



SPECIAL REPORT

Top travel trends of 2018

These days, we want more from our holidays than a tan and a souvenir T-shirt – we want to come home forever changed. As **Alexandra Carlton** discovers, Australia's most in-demand destinations have one thing in common: they're all about experiences, not escapes.

WE AUSTRALIANS are slowly but incontestably changing the way we spend our money and our time. Once, we worked to buy shiny things. These days, we work to buy experiences. In fact, every year we're spending about \$10 billion more on leisure activities than we did the previous year and we want our leisure time – particularly our holidays – to work as hard as we do. Whether it's spending a week at a yoga retreat, exploring another culture or taking a trip that simply brings us closer to our family, we want to join in rather than observe, move instead of sit still and connect, not gatecrash.

"Living in increasingly stressful and overcrowded environments is making people rethink what it means to escape," says Laura Swain, assistant editor of food, beverage and hospitality at global trend forecaster Stylus. "While the beach holiday does still hold appeal for many, we're seeing a desire for immersive, multidimensional experiences and stripped-back retreats that integrate outdoor activities with cultural and contextual insights."

The latest data from Tourism Australia backs her up, showing that Australians favour bushwalking, visits to national parks and outdoor sports over traditional holiday pastimes such as shopping and going to casinos. Indigenous-run tourism offerings are experiencing a period of unprecedented growth, as are wellness retreats. If you're looking for an escape that will give you a better sense of the world – and perhaps of yourself – these are the destinations to try.

Banubanu Beach Retreat (opposite); exploring the Magnificent Gallery with Johnny Murison from Jarramali Rock Art Tours (top) and relaxing on the escarpment at Laura, North Queensland



Cultural awakening

Visiting Indigenous sites and communities is one of the fastest-growing travel trends in the country, up 22 per cent between 2016 and 2017. "Aboriginal experiences are a vital part of Australia's tourism offering and something I can only see growing in appeal," says Tourism Australia managing director John O'Sullivan.

Travellers prefer tours and destinations that are owned and/or run by Indigenous people, such as Jarramali Rock Art Tours (jarramalirockarttours.com.au) in Cape York, Queensland. A family business run by Kuku Yalanji traditional owners, Jarramali offers camping trips and a four-wheel drive tour to the Magnificent Gallery, a collection of 450-plus pieces of ancient Aboriginal art that have been recognised by UNESCO as some of the world's most significant rock drawings.

There's also the Aboriginal-owned and -operated Wukalina Walk (wukalina.walk.com.au), described as a four-day

spiritual journey into Palawa (Tasmanian Aboriginal culture). The walk begins in Launceston and passes through the Bay of Fires (Larapuna) and Mount William (Wukalina) areas in the state's scenic north-east.

Banubanu Beach Retreat (banubanu.com), on Bremer Island (Dhambaliya) in East Arnhem Land, is one of the country's most unique eco escapes, combining Aboriginal history with awe-inspiring coastal landscapes. Guests can take tours to experience traditional Yolngu hunting and culture, plus there's fishing charters, beach fishing, self-guided walks and turtle watching expeditions.

"It's a sanctuary where guests can reconnect with nature and themselves," says co-owner Helen Martin, an Arrernte woman from Alice Springs. "There's no wi-fi. You can totally drop out at this remote island retreat, relax and stop stressing."

Wildlife without walls

We've all seen the Netflix documentaries and YouTube clips showing the ugly side of keeping animals in captivity. But the latest breed of wildlife-based travel experiences is sensitive to welfare and broader ecological considerations, allowing the creatures to live in habitats that mimic their natural environment as closely as possible.

Set to open near Eastern Creek early next year, Sydney Zoo (thezoo.sydney) will offer a "safari-like" experience for both animals and visitors, with hidden barriers and fences giving the exhibits an open-range feel. Managing director Jake Burgess says these measures are critical to animal welfare. "Sydney Zoo represents a unique opportunity to develop a world-class zoo from a blank page," he says. "As such, it's our responsibility to ensure our habitat designs meet world's best practice."

Another "wall-free" animal experience is Monarto Zoo (monartozoo.com.au), 65 kilometres south-east of Adelaide. It's the country's biggest open-range zoo, where visitors can observe 500 animals, including lions, rhinoceroses and giraffes. Melbourne's Werribee Open Range Zoo (zoo.org.au) hosts an overnight Slumber Safari experience and houses a 6000-square-metre gorilla exhibit that gives the apes room to live much as they would in the wild.



(From top) Jackalope hotel on the Mornington Peninsula; sugar-free vegan dining at The Raw Kitchen; chimpanzees hanging out at Monarto Zoo. (Opposite, from top) Alibi's udon noodles with tempeh sausage; d'Arenberg Cube in McLaren Vale; fine dining at Biota, Bowral; putting out traps for lobsters with Mandurah Cruises



Food with feeling

In 2016, tourists spent more than \$21 billion on food, wine and brewery experiences around the country, according to Tourism Research Australia – and the figure is increasing. When we're on holiday, we don't just want to dine at the latest restaurants, says Sally Cope, executive officer of Ultimate Winery Experiences Australia, a consortium of wineries that offer visitors more than just tastings. "Interactive and sensory experiences are very popular as learning has become a key component of travel," she says.

Jackalope (jackalopehotels.com.au), at Willow Creek Vineyard on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula, is one of the newer examples; it offers rural serenity, luxury accommodation, two restaurants, a cocktail bar and a winery in the one place. Another is d'Arenberg Cube (darenberg.com.au), a cellar door and architectural masterpiece in South Australia's McLaren Vale. As well as tastings and fine dining, the winery offers blending masterclasses and helicopter tours.

Travellers are also interested in playing a more hands-on role in sourcing the food they eat. Oysters are shucked straight from the water on the Coffin Bay Oyster Farm & Tasting Tour (oysterfarmtours.com.au) in SA's Eyre Peninsula. In Western Australia, an hour's drive south of Perth, Mandurah Cruises' Wild Seafood Experience (mandurahcruises.com.au) lets guests haul their own catch of western rock lobsters from craypots in the Indian Ocean. Back on land, they're barbecued for a seafood feast.



When we travel, we bring our dietary preferences with us – think veganism, vegetarianism or a taste for clean and organic. Boutique hotel Ovolo (hotel.qantas.com.au/ovolooolloomooloo) in Sydney's Woolloomooloo recently opened Alibi, which claims to be Australia's first entirely plant-based hotel restaurant. The Raw Kitchen (therawkitchen.com.au) in Fremantle, Perth, dishes up vegan, raw and sugar-free cuisine, while the award-winning Biota restaurant (biotadining.com), in the NSW Southern Highlands town of Bowral, sources ingredients from its own garden and has accommodation on site.



(From top) The Golden Door Health Retreat; a place to kick back at Gaia Retreat & Spa

Wellness warriors

Before we learned terms such as “detox” and “clean eating”, a holiday was about excess and indulgence. Today, people want to return home more energised and nourished than when they left, which is why the wellness tourism industry is worth about \$740 billion globally.

In Australia, the old guard – including Queensland’s Gwinganna (gwinganna.com) and NSW’s Gaia (gaiaretreat.com.au) and Golden Door (goldendoor.com.au) – still does health retreats very well. With decades of experience between them, they offer some of the most respected and effective getaways on the market. “The quintessential Gaia nurturing experience gives our guests the opportunity to realign themselves physically, spiritually and emotionally,” explains the destination’s director and general manager, Gregg Cave.

Some of the newer options, such as Lord Howe Island’s Bad Yogi (bodyyogi-retreats.com), strike a balance between boot camp and bliss. Operators Andrew Hampson and Glenn Walmsley keep the focus on yoga during the day but have no issue with a spot of indulgence after hours. “There are plenty of retreats where people survive on dhal and green tea but I love my red meat and red wine,” says Andrew. “Bottom line – with us, you have a full day of health, wellness and vitality then in the evening, no-one will look at you sideways if you crack open a bottle of wine with dinner.”

Holidaying with Nan

As baby boomers retire, many of them are seeking ways to spend more time with their grandchildren – and overworked gen Xers and millennials are only too happy to call on them for kid-wrangling duties while they’re on holidays.

Enter the multigenerational or 3G trip. It tops the list of 2018 luxury travel trends compiled by global travel-adviser network Virtuoso, which has seen a rise in 3G touring since 2010. “People are searching for authentic experiences and the opportunity to share them with children and grandchildren makes the memories more lasting,” says Martin Simons, general manager of Fraser Coast Tourism & Events. The Queensland region is encouraging older generations to holiday with relatives on the Fraser Coast as a way of sharing their heritage. It will soon launch the next stage of a military trail through the town of Maryborough, which will include a memorial to local hero Duncan Chapman, the first man ashore at Gallipoli.

The ACT is fast becoming a family favourite: for adults, there’s the National Gallery of Australia (nga.gov.au), with its world-class exhibitions such as the current *Cartier* showcase (until 22 July); and for kids, there’s educational fun to be had at Questacon science centre (questacon.edu.au). The affordable ski fields in Corin Forest (corin.com.au), about 45 minutes from the CBD, are gentle enough for beginners at both ends of the age spectrum, while East Hotel (easthotel.com.au) in Kingston is famous for its suites that have adjoining Kids Cubby areas where the little ones can disappear with an Xbox while the adults enjoy a drink.

In Tasmania, a stay on one-hectare Picnic Island (picnicisland.com.au) in Freycinet National Park is a wonderful way for families to reconnect. The isle’s accommodation sleeps up to 10 in two separate but connected dwellings. You get the entire island to yourself, with the exception of the local penguin colony. ●

