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ADVERTISING FEATURE

travel options for the mature west australian

Finding your spirit quokka on country at Wadjemup...Rottnest Island



Left to right; The Lane Café - Delicious crayfish burger - Bathurst Lighthouse - Aboriginal statue - Oliver Hill gun

by Chris Parry

I'VE written a few stories on Wadjemup (Rottnest Island) over the years, including a rite of passage visit with my daughter which was all about snorkelling at the Basin, getting a cream bun and a choc milk from the bakery and riding a bike and only stopping for quokkas, dugites and a very relaxed Ashton Agar.

If you haven't been

to the island before you will typically hit the Basin, Geordie Bay, cycle around the island, hit the bakery three times a day and try to capture a selfie with a quokka.

A cultural tour is where a Wadjemup rite of passage should begin. Before you put the flippers on or hop on a bike, put your cultural curiosity into gear. Enjoy a walking tour of the island that's much more than a tour, it's an experience that enriches your understanding of the island from an Aboriginal perspective.

Some of it is devastating but there's also a dreamtime story that describes how important the west end of the island is to Aboriginal people.

There are traditional songs and a very special sand ceremony that pay respect to Aboriginal ancestors and also remind you of a time when the island was connected to the mainland.

The Wadjemup Museum has been recently renovated and is full of new displays and stories and ways of interpreting old stories through touchscreens and audio experiences. The museum was always a bit too easy to walk past on the way to some other activity, but it's now destined to draw in visitors and provide a connection to the island that is not just interesting, but enriching.

Surprisingly for its size and the prominence of its tracks, many visitors

aren't aware that there is an active train. This tram-like train puffs busily up to Oliver Hill, which offers the best view of the island and an intriguing look deep inside Wadjemup.

A maze of tunnels takes you underground and gives you an understanding of the importance of Rottnest during World War II. You descend steep stairs to where artillery shells were stored and plotting rooms for aiming the big guns on Oliver Hill that protected the approaches to Fremantle.

There are a few ways to get on the water and see the island from a different perspective without a boat. There are fishing trips for kids and

whale watching tours with Rottnest Express which mean you're right in the middle of the action rather than departing from the mainland.

The whale watching adventure boat that scythes its way through monstrous swells slowing only for seals and whales. With engines barely idling, you can sit in complete awe as whales make their way down the Humpback Highway off the island.

The island sits in the middle of the Leeuwin Current and this explains why the waters around are always a bit warmer.

Wadjemup by night is fairly quiet. You might hear a few people heading back to their cottage from the pub being

scared of a quokka skipping across their path. Or, perhaps you could walk out to the end of Main Jetty which is perfect for catching a squid in the evening.

The rangers on the island wish more people took advantage of the bushwalking trails that criss-cross the island and are perfect for sitting quietly as a quokka goes about its business far from the lure of cake crumbs.

Perhaps when you're out walking have a crack at geocaching. This is modern day treasure hunting that allows you to search for hidden packages and pretend you're a modern day Long John Silver. Across more than 190 countries

there are more than three million geocaches and a sneaky number of these little hidden stores are on Wadjemup.

The path well-travelled on Wadjemup inevitably leads to the bakery or grab a cray dog at The Lane Café just across the mall from the bakery. If you need further indulgence and you can head straight back into The Lane Café and grab a Simmos icecream.

Rottnest is a favourite destination because we know it so well and we know what we like to do there. But there's more you can do there including opportunities to get a better understanding of the Aboriginal experience and stories of Wadjemup.

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