



Monkey Mia ... still magic

Getting up close to friendly bottlenose dolphins at Monkey Mia Conservation Park on the shores of Shark Bay Marine Park is a much-loved memory of many Western Australians and continues to be a magical experience for thousands of visitors each year.

Shark Bay is located on the coast of Western Australia, 850 kilometres north of Perth by road. The area was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1991, being one of only 21 locations worldwide to satisfy all four of the World Heritage natural criteria.

The area has some of the most spectacular scenery and unique animals found nowhere else in the world, but it's the Monkey Mia dolphins that have been the major drawcard to the region for more than 50 years.

Monkey Mia, located on the east coast of Peron Peninsula, is a popular tourist destination, world renowned for a small

group of Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops aduncus*) that visit regularly to be hand fed fish by tourists.

A LONG HISTORY

Monkey Mia is one of the few areas in Shark Bay that has deep water close to the shoreline, which makes it a perfect area for dolphins to forage for fish. The dolphins of Red Cliff Bay have been utilising this habitat long before fishers and tourists started frequenting the area. The local Aboriginal people, Malgana, tell of dolphins and people working together many years ago to bring in big schools of fish. The dolphins were rewarded by snapping up fish that escaped.

In the 1960s, fishers and dolphins fished the same areas and learnt to coexist with each other around the shores of Monkey Mia. Due to this coexistence, the dolphins became accustomed to the presence of humans and in 1964 a local fisherwoman enticed one of the dolphins to take a fish out of her hand.

By the 1970s Monkey Mia was becoming internationally renowned for the friendly dolphins who visited the shores to be hand fed and interact with humans.

During the 1980s thousands of tourists were visiting Monkey Mia to experience this unique interaction. This also provided an opportunity for dolphin researchers



to gather behavioural and genetic data on both the beach and offshore dolphin populations. This research has contributed a great deal to the current understanding of dolphins and informs management of the Monkey Mia dolphin experiences.

THE DOLPHIN EXPERIENCE

Visitors who had an experience with the dolphins at Monkey Mia more than twenty years ago will notice many changes in the way the dolphin experiences are run today. Dolphins are only fed under strict supervision of Parks and Wildlife Service officers and each dolphin is only fed a small amount of fish so that they continue to behave and hunt naturally and teach their young calves important survival skills.

There are no set times for dolphin experiences as they depend on if and when the dolphins visit the beach from 7.45am to 12pm. Only a select few of the female dolphins can be offered fish the first three times they visit during the morning. If the dolphins visit more than three times or after 12pm they will not be fed. It is best

to arrive early as dolphin experiences may finish well before 12pm.

When the dolphins arrive at the beach, Parks and Wildlife Service officers invite visitors to enter the waters of the Dolphin Experience Area to ankle depth. An interpretive talk is then conducted while volunteers are busy defrosting and weighing the locally caught fish. At the conclusion of the talk, visitors are asked to stand back on the shoreline and the volunteers carry the buckets of fish down to the beach.

Volunteers are assigned a beach feeding dolphin, and invite visitors, randomly selected one at a time, to come into the water and assist them with feeding the dolphins. Visitors are handed a fish and asked to place it into the water so the dolphin may take it from their hand. At the conclusion of the feed the buckets are rinsed out in front of the dolphins as a cue to them that the feed has concluded, at which point the dolphins will move offshore.

Although the feeds only happen in the morning, many visitors who take the time

Discover more about
Monkey Mia

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

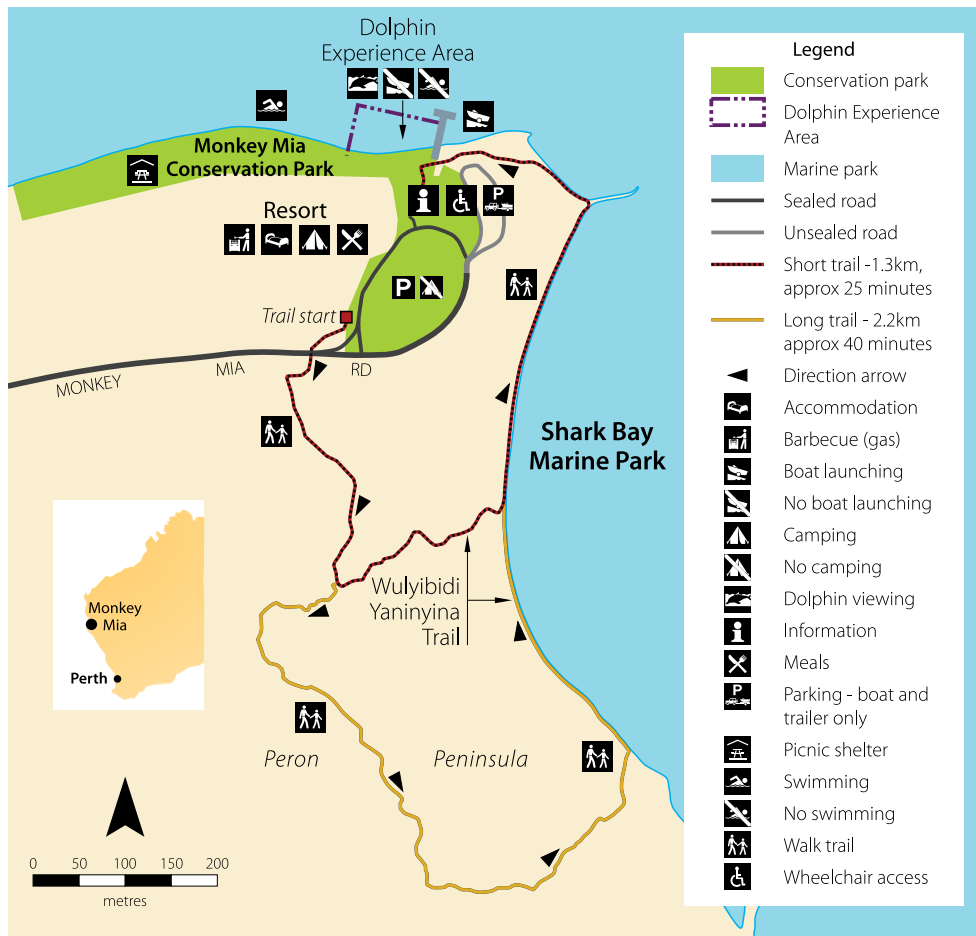
to enjoy Monkey Mia in the afternoons are rewarded with exciting displays of foraging by the dolphins in the shallow water along the beach.

Opposite page

Main Feeding time at Monkey Mia Dolphin Experience.

Photo – Tourism WA

Anticlockwise from left to right Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort by RAC Parks and Resorts. *Photo – Shark Bay World Heritage Discovery and Visitor Centre; Tamala rose. Photo – Jiri Lochman; Francois Peron National Park - Gregories. Photo – Marie Lochman; Wedge-tailed eagle. Photo – Jiri Lochman; Everlastings. Photo – Ian Anderson; Monkey Mia dolphin 'Charlie' in 1965. Photo – DBCA*



Above Dwarf bearded dragon.
Photo – Jiri Lochman

SHARK BAY MARINE PARK

Monkey Mia is not just about dolphins. The waters adjoining Monkey Mia are protected by the vast Shark Bay Marine Park and Hamelin Pool Marine Nature Reserve. These marine protected areas consist mainly of shallow sheltered bays that host over 10,000 dugongs, the world's largest seagrass beds, and stromatolites representative of the earth's oldest lifeforms.

The jetty alongside the Dolphin Experience Area is perfect for photographing dolphin interactions. From here, visitors can head out on a tour and visit the densest population of dugongs in the world, or venture into nearby Francois Peron National Park and meet some of the most unique and interesting fauna the region has to offer such as bearded dragons, western grasswrens, wedge-tailed eagles and even woma pythons

A MASTER PLAN

After so many years of excited visitors enjoying Monkey Mia, it was decided

in 2017 that it was time for an upgrade to enhance the visitor experience and complement the recent \$20 million upgrade and expansion of the Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort by RAC Parks and Resorts.

Stage one of the master plan was completed in July 2020 with the construction of a new ranger station to house staff, volunteers and researchers, and fish preparation facilities.

Funding from a Commonwealth Australian Heritage Grant will be put towards Stage two of the master plan, which will include tiered seating on the beach adjacent to the dolphin experience, a landscaped plaza at the interface with the resort and the beginnings of a World Heritage interpretive garden.

Future works, subject to funding, include refurbishment of the existing visitor centre, upgrading of the four-kilometre Wulyibidi Yaninyina Walk Trail and development of an elevated viewing deck.

The master plan also identifies opportunities for a 350-metre promenade

along the beachfront and an overwater viewing platform adjacent to the dolphin interaction area.

Do it yourself

Where is it? 850 kilometres north of Perth

What to do? Swimming, fishing, boating, camping, diving, snorkeling, dolphin experience

Facilities: Boat ramp, campgrounds, toilets, accommodation, parking, restaurant

Nearest Parks and Wildlife Service office: Shark Bay District office 63 Knight Terrace, Denham WA 6537 (08) 9948 2226

Entry fees apply

Park passes do not apply to Monkey Mia Conservation Park

Ask a Parks and Wildlife Service officer about volunteering at Monkey Mia or email monkeymiavolunteers@westnet.com.au