

WHERE TO STAY

INSIDER REPORTS ON THE BEST SPOTS TO BED DOWN. EDITED BY LYDIA BELL

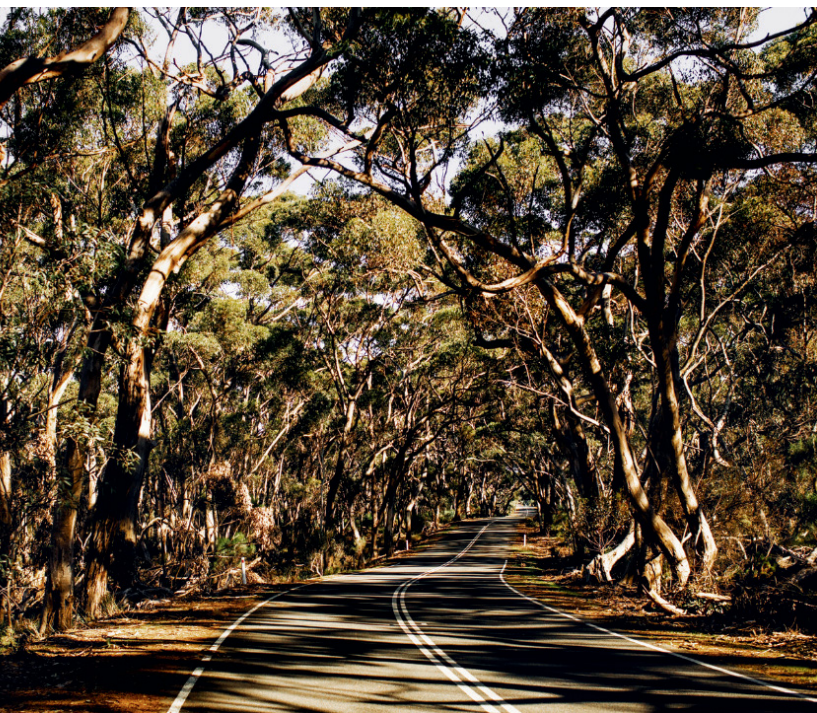
FIRST LOOK

A WIN IN THE ASHES

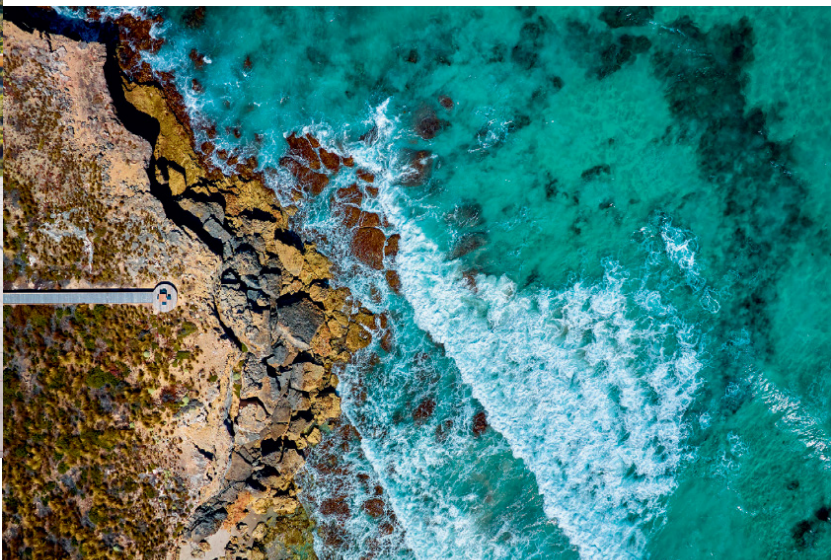
SOUTHERN OCEAN LODGE HAS RISEN LIKE A PHOENIX IN THE WAKE OF THE BUSHFIRES THAT DEVASTATED THE DEEP NATURE OF AUSTRALIA'S KANGAROO ISLAND. BY CHLOE SACHDEV



PHOTOGRAPH: GEORGE APOSTOLIDIS



Top row, from left: on the road in Kangaroo Island; Southern Ocean Lodge seen from across the clifftop. Middle row, from left: the lodge's Remarkable Suite; a kangaroo. Bottom row, from left: the Osprey Suite's terrace; boardwalk leading to the Southern Ocean. Previous page: aerial view of Southern Ocean Lodge



YOU DON'T GET A SECOND CHANCE to make a first impression, or so the saying goes. But standing in the curvaceous Great Room of the newly resurrected Southern Ocean Lodge, a near-replica of its former self, you would never know that four years ago this ecolodge burnt to the ground, leaving only an apocalyptic pile of tangled steel and iron. In the corner, an enormous reclaimed-metal kangaroo called Sunshine, one of the few survivors of the blaze, still watches over all the goings-on.

Outside, the skeleton eucalyptus trees are the scar tissue of the catastrophic “black summer” bushfires of January 2020, which engulfed Australia in curtains of fast-moving flames, killing close to a billion native animals and razing nearly half of Kangaroo Island to embers, including this luxury stay. But in the still-charred forest, a blanket of greenery has sprouted, signalling the island’s regeneration and the comeback of Australia’s iconic Southern Ocean Lodge.

When the original orb-shaped retreat opened in 2008 – a low-lying flying saucer floating above the island’s wild southwest coast, with uninterrupted last-stop-before-Antarctica views across the Southern Ocean – it was the second project for Baillie Lodges (the first was Capella Lodge on Lord Howe Island, which opened in 2003). The property was originally developed and owned by husband-and-wife

loyal to this outlook in every detail of Southern Ocean Lodge 2.0. Most of the menu is harvested from the island, with the majority of the seafood caught in the surrounding waters. The lodge was rebuilt by the original architect, Max Pritchard, who grew up on the island. He describes this commission as being given a “once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, twice”. The cream-coloured limestone feature wall that runs like a backbone down the lodge is by Scott Wilson, a Kangaroo Island resident, sheep farmer and stonemason. It mimics the surrounding cliffs and cleverly etches the lodge into the landscape. The giant kangaroo sculpture that looms large over the Great Room is by local artist Indiana James, and is now joined by a metal lyrebird created from items he and his wife Linda found in the ashes following the fire. The whimsical triptych artwork above my bed, which depicts the natural history of the area, is by another local, Janet Ayliffe.

Keeping a similar blueprint to the original incarnation meant making only a few tweaks, adjusting angles and the odd upgrade here and there, but the number of suites has expanded from 21 to 25. Extending from the main building like a grey-slate train chugging down the eastern edge of the bluff, the glass-fronted suites – all named after shipwrecks on the island – have midcentury modern curves,

THE LODGE IS A SOFT LANDING FOR THE “AUSTRALIAN GALAPAGOS”, WITH ITS ABUNDANCE OF FLORA AND FAUNA, INCLUDING A COLONY OF FRISKY SEA LIONS

duo James and Hayley Baillie. Hayley, the daughter of Australian entrepreneur Dick Smith, worked for more than a decade aboard expedition ships; James was the founding managing director of P&O Australian resorts. The couple went on to open Longitude 131° in Uluru and Silky Oaks Lodge in the Daintree, creating a portfolio of lodges in some of the most spectacular landscapes in Australia, each drenched in a sense of place. According to Hayley, it was her dad who first eyed this nature-soaked parcel of land – close to the vast Flinders Chase National Park, with giddy views down limestone cliffs that plunge into the white beaches of Hanson Bay and the pounding ocean – as a possible location for a beach house, back in the 1990s.

In April 2019, US private equity group KSL Capital Partners bought the entire Baillie Lodges portfolio, adding Clayoquot Wilderness Lodge in Canada, New Zealand’s Huka Lodge and, recently, a trio of Chilean experiential luxury stays, Tierra Hotels. Nine months after the acquisition, Southern Ocean Lodge burnt down. Keeping the Baillies on as creative directors and consultants was a smart move, enabling the brand to rebuild with its original spirit.

Kangaroo Island is Australia’s third-largest island. But with more than 30 per cent of its land protected in conservation parks and nature reserves, humanity’s encroachment remains minimal. The lodge is the soft landing of choice for the “Australian Galápagos”, with its abundance of endemic and native flora and fauna, including Australia’s third-biggest colony of frisky sea lions, which loll on a sugary beach nearby.

The retreat has a light-touch sustainable DNA that involves using local products, ingredients and people as much as possible. It’s been fiercely

sunken living rooms and fireplaces. Like the rest of the lodge, muted clotted-cream limestone tiles and recycled Tasmanian blackwood keep things fresh and simple. Repositioning the suites ever so slightly has brought into focus the wraparound glass walls that open to private decks, fresh Antarctic wind and, in the bigger ones, heated plunge pools. On the western edge of the lodge, the super-sized four-bedroom Ocean Pavilion suite is a new addition that sits like an amphitheatre with two infinity pools, outdoor fireplaces and views across the coastal cliffs and seafront wilderness.

The day before its official opening, I was one of the first inside the resurrected lodge. The new Southern Spa, with its timber-clad sauna and dual hot and cold plunge pools, was not yet open, but it looks like a blissful place to spend a few hours being wrapped, scrubbed and massaged in local lavender and eucalyptus, and honey from the island’s prized possession: the world’s only pure-strain Ligurian bee. In front of the lodge, the former swathe of coastal mallee – a highly flammable species of native tree – has been replaced with more than 45,000 more sensible fire-retardant plants across the property’s 250-acre private natural reserve. But perhaps the biggest upgrades, which will go unnoticed by the guests, are the cutting-edge fireproofing measures. State-of-the-art sprinkler drenching systems, special materials and automated procedures will protect the retreat and keep it bouncing into the future. Long live Southern Ocean Lodge, and Kangaroo Island. 📍

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