

# MARINE LIFE AND ISLANDS

*Our islands and waters are a vast playground for all manner of sea creatures...*

## A UNIQUELY AUSTRALIAN INVITATION

Australia's vast coastline gives it an unparalleled array of aquatic treasures and plenty of opportunity to interact with amazing marine life. Go swimming with the biggest fish in the world, snorkel on pristine coral reefs just a few metres offshore and see colourful fish, rare turtles and migrating humpback whales.

At a number of places along our long coastline pods of friendly dolphins visit the shore almost every morning to be hand fed. You can see them leaping in the air and feeding in the shallows of sheltered bays.

Apart from the wonders of the world's longest coral reef on our east coast and the world's most accessible reef experience on the other, our coastline includes spectacular stretches of sea-carved cliffs, sheltered bays where whales give birth, splendid beaches and a wealth of marine life.

Go snorkelling, diving, fishing or boating. Either way you'll be rewarded with breathtaking scenery, native wildlife and distant horizons.

Take a wildlife cruise for an up close view of dolphins and rare dugong. Or indulge the opportunity to swim and interact with wild dolphins.

Southern right whales pass along our western, southern and Victorian coastlines for their annual migration, while humpback whales are prolific all up and down the eastern seaboard at popular viewing spots such as Hervey Bay, Byron Bay, Eden and Warrnambool in Victoria. It is now fairly common for migrating humpback whales to call in at Sydney Harbour during the winter months, much to the delight of locals. Watch them from a boat cruise or from special land-based viewing platforms in the south-west of our continent.

In Australia, you'll find unspoilt nature at its best – bone-white beaches, turquoise waters and amazing coral reefs, just metres from the shore on our west coast and running down our coastline and surrounding our tropical islands on the east.

On the islands that ring our continent you'll find diverse marine life – everything from turtles hatching to penguins parading.

Australia is a land full of powerful experiences just waiting to be discovered. Encounters with our incredible wildlife on land and in the water will truly open your eyes wide in astonishment.

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## Some marine life and island facts

- Australia's marine environment is home to 4,000 fish species, 500 coral species in the northern reefs alone, 50 types of marine mammal and a wide range of seabirds.

- It is estimated that as many as 80 per cent of marine species found in southern Australian waters are found nowhere else.
- Around seven per cent of Australia's marine jurisdiction is identified marine protected areas.
- About half the size of Texas, the world's biggest coral reef, the Great Barrier Reef, is home to creatures ranging from tiny burrowing sea-worms to tiger sharks weighing more than a tonne - as well as dolphins, dugongs, whales, turtles, ponderous potato cod, moray eels and hump headed Maori wrasse. Proclaimed a marine park by the Australian Government in 1975, the reef provides incomparable vistas of multi-coloured coral, sponges and varieties of seaweed.
- The Great Barrier Reef will stun you with its magnificence. It's as big as the total combined area of the United Kingdom and Ireland, and contains more than 1,000 islands.
- The Great Barrier Reef area abounds with wildlife, including dugong and green turtles, varieties of dolphins and whales, more than 1,500 species of fish, 4,000 types of molluscs and more than 200 species of birdlife.
- Ningaloo Reef, covering 5,000 sq km of ocean, is famous for whale shark diving and in Shark Bay you can hand-feed wild dolphins. Australia's second largest marine park, Ningaloo Reef has corals that are often just a few metres from shore.
- Shark Bay is home to 10 per cent of the world's dugong population; as well as a number of other marine and land animals including dolphins, whales, manta rays, turtles, sharks and rare marsupials.
- In the latest US Travel + Leisure awards, Tasmania ranked as the top island in the 'Australia, New Zealand, and the South Pacific Region' and sixth in the 'Top 10 World's Best Island' category.

## Uniquely Australian

- **Swim with wild dolphins** in their natural environment, a rare and exhilarating experience. Dolphins are common along our entire coastline, but Western Australia, Baird Bay and Port Phillip Bay are the places for these unforgettable encounters.
- **Take a whale watching boat or sightseeing trip** from one of our many coastal towns geared up for this activity. Or catch a glimpse from beach or cliff top viewing areas on dry land. The experience of seeing these gigantic creatures rising from the ocean is unforgettable.
- **Visit Port Stephens on the NSW coast**, a barefoot paradise, complete with bottlenose dolphins, passing whales, fabulous seafood and great diving right off the beach at Nelson Bay.
- **Dive or snorkel the ribbon reefs of the Great Barrier Reef.** June and





July is the perfect time to spot dwarf minke whales. Unlike other whale species these inquisitive creatures actively seek encounters with divers and snorkellers.

- **Tour the turtle rehabilitation centre** at Reef HQ, the world's largest living coral reef aquarium. Located in Townsville, northern Queensland, it's the only public aquarium in the world where corals have spawned.
- **See the spectacle of sea turtles** heave themselves ashore at Mon Repos just north of Bundaberg, and bury their eggs in the sand of Australia's most accessible turtle beach.
- **Call in at Baird Bay on the South Australian coast**, one of the few places in the world where you can swim with dolphins and sealions in the wild.
- **Get a glimpse of magical sea creatures**, Leafy Seadragons, in the clear waters off Kangaroo Island, or view them close up at the Port Lincoln Seahorse Farm.
- **Go snorkelling among Australian Giant Cuttlefish** as they gather to spawn each year in the waters off Whyalla.
- **Watch Southern Right Whales** make their annual northern migration. South Australia is one of the best places in the world to do this with numerous vantage points on the Fleurieu, Yorke and Eyre Peninsulas from mid-May to October.
- **Walk on the beach among the sea lions** – though you do have to maintain a respectful distance – at Seal Bay on Kangaroo Island.
- **Watch the sunset march of the penguins** on an exclusive beach viewing with a private ranger. Phillip Island is home to a colony of little penguins, that make their way from the sea to their burrows every day at dusk, and Australia's largest colony of fur seals.
- **Go swimming with the biggest fish in the world**, the whale shark, which visits Ningaloo Reef each year. Or snorkel on the pristine coral reef just a few metres offshore and see colourful fish and rare turtles. There are no overcrowded pontoons on our West Coast– it's just you, a mask and fins, and the most amazing marine life you're ever likely to see.
- **Hand-feed a pod of friendly dolphins at Monkey Mia**. Shark Bay is home to 300 dolphins, which you can see leaping in the air and feeding in the shallows. They visit the shore almost every morning to be hand fed. Take a wildlife cruise for an up close view of dolphins and rare dugong.
- **Swim with wild dolphins** at Rockingham, near Perth or interact with them at Koombana Bay in Bunbury. Southern right and humpback whales pass along the WA coast for their annual migration. Watch them from a boat or from special land-based viewing platforms in the south west.
- **Witness mass coral spawning**, a three day event during March and April at Coral Bay or Exmouth on our West Coast.
- **Snorkel off deserted beaches where the beautiful coral reef is just metres from shore** in the stunning coastal setting and pristine waters of Coral Bay. Ningaloo Reef creates a massive barrier along our west coast, resulting in calm bays, perfect for family swimming and sea kayaking. Pitch a tent on the shore of the coral lagoon at Ningaloo Marine Park, hire a cabin or pull up a caravan.
- **See Southern Right Wales in their breeding ground** in the Great Australian Bight off the Nullabor Plain coastline, from your vantage point at Callosities Point on the Bunda Cliffs.

## Islands

- **The coral cays of Heron and Lady Elliot islands**, off the mainland towns of Gladstone and Bundaberg, are great places to view the nocturnal spectacle of hatching baby turtles in their natural environment. Lady Elliot Island is an ecological wonderland.
- **If you prefer luxury surrounds** and diving or fishing, then Heron, Wilson and Lizard are superb choices. Walk off the beach to the reef. The warm tropical waters are literally teeming with brightly-coloured fish and marine life.
- **Escape to the tranquility of spectacular Lord Howe Island**, one of the rare island groups in the world on the UNESCO World Heritage list.
- **Take a wildlife cruise** along the dramatic national park coastline of Bruny Island, off Tasmania's south-east coast. Former crayfisherman Rob Pennicott is waiting to show you the sights. At Friar Rocks, home to over 1000 curious Australian Fur seals, you can watch bull seals or seal pups at play. If you are lucky dolphins will join your journey. You may sight fairy penguins, White Bellied Sea Eagles, Albatrosses, Australian Gannets, Black-faced and Great Cormorants, Short-tailed and Sooty Shearwaters or even the rare Peregrine Falcon.
- **Follow comedian Billy Connolly's steps** from his World Tour travel show, in which he waxed lyrical about his favourite part of Australia – the Tiwi Islands (Melville and Bathurst) across the Torres Strait from Darwin in the Arafura Sea, which are inhabited by Torres Strait islanders. Eat witchetty grubs and fresh crab, see crocodiles and ibis, and go swimming in the Arafura Sea with the Tiwi people.
- **See New Zealand fur seals, Australian sea lions**, Cape Barren geese, dolphins, and white-breasted sea eagles on the cruise to Woody Island, one of the most pristine and ruggedly beautiful parts of Western Australia and one of 105 islands in the Recherche Archipelago. Snorkel in the crystal clear waters, swim, fish or bushwalk to summits with incredible views over the archipelago.
- **Discover large breeding colonies of seabirds** on the Abrolhos Islands, about 60 km off Australia's Western coast. Access is by charter/fishing/eco boat tours from Geraldton and Kalbarri, float plane tours from Geraldton, and aerial tours from Dongara, Geraldton and Kalbarri.

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2 Ibid.

3 [http://www.australia.com/about\\_australia/facts\\_and\\_figures/unique\\_wonders/Facts1\\_ALL.aust?L=en&C=AU](http://www.australia.com/about_australia/facts_and_figures/unique_wonders/Facts1_ALL.aust?L=en&C=AU)

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5 [http://www.australia.com/places\\_to\\_go/beach\\_coast\\_and\\_reef/Prod\\_Map\\_STD1.aust?L=en&C=AU](http://www.australia.com/places_to_go/beach_coast_and_reef/Prod_Map_STD1.aust?L=en&C=AU)