

W A N D E R

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ANCIENT RENEWAL

FEW OTHERWORLDLY LANDSCAPES
HAVE A WAY OF EMBEDDING
THEMSELVES INTO THE SOUL AS
KANGAROO ISLAND. OFTEN CALLED
THE GALAPAGOS OF AUSTRALIA,
THIS SANCTUARY PROMISES TO
BECKON YOU BACK TO A SIMPLER
TIME. CONNECTING WITH THE LAND
AND SEA, SAMPLING A LITTLE
MODERN BUSH MEDICINE AND
COMMUNING WITH CREATURES
FOUND NOWHERE ELSE ON EARTH
MAKES FOR REJUVENATION THAT'S
WELL WORTH THE JOURNEY.



SHANNON MELNYK





This story was submitted shortly before the Australian bush fires ravaged several regions of Southern Australia.

Although Kangaroo Island has also been affected, we've chosen to publish this story in an expression of Wander Magazine's true spirit: we celebrate the essence of wellness through travel and its impact on the mind, body and soul.

We are all connected. Members of the Kangaroo Island community who spoke with us for this story are resolute in their determination to rebuild. The beauty and fundamental heart of this much-revered "Galapagos of Australia" is intact and the very sharing of their home with you will be essential to their recovery.

A sensory feast permeates the present moment that seems to be aching for a pause button. High upon a cliff on a most magical perch sits an eco-wonder that pays homage to its Aboriginal roots while celebrating the contemporary sculptural limestone and glass architecture that effortlessly commands the sweeping panorama of Australia's Southern Ocean.

The Southern Spa is an oasis within the Southern Ocean Lodge, largely celebrated as one of the most spectacular retreats in the world. The intimate sanctuary on Kangaroo Island entices one to unspoiled beaches, lush bush and of course, as the island's namesake suggests, marsupials everywhere. Kangaroos, goannas, and bottlenose dolphins dance like no one's watching as spa guests are beckoned to a transformative experience.

Expansive views stretching toward the Antarctic make for restorative company as the healing rituals begin. The practice of Li'Tya, in indigenous culture, meaning 'of the earth', leads signature treatments that transport guests to ancient times. Sustainably wild-harvested local botanicals serve as potent antioxidants to purify, nourish and harmonize the body. Wild Rosella, quandong, cherry alder and Kakadu plum meet cleansing earth ochres and detoxifying desert salts to serve as potent earthly infusions used in Aboriginal medicines for 60,000 years and now here, in the uber-luxe Southern Ocean Lodge.



I am welcomed with a foot bath ritual and traditional smoke ceremony to cleanse the space, offer purification, and ground me into the now. I embrace a journey of native aromas for the signature Kodo treatment. Considered a melodic dance for the mind, body and spirit, it's a rhythmic body massage inspired by Aboriginal techniques that work to balance and realign energy flow. Incorporated in this treatment is also the use of finely carved wood paddles that is said to draw negative energy up and away from the spine. I am sinking into myself.

The creation of the Li'Tya spa line evolved over its founder's endeavour to adapt cutting-edge spa techniques to Aboriginal philosophies, healing techniques and ancestral botanical knowledge. Li'Tya was developed with over 20 years of research into the diversity, qualities and therapeutic applications of Australian plants, seeds, clays, salts and fruits. From its inception, Indigenous elders were consulted on historical knowledge and practices right up to today, where the line maintains an Aboriginal Advisory Board. Elder Anne Warren of the Ya'itd-mitung people is Chair of the Board and Director of Training, drawing from a lifetime of study and research into both the

medicinal and spiritual properties of indigenous plants and healing applications. In conjunction with Li'Tya's commitment to authentic practices is its "tread lightly" approach - ensuring minimal and recyclable packaging and no artificial ingredients or animal testing.

High up top of this Southern Australian cliff, it's the end of my treatment, but the beginning of my journey to experience one of Li'Tya's founding principles, "Aildt". It's an Aboriginal philosophy that we are all connected as part of one creative force. Aildt is our universal soul, our vitality; all our thoughts, words, actions and objects imparting their own vibration to form creation. I am ready to connect with the rawness of Kangaroo Island, Australia's remote treasure and third largest island.

It was 10,000 years ago that this stretch of eucalyptus forests and pristine coastlines separated from the mainland due to rising sea levels after the last glacial era. Today, more than one-third of Kangaroo Island is a conservation sanctuary or national park. That translates into a wellness trekker's dream covering terrain that's a harmonious collection of vast landscapes.





I feel humbled by the idea that Aboriginal people have traversed these lands in prehistoric times. Back then, the island was said to have been called “Karta”, Island of the Dead. The name hails from the Indigenous Dreamtime lore of Ngurunderi, who crossed the island, rising to become a star in the Milky Way. It is said the spirits of the dead follow Ngurunderi’s path there before arriving in the afterlife.

If this island is abundant with spirits, it’s an apt place to make peace with my own. It’s easy to strip everything down to my bare presence here, as I’m awed by the Gaudi-esque black mica and feldspar granite formations covered by a sunrise orange lichen – natural sculptures that the locals call Remarkable Rocks. I feel child-like freedom as I crawl and play on what looks like a giant Dr. Seuss set with the crashing coast below. Not far is Admirals Arch, equally unusual and beguiling. Thousands of years of erosion formed a rock bridge with dramatic stalactites that dangle from the ceiling of this rocky former cave. It’s a photographer’s paradise, but I try to just take it in. The rock pools underneath

the Arch are a virtual playpen for seal pups and not far from the equally playful bottlenose dolphins.

As renewal comes with ritual, discovery and play – it’s also abundant in my connection with the island’s critters. Should I will echidnas, ospreys and black swans to magically appear? Or approach sightings not as one would with the big five on an African Safari, but rather be at peace with what decides to reveal itself? The ancient “Aildt” way of being, has in the end, graced me with staring contests with kangaroos and wallabies, dancing dolphins at the wake of my boat, and unimpressed New Zealand fur seals lounging about at Seal Bay. Just as I resolve that I will never see most of these species ever again, at my journey’s end a koala, ravaged by unseasonable heat of days past, runs in front of me to cross the road and climbs a eucalyptus tree. He’s unbothered by my curiosity and I’m enveloped by nature’s delicate balance and the gift that is connection. The past is the present, and the present is the past – an ancient Aboriginal lesson I’ll pack with me wherever I go. **W**



From spa marathons in the South Pacific to leopard-lurking in the Sabi Sands, Vancouver-based journalist Shannon Melnyk seeks to share experiences with her readers that challenge convention, inspire curiosity, induce joy and soothe the soul. Check out her adventures at shannonmelnyk.com.