

Fodor's Choice South Australia

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Renowned for its celebrations of the arts, its multiple cultures, and its bountiful harvests from vines, land, and sea, South Australia is both diverse and divine. Here you can taste some of the country's finest wines, sample its best restaurants, and admire some of the world's most valuable gems. Or skip the state's sophisticated options and unwind on wildlife-rich Kangaroo Island, hike in the Flinders Ranges, or live underground like opal miners in the vast Outback.

WORD OF MOUTH

"Adelaide is charming and the wine valleys (Barossa, Maclaren, Clare) well worth a trip."

– Bokhara2

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Nearly 90 percent of South Australians live in the fertile south around Adelaide, because the region stands on the very doorstep of the harshest, driest land in the most arid of Earth's populated continents. Jagged hills and stony deserts fill the parched interior, which is virtually unchanged since the first settlers arrived. Still the deserts hold great surprises and many clues to the country's history before European settlement. The ruggedly beautiful Flinders Ranges, north of Adelaide, hold Aboriginal cave paintings and 540- to 620-million-year-old fossil remains of some of the earliest forms of life.

Yet South Australia is, perhaps ironically, gifted with the good life. It produces most of the nation's wine, and the sea ensures a plentiful supply of lobster and famed King George whiting. A short distance from the city, Kangaroo Island teems with native Australian wildlife. Sighting sea lions, koalas, and heath goannas is easy. South Australia may not be grand in reputation, but its attractions are extraordinary, and after a visit you'll know you've found one of Australia's best-kept secrets.

ADELAIDE

Australians think of Adelaide as a city of churches, but it has outgrown its reputation as a sleepy country town dotted with cathedrals and spires. The Adelaide of this millennium is infinitely more complex, with a large, multiethnic population and thriving urban art and music scenes.

The compact city center is where you'll find most of Adelaide's sights, shops, and grand stately buildings.

North of the Torrens River is North Adelaide, dominated by the spires of St. Peter's Cathedral. This genteel suburb is where the city's yuppies live, and it has great neighborhood restaurants. For fun in the sun, head to touristy Glenelg and its cooler neighbors, Henley Beach and Brighton. Many of the state's attractions are an easy drive from Adelaide. However, for a taste of the real South Australia, a trip to a national park or to the Outback is definitely worth the extra travel time. Short flights between destinations make any journey possible within a day or overnight, but the more time you leave yourself to explore the virtues of this underrated state, the better.

THE BAROSSA WINE REGION

Some of Australia's most famous vineyards are in the Barossa, about an hour's drive northeast of Adelaide. More than 200 wineries across the two wide, shallow valleys that make up the region produce some of Australia's most celebrated wines, including aromatic Rhine Riesling; Seppelt's unique, century-old Para Port; and Penfolds Grange, which sells for more than A\$600.

Cultural roots set the Barossa apart. The area was settled by Silesian immigrants who left the German-Polish border region in the 1840s to escape religious persecution. These farmers brought traditions you can't miss: solid bluestone architecture, the tall slender spires of the Lutheran churches, and *kuchen*, a cake as popular as the Devonshire tea introduced by British settlers. Together these elements give the Barossa a charm that is unique among Australian wine-growing areas.

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WINNING WINERIES

South Australia is the country's wine powerhouse, producing most of the nation's wine and boasting some of the oldest vineyards in the world. Thanks to its diverse geography and climate, the region produces a huge range of grape varieties—from cool-climate Rieslings in the Clare Valley to full-bodied Shiraz wines of the world-famous Barossa. Less well known, McLaren Vale has an exceptional variety of grapes, including Merlot, Chardonnay, and Cabernet Sauvignon, and just 20 minutes' drive from Adelaide is Adelaide Hills, where lower temperatures lead to great sparkling wines and Pinot Noir.



Most wineries in the Barossa operate sale rooms—called cellar doors—that usually have 6 to 12 varieties of wine available for tasting. You are not expected to sample the entire selection; to do so would overpower your taste buds. It's far better to give the tasting-room staff some idea of your personal preferences and let them suggest wine for you to sample. Some cellar doors charge an A\$5 tasting fee, refundable with any purchase.

Because the Barossa wineries are relatively far apart, a car is by far the best way to get around. But keep in mind that there are stiff penalties for driving under the influence of alcohol. Police can pull you over for a random breath test anywhere in the state, and roadside mobile breath-testing stations—locally known as “Booze Buses”—are not uncommon sights. The best advice is to take a tour. Barossa Epicurean Tours (☎ 0402/989-647, 🌐 www.barossatours.com.au) are highly praised. Gray Line Adelaide (☎ 1300/858687, 🌐 www.grayline.com.au/adelaide) offers a full-day tour of the Barossa Region (A\$117), leaving from Adelaide Central Bus Station, and includes lunch at a winery. Enjoy Adelaide (☎ 08/8332-1401, 🌐 www.enjoyadelaide.com.au) runs a full-day (A\$69) Barossa tour that visits four vineyards and includes lunch. Groovy Grape Getaways (☎ 08/8371-4000 or 1800/661177, 🌐 www.groovygrape.com.au) offers full-day (A\$79) Barossa tours with a visit to the Adelaide Hills and a barbecue lunch.

KANGAROO ISLAND

Kangaroo Island's landscape is surprisingly diverse. Here you will find steep cliffs crashing into the sea, dense rain forests, massive sand dunes, and pockets of red earth between stretches of bush and farmland. Only 96 miles long, the island is packed with indigenous wildlife that you might have trouble spotting elsewhere. Keep your eyes peeled for short-beaked echidnas, southern brown bandicoots, tammar wallabies, and even brushtail possums.

The most beautiful coastal scenery is in **Flinders Chase National Park**. The effects of seas crashing mercilessly onto Australia's southern coast are visible in the oddly shaped rocks on the island's shores. A limestone promontory was carved from beneath at Cape du Couedic on the southwestern coast, producing what is known as **Admiral's Arch**. From the boardwalk you can see the New Zealand fur seals that have colonized the area around the rock formation. About 4 kilometers (2½ miles) farther east are the aptly named **Remarkable Rocks**, huge fantastically shaped boulders balanced on the promontory of Kirkpatrick Point. This is a great place to watch the sun set or rise.

Much of Kangaroo Island has been cultivated since settlement, but after being declared a national treasure in 1919, a huge area of original vegetation has been protected in Flinders Chase. In December 2007

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ABOUT THE RESTAURANTS

Foodies are spoiled for choice in south Australia; the region famous throughout the country for its excellent produce. Make sure you try some of Adelaide's Mod-Oz cuisine, with dishes showcasing oysters, crayfish, and King George whiting prepared with Asian and Mediterranean flavors. Bush foods are also available in some eateries; look for kangaroo, emu, and wattle seed.

a bushfire burned a large part of Flinders Chase, and its destructive power and the various stages of regeneration are now on show.

The island's main attractions are widely scattered; you can see them best on a guided tour or by car. The main roads form a paved loop, which branches off to such major sites as Seal Bay, and Admirals Arch and Remarkable Rocks in Flinders Chase National Park. Stretches of unpaved road lead to lighthouses at Cape Borda and Cape Willoughby, South Australia's oldest. Roads to the island's northern beaches, bays, and camping areas are also unpaved. These become very rutted in summer, but they can be driven carefully in a conventional vehicle. Be alert for wildlife, especially at dawn, dusk, and after dark. Slow down and dim your lights so you don't blind the animals you see.

Flinders Chase has several 1½-kilometer to 9-kilometer (1-mile to 5½-mile) loop walking trails, which take one to three hours to complete. The 4-kilometer (2½-mile) Snake Lagoon Hike follows Rocky River over and through a series of broad rocky terraces to the remote sandy beach where it meets the sea. The sign warning of freak waves is not just for show.

FLINDERS RANGES NATIONAL PARK

Extending north from Spencer Gulf, the Flinders Ranges mountain chain includes one of Australia's most impressive Outback parks. These dry, folded, cracked mountains, once the bed of an ancient sea, have been sculpted by millions of years of rain and sun. Cypress pine and casuarina cover this furrowed landscape of deep valleys, which slope into creeks lined with river red gums. The area is utterly

fascinating—both for geologists and for anyone else who revels in wild, raw scenery and exotic plant and animal life.

The scenic center of the Flinders Ranges is **Wilpena Pound**, an 80-square-kilometer (31-square-mile) bowl ringed by hills that curve gently upward, only to fall away from the rims of sheer cliffs. The only entrance to the Pound is a narrow cleft through which Wilpena Creek sometimes runs. A mud-brick **visitor center** (☒ *Wilpena Rd.* ☎ 08/8648-0048), part of the Wilpena Pound Resort, has information about hiking trails and campsites within the park. Numerous steep trails make the Flinders Ranges ideal for bushwalking, even though the park has few amenities. Water in this region is scarce and should be carried at all times. The best time for walking is during the relatively cool months between April and October. This is also the wettest time of year, so you should be prepared for rain. Wildflowers, including the spectacular Sturt's desert pea, are abundant between September and late October.

The park's most dramatic walking trail leads to the summit of 3,840-foot **St. Mary's Peak**, South Australia's second-tallest summit and the highest point on the Pound's rim. The more scenic of the two routes to the top is the outside trail (15 kilometers [9 miles] round trip); give yourself a full day to get up and back. The midsection of the ascent is steep and strenuous, but views from the summit—including the distant white glitter of the salt flats on Lake Frome—make the climb worthwhile. ☒ *End of Wilpena Rd., 156 kilometers (97 miles) off Princes Hwy., via town of Hawker* ☎ 08/8648-4244, 🌐 www.flindersoutback.com.

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