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Doing time on KI

KANGAROO ISLAND HAS EARNED A SUMPTUOUS REPUTATION FOR GREAT PRODUCE, AS JANE ADAMS CONFIRMS.

Words **Jane Adams** Photography **Tony Lewis**



The simply serene outlook over Snellings Beach, Kangaroo Island.

History tells us that the first fabulous feast consumed on Kangaroo Island was on March 2, 1802 when mariner explorer Captain Matthew Flinders and his hungry crew sat down to celebrate their discovery. They dined on no less than 31 kangaroos, gnawing from near head to tail the marsupial that gave its name to this remarkable island.

One wonders how Kangaroo Island's gastronomy might have evolved if valiant French sailor and cartographer Nicholas Baudin had beaten Flinders to KI's 540-kilometre coast. He landed less than a year later near Penneshaw, on Australia's third largest island (after Tasmania and Melville Island), also reportedly devouring roo stew.

Those early KI visitors and residents – escaped convicts, sealers, whalers and unhappy sailors – didn't have erudite conversations about regional produce or food miles. They just hunted, fished and panned salt for survival, unwittingly passing their resilience, tenacity and stoic independence to subsequent generations of Kangaroo Islanders.

A FRESH FOOD BOUNTY

A visit to Fryar's Free Range Eggs sets the scene. Established in 1992 by Fiona and Tom Fryar whose father was one of the island's original soldier settlers, this 4000-acre property is home to 45,000 Highline brown chooks.

This merry band of free-ranging happy layers dwells in 45 purpose-built solar-powered portable sheds, each one guarded 24/7 by a pair of Maremma dogs trained to ward off eagles, feral cats and possums. (KI is a fox-free zone.)

The Fryars produce, crush and mix all their own feed grain, and collect about 10,000 dozen golden-yolk brown eggs a week in a well-loved ute, its contents largely destined for mainland breakfasts.

So too is the annual honey harvest from Kangaroo Island's Ligurian bee colony. In the early 1880s enterprising August Fiebig established an apiary near Penneshaw on



the Dudley Peninsula with 12 hives from Liguria, Italy. The Island's bees are all claimed to be direct descendents of the original colony – gentle-natured, disease-free honey producers protected since 1885 by a curious law declaring KI the world's only bee sanctuary.

Peter Davis of Island Beehive says he had a 'bee change' swapping sheep for honey. His property at Flinders Chase abutted the government apiary where inevitably Peter developed a fascination for bees. Now he runs 1000 hives to produce a range of intensely flavoured organic honeys including the aromatic Spring Flora and intense Stringy Bark.

Peter's palpable passion for Kangaroo Island is only slightly overshadowed by loquacious William Marshall who established another unique food chain sanctuary, the Rare Breeds Farm at picturesque Stokes Bay on the north coast. Here the prime purpose is to pat rather than to probe with knife and fork, while Will enthuses about his latest progeny – the Baudin pig. It too is directly descended from original inhabitants, two pigs left by the thoughtful Frenchman to provide food for future sailors.

These stocky squealers, thought to originate from South Africa (where Baudin stopped for supplies before sailing east), are now Will's primary focus as he builds his genetically pure conservation herd. He hopes to eventually market rare breed KI-reared Baudin pork.

OFFERINGS FROM THE SEA

Breeding programs also preoccupy the site managers at the Ausab Abalone Farm, near Stokes Bay. This impressive facility, owned and operated by the West Australian-based Kailis seafood dynasty, literally sucks the sea onto land to irrigate abalone beds protected by shade-cloth, where spawn are nurtured in over 1000 sea water-sluciced 'baths' and regularly fed with algae flour pellets.

After three years, these highly prized green-lipped and tiger abalone (members of the snail family) are ready for harvest and 'exported' to Australia's eastern seaboard and Asia where Kangaroo Island's pure clean waters command premium returns. The latest Southseas Abalone product is pre-sliced and marinated in Japanese seven-spice, mirin and soy.



This page (clockwise from top left): Sheep at Island Pure Dairy; a sample of Ausab Abalone; tasty canapés; fresh mulberries; Island Beehive honey. Opposite page: Heavy ploughing, on Snellings beach.

TREASURED TERROIR

Neighbours at Cape D'Estaing vineyard, managed by Wayne Conaghty, make an intense, spicy Shiraz (rated 92 by American point pundit Robert Parker) and the velvety blockbuster Cape D'Estaing Cabernet Sauvignon 2004, a finalist for the prestigious 2010 George Mackey Trophy flagging Kangaroo Island's largely unheralded potential as a wine region.

In fact, if another Frenchman has his way it's likely that Baudin's relatives may discover KI wines before some mainland connoisseurs. Flying winemaker Jacques Lurton spent his honeymoon on KI in 1997, deciding it was rather like the Languedoc, the ideal terroir for his Down Under venture, which he named The Islander. Lurton snapped up a soldier settler landholding and close-planted 11 hectares of grapes. His flagship Islander Yakka Jack is an esoteric blend of Sangiovese and Cabernet Franc, one that has captured palates from his local KI community in Parndana to Paris. Perhaps that explains the number of French speakers on the flight back to Adelaide?

ISLAND RETREATS

To sample and slurp your way through KI's full food and wine feast, you definitely need a few days. So where to stay?

If you have ever wanted to wake up facing towards Antarctica with a blustery ocean swell at the foot of your bed, then one of the shipwreck-named rooms of the spectacular Southern Ocean Lodge is a must. Set low in coastal bushland and surrounded by National Park, this luxury 21-suite lodge appears to tumble down the cliff edge – a dramatic isolated architectural statement that assimilates the grandeur of its setting with contemporary comfort and subdued sustainable design.

The use of local limestone, recycled timbers, natural earth colours and kangaroo theme bespoke soft furnishings cossets and calms against the windswept coastal backdrop, best viewed from arguably the world's most scenic shower. Plaudits too for the bushwalkers' incentive day-packs and water bottles, and the



admirable South Australian focused wine selection to slake energetic thirsts. Rates include daily breakfast, lunch and 4-course seasonal KI produce-driven dinners, and airport transfers.

FIRST CLASS FORAGING

Some people go to health retreats where they exercise well and eat little; others will prefer Nick Hannaford's deliciously edible idea of a Gourmet Food Retreat. Scion of South Australia's Holden automobile family, Nick knows how to create magic moments – and there were many dished up during his two-day 'Field To Feast' all-frills Kangaroo Island foraging tour. Nick whisks you straight from the airport to Kangaroo Island Pure



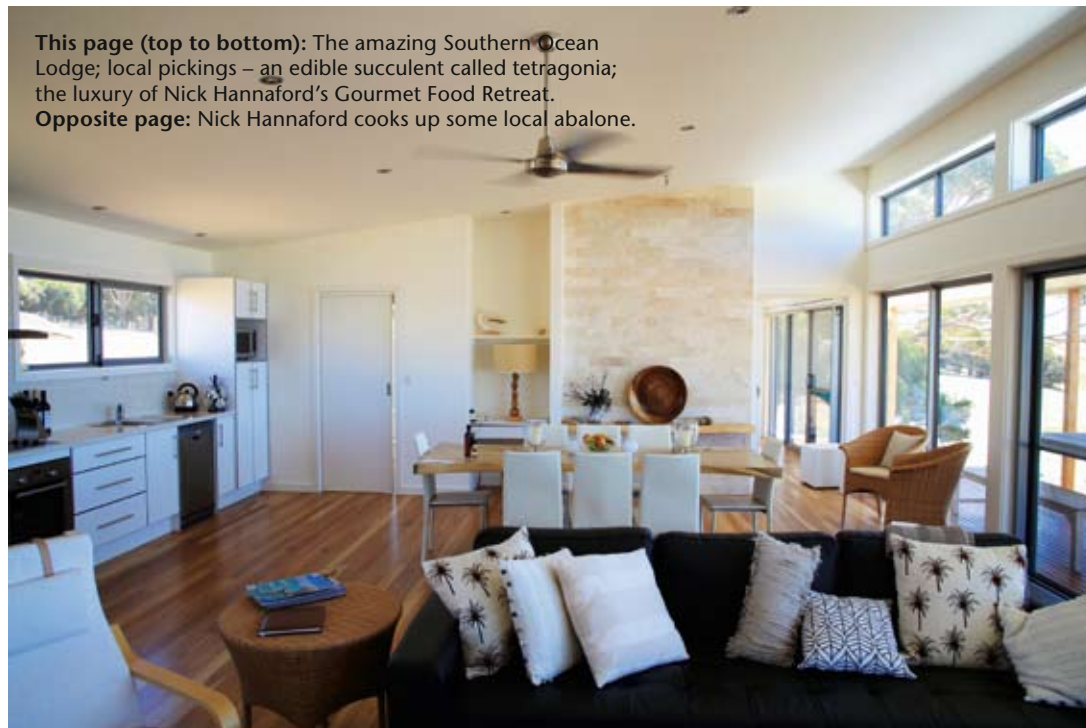
Sheep Dairy to try the day's fresh cheese, or to Fergusons seafood store for lobster tails and lobster oil, and KI Seafood for the lightly battered daily catch served with piquant pickled samphire collected from nearby rocky coves.

The 'hunter-gatherer' retreat introduces you to the producers who supply the food for the meals Nick prepares and hosts. His motto 'find it, eat it' means the seaside barbecue at the Hannaford's beach shack may feature periwinkles from nearby rock pools, grilled baby abalone, calamari with sheep's fetta, and King George whiting. The Shearer's Feast in the historic corrugated iron shearing shed starts under a 100-year-old fig tree and finishes with pick-your-own mulberry pie. All meals are complemented by local wines.

Feasters stay in three private luxurious homes in spectacular natural settings – the Sky House (two guests) a rammed earth Moorish bastion with breathtaking views; Stone House, a three-bedroom stone cottage set in coastal bush, and the white stucco Mediterranean-mood Cliff House that literally hangs over Snellings Beach (both comfortably housing six guests).

Another accommodation option is nearby Snellings View, a pair of architect designed spacious two-bedroom villas with big verandas, all mod-cons and breathtaking vistas.

This page (top to bottom): The amazing Southern Ocean Lodge; local pickings – an edible succulent called tetragonia; the luxury of Nick Hannaford's Gourmet Food Retreat.
Opposite page: Nick Hannaford cooks up some local abalone.



ROUGH AROUND THE EDGES

Now don't be fooled. All this talk about fabulous food, wine and luxury accommodation makes KI sound like a garden of Eden. But it is actually a wind-buffed landscape exposed to the strong winds of the Southern Ocean, where low-lying scrub and tinder dry bushes cling valiantly to salt-crusted soil. The distances between hamlets are deceptively long and the majority of roads that criss-cross the isle are unsurfaced and corrugated, ensuring bouncy bone-jarring sorties.

However, if you are willing to adopt some explorer tenacity colonised on the island, these slight discomforts will eventually amplify your holiday stories and intrepid foragers' rewards.

Jane Adams travelled to KI as a guest of Lifetime Private Retreats and the South Australian Tourism Commission.

+ Info

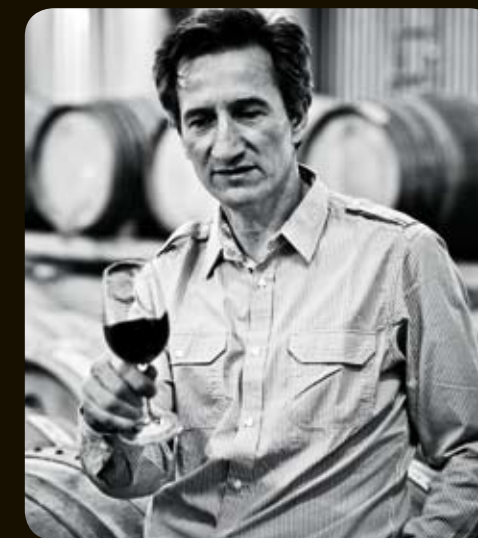
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Jacques Lurton is a prominent French winemaker who fell in love with Kangaroo Island and established The Islander Estate Vineyards in the year 2000.

Kangaroo Island is a vigneron's paradise. The ample sunshine, offset by cool maritime breezes, helps produce wines of elegance, concentration and restrained power.

For tours and tastings or more information please call 08 8553 9008 or 0429 886 711.

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