

# Colour and movement

## THE CULTURAL TOURIST

DEBBIE MACKINNON

I love preparing to head off on a painting trip; new horizons beckon and there's joyful anticipation of unknown landscapes to explore. The travelling artist always packs another tube of paint and more brushes instead of extra shoes. Clothes must stay minimal to make space for more sketchbooks, and my favourite backpack accommodates my largest drawing pad.

I am a landscape painter and in the past year I have visited some wonderfully diverse, far-flung places. Walking is the best way to discover new landscapes, generally away from the madding crowd, to allow solitude and time to both look and think. In the west of England, the coastal footpaths of Devon and Cornwall led me along flower-filled clifftops, where I could paint secluded aqua-fringed bays backed by intensely green fields. Sitting and drawing by a sheltered dry stone wall, with a magnificent view out to sea, I suddenly became aware I wasn't alone. A cow was attempting to eat my watercolours box, which I had left open on top of the wall. I rescued it and carried on, with the cow quietly chewing nearby.

I have also spent a month painting on the Greek island of Kefalonia, a place of myth and history and with the most wonderfully clear water. Kefalonia and nearby Ithaca are reputed to be the home of Odysseus. Wandering was a daily delight, knowing the sun would hit the sea at a certain time to create thousands of tiny diamonds on the surface and that early evening would bring a vivid intensity to the blueness of the water. Oh, the challenge of how to match that blue in my painting and the pleasure of working in the shady courtyard of our rural shepherd's cottage, with the scents of thyme and lemons in the air.



A visit to Western Australia to explore the countryside and coastline around Yallingup and Margaret River showed me Australia in its most stunning colours: the complementary combination of orange rocks and deepest turquoise ocean, alongside the whitest sand. And the anticipation of lunch ahead at a nearby winery. Late last year I was in Thailand, on Koh Yao Noi, a world away from the nearby bustle of Phuket, where afternoon storms darkened the skies, to contrast with emerald seas, and little chains of rocky islands appeared over the hor-

Artist Debbie Mackinnon; one of her Koh Yao Noi sketches, above right



izon. I explored by longtail boat and the driver was happy to anchor so I could finish painting the towering cliffs of those rocky islands close up, looming above the boat.

All cool and beautiful, I spent a winter week on Bruny Island, off Tasmania's southeast coast. Arriving by ferry, I was welcomed with huge skies and rainbows. I walked along pristine beaches to draw and paint with just seabirds for company. Incredible clouds and magnificent skies, reflecting in the still water, were the challenges I faced with my paints. There is nothing quite as good as being in the flow, and the afternoon can speed by while you battle with your painting and the changing weather conditions. Wind is not the outdoor painter's friend. I have lost more than one palette blown into the water and I have ended up literally "wearing" a painting that blew back at me off the easel.

But whatever the weather, off I go again, undaunted, to find new challenges en plein air. My next adventure awaits in the mountains of Andalusia in southern Spain. Now, how many rolls of canvas can I fit in that suitcase?

Debbie Mackinnon's latest solo show, *Ocean Stories*, has just opened at Sydney Road Gallery in Seaforth and runs to September 3. More: [sydneyroadgallery.com](http://sydneyroadgallery.com); [debbiemackinnon.com](http://debbiemackinnon.com).

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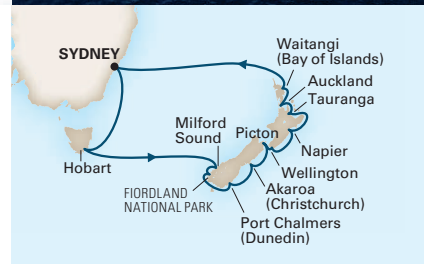
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