

Travel

BY SUSAN SKELLY

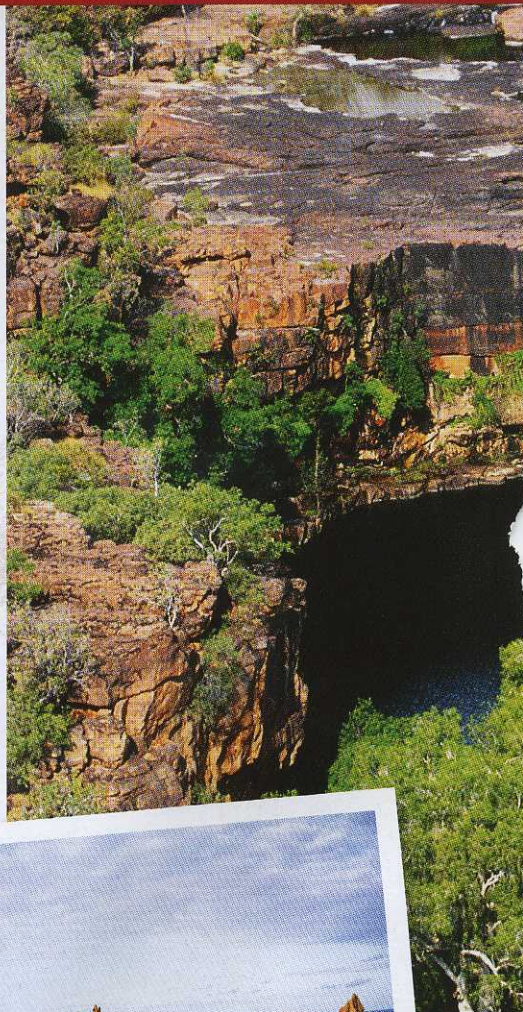
Rites
of passage

DREW KLUSKA'S FRIENDS are out-of-the-box types. You can bet they know something no one else knows. Like how to recognise a colony of koalas among a stand of manna gums; that a bundle of sticks high on a cliff marks a sea eagle's nest; that a V-shaped furrow on the water indicates a platypus swimming. They know rock artists from bullshit artists.

Kluska understands that there's a new kind of tourism abroad, and that it relies on maverick expertise. It's customised, educational, unforgettable.

One of the big new trends is the exceptional private guide, says Kluska – the one, for example, who has exclusive access to Arnhem Land, or the expert on fossils in the Flinders Ranges. "It's about something you can't buy off the shelf, it's about going home to your friends and saying, 'You would not believe what we did!' That's what, to

Forget endless days by the pool. There's a new anti-tourism abroad – and it's about delving into the unknown, with some culture and pampering on the side.



CASH AND CARRY Taking a chopper to premium fishing grounds off Queensland

Off the beaten track

Adventures in the outback are moving upmarket, with fine food, comfortable lodgings and even the chance to muster cattle.

**PRAIRIE HOTEL, FLINDERS RANGES, SA**

Just four hours' drive from Adelaide, the Flinders Ranges is not only one of the unsung gems of Australia, but also the closest truly outback destination to any capital city.

A centrepiece of Flinders Ranges tourism is Jane and Ross Fargher's Prairie Hotel at tiny Parachilna (pop. 7), a railway siding on the line between Port Augusta and Leigh Creek. Since they



CHEWING THE FAT Yarning and bush tucker are attractions at the remote Prairie Hotel in SA, left. Stunning Faraway Bay in WA, right

took it over a decade ago, the Prairie has attracted an eclectic mix of Australian and overseas travellers seeking a quintessential outback pub.

The Farghers, owners of

nearby Nilpena Station, oblige. With a background in food service, Jane's "feral food" platter – smoked emu pate, caesar salad with emu prosciutto, kangaroo tail soup, rabbit pie, goats' cheese



OASIS The pristine scenery at Bullo River Station, left, and locals share their culture, below



with his girlfriend and four buddies, wanted to finish a 12-month round-the-world *Boy's Own* fishing trip with a bang. They flew in by Gulfstream jet from Huka Lodge in New Zealand to Weipa in Queensland. Kluska had a 18m vessel, Manta Ray, stationed about 100km north, at the best fishing ground. Legendary game fisherman Dennis "Brazakka" Wallace, now into helicopter safaris, had three choppers ready to ferry them to the boat. There was a fishing guide for every person. They got 18 world records in eight nights.

"On the last night they wanted a big party - money was no object.

We organised to have an Aboriginal dance troupe flown up; and \$3500 of tropical blooms; the head chef from Red Ochre in Cairns prepared an incredible meal. They wanted to give everyone a gift - I got [private tour guide] Sab Lord to go out into deepest Arnhem Land where he sourced these incredible barks with barramundi painted on them, had them brought back to Darwin, couriered to Cairns and then delivered onto the plane that was flying up the dance troupe, chef and blooms. We had paper handmade to look like fish scales, we had cards made, the artwork was incredible: it blew them away.

"That's what we're good at - coming up with things people haven't thought of."

The eight days set the fishermen back about \$320,000. There were no complaints. "This is what real experiential tourism is about," says Kluska. "Getting access to places you

me, the new travel experience is about."

The 34-year-old agricultural science graduate is behind Outback Encounter, an Australian tour operation he set up eight years ago that now taps into all manner of top-drawer experiences, from visits to outback stations and private lodges to destinations you won't find in the garden variety brochure.

Pulling a rabbit out of a hat is all in a day's work. One of Kluska's recent calls was from an American fisherman who,

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and lots more - has become a "must-have" experience. Ross, a bushie, can often be found at the bar, yarning with visitors - who can include movie crews, city types and travellers headed for the Birdsville, Oodnadatta and Strzelecki tracks.

So successful has been the Prairie Hotel that Jane has joined forces with Cate Spurling to replicate the formula at South Australia's oldest licensed inn, The North Star Hotel at Melrose, halfway between Adelaide and the Prairie.

**Prairie Hotel, Parachilna,
SA, (08) 8648 4844
www.prairiehotel.com.au
North Star Hotel, Melrose,
SA, (08) 8666 2110
www.northstarhotel.com.au**

**FARAWAY BAY,
EAST KIMBERLEY, WA**

In the 20 years since it was established, barely 3000 white people have been to Faraway Bay, the aptly named cove at the very top of Western Australia. A camp there was blown away by Cyclone Ingrid in 2005, but

since rebuilt by owners Bruce and Robyn Ellison to offer a retreat from the world.

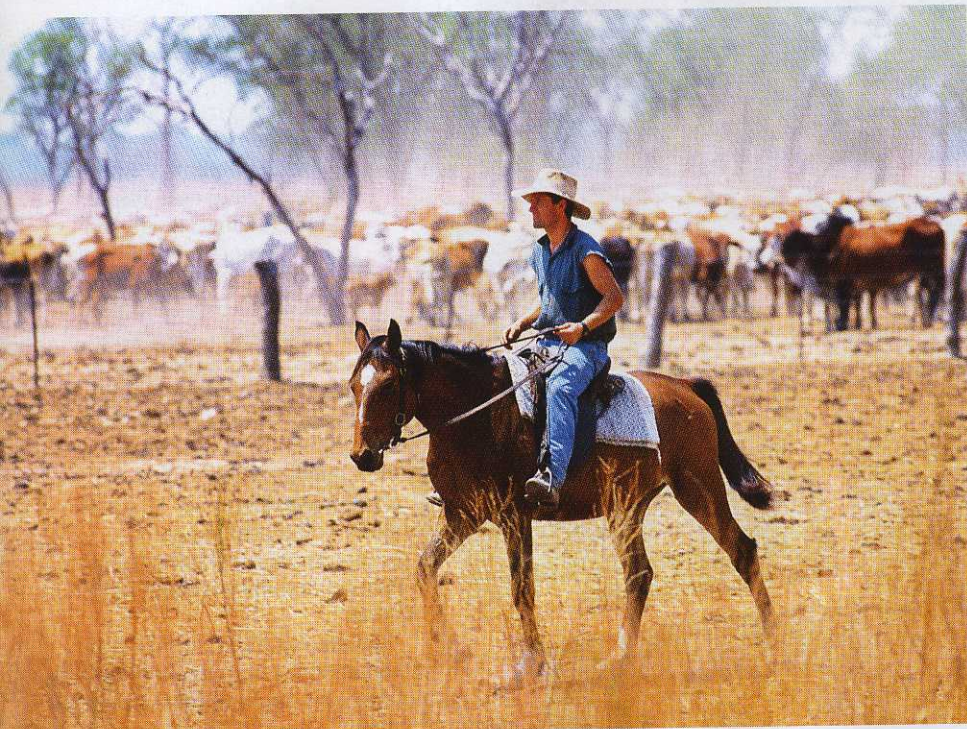
It is accessible only by light aircraft, and the 70-minute flight from Kununurra traverses the



rugged Ord River irrigation area. Once there, the colours of the bush are amazing, and there's plenty to do: fishing, exploring shell-laded beaches with ancient middens, birdwatching, crocodile-spotting, and dining on delights that invariably include the catch of the day.

Nearby is Bradshaw rock art that has been traced to pre-Aboriginal times, and the majestic Mitchell Falls.

**The Bush Camp at Faraway Bay,
via Kununurra, WA, (08) 9169 1214
www.farawaybay.com.au**



By and large it's the upmarket baby-boomers driving this anti-tourism, many of whom have, or still run, companies that make money, and so have an adventurous spirit. They probably backpacked in their youth and now pine for the freedom that that represented, but do not need to rough it again. At the same time, they may not want to go to Koh Samui to simply sit on the beach and veg out with a book.

"What they're after," says Rosebery, "is an authentic travel experience that lets their headspace go back to their youth - something culturally rich, which is what mass tourism has tended to destroy." Somewhere like Nihiwatu (see p60) where you don't feel hemmed in and part of a tourism production line. Or Claremont, an exclusive lodge 45 minutes from Christchurch on the South Island of New Zealand, a working sheep, cattle and deer station not far from the Waipara wineries, and home to some spectacular archaeological finds including dinosaur fossils.

In Australia, what people want will depend on where they come from.

Americans, says Kluska, will do one great



INNS AND OUTS Panache and panoramas on Kangaroo Island, above, and riding with the herd at full-on Bullo River Station, top

“WHAT WE'RE NOT DOING ANY MORE IS OPULENCE FOR OPULENCE'S SAKE”

simply couldn't normally access - places that are someone else's piece of paradise."

Robert Rosebery, executive director of Select Hotels and Resorts International, calls it the new anti-tourism. "What we're not doing any more is opulence for opulence's sake," he says. "Unless you are nouveau riche, there's a movement away from going to stay at a place where you just sit and feel lucky. There was a lot of that 10 to 15 years ago, but many people *live* in their idea of luxury now. They don't need to travel to find it. Ostentation is out."

escape trip to Australia in a lifetime, and they want the icons. They'll spend time in Sydney, see the Opera House, sail on Sydney Harbour, visit the Great Barrier Reef.

Australians are looking at the Top End and the Kimberleys, wanting to tap into their roots. Australia has become such an urbanised society, Kluska says, "they are really looking to discover the real Australia and rock art that's 50,000 years old".

The English holidaymaker sits somewhere between the two - they tend to be more adventurous, travel to Australia three or

Off the beaten track

WROTHAM PARK STATION CAPE YORK, QLD

As Australia becomes more urbanised, Australians have become increasingly isolated from farm and station life. Hence the explosion of farmstay tourism. Opened to the public just two years ago, Wrotham Park Station takes the genre to a new level, combining the ultimate outback station experience with unabashed luxury.

Located 250km from the

nearest town, Mareeba, Wrotham Park is a 600,000ha station that until recently was owned by the Australian Agricultural Company, and runs 35,000 cattle. Guests (maximum 20) stay in one of 10 beautifully appointed cabins on an escarpment overlooking the Mitchell River, and congregate for meals at The Homestead, a central lounge and dining room.

There's ample opportunity to see the workings of the property. Station manager Mat Daniel or one of his stockmen attend most evening meals,



intriguing guests with tales about the property and the characters passing through. Horse-riding, fishing, 4WD tours (air-conditioned), swimming in the pool and an open bar are all

CUTTING EDGE

The spectacular Wrotham Park Station perched on the edge of a Cape York escarpment

part of the pleasures of an outstanding destination.

Wrotham Park Station,
Qld, 1300 134 044

www.voyages.com.au

- PAUL MYERS

four times. "First trip they'll see the icons, second they'll venture further afield and by the third trip, get adventurous."

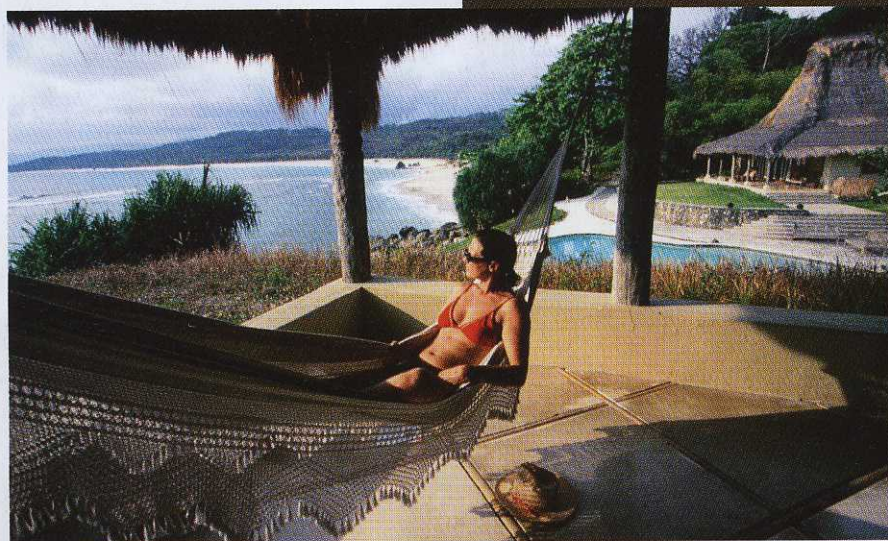
Kluska's fascination with customised travel grew out of a passion for Africa. The boy who grew up on a farm 600km west of Adelaide watched every Discovery Channel documentary on the continent, read every book he could get his hands on. In 1996, he headed to Kenya to manage the Wilderness Trails Lodge at Low Downs Wildlife Conservancy. "It lived up to everything and more ... I loved it for the wildness, the adventure, the experience, the people you met." Kluska became convinced he could replicate the bush adventure back home.

He is always looking for something new, though, and his latest venture is the rock star rental - spectacular Sydney homes for those who want the real deal. And he's toying with the idea of a camel safari.

In their book, *Neo Power*, on the consumers who comprise a new economic order, Ross Honeywill and Verity Byth sum it up:

For Neos, leisure travel is a way of connecting with desire, and expressing celebration and discovery. It fuels the spirit and creates new relationships and personal insights. It can be high-tech and high-touch, or low-tech and tactile. It can be a short break or a sabbatical. It can be solitary or intensely peopled. But the one thing it can't be is controlled by a corporation." It's personal. ●

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Simply stunning

Don't expect high-tech luxury on Sumba. It's the rustic pleasures that attract travellers.

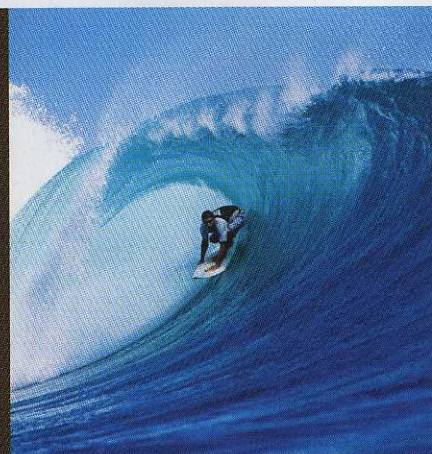
Luxury doesn't always mean Egyptian cotton, flat screens and French champagne. For some, luxury is simply time. Time out, time alone, time with family, time without mobile phones, faxes and emails.

The island of Sumba, one of Indonesia's Lesser Sunda Islands, is all about time. It's an hour's flight east from Bali's Denpasar airport to Tambolaka in West Sumba, and another two hours' drive to the coastal retreat known as Nihiwatu Resort. Add the five-hour flight from Australia to Bali and that's eight hours' travel time to step back a century.

Claude Graves is the man responsible for Nihiwatu, 12 bungalows perched on a cliff with panoramic ocean vistas. An old-time surfer from New Jersey, he made his money in Africa and moved to Bali before discovering Sumba on a surfing expedition 16 years ago. Graves loved it so much he bought 480ha, but only after six land title negotiations, red tape and an earthquake that reduced his first structures to rubble.

There are no phones at Nihiwatu, apart from a temperamental satellite phone in the back office behind the bar and open-air restaurant. The closest fax is two hours' drive away. The words laptop,

SWING LOW Honeymooners and surfers blend well at the sublime Nihiwatu resort



CODE BLUE The big guns of surfing are attracted to the powerful Sumba break

email and internet will be met with a red-stained betel nut stare.

The locals are friendly despite the "Sumba guns" swinging on some hips. These great machete-style knives are kept in wooden sheaths and tucked into the waist band. Once a tribal weapon, they are more likely to be used to lop a coconut than chop off a head.

Funerals are big here, involving the ritualistic slaughter of buffalo and horses to feed the dead on their spiritual journey. The local people are practising animists, and the entrails and organs of animals are regularly "read" to predict the future.

It is thought that 400,000 people inhabit Sumba. Most live hand-to-mouth, virtually untouched by western ways.

Graves set up the Sumba Foundation to help the people with clean water, schooling and medical supplies. Money from the cocktails served late at night goes towards the foundation, plus a percentage of everything spent at Nihiwatu. Locals trained in English and hospitality work the season at the resort.

There are two types of travellers at Nihiwatu - surfers and honeymooners - but they blend well over the nightly three-course meal, sharing tales of travel. Many venture into the local school to witness the work of the foundation and play soccer with a deflated ball with the children.

In the Nihiwatu visitors' book are big surf names such as Mark Occhilupo, big fashion names such as Hermès (who book out the entire retreat) and big Australian media names. Most return at least once, bringing gifts for the staff and a new soccer ball for the school.

- RACHAEL OAKES-ASH