

Adventure out

Nambung

NATIONAL PARK



In 2014–15 the Pinnacles Desert received nearly 300,000 visits from people who travelled there to marvel at its scenic and fascinating structures. Now, thanks to services offered in the park by two licensed tour operators, visitors can experience an entirely different perspective of this spectacular area.

BY RHIANNA KING



Nambung National Park is a popular destination for visitors to Western Australia as well as for locals. A two-hour drive from Perth, it's a comfortable day trip from the city or a welcome stop on a trip further north. The Pinnacles Desert is home to thousands of peculiar and spectacular limestone pillars that mark the landscape and captivate the imaginations of those who visit. The landscape is highly changeable; the time of day determines the shadow lengths cast by the varying-sized structures and the colour of the sky offers variation to the contrasting yellow sand. And while it's not known exactly how they were created, it's understood the likely processes occurred over the past half-million-years.

Until recently, there were only a few ways to explore the Pinnacles Desert – either by car or coaster bus and drive around the 4km one-way Pinnacles Desert Drive, stopping every now and then to get a closer look and take some photos. Or by foot around a 1.2km signed walk, which does a loop and guides those who would rather give their legs a good stretch and immerse themselves in the landscape. Visitors could do these by themselves or join a tour. Now, there's a third option, which gives visitors an entirely different perspective of the park and its surrounds.



UP, UP AND AWAY

For many, the rush of being in a helicopter is an adventure in itself, but visitors to Nambung National Park can now enjoy a birds' eye view of the park and surrounding area with Pinnacle Helicopter Flights. The company has been issued a commercial tour operator's licence from Parks and Wildlife permitting it to run tours from within the park. Licences such as these enable tour operators to provide visitors with enriched experiences that are beyond what Parks and Wildlife can offer in its land management capacity.

Pinnacle Helicopter Flights operates a booth in the Pinnacles Desert Discovery centre and offers three flight paths, which vary in time in the air, cost and the distance travelled. All three paths leave from the helipad behind the discovery centre and take in the Pinnacles Desert as well as an exclusive look at

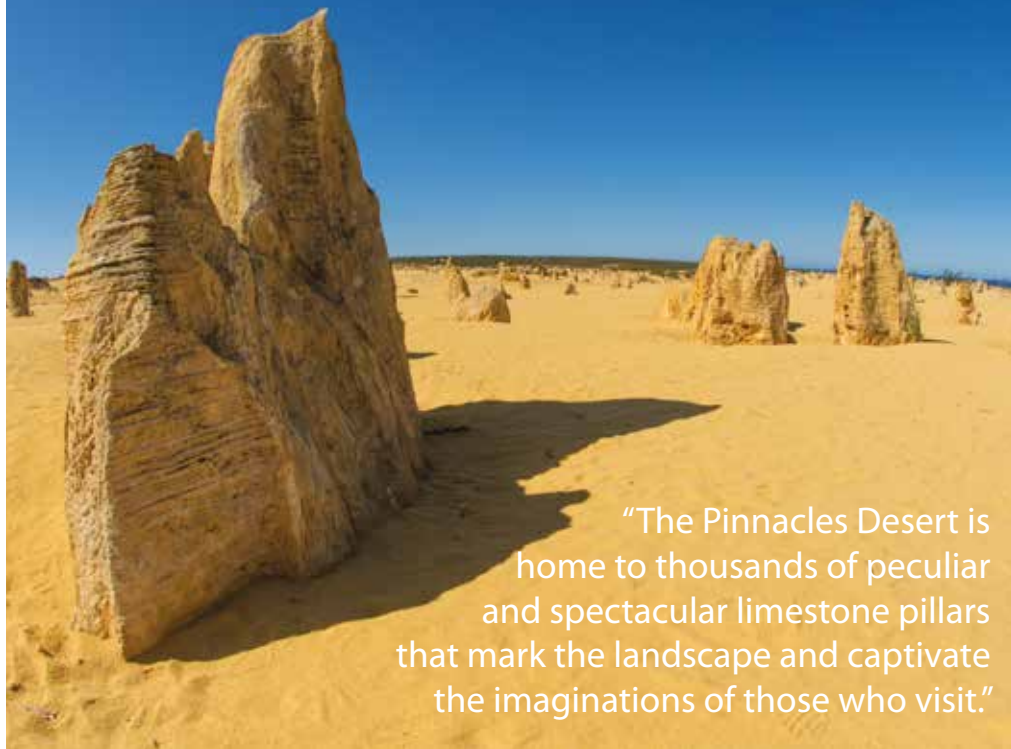
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Main A birds' eye view of the Pinnacles Desert.
Bottom Helicopter rides offer an entirely different perspective of Nambung National Park.

Above Visitors can witness the shifting sands of the Painted Desert.
Photos – Damon Annison

Above left Stromatolites at Lake Thetis.
Photo – Jiri Lochman

the Painted Desert, which houses little mounds believed to have been created by a different process than the one that made the Pinnacles. The longer two flights travel along the coastline, which is enveloped by Jurien Bay Marine Park and protects an important and unique part of the Western Australian coastline. This precious area is where the distribution



“The Pinnacles Desert is home to thousands of peculiar and spectacular limestone pillars that mark the landscape and captivate the imaginations of those who visit.”



Top The amazing limestone formations in the Pinnacles Desert.
Photo – Peter Nicholas/Parks and Wildlife

Above The Pinnacles Desert Discovery centre.
Photo – Jiri Lochman

Right Emus can be seen strutting around Nambung National Park.
Photo – Damon Annison

of some species from the tropical north and the temperate south overlap, and it is home to Australian sea lions, dolphins and a myriad of fish. It also contains extensive seagrass meadows, which shelter western rock lobsters, octopuses and cuttlefish. And the extensive reef system that runs parallel to the coastline comprises colourful sponges, sea squirts, anemones and corals.

The longest flight takes in the stromatolites of Lake Thetis in the northern part of Nambung National Park.

Newcomer – Rotorvation – has recently started catering to tourists who want to visit the Pinnacles but don't have the time to drive there. The company arranges a door-to-door service from Perth hotels and other accommodation to give people who might otherwise miss out due to time restraints the opportunity to see this magnificent part of Western Australia. The helicopter flights to the Pinnacles leave from Jandakot and stop at Yanchep National Park for a quick look at the caves, koalas and Aboriginal heritage. Visitors then land on a helipad in Nambung National Park where they are met by a vehicle that will guide them around the Pinnacles. Rotorvation also offers chartered flights, giving their clients the option to choose their own adventure.

There's no doubt that the Pinnacles and Painted deserts are spectacular when viewed from any angle, but observing them from the air, with the adrenaline rush that comes with being carried through the air by a rotor, and wearing a helicopter headset that make you feel a bit hardcore is an experience that's out of this world.



Do it yourself

Where is it? Nambung National Park is 200km north of Perth.

Facilities: Pinnacles Desert Discovery centre, toilets, barbecues, lookouts.

The state-of-the-art Pinnacles Desert Discovery centre provides award-winning interpretive information and sells a range of locally sourced arts and crafts, and other gifts and souvenirs. It also sells coffee, tea and other refreshments. The knowledgeable and friendly staff can also help with information about the area.

Helicopter rides: For more information on helicopter rides to, in and from Nambung National Park visit www.pinnaclehelicopterflights.com.au and www.rotorvation.com.au or visit your local tourist centre.



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See remarkable 360° vision of the Pinnacles Desert



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