

A bigger boat:
Equinox II in Darwin's
Cullen Bay Marina.

When big fish take the bait, there's an exhilarating snap as the line goes taut and the rod bends double. On one occasion, as the shattered prize appears at the surface, a shark rises straight after, takes a dart at the hapless fish, then vanishes.

For barra fishing, we take a long ride along the wild coastline to the Finnis River estuary, where mangrove trees are submerged up to their britches. The aim is to flick out a many-hooked lure without accidentally tearing a chunk from your companion's face as you do it. Barra hang out here like big kids in the precinct, shouting at pretty girls and occasionally eating passers-by. If there's anything they can't resist it's a shiny, silvery fish-like thingy, darting past their faces as you reel it back to the boat.

Barra also live in the streams and pools of mangrove swamps, so we're dropped off with a guide and handed our rods. As he backs the boat into deeper water, Mick's advice is: "Try not to get between a croc and the water, as they get scared." I assume he doesn't mean the run-away-and-hide kind of scared. We all look out for crocs.

The thing about mangrove swamps is they're full of mangrove trees. Getting amateur anglers to flick fishing line around here is equivalent to giving kittens a ball of twine and asking them to "tidy it up a bit". Occasionally a lure lands in the water, where the barra are no doubt having a rare old laugh. Mostly they land in branches. Some of them are still there.

At the end of a day off Dundee, when the mayor has winched you out of the water, and just before your beautifully

cooked catch is presented to you with lemon and a fork, you go to look at the sunset. Along as-yet unpaved roads, past property shooting up \$40 grand a quarter, the cliff-tops offer a grandstand seat for the Territory's biggest asset. If there's a dud sunset here, you get on the big phone and ask about that cash-back offer.

At the far dark shore, smoke from yet another bushfire rises from the trees. On a distant beach, there's a glimmer of firelight. Who could it possibly be? "There's a bloke who's there for weeks at a time, staying in an old caravan and living off the fish he catches," says Mick.

Getting away from his wife? I venture. The type of question Territorians like.

In the dark I hear his voice. "Blokes like that don't have a wife." **A**



For further information on fishing in the Northern Territory, go to www.tourismnt.com.au or call (08) 8951 8471

The author stayed at SkyCity Darwin:

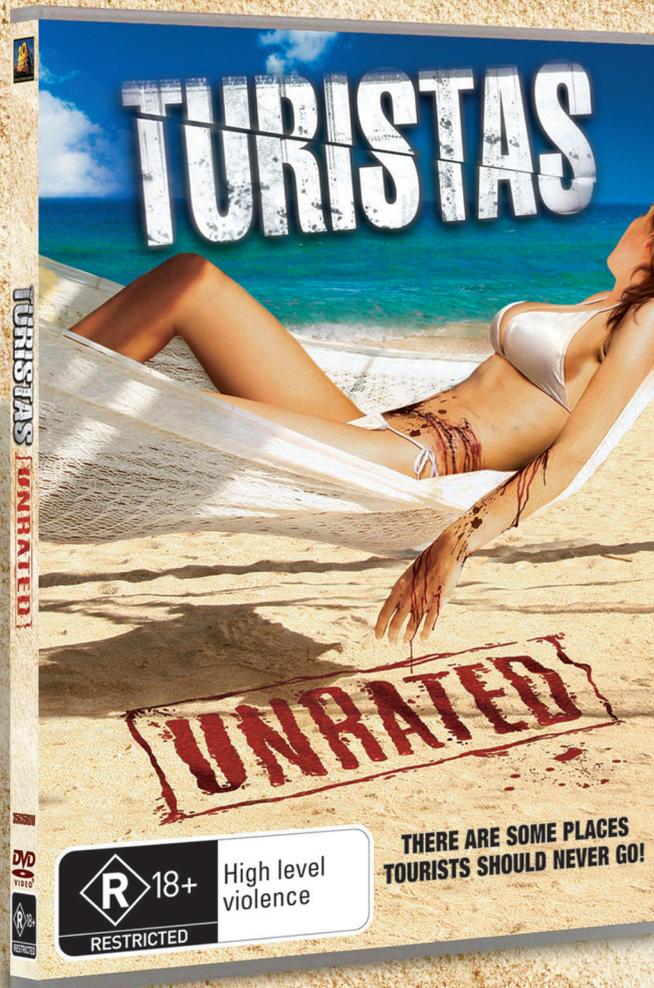
www.skycitydarwin.com.au

Darwin fishing charter was with Equinox Fishing Charters: www.equinoxcharters.com.au

Flights from Darwin to Dundee on Australasian Jet: www.ausjet.com.au

Dundee fishing charter was with Anglers' Choice: www.anglerschoice.com.au

There are some places
tourists should never go!



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