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The Sun-Herald

# travel

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## Home on the steppe

Adventures among the  
nomads of Mongolia



## SOUTH AUSTRALIA TRAVEL

# Five stars, plus a few million more

Casting nervousness about creepy-crawlies aside, **Lee Atkinson** camps out in high-class style.

**N**othing beats swagging out under the stars, watching shooting stars stream across the night sky while the drooping leaves of gum trees sigh softly in the breeze. It's the ultimate way to camp out in the bush – or at least it would be if I didn't have such an irrational fear of creatures that slide, slither or skitter, and wasn't convinced that as soon as I unroll my swag on the ground they will make themselves at home in my bed.

But for those like me, or who like to go bush without roughing it, the guys at Wild Bush Luxury's Arkaba Station have redefined the idea of swagging forever with three new bush camps in the heart of the Flinders Ranges in South Australia. Forget about any old notions of unfurling a scratchy, stiff, canvas bed roll in the dust – at these luxury camps you sleep on a specially constructed raised timber deck, between crisp cotton sheets, beneath a soft feather doona and under a canopy of stars.

"You could buy half a dozen swags for that price," declares my partner when I ring him from the airport the next day. Sure, you could, but what about the private chef, three-course meals and wine, hot-water bush shower and walking guide that comes with the swag? To say nothing of the luxury of sleeping out under the stars without having to worry about uninvited guests invading your space in the middle of the night. (From our luxe camp, we hear about one of the local girls being bitten, not once but twice by a king brown snake while she slept – in her own lounge room.)

The three camps are part of a four-day walking safari through the heart of the Flinders Ranges, from Arkaba Station to Wilpena Pound. Although the safaris run all year, we're here

during a freak heat wave and temperatures are in the high 40s, so we decide to laze around in the pool at the homestead, driving out to the camp by four-wheel-drive in the cool of the early evening instead.

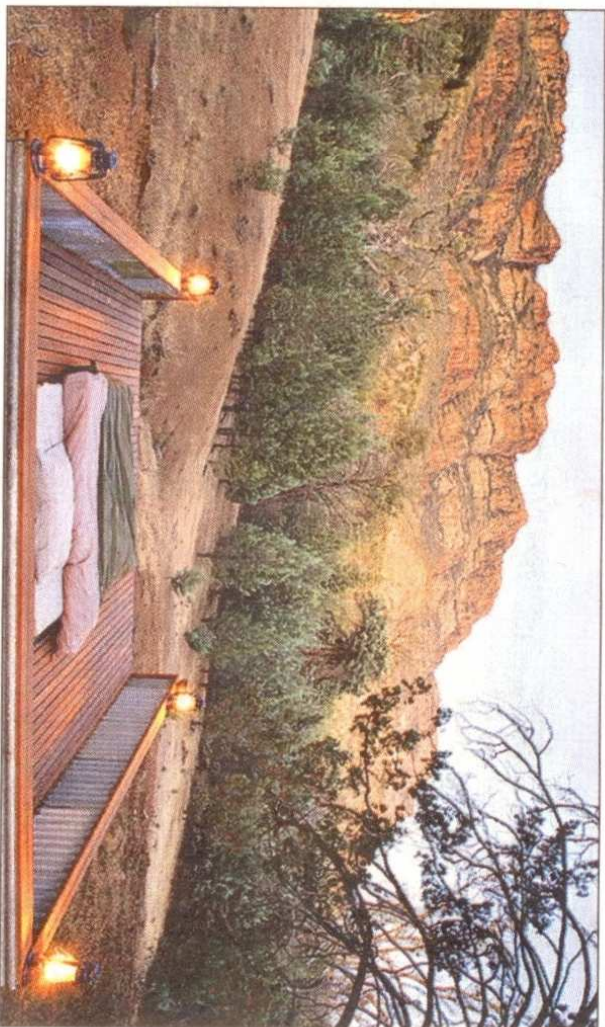
Arkaba Station, a 24,000-hectare working sheep station located on the edge of Wilpena Pound and the Flinders Ranges National Park, is one of the oldest properties in the Flinders. The homestead, built in 1856, is a classic bush building, with thick stone walls, deep shady verandas and a corrugated iron roof, flanked by the craggy ramparts of the Elder Range on one

**Until November last year, the homestead was a private home.**

side and the Chace Range on the other. The stone shearing shed was the main shed for the up to 100 stations that would bring their sheep across the ranges to be shorn here.

Most of those stations have long since gone but the historic shed is still in use and we wander there on our third day to watch some sheep being shorn, ducking out of the way of the harried rouseabouts as they fling the fleeces around.

Until November, the homestead was a private home but it has been transformed into a stylish lodge with five en suite bedrooms. Understated and elegant – with quirky decorative touches by local wildlife artist Rosie Woodford Ganf, such as glass-topped wool bales for bedside tables and bed posts fashioned from old myall fence posts – it's the type of place where you feel instantly at home, like visiting a wealthy uncle in the country.



**Nice pitch ... camping out means something a little different at Arkaba Station.**

Meals prepared by a resident chef are eaten around a shared table and accompanied by a selection of South Australian wines. It's convivial and relaxed but it's the range of activities on offer that make this place worth flying halfway across the country for.

Beyond the overnight walking safaris you can opt for shorter bushwalks with your own private guide, or a 4WD ridge-top drive across the station, wildlife viewing safaris, mountain biking or even a trip to the local pub, the Prairie Hotel at Parachilna.

It's an unbeatable opportunity to sleep out without having to worry about the creepy-crawlies. Who needs five-star luxury when you can have millions of the real thing?

*The writer was the guest of Wild Bush Luxury and the South Australian Tourism Commission.*

## TRIP NOTES

### GETTING THERE

▶ Sharp Airlines flies Adelaide to Port Augusta on weekdays, see [sharpairlines.com](http://sharpairlines.com).

### STAYING THERE

▶ Arkaba Station rates are \$790 a person a night, with a minimum two-night stay, and include all meals, beverages, return transfers from Port Augusta or Hawker and activities.

▶ The four-day, three-night walking safari costs \$2000 an adult and includes all transfers. Phone 1300 790 561, see [arkabastation.com](http://arkabastation.com).