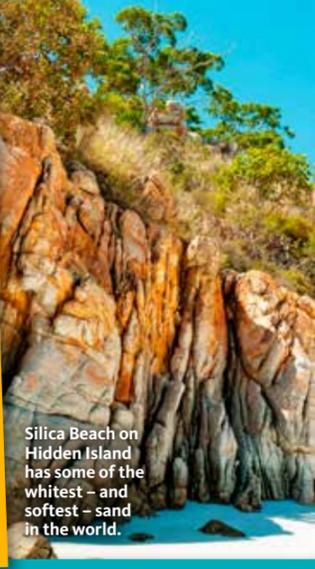


Sail away

It's the destination on every Aussie's wish list – and now it's affordable to sail WA's magnificent Kimberley coast *writes PHILLIP KOCH*



Phil loved cruising the Kimberley aboard the *MV Oceanic* (main).



Silica Beach on Hidden Island has some of the whitest – and softest – sand in the world.



What a catch! Phil with his 5kg cod – but he had to throw it back because it's not good enough to eat!

Raft Point at Doubtful Bay is home to vivid 30,000-year-old Aboriginal cave paintings.



The mangrove estuaries of magnificent King Sound are great for fishing.

The finer details
To book your cruise visit ahoybuccaneers.com.au. In Broome, Moonlight Bay Suites (moonlightbaysuites.com.au) offers self-catering accommodation from \$239 per night for two.

Naturalist David Attenborough called Horizontal Falls "one of the greatest wonders of the natural world".



The yacht was once hijacked by gangsters, the crew would comfortably fit in with a gang of big-hearted pirates and there is more than a dash of swashbuckling aboard the *MV Oceanic* – and that's why it's such a memorable and magical experience. Captain Steve Tucker, a part-time prospector who also has a pilot's licence and is building his own gyrocopter, has spent almost 40 years in the Kimberley in north WA, and knows its waterways like the back of his hand. And he has

enough tall tales to keep everyone entertained. Coxswain Dennis "Bala" Davey, a part-Aboriginal, part-Torres Strait Islander, was raised by his elders in the Kimberley and also happily shares his enthralling tales of living off the land and the water, even diving in to try to catch a turtle to show the guests – despite the bull sharks that stop us passengers swimming off the deck. At Montgomery Reef we spot about a dozen turtles as we watch the reef seemingly rise from the empty ocean as the tide

recedes. One of the Broome locals booked his passage just to witness this daily wonder. But the absolute star of this experience is the Kimberley in all its inspiring glory. From the vastness of the blue waters and the beauty of the stunning beaches and waterfalls, to the sandstone cliffs, mangroves and reefs, it surpasses all the pictures. And at night, the sky is full of stars that seem closer than they ever have before. There are 26 guests aboard, ranging in age from 28 to 76, with accommodation that

'The star of this experience is the Kimberley in all its inspiring glory'

includes sleeping in a swag on the beach or on deck (if the tides don't allow a beach camp) – although there are also a handful of cabins, two with ensuites. We tick off many of the landmarks of the gorgeous Buccaneer Archipelago, including Silica Beach with its stunning white sand, Ruby Falls, which are named after our

skipper's niece, Horizontal Falls, King Hall Island and Crocodile Creek – where we saw just one "baby" croc measuring about three metres – and Doubtful Bay with the incredible Raft Point Aboriginal cave paintings. All in beautiful 32-35°C sunshine. The landscape is unforgettable, but over the course of the seven-day/six-night cruise it's the people who make it so special, including the grey nomads and others from Tasmania, SA, Queensland, NSW and Victoria ticking off their bucket list.

We catch fish from the deck of the *Oceanic* and also on short trips on the tender, snaring enough snapper, tuna and red-throat emperor to feed everyone a few times. But then everyone loves the absolutely incredible food that chef Matt Shaddick kept producing, and the fact guests are expected to muck in and lend a hand with the washing-up creates a camp-like atmosphere. One of the great things about the *MV Oceanic* is its price. From \$2000 for the swag-under-the-stars option up to \$3300 per person for the double cabin with ensuite, it is about two-thirds cheaper than anything else on the market in 2017 and, because you can pre-order alcohol at bottle shop prices, you aren't slugged with a huge bill at the end. But more than that, it also has a shedload of charm, getting to see a world-famous part of Australia in all its pristine glory in this way.

Main picture: Joan Cheeseman