

# Back Down Under

Travel barriers are out and Great Barrier Reef trips are in, as Australia reopens its borders. **David Whitley** rounds up the new openings

**W**ith Australia reopening to fully vaccinated tourists from this week and Qantas bumping up its flight schedule to accommodate – Down Under is back on. Rules on testing and proof of vaccination vary by state, but the great Aussie adventure is viable again.

In the nearly two years since Australia shut itself away from the world, there have been some changes – and that means lots of exciting new things to do and places to stay. Here are the highlights of what's now on offer in each state.

## QUEENSLAND

Of all the Australian states, Queensland has the most new arrivals. In the far north, ownership of the Daintree Rainforest has been handed back to the Eastern Kuku Yalanji people. Indigenous bushstucker and bush medicine tours are now available at the Daintree's star attraction, Mossman Gorge. Also in the Daintree, Silky Oaks Lodge has reopened following a £7.5 million refurbishment. There's now a more pronounced jungle vibe, with treehouse-style suites.

On the Great Barrier Reef, Passions of Paradise has launched a citizen science tour from Cairns, allowing certified divers to help out conservationists monitoring reef health and planting coral. From Townsville, divers can head out to the Museum of Underwater Art, where a series of sculptures have been installed on the sea bed.

Elsewhere, Fraser Island is now going under its original indigenous name, K'gari. There's a new World

Heritage Discovery Centre at the Kingfisher Bay Resort exploring the island's ecology. Those more inclined to walking than self-driving can throw themselves into the 55-mile, six-day Fraser Island Great Walk.

There are plenty of new arrivals in and around Brisbane too. Hotel X brings five-star luxury to Fortitude Valley, River to Bay is offering cruises that hop between top cocktail bars, and the Hazelwood Estate by Lamington National Park offers a gracious country retreat on a polo and Wagyu beef farm.

**Book it:** The Queensland outback is also undergoing a renaissance. On AAT Kings' new Heart of the Outback tour, clients can discover dinosaurs, stay on vast sheep stations and savour beers in classic Aussie pubs. The seven-day trip costs from £2,605, including return flights to Brisbane. [aatkings.com](http://aatkings.com)

## NEW SOUTH WALES

Sydney's two icons, the Harbour Bridge and Opera House, have new tour options. BridgeClimb now offers an Aboriginal-guided climb, plus the Ultimate Climb, which spans the arch of the bridge to the other side of the harbour. The Opera House, meanwhile, has unveiled a tour focusing on its pioneering architecture. The Australian Museum has also reopened, following a huge makeover.

There have been several hotel openings in Sydney. These include the 'six-star' Crown Sydney, which hosts a branch of top restaurant Nobu and a massive outdoor

Michaelmas Cay  
Tropical North  
Queensland

Photo: Tourism and Events  
Queensland/Andrew Watson

# DESTINATIONS

## AUSTRALASIA | AUSTRALIA



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Finniss River, Northern Territory; Kangaroo Island, South Australia; Uluru, Northern Territory; Clare Valley Vineyard, South Australia

PICTURES: South Australian Tourism Commission/Ben Goode, Adam Bruzzone; Tourism NT/The Salty Travellers; Oliver McGivern



pool with harbour views. There's also the country's first Kimpton hotel, Kimpton Margot Sydney.

Quirlier options include the Wildlife Retreat at Taronga Zoo, which features keeper-guided tours, and Marramarra Lodge on the Hawkesbury River. Accommodation here comes in air-conditioned luxury tents, with bathrooms made from river stone.

There's new accommodation in increasingly hip second city Newcastle, too. The city's first five-star hotel, the Crystalbrook Kingsley, opened in 2021. And, for urban explorers, Newy Rides has launched bike tours showing off the city's highlights.

### NORTHERN TERRITORY

In Darwin, where direct Qantas flights will land until Western Australia reopens, there are some fun new tour options. Local provider 00Seven Adventures has launched buggying through the bush, and jetski tours of Darwin harbour. Darwin Airboat Tours, meanwhile, is offering high-speed jetboat outings from Stokes Hill Wharf.

Elsewhere, the Central Valley section of Litchfield National Park has been made more accessible, and there are five new swimming holes to enjoy.

New accommodation options include the De Lago Resort, an hour south of Darwin, which offers private decks and kayaking on Lake Bennett. Also of interest is the Finniss River Lodge, an experiences-focused lodge set among Top End wetlands and paperbark forests.

In the Red Centre, it's now possible to pick up an Uluru Audio Guide which is triggered via GPS. More than 100 stories are loaded on to the guides, and they're designed to play as you hit the right spots while driving through Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park.



### SALLY COPE, regional general manager for the UK and northern Europe, Tourism Australia

"We have created a comprehensive information page on Australia.com to assist our trade partners in planning clients' itineraries, while ensuring they enjoy a smooth and safe arrival in Australia. It offers an easy-to-use guide detailing the latest travel restrictions and requirements for each state and territory. Australia has long been a popular destination for Brits, with more than 700,000 visitors travelling to our country annually pre-Covid. Hence, we are rolling out a multi-channel marketing campaign from this week."

### SOUTH AUSTRALIA

South Australia's wildlife hotspot, Kangaroo Island, has 11 new walking tours. Walk Kangaroo Island has tailored each one to look at different aspects of the island, with experiences hosted by conservation guides.

Farther north, the Clare Valley Wilderness Wine Trail is a walking and cycling route linking the food producers and wineries of the Clare Valley. The first 12-mile stretch has opened, with the rest of the 60-mile loop slated to be ready by April.

In the Flinders Ranges, meanwhile, Nilpena Ediacara National Park has opened. The area is renowned for its extensive fossil fields, and visitors can explore the parts of the park where the biggest hauls have been uncovered, with guided walks pencilled in for March.

On the accommodation front, the big opening is the 251-room Sofitel in central Adelaide. Also new is Sequoia Lodge in the Adelaide Hills, which combines spring-fed hot pools and experiences such as sunrise yoga and Aboriginal storytelling sessions.

**Book it:** Abercrombie & Kent's two-week WOW Factor trip spends two nights at the Sequoia and visits the Barossa Valley wine region, Flinders Ranges and Kangaroo Island. Prices start at £5,995. [abercrombiekent.co.uk](http://abercrombiekent.co.uk) ➤



ABOVE: Wineglass Bay, Freycinet National Park, Tasmania PICTURE: Tourism Australia/Ian Butterworth

**SELLING TIPS**



By Joanna Reeve, head of sales at Intrepid Travel

“Since Australia’s sheer size can be daunting for first-time visitors, agents can show their value by finding a tour where everything is looked after, including accommodation, experiences and transport. For repeat travellers to Australia, why not suggest a walking or cycling tour? Post-pandemic, everyone is keen to get active in the great outdoors, and there’s no better place to do that than Australia.”

**VICTORIA**

Melbourne’s meeting hub, Federation Square, has undergone a major revamp, as has one of its major attractions – ACMI. Formerly the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, this is now a highly interactive, inventive celebration of all things film, TV and video games.

A 90-minute drive around Port Phillip Bay from Melbourne is Sea All Dolphin Swims, which specialises in swimming with dolphins tours, but also offers snorkelling and beachcombing experiences.

There are more creature encounters at the newly opened Wildlife Wonders on the Great Ocean Road, which offers conservationist-guided tours around a bushland wildlife sanctuary.

Walkers will be more interested in the Grampians Peaks Trail, a 100-mile walking route through the rock art and waterfall-packed Grampians region.

Melbourne’s new hotels include the five-star Marriott Docklands, with its 15th-floor infinity pool. The city’s first Oakwood Premier and Movenpick hotels have also opened.

Elsewhere, interesting debuts include the villas with private decks

and plunge pools at Cassis Red Hill, in the heart of the Mornington Peninsula wine region.

**TASMANIA**

Derby in the northeast has reinvented itself as a mountain-biking hub, but capital Hobart has seen the biggest changes. New tours include the Sunset River Cruise from Tasmanian Wild Seafood Adventures. These catamaran cruises venture along the Derwent River in search of dolphins, seals and seabirds, while guests tuck into fresh oysters and Tasmanian wine.

Walk on Kunanyi, meanwhile, has launched stargazing tours on Mount Wellington.

A landmark hotel, The Tasman, part of the Marriott Luxury Collection, opened inside Hobart’s former state government offices on Parliament Square in December.

Elsewhere, Experiential Tasmania has launched half-day guided walks on the Freycinet Peninsula, which take in beautiful Wineglass Bay.

**WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

When Western Australia joins the rest of the country in reopening,

Perth has a new flagship museum. The WA Museum Boola Bardip brings together stories and heritage from around the state, with a heavy indigenous focus. Less educational, but more fun, is the climb to the top of the Matagarup Bridge. You can also take a zipline across the Swan River from here.

West coast self-drive trips have got more interesting with the opening

of the Kalbarri Skywalk, which juts out high above the Murchison River.

**Book it:** Indigenous heritage plays a part in Intrepid Travel’s new five-day Margaret River and Albany Adventure. Costing from £1,005, the tour features a didgeridoo performance inside a cave and a bush walk in search of traditional plants and medicines. [intrepidtravel.com](http://intrepidtravel.com) **TW**

**LATEST TRAVEL RULES**

- 🌐 All Australian states require arrivals to be fully vaccinated or have proof of medical exemption before entering. Visitors must also complete an Australia Health Declaration form and present evidence of a negative PCR test taken no more than 72 hours before departure.
- 🌐 Northern Territory and Tasmania do not require an extra test on arrival.
- 🌐 New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria require visitors to take a lateral flow/antigen test within 24 hours of arrival and to self-isolate until the result is negative. It’s the same in South Australia, but it has to be a PCR test.
- 🌐 In New South Wales, visitors must take another test on day six.
- 🌐 For Western Australia, seven days of quarantine is still required.
- 🌐 Be aware that these rules are highly subject to change. Check on the state government websites before booking and departure.