



CLUB MARINE

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THE POWER AND THE PASSION

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Wild Kimberley

Western Australia's Kimberley region is a spectacular, ancient land that abounds with natural wonders.

By Dan Avila



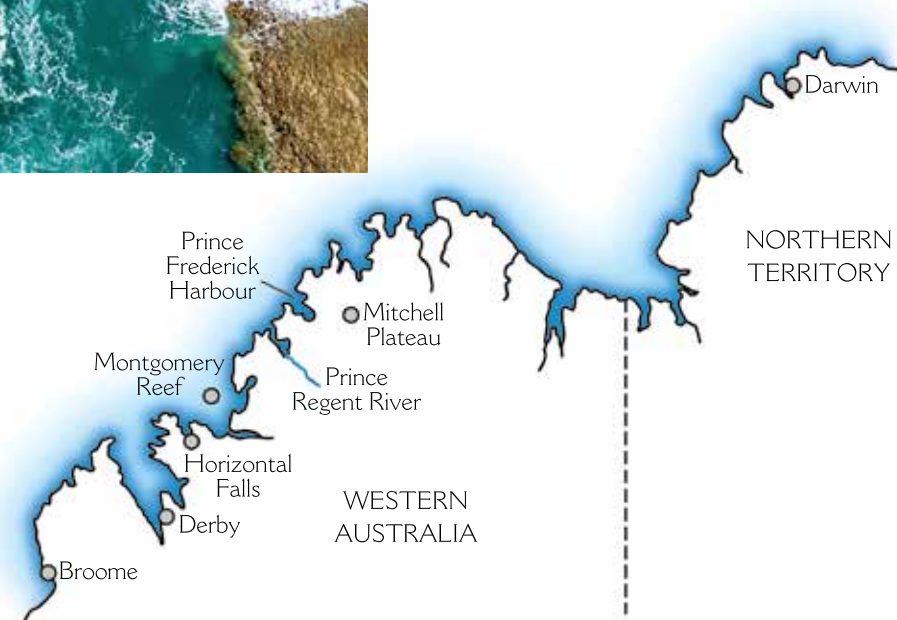
The Kimberley coast is as harsh and untamed as it is beautiful and remains broadly inaccessible to most. Exploring the Kimberley coast has been a life-long dream of mine and I recently spent a week living out this fantasy while cruising from Mitchell Plateau to Broome aboard *Great Escape*.

Cruising with only 11 guests and seven crew aboard The Great Escape Charter Company's 26m luxury catamaran is very different to a typical cruise ship experience – it's more like spending a week with a group of friends. The experience is a bespoke creation of the highly experienced and professional crew who have spent decades working and exploring this amazing part of the world.

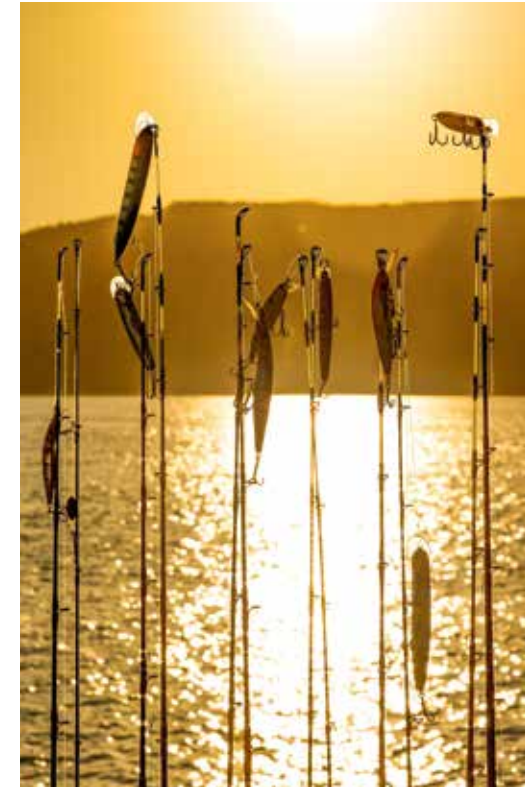
Cruising on a smaller vessel meant we could get far upriver and into the tight nooks and beautiful spots that larger ships cannot access. Getting further afield was a daily adventure in the helicopter that parked on the roof, or on one of the three tenders in tow.

Fishing the Kimberley usually means targeting barramundi. Our guides, Clive and Jeremy, had us bait-casting lures with precision and landing spectacular barra right past the noses of a few lazy saltwater crocodiles that are abundant in the calm waters. Freshly caught barra, mud crab and mangrove Jack were prepared daily by our chef.

Flying and hiking into waterfall-fed billabongs miles from anywhere for a midday swim was fantastic. Having a helicopter on hand added so much to the trip, and exploring the sites in the chopper (with the doors removed for a better view) was hard to beat.



P70/71 and above: Magnificent by boat and awe-inspiring from the air, the 400sq km Montgomery Reef rises from the water in low tide to reveal thousands of cascades and deep, navigable trenches begging to be explored.



Top: Flying up from Broome to Mitchell Plateau and then boarding a chopper to Prince Frederick Harbour – this was my first encounter with Great Escape, gleaming white in the middle of azure water, surrounded by iron-red cliffs.

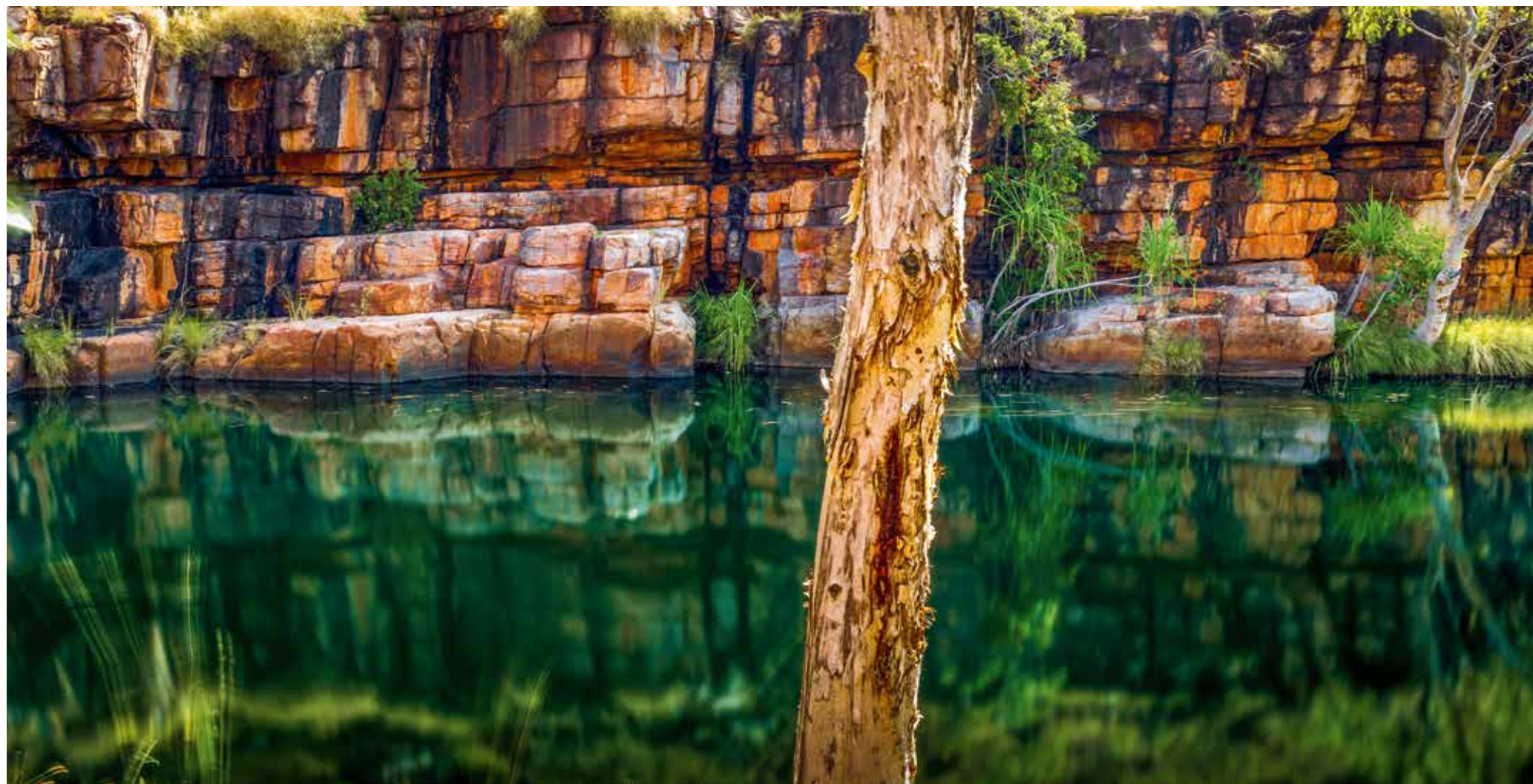
Above and right: Great Escape attracts interest from a range of local aquatic residents ...

Above: Winners are grinners – a nice trevally that was quickly served as ceviche and sashimi by our chef.

Right: The look of sheer jubilation when months of anticipation culminate in a metre-long barramundi. After landing this horse of a barra, it took Nick a few minutes to get the adrenalin level down to the point where his hands stopped shaking.



Above: A beautiful spot that shows off the cool colours of the Kimberley – stopping at a small sandy island for a quick swim in perfect weather.



Left and below: A melaleuca tree near Melaleuca Falls. After being flown in by Pete in the chopper and discovering some rock art, there was time for a swim under the waterfalls and a barbecue lunch in this gorgeous place.




One of the most iconic examples of the power of the Kimberley tides, the mighty Horizontal Falls are caused by the shift in tide that occurs faster than the water can move through the narrow passes. The result is a spectacular display of power which resembles a horizontal waterfall.



Montgomery Reef has to be seen to be believed. Located about 12nm off the central Kimberley coast, it covers 400sq km, making it Australia's largest inshore reef. It is completely dominated by extreme tidal flow. As the low tide sets in, the reef appears to rise up from the ocean, with the coral producing a gel-like emulsion to protect itself from the sun and elements. As the water recedes, the ocean rushes from the surface of the reef, resulting in deep channels. As the water pulls back with the tide, countless cascades flow off the reef. Flying at high altitude provided a view never to be forgotten.

The greatest demonstration of Kimberley tidal power is at Horizontal Falls. When the tide recedes, enormous bodies of water mound up, as the route back to the ocean is constrained to two narrow gaps between cliffs – resulting in the appearance of a horizontal waterfall.

After leaving Prince Regent River and heading offshore, we left the mothership to enjoy a barbecue on a sandy cay that only appears for a few hours at low tide. With a dinghy full of firewood, we watched as the island appeared out of the depths right in front of us. After dinner and a bonfire, we departed as the island was retaken by the incoming tide, erasing any trace that we were there.

Witnessing the perfectly preserved indigenous rock art for the first time is overwhelming. Crew member Liz is a qualified archaeologist and anthropologist specialising in Kimberley prehistory. We visited a number of these sites on the trip, helicoptering in to view what was created many thousands of years ago. While we stood quietly to absorb the ancient works in front of us, a large, lone dingo passed by and paused for a moment to observe us ... just another memorable moment from an unforgettable trip. 

Right: A sandy cay that only presents in low tide. After a dinner cooked on the coals next to a raging bonfire, we left as the rising tide removed all trace of our brief visit.





Ahoy Buccaneers

Broome residents Doug and Shelley Gould are parents of five and it was while searching for affordable, family-friendly sailing adventures in the Kimberley that the idea for Ahoy Buccaneers was born.

"We wouldn't consider a trip through the Kimberley without our kids, but the available options weren't affordable," says Doug. "We figured that by maintaining a low crew-to-guest ratio and not attempting the five-star option we could offer a really great, affordable Kimberley experience – so we bought a charter boat and created a sailing experience that could be enjoyed by the young at heart of all ages.

"Nature provides the breathtaking scenery and we match it with good times, good company, buckets of fun and great food. We endeavour to create lifelong memories for our guests, all focused on activities and excursions that complement the wilderness, wildlife, culture and heritage of the places we visit."

Their business, Ahoy Buccaneers, offers affordable adventures in Australia's North West

aboard the 80ft rigged cruiser *MV Oceanic*, which can motor or sail to hidden locations larger vessels can't reach. The crew take guests to secret fishing and swimming spots, remote beaches, and to view stunning examples of indigenous art. They can enjoy fishing, swimming, mud crabbing, collecting oysters, or just relaxing aboard in the spa while taking in a breathtaking Kimberley sunset.

The accommodation options include double cabins with en suite, cabins with shared bathrooms, or a more adventurous option of sleeping in a swag under the stars. The meals are prepared by experienced chefs and include freshly caught seafood that's barbecued on the deck.

Ahoy Buccaneers offers a range of cruises, including a seven-day experience to the untouched wilderness of the Buccaneer Archipelago, a pristine paradise of azure waters, rainforests, plunging cliffs, waterfalls, freshwater swimming holes and colourful reefs teeming with fish.

Those wanting to join a longer voyage can do so with the 13-day Bonaparte and Buccaneer Archipelago cruise, or the 13-day Broome to Wyndham cruise during the late wet season. It takes in the Bonaparte and Buccaneer Archipelagos and includes visits to the Horizontal Falls, Montgomery Reef, Kings Cascades, Bigge Island (with stunning Aboriginal art), Price Regent, Mitchell and Berkley rivers and the remains of Truscott Airbase.

Club Marine members who book a holiday with Ahoy Buccaneers can add a complimentary Cape Leveque Mail Run day trip to their cruise.

For conditions and more information, go to: AhoyBuccaneers.com.au.