

Sand meets sea at Sal Salis
Ningaloo Reef's eco-luxury
accommodations.

FAR

THE NEIGHBORING ISLAND COUNTRIES OF **AUSTRALIA** AND **NEW ZEALAND** OFFER ENDLESS CURIOSITIES AND TERRAIN TO EXPLORE. AND OVER THE LAST DECADE, THERE'S BEEN A MAJOR UPTICK IN THEIR LUXURY LODGING OFFERINGS, ENCOURAGING A NEW WAVE OF TRAVELERS TO MAKE THE JOURNEY—WITHOUT SPARING ANY INDULGENCE. **BY MARK ELLWOOD**

& AWAY

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF LUXURY LODGES OF AUSTRALIA

AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

are synonymous with many things—unbeatable outdoor pursuits, superb, fresh food, and an unforced friendliness amongst the locals. For some time, though, the challenge for luxe-loving visitors was the dearth of true five-star accommodations outside the main cities. That all changed when both countries began parallel programs—the Luxury Lodges of Australia and the Luxury Villas of New Zealand—aimed at dispelling that notion, and now networks of ultra-luxe lodges abound.

Over the last decade-plus, local travel specialists have leaned heavily on the programs when planning luxe multi-stop itineraries in the region. “They’re probably the most important thing to happen in the last quarter-century for luxury travel in Australia,” says The Tailor’s Drew Kluska of the program. Each property, he notes, is distinctive, but the Luxury Lodges program acts as an accreditation of quality in service, experience, and more, like a locally focused counterpart to global luxury guarantors, whether Virtuoso or Leading Hotels of the World. “They hold each other accountable, share experiences, and exchange knowledge, and so the quality has increased year on year.” Stuart Rigg of Southern Crossings agrees. Most of the properties are locally owned and operated, which means they’re primed to focus far more on making sure every aspect of their hotel, from operations to excursions, is regenerative and sustainable. Positive impact for luxury travel is a goal, rather than an afterthought. “It’s largely about local guides and encouraging engagement with the community,” says Riggs. “Many properties offer guests the opportunity to give back through local conservation activities, thus connecting them to the region long after their stay.”

Across the region, there are more than 30 such Luxury Lodges and Luxury Villas properties, but we’ve selected the eight standouts that cater to a particular interest—be it safari, culinary pursuits, snorkeling, and so much more.

NEW ZEALAND

BELOW
Flockhill Lodge sits on a 36,000-acre farm in the Craigieburn Valley.

▼ FLOCKHILL LODGE, CANTERBURY

BEST FOR: HIKERS AND FISHING AFICIONADOS

This working sheep station, or farm, sits in glorious isolation in the heart of the South Island. Ask to watch the shearers at work in their shed, the radio blaring as dozens of sheep pass near-silently along the shearing line. Those sheep share the 36,000-acre farm with an ultra-modern four-bedroom home-stead that sits perched on a hillside overlooking the valley (a cluster of additional villas will open in December just a short stroll down the slopes). Sit by the infinity pool to admire the view, or head out into the landscape to explore. Hike around the gorges or cast a line into the waters that quilt the property—fly fishing season runs from October to April. The property even poached its chef, Taylor Cullen, from one of Sydney’s top restaurants to run its restaurant, Sugarloaf, so the food is inventive without being fussy, like citrus-spiked Bruny Island oysters, the rare delicacy that grows on the promontory close to the Antarctic circle.



The Landing is rich with more than just history, offering indulgent views and superb estate-grown wine.

▼ THE LANDING, BAY OF ISLANDS

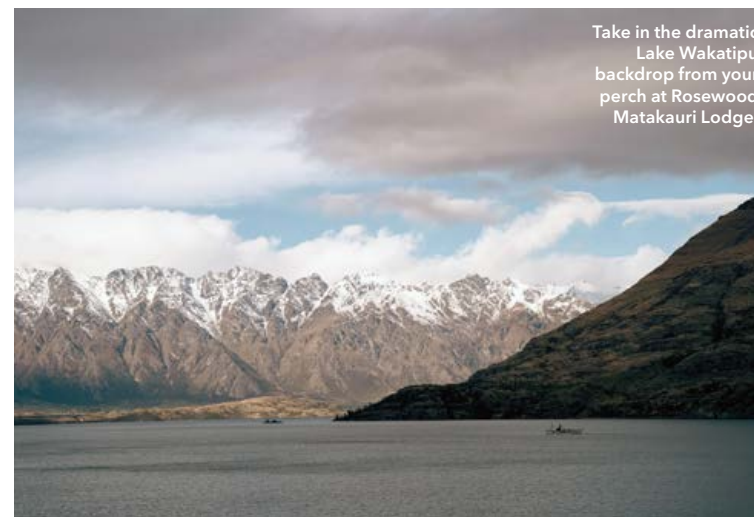
BEST FOR: OENOPHILES AND HISTORY BUFFS

This is where the Maori first arrived from Polynesia nearly a millennium ago, as well as where Europeans first settled. Indeed, the grave of the first European-descended child to be born (and die) here is marked by the huge Norfolk Pine on the waterfront. The Landing is a private, 1,000-acre estate, owned by the Cooper family, who also operate a superb winery here, known for its estate-grown wines and for several award-winning varietals; listen out for squawking while sipping on the deck of the winery, with the bird life here including almost two dozen skittish nocturnal kiwis (join one of the torch-lit nighttime tours to catch them in action). Among the four residences here, consider booking the main, five-suite home on the hill, or the two-bedroom, one-time boathouse, which the Cooper family designed expressly to be an adventure sports-hub for its four athletic teens.

▼ ROSEWOOD MATAKAURI LODGE, QUEENSTOWN

BEST FOR: ADRENALINE JUNKIES

The 13-key property, a short drive from adventure sports-hub Queenstown, was only recently added to the Rosewood roster. It’s a sleek, modern property, all whitewashed clapboard walls and beaten metal chandeliers, that sits right on Lake Wakatipu, the centerpiece of water activities here (hold on tight when the jet boat captain donuts as he careens through the riverways). It’s also easy to access Milford Sound by helicopter from here: clamber onboard next door and soar over to the isolated, rainy inlet, where waterfalls cascade down the steep surrounding cliffs, via a detour to the snow-capped mountains.



Take in the dramatic Lake Wakatipu backdrop from your perch at Rosewood Matakauri Lodge.



PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF ROSEWOOD MATAKAURI; THE LANDING

PHOTO BY LISA SUN (FLOCKHILL)

MAP ILLUSTRATION BY ANNE BENTLEY



**LONGITUDE 131,
NORTHERN TERRITORY**

BEST FOR: NATURAL WONDER-HUNTERS

Yes, it's easy to think of it as just a rock—albeit a monumental one. But the moment you glimpse Uluru (or Ayers Rock, as Europeans dubbed it), it's easy to understand how the monolith became such a mythical talisman to indigenous Australians. Its colors shift and change in sunlight, bleaching in daytime to a pale ochre, and warming to rich reds and purples as the sun sets. Fly over it in a helicopter to see the seams that run over the ridge, the texture resembling seersucker carved from stone, or walk out at nighttime to experience the 52,000 twinkling pinpricks of *Field of Light*, the now-permanent installation here by immersive artist Bruce Munro. You'll also see it at dawn from your bed at one of the glamping tents on this property, the only luxury accommodation close to Uluru. Book a treatment at Kinara spa, which uses indigenous ingredients and techniques.

At Longitude 131, immersive art and glamping enhance the earthly magic of Uluru.

AUSTRALIA

**SAFFIRE FREYCINET,
TASMANIA**

BEST FOR: FOODIE PILGRIMS

Tasmania's finicky micro-climates confer an unparalleled quality to its produce—the majority of the fish caught in its waters can later be found in Tokyo's famed Tsukiji market; notoriously hard-to-grow wasabi thrives here. The go-to gourmet hideout to enjoy all this and more is the 20-room Saffire Freycinet (say it Freh-ZHUN-ay), set in a breathtaking spot in Freycinet National Park: press a button to open the curtains each morning, and the views out across the craggy mountains seem CGI-enhanced. Idle on the beach in Wineglass Bay if the weather's warm—it's often chillier than most of the rest of the country here—or stroll out into the waters for lunch. Glug a glass of locally produced sparkling wine in your waders while a chef shucks fresh oysters right in front of you. Just save room for one of the multi-course dinners, anchored by local wagyu beef, organic venison, and small-batch cheeses.



Saffire Freycinet is located in the heart of Tasmania's wondrous Freycinet National Park.

**SAL SALIS,
WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

BEST FOR: SCUBA DIVERS AND SNORKELERS

Most reefs around the world, including the Great Barrier, sit off eastern coasts, but Australia is lucky to have a rare exception: the 162-mile-long Ningaloo, which ranges around the northwesternmost tip of Western Australia, one of the most isolated spots in the country. Even better, it's a fringing reef, which means that coral gardens and teeming fish are mere feet from shore; when you wade into the water, snorkel in hand, pay attention, as the reef is so close you can easily walk into it. Sal Salis is the only accommodation in the Cape Range National Park here: A 16-tent glamping property designed with minimal eco-impact (it could be packed up within days and leave no footprint behind). Power is solar, and there's no Wi-Fi or AC, but a fully stocked bar and gourmet chef are always on hand, and the tents are artfully angled to make the most of the prevailing cool breezes.

**SILKY OAKS LODGE,
QUEENSLAND**

BEST FOR: NATURE-SEEKERS AND CULTURE-CURIOS

This 40-room lodge sits overlooking the Daintree rainforest, the World Heritage-listed jungle that predates the Amazon by 10 million years. It's the perfect perch from which to explore the stories of ancient Australia via a Dreamtime Walk—a journey led by an indigenous guide who shares some of the traditions and stories of this sacred land. Plus, it's just a 30-minute helicopter ride from here out to the reef, too, so you can snorkel amid the day-glo-colored coral during the day, and have a picnic on an isolated island, before heading back for sundowners in the forest here, as caw-cawing bird calls ricochet round the semi-darkness. Make sure to ask your driver to fire up the resort's own podcast on the drive from Cairns—perfectly timed as a primer for the local region.



At Silky Oaks Lodge, enjoy a hammock hang-out, or hop in the helicopter for a quick ride to the coral reefs nearby.

**BAMURRU PLAINS,
NORTHERN TERRITORY**

BEST FOR: SAFARI-LOVERS

Australia's answer to safari is best explored at this remote station in the aptly named Top End: Head out across the floodplains here in an airboat to see flocks of magpie geese, crocodiles, and carpets of lilies, or hole up in a hide to spy on the buffalo and thousands of wild horses roaming the 76,000-acre reserve. The spacious rooms at Bamurru are standalone bungalows, each perched on stilts with nods to the ruggedness of this isolated spot in their décor—think corrugated iron and rusty patinas; floor-to-ceiling windows overlook the plains, where the waters dazzle as if on fire when the sun strikes the glassy surface. The brand-new Jabiru retreat, ideal for two couples, sits a little apart from the main lodge, effectively a private micro-camp with its own pool.



Sunset at Bamurru Plains offers a feast for the eyes as Buffalo and wild horses roam the expansive reserve.

POSITIVE IMPACT FOR LUXURY TRAVEL IS A GOAL, RATHER THAN AN AFTERTHOUGHT.



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