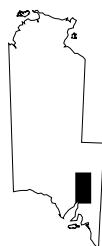


Flinders Ranges



Known simply as 'the Flinders', this ancient mountain range (once higher than the Himalayas) is an iconic South Australian environment. Jagged peaks and escarpments rise up north of Port Augusta and track a further 400km north to Mt Hopeless, before faltering down into the Strzelecki Desert. The colours here are remarkable: as the day stretches out, the mountains shift from mauve mornings to midday chocolates and ochre red sunsets.

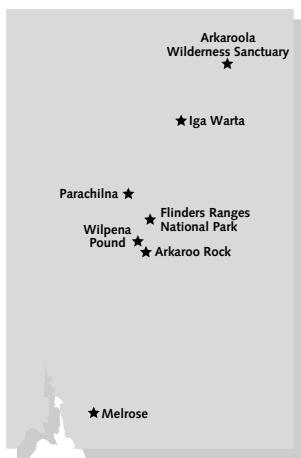
But the physical virtues of the ranges are only part of the story. Before Europeans arrived, the Flinders were prized by the Adnyamathanha peoples for their red ochres, which had medicinal and ritual uses. Sacred caves, rock paintings and carvings exist throughout the region.

In the wake of white exploration came villages, farms, country pubs and cattle stations, which seem to define the Australian outback identity. The Flinders were once a vital trade route into the Northern Territory, with the old *Ghan* railway clattering through. When the train tracks were rerouted and the Stuart Hwy made it quicker to get to Alice Springs, the Flinders took a back seat: ruins of sunstruck farms and abandoned mines pepper the region's hills and gullies.

This is also a tale of two ranges. The cooler Southern Ranges are studded with stands of river red gums. Here, country hamlets have cherubic appeal and wheat farming endures in the face of climate change. In the arid Northern Ranges, the desert takes a hold: the scenery here is stark, desolate and very beautiful. Cattle grids, emus and fast lizards cross the hot highway; homesteads have deep verandas and slow-spinning windmills. Even as you fly by at 110km/h, time here still...passes...slowly.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Careening off the Mawson Trail into gorgeous **Melrose** (p119), the Flinders' oldest town
- Paying your respects to the sacred Aboriginal paintings at **Arkaroo Rock** (p124)
- Spotting yellow-footed rock wallabies, emus and roos in **Flinders Ranges National Park** (p125)
- Hiking up to the lofty, desolate rim of **Wilpena Pound** (p125)
- Pulling into the **Prairie Hotel** (p128) in far-flung Parachilna for some 'feral' antipasto and a cold beer
- Learning about Adnyamathanha history and culture at the Aboriginal-run **Iga Warta** (p129)
- Reaching the end of the road and sliding into the swimming pool at **Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary** (p129)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: ☎ 08

■ www.flindersranges.com

■ www.flindersoutback.com

National Parks

The Flinders is hot and dry in summer, but during the rest of the year there's magical bushwalking to be had in the area's national parks. If you're planning to visit all the parks hereabouts (including the Flinders Ranges, Mt Remarkable and Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges parks), get hold of a Holiday Pass (per vehicle with/without camping \$50/30), valid for two months. You can purchase one from the Department for Environment & Heritage in Port Augusta (p137), the Wilpena Pound visitors centre (p125), or online at www.environment.sa.gov.au/parks/visitor/onlinepass.html.

Alternatively, a single-park day pass costs \$7.50 per vehicle, available from park rangers or at self-registration centres as you enter the parks. There's camping at Mt Remarkable (p121), Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges (p128) and Flinders Ranges national parks (p127), with bush camping at several other spots too. You don't have to rough it, though, as there are cabins at Alligator Gorge (p121) and Mambray Creek (p121), and the plush Wilpena Pound Resort (p126).

Tours

The following Flinders Ranges tours run from Adelaide; others depart Port Augusta (see p137), Quorn (p122), Hawker (p124), Wilpena Pound (p126) and Arkaroola (p129). Definitely book ahead as tours are very popular; some (particularly flights) require minimum numbers.

Arabunna Tours (☎ 8675 8351; www.southaustralia.com/S9008383.aspx; 7-day tour \$1050) Aboriginal-owned company offering cultural tours from Adelaide to the Flinders Ranges, Marree, Oodnadatta Track and Lake Eyre.

Bookabee Tours (☎ 8235 9954, 0408-209 593; www.bookabee.com.au; 4-/5-day tours \$1930/2380) Highly rated Indigenous-run tours to the Flinders Ranges and outback, including quality accommodation, meals, cultural tours, activities & interpretation.

Ecotrek (☎ 8346 4155; www.ecotrek.com; 7-day tour \$1548) Excellent all-inclusive tours walking the best sections of the Flinders, with soft beds, hot showers and food and wine at the end of each day.

Swagabout Tours (☎ 0408-845 378; www.swagabouttours.com.au) Dependable tours with the option of staying in hotels or camping under the stars. The Adelaide-to-Alice Springs trips (five-/seven-/nine-/10-day tours camping \$1350/1850/2400/2690, hotels \$1920/2675/3450/3850) take in the Flinders Ranges, Oodnadatta Track, Dalhousie Springs and Uluru. Dedicated Flinders Ranges trips (three/ four days camping \$650/1000, hotels \$870/1300) include

Quorn and Wilpena (plus Arkaroola and Blinman on the four-day jaunt), and can be extended to Coober Pedy.

Other major operators swinging through the Flinders:

Adventure Tours Australia (☎ 1300 654 604, 8132 8130; www.adventuretours.com.au)

Groovy Grape (☎ 1800 661 177, 8440 1640; www.groovygrape.com.au)

Wayward Bus (☎ 1300 653 510, 8132 8230; www.waywardbus.com.au)

Getting There & Around

BUS

Premier Stateliner (☎ 8415 5555; www.premierstateliner.com.au) buses run at least twice daily from Adelaide to Port Augusta (\$47, four hours) at the base of the Southern Flinders ranges. From here, **Yorke Peninsula Coaches** (☎ 8821 2755; www.ypcoaches.com.au) runs a Friday bus to Quorn (\$6, 45 minutes) and Wilmington (\$8, 1¼ hours). Yorke Peninsula Coaches also runs a Thursday bus from Port Pirie (south of Port Augusta) to Melrose (\$8, 1¼ hours) and Wilmington (\$9, 1½ hours); and a bus from Port Pirie to Laura (\$4, 20 minutes) and Wirrabarra (\$7, one hour) on the second and fourth Monday of the month.

Gulf Getaways (☎ 1800 170 170, 08-8642 6827; www.gulfgetaways.com.au) runs a Port Augusta-to-Wilpena shuttle on Fridays and Sundays, stopping at Quorn (\$20, 30 minutes), Hawker (\$40, 1¼ hours) and Wilpena Pound (\$50, 2¼ hours).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The Flinders Ranges are accessed from Adelaide by sealed roads off Hwy 1 and Main North Rd, and via the Barrier Hwy from New South Wales (NSW). If you're coming from NSW, you can also turn off the Barrier Hwy at Yunta and take gravel-surfaced roads to Wilpena Pound, Gammon Ranges National Park and Arkaroola. The major roads to Quorn, Hawker, Wilpena Pound, Leigh Creek and the Southern Ranges towns are all sealed. At the time of research the road between Parachilna to Blinman was being sealed, but the roads between Blinman and Wilpena and into Arkaroola were still gravel (fine in a 2WD car if you take 'em slow).

Anyone planning to travel off the main roads, particularly in the north, should be prepared for a dearth of drinking water, shops and service stations. If you're heading