

Four of the best Australian wilderness lodges, by Francesca Syz

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BAMURRU PLAINS NORTHERN TERRITORY Wake to the cacophony of blue-winged kookaburras and of buffalo splashing through the flood plain at Bamurru Plains, wild-bush luxury at its finest, a three-hour drive from Darwin, just west of the World Heritage-listed Kakadu National Park. There is an intimate, informal atmosphere at the lodge, which has nine Safari Suites built on raised timber platforms and open on three sides, to maximise exposure to the wilderness while you remain firmly in the lap of luxury. Meals are taken in the main lodge and suites have plenty of room for sprawling out with a book during the heat of the day. Heaven for twitchers, these plains are home to some 236 bird species including magpie geese, plum whistling-duck, egrets and ibis. Days are spent on exhilarating airboat trips, cruising the crocodile-filled Sampan river, fishing, and during the dry season, when the waters recede, heading across country on open-top 4x4 expeditions. The lodge is also located on a buffalo station, so if you're lucky you'll witness a muster.

The details Safari Suites from AU\$1,860 per night based on two sharing including all meals, drinks and scheduled activities, with a minimum two-night stay (00 61 2 9571 6655; bamurruplains.com).



ANGORICHINA STATION SOUTH AUSTRALIA For bushwalking, wildlife photography, Aboriginal rock art and a personalised outback experience, you can do no better than Angorichina Station, a working sheep farm in the beautiful red-coloured Flinders Ranges. Your hosts at the 1860s homestead, an oasis of calm and comfort in this dramatic landscape, are Ian and Di Fargher, whose family have run the place for four generations. The Farghers take only one group at a time, so guests will have their undivided attention and, best of all, the entire property (214 square miles) to themselves. A maximum of eight can stay at one time, in elegant, antique-filled rooms shared between the original pretty stone house and connected cottage, all set within landscaped gardens. Get involved as much or as little as you like – sheep mustering and shearing, on a guided walk to see emus, kangaroos and yellow-footed rock wallabies, or on a medicinal food walk with an Aboriginal guide, before returning to enjoy home cooking around the kitchen table and sundowners in the creek bed. **The details** Doubles from AU\$1,390 per night, based on two sharing, including all meals, activities and beer and wine with food (00 61 8 8354 2362; angorichinastation.com).

SOUTHERN OCEAN LODGE SOUTH AUSTRALIA Australia's third largest island but one of its least known, Kangaroo Island, a half-hour flight from Adelaide, is often referred to as the 'Galapagos of Australia' for its other-worldly wildlife and remote, rugged beauty. You will find dense forests, native bush and towering sand dunes, pristine beaches and a conservation-minded population of small-scale farmers and fishermen producing some of Australia's finest honey, olive oil, cheeses, oysters, prawns and crayfish. At the island's south-western tip is hip, high-end Southern Ocean Lodge, a low-rise, low-impact smudge on the horizon that follows the natural contours of its forested clifftop location. It has 21 chic suites with floor-to-ceiling ocean-facing windows, glorious lounging terraces, big sunken living-rooms and luxurious beds plus an excellent restaurant with an alfresco dining deck, and a Spa Retreat. Explore the numerous coastal tracks, join a gourmet food tour or head off on a guided hike to watch sea lions, koalas and more. **The details** Flinders Suite costs from AU\$1,800 per night based on two sharing, including full board and guided adventures. Minimum two-night stay (00 6 12 9918 4355; southernoceanlodge.com.au).



SAFFIRE TASMANIA There's an intelligent decadence about Saffire, a futuristic, 20-suite lodge on the Freycinet Peninsula, a 2½-hour drive from Hobart. Seven years and AU\$32 million in the making, this stone, timber and glass lodge opened in June. Like Southern Ocean Lodge, it embraces both conservation principles and its extraordinary setting, the gentle sandy curve of the peninsula. There is a central building shaped like a giant stingray with floor-to-ceiling windows facing Great Oyster Bay. Free-standing suites, fanning out on either side of it, are furnished with an eclectic mix of locally made timber furnishings and chairs by Charles and Ray Eames. Expect cashmere-covered hot water bottles, outstanding food and wine (don't miss the exceptional seven-course dégustation menu by the chef Hugh Whitehouse) and a spa that uses real Tasmanian sapphire dust. Daily experiences range from sea kayaking and night spotting at the marsupial lawn to visits to the local oyster farm. **The details** Suites from AU\$1,550 per night based on two sharing, including the dégustation menu and a spa treatment (00 61 3 6256 7888; saffire-freycinet.com.au). **Next week: British coaching inns**