

One Fine Bay

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FROM VISITING WHALES TO THE WHITEST SAND IN THE WORLD – JERVIS BAY BALANCES
A CORNUCOPIA OF BUSHLAND AND BEACH.

Metal sculptor Paul Dimmer shows his trademark smile with one of his rib cage designs.



FAST FACTS

Jervis Bay is part of the Shoalhaven and is about 180 kilometres south of Sydney on the NSW South Coast. The bay itself is a marine park and known for its pristine and unpolluted waters. It's about 15 kilometres long by 10 kilometres wide. The Beecroft Peninsula to the north is largely owned and used by the Australian Navy as a weapons range; access to this area is sometimes restricted. Point Perpendicular is the sheer 100-metre cliff at the tip of the northern peninsula, atop which is the Jervis Bay lighthouse.

To the south is the Bherwerre Peninsula which ends in Governor Head and Bowen Island. The island is a protected area for birds, particularly a Little Penguin rookery. Most of this southern peninsula is take up by the Booderee National Park and Botanic Gardens.



“Squeak. Squeak, squeak. Squeak”. Every step we took was accompanied by that noise. It sounded as though we were walking across a field of tightly packed rodents. In fact we were wandering down the beach that boasts the whitest sand in the world – Hyams Beach in Jervis Bay. Recently it was voted one of the top 10 beach experiences on the planet and, whether you agree with the ‘whitest sand’ claim or not, it certainly seems to have the squeakiest.

Only a few hundred metres along the beach, a crowd of people had gathered. All were looking out to sea and there was a buzz of excitement in the air. Lolling in the swell, less than 100 metres from the shore, was the huge, dark mass of an adult humpback whale. It almost seemed as though this enormous creature was ‘conducting’ its audience. As a barnacle-encrusted pectoral fin was slowly raised out of the water, it drew a crescendo of “oohs!” from the crowd, punctuated by a communal shout of glee as the fin crashed back down in an eruption of spray. All eyes in the crowd were on this behemoth; its every tail-flick, head-bob or fin-wiggle were marked by murmurs and gasps of awe. It was like a bizarre but beautiful symphony of admiration; a precious encounter between species at the border of their respective worlds.

Although whales just off the beach are a rare treat, Jervis Bay has many magical experiences on offer. Whether it’s catching sight of one of the resident pods of dolphins

Opposite page: Metal sculptor Paul Dimmer gets up close to his knife-feathered artwork named Ritual, featuring dancing brolgas. **This page, clockwise from top left:** Dimmer polishing a piece called “Lot’s Wife”, made from recycled stainless steel. Stainless steel, pewter, copper, forest red gum, and salvaged huon pine. Mild steel, stainless steel, stainless steel spoons, and handmade nails from a very old boat wreck.





cruising the waters for food or the seals that bask on the rocks at the mouth of the bay, the little penguins whose heads pop up from nowhere, or the kamikaze-like gannets plummeting into a shoal of fish, there's no shortage of wildlife action.

And whatever sort of action you have planned, there's always somewhere in Jervis Bay that you can do it. That magic almost-circle of the bay means that there is always a beach with protection from the wind if you want it – or another one with wild exposure, if that floats your boat. Or surf board.

Heading up to the northern arm of Jervis Bay – the Beecroft Peninsula – there's rugged bushy coastline to explore, protected from the summer northerly winds. From Honeymoon Bay, you can paddle a kayak (or walk) eastwards past Silica and Target Beaches and on to Boat Harbour. You can picnic in perfect peace here, watching sea eagles glide high on the thermals above and then indulge in a little gentle body surfing.

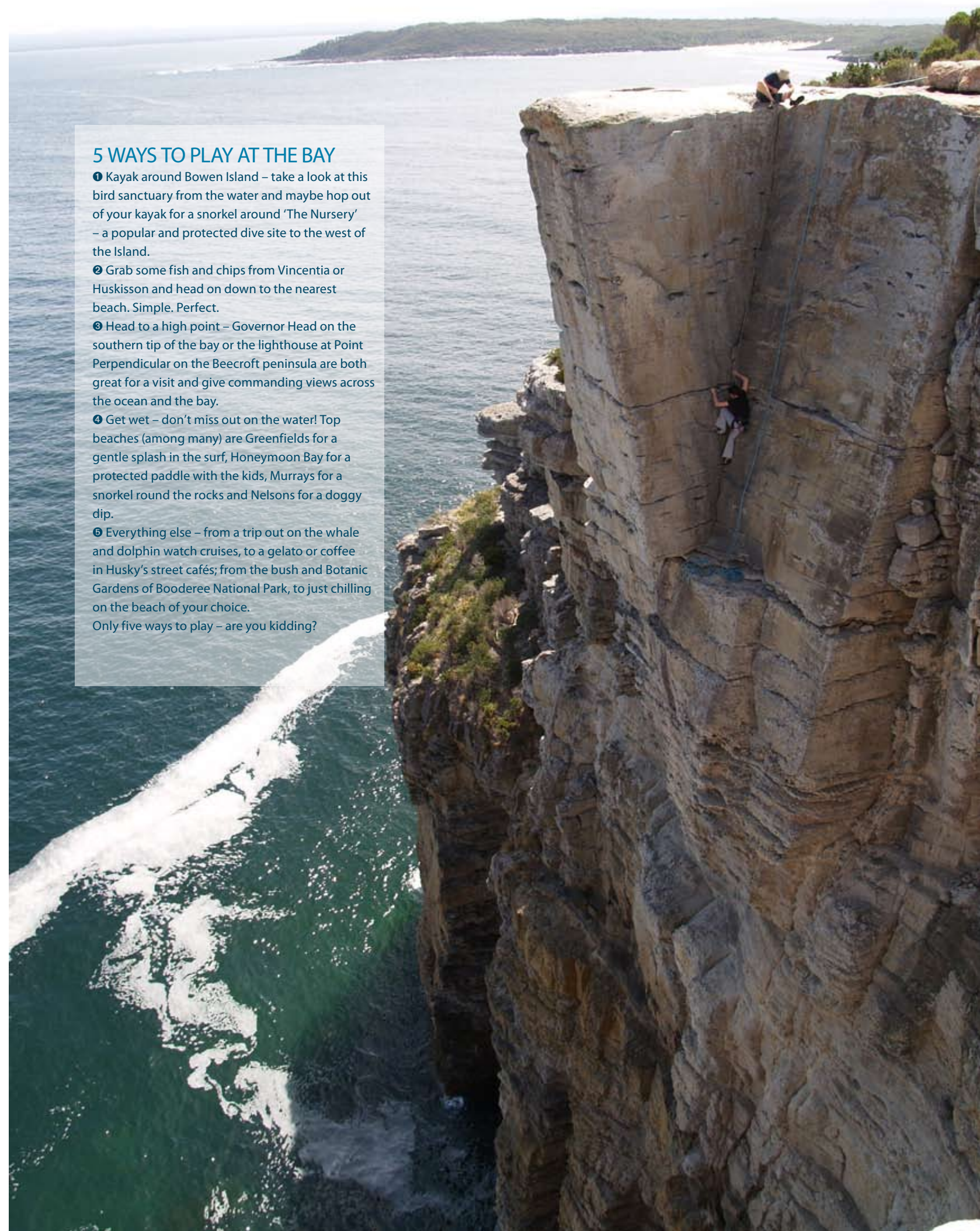
At the northernmost point of the Bay, Point Perpendicular rises vertically from the ocean. The cliffs around Point Perp (as it's locally known) are a rock-climbing Mecca – though not for the inexperienced or faint of heart. With the sea crashing onto jagged rocks below and steep walls of stone as the only exit, this is the Bay at its wildest.

At other times though, the relationship between Jervis Bay wild and Jervis Bay suburban is surprisingly close. Cruise along sections of Elizabeth Drive in Vincentia and see that grandiose mansions seem to have become confused and accidentally settled

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5 WAYS TO PLAY AT THE BAY

- 1 Kayak around Bowen Island – take a look at this bird sanctuary from the water and maybe hop out of your kayak for a snorkel around 'The Nursery' – a popular and protected dive site to the west of the Island.
 - 2 Grab some fish and chips from Vincentia or Huskisson and head on down to the nearest beach. Simple. Perfect.
 - 3 Head to a high point – Governor Head on the southern tip of the bay or the lighthouse at Point Perpendicular on the Beecroft peninsula are both great for a visit and give commanding views across the ocean and the bay.
 - 4 Get wet – don't miss out on the water! Top beaches (among many) are Greenfields for a gentle splash in the surf, Honeymoon Bay for a protected paddle with the kids, Murrays for a snorkel round the rocks and Nelsons for a doggy dip.
 - 5 Everything else – from a trip out on the whale and dolphin watch cruises, to a gelato or coffee in Husky's street cafés; from the bush and Botanic Gardens of Booderee National Park, to just chilling on the beach of your choice.
- Only five ways to play – are you kidding?





amid the fibro beach shacks and red-brick homes. On the other side of the regenerating sandhills though, Collingwood Beach is a perfect two-kilometre sweeping crescent, with glassy green water and the crisp crump of a small breaking swell. It's the ideal walking and jogging beach and often a dolphin guard of honour will cruise indolently nearby.

Although the main centres of Callala, Huskisson and Vincentia continue to grow, there are many parts of the bay protected by national park. On the southern arm of the bay, Booderee National Park includes the Botanic Gardens, which provide a rich diversity of local trees and plants. Flowering understoreys of banksias and hakeas surround the mottled trunks of spotted gums, a haven for honeyeaters and myriad other bird species.

Access to the glorious white sands of many of Booderee's beaches often involves a short stroll through tall, shady eucalypts. But this is a wonderful transition, like a theatre curtain being opened to reveal the bright lights of the stage – or in this case, the sun glittering on blue water. At Green Patch, there's the added pleasure of kangaroo encounters and dozens of brilliantly coloured rosellas and lorikeets along the way to the shore.

Murrays Beach lies at the very tip of the National Park. Fishing boats strike out from the boat ramp here, holiday makers stroll on the sands, while keen snorkelers can be surprised – and delighted – by large rays hanging around the rocks in the middle of the beach. And up on Governor Head, the rocky promontory at the end of Murrays, you can gaze out to sea once more and wave goodbye to the whales heading south for the summer. ■

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