



Introducing the **ABROLHOS**

BY DAN AVILA

*The jewel of the mid-west region of Western Australia
is The Abrolhos Islands, one of the most pristine
and beautiful marine environments in the world.*



Opening image: Bold, curious and as adorable as any pet pup, this infant Australian sea lion kissed the end of my lens as it ventured close to me after posing for a photo.

This page, clockwise from top: Rumour has it that many years ago, cray fishermen’s wives were tired of their dull fishing shacks on the barren coral islands, so they painted every residence in bold colours; Pearls grown at the Latitude Pearl Farm in The Abrolhos include those from cultured black lipped oysters.



These 122 islands, clustered into three groups, are mostly made up of coral reef structures with such important and unique biodiversity that The Abrolhos has been described as ‘Australia’s Galapagos’.

The Abrolhos, famous for being the site of the wreck of the *Batavia*, the subsequent rescue mission and mutiny in 1629, has long been the sole domain of professional fishers and pearl farmers, but thanks to cray-fishers-turned-tourism-operators Jay and Sonia Cox of Eco Abrolhos, these magnificent islands and the azure waters that surround them are now accessible to everyone.

Spending a week at the islands on the *Eco Abrolhos* was a wonderful combination of being guided through a photographer’s paradise and a sports fishing wonderland at the same time.

The ocean off Geraldton can be rough, but once in the protected lagoons of the coral atolls, everything changes. The waters become calm and luminous with all shades of blue and green – there is life everywhere. Whales, dolphins and fish surround the boat and sea birds are in huge numbers. Visitors to the islands have always been few and far between reflecting the lack of options for tourists. Perhaps that’s why I had so many up close and personal encounters with wildlife, untroubled by my presence.

The Australian sea lion is a relatively rare, curious inhabitant of the islands. They frequently swim and play with snorkellers and divers. While on a walk to handfeed a giant cod that is landlocked in a lake on a small island, we came upon a young sea lion and her pup on a pristine beach. Taking a seat on the sand at a respectful distance for a few photos, the young pup shuffled right up to me and gently nuzzled my camera while its mother kept watch.

A few of the islands are bird sanctuaries and the sheer numbers and density of nesting birds is almost overwhelming. The white-bellied sea eagle let me know when I ventured a little too close to her nest, but the rare lesser noddies sat quietly and calmly as I stood just centimetres away for a few photos. We then headed back to our floating hotel where the chef had simply dropped a line out the galley window to catch pink snapper and bald chin grouper for dinner. •

Dan used a pair of Canon 5D Mark III’s with four lenses; Canon 70-200mm L f/2.8 II IS, Canon 24-70 L f/2.8 II, Canon 17mm L TS-E f/4 tilt-shift and Zeiss Otus 85mm f/1.4 aided by the NISI filter system, Sunway L brackets and the SIRUI waterproof carbon tripod.



From left: Professional fishers access the shallow waters by suspended platforms that spider out from the coral islands; During crayfish season, Pigeon Island becomes an active village complete with its island school.



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Clockwise from top: The water surrounding the low lying coral islands is crystal clear and full of life; The wonderfully curious sea lions that inhabit the island group investigate the human visitors without fear; Even on coral islands with no soil, West Australian wildflowers take hold and thrive.



Clockwise from top left: Like a floating hotel, another sunset is enjoyed from the *MV Eco Abrolhos* in a protected bay; These bearded dragons are in huge numbers on East Wallaby Island, one of the only sand islands in the Abrolhos; Offering an entertaining escort between the mainland and the island group, bottle nosed dolphins and other marine mammals are in abundance.



"I've HEARD of getting CLOSE to NATURE but THIS was ..."

just ANOTHER DAY in WA

With less than 12,000 left in the world, Australian Sea Lions are an endangered species. Found along Australia's Coral Coast, sea lions are often seen relaxing on the beaches

of the Abrolhos Islands, 60km off the coast of Geraldton. The best way to interact with these captivating creatures is on a guided tour, learn more at australiascoralcoast.com

AUSTRALIA'S CORAL COAST .COM

ABROLHOS ISLANDS, GERALDTON



Clockwise from top: A quiet drink and delicious canapes enjoyed after exploring East Wallaby Island; The clear turquoise water ensures incredible visibility for snorkelling and diving; Common to the islands are the white-bellied sea eagles that build an impressive and elaborate nest.

Top right, next page: Ever playful, the highlight for many visitors is a close encounter swim with these engaging sea lions.

travel facts

GETTING THERE

- Geraldton Air Charter: geraldtonaircharter.com.au
- Shine Aviation: shineaviation.com.au
- Eco Abrolhos: ecoabrolhos.com.au

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Australia's Coral Coast: australiascoralcoast.com
- Visit Geraldton: visitgeraldton.com.au

