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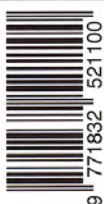
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Intrepid English explorer Matthew Flinders had always been just another chapter in a history book for me, until a cruise on the *True North* around South Australia's rugged coastline caused a major rethink.

On a white sandy stretch at Memory Cove, 20 kilometres from Port Lincoln, Flinders and his crew are remembered for their courage and spirit of adventure.

Eight of his men lost their lives in the cove in 1802 when their cutter capsized in choppy waters at dusk.



A brass plaque commemorates the efforts of the ship's master, John Thistle, and the seven crew members who were sent ashore to find fresh water but never returned to the *Investigator*, the first ship to circumnavigate Australia. Flinders later found their cutter floating bottom up with no sign of life and assumed all were drowned. He named the area Memory Cove in their honour, and the area where the cutter disappeared Cape Catastrophe, as well as nearby islands after Thistle and crew members.

Today, Memory Cove is not only steeped in Australian history, it is a protected wilderness area with stunning scenery and rare flora and fauna. With a blood red sunset as a backdrop and the *True North* anchored nearby, we toast the explorers, just as two haughty grey-brown emus wander up the beach, nonplussed. It's just one of many poignant moments experienced on the nine-day Southern Safari across the Great Australian Bight, from picturesque Wirrina Cove on the Fleurieu Peninsula to Ceduna.

Fellow passenger and history buff John Burgess provides an intriguing insight into



MEMORABLE

The *True North* on its journey. Left: A bronze plaque commemorating the eight seamen who lost their lives at Memory Cove.



IN FLINDERS' FOOTSTEPS

MATTHEW FLINDERS MAY BE RENOWNED AS THE FIRST TO CIRCUMNAVIGATE AUSTRALIA, BUT AS **SUE WALLACE** DISCOVERS, TRAVELLING AS A GUEST OF *TRUE NORTH*, MODERN DAY EXPLORERS CAN SAVOUR THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN BIGHT IMMERSSED IN BAREFOOT LUXURY.

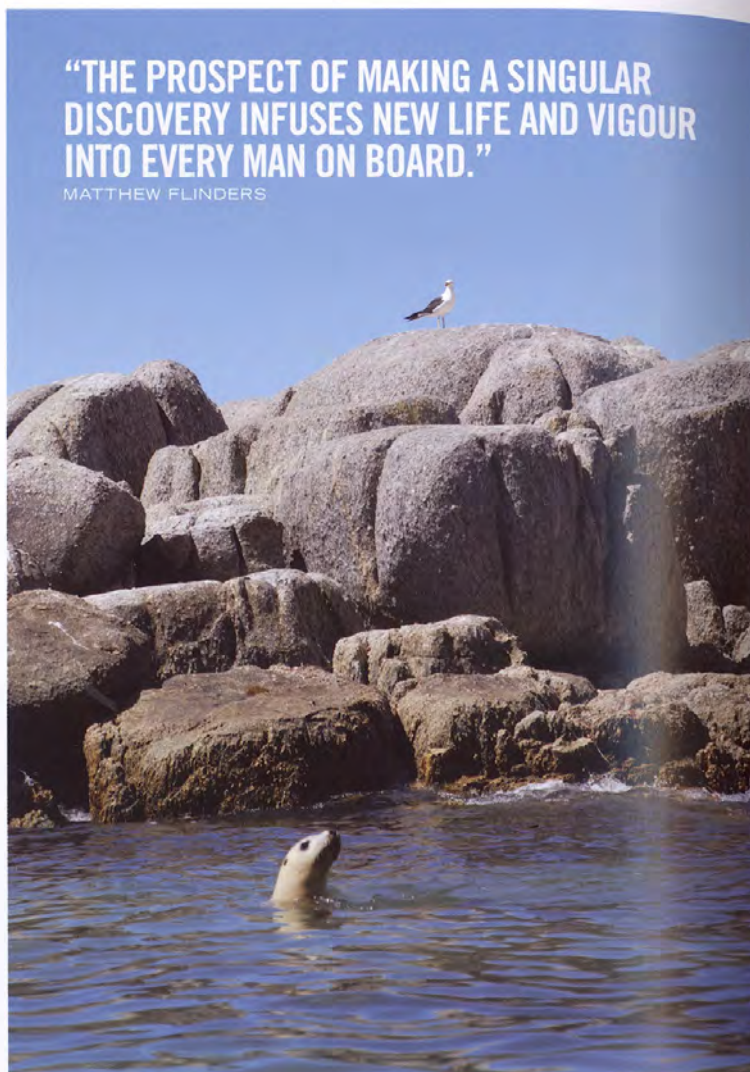
Flinders' adventures when our itinerary crosses the explorer's path. Stunning scenery, history, wildlife encounters, fresh seafood, beachcombing and fishing are the themes of this cruise that showcases Kangaroo Island, Port Lincoln, rugged shorelines and isolated islands sculpted by the wind and sea.

Before boarding, we do a whistle stop tour of picturesque McLaren Vale, home to some of South Australia's best drops, and visit Red Poles Art Gallery. Try the plump olives at Lloyd Brothers wine tasting at Wirra Wirra cellar door and lunch at the award-winning Penny's Hill, where Tony Parkinson's mantra is 'minimum crops, maximum quality'.

Upon boarding the *True North*, which oozes laid-back luxury, we are told to kick off our shoes – this is definitely a barefoot zone. Stilettos and runners are packed away and it doesn't take long for holiday mode to set in. The much-awarded *True North*, part of North Star Cruises Australia, caters for 36 passengers

LIVE THE WILDLIFE

Clockwise from right: Sea Lions put on a show; Swimming with great white sharks; The Wirra Wirra Winery, Fleurieu Peninsula; McLaren Vale Vineyards.



and offers luxury adventure cruising in Australian, Indonesian and Papua New Guinea's waters. It is best known for its iconic Kimberley adventures, with its trademark helicopter, an air-conditioned Eurocopter Squirrel that sits atop the boat. This cruise however is without the helicopter. Instead there are plenty of adrenaline-inducing adventures such as cage diving with great white sharks off Port Lincoln. It's the talk of the boat where an enthusiastic and dedicated crew of 20 ensures this is the trip of a lifetime. When the day of the shark encounter arrives, the question 'are you or aren't you?' is on everyone's lips. I decide to see these much-feared creatures in their own environment in complete safety as an opportunity of a lifetime and give the experience the green light. *True North's* fleet of expedition boats – six in all – ferry us out to the *Calypso Star* Shark Cage Diving vessel anchored near North Neptune Island where hefty chunks of bait entice great whites to linger.

Feeling a little nervous, I am even more jumpy after a safety briefing reminds us not to put our fingers outside the cage. There's also chatter about "Big Mumma", a whopper hovering nearby. Bait is tossed into the water and suddenly a huge marine predator lunges through the air to grab it – jagged teeth gleaming in the sun. 'I must be mad' flashes through my mind as I slowly pull on a wet suit and head towards the cage that is submerged off the back of the *Calypso Star*. As I lower myself into the water I can hear my heart thumping loudly. I put the regulator in my mouth and get accustomed to the water. Feeling more confident I turn and watch the green salty water for a sign of a great white. Just when I think there's nothing to this, I see a white flash and a monster heads my way. Surely this is Big Mumma. For a split second we eyeball each other – the shark looking at me makes me realise that is the closest I ever want to get to a great white, so I scramble out of the cage. I will always remember how gracefully the shark glided by but the



ferocity of its attack on the bait convinces me my next shark encounter will be from behind aquarium glass. Later that day, it's a definite change of pace as we anchor near Hopkins Island for beach combing and swimming while keen anglers head out to hook the elusive King George Whiting.

As we get closer to the beach, I get the feeling we are being watched. This time it is inquisitive Australian sea lions, putting on a show as they dive through the waves. Aware sharks consider sea lions tasty tucker, I wade out just a little from the shore and am soon joined by these doe-eyed creatures who swim around poking their heads up every so often to see what I am doing. Unlike my earlier encounter, these are cute and friendly. Sitting on the beach I watch as they ride the waves and salute the sun from the rocks – it's another priceless *True North* moment to treasure.

The next day, I am up for underwater encounter number three, but this time it's swimming with Southern Bluefin Tuna and we head out on a tour boat to the pontoon, 15 kilometres from Port Lincoln. I pull on a wet suit, snorkel, gloves and fins, and slip into the tuna pen. These fast fish can travel at a top speed of 70kms, but stop short just in front of me. There's also a touch pond with little ocean critters and an underwater observatory for those who don't want to get wet. On the return trip we hear just how lucrative the Japanese sashimi fish market is. The right tuna can fetch up to \$150,000 per tonne.

Landlocked excursions include Kangaroo Island, described as one of



earth's last unspoilt refuges, with a visit to Flinders Chase National Park and the outstanding Remarkable Rocks. Wind and waves have carved these colourful rocks into incredible shapes and we also visit Admiral's Arch and see seals basking in the sun. A stop at Andermel Marron for a taste of a fresh crayfish farm and a wine tasting at the Two Wheeler Creek Winery are other highlights. Visits to Coffin Bay and Streaky Bay named by Flinders because of the bands of colours, are also memorable and end with an oyster pie.

NEALE WINTER / BRETT SHERRIN / SATC



NATURAL WONDERS

Above: Remarkable Rocks, Flinders Chase National Park; Below Left: Weirs Cove, Kangaroo Island, South Australia; Right: Oysters are popular fare onboard *True North*.



"SURE, THE KIMBERLEY IS OUTSTANDING AND GETS IN YOUR BLOOD, WEST PAPUA AND PAPUA NEW GUINEA GET IN YOUR HEART BUT THIS CRUISE GETS IN YOUR BONES. WHEN YOU SEE WHAT THOSE EARLY EXPLORERS FACED, IT'S JUST AMAZING."

CAPTAIN GAVIN GRAHAM



BIG BITE

Above: The Nullarbor Plain, Eyre Peninsula South Australia; Sunset fishing; Exploring the coast's ocean caves.



Dining is a delight on *True North*, with cuisine created by talented chef, Andy Tonge, who worked with Shannon Bennett at Melbourne's Vue de Monde. For breakfast it's hard to decline the dukkah crusted poached egg with chickpea puree or berry pancakes with roasted pistachios and maple syrup. For lunch, maybe it's confit of duck with soba noodle salad, tempura king prawns with Wakame





salad or Neptune Island tuna and nicoise salad on the menu. Dietary whims are accommodated and you can drop by the galley to see what's for dinner any time. Evening drinks are complemented by seafood treats such as fresh oysters, kangaroo fillet with hibiscus, char-grilled marron tail, pearl meat ceviche, tuna sashimi and blue swimmer crabs. For mains, there are standouts such as slow roasted veal loin, seared king snapper and crispy skin Tasmanian salmon with Broome mango cous cous. Sweet finales such as strawberry soufflé, sticky date pudding and a white chocolate dish with warm rhubarb and honey emulsion earn a round of applause. Following dinner, there's the presentation of the keenly contested Nemo hat that goes to the best angler of the day. Many passengers are repeat guests keen to discover the more remote regions of Australia. Captain Gavin Graham says the Southern Safari is a great cruise as there's plenty of action,



but also time to sit back and enjoy the boat. "Sure, the Kimberley is outstanding and gets in your blood, West Papua and Papua New Guinea get in your heart but this cruise gets in your bones. When you see what those early explorers faced, it's just amazing," he says.

True North is all about barefoot luxury and although compact, it is spacious and you can always find room to stretch out and read a book in the lounge or enjoy a drink at the bar. My favourite haunt is the sundeck where I listen to the waves lapping, taste the salt spray, watch dolphins spin through the waves and scan that rugged coastline. Gutsy effort Commander Flinders. ○

www.northstarcruises.com.au



FACT FILE

The Southern Safari will operate from Adelaide to Ceduna January 15-23 2014. Priced from \$7,295 per person Ocean Class, \$10,495 per person River Class and \$11,995 per person Explorer Class. *True North* features 18 cabins: Explorer and River Class staterooms have king size beds while Ocean Class twins feature roomy singles. All have ensembles, in-cabin entertainment and satellite phones. There's a sundeck, observation lounge, ship's lounge, alfresco bar and a sports deck. Daily activities include scenic walks, culture, fishing, snorkelling, picnics, exploring and nature based tours.

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