

# Travel AUSTRALIA



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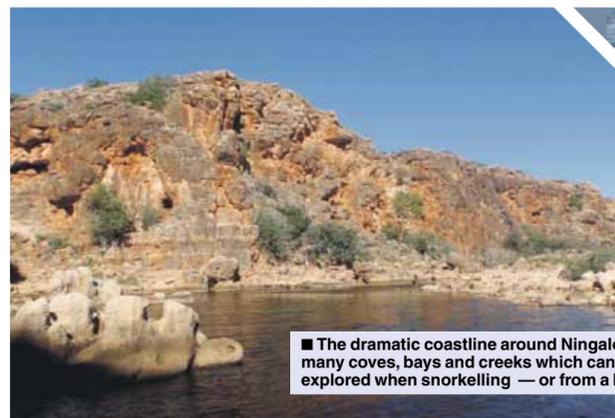
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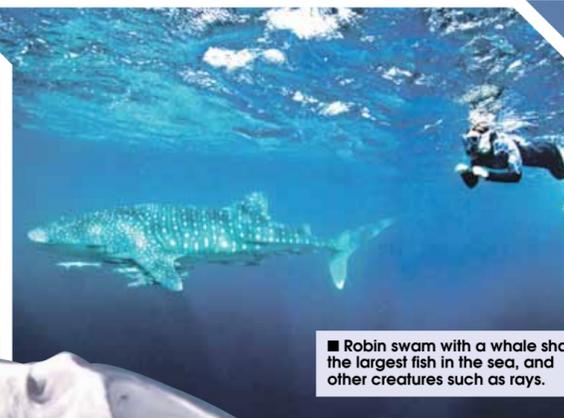
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■ The dramatic coastline around Ningaloo has many coves, bays and creeks which can be explored when snorkelling — or from a boat.



■ Robin swam with a whale shark, the largest fish in the sea, and other creatures such as rays.

■ Staying on the Shore Thing catamaran is the ideal base for seeing Australia's sealife and spectacular sunsets.

By Robin McKelvie

I've always wanted to venture to Perth, with its epic skyscrapers, sweeping sandy beaches and vast natural playground on its doorstep.

It's a playground where you can swim with the world's largest fish — the elusive whale shark.

We're talking, of course, not of Scotland's Perth, but of Perth in Western Australia, the world's most remote state capital.

I headed to the other side of the world to check out the biggest urban rebuilding programme in the city's history and to swim with those mighty marine monsters at the UNESCO World Heritage listed Ningaloo Reef.

Getting Down Under has never been easier with Emirates now offering Glasgow to Dubai flights twice a day with a good choice of onward connections that meant I arrived in Perth, not jet lagged, but rather shopping lagged after a day delving through the Emirates' malls and souqs.

My base in Perth was the brand new Frasers Suites (perth.frasershospitality.com). They have apartments in Glasgow and Edinburgh too, but not with views like these.

Outside the floor to ceiling windows, a forest of skyscrapers exploded all around and the Swan River, where European settlers first chanced upon the land that was to become today's prosperous city, blinked back in brilliant sunny welcome.

From my lofty apartment I could see how easy Perth is to navigate on foot with its grid-like street pattern, but I chose to join a walking tour with the award-winning Two Feet And A Heartbeat (twofoot.com.au). Their bright and breezy guides fill you in on the little colourful snippets and hearsay that help flesh out the story of this beguiling city.

Perth is booming from the wealth culled from its mineral

# Ningaloo is the hot place for swimming ... with sharks!

rich hinterland. The city centre is being totally transformed with the main railway station dug underground and a new leisure oasis being built in the gap to connect the two sides of the city.

Booming Perth also boasts a flurry of superb restaurants that serve boat-fresh seafood, hulking great steaks and the famed white wines of the Margaret River and Swan Valley.

At the Apple Daily & Eating House (Print Hall, 125 St Georges Terrace) Asian spices brought the fresh Western Australian produce alive, while at The Trustee on St Georges Terrace (thetrustee.com.au) I savoured their legendary chateaubriand with bone marrow. Delicious.

All too soon it was time to leave Perth's beaches and parks and

venture off in search of those whale sharks.

After a short flight north I arrived in Exmouth, the biggest town around the Ningaloo Reef, Australia's largest fringing coral reef, voted recently the number one snorkelling spot in the country. And that's saying something in a country blessed with the Great Barrier Reef!

At Ningaloo the reef comes right into the shore so at many points you can just pop on a snorkel mask and flippers and slip straight in to explore the myriad marine life.

As soon as your face is in the water the hubbub of the modern world eases away and you enter a world of shimmering coral gardens and glittering shoals of fish. There are more than 500 fish

species here alone. Turn one way and you'll see a turtle glide by, the other, a ray resting gently on the seabed.

You're unlikely to stumble across one of the elusive whale sharks when snorkelling, so I headed into the deeper water with Ocean Eco Adventures (www.oceanecoventures.com.au). They have their own spotter plane, which soon sent us off in search of the world's largest fish.

I've been travel writing for more than 15 years and it's not often I whoop louder than my daughters, but I'm not ashamed to admit that I did when I thrust my head under the water and caught my first sight of one of these leviathans.

Swimming alongside these graceful mottled grey whale sharks is quite simply one of the world's great travel experiences.

In one afternoon I swam with a number of whale sharks, some of them easily more than twice the length of my family car.

Again and again you are allowed back in for another snorkel so you spend some proper time with them.

The beauty of sailing around Ningaloo is that it doesn't just end with the whale sharks.

I spent two nights aboard Sail Ningaloo's (sailingningaloo.com.au) elegant Shore Thing catamaran. There's plenty of opportunity to get into the water with the giant manta rays, loggerhead turtles and sharks.

I quickly learned to trust the crew's advice that the reef and nurse sharks in Ningaloo are not dangerous!

If you're not keen on getting in the water yourself you can just relax on the stable yacht.

From the decks you scan the waters for a smorgasbord of other creatures that call Ningaloo their home or are passing through on their migrations.

I spent one morning watching the dolphins frolicking and mighty humpback whales breaching. On my last evening I savoured one of the epic sunsets that Ningaloo and Western Australia are famous for.

I'm a big fan of Scotland's Perth, but if you have a taste for fine wine, superb food, buzzing cities and world-class wildlife experiences its antipodean cousin and the neighbouring Ningaloo coast are quite a find too.

**FACTBOX**  
Further tourist information from Tourism Western Australia at [westernaustralia.com](http://westernaustralia.com)  
Return flights from Glasgow with Emirates to Perth via Dubai start at £780 (business class beds are available) from [emirates.com](http://emirates.com)  
Barrhead Travel at [barrheadtravel.co.uk](http://barrheadtravel.co.uk) arrange package holidays that take in Perth and Ningaloo.

