

Coronavirus: Phones run hot at secluded getaway spots



Luxico sales representative Sarah Ogilvie (left) at a Byron Bay holiday property with Samantha Field and Vicki Lee. Picture: Natalie Grono

• **PENNY HUNTER**

After weeks of COVID-19 lockdown, Australians are embracing the domestic holiday dream — but with critical caveats. With almost all borders closed, they don't want to drive too far from home; they're not keen to share their space with strangers; and health and safety concerns are paramount.

Mountain cabins, luxury homes, caravans and campsites, and remote island hideaways are all on the agenda for consumers desperate for a change of scenery, and pent-up demand is fuelling a boom in inquiries and bookings.

Luxico, a high-end holiday rental agency with 250 properties in the eastern states, has had a doubling of inquiries so far this month, compared with last year.

Founder Alexandra Ormerod said this week's announcement that travel restrictions would lift in NSW on June 1 had sparked an influx of bookings for Byron Bay, the south coast and Palm Beach. She said her clientele was cautious, seeking self-contained seclusion and a sense of personal safety in the wake of the pandemic.

"Everyone's desperate to get the heck out of their house," she said, adding: "The big change this week has been consumer confidence to confirm bookings now that they know it's OK to travel.

“It’s all systems go and people are pulling out their credit cards.”

Individual operators, too, said phones were running hot as people sought to secure getaways far from the madding crowds

Satellite Island, an exclusive hideaway off Tasmania’s Bruny Island, is fielding a barrage of inquiries. “They’re booking for this year and next as fast as I can keep up,” said owner Kate Alstergren.

Cam Williams, who owns the Howes Valley Hideaway in NSW’s Hunter Valley, said bookings were coming in thick and fast. “It has been really noticeable how much demand there is,” he said.

And on Kangaroo Island in South Australia, Tamsin Wendt, the co-owner of Oceanview Eco Villas, said “health anxiety” was a significant factor driving the interest in her property, which sits on 200ha with 1km of coastline.



Satellite

Island, an exclusive and remote tourist haven off Tasmania’s Bruny Island, has been swamped with bookings.

The NSW government’s websites VisitNSW.com and Sydney.com had a surge in traffic of 116 per cent compared with the previous week, following Wednesday’s announcement.

Accommodation provider Stayz also revealed that NSW searches had soared 148 per cent this week, while South Australia and Western Australia experienced leaps of almost 340 per cent and 130 per cent respectively in the week after the relaxation of their bans were announced.

Those searches translated into reality last weekend when South Australians, permitted to travel for leisure again for the first time, flocked to the Murray region and Fleurieu and Yorke peninsulas.

“South Australia is blessed with lots of space, and that’s what people are looking for,” said South Australian Tourism Commission chief executive Rodney Harrex.

Research by Tourism and Events Queensland found the state’s residents were favouring short-haul, self-drive holidays, and there had been a spike on the caravan and camping front, something confirmed by the Caravan Industry Association of Australia.

CIAA spokesman Peter Clay said the pandemic was fuelling a level of interest in RV and camping holidays not seen since the industry’s heyday in the 1980s and 90s.

“I think there’s going to be this great reconnection back to Australia, which we haven’t seen for about 20 years because it’s been so cheap to travel overseas,” he said.

Susan Wheeldon, Airbnb’s country manager for Australia, said the service had experienced a strong resurgence in the number of people planning trips for later in the year and into 2021, driven by “a powerful desire to explore our own backyard”.

“People are looking for stays that are close to home, familiar and safe — and that make for - affordable getaways. It’s great to see Aussies are wanting to get out there to support their local tourism industry,” she said.

Tim Stanhope, general manager of Emirates One&Only Wolgan Valley, said he believed the resort was what the public had been craving since lockdown.

“We’re a luxury resort that’s an easy three-hour drive from Sydney. We’re surrounded by 7000 acres of stunning bushland, and guests have their own private villa with its own pool,” he said. “Guests can be as isolated or connected as they want to be.”

Craig Bradbery, chief operating officer for Baillie Lodges, which has Silky Oaks Lodge in the Daintree, Longitude 131 at Uluru and Capella on Lord Howe Island, said while interest in the remote, nature-based locations was high, a reopening of borders and restarting of flights was essential.

“We really need all the state borders to be open, which will allow our airlines to re-establish their networks. This will give Australians the ability and confidence to start booking and travelling again.”

Secluded spots to get away from it all.

Tasmania (open from June 15)

[Satellite Island](#), off Bruny Island

[Freycinet Lodge Coastal Pavilions](#)

[Kittawa Lodge](#), King Island

[Corinna Wilderness Experience](#), in the Tarkine



Kittawa Lodge, a new accommodation offering on King Island, Tasmania.

Queensland

[Makepeace Island](#), Noosa

[Spicers Hidden Vale](#), Grandchester

[Gilberton Outback Retreat](#), north QLD



Gilberton Outback Retreat, west of Townsville.

NSW

[Calabash Bay Lodge](#), Berowra

[Greencape Lightstation Keepers Cottages](#), near Eden (opening June)

[Howes Valley Hideaway](#), Hunter Valley

[Kimo Estate](#), Gundagai



Kimo Estate at Gundagai. Picture: Hilary

Bradford

South Australia

[Oceanview Eco Villas](#), Kangaroo Island (opening early July)

[The Frames Retreats](#), Riverland

[Arkaroola](#), Flinders Ranges

[Southern Ocean Retreats](#), Fleurieu Peninsula



The Frames at Paringa in South Australia's Riverland, overlooking the Murray.

Victoria (opening dates to be announced)



Interior of the 'Barn' at Ross Farm, Meeniyan, Victoria.

[The Lodge at Dairy Flat Farm](#), Daylesford

[Old Rectory](#), Kyneton

[Ross Farm](#), Meeniyan

[Lon Retreat & Spa](#), Point Lonsdale

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

[Pullman Bunker Bay](#), Margaret River

[Sophie's Vineyard](#), Yallingup

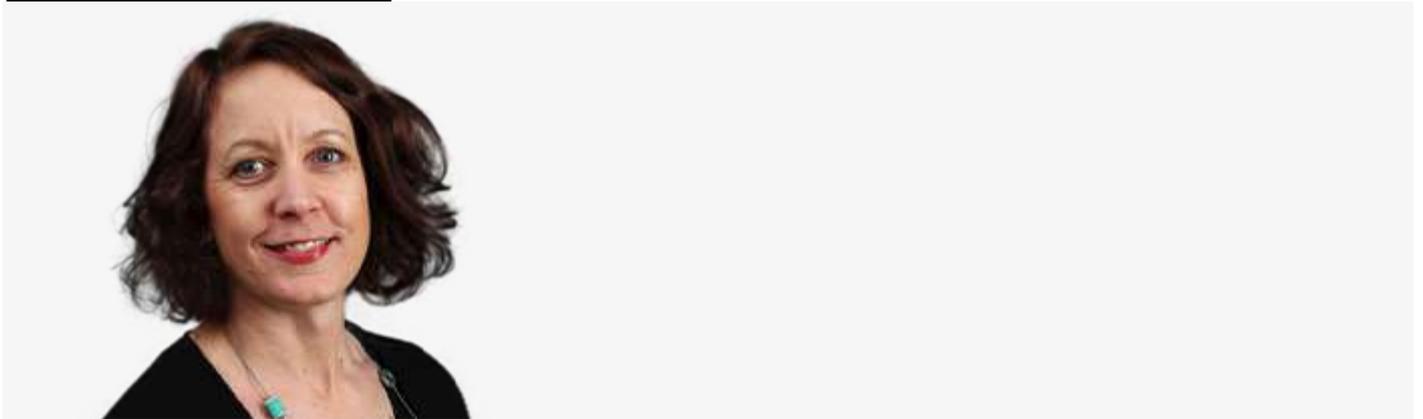
[Parry Beach Breaks](#), Denmark



Accommodation at Parry Beach Breaks, Denmark, WA.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions and grounded flights, some operators in remote WA and NT locations remain closed due to lack of access and to protect indigenous communities.

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