

HOTEL CENTRAL



Station Yourself in Australia

Experience the essence of the outback but with all the comforts. By STEPHANIE STEPHENS

Long after Oscar buzz has subsided about director Baz Luhrmann's blockbuster period romance *Australia*, viewers will contemplate their own epic journeys to what he calls a "unique place at the edge of the world." Once there, "the potential for you to have a transformative experience is very real," says Luhrmann. ¶ In the iconic outback, a case of city slicker's stressed-out "urbanitis" is easily cured by meaningful reconnection with one's inner jackaroo. Don an oilskin and make like Hugh Jack-

man and Nicole Kidman while learning to crack a bullwhip and ride a horse. Among the remote, rugged ranges, rivers, and gorges of the outback, adventure pursuits can include horseback riding, fishing, crocodile-spotting, and mustering livestock. Australian stations—some a million acres or more—are big on modern luxury with a twist, often delivered by memorable characters. They each offer multiple lodging options, from camping to top-level accommodations. In the category of "Best Experience," these four properties are definite Oscar contenders.

El Questro Wilderness Park

EAST KIMBERLEY REGION, WESTERN AUSTRALIA Cinematic scenes in *Australia* of cattle stampedes, river crossings, and romance were filmed at the million-acre El Questro, whose exclusive Homestead is fresh from a \$1.9-million refurbishment.

The stellar six-bedroom structure of recycled Australian timber feels elegantly homey—rustic furnishings are juxtaposed with contemporary Italian Zanotta sofas and Spanish woven cane chairs. The most elaborate, the Chamberlain Gorge Suite, is fearlessly cantilevered 30 feet above the river. Guests are invited to a nightly feeding frenzy of crocodiles and northern long-neck turtles. El Questro's Emma



Gorge Resort features 60 tented cabins—which come with blue-winged kookaburra serenades—suitable for families. Open Apr.-Oct. Bungalows from \$216, tent cabins from \$187; www.elquestro.com.au.

Home Valley Station

EAST KIMBERLEY REGION, WESTERN AUSTRALIA With its cattle brand of "HV8," this 700,000-acre working station at the base of the Cockburn Range—31 miles from El Questro—is owned by the Indigenous Land Corporation, which unveiled a renovation favoring an eco-green palette throughout. Accommodations range from eight spacious free-standing Grass Castles—floors have real bovine "fur" rugs—set on bubbling Bindoola Creek, to 28 corrugated iron and concrete Homestead Guesthouse Rooms reminiscent of the original stockman's quarters. The budget-friendly raised safari-style Eco Tents encourage closeness with the Kimberley region wilderness. Grass

The location of Wrotham Park Lodge's accommodations (above) allow for an outback experience just outside your doorway (left).

Hotel Central



Home Valley Station lodgings include comfortable canvas safari-style Eco Tents.

Castles from \$291, Guesthouse Rooms from \$159, Eco Tents from \$131; www.homevalley.com.au.

Wrotham Park Lodge

FAR NORTHERN QUEENSLAND Return visitors emulating the landed gentry paint word pictures of “a ‘fair dinkum,’ genuine, true-blue Aussie cattle station,” where 70,000 head graze 1.5 million acres. At sophisticated Wrotham, ten timber-slab quarters perch on the escarpment with furnishings that include leather armchairs draped with shawls and cushy daybeds. In bathrooms, rain showers on wood slats are enhanced by landscapes across the glistening Mitchell River, viewable through the picture window. A peek over the escarpment from your deck may reveal Pacific herons. Open Apr.-Oct. From \$1,039 per person, per two-night package with meals and selected activities; www.wrothampark.com.au.

Burrawang West Station

PARKES, CENTRAL NEW SOUTH WALES Tailor-made for the hurry-up visitor, the 10,000-acre “accessible outback” station on the Lachlan River is an hour’s flight from Sydney. The homestead is topped by two stone chimneys and outfitted with a grand piano and billiard table. Melbourne art critic John Buckley has assembled a refreshingly eclectic collection of Australian paintings and antique furniture. Guests stay in 12 suites in four lodges with screened verandas. Outside, alpacas guard birthing ewes and their lambs on this working sheep stud and cattle station. From \$609 per person, per night, all inclusive; www.burrawangwest.com.au.