

# DOLPHINS PLAY MORE THAN US ... AND HERE'S A WAY TO WATCH THEM DO IT

This is the easiest snorkelling you will ever do, simply float, put your face down and enjoy the dolphin show going off below!

WORDS CHRIS PARRY

**L**ET'S BEGIN THIS STORY ABOUT DOLPHINS by considering what three of my favourite minds have said about them. Albert Einstein, one of the most famous and eccentric theoretical physicists was drawn away from his blackboards and notebooks to once observe dolphins, he remarked. "There's no question dolphins are smarter than humans as they play more."

Another famous mind was that of author Douglas Adams, who wrote 'The Hitchhikers Guide To The Galaxy'. He said, "Humans think they are smarter than dolphins because we build cars and buildings and start wars etc ...and all dolphins do is swim in the water, eat fish and play around. Dolphins believe they are smarter for exactly the same reasons."

Another great mind, a bit younger and still forming his ideas, belongs to my son Tom who is 11 and has been

mentioned in several of my previous travel stories. Lifting his head out of the water and nearly blowing his mask off his face with the wideness of his eyes, upon seeing his first dolphins swim around him, he yelled; "I can hear them clicking! They're talking to me!"

Now who's to say which of those is the best quote about dolphins?

It's not hard to find stunning footage of dolphins on the internet. It's not hard to see pictures of dolphins in books. Quite often on television you'll see dolphin documentaries and it's fairly easy to find a dolphin experience in aquatic theme parks around the world. There are even a few experiences where the dolphins have been conditioned to come to humans and be rewarded with a fish and in exchange you can pat them on the nose.

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



What I want to describe for you in this story, and implore you to experience for yourself, once the world returns to normal and you can visit Western Australia, is to get off the plane, hire a car and drive to Rockingham. Or call me and I'll drive you there myself. It's only 45 minutes from Perth and what I want you to do is not just have the greatest experience with dolphins, but also have the most ecologically and environmentally responsible experience.

Perth Wildlife Encounters was founded by local man Terry Howson, however, the hard part about the business was forging a relationship with the dolphins that were found in the waters around Rockingham. For years Howson searched for the dolphins, put himself in the water alongside them but he never fed them, he never enticed them, he just put himself in their world. Finally, the dolphins decided he wasn't a bad bloke and they stopped swimming away from him.

In establishing a way for other people to share his experience, he founded his business on strict protocols, including no feeding and that the dolphins had to be found each time they went out, rather than conditioning the dolphins by establishing a known area where the encounters could take place. The encounters are designed to fit into the dolphin's way of life rather than responding to a boat that drops a bunch of humans in the water. The crew find the dolphins, place the boat at a safe distance in front of the anticipated path of the dolphins and you then enter the water.

The dolphins can then choose to go around you, under you, circle you, roll around you or just disappear to do other things. It's up to them how they want to interact.



**THE FIT OUT OF SNORKELS, MASKS AND BELTS IS EASY AND THE QUICK LESSONS FOR THOSE UNFAMILIAR WITH SNORKELLING PROVIDE THE REASSURANCE REQUIRED**

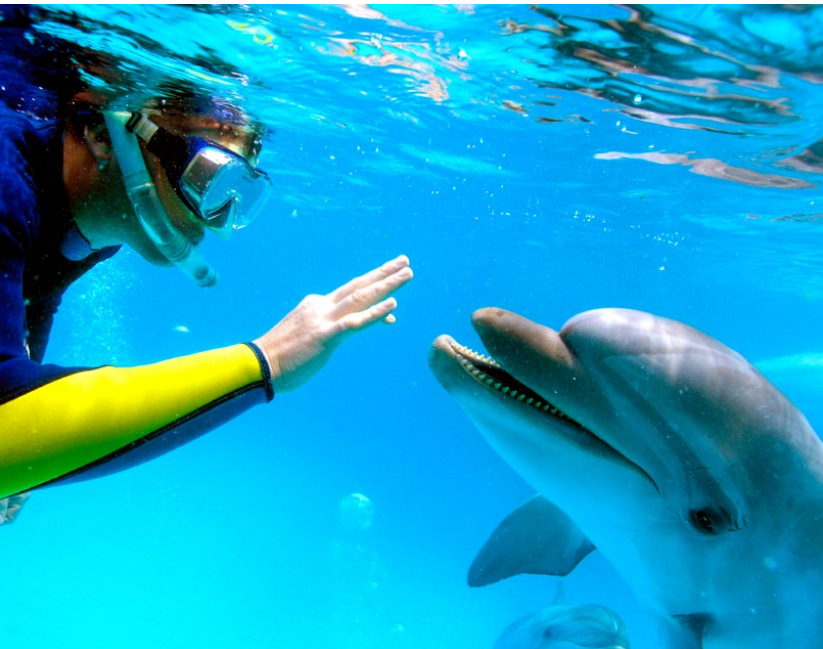
It's this approach to ecological and environmental tourism that has seen Perth Wildlife Encounters win prestigious tourism awards and be inducted into the Western Australian Tourism Hall of Fame and make me the world's greatest dad in the eyes of my children for taking them on this experience.

We arrive at Rockingham Jetty on Palm Beach and the boat is reassuringly big. Embarking is an easy process and as we step aboard, the crew are assessing what size wet suit we're going to require and it's with a heavy heart that I see them bring out the special box from the bilges of the boat that has the wet suit that they keep for emergencies in case they encounter a whale that wants to learn how to snorkel.

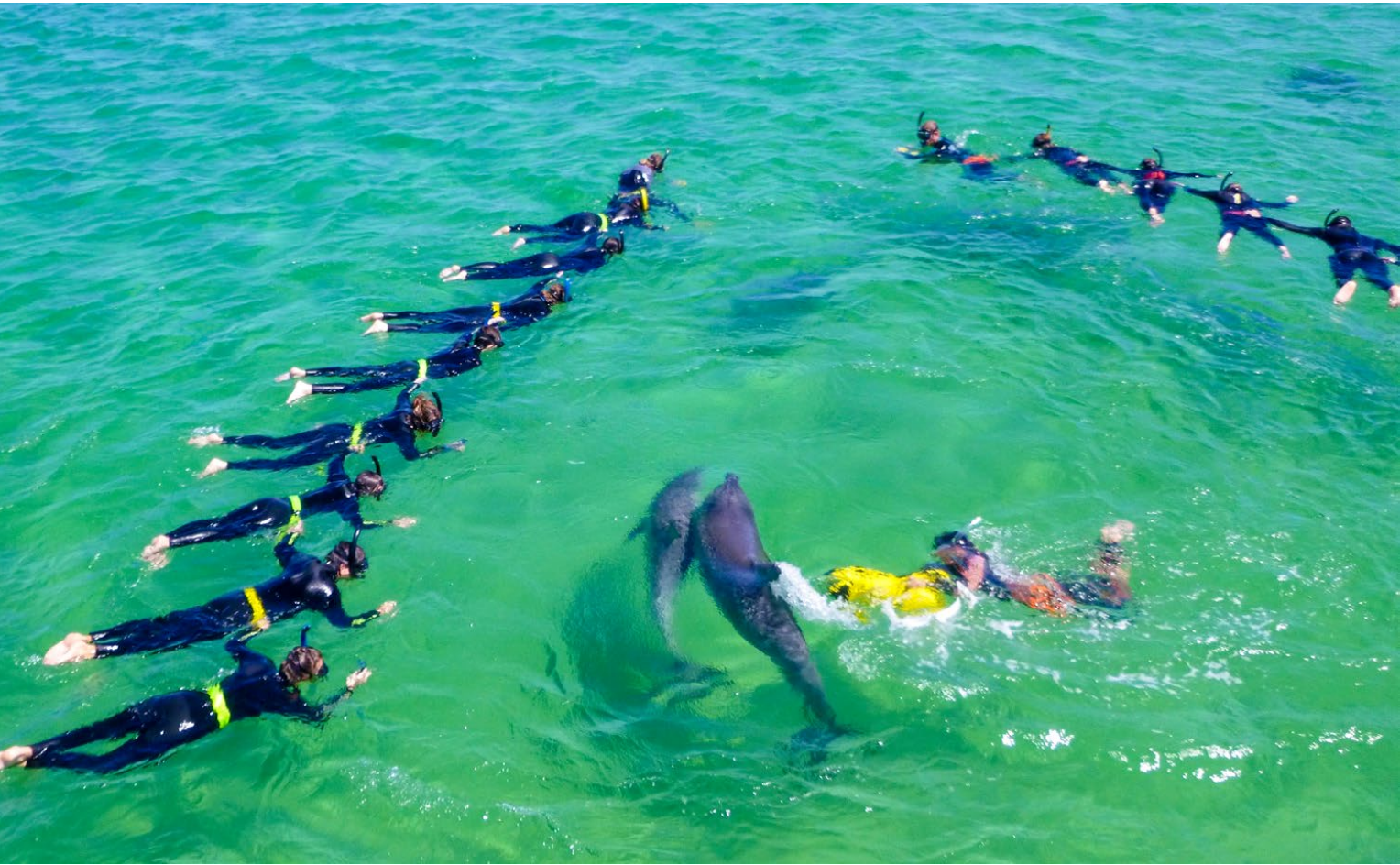
The fit out of snorkels, masks and belts is easy and the quick lessons for those unfamiliar with snorkelling provide the reassurance required. This is a feature of how professional the crew are. As we slip the lines from the jetty the skipper sends us out to the waters between Garden Island, Carnac Island and Kwinana and the search begins.

As the search for the dolphins is underway, our crew serve up fruit platters, and explain how we will enter the water and what the rules are. We are placed into teams that will step carefully off the stern into the water, holding onto the waist belt of the person in front of you. It's the easiest and safest snorkelling you will ever do. The water is deep and you're at a considerable distance from shore, but you feel safe and exhilarated.

The skipper spots some dolphins! Quick, get ready to get into the water! Oh no! Tom's mask is more fogged up than the windscreen of a London bus in winter. I just have time to spit and wipe it clean (oh the horror in his eyes seeing me spit into his mask) before we all link our hands around each other's







With the excitement still intact throughout the day, I have to mention the skill, friendliness and passion of the crew. These are locals who have been trained how to find the dolphins, not interfere with them and at the same time keep a safe watch on all of us and making sure our experience is special.

I made the comment earlier that the experience isn't life changing but it does create a life memory. I'm wrong. I could go back and rewrite this story and say from the outset that it is life changing but that wouldn't be honest. My thoughts have evolved as I have written this piece.

This experience is life changing because in a genuine and authentic way it provides the gift of an encounter with one of the most beautiful animals we share this planet with. This gift has changed the way I view how I want to encounter wildlife in the future and how I want my children to encounter wildlife and be inspired by opportunities in life that excite not just our senses but also the way they think about the world around them.

#### ESCAPE PLAN

While the world is currently rolling out Covid-19 vaccinations, international travel is still not likely to open until late 2021 or 2022. When travel to Western Australia is allowed it is likely that the visitors have to quarantine themselves in a hotel for two weeks.

When travel resumes, many major airlines fly directly to Perth. For more information on Perth Wildlife Encounters visit [www.dolphins.com.au](http://www.dolphins.com.au) or [www.rockinghamwildencounters.com.au](http://www.rockinghamwildencounters.com.au)

For information on visiting Western Australia visit [www.westernaustralia.com](http://www.westernaustralia.com) 



belts and with the grace of humans but not the grace of what's underneath us, we enter another world.

The water is clean and green. The long lines of sunlight stretch down into the water like thin silver rope tethering the water to the ocean floor. That moment when the dolphins first appear is not life changing but it is a life memory. It will never be forgotten how exciting it was to see and hear them, to feel the thump of your heart, the adrenaline tingling through your body, and share the water with these amazing animals. There's no food for them, there's no tricks they have to perform to get applause from us, it's them checking us out and we are so lucky. We are so lucky.

As soon as the dolphins have left, we climb back on to the boat and throughout the day we're in the water, out of the water, in and out and at no point does anyone say, "I've had enough, I'll just stay on the boat, thanks." The sheer privilege of the opportunity is known by all and nobody wants to miss out. The day is glorious and as lunch is handed out, we all talk about what we've seen. Our little family talk about the way the dolphins roll around us and click in a language that we wish we understood and can only guess at. I hear other people talk about the eyes of the dolphins and the way the light plays on their skin as they move through the water.

