

EXCEPTIONAL KANGAROO ISLAND

ARRIVING AT KANGAROO ISLAND, THERE IS a feeling of stepping back in time to the Australia of 50 years ago. Very little traffic, no crowds to speak of and a feeling of an unhurried existence that an older generation might describe as 'the good old days'. At every point, the landscape is picturesque and feels only lightly touched by development even though much of the island is used agriculturally. It is a mixed bag of highlights that one might hope to experience on a trip around Australia all conveniently compressed onto one island with manicured farm land upon rolling hills and beautiful Australian bush that meets both cliffs and pristine beaches.

Significant portions of the island are conservation reserved and there are so few introduced plants and animals that biologists refer to Kangaroo Island as "the closest to what temperate Australia was like at the time of European settlement."

Exceptional Kangaroo Island is one of Australia's leading tour operators and has been providing small groups and luxury private four-wheel drive tours since 1986. Owners Craig and Janet Wickham have designed their tours to show off the best that the Island has to offer, with bespoke options from full day or multiday experiences that can cover the islands popular and hidden treasures.

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Exceptional Kangaroo Island's interpretive guide, Tim Wendt, was one of KI's police officers in a former life and has intimate knowledge of every aspect of island life, the history and secret spots that many travelers would miss.

Touring with Tim means that even on unscheduled opportunistic stops, guests are always treated to wonderful island hospitality - a little like dropping in on old friends. Every tour varies somewhat to take advantage of the weather and seasonal opportunities as well as the interests of the guest, but each promises extraordinary wildlife encounters, excellent local produce and warm hospitality.

Kangaroo Island is Australia's third largest Island at 155 kms long and 55 kms wide. At this size, it has a mainland feel about it with enough separation to allow for diverse flora and fauna to develop and flourish into its own little biosphere. Separation from the mainland has offered isolation that has protected the delicate ecosystem which is the source of the Island's attraction. Archaeologists estimate that the indigenous inhabitants permanently left the island about 2000 years ago, with humans absent until 1802 when Captain Matthew Flinders arrived. Flinders and his crew were low on provisions and meat on arrival and the plentiful population of kangaroos were a God-send, and so the island was named.

Kangaroo Island's separation from the mainland has allowed for many species of animals to flourish and develop into distinctly identifiable subsets of their mainland cousins. The kangaroos of KI are derivatives of the Eastern Grey Kangaroo and, as the name suggests, are in healthy numbers across the



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island. They are shorter and stockier than the mainland Eastern Grey with short dark ears and can grow heavier than even the big red kangaroo of central Australia.

An integral and sought after part of the Exceptional Kangaroo Island Experience is close encounters with all kinds of wildlife. The Island's diverse landscapes provide protected habitat for sea-lions, fur seals, endemic kangaroos, wallabies, koalas, echidnas, platypus, goannas, 260 bird species (many rare or endangered), 4 species of possums, bandicoots and whales. For some, like the Tamar wallaby, venturing out of dense cover during the daylight hours is almost a suicide mission with enormous Wedge Tail Eagles patrolling the skies. About the size of a rabbit, the tiny Tamar is a prize catch for the marauding raptors which relentlessly patrol the landscape as they effortlessly soar on thermal currents high above with their two-meter wingspan.

Kangaroo Island is famed for its Australian Seal Lion population and Tim explains that Seal Bay is a popular stop on his tour. Seal Bay, on the central south coast, has been home to an Australian sea lion population for thousands of years, and guarantees visitors a memorable encounter with these relatively rare mammals. Australian Sea Lions are unique to South Australia and Western Australia and with a total population of only 14,700 animals, they are considered an endangered species.

While walking on a path through the dunes to reach the main seal colony beach, Tim scours the undergrowth. "Keep an eye out as you walk by the scrub. Seals will often take shelter here." Sure enough, more than 500 meters from the beach, a female Sea Lion was sleeping under the low bush canopy just a few meters from the path.

Seal Bay offers a voyeuristic view of daily life in Australia's third largest Sea Lion colony. Bulls fight for prominent positions and mating rights, while returning subgroups surf the breach break onto the shore. Walking along the beach just below the vegetation line Tim's eyes dart back and forth. Tim cautions "We always stay a healthy distance away from the Sea Lions as they are wild animals, even with

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LOCATION

Kangaroo Island is 110kms South West of Adelaide, off the Fleurieu Peninsula, South Australia.

GETTING THERE

REX Airlines flies daily to Kingscote Airport from Adelaide (baggage is restricted to 15kg per person). Sealink vehicle and passenger ferries operate daily services between Cape Jervis on the mainland and Penneshaw

WHAT'S INCLUDED

Pick-up from accommodation or airport, national and conservation park entry fees, lunch including local wines and morning/ afternoon teas. Single day and custom itineraries for several days on KI are available

WHAT TO BRING

Sunscreen, hat and comfortable clothing, walking shoes, binoculars, camera for landscapes and wildlife, sunglasses and a jacket/windbreaker for cool ocean breezes even in summer months.

WHEN TO COME

Tours operate year-round

CONTACT

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their puppy dog features.” “Most importantly, we don’t put ourselves between the animal and the ocean.”

Kangaroo Island is known for its produce and every tour with Exceptional Kangaroo Island showcases both the Island’s sumptuous offerings and the culinary skills of the interpretive guides. Depending on the tour and the route taken, lunch and tea breaks are enjoyed at any one of a number of beautiful locations and look outs. Following the scenic coast roads heading west towards Flinders Chase National Park, Tim pulls up the white Land Cruiser on a hilltop under a stand of tall eucalypts next to an historic cattle yard. Lunch is prepared while the distinct eucalypt blossom fragrance in the warm breeze and ocean views enhance the succulent King Island red wines that are enjoyed while Tim expertly grills local King George Whiting fillets with local white wine and butter. There are over 30 local vineyards and a dozen wineries to choose from, with Shiraz and Chardonnay the most common red and white varieties respectively. The Island is known for its abundant sea food with an active Rock Lobster fishery operating out of the azure water of Vivonne Bay, as well as commercial Abalone and line fishing industries. Even for recreational fishers, the waters are highly productive with plenty of very large King George Whiting and squid which are easily caught in the shallows.

Flinders Chase National Park is a key focus for many visitors and Exceptional Kangaroo Island offer full day tours of this 326 square kilometer park. Admirals Arch is high on most visitors lists. This rocky, windswept coastline with its huge eroded granite arch is home to thousands of New Zealand Fur Seals and consequently, it also a hotspot for Great White Shark predation. “It is not uncommon to see Fur Seals will big bites taken out of them” says Tim as he