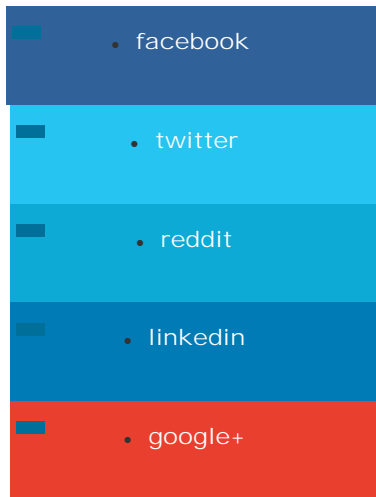


## Briefing

# Why Australia's Famous Beaches Are Losing Their Mojo

Marion Fulker Dec 23, 2014, 12:27 PM Bookmark





150 surfboard graveyard at Cottesloe Beach by artist Chris Anderson at the 10th Sculpture by the Sea. Paul Kane/Getty Images

I am a water baby and there is nothing I like better as the weather warms up than a trip to the beach. I admit to getting a bit panicky and out of sorts if I find myself in a landlocked situation for too long. Don't get me wrong, I love the bush and the occasional visit reminds me of just how beautiful it is. A few days communing with nature and taking in the eucalypt scent is about my limit. Forget camping or even glamping; after a day of swimming I like a good hot shower and a nice soft bed.

Fortunately for me, therefore, Australia is a big island and Perth, like my hometown of Sydney, is hugged by an expansive coast line that is lapped at by a vast ocean.

On the east coast lies the famous Bondi Beach, the place where I learnt to swim,

took my bronze medallion and was dunked many a time. There were of course also a few occasions when I ran panicked from the surf at the sound of the shark alarm.

Pretty much every Aussie has a favourite beach, be it Cottesloe or Scarborough here in the west; Bondi or Manly in Sydney and beach time plays an important role in the lives of many of us. Just ask the Prime Minister, Tony Abbott. He would no doubt wax lyrical about the health benefits of a daily constitutional in the Pacific Ocean however it is difficult not to get a mental picture that I would prefer not to have of him delivering that sermon in his budgie smugglers.

These beaches aren't just special to us locals, they are a focal point for visitors too. Yet they often underwhelm those that don't love them as we do. In our endeavours to keep our special seaside towns as museum pieces, we forget that they were constantly adapting before we locked them up in our hearts and minds.

Until 1902 it was illegal to swim in the surf during daylight hours in New South Wales and oh what a shock when the bikini arrived in the 1960s. So while we are prepared to let what we do, when we do it and what we wear at the beach evolve, it seems that we won't give their surrounds the same generosity.

This inability to allow renewal of our seaside towns is not solely an Australian trend however.

In 2011 I went to Blackpool in the north west of the UK for the first time. I was visiting as part of a study tour and we arrived in the middle of a bleakish day with a high wind and grey skies. One the beachside the wide promenade is

laced with gaudy amusement parlours and their flashing neon lights. On the other side are more 2 and 3 star motels and B&Bs than I care to mention. I could tell that my host was a bit embarrassed at its tawdriness when he quipped: “Blackpool is like a faded lady, best seen in a soft light.”

Blackpool is an extreme example of a seaside town that has lost its mojo. However, I believe the faded lady descriptor rings true of so many of Australia’s iconic beach-side suburbs too.

I often hear how genuinely surprised people are by the size of Bondi Beach. Yet if these fly by night tourists took the time to walk from Ben Buckler in the north to Icebergs in the south, they would change their tune; it’s a long, crowded walk. What they do comment on that I wholeheartedly agree with is the shabbiness of it.

This review from Trip Advisor by a Canadian tourist echoes many of the comments I have heard: “We’d heard all about Bondi Beach prior to our holiday to Australia, so thought we’d take a look, its famous for surfing but we didn’t see any surfers when we went there, the main beach was also quite small, the town itself is like an old English coastal town, buildings were quite old/bit run down, we expected something bigger/modern ... “

Some of Bondi Beach’s lack of grace and glamour is due to a shortage of care and attention to general maintenance in the public areas and a complicating factor is the number of transients in its community. However these are trivial issues when you are brave enough to acknowledge that Bondi hasn’t had a make-over

in many years. A face lift is long overdue to make it youthful again. I don't mean letting developers have their heads to build ugly skyscrapers but I do mean a sensible approach to the renewal of the area. Perhaps a bit of height and different architectural form would break the uniformity of it.

Cottesloe Beach has also suffered from this mean-spirited chastity belt. I recall taking a visiting architect on a drive along the coast from Scarborough to Fremantle. For once I remained quiet rather than providing a running commentary. When we came around the bend at Swanbourne heading south he turned to me and marvelled: "This reminds me of a 1950s New South Wales seaside town." To which I replied in a sunny tone: "No, this is the famous Cottesloe Beach."

Cities are dynamic and their distinctive neighbourhoods will live or die on their ability to adapt to change, be it climatic, demographic or economic. A recent report from the UK is scathing about a number of seaside towns that have become "dumping grounds" for the out of work and out of sorts and I saw this first hand in Blackpool.

So with that in mind as we head into summer, I say bring on the much needed makeovers to transform our beachside relics from faded ladies to beauties once again – it can't come soon enough.



**Marion Fulker spent her formative years at Bondi Beach and now paddles close to the shore at Port Beach near Fremantle. She is the CEO of think tank, the Committee for Perth and is an Adjunct Senior Research Fellow at The University of Western Australia.**

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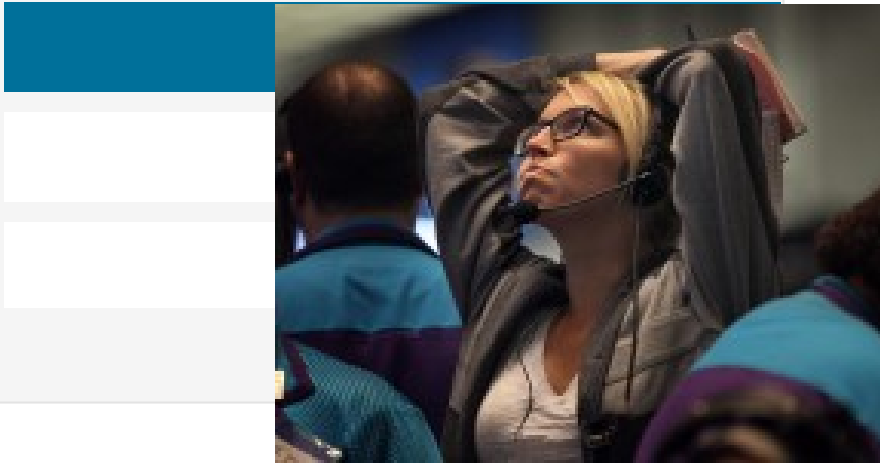
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S&P 500	2,028	-16.55	(-0.809%)
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S&P/ASX 200	5,410	-12.40	(-0.229%)

App Lets  
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