

Shore adventures

As celebrity chef John Torode explores Western Australia for his mini-series on *This Morning*, **Natalie Marsh** meets quokkas and more on Rottnest Island

I'm standing on the beach, eyes closed, palms facing upwards, the serene sound of waves filling my ears. I try to stay still, shuffling my feet to get them level in the sand, and breathe. A 'mindful moment' wasn't something I'd expected on this guided hike, but it was very welcome, particularly on this peaceful, deserted beach on Rottnest Island.

SERENE STROLLS

This three-mile guided tour with The Hike Collective isn't out to test our fitness levels, but instead aims to

help us connect with the nature around us. Owner Kate Gibson set up the company seven years ago as part of a mental health initiative, before becoming a fully fledged tour operator. She now runs a series of hikes and activities in rural areas, all within an hour of Perth's city bounds.

Standing among flakes of seaweed and crumbling cuttlefish shells that pepper the sand on Paterson Beach feels a world away from city life, but Rottnest Island – or Wadjemup, as it's known in the Indigenous language – is just 12 miles off the ➤

Rottnest Island

PICTURE: Tourism Australia

DESTINATIONS

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SAMPHIRE ROTTNEST

Set right on the beach at Thomson Bay and less than a 10-minute walk from the ferry jetty, Samphire Rottnest offers sea views that stretch all the way out to the Perth skyline. The nearby beach was used as a cooking spot for celebrity chef John Torode in his Western Australia mini-series on *This Morning* this month – and it's not hard to see the allure.

Taking its name from the thin, green indigenous ingredient, Samphire Rottnest opened its doors in October 2020. Not all visitors to Rottnest come for the day, and spacious, rustic-designed beachfront or poolside rooms await those who do want to stay. For a trendy spot to relax in, try the Beach Club, where a cocktail is the perfect accompaniment to the sweeping sea views, while the guest-only Samphire Club offers a little more privacy. Restaurant Lontara incorporates southeast Asian flavours with local food, creating innovative dishes including Fremantle octopus and rock lobster grilled on a robata, served with Sri Lankan yellow curry. Breakfast is also offered here.

Book it: Prices start from \$340 per night, based on a Beach Lane King Suite room.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:

A quokka; Rottnest Island; Natalie prepares for her seaplane trip

PICTURES: Tourism Australia/Hugh Stewart, Adrian Brown



coast of Western Australia's capital. As we finish up our mindful moment, we return to the path and continue along the route back to the Thomson Bay area – the island's 'settlement' – taking in more of the scenery as we walk. As hikes go, it's gentle on the body as well as the mind.

ABORIGINAL CULTURE

The island's nature is also key for the Noongar community – Indigenous people – as we learn from Walter and Meg McGuire of Go Cultural Aboriginal Tours and Experiences. While conducting a short sand ceremony for us, they emphasise the importance of listening to the elements, before sharing insight into Wadjemup's past. There were 3,700 Aboriginal men and boys imprisoned between 1838 and 1931, and the island was the largest site of Aboriginal deaths in custody in Australia. Standing by the burial ground where many were laid to rest is a moving experience. As the island continues to welcome local and international visitors – numbers in January 2023 were 24% up compared with January 2020 – it's important to acknowledge this past.

THE DETAILS

Ferries depart daily to Rottnest Island from three terminals on the mainland, including Perth and nearby

Rottnest is one of the only places quokkas can be found – making a 'quokka selfie' the most desirable souvenir of any visit

Fremantle, taking between 25 and 90 minutes. The more adventurous can arrive by plane or even seaplane, which makes for a thrilling take-off from the Swan River.

Rottnest is a small island, just under seven miles by three miles in size, but its irregular shape gives it a coastline that twists and turns, concealing many of its 63 beaches, with miles of tracks to explore. Bike and e-bike hire is popular across the island, the latter providing an excellent way to tackle the pesky hills at speed.

It's not long before I find myself in a quiet spot with only a small group of quokkas for company. Quokkas are, of course, one of the things Rottnest is best known for. These friendly, rodent-like creatures look as if they've got a permanent smile etched on their faces, and the island is one of the only places in the world they can be found – making a 'quokka selfie' the most desirable souvenir of any visit. ➤



ABOVE: Mandurah Ocean Marina PICTURE: Shutterstock/Kok Kin Meng

WILDERNESS

Rottneet Island is, of course, only a tiny part of Western Australia – a state that covers around a third of the country’s area. From the cascading waterfalls and deep canyons of the Kimberley to the whale sharks that reside in the Ningaloo Reef, many of the region’s most popular spots for intrepid types are farther north. You don’t have to venture too far from Perth to satisfy a sense of adventure, though.

Just an hour south is the coastal town of Mandurah, flanked by ocean on one side and a river on the other, with an extensive network of canals in the centre.

As darkness falls, we head into Yalgorup National Park, just outside the town, for a night-time bush walk with Salt and Bush Eco Tours. “Those who don’t like spiders, raise your hand,” says one of our guides, Jamie. My hand shoots straight up. But I’m reassured that even though spiders are an inevitable sighting, they won’t be big and, most importantly, they’re not

top tip

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poisonous. In any case, my worries soon subside when we come across the creature we’re looking for – a western ringtail possum.

They’re an endangered species, with fewer than 20,000 left in southwest Australia, according to Jamie. The one we’ve encountered appears to be staring straight at us, its small, beady eyes reflecting the light from our head torches. We peer through the night-vision camera to get a better look at the possum, partly hiding behind the branches, its long tail hanging low. We’re surrounded by silence, and it serves as a reminder that some of the best adventures are often the most peaceful. **TW**

BOOK IT

Abercrombie & Kent offers a seven-night stay in Albany, the Margaret River region and Perth, from £4,999, including international flights with Emirates, transfers and a day trip to Rottneet, for travel in June 2024. abercrombiekent.co.uk



Carolyn Turnbull,
managing director,
Tourism Western
Australia

“Whether clients are looking for soft adventure or more of a challenge, Western Australia is filled with breathtaking natural phenomena and a diverse range of wildlife. Cycle around Rottneet Island on an e-bike while encountering Australia’s happiest animal, the quokka; go bird-spotting in the Kimberley; or travel north to Karijini National Park, where you can marvel at millennia-old gorges and kayak or hike.

“Visitors can also take part in a huge number of adrenaline-filled activities across the state, including skydiving at Rottneet Island, descending underground into magical caves in the Margaret River, and swimming with the world’s biggest fish – the gentle whale shark – at Ningaloo Reef.

“There’s also an extensive network of hiking trails for all ages and skill levels. Western Australia hosts some of the country’s top mass-participation sporting events. The Cape to Cape mountain-biking event and Ironman Western Australia are taking place in the coming months, and the Busselton Festival of Triathlon will be returning to Perth next year.”



PICTURE: Matt Jelonek