

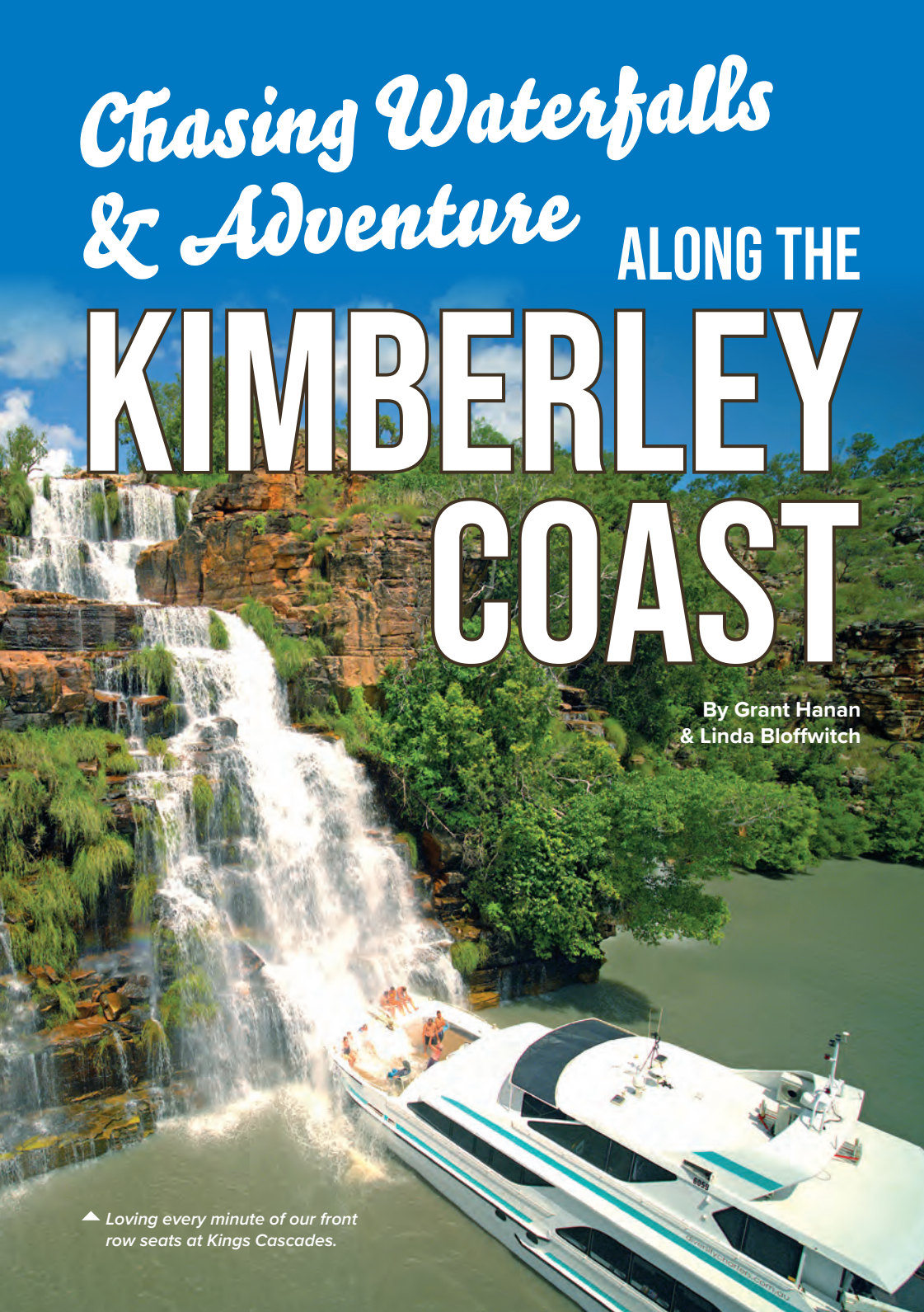
# Chasing Waterfalls & Adventure

ALONG THE

# KIMBERLEY COAST

By Grant Hanan  
& Linda Bloffwitch

▲ *Loving every minute of our front row seats at Kings Cascades.*



**Along the spectacular coastline between Broome and Wyndham towering gorges, breathtaking waterfalls, ancient art sites and some of the best fishing in the country awaits.**

**Grant and Linda couldn't resist experiencing all of this, plus more, on an adventure cruise with Diversity Charters.**

**A**s die-hard Kimberley visitors for a very long time, its natural beauty and remoteness continues to draw us back time and time again. So much so, we liken it to be our second home these days. And as 4W drivers, we've ticked off many of the usual big-ticket items that draw others like us to the region, while we've also squeezed in some of those hard-to-reach locations by taking to the skies. But if there was one thing tucked into the back of our minds we longed to make reality one day, it was cruising along the Kimberley coast. With its thousand-plus kilometres of coastline and hundreds of islands dotted offshore between Broome and Kununurra, there'd be no shortage of things to experience and explore. By taking to the water, it would provide another perspective to the region we love, and the only way to truly experience more of her secrets. With an upcoming milestone birthday, the timing was right, and what an unforgettable celebration it would be.



With a little research, we soon learnt there's no shortage of cruise operators in the Kimberley, so we put some criteria together that would help us select an operator. First and foremost, we wanted to maximise our time on the water and looked for the longest cruise duration possible. We found cruises generally varied between 6-14 days on average, and those longer durations travelled from Broome to Wyndham or Darwin, or in reverse. We also learnt the best of the best attractions accessible from a Kimberley cruise are located between Broome and Wyndham. That narrowed things down and we started by looking for an operator who did this leg, discounting any others that continued to Darwin.

With that bit sorted, there was still a lot more we needed to tick off before making a decision. Choosing a small group operator meant the boat wouldn't be crowded and could get into places where larger boats couldn't. These two factors were important, as we didn't want to fight for space on a

*Spectacular King George Falls was in full flow during our cruise.*



tender or miss out on getting close to attractions due to a boat's size and guest capacity. Other criteria included having a cabin with our own ensuite. While this isn't a biggie for some people, having our own was a big-ticket item on our list. Lastly, timing was the key. As our cruise coincided with an early April birthday, we would chase early season waterfalls and look for something that would work in with our dates.

To be honest, we weren't sure whether we'd find a cruise that could accommodate everything we had on our list within our budget, but we needed to start somewhere. After more research, we were pleasantly surprised we found an operator that looked the goods, budget included. Diversity Charters offers a 14 day Kimberley Dream cruise from Broome to Wyndham or in reverse, taking a maximum of 12 passengers, and with a couple of cabins having their own ensuite. With all meals, fishing and other activities included, we were over the moon it ticked all our boxes, so the deal was done.



After organising our cruise to coincide with another trip we'd planned along the Gibb River Road afterwards, we left our setup in Kununurra and flew to Broome a couple of days before Diversity departed. As alcohol on the boat is either BYO or can be arranged on your behalf by the crew, we took some time in Broome to shop and stock up for the trip. There aren't any shops along the way to restock if you run out, so very careful planning here is the key.

By the time departure day arrived, we felt like kids bursting with excitement to open presents on Christmas morning. Our cruise began at Broome's picturesque Gantheaume Point, where all guests were met by smiling Diversity crew and whisked by tenders from beach to boat. Welcome drinks awaited as we climbed aboard, and where we met our skipper, Cal Angove, and the five crew. Before departing Broome, Cal indicated there was some flexibility with the cruise itinerary and asked whether there were any specific places we were hoping



*Our skipper, Cal at the wheel. ▲*

to visit. When I piped up that I'd love to visit Sheep Island if possible, he answered, "Yep, no worries", without so much as blinking an eye. His positive response took me completely by surprise and made me feel like I was opening those Christmas presents again. With introductions and the safety briefing completed, we steamed out of Roebuck Bay with a sundowner in hand and soaked up sensational views of the setting sun. Now this is the Kimberley life!

▼ *Diversity is very much at home in the Kimberley waters.*



It didn't take us long to pick up Cal's relaxed, approachable and easygoing nature is what he's all about, and his passion for the Kimberley runs deep. "The remoteness of the Kimberley coastline is like nowhere else ..." he said during one of our many fishing sessions, "... and I still pinch myself every day about how lucky I am to show people how beautiful it is". We were never going to disagree.

When the tides up here are the biggest in Australia and the difference between high and low watermarks can be as much as 12 metres, navigating the coast can be treacherous to say the least. Yet Cal has been traversing these waters for more than a decade. He's been a skipper on both private yachts and charter boats since he was 22, before taking the plunge to buy his own boat four years ago. It's an incredible story really given he's just hit thirty.

Getting into the groove of life on Diversity as a guest was very easy. At just over 20 metres in length, Diversity is a sleek and well-appointed twin hull catamaran, and we were never going to be cramped for space even if the boat was full. As it turned out,

we shared our early season cruise with six other passengers. We quickly settled into our luxurious cabin on the flybridge which had ample space, adjustable air conditioning and an ensuite. Diversity has a no-shoe policy while on board, and we were all encouraged to make ourselves feel at home. I don't think any of us found that difficult at all. Diversity has three living areas, so we could take our pick where to admire the views, chat with others, read a book, or simply relax. The bow was the place to be for sundowners and snacks while watching rainbow-coloured sunsets, and gourmet-style main meals and desserts prepared by our chef, Nick, were generally served outside on the rear deck.

Speaking of food, Nick, was an absolute master in the kitchen and ensured the troops never went hungry. Somehow that was never going to happen when he consistently dished up delicious gourmet-style meals and snacks that rivalled five-star restaurants. On the off chance you still had an ounce of spare room to fill between meals, it was always easy enough to help yourself to barista style coffee

▼ *Watching Montgomery Reef appear on a dropping tide.*



*Diversity's three tenders returning from a fun-filled adrenaline-pumping ride through the Horizontal Falls.*



or a selection of teas, or let loose on the biscuit jar. Diversity's excellent hospitality didn't simply stop at our stomachs, but also extended to the cabins which were attended to daily. Ris and Cora were both a hostess with the mostest, working tirelessly during the cruise to ensure guests had the best time possible, leaving no stone unturned with their impeccable attention to detail.

Our first introduction to the tumultuous Kimberley tides was a wild ride through the spectacular Horizontal Falls. This was one destination we'd visited a decade ago for another milestone birthday, whizzing through the falls back then in a 20+ seat fast boat. This time was going to be different as we'd be on one of Diversity's tenders which is significantly smaller. Being a little apprehensive at first, I'm not sure why we had any reservations because we had more fun in the tender than we did all those years ago. Perhaps it had something to do with the number of times we zoomed up and back through the swirling waters of both gorges as I lost count after six.

Besides the Horizontal Falls, Montgomery Reef is a unique and special destination we had looked forward to experiencing having grown up watching the exploits of Kimberley icon, Malcolm Douglas. On a dropping tide, we all jumped into the tenders to witness the reef pop up in the middle of the ocean, creating waterfalls upwards of three metres. Seeing this amazing phenomenon just a short distance in front of us was something we won't forget in a hurry. Next to us just feet away was an abundance of turtles, sharks and golden trevally, while birds of all sorts on top of the reef were dished up a fish sushi train as many were caught in the shallows.

It's no secret the Kimberley coast is teeming with marine life and the fishing is simply off the charts. We can't say we've ever been diehard anglers, but we knew we had a serious problem if we couldn't catch at least one. With plenty of fishing action daily, we were thankful our expectations were well exceeded, and fresh fish made it to the menu on a few occasions. Coral trout and fingermark seemed to be the crowd

favourites, but seriously, you can't come all this way without catching a barra. But as we found out, that's not always easy. Towards the end of the trip we started to get worried our barra drought would continue, but as they say, good things come to those that wait. While fishing off a rock ledge up the Berkeley River, the stars aligned, and lady luck was on my side. After feeling a couple of sharp tugs and the rod bending awkwardly, I sprang into action with some words of encouragement by first mate, Brent, and deckhand, Jake. A few minutes later and it was all over. I think I had to pinch myself I'd actually reeled in an 87cm beauty. Not bad for a first ever barra catch, and coincidentally on my birthday too. What a present! But with the Kimberley such a large place, there's plenty more to catch than just fish. One afternoon we went ashore to prise oysters the size of a fist off rocks, which were later prepared by Nick and devoured by all with a sundowner on Diversity's bow. Another day, we dropped pots by some mangroves and later enjoyed mouth-watering chilli mud crabs again prepped by Nick that night. This was seriously good tucker.



*Not bad for a first-time barra catch. ▲*

But it's water that truly makes the Kimberley so special and cruising early in the season will have you visit sights that completely blow your socks off when there's so much water around. We saw cascading waterfalls everywhere we went, with well-known landmarks like Kings Cascades and King George Falls well and truly pumping. The roar of the water was deafening at both places, which got significantly louder the closer Cal edged Diversity towards the falls. Inching his way forward, he soon had Diversity's bow under the falls giving all those congregated up front a refreshing pummelling shower. This is where cruising with a smaller boat that can get in real close to these types of attractions has its distinct advantages.

While Cal anchored close to King George Falls for a couple of hours, we took to the tenders and headed for land to hike to the top of the falls. While the climb might be steep and gave our legs a solid workout, the swimming above the falls and the view from atop was worth every aching muscle. Our itinerary included a swim every day during the



◀ *Ready to reap the rewards of our oyster hunt.*



▲ *A morning shower of a different kind.*

cruise; if it wasn't in some spectacular gorge or next to some crystal-clear falls, a beach swim or two was on the cards when deemed safe by our croc spotter. For another completely unique and amazing experience, we swam in the middle of the ocean when a sandy cay popped up during low tide and even had a kick of the footy.

Living up to Diversity's motto, 'Adventure by day, luxury by night', our days were jam-packed with activities that usually started around 7am with either a cooked or continental breakfast. But when the sun starts to peak a little after five in these

parts, we'd all be up early and head out on to the bow to take in those spectacular sunrises. Besides fishing and swimming during the day, there were plenty of other highlights. With much of the Kimberley a canvas for indigenous art, we visited numerous spectacular art sites, and also hiked to the wreck of a crashed DC3 plane at Vansittart Bay.

If truth be told, there were just so many highlights of the cruise. Cal was true to his word and anchored Diversity

off Sheep Island, so we could take the tenders to shore for a visit. This island's prominent history dates back to the late 1880s when an attempt was made to establish a settlement which failed before it got going. The oppressive heat and humid weather of a wet season arrival would have made establishing camp a nightmare. Then there's the island's hilly terrain that's covered in large rocks, so conditions are far from suitable for grazing sheep. Topping things off, massive tides played havoc while settlers unloaded the boats, and the tides swallowed up a great deal of their

▼ *Fun under the sun at one of the islands we visited.*







▲ Ready to take a dip in another secluded pool.

▼ We found waterfalls everywhere we went.



stores. Suffice to say, the settlement was pretty well abandoned within that first year and today there's only a few bits and pieces that remain including a couple of lonely graves. Our visit to the island turned out to be bittersweet ... we were grateful to have got there, but on the flipside our visit was tinged with sadness knowing we were standing where many people's dreams had been shattered.

As the days passed and Diversity steamed closer towards Wyndham, I was dreading our Kimberley cruise coming to an end. I was far from ready to leave and could happily have stowed away for the return journey to Broome and do it all again. Before disembarking in Wyndham and hopping on a waiting bus to take all guests to Kununurra, it's not until reflecting upon our adventure that we soon appreciated the magnitude of it all. Not only had we travelled more than 1,000 kilometres since leaving Broome two weeks earlier, but we visited attractions we'd never heard of,

▼ Grant catching his first coral trout.



experienced adventure we'd only dreamed of, and came away with lasting memories and newly made friends.

If you've ever wanted to experience another side of the Kimberley that you otherwise couldn't get to by 4WD, then a cruise is the way to go. Think of it as an adult's version of fun when it provides everything ... it's the journey, the destination, and the experience, all wrapped up in one. Cal and his young energetic crew are a well-oiled machine, and he runs a tight ship to ensure guests leave with unforgettable memories and experience that trip of a lifetime. There's no disputing they well and truly hit that mark.

## INFORMATION BAY

For more information about Grant and Linda's Kimberley cruise and other cruises offered by Diversity, check out the Diversity Charters website at: <https://diversitycharters.com.au>

▲ *Rainbow-coloured sunsets were the norm during our cruise.*

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