

KANG

Driving along
Vivonne Bay

On a road trip around Kangaroo Island, off the coast of South Australia, **MEG LAW** and her family discover tourism is getting back on its feet following the devastating 2019/20 summer bushfires

AAROO

ISLAND

BY KOMBI





All aboard the SeaLink Ferry



The kombi disembarking the SeaLink ferry

“Look! There it is, mum! Kangaroo Island!” Excited shrills came from the bow of the ship as my two young pirates had a pretend sword fight and gallantly sailed the high seas. Onboard the SeaLink ferry, they had not drawn breath during the 45-minute journey, and the excitement was too much for these two intrepid young explorers as they finally caught a glimpse of our destination, Kangaroo Island in South Australia.

Driving off the ferry in our 1973 kombi, we were ready for the next leg of our adventure. We had spent three days on a road trip travelling from Victoria to South Australia in our little white van, exploring the vineyards of Coonawarra, the seaside towns of the Limestone Coast, and the spectacular beaches of the Fleurieu Peninsula.

As an introduction to the trip, we set the kids the challenge of researching and fact finding everything they could about Kangaroo Island, and this added some hilarity to the holiday, with them constantly shouting fun facts from the back of the kombi...

“Dad, did you know Kangaroo Island is Australia’s third biggest island?”

“Mum, there’s no rabbits on the island and they are banned!”

“Dad, did you know you can slide down sand dunes?”

“Dad, did you know Kangaroo Island is nearly seven times the size of Singapore?”

...and so, it went on...

Is it the wildlife, the landscapes, the local characters, the history or the huge size of the island that makes this place so special? Or is it something to do with the fact you can’t access the island unless you sail or fly? We set out to find out....

EXCEPTIONAL KANGAROO ISLAND TOURS

After rattling along in our loud kombi at 80km an hour on unsealed roads, it was a nice change to jump aboard a luxury 4WD van for the day with Exceptional Kangaroo Island Tours. We were fortunate to share the day with tour owner, Craig Wickham, to visit some of his favourite KI spots and learn about the history of the island; a great introduction before spending the next eight days exploring on our own. “Hey kids, how about we take a break here, and stop at the best café on Kangaroo Island!” Craig asked, as he pulled over on the side of a dirt track in the middle of nowhere and set up a table with white linen, freshly brewed coffee, Anzac cookies and even a hot chocolate and marshmallows for the kids.

At over 6ft tall, Craig is one of those likeable fellows who has charisma in spades, with his good humour, gentle nature and cheeky grin. Energy and enthusiasm are evident as he proudly shows off his home, and his passion for wildlife conservation is contagious.

**Dad, did you know
you can slide down
sand dunes?**



**The family enjoying
their road trip**

A local legend, Craig has lived on Kangaroo Island for more than 50 years, and it's fair to say he knows nearly every person who lives there as well as where to spot a few furry locals. No doubt, Craig has clambered every rockface, waded every rockpool, ridden his bike across every square kilometre of land, swam in every secret beach and swapped many yarns over a local pint or red wine at the local pub, but he wouldn't claim any of this as he is far too humble for skiting.

More than 45 per cent of the island was destroyed in the 'Black Summer' bushfires in 2019/20. Craig was quick to point out that while the locals have had the challenges of both bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic to contend with, they are certainly not despondent nor defeatist in their approach to tourism. Instead, they have been collectively proactive in using the quieter season to create new spaces, improve tourism experiences and renovate infrastructure. "We're a resilient bunch," he says. "We don't give up easily over here on Kangaroo Island. Why wallow in the past when you can dust yourself off and focus on the bright future ahead?"

After spending the day with Craig exploring some of the fire-affected areas of Flinders Chase National Park and surrounding bushland, it was easy to see that, just like people, the land, wildlife and trees can regenerate over time and use a variety of ingenious methods to protect themselves and bounce back stronger than ever.

Craig runs his tour with a jaunty air (bringing comedy to the occasional complaints of the young whining toddler in the back) and winning the heart of our eight-year-old daughter as they shared jokes, singalongs and belly laughs.

STOKES BAY

"I'm the leader! Follow me!" shouted our four-year-old as he excitedly led the way along the sand, barefoot, with his cute ▶

KANGAROO



**Dad and Daisy
sandboarding at
Vivonne Bay**



Chasing the sun at Stokes Bay



Caving and exploring secret beaches

wobbly 'toddler-esque' bare bottom covered in sand; the rest of us slowly walking in single file along the track in our flip flops, bathers and towels. The warm afternoon sun was the perfect beach weather, and we were on a mission to find the 'secret beach' near Stokes Bay that we had heard the locals talk about. After a short walk through some narrow caves and squeezing ourselves through the huge granite boulders, we arrived at the most beautiful site; white sand, turquoise water and not a soul to be seen! Next up was snorkelling, rockpool wading and dolphin spotting.

EMU BAY, PENNINGTON BAY AND SNELLING BEACH

Beach hopping was our favourite activity on Kangaroo Island, with our top family favourites including Emu Bay, Pennington Bay, and Snelling Beach. We even got to drive our old kombi along Emu Beach and plonk ourselves on the sand overlooking the aqua water for a picnic lunch, while the kids swam and had sandcastle building competitions.

You're spoilt for choice when it comes to beaches on Kangaroo Island. Boasting more than 500km of coastline, awesome surf breaks and kid-friendly rockpools abound, and it's easy to jump from one picture-perfect cove to the next, without running into anyone.

VIVONNE BAY

For those looking for some adrenaline fuelled adventure, you can't go past the popular sand boarding and tobogganing at Kangaroo Island Outdoor Action at Vivonne Bay, with activities ranging from quad bike tours to sandboarding/tobogganing and serene flat-water kayaking.

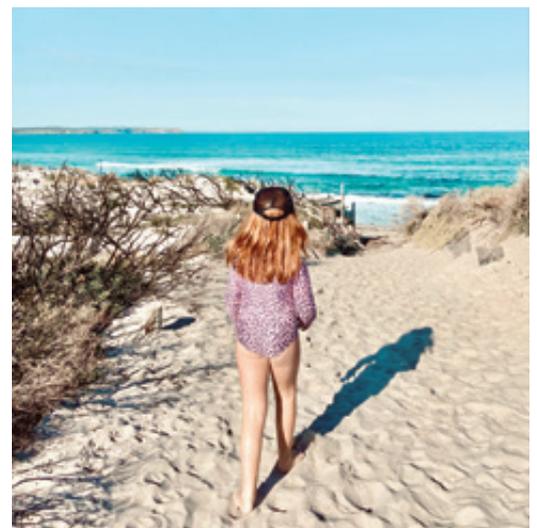
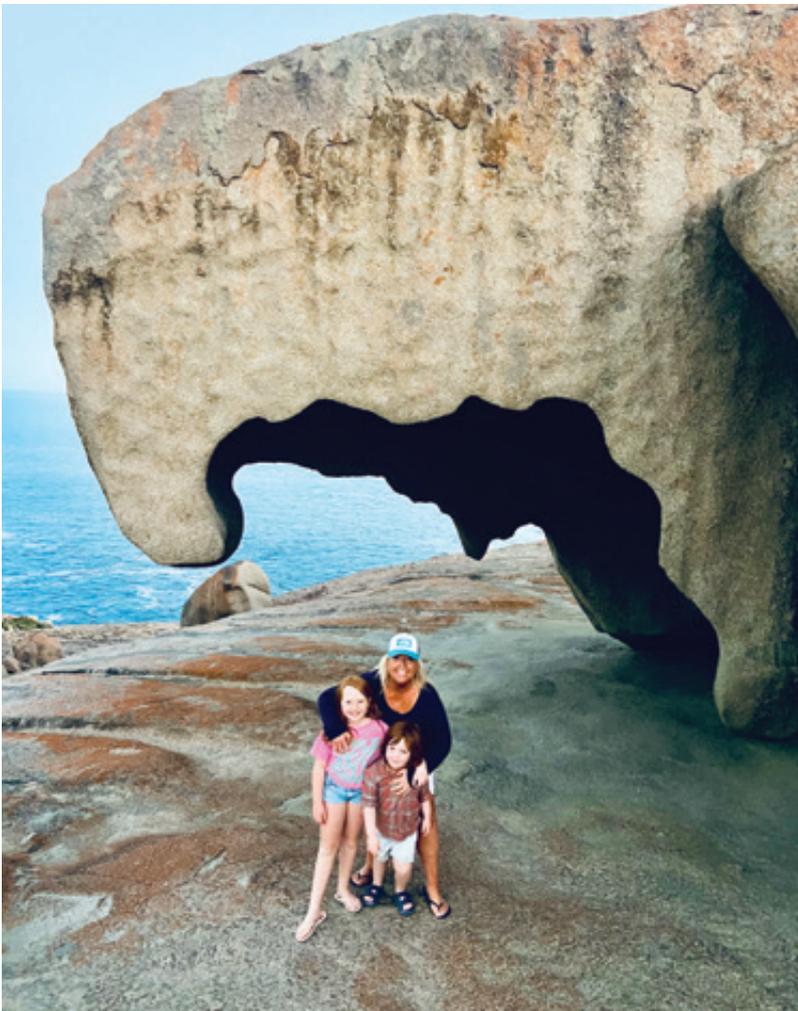
We had our hearts pumping at Little Sahara, a dune system on the south coast of the island, where we slid down sand dunes on toboggans and tried sandboarding. A unanimous family favourite, even our four-year-old squealed with excitement, as he flew down the slopes on his red toboggan at rapid speeds, covered in sand.

Next up we slowed down the pace and opted for a two-hour peaceful self-guided kayak on the Harriet River. We rented two double kayaks for the arvo and glided along the river, checking out birdlife, local flora, wildlife and plants and, of course, racing each other back – with lots of splashing along the way!

Sunkissed, waterlogged and with sand in our ears, we took our hungry bellies straight from the river to the Vivonne Bay General Store for the famous Kangaroo Island whiting burger and delicious chips. Let me tell you, it did not disappoint! Arriving back at our glamping family bell tent, under the light of the full moon, we carried the sleepy, worn out kids inside and tucked them in before calling it a day. ▶



CLOCKWISE FROM TO LEFT: Dolphins at Pennington Bay, Our kombi cruiser, Glamping under the stars, Our sandy beach girl, Remarkable Rocks in Flinders Chase National Park



Two little explorers Remarkables Rocks

Let me tell you,
these rocks
truly live up to
their name!

FAMILY-FRIENDLY KANGAROO ISLAND WINERIES AND FARMS

A trip to Kangaroo Island wouldn't be complete without a day spent visiting the many cellar doors, microbreweries, distilleries, lavender and honey farms. We tried everything from honeycomb and lavender scones to shiraz, sauvignon, cider, gin, gruyere and cheddar. Our daughter, who was still collecting 'fun facts' about Kangaroo Island, was excited to discover that the island is the oldest bee sanctuary in the world and, to this day, retains the purest existing strain of Ligurian bees, making up to 300 tonnes of honey each year, which is around the weight of a Boeing 747!

The island is full to the brim with local flavours and the relaxed, welcoming vibe of family-friendly wineries such as False Cape Wines, Dudley Wines and Islander Estate Vineyards meant even the kids enjoyed themselves with cubby houses, sand pits and climbing walls on offer while the adults relaxed and indulged.

SEAL BAY

You can't visit Kangaroo Island without making the obligatory trip to Seal Bay to check out the sea lions. Apart from the eponymous kangaroos, the best-known wildlife drawcard of this richly varied island is the endangered Australian sea lion. At Seal Bay, you can literally get amongst them on the sand and watch them sleep, surf, play and feed their young.

While the island is named after our iconic native marsupials, there are so many species of Australian animals on the island that the whole place feels like a wildlife park without fences. They include kangaroos, Tammar wallabies, koalas, echidnas, brush-tailed possums, bottlenose dolphins, the endangered glossy black-cockatoo and Cape Barren geese and migratory birds.

ADMIRAL'S ARCH AND REMARKABLE ROCKS, FLINDERS CHASE NATIONAL PARK

The natural, rugged beauty of Kangaroo Island is preserved through a system of national parks and conservation parks that cover almost one third of the island. High on the island's southern coast, you'll find the weathered granite boulders – the Remarkable Rocks – and, let me tell you, these rocks truly live up to their name!

Driving through Flinders Chase National Park, along the winding ribbon of bitumen which, as Instagram will testify, is also one of the most photographed roads in Australia, you will find Admiral's Arch and Remarkable Rocks.

We arrived just before sundown, as the sky turned into a magnificent collision of orange, purple and red hues, and were able to capture these massive, abstract shapes in all their glory. Perched 60m above the Southern Ocean, and more than 500 million years old, these landmarks have been shaped by millions of years of wind and rain and are still going strong.

NATURE LOVER'S PARADISE

There is so much more to Kangaroo Island than just its large size. If you are a family who seeks adventure and wants something different to the usual theme park holiday or resort with a kids club, then Kangaroo Island must be added to your list.

There is limited Wi-Fi and only three towns offering cafes and supplies, so be prepared to really get off the beaten track and explore this beautiful island, without the usual mod cons of home. Travelling in an old, loud kombi without devices, our kids loved playing old-fashioned car games and having singalongs, even pretending to be Siri:

Eldest: "Siri, what is the difference between a seal and a sea lion?"

Youngest (in the guise of Siri): "Seals don't have noses?"

Eldest: "Nooooo Siri, WRONG! DER! Seals don't have ear flaps and wriggle on their bellies on land, but sea lions walk on land using their bigger flippers!"

If you are after a relaxing, nature filled fun family holiday, then you can't go past Kangaroo Island. It is quite unlike any other South Australian destination. **KA**

The writer was a guest of Mercure Kangaroo Island Lodge, Seafront Holiday Park and Exceptional Kangaroo Island Tours.



Kayaking down the Harriet River

GETTING TO KANGAROO ISLAND

SeaLink operates a vehicle ferry from Cape Jervis, around a one hour and 40-minute drive south-west of Adelaide, to Penneshaw on Kangaroo Island. The journey takes 45 minutes. sealink.com.au

WHERE TO STAY ON KANGAROO ISLAND

Options include Mercure Kangaroo Island Lodge at American River and glamping in bell tents at Penneshaw kilodge.com.au seafrontholidaypark.com.au/bell-tents

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