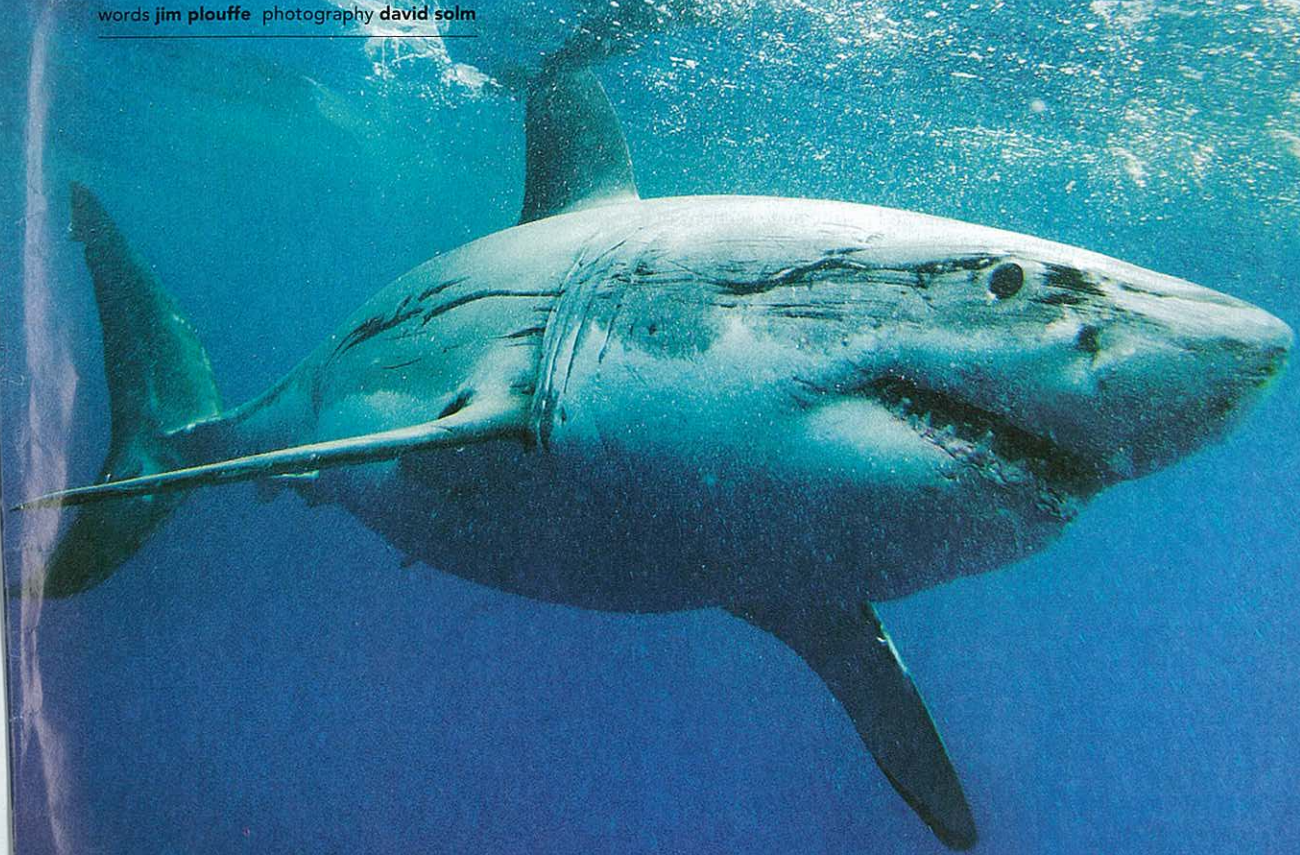


adventure down under

As Adelaide's Thunderbirds discovered, there's no better place for underwater fun than Port Lincoln

words jim plouffe photography david solm



SHARK!

It's the anticipation that kills you. For the entire two-and-a-half hour trip out to Neptune Island the TV aboard the *Calypso Star* plays shark docs on a loop. By the time you drop anchor in a sheltered cove overlooking a seal colony, you've seen great whites attack so many times that even glancing overboard gives you the heebie-jeebies. With a Rodney Fox Shark Expeditions boat having been moored nearby overnight, bets are that a shark will appear within half an hour. No one is ready when just 30 seconds later a 4.5-metre white pointer breaks the surface to gobble a tuna head. It's then that you wonder if the cage's 3cm-thick bars are strong enough. But when you descend into the cage and witness the grace of the sharks against a perfect blue canvas it's weirdly calming. As *Calypso Star* charter skipper Andrew Wright says, unlike at a zoo or safari park, you are the caged exhibit and the sharks simply swim by to take a look.

When the Adelaide Thunderbirds were scouting for a pre-season training camp location, they sought out a place that was both easy to get to and offered plenty of adventure for team-bonding sessions. The criteria for any active holiday, really.

The netballers chose Port Lincoln. The flight is quick (and now affordable) and among the activities on the menu is the chance to swim in a boom full of blue fin tuna. Nothing beats having a swarm of 20kg fish flashing past your head to make you bond in a hurry.

Well actually, one thing does.

How about having four great whites circling as you bob helplessly in a cage 250km off the South

Australian coast? Yes, there is no place quite like Port Lincoln to get the heart pumping – whether it's while watching as your tuna lunch swims by or as you later realise you might become lunch.

The shark nets protecting the swimming pool at the end of the jetty that juts from Port Lincoln's foreshore should give any swimmer pause before plunging into the waters around the town. So, if you want to get wet, it's best to book a tour to swim with tuna, frolic with a sea lion or get eyeballed by a great white.

After a swim in the crystal-clear water, enjoy a long, cool drink at the Marina Hotel, put your feet up at the ultra-modern Port Lincoln Hotel or relax at the Port Lincoln Tourist Park, one of the friendliest (and tidiest) caravan parks in the state.

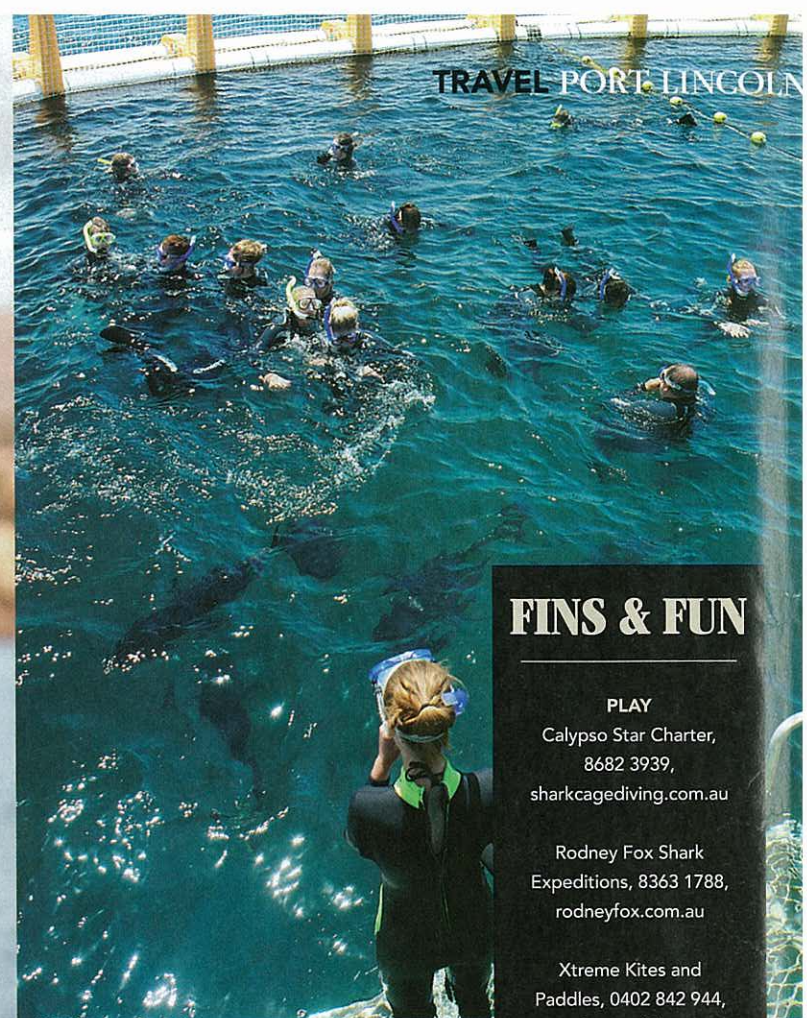


SURF Finding remote surf beaches and dealing with territorial local surfers can be challenging for visitors. A new operation, Xtreme Kites and Paddles, helps you find the best breaks and can also teach you how to kitesurf or paddleboard. Owners Scott Easton and his wife Jacqui are state champion kitesurfers and love to show off the peninsula's top spots. Or, for a leisurely surf on otherwise inaccessible private beaches, call David Doudle at Goin' Off Safaris and he'll throw in a spot of fishing, executive accommodation and great food.

TUNA It's hard to believe that diving into a pen full of tuna can be so much fun. Add 16 nervous Thunderbirds shrieking their heads off and the fun just multiplies. In fact, it's all just so enjoyable that there are now two swim-with-the-tuna operators competing for visitors to Port Lincoln. No matter which you pick, the Swim with the Tuna crew or Adventure Bay Charters, within 15 minutes of setting off from the marina you'll be on a pontoon staring into the murky depths, wondering if this was really a good idea. But plunge in and be amazed as the massive fish buzz past your facemask at up to 60km/h. If you're not keen on getting wet, the Swim with the Tuna pontoon offers an underwater viewing area as well.

CLOCKWISE from top left: The Thunderbirds swim with tuna; Thunderbird Bianca Giteau masters paddleboarding; Wilderness Wanders offers eco-tours of the Eyre Peninsula; sharks are a top draw; the white sandy beaches are stunning.

TRAVEL PORT LINCOLN



FINS & FUN

PLAY

Calypso Star Charter,
8682 3939,
sharkcagediving.com.au

Rodney Fox Shark
Expeditions, 8363 1788,
rodneyfox.com.au

Xtreme Kites and
Paddles, 0402 842 944,
xtremekitepaddle.com.au

Goin' Off Safaris,
8687 7480,
goinoffsafaris.com.au

Wilderness Wanders,
8684 5001, wilderness
wanders.com.au

Swim with the Tuna,
1300 008 862, swimwith
thetuna.com.au

Adventure Bay Charters,
0488 428 862, adventure
baycharters.com.au

STAY

Port Lincoln Hotel, 1300 766
100, portlincolnhotel.com.au

Marina Hotel, 8682 6141,
marinahotel.com.au

Port Lincoln Tourist Park,
8621 4444

MORE INFO

Port Lincoln Visitor Centre,
1300 788 378,
visitportlincoln.net

