

GRAZIA

FROM THE FRONT LINE

KATERINA, 34

'My son cried when I told him this is war'

ISSUE 825

9 17717451956129



21 MARCH 2022
€2.95 SPAIN €4.75

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FOUR WOMEN FROM UKRAINE TELL THEIR STORY

#StandWithUkraine

IT'S TIME TO...

EXPLORE

Bucket-list destinations

THIS YEAR WE CAN FINALLY DREAM BIG AGAIN – SPLASHING OUT ON AN EXTRA-SPECIAL HOLIDAY TO MAKE UP FOR TWO YEARS OF TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

COMPILED BY RACHEL LOOS

DISCOVER ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA

WORDS FIONA MCINTOSH



I AM LYING ON a heated massage table while Amy, my therapist, works irmangka-irmangka balm (that's scented emu bush balm, BTW) into my back. She's kneading my muscles in a technique used by indigenous healers. Beyond her, Uluru glows crimson in the afternoon sun and the scent of burning lemon myrtle hangs in the air.

I might be at one of Australia's most luxurious hotels, Longitude 131 (swimming pool, private deck with a bed to sleep beneath the stars and a pop-up bush bar for G&Ts), but the spa is designed to look like a *wiltja* (traditional Aboriginal shelter) and the balm is made by local *ngangkari* (healers); all profits from the sale of the balm go to help support their communities.

It's a similar story at the super-stylish Peninsula Hot Springs in the bush outside Melbourne, where a Kodo massage also begins with burning lemon myrtle leaf to cleanse negative energy and the native Australian botanical Li'Tya products are made from the oils of local trees and bushes. Later, I lie back in a geothermal mineral

pool, stare up at the eucalyptus and wonder if this is the same country I grew up in.

Embarrassingly, it's only taken white Australians 200-odd years to wake up to the potency of indigenous plants and medicines used by the world's oldest living culture. I was brought up in Australia but, until now, had never heard of them – the Australia I grew up in dismissed and mistrusted 50,000 years of Aboriginal wisdom and traditions.


But things have changed. On the walls, colonial art has been replaced by dot paintings created by the Anangu Aboriginal communities of the Northern Territory.

If you're looking to explore the roots of Australia, top of the list is, of course, Uluru, that monolithic beast of a rock that rises from the red dust of the outback. For the local Anangu people, it's the most



Peninsula Hot Springs. Above and right: Longitude 131





sacred cultural site of all and in 2018 tourists were banned from climbing it. You don't need to climb Uluru to feel its power – being able to touch it is enough.

Each of the 16 tented suites of Longitude 131 has a distant view of 'the rock' as if it were a painting framed by glass doors. It's a mesmerising vista and, with each shift of light or dust flurry, it changes colour from pale ochre to deep purple.

A sense of serenity surrounds Uluru when I visit. My guide is Joanne Connelly, an artist with the Maruku Arts Centre, a not-for-profit art and craft corporation run by the Anangu community, who was born and brought up here. As we walk through the eucalyptus trees, picking and eating bush tomatoes and chipping away at the sap of the desert bloodwood tree (a natural antiseptic), Joanne tells me about the creation stories written like a book in the natural markings and patterns on the face of Uluru. After the walk she shows me how to create dot paintings with traditional symbols. It's unbelievably therapeutic to sit at a table, with the red desert dust swirling around you, and apply dots to a black canvas in shapes that depict your journey through life.

This very physical reconnection with nature is also at the heart of the Peninsula Hot Springs. The spa retreat has teamed up with First Australian guide Lionel Lauch, who takes me on a bush tucker trek through the coastal bushland and teaches me how to cook ocean fish in bark. The walk finishes with a traditional meditation and sound healing ceremony. Lying on a mat on the edge of a cliff with my eyes closed, I can feel the warmth of the rocks beneath me and hear the surge of the surf. In a dreamy, transitory moment I finally get a taste of what it feels like to be connected to the natural world I grew up in, but never knew.

THE LOWDOWN

See Discover Aboriginal Experiences at australia.com. Flights from London to Sydney via Singapore from £830pp return; Sydney to Ayers Rock (for Uluru), from £200pp return, both qantas.com. Tented suites at Longitude 131 from £900pp/pn, longitude131.com.au. Dot painting workshops, £38pp, maruku.com.au. Spa day at the Spa Dreaming Centre, Peninsula Hot Springs, from £53. Lionel Lauch meditation and cleansing ceremony, from £20pp, peninsulahotsprings.com.



ISLAND PARADISE

RAA ATOLL, MALDIVES

If you're after soft white sand, turquoise water and swaying palm trees under a hot, hot sun, Cora Cora resort, in the pristine Raa Atoll, only reached by seaplane or boat, will tick all the boxes. Stay in a lagoon villa and jump straight into the sparkling sea from your deck, or step on to the sand from the beach villas. Jet-ski, paddle on top of the water or go diving – the resort's five-star PADI dive centre has 10 dive sites. Of course there's a fabulous spa; eat by the pool or in one of the restaurants with sunset views. There's a kids' club and a museum so you can understand the area's history. *From £600pn for a beach villa based on two people sharing, coracoraresorts.com*

ROOMS WITH A VIEW

SANTORINI, GREECE

Stay at Vora and every morning you'll wake up to a panoramic view of the glittering Aegean Sea framed by the traditional Cycladic white buildings and blue-domed churches. In the evening, your private terrace gives you a front-row seat for the island's famously stunning sunsets. A boutique hotel, Vora is made up of three designer villas carved into the rock that surrounds the moon-shaped bay. Each villa has its own infinity plunge pool. Situated in Imerovigli, a secluded village, you're never far from a chic bar or restaurant. *From £567pn, including breakfast, based on two people sharing, voravillas.com*



Above: Cora Cora. Left: Vora in Santorini

FAMILY FUN
SARDINIA, ITALY

If you think it's impossible to have a truly relaxing family holiday, Forte Village will do its best to change your mind. Chilled cocktail in hand, relax on a sunlounger on the white sandy beach or by one of the pools. Enjoy a massage in the Acquaforte Thalasso & Spa that includes a circuit of six pools. Feeling active? Head to the state-of-the-art gym or try one of the many different sports (tennis, netball, cricket, football, cycling) as well as a range of water sports and diving. Kids of all ages can whizz down a water slide in the water park while younger kids have Children Wonderland, with activities including theatre workshops and arts and crafts. For older children, there's go-karting, bowling and a disco. Eat in a different restaurant every night – new for this year is the Wild Scandinavian Barbecue restaurant – and stay in either a three- or five-star hotel or luxury villa. *Stays for a family of four start at £555pn on a half-board basis, fortevillageresort.com*

EXOTIC CHARM
SAYULITA, MEXICO

Imagine sitting on your terrace with views of the surrounding coastline, a sea-breeze ruffling your hair. A few minutes' stroll gets you to the local beach or walk a little longer through the jungle to a deserted beach paradise. Hungry? Tuck into a fish taco at a street food stall or choose from one of many buzzy restaurants. You can enjoy all this with a stay at Casita Luna, a boho-chic house in laid-back Sayulita, a fishing town not far from Puerto Vallarta. The house comes with a concierge who will organise anything from a yoga class to surfing, snorkelling and whale-watching. *Sleeps two (an extra bed can be arranged); from £125pn, minimum stay four/five nights depending on dates, welcomebeyond.com*

TROPICAL LIFE
GALLE, SRI LANKA

A mix of stunning beaches, varied landscape and ancient history have made Sri Lanka a new favourite destination – make your holiday extra special with a stay in a stylish villa with a housekeeper on tap. Kumbura Villa, not far from the UNESCO world heritage town of Galle on the south coast, was once the grand house of the village and has been lovingly restored. From the infinity pool, look out over the surrounding paddy fields. Locally, explore nearby beaches, temples and restaurants – transport can be arranged for hassle-free travel. Your housekeeper will rustle up delicious breakfasts and local dishes, such as cashew nut curry. Hire a private chef for a more international menu. *Sleeps eight, from £270pn, minimum stay two/seven nights depending on dates, edenvillas.com*

