



The recent (and still current) fires that have swept across Australia are, without a doubt, devastating. But, as much as it's heartbreaking to see those horrific images of the injured koalas and people wearing mouth masks, it's equally as inspiring to witness the collective power of the human spirit.

The millions of dollars in donations. The issue being weaved into speeches at the Golden Globe Awards. The endless flow of Instagram photos, from everyday people doing their part to help.

There's a silver lining to tragedies like the Australian fires. It challenges our perceptions, prompts us to act differently, and hopefully, become part of the solution.



Now is the time to take a trip locally.

This is THE time to travel, not avoid it

While you might not be thinking of taking a trip to these affected regions, this is exactly what these broken communities need. Tourism plays an integral role in helping these areas rebuild and thrive again. Many of the fires have occurred in small towns that rely on tourism and travellers... to buy their petrol, enjoy the local shops, eat at the bakeries and restaurants, and spend money on activities.

In fact, South Australia Tourism have launched the **Book Them Out** campaign to encourage travellers to visit the Adelaide Hills and Kangaroo Island. Tour with a local guide, meet the wildlife, buy the local produce, spirits, and wine, and stay a few nights.



Meet the local wildlife. Image: Nicole Brandon

Planning a trip to fire-affected areas

The millions of dollars in donations probably won't reach down to help 'Joe, who owns the local supermarket' – at least, not for some time. Your choice to travel to these areas (well after they've been contained) will quickly inject desperately needed cash into the local economies.



Show your support by staying in their accommodation and filling up your eskies.

Pick the region and check for safety updates

Take some time to survey the areas that have been the most affected across Australia. Are they regions you've always wanted to visit? Pick a location like Kangaroo Island, for example, making sure you're up to date with the latest news to ensure you're safe. Check-in with the local CFS updates and connect with someone who can give you location suggestions. Half of the island has been wiped out, but an equally large part of it has come through unscathed.



Be up to date with the last safety information on the region.



Work with local tourism providers

It's important to do your research, speak to local providers and be conscious of who you choose to travel with. Look for the companies who exist *in* and around the regions, so you know your money is going to directly and immediately help get them on the road to recovery.



Your next road trip can inject much-needed funds into fire-affected areas.

Take notice of local brands (and buy them at home)

You know that honey farm you visited in KI or that Adelaide Hills wine that you loved? Look for these local brands and support them from afar, once you've returned home. This is going to be a long road for these families, businesses, communities, and our country as a whole. The media will move onto the next, big news cycle... while these regions' towns, people, flora and fauna, have no choice but to take it one day at a time.



Support local produce, even after you've returned home. Image: Steve Hudson

Be prepared to experience new emotions

It's not often that travellers turn towards natural disasters. Safety threats aside, visiting regions that have experienced great trauma and loss, is emotionally challenging. So, it's important to prepare yourself to experience a broad range of emotions, as you're walking around these fire-torn towns. But this is the mystery of travel. It opens our eyes, our worldview, and is the greatest of teachers.



Think about the impact you have on the environment.

Think about your impact

This is a chance for us to take an honest look at our own actions. Are you recycling? Using a lot of single plastic? Over-consuming and taking unnecessary flights? There are always ways to make choices when you travel that have less impact on the environment.

We must be responsible for our own behaviours and take an honest look at what's not serving humankind. Change always follows contrast, and we can start today.

Postpone the big overseas trips and let's continue to show the world what the Aussie spirit is all about. *Mateship!*