

Land Of Ragged Mountain Ranges



Reptiles and wildlife have right of way at the Arid Lands Botanic Garden.

Like any number of places you pass through on your way to somewhere else, Port Augusta at the head of Spencer Gulf in South Australia is much more than a crossroad and worth discovering in its own right

Story and photography by GLENYS GELZINIS

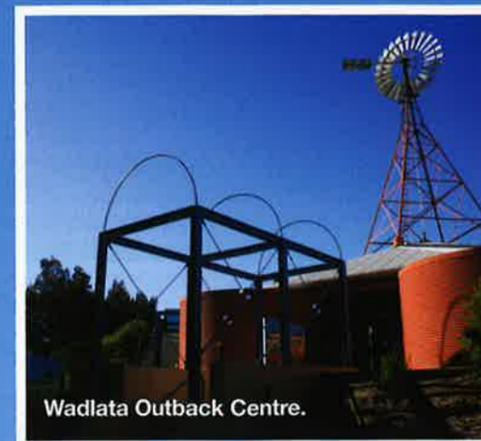
As always the journey is half the fun especially if you're travelling from the south. Starting with the quirky local attraction in the town of Lochiel 130 kilometres north of Adelaide, you'll see that Bumbunga Lake is home to the 'Loch Eel', pun intended. Rumour says it's a distant relative of the Loch Ness Monster and his rubber tyre body has been weathering his salt lake home for five decades. Next, coming into view is the spectacular Snowtown Wind Farm, the largest single wind farm in South Australia. The turbines which tower 80 metres high and stretch for around 30 kilometres, line the ridges of the Barunga and Hummocks Ranges and are absolutely mesmerizing as the blades tumble in a surreal and slow motion silent ballet. Then finally, the imposing Flinders Ranges start looming into view.

You know you're getting close to Port Augusta, just over 300 kilometres from Adelaide, when you start seeing the Ranges on one side of National Highway A1 and the expanse of water that is Spencer Gulf on the other. Blanketing the area in between are sheep and wheat growing

properties. There is a lot of head-turning scenery around and being the major route to the north and west of the country you will also encounter a lot of road trains and heavy vehicles. The highway has plenty of overtaking lanes which are well signposted in advance so with patience it's easy for caravanners, trucks and all motorists to share the road without stress.

One last thing to distract your attention just before entering the town of Port Augusta is the futuristic Sundrop Farm. This multimillion dollar enterprise in a nutshell, uses solar energy to create electricity and desalinate seawater to irrigate glasshouse tomato crops in this edge of desert landscape. The plan is for this sustainable intensive 20 hectare farm to produce 15,000 tonnes of hydroponically grown truss tomatoes annually. It's the only farm of its type in Australia so far and the tower central to the desalination process is easy to spot on your way into town.

Once in Port Augusta there are two standout places to visit. The Arid Lands Botanic Garden is a fascinating place to learn about Australian plants. While me-



Wadlata Outback Centre.



Acacia blossom.

All roads lead to the Flinders Ranges.



Mambray Creek campground, campers and caravans welcome.



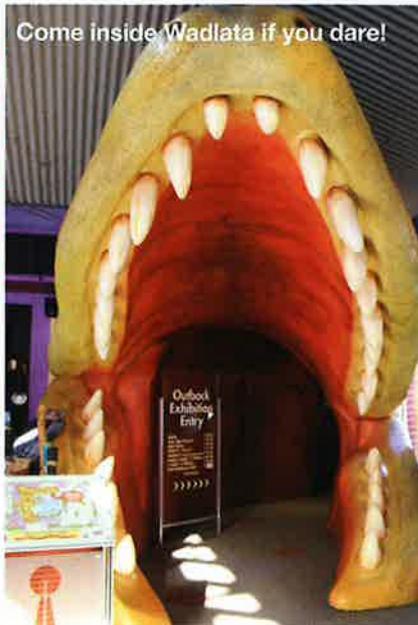
Lifelike swagmen and explorers tell their stories of discovering the outback.



How indigenous people use fire is explained with light, sound and commentary.



Foreshore art installation depicting the people, the Royal Flying Doctor service, Sturt Desert Pea and the Flinders Ranges and gulf waters.



Come inside Wadlata if you dare!

FACT FILE

How to get there:

Port Augusta is approximately 310 kilometres north of Adelaide on National Highway A1.

Stay:

There are two caravan parks in Port Augusta, one on the highway and the other set a little further back in the town.

www.big4.com.au/caravan-parks/sa/flinders-ranges-outback/discovery-parks-port-augusta

www.toparks.com.au/parks/south-australia/port-augusta/201-shoreline-caravan-park

Or for a flinders experience try the Spear Creek Caravan Park or Mambray Creek Campground,

www.spearcreekcaravanpark.com.au

www.environment.sa.gov.au/parks/Find_a_Park/Browse_by_region/Flinders_Ranges_and_Outback/mount-remarkable-national-park/camping-and-accommodation/mambray-creek

Must see places in Port Augusta:

Arid Lands Botanic Garden

www.aalbg.sa.gov.au

Wadlata Outback Centre

www.wadlata.sa.gov.au

Port Augusta Cultural Centre

www.portaugusta.sa.gov.au

andering the gardens you can learn how and where to use these plants at home and also find out about their traditional and medicinal uses. The garden has well laid out walking trails to take including one to a lookout with views to the Flinders. The garden is free to visit 7 days a week from 7.30am to sundown. It has a comfortable café that uses native plant ingredients in the menu and is so good that even locals patronise. There is a plant nursery as well as a kitch free gift shop. You can easily spend half a day or more here and the garden looks different every season with different species flowering throughout the year.

The other attraction Port Augusta is known for is Wadlata Outback Centre. This is an experience that you'd be best to put aside a day to appreciate fully, although they do give you a pass-out to come back. Located in the heart of town it looks like a standard building from the outside except for the giant windmill on top. On entering you are in for more of a surprise as you're invited through the gaping mouth of a snake and begin a journey through the belly of the reptile surrounded by sights and stories of the outback. Visitors are taken from the beginning of ab-

original dreamtime with explanations of how local landscapes came to be, through to early explorers experiences in opening up the country, the Ghan railway story and early settlers times. The further through the snake you go the more you learn of this region's history through to the gas and mineral exploration in the surrounding areas today. Then at the end you are safely delivered back to where you started and into the modern information centre, shop and cafe.

Having done the top two things that put Port Augusta on the map there is still more to see and do including strolling along the foreshore area. This lovely area overlooking the top of the gulf has green parks and gardens, playgrounds and BBQs and a wharf where dolphins are regularly seen cruising by. For lovers of indigenous art you will find the Cultural Centre located in the centre of town with displays of locally produced art and other touring exhibitions in the gallery.

Never far from sight though are those imposing peaks of the Flinders Ranges, parts of which are easily accessible from Port Augusta. Better still once you've enjoyed the sights of Port Augusta, set up camp just a little down the track at the

Spear Creek Caravan Park. Just over 30 kilometres south of Port Augusta on the Augusta Highway take the Horrocks Pass road and follow the sign posts which will take you to this peaceful and serene park, set within a working sheep station. Here you can set up camp be it tent, camper or caravan in powered or unpowered sites and have the southern Flinders Ranges as your backdrop. Campfires are allowed and apart from the stunning scenery you will also have a camp kitchen and dining area, laundry and bush walks on your doorstep. This is an ideal base for exploring the nearby Mount Remarkable National Park and Mambray Creek with its breathtaking gorges and rare yellow footed rock wallabies. There are stunning escarpments and massive River Red Gums in this part of the southern Flinders. Mambray Creek also has a campground which offers camping and unpowered caravan sites in this National Park.

Best time of year to visit: August through to November is the perfect time to visit Port Augusta and the southern Flinders Ranges with temperatures being mild to warm and native flowers coming in to bloom. Alternatively the autumn months, March through to May would also be ideal.

