



"Your guides morph from Crocodile Dundee to an Antipodean version of Jeeves"

Clockwise from above:
Take in the stunning scenery at walking pace; classic Aussie wildlife; the evening's camp; sleep under the stars in style



THE OUTBACK SAFARI

Arkaba, Australia

Most of us have a pretty clear idea of what we might see on safari: lions, elephants, giraffes, leopards. But if driving around in a Jeep ticking off the Big Five sounds a bit, well, goal-orientated, try something altogether more relaxed: an Aussie bushwalking safari.

Going walkabout is a rite of passage for Australians, and there's nowhere more stunning to do it than Arkaba, a sheep station in the Flinders ranges, five hours north of Adelaide, whose majestic, towering, 600-million-year-old peaks rise in the distance. The nearest concentration of human life is Hawker, an outback town 45 minutes away where the bar doubles as a post office and planes used to land on the high street.

But at Arkaba, there are plenty of signs of other kinds of life. On arrival, you'll be greeted by hardy but friendly guides Justin and Kat, leaders for your four-day walk through the bush. It's not for beginners: you'll be walking up to 12 miles a day and this is rough, uneven terrain. If you're not the sort of hiker whose boots are already broken in, forget it. But the wildlife you'll see is sufficiently exotic to be worth the blisters: kestrels, wallaroos, parrots, emus, galahs, hawks, yellow-footed rock wallabies, hundreds of kangaroos, spiders as

big as your hand, shingleback lizards, wedgetail eagles, bearded dragons, skinks.

And at the end of each day's walk, the best bit: dinner. You'll arrive at camp to all your bags delivered by a driver, champagne, a lit campfire, a hearty dinner bubbling away, oil lamps glowing in the coming darkness. Your guides morph from Crocodile Dundee to an Antipodean version of Jeeves: topping up your glass with more great Clare Valley wine, and heating water for you to take a bush shower looking out at the mountains.

Later, after you've watched the sunset painting the mountains an astonishing fiery red, it's time for bed. But this is no ordinary sleeping arrangement. Like generations of Aussie pioneers before you, you'll be sleeping under the stars, on a canvas roll-out swag bed that zips open to reveal a mattress and linen sheets. Toasty warm and exhausted from a hard day's walk, the only thing that may keep you awake is the thought of all those creepy crawlies. Well, this is the Outback.

NEED TO KNOW: A four-day, three-night walking safari costs Aus\$2,000 (about £1,300) per person. This includes transfers to Hawker, guides, all meals, drinks and camp gear. Visit arkabawalk.com. Fly to Melbourne with BA (britishairways.com), then connect to Adelaide with a wide choice of local carriers – find one on kayak.co.uk. Hire a car with Holiday Autos; holidayautos.co.uk.



ON THE WAY: North Bundaleer

It's an awfully long drive from Adelaide to Arkaba, so break up the journey halfway with a stay at North Bundaleer, repeatedly voted one of Australia's most romantic places to stay in Aussie travel mags. Gnarled blue gum trees with the odd kangaroo hopping up to the back door set the scene for what is essentially the home of Mick and Marianne, an old colonial homestead filled with a charming mishmash of African antiques, Liberty-print wallpapers and Oriental china. Dinners are home-cooked and sinfully delicious. Jet-lagged limbs will sink joyfully into Victorian brass beds with their layers of white linen, quilts and comforters.

Double rooms with dinner from Aus\$475 (about £310) per person per night. Visit northbundaleer.com.au.



Beyond the big five: other ideas...

1 THE SEA SAFARI

Closer to home (*below left*), Scotland's coast has an abundance of marine life including porpoise, dolphins, minke whales and basking sharks as well as sea eagles, golden eagles and puffins. Responsible Travel works closely together with the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust and offers impressive tailor-made day or short breaks. Visit responsibletravel.com.

2 THE TIGER SAFARI

A tiger is, of course, one thing an African safari doesn't deliver. At Taj Safaris' lodges, you'll go from luxurious tented camps (*below right*) out on safari drives into the Indian jungle, where – if you're lucky – you could catch sight of a rare Bengal tiger. Visit tajsafaris.com.



3 THE AMAZON SAFARI

Pink dolphins, piranha fish, black howler monkeys, alligators, jaguars, three-toed sloth, parrots, macaws and millions of colours of butterflies: the wildlife in the Peruvian rainforest is a riot of colour and danger. See it all in five-star luxury from a suite in a chic river boat (*bottom*). Visit aquaexpeditions.com.

4 THE DESERT SAFARI

Admittedly, you won't see many animals (other than camels) on this trip, but skimming across Dubai's stunning sand dunes in a four-wheel drive will be just as memorable. Choose between a morning, evening or overnight desert safari complete with sunset dune bashing, barbecues, belly dancing and traditional Bedouin camping. Visit desertsafaridubai.com. ■

