

Getting there

The attraction of Arkaba Station is its remoteness, which means getting there is a little challenging. The fastest way is to take a charter

flight from Adelaide airport to the town of Hawker and Arkaba Station will provide the 25km transfer from there. South Australian regional airline Sharp flies from Adelaide to Port Augusta from where Arkaba will provide the 75 minute transfer. Alternatively you can take a four and a half hour leisurely drive from central Adelaide.

Flights and transport for this story were provided by South

Australian Tourism Commission

www.arkabastation.com

www.wildbushluxury.com

www.southaustralia.com

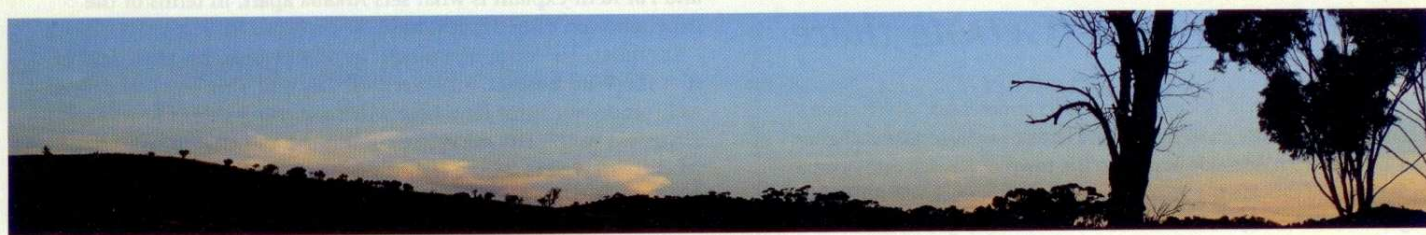
handle up to 8000 sheep. Today, it's still a working sheep station but only runs 3000 sheep as the new owners are determined to ensure the country returns to its natural state.

For the first time visitor, it's an opportunity for an authentic insight into a working station, as much as a relaxing break. The original homestead with its cool, deep verandahs has remained untouched and the happy squawking of hundreds of galahs every evening as they flit from the massive river gums that surround the homestead is probably the exact same soundtrack this country has heard for millennia. Inside, the main home has been gently renovated, to include generous ensuite bathrooms for all five rooms. Yes, that's correct. There are only five rooms available along with a separate charming Coachmen's Cottage for guests. This, hosts Sally and Pat Kent explain is what sets Arkaba apart, in terms of the experience on offer. It's intimate.

It's quiet. There are no crowds. In other words, it's bliss. Add to that the Wild Bush Luxury creed of "Eat well, drink well and sleep well" and your three days here will be nothing short of restorative. First, "eat well." The meals are communal and chef Jo, who has recently moved from the Daintree's Bamaru Plains Resort creates fabulous meals with local produce – her BBQ scotch fillet, and simple seared asparagus and zucchini with a freshly tossed salad and foil-wrapped baked potatoes finished with home-made ice-cream was sublime. Drink well: the Wild Bush Luxury company takes some pride in its wine lists. Expect to find boldface Barossa names such as Henschke and the deliciously floral Shaw and Smith sauvignon blanc. Arkaba Station runs on an honour system and the two fridges for the guests are full of cool drinks, chilled white wines and cold water. The "sleep well" aspect is also amply addressed with state-of-



the-art beds and a menu of pillows. The important point to make about Arkaba Station is that it isn't the sort of connect-the-dots five-star luxury some guests might expect. It's actually much more than that. As Wild Bush Luxury's mantra attests, they take care of the three basic needs of any guest seeking a spot of luxury. But Arkaba's real luxury lies in what you can experience and see. Access to this remote and beautiful landscape is rare and special. Nothing brings this home more than heading out on your first day with guide Kat. Setting off in the sturdy four wheel drive with plenty of water is just the start of an amazing adventure of discovery as you traverse the rough, dirt tracks that meander around the property. Ringed by the Chase and Elder Ranges and with the walls of the Wilpenna Pound on the northernmost tip of the station, it's a revelation just how much wildlife is thriving out here. With Kat you'll see eagles, hawks, emus and kangaroos (three different types) resting from the midday sun under the shade of the river gums, and, if you're lucky, a Central Bearded Dragon – a rather alarming looking creature she spotted under a rock. There are sheep, some of which are clearly runaways that have escaped the shearing season with enormous coats that fluff comically when they run. It's a fantastic way to begin to understand the ecosystem here and to respect the way life adapts to harsh conditions. Having a glass of sauvignon blanc while watching the sun burnish the rocky walls of Wilpenna Pound (an ancient geographic site of much significance) a spectrum of golds and reds and the palest blush pinks is a rather nice way to end the day. Later that night, after one of Jo's fabulous meals make some time for star-gazing as the sky is lit as if someone had shot a scatter gun into a velvet curtain, with more stars than is possible to imagine. We counted six shooting stars in an hour. Our wish? To come back here and explore even more of this remarkable area.



Walking Safaris and Sleep Under The Stars

Imagine falling asleep under the starry night and waking up to the sun colouring the Elder Ranges a bright red before your eyes. There is an exciting trekking activity on the roster at Arkaba Station, with guests walking a track through the property and sleeping in luxury swags on raised platforms in three different "camps" on the 60,000 acres. There will be a BBQ dinner provided and outdoor toilets and showers (eco-friendly ones) to complete the "rustic luxe" approach.

Classic Australian Bush Luxury

NOT LONG AGO THOSE WHO WANTED TO EXPLORE THE REMOTE AUSTRALIAN BUSH ROUGHED IT. OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS A BOOM IN WHAT HAS BECOME KNOWN AS BUSH LUXURY HAS MADE IT POSSIBLE TO BE IMMERSSED IN THE SIGHTS, SOUNDS AND SMELLS OF THE BUSH IN COMFORT. **MADELEINE STRATTON** EXPLORES SOME OF AUSTRALIA'S CLASSIC BUSH LUXURY RETREATS.

1. *Bamurru Plains*

On the edge of the Northern Territory's Mary River floodplains, close to the coast and Kakadu National Park, is camp Bamurru Plains.

It was the first of four properties (including Arkaba Station) that now fall under the Wild Bush Luxury company name. According to CEO Charlie Carlow, the term 'wild bush luxury' was not intended to be a brand; it first came about as a way of describing the experience Bamurru Plains offers guests.

The accommodation at Bamurru Plains was designed to remove modern and urban distractions and direct guests' focus to the surrounding wilderness. The camp's nine "safari suites" are set into the savannah bush, each with an ensuite.

Bamurru Plains is accessible by air, and is a 20-minute flight from both Darwin Airport and Kakadu National Park. Driving from Darwin takes three hours. Rates per night start at \$930 per person twin share or \$1,390 single occupancy. Packages for two nights including return airfares/transfers from Darwin start at \$2,300 per person twin share. Details, www.bamurruplains.com

2. *Faraway Bay*

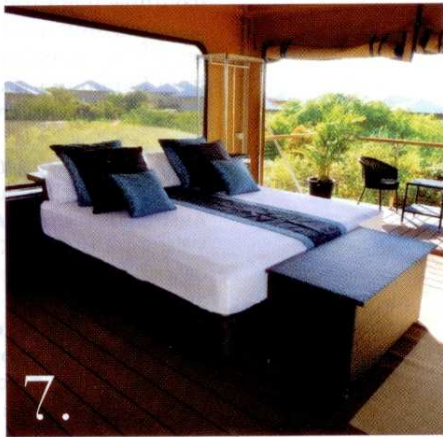
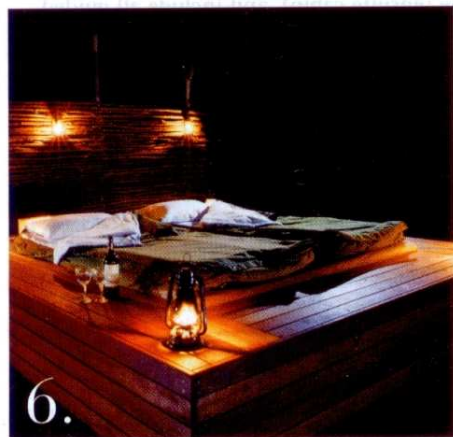
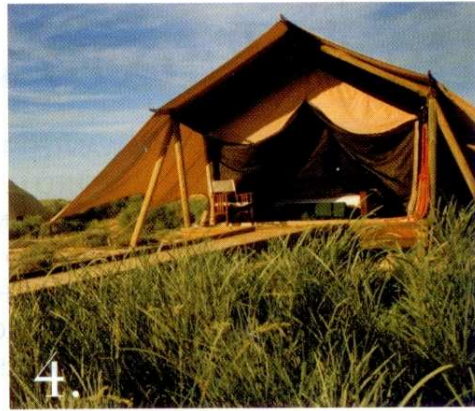
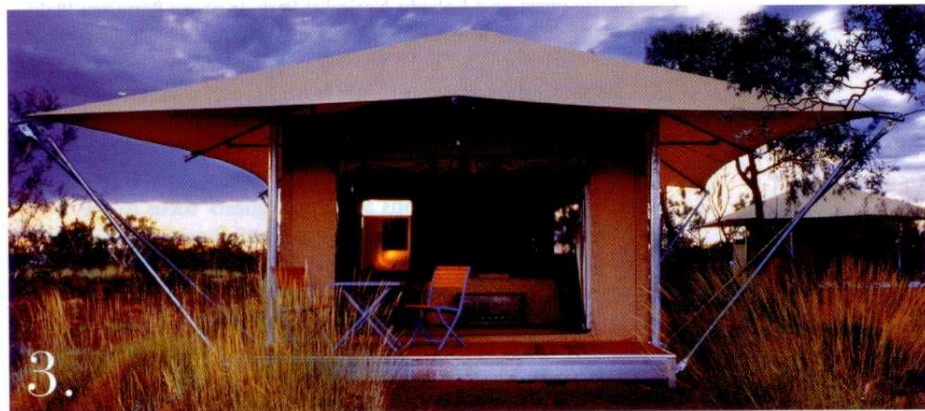
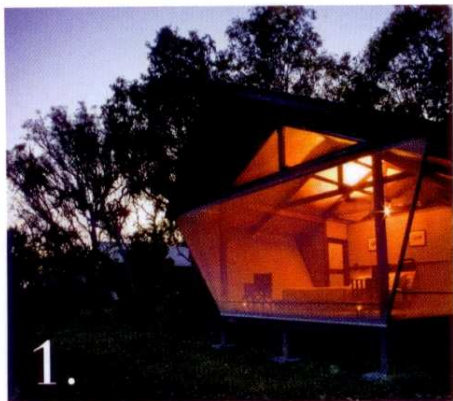
The Faraway Bay bush camp in Western Australia's remote East Kimberley region is a three-time winner of Australian Tourism's Unique Accommodation Award. "Our uniqueness lies in the stunningly pristine and remote location," says owner Bruce Ellison. "In this natural environment there is nothing to distract you from absorbing the extraordinary sights, sounds and magic of this isolated slice of the Kimberley."

Set on a rocky hilltop overlooking the Timor Sea, the remote bush camp is made up of eight spacious cabins each with 180-degree views of the cliff-lined bay. Six of the cabins feature ensuites and private outdoor solar-heated showers, and all are equipped with fans, lighting and mosquito nets.

Faraway Bay operates during the dry season from 1 April to 31 October. Rates start at \$3,760 per person twin share for a three day/three night package (ensuite cabin), and include all guided activities, unlimited boat charter, and all gourmet meals with select fine Australian wines and beers. Packages include transfer from Kununurra. Transfers from Darwin and Broome can be arranged. Details, www.farawaybay.com.au

3. *Karijini Eco Retreat*

The Karijini Eco Retreat, gold winner at the 2008 Western Australian Tourism Awards, is within the Karijini National Park in Western Australia. Karijini's Marketing Manager Amanda Hoyne describes the retreat as "outback style luxury, a unique blend of ancient, untouched spectacular landscapes and nature at its most raw and vulnerable combined with unobtrusive, up market tented accommodation providing home-style comforts to enable enjoyment and peace after a day exploring." Karijini National Park is nearly 199km from Paraburdoo Airport in the Pilbara region. Qantas and Skywest have direct flights several times a week. The spacious eco



tents include a front and rear deck, either a hotel-quality king-size or two single beds, low-wattage power and a private ensuite with hot showers. They are available from April through to October, and rates start at \$289 per tent per night (tent only).

Details, www.karijinicoretreat.com.au.

4. *Sal Salis*

Western Australia's Ningaloo Reef is 260km of fringing coral reef and is the world's largest reef close to land. Wild Bush Luxury's Sal Salis Ningaloo Reef is a safari camp that gives guests access to the reef and the surrounding natural environment. The camp is made up of five spacious luxury tents set metres from the reef with comfortable beds, 500 thread count sheets and ensuite bathrooms.

Guests at Sal Salis can take advantage of the proximity to Ningaloo Reef by spending the day snorkeling and sea kayaking; from April to June guests have the opportunity to swim with the whale sharks as they pass through the reef.

Sal Salis is an hour's drive south of Exmouth. Skywest operates a daily flight service from Perth to Exmouth and transfers can be arranged. Rates start at \$685 per person per night twin share. Details, www.salsalis.com.au.

5. *Longitude 131°*

Private views of the sun rising over Uluru; this experience alone is reason enough to stay at Longitude 131° in the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, Northern Territory. It lies at the entrance to the national park, and as Voyage's Public Relations Manager Louise Longman says, "it encapsulates bush luxury by offering guests a luxurious resort experience, with minimal impact to the surrounding environment."

The resort is made up of 15 luxurious white tents dotted along the landscape, each with a view of the iconic Australian rock monolith. "Each of the 15 white elevated tents is individually themed, paying homage to Australian pioneers," says Longman.

The tents feature reverse cycle air-conditioning, and electric blinds that can be raised to reveal Uluru at sunrise. Tents also house private bathrooms and showers and other creature comforts.

The best dining at Longitude 131° is under the stars; Table 131° is set on a dune with 360° views of Uluru and Kata Tjuta.

Longitude 131° provides a complementary return 4WD transfer for guests from Ayers Rock Airport. Rates start with a two-night package at \$3,262 per tent for one person or \$4,040 for two. Details, www.longitude131.com.au

6. *Blue Mountains Private Safaris*

Another Wild Bush Luxury property, Blue Mountains Private Safaris, is set in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales. Safaris begin with a helicopter flight from western Sydney taking in spectacular views of the Blue Mountains wilderness. The flight lands near a secret and exclusive bush camp in a southern part of the Blue Mountains. Those who don't want to fly can be picked up by a guide in central Sydney for a two-hour drive to the mountains, or they can drive to the Joajda Vineyard near Bowral to be met by a guide, who will transfer guests to the secret location.

Guests are accommodated in open air 'swag' beds (500 thread count cotton linen) set on inlaid cushions in raised wooden

platforms, which provide un-obscured views of the southern skies. Private ensuite facilities are provided in the form of hot water bucket showers and camp toilets.

Guests can take guided bushwalks to view native wildlife and flora, or explore a little further by taking a 4WD safari. Blue Mountains Private Safaris will also arrange guided tours of the private Yerranderie property, a 1,000 acre historic ghost town. Rates start at \$775 per person twin share for a two day/one night Swag Camp Safari. Details, www.bluemountainprivatesafaris.com

7. *Eco Beach Wilderness Retreat*

The Eco Beach Wilderness Retreat is set on the sands of the North-West Australian coast, overlooking the Indian Ocean an hour south of Broome. Designed to have a minimal impact on the surrounding environment, Eco Beach aims to be a parallel between luxury and the Australian outback experience.

Guests can choose to stay in luxurious Eco Villas or stylish Eco Tents. The one-bedroom villas feature ocean or bush garden views, solar power, hot water systems, kitchen facilities and air-conditioning and sleep up to four people. The safari-style tents have similar views, private front decks and low-wattage power supplies and sleep up to three people.

The ocean-front Jack's Bar & Restaurant offers breakfast, lunch & dinner menus. The retreat can also prepare picnic hampers for days spent exploring the coastline and natural environment.

To get to Eco Beach, guests can drive from Broome, or the retreat can arrange transport by helicopter or shuttle bus. Sailing enthusiasts can choose to sail from Roebuck Bay (a two hour cruise) and should keep a look out for migrating whales. Rack rates for villas start at \$450 per villa per night for a Garden View villa, \$750 for an Ocean View. Tents are priced from \$230 to \$250 per tent per night. Details, www.ecobeach.com.au.

8. *Paperbark Camp*

Paperbark Camp is set amongst a forest of Eucalyptus and Paperbark trees at Jervis Bay on New South Wales' south coast. Paperbark Camp's Camp Manager Ben Hutchings believes the idea of bush luxury "should involve the sites, smells and sounds of the natural wild without the discomforts that the wild naturally brings with it. The majestic stature of the trees on our property brings so much beauty visually, the smell of the forest when it rains ... whilst the (occasionally spooky) sounds of nocturnal creatures make for an unforgettable experience."

Paperbark camp has eight original safari tents and four deluxe safari tents. The original tents, built off-ground on timber platforms come with private outdoor ensuite, timber deck with outdoor furniture, full mosquito screening, comfortable queen or king/twin beds, and hotel amenities. The deluxe tent includes all of the above as well as a freestanding outdoor bath among the gum trees.

Paperbark Camp is two and a half hours south of Sydney. Guests can drive themselves or take a scenic train trip via Nowra (transfers to and from the camp can be arranged). Rates start at \$340 for the original tents and \$470 for the deluxe tents per person per night. Details, www.paperbarkcamp.com.au