



I've always been fascinated by orcas

Whale GOOD FUN

This orca jumped clear of the water



Rachelle Mackintosh
gets totally wild
in Bremer Bay,
WA

With their 'sea panda' charisma and legendary intelligence, orcas (also known as killer whales) have always fascinated me.

But while these seven-metre mammals roam all the world's oceans, they're constantly on the move – so chance encounters have been about the best I could ever hope for Down Under.

But that all changed recently when I heard about the Bremer Bay orca hotspot off the far south

coast of Western Australia.

Lying about 70km offshore, a vast underwater canyon serves a deep-sea buffet of beaked, pilot and sperm whales to around 200 peckish orcas that come to feast in the prey-rich waters between December and April.

I was thrilled to go on a whale-watching tour with family-owned Naturaliste Charters.

With their purpose-built vessel, the *Alison Maree*, they offer an excellent opportunity to see these wild beauties hunt, feast and play.

A WHALE OF A TIME

There's a buzz among the 85 passengers as the Bremer Bay township disappears behind us, and we adjust to the roll and sway of the Great Southern Ocean, en-route to what the *Alison Maree* crew call The Patch – an area known for its orca activity.

While sightings aren't guaranteed, Naturaliste's impressive 96 per cent success rate keeps me hopeful.

Throughout the 90-minute journey to the hotspot, we're served complimentary bites and catch glimpses of passing dolphins. Captain Paul

'Crossy' Cross and his expert crew, headed up by effervescent deckhand Kyle Sims and marine biologist Jennah Tucker, get us primed for the action by sharing tales of the orcas they've come to know by name.

Split Tip, Swirl, Cookie, El Notcho and baby Comet are among their favourites, but, as Jennah explains, there's still a lot to learn about these orcas. Even though they visit the area every year around the same time, it's still not known where the orcas spend the rest of their days.

I'm tucking into a buttery croissant when we arrive

at The Patch, and suddenly everything changes. It's like someone flicks a switch and we're surrounded by wildlife. Giant wandering albatrosses soar around us, elegant petrels tickle the sea with their dainty claws, and countless whale blows dance on the rolling swell.

For a moment the orcas are as curious as we are, and they greet the boat with close passes, lifting their heads out of the sea to people-watch. But just as quickly, the energy levels up a notch and they begin surging, in pursuit of a beaked whale.

Watching them hunt right

beside the boat is like stepping into a David Attenborough

documentary. The tension is so palpable it leaves me breathless. And while it didn't end well for the beaked whale, seeing the orcas work together reminds me that this is nature at its most wild and unfiltered.

This experience is raw, rare and a privilege to

A pelican



Seabirds from the tour boat



The area has stunning beaches



One of my orca photos

Bremer Bay Boat Harbour



A line of orcas

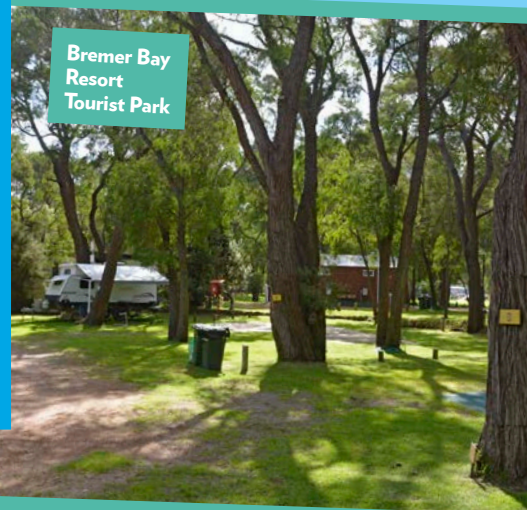




A beautiful
Royal Hakea



A glorious WA sunset



Bremer Bay
Resort
Tourist Park

witness – and it only happens in Bremer Bay.

REACH FOR A BEACH

Such unique wildlife sightings are just one highlight of Bremer Bay. With a host of attractions, this charming seaside hamlet is well worth the six-hour road trip south-east from Perth.

Whether you're keen to throw in a line or roll out your beach towel, you can take your pick of 10 standout stretches of sand.

Blossoms Beach is a favourite for families and folks learning to surf (lessons are held here during the summer school holidays). Anglers are drawn to the deeper waters of Little Boat Harbour Beach, where

silver trevally and King George whiting are often the catch of the day. At nearby Back Beach, you can park at the abalone farm and take a short, scenic stroll to the water's edge, or drive along it if you have a 4WD.

WILD DISCOVERIES

Beyond the shore, Bremer's landscapes are as unique and intriguing as its orcas. The expansive Fitzgerald National Park is a UNESCO-listed Biosphere Reserve, with a jaw-dropping array of biodiversity. Here you'll find 20 per cent of WA's plant species, including the colourful Royal Hakea and the beautiful Qualup Bell that are found nowhere else on Earth.

Pack a picnic for a visit to the Point Ann area, where the stunning views on the hour-long Heritage Trail are well worth lacing up your hiking boots for. Whale-watching platforms offer great views of visiting southern right whales

between June and October.

Around town the area's rich heritage is on show, including the Wellstead Open Air Museum and Homestead, the original home of pioneer pastoralist John Wellstead, who first settled in the area in 1850.

FEAST AND SIP

A visit to the National Trust-listed Bremer Bay Telegraph Station dating from 1875 reveals more fascinating heritage relics. It's also home to a charming and must-visit family-owned cafe.

Nearby, the Bremer Bay Brewing Company serves an ever-changing menu of upgraded pub grub (don't miss the delicious pulled brisket sandwiches) alongside live music and an impressive range of homegrown craft beers. I suggest you wet your whistle with their famous Spunky Whale session ale or the Sleepy Stingray

classic oatmeal stout.

STAY AWHILE

Bremer Bay has accommodation for every budget, including plush house rentals, a motel and two caravan parks within the townsite.

The tranquil Bremer Bay Beaches Resort Tourist Park has easy access to the sparkling shores of the Point Henry Peninsula, sprawling grounds dotted with forests, spa chalets, ensuite cabins, onsite caravans, and picturesque sites if you're bringing your own van.

Wherever you rest your head, this natural wonder-filled pocket of Western Australia will have you dreaming of your next visit. I'll be coming back, that's for sure! 🐋

Find out more about a *Naturaliste Charters* killer whale adventure at naturalistecharters.com.au or call (08) 9750 5500.



Tour boat
Alison Maree