

City of the Black Swan



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Travel through the charming port city of Fremantle and the pristine beaches of Cottesloe to Perth, one of the world's most remote, yet vibrant, cities.

Text **YD Bar-Ness**

▲ Above: Cyclists ride alongside Swan River in Perth.

Right: People enjoy the last of a summer day on a beach on Cottesloe. The iconic Indiana Restaurant can be seen in the background.

Often labelled as one of the most remote large cities in the world, Western Australia's capital, Perth, is one of the fastest-growing and attractive cities in the Southern Hemisphere. In the urban core, a new sensibility of fashion, entertainment and identity has grown over the last few years, yet, underneath this cosmopolitan verve, there is an ancient, timeless landscape waiting to be discovered.

Rambling around Freo

We'll start at sunrise at the beach, near the limestone cliffs and sand dunes of the old port city of Fremantle or Freo (as locals call it), and then travel upstream. Perth is set back from the ocean in the Swan River harbour. We'll begin at the very coastline itself, at the edge of the ocean, at Bather's Beach. Immediately before us, a limestone crag lifts upright, with an octagonal fortress—the Round House—marking this geo-strategic colony of the British

Empire. The Round House, built in 1830, is the oldest building of the English penal colony, and has the finest vantage of the town.

As we climb the stairs, the view opens up. From here, we see the activity of one of Australia's largest ports—a rainbow of shipping containers, tall orange loading cranes, and the tremendous bulk of cargo ships. The organic curves of the Maritime Museum can be seen clearly, as can the sprawling warehouse of Little Creatures, an iconic brewery-art gallery-cafe-meeting place. A handful of fish and chips shops cluster near the harbour walls, and the groves of tall pine trees of the Esplanade Park offer dark green shade and solace. Our eyes will be drawn eastwards, down the straight line of High Street to the central plaza and clock tower of Fremantle. Beyond it, we'll see the curve of the river, and the dark line of the Darling Hills behind.

We'll follow High Street, savouring the heritage buildings and pedestrian pace of the Fremantle city core. Students from Notre Dame University abound, moving from courtyards and classrooms to the city streets for study lunches and coffee dates. We could join them for croissants and cakes at Moore & Moore, one of the most popular study destinations. This cafe is blessed by both, a sunny courtyard hidden by stone walls, and a large interior space used as an art gallery. Or, we could hang out on the Cappuccino Strip, where a line of cafes and bars forms the entertainment heart of Freo. There, we'd hopefully be able to find ourselves a seat at Gino's, the most strategically located of all cafes. From here, we'd have a view of the constant traffic along this most beloved of streets.



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▲ Clockwise from above: People shop for fresh produce at a market in Fremantle; Afternoon crowd relaxes and grabs a bite on Fremantle's Cappuccino Strip; The Round House, Western Australia's oldest public building.

Mythical rivers and famous beaches

The quiet Fremantle train line runs from Freo towards Perth city (taking about 45 minutes), and we will make sure to sit on the westwards-facing side of the train, in hopes of an ocean view. The Swan River is broad here, and for a few moments, we'll bridge its deep, dark waters.

We can take a moment to appreciate the stories of the Noongar people, who have inhabited the Swan River for thousands of years before the English arrived. To them, the River marked the track of the Rainbow Serpent, which formed the landscape as it twisted and turned in mythological Dreamtime. Each rock and river of the entire continent can be understood as evidence of the Serpent's existence.

The train continues to the beachside township of Cottesloe. Next to the train line, Napoleon Street is lined with cafes and fashionable stores, and to the east, the green-architecture Grove Library is worth a visit; it's named for the century-old peppermint trees of the town.

We'll walk over a small hill to a beach. Here, the Australian culture of surfing, tanning, bikinis, and bathers is on full display. We can pause for a cuppa at the imposing palace architecture of the Indiana Teahouse, or stroll along the beach promenade with the joggers, bikers, and dog walkers.

Planetarium, parliament and park

We'll return inland to the train line, and continue on the rails to City West Train Station. We'll be on the very edge of the central urban core of Perth, but we'll approach the Central Business District by the most spectacular route possible.

Near the train station, the Sci-Tech Museum introduces people to some of humanity's technical accomplishments. The building is instantly recognisable by its domed roof, which hides a planetarium in which you can take a guided tour of the universe. We'll head directly south, and through the grounds of the Western Australian Parliament. With its modest landscaping and lack of ostentation, it may come as a surprise to discover this is the

governmental core for one of the largest landscapes and busiest economies of the modern world.

We'll cross over into the grounds of Kings Park, where we can study and be introduced to the flora of the region and the world. The wildflowers are famous for their abundance and colour. Signs and labels inform visitors about the Aboriginal knowledge and culture and about the significance of botanical sciences to the colonial goals of the British Empire.

Around Perth CBD

At this point, the view will open up and we'll see the city of Perth as a shimmering skyline, fit for a postcard. From here, near the wartime Cenotaph Memorial, we'll see the skyscrapers of the Central Business District (CBD), and the broad open fields fronting the River. In this picture, cranes feature abundantly—new towers are being built in this era of economic activity. The crystal wings and pinnacle of the Swan Bells offer a graceful contrast to the construction activity.

We'll descend to the city down onto St Georges Terrace, a major thoroughfare of the city core. The Terrace runs along the length of the city to the base of the towers, and connects with several of the indoor shopping arcades that cross perpendicularly. We can stop for a cuppa



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and a snack at the Greenhouse, and queue up with the business people at the counter of this environmentally conscious cafe. On its exterior surface, hundreds of potted ivy plants are busy photo-synthesising, making it quite literally the greenest place in town.

From the Terrace, we'll go through London Court. Facades and paintings reminiscent of an older European city decorate this narrow laneway of espresso bars and tourist shops. It will bring us onto the Hay Street Mall, one of the city's two pedestrian malls. Here, the commercial heart of Perth beats strong, and the clothing stores, record shops, electronic merchants, and restaurants serve a constant flow of customers.

Passing through another arcade, we'll arrive at Murray Street Mall, which opens into a large plaza. Here, the foot traffic is at its highest, and there is no shortage of benches and steps where we can people-watch. A set of bright green sculptures, known for their resemblance to surreal giant cactuses, points the way to the central Perth Train Station, where surface rail and subway lead off in all direction of



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▲ Clockwise from above: A rock climber on the limestone cliffs of the Swan River; The Swan Bell Tower, comprising 18 bells, was built to commemorate the new millennium. It is one of Perth's popular tourist attractions; Kings Park spans over a thousand acres and offers panoramic views of the Swan River and Darling Range.

the metropolis. A footbridge to other side of the tracks takes us to the Perth Cultural Centre plaza, from which we can easily access the human and natural history-focused Western Museum, discover the treasures at the Art Gallery of Western Australia or walk into the international market and nightlife district of Northbridge.

Exercising the legs and the palate

We'll continue our adventure by catching the train to Guildford. This historic township is placed where the Swan River is no longer navigable by boat. Upstream, rocks and rapids prohibited mercantile river trade has made the town an important river port. We'll make sure to visit the curio-shops and wine bars, and the unique Museum



Paul Kingsley / Alamy | IndiaPicture

of Natural History, which houses the Academy of Taxidermy. Inside the museum, we'll find some of the world's most impressive animals arrayed in lifelike poses, and learn a bit about the art and science of this biological collection.

Let's reward our efforts by stopping for a hot meal and a cold drink at the Rose and Crown, the oldest hotel in Western Australia. By day, it's a classic Aussie pub, and by night, it's a swish destination. If you take a moment to explore the interior of this sprawling building, you might find your way into the old tunnels of the wine cellar.

After our meal, we'll walk along the green banks of the Swan River, and then make our way up onto the escarpment, to Kalamunda. Sunday tourists flock to the farmer's market, and trek into the hills to explore the jarrah forest and granite domes. From the town centre, WA's premiere hiking trail, the Bibbulmun Track, begins its nearly thousand kilometre long journey to the city of Albany on the south

coast of Western Australia. Yellow signs bearing a picture of the Rainbow Serpent mark the path. If we only had time, we could start walking today.

Ending at the beginning

The sun is beginning to set on our day exploring Perth, and let us now make our way to Lesmurdie Falls. At the waterfall, we can see the exposed granite rocks of the Darling Hills—some of the oldest rocks on Earth, 2.5 billion years old.

The narrow coastal plain is laid out clearly below us, and we can track the path of the Rainbow Serpent as it crests over the hills. Impossibly large and inconceivably powerful, it shaped the land, creating the Swan River. At the coastline, it reached the ocean, and it is upon its track that we have been travelling today. If you look carefully, you can just see the sun setting over the ocean, at the same beach where we began our exploration.



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▲ Above: Hikers on the Bibbulmun Track, one of the world's great long distance walking trails, which stretches from Perth to Albany.

Below: A Tudor-style lane in London Court, Perth.

Fact file

Getting there

Jet Airways has daily, direct flights to Singapore from Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai and Kochi. From Singapore, fly to Perth using our codeshare partner Qantas. From Perth, one can hire a car or use public transport to get to Fremantle, Cottesloe, Guildford and Kalamunda.

Accommodation

Perth offers a variety of accommodation—from chain hotels to quaint inns, B&Bs and backpacker's hostels. Above Bored Bed and Breakfast is a charming boutique hotel located close to Perth CBD. For more information, log on to www.abovebored.com.au

For more information: Log on to www.westernaustralia.com