



AUSTRALIAN WILDLIFE AT ITS BEST IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

South Australia, with its vast tracts of pristine landscape, boasts a wide variety of natural history and wildlife based experiences in unspoilt surroundings ranging from cuddling koalas, whale watching and swimming with sea lions and dolphins, to exploring mysterious underground caves and taking 4WD vehicles along deserted, sandy beaches.

Australia is home to a huge range of plants and animals and South Australia has a greater diversity than any other part of the continent. And, with more than 300 parks located throughout the state, visitors could be forgiven for not knowing where to begin their quest for a holiday packed with flora and fauna.

This release is intended to provide a snapshot of what the state of South Australia has to offer visitors interested in wildlife and getting back to nature, and includes suggestions for activities throughout the seasons.

WHALE WATCHING

Head of Bight, 78kms west of Yalata on the Eyre Peninsula, is considered to be Australia's best land-based vantage point from which to view spectacular southern right whales at play. Part of the Great Australian Bight Marine Park, Australia's second largest marine park after the Great Barrier Reef, this is where the white sand dunes and beaches meet the Bunda cliffs of the Nullarbor.

The most reliable time of year to view these wonderful creatures in their natural habitat is in July and August. Having left the icy Antarctic waters in May for the warmer coastal comfort of their South Australian breeding grounds, up to 100 whales, including calves, can be seen in the waters adjacent to the Bunda Cliffs until early October. Adults, who can viewed from an excellent viewing platform, range from 16 to 18 metres and calves from five to seven metres in length. www.greatsafaris.com.au

SWIMMING WITH SEA LIONS & DOLPHINS

While whales appear for a few months of the year, colonies of sea lions have made South Australia their permanent home. At Baird Bay on the Eyre Peninsula visitors can participate in four-hour excursions that include swimming with sea lions and dolphins. Alan and Trish Payne of Baird Bay Charters also offer accommodation at their *Baird Bay Ocean Eco Apartments*. www.bairdbay.com

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On Kangaroo Island, a guided tour of Seal Bay reveals a beach packed with hundreds of sea-lions who spend their days fishing in deep, pristine waters, returning to sun themselves on the sand and nurture their young. Because of its isolation from native and introduced predators, the island is teeming with wildlife, including a population of about 6,000 New Zealand fur seals, best seen at Cape du Couedic.

DIVING WITH GREAT WHITE SHARKS

Port Lincoln, located on the Spencer Gulf that empties into the Southern Ocean, is home to many spectacular and rare sea creatures including the blue whale, giant squid and sea lions. However, there is another, namely the great white shark. It is possible to get close and personal with these giants of the deep by diving in a metal safety cage as organised by Rolf Czabayski who operates the MV Calypso Star, a luxurious and comfortable vessel able to accommodate up to eight passengers on four and one-day tours.

www.calypsostararters.com.au

PENGUINS

Near the pretty coastal town of Penneshaw on Kangaroo island and on Granite Island off Victor Harbor on the Fleurieu Peninsula, it is possible to see hundreds of little penguins making their way home as night falls after a hard day's fishing. They are sometimes referred to as blue, little blue and fairy penguins, and can be seen in these locations all year round, where their burrows are located in the rock faces.

LEAFY SEA DRAGONS

The South Australian state marine emblem is the delicate leafy sea dragon which inhabits the waters off the southern coast of Kangaroo Island and Fleurieu Peninsula and can be spotted there all year round. With a body shaped like a sea horse covered with leaf-like membranes, this rare creature reaches maturity at two years of age, when the males care for the young in a pouch.

KANGAROOS

Kangaroos are common throughout South Australia especially in the Mount Lofty and Flinders Ranges. Kangaroo Island has its own unique kangaroo, a smaller, long-haired, darker coloured sub-species of the western grey kangaroo that can be found on the mainland.

KOALAS

Koalas can be seen frequently in the wild on Kangaroo Island and in the National Parks of the Adelaide Hills, usually perched high in the branches of gum trees. They spend most of their day sleeping and wake around dusk to start feeding. Visitors to Cleland National Park in the Adelaide Hills have the opportunity to hold a koala.

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ECHIDNAS

Also known as spiny anteaters, echidnas are common on Kangaroo Island. With sharp spiny quills and a sticky tongue, they are more likely to be spotted during the winter months usually searching and digging for ants and termites.

YELLOW-FOOTED ROCK-WALLABY

These shy creatures can occasionally be glimpsed on the high rocky outcrops in the Flinders Ranges, particularly in Mount Remarkable National Park, which conserves colonies of the Yellow-footed Rock-wallaby. In the early days of European settlement, the beautifully marked wallaby was almost hunted to extinction for its much-valued fur.

WOMBATS

The southern hairy-nosed wombat can be found in a number of places, including the Murray River and the Gawler Ranges on the Eyre Peninsula.

EMU

The emu, an Australian icon to equal the kangaroo, can be sighted frequently roaming the grasslands of the Flinders and Gawler Ranges.

BIRDLIFE

The birdlife in South Australia is prolific especially in the Coorong National Park, an hour's drive south east of Adelaide on the Limestone Coast. Considered by many to be one of the most important water bird habitats in Australia, The Coorong acts as a magnet to huge numbers of birds with its shallow lagoons protected from the Southern Ocean by a line of sand dunes.

The 230 bird species found in the Coorong include cormorants, albatrosses, pie-eyed oyster catchers, crested and fairy terns, grebes, gulls and the world's largest breeding colony of Australian pelicans. The wetlands and lagoons of the Murray River also teem with birdlife, with black swans, egrets and many species of ducks thriving in the shallow waters and river reeds.

Australia's largest bird of prey is the wedge-tailed eagle. With a wingspan of nearly three metres (almost nine feet), it can often be seen soaring above the jutting ridges of the Flinders Ranges and Wilpena Pound. The Flinders Ranges is also the place to see multi-coloured parrots, galahs, corellas and honeyeaters.

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SAMPLE NATURE RESERVES

Gluepot Reserve, located near Waikerie in the semi-arid South Australian mallee, is considered by many to be one of Australia's most impressive reserves located in the Riverland Biosphere. One of only 12 UNESCO Biosphere Reserves in Australia, the 50,000-hectare area of virgin mallee scrub contains no less than six nationally endangered bird species and a unique flora and fauna adapted to the harsh conditions. The Gluepot Reserve Environmental Education Centre is run entirely by volunteers and presents regular courses in its converted shearing shed, including 'Painting Nature', 'An Introduction to Birds and Bird Watching' and 'Discovering the Vegetation & Habitat The Mallee Provides'. www.riverland.net.au/gluepot

Warrawong Wildlife Sanctuary, an award winning environmental, education facility in the Adelaide Hills, offers visitors a choice of year round guided and self guided walks (10am -4pm) and guided nocturnal walks (7.30-9pm) in order to learn about some of Australia's rare and endangered species like bettongs, potoroos and platypus. The sanctuary also concentrates on broader issues like conservation and management of Australian native animals, water, energy and natural resources. www.warrawong.com

USEFUL WEBSITES

www.ecotourism.org.au

www.environment.sa.gov.au

www.bikesa.asn.au

www.parks.sa.gov.au/parks/index.htm

www.walkingsa.org.au.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S WILDLIFE CALENDAR

SUMMER (December-February)

KANGAROO ISLAND

- **Kangaroos and tammar wallabies** are seen predominantly at dawn and dusk.
- **Little penguins** moult all their feathers at the end of the breeding season and can lose up to half their body weight.
- **New Zealand fur seals** give birth to chocolate-brown pups.
- **The Australian sea-lion** breeding season begins with pups born from January to June.
- **Heath goannas** lay 10-17 eggs in the warm, stable, humid atmosphere of termite mounds, the perfect incubator.
- **Koalas, wallabies and kangaroos** give birth to tiny young, which are naked and blind.

FLINDERS RANGES & OUTBACK

- **Wedgetail eagles** are sighted more frequently between November and May predominantly in the early morning. They rely on thermals for flight and feed on young bird species visiting the region for food during the summer months.
- **Reptiles** may generally be seen more often during the summer months when they warm themselves on rocks.
- Clear summer skies are ideal for **star-gazing** in the South Australian Outback – the ideal spot in the Arkaroola Observatory in the Flinders Ranges

AUTUMN
(March-May)

KANGAROO ISLAND

- **Glossy black cockatoos and little penguins** begin nesting.
- **Black swans** begin their courtship behaviour of wing-raising, neck-stretching and loud trumpeting.
- **Fungi** start to appear on damp ground and rotting wood.

FLINDERS RANGES & OUTBACK

Although anytime is considered to be a good time to visit the Flinders Ranges and Outback, the climate between April and October makes a winter visit more appealing. Wildlife is generally at its most active, too, particularly at dawn and dusk.

EYRE PENINSULA

Autumn is also considered a good time to visit the coastline and wilderness of the Eyre Peninsula region.

- Swim with **sea lions** and **dolphins** at Baird Bay
- Watch **southern right whales** entering South Australian waters to care for their young at the Head of Bight.

FLEURIEU PENINSULA

- Watch **southern right whales** off the coast of the Fleurieu Peninsula.

LIMESTONE COAST

- Autumn is a great time to visit wetlands, such as The Coorong, to see large numbers of migratory birds leaving southern Australia to fly north to breed.

WINTER
(June-August)

KANGAROO ISLAND

Winter is spectacular with lush green countryside, flowing rivers and abundant wildlife - Kangaroo Island at its most appealing. Land mammals, predominantly night, dawn and dusk feeders for most of the year, frequently come out by day during this season.

- **Koalas** emerge from the mother's pouch and begin to ride on her back. Visit Flinders Chase National Park for sightings.
- **Kangaroo and wallaby joeys** start to emerge from the mother's pouch and feed by her side.
- **Echidnas** form 'mating trains' where up to eight males will follow a female for around four weeks.
- **Waders**, on their migration from Siberia, begin to arrive.
- **Ospreys** show off to their mates in spectacular courtship fights.
- **Southern right whales** pass the shores on their migration from Antarctic waters to the Great Australian Bight to calve.

FLINDERS RANGES & OUTBACK

- **Emu chicks** are more likely to be seen late winter early spring.
- **Western grey and red kangaroos** are most active at dawn and dusk, their usual feeding period. They're more active during this season, as they don't have the summer heat to contend with when they prefer to laze in a shady corner to avoid losing energy.
- The rare **yellow-footed rock wallabies** can be seen at Telowie, Wilkawillina, Brachina and Bunyeroo Gorges
- **Euros** and **dragon lizards** can also be spotted in these areas of the desert.
- Depending on rainfall, wildflowers can bloom from August to October, beginning with the **Golden Wattle**, Australia's national floral emblem, which flowers in late August to early September.

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EYRE PENINSULA

- **Australian giant cuttlefish** migrate to shallow water at Whyalla to mate and spawn. During mating, the complex structures embedded in their skin produce thousands of colours and patterns, providing a stunning display for visitors.

MURRAY RIVER

- **Wombats** enjoy sunbathing outside their burrows on sunny winter days, particularly at Brookfield Conservation Park and on the roads between Sedan and Blanchetown.

LAKE EYRE

With sufficient rainfall, the inland rivers flood Lake Eyre during the winter and this usually harsh area becomes a breeding ground for waterbirds and marine life.

SPRING ***(September-November)***

With breeding at its peak during the spring, many birds have their brightest plumage and are singing to their hearts' content!

KANGAROO ISLAND

Spring is the season of rebirth. It is a wonderful time to see the spectacular array of wildflowers, birds and mammals.

- **Wildflowers** are in abundance. There are approximately 40 endemic floral species found on Kangaroo Island.
- **Eucalyptus oil** is in peak production. One tonne of leaf can produce up to 30 litres of oil.
- **Cape Barren geese** nest on top of the native iris grasses to incubate their eggs.
- **Platypuses** lay two eggs in a burrow up to 20 metres long.

LIMESTONE COAST

- Escape the heat of summer to visit World Heritage listed Naracoorte Caves National Park, complete with **great stalactite and giant marsupial ancestors** in the Victoria Fossil Cave.
- Spring is also when thousands of **bent-wing bats** migrate to the Naracoorte Caves and, between November and February they can be seen resting in the Maternity Cave view video link-up.
- The national parks of the Limestone Coast are transformed in October with the start of the **wildflower** season.
- This is also the time of year to watch migratory **waders** at The Coorong.

FLINDERS RANGES & OUTBACK

- **Sleepy lizards** and **frill-necked lizards** may be seen in this area between September and November, basking in the sun upon rock faces. **Bearded dragons** may also be found on rock outcrops throughout the Ranges.

For further information visit www.southaustralia.com.