

Directory

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ACCOMMODATION

As well as the usual range of hotels, motels, caravan parks and youth hostels in towns, the Territory offers some truly Aussie ways to spend the night. Roll out your swag under the stars in the desert, pull up your camper or caravan at a remote roadhouse or deserted rest area, experience the tranquillity of staying at a cattle station homestead, or blow \$1800 on a night in a luxury 'tent' and wake up to a view of Uluru.

There's a wide variation in seasonal prices for accommodation. The peak season is June to September (the middle of the Dry in the Top End), as well as school holiday periods (p267). April–May and October–November are quieter shoulder seasons. Summer (December–March; the middle of the Wet in the Top End) is the low season and prices can drop by as much as 30%. In this book high-season prices are quoted unless indi-

PRACTICALITIES

- **Newspapers** The main newspapers are the daily tabloid *NT News*, the *Darwin Times* (Darwin) and the twice-weekly *Centralian Advocate* (Alice Springs)
- **Radio & TV** The national TV and radio network is the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC; www.abc.net.au). Triple J (Alice Springs 94.9FM, Darwin 103.3FM) is an ABC youth radio station. The multicultural SBS National Radio (100.9 FM) is available in Darwin. In Darwin and Alice Springs there are two commercial TV channels, plus the government-funded ABC and SBS (which has multicultural international programming) and *Imparja*, an Aboriginal-owned and -run commercial TV station covering most of the Northern Territory.
- **Electricity** Voltage is 220 to 240V AC, 50Hz and electricity plugs are three-pin (not the same as British three-pin plugs). International adapters can be found in travel shops, some hardware shops and airports.
- **Weights & Measures** Australia uses the metric system. Petrol and milk are sold by the litre. Distance is measured by the metre or kilometre, and speed limits are in kilometres per hour (km/h)

cated otherwise. Accommodation sections are divided into Budget (up to \$80), Mid-range (\$80 to \$150) and Top End (\$150+), though many places will naturally fall into more than one category.

If you're looking for a last-minute deal, **Wotif** (www.wotif.com) is an excellent website that allows you to search accommodation by region and make a booking.

Bush Camping

Camping in the bush, either off the beaten track or at designated sites in national parks, is one of the highlights of a visit to the Northern Territory. Nights spent around a campfire under a blanket of stars, while

CAMPING IN THE WILD

Most of the land in Australia belongs to someone – even if you haven't seen a house for 100km or so – and you may need permission to camp on it. On Aboriginal land you will need permits. On public land observe all the rules and regulations.

- Select your camping spot carefully. Start looking well before nightfall and choose a spot that makes you invisible from the road, which will help with both privacy and security.
- Some trees (for instance, river red gums and desert oak) are notorious for dropping limbs. Don't camp under large branches.
- Ants live everywhere, and it's embarrassingly easy to set up camp on underground nests. Also beware of the wide variety of spiny seeds that can ruin your expensive tent groundsheet with pinprick holes.
- Carry out all the rubbish you take in, don't bury it.
- Observe fire restrictions and make sure your fire is safe.
- Don't chop down trees or pull branches off living trees to light your fire. In national parks you need to bring in firewood. Otherwise, use a gas stove for cooking.
- Respect the wildlife. This also means observing crocodile warnings and camping at least 50m away from suspect river banks.
- Don't camp close enough to a river or stream to pollute it. In most parks the minimum distance is 20m.

listening to the eerie sounds of the night, are unforgettable.

In the Centre, where rain is relatively rare and mosquitoes are not a problem, you don't even need a tent – a swag is the way to go. These ready-made zipped canvas bedrolls with mattress are widely available at camping stores, and are extremely convenient – they take literally a few seconds to pack or unpack. In the Top End it's still possible to use swags in the Dry; the only addition you'll need is a mosquito net.

In national parks camping is usually only permitted in designated areas, where facilities can range from a fireplace and a simple pit toilet to hot showers and free gas barbecues. Payment is made into an honesty box – don't forget! You keep a receipt from the envelope provided and place it on your car or tent. Camping is not permitted on Aboriginal land and you should ask permission to camp on private land, so always check before pitching a tent.

B&Bs & Cattle Stations

Bed and breakfast guesthouses aren't particularly numerous but, when you can find them, they offer a more homely, intimate alternative to hotels or motels. There are about half a dozen places in Darwin and

Alice Springs and a handful of others in smaller towns. The Northern Territory Bed & Breakfast Council website (www.bed-and-breakfast.au.com) has listings.

For a real outback experience, several working cattle stations in the Territory offer accommodation, where you can get a taste for station life or just enjoy the remoteness and solitude.

Caravan Parks

Caravan parks can be found in all Territory cities and towns, as well as roadhouse stops, the odd national park (such as Kakadu) and some pretty out-of-the-way places. You can pitch a tent for around \$10 per person or pull up a caravan or campervan to a powered site for around \$25. Most places have a camp kitchen, swimming pool, laundry, barbecues and a shop or kiosk, and all offer toilets and hot showers. You'll have no trouble finding a camping space, but it pays to book ahead for powered sites and cabins in peak season.

Almost all caravan parks have permanent cabins that range from simple one- or two-bedroom boxes with shared facilities to fully self-contained motel-style cabins with en suite and kitchenette. You can pay anything from \$45 a double to \$120 for the best cabins.

Hostels

The backpacker industry is alive and well in the Territory, so there are plenty of hostels in Darwin and Alice Springs and a handful more scattered around in Katherine, Tennant Creek, Yulara and Kakadu. Hostels offer a cheap bed and are a great place to meet other travellers. A bed in a shared dormitory costs around \$16 to \$20 and most also have comfortable private rooms from around \$50 (\$60 to \$70 with en suite).

Hostels are well set up for travellers: virtually all have kitchens with fridges, stoves, microwaves and cooking utensils, communal areas with TV, a laundry, Internet access, swimming pool, travellers' notice boards and tour booking services. Facilities and standards vary immensely and a lot can depend on the vibe and friendliness of staff.

Some roadhouses and communities along major highways also have beds for backpackers.

The main backpacker organisations in Australia are the YHA, VIP and Nomads. As well as discounts at the member hostels, card-holders are entitled to various discounts throughout the Territory.

Nomads World (☎ 02-9232 7788; www.nomadsworld.com) Relatively small organisation that runs pubs and hostels around the country. Membership for 12 months costs \$39.

VIP Backpacker (☎ 07-3395 6111; www.vipbackpackers.com.au) This international organisation is affiliated with seven hostels in the Territory. A one-/two-month membership costs \$41/55.

YHA (☎ 08-8981 6344; www.yha.com.au) The world's biggest youth hostel network has nine hostels in Alice Springs, Yulara, Kings Canyon, Darwin, Kakadu, Katherine and Tennant Creek. A Hostelling International membership costs \$55/85 for one/two years.

Motels & Hotels

For comfortable, midrange accommodation, motels (or motor inns) are the popular choice. There are dozens of motels in Darwin, Alice Springs and smaller towns, and most roadhouses also have motel accommodation. The average motel is a modern, low-rise affair with parking, swimming pool and tidy rooms with bathroom, fridge, tea/coffee facilities, TV, telephone and air-con. Expect to pay at least \$60 for a double and up to \$120 for more upmarket places.

Fancier hotels are limited to Darwin, Alice Springs and resorts such as Yulara, Kings Canyon and Kakadu. Most have fabu-

lous facilities and locations, but more than a few five-star places are clinical and corporate in atmosphere. Although rack rates are high, discounts and special deals mean you'll rarely pay full price except in peak season.

ACTIVITIES

See the Northern Territory Outdoors chapter (p48).

BUSINESS HOURS

Normal opening hours for offices and shops are 9am to 5pm (or 6pm) weekdays, and 9am to either noon or 5pm on Saturday. There's not much in the way of late-night trading in the Northern Territory, although a couple of major supermarkets in Alice Springs and Darwin are open 24 hours. Shops that cater for tourists are often open for Sunday trading in Darwin, Alice Springs and Yulara.

Banks are open from 9.30am to 4pm Monday to Thursday, and until 5pm on Friday.

Most roadhouses and service stations remain open from around 8am to 10pm. Some service stations in town are open 24 hours for fuel, but don't count on it. Restaurant hours are generally 8am to 11pm (for breakfast, if served), noon to 2pm or 3pm for lunch, and 6pm to 9pm for dinner.

CHILDREN

Travelling with children in the Territory can be a joy – bush camping, short walks, swimming in waterholes and spotting wildlife are all healthy, family-friendly activities. The whole region is like a giant wildlife park!

The biggest problem may be keeping young kids amused on those long road trips. Some travellers recommend investing in a portable DVD player or Play Station-type games (with headphones so they don't drive the driver up the wall!). At the very least, factor in regular rest stops: some roadhouses have small playgrounds.

Practically all places to stay in the Territory have swimming pools, and in Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs there are parks and playgrounds. Most kids love camping: get them involved in setting up the campsite and learn a bit about the night sky so you can explain constellations to them. High-lights for young children include the Yellow Water cruise at Kakadu, the waterfalls at Litchfield, boating on Katherine Gorge, handfeeding fish at Aquascene in Darwin,

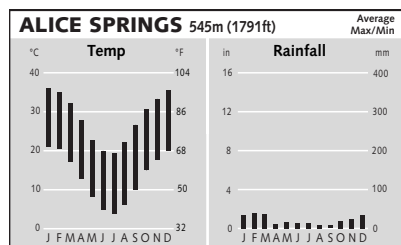
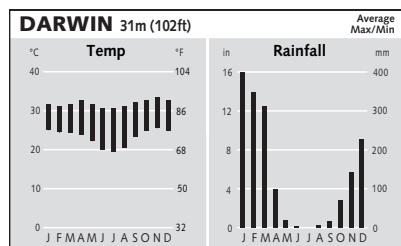
croc-jumping shows, camel riding and that first view of Uluru in the Red Centre. See Darwin for Children (p73) and Alice for Children (p190) for more ideas. There are substantial discounts for children on admission prices, transport and tours: in many cases kids under 12 or 15 are free.

Heat can be a problem while travelling in the Territory, especially in the hotter months when the relentless sun can be a killer in the Red Centre and high humidity makes life uncomfortable in the Top End. Overexposure can be life-threatening to young children. It makes sense to know a little first aid and be able to quickly recognise the effects of heat exhaustion and sunburn. Make sure the kids are well covered up with a hat, SPF 30+ sunscreen and sunglasses. If you're out walking, factor in plenty of shady rest stops. Swimming pools and waterholes (if safe) are the way to go on hot days. Always carry plenty of water (better than soft drinks or juices) and the whole family should drink regularly.

Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children* by Cathy Lanigan is a useful introduction to travelling with kids, while *Holiday with Kids* (www.holidaywithkids.com.au) is an excellent website dedicated to travel in Australia.

CLIMATE CHARTS

The two geographical zones – the Top End and the Centre – also correspond to the two climatic zones. See p14 for more details.



CUSTOMS

When entering Australia you can bring most articles in free of duty, provided that Customs is satisfied they are for personal use and that you'll be taking them with you when you leave. There's a duty-free per person quota of 2.25L of alcohol, 250 cigarettes and dutiable goods up to the value of A\$900. The catch is that if you exceed these dutiable limits you will be charged duty on the full amount, not just the excess.

Narcotics, of course, are illegal, and Customs inspectors and their beagles are diligent in finding them. Quarantine regulations are strict, so you must also declare all goods of animal or vegetable origin – wooden spoons, straw hats, the lot. Fresh food, particularly meat, cheese, fruit, vegetables, and flowers, is also prohibited. There are bins in the airport where you can dump any questionable items if you don't want to bother with an inspection. See also Interstate Quarantine p275.

Check the website www.customs.gov.au for more information.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Travel in the Northern Territory is generally safe and hassle-free if you're prepared and aware. Outback driving shouldn't be taken lightly – the last thing you want is to break down or get bogged in a remote area with no communications. See Outback Travel (p282) for more information.

Bushwalkers should also be prepared for the heat and lack of facilities. Always carry plenty of water and tell someone where you're going.

In Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine, petty crime can be a problem, particularly late at night. Avoid walking alone in unlit areas at night, and keep car doors locked and valuables out of sight.

Animal Hazards

Among Australia's unique and lovable wildlife there are a few less cuddly bush inhabitants, although it's unlikely that you'll come face to face with many of them.

You just can't get friendly with saltwater crocodiles, so before diving into that cool, inviting water anywhere in the Top End take note of the warning signs or find out from the locals whether it's croc-free. If you can't find someone to ask, don't risk it, even if there are no warning signs. Crocodiles

are found in river estuaries and large rivers, sometimes a long way inland. A German tourist was killed by a saltwater croc at Kakadu in 2002, after ignoring croc signs and jumping in for a late-night dip.

Another serious hazard is animals straying onto the road, particularly kangaroos but also livestock such as cattle. Vehicles travel fast on the main highways in the Territory and kangaroos can and will hop from the side of the road in the blink of an eye. The worst time to travel is between dusk and dawn.

Critters That Bite & Sting

The box jellyfish, also known as the sea wasp or 'stinger', is present in Territory ocean waters during summer, so swimming is not possible – stinger season is October to June. The sting from its tentacles is excruciatingly painful and can be fatal (see Bites & Stings p288 for treatment options).

Although the Territory has many species of snakes, few are dangerous or aggressive and, unless you have the misfortune to stand on one, it's unlikely that you'll be bitten. However, the most venomous ones (such as taipans, king brown snakes and death adders) are very dangerous, so leave them alone (see p288 for dealing with snakebites). Spiders also pose a small but significant risk (see p288).

For up to six months of the year you'll have to cope with those two banes of the Australian outdoors – the fly and the mosquito. In central Australia, flies emerge with the warmer spring weather (late August), particularly if there has been any spring rain, and remain until winter. Drones of mosquitoes (mozzies) may just about carry you away in the Top End, particularly around Kakadu, and some mosquito species carry viral infections (see p289 for strategies to avoid being bitten).

DISABLED TRAVELLERS

Travellers with a disability can certainly enjoy much of what the Territory has to offer. In Uluru and Kakadu there are a few walks accessible to wheelchair-bound visitors and many accommodation places – including camping grounds – have facilities for disabled travellers, such as ramps, lifts and handrails.

Long-distance bus travel is not yet a viable option for the wheelchair user. The

Ghan train has disabled facilities (book ahead). Avis and Hertz offer rental cars with hand controls at no extra charge for pick-up at the major airports, but advance notice is required.

Easy Access Australia by Bruce Cameron is a comprehensive book for travellers with a disability.

Deafness Association of the Northern Territory (☎ 08-8945 2016)

National Information Communication and Awareness Network (Nican; ☎ /TTY 1800-806 769; www.nican.com.au; 4/2 Phillips Close, Deakin, ACT 2600) Nican is an Australia-wide directory providing information on access issues, accessible accommodation, sporting and recreational activities, transport and specialist tour operators.

Northern Territory Visual Impairment Resource Unit (☎ 08-8981 5488)

DISCOUNT CARDS

Senior Cards

The **Seniors Card** (www.seniorscard.com.au) is available to permanent residents over the age of 60, and gives discounts on everything from accommodation and tours to car hire and meals – with participating businesses, of course. The card is free and you can apply online. Even without a card, seniors with proof of age receive a discount on admission to many attractions in the Territory – ask at the ticket counter.

Student Cards

A student card will entitle you to a wide range of discounts from transport and tour charges to admission fees. The most common is the **International Student Identity Card** (ISIC; www.isiccard.com) issued by student unions and hosting organisations. To get one you need to show proof of full-time student status – unless, of course, you're buying it off the street in Bangkok. For that very reason, some airlines require a card or letter from your home university before giving student discounts.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Australian Embassies & Consulates

For a complete list of Australian consular offices overseas, log on to www.dfat.gov.au/missions.

Canada (☎ 613-236 0841; www.ahc-ottawa.org; Suite 710, 50 O'Connor St, Ottawa K1P 6L2) Also consulates in Toronto and Vancouver.

France (☎ 01 40 59 33 00; www.france.embassy.gov.au; 4 Rue Jean Rey, 75724 Paris Cedex 15 Paris)

Germany (☎ 030-880 0880; www.australian-embassy.de; Wallstrasse 76-79, 10117 Berlin) Also consulates in Bonn and Frankfurt.

Indonesia (☎ 21-2550 5555; www.austembjak.or.id; Jl HR Rasuna Said, Kav C15-16, Kuningan, Jakarta Selatan 12940)

Ireland (☎ 01-664 5300; www.australianembassy.ie; 6 Fitzwillton House, Wilton Tce, Dublin 2)

Japan (☎ 03-5232 4111; www.australia.or.jp; 2-1-14 Mita Minato-Ku, Tokyo 108-8361) Also consulates in Sapporo, Nagoya and Osaka.

Netherlands (☎ 070-310 8200; www.australian-embassy.nl; Carnegielaan 4, The Hague 2517 KH)

New Zealand Embassy (☎ 04-473 6411; www.australia.org.nz; 72-78 Hobson St, Thorndon, Wellington); Consulate (☎ 09-921 8800; Level 7 PriceWaterHouseCoopers Tower, 186-194 Quay Street, Auckland)

Singapore (☎ 6836 4100; www.singapore.embassy.gov.au; 25 Napier Rd, Singapore 258507)

South Africa (☎ 012-342 3781; www.australia.co.za; 292 Orient Street, Arcadia, Pretoria 0083)

UK (☎ 020-7379 4334; www.australia.org.uk; Australia House, The Strand, London WC2B 4LA) Also consulates in Edinburgh and Manchester.

USA (☎ 202-797 3000; www.austemb.org; 1601 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington DC, 20036) Also consulates in Los Angeles and New York.

Embassies & Consulates in Australia

Most foreign embassies are in Canberra, but some countries have consulates (or honorary consuls) in Darwin.

Canada (☎ 02-6270 4000; www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/australia; Commonwealth Ave, Canberra ACT 2600)

France (☎ 02-6216 0100; www.ambafrance-au.org; 6 Perth Ave, Yarralumla ACT 2600)

Germany Embassy (☎ 02-6270 1911; www.german.embassy.org.au; 119 Empire Circuit, Yarralumla ACT 2600); Honorary consulate (☎ 08-8984 3769; 1824 Berrimah Rd, Berrimah, NT 0828)

Indonesia Embassy (☎ 02-6250 8600; www.kbri-canberra.org.au; 8 Darwin Ave, Yarralumla ACT 2600); Honorary consulate (☎ 08-8941 0048; 20 Harry Chan Ave, Darwin, NT 0800)

Ireland (☎ 02-6273 3022; 20 Arkana St, Yarralumla, ACT 2600)

Japan (☎ 02-6273 3244; www.japan.org.au; 112 Empire Circuit, Yarralumla, ACT 2600)

Netherlands (☎ 02-6220 9400; www.netherlands.org.au; 120 Empire Circuit, Yarralumla, ACT 2600)

New Zealand (☎ 02-6270 4211; www.nzembassy.com; Commonwealth Ave, Canberra ACT 2600)

Singapore (☎ 02-6273 3944; www.mfa.gov.sg; 17 Forster Cres, Yarralumla, ACT 2600)

South Africa (☎ 02-6273 2424; www.rsa.emb.gov.au; Cnr Rhodes Pl & State Circle Yarralumla, Canberra, ACT 2600)

UK (☎ 02-6270 6666; www.uk.emb.gov.au; Commonwealth Ave, Yarralumla, ACT 2600)

USA (☎ 02-6214 5600; http://canberra.usembassy.gov; Moonah Pl, Yarralumla, ACT 2600)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The Northern Territory has some of Australia's wackiest festivals, including a boat race on a dry river in Alice Springs, and another in Darwin where the boats are made entirely of beer cans! Some of the best festivals typify rural Australia, like the outback rodeos and horse races that draw together eccentric punters from hundreds of kilometres around. There are also Aboriginal cultural festivals that offer the chance to visit communities without a permit. There are happenings in the Territory all year round, particularly during winter. Following is a list of highlights.

May

Alice Springs Cup Carnival (p191)

Bangtail Muster, Alice Springs (p191)

June

Barunga Festival, Katherine (p138)

Finke Desert Race, Alice Springs (p191)

Merrepen Arts Festival, Daly River (p104)

July

Camel Cup, Alice Springs (p191)

Darwin Cup Carnival (p75)

Darwin Fringe Festival (p75)

Darwin to Bali Yacht Race (p75)

District Agricultural Shows Royal Darwin Show (p75); Katherine District Show (p138); Tennant Creek Show (p165); Alice Springs Show (p191).

August

Beer Can Regatta, Darwin (p75)

Darwin Festival (p75)

Darwin Rodeo (p75)

Flying Fox Art & Cultural Festival, Katherine (p138)

Yuendumu Sports Weekend (p209)

LEGAL AGE

As with elsewhere in Australia, the legal age for driving, voting and drinking is 18. The age of consent for heterosexuals and same-sex females is 16; for same-sex males it's 18.

September

Henley-on-Todd Regatta, Alice Springs (p191)

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

You'll find active gay and lesbian communities in Alice Springs (p191) and Darwin (p75), although you may come across homophobic attitudes outside the main towns. For general information, check out the **Gay Australia Guide** (www.gayaustaliaguide.bigstep.com), which has information on destinations, gay-friendly businesses, places to stay and nightlife in the Territory.

HOLIDAYS

Public Holidays

Following are the main national and local public holidays observed in the Northern Territory:

New Year's Day 1 January

Australia Day 26 January

Easter Good Friday to Easter Monday inclusive

Anzac Day 25 April

May Day 1st Monday in May

Queen's Birthday 2nd Monday in June

Picnic Day 1st Monday in August

Christmas Day 25 December

Boxing Day 26 December

Local holidays:

Alice Springs Show Day 1st Friday in July

Tennant Creek Show Day 2nd Friday in July

Katherine Show Day 3rd Friday in July

Darwin Show Day 4th Friday in July

School Holidays

The Christmas holiday period is part of the long summer school vacation; however, as this is the low season in the Northern Territory you're unlikely to find crowds or accommodation booked out. There are three other school-holiday periods during the year, falling from early to mid-April (including Easter), late June to mid-July, and late September to early October.

INSURANCE

A travel insurance policy to cover theft, loss and medical problems is a sensible idea. Some policies offer lower and higher medical expense options. There is a wide variety of policies available, so check the small print. Be sure that the policy covers ambulances or an emergency flight home - twisting your ankle and having to be airlifted out of a gorge

is a costly exercise. Some policies specifically exclude 'dangerous activities', which can include scuba diving, motorcycling or even trekking. A locally acquired motorcycle licence is not valid under some policies.

You may prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals directly rather than you having to pay on the spot and claim later. If you have to claim later, make sure you keep all documentation. Car hire companies have vehicle insurance, but you may be stuck with a high excess (such as with 4WD vehicles), so it pays to find an insurance policy that will cover it. See p285 for recommendations on health insurance and p281 for details on vehicle insurance.

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet access is widely available in cities and towns in the Territory, and a few roadhouses along the Stuart Hwy also have a coin-operated terminal, but don't expect to find it too far off the beaten track.

In Internet cafés the rate is around \$4 per hour, with a minimum of \$1 for 15 minutes. Cafés in Darwin, Alice, Katherine and Tennant Creek have broadband connections, USB ports and CD-burning services (for digital photos etc), and some allow you to plug your own laptop in and get connected.

If you've brought your palmtop or notebook computer and want to get connected, the first thing you should do is check out the roaming options with your own ISP (Internet service provider). There are few WIFI (Wireless Fidelity) connections in the Territory and generally only business hotels have data ports for laptops in their rooms.

Australia uses RJ-45 telephone plugs and Telstra EXI-160 four-pin plugs. A universal AC adaptor will enable you to plug it into the power supply without frying the innards of your computer. Keep in mind, too, that your PC-card modem may not work in Australia. The safest option is to buy a reputable 'global' modem before you leave home or buy a local PC-card modem once you get to Australia. Also see p17.

MAPS

Among the best touring maps are those published and regularly updated by **Hema** (www.hemamaps.com.au). Maps include *Northern Territory*, *Central Australia*, *Top End & Western Gulf* and *Red Centre*, as well as

4WD and desert track maps. **Westprint** (www.westprint.com.au) specialises in outback maps and is the best source of detailed maps of the MacDonnell Ranges, Tanami Track, Sandover & Plenty Hwys and Simpson Desert.

Most of these maps are available from tourist offices in Darwin and Alice Springs, or from some roadhouses. Also try **Maps NT** (Darwin ☎ 08-8999 7032; 1st fl, cnr Cavenagh & Bennett Sts; Alice Springs ☎ 08-8951 5344; 1st fl, Alice Plaza Shopping Centre).

For bushwalking, off-road 4WD driving and other activities that require large-scale maps, the topographic sheets produced by the National Mapping Division of **Geoscience Australia** (www.ga.gov.au) are the ones to buy. The more popular sheets are often available over the counter at shops that sell specialist bushwalking gear and outdoor equipment.

MONEY

Australia's currency is the Australian dollar, made up of 100 cents. There are 5c, 10c, 20c, 50c, \$1 and \$2 coins, and \$5, \$10, \$20, \$50 and \$100 notes. In this book, unless otherwise stated, prices given are in Australian dollars.

The best way to carry money in Australia is a combination of cash and a credit and debit (ATM) card, which allows you to draw local currency when you need it. Travellers cheques are an option for those still lost the travel time warp.

ATMs

There are 24-hour ATMs in most NT towns, including Darwin, Alice Springs, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Yulara, as well as Jabiru and Cooida in Kakadu National Park. They all accept cards from other Australian banks and most are linked to international networks – look for Cirrus, Maestro, Visa or MasterCard stickers. The most common banks are Commonwealth, Westpac, ANZ, National and Bank of SA.

ATMs can also be found in a growing number of roadhouses along the Stuart Hwy, and most service stations, supermarkets and other businesses will have Eftpos facilities that allow you to make purchases and even draw out cash with your ATM card (see Credit & Debit Cards right). Always have some cash in reserve in case these facilities are not operating.

Credit & Debit Cards

Credit cards (Visa and MasterCard) are widely accepted throughout the Northern Territory for everything from a hostel or hotel bed to a meal or adventure tour. What's more, a credit card is essential if you want to hire a car. Charge cards such as Diners and AmEx are not widely accepted.

Credit cards can also be used to get cash advances over the counter at banks and from ATMs, depending on the card.

A debit card allows you to draw money directly from your home bank account using ATMs, banks or Electronic Funds Transfer at Point of Sale (Eftpos) machines. Any card connected to the international banking network – Cirrus, Maestro, Plus and Eurocard – should work, provided you know your PIN (Personal Identification Number). Fees may be charged for using your card at a foreign bank or ATM – ask your bank before you leave home.

Tipping

Tipping is far from ingrained in Australian society and most people in the Territory don't bother. The only place where tipping is considered normal is restaurants, where 10% of the bill is reasonable for good service. Taxi drivers don't expect tips, but rounding up to the nearest dollar is the done thing.

Travellers Cheques

Changing travellers cheques (and foreign currency) at most banks is easy, and there are private exchange bureaux at Darwin and Alice Springs airports and in the centre of both cities. Commissions and fees for changing foreign-currency travellers cheques vary from bank to bank so it's worth shopping around to find the best deal.

Foreign exchange offices:

American Express (☎ 1300 139 060; Westpac Bank, 24 Smith St Mall, Darwin)

Bureau de Change kiosks (Todd Mall, Alice Springs)

Thomas Cook (☎ 08-8941 3828; 32 Smith St Mall, Darwin)

Taxes & Refunds

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) is a flat 10% tax on all goods and services, with some exceptions such as basic food items (milk, bread, fruit and vegetables etc). By law, the tax is included in the quoted or shelf prices, so all prices in this book are GST inclusive.

If you purchase new or secondhand goods with a minimum value of \$300 from any one supplier within 30 days of departure from Australia, you are entitled to a refund of any GST paid – see the **Australian Customs Service website** (www.customs.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=4646) for details.

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

The clarity and intensity of outback light, postcard opportunities like Uluru, the wild-life and scenery of the Top End and the many characters in the Territory provide plenty of ammunition and challenges for taking photographs and shooting video.

Remember that politeness goes a long way when taking photographs; ask before taking pictures of people. Many Aboriginal people do not like to have their photographs taken at all, even from a distance, so always ask (pointing to the camera may be enough) and respect their wishes if they say no.

Darwin and Alice Springs have camera shops where you can buy equipment and have repairs done. Film is available in towns throughout the Territory (around \$10 for a roll of 100ASA 36-exposure print film), but for slide film stock up in Darwin or Alice Springs. Digital cameras are consigning film to the annals of history and popular brands of memory sticks or flash cards are available from camera shops in Darwin and Alice Springs. Most Internet cafés offer a CD-burning service for photos.

Lonely Planet's Travel Photography: A Guide to Taking Better Pictures, by Richard I'Anson, offers a comprehensive guide to technical and creative travel photography.

POST

Post offices are open from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday. You can buy stamps at some newsagents (which often double as local post offices) and also at Australia Post shops in Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs.

All post offices will hold mail; the main post offices in Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine have efficient poste restante counters.

Australia's postal services are cheap and efficient. It costs 50c to send a standard letter or postcard within Australia. Australia Post has divided international destinations for letters into two regions. Airmail letters up to 50g to Asia-Pacific/Rest of the World

cost \$1.20/1.80. Aerograms/postcards (up to 20g) to any country cost 95c/\$1.10.

There are five international zones for parcels. You can send parcels up to 20kg by sea only to Europe and South Africa (Zone 5) and the USA/Canada (Zone 4); it's cheaper but can take a while. To all other destinations, airmail is the only option. Contact **Australia Post** (☎ 13 13 18; www.auspost.com.au) for details of parcel costs.

SHOPPING

There are plenty of things for sale in the Territory that are definitely not worth buying, such as plastic boomerangs, fake Aboriginal ashtrays and T-shirts, and all the other terrible souvenirs that fill the tacky souvenir shops in the big cities. Most of these come from Taiwan or Korea anyway. Before buying an Australian souvenir, make sure it was actually made here!

Indigenous Art & Artefacts

As you travel through the Northern Territory you'll be able to appreciate that the style and execution of Aboriginal artwork is as varied as the landscape you pass through. One of the best and most evocative reminders of your trip to purchase is an Indigenous artwork or artefact, and – apart from its aesthetic value – genuine quality Aboriginal art can make a good investment. By buying authentic items you are supporting Indigenous culture. Unfortunately much of the so-called Indigenous art sold as souvenirs is copied from Aboriginal people or is just plain fake. Admittedly it is often difficult to tell whether an item is genuine, or whether a design is being used legitimately, but it is worth trying to find out. One way to tell is to look for the 'Label of Authenticity'. Also check the following websites: **Aboriginal Australia** (www.aboriginalaustralia.com), **Desart** (www.desart.com.au) and **Kimberley & Arnhem Aboriginal Artists** (www.ankaaa.org.au).

It is best to buy artefacts either directly from communities that have art and craft centres or from galleries and outlets that are owned and operated by Indigenous communities. This way you can be sure that the items are genuine and that the money you spend goes to the right people.

Following are some of the Aboriginal-owned and -operated outlets where you can buy artefacts and crafts:

Aboriginal Arts & Culture Centre (p199) Alice Springs region.

Injalak Arts & Crafts Centre (p128) Arnhem Land.

Keringke Art Centre (p243) Alice Springs region.

Manyllaluk Community (p145) Katherine region.

Maruku Arts & Crafts (p255) Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park.

Merrepen Arts (p104) Daly River region.

Mimi Aboriginal Art & Craft (p140) Katherine.

Ngurratjuta Iltja Ntjarra (p199) Alice Springs.

Papunya Tula Artists (p199) Alice Springs.

Raintree Aboriginal Fine Art Gallery (p85) Darwin.

Warlukurlangu Art Centre (p209) Yuendumu.

Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre (p114) Kakadu National Park.

DIDGERIDOOS

These are the hot item to buy as they represent not only an affordable piece of decorative art but also an authentic and functional musical instrument – providing you buy a decent one and not a mass-produced piece of lathed wood. Many of the didgeridoos sold are not made by Indigenous people, and there are even stories of backpackers in Darwin earning good money by making or decorating didgeridoos. From a community outlet such as Injalak (Oenpelli) or Manyalaluk (near Katherine) you could expect to pay \$100 to \$200 for a functional didgeridoo that has been painted with ochre, and you may even get to meet the maker. On the other hand, from a souvenir shop in Darwin you could pay anything from \$200 to \$400 or more for something that looks pretty, but is really little more than a painted bit of wood. Still, there are many galleries in Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine selling genuine, high-quality didgeridoos. Ask questions: find out where it was made and by whom. A real didge should have imperfections – it won't be straight as a rod and the inside should feel rough (didgeridoos were originally made from dead branches of a northern Australian eucalypt that had been hollowed out by termites).

PAINTINGS

If you're interested in buying a painting, possibly in part for its investment potential, then it's best to purchase the work from a community art centre or a reputable gallery. A painting purchased without a certificate of authenticity from one of these outlets, in most cases, will not be easy to resell at a

later time – even if it is attributed to a well-known artist. Be guided by your own eye and heart in determining what is 'good' – you have to live with it when you get home! Buying a canvas from a local on the street in Alice Springs for \$50 is fine if you like what you're buying. Some of the artworks in the Territory have stratospheric price tags, but it's nothing compared with what a quality piece by a well-known artist will sell for in the galleries of Sydney or Melbourne.

Some other unique and more affordable items include painted boomerangs, beautiful screen-printed T-shirts, clap-sticks, seed and bead necklaces, carved seeds, and smaller artworks such as etchings and prints.

Australianiana

The term 'Australianiana' is a euphemism for souvenirs that are supposedly representative of Australia and its culture, although many are highly dubious. Stubby holders, printed T-shirts and plastic key-chains are common. Most of this stuff has novelty value only.

Also gaining popularity are 'bush tucker' items ranging from preserves made with indigenous ingredients to tinned witchetty grubs, or honey ants. There are also many varieties of jerky (dried meat). Bon appétit!

Opals & Gemstones

Though not actually found in the Northern Territory, the opal is Australia's national gemstone and they make fine souvenirs or jewellery. It's a beautiful stone, but buy wisely and shop around – quality and prices can vary widely from place to place.

Garnets, zircons and a number of other semi-precious stones are found in gemfields in the Territory and you can fossick for your own or buy them relatively cheaply in gem shops or jewellers.

TELEPHONE

The phone system in Australia is reliable and public Telstra payphones are widespread. In the Territory you'll find phones in towns and at roadhouses. The ☎08 area code is used for the Northern Territory (drop the 0 if calling from overseas) and Australia's international code is ☎61, so you dial ☎61-8- to reach a phone number in the Northern Territory from overseas.

Local calls cost 40c to 50c from public phones and 25c from private phones – there

PHONE CODES

Northern Territory	☎ 08
NSW & ACT	☎ 02
Queensland	☎ 07
South Australia	☎ 08
Victoria & Tasmania	☎ 03
Western Australia	☎ 08

are no time limits. Calls to/from mobile phones are timed and attract a higher rate. Long-distance domestic (Subscriber Trunk Dialling or STD) calls are charged by time and rates vary depending on distance, service provider and time of day – they are cheaper during off-peak hours (generally between 7pm and 7am).

From most phones you can also make international ISD (International Subscriber Dialling) calls, but the cheapest deals come with using a provider other than Telstra, usually through a phone card where calls to the UK and USA are as low as 4c a minute.

To call overseas with Telstra, dial the international access code from Australia (☎0011 or ☎0018), the country code, plus the area code (without the initial '0'), and then the phone number.

Many businesses have either a toll-free number (☎1800), which can be dialled from anywhere within Australia at no charge, or a ☎13 or ☎1300 number, which is charged at a local call rate.

To make a reverse charge call from any public or private phone, just dial ☎1800 738 3773 (1800-REVERSE).

Mobile Phones

Although the call range of mobile phones in the Territory is limited to major towns, it's useful to have one. Telstra CDMA has the widest coverage, while Telstra and Optus digital work fine in Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs, Uluru and Jabiru. You don't have to drive far out of town to lose the signal, but there are plans to stretch the coverage down the length of the Stuart Hwy.

Australia has two mobile networks: digital and the digitally based CDMA, plus the 3G broadband network. Australia's digital network is compatible with GSM 900 and 1800 (used in Europe), but is not compatible with the systems used in the USA or Japan. Ask your carrier in your home coun-

try whether your mobile phone will work in Australia before you leave.

Phone numbers with the prefixes 04xx or 04xxxx (digital) are for mobile phones. The main mobile phone carriers:

3 Mobile (☎13 16 83; www.three.com.au)

Optus (☎1300 301 937; www.optus.com.au)

Orange (☎1300 788 044; www.orange.net.au)

Telstra (☎12 51 11; www.telstra.com.au)

Vodafone (☎1300 303 030; www.vodafone.com.au)

Telstra and Optus offer the best coverage in the Territory, but the other services switch to Telstra roaming (at higher charges) outside their coverage areas. For travellers it's easy and cheap enough to get connected to a pre-paid mobile phone network without binding yourself to an expensive long-term contract. All you do is buy a starter kit, which may include a phone or, if you have your own phone, a SIM card and either a prepaid charge card or direct credit onto your phone using a credit card. The calls tend to be a bit more expensive than with standard contracts, but there are no connection fees or line-rental charges and you can buy the recharge cards at convenience stores and newsagents. Shop around as products and rates differ.

Phonecards

There's a wide range of local and international phonecards available at newsagents, milk bars and post offices for a fixed dollar value (usually \$10, \$20, \$30 etc). These can be used with any public or private phone by dialling a toll-free access number and then the PIN on the card and generally offer cheap international call rates. There are also Telstra phonecards (again sold in various dollar amounts), which you can insert into most (Telstra) pay phones.

TIME

The Northern Territory is on Central Standard Time, which is half an hour behind the eastern states (Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania), 1½ hours ahead of Western Australia and the same as South Australia. It's 9½ hours ahead of GMT/UTC (London), 13½ hours ahead of New York, 15½ hours ahead of LA, 2½ hours ahead of Jakarta and 2½ hours behind Wellington (New Zealand).

Things get screwed up in summer as 'daylight savings' does not apply in the

Northern Territory, Queensland or Western Australia, so from November to March (approximately), most eastern states are 1½ hours ahead of Northern Territory time, and South Australia is one hour ahead.

TOURIST INFORMATION

You could easily bury yourself under the mountains of brochures and booklets, maps and leaflets available on the Northern Territory.

The **Northern Territory Tourism Commission** (NTTC; ☎ 13 61 10, 08-8951 8471; www.nttc.com.au; 43 Mitchell St, Darwin) is very active in promoting the Territory both domestically and overseas. It publishes useful *Holiday Guides* to the Centre and the Top End with listings of accommodation and tour options throughout the Territory.

If you're looking for information about elsewhere in Australia, each state and territory has its own government tourism commission:

Australian Capital Territory (☎ 1300 554 114; www.visitcanberra.com.au)

New South Wales (☎ 13 20 77; www.visitnsw.com.au)

Queensland (☎ 13 88 33; www.queenslandholidays.com.au)

South Australia (☎ 1300 655 266; www.southaustralia.com)

Tasmania (☎ 1300 655 145; www.discovertasmania.com.au)

Victoria (☎ 13 28 42; www.visitvictoria.com)

Western Australia (☎ 9262 1700; www.westernaustralia.com)

The **Australian Tourist Commission** (ATC; www.australia.com) is the government body that promotes Australia abroad. Its website has information in eight languages.

VISAS

All visitors to Australia need a passport and visa. New Zealanders are issued visas on arrival; all other visitors must obtain a visa in advance, but for most nationalities it's a mere formality. Standard visas are valid for three months, but visitors are allowed a maximum stay of 12 months, including extensions.

For information on visas, extensions, Customs and health issues, check the **Department of Immigration & Multicultural & Indigenous Affairs** (DIMIA; ☎ 13 18 81; www.immi.gov.au). Visa application forms are available on this website and from Australian diplomatic

missions overseas and travel agents. You can apply by mail. Short-term tourist visas have largely been replaced by the free Electronic Travel Authority (ETA). However, if you are from a country not covered by the ETA, or you want to stay longer than three months, you'll need to apply for a visa.

Electronic Travel Authority (ETA)

The free ETA replaces the usual three-month visa stamped in your passport and is obtainable through any DIMIA-registered International Air Transport Association (IATA) travel agent or airline abroad, when you purchase your ticket. You can also register directly online at www.eta.immi.gov.au for a \$20 fee. ETAs are available to passport holders of 34 countries, including the UK, the USA, Canada, most European and Scandinavian countries, Japan, Korea, Malaysia and Singapore, and are valid for a three-month stay within 12 months of issue.

Working Holiday Visas

On a normal visa you're not allowed to work in Australia, but you may be eligible for a 12-month working holiday visa, which lets you supplement your travels with casual employment. People from 19 countries (including the UK, Canada, Korea, the Netherlands, Malta, Ireland, Japan, Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark) are eligible, but you must be between 18 and 30 years old at the time of application.

The emphasis on casual rather than full-time work means that you can only work for three months at a time with any one employer – but you are free to work for more than one employer within the 12 months. There's a limit on the number of visas issued each year, so it's a good idea to apply as early as possible.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Travelling in the Northern Territory is generally safe for women, but avoid walking alone at night and lone women should be wary of stopping for anyone on the highway. Sexual harassment is rare though some macho (and less enlightened) Aussie males still slip – particularly when they've been drinking.

Hitching is not recommended for solo women. Even when travelling in pairs, exercise caution at all times.

Transport

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THINGS CHANGE ...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and any ticket you may buy) works and the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

ENTERING THE COUNTRY

Provided your visa is in order (opposite), arrival in Australia is straightforward, with only the usual Customs declarations (p264). However, global instability has resulted in conspicuously increased security in Australian airport terminals (both domestic and international), and you may find that Customs procedures are now more time-consuming.

AIR – INTERNATIONAL Airlines

Darwin airport is the only one in the Northern Territory serving international flights.

The majority of visitors to the Northern Territory arrive either by road or air from elsewhere in Australia. Interstate domestic flights arrive in and depart from Darwin, Alice Springs and Yulara (for Uluru).

AIRLINES FLYING TO & FROM AUSTRALIA

The following are some of the major airlines with direct flights to Australia:

- Air Canada** (www.aircanada.ca; ☎ 1300 655 767; flies to Sydney)
- Air New Zealand** (www.airnz.co.nz; ☎ 13 24 76; flies to Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney)
- British Airways** (www.britishairways.com; ☎ 1300-767 171; flies to Melbourne, Perth, Sydney)
- Cathay Pacific** (www.cathaypacific.com; ☎ 13 17 47; flies to Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney)
- Emirates** (www.emirates.com; ☎ 1300 303 777; flies to Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney)
- Garuda** (www.garuda-indonesia.com; ☎ 1300 365 330; flies to Adelaide, Brisbane, Darwin, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney)
- Gulf Air** (www.gulfairco.com; ☎ 1300 366 337; flies to Sydney)
- Japan Airlines** (www.jal.com; ☎ 02-9279 1111; flies to Brisbane, Sydney)
- Lufthansa** (www.lufthansa.com; ☎ 1300 655 727; flies to Perth)
- Malaysian Airlines** (www.malaysiaairlines.com; ☎ 13 26 27; flies to Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney)
- Merpati Nusantara Airlines** (☎ 08-8981 2727; flies to Darwin)
- Qantas** (www.qantas.com.au; ☎ 13 13 13; flies to Adelaide, Brisbane, Darwin, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney)
- Royal Brunei Airlines** (www.bruneiair.com; ☎ 13 12 23; flies to Brisbane, Darwin, Perth, Sydney)
- Singapore Airlines** (www.singaporeair.com; ☎ 13 10 11; flies to Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney)
- Thai Airways** (www.thaiairways.com.au; ☎ 13 12 23; flies to Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney)
- United** (www.united.com.au; ☎ 13 17 77; flies to Perth, Sydney)
- Virgin Atlantic** (www.virgin-atlantic.com; ☎ 1300 727 340; flies to Sydney)

Tickets

In an age of Internet surfing and airline discounting, searching for and buying a bargain ticket has never been easier, but there is a confusing array of options.

DEPARTURE TAX

The international departure tax (\$27) is included in your airline ticket – check when you book.

A good travel agent is still invaluable to hunt down the cheapest fares with particular airlines, best routings and preferred stopovers, and you can arrange extras such as travel insurance and airport transfers. What's available and what it costs depends on the time of year, the route you choose and who you're flying with. The high season for flights to/from Australia is generally between December and February. The high season for travel in the Northern Territory, specifically, is around June to September, so you may well fly to Australia during low airfare season.

Good travel agents (especially for flight-only tickets) in Australia:

Flight Centre (☎ 13 16 00; www.flightcentre.com.au)

STA Travel (☎ 1300 360 960; www.statravel.com.au)

Online ticket sales work well if you are doing a simple one-way or return trip on specified dates. Most airlines have their own websites, or try the following Internet-based ticket sellers:

Airbrokers (www.airbrokers.com)

Cheap Flights (www.cheapflight.com)

Cheapest Flights (www.cheapestflights.co.uk)

Expedia (www.expedia.com)

Flights.com (www.flights.com)

Travel Online (www.travelonline.co.nz)

Travel.com (www.travel.com.au)

Asia

It's only a short hop across from Southeast Asia to Darwin. There are direct flights to/from Singapore (from \$800 return), Bali (Denpasar; from \$600 return), Brunei (Bandar Seri Bagawan; from \$950 return) and East Timor (Dili; from \$700 return) with Qantas, Garuda, Royal Brunei Airlines and Airnorth. From other Asian destinations, you will need to fly via one of these or via another Australian city.

Bangkok, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong are good places to shop around for discount tickets.

Airnorth (☎ 1800 627 474, 08-8920 4000; www.airnorth.com.au) Has twice-daily flights between Darwin and Dili in East Timor (\$380 one way).

STA Travel Bangkok (☎ +66-0-2236 0262, www.statravel.co.th); Singapore (☎ +65-6737 7188, www.statravel.com.sg); Hong Kong (☎ +852-2736 1618; www.statravel.com.hk); Tokyo (☎ +81-3-5391 2922; www.statravel.co.jp).

Canada

The air routes from Canada are similar to those from mainland USA. **Travel Cuts** (☎ 866-246-9762; www.travelcuts.com) is Canada's national student travel agency and has offices in all major cities. One-way fares out of Vancouver to Sydney or Melbourne cost from C\$1500.

Continental Europe

From major European destinations, most flights travel to Australia via one of the Asian capitals. One-way/return fares start from around €900/1400.

In Germany, good travel agencies include the Berlin branch of **STA Travel** (☎ 030-2859 8264; www.statravel.de).

In France, try **Usit Connect Voyages** (☎ 01 43 29 69 50; www.usitconnections.fr) or **OTU Voyages** (☎ 01 40 29 12 22; www.otu.fr) – both companies are student/youth specialists and have offices in many French cities. Other operators include **Nouvelles Frontières** (☎ 08 25 00 08 25; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr/nf).

New Zealand

Air New Zealand and Qantas operate a network of flights linking key NZ cities with most major Australian gateway cities. Another trans-Tasman option is the no-frills budget airline **Freedom Air** (www.freedomair.co.nz), an Air New Zealand subsidiary that offers direct flights between destinations on Australia's east coast and main NZ cities.

If you book early enough and do your homework, you can pay around NZ\$200 for a one-way fare from Sydney or Melbourne to Auckland, Christchurch or Wellington.

For reasonably priced fares, try one of the numerous branches of **STA Travel** (☎ 0508 782 872; www.statravel.co.nz). Another good option is **House of Travel** (www.houseoftravel.co.nz).

UK & Ireland

There are two routes from the UK: the western route via the USA and the Pacific, and the eastern route via the Middle East and Asia; flights are usually cheaper and more frequent on the latter. Some of the best deals around are with Emirates, Gulf Air, Malaysia

Airlines, Japan Airlines and Thai Airways International. British Airways, Singapore Airlines and Qantas generally have higher fares, but may offer a more direct route.

Popular agencies in the UK include the ubiquitous **STA Travel** (☎ 0870-160 0599; www.statravel.co.uk), **Trailfinders** (☎ 020-7628 7628; www.trailfinders.co.uk) and **Flight Centre** (☎ 0870-499 0040; www.flightcentre.co.uk).

Typical direct London–Sydney fares are UK£400/600 (one way/return) during the low season. At peak times, such as mid-December, fares go up by as much as 30%.

USA

Most flights between North America and Australia travel to/from the USA's west coast, with the bulk of these routed through Los Angeles, although some come through San Francisco. Numerous airlines offer flights via Asia or various Pacific islands.

San Francisco is the ticket consolidator capital of America, although good deals can be found in Los Angeles, New York and other big cities.

STA Travel (☎ 800-781 4040; www.statravel.com) has offices all over the USA. **Council Travel** (☎ 1800 226 8624; www.counciltravel.com) is also good.

Typically you can get a return ticket to Australia from the west coast from US\$1100/1400 in the low/high season.

AIR – DOMESTIC

Australia's major air carrier is Qantas and it's also the main airline flying into and within the Northern Territory. There are services between Darwin and Alice Springs and all other major Australian cities (including Cairns), and direct flights to/from Yulara (Uluru) from Sydney, Melbourne, Perth and Adelaide. Virgin Blue provides competition with services between Darwin and all state capitals, and limited services between Alice Springs and Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. Airnorth is a small NT-based airline with daily flights from Darwin to Broome and Kununurra.

Airnorth (☎ 08-8920 4001; www.airnorth.com.au)

Qantas (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com)

Virgin Blue (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com)

LAND

Getting to the Territory overland – whether by bus, train or car – means a lot of travel through some pretty empty country, but

INTERSTATE QUARANTINE

Within Australia, there are restrictions on carrying fruit, plants and vegetables across state and territory borders. This is in order to control the movement of disease or pests – such as fruit fly, cucumber thrips, grape phylloxera and potato cyst nematodes – from one area to another.

Most quarantine control relies on honesty and some quarantine posts at the state/territory borders are not always staffed. However, the Western Australian border is permanently manned and sometimes uses dogs to sniff out offending matter. This may seem excessive, but it's taken very seriously. It's prohibited to carry fresh fruit and vegetables, plants, flowers, and even nuts and honey across the Northern Territory–Western Australia border in either direction. The controls with South Australia and Queensland are less strict – there's usually an honesty bin for disposal even if the post isn't manned. Check at the borders.

there's no better way to gain an appreciation of Australia's sheer vastness... and it's a great adventure. The nearest state capital to Darwin is Adelaide, at just over 3000km, while Perth and Sydney are both around 4000km away – about the same distance as New York to Los Angeles and more than 2½ times the drive from London to Rome!

Border Crossings

Outback tracks aside, there are just three main (sealed) road routes into the Northern Territory: the Victoria Hwy from Western Australia (via Kununurra), the Barkly Hwy from Queensland (via Mount Isa), and the Stuart Hwy from Adelaide (via Coober Pedy). If you are well prepared with a 4WD vehicle, more adventurous options include the Tanami Track, Buntine Hwy and Docker River Rd from WA; the Savannah Way (Burketown to Borroloola), Sandover and Plenty Hwys from Queensland; and the crossing from Mt Dare in South Australia to the Old Andado Track.

Bus

While the thought of two days on a bus may not be too appealing, Australia's bus network is far more comprehensive than the

railway system, and gives you the freedom to get off and on wherever you choose.

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 1499; www.greyhound.com.au) is the only true national carrier and operates services into and out of the Territory on three routes – the Western Australian route from Broome, via Derby and Kununurra; the Queensland route through Mount Isa to Three Ways; or straight up the Stuart Hwy from Adelaide.

PASSES

If you're planning on doing a lot of travel in Australia, or even just a long-haul trip to the Territory, a bus pass will save you money and Greyhound has a variety of choices. The most flexible is the Kilometre Pass, which allows you to travel any route, get off and on as you choose and even backtrack until all your kilometres have run out. The pass is valid for 12 months from the date of first use. You should phone at least a day ahead to reserve a seat if you're using this pass and bear in mind that side trips or tours off the main route (eg to Kakadu and Uluru) may be calculated at double the actual kilometre distance – check first.

These passes start at 2000km with increments of 1000km to a maximum 20,000km.

Pass	Price (\$)
2000km	300
3000km	420
4000km	550
5000km	650
10,000km	1150
12,000km	1370
20,000km	2200

Another option is the set-route 'Aussie Pass', which gives you a set amount of time (usually three, six or 12 months) to cover a designated route. Many of these include the main highlights of the Territory – Uluru and Kakadu – as well as Darwin, Alice Springs and all the towns along the Stuart Hwy.

Discounts of 10% apply to YHA, VIP, Nomads and student card holders, and children under 14 (see p265).

QUEENSLAND

Most services from Queensland have a change of buses at Tennant Creek. Buses running daily between Queensland and Darwin in-

clude Mt Isa (\$300, 23 hours), Cairns (\$460, 41 hours) and Brisbane (\$590, 48 hours). On the same routes you can change at Tennant Creek for Alice Springs. Routes include Cairns to Alice Springs (\$410, 36 hours).

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Buses depart from Perth daily for Darwin. They travel along the coast via Port Hedland, Broome and Kununurra, and stop in Katherine. Fares and times to/from Darwin from points in WA include Perth (\$790, 62 hours), Broome (\$330, 25 hours) and Kununurra (\$170, 12 hours).

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

From Adelaide it's a straightforward trip direct to Alice Springs via Coober Pedy, or you can get off at Ertunda (overnight stop) and connect with services to Yulara (for Uluru).

There are direct daily services from Adelaide to Alice Springs (\$230, 21 hours), Port Augusta to Alice Springs (\$220, 15½ hours) and Coober Pedy to Alice Springs (\$135, 8½ hours).

BUS TOURS

There are plenty of tour companies running trips into the Territory, from small-group minibuses to large, impersonal coaches.

AAT Kings (☎ 08-8952 1700; www.aatkings.com) Big coach company with a wide range of tours in and around the Territory.

Desert Venturer (☎ 07-4035 5566; www.desertventurer.com.au) Twice-weekly three-day coach trip between Alice Springs and Cairns (\$350 plus \$55 for meals).

Groovy Grape (☎ 08-8371 4000; www.groovygrape.com.au) Seven-day Adelaide–Alice Springs (\$780); small-group backpacker trips.

Wayward Bus (☎ 08-8410 8843; www.waywardbus.com.au) Wide range of backpacker-style bus tours into and around the Territory, including Adelaide–Alice–Darwin, Uluru and Kakadu.

Train

The historical *Ghan* train – named after the Afghan cameleers who helped forge tracks through central Australia – is one of the world's great rail adventures, and an unforgettable way to cross the country from south to north. In 2004 the Alice Springs to Darwin section was finally opened, completing the trans-Australia crossing. For a history of the *Ghan*, see the boxed text p278.

You wouldn't book a seat on the *Ghan* because it's cheap or fast – in most cases it's cheaper to fly than travel seat-only on the train. It's the experience of rolling through the vast, flat expanse of the Centre, and being able to wander around the train, enjoy a beer, buy a meal and share stories with other travellers. If you can afford it, sleeper class offers not only comfort, but also a bit of old-fashioned romance.

The *Ghan* connects Adelaide with Darwin, via Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine. That's 2969km and 42 hours of track. From Adelaide there are rail connections with Sydney and Perth (*Indian Pacific*) and Melbourne (*Overlander*). You can also join the *Ghan* at Port Augusta, the connection point on the Sydney to Perth railway route.

From Adelaide, the *Ghan* departs for Alice Springs on Sunday, Wednesday and Friday (18 hours), continuing on to Darwin on Tuesday and Friday (another 24 hours). It returns from Alice on Thursday, Saturday and Sunday. From Melbourne, the *Overlander* has overnight services on Saturday and Thursday to Adelaide (10 hours), linking with the Sunday and Friday *Ghan* services. From Sydney, the *Indian Pacific* departs on Saturday and Wednesday to Adelaide (24 hours), also linking with the Sunday and Friday *Ghan* services.

COSTS & CLASSES

There are three classes on the *Ghan* and *Indian Pacific* – daynighter seat, sleeper (Red Kangaroo class) and 1st-class sleeper (Gold Kangaroo class). The *Overlander* has the daynighter seat and one sleeper class.

With a daynighter you get a reclining seat in an open carriage, foldaway table and access to a licensed lounge car serving light meals and drinks. Red Kangaroo sleeper class is a cabin with facing seats which fold away at night to make space for fold-down upper and lower bunks. Toilets and showers are outside the cabins and you use the same lounge car as the seat passengers.

The premium choice, for those who like to travel in style, is Gold Kangaroo sleeper. Here you get a private cabin (single or twin). It may look the size of a broom cupboard when you walk in but it has everything that opens and shuts – literally! Seating folds away, beds and washbasins fold down. The twins (upper and lower bunks) have private en suite with shower and toilet. In gold class you also get sit-down meals (breakfast, lunch and dinner, depending on the journey) in the quaint restaurant car, and you can kick back with a brandy in the sociable lounge car.

Small backpacker discounts apply to all fares, and international visitors (only) can take advantage of a deal that allows unlimited travel for six months in daynighter seat class on all three routes (adult/backpacker \$690/590); you must present your passport to qualify.

Adult/child fares for journeys into and within the Northern Territory appear in the boxed text. Note that trips from Perth change at Port Augusta.

The **motorail** allows you to put your own car on any of the above trains. Costs include: Adelaide–Alice Springs (\$390), Adelaide–Darwin (\$900), Melbourne–Alice Springs (\$440) and Sydney–Alice Springs

GHAN, INDIAN PACIFIC & OVERLANDER FARES

Journey	Seat	Sleeper	1st-Class Sleeper
Adelaide–Alice Springs	\$215/100	\$680/410	\$890/610
Adelaide–Darwin	\$440/200	\$1390/850	\$1830/1250
Darwin–Alice Springs	\$240/110	\$880/530	\$1150/780
Darwin–Katherine	\$80/65	\$940/660	\$1230/870
Katherine–Alice Springs	\$290/235	\$940/670	\$1230/870
Darwin–Tennant Creek	\$195/160	\$620/440	\$780/550
Tennant Creek–Alice Springs	\$165/130	\$470/330	\$590/420
Melbourne–Alice Springs	\$270/125	\$790/480	\$990/680
Melbourne–Darwin	\$490/225	\$1490/900	\$1900/1300
Sydney–Alice Springs	\$440/210	\$990/650	\$1310/930
Sydney–Darwin	\$630/300	\$1750/1110	\$2300/1570

THE GHAN

The famous *Ghan* train from Adelaide to Darwin is one of the world's great railway journeys, but it wasn't always that way.

The *Ghan* saga started in 1877, but the line took more than 50 years to reach Alice Springs, after its initial construction in the wrong place. As all the creek beds north of Marree were bone dry and nobody had ever seen rain out there, it was concluded that rain wouldn't fall in the future. In fact the initial stretch of line was laid right across a floodplain and when the rain came, even though it soon dried up, the line was simply washed away.

The wrong route was only part of the *Ghan*'s problems. At first it was built as a wide-gauge track to Marree, then extended as narrow gauge to Oodnadatta in 1884. But the foundations were flimsy, the sleepers too light and the grading too steep, and the whole thing meandered hopelessly. It was hardly surprising that, right up to the end, the top speed of the old *Ghan* was a flat-out 30km/h!

Early rail travellers went from Adelaide to Marree on the broad-gauge line, changed there for Oodnadatta, then had to make the final journey to Alice Springs by camel train. The Afghani-led camel trains had pioneered transport through the outback and it was from these Afghanis that the *Ghan* took its name.

Finally in 1929 the line was extended from Oodnadatta to Alice Springs. Though the *Ghan* was a great adventure, it was slow and uncomfortable as it bounced and bucked its way down the badly laid line. Worst of all, a heavy rainfall could strand it at either end or even in the middle. Parachute drops of supplies to stranded train travellers became part of outback lore and on one occasion the *Ghan* rolled in 10 days late!

By the early 1970s the South Australian state railway system was taken over by the Federal government and a new line to Alice Springs was planned. At a cost of \$145 million, a standard gauge was to be laid from Tarcoola, northwest of Port Augusta on the transcontinental line, to Alice Springs – and it would be laid where rain would not wash it out. In 1980 the line was completed ahead of time and on budget.

Whereas the old train took 140 passengers and, under ideal conditions, made the trip in 50 hours, the new train does it in 24 hours. The *Ghan* may not be the adventure it once was, but it's still a great trip – and since the final 1500km to Darwin was eventually completed in 2004, you can now travel right through the heart of Australia.

(\$640). Charges are slightly higher for vehicles over 5.5m in length and caravans are not taken.

RESERVATIONS

Book tickets through **Trainways** (☎ 13 21 47, international ☎ 61-8-8213 4592; www.gsr.com.au), which handles bookings for the *Ghan*, *Indian Pacific* and *Overlander*. Advances bookings are recommended in peak season (June to September), especially for motorail spaces. Discounted fares are sometimes offered, especially in the low season (February to June).

SEA

Although there are no scheduled passenger ferry services to or from the Northern Territory, it's possible – with a bit of graft and by being in the right place at the right time – to make your way here by hitching

rides or crewing on yachts. Ask around at harbours, marinas or yacht clubs. Darwin is as good a place as any to try to hitch a ride to Indonesia, Malaysia or Singapore. Try contacting the **Darwin Sailing Club** (☎ 08-8981 1700; www.dwnsail.com.au; Atkins Dr, Fannie Bay) or the **Darwin Harbour Mooring Basin** (☎ 08-8999 3970).

GETTING AROUND

AIR

Flying is a quick way to cover the vast distances of the Territory, but for regular scheduled flights you're limited to the daily Alice Springs–Darwin and Alice Springs–Yulara routes. Qantas also has flights to Gove, Air North covers communities in Arnhem Land, and a number of smaller airlines fly to Aboriginal communities, including the Tiwi Islands.

Airlines in the Northern Territory

Aboriginal Air Services (☎ 08-8953 5000; www.aboriginalair.com.au) This corporation of four Aboriginal airlines flies from Alice Springs to remote communities including Lajamanu, Yuendumu and Papunya, and to Kalgoorlie and Katherine.

Air Ngukurr (☎ 08-8945 2755; www.airngukurr.com.au) Charter flights to Bathurst and Melville Islands.

Airnorth (☎ 1800 627 474, 08-8920 4000; www.airnorth.com.au) Connects Darwin with Gove (from \$180 one way), Maningrida (\$140) and Groote Eylandt (\$190) in Arnhem Land; also offers charter flights.

Northern Air Charter (☎ 08-8945 5444; www.flynac.com.au) Operates scenic and charter flights from Darwin to Kakadu, and Alice Springs to Uluru.

Qantas (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au) Regular scheduled flights between Darwin and Alice Springs (from \$160 one way), Alice Springs and Yulara (from \$100) and Darwin and Gove (from \$150).

BICYCLE

A bicycle is a great way to get around towns in the Northern Territory. Darwin has a network of bike tracks, and Katherine and Alice Springs also have plenty of pancake-flat riding opportunities.

However, actually using a bicycle as your mode of transport in the Territory is another matter. You'll find thousands of kilometres of good, flat roads, but it can be a long way between towns and roadhouses. If you're coming specifically to cycle, it makes sense to bring your own bike. Check your airline for costs and the degree of dismantling/packing required. Within Australia you can load your bike onto a bus or train to skip the boring bits. Bicycle helmets are compulsory in Australia and it's useful to carry and use a bike lock.

It can get very hot in summer, and you should take things slowly until you're used to the heat. Cycling in 35°C-plus temperatures isn't too bad if you wear a cap under your helmet, use plenty of sunscreen, and carry and drink *lots* of water. Dehydration is no joke and can be life-threatening. When riding on highways the straight roads mean traffic can usually see you well in advance, but beware of those outback juggernauts, the road trains. If you hear one coming, it pays to get right off the road.

Of course, you don't have to follow the main roads and only visit towns. It's also possible to fill your mountain bike's panniers with muesli, pack the swag and head out

into the mulga and not see anyone for weeks. Water is the main problem in the 'dead heart', and you can't rely on finding it where there aren't settlements. In the Territory, rest stops with water tanks are spaced every 200km or so along major highways, and roadhouses are obliged to give you water. Carry a good map but be aware that the tank marked on your map may be dry or the water from it unfit for humans, and those station buildings possibly blew away years ago. That little creek marked with a dotted blue line? Forget it – the only time it has water is when the land is flooded for hundreds of kilometres.

Always check with locals if you're heading into remote areas, and notify the police if you're about to do something particularly adventurous. Check road conditions and weather forecasts, and make conservative estimates of how long your journey will take.

Useful contacts:

Northern Territory Cycling Association (☎ 08-8945 6012; www.nt.cycling.org.au) Information and links to local clubs.

Roc Tours (☎ 08-9279 6969; www.cycletours.com.au) Perth-based cycle tour company that offers fully supported tours through the MacDonnell Ranges and to Uluru, Kakadu and Litchfield.

Hire & Purchase

You can buy new bikes, accessories and equipment in Darwin and Alice Springs. Basic 15-speed mountain bikes start from around \$400, but you can pay a lot more for better-quality bikes with lightweight frames and suspension.

Most travellers looking for a casual ride will be content to rent a bike, which you can do in Darwin, Alice Springs, Yulara, Katherine and Tennant Creek for around \$20 per day.

BUS

Greyhound Australia (☎ 131499; www.greyhound.com.au) runs on all the major long-distance routes in the Territory, including Alice Springs to Uluru and Kings Canyon, Alice to Darwin via Katherine and Tennant Creek, and Darwin to Kakadu. Sample adult one-way fares include: Darwin–Alice Springs (\$260), Darwin–Katherine (\$70), Darwin–Tennant Creek (\$185), Alice Springs–Uluru (\$85) and Darwin–Jabiru (Kakadu; \$45). There's a 20% discount for children under 14, and 10% off for students/seniors/backpacker

cardholders. See p276 for bus pass details and interstate fares.

You can book seats over the Internet or by phone using a credit card, or directly through a travel agent or at the following terminals:

Alice Springs (☎ 08-8952 7888; 3/113 Todd St)

Darwin (☎ 08-8941 8700; 67-69 Mitchell St)

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The ultimate freedom in the Northern Territory is to have your own vehicle. Driving distances are long, but you can take it at your own pace and branch off the Stuart Hwy to places public transport doesn't go. To truly explore you'll need a well-prepared 4WD vehicle, but there are plenty of routes open to a conventional (2WD) vehicle. Shared between three or four people the cost of hiring a car or campervan is reasonable but, before you drive off into the sunset, you need to know a few things about outback travel.

Automobile Associations

The **Automobile Association of the Northern Territory** (AANT; ☎ 08-8981 3837; www.aant.com.au; 79-81

Smith St, Darwin) provides an emergency breakdown service. Reciprocal arrangements exist with the state motoring organisations in Australia and similar organisations overseas. If you're not already a member of any automobile organisation, you can join the AANT for an annual fee of \$105 (plus \$30 joining fee). For emergency breakdown services throughout the Territory call ☎ 13 11 11.

Driving Licence

Foreign driving licences are valid in Australia as long as they are in English or are accompanied by a translation. You can also get an International Driving Permit from Automobile Associations in your own country.

Fuel

Unleaded, diesel and LPG fuel are available from service stations and roadhouses. Prices vary from place to place depending on how remote they are, but fuel in the Territory is some of the most expensive in Australia. At the time of writing unleaded petrol ranged from \$1.30 a litre in Darwin and Alice to almost \$2 at some outback roadhouses, with

an average price of around \$1.40 a litre, but prices will probably be much higher by the time you read this. Distances between fill-ups can be long in the outback, so check locations and opening times of service stations and carry spare fuel.

Insurance

Know exactly what your liability is in the event of an accident. Rather than risking paying out thousands of dollars if you do have an accident, you can take out your own comprehensive insurance on the car or pay an additional daily amount to the rental company for an 'insurance excess reduction' policy. This reduces the excess (the amount of money for which you are liable before the insurance kicks in) from between \$2000 and \$5000 to a few hundred dollars, though significantly pushes the cost of rental up. Generally, insurance doesn't cover the cost of damage to glass or tyres. Always read the small print.

Be aware that if you are travelling on *any* dirt road you will not be covered by insurance unless you rent a proper 4WD. This applies to all companies, although they don't always point this out. A well-maintained dirt road leading to a major tourist site is usually not a problem. Ask before signing the agreement.

Similarly, because of the risk of hitting an animal, most companies void your insurance if you travel outside city limits between dusk and dawn.

Purchase

If you're buying a secondhand vehicle, reliability is important. Mechanical breakdowns in the outback can be very inconvenient (not to mention dangerous). You'll probably get any car more cheaply by buying privately rather than through a car dealer. You can get good deals on secondhand 4WD vehicles in the Territory, but you can bet they've been thrashed to death.

There's a popular travellers' used-car market in Peel St, Darwin (p86).

Rental

There are plenty of car-rental companies ready and willing to put you behind the wheel. Competition is pretty fierce so rates tend to be variable and lots of special deals pop up and disappear again. If you don't

have your own transport, in many places you really have to choose between a tour and a rented vehicle because there is no public transport and the distances are too great for walking or even cycling.

The main companies are **Budget** (☎ 1300 794 344; www.budget.com.au), **Hertz** (☎ 13 30 39; www.hertz.com.au), **Avis** (☎ 13 63 33; www.avis.com.au) and **Territory Thrifty Car Rentals** (☎ 1800 626 515; www.rentacar.com.au), with offices or agents in most towns. Local firms are also represented, so shop around. One advantage of the big operators is that they have better support services and can organise one-way rentals. Check the restrictions and any drop-off fees.

The major companies offer a choice of deals, either unlimited kilometres or 100km or so a day free plus a fixed rate per kilometre for anything over this. The latter is initially cheaper, but beware – if you underestimate the distances in the Territory you can end up paying a lot more.

Daily rates, including insurance, are typically about \$60 to \$80 a day for a small car (Holden Barina, Ford Festiva, Hyundai Excel), \$80 to \$100 a day for a medium car (Mitsubishi Magna, Toyota Camry, Nissan Pulsar) or \$100 up to \$130 a day for a big car (Holden Commodore, Ford Falcon). You must be at least 21 years of age to hire from most firms. In most cases you'll also need a credit card to rent a car.

CAMPERVANS

Many people find a campervan is the best way to explore the outback, and it's hard to disagree. From a two-berth to a full-blown family camper, they offer a home on wheels, allowing you to pull up anywhere and save on accommodation costs. Most have some sort of cooking facilities and there are a few 4WD models. They cost from \$90 to \$200 a day. The main rental companies include **Britz Australia** (☎ 1800 331 454; www.britz.com) and **Maui** (☎ 1300 363 800; www.maui-rentals.com). **Wicked Campers** (☎ 1800 246 869; www.wickedcampers.com.au) targets backpackers with fully equipped, funkily painted campervans from around \$50 a day depending on the length of hire. There are depots in Alice Springs and Darwin.

4WD RENTAL

Having a 4WD vehicle is essential to get right off the beaten track and out to some of the great wilderness and outback places.

ROAD DISTANCES (KM)

Alice Springs	---																			
Borroloola	1228																			
Camooweal (Qld)	976	748	---																	
Cooper Pedy (SA)	671	1899	1671	---																
Daly River	1451	921	1369	2121	---															
Darwin	1516	986	1434	2187	223	---														
Erdunda	199	1427	1174	472	1650	1715	---													
Halls Creek (WA)	1064	1189	1573	1735	1134	1199	1263	---												
Jabiru	1468	929	1377	2139	354	231	1667	1152	---											
Katherine	1191	662	1110	1862	259	324	1390	875	277	---										
Kings Canyon	323	1551	1299	740	1774	1839	268	1180	2050	1773	---									
Kununurra (WA)	1533	1105	1489	2204	775	840	1906	359	793	516	1856	---								
Mataranka	1086	557	1005	1757	364	429	1285	980	372	105	1409	621	---							
Nhulunbuy (Gove)	1795	1265	1713	2466	964	1029	1994	1580	615	705	2117	1221	708	---						
Oenpelli	1539	1000	1448	2210	425	302	1738	1223	71	348	2121	864	443	686	---					
Roper Bar	1262	372	1181	1933	540	605	1461	1156	558	281	1585	797	176	884	629	---				
Tennant Creek	504	699	471	1200	411	1011	703	1325	954	687	827	1029	582	1290	1025	758	---			
Timber Creek	1478	876	1342	1976	546	611	1504	588	554	287	1603	299	392	992	625	568	776	---		
Yulara	443	1671	1419	716	1518	1959	244	1507	1911	1634	303	2150	1529	2238	1982	1705	972	1723	---	

These are the shortest distances by road; other routes may be considerably longer.
For distances by coach, check the companies' leaflets.

Renting a 4WD vehicle is affordable if a few people get together. Something like a Suzuki/RAV4 (which can get you through most, but not all, tracks) costs around \$110 to \$130 per day; for a Toyota Landcruiser you're looking at around \$150 up to \$200, which should include unlimited kilometres. Check the insurance conditions, especially the excess, as they can be onerous.

Road Conditions & Hazards

All major highways are bitumen roads in good condition, particularly the Stuart Hwy. A number of secondary roads are just single-lane strips of bitumen known as 'beef roads', which the government laid in an effort to promote the beef cattle industry.

You don't have to go far to find yourself on dirt roads, and anybody who sets out to see the country in reasonable detail will have to do some dirt-road travelling. If you seriously want to explore, then you'd better plan on having 4WD and a winch. Conditions vary from well-maintained dirt and rough corrugations to deep sand and bulldust. Heavy rain will quickly change conditions and turn roads into muddy skating rinks; many become impassable when wet. If a road is officially closed because of heavy rain, you can be fined up to \$1000 per wheel for travelling on it – apart from the fact that you'd be mad to try to use it anyway.

For up-to-date road conditions, ask at the nearest tourist office, call ☎ 1800 246 199 or check the website www.roadreport.nt.gov.au.

You only have to check out the roadkill for a few hundred kilometres to realise that collisions with kangaroos, wandering cattle, camels, brumbies and the occasional emu can be a real hazard. Most roadkill is caused by trucks and road trains driving at night, but the result of a collision with an animal at high speed in a normal car can be disastrous. Kangaroos are most active around dawn and dusk, and often travel in groups. If you see one hopping across the road in front of you, slow right down – its friends are probably just behind it. If one hops out right in front of you, hit the brakes and only swerve to avoid the animal if it is safe to do so. If possible, avoid travelling at night on the highway.

Also watch out for the famous road trains. These consist of a prime mover and two, or usually three, trailers stretching for

as long as 50m. On dual-lane highways they pose few problems, although you will have to allow a surprisingly long distance and plenty of speed when overtaking. On single-lane bitumen roads you should get right off the road if one approaches, because you can be sure it won't! On dirt roads you also need to pull over, and often stop altogether while you wait for the dust cloud to clear.

A couple of incidents along the Stuart Hwy in recent years have led to warnings against stopping for people, or vehicles, on isolated stretches of road – even if they wave you down. Some locals would rather continue to drive with a flat tyre at night until they reached the next roadhouse.

OUTBACK TRAVEL

There are still many roads in central and northern Australia where the official recommendation is that you report to the police before you leave one end, and again when you arrive at the other. Then if you fail to turn up at the other end they can send a search party. Many tracks are well maintained and don't require a 4WD or fancy expedition equipment to tackle them. However, prepare carefully and carry important spare parts.

The **Automobile Association of the Northern Territory** (AANT; ☎ 08-8981 3837; www.aant.com.au; 79-81 Smith St, Darwin) can advise on preparation, and supply maps and track notes. Most tracks have an ideal time of travel. In the Centre it's not wise to attempt the tough tracks during the heat of summer (November to March) when the dust can be severe and water scarce, making a breakdown more dangerous. Travel during the Wet in the north may be hindered by flooding and impassable mud.

Apart from being well prepared with spare parts and tyres, plenty of water and a basic knowledge of outback driving (things like deflating tyres to get through deep sand), an extra safety net is to hire a satellite phone or EPIRB (Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon). In Alice Springs you can hire a sat phone for around \$150 per week, an EPIRB for \$25 a week and a reliable HF (High Frequency) radio set for \$80 a week from **Central Comms** (☎ 08-8952 2388; www.centralcomms.com.au).

The Northern Territory Tourist Commission produces the useful *4X4 guide* with tips and track descriptions.

DESERT TRACKS

The essence of the outback is getting off the main highway and into the remote desert wilderness. It's a unique driving experience where the sense of space, timelessness and often solitude can leave you in awe. Conquering the desert tracks can be a rewarding challenge and is always a great 4WD adventure. These are some of the great tracks in the Northern Territory.

- **Tanami Track** Turning off the Stuart Hwy just north of Alice Springs, the Tanami Track goes northwest across the Tanami Desert to Halls Creek in Western Australia. It's a popular short cut between the Centre and the Kimberley (p207).
- **Simpson Desert** Crossing the Simpson Desert from Birdsville (Queensland) to the Stuart Hwy is becoming increasingly popular, but this route is still a real test. A 4WD vehicle is definitely required and you should be in a party of at least three or four vehicles equipped with long-range two-way radios.
- **Sandover & Plenty Hwys** These remote routes run east from the Stuart Hwy north of Alice Springs to Queensland (p213 and p210).
- **Great Central Rd/Gunbarrel Hwy** The Great Central Rd runs west from Uluru by the Aboriginal settlements of Kaltukatjara (Dockers River) and Warburton to Laverton in Western Australia, and on to Perth via Kalgoorlie. The Gunbarrel Hwy is a rugged alternative route that requires a 4WD – see p252 for details.

Road Rules

Australians drive on the left-hand side of the road – Americans and Europeans, get used to it! There are a few local variations from the rules of the road as applied elsewhere in the West; for example, if an intersection is unmarked (not uncommon in the outback), you must give way to vehicles entering the intersection from your right.

The general speed limit in built-up areas is 50km/h (40km/h near schools at certain times). On the open highway in the Northern Territory, there is *no* speed limit outside built-up areas unless marked. Seat belts are fitted to all seats, and must be worn by law.

You must not drive with a blood-alcohol content over 0.05%. If you're caught with a concentration of more than 0.08%, be prepared for a hefty fine and the loss of your licence.

Travel Permits

If you wish to travel through the outback independently, you may need special permits if you are passing through Aboriginal land or visiting a community.

ABORIGINAL LAND PERMITS

A glance at any up-to-date land-tenure map of the Northern Territory shows that vast portions are Aboriginal land. Generally, the land has government-administered reserve status or it may be held under freehold title

vested in an Aboriginal land trust and managed by a council or corporation.

In some cases permits won't be necessary if you stick to recognised public roads that cross Aboriginal territory. However, as soon as you leave the main road by more than 50m you may need a permit. Arnhem Land is a good example of a restricted area. If you're on an organised tour the operator should take care of any permits – check before you book.

The easiest way to apply for a permit is to download a form from the relevant land council and send it by email. Alternatively you can send it by post or fax.

Allow plenty of time: transit permits can be approved within 24 hours, but others can take 10 working days. Keep in mind that your application may be knocked back for a number of reasons, including the risk of interference with sacred sites or disruption of ceremonial business. Also, some communities simply may not want to be bothered by visitors without good reason.

A transit permit is required for the Yulara–Kaltukatjara (Dockers River) Rd, but not for either the Tanami Track or the Sandover Hwy where these cross Aboriginal land. Travellers may camp overnight without a permit within 50m of the latter two routes. The following places issue permits: **Central Land Council** (☎ 08-8951 6211, fax 08-8953 4343; www.clc.org.au; PO Box 3321, Alice Springs, NT

0871) The CLC administers all Aboriginal land in the southern and central regions of the Territory.

Northern Land Council Darwin office (☎ 08-8920 5100; fax 08-8945 2633; www.nlc.org.au; PO Box 42921, Casuarina, NT 0811) Permits for Arnhem Land and other northern mainland areas; Katherine office (☎ 08-8972 2799; 5 Katherine Tce) Issues permits if you wish to drive along the Central Arnhem Hwy towards Gove; Jabiru office (☎ 08-8979 2410; Flinders St) Issues permits to visit Gunbalanya (Oenpelli).

Tiwi Land Council (☎ 08-8981 4898; www.tiwiland.council.net.au; Armidale St, Stuart Park NT 0820) Visitors to Bathurst and Melville Islands (known as the Tiwi Islands) should apply here.

HITCHING

Hitching is never entirely safe in any country and we don't recommend it, particularly in remote regions. If you do decide to hitch, don't do it alone – travel in pairs and let

someone know where you're going. Hostel notice boards are good places to look for a hitching partner.

Just as hitchhikers should be wary when accepting lifts, drivers who pick up hitchhikers or cost-sharing travellers also should be aware of the risks involved.

That said, hitching is certainly possible on major roads in the Territory such as the Stuart Hwy, Lasseter Hwy and Arnhem Hwy. The safest place to wait for a lift is outside a roadhouse or on the outskirts of a town.

LOCAL TRANSPORT

The only local transport of interest to visitors are the limited public bus networks in Darwin and Alice Springs. Taxis also operate in Darwin, Alice Springs, Katherine and Tennant Creek.

Health

Dr David Millar

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Healthwise, Australia is a remarkably safe country in which to travel, considering that such a large portion of it lies in the tropics. Tropical diseases such as malaria and yellow fever are unknown; diseases of insanitation such as cholera and typhoid are unheard of. Thanks to Australia's isolation and quarantine standards, even some animal diseases such as rabies and foot-and-mouth disease have yet to be recorded.

Few travellers to Australia will experience anything worse than an upset stomach or a bad hangover and, if you do fall ill, the standard of hospitals and health care is high.

BEFORE YOU GO

Since most vaccines don't produce immunity until at least two weeks after they're given, visit a physician four to eight weeks before departure. Ask your doctor for an International Certificate of Vaccination (otherwise known as 'the yellow booklet'), which will list all the vaccinations you've received. This is mandatory for countries that require proof of yellow fever vaccination upon entry (sometimes required in Australia; see right), but it's a good idea to carry a record of all your vaccinations wherever you travel.

Bring medications in their original, clearly labelled, containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing

your medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is also a good idea. If carrying syringes or needles, be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity.

INSURANCE

If your health insurance doesn't cover you for medical expenses abroad, consider getting extra insurance – check www.lonelyplanet.com for more information. Find out in advance if your insurance plan will make payments directly to providers or if it will reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures. In Australia, as in many countries, doctors expect payment at the time of consultation. Make sure you get an itemised receipt detailing the service and keep the contact details of the health provider. See p286 for details of health care in Australia.

REQUIRED & RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

If you're entering Australia within six days of staying overnight or longer in a yellow fever-infected country, you'll need proof of yellow fever vaccination. For a full list of these countries visit the **World Health Organization** (WHO; www.who.int/wer/) or **Centers for Disease Control & Prevention** (www.cdc.gov/travel/yb/outline.htm#2) websites.

If you're really worried about health when travelling, there are a few vaccinations you could consider for Australia. The WHO recommends that all travellers should be covered for diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella, chickenpox and polio, as well as hepatitis B, regardless of their destination. Planning to travel is a great time to ensure that all routine vaccination cover is complete. The consequences of these diseases can be severe and, while Australia has high levels of childhood vaccination coverage, outbreaks of these diseases do occur.

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel health advice to be found on the Internet. For further information, **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com) is a good place to start. WHO publishes a superb book called *International Travel*

MEDICAL CHECKLIST

- Antibiotics
- Antidiarrhoeal drugs (eg loperamide)
- Acetaminophen (paracetamol) or aspirin
- Anti-inflammatory drugs (eg ibuprofen)
- Antihistamines (for hayfever and allergic reactions)
- Antibacterial ointment for cuts and abrasions
- Steroid cream or cortisone (for poison ivy and other allergic rashes)
- Bandages, gauze, gauze rolls
- Adhesive or paper tape
- Scissors, safety pins, tweezers
- Thermometer
- Pocket knife
- DEET-containing insect repellent for the skin
- Permethrin-containing insect spray for clothing, tents and bed nets
- Sun block
- Oral rehydration salts
- Iodine tablets or water filter (for water purification)

and Health, which is revised annually and is available online at no cost. Another website of general interest is **MD Travel Health** (www.mdtravelhealth.com), which provides complete travel health recommendations for every country and is updated daily.

FURTHER READING

Lonely Planet's *Healthy Travel Australia, New Zealand & the Pacific* is a handy pocket-sized guide packed with useful information including pre-trip planning, emergency first aid, immunisation and disease information, and what to do if you get sick on the road. *Travel with Children*, from Lonely Planet, includes advice on travel health for younger children.

IN TRANSIT**DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)**

Blood clots may form in the legs (deep vein thrombosis) during plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. The longer the flight, the greater the risk. Though most blood clots are reabsorbed uneventfully, some may break off and travel through the blood vessels to the lungs, where they could cause life-threatening complications.

The chief symptom of DVT is swelling or pain of the foot, ankle or calf, usually – but not always – on just one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and breathing difficulties. Travellers

with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of DVT on long flights, you should walk about the cabin, perform isometric compressions of the leg muscles (ie flex the leg muscles while sitting), drink plenty of fluids and avoid alcohol and tobacco.

JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

Jet lag is common when crossing more than five time zones, and it results in insomnia, fatigue, malaise or nausea. To avoid it, try drinking plenty of (nonalcoholic) fluids and eating light meals. On arrival, expose yourself to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep etc) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate and meclizine are usually the first choice for treating motion sickness. Their main side effect is drowsiness. A herbal alternative is ginger, which works like a charm for some people.

IN AUSTRALIA**AVAILABILITY & COST OF HEALTH CARE**

Health insurance is essential for all travellers. While health care in Australia is of a high standard and is not overly expensive by international standards, considerable costs can build up and repatriation is very expensive. Ensure your existing health insurance will cover you – if not, organise extra insurance.

Australia has an excellent health-care system. It's a mixture of privately run medical clinics and hospitals alongside a system of public hospitals funded by the Australian government. The Medicare system covers Australian residents for some health-care costs. Visitors from countries with which Australia has a reciprocal health-care agreement are eligible for benefits specified under the Medicare programme. Agreements are currently in place with New Zealand, the UK, the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Italy, Malta and Ireland – check the details before departing these countries. In general, the agreements provide for any episode of ill health that requires prompt medical attention. For further details, visit www.health.gov.au/pubs/mbs/mbs3/medicare.htm.

There are excellent specialised public-health facilities for women and children in Australia's major centres.

Over-the-counter medications are widely available at privately owned chemists throughout Australia. These include painkillers, antihistamines for allergies, and skin-care products.

You may find that medications readily available over the counter in some countries are only available in Australia by prescription. These include the oral contraceptive pill, most medications for asthma and all antibiotics. If you take medication on a regular basis, bring an adequate supply and ensure you have details of the generic name as brand names may differ between countries.

Health Care in Remote Areas

In Australia's remote locations, it is possible there'll be a significant delay in emergency services reaching you in the event of a serious accident or illness. Do not underestimate the vast distances between most major outback towns; an increased level of self-reliance and preparation is essential.

Consider taking a wilderness first-aid course, such as those offered at the **Wilderness Medicine Institute** (www.wmi.net.au). Take a comprehensive first-aid kit that is appropriate for the activities planned, and ensure that you have adequate means of communication. Australia has extensive mobile phone coverage but additional radio communication is important for remote areas. The **Royal Flying Doctor Service** (www.rfds.org.au) provides an important back-up for remote communities.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES**Giardiasis**

Giardiasis (giardia) is widespread in waterways around Australia. Drinking untreated water from streams and lakes is not recommended. Use water filters and boil or treat water with iodine to help prevent the disease. Symptoms consist of intermittent bad-smelling diarrhoea, abdominal bloating and wind. Effective treatment is available (tinidazole or metronidazole).

Meningococcal Disease

This disease occurs worldwide and maybe a risk if you have prolonged stays in dormitory-style accommodation. A vaccine exists for some types of this disease, namely meningococcal A, C, Y and W. No vaccine is presently available for the viral type of meningitis.

Ross River Fever

The Ross River virus is widespread throughout Australia and is spread by mosquitoes living in marshy areas. In addition to fever, it causes headache, joint and muscular pains and a rash, and resolves after five to seven days.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

Rates of STD infection are similar to most other Western countries. The most common symptoms are pain while passing urine, and a discharge. Infection can be present without symptoms, so seek medical screening after any unprotected sex with a new partner. Throughout the country you'll find sexual health clinics in all of the major hospitals. Always use a condom with any new sexual partner. Condoms are readily available in chemists and through vending machines in many public places, including toilets.

Viral Encephalitis

Also known as Murray Valley encephalitis virus, this is spread by mosquitoes and is most common in northern Australia, especially during the Wet season (November to April). This potentially serious disease is normally accompanied by headache, muscle pains and sensitivity to light. Residual neurological damage can occur and no specific treatment is available. However, the risk to most travellers is low.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

Tap water is universally safe in Australia. All other water should be boiled, filtered or chemically disinfected (with iodine tablets) to prevent traveller's diarrhoea and giardia.

If you develop diarrhoea, be sure to drink plenty of fluids – preferably an oral rehydration solution containing lots of salt and sugar. A few loose stools don't require treatment, but if you start having more than four or five stools a day, you should begin taking an antibiotic (usually a quinolone drug) and an anti-diarrhoeal agent (such as loperamide). If diarrhoea is bloody, persists for more than 72 hours or is accompanied by fever, shaking chills or severe abdominal pain, you should seek medical attention.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Bites & Stings

MARINE ANIMALS

Marine spikes, such as those found on sea urchins, stonefish, scorpion fish, catfish and stingrays, can cause severe local pain. If this occurs, immediately immerse the affected area in hot water (as high a temperature as can be tolerated). Keep topping up with hot water until the pain subsides and medical care can be reached. The stonefish is found only in tropical Australia, from northwestern Australia around the coast to northern Queensland. An antivenin is available.

Marine stings from jellyfish such as box jellyfish and Irukandji also occur in Australia's tropical waters, particularly during the Wet season (November to April). The box jellyfish and the Irukandji have an incredibly potent sting and have been known to cause fatalities. Warning signs exist at affected beaches, and stinger nets are in place at the more popular beaches. Never dive into water unless you have checked – with local beach life-savers – that it's safe. 'Stinger suits' (full-body Lycra swimsuits) prevent stinging, as do wetsuits. If you are stung, first aid consists of washing the skin with vinegar to prevent further discharge of remaining stinging cells, followed by rapid transfer to a hospital; antivenin is widely available.

CROCODILES

The risk of crocodile attack in tropical northern Australia is real but predictable and largely preventable. Discuss the local risk with police or tourist agencies in the area

before swimming in rivers, waterholes and in the sea, and always heed warning signs.

SNAKES

Australian snakes have a fearful reputation that is justified in terms of the potency of their venom, but unjustified in terms of the actual risk to travellers and locals. Snakes are usually quite timid in nature and, in most instances, will move away if disturbed. They have only small fangs, making it easy to prevent bites to the lower limbs (where 80% of bites occur) by wearing protective clothing (such as gaiters) around the ankles when bushwalking. The bite marks are very small and may even go unnoticed.

In all cases of confirmed or suspected bites, preventing the spread of toxic venom can be achieved by applying pressure to the wound and immobilising the area with a splint or sling before seeking medical attention. Firmly wrap an elastic bandage (you can improvise with a T-shirt) around the entire limb, but not so tight as to cut off the circulation. Along with immobilisation, this is a life-saving first-aid measure.

SPIDERS

Australia has several poisonous spiders. Red-back spiders are found throughout the country. Bites cause increasing pain at the site, followed by profuse sweating and generalised symptoms (including muscular weakness, sweating at the site of the bite and nausea). First aid includes application of ice or cold packs to the bite, then transfer to hospital.

White-tailed spider bites may cause an ulcer that is very slow and difficult to heal. Clean the wound thoroughly and seek medical assistance.

Heat Exhaustion & Heatstroke

Very hot weather is experienced year-round in northern Australia and during the summer months for most of the country. When arriving from a temperate or cold climate, remember that it takes two weeks for acclimatisation to occur. Before the body is acclimatised, an excessive amount of salt is lost in perspiration, so increasing the salt in your diet is essential.

Heat exhaustion occurs when fluid intake does not keep up with fluid loss. Symptoms include dizziness, fainting, fatigue, nausea or vomiting. The skin is usually pale, cool

and clammy. Treatment consists of rest in a cool, shady place and fluid replacement with water or diluted sports drinks.

Heatstroke is a severe form of heat illness that occurs after fluid depletion or extreme heat challenge from heavy exercise. It's a true medical emergency, with heating of the brain leading to disorientation, hallucinations and seizures. Prevent heatstroke by maintaining an adequate fluid intake to ensure the continued passage of clear and copious urine, especially during physical exertion.

A number of unprepared travellers die from dehydration each year in outback Australia. This can be prevented by following some simple rules:

- Carry sufficient water for any trip, including extra in case of vehicle breakdown.
- Always let someone, such as the local police, know where you are going and when you expect to arrive.
- Carry communications equipment of some form.
- Stay with the vehicle rather than walking for help.

Insect-Borne Illnesses

Various insects can be a source of irritation and, in Australia, may be the source of specific diseases (dengue fever, Ross River fever). Protection from mosquitoes, sandflies, ticks and leeches can be achieved by a combination of the following strategies:

- Wear light loose-fitting, long-sleeved clothing.
- Apply 30% DEET to all exposed skin and repeating every three to four hours.
- Impregnate clothing with permethrin (an insecticide that kills insects but is believed to be safe for humans).

Ultraviolet (UV) Light Exposure

Australia has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world. Monitor your exposure to direct sunlight closely. Ultraviolet exposure is greatest between 10am and 4pm, so avoid skin exposure during these times. Always use SPF 30+ sunscreen, apply it 30 minutes before going into the sun and repeat application regularly to minimise damage.

Glossary

Basically, Australian (that's 'Strine') is a variant of English/American, owing much of its old slang to British and Irish roots, and often picking up the worst of newspeak from American TV. However, there are a few surprises and other influences, including Aboriginal terms.

Some words have completely different meanings in Australia than they have in English-speaking countries north of the equator. Some commonly used words have been shortened almost beyond recognition.

Lonely Planet publishes the *Australian Phrasebook* – an introduction to both Australian English and Aboriginal languages. The following glossary may also help.

arvo – afternoon
avagoyermug – traditional rallying call, especially at cricket matches
award wage – minimum pay rate

back o' Bourke – back of beyond, middle of nowhere
baile out – leave
banana bender – resident of Queensland
barbie – barbecue (BBQ)
barra – the famous fighting barramundi (a fish)
barrack for – support a sports team
bastard – general form of address that can mean many things, from high praise or respect ('He's the bravest bastard I know') to dire insult ('You rotten bastard!'); avoid if unsure
battler – hard trier, struggler
beanie – knitted woollen hat
beaut, beauty, bewdie – great, fantastic
bikies – motorcyclists
billabong – waterhole in dried up river bed; more correctly an ox-bow bend cut off in the dry season by receding waters
billy – tin container used to boil tea in the *bush*
black stump – where the *back o' Bourke* begins
block (ie 'do your block') – to lose your temper
bloke – man
blow-in – stranger
blowies – blow flies
bludger – lazy person, one who won't work
blue (ie 'have a blue') – to have an argument or fight
bluey, blue can – a can of Foster's beer (because it's blue)
bonzer – great, ripper

boomer – very big; a particularly large male kangaroo
boomerang – a curved flat wooden instrument used by Aboriginal people for hunting
booze – alcohol
booze bus – police van used for random breath testing for alcohol
bottle shop – liquor shop
brekky – breakfast
Buckley's – no chance at all
bull-dust – fine and sometimes deep dust on *outback* roads; also bullshit
bush – country, anywhere away from the city
bushbash – to force your way through pathless *bush*
bushranger – Australia's equivalent of the outlaws of the American Wild West (some goodies, some baddies)
bush tucker – native foods
BYO – Bring Your Own (*grog* to a restaurant, party etc)

camp oven – large, cast-iron pot with lid, used for cooking on an open fire
carik it – to die
cask – wine box (great Australian invention)
cheers – drinking salutation
chocka – completely full, from 'chock-a-block'
chook – chicken
clobber – to hit
coldie – a cold beer
come good – turn out all right
coolamon – Aboriginal wooden carrying dish
counter meal, country – pub meal
crook – ill, badly made, substandard
cut lunch – sandwiches

dag, daggy – dirty lump of wool at back end of a sheep; also either an affectionate or mildly abusive term for a person who is socially inept
daks – trousers
dampier – *bush* bread made from flour and water and cooked in a *camp oven*
dead horse – tomato sauce
dead set – *dinkum*, true
didgeridoo, didge – cylindrical wooden musical instrument traditionally played only by Aboriginal men
dill – idiot
dinkum, fair dinkum – honest, genuine
dinky-di – the real thing
dip out – to miss out or fail
dob in – to tell on someone
donga – demountable cabin
down south – the rest of Australia

Dreaming – a complex concept that forms the basis of Aboriginal spirituality, incorporating the creation of the world and the spiritual energies operating around us; has superseded 'Dreamtime' as the preferred term
drongo – worthless person, idiot
Dry, the – dry season in northern Australia (May to October)
dunny – outdoor lavatory

earbash – talk nonstop
esky – insulated box for keeping beer cold

fair crack of the whip! – *fair go!*
fair go! – give us a break
flat out – very busy or fast
flog – sell, steal
fossick – hunt for gems or semiprecious stones
furphy – a rumour or false story

galah – noisy parrot, thus noisy idiot
game – brave (as in 'game as Ned Kelly')
gander – look (as in 'have a gander')
garbo – person who collects the garbage
g'day – good day, traditional Australian greeting
gibber – Aboriginal word for a stone or rock, hence gibber plain or desert
give it away – give up
good on ya – well done
greenie, green can – a can of VB beer (because it's green)
grog – general term for alcoholic drinks
grouse – very good

hit pay dirt – strike it rich
homestead – residence of a *station* owner or manager
hoon – idiot, hooligan, yahoo
how are ya? – standard greeting; expected answer, 'good, thanks, how are you?'

icy-pole – frozen *lolly* water on a stick
iffy – dodgy, questionable

jackaroo – young male trainee on a *station* (farm)
jillaroo – young female trainee on a *station*
jocks – men's underpants
jumped-up – arrogant, or full of self-importance

kick back – relax (especially with a beer)
knock – criticise, deride
knocker – one who *knocks*

lair – layabout, ruffian
lairising – acting like a *lair*
lamington – square of sponge cake covered in chocolate icing and coconut

larrikin – a bit like a *lair*
lollies – sweets, candy

mate – general mode of address, whether you know the person or not
mozzies – mosquitoes
moiety – intermarrying divisions of Aboriginal society that describe kin relationships and provide a general guide to behaviour
Moreton Bay bug – edible crustacean named after the Queensland region where it's found
mud map – literally a map drawn in the ground, or any roughly drawn map
mulga – *outback* tree or shrub, usually covering a large area

nature strip – grass border beside road; verge
never never – remote country in the *outback*
no hopper – hopeless case
no worries – that's OK, no problem

ocker – describes someone who is uncultivated or boorish
offsider – assistant or partner
OS – overseas, as in 'he's gone OS'
OTL – Overland Telegraph Line
outback – remote part of the *bush*

paddock – a fenced area of land, usually intended for livestock
pastoralist – large-scale grazier
pavlova – traditional Australian meringue and cream dessert, named after the Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova
perve – to gaze with lust
pinch – steal
piss – beer
pissed – drunk
pissed off – annoyed
piss weak – no good, gutless
pokies – poker (slot) machines
postie – mailman
pukumani – decorated burial poles of the Tiwi Islanders

ratbag – friendly term of abuse
ratshit – lousy
rapt – delighted, enraptured
reckon! – you bet!, absolutely!
rego – registration, as in 'car rego'
rellie – relative
ridgy-didge – original, genuine
ringer – a worker on a cattle *station*
ripper – good
road train – semitrailer-trailer-trailer
roo – kangaroo
root – sexual intercourse
rooted – tired
ropable – very bad-tempered or angry

scrub – bush
sea wasp – deadly box jellyfish
sealed road – surfaced road
septic – American person (rhyming slang; ie septic tank/Yank)
session – lengthy period of heavy drinking
sheila – woman
shellacking – comprehensive defeat
she'll be right – *no worries*
shonky – unreliable
shoot through – leave in a hurry
shout – buy a round of drinks (as in 'it's your shout')
sickie – day off work ill (or malingering)
slab – carton of 24 beer bottles or cans
smoko – tea break
snag – sausage
sparrow's fart – dawn
spunk – good-looking person
station – large farm
sticky beak – nosy person
stinger – box jellyfish
story – a complex oral tale from the Dreaming that taps into concepts of legend, myth, tradition and the law; it carries more weight than Western notions of historical accounts
stubby – 375mL bottle of beer
Stubbies – popular brand of men's work shorts
sunbake – sunbathe (well, the sun's hot in Australia)
swag – canvas-covered bed roll used in the *outback*

tall poppies – achievers (knockers like to cut them down)
tea – evening meal
thongs – flip-flops (not be confused with American thongs!)
tinny – 375mL can of beer; also a small, aluminium fishing dinghy

too right! – absolutely!
Top End – northern part of the Northern Territory
troopie – troop carrier, ie 4WD Landcruiser
troppo – mentally affected by a tropical climate
trucky – truck driver
true blue – *dinkum*
tucker – food
two-pot screamer – person unable to hold their drink
two-up – traditional heads/tails gambling game

uni – university
ute – utility vehicle, pick-up truck

veggie – vegetable

wag – to skip school or work
wagon – station wagon, estate car
walkabout – lengthy walk away from it all
weatherboard – wooden house
wedgie – wedgie-tailed eagle; also the act of abruptly pulling someone's underpants up out of their trousers
Wet, the – rainy season in northern Australia (November to April)
whinge – complain, moan
wobbly – fit of anger (as in 'throw a wobbly')
woomera – stick used by Aboriginal people for throwing spears
woop-woop – *outback*, miles from anywhere
wowser – a fanatically puritanical person, a teetotaler

yahoo – noisy and unruly person
yakka – work (from an Aboriginal language)
yobbo – uncouth, aggressive person
yonks – ages, a long time
youse – informal plural of you, pronounced 'yooze'