

Australian GEOGRAPHIC

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OF THUNDER

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ATOMIC BOMB
SITES

Giants of the deep

- Top whale-watching spots • Bonus whale poster
- Blue whales – a massive mystery

Oasis in

Aurora

Going

TOP 10

Whale-watching spots

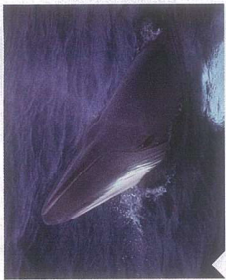
With 45 cetacean species found around Australia, a huge variety of marine mammals can potentially be spotted along the coastline or out at sea.

Southern right whales are commonly spotted around Australia and New Zealand.

FROM TAIL throws, spyhops and chin slaps, to blews and leaps above the surface while breaching, some whales can put on a spectacular display. And it's a show at which many Australians have a front-row seat, with nearly 60 per cent of the world's cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) found in our waters. Humpback and southern right whales are the most commonly

sighted. During annual migrations, some species can be seen at many locations, from the warm waters of tropical Queensland to the cooler southern coast of Western Australia. And with their immense size and the tendency of some to travel and calve in inshore waters, they are often easily observed from the beach or land-based lookouts.

SHANNON VERHAGEN



1 GREAT BARRIER REEF, QLD

The best time of year to spot dwarf minke whales on the reef is June–July, when pods of the curious animals gather here for a few weeks. Little is known about the migration pattern and life cycle of this subspecies of the common minke whale, but they are easily distinguished by their small size and mottled grey, black and white colouration. **MORE:** www.mikeball.com/expeditions/minke-whale-dive-expeditions

2 WHITSUNDAYS, QLD

During May–September, short-finned pilot whales frolic in the warm waters of the Whitsunday Islands. Highly social, they are often seen in pods of 15–50. They share this region with humpbacks, which arrive here to calve in the nursery grounds of these shallow, protected waters. 'Milgaloo', an albino humpback, has been seen on occasion in the waters of tropical north Queensland. **MORE:** www.tourismwhitsundays.com.au/attractions/whales

3 EDEN, NSW

Large pods of humpbacks can be seen off Eden's coast during September–November, on their southward migration from tropical breeding grounds. Staying close to shore with their calves, they can be seen from a number of land-based vantage points. Killer whales and sperm whales can also be seen further off the coast. The town's annual whale festival takes place at the end of October, and the Miller Whale Museum provides insight into the area's whaling history. **MORE:** www.edenwhalefestival.com.au

4 BRUNY ISLAND, TAS

Each year during May–July and September–December, humpback and southern right whales pass through Bruny's waters. Sightings are most common in Adventure Bay on South Bruny, where some whales take shelter for up to five weeks. Several other whale species visit the region on occasion, including killer whales, pygmy right whales and minke whales. **MORE:** www.brunywhalecruises.com.au

8 BREMER CANYON, WA

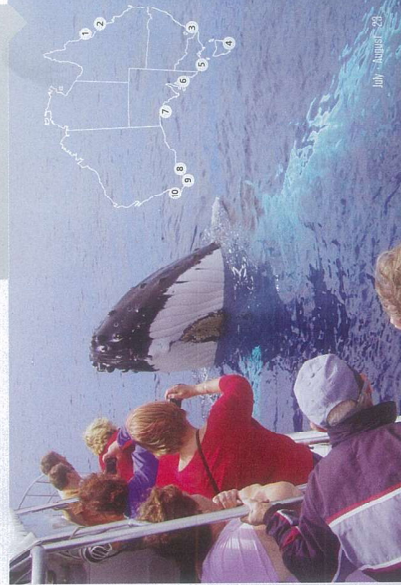
From Bremer Bay about 180km east of Albany, tour boats travel 70km offshore to Bremer Canyon, a marine hotspot teeming with life in January–April. Pods of killer whales regularly congregate here along with giant squid, sperm whales, beaked whales, dolphins, blue sharks and 'masses' of seabirds to take advantage of increased productivity, linked to hydrothermal vents on the sea floor. **MORE:** www.whales-australia.com.au/bremer-killer-whales

9 ALBANY, WA

Both humpback and southern right whales are regular visitors during June–November as they make their migrations to and from Antarctica. While the humpbacks continue north to Broome, the southern right whales take shelter in Albany's southern bays to mate and calve, where they can be seen from look-outs along the coastline. In May–June, blue whales are also occasionally sighted. Visitors can learn about the magnificent mammals at Whale World, a museum that was once a whaling station. **MORE:** www.albanywhalestours.com.au

10 GEORAPHIE BAY, WA

The south-west of Western Australia is a well-known biodiversity hotspot, and its waters do not disappoint. During October–November, pygmy blue whales and their calves can be sighted on their southward migration alongside bottlenose dolphins from the coast of Geographie Bay. Southern right whales, humpbacks and minke whales can also be sighted here. **MORE:** www.legendcharters.net.au



BOTTOM: LEGEND CHARTERS / MARGRITA MOUNGHEE; TOP: FLIP NICKLIN / GETTY IMAGES / BALENOPSIS ARCHIVEZ/STAS/SHUTTERSTOCK