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How to Choose the Best Kimberley Cruise for Your Travel Style

Our Friends · Monday, July 13th, 2026

A Kimberley cruise is not a resort at sea. It is expedition travel shaped by enormous tides, small boat landings, and remote coastline you cannot reach any other way. The right trip depends on what you want most, from peak waterfalls to whale sightings to a shorter, easier route.

Swimming in coastal saltwater is generally off limits here because of crocodiles, so set your expectations around scenic access, **wildlife**, and remote landscapes rather than beach days.

A Quick Way to Pick Your Trip

Start with one priority. Most travelers care most about one of these factors, and that single choice narrows the field fast.

- Peak waterfalls: Aim for April to May. King George Falls usually runs strongest after the wet season, and access is by cruise or scenic flight due to its remoteness.
- Cooler, drier days: June and July tend to be more comfortable, with lower humidity.
- Whale activity: Humpback season runs roughly June to August, with the strongest activity often in July and August.
- Shorter trip: Seven to eight nights usually covers the southern Kimberley rather than the full coast.
- Maximum access: Smaller ships reach farther upriver, and tenders are essential for daily landings.

When to Go: Season Tradeoffs

The commonly cited cruising window runs from April to October, and timing changes what you see.

Larger ships tend to sail May through September, while some smaller Australian operators start earlier in the season.

If Horizontal Falls appears on an itinerary, read the fine print. Western Australia announced management changes on March 15, 2024, with phases continuing through 2026 and 2028. Access can shift, so do not assume a through-the-gap experience is guaranteed.

Route Choice: Darwin to Broome or Reverse

Most Kimberley expedition itineraries operate between Darwin and Broome, which shapes flights and transfers. Multi-day cruises typically depart from Broome, Wyndham via Kununurra, and sometimes Darwin.

Classic routes are often 10 to 11 days and include highlights such as King George River and Falls, Montgomery Reef, Horizontal Falls, and the Hunter River.

Choose direction based on airports and return flights, then confirm exact stops because some Broome round trips skip King George Falls.

Ship Size and Comfort

Ship size affects access, pace, and the feel of each day.

Smaller expedition vessels, often carrying around 12 to 36 guests, can reach narrow rivers and move quickly. MV Reef Prince is a 38 metre catamaran carrying 36 guests, with Broome to Darwin itineraries that include King George Falls and Montgomery Reef.

Mid-size ships in the 72 to 120 guest range offer more space and amenities. Larger vessels around 184 guests bring more onboard comfort, but may trade some intimate river access.

Whatever the size, remember that daily timing is tide driven, so schedules shift to match the water rather than the clock.

Compare Routes and Ships

Before you shortlist options, it helps to skim a few sample itineraries side by side.

To compare sample small ship itineraries and vessel specs such as MV Reef Prince, browse [Kimberley Cruise Specialists](#) for route examples and seasonal highlights.

What You Will Actually Do

Zodiac cruising is the default excursion style in the Kimberley. Expect small boat outings most days rather than dock walk-offs.

Scenic flights and short hikes are common. Coastal swimming is generally not an option because of crocodiles.

Montgomery Reef is a standout. Its signature waterfall effect happens on the outgoing tide as the reef appears to rise from the sea, and currents there can reach around 2 metres per second.

Tides drive everything here. North west Australia sees ranges over 8 metres, and Derby has recorded more than 11.5 metres at extremes, which explains why excursion times move around.

Booking Windows and Logistics

Popular cabins and dates fill early. Planning 9 to 12 months out gives you a better choice of vessel and departure.

Consider travel insurance suited to remote areas, including medical evacuation, given how far these routes sit from major towns.

Pack practical sun protection, grippy shoes, and footwear you do not mind getting wet for beach landings. If traveling with kids before or after the cruise, quick-drying items like simple swim trunks pack down well.

Frequently Asked Questions

What month is best for waterfalls versus whales?

For waterfall flow, target April to May. For whales, plan June to August, especially July and August.

Which direction is better, Broome to Darwin or the reverse?

Both cover similar highlights on classic 10 to 11 day routes. Choose by flights and confirm King George Falls.

How small is a small ship?

Small expedition vessels often carry 12 to 36 guests. MV Reef Prince carries 36 guests; larger options carry roughly 72 to 184 guests.

Photo: Hugo Sykes via Pexels

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