

MAGAZINE

A *king* ascends to an unstable *throne*
amid a family *rift* and rising
global tensions

What's new?

Letters and *diaries* shed new *light* on Great Britain's *royal* history

By Alexander Larman



LONGITUDE 131, ULURU

ROCK OF AGES

A HEALING JOURNEY TO THE RED CENTRE

BY CAROLINE OVERINGTON

I have been feeling all at sea. I'm sorry, I know I have nothing to complain about, not in the scheme of things, but there it is. I've been... meh.

I know the cause. It's my children. They've grown up. I will, in a matter of weeks, have an empty nest and oh, how glum I've been.

"But it's going to be wonderful!" If one more person tells me that.

"You're going to have so much time to read, to write, to cook. You won't be rushing, rushing, rushing."

The problem is, I quite liked the rushing. Quite liked that only I, me, the Mum, could do what was needed. Quite liked how essential I was to the running of my family.

I just don't know what I'm going to do with myself. Which is maybe why I've found myself yearning to return to some of the places where I feel most grounded: Sorrento, in Victoria, where I got married. New York, where I found my feet as a grown-up. Uluru, where I had the first inkling – a whisper, deep within me, that only I could hear – that I was to be a mother. The latter has always made sense to me. Uluru, to me,

has always been a wholly feminine being, curved and beautiful against the landscape.

And so, I make my plans.

Longitude 131 – part of the Luxury Lodges of Australia collection – is a lodge discreetly positioned 15 minutes from the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. It is luxurious, without being ostentatious. There is plenty to do: you can laze in the pool or take a tour of the desert. There are cocktails, canapes, and it's all very lovely. But it's not why I've come.

I want to see Uluru. And when I do, she is exactly as I remember her – maternal, glorious. Except that she is crying. Water is pouring down her face.

For days, she weeps like this. Later, my guide will tell me that only two or three per cent of people who visit witness Uluru in the rain.

"You're so lucky," she says, and yes, I know that I am.

It takes two days for the skies to properly clear. The staff at Longitude celebrate by organising a tour of the Field of Light, Bruce Munro's large-scale



Heart of gold: The campsite is uniquely positioned; amenities; dining; tents with the lot



light installation, then a perfect dinner beneath the stars. When it's over, they snuff the candles, and hand out those big plastic torches like your dad used to have, so guests can make their own way down the bush tracks, back to the lodge.

We return to our tents – they are low-slung, glamorous affairs, set above the desert soil – to find swags rolled out for us, beneath the Milky Way. Within arm's reach: cognac, Baileys, popcorn, and ice.

Before we leave, there is a final tour – a meander around the base of the rock. I trot to reception, pre-dawn, to find the other guests have decided to sleep in.

My guide is only 23. It is a big day for her. She has never taken a tour by herself before.

"It looks like it's only going to be us," she says, cheerily.

Not wanting to be a bother, I say: "It's fine, we don't have to go."

"No, no," she says. "It's on the schedule, let's do it."

And so we set off, with me in the passenger seat, and my guide chatting happily as we make our way towards the rock's famous water hole. We spend a merry hour together, and then she says:

"There is a path. You can't get lost. If you'd like to spend some time on your own, I mean."

How does she know that I do?

I don't know, but then she is gone, and I am alone, the only person in the shadow of Uluru. It is so quiet I can hear my own heartbeat. I start to walk, and Uluru, she keeps me company, her presence at once sympathetic, timeless, and somehow true.

Yes, the earth is turning. Time, it is passing. Everything is unfolding exactly as it should.

I can't say for certain how long I remain in that state of grace, but eventually, in the distance, I see my young guide coming towards me, smiling and waving.

"I thought I'd lost you," she says, which is of course exactly what I'd been thinking – overthinking – about myself.

Uluru is sacred to Indigenous Australians. She lends her name, this calendar year, to one of the most important political questions of their lives. She is important to all of us, and possesses a power unlike anything I've ever experienced.

Go, and come back found.

◀ longitude131.com.au ▶

CHECKLIST

Perfect for: Couples celebrating special birthdays and anniversaries (you'll be made to feel so special); stargazers; romantics; gastronomes.

Must do: Mutitjulu Meander. Rise before 6am, have black coffee, and go out with your guide from Longitude 131 before the crowds and the heat of the day. Quiet, contemplative. Restorative. For a luxurious turn, Longitude 131 has a hot tub atop a hill. You can sit in there, with a glass of

champagne, and be mesmerised by the view. And then there's the stargazing. After dinner beneath stars, guides will extinguish the candles, and talk you through the brilliance of the Milky Way.

Bottom line: From \$4200 per tent, per night, inclusive of food, drink and a guided tour of Uluru.

Getting there: Longitude 131 is a 15 minute drive from Ayers Rock Airport; guides will meet you on arrival.