

# History

Michael Cathcart

## FIRST ARRIVALS

People first arrived on the northern shores of Australia at least 40,000 years ago. As they began building shelters, cooking food and telling each other tales, they left behind signs of their activities. They left layers of carbon – the residue of their ancient fires – deep in the soil. Piles of shells and fish-bones mark the places where these people hunted and ate. And on rock walls across Western Australia (WA) they left paintings and etchings – some thousands of years old – which tell their stories of the Dreaming, that spiritual dimension where the earth and its people were created, and the law was laid down.

Contrary to popular belief, these Aboriginal people, especially those who lived in the north, were not entirely isolated from the rest of the world. Until 6000 years ago, they were able to travel and trade across a bridge of land that connected Australia to New Guinea. Even after white occupation, the Aborigines of the northern coasts regularly hosted Macassan fishermen from Sulawesi, with whom they traded and socialised.

So when European sailors first stumbled on the coast of ‘Terra Australis’, the entire continent was occupied by hundreds of Aboriginal groups, living in their own territories and maintaining their own distinctive languages and traditions. The fertile Swan River Valley around Perth, for example, is the customary homeland of about a dozen groups of Noongar people, each speaking a distinctive dialect.

The prehistory of Australia is filled with tantalizing mysteries. In the Kimberley, scholars and amateur sleuths are fascinated by the so-called Bradshaw paintings. These enigmatic and mystical stick-figures are thousands of years old. Because they look nothing like the artwork of any other Aboriginal group, the identity of the culture who created them is the subject of fierce debate.

Meanwhile there are historians who claim that the Aborigines’ first contact with the wider world occurred when a Chinese admiral named Zheng He visited Australia in the 15th century. Others say that Portuguese navigators mapped the continent in the 16th century.

## DUTCH FIND NOTHING TO TRADE

These are intriguing theories. But most authorities believe that the first man to travel any great distance to see Aboriginal Australia was a Dutchman named Willem Janszoon. In 1606, he sailed the speedy little ship *Duyfken* out of the Dutch settlement at Batavia (modern Jakarta) to scout for the Dutch East India Company, and found Cape York (the pointy bit at the top of Australia), which he thought was an extension of New Guinea.

Ten years later, another Dutch ship, the *Eendracht*, rode the mighty trade winds across the Atlantic, bound for the ‘spice islands’ of modern Indonesia. But the captain, Dirk Hartog, misjudged his position, and stumbled onto the island (near Gladstone) that now bears his name. Hartog inscribed the details of his visit onto a pewter plate and nailed it to a post. In 1697, the island was visited by a second Dutch explorer named De Vlamingh who swapped Hartog’s plate for one of his own.

Other Dutch mariners were not so lucky. Several ships were wrecked on the uncharted western coast of the Aboriginal continent. The most infamous of these is the *Batavia*. After the ship foundered in the waters off modern Geraldton in 1629, the captain, Francis Pelsaert, sailed a boat to the Dutch East India Company’s base at Batavia. While his back was turned, some

demented crewmen unleashed a nightmare of debauchery, rape and murder on the men, women and children who had been on the ship. When Pelsaert returned with a rescue vessel, he executed the murderers, sparing only two youths whom he marooned on the beach of the continent they knew as New Holland. Some experts believe the legacy of these boys can be found in the sandy hair and the Dutch-sounding words of some local Aborigines. The remains of the *Batavia* and other wrecks are now displayed at the Western Australian Museum in Geraldton (p185) and in the Fremantle Shipwreck Galleries (p81), where you can also see De Vlamingh’s battered old plate.

The Dutch were business men, scouring the world for commodities. Nothing they saw on the dry coasts of this so-called ‘New Holland’ convinced them that the land or its native people offered any promise of profit. When another Dutchman named Abel Tasman charted the western and southern coasts of Australia in 1644, he was mapping, not a commercial opportunity, but a maritime hazard.

## MEANWHILE, OVER EAST

Today, the dominant version of Australian history is written as though Sydney is the well-spring of Australia’s identity. But when you live in Western Australia, history looks very different. In Sydney, white history traditionally begins with Captain James Cook’s epic voyage of 1770, in which he mapped the east coast. But Cook creates little excitement in Albany, Perth or Geraldton – places he never saw.

Cook’s voyage revealed that the eastern coastline was fertile, and he was particularly taken with the diversity of plant life at the place he called ‘Botany Bay’. Acting on Cook’s discovery, the British government decided to establish a convict colony there. The result was the settlement of Sydney in 1788 – out of which grew the great sheep industry of Australia.

By the early 19th century, it was clear that the Dutch had no inclination to settle Western Australia. Meanwhile, the British were growing alarmed by the activities of the French in the region. So on Christmas Day 1826, the British army warned them off by establishing a lonely military outpost at Albany, on the strategically important southwestern tip of the country.

## PERTH

The challenge to Aboriginal supremacy in the west began in 1829, when a boatload of free immigrants arrived with all their possessions in the territory of the Noongar people. These trespassers were led by Captain James Stirling – a swashbuckling and entrepreneurial naval officer – who had investigated the coastal region two years earlier. Stirling had convinced British authorities to appoint him governor of the new settlement, and promptly declared all the surrounding Aboriginal lands to be the property of King George IV. Such was the foundation of Perth.

Stirling’s glowing reports had fired the ambitions of English adventurers and investors, and by the end of the year, 25 ships had reached the colony’s port at Fremantle. Unlike their predecessors in Sydney, these settlers were determined to build their fortunes without calling on government assistance and without the shame of using convict labour.

As a cluster of shops, houses and hotels rose on the banks of the Swan River, settlers established sheep and cattle runs in the surrounding country. This led to conflict with the Aborigines, following a pattern which was tragically common throughout the Australian colonies. The Aborigines speared sheep and cattle – sometimes for food, sometimes as an act of defiance. In the reprisals which resulted, people on both sides were killed, and by 1832 it was clear the Aborigines were organising a violent resistance. Governor

Michael Cathcart teaches history at the Australian Centre, University of Melbourne. He is well known as a broadcaster on ABC Radio National and presented the ABC TV series *Rewind*.

The most comprehensive history of WA is the 836-page *A New History of Western Australia* (1981), edited by CT Stannage. It has nearly 20 contributors and includes excellent coverage of the clash of white and Aboriginal cultures, colonisation, religion, sport, unionism and party politics.

*Strange Objects* (1990) by Gary Crew and *The Devil’s Own* (1990) by Deborah Lisson, two fiction books for teens, interweave the history of the *Batavia* shipwreck with contemporary characters and plotlines. Entertaining (and sometimes challenging) books for the kids.

Robert Hughes’ bestseller *The Fatal Shore* (1987) offers a colourful and exhaustive historical account of convict transportation from Britain to Australia, and features a section on WA in this era.

Stirling declared that he would retaliate with such 'acts of decisive severity as will appal them as people for a time and reduce their tribe to weakness'.

### FRONTIER CONFLICT

In October 1834 Stirling showed he was a man of his word. He led a punitive expedition against the Noongar, who were under the leadership of the warrior Calyute. In the Battle of Pinjarra, the Governor's forces shot, according to one report, around 25 Aborigines and suffered one fatality themselves. This display of official terror had the desired effect. The Noongar ended their resistance and the violence of the frontier moved further out. (The pugnacious historian Keith Windschuttle rejects the idea that the frontier was violent, and argues that the Pinjarra incident was no more than a forceful police action.) You can learn more about conflict on the frontier at the Round House (p81) in Fremantle and at the Rottneest Museum (p92) on Rottneest Island.

### THE CONVICTS

Aboriginal resistance was not the only threat to the survival of this most isolated outpost of the British Empire. The arid countryside, the loneliness and the cost of transport also took their toll. When tough men of capital could make a fortune in the east, there were few good reasons to struggle against the frustrations of the west, and most of the early settlers left. Two decades on, there were just 5000 Europeans holding out on the western edge of the continent. Some of the capitalists who had stayed began to rethink their aversion to using cheap prison labour.

So in 1850 – just as the practice of sending British convicts to eastern Australia ended – shiploads of male convicts started to arrive in Fremantle harbour. They hacked roads out of the countryside and erected public buildings, including the prison (p81), Government House (p66), the Perth Town Hall (p66), the lunatic asylum, which now houses the Fremantle Arts Centre (p81), and the governor's summer residence – now the Quokka Arms. Most of the 10,000 men transported to the west over the next 18 years, however, worked on remote cattle and sheep runs, far from the main settlement.

### EXPLORATION & GOLD

Meanwhile, several explorers undertook journeys into the remote Aboriginal territories, drawn in by dreams of mighty rivers and rolling plains of grass 'further out'. Mostly their thirsty ordeals ended in disappointment. But the pastoralists did expand through much of the southwestern corner of WA, while others took up runs on the rivers of the northwest and in the Kimberley.

Perhaps the most staggering journey of exploration was undertaken by an Aboriginal man called Wylie and the explorer Edward Eyre, who travelled from South Australia, across the vast, dry Nullarbor Plain, to Albany.

By the 1880s, the entire European population of this sleepy western third of Australia was not much more than 40,000 people. In the absence of democracy, a network of city merchants and large squatters exercised political and economic control over the colony.

The great agent of change was gold. The first discoveries were made in the 1880s in the Kimberley and Pilbara, followed by huge finds in the 1890s at Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie, in hot, dry country 600km inland from Perth. So many people were lured by the promise of gold that the population of the colony doubled and redoubled in a single decade. But the easy gold was soon exhausted, and most independent prospectors gave way to mining companies who had the capital to sink deep shafts. Soon, the min-

'In 1850 – just as the practice of sending British convicts to eastern Australia ended – shiploads of male convicts started to arrive in Fremantle harbour'

ers were working, not for nuggets of gold, but for wages. Toiling in hot, dangerous conditions, these men banded together to form trade unions which remained a potent force in the life of Western Australia throughout the following century.

### THE GREAT ENGINEER

The year 1890 also saw the introduction of representative government – this was a full generation after democracy had arrived in the east. The first elected premier was a tough, capable bushman named John Forrest, who borrowed courageously in order to finance vast public works to encourage immigrants and private investors. He was blessed with the services of a brilliant civil engineer named CY O'Connor. O'Connor oversaw the improvement of the Fremantle harbour, and built and ran the state's rail system. But O'Connor's greatest feat was the construction of a system of steam-powered pumping stations along a mighty pipeline to drive water uphill, from Mundaring Weir near Perth to the thirsty goldfields around distant Kalgoorlie.

By the time John Forrest opened the pipeline, O'Connor was dead. His political enemies had defamed him in the press and in parliament, falsely accusing him of incompetence and corruption. On 10 March 1902, O'Connor rode into the surf near Fremantle and shot himself. Today, the site of his anguish is commemorated by a haunting statue of him on horseback, which rises out of the waves at South Beach.

Ironically, just as the water began to flow, the mining industry went into decline. But the 'Golden Pipeline' continues to supply water to the mining city of Kalgoorlie where gold is once again being mined, on a Herculean scale unimaginable a century ago. Today, there is a pipeline museum at Mundaring Weir. You can also follow the National Trust's Heritage Trail along the pipeline to Kalgoorlie, where you can visit the astonishing Super Pit and the Goldfields Museum.

### ABORIGINES

At the turn of the century, the lives of many Aborigines became more wretched. The colony's 1893 Education Act empowered the parents of white schoolchildren to bar any Aboriginal child from attending their school, and it was not long before Aborigines were completely excluded from state-run classrooms. The following decade, the government embarked on a policy of removing so-called 'half-caste' children from their parents, placing them with white families or in government institutions. The objective of the policy was explicit. Full-blood Aborigines were to be segregated in the belief that they were doomed to extinction, while half-caste children were expected to marry whites, thereby breeding the Aborigines out of existence. These policies inflicted great suffering and sadness on the many Aborigines who were recognised in the 1990s as 'the stolen generations'.

### WARS & DEPRESSION

On 1 January 1901, Western Australia and the other colonies federated to form the nation of Australia. This was not a declaration of independence. This new Australia was a dominion within the British Empire. It was as citizens of the Empire that thousands of Australian men volunteered to fight in the Australian Imperial Force when WWI broke out in 1914. They fought in Turkey, Sinai and in Europe – notably on the Somme. Over 200,000 of them were killed or wounded over the terrible four years of the war. Today, in cities and towns across the state, you will see war memorials that commemorate their service.

'Half-caste children were expected to marry whites, thereby breeding the Aborigines out of existence'

Though mining, for the time being, had ceased to be an economic force, farmers were developing the lucrative Western Australian wheat belt, which they cultivated with the horse-drawn stump-jump plough, one of the icons of Australian frontier farming. At the same time, a growing demand for wool, beef and the expansion of dairying added to the state's economic growth.

Nevertheless, many people were struggling to earn a living – especially those ex-soldiers who were unable to shake off the horrors they had endured in the trenches. In 1929, the lives of these 'battlers' grew even more miserable when the cold winds of the Great Depression blew through the towns and farms of the state. So alienated did West Australians feel from the centres of power and politics in the east that, in 1933, two-thirds of them voted to secede from the rest of Australia. Although the decision was never enacted, it expressed a profound sense of isolation from the east which is still a major factor in the culture and attitudes of the state today.

In 1939, Australians were once again fighting a war alongside the British, this time against Hitler in WWII. But the military situation changed radically in December 1941 when the Japanese bombed the American Fleet at Hawaii's Pearl Harbor. The Japanese swept through Southeast Asia and, within weeks, were threatening Australia. Over the next two years they actually bombed several towns in the north of the state including Broome, which was almost abandoned.

It was not the British, but the Americans, who came to Australia's aid. As thousands of Australian soldiers were taken prisoner and suffered in the torturous Japanese prisoner-of-war camps, Western Australians opened their arms to US servicemen. Fremantle was transformed into an Allied naval base for operations in the Indian Ocean, while a US submarine-refuelling base was established at Exmouth. In New Guinea and the Pacific, Americans and Australians fought together until the tide of war eventually turned against the enemy.

## POSTWAR PROSPERITY

When the war ended, the story of modern Western Australia began to unfold. Under the banner of 'Postwar Reconstruction', the federal government set about transforming Australia with a policy of assisted immigration, designed to populate Australia more densely as a defence against the 'hordes' of Asia. Many members of this new workforce found jobs in the mines, where men and machines turned over thousands of tonnes of earth in search of the precious lode. On city stock exchanges, the names of such Western Australian mines as Tom Price, Mt Newman and Goldsworthy became symbols of development, modernisation and wealth. Now, rather than being a wasteland that history had forgotten, the West was becoming synonymous with ambition, and a new spirit of capitalist pioneering. As union membership flourished, labour and capital entered into a pact to turn the country to profit. In the Kimberley, the government built the gigantic Ord River Irrigation Scheme, which boasted that it could bring fertility to the desert – and which convinced many Western Australians that engineering and not the environment contained the secret of life.

There was so much country, it hardly seemed to matter that salt was starting to poison country in the wheat belt or that mines scoured the land. In 1952, the British exploded their first nuclear bomb on the state's Monte Bello Islands. And when opponents of the test alleged that nuclear clouds were drifting over Australia, the government scoffed. The land was big – and anyway, we needed a strong, nuclear-armed ally to protect us in the Cold War world.

This spirit of reckless capitalism reached its climax in the 1980s when the state became known as 'West Australia Inc' – a reference to the state in operation as a giant corporation in which government, business and unions had lost sight of any value other than speculation and profit. The embodiment of this brash spirit was an English migrant named Alan Bond, who became so rich that he could buy anything he pleased. In 1983, he funded a sleek new racing yacht called *Australia II* in its challenge for the millionaire's yachting prize, the America's Cup. Equipped with a secret – and now legendary – winged keel, the boat became the first non-American yacht to win the race. It seemed as everyone in Australia was cheering on the day Bond held aloft the shining silver trophy.

But in the 1990s, legal authorities began to investigate the dealings of Alan Bond, and of many other players in West Australia Inc. Bond found himself in court and spent four years in jail after pleading guilty to Australia's biggest corporate fraud.

## TODAY

Today the population of the entire state is just two million people – about half of whom have come from overseas. Fewer than 70,000 of these are Aborigines. In 1993, the federal government recognised that Aborigines with an ongoing association with their traditional lands were the rightful owners, unless those lands had been sold to someone else. Since then, substantial areas of the state have passed into Aboriginal ownership. But Aborigines remain a disadvantaged minority, plagued by alcoholism, violence and poor health. At the same time, a young Aboriginal adult living in WA is 52 times more likely to spend time in jail than a non-Aborigine. Throughout the state, men and women of good will continue to work for 'reconciliation' between the two groups, but the advances take time and are often frustrated by the impatience of white powerbrokers with the process.

### WESTERN AUSTRALIA IN BLACK & WHITE

Like indigenous Australians in the rest of the country, the 70,000 or so Aborigines who live in Western Australia (WA) are the state's most disadvantaged group. Many live in deplorable conditions, outbreaks of preventable diseases are common and infant mortality rates are higher than in many developing countries.

The issue of racial relations in WA is a problematic one, and racial intolerance is still evident in many parts of the state. Especially (but not exclusively) in the remote northwest, a form of unofficial apartheid appears to exist, and travellers are bound to be confronted by it.

Another political issue in WA is the mandatory sentencing law. Introduced by the Court government in 1996, it is considered to discriminate against Aboriginal people (young Aborigines are 52 times more likely to experience jail time than a non-Aborigine). The law provides that third-time property offenders receive a mandatory 12-month jail sentence. Given the extreme disadvantage indigenous Australian children suffer, many consider that it is difficult for them to avoid participation in criminal acts. Human rights groups, including the United Nations, have protested against the law.

However, it is not all bad news for WA's Aborigines. Indigenous-owned businesses are becoming more prominent throughout the state, especially in the field of tourism (see p197), and many people of indigenous descent now take leadership roles on bodies such as shire councils and tourist boards.

We have provided information about indigenous businesses and tours wherever possible throughout this book. To explore Aboriginal WA further, grab a copy of Lonely Planet's *Aboriginal Australia & the Torres Strait Islands*.

For more information about native title claims in the west, and throughout Australia, see the National Native Title Tribunal website ([www.nntt.gov.au](http://www.nntt.gov.au)).

For detailed information on current indigenous issues see 'Living Black' on SBS's website ([www.sbs.com.au/livingblack](http://www.sbs.com.au/livingblack)).

Largely set in Western Australia, *Gallipoli* (1981, directed by Peter Weir, screenplay by David Williamson) is an iconic Australian movie exploring naivety, social pressure to enlist and, ultimately, the utter futility of this campaign.

Though the population of the state is small, it continues to grow and diversify. In many ways, Western Australia has been a state-in-waiting; its development has started and stalled several times in its short European history. But the dynamism and friendliness of the place – and the scale of the landscape – are seductive. If sometimes the place seems too unmindful of its heritage, perhaps that's because it is still dreaming of its future.

# The Culture

## REGIONAL IDENTITY

If Australians are shaped by their isolation from the rest of the world, Western Australians are removed an additional step from the majority of Australians living along the eastern coastline, more than 3000km away. This isolation has moulded Western Australians into a hardy, self-sufficient and innovative people, staunchly independent and parochial to the point that the notion of seceding from the rest of Australia occasionally surfaces. First mooted soon after Federation in the early 20th century, secession is still advocated by many who complain that the west's rich mineral resources contribute far more to the federal coffers than is returned in funding projects and services.

Western Australians feel the distance and differences from the east coast keenly, and wear their distinctiveness from the east with pride – especially on the sporting field, where defeating teams from the east coast is savoured. With Western Australia's (WA's) economy buzzing, most locals will tell visitors that this is the best place in Australia (if not the world!) to live and that the eastern capitals such as Melbourne and Sydney have no redeeming features – but often they appear to be protesting just a little too much.

Perhaps some of this desire to have a distinct identity stems from one-third of WA residents being born overseas; this steady stream of immigrants (Brits, Irish, New Zealanders, continental Europeans, South Africans and Asians) brings differing cultures to the melting pot. However, because of the high proportion of 'Western' immigrants (from the UK and New Zealand), the melting pot is still decidedly Western in flavour. In addition, with three-quarters of the WA population located in the Perth region, the melting-pot metaphor runs out of steam once you get to the regional areas. Indeed in many towns the indigenous population lives almost a completely separate existence to everyone else.

The Australian landscape has shaped a national character that is used to hardship, and in this Western Australians are no different to their eastern brethren. Living with adversity has also helped mould the anti-authoritarian, rebellious nature that comes from the country's convict past: Australians prefer to support the underdog over someone who has become too successful, too popular or 'too big for his boots'. Australians also prefer to be modest and not 'crow' about success. While 'getting ahead' (owning your house, a couple of cars and a boat) is popular in WA, boasting is not really part of the Australian character. It's a society where egalitarian values – you're no better than your neighbour and he's no better than you – are esteemed above all.

In the same vein, Australians often use humour as a social levelling tool. For those not familiar with its unique character, a first encounter with Australian humour can be a confusing experience.

Australian children are infused with the essential characteristics of the local humour – self-deprecation, sarcasm, irony and the occasional obscenity. One of the worst social faux pas in Australia is to take yourself too seriously, and youngsters learn how to 'take a joke' along with how to walk and talk.

Social interaction, particularly 'down the pub', is often a mix of jokes, amusing anecdotes and personal teasing. Visitors can be shocked to hear best mates trading insults ('taking the piss') or labelling each other a '\*\*\*\* bastard', until they realise it's meant in the nicest possible way. Swear words are often used as close terms of affection, and if you're being teased – welcome to the group.

Make sure you're always in on the joke with Lonely Planet's *Australian Phrasebook*, which has 256 pages of rhyming slang, Aussie expressions, national songs, Aboriginal languages and other cultural tidbits.

Aussies love a nickname, and Western Australians are the lucky recipients of the title 'sandproppers', named after a relative of the grasshopper who loves to burrow in sandy soils.



## LIFESTYLE

Almost three quarters of Western Australians live in Perth, where they thrive on a diet of mostly sunny weather, a high standard of living, pristine beaches, lush parks, good cafés and restaurants, and a laidback atmosphere that makes it seem more like a large country town than a city. Accordingly, most locals you'll meet will be relaxed and friendly – as you would be if you were as blessed with the Aussie version of the good life as they are.

Life's a beach for many Perthites, who strip off the business suit at the end of the day and head for the closest stretch of coastline they can find, often with a fishing rod or a surfboard. Holidays generally see most families headed straight for their favourite beach, often with a caravan in tow.

The Great Australian Dream has long been to own a house on a quarter-acre block, and the majority of folks still rate home ownership very highly on their 'to do' list. Inside the average Western Australian middle-class suburban home, you'll probably find a married heterosexual couple, though it is becoming increasingly likely they will be de facto, or in their second marriage.

Our 'dad and mum' couple will have an average of 1.4 children; however, the birth rate has been falling over the last few years, as more couples put off having children, preferring to focus on higher education and financial security before parenthood.

## POPULATION

Australia's population passed the 20 million mark in December 2003 and it's estimated that the population is now just over 20.7 million. Although WA is the largest state in the country it's also the most sparsely populated, being home to less than 10% of the population – an estimated 2.04 million in 2006.

Australia has been strongly influenced by immigration, and its ethnic mix is among the most diverse in the world. Some 33% of the population in WA is foreign-born, with the majority coming from the UK (11%), New Zealand (2%), Italy (1%), Malaysia (1%) and South Africa (1%). Around 3% of the state's population identify as being of Aboriginal origin.

Despite the extraordinarily low population density, population policy is fiercely debated in Australia. Opponents of increased immigration argue the dry Australian landscape can't sustain more people (among other arguments); others say population growth is an economic imperative, particularly considering Australia's declining birth rates.

## SPORT

Sport is an obsession for many in the west, and there's no sport that arouses more passion and pride than Australian Rules Football (or Aussie Rules). Though the national competition developed from the Victorian league, it has featured successful teams from other states for several years, including WA's beloved West Coast Eagles (which has won the premiership three times, the latest in 2006) and the Fremantle Dockers. You can catch a match from March to August (with the finals in September) at Subiaco Oval and at Fremantle – just remember to choose a side when you arrive (you will be asked who you go for)! If the Eagles and Dockers are playing elsewhere, there's the local Western Australian Rules competition for teams in and around Perth.

In summer, sports fans' focus quickly shifts and the hordes head for the **WACA** (Western Australian Cricket Association ground; ☎ 08-9265 7222; Nelson Cres, East Perth) to catch the drama of one-day and Test match cricket (the five-day international version of the game). A Test match is played in Perth most seasons, and there are regular interstate matches where the Western Warriors battle against

other states for the national championship (formerly known as the Sheffield Shield but now named after whoever buys the commercial rights).

## ARTS Cinema

Given that Australia only makes a couple of dozen feature films a year, it's no surprise that WA does not have a large film industry. However there are some excellent films (available from libraries and video outlets throughout the state) that showcase the landscapes and explore local issues, culture and history. Remote, stunning locations and common themes of struggle and hardship characterise many of these movies.

One of the latest films with a Western Australian setting is the psychological drama *Last Train To Freo* (2006), the first film by well-known actor and theatre director Jeremy Sims, about a couple of ex-cons catching the last train to Fremantle, joined by a young female law student who is unaware that the guards are on strike.

*Ten Canoes* (2006), directed by Rolf de Heer, takes a humorous and poetic look at the lives of a couple of Aboriginal tribes in the Northern Territory. It won a special jury prize at the Cannes Film Festival as well best film at the Aussie version of the Oscars, the Australian Film Institute (AFI) awards. Another de Heer film worth viewing is *Dingo* (1991), which follows a dingo trapper (and mad-keen jazz enthusiast) on an unlikely journey from outback WA to the jazz clubs of Paris.

The powerful *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002), directed by Phillip Noyce, is based in 1931 WA, a time when mixed-race Aboriginal children were routinely taken from their parents and sent to training camps to become domestic help for white families.

*Japanese Story* (2003), directed by Sue Brooks, was a hit with Australian critics and crowds, with the stunning Pilbara landscape sharing centre stage with highly regarded actress Toni Collette, playing a gritty Perth geologist whose trip to the Pilbara mines takes some unexpected turns.

The raw and powerful *Shame* (1987), directed by Steve Jodrell, is set in an isolated WA community where Deborah Lee-Furness (wife of actor Hugh Jackman) shines as a tough, motorbike-riding lawyer who rumbles into town and is horrified by the town's reaction to a gang rape.

Though filmed in the Northern Territory, *We of the Never Never* (1982) was based on a real-life story and novel set on a station in the Kimberley. It's an excellent depiction of the hardships women faced in the Australian outback in the early 20th century.

Largely set in WA and starring a very young Mel Gibson, Peter Weir's heart-rending film about the ill-fated battle of WWI, *Gallipoli* (1981), carries a timeless message about the futility of war.

*Blackfellas* (1993), based on Archie Weller's novel *The Day of the Dog*, traces a young Noongar man's struggle to come to terms with his culture while surviving in a white man's world.

## Literature

Encompassing the unpolished, rough humour of early writers from the northwest and goldfields to sophisticated works from a string of modern writers, WA's literary tradition is remarkably rich.

The most prolific of WA's writers was Katharine Susannah Prichard, who wrote extensively on local themes, often infusing her work with communist idealism (she was a lifelong party member). Her two renowned works are *Working Bullocks* (1926), set in the karri forests of the southwest and exploring the relationship between man and the environment, and the

WA has given the film world a couple of big names: Hollywood leading man Heath Ledger, star of *Brokeback Mountain* and *A Knight's Tale*; and Frances O'Connor, who features in *Al and The Importance of Being Earnest*.

With *Ten Canoes*, Australia's most intriguing film maker, Rolf de Heer, managed to make the first successful film about Aboriginals that doesn't have a white fella's point of reference. And it's funny and poignant, with a wonderful narration by David Gulpilil.

For more on Aussie Rules, see the websites of the Australian Football League ([www.afl.com.au](http://www.afl.com.au)), the West Coast Eagles ([www.westcoastegales.com.au](http://www.westcoastegales.com.au)) or the Fremantle Dockers ([www.fremantlefc.com.au](http://www.fremantlefc.com.au)).

prize-winning *Coomardoo* (1929), examining the taboo subject of black-white sexual relationships.

Born in 1935 and raised in Geraldton, Randolph Stow has used WA as the setting for some of his best-loved novels. Award-winning *To the Islands* (1958) is set in the far northwest and follows the path of a disillusioned white man and his Aboriginal companion on a journey of self-discovery. The semi-autobiographical *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* (1965) is a rites-of-passage tale of a child growing up in a small coastal town in WA.

One of Australia's most celebrated contemporary writers is Tim Winton, born in Perth in 1960. Many of his books celebrate the beauty of the WA landscape, particularly his nostalgic *Land's Edge* (1993), where he affectionately reminisces about childhood summers on the coast, and celebrates his powerful connection with the sea, inspiring us to discover the wild west for ourselves.

Winton's award-winning *Cloudstreet* (1991), an epic family saga based in postwar Perth, received rave reviews from local and international audiences – it's considered by many to be his best work. However it was *Dirt Music* (2001) that gained Winton more international exposure by being short-listed for the UK's Booker Prize. That novel explores the search for love and meaning against the backdrop of remote fishing villages, Broome and islands off the north coast. Winton's latest work, *The Turning* (2006), is a collection of short stories.

Another of WA's great modern writers is English-born Elizabeth Jolley, who has won numerous awards for her unusual short stories and novels. *The Well* (1987), which explores the relationship between an eccentric middle-aged woman and the young girl who comes to live with her, won the 1986 Miles Franklin Award (Australia's top literary award) and was made into a film in 1997. Jolley's most recent works include *An Innocent Gentleman* (2001) and *Learning to Dance* (2006).

In 1981 the Fremantle Arts Centre published *A Fortunate Life*, a moving autobiography by 'Aussie battler' AB Facey (see boxed text, p173), which follows his many trials and tribulations from Gallipoli to the Depression to life on the land in rural WA.

Western Australian journalist-turned-author Robert Drewe successfully interweaves intimate stories of life, love and relationships with important historical events. *The Drowner* (1997) combines a powerful love story with tales of drought in parched Australia and the CY O'Connor pipeline to the Kalgoorlie goldfields.

Also by Drewe, *The Shark Net* (2000) is a widely acclaimed memoir of a childhood spent in Perth in the 1950s and '60s, full of insights, joys and tragedies, including the murder of a close boyhood friend by serial killer Eric Edgar Cooke, the last person hanged at Fremantle Prison (p81).

Once dominated by writers of British and Irish descent, WA's literary scene has evolved to better reflect the state's multicultural makeup. Indigenous writers tend to focus on the theme of identity in often intensely personal autobiographies. Jack Davis' *The First-Born and other Poems* (1970) was a watershed in Aboriginal literature.

Sally Morgan's successful and groundbreaking autobiography *My Place* (1987) charts the author's discovery and exploration of her Aboriginality and her search for her true identity.

An outstanding talent is the Aboriginal writer Archie Weller. His *The Day of the Dog* (1981), tracing the fall of the traditional male role in Aboriginal society, garnered great reviews and was highly commended in the 1980 Vogel literary award. It was also made into the movie *Blackfellas* in 1993 (see Cinema, p27).

Nobody has captured the spirit of WA and its people as well as Tim Winton. With *Dirt Music* (2001), Winton even provides a soundtrack, available on CD.

Robert Drewe's latest work, *Grace* (2005), sees an inner-city Sydney film reviewer flee to the Kimberley and work in a wildlife park in 'Port Mangrove' while attempting to get her life back together.

Finally, Kim Scott's excellent *Benang* (1999), which won the Miles Franklin Award in 2000, is a confronting but rewarding read about the assimilation policies of the 20th century and the devastating effect they had on Aboriginal Australia.

## Dance & Theatre

WA has a wonderfully vibrant dance scene. The **Western Australian Ballet** ([www.waballet.com.au](http://www.waballet.com.au)) has a permanent home at His Majesty's Theatre (p77) and the **Western Australia Academy of Performing Arts** ([www.waapa.edu.au](http://www.waapa.edu.au)) offers degrees for those wishing to pursue the rigours of life as a dancer. Students will certainly need plenty of stamina if they want to join Perth's **Skadada** ([www.skadada.com](http://www.skadada.com)), who bill themselves as an 'electronic circus company' and gained critical acclaim for their Electronic Big Top show (which was staged in 1999).

Theatre is also strong in WA – no surprise given the number of excellent writers the state has nurtured. The **Perth Theatre Company** ([www.perththeatre.com.au](http://www.perththeatre.com.au)) has a strong commitment to Western Australian and Australian writers, while the **Black Swan Theatre Company** ([www.bstc.com.au](http://www.bstc.com.au)) is the state's flagship theatre company. The latter hosts a mix of theatre classics and innovative local productions, such as 2006's *Red Dog*, based on the legend of Red Dog (see the boxed text, p213).

The Western Australia Academy of Performing Arts ([www.waapa.edu.au](http://www.waapa.edu.au)) stages performances all year round, ranging from full stage productions to free recitals. See the website for details.

## ABORIGINAL ART

Art is a fundamental part of Aboriginal life and the Dreaming, serving as a connection between past and present, between people and the land. While art is a means for people to express themselves, their identity, culture and beliefs, just as importantly it's a political and economic enterprise.

Artists of all ages are experimenting with styles that reflect their experiences, circumstances and influences. These days they're just as likely to use acrylics and printmaking as they would have stringy bark or pandanus leaf. Get an introduction to Aboriginal art at Perth's Art Gallery of Western Australia (p63), home to one of the world's best indigenous collections, and Holmes à Court Gallery (p64), WA's best private collection. (The former curator of the Holmes à Court Gallery, Belinda Carrigan, owns Gecko Gallery in Broome.)

While paintings from Western Australia's (WA's) central Australian communities is among the most readily identifiable contemporary art, there's an enormous range of work being created. And while regional styles are distinct, each community within a region has an identifiable style, just as they have their own language and laws. *A Guide to Aboriginal Art and the Aboriginal Owned Art Centres* describes the work created by different communities, and its online database ([www.aboriginalart.org](http://www.aboriginalart.org)) lets you search for different styles, artists, techniques and communities.

Some standout artists from WA include Noongar artist Julie Dowling, the first indigenous graduate of Curtin University's Fine Arts program, whose work regularly features on the walls of the best public and private collections; Peter Newry from the Kimberley, whose indomitable land maps marked out in natural pigments reflect the landscape of his country; and Pintupi woman Ningura Napurrula from Kiwukurra in the Western Desert, whose strong, stunningly simple works hang in the new Musée du Quai Branly in Paris.

Indigenous art is created for the tourist market as much as it is the fine-art market, so whether you're buying art as a souvenir or investment, it's important to buy ethically. Only buy from galleries dealing with Aboriginal communities, from art centres at communities, or direct from individual artists; don't buy art from a bloke who approaches you in the car park with a painting under his jacket. These kinds of dodgy dealings devalue the work and the artist's reputation and have a negative economic impact on the artist and community. Get hold of *Purchasing Australian Aboriginal Art, A Consumer Guide* ([www.ankaaa.org.au](http://www.ankaaa.org.au)). But above all, buy what you like, buy something you have a connection to.

## Music

WA has a vibrant pop music scene, and while most of the state's bands stick to the popular pub-rock genre that Aussies love, the most imaginative of WA's artists is The Sleepy Jackson, fronted by blue-eyeliner-wearing oddball Luke Steele. The Sleepy Jackson's second album *Personality (One Was A Bird One Was A Spider)* showcases Steele's Brian Wilson-sized vision and highly-tuned pop sensibilities.

Ex-bandmates of Steele's formed the group End of Fashion, which has had success in Australia and New Zealand with its self-titled album of formulaic Aussie indie-pop. To keep it in the family, Luke Steele's sister Katy Steele has her own band, Little Birdy, which released its second album, the catchy, inventive *Hollywood* in late 2006. Another Perth band bothering the charts across Australia is Eskimo Joe, a pop-rock band whose third album *Black Fingernails, Red Wine* saw them expand their sound considerably.

More earthy are the Waifs, a folk/country/pop trio, who actually formed in Broome but are Perth-based. In 2003 their career went through the roof, with a double platinum album (*Up All Night*), a few awards and a tour with Bob Dylan. A friend of theirs (well, Perth *is* like a big country town!) is one John Butler, former busker and guitarist/singer-songwriter who fronts the imaginatively titled John Butler Trio, whose roots-rock is incredibly popular in Australia.

The Sleepy Jackson's *Personality (One Was A Bird One Was A Spider)* is a much more focused album than the first, *Lovers*. On this opus, Luke Steele channels Phil Spector's Wall of Sound, with dreamy George Harrison-esque guitars floating through, topped with Steele's own unique voice and spiritual themes.



# Environment Tim Flannery

The first naturalists to investigate Australia were astonished by what they found. Here the swans were black – to Europeans this was a metaphor for the impossible – while mammals such as the platypus and echidna were discovered to lay eggs. It really was an upside-down world, where many of the larger animals hopped, where each year the trees shed their bark rather than their leaves, and where the ‘pears’ were made of wood (a woody pear is a relative of the waratah).

It’s worthwhile understanding the basics about how nature operates in Australia. This is important because there’s nowhere like Australia, and once you have an insight into its origins and natural rhythms, you will appreciate the place so much more.

## THE LAND

There are two big factors that go a long way towards explaining nature in Australia: its soils and its climate. Both are unique. Australian soils are the more subtle and difficult to notice of the two, but they have been fundamental in shaping life here. On the other continents, in recent geological times processes such as volcanism, mountain building and glacial activity have been busy creating new soil. Just think of the glacial-derived soils of North America, north Asia and Europe. They feed the world today, and were made by glaciers grinding up rock of differing chemical composition over the last two million years. The rich soils of India and parts of South America were made by rivers eroding mountains, while Java in Indonesia owes its extraordinary richness to volcanoes.

All of these soil-forming processes have been almost absent from Australia in more recent times. Only volcanoes have made a contribution, and they cover less than 2% of the continent’s land area. In fact, for the last 90 million years, beginning deep in the age of dinosaurs, Australia has been geologically comatose. It was too flat, warm and dry to attract glaciers, its crust too ancient and thick to be punctured by volcanoes or folded into mountains. Look at Uluru and Kata Tjuta (the Olgas). They are the stumps of mountains that 350 million years ago were the height of the Andes. Yet for hundreds of millions of years they’ve been nothing but nubbins.

Under such conditions no new soil is created and the old soil is leached of all its goodness, and is blown and washed away. The leaching is done by rain. Even if just 30cm of it falls each year, that adds up to a column of water 30 million kilometres high passing through the soil over 100 million years, and that can do a great deal of leaching. Almost all of Australia’s mountain ranges are more than 90 million years old, so you will see a lot of sand here, and a lot of country where the rocky ‘bones’ of the land are sticking up through the soil. It is an old, infertile landscape, and life in Australia has been adapting to these conditions for aeons.

Australia’s misfortune in respect to soils is echoed in its climate. In most parts of the world outside the wet tropics, life responds to the rhythm of the seasons – summer to winter, or wet to dry. Most of Australia experiences seasons – sometimes very severe ones – yet life does not respond solely to them. This can clearly be seen by the fact that although there’s plenty of snow and cold country in Australia, there are almost no trees that shed their leaves in winter, nor do any Australian animals hibernate. Instead there is a far more potent climatic force that Australian life must obey: El Niño.

Tim Flannery is a naturalist, explorer and award-winning writer. He lives in Adelaide where he is director of the South Australian Museum and a professor at the University of Adelaide.

Tim Flannery’s *The Future Eaters* is a ‘big picture’ overview of evolution in Australasia, covering the last 120 million years of history, with thoughts on how the environment has shaped Australasia’s human cultures.

B Beale and P Fray’s *The Vanishing Continent* gives an excellent overview of soil erosion across Australia. Fine colour photographs make the issue more graphic.

**OLDEST, BIGGEST, LONGEST...** *Susie Ashworth*

- Western Australia covers 2.5 million sq km – 32.9% of the entire country.
- Its coastline stretches for 12,500km – 34% of the entire coastline of Australia.
- Mt Meharry (1245m), in the Pilbara, is the highest point.
- The Gascoyne (760km) is the longest river.
- The world's oldest rocks (4.1 billion years old) can be found at Mt Narryer, inland from Shark Bay.
- Mt Augustus is the largest rock in the world, twice the size and three times as old as Uluru in the Northern Territory.
- Marble Bar is reputedly the hottest town in Australia, with summer averages of 41°C.
- At 474m above sea level, Tom Price is the highest town in WA.
- Wagin is home to the 'biggest ram in the southern hemisphere', a 15m-tall fibreglass monstrosity.
- The 1833km-long Rabbit Proof Fence is the longest fence in the world.
- WA is home to Australia's 'second largest country', Hutt River Province Principality (p192), run by Prince Leonard and Princess Shirley.

The cycle of flood and drought that El Niño brings to Australia is profound. The rivers – even the mighty Murray River, the nation's largest, which runs through the southeast – can be miles wide one year, while you can literally step over its flow the next. This is the power of El Niño, and its effect, when combined with Australia's poor soils, manifests itself compellingly. As you might expect from this, relatively few of Australia's birds are seasonal breeders, and few migrate. Instead, they breed when the rain comes, and a large percentage are nomads, following the rain across the breadth of the continent.

**WILDLIFE**

Australia's plants and animals are just about the closest things to alien life you are likely to encounter on Earth. That's because Australia has been isolated from the other continents for a very long time – at least 45 million years. The other habitable continents have been able to exchange various species at different times because they've been linked by land bridges. Just 15,000 years ago it was possible to walk from the southern tip of Africa right through Asia and the Americas to Tierra del Fuego. Not Australia, however. Its birds, mammals, reptiles and plants have taken their own separate and very different evolutionary journey, and the result today is the world's most distinct – and one of its most diverse – natural realms.

**Animals**

Australia is, of course, famous as the home of the kangaroo and other marsupials. Unless you visit a wildlife park, such creatures are not easy to see as most are nocturnal, although you are likely to see a kangaroo in rural areas in the daytime. Their lifestyles, however, are exquisitely attuned to Australia's harsh conditions. Have you ever wondered why kangaroos, alone among the world's larger mammals, hop? It turns out that hopping is the most efficient way of getting about at medium speeds. This is because the energy of the bounce is stored in the tendons of the legs – much like in a pogo stick – while the intestines bounce up and down like a piston, emptying and filling the lungs without needing to activate the chest muscles. When you travel long distances to find meagre feed, such efficiency is a must.

Marsupials are so efficient that they need to eat a fifth less food than equivalent-sized placental mammals (everything from bats to rats, whales and ourselves). But some marsupials have taken energy efficiency much further. If you visit a wildlife park or zoo you might notice that far-away look in a koala's eyes. It seems as if nobody is home – and this is near the truth. Several years ago biologists announced that koalas are the only living creatures that have brains that don't fit their skulls. Instead they have a shrivelled walnut of a brain that rattles around in a fluid-filled cranium. Other researchers have contested this finding, however, pointing out that the brains of the koalas examined for the study may have shrunk because these organs are so soft. Whether soft-brained or empty-headed, there is no doubt that the koala is not the Einstein of the animal world, and we now believe that it has sacrificed its brain to energy efficiency. Brains cost a lot to run – our brains typically weigh 2% of our bodyweight, but use 20% of the energy we consume. Koalas eat gum leaves, which are so toxic that they use 20% of their energy just detoxifying this food. This leaves little energy for the brain, and living in the tree tops where there are so few predators means that they can get by with few wits at all.

The peculiar constraints of the Australian environment have not made everything dumb. The koala's nearest relative, the wombat (of which there are three species), has a large brain for a marsupial. These creatures live in complex burrows and can weigh up to 35kg, making them the largest herbivorous burrowers on Earth. Because their burrows are effectively air-conditioned, they have the neat trick of turning down their metabolic activity when they are in residence. One physiologist who studied their thyroid hormones found that biological activity ceased to such an extent in sleeping wombats that, from a hormonal point of view, they appeared to be dead! Wombats can remain underground for a week at a time, and can get by on just a third of the food needed by an equivalent-sized sheep. One day perhaps, efficiency-minded farmers will keep wombats instead of sheep. At the moment, however, that isn't possible, for the largest of the wombat species, the northern hairy-nose, is one of the world's rarest creatures, with only around 100 surviving in a remote nature reserve in central Queensland.

One of the more common marsupials you might catch a glimpse of in the national parks around Australia's major cities is the species of antechinus, or marsupial mouse. These nocturnal, rat-sized creatures lead an extraordinary life. The males live for just 11 months, the first 10 of which consist of a concentrated burst of eating and growing. And like teenagers, the day comes when their minds turn to sex, which then becomes an obsession. As they embark on their quest for females they forget to eat and sleep. Instead they gather in logs and woo passing females by serenading them with squeaks. By the end of August – just two weeks after they reach 'puberty' – every single male is dead, exhausted by sex and burdened with swollen testes. This extraordinary life history may also have evolved in response to Australia's trying environmental conditions. It seems likely that if the males survived mating, they would compete with the females as they tried to find enough food to feed their growing young. Basically, antechinus dads are disposable. They do better for antechinus posterity if they go down in a testosterone-fuelled blaze of glory.

If you are very lucky, you might see a honey possum. This tiny marsupial is an enigma. Somehow it gets all of its dietary requirements from nectar and pollen, and in the southwest there are always enough flowers around for it to survive. No-one, though, knows why the males need sperm larger even than those of the blue whale, or why their testes are so massive. Were humans as well endowed, men would be walking around with the equivalent of a 4kg bag of potatoes between their legs!

Despite anything an Australian tells you about koalas (aka 'dropbears'), there is no risk of one falling onto your head (deliberately or not) as you walk beneath their trees.

*Pizzey and Knight's Field Guide to the Birds of Australia is an indispensable guide for bird-watchers and anyone else even peripherally interested in Australia's feathered tribes. Knight's illustrations are both beautiful and helpful in identification.*

### TOP TEN WESTERN AUSTRALIA WILDFLOWER SPOTS

- Kings Park (p62), Perth
- Fitzgerald River National Park (p147), between Albany and Esperance on the south coast
- Porongurup National Park (p138), north of Albany
- Stirling Range National Park (p140), also north of Albany
- Mullewa (p177), in the central Midlands
- Dryanda Woodland (p172), southern Wheatbelt
- Kalbarri National Park (p190), on the Batavia Coast
- The Wheatbelt (p170)
- Wongan Hills (p176), in the central Midlands
- Morawa (p176), also in the central Midlands

So challenging are the conditions in Australia that its birds have developed some extraordinary habits. The kookaburras, magpies and blue wrens you are likely to see – to name just a few – have developed a breeding system called ‘helpers at the nest’. The helpers are the young adult birds of previous breedings, which stay with their parents to help bring up the new chicks. Just why they should do this was a mystery until it was realised that conditions in Australia can be so harsh that more than two adult birds are needed to feed the nestlings. This pattern of breeding is very rare in places like Asia, Europe and North America, but it is common in a wide array of Australian birds.

### Plants

Australia’s plants can be irresistibly fascinating. If you happen to be in the Perth area in spring it’s well worth taking a wildflower tour. The best flowers grow on the arid and monotonous sand plains, and the blaze of colour produced by the kangaroo paws, banksias and similar native plants can be dizzying. The sheer variety of flowers is amazing, with 4000 species crowded into the southwestern corner of the continent. This diversity of prolific flowering plants has long puzzled botanists. Again, Australia’s poor soils seem to be the cause. The sand plain is about the poorest soil in Australia – almost pure quartz. This prevents any one fast-growing species from dominating. Instead, thousands of specialist plant species have learned to find a narrow niche, and so coexist. Some live at the foot of the metre-high sand dunes, some on top, some on an east-facing slope, some on the west and so on. Their flowers need to be striking in order to attract pollinators, for nutrients are so lacking in this sandy location that insects like bees are rare.

If you do get to walk the wildflower regions of the southwest, keep your eyes open for the sundews. Australia is the centre of diversity for these beautiful, carnivorous plants. They’ve given up on the soil supplying their nutritional needs and have turned instead to trapping insects with sweet globs of moisture on their leaves, and digesting them to obtain nitrogen and phosphorus.

### ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The European colonisation of Australia, commencing in 1788, heralded a period of catastrophic environmental upheaval, with the result that Australians today are struggling with some of the most severe environmental problems to be found anywhere. It may seem strange that a population of

just 20 million, living in a continent the size of the USA minus Alaska, could inflict such damage on its environment, but Australia’s long isolation, its fragile soils and difficult climate have made it particularly vulnerable to human-induced change.

Damage to Australia’s environment has been inflicted in several ways, the most important being the introduction of pest species, destruction of forests, overstocking rangelands, inappropriate agriculture and interference with water flows. Beginning with the escape of domestic cats into the Australian bush shortly after 1788, a plethora of vermin, from foxes to wild camels and cane toads, have run wild in Australia, causing extinctions in the native fauna. One out of every 10 native mammals living in Australia prior to European colonisation is now extinct, and many more are highly endangered. Extinctions have also affected native plants, birds and amphibians.

The destruction of forests has also had a profound effect. Most of Australia’s rainforests have suffered clearing, while conservationists fight with loggers over the fate of the last unprotected stands of ‘old growth’. Many Australian rangelands have been chronically overstocked for more than a century, the result being extreme vulnerability of both soils and rural economies to Australia’s drought and flood cycle, as well as extinction of many native species. The development of agriculture has involved land clearance and the provision of irrigation, and here again the effect has been profound. Clearing of the diverse and spectacular plant communities of the Western Australian Wheatbelt began just a century ago, yet today up to one-third of that country is degraded by salination of the soils. Between 70kg and 120kg of salt lies below every square metre of the region, and clearing of native vegetation has allowed water to penetrate deep into the soil, dissolving the salt crystals and carrying brine towards the surface.

In terms of financial value, just 1.5% of Australia’s land surface provides over 95% of agricultural yield, and much of this land lies in the irrigated regions of the Murray–Darling Basin. This is Australia’s agricultural heartland, yet it too is under severe threat from salting of soils and rivers. Irrigation water penetrates into the sediments laid down in an ancient sea, carrying salt into the catchments and fields. If nothing is done, the lower Murray River will

The Climate Project is a programme that trains ordinary citizens (in the US, Australia and the UK so far) to become Climate Change Messengers who present the information delivered by Al Gore in the documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*. For more, go to [www.theclimateproject.org](http://www.theclimateproject.org).

In *The Weather Makers*, Tim Flannery argues passionately for the urgent need to address NOW – the implications of a global climate change that is damaging all life on earth and endangering our very survival. It’s an accessible read.

### TICKET TO NATURE *Susie Ashworth*

A visit to some of Western Australia’s national parks is a must, with most of the state’s big-ticket natural attractions protected in these areas.

Most parks are managed by the **Department of Environment & Conservation** (DEC; ☎ 6364 6500; [www.dec.wa.gov.au](http://www.dec.wa.gov.au); The Atrium, Level 4, 168 St Georges Tce, Perth), which has offices throughout the state. Camping is allowed in designated areas of some parks (around \$12.50 per night for two people). DEC produces informative brochures on the major national parks and nature reserves in the state, as well as reams of other literature and maps. To be assured of a camp site during peak periods, park rangers recommend turning up early in the morning, when camp sites are being vacated, to secure a spot. This book will identify where camping is possible in the beautiful wilderness of WA.

Nature lovers can save some dosh with a DEC park pass. One of the most convenient pass options is the Holiday Park Pass (\$35), which gives unlimited entry for four weeks. If you need more time, the Annual All Parks Pass (\$75) gives access for a year, while the Annual Local Park Pass (\$20) gives 12 months’ entry to one park or a group of local parks. Passes are available from DEC offices (except Crawley), the shop at [www.naturebase.net](http://www.naturebase.net), visitors centres around the state and at park entrances. Unfortunately, these passes do not cover entry to the Tree Top Walk or Monkey Mia. The unlucky folk who only have time for one or two parks should opt for the daily vehicle fee – \$10 per car per day (\$5 for motorcycles and \$4 for bus passengers).

The Wildflower Society of Western Australia’s excellent website (<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~wildflowers>) has an extensive list of recommended wildflower guides, suggested routes for wildflower regions, and details of shows and exhibitions.

**WILDERNESS BATTLEGROUND** *Susie Ashworth*

The 280km-long Ningaloo Reef is arguably Western Australia's most precious natural attraction: a stunning marine park that serves as a spawning ground, nursery and sanctuary for hundreds of species and a remote slice of wilderness for visitors to explore. In recent years it's been a battleground between developers planning to install a \$200 million resort on the reef and conservationists desperate to protect it. Local author Tim Winton became the figurehead of the conservationists' campaign, and thousands of nature lovers rallied to the cause. In July 2003 the government finally rejected the resort, stating it would not accept any development that threatened the fragile coast. To find out more about continuing campaigns, see [www.save-ningaloo.org](http://www.save-ningaloo.org).

But Ningaloo is just the latest in a long line of battles between conservationists and business interests clashing over the future of Western Australia's remaining wilderness. In the 1970s, environmentalists took on the Albany whaling industry (see p146). Since the 1980s the fight has been over the logging of spectacular old-growth jarri, karri and wandoo forests in the southwest. In the late '90s, West Australians took to the streets to rally for their beloved forests. The Labor Party was swept into state office on a strong environmental platform in 2001, promising to end the logging of old-growth and to introduce ecologically sustainable forest management. In the 2005 state election the high pressure topic was water conservation, echoing growing concern across the country, which continues at the time of writing.

Contact the **Department of Environment & Conservation** (DEC; [www.dec.wa.gov.au](http://www.dec.wa.gov.au)) for an update on new protected areas and the management of 25 million hectares of National Park and marine reserves; or the **Wilderness Society Western Australia** ([www.wilderness.org.au/regions/wa](http://www.wilderness.org.au/regions/wa)) for another perspective and current campaigns.

become too salty to drink in a decade or two, threatening the water supply of Adelaide, a city of over a million people.

Despite the enormity of the biological crisis engulfing Australia, governments and the community have been slow to respond. It was in the 1980s that coordinated action began to take place, but not until the '90s that major steps were taken. The establishment of **Landcare** ([www.landcareaustralia.com.au](http://www.landcareaustralia.com.au)), an organisation enabling people to effectively address local environmental issues, and the expenditure of \$2.5 billion through the National Heritage Trust Fund have been important national initiatives. Yet so difficult are some of the issues the nation faces that, as yet, little has been achieved in terms of halting the destructive processes. Individuals are also banding together to help. Groups such as the **Australian Bush Heritage Fund** ([www.bushheritage.asn.au](http://www.bushheritage.asn.au)) and the **Australian Wildlife Conservancy** (AWC; [www.australianwildlife.org](http://www.australianwildlife.org)) allow people to donate funds and time to the conservation of native species. Some such groups have been spectacularly successful; the AWC, for example, already manages many endangered species over its 1.3-million-acre holdings.

So severe are Australia's problems that it will take a revolution before they can be overcome, for sustainable practices need to be implemented in every arena of life – from farms to suburbs and city centres. Renewable energy, sustainable agriculture and water use lie at the heart of these changes, and Australians are only now developing the road-map to sustainability that they so desperately need if they are to have a long-term future on the continent.

# Western Australia Outdoors

If you love exploring the great outdoors you've come to the right place. Western Australia's (WA's) extensive coast and immense interior make it a perfect playground for outdoor enthusiasts, with countless tracks to follow, mountains to climb, waves to surf and reefs to explore.

## BUSHWALKING

WA is blessed with some stunning bushwalking terrain, from the cool fertile forests of the southwest and the seemingly endless walking trail of the **Bibbulmun Track** (see the boxed text, p38) to the national parks of the north in the rugged, tropical Kimberley.

Get in touch with like-minded souls through the numerous bushwalking clubs around the state; for a list of clubs and some useful links, contact **Bushwalking Australia** ([www.bushwalkingaustralia.org](http://www.bushwalkingaustralia.org)).

These Perth suppliers can provide bushwalking equipment and advice: **Mountain Designs** (☎ 9322 4774; [www.mountaindesigns.com.au](http://www.mountaindesigns.com.au); 862 Hay St, Perth) **Paddy Pallin** (☎ 9321 2666; [www.paddypallin.com.au](http://www.paddypallin.com.au); 884 Hay St, Perth)

## Perth & Surrounds

What better way to start than with WA's first national park, the **John Forrest National Park** (p98), where there's plenty of hiking as well as camping and picnicking facilities. There's an easy 15km walk that takes in waterfalls and has excellent views. For a tougher walk, head to the rugged **Walyunga National Park** (p98), where there's a medium-to-hard 18km walk (and some easier variations) that fords the Avon River and has excellent wildlife-viewing. If you're heading north, the **Yanchep National Park** (p103) offers an excellent array of walks from short, easy strolls to challenging full-day walks such as the Yaberoo Budjara walk trail, which follows an Aboriginal walking trail.

## Down South

Serious walkers gravitate to the rugged craggy beauty of the **Stirling Range National Park** (p140) north of Albany, one of the state's prime bushwalking

For national park news and updates, and detailed descriptions of national park trails, see the newly minted Department of Environment and Conservation website (DEC; [www.naturebase.net](http://www.naturebase.net)), or pick up brochures from local DEC offices.

## RESPONSIBLE BUSHWALKING

Please consider the following when hiking to help preserve the ecology and beauty of Western Australia.

- Do not urinate or defecate within 100m (320ft) of any water sources. Doing so pollutes precious water supplies and can lead to the transmission of serious diseases.
- Use biodegradable detergents and wash at least 50m (160ft) from any water sources.
- Avoid cutting wood for fires in popular bushwalking areas as this can cause rapid deforestation.
- Hillsides and mountain slopes are prone to erosion; it's important to stick to existing tracks.
- Bushwalking in much of the state's bushland is restricted because of the risk of spreading die-back, a nasty fungal disease that attacks the roots of plants and causes them to rot. Its spread can be prevented by observing 'no go' road signs and by cleaning soil from your boots before and after each hike.



areas. The popular Bluff Knoll climb (6km, three to four hours) will take your breath away – and so will the park's 1500 different species of wildflowers. Experienced hikers love the challenging 15.5km Stirling Ridge walk, WA's only alpine walk. Time your trip in late spring or early summer (September to November) to capture the park in all its flowering glory and be prepared for wind-chill and rain (and sometimes snow!) in winter.

Also north of Albany is the smaller **Porongurup National Park** (p138), with its signature granite rocks and pocket of dense karri forest. It offers a range of trails for bushwalkers, from the easy 10-minute Tree in the Rock stroll to the medium-grade Hayward and Nancy Peaks (three hours) and challenging three-hour Marmabup Rock hike. Wildflowers and a flurry of bird activity make springtime the peak season for Porongurup, but the park can be visited at any time of year.

WA has long stretches of spectacular coastline punctuated by interesting walks. Guaranteed to be a highlight of your trip are stunning walks through **Walpole-Nornalup** (p134), **Fitzgerald River** (p147) and **Cape Le Grand** (p151) national parks.

For travellers with stamina and some time on their hands, the **Cape-to-Cape Track** (p117) follows the coastline 135km from Cape Naturaliste to Cape Leeuwin, takes five to seven days, and has four wild camp sites en route.

### Up North

Summer's no picnic in the sweltering, remote national parks of the north, and high season for many is late autumn, winter and early spring (April to October). Terrain in these arid regions can be treacherous, so always do your homework, be prepared with water and supplies, and check in with the ranger's office before setting out.

**Kalbarri National Park** (p190) draws hikers with a seductive mix of scenic gorges, thick bushland and rugged coastal cliffs. The popular six-hour loop takes advantage of the dramatic seascapes and features a series of lookouts, including the Nature's Window, a favourite with photographers.

Rugged, sometimes hazardous treks can be taken into the dramatic gorges of the **Karijini National Park** (p215) and are popular with experienced bushwalkers – especially the walk to Mt Bruce summit (9km, five hours).

Visitors to the Kimberley's **Purnululu National Park** (p240) come to see one of Australia's most amazing sights – the striped beehive-shaped domes of

Lonely Planet's *Walking in Australia* guide gives plenty of detail on a number of walks in WA, mainly in the southwest and on the south coast.

### THE BIBB TRACK

If you've got eight spare weeks up your sleeve, consider trekking the entire Bibbulmun Track, a long-distance walking trail that winds its way south from Kalamunda, about 20km east of Perth, through virtually unbroken natural environment to Walpole and along the coast to Albany – a total of 963km.

Bushwalkers trek through magnificent southwest landscapes, including jarrah and marri forests, wandoo flats carpeted with wildflowers, rugged granite outcrops, coastal heath country and spectacular cliffs, headlands and beaches.

Camp sites are spaced at regular intervals, most with a three-sided shelter that sleeps eight to 15 people, plus a water tank and pit toilets. The best time for walking is from late winter to spring (August to October).

Thousands of walkers use the Bibbulmun each year, though most are only on the track for two or three days. For more information, contact the Department of Environment and Conservation's **Bibb Track Office** (☎ 9334 0265; [www.calm.wa.gov.au/tourism/bibbulmun\\_splash.html](http://www.calm.wa.gov.au/tourism/bibbulmun_splash.html)).

There is also plenty of information about the track on the Department of Education & Conservation's **NatureBase** ([www.naturebase.net](http://www.naturebase.net)) website.

### PLAYING FAVOURITES

Here are our five favourite national parks and why we love them so:

- Fitzgerald River National Park (p147) – wildflowers and whales
- Karijini National Park (p215) – gorgeous gorges galore!
- Ningaloo Marine Park (p208) – superlative snorkelling and surfing
- Shoalwater Islands Marine Park (p94) – wild dolphin wonderland
- Windjana Gorge National Park (p238) – cruising through crocodile country

the World Heritage-listed Bungle Bungles. Walks include the easy Cathedral Gorge walk, and the more difficult overnight trek to Piccaninny Gorge. The park is only open from April to December.

### CAMPING

WA is an outstanding place to go camping. Considering that most people go camping to 'get away from it all', this enormous state provides that in spades, especially in the national parks, where sleeping in a swag under the stars is almost obligatory. The weather is a major concern for campers; it can be uncomfortable in the north during summer due to the heat and flash flooding, and pretty miserable and cold in the south during winter. See *When to Go* (p11), and note that school holidays are not a good time for solitude in WA.

### CYCLING

Cyclists are made very welcome in WA. There are excellent day, weekend or even multiweek cycling routes. Perth has an ever-growing network of bike tracks, and you'll find the southwest region of WA good for cycle touring. While you'll find thousands of kilometres of good, virtually traffic-free roads in country areas, the distances between towns makes it difficult to plan – even if the riding is virtually flat!

For practical advice on cycling around WA, see p266. For bike hire in Perth, see p65.

Perth (p52) is a relatively bike-friendly city, with a good recreational bike-path system, including routes that follow the Swan River all the way to Fremantle, and extensive paths through Kings Park overlooking the city. For cycling maps, brochures and guides to particular routes, contact the **Department of Planning and Infrastructure** (☎ 9216 8000; [www.dpi.wa.gov.au/cycling](http://www.dpi.wa.gov.au/cycling); 441 Murray St, Perth).

Cyclists rule on virtually car-free Rottne Island (p91). It's a liberating place to ride, with long stretches of empty roads circumnavigating the island, allowing you to stop off at each beach for a swim! You can hire bikes on the island; see p94.

Mountain bikers have been exploring the **Munda Biddi Mountain Bike Trail** ([www.mundabiddi.org.au](http://www.mundabiddi.org.au)), which means 'path through the forest' in the Noon-gar Aboriginal language. When completed, it will be the mountain-biking equivalent of the Bibbulmun Track (opposite), taking off-road cyclists some 900km from Mundaring on Perth's outskirts through the beautiful, scenic southwest to Albany on the south coast. The first stage (to Collie, 332km) had been completed at the time of research, with camps situated en route a day's easy ride apart, with water, bike storage and bike repair facilities. You can pick up the excellent map pack (\$31) and more information from **Department of Environment and Conservation** (DEC; ☎ 9334 0333).

### TOP FIVE INDIGENOUS CULTURAL TOURS

- Wula Guda Nyinda, Monkey Mia (p196) – learn to love bush tucker, to let the bush talk to you, and how to identify the size of an animal by his poo, with Darren ‘Capes’ Capewell.
- Kodja Place Indigenous Tours, Kojonup (p172) – Noongar elder Jack Cox teaches you traditional practices and tells wonderful Dreaming stories over billy tea.
- Mamabulanjin Tours, Broome (p227) – learn traditional fishing, hunting and survival techniques as you walk the mangroves of Roebuck Bay.
- Yamatji Cultural Trails, Geraldton (p185) – compare the traditional past with contemporary issues around the camp fire, in a swag, under the stars.
- Yanchep National Park, Yanchep (p103) – let the Noongar people give you a dance lesson or two and get to give the didgeridoo a go.

### DIVING & SNORKELLING

With plenty of fascinating dives on offer throughout the state, including stunning marine parks and shipwrecks, WA is the perfect place to don a wetsuit and take the plunge. Local tourist offices can often help out with brochures and booklets on top regional diving or snorkelling spots.

Close to Perth, divers can explore shipwrecks and marine life off the beaches of **Rottneest Island** (p92); or head south to explore the submerged reefs and historic shipwrecks of the West Coast Dive Park within **Shoalwater Islands Marine Park** (p94), near Rockingham. You can take a dive course in Geographe Bay with companies based in **Dunsborough** (p120) or **Busselton** (p117), with its excellent dives under the jetty, on Four Mile Reef (a 40km limestone ledge about 6.5km off the coast) and the scuttled HMAS *Swan*.

Other wrecks popular with divers are the HMAS *Perth* (at 36m) which was deliberately sunk in 2001 in King George Sound near **Albany** (p141); and the *Sanko Harvest*, near **Esperance** (p148). Both wrecks are teeming with the marine life which has made the artificial reefs home.

Divers seeking warmer water should head north. A staggering amount of marine life can be found just 100m offshore within the **Ningaloo Marine Park** (p208), making this pristine piece of coastline fantastic for diving and snorkelling. On the **Turquoise Bay Drift Snorkel** (p208), you drift over the coral, get out down the beach, and do it again! If that whets your appetite, take in one of the most spectacular underwater experiences in the world – diving or snorkelling alongside the world’s largest fish, the whale shark. Tours are available from **Exmouth** (p204) and **Coral Bay** (p203).

### FISHING

With more than 6000km of coastline, WA is a fishing enthusiast’s paradise. From sailfish in the north to trout in the south there are all types of fishing on offer. Fishing is the state’s largest recreational activity and you’ll find locals dropping a line just about anywhere there’s water – and catching their dinner nearly every time.

Ocean lovers can find a place to fish just about anywhere along the coast at any time of year. Close to Perth, recreational fishers dangle a hook at **Rottneest Island** (p91), with King Wrasse and Western Australian dhufish (previously called the jewfish) both plentiful around the island.

South of Perth, popular fishing hot spots include **Mandurah** (p95), with options for deep-sea fishing, catching tailor from the long golden stretches of beach or nabbing Mandurah’s famed blue manna crabs and king prawns in the estuaries. You can scoot down to **Augusta** (p126) to chase salmon in

For local tips, events, news and rides, contact the Bicycle Transportation Alliance ([www.multiline.com.au/~bta](http://www.multiline.com.au/~bta); 2 Delhi St, West Perth).

The magazine and website *Western Angler* ([www.westernangler.com.au](http://www.westernangler.com.au)) are great resources for the serious WA fishing enthusiast.

the Blackwood River or whiting in the bay; or drop a line into the fish-rich waters underneath the famous jetty at **Busselton** (p117).

Sunny **Geraldton** (p185) is an excellent place to fish, with Sunset Beach and Drummond Cove popular spots, or you can take one of the excellent fishing charters out to the nearby **Houtman Abrolhos Islands** (p188). There’s great fishing all along the coast from here and as you move up into the hotter, steamier northwest, the fishing charter operators start to multiply, with a good chance to hook a monster fish at **Exmouth** (p204), the **Dampier Archipelago** (p213) and the game-fishing nirvana of **Broome** (p223). The northern Kimberley is also a popular spot for catching the tough-fighting and tasty barramundi.

You’ll need a recreational fishing licence if you intend catching marron (freshwater crayfish) or rock lobsters, if you use a fishing net, or if you’re freshwater angling in the southwest. They cost \$22 to \$38 or there’s an annual licence covering all fishing activities for \$75. Buy one from the **Department of Fisheries** (☎ 9482 7333; [www.fish.wa.gov.au](http://www.fish.wa.gov.au); 5G10 Building, 168-170 St George’s Tce, Perth), from its regional offices or online. Note that there are strict bag and size limits – see the website for specific details.

### SURFING & WINDSURFING

If you’re here to surf, WA is simply brilliant. Beginners, intermediates, wannabe pros and adventure surfers will find excellent conditions to suit their skill levels along WA’s coast. WA gets huge swells (often over 3m), so it’s critical to align where you surf with your ability. Look out for strong currents, huge sharks and territorial local surfers who are often far scarier than a hungry white pointer.

The state’s traditional surfing home is the southwest, particularly the beaches from **Yallingup** to **Margaret River** (see the boxed text, p121), and this stretch is perfect for a surf trip, with heaps of different breaks to explore.

Back up around **Perth** (p52) the surf is a lot smaller, but there’s often good conditions at bodyboard-infested **Trigg** (p64) and **Scarborough** (p64). Don’t despair if waves are small, simply head off to **Rottneest Island** (p91) where the surf is usually much bigger and better – check out Strickland Bay.

Heading north there are countless reef breaks waiting to be discovered on a surfing safari (hint: take a 4WD), with the best-known spots being the left-hand point breaks of Jake’s Point near **Kalbarri** (p190), Gnaraloo Station, 150km north of **Carnarvon** (p197), as well as Surfers Beach at **Exmouth** (p204). Buy the locals a beer and they might share the location of some lesser-known world-class spots. We’re not brave enough to do it in print – we have family living here.

Windsurfers and kite-surfers have plenty of choice spots to try out in WA as well, with excellent flat-water and wave-sailing. Kite-surfers in particular will appreciate the long, empty beaches and offshore reefs away from crowds.

After trying out Perth’s city beaches, the next place to head is **Lancelin** (p104), which is home to a large population of surfers, especially in summer. Both flat-water and wave sailing are excellent here. Further up the coast, **Geraldton** (p185) is another surfing hot spot – especially at the renowned Coronation Beach. The Shark Bay area has excellent flat-water sailing and the remote Gnaraloo Station, 150km north of **Carnarvon** (p197) is a world-renowned wave-sailing spot.

### WILDLIFE-WATCHING

For most visitors to WA there’s no better wildlife-watching than seeing the southern right and humpback whales make their way along the whole coast. In June the gentle giants are often spotted off the southern coast near Cape

Keen anglers wanting to take home more than an Esky full of empty beer cans should head to the nearest bookstore and pick up a copy of the freshly updated *Fishing Guide to Western Australia* by Kurt Blanksby and Frank Prokop, which identifies fishing hot spots from the Kimberley to the South Australian border.

For up-to-date surf reports and webcams, head to either [www.coastalwatch.com.au](http://www.coastalwatch.com.au) or [www.swellnet.com.au](http://www.swellnet.com.au).

*Taj Burrow’s Book of Hot Surfing* by WA’s top pro surfer Taj Burrow takes you through everything you need to know to get on a surfboard or just keep improving once you’re up on your feet.

Leeuwin on their annual pilgrimage from Antarctica to the warm tropical waters of the northwest coast. They can then be seen again on their slow southern migration down the coast in spring and early summer. Whale-watching tours leave from **Perth** (p65), **Rockingham** (p94) and **Cape Leeuwin** (p126), and generally cost around \$60/45 per adult/child for a three-hour cruise.

Southern right and humpback whales are also spotted off the Great Australian Bight, and regularly make themselves at home in the bays and coves of St George Sound in **Albany** (p141) from July to October. In whale-watching season, they are often also spotted from the cliff tops of the south coast, from **Fitzgerald River National Park** (p147), **Bremer Bay** (p148), **Cape Arid National Park** (p151) and **Torndirrup National Park** (p146).

Dolphins can be seen up close year-round at several places in the west, including the Dolphin Discovery Centre at **Bunbury** (p115), on an interactive dolphin tour from **Rockingham** (p94), or at the beach resort of **Monkey Mia** (p196), famous for its friendly colony of bottlenose dolphins as well as for checking out 10% of the world's dugong population munching on seagrass.

WA is also a bird-watcher's delight, with an enormous variety of species and two of the four official Birds Australia observatories. The **Eyre Bird Observatory** (p167), surrounded by mallee scrub and spectacular sand dunes, is a remote getaway off the Nullarbor for serious nature lovers. The **Broome Bird Observatory** (p234), in the middle of a mudflats region, attracts a staggering 800,000 birds each year. **Yalgorup National Park** (p97), south of Mandurah, is another important habitat for a wide variety of water birds, and is a magnet for local bird-watchers.

For excellent regional-specific advice, including events and a series of bird-watching guides, see the website of Birds Australia Western Australia Inc (<http://birdswa.iinet.net.au>).

# Food & Drink

Western Australia (WA) has fantastic fresh produce, enviable wines and an eclectic mix of culinary influences that often merge to create a wonderful dining experience – especially when mixed with sunshine and a sea view! Visitors will be surprised by the wide range of food available in restaurants, markets, delis and cafés – especially in Perth, Fremantle and Broome, as well as southern towns such as Margaret River and Albany. However, the further you get away from the tourist trail the less willing chefs are to deviate from the classic Aussie pub menu of steak and seafood simply presented. One thing that doesn't change, however, is the critically acclaimed wines of WA, where both big- and small-name vineyards produce world-class vintages.

The mix of European, Asian and indigenous ingredients and cooking methods is often termed 'Modern Australian' (Mod Oz). While in other countries this 'fusion' style of cuisine earns the term 'con-fusion' when poorly executed, in Australia this arguably works well. While there are no definitive dishes in the Mod-Oz style, an example of this might entail a French-trained Aussie chef cooking a kangaroo fillet using Asian-inspired ingredients.

## STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

With a wonderful, wild coastline, it's no surprise that most of WA's best food comes from the sea. Fresh WA seafood is harnessed from some of the purest waters you'll find anywhere, and usually cooked with great respect for the ingredients' freshness.

Along the endless coastline, eateries serve fish such as red emperor, coral trout, dhufish, pink snapper, King George whiting, threadfin salmon and the esteemed barramundi from the tropical north. Visitors can tuck into superb rock lobsters from Geraldton, dine on sardines caught near Fremantle, or munch on mussels and Exmouth Gulf prawns. Unique to the southwest are delicious marron, prehistoric-looking freshwater crayfish that feature on menus throughout the forest region.

Thanks to a large migrant population, travellers are also treated to a huge choice of cuisines – anything from Thai, Indian and Japanese to Chinese, Italian and Turkish. In the supermarkets of Perth the expat community can find everything they need to recreate their favourite dishes.

## DRINKS

### Non-Alcoholic Drinks

Australians drink a lot of fizzy soft drinks as well as having an odd obsession with flavoured milk (chocolate, coffee and strawberry are favourites), which often replaces breakfast! A good cup of tea these days means a tea bag in a cup of hot water, but Aussies still love a good 'cuppa'.

While nationalistic citizens around the world gaze at their coat of arms and get a tear in their eye, many Australians salivate. Yes folks, both the kangaroo and the emu make appearances on Australia's coat of arms and menus.

### TRAVEL YOUR TASTEBUDS

Yes, indeed, you can eat Australia's cute coat-of-arms animals, the kangaroo and the emu. Kangaroo is by far the most popular menu item of the two and its deep, purple-red meat is sweet and strongly flavoured (akin to game) and is generally served rare. In the north, you might encounter crocodile on the menu, a white meat similar to fish with a texture closer to chicken. On some bush-tucker walks you might be offered the witchetty grub, which looks like a giant maggot and tastes nutty, but with a squishy texture. It tastes better if you eat it with your eyes shut.

These days cafés in urban WA make a decent coffee, but there is still that little naming-convention problem: a short black is an espresso, a flat white is like a cappuccino without the foam and a 'long macchiato' is a coffee-making crime.

Perth and Fremantle are coffee-crazed (see the boxed text, p71), and addicts will be pleased with the offerings in Margaret River, Albany and Broome, but might be struggling to find a good espresso elsewhere, where a barista is often thought to be a South American freedom-fighter.

### Alcoholic Drinks

Foster's, Carlton Draught, Tooheys, XXXX and Victoria Bitter (VB) are all well-known Australian beers. The Swan Brewery, the west's biggest producer of beer, has two major brands: Swan and Emu.

Far more interesting are WA's excellent boutique breweries. Matilda Bay produces a range of beers with plenty of character and distinct styles. Red-back (a smooth wheat beer), Beez Neez (a honey-wheat beer), and Matilda Bay Bohemian Pilsner (strong-flavoured bitter) are all worth trying, as are the Reserve Beer range.

Fremantle's Little Creatures Pale Ale is a favourite tippie and its other boutique brews (the light Rogers' beer, the refreshing Pilsner and the brilliantly clear Bright Ale) are all popular in Perth and Fremantle. Visit the Little Creatures brewery, bar and restaurant in Fremantle (p85).

There are several other boutique breweries in pubs in Perth and Fremantle and yes, Guinness-lovers, your 'must-have' brew is occasionally found on draught in Irish pubs.

Australian beer is served ice-cold and has a higher alcohol content than British or American beers. Standard beer is around 5% alcohol, although most breweries now produce light beers (around 2% to 3% alcohol) and 'mid-strength' beers (around 3.5%). The flavour of these beers has improved enormously over the past few years – so there's no excuse for getting caught over the alcohol limit when driving.

Saving the best 'til last, some of the country's finest wines can be found in WA. See the Wineries chapter, p47.

## CELEBRATIONS

West Aussies love a good party and with such great weather, where better to indulge in food and wine than the great outdoors? Celebrations often take the form of barbecues (barbies), whether it's to watch a footy match (with the TV outside), celebrate a birthday or just as an excuse to get together. At these ritualistic get-togethers, the man of the house traditionally cooks, wearing an apron that bears an amusing slogan regarding the grill-master's drinking, cooking or sexual abilities. As Christmas falls in the middle of summer, even the traditional baked Christmas dinner is shunned in favour of a barbecue, with copious amounts of fresh seafood and steaks sizzling away. Generally held in the mid-afternoon, it allows time for a late-afternoon siesta followed by sneaking a few leftovers. If a barbie's not on, another popular celebration venue for groups is the local Indian, Chinese or Thai restaurant where you can BYO (bring your own alcohol) and order up a storm.

As WA's wine-growing regions have developed, so has the accompanying food industry. Down in the gourmet centre of Margaret River, foodies flock to the Margaret River Wine Region Festival in November, while Fremantle celebrates the sardine in January. Elsewhere in the state, most wine regions throw harvest festivals, which combine wine-tasting with samples of the region's best local produce. For more details on these festivals, see p252.

## WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

Perth has the kind of dining scene that you would expect for a cosmopolitan city, with the range of options encompassing small, cheap Asian eateries, fine-dining restaurants and everything in-between. In small towns, however,

In Australia BYO (Bring Your Own) is a tradition in which a restaurant allows you to bring your own alcohol. If the restaurant also sells alcohol, the BYO bit is usually limited to bottled wine only (no beer, no casks). A corkage charge is almost always added to your bill.

the choice narrows considerably. Usually you'll end up eating at a pub, with its ubiquitous 'counter meals', so called because they used to be eaten at the bar counter (and sometimes still are). The food is simple: seafood or meat with chips, often with a self-service salad bar. If you can't decide between seafood or meat, try the quintessential Aussie pub meal, surf 'n' turf (seafood and steak in the same dish).

What you will notice when you're in larger towns is the BYO option at cafés and restaurants. This can make restaurant dining more economical as you're not paying the restaurant's mark-up on wines.

See p248 for information on opening hours.

### Quick Eats

The insidious big-name fast-food outlets have infiltrated towns and highways all over the state. Other quick eats come from milk bars (a kind of delicatessen/general store), which serve home-made hamburgers (with bacon, egg, pineapple and beetroot if you so desire). Most towns close to the sea have at least one busy fish and chip shop and it's an Aussie tradition to take your battered fish and chips down to the beach, to enjoy the sea breezes and be stalked by menacing seagulls.

Another Aussie tradition is the ubiquitous meat pie – predominately steak and gravy in a pastry case. While the demand for more interesting choices has led to the introduction of gourmet pies, such as spinach and feta pies squeezed in among the beef options, don't go asking for these at a roadhouse in the outback – real men just have a meat pie with sauce!

## VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

Vegetarians not straying from the beaten tourist track will fare quite well. Cafés seem to always have vegetarian options, and the best restaurants may even have complete vegetarian menus. If you are venturing to less-populated country areas, your food choices are as slim as a supermodel. Vegans will find the going much tougher, but there are usually dishes that are vegan-adaptable at restaurants.

## EATING WITH KIDS

Dining with children in Australia is easy. Besides the obvious fast-food joints, children are very welcome at WA's omnipresent Chinese, Thai and Italian restaurants. Kids' items are usually available at cafés, and you'll often see families dining early in bistros and clubs – where there's either a separate kids' menu or kid-sized portions of dishes such as pasta or fish and chips.

### ORDERING, BILLS & TIPPING

Overseas visitors are often baffled at Aussie cafés and pubs where there are waiters but no table service. In some cafés and pubs you go to the counter and order, and pick up your food and drinks yourself. The more sophisticated version of this is where they give you a number or an electronic device and they either bellow out your number or the device rings like a cell phone when your food is ready. Another variation is where you order and are given a number to display on your table so the waiter can bring the food over. And then there are cafés with good old-fashioned table service.

Whichever way you order and receive your bill, the total at the bottom is all you are expected to pay. It should include GST (as should menu prices) and there is no 'optional' service charge added. Waiters are paid reasonably well, so they don't rely on tips to survive. Often, though, especially in urban WA, people tip a few coins in a café, while the tip for excellent restaurant service can be as high as 15% in the better establishments. The pesky incidence of add-ons (for bread, water, surcharges on weekends etc) is unfortunately rising.

Seafood and steak on the one plate (usually called surf 'n' turf) is an Aussie tradition. While chefs dare not get too creative with the dish, they get creative with its name – here are our favourites: reef & beef, ocean & earth, paddock & pond, prawns with horns.



## HABITS & CUSTOMS

Australian table manners are fairly standard – avoid talking with your mouth full, wait until everyone has been served before you eat, and don't use your fingers to pick up food unless it can't be tackled another way.

If you're invited to dinner at someone's house, take a gift. You may offer to bring something for the meal (sometimes a course such as dessert or a salad), but if the host refuses, take a bottle of wine.

'Shouting' is a revered Aussie custom where people in a bar or pub take turns to buy drinks for their group. It's unclear whether getting drunk is the aim or a consequence of this tradition – but don't leave before it's your turn to shout! At a toast, everyone should touch glasses.

A smoking ban for all indoor areas of pubs, bars and clubs came into effect from July 2006, which is why you'll see addicts puffing away outside these establishments. Never light up in someone's house unless you ask first – and don't take offence when you're pointed outside!

## MENU DECODER

Australians love to shorten everything, including people's names, so expect many words to be abbreviated. Some food- and beverage-related words you might hear:

**barbie** – a barbecue, where men do the cooking and bond over beers while the womenfolk sip wine and pretend to be impressed by the manful meat-wrangling

**Chiko Roll** – a large, spring roll-like pastry for sale in takeaway shops

**Esky** – an insulated ice chest to keep necessary supplies, such as beer

**sanger/sando** – a sandwich

**slab** – a case of beer

**snags** – sausages

**Tim Tam** – a chocolate biscuit that lies close to the heart of most Australians

**Vegetemite** – salty, dark-brown yeast extract that's best served spread on toast; iconic and adored by the Aussie masses, it's generally greeted with a shake of the head by visitors

In WA the opening dish of a three-course meal is called the entrée, the second course (the North American entrée) is called the main course and the sweet bit at the end is called dessert, sweets, afters or pud.

# Wineries

Campbell Mattinson & Terry Carter

While it's perhaps odd that we chiefly owe the current worldwide popularity of Western Australia's (WA's) wines to a 1965 academic publication entitled *The Climate & Soils of Southern WA in Relation to Vine Growing*, once you taste the results that led from this study, you'll certainly be toasting its author, Dr John Gladstone. The wineries that sprung up following his report laid the foundations for the region's formidable reputation.

Australian wine has exploded in both quality and quantity since that time and WA, particularly in terms of quality, has been a leading force in that change. Today WA is recognised as a world-class producer of a wide variety of table wines – red and white, both decadently expensive and delightfully affordable. Arguably like no other region in the world, the words 'Produced in Western Australia' signify, at the very least, a fantastically drinkable drop.

It's not that wine is new to WA, however. The most famous of the long-standing WA wine producers, Houghton, was founded way back in 1836, just outside Perth in the Swan Valley (p87). Its White Burgundy (now White Classic), first produced in 1937, is one of Australia's best-known wines – but even with that heritage, the Swan Valley as a wine-growing region has taken a back seat to the Margaret River's sublime grape-growing conditions, and Houghton today grows huge volumes of grapes in the southwest. For just as government geologist and keen wine enthusiast Dr John Gladstone foretold, just about anywhere south of Perth – especially those areas with the cooling influence of a nearby coastline – has the potential to be a very fine area for the production of wine. Cheers, Doctor!

## MARGARET RIVER

If you're looking for WA's best wines, look no further than the coastal area of Margaret River, 250km southwest of Perth. Before the good Doctor pinpointed the area as having the right soils and the right climate to produce first-class wines, Margaret River was a struggling, isolated town a lengthy journey from one of the world's most isolated capital cities.

Dr Gladstone got it right – as did the pioneering wine families who took up his advice. Although a great number of other terrific wineries are very well established, these four founding wineries are the cornerstone of Margaret River and form the basis of the region's reputation among the great wine regions of the world:

**Cape Mentelle** (☎ 9757 0888; [www.capementelle.com.au](http://www.capementelle.com.au); Walcliffe Rd, Margaret River)

Makes consistently excellent Cabernet Sauvignon and a wonderful example of the current 'it' wine, Sauvignon Blanc/Sémillon.

**Cullen Wines** (☎ 9755 5277; [www.cullenwines.com.au](http://www.cullenwines.com.au); Caves Rd, Cowaramup) Still in the family, it produces a superb Chardonnay and an excellent Cabernet Merlot.

**Moss Wood** (☎ 9755 6266; [www.mosswood.com.au](http://www.mosswood.com.au); Metricup Rd, Willyabrup) Makes a heady Sémillon, a notable Cabernet Sauvignon and a surprising Pinot Noir.

**Vasse Felix** (☎ 9756 5000; [www.vassefelix.com.au](http://www.vassefelix.com.au); cnr Caves & Harmans Rds, South Cowaramup) Good all-round winery and a must-see on any Margaret River winery tour.

The Margaret River region is flanked by a roaring surf coast and is generally blessed with long and often very dry summers, qualities that seem to infiltrate the wines, which are ripe, rich and stylish – they almost seem suntanned – and are often of stunning quality. Besides the initial four, the list of notable wineries in Margaret River is so long and impressive that it's impossible to include them all, but standouts include the following:

Campbell Mattinson is a journalist of over 20 years and an award-winning writer. In 2005 Campbell picked up the prestigious NSW Wine Press Club Wine Communicator Award, and he was a finalist at the World Food Media Awards in both 2003 and 2005.

For information and tasting notes about Western Australian wines, and to shop online for reds and whites, visit [www.mrwines.com](http://www.mrwines.com).

**Devil's Lair** (☎ 9757 7573; www.devils-lair.com; Rocky Rd, Witchcliffe) Small, cosy, stylish cellar door with top-of-the-line Chardonnay and Cabernet. Check out its Fifth Leg series as well.

**Howard Park** (☎ 9756 5200; www.howardparkwines.com.au; Miamup Rd, Cowaramup) Brilliant Cabernet and Shiraz, and a wide range of styles and prices. It also makes the MadFish range of wines.

**Leeuwin Estate** (☎ 9759 0000; www.leeuwinestate.com.au; Stevens Rd, Margaret River) A brilliant estate, with excellent wines, a stylish cellar door, highly regarded restaurant and an annual sell-out concert series (see p252). Oh, and they make one of the best Chardonnays in Australia – the Art Series Chardonnay.

**Pierro** (☎ 9755 6220; www.pierro.com.au; Caves Rd, Willyabrup) Powerful Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc to die for, in a quaint, leafy setting.

**Voyager Estate** (☎ 9757 6354; www.voyagerestate.com.au; Stevens Rd, Margaret River) A true gem, with great wines across the board and an elegant cellar door and restaurant.

**Xanadu Estate** (☎ 9757 2581; www.xanaduwines.com; Terry Rd, Margaret River) Broad range (including the popular Secession label), decent cellar door and restaurant.

It almost sounds cruel to label the following wineries as 'second-tier', but when you've got such a stellar line-up, that's generally how they are regarded. Still, all the following offer excellent wines in distinctive surroundings, and even then a good deal more wineries from Margaret River could be listed.

**Brookland Valley** (☎ 9755 6042; www.brooklandvalley.com.au; Caves Rd, Willyabrup) Getting better all the time; the Chardonnay and Merlot are fantastic.

**Happs** (☎ 9755 3300; www.happs.com.au; Commonage Rd, Dunsborough) Extensive, impressive range of wines and pottery.

**Juniper Estate** (☎ 9755 9000; www.juniperestate.com.au; Harman's Rd, South Cowaramup) Emerging star. Check out the Estate Shiraz and Semillon.

**Moss Brothers** (☎ 9755 6270; www.mossbrothers.com.au; Caves Rd, Willyabrup) Often neglected but wrongly so. Great Shiraz!

**Willespie** (☎ 9755 6248; www.willespie.com.au; Harman's Mill Rd, Willyabrup) Unusual Verdelho and an excellent shiraz.

Margaret River also produces a great deal of wine using a combination of the Sémillon and Sauvignon Blanc grapes. These very popular fruity wines are not Margaret River's very best but they are often the most affordable – and are highly regarded. Cape Mentelle, Cullen Wines and **Lenton Brae** (☎ 9755 6255; Caves Rd, Willyabrup) all make particularly exotic examples.

## SWAN VALLEY

While the strength of WA wine production is clearly in the cooler southern wine regions, the Swan Valley still has something to offer, not least because it makes a pleasant day trip from Perth, with the closest of the wineries, **Waters Edge Winery** (☎ 9277 2989; www.watersedgewinery.com.au; 77 Great Eastern Hwy, South Guildford), barely a 25-minute drive northeast of the city centre. The Swan Valley is WA's oldest wine region and while in quality terms it's generally not seen as a major contributor to Australia's growing wine reputation, it's good wine-tourism country, with fine food, full-flavoured wine, and hot dry weather perfect for outdoor wining and dining. Wine quality in the Swan Valley has lifted in recent years, especially in the production of fruity white wines made from Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc, Verdelho, as well as red wines made from Shiraz. The Swan Valley can also be visited by boat – up the Swan River, stopping at the Sandalford Winery – which adds to its charm.

The Swan Valley's most distinguished wine is in fact one of Australia's most famously affordable wines. Houghton White Classic (formerly White Burgundy) is a blend of a number of different white-wine grapes, drinks like a mix of tropical, zesty fruits, and even cellars well over five or more years –

Watershed Premium Wines (☎ 9758 8633; www.watershedwines.com.au; cnr Bussell Hwy & Darch Rd, Margaret River) is a relative newcomer in the Margaret River area, but its wines are already starting to attract attention.

While 2004, 2005 and 2006 were great years in WA for both quantity and quality of grapes, this means that there is currently an oversupply of wine – and while that's bad news for producers, it's good news for consumers.

a perfect memento of your trip. It's a good introduction to the rest of the range at **Houghton** (☎ 9274 9540; www.houghton-wines.com.au; Dale Rd, Middle Swan), from the very cheap to the very expensive; it's the area's best winery. Not that the area's short of wineries – at last count there were more than 30 of them. The following is a selection of the best:

**Jane Brook Estate** (☎ 9274 1432; www.janebrook.com.au; Toodyay Rd, Middle Swan) Clean, pure wines and outdoor dining facilities.

**Lamont Wines** (☎ 9296 4485; www.lamonts.com.au; Bisdee Rd, Millendon) Owned and run by the famous WA food-and-wine family, both of which are on impressive show here.

**Sandalford** (☎ 9374 9300; www.sandalford.com; West Swan Rd, Caversham) An old favourite with a large range and extensive facilities for visitors, including tours of the winery.

## PEEL & GEOGRAPHE REGIONS

This area stretches south of Perth, in the direction (but short) of Margaret River, from Rockingham to Donnybrook. The Peel region starts about 70km south of Perth – which often means that it's hot and dry and rugged. Like the Swan Valley, wine in this region is not generally considered of great significance – though a few wineries entirely buck that trend. **Peel Estate** (☎ 9524 1221; www.peelwine.com.au; Fletcher Rd, Baldivis) is the most obvious of them. Established in 1974 by Will Nairn, it has for much of that time produced one of Australia's best Shiraz wines, along with excellent Cabernet, a big Zinfandel, Chardonnay and Verdelho. It's a beautiful cellar door made predominantly of local Tuart-tree wood, with views through to the working winery. While not in the same class as Peel Estate, the **Millbrook Winery** (☎ 9525 5796; www.millbrookwinery.com.au; Old Chestnut Lane, Jarrahdale), a short drive west, is also worth the trip, with a large new cellar door and a 'drink now' range, the Barking Owl.

Further south, in the slightly cooler Geographe region, you'll find a large selection of wineries of varying quality, though the standouts are clear: **Capel Vale** (☎ 9702 1012; www.capelvale.com; Mallokup Rd, Capel) has a 30-year history of wine-making excellence, particularly with Chardonnay, Shiraz and more recently Merlot. It's all been made easier to enjoy with the recent re-building of the cellar door complex. Its only serious rival in the region is **Killerby Vineyards** (☎ 1800 655 722; www.killerby.com.au; Minnipup Rd, Stratham) just south of Bunbury, which founded the region in 1973 and is highly regarded for its Chardonnay and Shiraz. **Willow Bridge Estate** (☎ 9728 0055; Gardincourt Dr, Dardanup) also produces a large number of well-priced wines, its whites being of particular note.

## GREAT SOUTHERN

The Great Southern region will never challenge Margaret River's pre-eminence among wine-touring regions – Margaret River is so spectacularly beautiful – but from a purely wine-quality point of view, it's arguable that one day it will give Margaret River a run for its money. While not as developed in terms of wine tourism, it's still a fantastic wine region to tour. Shiraz, cabernet sauvignon, riesling and sauvignon blanc do especially well here.

The region stretches from the southeast town of Frankland, further south-east to Albany, and then west again to Denmark. Mt Barker, smack-bang in the middle of the region, is 350km southeast of Perth.

The thing that excites people about Great Southern's wines is that although they're full of flavour and power, they tend not to blow your head off – they have a sense of elegance to them. This combination of elegance and power is a much-desired and rare trait in a wine, and across all the above-mentioned varieties Great Southern seems capable of attaining it.

There are great wineries to explore here. In Frankland, the following produce terrific dry white and red wines:

**Alkoomi** (☎ 9855 2229; www.alkoomi.com.au; Wingeballup Rd) Still a family-run business, it produces a great Cabernet Sauvignon and Riesling.

**Ferngrove** (☎ 9855 2378; www.ferngrove.com.au; Ferngrove Rd) Produces an honest Chardonnay, an excellent Shiraz and a brilliant Cabernet Sauvignon/Shiraz blend, 'The Stirlings'.

**Frankland Estate** (☎ 9855 1544; www.franklandestate.com.au; Frankland Rd) One of the key wineries that can justly revitalise Riesling – fantastic stuff.

You'll find a greater concentration of wineries southwest of Frankland at Mt Barker and among the nearby Porongurup range – it's a region of increasing significance. Riesling and Shiraz are consistently great performers here, with lean, long-flavoured Cabernet Sauvignon heading steadily the same way. Wineries to look for:

**Forest Hill** (☎ 9848 2199; www.foresthillwines.com.au; Muir Hwy, Mt Barker) Try their Cabernet Sauvignon.

**Goundrey Wines** (☎ 9851 1777; www.goundrey.com; Muir Hwy, Mt Barker) Go for their excellent value Offspring range.

**Plantagenet Wines** (☎ 9851 3111; www.plantagenetwines.com; Albany Hwy, Mt Barker) The area's best winery – try its Chardonnays, Rieslings and reds.

Further south, at Albany and more especially at Denmark, you'll find some of the most esteemed wine names in Australia: **Howard Park** (☎ 9848 2345; www.howardparkwines.com.au; Scotsdale Rd, Denmark), also at Margaret River (p47), put this region on the map and nears legendary status for its superb Cabernet Sauvignon, Riesling and Chardonnay. **West Cape Howe** (☎ 9848 2959; www.westcapehowewines.com.au; South Coast Hwy, Denmark) is a winery offering straightforward wines that are excellent value. A winery in the region notable for its Pinot Noir is **Wignall's Wines** (☎ 9841 2848; www.wignallswines.com.au; Chester Pass Rd, Albany).

## PEMBERTON & MANJIMUP

If you travel east of Margaret River in the direction of the Great Southern wine region, about halfway between the two you'll hit the Pemberton–Manjimup area (280km due south of Perth) – which just goes to prove how ideal the deep south lands of WA are to vineyards. Pemberton is a beautiful, undulating area home to vast numbers of the area's famous karri trees, and with its cool-ish climate produces cooler wine styles – Pinot Noir, Merlot and Chardonnay in particular. Excellent producers in Pemberton:

**Salitage Wines** (☎ 9776 1771; www.salitage.com.au; Vasse Hwy) A large, stylish winery with all the bells and whistles – and the wines to back it up. Try one of the winery tours.

**Smithbrook Wines** (☎ 9772 3557; www.smithbrook.com.au; Smith Brook Rd) Probably the best wines in this area, though tasting is by appointment only. Excellent Merlot.

### UNCORKED

If you've gone to remove the cork on a wine in Western Australia only to realise that it has a screw-cap, don't feel short-changed – many excellent Aussie wines now have screw-caps to reduce the number of wines that suffer from 'cork taint'. There's no consensus amongst wine makers on the subject, but you won't find too many who disagree that screw-caps cheapen the appearance of a bottle. A new closure named Vino-lok, which has the appearance of a cork-stopped bottle but uses a glass stopper, will hit the market soon, but as it currently costs the same as cork, those who have already gone to screw-caps probably won't change. But what is changing is the closure for bottles of bubbly. The 'pop', followed by an errant cork flying across the room, could be a thing of the past – many respected sparkling wine producers are replacing the cork with the humble crown seal – the same seal used for a bottle of beer. Can a sizzle possibly match a pop?

## OTHER AREAS

Visiting a winery isn't always about finding the most fabulous wine on the planet, so here are a couple of others worth keeping in mind:

**Paul Conti Wines** (☎ 9409 9160; www.paulcontiwines.com.au; 529 Wanneroo Rd, Woodvale), due north of Perth (a 30-minute drive), is quite geographically distinct from its Swan Valley colleagues. Established in 1948, it's now producing good, flavoursome Chardonnay and Shiraz.

**Western Range Wines** (☎ 9571 8800; www.westernrangewines.com.au; Chittering Rd, Lower Chittering) comprises a number of tiny-sized wineries, which, banded together, create something a whole lot more noticeable. It's an hour's drive northeast of Perth in the Chittering Valley (quintessential hot, dry, north-of-Perth countryside) and the wines are very good. There are many other wineries nearby too.

The Wine Industry Association of Western Australia (www.winewa.asn.au) runs wine courses for consumers and the industry – check the website for details.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above – 'Do the right thing with our content.'