



PICTURES: TOURISM AUSTRALIA/JULIE FLETCHER; DESTINATION NSW; DA

THE HAPPY HOUR

Watch the light slip away at these special sunset spots

ULURU, NT

Let's start at the beginning – and make that more than 500 million years ago. The shapely contours of the world's largest monolith take on an otherworldly sheen in the glow of a slow sunset. It's a nuanced performance, like a paint-chart progression from pink to tangerine to intensities of red that change so markedly it's as if the sandstone's minerals are oxidising before my eyes. At equally popular dawn, Uluru is starkly silhouetted as it emerges out of the darkness as if from the beginnings of time. But sunset offers a little extra – a full moon, perhaps, in certain cycles, that hovers alongside Uluru, and the proximity of Bruce Munro's Field of Light installation of 50,000 illuminated spindles covering an area the size of seven footy grounds amid an eerie, elemental landscape that can't fail to stir the soul. **Stay** Sails in the Desert or Desert Gardens; ayersrockresort.com.au
parksaustralia.gov.au
SUSAN KUROSAWA

KOSCIUSZKO NATIONAL PARK, NSW

Sunset comes early in the Snowy Mountains in winter. It's a time of day notable not because the sky is awash with fluoro colours but

due to the gentle blue hue that descends all around as the sun disappears behind the ranges. It's a colour that's matched by the distinctive hush found only in a landscape muffled by snow. The chairlifts are silent, skiers have headed home on weary legs. Take a walk at this hour and the only sound you might hear is the crunch of your boots compacting the ice into patches of that same steel blue. It's my favourite part of the day, when I'm wrapped in the tired satisfaction of hours of physical exertion. My accommodation will be warm, with something suitably hearty on the stove. And as the dark engulfs the mountains, critters come out to play, leaving their little footprints in the snow for us to discover in the morning. **Stay** Numbananga Lodge at Smigin Holes; nationalparks.nsw.gov.au
visitsw.com

PENNY HUNTER

MINDIL BEACH, DARWIN

It's sun-worshipping with a ritualistic touch that could hark back to ancient civilisations; just add cans of beer or a chilled white. As the tropical sun, which has been high and mighty all day, sinks, Darwin residents and visitors gather within sight of water, at the harbour, Nightcliff foreshore or Cullen Bay, to mark the glorious departure. My favourite spot is

Mindil Beach where from April to October (Thursdays and Sundays) a Sunset Market with scores of arts and crafts and food stalls showcases the exuberant multiculturalism of the Top End. Locals tell me to look for the Green Flash, which can be seen above the sun just as it disappears. Maybe another sip of syrup might aid this apparition (like a leprechaun), I think, but it's a real, if rare, meteorological phenomenon. In the wet season, stay around for nature's double bill – a lightning display that can command the night sky with a ferocious beauty. **Stay** DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Darwin; hilton.com
northernterritory.com

GRAHAM ERBACHER

IKARA-FLINDERS RANGES, SA

From a ridge atop Chace Range, we have a panoramic view over the rims of Wilpena Pound, the ruckled Elder Range, and beyond to the distant shore of the dry Lake Torrens. This ancient, haunting landscape has long bewitched artists and filmmakers; Hans Heysen made the trek along rough bush roads in an A-Model Ford. We've arrived at this eyrie by helicopter and huddle around a campfire as the sun sinks and the show begins. Timeworn rocks spring to life as though spot-lit, ramparts morphing from red to blue against a darkening sky. Light thick as honey pools in the shadows of cypresses, creeps beneath the dry skirts of grass trees. And where a filmmaker might overlay a soaring soundtrack, nature conjures a silence deep as time as fire-red skies give way to night and a million stars. **Stay** Rawnsley Park Station; rawnsleypark.com.au
southaustralia.com
CHRISTINE MCCABE

TWILIGHT BRIDGE CLIMB, SYDNEY

The farther the sun drops, the higher we must climb to see it. We're atop the arch of Sydney Harbour Bridge, 134m above the water and its ferry wakes. From nowhere an old Rolling Stones line comes to mind, "... the world was a carpet laid before me". And there it is, Sydney unfurled like its own story, from the giant trusses and struts of the bridge to the ancient scooped shorelines of Lavender and Berrys bays. Beyond the silhouettes of Barangaroo's dark tower, Cockatoo Island and the cat's-

cradle web of Anzac Bridge, the sun dips to the horizon and takes a flashy bow. It has already left the building but the show's not over. The sky arcs up into a long bonfire encore as we descend by twilight and the sun struts its dawn stuff somewhere new. **Stay** Harbour Rocks Hotel Sydney MGallery; harbourrocks.com.au.

bridgeclimb.com
JOHN BORTHWICK

LADY ELLIOT ISLAND, QLD

For the most part, Australia's east coasters need to travel to western neighbour states to witness the beauty of the sun setting over the sea. Lady Elliot Island, which sits 80km off the coast of Bundaberg at the southernmost point of the Great Barrier Reef, is one of few places that bucks nature's design, thanks to its distance from the mainland. Each night, weather permitting, resort staff set up a drinks station near the island's 19th-century lighthouse, where guests can purchase a (literal) sundowner cocktail to enjoy while sitting on the sand as the fiery sun turns the sky to orange, pink and purples and vanishes into the watery horizon. From June to October, there's a strong likelihood of seeing migrating whales silhouetted against the skyline as night draws in. **Stay** Lady Elliot Eco Resort; ladyelliott.com.au
queensland.com

ALEXANDRA CARLTON

BRUNY ISLAND, TASMANIA

This "little island off the island" is the ultimate microcosm, with all the pristine hallmarks of Tasmania in miniature, from dramatically rugged seascapes and old forests to far-reaching views of the wild Tasman Sea. The historic Cape Bruny Lighthouse, first lit in 1838 and restored to grand working order, is such a great vantage point for molten-gold sunsets that Bruny Island Safaris, the only tour company given access by the state parks and wildlife service, has created a dedicated excursion. The lighthouse's isolation on spectacular dolerite cliffs, an impressive feat of engineering, provides a blue-ribbon position as the horizon starts to flare into colour. A massive outlook out to sea gives each sunset astonishing grandeur of scale, but the sky is far from empty. White-bellied sea eagles and albatross caw as they swoop and dive over

