

# THE WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN Travel + LUXURY

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10  
MUST-TRY  
DISHES AT  
BALI'S TOP  
RESTAURANTS

## DEEP IMPACT

How travellers can  
play their part in  
Australian conservation

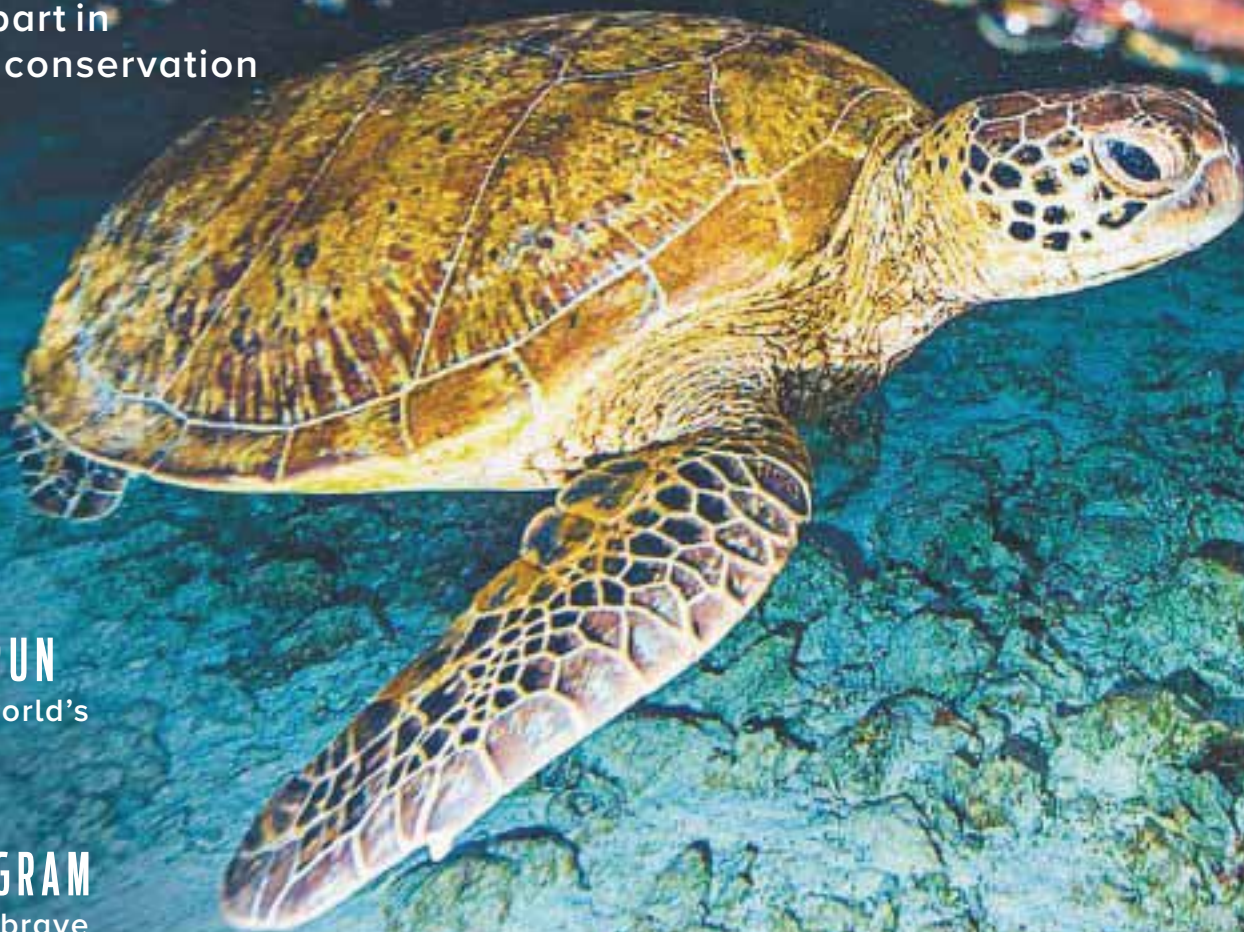
### MARATHON RUN

Surviving the world's  
longest flight

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### HELLO HOLOGRAM

Hotels adopt a brave  
new technological world





Devil Program, the state government's response to devil facial tumour disease, an infectious, fatal cancer that threatens the species with extinction. Having played their role as part of an insurance population for breeding, they live out their days in a sort of luxury retirement village filled with native plants.

Guests get to visit the devils at feeding time as part of Saffire's Tasmanian Devil Experience, a unique opportunity to observe and learn about the iconic species in its natural environment. Saffire partners with immunologists at the Menzies Institute for Medical Research in Hobart, who are working on a ground-breaking vaccine for this contagious cancer. Guests can support the research through the Adopt-a-Devil program, with funds going directly towards the vaccine effort. "The devils are ambassadors for their species," says head devil guide Nicole Dyble. "We have guests from all over the world stay



Koala at Spicers Hidden Vale in Queensland, main; Spicers Hidden Vale resort, opposite; Tasmanian devil, left; Great Barrier Reef, above right

here and they take the story of the devils home." Dyble says there's a magic moment when guests first approach the enclosure. "All of a sudden these little devils start stepping out of the wilderness. It blows them away every time. People get so excited they don't really listen to anything you say after that."

#### STAY

Saffire Freycinet's all-inclusive accommodation packages include the Tasmanian Devil Experience, along with wine tasting at a local vineyard, a beekeeping outing, a visit to Freycinet Marine Farm and more. Luxury suites from \$2800 a night, twin-share.

[saffire-freycinet.com.au](http://saffire-freycinet.com.au)

### The Great Barrier Reef

The Great Barrier Reef offers visitors opportunities to engage with conservation projects throughout its entire 2300km length, from Lizard Island in the north – where you can slip out of your hammock at the resort and stroll over to Lizard Island Research Station for a tour of the coral reef research facility – to Lady Elliot Island in the south, where guests contribute to manta ray research by snapping underwater photos of the gentle giants and uploading them to the Project Manta database.

Lady Musgrave HQ – a liveaboard pontoon in Lady Musgrave Island Lagoon – invites guests to become a marine biologist for a day, assisting scientists to gather underwater data. And if you can tear yourself away from your luxury villa at Orpheus Island Lodge, you can venture to Orpheus Island Research Station for a tour of the wet laboratory and a chat with scientists studying the impact of climate change and rising sea levels.



Fitzroy Island Resort's marine conservation program has guests volunteering at the Cairns Turtle Rehabilitation Centre, preparing food for injured sea turtles, and monitoring their populations in the ocean (discover a new turtle and you get to name it). You can also snorkel over Australia's first offshore coral nursery – viewing new corals planted by the Reef Restoration Foundation – and launch a search and destroy mission on the coral-eating Drupella snail. Every visitor who takes a full-day trip to the reef contributes \$8 towards management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

Fiona Merida, director of reef education and engagement at the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, says citizen science projects such as Eye on the Reef – a phone app that collects real-time data – help guide conservation efforts and management decisions. "It empowers people who love and visit the reef to play an active role in safeguarding this natural wonder for current and future generations," she says.

#### STAY

Lizard Island resort from \$2419 a night, twin-share.

[lizardisland.com.au](http://lizardisland.com.au)

Orpheus Island Lodge from \$3850 for two nights, all-inclusive.

[orpheus.com.au](http://orpheus.com.au)

Fitzroy Island Resort studio rooms \$209 a night.

[fitzroyisland.com](http://fitzroyisland.com)

Lady Musgrave HQ upper deck queen glamping beds from \$1800 a night.

[ladymusgraveexperience.com.au](http://ladymusgraveexperience.com.au)

### Royal Mail Hotel, Dunkeld

Conservation and agriculture might seem like unlikely bedfellows, but they get along pretty well at the Royal Mail Hotel in Dunkeld, western Victoria. Owned by a local pastoral company, the property boasts one of Australia's top regional restaurants (the fine-dining Wickens) and boutique accommodation in restored 1850s bluestone cottages that once housed farm workers. A 95ha chunk of adjacent land has been ceded to create the Mount Sturgeon Biodiversity Reserve, a protected area managed for its core diversity values, and ringed by a predator-proof fence. A captive breeding program for southern brown bandicoots, eastern quolls and fat-tailed dunnarts is run onsite, and in July staff celebrated the release into the reserve of three quolls, animals that had been extinct on the Australian mainland since the 1960s.

"It's a wonderful example of conservation in practice on agricultural land," says Royal Mail Hotel conservation manager Kai Dailey. Guests can take a guided tour of the enclosures and meet the animals as part of a Wildlife Conservation Education experience. "Interactive education is hugely important," says Dailey. "We show people how these unique animals have evolved to fill a niche in the environment, and what happens when that niche is no longer filled. And we teach people that everyone can play a role."

#### STAY

Deluxe Mount Sturgeon one-bedroom cottages are \$650 a night, two-night minimum.

[royalmail.com.au](http://royalmail.com.au)

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**Arkaba Conservancy**

Given the rampant wildlife and lush native vegetation ever-present across Arkaba, a private wildlife conservancy in South Australia's Flinders Ranges, you'd assume this ancient landscape has always been shaped by natural forces. But that's not the case. When Wild Bush Luxury acquired the former sheep station in 2009, the 24,000ha property was largely barren, stripped bare by 150 years of grazing. The new owners immediately implemented conservation initiatives to restore the landscape to something resembling its natural, pre-pastoral state. Today, native grasses are back in abundance, natural springs have reappeared in riparian zones, and towering stands of river red gums line the creeks. Two colonies of yellow-footed rock wallabies are now established, and in 2017 a western quoll – a species extinct in South Australia for a century – was spotted at Arkaba for the first time since being reintroduced to the Flinders Ranges in 2014.

Guests can contribute to ongoing restoration efforts through tree planting, assisting with fence removal (rel-



Swimming with a whale shark at Ningaloo Reef, Western Australia, above left; Mount Sturgeon Biodiversity Reserve, Victoria, above; Arkaba Conservancy in South Australia, left

ics from the livestock days), setting up trip cameras to monitor animal movements, or joining a biologist on wildlife surveys. "Travellers want to be actively involved in helping to make positive change," says John O'Sullivan, chief executive of Experience Co, which owns and operates Wild Bush Luxury. "And tourism operators can't sit idly by while the destinations they operate in are negatively impacted. We all need to play our part in helping to protect or restore the country we invite our guests to enjoy."

**STAY**

Arkaba Homestead is a member of Luxury Lodges of Australia, and has just five guestrooms, meaning a maximum of 10 guests at any one time. Rates are inclusive of all meals and drinks plus guided safari drives and bushwalks; \$1995 a night for up to two people; a 2 per cent levy goes towards conservation projects.

[experiencearkaba.com](http://experiencearkaba.com)

**Live Ningaloo**

"When people fall in love, they protect," says Sonia Beckwith. But can you see yourself falling in love with a whale shark? The way Live Ningaloo runs its swim tours, off the famous fringing reef near Exmouth in Western Australia, it's entirely plausible. Beckwith launched Live Ningaloo with her partner, Murray Pattison, in 2016, pledging to do things differently. She recognised that guest experience was central to conservation. If people were nervous or impatient during the swim, they wouldn't connect with the wildlife. By designing a tour with just a single swimming group, as opposed to other operators that switch groups in and out, it made for a much calmer, personalised experience. It gave guests time and space to take in the small details, like the way a humpback whale's eye seems to stare straight at you, how manta rays appear to fly through the ocean, and damsel fish will engage you in a dramatic stand-off should you swim over their bit of coral. "These experiences change people," says Beckwith. "You never forget it and you become passionate about protecting these extraordinary animals and their habitat."

Guests contribute to ongoing research, with every wildlife interaction documented and the data collated. Beckwith says they're in the process of developing an advanced citizen-science program that goes far beyond data entry, and they'll be exploring ways to work with local Indigenous groups. "What I'm trying to say is the work is never done," Beckwith explains.

**STAY**

Sal Salis has luxury safari tents nestled in the sand dunes just metres from Ningaloo Reef. A three-night whale shark or humpback whale swim package is offered in partnership with Live Ningaloo, from \$3615 a person, twin-share.

[liveningaloo.com.au](http://liveningaloo.com.au)  
[salsalis.com.au](http://salsalis.com.au)

## Zoos' new approach to wild immersion

Zoos have long shifted their focus from cages to conservation, and are now centres of research, advocacy and education. Taronga Zoo Sydney houses the Taronga Institute of Science & Learning, a "living laboratory" designed to inspire future scientists and conservationists through habitat classrooms, interactive STEM learning and tertiary workshops. It's also one of many zoos offering sleepovers "with" the animals, drawing guests in even closer. Choose either Roar and Snore safari tents, or the zoo's luxury Wildlife Retreat, a string of 62 low-rise guestrooms (pictured) overlooking The Sanctuary, a free-range habitat where guests enjoy exclusive mingling rights with a menagerie of native critters. Taronga Western Plains Zoo in Dubbo has even more overnight options, with "zoofari" lodges, self-contained cabins and billabong-side tents.

Diamond pythons and a mob of eastern grey kangaroos greet guests checking in to The Crocodile Hunter Lodge at Australia Zoo on Queensland's Sunshine Coast. Funds raised from staying in the bushland cabins go to Wildlife Warriors, a charity founded in 2002 by Steve and Terri Irwin to involve everyday people in wildlife protection. Four two-storey cabins with plunge pools and stone bathtubs are currently under construction, overlooking a freshwater billabong inhabited by crocodiles (a good incentive not to drop valuables off the veranda). Guests also get exclusive access to a 25m infinity pool, plus a peek inside Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital.

Canberra's Jamala Wildlife Lodge, inside the National Zoo and Aquarium, established as a sanctuary for rescued circus animals, has African-styled bungalows with a window to lions, tigers, cheetahs, sun bears and meerkats, plus an opulent, seven-bedroom safari lodge, and treetop suites.



Werribee Open Range Zoo on the outskirts of Melbourne is similarly African-themed, and offers a fully hosted "slumber safari" with sundowners, accommodation in a plush safari hut and guided night tour. Meanwhile, at South Australia's 1500ha Monarto Safari Park, construction of a luxury hotel and glamping hub is almost completed.

**STAY**

Taronga Wildlife Retreat from \$535 a night.

[taronga.org.au/sydney-zoo](http://taronga.org.au/sydney-zoo)

Australia Zoo Crocodile Hunter Lodge from \$894 a night.

[thecrocodilehunterlodge.com.au](http://thecrocodilehunterlodge.com.au)

Jamala Wildlife Lodge from about \$1650 a night.

[jamalawildlifelodge.com.au](http://jamalawildlifelodge.com.au)

Werribee Open Range Zoo slumber safari from \$450 an adult and \$240 a child.

[zoo.org.au/werribee](http://zoo.org.au/werribee)