



Black rock, as pictured here, is as slippery as ice when wet.

Staying Safe Along the Coast This Summer

Esperance's coastline is as unpredictable as it is beautiful. Whatever you're planning on getting up to this summer, take care along our coastline by educating yourself about its dangers. Whether you're a first-time visitor or a lifelong local, we urge you to read on.

Swimming

It's always safest to swim between the flags. In Esperance, the local Surf Life Saving Club patrols Twilight Beach on Sundays and public holidays – outside of these times, it's up to you to find the most suitable place to swim. "Look at the conditions and make sure your capabilities match those conditions," Chris Brien, Esperance Coastal Safety Committee member and Duty Officer for Surf Life Saving WA's southeast region, says. "If you're not comfortable going out in the conditions that you're looking at, don't go out."

If you're unsure of how to get out of a rip, it's highly recommended you swim between the flags, or head somewhere safer to swim, like the beach enclosure at James Street or one of the lagoons along Great Ocean Drive. Remember, conditions change quickly and no beach is 100 per cent safe. Take note of the BEN sign when you arrive at the beach, and never enter the water unless you're certain the conditions are suitable for your swimming ability.

Fishing

The safest place to throw a line is with your feet in the sand or from the Esperance Jetty. Rock fishing is a popular but extremely dangerous pastime in Esperance. A black algae that grows exclusively on rocks along the WA southeast coast poses a huge threat to those who fish and walk on the rocks.

Black rock is as slippery as ice when wet and should be avoided at all costs. If you do choose to fish from the rocks, pick a spot where you can tie off on a rock bolt. Rope and life jackets can be loaned, free of charge at Tatey's Fishing World, Southern Sports & Tackle, Dempster Sporting, Esperance Diving & Fishing, Moby Marine, and Duke of Orleans Bay Caravan Park.

Too many lives have been lost off the rocks in Esperance – there is no reason to risk yours. "If you've got wet feet, even if the rock is dry, you could slip," Chris says. "Do not step foot on the black. Do not chase a fish onto the black, do not take a selfie on the black. It's just not worth it."

Driving

The beach is subject to road rules, just like any other road. A 60km/h speed limit applies to all beaches, but when people are about, slow right down. If you're lucky enough to be cruising along the beach, chances are you're on holidays or have the day off, so what's the rush? It's not just your life you're risking by speeding.

Make sure you know your driving abilities and what your vehicle is capable of. The sand may look hard at the entry point, but undulations and soft spots can come out of nowhere, so don't drive onto the beach unless you're certain you and your vehicle can handle a variety of conditions.

If you're heading out of town, be prepared with enough food, water, fuel and a first aid kit, and don't put yourself in dangerous situations. Mobile coverage is patchy and even if you are in range, it can take hours for help to arrive if you need it.

Boating

Before you head out, tell someone where you're going and when you'll be back. "That's hugely important," Chris says. "If you're overdue, we can kick off a search straight away and if we know roughly where you are, we can look for you there first, then go from there."

There are several checks to be made before you head out on the water. Allow time to make sure your boat is seaworthy, your motors are in working order, your batteries are charged, you've got enough fuel, and you've got all your safety equipment onboard. "It's basic stuff, but if you're rushing to get out there or you're distracted by getting the kids in the boat, things can get left behind," Chris says. "Have a checklist and work your way through it."

A lifejacket is not just imperative for everyone onboard, it's the law.

Coastal Walking

Esperance has some of the most pristine and scenic hiking trails in the world, so get out there and enjoy them! To avoid finding yourself in a dangerous situation, do a little research before you head off.

Even if you're told a walk is short or easy, be prepared. Opt for sturdy, enclosed shoes over sandals and thongs, and take plenty of sun protection – a hat, sunnies and sunscreen at an absolute minimum. No matter where you're headed, water is imperative and it's a good idea to throw some easy-to-carry sustenance in your backpack or pocket, like a muesli bar, banana or trail mix. Always keep an eye out for snakes. Venomous snakes don't restrict themselves to just the bush, and have been spotted along popular paths in town, like Castletown Quays.

Match your capabilities to the conditions, and tell someone where you're going and when you'll be back. Avoid walking on rocks, especially black rocks, even if the water looks calm. Conditions change quickly and dangerous waves can come out of nowhere, so never turn your back on the ocean. Don't do stupid things, or take selfies in dangerous places, just for Instagram. No amount of likes is worth your life.



Take notice of the BEN sign when you arrive at the beach, as it contains important information about what to do in an emergency.