

# COBHAM

## CAPE *to* CAPE

Journeying through the  
stunning scenery of WA



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# A short stroll on the CAPE COAST

Walking between the capes in southwest WA is a perfect way to burn off the finest gourmet food in the land.

Words: Jock Serong

In a state where gigantic distances are everyday fare, Western Australia's southwest corner is the standout exception. The coastline between Cape Leeuwin and Cape Naturaliste is as compact and diverse as anything you might find in Victoria, with a climate as agreeable as the NSW Central Coast. What's more, the staggering range of plants and animals out here would give Tassie a run for its money. All in all, it's a coastline perfectly designed for walking and absorbing.

The coastline 70 kilometres north and south of the township of Margaret River is framed by the Cape to Cape Track: a walk that can take up to seven days for the truly committed, but which also works perfectly as a day trip, sampling the beaches, cafés and little towns that cling to this exquisitely beautiful coast.

The traditional owners of these lands and waters, the Wardandi people, have lived among incredible bounty. Up to 80 per cent of the vegetation here is endemic to the area – a wild profusion of native flowers such as orchids, wattles and white beard-heaths under a canopy of Rottneet tea tree and peppermint and the larger jarrah-marri sheltering behind the ridge. At the southern end of the walk,

towering karri trees give the region a deserved ancient character.

It's worth taking a torch at night to appreciate the wildlife that hides among this flora: as well as western grey kangaroos, there's echidnas and bandicoots on the ground, and possums, cockatoos, parrots, rosellas and honeyeaters sitting in the tree branches.

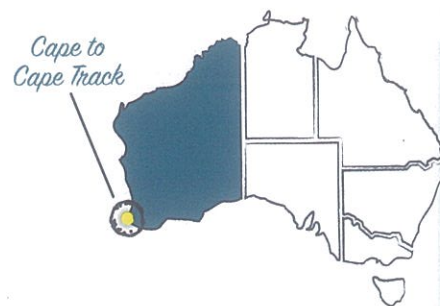
Loaded up with a full breakfast (more about the off-track scoffing shortly), the morning walk places you among an awakening world. The warm sun lures reptiles – beautifully-patterned carpet pythons, skinks and bearded dragons – to the rocks. Out to sea, humpback, southern right and (more rarely) blue whales cruise through these waters between June and December, along with pods of dolphins year-round.

The Cape to Cape Track is divided into five roughly equal sections, each with its own campsite. The northernmost section is fully paved and has safety rails, making it readily accessible for people with disabilities. We are tackling two sections of the track, but there's any number of ways to do the walking, from entirely independent hiking to fully-guided tours. The Friends of the Cape to Cape Track website lists about ten companies that offer various styles of walking along the route



Looking shoreward from the water, the scrub that slopes gently up from the beach is wild and untouched. The ocean and its creatures make the only sounds.





**Locals are quietly enjoying a time-honoured Sunday ritual: a cold beer on the sand to see out the weekend.**

we're travelling with Walk into Luxury, which puts a welcome emphasis on the local food, wine and resorts. The company also donates a percentage of its profits back to the 'Friends' group and other local charities.

Armed with a backpack containing a guidebook and GPS device, we hike north along Injidup Beach, a vast stretch of empty, blinding-white sand. Offshore waves rear and break in shades of blue and green. A snack on a fresh orange from the backpack and its into the Indian Ocean for a dip. Looking shoreward from the water, the scrub that slopes gently up from the beach is wild and untouched. The ocean and its creatures are the only sounds in earshot.

Coming up off the beach, we follow the signposts along the ridge to Smiths Beach, another stunning expanse of crystalline sand. It's late afternoon, the air's warm and still, and locals are quietly enjoying a time-honoured Sunday ritual: a cold beer on the sand to see out the weekend.

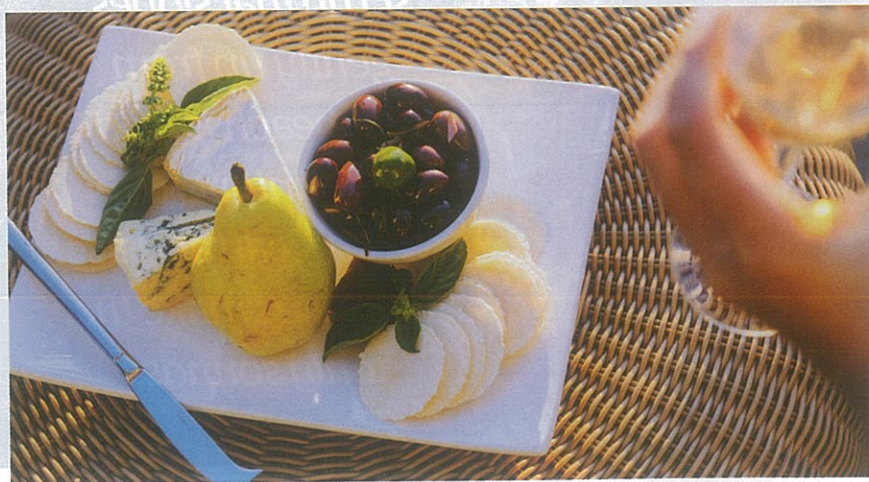
Further up the beach, a small gathering of surfers wait for a wave over a dark patch of reef. This coastline is internationally renowned for its surf, though there are so many different breaks that no-one looks starved for a wave.

The Smiths Beach Resort is the perfect counterpoint to the track. Having walked for kilometres and dispelled any guilt, this is your chance to laze about in the pool, read on the balcony and pick away at local cheeses and cabernet from Lamont's, the gourmet restaurant downstairs. Any leftovers – and indeed a fresh stash of gourmet produce – will go in the backpack for tomorrow's walking.

The next morning we walk from Sugarloaf Rock to Bunker Bay through very different scenery. Red-tailed tropical birds nest on Sugarloaf Rock, safe from land-based predators. Further north along this stretch, a group of divers struggle up the cliff with a bag of crayfish from the rockpools near Canal Rock. The cliffs are steeper here as we approach Cape Naturaliste, but as we bend east near the lighthouse the land slopes downhill again revealing the dazzling curves of Bunker Bay. Nestled in the trees is a welcoming café selling surprisingly good food and coffee. This is the unusual thing about the Leeuwin-Naturaliste coast – you can step out of the wilderness and find city-standard cuisine and head back in again, without changing your shoes.

Further towards Margaret River, there's an extraordinary expanse of scenery to take in: a marine reserve teeming with life at Yallingup Beach; giant waterfalls at Quininup and Meekadarabee; the soaring Wilyabrup sea cliffs near Gracetown and the strange limestone formation at Kilcarnup Beach known as Joey Nose, because it resembles a joey peering from its mother's pouch.

Halfway along the section where the Margaret River meets the sea, you'll find some of the most dramatic surf in Australia. There's a heavy shorebreak and views out to two of the most famous – and feared – waves in the region: Margaret River Main Break, and The Box. The Margaret is the most significant river to cross the walking route, and in







winter the crossing can test the nerves of even experienced hikers.

One of the loveliest sections of the Cape to Cape Track meanders through the heathland on the ridge above Contos Beach, sprinkled with wildflowers in the spring. The shade of the Boranup karri forest on the protected side of the ridge makes a serene change from days of coastal exposure.

Then it's back to the beach for a seven-kilometre stretch between Boranup Beach and Hamelin Bay, with rarely any sound but the roar of the surf. Shipwrecks litter Hamelin Bay (including those of three unfortunate vessels that foundered during one storm in July 1900), and the snorkelling here is among the best on offer on the Western Australian coast.

The track's southern end is marked by the Leeuwin Old Waterwheel, which once pumped water from the swamps up to the lighthouse cottages. Over more than a century it's been encrusted with the limestone that leaches from the water-supply and now stands frozen in time. It seems a subtle message from the land: wheels aren't welcome here. If you want to see the best of this place, you're going to have to get out and walk. [O]



**The Cape to Cape Track meanders through heathland on the ridge above Contos Beach sprinkled with wildflowers in the spring.**

## Round-up

### GET THERE

There are flights from all major cities to Perth daily with all major carriers. From there, it's a two to three-hour drive south.

### STAY

**Smiths Beach Resort**, nestled in the sand dunes just south of Yallingup.

[smithsbeachresort.com.au](http://smithsbeachresort.com.au)

**Acacia Chalets**, at Prevelly near Margaret River. [acaciachalets.com.au](http://acaciachalets.com.au)

### EAT & DRINK

**Lamont's** at Smiths Beach (and try their fantastic providore store for supplies!)

[lamonts.com.au](http://lamonts.com.au)

**The Gnarabar**, where you've a good chance of running into a touring pro surfer.

[gnarabar.com.au](http://gnarabar.com.au)

### EXPLORE

**Walk into Luxury** offer fully supported walking and gourmet packages.

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

Grab a coffee from **the caravan at Margaret River** mouth – it's a local institution.

### MORE INFO

[margaretriver.com](http://margaretriver.com)

[capetocapetrack.com.au](http://capetocapetrack.com.au)