

Getting Started

First things first – Western Australia (WA) is huge. Decide what you *really* want to see and then plan just how you're going to manage visiting it. While it's an easy destination to travel through, underestimating the distances between highlights can leave you feeling as if you've driven a stage of a car rally every day, with ridiculously long road trains (semitrailer trucks towing several trailers) and errant wildlife thrown in for good measure. WA is a friendly state that ambles along at a relaxed pace – it's best to do the same.

WHEN TO GO

Deciding when to go to this mammoth state depends on where you want to go, and then seeing if the weather is agreeable at that time of year. During summer (December to February) the temperate southwest of WA attracts hordes of holidaymakers keen to hit the beaches by day and the beer gardens by night, with temperatures often topping 30°C and rarely dropping below 10°C. Around Perth it's magic, if a little hot, and in the outback it's hot as well. In the Kimberley it's the middle of the wet season (November to April), characterised by flash flooding and hot, sticky, oppressive conditions. While nature puts on a magnificent show at this time of year – with waterfalls and spectacular electrical storms – dodgy road access and the aforementioned conditions make it enjoyable for only the most adventurous travellers.

The northern part of WA is best visited in winter (June to August) or early spring (September to mid-October). After the Wet has finished, the river and creek crossings have subsided and the dirt roads opened, the conditions are dry and warm with summer-like averages of 30°C – allowing you to fully explore this magical area. While winter can be quite rainy in the south of the state, spring offers the best weather and opportunity to be dazzled by the fantastic wildflowers.

Along with the weather, keep a wary eye on the school-holiday calendar. At these times, every West Australian with kids decides to pack up and head off to their favourite holiday hot spot. Accommodation from caravan parks to condos is booked solid and seemingly sleepy coastal towns hum with holidaymakers. The Christmas crush is usually at its worst from late December to late January, with other holiday stints in the middle of April, July and October (see Holidays, p254). You've been warned!

COSTS

While Australia today is good value for overseas visitors from Europe and North America, it's no longer a bargain destination. Despite this, holidays

See Climate Charts (p248) for more information.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- sunscreen, sunglasses and a hat to deflect ultra-fierce UV rays (p279)
- a travel-insurance policy covering you for any planned high-risk activities (p254)
- extra-strength insect repellent to fend off merciless flies, midges (sandflies) and mosquitoes (p250)
- your bathing suit – a must for the countless glorious beaches you'll encounter along the way
- plenty of driving music!

TOP TENS

Must-See Movies

These classic West-Aussie-focussed movies give you a great insight into the region's fascinating history and hardships. So dim the lights, tuck into some popcorn and prepare to be intrigued. For reviews, see p27.

- *Ten Canoes* (2006), directed by Rolf de Heer
- *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002), directed by Phillip Noyce
- *Shame* (1987), directed by Steve Jodrell
- *We of the Never Never* (1982), directed by Igor Auzins
- *Gallipoli* (1981), directed by Peter Weir
- *Dingo* (1991), directed by Rolf de Heer
- *Blackfellas* (1993), directed by James Ricketson
- *Last Train to Freo* (2006), directed by Jeremy Sims
- *Japanese Story* (2003), directed by Sue Brooks
- *Roadgames* (1981), directed by Richard Franklin

Top Reads

From historic tales of triumph over adversity to tomes examining the isolation of West Aussie life, WA's literary traditions are strong, with many of the following books achieving critical acclaim in Australia and abroad. For reviews, see p27.

- *Cloudstreet* (1991), by Tim Winton
- *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* (1965), by Randolph Stow
- *A Fortunate Life* (1981), by AB Facey
- *My Place* (1987), by Sally Morgan
- *Land's Edge* (1993), by Tim Winton
- *The Shark Net* (2000), by Robert Drewe
- *The Well* (1987), by Elizabeth Jolley
- *Benang* (1999), by Kim Scott
- *Wheatlands* (2000), by Dorothy Hewett & John Kinsella
- *Red Dog* (2001), by Louis de Bernières

Our Favourite Festivals & Events

Aussies love a good celebration, and the festive spirit comes easily to the people of the West! These are our top 10 favourites – other events are listed on p252 and throughout this book.

- Perth International Arts Festival, January to February (p67)
- National Aboriginal & Islander Day Observance Committee (Naidoc) Week, throughout WA, July (p252)
- Broome's Shinju Matsuri (Festival of the Pearl), September (p229)
- Kalgoorlie-Boulder Racing Round, September (p158)
- Perth Wildflower Festival, September (p253)
- Royal Perth Show, October (p253)
- Fremantle's Blessing of the Fleet, October (p84)
- Awesome Arts Festival, November (p253)
- Margaret River Wine Region Festival, November (p253)
- Fremantle Festival, November (p84)

in WA can still be quite economical for international visitors, with reasonably priced accommodation, and excellent-value food and general everyday costs.

A midrange traveller who plans to hire a car, see the sights, stay in mid-range B&Bs or hotels and have a decent restaurant meal in the evening should expect to be out of pocket at least \$160 per day (if travelling as part of a couple).

At the low-cost end, if you camp or stay in hostels, cook your own meals and avoid big nights out in the pub, you could probably manage on \$60 per day; for a budget that realistically enables you to have a good time, set aside \$80. These low-cost figures don't include long-haul trips, which can punish the budget wallet. Unless you plan to park yourself on a beach for your entire holiday, transport and fuel costs will be one of your biggest expenses (see *Getting Around*, p266).

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Before heading west, pick up some travel literature to help inspire your planning phase.

Robyn Davidson's *Tracks* (1980) describes the author's trek across 2700km of the outback from Alice Springs to Shark Bay in WA, equipped only with humour, determination and a handful of wild camels.

In *Penelope Bungalows to Broome* (2002), affable journalist Tim Bowden drives his beloved 4WD (Penelope) across the Kimberley, Pilbara and Nullarbor, and writes about the star attractions of the West and their history as well as the challenges of travelling through the region. However, it's taken us months to get over the photo of him showering in the nude...

Tony Horwitz's entertaining *One for the Road, An Outback Adventure* (1999) is a high-speed account of his round-Oz hitchhiking trip, including pit stops in Perth and Broome.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology (www.bom.gov.au/weather/wa) Up-to-the-minute information on WA weather and warnings.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Succinct summaries, links to other sites and the Thorn Tree forum.

NatureBase (www.naturebase.net) Official website of the Department of Environment & Conservation (formerly CALM), with detailed information on all national parks in the state.

Perth Now (www.news.com.au/perthnow) Online news site linked to the WA's *Sunday Times* newspaper, with local, national and international news stories and features.

RTRfm (www.rtrfm.com.au) The website of Perth's excellent independent radio station features upcoming gigs as well as a live feed of the station.

Swellnet (www.swellnet.com.au) Daily surf forecasts and webcams for WA; also try Coastalwatch (www.coastalwatch.com).

Tourism Western Australia (www.westernaustralia.com) State government—run site, with excellent sections on accommodation, restaurants, tours and attractions.

West Australian (www.thewest.com.au) Online version of the newspaper; features up-to-date local news, features and opinion.

Western Australia Government (www.wa.gov.au) Official website of the state government of WA; gateway to WA information and services.

LONELY PLANET INDEX

Litre of petrol
\$1.15 upwards!
Litre of bottled water
\$3.50
Middy of beer (VB)
\$3-3.50
Souvenir T-shirt
\$25
Street snack (meat pie)
\$3.50

HOW MUCH?

Bottle of good-quality WA wine
\$15-20
Cup of coffee
\$3-5
Double room in country pub
\$60-80
Surfing lesson
\$45
Whale-watching trip
\$60

Itineraries

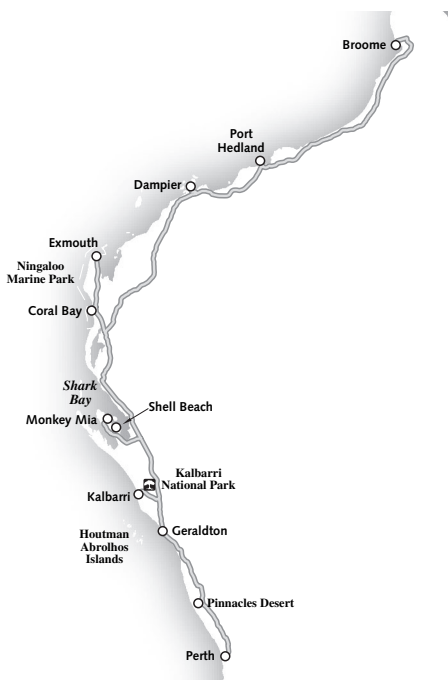
CLASSIC ROUTES

COASTAL CRUISING

One Month / Perth to Broome

Beachcombers, sun-worshippers and water-babies can cruise up Western Australia's splendid coasts to laze on white-sand beaches, swim in crystal-clear seas and snorkel over splendid coral reefs. From **Perth** (p52) take the Brand Hwy north to Cervantes for sunset at the spectacular **Pinnacles Desert** (p173). Hightail it to **Geraldton** (p185) and head offshore to the beautiful **Houtman Abrolhos Islands** (p188). Next stop **Kalbarri** (p190), for fishing and canoeing the sandstone gorges of **Kalbarri National Park** (p190). Continue to World Heritage-listed **Shark Bay** (p193) for marvellous marine life. Splash about with friendly bottlenose dolphins at **Monkey Mia** (p196) then take the **Wula Guda Nyinda walk** (p196) to learn about the indigenous Malgana people's relationship to the sea. Crunch over miniature cockleshells at **Shell Beach** (p193) before continuing to chilled-out **Coral Bay** (p203) and **Exmouth** (p204), for excursions into **Ningaloo Marine Park** (p208) to snorkel, swim with whale sharks, and watch whales on their migration south. Break up the last long haul at **Dampier** (p213) and **Port Hedland** (p218), on your way to **Broome** (p223) to enjoy the sublime sunset over **Cable Beach** (p232).

Travellers can easily do this 3200km journey in a month, but two months would do this spectacular coastline justice and allow you to spend longer at Ningaloo Marine Park, Monkey Mia and Broome.



DRIVING OVER THE TOP

One Month / Broome to Northwest Loop

Take this 4WD camping adventure in Australia's winter – the Dry season in the tropical north – so that you're finishing in spring before the Wet starts. Begin where 'Coastal Cruising' (opposite) ends, or fly into Broome, hire a 4WD and camping gear, and start 'Coastal Cruising' in spring, when it's starting to warm up in the south. Drag yourself away from cosmopolitan **Broome** (p223) after stocking up on supplies, then take to the Great Northern Hwy for the long haul to the outback town of **Fitzroy Crossing** (p239) and a cruise through magnificent **Geikie Gorge** (p238). Enjoy the wildlife – kangaroos, emus and eagles – and the empty road on the way to **Halls Creek** (p239) before camping and bushwalking the beehive domes of the Bungle Bungle Ranges at **Purnululu National Park** (p240). At **Kununurra** (p241) explore **Mirima National Park** (p242) and **Lake Argyle** (p243) and visit the crocodile park at **Wyndham** (p241). Camp your way along the unsealed **Gibb River Road** (p235), stopping off to walk gorgeous **Emma Gorge** (p237) and cruise El Questro Wilderness Park's **Chamberlain Gorge** (p237) to see indigenous art. Don't smile at the crocodiles as you walk through beautiful **Windjana Gorge** (p238), but take time to see how cute bats are in **Tunnel Creek** (p238). Stay overnight at dusty **Derby** (p235) before really escaping to camp on the remote **Dampier Peninsula** (p234). Here, Aboriginal communities with indigenous hosts can show you the best crabbing spots and take you fishing and swimming. Dream about doing it all again on the beaches back in **Broome** (p223).

You could complete this 2000km trip in three weeks, but more comfortably over a month, and with so many wonderful stops en route, why rush? Why not consider working on a pearling boat in Broome or outback station, or volunteering at a national park?



TAILORED TRIPS

SOMETHING WILD

If you like to walk on the wild side – if you're partial to jagged coastal cliffs and craggy windswept countryside, and you love your wildlife untamed – then WA's southwest is for you. Start with a snorkel with wild dolphins in Koombana Bay at **Bunbury** (p115). Beachcombers can marvel at the breathtakingly rugged coastline while surfers can ride some wild waves at **Yallingup** (p121) and **Margaret River** (p123). Head to **Augusta** (p126), Australia's most southwesterly point, to watch magnificent humpback whales (June to

September) from windy Cape Leeuwin. Climb 60m-tall karri trees in the untamed Gloucester National Park at **Pemberton** (p131) and do the **Tree Top Walk** (p134) through the thick canopy of tingle trees in the awesome forest of the Valley of the Giants. Gape at massive sand dunes and enormous granite boulders at **William Bay National Park** (p136), west of **Denmark** (p136). You can get close to wild sea lions on the rocky outcrops, but not too close (the area is known for its freak waves). Finally, gaze at the south's most awe-inspiring scenery, north of **Albany** (p141) at the spectacular **Stirling Range National Park** (p140), where the remarkable thousand-metre-high mountain peaks dramatically strike through the clouds.

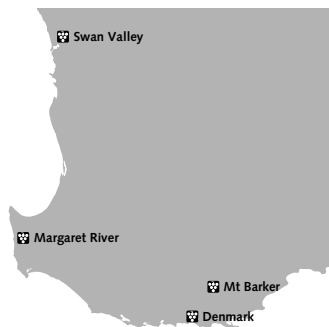


THE GRAPE ESCAPE

WA's original wine-making region, the historic **Swan Valley** (p87), just a short drive from Perth, should be your first port of call – Houghton's, founded back in 1836, is your go-to winery here. The region that really put WA's wines firmly on the world stage, however, is the stunning **Margaret River region** (p123), a couple of hours or so south of Perth. The famous four from the early days (not so way back in the late '60s and early '70s), Cullen Wines,

Cape Mentelle, Moss Wood and Vasse Felix, are all worth a visit. Continue your tasting tour with a couple of the 'newer' wineries – Leeuwin Estate and Voyager Estate. Still thirsty? Boot not full yet? Well if the Margaret River is just too popular for you, head to the Great Southern region, centred around sleepy **Mt Barker** (p140). Big names here include Plantagenet and Goundrey, and in the Frankland River area try Ferngrove and Frankland Estate. Further south a string of eminent winemakers call **Denmark** (p136) home, including West Cape Howe and Howard Park.

For detailed information on our favourite regions and vineyards, see p47.



Snapshot

Western Australia (WA) is booming as if a new gold rush has hit. With a fast-growing state economy that's constantly ahead of the national average, low unemployment and a very optimistic fiscal outlook, WA's confidence is tangible. This self-assuredness was upgraded to extreme buoyancy in September 2006 when one of the local Australian Rules football teams, the West Coast Eagles, won the national competition – for there is nothing the locals love better than one-upping the eastern states.

However, there's more to this sentiment than just winning a game of footy. WA has, since its inception, felt undervalued and underfinanced by the eastern states, and in turn by the federal government, which it sees as always happy to reap the rewards of WA's vast mining riches, but continually slow to recompense with federal infrastructure projects. Any hint of erosion of state powers reawakens the debate of WA seceding from Australia, a long-held, sometimes acted on, but ultimately unfulfilled desire (see p25).

While WA's economic outlook is generally rosy, the big western state has its fair share of droughts, bushfires, floods and cyclones that play havoc with its pastoral and farming communities. Water conservation is a huge issue in WA and in the lead-up to the 2005 state elections, it became a focal point. The Opposition Liberal-National coalition leader, Colin Barnett, came up with a bizarre proposal to build the world's longest canal to deliver water to Perth from the Kimberley to solve the problem. The Labor Premier, Geoff Gallop, proposed a \$350 million desalination plant. Common sense won through and so did the Labor Party. However, less than one year after being re-elected, Gallop resigned in order to fight his battle with depression. Alan Carpenter was sworn in as his successor on 25 January 2006.

WA's current boom is being driven by an audacious mining sector; however, this is not without its controversies. The fate of the state's old-growth forests and natural wilderness areas (such as Ningaloo Reef) has been widely debated, with the interests of mines, resorts and other business development constantly at odds with conservationists (see p36). One thing they can all agree on is how unwelcome the state's newest guest, the cane toad, is. This pest's entry into WA has constantly been in the news, with the formation of local vigilante groups such as the 'Kimberley Toad Busters', with its slogan, 'If everyone was a toadbuster, the toads would be busted.'

One development replacing cane toads and football as water-cooler conversation was the successful native claim title over the metropolitan area of Perth by the local Noongar Aboriginal people in September 2006. While this landmark decision has given other claimants across Australia renewed hope, back in Perth the talk was about the challenge to the decision at both federal and state levels. While there might be a gold rush on, it appears that closure for the long-standing issue of native title will have to wait.

FAST FACTS

Population: about 2.04 million people, 25.6 million sheep & lambs

Foreign-born Western Australians: around 33%

GSP (Gross State Product) growth: approx 2.7% (2004–05)

Inflation: 3% (2006)

Percentage of Australian exports: 25%

Unemployment rate: 3.6%

Average gross weekly income: \$811.70

Western Australia's coastline: 12,500km long

Number of wildflower species: 12,000

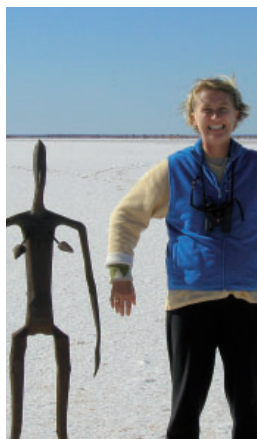
WA has approximately one-third of Australia's landmass and one-tenth of the population

On the Road



TERRY CARTER Coordinating author

During the gruelling road trip through the North we passed an untold number of brilliant surfing breaks, some well-known, some secret. However, the Margaret River area (p123), Western Australia's (WA's) spiritual home of surfing, is something else. The beauty of WA's wild coast with its fine wines and fab food is unmatched... Australia, you bloody beauty!



VIRGINIA JEALOUS A cold, clear day and salty Lake Ballard (p161) morphed into a snow-field, crunching slightly underfoot and glary enough to make me squint behind sunglasses. In mid-horizon floated a mirage of salt shimmering into water, the horizontal planes of lake and sky broken by silhouettes of sculpted steel. Magic.



LARA DUNSTON Coordinating author

First day of research, we swept north through sunny Perth cruising an easy 270km through the Swan Valley to Cervantes. Nothing prepared me for the magic of the Pinnacles (p173) at sunset. Sublime, I thought. If the other landscapes and light are as spectacular as this, it will be bliss. And 13,000km later? They were.



REBECCA CHAU The ferry to Rottnest (p91) is always full of promise. The trip back (pictured) is merely a chance to sleep, when pictures of the island's clownfish flutter beneath the eyelids. An author never nods on the job for long, though, so soon enough I was up in the best spot on the ferry: the back deck, for full sea-spray and sun.

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