



When you can't go exploring overseas, why not set the challenge to find somewhere within Australia that's a bit out of the way instead? My goal was to experience something off the beaten path and have a true adventure.

I found it right here in South Australia: St Francis Island in [the Nuyts Archipelago](#) – a group of roughly 30 islands and reefs off the coast of Ceduna in the Great Australian Bight.



St Francis Island is the base for 3 night/4 day expeditions.

I managed to sneak a spot on the first-ever 'test' tour out to St Francis Island which, at around 2,000 acres, is the second-largest island in the group and sits approximately 60km off the coast. Before you get too excited over the thought of an island getaway, this is not the Whitsundays. We're talking remote, rugged and wild, with not a palm tree or fancy cocktail in sight.



There is a limit of 12 passengers per tour.

The history of the island is all a bit sketchy, and details are lacking on what, how, when and where. A hundred or so years ago, it was used as a base for sheep farming and at some stage, it was likely part of the whaling industry. Our goal was to be amongst the small handful of people who have camped on the island over the last century.

I was personally interested in seeing some cool wildlife and having a unique adventure. One that's not experienced by the masses and has not saturated Instagram feeds or been hashtagged to death.

Wowee, did I manage to achieve that!



The good looking carpet python.

We'd been on the island for a grand total of about 45-seconds before the first python slithered through camp. Now, I'm no fan of the old nope rope/danger noodle/wiggle stick, but this was one good looking [snake](#). Also, I didn't even know we had pythons in South Australia! Bonus points for the fact that, unlike the snakes I usually see, this one can't actually [kill you](#). Winning.



The islands of Nuyts Archipelago are a sanctuary for birds.

Being a bit of a [bird lover](#), I was hoping to see some white-bellied sea eagles and this area is what you would describe as a *hot spot*. Ducking between islands on the boat we managed to see three separate birds, including one on a nest.

Some people might not overly care much about such things, but I was totally doing a happy dance. We also saw a bunch of ospreys which was pretty cool.



A population of over 500,000 short-tailed shearwaters mate and nest on the island.

Despite the many species of birds, the island is most famous for its local population of a few hundred thousand shearwaters, aka mutton birds – yes, because of how they taste, no, I didn't eat one.

Each morning before dawn they head out to sea to do whatever it is shearwaters do out there – swim, fish, frolic? At sunset, they fly back to the island and to their underground nests. I don't care if you're into birds or not, seeing a 'swarm' of thousands and thousands of birds descending on the island is a sight to behold. Unless you remember that Hitchcock film *The Birds*, in which case it might be truly terrifying!



It's a careful walk through the shearwater nesting ground to reach the ruins.

Birds aside, we also explored some small sea caves and checked out the old farmer's ruins. To think that someone from way back when, was silly enough to believe the island would be a good place to keep sheep.

There's some pretty great snorkelling straight off the beach too and oh, that's right, a pod of friendly dolphins swam right up to shore a few times a day. I even managed to jump in and say *hi* to them during our trip and yes it was cold but come on people, dolphins! Dolphins that you can swim with! Those that are not stuck in a marine park and literally no other people around!

I'm classifying it as one of the most ridiculously coolest things I've done in a very long time. To be fair, courtesy of Covid, I've done bugger all these last 12 months, but this measures up against stuff I did before 2020 when you could actually go places.



Ruddy turnstones are among the many types of birds inhabiting the islands of the Nuyts Archipelago.

If you're into critters there were also some crazy little spiders, some sea lions and a legless lizard – not drunk, it just didn't have any legs and I'm still convinced that makes it a snake but apparently not.

Back to birds, it was spotters paradise! Among the sea eagles, ospreys and shearwaters, there was also sooty oystercatchers, hooded plovers, ruddy turnstones, honeyeaters, rock parrots, and terns. Just to name a few!



Tour operator, Rod, worked with National Parks SA to offer these small group expeditions.

You're probably thinking this all sounds pretty great, and you'd be right. So, why isn't it more popular? Well, there's a catch.

First of all, it's remote. Not 'remote' as in the kind of stuff they say in brochures to lure you in, but this is actually remote. Not just a little bit remote, I mean really remote. 60km offshore means you ain't swimming there or even taking your tinny out for a quick look around. You need a big boat to get out there and on top of that, a fair chunk of the journey is across a particularly tricky section of water, so you need to really know what you're doing to make the return trip safely.

St Francis Island is part of the Nuyts Archipelago Wilderness Protection Area and visitors must leave no trace. Since they are the only tours operating, the good people at EP Cruises have special permission to keep a few basics on the island to avoid having to cart everything in and out for each expedition.



It was a mighty storm!

We went in November which the locals call 'Blowvember' so our weather was rough. We got out there easily enough, but couldn't get back safely and ended up having to wait out the worst of a storm by spending an extra day. Then the trip back was a tad bumpy, but I've seen photos from tours since our 'tester' and in place of the rain and forks of lightning we endured, these tours boast clear skies and calm seas.



We camped in the dunes and despite the storm, our swags held up really well.

If you're a nature lover and like solitude, the ocean, wildlife, fresh seafood, snorkelling,



hiking, exploring near to uncharted territory and having very cool camping experiences, this is well worth looking into. You might even spot a cheeky whale swimming past! We saw one at a distance but during whale season you're better off heading to 'nearby' Fowlers Bay.



Swimming with wild dolphins is the coolest thing I've done in a long time.

For what it's worth, here's what I packed for this remote and wild island adventure:

1. Warm clothes – I love merino for the comfort, warmth and stink-less-ness. A quick dip in the ocean was my shower.
2. Waterproof jacket.
3. Snorkelling gear including a 5mm wetsuit.
4. Merrell Moab 2 hiking boots – these are awesome and go with me everywhere!
5. I slept in a 23Zero Dual Swag – it kept me nice and dry and held up well in some pretty extreme weather.
6. Warm sleeping bag – I have two but when size/space/weight isn't an issue I go for the Coleman Pilbara. It's super roomy and comfy.

EP Cruises supplied food, water, tables, chairs, and a couple of gazebos for shelter... but I took snacks. Because... snacks!

What's been your wildest, most remote adventure?