

DOC HOLIDAY
 EXPERT WEEKLY
 ADVICE ON YOUR
 TRAVEL DILEMMAS
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We're a group of 12 men taking a golf tour of Scotland in July-August and we would like to hire an 18-seat minibus, picking up and dropping off in Edinburgh. Can you assist with this part of our trip?

To hire a vehicle in Scotland with more than nine seats requires a driver with a bus-driving entitlement on their licence. If one of your group has this, then you are fine to self-drive. If no one has the appropriate operator's licence, these are the two options. First, you could look at hiring two smaller vehicles, or second use the company Creative Travel Connections (ctscotland.com) which has 16 or 25-seat luxury Mercedes coaches for hire. The coaches come with a driver and have plenty of space for your luggage and golf clubs. They can tailor an itinerary of any length to include the courses you want to play, and it'll be handy to have the driver's local knowledge at your fingertips. The daily rate for a full-sized coach is about \$880 for eight hours. If you go overnight outside Edinburgh the driver's dinner, bed and breakfast will be additional.

My wife and I are holidaying in Canada and Alaska midyear, flying Qantas to Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas, then domestic to Calgary. We have what will amount to about five hours between flights. Will we be permitted to leave the airport precinct? If so, could you suggest some tourist activities?

Your Qantas flight will arrive at Terminal D, where you will claim your bags, clear Customs and Immigration, then turn in your baggage for the domestic flight if it's been through checked. Here's where you now have a choice, and it will depend on how long it's taken to get this far. Dallas Fort Worth Airport can be good one day and terrible the next for the time it takes to get through Customs and Immigration. If you have a good run, it will take about an hour. The 30-minute off-peak drive to either Dallas or Fort Worth will cost about \$90 return, and then you'd need to allow at least one hour back at the airport to reach your departure gate. This leaves roughly two hours. In my opinion it's probably not worth it. Instead why not take your time transferring terminals; there's the free Skylink high-speed train connecting the five, or you could head outside and walk. There are many things to do to fill in a couple of hours including the Walking Path, and strolling around the Public Art Program in Terminal D which features works from more than 30 local artists. All terminals offer complimentary travel lounges with wi-fi, and Terminal D has the DFW Airport Theatre where you can plug in your headphones, sit back and relax with movies or CNN. There are also more than 120 dining and 100 shopping outlets within the airport.

My partner and I are considering travelling to South America this year and doing all the touristy things such as the Galápagos Islands, an Amazon cruise and Machu Picchu. We have looked at several brochures but can you help with a recommended, reputable and reliable agent who would look after a couple of "oldies" aged 69 and 71?

You're not oldies, you're POOAAs: pensioners off on an adventure (I made that up). Anyone operating as a licensed travel agent in Australia (with the exception of NT) will also be a member of the Travel Compensation Fund (TCF). This national body monitors the financial viability of licensed travel agents in Australia to protect you in case of their collapse. Furthermore, most Australian travel agents belong to AFTA (the Australian Federation of Travel Agents Limited). If you look for this logo, you can be certain that you're dealing with someone who is fully licensed and bonded with the TCF. Your local shopping centre is likely have a travel agent ready and willing to chat with you about your requirements. If that is not possible or there isn't one, and at the risk of backlash from every privately owned agency, contact a well-known, large operation such as Flight Centre (flightcentre.com.au).

Questions should not exceed 75 words (no attachments) and include an address. A limited selection of questions will be published and may be edited. Personal replies from the Doc are unfortunately not possible.

Luxury to rock

ANNA BRAIN gets a taste of an outback oasis that's fit for a future king and queen

GAZING across at the great rock, I'm sipping tea and pretending to be Kate Middleton, with less hair but more personality.

If road testing royal digs is a full-time job, you can sign me up for life. It's all but confirmed that on their Aussie tour Kate and Prince William will spend a night at Longitude 131, the closest accommodation to the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. All 15 luxury suites – all facing the famed rock – are booked out for April 22, which coincidentally is when the royal pair head up north, and they are expected to leave young George with a nanny in Canberra.

This is a premium resort, but the vibe is casual, which would appeal to Kate and Will, who are reported to be a down-to-earth couple.

Whether dining under the stars at Table 131 or indoors, there's more emphasis on wearing layers of practical clothing and sensible, closed-toe shoes than making a style statement.

Unsurprisingly, there's a lot to like about life at this level of luxury. A wall of window in each room offers an uninterrupted and unparalleled view of Uluru, with nothing in between you and it except desert oaks and spinifex grass growing in red dirt.

Rooms face the north side of the rock, which bears natural markings you never see in tourism photos because they are culturally sensitive to the local Anangu people. As a spectacle, it's like seeing craters on the moon, up close.

In what seems like bad timing, the accommodation is set to be renovated a few weeks after the royal visit, upgrading the pool, adding balconies to tents and even greater luxury (who can keep up?). But the property, nearly 10 years old (it was razed in a bushfire one year after being built), is still in great nick.

To call the accommodation "tents" is a stretch. Windows, walls and tiled floors usually qualify as being a room, though the draped canvas roof is straight out of Arabian Nights. Tents don't usually have such luxurious bathrooms either, including a shower with a view into a sand dune where dingoes frolic. The sides of the vanity mirror slide across, so one can keep an eye on the rock while brushing one's teeth.

The throne, upon close inspection, is discoloured by high levels of calcium and other minerals in the bore water, but is otherwise fit for a future-king. It's worth noting that everything – accommodation, guided tours, meals, open bar, etc – is included in the package price.

It's a short stroll, 50m or 100m from rooms to the main building, Dune House, where superb meals are taken. A three-course lunch and four-course dinner menu changes daily, so if you don't see a kanga in the wild, the next best thing might be a delicate roo carpaccio.

Upon arrival, your arm starts waving like a windscreen wiper, swatting away the tiny but terrible flies that will plague you during daylight hours. A fly net, worn stylishly over a hat when outdoors, is the best defence against inhaling the little blighters.

Looking like a troupe of rakish beekeepers, we filed on to a bus for our first foray into the national park. Drives in the area are incredible, the ever-present monolith surrounded by earth the colour of an ent-out-cas tennis court, in stark contrast with foliage that ranges from pale straw to sage green.

Our guide, the first of many well-informed individuals who all spin a good yarn, tells us the land is the greenest it's been in 10 years, thanks to recent rainfall. We're headed for the cultural centre, for a brief education about the local indigenous culture. It's worth a look, but in need of an update, and half of it was closed when we passed through.

Afterwards, we enjoyed champagne and canapés while watching sunset from a vantage point in between Kata Tjuta, formerly known as the Olgas, and Uluru, once Ayers Rock. Back at Longitude dinner is served under the stars by clever cookies with torches on their



Fit for a royal couple: the view of Uluru from the hotel at Longitude 131 (above) will suit Kate and Will (left) just fine; the luxury accommodation at Longitude 131 (below); and a sand goanna among the local wildlife.

heads, followed by an astronomy talk. Going hungry will be the least of Kate and Wills' worries.

The next morning, we drag our weary heads from the very good beds at Longitude (no princess and the pea scenario here) before sunrise to see Kata Tjuta up close, a 45-minute drive from the resort. Luckily we spy some camels out in the dunes, and later in the day, sand goannas, which the Anangu call "tinkers", sunning themselves beside a walking track.

Walking in between the massive rock formations to the Walpa Gorge, our guide gives us a geology talk, which basically dumbs down the explanation of how the earth spewed up these almighty rocks over a period of about 50 million years. It's a nice touch that all the guides are equally well versed in indigenous creation stories and theories of evolution.

When William's parents, Charles and Di, visited Uluru 20 years ago, there were tourists clambering all over it. It was considered to be the "must-do" experience, a rite of passage for visitors.

Today, only about 25 per cent choose to disregard signs that say "please don't climb". It's not banned by the indigenous land owners, but it isn't encouraged. This is a sacred place where secret men's

the royals



business is still conducted by the local community.

Open only in good weather, the 348m climb is treacherous, and few are prepared for how much heat will emanate from the rock in the middle of the day. Though they are adventurous people, there's almost no chance the royals will climb up. Instead they are scheduled to walk around the base of the iconic site, which is preferred by the Anangu people. Should they wish to sign, there's an "I did not climb Uluru" register.

Something that can't be organised, even for royalty, is good weather, and we were blessed with two sunny but not overly hot days, and a third with rain. A rain-soaked desert smells heavenly, as low-hanging clouds create a moody aura around the now dark-coloured rock. Puddles form and dingoes materialise seemingly from nowhere to roll around in them. Will Kate and Wills enjoy their stay? It's hard to imagine anyone wouldn't be utterly besotted by this place with all its history and mystery.

THE DEAL

GETTING THERE

Longitude 131 is offering free flights with Alliance Air direct from Tullamarine with a two or three-night stay. The fly free offer is available until June 29.

Packages are priced from \$2200 per person twin share for two nights and include all dining and beverages.

ONLINE
longitude131.com.au



THE WRIGHT WAY

Trying to live the lifestyle designed by one of America's greatest architects, Frank Lloyd Wright, can lead to sleepless nights, writes **SIMON PLANT**

FRANK Lloyd Wright designed buildings that bent rules ... and often broke them.

To stand on the jutting balconies of Fallingwater, in Pennsylvania, or to climb the winding ramps inside New York's Guggenheim Museum is to sense the man's audacity, his sheer bravado and begin to understand why many regard him as the greatest American architect of the 20th century.

But what is it like to bunk down in a Wright residence? The answer is: very special. I can now say that having stayed at one of the few Wright-designed homes available for public rental.

Seth Peterson Cottage, in rural Wisconsin, nestles on a bluff overlooking picturesque Mirror Lake about a 90-minute drive from Chicago and was designed by Wright in his 90th year. His client — a wealthy young man named Seth Peterson — wanted a country place just big enough to accommodate him and his intended bride ... and that's what Wright delivered: a compact one-bedroom structure crafted from local sandstone and timber.

Tiny though it is, Seth Peterson Cottage possesses a quiet monumentality that hits you as soon as you arrive. The building crouches in the woods, as if it has almost erupted out of the earth, with tall windows admitting light on three sides and stone buttresses supporting a sharply angled roof.

Wright championed a uniquely American style of design, one that he hoped would awaken people to new ways of living. Seth Peterson Cottage — constructed after his death in 1959 — is a nimble expression of the "organic architecture" he had in mind with open-plan rooms, low-hanging eaves and over-size French doors. Flagstones on a terrace carry on through the house — dissolving all barriers between

inside and out — while a massive fireplace looms like a rock face in the centre living room.

Ample firewood is supplied to keep that hearth burning and as we warmed our toes on a chilly evening in the fall, we agreed a Wright house is like no other. The architect has had a say in every aspect of Seth Peterson, from the heavy handcrafted furniture (replicas replacing the originals) to the plywood frieze of pine trees set into narrow windows just below the roof.

Wright's sense of proportion is peculiar, too. The kitchen here is barely big enough to swing a kettle in. And the bedroom? Intimate to say the least. We were assured the double bed slept two "comfortably".

It doesn't. Thank goodness for the fold-out bed built into a fireside couch.

Wright never visited the Seth Peterson site — his wishes were conveyed by intermediaries — but Taliesen, his rural estate at Spring Green, is barely an hour away and a tour of the meandering house he built there on the brow of a hill is recommended if you want an insight into his exacting mind. Not to mention Wright's tangled love life which earned him a reputation for being a home-wrecker as much as a home builder.

Seth Peterson never saw his cottage either. He died in tragic circumstances before it was finished and local authorities, unsure what to do with the place, simply boarded it up. Conservation crews came to the rescue in the early 1990s and over 20 years, this modernist redoubt has since attracted more than 15,000 appreciative visitors.

Seth Peterson Cottage is available to rent year-round (two-night minimum stay), from \$300 a night.

sethpetererson.org, taliesenpreservation.org

Escape. — directory

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