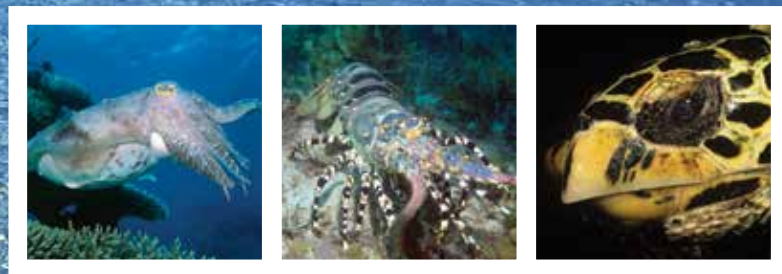


Adventure out



KAYAKING

ALONG NINGALOO COAST



A kayak trail along the Ningaloo Coast is giving visitors a unique view of the coastline above the water and a platform from which to explore the marine world under the surface. Parks and Wildlife's Ray De Jong journeys out for a paddle and a snorkel.

by Ray De Jong



“I saw cuttlefish, squid, and varieties of trevally fish as my kayak glided across the glassy waters. The coral structures below me were a hive of activity...”

The popularity of kayaking is increasing around Australia and the world. In response, the Department of Parks and Wildlife, in cooperation and consultation with the community, is working to develop new opportunities for people to experience Western Australia’s amazing coastline. Developing a kayak mooring and snorkel trail on the World Heritage-listed Ningaloo Coast has been a major initiative.

The first phase of developing the trail was the installation of 10 kayak moorings in Ningaloo Marine Park at Bundegi, Tantabiddi, Osprey and at four sites at

Coral Bay. Each site is located 400m to 600m offshore and, labelled with ‘kayak’s only’, they are easily identifiable and big enough for paddlers to see at a distance. The moorings provide kayakers with an opportunity to paddle out to relatively close-to-shore sites, tie off on the mooring lines and immerse themselves at some great offshore snorkelling sites. The trail is already proving extremely popular, with many groups and individuals using this exciting new nature-based experience.

Stage two of the kayak trail development will be a multi-day paddle opportunity from Yardie Creek in the south of Cape Range National Park to Bundegi Coastal Park on the North West Cape. This is expected to be completed within the next couple of years.

it about catching up on the jobs around the house that always seem to be there. No, this Saturday was all about heading out to Osprey Bay and taking a leisurely paddle out to the newly installed kayak mooring sites and slipping into the ocean to explore the underwater world.

The end of the work week couldn’t come fast enough and with my kayak, and my paddle, lifejacket, snorkel, fins and Go Pro underwater camera stashed inside I was organised. Frozen water bottles and light snacks were packed in the dry bag.

I rose with the sun and the Bureau of Meteorology was spot on with its forecast – not a breath of wind. I shared the details of my plan with my family, left Exmouth and made a quick detour up to the Vlamingh Head Lighthouse to check out the swell and ocean conditions. Pure ‘glass off’. After a 40-minute drive I arrived at Osprey Bay and pulled up at the car park. Scanning the horizon, I made out my first destination point: a mooring buoy about 600m offshore from the mainland in a south-westerly direction.

As I paddled from the shore, I came across a hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) that had popped up for a breath of air. The water was so clear and calm that I could watch it swim away into the

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Main Kayaking on the World Heritage-listed Ningaloo Coast.

Photo – Tourism WA

Inset left A reef cuttlefish.

Photo – Alex Steffe/Lochman Transparencies

Inset centre An ornate rock lobster.

Photo – Clay Bryce/Lochman Transparencies

Inset right A hawksbill turtle.

Photo – Jiri Lochman

Above The stunning Ningaloo Coast Ningaloo Reef.

Photo – Brett Dennis/Lochman Transparencies

GETTING OUT

One day in November I scanned the four-day weather forecast and the constant winds that had been blowing from the south-west for the past two weeks appeared to be finally easing. The coming Saturday looked to be one of those perfect ‘glass offs’ – a term that excites surfers, fishermen and divers alike. But, for me, this Saturday wasn’t about chasing waves along the Ningaloo Coast, nor was



Above Vlamingh Head Lighthouse.
Photo – Jiri Lochman

Left Turquoise Bay in Cape Range National Park is a beautiful and popular area for snorkelling and swimming.
Photo – Bill Belson/Lochman Transparencies

See for yourself

For more information about the kayak sites visit www.dpaw.wa.gov.au or trails.wa.com.au. Access to the kayak mooring sites is through Cape Range National Park where entry fees apply or from Bills Bay in Coral Bay. Facilities available in the area include camping, an interpretive discovery centre with refreshments and souvenirs, and toilets. The best time to visit these sites is from April to September. However, always check local ocean and weather conditions before you depart. Ensure that your kayak is suitable for the conditions and that all safety equipment is in good working order. If you're in doubt – don't go out.

distance and around some coral structure that was only metres from the shoreline. The paddle out to the mooring buoy on a day like that was, by definition, a nature-based experience. I saw cuttlefish, squid, and varieties of trevally fish as my kayak glided across the glassy waters. The coral structures below me were a hive of activity and I saw blue-green chromis fish (*Chromis viridis*), scribbled angelfish (*Chaetodontoplus duboulayi*) and lemon damsels (*Pomacentrus moluccensis*), along with different species of parrotfish and surgeonfish.

After a good half-hour paddle I arrived at the mooring site and secured my kayak containing all my gear to the mooring. What I felt, even just sitting on the kayak out here resting up for a moment, was something that is hard to explain. The salt air, the warm water, the sounds of the small waves crashing onto the reef just several hundred metres away, the sea birds diving into the ocean in the distance culminated into an unforgettable experience, and, amazingly, one that is available in my backyard for everyone to enjoy.

Mask, snorkel and fins on, I immersed myself into the ocean. Instantly I was in awe of what appeared below and around

me; in every direction there was marine life. From a variety of corals such as plate, staghorn and porites bombies – all in pristine condition – to a myriad of fish – the number of species as varied as the colours they adorn. I checked out this incredible underwater playground in the proximity of the kayak mooring for the next half an hour before getting back on board and making my way over to the next mooring site, some 500m away.

Once in the water again I headed over to the western edge of the reef where I came across a large patch of staghorn coral (*Acropora* sp.) – each polyp alive with colour. Diving down under a ledge, I was greeted by a massive ornate rock lobster (*Panulirus ornatus*) that I estimated to be at least 25 years old. Alongside the crayfish lay a 1.5m grey reef shark (*Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos*) resting, its tail the only visible sign.

Back up to the surface and the ocean conditions were still perfect. A slight ripple appeared on the water surface from the offshore wind just starting to increase – three knots at most. Paddling back to the launch site I enjoyed the view in reverse with Cape Range dominant in the skyline.

As I paddled past the rocky shoreline and made my way to the sandy beach

where I first launched three hours earlier I was reminded of how incredibly fortunate we are to have such an amazing coastline with such a diverse range of marine life in pristine condition. With more than 500 tropical fish species, and about 200 species of coral that live in and around the Ningaloo Coast, people are bound to see marine life. But, even by usual standards, today was exceptional. It certainly reinforced for me the reasons why we live where we live, and why we do what we do.



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