

MARGARET RIVER

ALTHOUGH it has been a favourite tourist destination for a long time, the Margaret River Region continues to evolve.

Award-winning wines, quality food, unique art, world class surfing and amazing scenery continue to be the centre of the offering, but with more innovation.

The joining of the tourist associations in Augusta-Margaret River and Geographe Bay has allowed for a combined focus on what were previously separate objectives, although sometimes running parallel to one another.

One of the newest initiatives, the Megafauna Discovery Map, now gives children more reason to look forward to a trip to the region. The interactive trail takes visitors to Lake, Jewel and Mammoth Caves, as well as the Margaret River Visitor Centre, where they receive a stamp once they have answered a question relating to a specific megafauna sculpture.

Once the kids have completed the trail, they become a "certified megafauna explorer" and receive free entry to Ngilgi Cave in Yallingup. The map also includes a heap of kids' activities.

The sculptures are the highlight though – a Zygomaturus Trilobus, Marsupial Lion, Short-faced



A region of plenty

Whether it's wine tasting, surfing, finding megafauna or enjoying natural beauty, there's something for everyone here, writes Brad Elborough

**NATURAL ATTRACTION:** The beach at Busselton and its famous jetty (main); and Cape Naturaliste Lighthouse near Dunsborough (right). Pictures: Tourism Western Australia

Kangaroo and a Tasmanian Tiger – which were created by talented local artist and one of the cave guides, Alan Meyburgh.

Adults wanting to explore the region (sans kids) should check out the new four-day,

Cape to Cape, walking itinerary recently released by Walk into Luxury. As the name suggests, participants on one of these itineraries spend some of the day enjoying a picturesque walk and finishing at one of the

Margaret River Region's luxury resorts and retreats.

The Cape to Cape Track is widely recognised as one of Australia's top walking spots and Walk in Luxury allows you to enjoy it with a bit of style.

More: [walkintoluxury.com.au](http://walkintoluxury.com.au)

This particular itinerary showcases the best of nature, food and wine, and allows you to kick your feet up at night in the ultra luxe accommodation in pool villas at Injidup Spa

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The Margaret River Region starts in Busselton, about 220km south of Perth.



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SPECIAL REPORT



the Forrest Highway makes about a 2½-hour journey. The region also includes towns of Dunsborough, Yallingup, Cowaramup, Margaret River, Augusta and Gracetown – names familiar with wine lovers and surfers from around the world.

For more information on the Margaret River Region, visit [margaretriver.com](http://margaretriver.com)

STEVE Millington says that the coastline in the Margaret River Region in the South-West of Western Australia is as picturesque as anywhere in the world.

He gets to see it in a unique way every day as part of his job – the pilot of the Tiger Moth Adventure Tours.

The Tiger Moth is one of the world's iconic biplanes that was used mainly as a trainer plane in World War II – and was in service in the 1930s, '40s and '50s.

Steve runs three itineraries from the Busselton Regional Airfield, mostly at 1000ft (about 305m) throughout the region, but as low as 500ft above the Busselton Jetty.

With 30 years of flying planes at low altitude for agriculture and forestry purposes, he says this is a lot more fun.

"Flying in a biplane looked like a lot of fun. When given the chance I thought 'wow! if that did that to me...' and that's how it started," he said.

"You can see the wineries, the green pastures, wildflowers... there are patches of bushland. There's a bit for everyone."

"The Busselton to Cape



## Two-wing flight of fancy

**FLY HIGH:** Steve Millington and his 1940s Tiger Moth biplane give just one passenger (and the pilot) a unique view of WA's South-West coast.



show some emotion when we land."

Those customers range from 25 years (10 is the youngest that Steve will take) to 92.

Tiger Moth Adventure Tours have been operating since September and Steve

has shared the experience with more than 300 people already. The make of the plane allows for only one person to go up in the air with him at any one time, and there are plenty taking the opportunity.

Steve has three set itineraries on offer, or you can customise a flight plan.

• A Busselton Jetty Reconnaissance (20min): Get

a close bird's-eye view of the longest wooden jetty in the southern hemisphere – \$180.

• Geographe Bay Reconnaissance (30min): Check out the jetty on your way to Dunsborough. You might even see a whale or two – \$250.

• Busselton to Cape Naturaliste (55min): Take the coastal route via Dunsborough, Eagle Bay and Bunker Bay to Cape Naturaliste Lighthouse, returning via Yallingup, and inland over rolling hills and wineries – \$450.

Visit [tigermothadventureflights.com.au](http://tigermothadventureflights.com.au) or call Steve on 0488 574 544.

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Web: [www.dunsboroughmotel.com.au](http://www.dunsboroughmotel.com.au)



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## MARGARET RIVER

## Whale of a good time



## BRAD ELBOROUGH

**I**F YOU want to be almost guaranteed a humpback whale sighting, now is the time to visit Augusta.

Legend Charters, one of several whale-watching tour companies that run from the Augusta Harbour, has just started their sixth season of operation from the popular town in the Margaret River Region and Sandy Jensen (owner/operator with her husband, Dean) says they have a 99 per cent sighting success rate. And from this year, even more people can experience these amazing animals.

Up to 35,000 humpback and southern right whales, and even the occasional rare blue whale, travel through the waters of the Margaret River Region on their northern migration.

Flinders Bay, Augusta, is the last resting point for the humpback whales as they head

north from Antarctica to their warmer breeding grounds.

"They're still courting and it can be quite intense, with up to 15 boys fighting for the attention of one female," Sandy said. "This is our sixth season and I do get very excited still when I get to go out."

"For me, it helps me know my place in universe, especially when they come alongside the boat for a look at you; or even when they're just going about their business."

"The charters are only allowed to approach within 100m, but the whales do get curious and get a lot closer than that by themselves. The humpbacks grow to up to 50ft (about 15m), 60ft for a southern white and the blue whale (which can be found later in the season in Geographe Bay) can get to 80-100ft – like the size of an airplane."

"Because the humpbacks are resting, not just traveling

through, once the season is well under way you can get 300 to 400 whales in the bay – sometimes within 50m of the beach. There are so many concentrated in such a small area, we know where we are going. We have a 99 per cent sighting success across the two areas we visit."

The new whale-watching season has only just started in the Margaret River Region, but already the new \$36.4million Augusta Boat Harbour is making life easier for everyone.

Where Legend Charters previously had to take their customers (12 at a time) to their sightseeing boat from the shore on a dinghy, now they can simply step aboard.

Plus an ocean swell coming in from a certain direction, that would stop tours happening altogether, is no longer an issue.

Charter companies can now also run more tours in a day. Not only are they saving time

with not having to cart customers via dinghy, they are not having to get back to a mooring before light makes transiting to the shore difficult.

The new harbour has also seen new operators come into the market and these numbers are expected to increase over the next few years.

"It just makes life so much easier," Sandy said. "We can get out nearly every day. It will also open up the market to people who are less agile – some people would turn up and take one look at the dinghy and say 'no way'."

The new harbour also has barbecue facilities, undercover areas, toilets and showers.

Legend Charters tours depart at 10.30am and 1.30pm daily and spend between two and three hours on the water. **Costs:** Adults \$80; children (2-17) \$50; concession \$75; family (2 adults, 2 children) \$250.

Visit [legendcharters.net.au](http://legendcharters.net.au) or call 0419 908 742.



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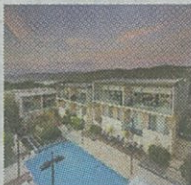
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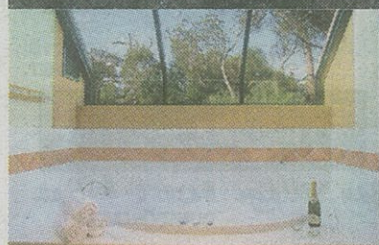


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SPECIAL REPORT



DRINK IT IN: Learn about Margaret River's best wines on an award-winning Top Drop Tours trip with Chris and Kerry O'Hare.

# Sample the fine wine

BRAD ELBOROUGH

THE Margaret River Region officially boasts the country's best tour operator, Top Drop Tours. Owned and operated by wine, food and travel trawlers, Chris and Kerry O'Hare, Top Drop Tours claimed the gold medal at the 2014 Qantas Australia Tourism Awards for being the best tour operator.

They centre their offering around the area's popular food and wine industries, offering three styles of tour: set itinerary, customised tours and private tours. And they believe that size does matter; keeping their tour numbers to small numbers. So what's their point of difference?

"We spend time talking, by phone or email, to our clients before they come on tour to find out what they are interested in," Chris said. "We talk a lot – about where they buy wine and what sort – which helps us to put their unique itinerary together."

"Then when we go to the first winery, we watch them at the tasting and then we confirm or change the stops for the rest of the day based on what we see. Small groups allow for this effectively."



Some people on a Top Drop Tours trip are serious about learning about wine, the processes involved in making the various wines and what foods they pair with. Others are simply out for a day in Margaret River's quality wineries.

After five years in operation, most of the region's wineries are supportive of what Top Drop Tours is doing, even if they don't see them come through their cellar door for a few weeks, as they know that those who visit like their wines.

"We came from Perth, but we spent so much time down here; we loved it," Kerry said.

"There didn't seem to be tours though that met what we wanted and we did them all. If you want to jump on a bus, that was catered for, but not small groups, offering personal service like we now do."

"We're so lucky – I might be biased – to have the best wine region in Australia. Some of the wines here, internationally, are breaking ground. Many people don't realise what is in their own backyard."

"What our tours are doing is providing an opportunity to learn more about what wineries are

doing, learn about flavours of Margaret River, get behind the scenes, see the processes, meet people, enjoy flavour pairing sessions, to learn what works and what doesn't."

Visit [topdroptours.com.au](http://topdroptours.com.au) or call 0407 443 860

**Other West Australian medallists at the 2014 Qantas Australia Tourism Awards were:** Ecotourism - **Silver:** Out of Sight Tours. Visitor Information and Services. **Bronze:** Geographe Bay Tourism Association. Standard Accommodation - **Silver:** Cottlesloe Beach Hotel. Luxury Accommodation - **Silver:** Cable Beach Club Resort & Spa. New Tourism Development - **Bronze:** Segway Tours WA. Local Government Award for Tourism - **Winner:** City of Fremantle.

## Varied events to tempt you

Are you looking for more incentive to head to the Margaret River Region? Here are some upcoming events that are scheduled in the area that may whet the appetite.

**Truffle Celebration, Wills Domain Restaurant and Winery (June 13)**  
Celebrate the start of Truffle Season 2015. Tickets are \$170, or \$220 with matched Wills Domain wines.

**Revive Weight Loss Retreat at Smith Beach (June 19-22)**  
A five-day break from the stresses of life, work and family in the gorgeous South-West run by personal trainer Katie Carmichael and health coach Sarah Breheny. [reviveweightlossretreat.com.au](http://reviveweightlossretreat.com.au)

**Liquid Gold - Long Table Dinner at Olio Bello (June 20)**  
Celebrate Harvest at Olio Bello and learn about what makes us one of Australia's most awarded. (\$95, fully inclusive)

**South-West MudFest at Bootleg Brewery (July 4)**  
A jam-packed day full of mud, burgers and beers, with new obstacles and even more mud in its second year.

**The Church at Settlers Tavern, Margaret River (July 16)**  
Check out ARIA Hall of Famer, The Church as they celebrate their 35th year of making music.

**Busselton City to Surf (August 16)**  
Registrations are open. [busselton.perthcitytosurf.com](http://busselton.perthcitytosurf.com)

**Cinefest Oz - Busselton, Dunsborough, Margaret River and Bunbury (August 26-30)**  
Cinefest OZ premieres feature films and events in the region's cinemas, wineries, small bars and galleries, making it an unforgettable five-day feast for the senses. [cinefestoz.com](http://cinefestoz.com)

**Southwest Wedding Fair Venue Open Day (August 29-30)**  
Southwest venues will open their doors on Saturday (10am-3pm) for you to peruse at your leisure or on a guided tour. Then on Sunday (9.30am-3pm) meet many wedding vendors at the Southwest Wedding Fair at Abbey Beach Resort in Busselton.

**Food and Wine Fest, Donnybrook (November 28)**  
Tastings from local wineries and local specialty produce stalls will tempt your tastebuds. Free wine and olive oil appreciation sessions. [donnybrookfoodandwinefest.com.au](http://donnybrookfoodandwinefest.com.au) [margaretriver.com/what-to-do/events](http://margaretriver.com/what-to-do/events)

For more information on the Margaret River Region, the local visitor centres are a terrific reference.

Busselton Visitor Centre  
Busselton Foreshore, beach end of Queen St  
Ph: 9752 5800  
Web: [geographebay.com](http://geographebay.com)

Dunsborough Visitor Centre  
Dunsborough Park Shopping Centre, Seymour Blvd  
Ph: 9752 5800  
Web: [geographebay.com](http://geographebay.com)

Margaret River Visitor Centre  
100 Bussell Highway  
Ph: 9780 5911  
Web: [margaretriver.com](http://margaretriver.com)

Augusta Visitor Centre  
Cnr Blackwood Ave and Ellis St  
Ph: 9758 0166  
Web: [www.margaretriver.com](http://www.margaretriver.com)



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Email [whalers@whalerscove.com.au](mailto:whalers@whalerscove.com.au)  
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