



# *This is* AUSTRALIA

You've swum at Kakadu, snorkelled the Great Barrier Reef and clambered through the Kimberley, but as **Ute Junker** discovers, you haven't even scratched the surface of the best of regional Australia.

Pumphouse Point,  
Lake St Clair, Tasmania

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PHOTOGRAPHY: ADAM GIBSON





Some of our best attractions lie off the beaten track. From uninhabited islands and country towns turned gourmet getaways to an outback museum where you can dig up dinosaurs, there are some unsung gems tucked away in regional Australia. We have picked a dozen destinations that should be on your bucket list. But you'll want to see them soon, before the rest of the country wises up.

### 1. BEST WINE TRAIL

#### CLARE VALLEY RIESLING TRAIL, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

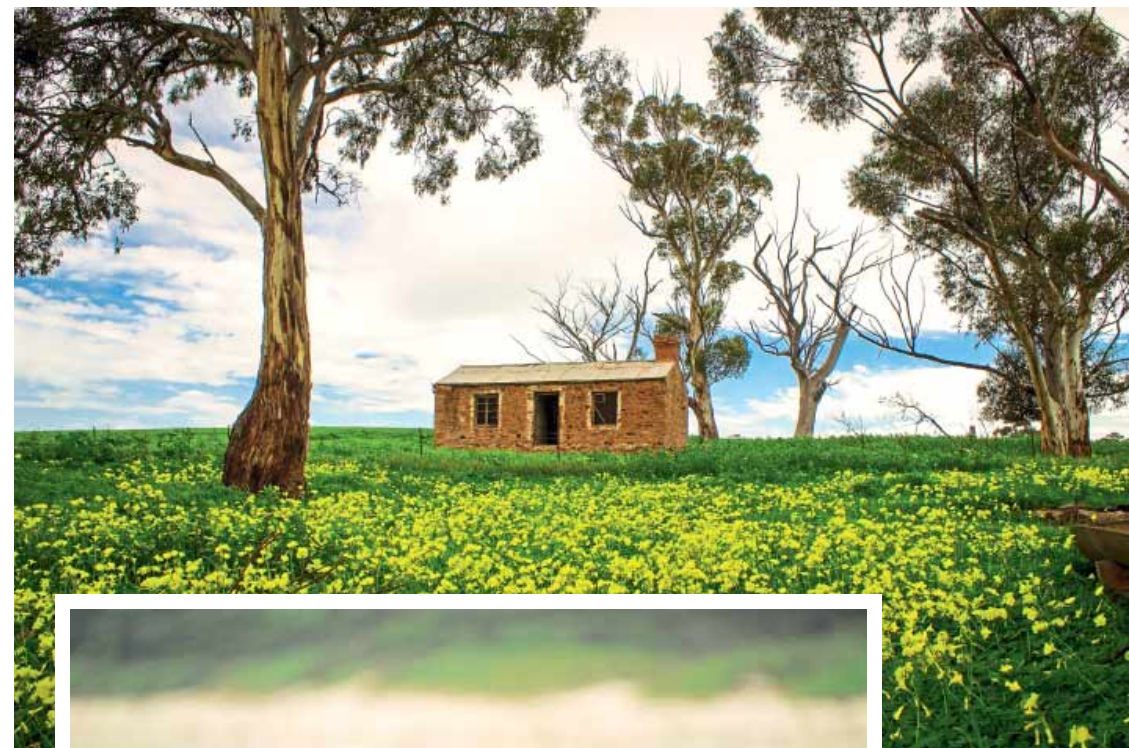
A tree-lined walking, running or cycling route following an old railway track, the Riesling Trail links seven villages in South Australia's most idyllic wine region, the Clare Valley. Each stretch is a comfortable length – 5-8km – with loops that make it easy to return to your starting point. Which one to try first? The Clare to Sevenhill route allows stocking up on treats at one of Clare's gourmet stores and a picnic at the area's oldest winery, the picturesque Sevenhill Cellars. Alternatively, you can spend the morning cycling from Leasingham to Auburn with lunch at Terroir, the best restaurant in the valley. Make sure to leave room in your bicycle basket for a bottle or two of the area's superb wines: standouts include the internationally acclaimed Grosset Wines in Auburn and Jim Barry Wines at Clare. [rieslingtrail.com.au](http://rieslingtrail.com.au)

### 2. BEST GARDEN

#### MALENY BOTANIC GARDENS, QUEENSLAND

The cows are the only ones that might have a beef with this lovely garden, located atop an escarpment in the Sunshine Coast hinterland. Before businessman Frank Shipp snapped up this property and turned it into a magnificent 3ha garden, the land was used as cow paddocks. Shipp pulled up privet, moulded and stonewalled a cascading series of terraces, and turned swamps into lily ponds. The result is an enchanting landscape that moves from orchid-filled rainforest to cascading waterfalls and Oriental-style lakes, offering Instagram-worthy opportunities at every turn, along with panoramic views of the Glasshouse Mountains. Rest up in one of the pagodas before heading up to the huge aviary – another of Shipp's passions – to meet the macaws and parrots. [malenybotanicgardens.com](http://malenybotanicgardens.com)

MALENY PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY SUNSHINE COAST DESTINATION; CLARE VALLEY: LACHLAN SWAN/SOUTH AUSTRALIAN TOURISM COMMISSION; GARMA: COURTESY GARMA; RECHERCHE ARCHIPELAGO: JIRI LOCKMAN/AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC



### 3. BEST ISLANDS

#### RECHERCHE ARCHIPELAGO, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

It has seal colonies, a mighty shipwreck and was once home to pirates, so how has the Recherche Archipelago stayed under the radar for so long? This group of 100 uninhabited islands off the coast near Esperance was mapped by Dutch navigators in the 17th century, but has seen little action since pirate captain Black Jack Anderson used the islands as a base for plundering passing supply ships in the 1830s. Take a cruise from Esperance to check out the local wildlife, including fur seals, Cape Barren geese and sea lions, before bushwalking on Woody Island. Divers will want to head straight for the wreck of the bulk carrier *Sanko Harvest*. The 174m tanker, which sank in 1991, is the second-largest wreck dive in the world, known for its groper and red snapper. [westernaustralia.com](http://westernaustralia.com)

### 4. BEST WILDERNESS ACCOMMODATION

#### PUMPHOUSE POINT, TASMANIA

We owe a vote of thanks to the anonymous public works architect who, back in the 1930s, was tasked with designing a pumping station in the wilds of Tasmania. Choosing whimsy over functionalism, he created a pretty neoclassical building set on a long pier stretching out into Lake



St Clair, which has now been reinvented as Tasmania's latest luxury wilderness retreat. Blanketed by pristine rainforest, Lake St Clair is a paradise for hikers, mountain bikers and fishermen. Guests at Pumphouse Point can choose from rooms in the intimate Pumphouse, with its spectacular all-round views, or the Shorehouse. Particularly impressive is the in-room larder stocked with treats such as wood-roasted salmon and Stefano Lubiano riesling – perfect grazing for lazy afternoons gazing out at that view. [pumpphousepoint.com.au](http://pumpphousepoint.com.au) ➤

### REGIONAL SURPRISES

Clockwise from far left: Maleny Botanic Gardens, Qld; Clare Valley, SA; Garma Festival, NT; Recherche Archipelago, WA





REGIONAL SURPRISES

Squeaky Beach, Victoria

## 5. BEST INDIGENOUS SITE

### CAVE HILL, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

From the outside, it's a rocky cave with a low-slung entrance, just another outcrop in the undulating desert landscape. Step inside, however, and you find yourself in one of Central Australia's most remarkable rock-art sites, a place depicting one of the key creation stories of the desert mob. Here at Cave Hill, several hours' drive south of Uluru, the cave ceiling is covered with images depicting the tale of seven sisters chased by the wicked Wati Nyiru. Eventually, the sisters fled into the sky where they became the Pleiades star cluster, while Wati Nyiru, forever in pursuit, was immortalised as Orion. A local elder recounts the legend while leading visitors past key sites of the action, finishing with a visit to the cave itself.

[seitoutbackaustralia.com.au](http://seitoutbackaustralia.com.au)

## 6. BEST DESERTED BEACH

### SQUEAKY BEACH, VICTORIA

Tens of thousands of beaches fringe our coastline, but few come as close to perfection as Squeaky Beach in Wilson's Promontory National Park. A gentle curve of white sand lapped by wonderfully translucent water, sheltered by surrounding bushland, it ticks all the boxes. Even the location is just right: about three hours from Melbourne, it is accessible without ever getting overcrowded. Laze away an afternoon with a picnic while the children play in the maze-like paths between the rocks. The more energetic should follow the tracks in either direction to Norman Beach or Whisky Bay. And yes, just in case you're wondering, the sand really does squeak. [visitvictoria.com](http://visitvictoria.com)



Cave Hill, South Australia

## 7. BEST DINOSAUR EXCAVATION

### THE AUSTRALIAN AGE OF DINOSAURS MUSEUM, QUEENSLAND

Few of us completely outgrow our childhood dreams of discovering a dinosaur. Now Australia's most unusual museum lets visitors do just that. Near Winton in far western Queensland, the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum of Natural History is the only place in the country where you can literally dig up a piece of the past. The museum was born after local farmer David Elliott stumbled across a dinosaur bone while mustering his sheep. The find turned out to belong to the largest dino ever discovered in Australia, triggering further excavations of the fossil-rich soil. Visitors are given a set of tools and assigned a particular fossil waiting to be prised out of the rock, a hands-on approach that is a hit with families. [australianageofdinosaurs.com](http://australianageofdinosaurs.com)

SQUEAKY BEACH PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES;  
CAVE HILL: COURTESY SEIT OUTBACK AUSTRALIA



## REGIONAL SURPRISES

### 8. BEST TOWN FOR FOODIES

#### KYNETON, VICTORIA

Booms have a way of sweeping through the tiny central Victorian town of Kyneton, 80km north of Melbourne. The first, courtesy of the Gold Rush, left a legacy of elegant bluestone buildings. The second, a culinary explosion spearheaded by Melbourne chef Annie Smithers who relocated here a decade ago, has seen those buildings filled with one of the best collections of restaurants in regional Australia. Ten years on, Source Dining (formerly called Annie Smithers Bistrot) still pulls them in with creative desserts such as doughnuts served with calvados custard, caramelised apple, and gingerbread ice-cream. Other popular options include the Little Swallow Café, Midnight Starling, a sleek wine bar serving quality bistro food, and Mr Carsisi, where the Turkish-influenced menu ranges from mezze – kingfish carpaccio with sumac and lime dressing, and walnut and herb salad – to roast ocean trout with lemon labneh and shredded beetroot, sumac and barberry salad. For a post-prandial stroll, browse the Piper Street shops, from the Persian Room's rugs to intriguing odds and ends at Stockroom and Kabinett. [kyneton.org.au](http://kyneton.org.au)

### 9. BEST NATIONAL PARK

#### BORDER RANGES, NEW SOUTH WALES

Is that a triceratops peeking through the dense undergrowth? It is no wonder that the winding trails of the Border Ranges National Park inspire Jurassic Park fantasies, the stands of Antarctic beeches and Araucarian conifers in this rainforest are among the oldest surviving tree species in the world. Although dinosaurs are thin on the ground – you are more likely to spot pademelons, bandicoots, sooty owls and honeyeaters – there is still plenty to see. Highlights include the Booyong Walking Track and the Pinnacle Walk, best undertaken early in the morning when you can see the sunrise illuminating the extinct volcano, Wollumbin.

Other trails take you past rushing waterfalls fringed by bird's nest ferns or lilies, or through dappled clearings where lyrebirds sing. Perhaps the most startling thing about this slice of ancient wilderness is how accessible it is, an easy drive from Lismore near the NSW-Queensland border. [nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/Border-Ranges-National-Park](http://nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/Border-Ranges-National-Park) >

Pinnacle Lookout, Border Ranges, New South Wales



## REGIONAL SURPRISES



### 10. BEST FESTIVAL

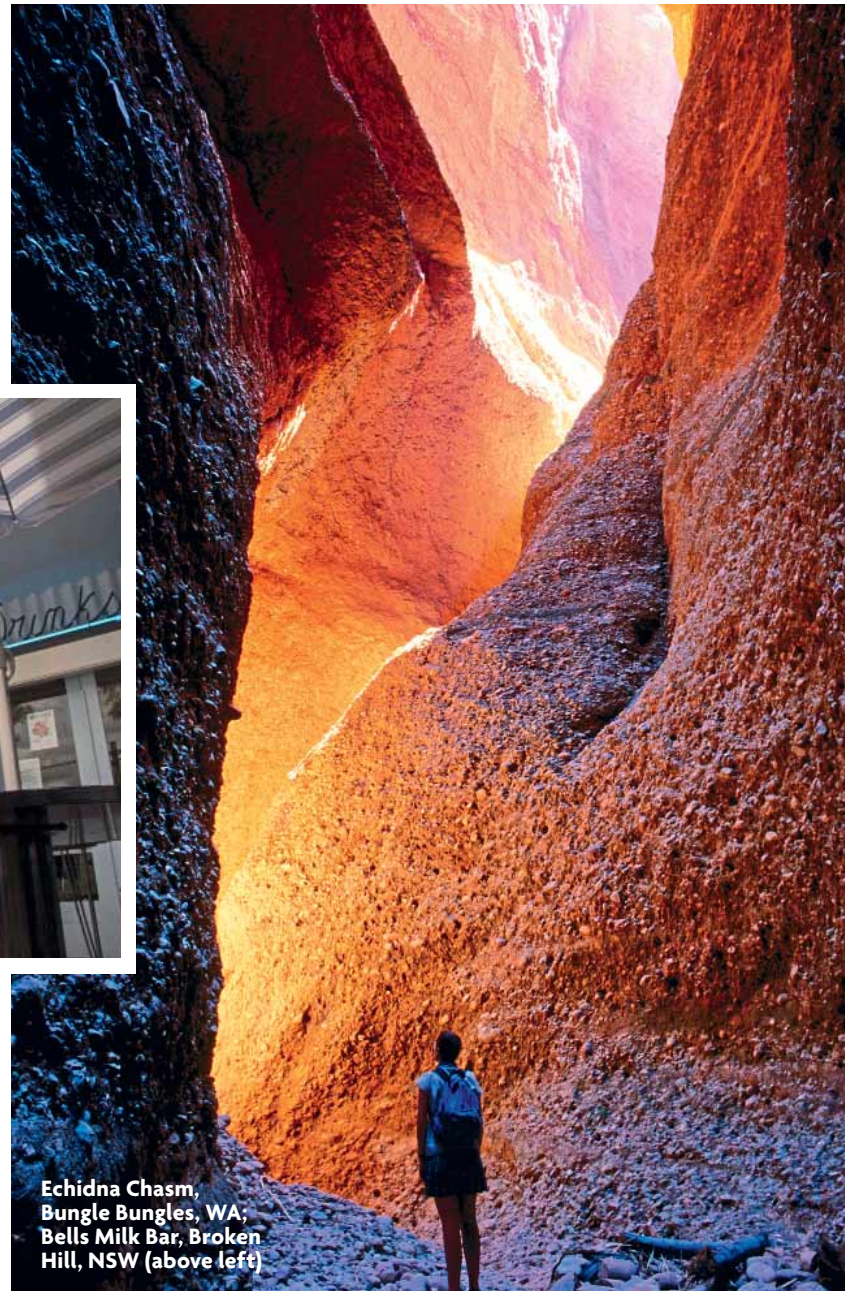
#### GARMA, NORTHERN TERRITORY

Anyone who has ever attended a Garma Festival will tell you that you can learn a lot in four days. How to dig for shellfish, what a smoking ceremony looks like, Indigenous songs, perhaps even a new perspective on the economics of remote communities. It's all on the menu at this four-day festival. Hosted in August every year by the Yolngu people of Arnhem Land, this gathering is a great opportunity to gain a better insight into Indigenous culture, and have a lot of fun. Camping on an escarpment high above the coast, participants attend workshops, learn cultural activities including bushcraft skills, and watch nightly ceremonies featuring song and dance performances. [garmafestival.com.au](http://garmafestival.com.au)

### 11. BEST MILK BAR

#### BELLS MILK BAR, BROKEN HILL, NEW SOUTH WALES

Heritage is heaped high in Broken Hill. This is, after all, the only town in Australia to be included on the National Heritage List. However, the town's best trip-back-in-time experience has nothing to do with its rich mining heritage. It is the humble Bells Milk Bar, a true-blue slice of the 1950s that has never been renovated or refreshed. It is all here, just as you remember it – from life or the movies – formica tables, cosy booths, lime spiders and malted milk. For a real retro experience, make like Sandra Dee and order a milkshake served in a tall anodised aluminium container. [bellsmilkbar.com.au](http://bellsmilkbar.com.au)



Echidna Chasm,  
Bungle Bungles, WA;  
Bells Milk Bar, Broken  
Hill, NSW (above left)

### 12. BEST GORGE

#### ECHIDNA CHASM, PURNULULU NATIONAL PARK, WA

Usually photographed from the air, this collection of beehive-shaped domes looms unexpectedly out of the outback. To see the Bungle Bungles at their best, however, you have to get your feet dirty. Up close, you discover the deep gorges that divide the domes, carved by the waters that surge through every wet season. Among the most spectacular is Echidna Chasm, a narrow, high-sided gorge that would make a fitting backdrop for the climax of an Indiana Jones movie. The going is tricky across the stone-covered floor of the palm-filled gorge. The walls narrow to little more than a crack in the rock, creating a claustrophobic yet compelling experience. This isn't the only remarkable gorge in the Bungle Bungles. At the southern end of the formation is the circular Cathedral Gorge, a natural amphitheatre with impressive acoustics. Early in the season, a shallow pool shaded by overhanging rock ledges provides shade from the glaring sun, making it the perfect place for a picnic. [westernaustralia.com](http://westernaustralia.com)

BELLS PHOTOGRAPHY: SIMON BAYLIS/OUTBACK NSW TOURISM;  
ECHIDNA CHASM: GETTY IMAGES