

DIVE IN FOR GREAT DINING

LIKE torpedoes, they rocket from the deep and hurtle towards me – metallic flashes of streamlined muscle.

They whiz past my face, power under my arms and dive for another onslaught at the pilchards tossed into the water.

It's not every day you get to swim with your dinner. And who knew swimming with southern bluefin tuna would be such fun?

Tuna are non-stop swimmers, needing to travel at least their body length every second to get enough oxygen. They can accelerate at twice the speed of a Ferrari and swim up to 70km/h, but are so agile they never once bump into me in the confined space of the harbour pen.

I'm exploring Australia's seafood frontier on South Australia's Eyre Peninsula.

Swimming with tuna is one of many activities based around the peninsula's prolific seafood produce, which includes oysters, mussels, prawns, abalone, rock lobster, calamari, sardines, tuna, King George whiting, kingfish and snapper.

Two hours later I'm in Del Giorno's Cafe and Restaurant at Port Lincoln, dining on locally farmed tuna. It doesn't get much fresher and it's heartening to know the tuna is sustainably farmed.

Port Lincoln, on the tip of the Eyre Peninsula, has the largest commercial fishing fleet in the southern hemisphere, and it is rumoured there are more millionaires here per capita than anywhere else in the country.

But the locals are laid-back, friendly and happy to share their stories.

Briar Jensen visits Australia's culinary frontier – the Eyre Peninsula Seafood Trail

Matt Waller, a fourth-generation fisherman, set up Adventure Bay Charters five years ago to offer visitors an insight into the fishing industry and a chance to swim with tuna, sea lions and great white sharks.

"Tourism helps people understand the industry and sustainable fishing methods," says Waller on his interpretive walking tour of the marina precinct.

Lincoln Cove Marina, built in 1985 to protect the fishing fleet, is a hive of activity.

Trawlers unload pallets of snap-frozen prawns. Crews repair massive wire cables used to trawl their nets. Boats load up with pilchards for the tuna farms. Seagulls whirl expectantly overhead, while a pelican eyes the action from a nearby pylon.

Waller says after the introduction of quotas in the 1980s dramatically reduced the tuna fleet, the region's fishing industry embraced sustainability, with some sectors holding the world's leading certification for sustainable practices.

Prawn trawlers work on average 55 nights a year, on the "dark side of the moon", fishing only about 15 per cent of the Spencer Gulf.

Southern bluefin tuna are caught to a strict

quota in the Great Australian Bight then taken to farms where they are fattened on pilchards for five to eight months.

Coffin Bay, on the eastern side of the peninsula, is famous for its oysters.

At the local boat ramp, men swaddled in multiple wetsuits, heads bent to the wind, scurry between colossal tractors and steel boats laden with oyster bags.

At Pure Coffin Bay Oysters, Chris Hank explains how Pacific and native angasi oysters are farmed. Over 18 months, they're regularly brought in for grading. They're placed in bags with progressively larger mesh, facilitating greater water flow. The bags hang from lines suspended in water near the harbour entrance.

Terrified I'll stab myself with the lethal-looking knife, I let Hank shuck an oyster for me. It's plump and deliciously salty, plucked from the water only two hours earlier.

The oysters obviously thrive here and I can see why. The water is gin clear, even way up the harbour at the boat ramp.

On the drive back to Port Lincoln, I stop by the two local cellar doors, Delacolline Estate, with fields of lavender between the vines, and Boston Bay Wines, which has views over vines to the bay beyond.

Back in town, the deck of the Marina Hotel proves the ideal spot to relax with a drink and watch fishing boats come and go and a pod of dolphins scope out the marina.

At Sarin's Restaurant in the Port Lincoln Hotel, dinner is an entree of tuna rosettes followed by a seafood platter piled high with



UNIQUE LOCATIONS: Swimming with tuna (main); oyster farmer Chris Hank (top); the bar at the Port Lincoln Hotel (above).

King George whiting, Coffin Bay oysters, grilled king prawns, Kinkawooka mussels and salt-and-pepper squid, accompanied by a Delacolline semillon sauvignon blanc.

But you don't have to dine out to enjoy local produce. Pop into a direct-to-the-public outlet for a variety of fresh seafood, preparation advice and recipe suggestions. Or buy a cheap fishing rod and a bag of cockles and for less than \$10 you can catch your own from the jetty. I heard of one chap who caught his limit of squid in 15 minutes.

The writer was a guest of South Australian Tourism.

TRAVEL MATE

GETTING THERE: Port Lincoln is about a six-hour drive from Adelaide (including a two-hour ferry ride). There are daily flights between Adelaide and Port Lincoln.

STAYING THERE: The Port Lincoln Hotel sits on the Boston Bay foreshore. See portlincolnhotel.com.au or ph (08) 8621 2000.

DOING THERE: Collect a Seafood Trail booklet from the Port Lincoln Visitor Information Centre or see seafoodtrail.com.

View, hand feed or swim with southern bluefin tuna with Adventure Bay Charters, which also has marina walking and tasting tours. See adventurebaycharters.com.au or ph (08) 8682 2979. Fresh Fish Place runs oyster and seafood tasting tours. See portlincolnseafood.com.au or ph (08) 8682 2166. Pure Coffin Bay Oysters runs an oyster shed tour and tasting. See coffinbayoysters.com.au or ph (08) 8522 1810. **MORE INFO:** southaustralia.com or visitportlincoln.net

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