



As 2020 came to a close and the possibility for airline travel remained uncertain, the idea for a road trip sparked! Being so vast and isolated, Western Australia seemed like the safest option to plan such an adventure. Deciding to tackle one of the most iconic long-distance drives, our merry crew of three amigos set off from Adelaide in mid-January, with the intention of driving across the Nullarbor to Fremantle before returning home. We would get the road trip playlist pumping and try to visit plenty of WA's beautiful southern beaches and forests along the way.

Planning for the trip was free-spirited, and based around visiting national parks and points of interest – plus whatever campervan-friendly stays were nearby. With that sorted, we had to develop a trip philosophy. After a lengthy discussion, we settled for the wisdom of *you never regret a swim*, and decreed a compulsory wine and cheese platter to put us in good stead for the trip of a lifetime!



On the first leg of the journey between Port Augusta and Streaky Bay.

Adelaide to Port Augusta

This familiar South Australian stretch of the A1 has been travelled by many people a bazillion times over, en route to the Flinders Ranges, Gawler Ranges, Eyre Peninsula, or Northern Territory. Our first camp was at a convenient roadside rest stop outside of Port Augusta, with trucks going past at all hours of the night. Thankfully the excitement of embarking on the trip outweighed the noisy camping spot, and we settled in for an early night after enjoying the puzzle of setting up the campervan beds.

Iron Knob to the Nullarbor

We stopped at the Iron Knob community camping area for breakfast, then continued on to Streaky Bay for the road trip staple lunch of salad wraps with sriracha mayonnaise. The weather was sunny and perfect for a swim in the bay, and a couple of young boys were catching mullet right next to the boat ramp where we had parked. After passing through Ceduna, we fuelled up at Nundroo and soon the landscape changed from dense mallee forest into saltbush shrubs, signalling the start of the Nullarbor.



The Penong Windmill Museum is approximately an hour's drive west of Ceduna and well worth checking out.

Nullarbor to Norseman

With the intention of reaching Fremantle in a couple of days, we put in a solid day's drive of 1000km to reach Norseman from our roadside rest stop on the Nullarbor Plain. It was a stretch for three University students on holidays to get on the road by 9 am, but the absence of the previous day's headwind made driving far more enjoyable.

After a photoshoot with the Big Whale at the Nullarbor Roadhouse, we made our way towards the border town of Eucla. Bright white sand dunes gleamed in the distance as the road passed along the cliffs of the Great Australian Bight. Due to COVID travel regulations, the



Western Australian police asked us many questions as we crossed the state border from SA into WA, which gave us the odd feeling of entering the EU or Africa rather than the usual 'no worries' attitude at Australian state borders.



The Big Whale at the Nullarbor Roadhouse.

Stranger still, was the lack of trucks and other travellers on the road, but we were impressed with the noticeable improvement in the road conditions on the other side of the border. West Australian roads are undergoing significant upgrades and although we experienced roadworks and speed restrictions, the difference when comparing to South Australian roads was significant.

We continued on through Madura, and found the area was hilly with plenty of trees. A landscape that offered a greater variety of scenery than what we had expected of the Nullarbor. Past the *90 Mile Straight* and near Balladonia, the road is elevated with deep swales on either side. Aware of the risk and not wishing to drive our campervan into a ditch, we dedicated our focus to the road. As we neared Norseman, the thick smoke from a bushfire began to cover the road but fortunately, the fire front was heading away from us.



The view from Mount Jimberlana with our rest stop down below.

Norseman to Perth

We camped the night at the quiet Jimberlana rest stop outside Norseman. Behind the rest stop, Mount Jimberlana gave us excellent panoramic views of the surrounding Great Western Woodlands. We walked up at daybreak to stretch our legs before committing to another long day of driving into Perth – an 800km drive via Kalgoorlie.

As we neared the capital city, the landscape shifted from the temperate woodlands to agricultural pastures and cropland. Despite telling our friends and family we were on a 'Perth road trip', we decided to bypass the capital (with the intention to visit it on another trip) and headed straight to Fremantle instead, approximately 30 minutes southwest of Perth.



Rottnest Island is a short ferry ride from Fremantle or Perth and is a popular holiday destination.

Rottnest Island

While we never made it into Perth itself, we did visit Rottnest Island – known as Wadjemup to the Noongar people. The island sits just offshore from Perth and is easily accessed by a short ferry ride from either Fremantle or the city. Our impressions were that the island was akin to a large theme park, with no cars driving around and heavily populated by tourists.

Home to the quokka and boasting white sandy beaches, secluded coves, reefs and surf breaks, it's no wonder the island is a favourite! Our snorkels got their first outing and with plenty of sunscreen, we enjoyed a day of exploring the sheltered bays and reefs, using hired bicycles to get around.



Driving through jarrah, marri and peppermint bushland to reach Jarrahdene campsite.



Perth to Margaret River

Our caravan park was conveniently located near Fremantle and made for a terrific base while we wandered around and soaked up the atmosphere of the old port city. We had breakfast and coffee at Hush and came out of the op shops with a stack of books and t-shirts. Before setting out for Margaret River we filled up our water supplies and jerry cans, restocked on food and did some laundry.

Once packed up and on the road again, we headed south down the coast, pulling up for lunch at the side of a pine forest outside of Bunbury. We had intended to camp at Boranup Forest, however, after discovering it to be full, we found a nice spot at Jarrahdene campground just up the road in Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park.



The Noongar name for Canal Rocks is Winjee Sam.

Margaret River/Cape Leeuwin

The next day we visited Lake Cave, one of several limestone caves within the National Park. As we were on a tight budget, we didn't want to stump up for a guided tour, but the attendant showed us a viewing platform with free access. A few kilometres down the road, the mouth to Margaret River offered a great spot to watch surfers and walk along the beach. A bit of unexpected excitement came about when as soon as we arrived, the Surf Lifesaving helicopter circled above and everyone got out of the water with talk of a shark sighting! Being a globally acclaimed wine region, the Margaret River has so much to offer and we appreciated some Cabernet Sauvignon at a cellar-door before making our way further north to the impressive Canal Rocks. Later in the afternoon, Hamelin Bay beckoned and turned out to be one of the best swimming beaches (and most packed caravan parks) we had ever experienced.



Keeping everything ship-shape with some housekeeping halfway into our trip.

So far, the trip had taken 7 days including one rest-day visiting Rottnest Island. This felt like a reasonable pace but still allowed us to enjoy long lunch stops and leisurely swims, as well as visiting attractions and arriving at campsites with daylight to spare. If you're planning a similar trip and want a few lazy days around camp or on the beaches, you could easily break it up and spend longer.

Stay tuned for Part 2 where we explore the southern coast of WA before turning inland and making our way back across the Nullarbor.

What's been your longest road trip?