

# Ultimate guide to the South West

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With its spectacular coastline, towering forests and a feast of gourmet experiences, our South West region has long been a magnet for WA holiday makers.

The list of reasons to head south continues to grow as new attractions and experiences emerge throughout this stunning region.

If you're after adventure, there are many options for actively exploring WA's south, including the Bibbulmun and Cape to Cape walk tracks. There are world-class mountain bike trails and beautiful lakes and rivers for kayaking.

At Dunsborough, Busselton, Augusta and Albany you can go whale watching, or get up close to orcas on a cruise around the Bremer Bay Canyon.

There's more than you ever imagined waiting to be experienced and explored, and there's never been a better time to take a new look at your South West.

## Seasonal highlights

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Summer	Snorkel in the crystal-clear water of Greens Pool in Denmark and enjoy a plate of succulent marron fresh from the Warren River.
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Autumn	Walk through the striking autumn colours of the Golden Valley Tree Park in Balingup, and cast a line out to hook an Australian salmon at Shelley Beach near Albany.
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Winter	Go on the hunt for the rare winter black truffle in Manjimup, and catch Beedelup Falls in full flow near Pemberton.
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Spring	See wildflowers in bloom through the karri forest in Boranup Forest and walk part of the Cape to Cape Track between Cape Naturaliste and Cape Leeuwin.
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Year-round	Book a guided tour of a foodie trail for some delicious local insights, and go underground to explore the Margaret River region's ancient caves.
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## Places to visit

### Bunbury - Geographe

It may not bask in the same glow of publicity as internationally known neighbour Margaret River, but you'll find a burgeoning food and wine scene, outdoor and ocean adventures, and art attractions in the gateway to the South West.

[Bunbury Regional Art Gallery](#) is home to The Hotchin Bequest, a collection of works donated between the 1940's and 1960's by Western Australian Philanthropist, Sir Claude Hotchin. Prominent Australian artists such as Albert Namatjira, Ernest Philpot and Elizabeth Durack feature. The Gallery also houses works from Noongar artists such as Bunbury local Troy Bennell. An accomplished artist, curator and cultural performer, Bennell conducts the Ngalang Wongi Dreaming Town Tour.

At Koombana Bay, you can meet and swim alongside Bunbury's local dolphins and learn more about them in the interpretive centre. Bunbury's [Dolphin Discovery Centre](#) monitors the dolphins and operates swim tours with them in the Bay. For those not wanting to pull on a wetsuit, a year-round eco cruise is just as informative.

At Wellington National Park near [Collie](#), the area is now a mecca for mountain bikers. If you're an occasional rider or just don't want to carry a bike while road tripping, the Kiosk at Wellington Dam hires bikes, as does Crank 'n Cycles in Collie.

Further south, [Balingup](#) has cultivated a reputation for quirkiness over the years with their annual Medieval Festival and ghost walks. The latter is more of a telling of pioneer

stories than tales of ghouls. Balingup is home to the Golden Valley Tree Park, a sixty-hectare arboretum and WA's largest. The town is also a treasure trove for op shoppers.

## Ferguson Valley

Just a 15-minute drive from Bunbury in the Ferguson Valley, there are more than 20 vineyards, among them celebrated wineries like Green Door Wines, Talisman and Willow Bridge Estate. The options for foodies in the Valley range from degustation menus to hearty fare at quaint local cafes. Visit galleries to buy original works from local artists, including jewellery, ceramics and glassware.

The area is a popular spot for cycling, with scenic trails that wind through the hilly countryside.

To the east, in Wellington National Park, you'll see one of the tallest trees in the region - King Jarrah. Standing at approximately 36 metres high, it's thought to be between 300 and 500 years old. Find it south of Wellington Dam on King Tree Road.

One renowned local attraction not to miss is the quirky Gnomesville. There are estimated to be more than 5,000 garden gnomes spread throughout this colourful gnome kingdom from all over the world. It's just off the roundabout linking Wellington Mill Road and Ferguson Road.

RELATED: [7 of WA's quirkiest attractions »](#)

## Margaret River Region

The [Margaret River](#) region's wine and food story is now world renowned. Events like the annual WA Gourmet Escape, that occurs across the region and in surrounding towns like [Dunsborough](#), have brought much attention, but there are experiences between the twin capes that are lesser known and best accessed with an expert guide.

For a very different kind of wine tour, try one that includes other outdoor adventures as well. Sean Blocksidge of [Margaret River Discovery Co.](#) offers small group tours that reveal just what makes this region ideal for the award-winning wines it produces. Tours can include canoeing, catching marron, a chat about the local environment and a private winery lunch, ending with a trip to the Wilyabrup Cliffs. "We sit on the rocks and talk about the geology, the climate and the Leeuwin current, and why it all produces the most consistent wine region in Australia," says Blocksidge.

Dr Cam O'Beirne, on the other hand, doesn't just sit on rocks, he also enjoys jumping (safely) from them. O'Beirne is the owner of [Margaret River Adventure Co.](#) which offers coastering experiences, described by O'Beirne as "a blend of rock-hopping, shore-scrambling, swell-riding, and rock jumping for the ultimate aquatic adventure." It's an opportunity to see parts of the coast close-up that would otherwise be inaccessible.

Back on dry land, Josh Whiteland of [Koomal Dreaming](#) introduces visitors to the six Noongar seasons and an insight into the culture of the Wardandi people's 40,000 years of history. Whiteland has many experiences to share, from snagging a bucket of herring, to campfire cook-ups at his meeting place near Cape Naturaliste.

## Southern Forests and Valleys

Directly east of Margaret River town and around one hour on the Mowen Road, you'll come to [Nannup](#) and the Blackwood River Valley.

The historic towns of Nannup and [Bridgetown](#) along with Balingup in the southern half of the Bunbury-Geographe region, are together known as the Villages in the Valley, and are linked by scenic drives that will take you past rolling hills and farmlands which are a vibrant green in the cooler months.

Follow the area's food trails to taste chestnuts, local honey and sheep's cheese. In Nannup, you can enjoy one of the many farm gate experiences, picking your own fruit fresh from the orchards.

In Bridgetown, Adam Roebuck and Antonio Sita's [Little Hill Farm](#) has four studios overlooking the hills. "We saw the potential of the town," says Roebuck. "We think the region is entering its heyday and we're glad to be a part of that. We serve farm to plate meals, growing much of our own produce."

Saturday farm tours are popular and include a demonstration of an essential country skill: scone making. "Sharing the secret to the perfect scone can be quite contentious," says Roebuck.

For a true nature experience, keep heading further south to [Manjimup](#), [Pemberton](#) and Northcliffe, and then on to the coastal towns of Windy Harbour and [Walpole](#). Here the forest and ocean meet in a diverse landscape where you can explore towering old growth forest, find waterfalls, paddle on tranquil lakes and even drive over massive inland sand dunes.

About 30 minutes south of Pemberton, the Yeagarup Dunes are the largest land-locked mobile dune system in the Southern Hemisphere. Mobile means they're moving - and at quite a pace. Stretching out across 10 kilometres, the sands are heading towards the forest at a rate of four metres per year. It's a spectacular sight to see vast dunes meet lush forest.

Toni and Graeme Dearle of [Pemberton Discovery Tours](#) can take you over the dunes on a four-wheel drive tour.

The Dearles also recommend a visit to the magnificent limestone and basalt cliffs that hug the coast at Windy Harbour. "If you have time, get to Windy Harbour. The limestone cliffs at Tookulup are very similar to the Great Australian Bight, the way the cliffs drop off into the ocean," says Dearle. "It's pretty special."



## Southern Forests

There's a wealth of national parks in the Southern Forests, including Gloucester, Greater Beedelup, Shannon, Warren and D'Entrecasteaux, and so many ways to experience them. The brave will climb Gloucester Tree, or there's the more sedate route via The Great Forest Trees Drive in the Shannon National Park, a 48-kilometre drive trail against a backdrop of karri forest. Stop at one of the many picnic and information spots. Close to the [RAC Karri Valley Resort](#), the Beedelup Loop Walk is a fantastic forest walk with the pay-off of seeing Beedelup Falls. Rated as moderate to hard (and with a disability access viewing platform), it's just 4.5 kilometres. For the keen angler there are freshwater fishing opportunities for prized trout. Check the Pemberton Visitor Centre for a local guide.

In addition to fresh seafood such as the local marron, you can also indulge in some of the region's famous land-based fresh produce.

In season, truffle hunting has become a must-do. Manjimup is world-renowned as a producer of winter black truffle, much of it exported overseas to be used by chefs at Michelin-starred restaurants. Gavin and Mel Booth of [Australian Truffle Traders](#) lead tours on their family farm. You'll be introduced to the complexities of truffle growing as you walk along rows of oak and hazel trees. You'll also get to meet the real stars of the industry: the highly trained dogs that sniff out the truffles growing underground.

Beyond the region's many cellar doors, farm tours run by the [Southern Forests Food Council](#) allow visitors to experience life on the farms and orchards of this WA food bowl. Get a first-hand look at famed local orchards like Newton Orchards of Manjimup.



## The Great Southern

As you travel on towards Nornalup and [Denmark](#), into the Great Southern region, you'll pass Walpole where you'll head into old growth forests. Don't miss the Valley of the Giants Tree Top Walk. The 600 metre walkway suspended 40 metres up in the canopy of tingle trees, some dates at more than 400 years old, is a wholly different way to commune with nature.

Before reaching Denmark with its concentration of cellar doors, cafes and wide-open beaches, be sure to stop at Peaceful Bay Fish and Chips - a contender for WA's best, and the sheltered waters of Greens Pool, a favourite swimming spot for Denmark locals.

In [Albany](#), you can enjoy the additional options and atmosphere of a bigger city while still being surrounded by stunning natural wonders. Don't miss the award-winning [National Anzac Centre](#), pop into the Albany Farmers Market, and enjoy a fabulous range of strong dining options, from the harbourside pub Due South, to nationally acclaimed bar-restaurant Liberte. Stop by [Augusta](#) for brilliant whale-watching (in season).

Although it's a well-trodden path, no trip to Albany is complete without a visit to Torndirrup National Park to feel the power of the Southern Ocean as it smashes into the rocks and cliffs at The Gap and Natural Bridge.

A new addition to Albany town in 2021 will be the Hilton Garden Inn offering affordable waterfront accommodation with ocean and harbour views.

Off-peak periods are always a joy in the South West. If you're on a budget, accommodation rates can be lower, but the real drawcard is that attractions and towns are quieter. Many locals will tell you it's the best time to travel, because you'll feel like you have the place all to yourself.

## Planning a visit

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**Getting there and around** Most popular road trip itineraries in the South West can be tackled in a two-wheel drive vehicle. Four-wheel driving enthusiasts also have many options for going off road, from sand dunes and beaches, to inland forest tracks.

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**When to visit** The South West is a year-round destination with plenty to do in every season. Summer offers perfect beach weather, with an average maximum temperature of around 32 degrees. In winter, daytime temperatures average between 10 and 22 degrees.

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**Related road trips**

- [Top WA road trips down south](#)
- [Perth to Pemberton and Margaret River](#)
- [Perth to Gracetown](#) road trip
- [Perth to Albany and Porongurups](#)

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**Ask a local** For more information about South West touring and the location of regional visitor centres, visit [Australia's South West](#).