



Galapagos luxe: Kangaroo Island reigns supreme as Australia's best-protected wildlife microcosm—soon it will have a resort to match, Robert Bevan reports



Top: The pure turquoise waters of Hanson Bay.

Left: The local sea lions use the island's beaches as a place to digest and enjoy the sunshine.

The Australian sea lion pups do their best to undermine their guards' regime at Seal Bay Conservation Park. Rangers from the visitors' centre on the southern coast of Kangaroo Island are determined to keep human visitors in controlled huddles and at the required 10-metre distance from their endangered beach-dwelling charges.

But the pups like to roll their soulful eyes, slide down sand dunes, loll across boardwalks. They are at once curious and skittish – if animated sausages can be described as skittish. Their blubbery parents are too tired to care. Having spent three solid days fishing beyond the horizon, they now lie side by side on the sand, flipper in flipper.

KI, as it's known, is Australia's Galapagos, just 45 minutes by ferry off the Fleurieu Peninsula in South Australia. Having avoided the mainland scourges of fox and rabbit, it is a 4500 square kilometre sanctuary for the thronging indigenous wildlife – the platypus, the echidna, Tammara wallabies, small Kangaroo Island roos, fur seals and thriving metropolises of dangling koalas.

But your interaction with the natural world is often mediated, and not just at Seal Bay. At Kingscote, the island's low-slung capital, cringing from Antarctic winds, there is a housing estate for Little Penguins. These rows of tiny wooden shacks built as artificial shoreline burrows are near the town jetty – Aussie suburbia extended to the rest of the animal kingdom.

Human hullabaloo, and the mess our species leaves in its wake, makes rangers, fences and penguin housing necessary. It works against the place's prelapsarian appeal.