

The Pristine bounty of Kangaroo Islands food

By Richard Cornish

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Kangaroo Island sits in cool water of the Southern Ocean that wells up from Antarctica. Crystal clear, the sea appears azure blue as it laps the golden sandy beaches and pounds the rugged rocky cliffs. Surrounded by water KI, as the island is known, enjoys a mild microclimate perfect for holiday making and growing superb food.

The 150-kilometre-long island has 540km of coastlines and sits at the heart of one of the world's best lobster fisheries.

The rugged rocks that dominate the southern shoreline of this, the third largest island in Australia, make an ideal underwater habitat for southern rock lobsters. Their luscious, flavoursome sweet flesh is determined by their rich diet of abalone, mussels and crabs. Here

they are commercially harvested using traditional 'cray pots' and processed onshore or exported live.

One of the most trusted names in the seafood game is Ferguson Australia, owned by third generation fishers Debra and Andrew Ferguson.

The Fergusons bought their first fishing boat over forty years ago when they were a young married couple. Through hard work and determination, the couple has developed the industry in the area, expanding upon live lobster export by processing lobster into frozen picked meat, tails and medallions.

The medallions are generously portioned, thick cross sections of the tail including the shell for presentation and flavour, and popular with international customers. Restaurants at locations including Hong Kong's renowned Dotcod, the Hong Kong Cricket Club and The Venetian in Macau all serve Ferguson Australia lobster medallions.

"We have incredible seafood here in South Australia and around Kangaroo Island," says Debra Ferguson, passionate about the quality of her products. "It's due to the rich, pristine waters from Antarctica."

Her company also harvests king crabs that are exported to China and sold into the market. "We are looking forward to the free trade agreement so we can keep our brand [and therefore identify its Australian origin] on the crabs."

Ferguson Australia has a processing plant near Adelaide airport and will pack seafood for those travelling both domestically and internationally.

For those who find themselves on the island itself, the Ferguson shop at Kingscote, the major town on Kangaroo Island, is considered a must-see. Visitors can buy fresh lobster and a range of their other fresh seafood direct.

Kangaroo Island is also renowned for freshwater crayfish. Called marron,





these large native crustaceans are raised in farm dams then purged in clean fresh water at Andermel Marron Cafe. Here visitors can buy whole fresh marron or sit down and enjoy a meal of this sweet and delicately flavoured crayfish along with a glass of wine from Two Wheeler Creek Wines.

This modern building, perched in the green rolling hills, is just one of over a dozen farm gate experiences that can be found at the Kangaroo Island Farm Gate and Cellar Door Tour. This self-guided tour also includes visits to The Oyster Farm Shop, where one can buy the deliciously flinty Kangaroo Island Premium Oysters and Kangaroo Island Lavender Farm serving freshly baked scones redolent with the aroma of their farm grown lavender flowers.

Many of these producers come together at the monthly Kangaroo Island Farmers' Market held on the first Sunday of every month in the village of Peneshaw.

Covering great swathes of the island are fields covered in golden grain and paddocks filled with broad beans. The aroma when they flower fills the air with a heady perfume in the winter months. Because of the island's maritime climate, the grains grown on the island, particularly wheat, ripen slowly, giving them time to develop flavour and nutrients.

Making the most of the local climate is King Island Pure Grain, a previous winner of the National Australia Bank's Agribusiness Award for Excellence for 'Australian Farm Journal Rural Enterprise'.

Managing Director Neil Pontifex works with 40 experienced local farmers who grow wheat, broad beans and non-genetically modified canola for King Island Pure Grain. These farmers minimise their chemical use and maximise their food safety.

"There is a culture of agricultural excellence on the island," says Pontifex, "and the farmers know that the premium they are paid for



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their grain (and seeds) depends on their record keeping diligence so we can guarantee paddock to plate traceability.”

King Island Pure Grain’s non-GM canola is exported to Japan where it is crushed and used by Pal System, a cooperative food buying group that delivers premium clean safe food to customers’ homes. The broad beans are exported to Asia and deep fried and seasoned and make nutritious snacks.

Another business making the most of the island’s bounty is Kangaroo Island Spirits. This artisan distiller harvests wild native juniper (*Myoporum insulare*) and blends it with other hand roasted botanicals, many of which are grown on the island.

This mix is infused into basket-distilled spirit to create their Wild Gin, a smooth and aromatic gin that has won medals at the New York International Spirits Competition, and the Hong Kong International Spirits Competition. A new still has been commissioned specifically for

export production and will be on line by June 2015.

“We have been overwhelmed with international requests for our products,” says owner John Lark referring also to his vodka and liqueurs. Kangaroo Island Spirits are used in top bars across Australia where mixologists are incorporating them in their best concoctions.

One of King Island Spirit’s most popular liqueurs is made with Kangaroo Island Honey, unique as the honey bees on the island are the Ligurian strain of European honey bees. They arrived in the late 1880s and remained protected due to an 1885 act of parliament that declared Kangaroo Island a sanctuary, prohibiting other bees from the island. As a result, the population here is the only genetically pure line of Ligurian bees in the world.

Small honey producers on the island such as David and Jenny Clifford from Clifford’s Honey Farm have an operation of just 300 hives which they move about the island chasing

the honey flows from the native trees such as mallee and bottle brush as well as the crops like canola and broad beans. The quality of the honey is outstanding, naturally clear and aromatic with delicate savoury notes. The Clifford’s do minimal processing to get the honey in the jar, never pastuerising the honey and only filtering it. The honey is so rare and highly regarded that it has been recognised by Slow Food’s internationally renowned Ark of Taste program.

Kangaroo Island is in fine company when it comes to wine, being included in the internationally recognised Fleurieu GI or Geographic Indicator.

Although small, producing just 7000 dozen bottles, The Islander Estate has a broad reputation, being founded by Bordeaux born and trained Jacques Lurton. Here are produced estate wines, the signature being The Investigator, based on cabernet franc.

The Islander Estate exports to United Kingdom, Canada, France,

Germany, Denmark, Holland, Finland, Poland, United Arab Emirates, New Caledonia, Hong Kong, Macau, China and New Zealand.

“It’s the wonderful influence of the sea that unites the region,” says Kangaroo Island Distillery’s John Lark, referring to rainfall and cooling sea breezes.

The fact this region is one of the most beautiful in South Australia, with its azure sea and gold coloured cliffs, means that this little piece of the world has become known abroad far beyond its stunning beautiful shores.

Two great times to sample the delights of Kangaroo Island are during the annual Kangaroo Island Cup horse race (13-15 February 2015) or the Kangaroo Island FEASTival of food of wine (1-8 May 2015).

This story is one of a five-part series from Australia Unlimited profiling Australian destinations and premium food and wine exporters from those regions.