

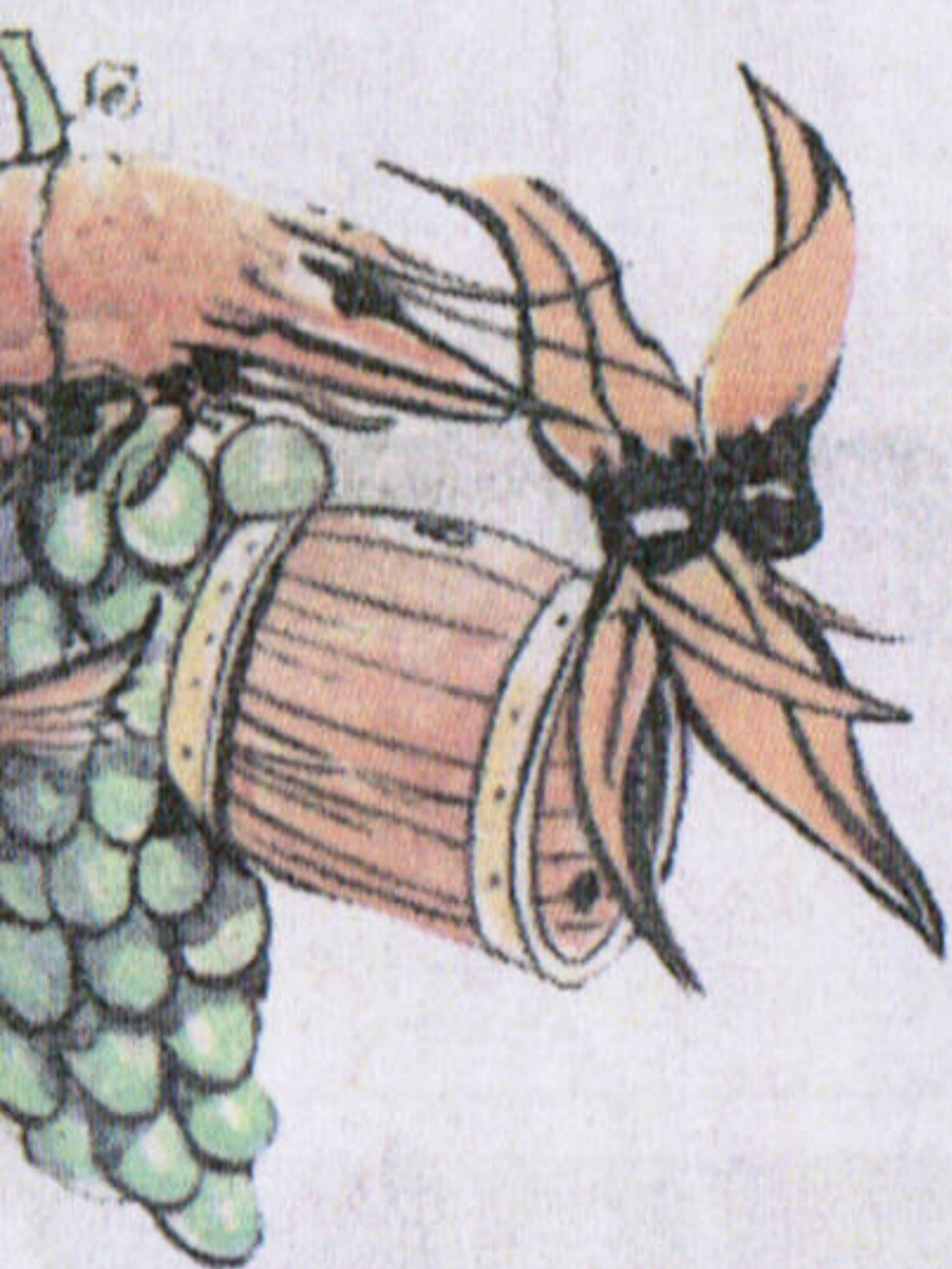
# Almost French

With great beaches, sunny weather and fine food and wine, the Fleurieu Peninsula has everything you could want for a magic summer holiday, writes **Bruce Elder**.





Signs of summer ... old boat shed at Second Valley on the Fleurieu Peninsula. Photo: SATC/Adam Bruzzone



## SOUTH AUSTRALIA SPECIAL

In these “interesting times”, if you are thinking of going to the Mediterranean for a Peter Mayles-like summer sojourn, you might like to consider a safer and cheaper alternative. Such as the Fleurieu Peninsula.

“But,” you cry, “what about the olive groves, the vineyards, the fine food, the lazy, warm Mediterranean nights, the friendly locals, the discoveries of gourmet wonders at the local markets, the delicious local pizzas, the fresh fish served with glorious salads and lots of fine wines, crispy bread and virgin olive oil?”

Don't worry. The Fleurieu has them all. And, as

a bonus, the air is cleaner, it's not crowded and the weather seems permanently sunny. Fine wines flow from every bottle and barrel and the sense of relaxation is overpowering.

The Fleurieu – named after Comte Charles Pierre Claret de Fleurieu by the French explorer Nicholas Baudin – is bounded by Cape Jervis in the south, the vineyards of McLaren Vale in the north, Gulf St Vincent in the west and Lake Alexandrina in the east.

Every corner is seen as a possible weekend destination by Adelaide residents. They drive down to Goolwa and Hindmarsh Island to go boating.

They go bushwalking in Deep Creek Conservation Park. They stock their cellars with wines from McLaren Vale. They find their favourite beach town, then swim, fish and laze around. They do overtly holiday and touristy type activities in Victor Harbor (yes, it really is spelt the American way). They gorge themselves in boutique restaurants and purchase the region's heady and diverse produce. And, most recently, they have started heading off to Yankalilla Bay, where in 2002 the navy scuttled HMAS Hobart (now a popular dive site).



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Adelaide is easy to exit. Get onto the Anzac Highway, at the western end of South Terrace, glide into the M13 and you're on your way. Thirty-five minutes later vineyards stretch to the horizon. This is McLaren Vale.

There's no simple way of exploring wine regions. Either you're an aficionado – which means you head straight for the winery of your choice and demand cases of the 1998 cabernet sauvignon – or you mooch like an eyeless Samson. My technique was to ask someone knowledgeable, which yielded a must-do list that included Hardys at Reynella (for the history), Coriole, D'Arenberg, Wirra Wirra, Maxwell and Fox Creek.

(There's an excellent 180-page free booklet, *South Australian Secrets: A Glove Box Guide to South Australia's Wine Country*, which devotes 28 pages to the peninsula.)

As I headed into McLaren Vale my first watering hole was Reynella. While there's tasting and a cellar door, the real attraction is the beautiful sandstone home built by John Reynell (now used as offices by BRL Hardy executives), the National Trust-listed

meats and the vineyard's own olive oil – all for a modest \$14 a person.

Further down the hill is the family-run Maxwell Wines, where Mark Maxwell will happily show visitors the daily workings of a winery. The cellar door is literally next to, and above, the vats where the grapes are fermented. In late February and March you can watch as the grapes are crushed.

South of McLaren Vale is Wirra Wirra which, as the driver on a wine tour explained to me, was the vineyard largely

Willunga, is that Russell's pizzas are "the best in Australia". It is one of those claims that can never be verified, but let's say that Russell Jeavons's pizzas are very good and a visit to his ancient shed in the heart of Willunga provides a mixture of high eccentricity and seductive taste thrills.

Russell offers his pizzas to the public only on a Friday night, which means he is always booked out. He seems to employ the entire local teenage population. Russell's son, Tim, was cooking on the night and his many schoolfriends cut bread, doled out antipasto and served apple and mulberry pies for dessert.

The building is rustic and

