

Western Australia's wonders

The state of Western Australia is an ideal study destination for adventure enthusiasts and nature lovers. Swimming with sharks, dolphin watching, surfing, sandboarding and skydiving are just some of the leisure pursuits that students can try, as AMY BAKER finds out.

According to Warren Milner at Milner International College in Perth, students can be unaware of the vast size of Western Australia and the affluence of the state. Students will be pleased to discover then, if they are staying with host families, that large houses with swimming pools are common.

The region enjoys a very warm climate, and capital city, Perth, boasts the title "sunniest capital city in the world". It is also said to be the most isolated capital city in the world – testifying to the vastness of the region that spreads east of Perth, which is located on the western coast of Australia.

With 70 per cent of Western Australians living in the capital city, Perth serves as the epicentre of the state and as the starting point for many visitors exploring the wild natural wonders of Western Australia. "Western Australia is a large and beautifully diverse place," says Shelley McPhee at

Phoenix Academy in Perth. "It provides a vastly varied landscape including the red earth of the north, aboriginal cultural sites, breathtaking gorges, the wine region of the southwest, and pristine and deserted beaches along the coast. Perth is the gateway to all of these diverse regions."

In the far north of the state is the Kimberley region, home to Aboriginal settlements – which can be visited after permission has been obtained at the Aboriginal Affairs Department in Perth – and the oddly-named Bungle Bungle National Park. Liza Gomes, Marketing Consultant at the Alexander Education Group, says students like to explore this remote area. "Students can drive along the red-dust out-back road on a four-wheel drive adventure."

Broome is one of the largest conurbations in the area and a delightful destination

for students with its palm-fringed beaches and cosmopolitan atmosphere. There is a distinct Japanese and Chinese influence on the town, which stems back to the industrious pearling days when many Asian divers worked in the area. In the early 1900s,

Broome supplied 80 per cent of the world's mother-of-pearl.

Still supporting the pearling industry, the town is a popular holiday destination today boasting white sandy beaches and stunning sunsets over the Indian Ocean. It is also home to a campus of Notre Dame University, where

there are colleges of education, business and nursing. "There is a great mix of people studying on campus," claims the university. "Students travel to Broome from throughout the Kimberley, from all parts of Western Australia and beyond."



Monkey Mia
For almost 30 years, generations of wild bottle-nosed dolphins have been visiting a remote beach near a settlement called Monkey Mia. Visitors can feed the dolphins and walk amongst them in the shallows

Agent viewpoint



"Western Australia is everything that Europe is not: it's not crowded, it's not problematic and it's not expensive.

There is something for everybody: golf, horse riding, archery, football, rugby and tennis are just some of the sports available. Western Australia is also one of the cheapest places in the world to obtain a pilot's licence. Perth itself offers every kind of nightlife and one of the world's most important aboriginal art collections. There are

many excellent pubs – some with their own micro-breweries – nightclubs and restaurants [in the city]. I would recommend this destination to anybody who wants a safe but new and different location and for anyone who wants an inexpensive destination for more than four weeks."

Marco Righetti, Education Consultants sas, Italy

"There are quite a few reasons why students, particularly Asian students, choose Western



Australia as their destination: the proximity of Perth, the closest big city in Australia to [many Asian countries]; the multicultural environment of the city –

this means less culture shock, which for younger Asian students, in particular, can be a big handicap; the clean and relatively secure environment [persuades] parents to let their kids study there; and the cost of living, both for food and accommodation, is relatively cheap. Sporting



The Pinnacles, where students can try sandboarding (left); the Tree Top Walk – 600 kilometres in length – was voted best attraction in the state in 1999 (below)



Below Broome is a desolate stretch of coastline known as Eighty Mile Beach, which leads towards one of Western Australia's newest towns, Exmouth, nestling in the northwestern corner of the state. Exmouth, and nearby Coral Bay, are popular locations with fishing enthusiasts and those keen to swim with whale sharks in the Ningaloo Marine Park. Ningaloo Reef is the only place where these harmless sharks, which feed on plankton and small fish, appear in such great numbers. Daily diving expeditions take place from March to June.

Further down the coastline, in Shark Bay, is Carnarvon, one of the major banana growing regions of Western Australia. Named after Lord Carnarvon, the British Secretary of State between 1866 and 1874,

Carnarvon is also known for the role it played as a Nasa tracking station during the Apollo missions, including Neil Armstrong's landmark mission in 1969. This role was recently immortalised in the film *The Dish*. Another local attraction, 70 kilometres from the town, is known as the Blowholes, where powerful ocean waves force jets of water 20 metres in the air through sea caves.

McPhee at Phoenix Academy says that students are encouraged to visit favourite Western Australia beauty spots. "Our dedicated recreation and study tours office can arrange trips to Monkey Mia to visit world-famous dolphins," she adds. Monkey Mia is

also in Shark Bay, so named by William Dampier in 1699 because he apparently believed the area was infested with sharks. He may have mistaken the local dolphin population to be sharks. In fact, the "friendly" dolphins of Monkey Mia are world famous because they swim to the shore regularly to interact with humans.

"Many students take a one-day excursion to explore [the Pinnacles], a unique 'forest' of thousands of limestone spires and pillars, 250 kilometres north of Perth," continues Gomes. The Pinnacles formation, near Lancelin, began more than a million years ago during the earth's glacial period. Gomes adds, "Another natural wonder in the Heartlands region is Wave Rock, near Hyden, which rises 15 metres above the ground like a giant wave about to break."

The Heartlands region is quite remote, but there is plenty of interest for students

keen to venture into the interior of the state. Highlights include Coolgardie, which was the site of Australia's greatest gold rush. The Goldfields Exhibition Museum traces the history of the region, while nearby, Coolgardie Camel Farm offers day- and hour-long camel treks and the chance to see camel calves. Gomes says, "Visits to the Avon Valley [are popular]. Students can wander through historic towns such as York, the state's oldest inland town, or the more adventurous

can try skydiving or floating above the landscape in a hot air balloon or glider."

According to Tim Bowyer at World English in Perth, "Perhaps Western Australia's best-kept secret is its green and leafy south. The great forests of southwestern Australia are full of giant Kari and Tingle trees, which have to be seen to be believed." The town of Walpole is surrounded by na-



activities, travelling within the region and [notably], fishing, are popular outdoor activities, particularly with students of Oriental origin."

Udaya Halim, King's English and Education Centre, Indonesia/Australia

"Western Australia is totally different from Japan. It has more space but less people. The atmosphere is relaxed and it is the best environment [for] study. Also, tuition fees and living costs are not so



expensive, compared to other countries [and] even [Australia's] eastern states, so if students wish, it is possible that they cover all costs by themselves. The area has beautiful nature; forests, oceans, animals and so on. Students are deeply fascinated by it. They spend their free time going surfing, bodyboarding, diving [and] having parties."

Hideko Yura, Perth School Advisory Centre/Blue Travel, Australia



"Students like the quality of life and the beauty of Western Australia. In their free time, they [have part-time] jobs, enjoy the beaches and during the holidays, they travel through [the state]. I would recommend Western Australia as a destination for students who don't have a big budget, students who don't like big cities and for those who love nature."

Maryvonne Roucou, Campus Australia, France

Did you know?

- Western Australia is three-and-a-half times bigger than Texas in the USA, and the UK would fit into it six times.
- Marble Bar in the north of Western Australia holds the world record for 160 consecutive days registering over 100 degrees Fahrenheit (37.8° centigrade) in temperature.
- Perth holds the world record for the capital city with the most consistent wind. A daily breeze known as "The Fremantle Doctor" arrives almost every day between 12 pm and 3 pm – cooling down beach goers.
- Another strange record which Western Australia is trying to claim this year is the world record for the "dog in a ute" queue. The strange competition, which apparently is held regularly between the states of Western Australia and Victoria, sees utility vans (known as "utes") lining up, each with a dog in the back. The record for the queue is apparently some 15 kilometres! The next world record attempt is being held in Corrigin in April.
- Famous Western Australians include entertainer Rolf Harris, the pop group INXS and ex-Prime Minister, Bob Hawke.
- Western Australia's Margaret River region is world renowned for the quality of its surfing waves, which are comparable to the waves of Hawaii. And the waters of Western Australia are home to the largest fish in the world, the harmless whale shark, which grows to 13 metres long.
- An English ship, called *The Trial*, was wrecked off the Western Australian coast in 1662 with bullion estimated to be worth US\$10 million in today's terms.
- The standard of housing in the state is among the highest in the world. It is not uncommon for homes to have five bedrooms, two bathrooms and a pool.
- In the far north of the state, south of Kununurra, is the world's largest mine, the Argyle Diamond Mine. It is the main source of rare pink diamonds.
- Broome is twinned with Taichi-Cho in Japan while Perth is twinned with Houston and San Diego in the USA, Rhodes and the island of Megisti in Greece and Kagoshima in Japan. Fremantle lists Molfetta in Italy and Wellesley in Malaysia among its twin cities.

tional park and here, students can gain access to the Valley of the Giants, where nature trails lead into a world heritage forest of stunning proportions.

Above Walpole towards Perth is Margaret River. While some students and backpackers associate this region with world-class surfing, the town is also renowned because it is the hub of one of Australia's important wine regions. "If a student enjoys good food and wine,

then a highlight [of their stay] may be a visit to the wine regions of the Swan Valley or the Margaret River," says Bowyer. Gomes points to "walking on shimmering white beaches and watching families of whales in the bays around Esperance on the south coast" as another popular activity.

While Western Australia has plenty of attractions to keep visitors enthralled, students are generally based in Perth or nearby Fremantle, because this is where the majority of English teaching institutions are located. The Australian Institute for University Studies (AIUS) is an exception, located in a town near Perth called Joondalup.

"AIUS offers overseas students a terrific language-based experience set in an Australian bush setting, complete with wildflowers and kangaroos," says AIUS's Brad Chapman. "As it is a university campus, we have a student guild which proactively interacts with the community."

Language schools in Perth are also keen to point out that students can get involved in city life, as well as enjoy Western Australia's wider appeal. Milner says there is a central office for volunteers for different charities in Perth that students can contact, while McPhee recounts, "Many students



The Swan Bells, Perth

The Swan Bells is the name of a tower – that is taller than the Statue of Liberty – which houses 500-year-old church bells given as a gift by London. It lights up at night and the bells ring every hour

become involved with the local community by joining local sporting clubs. One Japanese student was able to join a semi-professional soccer team."

World English can organise work experience for students, either paid or unpaid, while Saxon Begg, at Geos-St Mark's International College, points out that students can take part in the multicultural festival held every September. "During the Perth International Arts Festival [in

January/February], classes will visit various performances," she adds. The annual arts festival encompasses opera, theatre, film and music performances in stunning locations.

University-based institutions have an

advantage in that they can offer students easy interaction with local students. At the Centre for English Language Teaching at the University of Western Australia (UWA), Bianca Panizza says, "[We] often have UWA

students acting as conversation partners to small groups of students."

All schools, however, are keen to ensure that students have as rewarding an experience as possible. At Tafe International Western Australia in Perth, an orientation camp is being organised in February, as Kylie-Anne Stokes explains. "Students will be able to participate in, and see demonstrations in, activities such as spear throwing, boomerang throwing, aboriginal art, bush walking and barbecues," she says.

Students enjoy living in Perth too, because of its good recreational facilities, pristine white beaches and relaxing lifestyle. Stokes says, "Most students tell us they find the combination of Perth's wonderful environment and the friendliness of the Western Australian people to be the [best part] of their stay." □

"We visit Caversham Wildlife Park at night [so that] students can see Australian native animals when they are more active. The students have a barbecue and then when it's dark, watch the nocturnal animals by torchlight – Tasmanian devils, possums, wombats, echidnas, bats and bandicoots."

Natalie Johnston, Geos-St Mark's International College, Perth



Bungle Bungle National Park

In the northern Kimberley region, helicopter rides are popular over this national park. Visitors get a good view of the rock formations striped like tigers because of naturally growing silica and lichen