

On

KANGAROO ISLAND, ART AND NATURE INTERSECT

BY SUZANNE MORPHET

A rustle in the bush alerts me to their presence. Two, three, no, wait—four wallabies graze on greenery a few metres away. I turn on the narrow footpath and signal to my husband. Seconds later, they bound into the bush on powerful hind legs.

Kangaroo Island in South Australia is home to the country's most iconic species, including these adorable Tammar wallabies. There's so much wildlife, even platypus and penguins, that the island is sometimes called "a zoo without walls."

It's not only animals that bring us here. Bigger than Long Island, New York, but smaller than Bali, Kangaroo Island offers a stunning landscape enlivened by a creative community that has us continually pausing on a trail or pulling off the road for a better look at something.



AFTER THE WILDFIRES

Wildfires in 2019 and 2020 burned almost half of Kangaroo Island. News reports of the tragedy seared devastating images into our consciousness. We weren't sure what we'd find four years later, so we were thrilled to discover that wildlife has recovered and flora is flourishing.

EXPLORE THE KANGAROO ISLAND SCULPTURE TRAIL

We reach Kangaroo Island by ferry, as most people do, arriving in the tiny town of Penneshaw, population 269, where we check into our glamping tent at Seafront Holiday Park. Meandering through the natural dune landscape directly behind our tent is the 1.5-kilometre Sculpture Trail. It leads us up short, steep slopes, across a deep ravine on a swing bridge, and around native shrubs and trees, some hundreds of years old.

Along the way, we stop to admire more than a dozen sculptures, some crafted from natural materials, others created from strong, durable metal. *Resilience*, made from steel and bronze and illuminated with LED lighting at night, captures the strength of the Kangaroo Island community in general, while *Remembering Dick & Clayton* speaks directly to the loss of two islanders in the wildfires.

Alive with bird song, the hum of bees, and those shy wallabies, the hard-packed earth trail is a sculpture in itself, one with poetic form, as a dozen haikus, written by a local poet, sit along it, demanding we pause, read and think.

Elyssa Kreher, one of the volunteers behind the project, tells me later the trail is meant to be an artistic reflection of the island, allowing visitors "to slow (down), to feel present."

SLEEP IN NATURE

Accommodations on Kangaroo Island reflect the importance of the natural world to locals. From the curved walls of the newly rebuilt Southern Ocean Lodge (the original one was destroyed in the fire) to the minimalist aesthetic of our glamping tent that billows in the breeze at night, it's easy to find a place where the wind or waves will lull you to sleep.

THE SIGHTS DELIGHT

Driving around Kangaroo Island is delightful—whether it's on the paved two-lane highways, the numerous dirt roads that locals travel at surprising speeds, or



Remarkable Rocks Will Rock You

In Flinders Chase National Park, discover what 500 million years of wind, rain and waves created from granite boulders. The strangely shaped boulders, some orange with lichen, sit atop a flat rock, as if placed by a giant sculptor's hand for an outdoor gallery.



on hard-packed white sand beaches. Yes, it's legal to drive on beaches, park and go for a swim! Across the island, our jaunts take us through countless "tunnels" created by towering narrow-leaved mallee, a type of eucalyptus tree. At Clifford's Honey Farm, we learn that Kangaroo Island's Ligurian bees, imported from Italy in 1884, are now the purest in the world. At Islander Estate Vineyards, we sip wines from a fifth generation Bordeaux winemaker who fell in love with the island. And at Cape Willoughby Lighthouse we enjoy panoramic views across Backstairs Passage to the mainland.

One day we let tour guide (and children's book author) Becky Westbrook of Kangaroo Island Touring Company do the driving so we can enjoy the views and spot wildlife. "There's a mob over there," Becky says,

pointing to a group of 30 or 40 western grey kangaroos. At Seal Bay, sea lions doze in the sand as waves crash against the shoreline. Near Flinders Chase National Park, we crane our necks for my most anticipated experience. High in the tree tops of a manna gum, a koala sleeps, eyes closed, the branch she holds rocking gently in the wind. The scene is a lullaby come to life. **DS**

TRAVEL PLANNER

Everything you need to know, including how to get there: tourkangarooisland.com.au