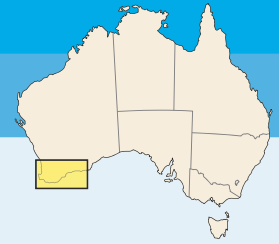


Your great Australian journey starts here

SOUTH-WEST, BEACHES AND GOLDFIELDS



Length: 8–14 days Fly/drive option: Perth, Albany, Esperance

Immerse yourself in the diversity of Australia's south-west corner, wallowing in the wine and waves of Margaret River before disappearing into the tall timber of one of the country's finest forests, where karri trees seem to scratch at the sky and tingle trees boast trunks wider than cars. Flop onto the incomparable beaches of the south coast, sharing in Matthew Flinders' sentiments when he named Lucky Bay, now in Cape Le Grand National Park. Make a golden return to Perth as you drive through Kalgoorlie and the wind-brushed wheat belt around Merredin.

Travel tips

Strap a bicycle onto your vehicle and you'll have ample opportunities to sample sections of the new Munda Biddi Trail.

Spring is a great time to travel throughout the south-west, with around 4000 varieties of wildflowers blooming in the region. Winters are comfortable, with the added attraction of the whale-watching season in Augusta and Albany.

Websites

- www.westernaustralia.com
- www.australiasouthwest.com.au
- www.australiasgoldenoutback.com
- www.geographebay.com
- www.margaretriver.com
- www.kalgoorlietourism.com
- www.albanytourist.com.au
- www.visitesperance.com



Route	Distance	Duration
Perth – Bunbury	177 km	2hrs 30mins
Bunbury – Augusta	177 km	2hrs 30mins
Augusta – Albany	425 km	5hrs 40mins
Albany – Esperance	479 km	6hrs 20mins
Esperance – Kalgoorlie-Boulder	392 km	5hrs 10mins
Kalgoorlie-Boulder – Perth	597 km	8hrs

A to B Perth to Dunsborough

After heading south from Perth (www.experienceperth.com), amble through Fremantle (www.fremantlewa.com.au). Have a meal or coffee on South Terrace, rummage through the weekend market, or check out some of the port's maritime history. Thirst quenchers can be found at the Little Creatures or Sail & Anchor working breweries.

To get into the spirit of the wild wonders on this tour, take a day trip from 'Freo' over to Rottne Island (www.rottnestisland.com) to see the **quokkas** or stop in Rockingham, where you can swim among dolphins or cruise around Penguin, Seal and Bird islands to view little penguins, sea lions and dolphins (www.rockinghamwildencounters.com.au).

Dolphin swims are also available in Mandurah and you can continue the dolphin theme at Bunbury's Dolphin Discovery Centre (www.dolphindiscovery.com.au) on Koombana Bay. Dip into the centre's displays or into the ocean itself, snorkelling among wild dolphins.

In Bunbury (www.visitbunbury.com.au), Boulter's Heights (complete with artificial waterfall) offers a **great view** across the city and the 1842 wooden St Marks Church is thought to be the second-oldest church in WA.

Continue along the coast to Busselton (www.busselton.wa.gov.au) and walk the 1.8 km jetty, the longest timber pier jetty in Australia. While on the jetty, you can observe corals and schooling fish through the windows of the Busselton Jetty Underwater Observatory (www.busseltonjetty.com.au).

At Dunsborough, venture out to the lighthouse on the tip of Cape Naturaliste, where there are daily tours. In spring, follow the **walking tracks** from the lighthouse to the cliff-top whale lookout and you'll see southern right whales lazing about in Geographe Bay (www.geographebay.com). For a closer look, take a **whale-watching cruise** from Dunsborough with Naturaliste Charters (www.whales-australia.com).



TOURISM WESTERN AUSTRALIA

B to **C** Dunsborough to Augusta

Swinging south onto Caves Road, the drive passes Yallingup, a place of surfing legend and a beautiful beach to boot.

You're now entering the Margaret River wine region (www.margaretriver.com), which has more than 100 **wineries**, and plenty of cellar doors to slow your journey to a crawl. Wine purchases can be complemented with a host of gourmet produce: chocolate, fudge, yoghurt, coffee and virgin olive oil (www.margaret-river-online.com.au).

Midway between the two capes, turn west to Prevelly – the Margaret River known to surfers – or inland to the Margaret River township.

Work it all off by exploring the multitude of caves that puncture the area. Get a feel for spelunking at **CaveWorks**, south of Margaret River on Caves Road, before exploring Mammoth Cave, home to an array of fossils; the subterranean reflections of Lake Cave; or the straw stalactites of beautiful Jewel Cave.

Back on Caves Road, pass through the country's westernmost stands of karri trees. Ruler-straight, they're among the tallest trees in the world.

At Hamelin Bay, wander the pure white sands of Boranup Beach before continuing on to Augusta, where nearby Cape Leeuwin marks the separation between the Indian and Southern oceans. Savour the wide-open views beside the lighthouse.

In winter, Augusta has its own whale encounters, with humpback whales migrating through Flinders Bay. Take a **whale-watching cruise** here and you may even see humpbacks and southern rights together (www.whales-australia.com).

C to **D** Augusta to Pemberton

Double back along the Bussell Highway to Karridale, turning east onto the Brockman Highway. If you're due some exercise by the time you hit Nannup, wander among the town's historic buildings or spend a few hours paddling a **canoe** along the glorious Blackwood River (www.members.westnet.com.au/blackwoodrivercanoeing).

Turning south, the drive reaches Pemberton (www.pembertontourist.com.au), a major holiday centre in the south-west forests, set among the tallest of the karri trees. Take the challenge of scaling the metal spikes of one of the karri **climbing trees** – there are three open to the public near Pemberton, the most popular of which is the 61 m high Gloucester Tree, just 3 km out of town. This adventurous activity isn't for the faint-hearted. There are more big trees in Big Brook Arboretum, featuring tall timber from around the world, or you can venture out among the parade of forested national parks that surrounds the town: Beedelup, Warren, Brockman, or the shifting sand dunes of D'Entrecasteaux National Park.



Karri forest

One of the best ways to experience the forest is along the **Great Forest Trees Drive** in Shannon National Park (www.naturebase.net), en route to Walpole. This 48 km drive, on good dirt roads, meanders through old-growth karri forest and has radio broadcasts about the forest as you drive.

D to E Pemberton to Albany

Beyond Shannon National Park is the delightfully low-key town of Walpole (www.walpole.com.au), which has great forest and great waterways. See the former at the Giant Tingle Tree – visitors used to park their cars *inside* this beauty. On the famous Tree Top Walk in the **Valley of the Giants** (www.valleyofthegiants.com.au), you can climb up to 40 m into the canopy for a bird's perspective on the forest. The Walpole and Nornalup inlets can be explored with WOW Wilderness EcoCruises (www.wowwilderness.com.au) or on a **houseboat** (www.houseboatholiday.com.au).

If you fancy a walk, the **Bibbulmun Track** (www.bibbulmuntrack.org.au) passes through town. This 964 km track connects Kalamunda and Albany, and some of its finest sections are around Walpole. A **mountain-biking** equivalent – the Munda Biddi Trail – will eventually follow a similar course. Sections of the track are already open (www.mundabiddi.org.au).

Beyond Walpole the forest delights are joined by coastal delights: the suitably named Peaceful Bay; Greens Pool in William Bay National Park (www.naturebase.net), which offers sheltered **swimming** in an idyllic setting; and West Cape Howe National Park beyond Denmark (www.denmarkwa.com.au) combines fine beaches with dramatic cliffs.

Albany (www.albanytourist.com.au) is the south coast's major town and WA's first settlement, set on the edge of the vast King George Sound. Among its beautiful old buildings you'll find plenty of other distractions, whether it be the **views** from mounts Melville and Clarence, the curiously shaped Dog Rock (complete with painted-on collar) or **whale-watching** in the sound (July to October).

Middleton Beach is the sand of choice, while **Torndirrup National Park** (www.naturebase.net) and its surrounds offer some fantastic short outings, such as the granite Natural Bridge, restful Frenchman Bay and Whale World museum (www.whaleworld.org), in Albany's former whaling station.

E to F Albany to Esperance

Leaving Albany you can continue near the coast on the South Coast Highway, ducking into the crucial wildlife reserve (and gorgeous coastline) of Two Peoples Bay. Alternatively, detour inland towards the striking, sharp-tipped Stirling Range, turning into the **wineries** in Porongurup and Mount Barker (www.mountbarkertourismwa.com.au). In the Stirling Range, camp or find a cabin at the Stirling Range Retreat (www.stirlingrange.com.au), or stay at The Lily (www.ozemail.com.au/~thelily/), an unusual Dutch windmill at the foot of the mountains. Stirling Range National Park (www.naturebase.net) has a wide selection of **walking** opportunities, foremost among them being Bluff Knoll, southern WA's highest peak, wrapped in seasonal wildflowers and with the widest views imaginable.

At Jerramungup, continue west along the South Coast Highway, near the northern edge of **Fitzgerald River National Park** (www.naturebase.net), which is famed for its wildflower displays. This Biosphere Reserve contains more than 1800 species of flowering plants, or around 20 per cent of all plant species in WA.

Past Ravensthorpe, journey on to Esperance (www.visitesperance.com), set among some of the finest **beaches** in the country. It's a short drive out to **Cape Le Grand National Park** (www.naturebase.net), where Lucky Bay more aptly describes things than does neighbouring Hellfire Bay.

On the other side of town is the Great Ocean Drive, hopping from beach to beach.

Dotting the bay and beyond are the hundreds of islands of the Archipelago of the Recherche. You can cruise among them and their marine life, with Mackenzie's Island Cruises (www.woodyisland.com.au).

F to G Esperance to Kalgoorlie

The drive turns north at Esperance, heading out through farmland and into salmon gum woodland to Norseman (www.norseman.info), best known as the starting post for the long haul east across the Nullarbor Plain. The tailings from the gold mines tower above town, while the life-sized corrugated-iron camels – a tribute to the early camel trains – provide a striking image within the town. The best **view** is from Beacon Hill, while there are spectacular outback sunsets across Lake Cowan, a salt lake north of town.

Beyond Lake Cowan, take the turning through Kambalda and into the legendary mining city of Kalgoorlie–Boulder (www.kalgoorlietourism.com), the heart of the WA goldfields. Visit the Australian Prospectors and Miners Hall of Fame (www.mininghall.com) for an inviting look at the gold that drives the city. Here, you can descend into a gold mine, visit the new Chinese Garden of Remembrance or **pan for gold**. The Western Australian Museum (www.museum.wa.gov.au) offers more glimpses into Kalgoorlie's golden history. From the museum you can also wander into the British Arms, which once had the distinction of being the narrowest pub in the country.

Wander Hannan Street for a remarkable collection of historic buildings and pubs, or share in Kalgoorlie's historic naughty side with a tour of the Langtrees 181, a working brothel in the Hay Street red-light district.

Take a detour north through Menzies to Lake Ballard, where 51 human **sculptures** are spread across 7 sq. km of the salt lake.

G to A Kalgoorlie to Perth

From the goldfields to the golden wheat fields, the drive crosses the sand plain on which spring weaves a carpet of **wildflowers**. The drive along the Great Eastern Highway begins through another gold town, Coolgardie (www.coolgardie.wa.gov.au). Once one of the busiest towns in the State, it's now a quiet tourist centre. The Goldfields Exhibition Museum recounts the glory days, or you can just amble away on a **camel trek** with Coolgardie Camel Farm.

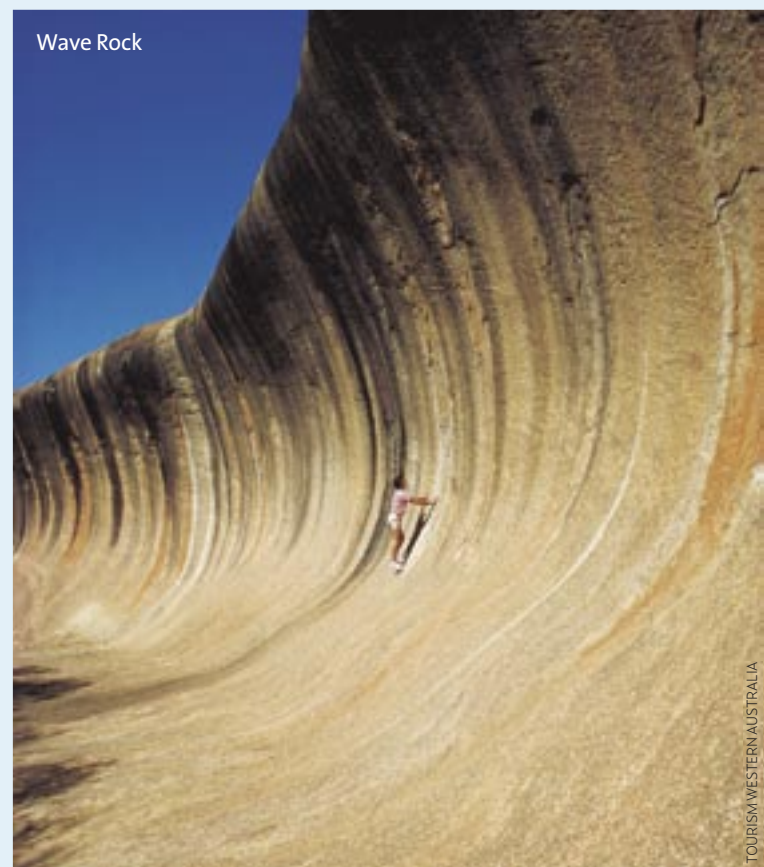
At Merredin (www.merredin.com/Nuke) there are more wild things in the archive at the beautiful **Cummins Theatre**. Here, you'll find the signatures of past theatre performers, including AC/DC, Johnny O'Keefe, John Paul Young and Sherbet.

From Merredin you can take a substantial detour south to Hyden (www.hyden.asn.au), the location of the famous **Wave Rock** (and the equally curious Hippo's Yawn), curling like a wave about to break.

Less than 60 km on from Merredin is Kellerberrin, the unlikely setting for a cutting-edge **art gallery**. At the International Art Space Kellerberrin Australia (www.iaska.com.au) you'll find exhibitions and studios from contemporary artists.

At Northam, green replaces gold as you enter the Avon Valley (www.naturebase.net), beginning the final leg into Perth.

Take some time for a tour about the valley, visiting the National Trust-listed towns of Toodyay (www.toodyay.com) and York (www.yorkwa.com.au), the latter being WA's first inland town. For a burst of adrenaline you can **skydive** over the valley (www.skydive.com.au). For similar views, take a sunrise **balloon flight** (www.windwardballooning.com), and for a final sniff of the bush pay a visit to the Avon Valley and John Forrest national parks (www.naturebase.net). ■



Wave Rock

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