

FASHION PALETTE RESET AT MILAN MEN'S DESIGN YOUNG GUNS TO WATCH DIGITAL LIFE HEY, HOME AUTOMATION!

# Life & Leisure

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## TOP 25

### AUSTRALIAN ESCAPES IN 2023 NO PASSPORT REQUIRED

Fishing in the Tiwi Islands, where Coral Expeditions will cruise this year.



# Domestic bliss

## TRAVEL HOT LIST AUSTRALIA 2023



Feed your wanderlust with 25 fresh ways to escape right here at home, writes Fiona Carruthers.

**Looking for something** out of the box this year? A range of just-opened and about-to-open regional boutique hotels and five-star city stunners are on offer, as are a number of refurbished yachts offering new itineraries.

Whether you fancy hiring a boat with crew for half a day in the Whitsundays to discover the best “local” snorkel spots or staying on a world-famous horse stud near Scone in a designer home with a pool and firepit, here’s a handy guide to where to go in Australia this year and beyond.

### GONE COASTAL

#### 1 **Just get to the point** | South Arm Peninsula, Tasmania

Since opening last year, the three-bedroom, adults-only The Point has sealed its reputation as a highly coveted getaway. It’s a 20-minute drive from both Hobart CBD and Hobart airport, but another world away. Set on 20 hectares, the dramatic, architect-designed house overlooks Frederick Henry Bay and May’s Point surf break below. A private beach track takes you to the water’s edge.

Get in now before the golfers do: the nearby 18-hole Seven Mile Beach golf course is nearing completion. Tour professional Mat Goggin's development group The Golf Preserve is behind the project, slated to open later this year.

The Point is \$1650 a night in low season (for up to six adults), rising to \$1800 during peak season and during Dark Mofo, the winter festival happening this year from June 8-22.

If The Point is too big for your purposes, try the cute-as-a-button Arc Pavilion – a seven-metre-long tiny house on wheels for two with one queen-sized bed. Also opened last year, it's wrapped by decking and set in a garden with a deep-soak outdoor bathtub. Arc Pavilion is on Tassie's north-west coast, a 10-minute drive from Devonport.

## **2 Retro surf chic in the 'mook | South Coast, NSW**

If you like Halcyon House at Cabarita Beach in NSW, head for Motel Molly in Mollymook, which opened on December 1 and is far more wallet-friendly. Lead-in rates are from \$299 a night for a standard room, rising to \$699 for the three-bedroom suite – but the sweet spot is arguably \$389 for an oceanside balcony or garden suite.

With just 16 keys, Motel Molly is nice and cosy.

The property has been hailed as having strong Mediterranean influences, resembling Palm Springs with a Malibu vibe, and even hinting at Morocco. Yes, it's chic, and there are colourful tiles and a few exotic pots, but dare we say such descriptors might be fanciful. Let's just agree that Molly's gentle sorbet colours, classic old-surf-motel bones, cute retro pops (including surfboards and striped umbrellas) are bound to please, as is the easy-breezy room decor.

## **3 Well hello, Cressie Head |**

North Coast, NSW When you hear that Ksubi cofounder George Gorrow and his wife Cisco Tschurtschenthaler are about to open their first Australian hotel, you know it's time to crank up Sherbet's Summer Love, preferably from the cassette deck of a classic HG Holden with Trimatic 3-speed automatic transmission.

Sea Sea will open its doors on May 1, and like most things the Gorrows touch, it leans heavily into the 1970s for vibe and fitout.

Yes, at first blush, Sea Sea is yet another offering in the fast-growing "refitted retro surf motel" genre. But when the pair promise the single-storey 28-room hotel (remodelled from what was Crescent Head Resort) will be "nothing like what Crescent Head has ever seen", well, that's arguably the hotel industry's understatement of the year.

As one guest wrote of The Slow in Canggu, the Gorrows' hotel on the south coast of Bali: "Unbelievable decor, really unique for southern California in the '70s. let alone modern-day Canggu."

Virtually the only downside we can see is that sleepy Crescent Head can finally be considered officially discovered.

Sea Sea will also sell Non-Type, the new menswear label from Gorrow and Ksubi cofounder Gareth Moody.

#### **4 Spoilt for choice | Kangaroo Island, South Australia**

If there's one region to watch this year, it's Kangaroo Island, a 45-minute ferry ride or 30-minute flight from Adelaide. Named Karta Pintingga by the Kaurua Miyurna people, this is Australia's third-largest island after Tasmania and Melville Island.

Four Wander eco pods (sleeping up to 10 guests in total) opened late last year on the north coast of the island. Staying with the small-footprint genre, CABN will unveil its first off-grid tiny houses on Kangaroo Island in May with CABN Cape St Albans – a series of nine architecturally designed, custom cabins, each with a deck and outdoor bath overlooking the sea. You'll find them a 30-minute drive from Penneshaw, the island's main ferry port.

In November, Southern Ocean Lodge will reopen on its original site at Kingscote on Nepean Bay, close to the island's airport. The internationally acclaimed luxury lodge, originally opened by James and Hayley Baillie of Baillie Lodges in 2008, was burnt to the ground in the December 2019-January 2020 fires.

Original architect Max Pritchard and his partner Andrew Gunner have recreated the dream, and the Baillies and the architects argue the new \$50 million lodge will have even better views (as if that were possible). To achieve this, the building has been slightly reoriented to the south. It pretty much stays true to the original footprint, and the Osprey, Remarkable and Flinders suites will be reinstated with slight design improvements.

New to the lodge is a 640-square-metre Ocean Pavilion, sitting a short distance from the other suites, with a wet-edge pool, large terrace and four bedrooms and bathrooms. A luxurious day spa, gym, sauna, and hot and cold plunge pools are also in play, as is a strong emphasis on all things environmental and sustainable.

#### **5 Calling all lounge lizards | Sunshine Beach, Queensland**

Founded in 2013, Luxico private holiday homes offer only "ultra villas" and "home hotels" with no-expense-spared features such as 24/7 concierge, infinity pools, private theatres, helipad access, and views galore. If you want to stay where the movie and rock stars stay, jump on their site and peruse both the old classics and new additions. We'll take the five-bedroom, four-bathroom Spyglass on the Sunshine Coast at \$4800 a night.

CITY ROOM BOOM

#### **6 Heritage reimaged | Sydney**

Hard on the heels of the refurbishment of the InterContinental Sydney, housed in the 1851 Treasury building, comes Capella Sydney in the heritage-listed former department of education headquarters on Bridge Street. The Edwardian Baroque-style building by architect George McRae was finished in 1915. His legacy is celebrated by Capella with the McRae Bar, overlooking Loftus Street. On the dining front, Brent Savage and Nick Hildebrandt of The Bentley Group will create Brasserie 1930 in the vein of “a traditional brasserie, delivered through a contemporary Australian lens”.

This spectacular 192-room hotel, the first foray into Australia by Singapore-based Capella group, opens in March. The average room size is 55 square metres. The signature Capella Suite is 235 square metres.

Also look out for 82-room Hotel Morris (operated by Accor) opening soon in Sydney’s 1929-built West End Hotel at 412 Pitt Street.

## 7 **Putting on the ritz** | Melbourne

When it opens in March across the top 15 floors of the West Side Place project opposite Southern Cross Station, the 250-room Ritz-Carlton Melbourne will be Australia’s tallest hotel.

“With design that blends the best of the brand and the destination, combined with the finest amenities, culinary offerings and personalised service, The Ritz-Carlton Melbourne will deliver an experience tailored to today’s luxury guest, and deeply connected to this vibrant city,” says the hotel’s general manager, Antony Page.

Book a stay just to check in at the sky lobby, a glass-wrapped reception area on the 80th floor with city and Port Phillip Bay views. Even the indoor pool has floor-to-ceiling windows. This is the brand’s second property in Australia, after The Ritz-Carlton Perth.

Also look out for the 235-room Le Meridien. The brand is returning to Australia with a new hotel opening on Bourke Street in Melbourne’s theatre district.

## 8 **Five-star waves** | Gold Coast, Queensland

New York, London, Istanbul, Bordeaux, and now Burleigh Heads. Mondrian Gold Coast will be the line’s first branded residences in Australia when it opens later this year.

The development, comprising a 208-room hotel and 89 residential apartments, will feature a large pool, a fitness centre and spa, plus several restaurants.

Meanwhile, the Ritz-Carlton recently announced it would join a \$480 million waterfront development at Mariner’s Cove in Main Beach, scheduled to open in 2026 before the 2032 Olympics in Brisbane.

## 9 **Simply the biggest** | Sydney

Scheduled to finally open this year after multiple delays, W Sydney has been mired in controversy for being too big and flashy. But hey, this is the Emerald City: go brash or go home, especially when it comes to the Darling Harbour precinct.

The 585-room hotel will be the biggest W in the world when it finally opens in the distinctive curved “Ribbon” building. The Marriott-operated W Sydney will include an infinity pool, plus a swanky two-storey rooftop bar and restaurant.

### 10 **Manly refresh** | Sydney

Situated 17 kilometres from the city centre, the fully refurbished and rebranded Manly Pacific Sydney Mgallery Collection hotel is a shot in the arm for one of Sydney’s most famous beaches. A hotel has stood on this site since the early 1900s. Refurbished as an “ode to the ocean” in collaboration with Australian furniture designers Coco Republic, the Manly Pacific has 213 rooms, including the exclusive Infinity Residence.

Don’t neglect to call on the “beach butler” to put up your beach umbrella or run over an impromptu picnic. Wellness centred on the ocean will also be core to the hotel experience once the day spa opens later this year. The rooftop pool is a showstopper.

Lead-in rooms are priced from \$279 a night, while Ocean View rooms start from \$579 and Coastal Suites from \$1404.

## REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

### 11 **New York in the bush** | Central NSW

The former sheep farm Wilga Station is going from strength to strength. On the outskirts of Bathurst, 200 kilometres north-west of Sydney, what started as a secluded, Scandistyle “Farmers Hut” and romantic escape for two has morphed into a mini bush empire, including the Shearers Hall, a luxury five-bedroom retreat (opened in 2021).

Late last year, Wilga opened the heritage Wool Store in town, offering five New York loft-style apartments, including a penthouse with 360-degree views over Bathurst. Never has the bush looked quite so Big Apple. The property’s 2 million-litre natural swimming pond is also up and running.

Stay in town or on the 105-hectare working sheep farm that’s been in the Keith family for three generations. Prices start from \$275 a night for an Upper East Studio in the Wool Store or \$1400 a night for the four-bedroom Penthouse. The Shearers Hut is \$1100 a night (for up to 10 people), or \$450 a night for the Farmers Hut. Both are two-night minimum stays, and both include hot breakfast hampers.

A huge shout-out too for The Barn, an architecturally designed four-bedroom luxury house with native landscaped gardens and pool that’s just opened on picturesque thoroughbred horse stud Kitchwin Hills, near Scone in the Hunter Valley. As the property’s owners say,

“this is your unique opportunity to stay on a working stud farm and soak up all the atmosphere of horses and horse life”. Priced from \$1500 a night on weekends and \$1000 during the week, it sleeps up to 14 people.

### 12 **Big skies, lazy days** | Rakula, Northern Territory

The latest “big station stay” to join the Northern Territory’s roster is Finnis River Lodge in Rakula, a 90-minute drive or 20-minute charter flight south-west of Darwin. It sits in the territory’s tropical savanna region, governed by the wet (December to March) and dry (April to November) seasons. Note that the Indigenous calendar actually identifies six seasons a year, as heat and humidity rise and fall in between the wet and the dry.

Lap it all up from one of the lodge’s six just-built luxury rooms, all with expansive decks and air-conditioning. There’s also that five-star must-have: an infinity edge pool with views – in this case facing west across the floodplains.

Priced from \$1250 a night twin share for a minimum two-night stay that includes food, beverages and internal touring.

### 13 **Indulge the senses** | Dandenong Ranges, Victoria

This one is for your longer-term bucket list. Suffice to say, fans of the exclusive, wellness-focused Six Senses resorts can start rejoicing with a carrot juice. Six Senses (bought by the InterContinental Hotels Group in early 2019) will open its first Australian property in 2025 – at the historic Burnham Beeches estate in Victoria’s Dandenong Ranges.

The 22-hectare property, including a three-storey 1933 art deco mansion, will undergo a \$100 million redevelopment by Trenerry Consortium. The resort will have a 43-room hotel across the mansion’s three main wings and landscaped heritage gardens. Trenerry Consortium is backed by the wealthy Smorgon family, whose diverse business interests include hedge funds, steel and tomatoes.

In the meantime, the closest Six Senses remains Fiji (where rates start from about \$1400 a night plus taxes for a pool villa).

Those in the market for a small boutique stay in regional Victoria this year should consider the 18-room Portarlington Grand Hotel on the Bellarine Peninsula, a 32-minute drive from Geelong. The hotel, built in 1888, reopened last year after a multimillion-dollar refresh.

### 14 **Bathe and sauna in style** |

Sorrento, Victoria

A grand European-style bathhouse has just opened at the Aurora Spa, housed in the recently refurbished heritage hotel The Continental in Sorrento, 108 kilometres south of Melbourne. The all-weather bathing experience – with interiors by Woods Bagot –

celebrates the healing power of water. It's all done by Aurora founder Lyndall Mitchell, who has more than two decades of expertise in the wellbeing industry.

Guests can explore the large subterranean space of the Aurora Spa & Bathhouse at their leisure, or follow its set bathing ritual – a 10-step journey with a circuit of hot and cold experiences, featuring hydro massage elements and magnesium-rich waters.

A 90-minute bathing session is priced from \$95 to \$110. Aurora's signature 90-minute Himalayan Sound and Stone Massage is \$280.

Notably, Aurora also has one of the largest saunas in the southern hemisphere, as well as a custom-made glacial mist room. Overnight retreats are also available, including with Dr Libby Weaver, the internationally acclaimed nutritional biochemist.

## 15 **Bed down with Twiggy** |

Margaret River, Western Australia

Rich Lister Andrew “Twiggy” Forrest is a man with many hats, caps and visors, not to mention hi-vis vests. He also has a big passion for his home state of Western Australia. In December 2021, Forrest snapped up one of Margaret River's finest properties, Cape Lodge, via the family's investment vehicle Tattarang. Set on 16 hectares, the 22-room lodge has had continual tweaks, but the hot news here is a grand overhaul being rolled out over the next 12 to 24 months. Watch this space.

Meanwhile, a luxury four-bedroom, three-bathroom separate dwelling, The Residence, is available for up to eight people, priced from about \$6500 a night.

Margaret River will be a hive of activity this year. “Tiny house” leader Unyoked recently opened three “hidden” cabins (Nolan, Serena and Anja) in Augusta, at Margaret River's southern tip, and stylish Olio Bello – on a 130-hectare organic olive farm with 8000 olive trees – is upping its glamping game with 10 new safari-style bungalows perched around the lake.

Designed for minimum environmental impact and maximum comfort, each bungalow features an en suite bathroom, kitchenette, eco-fan, reverse-cycle air-conditioning and farm-made products. Priced from \$325 to \$350 a night with breakfast, the bungalows are designed for two people, but can accommodate more.

Staying in Western Australia, accommodation options are looking more promising in Kununurra with the opening of The Cambridge, formerly trading as the Ibis Styles Kununurra and now pitching itself as an upscale hotel.

Work is still under way around the hotel complex, but the dining areas and 60 fully refurbished guest rooms are ready – and the swimming pool will reopen later this year.



Situated in the heart of the eastern Kimberley region, it is a good base for guests to access El Questro Wilderness Park, Lake Argyle and World Heritage-listed Purnululu National Park.

## CRUISING INTO 2023

**16 So Frenchy, so chic** | Kimberley, Western Australia The arrival of three-masted French yacht Le Ponant in Australia from April has been almost as hyped here as the launch of the Titanic. But far be it from us to jinx Le Ponant, not least given Life & Leisure will be aboard its first voyage in Australian waters.

Le Ponant began sailing in the Mediterranean last year after an extensive refurbishment at the San Giorgio del Porto shipyard in Italy. The yacht is marketed as “barefoot luxury in a remarkably private setting” for 32 guests in 16 staterooms and suites. Look out for the new itinerary from Captain’s Choice, Kimberley Coast with Le Ponant & Outback Stations.

The 16-day Captain’s Choice itinerary departs on July 9, and includes visits to the Bullo River Station, priced from \$29,900 a person twin share.

**17 True to spirit** | Northwest Western Australia Australian-owned, Kimberley-based True North Adventure Cruises has rightly won itself a large fan base since it was founded in 1987. True North II, now in the final stages of its extensive refurbishment in Fremantle, will set off on its first voyage as a virtually new ship on March 28, from Perth to Dampier in the Pilbara region, carrying 20 guests over three decks.

The ship was originally launched in 1999, but is being totally refitted, with five dedicated adventure boats and a helicopter now part of the deal.

New itineraries include fishing and snorkelling at the Montebello Islands; seeing the solar eclipse at Ningaloo Reef; 13 nights on the Great Barrier Reef; and a seven-night itinerary suited to charter that will feature Christmas and New Year in Sydney.

The seven-night Ningaloo Eclipse voyage (April 15-21) starts from \$16,995 per person in Ocean Class. Note that berths on True North II are generally 25 per cent cheaper than on True North.

**18 My island home** | Kimberley & Tiwi Islands Queensland-based Coral Expeditions is casting its gaze north with new cruises for this year and next year that take in the sweep of the Tiwi Islands (80 kilometres north of Darwin), before sailing on to the Kimberley to explore ancient rock art dating back more than 40,000 years, including the Wandjina and Gwion Gwion paintings.

The 10-night journey on Coral Discoverer (which carries 70 guests) is priced from \$12,540 per person for sailings in August and September. The itinerary includes visits to the Munupi Arts and Tiwi Design centres, where art can be purchased direct.

**19 Living the dream** | Far North Queensland

Bareboating (sans crew or staff) has long been a thing in the glorious Whitsundays, 74 islands scattered across 283 square kilometres of water. But if you're not sure where to go – or want someone to hold your flippers – turn to Whitsundays Private Charters, which began operating late last year.

The company was started by Amelia and Jake Shearman, and the idea behind it was to offer more “accessible” luxury, so those short on time or money or both can briefly enjoy the high life.

The Shearmans take bookings for their Axopar 37 Sun-Top as a “whole boat” charter (regardless of whether it's for one person or more), and a wide range of tours are available between 6.30am and 6.30pm. (Note it's not available overnight, and is for a maximum of 10 people.)

This is a “choose your own adventure” product, with two-hour sunset cruises starting from \$1200, or full-day hire from \$4450. “The Whitsundays is about getting out there,” says Jake Shearman. “Snorkel for the day at your choice of reefs or distant islands. Get places fast with us, then take time to indulge in stillness.”

## 20 **Rent your own superyacht** | Sydney and beyond

Who wants to be a millionaire? You will when you enjoy fresh oysters and charred kingfish, puttanesca salsa, chickpeas and basil for lunch with a bottle of champagne aboard Sea Raes. This sleek superyacht, owned by media executive Antony Catalano's boutique hotel brand Raes of Wategos – began operating last winter in the Whitsundays, before arriving in Sydney at the end of November for its first season in the Emerald City. The stylish 29-metre yacht can take up to 10 guests, and has four crew members, including a chef. All menus are curated by Raes Collection executive chef Jason Saxby. Sea Raes will be on Sydney Harbour and Pittwater until April, before heading to the Gold Coast in May and June. It will then spend July to October in the Whitsundays and Airlie Beach. The boat can be hired from \$2000 an hour, for four hours minimum. Or hire it overnight for two full days from \$25,000.

## CULINARY JOURNEYS

### 21 **Under the Milky Way tonight** |

Kakadu, Northern Territory

Billed as Australia's premier Indigenous food festival and “a cultural food festival 65,000 years in the making”, Taste of Kakadu takes place from May 13 to 21 and includes a dreamy Kakadu Full Moon Feast, curated by Kakadu Kitchen's Ben Tyler. Just in time comes the launch (in April) of Yellow Water Villas: five luxury retreats in Cooina, in the heart of Kakadu National Park, adjacent to the Yellow Water Billabong.

You couldn't find a better base from which to enjoy the feasting and festivities.

## 22 **A taste of kaiseki** |

Oborozuki, Sydney As usual, so much is opening in Sydney on the food scene. Life & Leisure likes Japanese restaurant Oborozuki, for 120 diners. Along with teppanyaki, it serves up kaiseki, the “time-honoured Japanese haute cuisine tradition” that dates back about 600 years.

Similar to a degustation, the multi-course menu includes cold to hot dishes featuring seasonal ingredients You’ll find Oborozuki at level 3, 5/71 Macquarie Street, Sydney.

## 23 **Pt. Leo Estate turns five** |

Mornington Peninsula, Victoria

Both the estate’s Laura and Pt. Leo Restaurant reopened late last year following a six-month closure after a fire. There’s a refreshed dining offering at the elevated Laura, dubbed “The Laura Experience”, offering 10 courses focused on the best seasonal ingredients. It’s all plated up against the background of views out over the 130-hectare sculpture park.

In March, it will be five years since the opening of Pt. Leo Estate and Laura. Join in the celebrations at Point Leo Estate.

## 24 **Pour me a pillar** |

Healesville, Victoria

Just over 112 kilometres north of Pt. Leo Estate, you’ll find Four Pillars Gin Distillery in Healesville in the Yarra Valley, an hour’s drive north of Melbourne. Four Pillars last year unveiled its \$7 million, copper-clad hospitality venue next door. Pop in when you need a break from wine tasting in the Yarra.

## 25 **Sushi up** | Brisbane, Queensland

The opening last year of the Sushi Room in Brisbane’s swanky Calile Hotel was rightly surrounded by a high-octane buzz. The beautifully fitted out venue is presided over by head chef Shimpei Raikuni, who focuses on minimalism: “Simplicity, purity of flavour and intelligence forms the basis of this menu,” he says. Book now if you haven’t already; 48 James Street, Fortitude Valley, Brisbane.

Flush with its success in South Melbourne, also new to Brisbane is Komeyui, from owner-chef Motomu Kumano, who grew up in a small fishing town in Hokkaido. Book a table or a place at the sushi counter, the longest in Brisbane, but hurry.

Komeyui opened in Melbourne in April 2020, just as the pandemic arrived to decimate the hospitality industry, but that has not stopped it garnering a spot among the city’s finest restaurants. 191 Wharf Street, Spring Hill, Brisbane.<sup>L&L</sup>