

Introducing Western Australia (WA)

Ever heard the expression 'bigger than Texas'? It applies here. You could fit Texas into Western Australia and still have room for New Zealand. There's 12,000km of magnificent coastline and more species of wildflowers than the rest of the world. The western skies blaze with more days of sunshine and certainly more visible stars than most places.

East-coast Australians who have visited speak of the west with a kind of reverence. They tell of wondrous weather and white wine. They describe incredible beauty: a tropical north, ancient rock-art galleries, vast central plains where five broad rivers meet, and a south with giant trees and billion-year-old outcrops of granite. The names are equally pleasing: the Pilbara, Wanna Munna, the Kimberley, Esperance.

Visitors can find themselves travelling infinite roads through forest, mulga scrub or desert. They can lose themselves in leisure or amazing blue water. They can explore the kind of sweeping outback that Australia is famous for. They can learn of the oldest culture in the world and how it has been challenged, but never erased, by the newest. From the bottom of Southeast Asia to the Southern Ocean, there's a lot of space and not many people, but WA is far from empty.

State-Wide Must Sees & Dos

Margaret River – Experience locally produced Sauvignon Blanc in this hugely popular wine region, with its sophisticated restaurants and internationally acclaimed vineyards. There's also some of the best surfing in Australia and wild coastal caves.

Valley of the Giants – Reach amazing heights on the breathtaking Tree Top Walk in this small region of southwest WA, where tingle tingle trees, unique to the area, live for up to 400 years and can grow to 60m.

Ningaloo Marine Park – Swim with the mighty whale sharks or just float over the magnificent coral reefs and extraordinary fish in this stunning marine park, possibly the state's most precious natural resource.

The Kimberley – Explore the ancient and awesome landscape of one of Australia's last great adventure-travel frontiers, a lightly travelled and remote area with fantastic rivers, thunderous waterfalls, deep chasms and bulging boab trees.

The Southern Outback – Discover gold-mining history, ghost towns, wildlife and remote, dry landscapes in the area north and east of Kalgoorlie-Boulder – the outback Australia that many travellers come to see.

Broome – Watch a flaming red sunset as you finish a camel ride along the white sandy stretch of Cable Beach, one of Australia's finest beaches.

Introducing Perth

On experiencing Perth's vibrancy and bountiful beaches, with the rich southern wilderness and wineries at its feet, some visitors wonder why Australians settled for the east coast at all. The southwestern coastline and its capital – the world's most remote city of its size – have all you could want. Most Western Australians (around 80%) agree by choosing to call Perth home. Its riches include constant sunshine, great food, a relaxed pace, natural beauty and space. Even the dogs have their own beach here.

Perth is situated around the wide Swan River. To the east it stretches towards a gentle backdrop of hills and the vineyards of the Swan Valley. In the city centre, the towers of the central business district dominate St Georges Tce. North of here, the Hay and Murray St Malls and arcades are filled with shoppers who spill over into the neighbouring suburbs of Northbridge, Leederville and Highgate.

The high green expanse of King's Park overlooks Perth's western end. Beyond, to the northwest of the city, are the Indian Ocean, stylish Subiaco and the busy beachside suburbs of Cottesloe and Scarborough. Fremantle ('Freo') is only 20 minutes south by car – see 'Don't Miss...' for more information on this fantastic spot.

Perth's Weather

Perth has a long and hot summer where little rain falls and the temperature can stay up around 30°C, especially in January and February. Winds off the sea, known as the 'Fremantle Doctor' help cool the city. Winter brings coolish weather and rain, with a pleasant average temperature of 18°C.

Cultural Overview

The dominant culture in Perth is an outdoors one: it seems most Perthites are devoted to some kind of outdoor activity, whether it's swimming, surfing, fishing, yachting, windsurfing, snorkelling or sunbathing. But this is not all they're about; the city also has a strong artistic community, as is evidenced from its Cultural Centre (see 'Don't Miss...'), with its fabulous museum, galleries and library all in the one place, and its many festivals and events devoted to the arts and the city's rich cultural heritage (see 'Perth Events'). It also has some great bookshops, including the **All Foreign Languages Bookshop**.

All Foreign Languages Bookshop: 101 William St, City Centre. **Phone:** 08 9321 9275

Don't Miss...

Perth's attractions are all within easy reach of the city centre, and many have their own stops on the free Central Area Transit (CAT) bus service (maps of these buses' routes are readily available all over the city). Here are some ideas of what's in store:

Get cultured at the Perth Cultural Centre, where you'll find the **WA Museum**, the **Art Gallery of WA** and the **Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts** – all within easy walking distance of each other, and all excellent.

WA Museum: James St Mall. **Phone:** 08 9427 2700 **Website:** www.museum.wa.gov.au

Art Gallery of WA: 47 James St. **Phone:** 08 9492 6600 **Website:** www.artgallery.wa.gov.au

Institute of Contemporary Arts: 51 James St. **Phone:** 08 9227 6144 **Website:** www.pica.org.au

Don't Miss... (Con't)

Catch a ferry from Perth's Barrack St Jetty to fabulous **Fremantle**, a gorgeous historic port town on the mouth of the Swan River, where you'll find quality museums, a great music and arts scene and excellent cafes and pubs. While there, be sure to check out the lively **Fremantle Markets** (open Fri-Sun).

Fremantle Markets: cnr South Tce & Henderson St

Jump on another ferry for a day trip over to lovely car-free **Rottnest Island** for superb **snorkelling** and **scuba diving**, **swimming** (Longreach and Geordie Bays and The Basin are best), **surfing** (head to Strickland, Salmon and Stark Bays), **cycling** and spotting **quokkas** (cute nocturnal marsupials of the wallaby family, native to southwest WA).

Have a once-in-a-lifetime encounter with **humpback whales** as they pass by Perth on their annual journey to Antarctic waters from September to December – for details on whale-watching cruises, contact **Mills Charters**.

Mills Charters: **Phone:** 08 9246 5334 **Website:** www.millscharters.com.au

Get a sun tan in the middle of a pub at beautiful **Cottesloe's** open-windowed institution the **Ocean Beach Hotel**. Make sure you stay long enough to watch the sun set over the Indian Ocean.

Ocean Beach Hotel: 1 Eric St. **Phone:** 08 9384 5111

Eat & Be Merry At...

Perth has more restaurants per head than anywhere else in the country. Northbridge is the best place to treat your taste buds, Oxford St in Leederville has its fair share of decent cafes and it's also worth the trip to Beaufort St in Mt Lawley (catch bus No 67 or wander up from Northbridge through Highgate). You won't be in Perth long before you hear about the legendary 'Sunday Sesh' (Sunday Session) – this is when just about *everyone* heads to the pub for an afternoon of beer and conversation. Here are a few favourites for eating and being merry:

Start your day right with a 'belly full' breakfast at wonderful **Tarts**, where delicious local Western Australian produce is used in the cooking – yum.

Tarts: 212 Lake St, Northbridge. **Phone:** 08 9328 6607

If you like your Indian food with a kick, don't miss the authentic, spicy Southern Indian delights of **Maya Masala**, especially the *dosa* (huge crepes with delicious fillings).

Maya Masala: cnr Lake & Francis Sts, Northbridge. **Phone:** 08 9328 5655

For an extra special occasion, try all 10 dishes on the famous degustation (small tasters) menu at **Jackson's** – afterwards you'll want to kiss the excellent waiting staff, or chef Hugh Jackson himself.

Jackson's: 483 Beaufort St, Highgate. **Phone:** 08 9328 1177 **Website:** www.jacksonsrestaurant.com.au

On a Sunday afternoon, watch the yachts bob at the marina while sampling the fantastic beers at **Little Creatures**. This outstanding waterfront brewery in a converted warehouse also has an excellent wine list and is great for pizza.

Little Creatures: 40 Mews Rd, Fremantle. **Phone:** 08 9430 5555 **website:** www.littlecreatures.com.au

Another good place for a Sunday Sesh is **Brass Monkey Bar & Brasserie**, which has fantastic indoor and outdoor areas, including a great beer garden.

Brass Monkey Bar & Brasserie: 209 William St, Northbridge. **Phone:** 08 9227 9596

Perth Events

Like other Australian capital cities, Perth loves to celebrate. Here are a few ways you can join in:

Perth Royal Show – This typically Australian agricultural show is a must for overseas visitors. Held in late September, there's a huge amount of entertainment, including sheep dog trials, stunt car jumping, racing pigs(!), stilt-walkers, fireworks, cooking demonstrations, the Grand Parade of animals, heaps of amusement park rides and much more.

Perth Royal Show: Website: www.perthroyalshow.com.au

Artrage – This contemporary arts and local culture festival occurring annually in October around Northbridge, is a month-long celebration of WA's most innovative new talent, along with interstate and overseas guests.

Artrage: Website: www.artrage.com.au

Gay Pride March – On the events calendar since 1990, this Pride Parade is a colourful night-time march that marks the end of October's Pride Festival. It starts at the Brisbane & William Sts intersection, just north of Northbridge.

Gay Pride March: Website: www.pridewa.asn.au

Fremantle Festival & Street Arts Festival – Held in November, the Fremantle Festival celebrates the town's colourful culture, while the Easter Street Arts Festival attracts 100,000+ visitors to see the world's best buskers in action.

Fremantle Festival & Street Arts Festival: Website: www.fremantlefestivals.com

Perth International Arts Festival – Also held in November, this is Australia's oldest international arts festival with an aim to bring art into everyday life, not just to those who are art-lovers. The extensive programme covers music, drama, film, dance, visual arts and literature.

Perth International Arts Festival: Website: www.perthfestival.com.au