



## Writing the Wildbook for Whale Sharks with Heather Kay

### RELATED EXPERIENCE:

#### Deluxe Whaleshark Swim

FULL DAY (SHARED / PRIVATE)



### CONSERVATION IN ACTION

- Participate in Wildbook for Whale Sharks citizen science program to identify individual Whale Sharks
- Tour includes financial contribution to the Parks & Wildlife Service



Ningaloo Reef is one of the best places in the world to swim with Whale Sharks, with hundreds congregating in the world-renowned marine park from March to early August. "I'm very fortunate to work in an area that has one of the highest interaction rates with Whale Sharks in the world," says Exmouth Dive & Whalesharks Ningaloo spotter and snorkelling guide, Heather Kay. "We find them, we swim with them, and we photograph them for identification purposes."

Although some guests are happy to simply swim with the world's largest fish, others are keen to contribute to research efforts. "Our videographers are required to get a shot of each Whale Shark we swim with, and we also encourage all of our guests to participate. Everyone can submit their photos to Wildbook for Whale Sharks and learn about the exact shark they swam with," Heather explains. "The more data we gather, the more we learn about these gentle giants."

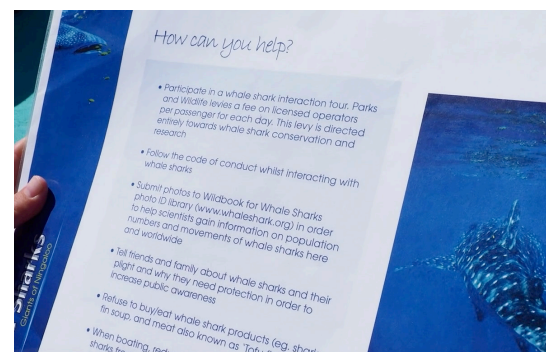
The Wildbook for Whale Sharks photo identification platform was introduced in 1994, and Heather explains that there are individual Whale Sharks who have visited Ningaloo Reef every year since. "Some even come back at the same time every year," she says. "Information like this

helps us to track the total number of Whale Sharks and grow our understanding of their behavioural patterns."

Whale Sharks, which can grow up to 12 metres long, are considered to be slow swimmers, so keeping up with them is relatively easy. Taking a photo of an individual, however, can be challenging.

"For identification purposes, we need photos taken behind the shark's left dorsal fin and also behind the gill slits, which is like the shark's fingerprint region," Heather explains. "Then those photos are compared to the photos of 1600 individual Whale Sharks that have been sighted in the area since 1994. Sometimes we get lucky and are able to recognise an individual shark in the water, especially if it has specific scarring or marks."

Guests who are interested in ongoing support can sign up to 'Adopt a Whale Shark', which includes a monthly donation to the cause. Heather explains: "The really cool thing about this is that every time the adopted shark is seen, an email with details about the shark's current size and its most recent location is sent to the sponsor."



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# Tracking Manta Rays with Amelia Armstrong

## RELATED EXPERIENCE:

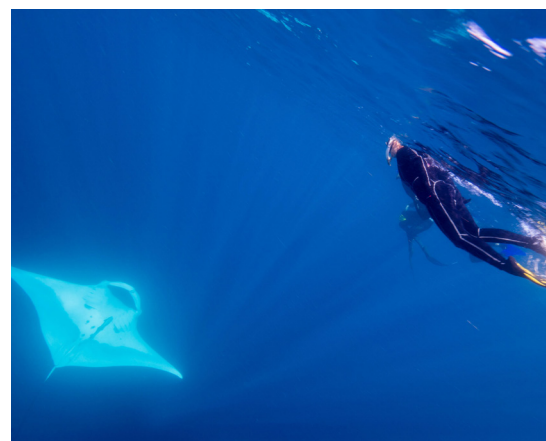
Behind the Scenes with Researchers:  
Manta Rays Private Charter

FULL DAY (PRIVATE)



## CONSERVATION IN ACTION

- Participate in citizen science Project Manta program to identify individual Manta Rays
- Tour includes financial contribution to the Parks & Wildlife Service and in-kind contributions to Project Manta



Manta Rays have been around for millions of years, and their reliable aggregations are an important part of Western Australia's marine ecotourism offering. Yet, it was only discovered as recently as 2009 that there are two species of Manta Rays.

"To think that an entire species with a five-metre wingspan had gone unnoticed for so long goes to show just how much we have left to learn about our oceans," explains Project Manta researcher Amelia Armstrong. "Almost all of the information we have about reef Manta Rays globally has therefore been from the last 10 years. Our goal at Project Manta is to study and expand our knowledge on the population ecology and biology of Manta Rays within Australian waters."

Project Manta was founded in 2009 at Brisbane's University of Queensland, and in 2015 the multidisciplinary organisation joined forces with researchers at Murdoch University in Perth, which in turn facilitated an opportunity to expand Manta Ray studies from the east coast to the west of Australia.

"I was born and grew up in Queensland, but when the opportunity came up to study Manta Rays in Exmouth, I jumped," Amelia says. "The work we are doing here on Ningaloo is very exciting and progressing really well. We study their movement, biology, what they eat and where they go. In Exmouth, Exmouth Dive & Whalesharks Ningaloo

have been paramount in supporting the studies and in sharing findings with their guests."

When opportunities arise, Amelia loves getting on board a charter boat with Exmouth Dive & Whalesharks Ningaloo to chat all things Manta Rays. "I could talk all day long about them," she laughs. "And I certainly do if guests are interested in hearing about these charismatic creatures."

"Our goal at Project Manta is to study and expand our knowledge on the population ecology and biology of Manta Rays within Australian waters."

She explains that the two hot spots in Western Australia for monitoring Manta Ray activity are in Exmouth and Coral Bay and that, thanks to the unique spot patterns on the belly of reef Manta Rays, combined with ongoing photo ID submissions from the public, Project Manta has been able to identify more than 1200 individuals that call Ningaloo home.

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# Swimming Alongside Humpback Whales with Corrine Matthews

## RELATED EXPERIENCE:

### Deluxe Humpback Swim

FULL DAY (SHARED / PRIVATE)



#### CONSERVATION IN ACTION

- Participate in citizen science programs contributing to the Centre for Whale Research Western Australia catalogue
- Tour includes financial contribution to the Parks & Wildlife Service and in-kind contributions to Centre for Whale Research



Marine scientists say that the Humpback Whale call is one of the most complex animal sounds there is. "It's a very beautiful and melancholy song and sounds a little like a door creaking or a violinist warming up," spotter and snorkelling guide, Corrine Matthews, says. "Some days when we snorkel on the outer reef of Ningaloo, we ask our guests to dive down and just listen. Sound travels underwater four times faster than above water."



Hearing a Humpback Whale call is a tantalising teaser to swimming alongside one. "The two experiences are vastly different, but they both offer an opportunity to get to know this special whale species a little better," Corrine says. "What I love about Humpback Whales is their focus on connection. They are rarely alone, and when we swim with them, I believe that you can also feel this connection."

Exmouth Dive & Whalesharks Ningaloo was one of the first operators in Western Australia to offer Humpback Whale swims, and with every Humpback Whale swim tour sold, a donation is made to the Centre for Whale

Research Western Australia and the Parks & Wildlife Service, with the option for guests to donate additional amounts.

The tours support ongoing Humpback Whale research and safety is paramount. "We have pilots in the air who have eyes on us; the guides swim with radios in their hands; the skipper has a radio; and the whole team is in continuous communication to ensure that everyone is happy and safe," Corrine explains.

Swimming with one Humpback is the goal, but since the whales often travel in twos, guests are sometimes able to swim with a mother and her calf, and even a male escort if they're very lucky. "The first time I swam with a Humpback Whale took my breath away and it felt like there was nothing else in the world except this giant of the ocean and me," Corrine recalls.

"I hear similar statements from guests after they experience their first swim, too. The adrenalin is high, but the minute you see a Humpback your body and mind just freeze in the moment."



"What I love about Humpback Whales is their focus on connection. They are rarely alone, and when we swim with them, I believe that you can also feel this connection."

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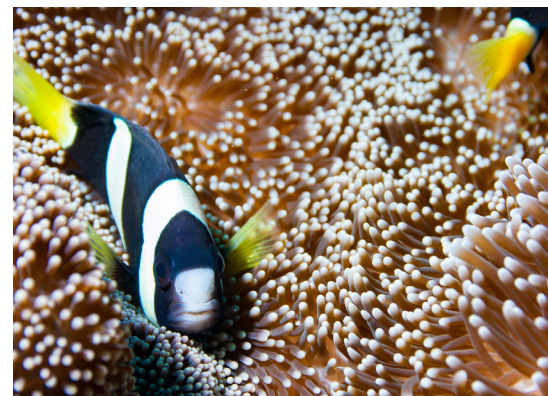
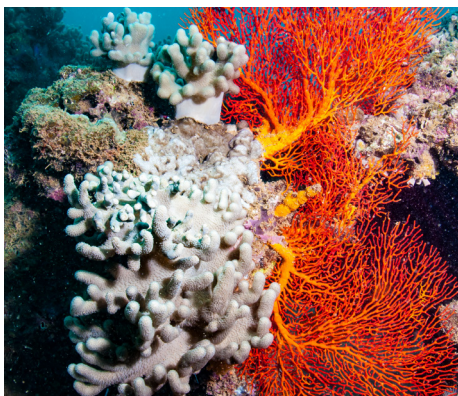


# Diving the Muiron Islands and Outer Reef with Mark Ferguson

## RELATED EXPERIENCES:

Outer Reef or Islands Scuba Dive & Snorkel  
FULL DAY (SHARED / PRIVATE)

Ningaloo Reef Dive Tour  
FULL DAY (SHARED / PRIVATE)



For Mark Ferguson, co-founder and skipper of Exmouth Dive & Whalesharks Ningaloo, every day out in the water is a good day. "I learnt to dive when I was 24 and am in the water at every opportunity. I just love the sea and showing guests the underwater world," Mark says.

Exmouth Dive & Whalesharks Ningaloo offers a huge array of tours to suit just about anyone, but Mark particularly enjoys showcasing the Muiron Islands to guests. "It's part of Ningaloo, but it's at the very end of the Cape, and takes us about an hour and 20 minutes on the boat to reach the snorkel and dive site," he says. "Most people really enjoy that time on the boat. We might see Humpback Whales from June to October, it's highly likely that we'll spot dolphins, and seabirds are often out in full force feeding on shoals of bait fish."

The Muiron Islands site is ideal for families, couples and groups of people with different skillsets, because the reef structure is as shallow as five metres in some parts and as deep as 18 metres in others. "It's a really accessible site for both snorkellers and divers. We can have all skill levels out in the water and everyone gets a great view of what's hiding underneath," Mark explains.

As for what is hiding underneath... well, Mark speculates that you could spend days exploring and there would still be more to see.

He explains: "You have two unique locations at Muiron Islands. The west side is open to the ocean, and here we are privy to an interesting mixture of both hard and soft corals. The soft coral, in particular, is very beautiful as it's a mix of bright orange, pink and blue hues. The east side is a little shallower, and although it's mostly hard coral and sometimes there is less visibility here, we quite often see Green, Loggerhead and Hawksbill Turtles, which guests really enjoy."

"It's a really accessible site for both snorkellers and divers. We can have all skill levels out in the water and everyone gets a great view of what's hiding underneath."

All the snorkel sites offer guests the opportunity to see hundreds of fish scooting around, and because of the many ledges, caves and nooks, the maze-like structure offers snorkellers and divers the opportunity to kick back and simply drift along with the currents while watching the underwater world go by.

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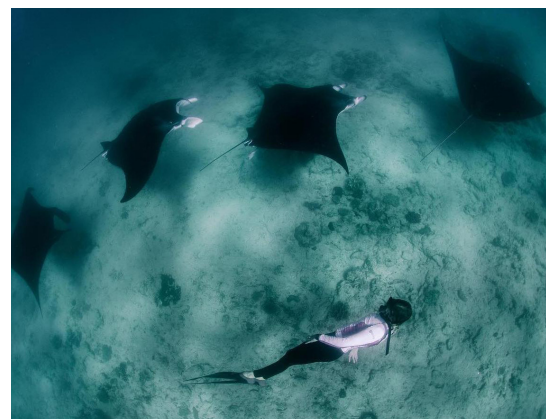


## Sunset Wine and Whale Watching across Exmouth Gulf with Lindsay Sorensen

RELATED EXPERIENCE:

Sunset Whale Watching Tour

2 HOURS (SHARED / PRIVATE)



When holidaymakers visit the Ningaloo region for the first time, they often book tours of the Ningaloo Reef first, attracted to the open ocean and everything that it offers. But Exmouth Dive & Whalesharks Ningaloo scuba diving and snorkelling guide, Lindsay Sorensen, says that Exmouth Gulf is just as special.

“The clouds often look like puffs of fairy floss, and then you might have whales playing in the water, too. It’s incredible.”

“The Ningaloo Coast side is famous for its reef, but the Exmouth Gulf side of the peninsula is magical,” she says. “The diversity of marine animals found here is astounding, and it’s a nursery for so many species of fish and marine invertebrates.”

When you ask Lindsay about her most memorable moment on the gulf, she doesn’t hesitate to answer: “Any time we get to watch adult and baby whales interacting with each other is remarkable,” she says. “The whales travel from Antarctica to the Kimberley where they have their babies, then they turn around and come back, so we often see

mothers and calves in the gulf. Humpback Whales have massive pectoral fins and they’re the most acrobatic whale in the ocean, so seeing an adult perform a trick and then watching a baby try and copy is unforgettable.”

Exmouth Dive & Whalesharks Ningaloo offers whale watching tours August through October, and sunset tours are, rightly, very popular. “Watching the sunset heightens the experience,” Lindsay says. “We don’t actually see the sun sink into the ocean in the gulf, which you would if on the open ocean, but we do see the sun setting along the Cape Range, and this transforms the whole gulf into a purple-pink colour. The clouds often look like puffs of fairy floss, and then you might have whales playing in the water, too. It’s incredible.”

Even on rare days when the sunset might not be as glorious as anticipated, guests are always moved by the number of majestic Humpback Whales resting in the gulf. “Any day out here is special,” Lindsay says. “The Exmouth Gulf is a sanctuary for so many marine creatures and is a critical ecosystem for us to protect for future generations.”

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# Capturing Ningaloo's Majestic Underwater Landscapes with Chiara Bussini

## RELATED EXPERIENCE:

Ningaloo Underwater Photography Course

FULL DAY (SHARED / PRIVATE)



Exmouth Dive & Whalesharks Ningaloo scuba diving and snorkelling guide, Chiara Bussini, believes that once you start taking photographs underwater it can easily turn into a life-long hobby. "I started with land-based photography over a decade ago, but now my main focus is taking photos underwater," she says. "I moved into the underwater realm when I began scuba diving. I haven't looked back."

Chiara has been living in Ningaloo for close to five years, and although she spends most of her time in the water, she says that no day is the same and there is always something new and exciting to see and photograph.

"Ningaloo offers such a big variety of subject matter to shoot. There are colourful corals, schools of fish, marine megafauna, and then we have what we call the Big Three of Ningaloo: Whale Sharks, Manta Rays and Humpback Whales," she explains.

"Sometimes you might be focusing on the details of a coral growth and then a huge Manta Ray will glide past. You never know what you might come across." Regardless of skill level, Chiara explains that it's for this exact reason that the Ningaloo Reef is an underwater photographer's dream destination. "There's a big variety of marine life to see and it's easily accessible to both snorkellers and divers," she says.

For Exmouth Dive & Whalesharks Ningaloo guests, the Muiron Islands and Lighthouse Bay locations offer plenty of opportunities

to hone their underwater photography skills, and Chiara says that both snorkelling and diving can reap great rewards. "You don't have to dive really deep for better or more interesting photos. In fact, because I enjoy using natural light, I tend to prefer sticking close to the surface," she says.

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The photography tour is fairly relaxed and can be customised to guests' abilities and requirements, and Chiara explains that the two main objectives of the day are for guests to become comfortable with their own equipment and to make the most of the astounding underwater ecosystem. "The day tour includes a mini photography course and then plenty of time in the water," Chiara says. "I go over the basics, such as perspective and angles first, and then working in the water is the best way to learn and improve."

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