

Travel



Grand
Left, the Remarkable Rocks form part of Kangaroo Island's landscape; Inset, a sea lion at Seal Bay Conservation Park

Corbis, Alamy

Totally wild

Australia's remote Kangaroo Island offers a pristine environment for some thrilling species. By Andrew Jefford

Sky House, my home for the night, is perched high on a hill, its rammed earth walls in Moorish style, all lanterns and arches. The hillside grasses had silvered at summer's end, dropping down to a bay whose waves, on this windless evening, unfurl languidly over the shell sand. Dinner is served on white linen under a cavernous fig tree set back from the shore.

Bedtime brings a creamy onslaught of stars; a harvest moon creeps up behind the hills to the east, orange as mimosette cheese. We leave the curtains undrawn; it would be crass to veil such a scene.

Kangaroo Island – Australia's third-largest island, after Tasmania and Melville Island – lies 16km (10 miles) from the South Australian mainland. South Australians tend to disdain it, perhaps dissuaded by the high cost of the ferry crossing (A\$172/£105 return for a car), reputedly the world's most expensive.

International visitors, by contrast, love it. It's beautiful, unspoiled, remote and teeming with wildlife: a one-visit synopsis of the southern shore of the continent. In Lifetime Private Retreats and the more recently built Southern Ocean Lodge, it also has some of the country's finest accommodation.

Sky House is one of the three houses that constitute Lifetime Private Retreats, developed by artist Nick Hannaford and his sister Rachel from a property acquired by their grandfather, Sir James Holden, a member of Australia's one-time leading car-building family (Holden is now General Motors in Australia). The property lies at the end of a long series of dirt roads through the bush, and the houses can either be rented as self-catering units, or you can pay to have your every wish catered for.

Nick's cooking, using local ingredients including samphire from the river running into the bay as well as fish, crayfish and lamb, is some of the subtlest I've had in Australia. If the weather discourages dining under the fig tree, there's a private beach shack or, for larger groups, a candle-lit shearing shed.

Kangaroo Island has an intimate feel:



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KANGAROO ISLAND

More than a hop, skip or jump

Travel

The easiest way to get to the island is to take the short scheduled Rex Airlines flight from Adelaide to Kingscote, its largest town (www.rex.com.au), or charters from Air South (www.airsouth.com.au, tel: +61 8 8234 3244). Or drive from Adelaide to Cape Jervis (106km/66 miles), from where you can use the Kangaroo Island Sealink Ferry (www.sealink.com.au). Budget, (www.budgetki.com) and Hertz (www.hertz.com.au) rent cars.

Accommodation

Luxury accommodation is available from Lifetime Private Retreats (www.life-time.com.au, tel: +61 8 8559 2248), pictured, on the north coast; and Southern Ocean Lodge (www.southernoceanlodge.com.au, tel: +61 2 9918 4355) on the south coast. The closest accommodation to Flinders Chase National Park is Kangaroo Island Wilderness Retreat (www.kiwr.com, tel: +61 8 8559 7275). For hotels, budget and self-catering

accommodation, see www.kangarooislandholidayaccommodation.com.au, or tel: +61 8 8553 9007. B&B is available at Stranraer Homestead (www.stranraer.com.au, tel: +66 8 8553 8235); eco-camping from Flour Cask Bay Sanctuary (www.ecokangarooisland.com.au, tel: +61 9 8553 7278).

Tours

Exceptional Kangaroo Island (www.exceptionalkangarooisland.com, tel: +61 8 8553 9119)

offers small group tours. Quad bike and kayak tours are available from Kangaroo Island Outdoor Action (www.kioutdooraction.com.au, tel: +61 8 8559 4296).



Eating and drinking

Sample honey at Island Beehive (www.island-beehive.com.au, tel: +61 8 8553 0080). Find yoghurt and cheese at Island Pure Sheep Dairy (tel: +61 8 8553 9110), and crayfish at Andermel Marron (www.ndermel.com.au, tel: +61 8 8559 4114). The finest winery is The Islander Estate (www.iev.com.au, tel: +61 8 8553 9008). Good restaurants include Bella in Kingscote (tel: +61 8 8553 0400) and Sorrento's in Penneshaw (tel: +61 8 8553 1028).

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Smitten with Brittany

The simple pleasures that lured painters such as Gauguin to the French region are intact. By Richard Holledge

Brittany does not feel like a holiday destination in crisis. The seafood platters are piled improbably high, the cider fizzes gently on the palate and only the clatter of yachts' rigging disturbs the peace.

But crisis there is. According to Brittany's daily newspaper Le Télégramme, 15 per cent fewer nights are being spent in the region than 12 years ago and the British, who once made up 50 per cent of overseas visitors, have slipped to 40 per cent, deterred by the strong euro. Can Brittany compete with low-cost resorts and new destinations such as Tunisia and Morocco, the paper asks?

Over a dish of oysters and a glass of Muscadet in a harbourside café, the answer becomes apparent. Do nothing.

What makes Brittany so special is precisely that it is not Tunisia or Morocco or an "all-inclusive" resort. This is a region of simple pleasures; clear skies and sandy beaches, walking, fishing and boating, and eating in restaurants that

serve local fare such as crêpes and *fruits de mer*.

That's what has drawn visitors here since artists colonised the region in the 19th century. Few places attracted more of them than the fishing village of Pont-Aven in Finistère, on the west coast of Brittany. "A little inexpensive hole of a place" was how painter Félix Jobbé-Duval described it to Paul Gauguin in 1886. Gauguin set up easel here and started what became the Pont-Aven school.

Some of the scenes that inspired the artists will be on display at Tate Modern's Gauguin exhibition in September and one can still see the attraction. Pont-Aven is a pretty little town divided by a river that rushes to the sea. It used to power 14 watermills, which ground grain into flour before being exported to destinations such as England. Now the only operating wheel is the centre of attraction in the Restaurant Le Moulin du Grand Poulguin, one of the village's many crêperies and cafés that share the streets with countless art galleries, all boasting Gau-

guin-esque sunsets, fishermen and tillers of the soil.

One of the best ways to get to know the area around Pont-Aven is to join the long-distance trail, the Grande Randonnée 34. It follows the coast along cliffs of gorse and pine, passing hamlets, headlands and small ports. Detour inland and the scene is one of mellow meadows and wooded paths fringed with primroses and violas.

And there are plenty of *chambres d'hôtes* nearby to use as a base. Just as essential are places to eat at regular intervals: a good morning's walk from Pont-Aven,

for example, will take you to Port Belon with its typical granite houses, moored yachts, small château – and Chez Jacky restaurant.

The name may suggest a diner on London's North Circular Road but this is the home of the Belon oyster, a delicately flavoured bivalve that has gourmards travelling from all over the world to sample it. The restaurant farms them in the 60 acres of estuary that it overlooks and serves them alongside its signature dish, *fruits de mer royale*. This noble feast costs a reasonable €130 (£110) for two and is best washed down with a

bottle of Muscadet-sur-Lie.

For more simple fare, try La Crêperie just opposite, which offers traditional Breton galettes stuffed with spinach or cheese as a first course, followed by crêpes with chocolate, Grand Marnier or the local favourite, sugar and butter.

The GR 34 meanders along the coast through the village of Brigneau, then on to Le Pouldu, where Gauguin moved in 1889, complaining of the crowds in Pont-Aven. He wrote: "I am beside the sea in a fisherman's inn near a village of 150 inhabitants. I live here like a peasant as if I was a savage."

Today Le Pouldu is a hectic resort full of surf clubs, bars and holiday homes. Gauguin stayed in the Hôtel de la Plage, now a museum with copies of the paintings Gauguin and his fellow artists daubed directly on to the walls. Such is the change in the village that the headland he painted in "Harvest: Le Pouldu" (1890) is crowded out by buildings.

Better to walk back to the port of Doëlan, pause to listen to a couple on the har-

bour wall singing along to their accordions, and stop at Le Suroit, where fishermen in flat tweed hats and fulsome moustaches drink the dark local beer and eat *assiettes de poissons fumés*.

Surely this is enough to entice the crowds? Michael Dodds, an Anglo-Irishman who is the region's marketing director, says the reasons for the drop in British visitors has been the fall in the pound, the increase in low-cost flights to southwest France and the opening up of new destinations with high-speed TGV trains.

He plans to appeal to a younger audience by promoting the annual Festival des Vieilles Charrues – The Old Ploughs – a pop concert which will be headed by Mika and Muse in the market town of Carhaix.

"People don't know anything about the festival," he says. "We had Bruce Springsteen here last year."

Yet Dodds knows he cannot stray from the region's true spirit. "Brittany is about simple pleasures," he says. "It's not chic, not glamorous, *pas de bling-bling*, as they say here."



Inspiring Pont-Aven, an artists' colony in Finistère

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