

**Ningaloo Coast – Swimming with humpbacks – Coral Bay...**



*Western Australia where desert meets the Indian Ocean: Ningaloo Reef*

The rugged arid **Cape Range** desert meets the **Ningaloo Reef** in contrast to sparkling white beaches, turquoise waters and stunning underwater scenery. This World Heritage area expands over 6,065 square kilometres. Ningaloo reef is one of the most extended pristine fringing reefs in the world and Australia's second longest. An incredibly biodiverse marine environment, home to over 200 coral fish varieties, 500 other fish species plus a host of crustaceans, molluscs and corals.

In places the reef comes right up to the beach and extends as little as 200m offshore.

The arid climate of the Ningaloo Coast keeps the water very clear – a must to sustain good coral health.

In the southern winter months between June and October **humpback whales** pass through the marine park on their way to the Kimberley where they mate and give birth.

On their way back to the Antarctic, mothers and their new-born calves rest and play in the warm waters of the Exmouth Gulf. **We take up the opportunity to swim with these wonderful creatures!**

Since humpback whales are no longer on the 'endangered species' list, regulations have been relaxed: As part of a running trial, selected operators are permitted to take snorkellers to the waters for up-close encounters with the humpbacks.

**An encounter operates like this:**

Circling above, a **spotter plane** radios the whale's coordinates to our captain. When the target comes into view of the boat a few hundred yards away, a signal is given to slide into the water (quickly and quietly, keeping disturbances to a minimum).

A maximum of seven swimmers plus two guides are allowed into the water at any one time.

In the water, our lead guide receives instructions via handheld radio from the pilot overhead as in which direction to swim.

The whales travel fast and timing is of the essence to meet the approaching cetaceans.

Despite best efforts of all involved (pilot, crew, guides & snorkellers) there remains an element of 'hit & miss' - this is not a Disneyland ride but a raw encounter with unpredictable nature (whales suddenly diving deep or diverting course).

Nevertheless, we do get lucky... what unforgettable moments: **On two occasions a female whale, with new-born calf tucked in close by her side, passes us within metres!**

*(underwater pictures below courtesy of 3-Islands Cruises/Exmouth)*





*3-Islands whale watch boat*



*Humpback coming our way*



*Waiting for our signal to jump...*

KJ

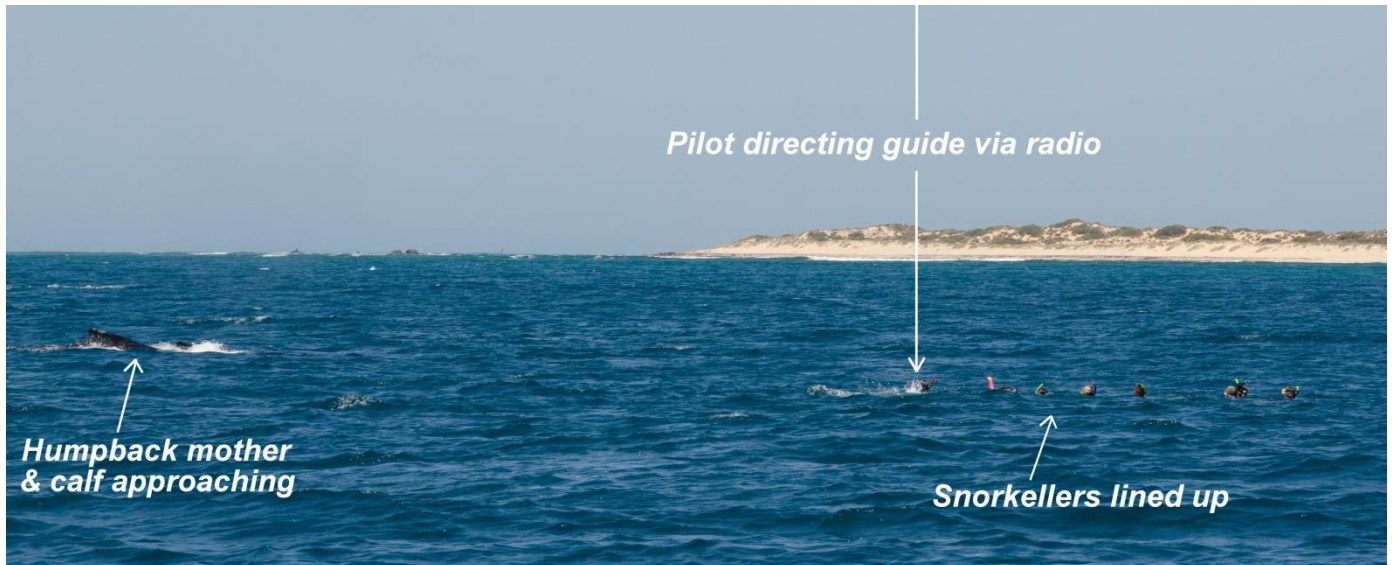
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*Spotter plane above*



*Pilot directing guide via radio*



*Humpback mother  
& calf approaching*

*Snorkellers lined up*

**Larger than life... the ENCOUNTER...!**



*Humpback whale at Exmouth/Ningaloo Reef*



On the way home we observe mating turtles...



Exploring the Ningaloo Reef

*Desert meets ocean: Yardie Creek with Ningaloo Reef*



*Ningaloo Reef sits very close to shore*







*Welcome to Ningaloo Reef*



*Tropical Kayjayfish*



*Turquoise Bay/Ningaloo*





*Yardie Creek/Cape Range National Park*







No bananas ☺↓

**BLUE LIPS**  
**Fish & Chips**  
 9949 1130

Plan B -  
when the  
fish  
ain't  
biting!

**Please Bring:**

- Your lunch and any snacks.
- Any other drinks you like.
- Suitable clothing.
- Camera

**Sorry Not Allowed**

- Large eskys (use ours).
- Hand held GPS.
- Banana's (yes really).

Feel free to bring your own rod/  
reel if you wish but not  
required.

Where you aware of such drastic fishing rules in force on fishing charters the world over? ↑↑↑↑↑

We camp at Yardie Creek Station in Cape Range National Park.

Exmouth and the gulf area are known as "Cyclone Alley".

In 1999 the Australia's fiercest storm flattened the town.

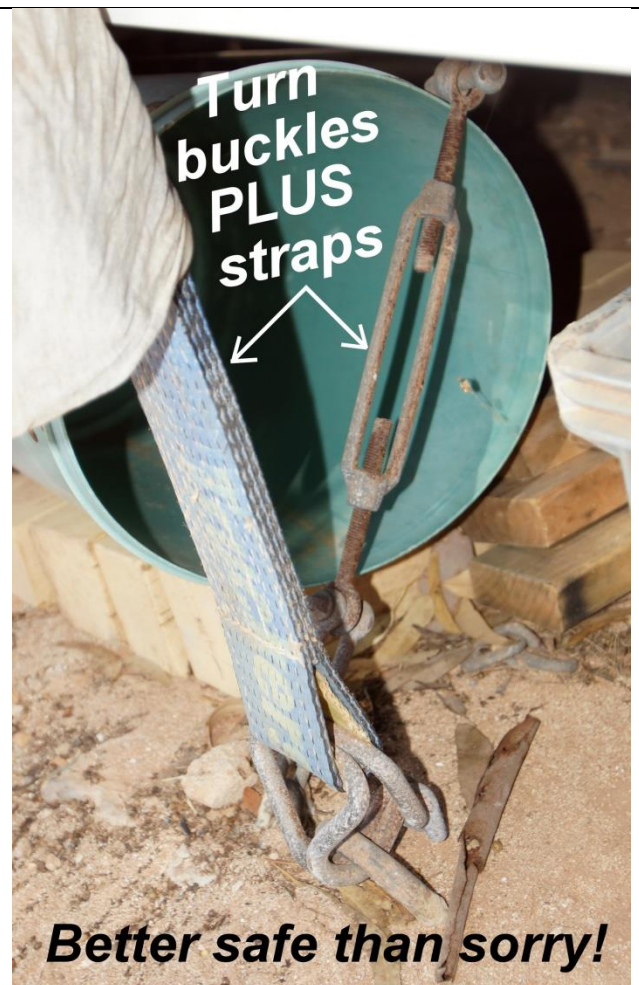
One of the residents has well prepared for the looming cyclone season as the pictures below illustrate (interesting to note that even cars and boats are classified "loose objects" – hard to fathom!).

...from a current local paper →

In 1999 — the town was almost flattened by winds over 267km/h," Mr McCarthy said.

To prepare, people need to create an emergency kit, trim trees, have a way to secure loose objects including cars and boats(!), and know where they will bunker down if the alert goes red.





**Coral Bay is next...**





**Skeleton Bay** has the largest recorded annual aggregation of reef sharks within Ningaloo Marine Park. This aggregation consists of black- and white-tip reef sharks, grey reef and lemon sharks, pregnant females and shark pups.





Fierce southerly winds have been howling ever since Exmouth – the water is only 22C/64F. We only last 30 min max, snorkelling... and decide one day on a dune buggy ride instead to explore the sand hills near Coral Bay.



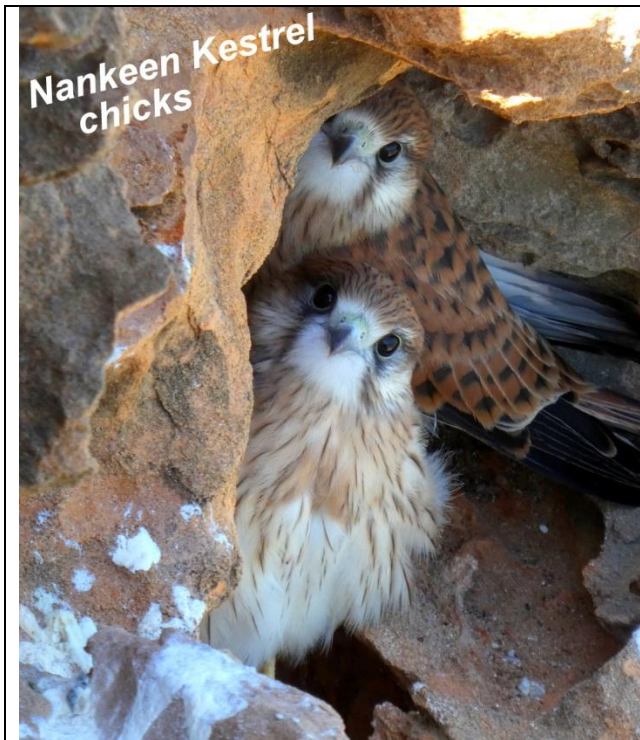


## *Exploring Coral Bay*



**All the while keeping an eye out for the local wild life**





Nankeen Kestrel chicks

Nesting in a cliff face hideout above the Bay



Coral Bay Swallow chicks



Gilbert's Dragon at Coral Bay

No sooner have we left the crocodile belt up north we now frequently stumble upon signs like these...

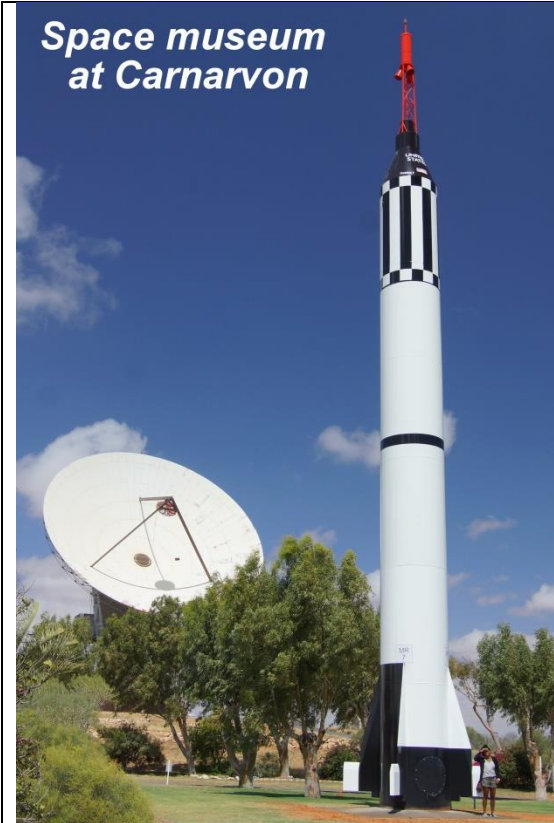
*"Tourists must get the impression, in Australia there is something around every corner that tries to bite, sting, poison or eat you!"*





A short make-over at Carnarvon and we hike back up north for 120km to Gnarlloo Station...

Space museum  
at Carnarvon



Not a selfie – I am shooting the mirror in front of me  
which reveals the apron's image **XIRTAM** the  
right way round!



Fair dinkum, this is a first – a real **MATRIX** hair cut

Warning near the Blow Holes  
at Quobba Station





*Ocean in motion -  
Quobba blow holes*



*Gnaraloo 3-Mile Camp*





*Catching up with old mate Andy Eberbach*





***Gnaraloo sand storm***



***Kitchen window left open 1/2 inch overnight  
for fresh air***

***Relentless sand blast***



***Pied Oystercatcher***





Our friend Andy has been telling us windsurfing and kitesailing stories about **Gnaraloo** for untold years, so it is with much anticipation when we finally turn up at this place. Andy works as an orthodontist in Switzerland but manages, with cunning forward planning, to hang out here for three months every year. Sadly we feel forced to bail out of 3-Mile Camp prematurely after a couple of nights due to stupendous winds which render further explorations impossible amid a relentless sand blast.

Though we have fallen in love with the spectacular coast line and don't feel like fully departing just yet. **Red Bluff** some 20km south offers better protection from the wind and has no horizontal dust storm.

***Red Bluff morning from bedroom window***



***Camp at Red Bluff - rear window view***





*Camp Matrix at Red Bluff*





*Take-off...*



*...and ride*



*Red Bluff*



Driving on south we stay for one night at **Wooramel Station** camped by a 'downside-up' river (sand on top!). Although water continues to flow deep underground, this river only fills up properly about three times a year, the station owner explains.

In catering for passing travellers they have set up a hot artesian bore which we enjoy in the morning, soaking our road-weary bodies.

***Wooramel (downside-up) River***



***Wooramel River***





**Next episode: Shark Bay – Stromatolites – Kalbarri NP... more soon!**

***Greetings from  
Chris and Katherine***

