

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Rejoice, luxury hotels across Australia are beginning to reopen

As travel restrictions ease in many parts of the country, top resorts and hotels are planning their comebacks.



The Louise, one of the Barossa Valley's most indulgent stays, will be open from July.

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Monday morning – entering week nine of lockdown – and Emma Welling, director of sales and marketing at The Louise in South Australia's Barossa Valley, is busy helping prune the garden, shine the silver, and polish the grapes in readiness for reopening on July 31.

"We've definitely not wasted [this time](#)," she assures those familiar with the 15-suite property, which has been shut since late March. "Thanks to JobKeeper, we've been able to keep all 45 full- and part-time staff on the books – and now everyone is just focused on reopening."

Umbrella marketing group Luxury Lodges of Australia has 19 properties across the nation – less one since Kangaroo Island's spectacular [Southern Ocean Lodge](#) burnt to the ground in the devastating bushfires of January.



Even pre-COVID-19, The Louise checked in guests direct from the carpark to their room.

These properties represent the pinnacle of luxury accommodation in Australia, from The Louise's lead-in rooms for \$591 a night or a glamping tent at Sal Salis in Western Australia from \$849, through to [Lizard Island](#)'s spectacular The Villa, priced at \$6299 a night for two people.

By late March, every single one had closed due to the virus – and some located in remote areas of the Top End will remain closed for 2020, notably El Questro and Bamurru Plains.

But in line with government regulations, the bulk of the nation's luxury lodges are moving to a reopen phase, led by WA's Cape Lodge on May 29. On June 1, Pretty Beach House and sister property Bells in NSW will both fully reopen.



Sunset at Sal Salis – the perfect spot for whale watching from shore.

Given the standard of these properties, reopening is easier in many ways than for a multi-storey chain hotel.

"We are never crowded – we only cater for a maximum of eight guests," says Pretty Beach House's Brian Barry. "We're certainly looking forward to getting back to business in full compliance with new government regulations."

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Like all hotels, the luxury lodges will have to subscribe to the new world order of limited numbers of diners in their restaurants at any given time, increased deep cleans and social distancing rules in place.

"So much of what's being raised now we already do, but we're working on articulating this better," says Welling. "There will be subtle changes to ensure guests are totally comfortable on our property."



Pretty Beach House in the Bouddi National Park, NSW, and its sister property Bells will both fully reopen on June 1.

One thing you won't have to worry about at The Louise is a crowded check-in desk. Even pre-COVID-19, the property checked in guests direct from the carpark to their room. "There's no handling keys or signing documents using a common pen anyway," she adds.

In keeping with the philosophy of Luxury Lodges of Australia, all members are committed to no heavy discounting. Reopening rates at The Louise range from a lead-in price of \$591 to \$1200 for the top suite.

"The sentiment from Luxury Lodges and the tourism industry as a whole is that the Australian tourism industry is something really special," says Welling. "For everyone to go out and discount at this point would be unsustainable. I think our clients feel the same – they want our businesses to keep running."



The Louise's restaurant, Appellation, is now offering tiers of options in its menus because "everybody has taken a hit". **SA Tourism**

However, The Louise is looking at its restaurant, Appellation, offering "tiers of options" from its usual five-course set menu to cheaper three-course menus, given "we well understand that everybody has taken a hit".

Welling's tip for the sweet spot is the lodge's five mid-level suites, classed as Stonewell, available from \$800 a night per room.

"With an outdoor shower and gas log fireplace, they are my favourite suites for the cooler months," she says. "How could you resist a glass of Barossa's finest by the fire? It's ideal."

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Reopenings at a glance

FROM MAY/JUNE

Cape Lodge, Yallingup, WA

Reopening from May 29, the 22-room lodge is set on a vineyard in prime Margaret River wine country, offering easy access to the region's food and wine attractions, plus its wild coastal walks. Cape Lodge is a three-hour

drive south of Perth. Try the three-night "luxury escape" package from \$999 for two adults, or indulge in a private stay at the five-room Residence set on its own estate. capelodge.com.au

Pretty Beach House, Central Coast, NSW

Once you've seen a photo of the infinity pool under the gum trees at Pretty Beach House, overlooking Pretty Beach in Bouddi National Park – a 90-minute drive (or 20-minute seaplane/helicopter ride) north of Sydney – it will keep bubbling to the surface of your mind after every other draining day spent in the home office. It's open from June 1 and celebrity chef Sean Connolly is consulting chef for the four private pavilions, each equipped with a bar and plunge pool. Pavilions from \$1000 a person, per night, all-inclusive, or book the entire property for \$8800. prettybeachhouse.com

FROM JULY

Lizard Island Resort , Queensland

The most northerly resort on the Great Barrier Reef is set on an island national park a 60-minute flight from Cairns. Hoping to open on July 1, this is the sort of South Seas idyll where you dream about being shipwrecked. Choose from 40 rooms and suites, or splurge on the clifftop Villa with supreme Coral Sea views. Social distancing is no problem with 24 white-sand beaches to wander. Prices start from \$2200 a night. lizardisland.com.au



Lizard Island is the sort of South Seas idyll where you dream about being shipwrecked.

Sal Salis Ningaloo Reef, Cape Range National Park, WA

The only accommodation set inside the UNESCO-protected Cape Range National Park, clasped between Ningaloo Reef and the rusty outback. Located 1200 kilometres north of Perth, the tents reopen from early July, pending when the border between Perth and the Coral Coast is reopened. Book one of the 15 eco-luxe glamping tents and watch 'roos bounce along the dunes from the deck, or sip rosé on the coral-strewn private beach. Reef boat trips allow you to swim alongside six-metre whale sharks, manta rays and humpback whales. Best of all, there's no Wi-Fi. From \$849 a night per person, twin share, minimum two-night stay. salsalis.com.au

Mt Mulligan Lodge, Far North Queensland

Set on a privately owned, 28,000 hectare property at the foot of Mount Mulligan, the four-pavilion luxury lodge offers plenty of outback adventures. Access is via helicopter or four-wheel drive ex Cairns. Stay from July 10, with all-inclusive rates from \$1700 a night for two people through to \$3300 in the Outback Pavilion for four guests. mountmulligan.com

FROM AUGUST

Capella Lodge, Lord Howe Island, NSW

Scheduled to reopen from August 29, the nine-room lodge overlooks the ocean and rugged mountains on the southern end of Lord Howe Island. Sail your yacht there – or take a two-hour QantasLink flight from Sydney. Priced from \$850 a person per night to \$1800 for the premium Lidgbird Pavilion. lordhowe.com

Need to know

Please ensure you check relevant state government health warnings and travel advice before undertaking any trip.

To learn more about these properties, see luxurylodgesofaustralia.com.au.



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