



# Hooked on a mackerel mecca

The Top End provides a true adventure getaway



TRAVEL with David Lems

IT'S remote, breathtakingly beautiful and a sportfishing mecca.

Groote Eylandt is Australia's fourth largest island with a fascinating future in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Traditional owners live on 2285sq km of island, playing an important role protecting large tracts of precious land around lucrative manganese mining operations.

The Groote Eylandt coastal scenery, about 50km from the mainland, is spectacular.

It is part of a stunning archipelago of largely untouched islands off the eastern coast of Arnhem Land.

However, it's on Groote Eylandt where tourism is becoming an appealing new option, especially for those who love world-class sportfishing or want to get away from the stress of busy life.

Nestled among the peaceful coastal bushland is the recently renamed Groote Eylandt Lodge, managed by Metro Hotels.

The lodge was previously called Dugong Beach Resort before its "rebirth" in July to better fit the indigenous importance of the island.

The lodge is comfortable and safe, offering a slice of luxury for guests in the executive and deluxe bungalows.

Being so close to exceptional fishing waters, the lodge has also been established with the keen angler in mind.

A fishing village called Makarda Lounge offers cheaper accommodation for groups of up to 25 people. All the sportfishing gear is provided for a successful outing offshore or around the nearby islands.

The recently established Groote Eylandt Sportfishing operation has become the focus in expanding tourism in the secluded region.

On my offshore trip, the fishing was incredible with 14 different species caught, including powerful spanish mackerel, hard-fighting tuna and delicious coral trout.

The charter offers a variety of options, including the chance to catch a billfish in the vast open waters of the Gulf.

While I failed to hook one of the majestic kings of the ocean, I had little to be disappointed about.

The non-stop excitement came from trolling for a variety of aggressive surface feeders and bottom bashing for tasty reef fish, which are in abundance.

Being out in such a vast expanse of water was a bit like fishing off Fraser Island. But Groote Eylandt fishing offers so much more, with a diversity of lure-crunching species rarely seen in one place.

What came as a surprise is that Groote Eylandt is 600sq km larger than Fraser Island.

“ On my offshore trip, the fishing was incredible with 14 different species caught ”

Heading offshore allows you to appreciate the size of the fishing paradise.

Back on the island, the Seagrass Restaurant chef at the lodge will cook your catch as part of a delicious range of culinary delights.

While sportfishing is a major attraction, lodge managers are keen to develop more cultural tours.

A knowledgeable guide with indigenous heritage can take you to more remote parts of the island, sharing his insights into Aboriginal life while showing you cave paintings and places of spiritual significance to the Anindilyakwa traditional owners.

Their art depicts a close affinity with the sea. Drawings of dugong, stingrays, sea turtles and sawfish are prominent in their paintings that carry fascinating stories of their past.

Scenic flights from nearby Groote Eylandt airport provide another highlight, showcasing the astonishing features of the archipelago.

Flying during calm morning conditions enhances the experience in a small aircraft.

Getting to Groote Eylandt is an adventure in itself, requiring a three-and-a-half hour flight from Brisbane before a connecting link from Darwin.

However, spending a few days exploring Darwin either side of the short island detour can make the Groote Eylandt experience even more enjoyable.

\* The writer was a guest of Tourism Northern Territory.

## TRAVEL SNAPSHOT:

✦ **GETTING THERE:** Regular flights from Brisbane to Darwin on Qantas, Virgin Airlines and Jetstar. Airnorth provides the connecting flight from Darwin to Groote Eylandt airport.

✦ **MUST DO:** An offshore charter (Groote Eylandt Sportfishing), scenic flight (Katherine Aviation) and cultural tour (arranged at lodge). The food at Groote Eylandt Lodge is magnificent. Golfers have a nearby nine-hole course to play in between fishing and exploring.

✦ **MORE INFO:** Email [dwinchester@grooteeylandtlodge.com.au](mailto:dwinchester@grooteeylandtlodge.com.au) or google Groote Eylandt Lodge.



WANT MORE? WATCH THE VIDEO ON OUR WEBSITE

✦ David Lems with one of several mackerel he caught during an action-packed day fishing offshore from Groote Eylandt in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

## EUROPE



## Charter your own barge

EUROPE'S largest luxury hotel barging company reports strong advanced bookings for their 2016 season, with charters among the popular options.

To generate interest in one of its newer cruising areas, the Alsace and Lorraine region of eastern France, the company is offering up to \$4045 off whole boat charters for select August 2016 departures on the Panache.

Managing director Derek Banks attributes the growth in bookings to an increasing awareness of hotel barge cruising and the growing market for multi-generational family and group travel.

The 12-passenger Panache is staffed with a crew of six, which includes a master chef, deck hand, tour guide and two housekeepers. From mid-June through October, the stylish hotel barge cruises the Canal de la Marne au Rhin.

✦ **MORE DETAILS:** [gobarging.com](http://gobarging.com) or call 1800 828 050.

## SINGAPORE



## Only the best

TREAT yourself to a luxury retreat at The Park Regis Singapore. Prices start from \$291 per room per night and include sunset cruise, buffet breakfast and free wi-fi. Valid until December 30. Rates are for two guests and a minimum two-night stay.

✦ **MORE DETAILS:** [www.parkregissingapore.com](http://www.parkregissingapore.com).