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KAREN GARDINER

DESERT ESCAPES

· THE WORLD'S MOST INCREDIBLE PLACES TO STAY ·

Lannoo

INTRODUCTION

Desert escapes



I feel at home in the natural world but will always lean towards extreme landscapes, those places where nature makes you sit up and notice and that feel just a little bit more intense. And so I prefer my sand in a raw red desert than a pristine white beach. A sunny beach is eager to please, but the desert challenges you to take it on. It's a forbidding landscape but one that is sublime in its solitude, starry skies, stillness and space.

My first taste of the desert was intoxicating. I was in Australia's Northern Territory where the hot air felt like a slap and the red earth looked like a firestorm. Having spent most of my life up until that moment on the northeast coast of Scotland, it was a sensation that felt utterly out of my then-small world. That sensation, and the desert, has tugged at me ever since.

The desert can be brutal, and without suitable shelter it will devour you. Building a shelter in an extreme landscape with limited resources is demanding, and yet, there's something about the challenge of a desert that inspires creativity. In the following pages you'll journey around deserts from the Gobi in Mongolia to the Atacama in Chile

and discover accommodations as diverse as the landscapes. Some take their cues from their cultural environment, such as terracotta domes inspired by the traditional homes of the Indigenous Himba of Namibia. Others take their inspiration from the surrounding flora—the exterior of a contemporary cabin that utilises the design of a tough endemic plant, for example. Many are concerned with making as gentle a footprint on the earth as is possible—such as light-touch tented villas that can be removed without a trace. And then there are those that evoke the nostalgia of the past or the hope for a bright future, from renovated mid-century Airstreams to glass pods that look as if they've just touched down on a new planet.

While these escapes are far from simply places to lay your head and each is worth the trip alone, all are in locations that demand to be explored. At each of the following desert escapes, curious travellers will find opportunities to forge a deeper connection with their surroundings, whether that's by camel trekking over dunes, observing desert-adapted wildlife, or simply watching the sun dip over a sandstone arch.

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AUSTRALIA





LONGITUDE

131°

Spectacular views and glamorous seclusion in Australia's spiritual heartland

Simpson Desert

Yulara Drive, Yulara

Australia	+61 2 9918 4355
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longitude131.com.au



Lying at the gateway to Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park in Australia's Northern Territory, and surrounded by the rugged rust-coloured plains and dunes of the Simpson Desert, Longitude 131° commands unparalleled views of the iconic monolith Uluru – and you don't even have to leave your bed to enjoy them.

Guests at this romantic, secluded retreat in the spiritual and geographical heart of Australia stay in 16 luxury tents, which are safari-style pavilions topped with flowing white canopies that make a gentle impression on the landscape. Tents are raised above the sandy desert floor in order to minimise environmental impact and floor-to-ceiling windows offer panoramic views of Uluru and its ever-changing colours from the feet of the plush, organic linen-draped beds. You can get

even closer to nature by requesting a 'swag turndown' service and sleeping out on the roomy balcony in the cool night air under a blanket of stars. Each tent is named after a notable Australian pioneer or explorer and adorned with relevant memorabilia, such as letters or photos from their daring adventures, and custom-made furniture from Australian designers is complemented by colourful artworks by local Indigenous artists. The two-bedroom Dune Pavilion offers the ultimate in outback luxury with separate living and sleeping areas, deep soaking tubs and a private plunge pool. It's also Australia's only accommodation that boasts views of both Uluru and Kata Tjuta.

At the heart of the resort is the Dune House, where you can sip sundowners at the convivial help-yourself bar.

A fusion of modern Australian and Indigenous flavours are served for dinner either inside the Dune House or under the stars at Table 131° which is perched atop a sand dune.

Soaking up the views of rock is the main attraction here, but the resort offers a wide selection of guided touring experiences, from an early morning walk around the base of Uluru or hike to the Karingana lookout, to a camel ride across the dunes or traditional dot-painting lesson with Aboriginal artists. After a day spent exploring the Red Centre's vast outback landscape you can retreat to Spa Kinara for a rejuvenating treatment or simply enjoy the serenity and stillness of your surroundings while cooling off from the searing desert heat in the plunge pool outside the Dune House.





MT. MULLIGAN LODGE

A rugged and intimate escape in the shadow of majestic Mount Mulligan

Queensland

499 Thornborough-Kingsborough Road,
Mount Mulligan

Australia | +61 74 777 7377

mountmulligan.com



Outback solitude and adventures await at Mt. Mulligan Lodge, situated in the vast and rugged North Queensland backcountry, a 2.5-hour four-wheel drive or 35-minute helicopter ride from Cairns. Tucked away in a 28,000-hectare (66,000-acre) working cattle station, home to around 2,400 head of Brahman-cross cattle, this luxurious and intimate property sits below the spectacular 11 mile (18 kilometre) sandstone ridge of Mount Mulligan (known to Aboriginal people as Ngarrabullgan), a natural outback wonder that is ten times larger than Uluru, yet far less known.

The few travellers who make it to this out-of-the-way escape will find a captivating mix of cinematic landscapes, contemporary comfort and a rich blend of Indigenous and colonial history – inhabited by the Indigenous

Djungan people for almost 40,000 years, the landscape still bears traces of the late 19th-century gold rush and 20th-century coal rush. The remains of old Mount Mulligan township, now a ghost town, and mine can be explored while on the property.

The lodge's spacious suites and pavilions overlook a sparkling weir and have a total capacity of just 16 guests. All boast majestic views of the ever-changing colours of Mount Mulligan and deep corrugated iron bathtubs on their private decks. Those seeking a (relatively) rarer outback experience can book one of the property's outback tents on the other side of the weir, which are nestled amongst Australian eucalyptus woodlands—don't be deterred by the name, these 'tents' come with full beds, air conditioning and well-stocked mini-

bars. No matter which you choose, all accommodations come with their own electric buggy for impromptu explorations of the sprawling station.

Mt. Mulligan is an all-inclusive lodge and as well as three gourmet meals a day, each with an emphasis on locally sourced seasonal produce, guests can choose a daily curated experience, which run the gamut from adrenaline-pumping ATV adventures to gently floating downstream on a paddleboard, barramundi fishing in the weir, or witnessing the outback spectacle of cattle mustering. After a day of adventure, cool off in the infinity pool (or keep cosy by the main pavilion's fireplace) then head to the Sunset Bar to watch the outback sky turn shades of orange and red with a glass of outstanding Australian wine in hand.

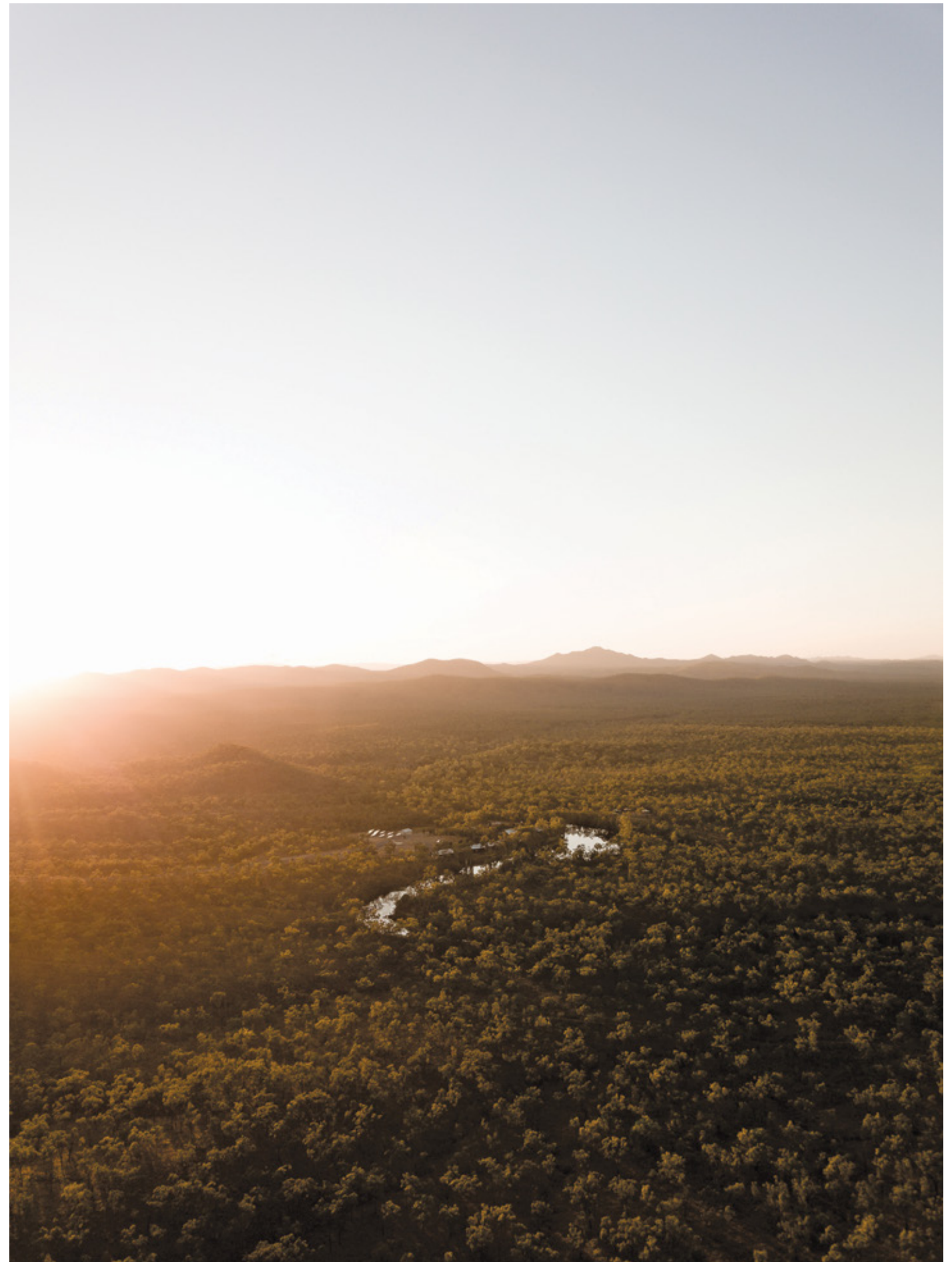






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