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*Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future*



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# Paper Abstracts

## **Cumulative visitation by expedition cruise vessels along the remote Kimberley coast, northern Australia**

Lynnath E. Beckley  
Murdoch University  
Perth, Australia

**Email:** l.beckley@murdoch.edu.au

**Co-Authors:** Emily A. Fisher, Harriet Davies

Adequate management of the coastal waters of the remote, tropical Kimberley region in northern Western Australia requires knowledge of the spatial and temporal extent of human use by the various sectors of the economy (commercial, recreational and traditional). Vessel-based expedition cruising is popular along the central and eastern Kimberley coasts where the flooded ria coastline, remarkable geology, enormous tides, noteworthy marine and terrestrial biodiversity, and indigenous cultural assets attract discerning visitors. In order to investigate the extent of the expedition cruise industry, a desk-top study was undertaken to quantify the numbers, and passenger capacity of, expedition cruise vessels advertising voyages along the Kimberley coast, details of their itineraries and the types of shore-based and water-based activities offered to the passengers. The cruise vessels operate in the coastal waters of the Kimberley mainly during the dry season from April to September between the ports of Broome and Wyndham though some include visits to Darwin in the adjacent Northern Territory and neighbouring countries such as East Timor or Indonesia. Eighteen cruise vessels (12-103 m in length) operated in the Kimberley in 2013 and 80% of these vessels carried less than 40 passengers. In the itineraries, more than 110 sites were listed as places visited by the cruise vessels although one third of the listed sites were visited less than 20 times during the season and then, only by the smaller vessels. Excluding the port of Broome, Montgomery Reef (275 vessel visits with 7,382 passengers), Horizontal Falls (260 vessels visits with 7,068 passengers), Raft Point (250 vessel visits with 6,786 passengers), Prince Regent River (235 vessel visits with 6,308 passengers) and Talbot Bay (211 vessel visits with 6,176 passengers) were the most frequently visited sites. Much of the area frequented by the expedition cruise vessels is encompassed by the newly proclaimed Lalang-gurram Camden Sound Marine Park and the designated Horizontal Falls and Northern Kimberley Marine Parks. Activities at the sites usually included small boat excursions to the shore for picturesque visits to waterfalls, wildlife spotting (e.g., crocodiles), historical sites and Aboriginal rock art as well as walking, swimming in waterholes, fishing and scenic helicopter rides. The entire Kimberley coastline was also surveyed by two observers in a Cessna 210 light aircraft during the peak tourist season over four consecutive days in July 2013 to verify the actual locations and activities of expedition cruise vessels in the region. Results of this survey showed high concurrence with the advertised itineraries. Despite the many limitations of this desk-top study, the cumulative estimates of visitation to the Kimberley coast provide managers and traditional owners, particularly the Dambimangari, Unguu and Wunambal Gaambera people, with an indication of where potential impacts may occur and where future monitoring and management might be necessary.

**Keywords:** cruise, remote, activities, aerial survey, Kimberley, Australia