

Cape to Cape deluxe

WA's southwest coast is famed for its rugged coastline and unique wildflowers. Now you can sample the long distance Cape to Cape Track in style.



The trail is well signposted.

INSET: Wildflowers like this native rose can be spotted at certain times of the year.



The 135km Cape to Cape Track follows the coast in the southwest corner of WA from Cape Naturaliste to Cape Leeuwin. The one snag is that it has no public transport linking access points to the track. So day walkers have to either car pool, leaving a car at each end of the day's walk, or else do return walks.

Both these options are limiting. So when tour operator Walk Into Luxury offered us a chance to sample their self-guided walks with car transfers to and from the track, it was an offer that we just couldn't refuse. As a bonus, we were to sample some of the best food, wine and accommodation of the Margaret River region. As they say, it's tough work but someone's got to do it.

Getting ready

We went on a three-day walk, covering one long and two shorter sections of the track. On the evening before we set off, Nikki and Adam King of Walk into Luxury came along to explain how the walk was organised. They presented us with backpacks that had three compartments; one with a 2l water bladder, one insulated compartment with freezer packs to keep gourmet snacks cold, and one for our own gear.

The backpacks were equipped with a book of detailed maps showing the day hikes with photographs of landmarks along the way, a first aid kit and a GPS communicator. Adam explained how to use the GPS, which was pre-programmed with messages like "Running late, I'm okay" and "I'm lost, send directions". As a result, hikers are able to travel on their own without a tour guide, but still keep in contact if needed.

Rugged coastline

The first day's walk was a fairly easy 6km hike from Smiths Beach southwards to Injidup Spa Retreat. No car transfer to the trail was needed, since the Cape to Cape Track goes right past Smiths Beach Resort. So we simply walked out onto the track and followed the coastline.

The scenery along this section of the track is spectacular, with many bays, rocky outcrops, limestone cliffs and capes projecting out into the ocean. We had a mostly sunny day, which showed the deep blue ocean and white sandy beaches at their best. The trail stays mostly on high ground, with occasional hills to climb or descend, and some sets of stairs.

Navigating was easy, since the trail is well marked with posts.

BELOW: Navigation, safety and communications equipment was provided for the walk.
LEFT: Walking through coastal scrub near Injidup.



WALK INTO LUXURY

We had a chat with Nikki and Adam Smith of Walk Into Luxury to learn more about the service they provide. They explained that they are keen walkers who have done some of the world's great walks in Europe and North America. Then they decided to see more of Australia, and are great fans of the Cape to Cape Track. Last year they started Walk into Luxury, with the intention of making it easy for walkers to sample the best of the Cape to Cape, and to enjoy some of the great food, wine and accommodation of the Margaret River region. They described their approach as a bit of an indulgence, but one which is ideal for time-poor walkers who would be daunted by having to organise their own walk along the Cape to Cape. More info visit www.walkintoluxury.com.au

About the only time we were uncertain of the route was when climbing through the granite outcrop south of Smiths Beach. There were so many criss-crossing routes that it was hard to decide whether we were still on the trail. However all the routes seemed to come out at the right place.

Projected timing for the walk was almost spot-on. We arrived about 10 minutes ahead of schedule, and were driven to the secluded Losari Retreat, where we were to spend the next two nights. We had our own luxury villa, with a lake view, heated spa bath, outdoor barbecue on the wooden deck, gourmet food awaiting us in the fridge, and several local wines to try. During the day, our car and luggage had been moved to our villa.

Wild about wildflowers

The next morning was a reminder that weather on the southwest capes can be very changeable. We ate breakfast looking out the window at steady rain and were glad that we had brought along some waterproof gear. However it turned out to be a grey day with only scattered showers, so we didn't need to use our waterproofs much.

The route day was a 7km hike from Moses Rock southwards to Willyabrup Cliffs. In the overcast conditions, the coastline wasn't as photogenic as the day before. However the wildflowers, which

grow profusely along the track in spring, were at their best. Native rose, coastal banjine, cutleaf hibbertia, and many more striking wildflowers, seemed to be competing for our attention.

The track had plenty of ups and downs, plus a long set of stairs up onto the cliff top at one point. Navigating the track was again fairly easy, with the only tricky section being the final uphill climb away from the Cape to Cape Track to the pickup point. That part was not signposted, so the map book came in handy.

This was the only occasion when we needed to use the GPS communicator. We arrived at the pickup point ahead of schedule, but the car was a few minutes late. So we sent a message to say we had arrived, and the car arrived shortly afterwards. We were driven to the classy Wills Domain restaurant for a four-course gourmet lunch with wine tasting. That night we stayed at Losari Retreat again and enjoyed treating ourselves to even more fine food and wine in the evening.

Caves and forests

The weather forecast for the third and final day was "a possible shower". However, the day dawned in very unpromising fashion, with rain that got heavier with time. Just before we were picked up for transfer to the walking track, the heavens really opened up and

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CAPE TO CAPE

Explorer Tours



it looked like we were going to be drowned. But the rain eased off by the time we reached the track, so we set off on the hike in a gap between the showers.

The route was longer than the previous days; about 12.5km from Redgate Beach to Contos Beach, and on through Boranup Forest. The first half of the trail was along the coast, and the rest was heading inland along forestry tracks. There were occasional heavy showers and a lot of wet undergrowth to wade through, so we again appreciated our wet weather gear.


We also learned not to trust the pockets of our 'waterproof' jackets, after taking a camera out of a zipped pocket and finding water dripping out of it. Fortunately the sodden camera continued working. Despite the rain, the coastline was unexpectedly photogenic with some weird light filtering through the clouds and dramatic views of rain fronts sweeping across the coast.

The track goes right past Bobs Hollow Grotto, a yawning cavern in the limestone cliff facing the ocean. We used the sheltered cave as a convenient location to check the map, out of the wind and rain.

The walk through Boranup Forest was a change of scenery after all the coastal walking. Some sections went through magnificent stands of tall karri trees and other sections were

lined with peppermint trees with drooping branches covered in masses of white flowers. There were again plenty of wildflowers along the route.

Overall, we enjoyed all three days of the walk. Each section of the track had its own distinctive character, and the unexpected changes in the weather actually helped to add variety. By the end, we felt that we didn't really want to go home; we just wanted to keep on walking forever.

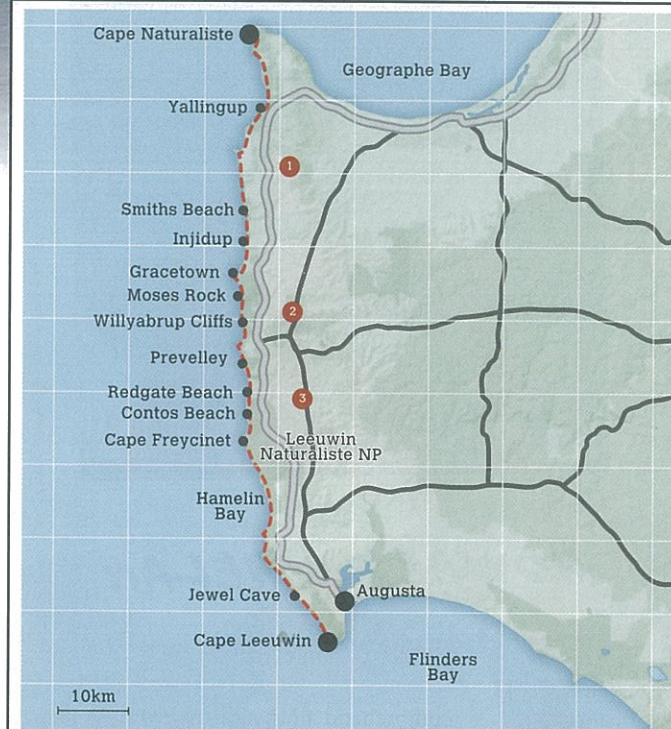
Maybe the oddest aspect of the whole experience was the fact that we never saw any other walkers on the track. There were a few rock climbers and some school groups camping in the forest, but no other hikers. Despite the fact that we were just 250km south of Perth, the rugged coastline and lack of other walkers gave an exhilarating sense of being somewhere very remote. But with the GPS communicator, we were always able to send a message if needed. As a bonus, we also knew that a touch of luxury was waiting for us at the end of the day's walk. Yes, you could easily get used to this style of hiking. 

Great Walks was a guest of Walk into Luxury and the Augusta Margaret River Tourism Association.

Walk notes

CAPE TO CAPE TRACK, WA

Total walk: 135km/5-7 days | Grade: moderate



Walk Into Luxury trip

Time/distance: 3 days/26km

Grade: moderate

Day 1: 6km. Smiths Beach – Injidup.

Day 2: 7km. Moses Rock – Willyabrup Cliffs.

Day 3: 12.5km. Redgate Beach – Contos Beach.



NEED TO KNOW

The Cape to Cape Track is best walked in spring and autumn, since the track is fairly exposed to the elements. It can be cold, wet and windy in winter, and hot in the summer. The toughest sections of the track are those where you walk along the soft beach sand. For more info visit <http://parks.dpaw.wa.gov.au/know/cape-cape-track>

You may wish to visit some of the nearby vineyards, caves and towns of the Margaret River region during free time on the luxury walk. For more info visit www.margaretriver.com



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Tour Length:
8 Days, starts and finishes in Perth

Distance walked:
135 km for a full end to end. On some days you can choose to walk half days.

Difficulty:
Moderate to Challenging

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