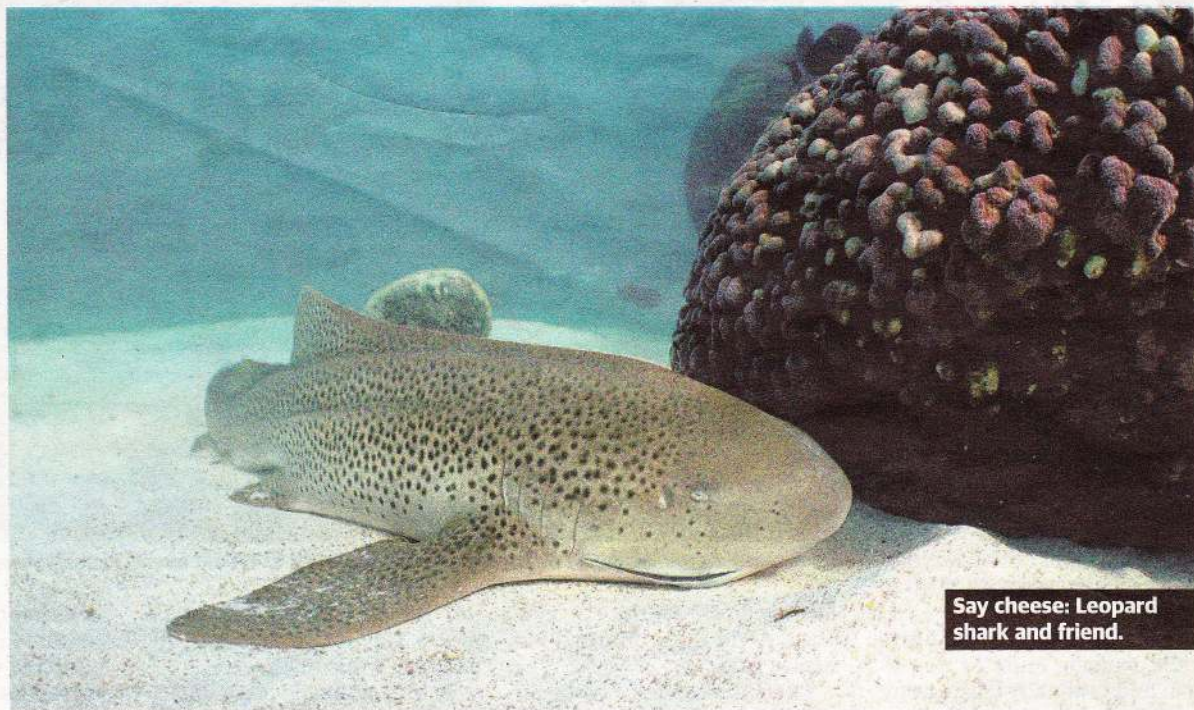


REEF WONDERS



Say cheese: Leopard shark and friend.

Ningaloo's charm worth smiling over

■ **Stephen Scourfield**
Travel Editor

A leopard shark lies on the sandy bottom in the placid waters inside Ningaloo Reef, apparently with a smile on its face.

And Luke Riley, from Sail Ningaloo's luxury catamaran Shore Thing, dives down to photograph it.

It is only an appropriately placed sucker fish that's giving the leopard shark that grin but the fish that the Australian Museum describes as a sluggish slow-swimmer, unaggressive and harmless might well have good reason to smile.

It lives on the longest fringing reef in the world — an area which the Australian Government, supported by the WA Government, last year nominated for World Heritage listing.

At the same time, it placed the Ningaloo coast on the National Heritage List.

The UNESCO World Heritage Centre is expected to announce in June whether the Ningaloo Coast will be added to the World Heritage list.

Better known for its annual visitation by whale sharks, which are by the reef now feeding on plankton

after a mass coral spawning, and for big mobs of manta rays, the reef has some 500 species of fish and 300 of coral.

And it is this reef that has drawn and keeps Mr Riley here, after almost four years involvement with marine monitoring programs in the Seychelles.

Even compared with the Seychelles, he says, Ningaloo Reef "is just amazing".

TRAVEL LIFTOUT
Inside today's Motoring liftout