



Ningaloo Marine Park

The beauty and biodiversity of Ningaloo Marine Park helped the Ningaloo Coast earn its prestigious new World Heritage area listing.

Above Colourful coral gardens abound in Ningaloo Marine Park.

Photo – Geoff Taylor/Lochman Transparencies

Top right Diving is popular in the park.

Photo – Eva Boogaard/Lochman Transparencies

Above right An anemone fish.

Photo – Ross Gudgeon

Far right Ningaloo Marine Park.

Photo – Brett Dennis/Lochman Transparencies

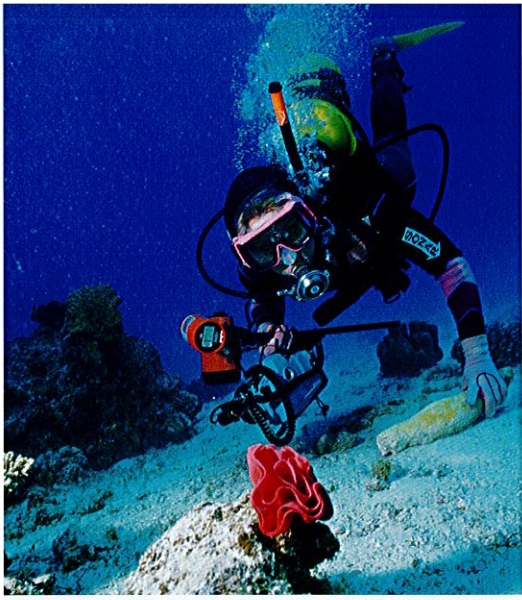
The coral gardens of Ningaloo Reef stretch nearly 300 kilometres in a north–south direction and are protected in Ningaloo Marine Park and the adjoining Muiron Islands Marine Management Area. They are a major component of the newly declared Ningaloo Coast World Heritage area, which also includes Cape Range National Park, Muiron Islands Nature Reserve, Jurabi and Bundegi coastal parks and Learmonth Air Weapons Range.

Perhaps what makes Ningaloo Reef most treasured to visitors is its close proximity to the beach. In many places you need simply step from the beach and wade a few metres to enter the fairytale-like world of the reef. Indeed, Ningaloo Reef is regarded as one of the world's richest, and largest, coastal fringing reefs.

Dive among the coral castles and you are bound to revel in the kaleidoscope of life. Fortresses of staghorn coral protect Clarke's anemone fish (*Amphiprion clarkii*) and hyper-coloured damsel fish, angelfish and butterflyfish.

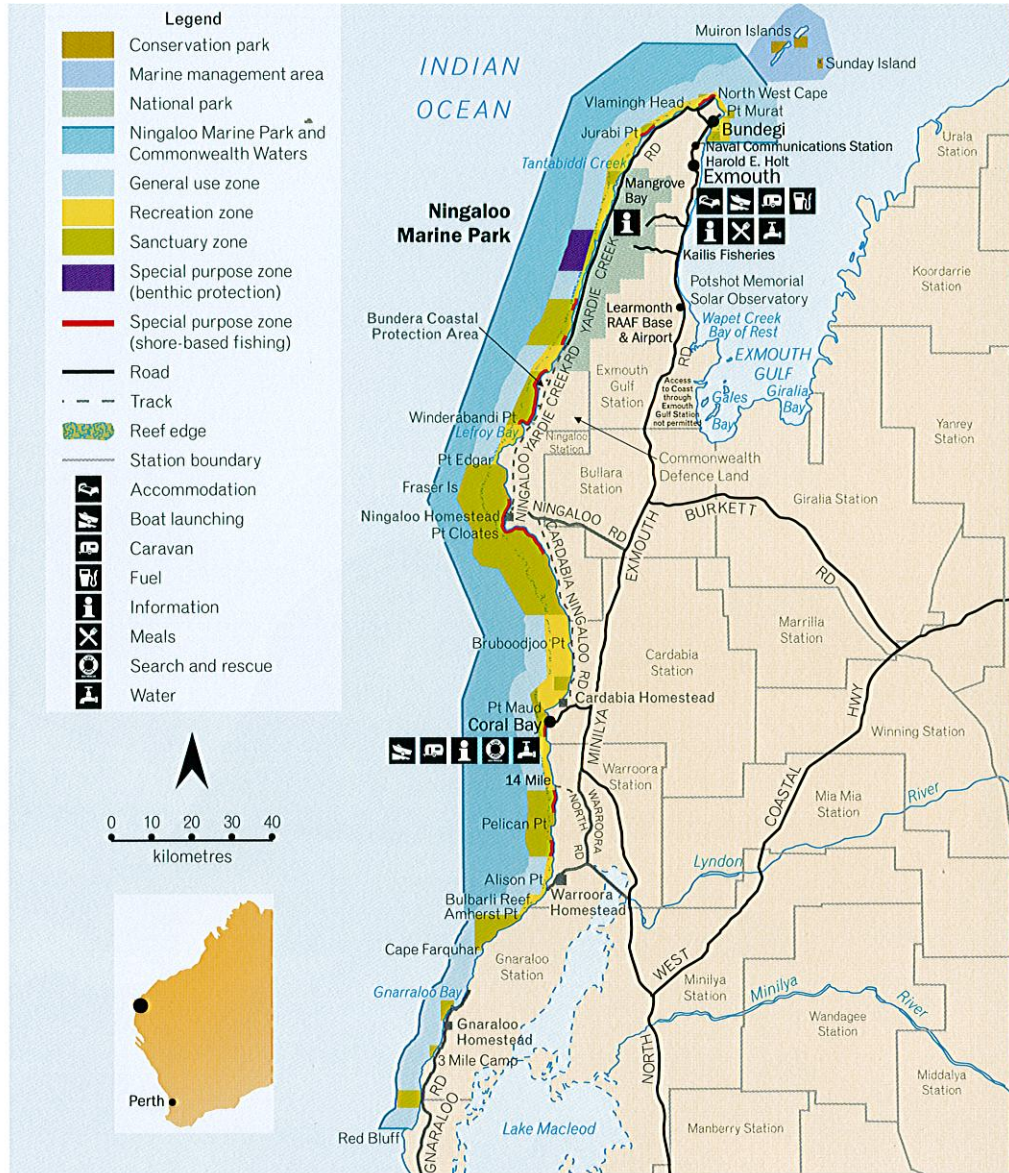
The area is home to more than 200 species of coral, 500 species of fish, more than 600 mollusc species and more than 90 species of sea star, urchin and sea cucumber. Researchers have also recently confirmed that possibly Australia's largest and most diverse shark and ray fauna exists on Ningaloo Reef, with more than 118 species believed to occur here. In addition, the surveys have uncovered a new species of ray—a type of maskray—which is possibly endemic to Ningaloo.

The marine park is also well known for its whale shark (*Rhincodon typus*) and manta ray (*Manta birostris*) populations. Ningaloo is one of the best places in the world to swim with these magical creatures, as the animals can be regularly seen feeding on the surface. Whale sharks can reach more than 12 metres in length, making a swim alongside such a huge, majestic animal a truly memorable experience. More than 14,000 people came to Ningaloo to swim with the whale sharks last year.



Marine mammals are also in plentiful supply here. About 1,000 dugongs (*Dugong dugon*) inhabit the region and 16 species of whale and dolphin have been recorded, ranging from the blue whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*), killer whale (*Orcinus orca*) and humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) to the Indo-Pacific humpback and bottlenose dolphins (*Sousa chinensis* and *Tursiops* sp.). Visitors can join whale watching charters during the annual humpback whale migration. As humpback whale mothers and calves cruise back along the Western Australian coast, they slow down to rest, feed and play in the Exmouth gulf from September to November. The concentrations of the whales in the gulf at this time of year are now said to be at the highest, per square kilometre, for whales recorded anywhere in the world.

The shores of Ningaloo Marine Park and the Muiron Islands Marine Management Area are also globally important nesting habitats for three species of marine turtle—the loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*), green (*Chelonia mydas*) and hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*). If you visit in the nesting season from November to January, you may see turtles laying on the beaches, hatchlings emerging and



large in-water aggregations of adult turtles. Year round, you can also see all species of turtles when walking the beaches or boating.

Exploring the park

Tourism operators in Coral Bay and Exmouth offer a wealth of ways to experience Ningaloo Marine Park. You can book glass-bottom boat tours, kayaking tours, snorkelling tours, scuba diving charters, whale watching charters, swim-with-manta-ray tours, swim-with-whale-shark tours, turtle tours and eco-boat charters—the list goes on.

Another way of taking in the marine park's scenic beauty is aboard a scenic flight, either in a chartered light aircraft or in an ultralight craft. From the air you can truly appreciate the immensity of the reef and delight in the palette of changing blues. You're also likely to spot manta rays and turtles from the air and, in season, whale sharks and whales.

Fishing is also a popular recreational activity within the marine park. Be sure to pick up a marine park brochure from the Department of Environment and Conservation to familiarise yourself with park zones and permitted activities and also check the latest Department of Fisheries' possession, size and seasonal limits.

park facts

Where is it? The park is accessible from Coral Bay and Exmouth.

Total area: 263,343 hectares.

What to do: Snorkelling, swimming, scuba diving, whale watching, eco-tours, scenic flights, fishing.

Facilities: Boat ramp, Milyering Visitor Centre, Jurabi Turtle Interpretive Centre, bird hide at Mangrove Bay.

Nearest DEC offices: Exmouth District Office, 20 Nimitz Street, Exmouth, phone (08) 9947 8000.

DEC Coral Bay, phone (08) 9948 5131 and Milyering Visitor Centre, phone (08) 9949 2808.



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