



# Wilde

By RACHAEL OAKES-ASH

**K**angaroo Island. The name suggests a tourist trap for gullible foreign visitors. But while you will find bus tours on the island you won't find too many locals selling tacky souvenirs: probably because they're too busy tending to their land.

Situated a two-hour drive and 45-minute ferry ride, or a half-hour flight from Adelaide, the island is a pleasant mixture of farming, industry and tourism.

With about 500km of coastline and 4300sq km of land, a mere two days won't cut it. But that's all I have, plus a four-wheel-drive to navigate the unsealed roads of red dirt, soggy after recent rain. We city gals aren't used to connecting with fellow drivers, preferring to keep our eyes averted when navigating city streets. The first driver to pass me waves and I wonder if I have put my headlights on by accident.

The second does the same; the third lifts his fingers from the steering wheel and it is then I realise this is country etiquette when passing a fellow driver.

I take to it with gusto, willing another car to come my way, surprised at how pleased I am to be acknowledged. But there's more pleasure to come.

Life Time Retreats sits atop Snellings Beach on the north-east coast of the island. Three houses — Cliff House, Sky House and Stone House — share beachfront and hilltop private land owned by Belinda Holden, of the car family, and purchased three generations ago. It is now leased to her children, Rachel and Nicholas Hannaford.

This land will never be built out, and if you want a local shop or a pub you'd better start walking at sun-up. Life Time Retreat's remoteness is its biggest selling point.

There's a sense of theatre here — book accommodation and you'll receive one of the three houses all to yourself. Make sure you fill out the questionnaire sent to you upon booking, it's filled with obscure questions about your likes, dislikes and history that guarantee personal surprises during your stay.

All is revealed upon arrival as I enter the Cliff House that hangs high on the edge of the beach.



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The smell of popcorn wafts in the air and I am transported back to my family home. Popcorn was my childhood favourite smell, as I noted in the questionnaire.

The Life Time experience, complete with round turret bedrooms and shelves filled with games, is pure Enid Blyton lost in time except that the lashings of ginger beer are now laced with alcohol.

I am to meet Miss Rachel that evening at 7pm for a feast in the

Shearer's Shed set back from the beach behind the dunes, where the real performance begins: Bedouin-style drapes, red velvet, dripping candles, a massive wooden table with matching church pews and seven courses.

The next day, after yoga at Sky House, I am back on the road waving from my wheel.

There's no time for Life Time's croquet and high tea or Sunday Drunch (Saturday night leftovers to

create a mix of lunch and dinner) as seal colonies, honey farms and Flinders Chase National Park await.

Seal Bay on the east coast of the island is as touristy as it gets here. Groups are guided on to the rugged beach by rangers who ensure they keep the required distance from the colony of Australian sea lions that call this home.

Kangaroo Island is literally bursting with animal life. You will lose count of the number of wallabies and

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**Rugged beauty:** (Clockwise from far left) Sea lions in Seal Bay; Remarkable Rocks; the view from Cliff Top; and Stranraer homestead

Homestead is a working farm owned by Lynn and Graham Wheaton and set on 1200ha of lush, rolling land. It comes complete with its own cricket pitch and corrugated iron pavilion used by the community cricket team each Saturday in summer.

The homestead was purchased by Graham's grandfather in 1911 and restored in 1998 to its original form. It took four years to complete as it was done mostly by Lynn and Graham while she continued to work as the principal of the local school and he worked the property.

At Stranraer, it's all about the dining room. Most guests spend their days on eco, adventure or gourmet tours, returning to the Homestead at the end of the day to soak in the claw-footed bath before sharing stories over a meal.

Lynn delights with her culinary skills and joins Graham's after dinner conversation before doing it all again come breakfast time.

My return flight allows me just enough time to explore Penneshaw on the north-east coast. This is where the passenger ferry delivers people and cars to the island. The Penguin Stop cafe is one of a number of gourmet produce outlets featured on the Kangaroo Island food and wine trail. Serving up local epicurean delights, it doubles as an art gallery. Stop here off the ferry and you won't go much further.

When I next return, and I will, there is talk that a new eco-resort on the south coast will have been completed by the owners of Lord Howe's Capella Lodge.

It's a classic dilemma in paradise. When you have your own slice of a gem like KI, you don't always want others to know about it. Either way, I'm bringing my dollar back to the island: two days was only a tease.

**The writer was a guest of the South Australian Tourist Commission.**

## FACT FILE



**GETTING THERE:** Rex Airlines flies from Adelaide to Kangaroo Island from \$84 one way. Details: 13 17 13, [www.rex.com.au](http://www.rex.com.au)

By car and ferry: Kangaroo Island Sealink operates four daily passenger and vehicle ferries between Cape Jervis and Penneshaw. Return family passenger fare for two adults and three children starts at \$175. Details: 13 13 01, [www.sealink.com.au](http://www.sealink.com.au)

**STAY:** Life Time Retreats Solstice package includes transfers from Kingscote airport, breakfast and dinner, yoga, a full private bar and beach shuttle. \$600pp a night. (08) 8354 2368, or [www.life-time.com.au](http://www.life-time.com.au)  
Graham and Lynn Wheaton's Stranraer Homestead has four guest rooms, open fires and gourmet dining, from \$208 a room (sleeps two) including breakfast. [www.stranraer.com.au](http://www.stranraer.com.au)

Kangaroo Island Wilderness Retreat, on the edge of Flinders Chase National Park, is an eco-friendly lodge with wild wallabies. From \$140 a room. [www.kiwr.com](http://www.kiwr.com)

**MORE:** South Australia Tourist Commission's website [www.tourkangarooisland.com.au](http://www.tourkangarooisland.com.au)



roos you pass, while possums are abundant and you may well stumble on an echidna while trekking to the Remarkable Rocks formation on the south-east coast.

One place devoid of life is Little Sahara, a mini desert of sand dune after sand dune plonked in the middle of Australian scrub.

It's worth finding the unsigned turnoff for the photo opportunity.

Hospitality is what it's all about on this remote piece of land. Stranraer