

Around Darwin



There are plenty of attractions within a few hours' drive of Darwin, many of which can be visited in a single day tour.

Close to the city, but a world away from its hustle and bustle, Mandorah is a 6km ferry ride from Darwin and the ideal place to relax with a cold drink. Howard Springs Nature Park, southeast of Darwin, offers a chance to cool off in a natural spring accompanied by fish and reptiles – but not the kind that will make a meal of you. But you can turn the tables on the Top End's most feared resident and grab a croc burger at the Darwin Crocodile Farm, which has hundreds of crocs destined for the plate and the handbag, as well as several huge brutes to remind you of your natural place in the food chain.

Everyone should visit the fascinating Tiwi Islands to experience the distinctive culture and friendly people of Bathurst and Melville Islands. Here you will have the opportunity to purchase some of the remarkable art and beautiful fabrics from the artists themselves.

Litchfield National Park is a very popular wonderland of plunging waterfalls and crystal-clear rock pools, which will inspire you to gear up with goggles and plunge in. Further natural delights are to be found in the superb Territory Wildlife Park, an excellent place to view, photograph and discover the Top End's fauna highlights. Finally, as well as leading to Kakadu, the Arnhem Hwy passes the famous jumping crocodiles of Adelaide River Crossing and the little-known bird-watching centre of Mary River National Park.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Swimming and snorkelling in the waterholes below the majestic falls in **Litchfield National Park** (p98)
- Discovering the art, history and culture of the fascinating **Tiwi Islands** (p91)
- Watching native fauna strut its stuff at the **Territory Wildlife Park** (p96)
- Swimming with turtles under a canopy of monsoon forest at **Howard Springs Nature Park** (opposite)
- Exploring the fish-filled waters and bird-filled skies of the magnificent **Mary River Region** (p93)
- Catching a show or sinking a beer in the glow of a magical sunset at **Mandorah Beach** (opposite)
- Flinging a lure for barrelling barramundi on the **Daly River** (p104)



■ TELEPHONE CODE ☎ 08

- NT Parks & Wildlife Commission: www.nreta.nt.gov.au
- NT Fisherman's Association: www.afant.com.au

National Parks

There are plenty of wonderful national parks and reserves within a short drive of Darwin. Most offer basic camping, short walks, and excellent bird- and wildlife-watching. The jewel in the crown is **Litchfield National Park** (p98) with its many opportunities to swim and snorkel under bubbly cascades in clear cool pools. There are more swimming opportunities at the natural springs of **Berry Springs** (p96) and **Howard Springs** (right).

Avid bird-watchers may already know about the highly regarded **Mary River National Park** (p94), and they can keep their binoculars out for **Fogg Dam Conservation Reserve** (p92).

Northern Territory Parks & Wildlife operates the information centre, **Window on the Wetlands** (p93), and the excellent **Territory Wildlife Park** (p96) where you can easily discover the delights of Top End wildlife. Parks & Wildlife also runs a packed schedule of walks, talks and slide shows throughout the Dry. The schedule is published in the widely available *Come Alive in Territory Parks* and is posted at individual park information bays.

MANDORAH

This low-key, relaxed beach resort on the tip of Cox Peninsula is 128km by road from Darwin, or only 6km across the harbour by regular ferry. Darwinites converge for a lunch, a quiet afternoon drink or dinner at the pub, before catching the ferry home. Fishing from the pier here is reputedly good, with catches of barramundi, queenfish and mackerel.

The **Mandorah Beach Hotel** (☎ 8978 5044; mandorahbeachhotel@bigpond.com; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$12/15, dm \$15, d from \$85; ☎ ☎ ☎) has sublime views over the beach and turquoise water to Darwin. All rooms have a fridge and tea/coffee facilities, and overlook the harbour. There's a restaurant and a beachfront beer garden. The pool is huge and there's a volleyball court on the beach.

Boat hire (half/full day \$100/150), jet ski hire (30/60 minutes \$60/100) and bait are also available.

Aboriginal Corroborees (adult/child \$60/30; ☎ 7pm Wed & Fri May-Jun; 7pm Mon, Wed & Fri Jul-Sep) is a highly recommended show performed by the Kenbi Dancers, held at the hotel. Admission includes dinner.

The **Sea Cat** (☎ 8978 5015; adult/child/family return fare \$18/9.50/50) operates about a dozen daily

services, with the first departure from the Cullen Bay Marina in Darwin at 6.30am and the last at 10pm (midnight on Friday and Saturday). The last ferry from Mandorah is at 10.20pm (12.20am Saturday and Sunday).

HOWARD SPRINGS NATURE PARK

The nearest natural crocodile-free swimming hole to Darwin is at the 283-hectare **Howard Springs Nature Park** (Map p90; ☎ 8am-8pm) about 35km southeast of Darwin. The forest-surrounded swimming hole, also home to long-necked turtles, catfish and barramundi, makes for a pleasant dip though it can get uncomfortably crowded. There are picnic areas with barbecues and wandering wallabies, a separate toddlers' pool and a 1.8km **walking track** around the springs that is good for bird-watching.

The **Howard Springs Holiday Park** (☎ 1800 831 169, 8983 1169; www.howardspringscaravanpark.com.au; 170 Whitewood Rd; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$20/25, cabins from \$80; ☎ ☎) has a shop, good amenities and a camp kitchen with gas barbecues, microwave and fridge. It makes a viable alternative to the van parks in Darwin itself, and has a disabled cabin and facilities.

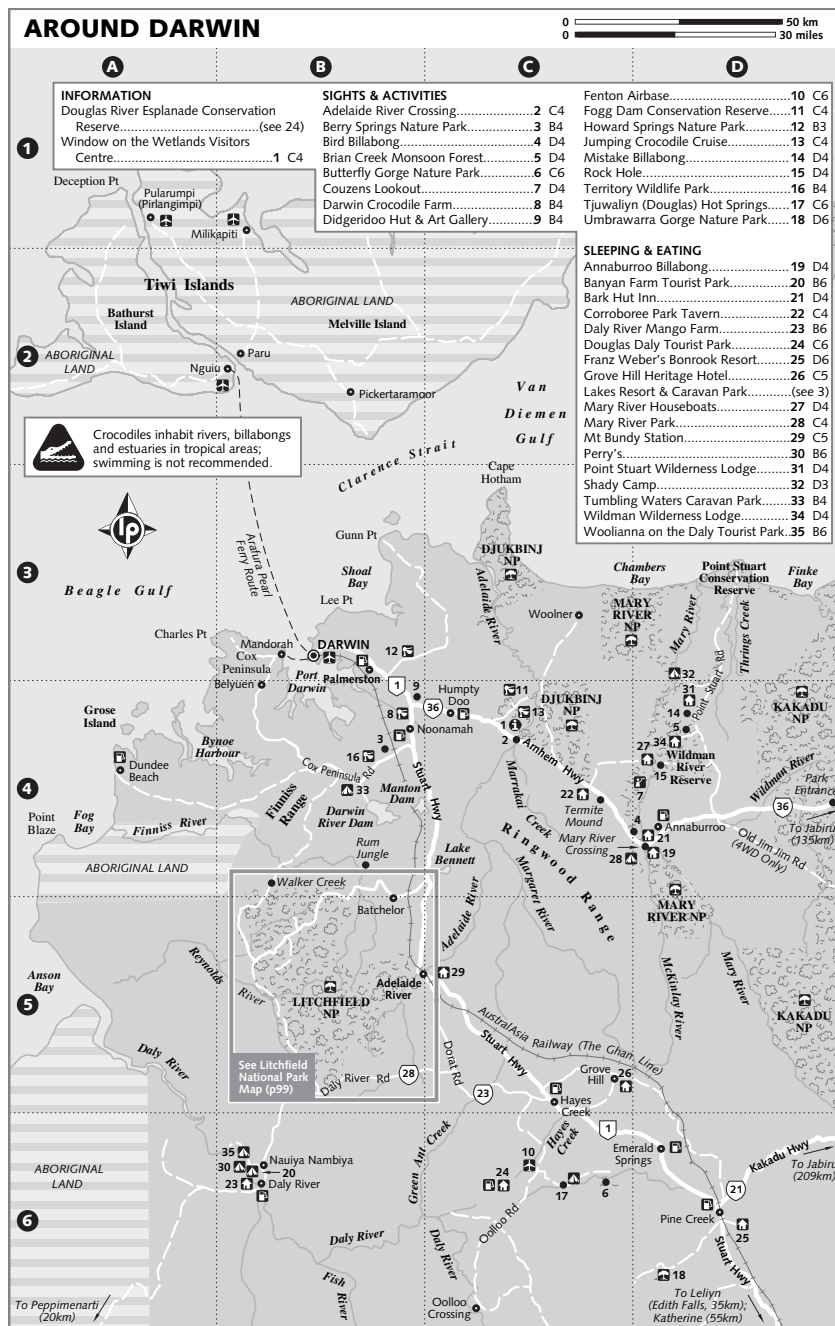
It's 24km from Darwin to the Howard Springs turn-off, which is 4km beyond the turn-off to Palmerston.

DARWIN CROCODILE FARM

About 40km south of Darwin, the **crocodile farm** (Map p90; ☎ 8988 1450; www.crocfarm.com.au; Stuart Hwy; adult/child \$10/5.50; ☎ 9am-4pm) has around 8000 saltwater and freshwater crocodiles. Many of the crocodiles have been relocated from the wild because they've become a hazard to people. But it's no charity drive – the farm harvests the beasts for their skins and meat, which you'll find served up at a number of Darwin eateries. Or you can sample a croc burger here for \$6.

There's a small exhibition area with photos and the skull of Charlie, a massive croc killed in 1973 that measured nearly 7m and was an estimated 80 to 90 years old. Live attractions include Burt, a 5.1m movie star from the film *Crocodile Dundee*; Snowy, a snappy blonde; and an American alligator for that important comparison.

There are guided tours and feedings – the most interesting time to visit – at 2pm daily. Many day trips from Darwin include the croc farm on their itinerary.



TIWI ISLANDS

pop 3600

Bathurst and Melville Islands are two large, flat islands about 80km north of Darwin. Owned by the Tiwi Aboriginal people, they are commonly known as the Tiwi Islands. The Tiwis ('We People') have a distinct culture and, although the islands have little tourist facilities, they can be visited on organised tours.

The Tiwis' island homes kept them fairly isolated from mainland developments until the 20th century, and their culture has retained several unique features. Perhaps the best known are the *pukumani* (burial poles), carved and painted with symbolic and mythological figures, which are erected around graves. More recently the Tiwi have turned their hand to art for sale – carving, painting, textile screen-printing, batik and pottery using traditional designs and motifs. The Bima Wear textile factory was set up in 1969 to employ Tiwi women, and today makes many bright fabrics in distinctive designs. Bima designed and printed the vestments worn by Pope John Paul on his visit to the Territory in 1987. See p41 or visit the Tiwi Art website (www.tiwiart.com) for more information.

The main settlement on the islands is **Nguiu** in the southeast of Bathurst Island, which was founded in 1911 as a Catholic mission. On Melville Island the settlements are **Pularumpi** and **Milikapiti**.

Most of the 2700 Tiwi Islanders live on Bathurst Island (there's about 900 people on Melville Island). Most follow a mainly non-traditional lifestyle, but they still hunt dugong and gather turtle eggs, and hunting and gathering usually supplements the diet a couple of times a week. Tiwis also go back to their traditional lands on Melville Island for a few weeks each year to teach and to learn traditional culture. Descendants of the Japanese pearl divers who regularly visited here early this century also live on Melville Island.

HISTORY

The Tiwi had generally poor relations with the Macassans who came from the island of Celebes (now Sulawesi) in search of trepang, or sea cucumber, from the 17th century. This earned them a reputation for hostility

that stayed with them right through the colonial era. There is some evidence that the Portuguese raided the islands for slaves in the 17th century, which may go some way to explaining the origins of the hostility.

A British settlement was established in the 1820s at Fort Dundas, near Pularumpi on Melville Island. Initial hopes were high as the land seemed promising, but the climate, disease, absence of expected maritime trade and, to a degree, the hostility of the local people, all took their toll and the settlement was abandoned within 18 months.

In the late-19th century, two South Australian buffalo shooters spent a couple of years on Melville Island and, with the help of the Tiwi, reputedly shot 6000 buffaloes. The Tiwi speared one of the shooters; the other, Joe Cooper, fled to Cape Don on the Cobourg Peninsula, but returned in 1900 and spent the next 16 years with the Tiwi.

Efforts by the Catholic church to establish a mission on Melville in 1911 met with resistance from Joe Cooper, so the mission was set up on Bathurst Island. The Tiwi initially were extremely suspicious, as the missionaries had no wives, but the situation improved in 1916 when a number of French nuns joined the mission. (Mission activity ceased in 1972 with the granting of self-determination.)

Bathurst Island was the first point in Australia to be attacked by the Japanese in WWII. During the war, the people of the Tiwi Islands played a significant role by capturing fallen Japanese bomber pilots, rescuing allied pilots and guiding allied vessels through dangerous waters.

INFORMATION

To visit the Tiwi Islands independent of a tour group, you must have a 'host' on the islands and your host needs to apply for your permit to the Chairman of the **Tiwi Land Council** (☎ 8981 4898; fax 8981 4282; www.tiwilandcouncil.net.au; PO Box 38545 Winnellie 0821; Armidale St, Stuart Park, Darwin). If you have your own boat, it is possible to visit the islands (fishing guru Rex Hunt's No 1 fishing destination!) without a 'host' and go ashore and camp at six designated sites. You will still need to apply for the permit.

The one time it's possible to visit the islands without a permit is on the Tiwi football grand final day, a huge event in late March. Australian Rules football is a passion among

Tiwi people. It's necessary to plan flights well in advance at this time. Realistically, a tour is the best option.

TOURS

Tiwi Tours (☎ 1300 721 365, 8922 2777; www.aussieadventure.com.au) runs fascinating and worthwhile Tiwi Island tours, although interaction with the local Tiwi community tends to be limited to your guides and the local workshops and showrooms. A one-day tour (adult/child \$330/280) to Bathurst Island includes a charter flight, permit, lunch, tea and damper with Tiwi women, craft workshops, and visits to the early Catholic mission buildings, the Patakijiyali Museum and a *pukumani* burial site.

An overnight tour staying in air-con cabins costs \$580/550 for adults/children. Although one day is long enough to see the sights, the extended tour allows you to get a better experience of the people and culture.

Another option is the Bathurst Island ferry, the **Arafura Pearl** (☎ 8941 1991; seacat@bigpond.com; adult/child lower deck \$220/150, upper deck \$240/170; ☎ Mon, Wed & Fri, Mar–Nov), which runs day tours in association with Tiwi Tours. Leaving Cullen Bay ferry terminal at 8am and returning at 5pm, each leg takes about two hours, and you spend all of the land time in Nguiu, visiting the church, museum, Tiwi Design and Ngaruwanajirri Art Community.

Tiwi Art Network (☎ 8941 3593; www.tiwiart.com; \$400; ☎ 8am–5.30pm Mon–Fri) operates tours directed at art enthusiasts and collectors. The one-day tour visits Tiwi Design, on Bathurst Island, and Jilamara and Manupi on Melville Island. Tours are organised on demand.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

If you're arranging a visit yourself, **Tiwi Travel & Freight** (☎ 8945 5600; www.tiwi.travel.com.au) and **Air Ngukurr** (☎ 8945 2755; www.airngukurr.com.au) fly charter services to Bathurst and Melville Islands. A permit is required to visit the islands – see p91 for details.

ARNHEM HIGHWAY

The Arnhem Hwy branches off the Stuart Hwy towards Kakadu National Park 34km south of Darwin. The highway crosses two major rivers, the Adelaide and the Mary, passing through a region of significant wet-

lands best known for the acrobatic antics of the crocodiles on the Adelaide River.

At the intersection of the highways is the **Didgeridoo Hut & Art Gallery** (☎ 8988 4457; 1 Arnhem Hwy), an Aboriginal-owned venture where you can watch artists from Kakadu and Arnhem Land at work and purchase Indigenous arts and crafts.

HUMPTY DOO

pop 4790

Only 10km along the highway you come to a small but spread-out town with an incredible name – Humpty Doo.

They insist on no dress code at the friendly **Humpty Doo Hotel** (☎ 8988 1372; fax 8988 2470; Arnhem Hwy; cabins \$65; ☎ ☎). Sunday is particularly popular and local bands occasionally play on Friday or Saturday. The bistro (mains \$10 to \$20) serves burgers, steaks and schnitzels with obligatory chips, and is open for lunch and dinner.

Humpty Doo Homestay (☎ 8988 1147; bmaden.topen@austarnet.com.au; 45 Acacia Rd; cottage d \$100; ☎), 2.5km north of the Arnhem Hwy (turn left just past the pub), is a delightful fully equipped cottage set in tropical gardens, which sleeps up to four people comfortably. There's an outdoor BBQ area and pool, and the nightly rate decreases for longer stays.

Getting There & Away

Darwinbus 447 and 450 run twice daily from Monday to Friday between Palmerston and Humpty Doo. Bus 447 runs once daily on Saturday.

ADELAIDE RIVER WETLANDS Fogg Dam Conservation Reserve

About 15km beyond Humpty Doo is the turn-off to Fogg Dam Conservation Reserve (Map p90), which lies 10km north of the highway. A carpet of green conceals most of the dam waters, which provide a wetland home to numerous water birds.

In the 1950s investors pumped a load of money into the Humpty Doo Rice Project, a scheme to turn the Adelaide River floodplains into a major rice-growing enterprise. It lasted just 10 years due to poor infrastructure and highly variable seasons; however, the dam quickly became an important Dry-season refuge for wildlife. During the Dry you're likely to see plenty of white-bellied sea eagles, magpie geese, broilgas,

jabirus, kingfishers, ibis and egrets. The reserve also contains large numbers of water pythons – which feed almost exclusively on the numerous dusky rats – plus a multitude of mosquitoes and saltwater crocodiles.

The road into the reserve goes right across the old dam wall. On the western side of the wall, the elevated **Pandanus Lookout** has interpretive signs and is a good spot to catch a sunset.

There are several other viewing platforms, and marked walks start at the reserve entry car park. The **Monsoon Forest Walk** (3.6km, 1½ hours return) takes you through a variety of habitats, including monsoon and paper-bark forests, then on to the floodplains. On the other side of the road, the **Woodlands to Waterlilies Walk** (2.2km, 45 minutes return) skirts the southern edge of the dam through woodlands that fringe the floodplains. The walk along the dam wall to the **Pandanus Lookout** (2.2km, 45 minutes return) is accessible by wheelchair (or you can drive).

You may see northern quolls and black-footed bandicoots on the **nocturnal walks** (☎ 8988 8188) conducted by rangers during the Dry; bookings are essential. There's a picnic area here with shelter and toilets.

Window on the Wetlands Visitors Centre

This modern **Visitors Centre** (Map p90; ☎ 8988 8188; ☎ 7.30am–7pm) sits atop Beatrice Hill, by the Arnhem Hwy 3km past the Fogg Dam turn-off. Interactive displays give great detail on the wetland ecosystem, as well as the history of the local Aboriginal people and the pastoral activity that has taken place in the area. You can also smell a bat colony, or get an experience of diminutive life as a mudskipper. There are great views over the Adelaide River floodplain from the observation deck, and binoculars for studying the water birds on Lake Beatrice. Regular nature talks take place during the Dry.

Further along the Window on the Wetlands access road is the **Jumping Crocodile Cruise** (Map p90; ☎ 8988 9077; www.jumpingcrocodile.com.au; adult/child/family \$30/15/70; ☎ 9am, 11am, 1pm & 3pm), which stages one-hour tours involving wild crocs jumping for food.

Adelaide River Crossing

A further 8km along the Arnhem Hwy is Adelaide River Crossing, the original home

to the **Croc jumping** cruises. There are now about four operators feeding aerobic crocs on this stretch of the Adelaide River – all with confusingly similar names. Two of these depart from opposite sides of the road, on the western bank of the river, at the crossing. The MO is pretty similar – a crew member or lucky tourist gets to hold one end of a long stick that has a couple of metres of string attached to the other end. Tied to the end of the string is a very domesticated-looking pork chop. Not exactly wild bush tucker, but apparently the crocs think it's worth the effort. The whole thing is a bit of a circus really, but it is still an amazing sight.

At the original **Adelaide River Queen** (☎ 8988 8144; www.jumpingcrocodilecruises.com.au; 1½hr cruise adult/child/family \$36/20/100, 1hr cruise \$28/18/70; ☎ 9am, 11am, 1pm & 3pm Dry season, 9am, 11am & 2.30pm Wet season), the 1pm cruise is the only one-hour cruise, and usually takes place in the smaller vessel – so you are even closer to the crocs! The number of crocs waiting for hand-outs varies, but among the regulars are some giants measuring 6m.

Darwin Day Tours (☎ 1300 721 365; adult/child \$80/65) departs Darwin at 12.45pm, connects with the afternoon croc cruise, and visits Fogg Dam and Window on the Wetlands before returning to Darwin at 6.30pm.

MARY RIVER REGION

The wetlands and wildlife of the Mary River National Park are the central attractions in this region, which is renowned worldwide in bird-watching circles. Fisherfolk, too, hold the Mary River and its monster barramundi in high esteem. There are several ways to access the river: via 2WD and 4WD public roads or as a guest of one of the several resorts that specialise in looking after bird-watchers and anglers, as well as travellers just wanting to find a quiet and natural retreat.

Sleeping & Eating

There are several accommodation and dining options along the Arnhem Hwy on the way to Mary River National Park and a few good camping grounds within the national park (p95).

Corroboree Park Tavern (Map p90; ☎ 8978 8920; fax 8978 8954; Arnhem Hwy, Corroboree Park; unpowered/powered sites for 2 \$10/20, s/d cabin \$50/60; ☎ ☎) This friendly roadhouse, 22km from Adelaide River Crossing, is a good base for exploring

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Mary River Park (Map p90; ☎ 1800 788 844, 8978 8877; www.maryriverpark.com.au; Arnhem Hwy, Mary River Crossing; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$18/25, dm \$18, cabins from \$120; ♿ ♿) This sprawling, family-run bush retreat, with a 3km frontage on the Mary River, has made quite a name for itself in bird-watching circles. What makes this place stand out is the access to walking trails and numerous guided tours that are on offer. The 3½-hour sunset star-gazing dinner cruise (\$65) includes an Aussie stew and damper dinner with billy tea on a sandbar in the middle of the river. There are croc-spotting trips (adult/child \$38/25), and expertly guided bird-watching tours can be arranged. There's plenty of space to find a quiet camp, and you can rest assured that no noisy tour groups are going to arrive at dusk and set up camp 2m from your tent. Though the cabins are small, they're comfortable enough and a continental breakfast is included. There's a casual restaurant (mains \$15 to \$22) and a fully equipped camp kitchen. The daily Greyhound Australia bus to/from Kakadu will stop at the front gate.

the region. There's lots of grassy camping space, cosy budget cabins and pet saltwater and freshwater crocs. And check out the huge croc skull in the bistro (mains \$10 to \$20).

Mary River Houseboats (Map p90; ☎ 8978 8925; Corroboree Billabong; 6-/8-berth houseboats for 2 days \$520/590, extra day \$190/270) Groups, particularly fishos, should consider hiring a houseboat to explore the Mary River. A \$300 bond is required. Dinghies and fishing tackle also can be hired. The turn-off to the houseboat berth is 1km east of Corroboree Park, then 20km along an unsealed road. Houseboats are only rented out during the Dry.

Bark Hut Inn (Map p90; ☎ 8978 8988; barkhutinn@bigpond.com; Arnhem Hwy, Annaburroo; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$14/22, s/d/f \$45/60/80, unit for up to 6 people \$120; ♿ ♿) This is the most atmospheric roadhouse along the highway. The rustic bar is adorned with boar and buffalo heads, and a remarkable bullet collection. The bistro (mains \$15 to \$20) gets good reviews and there are great home-made muffins and pastries. Fishing and wildlife tours can be arranged with prior notice.

Annaburroo Billabong (Map p90; ☎ 8978 8971; Arnhem Hwy; unpowered sites per adult/family \$15/20, dm \$7.50, cabins \$65; ♿) This place exudes even more rustic charm with a wandering menagerie, friendly management and not too many rules. The elevated timber-and-bamboo cabins have a fridge and there is a good camp kitchen and immaculate tin-and-bamboo amenity blocks. There are free canoes for guests to paddle around the billabong.

Getting There & Away

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) coaches run between Darwin and

Jabiru daily and will drop you off and pick you up on the highway at or near the various accommodation places for about \$25 one way from either Darwin or Jabiru. If you're driving on to Kakadu National Park from the Mary River Region, an alternative access route is via the 4WD-only Old Jim Jim Rd. The turn-off from the highway is 18km beyond the Bark Hut Inn and the road is often impassable in the Wet.

Mary River National Park

This major reserve covers the Mary River wetlands, which extend north and south of the Arnhem Hwy. This area offers excellent fishing, bird-watching and wildlife-spotting opportunities, and because there is not much in the way of infrastructure, it is far less visited than nearby Kakadu. The main access road, the Point Stuart Rd, turns off the Arnhem Hwy 19km west of the Bark Hut Inn (400m east of the Jim Jim Rd turn-off) and leads north. It is 2WD-accessible in the Dry and sealed for the first 17km and unsealed for the 37km to Shady Camp.

INFORMATION

The **Window on the Wetlands Visitor Centre** (p93; ☎ 8988 8188; ☎ 7.30am-7pm) is the national park information centre for the region between Darwin and Kakadu. In case of emergencies, there is a **ranger station** (☎ 8978 8986) accessed from the Point Stuart Rd. The park's 4WD roads are closed during the Wet; for road information call ☎ 1800 246 199.

SIGHTS

A few kilometres before the Mary River Crossing, **Bird Billabong** is accessible by 2WD

year-round. The scenic **loop walk** (1.4km return, 1½ hours) passes through tropical woodlands, with a backdrop of Mount Bundy granite rocks, and there's a beautiful view of the surrounding hills from the lookout. Creeks run across the track in the Wet and there's no water or facilities here.

At **Mary River Crossing** there's a small reserve beside the highway near the Bark Hut Inn. A boat ramp provides access to the river and there's a picnic ground and toilets.

Access to the northern part of the park is via the Point Stuart Rd, which turns north off the Arnhem Hwy 19km east of the Bark Hut Inn, and via Hardies (4WD) Track, which continues north from the Bird Billabong access road. A brochure on Hardies Track is available from the Bark Hut Inn.

Sixteen kilometres north along the Point Stuart Rd, another dirt road heads west for 16km to **Couzens Lookout** on the Mary River. It offers great views, especially at sunset, and has a basic camping area. **Rockhole**, 1km further along, has a boat ramp, information boards, picnic tables and toilets.

Back on the Point Stuart Rd, about 9km north of the Couzens Lookout turn-off, another side-road heads west to the **Brian Creek Monsoon Forest**. About 400m along this road is a car park with a 800m walk leading to a small pocket of rainforest boasting an awesome strangler fig and plenty of hand-sized spiders that weave webs across the track. This side road continues west to the Wildman Wilderness Lodge (right).

Again back on the Point Stuart Rd, about 3km past the Brian Creek/Wildman turn-off, **Mistake Billabong** is an attractive wetland with a viewing platform and picnic ground. A further 7km brings you to Point Stuart Wilderness Lodge (right).

Another 18km brings you to **Shady Camp**, a popular fishing spot right on the Mary River where there are picnic tables, pit fires, toilets, camp sites and a viewing platform. The grassy camp sites under banyan trees are appealing, but armies of mosquitoes swarm in at dusk so come prepared. There is also a boat ramp and boat hire is available (see right for details).

ACTIVITIES

The **fishing** fraternity is of course interested chiefly in the barramundi that are found in the Mary River waterways. Boat ramps are

located at Mary River Crossing, Rockhole and Shady Camp. Corroboree Billabong is also a popular spot.

Shady Camp Boat Hire (☎ 8978 8914; Point Stuart Wilderness Lodge) has self-drive 3.7m boats for hire at \$90/135 per half/full day, and 4.1m boats for \$120/170.

TOURS

Only a few companies include Mary River in tours out of Darwin; usually they will combine it with a trip to Kakadu. **Adventure Tours Australia** (☎ 1300 654 604) include a Mary River cruise and overnight at Point Stuart Wilderness Lodge in their two-, three- and six-day Kakadu safaris.

There are private concessions within the park that offer accommodation and trips out on the river during the Dry. The Wildman Wilderness Lodge runs two-hour **crises** (adult/child \$40/20) from Rockhole on demand. From the Point Stuart Wilderness Lodge, a two-hour wetland cruise costs \$35 per person, also on demand.

SLEEPING & EATING

There are basic camping grounds at **Couzens Lookout Camping Area** and **Shady Camp** (adult/child/family \$3.30/1.65/7.70).

Wildman Wilderness Lodge (Map p90; ☎ 8978 8912; www.voyages.com.au; powered sites for 2 \$25, d \$95, d incl meals \$160; ♿ ♿ ♿) Set in lush gardens on the edge of the flood plains, this lodge has comfortable cabins and facilities, a friendly intimate atmosphere and a licensed dining room that usually has four to five selections.

Point Stuart Wilderness Lodge (Map p90; ☎ 8978 8914; fax 8978 8898; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$20/24, dm \$25, d from \$70; ♿ ♿ ♿) The 1.5km access road to this lodge turns off the Point Stuart Rd 5km north of Mistake Billabong. This is part of an old cattle station with grassy camp sites and comfy cabins, and a good bar and bistro (mains \$18 to \$22) with breakfast, dinner and packed lunches. There are 30-minute bush tucker walks (\$5 per person) and evening corroborees (\$15 per person).

DOWN THE TRACK

The Stuart Hwy (the Track) is the bitumen artery that connects Darwin on the coast with Alice Springs, 1500km to the south in the heart of the Red Centre.

TERRITORY WILDLIFE PARK & BERRY SPRINGS

The turn-off to Berry Springs is 48km down the Stuart Hwy from Darwin, then it's 10km along the Cox Peninsula road to the Territory Wildlife Park and the adjoining Berry Springs Nature Park – two worthwhile attractions that can be combined as a day trip from Darwin.

Territory Wildlife Park

Situated on 400 hectares of bushland, some 60km south of Darwin, the **Territory Wildlife Park** (Map p90; ☎ 8988 7200; www.territorywildlife.com.au; Cox Peninsula Rd; adult/concession/family \$18/9/40; 🕒 8.30am–6pm, last admission 4pm) is an excellent open-air zoo that shouldn't be missed. The state-of-the-art enclosures feature a wide variety of Australian wildlife, some of which is quite rare. There is a restaurant and picnic area, wheelchairs are available and strollers can be hired.

Highlights of the park are the **Flight Deck**, where birds of prey display their intelligence and dexterity; the **nocturnal house**, where you can observe nocturnal fauna such as bilbies and bats; 12 habitat **aviaries**, each representing a different habitat from mangroves to woodland; and a huge **walk-through aviary**, representing a monsoon rainforest. Pride of place must go to the **aquarium**, where a walk-through clear tunnel puts you among giant barramundi, stingray, sawfish, saratoga and a score of others, while a separate tank holds a 3.8m saltwater crocodile. These subsurface views of billabong life are not to be missed.

To see everything you can either walk around the 4km perimeter road, or hop on and off the shuttle trains that run every 15 to 20 minutes and stop at all the exhibits.

A number of free talks and activities are given by the staff each day at the various exhibits, and these are listed on noticeboards at the main entrance. Don't miss one of the free-flying birds of prey demonstrations at 10am and 3pm daily.

Day tours are operated by several companies (see p75). **Darwin Day Tours** (☎ 1800 811 633) depart at 7.30am daily for the park, returning at 1.30pm. The price (adult/child \$60/50) includes the entry fee.

Berry Springs Nature Park

Close by is **Berry Springs Nature Park** (Map p90; admission free; 🕒 8am–6.30pm), which is a great

place for a swim and a picnic. There's a thermal waterfall, spring-fed pools ringed with paperbarks and pandanus palms, and abundant birdlife. Bring a mask and snorkel to check out the teeming aquatic life.

Under shady trees there is a pleasant grassed picnic ground with barbecues. Other facilities include toilets, changing sheds, showers and amenities for the disabled. There's a small information centre and a 30-minute **walking trail** offers bird-watching.

The **Rainbow Café** (🕒 11am–5pm) is run by a fabulous lady who sells inexpensive snacks, sandwiches, hot food, drinks and the imperative insect repellent. If the pool is open, the kiosk is open.

Sleeping & Eating

Tumbling Waters Caravan Park (Map p90; ☎ 8988 6255; fax 8988 6222; Cox Peninsula Rd; unpowered/power sites for 2 \$18/22, cabins \$60–110) This friendly and attractive resort is about 10km west of Berry Springs in the Darwin River region. The budget cabins have shared amenities, and facilities include a bar, camp kitchen, pool and a freshwater croc display.

Lakes Resort & Caravan Park (☎ 8988 6277; www.lakesresortcaravanpark.com.au; unpowered/power site for 2 \$20/25, cabins \$55–80; 🕒 🚰 🚿) In Berry Springs itself, this is about 2.5km east of the Wildlife Park and has a bar and bistro (mains \$15 to \$20). It's well set up for water sports, with a pool with a water slide and a small lake for water-skiing and jet-skiing.

BATCHELOR

pop 730

This small town lies 12km west of the Stuart Hwy, about 100km south of Darwin. The town was established in 1952 to service Australia's first uranium mine – Rum Jungle. The mine closed in 1971, and these days Batchelor owes its existence to the Batchelor Institute for Indigenous Education, and the fact that it is the main access point for Litchfield National Park.

For Internet access try the **Batchelor Library** (Batchelor Institute; ☎ 1800 677 095; Nurdina St; 🕒 8am–4pm Tue–Fri, 10am–4pm Mon, 5.30–8pm Mon–Thu, 1–4.30pm Sun). You can pick up national park fact sheets, and you may even be able to find a ranger at the **Parks & Wildlife office** (☎ 8976 0282; cnr Pinaroo & Nurdina Sts; 🕒 8am–5pm Mon–Fri).

The **Coomalie Cultural Centre** (☎ 8939 7404; cnr Awillia Rd & Nurdina Sts; 🕒 10am–4pm Tue–Fri, 8am–

QUEENS IN GRASSLAND CASTLES

The savannah woodlands of the Top End are dotted with innumerable, regularly spaced mounds of earth. Some are football-sized domes, others towering monoliths or dirt cones that spread in every direction. From a distance they can look like herds of grazing antelope in the waving grass and, in a sense, that is what they represent, for they are built by the most abundant grazing animals in tropical Australia – termites.

Termite mounds are a wonder of natural engineering. Termites are blind, silent insects only a few millimetres in length, but somehow they cooperate to surround themselves with these vast, protective fortresses. Grains of earth, cemented with termite saliva, can grow to house a colony of millions. Collectively termites consume tonnes of grass and wood annually, and storage chambers in the mound may be filled with vegetation; other passages serve as brood chambers and ventilation ducts.

The hub of the colony is the queen, whose main task in life is to squeeze out millions of eggs. Most eggs hatch into workers, who tend the queen, forage for food and build the mound. Others become soldiers that defend the nest against raiders – termites are a favourite food of lizards, birds and echidnas. Every year a few develop into sexually mature, winged nymphs that leave to mate and raise a new colony. This is the moment other grassland inhabitants await – as the winged termites leave the nest they are snapped up by frilled lizards and birds. The toll is enormous and only one in a million termites survives to found a mature colony.

Several species of termites make recognisable and distinctive mounds. Magnetic termites (*Amitermes meridionalis*) make broad, flattened mounds about 2m high – rather like tombstones – that are aligned roughly north–south. The morning sun heats the flat surface and raises the mound's internal temperature; during the heat of the day, when the sun is overhead, the mound's narrow profile ensures an even temperature is maintained. But not all these mounds face exactly the same direction, as local climatic and physical conditions, such as wind and shade, dictate just how much sun each should receive. Scientists are mystified as to how the termites align their mounds.

Another species, *Coptotermes acinaciformis*, hollows out the trunk and branches of living trees, and in the process forms the tubes essential for that famous Aboriginal musical instrument, the didgeridoo.

The aptly named cathedral termites (*Nasutitermes triodiae*) make the most massive mounds of all, huge buttressed and fluted columns over 6m high. The same engineering feat in human terms would be a skyscraper nearly 2km high that covers eight city blocks, built by a million workers – blindfolded!

2.30pm Sat Apr–Sep) displays and sells a range of Indigenous art and crafts from throughout the Territory. Signs through town mark the way to this vibrantly painted building.

The **Batchelor Butterfly & Bird Farm** (☎ 8976 0199; www.butterflyfarm.net; 8 Meneling Rd; adult/child \$7/3.50; 🕒 9am–4.30pm) is a pleasant diversion, with large walk-through enclosures decked with tropical vegetation full of birds and butterflies bred on the farm. Admission includes a cuppa and informative tour, and accommodation and meals are available.

Sleeping & Eating

Jungle Drum Bungalows (☎ 8976 0555; www.jungle drumbungalows.com.au; 10 Meneling Rd; d/q \$100/140; 🕒 🚰 🚿) Lush tropical gardens veil the colourful Bali-style bungalows, each with a

patio, bathroom, TV and fridge. Beside the shaded pool is an excellent licensed restaurant (mains \$15 to \$20) serving a small but varied selection of steak, chicken, pasta and curry; children's meals are \$10.

Mine Managers Residence (☎ 8976 0554; www.historicretreat.com.au; 19 Pinaroo Cres; d \$125; 🕒) This is the beautifully restored residence of the erstwhile Rum Jungle mine's managers. Furnished in '50s style with plenty of louvred windows, the house has five guest rooms including a bunk room. The tariff includes a tropical continental breakfast.

Batchelor Butterfly & Bird Farm (☎ 8976 0199; www.butterflyfarm.net; 8 Meneling Rd; d \$65–75; 🕒 🚰 🚿) Cosy home-stays in a guesthouse with shared bathroom, fully equipped kitchen, and a lounge complete with organ

and guitar are on offer here. Homemade snacks and meals, served in the butterfly- and buddha-adorned restaurant (mains \$12 to \$18) include numerous vegetarian options served with home-grown tropical trimmings.

Banyan Tree Caravan & Tourist Park (Map p99; ☎ 8976 0330; www.banyan-tree.com; Litchfield Park Rd; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$18/20, budget s \$45, cabin from \$95; ♿ ♿) Located 11km from Batchelor towards Litchfield, this place has grassy, shaded sites, good-value budget rooms, a wheelchair-friendly cabin and a licensed bistro (mains \$14 to \$18). The camp kitchen has a BBQ, stove, fridge and tables.

Batchelor Resort (☎ 8976 0166; www.batchelor-resort.com; 37-49 Rum Jungle Rd; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$20/27, self-contained cabins \$105, motel d \$140) This resort comprises a caravan park, motel and bistro (mains \$15 to \$20), and even an 18-hole mini golf course.

Batchelor General Store (☎ 8976 0450; 7am-6pm) This is well stocked, with an attached takeaway counter and post office.

Getting There & Away

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) buses stop at Rum Jungle service station on the run between Darwin (\$38, 1½ hours) and Katherine (\$65, three hours).

LITCHFIELD NATIONAL PARK

This 1500-sq-km national park, 115km south of Darwin, encloses much of the spectacular Tabletop Range, a wide sandstone plateau mostly surrounded by cliffs. The park's main attractions are four waterfalls that drop off the edge of this plateau, unusual termite mounds and curious sandstone formations. Beautiful country, excellent camping grounds, and the 4WD, bushwalking and photography opportunities are also highlights. It's well worth a few days, but note that weekends can get crowded.

There are few better places in the Top End to swim than in Litchfield. The park is riddled with idyllic waterholes and crystal-clear cascades, and crocs are absent from all but a few. A mask and snorkel will reveal abundant aquatic life.

Litchfield Park is about two hours' drive from Darwin via both of the main access roads. One, from the north, involves turning south off the Berry Springs to Cox Peninsula road onto a well-maintained dirt

road, which is suitable for 2WD vehicles except in the wet season. The more popular approach is along a bitumen road from Batchelor into the east of the park. These access roads join up so it's possible to do a loop from the Stuart Hwy. The Finniss and Reynolds Rivers may cut off sections of the park during the Wet. The southern access road is unsealed and normally closed during the Wet, even to 4WD vehicles.

Information

There is no visitors centre, but an information bay 5km inside the park's eastern boundary has a map showing walks and lists road closures. Informative signboards at most sites explain geology, flora and fauna, and Aboriginal activity. There's another information bay inside the northern boundary.

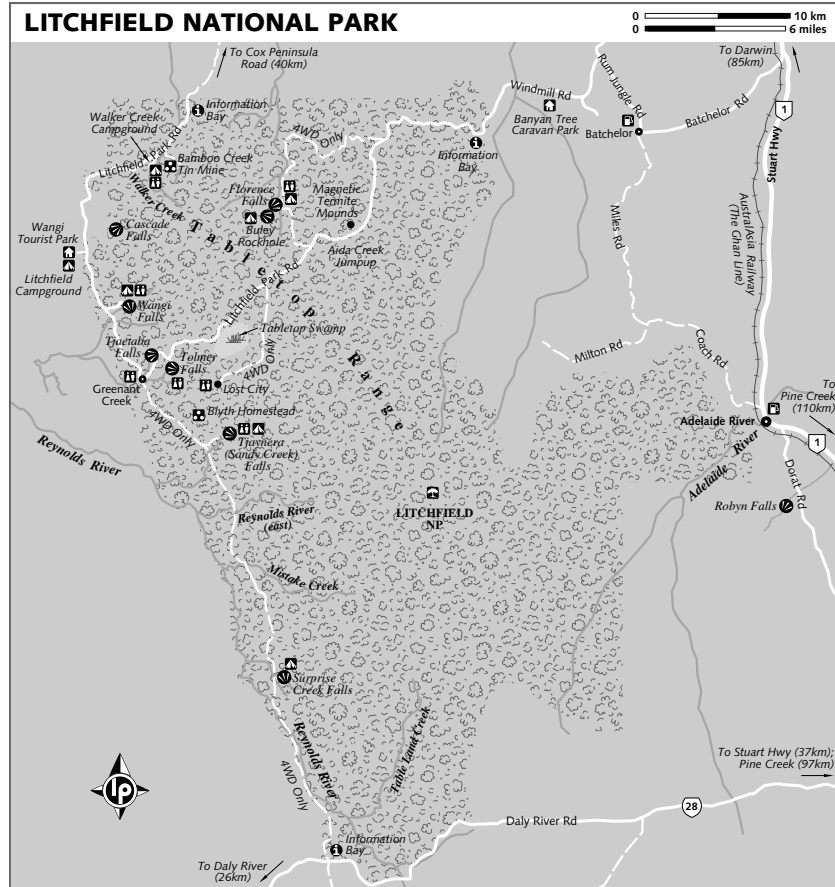
Maps NT publishes a very good 1:30,000 *Litchfield National Park* map, available from the information centre (p65) in Darwin and through some shops and accommodation in Batchelor and the park. If more detail is required, the topographic sheet maps that cover the park are the 1:100,000 *Reynolds River* (5071) and the 1:50,000 *Sheets NO 5071* (I-IV). These are available from Maps NT (p63) in Darwin.

A ranger is stationed near the northern entrance to the park, but should only be contacted in an emergency. During the Dry, the rangers conduct a number of activities aimed at increasing your enjoyment and knowledge of the park. The schedule is published in the widely available *Come Alive in Territory Parks* and should be posted at the information bays on the way into the park and at Wangi Falls. For further information contact the **Batchelor Parks & Wildlife office** (☎ 8976 0282; 1 Pinaroo Cres). There are emergency call devices (ECD) at Florence, Tolmer, Wangi and Tjaynera Falls.

Litchfield is open all year and the main access road, which passes the main sights, is sealed. The nearest fuel is at Batchelor and there's a kiosk at Wangi Falls (no fuel or alcohol).

Dangers & Annoyances

Remember, saltwater crocs are alive and plentiful in the nearby Finniss and Reynolds Rivers, and can move into areas such as Wangi Falls during the Wet. Always pay attention to any signposted warnings.



Scrub typhus is spread by a tiny mite that lives in long grass during the Wet season. Several cases – including a fatality – have been associated with Litchfield National Park. The danger is small, but cover up your legs and feet should you need to walk in this habitat (most visitors won't encounter the problem). If you fall ill after a visit to the park, advise your doctor that you have been to Litchfield.

Sights

MAGNETIC TERMITE MOUNDS

About 17km from the eastern boundary of the park is a field of curious termite mounds that are all aligned roughly north–south. A small boardwalk takes you out close to

some of the mounds, and there's an excellent information display. Nearby are some giant mounds of the aptly named cathedral termites.

BULEY ROCKHOLE & FLORENCE FALLS

Almost immediately after the termite mounds, the road climbs the escarpment up the Aida Creek Jumpup and after 6km you come to the Florence Falls turn-off on the eastern edge of the plateau. The falls lie in a pocket of monsoon forest 5km off the road along a good track.

Buley Rockhole is a very popular (sometimes too popular) spot of bubbling cascades and pools, with toilets and picnic tables. A track from the day-use car park (3.2km

return, 1½ hours including swim) follows Florence Creek to Florence Falls.

Florence Falls has a walking track (with wheelchair access), 200m from the car park, that leads to a lookout over the twin falls and an idyllic plunge pool. This excellent swimming hole is reached via a boardwalk and staircase (500m, 15 minutes) or via the Shady Creek walk (1.8km return, one hour including swim), which features small pools near several picturesque picnic areas upstream. There's also a trail that links to the longer Tabletop Track, which encircles the Tabletop Range.

LOST CITY

Erosion of softer soils, gouged out of the plateau, has left these more resistant sandstone columns and blocks that, with a little imagination, resemble ruined buildings. There's a short walk around the 'city', but no facilities or water. The Lost City turn-off lies 4.2km from the Florence Falls turn-off. The 10.5km (30 minutes) access track is 4WD only.

TABLETOP SWAMP

About 5km past the Lost City turn-off a track to the left leads a few hundred metres to Tabletop Swamp. This small, paperbark-ringed wetland supports water birds, such as green pygmy geese and large egrets, and there are honeyeaters feeding on the paperbark blossom. A short walk goes around the swamp and there are picnic tables.

TOLMER FALLS

The Tolmer Falls turn-off is 6km past the swamp. Here the escarpment offers sweeping views over the tropical woodland stretching away to the horizon. The falls, which cascade spectacularly into a deep, narrow gorge, screen a series of caves that form the largest known breeding site for the endangered orange horseshoe bat and ghost bat.

Access to the falls themselves has been restricted to protect the habitat, and there is no swimming at this site. A 400m walking track (with wheelchair access) leads to the falls lookout. From here the track continues to complete a loop (1.6km, 45 minutes) back to the car park, passing beautiful, small rock pools above the falls.

There are toilets, an information shelter and an emergency call device in the car park.

GREENANT CREEK & TJAETABA FALLS

Another 2km along the main road is the access road to Greenant Creek, which has a picnic area, toilets and a walking trail (2.7km return, one hour) to Tjaetaba Falls. The pretty falls area is sacred to local Aboriginal people and swimming is not permitted in the creek below the falls.

BLYTH HOMESTEAD RUINS, TJAYNERA FALLS & SURPRISE CREEK FALLS

Just 1km beyond the Greenant Creek turn-off is the turn-off to Tjaynera (Sandy Creek) Falls, which lie 9km off the road along a corrugated 4WD track with a couple of water crossings and speed humps.

Only 700m in is a major water crossing through the fast-flowing Tolmer River. Around 5.5km down the track is the turn-off for Blyth Homestead, a further 1.5km and one more river crossing away. This 'homestead' was built in 1929 by the Sargent family, and it remained in use until the area was declared a national park in 1986.

Back on the main track the road forks after 2km. The left (eastern) fork heads to Tjaynera Falls (1.5km) with a good camping ground, while the right fork continues south to Surprise Creek Falls and the Daly River Rd. The 3.4km (1½ hours) return walk to Tjaynera Falls meanders through cycad-filled gullies and paperbark forest. The plunge pool here is deep, cool and far less crowded than the more easily accessible sites.

Surprise Creek Falls is a further 13km south through the isolated southern reaches of the park. This track is the last to be opened after the Wet, as it cuts through a swamp and the Reynolds River. Never swim in the Reynolds River as saltwater crocodiles may be lurking. There's a short walk at the falls to a series of waterholes that lead into a deep pool, which is perfect for a refreshing dip. Camping is free at Surprise Creek Falls.

The southern track eventually links up with the Daly River Rd, 17km beyond Surprise Creek – this section opens before the route between Surprise Creek and Tjaynera Falls. From the Daly River Rd intersection you can head east to the Stuart Hwy or southwest to Daly River.

WANGI FALLS

The main road through the park continues north from the Tjaynera turn-off another

6.5km to the turn-off to the most popular attraction in Litchfield – Wangi Falls (pronounced *wong-guy*), 1.5km along a side road. This area can really become overrun on weekends.

The falls here flow year-round and fill a beautiful plunge pool that is great for swimming. Although the pool looks safe enough, the currents can be strong. Beside the pool a sign points out the dangers, and markers indicate when the water is considered too high to be safe. There's an emergency telephone at the car park. Excellent visibility makes it a great spot for snorkelling.

A marked walking trail (1.6km return, one hour) takes you up and over the falls for a great view. There's a boardwalk over the two river crossings that turn into the falls, and it's quite a steep walk in places.

There are barbecues (BYO wood), tables and a kiosk in the picnic area.

WALKER & BAMBOO CREEKS

After passing the accommodation that sits just outside the park's boundary (Litchfield Tourist Precinct), the road loops back into the park, and after about 12km there's a turn-off to Walker Creek that leads 600m to a picnic area with tables and pit fires by the creek. A rock pool walk (3.5km, one hour) leads upstream along a fern-fringed river to a rock pool swimming area.

At Bamboo Creek, a further 1.5km up the main road, the well-preserved ruins of the tin mines that operated here in the 1940s provide an insight into the working conditions of the miners. It's well worth a look – there are informative signs and a loop walk (600m, 20 minutes).

It's only another 3km to the northern boundary of the park, and from there it's around 42km of corrugated dirt road to the Cox Peninsula Rd.

Tours

Numerous companies offer trips to Litchfield from Darwin, ranging from small-group tours that uncover the uncrowded gems to backpacker buses that blitz the popular waterholes. Most day tours cost from \$80 to \$120, which includes pick-up from your accommodation, guided tour of various sights, at least one swim, morning tea and lunch.

Albatross Helicopters (☎ 8988 5081 or Litchfield camping ground ☎ 8978 2077; per person from \$90),

based at the Litchfield camping ground, has various tours over Litchfield and the Daly River region.

Batchelor Air Charter (☎ 8976 0023; \$450) offers hour-long scenic charter flights over Litchfield. The plane holds up to five passengers.

Goanna Eco Tours (☎ 1800 003 880, 8927 2781; www.goannaecotours.com.au; adult/child \$110/95) is recommended by readers for its one-day tour, which includes a jumping croc cruise on the *Adelaide River Queen*, lunch and plenty of opportunities to swim.

Kakadu Dreams (☎ 1800 813 269; \$80) runs all-inclusive backpacker-focused day tours.

Odyssey Tours & Safaris (☎ 1800 891 190; www.odysaf.com.au; adult/child \$540/470) has an expertly guided two-day tour to exclusive areas of the park, as well as other 4WD-only sights.

Wangi Wildlife Cruises (☎ 8978 2022; \$45) take place on McKeddie's Billabong, an extension of the Reynolds River. Enquire about availability either directly or at the Monsoon Café (below).

Sleeping & Eating

There are pleasant **camping grounds** (adult/child/family \$6.60/3.30/16) at Buley Rockhole (2WD access) and Florence Falls (one 2WD and the other 4WD-only access), which have toilets and pit fires (BYO wood). Cold showers and disabled facilities are also available at the Florence Falls 2WD camping ground, which is very close to the falls. At Tjaynera Falls the camping ground has hot showers, flushing toilets and pit fires (BYO wood). Camp fees (as above) apply and are either collected by a ranger or deposited into the honesty box. Camping is free at Surprise Creek Falls.

At Wangi Falls the camping ground (fees apply) has hot showers and facilities for the disabled. The large, rocky sites are good for vans, but make tent camping a bit uncomfortable. The **kiosk** (☎ 8am-6pm May-Oct, 8am-4pm Nov-Apr) here sells snacks, barbecue packs, ice cream, ice and mosquito repellent, and can advise on whether cruises on the Reynolds River are available.

Other options are available in the Litchfield Tourism Precinct, 4km north of Wangi Falls.

Litchfield camping ground (☎ 8978 2077; unpowered sites for 2 \$12; permanent tent d \$50) Has shady camp sites and spotless tented accommodation and the licensed Monsoon Café (mains \$14 to \$20). Open for breakfast, lunch and

dinner, the Monsoon offers good coffee, great cooked breakfasts and burgers, and a wicked mango cheesecake.

Wangi Tourist Park (☎ 8978 2185; www.wangitouristpark.com.au; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$16/25) Nearby is this park with shaded, sparsely grassed sites, and disabled facilities.

Walker Creek camping ground (adult/child/family \$3.30/1.65/7.70) These secluded, walk-in bush camp sites have their own swimming area, table and pit fire. The fact that campers have to lug their own gear upstream from the car park makes it even more appealing. Individual sites must be booked on the reservation board in the car park. The furthest site is about 2km away; some sites are 750m away from the toilets.

Getting There & Away

The main access to the park is via Litchfield Park Rd, which runs from the Stuart Hwy through Batchelor. The northern access joins the Cox Peninsula Rd and may be of interest to those going via the Territory Wildlife Park and Berry Springs to/from Darwin (115km), though this route includes a 42km unsealed section. The southern access, a narrow 4WD track to Daly River Rd, is closed through the Wet.

ADELAIDE RIVER

pop 230

Not to be confused with Adelaide River Crossing, on the Arnhem Hwy, this sleepy settlement, 111km south of Darwin, was an important point on the Overland Telegraph Line (OTL), the North Australia Railway and as a rest camp and supply depot during WWII.

The town comes alive during June when the annual race meeting, Adelaide River

Show, Rodeo, Campdraft and Gymkhana are held at the showgrounds.

There's a visitor information centre in the **Railway Museum** (☎ 8976 7101; ☎ 10am-4pm May-Oct, variable hrs Nov-Apr), near the Daly River Rd turn-off.

Well-signposted east of the highway, the **Adelaide River War Cemetery** is the largest war cemetery in the country. The sea of white crosses in honour of those killed in the Japanese air raids during WWII is a solemn reminder of the grim cost of war. There are a few picnic tables and gas barbecues in a tranquil park along the river bank here.

A small **pioneer cemetery** on the southern side of the bridge has five graves dating back to 1884.

Sleeping & Eating

Mt Bundy Station (Map p90; ☎ 8976 7009; mt.bundy@octa4.net.au; Haynes Rd; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$16/18, s \$25, d & tw \$50-150; ☎) This place, 3km from town, is great for relaxing, fishing or horse riding. The spotless bunkhouse has a kitchen and is good value. The larger cottage has more comfortable accommodation for up to four people. If you book, the owners will pick you up from the bus stop on the highway. Horse riding costs adult/child \$30/15 for one hour.

Adelaide River Inn (☎ 8976 7047; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$10/15, cabins \$65; ☎) This hotel and caravan park hides behind the roadhouse, has comfortable en suite cabins and serves mountainous meals and good-value breakfasts in its bistro (mains \$10 to \$20). Buffet specials (\$15) are served in the shady beer garden; the Sunday roast (lunch and dinner) costs \$15. Charlie the water buffalo, who shot to fame in *Crocodile Dundee*, stands atop the bar.

DETOUR

This scenic route, part of the Northern Goldfields Loop, detours to the east of the Stuart Hwy just south of Hayes Creek and loops back onto the Kakadu Hwy near its intersection with the Stuart Hwy at Pine Creek. The dirt road is a bit rough in places, and despite the fact that there is the odd gold or tin mine still operating, there's very little traffic. On the route of both the old railway line and the OTL, the **Grove Hill Heritage Hotel** (Map p90; ☎ 8978 2489; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$12/17, s \$28-33, d \$80; ☎) is part museum and part outback watering hole. Built by the Lucy family in the 1930s, the corrugated-iron construction was to prevent it being eaten away by termites. Nowadays it seems to be all held together by cobwebs and rusty nails. Inside is a bizarre mix of bric-a-brac and farm implements. The camp sites are basic and there is little shade, though the camping is free on the last Saturday of every month, as is the social sausage sizzle.

You can stay at the town's **showground** (unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$11/16, s/d \$30/45; ☎), about 500m or so along the Daly River Rd. The pool is shaded and the sites are grassy, and showers and barbecues are available. There's a bar open from Thursday to Saturday and cheap meals (Thursday and Saturday evenings only).

Getting There & Away

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) buses operate between Darwin (\$38, two hours) and Katherine (\$65, 2½ hours), stopping in Adelaide River.

HAYES CREEK

Hayes Creek Wayside Inn (☎ 8978 2430; Stuart Hwy; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$5/15, s \$18, motel s/d from \$34/50; ☎) has a friendly, authentic charm. Free tea or coffee is available for motorists and meals (mains \$12 to \$18) are served all day in the bistro. There's a spring-fed waterhole near the grassy camping ground. Gemstone fossicking, gold panning and tours of nearby WWII sites can be arranged here with **Doc's Tours** (from \$35 per person).

DOUGLAS DALY REGION

From Adelaide River the Stuart Hwy runs southeast for 100km or so to the historical town of Pine Creek. However, consider taking the old highway, Dorat Rd, instead. There are a few interesting detours such as Ooloo Rd, which leads to Douglas Daly Park and Ooloo Crossing. Dorat Rd also gives access to Daly River Rd, which leads 80km to Daly River, a popular fishing spot on the river of the same name.

Robyn Falls

The turn-off to these small waterfalls (Map p99) is about 15km along the highway from Adelaide River. From the car park it's a 10-minute scramble along a rocky path to the small plunge pool at the base of the falls, which flow year-round. Be prepared for armies of fierce mosquitoes!

Fenton Airbase

From a marked turn-off on the Ooloo Rd, at the end of a deeply rutted track possibly best left to 4WD vehicles, Fenton Airbase (Map p90) was headquarters to a large number of American and Australian air force personnel during WWII.

There's not much to see – just concrete foundations of the former buildings scattered through surrounding bush and scrub. Along with abandoned fuel drums and broken beer bottles that have weathered a succession of bushfires, it's a fascinating and slightly haunting place to explore.

The airfield is further south, via another turn-off from Ooloo Rd. While the control tower is long gone, the airstrip itself is largely intact. There are also the remains of a former aircraft 'graveyard' here, where damaged warbirds were left to rust in peace.

Tjuwaliyn (Douglas) Hot Springs

To reach Tjuwaliyn (Map p90), turn-off Ooloo Rd 35km south of the Old Stuart Hwy. The springs are a further 7km down a dirt track (usually OK for 2WD vehicles). The hot springs themselves are too hot for bathing (40°C to 60°C). There is, however, a good spot for bathing where the hot spring water mixes with the cool river water near the camping ground. The **camping ground** (adult/child/family \$6.60/3.30/16) has pit toilets, barbecues, picnic tables and drinking water.

Butterfly Gorge Nature Park

A 4WD track stretches 17km beyond Tjuwaliyn Hot Springs to Butterfly Gorge Nature Park (Map p90). True to its name, butterflies sometimes swarm in the gorge, which is reached via a short walking track through a tall paperbark forest from the car park. The gorge is a 70m-deep gash cut through the sandstone escarpment by the Douglas River. There are numerous rock pools, the large one at the base of the gorge being a popular swimming hole. There are no saltwater crocs this far up the river, although you may well see freshies. The park is closed in the Wet.

Douglas River Esplanade Conservation Reserve

Another 7.5km south along Ooloo Rd from the Tjuwaliyn turn-off, **Douglas Daly Tourist Park** (Map p90; ☎/fax 8978 2479; douglasdalypark@bigpond.com; Ooloo Rd; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$19/27, cabins \$40-110; ☎) is a pleasant camping ground next to the Douglas River, which has access to the conservation reserve. The river frontage is dotted with amazing swimming holes, such as the arches, and numerous fishing spots. The park is clean and friendly with a small shop and petrol

bowers. Cooked meals are available at the bar (mains \$10 to \$20).

Ooloo Crossing, about 40km further along Ooloo Rd, no longer crosses the Daly River but is renowned for its fishing.

DALY RIVER

pop 620

The settlement of Daly River lies 81km west of the old Stuart Hwy along a narrow bitumen road. It's far enough away from Darwin (240km) to remain pleasantly uncrowded and the big draw here is the barra fishing.

Most of the population belongs to the Nauiia Nambiyu Aboriginal community, reached via a turn-off to the west a few kilometres before town. There's a well-stocked general store, service station and **medical clinic** (☎ 8978 2435) here, and visitors are welcome without a permit, although note that this is a dry community. The rest of the town consists largely of the lively pub, a supermarket and the **police station** (☎ 8978 2466).

Locally made arts and crafts are exhibited at the exemplary gallery and resource centre, **Merrepen Arts** (☎ 8978 2533; merrepen@bigpond.com.au; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri). The art displayed here is unique to this region and many artists are represented. The **Merrepen Arts Festival**, held on the first weekend of June, celebrates arts, crafts and music from communities around the district, such as Wadeye, Nauiia and Peppimenarti.

A popular activity here is getting out on the river and dangling a line. If you don't have your own boat, fishing tours and **boat hire** (half/full day from \$180/250) are available at accommodation places.

Sleeping & Eating

The best option is to camp. Just 500m from town on the road that takes you to the Mango Farm is the Daly River crossing, where a huge sandbar is a popular, although dusty, free camping spot. There are only a couple of good sites with shade. Note: the river is infested with salties.

Daly River Mango Farm (Map p90; ☎ 1800 000 576, 8978 2464; www.mangofarm.com.au; unpowered/powering sites for 2 \$23/26, budget d \$65, cabins \$120, houses \$220-270; ☎ ☎) Signposted 7km from the river crossing, this welcoming place is right on the banks of the river. Once the site of a Jesuit mission, and the first mango farm in Australia, a magnificent grove of 90-year-

old mango trees shade the grassy camping ground. Facilities include a communal kitchen and barbecue. The fanciful stone cabin has an unbeatable river view, while the other accommodation is clean and functional. Dinner is available in the bistro (mains \$15 to \$25) on Saturday; there's a free sausage sizzle on Tuesday, and barra and chips takeaway on Friday. Guided fishing and boat hire is also available.

Perry's (Map p90; ☎ 8978 2452; www.dalyriver.com; Mayo Park; unpowered/powering sites for 2 \$20/25; ☎ ☎) This is a very peaceful place to get away from it all with 2km of river frontage and gardens where orphaned wallabies bound around. The camping sites are well spaced for privacy, and comfortable homestead stays with meals included can be arranged with the friendly owners. Dick Perry is a well-known fishing expert and operates guided trips; boat hire and tackle is also available.

Banyan Farm Tourist Park (Map p90; ☎ 8978 2461; Woolianna Rd; unpowered/powering sites for 2 \$16/20, cabin/cottage \$50/100; ☎ ☎) The bitumen runs right to the front door of this friendly park that often hosts large fishing conventions. There's plenty of shady sites, a camp kitchen, comfortable budget accommodation, a boat ramp and guided fishing trips.

Woolianna on the Daly Tourist Park (Map p90; ☎ 8978 2478; Woolianna Rd; unpowered/powering sites for 2 \$22/26, self-contained unit per person \$85; ☎ ☎) Woolianna is reached via a 15km dirt road, which is signposted before town. Located on the banks of the Daly River, it has a shady green lawn for camping, and beds in multi-bedroom self-contained flats.

Daly River Roadside Inn (☎ 8978 2418; unpowered/powering sites for 2 \$15/25; dongas \$40 per person; d \$90; ☎) In town, this rowdy pub has OK motel rooms always with a small shady camping ground. Meals are available at the bar (mains \$15 to \$25).

Getting There & Away

The Nauiia Nambiyu community runs a weekly dry-season **minibus** (☎ 8978 2422) service between Daly River and Darwin. Call for cost and times.

PINE CREEK

pop 740

Pine Creek was once the scene of a gold rush, from which some of the old timber and corrugated-iron buildings still survive. Bird-

watchers flock to this area, as it is said to have the largest variety of species in the Territory.

As Pine Creek lies 1km or so off the highway it also manages to retain a peaceful atmosphere, undisturbed by the road trains thundering up and down the highway. Here the Kakadu Hwy branches off the Stuart Hwy to Cooida and Jabiru, in Kakadu National Park.

History

In the early 1870s labourers working on the OTL found gold here, sparking a rush that was to last nearly 20 years. Chinese workers were brought in to do much of the tough mining work and it was not long before more Chinese began arriving under their own steam, eventually outnumbering Europeans 15 to one.

Not all the Chinese who arrived to work on the goldfields were labourers; many were merchants and Pine Creek boasted a number of Chinese stores. Once the gold ran out the population of Pine Creek dwindled, with many miners returning to China in the 1890s.

Everyone going to Pine Creek in the hope of striking it rich faced a difficult journey from Palmerston (Darwin). There was no road to the diggings, and although a person on horseback could do the journey in a few days in the Dry, a fully laden wagon could take up to six weeks. Finally the decision was made to build a railway, and in 1889 Pine Creek became the terminus of the North Australian Railway.

Information

The old railway station residence houses the local information centre, although it keeps very irregular hours. The **post office** (☎ 8976 1220; Moule St), near the pub, is the agent for the Commonwealth and National Australia banks. There are public telephones outside here and public toilets in the white building near the post office.

Sights & Activities

Dating from 1888, the **railway station** (admission free; ☎ daily) has a display on the Darwin to Pine Creek railway (1889-1976). The steam engine here, built in 1877, has been lovingly restored. Next to the station is the **Miners' Park**, which has old bits of rail equipment scattered about, and some information boards.

The **Pine Creek Museum** (Railway Tce; adult/child \$2.20/free; ☎ 11am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-1pm Sat & Sun in the Dry), in an old mining warden's residence, has mining memorabilia and a mineral collection, plus old telegraph equipment and bric-a-brac.

Across from the football oval is the former **Playford Club Hotel** (Main St), a corrugated-iron relic of the gold rush days and mentioned in the classic outback novel *We of the Never Never*. For nearly 70 years it was the town's only pub; these days it's a private residence.

A visit to **Gun Alley Gold Mining** (☎ 8976 1221; ☎ 8.30am-3pm) will transport you back to the mining era. There's fully operational steam equipment and gold panning costs adult/child \$10/5 a swish.

Art enthusiasts should visit Alain Denouel's **airbrush studio** (☎ 8976 1160; Main Tce), next door to Ah Toy's General Store, where you can purchase quality prints of Alain's striking depictions of Top End nature.

Sleeping & Eating

Pine Creek Diggers Rest Motel (☎ 8976 1442; 32 Main Tce; s/d/q cabins \$80/90/100; ☎) This is easily the best place in town. The immaculately clean self-contained cabins are set in lush gardens and the friendly owner is a reliable source of information about the district.

Franz Weber's Bonrook Resort (Map p90; ☎ 8976 1232; www.bonrook.com; Stuart Hwy; s \$50, d \$85-120, f \$120; ☎ ☎) Just 8km south of town, this tranquil B&B has a beautiful setting on a wild horse sanctuary where the brumbies are free to roam. In the spotless rooms there's no TV and no phone - just the sound of the wind in the trees and the birds outside. The tariff includes a continental breakfast.

Pine Creek Hotel-Motel (☎ 8976 1288; 40 Moule St; s/d \$70/85; ☎) The motel rooms are ordinary clean rooms with fridge and TV, and the rates include a continental breakfast. Counter meals are available at the pub (mains \$10 to \$20).

Lazy Lizard Tourist Park & Tavern (☎ 8976 1224; unpowered/powering sites for 2 \$15/18; ☎) The Lizard has an ordinary camping ground, but an atmospheric, open-sided bar supported by carved ironwood pillars. The bistro (mains \$15 to \$25) has intriguing meals such as the 'glutton's delight' (mixed grill, \$14.50).

Maise's Café (☎ 8976 1241; Moule St; ☎ 7am-5pm) Next to the pub, it offers a variety of delicious hot and cold, tasty food (try the

mango smoothies or home-made iced coffee). Its namesake, Mayse Young, was a one-time publican of the Pine Creek pub. Her autobiography *No Place for a Woman* is on sale at the café. Incongruously, a life-sized model of James Dean slouches by the door and Hollywood memorabilia adorns the walls. One of the many curios is the Abe Lincoln greenback signed by the great-grandson of John Wilks Booth.

Getting There & Away

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) buses along the Stuart Hwy pull into Pine Creek. Buses stop at Ah Toy's General Store in Main Tce. Fares include Darwin (\$55, 3½ hours) and Katherine (\$33, one hour).

UMBRAWARRA GORGE NATURE PARK

The tranquil Umbrawarra Gorge Nature Park (Map p90) features some Aboriginal rock-art sites, small sandy beaches and safe swimming in the rock pools. The turn-off is about 3km along the Stuart Hwy south of Pine Creek; it's then 22km along a dirt road (which is often impassable in the Wet)

to the park. The creek stops flowing late in the dry season.

In Aboriginal legend, the gorge is the Dreaming site of *Kuna-ngarrk-ngarrk*, the white-bellied sea-eagle. Here he caught and ate a barramundi; the white flakes in the granite rock are said to be the scales of the barra, and the quartz outcrops are the eagle's droppings. Rock art can be seen along the gorge walls at its eastern end.

The gorge was first explored in 1872 and takes its name from the Umbrawarra tin mine, which in 1909 was the Territory's largest. However, little ore was removed before malaria swept through the area and left more than 40 miners dead. As the European miners left for better prospects, Chinese miners moved in and about 150 of them worked the area up until about 1925. The former mine site is now the car park area.

A marked walking track (2km return, 30 minutes) leads from the car park to swimming holes in the gorge and you can swim and rock-hop the rest of its 5km length.

There's a basic **camping ground** (adult/child/family \$3.30/1.65/7.70) with tables, pit toilet and fireplaces.