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HOOKED ON WILD LUXURY

SARAH NICHOLSON

Berkeley River Lodge is buzzing with news from the water. "Did you hear what happened today," a fellow guest asks as I arrive at sunset drinks which, on this tranquil dry-season evening, are happening on a west-facing plateau past the last elevated ocean-view villa.

"One of the ladies out fishing this afternoon caught a crocodile, a saltwater crocodile."

I've just returned from a day on the water with lodge managers Jennifer Fitzmaurice and Ross Penegar, spotting crocs while cruising

kilometres inland to the rock pools that mark the start of the Berkeley River during these rainless midyear months, so reptilian monsters quickly fill my mind.

But the story is a lot less sinister with the novice angler, using a handline while her more experienced companions were casting for the wild barramundi that frequent the Kimberley coast, catching and quickly releasing a metre-long baby.

While it is uncommon for a croc to be hooked, it's not unusual for guests returning from a few hours on reef or

river with a Berkeley River Lodge guide to deliver fresh fish to the chefs who prepare the catch for mealtime at Dunes restaurant.

"It's always nice to watch a healthy fish swim away but you can't beat freshly-caught fish, so we take a little back to the restaurant, and giving guests the opportunity to eat the one they caught for dinner that night is special," Fitzmaurice says.

Berkeley River Lodge sits on the Joseph Bonaparte Gulf, 150km from Wyndham, at the place the Berkeley River meets the Timor Sea. It only accommodates 40 guests at a time and is so remote that air and sea are the only ways in.

But it's this inaccessible location

that almost guarantees catching something when casting a line.

"We're so remote hardly anyone else comes to fish in these waters," Fitzmaurice says.

"Fishing from the river mouth is a lot of fun – there's the chance to catch salmon, queenfish and sharks – but, if the tide and weather permits, we take the vessel out around the islands to do some reef fishing or chase spanish mackerel.

"But during the warmer months, we tend to catch barramundi on every fishing trip and watching a guest catch a trophy fish is always an amazing experience."

There's more to Berkeley River Lodge than fishing and those not interested in angling are invited to do as much or as little as they like with cruises, guided hikes, picnics, and wildlife watching on offer.

"The landscape is vivid and colourful, the sunrises and sunsets

spectacular, our guides take guests to some of the most remote and spectacular places in the world, and taking guests who don't think they are capable of doing hikes up to a secluded waterfall or swimming hole always stands out," Fitzmaurice says.

"The fishing and activities are outstanding with each day better than the last, but you certainly can't top eating your own freshly-caught barramundi or mangrove jack for dinner on the evening you caught it."

THE WRITER WAS A GUEST OF BERKELEY RIVER LODGE.

ESCAPE ROUTE

BERKELEY RIVER LODGE

GETTING THERE

The property sits on the Kimberley

coast in the far north of Western Australia with Airnorth flying to Kununurra from Perth, Broome and Darwin and a Kimberley Air Tours plane completing the journey to the Lodge's private airstrip. airnorth.com.au

STAYING THERE

Berkeley River Lodge is a seasonal property that will close for the wet season from November 3, reopening on March 6. Guests can stay in ocean-view or river-view suites. berkeleyriver.com.au



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