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Top 10 luxury escapes + Longitude 131° refresh

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Queen of the desert

After being refreshed with work by Australian designers and Indigenous

artists, Longitude 131° is finally worthy of the Baillie Lodges luxury brand.



The unparalleled view of Uluru from the Longitude 131° resort in Central Australia.

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THIS PAGE: *With only 16 tents, the resort provides a sense of solitude to guests. OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: in the Dune Pavilion, graphite-toned Agape bathtub and black Brodware fixtures. Private free-standing Vola outdoor shower outside the new Spa Kinara. The Dune Pavilion has its own private plunge pool, inspired by a traditional homestead water tank. Boardwalks leading to the spa, its corrugated iron exterior deliberately corroded for dramatic effect against the red earth.*



It may have taken four years and three refurbishments, but Hayley Baillie thinks she's finally got Longitude 131° aesthetically up to speed. Back in 2013, the cofounder of Baillie Lodges and her husband and business partner, James, acquired the exclusive wilderness retreat — comprising 16 luxury tents topped by billowing white canopies — adding it to their portfolio alongside the equally spectacular Southern Ocean Lodge on Kangaroo Island and Capella Lodge on Lord Howe Island.

Working with architect Max Pritchard, the Baillies embarked on a multimillion-dollar makeover rolled out in stages. The latest touches include the super-luxe Dune Pavilion, a new premium suite with exclusive VIP views of both Uluru and Kata Tjuta; a refreshed Dune House, with a dazzling new bar and al fresco dining area; the Dune Top, the property's highest point offering 360° desert views from cosy dining nooks; and Spa Kinara, a striking dome-shaped sanctuary designed to resemble a traditional *wiltja*, or Indigenous shelter.

The Baillie brand is renowned for providing authentic luxury experiences with a distinctive Australian flavour and a dedicated eco-sensitive approach. Here, Hayley talks about her design decisions and her devotion to supporting the local Indigenous culture.

Longitude 131° had an incredible decade since it was opened in 2003. But it was time to take it into the next. We feel that by adding some essential elements it has really become a Baillie Lodges property now. It also brings Longitude 131° into the next decade of experiential luxury in true Australian style, from our first-name service to the food and wine to the opportunities we offer our guests that are unique to the Yulara destination. **We added a large private balcony onto each tent about a year ago, each with a daybed and a fireplace.** Every second night a deluxe swag is rolled out onto the daybed on the balcony, so if you choose you can sleep under the stars. It's an absolutely incredible thing to do in the outback — there's no light pollution, so it's like you're in a domed room of stars. You get the immersion into the environment in an absolutely authentic way.

When we took over the property, I felt very strongly there wasn't enough focus on the Aboriginal Australian. There were no artworks, there was no intent to place importance on their significance to our culture. That was the catalyst for ensuring the evolution of our refurbishment had a very strong place to showcase the Indigenous heritage, mainly from an artistic perspective. We've sourced artworks by artists from the communities that make up the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands just over the South Australian border, and they're prominently featured throughout the property. We commissioned a communal project with the Ernabella Arts centre to create around 500 handpainted ceramic tiles lining the wall in the Dune House; we've got baskets »



“You get the immersion into the environment in an absolutely authentic way”

THIS PAGE: the fiery red desert sand surrounding Uluru. OPPOSITE PAGE: the newly designed Table 131° outdoor dining area has a central campfire; after dinner, the resident astronomer shares tales of the Southern constellations.

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The Dune Top, the property's highest vantage point, has outdoor furniture by Robert Plumb, an EcoSmart Fire Stix fireplace by Hiroshi Tsunoda, and a plunge pool to enjoy while watching the spectacular lightplay as the sun slips below the horizon.

« from the Tjanpi Desert Weavers; traditional Indigenous woodwork from the Maruku Arts centre at Uluru; and paintings by Barbara Moore and Nyumiti Burton. We also offer an exclusive art experience in which guests can fly out to Ernabella and meet the artists. That's really exciting because it's wonderful for the arts centre but it's also amazing for us to be able to foster these associations and relationships with the First Australians.

We've moved away from the Australian Heritage early settler's design theme to a more contemporary Australian style. We've harnessed that by using local artisans, makers and designers throughout, including furniture by Pierre and Charlotte Julien, Nathan Day, and Robert Plumb. The limited-edition Settlers chair by Jon Goulder in the Dune Pavilion was an investment piece and a wonderful synergy with the Jam Factory in Adelaide. We've also had a fantastic relationship with Ross Gardam, who's designed the beautifully contemporary light fixtures in the guest tents as well as bespoke wall lights in the Dune Pavilion.

Outside, everywhere you look, there's red. It can get really bright on a sunny day, so Spa Kinara provides a lovely, cocooning dark space. We've suspended six spinifex woven birds created by the Tjanpi Desert Weavers from the timber ply ceiling. I love the idea that you just lie there and when you look up, you see all these beautiful birds made by a group of women who live in a community close by. The spa's second room features the *Kulata* installation of 25 traditional spears handcrafted by the young men of Ernabella under the guidance of elder Adrian Intjalki. They're showcased quite dramatically against the black graphite walls. It looks really spectacular, but it's also keeping culture strong and alive. It's wonderful to be able to sell artworks to give money back to the Indigenous community, but it's also an opportunity for the elders to show the younger generations how to keep these practices going. It's a win-win for everybody. *VL*

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