. And the elegant suites' layout has been redesigned to feel "cosier, like being aboard a ship looking out to sea", said Hayley Baillie.





[Sunshine amid the burnt-out ruins of the lodge.](#)

A new premium “owners pavilion” boasts two plunge pools high on the clifftop, plus there’s an expanded day spa with gym and hot and cold plunge pools and a larger deck in front of the Great Room with a wet-edge pool looking out to sea.

Only a dozen or so suites are open in the lead-up to Christmas as the resort beds down but demand is running hot.

“(When) the property opened reservations in May they took more than a million dollars of bookings in one day,” said James Baillie.

Many of the guests arriving this month were regular visitors to the old lodge, opened in 2008 and a game-changer not only for the island, where one in two jobs is linked to tourism, but for Australian tourism as a whole.



[The terrace and pool, Southern Ocean Lodge, Kangaroo Island. Picture: George Apostolidis](#)

Back then, SOL bagged a host of international awards and attracted a new cohort of high-end travellers from the US and Europe, tapping into a market so effectively courted by New Zealand. The return of SOL has generated plenty of interest among overseas travel press with Kangaroo Island leaping to the top of places to visit in 2024.

Return visitors will not only notice changes to the lodge but to the vast wilderness ravaged by the 2020 fires. Ghostly tree trunks run to the horizon but the lush bush has regenerated swiftly, exhibiting a new beauty built on resilience.

And the lodge has employed cutting-edge technologies in the rebuild, increased water capture and storage, solar power generation, a remote-controlled sprinkler system and the planting of tens of thousands of fire retardant plants around the perimeter.

It's a new iteration for a new era on Kangaroo Island.