

Shutter island A local plays didgeridoo with Uluru view; swimmers on Bondi Beach; whale shark moment. Credit: Eugene Tan



Bondi-based photographer Eugene Tan reveals the wild glory of his favourite dazzling vistas across northwest Australia

The Northern Territory and Western Australia offer intense colours, vast landscapes under vivid skies and ancient Indigenous culture. When you reach the Northern Territory, it's a sea of red. Arriving is like landing on Mars. I typically photograph the coast so this feels like a very special place to shoot. It's sparse, with an air of complete isolation. The region also has a strong connection to our First Nation people. This is place that's best seen at sunset. It's the desert air. Something magical happens in the golden hour, which produces amazing gradients of sky. Your number one stop has to be Uluru. My first sight of the enormous rock was truly unforgettable. The

experience felt almost spiritual. The Field of Light, where 50,000 glowing spheres illuminate the surrounding desert at dusk, is particularly memorable, as is supper served among nearby sand dunes. I arrived at sunset with a local playing the didgeridoo with Uluru in the distance. As we dined, he used a pointer to explain how his people read the stars and planets, recounting the stories they see in the sky. It's very atmospheric. I also headed north into Litchfield National Park where waterfalls pour off sandstone escarpments into clear pools surrounded by monsoon forest. My helicopter landed on the rocks among its gorges and cascades, right

next to Sandy Creek and Wangi Falls, where we jumped in for a swim. The chopper flew above Kakadu National Park, landing close to Ubirr to study cave paintings dating back thousands of years. It's a reminder that Australia is an old land where people have lived for an awfully long time. The rock art is in the middle of nowhere. It's astonishing that our Indigenous communities survived somewhere so remote. They're true wilderness people. I grew up in Western Australia and have photographed across the state. It's massive, as big as Europe, with remarkably varied landscapes. Broome, where the desert's red dirt meets the crystal clear Indian Ocean, is beloved by an eclectic pub crowd from pearl divers to backpackers, while phenomenal Ningaloo has its whale sharks, and El Questro in the Kimberley mixes mountains, rivers and yet more beautiful waterfalls. Western Australia also has Rottneest, quite possibly my favourite island in the world. In parts the water is so blue it resembles the Aegean. From my childhood home in Margaret River, whose excellent waves produce many professional surfers, I'd head north to dive off Rottneest at night. Right now I'm driving through the Southern Forest, photographing a coastline renowned for its water's dazzling hues. Around Denmark, where beautiful white beaches are backed by limestone cliffs, the sea is a fluorescent blue, its clarity incredible. And, wonderfully, there's hardly

anyone here. Yesterday I swam off Esperance's huge beach without another person in sight. It's the same at Lucky Bay – although you'll likely share the sand with kangaroos. Growing up, I spent a lot of time around Dirk Hartog Island and Shark Bay's red earth, crystal blue water and prolific seagrass. As a kid, I camped there and rode dirt bikes with my mates. I'd love to return now as a professional photographer. It's the colours – they would be fantastic to shoot from the air. Yet on most days over the last 25 years, it's Sydney's Bondi Beach – home to my family and my Aquabumps gallery – that I've photographed. Every sunrise I head over there to capture the brilliant light, diverse humanity – from clubbies to tourists to surfers – and busy activity. Few beaches on Earth have so much going on.

TAN'S TIPS

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

It's huge, so plan well. Jetstar's new route from Sydney to Margaret River Airport is a game-changer, flying directly into a favourite region. I'm staying with Heyscape: solar-powered, off-grid cabins springing up across rural land in Western Australia.

BONDI

Photograph at sunrise for the best colours, from South Bondi (across Icebergs Club & Swim School) with Ben Buckler in the foreground. Bondi's great in late February–March with smaller crowds, 22C seas and super clear water.

NORTHERN TERRITORY

Fly straight to Uluru and experience the sunset. For photographs, line up the dying sun with the huge rock from the Field of Light. Be careful not to wander off-track – this is sacred land.



Eugene Tan is an acclaimed surfing and ocean photographer. His fourth book, 25 Laps Around the Sun, documents a quarter century of capturing beaches worldwide. aquabumps.com

