



CATSPA W AND SMOKEBUSH



TURQUOISE COAST

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The car was parked on a small promontory overlooking the Indian Ocean. A totally empty beach curled away into the distance, while a few desultory waves rose gently out of turquoise shallows before subsiding onto white sand.

Australia's west coast is somewhat unfriendly for both sailors and drivers. The shoreline is backed by either lines of dunes or high, rugged cliffs with few sheltered bays. As a result the north-south highways are well inland – with no ocean views – but there are two roads that take travellers on a picturesque ride along the edge of the ocean.

A couple of hundred kilometres north of Perth is what is called the Turquoise Coast, where the colours in the shallows outdo anything the Mediterranean can offer. This is where the appropriately named Indian Ocean Drive curves gently through blossom-studded bush with periodic views of a sparkling sea. A few other cars and an occasional motor home or caravan pass the other way, but there's none of the heavy thundering traffic of the main highways. It's a wonderfully relaxing drive.

The other stretch of sea-view driving is further north again, on the approaches to the resort town of Kalbarri where the start of the Zuytdorp Cliffs (named after the Dutch ship *Zuytdorp*, which was wrecked on the reef here in 1712 and only discovered in 1927) provide giddy views of plunging slopes, stacks and crashing breakers.

The Indian Ocean Drive starts at Cervantes, 247 kilometres north of Perth. Cervantes is one of a series of crayfishing ports strung along the coast south of Geraldton. Most are like Cervantes, open anchorages tucked behind offshore reefs and small limestone islands. These provide some shelter when the so-called sea breeze comes howling in on summer days, and creates one of the world's windsurfing meccas. The combination of wind and flat(tish) water makes for safe low-level flying.

Summer mornings before the wind changes, and those glorious in-between months of spring and autumn, are when this coast sings. Winding, sandy tracks lead down to hidden bays. In the lee of limestone headlands, sheltered even from the sea