

BOOMTOWN

Despite being a little busier than it was a few years ago, Western Australia's fast-evolving capital city has maintained its small-city feel...

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No longer the isolated poor relation of the eastern states, Perth has thrived thanks to the mining boom. Today it is a cosmopolitan city with a multi-cultural population, some great shopping, sophisticated eating options and a couple of fascinating museums.

It also doesn't hurt that it's attractively perched on the banks of the Swan River, and is the main gateway to West Coast attractions such as nearby Margaret River and Ningaloo Reef to the north.

Captain James Stirling founded Perth in 1829 as part of Australia's first free colony, but groups of Noongar people and their ancestors had already been living in the area for tens of thousands of years.

In 1850 the convicts arrived, and the city began to grow but it was the gold rush in the late 19th century that really changed things as the population skyrocketed and Perth mushroomed.

The last 10 years have seen a similar expansion, as the healthy iron ore

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Above, the Perth skyline, with its towering skyscrapers



The turquoise shore of Rottnest Island



The Art Gallery of Western Australia has a fine collection of indigenous art

industry has attracted interstate workers and large numbers of international migrants to the West Coast, particularly from English-speaking countries such as the UK, South Africa and New Zealand.

Recently it was estimated that Perth is home to almost 2.5 million people after having experienced the fastest population growth of all capital cities in Australia.

PURE GOLD

Despite being a little busier than it was a few years ago and the building work that seems to be going on everywhere, Western Australia's capital has so far maintained its laidback, small-city feel.

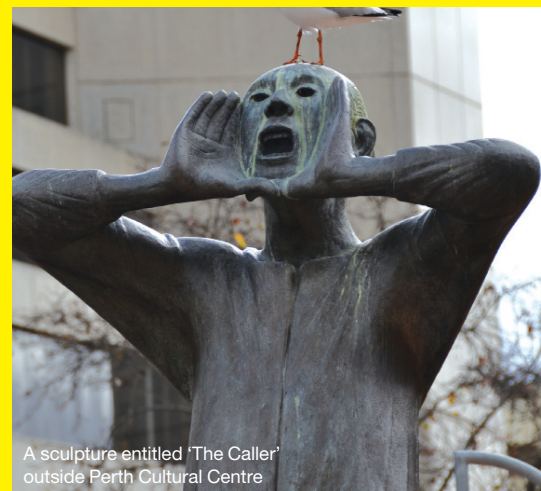
The Central Business District (CBD) covers only a small area, from St George's Terrace to Wellington Street, and shopping is centred predominantly

around two streets that are connected by a series of arcades.

A walk around the centre reveals that Perth is not made up solely of towering, glittering skyscrapers but also a range of architectural styles from colonial to the mock-Tudor London Court, an open-air arcade built in the 1930s.

Although there are few sights as such in the centre itself, the Perth Mint on Hay Street is a surprisingly interesting place to visit. Still housed in its original building, which dates back to 1899, it is the oldest working Mint in the country.

Originally set up to refine the output from the goldfields, it now offers regular guided talks which explain more about the workings of the Mint, a chance to watch a traditional gold pour when gold is heated to molten and then transformed



A sculpture entitled 'The Caller' outside Perth Cultural Centre

into a gold bar, and you can also admire the largest coin in the world, which is made of pure gold.

South of the CBD, work is underway to build a new waterfront, Elizabeth Quay, where there will be hotels, restaurants, bars and an indigenous cultural centre.

At the moment, however, it is merely a huge building site with barriers, cranes, earth movers, and workers in fluorescent yellow jackets with dust swirling around their heads.

If you make yourself walk past all this activity though, and down Barrack Street, you will be rewarded by the Swan Bells and the Barrack Street Jetty.

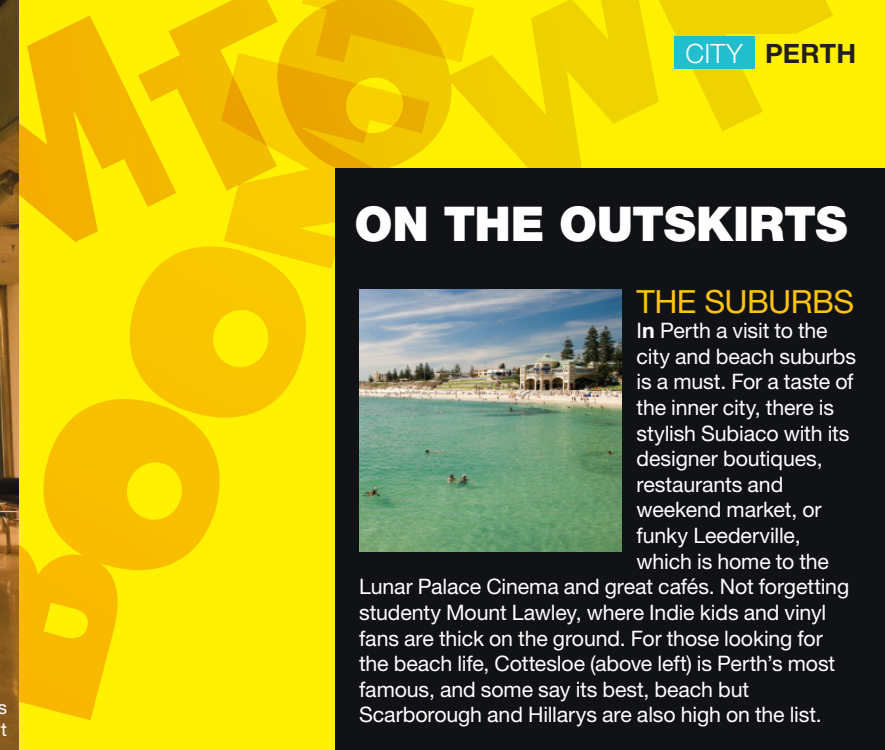
The Bell Tower is where the 12 bells originally from St Martin-in-the-Fields in London reside, and there are bell-ringing demonstrations most days and an observation deck that offers great views of Perth and the river.

Various cruises and ferries leave from the jetty here, and you may well see cyclists and walkers enjoying the tracks that run along the banks of the river. >>

Perth is not made up solely of towering, glittering skyscrapers but also a range of architectural styles



There is plenty to see and do in the vibrant Perth Cultural Centre area



ON THE OUTSKIRTS



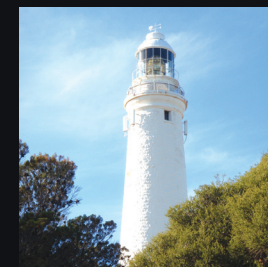
THE SUBURBS

In Perth a visit to the city and beach suburbs is a must. For a taste of the inner city, there is stylish Subiaco with its designer boutiques, restaurants and weekend market, or funky Leederville, which is home to the Lunar Palace Cinema and great cafés. Not forgetting studenty Mount Lawley, where Indie kids and vinyl fans are thick on the ground. For those looking for the beach life, Cottesloe (above left) is Perth's most famous, and some say its best, beach but Scarborough and Hillarys are also high on the list.



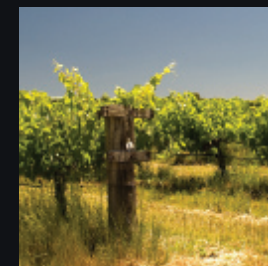
FREMANTLE

The port of Fremantle or 'Freo' is a popular day trip for locals at weekends and for visitors any day of the week. It has retained many of its historic buildings and the best way to explore is on foot, stopping regularly to check out the galleries and have a pick-me-up in one of the many cafés. Sights include the Fremantle Prison, where you can take tunnel or night-time torchlight tours; the Round House, built in 1831 and the oldest public building in Western Australia and the site of the colony's first hanging; and the Western Australia Maritime Museum and Shipwreck Gallery. From Friday to Sunday, Fremantle covered markets are open and stalls sell everything from pancakes to vegetables to handmade jewellery and boomerangs.



ROTTNEST ISLAND

Accessible from Perth or Fremantle by ferry, exploring Rottnest is a great way to spend the day. Hire a bike and cycle around the island, stopping to snorkel or swim at some of the many bays and keep a lookout for the resident quokkas, cute indigenous marsupials. Note that during the Australian summer the island can get very busy and if you want to stay, book your accommodation well in advance.



SWAN VALLEY

Another good day trip from the city is a wine tasting tour of the Swan Valley, Perth's wine growing region. One option is to follow the Swan Valley Food and Wine Trail, which is a 32 kilometre scenic drive that takes you past wineries, breweries, art galleries and markets.



Did you know?
The land on which Perth now stands was known as Boorloo by the Aboriginals who once lived here.

Perth's laneways are filled with high-end boutiques, cafés, bars and restaurants

Bikes can be hired in the city if you want to explore on two wheels, and if you're feeling energetic you can even cycle to the port suburb of Fremantle.

GREEN SPACE

Perth is often described as an outdoor city, and anyone up and about early at weekends will see locals cycling, running, walking and taking advantage of the open spaces and largely predictable weather.

There are a number of green areas breaking up the urban sprawl and the highlight of these is Kings Park and Botanic Garden, west of the CBD.

The park overlooks the city and if you climb the hundred or so steps of the DNA Tower you're rewarded with spectacular views. With over 400 hectares of what is predominantly bushland, Kings Park is a popular picnic spot and a good option for those travelling with kids that need to let off steam.

The Botanic Garden section is home to over 2,000 species of flowering plants, some of which can be admired from the Lotterywest Federation Walkway, a series of paths and a bridge suspended above the eucalyptus trees.

There are free guided walks of the park daily at 10am, noon and 2pm, and they leave from outside the Aspects of Kings Park shop, which sells a range of art and

the stars. Back in the centre of Perth and over the railway line – there's currently a project underway to sink the line and open up the area – you reach Perth's Cultural Centre.

A vibrant space with free Wi-Fi and hosting a range of events, it is also the gateway to Northbridge, with its bars, restaurants, backpacker hostels and vintage shops.

If walking the Northbridge streets, keep your eyes open for the small Perth Centre for Photography on Aberdeen Street, where temporary photographic exhibitions are staged.

If you stroll down some of the side streets in the city you will find buzzing bars and restaurants

design products as well as books, and can be an excellent place to pick up unique gifts or cards.

In summer, the Opel Moonlight Cinema sets up on the lawn and classic films and new releases are screened under

The Cultural Centre's Western Australian Museum is a big hit with kids, and there are dinosaur bones and skeletons on display, as well as collections of Victorian-era stuffed animals and birds, and minerals and fossils.

Older children and adults should make sure they visit the WA Land and People exhibition and the fascinating Katta Djinoong – First Peoples of Western Australia, charting the history and culture of the Aboriginal peoples of WA and exploring such issues as the Stolen Generations.

The nearby Art Gallery of Western Australia has a very fine collection of indigenous art, as well as some contemporary and classic works from Australian and European artists and a



Kings Park helps break up the urban sprawl



Hop on a tram for a unique way to discover the port suburb of Fremantle

variety of temporary exhibitions. Those interested in more cutting-edge works should pop into the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art (PICA), which hosts frequently changing exhibitions.

While you are in the area don't overlook the State Library where there are usually some interesting ex-library books for sale for as little as 50 cents.

BUZZING BARS

After a hard day of sightseeing, enjoy a drink in one of its many bars. Inspired by Melbourne, Perth has been redeveloping its laneways and if you stroll down some of the side streets in the city you will find buzzing bars and restaurants.

The introduction of relaxed licensing laws has seen the bar scene flourish and there's even a leaflet dedicated to drinking venues in the information centre.

With more bars opening all the time, however, the best way to discover them is to take a walk and see which captures your attention, or ask the locals for their current favourite picks.

Perth has changed a lot over the last few years and seems set to continue to do so, with plans for new structures and improvements to existing attractions. It has, however, evolved without losing that elusive element that marks it out as separate from the country's other capitals.

Often dismissed in the past as a quiet, dull backwater, Perth may not be a metropolis but it should not be overlooked as a destination in its own right. Come and explore the museums and galleries, enjoy the city's atmosphere, eat well and take advantage of all the sights on Perth's doorstep. >>



Need to know... Perth

GETTING THERE



Qantas flies from London Gatwick to Perth via Dubai from £767. See

www.qantas.com.au. Other airlines that fly to Perth include Emirates, Singapore Airlines and British Airways.

GETTING AROUND



Perth International Airport is situated 16 kilometres (10 miles) from the city centre. Many people hire a car if arriving by plane, or there is the option of taking a taxi.

The Connect shuttle plies the route between the airport and various drop-off points in Perth but only runs every 50 minutes of so. If you don't have much luggage a better option may be to take the free shuttle to the domestic terminal

and jump on the number 37 bus. It leaves frequently and is much cheaper than the shuttle.

The best way to explore Perth is to walk around the centre and take advantage of the three colour-coded Central Area Transit (CAT) buses which are free. There is also a hop-on hop-off bus that takes in the main sights. Buses and trains run to the outlying suburbs.

CLIMATE



The summer in Perth, from December to late March, is usually dry and hot (sometimes very hot), with the winters cooler and wetter. The wettest month is July. It is the sunniest capital in Australia with an average of over seven hours of sunshine a day. The cloudless skies and strong sun mean that

visitors should wear high-factor sunscreen and cover up to avoid burning. There is usually a strong wind that blows in from the ocean, which can take the edge of the hottest days. September to November (Australia's spring) is probably the best time to visit, but the only month you really want to avoid is February, because of its soaring temperatures.

FURTHER INFO



Lonely Planet's *Perth and West Coast Australia* is the most up-to-date West Coast guide on the market at the moment. It is worth checking out the Time Out Perth website to see what's on at www.au.timeout.com/perth and www.westernaustralia.com also has some useful information.



The city's distinctive Swan Bell Tower visible in the distance



The CBD boasts a unique array of architectural styles

31°C	31°C	29°C	25°C	22°C	19°C	18°C	18°C	20°C	23°C	26°C	29°C
JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC



SLEEP A popular option for those looking for a quiet hostel is the Emperor's Crown (85 Sterling Street, emperorscrown.com.au) which offers double ensuites from A\$130 (£76) and four-bed dorms from A\$A36 (£20).

EAT Northbridge is a good place to look for cheap eats and there are a wealth of Asian restaurants to choose from. If you're here on a Saturday night, the Japanese restaurant Jaws (www.jawssushi.com.au) on Hay Street does an all-you-can-eat deal for A\$37 (£22).

DO Perth is a good place to try kitesurfing so head to Leighton Beach near Fremantle or Brighton Beach and have a go. If you want something more sedate, Piccadilly Cinemas hosts Backpacker Mondays, when you can get discounted tickets.



SLEEP The central Rendezvous Studio Hotel Perth (www.rendezvoushotels.com) caters predominantly to business travellers but its smart two-bed apartments with a decent-sized living area and kitchen space could make it a good option for families. There is also parking and a restaurant on site. Apartment prices start from A\$319 (£188).

EAT Those with fussy eaters in tow may want to try Miss Maud (Corner of Murray and Pier Streets, www.missmaud.com.au), which is popular for its Swedish-style smorgasbord buffet. Lunch and dinner prices start at A\$48 (£28) for adults and A\$23 (£14) for children.

DO A day on the sand is a good option but alternatively you should take the ferry from Barrack Street Jetty to Perth Zoo (www.perthzoo.wa.gov.au). It's a small place where animals are kept in natural settings.



SLEEP A short distance from the centre in a quiet suburban location but close to a red CAT line bus stop, the Richardson Hotel (32 Richardson Street, www.therichardson.com.au) offers spacious, tastefully decorated rooms and suites with private balconies. Rates start from A\$395 (£230).

EAT Russell Blaikie's Must Winebar (519 Beaufort Street, www.must.com.au) prides itself on using seasonal produce to create French-inspired dishes such as confit duck leg for A\$42 (£25) or dry aged steak with béarnaise sauce for A\$46 (£27).

DO Cruise the Swan River from Perth to Fremantle with Captain Cook Cruises (www.captaincookcruises.com.au) for a couple of hours. There's also the option of a seven-hour cruise with a stop-off at a winery for lunch from A\$165 (£97).