

The Rottnest re

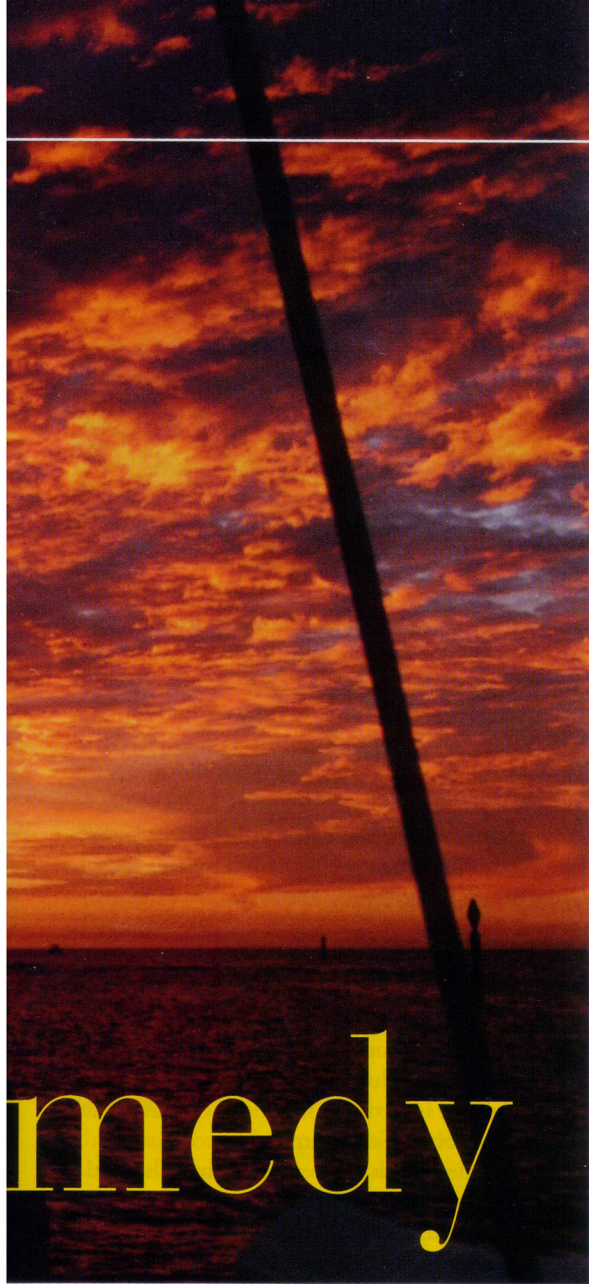
A night at Rottnest Island's Rocky Bay is the perfect antidote for any jetlag or city blues, says Denis Glennon.

Flying on a Friday night, somewhere over India, en route from Paris to Perth at the end of a long and tiring but successful business trip I think of Fremantle, the gateway to many great destinations in the Indian Ocean. The thought of its crystal-clear waters and warm climate (compared to the freezing temperatures of Europe) lifts my spirits and gladdens my heart. Despite a 2am landing, I know where I plan to be at sunset tomorrow – at Rocky Bay, Rottnest Island, 12nm off the WA coast, on our 14.9m ketch, Calypso V.

It is not yet 8am on Saturday as my wife and sailing mate, Una, casts off our docklines at Fremantle Sailing Club. The blue sky is cloudless, the temperature a pleasant 20°C. The 15kts SE wind is perfect, as we sail with it on the port quarter. Our course is for Phillip Rock – to try for two or three King George whiting which hopefully will feature as the main course for our onboard dinner this evening. No mainsail is needed. The large genoa and mizzen are full and drawing, and Calypso V is making six knots in calm waters, leaving the cares of the shore in the eddies of its wake. The glorious heat stirs the nerves under my skin, and apart from the chuckle of water along the hull and the occasional swish of a bow wave we are conscious only of the serenity and stillness of “sailing free”.

The antidote

To set sail at times like this always fills me with a surge of well-being. My private antidote to the world of business, or pure magic? Perhaps both.



medy



MAIN: Sunset at Rocky Bay.
TOP: Una relaxing on the deck of Calypso V as we sail to Rottneest Island.



LEFT: Una returning from snorkelling on the nearby reefs.

The aroma of freshly brewed coffee and croissants wafts from the galley. For the next hour and a half under autopilot, we do not tend to sheet or wheel, only experience the pleasure of the reflection of sunlight from the sparkling water. Three dolphins join us, complementing the ketch's performance with their own agile delight. It is time to furl the sails as we approach Phillip Rock to drop anchor at a carefully guarded patch of sand and weed – a habitat of the "King Geordies". Thank heavens for the accuracy of GPS. The clank of the anchor shank as it departs the bow roller does not intrude upon the tranquillity but rather blends with it. King George whiting are susceptible to fresh bait. Within 15 minutes we have a magnificent squid on board – the wings for bait, the rest for entrée this evening. No need to take more.

The sea is almost calm. The balmy southeasterly breeze provides near-perfect conditions for fishing. Una lands the first whiting, weighing about one kilogram and within 20 minutes another two are on board – sufficient.

Not a cloud in the sky. The mainland has faded into a far-off haze. The breeze is gentle and warming. Standing only in shorts I prepare the squid and the fish and breathe in the sun, silence and splendour of it all.

We still have five nautical miles to reach Rocky Bay and it is preferable to be at anchor before the "Fremantle Doctor" (sea breeze) arrives. Also it will be easier to set the crayfish pots in our favourite "holes" while the sea is calm.

Thomson Bay

Thomson Bay is already filling up with boats of all sizes and classes as we motor-sail, under mainsail only, through them. Those lucky enough to sail on Friday evening are having morning tea or a swim. Day visitors to the island are disembarking from the ferries. Already, I am in holiday mood even though it is less than nine hours since I landed at Perth airport.

Abeam of Bathurst Point lighthouse the turquoise colour of the ocean is brought to glistening life by the