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Total Guide

Australia

Heading Down Under? Turn this page and tick off its unmissables...

Page 54 Rock star:
how to do Uluru
without a misstep

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Bondi — a local's tips
for Sydney

Page 74 Aqua
bats! Wild water
experiences for all



HOP TO IT!
TOP WILDLIFE
TO SPOT

70

You'll love Australia because...

its landscapes are heart-stopping

Waterfalls, gorges, beaches and the red-hot heartland. Nowhere does scenery more spectacular

Q
&
A

How to do Uluru?

On a map, the iconic red rock looks like it's near Alice Springs. It's actually a six-hour drive away — so it makes sense to fly into Ayers Rock airport instead. There are cheap direct flights (from £63 one way) from seven Oz cities, including Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Cairns.

Climbing Uluru is now banned, but it doesn't matter — walking around it is better anyway. Start early to beat the heat on the flat-but-exposed 10km Uluru Base Walk (you'll want to finish by 11am) and stop to read the signs, as several give Aboriginal explanations for all the caves, gullies and weird rock bulges. Afterwards, for even more

of an indigenous insight, visit the Cultural Centre by the main car park.

You could pay an eye-watering £2,400pp for three nights in a luxury glamping tent at Longitude 131° (longitude131.com.au), but the Ayers Rock Resort (ayersrockresort.com.au), made up of six hotels, is the affordable option. Best value comes with staying longer — from £200pp for three nights, B&B, in the Outback Pioneer Hotel (versus the usual £193 a night per room).

Three nights is about right, though — there's plenty to do here, including camel-riding tours (from £44), Aboriginal dot-painting workshops (from £39) and helicopter flights (from £82). All this fun

gets expensive, obviously, so do take advantage of the resort's freebies, including bush-food experiences and guided garden walks, plus photo-worthy moments at the designated sunset and sunrise viewing areas.

If you want the freedom to explore, rather than relying on resort shuttle buses, hire a car at the airport. Comparison site vroomvroomvroom.com.au has deals from £44 a day, particularly useful for popping to Kata Tjuta. Some people even prefer these huge, bulbous domes, 60km west of Uluru, and the accompanying three-to-four-hour Valley of the Winds walk back to the magnificent red rock.

Turn the page for the lowdown on more amazing Aussie landscapes ➔







LOCAL TAKE

Great walks

By Heath Garratt of
the Tasmanian
Walking Company
(taswalkingco.com.au)

'Just looking for one day in the Great Outdoors? The Blue Mountains, near Sydney, offer so many options, from one-hour walks to full-day trails with clifftops and waterfalls. Wilson's Promontory in Victoria is good for coastal scenery and sand dunes, while the Gold Coast hinterland in Queensland teems with rainforest streams, waterfalls and glowworm caves. Or, if you want to try a multi-day walk, you have to do your research and be self-sufficient — taking plenty of food and water with you. Unless, of course, you get an operator such as my Tasmanian Walking Company or Great Walks of Australia (greatwalksofaustralia.com.au) to do the planning and guiding for you. I love the diversity of the Overland Track from Cradle Mountain to Lake St Clair in Tasmania — about 60km of lakes, alpine moors and waterfalls tackled over six days. And the 110km Great Ocean Walk in Victoria feels elemental — rough seas, clifftops, rock formations, beach walks and koalas.'



Phew-point: sunrise over Wineglass Bay and the Freycinet National Park

Our top five jaw-drop picks

1 Mossman Gorge, North Queensland

Smoothed ancient boulders are lapped by clear, swimmable pools beneath a neon-green rainforest canopy. This slice of the far north jungle is super lush at the start of the dry season (May to October), so come then. Hop on the shuttle bus from the visitor car park (£6 return), then take your pick of superb trails.

2 Horizontal Falls, Western Australia

At the edge of the Indian Ocean, through remote, jutting sandstone outcrops, shifting tides create whirlpools and a bizarre waterfall effect. Bounce along them in a

speedboat; Horizontal Falls Adventures (horizontalfallsadventures.com.au) runs day tours from Broome, including a 4WD trip up the Dampier Peninsula and a seaplane flight to the Falls (£494pp).

3 Wineglass Bay, Tasmania

This dreamy curve of blue and beach makes you work for it — the sands are a good two-hour return walk from the National Park car park on the Freycinet Peninsula. Just want the photo? There's a perfect lookout 1.5km into the schlep.

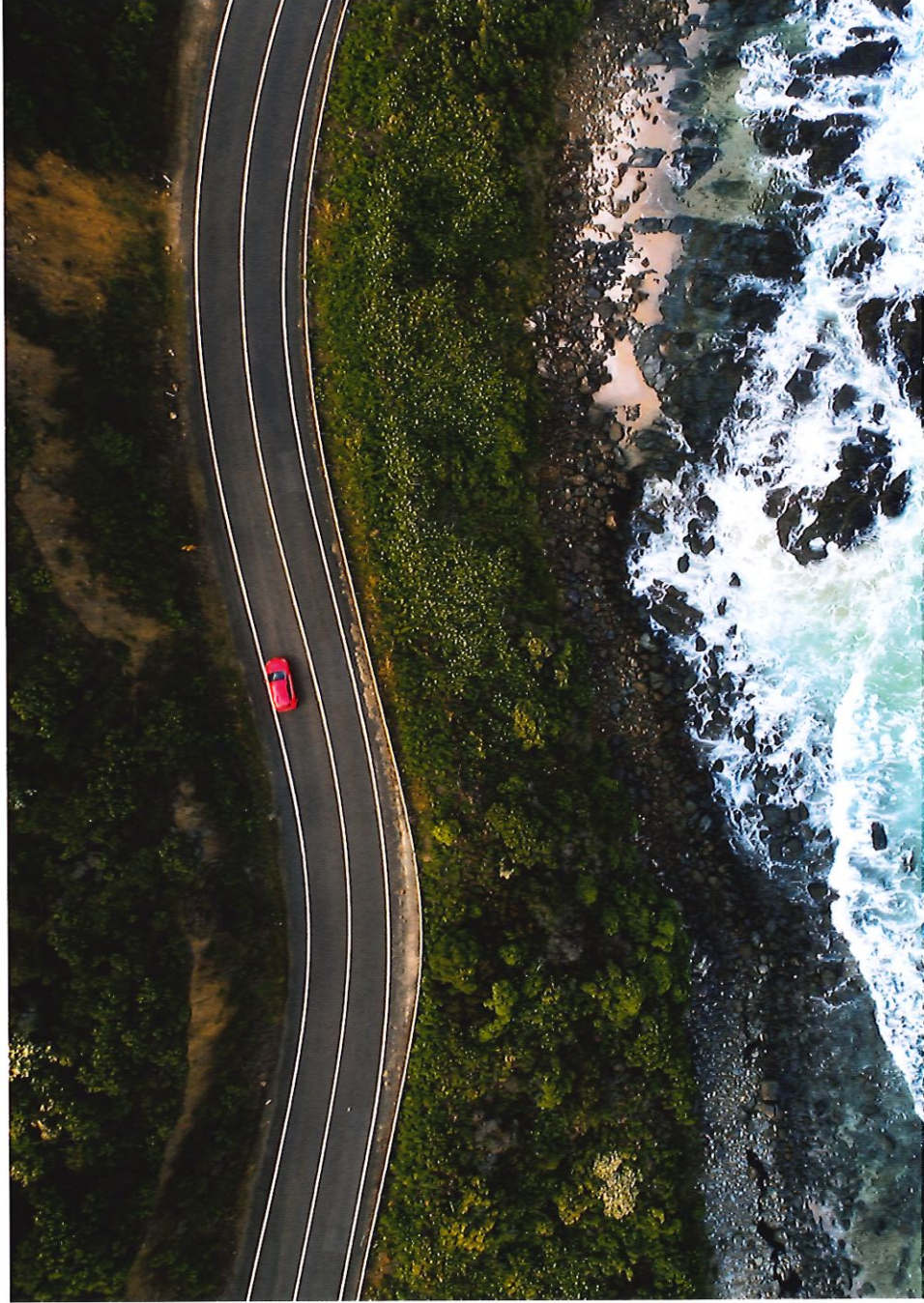
4 Wilpena Pound, South Australia

This natural amphitheatre is the centrepiece of Flinders Ranges National Park, a five-hour drive from

Adelaide. Board a scenic flight, soaring over the rock walls that rise from the parched Outback (wilpenapound.com.au; £97). Or explore on foot — the three-and-a-half hour Wangara Lookout hike, following the creek, provides top-notch stonescape views.

5 Grampians, Victoria

Inland from the Great Ocean Road, this green, craggy region is irresistible for rock climbers and abseilers. The Grampians Mountain Adventure Company runs half-day beginner sessions (grampiansadventure.com.au; £66), but there are many easy-access lookouts, too. Boroka Lookout, with its poser-friendly overhanging rock ledge, is just a short amble from the car park.



You'll love Australia because...

the road trips are epic

Long, empty highways through landscapes that time forgot — put your foot down

Our top three driving adventures

1 Great Ocean Road

This classic coastal trip from Melbourne can be done in a day, but then you'd miss out on its sandy beaches, forest walks and cutesy towns. So allow three to tackle the 660km round-trip. Start with surf spots — take a lesson in Torquay (torquaysurf.com.au; £33) or watch from

clifftops as experts tackle frothy Bells Beach — before heading on to Anglesea for guaranteed 'roo sightings (at the Golf Club) and an overnight at beach town Lorne. The Grey River Road at Kennett River is prime koala- and cockatoo-spotting territory, then the drive heads south and inland through Cape Otway forests to emerge at the rugged Shipwreck

Coast, stacked with epic rock formations such as the Twelve Apostles. Stay over in Warrnambool to see whales at Logans Beach (May to October) before heading back.

2 The South West

Western Australia's fringes provide an easy week-long introduction to the state's vast beaches, sublime wine and unique nature. Three hours south

of Perth, the Margaret River region delivers the lot: wineries, caves, surf beaches and coastal walks, while further southeast, Pemberton is dense with enormous kauri trees — join a treetop walk at the Valley of the Giants (valleyofthegiants.com.au; £12). Next up is the historic city of Albany and its evocative coastline. Albany's former whaling station reveals all about

the ocean's gentle giants (discoverybay.com.au; £18), while the mysteriously smooth Elephant Rocks near Denmark town are particularly photogenic. More wineries and bushwalks at the giant granite Porongurups outcrops round things off.

3 The Atherton Tablelands Loop

North Queensland isn't only about the Great Barrier Reef, as this one-day, 160km loop from Cairns shows. After a winding drive through the Gillies Range, step inside the implausibly enormous Cathedral Fig

Rounding the curve: aerial view of the Great Ocean Road; left, Elephant Rocks near Denmark town in the South West; the rolling hills of the Atherton Tablelands



LOCAL TAKE

The Big Lap

By Rob and Tracy Morris, family-travel bloggers (theblondenomads.com.au)

'You can do the Big Lap — that's what the drive around the whole of Australia is known as — in three months, but you'd be screaming by the end of it. Realistically, you need six months, and it's important to time it right so you're in the south for summer and in the north for the dry season (May to October). Ideally, you'll want a 4WD, as it'll allow you to get to special, rare spots. If not, don't worry: Highway 1 goes all the way round the country and you'll still find amazing places. Speak to your car-hire agency or ask other travellers which roads are OK in your vehicle. The Wikicamp app — which has an interactive map of campsites and facilities — is our must-have tool, while drivenow.com.au is a useful comparison site for campervan hire. As for our favourite stop? Visiting the Cygnet Bay Pearl Farm (cygnetbaypearlfarm.com.au; £20) on the Dampier Peninsula, north of Broome. We walked through mangroves, caught mud crabs, and our indigenous guide opened and smoked oysters by lighting grasses on the rocks.'

tree in Danbulla National Park; swim with turtles at Granite Gorge (granitegorge.com.au; £7.50); and platypus-spot from the bridge on the Peterson's Creek walking track near Yungaburra. You'll eat well along the way: stop at Mareeba's Coffee Works (coffeeworks.com.au), nibble gourmet chocs and cheese at Gallo Dairyland (gallo dairyland.com.au), and quaff surprisingly palatable mango wines at Golden Drop (goldendrop.com.au) in Bibbohra. On the way back through the rainforest to Cairns, you'll find the multi-tiered, Barron Falls thundering in full (December to March).

Q
&
A

How about train journeys?

Most train travel in Australia is slow and utilitarian — so fly, drive or take the Greyhound bus. However, the epic cross-country trips with Journey Beyond Rail (journeybeyondrail.com.au) are a different matter. Don't bother with the *Great Southern* — it covers areas better ticked off on a road trip. Choose between the glorious *Ghan* (Adelaide to Darwin; pictured) and the *Indian Pacific* (Perth to Sydney). Both are three-to-four days long and all-inclusive, laying on the luxury of private cabins, on-board fine dining, alcohol and excursions such as a Katherine Gorge cruise or Barossa Valley wine-tasting. But they're expensive — from £1,062pp for the *Ghan* and £1,007pp for the *Indian Pacific*; consider them as once-in-a-lifetime experiences rather than simply a way of getting from A to B. The cheapest fares are in June, July and August, fortunately — the nicest time to travel as the furious Outback heat has yet to hit.



You'll love Australia because...

its stylish cities sizzle

Cool culture, hip bars and cutting-edge restaurants — Oz's hubs are *hot* right now





LOCAL TAKE

How to do Sydney like an insider

By Donna Hay,
cookbook author

'I always take visitors on the ferry from Circular Quay, in the city centre, to Manly, on the north shore of the harbour. It takes half an hour, and you pass some spectacular scenery on the way. Manly has come on leaps and bounds, with little microbreweries such as 4 Pines (4pinesbeer.com.au) near the ferry terminal. I head to Shelly Beach, where the Boathouse Café (theboathousesb.com.au; mains about £11) does great salads and seafood, and

there's a little marine reserve with the bluest, clearest water — you can even see sea horses there. If you've got a car, take a picnic to the Royal National Park in the south of the city. Wattamolla Falls is a big lagoon, with a waterfall spilling into the ocean. The nearby clifftop walk is a good place to see Aboriginal rock art, too. Dining-wise, Sydney's great at casual, seaside and outdoor. Cafe Sydney

(cafesydne.com; mains about £22), at Circular Quay, has the iconic harbour views, but also a diverse menu. And if you're heading to the Opera House, try the Bennelong Bar inside — it serves red-claw yabbies (crayfish) for about £20. But the true Aussie meal is a sausage roll or pie. Get yours from Lorraine's Patisserie (merivale.com; £3) near the Ivy Building, along with one of its divine passionfruit truffles (£1).'

Turn the page for the lowdown on more hot cities ➔





Our top five things to do in Melbourne

1 Explore Federation Square

Bizarre angular buildings, ever-changing gallery exhibitions and quirky pop-ups (big-screen tennis watched from deckchairs one day, meditation classes the next) make Federation Square Melbourne's must-see meeting point. Don't miss the Ian Potter Centre (ngv.vic.gov.au), where you'll get a free introduction to Aussie art.

2 Get lost in the laneways

Melbourne's laneways (pictured) — former bin alleys turned into paint-splattered warrens of hip bars and restaurants — ooze alternative energy. Discover them and the biggest street-art scene in the southern hemisphere with Melbourne Street Art Tours (melbournestreettours.com; £38). Its guides are artists and will help you spot subtle sticker art and political paste-ups among the big, eye-catching murals.

3 Hang out in Fitzroy

Northeast of the centre, feisty and fun Fitzroy is all live-music pubs, indie

galleries and upcycled-clothing shops. It's also the epicentre of a high-quality vegan restaurant scene — the plant-filled Transformer warehouse (transformerfitzroy.com; mains about £11) is the most visually spectacular, while Rose Street Artists' Market (rosestreetmarket.com.au) is a must for stylish souvenirs.

4 Catch a game

The Melbourne Cricket Ground (mcg.org.au) is the high temple of two sports — cricket and high-speed Aussie Rules football. Entry to games starts at £6, but if tickets are scarce, sign up for a behind-the-scenes tour, including the worthwhile National Sports Museum (£14).

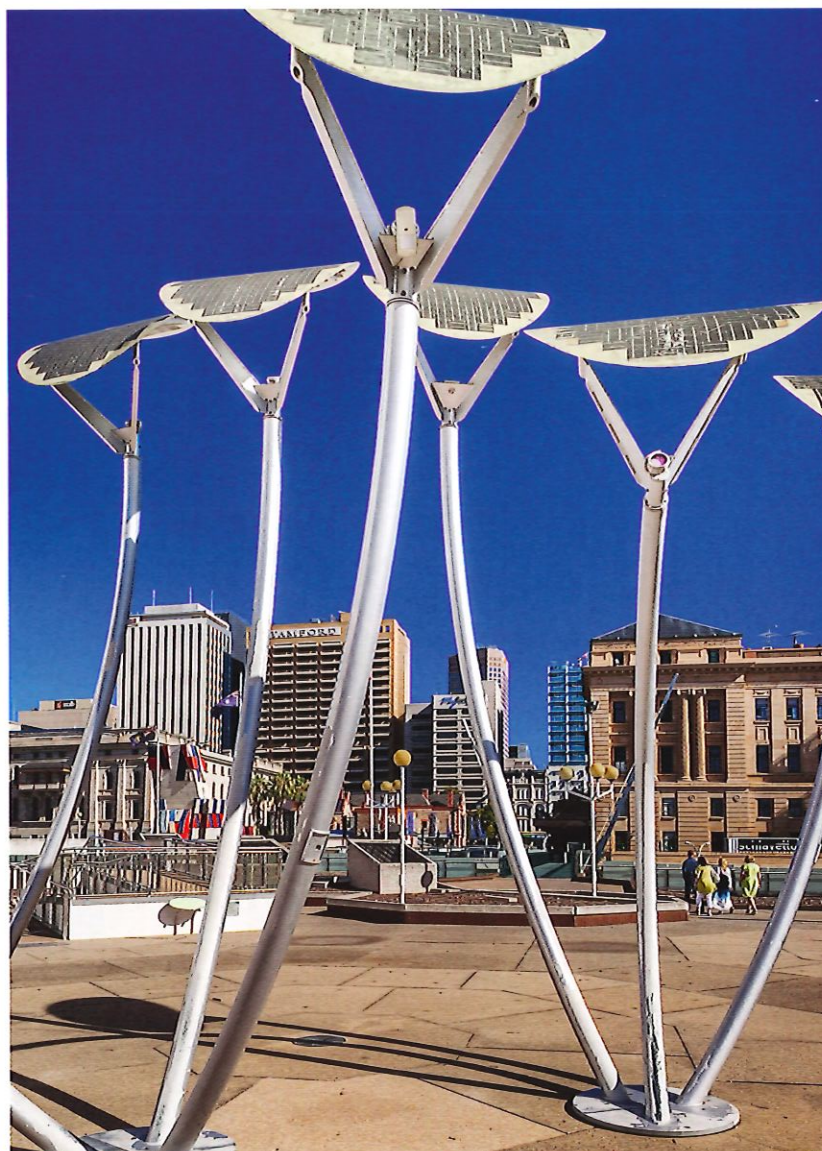
5 Get indigenous insight

Australia's got some head-turning native flora — for example, towering eucalyptus trees — so stop by the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria (rbg.vic.gov.au; free) for an absorbing spin through the highlights. Guides on the Aboriginal Heritage Walk (£19) show off local plants, detailing what the indigenous Kulin people used them for — be it foods, tools or medicine.

Q & A

What are the other crucial cities?

Sydney and Melbourne headline most classic Oz itineraries, but don't discount the country's smaller hubs — each has its own charms. Subtropical Brisbane, in the northeast, isn't just a jumping-off point for the Great Barrier Reef or Gold Coast beaches. It has captivating animal-watching of its own (a world-class koala sanctuary and humpback whales in Moreton Bay, as well as a winding river for boat rides, and diverse nightlife. On the south coast, Adelaide (pictured) is most famous for its neighbouring wine regions — the Barossa, McLaren Vale and Adelaide Hills — as well as wildlife star Kangaroo Island. Meanwhile, its city centre has good museums (try the Art Gallery of South Australia), the foodie Central Market, and a packed events calendar. Finally, consider Perth (now reachable nonstop from London, with Qantas). It's got the same laid-back-beachy, nightlife-buzzy vibe as Sydney or Melbourne, but it's smaller, sunnier — and sits on the shores of the Indian Ocean. That means endlessly inventive fusion food and exquisite local wines (try it all at Wildflower; wildflowerperth.com.au; mains about £27); a raffish edge around portside Fremantle and Northbridge; chunks of tropical jungle and bush in vast Kings Park; and, just a few kilometres offshore, the utterly unspoilt Rottnest Island for snorkelling, surfing, whale-spotting and quokka-bothering (the fearless little marsupials are Instagram-breakingly cute).



You'll love Australia because...

its food and wine are superb

The seafood, the vino, the barbies, even the bugs and bushtucker — everything's delicious Down Under

Q
&
A

What are Oz's essential eats?

Ever had a banana prawn? How about a finger lime? If you've never been to Australia, chances are not — because they're only found here. Just as it has its own distinct wildlife, Australia has unique native ingredients, providing thrilling new flavours in every region you visit. Spend a few days in tropical Queensland and along with those slender, juicy finger limes you'll sample Moreton Bay bugs (like lobster, pictured), tart lily pilli fruit and locally grown coffee and vanilla. In Western Australia, black truffles and marron crayfish star on menus; in cooler-climate Tasmania, whiskies and beers chase down oysters, island-grown wasabi, mushrooms and apples. And, pretty much anywhere in the country, you'll find wallaby steaks or sausages, and ostrich and kangaroo on offer.

You can try many traditional Aussie ingredients on a 'bush tucker' tour or cookery class. But many of the country's slickest restaurants are also getting in on the native food game. Adelaide's much-lauded Orana (restaurantorana.com; 20 courses £72) serves macadamia nuts, crocodile and wattleseed (acacia seed) in its refined dishes. In Melbourne, often rated Australia's food capital, zingy Asian-fusion joints such as Chin Chin (chinchinrestaurant.com.au; mains about £18) sit alongside elevated fine-dining experiences such as the one at Attica (attica.com.au; tasting menu £180), where emu liver and black-ant lamingtons (sponge cakes) feature.

Fancy food aside, there's one Oz eating experience that's truly unmissable — a classic barbecue. It's best done DIY: stock up on produce at Sydney's Bondi Farmers' Market and take your treats down to neighbouring Biddigal Reserve to flame up on free 'cues. Or wait until you're in the Outback: in Alice Springs, glamping pad Squeaky Windmill (squeakywindmill.com; safari-tent doubles from £96, room only) will sort all the trappings, so you can grill and eat under a patchwork of stars (£38 for two people).

Turn the page for more foodie thrills →







LOCAL TAKE

Coffee break

By Matthew Lewin,
Australian barista
champion (ona
coffee.com.au)

'Australians have long loved coffee, thanks to the influence of Italian immigrants. But in the past 10 years or so there has been a real change in approach. Pioneers such as those from Melbourne's Proud Mary cafe (proudmarycoffee.com.au; house blend £2.50) now travel to farms and source their coffee with love. The beans are farmed better, an element of science has been brought into the farm-to-cup process, and different flavours — white flowers, ruby grapefruit — are being unlocked. You'll find great brews around the country — the flat white, in particular, has become pretty synonymous with Australian coffee. My very favourite is Reformatory Caffeine Lab (thereformatorylab.coffee; signature blend £4) in Sydney. It focuses on high-end coffee and even serves the ground beans next to the cup so you can smell them as you sip.'



Fields of dreams:
Hunter Valley
vineyards

Our top five wine regions

1 Barossa Valley

Carpeted with thick, gnarled vines — older than most in Europe — and dotted with pretty homes with wraparound-verandas and creaky rooms, this picturesque wine region north of Adelaide shows that the 'new world' can do old-school, too. The Barossa's sun-baked hills produce top-quality, long-ageing reds: stock up on serious shiraz at boutiquey Rockford (rockfordwines.com.au) or century-old fortified wine at Seppeltsfield (seppeltsfield.com.au).

2 Hunter Valley

Three hours' drive north of Sydney, the Hunter Valley feels a world away — kangaroos hop between vines, forested hills are awash with gum trees and long-running wineries welcome visitors for tastings of crisp, peachy semillon and zippy

chardonnay — the most popular local varieties. Tick off a few cellar-door tasting rooms — Brokenwood (brokenwood.com.au), in Pokolbin, is a must — then join a cycle tour (huntervalley-australia.com).

3 Mornington Peninsula

Surf-lapped sands, juicy glasses of pinot noir, seals lolling at the end of a scrub-lined boardwalk — all just an hour's drive from Melbourne — the Mornington Peninsula offers the best of all worlds. City dwellers escape en masse to its idyllic shores in summer; join them after sipping some of Australia's most refined tipples at Ten Minutes by Tractor winery (tenminutesbytractor.com.au).

4 Yarra Valley

On the map it's so close to Melbourne it could practically be in the city centre, yet the pretty Yarra Valley feels properly rural, with

dozens of cellars to take in, alongside chocolate shops, hot-air-balloon rides and art galleries. The wines are just as diverse as the activities: you'll find top-notch chardonnays, pinot noirs, cabernet sauvignons and shiraz to choose from. Vino not your thing? The local fizzy cider and craft ales are just as sublime — try Coldstream (coldstreambrewery.com.au).

5 Margaret River

Welcome to the home of the good stuff. Despite producing just 3% of Oz's wine, this little pocket in the southwest is responsible for more than 20% of its premium bottles. You've 120 world-class wineries to wobble between, and the scenery's intoxicating, too: the region is ripe with bursting meadows, bustling Farmers' Markets, epic walks, mysterious caves, lush forest, world-class surfing and long, empty, 'roo-dotted beaches.

You'll love Australia because...

the beaches are beauties

Want to stop and flop, go sand-driving or swim with dolphins? One of these fine strands will fit the bill

Our top five shorelines

1 Rainbow Beach, near Fraser Island

Step onto the sands and you'll know how Queensland's Rainbow Beach got its name — the dunes lining this long, impressive sweep are streaked with red and gold. Sunbathe, swim at the kid-friendly natural lagoon, or hop in the car — the beach doubles as a highway and you can practise sand-driving in a hired 4WD or on a day

tour from Noosa (greatbeachdrive4wdtours.com; £108).

2 Palm Beach, Sydney

When Bondi and Manly are wall-to-wall with towels, this majestic, northerly beach (pictured) has plenty of space. Wild-feel 'Palmy' is where Sydney's cashed-up hang out — and where *Home and Away* is filmed. The further north you go, the quieter it is (walk to the lighthouse on Barrenjoey headland for the views).

3 Pebbly Beach, New South Wales

Sea eagles glide overhead and, if you keep your eyes peeled, you could see dolphins off-shore, but lounge-friendly Pebbly Beach in New South Wales is most famous for the dozen-or-so kangaroos that call it home. Emerging from the thick green forest of the Murramarang National Park, this misnamed beach (it's not pebbly, it's sandy) is best built into a Sydney-to-Melbourne coastal road trip.

4 Glenelg Beach, Adelaide

Half-an-hour by tram southwest of Adelaide city centre, Glenelg Beach's powdery expanses are backed by scores of upbeat cafes with breezy terraces. Turn up at 7.15am and Temptation Sailing (dolphinboat.com.au; £66) will take you out to swim with the local dolphin pod. Afterwards, grab an ice cream and watch as kids dare each other to perform jumps off the pier.

5 Apollo Bay, Great Ocean Road

Two-and-a-half hours southwest of Melbourne along the Great Ocean Road, Apollo Bay has enough top drinking and dining spots to merit a few days' stop and flop. And, if just idling about, body-surfing and sandcastle-building start to lose their appeal, book a trip with Apollo Bay Surf and Kayak (apollobaysurfkayak.com.au; £41) and it will take you on a guided paddle to see the fur seal colony.





LOCAL TAKE

Where to surf

By Eugene Tan, surf photographer
(aquabumps.com)

'I surf mostly at Bondi, in Sydney — it's south-facing, which means it breaks all the time. It suits all levels, too — waves can be over my head at the south end, but knee-high at the north end, where Let's Go Surfing (letsgosurfing.com.au; £47) holds beginners' lessons. Further up, on the New South Wales coast, try low-key surf towns such as Forster and Crescent Heads. Also, Byron Bay and Noosa have several beaches facing different directions, so you can always surf at one of them. The Pass at Byron is a great place to learn. And for Melbourne? Bells Beach and the Winkipop surf break, in the middle of the Great Ocean Road, are very reliable — like a groomed ski run on a snowy mountain. Lorne and Wye River, further along, are better for novices. If you're learning to surf on the Great Ocean Road, pick a small-swell day as it can get intense — see forecasts on Coastal Watch (coastalwatch.com).'



Q Where to go for an easy-peasy beach-resort holiday?

Your top three options for sun, sea and sand are neighbours: Byron Bay, the Gold Coast and Noosa (pictured). Within three-and-a-half hours' drive of each other along the east coast, all have kilometres of powder-soft beaches, as well as great surfing and individual vibes.

Byron is an alternative-culture hot spot — expect yoga, bare feet in supermarkets, circus-skills classes and didgeridoo-carving workshops. Much of the Gold Coast is brashly Florida-feel, with nightclubs, theme parks and high-rise beachside apartment buildings, though laid-back Burleigh Heads and family-friendly Coolangatta are a chilled-out change of scene. Noosa is distinctly sophisticated, with top-drawer dining and shopping along Hastings Street, as well as surrounding National Parks for hikes and a network of kayak-friendly waterways.

You'll love Australia because...

it's wildlife—crazy

Some are cuddly, some slippery, and some downright dangerous — Oz's critters are a thrilling must-see

Our top five species to spot

1 Kangaroos

You'll have to journey into the remote Outback to find the huge, imposing red kangaroo, but the smaller, less intimidating (and more common) greys abound in southern pockets of Oz, often near the coast. They love open grassland with wooded shelter on the fringes — think paddocks, campsites and golf courses.

2 Koalas

Bad news: they're usually sleeping. So, look for fuzzy grey balls (binoculars help) tucked high up in towering

eucalyptus trees in the south and east parts of the country. Noted hot spots include Port Macquarie on the New South Wales coast, Noosa National Park in Queensland, and Cape Otway on Victoria's Great Ocean Road.

3 Crocodiles

Big 'salties' (saltwater crocs) hang out in the northern tropical waterways. They're best seen on a boat cruise, in the Northern Territory's Kakadu National Park (kakadutourism.com; from £43) and Far North Queensland's Daintree River (daintreerivercruise.com.au; £16).

4 Wombats

These furry little bear-like creatures are nocturnal and hard to spot in their usual southeastern bush habitat. Less so on Tasmania's Maria Island (encountermaria.com.au; £25 return ferry), where you'll find yourself pretty much tripping over them.

5 Penguins

The smallest in the world, fairy penguins proliferate in a few coastal spots. Watch them waddle home from the sea at night in Bicheno, eastern Tasmania (bichenopenguintours.com.au; £22) or on Victoria's Phillip Island (penguins.org.au; £14).

Turn the page for more on Oz's amazing wildlife ➔





LOCAL TAKE

Dangerous creatures

By Matt Wright, star of *Outback Wrangler* TV show

'The world is full of creatures (and Australia has some that are genuinely unique), but we've lost touch with nature to the point that we're scared of them. Don't be! I live in the Bush and I rarely come across snakes. Most aren't venomous and are actually quite placid — none have any interest in you and they'll only defend themselves if they're trodden on or feel cornered. If they hear you coming, they'll take off, so walk loudly, especially in remote places. As for crocodiles? They're opportunists and don't really want to tackle anything that's too big, like a human. If they attack a person in the water, it's because they've seen a head bobbing and think it's something smaller. But, just to be safe, always stick to designated swimming areas and campsites, especially in the north. As with crocs, shark attacks are usually a case of mistaken identity — don't swim or surf near seal colonies, such as Phillip Island, south of Melbourne.'



Q
&
A

Where do I head for the ultimate wildlife break?

For cute-creature overload, you need South Australia's wild, rugged Kangaroo Island. Koalas and platypuses were introduced to the Flinders Chase National Park in the '20s, when it was feared they could become extinct, while 'roos, wallabies and bandicoots are found all over the island. Penguins mass at Penneshaw, pelicans at Kingscote Wharf, and seals and sea lions (pictured) at several rocky coastal spots. If you're driving, be aware that the return ferry starts at £108 for two people with one car (sealink.com.au). Or take a tour: Kangaroo Island Adventure Tours (kiadventuretours.com.au) has a two-day trip from £236pp, full-board, including ferry from Adelaide and accommodation at bushland-surrounded Vivonne Bay Lodge.

Way north, Kakadu National Park is famed for its crocs, but you'll also spot muscular black

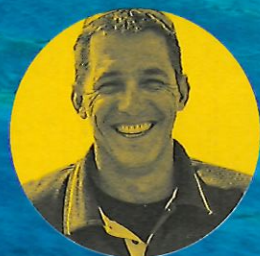
wallaroos, flatback turtles and huge termite mounds. Birdwatchers will be happy — one third of Oz's bird species are found here, and in the Mamukala Wetlands you'll tick off magpie geese, kites, kingfishers and purple swamp hens. Take a 4WD tour: a three-day trip from Darwin, staying at the Mercure hotel in Jabiru, costs from £543pp (kakadutoursandtravel.com.au).

Finally, make for Canberra, known as 'the Bush Capital'. It's the one city where you might see kangaroos hopping around (the Federal Golf Club is a reliable spot). The Australian National Botanic Gardens (anbg.gov.au; free) has possums, water dragons (lizards), swamp wallabies and echidnas, while the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and Namadgi National Park are good bets for emus, platypuses and koalas. Stock up on maps, then self-drive for impromptu roadside sightings. Dawn and dusk are usually best as animals are most active then, but be extremely careful — 'roos have zero road sense.

You'll love Australia because...

it's a watery wonderland

Calm coves, boisterous breakers and animal encounters — your fish is our command



LOCAL TAKE

The Great Barrier Reef

By Gareth Phillips,
marine biologist and
owner of Reef Teach

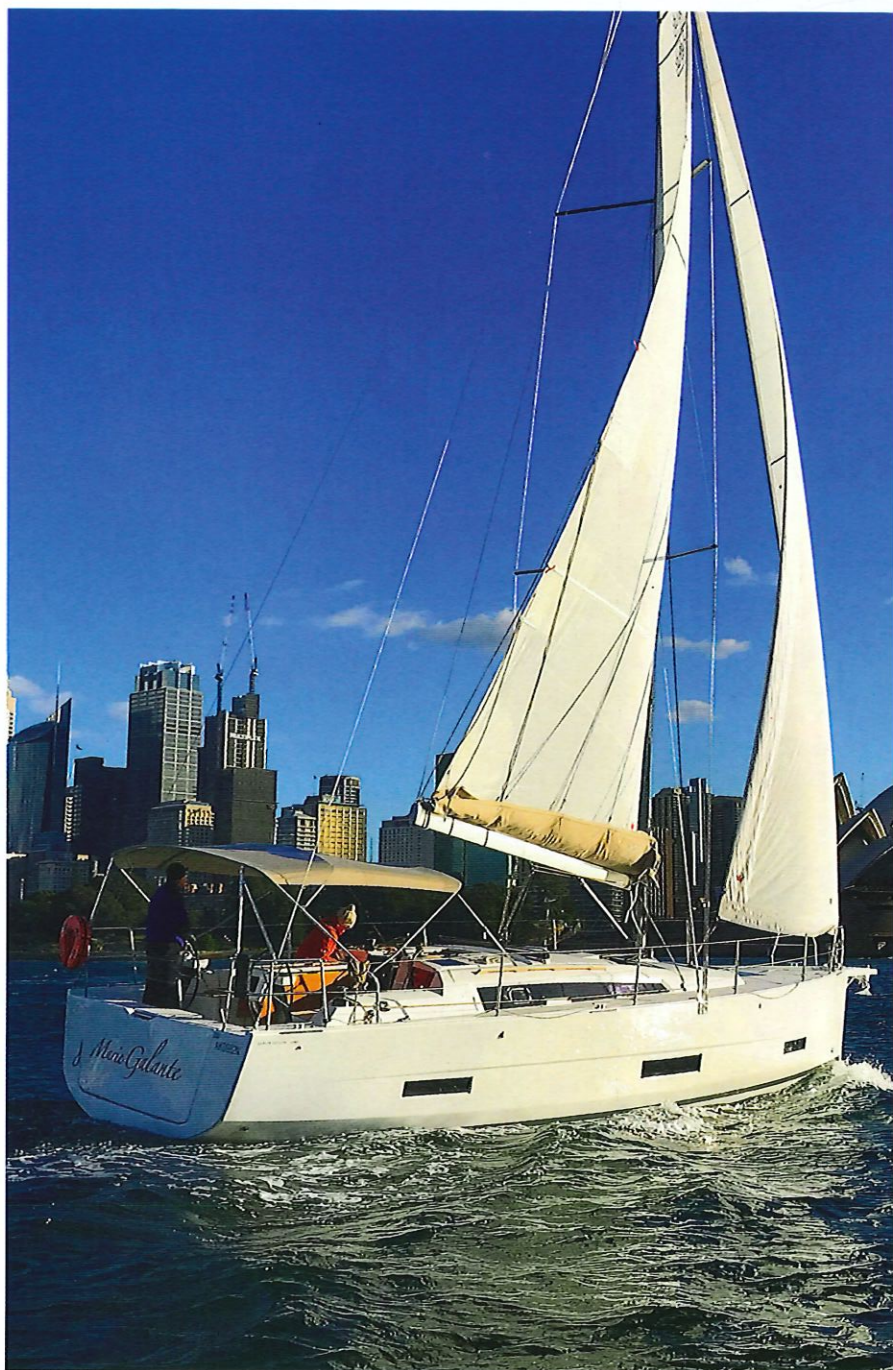
'The Great Barrier Reef is more than 2,300km long, and there are many different ways to experience it. The most common is on a day-trip from Cairns or Port Douglas, though you can also go from the Whitsundays or Townsville, further south, and Cape Tribulation, further north. Look at options carefully to ensure your trip will meet your expectations and budget. Some companies charge for lycra suits, snorkelling tours and prescription snorkelling masks (if you have spectacles), for example, so always check the fine print. Also ask what information is provided — do they offer guided snorkelling tours? Have they got a marine biologist on board? The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

(gbrmpa.gov.au) has a list of companies that use accredited Master Guides. Finally, before booking, know exactly where your trip goes. The inner reef tends to be patchier, between banks of sand and with more soft coral. The outer reef has greater diversity and, usually, better visibility.

Got more than a day? Try a day sailing in the Whitsundays or a visit to one of its islands. At Michaelmas Cay, for instance, you can sit on the sand with birds all around you, then go snorkelling (oceanspirit.com.au; £121pp). Or, on Lady Elliott Island, you can snorkel on the reef straight off the beach, and then stay overnight (ladyelliott.com.au; cabins from £105, room only, plus £192 for return flights from Bundaberg or Hervey Bay). If you've a mixed-interest group, try a Seastar cruise from Cairns, which offers different experiences on the same trip (seastarcruises.com.au; £118 for a day).

Finally, know that there's not one prime time to visit the reef. Visibility is usually better in the Aussie winter, but sea conditions are calmer in summer. I love the transition periods — April and May, then October and November — for the best of both worlds.'

See overleaf for more aquatic Oz escapades ➔



Q
&
A

What about sailing holidays?

Australia may not be an obvious cruise destination like the Med or Caribbean, but some of it really is best explored by boat. In Sydney, combine the obligatory harbour cruise with a sailing taster — Sydney by Sail's three hours on the waves lets you play crew (sydneybysail.com; £97). In Queensland's yachtie haven, the Whitsunday Islands, a crewed sailing jaunt will give you a sampler of life aboard: a two-day island-hopping yacht adventure costs from £218pp (whitsundaysailingadventures.com.au).

Cruising is an option, too: in fact, it's the best way to see the remote, largely inaccessible northwest of Oz. Operators such as Coral Expeditions are pricey (from £4,792pp for a 10-day expedition from Broome to Darwin; coralexpeditions.com), but you'll get to areas unreachable by land, seeing horizontal waterfalls and ancient rock art.

Our top five aquatic adventures

1 Swimming with whale sharks

Between April and August, the already considerable appeal of the coral carnival in Western Australia's Ningaloo Reef is ramped up by the biggest fish on Earth. Swim with nine-tonne whale sharks (pictured) with experts from Live Ningaloo (liveningaloo.com; full-day cruise from £318).

2 Kayaking with dolphins

Paddle out from Byron Bay in New

South Wales and Flipper and friends might breach right next to you, then swim alongside your kayak for their own entertainment. Book a trip with Cape Byron Kayaks (capebyronkayaks.com; £38) — its tour finishes with a splash of adventure: you'll kayak back through breaking waves.

3 Shipwreck-snorkelling

The Tangalooma Wrecks, 15 deliberately scuttled ships just off the beach at Moreton Island, Queensland, have become the centrepiece of an underwater

ecosystem. Even better, visiting requires minimal effort — you can simply use the current to glide past as you ogle the super-shoals. Australian Sunset Safaris (sunsetsafaris.com.au) runs day-trips from Brisbane from £109.

4 Beachside paddleboarding

In Oz, stand-up paddleboarding is big and you can try it all along the coast. But for convenience and relatively calm waters, buzzy St Kilda Beach in Melbourne is the ideal place to go to learn. Stand-Up

Paddle HQ (supb.com.au) runs 90-minute lessons from £33pp.

5 Canoeing in a national park

A three-hour journey from Darwin, the lofty sandstone gorges of Nitmiluk National Park in the Northern Territory are usually conquered by boat. Taking them on by canoe makes you feel smaller, adds a sense of achievement and you get close to the ancient Jawoyn rock art of the third gorge. Go with indigenous-run Nitmiluk Tours (nitmiluktours.com.au; half-day £39).



You'll love Australia because...

you can do it in less time than you think

A whole continent in a week? Not quite, but here are our recommendations for travellers time-rich *and* time-poor

Our top six itineraries

1 One-week faster

For a whistle-stop visit, forego Sydney and Melbourne — the flight Down Under to Perth is four hours shorter, and the city has postcard Aussie beaches. Spend a couple of days exploring the restaurants, bars, museums and art of Perth

and Fremantle, then take a jaunt to Rottnest Island. Next, it's a mini road trip southwest to the vineyards, caves and surf beaches of Margaret River.

2 Wildlife and wine fortnight

First, allow three or four days to discover the laneways and hip neighbourhoods of Melbourne. Then

take a further three to drive along the Great Ocean Road. But instead of looping back to Melbourne, continue on to Adelaide, detouring to Kangaroo Island for prolific wildlife viewing. Spend a day wine-tasting in the Barossa Valley before dropping off the car, then immerse yourself in Adelaide's heritage buildings and beaches.

3 Two-week classic triangle

Spend five or six days in Sydney — with side trips to the Blue Mountains, the peaceful bushland of the Royal National Park and the Hunter Valley wine region. Then fly to Uluru for three days of rugged Outback and indigenous experiences. Finish off by flying onwards to Cairns for Great Barrier Reef snorkelling cruises and rainforest adventures.

4 East Coast in three weeks

With three weeks to work through, fly into Brisbane and head south for a few days' beach time, either on the Gold Coast or Byron Bay. After a Moreton Island day-trip, venture north by car or coach,

allocating three days each to Noosa and Fraser Island. Laid-back coastal towns Agnes Water, Yeppoon and Mackay are good journey breakers on the way north before you hit the Whitsundays for three days of sailing. Koalas on Magnetic Island and adrenaline hot spot Mission Beach are the prime stops before you reach GBR hub Cairns.

5 West and north in three weeks

Kick off in Perth, with Rottnest and Swan Valley side trips, before preparing for the big drive north. Key stops in the vast red northwest include Shark Bay (feed dolphins at Monkey Mia), the 260km-long Ningaloo Reef and Karijini National

Rock solid: Cape
Hauy on the Tasman
Peninsula, Tasmania

Park. Make Broome a beachy base for a few days before tackling the remote, rugged Kimberley and Top End, with Katherine Gorge and Kakadu National Park prime stops before arriving in Darwin.

6 Mix-it-up month

Four weeks can mean four very different Australias. Begin with Sydney or Melbourne (whichever most tickles your fancy), building in side trips to the likes of the Blue Mountains or Phillip Island. Then fly up to the Top End to hit the highlights before a week doing Tasmania's greatest hits and a week's beachy R&R in Noosa and Fraser Island, flying back to the UK from Brisbane.



LOCAL TAKE

Doing it without driving

By John Band, Sydney-based transport analyst

'Due to Australia's sheer size, domestic flights are necessary for most visitors. The key airlines are Qantas, Virgin Australia and Jetstar, and fares are pretty reasonable — expect to pay from £36, one way, for Sydney to Melbourne. Webjet (webjet.com.au) is really useful for comparing times, prices and baggage allowances.

Coach services are the slower alternative, and though they're not always cheaper — the 13-hour journey from Sydney to Melbourne, for example, costs from £50 — Greyhound does cover most places of interest on the east coast, so their hop-on, hop-off passes are worth a look if you're planning multiple stops (greyhound.com.au; £258 for Sydney to Cairns).

Public transport in the cities is good, and there are plenty of day tours to highlights in the countryside.

It's even possible — with much timetable-scouring and advance-planning — to get around the wine regions, the Great Ocean Road and the South West by public transport. But forget about travelling the Outback without your own car — it's impossible.'



Q What about a long trip?

With two months or more to spare, combine some of the shorter itineraries, but driving the stretches you'd otherwise fly, making the stops along the way part of your holiday. Classic examples include Sydney to Melbourne via Canberra, visiting the Snowy Mountains and detouring to the Murray River and Victoria's gold-mining heritage cities. Or consider Sydney to

Byron Bay, which will have you rolling through gorgeous, chilled-out surf towns such as Crescent Head and Yamba (pictured). Longer journeys also permit extravagances, such as cross-country train journeys or multi-day learn-to-dive courses before hitting the Great Barrier Reef. Alternatively, take extra days in beachy spots such as Noosa, the Gold Coast and Byron Bay to have a look around the hilly, forested hinterlands, home to National Parks.

Get me there

GO INDEPENDENT

ADELAIDE: Cathay Pacific flies from Heathrow, Gatwick and Manchester, via Hong Kong, from £779 return. **Emirates** flies from Gatwick, via Dubai, from £679. **Qantas** flies from Heathrow, via Singapore and Perth, from £717. **Qatar Airways** flies from six UK airports, via Doha, from £660. **Singapore Airlines** flies from Heathrow and Manchester, via Singapore, from £705. **BRISBANE:** Cathay Pacific flies from Heathrow, Gatwick and Manchester, via Hong Kong, from £779 return. **Emirates** flies from Gatwick, via Dubai or Singapore, from £799. **Etihad Airways** flies from Heathrow and Manchester, via Abu Dhabi, from £705. **Qantas** flies from Heathrow, via Singapore, from £718. **Singapore Airlines** flies from Heathrow and Manchester, via Singapore, from £740. **CAIRNS:** Singapore Airlines flies from Heathrow and Manchester, via Singapore, from £740 return. **CANBERRA:** Qatar flies from six UK airports, via Doha, from £722 return. **Singapore Airlines** flies from Heathrow and Manchester, via Singapore, from £770 return.

DARWIN: Singapore Airlines flies from Heathrow and Manchester, via Singapore, from £695 return. **GOLD COAST:** Singapore Airlines flies from Heathrow and Manchester, via Singapore, from £680 return. **MELBOURNE:** Cathay Pacific flies from Heathrow, Gatwick and Manchester, via Hong Kong, from £779 return. **Emirates** flies from Gatwick, via Dubai and Singapore, from £699. **Etihad Airways** flies from Heathrow and Manchester, via Abu Dhabi, from £687. **Qantas** flies from Heathrow, via Singapore, from £713. **Qatar** flies from six UK airports, via Doha, from £674. **Singapore Airlines** flies from Heathrow and Manchester, via Singapore, from £700. **PERTH:** Cathay Pacific flies from Heathrow, Gatwick and Manchester, via Hong Kong, from £769 return. **Emirates** flies from Gatwick, via Dubai, from £649. **Qantas** flies non-stop from Heathrow from £867 return, or via Singapore from £881. **Qatar** flies from six UK airports, via Doha, from £678. **Singapore Airlines** flies from Manchester, via Singapore, from £690. **SYDNEY:** BA flies from Heathrow, via Singapore, from £700 return. **Cathay**

EDITOR'S TIP

Hiring a car? Be aware there are quarantine restrictions on what food you can take across state borders, with fines for those carrying banned items. See interstate.quarantine.org.au before setting off

Pacific flies from Heathrow, Gatwick and Manchester, via Hong Kong, from £779. **Emirates** flies from Gatwick, via Dubai, from £679. **Etihad Airways** flies from Heathrow and Manchester, via Abu Dhabi, from £697. **Qantas** flies from Heathrow, via Singapore, from £716. **Qatar** flies from six UK airports, via Doha, from £681. **Singapore Airlines** flies from Heathrow and Manchester, via Singapore, from £740.

GET AROUND

BY PLANE: Fly domestically with Virgin Australia, Jetstar, Qantas Domestic, Tiger Air and Rex. If you've booked your international flight with Qantas (via the Manage Booking page when you log in online), you may be eligible for discounted Explorer fares, which let you book multi-city itineraries to more than 30 destinations within Australia. **BY CAR:** Driving is on the left and hire options are abundant in all major airports and cities. Try Hertz (hertz.co.uk), Avis (avis.co.uk), Sixt (sixt.co.uk) and Enterprise (enterprise.co.uk). A week's car hire with Enterprise, picking up and dropping off at Sydney airport, costs from £164. **BY TRAIN OR BUS:** See page 79.

GO PACKAGED

ESCORTED: Trailfinders (trailfinders.com) has a 14-night Treasures of Australia package — an escorted tour visiting Sydney, Hamilton Island, Port Douglas, Cairns, Uluru, Alice Springs and Melbourne — from £4,749pp, including return flights from Heathrow, flights and airport transfers in Australia, selected sightseeing and many meals. **FAMILY:** Audley Travel (audleytravel.com) has a 17-day Family Australia trip combining Sydney, Brisbane, the Sunshine Coast and the Great Barrier Reef from £3,990pp, B&B, including return flights from the UK, transfers, and a Whitsunday Islands cruise. **WILDLIFE:** AusTravel (austravel.com) has a 15-day Ocean to Outback tour exploring Darwin and the Northern Territory before heading south to Adelaide and the Barossa Valley, from £3,469pp, room only, including Heathrow flights, internal flights and some tours.

FURTHER INFORMATION

See australia.com.

