

Our 2010 / 2011 Australian Outback Safari

By Graeme Barker and Megan Swan

Newsletter Number Thirteen

We found lots to see and do at Exmouth, Ningaloo Reef and Monkey Mia at Shark Bay.



Snorkelling & Sea Kayaking at Ningaloo Reef was simply stunning. Viewing thousands of bright tropical fish, turtles, sting-rays & reef sharks amongst the beautiful coral.

A day spent sailing Shark Bay whilst whale watching, spotting dugongs & dolphins aboard the **'Shotover'** a 60ft off-shore racing catamaran was outstanding. >>>



We enjoyed feeding the dolphins at Monkey Mia each morning just meters from our idyllic camp-site.

We took the rugged 4WD track to "Steep Point" (the isolated and most western point of Australia) where we watched fishermen cling perilously to cliff tops enjoying land-based game fishing, using helium balloons to carry their rigs out to sea from the top of the 100m + high **Zuytdorp Cliffs**. >>>



<<< Driving south for 2 days along the **Zuytdorp Cliff-tops** on an extremely obscure track over sharp volcanic-like rocks was slow, but this gave us the opportunity to spot the water spouts of migrating humpback whales as they breached the surface with their calves in tow, cruising up the coastline close to the sheer cliff faces. For 2 days we had an exclusive parade of whales, amazingly with no one else in sight.



Camping in isolation (12 minutes set-up time) Thats the life we've enjoyed this year!

Heading south to Perth we zig-zaged through many areas of spectacular spring wildflowers as we travelled via the Thunder Bay Blowholes, Kalbarri, Carnarvon, Geraldton, Jurien Bay, Cervantes & **The Pinnacles** >>>



<<< We arrived in **New Norcia** (Australia's only Monastic town) then proceeded through the lovely historic towns of Bindoon, Toodyay, Northam to arrive at the quaint little historic town of York via the Avon Valley. With Christmas quickly approaching the

pressure was now on for us to get back to Thailand for the balance of Graeme's dental surgery so we left our vehicle with friends at Perth before flying back to Bangkok for him to have 26 crowns fitted. While in Thailand we had some 'R&R' visiting Phuket, Krabi, Hua Hin & Pattaya.

Graeme making friends with the locals in Thailand!





24 /7 the traffic in Bangkok never stops.



Travelling by Tuk Tuk is always fun!



In Phuket the Tuk Tuk's take on a different style (usually Daihatsu's) these are individually customised by their proud owners and as you can see Graeme only chose to travel in the most jazzed up models. These are fitted with flashing neon lights, sub woofers and great sound systems.



Thailand boasts a population of 69 Million. As a result motor cycles are certainly a popular means of travel with literally thousands available to rent if you dare to take on the challenge in a country where there appears to be no road rules, but we saw no apparent sign of any road rage, despite the fact that approx 1000 deaths are recorded monthly from motor cycle accidents!



‘Now ain’t this so cute’. The children sleep while the parents are hard at work peddling their wide variety of merchandise from Dad’s grossly overloaded Tuk Tuk.



Traditional ‘Long Boats’ are used as a fast and reliable water Taxi service around the multitude of islands in southern Thailand. These photos were taken at **‘James Bond Island’** near Phuket.



A novel **‘VW Combi Bar’** complete with ice machine, flashing neon lights, fold out bar tables, hydraulically raised roof panels, stools & a fabulous sound system made a great mobile Party Palace!

With our exciting month long visit to Thailand almost at an end, we booked the front seats upstairs in this VIP coach from Krabi to Hua Hin, a 10 hour trip. This gave us an unrestricted view of the many fascinating small towns and settlements that we passed through.

With a Coach Driver, a Hostess, and a Porter, we were waited on hand and foot. This trip also included a meal at the half-way point at a roadhouse seating 800!! We still wonder what we ate there, but it sure tasted good.



After arriving back in Perth we took little time getting back into the groove and resuming our 4WD Safari. The laid back city of Perth was such a contrast to Bangkok!

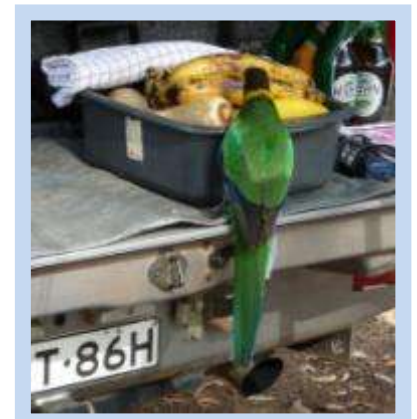
Kicking back in Fremantle >>>

Soon the lure of the great Aussie outdoors drew us back. The locals sure made Graeme feel welcome!



Some very fine feathered and furry friends indeed. 'Mate!

**Just make ya self at home!
<<< Laughed the Kookaburra**





A slice of lemon, ginger, cracked pepper and sea salt should do the trick. The catch of the day was delicious after a few minutes in tin foil in the hot embers. Megan will be pleased with this I'm sure!

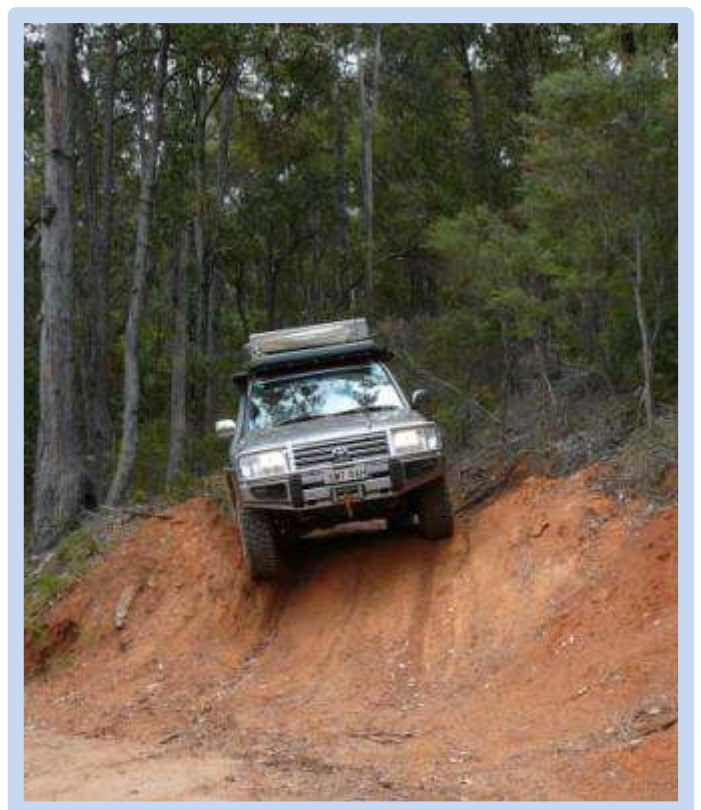
There are so many Kiwi's living in and around Perth they have opened this store which stocks all the Kiwi favourites normally unavailable here.

Some Aussies tell us they have had to learn to speak "Kiwi" to fit in around here!



<<< Back on Safari now doing what we enjoy most and then being confronted by yet another challenge or two. Graeme wasted no time in winching this obstacle off to the side so we could continue to explore this wonderful national park in the hills south-west of Perth.

I chose to walk this next section as I thought I would be more use as a photographer than a 'ground anchor' inside the cab.....



Heading south we continued to thoroughly explore the beautiful 4wd tracks in the Jarrah forests from Dwellingup to Donnybrook via Collie. We then enjoyed the coastal towns of Australind, Bunbury and Busselton (home of the longest and prettiest jetty in West Australia, at 1.8km long)

I promised Megan at the outset that this 4WD Safari would encompass plenty of variety and moments to remember so we couldn't pass through the famous Margaret River wine region without taking a good look around!

We visited some 28 wineries, ranging from small boutique outlets with quaint 'Cellar Doors' to the scrumptious grand estates! Many had extensive gardens, art galleries, cafes and restaurants. A host of breweries and producers of everything from cheese, chocolate, nougat, olives, jewellery and soap beckoned us in for sampling.

Well, as Megan says 'you've just got to do your best! Sip, sample and shop till you drop!!'



This perfect day would not have been complete without a glass of wine and a delicious platter, whilst reclining in luxurious soft leather chairs at the end of this fine winery estate restaurant.

From the wineries in the Margaret River region, to adventures in the stunning ‘**Lake Cave**’ & the ‘**Jewel**’ limestone caves. Variety is certainly the spice of life!



Wow, as you can see, we’ve enjoyed a magnificent roller-coaster ride over the last few weeks. It’s been hectic but what a great time we’ve had.

Well it’s time to top up the drinks and throw another log on the fire, life amongst the sand dunes ain’t that bad at this time of the year!

In our next newsletter we will tell you of our excursions to Windy Harbour, Warpole and Denmark on the south coast and beyond.

This last photo clearly shows where we are right now, rather ironical don’t you think?

Talk to you soon, kind regards Graeme & Megan.

