

HIGHlight

# Saving the TURTLES



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Western Australia’s Ningaloo coast is a nature-lover’s paradise – particularly so during the region’s marine turtle nesting season, an annual phenomenon that takes place between November and April.

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From November to April, nature-lovers can witness a unique natural phenomenon. During these months, marine turtles nest on mainland beaches adjacent to Ningaloo Reef, at numerous turtle rookeries that are vital to the survival of turtle populations worldwide.

The Jurabi Turtle Centre, a collaborative facility between the Western Australia Department of Environment and Conservation and the Shire of Exmouth, is located just 13 kilometres from Exmouth township. Visitors are encouraged to participate in guided turtle interactive experiences. Evening tours operate from December to February each season and provide visitors with exhilarating opportunities to view marine turtles nesting in their natural environment and to learn more about the region’s active conservation of its turtles.

For those interested in a more hands-on experience, the Ningaloo Turtle Program (NTP) is a community-based volunteer program run by the Department of Environment and Conservation, the Cape Conservation Group Inc with WWF Australia. This exciting program attracts local, national and international volunteers every year when, from December to February, nature-lovers are recruited as

**N**ingaloo Reef is Australia’s largest and most accessible fringing reef system and is home to three of the world’s seven species of marine turtles: Green, Hawksbill and Loggerhead.

The reef lies off the eastern shores of the North-West Cape of Western Australia and stretches some 300 kilometres from the waters of Exmouth in the north, to Red Bluff in the south. Here, visitors can encounter marine turtles year-round by snorkelling just a short distance from the shore, diving the outer reef or experiencing them from the deck of a wildlife cruise. Turtle nesting season is another fantastic opportunity to encounter these beautiful creatures up close in natural surrounds.

## FACT FILE

**Below:** The rugged west coast of Dirk Hartog Island.

'turtle trackers' to record turtle-nesting data. There is also ample opportunity for volunteers to take in the natural sights of this spectacular stretch of coastline and its inland gorges or go camping in the serene Cape Range National Park, just a stone's throw from Exmouth.

Further south at Gnaraloo Station, another important and exciting marine turtle program commenced during 2008. The Gnaraloo Marine Turtle Conservation Program was developed and is managed by Gnaraloo Station owner Paul Richardson and Environmental Manager Karen Hattingh, with advice and direction from the Department of Environment and Conservation in Exmouth.

The Gnaraloo coastline adjacent to the Ningaloo Marine Park, around 150 kilometres north of Carnarvon, is often described as one of Western Australia's last wilderness frontiers. Here, visitors are able to get away from the daily grind of life and enjoy the region's natural beauty and magnificent stretches of coastline.

Visitors to Gnaraloo will delight in its unspoilt, rugged environment, towering dunes, white sandy beaches, clear waters and a range of activities that include world-class snorkeling, surfing, windsurfing, kite-surfing and fishing.

Throughout the breeding season, turtle nests are found all along the Gnaraloo coastline, with significant loggerhead and green turtle rookeries found at Gnaraloo Bay.

Gnaraloo 'turtle tracker' teams, comprising carefully recruited scientific volunteers from all over the world, undertake daily monitoring of turtle nesting and hatching activities.

Data collected from these activities are collated and provided to the Western Australian Department of Environment and Conservation, and further contribute to Ningaloo turtle conservation.

For visiting holidaymakers, there may also be some fantastic opportunities to join the appointed turtle teams and observe the work being undertaken. This makes for a great addition to any stay at Gnaraloo and is particularly exciting from January onwards, when nests that were laid earlier in the season produce small hatchlings that emerge at night and wriggle their way towards their new lives in the Indian Ocean.

So when you're planning your next laidback beach holiday in Western Australia, consider adding an extra experience to your stay by observing the work being done to protect the turtles of Ningaloo. ■



### GETTING THERE

Skywest operates daily flights from Perth to Exmouth and Carnarvon.

### The Ningaloo Turtle Program

Volunteers must commit to four weeks' service. Program participation includes camping and cooking equipment as well as meals.

[www.ningalooturtles.org.au](http://www.ningalooturtles.org.au)

### The Jurabi Turtle Centre

Turtle interaction tours operate from December 2009 until the end of February 2010

Bookings are essential.

[www.ningalooturtles.org.au](http://www.ningalooturtles.org.au)

### The Gnaraloo Marine Turtle Conservation Program

Contact Gnaraloo for more

information about the marine turtle program, phone: 08 9315 4809.

For information on holidaying at the station, phone: 08 9942 5927.

[www.gnaraloo.com](http://www.gnaraloo.com)

### Turtle Watcher's Code of Conduct

Western Australia's Department of Environment and Conservation encourages visitors interested in seeing the Ningaloo turtles to familiarise themselves with and abide by the Turtle Watcher's Code of Conduct.

For details, go to [www.dec.wa.gov.au/marineturtles/code-of-conduct](http://www.dec.wa.gov.au/marineturtles/code-of-conduct)

For more information on visiting the region, visit

[www.australiascoralcoast.com](http://www.australiascoralcoast.com)

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