



GREAT

There's no better way to explore the Kimberley's wild coastline than on board an exclusive, private catamaran, as Dan Avila discovers.

EXPECTATIONS

Privacy and complete personalisation – these are among the alluring attributes of a charter cruise aboard a luxurious motorised catamaran. And for the fortunate few, exclusive charter represents the ultimate bespoke way to explore the world's greatest waterways.

The Great Escape Charter Company is a pioneer in small vessel cruising along Western Australia's Kimberley coast, and exclusive charter is an increasingly significant component of its annual cruise calendar.

For small groups or families, a private exploration of Australia's wildest – and arguably most dramatic – coastline, with the knowledge and experience of the Great Escape team, is the closest thing to cruising perfection.



Kimberley calling

There's a reason why the Kimberley coast holds an almost legendary appeal. This is the epitome of untamed Australia, a pocket of the country where turquoise waters lap at pindan soil, with rocks so ancient that there are no body fossils to be found – their formation predates the life required for their existence.

Evidence of dinosaurs, however, abounds, both in the enormous preserved footprints discovered and in sightings of estuarine crocodiles, their current reptilian incarnate.

The dominant forces of nature in the Kimberley are the tides, and it's this factor alone that requires a deft hand to safely navigate the region's waterways. The MV *Great Escape* discovers this pull at the Horizontal Falls (the result of the highest tides in Australia) as well as at Montgomery Reef, which bursts from the ocean as the tide recedes, revealing all manner of rays, turtles and sharks.

For those with a passion for cultural discovery, the Kimberley is a treasure trove of ancient art, with breathtaking Bradshaw and Wandjina rock art dating back tens of thousands of years. Some of the region's most fascinating archaeological sites are those 'discovered' by the Tucker family.

Family spirit

The Tuckers have been guiding their *Great Escape* guests through the Kimberley, from Wyndham to Broome and out to Rowley Shoals, for almost 20 years. It's fair to say they know a thing or two about the region's most alluring (and hidden) features. But an exclusive charter with the brand goes above and beyond this vast knowledge.

It's the bespoke nature of these adventures – made possible by the small number of guests and the handpicked crew of seven – that make them so special, giving the 14 guests dedicated access to an onboard helicopter and three tenders for exploring the waterways. It's a hot ticket, with many travellers booking years in advance, with a significant charter waitlist already in place for 2022.

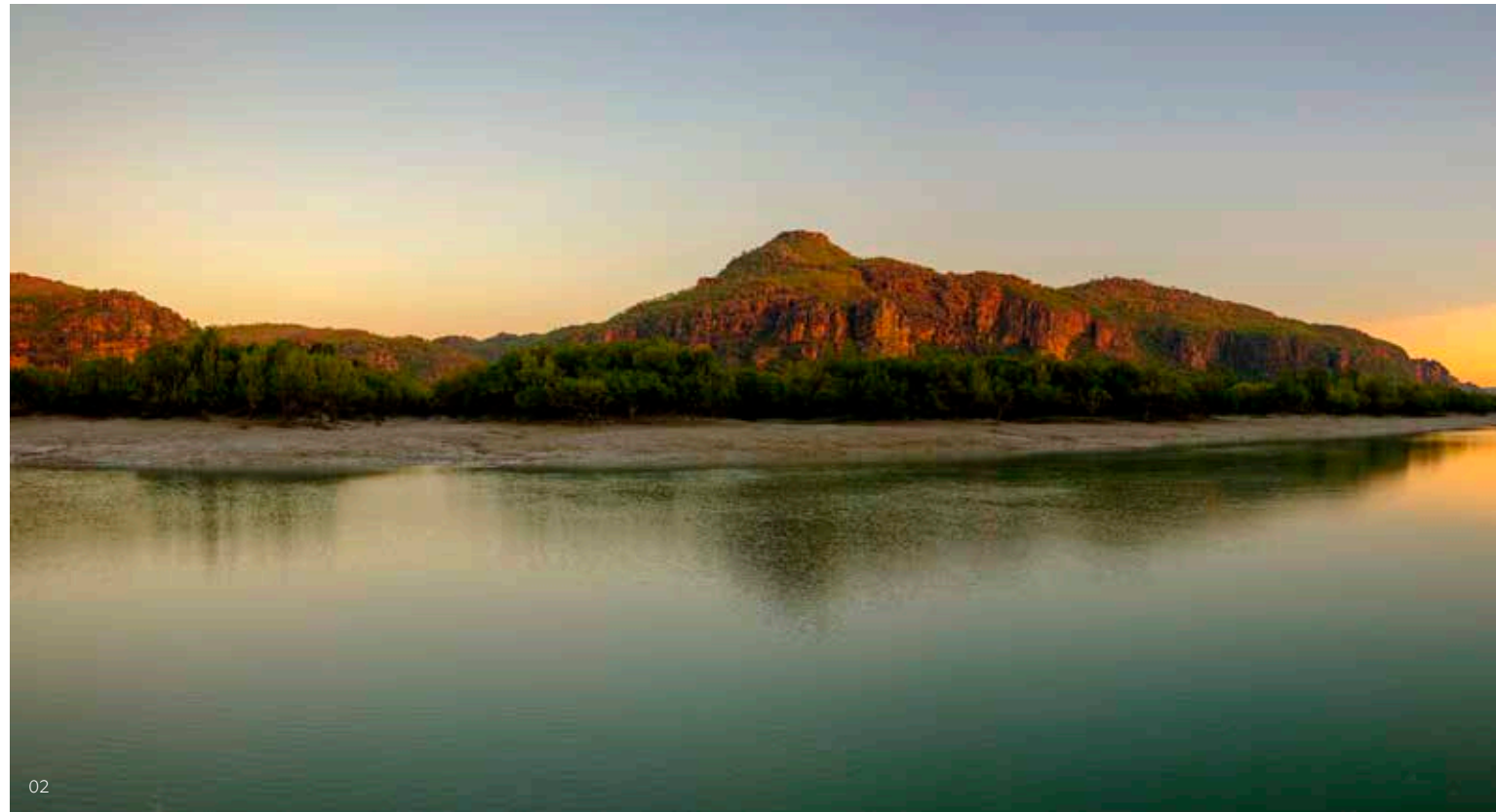
Built for the Kimberley

A catamaran purpose-built for the Kimberley, the MV *Great Escape's* shallow draft makes her perfect for gliding along rivers and over reefs that larger, deep-water vessels, could never navigate. The clever design makes her stable and effortlessly manoeuvrable, and her broad hull provides for spacious hotel-style living configurations that belie her small proportions.

It would be easy to while away a day on board, but there are plenty of distractions around you to get you off and exploring.

Each day in the Kimberley is different. Some mornings we rise early to enjoy a spot of sports fishing; other days we drift along mangrove-lined creeks in tenders, on the lookout for birds and crocs. The same boats drop us onto islands where we harvest oysters directly from the rocks – as the sun drops, we jump in the chopper and head out for clifftop drinks as the last of the day disappears.

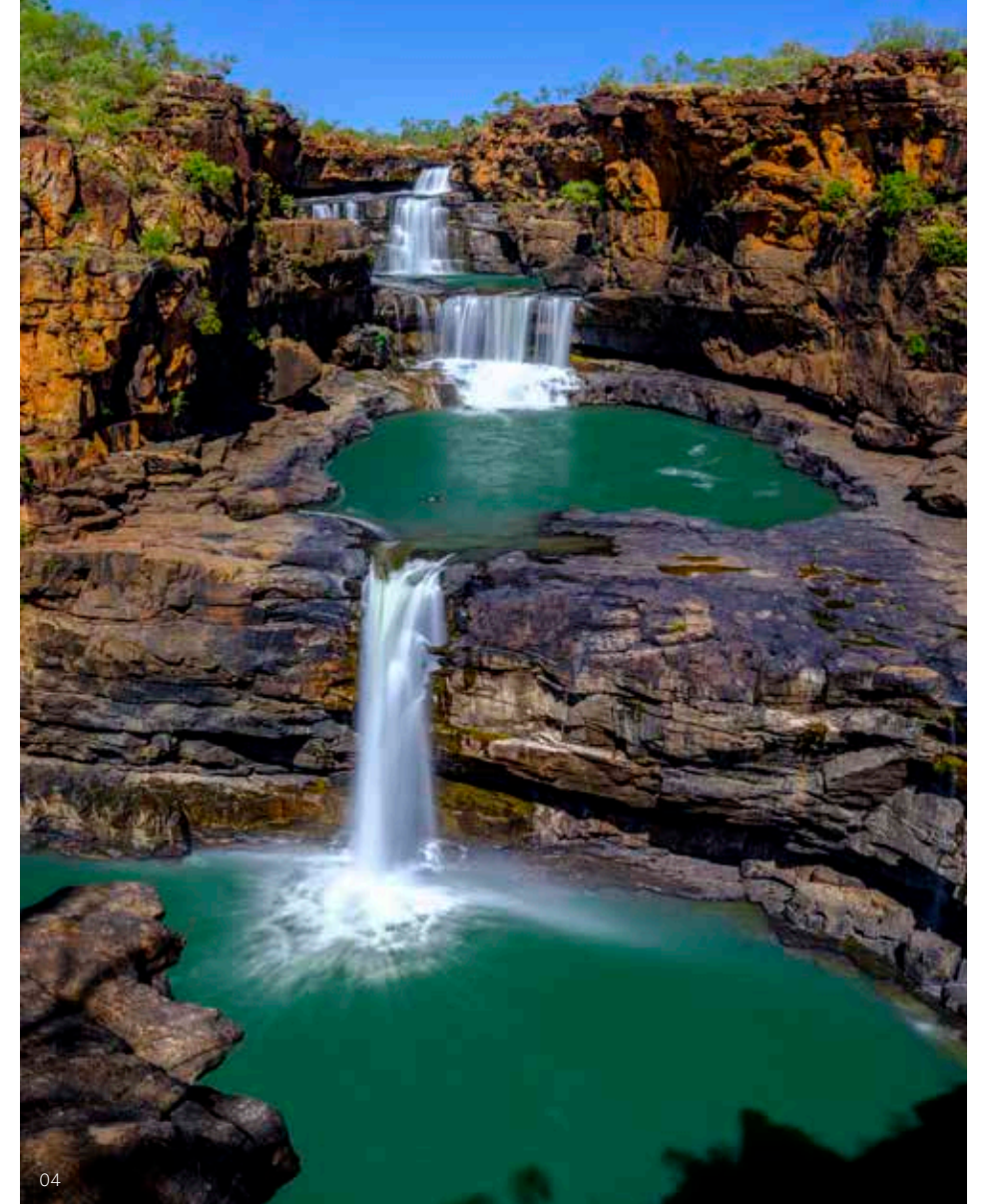
At moments like these, you'd be forgiven for thinking you're the only person on Earth – which fits the *Great Escape* exclusive charter ethos to a tee, really. ♦



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01 Montgomery Reef glimpsed from the air 02 Early morning in the Hunter River area 03 Fine food and wine star on any *Great Escape* tour 04 The multi-staged Mitchell Falls 05 King Cascades, where the ship pushes under the falls to offer passengers an outdoor 'shower'. All images © Dan Avila.

Travel file

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