



I'm always surprised how Australia manages to have red desert in one corner and incredible ocean blues in the other. And I love how it can go for months without rain but then in a few nights of crashing storms even the driest rivers run again.

We have spent the last few months on a stretch of Australia's Coral Coast experiencing the extremes of this country's beauty and force. Let's take a road trip from Carnarvon to Coral Bay.



Ningaloo Reef off Warroora Station.

Wooramel Riverside Retreat

First stop, Wooramel Riverside Retreat. If you told me that on a 42° day I would be getting into an artesian hot spring I would have said, you're dreaming. But with the water sitting at a toasty 32° it was actually cooler in than out.

Wooramel River Retreat is set 2km off the highway on a quiet sheep and cattle station. If you haven't camped at a working station before I highly recommend it. You generally drive through barren paddocks, wondering how anything survives, before arriving at the homestead almost miraculously colourful. At Wooramel the grass is green and lush, the palm trees don't even seem out of place and amazing flora brings an influx of colourful native birds.

The four baths are filled with a constant flow of artesian bore water full of soothing salts that refresh your skin and revive your aching bones. There are large open campsites running along the river, which flows only 3-4 times a year.

The bathrooms are old water tanks that have been converted into rustic facilities dotted around the grounds. At night under a crisp cloud of stars, our camp was visited by a couple of horses looking for an extra feed.



Relax in the waters from the artesian hot spring.

Carnarvon Space and Technology Museum

We have always been fascinated by our relationship with the stars and how little we really know about the universe. But it's amazing how much time and effort has been put into pushing the limits of discovery in space. Before it became the Carnarvon Space and Technology Museum it was actually a key player in getting a man on the moon.

The museum is now run but a group of keen volunteers and their cat, Buzz. You can take a simulated ride in a command capsule, you can dress up in a space suit, or you can head out the back to the kid's discovery centre (our favourite). The museum is open from 10am-2pm and costs \$10pp (discounts apply for children and concessions) with free tea and coffee.



The Carnarvon Space and Technology Museum is a fascinating place to visit.

The Aquarium

When day heats up we always find it's best to visit our fishy friends at their place. The



Aquarium, about 80km north of Carnarvon is where they all seem to be. Known as a treacherous piece of coastline, clearly indicated by the *King Waves Kill* sign, the Aquarium is protected from these violent waves.

Like a big lagoon, it is safe for the whole family to swim and snorkel. It is fairly shallow with some amazing fish, wobbegongs and colourful reef. You can camp at the Aquarium or you can drive into Quobba Station or Red Bluff.



Do some snorkelling at the Aquarium.

Quobba homestead

Quobba homestead is just 10km from the Aquarium and has toilets and showers. The campsites are mostly beachfront and never too far from good fishing spots. Ask Tim and Sara for a map of the best fishing locations on your way in. Red Bluff is another 50km further on rough dirt roads to an old school surf camp, *Camp of The Moon*.



We stayed at Quobba Homestead during our trip.

Red Bluff

This is an iconic surf break and a popular location for a variety of different campers. There are shacks you can hire out if you want to add a little something extra to your camp set up. There are also safaris tents you can hire out and a small cafe (only open in peak months) serving good coffee, some food and what some are describing as the best mango smoothie ever.



You can hire out a shack at Red Bluff.

Gnaraloo Bay

If you're looking for a day at the beach with a little less wind factor Gnaraloo Bay is usually your best bet. The bay is also home to a large turtle rookery so check what stage of activity the turtles are up to in the month you are visiting.

Gnaraloo is also a popular spot for boat launching, but let me tell you from experience, the sand is SOFT. Only launch if you have another car nearby for recovery. Accommodation is available at the Gnaraloo homestead or at 3 Mile camp.



Head to Gnaraloo Bay for a day by the water.

Warroora Station

To make it to your next stop up the coast you will need to drive back almost to Carnarvon to get back on the highway. Warroora Station is 190km from Carnarvon with the most accessible camping at 14 Mile Camp. Here you can park up directly on the beach with the sea breeze in your hair. Western Australia, WA, "Windy Always". So if you are in a tent I'd suggest



seeking shelter behind the dunes at 14 Mile, Steven's or Sandy Point. We decided to set up at 14 Mile, as it was the best place to put the boat in and do day trips through the station.



Our set up at Warroora Station behind the dunes.

Coral Bay

At the northern end of Warroora Station, there is a “no-through road to Coral Bay” which is oddly well used by people travelling to Coral Bay. At just 25km away, Warroora is the perfect place to base yourself for exploring Coral Bay as well, and a whole lot cheaper than staying in town.

Coral Bay is a bustling little place popular with backpackers, which has plenty of activities if you have money to spend. Whale shark and other marine interaction tours leave from here as well as 4x4 and ATV tours.



If you can handle the swim, then you'll appreciate Ayer's Rock.

Ayer's Rock

If you're looking for free things to do they all involve the ocean. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays there is free fish feeding at 3.30pm in the bay. Large Spangled Emperors are the usual guests. If you are a good swimmer then you must try to find the impressive Ayer's Rock, a huge coral brain.

You will need to swim out to the black and white kayak buoy, once there face the open ocean and then swim at a diagonal to the left about 20-30m until you find it. It's pretty special.



Our favourite diving spot on this trip was Five Fingers Reef.

Five Fingers Reef

But our favourite dive spot so far has to be Five Fingers Reef. This is definitely 4WD only, but it would be worth the walk if you wanted to park your 2WD near the boat ramp and walk the beach to get there. We saw some amazing aquatic creatures and their wild relationships just tens of metres offshore.

There are baby sharks around and you're almost guaranteed to be able to swim with turtles. You can also spearfish at Five Fingers, just make sure you know the rules.

What's the best road trip you've ever done?