



**GROWING numbers of visitors are flocking to Western Australia's Coral Coast each year to enjoy the year-round sunshine, get closer to nature and escape the crowds of the city.**

The spectacular region begins two hours drive north of Perth at the coastal town of Cervantes and stretches more than 1000km north along pristine coastline to Exmouth.

Boasting warmer average temperatures than Perth all year round, the Coral Coast offers perfect conditions for visitors to enjoy a range of watersports, including swimming, surfing, snorkelling, scuba diving, fishing and boating.

Although the region's pristine beaches and abundant sunshine are major drawcards, nature lovers also visit to watch humpback whales as they make their annual migration along the coast between July and October, while simultaneously vibrant wildflowers burst into bloom on land.

WA's Coral Coast is a great self-drive destination and there are also plenty of great tour options available and a varying standard of accommodation options.

Regular flights depart Perth for Geraldton, Kalbarri, Monkey Mia, Carnarvon and Exmouth.

#### **Visitor rise takes town from 'Gero' to hero**

ANYONE who has not been to Geraldton for a few years may not recognise the transformation it has undergone.

Traditionally a stop over en route to previously more popular destinations along Australia's CoralCoast, "Gero" is beginning to retain the leisure traveller for a much longer period of time.

Scott Cogar, managing director of Broadwater Mariner Resort in Geraldton, says people are becoming more aware of the range and depth of Geraldton's tourism offering.

He said his resort, which since opening in 2009 has been popular with those working in the resource industry, was starting to see a shift towards traditional hotel clientele.

Cogar said his corporate market outside of the resource sector had increased by 50 per cent in the past six months, while leisure clients had also increased by 20 per cent.

He said people planning on passing through were beginning to realise Geraldton was more than a stopover for supplies and fuel.

"The depth of experiences in and around Geraldton is not well understood by a large proportion of the tourism market," he said.

"People who would usually pass by without spending any time here are now seeing the improvements to the main beach and love the beautification that has been undertaken on the foreshore.

“The addition of a bar, cafe and retail precinct makes Geraldton a contemporary destination, equal to any other regional town in WA.”

Cogar says the beauty of Geraldton is that it caters for every member of a family, as it has terrific beaches, dedicated cycle paths, shipwrecks for divers and snorkellers, plus attractions such as the Abrolhos Islands (for keen fishermen) and the memorial for the HMAS Sydney.

The Broadwater Mariner Resort is the newest and largest accommodation provider in Geraldton with 103 hotel rooms and 1-, 2-, and 3-bedroom apartments.

Cogar said he was determined to provide a contemporary and well-appointed hotel experience that would match the direction in which Geraldton’s tourism offering was heading.

### **No tough choices**

IF you are heading to Dongara or Port Denison, about 360km north of Perth, don’t fill up on junk food and snacks along the way. You will regret it.

Some of WA’s and even the country’s culinary offerings can be found here - officially.

The Port Denison-Dongara area has enjoyed solid growth in tourism in recent years.

Grannys and South beaches and the Irwin River are popular with visitors looking for any activity that requires water, while the region also has a long and proud history with the crayfishing industry.

The Port Denison Marina is a popular meeting place, with a choice of shops close by and is also busy with leisure and commercial boat traffic.

It is also where you will find the best steak sandwich in regional WA.

Southerlys Harbour View and Bar and Restaurant claimed that honour last month at the Hotel Association of Australia’s WA award ceremony.

AHA (WA) CEO, Bradley Woods, said all five finalists reflected the quality, taste and freshness of ingredients of steak sandwiches that are served in pubs, hotels and bars throughout WA.

Yet Southerlys beat Murphy’s Irish Pub (representing outer Perth), Broken Hill Hotel Boulder (Golden Outback), Esplanade Hotel (North West) and The Bridgetown Hotel (SouthWest) for the title.

Owner-operator Callum Kerr (who shares duties with his wife, Sonia), said that the key to producing the best steak sandwich is consistency in preparation and also using the best ingredients (which are local, where possible).

“A customer decides whether they like the sandwich or not when he first looks at it,” Kerr said.

“We also use hand-cut chips, not frozen chips, and our Irish chef Noel has developed a secret dressing.

“But the key is letting the steak rest before adding it to the sandwich so that the bread is not soggy three quarters of the way through.”

About 3.5km away from Southerlys is another terrific food offering, but it’s not found in a fancy restaurant or seaside cafe.

The Caltex roadhouse on Brand Highway, outside of Dongara, is home to some of the best pies in Australia.

Its pepper pie has claimed the gold medal for its category at the Great Pie Competition for two consecutive years, while the Caltex added steak and Guinness pie to its gold medal count in 2012.

Nine other pies have won either silver or bronze medals in the competition in the past two years.

The entries have been sent for 2013 and owners Stuart and Leanne Doyle are eagerly awaiting judgment.

### **Shark a great view**

WHALE sharks and humpback whales are making an almighty splash along Western Australia’s Coral Coast.

Australia’s Coral Coast CEO, David O’Malley said the Coral Coast is the ideal holiday destination during winter, as the weather is warm and sunny and there’s a wealth of wildlife to see throughout the region.

“Ningaloo is currently experiencing an excellent whale shark season, with tour operators reporting a 99 per cent success rate of sightings on their tours,” O’Malley said.

However, whale sharks (the largest fish in the sea) are not the only gentle giants to visit Australia’s Coral Coast during winter.

“Tens of thousands of humpback whales have also just started to make a splash along the Coral Coast,” O’Malley said.

“If visitors go on a whale shark tour during June or July they are also likely to see humpback whales.

“Humpbacks are considered the most acrobatic of the whale species and they put on a quite a show - breaching, tail slapping, rolling and spy hopping to the delight of onlookers.

“Whale watching tours are offered in Cervantes, Jurien Bay, Kalbarri, Coral Bay and Exmouth and there are some great coastal vantage points for viewing them along the entire length of the Coral Coast.”

For those who would rather get in the water and check out the marine life for themselves, the Department of Environment and Conservation has installed 10 day-use kayak moorings in Ningaloo Marine Park.

Kayak moorings, black buoy with white label, have been provided along the marine park to enable day-use kayak and snorkel activities to explore Ningaloo's World Heritage-listed marine environment.

All sites provide varying kayak and snorkel experiences; some offer extended paddles to shallow snorkel sites, while others provide shorter paddle distances to deeper snorkel sites.

However all sites require kayak and snorkelling experience. For further information on seeing the whale sharks and humpback whales, including tour details, visit [australiascoralcoast.com](http://australiascoralcoast.com)

For further information about the kayak moorings, contact the Milyering Visitor Centre on 9949 2808 or the DEC Exmouth District office on 9947 8000.

### **Seaside town with the lot**

SWIMMING with dolphins, turtles and fish does not have to be something you do only when you go on holidays.

And fishing, boating, diving, surfing and exploring the wonders of WA’s Shark Bay World Heritage Area can be something you do when you have a spare few minutes, not only when you can get time off from work.

The Coral Coast is a great destination for a holiday but a growing number of West Australians are already calling parts of it home.

Some saw the development of the Indian Ocean Drive as an opportunity to cash in on what promised to be a growing and popular tourism industry.

Others have since moved to one of several attractive towns for work as the demand for infrastructure began to grow.

LandCorp, the State Government’s land and property delivery agency, is urging people to consider buying their own patch of paradise in one of the many picture-perfect towns along the coast.

And it is warning that those interested in a sea change need to get in quick. Denham is one example.

It is 800km north of Perth, with easy access via major transport routes including the picturesque Indian Ocean Drive and North West Coastal Highway.

Once an isolated seaside town, Denham has become a Coral Coast hot spot for WA families and visitors, with plenty of opportunities for people to lay down more permanent roots.

LandCorp general manager regional Stuart Nahajski said Denham’s residential estate, just 500m from the town centre, provided superb ocean vistas across Freycinet Reach and Dirk Hartog Island.

But with only 25 lots still available, he said people looking for the perfect coastal location to build their own holiday or full time home would need to move quickly.

“Denham residential estate offers relaxed coastal living in one of WA’s most desirable holiday destinations,” he said.

“With current land prices, there’s never been a better time to buy your own patch of paradise.

“WA has so much to offer without the hassle of overseas travel expenses. I’d urge people to step back and look at what we’ve got in our back yard first, and then consider the benefits of claiming part of it as your very own.”

Nahajski said the fact Denham was close to famous attractions including Monkey Mia, Shell Beach and the Hamelin Pool Stromatolites made it a popular choice for young families.

“Denham itself has a range of shops, restaurant, cafes, tourist facilities and public recreation areas,” he said.

“LandCorp worked closely with the local community, the Shire of Shark Bay, the Yamatiji Land and Sea Council, the Gascoyne Development Commission and the Department of Environment and Conservation, to ensure the estate is well located and sensitive to the region’s natural environment.”

Nahajski said LandCorp had long been developing land on WA’s coast including the popular Carnarvon Northwater and Exmouth estates.

“Great value coastal land north of Perth is also available in a number of other towns,” he said.

“Cervantes is the southern gateway to WA’s Coral Coast , boasting some spectacular beaches and right now there are still 15 lots waiting for the right people to call home.

“As well as glorious sunsets among the shadows of The Pinnacles and spectacular beaches, there are a host of facilities, including a school, parks, bowling club, skate park and golf course.”

### **Time to dash for gas**

IN LESS than 10 years, the Kickstarters Gascoyne Dash has developed into the best event on WA’s busy tourist calendar.

The Dash is also considered one of the most gruelling desert motorsport events on the racing calendar.

The Kickstarters Gascoyne Dash is a cross-country race across harsh outback terrain between the seaside town of Carnarvon and Gascoyne Junction.

It pits car against car and bike against bike - then the quickest of each against each other - to determine who is crowned the “King of the River”.

Event director Paul Kelly said the event’s slogan, “winning is something, but finishing is everything”, gave an insight into how tough the race was.

“The race is long and tough, with competitors covering more than 500km in off-road racing machines such as motorcycles, quad-bikes, four-wheel drives and buggies over two days,” he said.

The Gascoyne event, which will celebrate its 10th year in 2013, was awarded the gold medal at the 2012 WA Tourism Awards for being the state’s best in the category of festivals and events.

The Dash attracts intrastate and a growing field of national and international competitors and fans.

It is also a terrific example of what a united community can do to promote itself and has developed a fantastic festive atmosphere around the event.

The Dash is run wholly by volunteers and involves the entire local community, which benefits from a massive swell in visitors, and not just over the four days of the event.

Most of those who visit - whether to participate or spectate - extend their stay to take in surrounding areas and also to travel to other parts of the Coral Coast.

Aside from the motorsport, the immediate area includes the spectacular Kennedy Ranges National Park, the historic Gascoyne Junction, wildlife and the coastal oasis of Carnarvon.