

Seasons in the Kimberley

The following is based on an excerpt from the book, *Penelope – Bungles to Broome*, by Tim Bowden and some notes from *A Guide to the Kimberley Coast* by Len Zell. People from outside the region talk about the ‘wet’ and the ‘dry’. The reality is much more complex. The quote below is from the *Guide to the Kimberley Coast*.

“The ‘wet’ usually occurs between November and April with the most rain in January and February. The ‘wet’ totally changes the landscape from brown to green with rushing deep water, falls over cliffs into the rivers, saltwater rivers with a fresh water layer rushing over it into the sea and many other foaming and gurgling examples of this great change. About 10% of Australia’s fresh water runoff comes from the Kimberley – half as much again as the Murray Darling Basin. Hot humid conditions accompany the NW winds, clouds and lightning of the thunderstorms of the ‘wet’.”

“Cyclones are regular events on the Kimberley coast – it is one of the most cyclone-prone coasts anywhere in the world. They form to the northwest and an average of two per year cross the coast and there is usually one with destructive force about every two years. The official cyclone season extends from November to April but they have been known to occur in every month of the year in the hundred or so years of records.....”

“During the ‘dry’ you can almost be guaranteed blue skies, hot days, cool nights, calm seas and no rain. These dramatic weather differences drive similarly dramatic changes in the flora and fauna of the regions as well as creating the whole mood and colour of the landscape.”

That’s the western view. The Aborigines of the north-west Kimberley divided their year into seven seasons. I’m not sure which language the following is from but I believe the Bardi near Broome had different terms.

Seven seasons

Yirma (May-August). This is the dry season when the south-east winds blow steadily. Grasses and spinifex are burned to encourage new growth and to attract game. It is a pleasant time of year with plenty of food, a time when ceremonies are held.

Yawala or Yuwala (September-November). Heat is building and rivers are drying into pools. A difficult period. Most root crops have been gathered.

Djaward or Jaward (late November-December). This is a period of hot and unsettled weather with the approach of the rainy season. Thunder clouds build and sudden storms with lightning are common. Many of the edible fruits have ripened so food is plentiful.

Wundju (January-February). This is the real Wet with heavy rain falling almost daily. The rivers are flooded and the ground is waterlogged. Root crops from the dry season are rotten and sour. Hunting for game sustains life but the rain makes it difficult to hunt. People build bark shelters or live in caves. Sickness is common.

Maiaru or Mayaru (late February-March). The rain is easing and life is getting a bit better although bush food is still scarce. This season is sometimes called ‘autumn’ because some leaves fall from trees.

Bande manya (April). The weather settles further. Everything is ripening. The first of the new season’s root crops mature, ending the lean months of the wet season.

Goloruru (late April). This is when the south-east trade winds finally begin to blow, heralding the dry. More root crops reach maturity.

Willis’s Walkabouts offers Kimberley trips in five of the seven seasons. The heat and lack of flowing water in **Yawala** and **Djaward** combine to make this the least comfortable time of year.