

Adventure out

KINGS PARK Yorga's tour

Kings Park, or 'Kaarta Gar-up', as it was known by the local Nyungar people, was an important site for womans' business. I joined traditional owner Kerry-Ann Winmar for a cultural walking tour to learn more about the ancient history of this inner-city haven.

by Rhianna King



Located at the heart of Perth's city, Kings Park is many things to many people – an inner city bush setting to explore, a place to bring the kids for some nature play, a stunning setting for a special event or a sacred haven to run, walk or cycle through. For Whadjuk woman and traditional owner Kerry-Ann Winmar, Kings Park is the homeland of her people, and her connection to the area runs deep.

Kerry-Ann is one of three tour operators who provide visitors with an insight into the rich cultural significance of the area, which is known as 'Kaarta Koomba', 'Kaarta Gar-up' and 'Mooro Kaarta' by its traditional owners. I joined her for one of her 70-minute tours, on a beautiful late-spring afternoon. Aboriginal people know this time of year as 'Kambarang' – when rainfall decreases and the 'Moordjarl', or WA Christmas tree as it's commonly known, appears, to indicate they should return to the coast for the warmer months.

NOT JUST A PRETTY FACE

I have visited Kings Park probably hundreds of times over the years and have spent countless hours appreciating the beauty and diversity of the plants that occur there. But Kerry-Ann provided insight into the hidden uses of the native plants, which were crucial to the survival of the Aboriginal people who lived and passed through the area.

The tour started at Aspects of Kings Park Gallery Shop and journeyed through the Western Australian Botanic Garden, where Kerry-Ann provided descriptions of the uses of a number of plants, such as the candlestick banksias that were used to carry fire long distances, the tuarts that were hollowed to make a

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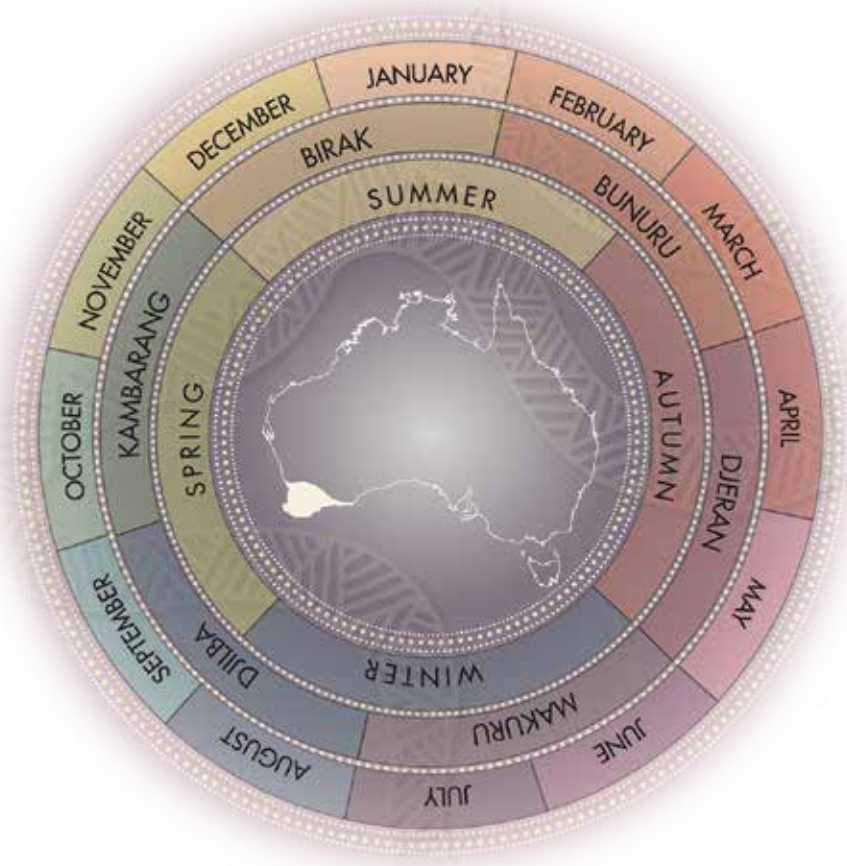
Main Kerry-Ann Winmar takes visitors through the cultural significance of Kings Park.

Photo – Rhianna King/DBCA

Inset Holly-leaved banksia.

Photo – Babs and Bert Wells/DBCA

Above The Nyungar six seasons.



“Kerry-Ann’s connection to family is a strong theme of her tour; she honours her ancestors for the knowledge she has of bush tucker and bush medicine.”

‘yandi’ – a type of dish used to carry babies, the reeds that were used to make baskets, and the various seeds that were ground up to make damper. The uses of these plants, and their fruits and flowers, had been discovered and perfected over eons, and passed down from generation to generation, usually along the female line.

Kerry-Ann explained that the six seasons provided Aboriginal people with guidance about what was available and where, so they always had access to fresh fruit, vegetables, meat and fish. She also explained that Aboriginal people were the first farmers of Australian soil and cultivated vegetables by replanting tubers.

Along the way, Kerry-Ann demonstrated that the bush is a virtual apothecary; peppermint leaves were used to sooth sore throats and as an insect repellent, and holly-leaved banksia were

consumed for their medicinal value. I was also fascinated to hear how mothers used paperbark on their babies for medicinal purposes.

FAMILY MATTERS

For me, one of the most enjoyable features of the tour was hearing how Kings Park was used as a birthing place for local Aboriginal women, including for Kerry-Ann’s great-grandmother who was born near the Pioneer Women’s Memorial fountain. Today, this area houses a bronze statue of a woman holding her child, and boasts a three-minute water dancing sequence, but Kerry-Ann’s great-grandmother was grounded to the land that lay as ‘far as the eye could see’ around her birthplace, a place where Kerry-Ann says she feels good energy and derives strength from while she’s there.



Above left Kerry-Ann shows the tour group a kangaroo skin that was stitched together by her mother.

Above Aboriginal people used native seeds for food and medicinal purposes.
Photos – Rhianna King/DBCA

Left The Pioneer Women’s Memorial Fountain houses a statue of a woman holding her child and a three-minute water dancing sequence to epitomise the significance of the site as a birthing place for local Aboriginal women.
Photo – David Steele/Alamy



Kerry-Ann’s great-grandmother was five years old when she stood with her people on the top of Mount Eliza scarp and watched the European settlers arrive and settle the Swan River Colony. Having never before seen people with pale skin, the local Aboriginal people thought they were the spirits of their dead ancestors.

Kerry-Ann’s connection to family is a strong theme of her tour; she honours her ancestors for the knowledge she has of bush tucker and bush medicine, which has been passed down through her family from generation to generation. And, her eight-year-old grandson was on hand to help demonstrate the use of ochre for ceremonial and traditional body painting. I found it touching to watch him grinding up the rock to make the colour, mix it with water and then apply it to the back of his grandmother’s hand, carrying on the

traditions of his ancestors while providing assurance that their sacred stories and ceremonies were in good hands.

Kerry-Ann spoke of the value she places on being able to pass her knowledge and traditions to her children and grandchildren, and the opportunity to share it with the wider community.

“I want to tell my story my way ... it’s important to keep it strong,” she said. And I was glad to hear it.



See more of the tour

Scan this QR code or visit Parks and Wildlife Service’s ‘LANDSCOPE’ playlist on YouTube.



Do it yourself

Where is it? 1.5 kilometres from Perth’s CBD

Facilities: Restaurants, cafes, kiosk, toilets, walk trails, playgrounds.

Tours: Nyungar Tours Kings Park Yorga’s Walk runs at various times throughout the week. For more information visit nyungartours.com.au or call 0477 442 515.

Go Cultural Aboriginal Tours and Experiences operates tours to help visitors learn about Kaarta Gar-up and about Mt Eliza’s intriguing past and its spiritual significance to Nyongar people. For more information contact Go Cultural on 0459 419 778 by email (info@gocultural.com.au) or visit www.gocultural.com.au

Aboriginal Productions also offers walking and talking on Country for corporate and other groups seeking an authentic understanding of local Aboriginal culture. For more information contact Aboriginal Productions by email (abprodpr@inet.net.au) or visit www.aboriginalproductions.com.au