



ESCAPE HOT SPOT

# One that got away



UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL WITH A GREAT WHITE OFF PORT LINCOLN IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

## SWIMMING WITH GREAT WHITE SHARKS WAS THE GREATEST EXPERIENCE HE'S NEVER HAD, WRITES BRAD CROUCH

"SHARK!" came the urgent warning cry, but it was too late. I was too far from the boat to get out of the water before it arrived. Besides, it was the reason I was in the water in the first place.

Welcome to the world of shark-cage diving, where — provided things go to plan — you lure massive great white sharks in with tuna bait and berley, then eyeball them while swimming in a cage.

In South Australia, where you can snorkel with giant cuttlefish, playful sea lions, regal dolphins and powerful tuna, swimming with great white sharks seems almost logical.

Almost. Great white sharks can grow to more than 5m, are finely tuned killing machines and have been known to take humans swimming in their domain.

They are not to be messed with. But the sheer fascination of these massive, majestic, misunderstood creatures made the option of a cage dive too hard to resist.

We met at 6.30am at Port Lincoln's Marina

Hotel car park, near where the Calypso Star was berthed for the trip. The 17m vessel is comfortable, with airconditioning, a full galley, TV, video, hot showers and three cabins for overnight trips.

The 2½-hour trip to the Neptune Islands was a pleasant morning's cruise. As we munched on seemingly endless snacks, the passengers introduced themselves. Two couples from Queensland, some people from WA, several British backpackers and most interestingly of all, Mark Hensel. Once a keen scuba diver, he has not been in the water since his father was killed by a shark in South Australian waters in the 1980s. His wife bought him the trip as a gift.

After riding the swells, the boat arrived at North Neptune Island. A large colony of seals on the rocks checked us out — their presence is one reason great white sharks regularly inhabit these waters.

The dive operators now recognise a host of



**Sunday Times**  
**16/11/2008**  
**Page: 3**  
**Escape**  
**Region: Perth**  
**Circulation: 328000**  
**Type: Capital City Daily**  
**Size: 586.78 sq.cms**  
**-----S**



regular shark visitors who seem to return each year — Scarface, Razorback, Christie, 737, Fury and others. A video on the trip out showed the sharks effortlessly swimming around the cage, dwarfing it, and occasionally having a snap at it.

Once anchored in a sheltered area, deckhand Matt Smith began throwing huge chunks of tuna overboard on ropes. Fish of all sorts soon began filling the waters around us while seabirds came in to fight for their share.

But no fins. Time passed, and Matt threw more tuna over as each chunk was eaten by the fishlife.

Lunch came and went, as did more coffees. All of us were anxiously scanning the waters, hoping for a fin — the bigger the better. Then Andrew suggested putting on our wetsuits, getting in the cage and waiting.

Time wore on. The show around us was entertaining, but my toes were turning numb, my fingers cramping.

Then came the startled cry. “Shark!”

In a nanosecond, a powerful killing machine emerged from the murkiness and lunged at a watermelon-sized piece of tuna just metres from my face. The gathered fish scattered, and I instantly went from a corner of the cage to cowering in the centre, as far from the viewing gaps as I could get.

Another predator followed, and with my heart pounding I watched as they tore apart the tuna. They were big sharks, maybe 3m, but as realisation set in so did disappointment. They were bronze whalers, not great whites, and after a quick munch they were gone.

The adrenalin surge was enough to keep me in the cage for another half-hour despite the cold, hoping a great white would make an appearance.

Alas, on this day no great whites showed. As far as fish stories go, this was one that got away.



## GO

**GETTING THERE: Options to get to Port Lincoln include flying Regional Express from Adelaide.**

**STAY: Port Lincoln has plenty of choices including the Port Lincoln Hotel and the Marina Hotel.**

**TOUR: A full-day shark cage dive trip costs \$375. If no sharks are sighted, there is the offer of another trip at half price. Trips of several days are also available.**

**Call 8682 3939 [www.sharkcagediving.com.au](http://www.sharkcagediving.com.au)**

