



Tales from the west wing

There are sublimely private new digs at Kangaroo Island's Southern Ocean Lodge

SUSAN KUROSAWA

The 180-degree view is oceanic in every sense; head-swivelling in its breadth, dramatically deep and capped in foamy white this windy afternoon at the clifftop Ocean Pavilion on Kangaroo Island's Southern Ocean Lodge estate. This Baillie Lodges property, all but razed in the 2020 bushfires, recently reopened to great fanfare after a massive rebuild and an empathetic redesign by original architect Max Pritchard. But there have been silver linings from the devastation, too, one of which is the introduction of this new 625 sqm indoor/outdoor dual-winged pavilion adjacent to the main lodge. It's a versatile satellite residence of serpentine curves that divides in two, thanks to a lockable wall that can be divided into east and west sections, and thus can be sold as a whole retreat or two separate bookings.

We are ensconced as a family, with energetic granddaughter in tow and, with no other guests checking in during our three-night sojourn, we have the run of the place, which means more space than we could ever need and a choice of plunge pool or Jacuzzi on separate terraces. The latter is heated to a lively 38C, and we happily poach each evening as the sun sets and air temperatures plummet. The four-suite inventory covers a generously sized king and twin configuration across each wing, all in soft earthen and seascape shades and with walk-in closet, plus TVs and good lighting (hurrah for reading spotlights in the bedheads). All the ensuites are large, with rain showers, fresh-smelling unguents and free-standing oval bathtubs by wall-sized windows.

Outside, sea eagles are hovering on the thermals and kestrels hastening past. The granddaughter has her binoculars out, looking for whale tails. There's nothing between us and Antarctica, we tell her, and she gasps.

It feels like total immersion in a NatGeo documentary. We could be perched in a giant osprey's nest were it not for the visible comforts within instant reach. Decor details include Indigenous artworks and all the favourite Baillie Lodges' design collaborators, such as textiles with kangaroo motifs by Julie Paterson, Llewelyn Ash custom glassware, Bem-boka towels and linens, and mattresses by A.H. Beard.

The dining and lounge area would be sufficiently roomy for a conference, let alone a house party, and chairs and sofas are almost too abundant to count. There are a few design differences between the wings that would bear consideration when booking. The west has a suspended fireplace that all but hovers like a flying saucer, while the east is home to an EcoSmart fireplace. We are torn between the two but spend more time in the east as the Jacuzzi is on permanent call, while the west's in-



finity plunge pool is a little too cool this capricious summer.

So, Ocean Pavilion is a very posh house party set-up with the Baillie Lodges' hallmarks of open bar with premium spirits plus pale ale and coastal lager from KI Brewery, wine (South Australian labels dominate), and a generous range of snacks. Plates of small lamingtons appear as if dropped by pixie hands, and choc kangaroos and koalas stay cool in the bar fridge. The coffee machine wouldn't look out of place at a cafe.

There are no cooking facilities (this is not an ordinary beach shack) but canapes and food can be delivered from the main lodge's dining room, reached by a private path or supplied golf cart. We choose to take meals in the lodge proper, usually via a detour to the upper lounge so our junior adventurer can greet Sunshine, a huge wrought iron kangaroo sculpture and certified bushfire survivor. Dinner hits include beautifully sweet local marron and line-caught whiting plus sinful desserts such as white chocolate panna cotta with lemon myrtle macadamia crust. An open bar, amply stocked with the likes of Baillies 9 gin from island distiller KI Spirits, and a walk-in cellar are well patronised by guests.

Are we relaxed yet? The stay is not complete without a visit to Southern Ocean Lodge's wellness spa, now relocated to the main building from the site where Ocean Pavilion sits. This new iteration faces bush scrub and plantings of wind-protected native saplings. Treatments include local ingredients such as honey, botanicals and eucalyptus oil, and the signature range is by Queensland brand Alkeme. Therapist Amy does all she can to keep me awake but I'm snoozing like a sea lion. And then, just like that, it's time to bid goodbye.

We hope the granddaughter remembers every detail of a remarkable stay that has confirmed her love of nature. She has purloined a list of the lodge's "neighbourhood creatures" and is now remarkably knowledgeable about skinks and geckos. She asks if our guide Becky Westbrook of Kangaroo Island Touring Co can come home with us. Later we buy her a copy of Becky's enchanting children's book, Evie and the Bushfire. I am pretty sure it's taken up permanent residence under her pillow.

Susan Kurosawa was a guest of Baillie Lodges. baillielodges.com.au kangarooislandtouring.com.au

TO-DO LIST

DRIVE

Kangaroo Island has regenerated at almost magical pace since the bushfires, especially tracts of Flinders Chase National Park, home to the Remarkable Rocks and Admirals Arch, where long-nosed fur seals hang out. Kangaroo Island Touring takes visitors to the greatest hits with plenty of insider treats and knowledge too.

southaustralia.com

SPY

Raptor Domain is home to the only free-flying demonstrations of birds of prey in South Australia. The keepers put on a terrific show, handling the likes of wedged-tail eagles and barn owls, and there are opportunities for supervised participation. Private experiences available.

kangarooislandbirdsofprey.com.au

WANDER

Seal Bay Conservation Park, run by the National Parks and Wildlife Association of SA, is home to the endangered Australian sea lion and these comical creatures lounge on the sand and flip-flop along walkways. Ticketed entry; self-guided boardwalk visits or escorted tours available.

parks.sa.gov.au

CUDDLE

Kangaroo Island Wildlife Park is one of only five nature attractions in Australia licensed for supervised koala-holding sessions. Star turn Alfie steals the show, and the expert naturalists are full of tales about rescuing injured wildlife during the fires; pre-booked sessions 10.45am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm (\$45). Presentations by keepers, 11.30am and 3.00pm (included in entry fee).

kangarooislandwildlifepark.com

ESSENTIALS

Southern Ocean Lodge's Ocean Pavilion accommodates eight guests in total or four guests each in the east and west wings, bookable separately. From \$7650 a night for four guests in Ocean Pavilion East; \$8550 a night in Ocean Pavilion West. Rates include all lodge dining and drinks, in-suite bar replenished daily, signature guided experiences of Kangaroo Island and return airport transfers.

southernoceanlodge.com.au