

Small but perfectly formed

These petite Australian hotels and lodges punch above their size.

By SUSAN KUROSAWA



The view from Pretty Beach House on the NSW Central Coast.

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PRETTY BEACH HOUSE, CENTRAL COAST, NSW

Popular as a celebrity hideaway, romantic retreat or private house-party booking, this headland property on the Wagstaffe peninsula, about 20 minutes from Woy Woy, comprises an imposing main building made from mud bricks, sandstone and timber posts, and a series of three pavilions with plunge pools and one treetop penthouse, all set amid angophoras and heathland, with an eclectic interior design echoing bush and coastal colours and textures. There's a main infinity pool, small wellness spa, wine cellar and dining arrangements that can be as communal or private as you like. The tariff is inclusive of meals and drinks, with dishes influenced by Italian flavours; the eggs are from resident chooks and herbs freshly pulled from the garden. Luxurious details include Busatti bed linen, fine tableware

and deep bathtubs, and dedicated care from a discreet team that's looked after the likes of Bill Gates and Hollywood big guns.

Also try The Lodge at Dairy Flat Farm, Daylesford, Victoria.

prettybeachhouse.com

ARKABA, FLINDERS RANGES, SA



The Arkaba Homestead, Flinders Rangers, South Australia.

Just 10 guests can be accommodated at Wild Bush Luxury's Arkaba Homestead and satellite Coachman's Cottage; the original layout of the sprawling 1850s homestead has been retained, with four guestrooms opening to a classic country veranda, while the tucked-away cottage is popular with honeymooners. But beyond the heritage heart of this former sheep station, now a vast nature conservancy, lie adventures galore with experienced field guides, including wildlife viewing in - safari vehicles or on foot, birdwatching and photography excursions. The landscape itself is a lure, too, with high ranges, deep gorges and floodplains, and birders should note that almost 300 species have been recorded in the Flinders. An overnight heli-swag experience, including chopper and safari drive transfers, campfire dinner and sleeping under the stars on comfy platforms, is the ultimate add-on.

Also try Sal Salis Ningaloo Reef, Exmouth, WA.

arkabaconservancy.com

SPICERS BALFOUR RETREAT, BRISBANE



The Balfour Kitchen at Spicers Balfour Hotel. Picture: AAP

With an inventory of 17 guestrooms, this New Farm property is uniquely small for a capital city, and just a few minutes from the new Howard Smith Wharves development. Accommodation ranges across a restored early 20th-century Queenslander residence, with gabled fretwork and original archways, which opened in 2010 with nine suites, and a nearby 1930s building, added to the mix in 2015 and offering eight suites. There are all the expected design flourishes of a Spicers Retreats member, including hallways filled with Australian contemporary art. Head to the small rooftop bar for Story Bridge and skyline views; the Vietnamese cuisine at award-winning Balfour Kitchen, in the Queenslander house, includes Monday night “bao and bowls”, surely one of Brisbane’s best dinner bargains. The hotel has commendable eco credentials.

Also try Spicers Potts Point, Sydney.

spicersretreats.com

THE ISLINGTON, HOBART



Islington Hotel in Hobart is filled with heritage features. Picture: Richard Jupe

There are 11 guestrooms in this charming bolthole, with five classic chambers in the gracious 1847-built main house and six in a contemporary pavilion wing offering views of a well-groomed garden. Expect a seamless and tasteful blend of heritage features and modern comforts and the level of friendly service expected at a petite hotel. The Islington is suitable for couples, with a rule of no guests under 16 years, and its quiet South Hobart setting, with Mount Wellington views, is about five minutes by car from the Tasmanian capital's key attractions. Dining is taken seriously, with a focus on local ingredients and regional wines; and the owners' remarkable collection of arts and antiques takes centre stage in the drawing room and many suites, including three dressed in immaculate Regency style.

Also try The Lodge on Elizabeth, Hobart.

islingtonhotel.com.au

NOTE: Many Australian hotels and resorts are now closed during the COVID-19 crisis but the majority are taking forward bookings for dates later this year and into 2021.

SUSAN KUROSAWA



ASSOCIATE EDITOR (TRAVEL)