

Shortcuts

R&R

A world away from room service

Forget the fly-and-flop (momentarily...). Right now, Australians are looking for more immersive, authentic holidays, writes **SHYLIE RIMMER**

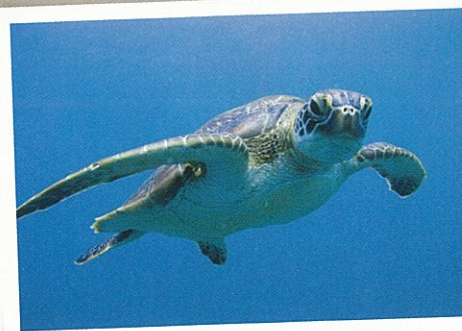
The week-long cruise is definitely enjoyable from time to time... but what if you want to bring home something deeper than a tan? There's a lot to be said for luxury, it's true – but if you want to avoid the typical tourist trip, there are plenty more authentic adventures to be found.

Take homestay.com, for example – the website launched in Australia just one year ago and, at time of print, offers 878 stays across the country. Unlike more readily known airbnb.com, this concept is based around living like a local, with a local. Sign up, and you can stay in someone's home (all hosts have had a thorough background check) and have them show you around the area the way only a local can, and for a lot less than a hotel room (\$40–\$120 per night).

A different kind of homestay is brewing in Arnhem Land, too: newly launched indigenous company Lirrwi Tourism (lirrwitourism.com.au)

provides Australians with the opportunity to immerse themselves in the daily lives and traditions of the Yolngu people. Stay with local families on ancestral soil, take part in customary ceremonies and get your hands busy with fishing, food gathering and crafts. The initiative aims to provide direct income for communities.

If you're looking to finish your vacation like you've made a tangible difference, there are other alternatives: like BlazeAid (blazeaid.com). In 2009, when Black Saturday fires tore through Marysville and its surrounds, what sprung from the ashes was Kevin and Rhonda Butler's creation – a team effort which saw the rebuilding of fences on farmlands across the region. Since then, the BlazeAid team has gone on to help victims of Cyclone Yasi and various drought-stricken areas around Queensland. You can volunteer for a day, a week or more, but be prepared for fairly basic accommodation, though – you'll be working in a disaster zone after all.



Pack your flippers – the gorgeous turtles in World-Heritage-listed Ningaloo Reef need you!

Finally, if you like the idea of voluntourism but prefer not to, you know, shower with thongs on, there are plenty of environmental causes that need help (and often in incredible locations). We like The Ningaloo Turtle Program (ningalooturtles.org.au) which calls for volunteers between December and January to step out of the hotel and onto the beach to help save the little green locals of Western Australia.