



Putting the seal on eco-tourism

Don't be fooled by the name – Kangaroo Island has a lot more to offer than kangaroos. It's a wildlife wonderland.

The view from the headland is magnificent: barren paddocks dotted with trees dropping down to jagged cliffs pounded by foaming white seas. I'm so busy marvelling at the coastline, I nearly step on an echidna as I set about collecting native apricot seeds.

Kangaroo Island, south of Adelaide, SA, is Australia's third largest island. About 4,400 people live there and more than one third of the island is national or conservation park. This means the place is crawling with wildlife.

The native apricot seeds I'm collecting peek out of the half-opened yellow fruits like miniature redcurrants. Once dry, the seeds will be sent off to the Trees For Life seed bank in Adelaide. The seed collecting is part of an ongoing project run by retired teachers Pat and David Welford, for visitors to their Cape Cassini Wilderness

Retreat. For part of my stay, I've signed up to their working holiday scheme with tasks designed to help run the retreat and support local conservation programs.

When it comes to ecotourism, Cape Cassini is the real deal. The retreat is self-sufficient in terms of electricity and water. It follows a passive energy design and has earned advanced eco-accreditation and two medals for sustainable tourism. David keeps a chart in the hall so guests can track energy generation and usage from the wind turbine and solar panels. Pat tends an organic orchard, which is patrolled by five geese and watered by aerated greywater.

The retreat is on the north shore of Kangaroo Island. Set in what David refers to as "a 4.5-km-buffer zone of wilderness and health," and alongside two kilometres of coastline, the retreat is gloriously

remote. The nearest shop is 40 km away and, once you've bumped your way down the wildflower-fringed track to the house, you're unlikely to get mobile reception.

The house is built of local stone and rammed earth, and a large, two-sided woodburner provides a focal point for drinks before dinner. Over roasted almonds and chilled riesling we discuss the next morning's program.

We start by collecting banksia and hakea seeds. The trick with banksias is to find half-opened cones – I look for May Gibbs' banksia men and get it right each time. The kidney-shaped hakea seeds are more of a challenge, and we need gloves to protect against the spiny branches.

On one of my 'days off' I join David's island tour. We head out along the scenic north coast and by lunchtime reach the Flinders Chase National Park at the

Kangaroo Island is home to myriad species of wildlife, including a large colony of New Zealand fur seals.



Fact file

● **Getting there:** The Sealink ferry crosses daily from Cape Jervis on the Fleurieu Peninsula (two hours South of Adelaide) to Penneshaw on Kangaroo Island. Sealink also runs a bus service from Adelaide to Cape Jervis, and a shuttle bus from the ferry terminal at Penneshaw to American River and Kingscote (www.sealink.com.au).

Regional Express Airlines (REX) flies between Adelaide and Kingscote four times daily (www.rex.com.au).

● **Where to stay:** Our writer stayed at Cape Cassini Wilderness Retreat (08 8559 2215, www.capecassini.com.au). Flour Cask Bay Sanctuary (08 8553 2356, www.eco-sanctuaries.com) is one of *G Magazine's* sponsors and offers private accommodation and camping sites.

● **Rates:** Cape Cassini has two queen-size en suite rooms with north-facing, ocean-view balconies at \$245 per night, based on two people sharing. A twin-bed room with private bathroom is also available in conjunction with a queen room to accommodate four people at \$385 per night.

● **Dining:** Continental breakfast is included. Picnic lunches are available for \$25, and two-course dinners are \$40 per person.

● **Working holidays:** Stay at Cape Cassini for half rates in exchange for four hours' involvement per day in tasks that help run the retreat. These include weeding, working in the organic orchard, collecting firewood, collecting seeds, bushfire hazard clearing, marking trails and more. Available for a minimum three-night stay from 1 June to 30 September 2008.

G-spot

Kangaroo Island was named by Matthew Flinders in 1802 - in appreciation of the abundant meat supply provided by the island's kangaroos.

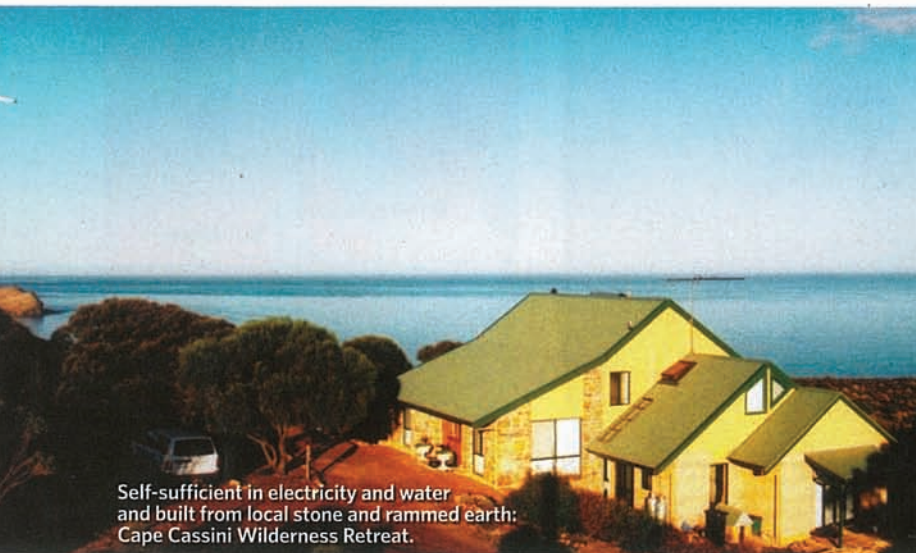
western end of the island, where we fight off greedy magpies keen to scavenge picnic crumbs.

David is a mine of information and weaves stories of local and historical interest, moving through Pangaeian and Gondwanan times and beyond as we drive to Admiral's Arch, a natural archway sculpted by the sea and home to a sizeable colony of New Zealand fur seals. I admire the tenacity of a lone birdwatcher who keeps up a daily 12-hour vigil in the hope of spotting an arctic tern. Not a bad place to hang out, but the musky smell of seal is on the strong side.

There is so much to see on the island, but with a keen student on board, David stops regularly to measure road kill (mainly goannas) to assist the Pelican



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Self-sufficient in electricity and water and built from local stone and rammed earth: Cape Cassini Wilderness Retreat.



The retreat's organic garden is watered with aerated greywater.

» Lagoon Research Centre with its survey work. I worry that we'll miss the last tour of the Australian sea lions at Seal Bay, but we just make it. The afternoon sun highlights the velvety sheen of these wonderful - if ungainly - creatures; some are sprawled like huge beanbags; others scratch or perform yogic backbends; and the pups lollop across the sand to find their mothers. Protected by a reef, this colony is the third largest in Australia.

CHARLOTTE FRANCIS

Squeezing every drop of daylight out of the tour, we arrive at the Latham Conservation Park just before sunset and keep our eyes peeled for the glossy black cockatoo. Although numbers are increasing thanks to a recovery program, we don't make any sightings; but we do spot a telltale sign: bright orange

fragments of chewed she-oak cones. I'm thrilled to have come close to such a rare bird, and the profusion of wallabies and kangaroos on the drive home makes up for their absence.

On my last full day, the graceful flight of a pair of wedge-tailed eagles viewed from the comfort of my north-facing balcony inspires me to practise my Tai Ch'i. All too soon it's lunchtime, and David selects a rocky amphitheatre down on the foreshore as our picnic spot. Pat's fig and almond log is made with fruits harvested from her orchard, and we eat it topped with a tangy sheep's feta from a local island dairy. Delicious!

CHARLOTTE FRANCIS is a freelance writer based in Melbourne.

Art Feast

The Kangaroo Island Art Feast is an annual celebration of art, food and wine, held at various venues across the island every October (3-6 October 2008). The event brings together local potters, artists, wine makers and specialist food producers, with delectables ranging from cheeses, honeys and jams to locally reared meats and island seafood. An Art Feast bus tour can take you on a circuit of the venues. (www.tourkangarooisland.com.au).

Recommended: The Bay of Shoals winery on Cordes Road, Kingscote - for wine tastings, stunning views and an exhibition of local art (www.bayofshoalswines.com.au).

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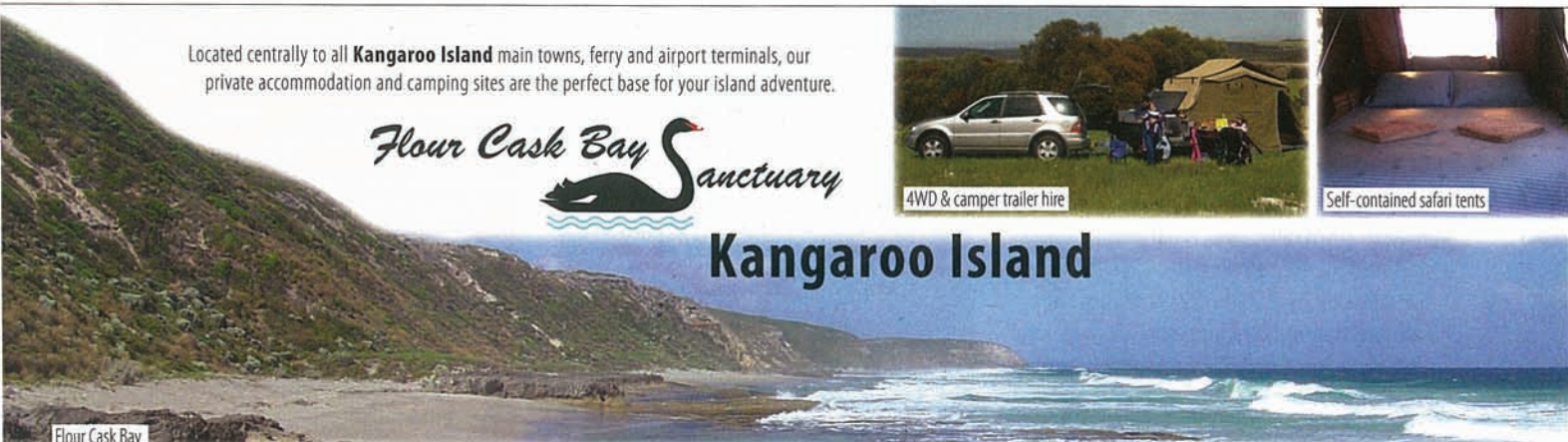
Kangaroo Island



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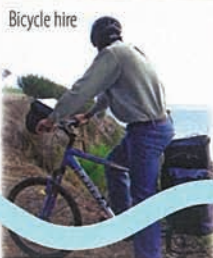


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