

On the horizon



With travel to Australia off the cards for now, look to book next year with **David Whitley's** round-up of summer stunners Down Under

For many British travellers, the prime time to visit Australia is during the British winter – after all, the idea is to escape to the sun, and that's when key destinations such as Sydney, Melbourne, Perth and Tasmania are at their warmest.

But with no guarantee of Australia's borders opening any time soon, travellers might be looking to defer their high-value trip and rebooking for spring or summer 2021.

Luckily, Australia is a continent, and not everywhere Down Under follows the same weather patterns. Indeed, some Aussie destinations are best visited between May and October. Most of these are in the tropics – where the seasons are wet and dry, rather than hot and cold, and it's far more pleasant in the dry – but the same applies to the outback; you want to be going there when it's cooler.

So if clients are planning to travel during next year's summer holidays, or want to get the best of what tends to be regarded as Australia's off-season, these are the places to nudge them towards.

BROOME

Backed by deep red dunes, Broome has to be one of the world's weirdest resort towns.

Its prime attraction is the 14-mile Cable Beach, which fishermen drive along in 4x4s and camel tour operators plod across at sunset. There's a strong Asian influence, the pearling industry heritage (best explored at the Pearl Luggers museum) is riveting, and the huge tides expose both dinosaur footprints and Second World War flying boat wrecks.

Broome is also the gateway to the rugged Kimberley region, where spectacular rock formations, photogenic gorges, activity-packed outback stations and strange horizontal waterfalls can be strung together in an adventurous touring route.

Book it: APT offers a nine-day Essence of the Kimberley round-trip from Broome, from £3,345 land-only in May or August 2021, and £2,995 in September, including accommodation, meals, driver-guide and activities.
aptouring.co.uk ➤

King George River, The Kimberley, Western Australia



ABOVE: Kata Tjuta National Park **FACING PAGE:** (clockwise from top left) Charles Knife Canyon, near Exmouth; Noah Beach in Daintree National Park, Cape Tribulation; Kuranda Scenic Railway, Queensland; Magnetic Island **PICTURES:** Tourism Australia; True North Adventure Cruises; exmouthdiving.au; Townsville Enterprise; Reuben Nutt

BEST OF THE REST

🌴 **Cape Tribulation:** This Queensland rainforest hideaway is one of the closest points to the Great Barrier Reef. Small-group reef trips leave from the beach, but it's also a great spot for rainforest boardwalks and – potentially – spotting the elusive cassowary.

🌴 **Magnetic Island:** Maggie has carved a niche as an easy-going Queensland destination. It has great beaches and watersports, several accommodation options and enough real-world atmosphere to make eating, drinking and shopping interesting.

🌴 **Mission Beach:** Long-known as an affordable Queensland destination, Mission Beach has carved itself a niche as an adventure tourism hotspot, with skydives that land on the beach and rafting trips on the Tully River.

EXMOUTH

The magic of Exmouth is its isolation. It's a mammoth 13-hour drive north of Perth (flying into Learmonth airport is a sensible shortcut for clients who don't want to drive) and it is proper outback despite being right next to the coast.

The Cape Range National Park stretches down the western side of the North West Cape Peninsula. Here, a string of beaches come with campsites and rugged rockscapes behind them.

Among the highlights is Yardie Creek, a dramatic gorge known for its wildlife – including black-footed wallabies, red kangaroos and sea eagles. Elsewhere there's the Charles Knife Canyon, which offers a scenic drive past dramatic cliff faces, deep blues of the Exmouth Gulf glowing out behind.

The Ningaloo Reef – almost as spectacular as the Great Barrier Reef, and much less crowded – is just a few front crawl strokes offshore and is a great spot for kayaking and whale-watching, with humpback

“The magic of Exmouth is its isolation...it's proper outback, despite being right next to the coast

season from August to November. **Book it:** Anzcro has a nine-day Ultimate Coral Coast self-drive round-trip from Perth exploring the highlights of the west, including Exmouth, from £1,078. anzcro.co.uk

DARWIN

The Northern Territory's capital brims with character – part rough-and-ready Aussie bloke, part Asian, part bohemian. Top attractions include Crocosaurus Cove, where it's possible to swim in a five-metre crocodile's enclosure, protected

only by a see-through acrylic box; and the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, which has good exhibits on wildlife and cyclones.

Darwin primarily acts as the gateway to the Top End's national parks, however. The big three are Litchfield, with its termite mounds and waterfalls; Nitmiluk, home to a series of gorges known as Katherine Gorge; and Kakadu, a sprawling, intoxicating land of bird-packed wetlands, crocodile-spotting cruises, sandstone escarpments and ancient Aboriginal rock art.

Book it: Intrepid Travel offers a four-day Kakadu, Katherine & Litchfield Adventure – best undertaken in the dry season when the national park roads are passable – from £715. intrepidtravel.com/uk

CAIRNS

The most popular gateway to the Great Barrier Reef is a proper city, albeit one with a demob-happy, party vibe. The reef is obviously

the main attraction, and if you've got time, it's worth doing two different trips out there – the individual reefs have different qualities and aquatic life, while cruises cater to different tastes.

The Quicksilver catamaran cruise to Agincourt Reef is a great all-rounder, including an underwater observatory and a coral-viewing tour in a semi-submersible as well as the usual snorkelling. But there are also more beach-focused cruises out to Green Island and trips to the rainforest town of Kuranda via the Skyrail cable car and Scenic Rail train.

Book it: Inspired by Australasia offers a full-day Outer Barrier Reef Cruise to Agincourt Reef with Quicksilver from £155. inspiredbytravel.co.uk

THE WHITSUNDAYS

There's plenty of reef to explore around the Whitsunday Islands farther south, but it's the islands themselves – many of which have outrageously impressive white-sand beaches – that are the stars. It's possible to stay on several of them, with options ranging from basic camping on Hook Island to high-end luxury on Hayman Island.

Hamilton Island is the action-packed all-rounder, with several accommodation options and an enormous range of things to do including jetskiing, wildlife walks, golf and quad biking. It's easy to book as an add-on, with four-night stays costing from around £763.

The other way to tackle the islands is on a multi-day yacht cruise from the town of Airlie Beach. These range from backpacker party boats to crewed charters with spacious cabins.

Book it: G Adventures includes three days of sailing in its basic, small-group Brisbane to Cairns Experience: Sand Dunes & the Whitsundays trip, lasting 10 days, from £1,087 in June 2021. gadventures.co.uk

RED CENTRE

That big red rock on all the postcards is much better visited in the Australian winter, when the walks can be completed without excruciating heat. The sunset and sunrise viewings of Uluru will do for the photos, but there's so much more to it. The roughly six-mile base walk should be treated as mandatory, as should a side visit to the quieter and equally mysterious red rock domes of Kata Tjuta. The range of activities available from the Ayers Rock Resort – including Aboriginal dot-painting workshops, camel rides, stargazing experiences and dinner on the sand dunes – has massively expanded in recent years.

Book it: First Class Holidays' three-day Uluru & Kings Canyon Discovery includes Uluru and Kata Tjuta, from £726 land-only. fcholidays.com

GETTING THERE



For Broome and Exmouth, **Perth** is the major connection point – internal flights are cheap when added to international Qantas tickets. Or there are seasonal flights to Broome from Melbourne, Sydney or Brisbane, useful for linking longer itineraries without the detour to Perth.

Options for getting to **Cairns** without a lengthy backtrack via Brisbane include Jetstar from Tokyo Narita and SilkAir from Singapore. Likewise, time-savers for **Darwin** include direct routes from Singapore with Jetstar Asia and SilkAir, which can be worked into codeshares.

Brisbane is the main connection point for the Whitsundays – flights go into Hamilton Island or Proserpine.

Ayers Rock Airport at **Uluru** is amazingly well-served, with direct flights to Adelaide, Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Cairns and Darwin.