

Beating new paths

MEET THE AUSTRALIANS WHOSE RELENTLESS DRIVE IS INNOVATING THE WAYS WE TRAVEL.

BY ANDREA BLACK

Longitude 131° is one of Beckons' five Australian properties, with James and Hayley Baillie (below) integrally involved in the global brand's launch.



COURTESY OF BECKONS. RIGHT: PETER BRAIG

For Australia's titans of the travel industry to stay relevant, they need to keep evolving on the world stage.

A key example is James and Hayley Baillie, who are already well-known for globally renowned properties such as Great Southern Ocean Lodge in South Australia and Silky Oaks Lodge in Queensland. Now, the founders of Baillie Lodges have become an integral part of the newly launched Beckons brand. Beckons brings together the portfolios of Baillie Lodges and Tierra Hotels to create a nine-lodge collection spanning Australia, New Zealand, Chile and Canada.

James Baillie says Beckons takes a personally conceived, intimate offering and extends it to the world.

"When we opened Capella Lodge on Lord Howe Island back in 2003 — and in that, launched the Baillie Lodges brand — Hayley and I had a vision of the kind of lodging experience we wanted to offer our guests, where generously inclusive rates, first-name service, 'barefoot luxury' and a real sense of place combine to create a sense of staying at one's own holiday home amongst like-minded friends," Baillie says.

"More than 20 years on, we're delighted that this home-grown,

Australian family business has captured the imagination of investors as a proposition that has worldwide appeal."

Notable recent milestones include the renovation and redesign of Huka Lodge in New Zealand and Tierra Atacama in Chile, as well as the rebirth of the flagship Kangaroo Island property Southern Ocean Lodge following a devastating 2020 bushfire.

That expansion continues into 2026, with state-of-the-art wellness facilities slated for Silky Oaks Lodge (Daintree) and The Louise (Barossa Valley), as well as new premium suites at Tierra Patagonia (Chile). There's talk of growth, too, with new locations planned around the world.

"For our Beckons guests, an expanded network of lodges and experiences in incredible destinations means there will be more opportunities to travel around the world in the style they prefer, with a chance to discover the people and places, wildlife, food, drinks, culture and art in each near-and-far-flung location," Baillie says.

"We're looking forward to continuing to work with the great team at Beckons and seeing this unique brand of hospitality flourish in new locations around the world."

beckons.com





Cruising industry doyenne Sarina Bratton (left) now heads up Pearl Expeditions, offering boutique itineraries aboard the luxurious *Paspaley Pearl* (below).

ACCESS, NOT EXCESS

Heading out to sea, it's no surprise that Sarina Bratton, the co-founder of Orion Expedition Cruises, should be involved in an innovative venture. Already recognised with an Order of Australia (AM) for her significant services to tourism and particularly cruising, Bratton now brings her visionary leadership to the newly-founded Pearl Expeditions as executive chair.

This partnership between the extensively experienced Bratton and Darwin-based pearling company Paspaley offers immersive explorations of the Kimberley, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia and Borneo aboard the 30-guest luxury motor yacht, *Paspaley Pearl*.



"People tend to describe a sea voyage as a cruise, maybe in the Mediterranean, the Caribbean or even the Kimberley; [at Pearl Expeditions] we speak of boutique expeditions," Bratton says.

"A cruise follows a fixed schedule, whereas a boutique expedition follows a course of interest, responds to excitement, and provides access to places that a cruise and most expedition ships never see."

Bratton says the business model centres around access, rather than excess. "Enabling experiences rarely considered as being possible in the world of travel," she explains.

"At 50 metres long, with a primarily Australian crew of 22, *Paspaley Pearl* is the only boutique vessel in the Australasian region to offer balcony cabins. Seven of her 15 suites have private balconies."

Bratton is looking forward to returning to the Kimberley this season. "It will be my 15th expedition there since 2003, and not one trip has ever been the same," she says.

Pearl Expeditions is also actively scouting future destinations. "Our focus is on regions that have layered histories, distinctive ecosystems, and strong cultural narratives. We are particularly interested in areas that are accessible only to boutique expedition vessels, and where thoughtful tourism can play a positive role."

pearlexpeditions.com

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JOSH BURKINSHAW, COURTESY OF PEARL EXPEDITIONS



The Aurora Australis Suite on board Journey Beyond's signature services offers "a more refined way to experience Australia by train", says David Donald (below).

response to that demand, offering a more refined way to experience Australia by train."

The interiors were created by renowned design firm Woods Bagot. Donald says a standout feature is the way in which the design draws on the Art Deco period of rail travel, reinterpreted through distinctly Australian materials and textures.

"From leather and timber to the way light moves through the space, it feels deeply connected to the landscape while still sitting comfortably among the world's great luxury experiences," he says.

The opulence doesn't end with design. "From a personalised butler service and private in-suite dining to a curated in-room bar tailored to each guest's preferences, every element has been thoughtfully considered," Donald says.

"Our suite guests will experience a more elevated layer of our Off Train Experiences, from scenic flights over Kalgoorlie's Super Pit and dining in the Adelaide Hills on the Indian Pacific. On The Ghan, this extends to extraordinary moments across the Red Centre, including flights over Katherine Gorge with a landing in the gorge, and chartered journeys to Uluru for a private lunch within the National Park."

For Journey Beyond, it's an exciting time as the company expands its portfolio and builds on the strength of its customers' experiences, he says.

"Our focus is on delivering journeys that connect guests to Australia's landscapes, culture and hospitality in a more considered way."

journeybeyondrail.com.au 📞

REFINED RAIL TRAVEL

With 'slow' travel trending, luxury travellers are increasingly looking to explore the world by rail. Anyone who has travelled on the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express in Europe or the Rocky Mountaineer in North America will understand the lure of luxurious rail travel.

This elevated experience has finally arrived in Australia with the recent introduction of the new Australis Suite and Aurora Suite on Journey Beyond's The Ghan, Indian Pacific and Great Southern trains. A key player has been David Donald, Journey Beyond's managing director of rail and touring.

"There's been a clear shift toward more immersive, high-end travel where guests are seeking depth, comfort and a strong sense of place," Donald says.

"The Aurora Australis Suites are our

