

South Australia



The driest state on the driest continent, South Australia (SA) beats the heat by celebrating life's finer things: fine landscapes, fine festivals, fine food, and (...OK, forget the other three) fine wine. SA isn't an automatic 'must see' on everyone's list – rather, the state has a 'secret' status the locals are only too happy about.

Start your explorations along the sea-salty Limestone Coast. To the north, the Murray River curls Mississippi-like towards the sea; to the northwest, the Fleurieu Peninsula is a decadent weekend for Adelaidians, with Kangaroo Island's wildlife, forests and seafood not far offshore. Adelaide remains near Australia's cultural high-water mark – a chilled-out, gracious city with world-class festivals, restaurants and a hedonistic arts scene: pubs and eat-streets abound. A day trip away, the Barossa and Clare Valleys are self-assured viticulture success stories.

Looking like mini-Italy on the map, Yorke Peninsula makes for a beachy, slow-paced detour. Further west, Gargantuan Eyre Peninsula is fringed with oyster farms and fishing towns, and offers some truly amazing encounters with SA's underwater residents. Wheeling into the Flinders Ranges, wheat fields give way to arid cattle stations beneath russet peaks. Continuing north, the Stuart Hwy tracks across the dead-flat desert, eccentric outback towns like Woomera and Coober Pedy emerging from the heat-haze.

So wind your watch back 30 minutes and slip into SA time. Crowd-free and relaxed, SA makes a perfect escape from the east coast frenzy.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Sniff out the ripest cheese, fullest fruit and strongest coffee at Adelaide's **Central Market** (p729)
- Trundle past pelicans, dunes and lagoons in **Coorong National Park** (p764)
- Watch the little **penguins** (p759) waddle on Kangaroo Island
- Slurp down a dozen briny oysters and watch passing whales at **Coffin Bay** (p790)
- Noodle for opals in the moonscape mullock at **Coober Pedy** (p804)
- Swirl, nose and quaff your way through the wine regions **McLaren Vale** (p750), **Barossa Valley** (p775), **Clare Valley** (p780), **Coonawarra** (p768) and **Adelaide Hills** (p744)
- Kick back with a cold schooner or two in **Adelaide's pubs** (p740)
- Hike up to the lofty, desolate rim of **Wilpena Pound** (p797) in the Flinders Ranges



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 08

■ POPULATION: 1.6 MILLION

■ AREA: 984,400 SQ KM



HISTORY

South Australia was declared a province on 28 December 1836, when the first British colonists landed at Holdfast Bay. The first governor, Captain John Hindmarsh, named the state capital Adelaide, after the wife of the British monarch, William IV. While the eastern states struggled with the stigma of convict society, SA's colonists were free citizens – a fact to which many South Australians will happily draw your attention.

The founders based the colony on a utopian 19th-century ideal of social engineering. Land was sold at set prices by the British government to help establish mainly young, skilled married couples; the concept was that equal numbers of men and women, free from reli-

gious and political persecution, would create an egalitarian new order.

Between 1838 and 1841, 800 German farmers and artisans (many persecuted Lutherans from Prussia) arrived and settled Hahndorf in the Adelaide Hills – now the best preserved German village in the state. Many more followed over the next decade, bringing vine cuttings with them – SA's famous vineyards began to take root.

The young colony's early progress was slow – only British government funds saved it from bankruptcy – but it became self-supporting by the mid-1840s and self-governing by 1856. Following the successful crossing of the continent by local explorers, SA won the contract to lay the Overland Telegraph from