

THE WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN

# TRAVEL + INDULGENCE

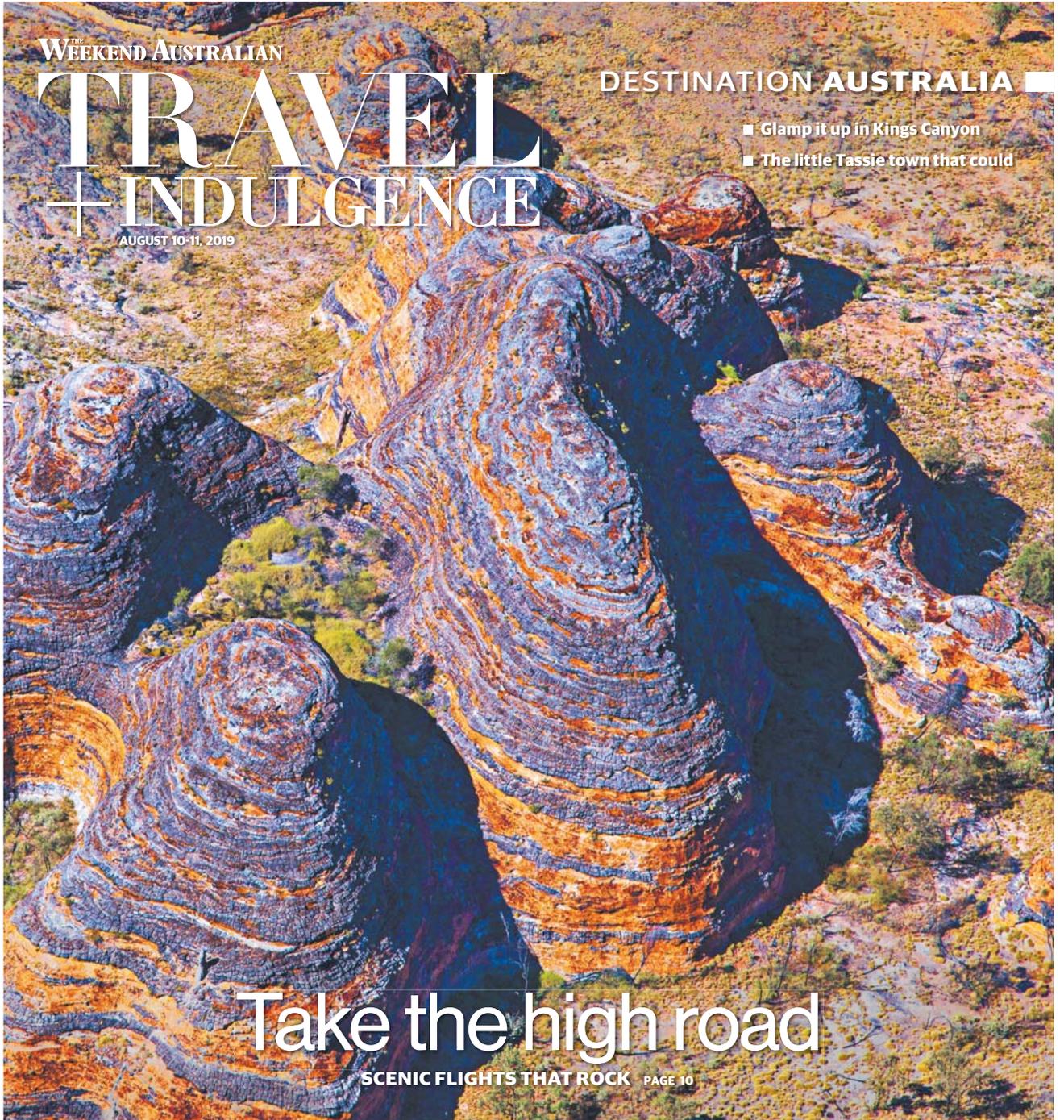
AUGUST 10-11, 2019

DESTINATION AUSTRALIA

- Glamp it up in Kings Canyon
- The little Tassie town that could

## Take the high road

SCENIC FLIGHTS THAT ROCK PAGE 10



# THE VIEW FROM UP HERE



The nation's natural beauty is of the highest order

## **BUNGLE BUNGLE RANGE, WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

Perspective changes everything. From below, the Bungle Bungle Range, centrepiece of the World Heritage-listed Purnululu National Park in Western Australia's Kimberley, is a cathedral of towering limestone spires and domes frilled by crackling grasslands. But from above, it's a scattering of marbles striated black-and-orange and glowering in the afternoon sun. To get here, we've flown from Kununurra over Lake Argyle, where half-drowned islands gasp for breath in its commodious interior. We've crossed over the lake's wetlands where the Ord River, glowing emerald, surges into this watery corral, then watched as its tail withers on the desiccated horizon. We've peered down at dimpled hills morphing into violently rucked ridges and smashed plateaux. And then, as the Bungle Bungle Range flattens out beneath us, we've beheld an eruption of carbuncles across an elephant-hide terrain. This is a city cut through with tunnels and gorges and caves at eye level; but from up here, it's a maze decipherable only by the custodians of this primeval land.

■ [aviair.com.au](http://aviair.com.au)

**CATHERINE MARSHALL**

## **TOWNSVILLE TO ORPHEUS ISLAND, QUEENSLAND**

My transport to the luxurious Orpheus Island Lodge, near Townsville, is a gleaming red Air-

bus H130 helicopter worth a cool \$4 million. The 25-minute flight cuts across the coast, where we spy several dugongs grazing on the seagrass just offshore. Marije Kenter, our young Dutch pilot, traces the circumference of Rattlesnake Island, urging us to keep an eye out for turtles in its crystal-clear shallows. In the distance, Hinchinbrook's rugged profile rises dramatically from the ocean like a jungle-clad Jurassic giant. As we approach Orpheus, the double black diamonds of two manta-rays can be seen cruising the edge of the reef. There's been talk of the first whale sighting of the season, and would you believe it? There she blows. Marije swings her craft around sharply and we bank back for another look just as the humpback breaches with a mighty splash. As short flights go, this one has been wild.

■ [orpheus.com.au](http://orpheus.com.au)

■ [nautilusaviation.com.au](http://nautilusaviation.com.au)

**PENNY HUNTER**

## **THE GRAMPIANS, VICTORIA**

Victoria's 168,000ha Grampians National Park is a magnet for rock climbers and hikers keen to get among its dramatic sandstone formations, flora and fauna. But for those short on time or energy the smart alternative is a flying visit with Grampians Helicopters. Its hour-long grand scenic loop takes in all the park's main attractions, skimming above the shimmering mirror of Lake Wartook to Brigg's Bluff, Mackenzie River Gorge, sparkling waterfalls and The Pinnacle Lookout. Entire mountain ranges are traversed with ease as pilot Justin Neofitou points out the Grampians' highest peak, Mount William, the Serra Range running down to Dunkeld town-

ship and the agriculturally rich Western Plains — “as flat as a billiard table” — that grow much of Australia’s cereal crops. The

park’s wave-like forms and richly contoured stone make sense when Neofitou explains this ancient landscape was once the seaboard of eastern Australia. Some things are best appreciated from the air.

■ [grampianshelicopters.com.au](http://grampianshelicopters.com.au)

#### **KENDALL HILL**

#### **ULURU AND KATA TJUTA, NORTHERN TERRITORY**

The return whirl from Ayers Rock Airport with Professional Helicopter Services takes just 25 minutes but time feels satisfyingly suspended. It’s a clear winter’s morning and colours are heightened. Our pilot keeps his commentary to a minimum. “Let’s let the country do the talking,” he quips. The sky is an exaggeration of the bluest of blues, the desert a remarkable red. As we hover over the blocky mass of Uluru and the conglomerate rock domes of Kata Tjuta, it’s clear these are not the flat, uni-faceted formations seen from ground level but complicated masses of striations and honeycombed surfaces. On Uluru, greenery grows from deep grooves and indentations appear as a tracery of animal tracks. All around us, the landscape is a canvas of silvery-green vegetation, waterholes and

song lines, an indigenous dot painting come to life, honouring the Tjukurpa dreamtime stories of country, kinship and law.

■ [phs.com.au](http://phs.com.au)

#### **SUSAN KUROSAWA**

#### **PAINTED HILLS, SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

Anna Creek Painted Hills in central South Australia are impressive not for their size but their colours of ochre, orange, caramel and mustard. If you stumble across them, you’re either lost or trespassing on the world’s largest cattle station. On the bed of our ancient inland sea, this 20km-long band of clay, sandstone and iron-oxide hillocks west of William Creek is inaccessible to the public except on a one-hour Wrightsair return flight. In a tiny Cessna, we’re barely 300m above the gibber plains, but pilot Jake Gatt has no trouble finding the airstrip. “The winds are predictable here, so all the dunes run in one direction. I can navigate by them.” The desert is scintillating, with recent rains leaving small pools glistening in the afternoon sun and greening what vegetation there is. We’re given 30 minutes walking among the hills. Some are topped with stark sandstone stacks, while others look like mullock heaps from

some abandoned mining operation. Yet Jake reckons there’s never been human habitation here. “Just cattle. And ’roos.”

■ [wrightsair.com.au](http://wrightsair.com.au)

#### **JEREMY BOURKE**

#### **FLINDERS ISLAND, TASMANIA**

It’s the lunchtime flight that’s literal, a journey by helicopter and four-seater Cessna to one of Australia’s most beautiful islands, purely for lunch. It sounds like something from the moneyed tropics, but this is Tasmania and the island is Flinders. The lunch is one of a number of decadent Tasmanian flight experiences run by Unique Charters, and begins with a helicopter pick-up from beside Launceston’s Peppers Silo Hotel. After a quick transfer to a Cessna in Bridport, we’re soon flying over Bass Strait towards Flinders

Island’s west coast, a shoreline that combines the mountain grandeur of Freycinet Peninsula with the blazing colours of the Bay of Fires. We land at Killiecrankie, where I meet Jo Youl, owner of the island’s finest restaurant, The Flinders Wharf. In a shack beside the perfect white curve of Killiecrankie Beach, Jo prepares a three-course lunch using island ingredients — slow-cooked lamb with samphire — and flavours as fine as the beach view. As flying lunches go, there have been few better.

■ [uniquecharters.com.au](http://uniquecharters.com.au)

#### **ANDREW BAIN**

#### **CAIRNS TO MOORE REEF, QUEENSLAND**

The morning starts off iffy, with dark clouds hanging over Cairns unleashing short, sharp showers, which is a shame because it’s reef day on my short break. But this is the tropical north. As pilot Glenn Silva propels our Great Barrier Reef Helicopters craft up from Cairns airport and swoops across green wetlands to the blue-grey Coral Sea, those pesky clouds call it quits. The water shimmers more vividly blue beneath us now, coral formations clearly taking shape. There’s Fitzroy Island to our right and Green Island, already busy with day trippers, to our left. We press on 50km to our destination, Moore Reef. Glenn’s voice crackling through the headphones with info about the natural marvel all around. He’s on the lookout for marine life, spots a reef turtle or two, drops altitude and circles. I’m not sure what landing at our destination will entail, but then spy a helipad pontoon in the aqua yonder. Whoa, down we go. I’m in time to join a Dreamtime Dive and Snorkel cruise, conducted by indigenous rangers, which has left Cairns very early this morning.

■ [gbrhelicopters.com.au](http://gbrhelicopters.com.au)

**GRAHAM ERBACHER**

### **ARKAROOLA WILDERNESS SANCTUARY, SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

Thermals rising from ancient rock buffer our Cessna 207 as Doug Sprigg banks us round to

get a better look at twisted land formations officially explained as “geology on steroids”. Sprigg is the ruler of Arkaroola, a 630sq km wilderness sanctuary in the Flinders Ranges. The astounding earth below us has quite a story to tell. It’s seen seabeds and volcanoes. It’s spent two billion years being folded, metamorphosed, folded again, eroded, punctured by granite, uplifted and injected with all manner of minerals — all of which gives Sprigg a lot of explaining to do. “Let’s just say it’s geological chaos,” he summarises. We soar over the stegosaurus-like spine of Griselda Hill,

see ridgelines that accelerate skywards to a precipice, cliff faces that sport a spinifex stubble, tufts of deep green vegetation collecting in deep gorges and water holes like opal pendants. For a scarcely believable contrast we swoop low on the flat, blinding white salt surface of Lake Frome, before touching back down on a landing strip shaved into the red dirt. A rock star tour.

■ [arkaroola.com.au](http://arkaroola.com.au)

**RICKY FRENCH**

### **DARWIN TO SWIM CREEK STATION, NORTHERN TERRITORY**

I have the single-engine Cessna 210 Centurion all to myself as we head out of Darwin, the high-wing aircraft ensuring my view of the sparkling delta unfolding beneath us is unimpeded by pesky plane parts. Chartair has been flying in regional and remote Australia since 1974 and has about 40 planes in

its fleet, this one taking me to Bamurru Plains, an eco resort sitting within a vast working buffalo station. The Adelaide River coastal floodplain begins just 50km east of Darwin. For as far as I can see, the Adelaide River loops like a silvery slinky across the plains, home to endangered flora and fauna. This breathtaking view of the Top End, lush and green at the end of the wet season is an aerial glimpse of my future: at Bamurru Plains I will skim across floodplains in an airboat, getting a close-up look at what was flying past beneath.

■ [chartair.com.au](http://chartair.com.au)

**JANE NICHOLLS**

### **ROSE BAY TO WHALE BEACH, NSW**

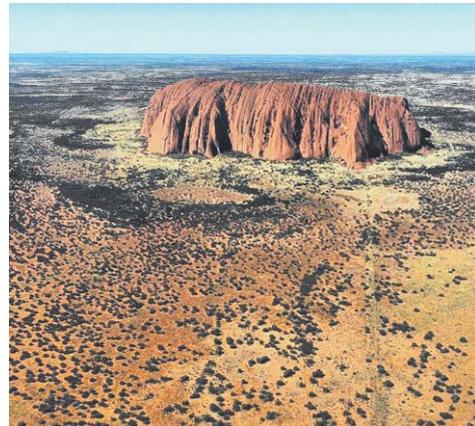
A glamorous young Sydneysider recently gushed to me about a first date. She’s the

been-there-done-most-things type but was still impressed her suitor whisked her up to

**Jonah’s at Whale Beach**, on Sydney’s northern beaches, via seaplane. I might have felt envious except I’ve had that pleasure too. It’s the sort of scenic jaunt that prompts awe and wonder, even if you call NSW’s capital city home. Taking off from Sydney Seaplanes’ base at Rose Bay, the plane flies low enough that I feel like a seabird on the wing, casually taking it all in, and comfortable knowing my belly will soon be filled with delicious things. After passing over coves that resemble dot paintings thanks to all those moored yachts, lunch unfolds as I had imagined, in a haze of scrumptiousness. The most memorable part is the return. From Pittwater we bank sharply over the peninsula to bob our way back along the coastline, drifting over ocean pools, rock platforms and surfers catching long peeling point breaks.

■ [seaplanes.com.au](http://seaplanes.com.au)

**KATRINA LOBLEY**



SUSAN KUROSAWA

**Great Barrier Reef, main; Uluru, above;  
Grampians National Park, left; Arkaroola  
Wilderness Sanctuary, below**

