

## Australia

## Homegrown highlights of the high life

## Getting shocked at MONA

Enchanting, beguiling, infuriating, disorienting: everyone has a different take on Hobart's Museum of Old and New Art, and that is precisely what makes it the country's most interesting museum. Oh, and it also kicks-started a Tasian tourism boom that shows no signs of slowing.

## Meeting the giant emu in the sky

When the first Australians gazed up at the heavens, they saw very different shapes to the ones we see. A night of stargazing is just one item in a packed calendar of Indigenous-based activities at Ayers Rock Resort, many of which are free. Hands-down the best place in the country to learn more about Aboriginal culture.

## Shacking up in Canberra

There are no satin sheets at the hotel that made Canberra sexy; rather, the quirky Hotel Hotel reimagines a bush shack in the nation's capital. The rooms are not to everyone's taste, but the outside-the-square approach makes this Australia's most original hotel.

## Donning waders for a gourmet breakfast

Tasmania's most luxurious lodge, Saffire Freycinet, is known for its superlative food and wine, but the gourmet highlight is standing thigh-deep in water at an oyster farm, breakfasting on mollusks pulled straight from the sea.

## Getting (hot) stoned at Qualla

There are lots of little luxuries to enjoy at The Whitsundays' most indulgent resort, but for total relaxation, head to the spa, where the Bullari Yarrul hot stone massage will melt away your tension.

## Getting wiggly at QT hotels

They are best known for the be-wigged Directors of Chaos that greet arriving guests, but QT Hotels score big for food, for design, for investing in art, and for launching a cool boutique brand that has spread twifly right across Australia and New Zealand.

## Eating your way across Maria Island

Tasmania has plenty of magnificent guided walks, but the Maria Island Walk scores big for its gourmet candlelit dinners, its bush and beachscapes, its convict ruins and the chance to spot wombats, penguins and sea lions. And did we mention the food?

rather, Hotel Hotel now has plenty of company, with cutting-edge properties opening right around the country, from the quirky Old Clare Hotel in Sydney to Perth's luxe Como The Treasury.

Australian travellers are also following their stomachs. Gourmet destinations are more popular than ever, with hungry travellers flocking to foodie hubs such as Daylesford and Kyneton in Victoria, Nooks on the Sunshine Coast and Mudgee in NSW. Our willingness to travel long distances for a good meal has super-charged the country's regional dining scene: indeed, this year's NSW Good Food Guide Regional Restaurant of the Year was a hotel restaurant, Paper Daisy, at Haleysay House.

It's not just about restaurants. Western Australia's Margaret River Gourmet Escape festival has been hugely successful, thanks to a series of signature events and a roster of big-name chefs from around the world. Margaret River isn't the only destination to have discovered that festivals can give a big boost to the bottom line; just ask Sydney, with its mega-successful Vivid Festival, and Hobart with its midwinter Dark Mofo Festival.

And speaking of Tasmania, if we had to give an award for tourism success over the past decade, the island state would be the clear winner.

Booed by the remarkable success of the Museum of Old and New Art, launched in 2011, the state's tourism operators have invested heavily, launching an automobile array of new hotels and experiences and turning Tasmania into an international tourism hot spot.

From mountain hiking tracks to boutique hotels such as Pamphouse Point to walking trails such as the Three Capes Walk, Tasmania has proven that Kevin Costner was right all along: if you build it, they will come. **T**



Close to home: (Clockwise from main) The stairway that joins the Nishi building with Hotel Hotel in Canberra; the view from Saffire Freycinet, Coles Bay, Tasmania; Fat Car, MONA; Margaret River gourmet escape. Photos: Nic Walker, MONA

## Doughnuts with a difference in Victoria

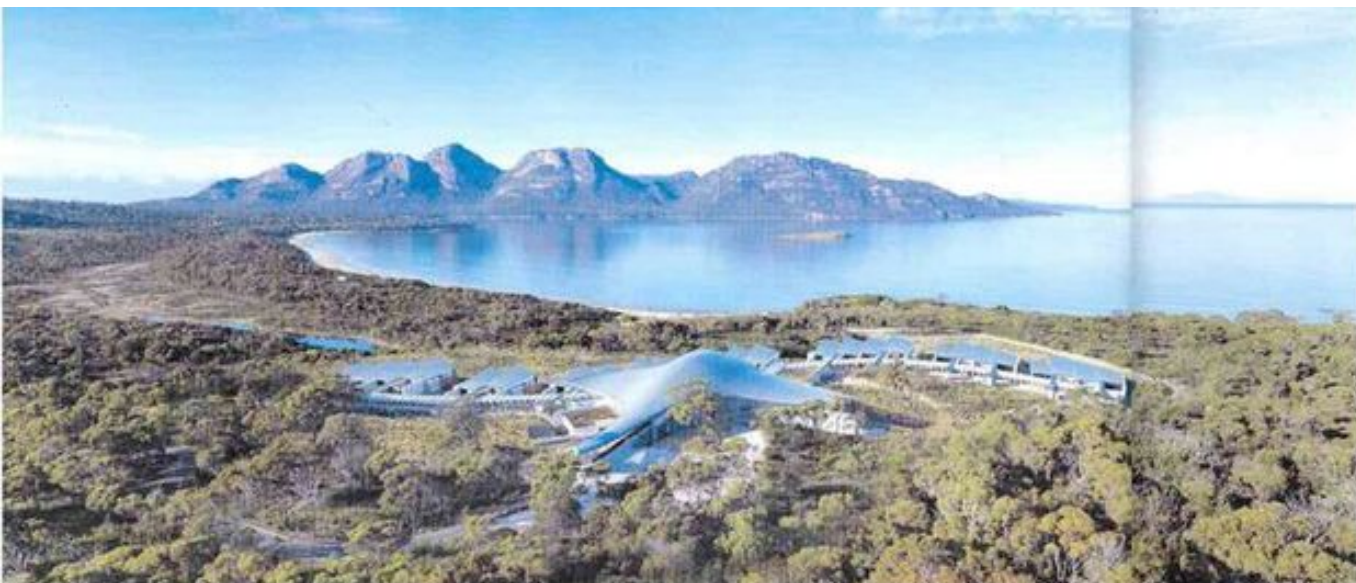
Forget about farms: these days, we head to the country for fine cooking. Far-flung restaurants such as Fleet in NSW's Brunswick Heads have become destinations in their own right, but the top dog is Dan Hunter's Brae restaurant in rural Victoria, acclaimed for dishes such as smoked eel doughnuts.

## Holling out on Kangaroo Island

Hope that the weather turns while you are staying at Southern Ocean Lodge. There is nothing better than grabbing one of the superb beds in the help-yourself wine cellar, curling up under one of the angora blankets, and watching a storm roll in through those floor-to-ceiling windows.

## Seeing the lights in Sydney

Savvy cities and towns across the country are realising what a tourist drawcard a festival can be, but none can outshine Vivid, which lights up Sydney every winter with its mesmerising illuminations.



## Domestic bliss from coast to coast

From outback adventures to cutting-edge hotels, Australia is a more diverse destination than ever before, writes Ute Junker.

Australian travellers are going wild. Look at the growth areas of our domestic travel industry over the past decade, from outback Indigenous experiences to luxury lodges perched in remote locations. One thing is clear: we are embracing our natural landscapes more than ever before. Take our love affair with long distance hikes. Not so long ago, if you wanted to go bush for days on end you had to sleep under eucalypt and carry your supplies with you. These days, you can set out on a three- or four-day hike safe in the knowledge that your meals will be taken care of and that after a hard day's walking, you will be retiring to a comfy bed.

Several companies now offer luxury hikes in some of our most dramatic landscapes. The grandeur of the Flinders Ranges, the tall forests and towering beaches of Western Australia's Bibbulman Track, Tasmania's pristine coasts and forests; all can now be explored in comfort.

The power of our landscape has also fuelled the growth of luxury lodges. After years of being overshadowed by New Zealand's high-end offerings, the past decade has seen a remarkable number of luxurious lodges spring up, from Southern Ocean Lodge on Kangaroo Island to Tasmania's Saffire Freycinet and Wolgan Valley in the Blue Mountains.

While these properties are most famous for their sky-high price tags and their five-star indulgences, the essence of their appeal is the opportunity to be enveloped by magnificent natural surroundings.



Indulgence: (Clockwise from main) Saffire Freycinet, The Old Clare Hotel, Wolgan Valley Resort & Spa, Tiwi Islands. Photos: Chris Court, Alamy

Not everyone can afford a luxury lodge, but increasing numbers of us are delving deeper into the continent's Indigenous cultures. Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia in particular have developed an impressive portfolio of Indigenous experiences to suit every budget. Whether it is a Deviltime walk through

Mossman Gorge in the Daintree, a day trip to the Tiwi Islands off the coast of Darwin, or a lesson in forgotten history in the Kimberley's Windjars Gorge, these encounters are always eye-opening. If it's a more immersive experience you are after, there are plenty of options available, from a multi-day trip through Arnhem Land with Lirwa Tourism to



staying with an Indigenous community at Lumbadina in Western Australia's Dampier Peninsula. It's not all about the great outdoors, of course. Travellers who prefer a city break have been delighted by the new breed of boutique hotels that has sprung up right around the country. Among the pioneers, to many

people's surprise, was Canberra, which added its cool quotient considerably with the opening of Hotel Hotel in 2011.

This boundary-pushing hotel is not to everyone's taste, but there is no denying the creativity that has informed every element of the hotel, from the spectacular cantilevered staircase to the hand-crafted crockery and