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# IN THE WILD LANDS

With red dust her close companion, Sue Wallace finds the vast beauty of Western Australia's remote Kimberley wilderness as inspiring as it is seductive.



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Under an inky black sky home to the brightest of stars, I am scrubbing red dust from my feet while surrounded by bubbles in the outdoor bathtub. I have quickly discovered that ingrained red dust is a part of life in the Kimberley, hence the scrubbing brush and bath salts perched on the shelf in my villa at the Berkeley River Lodge.

As I laze back gazing up at the canopy of stars, the vastness of the universe almost overwhelms me, just like the landscape. It's the kaleidoscope of colours – azure waters, red cliffs, white sand and blue skies – that seduces you.

Accessible only by sea or air, this is one place where the journey is almost as good as the destination. The 60-minute flight in a small seaplane from Kununurra takes passengers over a patchwork of sandalwood farms, green pastures and lots of red soil with streams snaking across the plains.

01 Plenty of space at the Berkeley to relax and take in the surroundings  
02 The gorge  
03 The Berkeley River Lodge

Eyes peeled to the horizon, something glistens ahead and the resort's 20 villas and swimming pool take centre stage.

Nestled in the Joseph Bonaparte Gulf with views to Reveley Island, about 150km north-west of Wyndham, the Berkeley River Lodge is a dream come true for Kimberley entrepreneurs Martin and Kim Peirson-Jones.

The couple spent two years living in harsh conditions while they built the resort on a 65m sand dune – everything from nuts and bolts to air-conditioners was delivered by barge from Wyndham, a 30-hour return trip.

My spacious villa is a perfect haven. With a splash of lime here and there,

there is a comfortable king-size bed, coffee machine and water chiller, and a deck with a daybed strategically placed to soak up the river views.

The outdoor bathroom enclosed by a brush fence features a shower, eco-toilet, twin vanity and enormous marble bath.

As comfortable as the villa is, you simply can't stay indoors; the Kimberley is like a magnet that entices you to discover her secrets.

*“The Kimberley is like a magnet that entices you to discover her secrets”*

#### Nature's bounty

Berkeley River Lodge gives guests the chance to connect with its stunning natural surrounds in just about every way imaginable. There are four-wheel drive tours, sea turtle viewing and monitoring, guided hikes and astronomy tours. For a bird's-eye view, a Bell 407 helicopter is at the ready to whisk you to inaccessible places where few have ever ventured.

One of the highlights for us is a river cruise that takes us along the Berkeley River and beyond. Lofty red-pleated cliffs frame blue waterways and, apart from an occasional rock wallaby on a ledge and a sea eagle flying overhead, there's a feeling of isolation in this remote Kimberley area.

As the temperature and humidity climb, our guide Jason nudges the river cruiser under a waterfall, so we can all cool off on a small platform under the tumbling waters. Later we scramble up the rocks and take a dip in a secluded crystal-clear freshwater rockpool, well away from any crocodiles.

Fishing is another adventure here and we head out with Karl, a giant of a man, who seems to know everything there is to know about fishing.

“I can't promise you'll get a fish, but we'll have fun trying,” Karl says, as we pull up to one of his favourite spots.

Queen fish, threadfin salmon and mulloway frequent these parts and it's our lucky day because the barramundi are biting.

Any doubts about crocodiles in residence disappear as we see something that resembles a floating log quickly turn and disappear underwater. After our fishing expedition, the 20m infinity pool back at the resort is a welcome respite from the heat.

#### Star-studded dining

As the vibrant sun sets and we gaze out over the glimmering Timor Sea, it's cocktail time in the main lodge and we celebrate our catch with espresso martinis all round.



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Seymour, formerly of the Golden Door Health Retreat Elysia at Pokolbin, serving a menu of fresh flavours, tasty produce and just-baked homemade bread.

We start the day with Berkeley fruit salad and eggs Benedict Berkeley-style; for lunch we dine on chai tea-smoked duck with glazed Granny Smith apples and basil. Dinner is a decadent degustation menu with standouts definitely the barramundi which looks familiar, scallops and truffle tortellini and a sensational crème caramel.

After dinner I flick through a book on the Kimberley's 350-million-year-old gorges and a diary with snapshots that capture the building of the resort – both leave me in awe.

A billion stars light the way back to my villa and I savour my last night here. Yes, my feet are dusty again but I have learnt that in comparison to this experience, a little red dust just doesn't matter. ♦

The convivial barman shares a secret – the resort has the best view from the men's loo. “Go on, have a peep,” he says, keeping guard. I pop my head in and agree it is definitely deserving of a blue ribbon.

But the most accolades are reserved for the blood red and golden sunsets that take your breath away.

Dining here is a gourmet adventure in the Dunes Restaurant with head chef Paul

#### Travel file

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