

EXPLORE

Travelling Around with Maggie Cooper



True North amid the stunning landscapes and waterways of the Kimberley coast, WA. The ship's shallow draft allows it to access areas other cruise ships cannot access.

PHOTO: NORTH STAR CRUISES

Doin' the crocodile rock



Maggie Cooper takes in the Staircase to the Moon and wonders



Many of the onlookers were moved to tears by the overall beauty of the evening

THERE IS nothing – absolutely nothing – half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats. So declared the

Water Rat in Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*.

When that boat (ship) is cruising the Kimberley coast from Broome to Wyndham with just about everything the traveller needs for the ultimate blend of luxury and adventure ... it makes messing about worth doing.

When a friend proposed a trip to Broome followed by a week onboard True North, a 50m luxury cruiser, it couldn't have come at a better time. A long, cold, wet winter had us both craving someplace warm for a break. Broome is a rapidly growing town that still boasts a frontier feeling in the old centre; however dozens of suburbs seem to be springing up.

We stayed at the Broome Beach Resort, a pleasant complex of self-contained cabins in tropical gardens and an easy walk to the famous Cable Beach. Bicycles from Broome Cycles topped up our fitness for the cruise; Broome has a large network of cycle paths and the terrain is largely flat, making it easy to get around.

There are several excellent restaurants in the city centre and at Cable Beach; Azuki Japanese Fusion is highly recommended.

Our stay in the north-western town coincided with the Staircase to the Moon. The rising full moon is reflected in the exposed mudflats at low tide, creating the illusion that gives the occasion its name. We – alongside

TRAVEL FACTS

- Qantas flies direct from Brisbane to Broome on Thursdays and Sundays. qantas.com.au
- Broome Beach Resort, 4 Murray Rd, Cable Beach. broomebeachresort.com
- Broome Cycles, 08 9192 6731
- Azuki Japanese Fusion Restaurant, 15 Napier Terrace, Broome, 08 9193 7211
- Mangrove Resort Hotel, 47 Carnarvon St, Broome.
- North Star Cruises, 08 9192 1829. northstarcruises.com.au

several hundred other tourists – observed the staircase from the terrace at the Mangrove Resort Hotel. The covers band gave up the stage for an Indigenous didgeridoo player; the ancient thrumming of the instrument as the moon rose was a deeply emotional experience as he appeared to call it up from the ocean.

The cruise on True North began at Gantheaume Point; a bus picked us up from our accommodation and delivered us to the sands where we caught our first glimpse of the gleaming white vessel, skippered by the dashing and well named Captain Greg Lee Steere, that would be our home for the next week.

North Star Cruises, the operator had prepared us well; detailed information is on their website and was emailed to us before leaving.

Cabins onboard True North vary in size and price; Sue and I shared a smaller cabin on the lower deck which was very comfortable and roomy enough for the amount of time spent there. The en suite boasted an excellent shower and

L'Occitane toiletries are provided. There is a television and DVD player in each cabin with a library of DVDs available at no charge.

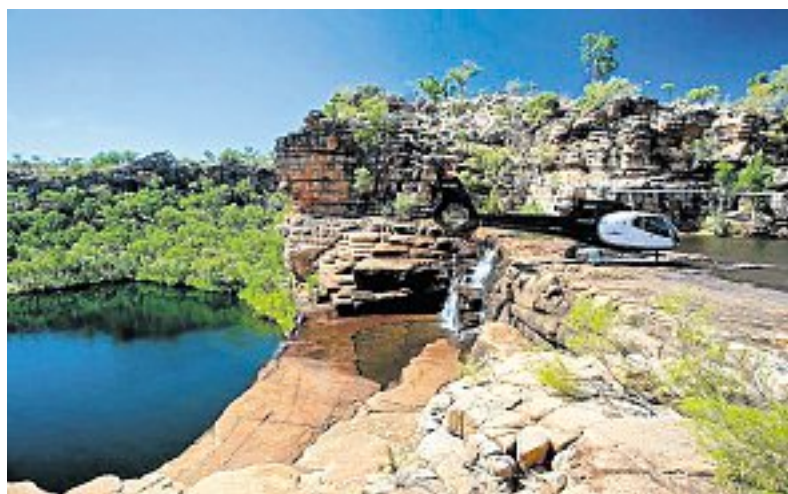
No cash exchanged hands onboard until the final morning. A tab was kept for alcohol onboard; all other beverages and all meals were included in the fare. I suggest keeping a tally of the alcohol you order; we found bottles of wine had been charged to our account which we hadn't ordered (or consumed). The staff apologised and removed the charges, but it's obvious the odd mistake is made. The other cost was for heli flights; the chic black and white onboard helicopter was perched on the bridge deck during the cruise. Chopper rides weren't cheap, averaging \$500 per person per flight; it would be easy to double the cost of the cruise. Packages were available. True North carries 36 passengers and 17 crew; by the end we had shared a dining table with just about every guest and crew member. Breakfast was buffet style, with a hot option most mornings. North Star caters for most diets if notice is given; the fine dining on offer is not a la

carte, but the next day's menu was delivered to our cabin each night and written up on a whiteboard. We only had to speak to Andy Tonge, the talented head chef, for him to organise an alternative if we were not happy with what was on offer. Food was varied and beautifully prepared and presented; fish caught by guests featured some days.

The geological formations that make up the Kimberley are thought to be the oldest in the world; there's nothing quite like standing beneath a cliff face formed around 1.8 billion years ago to make one feel a little insignificant. Wandjina and Gwion Gwion rock art and deep freshwater pools feature throughout the region.

We took several excursions ashore or along the rivers and gorges each day to view the stunning scenery and local wildlife.

A word here about that wildlife: we came across dugong, whales, green turtles, sharks, wonderful birdlife and, of course, *Crocodylus porosus* – the saltwater crocodile. The crew was very safety conscious and with good reason; there were crocs just about everywhere we travelled and are a genuine threat if the commonsense rules and warnings were not followed. We had many opportunities to observe great numbers of crocs from the tinnies; early nervous sightings of "logodiles" – as floating branches are called up there – gave way to almost blasé murmurs as yet another actual crocodile sunned itself on a muddy bank or surfaced nearby. Swimming is allowed on only two or three occasions for safety reasons under the watchful eyes of crew members – no-one was prepared to argue. If you don't want to leave a beach in a Lacoste sleeping bag, I'd suggest you follow orders. Highlights included running uphill (yes, uphill) on water in a tinnie as the ocean streamed off Montgomery Reef; surfing the Horizontal Falls (also in a tinnie); sitting on a beach on Indo Island watching the sun drop into a scarlet Indian Ocean and the unsurpassed, heart-stoppingly beautiful scenery from atop King George Falls.



THRILL RIDE: True North's onboard helicopter provides access to some stunning areas such as Eagle Falls.



KIMBERLEY BEACH: One of the many pristine white sand beaches visited on the cruise.

Prices for the North Star Cruises seven-day Kimberley Snapshot cruise start from \$9495 per person.