

# REMOTE TREASURES

A fortunate Dan Avila embarks on an extraordinary adventure, snorkelling and diving on the Rowley Shoals in the waters of the Kimberley.



You might not have heard of it, but the Rowley Shoals is one of the most pristine, untouched and diverse diving and snorkelling locations on the planet. And given its remote location, some 300 kilometres off the coast of Broome, Western Australia, it's set to remain that way.

You can't just 'go' there – and that's part of what makes it so special. It takes planning and booking (sometimes months in advance) to secure a coveted spot on a five- or seven-night cruise offered by The Great Escape Charter Company, and there are just 14 lucky guests sharing this unique aquatic adventure at the same time.

The company's Rowley Shoals experience does full justice to its storied reputation, with first views of colourful corals breaking the surface of the calm, turquoise water signalling our arrival after steaming overnight from Broome.

## A liveaboard adventure

*MV Great Escape* is the last word in small-vessel, luxury adventure cruising in Australia, and for the next week, this wonderful boat is our moving home.

The quality of this light, understated yet upscale vessel, with recently refreshed interiors and hotel-style cabins, is only surpassed by the onboard team, all highly experienced and inherently driven to give each guest a bespoke and memorable Rowley Shoals experience.

The days are busy, but never rushed, with the adventures geared toward snorkellers and scuba divers alike. In fact, with the most vibrant colours closer to the surface (colour actually dissipates with water depth), even novice snorkellers are guaranteed extraordinary experiences in coral gardens teeming with marine life. Seasoned divers, meanwhile, travel from around the globe to explore these incredible reefs.

Life in the waters of the Kimberley is dictated by tides. In some locations, tidal 'bottlenecks' have created coral channels that stretch for kilometres and a snorkel 'run' through these passages is a must-do.

Once deployed by tender at the head of the channel, we drift purposefully with the current and so begins a magnificent, effortless reef adventure through a pristine coral network.

On our return to the 'mothership' in the same tenders, there's time for a swim with a group of manta rays, happy to barrel roll and glide around us in a memorable display of aquatic perfection.

## Beneath the waters

The Rowley Shoals is a wonderland of marine life, some of it very large. Each morning, captains and dive masters Dan Barrett Leonard or Chris 'Trippy' Tucker outline the day's plans with no two locations quite the same.

Most of the dive sites have been charted by the cruise line owners themselves. Their intimate knowledge of the destination is reassuring and the diving unrivalled.

In clear waters, free of stingrays and a balmy 27 degrees, I explore towering reef systems resembling Atlantean ruins, with reef caves and columns that can be endlessly explored. Reef fish, enormous cod and fast-moving, powerful pelagics, such as dogtooth tuna, are plentiful.

I'm excited to see lots of sharks, from oceanic whitetips to silvertips and others, but my own scuba shark experience was easily trumped by my wife's snorkelling encounter, coming face-to-face with a very large tiger shark that casually swam away after making close eye contact – certainly enough to get her heart racing!

From adrenaline-charged night dives through bioluminescence illuminated by moonlight, to awe-inspiring connections with nature at its most beautiful, The Great Escape Rowley Shoals experience is invariably treasured by a very fortunate few. ♦

## Travel file

### Cruise

The Great Escape Charter Company's Rowley Shoals aquatic adventures are offered in October and November. They are often booked up well in advance, so early planning is essential. Diving and snorkelling equipment hire can be arranged. [greatescapecruises.com.au](http://greatescapecruises.com.au)



01 Diving the Rowley Shoals is extraordinary © Dan Avila 02 The coral gardens are teeming with marine life © Dan Avila 03 *MV Great Escape* accommodates 14 guests in style © Dan Avila



Scan this code with your mobile device to unlock a video Dan shot while in the Rowley Shoals. Even more inspiration to visit Western Australia.