

Island drive delights

KANGAROO ISLAND IS ONE SURPRISE AFTER ANOTHER, WRITES BARRY O'BRIEN



Terry Dodd, from Seaton, plays the Dudley Wines one-hole golf course on Kangaroo Island, overlooking Backstairs Passage; and, from left, Dudley Wines; a whiting burger from Vivonne Bay General Store; and a yacca thriving in the charred bush. Pictures: Barry O'Brien

KANGAROO Island is largely still an under-revealed adventure – isolated, rugged, wild natural beauty, unspoilt, lots of dirt roads and with some of the most magnificent pristine beaches and coastal scenery in the world. It is also full of surprises.

Wife Pat and I were on the Island after taking advantage of a special SeaLink offer in The Advertiser. We had spent three glorious days on KI based at Emu Bay Holiday Homes, 15 minutes out of Kingscote, travelling to the usual tourist spots and discovering some dirt road gems off the blacktop highways.

After the 45-minute traverse from Cape Jervis, first stop in Penneshaw was to the tourist centre, where Sylvia greeted us and made us aware of the “traps” of the island.

Only four places to get petrol, Penneshaw, Kingscote and restricted hours in

Parndana and Vivonne Bay. “Don’t head off to Admirals Arch at the other end of the Island expecting to get fuel and food, because there is nothing there,” she warned.

Our first location, and surprise, was Dudley Wines on the Dudley Peninsula. We headed along the dirt track with low expectations but the revelation was stunning. The decor is based around the wine industry, with half barrels holding up tables, twisted, dried vines acting as lampshades and the slats of barrels forming fences.

We feasted on a tasting plate of local produce (\$30) on the clifftop balcony with a commanding view over a gully leading to Backstairs Passage.

Would-be golfers hacked away ball after ball on a “one-hole golf course” into the gully (\$10 for 20 balls – and didn’t have to fetch them).

The Emu Bay “rustic cabins” as advertised had

booked out so we accepted the swish three-bedroom residence Amani, in the elevated position at the top of the estate.

The view over the bay was stunning and almost commanded me to wake before 7am each day to absorb the splendour of the sunrise.

Curious koalas nibbled on eucalyptus leaves in nearby trees and kangaroos kept pace with the car as they hopped to new destinations.

KI is 155 km long and 55km wide. Sealed roads lead to mainstream sightseeing but dirt roads predominate and lead to little gems.

It was annoying on a number of occasions to travel along a dirt road with little idea of points of the compass and to come to a T-junction with no indication of left or right to the next destination – and no one to ask.

On the road from Stokes Bay, with no corner delis,

lunch seemed unobtainable until we came to the Emu Ridge Eucalyptus Oil Distillery, where a delicious meal was whipped up for us.

The haloumi salad was coated in sticky fig syrup, another product of the Island.

For dessert, a short distance away was Clifford’s Honey Farm, where we had a honey ice cream – pay for one, get two, courtesy of a Kangaroo Island Overseas Road Trip Passport issued by SeaLink. The passport gives discounts and two-for-one on a vast range of products and eateries.

The drive along the bitumen South Coast Road to Admirals Arch and Remarkable Rocks in Flinders Chase National Park was a stark reminder of the bushfire that ravaged the Island.

How the fire raced along the roadway, destroying vegetation on either side, while next to wide open bare paddocks, shocked us.

One plant that looked healthy among its blackened neighbours was the xanthorrhoea, better known as yaccas.

Guide Emily, at Little Sahara Adventure Centre, explained these drought-resistant plants thrive on fire.

In the middle of burnt vegetation, the slow growing, shallow-rooted yaccas stand out as untouched. During a fire, old dry foliage that has become tightly packed insulates the tree from the extreme heat of the blaze.

The dead leaves burn but the trunk is protected by the green leaves. Natural resin, or gum, melts and then solidifies.

Yacca gum was once a thriving industry, with the gum reduced to powder and exported overseas to be used in the manufacture of explosives and fireworks, but this practice has been discontinued.

The new beginnings of this

fabulous Island are symbolised in the lush regeneration growth springing from the fire-ravaged trees.

At Vivonne Bay General Store – don’t blink or you’ll miss it – we had an Island-famous whiting burger and, thanks to the “passport”, a serve of delicious chips.

The burger was different and tasty but, in my mind, all you need on delicious Kangaroo Island whiting, which I devoured at every opportunity, is a squeeze of lemon.

On our last day, we visited the restored Hope Cottage museum in Kingscote, one of three buildings built in 1859 named Faith, Hope and Charity. Hope and Charity remain but, like the rock band, Faith no more!

While waiting for the ferry in Penneshaw, Millie Mae’s Pantry lunchtime cuisine rounded out our journey of culinary delights.