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PHOTOGRAPHY: SOUTH AUSTRALIA TOURISM

LAP OF LUXURY

WORDS BY ALIX CLARK

Discover regional riches and the redefinition of luxury at South Australia's indulgent lodges.



Clockwise from above: South Australia is world-renowned for its wines; The Louise in the Barossa Valley offers scenic hiking; The eco-smart fireplace at Kangaroo Island's Southern Ocean Lodge; Arkaba Station in the Flinders Ranges serves drinks alfresco.



Luxury, *noun* 1. indulgence in and enjoyment of rich, comfortable and sumptuous living.

That was then, but now luxury has taken on a new definition, or three:

1. enjoying a gourmet meal cooked on an open fire in the Flinders Ranges before choosing between three types of pillows and going to sleep in a swag that's been made up with 500-thread-count sheets;
2. luxuriating in a hot, private outdoor shower in the Barossa Valley after dining on an eight-course meal with wines to match;
3. padding across a heated limestone floor in your suite to light the fire set into the coffee table, and then settling into the sunken lounge area to admire the view that stretches all the way from Kangaroo Island to Antarctica.

That's how luxury is manifested in three different but equally luxurious lodges in regional South Australia. ▷



This page, clockwise from above: Arkaba Station arranges deluxe camping; The sundowner, complete with canapés, is an Arkaba tradition; The homestead's refurbished interior is 'settler chic'. Opposite page, from top: Savour Barossa Valley views with a glass of the local drop at The Louise; Experience fine dining at Appellation; All suites at The Louise offer absolute luxury.

HOME FROM HOME

Arkaba Station, Flinders Ranges

As the sun rises over the mountain range known as the Elder that forms one boundary of the 21,405-hectare Arkaba Station, the ancient rocks glow red and then fade to mottled brown; they're dotted with caves and a scattering of foliage where Aboriginal art sites and rarely sighted tree kangaroos abound.

In-house field guides Kat Mee and Brendan Bevan are on hand to ensure that guests of the outback station don't miss a thing while they're touring in an open safari-style 4WD that's packed with all the essentials: water, binoculars and, of course, canapés and sparkling wine for sunset drinks (or tea, coffee and freshly baked muffins for the sunrise tour).

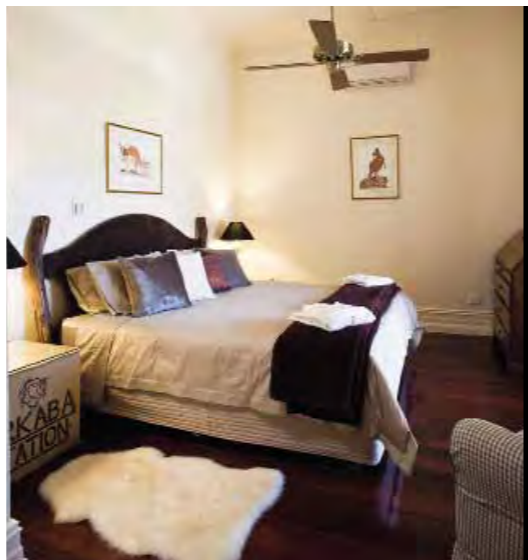
Over the course of our time here, we see kangaroos, wallabies, emus, shingle-back lizards, wedge-tailed eagles (and their chicks) and a plethora of other native fauna. Back at the homestead, we are met by our hosts bearing cool washcloths and mint lemonade. There's just enough time for a revitalising rainwater shower before Arkaba Station's full-time chef serves lunch in the outdoor dining room.

Arkaba was built in 1856 and luxuriously renovated at the end of 2009 to create a five-suite homestead that has taken its decorating cues from the property's history as a sheep station. The depot shed had up to 40 bladeshearers handling the flocks of many surrounding properties.

Staying at Arkaba is much like staying with country friends – if your friends own a very large farm, have excellent taste in



I have just enough energy left to retire to my suite to enjoy the stars and the steam on offer in the outdoor shower.



interiors and have a chef on call, that is. The towel rails in the spacious bathrooms are fashioned from old fence posts, the bedheads are upholstered in sheepskin and the bedside tables are miniature Arkaba-branded wool bales. We are encouraged to help ourselves to the bar, relax in the library or loll about in the outdoor lounge room.

In addition to homestead stays, Arkaba offers luxury bushwalking and camping for groups of up to eight people. The 50-kilometre walking safari takes four days and covers the length of the property. At the end of each day, guests relax at a well-appointed bush camp with a deluxe swag with 500-thread-count sheets, a pillow and even a thick mattress. Roughing it never looked so smooth.

VALLEY HIGHS

The Louise, Barossa Valley

From the rugged beauty of the Flinders Ranges we travel south to the rolling vineyards of the famous Barossa Valley, where some of the oldest vines in the world grow. Our accommodation here is The Louise, an all-suite establishment that is home to South Australia's finest

regional restaurant, Appellation. Once we've settled into our spacious suite, which comes complete with a private courtyard, a terrace with vineyard views and a private outdoor shower, it's hard to leave, but our tour guide and his vehicle awaits – and it's difficult to ignore a gleaming vintage Daimler. Nor can we ignore our guide John Baldwin's impressive handlebar moustache, but we don't let that distract us from the task at hand: tasting our way through South Australia's best wines.

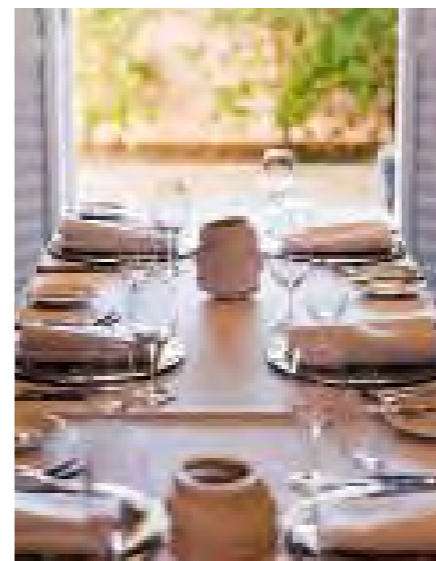
Yalumba is Australia's oldest family-owned winery. In addition to its barrel-making and distillery, it has an impressive series of cellars containing some seriously rare wines. These include a bottle of Madeira from 1827 (no, you can't afford it) and a Yalumba Four Crown Port that

travelled with Australian explorer Sir Douglas Mawson to the Antarctic from 1911 to 1914 (he didn't drink it all, so he returned the leftovers to his sponsor).

The cellars culminate in two impressive private tasting rooms that were once wine-holding tanks. The concrete walls have been stained by wine over the years and newly polished with paraffin wax. The aesthetic is envied by visiting restaurateurs as much as the wines.

Going from big to boutique we next visit winemakers Greg and Alison Hobbs on their front porch and then Damien and Eva Tscharke (10 minutes away). Both wineries are micro-sized but very well regarded by industry insiders and discerning customers.

Wine is only part of the sensory experience of the Barossa Valley and we return to Appellation, where executive chef Mark McNamara offers us a choice between a 10-course degustation menu or à la carte. We decide on à la carte, but four courses quickly turn into eight or nine with the addition of amuses-bouche, dessert and petits fours. All the dishes on the menu draw heavily from local produce, including the restaurant's own kitchen garden. The spiced roasted sweet potato, pepitas and almonds with cumin dressing, in particular, has me rolling my eyes and squealing in undignified delight. Well sated, I have just enough energy left to retire to my suite to enjoy the stars and the steam on offer in the very private outdoor shower. ▷



south australia



Clockwise from top left: Go beach fishing for garfish or snook on Kangaroo Island; Dramatic views from the Pavilion at Southern Ocean Lodge; The suites here epitomise subtle luxury.



OCEAN BREEZE

Southern Ocean Lodge, Kangaroo Island

The relaxed pace of the Barossa Valley seems like veritable bustle compared with the solitude of Southern Ocean Lodge, which is perched on the south coast of Kangaroo Island in splendid isolation. This spectacular and much-awarded lodge is breathtaking in every aspect – its design, its vistas and its luxurious attention to detail. The owners have opted for subtlety: in each of the 21 suites the limestone tiled floors are heated; the bookshelf in the lounge area is full of holiday reading; and the complimentary in-room minibar is well stocked with delicious local treats.

The suites are situated along a 250-metre breezeway that tumbles down the coastline

from the Great Room, where guests meet for pre-dinner drinks and for all meals. On our arrival, the Great Room offers the full force of a view that stretches in every direction, from coastal headlands to bush full of wildlife and an ocean that next laps the shores of Antarctica.

However, there's more to see here than the view and we join a tour to nearby Flinders Chase National Park, 20 minutes' drive away. We spot the island's tamar wallabies but, sadly, no koalas, despite the fact that the island has a large population, which was introduced in the 1920s when koalas were under threat on the mainland. The introduced mammals thrived on Kangaroo Island to such an extent that a sterilisation program was begun in 1997 and the population is now back under control.

The most remarkable sight of the tour is just that – the Remarkable Rocks – six- to seven-metre spherical boulders balanced on a coastal monolith. Driving for another 10 minutes further down the coast, we stumble across a colony of New Zealand sea lions that flirt, play and fight before they bask on the rocks.

Speaking of basking, we head back to the lodge for another locally inspired meal before grabbing a glass of wine and wandering up to the star-gazing deck. Here we admire an ocean of stars before heading to bed and falling asleep to the sound of Antarctic waves. 🍷

Getting there • To book your Virgin Blue flight to Adelaide, visit www.virginblue.com.au or call 13 67 89 (in Australia).

GETTING AROUND

South Australian Air Charters

To minimise your travel time so you can maximise your relaxation time, consider charter flights. A small plane, such as the five-passenger Navajo we boarded, is perfect for those travelling with family or friends. South Australian Air Charters offers a number of options, landing at airstrips close to the various lodges. Private transfers can then be arranged with the accommodation operators to take you to your destination. Not only is the service convenient, it also allows you to get your bearings with an aerial view of your destination. +61 4 1431 6755, www.saac.net.au

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