

ROOM AT THE INN



JANE NICHOLLS

Lulled by watching the ocean waves and forest ravens, swamp harriers and white-faced herons glide in and out of view, I'm drifting off to sleep on the comfy couch when I hear grunting outside. It's a pair of amorous Bennett's wallabies. Even without a television, the National Geographic channel is playing in living colour here on Tasmania's King Island.

My accommodation has windows everywhere, yet the only other visible evidence of humans is the distant Currie Lighthouse, one of three on this shipwreck-hotspot isle. Just south is the site of the ruined Catarqui, Australia's worst peacetime maritime disaster in which about 400 people died in 1845. It's far from my reality, snugly shackled up in one of two luxurious chalets that opened late last year.

Kittawa Lodge is a brave leap of lifestyle faith. Owners Aaron Suine, a lawyer, and Nick Stead, an organisational psychologist, have stepped back from successful corporate careers in Sydney to realise their dream of raising son Abraham, 4, in a small community. "We loved speaking to the people we met staying in boutique luxury accommodation on our travels, and wanted to take what we'd learned and create a space for people to escape and enjoy, as well as a life for our family that was more present and enriching," says Suine.

The 39ha property was previously used for agistment, being too rugged for much else. Melaleucas clump around a small wetland and there is almost a kilometre of pristine coastline. Tufa terraces, rare geological phenomena that are about 5000 years old, dot the property. Natural clefts in the ancient



sand dunes mean the three lodges (including the couple's home) stand out of sight of each other.

Construction lawyer Suine ensured the dwellings sit lightly on the landscape; Kittawa is off-grid for power, water and waste, the infrastructure hidden neatly in a maintenance hub behind the couple's lodge. They have planning approval to build four more abodes, but they're in no rush.

The interior design is chic and thoughtful: two slanted oak rods with LED reading lights are angled above the couch; sand-coloured linen and burnt-orange woollen throws on the sea-green bed cover are a subtle nod to



Kittawa Lodge, main; calcified forest on King Island, above; lodge sitting area and bathroom, left

the roiling view. King Island is home to many artists, including Dianne and Andrew Blake, whose Whale Tail House featured on TV show *Grand Designs* and is open to visitors by appointment. Their work is among pieces on the walls, all available for purchase. There are ceramics, books and a gorgeous display of native flowering branches gathered by Suine.

Generous breakfast provisions await in the fabulously equipped kitchen. With oils and condiments, a wide range of staples, food processor and quality knives, cutlery and crockery at hand, gourmet guests can cook up a storm with the island's amazing produce — beef, lobster, cheese. My tip: eat out during the day, dine in at night. There are many more wallabies than cars.

Accommodation packages can include Suine and Stead taking you for a drive. We head to the natural wonder of the 7000-year-old calcified forest within Seal Rocks Reserve, passing an echidna and marvelling at the Mad Max-esque landscape where the Roaring 40s rage. After driving through a couple of farm gates (the roads are public access, which isn't clear to a non-local), we reach Stokes Point, King Island's southernmost point, where huge tangles of kelp wash up and can be harvested. On the beach are wallaby tracks and the imprints of birds, perhaps from little penguins, which have colonies on the island. It's a perfect "clink" moment and Suine whips out a carafe and pours a gin cocktail.

Back in my lodge, the all-Tasmanian bar is equipped with everything to mix my own sun-

CHECKLIST

Kittawa Lodge

South Road, Pearshape, King Island; kittawalodge.com

Tariff The property is accepting bookings from Tasmanian residents and mainland visitors for stays from August 1, with complimentary rescheduling if required due to border controls; \$680 a night, twin-share, for two-night minimum until January 1, including gourmet breakfast provisions.

Getting there There are no passenger ferry services to King Island. Prior to the imposition of COVID-related border restrictions, Sharp Airlines, Rex Regional Express and King Island Airlines offered flights from Melbourne, Burnie-Wynyard and Launceston. Sharp has resumed services from Burnie and Launceston. Kittawa Lodge is about 20 minutes' drive from the airport. King Island Car Rental is the only rental company on the island; book in advance.

Bedtime reading Bruny, the new dystopian novel by Stella Prize-winning author Heather Rose, is set on another ruggedly beautiful Tasmanian island, in the context of disturbingly recognisable political upheaval.

Stepping out At King Island Garlic, aka Frog Shack Farm, not far from Kittawa Lodge, buy some of Carmen Holloway's bulbs from the honesty stand. Book ahead for an inspiring walk around her farm, where she has spent more than two decades planting natives to encourage the return of rare birds such as the tiny King Island brown thornbill; kingislandgarlic.com. Meat Your Beef is a tour hosted by super-smart Black Angus farmer and wonderful cook Ana Pimenta and husband Tom Perry; meatyourbeef.com.au. And of course, head for a free cheese tasting at King Island Dairy; kingislanddairy.com.au.

Brickbats Every corner of Kittawa Lodge is environmentally conscious, so it was a surprise to see a Nespresso pod coffee maker. The pods are all faithfully recycled, but I'd prefer a plunger.

Bouquets A net bag hangs next to the all-weather jackets in each lodge's vestibule. Guests can take it on beach walks to collect any washed-up rubbish.

Also try Bedarra, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland; Capella Lodge, Lord Howe Island.

downer, and the enormous bathtub is perfectly angled to watch the blue horizon give way to a starry night over Bass Strait.

Jane Nicholls was a guest of Tourism Tasmania and Kittawa Lodge.

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