



AUSTRALIAN PLACES TO VISIT BEFORE YOU TURN SIXTY-FIVE

BY SUSAN GOUGH HENLY

How many Australians have speared a trevally with a traditional owner in the aquamarine waters off Arnhem Land, slept in a swag under a canopy of stars in the Simpson Desert, watched flocks of red-legged jabiru rise from billabongs thick with purple water lilies or found the perfect Robinson Crusoe tropical isle? Many of us leave it until we've qualified as grey nomads* and are already retired. Australia has a wealth of travel adventures from pristine wilderness to the isolated outback and T+L, in consultation with a panel of experts, has found them. So, don't wait - go now.

*grey nomad *say: gray'nohmad*
noun colloquial: 1. an older person, often retired from full-time work, who travels around the country, living in a caravan or motorhome.

DEFINITION: MACQUARIE DICTIONARY



In selecting our 65 remarkable, and often secret, places we have sought the guidance of experienced trailblazers and specialists who have seen Australia.

THE TRAILBLAZERS

BARBARA AND JOHN SULLIVAN

Queenslanders Barbara and John Sullivan spent more than a decade living in the United States and Europe before settling in Sydney. Barbara is the chief executive of a trade publishing firm and John runs his own real estate company. They have explored Queensland, the High Country, the Flinders Ranges, the Simpson Desert, the Red Centre, the Top End and the Kimberley in their 4WD.

Next trips The Gulf Country; up the Oodnadatta Track and the Tanami Track to Halls Creek.
You must see Australia because "The sheer remoteness can't be replicated anywhere else in the world."

IAN AND SIMONE CARSON

Ian Carson, chairman of a major turnaround company, and his wife, Simone, recently returned from a 10-week trip with their three children circumnavigating Australia from Cairns to Melbourne. Two years ago they created Second Bite, a non-profit organisation that recycles surplus food from markets.

Next trips Camping with an

Aboriginal community; Tasmania's Overland Track and exploring the south-west wilderness.

You must see Australia because

"It is vital to show your children so they can understand their own country before they head off across the world."

GILL AND BARRY BRACKEN

Sydneysiders Gill and Barry Bracken have retired to a vineyard in the Hunter Valley. Barry was a leading orthopaedic surgeon while Gill worked in finance. They have combed Australia in their 4WD exploring the Flinders Ranges and the Red Centre, crossing the Simpson Desert and driving from Sydney to Perth. They've also done extensive long-distance sailing trips and cruised the north coast of Australia from Broome to Cairns.

Next trips Max Davidson's Arnhem Land safaris; Cocos (Keeling) Islands off Australia's north-west coast.

You must see Australia because

"It's our own backyard but there is still so much that is unknown."

BARRY DAVIES

Lamington Plateau-based Barry Davies is a freelance, certified eco-guide who leads walking, bird watching and other special-interest tours throughout Australia and the world. He operates tours through his company, Gondwana Guides. He won the Ecotourism Association's Australian EcoGuide of the Year Award in 2005.

Next trips Norfolk Island; a seven-day walking trip along the rabbit-proof fence through the mountains of the Scenic Rim in southern Queensland.

You must see Australia because

"It is rich with ancient stories, fascinating wildlife, colourful landscapes and characters. It is unique."

THE SPECIALISTS

Drew Kluska, founder of Outback Encounter, and Charlie Carlow, founder of Wilderness Australia, have distilled the essence of Australia to offer their well-heeled, mostly international, clients opportunities to stay in intimate properties and experience unspoilt locations with locals. Both of these travel innovators drew inspiration from the African safari experience. The irony is, says Kluska, they are showing visitors a side of Australia that most of its residents have never seen.

"Australia has some of the last great wildernesses on earth and there is a certain eccentricity about the locations and characters that give the country a particular charm," says Carlow. "We try to translate what is uniquely Australian and take off the rough edges."



Roaring 40s kayaking takes place at Breaksea Island, TAS, seen here from Mount Stokes.

TASMANIA

THE LODGE AT TARRALEAH

Why here Located on the edge of the Tasmanian wilderness, this Art Deco lodge, originally built to house Tasmania's hydro electricity officers, now showcases contemporary Tasmanian design, local gourmet specialities and a wide range of wines and single malt whiskies, not to mention sensational fly-fishing, bushwalking, mountain-biking and wildlife.

In the know Enjoy the view over forested green hills and valleys from the cliff-top hot tub.
Essentials 03 6289 1199; www.tarraleahlodge.com; a two-hour drive from Hobart or Launceston.

SOUTH-WEST WILDERNESS

Why here This is one of the most remote places on the planet, doubly inscribed on the World Heritage list for its values both natural (it is one of three remaining temperate wilderness areas in the Southern Hemisphere) and cultural (indigenous sites

reveal human habitation for 30,000 years).

In the know From the base of a comfortable bush camp, Roaring 40s Kayaking offers kayaking in a vast drowned river valley surrounded by jagged mountains. There's also walking across dramatic ridges, button-grass plains and ancient forest.
Essentials 03 6267 5000; www.roaring40skayaking.com.au

PEPPER BUSH ADVENTURES

Why here Tasmania is your oyster with Craig Williams at the helm. This local bushie is an expert on the Tasmanian wilderness and crafts trips tailored to your interests, be they bushwalking, wine-tasting or wildlife-viewing.

In the know He is particularly fond of showing people the reclusive platypus, the eastern quoll and virgin old-growth forests, but be sure and ask for his bush-tucker recipes such as Tasmanian three-spice trout with lemon myrtle, mountain pepper and native kunzea.
Essentials 03 6352 2263; www.pepperbush.com.au

BRICKENDON, LONGFORD

Why here Stay in the historic coachman's or gardener's cottage at this working farm run by the same family for seven generations.

In the know Kids love to feed the ducks, goats and chickens and play old-fashioned games in the original farm village with its barn, chapel, henhouse, bakery and woolshed.
Essentials 03 6391 1383; www.brickendon.com.au; 20 minutes drive south-west of Launceston.

NEW SOUTH WALES

MUNGO NATIONAL PARK

Why here The moonlike landscape of Mungo National Park, part of the Willandra Lakes World Heritage area, contains traces of Aboriginal inhabitation going back 40,000 years, making it the oldest known site of human occupation in Australia.

In the know Take a tour with Aboriginal guides from Harry Nanya Tours to visit places like the Walls of China. Stay at the Aboriginal-owned Mungo Lodge, which is reopening in >>

ON THE WATER

Bruny Island, TAS

Tonia Cochran of Inala Nature Tours conducts bird-watching and wildlife tours while Bruny Island Charters offers a dramatic boat trip to a seal colony. Bruny Island is 40 kilometres south of Hobart, accessible by ferry (www.brunyisland.net.au); Inala Nature Tours, 320 Cloudy Bay Road; 03 6293 1217; www.inalabruny.com.au; Bruny Island Charters, 03 6293 1465; www.brunycharters.com.au; Accommodation: Morella Island Retreats, 03 6293 1131; www.morella-island.com.au.

Strahan and the Gordon River, West Coast Yacht Charters, TAS

Sail across Macquarie Harbour on the 20-metre ketch, Stormbreaker, and up the Gordon River where you stay the night. Enjoy the rain-forest's mirrored reflections long after the cruise ships have left. 03 6471 7422; www.tasadventures.com/wcyc

Myall Lakes, NSW

The largest coastal lake system in NSW and an important water bird habitat makes this a perfect area for meandering by houseboat. Luxury Houseboat Hire, Bulahdelah; 02 4977 4380; www.luxuryhouseboat.com.au

Great Barrier Reef with Enterprise Charters, QLD

This 17-metre luxury cruiser, with a master and two twin cabins, offers private cruising on the reef, with exquisite food and snorkelling. You choose wherever you want to go between Port Douglas and Lizard Island. 07 4098 5279; www.stargatamarine.com

Kimberley coast, Coral Princess Cruises, WA

"The Coral Princess Cruise we did from Darwin to Broome was stunning, right at the top of our favourite Australian journeys anywhere," says Gill Bracken. Visit a Wandjina art site at Bigge Island, fly to the Mitchell Falls by helicopter, witness the tidal rush at Horizontal Falls. 07 4040 9999; www.coralprincess.com.au

April 2008 after a complete refurbishment.

Essentials Harry Nanya Tours, 03 5027 2076; www.harrynanyatours.com.au; Mungo Lodge, 03 5029 7297; www.mungolodge.com.au; 110 kilometres from Mildura in south-western NSW.

MONTAGUE ISLAND

Why here Explore NSW's largest colonies of fairy penguins and fur seals on this nature reserve eight kilometres off the coast at Narooma. There are two options for staying in the restored head lighthouse keeper's quarters: a fully catered, fully guided program with Conservation Volunteers Australia or the brand-new self-catering option.

In the know This is one of the Southern Hemisphere's best dive locations.

Essentials www.montagueisland.com.au; Conservation Volunteers Australia, 03 5330 2600; www.conservationvolunteers.com.au

NORTHERN TERRITORY

BAWAKA CULTURAL EXPERIENCE, ARNHAM LAND

Why here Traditional owner, Timmy Djawa Burarrwanga, has fashioned a remarkable tour to share his culture on this pristine

stretch of white sand fringing the aquamarine sea.

In the know Women learn about basket-weaving and men about spearing fish. And more often than not, you'll enjoy a big feast of fish, oysters and mud crab.

Essentials Port Bradshaw, 08 8987 3433; dhanbul.admin@octa4.net.au; Qantas flies to Gove.

DUGONG BEACH RESORT, GROOTE EYLANDT

Why here This new resort has a fascinating array of indigenous art and tours (rock art, spear-fishing, bush tucker) by the Anindilyakwa community. Former footballer Andrew Ettingshausen's sports-fishing operation is next door.

In the know Located off the east coast of the Northern Territory, Groote Eylandt has only recently opened to tourism but there is an existing infrastructure (thanks to the BHP Billiton manganese mine on the island) that belies its remoteness.

Essentials 1800 877 077; www.dugongbeachresort.com.au; flights from Darwin on Vincent Aviation and Qantas-affiliated Airnorth.



Opposite from left: the Maningrida Aboriginal art community in Arnhem Land, NT; posh camping at the Mornington Wilderness camp, WA.

REMOTE ABORIGINAL ART COMMUNITIES BY AIR

Why here Visit Balgo Hills, Fitzroy Crossing, Maningrida, Ngukkur, Tiwi Islands, Yirrkala and Haast's Bluff to learn about each culture and buy art directly from the artists.

In the know Art collector, experienced pilot, and former remote area nurse, Helen Read has developed close connections with more than 35 remote Aboriginal communities in the past 22 years.

Essentials 08 8948 5055; www.didgeri.com.au

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

KIMBERLEY COASTAL CAMP

Why here Remote even by Kimberley standards, this beach destination has half a dozen gazebos, fashioned from corrugated iron and driftwood with crushed shell floors, tucked amongst sandstone outcrops.

In the know Admiralty Gulf is a world-class fishing spot. Rock overhangs reveal mysterious

SAFARIS

Davidson's Arnhem Land Safaris, NT

Davidson's is number one on the list for everyone who has explored the Top End. "A major highlight is the rock art and the birdlife is extraordinary," says Ian Carson. 08 8927 5240; www.arnhemland-safaris.com

Lord's Kakadu and Arnhem Land Safaris, NT

Sab Lord lived in Kakadu before it was declared a national park and grew up with the local Aborigines. Today he handcrafts private adventures for an insider's look at the remarkable landscape, wildlife and rock art of the Top End. 08 8948 2200; www.lords-safaris.com

Eyre Peninsula, Australian Coastal Safaris, SA

In a world first, you can swim with southern blue fin tuna at Port Lincoln, follow the oyster trail at Coffin Bay, and swim with wild sea lions and dolphins in Baird Bay. "This is a remarkable combination of local knowledge of sea life and seafood," says Drew Kluska. 08 8351 7185; www.australiancoastalsafaris.com

Bush Safari Company camel safaris, SA

Rex Ellis has been leading camel safaris for 33 years. One of his most popular is through the remote parts of Flinders Ranges where you will see the rare yellow-footed rock wallabies, lizards and peregrine falcons. For the hardy there are extended desert expeditions and boat trips following inland floods. 08 8543 2280; www.safarico.com.au

Kangaluna Camp, Eyre Peninsula, SA

Geoff Scholz delivers the quintessential luxury Aussie safari, offering insights into the ancient volcanic landscape of the Gawler Ranges plus, says Charlie Carlow: "Some of the best opportunities to see Australian fauna in the wild, such as red and grey kangaroos and echidnas." 08 8680 2045; www.gawler-rangessafaris.com



Bradshaw art (elongated human figures with elaborate decorations). The open-air shed, with its found-art sculptures, is the site of inspired meals of sparkling, fresh seafood.

Essentials 0417 902 006; www.kimberleycoastalcamp.com.au; small plane from Broome, Kununurra or Darwin to Mitchell Plateau and transfer by helicopter to Admiralty Gulf.

BUSH CAMP AT FARAWAY BAY, KIMBERLEY

Why here Cruise up King George Gorge to massive twin falls cascading over magnificent cliffs. Check out the dugongs, sharks and crocs, bathe in a freshwater swimming hole and even hit golf balls over the cliffs. **In the know** On a red rock terrace above the blue waters of Faraway Bay, the open-sided, slate-floored Eagle Lodge is where delicious buffet-style meals feature seafood or camp-oven roasts. Screened corrugated-iron cabins with simple ensuite bathrooms are open to the breezes and bird calls.

Essentials 08 9169 1214; www.farawaybay.com.au; small plane from Kununurra, Darwin and Broome.

MORNINGTON WILDERNESS CAMP, KIMBERLEY

Why here This is the Australian Wildlife Conservancy's showcase, a 3000-square-kilometre property featuring spectacular gorges and tropical savannah. For the fortunate few there are just 10 luxury safari-style tents overlooking beautiful Annie Creek.

In the know "We took our kids on an early morning birdwatching tour led by a young scientist who showed us extremely rare species, such as the Gouldian Finch," says Ian Carson. You can canoe the Dimond Gorge, take a cooling dip in Sir John Gorge and visit the remarkable falls at the Fitzroy Bluff natural amphitheatre.

Essentials 08 9191 7406; www.australianwildlife.org; 80 kilometres off the Gibb River Road by 4WD.

KARIJINI ECO RETREAT, PILBARA

Why here This is a brand-new luxury eco tent resort owned by the Gumala Aboriginal Corporation. **In the know** "There is one place where you stand on a precipice above the intersection of four gorges. The water is a remarkable luminescent green, which is different to anywhere else," says Ian Carson.

Essentials 08 9425 5550; www.gumala.com.au; 1400 kilometres north of Perth.

NINGALOO REEF RETREAT, EXMOUTH

Why here Snorkel with turtles, kayak to the blue lagoon, and from April to July, swim with the whale sharks, the gentle plankton-eating giants of the deep.

In the know "You walk five metres through translucent water off a pure white-sand beach and you are on the reef," says Simone Carson. "And the enthusiastic young guides take you on drift snorkels and explain so much about the marine life." »



FROM LEFT: CAROLINE WEST; COURTESY MORNINGTON WILDERNESS CAMP; OPPOSITE FROM TOP: JENNIFER SOO, AMANDA PRIOR; BOUSOLE PERPALINOR COMPASS FROM HERMES (S1080); WWW.HERMES.COM



From left: driving cattle on Bullo River Station, NT; the rolling hills of the Barossa Valley, South Australia's premier wine region. Opposite: the stunning view from Bedarra Island Villa and Studio, QLD.

Essentials 08 9949 1776; www.ningalooareefretreat.com; a one-hour drive from Exmouth on Yardie Creek Road to Cape Range National Park. Free daily bus transfers from Exmouth.

KEPA KURL ECO DISCOVERY TOURS, ESPERANCE

Why here The beaches around Esperance are some of the best in Australia and this award-winning eco tour company named after the Aboriginal name for Esperance offers insight into the indigenous population.

In the know Learn about hunting and gathering bush and beach tucker, drink fresh water on the beach, go whale-watching.

Essentials Esperance Museum Village, cnr Dempster and Kemp streets, Esperance; 08 9072 1688; www.kepakurl.com.au

DAMPIER PENINSULA INDIGENOUS TOURS

Why here Several Bardi communities share their culture and country via informal tours.

Lombadina Aboriginal Adventures has motel-style units, a craft shop with pearl and ebony jewellery and offers bush tucker tours, kayaking, fishing charters and mud crabbing. Goombaragin Eco Ventures has excellent bush and beach tours and eco tents overlooking the deserted coastline.

In the know "We loved visiting Lombadina," says Simone Carson, "to see the ancient human footprints alongside those of a bird-like dinosaur."

Essentials Lombadina 08 9192 4936; Goombaragin 08 9192 4717; www.waitoc.com

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

SIMPSON DESERT

Why here This ocean of sand has 1111 of the world's longest parallel sand dunes, underlain by the Great Artesian Basin. "The 60 sensuous springs at Dalhousie Springs range from 38°C to 43°C and are surrounded by paperbarks and waving reeds. There are heaps of Aboriginal mythological sites

STATION STAYS

Pungalina Station, Tennant Creek, NT

Located in isolated, lush country (65 kilometres from the Savannah Way by 4WD) with big gorges slicing through the landscape, limestone caves and crystal-clear swimming holes. There are opportunities to go barramundi-fishing and kayaking. 03 9882 4236 (reservations) or 08 8975 8951 (station); www.pungalinasafaris.com.au

Bullo River Station, NT

This cattle property (200 kilometres from Kununurra by 4WD) has massive winding rivers, gorges, wetlands, crocs, birds, barramundi-fishing, rock art, boab trees and hearty country cuisine. 08 8354 2719 (reservations) or 08 9168 7375 (station); www.bulloriver.com

Ooraminna Homestead, Deep Well Station, NT

An authentic, 2000-square-kilometre Red Centre cattle station situated just south of Alice Springs. Accommodation in spacious bush huts. 08 8953 0170; www.ooraminnahomestead.com.au.

Home Valley Station, WA

Nick Bradley has Kimberley blood running through his veins and has transformed this Aboriginal-owned property 120 kilometres from Kununurra into a jewel of an experience with luxury tents and huge open showers. 08 9161 4322; www.homevalley.com.au.

Arkaba Station, Flinders Ranges, SA

Surrounded by the magnificent Elder and Chace Ranges and the southern wall of Wilpena Pound, this sheep station sprawls across craggy sandstone escarpments and slate creek beds lined with river red gums. Don't miss the ridgetop 4WD tour through some of the most rugged landscapes on earth at nearby Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary. Arkaba Station, 08 8648 0004; www.arkaba.com and Arkaroola Sanctuary, 08 8648 4848; www.arkaroola.com.au

BEACH RETREATS

Kims Beach Hideaway, Toowoon Bay NSW

Kims embodies the essence of a perfect beach getaway: fabulous food and spacious bungalows containing everything you need. While it has evolved from a simple camp to luxurious hideaway, the Strachan family have held true to their personal attention to detail since the 1950s. 02 4332 1566; www.kims.com.au

Woodwark Bay, Airlie Beach, QLD

Absolute privacy is what this luxurious beach house compound is all about. Six artfully appointed thatched-roofed huts are just part of the draw, the in-house chef provides superb food and wine and there are many playthings from jet skis to quad bikes for guests to enjoy. 08 8354 4405; www.outbackcounter.com

Bedarra Island Villa and Studio, QLD

Near the water's edge in the heart of a 0.8-hectare estate wrapping around a palm-fringed beach, the open-plan villa and studio are perfect for tropical living. Contemporary Hotels, 02 9331 2881; www.contemporaryhotels.com.au/bedarra

Sea Breeze 1770, QLD

A modernist beach house combining sensational views, high design and eco-sensitivity, plus access to a private super-yacht to explore the southern Great Barrier Reef. 08 8354 2723; www.seabreeze1770.com

Sanctuary Retreat at Mission Beach, QLD

Set on 18 hectares of rainforest, this affordable and accredited eco-lodge, 700 metres from a pristine beach, is one of the few places to see cassowaries in the wild. Cabins and huts on stilts have views of the Coral Sea. This is a perfect setting for a range of yoga retreats. 72 Holt Road, Bingil Bay, 07 4088 6064; www.sanctuaryretreat.com.au

here," says Gill Bracken.

In the know "You can only go about 25 kilometres an hour with your tyres let right down," says John Sullivan. "It's easier to go west to east."

Essentials www.parks.sa.gov.au/simpson_cp/visit for information about the Desert Parks Pass and Bulletin as well as access routes and safety tips.

PETER LEHMANN WINES, BAROSSA VALLEY

Why here Embodying both the traditions and maverick character of Australia's wine industry, Peter Lehmann founded his winery in 1979 to buy red wine grapes that were being threatened by the vine pull program. Today, Peter Lehmann Wines is a great place to enjoy a bottle of shiraz with a platter of Barossa produce in the shade of the river red gums.

In the know Seek out some of the other distinctive Barossa winemaker characters such as Robert O'Callahan at Rockford, Dave Powell at Torbreck and Charles Melton.

Essentials Off Para Road, Tanunda; 08 8563 2100; www.peterlehmannwines.com.au; www.barossa-region.org

HEAD OF BIGHT, NULLARBOR PLAIN

Why here The Bunda Cliffs – part of the longest line of cliffs on earth – are among the best places in the world to see the annual migration of up to 100 Southern Right Whales.

In the know Between May and October you can see mothers and calves feeding and playing beneath the cliffs.

Essentials This area is extremely remote so it is only accessible by 4WD, and the weather can be highly variable. The Bunda Cliffs are on Yalata Aboriginal land. To purchase permits to visit the area stop at the White Well Ranger Station two kilometres south of the entrance on the Head of Bight Road. www.yalata.org »



FROM TOP: COURTESY BEDARRA ISLAND VILLA AND STUDIO; OPPOSITE: GEOFF LUNG ©/F8 PHOTO LIBRARY.

COORONG

Why here Made famous by the movie *Storm Boy* in the 1970s, the Coorong is home to the largest permanent breeding colony of Australian pelicans. Explore this region with "the bird man", David Dadd who is a walking encyclopedia on its geology, biology and history.

In the know Stay in a historic cottage at Pottaloch Station, one of South Australia's earliest properties, located on the shores of Lake Alexandrina.

Essentials Coorong Nature Tours, 0428 714 793; Pottaloch Station, 08 8574 0043; www.pottaloch.com; indigenous activities at Camp Coorong, 08 8575 1557 and Coorong Wilderness Lodge, 08 8575 6001.

MCLAREN VALE

Why here Enjoy the best of all worlds in this haven on the Fleurieu Peninsula where voluptuous hills covered with grapevines, olive and almond groves meander down to a pristine coastline of white sandy beaches on Gulf St. Vincent.

In the know Foodies will discover an embarrassment of riches here: visit Willunga Farmers' Market on Saturday, Fino restaurant, Coriole Vineyards, the Victory Hotel and the Star of Greece, a colourful 1950s beach shack offering fresh seafood as well as the ultimate in beachfront views.

Essentials McLaren Vale Grape, Wine and Tourism, 08 8323 8999; www.mclarenvale.info; 40 kilometres south of Adelaide.

VICTORIA

GREAT SOUTHWEST WALK, PORTLAND

Why here This 250-kilometre loop weaves along unspoiled ocean beaches, through eucalypt forests, across lighthouse-topped capes above the tallest sea cliffs in Victoria and beside the dramatic gorges of the Glenelg, Victoria's longest estuarine river.

In the know One of the most popular sections of the walk is along Cape Bridgewater. You'll see spectacular blowholes, a petrified forest of Moonah trees, freshwater springs, and look out over Australia's largest permanent fur seal colony from the soaring cliffs.

Essentials Portland Visitor Information Centre, 03 5523 2671; www.visitdiscoverycoast.com. Stay at Cockles on the Beach beach house, 03 5529 5206 or Seaview Lodge, 03 5526 7276, at Bridgewater Bay.



The Coorong is home to the largest permanent breeding colony of Australian pelicans. Opposite: sleeping rough in style in a Blue Mountains luxury swag, NSW.

POINT HICKS LIGHTHOUSE, CROAGINGALONG NATIONAL PARK

Why here Stay in one of the two adjoining 1890s assistant lighthouse keepers' cottages above the pink granite headland first sighted by Captain Cook's lieutenant, Zachary Hicks, in 1770.

In the know Climb the spiral staircase of the tallest lighthouse in mainland Australia for a spectacular view over the 12-kilometre-long West Beach. Sandboard the highest dunes in

the Southern Hemisphere.

Essentials 03 5158 4268; www.pointhicks.com.au; 45-minute drive along dirt roads from Cann River.

CAPE OTWAY CENTRE FOR CONSERVATION ECOLOGY

Why here This post and beam mud-brick guest house is designed using the latest passive solar technology to leave an

Ballooning Canberra, ACT The atmospheric conditions and variety of landing sites make Canberra the perfect ballooning spot. What more peaceful way to view Australia's carefully planned capital built on sheep paddocks 93 years ago? 02 6285 1540; www.canberraballoons.com.au

ADVENTURE

Katherine River, Gecko Canoeing, NT

Below the famous line of 13 gorges, paddle along quiet pools, lined with paperbarks. Check out kites and kingfishers in the early morning stillness. Great outback tucker and sleeping in swags. 08 8972 2224; www.gecko canoeing.com.au

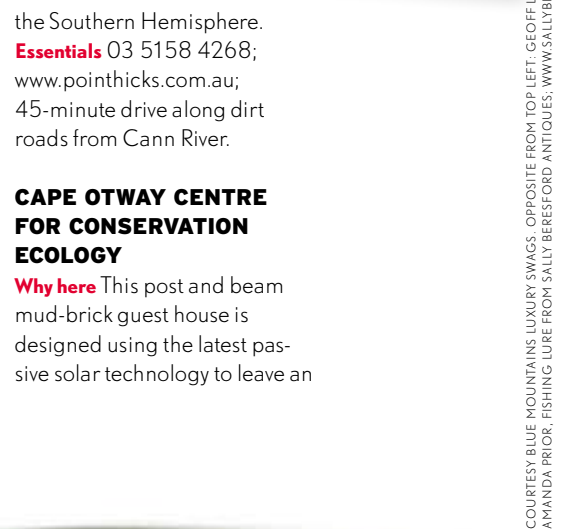
Kings Canyon Rim Walk, NT

The six-kilometre, three- to four-hour Rim Walk begins with a 500-step climb that locals have nicknamed "Heart Attack Hill". But once you get to the top the rewards are ample: breathtaking views of the gorge and a maze of beehive sandstone domes. Watarrka National Park is located about 450km south-west of Alice Springs. The brand-new Kings Canyon Wilderness Lodge offers deluxe eco tents at nearby Kings Creek Station. 03 9277 8499; www.aptouring.com.au

Blue Mountains stay in a luxury swag, NSW

Fly in by helicopter from Sydney and Mark Tickner will take you on a bevy of adventures that might include bushwalking and fly fishing, sleeping each night under the stars in a luxury swag. Wilderness Australia, 02 9571 6677; www.wildernessaustralia.com.au

High Country Horseriding, VIC No-nonsense horsewoman Helen Packer offers full-day high country rides, multi-day horse safaris with fully equipped campsites and weekend adventures. Stay at Pretty Willows Farm in the hidden Bundarra River Valley near Anglers' Rest in East Gippsland. 03 5159 7241; www.horsetreks.com.



COURTESY BLUE MOUNTAINS LUXURY SWAGS. OPPOSITE FROM TOP LEFT: GEOFF LIVING @ FB PHOTO LIBRARY; SUSAN COUGH HENLY; AMANDA PRIOR; FISHING LUKE FROM SALLY BERESFORD ANTIQUES; WWW.SALLYBERESFORD.COM.AU.



almost imperceptible footprint. Help monitor the wildlife or do part of the Great Ocean Walk.

In the know Observe kangaroos, koalas and other indigenous animals as you walk through their natural habitat of manna gums, messmate and maleulca.

Essentials Cape Otway Lighthouse Road, 03 5237 9297; www.capeotwaycentre.com.au

HERONSWOOD, MORNINGTON PENINSULA

Why here Explore five acres of "edible landscape" cottage gardens overflowing with heirloom vegetables, fruit and flowers surrounding historic Heronswood House. Then tuck into a flavourful "fork-to-fork" experience that champions the lowest food miles possible.

In the know Pick up a couple of practical tips from the resident Digger's Club gardeners about creating mini plots where you can grow enough vegetables to feed a family of four.

Essentials 105 Latrobe Parade, Dromana; 03 5984 7321 (shop); 03 5984 7318 (dining); www.diggers.com.au

MERRINDIE MOUNTAIN RETREAT, MANSFIELD

Why here Explore the high country in style, whether it is on horseback, by 4WD, or bushwalking.

In the know Relax in your hill-top chalet on more than 100 hectares with a trout-filled dam.

Essentials 08 8354 4405; www.outbackcounter.com.au

QUEENSLAND

GOLD COAST HINTERLAND GREAT WALK

Why here Experience dramatic waterfalls, panoramic lookouts, melodious bowerbirds and lyrebirds and the world's largest subtropical rainforest plus extensive temperate rainforests of soaring Antarctic beech.

In the know "The Lamington National Park has some of the country's best walking tracks," says Barry Davies. "The Coomera Falls track is one of the great rainforest walks in Australia."

Essentials Two hours' drive south of Brisbane. New eco-village and spa at O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat, 07 5502 4911; www.oreillys.com.au; Binna Burra Mountain Lodge has more traditional digs plus inspiring health spa. 07 5533 3622; www.binnaburralodge.com.au

SOUTH LONG ISLAND NATURE LODGE, WHITSUNDAYS

Why here This eco-escape at secluded rainforest-encircled Paradise Bay offers nine luxurious, renovated bungalows.

In the know The resort supplies its own solar energy and water and manages all waste, but it doesn't skimp on luxuries. Access is by helicopter and »



The Daintree River, Cape Tribulation National Park. Opposite, from left: rugging up for a walk along Wilsons Promontory, VIC; Shark Bay, WA.

you sail all over the Whitsundays in a private catamaran. Check out the fabulous aboriginal art. **Essentials:** 07 4946 9777; www.southlongisland.com

HAGGERSTONE ISLAND, NORTHERN GREAT BARRIER REEF

Why here The ultimate Robinson-Crusoe island, not far from the tip of Cape York, where Anna and Roy Turner have crafted two round huts with sundecks and slate bathrooms and a rustic beach shack with outdoor bathroom amidst the coconut palms. Guests gather for gourmet feasts straight from the sea and the garden in the soaring main pavilion. **In the know** Roy takes guests snorkelling around historic shipwrecks, swimming in lakes perched in mainland sand dunes and fishing for tuna, coral trout and barramundi. **Essentials** 07 4060 3413; www.haggerstoneisland.com; air charter from Cairns.

CARNARVON GORGE

Why here Gouged from the surrounding landscape, the 16,000-hectare Carnarvon Gorge is a lush oasis abounding in birdlife. Cabbage tree palms, grass trees, cycads and ferns line the main gorge beneath sandstone cliffs, while remnant rainforest flourishes in the sheltered side gorges. **In the know** "You must do the Moss Garden Walk and Ward's Canyon Walk [home to the world's largest fern]," according to Barry Davies. **Essentials** Carnarvon Gorge is located between Roma and Emerald. Stay at the Carnarvon Gorge Wilderness Lodge, 07 4984 4503; www.carnarvon-gorge.com or at the Takarakka Bush Resort, 07 4984 4535; www.takaracka.com.au

COCKATOO HILL RETREAT, DAINTREE

Why here Sleep tight in a hand-crafted king-sized timber bed in a thatched-roof treehouse with

stunning views above the rainforest to the Coral Sea.

In the know Owned by a French couple, Carmen Fabro and Gilles Germain, who with prior arrangement, offer delectable *table d'hôte* meals. **Essentials** 13 Cape Tribulation Road, Daintree; 07 4098 9277; www.cockatoohillretreat.com.au

MASTHEAD ISLAND, CAPRICORNIA NATIONAL PARK

Why here One of the most pristine coral cays in the southern Great Barrier Reef, with an untouched pisonia forest and a massive reef, this is also an important rookery for loggerhead turtles. **In the know** Even though it is a major undertaking bringing in water, tents, stove and food, it is one of the greatest things to experience wilderness camping on a tropical island. Because there is no lagoon you have to time your arrival and departure for high tide.

LANDMARKS

Shark Bay, WA

Australia's westernmost point is a major dugong habitat. At Hamelin Bay you can see the most extensive examples of marine stromatolites in the world. "They might be ugly but they are the oldest form of life on earth," says Simone Carson. www.sharkbay.asn.au

Wilson's Promontory, VIC

The Prom has something for everyone: a campground at Tidal River with eco cabins, motel units, even an open-air cinema. But the scenery is the main attraction: wide, sweeping beaches, granite headlands, and rainforest. www.parkweb.vic.gov.au

Mitchell Falls, WA

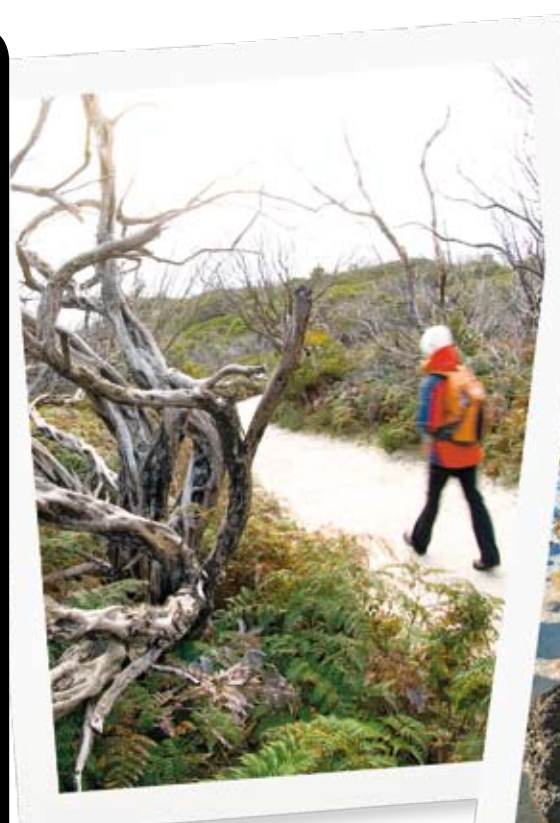
It's worth making the effort to drive and do the stunning bushwalk to the falls. "The best option is to walk about one-and-a-half hours down to the falls and take a helicopter back to the campground," says John Sullivan. Drysdale River Station, 08 9161 4326; www.drysdale-river.com.au has fuel, accommodation and meals.

Lord Howe Island, NSW

"You must come here for the pure beauty and unique birdlife," says Carlow. Cycling is the preferred form of transport on this World Heritage island. Relax in luxury at Capella Lodge, check out the rainforest, seashore or have Jack Shick guide you up Mt Gower. 02 6563 2114; www.lordhoweisland.info; Capella Lodge; 02 9918 4355; www.capellalodge.com.au

Mount Kosciuszko, NSW

This UNESCO Biosphere Reserve has six wilderness areas with lakes, wildflowers, historic huts, and Australia's highest mountain. Take a guided walk and catered camping experience to Blue Lake and Kosciuszko's peak. Kosciuszko Alpine Guided Walks, Lake Crackenback Resort, 1650 Alpine Way, Crackenback; 02 6451 3000; www.novotel-lakecrackenback.com.au



Essentials Camping permit required. Book by phone 13 13 04 or via the internet up to 11 months in advance with Queensland Parks and Wildlife, (www.epa.qld.gov.au/parks/), includes details on information packs and boat charters from Gladstone). The site is closed from October to Easter to protect nesting seabirds and turtle hatchlings.

LAWN HILL GORGE

Why here "In the middle of savannah country, Lawn Hill Gorge, filled with the emerald waters of Lawn Hill Creek, is surrounded by lush vegetation that attracts incredible birdlife such as crimson finches, lorikeets, parrots and the rare purple-crowned fairy wren," says Barry Davies. "There are good walking tracks and you can also rent canoes. Be careful not to disturb any freshwater crocodiles." **In the know** "A magic place to stay is Adel's Grove, named

from the initials of French botanist Albert de Lestang who developed an experimental garden in the 1930s and shipped seeds to botanic gardens all over the world," adds Davies. **Essentials** www.epa.qld.gov.au, 340 kilometres north-west of Mt Isa (via Riversleigh) on mainly unsealed roads. Air-strip at Adel's Grove, 07 4748 5502; www.adelsgrove.com.au.

ROSE GUMS WILDERNESS RETREAT

Why here Jon and Peta Nott bought a dairy farm in the hills above Cairns in 1994 and planted 14,000 native trees to return the 145-hectare property to its natural state. Now you can stay in hand-crafted pole and timber treehouses with floor-to-ceiling windows and cathedral ceilings. **In the know** You will hear many of the 160 bird species from your

spacious balcony, but be sure and try the rainforest walks and sample Laotian delicacies in the retreat's restaurant. **Essentials** Land Road, Atherton Tablelands; 07 4096 8360; www.rosegums.com.au,

UNDARA VOLCANIC NATIONAL PARK

Why here Walk in the path of a volcano. "This park is so unusual because it contains the remains of the Earth's longest flow of lava originating from a single volcano," says Barry Davies. Caves within this lava tube are fertile pockets in which rainforest plant and animal species thrive. **In the know** Stay in a turn-of-the-century railway carriage at the Undara Lava Lodge. **Essentials** 07 4097 1900; www.undara.com.au; 300 kilometres south-west of Cairns. +

FROM LEFT: COURTESY TOURISM VICTORIA; COURTESY TOURISM WA. OPPOSITE FROM LEFT: AMANDA PRIOR; STAINLESS STEEL ARMY KNIFE FROM TIFFANY & CO. \$305; 02 9235 1777; PHOTO LIBRARY