



More than just exceptional wines, the Margaret River region of Western Australia offers activities to engage the whole family – even tweens and teens.

Adventures in Margaret River

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I'm lying flat on my belly in the sand of an ancient riverbed, 45 metres below the earth's surface. It's properly dark, except for the helmet lights worn by my family and our guide, Shae Small.

"This is the deepest part of the cave, so there's more carbon dioxide down here," Shae says. "From here, we'll have to belly-crawl – use your elbows or you'll never fit through."

She nimbly scurries along the riverbed, through a horizontal cave gap. My husband and three kids (9, 12 and 15) follow, and I'm alone, staring at the dark hole where they disappeared, wondering if it's the lack of oxygen or my mild claustrophobia that's making it hard to breathe.

We're in Western Australia's Margaret River, a three-hour drive from Perth. My husband and I are definitely keen to sample the area's renowned wines, but rather than dragging the kids around

countless vineyards while they play on their phones, we're seeking activities we can all enjoy. Luckily, Margaret River caters for all, including adventurous tweens and teens and their slightly apprehensive parents.

One thing I'm not apprehensive about as I arrive in wine country is my choice of accommodation. With kids of this age, hotel rooms can be tricky, so I've booked a beachfront house through booking company **Private Properties**. Called "Picquet", the house sits on the shores of Eagle Bay, and is high on glass-walled wow-factor. We arrive in the dark, and the kids explore at pace; by the time I catch up, all three are on the in-ground trampoline, laughing and flying through the night, illuminated by a full moon. Next, they discover the outdoor spa, and we all plunge into the chilly swimming pool before soaking in steamy bubbles.

Left: Cullen Wines offers kid-friendly fine dining

From top right: Crawling along the ancient river bed of Ngilgi Cave; Electric quad biking in the Boranup Karri Forest; Caves Road Collective and its spectacular fountain

Adventure beckons

We agree to start our trip with adventure caving at **Ngilgi Cave**, as none of us has tried anything like this before. Following a safety talk and “likelihood-of-panic” questioning, Shae leads us deep into the cavern, where we duck under the safety rail, clambering over boulders and through chasms, in total darkness.

Reaching the riverbed in the bottom of the cave, and with torches switched off, she explains the ancient Wardandi Aboriginal legend of the cave, where Ngilgi, the good spirit of the ocean, defeated the evil cave spirit, Wolgine.

From underground to very much above ground, our second activity is **Forest Adventures South West**, where zip-lines and rope obstacles await, including riding a bicycle across a wobbling bridge in the treetops and hand-peddling an inverted unicycle.

Set beneath a crop of shady tuart trees, the park has courses for different ages and confidence levels. I’m thankful for the foolproof carabiner system that makes it impossible to fall as my nine-year-old daughter fearlessly Tarzans across the forest to a giant rope spider web. I nervously realise that she’ll expect me to join her. Keeping in mind my mission of sharing experiences, I recheck my double-locking carabiner, and step off the platform.

The forest theme continues 15 minutes south of Margaret River township where we meet Gary Ingram of **Eco Adventures Margaret River** and his custom-designed quad bikes (four-wheel motorcycles) in the towering Boranup Karri Forest. With their speed limited to 25 kilometres per hour, the bikes have a low centre of gravity, preventing roll-overs. Being electric and almost silent means my pillion son and I easily hear the chattering of purple-crowned lorikeets and the screech of majestic red-tailed black cockatoos.





Above: Giant stingray at Hamelin Bay coming in for a pat

Right: Boardwalks through the main cavern of Ngilgi Cave showcase impressive stalactites

Traversing the trails, Gary points out the difference between the younger logging regrowth trees and a few that are 500 to 600 years old, some 60 metres tall. At Dingo Cave, we stand on a locked steel grate, staring into a vertical cave that may be 800,000 years old. With interactive iPads, we learn of fossilised animals that have been found in nearby caves, like the long-extinct Tasmanian tiger and marsupial lion.

From a lookout, Gary points out **Hamelin Bay**, famous for friendly giant stingrays, and we can't resist visiting. From the beach, we spot five of the smooth rays, each over one metre wide, patrolling the shallows for fish scraps offered by fishermen. After we roll up our jeans and wade in, a large ray inspects us, brushing against my husband's hand and eliciting squeals of delight from my daughter.





Above: Lakefront and beer-garden dining at Caves Road Collective

Right: The Private Properties house “Picquet” sits right on the beach at Eagle Bay

Dining without whining

Our food choices also needed to tick everyone’s boxes, and a pool table is the clincher for the kids at **Caves Road Collective**, while the adults are intrigued by the integrated brewery, winery and gin distillery. Seated by a roaring log fire, we start with a tasting paddle of Black Brewing Co. pale ales, enjoying the lake and giant fountain views. Menu highlights include a tempura whiting fillet taco, and pulled pork buns that the kids love.

Recognising that a visit to Margaret River is incomplete without a winery lunch, we treat ourselves at **Cullen Wines**. The winery’s restaurant has two “hats” in the Australian Good Food Guide, and with the option to dine in the garden, “kid-friendly” and “fine dining” actually go hand in hand here. Much of the produce is organically grown on the estate, and while the kids wait for teenage-sized pasta and tender braised lamb, they wander through the sensory garden. Meanwhile, the adults savour delicacies like smoked and seared kangaroo fillet with white beetroot puree and sorghum popcorn while sampling Cullen’s signature biodynamic wines.

Back at Ngilgi Cave, I’m staring at the narrow blackness where my family has disappeared. I can hear the kids chatting excitedly, sharing this uncomfortable and fascinating experience. It occurs to me that soon enough they’ll be back on their devices, and I decide to make the most of right now, knowing we will talk about this for years. Shelving my fears, I adjust my headtorch and wriggle into the darkness. *E*

FACT FILE

Getting there

Various airlines fly from Singapore to Perth in around five hours. Margaret River is a three- to four-hour drive south of Perth.

Where to stay

Browse the range of luxury self-contained accommodation for various budgets at privateproperties.com.au.

Out and about

- Quad biking: ecoadventuresmargaretriver.com
- Ngilgi Cave Adventure Tour: margaretriverattractions.com/caves/ngilgi-cave
- Forest Adventures South West: forestadventures.com.au
- Hamelin Bay stingrays and more: margaretriver.com

Food and wine

- Cullen Wines: cullenwines.com.au
- Caves Road Collective (kids eat free with a paying adult on Sundays): cavesroadcollective.com.au

