

Western Australia has a reputation for world-class beaches and some are even touted to be among the best in Australia! Thousands of locals and tourists flock to the coastal town of Kepa Kurl/Esperance every year to enjoy the kangaroos and pristine white sand of Lucky Bay - one of the more well-known destinations within Cape Le Grand National Park.

I've got a little secret to tell you though.

Kepa Kurl is the Nyungar people's Wudjari name for Esperance.

Almost every single beach within 150km along the coast in either direction of Kepa Kurl/Esperance is equally as breathtaking. You really can't go wrong picking any of them. Yes, Lucky Bay is stunning and is absolutely worth a visit. Instead of making it the sole purpose of your holiday though, why not explore the other beaches nearby? They are just as good but with half the crowds, they are arguably even better!

The whole coastline around Kepa Kurl/Esperance is worth exploring.

Where is Kepa Kurl/Esperance?

Kepa Kurl/Esperance is located on the south coast of WA, near the Great Australian Bight, and roughly 7.5 hours drive from Perth. It's 4 hours south of Kalgoorlie and is considered to be WA's most eastern coastal town before heading back out to the Eyre Highway and across the Nullarbor.

The Nyungar and Ngadju people are the Traditional Custodians of the Land in and around Kepa Kurl/Esperance. The Ngadju people are connected to the inland country between Kalgoorlie and Esperance, while the Nyungar ancestral lands span over 30,000 square kilometres across southern Western Australia. This area is governed by the Esperance Tjaltjraak Native Title Aboriginal Corporation, who are the Native Title Body Corporate for the Wudjari Nyungar people. Named Kepa Kurl in Wudjari language, the coastline features a series of bays and Kepa (water) Kurl (boomerang) aptly describes the two bays closest to the town, *where the waters lie like boomerangs*.

In the scheme of things, it's rather an isolated town with the next major hub being Albany - nearly 500km away. Hopetoun is only 200km away and is located in the middle of the two. Despite being smaller and having limited services, Hopetoun doesn't disappoint on beaches!

A secret beach in near Kepa Kurl/Esperance!

Kepa Kurl/Esperance is significant enough to have car yards, multiple grocery stores, and all the essential services you need when travelling through. If you have mechanical or electrical issues, or you need to buy spare parts, there's a pretty good chance of getting them sorted in town.

With local industries of agriculture, tourism, and fishing (including charters), the town also supports a significant trade port that manages more than 11 million tonnes of import and export every single year! It's a beautiful town built along the stunning coastline and has loads of activities on offer. Whether you choose to stay within the town, or on the outskirts, there are plenty of camping and accommodation options.

Seriously, look at that water!

When is the best time to visit?

Being on the southern coast of Western Australia, with no other significant landmass to protect it from the arctic, Esperance can get cold!

The warmer months of the year from October through to April, are considered the best and are also the most popular. During these months, the daytime temps are around 20°C – 25°C.



A friendly local at Thomas River in Cape Arid National Park.

Camping

If you are making the effort to visit Kepa Kurl/Esperance you should stay a few nights at least, especially if you are coming down from the north on a big lap of Oz, or heading westbound across the iconic Nullarbor.

Asides from the caravan parks, Airbnb's, hotels and motels, you have a variety of DPAW campsites in both directions, with Lucky Bay and Le Grand Beach both being very popular campsites right in the middle of the national park.



It's easy to see why Cape Le Grand Beach is so popular.

Beaches

Looking down upon the spectacular turquoise ocean from the clifftops the crystal clear water is so inviting, and having a dip is refreshingly worth it despite the frigid temperature!

Many of the beaches are seaweed free and the white sand is so clean and silky that it literally squeaks if you scuff your feet. It's entertaining to create the sound and if you are driving over it, your tyres do exactly the same thing. The squeaks from the sand are really quite unusual – like a group of puppies squealing for your attention!

Most of the beaches in and around Kepa Kurl/Esperance are quick and easy to access. Many are situated within the national parks with incredible hiking trails along the coast or through the surrounding bush.



Duke of Orleans Bay offers a choice of excellent 4WD tracks, but is also great for fishing and diving.

Do you need a 4WD?

Yes and no! A 4WD gives you access to almost all of the beaches surrounding Kepa Kurl/Esperance, but if you're not wishing to seek out the lesser-known areas, then a 2WD is fine. Some of the more popular beaches feature compact and smooth sand that makes it quite safe to drive onto.

Please know that some of the beaches are so soft that even 4WD's struggle to drive on them. Taking any vehicle onto the sand is not something you should be doing without understanding how to manage sandy terrain and how to keep yourself safe when going off-road.

For us, a 4WD means that we can get to beaches where no one is! Lucky Bay is beautiful and

still worthy of a visit, but it's even better when you don't have to share a place with dozens of other vehicles and people.

If you plan on using a 4WD in Kepa Kurl/Esperance, make sure you take the right gear with you including a shovel, tyre gauge, tyre deflators and compressor, traction boards, and have a good understanding of how to recover yourself. We've come across some incredibly soft beaches and had quite a hard time getting out of them in the past!

Lower your tyre pressures when driving on sand, especially soft sand.

Do you need a park pass?

Many of these beaches are located within one of the three national parks along this stretch of coastline – Stokes National Park, Cape Le Grand National Park, and Cape Arid National Park. These all have entry fees and require you to have a park pass. Individual passes are available, but the more economical option is to get a longer park pass that covers a number of parks.

At the time of publication, fees are \$15 per vehicle, \$8 per motorcycle and \$8 concession per vehicle. Alternatively, you can buy an annual parks pass for \$120, a 4-week pass for \$60, a 2-week pass for \$40, or a 5-day pass for \$25. If you are with RAC you get 50% off the annual and 4 week passes.

Wharton Beach is slightly west of Duke of Orleans Bay.

What's the best beach?

Honestly, as I said from the outset, all the beaches along the coast around Kepa Kurl/Esperance are incredible. Each is unique and well worth a visit!

- **Tourist hot spots** - the most popular beaches are Wylie Bay, Lucky Bay, Hellfire Bay, Cape Le Grand Beach, and Twilight Beach
 - All are stunning and well signed, with easy access from bitumen roads
 - There's a bit of driving to get to these beaches though – you have to go out of Kepa Kurl/Esperance and around
 - Cape Le Grand Beach is about 60km or 45 minutes out of town, but once you are in the national park, each beach is within a few minutes of the other
 - There are walks between Lucky Bay and Thistle Cove that are definitely worth exploring
- **Lesser-known spots** - we prefer to head away from the crowds and visit places like Stokes National Park and Munghlinup Beach further up the coast to the west
 - Stokes National Park is home to an interesting inlet that is worth a look
 - You'll find some of the most incredible reef systems that you've ever seen – I'm still waiting to return for a dive and fish in some of these!

Located between Cape Le Grand and Cape Arid National Parks, the beaches around Duke of Orleans Bay are spectacular.

We love the eastern beaches around Duke of Orleans and Thomas River. Our most favourite beaches by far are around Duke of Orleans Caravan Park, with beaches only minutes away, and somewhere to visit regardless of which way the wind is blowing or what activities you're into.

We've spent 10 days at the caravan park exploring the place, and still left feeling like there was more to experience. We'd be happy to return many times over!

 *Heading out for a Kayak and dive.*

Thomas River has 29 kilometres of beach that you can drive on, and you can hop from bay to bay soaking up some of the most stunning parts of the country. There's also a heap of beaches in between these two locations that we haven't yet been to but are highly spoken about.

If you are really adventurous, you can head all the way east to Israelite Bay in Cape Arid National Park. It's one of the less attractive beaches in the area but is prized for its fishing and isolation.

 *The setting sun at Thomas River puts on a show.*

Let's face it, any beach is awesome and we've fallen in love with many over the years - as I'm sure you have and will. Kepa Kurl/Esperance is pretty special though, and the beaches are so good that I've been asked why people in WA travel overseas with this in their backyard.

Add this area to your bucket list!

So, do you agree? Does Kepa Kurl/Esperance have the best beaches in Australia?