

TRUE ABORIGINAL: EACH OF THE 15 LUXURIOUS TENTED ROOMS AT LONGITUDE 131° COMES WITH A VIEW OF AUSTRALIA'S FABLED AYERS ROCK.



LONGITUDE 131°
longitude131.com.au

AN AUSTRALIAN ROCK STAR

The reborn **Longitude 131°** is an Outback lodge worthy of a (future) king.

BY LAURIE WERNER

It is undeniably impressive. Uluru—a.k.a. Ayers Rock—that abrupt sandstone mountain that shimmers up out of Australia's desolate "Red Centre" like some vivid, prehistoric hallucination. But the question remains: Is it worth seeing in person? Opinion seems to be about evenly divided between "There's something so spiritually powerful about the place" and "Why are you going there? It's just a big rock."

As it turns out, there are plenty of fine reasons to make

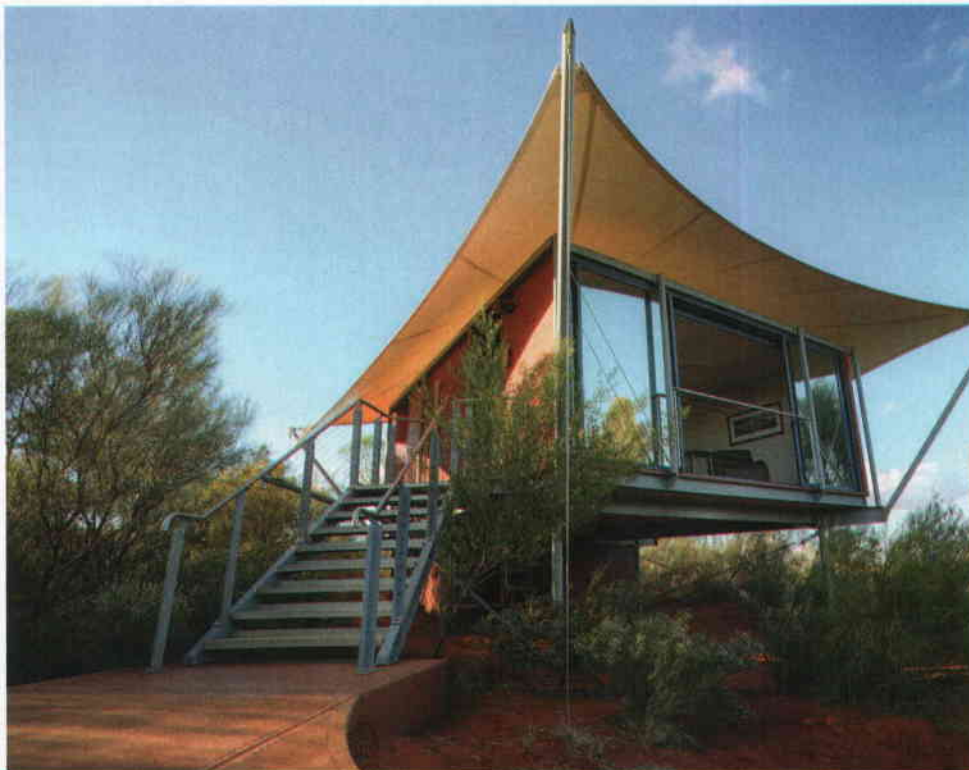
the journey to the Rock and, as of this year, an added inducement: Baillie Lodges, owner of Kangaroo Island's sublime Southern Ocean Lodge, has taken over and renovated Uluru's beguiling tented camp, Longitude 131°, and is re-elevating the resort experience to a level worthy of the magnificent views. (Prince William and the Duchess of Cambridge spent a night there this summer—without Prince George, as children under 12 are not allowed.)

The experience begins

the moment you land at the one-room Ayers Rock Airport and are met by the lodge's enthusiastic guides, who, in the 18-minute ride to the camp—past barren landscape dotted with spinifex grass and desert oaks—begin to relate the history of the Aboriginal Anangu who live on this land as they have for thousands of years. On the resort's grounds, the first sight is the new helicopter that ferries guests to see area sites (such as 22,000-year-old cave paintings—predating Lascaux by about 7,000 years).

The main path takes you up a red sand dune to Dune House, site of dining, cocktails, lounging and Rock gazing, which is now refreshed with contemporary furniture accented with brightly patterned pillows and rugs, and colorful Aboriginal artifacts and art.

Dotted around Dune House are the 15 "tents," with totally enclosed, air-conditioned cottages topped with white pointed canvas roofs that look like they might have parachuted in. The decor has also been updated—contemporary furniture and



FROM HERE TO MODERNITY: THE LOCAL ANANGU TRIBE GUIDES GUESTS THROUGH THE OUTBACK, WHILE AT THE RESORT, TABLE 131° SERVES CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN CUISINE.

plush beds, plus modern comforts: fast Wi-Fi, an iPad packed with what seems like every album released in the last 50 years, a Nespresso machine, a Breville electric kettle with water temperature settings for different types of tea. And if you get peckish, there's aged cheddar from Tasmania in the minibar and several types of cookies delivered every night.

The cottages (\$2,200 per night for two, including meals and excursions) are identical in size (there are plans for two additional two-bedroom cottages with their own plunge pools; also plans for outdoor decks on the cottages and a second pool), and all have straight-on views of Uluru. Each is named after a notable Outback pioneer, with framed documents detailing that person's history on the wall. Mine, No. 14, was Len Tuit, a truck driver turned early tour guide to the region shown in clippings from 1950 leading ladies in summer dresses on a climb up the Rock (named in 1873 for Henry Ayers and officially renamed Uluru/Ayers Rock in 2002). As our guides would later explain, the locals wouldn't be so keen on Tuit doing that today.

There are, in fact, signs at the base of Uluru asking people not to climb the 1,142-foot-high rock. Seen up close, it is

nothing like the smooth monolith presented in photos—its faces are in fact marked with jagged slashes, etchings of figures, patterns of holes, caves and paintings. These are sacred sites, telling stories that the Anangu use to guide them in life. They can't actually stop tourists from climbing the face—except in dangerous weather



conditions—owing to the terms of the deal the government struck with the Anangu in 1985: The government returned the land, but the Anangu in turn had to lease the land back to the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service for 99 years. They and the service administer it jointly. Despite all discouraging words, one out of four tour-

WINE THAT TRAVELS WELL

Italy's Moreschi uncorks the ultimate two-bottle tote.




Moreschi, famous for creating glove-soft Italian leather shoes, has now applied its hand-sewn techniques to getting your wine around town in style. The limited-edition Vinous Wine Tote (\$1,200; vinousmedia.com) coddles two bottles in a carrier that is buttery French calfskin leather on the outside and goatskin suede on the interior. If you can stop caressing the tote long enough, you might even get around to drinking what's inside.

ists still attempts the climb.

The Anangu would prefer to guide you yourselves or in concert with your lodge guides, sharing legends along the way and pointing out the rock markings that illustrate them. Without climbing a step, guests can take wonderful walking trails through dramatic crevices and gorges, plus a 6-mile walk around Uluru's base. Just watching the colors shift at sunset from orange to red to blue against a melon-colored sky is pretty dazzling, especially since Longitude's guides are adept at finding private spots away from the hordes that come out to do the same thing. They pack along a fine selection of cocktails and canapés, too.

Dining at Longitude is also a major

highlight. Chef Seona Moss was retained from the previous ownership, but Baillie has given her more freedom and deeper pockets. "Before it was more hotel-y," she says. "Now it's bespoke." And utterly delectable, with dishes such as Hervey Bay scallop linguine with shallots, rainbow chard and lemon, cauliflower and Camembert soup with truffles and Parmesan, Cloudy Bay Storm Clam Ceviche with macadamia oil, tender Coorong Angus beef with Pinot Noir and pink peppercorn jus.

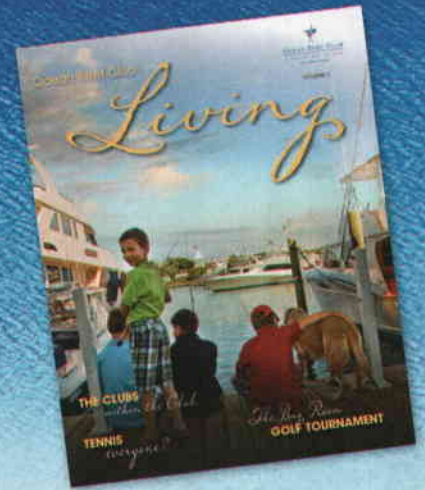
Add a table on a sand dune under the stars of the Southern sky with the sounds of a didgeridoo in the distance, and, Rock or no Rock, that is pretty mystical all on its own. 



A NEW BEACH BOUTIQUE

Royal Blues brings an art-hotel sensibility to Florida's Gold Coast.

"You know that long list of credits that rolls by at the end of a movie?" asks Hollywood and Broadway producer Edward Walson. "That's how many people it takes to get a hotel off the ground." In theater terms, his luxury boutique hotel, Royal Blues, which opened last April, would qualify as off-off-Broadway, situated on a sandy swath of Atlantic oceanfront in Deerfield Beach, Florida, about 45 minutes north of Miami. The location was chosen, Walson admits, partly out of nostalgia—he vacationed there when he was a child—and Royal Blues imports a touch of South Beach cool to Deerfield's family-oriented Americana. The hotel's architecture is spare and modern, its 12 rooms (beginning at \$495 a night) make deft use of wide wood paneling, leather and marble to conjure interiors that bear a passing resemblance to those of a yacht. The restaurant, Chanson, specializes in seafood from around the world and underscores the fact with an elevated, 18-foot-long bow-front aquarium. And, no, you can't pick your fish—the tank is just a drama unfolding with stand-in actors.



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