

Assessing tourism potentials in the Fitzroy Valley

Promoting sustainable Indigenous tourism
development in WA's Kimberley region



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Curtin University, Tourism Research Cluster (TRC)

In collaboration with: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre (BCEC)



Curtin University

Tourism
Research Cluster

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that when in Perth we meet, work, and live on the land of the Whadjuk Noongar people. In the Fitzroy Valley, we are respectfully on the land of five different language groups, and acknowledge that the sovereignty of Bunuba, Walmajarri, Wangkatjungka, Nyikina and Gooniyandi people was never ceded. We pay respect to Elders, past and present, and acknowledge the important role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders continue to play in caring for country across Western Australia. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this country and their continuing connection to land, waters and community.

Impressum

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About the TRC

The Tourism Research Cluster (TRC) increases Curtin's tourism research capability by providing a framework for the skills, expertise and resources of researchers to be shared, increasing opportunities for collaboration and building on the strengths of Curtin's well-established multidisciplinary approach to tourism research.

Since its inauguration in 2010, the Tourism Research Cluster (TRC) has been the fundamental player in Curtin's world-class rated research in the area. The TRC is a vibrant cross-faculty research group of internationally-recognised academics. The TRC connects industry, government and academia and also offers a gateway for students to develop research skills. Through its diverse network of tourism academics from backgrounds such as marketing, geography, management, cultural anthropology, public policy, economics, spatial sciences, and statistics, the TRC targets topical tourism issues with wide-ranging expertise. The TRC offers members the chance to meet and network with tourism experts worldwide, share ideas and explore collaborative opportunities.



Cover Image: Tour boat at Danggu Geikie Gorge. Photo: Tourism WA

About Environs Kimberley

Environs Kimberley (EK) is the Kimberley's peak environmental NGO set up in 1996 to support Traditional Owners in protecting the Kimberley from the damming of the Martuwarra Fitzroy River and large-scale land clearing to grow cotton. EK works for the protection and management of Kimberley lands and waters. EK operates at the local and regional level with communities, landholders and land managers, especially Aboriginal Traditional Owners and their ranger groups, to tackle environmental problems that concern them through scientific research, monitoring, community-based planning and management. The organisation provides a strong regional voice on environmental matters especially to government and industry and advocates for the preservation of the Kimberley's natural assets.

Kimberley country is inseparable from the Aboriginal people to whom it belongs and this guides all of the EK activities. EK supports responsible development that is locally based and compatible with the special qualities and values of this region.

Please Note

This report uses the terms 'Aboriginal people', 'Indigenous people', 'Traditional Owners/Custodians', and 'First Australians' interchangeably.

When referring to the study area, the Fitzroy Valley, two well-accepted definitions are taken into account in this report. In its widest sense, the Valley includes the whole catchment area of the Martuwarra Fitzroy River. In the geographically narrower socio-demographic understanding, the Fitzroy Valley sits within the catchment area and is defined by the distribution of its people. Depending on the source of information used for particular statements, either the wider or more narrow definition will be considered; this will either be explicitly mentioned or contextually implied.



Fitzroy Bridge connects to Fitzroy Crossing, the central hub of the Fitzroy region. Photo: Sean Scott

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Executive Summary

The Fitzroy Valley is nestled within the West Kimberley region of Western Australia, and, if considered in its narrower circumscription, is located approximately 400km east of the commercial hub of Broome and 2,500km north of the state's capital, Perth. Home to five distinct language groups (Bunuba, Walmajarri, Wangkatjungka, Nyikina and Gooniyandi), the Fitzroy Valley sustains a rich and continuing Aboriginal culture dating back tens of thousands of years. The dramatic and relatively untouched landscapes paired with immeasurable cultural and environmental significance make it an integral component of WA's tourism experience. In a consolidated nature-based destination in which 80% of the population is Aboriginal, Indigenous tourism development in the Fitzroy Valley can play a critical role in increasing employment opportunities for residents on-country whilst creating authentic tourism products that enhance tourism experiences in the region.

Tourism as a form of long-term sustainable development for indigenous communities has been shown to be compatible with Aboriginal culture and connection to land and country, and offers opportunities for economic engagement in harmony with traditional environmental and socio-cultural practices (Fletcher et al. 2016).

This report was commissioned by Environs Kimberley to investigate further tourism potentials for the Fitzroy Valley under three different scenarios: the present situation, if a National Park was to be declared, and if the Kimberley was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

To achieve this objective, a mixed method approach was adopted consisting of a desktop study to contextualise the study area, a quantitative online survey with potential visitors to the region (2021; n=2,976), interviews with key tourism stakeholders and community members who live and/or work in the region (2021; n=21), analyses of 2016 Census data to identify strategic industries of existing strength, and an estimation of job creation opportunities.

The study's key findings reveal the below:

(1) Current situation

- **Landscape of the West Kimberley:** The Australian National Heritage Listed largely undisturbed dramatic landscape of the West Kimberley is home to outstanding biological diversity, cultural richness and significant evidence of Australia's evolutionary path through geology and fossil records.
- **Indigenous culture:** The Fitzroy Valley and Kimberley region at large is home to the world's oldest continuing culture, its vibrant Indigenous heritage rooted in at least 40,000 years of occupation. With approximately half of the current population of the Kimberley composed of Aboriginal people, culture and language are strong and highly diverse. The Martuwarra Fitzroy River plays a central role in the socio-economic systems of the region sustaining traditional and emerging livelihoods.
- **Connections to the river:** Aboriginal nations demonstrate strong connections and affiliations with the water in the area. In this study, all Indigenous interviewees – with no exception – describe their relationship to the Martuwarra Fitzroy River as one of deep belonging and of custodianship.
- **Threats to the river:** Due to the central and active role the river plays in the life of local communities, water governance is a priority area of concern for Indigenous peoples in the Fitzroy Valley. Some of the main threats to the life of the Martuwarra Fitzroy River identified by interviewees include damming and the use of pumps to draw out water from the river for irrigation in large-scale agriculture.
- **Governance of the river:** Given the interconnectedness of the cultural and natural environment that spans across the river ecosystem, a number of community members call for an agreement to be made between all Traditional Owners of the Fitzroy catchment with regards to the protection and use of the River.
- **Protection of the river:** While most interviewed Traditional Owners are in favour of expanding National Park protection in the Fitzroy Valley ("Stage 1" proposals attaining extensive support), a high level of control is deemed paramount to ensure traditional ways are respected, sacred sites are preserved, and Aboriginal people are able to be active contributors and beneficiaries. Interviewees associated the establishment of a National Park with protection from dam proposals.
- **Social inequality** is made evident by the stark disparity in home ownership and school completion between

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Disparities are also obvious in employment figures: Only 16% of employed staff in the Kimberley are Aboriginal and only 27% of the region's Indigenous people participate in the workforce, whereas over 80% of non-Aboriginal people are currently employed. This inequality is also observed in business ownership, whereby 144 of 2,253 businesses are Aboriginal-owned, only 6.4% of all Kimberley businesses.

- **Focus on job creation:** As of March 2020, the Kimberley had an overall 16.2% unemployment rate making job creation a priority (Kimberley Development Commission, 2020b). Overall, the Kimberley region demonstrated a growing trend in unemployment rates over the past ten years (2010–2020). Halls Creek and Derby, the two Local Government Areas (LGAs) composing the Fitzroy Valley, have the highest unemployment rates among all Kimberley LGAs (40% and 30% respectively). Estimated population trends for the Kimberley vary considerably between a growth of 40,000 to a slight retraction by 2030 (Regional Development Australia, 2020). Employment opportunities will need to be commensurate with the actual population growth.
- **Tourism as an important employer:** The service industry accounts for more than three-quarters of the Kimberley region's employment, that is, over 11,500 people of which nearly two thousand are Aboriginal. Tourism, evidently a labour-intensive industry, provides 12.2% of the Kimberley's jobs. Currently, about 1,500 to 1,800 people (depending on the source) are employed through tourism in the Kimberley, of whom 145 are Aboriginal, representing 9.6% of the entire tourism workforce and representing opportunity for growth (Kimberley Development Commission, 2020b; REMPLAN, 2021). This means tourism is the third most important employer in the region after health care and education.
- **Comparative advantage in creative arts, tourism and conservation:** An analysis of the region's industry structure indicates that the Fitzroy Valley (more specifically, the SA2 region of Derby-West Kimberley) has a number of sectors of relative comparative advantage, or strength, including areas relevant to the tourism industry such as: creative arts, sightseeing transport ('tours'), conservation & parks management and accommodation. Within the region, these sectors employ a greater proportion of people than in the Australian average. This is also in line with earlier findings that confirm higher Aboriginal engagement in the art and culture sector (Throsby and Petetskaya, 2016; Department of Culture and the Arts, 2016). Our analysis however shows that in particular, the nature reserves, conservation and parks operations industry stands out as a strategic target industry for potential employment growth. It is already particularly well embedded in the local economy, and a reasonably complex industry relative to other key sectors in the region. A comparison to the Kakadu and Uluru regions, two prominent destinations with significant Indigenous-led tourism sectors, suggests National Park/World Heritage listing may lead to a substantial increase in jobs in conservation and parks management. Further, the Fitzroy Valley is well positioned to expand tourism employment, particularly through diversification toward a more integrated tourism sector.
- **Contributions to economy:** Services, Tourism, Minerals and Energy, and Agriculture are the highest contributors to the region's Gross Regional Product, making up the dominant sectors of the economy. Both Construction (\$694m) and Tourism (\$563m) outperform the Mining industry (\$558m) in terms of output generation. Tourism is responsible for an estimated 10% of the region's gross revenue generated by businesses (Kimberley Development Commission, 2020b).
- **Tourist spend (Kimberley):** A total of 544,000 visitors spend on average more than \$563 million per year in the Kimberley; domestic visitor spending is on average \$1,025 per trip (Kimberley Development Commission, 2020b).
- **Tourist profiles (Kimberley):** Visitors to the Kimberley are predominantly domestic travellers residing in Australia; 9% visit from overseas. Of the domestic visitors to the region, 59% are intrastate tourists and 31% are interstate travellers. Although international tourists account for only a small proportion of the visitors, they tend to stay in the region three times longer than WA and Australian visitors (Tourism Western Australia, 2020a).
- **Tourist profiles (Fitzroy Valley):** The Shire of Derby (which includes the Valley's central hub, Fitzroy Crossing) receives an average of 113,000 annual visitors, whereas Halls Creek hosts just over half as many, averaging at 64,000 visitors per year. Approximately 10–13% of visitors to the Fitzroy Valley are classified as international travellers (Tourism WA Strategy and Research, 2020b; Tourism WA Strategy and Research, 2020c).
- **Tourist spend (Fitzroy Valley):** Between 2017–2019, visitors to the Shires of Derby and Halls Creek generated \$84 million spending per year on average, \$43 million of which was spent in the Shire of Derby. Visitors' average trip spend was higher in Halls Creek than in Derby, despite the shorter number of overnight stays. In Derby tourists spent \$430 per trip on average compared to \$549 in Halls Creek. (Tourism WA Strategy and Research, 2020d; Tourism WA Strategy and Research, 2020e).

- **Indigenous Tourism Operations:** There are several established tourism businesses in the Fitzroy Valley. In the Fitzroy region alone (narrower perimeter of the Valley), a total of 14 enterprises are listed as members under the Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Council (WAITOC). Of these, five focus on delivering cultural tours throughout the area, four offer a range of accommodation options from camping to lodging, and four are art and cultural centres or galleries providing an array of products from cultural dance and music to traditional paintings. It is important to note that pioneer Aboriginal tourism operators in the region, such as Bungoolee Tours, Mimbi Caves Tours & Campground and Darnku Heritage Cruises, have created cultural and reputational assets that build the foundations for future tourism development in the Valley.

(2) Tourism potentials

- **The Fitzroy Valley's tourism appeal:** Interviewees stressed the striking landscapes, rich biodiversity, geological significance, but most of all cultural diversity and long-standing traditions as key attractors of the Fitzroy Valley. At the crossroads between different language groups and one of the few places one can overhear multiple Australian languages being fluently spoken concurrently, Fitzroy Crossing was regarded as one of the most Indigenous towns in the Kimberley. Interviewees pointed out that the Valley is riddled with remarkable stories, from ancient lore to more recent historical accounts, such as the Bunuba resistance. Several interviewees stressed that the Traditional Owners are also open to share their stories and knowledge openly with interested visitors – an attitude that is of great benefit for tourism development. The Valley is also home to artistic talent, which can be witnessed in any of the art galleries dotted through the area.
- **Perceived benefits of tourism development:** Essentially all participants interviewed in the study were receptive to tourism development in the region. Respondents saw tourism as a means to attain valuable economic output, much-needed environmental protection and sustained social improvements. The benefits of tourism identified by respondents include:
 - creating beneficial commerce for the Valley due to providing employment in remote regions and bringing more cashflow to the area;
 - building capacity by learning transferrable skills; enabling communities to work on country using traditional skills and knowledge intrinsic to Indigenous ways of life (e.g., storytelling, walking on country, locating bush foods and medicines, tracking animals, finding fresh water, etc.);
 - allowing workplaces to be “Indigenised”; encouraging intergenerational transfer of knowledge, whereby elders teach younger generations about country and culture to be used in tourism products;
 - promoting reconciliation via cultural exchange between Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous people, breaking down cycles of preconceived barriers through lived and shared experiences; supporting sustainable environment management, as tourism relies heavily on healthy and clean ecosystems; instilling pride in Indigenous people's cultural identity and building a sense of purpose;
 - offering younger generations prospects and meaningful opportunities to stay in their communities; attracting infrastructure investment to beautify spaces that can be enjoyed by all in the community; allowing for retail of existing local arts and craftsmanship, and boosting demand for the existing service industries.
- **Local perspectives on key measures to support tourism development:** Local and in particular Indigenous interviewees associated the designation of National Parks with economic benefits and an increase in job opportunities for Indigenous people through ranger programs and tourism. In addition to National Parks, UNESCO World Heritage Sites and Geoparks were also suggested by Indigenous leaders as conduits to leverage the region's tourism assets whilst up-levelling the area's protection status. With rich biological and geological significance (e.g. Devonian Reef system, diversity of fossils), these listings are considered strategic avenues to increase the area's appeal for tourism in particular.
- **Tourism market potential:** Conservative results indicate that about 17% of WA residents and 11% of non-WA Australians state they are likely to visit the Fitzroy Valley for tourism purposes over the next five years. This equates to a total domestic potential market of 2.9 million adults over 5 years, or 0.6 million adults annually. This suggests the potential market for the Fitzroy Valley region to be up to 6 times its current domestic visitation. Utilising the most conservative estimate (5.1% WA; 3.4% non-WA), the market potential for the Fitzroy Valley would amount to 180,000 domestic adult visitors annually, which is still a 1.8-fold increase of its current 102,000 domestic visitors.
- **Increase in probability of visitation through National Park status:** Results indicate the existence of protected areas and their status positively influences the likelihood of domestic visitors travelling to the Fitzroy Valley in the next five years. National Park status increases the probability of visiting by 9% (with the 95% confidence interval between 3% and 15%) compared to when the area has not been declared either a National Park or World Heritage listed. A World Heritage Site declaration does not seem to produce an additional effect on top of the National Park status on domestic tourism markets. It needs to be noted, however, that this effect may be stronger on international tourism markets.

- **National Park development scenario and implications for tourism spend:** In a calculation that takes into account conservative market potential estimates and the predicted increase in likelihood of visitation due to the declaration of a National Park, a National Park development scenario in the Fitzroy Valley may result in an additional domestic annual tourist spend of up to A\$13 million (or up to A\$43 million under more optimistic assumptions).
- **National Park development scenario and employment implications:** Taking the observed ratio between employment and expenditure in the Western Australian State Tourism Satellite Account 2019-2020 as reference point, the National Park development scenario in the Fitzroy Valley may result in the creation of approximately additional 160 full-time equivalent tourism-related jobs (under conservative estimates). This estimate only considers ‘direct’ effects. This estimate does not include additional employment opportunities that are likely to arise due to non-tourism related effects (such as conservation activities) of a National Park development scenario.
- **The importance of factors influencing tourists' eventual decision to visit the Fitzroy Valley:** Being able to enjoy intact nature and landscape was rated as being of highest importance, with 41% of respondents indicating it as ‘very important’; and 93% of respondents rating its importance above the midpoint. The possibility to see ‘local attractions’ achieved the second highest average importance rating (39% of respondents rating it as very important) which indicates the critical relevance of creating tourist attraction points in order to boost visitation to the region. Aboriginal experiences, long-distance hiking trails and high-quality but low impact eco lodges resulted in higher declared levels of interest. For example, 73% declared that the presence of Aboriginal experiences would increase their interest in visiting the Fitzroy Valley region.
- **Challenges for tourism development:** Challenges identified by interviewees that inhibit locals from making the most of tourism industry opportunities include lack of business education and training (e.g. marketing, insurance, bookings, etc.), lack of intergenerational wealth (start-up capital), cultural shyness and symptomatic lack of confidence, difficulty accessing funding, priority cultural obligations affecting business commitment, and poor facilities available, including internet coverage.

(3) Recommendations

Please refer to Section 7 to consult the report's key recommendations.



The Gibb River Road is a popular 4wd route cutting through the Kimberley Plateau eastward to Kununurra, guiding visitors to many of the Kimberley's iconic attractions. Photo: Tim Nicol



1. Introduction

Across Australia's north-western corner splays the Kimberley, a region expanding 400,000 square kilometres with a population of less than 40,000 people, making it one of the least populated places on Earth (WA Government Dept of Primary Industries and Regional Development, 2017). With a landscape laced with towering gorges, ancient reef systems, roaring rivers and abundant wildlife, the Kimberley region is often revered as Australia's "Final Frontier". The Fitzroy Valley sits within the West Kimberley along the banks of the mighty Martuwarra Fitzroy River and its catchment area at the edge of a 350-million-year-old Devonian Reef. It is home to approximately 4,500 people, 80% of whom are Aboriginal from five different language groups (Bunuba, Walmajarri, Wangkatjungka, Nyikina and Gooniyandi) (Marulu FASD Strategy, n.d.). There are 45 distinct communities within the Valley, with Fitzroy Crossing town at its centre.

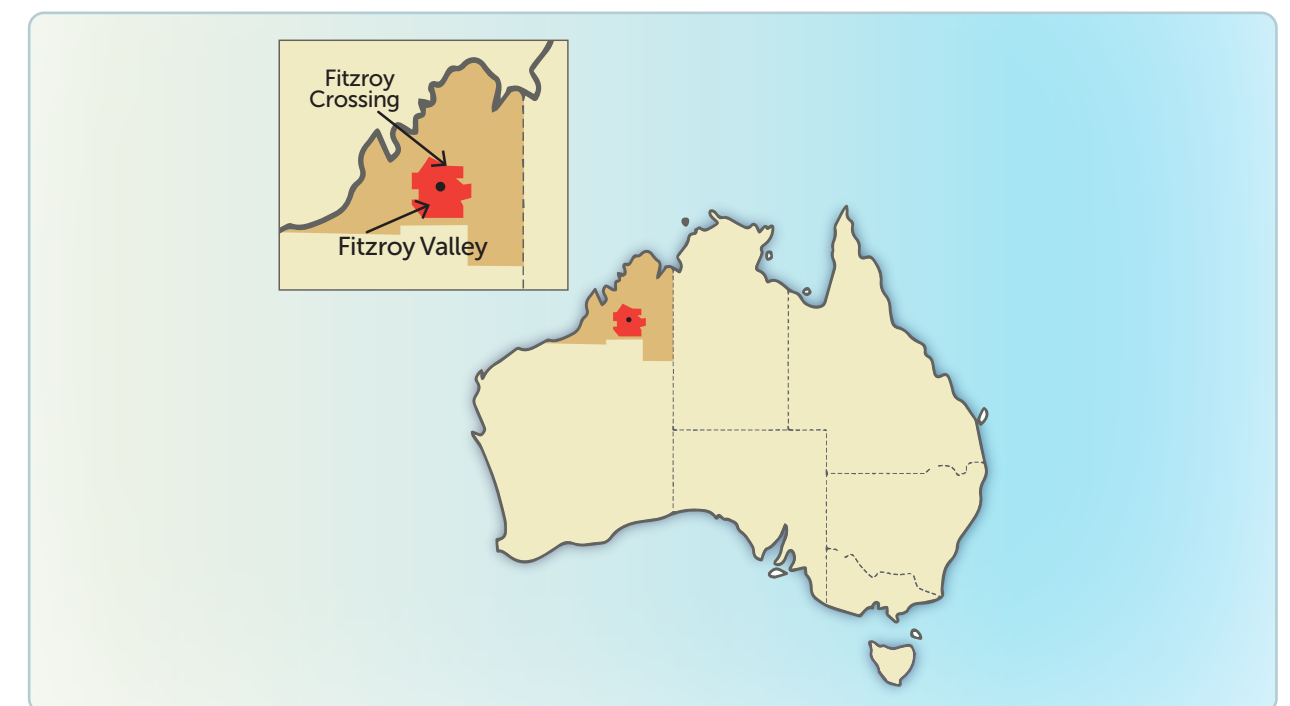


Figure 1: The Fitzroy Valley (narrow circumscription) within the Kimberley region in Western Australia.

Source: Marulu FASD Strategy (n.d.)

Armed with pristine wilderness and astonishing geological, biological and cultural treasures, the Fitzroy Valley and the Kimberley at large are well-equipped to provide a wealth of exciting one-of-a-kind opportunities to visiting tourists. In fact, an analysis conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that visitor numbers in the Kimberley reached an average record high of 593,000 in 2017, visitation rates having grown steadily by 2% every year from 2008 to 2018 (Kimberley Development Commission, 2019a). Despite the significant growth observed in the tourism sector, the region faces ongoing discussions in regards to its development priorities. Some of these conflict with each other as they may negatively impact its environmental and cultural patrimony and hold the potential to undermine its appeal as a pristine nature-based tourism destination (Curtin Sustainable Tourism Centre, 2010).

This project seeks to assess potentials for tourism demand, job creation and product development in the Fitzroy Valley under three different scenarios: limited protection, if a National Park were to be declared, and if the Kimberley at large were listed as a World Heritage Site.

Opposite Image: Tourists visit Danggu Geikie Gorge to marvel at the spectacular 30-metre high cliffs carved over thousands of years by the Fitzroy River. Photo: Tourism WA

As such, the study sought to:

- highlight potential tourism development opportunities for the Fitzroy Valley,
- assess potential visitor numbers, potential tourist expenditure and potential jobs created under the three hypothetical scenarios (i.e., limited formal protection, National Park, World Heritage listing),
- assess Traditional Owner preferences and aspirations for tourism development in the Fitzroy Valley, and
- devise recommendations to achieve tourism potentials in the region.

The above objectives were achieved by means of the following phases:

1. Desk research on the current situation and site analysis;
2. Online choice experiment to estimate the number of potential visitors and tourist spending under the three hypothetical scenarios;
3. Qualitative interviews with community stakeholders and tourism providers in the Kimberley and a field visit to deepen the site analysis and collect community voices on development prospects;
4. Analyses of 2016 Census data to identify tourism-related industries of existing strength and of strategic potential following the 'smart specialisation' approach;
5. Estimation of implications for job creation;
6. Devising recommendations.

Based on the above research design, the study's findings offer empirical insight into tourism potentials for the Fitzroy Valley region, markedly in the realm of Indigenous-led tourism development that is not only attractive from a market perspective, but also conducive to environmental protection and supported by its residents. The research findings offer insights for the potential development of the Kimberley as a tourism destination for the benefit of the local community and tourism providers who live and operate businesses in the area.



Telegraph Pool is a popular fishing and camping location along the Fitzroy River. Photo: Matt Deakin

2. Site Analysis: The Kimberley Region & Fitzroy Valley

In recent times both the Federal government and individual businesses have put forward proposals for irrigation in the Martawurra catchment. The proposals vary with respect to the size of the proposed development and the source of water proposed to supply irrigation. Original work for this report fully documented in Appendix 1 assessed benefit cost ratios for four scales of potential irrigation developments very similar to original study proposals.

Regional History

The Fitzroy Valley and Kimberley region at large bear witness to the world's oldest continuing culture, its vibrant Indigenous heritage rooted in at least 40,000 years of occupation (Australian Government Dept of Agriculture, Water, Environment, 2011). Colourful paintings displayed in countless bush galleries found on cliff and cave walls across the area reveal some of the most astonishing examples of rock art in the world and demonstrate the ancient and ongoing painting tradition of the region's Indigenous people (Australian Government, n.d.).

With approximately half of the current population of the Kimberley composed of Aboriginal people, culture and language are strong and highly diverse (Curtin Sustainable Tourism Centre, 2010). Aboriginal lives in the Kimberley during the 19th century's colonial occupation were faced with great struggles, exemplified in the well-known Bunuba resistance led by Jandamarra in the late 19th century who was a key figure in the fight against Colonial pastoral settlement as part of the expansion of the British Empire. The infamous battle against 30 police officers was staged in the heart of the Fitzroy Valley at Bandilngan Windjana Gorge and Dimalurru Tunnel Creek (Australian Government, n.d.; Pedersen & Woorunmurra, 1995).

European exploration of the Kimberley coast began as early as the 16th century, long before Captain Cook set sail to the southern land. With the arrival of colonisers to the Kimberley in the 19th century, the region's pastoral history was forged involving both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Pearlring off the west coast of the Kimberley as well as pastoring inland were important export activities for early day British settlers (Australian Government, n.d.).

Socio-Cultural Geographic Profile

The Kimberley region lies within Australia's North West covering 425,000km², an area twice the size of the State of Victoria (WA Government Dept of Mines and Petroleum, 2009) and sparsely inhabited by a population of 36,014, residing across six towns, approximately 160 remote communities, and 100 pastoral properties (Kimberley Development Commission, 2019b). More than 90% of the Kimberley is claimed as Native Title lands, with Traditional Owners holding a key role in the region's industries, infrastructure, and services (Kimberley Development Commission, 2019b). Half of the Kimberley's population is Aboriginal, encompassing approximately 30 distinctive language groups (Kimberley Development Commission, 2019b). Nevertheless, social inequality is made evident by the stark disparity in home ownership and schooling between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, the latter owning 5 times more homes and completing high school at a rate nearly 4 times greater than the prior (Kimberley Development Commission, 2019b).

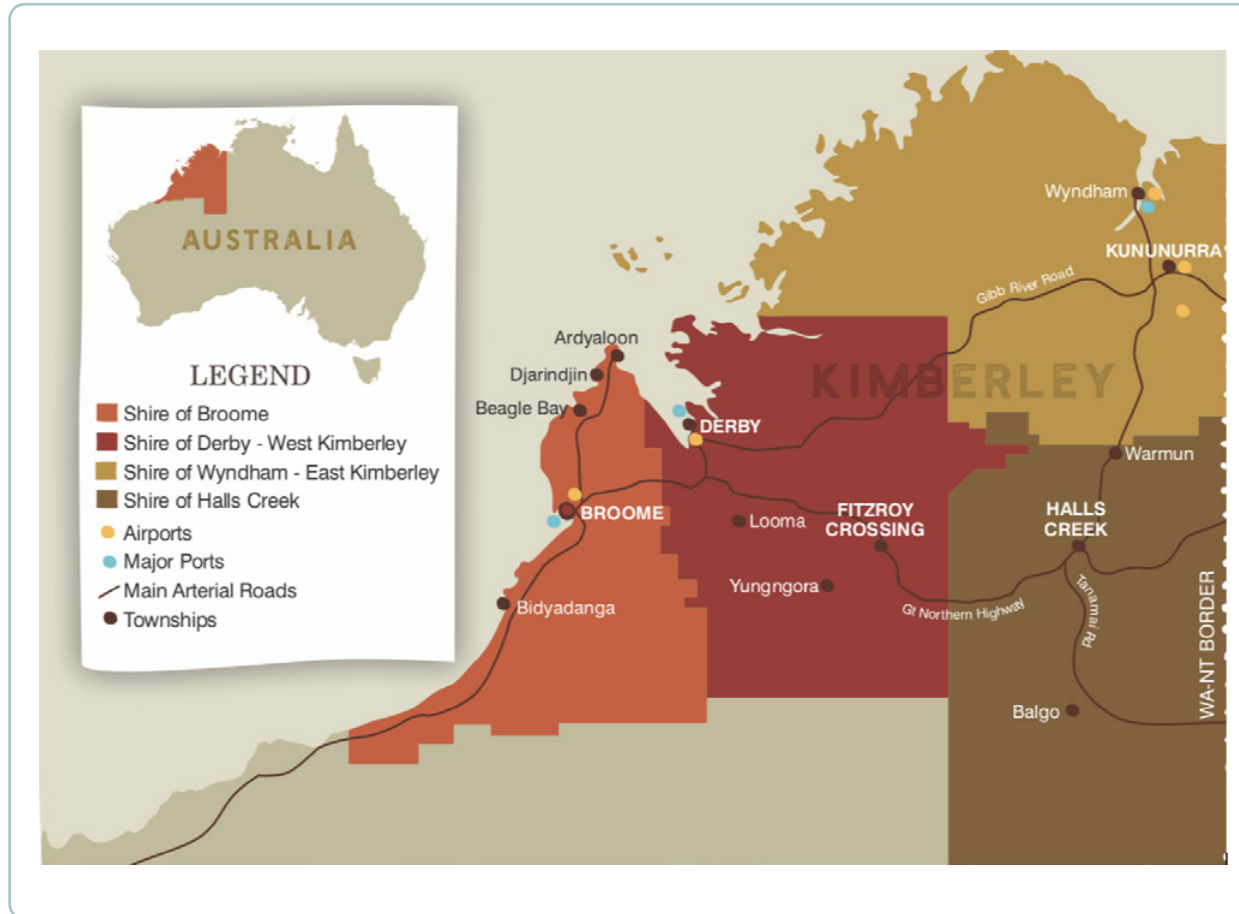


Figure 2. Key subregions, towns and communities of Australia's Kimberley region.
Source: Kimberley Development Commission (2019b)

The Fitzroy Valley is in the heart of the West Kimberley, approximately 400km east of the region's biggest town centre, Broome, and 2,500km north of Perth (Marulu FASD Strategy, n.d.). The Martuwarra Fitzroy River catchment area encompasses roughly 90,000km² (van Dam, Bartolo & Bayliss, 2008). When taking the entire catchment area of the Martuwarra Fitzroy River into consideration, Derby and Fitzroy Crossing are the Valley's major towns. The Martuwarra Fitzroy River, one of the largest free-flowing rivers of Northern Australia and the largest river in Western Australia, dissects the Valley from east to west and dictates not only its topography, but most of the life that centres around it. Nevertheless, according to the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (Morphy 2010), the Valley itself is defined by its communities rather than by geographical landmarks. As such, the margins of the Valley outline the outermost boundaries of cattle stations, given the furthest settlements are located on cattle grounds (Morphy 2010) (Figure 3). There are 45 communities in the Valley, ranking from Fitzroy Crossing as the centremost and largest with 300 people, through to small Aboriginal pastoral sites that are only seasonally occupied (Marulu FASD Strategy, n.d.). About 80% of the 4,500 people residing in the area are Aboriginal from five unique language groups: Bunuba, Walmajarri, Wangkatjungka, Nyikina and Gooniyandi (Marulu FASD Strategy, n.d.). From a governance perspective, the communities in the Valley fall under either the Shire of Derby or the Shire of Halls Creek.

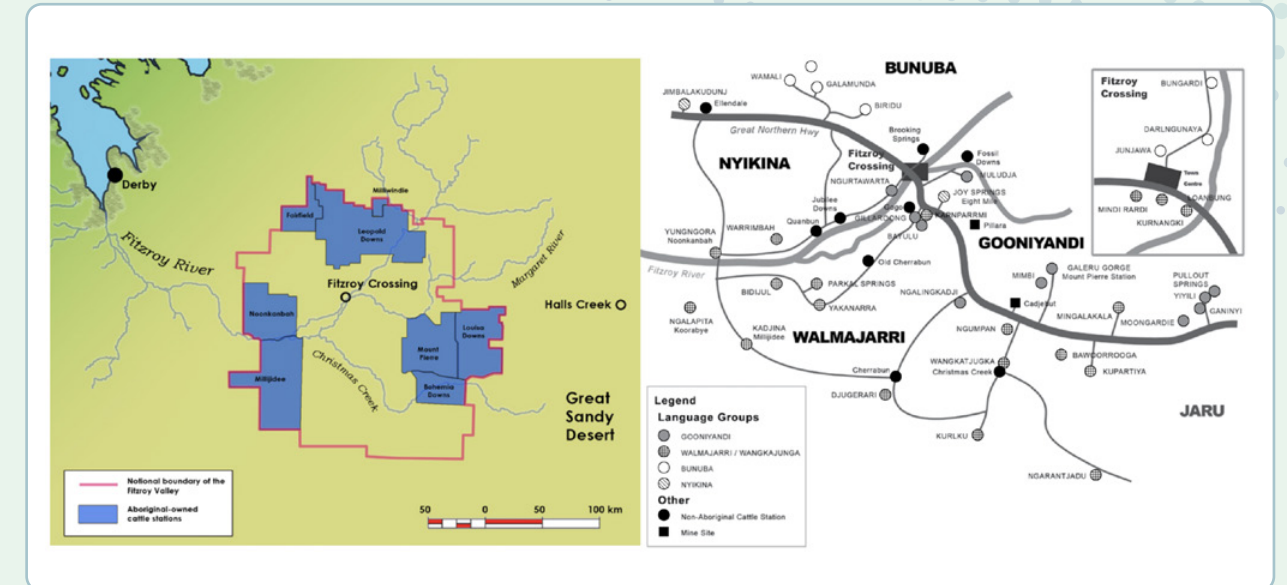


Figure 3. The Fitzroy Valley's notional boundaries and five language groups.
Source: Morphy (2010)

Bunuba country extends through ranges, rivers and green plains including Fitzroy Crossing and the iconic attractions of the Bandilgan Windjana Gorge, Dimalurru Tunnel Creek and Danggu Geikie Gorge. Gooniyandi country crosses varied landscapes from floodplains to ranges and includes Mimbi Caves, Birndiwa (Mt Huxley) and sections of the Margaret, Louisa, and Mary Rivers. People of the Nyikina identify themselves as those who belong to the Lower Fitzroy River, known as 'yimardoowarra'. Members of the Walmajarri language group traditionally lived in the Great Sandy Desert and later moved north to cattle stations, towns and missions. Wangkatjungka, much like Walmajarri, is also desert country encompassing salt lakes and red sand dunes, its people now living in multiple places along the Fitzroy Valley (Marra Worra Worra Aboriginal Corporation, n.d.). It is evident from the information included in the maps in Figure 3 above that Fitzroy Crossing is a significant hub of interaction between multiple language groups. It is also important to note that the diversity and integrity of traditional regional socio-cultural systems in the Valley have remained relatively preserved despite its disruptive pastoral history, as is highlighted by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research:

"The region, as it defines itself today, is the product of a layered history. It is a cattle station landscape imposed on an underlying Aboriginal cultural and linguistic landscape. The contemporary Valley defines itself in terms of the country and the cattle stations that people were forced off, and the communities to which they then began to return, including, more recently, on cattle stations that they now own. The identity of the region has been further consolidated by the formation of Aboriginal organisations that service the communities of the Valley." (Morphy, 2010, pg. 14.)

The Kimberley's residents are young with the average age of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people being 25 and 36 years respectively (Kimberley Development Commission, 2019b). As shown in Figure 4, the Aboriginal population of the Fitzroy Valley resembles that of most Indigenous Australian populations, the broad base of the pyramid representative of a very young population with potential to grow into the predictable future. On the other hand, the narrow tip of the graph indicates high mortality rates among older adults, although the Fitzroy Valley's population includes a relatively high number of elderly people in comparison with various other Aboriginal communities (Morphy, 2010). Based on recent data (2018-2019), there has been a slightly greater migration of people away from Fitzroy Valley than into the region (Kimberley Development Commission, 2020a).

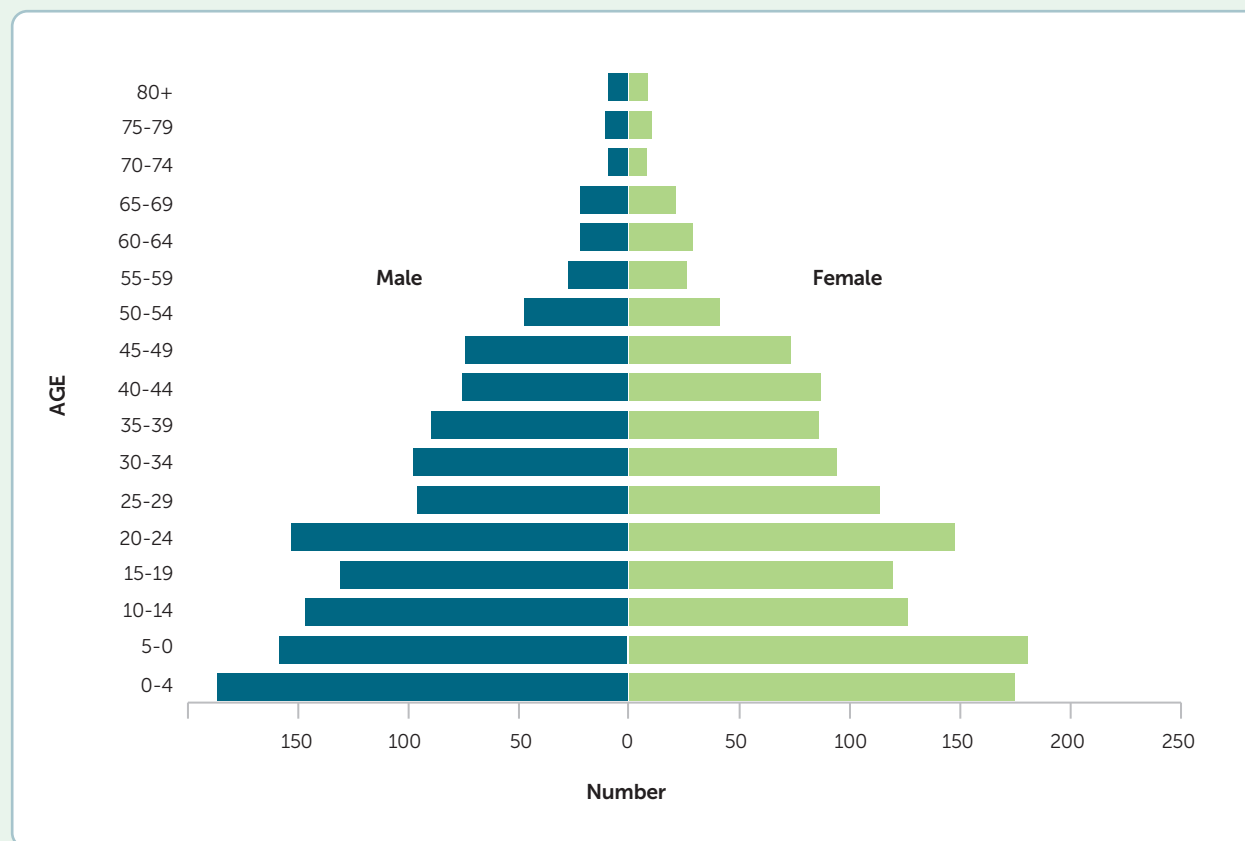


Figure 4. The Fitzroy Valley's Aboriginal population by sex and age (2009).
Source: Morphy (2010)

Economy

The Kimberley's economy is responsible for 3.3% of WA's Gross Regional Product (GRP), generating \$3 billion per year immediately before the COVID-19 pandemic (Kimberley Development Commission, 2020b). It is also characterised by its multiplicity and strong service base. The cost of living in the Kimberley is on average 15.6% higher than in Perth – Halls Creek is on average 26.9% more expensive than the state capital making it the most expensive place to live in the Kimberley (Kimberley Development Commission, 2020a).

In terms of local government areas (LGAs) and their contribution to the Gross Regional Product, Broome holds the highest rank with a steady increase over a ten-year period (2008 – 2018). Broome is followed closely by Derby, one of the two LGAs in the Fitzroy Valley, with the exception of the last two years on record (2017 and 2018), in which Derby experienced a sudden decrease. Halls Creek, the other LGA in the Valley, has demonstrated stable economic activity between 2008-2018, however, of the LGAs in the Kimberley, it contributes the least to the Gross Regional Product (Kimberley Development Commission, 2020a). (See Figure 5)

Services (e.g., construction, transport), Tourism, Minerals and Energy, and Agriculture are the highest contributors to the region's Gross Regional Product, making up the dominant sectors of the economy. Both Construction (\$694m) and Tourism (\$563m) exceed the Mining industry (\$558m) in terms of output generation (Kimberley Development Commission, 2020b). These sectors are supplemented by the traditional pastoral industry and other emerging commerce that diversify the Kimberley's economic network further, such as aquaculture and savannah burning (fire management). Interestingly, as the only region in Western Australia to partake in Australia's Emissions Reduction Fund, savannah burning is projected to have generated \$1m in Australian Carbon Credits, with another \$10m filtering back to the community as a consequence (Kimberley Development Commission, 2020b).

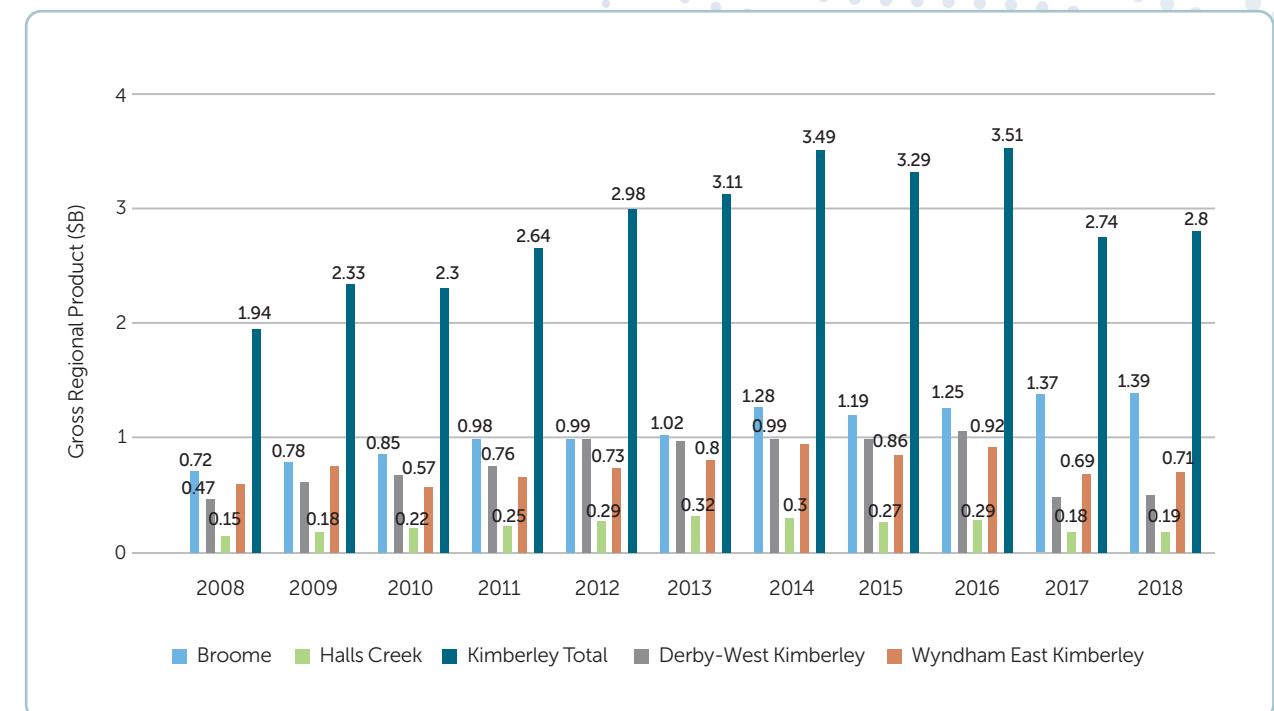


Figure 5. Kimberley's Gross Regional Product from 2008 to 2018 per Local Government Area.
Source: Kimberley Development Commission (2020a)

Over 15,000 people are employed in the Kimberley region (Kimberley Development Commission, 2020b). As of March 2020, the Kimberley had a 16.2% unemployment rate. The service industry accounts for more than three-quarters of the region's employment, that is, over 11,500 people of which nearly two thousand are Aboriginal. Tourism, evidently a labour-intensive industry providing 12.2% of the Kimberley's jobs, is said to be key to achieving regional prosperity (Kimberley Development Commission, 2020b). Currently, about 1,500 to 1,800 people (depending on the source) are employed through tourism in the Kimberley, of whom 145 are Aboriginal, representing 9.6% of the entire tourism workforce and representing opportunity for growth (Kimberley Development Commission, 2020b; REMPLAN, 2021). This means tourism is the third most important employer in the region after health care and education. In contrast, the minerals and energy sector provides for the lowest employment rate among the region's key industries, employing a total of 640 people of which only 96 are Aboriginal. Compared with other larger regions in Western Australia such as the Peel and the Pilbara, the Kimberley has a higher number of businesses per capita, with approximately 6.3 businesses per 100 people (Kimberley Development Commission, 2020b). Estimated population trends for the Kimberley vary considerably between a growth of 40,000 to a slight retraction by 2030 (Regional Development Australia, 2020). Employment opportunities will need to be commensurate with the actual population growth.

As for the number of people in the labour force per local government area, in March 2020 Broome was home to 8,821 workers, Wyndham to 3,795, followed by Derby with 3,035 and Halls Creek with 1,156 employed residents (Kimberley Development Commission, 2020a). The region as a whole has a significantly greater unemployment rate than that of the WA average, with Halls Creek holding the highest rate (more than 40% at the start of 2020) among all LGAs in the Kimberley. Although substantially less grave than the neighbouring shire, Derby also pertains an increasing unemployment rate that is greater than that of other LGAs in the Kimberley besides Halls Creek. Overall, the region has been plagued over the past ten years (2010-2020) by growing trends in unemployment rates, though with stark variance between the different LGAs.

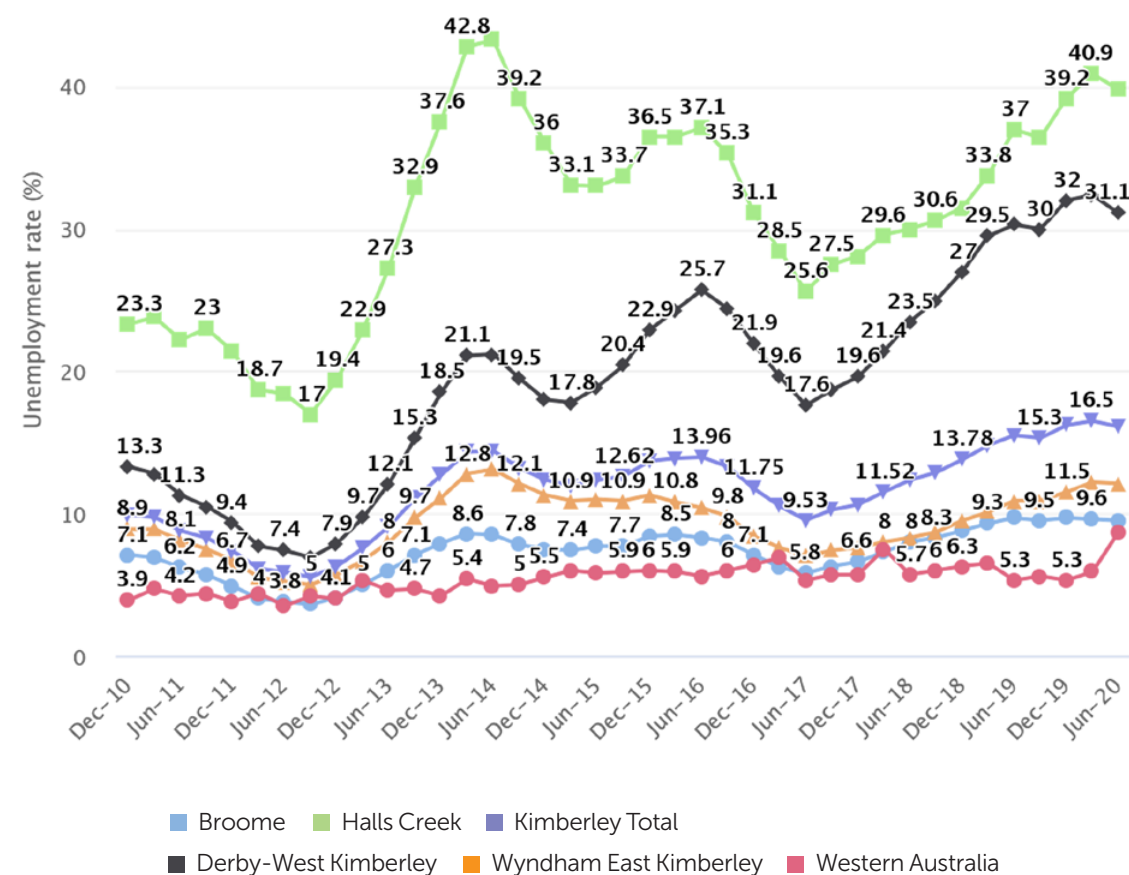


Figure 6. Kimberley unemployment rates by Local Government Area.
Source: Kimberley Development Commission (2020a)

Although Indigenous people have (to a certain degree) controlling and influencing rights over a large portion of the Kimberley’s land mass, the region faces many challenges that are common across remote Australia. Low Indigenous workforce participation, dependency on welfare programs, and lack of capacity building all contribute to substantial impediments to equitable development. For instance, only 16% of employed staff in the Kimberley are Aboriginal across all major sectors in the economy. Only 27% of the region’s Indigenous people participate in the workforce, whereas over 80% of non-Aboriginal people are currently employed. Furthermore, Aboriginal incomes average at 40% of WA’s state average. This disparity is also observed in business ownership, whereby 144 of 2,253 businesses are Aboriginal-owned, only 6.4% of Kimberley businesses. This dichotomy extends beyond economic parameters and is reflected in reduced life expectancies for Aboriginal people (approximately 10 years lower for Aboriginal people than non-Aboriginal people).

Environment

As mentioned previously, the Kimberley region at large is often celebrated as one of Australia’s (if not the world’s) great wilderness areas in terms of the intactness of its environment and ecological values (Poelina et al., 2020). The largely undisturbed dramatic landscape of the West Kimberley is Australian National Heritage Listed, and is home to outstanding biological diversity, cultural richness and significant evidence of Australia’s evolutionary path through geology and fossil records (Australian Government, n.d.). Towering escarpments, sandstone hills and ancient reef systems cut by free-flowing rivers that have carved deep gorges across the landscape, enclosed by expansive deserts and wild coasts, have created favourable conditions for plant and animal specialisation and diversification in this remote corner of Earth (Australian Government, n.d.).

Multiple ecosystems form a mosaic across the region, from mangroves to rainforests, savannahs to deserts (Kimberley Development Commission, 2021). Wet and dry seasons dictate the region’s dynamics. From October to March tropical rains flood the Kimberley with some of the highest rainfall seen on the continent, creating accessibility impediments and flushing the landscape with green growth. The less humid dry season, extending from April to September, welcomes peak tourism activity in the region, receiving the bulk of visitors during this time.

The Kimberley’s varied terrain provides critical habitat for many plants and animals found nowhere else in the country (Australian Government Dept of Agriculture, Water, Environment, 2011) and offers refuge for numerous endangered and threatened species (The Kimberley, n.d.a). It functions as a sanctuary for several native mammals that have retracted from the rest of Australia (The Kimberley, n.d.a), it acts as a nursery for the world’s largest humpback whale population (Curtin Sustainable Tourism Centre, 2010) and as extensive feeding grounds for migrating waders before their monumental flight to the Arctic (Broome Bird Observatory, 2020).

In terms of the specific study area, the National Heritage Listed Martuwarra or Fitzroy River is Western Australia’s largest river running 700km from its source in East Kimberley to its mouth at King Sound near Derby (The Kimberley, n.d.b). It is also one of the greatest unregulated rivers left in the country, largely undammed, and is praised for its significance in fostering cultural life and biodiversity (Science Statement of Support, n.d.). The Martuwarra Fitzroy River catchment itself displays weathered soils with reduced fertility (Centre of Excellence in Natural Resource Management, 2010). Rainfall in the Valley varies tremendously from year to year, and is highly seasonal, falling predominantly in the wet season (Pusey and Kath, 2015). The same can be said for the Martuwarra Fitzroy River’s stream flow, eventuating in great high and equally low water availability in the Valley throughout the year and from one year to the next (Pusey and Kath, 2015). These conditions support woodlands, vine thickets and hummock grasses, with springs, pools and wetlands providing critical habitat for flora and fauna throughout the harsh dry season (Centre of Excellence in Natural Resource Management, 2010). A number of threatened species rely on the catchment area for their survival, including the Freshwater Sawfish, the Northern River Shark, and the Purple-crowned Fairy-wren (Centre of Excellence in Natural Resource Management, 2010). There are also a total of 18 fish species endemic to the Martuwarra Fitzroy River (The Kimberley, n.d.b).



Bush walkers explore Mornington Wilderness Camp located in the upper catchment area of the Fitzroy River. Photo: Tim Nicol

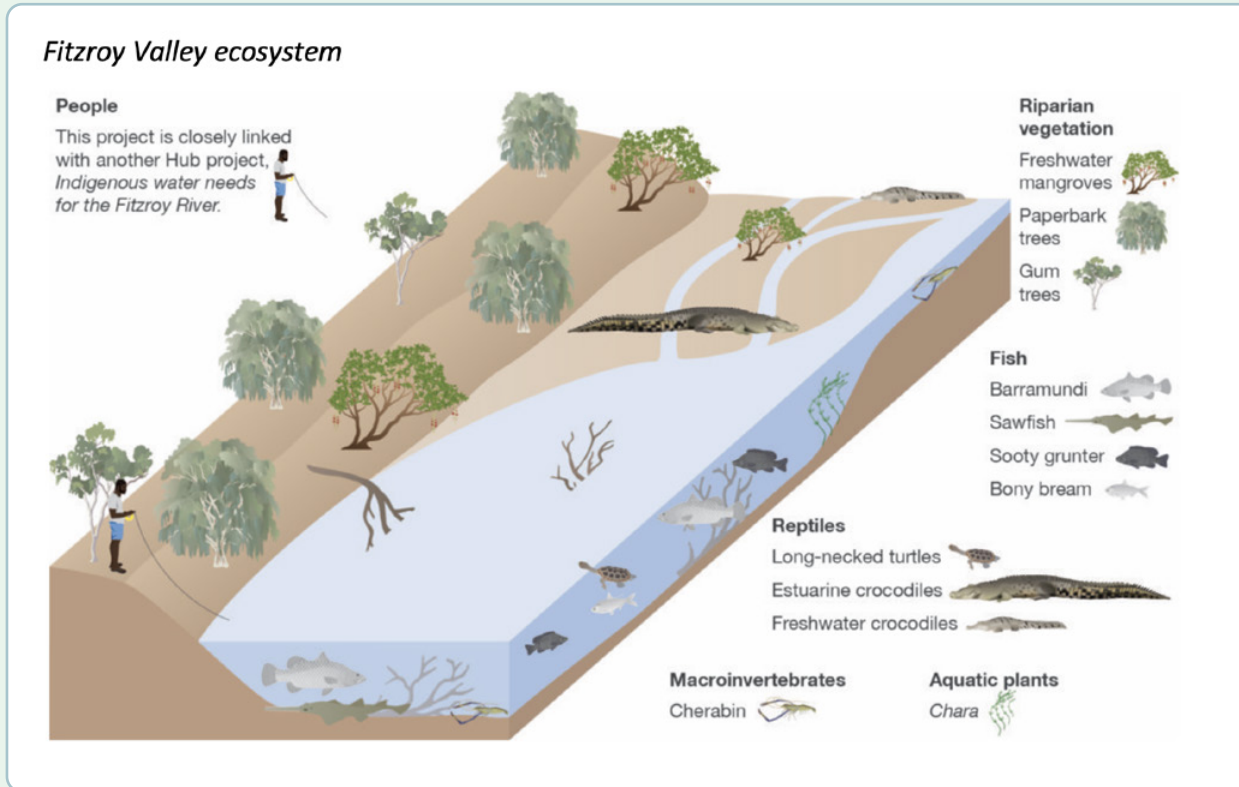


Figure 7. Fitzroy Valley ecosystem.
Source: Northern Australia Environmental Resources Hub (n.d).

With the majority of residents in the Fitzroy Valley being Traditional Owners, connection to country and its rhythms is fundamental to the social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of communities. Looking after country is deeply rooted in cultural practices and is of high importance for healing (Government of Western Australia, 2017). As stated by the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council (2020): “We believe the river to be the lifeblood of our Nation”. Listed for its intrinsic cultural values, Martuwarra perfectly illustrates locals’ timeless connection to the environment. The river links four different cultural expressions of the Australia-wide Rainbow Serpent tradition throughout its course (Australian Government, n.d.). Indigenous rangers combine traditional knowledge with western science to engage in land management and keep country healthy (The Kimberley, n.d.a). Indigenous residents to the Valley also rely on the health of the river and other waterways for subsistence, Barramundi and Cherabin being staple foods in the region (The Kimberley, n.d.b). As a consequence, Traditional Owners have increasingly been calling for authority and control in water governance and the determination of water allocations (Jackson, 2015).

Pastoral grazing is a key socio-economic aspect of the Fitzroy Valley and dominates much of the area with 95% of the catchment covered by pastoral leases (Pusey and Kath, 2015) (Figure 8). According to Pusey and Kath (2015), a potential key driver of land use change in the Valley could be the intensification of pastoral grazing, namely of cattle. Other land uses include some areas for mining, and small areas for irrigated cropping.

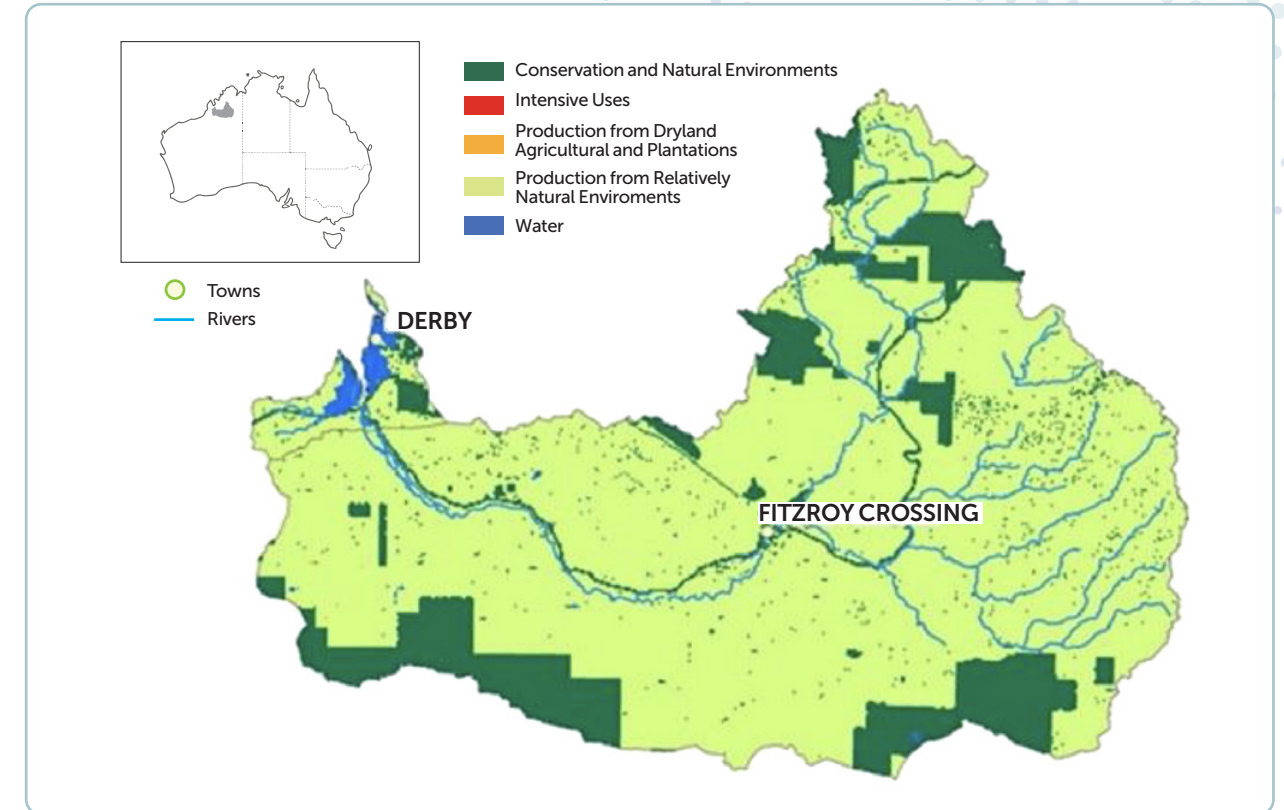


Figure 8. Major land uses in the Fitzroy Valley.
Source: Pusey and Kath (2015)

Note. Areas highlighted in light green in the map of the Martuwarra Fitzroy River catchment above correspond to ‘production from relatively natural environments’, which refer to grazing. Dark green patches represent conservation and natural environments.

Alongside the Fitzroy Valley’s rich environmental assets come also grave threats to its cultural and environmental diversity. Groundwater and surface extraction, land clearing and loss of native vegetation cover, mining, over-grazing and salinization are among major threats facing the region (Pusey and Kath, 2015; van Dam, Bartolo & Bayliss, 2008). A further potential risk to the environmental value of the region is the damming of the Martuwarra Fitzroy River and surface water use for irrigation (The Kimberley, n.d.b). The Martuwarra Fitzroy River’s immense waterflow has long attracted interest for its farming potential, and several proposals for dams and irrigation pumps have been put forward for large-scale farming projects (van Dam, Bartolo & Bayliss, 2008; Wahlquist, 2020). While currently considered a free-flowing river, water would be extracted from the river’s channels and stored in tanks along the floodplains under these proposals (The Kimberley, n.d.b). Such changes to the river’s natural ecology could have significant consequences, as illustrated in the death of 46 freshwater sawfish in 2018 after the river was pumped for just 1-2 gigalitres of water (The Kimberley, n.d.b). These pressures prompted the establishment of the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council composed of local traditional custodians to protect the River from harmful future development (The Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council, n.d.). Furthermore, according to a WA Government consultation with stakeholders regarding managing water in the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Catchment, it has been detected that “most people [consulted] understand and support” the call for a ‘no dam policy’ for on-stream dams along the Martuwarra Fitzroy River (Government of Western Australia, 2020, p. 6). After decades lobbying against proposals to dam the river, Bunuba Traditional Owners entered an agreement with the WA Government in December 2020 for the inception of the Fitzroy River National Park, adjoining the existing Danggu Geikie Gorge National Park (The Kimberley, 2020), which would grant the area legal environmental protection.

3. Tourism in the Fitzroy Valley

The Kimberley and the Fitzroy Valley as a tourism destination

Remoteness and timelessness are at the core of the Kimberley’s identity as a tourism destination. Its awe-inspiring wild landscapes, rich Aboriginal culture and unique wildlife make it an epic holiday destination with increasing popularity both nationally and internationally (Pforr & Volgger, 2019; Scherrer et al, 2011). In 2020, the Kimberley was the only location in Australia to be included in the New York Times’ annual list of top places to visit, ranked fifth before other iconic destinations like the Bahamas, Sicily and Paris (New York Times, 2020). Among attractions mentioned by the New York Times were the Bungle Bungle Range, Lake Argyle, El Questro’s waterfall and gorges, and Aboriginal cultural tours in Broome. According to Tourism Australia (n.d.), additional attractions not to be missed include the Horizontal Falls, the Buccaneer Archipelago, Cape Leveque on the tip of the Dampier Peninsula and the infamous Gibb River Road which transverses the Kimberley. Given the region’s key drawcards and attractions, it is clear that the success of the Kimberley’s brand as a premier if not ‘luxury’ tourism destination greatly depends on the intactness of its natural environment and cultural landscape (Curtin Sustainable Tourism Centre, 2010; Poelina & Nordensvard, 2018).

Two small towns make the tourism hubs of the Fitzroy Valley, Derby, just 220km from Broome, and Fitzroy Crossing, another 250km east. Both towns currently function as bases and over-night stops for visitors exploring the Valley and beyond. Derby, located along the mouth of the Martuwarra Fitzroy River, is considered the gateway to the outback as it marks the start (or finish) of the notorious Gibb River Road (Australia’s North West, n.d.a). “The Gibb” is a 660km track cutting through the Kimberley Plateau eastward to Kununurra, guiding visitors to many of the Kimberley’s iconic attractions. Derby has streets lined with boab trees and Australia’s highest tides. It is also an important tourism hub due to its close proximity to the Buccaneer Archipelago, where the Horizontal Waterfalls are located; for its art scene with the Mowanjumb Aboriginal Art and Cultural Centre and the Norval Gallery; and for the historic Boab Prison Tree (Australia’s North West, n.d.a). Fitzroy Crossing, on the other hand, is adjacent to some of the Valley’s greatest gems. The Devonian Reef National Parks includes Danggu Geikie Gorge, Dimalurru Tunnel Creek and the Bandilngan Windjana Gorge, all of which are nestled within an ancient 350-million-year protected reef system (Australia’s North West, n.d.b). Not far is Fossil Downs where the Gogo fish fossil was found, and Mimbi Caves in the heart of Gooniyandi country where a complex cave network reveals rock art galleries and a fossilised reef. The Crossing Inn, established in 1897 to serve pastoralists and prospectors in Fitzroy Valley, is still in operation and represents a more recent historical landmark.

The tourism industry in the Kimberley and Fitzroy Valley

Tourism is one of the major industries in the Kimberley, responsible for an estimated 12% of the region’s employment and 10% of the gross revenue generated by businesses (Kimberley Development Commission, 2020a). Recent data show that an estimated total of 544,000 visitors spend more than \$563 million per year in the Kimberley (Kimberley Development Commission, 2020b). About 1,500 people are employed through tourism in the Kimberley, of whom 145 are Aboriginal (Kimberley Development Commission, 2020b). Tourism is seemingly a beneficial industry for the Kimberley’s communities as it is labour-intensive, offering more employment opportunities for residents than other sectors (Curtin Sustainable Tourism Centre, 2010). Furthermore, when compared to other sectors, the tourism industry has been shown to have a high regional economic return per dollar invested - in 2010 the return was found to be between \$1.50-1.70 (Curtin Sustainable Tourism Centre, 2010).

As illustrated in the previous section, unemployment rates in the Fitzroy Valley’s two Shires are much higher than the state average, reaching 40% (Halls Creek) and 30% (Derby) respectively in June 2020 (Kimberley Development Commission, 2020a). With limited job opportunities in the area, remote Indigenous communities have voiced their interest in growing business and enterprise in the Valley to diversify their economy that currently relies heavily on pastoral activities, and are looking to become more active in tourism as a means to provide employment opportunities for young people (Government of WA, 2017).

Visitor Profiles

The visitor profiles for the Fitzroy Valley outlined below are taken from Tourism WA Overnight visitor factsheet 2017-2019 relating to the Shire of Derby and the Shire of Halls Creek (Tourism WA Strategy and Research 2020a; Tourism WA Strategy and Research 2020b). Visitors to the Kimberley are predominantly domestic travellers residing in Australia; 9% visit from overseas (Tourism Western Australia, 2020a). Of the domestic visitors to the region, 59% are intrastate tourists and 31% are interstate travellers. Although international tourists account for only a small proportion of the visitors, they tend to stay in the region 3 times longer than WA and Australian visitors, with an average of 19.4 overnight stays as opposed to the 5.7 and 9.4 nights spent by intra and interstate visitors respectively (Tourism Western Australia, 2020a).

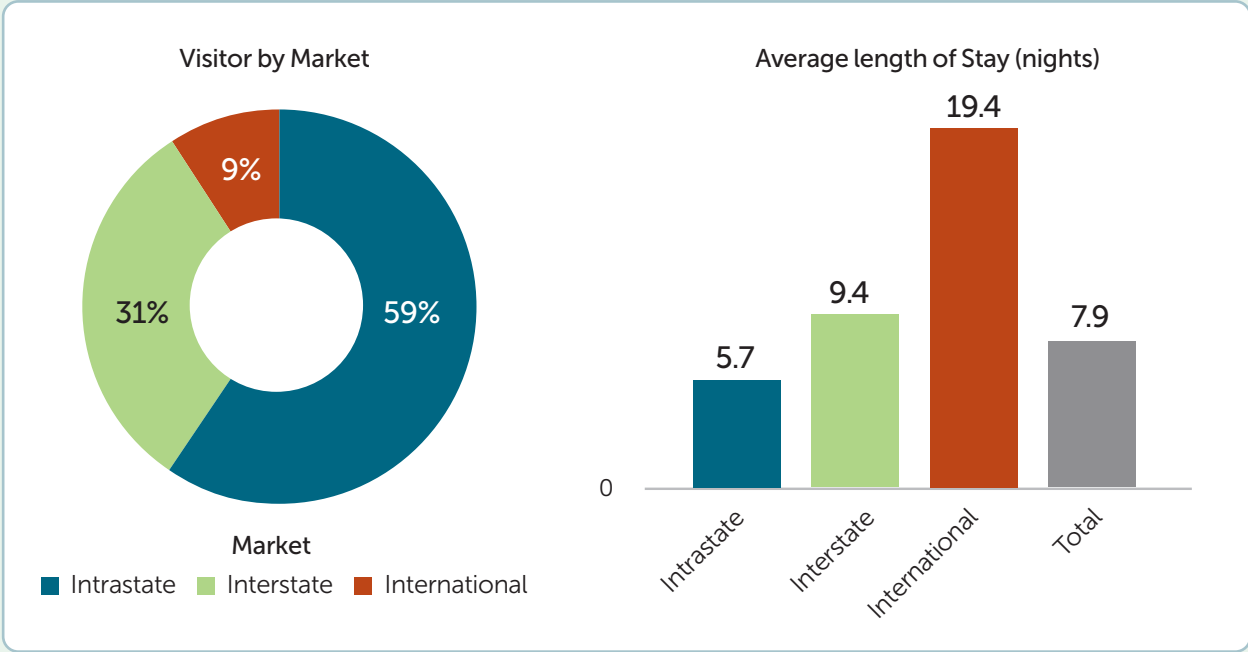


Figure 9. Kimberley visitors by market and by average length of stay.

Source: Tourism WA Strategy and Research (2020a)

To better understand the profile of visitors to the Fitzroy Valley, data from the Shire of Derby and the Shire of Halls Creek were considered as these two shires make up the Valley’s local government areas. Based on a three-year average between 2017 and 2019, the Fitzroy Valley accounts for 13.6% of visitor spending between the Kimberley’s local government areas, whereas Broome generates 68% (Tourism WA Strategy and Research, 2020b; Tourism WA Strategy and Research, 2020c).

The Shire of Derby (which includes the Valley’s central hub, Fitzroy Crossing) receives an average of 113,000 annual visitors, whereas Halls Creek hosts just over half as many, averaging at 64,000 visitors per year (Tourism WA Strategy and Research, 2020b; Tourism WA Strategy and Research, 2020c). Approximately 10-13% of visitors to the Fitzroy Valley are of international origin. Derby welcomes a significantly bigger intrastate audience (58%) than Halls Creek, where 48% of domestic visitors are from WA and 41% are from other states and territories (Tourism WA Strategy and Research, 2020b; Tourism WA Strategy and Research, 2020c). Visitors to Derby tend to stay 5.7 nights in the area, varying from 4.3 days for intrastate to 10 days for international travellers. In Halls Creek, international tourists tend to stay 3.1 nights, intrastate and interstate visitors stay an average of 2.3 and 2.5 nights (Tourism WA Strategy and Research, 2020b; Tourism WA Strategy and Research, 2020c).

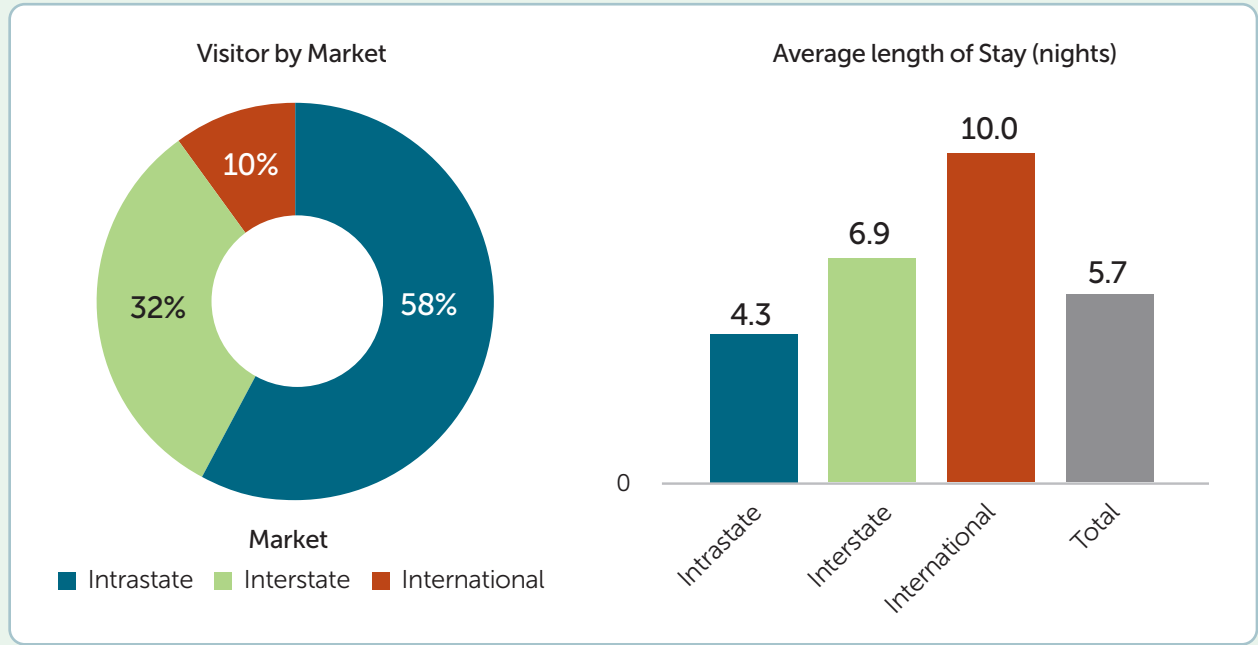


Figure 10. Shire of Derby visitors by market and by average length of stay.
Source: Tourism WA Strategy and Research (2020b)

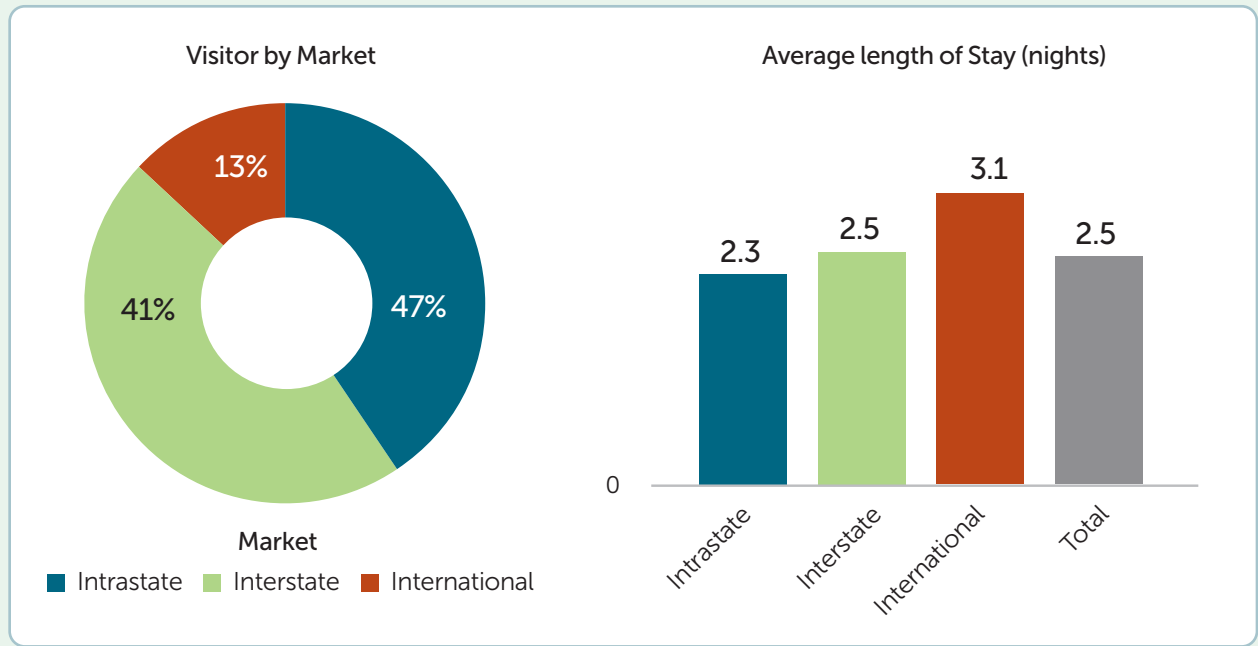


Figure 11. Shire of Halls Creek visitors by market and by average length of stay.
Source: Tourism WA Strategy and Research (2020c)



The Fitzroy River National Park will extend from Danggu Geikie Gorge National Park along the Fitzroy River to the north and along the Margaret River to the east. Photo: Wild Road Wanderers

Amongst domestic visitors, the two core reasons for visiting Derby and Halls Creek LGAs are for holidays and for business. For international tourists, having a holiday was the primary purpose of their travel to the region (95%) (Tourism WA Strategy and Research, 2020b; Tourism WA Strategy and Research, 2020c).

Camping or staying in a caravan is the favoured accommodation type for Derby's domestic visitors (34%), and although this is also the most popular option for Halls Creek's domestic visitors (28%), staying in a hotel, resort or inn is chosen by 18% of its domestic travellers. International visitors to Derby prefer staying in a rented house or apartment (21%) over camping (13%), with hotel/resort accommodation being the least popular (11%). The vast majority of internationals (46%) in Halls Creek tend to camp or stay in a caravan, although 14% choose to rent a house or flat. It is important to note, however, that demand patterns are obviously related to the type of accommodation available in the area (Tourism WA Strategy and Research, 2020b; Tourism WA Strategy and Research, 2020c).

Domestic travellers to the Fitzroy Valley seem to be predominantly males (65% in Derby and 71% in Halls Creek), with quite a distributed range of age groups from 20 years onwards. Domestic travel parties in Derby are varied, adult couples taking the lead (29%) soon followed by those travelling alone (22%), with a notably small percentage relating to family groups (5%). In Halls Creek most domestic visitors travel alone or as a couple. International travellers in both Derby and Halls Creek tend to be composed of travel parties with an even gender balance, mainly of adult couples (50% in Derby, 44% in Halls Creek) or solo travellers (30% in Derby, 33% in Halls Creek). There are plenty of young travellers to the Valley with total 35% between the ages of 20 and 34 years; a substantial portion of visitors is aged between 50-64 (26%), and a considerable section is 65 and older (20%) (Tourism WA Strategy and Research, 2020b; Tourism WA Strategy and Research, 2020c).

Between 2017-2019, visitors to the Shires of Derby and Halls Creek generated \$84 million spending per year on average, \$43 million of which was spent in the Shire of Derby. Visitors' average trip spend was higher in Halls Creek than in Derby, despite the shorter number of overnight stays. In Derby tourists spent \$415 per trip on average compared to \$636 in Halls Creek (Tourism WA Strategy and Research, 2020d; Tourism WA Strategy and Research, 2020e).

Existing tourism businesses in the Fitzroy Valley

There are a number of established tourism businesses in the Fitzroy Valley. In the Fitzroy region alone (considering the narrower perimeter), a total of 14 enterprises are listed as members under the Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Council. Of the 14 Aboriginal-owned businesses, five focus on delivering cultural tours throughout the area, four offer a range of accommodation options from camping to lodging, and four are art and cultural centres or galleries providing an array of products from cultural dance and music to traditional paintings. It is important to note that pioneer Aboriginal tourism operators in the region have sustained business outcomes and have created cultural and reputational assets that build the foundations for future tourism development in the Valley. These businesses include (but are not limited to) Bungoolee Tours, Mimbi Caves Tours & Campground and Darnku Heritage Cruises, who, through determination and consistency, have carved the path for emerging businesses to unfold.

4. Analysis of tourism market potentials

Methodological note

(a) Experimental treatments

By applying an experimental research design, survey participants residing in Australia were randomly allocated one of six adverts about the Fitzroy Valley, and were requested to declare a probability of visitation to the Fitzroy Valley after reading the advert. The three listing and/or protected area scenarios (none; National Park; World Heritage Listed) were applied both with and without experientially anchored promotional material as this might be expected to have an effect on intention to visit. This resulted in a total of six experimental treatments (see Table 1).

Table 1: Experimental design with six different adverts shown to respondents.

Label	Treatment group	Promotional material	Listing/protected area status
A0	1	rational	none
A1	2	emotional/experiential	none
B0	3	rational	National Park
B1	4	emotional/experiential	National Park
C0	5	rational	UNESCO World Heritage Listed
C1	6	emotional/experiential	UNESCO World Heritage Listed

(a) Experimental treatments

The six advertisements are provided in the Appendix. Note the use of headings and emphases to underscore the listing and/or protected area status and the promotional tone. Furthermore, note that the treatments C0 and C1 include the listing as a National Park in addition to the UNESCO World Heritage Listing.

(b) Questionnaire

The questionnaire included three parts. The first part contained some simple demographics and a filter question on how likely the respondent was to visit the Fitzroy Valley region. People who indicated a visit was most unlikely, either due to a lack of interest or their circumstances preventing it, did not proceed with the rest of the survey. It is reasonable to assume these respondents are unlikely to visit regardless of any advertising treatment.

The second part of the questionnaire presented the respondent with one advertisement randomly chosen from the six experimental treatments illustrated in Table 1. The fact that respondents were only shown one randomly selected advertisement was a key part of the experimental design. This means respondents are very unlikely to anticipate the purpose of the study and respondents are presented with one realistic scenario. The randomisation allows causal conclusions of treatment on probability of visitation. Alternative research designs, such as asking respondents if they are more likely to visit if the region is World Heritage listed, are likely to introduce bias in responses and do not present a realistic scenario. This bias of alternative research approaches was verified in this data.

The third and final part of the questionnaire asked respondents to answer a variety of questions concerning their likelihood of visiting, their likely spending during a visit and some questions regarding their attitudes.

(b) Respondents

Respondents were recruited online through Qualtrics and the survey was conducted between February and April 2021. Systematic sampling was applied to over-sample the key intrastate market with a total of 2,976 people (973 WA; 2003 non-WA) completing the initial screening question.

The importance of protected area status to visitation was assessed on a subset of 266 people (137 WA; 129 non-WA). Most respondents removed were deemed outside the potential market based on their answer to the filter question (see below), but a few were removed because they failed an attention test question (indicating they had not comprehended the advertisement sufficiently to know whether the region was designated as a National Park or a UNESCO World Heritage Listing) or because of speeding (they took less than 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire).

Results

(a) Potential Market

Much caution is required when extrapolating percentages to the Australian population, however results suggest the potential tourism market for the Fitzroy Valley is substantial (Table 2). A more conservative estimate results from the many people (17% WA residents; 11% non-WA Australian residents) who said they are likely to visit in the next 5 years. An optimistic estimate including people willing to investigate the possibility further (37% WA; 27% non-WA) suggests a potential market of 54% (WA) and 38% (non-WA) of Australian residents.

The most conservative estimate based on the share of respondents who gave the third or fourth response shown in Table 2 and then proceeded to complete the *full* survey, learning more about Fitzroy Valley by reading an advert and passing all quality checks, suggests a potential market of 5.1% WA residents and 3.4% non-WA residents.

Table 2: Perceived viability of booking a holiday trip to the Fitzroy region.

Over the next five years, for me, booking a holiday trip to the Fitzroy region is.	WA		Non-WA	
Not viable (I lack the time and/or the money)	234	24%	712	36%
Viable but I have no interest in doing so	217	22%	529	26%
Viable and I am willing to investigate the possibility further	356	37%	547	27%
Viable and I am likely to visit	166	17%	215	11%
Total	973	100%	2003	100%

Based on the 2016 census data, there are approximately 2.5 million adults in WA (and 23.4 million Australian adults outside WA, here referred to as non-WA adults). Applying the more conservative and more optimistic percentages shown in Table 2 suggests the potential domestic market over 5 years to be between 0.4 and 1.4 million WA adults and between 2.6 and 8.9 million non-WA adults. This equates to a total domestic potential market of between 2.9 and 10.3 million adults over 5 years, or 0.6 to 2.1 million adults annually. Currently, the Kimberley region receives approximately 0.4 million domestic visitors annually (rolling three-year average 2017-2019; Tourism WA, 2020a) and the Fitzroy Valley receives 102,000 domestic visitors (Tourism WA, 2020b). Cautious estimates (17% WA; 11% non-WA) suggest the potential market for the Fitzroy Valley region to be up to 6 times its current domestic visitation, especially since these visitors may potentially also visit more than once. Utilising the most conservative estimate (5.1% WA; 3.4% non-WA), the market potential for the Fitzroy Valley would amount to 180,000 domestic adult visitors per year which is still a 1.8-fold increase of its current 102,000 domestic visitors (Tourism WA, 2020b).

It is reasonable to assume the respondents who declared they are unlikely to visit the region due to lack of interest or feasibility of visitation (Table 2) have (approximately) a zero probability of visiting and therefore are unlikely to spend money in the region regardless of listing status or product interventions they are exposed to.

While the above results indicate a good baseline level of interest, it needs to be noted that many steps and measures (on both demand and supply sides, including communication and product development) are required to translate such a stated potential interest in considering a visit into actual visitation. There are a number of factors that need to be taken into consideration when interpreting these numbers, including people finding it difficult to assess the likelihood of future behaviour accurately (e.g., Kahnemann & Tversky, 1972) as well as lack of awareness and familiarity: Prior to seeing the advertisement, approximately half (55% WA; 46% non-WA) of people stated they either had never heard of the Fitzroy Valley region or had heard the name but knew little more. This lack of familiarity and awareness hampers the ability of respondents to accurately assess their likelihood of visitation. They may either overestimate or underestimate this likelihood as a consequence. This also stresses the importance of communication (i.e., advertising) and creating awareness in order to translate a proportion of the market potential into actual visitation.

Due to these factors, we suggest opting for a more conservative and cautious estimate of the market potential.

(b) The importance of protected area status

This study also asked some respondents about their probability of visiting in the next five years, under different scenarios of protected area status of the Fitzroy Valley. This part of the analysis only used data from people who passed all quality checks (including speeding and attention check), because answers from people who do not read the advertisement carefully do not contribute in achieving valid and reliable results. Overall, the obtained findings illustrate that the existence of protected areas and their status positively influence the likelihood of visitors travelling to the Fitzroy Valley in the next five years (see Table 3). Both the National Park status and the UNESCO World Heritage Listing tend to generate higher probabilities of visiting than scenarios under which the area has not been declared either a National Park or World Heritage Listed.

Table 3: Regression analysis predicting the probability of visiting among those who have declared a willingness to explore a visit to the Fitzroy Valley.

	B	SE	t	p	
(Intercept)	56.83	3.13	18.14	0.000	***
National Park	9.26	3.06	3.03	0.003	**
World Heritage Listing	6.19	2.63	2.35	0.019	*
Emotional advert	-0.45	2.19	-0.21	0.836	
A-priori visitation interest	12.58	2.49	5.04	0.000	***
# of previous NP visits	4.08	1.12	3.64	0.000	***
# of previous WHS visits	-1.25	1.21	-1.04	0.300	

Note: * denoting a statistical significance level at $\alpha=0.05$; ** at 0.01; and *** at 0.001
A-priori visitation interest equals 0 when the third response in Table 2 is given and equals 1 when the fourth response is given.
of previous visits (NP and WHS) are measured on a scale of 0 to 5 (0; 1; 2-4; 5-10; 11-20; more than 20 visits).

Overall, the probabilities of visiting after viewing an advertisement about the Fitzroy Valley region varied from 5% to 100%, with a mean of 72% (median of 75%). These high probabilities are promising; however, they reflect the fact that many people unlikely to visit have already been removed and people are indicating their current intentions or desires. This is likely to be higher than the actual visitation rates in the next 5 years. Moreover, it is necessary to remember that these respondents have all seen and carefully read an advert about the Fitzroy Valley region.

Table 3 indicates that for a respondent who received the basic advertisement (rational advertisement) with no mention of a National Park or a World Heritage Site and who has not knowingly visited a National Park or World Heritage Site in the last five years, the average probability of visiting is 56.83% (the intercept). Adverts specifying that the Fitzroy Valley is a National Park increase this probability of visitation by 9.26% (to 66.09%). Hence the estimated effect of National Park status is about 9%, with the 95% confidence interval between 3% and 15%.

Adverts specifying the Fitzroy Valley to be part of a World Heritage Site increase this probability of visiting among domestic visitors by 6.19%. While it appears that being a World Heritage Site generates smaller positive effects on visitation than a National Park (+6.19% < +9.26%), these values are not significantly different ($p = .253$). Hence, the data is consistent with the World Heritage Site declaration being no different in its impact to the National Park declaration (combining these two treatments provides an overall estimate of 7.2%). Both generate a significant positive effect on declared likelihood of visitation. Please also note that this survey was conducted with domestic Australian visitors only. It can be assumed that Australians are very familiar with a National Park protected area status, and thus this status can be considered a 'brand' Australians know very well. On the other hand, a World Heritage listed site may produce a notable effect within the international tourism market.

In addition, we observed a number of control variables: The emotionally worded advert does not have a statistically significant effect relative to the rational (and arguably simpler) advert ($p = .836$). Respondents indicating they were likely to visit at the beginning of the survey, before reading any advert, had a 12.58% higher probability of visiting ($p < .001$). The more times a respondent has knowingly visited a National Park in the last five years, the more likely they were to visit the Fitzroy Valley region. Impacts of this travel experience or travel interest factor range from 4.08% (for one previous visit) to 20.4% (for the highest category of more than 20 visits). Previous visits to World Heritage Sites, on the other hand, did not significantly ($p = .300$) influence the probability of visiting the Fitzroy Valley region. This comparison stresses the strongly anchored awareness and loyalty around visitation of National Parks for the domestic Australian tourism market.

In conclusion, respondents are more likely to declare a higher probability of visiting the Fitzroy Valley region

- if presented with an advert that explicitly mentions the Fitzroy Valley as a National Park (note that the World Heritage Listing implied a National Park status as well),
- if they have knowingly visited National Parks in the past, and
- if they have a stronger interest in visiting Fitzroy Valley prior to seeing any advertisement.

(c) Tourist spending estimates and impact on employment

In a calculation that takes into account conservative market potential estimates (180,000 per year), a stated willingness to pay of \$1,000 per person, and the predicted increase in likelihood of visitation due to the declaration of a National Park (a conservative average of 7.2%), a National Park development scenario in the Fitzroy Valley may result in an additional domestic annual tourist spend of up to A\$13 million (or up to A\$43 million under more optimistic assumptions).

Please note, however, that these numbers assume that advertising has reached and been perceived by all people that consider visiting. These numbers are based on demand side analyses only and thus are also contingent upon the supply side being able to appropriately deliver in response to increased demand (in terms of quantity and expected quality). Please also note that these calculations consider effects on domestic markets exclusively. Additional impacts on international tourism markets may eventuate.

Taking the observed ratio between employment and expenditure in the Western Australian State Tourism Satellite Account 2019-2020 as reference point (TRA, 2020), the National Park development scenario in the Fitzroy Valley may result in the creation of an additional 158 full-time equivalent tourism-related jobs (under conservative estimates). This estimate only considers 'direct' effects and allows for 'indirect effects' to flow out of the region. This estimate does not include employment opportunities that are likely to arise due to non-tourism related effects (such as conservation activities) of a National Park development scenario.

(d) The perceived importance of other factors

Respondents were also asked the importance of factors influencing their eventual decision to visit the Fitzroy Valley (Figure 12) and whether some factors would increase or decrease their likelihood of visiting (Figure 13). Some emerging themes are highlighted below.

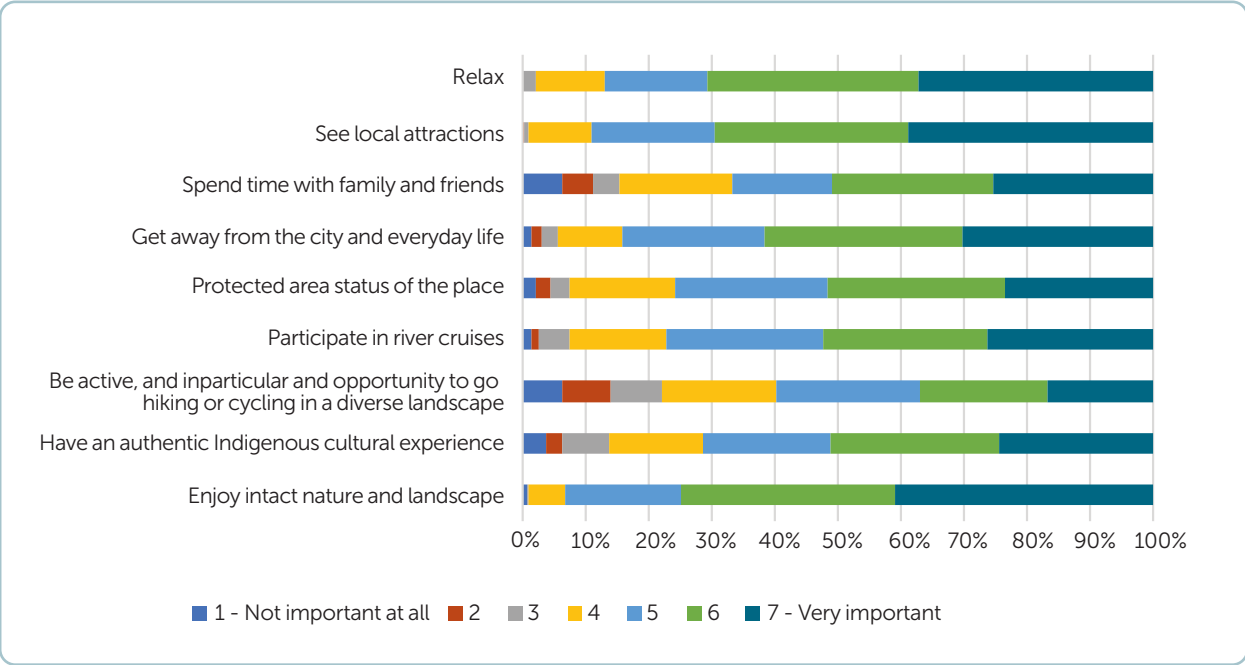


Figure 12. Perceived importance of factors in determining a visit to the Fitzroy Valley.

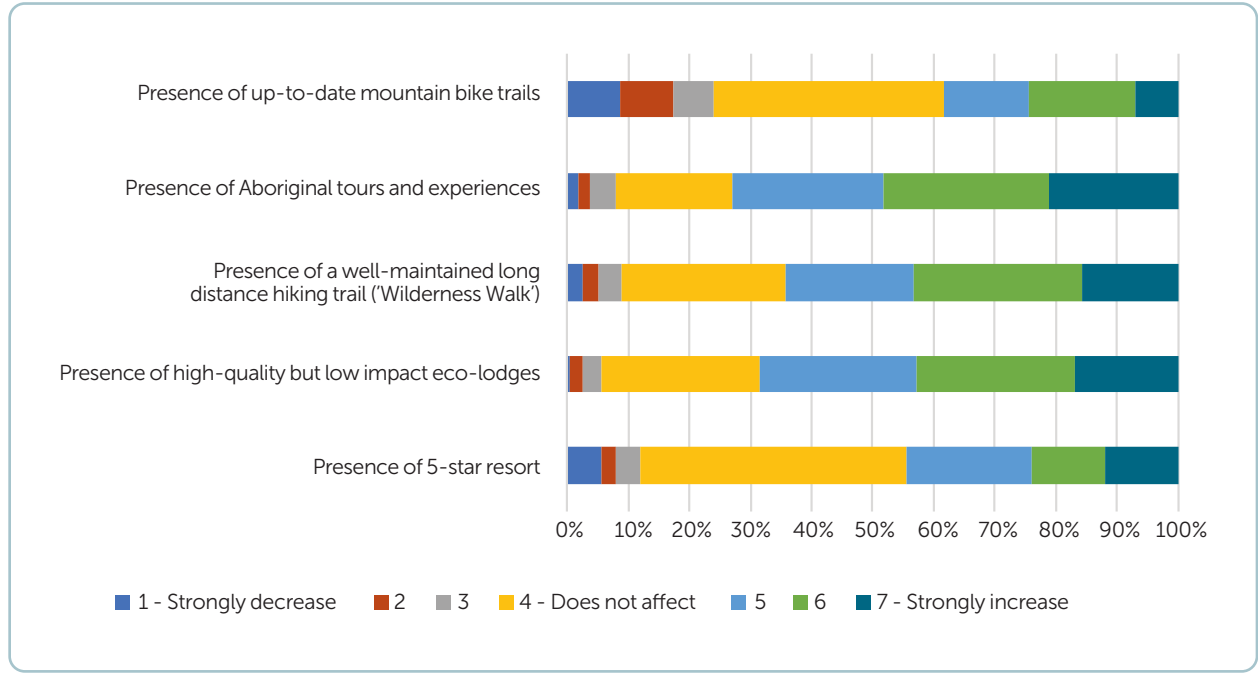


Figure 13. Tourism experiences and infrastructures increasing vs decreasing interest in visiting the Fitzroy Valley.

Intactness of the landscape:

Being able to enjoy intact nature and landscape was rated as being of highest importance, with 41% of respondents indicating it as 'very important'; and 93% of respondents rating its importance above the midpoint (5 or higher).

We also asked respondents whether they would support the Martuwarra Fitzroy River region being protected more extensively as a National Park or being included as part of a World Heritage site (results not shown in the figures above). Almost no one opposed these options, whereas 91% and 88% respectively were in favour.

Tourism attraction points and accommodation options:

The possibility to see 'local attractions' achieved the second highest average importance rating (39% of respondents rating it as very important) which indicates the critical relevance of creating tourist attraction points in order to boost visitation to the region. Well-maintained long-distance hiking trails (64% declaring an increase in interest, 9% declaring a decrease in interest) and, to a lesser degree, the presence of up-to-date mountain bike trails (38% declaring an increase, 24% declaring a decrease) resulted in net increases in declared interest of visitation. The same is true for the presence of high-quality but low impact eco-lodges and the presence of a 5-star resort. Both resulted in a net increase in interest of visitation. However, this effect was more pronounced with eco-lodges (68% increase, 6% decrease) than with the 5-star resort (44% increase, 12% decrease).

Aboriginal tourism experiences:

71% of respondents rated the opportunity to have an authentic Indigenous cultural experience above the midpoint (5 or higher) in terms of importance. Providing strong support for this finding, 73% also declared that the presence of Aboriginal tours and experiences would increase their interest in visiting the Fitzroy Valley region.

5. Interviews with Fitzroy Valley community members and tourism stakeholders

Methodological note

In-depth interviews were conducted with residents of the Fitzroy Valley and tourism stakeholders within the Kimberley and Fitzroy Region to capture thoughts and opinions about the Martuwarra Fitzroy River and economic development in the Valley, particularly with regards to tourism. Interviews constitute an efficient way of pooling on-ground expertise, and thus generate insights that interlace knowledge of lived experience with a good understanding of possibilities and contingencies for the area.

Throughout May 2021, we consulted with 21 community members and tourism stakeholders about their views on tourism development in the Fitzroy Valley, of whom 15 were Indigenous and 6 non-Indigenous. Interviewees were carefully selected in order to represent the cultural diversity inherent in the Valley and to capture the multiple outlooks shared by community members and stakeholders from different backgrounds who, in one form or another, hold a connection with the area. Most interviews were conducted face-to-face with permission granted by relevant authorities to enter Aboriginal communities. Face-to-face interviews on country were preferred over virtual encounters as they are culturally more appropriate and accessible, however online interviews were conducted when in-person interviews were not made possible.

Efforts were made to represent each of the Valley's five language groups (Nyikina, Walmajarri, Wangkatjunka, Gooniyandi and Bunuba) in the interviews, which were scheduled with the assistance of a local cultural facilitator to assist with language and cultural barriers. Additionally, interviews were conducted with tourism operators, service providers and representatives from not-for-profit organisations, Aboriginal corporations, councils and tourism organisations. The criterion for selecting these interviewees was their knowledge, connection to country and/or their experience working in tourism-related fields within the Fitzroy Valley region. Tourism as well as non-tourism community members were included in the group of interviewees in order to reduce bias that may not be representative of the Valley's view on the matter. Therefore, interviewees involved in a range of industries were approached. The interview process lasted between 30 to 90 minutes each, and interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format with open-ended questions to allow respondents to convey their own opinions about specific topics in a rather unconstrained manner, enabling them to steer the conversation into their particular area of interest and expertise. Openness is a key requirement of qualitative interview techniques as it enables interviewees to voice their own problem definitions, descriptions of reality and suggestions for solutions (Gephart, 2004). Questions revolved around topics such as connection to country and to the Fitzroy River, the region's key challenges and opportunities, desired and unwanted development in the area, tourism in the Valley, and visions for the future.

Interviewees' identities were kept anonymous in order to protect the integrity of participants; interviews were recorded with consent from participants, transcribed and systematically explored by means of a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method enables the analysis of qualitative, open interviews on a categorical basis and hence supports the identification of statement patterns in the overall set of interviews. Thus, the focus is on the comprehensive set of interview statements from all participants rather than on a single interviewee's statement. Based on this principle, the analysis transcends the individual respondents and treats the whole interview set holistically as statements are grouped on a thematic basis, not on the basis of who spoke (Pechlaner & Volgger, 2012).

Results

The results obtained from the interviews with local community members and tourism stakeholders point to three key themes which are central to understanding the complexity of the Valley, not only in terms of challenges but also in terms of identifying pathways moving forward; these are: country, community, and the economic development (see Figure 14). Unsurprisingly, these correspond to the three pillars that define sustainability, given this concept is often at the heart of traditional Indigenous cultures. These three themes are not independent from each other, and in fact are interconnected in essence. Findings suggest that tourism is considered to be a potential means to address existing issues in the Fitzroy Valley, as it feeds into each of the three central themes identified. In the subsections that follow, the insights gathered for these themes are untangled and discussed in more detail.



Figure 14. Key themes in the interviews.

(a) Country

Connection to country

Aboriginal nations demonstrated strong connections and affiliations with the water in the area. In this study, all Indigenous interviewees – with no exception – describe their relationship to the Martuwarra Fitzroy River as one of deep belonging and of custodianship. The River is seen as a life-giver not only in the sense of sustaining an intricate food chain on which the Martuwarra Traditional Owners still rely on for food and wellbeing, but also in a much more profound sense, in that the River itself and all of its associated springs, soaks, billabongs and underground channels connect the Valley's five nations through shared songlines and stories. The water that flows through the River and its related waterways is represented by Yoongoorookoo, the Rainbow Serpent, an ancestral being believed to be responsible for the creation of the river system and living on in the Valley until this day (River of Life et al., 2020). As such, the Martuwarra Fitzroy River as a living entity with right to life, encapsulates significant cultural, environmental and economic values, and its protection is understood to be an obligation of all who belong to it under Warloongarri Law (the law of Martuwarra) (River of Life et al., 2020). Furthermore, due to historical displacement suffered by Aboriginal people across the Kimberley, reconnecting with country and spending time on ancestral lands is deemed a powerful tool for healing deep wounds.

"My DNA has been here from the beginning of time. When I introduce myself, I say 'I am a woman who belongs to the Fitzroy River'. [...] My totem is a blue-tongue lizard, so we learn as indigenous people that we have relatives that are non-human, so our world is about we, not me." (Indigenous interviewee)

"Living on country, we are very much impacted by climate change, food scarcity, food insecurity, water scarcity, changes in the environment. As I said, our lifeways, our livelihood and our economies are heavily reliant on the Fitzroy River being a very healthy system, because Martuwarra means "River of Life", and so therefore it is a living sacred ancestral being that gives life to every other living creature, the birds, the trees, the fish, all of that. It is a symbiotic co-existence, so what we are saying is that we definitely want to showcase and share this amazing cultural and diverse landscape, but we need to think carefully about what the alternative economies can be, must be, should be." (Indigenous interviewee)

"Our old people tell stories about the dreaming of the waterholes [and the river]...The River connects from Bunuba, Gooniyandi, Walmajarri, Wangkatjunka down to Nyikina country. Some of my families here, they are buried all along the Fitzroy Valley, along the River. They've lived here for so many years..." (Indigenous interviewee)

Threats to country

Due to the central and active role the River plays in the life of local communities, water governance is a priority area of concern for Indigenous peoples in the Fitzroy Valley; according to 'First Law', access to and care for water is a responsibility, a duty and a right (Martuwarra River of Life et al., 2021). Some of the main threats to the life of Martuwarra identified by interviewees include damming and the use of pumps to draw out water from the River for irrigation of large-scale agricultural activities. This is mirrored by research conducted by the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council, which found that locals' sentiment towards the Fitzroy catchment is that it should be protected from extractive resource industries (Poelina et al., 2020). The use of harmful chemicals in crop production and the consequent run-off pollution was a concern associated with these practices raised by locals. Certain pastoral practices, over-fishing (e.g., use of large nets across the river) and littering were also mentioned as ongoing challenges that threaten the health of the riparian ecosystem. Furthermore, many interviewees also linked fracking and mining to predatory industries in the broader River country that pose imminent risks to the sustainability of the region.

Almost all interviewees in this study declared they do not approve of taking water out of the River, as this would negatively impact the trees and animals that depend on it, and could potentially lead to droughts in the river and its catchment area. Even if development were to occur in another Indigenous language group's country, concerns were raised about unwanted effects permeating the landscape, as projects actioned upstream would inevitably impact communities downstream. Some warned that if too much water were taken, spiritual entities that live in the Valley responsible for keeping culture alive and strong could be disturbed, and may ultimately "leave the Valley in search of another place to settle" if this were the case. Beyond environmental and spiritual concerns linked to water extraction, participants also warned of potential impacts to tourism activities (e.g., river cruises) if water was to be drawn out of the Fitzroy River, as this may have an effect on important attraction points, such as Windjana Way and/or Geikie Gorge.

Although a majority of interviewees expressed a more conservative view regarding the extraction of water from the River, some interviewees emphasised that they do not oppose development in the Valley. These interviewees deemed (economic) development of the Fitzroy Valley as a high priority, but they explicitly mentioned that this should be pursued in a manner that does not harm the River. A minority of interviewees in this study mentioned that they were also open to considering water usage proposals with adequate management under the condition that Traditional Owners were to retain full control over such activities and enough research was available to ensure that these activities would not impinge on the health of the River. Given the interconnectedness of the cultural and natural environment that spans across the river ecosystem, a number of community members call for an agreement to be made between all Traditional Owners of the Fitzroy catchment with regards to the protection and use of the River. For that matter, the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council, formed in 2018 by Traditional Owners from six nations along the Fitzroy River, "provides a model for Indigenous-led regional cultural water governance, advocating decolonising the Catchment by promoting new and emerging economies", whereby the group's capacity for collaborative planning between government, industry and Native Title Holders is strengthened (Poelina et al., 2020).

"We need to keep our River and Valley areas clean, with no rubbish and all them [sic] other stuff. We need the water here to keep our country alive, to keep what we eat in the river. We need the water here for the fish to live in, instead of taking the water away from us." (Indigenous interviewee)

"It is a very globally unique place, and I think we need to slow down in terms of the types of development we are proposing. We are not anti-development, we are very pro-development, but it needs to reflect maintaining the life of the River, which is a sacred, ancestral being which all of the nations connect to and celebrate. [...]" (Indigenous interviewee)

Protection of country

Despite the diversity of views and perspectives shared by the Valley's language groups, the consensus seems to be that the protection of the River country is ultimately beneficial to all. With a cultural responsibility and obligation to look after country, Indigenous interviewees suggested ways that would aid the protection of the Fitzroy River catchment area.

Aboriginal ranger programs (e.g., Ngurrara and Yanunijarra Rangers, Bunuba Rangers, Gooniyandi Rangers) were praised for their role in giving continuity to custodianship of country, whereby traditional practices are met by western techniques to deliver holistic Indigenous-led conservation and land management. These programs were also highly valued due to their ability to create fulfilling employment opportunities on country. The importance of having both female and male ranger programs was emphasised due to duties related to both "men and women's business". Beyond environmental protection, ranger programs often encompass the protection of sacred sites, intergenerational knowledge transfer (where provisions are made to take elders and children to special areas where stories can be shared), and tour-guiding.

Another pathway for protection of the Valley’s environmental and cultural significance addressed by interviewees is by means of the establishment of protected areas, such as National Parks, Geoparks and Biosphere Reserves along the Fitzroy River and Valley. The extension of a National Park in the Fitzroy Valley seems to be supported by a significant part of the community, although some do hold reservations towards this type of proposal due to a concern of losing control over custodianship of traditional lands. While most are in favour of expanding the number and/or area of National Parks in the area, ascertaining a level of control is deemed paramount to ensure traditional ways are respected and sacred sites are preserved, and guarantee that Aboriginal people are active decision-makers, contributors and beneficiaries. Many participants associated the establishment of a National Park with protection from damming and irrigation proposals. In addition, interviewees also associated the designation of National Parks with economic benefits and an increase in job opportunities for Indigenous people through ranger programs and tourism.

For example, the Bunuba Dawangarri Aboriginal Corporation is currently in advanced negotiations with the WA State Government regarding jointly managing proposed National Park(s) via an Indigenous Land Use Agreement. Negotiations include the expansion of the Bunuba Ranger Program creating significant employment opportunities for local Indigenous people, as well as an extensive Kimberley cultural tourism product, which aims to boost visitation rates and increase cash flow to the region by creating new revenue streams. The focus of the negotiations centres on balancing commercial activities with local control and cultural respect, with the intent to achieve positive outcomes through joint-management agreements in protected areas.

With regards to the current proposal of a National Park extended from Geikie Gorge, Stage 1 (protection of the river and river banks) attained substantiated support; the more extensive Stage 2 plan seemed to result in some scepticism among a handful of interviewed participants, due to concerns about how the more extensive National Park might affect Aboriginal-owned pastoral businesses.

In addition to National Parks, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Geoparks, Biosphere Reserves and a host of other mechanisms were also suggested by Indigenous leaders as conduits to leverage the region’s tourism assets whilst increasing the area’s protection status. With exceptionally rich biodiversity and geological significance (e.g., Devonian Reef system, diversity of fossils), these listings are considered strategic avenues to enhance the area’s protection and tourism appeal.

“Before this job I worked in the mining industry for 10 years, but I started seeing what it was doing to country, and I’ve always had a strong connection to country. I think for too long Aboriginal people have been looked over [...]. We’ve always had smart people with a good voice, and I think now is a time where people have started looking to Aboriginal people, we are fully capable of doing our own things. This job for myself [ranger] [...] is good, what I am used to doing in my own spare time, I now am paid to do, plus I get assistance through my partners, my employers and other stakeholders that we work with.” (Indigenous interviewee)

“You have to have an alternative narrative, you can’t just say ‘we don’t want invasive, unjust development’. We are looking at what are the sustainable livelihoods on country. We believe that these economies are invested in the cultural and environmental values and landscape. From everything to being able to travel through the country and show people country with luxury tourism, but also, the opportunity to immerse yourself in the biodiversity and to see the land from a different way so we can, in particular for fellow Australians, create a deeper sense of ecological care for this beautiful place, which is National Heritage listed.” (Indigenous interviewee)

“I think it looks good [National Park proposal], from what I have been able to read it is like a dream come true, it would give us control over the river to protect it.” (Indigenous interviewee)

(b) Community

Community context

As demonstrated in the subsection above, Indigenous culture is still very much alive and strong in the Fitzroy Valley. At the crossroads between different language groups and one of few places one can overhear multiple Australian languages being fluently spoken concurrently, Fitzroy Crossing was regarded by one interviewee as one of the most Indigenous towns in the Kimberley. Interviewees point out that the Valley is riddled with remarkable stories, from ancient lore to more recent historical accounts, such as the Bunuba resistance led by Jandamarra at Windjana Gorge. The Martuwarra Traditional Owners are guardians of these tales, keeping them alive through generations by storytelling. Several interviewees stressed that many Traditional Owners enjoy sharing stories and knowledge with interested visitors – an attitude that is aligned with tourism development. The Valley is also home to artistic talent, which can be witnessed in any of the art galleries dotted through the area.

As with most Indigenous nations across Australia, British settlement in the Fitzroy Valley has left lasting scars on community. Since the late 1800s, graziers introduced their stock to the Valley and through this process many Aboriginal people were forced into the pastoral industry or displaced into missions and reserves. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, many desert societies migrated north and settled within the Fitzroy Valley (e.g., Wangkatjunka and Walmajarri). In the latter half of the 20th century during the civil rights movement that pushed for equal pay in pastoralism, Fitzroy Crossing became the epicentre of incoming ‘migrants’ from surrounding stations, and, unable to cope with the sudden surge of residents, became a field of makeshift shelters.

Social Issues

Due to a continuing history of neglect, the Valley suffers from a range of social issues that complexifies the task of building better futures. According to interviewees, lack of future prospects and opportunities, a flawed education system, impaired access to housing, and unhealed traumas leads to alcohol and drug abuse which in turn drives the increasing rates of youth crime, domestic violence and high unemployment. Elders reported being devastated by the growth in break-ins and robberies in Fitzroy Crossing.

From a tourism perspective, reputation fuelled by social problems has the potential to be damaging to a travel destination, with a few local tourism operators explaining that visitors sometimes feel unsafe and prefer by-passing Fitzroy Crossing due to negative media coverage. From an employment perspective, interviewees noted that getting community involved in projects can be challenging at times because of motivational problems linked to aforementioned traumas, yet most confirmed there is genuine interest within communities to engage with tourism, including among younger generations. In fact, tourism was consistently regarded as a prominent sector to develop further, as it builds on the Fitzroy Valley’s strengths and remedies its shortcomings (see a more extensive discussion further below). Challenges identified by interviewees that inhibit locals from making the most of tourism industry opportunities at present include:

- Lack of long-term business education, training and mentorship (e.g., marketing, insurance, bookings),
- Lack of intergenerational wealth (start-up capital),
- Cultural shyness and symptomatic lack of confidence,
- Lack of administrative, computer and financial skills,
- Difficulty accessing funding and seeking investment,
- Priority cultural obligations affecting business commitment,
- Transport issues (lack of driver’s license and/or vehicle),
- Poor facilities available, including internet coverage.

“Until we don’t make education for our children a priority, this place is not going to be safe for us to bring tourists here. We love the tourist dollar, who doesn’t, but we can’t guarantee security on our premises.” (Indigenous interviewee)

“We do come from a history of oppression and demolishing our confidence to be proud of who we are and to be confident to be putting out that culture and so on. There is a lot of shame, it takes a lot to stand up in front of forty people and confidently deliver something special and unique.” (Indigenous interviewee)

Pathways forward

Faced with these entrenched social issues, participants indicated potential pathways to redress social justice in the area. Providing better access to quality two-way learning education and housing was seen as key to improving the livelihoods of communities in the Valley. “Healing the spirit” was another priority item identified, with “getting back on country” systematically depicted as the most effective way to do so. Several interviewees shared their own experience of spending more time in their ancestral country and their communities, and how this functioned as ‘rehab’ away from life in Fitzroy Crossing. To remediate increasing youth crime, getting kids on country together with elders was said to be of vital importance, as this would enable kids to learn Indigenous law and lore and ultimately strengthen their cultural identity and pride. Finally, creating fulfilling job opportunities on country that employ the existing knowledge and skill set of Indigenous people was also portrayed as critical to addressing the Valley’s social problems. Different tourism stakeholder interviewees who operate in the Valley stressed that a self-determination approach is more likely to yield positive outcomes than a top-down initiative that seeks to address the region’s social inequalities. Effective strategies, they said, must encompass foundational well-being as well as capacity-building and up-skilling.

This is in line with a growing body of evidence that indicates that programs and services aimed at improving social and economic outcomes for Aboriginal people are more effective if carried out in an environment where Aboriginal culture is recognised and valued (WA Government Department of Culture and The Arts, 2016). Throsby and Petetskaya (2016) state that “an essential aspect of sustainability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is to ensure that mechanisms for cultural maintenance are protected and encouraged. [...] Moreover, cultural maintenance activities offer substantial economic benefits to Indigenous people who engage in them”.

“The more you get out on country the more you become country.” (Indigenous interviewee)

“If the community’s spirit is sick, and then you come in and say let’s do tourism, it’s not going to be sustainable, so part of what we are talking about is having a holistic approach, you have to work to bring healing, reconnection to culture, all your foundational stuff. What we do [historically] is we keep putting the cart in front of the horse, instead of the horse in front of the cart. If you are talking about tourism in the Fitzroy Valley, if you really look at some of the issues recently, there are people who are bypassing staying in Fitzroy right now because the situation has gotten worse and worse and it isn’t safe, so if you don’t heal the spirit of the community, so that when people come there it is a safe, beautiful, enriching place to be, then you are beating your head against a brick wall.” (Tourism stakeholder interviewee)

“If you want to act in that space, you need to address the socio-economic determinants, which are around education, housing and employment, and employment needs to be done in a cultural way that leads to sustainable change. Often the non-Indigenous community tells the Indigenous community what they need, instead of sitting and listening and hearing what they want to do, and then enabling them to be able to do that.” (Tourism stakeholder interviewee)

(c) Economy: Sustainable economic development through tourism

Tourism potentials

While many participants criticised the government’s decision to defund small remote communities, paving the way to Indigenous-led sustainable economies in the Valley seems timelier than ever.

Essentially all participants interviewed in the study were receptive to tourism development in the region (although some stressed such activities must constitute low-impact sustainable/eco-tourism in order to protect that which makes the Valley an appealing destination). Those who did not work in the industry welcomed the expansion of the sector in the area, while those already involved with the trade were eager to encourage new-comers to join. Respondents saw tourism as a means to attain valuable economic output, much-needed environmental protection and sustained improvements for social issues. Additionally, tourism was often perceived as superior to the area’s other main employers, stations and mines, both in terms of number of potential jobs created as well as regarding quality of work.

Interviewees saw the Valley as an appealing travel destination due to its striking landscapes, rich biodiversity, geological significance, but most of all, due to its cultural diversity and long-standing traditions. Experiencing Indigenous culture and listening to stories (be it sitting around the fire, through music and performance, or through art) passed on through countless generations were listed as the major drawcards of the region. In fact, many saw the role of Indigenous tour-guiding to be one of unveiling to visitors the full story behind the stunning sceneries they would otherwise know very little about, as well as guiding them through country safely and respectfully (staying clear of no-go zones). One tour operator pointed out that whenever asked, visitors who joined their tour always named the

cultural component of the experience to be the most valuable, above the stunning gorges and voluptuous boabs. The ecological profile of the Valley was also seen as a key area to explore through eco-tourism, avitourism, and science tourism. Respondents noted, however, there are distinctions between markets in terms of interest and spending, and highlighted the importance of careful market segmentation in order to identify potential target groups. Some noted a shift in market segments and visitation patterns associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, with a sudden drop in international visitation, replaced by a greater influx of domestic, intra-state holiday-makers.

Alongside other complimentary industries, tourism was revered as a positive commerce for the Valley for a number of reasons beyond providing employment in remote regions and for bringing more cashflow to the area. Poelina and Nordensvard (2018) argue that sustainable luxury tourism (contrary to mass-tourism) has the ability to “combat social exclusion, strengthen the capabilities of Indigenous remote communities and protect the environment and ecosystems” by means of targeting high-value travellers with high-end offers worth the remote travel and higher cost.

The host of tourism development benefits identified by respondents include:

- Builds capacity by allowing entrepreneurs and employees to learn transferrable skills that can easily be applied in other sectors;
- Enables communities to work on country using traditional skills and knowledge intrinsic to Indigenous way of life (e.g., storytelling, walking on country, locating bush foods and medicines, tracking animals, finding fresh water, etc.), allowing workplaces to be “Indigenised”;
- Encourages intergenerational transfer of knowledge, whereby elders teach younger generations about country and culture (ultimately keeping traditional law and language alive);
- Promotes reconciliation via cultural exchange between Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous people, breaking cycles of preconceived barriers through lived and shared experiences;
- Supports sustainable environment management, as tourism relies heavily on healthy and clean ecosystems;
- Instils pride in Indigenous people’s cultural identity and builds a sense of purpose;
- Offers younger generations, who are more likely to move away from ancestral lands and to get involved with crime, exciting prospects and meaningful opportunities to stay in their community;
- Attracts infrastructure investment to beautify spaces that can be enjoyed by all in the community;
- Allows for retail of existing local arts and craftsmanship, and boosts demand for the service and hospitality industries;
- Justifies increase in National Park entrance fees, which generates additional funds.

“We need to start showing people why we are so protective of country, we have all these beautiful sites that all have their stories, many are sacred and have cultural significance. Each story is unique to these places and each have their own name. Getting that story out will show why our people are so protective of country. Showing people why we are protective could be a benefit [of tourism].” (Indigenous interviewee)

“We become self-determined, we become self-sufficient in our own occupation. [...] There is so much positive things that get caught in the Indigenous tourism web. Reconciliation is one of them, every year I’ve got about 15,000 people, they have actually done reconciliation face-to-face and bridged the gap far more than they do sitting in an office. That’s the bare bones of it.” (Indigenous interviewee)

“It [tourism] is a beautiful, harmonious activity where two cultures come together, one culture that has been almost decimated and wiped out, and another culture that is coming to reengage in a respectful way. It is reconciliation in action, and that is how I always put it. Growing up here I never thought I would be a tour guide, but witnessing this [...], it worked out that way. It takes patience to sit down with the Elders and learn, to be curious, to always ask questions, absorb all that information, process that, and articulate it into something you can share. [...]” (Indigenous interviewee)

“I’ve been committed for the last five to six years, I’ve had a range of other jobs, but there has been no other job in my whole life that has paid me more [than owning/operating a tourism business].” (Indigenous interviewee)

Pathways to success in tourism

Needless to say, given the social issues currently present in the area, support is needed before tourism can blossom and achieve its potential in addressing the Fitzroy Valley's needs.

Indigenous participants voiced their exhaustion and frustration with the ever-changing set of rules and programs they are subject to – the constant alterations making it difficult for communities and individuals to gain traction. For that matter, when setting up support networks and initiatives for the Valley, listening to Traditional Owners and allowing them to self-determine is key to delivering successful outcomes, as is consistency and long-term strategies that account for initial years of building trust and positive behaviours.

According to interviewees, capacity building is fundamental to increase the level of employment in the Valley, particularly with regards to business skills, financial planning and IT, as well as prevailing business expectations. Mentoring programs offered consistently and on-ground were also considered to be necessary for positive tourism development. Ideally, mentoring programs should offer assistance to businesses in different stages of development, from emerging businesses to those looking to up-scale and broaden their outreach. Such a program, most argued, would be responsible for assisting tourism operators to achieve realistic targets through tangible steps, showcasing good models and fostering the exchange of knowledge with pioneers who have weathered the start-up phase of business. Another idea brought up a number of times when discussing requirements to boost tourism in the Valley was to have a local tourism hub whose core purpose would be to assist small businesses across the region with marketing, insurance, bookings, liaising with inbound/outbound markets, and other administrative tasks. Partnering with large and experienced operators who can run parts of the tourism service chain may also assist in overcoming this gap in business know-how. Partnerships with mainstream operators on a business-to-business model was certainly considered as a viable option by a number of interviewees.

Furthermore, a few interviewees stressed that setting up systems that account for cultural obligations was key to building a reputable business, brand and destination. Perceived reliability is a critical factor for tourism; last-minute cancellations have the potential to cause harm to tourism operations as it disrupts trust between the visitor and operator. Cultural obligations are often understood as being of utmost importance to a lot of Aboriginal people; therefore, to reduce the risk of perceived unreliability when unforeseen circumstances arise, having a pool of trained employees able to deliver each product on offer would enable operators to handle their availability more flexibly.

Finally, interviewees noted that monetary support is fundamental to get tourism projects off the ground, and many confided that funding is currently lacking. Much like other heavily subsidised industries in the State, some interviewees defended the need for serious investment from state and federal governments as well as from the private and corporate sector if tourism is indeed to meet its full potential in Fitzroy. Some interviewees pointed to the Ord River irrigation scheme based in the East Kimberley, for instance, and described it as a heavily subsidised initiative to boost agricultural development in the north with very modest employment outcomes (see also numbers provided in Grudnoff and Campbell, 2017). Comparatively, employment profiles in the West Kimberley, which remains irrigation-free, seems similar to that of the East Kimberley, regardless of its capital-intensive industries (Campbell and Aulby, 2018). In comparison, the job outcomes of the Aboriginal Tourism Development program led by WAITOC across WA from 2014 to 2018 appear more promising. (Clean State, 2020).

"It's a lot more than creating jobs on country, it is about creating a healthy space for people to be, and then around that, looking at the strengths of being on country. It is about creating a space on country that is safe, is connected to the land, to community. We've had young fellas who instead of being locked up have come out and worked in community, and comments they say is that it is peaceful here, and when they go into town they say it is noisy, there is a lot of shouting, a lot of drinking, but then in the community, there is a sense of purpose, it's quiet, and spirit feels good." (Tourism stakeholder)

"If you say that there's drugs, alcohol, dysfunction, family violence, and all of that stuff, and say, that's just the way it is in the Kimberley, and say, let's chuck in tourism on top of that, it's not going to work. Some of the challenges with Fitzroy Valley is, when dysfunction is there for so long, people actually think that the dysfunction then becomes normal, 'this is just Fitzroy', and what we are saying is that, no it's not, it doesn't have to be like that, they [community] are reauthoring the story. [...] When you've taken people's power away, you don't know that you can drive your own change, when you help them to be able to take the power back, when you help them know how they can take their power back, it changes the whole way of thinking and being." (Tourism stakeholder)

"If you want to develop tourism in the Fitzroy Valley, you have got to be in the Fitzroy Valley, you can't be in Broome, you can't be in Perth [...] That full-time presence is the really important thing, to have somebody there all of the time, not only for when potential tourism operators get a good idea and get enthusiastic, but also, to monitor what's going on, what meetings are taking place, meet people when there is a National Park is being discussed, get involvement in that. To have someone there full-time, you'd pick up on all of those things." (Tourism stakeholder)

Enhancing the Fitzroy Valley's tourism appeal

There are a number of things considered crucial in order to enhance the attractiveness of the Fitzroy Valley as a tourism destination. These largely fall under infrastructure improvement and product diversification. Infrastructure serves to ensure visitors' needs are catered to, while product availability and diversification encourage visitors to spend more time (and money) in the Valley rather than making it a day-trip destination.

Infrastructure:

- High-quality accommodation offerings in and out of Fitzroy Crossing, including wilderness/eco lodges;
- Internet coverage accessibility in Fitzroy Crossing and Aboriginal communities;
- Scenic routes in addition to the Gibb River Road;
- 'Beautification' of the town centre in Fitzroy Crossing.

Product diversification:

- Luxury tourism offers;
- Outdoor cinema and auditorium for theatre, music and dance performances;
- Regular events calendar;
- National Park, UNESCO World Heritage Site, Geopark and/or Biosphere Reserves to protect and showcase tourism assets;
- Self-guided walking tours offered as a 'minimum experience' with opportunity to book guided tours;
- Bird-watching tours, tours centred on experiencing the biodiversity of the region;
- Multiple day hiking and bicycle circuits complemented by accommodation;
- Quad-biking and horse riding opportunities and/or tours;
- Bush tucker and bush medicine culinary experiences;
- Pop-up art and culture centres nearby natural attractions;
- Opportunities to bundle tour packages combined with accommodation.

Concluding remarks

Based on extensive conversations shared with interviewees in the Fitzroy Valley, Indigenous-led tourism is shown to be a potential sustainable economic activity that could provide not only economic benefits to communities in the region, but also offer opportunities to contribute positively to environmental conservation (e.g., through a National Park). Furthermore, tourism could contribute to cultural preservation by creating 'spaces' to share knowledge intergenerationally and with visitors, reconnecting younger generations to their own traditions and inviting non-Aboriginal people to engage with the world's longest living culture. In this context, tourism presents itself as an alternative development pathway in contrast to ongoing conventional models. If met by a number of other complimentary practices, tourism development may be able to create a solid 'forever economy' for the Valley and its people.

Whilst tourism in the Valley is still somewhat sparse considering its significant potential to grow, it is important to emphasise and reiterate that there has been ongoing mobilisation on behalf of Aboriginal people and organisations in the Fitzroy Valley to expand tourism development in the area. Aboriginal leaders have historically self-organised and made use of support mechanisms in order to create initiatives to grow the industry, as it has long been identified as a desired industry. For instance, in 2005 a Kimberley Appropriate Economies Roundtable meeting was held in Fitzroy Crossing, where many local Aboriginal people voiced their interest and support for economic development through tourism and a number of other sectors, including arts and culture, agriculture and pastoralism. According to the Roundtable report, with regards to tourism, the group identified commitment, control over country, start-up capital and natural resources, as well as cooperation as key principles for appropriate tourism development (Hill et al., 2005). As demonstrated by the interviews carried out in the Fitzroy Valley for this project, much of those points remain at the forefront of tourism planning for the region. Similar principles for appropriate development of the arts industry were also named, given the considerable overlap of both sectors, including being on country, enabling knowledge to be passed down to young people, and respecting cultural story-bearers. Other initiatives with the aim of strengthening tourism in the Valley include the formation of the Fitzroy River Aboriginal Tourism Association, the Kimberley Tourism Project, and more recently plans for the Fitzroy Crossing Tourism Hub. The fact that some projects have been discontinued emphasises the need for long-term coordinated investment and commitment.

6. Analysis of 2016 census data

Methodological note

This section draws upon metrics developed under the ‘Smart Specialisation’ approach, a place-based approach to regional development and industry policy. Smart Specialisation aims to identify local existing and potential industrial strengths, thereby providing an evidence-based guide to industrial diversification, market and entrepreneurial opportunities (see Bond-Smith et al. 2019). The measures used here are generated from employment-by-industry data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ (ABS) 2016 Census of Population and Housing, enumerated by place of work. Data by workers’ place of work, as opposed to place of usual residence, provides the best basis for determining the economic output attributable to a particular geographical region. Initially, indicators of the existing economic strengths of the Fitzroy Valley are generated to identify industries that may be strategically targeted to boost tourism in the region. Comparisons are then made to regions encompassing Kakadu National Park and Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, two prominent tourist destination areas that are also UNESCO listed World Heritage sites. These comparisons allow an assessment of the Fitzroy Valley’s industrial structure relative to other major Aboriginal tourism destinations, as well as likely entrepreneurial and employment opportunities associated with attainment of National Park and/or UNESCO World Heritage status.

The ABS defined Statistical Area Level 2 (SA2) of Derby-West Kimberley has been used as the best available geographical approximation to the Fitzroy Valley region, given that the methodology is based on enumeration by place of work. Uluru is represented by the Petermann-Simpson SA2 area. To generate an area approximating Kakadu National Park, an area has been defined using the Alligator SA2 region, which encompasses Jabiru, the main township servicing the Kakadu National Park, but excluding a number of Destination Zones West of Darwin (note that the wider Darwin area is not included in the Alligator SA2 Region). The analysis is undertaken at the detailed industry ‘class’ level, comprised of 717 industry classifications.

Two key metrics are calculated for each region: ‘revealed comparative advantage’ and ‘relatedness density’. A third measure, ‘complexity’, is industry specific and does not vary by region. These measures can be explained as follows:

- Revealed Comparative Advantage (RCA) – gives an indication of what economic activities, or industries, a region is currently good at. It signals the maturity or the stage of development of an industry for a given region. For a particular industry and region, RCA is the industry’s share of employment in the region, relative to the industry’s share of employment Australia-wide. For example, the industry of Accommodation has an RCA of around 3.6 for Derby-West Kimberley. This means the proportion of workers employed in the accommodation industry in Derby-West Kimberley is 3.6 times higher than the proportion employed in accommodation for Australia as a whole. Hence this is a sector of relative comparative advantage, or strength, for the region.
- Relatedness density (RD) – relatedness measures how closely industries in a region are interrelated. The measure is derived from an algorithm based on how often industries across Australia are located in proximity to one another. As an example, employment in grape growing and in wine making are often co-located in the one region. When an industry is co-located with many other industries that it is strongly related to within a region, then it has a high relatedness density, and can be said to be strongly embedded in the region. This means that employment in that industry is less likely to shift out of the region, and the industry may offer potential for future employment growth within the region.
- Complexity – a complex product or industry is one that needs a lot of knowledge and networks to be produced. For instance, artificial intelligence requires the combined knowledge of automation, robotics, engineers, programmers, IT, statistics and linguists among many others. There is evidence that economies or regions that produce a larger number of complex goods experience faster economic and wage growth. The complexity measure ranges from around 10 for a range of cropping and farming industries to a maximum for advanced manufactures.

Fitzroy Valley’s relative economic strengths

Table 4 lists the top 30 industry classes in the Fitzroy Valley (Derby-West Kimberley SA2) by their RCA. Note that an RCA value of greater than 1 indicates a relative comparative advantage – or higher than typical share of employment – for the industry in the region. The industries likely to be aligned with tourism are bolded. As of 2016, onshore aquaculture and forestry support services stood out as the sectors with the strongest comparative advantage in the region. Critically, Accommodation – a key sector for tourism – is also a relative strength of the Fitzroy Valley region. There is also relatively high employment in a number of services that are largely government provided, notably in the health and education sectors.

Industries with a high RCA, as well as relatively high complexity and relatedness, can be seen as strategic targets for potential employment growth. Interestingly, for tourism, the nature reserves, conservation and parks operations industry stands out as one of those industries. It is already particularly well embedded in the local economy, and a reasonably complex industry relative to other key sectors in the region. Accommodation represents another sector with strong growth potential. Creative and performing arts appears as an existing area of strength, though in this case is the classification of ‘not further defined’ (nfd), meaning it relates to employment in creative and performing arts which could not be allocated to existing industry classifications on the available information. However, the classification of ‘creative artists musicians, writers and performers’ is also one of comparative advantage for the Fitzroy Valley (though not making the top 30 with an RCA of 2.8), confirming creative arts as having potential as a strategically important activity for tourism in the region.

Scenic and sightseeing transport is another tourism area of relative comparative advantage for the region, but lacks local supporting and related industries. As retail trade is typically included in ABS classifications of tourism related industries, the two retail industries of fuel retailing and other store based retailing (not fully defined) have been highlighted. Demand for fuel retailing will be substantially aligned with visitor activity, and this sector is well embedded within the local economy.



Fitzroy Bridge connects to Fitzroy Crossing, the central hub of the Fitzroy region. Photo: Damian Kelly

Table 4: Derby-West Kimberley industry metrics (2016 Census).
(nec = not elsewhere classified, nfd= not further defined).

Rank	Industry	RCA	RD	Complexity
1	Onshore Aquaculture	63.8	6.7	16.7
2	Forestry Support Services	31.4	5.9	24.9
3	Medical Services (nfd)	25.6	4.0	44.2
4	Other Interest Group Services (nec)	20.0	0.0	23.2
5	Hospitals (nfd)	19.7	9.0	42.0
6	Correctional & Detention Services	16.4	13.3	30.5
7	Creative & Performing Arts Activities (nfd)	13.3	2.4	43.8
8	Beef Cattle Farming. Specialised	12.3	8.7	10.4
9	Adult Community & Other Education (nec)	10.3	0.0	16.7
10	Road Passenger Transport (nfd)	8.2	0.0	34.3
11	Scenic & Sightseeing Transport	7.7	0.0	29.8
12	Waste Collection Services (nfd)	7.6	0.0	41.3
13	Sports & Recreation Activities (nfd)	6.4	0.0	41.0
14	Medical & Other Health Care Services (nfd)	6.3	16.7	22.9
15	Iron Ore Mining	6.2	9.9	34.9
16	Other Store Based Retailing (nfd)	6.1	0.0	45.2
17	School Education (nfd)	5.9	0.0	19.2
18	Social Assistance Services (nfd)	5.8	0.0	22.5
19	Health Care & Social Assistance (nfd)	5.5	20.0	21.0
20	Nature Reserves & Conservation Parks Operation	5.4	8.8	21.1
21	Other Health Care Services (nec)	4.6	12.0	29.1
22	Combined Primary & Secondary Education	4.5	0.0	16.6
23	Road & Bridge Construction	4.4	20.0	28.5
24	Residential Property Operators	4.2	0.0	27.2
25	Other Transport Support Services (nec)	4.1	0.0	31.9
26	Mineral.Exploration	4.1	6.3	36.3
27	Other Fabricated Metal Product Manuf (nec)	4.1	0.0	57.2
28	Fuel Retailing	3.9	7.7	18.9
29	Accommodation	3.6	7.4	15.5
30	Entertainment Media Retailing	3.5	5.6	36.9

Comparison to Kakadu and Uluru

Table 5 lists the tourism-related industries in which both the Kakadu and Uluru defined geographical areas have a revealed comparative advantage of greater than 1. The industries of highest comparative advantage for the two established tourism destinations are nature reserves, conservation and parks operations; scenic and sightseeing transport; and accommodation. Each of these are also existing areas of strength for the Fitzroy Valley, but not to nearly the same degree as in Kakadu and Uluru. On the basis of this comparison, Fitzroy Valley might anticipate a several-fold increase in employment in parks management and conservation as a result of National Park and World Heritage status, potentially in the form of expanded Ranger programs. While this may seem a larger impact than that implied by the above estimated effect of National Park status or World Heritage listing on visitor numbers, much of any increased employment may arise through sources of revenue unrelated to tourism numbers, such as access to funding for environmental and conservation initiatives made possible by those listings.

Table 5: Key tourism industry metrics: Fitzroy Valley, Kakadu and Uluru regions

Rank	Industry	RCA			RDComplexity		
		Fitzroy Valley	Kakadu	Uluru	Fitzroy Valley	Kakadu	Uluru
	Nature Reserves & Conservation						
	Parks Operation	5.4	24.9	38.5	8.8	17.7	5.9
	Scenic & Sightseeing Transport	7.7	35.3	19.2	0.0	14.3	3.6
	Accommodation	3.6	35.7	9.2	7.4	18.5	5.6
	Travel Agency & Tour						
	Arrangement Services	0.9	10.4	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Air & Space Transport	1.1	4.7	2.9	7.1	14.3	10.7
	Fuel Retailing	3.9	1.8	4.3	7.7	7.7	7.7
	Pubs, Taverns & Bars	1.1	3.9	2.1	11.1	11.1	11.1
	Catering Services	0.0	3.6	2.2	0.0	33.3	16.7
	Food & Beverage Services nfd	0.6	1.5	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.0

The higher relative employment concentration in scenic and sightseeing transport and in accommodation in Uluru and Kakadu will be more directly related to visitor numbers and, therefore, to a higher importance of tourism expenditure within those regional economies. In terms of relatedness density, these three top tourism industries score much higher in Kakadu, indicating they are more strongly embedded in the regional economy and serviced by supporting industries located in the Kakadu region. However, the Fitzroy Valley region does display higher related density for nature reserves, conservation and parks operations and accommodation than Uluru.

Kakadu also displays a high proportion of overall employment in travel agency and tour arrangement services, that is not apparent for either the Fitzroy Valley or Uluru regions. Further, a number of other industries reveal very high RCA scores for Kakadu that were not industries of relative comparative advantage for Uluru, and hence not listed in Table 5. These include interurban and rural bus transport (RCA=57.5), airport operations and other air transport support services (18.4) and passenger car rental and hiring (17.5). Essentially, Kakadu appears to have a much more integrated and diversified local tourism sector, while Uluru tourism relies to a greater extent on supporting services from outside its boundaries, such as travel agencies. Fitzroy Valley recorded no employment in catering services in 2016 and limited food & beverage services, with no related industries for catering services. Given the apparent comparative advantage in the catering sector in Kakadu and Uluru, as well as a high level of relatedness density, it would appear that this sector is likely to be a critical capability to support tourism.

Concluding Remarks

These comparisons suggest declaration of the Fitzroy Valley as a National Park, and possibly World Heritage listed site, may considerably boost employment in park management and conservation; while any general increase in tourism numbers would boost employment in scenic and sightseeing transport and accommodation. Encouragingly, all three of these key industries are already sectors of relative strength in the Fitzroy Valley, and two of them are well embedded in the local economy, providing a solid base from which to further promote tourism. The two contrasting examples of existing, prominent tourism destinations demonstrate there is considerable scope for expansion of Fitzroy Valley's tourism sector in two dimensions. One is a deepening of current areas of strength. The second is for greater diversification toward a more integrated tourism sector, encompassing new businesses in industries such as travel agencies and tour services and support services in transport, catering and retail. A successful tourism industry in the Fitzroy Valley may also require initial support for developing these broader local capabilities.

As is always the case with such analyses of secondary data for individual geographical areas, the results offer valuable pointers to areas of strategic potential, but must be complemented by local knowledge for their validation and interpretation to generate meaningful insights.

7. Key Recommendations

The below recommendations are only a succinct summary of the more extensive findings of this report, they deliberately present a focussed and condensed overview of the most critical factors identified in the study. These recommendations are based on interviews with community stakeholders in Fitzroy Crossing as well as established or emerging tourism providers in the Kimberley; they are also based on quantitative market research on the Australian domestic tourism market.

Main Recommendations

This report suggests that, under specific conditions, *tourism development* can make a relevant contribution to develop the Fitzroy Valley in a sustainable manner that respects economic, cultural, social and environmental standards.

More specifically, tourism can support development of the Fitzroy Valley due to the following reasons:

(1) Creating significant economic opportunities through tourism:

Under the studied scenario of declaring the Fitzroy Valley a National Park, future tourism demand may be able to generate an additional A\$13 million (conservative estimate) to A\$43 million (optimistic estimate) of tourism spending annually; this is equivalent to creating a substantial number of employment opportunities (conservatively estimated at an additional 158 tourism-related FTES).

This would create a multitude of entrepreneurial and employment opportunities, some of which are highly compatible with cultural practices of Aboriginal people, such as opportunities related to arts, crafts, performance, guiding, storytelling, and food procurement and preparation. The arts sector in the Kimberley, for instance, which entails cross-pollinating synergies with the tourism industry, has been shown to employ one of the highest rates of Aboriginal people (WA Government Department of Culture and Arts, 2016), and to provide a significantly higher annual income to those working in the sector than the overall annual average for Aboriginal people in the Kimberley (Throsby and Petetskaya, 2016).

Practically all interviewed Indigenous community members declared that they support development in forms that do not compromise the ecological, cultural and spiritual values of the landscape to which they have a "duty of care".

(2) Contributing to Aboriginal youth wellbeing through tourism:

Tourism development can nurture opportunities for young Aboriginal people to connect to culture, by facilitating the inter-generational sharing of cultural principles through association with prestige and (economic) value. This can serve as an incentive for Aboriginal youth to engage with their cultural tradition. Tourism development, including the strongly related arts and culture sectors, can allow Aboriginal youth to find purposeful employment and meaningful activities, which is likely to also generate positive social outcomes. This is made evident from past and ongoing lived experiences with tourism activities in the Fitzroy Valley, as confirmed by interviewees. However, there is notable scope to enhance youth participation through bespoke incentives.

(3) Strengthening cultural identity, awareness and understanding through tourism:

As tourism can be a way to nurture positive attitudes and interest of the general public towards Aboriginal culture, involvement with tourism activities is likely to generate pride on behalf of Traditional Owners. Tourism can also allow for inter-cultural exchange, sharing of knowledge and learning, in particular with regards to the opportunity for Traditional Owners to showcase their knowledge and traditional practices to foster respect and appreciation. Inviting tourists on country can result in a better understanding of the reasons why Aboriginal people demand high standards of protection of the landscape. In sum, tourism is an industry that celebrates and valorises the knowledge and culture of Traditional Owners and thus is compatible with achieving both economic and cultural empowerment.

(4) Guarding the cultural, spiritual and ecological values of the landscape through tourism:

It is possible to develop tourism in a sensitive manner that is unlikely to interfere at large scale with the cultural, spiritual and ecological values of the place. Tourism can even be in a synergistic relationship with the intention to protect significant sites as protection becomes associated with economic benefits as well. As illustrated by the efforts of North Kimberley groups in developing a visitor pass for tourism operators in order to manage tourist numbers, it is important that tourism development in the Fitzroy Valley is pursued with the premise of community engagement and local leadership.

Recommendations to ensure a sensitive and beneficial tourism development:

The above-mentioned positive achievements seem contingent on the below conditions, and recommendations:

- (1) **Declaring parts of the Fitzroy Valley as a National Park** to conserve the ecological and cultural value of the Martuwarra Fitzroy River and to increase the area's attractiveness as a tourism destination. However, ensuring localised control for communities and Traditional Owners requires special attention. A National Park development scenario can create a substantial number of jobs in the tourism sector, as discussed in detail in this report; but on top there are also additional non-tourism related employment opportunities associated with National Parks which should not be disregarded. An example of this is the Indigenous Land Use Agreement negotiated between the Bunuba Dawangarri Aboriginal Corporation and the WA State Government for the joint management of National Parks on Bunuba Country.
- (2) **Taking complementary actions to protect the unique natural, cultural and spiritual landscape** that hinges upon a functioning Martuwarra Fitzroy River catchment (inclusive of groundwater, ephemeral or permanent surface waters), with implications for waterholes and billabongs in the wider area.
- (3) **Enabling Traditional Owners to take leadership in the tourism development process** to ensure local ownership, commitment, confidence and the emergence of a system of 'Indigenised jobs' (i.e., roles that are particularly conducive for Indigenous employment, that are aligned with Indigenous worldviews and systems that allow for cultural obligations to be met). It is also critical to consider models of creating full-time employment in a seasonal industry such as tourism. The growth of ranger groups, collaborative working relationships with Conservation Departments, and potential changes to pastoral leases to enable greater tourism operation are complementary assets for locally anchored tourism development in the region.
- (4) **Working closely with the local youth to ensure their involvement** via recognising their ideas in terms of tourism products they would like to pursue, which can help in achieving positive social outcomes. Tourism products in the Fitzroy Valley are currently bespoke, largely carried out by elders who have had a challenging time in engaging younger generations to participate, which could potentially hamper their immediate ability to capitalise on a boost in visitation. Involving the local youth is thus critical for efforts in scaling up operations.
- (5) **Improving perceived safety and security**, with the leadership of elders, opportunities for youth and functioning communities playing a critical role in this context.
- (6) **Expanding the amount of quality accommodation** available in Fitzroy Crossing and surrounding areas in order to ensure tourists are encouraged to stay overnight. In this context, high-quality but low-impact eco lodges received stronger support in the experiment conducted as part of this study compared to a 'standard' 5-star resort. Good practice examples of market-ready tourism products in the Kimberley (centred around accommodation), that can be used as a model, include the Mornington Wilderness Camp and Kooljaman at Cape Leveque, which offer guests glamping accommodation, a range of diversified eco-cultural tours and activities, and dining experiences all in one stunning destination, adding cultural and environmental value to tourism products.
- (7) **Expanding the number, quality and physical/virtual connectedness of attraction points** available in the Fitzroy Valley (ideas are not limited to, but include regular events and an emerging festivals calendar, long-distance hiking and MTB trails, theatre/performance-based offerings, 4WD tracks, horse-riding, bird watching, museum etc). It should be noted that long-distance hiking trails received the strongest support in this study's market research.
- (8) **Ensuring a balanced mix of self-guided and guided experiences for tourists**; self-guided experiences are not only necessary to meet the demand of some tourists but they also ensure a constantly available minimum experience. Additionally, available guided experiences can enrich the tourist experience and generate additional revenue.
- (9) **Extending the amount of business training and individualised mentoring** available to Indigenous tourism entrepreneurs (existing and emerging). It seems essential that this mentoring evolves into a long-term and continuous partnership with interpersonal trust being a key factor.
- (10) **Considering initiating a process of World Heritage Site application** (with a WHS centre located in Fitzroy Crossing), in particular after additional consultation and research of the impact of such a declaration on international tourism markets. Similar ideas to be scrutinised may include Geoparks and Biosphere Reserves.
- (11) **Learning from the success of ranger programs and arts centres**, which includes their compatibility with Indigenous cultural values and practices. This also means that it is essential to integrate these successful initiatives into the overall tourism product offering as this will likely generate two-way benefits (for the attractiveness of the tourism product, but also additional opportunities for ranger employment and sales opportunities for art).

- (12) **Expanding advertising and communication about the Fitzroy Valley and its tourism attractions** (in particular once additional tourism products start becoming available) in order to increase much-needed awareness among the target markets.
- (13) **Ensuring that small tourism operators receive support with administration, marketing and insurance**, as both disposable time and skills in these areas might be missing. If tourism is to provide ongoing job opportunities, it requires investment in human resources as well as businesses at different scales and stages of development. In addition to support with marketing, book-keeping, scheduling bookings, and accounting, it is important for prospective tourism entrepreneurs to have assistance in defining products, identifying a market, and building business resilience. Solutions can include an extended role for existing organisations (including WAITOC and local Aboriginal corporations) and/or the creation of a localised 'tourism hub' to realise economies of scale and scope, and broker relationships with markets and other institutions. Supporting the creation of scale in tourism operations will also be beneficial in mitigating the impact of overhead costs. A local tourism hub for the Fitzroy Valley has long been discussed (including prior attempts of establishing it), and in order for such a hub to work effectively, it needs to have a focus on financial support and skills, offer facilities and be integrated and supported by local shire operations.
- (14) **Promoting infrastructure investment into digital connectivity and transportation** will make it easier for locals to live and work on country (and thus keeping their cultural ties) but will also generate benefits in terms of tourism attractiveness. Although a notable potential tourism market size for the Fitzroy Valley has been identified in this study, this does not directly translate into actual visitation, as often time attractions are remote and lack accessibility and infrastructure for tourists to visit, resulting in higher costs incurred in travel. Accessibility and cost-effectiveness underpin sustained activity, which underscores their relevance for successful tourism ventures in remote areas.
- (15) **Encouraging mutually beneficial strategic partnerships** between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous tourism businesses that can result in more attractive products due to complementary competences and capabilities.
- (16) **Creating opportunities for local Aboriginal people to travel** and experience quality tourism products themselves in order to raise awareness about tourist needs.
- (17) **Strengthening tourism networking organisations** (such as destination management and marketing organisations) in order to optimise network benefits and 'experience bundles'. The widespread concept of the visitor centre is a great start but rarely sufficient; there is a requirement for such organisations to take on a more proactive role in coordinating and connecting the various tourism providers, creating scale in marketing, market research and product development, representing local tourism interests in regional and state-wide discussions, and representing the needs of the tourism industry with respect to other sectors and interests.



A cruise on the Fitzroy's waters or a bushwalk along its tree-lined banks will reveal an abundance of unique fish and birdlife.
Photo: Ruchira Somaweera

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9. Appendix

A photo of a nature-based attraction point in the Fitzroy Valley was added to all advertisements.

Advertisement A0:

The Fitzroy Region

The Fitzroy Valley is an extensive region nestled within remote West Kimberley, expanding across the landscape along the banks of the Fitzroy River and its tributaries. Here, the cliffs of Geikie Gorge reveal a 350 million year old Devonian reef system, carved over thousands of years by the Fitzroy River.

The region is just as rich in history and heritage as it is in **environmental significance**. It is home to five different language groups, each with their own distinctive customs and culture. Fitzroy Crossing, the central hub of the Fitzroy region, **has many significant cultural sites**, including ancient rock art of the Gooniyandi people who inhabited the nearby Mimbi Caves. Fitzroy Crossing has a historical townsite and causeway crossing.

To the north of the region is Windjana Gorge. It presents 100 metre walls carved over hundreds of millions of years. Nearby is Tunnel Creek which is part of **Western Australia's oldest cave system** with a subterranean world of bats and freshwater crocodiles.

Advertisement A1:

The Fitzroy Region

The Fitzroy Valley is an extensive region nestled within remote West Kimberley, expanding across the landscape along the mighty banks of the Fitzroy River and its tributaries. Here, the soaring cliffs of Geikie Gorge reveal a 350 million year old Devonian reef system, carved over thousands of years by the Fitzroy River. **A gentle cruise on its waters or a bushwalk** along its tree-lined banks will be sure to expose a staggering variety of unique fish and birdlife.

The region is just as rich in history and heritage as it is in **environmental significance**. It is home to five different language groups, each with their own distinctive customs and culture. Fitzroy Crossing, the central hub of the Fitzroy region, has **many significant cultural sites to be explored**, including ancient rock art of the Gooniyandi people who inhabited the nearby Mimbi Caves. **Indigenous tours** will lead you through a labyrinth of caves and gorges to **uncover age-old stories, delicious bush tucker and traditional medicines** of one of the oldest surviving cultures on Earth. While in Fitzroy Crossing, it's worth the short drive to the original town site and causeway crossing **to visit the legendary Crossing Inn or hook a barramundi from the Fitzroy River**. Stay the night in the secular Inn or head to Mimbi Caves or Imintji to pitch a tent under the stars and **experience a night camping with Traditional Custodians** (think stories told over the camp fire over cups of tea and a chance to try your hand at some dot painting!).

To the north, you're also within reach of stunning Windjana Gorge. Here you can marvel at the sheer 100 metre walls carved over hundreds of millions of years that once staged the legendary escape and refuge of Indigenous icon Jandamarra. Continue on to Tunnel Creek and **take a torch-lit walk through Western Australia's oldest cave system**, venturing 750 metres into a subterranean world of bats and freshwater crocodiles. If you are vigilant, painted up high along the cave walls with ochres, you will spot the notorious West-Kimberley Wandjina spirits left by generations past.

Advertisement B0:

The Fitzroy Valley National Park

The Fitzroy Valley National Park covers an extensive region nestled within remote West Kimberley, expanding across the landscape along the banks of the Fitzroy River and its tributaries. The **National Park** was recently set up to **better protect this unique river system** entrenched in ancient geology and endowed with unique biological richness and old fossils from human-induced interference that threatened the area. Here the cliffs of Geikie Gorge reveal a 350 million year old Devonian reef system, carved over thousands of years by the Fitzroy River.

The region is just as rich in history and heritage as it is in **environmental significance**. It is home to five different language groups, each with their own distinctive customs and culture. Fitzroy Crossing, the central hub of the Fitzroy region and adjacent to the National Park, has **many significant cultural sites**, including ancient rock art of the Gooniyandi people who inhabited the nearby Mimbi Caves. Fitzroy Crossing has a historical townsite and causeway crossing. In the north of the National Park is Windjana Gorge. It presents 100 metre walls carved over hundreds of millions of years. Nearby is Tunnel Creek which is part of **Western Australia's oldest cave system** with a subterranean world of bats and freshwater crocodiles.

Advertisement B1:

The Fitzroy Valley National Park

The Fitzroy Valley National Park covers an extensive region nestled within remote West Kimberley, expanding across the landscape along the mighty banks of the Fitzroy River and its tributaries. Recently established to better protect the unique river system and the ecosystems and geology it sustains, the **National Park** is also testimony to the area’s striking scenic beauty. Whether you are an adventurous traveler or seeking a relaxing getaway, the Park’s **spectacular waterfalls, refreshing swimming holes, and deep gorges provide every visitor with a unique experience.**

Here, the soaring cliffs of Geikie Gorge reveal a 350 million year old Devonian reef system, carved over thousands of years by the Fitzroy River. **A gentle cruise on its waters** or a bushwalk along its tree-lined banks will be sure to expose a staggering variety of unique fish and birdlife.

The region is just as rich in history and heritage as it is in **environmental significance**. It is home to five different language groups, each with their own distinctive customs and culture. Fitzroy Crossing, the central hub of the Fitzroy region and a short drive from the National Park, has **many significant cultural sites to be explored**, including ancient rock art of the Gooniyandi people who inhabited the nearby Mimbi Caves. **Indigenous tours** will lead you through a labyrinth of caves and gorges to **uncover age-old stories, delicious bush tucker and traditional medicines** of one of the oldest surviving cultures on Earth. While in Fitzroy Crossing, it’s worth venturing to the original town site and causeway crossing to **visit the legendary Crossing Inn or hook a barramundi from the Fitzroy River**. Stay the night in the secular Inn or head to Mimbi Caves or Imintji to pitch a tent under the stars and **experience a night camping with Traditional Custodians** (think stories told over the camp fire over a cuppa and a chance to try your hand at some dot painting!).

Towards the northern borders of the Park you'll be within reach of the stunning Windjana Gorge. Here you can marvel at the sheer 100 metre walls carved over hundreds of millions of years that once staged the legendary escape and refuge of Indigenous icon Jandamarra. Continue on to Tunnel Creek and **take a torch-lit walk through Western Australia's oldest cave system**, venturing 750 metres into a subterranean world of bats and freshwater crocodiles. If you are vigilant, painted up high along the cave walls with ochres, you will spot some of the notorious West-Kimberley Wandjina spirits left by generations past.

Advertisement C0:

The Fitzroy Valley National Park in the Kimberley UNESCO World Heritage Site

The Fitzroy Valley National Park, embedded in the Kimberly UNESCO World Heritage Site, covers an extensive region nestled within remote West Kimberley, expanding across the landscape along the banks of the Fitzroy River and its tributaries. The **National Park** was recently set up **to better protect this unique river system** entrenched in ancient geology and endowed with unique biological richness and old fossils from human-induced interference that threatened the area. Here, the cliffs of Geikie Gorge reveal a 350 million year old Devonian reef system, carved over thousands of years by the Fitzroy River.

To be included on the **World Heritage List**, sites must be of universal value and meet at least one of ten selection criteria. Given the region has recently been listed within the Kimberley UNESCO World Heritage Site, it is just as rich in history and heritage as it is in **environmental significance**. It is home to five different language groups, each with their own distinctive customs and culture. The UNESCO has designated the area as a World Heritage Site to **preserve its cultural and historical significance for all of humanity**. The Kimberley stands for more than 40,000 years of lived Indigenous culture (materialised in some of the most remarkable series of rock paintings in the world) and recent history of early European settlement as well as the Aboriginal people’s resistance to it. Fitzroy Crossing has **many significant cultural sites**, including ancient rock art of the Gooniyandi people who inhabited the nearby Mimbi Caves. Fitzroy Crossing has a historical townsite and causeway crossing.

Towards the north of the National Park and also part of the World Heritage Site is Windjana Gorge. It presents 100 metre walls carved over hundreds of millions of years. Nearby is Tunnel Creek which is part of **Western Australia’s oldest cave system** with a subterranean world of bats and freshwater crocodiles.

Advertisement C1:

The Fitzroy Valley National Park in the Kimberley UNESCO World Heritage Site

The Fitzroy Valley National Park, embedded in the Kimberly UNESCO World Heritage Site, covers an extensive region nestled within remote West Kimberley, expanding across the landscape along the banks of the mighty Fitzroy River and its tributaries. Recently established to better protect the unique river system and the ecosystems and geology it sustains, the **National Park** is also testimony to the area’s striking scenic beauty. Whether you are an adventurous traveler or seeking a relaxing getaway, the Park’s **spectacular waterfalls, refreshing swimming holes, and deep gorges provide every visitor with a unique experience.** Here, the soaring cliffs of Geikie Gorge reveal a 350 million year old Devonian reef system, carved over thousands of years by the Fitzroy River. **A gentle cruise on its waters** or a **bushwalk** along its tree-lined banks will be sure to expose a staggering variety of unique fish and birdlife.

To be included on the **World Heritage List**, sites must be of outstanding universal value and meet at least one of ten exquisite selection criteria. Given the region has recently been listed within the Kimberley UNESCO World Heritage Site, it is just as rich in history and heritage as it is in **environmental significance**. There is an illustrious list of only 20 World Heritage Sites in Australia and approximately 1,000 worldwide, which means **you will be visiting a place recognised to be among the most outstanding and authentic cultural experiences on the globe**. You will experience Indigenous culture and knowledge that has been passed on for more than 40,000 years and you will learn about the recent history of early European settlement as well as the Aboriginal people’s resistance to it. **Expect to see world-renowned rock art figures** such as the Wandjina creator spirits which are a stunning visual record of an ongoing Aboriginal painting tradition.

The Fitzroy region is home to five different language groups, each with their own distinctive customs and culture. Fitzroy Crossing, the central hub of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, has **many significant cultural sites to be explored**, including ancient rock art of the Gooniyandi people who inhabited the nearby Mimbi Caves. Indigenous tours will lead you through a labyrinth of caves and gorges to **uncover age-old stories, delicious bush tucker and traditional medicines** of one of the oldest surviving cultures on Earth. While in Fitzroy Crossing, it’s worth venturing to the original town site and causeway crossing to **visit the legendary Crossing Inn or hook a barramundi from the Fitzroy River**. Stay the night in the secular Inn or head to Mimbi Caves or Imintji to pitch a tent under the stars and **experience a night camping with Traditional Custodians** (think stories told over the camp fire over a cuppa and a chance to try your hand at some dot painting!).

Towards the northern edge of the World Heritage Site is stunning Windjana Gorge. Here you can marvel at the sheer 100 metre walls carved over hundreds of millions of years that once staged the legendary escape and refuge of Indigenous icon Jandamarra. Continue on to Tunnel Creek and **take a torch-lit walk through Western Australia's oldest cave system**, venturing 750 metres into a subterranean world of bats and freshwater crocodiles. If you are vigilant, painted up high along the cave walls with ochres, you will spot some of the notorious West-Kimberley Wandjina spirits left by generations past.



Stunning sunset on the Fitzroy River at Sir John Gorge in the upper Fitzroy River catchment. Photo: Adam Monk

