



CRUISE
SPECIAL
2011



CRUISE: MV Orion,
10-night luxury cruise

WHERE: The Kimberley,
departing Darwin/Broome

CALL OF THE WILD

For the world-weary, there may be no better antidote than an escape by luxury vessel to the Kimberley region, where you'll experience some of the most remote and beautiful wilderness in Australia.

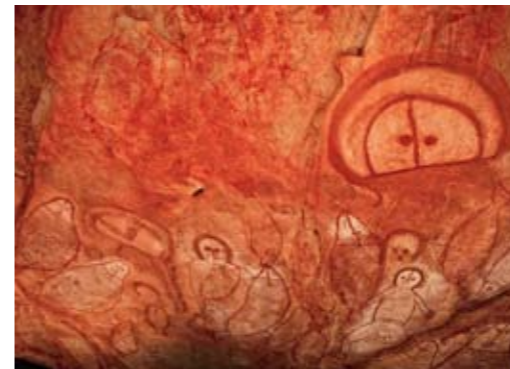
Words by **Josephine Brouard**

It's not often that one's fantasies match reality, but that's what happened on day four of our cruising holiday to Australia's Top End. For one blissful, shimmering, golden moment, time stopped and everything – light, temperature, and panoramic vistas – conspired to replenish a soul sick of city life and starved for natural wonder.

We had docked in Koolama Bay on Australia's northwest coast the night before, and alighted one of MV Orion's many trusty inflatable motorised Zodiac vessels the following afternoon for a three-hour cruise up the King George River en route to King George Falls.

As we chugged mellifluously along the river, surrounded by cliffs of rugged pink sandstone, both water and sky were brilliant blue, the warm sunshine offset by a gentle, refreshing breeze. Guides pointed to eagles soaring in the sky and osprey nests perched high on cliff tops, while a choir of cameras clicked and whirred.

I surrendered, speechless, to sensations of subtle, trembling pleasure as we approached the falls, nudging our posse of Zodiacs as close to the spray as we could



get. Water cascaded over the cliff as we bobbed in frothing foam whipped up by the weight of a torrent unleashed in lush, spectacular style.

FLYING HIGH

What a contrast to the day before when I had boarded a small airplane for an aerial sortie over the Bungle Bungles. I typically don't travel well, and this was no exception. Ten minutes into the flight, the cabin rocking wildly in midday heat, I closed my eyes, and prayed for touchdown. The remainder of my party, meanwhile, oohed and aahed in raptures at the wonders of nature below.

Lake Argyle, resplendently full after a generous wet season, shimmered below us magnificently, but I could barely take it in; similarly, despite the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to view the famous beehive grid that is the Bungle Bungles, I felt too unwell to open my eyes for more than brief glimpses.

BEAUTY OF THE BUSH

Fortunately, in the ensuing days, our daily forays into Australia's great wilderness – a seemingly endless canvas of sandstone pink, dazzling blue and lush verdancy – inspired many of us travellers to quote bush poetry. Who wouldn't feel moved to "love a sunburnt country" when surrounded by undulating outcrops of ochre offset by aquamarine and sapphire water and scribbles of cloud wafting across an intense blue sky?

Each day of our luxury cruise was an adventure as we set out from Darwin to Broome by way of 10

different overnight stops in remote bays south of the Timor Sea. One day we'd visit Jar Island to witness rock sketches that pre-date Aboriginal settlement, on another we'd hike to caves where Wandjina rock art depicts fish, dugongs and crocodiles and dates back about 8000 years. On each occasion, our guides' understanding and appreciation of the region greatly enriched the experience.

Aboriginals and crocodiles: these are the hardy inhabitants of The Kimberley, a sprawling terrain twice the area of Victoria with a total human population of less than 100,000. Far more numerous are the crocodiles with their pale green hooded orbs flicking continuously like camera shutters as they dip languidly below the water's surface, reappearing seconds later with corrugated gullets in menacing Vs as they gulp down their catch of the day. Swimming here is strictly for the suicidal, but thanks to MV Orion crew, we are escorted to crocodile-free lagoons where we can splash under waterfalls or doze on baking rocks.

It's all relentlessly relaxing, making it a holiday I'm unlikely to forget, and worth every cent of the \$22,000 we spend for the twin-share 11 days and 10 nights [with everything inclusive, except alcohol and special excursions].

With glamorous helicopter flights to mountain-top pools, fascinating natural science talks by various boffins on board, five-star cuisine around the clock and deluxe customer service every step of the way, I'm thinking of a cruise to Antarctica or the Russian Far East next.

SUNBURNT COUNTRY
Opposite page:
Beneath the King
George Falls
Clockwise from
top left: Aboriginal
rock art; the Bungle
Bungles; Horizontal
Falls – another
highlight of the cruise.

Travel Details

Orion Expedition Cruises'
10-night Kimberley
Expedition cruise
starts at \$9100 per
person ex Darwin. Visit
orionexpeditions.com



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