

# Contents

<b><u>The Authors</u></b>	<b>12</b>	<b><u>Around Darwin</u></b>	<b>88</b>
<b><u>Getting Started</u></b>	<b>14</b>	Mandorah	89
<b><u>Itineraries</u></b>	<b>18</b>	Howard Springs Nature Park	89
<b><u>Snapshot</u></b>	<b>23</b>	Darwin Crocodile Farm	89
<b><u>History</u></b>	<b>24</b>	<b>TIWI ISLANDS</b>	<b>91</b>
<b><u>The Culture</u></b>	<b>29</b>	History	91
<b><u>Aboriginal Art</u></b>	<b>36</b>	Information	91
<b><u>Environment</u></b>	<b>42</b>	Tours	92
<b><u>Northern Territory Outdoors</u></b>	<b>48</b>	Getting There & Away	92
<b><u>Food &amp; Drink</u></b>	<b>54</b>	<b>ARNHEM HIGHWAY</b>	<b>92</b>
<b><u>The Top End</u></b>	<b>59</b>	Humpty Doo	92
<b><u>Darwin</u></b>	<b>61</b>	Adelaide River Wetlands	92
Orientation	62	Mary River Region	93
Information	63	<b>DOWN THE TRACK</b>	<b>95</b>
Sights	65	Territory Wildlife Park & Berry Springs	96
Activities	71	Batchelor	96
Walking Tour	72	Litchfield National Park	98
Darwin for Children	73	Adelaide River	102
Tours	74	Hayes Creek	103
Festivals & Events	75	Douglas Daly Region	103
Sleeping	76	Daly River	104
Eating	79	Pine Creek	104
Drinking	82	Umbrawarra Gorge Nature Park	106
Entertainment	83	<b>Kakadu &amp; Arnhem Land</b>	<b>107</b>
Shopping	84	<b>KAKADU NATIONAL PARK</b>	<b>108</b>
Getting There & Away	85	West Alligator Area	119
Getting Around	86	South Alligator Area	119
		Ubirr	120
		Jabiru	121
		Nourlangie	122
		Malabanbadju, Burdulba & Muirella Park	124
		Jim Jim & Twin Falls	124
		Yellow Water & Cooinda	126
		Cooinda To Pine Creek	126
		<b>ARNHEM LAND</b>	<b>128</b>
		Gunbalanya (Oenpelli)	128
		Cobourg Peninsula	129
		Eastern Arnhem Land	130
		<b>Katherine &amp; Victoria River District</b>	<b>133</b>
		<b>KATHERINE</b>	<b>135</b>
		History	135
		Orientation	135

Information	135
Sights	137
Activities	137
Tours	138
Festivals & Events	138
Sleeping	138
Eating	139
Entertainment	140
Shopping	140
Getting There & Away	140
Getting Around	140
<b>AROUND KATHERINE</b>	<b>141</b>
Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park	141
Leliyn (Edith Falls)	144
Cutta Cutta Caves Nature Park	144
Manyallaluk	145
Mataranka	145
Eley National Park	147
Eley Cemetery	148
<b>VICTORIA RIVER DISTRICT</b>	<b>148</b>
Flora River Nature Park	149
Victoria River Crossing	149
Timber Creek	150
Gregory National Park	151
Keep River National Park	154
Western Australia Border	155
<b>BUNTINE &amp; BUCHANAN HIGHWAYS</b>	<b>155</b>
Top Springs	155
Kalkaringi	156
Lajamanu & The Tanami Track	156

## The Barkly Region 157

<b>DOWN THE TRACK</b>	<b>158</b>
Larrimah	158
Daly Waters	160
Dunmarra	161
Elliott	161
Renner Springs	161
Banka Banka	162
Attack Creek Historical Reserve	162
Three Ways	162
Tennant Creek	162
Devil's Marbles Conservation Reserve	167
Wauchope	167
Wycliffe Well	167
Davenport Range National Park	168
<b>BARKLY TABLELAND &amp; THE GULF</b>	<b>168</b>

Roper Bar	168
Roper Bar to Borrooloola	169
Borrooloola	169
Around Borrooloola	171
Borrooloola to Wollogorang	171
Cape Crawford	172
Cape Crawford to Barkly Homestead	172

## The Red Centre 173

### Alice Springs 175

History	176
Orientation	176
Information	177
Sights	179
Activities	184
Walking Tour: Historical Alice	189
Alice for Children	190
Tours	190
Festivals & Events	191
Sleeping	193
Eating	195
Drinking	198
Entertainment	198
Shopping	199
Getting There & Away	200
Getting Around	201

### North of Alice 203

<b>UP THE TRACK</b>	<b>204</b>
Aileron	204
Ti Tree & Around	205
Central Mt Stuart Historical Reserve	206
Barrow Creek	206
<b>TANAMI TRACK</b>	<b>207</b>
Tilmouth Well	209
Yuendumu	209
Granites Gold Mine	210
Rabbit Flat	210
Rabbit Flat to Halls Creek (WA)	210
<b>PLENTY HIGHWAY</b>	<b>210</b>
Gemtree	211
Harts Range	211
Jervois	212
Jervois to Boulia (Qld)	212
<b>SANDOVER HIGHWAY</b>	<b>213</b>
Utopia	213
Lake Nash	213

## West MacDonnell & James Ranges 215

<b>WEST MACDONNELL NATIONAL PARK</b>	<b>216</b>
John Flynn's Grave	219
Simpsons Gap	219
Standley Chasm (Angkerle)	220
Ellery Creek Big Hole	221
Serpentine Gorge	221
Serpentine Chalet Ruins	221
Ochre Pits	222
Ormiston Gorge	222
Glen Helen Gorge & Homestead	223
Redbank Gorge	224
Roma Gorge	224
<b>JAMES RANGES</b>	<b>225</b>
Hermannsburg	225
Finke Gorge National Park	226
Mereenie Loop Road	228
Ernest Giles Road	229
Watarrka National Park (Kings Canyon)	229

## The Southeast 233

<b>EAST MACDONNELL RANGES</b>	<b>234</b>
Emily & Jessie Gaps Nature Park	235
Corroboree Rock Conservation Reserve	235
Trephina Gorge Nature Park	236
N'Dhala Gorge Nature Park	237
Ross River Resort	238
Arltunga Historical Reserve	238
Ruby Gap Nature Park	240
<b>NORTH OF THE SIMPSON DESERT</b>	<b>240</b>
Alice Springs to Finke	240
Old Andado Track	242
<b>DOWN THE TRACK</b>	<b>243</b>
Rainbow Valley Conservation Reserve	243
Stuart's Well	243
Erlunda	244
Kulgera	244
South to Port Augusta	244

## Uluru-Kata Tjuta 245

<b>LASSETER HIGHWAY</b>	<b>246</b>
Mt Ebenezer	246

Mt Conner	246
Curtin Springs	246
<b>ULURU-KATA TJUTA NATIONAL PARK</b>	<b>246</b>
Uluru (Ayers Rock)	253
Kata Tjuta (The Olgas)	255
Yulara	256
Getting There & Away	259
Getting Around	260

## **Directory** **261**

Accommodation	261
Activities	263
Business Hours	263
Children	263
Climate Charts	264
Customs	264
Dangers & Annoyances	264
Disabled Travellers	265
Discount Cards	265
Embassies & Consulates	265
Festivals & Events	266
Gay & Lesbian Travellers	267
Holidays	267
Insurance	267
Internet Access	267
Maps	267
Money	268
Photography & Video	269
Post	269
Shopping	269
Telephone	270
Time	271
Tourist Information	272
Visas	272
Women Travellers	272

## **Transport** **273**

<b>GETTING THERE &amp; AWAY</b>	<b>273</b>
Entering the Country	273
Air – International	273
Air – Domestic	275
Land	275
Sea	278
<b>GETTING AROUND</b>	<b>278</b>
Air	278
Bicycle	279
Bus	279
Car & Motorcycle	280
Hitching	284
Local Transport	284

## **Health** **285**

<b>BEFORE YOU GO</b>	<b>285</b>
Insurance	285
Required & Recommended Vaccinations	285
Internet Resources	285
Further Reading	286
<b>IN TRANSIT</b>	<b>286</b>
Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)	286
Jet Lag & Motion Sickness	286
<b>IN AUSTRALIA</b>	<b>286</b>
Availability & Cost of Health Care	286

Infectious Diseases	287
Traveller's Diarrhoea	288
Environmental Hazards	288

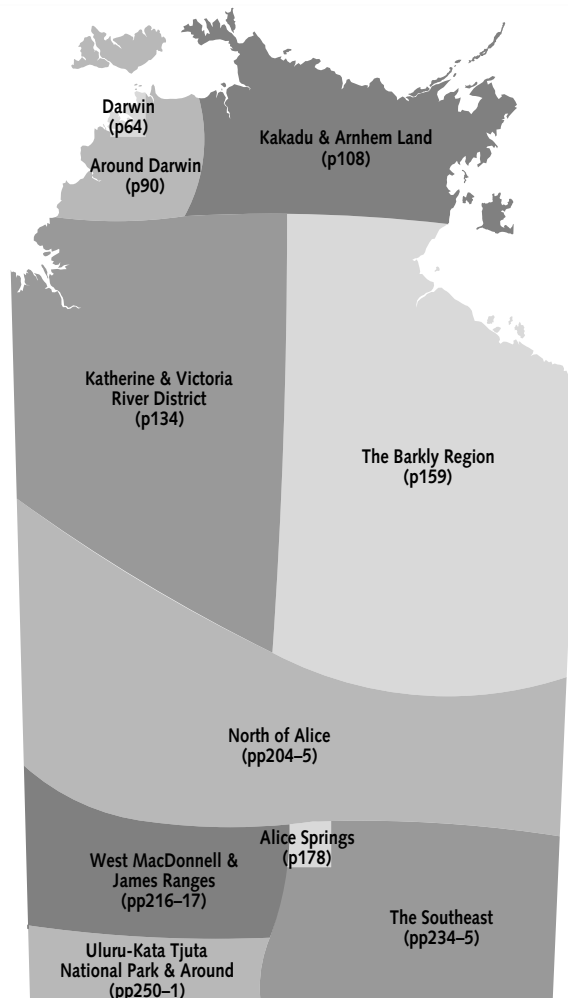
## **Glossary** **290**

## **Behind the Scenes** **293**

## **Index** **300**

## **Map Legend** **308**

# Regional Map Contents



# Getting Started

The only thing better than going on your trip is planning for it. Spreading out the maps, combing through the guidebooks, surfing the Web, reading accounts of pioneering travellers and dreaming about the possibilities are all part of the thrill of travel.

Australia is generally a very easy, hassle-free country to travel in and the Northern Territory is no exception, but it can throw up a few tricky situations by virtue of its size and remoteness. If you're planning on bushwalking or outback driving you'll need to be better prepared than if you're sticking to the Stuart Hwy or going on a tour. And then there are the basic questions: when should I go? What to take? How much do things cost? You don't really want to miss Litchfield because the roads are closed, or fry under the February sun at Uluru. The Territory is big, but not too big to see the highlights in a single trip. The following tips should get you primed for your trip.

## WHEN TO GO

Like southern Australia, the Red Centre follows the standard four-season weather pattern, although the transition is much more subtle – spring and autumn are mild variations on summer and winter. However, the tropical Top End has two distinct seasons: the Wet and the Dry. Across the whole Territory, the best time to visit weather-wise (and certainly the most popular with visitors) is between May and October. In the Top End, it's the Dry season, when the climate is dry and warm, most outback roads are open, swimming holes at Litchfield and Katherine are accessible and the waters of the northern beaches are largely free of the dreaded stingers (box jellyfish). Meanwhile, in the Centre, days are often sunny but mild with temperatures plummeting at night – it's not unusual to have overnight temperatures as low as 0°C or even subzero around Alice Springs and Uluru. That means being well prepared if you're camping, but at least it's usually dry.

The Wet season in the Top End (November–April) is steamy and tropical with short bursts of heavy rain falling most days. The obvious disadvantages – apart from the rain and high humidity – are that many unsealed roads are impassable, swimming is not possible in the sea (be-

See Climate Charts (p264) for more information.

### DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Swag or sleeping bag – for camping out under the stars
- Compass and maps – essential tools for serious bushwalking
- Camera and film (or memory cards) – let the shutter go wild
- Swiss army knife – useful multipurpose tool
- Torch (flashlight) – essential for dark camping grounds
- Tropical-strength insect repellent – for those maddening flies and mozzies
- Bushman's hat, sunglasses and sunscreen – sun protection is paramount
- Swimsuit and towel – for beaches, billabongs and hotel pools
- Sense of adventure and spirit
- Heavy-duty travel insurance in case of an outback mishap
- A willingness to call everyone mate, whether or not you know them or like them

cause of stingers) or in most inland waterholes (because of crocodiles), and some attractions and camping grounds may be closed. But it's not all bad during the Wet, and some travellers find this the most beautiful time of year, when everything is green and lush, spectacular electrical storms light up the sky and a dearth of tourists means you can join the locals at the best of the barramundi fishing spots.

In the Centre, summer (December–February) can get ridiculously hot. With temperatures topping 40°C in the shade it's really too hot to do much in the middle of the day.

Spring and autumn (September–November and March–May) are good times to be in the Centre, although spring can be marred by plagues of bush flies if there has been recent rain. It's also the time for wildflowers in the outback, which can be stunning after rains.

Other considerations: the best of the Territory festivals kick off between June and September, while accommodation prices are higher and camping grounds and other places are more crowded at this time, especially during school holidays.

## COSTS & MONEY

In Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs, costs for most goods and services are comparable to the rest of Australia, but it's when you start getting into more remote areas that travel here becomes more expensive – especially for fuel and accommodation. Long distances mean that fuel will be a major expense (while cheap by European standards, it's more expensive here than elsewhere in Australia), but for many travellers this is offset by camping and self-catering.

Accommodation is an obvious daily expense, but if you're camping or caravanning it can be as little as \$3 per person in national parks to \$10 or \$15 per person at caravan parks. There are backpacker hostels in most towns where you can get a dorm bed for \$18 to \$22, or private room for around \$50 to \$70 a double. Motel rooms start at around \$60 a double, but go up to \$120 or more, and hotel rooms in cities cost from \$90 to \$200. Resorts like Yulara (Ayers Rock) charge premium prices for accommodation.

Your daily budget in the Territory will depend on how you are travelling. If you're taking your time, mostly camping and self-catering and using your own vehicle, you could get by on \$50 a day per person (based on two people travelling together). Vehicle hire would increase that to \$80 to \$100 a day. A backpacker, using public transport and tours, staying in hostels and mixing self-catering with eating out and a few beers, should count on around \$80 per day. Midrange travellers – staying in motels or guesthouses, eating out, sightseeing and self-driving – should budget at least \$150 a day per person. With \$200 a day you can really travel in style. On top of these budgets, add shopping and entertainment.

Outside the essential expenses, remember there are lots of free things you can do in the Territory. Bushwalking, swimming, wildlife-spotting, bush camping and Darwin's beaches and parks can all be enjoyed for nothing more than the time and effort it takes to get there. Families with young kids will find that the anklebiters get free (or heavily discounted) entry to most attractions and some transport and tours.

## TRAVEL LITERATURE

Reading the tales of travellers who have gone before is a great way to gain a sense of place and fuel the wanderlust.

*Tracks* (1980) by Robyn Davidson tells the amazing story of a young woman who set out alone to walk 1700km from Alice Springs to the

### HOW MUCH?

Cup of coffee \$2

Newspaper \$1

Pie & sauce \$4

Stubby holder \$6-8

Didgeridoo \$150-400

See also Lonely Planet Index, inside front cover.

Western Australian coast with her camels. It almost single-handedly inspired the current Australian interest in camel safaris!

*One for the Road* (1999) by Tony Horwitz is an entertaining account of a high-speed hitchhiking trip through Australia, including the central Australian outback. Horwitz meets plenty of characters and stops at every bush pub along the way.

*The Singing Line* (1999) by Alice Thompson follows the south–north journey of the Overland Telegraph Line (called the ‘singing line’ by early Aboriginal people), retracing the steps of Charles Todd, the author’s great-great-grandfather. Although the book dwells heavily on the lives of

Charles and Alice Todd (after whom Alice Springs was named), it neatly mixes travel, history and the hardships of early pioneers.

*The Songlines* (1998) by Bruce Chatwin is a controversial but highly readable book, which gives an account, both real and imagined, of his experiences among central Australian Aboriginal people.

In *Down Under* (2000), Bill Bryson paints his amusing dry wit and outside-looking-in views across Australia, including a trip from Darwin to Alice, though his cursory look at Uluru is disappointing.

*Crocodile Attack* (1988) by Hugh Edwards explores in chilling detail the history of injuries inflicted by these ancient predators, several of which occurred in the Territory’s Top End. Gripping reading!

*Journey in Time: the 50,000 Year Story of the Australian Aboriginal Rock Art of Arnhem Land* (1993) by George Chaloupka is the best reference on Arnhem Land rock art. A great coffee-table book and still widely available.

*Australian Guide to Stargazing* (2001) by Gregg Thompson will tell you everything you need to know about the amazing starry palette that is the outback sky at night.

**‘Crocodile Attack... explores in chilling detail the history of injuries inflicted by these ancient predators’**

## TOP PICKS

### Must-See Movies

It’s not known for its film industry, but the unique outback landscape and cultural significance has made the Territory the setting of choice for many film-makers. For a taste of the Territory before you get there, feast your eyes on these flicks. See Cinema (p33) for a discussion of these films.

- *Yolngu Boy* (2000) Director: Stephen Johnson
- *Wolf Creek* (2005) Director: Greg McLean
- *Crocodile Dundee I & II* (1986/88) Director: Peter Faiman/John Cornell
- *Evil Angels (A Cry in the Dark)*; 1988) Director: Fred Schepisi
- *Dead Heart* (1996) Director: Nick Parsons
- *Japanese Story* (2003) Director: Sue Brooks

### Top Reads

There are many books dealing with the hardships of life in the outback. Try these stories of strength and courage. See Literature (p32) for more on Australian fiction.

- *We of the Never Never* By Jeannie Gunn
- *From Strength to Strength* by Sarah Henderson
- *I, Aboriginal* by Douglas Lockwood
- *The Strength of Our Dreams* by Sarah Henderson
- Any book by Len Beadell
- *In the Middle of Nowhere* by Terry Underwood

### Festivals & Events

The Northern Territory has some of the craziest festivals in Australia. These are our favourites but for a full list see p266.

- Henley-on-Todd Regatta (Alice Springs; p192)
- Beer Can Regatta (Darwin; p75)
- Beanie Festival (Alice Springs; p192)
- Camel Cup (Alice Springs; p192)
- Alice Springs Cup (Alice Springs; p192)
- Barunga Festival (Barunga; p138)
- Flying Fox Art & Cultural Festival (Katherine; p138)
- Darwin Festival (Darwin; p76)

## INTERNET RESOURCES

The World Wide Web is a rich resource for travellers. You can research your trip, hunt down bargain airfares, book hotels, check on weather conditions or chat with locals and other travellers about the best places to visit (or avoid!).

Useful websites are listed throughout this book. A few general sites:

**Aboriginal Australia** ([www.aboriginalaustralia.com](http://www.aboriginalaustralia.com)) Although a commercial site, this covers Aboriginal art, culture and tours with links to other related sites.

**Australia Bureau of Meteorology** ([www.bom.gov.au/weather/nt](http://www.bom.gov.au/weather/nt)) For the latest in weather reports and forecasting.

**ExplorOz** ([www.exploroz.com](http://www.exploroz.com)) Excellent site for 4WD and camping information, including outback track notes.

**LonelyPlanet.com** ([www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/australasia/australia](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/australasia/australia)) Destination information on NT plus the travellers’ bulletin board, The Thorn Tree, and tons of slick travel info.

**Parks & Wildlife Commission NT** ([www.nreta.nt.gov.au](http://www.nreta.nt.gov.au)) Everything you need to know about the Territory’s national parks.

**Travel NT** ([www.travelnt.com](http://www.travelnt.com)) A comprehensive travel guide produced by the Northern Territory Tourist Commission.

# Itineraries

## CLASSIC ROUTES

### TOP END TRIANGLE

One Week

This trip neatly combines the highlights of the Top End and is also accessible to 2WD vehicles. Start in **Darwin** (p61) with a few days to acclimatise. Visit the Mindil Market, Cullen Bay, the museum and Aquascene. Head south down the Stuart Hwy and east onto the Arnhem Hwy, with a stop at **Window on the Wetlands** (p93) and a croc-jumping tour. After about 115km you enter **Kakadu National Park** (p108). Head for **Ubirr** (p120) to see the rock art and either camp here or continue on to stay at **Jabiru** (p121) or **Cooinda** (p126). The following day check out the visitors centres at Jabiru and Cooinda, and book on an early morning Yellow Waters Cruise. Visit Nourlangie Rock in the late afternoon to see the awesome rock art. If you have a 4WD and the tracks are open, head down to Jim Jim and Twin Falls. Leave Kakadu south via the Kakadu Hwy to Pine Creek.

Head back up the Stuart Hwy through Adelaide River, then take the Batchelor Rd to **Litchfield National Park** (p98). You pass towering termite mounds on the way to the main attractions – the waterfalls and swimming holes at Florence, Buley Rockhole, Tolmer and Wangi. Camp overnight at Florence or Wangi and return to Darwin via the unsealed Cox Peninsula Rd (Dry season only) or back along the Stuart Hwy.

This route covers the highlights of the Top End looping from Darwin through Kakadu National Park and Litchfield National Park, with plenty of opportunities for camping, swimming, fishing and wildlife-spotting. Most of the journey is on sealed roads following the Arnhem, Kakadu and Stuart highways for around 900km.



### RED CENTRE CIRCUIT

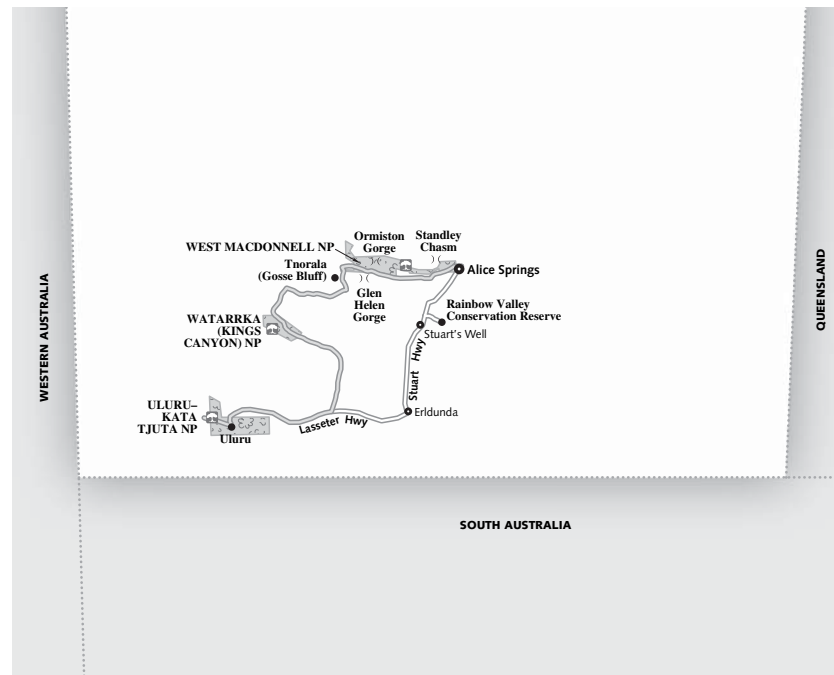
Five to Seven Days

The classic Red Centre route is a return trip from Alice Springs to Uluru, which can be done as a fantastic loop drive via the West MacDonnell Ranges and Kings Canyon. Until the Mereenie Loop Rd is finally sealed, travellers with 2WD rental cars will have to stick to sealed roads.

Start in **Alice Springs** (p175) with a couple of days spent exploring the Desert Park, Telegraph Station, Alice Springs Cultural Precinct and other attractions. Head west along Larapinta Dr and veer off onto Namatjira Dr and into the West MacDonnell National Park, where you'll pass a string of fine gorges and bushwalks in the ranges, including **Standley Chasm** (p220) and **Ormiston Gorge** (p222), on the way to **Glen Helen Resort** (p223) where you'll find camping, accommodation and a pub.

From here the road is unsealed to Kings Canyon. After about 60km there's a detour to the meteorite crater at **Tnorala** (Gosse Bluff; p224) and after another 12km you come to the start of the **Mereenie Loop Rd** (p228), a 155km road passing through Aboriginal land and ending at the Kings Canyon Resort in Watarrka National Park. Spend the night here or at neighbouring Kings Creek Station, then do the mind-blowing **Kings Canyon walk** (p230) before continuing on to Yulara 300km away. Spend two or three days exploring **Uluru - Kata Tjuta** (p245) before heading back to Alice Springs (580km) via the Stuart Hwy, with a possible stop for a camel ride at **Stuart's Well** (p243). Try to make it to the **Rainbow Valley Conservation Reserve** (p243), 24km off the Stuart Hwy, for sunset before travelling the final 90km back to the Alice.

You'll cover around 1300km on this classic circuit drive from Alice Springs to Uluru via the West MacDonnell National Park and Kings Canyon. Around 220km is currently unsealed. An alternative is to go via the Stuart Hwy and Lasseter Hwy and backtrack.



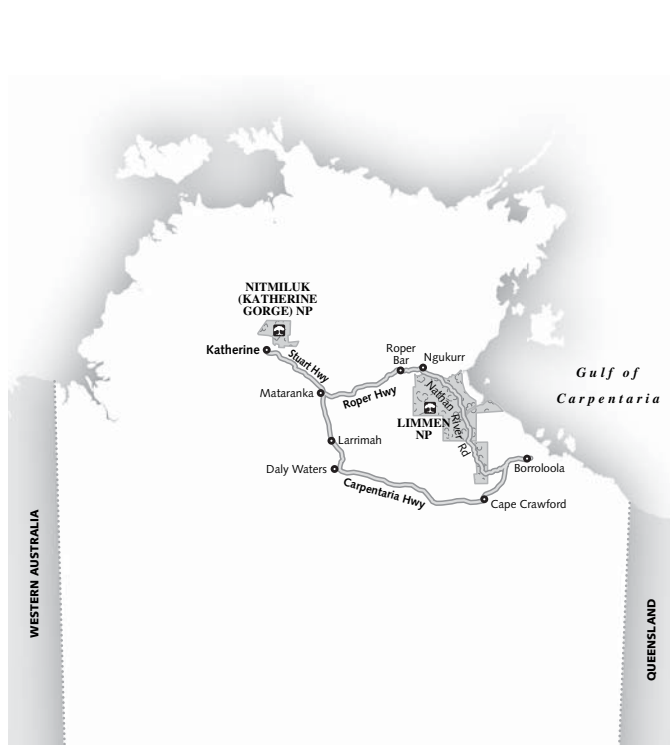
## ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

### CARPENTARIA LOOP ('GULF COURSE')

Three to Five Days

This loop trip heads out from the Stuart Hwy to the Gulf of Carpentaria through the remote Barkly Tableland. Starting in **Katherine** (p135), don't miss canoeing or a boat trip at **Nitmiluk National Park** (Katherine Gorge; p141). Drive the 100km south to **Mataranka** (p145) for a dip in the thermal pools, then take the Roper Hwy east for 175km to **Roper Bar** (p168), where there's renowned barramundi fishing on the Roper River. About 30km away the Aboriginal community of **Ngukurr** (p169) has an art centre. The 400km unsealed Nathan River Rd to Borroloola passes the Lomarium Lagoon and through the **Limmen National Park** (p169). About 50km from the Gulf, **Borroloola** (p169) is a mecca for fishing but not much else. Head southwest on the Carpentaria Hwy to **Cape Crawford**, one of the Territory's remote roadhouses. From there it's 270km back to the Stuart Hwy, which emerges near **Daly Waters** (p160). Stop in for a feed and a beer at the classic outback pub here before continuing up the highway to **Larrimah** (p158) for a pie at Fran's and then back to Katherine, or head south to Tennant Creek and Alice Springs.

Pack a rod for some of the Territory's best barra and sea fishing, and drive through one of the country's most remote national parks. Spend four or five days cruising out to the Gulf of Carpentaria and back along the Roper Hwy and Nathan River Rd to Borroloola, then back along the Carpentaria Hwy to Daly Waters. The 1275km drive starts and ends in Katherine.



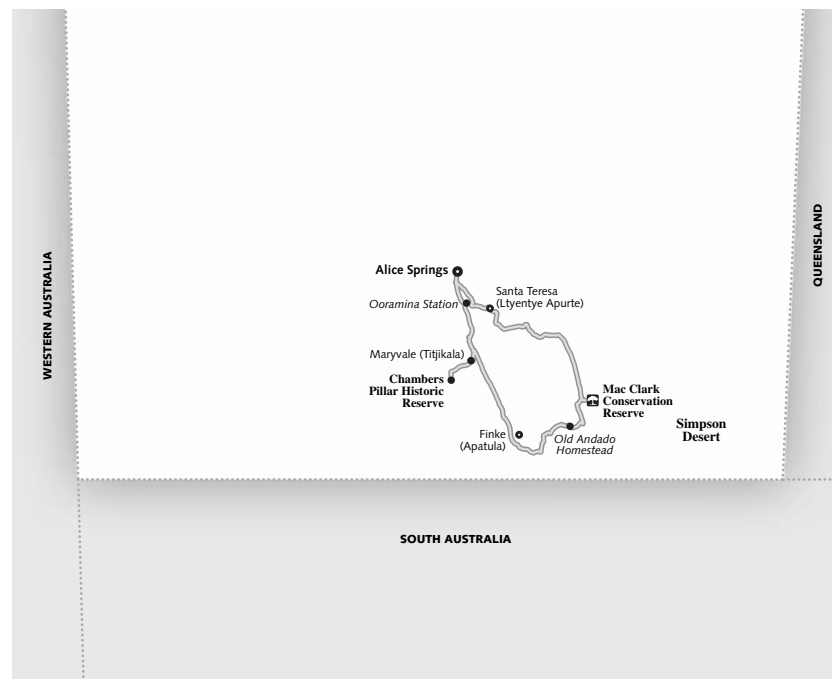
### SIMPSON DESERT LOOP

Three to Four Days

The region south of Alice Springs and east of the Stuart Hwy is lightly populated and little visited by travellers, but it makes a great 4WD adventure on the fringes of the vast Simpson Desert.

Head south from Alice Springs on the Old South Rd, which roughly follows the original *Ghan* railway line. On the way you pass the turn-off to **Ooraminna Station** (p240) and Ewaninga rock carvings. The road is in reasonably good condition as far as Maryvale Station, where you can visit the Aboriginal community and art centre at **Titjikala** (p241). Don't miss the 45km detour along a rough 4WD-only track to **Chambers Pillar** (p242), a bizarre sandstone pillar towering above the flat plains. Plan to camp overnight here. Returning back to the Old South Rd, turn off on the sandy, rollercoaster track to the Aboriginal community of **Finke** (p241) following the route of the annual Finke Desert Race all the way. From Finke the road heads east onto the Old Andado Track and some pretty lonely country. After 18km you come to Molly Clark's **Old Andado Homestead** (p242) – the only bed for many a mile. Heading north, next stop is the **Mac Clark Conservation Reserve** (p242), a short detour off the main track. From here it's a long drive over sand country to **Santa Teresa** (p242), an Aboriginal community where you can visit the excellent Keringke Art Centre, then it's another 90km back to Alice Springs.

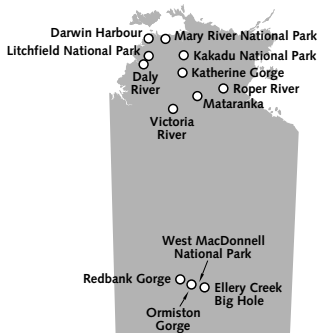
Red sand dunes, remote Aboriginal communities and the edge of the Simpson Desert await on this 800km loop drive from Alice Springs. Highlights include Chambers Pillar and the adventure of outback 4WD touring.



## TAILORED TRIPS

### BARRA & BILLABONGS

The Top End has some of the best barramundi fishing in the land. From Darwin head to the acclaimed **Mary River Region** (p93), where you can camp by a river, luxuriate in a fishing lodge or catch barra 24/7 on a houseboat. The next stop is **Kakadu National Park** (p108) to join a guide on Yellow Water or to tackle the untamed South Alligator and East Alligator Rivers. Detour to **Daly River** (p104) if heading back to Darwin, but first consider heading southwest to the **Victoria River**, or southeast to the **Roper River** (p168) and the pristine rivers of the Gulf.



If fishing isn't your bag, you can still have fun on and in the water. Take a **harbour cruise** (p74) in Darwin or a **boat cruise** (p116) in Kakadu, swim in the pristine waterholes of **Litchfield National Park** (p98), lounge in the bath-like thermal pools at **Mataranka** (p145) or hire a canoe and paddle up **Katherine Gorge** (p143). In the Centre, head for the waterholes of the **West MacDonnell National Park** (p216) – Ormiston Gorge, Ellery Creek Big Hole and Redbank Gorge.

### DOTS & DIDGERIDOO

The Territory is peppered with opportunities to see Aboriginal culture, either through cultural tours, contemporary art centres, sacred sites or ancient rock art.

Kakadu National Park has some of Australia's best rock art sites, particularly at **Nourlangie** (p122) and **Ubirr** (p120). Just across the East Alligator River you can visit (with a permit) the Injalak gallery at **Gunbalanya** (Oenpelli; p128) in Arnhem Land. From Darwin there are tours to the **Tiwi Islands** (p92) where you can see a distinct Aboriginal culture and fine art. At **Daly River** (p104), south of Darwin, Merrepen Arts Centre is highly regarded and there's a cultural festival here in June. Another good Aboriginal festival is held at **Barunga** (p138), also in June. Just south of Katherine, **Manyallaluk** (p145) offers excellent cultural tours with the Jawoyn Aboriginal people.

Alice Springs is full of galleries displaying works from central desert artists, but there are several communities you can visit to see the artists working first-hand. About 90km south of Alice at **Santa Teresa** (p242) is the Keringke Art Centre. Along the Tanami Track, stop in at the Warlukurlangu Art Centre in **Yuendumu** (p209).

**Uluru** (Ayers Rock; p253) has immense spiritual significance to the Anangu people and Anangu Tours has local guides to explain the *Tjukurpa stories* and change your view of the land. The **Cave Hill Safari** (p252), from Uluru, is an excellent trip deep into Pitjantjatjara country.





# Snapshot

The Northern Territory has always been something of an outpost of Australia: an eccentric, laid-back place where things are done a little differently. Territorians will happily talk about anything, from uranium mining to Aboriginal issues and the spectre of drought to frightening petrol prices and the best spot to land a barra.

Only since 1974 has the Northern Territory had a fully elected Legislative Assembly, with self-government granted in 1978. Territorians went to a referendum in 1998 (a year after the Federal government had stepped in and overturned its controversial voluntary euthanasia laws) to decide whether to move up to full statehood. The answer was no (51.3% of the vote), but the hot tip is that there will be another attempt at the constitutional change for statehood in 2008 – the 30th anniversary of self-government. The Territory's 25-seat parliament is headed by Chief Minister Clare Martin, who led the Labor Party to its second successive term in government in a landslide election victory in 2005.

The 2005 election was run and won largely on 'law and order' issues, which critics claimed were nothing more than race politics. Labor vowed to introduce a tough 'anti-social behaviour act' aimed at dealing with public drunks and Darwin's so-called 'long-grassers', mostly itinerant Aboriginal people who choose to sleep rough or set up camps in public parks and grassland. Council bylaws prohibit it and patrols regularly move people on and dish out fines.

Many of the communities on Aboriginal land are 'dry' (meaning alcohol is prohibited by agreement with community leaders) but a growing problem, particularly among bored youth, is petrol sniffing. Numerous deaths have occurred in remote communities as a result of sniffing, prompting the Territory government to pledge \$10 million in substance-abuse programmes. If Aboriginal issues of housing, health and education weren't bad enough, in 2005 the Federal government abolished the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), Australia's peak Indigenous body. Aboriginal-elected regional councils were replaced by a government-appointed advisory board, after years of criticism that sections of ATSIC were corrupt and inefficient. Indigenous leaders argue that the demise of ATSIC removes a direct community voice and a genuine say in self-determination.

On a more positive note, the increasing popularity of genuine Aboriginal art and Aboriginal-run tours is providing a boost to many communities in the Territory. Top-quality artworks find their way into major Australian galleries or international collections and fetch big money.

The Northern Territory economy is dominated by two major industries: tourism and mining. The much-hyped and long overdue *Ghan* line from Alice Springs to Darwin was finally completed in 2004, providing a further boost to the tourism industry, which has positively boomed in the last decade or so. Mining contributes about 20% of gross state product, with bauxite, manganese, gold and ore (zinc, lead, silver) the main resources. Oil and gas are also extracted on land and offshore. The most controversial industry, however, is uranium mining (see p46).

Almost half of the Territory is made up of pastoral leases – mostly cattle station country – and central Australia is in the grip of a severe drought. The Federal government has offered \$1.8 billion in drought assistance programmes, but what is really needed is a rain dance.

## FAST FACTS

Population:	198,500
Indigenous population:	56,900
Area:	1.35 million sq km
Unemployment:	6.1%
Average income:	\$38,000
Average house price (Darwin or Alice Springs):	\$280,000
Gross State Product (GSP):	\$9.4 billion
Air rescues from Uluru per year:	3–4
Approx fly population: six trillion (and counting...)	
Flora emblem:	Sturt's Desert Rose
Visitors in 2004:	1.65 million
Tourism impact in 2004:	\$1 billion and 14,000 jobs

# The Authors



## PAUL HARDING

### Coordinating Author, The Red Centre

Melbourne-born Paul has spent the past 10 years travelling and writing about places around the world, but he's yet to find a place that he likes more than Australia. Dusting off the 4WD, he journeyed through the Red Centre for this edition, where he met a few characters in the Alice, realised that Uluru at sunset still looks amazing no matter how many times you see it, and added to his small but much-loved Aboriginal art collection. Paul has contributed to numerous Lonely Planet guides, including *Australia* and *New South Wales*.

### My Northern Territory

The drive from Alice Springs (p175) out through the West MacDonnell Ranges (p216), camping and bushwalking through the gorges, is unbeatable – and that's before you get to Kings Canyon (p229) and Uluru (p253), two of the centre's great sights. I also love the transition from the dry Centre to the moist Top End. There's a great sense of anticipation as you leave Alice Springs for the 1500km drive up the Stuart Hwy. I was lucky enough to see a full moon rising over the Devil's Marbles (p167) at dawn and I loved canoeing up Katherine Gorge (p141). After a few days' camping in Kakadu National Park (p108), Darwin (p61) comes as something of an urban surprise!



## LINDSAY BROWN

### The Top End

As a former biologist, Lindsay jumps at the chance to research wild and wonderful places. And having already explored several Top End parks just for fun, it was time to return for 'work'. As a Lonely Planet author Lindsay has contributed to several titles including *Australia*, *Queensland* and *East Coast Australia*.

### LOVELY PLANET AUTHORS

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## SUSANNAH FARFOR

Susannah is a Melbourne-based writer and editor whose work regularly appears in adventure-related travel and food publications. Fascinated by the more remote regions of Australia, she has travelled in every state and wrote the previous edition of this title, as well as coordinating Lonely Planet's *Adelaide & South Australia* guidebook.

### CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

**Matthew Evans** wrote several boxed texts in the Food & Drink chapter (p54). Matthew was a chef before he crossed to the 'dark side' and became a food writer and restaurant critic. He is also the award-winning author of four food books, including Lonely Planet's *World Food Italy*, and there is little that he wouldn't eat as long as he lives to tell the story.

**Tim Flannery** wrote the Environment chapter (p42). Tim's a naturalist, explorer and writer. He is the author of a number of award-winning books, including *Country* and *The Future Eaters*. Tim lives in Adelaide where he is director of the South Australian Museum and a professor at the University of Adelaide.

**Dr David Millar** wrote the Health chapter (p285). Dr Millar is a travel medicine specialist, diving doctor and lecturer in wilderness medicine who graduated in Hobart, Tasmania. He has worked in all states of Australia and as an expedition doctor with the Maritime Museum of Western Australia. Dr Millar is currently a Medical Director with the Travel Doctor in Auckland.

**Simon Sellars** is a freelance writer, editor and web developer. Because he's in love with the Australian landscape, and as the Northern Territory is Australia in hyperdrive, he was thrilled to work on this book. Simon wrote the History (p24), Food & Drink (p54), Culture (p29) and Aboriginal Art (p36) chapters.

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# History

## ROCK ART, SEA SLUGS & EUNUCHS: EARLY SETTLEMENT

The first human contact with Australia began around 60,000 years ago, when Aboriginal people from what we know today as Indonesia and Papua New Guinea made the journey across the straits, signalling the beginning of the world's longest continuous cultural history. Some theories suggest that as few as three to five couples made the initial journey.

The first visitors found a relatively non-threatening environment, inhabited by just a handful of carnivorous predators. Within a few thousand years, Aboriginal people were able to populate much of Australia, although the central regions were not occupied until about 24,000 years ago.

The physical landscape tells the story through archaeological evidence, including artefact scatters, rock-art sites and shell middens. At Kakadu (p108) and Uluru (p253) national parks, there are camp sites and rock quarries where stone tools were made. Kakadu also has some spectacular rock art, dating back thousands of years and presenting a graphic insight into past societies.

The Chinese eunuch Admiral Cheng Ho (Zheng He) may have been the first non-Aboriginal visitor to northern Australia. He reached Timor in the 15th century and the theory goes that it's plausible he also made it to Australia – although some say he may not have had enough seamen to make two stops.

In 1879, a small, carved figure of the Chinese god Shao Lao was found lodged in the roots of a banyan tree in Darwin. That's the 'smoking gun', the pro-Zheng camp says: the carving apparently dates from the Ming dynasty (1368–1644).

There's evidence to suggest that the Portuguese were the first Europeans to sight Australia's northern coast, sometime during the 16th century. Then, we know for sure, the Dutch came along, sailing north-west from the foot of the Gulf of Carpentaria to make landfall at Groote Eylandt and Cape Arnhem. The storied Dutch navigator Abel Tasman sailed the entire north coast from Cape York to beyond the Kimberley in Western Australia.

Other visitors to the north were Macassan traders from the island of Celebes (now called Sulawesi), who came for trepang (sea cucumber) in the 17th century. The Macassans were from a parallel universe to your typical plundering European, setting up camps for three months at a time, gathering and curing trepang, and trading dugout canoes, metal items, food, tobacco and glass objects with the Aboriginal people. There were many interracial relationships, and some Aboriginal people even journeyed to Macassar (on Celebes) to live.

In 1906, government regulations banned the Macassans from further trading, but as a model for international relations the nature of the symbiosis between Macassans and Aboriginal people is certainly due for a revival. Until then, rock art from the era gives you the picture (see p36).

Two very different, intelligent introductions to Australian history are Stuart Macintyre's *A Concise History of Australia* and Geoffrey Blainey's *A Shorter History of Australia*.

Two excellent accounts of the Territory's history are the wide-reaching *Far Country* (1982) by Alan Powell, featuring absorbing accounts and anecdotes from the early days, and Ernestine Hill's *The Territory* (1951), which is out of print but worth trying to track down for its warts-and-all look at a region in transition.

## THE 'WILD WEST' OF THE NORTH

The 18th century saw the establishment of the British colony at Botany Bay. After that the rest of the land was ripe for the plundering – except for the Territory, which wasn't even fit for convicts. In 1824 the Brits established a military settlement on Melville Island, but it lasted just over a year. A second garrison settlement, Fort Wellington, was set up on the mainland near Croker Island at Raffles Bay, but by 1829 it, too, had been abandoned. In 1838 a third party gave it another go at Port Essington on the Cobourg Peninsula, but isolation, disease, death, white ants and a cruel climate battered the Poms yet again.

Across the country, settlers (known as 'squatters') were pushing deeper into Aboriginal territories in search of pasture and water for their stock. Aboriginal people defended their lands with desperate guerrilla tactics, spearing cattle (often for food, as squatters had destroyed much of their traditional 'bush tucker') and attacking isolated stations, led by resistance fighters such as Nemarluk, who was well known in the Territory. In return,

### ABORIGINAL LAND RIGHTS

Britain settled Australia on the legal principle of *terra nullius*, which meant that the country was legally unoccupied. Settlers could therefore take land from Aboriginal people without signing treaties or providing compensation.

After WWII Aboriginal people became more organised and better educated, and a political movement for land rights developed. In 1962 a bark petition was presented to the Federal government by the Yolngu people of Yirrakala, in northeast Arnhem Land, demanding that the government recognise Aboriginal peoples' occupation and ownership of Australia since time immemorial. The petition was ignored, so the Yolngu people took the matter to court – and lost. In the famous Yirrakala Land Case in 1971, Australian courts accepted the government's claim that Aboriginal people had no meaningful economic, legal or political relationship to land. The case upheld the principle of *terra nullius* and the position that Australia was unoccupied in 1788.

The Yirrakala Land Case was based on an inaccurate (if not outright racist) assessment of Aboriginal society, and the Federal government came under increasing pressure to legislate for Aboriginal land rights. It eventually passed the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* 1976, establishing three Aboriginal Land Councils, empowered to claim land on behalf of traditional Aboriginal owners.

Under the Act, the only claimable land is 'unalienated' – that is, land outside town boundaries that no-one else owns or leases, which usually means semi-desert or desert. So when the Anangu, Uluru's traditional owners, claimed ownership of Uluru and Kata Tjuta, their claim was disallowed because the land was within a national park. It was only by amending two acts of parliament that Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park was handed back to its traditional owners on the condition that it was immediately leased back to the Federal government as a national park.

Around half of the Northern Territory has been claimed, or is under claim. The process is tedious in the extreme and can take years to complete: almost all claims are opposed by the Territory's government, and claimants are required to prove that they are responsible under Aboriginal law for the sacred sites. Many claimants die of old age before the matter is resolved.

Once a claim is successful, Aboriginal people have the right to negotiate with mining companies and ultimately accept or reject exploration and mining proposals. This right is strongly opposed by the mining lobby, despite the fact that traditional Aboriginal owners in the Territory only reject about a third of these proposals outright.

## TIMELINE 60,000 BC

Most experts say that Aboriginal people settled in Australia around this time.

## 1821

Philip King makes his last voyage. His charts were so accurate that they still form the basis of modern navigational charts.

## 1862

John McDouall Stuart makes the last of his famous expeditions into the Territory, earmarking the area for future development.

## 1872

The Overland Telegraph Line is completed, slashing communication times between Australia and England from six months to seven hours.

the poisoning of traditional waterholes and savage reprisal raids saw many of them killed, until a compromise was eventually reached: Aboriginal people took low-paid jobs on sheep and cattle stations as drovers and domestics, and in return they remained on their traditional lands, adapting their cultures to their changing circumstances. This arrangement continued in outback pastoral regions until after WWII.

By the early 1900s, laws designed to segregate and 'protect' Aboriginal peoples were passed in all states, restricting on Aboriginal peoples' rights to own property and seek employment. The *Aboriginals Ordinance* 1918 even allowed the state to remove children from Aboriginal mothers if it was suspected that the father was non-Aboriginal. Parents were considered to have no rights over the children, who were placed in foster homes or childcare institutions. This practice continued until the 1970s and the psychological wounds borne by the 'Stolen Generations' remain an open sore.

And yet the Ordinance gave a degree of protection for 'full-blood' Aboriginal people living on reserves, as non-Aboriginal people could enter only with a permit, and mineral exploration was forbidden. Arnhem Land was declared an Aboriginal reserve in 1931, though Aboriginal people were still murdered on their land by 'police patrols'.

## TAMING THE UNTAMEABLE

In the early 1840s there was great demand by squatters in New South Wales for cheap Asian labour, and pressure was put on the colonial government to find an overland route to the Port Essington settlement. It was hoped this would not only provide an easy route in for labourers, but also a route out for exports of horses and cattle.

In 1844 the government refused to fund an expedition, but a Prussian scientist by the name of Ludwig Leichhardt raised the ready by private subscription and set off from the Darling Downs in Queensland. The party reached the Gulf of Carpentaria after nine months, and then headed northwest along the coast, discovering and naming a number of major rivers, including the McArthur, Roper, Limmen and Wickham.

They entered a world of pain: horses were drowned in the Roper River, members were killed in Aboriginal attacks, and food was limited to bush tucker. They eventually crossed the Arnhem Land escarpment and struggled into Victoria on 17 December 1845, 14 months after setting out. Although Leichhardt became something of a hero, the trip itself was largely a failure as the route was far too difficult for regular use and no promising grazing areas were discovered.

During the 1850s two South Australian speculators, James Chambers and William Finke, employed a young Scottish surveyor, John McDouall Stuart, to head north and find new grazing lands. In March 1858 Stuart's small party reached Central Mount Sturt (later renamed Stuart), and tried, unsuccessfully, to cross the inhospitable country northwest to the Victoria River. Already weakened by disease and short on supplies, the party eventually turned back after a hostile encounter with a group of Warramungu Aboriginal men at a place Stuart named Attack Creek (p162).

Stuart, now a hero, was soon back on the trail north. With a party of 11 men and 45 horses he returned to Attack Creek and managed to continue for a further 250km before being forced once again to return south.

Within a month of returning, the foolhardy Scotsman was heading north again and this time he reached the mangrove-lined shores of the north coast at Point Stuart on 24 July 1862.

Partly as a result of Stuart's reports, South Australian governors annexed the Northern Territory in 1863 with an eye to development, but by the time of Federation in 1901 the Territory was in debt.

## GOLD & OTHER PIPE DREAMS

In 1851 prospectors discovered gold in New South Wales and in central Victoria. The colonies were suddenly awash with prospectors, entertainers, publicans, sly-groggers, prostitutes and quacks from overseas.

The Territory was opened up with the discovery of gold at Yam Creek, about 160km south of Palmerston (now Darwin). The find spurred on prospectors, and it wasn't long before other finds had been made at nearby Pine Creek, sparking a minor rush and the hope that this would finally be the economic hurry-up that the South Australian government so desperately needed.

While the finds in the Territory were puny compared with those in Victoria and Western Australia, they generated activity in an economically unattractive area. To encourage more people to the area, the South Australian government built a railway line in 1883 from Palmerston (Darwin) to Pine Creek.

Soon after Federation, the South Australian government threw in the towel, offering its ugly duckling back to the Federal government. Most projects (like sugar, tobacco and coffee plantations) had failed completely or provided only minimal returns, which meant that speculators and investors got cold feet and the Territory remained an economic backwater.

The 1930s saw peanuts become the newest agricultural experiment, but competition from Queensland nuts (the dry, one-seeded indehiscent fruit variety, rather than the state's politicians), combined with marketing problems and poor Territory soils, meant that decent profits were in short supply. A fledgling pearl industry developed from Darwin, but it relied on cheap Asian labour and was severely nobbled by competition from the Japanese. Crocodiles and snakes were hunted for their skins but this, too, failed to survive the severe depression of the early 1930s.

The Territory might have struggled to pay its way but advances in technology and communications meant that it wasn't shunned entirely: passenger flights operated by Qantas had to make an overnight refuelling stop in Darwin; Tennant Creek became a minor boom town thanks to mining; and Alice Springs had a rail connection to Adelaide in 1929.

## WWII & BEYOND

At 9.57am on 19 February 1942, nearly 200 Japanese aircraft bombed Darwin's harbour and the RAAF base at Larrakeyah, not far from the city centre. Darwin was attacked 64 times during the war and 243 people lost their lives; it was the only place in Australia to suffer prolonged attacks.

In March 1942, the entire Territory north of Alice Springs was placed under military control and by December there were 32,000 men stationed in the Top End. Many reminders of this era can still be seen along or just off the Stuart Hwy between Alice Springs and Darwin.

In 2005 the Northern Territory government released declassified files that detailed masses of UFO sightings across the Top End over the previous 30 years, including unexplained sightings by air-force pilots.

**'They entered a world of pain: horses were drowned in the Roper River, members were killed in Aboriginal attacks, and food was limited to bush tucker'**

1888

The Territory's European population is outnumbered four to one by Chinese immigrants, who dominate the goldfields.

1942

Darwin is bombed by the Japanese during WWII.

1974

Cyclone Tracy hits Darwin on Christmas Eve, killing 65 people.

1978

The Northern Territory is granted self-government.

As the war ended, the Australian government embarked on an ambitious scheme to attract thousands of immigrants. People flocked from Britain and non-English-speaking European countries, with large numbers of Greeks, Italians, Slavs, Serbs, Croatians, Dutch, Poles, Turks, Maltese and Lebanese taking up the offer of government-assisted passage.

Although this immigration boom led to high growth in the urban areas of Darwin and Alice Springs, a shortage of Federal funds for the Territory meant there was little development and the rebuilding of Darwin proceeded at a snail's pace.

By contrast, the mining industry belted along. Copper and gold from Tennant Creek, oil and gas from the Amadeus basin in the Centre, gold from the Tanami, bauxite from Gove, manganese from Groote Eylandt and uranium from Batchelor (and more recently Kakadu) have all played an important role in the economic development of the Territory.

But the big success story is tourism. At the end of WWII the population of Alice Springs was around 1000; today it's over 28,000, a direct result of the selling of the outback as 'the real-deal Aussie experience', with Uluru the main attraction. The rise in environmental awareness and ecotourism has also boosted the popularity of Kakadu National Park; Uluru and Kakadu each receive over half a million visitors per year.

The 1970s were optimistic times in the Territory, but that heady mood was severely tested by Australia's worst natural disaster. On Christmas Eve 1974, Cyclone Tracy ripped through Darwin, killing 65 people and destroying 95% of the city's dwellings. Within four years the city was largely rebuilt and it has never looked back.

During 1999 and 2000 there was national outrage over the so-called 'mandatory sentencing laws' in the Territory (which means, to give an extreme example, that a life sentence means life with no exceptions, despite any extenuating circumstances or new evidence). 'Zero-tolerance' policing was also promoted, increasing the jailing of Aboriginal people for trivial offences (given that people from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to come into contact with the legal system). In 2001, the Northern Territory repealed the laws when a young Aboriginal man committed suicide in prison after stealing a small amount of stationery.

In 1996, the Northern Territory government became the first in the world to legalise voluntary euthanasia. Although the legislation was soon overturned by the Federal government, by then three people had voluntarily died.

## 1980

Baby Azaria Chamberlain is taken by a dingo at Uluru. Her mother Lindy is jailed for Azaria's murder in 1982, but is later exonerated.

## 2004

After a 70-year wait, the *Ghan* passenger train runs from Adelaide to Darwin, finally linking the Top End with the southern states.

# The Culture

## REGIONAL IDENTITY

To the outside world, the Northern Territory has never really had a proper identity. First, it was considered too tough to settle; then it was annexed by South Australia and eventually ditched like some kind of ugly duckling; then it was under military control; then the Federal government, in the immediate postwar period, ignored it. It only became self-governing in 1978. On top of that, it's not even a 'state' – it's a territory (an 'in-between state') and that seems a bit wishy-washy. Doesn't it?

Well, no. Territorians are proud of their rugged individualism, and proud of their ability to make a go of it in Australia's harshest terrain, where generations before have failed. Territorians point to the struggles of the past as a badge of honour, and there's a palpable sense that the place is remarkably different from the mainstream of Australian society. Some Territorians go further, seeing themselves as a separate nation from the rest of Australia.

In fact, Darwin is closer to Jakarta than Sydney and has consequently developed a distinctive cultural hybrid of Australian, Indigenous and Asian influences. Whereas the term 'Territorian' may have excluded ethnic groups in the past, now it's being reclaimed to embrace the Territory's diverse multiculturalism: 17% of the Territory's population was born overseas, and many of this sector's children and grandchildren continue to identify with their forebears' tradition. The local politicians are even starting to talk of how the Territory is more a part of Southeast Asia than Australia – a model that's held up as the way forward for the rest of the country.

The Northern Territory also has Australia's largest Indigenous population – 28% are of Aboriginal heritage. There's been cautious recognition by white Territorians of the importance of this heritage, and tribal law – which had been outlawed by white-Australian laws – has begun to be reinstated in some areas.

## LIFESTYLE

As you can imagine, there's not a great deal of urban living here (except for Darwin); if you're coming from Melbourne don't expect your coffee to be a macchiato and, if arriving from Sydney, get ready for more of a tan than even the hottest Double Bay solarium could ever provide.

In the outback, some station properties are about 500km from the nearest doctor, supermarket and school; children might have to sit down in front of a high-frequency (HF) radio transceiver to receive an education. But the strain of outback life has eased somewhat, with developments such as the Royal Flying Doctor Service, the School of the Air and the expanding national telephone network softening the tyranny of distance.

Despite the population being spread over such a huge area, community spirit still binds the land, reflected in the turn-out for social functions and for more esoteric pursuits like beer-can regattas and dry-river racing, activities that can only thrive in a place used to making its own fun.

## Aboriginal Society

Many Aboriginal people living an urban life still speak their Indigenous language (or a mix), while retaining knowledge of the environment, bush medicine and food ('bush tucker'). Across the region traditional rites and ceremonies are being revived.

**'Territorians point to the struggles of the past as a badge of honour, and there's a palpable sense that the place is remarkably different from the mainstream of Australian society'**

Indigenous ceremonies revolve around the activities of ancestral beings, prescribing codes of behaviour and responsibilities for looking after the land and all living things. The links between the people and their spirit ancestors are totems; each person has their own totem, or Dreaming, and these take many forms – caterpillars, snakes, fish, birds and so

#### RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL: DOS & DON'TS

Experiencing Aboriginal culture is a highlight of any trip to the Territory. There is some basic protocol, but the best thing you can do is to always ask when in doubt. For more information on responsible tourism, see the Aboriginal Tourism Australia website ([www.ataust.org.au](http://www.ataust.org.au)).

- Do remember that Indigenous people's lives do not necessarily revolve around your visit.
- Do understand that certain Indigenous behaviour is culturally influenced and is not intended to offend: the phrases 'thank you', 'hello' or 'goodbye' may not be used in some areas, or direct eye contact may be avoided.
- Do take your time. Begin with a few pleasantries to establish your interest in the person you are talking to, and see if they're interested in talking to you.
- Do remember that, in general, if you want to learn something, give something in return: tell a story or anecdote to hear a story.
- Do learn to appreciate difference. In some remote communities women dress modestly and it may not be appropriate for a woman to approach a group of males or socialise with them by herself. A firm handshake can signal aggression; a soft clasp of hands is usually better.
- Do respect the wishes of custodians when visiting Indigenous sites: read signs carefully, keep to dedicated camping areas, and don't wander into unauthorised areas.
- Do take care not to casually kick ant beds or stones, break twigs from (or deface) trees or souvenir earth, leaves or cultural artefacts.
- Do resist the temptation to touch artworks and motifs; your skin's natural oils can cause considerable deterioration. Dust also causes problems – move thoughtfully at rock-art sites and leave your vehicle some distance away.
- Do check whether alcohol rules apply when visiting a community. Permit conditions might include rules relating to the purchase and consumption of alcohol, or forbid any alcohol in the area at all, even if it remains unopened in the boot of your car, with fines for non-compliance.
- Don't raise your voice and labour over each word in the hope that you will be understood. You will feel foolish when someone responds to you in fluent English.
- Don't be too forceful when approaching a group of Indigenous people: stand a little way off and approach slowly. In remote communities, try making some movement or noise; coughing is a typical way by which Indigenous Australians announce their presence.
- Don't use the names of deceased people; in some Indigenous cultures this is unacceptable.
- Don't feel compelled to fill gaps in conversation with idle chit-chat. Aboriginal people tolerate more silence in communication than the average Westerner, so just wait and listen.
- Don't be overly loud: shame is a very important emotional force in Indigenous lives, and you could cause Indigenous Australians to be shamed if your behaviour is extroverted.
- Don't be too inquisitive. Access to ritual and cultural knowledge may be restricted to specific individuals or groups. Senior individuals may volunteer information as they see fit, perhaps about cultural practices and rituals already in the public eye.
- Don't wear out your welcome by taking excessive photos or video. Always ask permission and offer to send copies of photographs or footage (make sure you get an address). If you have permission to use photographs in reports or publications, acknowledge the names of the individuals in the shots.

on. Songs tell of how these powerful creator ancestors exert benign or malevolent influences, the best places and times to hunt, where to find water in drought years, and of specific kinship relations and identification of correct marriage partners.

Some areas feature Aboriginal community schools, where pupils are taught in English and their tribal language. Larger towns also have residential colleges for Aboriginal students.

#### POPULATION

The Northern Territory accounts for about 17% of Australia's landmass but only 1% of the population. Of the Territory's 198,500 inhabitants, 56,900 are of Aboriginal descent; the remainder is a multicultural mix entrenched in the cities.

The entire eastern half of the Top End comprises the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve, and major settlements are at Nhulunbuy (Gove), on the peninsula at the northeastern corner, Gunbalanya (Oenpelli) just across the East Alligator River from Ubirr in Kakadu National Park, and Maningrida on the Liverpool River estuary.

Northern Territory Aboriginal people generally define themselves by their 'nation' (or tribe), skin group or language group. Some examples include the Eastern Arrernte people (around Alice Springs), the Warlangu people (around Tennant Creek) and the Jawoyn people (around Katherine).

One of the most widespread Aboriginal languages in Australia today is Kriol, with more than 20,000 speakers throughout most of the Katherine region and the neighbouring Kimberley region in Western Australia. Kriol, although based on English, is heavily influenced by traditional Aboriginal language in its vocabulary and structure.

#### SPORT Football

The biff and bash of the hybrid game, Australian Rules football (like a cross between Gaelic football and Greco-Roman wrestling), is the spectacle of choice. However, unlike down south where footy is played in winter, here they put boot to ball during the Wet. In late March, the Tiwi Islands' football Grand Final is a very popular event.

Footy is a particular source of pride among young Aboriginal men, and the Aboriginal All-Stars regularly play against top-level AFL opposition. After being recruited by an AFL club, 80% of Aboriginal footballers go on to play a substantial amount of AFL games, compared with 40% for non-Aboriginal players.

Football is a centrepiece of the Yuendumu Sports Weekend, the 'Aboriginal Olympics' that draws people from as far as 1500km away to compete (Yuendumu is a desert Aboriginal community hundreds of kilometres from Alice Springs). The footy at Yuendumu is certainly different: players are often barefoot and the ground is red and rock hard. Community rivalry is such that the winner needs to get away in a hurry or else suffer retribution, while offensive on-field behaviour is dealt with, bush-style, by a tribunal of Aboriginal Elders.

#### Other Sports

During the Dry, creams, pads, boxes, stumps, flippers and googlies are the weapons of choice; translated, this means cricket is played at club level. The Territory has no representative in the nationwide Pura Cup competition, although interstate teams pop up here for out-of-season

The Northern Territory has Australia's highest male-to-female sex ratio (111.1 males per 100 females) and the lowest median age (30.3 years).

match practice. Recently Darwin has begun to host international test cricket matches.

Tennis, triathlons and swimming meets are held in Darwin and Alice Springs, and Alice hosts the Masters Games, a mature-age event held biennially in October.

Every second year in May, Darwin hosts the Arafura Games (p75), a major event for developing athletes in the Asia-Pacific region.

Racing carnivals and rodeos are held in every major centre, and draw people from hundreds of kilometres around.

And now for something completely different: Alice Springs plays host to the Camel Cup (camel racing), the Finke Desert Race (with charging motorcycles and buggies) and the Henley-on-Todd Regatta (boat race on a dry river bed) – see p191 for details of these events – while Darwin has the Beer Can Regatta (featuring boats made from beer cans; p75).

## ARTS

See p36 for information on Aboriginal visual art.

## Literature

The Territory can mean all things to all people, especially when channelled through the metaphors and similes of wordsmiths. In her short piece, *My Australian Girlhood* (1902), Rosa Praed draws on her outback experience to portray her affectionate childhood relationship with Aboriginal people, while Jeannie Gunn's well-known *We of the Never Never* (1908), a story of the life and trials on Elsey Station, includes a patronising depiction of Aboriginal people, along with this description of the Territory: a 'land that bewitches her people with its strange spells'.

Catherine Martin's 1923 novel, *The Incredible Journey*, follows the trail of two black women, Iliapo and Polde, through the harsh desert environment they traverse in search of a little boy who had been kidnapped by a white man.

Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia* (1938) is an outback epic, with sweeping descriptions of the northern country, while Herbert's *Poor Fellow My Country* (1975) tells the fortunes of a northern station owner, and voices bitter regret at the failure of white people to reconcile with the Indigenous population.

The English novelist Nevil Shute was a bit of an outback fetishist. His *A Town Like Alice* (1950) was a popular novel that was later made into a film. The main character, Joe Harmon, describes Alice as a 'bonza place with plenty of water'. Shute's *In the Wet* (1953) is a bizarre, borderline sci-fi novel, filled with opium-induced dreams about a future society where a mixed-race Aboriginal man saves the monarchy and ends a looming political crisis.

*The Children* (1959), by another English writer, James Vance Marshall, concerns two white siblings, a boy and a girl, lost in the Northern Territory after their plane crashes; they meet an Aboriginal boy who has gone 'walkabout' and a clash of cultures ensues. The book was later made into the film *Walkabout* (see Cinema opposite).

Sara Henderson's autobiographical trilogy, *From Strength to Strength* (1993), *The Strength in Us All* (1994) and *The Strength of Our Dreams* (1998), draws on the triumphs and tragedies of life on Bullo River Station, in the far northwest of the Territory past Timber Creek.

Contemporary literary stars in the Territory include Nicolas Rothwell, whose award-winning *Wings of the Kite Hawk* (2003) recasts the desert as a field of dreams, and Stephen Gray, who wrote *The Artist is a Thief* (2000), a 'philosophical detective novel' set in a fictional Aboriginal community.

For an excellent introduction to the latest writing coming out of the Territory, try *True North: Contemporary Writing from the Northern Territory* (2004), edited by Marian Devitt.

Northern Territory Writers' Centre (www.ntwriters.com.au) produces a number of interesting poetry collections, including *Landmark* (1999) and *Living Room: Poems from the Centre* (2003).

## Song & Narrative

The unifying factor in Aboriginal oral traditions is the Dreaming (see p29). Traditional renderings include the sounds of clapsticks and the didgeridoo, as the rhythm of dancers accompanies each poetic line; naturally, much organic power is lost in the transition to the printed word.

TGH Strehlow was one of the first methodical translators, and his written works include *Aranda Traditions* (1947) and *Songs of Central Australia* (1971). Catherine and Ronald Berndt compiled 188 songs in the collection *Djanggawul* (1952) and 129 sacred and 47 secular songs in *Kunapipi* (1951), while *The Land of the Rainbow Snake* (1979) focuses on children's stories from western Arnhem Land.

Many stories from the Dreaming have appeared in translation, illustrated and published by Aboriginal artists, including *Joe Nangan's Dreaming: Aboriginal Legends of the North-West* (1976) by Joe Nangan and Hugh Edwards; *Visions of Mowanjurn: Aboriginal Writings from the Kimberley* (1980) by Kormilda Community College, Darwin; and *Gular-abulu* (1983) by Paddy Roe and Stephen Muecke.

## Cinema

Many films have exploited the Territory's landscape for all kinds of effects: mystical, psychological, symbolic, aesthetic.

*Walkabout* (1971), by English experimental director Nicolas Roeg, is a hallucinatory tale based on a novel by James Vance Marshall (see Literature opposite) and starring David Gulpilil, the Territory's most famous and recognisable actor.

*A Town Like Alice* (1956) and *We of the Never Never* (1982) have a languid appeal, while *Jedda* (1955) is a compelling, bleak story of Aboriginal life, with some scenes filmed at Katherine Gorge.

Paul Hogan's *Crocodile Dundee* (1985) is a phenomenally successful film that did much to boost tourism in the Top End, particularly in Kakadu where parts of it are set. The clownish adventures of Mick 'Crocodile' Dundee, a bush Everyman who wanders into the urban jungle with predictable results, spilled over into two sequels, a host of look-alike tour guides, and a (thankfully short-lived) craze for Akubra hats.

CAAMA, the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (www.caama.com.au), began 25 years ago and has since built up an impressive folio of Indigenous media production and broadcasting. Filmmakers from CAAMA Productions, the Association's film and TV branch, have enjoyed success at overseas film festivals including Cannes.

## TOP ABORIGINAL CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

- Combining a wildlife safari, Aboriginal cultural tour and bush-tucker tasting in Kakadu National Park, led by an Indigenous guide (p118)
- Getting a true insight into the land and cultural significance of Uluru through the eyes of the traditional owners (p251)
- Sampling bush tucker, walking a bush-medicine trail and trying your hand at traditional painting at Manyallaluk, near Katherine (p138)
- Travelling by 4WD from Uluru to the Cave Hill Aboriginal community, to learn about their creation stories and traditions, and see rock-art sites (p251)
- Meeting local Aboriginal people in Alice Springs, taking in a bushwalk, dance performance and a didgeridoo lesson (p191)
- Flying to the Tiwi Islands to meet locals, attend a craft workshop and visit mission buildings, a museum and pukumani burial site (p92)
- Overnighting at the Arrernte community at Wallace Rockhole, near Hermannsburg, for rock art, bush medicine and bush-tucker tours (p226)



*Evil Angels* (1987), released overseas as *A Cry in the Dark*, stars Meryl Streep and depicts the infamous story of Lindy Chamberlain, whose baby was snatched by a dingo at Uluru.

The cult Aussie drag-queen film, *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994) made prominent use of the Territory's rugged, exotic charm, as did *Japanese Story* (2003), about a white tour guide and the Japanese businessman she falls in love with.

*Dead Heart* (1996), set against the backdrop of an outstation near Alice Springs examines the collision of white and tribal laws. *Yolngu Boy* (2001) is a rites-of-passage movie, uncompromising in its depiction of the problems faced by Aboriginal youth torn between traditional and modern Western culture.

The documentary *Beyond Sorry* (2003) tracks the lives of two Arrernte Aboriginal women: Zita, who was brought up to live as a white person, and Aggie, who became a tribal Elder. The contrast between the two women's lives provides poignant commentary on the Stolen Generations (p26).

Greg McLean's super-vicious, ultra-sadistic slasher film *Wolf Creek* (2005) takes a hunting knife to the Crocodile Dundee myth with its skilful exploitation of urban folk's fear of the outback. Although set in Western Australia, it's partly based on the case of backpacker Peter Falconio, who went missing in the Northern Territory.

## Music

The basic instruments of Aboriginal culture in historical times included hitting the ground with hunting sticks, clapping boomerangs together or using hands or the stomping of feet to keep the beat or time. Today Aboriginal tribes still use percussion, hitting together different shaped clapsticks or message sticks to make different pitches – high or low.

The most famous Aboriginal instrument is the didgeridoo (see p39), which comes from the top end of the Northern Territory – its Yolngu name is *yidaki*. Today it has become a recognised Aboriginal instrument throughout Australia and has been incorporated into contemporary music by Aboriginal artists including the group Yothu Yindi, whose Aboriginal members are among the traditional owners of northeast Arnhem Land. Yothu Yindi combine ancient song cycles and traditional Aboriginal instruments with contemporary instruments and a modern pop sensibility.

The Territory is home to a few old 'bushies', notably Ted Egan, now the administrator of the Northern Territory. Egan's brand of country-folk, infused with tall Territorian tales, is loved by many.

Arrernte band NoKTuRNL play a hard-hitting, groove-laden fusion of rap and metal, with politically charged lyrics. Other contemporary Aboriginal musicians from the Territory include: the Saltwater Band and Letterstick, both of whom play Indigenous music in a reggae/ska style; Djalal Gurruiwim, an Elder from northeast Arnhem Land and a master *yidaki* player; Broken English, a legendary pub-rock band; Peter Brandy, originally from Halls Creek but now living in Darwin, where he plays a fusion of country and pop; Nabarlek, mixing Indigenous roots music with rock; George Rurrumbu, former lead singer of the disbanded Warumpi Band, who were legends in the Territory and a big influence on Yothu Yindi; and Shellie Morris, an acoustic folk singer popular around Darwin.

## Dance & Theatre

Dance is integral to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, a physical and spiritual expression that incorporates music, song and art. An Indigenous dance performance will tell a *story* of the Dreaming, of an ancestor

spirit or of the passing down of a law. As most spirit ancestors were animals or birds, dancers imitate the movements and sounds of these creatures.

Dancing styles vary across regions and tribes. Most dances are accompanied by singing, percussion instruments such as clapsticks and boomerangs, or the clapping of hands and thighs. The *yidaki* provides music to the rhythmical stomp of Arnhem Land.

The Tracks Dance Company, based in Darwin, recently won the Sydney Myer Performing Arts Award (Group Award), an outstanding achievement for a company outside of Sydney or Melbourne. Although a non-Indigenous company per se, Tracks seeks to reflect the Territory's unique character in its work, which means close collaboration with Aboriginal artists.

Michael Watts, an emerging playwright from Alice Springs, has generated national attention for works such as *Train Dancing* (2001), about an Aboriginal man torn between love and the effects of racial intolerance. Watts' work has been performed by the Alice Springs-based Red Dust Theatre company, which stages many plays capturing the essence of the Territory.

Music NT ([www.musicnt.com.au](http://www.musicnt.com.au)) is an invaluable resource for anyone interested in Territorian music, with all bases covered from Indigenous to hip hop.

Beloved Territorian bushy Ted Egan is the inventor of the Fosterphone, a percussion instrument made from a beer carton (typically Fosters brand). This gave rise to claims that Egan tuned the instrument by drinking the beer, and requests at gigs for Egan to sing in XXXX (a popular Queensland beer).

# Aboriginal Art

Indigenous art in Australia dates back at least 30,000 years and includes rock carvings, body painting and ground designs. Early art was based on the Dreaming – the Creation – when the earth was formed by struggles between powerful supernatural ancestors such as the Rainbow Serpent, the Lightning Men and the Wandjina spirits. The Dreaming can relate to a person, an animal or a physical feature, or it can be more general, relating to a region, a group of people, or natural forces such as floods and wind.

Body art, another important form of creative expression, is often combined with dance. For example, the Gunwinggu men of west Arnhem Land use a design of intricately patterned crisscross lines on their torsos, given to them by their giant ancestor Luma Luma. The decaying body of Birrkilli, the sacred whale of the Gurrkirr clan, gave them the colours and diamond patterns used in their rituals.

## ROCK ART

Arnhem Land is an area of rich artistic heritage, hosting rock paintings made an estimated 60,000 years ago. The art here takes a literal approach in its depiction of Dreaming *stories*. Easily recognisable (though often stylised) images of ancestors, animals and Macassans (Indonesian mariners; see p24) can be found along with mythological beings and European ships. It's an absorbing record of changing environments and lifestyles over the millennia.

Some places boast paintings from more recent eras, sometimes superimposed over older paintings. Many sites are kept secret – not only to protect them from damage, but also because they are supposedly inhabited

In the 1930s Albert Namatjira, the famous NT Aboriginal artist, was introduced to European-style watercolour painting by a non-Indigenous artist, Rex Batterbee.

## PLAYING POSSUM

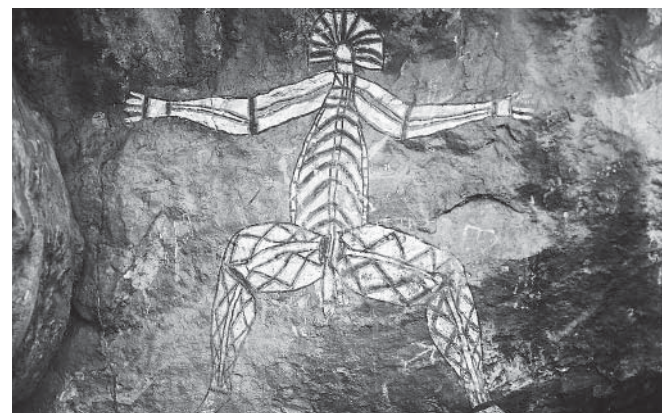
The birth of the modern Aboriginal art movement took place in 1971 at Papunya, 285km north-west of Alice Springs, when a group of community Elders, employed as groundskeepers at the Papunya school, were encouraged to paint a mural on one of the school's external walls. Other community members became enthused by the project and from those humble beginnings spawned a profound ripple effect – images of spiritual significance had, for the first time, taken on a permanent and very public form.

Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri (1932–2002), one of the pioneers of the Papunya movement, was the first Aboriginal painter to be feted by European and US patrons. He was a contemporary of perhaps the most famous Aboriginal artist, Albert Namatjira, who offered to tutor Possum (then a woodcarver) to paint in the Namatjira fashion. Possum, as usual, preferred to strike out on his own, and came to be known for his choreography of three-dimensional space. Perhaps his most iconic work is *Warlugulong* (1976), a large canvas featuring layers of ancestral legends superimposed over each other in an exciting new style.

In 1988 Possum enjoyed an important retrospective at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, along with extensive media coverage in the UK and the US. More overseas exhibitions followed, although Possum saw little money from these.

In 1999 Possum identified a large proportion of his works at a Sydney exhibition as fake, but his credibility was undermined when it was discovered he had previously signed works painted by his family members (even though this was typical of the collaborative nature of Aboriginal art). Humiliated by the negative publicity, he withdrew and stopped painting.

Possum was awarded the Order of Australia in 2002, but he died on the morning of the ceremony.



An example of the superb rock art that can be seen in Kakadu National Park.

GREG ELMS

by malevolent beings, who react badly to those unskilled in Indigenous customs. Two of the finest sites are open to visitors, though: Ubirr (p120) and Nourlangie (p122) in Kakadu National Park.

The early hand or grass prints were followed by a 'naturalistic' style, with large outlines of people or animals filled in with colour. After that came the 'dynamic' style, in which motion was often depicted (like a dotted line to show a spear's path through the air). In this era the first mythological beings appeared, with human bodies and animal heads.

The next style mainly showed human silhouettes and was followed by the curious 'yam figures', in which people and animals were drawn in the shape of yams (or yams in the shape of people and animals). The style known as 'x-ray', which showed creatures' bones and internal organs, also appeared in this period.

## DOT PAINTING

Western Desert paintings, also known as 'dot paintings', partly evolved from 'ground paintings' that formed the centrepiece of dances and songs. These were made from pulped plant material, and the designs were created on the ground using dots of this mush. Dots were also used to outline objects in rock paintings, and to highlight geographical features or vegetation.

These paintings can seem random and abstract, but they actually depict Dreaming *stories*, and can be viewed in many ways, including as aerial landscape maps (which raises the question: who would be watching from above, and how did they get there?). Subjects are often depicted by the imprint they leave in the sand – a simple arc depicts a person (the print left by someone sitting), a *coolamon* (wooden carrying dish) is shown by an oval shape, a digging stick by a single line, a camp fire by a circle. People are identified by the objects associated with them – digging sticks and *coolamons* for women, spears and boomerangs for men. Concentric circles usually depict Dreaming sites, or places where ancestors paused in their journeys.

While these symbols are widely used, their meaning within each individual painting is known only by the artist and the people closely associated with him or her, since different clans apply different interpretations to each painting. Sacred *stories* can therefore be publicly portrayed, as the deeper meaning is not revealed to most viewers.

The colours used in central Australian dot paintings feature reds, blues and purples.

The meticulously detailed Aboriginal Art website ([www.aboriginalart.org](http://www.aboriginalart.org)) features extensive listings and information on various artistic styles for every Aboriginal art centre in the Territory.

## BARK PAINTING

It's difficult to establish when bark was first used, partly because it's perishable and old pieces simply don't exist. However, we do know that European visitors in the early 19th century noted the practice of painting the inside walls of bark shelters.

The bark used is taken from the stringybark tree (*Eucalyptus tetradonta*) in the Wet season when it's moist and supple. The rough outer layers are removed and the bark is dried by placing it over a fire and then under weights on the ground to keep it flat. In a couple of weeks the bark is dry and ready for use.

The pigments used in bark paintings are mainly red and yellow (ochres), white (kaolin) and black (charcoal). The colours are gathered from special sites – some of these have been mined for centuries by the traditional owners and historically were traded with other clans. These natural pigments are still used today, giving the paintings their superb soft and earthy finish. Traditionally, binding agents such as egg yolks, wax and plant resins were added to the pigments. These days, such agents have been replaced by synthetics such as wood glue. The brushes used in the past were obtained from the bush materials at hand (twigs, leaf fibres, feathers, human hair) but these have also largely been replaced by modern brushes.

One of the main features of Arnhem Land bark paintings is the use of *rarrk* designs (crosshatching), which have been handed down through generations. These designs identify the particular clans, and are based on body paintings. The paintings can also be broadly categorised by their regional styles. In the regions to the west, the tendency is towards naturalistic images and plain backgrounds, while to the east the use of geometric designs is more common.

The art reflects Dreaming themes that vary by region. In eastern Arnhem Land the prominent ancestor beings are the Djang'kawu Sisters, who travelled the land with elaborate dilly bags (carry bags) and digging sticks (for making waterholes), and the Wagilag Sisters, who are associated with snakes and waterholes. In western Arnhem Land the Rainbow Serpent, Yingarna, is the significant being (according to some clans), as is one of her offspring, Ngalyod. Other groups paint Nawura as the principal being, travelling through the rocky landscape creating sacred sites and giving people the attributes of culture.

*Art, History, Place* (2004), by art scholar Christine Nicholls, offers a comprehensive overview of Australian Indigenous art – from its origins 40,000 years ago to contemporary work – with extensive referencing of Central Desert and Arnhem Land work.

### PURCHASING ABORIGINAL ART

A few key factors to consider when purchasing Aboriginal art:

- Always check authenticity, ensuring the art is attributed to and licensed to an Aboriginal artist.
- All Aboriginal art should include a certificate of authenticity; in the case of small artefacts, this may take the form of art centre or gallery labels. Documentation should provide details including the artist's name; dates when the work was produced; the artist's language group; details of where the work was made; and an artist's statement.
- If purchasing art works from a gallery, you might like to consider whether the gallery is a member of a professional association, like the Australian Commercial Galleries Association, and whether the work has been sourced from a recognised art centre.

For more information, visit the website of the **Association of Northern, Kimberley & Arnhem Aboriginal Artists** ([www.ankaaa.org.au](http://www.ankaaa.org.au)).

The *mimi* spirits also feature on bark and rock art. These mischievous entities are said to have taught Indigenous people hunting, food gathering and painting skills.

## CONTEMPORARY PAINTING Desert Mob

This annual exhibition, in its 15th year, showcases recent Aboriginal art and craft at the Araluen Arts Centre in the Alice Springs cultural precinct (p180). It provides a unique opportunity for members of the public to purchase and view work from established and up-and-coming Aboriginal artists. In 2004, 400 works from across the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia were exhibited.

The work is sourced from Aboriginal-owned and -governed art centres in Central Australia, organisations that in many communities provide the sole source of income for Indigenous people, as well as acting as custodians of Aboriginal culture.

### Keringke Art Centre

The Keringke Art Centre started in 1987 with a nine-week fabric-painting course and soon began exhibiting abroad. The women of the Centre work with bright colours, expressing traditional motifs and personal experiences within modern society. Keringke is located in Ltyentye Apurte (Santa Teresa; p242), a small community about 80km southeast of Alice Springs.

### Ngukurr

Since the late 1980s the artists of Ngukurr (p169), near Roper Bar in southeastern Arnhem Land, have been producing works using acrylic paints on canvas. Although ancestral beings feature prominently, the works are generally much more modern – their free-flowing forms often have little in common with traditional formal structure.

### Utopia

This community (p213), northeast of Alice Springs, came into existence in 1977 and was initially known for its batik work. In the late 1980s members of the community started to paint on canvases with acrylics, largely abandoning batik. While some men in the community paint, Utopia is best known for its women artists, in particular Emily Kame Kngwarreye (Anmatyerre; 1910–96), Ada Bird Petyarre (Anmatyerre), Kathleen Petyarre (Anmatyerre/Eastern Alywarre) and Gloria Tamerre Petyarre (Anmatyerre).

## ARTEFACTS & CRAFTS

Objects traditionally made for practical or ceremonial use, such as musical instruments and weapons, often featured intricate and symbolic decoration. In recent years many communities have also developed non-traditional craft forms that have created employment and income, and the growing tourist trade has seen demand and production increase steadily. For tips on purchasing crafts, see p269.

### Didgeridoos

These ubiquitous craft items have enjoyed a phenomenal boom in popularity over the last decade or so, particularly with white boys sporting dreadlocks at 'earth' festivals across Australia. Originally they were (and still are, in many Indigenous communities) used as ceremonial musical instruments in Arnhem Land (where they are known as *yidaki*). The original instrument was made from eucalypt branches that had been

**'Didgeridoos have enjoyed a phenomenal boom in popularity over the last decade or so, particularly with white boys sporting dreadlocks at 'earth' festivals across Australia'**

hollowed out by termites. The tubes were often fitted with a wax mouth-piece made from sugarbag (native honey-bee wax) and decorated with traditional designs.

### Boomerangs

These curved wooden throwing sticks are used for hunting and also as ceremonial clapsticks. Contrary to popular belief, not all boomerangs are designed to return when thrown – the idea is to hit the animal being hunted. Although boomerangs follow a similar fundamental design, they come in a huge range of shapes, sizes and decorative styles, and are made from a number of different wood types. The boomerang has infiltrated Western popular culture almost as much as the didge – in bizarre ways, such as the metal boomerang that was used to pick off berserk bikers in *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior*, and in deeply disturbing ways, like the boomerangs mass produced and branded by perfume giant Chanel that sell for \$300. Why not buy the real thing?

### Wooden Sculptures

Most traditional wooden sculptures were made for particular ceremonies and then discarded but, early in the 20th century, missionaries encouraged some communities and groups to produce wooden sculptures for sale.

Arnhem Land artists still produce soft-wood carvings of birds, fish, other animals and ancestral beings. The lightweight figures are engraved and painted with intricate symbolic designs. Due to their isolation, the

Top End Arts (www.topendarts.com.au) has an informative section devoted to NT Aboriginal art, including information on regional differences and ethical purchasing, and advice on where to buy.

Burial site with *tutini* funerary poles, Tiwi Islands.

PETER PFSCHELINZEW



Indigenous people of the Tiwi Islands have developed art forms – mainly sculpture – unlike anywhere else, although there are some similarities with the art of Arnhem Land in the use of natural pigments, feathers and wood for carvings and baskets. In the last 50 years or so, the Tiwi have been producing sculptured animals and birds, many of these being Creation ancestors, as well as traditional *tutini* funerary poles.

### Scorched Carvings

Also very popular are the wooden carvings that have designs scorched into them with hot fencing wire. These range from small figures, such as possums, up to quite large snakes and lizards. Many are connected with Dreaming *stories* from the artist's country. In central Australia one of the main outlets for these is the Maruku Arts & Crafts Centre at the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park Cultural Centre (p255). The Mt Ebenezer Roadhouse (p246), on the Lasseter Hwy (the main route to Uluru), is another Indigenous-owned enterprise and one of the most inexpensive places for buying sculpted figures.

### Fibre Craft

Articles made from fibres are a major art form among women. String or twine was traditionally made from bark, grass, leaves, roots and other materials, hand-spun and dyed with natural pigments, then woven to make dilly bags, baskets, garments, fishing nets and other items. Strands or fibres from the leaves of the pandanus palm (and other palms or grasses) were also woven to make dilly bags and mats. While all these objects have utilitarian purposes, many also have ritual uses.

### Hollow-log Coffins

Hollowed-out logs, often used for reburial ceremonies in Arnhem Land, are also a major form of artistic expression. Highly decorated, often with Dreaming themes, they are known as *dupun* in eastern Arnhem Land and *lorrkon* in western Arnhem Land.

### Textiles

The women of Utopia (see p213) are known for their production of brightly coloured silk batiks based on traditional women's body-painting designs called *awely*, and on images of flora and fauna.

In the late 1980s techniques using acrylic paints on canvas were introduced at Utopia, and Utopian art is now receiving international acclaim.

### Pottery

The Western Arrente community of Hermannsburg (p225) has recently begun to work with pottery, a non-traditional Indigenous craft. They have incorporated moulded figures and surface treatments adapted from Dreaming *stories*.

'Hollowed-out logs, often used for reburial ceremonies in Arnhem Land, are also a major form of artistic expression'

# Environment Tim Flannery

## A UNIQUE ENVIRONMENT

There are two really big factors that go a long way towards explaining nature in Australia: its soils and its climate. Both are unique. Australian soils are the more subtle and difficult to notice of the two, but they have been fundamental in shaping life here. On the other continents, in recent geological times processes such as volcanism, mountain building and glacial activity have been busy creating new soil. Just think of the glacial-derived soils of North America, north Asia and Europe. They feed the world today, and were made by glaciers grinding up rock of differing chemical composition over the last two million years. The rich soils of India and parts of South America were made by rivers eroding mountains, while Java in Indonesia owes its extraordinary richness to volcanoes.

All of these soil-forming processes have been almost absent from Australia in more recent times. Only volcanoes have made a contribution, and they cover less than 2% of the continent's land area. In fact, for the last 90 million years, beginning deep in the age of dinosaurs, Australia has been geologically comatose. It was too flat, warm and dry to attract glaciers, and its crust too ancient and thick to be punctured by volcanoes or folded into mountains. Look at Uluru and Kata Tjuta: they are the stumps of mountains that 350 million years ago were the height of the Andes. Yet for hundreds of millions of years they've been nothing but nubbins.

Under such conditions no new soil is created and the old soil is leached of all its goodness, and is blown and washed away. The leaching is done by rain. Even if just 30cm of it falls each year, that adds up to a column of water 30 million kilometres high passing through the soil over 100 million years, and that can do a great deal of leaching! Almost all of Australia's mountain ranges are more than 90 million years old, so you will see a lot of sand here, and a lot of country where the rocky 'bones' of the land are sticking up through the soil. It is an old, infertile landscape, and life in Australia has been adapting to these conditions for aeons.

Australia's misfortune in respect to soils is echoed in its climate. In most parts of the world outside the wet tropics, life responds to the rhythm of the seasons – summer to winter, or Wet to Dry. Most of

Tim Flannery's *The Future Eaters* is a 'big picture' overview of evolution in Australasia, covering the last 120 million years of history, with thoughts on how the environment has shaped Australasia's human cultures.

The Northern Territory Environment Centre ([www.ecnt.org](http://www.ecnt.org)) has a plethora of information about Northern Territory environmental issues, including the vexed issues of uranium mining and land clearing.

## THE CHANGING SEASONS Susannah Farfor

Plants and animals vary according to habitat, and influence each other in a complex balance of predator and prey. Broadly speaking, there are two distinct habitat zones in the Territory shaped by climate – the arid zone and the wet-dry tropics to the north, which includes the entire Top End.

The arid zone is characterised by low rainfall and hardy, stunted vegetation. When rain falls in this country, life moves into top gear: flowers and woody plants burst into bloom; the sandhills, plains and rocky ridges come alive with nectar-eating birds and insects; and predators enjoy the bumper harvest. For nature lovers this is the best time to visit the Centre.

Wildlife is also attuned to the dramatic annual cycle of Wet and Dry seasons in the Top End. The warm, clear days of the Dry cause waterholes to shrink and large concentrations of wildlife gather near billabongs. The late Dry is an excellent time to see wildlife in northern Australia. By the early Wet most animals are gearing up to breed, migratory birds arrive from Southeast Asia and many different species of insects hatch. With the Wet season rains, breeding is in full swing, drawing to a close as the rains peter out and the cycle begins again.

## NORTHERN TERRITORY NATIONAL PARKS Paul Harding

The Territory boasts two of Australia's star attractions: the Unesco World Heritage-listed Kakadu and Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Parks, both jointly managed by Parks Australia and the traditional Aboriginal owners. But you might be surprised to know the Territory has another 14 national parks administered by the Parks & Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory ([www.nreta.nt.gov.au](http://www.nreta.nt.gov.au)), along with some 25 conservation or historical reserves and 12 nature parks.

The most popular and accessible parks can be reached by conventional vehicle, although even sealed roads into Top End parks can become impassable during the Wet. Other parks are tough to get to and present an exhilarating challenge for 4WD enthusiasts. All of the Territory's parks and reserves offer superb bushwalking opportunities and most have camping facilities. Apart from the 'big two', national parks you should pencil into your itinerary include Litchfield and Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) in the Top End; West MacDonnell, Finke Gorge and Watarrka (Kings Canyon) in the Centre.

In Arnhem Land, the Garig Gunak Barlu National Park features marine and rainforest environments, but a permit is required to visit and it's a pretty remote spot, accessible only by air or a long 4WD journey. Some of the more obscure highlights include Mary River National Park for bird-watching and fishing; Keep River National Park for bizarre sandstone formations and scenery; Gregory National Park for 4WDing; Devil's Marbles and Chambers Pillar conservation reserves for photogenic rock formations; Arltunga Historical Reserve for a step back in time; and Ruby Gap Nature Reserve for a rugged 4WD experience.

Public access is encouraged if safety and conservation regulations are observed. Pets and firearms are not allowed in national parks and nature reserves. Many parks offer ranger-guided walks and talks in the busy season (usually June to September).

National Park	Page	Features	Activities	Best Time to Visit
Kakadu	p108	wetlands, escarpments, waterfalls, rock art	bushwalking, boat cruises fishing, bird-watching	May–Sep
Uluru-Kata Tjuta	p246	rock formations flora & fauna	walking, cultural & desert tours, rock viewing, photography	Apr–Nov
Nitmiluk	p141	Katherine Gorge, open woodland waterfalls	bushwalking, canoeing, swimming, fishing	May–Oct
Litchfield	p98	sandstone ranges, waterfalls termite mounds, open woodlands	bushwalking, swimming, 4WDing	Mar–Nov
Watarrka	p229	Kings Canyon, sandstone ranges, cycads	bushwalking, scenic flights, photography	Apr–Nov
Finke Gorge	p226	Palm Valley, gorges, river beds	bushwalking, 4WDing	May–Oct
West MacDonnell	p216	ranges, gorges, waterholes, arid zone flora & fauna	bushwalking, cycling, swimming, scenic flights	year-round
Elsy	p147	monsoon forest, rivers thermal pools	bushwalking, swimming canoeing	Apr–Sep
Keep River	p154	rock art, boabs, sandstone outcrops	bushwalking	May–Aug
Gregory	p151	grassy woodland, sandstone escarpments	4WDing, bushwalking, boating	May–Sep

Australia experiences seasons – sometimes very severe ones – yet life does not respond solely to them. This can clearly be seen by the fact that, although there's plenty of snow and cold country in Australia, there are almost no native trees that shed their leaves in winter, and nor do any Australian animals hibernate.

## WILDLIFE IN THE TERRITORY

The Northern Territory is famous as a home to kangaroo and other marsupials but, unless you visit a wildlife park, such creatures are not easy to see as most are nocturnal. Their lifestyles are exquisitely attuned to Australia's harsh conditions: marsupials are so efficient that they need to eat a fifth less food than equivalent-sized placental mammals (everything from bats and rats to whales and ourselves), while kangaroos, alone among the world's larger mammals, hop because it turns out that hopping is the most efficient way of getting about at medium speeds. This is because the energy of the bounce is stored in the tendons of the legs – much like in a pogo stick – while the intestines bounce up and down like a piston, emptying and filling the lungs without needing to activate the chest muscles. When you travel long distances to find meagre feed, such efficiency is a must.

The Devil's Marbles (p167), enormous granite boulders seemingly tossed to the ground south of Tennant Creek, are believed by the local Warramungu Aboriginal people to be the eggs of the Rainbow Serpent.

### TOP TERRITORIAN WILDLIFE *Simon Sellars*

#### Birds of Prey

These ruthless scavengers circle over fires for barbecued prey, when they're not consuming their version of fast food: roadkill. The wedge-tailed eagle (wedgie), with a wingspan of up to 2m, is often seen in the outback; it's the Northern Territory's fauna emblem, too. The black kite, with a distinctive forked tail, is virtually everywhere. The white-bellied sea eagle is almost as big as a wedgie and is common around large waterways, where it plucks fish from just below the surface. Remember: don't give a sea eagle a 'wedgie' – that's just asking for trouble.

#### Crocodiles

These 'take-no-prisoners' killing machines colour the Aussie psyche in everything from nature-gone-wrong horror films to real-life stories of tourists who've become lunch. They're found just about anywhere near water in the Top End; the best photo opportunities are at Yellow Water in Kakadu (p126) or Adelaide River Crossing (p93). There are three types of Aussie croc: the inoffensive freshwater crocodile ('freshie'); the extremely dangerous saltwater, or estuarine, crocodile ('saltie'), which can grow to a staggering 6m (20ft) long; and the slang term 'crock of s\*\*t' ('load of rubbish'). The under-resourced Northern Territory government, unable to cull its annual quota of 600 salties, is contemplating outsourcing the killing to safari hunters, who would pay for the privilege.

#### Dingoes

Australia's native dog was brought into the country from Southeast Asia some 6000 years ago and domesticated by Aboriginal people. Pure strains are becoming rare as they interbreed with domestic dogs. Dingoes prey mainly on rodents and small marsupials, although when other food is scarce they sometimes attack livestock (and people).

#### Frilled Lizards

These little rippers are commonly seen in the Top End during the early Wet pretending to be tree stumps or trundling about on their hind legs. The lizard's frill opens when it's pissed off, so be nice. In the sandy deserts, around 50 species shelter among spinifex or burrow into the sand.

Among the more common marsupials you might catch a glimpse of in the Territory's national parks are species of antechinus. These nocturnal, rat-sized creatures lead an extraordinary life. The males live for just 11 months, the first 10 of which consist of a concentrated burst of eating and growing. Like teenage males, the day comes when their minds turn to sex, and in the antechinus this becomes an obsession. As they embark on their quest for females they forget to eat and sleep. Instead they gather in logs and woo passing females by serenading them with squeaks. By the end of August – just two weeks after they reach 'puberty' – every single male is dead, exhausted by sex and burdened with carrying around swollen testes.

This extraordinary life history may also have evolved in response to Australia's trying environmental conditions. It seems likely that, if the males survived mating, they would compete with the females as they tried to find enough food to feed their growing young. Basically, antechinus dads are disposable. They do better for antechinus posterity if they go down in a testosterone-fuelled blaze of glory.

One thing you will see lots of are reptiles. Snakes are abundant, and they include some of the most venomous species known. Where the opportunities to feed are few and far between, it's best not to give your prey

H Cogger's *Reptiles and Amphibians of Australia* is a bible to those interested in Australia's reptiles, including its goodly assortment of venomous snakes, and useful protection for those who are definitely not. This large volume will allow you to identify the species, and you can wield it as a defensive weapon if necessary.

### Kangaroos & Wallabies

The distinctive red kangaroo, ranging over most of inland Australia, is the largest – a fully grown male can stand 2m high and has the attractive reddish coat; females have to make do with blue-grey. Most common in the Top End is the agile wallaby, about 1.7m long when fully grown. By the way, despite what you may have heard, kangaroos don't hop down city streets, they are not kept as pets by Mr & Mrs Joe Suburban, and a kangaroo has never held the Australian welterweight boxing belt.

#### Snakes

The Territory hosts various species of python, some beautifully marked, which kill their prey by constriction. Olive and water pythons hunt at night for rodents and can grow quite large. Most other snake species are poisonous, although only a few are dangerous. Whip snakes are slender, fast-moving species common in the Top End. Several large, venomous species such as the taipan, death adder and brown snake should be avoided at all costs.

#### Water Birds

In the Dry, Top End waterholes are awash with armies of noisy waterfowl: magpie geese, ducks, herons, egrets and Australia's only native stork, the jabiru.

#### Wildflowers

After rain, desert dunes are decorated with desert roses, grevilleas and wattle. The most common of these 'ephemerals', or short-lived plants, are the multitude of daisy species. The poached-egg daisy features white petals and a pale-yellow middle. Common inland flowering shrubs include the desert bottlebrush; the honey grevillea, with golden flower spikes; and the holly grevillea, with its holly-like leaves and red flowers.

#### Wild Horses

Known as 'brumbies', this domestic stock gone wild once attained pest proportions in the Territory, which the government addressed by gunning them down from helicopters: a not-so-popular move with animal activists given that the animals were often wounded and took agonising days to die.

**ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES** *Paul Harding*

With a small population and a large land area, the Northern Territory has a relatively 'clean' environment as far as pollution, waste and sustainable energy are concerned. Some of the biggest environmental challenges here are in natural factors such as introduced pests, weeds and fire management. Protecting the environment must also be balanced by economic factors such as pastoral leases and mining. Some of the key areas of environmental concern are protecting the Top End's river systems, particularly the Daly River, and marine conservation, including mangrove protection around Darwin Harbour.

Numerous introduced pests are causing trouble in the Territory. In northeast Arnhem Land millions of dollars are being spent on the eradication of the insidious yellow crazy ants, which have caused infestations over an area of more than 25,000 sq km. The ants, believed to have been introduced from Asia during WWII, form 'super colonies' that can be as dense as 1000 ants per sq metre. As well as devouring native plants, they can squirt an acid that blinds other animals.

The toxic, unattractive and much reviled cane toad has long been a threat to native animals in Queensland and northern New South Wales, since its introduction to combat the cane beetle in the 1930s (a move that failed almost completely as the beetles can fly, but the toads can't). In the last few years the toads have been moving westward into the Northern Territory and have been sighted in the wetlands of Kakadu National Park and even in Darwin. They breed rapidly and exude a toxic substance that is poisonous to a range of predators, including birds, fish and crocodiles. Apart from halting the spread on land, authorities are desperate to ensure the toads don't make the hop across the water to the Tiwi Islands. One of the difficulties in controlling the cane toads is identification – they bear a similarity to the marbled frog, a common native of the Darwin area.

During the 19th century, misguided acclimatisation societies tried to replace the 'inferior' Australian plants and animals with 'superior' European ones. Such cute blessings as rabbits and foxes, which thrive in rural and outback Australia, date from this time. Many other introduced feral animals still thrive in the Territory, particularly in the Top End where there are plenty of water sources. Wild pigs, feral cats, donkeys, horses (brumbies), camels and buffalo roam around, competing with livestock, trampling young native plants and potentially spreading disease such as foot-and-mouth. Attempts to cull or remove these animals has met with some success, particularly horses and water buffalo.

Fast-growing buffle grass was imported to the Territory from southern Africa as a stock feed, but it's now causing problems as a noxious weed, choking out native plants and creating a carpet of highly flammable growth that's difficult to control with traditional mosaic burning. Another noxious weed, the Mexican poppy is a poisonous thistle-like plant that, like most noxious weeds, presents a threat to pasture and stock as well as native plants.

Uranium mining is a controversial environmental issue in the Northern Territory – an estimated 15% of the world's recoverable yellowcake lies beneath the surface, much of it in Kakadu National Park. When Canberra overruled the Northern Territory government's preferred policy of no more mining leases in 2005, some 16 companies applied for exploratory mining licences. Unlike Jabiluka (temporarily closed), Koongarra (proposed) and Ranger (due to close in 2010), any new mines will have to be located outside the national park. In the case of Koongarra, a moratorium on mining has just been lifted and the French company that owns it is seeking approval to resume mining against the wishes of environmentalists and the traditional owners.

The deserts are a real hit-and-miss affair as far as wildlife is concerned. If visiting in a drought year, all you might see are dusty plains, the odd mob of kangaroos and emus, and a few struggling trees. Return after big rains, however, and you'll encounter something close to a Garden of Eden. Fields of white and gold daisies stretch endlessly into the distance, perfuming the air. The salt lakes fill with fresh water, and millions of water birds – pelicans, stilts, shags and gulls – can be seen feeding on the superabundant fish and insect life. It all seems like a mirage, and like a mirage it will vanish as the land dries out, only to spring to life again in a few years or a decade's time. For a more reliable bird spectacular, Kakadu is well worth a look, especially towards the end of the Dry season around November.

Of Australia's 155 species of land snakes, 93 are venomous. Australia is home to the majority of the world's 15 most venomous snakes.

a second chance – hence the potent venom. Snakes will usually leave you alone if you don't fool with them. Observe, back quietly away and don't panic, and most of the time you'll be OK (see p288 for information on treating snakebites).

Some visitors mistake lizards for snakes, and indeed some of the Territory's lizards look bizarre. Unless you visit Komodo in Indonesia, you will not see a larger lizard than the desert-dwelling perentie. These beautiful creatures with leopard-like blotches can grow to more than 2m long, and are efficient predators of introduced rabbits, feral cats and the like.

# Northern Territory Outdoors

Nature reigns supreme in the Northern Territory and the highlight of any trip here is to get out and experience the many activities on offer, whether it's a walk in the bush, a ride on a camel, casting a lure for a barramundi or floating over the desert in a hot-air balloon.

## BUSHWALKING

With a mix of desert environment, gorge country and superb national parks, the Northern Territory has some of Australia's wildest bushwalking country. To gain a true appreciation of the unique ecosystems throughout the Territory, you'll need to venture into the 'bush' (the all-purpose Aussie term for the countryside) on foot. However, this doesn't mean you need to strap on a backpack and swag and disappear into the wilds for days on end. Much of what the bush has to offer can be explored on easily accessible marked walking tracks that can take anything from 10 minutes to several hours. For more serious bushwalkers there are plenty of longer overnight and multiday walks through varied terrain and landscapes.

Walking will allow you to absorb the sights, smells, sounds and wildlife of places like Kakadu, Litchfield, Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge), the MacDonnell Ranges and Watarrka (Kings Canyon), as well as lesser-known national parks such as Keep River and Gregory. Uluru may look good from the sunset viewing car park, but to really appreciate it you need to do the base walk – and Kata Tjuta will never look the same again after you've done the Valley of the Winds walk.

## RESPONSIBLE BUSHWALKING

To help preserve the ecology and beauty of the Territory, consider the following tips when bushwalking:

- Carry out all your rubbish and don't forget cigarette butts and plastic wrappers. Never bury rubbish.
- Minimise waste by taking minimal packaging and no more food than you will need. Take reusable containers or stuff sacks.
- Contamination of water sources by human faeces can lead to the transmission of all sorts of nasties. Where there is a toilet, please use it. Where there is none, bury your waste at least 30m from a watercourse.
- Don't use detergents or toothpaste in or near watercourses, even if they are biodegradable.
- Avoid trampling or removing the plant life.
- Don't depend on open fires for cooking. Carry a lightweight stove.
- Ensure that you fully extinguish a fire after use. Spread the embers and flood them with water.
- Discourage the presence of wildlife by not leaving food scraps behind you. Place gear out of reach.
- Do not feed the wildlife as this can lead to animals becoming dependent on hand-outs, to unbalanced populations and to diseases.

## BUSHWALK GRADINGS

Grading systems for bushwalking are always arbitrary. However, having an indication of the grade or level of difficulty may help you choose the walks that will best suit your fitness level. For most of this book we use three basic gradings:

**Easy** A walk on flat terrain or with minor elevation changes usually over short distances on well-travelled, marked routes with no navigational difficulties.

**Medium** A walk with challenging terrain, often involving longer distances and steep climbs.

**Difficult** A walk with long daily distances and/or difficult terrain with significant elevation changes; may involve challenging route-finding.

Note that the multiday Larapinta Trail (p218) has its own grading system.

The best multiday walks in the Territory include the 230km **Larapinta Trail** (p218) through the West MacDonnell Ranges, which is divided into 12 sections ranging from 12km to 31km; and the 66km **Jatbula Trail** (p142) from Katherine Gorge to Leliyn (Edith Falls).

Guided walks are offered by the following companies:

**Trek Larapinta** (☎ 08-8953 2933; www.treklarapinta.com.au) Guided walks on the Larapinta Trail.

**Willis' Walkabouts** (☎ 08-8985 2134; www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au) Extended guided bushwalks year-round in both the Top End and the Centre.

**World Expeditions** (☎ 1300 720 000; www.worldexpeditions.com.au) More Larapinta Trail walks.

## Safety & Precautions

In a harsh, remote environment, it pays to be prepared. First rule is to carry plenty of water – at least 1L per person per hour. If you're going on a long walk, let someone know of your planned route and intended return time. Stick to marked trails or make sure you have a good map and compass and know how to use them.

In central Australia, avoid walking in the hottest months (November to March). For multiday walks into remote regions it pays to hire an Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB). For use only in emergencies, these nifty gadgets send out a distress signal allowing rescuers to locate you. They can be hired in hiking shops in Alice Springs and Darwin for around \$10 a day.

In the Centre, Parks & Wildlife operates the voluntary **Overnight Walker Registration Scheme** (☎ 1300 650 730; www.nreta.nt.gov.au), which is a safety net for overnight walkers. Call with credit card details and full details of your intended walk. There's a deposit of \$50/200 per person/group, which is refunded when you deregister. You must deregister by noon on the nominated day of completion, otherwise a search will be organised – at great expense. The scheme only applies to the Larapinta Trail, Ormiston Gorge to Mt Giles in the West MacDonnell National Park, and the Giles Track in Watarrka National Park. In Kakadu and Nitmiluk national parks, registration for overnight walks is compulsory and a permit must be obtained at the respective visitors centres (\$50 deposit at Nitmiluk). Elsewhere, you should notify the ranger of your intentions if heading out on a long walk.

Other tips:

- Pay any fees and acquire any permits required by local authorities.
- Obtain reliable information about physical and environmental conditions along your intended route (eg from park authorities).
- Be aware of local laws, regulations and etiquette about wildlife and the environment.

For information on national parks in the Northern Territory see the Parks & Wildlife website (www.nreta.nt.gov.au) and the Parks Australia website (www.deh.gov.au/parks).



**TOP BUSHWALKS**

- Kings Canyon Rim Walk, Watarrka National Park (p230)
- Jatbula Trail, Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park (p142)
- Barrk Sandstone Bushwalk, Kakadu National Park (p124)
- Ormiston Pound Walk, West MacDonnell National Park (p223)
- Plateau above Twin Falls, Kakadu National Park (p126)
- Mt Sonder, West MacDonnell National Park (p224)
- Trephina Gorge, East MacDonnell Ranges (p236)
- Valley of the Winds, Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park (p256)
- Smitt Rock, Nitmiluk National Park (p142)
- Motor Car Falls, Kakadu (p127)

- Walk only in regions and along tracks that fall within the limits of your capabilities.
- Never assume a watercourse or body of water indicated on a map actually contains water.

**CAMEL & HORSE RIDING**

Plodding through the desert on a doe-eyed dromedary, or saddling up to ride at a remote cattle station, is as outback as it gets.

Camels have existed out here since early explorers first imported them to help cover long distances in the harsh conditions. In 1860 camels were imported for the ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition and by the late 1860s they were arriving in large numbers along with their handlers – often referred to as Afghans, but actually from various parts of west Asia. The camels were superbly adapted to life in the desert, able to carry heavy loads and survive for relatively long periods without water. Today there are an estimated 60,000 wild camels roaming around the Territory!

Camel tourism began in the 1960s and there are currently four operators in the Territory offering anything from a 10-minute ride to a multiday safari. In Alice Springs (p184) you can take a camel out to breakfast or dinner at the Frontier Camel Farm, or go on an overnight ride, sleeping out in a swag with Pynden Camel Tracks. Down at Uluru (p251) you can plod out towards the Rock at sunrise or sunset with Uluru Camel Tours. For the true camel experience, however, head to Camels Australia at Stuart's Well (p244). Here you can take three- or five-day safaris into the desert. Camels are saddled and led in convoy and are surprisingly easy to ride, but several hours on a dromedary can leave you bow-legged and backside-sore!

Horses have also played an integral part in outback station life, although they have largely been replaced by vehicles and motorcycles. Still, horse-riding opportunities are surprisingly limited, partly due to high public liability insurance costs. In the Centre, Old Ambalindum Homestead (p184) offers riding lessons and short trail rides. Riding's also available at Mt Bundy Station in Adelaide River (p102).

**CYCLING**

You don't have to be a hard-core, long-distance cyclist to enjoy a bit of pedal power in the Territory. The flat terrain of Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine is perfect for getting around and seeing the sights, and

bikes can easily be hired in towns. The cycling track from Alice Springs to Simpsons Gap in the West MacDonnell Ranges (p219) is an excellent day trip and even Uluru can be circumnavigated by bicycle.

As for riding further afield, the distances are vast: along stretches of lonely outback road you may spot a cyclist and wonder what the hell they're doing out there in the searing heat, miles from anywhere. For some, this is almost a rite of passage; the rest stops containing water tanks every 200km or so on main highways make the going a bit easier.

**DIVING**

Darwin Harbour is a wreck-diver's delight. Wrecks from WWII and Cyclone Tracy have created artificial reefs encrusted with marine organisms, which support an abundant mix of soft corals and tropical fish. Unfortunately, the huge tides mean visibility may be poor and diving times can be restricted – neap tides are the best time to dive. See p71 for dive outfits. Diving and snorkelling is also possible from the Gove Peninsula in Arnhem Land if you're on the right tour or charter.

**FISHING**

For many visitors to northern Australia, the biggest lure is to land a 'barra' – Australia's premier native sport fish. Barramundi have great fighting qualities: the fish will make a couple of hits on your line, but once it takes a lure or fly, it fights like hell to be free. As you try to reel one in, chances are it will play the game for a bit, then make some powerful runs, often leaping clear of the water and shaking its head in an attempt to throw the hook. Even the smaller fish (3kg to 4kg) can put up a decent fight – but when they are about 6kg or more you have a real battle on your hands.

Landing the barra is a challenge, but it's only half the fun; the other half is eating it. The taste of the flesh does depend to some extent on where the fish is caught. Fish that have been in saltwater or tidal rivers are generally found to have the sweetest flavour; those in landlocked waterways can have a muddy flavour and softer flesh if the water is a bit murky.

Barramundi is found throughout coastal and riverine waters of the Top End. The best time to catch them is post-Wet (ie around late March to the end of May). At this time the floods are receding from the rivers and the fish tend to gather in the freshwater creeks. A good method is to fish from an anchored boat and cast a lure into a likely spot, such as a small creek mouth or floodway.

Of course, barramundi is not the only fish around. Other popular sport fish include queenfish, mangrove jack, saratoga and threadfin salmon. In coastal waters you'll find Spanish mackerel, barracuda, trevally, golden snapper and red emperor.

There are dozens of commercial operators offering fishing trips for barra and other sporting fish throughout the Top End.

**TOP FISHING SPOTS**

- Mary River (p94)
- Daly River (p104)
- Borroloola (p169)
- Roper Bar (p168)
- Kakadu National Park (p108)

For the lowdown on diving in Australia, see Scuba Australia ([www.scubaaustralia.com.au](http://www.scubaaustralia.com.au)), which has a Northern Territory section.

For an all-round fishing resource, check out [www.fishingtheterritory.com](http://www.fishingtheterritory.com).

The first camel imported to Australia came from the Canary Islands in 1940.

You don't need a fishing licence in the Territory, but there are a few rules. The minimum size limit for barra is 55cm (it's no coincidence that this also happens to be the side measurement of a slab of beer!), and the bag limit is five fish in one day (two in the Mary River system). The fish may not be retained on a tether line at any time, and spears or spear guns cannot be used. Certain areas of the Northern Territory are closed to fishing between 1 October and 31 January.

For more information on fishing regulations contact the **Amateur Fishermen's Association of the Northern Territory** (☎ 8989 2499; www.afant.com.au) or **NT Fisheries** (☎ 8999 2372).

## FOSSICKING

Northern Australia experienced a couple of mini-gold rushes in the early days, and panning or fossicking for gems and minerals is still a popular pastime. To get to the best spots you really need a 4WD, and don't kid yourself – it's hard, backbreaking work under hot sun if you really want to find that hidden jewel or nugget! With a bit of effort and a good eye, fossickers will find rewards such as agate, amethyst, garnet, jasper, zircon and, of course, gold. Good places to try are the Harts Range (p211) and the northern goldfields between Pine Creek (p104) and Hayes Creek (p103).

In order to fossick you must first obtain a fossicking permit (free). They are available from the tourist offices in Darwin and Alice Springs, or Gemtree (p211) in the Harts Range. Permission to fossick on freehold land and mineral leases must be obtained from the owner or leaseholder. Contact the **Department of Mines & Energy** (in Darwin ☎ 08-8999 5286, in Alice Springs ☎ 08-8951 5658) for information on mining law, geological maps, reports and fossicking guides.

## HOT-AIR BALLOONING

Few experiences are as exhilarating as floating high above the desert as dawn breaks over the rugged MacDonnell Ranges. Once the initial nerves wear off, hanging in the basket of a hot-air balloon is a calming, almost surreal experience, with barely a sound except for the occasional blast of the burners and the clicking of cameras. Three hot-air balloon companies operate daily flights from Alice Springs (p184). They start early in darkness, looking for a suitable launch site in the desert, then there's a flurry of activity as the balloon is unpacked, attached to the basket and inflated. After a one-hour or half-hour flight, the basket touches down – hopefully like a feather – and you're taken for a rewarding chicken and champagne breakfast.

## SCENIC FLIGHTS

Taking to the air in a light plane or helicopter gives you unparalleled views over some of the Northern Territory's finest landscapes. In some cases flights offer the chance to see places that are inaccessible by vehicle or on foot, and the photo opportunities are superb. Some of the best flights are out to Jim Jim and Twin Falls in Kakadu National Park from Jabiru and Cooida (p117) or Darwin (p75), flights over Litchfield National Park (p101), helicopter flights over Katherine Gorge (p144), flights over Uluru (p252), and helicopter flights over the West MacDonnells from Glen Helen Resort (p223).

## SWIMMING

With a hot year-round climate in the Top End and scorching summers in the Centre, swimming is understandably popular. Because of the seasonal presence of the dangerous box jellyfish (marine stingers), Darwin's beaches

are safest from May to September – check locally before venturing in. Likewise, most of the estuarine waters, billabongs and rivers in the Top End are off limits because of saltwater crocodiles. Always heed warning signs and err on the side of caution.

Favourite spots for safe swimming in the Dry are the waterfall-fed plunge pools at Litchfield National Park. Katherine Gorge (p141) is also a good place for swimming. There are several inviting thermal pools in the Top End, including at Mataranka (p145), Berry Springs (p96), Katherine (p137) and the more remote Tjuwalyin (Douglas) Hot Springs (p103).

In the Centre, the MacDonnell Ranges have a string of permanent waterholes that can be freezing in winter but are a godsend in summer. They include Ellery Creek Big Hole (p221), Ormiston Gorge (p222) and Redbank Gorge (p224).

## WILDLIFE-WATCHING

Whether you realise it or not, there's a menagerie of wildlife in the Northern Territory, especially if you're bushwalking or boating. Much of the fauna is very shy (that's what puts the 'wild' in wildlife) and many animals in central and northern Australia are only active at night.

But take the time to stop and look around, and you'll see plenty. The best places for guaranteed wildlife sightings and a chance to see lots of animals up close are the superb Territory Wildlife Park (p96) outside Darwin and the Desert Park (p179) at Alice Springs.

You only want to see saltwater crocodiles from a safe distance, but crocodile farms in Darwin (p69) and the jumping croc shows on Adelaide River Crossing (p93) are a real eye-opener. You may see freshwater crocs at Litchfield National Park (p98) and Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge; p141). The best natural wildlife park in the Territory is Kakadu National Park, especially for bird-watchers. On the Yellow Water cruise (p116) you'll see birds such as herons, egrets, kingfishers, brolgas and jabirus, as well as sea eagles and kites. Another excellent opportunity for bird-watching is the Mary River wetlands (p94).

In the arid centre you'll see kangaroos, black-footed rock wallabies, dingoes and, if you're lucky, small marsupials. Wedge-tailed eagles and whistling kites are a common sight in the air. Good places for wildlife-spotting include the West MacDonnell Ranges (p216) and Watarrka National Park (p229).

The wedge-tailed eagle – the Northern Territory's fauna symbol – has an average wingspan of 2.3m.

The world's worst ballooning disaster occurred in Alice Springs in 1989 when 13 people died after two balloons collided in midair.

# Food & Drink

Australia doesn't really have a national dish. What it does have is 'Modern Australian', an attempt to classify the unclassifiable. If it's not authentically French or some other imported cuisine, or if it's a melange of East and West, or contemporary and traditional styles, then it's Modern Australian. Cuisine doesn't really alter from one region to another, but some influences are obvious, such as the Southeast Asian migration to Darwin. For the Northern Territory government, that's your authentic Australian cuisine right there – a glorious jumble of Indigenous and multicultural infusions. Accordingly, they've initiated a 'New Tastes of Australia' branding campaign for local food and produce, and rebranded Darwin as a centre for 'food tourism'. There may come a day soon when the Territory's mooted harvesting of magpie geese, freshwater long-neck turtles, crocodiles, mud-mussels and other native wildlife species is embraced by the rest of the country's culinary scene.

## STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

Barramundi is the Territory's ubiquitous, iconic fish dish and it's generating a buzz overseas, too: at the Danish royal wedding in 2004, Northern Territory barramundi was served in favour of the traditional Atlantic salmon.

Territorian tiger prawns, yabbies, mud crabs and prawns are delectable, while on a different tack (still aquatic, though) the government is looking to trial, in consultation with Indigenous communities, the cultivation of trepang (also known as the 'sea cucumber' or 'sea slug') for Asian food markets. If successful, the trepang would be making a rousing comeback – it's a symbol of early Indigenous history in the Territory, and of cooperation and peace with other cultures (see p24).

Generally, meat, meat and more meat is the go – in the Territory, old habits die hard and cholesterol is for wimps. If you are into dinner-plate-sized, inch-thick steaks, you've come to the right place. Novelty meats such as kangaroo, camel, crocodile and buffalo also feature prominently, especially in places where gaggles of tourists congregate.

### TRAVEL YOUR TASTEBUDS *Matthew Evans*

Much of the Territory's most interesting (if not always the most delicious) produce is native. There's kangaroo, a deep, purpley-red meat, which is deliciously sweet. Fillets are so tender and lean they have to be served rare. The tail is often braised in the same way oxtail is cooked. There's also crocodile, a white meat not dissimilar to fish with a texture closer to chicken. In the outback you may be encouraged to try witchetty grubs, which look like giant maggots and taste nutty, but with a squishy texture. In Kakadu you may find green ants. The way to eat them is to pick them up and bite off their lightly acidic bottoms. Sugar ant abdomens are full of sweet sap; again, just bite off the tail end.

Much of the native flora has evolved to contain unpalatable chemicals. Despite this, you may enjoy fiery bush pepper, coffee-like flecks of wattle seed, vibrant purple rosella flowers, lightly acidic bush tomato (*akudjura*), and, of course, the Hawaii-appropriated macadamia nut.

The wildest food of all is Vegemite, a dangerously salty yeast-extract with iconic status. Most commonly used on toast, it's also not bad on cheese sandwiches. It's often carried overseas for homesick expats, or licked from fingers by freckle-faced youngsters. Outsiders tend to find the flavour vulgar and completely overwhelming. But what would they know?

The *Australian Regional Food Guide*, by Sally and Gordon Hammond, is an invaluable resource for travellers, with listings for regional food producers, restaurants and so on covering every state and territory. There's an accompanying website ([www.australianregionalfoodguide.com](http://www.australianregionalfoodguide.com)).

There are over 170 bush foods and medicines available for consumption in the outback.

In Darwin you can wrap your laughing gear around dishes from Indonesia, India, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Brazil, Portugal, the Philippines, Laos, Japan, Germany, Vietnam, Thailand, China, Italy, Greece and more.

In some of the flashier restaurants, you might find bush-tomato roesti with munthari chutney, camel-eye fillet salt-bush wraps with Borrooloola mud crab, Barramundi moulie, Thai camel salad with yam bean and tamarind, or char-grilled kangaroo dusted in wattle seed and native peppers.

As a rule, outside of Darwin the food scene is pretty much standard – your barramundi will come with chips, or it won't come at all. You might also find that the croc meat you've heard so much about will be crumbed and fried. Alice Springs, Yulara and Kakadu, however, feature restaurants with innovative menus touting many native Australian ingredients, such as wattle seed and quandong.

## DRINKS

In the Territory, it seems, you can order any type of drink you want – as long as it's beer (or Coke). That's largely due to the climate: after a long, hot day working, walking or driving, a cold ale is almost a necessity, so much so that alcohol consumption here ranks above all Australian states and is among the world's highest – a recent estimate attributed 1120 standard alcoholic drinks per Territorian per year.

Many roadhouses pride themselves on the variety of beer they stock, but if you're wondering what to ask for, a 285mL glass of beer is a 'handle', a 425mL glass is a 'schooner' and a 375mL bottle with a cap is a 'stubby'. Most beers have an alcohol content around 5%. That's less than many European beers but stronger than most North American beer (which, as we all know, is like making love in a canoe). Light beers come in at less than 3% alcohol.

Well-known beers in the Territory include Victoria Bitter (or VB), Melbourne Bitter and Carlton Draught; the only brew indigenous to the Territory is NT Draught, but it's not terribly popular. The best mainstream Aussie beers are produced by Cascade (Tasmania) and Coopers (South Australia), and keep your eye out for the products of boutique breweries like James Squire, Matilda Bay, Little Creatures and Mountain Goat. You'll find Guinness on tap in numerous pubs in Alice and Darwin.

Excessive use of alcohol is a problem in many Aboriginal communities and for this reason many are now 'dry'; it's an offence to carry alcohol into these places. The problem has also led to restricted trading hours and even 'dry days' in some places.

If you don't fancy a beer, you could always turn to wine, as many Australians have done. Good-quality Australian wines are relatively cheap and readily available. Most wine is sold in 750mL bottles or in 2L and 4L 'casks' (a great Australian innovation, sometimes called 'Chateau Cardboard' or 'goonies').

White wines are almost always consumed chilled; in summer or in the outback many people chill their reds, too. Australia also produces excellent ports (perfect for around the campfire) and superb muscats, but average sherries.

But the Territory always has to do things differently, and in the case of wine it really has no choice; the harsh climes make grapevines a non-starter. Instead, while you're here, try some mango wine – from the Red Centre Farm (p206). The extra-dry variety complements spicy dishes, while sweet mango wine is terrific with dessert.

The Northern Territory has the world's highest per capita consumption rate of Coca-Cola.

## CELEBRATIONS

Food and celebration are strongly linked: celebrations often involve equal amounts of food and alcohol. A birthday could well be a barbecue (barbie) of steak or prawns, washed down with a beverage or two. Weddings are usually followed by a big slap-up dinner, though the food is often far from memorable. Christenings are more sober, mostly offering home-baked biscuits and a cup of tea.

Christmas, in mid summer, is less likely to involve a traditional European baked dinner, and more likely to be replaced by a barbecue, full of seafood and quality steak, as a response to the warm weather. Prawn prices skyrocket, chicken may be eaten with champagne at breakfast, and the main meal is usually in the afternoon, after a swim, and before a really good, long siesta.

## WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

Most restaurants open around noon for lunch and from 6pm or 7pm for dinner. Lunch is usually taken shortly after noon, and dinner bookings are generally made for 7.30pm or 8pm, though in Darwin some restaurants stay open past 10pm.

In Darwin, the climate is naturally suited to alfresco dining, as well as to the delightful night-market tradition. As the sun dips, half the town descends on Mindil Beach Night Market, where every man, woman, kid and dog settles under the coconut palms for sunset, submitting to whichever tantalising food stall overwhelms their olfactory nerves the most. Similar stalls can be found at the Parap Village Market, Nightcliff Market and Palmerston Market, while Rapid Creek Market resembles an Asian marketplace, boasting exotic ingredients, a heady mixture of spices and the scent of jackfruit and durian. See p80 for more on Darwin's markets.

Darwin and Alice Springs have a fabulous range of eateries, with all major cuisines represented at any budget, though your money will not go as far as in southern capitals. Prices range widely from \$10 up to \$30 for a main course; portions will generally be enormous. Most places are licensed to sell alcohol, though some also advertise BYO (bring your own).

## Quick Eats

A competitively priced place to eat is in a club or pub where you order (at the kitchen or bar) staples like fisherman's basket, steak, mixed grills, chicken cordon bleu or Vienna schnitzel.

While not serving the most inspired food, roadhouses provide convenient stops along the highways. Typically, you'll find fried food and snacks, though some roadhouses also function as the town pub.

While a wide range of produce is sold in supermarkets, most of it has been trucked long distances and is not always as fresh as it might be. It can also be more expensive than in east-coast cities. The exception is beef,

### TOP TERRITORY DINING EXPERIENCES

- Dining champagne-style in the desert at the Sounds of Silence dinner, Yulara (p258)
- Eating a freshly caught barramundi – from your own line – in the Top End (p51)
- Browsing the multitude of ethnic food stalls at Mindil Beach Market, Darwin (p80)
- Taking a camel ride out to a three-course bush dinner, Alice Springs (p191)
- Barbecuing your own barra, roo, camel or emu meat at the Outback Pioneer, Yulara (p258)

## DOS & DON'TS *Matthew Evans*

- Do 'shout' drinks – this is a revered custom where people rotate paying for a round of drinks. Just don't leave before it's your turn to buy, and always shout for your group on arrival at the pub.
- Do tip (up to 15%) for good service, when in a big group, or if your kids have gone crazy and trashed the dining room.
- Do show up for restaurant dinner reservations on time. Not only may your table be given to someone else if you're late, staggered bookings are designed to make the experience more seamless.
- Do take a small gift and/or a bottle of wine to dinner parties.
- Do use British knife and fork skills: keep the fork in the left hand, tines down, and the knife in the right.
- Do offer to wash up or help clear the table after a meal at a friend's house.
- Do ring or send a note (even an email) a day or so after a dinner party, unless the friends are so close you feel it unnecessary. Even then, thank them the very next time you speak.
- Do offer to take meat and/or a salad to a barbecue. At the traditional Aussie barbie for a big group, each family is expected to bring part or all of their own tucker.
- Don't smoke in eateries – it's banned – and never smoke in someone's house before asking.
- Don't talk with your mouth full – it's considered uncouth.
- Don't ever accept a shout unless you intend to return the shout soon afterwards.
- Don't freak out when the waiter in a restaurant attempts to 'lap' your serviette (napkin) by laying it over your crotch. It's considered to be the height of service. If you don't want them to do this, place your serviette on your lap before they get a chance.
- Don't expect a date to pay for you. It's quite common for everyone to pay their own way.
- Don't expect servile or obsequious service. Professional waiters are intelligent, caring equals whose disdain can perfectly match any diner's attempt at contempt.
- Don't ever tip bad service.

locally produced and cheap. Away from the main towns, the range and freshness of food drops and prices increase.

Milk bars sell an assortment of pies, pasties, sandwiches and milkshakes, and there are usually a few fast-food joints. All towns of any size have at least one pizza place and an Asian takeaway, while Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine have bakeries and delicatessens selling gourmet fare.

## VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

Many cafés and restaurants in Darwin and Alice Springs have vegetarian dishes on the menu, while enlightened pubs and roadhouses often feature something meatless. Elsewhere you may have to resort to cheese and tomato toasties, the fairly ordinary salad bars at pub bistros, or cook for yourself. Take care with risotto and soups, as meat stock is often used.

Vegans will find the going much tougher, but there are usually dishes that are vegan-adaptable at restaurants.

## EATING WITH KIDS

Dining with children is relatively easy. Apart from the most flash places, children are generally welcomed, particularly at Chinese, Greek or Italian restaurants. Kids are usually more than welcome at cafés, while bistros

**EAT YOUR WORDS** *Matthew Evans*

**Barbie** A barbecue, where (traditionally) smoke and overcooked meat are matched with lashings of coleslaw, potato salad and beer.

**Chiko Roll** A fascinating large, spring roll–like pastry for sale in takeaway shops. Best used as an item of self-defence rather than eaten.

**Esky** An insulated ice chest to hold your tinnies, before you hold them in your tinny holder. May be carried onto your tinny, too.

**Pav** Pavlova, a meringue dessert topped with cream, passionfruit and kiwifruit or other fresh fruit.

**Rat coffins** Meat pies (aka maggot bags); the traditional ones are made with minced beef and eaten with tomato sauce.

**Sanger/sando** A sandwich.

**Snags** Sausages (aka surprise bags).

**Snot block** A vanilla slice – vanilla custard topped and tailed with pastry.

**Tim Tam** A commercial chocolate biscuit that lies close to the heart of most Australians. Best consumed as a Tim Tam Shooter, where the two diagonally opposite corners of the rectangular biscuit are nibbled off, and a hot drink (tea is the true aficionado's favourite) is sucked through the fast-melting biscuit like a straw. Ugly but good.

**Tinny** Usually refers to a can of beer, but could also be the small boat you go fishing for mud crabs in (and you'd take a few tinnies in your tinny, in that case).

**Tinny holder** Insulating material that you use to keep the tinny ice cold, and nothing to do with a boat.

and clubs often see families dining early. Many fine-dining restaurants don't welcome small children (assuming they're all ill-behaved).

Most places that do welcome children don't have separate kids' menus, and those that do usually offer everything straight from the deep fryer – crumbed chicken and chips, that kind of thing. It's better to find something on the menu (say a pasta or salad) and have the kitchen adapt it slightly to your children's needs.

# Darwin



The capital of the Northern Territory and the hub of northern Australia, Darwin has a distinctive Top End vibe thanks to its young, eclectic and cosmopolitan population (which is nearing 110,000), its somewhat turbulent history and its geographical setting. With its proximity to Asia, Darwin has long held aspirations of becoming a consequential city of international trade, and with the recent rail link to southern capitals this goal may well be realised.

While the future looks bright, there are lessons and legacies from the past. Darwin has endured total makeovers several times since its settlement in 1861 thanks to more than a few destructive cyclones and a barrage of Japanese bombs during WWII. Rebuilt and revitalised over subsequent decades, Darwin has developed into a vibrant multicultural centre that remains intimate because of its small size, as well as retaining a frontier atmosphere because of its indisputable remoteness from the majority of Australia's population.

Darwin's pre-eminent asset is its proximity to iconic Australia – a less-trampled land of endless horizons, fascinating Indigenous culture, postcard landforms and amazing wildlife. Not surprisingly, Darwin is a major stop for travellers, with a constant flow of them coming and going from Asia, or making their way around Australia. So hang around, take in the vibe and explore the backyard – the famous national parks of Kakadu and Litchfield with their rugged landscapes, idyllic waterfalls and unique wildlife – and discover the people, culture and art of the nearby Tiwi Islands and Arnhem Land.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Mingling and munching among the exotic stalls at the atmospheric **Mindil Beach Sunset Market** (p80)
- Handfeeding the ravenous schools of wild fish at **Aquascene** (p68)
- Romancing under the rigging on a sunset **harbour cruise** (p74)
- Wining, dining and winding down on the waterfront at **Cullen Bay** (p79)
- Joining a party at the pulsating old 'Vic' – the **Victoria Hotel** (p83)
- Reclining under the stars with the film star of your choice at the **Deckchair cinema** (p84)
- Hearing Cyclone Tracy and exploring Aboriginal art at the **Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory** (p65)



■ TELEPHONE CODE ☎ 08

■ Tourism Top End: [www.tourismtopend.com.au](http://www.tourismtopend.com.au)

■ Darwin City Council: [www.darcity.nt.gov.au](http://www.darcity.nt.gov.au)

## ORIENTATION

Darwin's compact CBD sits at the end of a peninsula poking into the turquoise waters of Port Darwin. The main road connecting Darwin to the rest of the world, the Stuart Hwy, swings west through Berrimah, passing Darwin airport, before heading south down the peninsula to become Daly St. From Daly St, the wide Esplanade runs southeast between the city and the leafy foreshore parkland, before swinging northeast through the picturesque government precinct overlooking Darwin Harbour. There are big plans for development of the wharf precinct, which will see the city's focus shift towards the harbour in years to come. For now it's a bit of a backwater with a few attractions at Stokes Hill, and restaurants on Stokes Hill Wharf.

The main shopping, accommodation and dining area is along the parallel Mitchell, Smith and Cavenagh Sts, including the pedestrianised Smith St Mall, and the intersecting Knuckey St.

Long-distance buses pull in to the Transit Centre off Mitchell St in the city centre – and accommodation options start less than a minute's walk away. Most of what you'll

want in central Darwin is within two or three blocks of the Transit Centre or Smith St Mall.

The suburbs spread 15km away to the north and east, starting with Larrakeyah and the Cullen Bay Marina immediately north-west of the centre. From the northern end of Smith St (and the Cullen Bay turn-off), Gilruth Ave continues north through the Botanic Gardens and past Mindil Beach, the setting for the famous sunset market. Further north are the popular inner suburbs of Parap and Fannie Bay, East Point Reserve with its military heritage and the northern suburbs.

Darwin's airport is 12km northeast of the centre, while the train station is about 15km to the east, near Berrimah; see p86 for transport details.

### Maps

*Destination Darwin & the Top End* is a free guide with fold-out city maps at the back. It's available at the information centre and the kiosk in the mall and at various tourist sights around town.

Most bookshops and many tour desks sell maps of Darwin, Kakadu and the Top End.

### DARWIN IN ...

#### Two Days

Check out the art and culture at the fascinating **Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory** (p65) before heading down to Doctors Gully to handfeed Darwin's deepest denizens at **Aquascene** (p68). As the tropical sun sets, join the throng at **Mindil Beach sunset market** (p80) or hop on an old lugger for a romantic **harbour cruise** (p74). On day two, take advantage of the cool morning air to stroll the excellent **George Brown Botanic Gardens** (p68). Then head out to **Crocodylus Park** (p69) to cuddle a croc, before winding down at one of the waterfront café-bars at **Cullen Bay** (p79).

#### Four Days

Follow the two-day itinerary, then head to the **Territory Wildlife Park** (p96) for a full day of fraternising with fauna. Get back to Darwin to catch a flick at the **Deckchair Cinema** (p84). On the fourth day check out the **Indo-Pacific Marine Exhibition** (p69) and **Australian Pearling Exhibition** (p69), before grabbing a bite at **Stokes Hill Wharf** (p68). Then catch an evening ferry to **Mandorah** (p89) for a show and seafood dinner.

#### One Week

Follow the four-day itinerary then take a tour or hire a car to experience the wonders of **Kakadu National Park** (p108). On the way to Jabiru feed a jumping croc at **Adelaide River Crossing** (p93), watch the sunset at **Ubirr** (p120), and take a cultural cruise on the **East Alligator River** (p117). Don't miss the wildlife cruise on **Yellow Water** (p116) before returning to Darwin. Also consider a tour of **Bathurst Island** (p92) to experience Tiwi culture and have the opportunity to purchase art and chat with the artists.

The **NT General Store** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 8242; 42 Cavenagh St) has a particularly good range, including topographic maps for bushwalking.

For good maps of the entire Territory try **Maps NT** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8999 7032; www.ipe.nt.gov.au; Land Information Centre; 1st fl Nichols Pl, cnr Cavenagh & Bennett Sts; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri).

### INFORMATION Bookshops

**Angus & Robertson** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 3489; 18 The Galleria, Smith St Mall) Stocks a broad range of fiction, non-fiction, Australiana and travel books.

**Bookworld** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 5277; Paspalis Centrepoint, 48-50 Smith St Mall) Similar range to Angus & Robertson.

**NT General Store** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 8242; 42 Cavenagh St) Stocks a good range of travel guides as well as maps.

**Read Back Book Exchange** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 0099; 32 Smith St Mall) Secondhand books, CDs and videos.

### Emergency

**Ambulance** (☎ 000)

**Fire** (☎ 000)

**Lifeline** (☎ 13 11 14)

**Poisons Information Centre** (☎ 13 11 26; ☎ 24hr)

Advice on poisons, bites and marine stingers.

**Police** (☎ 000 or 13 14 44)

**Sexual Assault Referral Centre** (☎ 8922 7156)

### Internet Access

Hotels and hostels generally have their own terminals and there are numerous Internet cafés in the CBD. Rates are usually between \$3 and \$5 per hour.

Some options:

**Backpackers World Travel** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 5100; www.backpackersworld.com; Shop 9, 21 Knuckey St)

**Global Gossip** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8942 3044; 44 Mitchell St)

**Internet Outpost** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 0720; Shop 5, 69 Mitchell St)

**NT Tours & Travel Internet Cafe** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8942 3044; Shop 6, Harry Chan Arcade, 60 Smith St)

**Northern Territory Library** (Map pp66-7; Parliament House, Mitchell St; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 1-5pm Sat & Sun) You'll need to book when it is busy, but it doesn't get cheaper than this.

**Roma Bar** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8942 3044; 44 Mitchell St) Popular café with wireless network (see also Eating p82).

**Saus IT** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 0622; Shop 10, Paspalis Centrepoint, Smith St Mall; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-3pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) Friendly and helpful,

it offers CD burning and you can bring your own laptop. There's a 'happy hour' (4pm to 6pm) on weekdays.

### Medical Services

**Chemmart** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 4442; Mitchell Centre, Mitchell St; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun)

**Guardian Pharmacy** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 9202; Smith St Mall; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm Sun)

**Travellers Medical & Vaccination Centre** (Map p64; ☎ 8981 7492; 1st fl, 43 Cavenagh St; appointments ☎ 8.30am-noon & 1.30-3.30pm Mon-Fri)

**Night & Day Medical & Dental Surgery** (Map pp66-7; medical ☎ 8927 1899, dental ☎ 8927 9418; Shop 31, Casuarina Shopping Centre; ☎ 8am-late Mon-Sat, 9am-late Sun)

**Royal Darwin Hospital** (Map p64; ☎ 8922 8888; Rocklands Dr, Tiwi)

### Money

The four major banks have branches with ATMs all over the city centre.

**ANZ** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8982 3510; 69 Smith St)

**Commonwealth Bank** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8982 8707; 66 Smith St) There's a handy ATM outside the Youth Hostel on Mitchell St.

**National Bank** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 13 22 65; 82 Mitchell St)

**Westpac** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 13 20 32; 24 Smith St) There's an ATM near Chili's Backpackers.

You'll find a **bureau de change** (Map pp66-7; 69 Mitchell St; ☎ 8am-9pm) at the Transit Centre, plus another at the airport. Other money-changers:

**American Express** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 13 13 98; inside Westpac Bank, 24 Smith St)

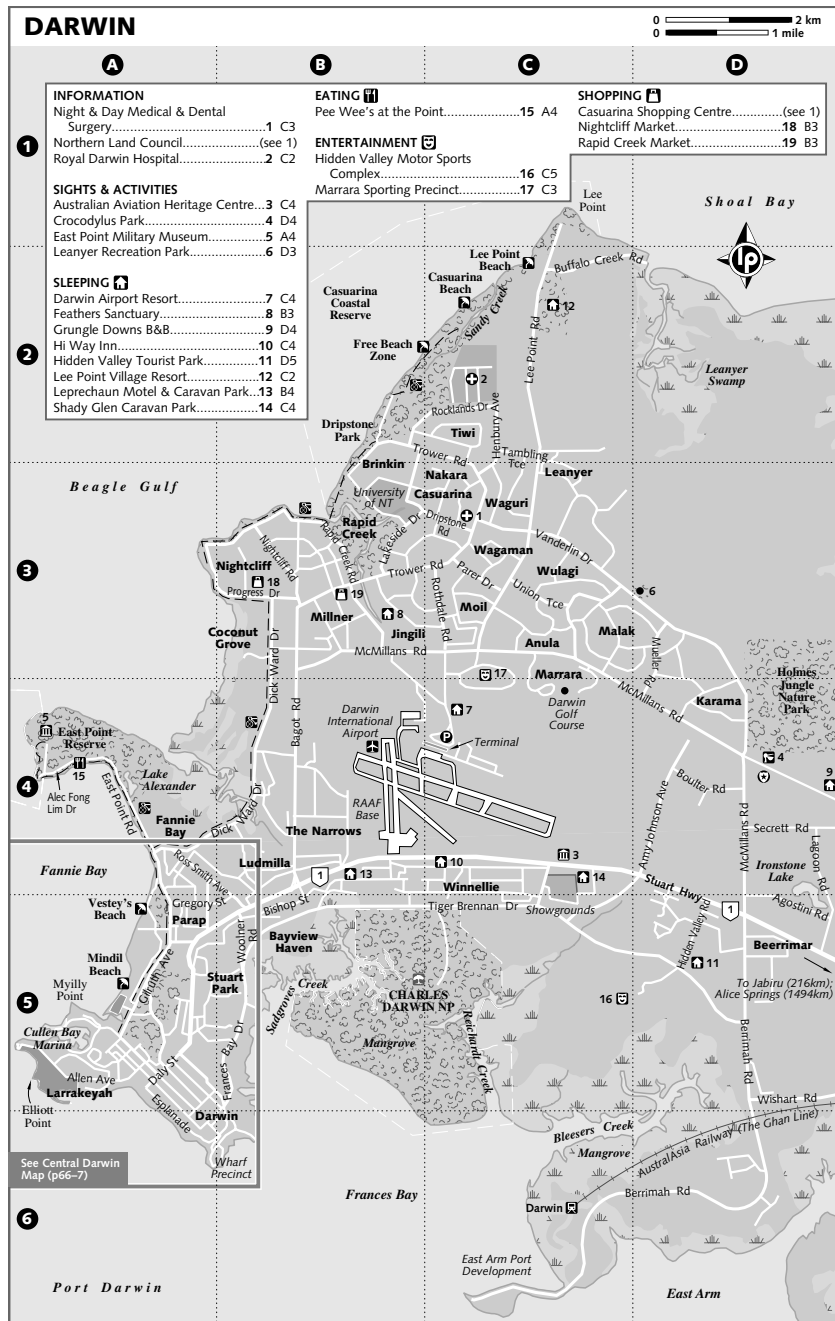
**Travellex** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 6182; Shop 1a, Star Village, 32 Smith St Mall)

### Permits

If you are going fossicking or travelling through Aboriginal land you'll need a permit. If you are going on an organised tour, the tour company will organise your permits. **Department of Business, Industry & Resource Development** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8999 5511; www.dbird.nt.gov.au; Paspalis Centrepoint, Smith St Mall) For fossicking permits.

**Northern Land Council** (Map p64; ☎ 8920 5100; www.nic.org.au; 9 Rowling St, Casuarina) Issues permits for Arnhem Land.

**Tiwi Land Council** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 4898; www.tiwilandcouncil.net.au; Armidale St, Stuart Park) Issues permits for the Tiwi Islands.



## Post

**Main post office** (Map pp66-7; cnr Cavenagh & Edmunds Sts; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat) You can send packages by sea or air, and there's an efficient poste restante. Before queuing, check the printed poste restante list in the folder on one of the benches.

## Tourist Information

Noticeboards and tour desks in most of the hotels and hostels run the gamut of advertisements for tours, buying and selling vehicles, rides and travel companions.

### Darwin Regional Tourism Association

**Information Centre** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8936 2499; www.tourismtopend.com.au; cnr Knuckey & Mitchell Sts; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) Stocks hundreds of brochures and can book tours or accommodation for businesses within its association. Free publications include *Destination Darwin & the Top End*, published twice yearly, and *The Top End Holiday Guide*, an annual guide to regional attractions. A full range of fact sheets on Top End national parks is also available.

**Tourist information desk** (Map p64; ☎ 8936 2477; Darwin airport) Free tour and accommodation bookings. It opens to meet all international and major domestic incoming flights.

**Tourist information kiosk** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8942 1856; Smith St Mall) A branch of the regional information centre that is only occasionally open.

## Travel Agencies

To book or confirm flights, bus and train travel, there's no shortage of agents in Darwin. The following are centrally located:

**Backpackers World Travel** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 5100; www.backpackersworld.com; Shop 9, 21 Knuckey St)

**Flight Centre** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 8002; www.flightcentre.com.au; 24 Cavenagh St)

## SIGHTS

### Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory

Don't miss a visit to this excellent **museum and art gallery** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8999 8211; www.nt.gov.au/cdca/dam; Conacher St, Fannie Bay; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun, closed holidays), about 4km from the city centre. It has an eclectic collection, but it's well presented and not too big. A highlight is the Aboriginal art collection, which provides an excellent introduction to many different styles, although its focus is on the art of the Top End. The collection is particularly strong in carvings and *pukumani* burial poles from the Tiwi Islands, and bark paintings from Arnhem Land.

Don't miss the Cyclone Tracy display that graphically illustrates life before and after the disaster. You can stand in a little room and listen to the whirring sound of Tracy at full throttle – a sound you won't forget in a hurry. The cavernous Maritime Gallery houses an assortment of weird and wonderful craft from the nearby islands and Indonesia, as well as a pearling lugger and a Vietnamese refugee boat.

Pride of place among the stuffed animals undoubtedly goes to 'Sweetheart', a 5m, 780kg saltwater crocodile, which became a Top End personality after attacking several fishing dinghies on the Finnis River south of Darwin. The locally focused natural history section is well set out into different habitats.

The museum has a good bookshop and the Cornucopia Cafe is a great lunch spot. Bus 4 and 6 travel close by, or get here on the Tour Tub (see p74) or along the bicycle path from the city centre.

## CYCLONE TRACY

The statistics of this natural disaster are frightening. Cyclone Tracy built up over Christmas Eve 1974 and by midnight the winds began to reach their full fury. At 3.05am the airport's anemometer failed, just after it recorded a wind speed of 217km/h. It's thought the peak wind speeds were as high as 280km/h. In all, 66 people died. Of Darwin's 11,200 houses, 50% to 60% were destroyed either totally or beyond repair, and only 400 survived relatively intact.

Much criticism was levelled at the design and construction of Darwin's houses, but plenty of places at least a century old, and built as solidly as you could ask for, also toppled before the awesome winds. The new and rebuilt houses have been cyclone-proofed with steel reinforcements and roofs that are firmly pinned down.

Most people say that next time a cyclone is forecast, they'll jump straight into their cars and head down the Track – and come back afterwards to find out if their houses really were cyclone-proof!



**INFORMATION**

**1** American Express..... (see 20)  
 Angus & Robertson.....1 B8  
 ANZ Bank.....2 A7  
 Backpackers World Travel.....(see 49)  
 Bookworld.....3 B7  
 Bureau de Change.....34 E5  
 Chemmart.....(see 7)  
 Commonwealth Bank.....4 A7  
 Darwin Regional Tourism Centre.....5 B8  
 Dept of Business, Industry & Resource Development.....(see 3)  
 Flight Centre.....6 B8  
 Global On Phone.....8 B  
 Indonesian Consulate.....9 F7  
 Internet Outpost.....(see 115)  
 Main Post Office.....10 B7  
 Maps NT.....11 F7  
 National Bank.....12 D6  
 Northern Territory Library.....(see 34)  
 NT General Store.....13 B7  
 NT Tours & Travel Internet Cafe.....14 B7  
 Police Station.....15 A8  
 Read Back Book Exchange.....16 B8  
 Saus IT.....(see 3)  
 Tourist Information Kiosk.....17 E3  
 Travellers Medical & Vaccination Centre.....18 B8  
 Westpac Bank.....19 A7

**2** Aitah Holiday Apartments.....39 E5  
 Altai Motel.....40 D6  
 Banyan Lodge.....41 B6  
 Bayville Lodge.....42 D2  
 Botanic Garden Apartments.....43 D4  
 Capricornia Motel.....44 E2  
 Cavenagh.....45 E7  
 Cherry Blossom Hotel.....46 D7  
 Chill's.....47 A8  
 Crown Plaza Darwin.....48 B8  
 Darwin Central Hotel.....49 A7  
 Darwin International YHA.....50 A7  
 Frogshollow Backpackers.....51 E6  
 Frontier Hotel.....52 D5  
 Gecko Lodge.....53 C5  
 Holiday Inn Darwin.....54 D6  
 Mauna View.....55 C5  
 Melaleuca on Mitchell.....(see 67)  
 Mirambeena Resort.....56 E6  
 Novotel Arnhem.....57 E7  
 Palms City Resort.....58 B8  
 Palms Motel.....59 E5  
 Parap Village Apartments.....60 E2  
 Park Lodge.....61 E3  
 Peninsula Apartment Hotel.....62 D6  
 Pondaana Inn.....63 D6  
 Saville Park Suites.....64 A7  
 Steeles at Larrakoyah.....65 D6  
 Top End Hotel.....66 D6  
 Value Inn.....67 A7

**3** Darwin Sailing Club.....25 B2  
 Darwin Soccer Centre.....26 D2  
 Eagle Bay Club Museum.....28 D1  
 George Brown Botanic Gardens.....29 D4

**4** Aquascene.....21 D6  
 Australian Pearling Exhibition.....22 F7  
 Chinese Temple.....(see 23)  
 Chung Wah Society Museum.....23 F7  
 Coral Divers.....24 E4  
 Darwin Sailing Club.....25 B2  
 Darwin Soccer Centre.....26 D2  
 Eagle Bay Club Museum.....28 D1  
 George Brown Botanic Gardens.....29 D4

**5** Aquascene.....21 D6  
 Australian Pearling Exhibition.....22 F7  
 Chinese Temple.....(see 23)  
 Chung Wah Society Museum.....23 F7  
 Coral Divers.....24 E4  
 Darwin Sailing Club.....25 B2  
 Darwin Soccer Centre.....26 D2  
 Eagle Bay Club Museum.....28 D1  
 George Brown Botanic Gardens.....29 D4

**6** Aquascene.....21 D6  
 Australian Pearling Exhibition.....22 F7  
 Chinese Temple.....(see 23)  
 Chung Wah Society Museum.....23 F7  
 Coral Divers.....24 E4  
 Darwin Sailing Club.....25 B2  
 Darwin Soccer Centre.....26 D2  
 Eagle Bay Club Museum.....28 D1  
 George Brown Botanic Gardens.....29 D4

**7** Aquascene.....21 D6  
 Australian Pearling Exhibition.....22 F7  
 Chinese Temple.....(see 23)  
 Chung Wah Society Museum.....23 F7  
 Coral Divers.....24 E4  
 Darwin Sailing Club.....25 B2  
 Darwin Soccer Centre.....26 D2  
 Eagle Bay Club Museum.....28 D1  
 George Brown Botanic Gardens.....29 D4

**8** Aquascene.....21 D6  
 Australian Pearling Exhibition.....22 F7  
 Chinese Temple.....(see 23)  
 Chung Wah Society Museum.....23 F7  
 Coral Divers.....24 E4  
 Darwin Sailing Club.....25 B2  
 Darwin Soccer Centre.....26 D2  
 Eagle Bay Club Museum.....28 D1  
 George Brown Botanic Gardens.....29 D4

**ENTERTAINMENT**

Brown's Mart.....30 E7  
 Darwin City Cinemas.....31 A7  
 Darwin Entertainment Centre.....32 D6  
 Deckchair Cinema.....33 E8  
 Discovery & Lost Art.....34 E7  
 Nivvana.....35 D6  
 Retro.....36 C4  
 SkyCity Darwin.....37 A7  
 Throb.....38 C4

**SHOPPING**

Aboriginal Fine Arts.....(see 7)  
 di Croco.....(see 102)  
 Fishing & Outdoor World.....99 E4  
 Framed.....100 B7  
 Maningrida Arts & Culture.....(see 48)  
 Parap Village Market.....101 E2  
 Paspaley Pearls.....102 B8  
 Rainforest Aboriginal Fine Arts Gallery.....103 B7  
 Territory Colours.....104 B7

**TRANSPORT**

Avis.....105 D6  
 Britz Australia.....106 E4  
 Budget.....107 D6  
 City Bus Interchange.....108 E7  
 Darwinbus.....(see 108)  
 Europcar.....109 E6  
 Hertz.....110 D6  
 Nifty Rent-A-Car.....111 D6  
 Sea Cat (Boats for Mandorah & Tiwi Islands).....112 B5  
 Thrifty.....113 E4  
 Tour Tab Bus Stop.....114 B7  
 Transit Centre.....115 A7  
 Travellers Car Market.....116 A7

**DRINKING**

Parap Fine Foods.....(see 101)  
 Relish.....80 B7  
 Rendezvous Cafe.....81 B6  
 Rocky's Drift.....82 A8  
 Skatstone's.....(see 49)  
 Skavoske.....(see 69)  
 Shenanigans.....83 A7  
 Simply's.....(see 101)  
 Souse.....84 E7  
 Tim's Surf 'n' Turf.....85 A7  
 Vietnam Saigon Star.....85 A7  
 Waterhole Restaurant.....(see 49)  
 Woolworths.....86 B7  
 Woolworths.....87 A7  
 Yots Cafe.....(see 69)

**DRINKING**

Parap Fine Foods.....(see 101)  
 Relish.....80 B7  
 Rendezvous Cafe.....81 B6  
 Rocky's Drift.....82 A8  
 Skatstone's.....(see 49)  
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 Tim's Surf 'n' Turf.....85 A7  
 Vietnam Saigon Star.....85 A7  
 Waterhole Restaurant.....(see 49)  
 Woolworths.....86 B7  
 Woolworths.....87 A7  
 Yots Cafe.....(see 69)

CENTRAL DARWIN

**ENTERTAINMENT**

Brown's Mart.....30 E7  
 Darwin City Cinemas.....31 A7  
 Darwin Entertainment Centre.....32 D6  
 Deckchair Cinema.....33 E8  
 Discovery & Lost Art.....34 E7  
 Nivvana.....35 D6  
 Retro.....36 C4  
 SkyCity Darwin.....37 A7  
 Throb.....38 C4

**SHOPPING**

Aboriginal Fine Arts.....(see 7)  
 di Croco.....(see 102)  
 Fishing & Outdoor World.....99 E4  
 Framed.....100 B7  
 Maningrida Arts & Culture.....(see 48)  
 Parap Village Market.....101 E2  
 Paspaley Pearls.....102 B8  
 Rainforest Aboriginal Fine Arts Gallery.....103 B7  
 Territory Colours.....104 B7

**TRANSPORT**

Avis.....105 D6  
 Britz Australia.....106 E4  
 Budget.....107 D6  
 City Bus Interchange.....108 E7  
 Darwinbus.....(see 108)  
 Europcar.....109 E6  
 Hertz.....110 D6  
 Nifty Rent-A-Car.....111 D6  
 Sea Cat (Boats for Mandorah & Tiwi Islands).....112 B5  
 Thrifty.....113 E4  
 Tour Tab Bus Stop.....114 B7  
 Transit Centre.....115 A7  
 Travellers Car Market.....116 A7

## Aquascene

Hundreds of fish head to shore at high tide each day to feast on the bread at **Aquascene** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 7837; www.aquascene.com.au; 28 Dorsers Gully Rd; adult/child/family \$7/4/20), near the corner of Daly St and the Esplanade. It's quite a 'loaves and fishes' experience to be surrounded by schools of green milkfish (some 1.5m in length) thrashing around and snapping at the soggy morsels. More sedate mullet, batfish, rays and catfish and quite a few other species join in. Children love it. Phone ahead or check in *This Week in Darwin* or *Destination Darwin & the Top End* for feeding times.

Aquascene is an easy walk from the north end of the Esplanade.

## George Brown Botanic Gardens

The 42-hectare **Botanic Gardens** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 1958; admission free) showcase plants from the Top End and around the world. Of particular interest are the monsoon vine forest, the mangroves and coastal plants habitat, and a magnificent collection of native and exotic palms. The pleasant gardens are also a splendid place for a walk, particularly in the cool of the morning.

The site was first used by Europeans in the 1870s to establish a fruit and vegetable plantation. Cyclone Tracy destroyed nearly 80% of the gardens in 1974, and it was under the curatorship of George Brown that much of today's magnificent gardens were established.

Many of the plants here were traditionally used by the local Aboriginal people, and self-guiding Aboriginal Plant Use trails have been set up – pick up a brochure at the gardens' **Information Centre** (☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-4pm Sat & Sun) near the Geranium St entry. Free **guided walks and talks** (☎ 9.30am Thu, May-Jun) with Gardens staff cover a number of topics. Check at the information centre for other times.

Over the road, between Gilruth Ave and Fannie Bay, there's a coastal habitat section that features sand dunes, a small wetland and a mangrove boardwalk that leads along the bay to the museum. The Coastal Plant Use walk takes about 20 minutes. All the way to the museum takes about 40 minutes. There are sections of rock-hopping, and parts of the trail (at the base of the Fanny Bay cliffs) are impassable at high tide.

It's an easy 2km bicycle ride out to the gardens from the centre of town along Gilruth Ave and Gardens Rd (gates open 7am to 7pm), or there's another entrance off Geranium St (open 24 hours), which runs off the Stuart Hwy in Stuart Park.

## Parliament House & Supreme Court

Dominating the edge of town just south of Smith St Mall is **Parliament House** (Map pp66-7; tour bookings ☎ 8946 1525; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, tours 9am & 11am Sat), dubbed 'the wedding cake', and the adjoining Supreme Court buildings.

The grand parliament building was opened in 1994 and drew much criticism for 'lacking outback ambience'. But, perhaps more appropriately, it owes something to Southeast Asian architecture and evokes the grandeur of colonial buildings worldwide. It's worth going through the security check to wander through the cavernous interior to the secluded café, Speakers Corner, which has impressive views.

The building also houses the **Northern Territory Library** (☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 1-5pm Sat & Sun).

The nearby **Supreme Court** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) is chiefly of interest for the fine artwork on display inside. A mosaic by Aboriginal artist Nora Napaltjari Nelson lines the floor. Called *Milky Way Dreaming*, some 700,000 pieces of Venetian glass were used in its construction. Also on display is *Kooralia and the Seven Sisters*, a rug woven by Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri that was the centre of a copyright dispute and marked a landmark decision in favour of an Aboriginal artist.

## Wharf Precinct

The are big plans for the area around Darwin Harbour, including a new cruise-ship terminal, hotels, restaurants and a wave pool. Part of this ambitious development may be up and running during the life of this edition. For now, the old **Stokes Hill Wharf**, below the cliffs at the southern end of the city centre, is worth exploring. It's a short stroll down from the Survivors' Lookout at the end of Smith St, past the WWII Oil-Storage Tunnels and the Indo-Pacific Marine Exhibition.

At the end of the jetty an old warehouse houses a food centre that's ideal for an alfresco lunch, cool afternoon beer or inexpensive fish/schnitzel and chips, or an Asian dinner.

## WWII OIL-STORAGE TUNNELS

You can escape from the heat of the day and relive your Hitchcockian fantasies by walking through the **oil-storage tunnels** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8985 6333; adult/child \$4.50/2.50; ☎ 9am-5pm May-Sep, 10am-2pm Tue-Fri Oct-Nov, Jan & Mar-Apr, closed Dec & Feb). After Japanese air raids destroyed above-ground oil tanks near Stokes Hill Wharf, five oil-storage tunnels were dug by hand into the rock cliff. It was an ambitious project that ultimately failed because of the high water table and seepage, and the tunnels were never used.

Tunnels 5 (171m long) and 6 (78m) are open to the public, and on the walls there's a series of interesting wartime photos.

It's an easy walk from the city centre and the Tour Tub (see p74) stops here.

## INDO-PACIFIC MARINE EXHIBITION

This excellent **marine aquarium** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 1294; adult/child/family \$16/6/38; ☎ 10am-5pm) gives you a close encounter with the denizens at the bottom of Darwin Harbour. Each small tank is a complete ecosystem, with only the occasional extra fish introduced as food for some of the predators, such as stonefish or the bizarre angler fish. Box jellyfish are occasionally on display, as well as sea horses, clownfish and butterfly fish. The living coral reef display is especially impressive.

Readers recommend the **Coral Reef by Night** (\$75 per person) show and seafood buffet, held at 7pm on Wednesday, Friday and Sunday.

The Tour Tub (p74) stops here.

## AUSTRALIAN PEARLING EXHIBITION

Housed in the same building as the aquarium, the **Australian Pearling Exhibition** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 1294; adult/child/family \$6.60/3.30/17; ☎ 10am-5pm) has excellent displays and informative videos on the harvesting, farming and culture of pearl oysters in the Top End. You can also experience life underwater inside a simulated diving helmet.

## Australian Aviation Heritage Centre

Darwin's **aviation museum** (Map p64; ☎ 8947 2145; www.darwinsairwar.com.au; 557 Stuart Hwy, Winnellie; adult/child/family \$12/7/30; ☎ 9am-5pm), about 10km from the centre, is a huge hangar that's crammed with aircraft and aircraft bits. The centrepiece is a mammoth B52 bomber, one of only a few of its kind displayed outside the USA, which has somehow been squeezed

inside. It dwarfs the other aircraft, which include a Japanese Zero fighter shot down in 1942 and the remains of a RAAF Mirage jet that crashed in a nearby swamp. Short videos on the bombing of Darwin and the mighty B52 run daily and are available for purchase. Free guided tours commence at 10am and 2pm. It's worth a look for the B52 alone, but there are many interesting displays.

Bus 5 and 8 run along the Stuart Hwy and it's on the route of the Tour Tub (p74).

## Crocodylus Park

Out on the eastern edge of town, this **wildlife park** (Map p64; ☎ 8947 2510; McMillans Rd, Berrimah; adult/child/family \$25/12.50/65; ☎ 9am-5pm, tours 10am, noon & 2pm) features hundreds of crocs and a mini zoo comprising lions and other big cats, spider monkeys, marmosets, cassowaries and large birds. Allow about two hours to look around the whole complex, and you should time your visit to include a tour, which includes a feeding demonstration.

There's an excellent display on the life cycle and behaviour of crocs, and graphic information on croc attacks. The entry price includes the chance to be photographed handling a baby croc.

The park is about 15km from the city centre. Take bus 5 from Darwin.

## Fannie Bay Gaol Museum

The original buildings of this interesting **museum** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8999 8201; cnr East Point Rd & Ross Smith Ave; admission free; ☎ 10am-4.30pm) were erected in 1883, and the grounds housed Darwin's main jail for nearly 100 years. Among its locally famous inmates was Harold Nelson, who lobbied for political representation and eventually became the Territory's first member of parliament.

You can wander around the grounds and enter the old cells and, if you're looking for something chilling, you can see a gallows constructed for two hangings in 1952. The sorry tale behind the hangings is graphically illustrated inside. There's also a minimum security section, used at various times for juvenile delinquents, lepers and Vietnamese refugees. The jail closed in 1979, when a new maximum security lock-up opened at Berrimah.

Bus 4 and 6 from the city centre pass nearby the museum; it's also on the Tour Tub (p74) route.

## East Point Reserve

North of Fannie Bay (Map p64), this spit of land is particularly good in the late afternoon when wallabies emerge to feed and you can watch the sun set over the bay. On the northern side there are some wartime gun emplacements and the military museum (below); monsoon vine forest rings the peninsula and the reserve also extends to the surrounding fringing coral reefs and sponge beds. The beach is worth combing for scattered coral fragments and other interesting debris.

**Lake Alexander**, a small, recreational salt-water lake, was made so people could enjoy a swim year-round without having to worry about box jellyfish. There's a good children's playground and picnic areas with BBQs. A 1.5km **mangrove boardwalk** (🚶 8am-6pm) leads off from the car park. Signs explain the uses the Larrakiah people made of mangrove communities.

Vehicles are permitted in the reserve, and there's also a good bicycle track and footpath.

## EAST POINT MILITARY MUSEUM

Devoted to Darwin's WWII experiences, this small, well-presented **museum** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 9702; www.epmm.com.au; adult/child/family \$10/5/2\$; 🕒 9.30am-5pm) is north of Fannie Bay within East Point Reserve. Inside there's a 15-minute video on the bombing of Darwin, and cabinets showing various weapons and wartime photos. One curio is a captured bible in Japanese.

Outside there's an assortment of military hardware – check out the ball turret, about the size of a large beach ball, from an American B24 Liberator. The centrepiece is a concrete emplacement housing a replica 9.2in gun. The original massive gun could lob a shell weighing 172kg over a distance of 27km, although it was not installed and tested until 1945, by which time the war was all but over! Ironically, the gun was sold for scrap to a Japanese salvage company in 1960.

The museum is well worth a visit if you're into militaria. It's on the Tour Tub route (p74) and there's bicycle parking.

## Milly Point Historic Precinct

At the far northern end of Smith St is this small but important precinct (Map pp66-7) of four houses built in the 1930s. The houses

were designed for the tropical climate by the Northern Territory Principal Architect, BCG Burnett, who came to Darwin in 1937 after spending many years working as an architect in China. The small elevated point was a prime residential spot as it had fine views and enjoyed sea breezes, and so it was here that the top civil and military officials were housed.

The houses are now on the Register of the National Estate, and one of them, Burnett House, operates as a **museum** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 2848; admission by donation; 🕒 10am-3pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sun). There's a tantalising high tea (\$7.50) in the gardens on Sunday afternoon from 3.30pm to 6pm.

## Chinese Museum & Temple

The **Chung Wah Society Museum** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 0898; btwn Litchfield & Wood Sts; admission by donation; 🕒 10am-2pm Wed-Mon, Apr-Oct) is a fascinating exploration of Chinese settlement in the Top End. There's also a scale model of prewar Darwin. Follow your senses into the ornate **Chinese Temple** (🕒 8am-4pm).

## Cultural Parks & Reserves

Three reserves have been set aside in the Darwin vicinity for their natural, cultural and historical value. All have picnic areas, toilets, barbecues and walking trails.

NPWS rangers lead informative walks through the parks – pick up a copy of *Territory's Parks Alive* at the information centre for details.

## CASUARINA COASTAL RESERVE

Sites of Aboriginal and historical significance are preserved in this stretch of fine, sandy beaches (which includes a nude bathing area) between Rapid Creek and Lee Point (Map p64). The rock offshore is a registered sacred site known to the Larrakiah as *Dariba Nunggalinya*. It is said that interference with the rock led to Cyclone Tracy.

## CHARLES DARWIN NATIONAL PARK

Declared in 1998, this little **national park** (Map p64; 🕒 7am-7pm) on the shore of Darwin Harbour preserves extensive stands of mangroves and ammunition storage bunkers that date back to 1944. There's a pleasant grassed area with fine views over the harbour and a couple of short walking and cycling trails.

## HOLMES JUNGLE NATURE PARK

This 250-hectare park (Map p64) in Darwin's eastern suburbs features a small remnant of monsoon rainforest that is sustained by a permanent spring. This patch of forest is typical of the monsoon forest that once covered much of the Darwin area. Banyan trees and various palms, vines and ferns form the monsoon habitat, while the woodland area is dominated by eucalypts and grevilleas.

## ACTIVITIES

### Beaches & Swimming

Darwin has plenty of beaches – popular ones include **Mindil** and **Vestey's** on Fannie Bay, and **Mandorah** (p89), across the bay from the city. A stretch of the 7km **Casuarina Beach** further northeast is an official nude beach. Darwin's swimming beaches tend to be far enough away from mangrove creeks to make the threat of meeting a crocodile very remote. However, the potential is always there for the unlucky or unwary swimmer. Crocodile numbers in the Northern Territory continue to increase and this will inevitably lead to a greater probability of encounters between crocs and swimmers.

It's unwise to venture into the water between October and May because of the deadly box jellyfish. However, it is also worth noting that while June to September is considered to be 'safe', Darwin Hospital has records of stings occurring every month of the year!

There's a safe saltwater lake for swimming at **East Point Reserve** (opposite), and a **water park** (Map p64; Vanderlin Dr, Leanyer; 🕒 10am-7pm) at Leanyer Recreation Park in the northeastern suburbs. The main public **swimming pool** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 2662; Ross Smith Ave, Parap; adult/child \$3/1.40; 🕒 6am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) has a partly shaded 50m pool and a children's play pool.

## Cycling

Darwin has a series of excellent bicycle tracks. The main one runs from the northern end of Cavenagh St to Fannie Bay, Coconut Grove, Nightcliff and Casuarina. At Fannie Bay, a side track heads out to the East Point Reserve. For a map of the bike paths see the website for the **Darwin council** (www.darcity.nt.gov.au/Cycle\_Paths.htm). For related information see the websites of the **Northern Territory Cycling**

**Association** (www.nt.cycling.org.au) and the **Darwin Cycling Club** (www.darwincyclingclub.org).

Most hostels hire out bicycles, and the usual charge is \$15 to \$20 per day for a mountain bike. Other hiring places:

**Darwin Scooter Hire** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 3266; www.scootahire.com.au; Mitchell St) Opposite Shenanigans.

**Kakadu Dreams** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 3266; 50 Mitchell St)

## Diving

The Japanese bombs of WWII and Cyclone Tracy have contributed an array of wrecks to the floor of Darwin Harbour. Over the years, coral has encrusted these artificial reefs and attracted a myriad of colourful marine life. On the downside Darwin experiences massive tides, which churn the sea floor and restrict diving times, so you will need to plan ahead to catch the best conditions (only during neap tides). **Cullen Bay Dive** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 3049; www.divedarwin.com; 66 Marina Blvd, Cullen Bay Marina) conducts PADI-affiliated instruction courses and wreck dives throughout the year. Basic open-water instruction costs \$650, including equipment hire. Experienced divers can take a double boat dives for \$160 including all gear.

**Coral Divers** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 2686; www.coraldivers.com.au; Shop 3, 42 Stuart Hwy, Stuart Park) is another company worth trying with courses starting at \$480 and double boat dives with gear costing \$150.

## Fishing

Fishing is another word for living for many inhabitants and visitors to the Top End, and Darwin is blessed with some great fishing spots. There's no shortage of charter operations taking anglers into the harbour or beyond for some outback barra action or blue-water sportfishing among the islands. Their brochures occupy a dedicated stand at the information centre. You could try **Mangroves & Mudcrabs** (☎ 8945 1432), where a full day of exploring, fishing and crabbing costs \$150 per person (minimum two people) with all gear, lunch and drinks supplied, or those run by the **Tour Tub** (☎ 1800 632 225) from Stokes Hill Wharf, where a half/full day on the harbour costs \$85/150.

Boat and fishing gear hire is also available from several companies, such as **Gecko** (☎ 0439 895 934).

## Golf

**Garden Park Golf Links** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 6365; www.gardensparkgolf.com.au; Gardens Rd; adult/student 9-holes \$13/8, 18-holes \$18/13; 🕒 6.30am-7pm) is a nine-hole golf course centrally located near the Botanic Gardens. There's also an 18-hole mini-golf course (adult/child \$5.50/3.30) for family fun.

## Indoor Rock Climbing

The **Rock Centre** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 0747; Doctor's Gully Rd; bouldering \$11, climbing per adult/child \$25/17; 🕒 noon-3pm Tue-Fri, 9.30am-6pm Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) uses the walls of an old WWII oil-storage tunnel near Aquascene. There is no time limit, and fees include harness and shoe hire.

## Sailing

Only members can visit the **Darwin Sailing Club** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 1700; www.dwnsail.com.au; Atkins Dr, Fannie Bay), but you can get temporary membership (free) on the spot. Although you can't charter boats here, there is a notice board advertising crewing needs and detailing the seasonal race programme.

The **Winter School of Sailing** (☎ 8981 9386, 0417 818 257; members.ais.net.au/sailschool; 3hr cruise \$55, overnight cruise from \$110, courses from \$145) sails the harbour in *Zanzibar*, a 11.6m sloop berthed at Cullen Bay Marina. You can learn and participate or just sit and relax. Longer cruises to Port Essington, Bynoe Harbour and Channel Point can also be arranged.

## WALKING TOUR

Despite its shaky beginnings and the destruction caused by WWII and Cyclone Tracy, Darwin still has several historical buildings. Their background is detailed in the *Darwin Heritage Walk*, a brochure produced by the National Trust and available at the information centre.

This walk begins at one of the city's most famous landmarks, the **Victoria Hotel** (1; p82), near the southeastern end of the Smith St Mall. The stone 'Vic' was originally built in 1890 and was badly damaged by Cyclone Tracy. It has been extensively renovated and remains a great watering hole.

Continuing southeast along the Mall, the building on the southwestern corner of the Mall and Bennett St only dates from 1981, but it incorporates the colonnade of the 1884 stone **Commercial Bank building** (2), which at the time was one of the finest buildings in the city. The new building houses choice outlets for pearl and crocodile products (see p85).

Crossing Bennett St and continuing southeast along Smith St, you'll come to the remains of **old Palmerston town hall** (3; 1883) on the right; it was built during the gold boom and was virtually destroyed by Tracy. Opposite is the former mining exchange, **Brown's Mart** (4; 1885; p84), which was badly damaged in the fierce cyclone of 1897 and again by Tracy. It was restored on both occasions and now houses a theatre.

Head northeast through the gardens of Civic Sq, where you will find the **Tree of**

**Knowledge** (5), one of the largest banyan figs in Darwin and a significant historical meeting place; read its story on a plaque nearby. Back on Smith St, head southeast towards the Esplanade, and the **old police station** and **old courthouse** (6; 1884), which were used by the navy from WWII until 1974. They were badly damaged by Tracy, but have been restored and are now used as government offices. A small plaque in the garden bed on the Smith St side of the building marks the spot where the first Telegraph Station stood.

Across the Esplanade, perched on the edge of the escarpment, is the **Survivors' Lookout** (7), with views out over the harbour. The lookout has a number of interesting photographs depicting the Japanese bombing raids. Steps from here lead down to Kitchener Dr and the **WWII Oil-Storage Tunnels** (8; p69).

Heading southwest along the Esplanade, **Government House** (9), built in stages from 1870, was known as the Residency until 1911 when the Territory came under the control of the Commonwealth Government. Initially it was little more than a large room with hand-cut stone walls and canvas roof. The current building dates from 1877 and, although damaged by virtually every cyclone since, it is in fine condition today. Outside is a memorial plaque commemorating the bombing of Darwin in 1942.

Almost opposite Government House is a **memorial cairn** (10) to the completion of the telegraph cable from Banyuwangi in Indonesia, which was brought up the cliffs to the Telegraph Station. This cable put Australia into instant communication with Britain for the first time.

Set back from the Esplanade is **Parliament House** (11; p68). Continue northwest around the Esplanade to Herbert St and the green expanse of **Bicentennial Park** (12). The **Anzac Memorial** (13) commemorates those who fought in WWI and other campaigns. From here it's a pleasant walk by the water to the western edge of the gardens. There are excellent views out over the bay from the **lookout** (14), which is a good spot to catch a colourful sunset.

At the northwestern end of the park, a path leads down to **Doctor's Gully** (15), which has a few signs describing the area's history, but is really only worth a stop when it's fish-feeding time at **Aquascene** (16; p68). A boardwalk leads from the gully through

a small patch of monsoon forest to emerge at Daly St, from where you can get onto the Esplanade and continue back (southeast) towards the city centre.

At the corner with Knuckey St is **Lyons Cottage** (17; admission free; 🕒 10am-4.30pm), an attractive stone building built in 1925. It served as the executive residence for the British Australian Telegraph Company, the company that laid the submarine cable between Java and Australia. It is now a museum, the walls lined with interesting photographs of early Darwin.

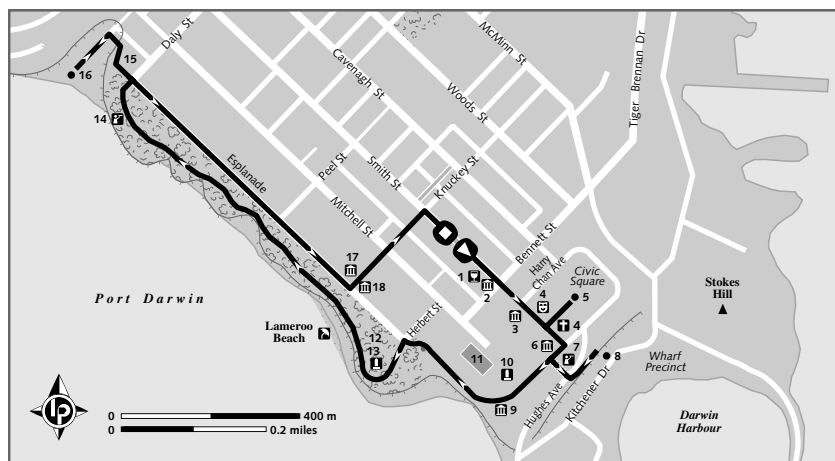
On the opposite corner is the **Old Admiralty House** (18), one of the few 1930s Burnett buildings still standing in Darwin (see p70 for details of the work of BCG Burnett). It was built in 1937 and originally stood on the corner of Peel St. From here you can stroll northeast down Knuckey St and then turn right into the Smith St Mall where a cool drink awaits at the Vic.

## DARWIN FOR CHILDREN

Darwin is great for children. At the top of the list would have to be **Aquascene** (p68) where kids of all ages will be thrilled to handfeed torpedo-like milkfish and schools of their more demure cousins – getting a soaking is part of the fun. More fishy delights await at the **Indo-Pacific Marine Exhibition** (p69) where aspiring deep-sea divers can stick their faces into the viewing bubbles and check out life on the sea floor. There's more fun with an educational spin at the **Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory** (p65), where kids can interact with many displays and get hands-on with bugs and microscopes in the Teach & Explore Room.

The **George Brown Botanic Gardens** (p68) has plenty of shade and space, as well as a Children's Evolutionary Playground where curious minds can grapple with plant evolution. Wildlife lurks in Darwin's suburbs, and if you have ever wanted your kids to grab a crocodile, then head to **Crocodylus Park** (p69), which has cuddle-size crocs as well as their scarier parents.

Not too far out of town are a couple of superb wildlife attractions. Don't miss the birds of prey flight show at the **Territory Wildlife Park** (p96), where the kids can also look a 4m crocodile or a barrel-size barramundi right in the eye. Wide eyes and gasps are sure to accompany the jumping crocs at



## QUIRKY DARWIN

Blame the humidity. Others do. Darwin weather, so it seems, provokes a powerful thirst that only cold beer will quench. We are not talking boutique, organic ales with a hoppy nose and pretentious label, nor precious pilsners packaged in pretty bottles. Just ya beer that comes in red and green cans – the more the merrier – or huge 2L 'Darwin stubbies'. These brutes of bottles are now a tourist trap, but they have a legitimate history: when brewing was ceased in Darwin, vast quantities of packaged beer had to be shipped overland from Melbourne and the 'stubby' was a 'logistics' solution.

Getting back to all those red and green cans. Over 30 years ago, when the territory boasted one of the highest beer consumptions per capita in the world, it was decided to utilise the surplus cans by building a fleet of ships. Brilliant! The annual Beer Can Regatta (opposite) has become a Darwin institution, a day of family fun and a mega media event. Such silliness is, of course, justified in the name of charity.

If you really want to soak up that sun into every pore, and if exposing it all to the odd Irukanji is of no concern, then **Born Free!** (☎ 8927 1773) runs personalised itineraries to Darwin's nude beach and other 'back-to-nature' spots.

**Adelaide River Crossing** (p93), where deadly reptiles do their best Flipper impersonation. There are more huge brutes on display at the **Darwin Crocodile Farm** (p89), as well as the rare opportunity to compare an alligator with a crocodile (remember to take notes, as you'll likely be quizzed by the kids later).

You can have inexhaustible offspring climbing up the wall at the **Rock Centre** (p72), which also organises action-packed programmes during the school holidays. Had enough quality time? For professional short-term childcare, look up 'Baby Sitters' and 'Child Care Centres' in the *Yellow Pages* telephone directory.

## TOURS

There are innumerable tours taking in the sights in and around Darwin offered by a host of companies. The information centre in the Mall is the best place to start looking and asking questions. You can also book tours and accommodation from here. Remember that many tours run less frequently (or not at all) in the Wet season.

## Aboriginal Cultural Tours

**Unique Indigenous Land Tours** (☎ 8928 0022; adult/child \$80/60) runs a half-day tour that visits significant Larrakia sites around Darwin, an art gallery and the George Brown Botanical Gardens. Other day tours with Aboriginal and wildlife themes include Howard Springs, Litchfield and Kakadu National Parks.

For detailed information on the cultural tours to the Tiwi (Bathurst and Melville) Islands see p92. See p89 for information on the Aboriginal corroborees by the Kenbi Dancers at the Mandorah Beach Hotel.

## City Sights

**Darwin Day Tours** (☎ 1300 721 365; www.aussieadventure.com.au) operates an afternoon city tour (adult/child \$55/45), which takes in all the major attractions, including Stokes Hill Wharf, the Museum & Art Gallery and East Point Reserve, and can be linked with a sunset harbour cruise (\$95/70).

The **Tour Tub** (☎ 8985 6322; www.tourtub.com; adult/child \$25/15; ☎ 9am-4pm, closed Dec) is an open-sided minibus that tours around the various Darwin sights throughout the day. In the city centre it leaves from Knuckey St, near the end of the Smith St Mall (opposite Woolworths), on the hour. Sites visited include Aquascene (only at fish-feeding times), Indo-Pacific Marine and Wharf Precinct, MGM Grand Darwin casino, the Museum & Art Gallery, East Point and the Military Museum, Fannie Bay Gaol Museum, Parap Market (Saturday only) and the Botanic Gardens. Users of this hop-on, hop-off service are entitled to discounts at places along the route – see its widely available brochure for details and for exact times. Bookings may be required when business slows outside the peak season.

## Harbour Cruises

There are plenty of boats based at the Cullen Bay marina to take you on a cruise of

the harbour. You'll find their glossy brochures at the information centre.

**Spirit of Darwin** (☎ 8981 3711; www.spiritofdarwin.net; adult/child \$33/18) is an air-conditioned and fully licensed motor-catamaran that does a two-hour sightseeing cruise at 1.40pm and a sunset cruise at 5.30pm daily.

Three-hour sunset cruises on the historical pearling lugger **Anniki** (☎ 8941 4000; www.australianharbourcruises.com.au; adult/child \$50/30) depart at 5pm and include complimentary sparkling wine and nibbles.

If you want to include a full dinner with the sunset cruising experience, try **Darwin Cruises & Charters** (☎ 8942 3131; www.darwinharbourcruises.com.au; adult/child \$80/55), which operates the 30m schooner *Alfred Nobel*. Its 20m schooner *Tumlaren* does a three-hour sunset cruise (adult/child \$50/33) departing at 5pm, and a BBQ lunch cruise (adult/child \$60/37) departing at noon.

Alternatively, you could just take a trip across the harbour from Cullen Bay to Mandorah (p89), where you can relax at the pub or drop a line from the jetty before catching the ferry back at sunset.

## Scenic Flights

**Northern Air Charter** (☎ 8945 5444; www.flynac.com.au) operates scenic flights over the Top End that include Kakadu and Arnhem Land (\$395 per person) or Kakadu and Katherine (\$525).

## Tours Beyond Darwin

For details on organised tours to Litchfield National Park see p101. For organised tours to Kakadu see p117, for the Tiwi Islands see p92 and for Arnhem Land see p128.

A number of operators do trips to the jumping crocodiles at Adelaide River Crossing (p93), the Crocodile Farm (p89) and to the Territory Wildlife Park (p96).

**Darwin Day Tours** (☎ 1300 721 365; www.darwindaytours.com) offers various full- and half-day trips. The morning half-day Territory Wildlife Park tour costs adult/child \$60/50, while the afternoon jumping crocodile tour costs \$80/65. The full-day Wildlife Spectacular tour (adult/child \$140/110) includes the Territory Wildlife Park, Darwin Crocodile Farm, the jumping croc cruise, Window on the Wetlands (p94) and Fogg Dam (p92). There's also a day trip to Katherine Gorge (adult/child \$160/80).

**Australian Pacific Touring** (APT; ☎ 1800 891 121; www.aptouring.com.au) does numerous extra-Darwin excursions, including a day tour to Katherine Gorge and Leliyn (Edith Falls; adult/child \$155/80) that includes a gorge cruise, another to Kakadu (\$160/80) that includes the Yellow Water trip, and another to Litchfield National Park (\$100/85).

**AAT Kings** (☎ 8923 6555; www.aatkings.com) runs similar trips from Darwin including Litchfield (adult/child \$100/85), Katherine Gorge (\$160/80) and Kakadu (\$160/80).

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Darwin has plenty of colour and flair when it comes to local festivals. Most of these take place in the Dry; check with the information centre for exact dates.

## May

**Arafura Games** (2007) Darwin is the host to this biennial sporting event that attracts competitors from Australasia, Asia and the Islands.

**Freds Pass Rural Show** A very popular agricultural show at the Freds Pass Reserve, McMinns Lagoon, south of Palmerston.

## July

**Royal Darwin Show** This agricultural show takes place at the showgrounds in Winnellie on the fourth Friday of the month. Activities include all the usual rides, as well as demonstrations and competitions.

**Darwin Cup Carnival** The Darwin Cup racing carnival takes place in July and August of each year, and features eight days of horse races and associated social events. The highlight is the running of the Darwin Cup.

**Darwin to Bali Yacht Race** Darwin is the starting point for this fiercely contested yacht race, which draws an international field of contestants.

**Darwin Fringe Festival** Showcases eclectic, local performing and visual arts.

## August

**Beer Can Regatta** An utterly insane and typically Territorian festival that features races for boats made out of beer cans. It takes places at Mindil Beach and is a good fun day.

## GAY & LESBIAN DARWIN

The Darwin Pride Festival (www.darwinpride.com) is a fortnight of celebration and partying held in June. Darwin's premier gay venue, Throb nightclub (p84), features heavily in the festivities.

**Darwin Rodeo** Yee ha! The whips crack as international teams compete in numerous events.

**Darwin Festival** This mainly outdoor arts and culture festival reflects the city's large Aboriginal and Asian populations and runs for about two weeks.

## SLEEPING

Darwin has plenty of accommodation to suit every budget. There are several shady caravan parks scattered around the outer suburbs, while hostels with a party attitude cluster along Mitchell St in the city.

Midrange options aren't hard to find in and around the CBD, and serviced apartments for long-term stays can be found in Cullen Bay and to the north in Stuart Park and Parap. There's also a small selection of friendly B&Bs in the suburban fringe.

Most of Darwin's top-end hotels are on the Esplanade, overlooking Bicentennial Park and Port Darwin; others are found a block or two back in the CBD.

## Budget HOSTELS

There's a host of choices in this bracket, most of which are on or near Mitchell St, a stone's throw from the Transit Centre. Most have a courtesy phone at the airport and will pick up from the bus or train stations or the airport if pre-arranged.

Competition is keen and standards are pretty high, so it's always worth asking about discounts for the first night, or for a weekly rate (usually seventh night free). YHA/VIP and other discounts apply. Facilities usually include communal kitchen, pool and laundry facilities, but most places turn on the air-con only at night. Complimentary breakfasts are often available.

**Darwin International YHA** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 3995; darwin@yhant.org.au; 69 Mitchell St; dm \$23-25, d or tw \$55-70; 🕒 24hr reception; 📺 📺 📺) At one end of the Transit Centre, this is a clean, popular place with a large open kitchen and meals area overlooking a large pool. The rooms may be getting a little tired, but the staff are consistently praised for being friendly and helpful. It also has games and TV rooms, lockers and an ATM.

**Melaleuca on Mitchell** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 1300 723 437; www.melaleucaonmitchell.com.au; 52 Mitchell St; dm \$30, s or d \$95; 📺 📺 📺) This modern backpackers has a great rooftop bar and pool area, complete with waterfall spa and

big screen TV. It feels a bit isolated and over-protected from the action down on the street, but that may change when the café and beer garden are constructed next door. The spotless rooms are modern-austere but comfortable and secure.

**Cavenagh** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 1300 851 198, 8941 6383; www.thecavenagh.com; 12 Cavenagh St; dm \$25, s or d \$55-95; 📺 📺 📺) There's a range of rooms here, all converted motel rooms that are clean and comfortable and arranged around a huge central pool. Dorms are either four-bed or 16-bed and the motel rooms have private bathrooms. It's a sociable place with a perpetual pool party atmosphere and an onsite bar/restaurant that gets pretty rowdy and has good-value meals.

**Frogshollow Backpackers** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 1800 068 686; www.frogshollow.com.au; 27 Lindsay St; dm \$20, s or d \$60; 📺 📺 📺) This hostel is situated in a lush garden opposite parkland. The atmosphere is relaxed and quiet, and there's a choice of four-, eight- or 12-bed, fan-cooled or air-con (at night) dorms of varying sizes. There's a swimming pool and spa in the garden and a pool table in the common area. This place is only about 10 minutes' walk from the Transit Centre, or you can contact them for a free pick-up.

**Banyan View Lodge** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 8644; www.banyanviewlodge.com.au; 119 Mitchell St; dm \$20, s, d or tw without/with air-con \$55/60; 📺 📺 📺) This is a big YWCA that welcomes men and has no curfew. The spacious rooms have fans and fridges, and are clean and well kept; there are two TV lounges, a kitchen and a small spa in a large tropical garden. Weekly and longer rates are also available.

**Park Lodge** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 5692; www.parklodgent.com; 42 Coronation Dr, Stuart Park; s/d \$45/55; 📺 📺 📺) A friendly welcome and a quiet relaxing stay can be counted on at this suburban retreat. The small rooms have air-con, fridge, sink and private balcony. There's a well-equipped kitchen, a very spacious TV/sitting room and an inviting pool. It's only a short cycle ride from the city centre. Numerous city buses, including the 5 and 8, run along the highway nearby; ask the driver where to get off.

**Gecko Lodge** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 1800 811 250; www.geckolodge.com.au; 146 Mitchell St; dm \$20, tw & d \$50; 📺 📺 📺) In a pair of well-worn elevated houses towards Mindil Beach, this small, personable, family-run hostel offers a relaxing

stay a short walk from the action. The original house of the pair has lush gardens and a pool and the better rooms. There's bike hire and a free pancake breakfast.

**Chilli's** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 1800 351 313; www.chillis.com.au; 69A Mitchell St; dm \$19, tw & d \$55; 📺 📺 📺) Next door to the Transit Centre and convenient to the action on Mitchell St. There's no pool, but it has a sundeck and spa, a pool table, an air-con TV room and a breezy kitchen and meals area overlooking Mitchell St. Rooms are clean four-, six- and eight-bed dorms and basic doubles and twins. There's a helpful tour desk and a number of Internet terminals on the ground floor.

## HOTELS & MOTELS

**Barramundi Lodge** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 6466; barramundilodge@bigpond.com; www.barramundilodge.com.au; 4 Gardens Rd, The Gardens; s \$50-55, d \$95; 📺 📺 📺) Perched opposite the golf course between the CBD, the Botanical Gardens and Mindil Beach, this is a good-value option wavering between Budget and Midrange. Spotless and spacious, the old-fashioned, louvre-windowed rooms have a TV and kitchenette, though the bathrooms are communal. There's a laundry and a pool lounge area with a BBQ. Room rates drop for longer stays and in the Wet.

**Palms Motel** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 4188; fax 8981 4415; 100 McMinn St, s or d \$80-90; self-contained rooms \$110; 📺 📺 📺) The Palms Motel is a comfortable and convenient option close to the CBD. The older-style budget rooms are well maintained and perfectly adequate with TV, phone, and tea and coffee facilities. There's a BBQ area by the pool and limited lock-up parking if required.

**Leprechaun Motel & Caravan Park** (Map p64; ☎ 8984 3400; fax 8984 3333; 378 Stuart Hwy, Winnellie; dm per night/week \$18/90, s or d \$75, 4-person cabins \$120, unpowered/powerd sites \$24/28; 📺 📺 📺) This complex has a range of accommodation. Rooms and cabins are satisfactory if bland, and set far enough back from the highway to shun most road noise. It claims the title of 'closest caravan park to the CBD' and has a swimming pool, BBQs and grassed, shady tent sites. A no-pet policy applies.

**Hi Way Inn** (Map p64; ☎ 8947 0979; 430 Stuart Hwy, Winnellie; s or d \$70-80; 📺 📺 📺) This is the first motel you'll pass if you're arriving by road from the south. It's cheap and serviceable and sits right by the busy highway.

## CAMPING

There are several caravan parks within 10km to 15km of the city centre. There are discounts for terms of a week or longer, and special off-season rates in the Wet. Prices given below for powered and unpowered sites are for two people. Leprechaun Motel & Caravan Park (left) also has a camping ground.

**Shady Glen Caravan Park** (Map p64; ☎ 8984 3330; www.shadyglen.com.au; cnr Farrel Cres & Stuart Hwy; unpowered/powerd sites \$24/26, cabins \$100-190; 📺 📺 📺) This is a lush, well-treed caravan park with immaculate facilities, camp kitchen, licensed shop and friendly staff.

**Hidden Valley Tourist Park** (Map p64; ☎ 8947 1422; www.hvtp.com.au; 15 Hidden Valley Rd, Berrimah; unpowered & powerd sites \$25, self-contained cabins \$80-120; 📺 📺 📺) This is Darwin's newest caravan park, positioned well away from the main road, and it has the appeal of a hidden oasis with grassy grounds, numerous palms and tropical plants and a large pool.

**Lee Point Village Resort** (Map p64; ☎ 8945 0535; fax 8945 0642; Lee Point Rd; unpowered/powerd/en suite sites \$22/25/28, cabins \$80; 📺 📺 📺) This spacious park, 15km north of the city, is only 800m from the attractive Lee Point beach. Facilities here are excellent with many powered sites having their own private bathroom. The comfortable cabins have share facilities.

## Midrange B&Bs

**Steeles at Larrakeyah** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 3636; www.steeles-at-larrakeyah.com.au; 4 Zealandia Cres, Larrakeyah; d \$150; 📺 📺 📺) Perfectly positioned midway between the city centre, Cullen Bay and Mindil Beach, there are two rooms in this pleasant Spanish Mission-style place each with a private entrance, fridge and tea/coffee facilities.

**Grungle Downs B&B** (Map p64; ☎ 8947 4440; www.grungledowns.com.au; 945 McMillans Rd, Knuckey Lagoon; d/cottage from \$100/250; 📺 📺 📺) This rural retreat is still only a short drive from the city. The modern B&B on a 5-acre property is convenient to Crocodylus Park, Holmes Jungle Reserve and Knuckey Lagoon. It has a large pool and is pet friendly.

Other options are covered in the **Bed and Breakfast directory** (www.bed-and-breakfast.au.com).

## HOTELS & MOTELS

**Darwin Airport Resort** (Map p64; ☎ 8920 3333; www.darwinairportresort.com.au; cnr Henry Wrigley & Sir Norman

Brierly Dr; d from \$150; (P) (♿) (♿) This new resort is right by the airport, snuggling into the surrounding bushland. It features several levels of accommodation from fully appointed business suites to rather whimsical-looking, thoroughly comfortable bungalows set around an impressive pool and landscaped gardens. There's an excellent restaurant, Essence (mains \$20 to \$30), and bar, and exceptional service.

**Cherry Blossom Hotel** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 6734; fax 8941 3620; 108 The Esplanade; d \$99; (P) (♿) (♿)) This friendly boutique hotel of just 19 rooms represents good value on the Esplanade. All rooms have a double bed and a single plus all the expected appointments. There's no restaurant, but there are numerous options within walking distance.

**Mirambeena Resort** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 1800 891 100, 8946 0111; www.mirambeena.com.au; 64 Cavenagh St; d from \$160, townhouses \$245; (♿) (♿) (♿)) This huge resort right in the CBD looks a little worn in places, but it has plenty of lush tropical gardens and two impressive pools. All rooms are well appointed, and wheelchair accessible rooms are available. There is a restaurant (mains \$16 to \$30) and café on site.

**Value Inn** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 4733; www.valueinn.com.au; 50 Mitchell St; s, d or tr \$99; (P) (♿) (♿)) Opposite the Transit Centre, this central hotel has quite small rooms equipped with a queen-size and single bed, fridge and TV. Two rooms with handicap facilities are also available. Be sure to indicate whether you want a smoking or nonsmoking room.

**Top End Hotel** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 1800 626 151, 8981 6511; bestwestern.com.au/topend; cnr Mitchell & Daly Sts; s/d \$100/110; (P) (♿) (♿)) At this well-run motel each comfortable room opens onto the pool and garden; and though the hotel has various bars and night spots, the rooms are sufficiently distant to get a good night's sleep. Discounts here during the Wet are very attractive.

**Frontier Hotel** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 5333; reservations@frontierdarwin.com.au; 3 Buffalo Ct; d \$140-185; (P) (♿) (♿)) On the northern edge of town, this block of spacious, stylish rooms boasts excellent views, particularly from the 6th-floor apartments. There's a bar and the rooftop restaurant (mains \$25 to \$30) has stunning harbour views across the golf course.

**Asti Motel** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 8200; asti1@inet.au; 7 Packard Pl; d from \$130; (P) (♿) (♿)) This large block of motel units is conveniently central

and has clean, if nondescript, rooms appointed with TV, phone and fridge. Family rooms with kitchenette that sleep up to four are also available.

**Poinciana Inn** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 8111; cnr Mitchell & McLachlan Sts; d \$135; (P) (♿) (♿)) Poinciana is a block of unexceptional motel units at the edge of the CBD, and there are plenty of restaurants within walking distance. Each room has a phone, fridge and TV. A buffet breakfast is available for \$16.

**Capricornia Motel** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 4055; fax 8981 2031; 3 Kellaway St, Fannie Bay; s \$80/90; (P) (♿) (♿)) The Capricornia Motel has tired but clean rooms with a fridge. Avoid the designated smoking rooms. There's a communal kitchen and bike hire and it's handy for the museum and Mindil Beach.

## APARTMENTS

There are plenty of serviced apartments in Darwin. Most will give discounts if you stay a week or more, and there are often significant discounts in the Wet season.

**Palms City Resort** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 1800 829 211, 8982 9200; www.citypalms.com; 64 The Esplanade; motel d \$150-160, villa d \$165-250; (P) (♿) (♿)) True to its name, this centrally located resort is surrounded by palm-filled gardens. The superior motel rooms are worth the extra \$10, if you covet a microwave and value space, while the executive villas with outdoor spa are pure luxury. All villas come with electric BBQs on the veranda. Buffet breakfasts cost \$15.

**Parap Village Apartments** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 1800 620 913, 8943 0500; www.parapvillageapartments.com.au; 39-45 Parap Rd, Parap; d \$170-225, townhouses \$245;

(P) (♿) (♿)) This place sits across the road from the pleasant Parap Village, which hosts a thriving Saturday market and a couple of good eateries. Caveous self-contained apartments boast a balcony, full kitchen and laundry. The townhouses comfortably sleep six, and there are two pools and a children's play area on site. Reduced rates are available in the Wet and for stays of seven nights or more.

**Marina View** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 1800 060 646, 8981 0919; info@marinaview.com.au; 32 Marina Blvd, Cullen Bay; d from \$170; (P) (♿) (♿)) The Marina View welcomes short-term stays in its roomy, well-appointed one- and two-bedroom serviced apartments overlooking the marina at Cullen Bay. Convenient to the restaurants at the marina, it is also only a few minutes' drive from the city.

**Alatai Holiday Apartments** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 1800 628 833, 8981 5188; www.alataiapartments.com.au; cnr McMinn & Finnis Sts; studio/apt \$150/215; (P) (♿) (♿)) This is a neat complex built around a swimming pool at the northern edge of the city centre. The compact studios and more roomy apartments have their own kitchen and laundry. There's a Chinese restaurant (mains \$10 to \$18), and cheaper walk-in rates are available, as are discounts in the Wet.

**Peninsular Apartment Hotel** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 1800 808 564; peninsularapts@octa4.net.au; 115 Smith St; s, d or tr \$130; (P) (♿) (♿)) The peninsular offers good-value accommodation just 10 minutes' walk from the city centre. Rooms are simple and spacious, though looking a bit tired, and have a bathroom and kitchenette. There's a bar and shaded pool downstairs.

## Top End

Many of Darwin's upmarket hotels are on the Esplanade, making best use of the prime water views across the park. Other options are in the city centre, and keep an eye on new harbour precinct developments. High-season rack rates are listed, though these are rarely charged. Bargains can be had by perusing websites such as www.wotif.com.au, and simply asking about discounts, particularly during the Wet.

**Darwin Central Hotel** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8944 9000; www.darwincentral.com.au; cnr Smith & Knuckey Sts; s/d from \$170/220; (P) (♿) (♿)) Right in the centre of town, this is a plush independent with contemporary style and impeccable facilities. Its award-winning Waterhole

restaurant is popular with locals and travellers alike. It has excellent accessibility for disabled travellers and a plunge pool. Valet parking costs \$7 a night.

**Saville Park Suites** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 1300 881 686, 8943 4333; www.savillesuites.com; 88 The Esplanade; d from \$230, 1-2-bedroom apt from \$260/370; (P) (♿) (♿)) Pay less for city views, more for stunning harbour views in this complex of spacious suites.

**Crowne Plaza Darwin** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8982 0000; www.crowneplaza.com.au; 32 Mitchell St; d from \$180; (P) (♿) (♿)) This is one block back from the Esplanade but still commands fine views. It has the full gamut of facilities and weekend deals are sometimes available.

**Feathers Sanctuary** (Map p64; ☎ 8985 2144; www.featherssanctuary.com; 49A Freshwater Rd, Jingili; d \$275; (♿)) One for bird enthusiasts and nature lovers. Each modern, attractive, timber and iron cabin has its own private aviary, and the setting, complete with waterhole, is distinctly rural despite its proximity to the city.

**Novotel Atrium** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 0755; www.novoteldarwin.com.au; 100 The Esplanade; d \$200-260, 2-bedroom apt \$320; (P) (♿) (♿)) The Novotel indeed boasts an impressive atrium. The comfortable, well-appointed rooms are arranged around the verdant atrium, at the bottom of which is a restaurant and cocktail bar swathed in palms and vines.

**Holiday Inn Darwin** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8980 0800; www.holidayinn.com.au; The Esplanade; d from \$200; (P) (♿) (♿)) The Holiday Inn chain occupies two hotels on the Esplanade. Prices and facilities are similar in the Holiday Inn Esplanade next door. Rates reduce on the weekend and usually include a buffet breakfast.

## EATING

Darwin is the glistening pearl in the Territory's dining scene. The quality and diversity top anywhere else, so make the most of it while you are here. Savour the exotic and innovative creations at the city's top restaurants, or embark on a culinary jaunt through Asia as you investigate the fast, cheap and varied delights that sizzle and smoke at any of Darwin's bustling multicultural markets (see p80).

Cullen Bay, the marina/condo development north of the city centre, has a hip, waterfront dining scene, while the food centre at the end of Stokes Hill Wharf provides cheap and cheerful fish and chips

## THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Botanic Gardens Apartments** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8946 0300; www.botanicgardens.com.au; 17 Geranium St, Stuart Park; motel d from \$140, apt \$190-300; (P) (♿) (♿)) In a unique and peaceful location adjacent to the Botanic Gardens, the good-value motel rooms and spacious apartments here are surrounded by palms and lush tropical gardens, and there are two fabulous pools to cool off in. Each airy apartment has a balcony, full cooking facilities and a laundry. The three-bedroom apartments sleep up to six, and the best rooms have prestigious views over the Botanic Gardens to the Timor Sea.

## TO MARKET, TO MARKET

As the sun heads towards the horizon, half of Darwin descends on **Mindil Beach Sunset Market** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 3454; off Gilruth Ave; 5-10pm Thu & 4-9pm Sun May-Oct) with tables, chairs, rugs, grog and kids to settle under the coconut palms for sunset and decide which of the tantalising food-stall aromas has the greatest allure. Take your choice – there's Thai, Sri Lankan, Indian, Chinese, Malaysian, Brazilian, Greek, Portuguese and more, all at around \$5 to \$8 a serve. Top it off with fresh fruit salad, decadent cakes or luscious crepes, before cruising past arts and crafts stalls bulging with hand-made jewellery, fabulous rainbow tie-died clothes, Aboriginal artefacts, and wares from Indonesia and Thailand. Patrons peruse and promenade, or stop for a pummelling massage or to listen to rhythmic live music. An outdoor cinema is set up on the first Thursday of each month the market is open. Mindil Beach is about 2km from the city centre. Bus 4 and 6 go past the market area or you can catch a shuttle (\$2).

Similar stalls (you'll recognise many of the stall holders) can be found at various suburban markets from Friday to Sunday. There's **Parap Village Market** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8am-2pm Sat), where you will find the full gamut of Southeast Asian cuisine, as well as plenty of ingredients to cook up your own storm. **Nightcliff Market** (Map p64; Pavonia Way; ☎ 8am-2pm Sun), **Palmerton Market** (Frances Mall; ☎ 5-10pm Fri, Dry season only), southeast of the city, and **Rapid Creek Market** (Map p64; Trower Rd; ☎ 5-10pm Fri, 8am-2pm Sun), which is Darwin's oldest market, are all reminiscent of Asian marketplaces, with a tremendous range of tropical fruit and vegetables mingled with a heady mixture of spices and swirling satay smoke. Among the fresh produce you can also find book stalls, bric-a-brac and purveyors of everything from sharks' teeth to mango smoothies.

and Asian stirfries, or you could try dangling a line from the wharf to hook your own meal.

## Restaurants

**Hanuman** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 3500; 28 Mitchell St; mains \$15-25; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner daily) Enticing aromas waft out onto Mitchell St from this sophisticated and innovative Indian and Thai nonya restaurant. Try Hanuman's signature dish of oysters bathed in lemongrass, chilli and coriander or the *meen mooli* – reef fish in coconut and curry leaves.

**Café Twilight on Lindsay** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 8631; 2 Lindsay St; mains \$20-30; ☎ lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sat) Twilight boasts innovative, fusion cuisine with a European base and tropical ingredients in a romantic alfresco setting. Dine in the lush tropical garden, which sparkles with fairy lights at night. Delightful (and affordable) tapas are served with bread and salad. Bookings are recommended.

**Sonsie** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8942 2278; 34 Parap Rd, Parap; mains \$25-35; ☎ lunch Fri, dinner Wed-Sat) This award-winning, fully licensed restaurant is secreted in the Parap Village shopping centre. The elegant cuisine, such as marinated rack of lamb with beetroot fettuccine or chicken and vegetable roulade, can be shared Asian style with accompaniments of rice or stirfry vegetables.

**Waterhole Restaurant** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8944 9120; Darwin Central Hotel, cnr Smith & Knuckey Sts; mains \$22-30; ☎ dinner) Refined contemporary Australian cuisine, including delicious steaks and seafood and magnificent desserts, can be savoured in a casual setting with excellent service.

**Deck Bar** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8942 3001; 22 Mitchell St; mains \$15-30; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Wash down delicious Asian, Moroccan and European offerings with a selection from the excellent range of wines, many available by the glass, or the 20-odd ales on tap. The lubricated chatter out on the expansive wooden deck is about the latest mobile phones, the boss, the property market or the Deck's first-rate coffee.

**Pee Wee's at the Point** (Map p64; ☎ 8981 6868; Alec Fong Lim Dr, East Point Reserve; mains \$25-35; ☎ dinner) Pee Wee's has an unbeatable location with sweeping views over the harbour to East Point. Grilled barra, roo and eye fillet top the Asian-influenced menu. Bookings are recommended.

**Sawasdee** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 3335; Shop 1, 52 Marina Blvd, Cullen Bay; mains \$10-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) Seafood and vegetables dominate at this waterfront eatery, which has well-executed Thai stirfries and curries, plus a few Malaysian dishes, all served up in a great position overlooking the marina.

**Crustaceans** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 8658; Stokes Hill Wharf; mains \$25-50; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat) This highly regarded seafood restaurant perches on the end of Stokes Hill Wharf, where diners can enjoy sunset and views over Frances Bay. Fresh fish, mud crabs, lobster, crocodile and oysters grace the tables and are accompanied by a first-rate wine list.

**Salvatore's** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 9823; 21 Knuckey St; mains \$12-20; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This tiny Italian restaurant has a huge, reasonably priced menu of cooked breakfasts, coffee-and-cake deals and gourmet pizzas. The generous offerings, children's menu and inexpensive wine by the glass make it a good casual family eatery.

**Vietnam Saigon Star** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 1420; Shop 9, 60 Smith St; mains \$10-20; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun) A typical Vietnamese eatery with a typically extensive menu including a dozen sauces multiplied by beef, pork, chicken and seafood. Vegetarians are well catered for and there are good-value lunch specials for around \$10.

**Tim's Surf 'n' Turf** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 1024; 10 Litchfield St; mains \$10-20; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner daily) Tim's is a very relaxed, informal place secreted in a backstreet in the CBD. Steak, seafood, pasta, chicken and croc feature on the menu that doubles as an order form

(pencil provided). Lunch is great value with all dishes just \$10.

## Pubs

A few pubs entice backpackers off the pavement with free barbecues and cheap meals to soak up the beer. More digestible pub grub is also on offer, though it usually features a lot of meat and chips.

**Rorke's Drift** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 7171; 46 Mitchell St; mains \$15-25; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Features traditional pub fare of steaks and pasta and 'pie of the day', all in cheerful proportions. It also boasts crisp-based pizza, limited vegetarian alternatives and a popular Sunday roast with Yorkshire pudding.

**Shenanigans** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 2100; cnr Peel & Mitchell Sts; snacks \$4-10, meals \$11-25; ☎ lunch & dinner) Shenanigans is Darwin's original and ever-popular Irish-theme pub next to the YHA hostel. It serves cold Guinness and generous pub grub, including Top End steaks and barra and a few Irish meals such as a hearty Irish stew.

**Lizards Bar & Grill** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 6511; Top End Hotel, cnr Mitchell & Daly Sts; mains \$15-25; ☎ lunch & dinner) The leafy outdoor decking at Lizards is a good place to devour T-bone, chicken parmigiana or barra fillet with an icy cold beer or chardonnay.

## Cafés

**Moorish Café** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8991 0010; 37 Knuckey St; mains \$20-30; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Be seduced by the aromas emanating from this divine café fusing African, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern delights. Browse tantalising tapas (\$3 to \$6); try the tagine of the day or the vegetarian paella, or splurge, as we did, on the Portuguese seafood hotpot with homemade bread. There are \$10 lunch specials, classical Spanish guitar on Tuesdays and belly dancers on Saturday nights.

**Buzz Café** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 1141; The Slipway, Cullen Bay; mains \$16-30; ☎ lunch & dinner) This chic café/bar/restaurant furnished in Indonesian teak and Mt Bromo lava has a great multilevel deck and makes a lovely, sunny spot for an afternoon drink, followed by another, and another. The meals are Mod Oz, with some excellent salads and dishes to share. Check it out – all will be revealed in the men's toilets.

**Café Uno** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8942 2500; 69 Mitchell St; mains \$15-25; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Jammed

## THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Ducks Nuts Bar & Grill** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8942 2122; 76 Mitchell St; mains \$15-25; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This slick bistro delivers some clever fusion of Top End produce with that Asian/Mediterranean blend we like to claim as Modern Australian. The gonads may be poultry but the dishes are hefty and good value. The pan-fried barra on jasmine rice topped with tender calamari and a pungent pesto sauce perhaps took fusion beyond the laws of gourmet physics, but it washed down well with an icy Tasmanian beer and left no room for surveying the clever desserts. The red Thai duck shank and banana curry hinted at a continuing obsession with Daffy's nether regions. The glossy Bar Espresso coffee shop in the Ducks Nuts complex delivers good brekkies and caffeinated brews, while Tzars Vodka Bar is for modish lounge lizards and occasional live entertainment after 10pm.



into the busy backpacker zone, Uno's interior is sophisticated and arty, and the terrace is great for people-watching. Generous pastas, delicious pizzas and blackboard specials are served with gusto, accompanied by a good wine selection and the requisite rich coffee and desserts.

**Yots Cafe** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 4433; 54 Marina Blvd, Cullen Bay; mains \$10-25; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Busy and efficient with a great deck overlooking the marina, Yots boasts an extensive menu of mostly Mediterranean renditions of quality seafood, steaks, chicken and kangaroo. There are also scrumptious wood-fired pizzas, an exceptional wine list and superb coffee.

**Relish** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 1900; Shop 1, 35 Cavenagh St; ☺ breakfast & lunch Mon-Fri) A groovy little café with a good dose of acoustic music, art books and magazines. Pierced patrons gaze at walls plastered with ads for live music and theatre, and devour gourmet melts, ciabattas, focaccias and good coffee or spicy chai.

**Cornucopia Café** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 1002; Conacher St, Fannie Bay; mains \$10-20; ☺ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) This deservedly popular café appended to the museum (hence the opening hours) is a great lunch spot. The menu is varied – including tempting focaccias, pastas, burgers, coffee-and-cake deals and cooling iced coffee/chocolate. Enjoy it out on the deck or in the air-conditioned interior.

**Roma Bar** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 6729; 9-11 Cavenagh St; mains \$10; ☺ breakfast & lunch; ☑) This is a local (caffeine) institution with wireless Internet access (\$2.50 per hour), where you'll find many heads buried in newspapers, notebook computers or engaged in a discussion about the environment. There are some good vegetarian options on the menu and a whiff of the hippydom in the patronage – shame about the cigarette smoke, though.

**Rendezvous Café** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 9231; Shop 6, Star Village Arcade, 32 Smith St Mall; mains \$5-12; ☺ lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Thu-Sat) Tucked away in a quiet arcade off Smith St, this Thai and Malaysian BYO has legendary laksa status.

## Quick Eats

**Mindil Beach Sunset Market** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 3454; off Gilruth Ave; ☺ 5-10pm Thu & 4-9pm Sun May-Oct) is a Darwin institution (see the boxed text p80) that draws huge crowds with its

multicultural array of Asian street food, pizzas, crepes, Australian native fauna (see the tastefully named Roadkill Café) and refreshing smoothies. There's something for everyone.

**Indian Cafe** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 0752; 1/15 Knuckey St; mains \$7; ☺ lunch & dinner) This 'hole in the wall' curry joint has \$7 two-curries-and-rice meal deals. Select from half a dozen meat, vegan and vegetarian concoctions, and eat in on the laminex or take away.

**Simply's** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 4765; Star Village Arcade, 32 Smith St Mall; mains \$5-10; ☺ lunch Mon-Fri) Serves simple healthy vegetarian/vegan food with flair. It has veggie burgers, salads, hot meals, smoothies and a variety of freshly pressed juices.

**Bay Seafood Café** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 8789; 57 Marina Blvd, Cullen Bay; barra & chips \$9; ☺ lunch & dinner) A very popular 'fish 'n' chipper'. Team it with a crisp Greek salad (\$5) and take your steaming paper package down to the beach for sunset.

**Cold Rock Ice Creamery** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 2668; Shop 33, Mitchell Centre, 55-59 Mitchell St; ice creams \$4-6; ☺ lunch & dinner) Reward yourself on a hot Darwin night with one of the multitude of creamy combinations at this popular chain.

**Burnett House** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 0165; 4 Burnett Pl; \$7.50; ☺ Sun afternoon) Feeling peckish on a Sunday afternoon? Perhaps try the High Tea at Burnett House in the Myilly Point Heritage Precinct (p70) where you'll be served dainty sandwiches, delightful cakes and a pot of tea or coffee.

## Self-Catering

There are three supermarkets in town. **Coles** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 8055; Mitchell Centre, 55-59 Mitchell St) is open 24 hours, while **Woolworths** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 6111; nr Cavenagh & Whitfield Sts) is open until midnight most nights. There's another **Woolworths** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 2864; 56 Smith St) near the corner of Smith and Knuckey Sts.

**Parap Fine Foods** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 8597; 40 Parap Rd, Parap) is a local foodie haunt teaming with gourmet temptations, including organic and health foods.

## DRINKING

Most of the bars popular with travellers are on Mitchell St, all within a short walk of each other.

**Victoria Hotel** (The Vic; Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 4011; 27 Smith St) This old, stone hotel has long been Darwin's favourite pub: a place where backpackers and locals mingle and party. The stylish street-level Settlers Bar is open from 10am and hosts live music most nights. Upstairs is Banjos where you will find pool tables, a balcony and occasional DJs. Banjos opens at 7pm when tour groups turn up.

**Rorke's Drift** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 7171; 46 Mitchell St) Set in a former cinema with walls featuring memorabilia of the Zulu War, Rorke's has a certain colonial grandeur. There's over a dozen beers on tap, a menu that would feed an army and a great terrace in which to enjoy it all.

**Deck Bar** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8942 3001; 22 Mitchell St) Over 20 beers on tap and many more in bottles, plus an excellent range of wines, many available by the glass, can all be enjoyed on a vast alfresco deck. You can also grab a meal here.

**Top End Hotel** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 6511; nr Mitchell & Daly Sts) This busy little entertainment enclave has several clubs and bars, including Lizards Bar & Grill, which has a great beer garden and pulls in revellers of all ages for its big-screen sports broadcasts and weekend bands.

**Darwin Ski Club** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 6630; Conacher St, Fannie Bay) This clubhouse for water-skiers has a great location on Vestey's Beach. It's a sublime spot to sink a cold ale (outside bar opens at noon) as the sun sets over the water. Interstate or international visitors get issued with a free membership.

**Shenanigans** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 2100; 69 Mitchell St) To be sure it's an Irish theme pub, but the food is good and there's some form of entertainment most nights.

Other popular city watering holes:

**Buzz Café** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 1141; The Slipway, Cullen Bay) Stylish waterfront café/bar/restaurant. Oh, so very relaxing.

**Cavenagh** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 6383; www.the.cavenagh.com; 12 Cavenagh St) Insanely popular backpackers' bar just a stagger from their rooms.

**Ducks Nuts Bar & Grill** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8942 2122; 76 Mitchell St) Swanky vodka bar with live entertainment and fine food.

## ENTERTAINMENT

Darwin is a city of warm nights and numerous options. The nightclubs and live music venues in the CBD are close enough together

that you can take a wander to find one you like. Other tastes in entertainment are also catered for, with theatre, film and concerts.

You'll find up-to-date entertainment listings for live music and other attractions in the Friday edition of the *Northern Territory News*. For a more alternative scene, check out the walls at Relish or the Roma Bar (opposite) or pick up the free, widely distributed monthly publication *Fresh*. **Top End Arts** (www.topendarts.com.au) lists events happening around town and is available at the tourist information office. Keep an eye out for bills posted on notice boards and telegraph poles that advertise dance and full-moon parties.

## Aboriginal Cultural Performances

**Aboriginal Corroborees** (☎ 8978 5044; adult/child \$60/30; ☺ Wed & Fri 7pm May-Jun; Mon, Wed & Fri 7pm Jul-Sep) This is an excellent dinner and show by the entertaining and exciting Kenbi Dancers, and is held just over the water at Mandorah Beach Hotel (see p89 for ferry information).

## Live Music

Just about every pub/bar in town has some form of live music, mostly on Friday and Saturday nights. Some places also keep their microphones busy with karaoke and DJs on other nights.

**Top End Hotel** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 1800 626 151; fax 8941 1253; nr Mitchell & Daly Sts). Lizards Bar or the larger beachcombers venue host live bands from Friday to Sunday.

**Victoria Hotel** (The Vic; Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 4011; 27 Smith St Mall) A popular two-storey haunt off the Mall, which draws in a lively backpacker crowd. Live bands play downstairs in the Settlers Bar from Wednesday to Saturday.

**Nirvana** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 2025; Smith St) Over Daly St, this is a cosy restaurant-bar with live jazz/blues every Thursday, Friday and Saturday night and a jam session every Tuesday. You must eat (mains \$15 to \$30) as you drink; bar snacks are available at reasonable prices.

**Darwin Ski Club** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 6630; Conacher St, Fannie Bay) There's jazz at the open-air bar from 5.30pm on Friday and live music from 5pm on Sunday.

**Ducks Nuts Bar & Grill** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8942 2122; www.ducksnuts.com.au; 76 Mitchell St) Sassy Sunday

sessions (2pm to 6pm) featuring blues and jazz.

Most of the ritzy hotels stretched out along the Esplanade have bars where you can sip to the sounds of tinkling ivories. The Jabiru Bar in the Novotel Atrium is one to try.

## Nightclubs

**Discovery & Lost Arc** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8942 3300; 89 Mitchell St; ☎ 9pm-late, Fri & Sat) Discovery is a popular dance venue where young things pulse to commercial anthems. Lost Arc is the dim blue bar at the front of the complex.

**Throb** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 3358; 64 Smith St; admission \$10; ☎ from 10pm Thu-Sun) Throb is Darwin's premier gay- and lesbian-friendly nightclub and cocktail bar, where party-goers can enjoy regular drag shows and theme nights. Touring live acts sometimes play here.

**Retro** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 6511; Top End Hotel, cnr Mitchell & Daly Sts; ☎ Tue, Fri & Sat) Retro is a large dance club that occasionally hosts live bands. It gets busy on Tuesdays when cheap drinks are on offer.

## Cinemas

**Deckchair Cinema** (Map pp66-7; www.deckchaircinema.com; Kitchener Dr, Wharf Precinct; adult/child/family \$13/6/45; box office ☎ from 6.30pm Apr-Oct) During the Dry, the **Darwin Film Society** (☎ 8981 0700) runs this fabulous cinema near the Stokes Hill Wharf. Here you can watch a movie under the stars while reclining in a deckchair – bring a cushion for real comfort. Screenings are listed in the newspapers or on flyers around town.

**Museum & Art Gallery Theatre** (Map pp66-7; Conacher St, Fannie Bay; adult/concession \$13/10) The film society also has regular showings of offbeat and art-house films at the museum during the Wet season (see p65).

**Darwin City Cinemas** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 981 5999; 76 Mitchell St; adult/child \$14/10) This is the city's large cinema complex, screening the latest release blockbuster films across five theatres. Head down on Tropical Tuesday for \$9 entry (all day).

## Theatre

**Darwin Entertainment Centre** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8980 3333; www.darwinentertainment.com.au; 93 Mitchell St; box office ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Fri & 1hr prior to shows) Houses the Playhouse and Studio Theatres, and hosts events from fashion-award

nights to plays, rock operas, comedies and concerts. Ring for bookings and 24-hour information.

**Brown's Mart** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 5522; www.brownsmart.com.au; Harry Chan Ave) An historical venue that features live theatre performances. An arty crowd congregates here for Bamboo Lounge on selected Friday evenings, which may include anything from a short film festival to touring bands. It's all-inclusive, hassle-free and there's also a bar. Brown's Mart also hosts Darwin's Fringe Festival (see p75).

## Casino

**Skycity Darwin** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8943 8888; Gilruth Ave) On Mindil Beach, this is Darwin's flashy casino complex with accommodation and three restaurants. It has the full range of tools to help you lose your shirt; and to ensure you have one to lose there's a dress code, which means no singlets, thongs or dirty clothing.

## Sport

There's quite a bit happening on the local sports scene, and Darwin sees occasional national and international cricket and football matches. The most significant international sporting event is the biennial Arafura Games (p75).

The major sports venue in Darwin is the Marrara Sporting Precinct (Map p64) in the northern suburbs. It is home to the **Northern Territory Football League** (www.aflnt.com.au), the local Australian Rules league, which has its season during the Wet. Check the website for teams and fixtures. There are occasional matches held against AFL teams.

**Northern Territory Rugby Union** (www.ntu.rugbynet.com.au) matches are played at Optus Park in Marrara Sporting Precinct. There's also a local Rugby League competition, and Northern Territory Soccer was getting a new home at Marrara at the time of writing. Petrol-heads cut loose at **Hidden Valley Motor Sports Complex** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8984 3469; Hidden Valley Rd, Berrimah), which hosts a round of the V8 Supercars.

## SHOPPING

You'll find specialists shops for outdoor gear, cameras and film, books, fishing tackle, fashion clothing, and more in Darwin's CBD. Many chain stores are represented at

the large Casuarina Shopping Centre (Map p64). A visit to one of Darwin's fabulous outdoor markets (p80) is an 'essential' for all shopaholics.

## Indigenous Arts & Crafts

The city centre has a good range of outlets selling arts and crafts from the Top End, such as bark paintings from Arnhem Land, and carvings and screen-printing by the Tiwi people of Bathurst and Melville Islands. It's worth having a browse in a couple of galleries to build some knowledge of artists and prices, and to recognise the regional differences in art.

**Raintree Aboriginal Fine Art Gallery** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 9933; Shop 5, 20 Knuckey St) One of Darwin's original Aboriginal galleries, Raintree specialises in works from the western Arnhem Land region, and also features contemporary and traditional work from other regions.

**Framed** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 2994; 55 Stuart Hwy, Stuart Park) Framed presents a fine range of arts and crafts in its gallery near the entrance to the Botanic Gardens. The eclectic and ever-changing range is typically Territorian and tropical, and includes contemporary Aboriginal art, pottery, jewellery and exquisitely carved furniture. All tastes are covered.

**Maningrida Arts & Culture** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 4122; www.maningrida.com; Shop 1, 32 Mitchell St) Features didgeridoos, weavings and paintings from the Kunibidji community at Maningrida on the banks of the Liverpool River, Arnhem Land.

**Aboriginal Fine Arts** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 1315; 1st fl, cnr Mitchell & Knuckey Sts) This gallery sells art from Arnhem Land and the Central Desert region, including the work of high-profile artists. There's a large selection of didgeridoos downstairs.

**Mason Gallery** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 9622; Shop 7, 21 Cavenagh St) Features some acrylics from the Western Desert region and some fine bark paintings from Arnhem Land.

**Territory Colours** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 1803; 21 Knuckey St) Contemporary paintings and crafts, including glass, porcelain and wood from local artists.

## Accessories

**Paspaley Pearls** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8982 5555; 19 Smith St Mall) A Darwin institution, Paspaley farms, crafts and sells top-quality pearls.

**di Croco** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 4470; Paspaley Pearls Bldg, 19 Smith St Mall) A wide range of handbags, belts, wallets and accessories made from the skin of farmed salties.

## Outdoor Equipment

**NT General Store** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 8242; 42 Cavenagh St) For all your camping equipment needs, this is one of the best places with shelves piled high and friendly service. It also has a great range of maps (see p62).

**Fishing & Outdoor World** (☎ 8981 6398; 27 Cavenagh St) Easy to find with the artillery piece above the door, it has an extensive range of tackle, lures, rods and anything else you might need to hook a barra.

**Gone Bush** (☎ 0413 757 000; gonebush@octa4.net.au) Gone Bush hires out good quality camping gear at reasonable prices, including tents, stoves and eskeys, and will deliver to your accommodation. This makes an excellent option if you're planning your own trip to Kakadu and fancy doing it on the cheap at your own pace.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

See p273 for details of international flights in and out of Northern Territory.

Domestic flights connect Darwin with all other Australian capital cities, as well as Alice Springs, Jabiru (Kakadu), Broome, Cairns, Kununurra and various regions throughout the Top End. Prices quoted here are for low-end, one-way fares during the Dry. One-off prices on the web will often be cheaper.

**Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au) has direct daily services to Adelaide (one way from \$400), Alice Springs (\$300), Brisbane (\$350), Cairns (\$340), Melbourne (\$400), Perth (\$500) and Sydney (\$360).

**Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com.au) flies daily direct to Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane for very similar prices.

**Airnorth** (☎ 1800 627 474; www.airnorth.com.au) services the Top End region, with daily flights to Broome (\$400), Gove/Nhulunbuy (\$270) and Kununurra (\$250).

Other, smaller routes are flown by local operators; ask a travel agent.

## Boat

**Sea Cat** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8978 5015; adult/child/family return \$18/9.50/50) runs a regular ferry service to

and from Mandorah (see p89). This company also runs the **Arafura Pearl** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 9696; seacat@bigpond.com; adult/child lower deck \$220/150, upper deck \$240/170; 🚢 Mon, Wed & Fri Mar-Nov) ferry to Bathurst Island (see p92). Both services depart from Cullen Bay ferry terminal.

## Bus

You can reach/leave Darwin by bus on three routes: the Western Australian route to/from Kununurra via Katherine; the Queensland route to/from Mt Isa via Three Ways; or straight along the Track to/from Alice Springs and Adelaide. For further information on interstate bus travel see p275.

All long-distance bus services are operated by **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au; Transit Centre, 69 Mitchell St; 🚏 6am-3.45pm Mon-Fri, 6am-1.30pm Sat & Sun). At least one service per day travels up and down the Stuart Hwy. Buses depart from the rear of the Transit Centre and stop at various points down the Stuart Hwy, including: Batchelor (\$38, 1½ hours), Adelaide River (\$38, two hours), Pine Creek (\$55, 3½ hours), Katherine (\$70, 4½ hours), Mataranka (\$90, 6½ hours), Tennant Creek (\$185, 14 hours) and Alice Springs (\$260, 22 hours).

For Kakadu, there's a daily return service from Darwin to Cooina (\$60, six hours) via Jabiru (\$45, 3¾ hours).

## Car & Motorcycle

There's a proliferation of budget car-rental operators in Darwin, and all the major companies are represented.

For driving around Darwin, conventional vehicles are cheap enough, but most companies offer only 100km free and around Darwin 100km won't get you very far. The prices invariably drop for longer rentals for both conventional and 4WD vehicles. See p281 for information on longer-term car and campervan rentals.

Rental companies, including the cut-price ones, generally operate a free towing or replacement service if a vehicle breaks down. But (especially with the cheaper operators) check the paperwork to see exactly what you're covered for in terms of damage to vehicles and injury to passengers. The usual age and insurance requirements apply in Darwin. There may be restrictions on off-bitumen driving, or the distance you're allowed to go. Even the big firms' insurance may not cover

you when driving off-bitumen, so make sure you know exactly what your liability is in the event of an accident. It is certainly worth taking out comprehensive insurance.

Nifty Rent-A-Car is about the cheapest there is, starting at \$35 per day with free 100km. There are also plenty of 4WD vehicles available in Darwin, but you usually have to book ahead, and fees and deposits are higher than for 2WD vehicles. Larger companies offer one-way rentals plus better mileage deals for more expensive vehicles.

Most rental companies are open every day and have agents in the city centre. Avis, Budget, Hertz and Thrifty all have offices at the airport.

**Avis** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 9922; 89 Smith St)

**Britz Australia** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 2081; 44 Stuart Hwy, Stuart Park)

**Budget** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8981 9800; cnr Daly & Doctors Gully Rd)

**Europcar** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 0300; 77 Cavenagh St)

**Hertz** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 0944; cnr Smith & Daly Sts)

**Nifty Rent-A-Car** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8941 7090; 86 Mitchell St) Also home to Advance Car Rentals.

**Thrifty** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8924 0000; 64 Stuart Hwy, Stuart Park)

If you're trying to buy or sell an old clunker for the next leg of your journey, the **Travelers' Car Market** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 0418 600 830; Peel St; 🚏 8am-4pm) is just around the corner from Mitchell St.

## Train

The famous *Ghan* train operates weekly (twice weekly May to July) between Adelaide and Darwin via Alice Springs. The Darwin terminus is located on Berrimah Rd, about 18km or 20 minutes from the city centre. A taxi fare into the centre is about \$30, though there is a shuttle service to/from the Transit Centre for \$10, as well as spruikers from various hostels waiting for potential customers to step off the train. See p277 for fare details. Bookings (recommended) can be made through **Trainways** (☎ 13 21 47; www.trainways.com.au).

## GETTING AROUND

### To/From the Airport

**Darwin International Airport** (Map p64; ☎ 8920 1805) is about 12km northeast of the centre of town, and handles both international and domestic flights. A taxi fare into the centre

is about \$20. **Darwin Airport Shuttle** (☎ 1800 358 945, 8981 5066) will pick up or drop off almost anywhere in the centre for \$8.50/17 one way/return. When leaving Darwin book a day before departure.

## Public Transport

**Darwinbus** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 8924 7666; Harry Chan Ave; 🚏 info counter 8am-12.45pm & 1.45-5pm Mon-Fri) runs a comprehensive bus network that departs from the city bus interchange, opposite Brown's Mart. Buses enter the city along Mitchell St and leave along Cavenagh St.

Fares are on a zone system (one/six zones cost \$1.40/2.80). Daily and weekly Tourcards, available from all bus interchanges, some newsagencies and the tourist information office, offer unlimited travel. Daily adult/child cards cost \$5/2.50; seven-day cards cost \$25/12.50.

Bus 4 (to Fannie Bay, Nightcliff, Rapid Creek and Casuarina) and bus 6 (Fannie Bay, Parap and Stuart Park) are useful for getting to Aquascene, the Botanic Gardens, Mindil Beach, the Museum & Art Gallery, Fannie Bay Gaol Museum and East Point and the markets.

Bus 5 and 8 go along the Stuart Hwy past the airport (but not near the terminal building) to Berrimah, from where the 5 goes north to Casuarina and the 8 continues along the highway to Palmerston.

The **Tour Tub** (☎ 8985 6322; www.tourtub.com) minibus tours Darwin's sights throughout the day and you can hop on and off along the route (see p74).

## Scooter

**Darwin Scooter Hire** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 0418 892 885; www.scoota.com.au; Mitchell St), opposite Shenanigans, rents out scooters for \$30/40 per two/four hours or \$50 per day. Two-seater scooters are also available for hire, along with bicycles (see p71).

## Taxi

Taxis wait outside Woolworth's on Knuckey St, diagonally opposite the north end of Smith St Mall, and are usually easy to flag down. Phone **Darwin Radio Taxis** (☎ 13 10 08).

**Arafura Shuttle** (☎ 8981 3300) runs a convenient 24-hour, door-to-door, minibus service that will take you anywhere within the CBD, the northern suburbs, or Palmerston.

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# Around Darwin



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

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

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

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

## HIGHLIGHTS

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



■ TELEPHONE CODE ☎ 08

- NT Parks & Wildlife Commission: [www.nreta.nt.gov.au](http://www.nreta.nt.gov.au)
- NT Fisherman's Association: [www.afant.com.au](http://www.afant.com.au)

## National Parks

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

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

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

## MANDORAH

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

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

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

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

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

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

## HOWARD SPRINGS NATURE PARK

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

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

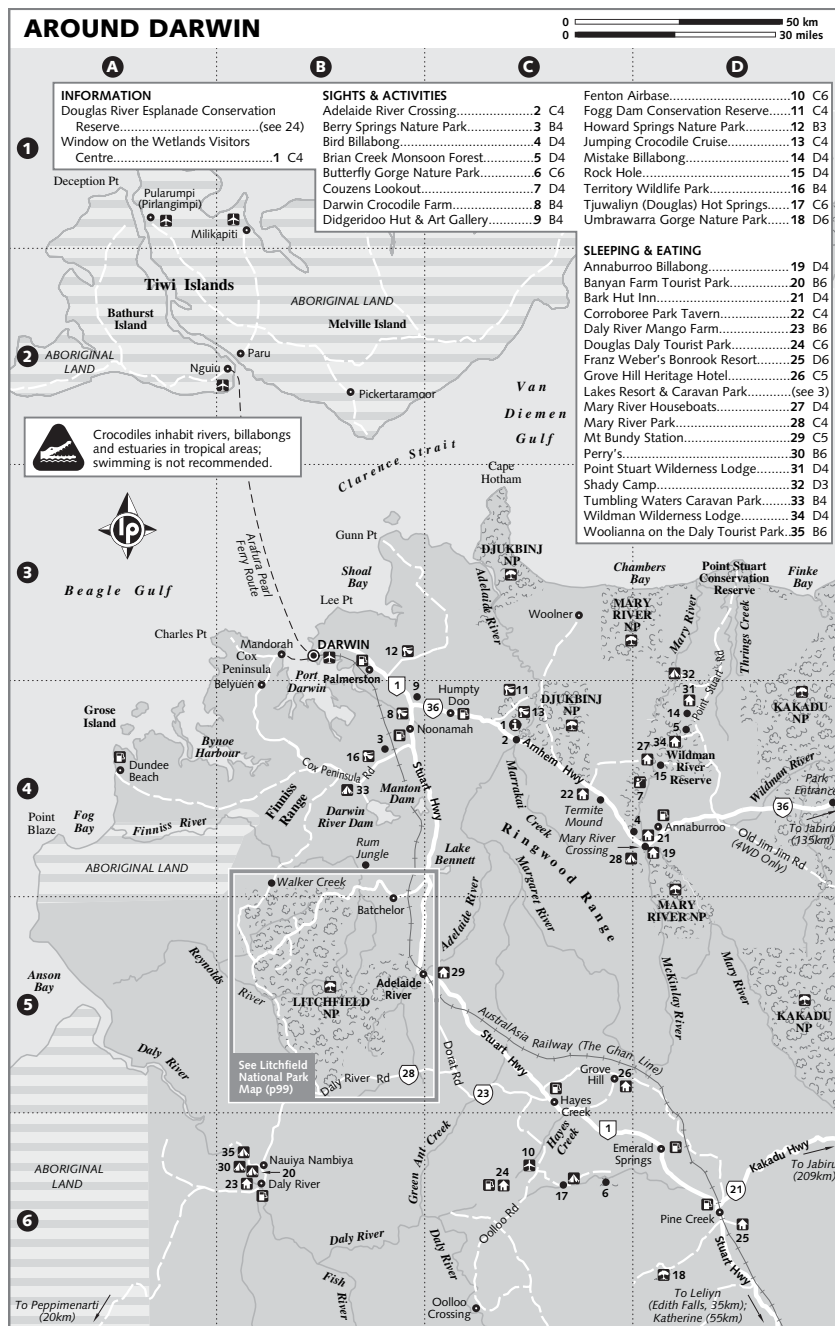
It's 24km from Darwin to the Howard Springs turn-off, which is 4km beyond the turn-off to Palmerston.

## DARWIN CROCODILE FARM

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

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

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



## TIWI ISLANDS

### pop 3600

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

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

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

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

### HISTORY

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

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

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

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

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

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

### INFORMATION

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

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

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

## TOURS

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

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

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

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

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

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

## ARNHEM HIGHWAY

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

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

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

## HUMPTY DOO

pop 4790

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

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

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

## Getting There & Away

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

## ADELAIDE RIVER WETLANDS Fogg Dam Conservation Reserve

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Window on the Wetlands Visitors Centre

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

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

## Adelaide River Crossing

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

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

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

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

## MARY RIVER REGION

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

## Sleeping & Eating

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

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

### THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

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

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

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

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

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

### Getting There & Away

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

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

### Mary River National Park

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

### INFORMATION

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

### SIGHTS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### ACTIVITIES

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

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

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

### TOURS

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

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

### SLEEPING & EATING

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

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

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

## DOWN THE TRACK

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

## TERRITORY WILDLIFE PARK & BERRY SPRINGS

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

### Territory Wildlife Park

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

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

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

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

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

### Berry Springs Nature Park

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

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

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

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

### Sleeping & Eating

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

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

## BATCHELOR

pop 730

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

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

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

## QUEENS IN GRASSLAND CASTLES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Sleeping & Eating

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

## Getting There & Away

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

## LITCHFIELD NATIONAL PARK

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

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

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

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

## Information

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

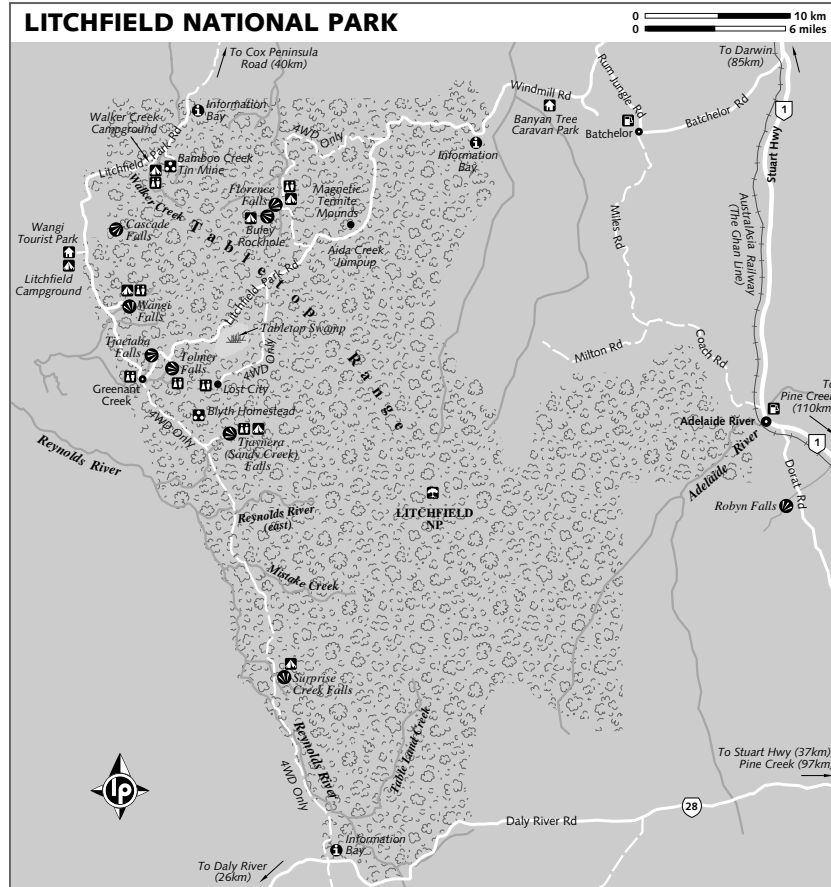
Maps NT publishes a very good 1:30,000 *Litchfield National Park* map, available from the information centre (p65) in Darwin and through some shops and accommodation in Batchelor and the park. If more detail is required, the topographic sheet maps that cover the park are the 1:100,000 *Reynolds River*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

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

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

## Dangers & Annoyances

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



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

## Sights

### MAGNETIC TERMITE MOUNDS

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

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

### BULEY ROCKHOLE & FLORENCE FALLS

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

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

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

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

#### LOST CITY

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

#### TABLETOP SWAMP

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

#### TOLMER FALLS

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

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

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

#### GREENANT CREEK & TJAETABA FALLS

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

#### BLYTH HOMESTEAD RUINS, TJAYNERA FALLS & SURPRISE CREEK FALLS

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

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

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

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

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

#### WANGI FALLS

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

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

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

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

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

#### WALKER & BAMBOO CREEKS

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

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

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

#### Tours

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### Sleeping & Eating

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Getting There & Away

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

## ADELAIDE RIVER

pop 230

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Sleeping & Eating

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

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

### DETOUR

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

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

### Getting There & Away

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

## HAYES CREEK

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

## DOUGLAS DALY REGION

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

### Robyn Falls

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

### Fenton Airbase

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

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

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

### Tjuwaliyn (Douglas) Hot Springs

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

### Butterfly Gorge Nature Park

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

### Douglas River Esplanade Conservation Reserve

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

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

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

## DALY RIVER

pop 620

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

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

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

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

## Sleeping & Eating

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Getting There & Away

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

## PINE CREEK

pop 740

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

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

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

## History

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

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

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

## Information

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

## Sights & Activities

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

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

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

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

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

## Sleeping & Eating

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Getting There & Away

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

### UMBRAWARRA GORGE NATURE PARK

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

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

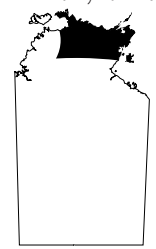
In Aboriginal legend, the gorge is the Dreaming site of *Kuna-ngarrk-ngarrk*, the white-bellied sea-eagle. Here he caught and ate a barramundi; the white flakes in the granite rock are said to be the scales of the barra, and the quartz outcrops are the eagle's droppings. Rock art can be seen along the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

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

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

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

# Kakadu & Arnhem Land



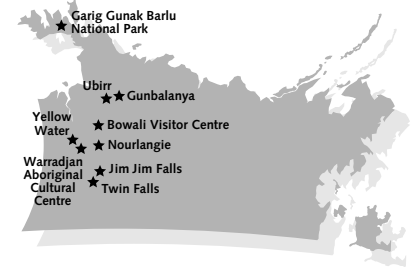
Kakadu and Arnhem Land epitomise the remarkable landscape and cultural heritage of the Top End. Each is a treasure house of natural history and Aboriginal art, and both are significant in terms of contemporary Indigenous culture and its connection with tradition.

Kakadu is not just a nature reserve; it is also an acknowledgement of the elemental link between the Aboriginal custodians and the country they have nurtured, endured and respected for thousands of generations. The landscape is an ever-changing tapestry – periodically scorched and flooded, apparently desolate or obviously abundant depending on the season. The sun-baked rocky ramparts of the Arnhem Land escarpment mark the boundary of the ‘stone country’ – the elevated Arnhem Land Plateau. In a big Wet, dramatic waterfalls cascade off the escarpment to fill raging watercourses that spill over onto the vast floodplains. Replenished lowlands of emerald green are scattered with sprawling billabongs, life is super-abundant and roads are flooded. The plateau and the sandstone outliers become islands of sanctuary: ancient monsoon shelters and rock-art galleries.

The water will recede, shrinking billabongs will become crowded then deserted, fires will ignite, a patchwork of green, yellow, brown, black will await next season’s rains. For climate calls the tune, as it always has – when the migrating birds arrive, when the crocodile lays her eggs, when the magpie geese can be easily hunted.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Viewing the exceptional Aboriginal rock-art galleries under the massive rock face of **Nourlangie** (p122)
- Spotting the ochre thylacine and catching the sunset from the rocky sentinel of **Ubirr** (p120)
- Discovering the rock-art of Injalak and visiting the art centre at **Gunbalanya** (p128)
- Cruising with crocodiles and seeing remarkable birdlife on **Yellow Water Wetlands** (p116)
- Visiting Kakadu’s excellent and absorbing **Bowali Visitor Centre** (p114) and **Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre** (p114)
- Taking a small-group, expertly guided tour to explore **Jim Jim and Twin Falls** (p124)
- Investigating the ruins of Victoria Settlement in the remote **Garig Gunak Barlu National Park** (p129)



■ TELEPHONE CODE ☎ 08

■ Kakadu National Park: [www.deh.gov.au/parks/kakadu/](http://www.deh.gov.au/parks/kakadu/)  
 ■ East Arnhem Land Tourism Association: [www.ealta.org](http://www.ealta.org)

# KAKADU NATIONAL PARK

Kakadu National Park is one of Australia's (if not one of the world's) greatest national parks. Encompassing almost 20,000 sq km, it is certainly one of the largest parks in Australia, and is renowned for its protection of a spectacular ecosystem and an important concentration of ancient rock art. In 1984, Kakadu gained World Heritage Listing for both its ecological and cultural heritage.

The name Kakadu comes from Gagadju, one of the languages spoken in the north of the region. Much of Kakadu is Aboriginal land, leased to the government for use as a national park. The entire park is jointly managed by Parks Australia and the traditional Aboriginal owners. There are around 300 Aboriginal people living in several Aboriginal settlements in the park and in the township of Jabiru, and about one-third of the park rangers are Aboriginal.

The traditional owners are represented through five associations, which own a number of the park's material assets, including resorts at Jabiru and Cooinda, the Border Store and the Yellow Water cruise operation.

## History

Kakadu was proclaimed a national park in three stages. Stage One, the eastern and central part of the park (including Ubirr, Nourlangie, Jim Jim and Twin Falls and Yellow Water Billabong), was declared in 1979. Stage Two, in the north, was declared in 1984 and gained World Heritage listing. Stage Three, in the south, was finally listed in 1991, bringing virtually the whole of the South Alligator River system within the park.

## ABORIGINAL HERITAGE

It is known that Aboriginal people have lived in the Kakadu area for at least 23,000 years, and possibly up to 50,000 years. Artefacts such as stone tools and grindstones found at a number of sites indicate constant habitation in the area.

As in other parts of Australia, the people led a hunter-gatherer existence, where men hunted and women gathered vegetable foods and seeds. They moved through the country as necessary, but never aimlessly, and along defined paths that had been used for generations in the search for food, water or other natural resources such as ochre or spears.

The rocky nature of the rugged countryside that typifies much of the park offered excellent shelter and many of these shelters bear art sites of international importance.

Today the park is occupied by a number of different groups (or clans), each with a different language and often different traditional practices. Although many practices have been modified or lost altogether in the years since contact with whites, the traditional owners still have strong personal and spiritual links with the land.

## EUROPEAN EXPLORATION

Although a number of vessels had sailed along the coast on exploratory voyages since the mid-17th century, it wasn't until Captain Phillip King made a number of voyages between 1818 and 1822 that any of the hinterland was investigated. King travelled up the East Alligator and South Alligator Rivers, and named them after mistaking the many saltwater crocs for alligators.

The first European to come through this area overland was the remarkable Prussian naturalist Ludwig Leichhardt, who set out from Queensland in October 1844 for Port Essington on the Cobour Peninsula. He crossed the Arnhem Land plateau and the South Alligator River many months later, before finally staggering into Port Essington, somewhat worse for wear, in December 1845.

Some 20 years later, a party led by experienced explorer John McKinlay was sent out by the South Australian government to find a better site than Escape Cliffs by the Adelaide River mouth for a northern settlement. McKinlay botched the expedition by not setting out until the middle of the wet season, which had been particularly severe that year. The party took months to travel just the relatively short distance to the East Alligator River, and ended up bailing out by shooting their horses, constructing a makeshift horse-hide raft and floating all the way back to Escape Cliffs!

In the 1870s the surge of prospectors to the goldfields at Pine Creek led to increased activity in the Kakadu area, and this was followed by the start of pastoral activity.

In the 1890s a few Europeans started to make a living from shooting buffalo for hides in the Alligator rivers region. Foremost among these men was Paddy Cahill, who dominated European settlement in this area until 1925. In that year the Church Missionary Society was given permission by the government to establish a mission at Oenpelli, one of a number throughout the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve, which had been established in 1921. By this stage any attempts to set up pastoral properties had failed and parts of the area had become vacant crown land.

The buffalo industry continued throughout the first half of the 20th century with many Aboriginal people working as hunters and tanners. However, with the introduction of synthetics demand fell away and hunting became unviable.

In 1969 and 1972 the precursors to Kakadu, the Woolwonga and Alligator Rivers Wildlife Sanctuaries, were declared. These were followed in 1978 by the granting of some land titles to the traditional Aboriginal owners under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976*, and the proclamation of the Kakadu National Park in 1979.

## MINING

In 1953 uranium was discovered in the region. Twelve small deposits in the southern reaches of the park were worked in the 1960s, but were abandoned following the declaration of Woolwonga Wildlife Sanctuary.

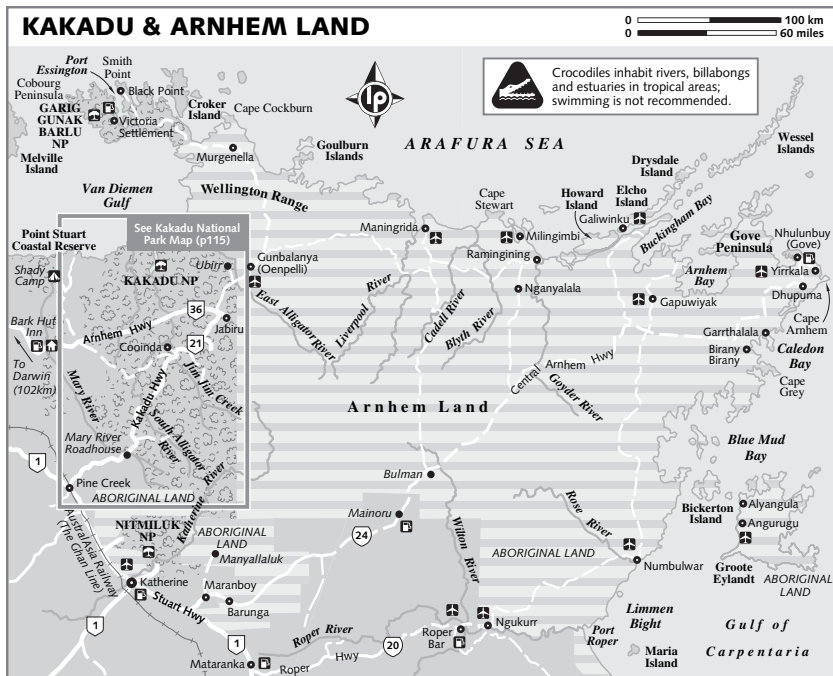
In 1970 three huge deposits – Ranger, Nabarlek and Koongarra – were found, followed by Jabiluka in 1973 (see the boxed text p110). The Nabarlek deposit (in Arnhem Land) was mined in the late '70s, and the Ranger Uranium Mine started producing ore in 1981.

## Wildlife

### HABITATS & PLANTS

Kakadu's landforms, vegetation and wildlife are inextricably linked, and an understanding of one is virtually impossible without some appreciation of the others.

The Kakadu region has six major landforms: the Arnhem Land escarpment and



### JABILUKA MINE

Uranium was discovered at Jabiluka in 1971, and an agreement to mine was negotiated with the local Aboriginal peoples. Mine development was delayed due to oscillating Federal government mining policy until 1996, by which time concern had grown that Aboriginal Elders had been coerced into signing the agreement.

The Jabiluka mine became the scene of sit-in demonstrations during 1998, which resulted in large-scale arrests. A Unesco delegation inspected the mine site and reported that it would endanger Kakadu's World Heritage listing, a finding later contradicted by an Independent Science Panel. In 2003, stockpiled ore was returned into the mine and the decline tunnel leading into the deposit was backfilled as the mining company moved into dialogue with the traditional landowners, the Mirrar people.

In February 2005 the current owners of the Jabiluka mining lease, Energy Resources of Australia (ERA), signed an agreement that gave the Mirrar the deciding vote on any resumption of this controversial mining project. Under the deal ERA is allowed to continue to explore the lease, subject to Mirrar consent. In addition, every four years ERA is allowed to ask the Mirrar to consider opening the mine, beginning in 2006. As the Mirrar have staged a David and Goliath-style battle against the mine's construction for many years, it's unlikely their position, based on cultural and environmental concerns, will change. However, with the closure of the Ranger mine in 2010, the Mirrar will be under considerable pressure to find alternative income.

plateau, coastal estuaries and tidal flats, riverine floodplains, lowlands, monsoon rainforests, and the southern hills. Each has its own distinctive mix of vegetation and animals. Over 1600 plant species have been recorded in the park, and a number of them are still used by the local Aboriginal people for food, bush medicine and other practical purposes.

### Arnhem Land Escarpment & Plateau

The meandering Arnhem Land escarpment cuts into the eastern boundary of the park and marks the start of the vast Arnhem plateau – a rugged expanse of sandstone stretching 500km through east and south-east Kakadu. The eroded cliffs, ranging from 30m to 300m in height, provide a dramatic backdrop to many parts of the park. The plateau itself is surprisingly dry, mainly because any rain soaks quickly into the sandstone, recharging the water table and keeping many rivers and waterfalls flowing year-round.

The soil on the plateau is shallow and low in nutrients, and supports hardy plants that can tolerate the generally poor conditions, such as spinifex grass and the endemic sandstone pandanus palm.

### Coastal Estuaries & Tidal Flats

The coastal zone has long stretches of mangroves, which are important for stabilising the mud flats and provide a nursery ground for marine and bird life. Mangroves line the

South Alligator River for much of its length upstream, but most of this habitat is not generally accessible.

### Floodplains

Kakadu is drained by four major rivers (from west to east, the Wildman, West Alligator, South Alligator and East Alligator), which during the Wet overflow to form vast wetlands. These floods are a chaotic yet vital part of the park's ecology. Areas on river floodplains that are perfectly dry underfoot in September could be under 3m of water a few months later. As the waters recede in the Dry, some loops of wet-season watercourses become cut off, and don't dry up; these billabongs are a magnet for wildlife.

The wetlands and many of the permanent billabongs are fringed by stands of tall trees, predominantly paperbarks with their sweet-smelling blossoms, which attract a multitude of birds, and also freshwater mangroves and pandanus palms. The wetlands offer some of the most spectacular sights of the park, and have been considered sufficiently important to be placed on the List of Wetlands of International Importance. Some of the more accessible wetland areas include Yellow Water, Mamukala, Ubirr and Bubba.

### Lowlands

About half the park – predominantly the southern section – is dry lowlands with

open grassland or woodland. The main tree of the woodland, and one that dominates much of the Top End, is a eucalypt, the Darwin woollybutt – a predominantly smooth-barked tree with a conspicuous fibrous base. Below the canopy, pandanus palms and other small trees grow, while the ground is covered by annual grasses. Naturally enough these grasses are the dominant form of vegetation in the grasslands, and after the Wet can shoot up to 2m high.

Much of the Kakadu Hwy from the Stuart Hwy into Jabiru passes through this habitat.

### Monsoon Rainforest

Isolated pockets of monsoon rainforest appear throughout the park, and are of one of two types: coastal and sandstone. Coastal monsoon rainforest is dominated by banyan, kapok and milkwood trees, and generally appears along river banks or other places where there is permanent water – either above or below ground. Sandstone monsoon rainforest grows along the gorges of the escarpment, such as at Jim Jim Falls.

### Southern Hills

Rocky hills and ridges in the southern part of the park are of volcanic origin, and erosion of this material has led to a distinctive soil, giving rise to some unique flora and, in turn, fauna. One of the most noticeable and

widespread eucalypts found here, especially in the Gunlom vicinity, is the salmon gum, which has smooth salmon-pink trunk and branches.

### ANIMALS

Kakadu has over 60 species of mammals, more than 280 bird species, 120 or so types of reptile, 25 species of frog, 55 freshwater fish species and at least 10,000 different kinds of insect. There are frequent additions to the list and a few of the rarer species are unique to the park.

Most visitors see only a fraction of these creatures in a visit, since many of them are shy, nocturnal or scarce. Take advantage of talks and walks led by park rangers, mainly in the Dry, to get to know and see more of the wildlife (see p116).

### Mammals

Eight types of kangaroos and wallabies inhabit the park, mostly in the open forest and woodland areas, or on the fringes of the floodplains. Most commonly seen are agile wallabies – petite, fawn-coloured wallabies that rocket through the undergrowth or into the path of your car – and the large antilopine wallaroo, Kakadu's largest macropod. Those not so often sighted include the short-eared rock wallabies, which can sometimes be seen at Ubirr first thing in the morning and at

### WHY SO MUCH SMOKE?

Many first-time visitors to the Top End in the Dry comment on the amount of smoke in the sky from large bushfires. In a country where bushfires are associated with enormous damage and loss of life, it sometimes seems as though huge tracts of the Top End are being reduced to ashes. In fact the truth is that the fires, although uncontrolled, are deliberately lit and are rejuvenating the country.

For thousands of years Aboriginal people have used fire as a tool for hunting and environmental management. In fact, they have been doing it for so long that they have changed the environment, selecting many plant species that not only survive fires, but which also rely on them for seedling regeneration. The usual practice was to light fires in the early Dry to burn the lower shrubs and spear grass that grows so prolifically during the Wet. Fires late in the Dry were avoided as they could burn out of control over huge areas. The early-season fires would burn over a fairly small area, and the result was a mosaic of burnt and unburnt areas. Populations of plants and animals that would have been destroyed in a wildfire could thus shelter in unburnt refuges and recolonise burnt areas.

Since European settlement of the Top End and the decline in Aboriginal people leading a traditional existence, the burning patterns have changed. This led to the accumulation of unburnt material on the ground and any fires late in the season could destroy huge areas.

The benefits of the traditional methods of environmental management have been recognised for some time now and park management now recreates the mosaic burn pattern.



sunset. It is well camouflaged and when still can easily be missed. Also keep your eyes open for the enigmatic and beautiful black wallaroo at Nourlangie Rock, where individuals sometimes rest under shaded rock shelters.

Nocturnal northern brushtail possums, sugar gliders and northern brown bandicoots are also common in the woodlands. Kakadu is home to 28 bat species and is a key refuge for four rare varieties. At dusk, look out for huge fruit bats leaving their camps.

Dingoes are also sometimes encountered bounding through spear grass along the roadsides.

### Birds

Spectacular, numerous, colourful and noisy – birds are the most conspicuous inhabitants of Kakadu. Those with a general interest will find much to enjoy on the wetlands and walking tracks; keen bird-watchers should head straight for Nourlangie Rock or Gunlom to winkle out some of the rarer species before enjoying the water-bird spectacle. The greatest variety is seen just before the Wet, when masses of birds congregate at the shrinking waterholes, the migrants arrive from Asia and many species start their breeding cycle.

Kakadu is internationally famous for its abundant water birds, and the huge flocks that congregate in the dry season are a highlight. The park is one of the chief refuges in Australia for several species, among them the magpie goose, green pygmy-goose and Burdekin duck. Other fine water birds include pelicans, darters and the black-necked stork, or jabiru, with its distinctive red legs and iridescent blue-black plumage. Those with bright yellow eyes are females; the males have black eyes. Water birds are most easily seen at Mamukala and other wetlands, or on the Yellow Water cruise.

The open woodlands are home to yet more birds. You're quite likely to see rainbow bee-eaters, kingfishers (of which there are six types in Kakadu), the long-tailed pheasant coucal and the endangered bustard, Australia's heaviest bird of flight, as well as gaudy parrots and cockatoos: look for raucous sulphur-crested white cockatoos in the paperbark trees and spectacular red-tailed black cockatoos on recently

burnt ground. Raptors include majestic white-bellied sea eagles, which are often seen near inland waterways, while whistling and black kites are common. Count yourself lucky if you spot an emu in the park – and keep it to yourself, lest it ends up as bush tucker. At night you might hear barking owls calling (they sound just like dogs) and you will almost certainly here the plaintive cry of the bush stone-curlew.

### Reptiles

Kakadu is home to an extraordinary number of reptile species. Of the 120 species so far recorded, 11 are endemic, and the striking Oenpelli python was first seen by non-Aboriginal people only in 1976. The world's largest reptile (the estuarine or saltwater crocodile) is abundant in Kakadu. Several large specimens normally hang around Yellow Water. Both Twin and Jim Jim Falls have resident freshwater crocodiles, which are considered harmless. While it's quite a thrill to be so close to nature, all crocodiles are not to be meddled with on any account.

After the crocodiles, Kakadu's most famous reptilian inhabitant is probably the frilled lizard. These large members of the dragon family can grow to 1m in length and are a common sight during the Wet. Look for them sitting upright by the roadside, or scurrying away through the bush on their hind legs. You're more likely to spot one of the goanna species weaving along the trails or sliding through the water.

Although Kakadu has many snakes, most are nocturnal and rarely encountered. Several beautiful species of python include the olive python and the striking black-headed python. File snakes, so named because of the texture of the skin, live in permanent billabongs and are a favoured bush tucker.

### Fish

Among the 55 species of fish are some that spend part of their lives in saltwater. The most famous is, of course, the barramundi – a renowned sportfish that can grow to well over 1m long. All 'barra' are born male and change to female at the age of five or six years. The secretive archer fish is so named because it swims just below the surface and, with pinpoint accuracy, squirts drops of water at insects on overhanging branches to knock them down as prey.

### Insects

If you're wondering what that engine-like sound coming across the wetlands at dusk is, don't ask – run! The mosquitoes at Ubirr may just carry you away, and they seem to come equipped with hypodermic needles. Mozzies seem to be the most noticeable insect in the park, although they become less of a menace as you move south.

Termites are probably more abundant still, although their impressive earth mounds are much more obvious than the actual insects; these are northern Australia's answer to the vast grazing herds of Africa.

One of the most famous of the park's insect inhabitants is Leichhardt's grasshopper, a beautiful blue and orange insect that was not seen again by science until 130 years after its discovery in 1845. The Aboriginal people know them as Aljurr, the children of Namarrgon (Lightning Man), because they are said to call their father to start the storms before the Wet.

### Climate

The average maximum temperature in Kakadu is 34°C year-round. Broadly speaking, the Dry is from May to October and the Wet is from November to April; unsurprisingly, most of the average rainfall of 1600mm falls in the Wet. The transition from Dry to Wet transforms the Kakadu

landscape: wetlands grow, rivers flood and unsealed roads become impassable, cutting off some highlights like Jim Jim Falls.

### Orientation

Kakadu National Park is huge. It's 170km from Darwin at its nearest boundary, and stretches another 130km from there across to the western edge of Arnhem Land. It is roughly rectangular and measures about 210km from north to south.

Two main roads traverse the park (Arnhem Hwy and Kakadu Hwy), which are both sealed and accessible year-round. Most points of interest and places to stay are reached off these highways.

The Arnhem Hwy stretches 120km east from the Stuart Hwy to the park entrance and a further 107km to Jabiru, passing the resort at South Alligator on the way.

Seven kilometres past the South Alligator bridge is the Mamukala Wetlands, and 29km further is the turn-off to Ubirr, one of the park's major sites, which lies another 39km to the northeast near the East Alligator River. This road also gives access to Gunbalanya (Oenpelli), Arnhem Land and the Cobourg Peninsula.

The bitumen Kakadu Hwy turns south off the Arnhem Hwy shortly before Jabiru. It runs past the Park Headquarters and Bowali Visitor Centre (2.5km), and the turn-offs to

### KAKADU'S SEASONAL CYCLE

The Aboriginal people of Kakadu recognise six seasons in the annual climatic cycle. These seasons are marked not only by observed changes in the weather but also by its effect on plant growth and animal behaviour.

**Gunmeleng** This is the 'build-up' to the Wet, which starts in mid-October. Humidity increases and the temperatures rise to 35°C or more – and the number of mosquitoes, always high near water, rises to near plague proportions. By November the thunderstorms have started, billabongs are replenished and the water birds and fish disperse. Traditionally this is when the Aboriginal people made their seasonal move from the floodplains to the shelter of the escarpment.

**Gudjuek** The Wet proper continues through January, February and March, with violent thunderstorms and an abundance of plant and animal life thriving in the hot, moist conditions. Most of Kakadu's rain falls during this period.

**Banggereng** In April, storms (known as 'knock 'em down' storms) flatten the spear grass, which during the course of the Wet has shot up to 2m in height.

**Yekke** The season of mists, when the air starts to dry out, extends from May to mid-June. The wetlands and waterfalls still have a lot of water and most of the tracks are open; and there aren't too many other visitors. The first firing of the countryside begins.

**Wurrung & Gurrung** The most comfortable time to visit Kakadu is during the late Dry in July and August. This is when wildlife, especially birds, gather in large numbers around shrinking billabongs; it's also when most tourists come to the park.

Nourlangie (21km), Muirella (28km), Jim Jim Falls (41km), Cooida (47km), Maguk (88.5km) and Gunlom (134km), before passing through the southern entrance to the park (145km) and emerging at Pine Creek on the Stuart Hwy (207km).

Old Jim Jim Rd leaves the Kakadu Hwy 7km south of Cooida and heads west for 145km, passing Giyamungkurr (Black Jungle Springs), before joining the Arnhem Hwy east of Bark Hut.

## MAPS

The *Kakadu National Park Visitor Guide & Maps* booklet contains detailed information on all the sights and facilities, including good maps. It is available at the Darwin visitor information centre, Bowali Visitor Centre and the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre.

The Hema *Kakadu National Park* 1:390,000 map is updated regularly and is widely available. The Bowali Visitor Centre sells 1:100,000 topographic maps covering most parts of the park; they can also be studied at the Bowali resources centre. These are essential if you are exploring some remote areas of Kakadu.

## Information

**Kakadu National Park** ([www.deh.gov.au/parks/kakadu](http://www.deh.gov.au/parks/kakadu); admission free) is open year-round. Access roads to Jim Jim and Twin Falls and to West Alligator Head are closed during the Wet, and attractions in the southern part of the park, such as Gunlom, are accessible only to 4WDs in the Wet.

## BOWALI VISITOR CENTRE

The **Bowali Visitor Centre** (☎ 8938 1121; Kakadu Hwy; ☎ 8am-5pm) is a beautifully designed building of walk-through displays that sweep you across the land, explaining Kakadu's ecology from both cultural and conservation perspectives. There is good access and facilities for disabled visitors, a souvenir shop and a good café with espresso coffee and snacks.

The information desk has plenty of leaflets on various aspects of the park. A theatre shows a 25-minute audio-visual presentation on the seasonal changes in the park (screened hourly from 9am to 4pm), and an excellent resource centre has a comprehensive selection of reference books and maps. Another theatre shows documentaries about the park from 8.30am to 3.30pm daily.

The Marrawuddi Gallery sells a range of souvenirs and is well stocked with books on all things Kakadu. A couple of recommended purchases are Bill 'Kakadu Bill' Neidjie's *A Story About Feeling*, which allows you to feel Kakadu, and Malcolm Arnold's *Birds of the Top End*.

The visitors centre is about 2.5km south of the Arnhem Hwy intersection. A walking track connects it to Jabiru, about 2km away (30 minutes). Allow at least two hours to get the most out of a visit.

## WARRADJAN ABORIGINAL CULTURAL CENTRE

This **cultural centre** (☎ 8975 0051; Yellow Water Area; ☎ 9am-5pm) near Cooida gives an excellent insight into the culture of the park's traditional owners. The circular design of the building symbolises the way Aboriginal people sit in a circle when having a meeting and is also reminiscent of the *warradjan* (pig-nosed turtle).

The displays depict creation stories when the *Nayuyunggi* (first people) laid out the land and the laws, and the winding path you follow through the display symbolises the way the Rainbow Serpent moves through the country. It gives an introduction into the moiety (kin relationships) system and skin names (groups) of the region.

You can choose the video you wish to view from one of 12 on Kakadu and aspects of the local culture. There's also a craft shop selling local art, didgeridoos and paintings, as well as T-shirts and refreshments.

Warradjan is an easy walk (1km, 15 minutes) from the Cooida resort.

## DISABLED ACCESS

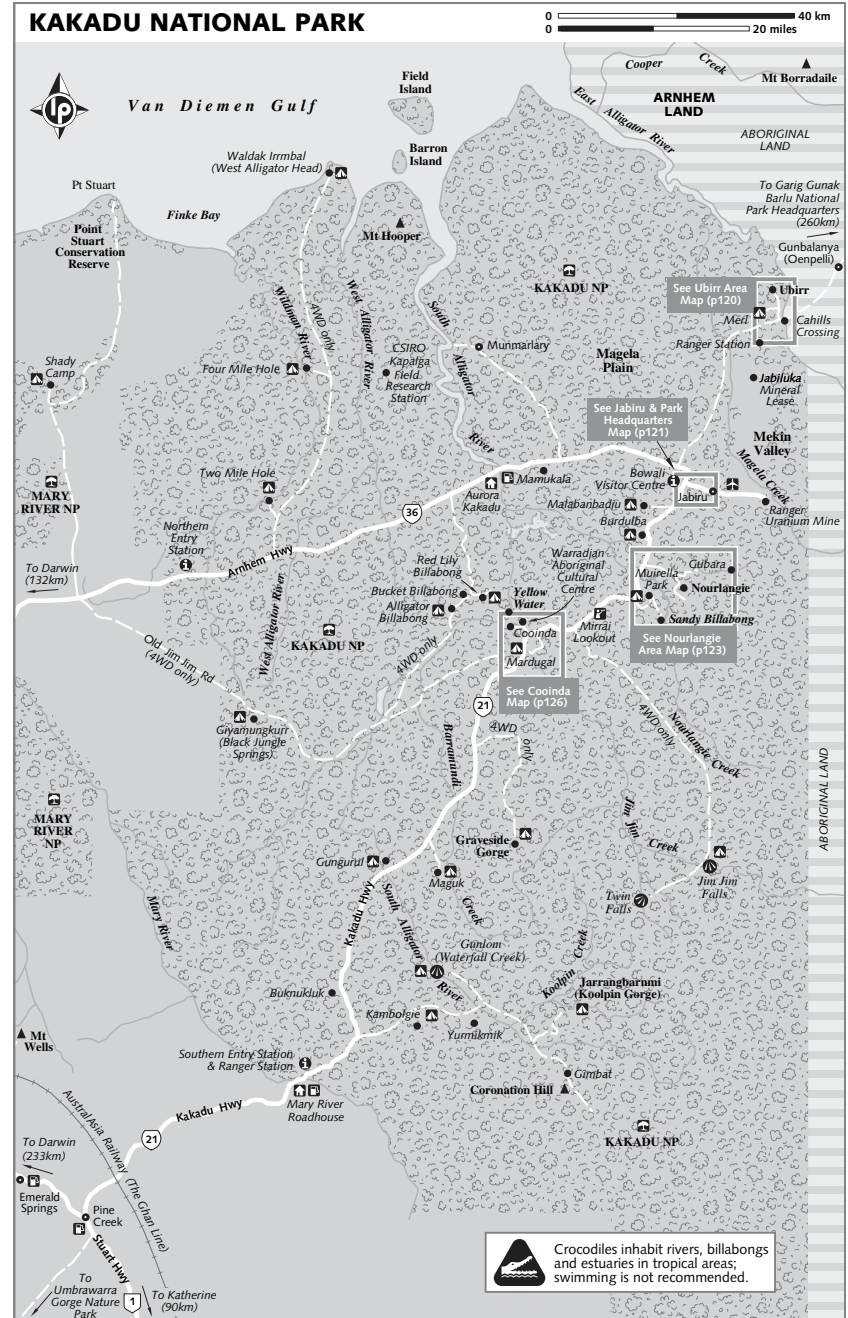
There is wheelchair access to the main gallery and Rainbow Serpent art sites at Ubirr, Anbangbang rock shelter (the main gallery at Nourlangie), the plunge pool at Gunlom, Bowali Visitor Centre and Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre.

Wheelchairs can also be accommodated on the Yellow Water cruise – advise staff when booking.

## Activities

### BUSHWALKING

Kakadu is excellent but challenging bushwalking country. Many people will be satisfied with the marked tracks. For the more



## ROCK ART

Kakadu's extraordinary rock-art sites were critical to the park's World Heritage listing. The art is referred to as naturalistic – portraying the physical, social and cultural environment – and may depict animals that no longer exist, such as the thylacine. More than 5000 sites are known, the oldest dating from more than 20,000 years ago. Truly this is one of the world's greatest collections of rock art: some of the finest galleries are at Ubirr, Nourlangie and Nanguluwur.

The paintings have been classified into four roughly defined periods: Pre-estuarine, which is from the earliest paintings up to around 6000 years ago; Estuarine, which covers the period from 6000 to around 2000 years ago, when rising sea levels flooded valleys and brought the coast to its present level; Freshwater, from 2000 years ago; and Contact period, from about 500 years ago.

For the local Aboriginal people the rock-art sites are a major source of traditional knowledge and are used as their historical archives. The most recent paintings, some executed as recently as the 1980s, connect the local community with the artists. Older paintings are believed by many Aboriginal people to have been painted by spirit people, and depict *stories* that connect the people with creation legends and the development of Aboriginal law.

The majority of rock-art sites open to the public are relatively recent. The paintings, which often have layers of styles painted over one another, may depict hunting scenes, favoured prey, ceremonies or creation ancestors. The hauntingly beautiful stick figures are *mimi* ancestral beings and are one of the oldest art styles.

The conservation of the Kakadu rock-art sites is a major part of the park management task because the natural, water-soluble ochres (paints) used are very susceptible to water damage. Drip-lines of small ridges of clear silicon rubber have been made on the rocks above the paintings to divert the water flow. The most accessible sites receive up to 4000 visitors a week, which presents the problem of dust damage. Boardwalks have been erected to keep the dust down and keep people at a suitable distance from the paintings.

adventurous there are infinite possibilities, especially in the drier southern and eastern sections of the park. You will need a permit from the Bowali Visitor Centre to camp outside established camping grounds.

The marked tracks within the park range from 1km to 12km long and are all fairly easy. Many of the ranger-led activities involve a guided walk along various tracks, and there is a *Park Notes* fact sheet for most, so you can do a self-guided walk. These sheets are available from the visitors centre and usually from a box at the start of each track. Lonely Planet's *Walking in Australia* features a detailed trail description of the Barrk Sandstone Bushwalk at Nourlangie.

A bushwalking permit, available from the Bowali Visitor Centre, is needed for overnight walks. Topographic maps are necessary for extended walks and must be submitted with a permit application. The maps are available from **Maps NT** (☎ 8999 7032; 1st fl, cnr Cavenagh & Bennett Sts, Darwin; ☹ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) and at the Bowali Visitor Centre. Allow one week for the permit to be issued.

The **Darwin Bushwalking Club** (☎ 8985 1484; www.bushwalking.org.au/dbc) welcomes visitors and

may be able to help with information too. It has walks most weekends, often in Kakadu.

## GUIDED WALKS & TALKS

A wonderful variety of informative and free activities are conducted by park staff during the Dry. If you're in the area, they're well worth joining. The range includes: art-site talks at Ubirr and Nourlangie; guided walks at Ubirr, Nourlangie, Yellow Water, Mardugal, Maguk and Gunlom; kids' activities at Gunlom; and slide shows in the early evening at the Kakadu Lodge in Jabiru, Muirella Park camping ground, Aurora Kakadu Resort at South Alligator, Gagudju Lodge Cooinda, Mardugal camping ground and Gunlom camping ground.

The schedule of activities differs somewhat from season to season; find out details from the Bowali Visitor Centre.

## WETLAND & RIVER TRIPS

### Yellow Water Cruise

The **cruses** (☎ 8979 0145; www.gagudju-dreaming.com; 1½hr adult/child \$40/16, 2hr \$45/18) on the Yellow Water wetlands that operate throughout the year are probably the most popular

activity within the park. Take extra film as you'll spot crocodiles and numerous species of water birds against a backdrop of vivid greens and a bright blue sky mirrored in the still water. The dawn trip is the best, but the other trips throughout the day can be equally good. Take mosquito repellent and sunscreen.

During the Dry, 1½-hour trips depart daily at 11.30am, 1.15pm and 2.45pm, and two-hour cruises leave at 6.45am, 9am and 4.30pm. During the Wet, only 1½-hour trips are available, leaving daily at 8.30am, 11.45am, 1.30pm and 3.30pm.

Tickets are purchased at Gagudju Lodge Cooinda (p126), from where a shuttle bus will deliver you to the departure point. Book at least a day ahead during busy times.

### East Alligator River Cruise

It's worth taking a **Guluyambi cruise** (☎ 1800 089 113; www.guluyambi.com.au) on the East Alligator River near Cahill's Crossing in the north of the park. An Aboriginal guide accompanies the 1½-hour trip and the emphasis is on Aboriginal culture and relationship with the land.

Cruises depart from the upstream boat ramp at East Alligator at 9am, 11am, 1pm and 3pm in the Dry and cost \$40/20 per adult/child. Bookings can be made at the Border Store, Jabiru airport and most travel agencies. Be at the boat ramp 15 minutes prior to departure.

During the Wet, Guluyambi operates additional half-day tours including a cruise across the picturesque flooded Magela Creek and a bus drive on to Ubirr (adult/child \$100/80). It departs Jabiru at 10.30am daily and provides the only means by which visitors can get to Ubirr when it is at its best.

## SCENIC FLIGHTS

The view of Kakadu from the air is spectacular. **Kakadu Air** (☎ 1800 089 113; www.kakaduair.com.au), at Jabiru and Cooinda, have 30-minute/one-hour fixed-wing flights for \$100/175 per person. Helicopter tours cost from \$170 (20 minutes) to \$430 (70 minutes) per person. A scenic flight is the only way to see the stunning Jim Jim and Twin Falls in the Wet and if you're after that aerial view of the majestic Arnhem Land escarpment, take the one-hour flight from Cooinda.

## Tours

There are loads of tours to Kakadu from Darwin and a few that start from inside the park. These range from comfortable sight-seeing to bumpy 4WD trips with energetic activities. Shop around and ask about student/YHA discounts, stand-by rates and wet-season specials.

The first thing to note is that even if you don't have your own wheels, it's possible to explore Kakadu and its surrounds at your leisure and at a discount. Trying to get around on a bus pass alone will be frustrating, but you can see a lot by combining transport to Jabiru, Ubirr and Cooinda with a couple of tours. Camping gear can be hired inexpensively in Darwin (see p85).

Generally, day tours from Darwin combine two sights such as Nourlangie Rock and the Yellow Water Cruise and are very long (ie 14-hour) days and cost around \$160. Two-day tours taking in Nourlangie, Ubirr and the Yellow Water cruise cost around \$350. Three-day tours typically go off the bitumen and take in Jim Jim Falls, Nourlangie and the Yellow Waters cruise, and cost from \$650. Longer trips will give time to really appreciate the park and explore the more remote attractions.

## FROM DARWIN

Readers consistently recommend **Wilderness 4WD Adventures** (☎ 8941 2161; www.wildernessadventures.com.au) for the young and energetic traveller. Another small-group option with a good reputation that has a range of tours is **Billy Can Tours** (☎ 1800 813 484). At the top end of Top End safaris, **Odyssey Tours & Safaris** (☎ 1800 891 190; www.odysaf.com.au) runs comfortable, non-rushed tours from three to five days overnighting in either lodges or exclusive permanent tent sites.

A one-day tour to Kakadu from Darwin is really too quick, but if you're short of time it's better than nothing. You could try **Aussie Adventure** (☎ 1300 721 365; www.aussieadventure.com.au; adult/child incl lunch & cruise \$150/130), which will whizz past some wetlands, on to Ubirr art site, Bowali Visitor Centre and Yellow Water for a two-hour cruise, then back to Darwin. You could also try **APT** (☎ 1800 891 121) for reasonable coach-touring. **Unique Indigenous Land Tours** (☎ 8928 0022; adult/child \$210/170) organises a full day in Kakadu that includes visits to local artists and a bush tucker walk.

**Willis's Walkabouts** (☎ 8985 2134; www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au) organises bushwalks of two days or more, guided by knowledgeable Top End walkers following your own or preset routes.

#### FROM JABIRU & COOINDA

The 4WD access road to Jim Jim and Twin Falls inhibits many from venturing to these beautiful spots. Most 4WD rental agreements stipulate that the vehicle must not be taken along this route. A few companies run trips out to Jim Jim and Twin Falls, including lunch and paddling gear, departing from Jabiru or Cooinda. These include **Kakadu Gorge & Waterfall Tours** (☎ 8979 0111; www.gagudju-dreaming.com; adult/child \$170/145) and **Lord's Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris** (☎ 8948 2200; www.lords-safaris.com; adult/child \$140/130), which also runs trips into Arnhem Land (Gunbalanya) for \$180/130.

**Kakadu Animal Tracks** (☎ 8979 0145; www.animaltracks.com.au; adult/child \$135/75) runs highly recommended tours combining a wildlife safari and Aboriginal cultural tour with an Indigenous guide. You'll see thousands of birds on the floodplains in the Dry, and get to hunt and gather, prepare and consume bush tucker and crunch on some green ants. The seven-hour tour departs Cooinda at 1pm.

**Kakadu Fishing Tours** (☎ 8979 2025; Jabiru; half/full-day \$145/260) operates fishing tours on the South and East Alligator Rivers. **Yellow Waters Fishing Safaris** (☎ 8979 0415; Cooinda) operates full- and half-day fishing tours on Yellow Waters billabong.

Want to learn more about uranium? You can take a two-hour tour of the Ranger mine east of Jabiru. The tours of the large open-cut mine and extraction plant are run by **Kakadu Air** (☎ 1800 089 113; adult/child \$25/10; ✈ 10.30am & 1.30pm May-Oct) and depart from Jabiru airport.

#### Sleeping

With the exception of camping grounds, accommodation prices in Kakadu can vary tremendously depending on the season – Dry-season prices (given here) are often as much as 50% above wet-season prices. Details of hotels, resorts, restaurants and cafés are listed under individual place headings throughout the section.

#### CAMPING

Facilities at camping grounds operated by the National Parks range from basic sites with

pit toilets to full amenities blocks with solar hot showers, although there's no electricity at any of them. Some remote bush sites, usually accessible only by 4WD, have no facilities. Commercial camping areas with more facilities, such as restaurants and swimming pools, are attached to the various resorts at South Alligator, Jabiru and Cooinda.

#### National Parks Camping Grounds

There are four main National Parks **camping grounds** (adult/child \$5.40/free). These are at Merl, near the Border Store at Ubirr; Muirella Park, several kilometres south of the Nourlangie turn-off and then 6km off Kakadu Hwy; Mardugal, just off the highway 1.5km south of the Cooinda turn-off; and Gunlom, 37km down a dirt road that branches off Kakadu Hwy near the southern entry gate. Only Mardugal is open during the Wet. All have pit fires, hot showers, flushing toilets, drinking water and a generator zone. These are the only sites that are really suitable for caravans. See the individual sections for more details.

National Parks provide 14 more basic camping grounds around the park at which there is no fee. They have fireplaces, some have pit toilets and at all of them you'll need to bring your own drinking water. To camp away from these grounds you will need a permit from the Bowali Visitor Centre.

#### Getting There & Around

##### AIR

**Northern Air Charter** (☎ 8945 5444; www.flynac.com.au) flies from Darwin to Jabiru and also has full-day scenic flights of Kakadu from \$400 per person.

##### BUS

**Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) has a daily service between Darwin and Cooinda via Jabiru. Buses reach the Yellow Water wetlands in time for the 1pm cruise, and depart after the cruise, 1½ hours later. The bus leaves Darwin at 6.30am and Jabiru at 10.15am, arriving at Cooinda at 12.30pm. It departs from Cooinda at 2.30pm and Jabiru at 4.10pm, and arrives in Darwin at 7pm. One-way/return fares from Darwin are \$45/85 (Jabiru) and \$60/115 (Cooinda).

##### CAR

Ideally, take your own vehicle. It doesn't have to be a 4WD, since roads to most sites

of interest are sealed, but a 4WD will give you greater flexibility and is the only possible way to see Jim Jim or Twin Falls. Sealed roads lead from Kakadu Hwy to Nourlangie, to the Muirella Park camping area and to Ubirr. Other roads are mostly dirt and blocked for varying periods during the Wet and early Dry.

Hire cars (including 4WDs) are available through **Thrifty** (☎ 1800 626 515; Gagudju Crocodile Holiday Inn) at Gagudju Crocodile Holiday Inn in Jabiru (p122).

#### WEST ALLIGATOR AREA

A turn-off to the north, just past the park entrance on the Arnhem Hwy, leads to basic camp sites at **Two Mile Hole** (8km) and **Four Mile Hole** (38km) on the Wildman River, and **Waldak Irrmbal** (West Alligator Head; 80km), which are all popular fishing spots. The track is suitable for conventional vehicles only in the Dry, and then only as far as Two Mile Hole.

About 35km further east along the Arnhem Hwy, a turn-off to the south, again impassable to 2WD vehicles in the Wet, leads to camp sites at **Alligator, Bucket** and **Red Lilly** billabongs, and on to the Kakadu Hwy.

#### SOUTH ALLIGATOR AREA

The South Alligator River Crossing is on the Arnhem Hwy 64km into the park, 3km past Aurora Kakadu resort. There's a boat ramp at this popular fishing spot and a picnic area near the bridge. The resort has a bar, fuel and a well-stocked shop.

#### Bushwalking

There are a couple of easy walks here.

**Gu-ngarre Monsoon Rainforest** (3.6km return, 90 minutes, easy) This flat circular walk skirts the South Alligator resort through monsoon forest and woodlands before passing Anggardabal billabong. Interpretive signs show Aboriginal plant uses.

**Mamukala Wetlands** (3km, up to two hours, easy) This large wetland area is an excellent place to view water birds on the wetlands fringed with paperbark woodlands. It is at its best during September and October, when truly spectacular congregations can build up, including thousands of magpie geese. A short walk from the car park leads to a bird-watching hide overlooking the wetlands, while the longer walk leads through the woodlands around the wetlands.

#### Sleeping & Eating

**Aurora Kakadu** (☎ 1800 818 845; www.auroraresorts.com.au; Arnhem Hwy; unpowered & powered sites per person

#### SHARING KAKADU STORIES

##### The Namarkan Sisters

The story of the Namarkan sisters is told to warn young children about the dangers of crocodiles. One day, the sisters were sitting together by a billabong when one of the sisters dived into the water, changed into a crocodile, then paddled back and frightened the life out of her sister. She then changed herself back and returned to her sister, who related how she had been terrified by a crocodile.

The first sister got such a kick out of this, that she repeated it over and over. Finally the other sister realised what was going on, and retaliated in the same way. The sisters then realised that if they were to turn themselves into crocodiles permanently, they could scare and eat anyone they pleased.

Today the Namarkan sisters are present in all crocodiles, evident in the lumps behind the eyes and their great skill and cunning as hunters.

##### The Rainbow Serpent

The story of the Rainbow Serpent is a common subject in Aboriginal traditions across Australia, although the story varies from place to place.

In Kakadu the serpent is a woman, Kuringali, who painted her image on the rock wall at Ubirr while on a journey through this area. This journey forms a creation path that links the places she visited: Ubirr, Manngarre, the East Alligator River and various places in Arnhem Land.

To the traditional owners of the park, Kuringali is the most powerful spirit. Although she spends most of her time resting in billabongs, if disturbed she can be very destructive, causing floods and earthquakes, and one local story has it that she even eats people.

\$10, budget rooms per person \$20, motel rooms \$145-200; (♿) A couple of kilometres west of the South Alligator River, this place is set in lush, sprawling gardens with shady trees and plenty of bird life. The budget rooms contain four bunks, en suite and fridge, and the motel rooms are spacious with phone and tea and coffee facilities. There's a pool and spa area, tennis court, laundry and gas barbecues, plus a restaurant (buffet dinner \$35) that's open for breakfast and dinner, and a bar (mains \$17 to \$26) that serves lunch and dinner.

The **shop** (h6.30am-8pm) sells fuel, basic groceries and souvenirs.

## UBIRR

Ubirr is an outcrop of the Arnhem escarpment, famous for its spectacular Aboriginal **rock-art site** (☞) 8.30am-sunset 1 Apr-30 Nov, 2pm-sunset 1 Dec-31 Mar). It lies 39km north of the Arnhem Hwy.

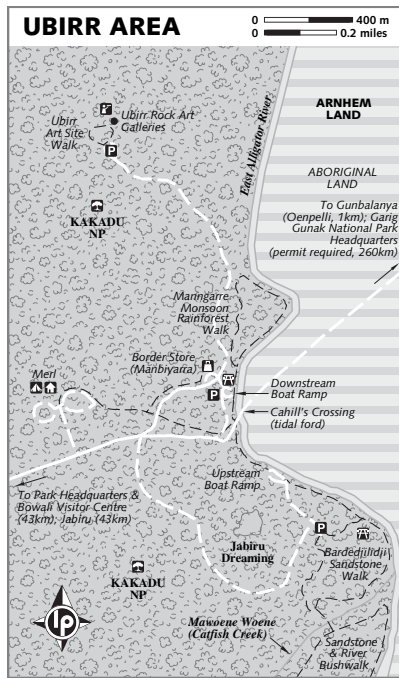
An easily followed path from the Ubirr car park takes you through the main galleries. A track then leads up to a lookout with superb views over the Nardab floodplains, which are stunning at sunset. There are paintings on numerous rocks along the path, but the highlight is the main gallery with a large array of well-preserved x-ray-style wallabies, possums, goannas, tortoises and fish, plus a couple of *balanda* (white men) with hands on hips, an intriguing Tasmanian tiger and *mimi* figures. Also of major interest here is the Rainbow Serpent painting, and the picture of the Namarkian Sisters, shown with string pulled taut between their hands.

The Ubirr paintings are in many different styles. They were painted during the period from over 20,000 years ago right up to the 20th century. Allow plenty of time to seek out and study them.

Shortly before Ubirr you pass the **Border Store** (☎ 8979 2474; ☞ 7am-7pm Apr-Dec), which sells supplies and snacks. There is a National Parks camping ground nearby (see opposite), and boat ramps upstream and downstream of Cahill's Crossing. There are also picnic tables on the riverbank opposite the Border Store.

Other activities in the area include bushwalking, fishing and cruises on the East Alligator River (see p117).

All of the access roads are sealed, although low-lying areas may be inundated during the Wet.



This part of the park is as far east as you can go, and the East Alligator River marks the boundary with Arnhem Land. If you have a permit, Cahill's Crossing – a tidal ford – gives access to Arnhem Land and Gunbalanya (Oenpelli), plus Garig Gunak Barlu National Park on the Cobouru Peninsula. Exercise caution when crossing the ford – vehicles are occasionally swept away – and on no account should you attempt to cross on foot because death by crocodile is a distinct possibility.

## Bushwalking

There are four tracks in the Ubirr area:

- Ubirr Art Site Walk** (1km return, one hour, easy) This track loops around the rock-art galleries, and there's a short but steep side track to a lookout with stunning panoramic views over the East Alligator River floodplain. It's popular at sunset.
- Manngarre Monsoon Rainforest Walk** (1.5km return, 30 minutes, easy) Mainly sticking to a boardwalk, this walk starts by the boat ramp near the Border Store and winds through heavily shaded vegetation, palms and vines.
- Bardedjilidji Sandstone Walk** (2.5km, 90 minutes, easy) Starting from the upstream picnic area car park, this walk takes in wetland areas of the East Alligator River and

some interesting eroded sandstone outliers of the Arnhem Land escarpment. Informative track notes point out many features on this walk.

**Sandstone & River Bushwalk** (6.5km, three hours, medium) This extension of the Bardedjilidji Walk features sandstone outcrops, paperbark swamps and riverbanks.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Merl Camping Ground** (adult/child \$5.40/free) This National Parks ground is close to Ubirr and the Border Store. There's plenty of shade, a generator-use zone and showers and toilets. Be prepared for legions of mosquitoes and remember it's closed in the Wet.

**Border Store** (☎ 8979 2474; ☞ 7am-7pm Apr-Dec) Stocks a good range of groceries, snacks and takeaway food. Alcohol is not available and neither was fuel at the time of writing. The popular hostel that once was here was in disrepair and closed, but may re-open during the life of this edition.

## JABIRU

pop 1780

The township of Jabiru, built to accommodate workers at the nearby uranium mine,

was completed in 1982 and is the major service centre for Kakadu.

## Information

The town's Jabiru Plaza shopping centre has a good range of amenities. There's a branch of the Westpac Bank and a Commonwealth Bank agency, and Eftpos is available at the supermarket or Mobil service station.

**Jabiru Community Health Centre** (☎ 8979 2018; Jabiru Plaza; ☞ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri except Wed 9am-2.30pm)

**Jabiru Travel Centre** (☎ 8979 2548; Shop 6, Jabiru Plaza; ☞) Internet access \$3 per 20 minutes.

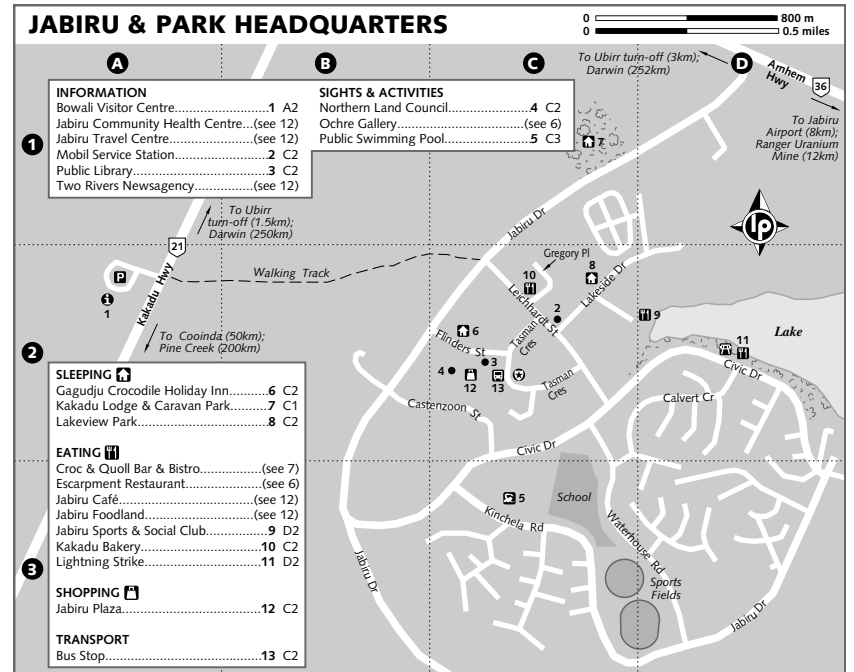
**Mobil service station** (☎ 8979 2001; cnr Leichhardt St & Lakeside Dr; ☞ 6.30am-8.30pm) For fuel, mechanical repairs, camping gas, general groceries and ice.

**Northern Land Council** (☎ 8979 2410; Flinders St; ☞ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Issues permits (\$14) to visit Gunbalanya (Oenpelli), across the East Alligator River.

**Police station** (☎ 8979 2122; Tasman Cres) Opposite the shopping centre.

**Public library** (☎ 8979 2097; per 20min \$3; ☞) Email access.

**Two Rivers Newsagency** (☎ 8979 2727; Jabiru Plaza; ☞ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat, 9am-12.30pm



Sun) Houses the Commonwealth Bank agency and post office where the mail closing time is at 5pm Monday to Friday and noon Saturday.

### Sights & Activities

It's worth a wander through the **Ochre Gallery** in the foyer of the Gagudju Crocodile Holiday Inn on Flinders St. The gallery displays a range of works from Kakadu and Arnhem Land.

You can hire boats at **Kakadu Boat Hire & Tackle** (☎ 8979 3703) for \$180 per day (including fuel), though you'll need a towbar on your car. Rod and reels, eskies and chairs are also available.

If you feel like a dip there's an Olympic-sized **public swimming pool** (☎ 8979 2127; adult/child/family \$3/1.30/6; 🕒 10am-6pm Mon, Wed & Fri, noon-6pm Tue & Thu, 10am-4pm Sat, noon-6pm Sun) just off Civic Drive.

See p118 for details on tours from Jabiru.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Gagudju Crocodile Holiday Inn** (☎ 8979 9000; www.gagudju-dreaming.com; Flinders St; d \$170-290; 🍷 🍷 🍷) This place is designed to resemble a crocodile when viewed from the air and graces many brochures and postcards of Kakadu. The rooms are clean and comfortable if a little ordinary. Try for one on the ground floor beside the central pool. The Escarpment Restaurant (mains \$25 to \$30) shows a bit more verve, serving inspired buffet and à la carte meals seasoned with bush ingredients, and delectable desserts. It's open for all meals. The art hanging in the Ochre Gallery in the foyer is worth inspecting.

#### THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Lakeview Park** (☎ 8979 3144; www.lakeviewkakadu.com.au; 27 Lakeside Dr; r for up to 4 people \$85, d/cabin \$110/180; 🍷 🍷) Aboriginal-owned Lakeview Park is a particularly good option for families and groups, offering a range of comfortable tropical-designed bungalows set in lush gardens. The fan-cooled budget rooms are also available to YHA members (and only YHA members!) for \$20 a bed. The doubles share a communal kitchen, bathroom and lounge, and also come equipped with their own TV and fridge, while the two-bedroom cabins sleep up to five people.

**Kakadu Lodge & Caravan Park** (☎ 1800 811 154; www.aurora-resorts.com.au; Jabiru Dr; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$20/25, dm \$31, lodge r \$130, cabins \$195-230; 🍷 🍷 🍷) An impeccable resort with shady, grassed sites and a great swimming pool. The comfortable, no-frills dorms and lodge rooms have linen and sleep four people; bathroom and cooking facilities are communal. The cabins have en suites and kitchenette and sleep up to five people. There are coin-operated gas barbecues, camp kitchens and laundry facilities. Internet access is available at the kiosk which sells a small range of groceries and ice. Overlooking the pool, the **Croc & Quoll Bar & Bistro** (dinner mains \$20) features barra and roo as well as pasta, curry burgers, steak and the odd vegetarian option. It's open for breakfast and dinner.

**Kakadu Bakery** (☎ 8979 2320; Gregory Pl; 🕒 7am-2pm Mon-Fri, 7am-1pm Sat) Near the fire station, this superb little bakery has a range of fresh bread and pies and is the only place to get a cheap meal in the early morning. The scrolls here are delicious and the bags of Anzac cookies come highly recommended.

**Lightning Strike** (Civic Dr; meals \$5-10; 🕒 10am-5pm Thu-Sun) This tiny van beside the lake is tops for takeaway. The homemade pastries are a highlight but it's all good – hamburgers, yiros, pizza, nachos and fish 'n' chips.

**Jabiru Sports & Social Club** (☎ 8979 2326; Lakeside Dr; mains \$10-15; 🕒 lunch daily, dinner Mon-Sat) This is the place to meet the locals over a beer. The meals aren't haute cuisine but they are generous.

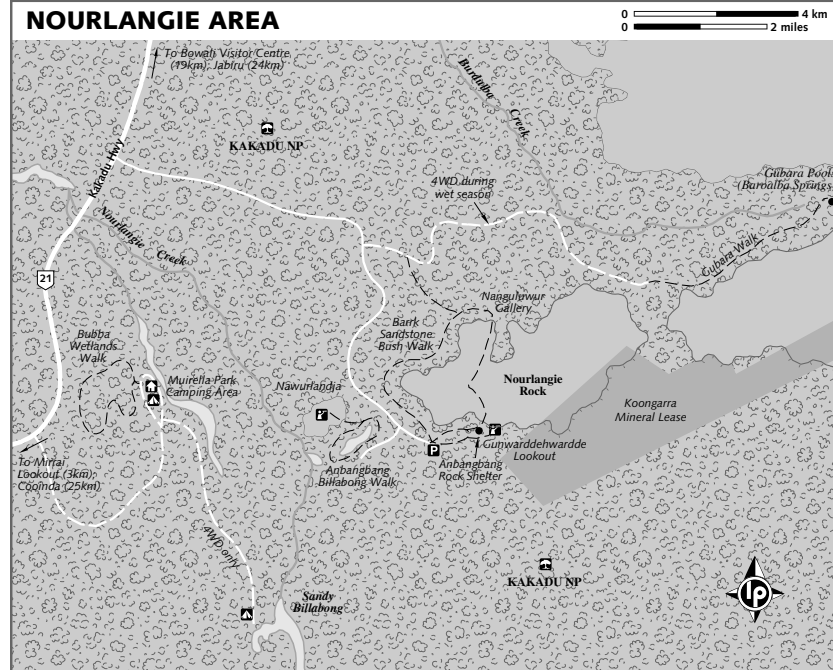
**Jabiru Café** (☎ 8979 2570; Shop 7, Jabiru Plaza; meals \$5-15; 🕒 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm Sat & Sun) In the Jabiru Plaza shopping centre, this greasy spoon prepares fresh sandwiches, burgers and Chinese food.

**Jabiru Foodland** (Jabiru Plaza; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun & public holidays) This supermarket is well stocked and has a good range of camping equipment.

If you need a drink, stock up in Darwin or the Bark Hut Inn (p94); takeaway liquor is not available to casual visitors to Jabiru. Alcoholic drinks can be bought and drunk on the premises at the hotels in Jabiru, Cooninda and South Alligator.

### NOURLANGIE

The sight of this looming, mysterious, outlier of the Arnhem Land escarpment makes it easy to understand why it has been impor-



tant to local Aboriginal people for so long. Its long, red, sandstone bulk – striped in places with orange, white and black – slopes up from the surrounding woodland only to fall away at one end in sheer, stepped cliffs. Beneath is Kakadu's best-known collection of rock art.

The name Nourlangie is a corruption of *nawulandja*, an Aboriginal word that refers to an area bigger than the rock itself. You reach it at the end of a 9km sealed road, which turns east off the Kakadu Hwy, 21km south of the Arnhem Hwy. Turn-offs along this route lead to other interesting spots, such as the dirt track to Nanguluwur and Gubara, Nawulandja lookout and Anbangbang, and make spending a whole day in this area of Kakadu worthwhile. The road is open from 8am to sunset daily.

From the main car park a walk takes you first to the **Anbangbang rock shelter**, which may have been used for 20,000 years as a refuge from heat, rain and the frequent wet-season thunderstorms. The shelter may have housed up to 30 people of the Warramal clan. Archaeological finds have

revealed that the shelter was in almost constant use from about 6000 years ago to the time of contact.

The **Anbangbang Gallery** is the main gallery and is accessible by wheelchair – elsewhere the track is steep in parts. The gallery here was repainted in the 1960s by Nayambolmi (also known as Barramundi Charlie), a respected artist, fisherman and hunter. The major character in the gallery is **Namondjok**, who broke traditional law by committing incest with one of his clan sisters. Next to Namondjok is **Namarrgon**, the Lightning Man, depicted here surrounded by an arc of lightning.

From the gallery a short walk takes you to a lookout with a view of the Arnhem Land escarpment, and Lightning Dreaming (Namarrgon Djadjam), the home of Namarrgon.

### Bushwalking

Nourlangie is one of the most visited parts of the park, and there are five other walking tracks at points along the access road. **Nawulandja Lookout** (600m return, 30 minutes, medium) This is just a short walk up a gradual slope, but it

gives excellent views of the Nourlangie Rock area and is a good place to watch the sunset.

**Nourlangie Art Site** (1.5km return, one hour, easy to medium) This path takes you around the base of Nourlangie Rock past the range of excellent rock-art sites. From the gallery you can walk on to Gunwarddehwardde Lookout.

**Anbangbang Billabong Walk** (2.5km loop, one hour, easy) This picturesque, lily-filled billabong lies close to Nourlangie, and the picnic tables dotted around its edge make it a popular lunch spot. The track starts on the left about 1km back from the main Nourlangie car park.

**Nanguluwur Gallery** (3.5km return, two hours, easy) This outstanding, but little visited, rock-art gallery sees far fewer visitors than Nourlangie simply because it's further to walk and has a gravel access road. Here the paintings cover most of the styles found in the park, including very early dynamic style work, x-ray work and a good example of 'contact art', a painting of a two-masted sailing ship towing a dinghy. The colours in the overhanging rock are also beautiful.

**Gubara Pools** (6km return, two hours, medium) Further along the same road from Nanguluwur is the turn-off to this 3km walk, which winds along a sandy path and skirts some clear pools in a patch of monsoon rainforest also known as Baroalba Springs. Remarkably, at least 14 species of freshwater fish are found in these small pools.

**Barrk Sandstone Bushwalk** (12km loop, eight hours, difficult) Barrk is the male black wallaroo and you might see this elusive marsupial if you set out early. Starting at the Nourlangie car park, this difficult walk passes through the Anbangbang galleries before a steep climb to the top of Nourlangie Rock. Cross the flat top of the rock weaving through sandstone pillars before descending along a wet-season watercourse. The track then follows the rock's base past the Nanguluwur gallery and western cliffs before emerging at the car park. It passes through some diverse habitats and offers stunning views. Pick up a copy of the relevant *Park Notes*, do not walk alone, start as early as possible and carry plenty of water; it's also probably a good idea to tell staff at Bowali that you're going on this walk, and let them know when you get back.

## MALABANBADJU, BURDULBA & MUIRELLA PARK

Muirella Park is an excellent camping area that's convenient as a base for visiting Nourlangie, 25km away, and for Cooinda and Yellow Water, which are about 30km south along the Kakadu Hwy. Two other basic camping grounds, Malabanbadju and Burdulba, are just off the Kakadu Hwy, south of Jabiru.

### Bushwalking

A couple of pleasant walks start from the Malabanbadju and Burdulba camping areas.

You'll find the Mirrai Lookout signposted off the Kakadu Hwy, while Bubba Wetlands is accessed from Muirella Park.

**Bubba Wetlands Walk** (4km return, two hours, easy) Starting near the Muirella Park camping ground (signposted), this walk skirts the edge of the Bubba Wetlands. There are wooden benches at intervals around the edge. There is no access to this walk in the Wet.

**Iligadjarr Floodplain Walk** (4km loop, 90 minutes, easy) The name refers to the ancestral file snakes that live in the billabong, and on this interesting walk along the grassy floodplain around Burdulba billabong you can learn something of the uses the Aboriginal people had for the various wetland plants. Don't try to do this walk in the Wet.

**Mirrai Lookout** (1.6km return, one hour, difficult) This lookout is just off the Kakadu Hwy, 4km south of the Muirella Park turn-off. The track scales the dizzy heights of Mt Cahill (120m) and trees obscure some of the view.

### Sleeping

Situated right on a paperbark-lined billabong, **Muirella Park** (adult/child \$5.40/free) is a National Parks camping ground 6km off the Kakadu Hwy and 7km south of the Nourlangie Rock turn-off. It's actually on a reclaimed airstrip that was part of a safari camp in the 1950s. There's shaded barbecues and excellent amenities. Note that parts of the site can be flooded during the Wet.

Malabanbadju and Burdulba Camping Grounds have few facilities and camping is free. A 6km 4WD track leads from Muirella Park to a free bush camping area at Sandy Billabong, which has basic toilet facilities only.

## JIM JIM & TWIN FALLS

These two spectacular waterfalls are along a 4WD dry-season track that turns south off the Kakadu Hwy between the Nourlangie Rock and Cooinda turn-offs. The 57km track to Jim Jim Falls is lined by the escarpment and the last 9km is slow going.

Jim Jim Falls, a sheer 215m drop, is awe-some after rain, but its waters shrink to nothing by about June. Even so, the gorge is impressive at any time, and the plunge pool makes a great swimming hole (when it is croc-free) – there's even a brilliant-white sandy beach. To reach the falls themselves requires a 1km scramble over rocks and tree trunks.

Twin Falls are reached via a 10km bumpy ride from Jim Jim camping ground, followed by an 800m boat shuttle through the

snaking, forested gorge that cuts through 200m sandstone cliffs. The boat shuttle was introduced because of the risk posed by crocodiles. Tickets (adult/child \$10 return) can be purchased at the Garnamarr Camping Area, Bowali Visitor Centre, Gagudju Crocodile Holiday Inn, Gagudju Lodge Cooinda, Mardugal camping ground and the information centre in Darwin (p65).

Twin Falls is possibly more impressive for most visitors as it enjoys year-round flows. The flows of Jim Jim Creek at the Jim Jim camping area means the track is often impassable until well into the Dry. Markers indicate the depth in the middle of the creek, but these should be used as a rough guide only as wheel tracks in the sandy creek bed can mean the water is deeper than you think. If you are unsure, wait for a tour vehicle or someone else with local knowledge to cross before attempting it. This crossing is suitable only for high clearance 4WDs equipped with a snorkel.

### CROCODILES

Australia has two types of crocodile: the freshwater or freshie (*Crocodylus johnstoni*) and the estuarine crocodile (*C. porosus*), better known as the saltwater or saltie. Both are found in the northern part of the country, including the Northern Territory.

The saltwater crocodile is Australia's largest, heaviest and most dangerous reptile, growing to over 6m in length. It is common in both fresh and salt water in the Top End, including billabongs, estuaries and major river systems. It is often seen at sea, sometimes far from land, and is also found throughout Southeast Asia and parts of the Indian subcontinent.

Most of its diet consists of crabs, fish and turtles, but for a large 'saltie' any animal is potential game, including wallabies, livestock, dogs and even humans. A hunting crocodile waits submerged, superbly camouflaged with only its eyes and nostrils above the surface. Should an animal get too close, it lunges with incredible power and speed, propelled by its massive tail, and drags its victim under water. Although those powerful jaws can crush a pig's head in one bite, the croc first drowns its prey by rolling over and over. Crocs cannot swallow under water and after the 'death roll' must surface to eat.

But even an estuarine crocodile's life has its trials. The young are born only 30cm in length and to reach maturity they must dodge birds, fish and larger crocodiles. To find a mate, a male must run the gauntlet of confronting older, territorial males, which sometimes inflict fatal injuries. Travelling overland at night to reach a new waterhole, crocs sometimes perish in bushfires. Or, trapped in a drying swamp, they can suffer death by dehydration. Should it survive these hardships, a croc can live 50 years and some very large specimens are estimated to be 80 years old.

The smaller freshwater croc is endemic to Australia and is found in freshwater rivers and billabongs. Freshwater crocs, which have narrower snouts and rarely exceed 3m in length, are harmless to people unless provoked.

All crocs are totally protected in the Territory, and Parks & Wildlife spends considerable time and money surveying waterways and ensuring they are safe for people to enjoy. Ask locally before swimming or even paddling in any Top End waterways. Attacks on humans by salties in recent years have been well documented. Warning signs are posted alongside many dangerous stretches of water.

A few adventure tours regularly visit Jim Jim and Twin (see p117). The road to both Jim Jim and Twin is often closed until well into May or even June, and road access to Twin Falls closes off in the early Wet. If the road is open, Jim Jim alone is worth the visit as there is usually plenty of water dropping over the cliffs. The only way to see the falls during the Wet is from the air.

### Bushwalking

Some rough scrambling are all that's required to get the most out of these two magnificent waterfalls.

**Budjmii Lookout** (1km return, 45 minutes, medium) There are excellent escarpment views on this fairly rugged walk, which starts from the Jim Jim camping ground.

**Jim Jim Falls** (1km return, one hour, medium) This is more of a scramble than a walk, as you climb over and around boulders of increasing size as you approach the falls. It is definitely not suitable for small children unless you can carry them. Allow at least an hour for a swim in the fantastic plunge pool at the foot of the falls.

**Barrk Malam** (6km return, five hours, difficult) This is a very steep marked trail up to the plateau above Jim Jim Falls. Carry plenty of water.

**Plateau above Twin Falls** (6km return, three hours, medium) This marked trail offers good views and the chance to swim (at own risk) in pools above the falls.

## YELLOW WATER & COOIDA

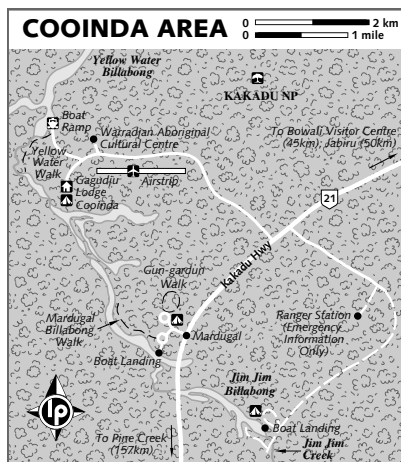
The turn-off to the Cooida accommodation complex and the superb Yellow Water wetlands is 48km down the Kakadu Hwy from its junction with the Arnhem Hwy. It's then 4.5km to the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre (p114), a further 1km to the Yellow Water wetland turn-off, and about another 1km again to Cooida.

A boat trip on the wetlands is one of the highlights of most people's visit to Kakadu (see p116). Yellow Water is also an excellent place to watch the sunset, particularly in the Dry when the smoke from the many bushfires at this time of year turns the setting sun into a bright red fireball. Bring plenty of insect repellent with you as the mosquitoes can be voracious.

Visitors should be particularly careful of crocodiles at Yellow Water – some impressive specimens hang around here. Keep well away from the water's edge and don't dangle your legs over the edge of the floating pontoons.

## Bushwalking

The accessibility of the wetlands and the boat cruises make this the busiest part of the park.



**Mardugal Billabong** (1km, 30 minutes, easy) Close to Mardugal camping area, a short walk takes you along the shore of Mardugal Billabong.

**Yellow Water** (1.5km return, one hour, easy) This walk is little more than a stroll along a raised boardwalk out to a small viewing platform over the wetland.

**Gun-gardun** (2km, 40 minutes, easy) Also near the Mardugal camping ground, this circular walk showcases woodlands – Kakadu's most widespread habitat.

## Sleeping & Eating

Cooida is by far the most popular place to stay, mainly because of the proximity of the Yellow Water wetlands and the famous boat cruises. It gets crowded at times, mainly with tour groups.

**Gagudju Lodge Cooida** (☎ 8979 0145; www.gagudju-dreaming.com; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$15/30, dm \$30, budget/motel d \$70/240; 🚻 🚺 🚿) This resort has a large camping area with plenty of shade, although the facilities are stretched at times. The budget air-con units are comfortable, though tiny, and share the camping ground bathroom facilities. There's a camp kitchen at the centre of the budget rooms. The motel rooms are spacious and comfortable and sleep three people; an extra \$30 will get you a fourth bed. These rooms drop to \$150 when demand isn't high.

At the time of research the bar and restaurant area was undergoing renovation. The **Mimi Restaurant** (mains \$25-30; 🍳 breakfast & dinner) serves a continental and cooked breakfast and at dinner there is usually a Top End selection of barra, buff and croc. The **Barra Bar & Bistro** (mains \$15-20; 🍷 10am-10pm) serves pizzas and snacks and lunch mains from noon to 2.30pm, and has live entertainment five nights a week. The **shop** (🕒 6am-9pm dry season, 6am-7.30pm wet season) at the resort sells fuel plus basic food, film and souvenirs.

Just off the Kakadu Hwy, 2km south of the Cooida turn-off, the National Parks **Mardugal Park** (adult/child \$5.40/free) camping area is the only site not affected by the Wet. It's a nice, shady spot with showers, toilets and a generator zone.

## COOIDA TO PINE CREEK

Just south of the Yellow Water and Cooida turn-off, the Kakadu Hwy heads southwest out of the park to Pine Creek on the Stuart Hwy, about 160km away.

About 45km south of Cooida is the turn-off to the beautiful falls and pools of **Maguk**

## SICKNESS COUNTRY

During the 1950s and '60s the southern part of what is now Kakadu National Park was the site of about a dozen small mines through the South Alligator River valley. The mines pulled high-grade uranium, gold, zinc, lead, silver, palladium, tin and copper from the ground. All mining ceased in 1964.

The Jawoyn people call this area Buludjang – Sickness Country – and believe it was created by Bula, a powerful spirit who still lives underground, and that Bolung, the Rainbow Serpent, inhabits the billabongs in this country. They also believe that, if disturbed, both these creation ancestors can wreak havoc in the form of great storms, floods, disease and even earthquakes.

In geological terms, the Buludjang contains high levels of uranium and unusually high concentrations of arsenic, mercury and lead. In the 1980s preparations to mine Guratba (Coronation Hill) in the Buludjang created great fear among the Jawoyn people. In the words of one Elder:

'My father know that gold was there longa Guratba. He said, "Don't take any white man there. Bulardemo (Bula) will rock 'im, you and me. Shake the ground. We won't be alive. He will push and burn the trees...no hope, nobody can stop him.'"

But of course we all know that Australian uranium is used only for peaceful purposes.

(Barramundi Gorge), 12km off the highway along a 4WD track. Another 5km brings you to the turnoff to **Gungural**, a picnic area and basic camping ground that is 2WD accessible. Nearby, the highway crosses the South Alligator River, the traditional boundary between Jawoyn and Gagudju country.

After a further 37km along the highway, a turn-off on the left (east) leads 37km along a gravel road to **Gunlom** (Waterfall Creek). This is another superb escarpment waterfall and plunge pool, and the only one accessible by conventional vehicle. There is camping here and a lovely grassy picnic area with gas barbecues and tables shaded by salmon gums.

Southeast of Gunlom, accessible by 4WD only and then with a permit, is **Jarrangbarmi** (Koolpin Gorge) – a beautiful and little-visited gorge with rock-art sites. This area is worth visiting as part of a tour, since the rock-art galleries are hard to find. Inquire about tours to this area with the operators mentioned on p117.

## Bushwalking

The southern section of the park is less frequented than others, although the car park at Gunlom is sometimes full.

**Maguk** (2km return, one hour, medium) From the Maguk camping ground, this flat walk takes you to a plunge pool at the base of a small waterfall, which flows year-round. Allow time for a swim.

**Gunlom Waterfall** (1km return, one hour, difficult)

This short but steep walk takes you to the top of the dramatic Gunlom Waterfall. It has incredible views and is a good place to look for rare escarpment wildlife, such as

black wallaroos. There's also a short walk to the large pool at the base of the waterfall (200m) with disabled access. Another, to Murrill Billabong (1km), carries on to the bank of the South Alligator River (2.5km).

**Jarrangbarmi** (Koolpin Gorge; 2km, 90 minutes, medium) This unmarked track follows Koolpin Creek to a series of pools and waterfalls. There's a rock-art site and safe swimming in the creek.

## YURMIKMIK BUSHWALKS

Five walks of varying difficulty penetrate the southern stone country of the park from Yurmikmik, 5km south of the South Alligator River on the road to Gunlom. Some are day or half-day walks, and others are overnight and involve bush camping and navigational skills; these require permits and should only be attempted by experienced bushwalkers.

**Boulder Creek Walk** (2km loop, 45 minutes, medium) This is the easiest of the Yurmikmik walks and crosses Plum Tree Creek through woodlands and monsoon forest to return to the car park.

**Yurmikmik Lookout Walk** (5km return, 90 minutes, medium) The lookout gives fine views over Jawoyn country – the rugged ridges of the southern park area, the South Alligator River and the high, flat Marrawal Plateau.

**Motor Car Falls Walk** (7.5km return, three hours, medium) Named after the exploits of an old tin miner who drove his truck up here in 1946, this is actually a disused vehicle track. Markers lead to a plunge pool.

**Motor Car Creek Walk** (11km, seven hours, difficult) From Motor Car Falls, this is an unmarked section along the creek to the South Alligator River. It is essential to carry a topographic map (Topographic Map Sheet 5370/NatMap Series or Callaman 1:50,000) and compass, and a camping permit is required.



**Motor Car and Kurrundie Creek Circular Walk**

(14km, 10 hours, difficult) A topographic map, compass and camping permit are essential for this unmarked overnight walk. The effort will be repaid by remote and seldom-visited country along Kurrundie Creek, returning by the South Alligator River and Motor Car Creek.

**Sleeping & Eating**

**Mary River Roadhouse** (☎ 8975 4564; Kakadu Hwy; unpowered/power sites for 2 \$13/17, dm \$17, budget s/d \$30/40, motel d \$90; ♿ ♿) Located just outside the park's southern boundary, this friendly roadhouse has a variety of accommodation options and a bistro (mains \$15 to \$20), which is open for lunch and dinner, plus cheaper takeaway food. This place can get busy in the Wet, when tour groups bypass Kakadu's drenched camping grounds to overnight here.

National Parks operates the **Gunlom camping ground** (adult/child \$5.40/free), a mostly shady area with flush toilets, hot showers, water and gas barbecues, and there's a separate generator area. Other basic camping grounds in the area include: Maguk; Gungural, which is accessed from the highway; and Kambolgie, on the Gunlom Rd.

## ARNHEM LAND

The entire eastern half of the Top End comprises the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve, a vast, virtually untouched area with spectacular scenery, few people and some superb rock-art sites. The area is about the size of Victoria and has a population of around 20,000. The only settlements of any size are Nhulunbuy (Gove), on the peninsula at the northeastern corner, and Gunbalanya (Oenpelli), just across the East Alligator River from Ubirr in Kakadu National Park.

To the north is the remote Cobourg Peninsula, most of which is preserved as Garig Gunak Barlu National Park and features the ruins of the ill-fated Victoria Settlement, some fine fishing and the world's only wild herd of banteng, or Indonesian cattle.

Access to Arnhem Land is by permit only and numbers are strictly controlled. It has long been known for its superb fishing, but the 'stone country' – the Arnhem escarpment and its outliers – also hosts literally thousands of Aboriginal rock-art sites of incredible variety, age and interest.

Access to Gunbalanya (Oenpelli) and Cobourg Peninsula is across the East Alligator River from Ubirr in Kakadu. Access to the central and northeastern section of Arnhem Land is via Katherine.

**Tours**

If you get the opportunity to head into Arnhem Land – jump! A few tours take visitors into Arnhem Land, though usually only to the western part.

**Arnhemlander** (☎ 1800089113; www.arnhemlander.com.au; adult/child \$185/145) operates 4WD tours to the Mikinj Valley and Injalak Art Centre at Gunbalanya (Oenpelli).

**Davidson's Arnhemland Safaris** (☎ 8927 5240; www.arnhemland-safaris.com) has been taking people to Mt Borradaile, north of Oenpelli, for years. Meals, guided tours, fishing and accommodation in the comfortable safari camp are included in the daily price of around \$450; transfers from Darwin can be arranged. The three-day tour from Darwin, Kakadu or Katherine costs \$2400 twin-share. They also run hunting and fishing safaris.

**Lords' Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris** (☎ 8948 2200; www.lords-safaris.com; adult/child \$180/130) runs highly recommended small-group 4WD tours to Gunbalanya (Oenpelli), including an Aboriginal guided walk to the Injalak Hill rock-art site, lunch and a scout around the Mikinj Valley.

**Venture North Australia** (☎ 8927 5500; www.northemastralia.com; 4-/5-day tour \$1300/1600) has tours to remote areas and features expert guidance on rock art. It also has a safari camp near Smith Point on the Cobourg Peninsula.

**Gove Diving & Fishing Charters** (☎ 8987 3445; www.govefish.com.au) runs a plethora of fishing, diving and snorkelling, and wilderness trips from Nhulunbuy.

**GUNBALANYA (OENPELLI)**

pop 740

Gunbalanya is a small Aboriginal town 17km into Arnhem Land across the East Alligator River from the Border Store in Kakadu. The drive in itself is worth it: brilliant green wetlands and spectacular escarpments make the journey picturesque.

A permit is required to visit the town, which is usually issued for the **Injalak Arts & Crafts Centre** (☎ 89790190; www.injalak.com). At this centre, artists and craftspeople produce traditional paintings on bark and paper, plus

didgeridoos, pandanus weavings and baskets, and screen-printed fabrics, either at the arts centre or on remote outstations throughout Arnhem Land. Prices here are wholesale – all sales benefit the artists and therefore the community. Credit cards are accepted and discounts are offered to YHA members.

As you walk around the veranda of the arts centre to see the artists at work (morning only), peer out over the wetland at the rear to the escarpment and Injalak Hill (Long Tom Dreaming). A knowledgeable local guide will conduct tours to see the fine rock-art galleries here. The two-hour tours (bookings essential) cost \$120 per group and depart Gunbalanya at 9am from Monday to Friday (also Saturday from June to October). It's a hot climb and you will need to take water.

You can obtain permits from the **Northern Land Council** (☎ 8979 2410; Flinders St, Jabiru; per person \$13.20; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri), which issues them on the same day, although 24 hours' notice is appreciated. Road access is only possible between May and October, otherwise you'll need to fly in and out.

Check the tides at Cahill's Crossing on the East Alligator River before setting out so you don't spend hours sitting around on the bank.

**COBOURG PENINSULA**

This remote wilderness, 570km northeast of Darwin by road, includes the Aboriginal-owned **Garig Gunak Barlu National Park**. The peninsula juts nearly 100km into the Timor Sea from the northwest tip of Arnhem Land.

The Cobourg Peninsula is on the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance and is the habitat of a variety of migratory birds. The marine section of the park protects the peninsula's rich surrounding waters. Coral reefs and seagrass meadows attract dugong, dolphins and six species of turtles. Indo-Pacific humpbacks are seen regularly in Port Essington. You may also come across a wide variety of introduced animals, such as Indonesian banteng cattle, Timor ponies and pigs, all imported by the British when they attempted to settle the Top End in the 19th century. The coastline here is beautiful but unfortunately unsafe for swimming due to crocs, sharks and sea stingers.

The fishing here is legendary, and sought-after fish include tuna and mackerel and a variety of reef fish. A couple of resorts provide

fishing trips (see p130). It's not really possible to explore the inland parts of the park as there are virtually no tracks within the park apart from the main access track, but you can still wander along the white sandy beaches.

The park is jointly managed by the local Aboriginal inhabitants and the Parks & Wildlife Commission. Alcohol must not be consumed while travelling through Arnhem Land, but it's permitted beyond the Garig Gunak Barlu entrance.

**History**

Traditionally, Aboriginal clans lived off the rich marine life of the area. They traded trepan (sea cucumbers) for artefacts such as pottery, fabrics, tobacco, gin, steel blades and food with the Macassans (from Sulawesi) in trading lines that spanned the length and breadth of Australia. Some of their words were absorbed into the Aboriginal languages, such as *balanda* (white man) and *mutiyara* (pearl shell).

In 1818 Captain Phillip King explored and named the Cobourg Peninsula and Port Essington. British fears of French and Dutch expansion into the area led to unsuccessful attempts at settlement at Melville Island, then Raffles Bay on the Cobourg Peninsula, and a third attempt at Port Essington in 1838. This garrison town was named Victoria Settlement, and at its peak was home to over 300 people. The British intention was that it would become the base for major trade between Australia and Asia, but in 1849, after the settlement had survived a cyclone and malaria outbreaks, it was abandoned.

**Information**

Entry to Garig Gunak Barlu is by permit. You pass through Arnhem Land on the way, and the Aboriginal owners here restrict the number of vehicles going through to 20 at any one time. It's advisable to apply up to a year in advance for the necessary permit, which must be obtained from the **Parks & Wildlife Commission** (☎ 8999 4814; PO Box 496, Palmerston, NT 0831). The camping fee is \$220 plus \$13 transit fee per vehicle (five people) for a stay of up to seven days.

At Black Point (Algarlarlari) there is a ranger station and **visitors centre** (☎ 8979 0244) that has an good cultural centre detailing the Aboriginal, European and Macassan people, and the history of Victoria Settlement.

You'll need a 4WD to explore this remote region; no caravans or trailers are allowed into the park.

**Garig Store** (☎ 8979 0455; Black Point; 🕒 4-6pm Mon-Sat) sells a good range of provisions including frozen meats, dairy products, ice, fuel, camping gas and outboard mix. Credit cards are accepted and basic mechanical repairs generally can be undertaken. Boat tours to Victoria Settlement and hire boats can be arranged here.

## Sights

**Victoria Settlement** (Murrumurrdmulya) is tucked into the far reaches of Port Essington, the superb 30km-long natural harbour that virtually cleaves the peninsula in two. It's well worth a visit, but is accessible by boat only. It is remarkable to think that where soldiers and civilians once strutted about in Victorian finery there's now only woollybutts and vines. The ruins still visible include various chimneys and wells, the powder magazine, part of the hospital, some peculiar beehive-shaped stone cottages and the cemetery where many of the original settlers were buried.

Boat tours and hire can be arranged at the Garig store (above).

## Sleeping & Eating

**Cobourg Beach Huts** (☎ 8979 0455; www.cobourgbeachhuts.com.au; Smith Point; d \$220; 🚻) These secluded beachfront huts are fitted with solar-heated showers and louvered window-walls, and enjoy fantastic views overlooking Port Essington from their verandas.

**Cape Don** (☎ 1800 000 871; www.capedon.com.au; Cape Don; tw share per person \$675) At the lighthouse keeper's homestead, it includes comfortable accommodation, airfares to/from Darwin, all meals, guided fishing and wildlife tours in the price. Three- to seven-day packages are available.

**Seven Spirit Bay Wilderness Lodge** (☎ 8979 0277; www.sevenspiritbay.com; Vashon Head; tw share per person \$1300) This is an award-winning resort set in secluded wilderness accessible only by air or boat. Accommodation is in open-sided 'habitats', each with semi-outdoor private bathroom. This price includes two days' accommodation and meals, all activities and return air transfer from Darwin.

There's a good, shady camping ground about 100m from the shore at Smith Point. Facilities include showers, toilets, barbecues

## DETOUR

Unashamedly, this is a fishy detour. Near the remote Aboriginal community of **Maningrida**, which is about 400km northeast of Darwin on Arnhem Land's north coast, is an exclusive fishing lodge: **Arnhemland Barramundi Nature Lodge** (☎ 8983 1544; www.barralodge.com.au; tw share per person \$4000). Three-day packages from Darwin include return airfare, accommodation, meals, guided fishing trips, fishing gear and permits to enter Aboriginal land. The lodge has unparalleled access to several wild rivers, isolated lagoons and expanses of blue water. Accommodation is in comfortable safari-style cabins and while fishing is what it's all about, non anglers can revel in the wildlife viewing, and visit the Maningrida Arts and Culture Centre and local rock art.

and limited bore water; generators are allowed in one area of the camping ground.

## Getting There & Away

The quickest way to get to Garig is by air, although it will leave you without transport when you arrive. There's an airstrip at Smith Point (Ngardimardi), which is serviced by charter flights, such as **Northern Air Charter** (☎ 8945 5444; www.flynac.com.au), from Darwin.

The track to Cobourg starts at Gunbalanya (Oenpelli) and is accessible by 4WD vehicle only. The track is closed in the Wet and usually opens in early May. The 270km drive to Black Point from the East Alligator River takes four to six hours and the track is in reasonable condition. The trip must be completed in one day as it's not possible to stop overnight on Aboriginal land.

Check the tide chart, included with your permit or at Bowali Visitor Centre in Kakadu, for low tide crossing times at Cahill's Crossing on the East Alligator River.

## EASTERN ARNHAM LAND

Gove Peninsula is the area of most interest to visitors of Eastern Arnhem Land. This is the home of the Yolngu people who have lived in the area for around 60,000 years. Notable figures from this region include the band Yothu Yindi, many high-profile academics, actor David Gulpillil and artist David Mangali (whose work appeared on

Australia's first dollar note in the 1960s). The movie *Yolngu Boy* was filmed here.

## History

Dutch navigators in the 17th century were followed by Englishman Matthew Flinders, who named this area after one of the earlier Dutch ships. Early overland visitors to Arnhem Land were the explorer Ludwig Leichhardt in 1845 and the South Australian surveyor David Lindsay in 1883.

During the late-19th century, cattle stations covered much of the area, although the land was largely unsuitable for stock, and there were also a number of Christian missions. In 1931 the area was proclaimed an Aboriginal reserve on the recommendations of an investigation in the Northern Territory by the Federal government.

In 1963 the Aboriginal people of Yirrkala made an important step in the land rights movement when they protested against the plans for a manganese mine on their land. They failed to stop it, but forced a government inquiry and won compensation.

## Information

**The East Arnhem Land Tourist Association** (☎ 8987 2255; www.ealta.org; Westall St, Nhulunbuy) has an office attached to the Walkabout Lodge.

## PERMITS

If you are flying into Gove, no permit is needed, but to venture outside Nhulunbuy (even to the beaches close by) you need to get a Recreational Permit (\$22) through the local **Dhimurru Land Management Aboriginal Corporation** (☎ 8987 3992; www.dhimurru.com.au; Arnhem Rd, Nhulunbuy). These are issued on the spot. It also publishes a useful visitors' guide (\$10), available at its office. A permit is not necessary to visit the Buku Larrngay Mulka Art Centre & Museum in Yirrkala.

If you wish to drive along the Central Arnhem Hwy from Katherine, a permit from the **Northern Land Council** (☎ 8971 9802; 5 Katherine Tce, Katherine) is required. You'll need confirmed accommodation bookings in Nhulunbuy or verification that you are visiting family or friends there. Allow at least two weeks for the issue of a permit.

## Tours

**Birds, Bees, Trees & Things** (☎ 8987 1814; www.birdsbeestreesandthings.com.au) is a one-man outfit of-

fering cultural tours to Dhalinybuy, a designated recreation area near Cape Arnhem, and a day with the local Yolngu community. Costs vary depending on group size from \$300 to \$350 per person.

There are plenty of operators offering fishing, diving charters and wilderness safaris. Contact the tourist association for details.

## Groote Eylandt

This large island off the east Arnhem Land coast is also Aboriginal land, with a big manganese-mining operation. Alyangula, the main settlement here, has a population of about 650.

## Nhulunbuy

pop 4000

The township of Nhulunbuy was built in the 1970s to service the bauxite-mining centre, 15km from town, which has a deep-water export port. On Friday morning there are free **tours** of the bauxite mine and plant.

**Nambara Arts & Crafts Aboriginal Gallery** (☎ 8987 2811; www.ybe.com.au; Melville Bay Rd) sells locally made art and crafts from northeast Arnhem Land and often has artists in residence.

**Buku Larrngay Mulka Art Centre & Museum** (☎ 8987 1701; www.aboriginalart.com.au; admission \$2), 20km south of Nhulunbuy, is a major repository of bark painting, carved totems and other artefacts in the country, and shouldn't be missed. Pride of place goes to the two superb Yirrkala Church Panels, each depicting one of the two moieties (or groupings) underpinning the Yolngu kinship system – *Duwa* and *Yirridja*.

## SLEEPING

**Walkabout Lodge** (☎ 8987 1777; www.walkaboutlodge.com.au; 12 Westall St; s/d \$160/185, premier d \$220; 🚻 🚿) This is a beachfront resort complex with a pool and restaurant close to the town's facilities. The premier rooms have a lovely aspect and reception can help process beach-walking permits.

**Gove Peninsula Motel** (☎ 8987 0700; www.gove.motel.com; 1 Matthew Flinders Way; s or d \$135, tw \$145; 🚻 🚿) This is the best place to stay in Nhulunbuy itself.

**Mainoru Outstation Store** (☎ 8975 4390; Central Arnhem Hwy) It abuts Arnhem Land to the south and sells fuel, takeaway food and supplies. Inquire here about B&B accommodation at beautiful Mainoru, a working cattle station.

## Getting There & Around

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

There's a shuttle service (\$8) from the airport to town, or you can hire a car from **Gove Rentals** (☎ 8987 1700), which has an office at the airport.

### AIR

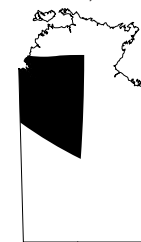
**Airmorth** (☎ 8920 4000; www.airmorth.com.au) flies between Darwin and Nhulunbuy for \$270 one way, and between Darwin and Groote Eylandt (\$300). **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas

.com.au) also flies between Darwin and Gove (one way from \$185).

### LAND

Access to Gove (during the Dry only) is via the gravel Central Arnhem Hwy, which leaves the Stuart Hwy 52km south of Katherine and cuts northeast across Arnhem Land the 700km or so to Gove. Locals do the trip in as little as nine hours, but it's better to take your time and do it in a couple of days. You will need a permit for this trip (see p131).

# Katherine & Victoria River District



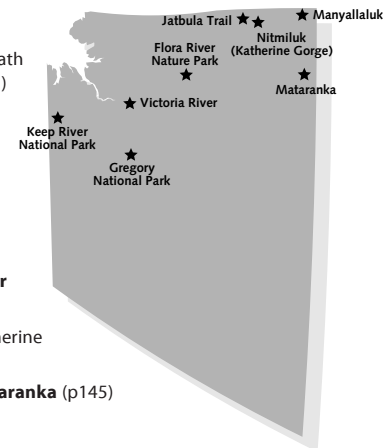
The town of Katherine is the Territory's third-largest settlement and a major crossroads for travellers. Passing through town are the Stuart Hwy, from Darwin to Port Augusta, and the Darwin–Adelaide railway, while the Victoria Hwy branches west towards the Kimberley region of Western Australia. There are several attractions in the Katherine region, but top of everyone's list should be the majestic Katherine Gorge, the centrepiece of the Nitmiluk National Park. This is one of the Territory's finest parks with spectacular scenery and wonderful opportunities for canoeing, bushwalking and swimming.

South of Katherine, you can visit Cutta Cutta limestone caves, or take the turn-off to Manyallaluk to immerse yourself in traditional Aboriginal culture. About 100km south of Katherine, the popular Mataranka hot springs bubble up from deep beneath the earth to afford a rejuvenating and relaxing swim. For an even more natural spa, head to nearby Bitter Springs, where the warm mineral-rich waters flow untamed through the palm forest.

West of Katherine, the Victoria Hwy traverses some of the Territory's finest scenery on its way to the Western Australia border. Nature's gifts include the secluded Flora River, where you can paddle from one pristine waterhole to the next, and the red sandstone gorges of the untamed Victoria River. This is an area of crocodile-infested rivers, bizarre boab trees and vast cattle stations. Large parts of this country have been conserved in reserves such as Gregory National Park and the remarkable Keep River National Park.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Paddling a canoe along an ancient course beneath the spectacular walls of **Katherine Gorge** (p141)
- Delving deeper into Aboriginal culture with hands-on instruction at **Manyallaluk** (p145)
- Watching wallabies come to drink at sunset on the wild **Victoria River** (p151)
- Exploring pastoral history and the rugged 4WD tracks of **Gregory National Park** (p151)
- Canoeing the mineral-blue waters of **Flora River Nature Park** (p149)
- Bushwalking the **Jatbula Trail** (p142) from Katherine Gorge to Leliyn (Edith Falls)
- Soaking tired limbs in the thermal pools at **Mataranka** (p145)



■ TELEPHONE CODE ☎ 08

- Katherine Regional Tourism Association: [www.krta.com.au](http://www.krta.com.au)
- NT Parks & Wildlife Commission: [www.nreta.nt.gov.au](http://www.nreta.nt.gov.au)

## National Parks

The Katherine region and Victoria River District boast some of the finest national parks in the Territory. In addition to conservation and education, these parks are especially well set up for recreational activities such as canoeing, bushwalking, 4WDing, fishing and camping.

**Nitmiluk National Park** (p141) embraces one of the Northern Territory's prime attractions – Katherine Gorge. Here you can take a tour or paddle your own canoe through a series of spectacular sandstone gorges whose silent towering walls conceal ancient art and evoke more than a little awe and mystery. Nitmiluk is also home to Leliyn (Edith Falls), a tranquil, fish-filled swim-

ming hole, and the Jatbula Trail, a spectacular five-day bushwalk linking Katherine Gorge to Leliyn.

More water-borne activity is possible at **Flora River Nature Park** (p149), where special ramps have been constructed over the natural tufa dams to allow canoes to move from one section of the river to another. Well-prepared 4WDers will relish the challenging tracks of **Gregory National Park** (p151), while bird-watchers and budding botanists will find plenty of new discoveries at remote **Keep River National Park** (p154), near the Western Australia border.

Northern Territory Parks & Wildlife also runs a packed schedule of walks, talks and slide shows throughout the Dry.

schedule is published in the widely available *Come Alive in Territory Parks* and the local schedule should be posted at the relevant park's information bays.

## KATHERINE

pop 6720

This bustling little place is the biggest town by far between Darwin and Alice Springs. Katherine has long been an important stopping point – the river it's named after is the first permanent running water on the road north from Alice Springs. It's a mixed blessing really, because Katherine has suffered several devastating floods. The last major flood, in January 1998, inundated the surrounding countryside and left its mark up to 2m high on Katherine's buildings. Katherine is a good place to replenish supplies on the long drive north or south, or west along the Victoria Hwy to Western Australia. It's also the gateway to the spectacular Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park.

## HISTORY

The Katherine area is the traditional home of the Jawoyn and Dagoman Aboriginal people. Following land claims they have received the title to large parcels of land, including Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park.

The first Europeans through the area were those in the expedition of Ludwig Leichhardt in 1844. The river was named the Catherine by John McDouall Stuart in 1862, but for some reason the current spelling was adopted. As was so often the case with Territory towns, it was the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line and the establishment of a telegraph station that really got the town going.

Pastoral ventures soon followed, one of the most notable being the establishment of Springvale Station by Alfred Giles in 1878. Although his attempts at sheep and cattle farming were not outrageously successful, he laid the foundations for the cattle industry in the Katherine region.

The town found its current site when the railway bridge over the Katherine River was opened in 1926. During WWII, Katherine became a major defence-force base, and it

even received a bit of attention from the Japanese when nine bombers raided the town in March 1942.

The town now survives largely on the tourism generated by Nitmiluk National Park and the business from nearby Tindal air force base.

## ORIENTATION

Katherine's main street, Katherine Tce, is the Stuart Hwy as it runs through town. Giles St, the road to Katherine Gorge, branches off to the northeast in the middle of town. Murphy Street branches west off the Stuart Hwy to become the Victoria Hwy (for Victoria River, Timber Creek and Western Australia), part of Hwy 1 around Australia.

Long-distance buses pull into the transit centre and 24-hour BP station, diagonally opposite the information centre.

## INFORMATION

### Bookshops

**Katherine Books** (☎ 8972 2530; Shop 10, Oasis Shopping Centre)

**Top News** (☎ 8971 1203; Shop 9, Oasis Shopping Centre) For newspapers, magazines and maps.

### Emergency

The **police station** (☎ 8972 0111; Stuart Hwy) is 2km south of the centre of town.

### Internet Access

**Didj Shop Internet Café** (☎ 8972 2485; cnr Giles St & Railway Tce; per 15min/1hr \$2/7) Internet access is available here, along with a chat.

**Katherine Art Gallery** (☎ 8971 1051; 12 Katherine Tce; per 15min \$2) Aboriginal art and craft shop (see Shopping p140).

**Katherine library** (☎ 8971 1188; Randazzo centre, Katherine Tce; per 30min \$3; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue, Wed & Fri, 10am-7pm Thu, 10am-1pm Sat)

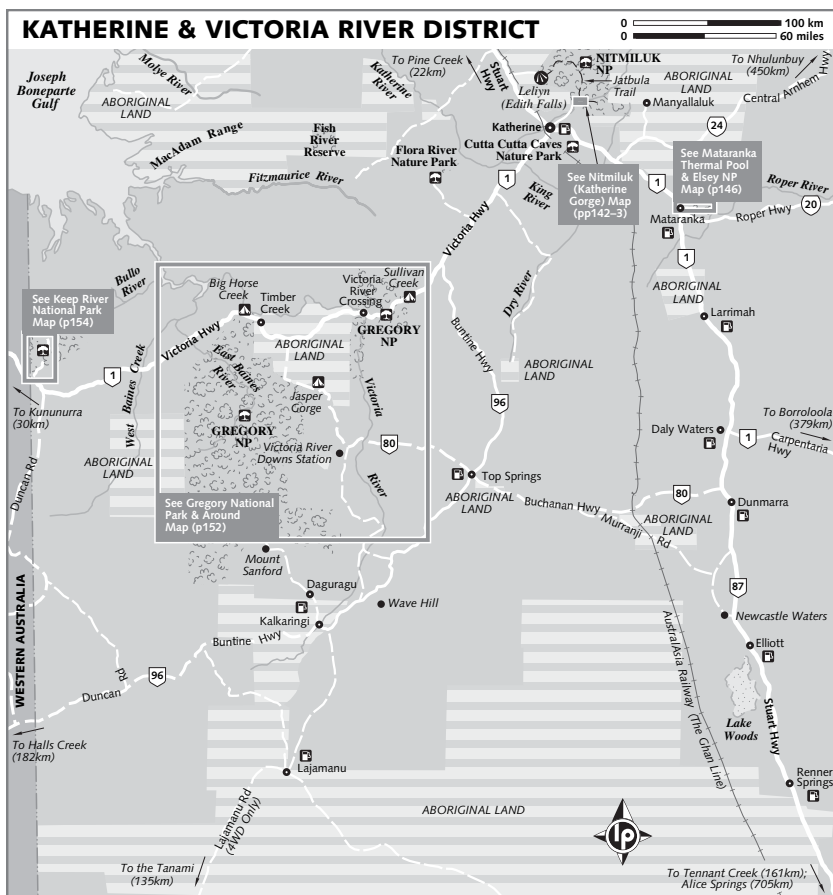
### Medical Services

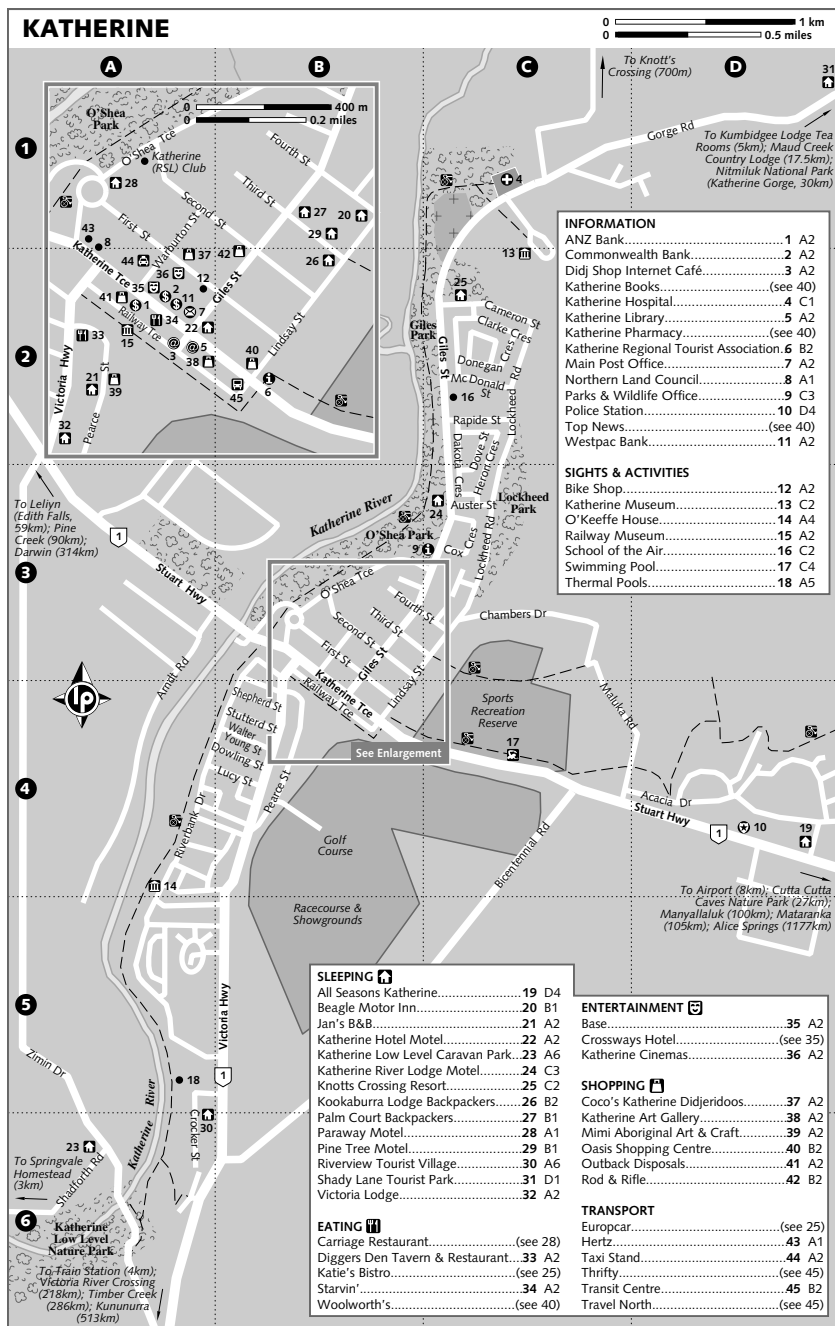
**Katherine Hospital** (☎ 8973 9211; Giles St) In case of emergency, the hospital is about 2.5km north of the town centre.

**Katherine Pharmacy** (☎ 8972 3310; Shop 18, Oasis Shopping Centre)

### Money

Branches of the ANZ, Commonwealth and Westpac banks, all with ATMs, line Katherine Tce.





INFORMATION	
ANZ Bank.....	1 A2
Commonwealth Bank.....	2 A2
Didj Shop Internet Cafe.....	3 A2
Katherine Books.....	(see 40)
Katherine Hospital.....	4 C1
Katherine Library.....	5 A2
Katherine Pharmacy.....	(see 40)
Northern Regional Tourist Association.....	6 B2
Main Post Office.....	7 A2
Northern Land Council.....	8 A1
Parks & Wildlife Office.....	9 C3
Police Station.....	10 D4
Top News.....	(see 40)
Westpac Bank.....	11 A2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
Bike Shop.....	12 A2
Katherine Museum.....	13 C2
O'Keefe House.....	14 A4
Railway Museum.....	15 A2
School of the Air.....	16 C2
Swimming Pool.....	17 C4
Thermal Pools.....	18 A5

SLEEPING	
All Seasons Katherine.....	19 D4
Beagle Motor Inn.....	20 B1
Jan's B&B.....	21 A2
Katherine Hotel Motel.....	22 A2
Katherine Low Level Caravan Park.....	23 A6
Katherine River Lodge Motel.....	24 C3
Knotts Crossing Resort.....	25 C2
Kookaburra Lodge Backpackers.....	26 B2
Palm Court Backpackers.....	27 B1
Paraway Motel.....	28 A1
Pine Tree Motel.....	29 B1
Riverview Tourist Village.....	30 A6
Shady Lane Tourist Park.....	31 D1
Victoria Lodge.....	32 A2

EATING	
Carriage Restaurant.....	(see 28)
Diggers Den Tavern & Restaurant.....	33 A2
Katie's Bistro.....	(see 25)
Starvin'.....	34 A2
Woolworth's.....	(see 40)

ENTERTAINMENT	
Base.....	35 A2
Crossways Hotel.....	(see 35)
Katherine Cinemas.....	36 A2

SHOPPING	
Coco's Katherine Didjeridoos.....	37 A2
Katherine Art Gallery.....	38 A2
Mimi Aboriginal Art & Craft.....	39 A2
Oasis Shopping Centre.....	40 B2
Outback Disposals.....	41 A2
Red & Rifle.....	42 B2

TRANSPORT	
Europac.....	(see 25)
Hertz.....	43 A1
Taxi Stand.....	44 A2
Thrifty.....	(see 45)
Transit Centre.....	45 B2
Travel North.....	(see 45)

**Post & Telephone**

Telephones are located outside the **main post office** (cnr Katherine Tce & Giles St), as well as at the Oasis shopping centre and the information centre.

**Tourist Information**

**Katherine Region Tourist Association** (☎ 8972 2650; www.krta.com.au; cnr Stuart Hwy & Lindsay St; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat & Sun, to 5pm in the Dry) Stocks information on all areas of the Northern Territory, plus national park information notes.

**Northern Land Council** (☎ 8971 9802; 5 Katherine Tce) If you wish to drive along the Central Arnhem Hwy towards Nhulunbuy (p131), a permit from the Northern Land Council is required.

**Parks & Wildlife office** (☎ 8973 8888; 32 Giles St) National park information notes are available here.

**SIGHTS**

The **Katherine Museum** (☎ 8972 3945; Gorge Rd; adult/child \$3.50/1; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri & 10am-1pm Sat Mar-Oct, 10am-1pm Mon-Sat Nov-Feb, 2-5pm Sun year-round) is in the old airport terminal opposite Katherine Hospital, about 3km from the centre of town. The original Gypsy Moth biplane flown by Dr Clyde Fenton, the first Flying Doctor, is housed here along with a tiny helicopter used for cattle mustering. There's a good selection of historical photos, including a display on the 1998 flood.

A few kilometres beyond the museum and signposted off Gorge Rd is **Knott's Crossing**, the original Katherine River crossing and now a popular fishing spot. A building near here, formerly the Sportsman's Arms & Pioneer Cash Store, was used in the filming of *We of the Never Never*.

Katherine's **Railway Museum** (Railway Tce; admission \$2; ☎ 1-4pm Mon-Fri May-Oct), owned by the National Trust, includes a display on railway history in the original station building (1926) and a dilapidated steam engine sitting on a section of the old north Australian line.

At the **School of the Air** (☎ 8972 1833; www.schools.nt.edu.au/ksa; Giles St; adult/child \$5/2; ☎ Mar-Nov), 1.5km from the town centre, you can listen into a class and see how kids in the remote outback are educated. Guided tours are held at 9am, 10am, 11am on weekdays and bookings are preferred.

**O'Keefe House** (Riverbank Dr; admission \$2; ☎ 1-4pm Mon-Fri in dry season), near the Victoria Hwy, is one of the oldest buildings in town. It was originally constructed with simple bush

poles, corrugated iron and flywire mesh by the Army in 1942 as a recreation hut. After WWII the building passed through a number of hands, until it was bought in 1963 by Olive O'Keefe, a nursing sister who became well known for her work throughout the Territory. The building was bought by the National Trust after 'Keefie's' death in 1988.

Ernest Giles established **Springvale Homestead** (☎ 8972 1355; Shadforth Rd) in 1879 after he drove 2000 cattle and horses and 12,000 head of sheep from Adelaide to the site in 19 months. It claims to be the oldest cattle station in the Northern Territory. The stone homestead still stands by the river, about 8km southwest of town. You're welcome to wander around the homestead, or take the free tour at 3pm daily (except Monday) from May to October.

**ACTIVITIES**

**Cycling**

Katherine is more or less flat and cycling is a good way to get around town. The **Bike Shop** (☎ 8972 1213; Shop 3, 16 First St) can do repairs and has bikes and gear for sale. Bikes are available for hire at some hostels, such as Kookaburra Lodge Backpackers (\$10 per day).

**Scenic Flights**

**Skysafari** (☎ 1800 089 103; Nitmiluk National Park) Helicopter flights over three/eight/13 gorges in Nitmiluk cost \$60/90/145.

**North Australian Helicopters** (☎ 1800 621 717) Runs similar flights from Kumbidgee.

**Swimming**

The 105-hectare **Katherine Low Level Nature Park** is 5km south of town, just off the Victoria Hwy. It's a great spot on the banks of Katherine River, with a popular dry-season swimming hole. There are picnic tables, gas barbecues and toilets here. A cycle/walking path along the southern bank of the river connects the park with town and the **thermal pools**. Floating in the clear, warm (32°C) waters past pandanus palms to the rapids area is a delight. The pools are accessible from the Victoria Hwy, a few kilometres south of town, or there's wheelchair access from Croker St. For wheelchair access call the **council** (☎ 8972 1322; ☎ 8am-4.30pm) for the combination lock code.

The public **swimming pool** (☎ 8972 1944; Stuart Hwy; adult/child \$3/1.50; ☎ 10am-6pm), about 750m

KATHERINE & VICTORIA RIVER DISTRICT

KATHERINE & VICTORIA RIVER DISTRICT

past the information centre towards Maratanka, is partly shaded.

## TOURS

Katherine has a diverse range of tours on offer. You can delve into local history or Aboriginal art and culture, cruise out to Nitmiluk, or journey into Kakadu and Arnhem Land. Ample brochures are available at the information centre.

**Gecko Canoeing** (☎ 8972 2224; www.geckocanoeing.com.au) runs exhilarating guided canoe trips on the more remote stretches of the Katherine River. Trips vary from one/three days (\$180/600) on the Katherine River to expeditions of up to 10 days on the Baines, Wickham and Victoria Rivers. A combined five-day hike along the Jatbula Trail in Nitmiluk National Park with five days of canoeing costs \$2000. Prices include meals and safety gear.

**Katherine Town Tour** (☎ 8971 0793; www.katherinetowntour.com; adult/child \$35/25) operates half-day tours of local and regional attractions, including the Cutta Cutta Caves (p144) and Springvale Homestead.

**Manlyallaluk Tours** (☎ 1800 644 727; www.manlyallaluk.com; Manlyallaluk) offers excellent Aboriginal culture tours at Manlyallaluk (p145), some of which depart from Katherine. A one-day cultural experience (adult/child \$165/80) from Katherine includes a bush-tucker and bush-medicine walk, lunch, and painting and craft activities.

**Travel North** (☎ 8971 9999; www.travelnorth.com.au; Transit Centre, Katherine Tce) has two-day camping trips via Kakadu to Darwin, which cost \$360 and include all meals and a Yellow Water cruise. Other tours include Kakadu, Arnhem Land, Litchfield and Manlyallaluk.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

**Katherine Country Music Muster** Features plenty of live music in the pubs and on the street over the May Day long weekend.

**Katherine Canoe Marathon** Two-day, 80km race organised by the Red Cross in June.

**Barunga Festival** During the Queen's Birthday long weekend in June, Barunga, 80km southeast of Katherine, hosts Aboriginal people from around 40 communities. There are displays of traditional arts and crafts, as well as dancing and athletics competitions.

**Katherine District Show** An annual agricultural show held in July, incorporating the Katherine Rodeo and Campdraft.

**Flying Fox Art & Cultural Festival** Runs throughout August and features local artists and performers, dragon-boat races and a street parade.

## SLEEPING Budget

### HOSTELS

Katherine's hostels tend to be converted motels, with bathrooms in each room. Each has a pool and cooking facilities, and although within a short walk of the transit centre, all offer pick-ups from there. Information boards in the hostels are a great place to check job opportunities on remote stations.

**Kookaburra Lodge Backpackers** (☎ 1800 808 211, 8971 0257; www.kookaburrabackpackers.com.au; cnr Lindsay & Third Sts; dm \$19, s/d or tw \$50; ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓) A few minutes' walk from the transit centre, this is a popular, well-run place with a friendly, relaxed atmosphere. The double rooms have a TV and fridge. There's a kitchen in each dorm room, an outdoor common area with TV, and bike and canoe hire. A free breakfast and YHA/VIP discounts are available.

**Palm Court Backpackers** (☎ 1800 626 722; www.travelnorth.com.au; cnr Third & Giles Sts; dm \$19, tw or d \$50; ☎ ☑ ☒) This friendly hostel is a few blocks from the main street and offers free pancake breakfasts. The old motel rooms are looking worn and weary, but each room has a bathroom, fridge and TV.

**Victoria Lodge** (☎ 1800 808 875; 21 Victoria Hwy; dm/ s/d \$18/40/55; ☎ ☑ ☒) Not too far from the main street, this is a clean place with a variety of units, double rooms and dorms. There's a combined kitchen and lounge area with TV and shared bathroom between each couple of rooms.

### MOTELS

**Katherine River Lodge Motel** (☎ 8971 0266; www.katherineriverlodge.net; 50 Giles St; s/d/family \$60/70/100; ☎ ☑ ☒) This is a large motel with spotless, good-value rooms, including adjoining family rooms that sleep six. The attached River Restaurant (mains \$10 to \$15) serves inexpensive hearty meals, including \$6.50 kids' meals.

**Beagle Motor Inn** (☎ 8972 3998; cnr Lindsay & Fourth Sts; s/d \$60/70; ☎ ☑ ☒) This affordable motel is in a quiet location close to the town centre. The rooms are well worn and nothing special (some cheaper rooms share bathrooms), but it's a friendly place and there are disabled rooms and a licensed restaurant.

## CAMPING

**Knott's Crossing Resort** (☎ 1800 222 511, 8972 2511; www.knotscrossing.com.au; cnr Cameron & Giles Sts; unpowered/power sites for 2 \$18/22, cabins from \$60, motel d from \$110; ☎ ☑ ☒) On the road towards the gorge, this resort is set amid lush tropical gardens. All powered sites have private bathrooms and there are spacious family rooms with kitchens, plus the excellent Katie's Bistro.

**Katherine Low Level Caravan Park** (☎ 8972 3962; lowlevel@austarnet.com.au; Shadforth Rd; unpowered/power sites for 2 \$24/27, cabins from \$95; ☎ ☑ ☒) Across the river, off the Victoria Hwy about 5km from town, is this manicured park with plenty of shady sites, a great swimming pool and spotless amenities. There are barbecues as well as a camp kitchen equipped with a stove, fridge and a microwave. The bar and bistro (mains \$10 to \$20) area shelters under a massive fig tree.

**Shady Lane Tourist Park** (☎ 8971 0491; www.shadylanetouristpark.com.au; Gorge Rd; unpowered/power sites for 2 \$20/25, cabins from \$50, self-contained cabins \$95; ☎ ☑ ☒) This is a friendly park about 6km out of the town centre towards Nitmiluk. There is plenty of shade, a range of spotless cabins and clean amenities, while the camp kitchen has a fridge and gas barbecues.

**Riverview Tourist Village** (☎ 8972 1011; www.riverviewtouristvillage.com.au; 440 Victoria Hwy; unpowered/power sites for 2 \$17/21, budget s/d \$28/38, motel s/d \$65/75, cabins from \$65; ☎ ☑ ☒) This complex is convenient to the thermal pools, is pet friendly and there's lots of shade. If the sound of road-trains whizzing by doesn't lull you to sleep, try to secure a site away from the highway boundary.

There are also powered en suite sites at the All Seasons Katherine (below).

## Midrange

**All Seasons Katherine** (☎ 1300 812 443, 8972 1744; www.accorhotels.com.au; Stuart Hwy; powered sites for 2 \$25, d \$120-140; ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓) About 4km south of the town centre, this is Katherine's best hotel, which incongruously also has a pleasant caravan park with barbecues, gardens and a tennis court. The spacious queen-size doubles are worth the extra outlay, and the family room with kitchen is great value. Wheelchair accessible rooms are also available. The restaurant serves a buffet dinner (\$28).

## THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Maud Creek Country Lodge** (☎ 8971 1814; www.maudcreeklodge.com.au; Gorge Rd; s/d \$110/135, cottage d \$165; ☎ ☑ ☒) This friendly and peaceful rural retreat is just 6km from the gorge on a former cattle run. Here you can go bushwalking, bird-watching and river fishing or just relax under the shady veranda. There are motel-style rooms that share a communal kitchen and TV lounge, or there is a private self-contained cottage. A continental breakfast is supplied with all tariffs and the minibar is pegged at town prices.

**Jan's B&B** (☎ 8971 1005; jcomleybbaccom@yahoo.com.au; 13 Pearce St; guesthouse s/d \$50/85, B&B s/d \$110/150; ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓) This place is a real gem with immaculate B&B rooms sharing bathroom facilities, or a fully self-contained guesthouse. Guests are welcome to use the pool table, piano, lounge area, spa and the guesthouse's (next door) pool and kitchen. Book ahead.

**Paraway Motel** (☎ 8972 2644; reservations@parawaymotel.com.au; O'Shea Tce; s/d \$80/90; ☎ ☑ ☒) This smart motel is as neat as a pin and its quiet location is still handy to the shops. Standard motel rooms are spotless and comfortable. There's the excellent Carriage Restaurant and it is handy to the Katherine (RSL) Club.

**Pine Tree Motel** (☎ 8972 2533; pinetree2@bigpond.com; 3 Third St; s/d \$100/120, ☎ ☑ ☒) This is a comfortable chain motel with spacious, well-appointed rooms arranged around a central garden and pool. There's a licensed restaurant and guests can enjoy a poolside barbecue on Sunday.

**Katherine Hotel Motel** (☎ 8972 1622; 3 Giles St; s/d from \$75/80; ☎ ☑ ☒) This large complex has standard motel rooms, queen-size rooms and family rooms. There's a bistro, cocktail bar and lively public bar, which is thankfully well away from the rooms.

## EATING

**Katie's Bistro** (☎ 8972 2511; Knotts Crossing Resort, cnr Giles & Cameron Sts; mains \$19-28; ☎ ☑ dinner) This tourist park bistro is locally regarded as Katherine's best restaurant. The dozen or so main courses may include Japanese hotpot, or seared buffalo fillet, as well as

grilled barra, steaks and one or two vegetarian options. Quality wine is available by the glass.

**Carriage Restaurant** (☎ 8972 2644; Paraway Motel, O'Shea Tce; mains \$20-27; ☎ dinner) A quiet licensed restaurant with a delicate touch. Choose from a small range of delectable mains such as the flaky vegetarian parcel, Moroccan lamb or classic pan-fried barramundi.

**Diggers Den Tavern & Restaurant** (☎ 8971 0422; 7 Victoria Hwy; mains \$9-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) This welcoming bar has an all-day menu till 6pm, then cranks up its busy and popular kitchen with pizzas, pastas, steaks and, on Thursdays, a \$10 buffet.

**Kumbidgee Lodge Tea Rooms** (☎ 8971 0699; Gorge Rd; mains \$7-18; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This casual eatery, 10km out of town, is a tranquil spot to indulge in a hearty 'bush breakfast' (\$12) or a Devonshire tea while catching up with the rest of the world in the newspapers. The Sunday buffet breakfast (\$12) is hugely popular.

**Starvin'** (☎ 8972 3633; 32 Katherine Tce; mains \$8-18; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat) The local pizza and pasta joint for when nothing but a pizza will fill the hole.

**Woolworth's** (Oasis Shopping Centre; Katherine Tce; ☎ 7am-10pm) If you're self-catering, this is the cheapest place for hundreds of kilometres around to stock up on supplies. It also has a liquor shop and a bakery.

## ENTERTAINMENT

The **Crossways Hotel** (☎ 8972 1022; 23 Katherine Tce) boasts the town's only nightclub, **The Base** (admission \$5; ☎ 9pm-4am Fri & Sat), which kicks off around 1am, though Saturday nights may not kick off at all. A block away on the main street, the **Katherine Hotel Motel** (☎ 8972 1622; cnr Katherine Tce & Giles St) has occasional live bands.

**Katherine Cinemas** (☎ 8971 2555; www.katherinecinemas.com.au; 20 First St; adult/child \$13/8) screens current release movies.

## SHOPPING

**Mimi Aboriginal Art & Craft** (☎ 8971 0036; mimiarts@bigpond.com; 6 Pearce St) This Aboriginal-owned co-op sells quality art and crafts from the Katherine, Arnhem Land and Kimberley regions.

**Coco's Katherine Didgeridoos** (☎ 8971 2889; 21 First St) Sells didgeridoos in a variety of keys (A to G) from its shed.

**Katherine Art Gallery** (☎ 8971 1051; 12 Katherine Tce) This shop has a wide range of art from the Katherine area as well as the central deserts and Arnhem Land.

**Outback Disposals** (☎ 8972 3456; 58 Katherine Tce) This store can supply all the camping gear you'll need, including a vast range of parts for gas stoves.

**Rod & Rifle** (☎ 8972 1020; cnr Giles & Second Sts) A huge emporium of outdoor, camping and fishing supplies.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Katherine Airport is 11km south of town, just off the Stuart Hwy. **Airmorth** (☎ 1800 627 474) and a number of other companies fly charters to/from Katherine from Darwin and Alice Springs and other destinations in the Territory.

**Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) has regular services between Darwin and Alice Springs, Queensland or Western Australia. All buses stop at Katherine's **Transit Centre** (☎ 8971 9999; 6 Katherine Tce). Typical one-way fares from Katherine include: Darwin (\$70, 4½ hours), Alice Springs (\$210, 15 hours), Tennant Creek (\$135, eight hours) and Kununurra (\$110, 4½ hours).

The *Ghan* train travels between Adelaide and Darwin, stopping at Katherine for a few hours to allow passengers to visit Katherine Gorge; see p277 for timetable and fare details. Katherine train station is off the Victoria Hwy, 9km southwest of town. **Travel North** (☎ 8971 9999; Transit Centre) runs shuttles between the station and town.

Car rental companies: **Europcar** (☎ 13 13 90; Knotts Crossing Resort, cnr Cameron & Giles Sts) **Hertz** (☎ 8971 1111; cnr Katherine Tce & O'Shea Tce) **Thrifty** (☎ 8972 3183; Transit Centre, 6 Katherine Tce)

## GETTING AROUND

The town centre is compact enough to walk around, although some sights, such as the thermal pools and museum, are a bit far – you can rent bicycles at Kookaburra Lodge (p138) and Palm Court Backpackers (p138).

Taxis congregate at a stand near the corner of Warburton and First Sts, behind Red Rooster. Alternatively, call **Katherine Taxis** (☎ 8972 177).

# AROUND KATHERINE

## NITMILUK (KATHERINE GORGE) NATIONAL PARK

This 2920-sq-km park, about 30km from Katherine, is one of the most visited sites in the Northern Territory. The best-known feature is the series of 13 sandstone gorges, known as Katherine Gorge, which has been carved out by the Katherine River on its journey from Arnhem Land to the Timor Sea. It is a hauntingly beautiful place (when it's not crowded) and is well worth a visit. In the Dry the tranquil river is perfect for a paddle, but in the Wet the deep still waters and dividing rapids are engulfed by an awesome torrent that churns through the gorge.

The lesser-known Leliyn (Edith Falls), also part of Nitmiluk, are accessible from the Stuart Hwy 40km north of Katherine. Leliyn features a great swimming hole, waterfalls and walking trails. Access roads to both sections of the park are sealed, but may be cut off for short periods during the Wet.

What was once Katherine Gorge National Park was proclaimed in 1962. In 1989 the Jawoyn Aboriginal people gained ownership following a land claim that had been lodged in the late 1970s. The name was changed to Nitmiluk and the land leased back to Parks & Wildlife (then known as the Conservation Commission). It is now managed by the Nitmiluk Board of Management, which has a Jawoyn majority, and traditional practices such as hunting, food gathering and ceremonies are still carried out in the park. Nitmiluk is the Jawoyn name for the Cicada Dreaming, which takes in the area from the park headquarters up to the end of the first gorge.

## Wildlife

### ANIMALS

The park's animal life is also typical of the Top End. Large goannas are a common sight around the boat ramp area, and agile wallabies visit the camping ground. Flying foxes squabble and chatter around the picnic ground and ply the gorges at dusk.

Birds are abundant and about 170 species have been recorded in the park. Around the camping ground and Nitmiluk Centre look for noisy gatherings of apostlebirds, parrots such as the aptly named rainbow lorikeet and

red-winged parrot, and flocks of little corellas. Great bowerbirds, blue-faced honeyeaters and blue-winged kookaburras are also common around the park HQ. In dry weather look for small birds, such as finches and honeyeaters, coming in to drink at sprinklers. One of the park's most valued inhabitants is the rare and endangered Gouldian finch.

## PLANTS

The most obvious plant community here is the open woodland, so typical of the Top End, dominated by trees such as bloodwoods, ironwood and the beautiful salmon gum. Between and under the trees are smaller shrubs, including native plums and tall (up to 2m high) spear grass. Pockets of monsoon rainforest grow in sheltered, well-watered sites, such as Butterfly Gorge. Along the main waterways grow lofty paperbarks and stands of pandanus, while the higher sandstone ridges are typically covered in spinifex grass and hardy shrubs such as grevilleas and acacias.

## Information

The **Nitmiluk Centre** (☎ 1800 089 103, 8972 1253; ☎ 7am-7pm Apr-Sep, 7am-5pm Oct-Mar) has excellent displays and information on the park's geology, wildlife, the traditional owners (the Jawoyn) and European history. There's also a desk for **Parks & Wildlife** (☎ 8972 1886), which has information sheets on a wide range of marked walking tracks that start here and traverse the picturesque country south of the gorge. Some of the tracks pass Aboriginal rock paintings up to 7000 years old. The more detailed *Guide to Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park* (\$6.60) is also available here. Registration for overnight walks and camping permits (\$3.30 per night) is from 7am to 1pm; canoeing permits are also issued. Check at the centre for information on ranger talks.

The Nitmiluk Centre, camping ground and boat tours are all wheelchair accessible.

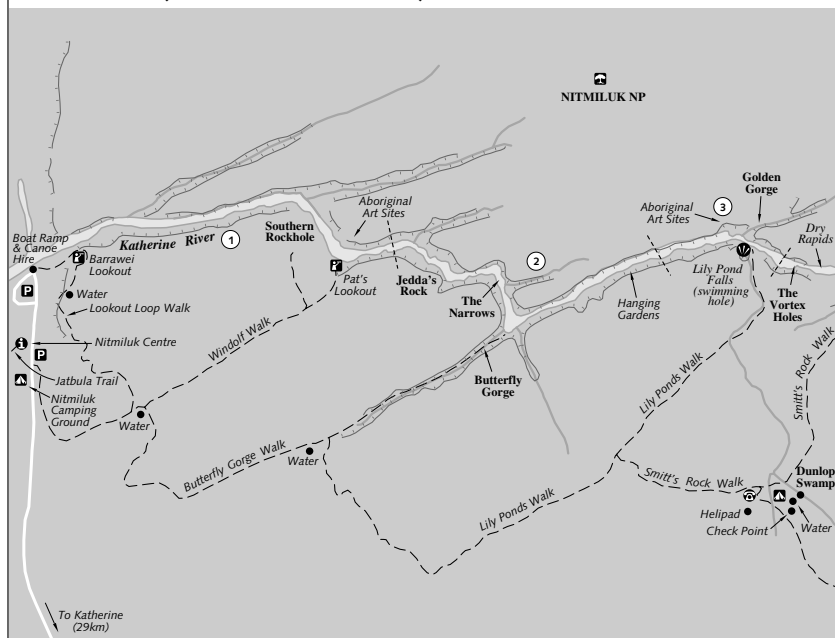
## Activities

### SWIMMING

The gorge is usually safe for swimming in the Dry and there's a designated swimming platform near the picnic area (yep, the one opposite the croc trap!). However, it's probably best enjoyed by taking a canoe and finding your own space somewhere upstream.



## NITMILUK (KATHERINE GORGE)



In the Wet the gorge is closed to boats and canoes. The only crocodiles around are generally the freshwater variety; however, Parks & Wildlife staff will advise if the situation is otherwise.

## BUSHWALKING

The park has approximately 120km of walking tracks, ranging from short strolls to the 66km one-way Jatbula Trail to Leliyn (Edith Falls). Updated information, maps and information sheets on the walking trails are all available from the Parks & Wildlife desk at the Nitmiluk Centre.

Walkers setting out on any overnight walk must register and deregister at the Nitmiluk Centre. There's a \$50 refundable deposit for any overnight walk and a camping fee of \$3.30 per person per night. For day walks, registration is not necessary, but you should inform someone of your intentions, and you can voluntarily register with the ranger. Don't forget to deregister on return.

The main walks, all of which are clearly marked, are listed here. Note that all distances include return (measured from the Nitmiluk

Centre), and that times will vary depending on the individual and the weather.

**Barrawei (Lookout) Loop** (3.7km, one hour, medium) A short, steep climb with good views over the Katherine River.

**Windolf** (8.4km, 3½ hours, medium) A good walk that features a swimming spot at the southern rockhole near the end of the first gorge.

**Butterfly Gorge** (12km, 4½ hours, difficult) A shady walk through a pocket of monsoon rainforest, often with butterflies, leads to midway along the second gorge and a deep water swimming spot.

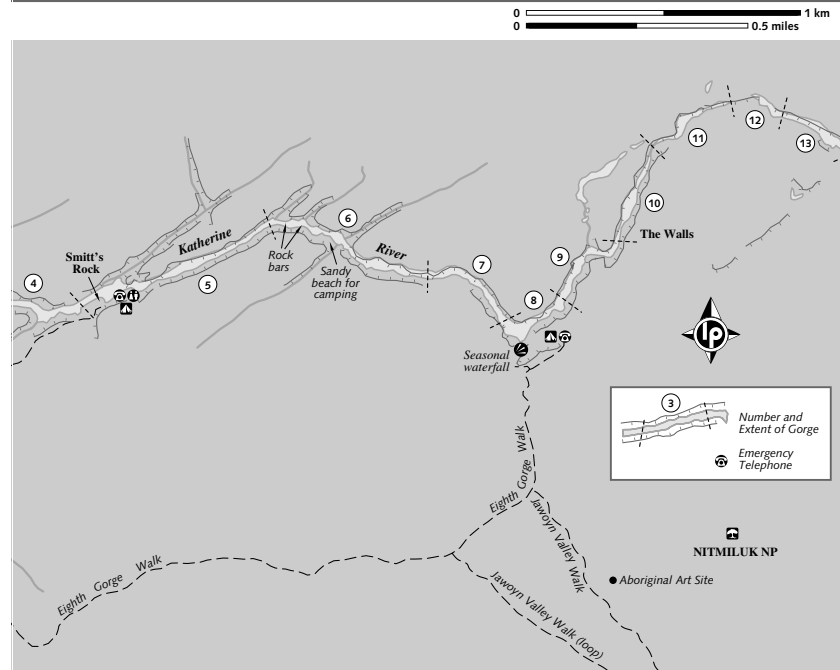
**Lily Ponds** (20km, 6½ hours, difficult) This walk leads to Lily Pond Falls, at the far end of the third gorge. Ask at the Nitmiluk Centre for an update on the swimming hole here.

**Smitt Rock** (24km, 8½ hours, difficult) A rugged trek that takes you to Smitt Rock near the start of the fifth gorge. There are excellent gorge views along the way, and you can swim and camp overnight at Dunlop Swamp.

**Eighth Gorge** (33km, overnight, difficult) Most of the way this trail is actually well away from the edge of the gorge, only coming down to it at the end.

**Jawoyn Valley** (40km, overnight, difficult) A wilderness loop trail leading off the Eighth Gorge walk into a valley with rock outcrops and rock-art galleries.

**Jatbula Trail** (66km, five days, difficult) This walk to Leliyn (Edith Falls) climbs the Arnhem Land escarpment,



taking in features such as the swamp-fed Biddlecombe Cascades (11.5km from the Nitmiluk Centre), the 30m Crystal Falls (20.5km), the Amphitheatre (31km) and the Sweetwater Pool (61.5km). Note that this walk can only be done one way (ie you can't walk from Leliyn to Katherine Gorge) and that a minimum of two people are required to do the walk. See the Parks & Wildlife information sheet and Lonely Planet's *Walking in Australia* for detailed trail notes.

## CANOEING

Nothing beats exploring the gorges in your own boat. Bear in mind the intensity of the sun and heat, and the fact that you may have to carry your canoe over the rock bars and rapids that separate the gorges. Pick up the *Canoeing Guide* (which shows points of interest along the way, such as rock art, waterfalls and plant life) at the Nitmiluk Centre.

**Nitmiluk Tours** (☎ 8972 1253; nitmiluk@bigpond.com) hires out single/double canoes for a half day (\$34/55, departing 9am and 1pm) or full day (\$45/70, departing 9am), including the use of a waterproof drum for cameras and other gear, a map and a life jacket. The canoe shed is at the boat ramp by the main car park, about 500m beyond the Nitmiluk Centre.

You also can be a little more adventurous and take the canoes out overnight for \$135/90 per adult/child, plus \$3.30 for an overnight camping permit. Bookings are essential as overnight permits are limited and there is a \$60 deposit. It's also possible to use your own canoe in the gorge for a registration fee of \$5.50 per person per day, plus a refundable \$50 deposit.

## FISHING

There are more than 40 species of fish in the river (including barramundi), which makes fishing, by lure only, popular here.

## Tours

## GORGE CRUISES

The other, much less energetic way to get out onto the water is on a cruise run by **Nitmiluk Tours** (☎ 1800 089 103, 8972 1253; nitmiluk@bigpond.com; Nitmiluk Centre). Bookings on some cruises can be tight in the dry season, so it's a good idea to make a reservation the day before.

The two-hour cruise (adult/child \$45/17) goes to the second gorge and visits a rock-art gallery (including 800m walk). Departures

are at 9am, 11am, 1pm and 3pm daily year-round. There's wheelchair access to the top of the first gorge only. The four-hour cruise (adult/child \$65/30) goes to the third gorge and includes refreshments and a chance to swim. Cruises leave at 9am daily from April to late October, plus at 11am and 1pm May to August. Finally, there's an eight-hour trip (adult or child \$105), which takes you up to the fifth gorge, involves walking about 5km and includes a barbecue lunch and refreshments. It departs at 9am daily from May to October.

During the Wet, and departing only when the water level is above 2m, power boats (adult/child \$50/37, 45 minutes) speed to the end of the third gorge, straight over the dry-season rock bars and rapids.

### BUSHWALKING

Extended bushwalks in and around Nitmiluk, with overnight camping, are offered by **Willis's Walkabouts** (☎ 8985 2134; www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au).

### SCENIC FLIGHTS

Helicopter flights with **Skysafari** (☎ 1800 089 103, 8972 2345) include a 10-minute sweep of three gorges for \$60, a 15-minute flight over eight gorges for \$90, and a 25-minute flight through all 13 gorges for \$145. These flights and others can be booked at the Nitmiluk Centre.

### Sleeping & Eating

Camping is the only option at the gorge itself.

**Nitmiluk Caravan Park** (☎ 8972 1253; Nitmiluk Centre; unpowered/power site for 2 \$19/23) This park has plenty of grass and shade and is well equipped with hot showers, toilets, barbecues and laundry. Wallabies and goannas are frequent visitors.

**Nitmiluk Bistro** (☎ 8972 1253; Nitmiluk Centre; mains \$12-20; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Serving well-prepared breakfasts, snacks and lunches, such as burgers and salads, this licensed bistro occasionally puts on evening meals in the Dry, sometimes accompanied by live music.

### Getting There & Away

It's 30km by sealed road from Katherine to the Nitmiluk Centre, and a few hundred metres further to the car park, where the gorge begins and the cruises start.

**Travel North** (☎ 8972 1044; Transit Centre, 6 Katherine Tce, Katherine; one way/return \$15/22) runs a regular shuttle bus between Katherine and the gorge to meet up with the gorge tours and on an 'as required' basis. Buses leave the Transit centre at 8am, 12.15pm and 2.15pm and leave the gorge at 9am, 1pm and 5pm. Children travel at half price. Seats are usually booked with cruise bookings.

### LELIYN (EDITH FALLS)

Leliyn is in the western corner of the park and can be reached by car from the Stuart Hwy, 40km north of Katherine, then it's 20km further along a sealed road to the falls and camping ground. The falls themselves cascade into the lowest of three large **pools** (swimming ☎ 7am-7pm); it's a beautiful, safe place for swimming and a ranger is stationed here throughout the year.

Bushwalking here reveals many treasures. The **Leliyn Trail** (2.6km loop, 1½ hours) climbs into escarpment country through grevillea and spinifex and past scenic look-outs (Bemang is best in the afternoon) to the Upper Pool, where the **Sweetwater Pool Trail** (8.6km return, three to five hours, medium) branches off. The peaceful Sweetwater Pool has a small camping ground site; overnight permits are available at the kiosk.

Jawoyn traditional owner Ryan Baruwei leads **tours** (30min/1hr \$15/20) at Leliyn explaining its significance and meaning to the Jawoyn, as well as the traditional uses of the native flora. Book through the **Katherine Visitor Information Centre** (☎ 8972 2650).

The Parks & Wildlife **camping ground** (☎ 8975 4869; adult/child/family \$8.80/4/20) at the main pool has grassy sites, lots of shade, toilets, showers, a laundry and disabled facilities. Fees are paid at the **kiosk** (☎ 8am-6pm), which sells good-value breakfasts, snacks and basic supplies. Nearby is a picnic area with gas barbecues and tables.

Access to the park is year-round, though occasional flooding does occur.

### CUTTA CUTTA CAVES NATURE PARK

These tropical caves are the only cave system open to the public in the Territory. The 1499-hectare Cutta Cutta Caves Nature Park protects this extensive karst (limestone) landscape 27km south of Katherine. The caves have a unique ecology and you'll be sharing the space with brown tree snakes, plus the

endangered ghost bats and orange horse-shoe bats that they feed on, 15m below the ground. During the Dry, however, the bats move into the far recesses of the caves and visitors have little chance of seeing them.

Cutta Cutta is a Jawoyn name meaning many stars; it was taboo for Aborigines to enter the cave, which they believed was where the stars were kept during the day. The first European person to see the cave was a local stockman in 1900, after whom it was known as Smith's Cave.

Only one cave is currently open to the public and it was badly damaged by Australian soldiers during WWII, who used the limestone curtains and stalactites for target practice. In the Dry the caves are in fact quite dry, but in the Wet they can flood.

The only way to see the caves is through **Guided Cave Tours** (☎ 8972 1940; adult/child \$13/6.50; ☎ 9am, 10am, 11am, 1pm, 2pm & 3pm dry season), which run 45-minute tours from the caves' kiosk. There are limited numbers on each tour, so book ahead. Inquire at the Parks & Wildlife office in Katherine about whether the nearby **Tindal Cave**, which is larger and in better condition than Cutta Cutta Caves, is open.

### MANYALLALUK

The former 3000-sq-km Eva Valley cattle station, **Manyallaluk** (☎ 1800 644 727, 8975 4727) abuts the eastern edge of Nitmiluk National Park, the southern edge of Kakadu and the western edge of Arnhem Land. The name Manyallaluk comes from a Frog Dreaming site found to the east of the community. The land is owned by the Jawoyn Aboriginal people, some of whom organise and lead highly regarded **cultural tours** (self-drive adult/child \$125/70, incl transfers to/from Katherine \$165/80). You'll learn about traditional bush tucker and medicine, spear throwing and how to play a didgeridoo on the one-day tours, which include lunch and billy tea.

Run in conjunction with **Odyssey Tours & Safaris** (☎ 1800 891 190; www.odysaf.com.au), two-day Nipbamjen Arnhem Land tours, offer a unique opportunity to explore rugged, pristine wilderness and interact with the Aboriginal people. The tours depart Katherine Saturday and Wednesday from May to October and cost \$565, including meals and accommodation.

**Manyallaluk Art & Craft Centre** (☎ afternoon Mon-Thu, or by appointment) has excellent art and

crafts at competitive prices, and is included in the tours. No permits are needed to visit the community, but alcohol is prohibited.

There's a **camping ground** (unpowered/power site for 2 \$12/18) with grassy sites, and a community store with basic supplies.

The community is equidistant – around 100km – from Katherine and Mataranka. The turn-off to Manyallaluk is 15km along the Central Arnhem Hwy, then 35km along a well-maintained, all-season gravel road. The trip takes about 90 minutes.

### MATARANKA

pop 500

The main attraction of Mataranka, 105km southeast of Katherine, is the nearby Eley National Park and its famous thermal pools.

The first European explorers through this region were Ludwig Leichhardt (1845) and John McDouall Stuart (1862). When AC Gregory came through in 1856 on his exploratory journey from Victoria River Depot (Timber Creek), he named Eley Creek after Joseph Eley, a young surgeon and naturalist in his party. The name went on to become famous as Eley Station (established in 1881) – the setting for *We of the Never Never* (see the boxed text p147).

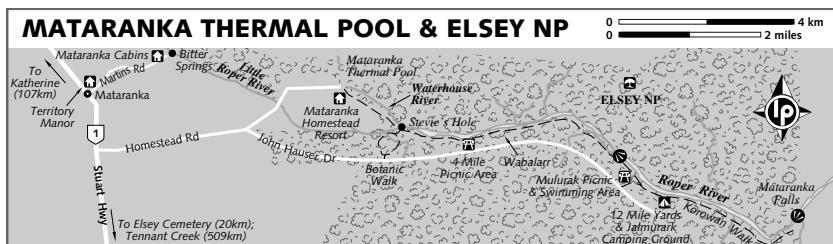
The **Back to the Never Never Festival** takes place in Mataranka in May and includes an art show, rodeo and bush poetry recitals.

### Information

The **Mataranka Rural Transaction Centre** (☎ 8975 4403; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) is the post office agent and has Internet access (\$2 per 15 minutes). Facilities along the west side of the main street include a supermarket, a couple of roadhouses, a **police station** (☎ 8975 4511) and a pub.

### Sights & Activities

Mataranka's famous crystal-clear **thermal pool** is about 10km east of town. The turn-off to the hot springs is 1.5km south of Mataranka, and then it's 8km along the bitumen Homestead Rd. The warm, mineral-rich waters flow from Rainbow Spring into a landscaped pool surrounded by rainforest palms. Don't expect the secluded tranquillity of other hot springs in the Top End; the pool is reached via a short boardwalk from the touristy Mataranka Homestead Resort and can get very crowded. There's no need to worry about the



freshness of the water, however, as it comes out of the ground at more than 16,000L per minute at a temperature of 34°C.

About 200m away (follow the boardwalk) is the **Waterhouse River**, where you can walk along the banks, or rent canoes for \$10 an hour. **Stevie's Hole**, a natural swimming hole in the cooler Waterhouse River, about 1.5km from the homestead, is rarely crowded.

Outside the homestead entrance is a replica of the **Elsey Station Homestead**, which was made for the filming of *We of the Never Never* (shown daily at noon in the main homestead), and now houses historical displays.

The **Never Never Museum** (Stuart Hwy; adult/child \$2.50/1; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri), back in Mataranka town, has displays on the Overland Telegraph Line, as well as WWII and railway paraphernalia.

## Tours

**Travel North** (☎ 1800 089 103; www.travelnorth.com.au; adult/child \$85/70) runs half-day tours to the Mataranka thermal pool from Katherine.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Mataranka Homestead Resort** (☎ 8975 4544; matarankahomestead@bigpond.com.au; Homestead Rd; unpowered/powerd site for 2 \$18/22, dm/s/d \$17/80/95, cabins from \$100; 🍷) This popular resort, only 100m from the thermal pool, has accommodation to suit all budgets. The large camping ground has plenty of grass and shade, good amenities and barbecues. The hostel rooms are rustic (fan-cooled only) but quite comfortable, and linen is provided. The air-con motel rooms have fridge, TV and bathroom, while the cabins have a kitchenette and sleep up to six people. Bookings are advised.

The resort's Garden Bistro (mains \$12 to \$22) churns out steaks, fish and chicken dishes for lunch and dinner. It operates from the Maluka Bar area, as does Jeanie's Takeaway (mains \$6 to \$12), which serves burg-

ers and snacks. You can get an insight into the early drover's palate at Cheon's Kitchen, next to the Elsey Station Homestead replica, which serves up corned beef or stew and damper from June to August. There's also a shop here selling basic groceries.

**Mataranka Cabins** (☎ 8975 4838; www.mataranka.cabins.bigpondhosting.com; Martins Rd, Bitter Springs; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$15/18, cabins \$70; 🍷) Located on the banks of the Little Roper River, only a few hundred metres from Bitter Springs thermal pool, is this quiet bush camping ground with comfortable cabins. The secluded, open-plan cabins are equipped with linen, bathrooms and kitchens, and accommodate up to six people. Check out the amazing termite mounds adorning the front paddock.

**Territory Manor** (☎ 8975 4516; www.travelnorth.com.au; Martins Rd; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$19/22, s/d \$80/95; 🍷 🍷) About 300m off the highway, north of Mataranka on the road to Bitter Springs, this place has ample shady sites and attractive rammed-earth motel rooms. The restaurant (mains \$15 to \$20) serves huge steaks, fresh barramundi and delicious desserts. Barramundi in the dam are fed in spectacular manner at 9.30am and 1pm daily.

**Stockyard Gallery** (☎ 8975 4530; Stuart Hwy; ☎ 8am-5pm) In town, this casual café set in a tranquil garden is a bit of a legend. There's a delicious range of home-made snacks and cakes – try the muffins with fresh plunger coffee, an excellent mango smoothie or the unusual bush-orange ice cream. The art gallery here is worth a browse and information on the region is also available.

Other sleeping and eating options in the town itself:

**Mataranka Roadhouse** (☎ 8975 4571; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$13/18, s/d/cabin \$65/75/95; 🍷)

**Mataranka Hotel** (☎ 8975 4512; fax 8975 4323; s/d/cabin \$55/65/95; mains \$8-20; 🍷 lunch & dinner; 🍷) Graffiti-adorned old pub.

## Getting There & Around

**Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) buses travelling up and down the Stuart Hwy make the detour to the home-stead. To Darwin it's \$90 (6½ hours) and to Alice Springs it's \$200 (14½ hours).

## ELSEY NATIONAL PARK

This 138-sq-km national park surrounds the Mataranka Homestead and takes in the Little Roper River and a long stretch of the Roper River, with monsoon forests along its banks. On the eastern edge of the park are colourful tufa limestone formations, which form the Mataranka Falls. The Roper River section of the park is reached along John Hauser Dr, which turns off Homestead Rd.

The area is the site of some Dreaming trails of the Yangman and Mangarrayi people. Mataranka Station was selected as an experimental sheep station in 1912. The sheep did not prosper and were removed in 1919, but cattle did better and some of the yards are still standing at 12 Mile Yards.

## Sights & Activities

**Bitter Springs**, a serene, palm-fringed thermal pool, is accessed via Martins Rd from Mataranka. Its language name is *Korran*, part of the Black Cockatoo Dreaming, but its less tasteful name was derived from the

high mineral content that makes the water unpleasant to drink. The incredible blue colour of the 34°C water is due to dissolved limestone particles.

A **walking trail** (900m loop, 15 minutes) circles the spring and has viewing platforms into palm and paperbark forests. You can jump in for a therapeutic swim upstream from the bridge. There are information boards, toilets and gas barbecues near the car park.

There are some tranquil and safe **swimming spots** along the Roper River at 4 Mile, Mulurark and 12 Mile Yards. Freshwater crocs inhabit the river but it is safe to swim above the falls.

A few kilometres along John Hauser Dr from the Homestead Rd turn-off, the **Botanic Walk** (1.5km, one hour, easy) passes through dense vegetation bordering a creek and has interpretative signs explaining the Aboriginal uses of various species. **Korowan Walk** (4.1km one way, two hours, easy) follows the scenic Roper River downstream from Mulurark, through 12 Mile Yards (1km) to a set of small cascades and Mataranka Falls.

**Canoe hire** (s/d canoe per hr \$6/8) is available from the 12 Mile Yards camping ground. **Fishing** is permitted and prized catches include barramundi, black bream and saratoga.

## JEANNIE GUNN

Probably the most famous woman in the history of the Territory is Jeannie Gunn. Originally from Melbourne, where she had run a school for young ladies, she arrived in the Territory in 1902 with her husband, Aeneas, who had already spent some years there and was returning to take up the manager's position at Elsey Station.

It was a brave move on the part of Jeannie as at that time there were very few European women living in the Territory, especially on isolated cattle stations. They made the trip from Darwin to Elsey station over several weeks during the Wet.

Station life was tough, but Jeannie adapted to it and eventually gained the respect of the men working there. She also gained a good understanding of the local Aboriginal people, a number of whom worked on the station.

Only a year after their arrival at Elsey, Aeneas contracted malarial dysentery and died. Jeannie returned to Melbourne and soon after recorded her experiences of the Top End in the novel *We of the Never Never*, published in 1908. She was a keen observer of the minutiae of station life, and her observations captured the imagination of the people down south who led such a different existence. These days, however, her depiction of Aboriginal people seems somewhat patronising.

Jeannie was awarded an OBE in 1939 for her contribution to Australian literature, and died in Melbourne in 1961 at the age of 91.

Her book remains one of the classics of outback literature, recording in detail the lives of the early pioneers, and was made into a film in 1981.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Jalmurark Camping Ground** (adult/child/family \$6.60/3.30/16) Located at 12 Mile Yards, this place has lots of grass and shade. There are solar hot showers, toilets, tables and gas barbecues. Note, generators are not allowed.

There are picnic grounds with tables, pit barbecues and toilets at Bitter Springs, 4 Mile Yard and Mulurark.

## ELSEY CEMETERY

About 7km off the Stuart Hwy, 7km south of the Roper Hwy turn-off, is Elsey Cemetery where a number of the real-life characters portrayed in the novel *We of the Never Never* are buried. Among them are Aeneas Gunn, the manager of the station and husband of Jeannie Gunn, the book's author.

During WWII the army located the bodies of a number of them, including Henry Ventlia Peckham ('The Fizzer'), and moved their remains here.

The site of the original homestead, as near as can be determined, is 500m or so beyond the cemetery, by the bridge over the Elsey Creek. A plaque and cairn mark the spot.

# VICTORIA RIVER DISTRICT

The Victoria River, one of the largest in northern Australia, starts in rugged country on the northern fringes of the Tanami Desert and winds its way north through sandstone gorges, native grasslands, and vast cattle stations, before entering the sea in the Joseph Bonaparte Gulf.

It's 513km on the Victoria Hwy from Katherine to Kununurra in Western Australia. The road is bitumen for its entire length and in very good condition as it traverses expansive pastures and woodlands, winds through sandstone outcrops and crosses the flood-prone Victoria River. As you approach the border you'll notice the distinctive boab trees found in much of the northwest.

The majority of travellers to the area tend to keep to the Victoria Hwy; however, there's much to see and do in the Gregory and Keep River National Parks, especially if you have a 4WD and a sense of adventure.

There's a 1½-hour time change when you cross the border. All fruit and vegetables

must be left at the quarantine inspection post here. When entering the Territory from Western Australia, a variety of fruits and vegetables must also be deposited here.

## History

European exploration started when the British naval vessel HMS *Beagle* surveyed the north coast in 1839, having recently completed a five-year worldwide journey with a young naturalist on board by the name of Charles Darwin. The *Beagle* negotiated the difficult mouth of the Victoria River (named by the *Beagle's* captain, John Wickham, in honour of Queen Victoria) and sailed 200km upriver to its navigable limit, which today is the site of Timber Creek.

In the 1850s the Colonial Office in London, with the prompting of the Royal Geographic Society, funded an expedition that was to travel from the Victoria River east to the Gulf of Carpentaria. The expedition was led by a young surveyor, Augustus Gregory, and the party landed at (and named) Timber Creek, when their ship, the *Tom Tough*, ran aground in shallows and was repaired with local timber.

For the next six months Gregory and his party surveyed the area extensively, and it was largely thanks to his glowing reports of the region that pastoral activity and European settlement followed. The 1880s saw a pastoral boom, and it was during this time that the major stations of the Victoria River District were established – Victoria River Downs (the so-called 'Big Run' or VRD), Wave Hill, Bradshaw, Auvergne and Willeroo.

The cattle industry became the backbone of the Territory economy, and in the post-war recovery period of the 1950s there was strong worldwide demand for meat. This led to the development of an infrastructure across the Territory and Queensland, but particularly in the Victoria River District where cattle were so important.

In 1966 Wave Hill Station became the focus for the Aboriginal land rights issue when 200 Gurindji Aboriginal workers and their families, led by Vincent Lingiari, walked off the job in protest against poor living and working conditions (see the boxed text opposite). It wasn't until 1975 that the Gurindji received title to 3200 sq km of claimed land at Wave Hill, and it was 1986 before full ownership was granted.

## THE WAVE HILL STOCKMEN'S STRIKE

Aboriginal stockmen played a large role in the early days of the pastoral industry in the Northern Territory. Because they were paid such paltry wages (which often never even materialised) a pastoralist could afford to employ many of them, and run his station at a much lower cost. White stockmen received regular and relatively high wages, were given decent food and accommodation, and were able to return to the station homestead every week. By contrast, Aboriginal stockmen received poor food and accommodation and would often spend months in the bush with the cattle.

In the 1960s Vincent Lingiari was a stockman on the huge Wave Hill Station, owned by Vestey's, a British company. His concern with the way Aboriginal workers were treated led to an appeal to the North Australian Workers' Union (NAWU), which had already applied to the Federal Court for equal wages for Aboriginal workers. The Federal Court approved the granting of equal wages in March 1966, but it was not to take effect until December 1968. Lingiari asked the Wave Hill management for equal wages but the request was refused and, on 23 August 1966, the Aboriginal stockmen walked off the station and camped in nearby Wattie Creek. They were soon joined by others, and before long only stations that gave their Aboriginal workers good conditions and respect were provided with workers by Lingiari and the other Gurindji Elders.

The Wattie Creek camp gained a lot of local support, from both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people, and it soon developed into a sizeable community with housing and a degree of organisation. Having gained the right to be paid equally, Lingiari and the Gurindji people felt, perhaps for the first time since the arrival of the pastoralists, that they had some say in the way they were able to live. This victory led to the hope that perhaps they could achieve something even more important – title to their own land. To this end Lingiari travelled widely in the eastern states campaigning for land rights, and finally made some progress with the Whitlam government in Canberra. On 16 August 1975, Prime Minister Gough Whitlam attended a ceremony at Wattie Creek where more than 3200 sq km of land (now known as Daguragu to the Gurindji) was handed over. This was solemnly symbolised by Whitlam pouring earth into the hand of Lingiari.

Lingiari was awarded the Order of Australia Medal for service to the Aboriginal people, and died at Daguragu in 1988.

When a second federal electorate was formed in the Northern Territory in 2001, it was honoured with the name Lingiari. Yet perhaps a more significant postscript than that recognition was the achievement in 2003 by three descendants of the Wave Hill strikers. Kalkaringi Community Education Centre students Rhonda Rankin, Lianna Brown and Meshach Paddy completed Year 12 at their home community – a ground-breaking accomplishment for Northern Territory's remote Indigenous communities.

## FLORA RIVER NATURE PARK

Flora River Nature Park, 132km southwest of Katherine, protects a beautiful stretch of the mineral-rich Flora River, including the lush riverine forest lining its banks, the dry open woodland it dissects, and the mineral springs that bring it too life. The high mineral content lends the water an almost unnatural hue. The glowing blue-green water is responsible for the fascinating tufa dams, where calcium carbonate precipitates onto roots and rocks and eventually dams the river, raising its level and creating pretty cascades.

Although there is access to the river at a few points to view the tufa cascades, the park is best enjoyed by boat, particularly a silent canoe. The birdlife in this veritable oasis is

amazing, and the fishing (lure only) can be good, but there's no swimming due to the crocs. Regulations only allow canoes or small tinnies less than 3.6m with engines less than 15hp. To protect the tufa there are small ramps for crossing the dams and power boats are limited to a 3km stretch of the river.

At **Djarrung camping ground** (adult/child/family \$6.60/3.30/16) there are hot showers and barbecues (collect wood before entering park).

The park turn-off is 87km southwest of Katherine; the park entrance is a further 36km along a good dirt road.

## VICTORIA RIVER CROSSING

The setting of Victoria River Crossing (where the Victoria Hwy crosses the Victoria River,

192km southwest of Katherine) is superb. The crossing snugly sits among sandstone gorges, and the high red cliffs and flat-top range are quite a sight. Much of the area around the crossing forms the eastern section of the Gregory National Park (opposite), and there are basic camping and picnic facilities at **Sullivan Creek** (adult/child/family \$3.30/1.65/7.70), about 17km east of the crossing.

The settlement, west of the bridge, basically consists of a roadhouse, the **Victoria River Wayside Inn** (☎ 8975 0744; fax 8975 0819; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$15/20, s/d \$35/65, motel d from \$80; ☎ 7am-10pm; ♿), which is a pleasant place with grassy, though slightly exposed sites, budget dongas and comfortable motel rooms. It also has a shop, bar and a dining room (mains \$16 to \$22), which is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Access to the river itself is via a track 500m west of the crossing. Bush camping is permitted 10km upstream from the crossing – accessible by boat only. Three-hour boat cruises (\$45 including morning or afternoon tea) and fishing trips (\$65, BYO gear) can also be arranged here.

## TIMBER CREEK

pop 300

Almost 100km west of Victoria River Crossing is Timber Creek, the only town between Katherine and Kununurra. It is close to the Victoria River at the foot of the rugged Newcastle Range. Barramundi fishing is a major drawcard to Timber Creek, whether casting a line from shore, taking a boat trip, or hiring a tinny.

It's a tiny place that relies almost entirely on passing trade as people stop to rest and refuel, or stock up with supplies before heading off into Gregory National Park.

## History

In 1839 the *Beagle* negotiated the river to a spot about 8km from town, which came to be known as the Victoria River Depot. The depot was established to service the new pastoral leases that had opened up the country to the south.

Race relations were an early problem, and a police station was set up here at the turn of the 20th century to establish order and help control the 'hostile' Aboriginal people. These days the old police station is a museum.

## Information

The caravan park and motel, service station, supermarket and two pubs are clustered along the highway in 'town'. There's no bank, but the roadhouses have Eftpos facilities.

**Medical clinic** (☎ 8975 0727)

**Parks & Wildlife Office** (☎ 8975 0888; ☎ 7am-4.30pm) About 1km west of town on the highway, it has informative displays on the region, good wall maps of Gregory National Park, and park notes. If you require the detailed 4WD track notes to Gregory National Park, you will need to ask for them.

**Police station** (☎ 8975 0733)

**Timber Creek Community Council** (☎ 8975 0860; per 30min \$2.50; ☎ 8am-4.30 Mon-Fri) Internet access about 500m west of the Wayside Inn.

## Sights & Activities

The old **Police Station** (admission \$2.50; ☎ 9-11am Mon-Fri May-Oct), built in 1908 to replace the 1898 original, is now a museum with displays of old police and mining equipment. The turn-off down O'Keefe St is about 2km west of town; about 200m past the museum is an old **cemetery**.

The **Timber Creek Heritage Trail** is a 3.5km return walk that starts next to the roadhouse at the western end of town. It takes a leisurely two hours, including a stop at the bird hide in front of the Parks & Wildlife office and time to look at the police station and graves.

Two kilometres west of town, a sign reading 'river access' leads to **Policeman's Point**, where there's good fishing off the rocks.

There's a series of scenic **lookouts** about 5km west of town, plus a memorial to the Nackerroos (North Australian Observation Unit) with information detailing the area's military history. The view looks out over the Victoria River to the Bradshaw army base.

There is no public access to the army-run Bradshaw Station side of the bridge spanning the Victoria River, but you can walk across for the view.

A further 12km west of town, a cairn marks the turn-off to the **Gregory's Tree Historical Reserve**, a great boab on which Augustus Gregory carved the date of the arrival and departure of his North Australia Expedition. Interpretive boards tell his story. It's 3.5km down a dirt road then a 500m return walk that is wheelchair accessible.

**Timber Creek Boat Hire** (☎ 8975 0722; per half/full day \$70/100) has punts with 15hp outboards for hire – inquire at the roadhouse.

## Tours

Bookings for most tours in the area can be made through **Beverley's Booking Centre** (☎ /fax 8975 0850).

**Barra Fishing Safaris** (☎ 8975 0688; \$220) has full-day fishing trips, including all fishing gear, lunch and refreshments.

**Big Horse Barra** (☎ 8975 0850) offers similar fishing tours.

**Max's Tours** (adult/child incl refreshments \$60/30; ☎ 4pm during the Dry) runs a 3½-hour trip on the Victoria River, where you'll see crocodiles, wallabies, turtles, fish and a glorious sunset on one of Australia's largest untamed rivers.

**Northern Air Charter** (☎ 8975 0628; www.flynac.com.au; per person \$350, minimum 2 people) runs scenic flights over the Bungle Bungles in Western Australia, which are better value than in Western Australia itself. The circular flight includes Piccaninny Gorge, Argyle Diamond Mine, Lake Argyle, Keep River National Park and up to the spectacular, rugged mouth of the Victoria River. You can even stop at Sara Henderson's 'Bullo Station'.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Timber Creek Gunamu Tourist Park** (☎ 8975 0722; fax 8975 0772; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$13/19, budget s/d \$45/70, motel d \$90-105; ♿) Although it looks like there are several businesses in town, they nearly all fall under this umbrella organisation. Enormous trees shade the 'Circle F' camping area, which is bordered by a creek (unsafe for swimming) and there are a couple of good swimming pools. There is no camp kitchen.

This complex includes the **Timber Creek Hotel/Roadhouse** (☎ breakfast & lunch) and the **Wayside Inn** (mains \$10-20; ☎ dinner), which both have bars and bistros serving standard roadhouse meals; takeaway food is also available at the roadhouse. The **supermarket** (☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat) here has a good range of staples and frozen meat, and a post office agency.

Parks & Wildlife runs the **Big Horse Creek camping ground** (adult/child/family \$3.30/1.65/7.70), beside the river in Gregory National Park, 10km west of town.

## Getting There & Away

**Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) buses call through on the route between Katherine (\$60, 3¼ hours) and Kununurra (\$55, 1¼ hours).

## GREGORY NATIONAL PARK

This little-visited park sits at the transitional zone between monsoonal and semi-arid regions and covers 12,860 sq km. Apart from the beautiful sandstone scarps that the Victoria Hwy passes through, most visitors see little of Gregory. But some parts are accessible to 2WDs and, for those properly equipped, the park's rugged 4WD tracks will provide a challenge rewarded with superb gorge country and solitude.

The park was gazetted in 1990 and apart from its scenic values protects reminders of the early pioneers and links to the region's Aboriginal people – the Wardaman, Ngariman, Ngaliwurri, Nungali, Jaminjung and Karrangpurra groups. The park's core is the former Bullita Station, but it also includes parts excised from neighbouring stations, such as Victoria River Downs, Humbert River, Delamere, Auvergne and Innesvale.

The park consists of two separate sectors: the eastern sector, also known as the Victoria River section, and the much larger Bullita sector in the west. The two areas are separated by the Stokes Range Aboriginal land. Bullita was originally an outstation of the Durack family properties.

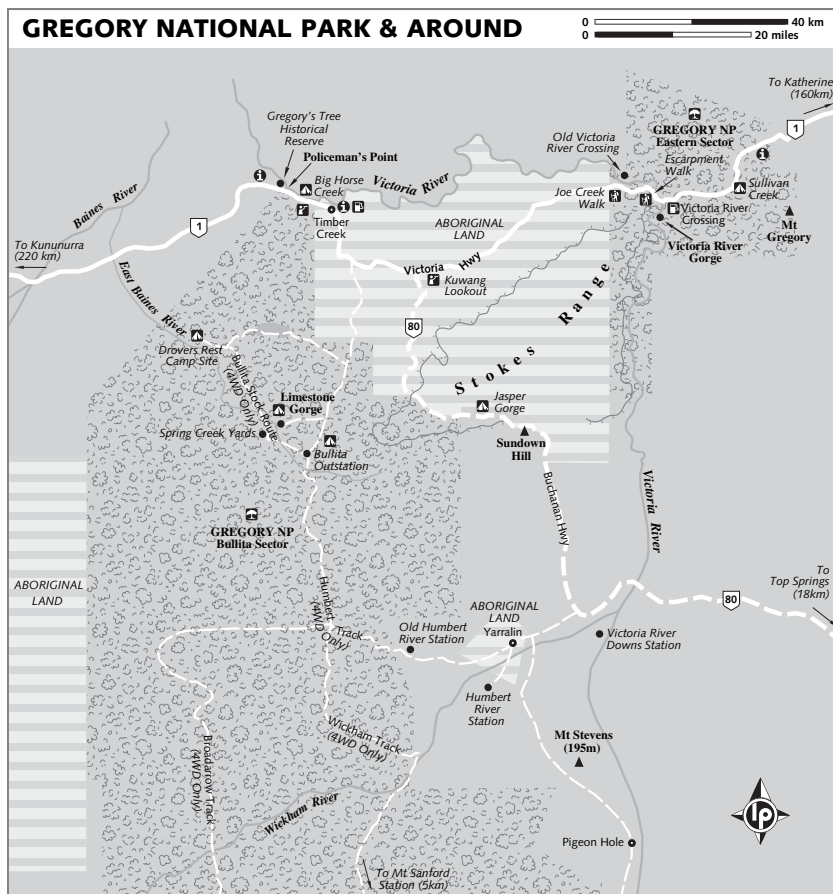
The park offers a chance to get off the beaten track. There's excellent fishing, bush camping and a 4WD track network that tests both vehicle and driver.

## Wildlife ANIMALS

There is not a great deal of animal life to be seen, particularly during the Dry, although agile wallabies are reasonably common. Among the 140 bird species recorded are the white-quilled rock-pigeon of rocky escarpments, the white-browed robin and the rare Gouldian finch.

## PLANTS

The northern part of the park consists of grassy woodland, with pockets of monsoon forest, while the southern hills are dominated by snappy gum and spinifex; less-common plants include the Victoria palm, a *Livistona* palm that grows on the sandstone escarpments, and the northern grey box, a eucalypt endemic to the park. Despite the arid conditions, some 900 plant species grow in the park, including 70 acacias and 30 eucalypts.



## Information

Information on the park can be obtained from **Parks & Wildlife** (in Timber Creek ☎ 8975 0888, in Bullita ☎ 8975 0833). Road condition reports are available from the Timber Creek and **Katherine Parks & Wildlife office** (☎ 8973 8888).

There's an information bay just inside the park's eastern boundary, about 165km west of Katherine and 31km east of Victoria River.

To travel on any of the 4WD tracks you need to **self-register** (☎ 1300 650 730) and leave a \$50 credit card deposit, which is re-credited on deregistration. You may not see another car in weeks on these lonely tracks. Along the Bullita Stock Route track there is a sign-in, sign-out book at each end

of the track. Parts of the 4WD tracks are pretty rugged and it is not recommended for 'light' 4WDs; high ground clearance is essential and it is recommended that two spare tyres be carried.

No provisions are available in the park and all visitors must be self-sufficient. The nearest stores are at Timber Creek and Victoria River Crossing.

Water should be carried at all times and any taken from rivers or billabongs needs to be boiled before drinking. Both saltwater and freshwater crocodiles live in the park.

The Bullita sector of the park is sometimes closed during the Wet season and all the 4WD tracks are closed between October and May.

## Sights & Activities

### BULLITA OUTSTATION

The historical homestead here has interpretive displays and the very photogenic original timber stockyards, which are maintained by Parks & Wildlife staff. The name of one of the Duracks is carved in a boab tree nearby. The homestead is 52km from the Victoria Hwy along a well-maintained gravel road that's suitable for conventional vehicles. There's a shady camping ground with good access to the East Baines River for fishing.

### LIMESTONE GORGE

Limestone Gorge is 9km off the main Bullita access track and accessible by 2WD vehicle during the Dry. Before you reach the camping ground there's a short **Calcite Flow Walk** (600m, 30 minutes) to interesting limestone formations. At the gorge camping ground, on the junction of East Baines River and Limestone Creek, there's excellent swimming in the croc-free Limestone Creek and a **Limestone Ridge Walk** (1.8km, one hour) providing views the karst landforms and the East Baines River.

### BULLITA STOCK ROUTE 4WD TRACK

This 93km track follows part of an old stock route into the western part of the park through some beautiful limestone-gorge country to the **Drovers Rest Campsite** (50km from Bullita Outstation), then loops back to join the main Bullita access track, 27km from the Victoria Hwy. Average driving time to complete the track is eight hours.

Cattle were taken from Bullita and Humbert River Stations along this track to the Auvergne Stock Route further north, and then on to the meatworks in Wyndham (Western Australia). The Spring Creek Yards (13km from Bullita Outstation) were typical of yards used during cattle drives, when up to 500 head were moved.

At the junction of the Spring Creek and East Baines River (21km), a huge boab was obviously the site of a regular drovers' camp – 'Oriental Hotel' is carved into it and still clearly visible.

### HUMBERT 4WD TRACK

This track along an old packhorse trail is an alternative entry or exit point to the park. It connects Bullita with Humbert River Station 62.5km away, just outside the southeastern

edge of the park and 30km west of Victoria River Downs. The track was originally a supply trail for Humbert River from Victoria River Depot. It passes through some superbly scenic and quite isolated country, and it takes about six hours from Bullita to Humbert River. There is only bush camping along this route.

### WICKHAM & BROADARROW TRACKS

The 92km Wickham and 230km Broadarrow tracks extend into the southern region of the park, and beyond onto pastoral roads to the Buntine Hwy. These tracks see even fewer vehicles, are slow going and pass through rugged, dry country.

### BUSHWALKING

The smaller eastern section of the park has a few short walks up and along the Victoria River escarpment.

#### Escarpment Walk (3km return, 1½ hours, medium)

Spectacular views of the escarpment and interpretive signs punctuate this walk, 2km past Victoria River Crossing. Watch out for the loose surface in places.

**Joe Creek Walk** (1.7km return, 1½ hours, medium to difficult) The turn-off to this walk is 10km west of the Crossing. This is a beautiful, tranquil spot where you can scramble up the escarpment for more stunning views. It's best in the early morning. After wet-season storms, small cascades water the Livistona palms lining the foot of the cliffs. There's a picnic ground with tables, pit barbecues and toilets.

#### Kuwang Lookout (100m return, 15 minutes, easy)

Between Victoria River Crossing (60km) and Timber Creek (35km), this lookout (150m from the car park) gives a fine, sweeping view over the peaks of the Gregory National Park 12km away. An interpretive sign explains the Aboriginal significance of what you see.

### Sleeping

Sullivan Creek Camping Ground – 17km east of Victoria River Crossing – sits by a waterhole you can't swim in and has no drinking water, but it does have picnic tables, pit barbecues, toilets and a smattering of shade. Bush flies can be bad here.

The camping grounds at Bullita Homestead, Limestone Gorge and Big Horse Creek in the western part of the park have picnic tables, wood fires and pit toilets. Big Horse Creek is a beautiful spot to launch if you've brought a tinny along with you.

Pay **camping fees** (\$3.30/1.65/7.70 per adult/child/family) into the honesty box at each site.

## KEEP RIVER NATIONAL PARK

Bordering Western Australia just off the Victoria Hwy, this 570-sq-km park has stunning sandstone formations, varied walks and a number of significant Aboriginal rock-art sites. This region of the Territory is the tribal area of the Mirriwung and Gadjerong people. Two communities live within the park and carry on their association with the land.

### Information

There's an information bay 400m along the entrance road with facts about the park's landscape, culture and wildlife. A notice-board advises if any trails are closed.

There's a **rangers station** (☎ 9167 8827) and Interpretive Centre (usually unstaffed) 3km into the park from the main road. Cockatoo Lagoon can be seen from the bottom of the garden here.

Bushwalkers intending to camp overnight in the park away from the designated camping grounds must notify the rangers before setting off. It's a good idea to carry a topographic map (1:100,000 *Keep River* 4766) and compass, and definitely carry water. Reliable water is available only from a tank near the park entrance and at Jarnem camping ground. Temperatures in the Wet (November to April) are hot (37°C) and it gets very humid.

Access to the park's sights and camping grounds is along gravel roads usually suitable for 2WDs, but they may be cut by floods during the Wet.

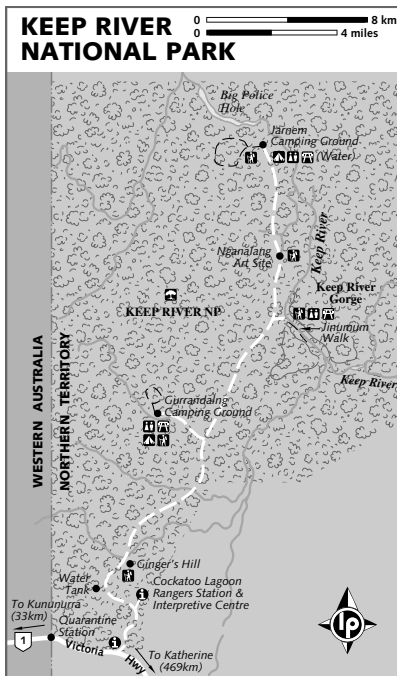
### Sights

The beautiful scenery is a reason in itself to visit the boab-studded Keep River National Park, but there are a few other attractions.

It supports abundant wildlife – some 200 bird species and 50 mammals have been recorded in the park, although many are nocturnal or active only at dawn and dusk.

**Cockatoo Lagoon**, behind the Interpretive Centre, is worth a visit to see several species of water birds, including spoonbills, jabirus and plumed whistling ducks. Access is limited because it's also the home of the rare flat-headed frog.

The park's many sandstone outcrops are home to creatures adapted to this environment – look out for short-eared rock wallabies, and listen for the sudden whirr of a fleeing white-quilled rock pigeon, or



the melodious call of the sandstone shrike thrush echoing among the rocks.

The **rock-art site** at Nganalang has an estimated 2500 rock carvings (petroglyphs), and a very impressive rock-art gallery with numerous painted images, including *gurrimalam* the rainbow snake, echidnas, kangaroos, tortoises and crocodiles.

### Bushwalking

Pamphlets about self-guided walks are available at the start of the trails. Remember to carry sufficient water and wear a hat. Check the information bay for updates on trail conditions.

**Nganalang** (500m, 10 minutes, easy) This short walk leads to an impressive rock-art site on a beautiful sandstone outcrop.

**Ginger's Hill** (500m, 10 minutes, easy) A gentle walk off the main entrance road to an interesting rock hide used by Aboriginal hunters to catch hawks and eagles.

**Gurrandalng Walk** (2km, one hour, medium) This pleasant walk heads off from the Gurrandalng (Brologa Dreaming) camping area and scrambles up an escarpment for some fine views. Excellent interpretive signs explain the wildlife and flora. Great in the early morning and late afternoon.

**Jitunum Walk** (3km, 1½ hours, easy) A comfortable walk through the gorge. Look for Aboriginal paintings along the steep red walls and enjoy the frenetic birdlife near the permanent waterholes. There are picnic tables and fireplaces at the car park.

**Jarnem walks** Three interesting walks start at the camping ground in the north of the park and follow the same route for the first 1.3km. The **Nigli Gap Walk** (6km return, two hours, medium) leads to eroded sandstone formations, part of the same range as the Bungle Bungles – it's most photogenic in the afternoon. The **Lookout Walk** (4.5km return, two hours, medium) heads up to a panoramic viewpoint. The **Loop Walk** combines both of these walks.

### Sleeping

There are two **camping grounds** (adult/child/family \$3.30/1.65/7.70). Gurrandalng, 15km into the park, allows generators and is very popular. Jarnem, 28km from the entrance, is quiet, usually uncrowded and has a water tank. Each site has picnic tables, fireplaces and pit toilets. Pay fees into the honesty boxes.

### WESTERN AUSTRALIA BORDER

Several kilometres past the Keep River turn-off there is a 24-hour agricultural checkpoint where you must leave all fruit, vegetables, nuts and honey before proceeding. If you're only heading into Western Australia for a day, ask the staff to keep it safe for 24 hours.

Useful phone numbers across the border include the **Kununurra Tourism Bureau** (☎ 08-9168 1177), **hospital** (☎ 08-9168 1522) and **police** (☎ 08-9166 4530).

## BUNTINE & BUCHANAN HIGHWAYS

The Buntine and Buchanan Hwys are lonely roads linking remote cattle stations and Aboriginal communities with the Victoria and Stuart Hwys, and which offer alternative routes into Gregory National Park and Western Australia. The Buntine, named after road-train and beef-road pioneer Noel Buntine, leaves the Victoria Hwy 126km southwest of Katherine and is sealed all the way to Kalkaringi, via Top Springs. From Kalkaringi it's unsealed to Halls Creek in Western Australia.

From the Stuart Hwy, the gravel Buchanan Hwy (named after legendary stock-

man Nat Buchanan; see boxed text below) traverses a monotonous 180km to Top Springs, before continuing northwest past the famous Victoria River Downs cattle station, through the impressive Jasper Gorge, to eventually link with the Victoria Hwy 30km east of Timber Creek.

### TOP SPRINGS

Top Springs is not a pretty place; it consists solely of a roadhouse and a road junction. The Murrnaji Stock Route, which connected Newcastle Waters with Wave Hill and was pioneered by Nat Buchanan, passed through Top Springs.

The only option here is the **Top Springs Hotel/Roadhouse** (☎ /fax 8975 0767; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 free/\$10, budget s/d \$25/45, motel d \$85; ♿ ♿), which has a grassy camping area, budget dongas and comfortable motel rooms. There are two bars and good meals are available in the dining room (mains \$10 to \$20). Basic groceries and fuel are also available here.

From Top Springs the bitumen Buntine Hwy (formerly Delamere Rd) heads north

### NAT BUCHANAN

Although Nathaniel Buchanan was not a great land-holder in the mould of Kidman or the Duracks, he was a great cattleman and drover, and was responsible for the settlement of huge areas of the outback.

Known as Old Bluey because of his shock of red hair, Nat Buchanan led many drives through Queensland and the Northern Territory, including what was likely the largest cattle drive ever undertaken in Australia: the movement of 20,000 head from Aramac in Queensland to Glencoe Station, near Adelaide River in the Northern Territory.

In 1896, at the age of 70, Buchanan set off from Tennant Creek, trying to find a direct route across the Tanami Desert to Sturt Creek in the north of Western Australia. He hoped to find a route suitable for droving cattle, rather than having to take them further to the north. While the hoped-for route didn't eventuate, this was probably the first European crossing of the Tanami Desert.

Buchanan was accompanied on some of his cattle drives by his son Gordon, who reflected on his experiences in the book *Packhorse & Waterhole*.

**DETOUR**

The gravel Buchanan Hwy heading northwest from Top Springs takes you to the famous Victoria River Downs Station (100km). The road is generally in good condition and can easily be travelled by conventional vehicles in the Dry.

**Victoria River Downs**, known throughout the Top End as VRD, or the Big Run, is one of the largest stations in the area (over 12,000 sq km), and is its focal point. It was one of the many large pastoral leases established in the 1880s and was stocked with cattle brought in on the hoof from Queensland. Jock Makin wrote about the place in his book *The Big Run*.

The road passes right by the homestead area, which looks more like a small town than a station. There are no tourist facilities, although the public are welcome to use the **general store** (☎ 8975 0853; 🕒 7-9.30am, 10am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-12.30pm Sat), which stocks all manner of gear and groceries, including cold drinks.

From VRD the road continues north to the Victoria Hwy (140km), passing through the spectacular red sandstone of **Jasper Gorge** (60km), part of the Stokes Range on the edge of Gregory National Park. There's a small secluded bush camping ground (no facilities) on Jasper Creek where you can trap Cherapin (a delicious crustacean) and fish.

If you're travelling by 4WD, it's possible to enter Gregory National Park via a rough track from Humbert River Station, 30km west of VRD; see p153. Before doing so, self-register for the route on ☎ 1300 650 730.

to join the Victoria Hwy (165km), or you can head southwest to Kalkaringi and Western Australia, or east to Dunmarra (182km) on the Stuart Hwy, or northwest to Victoria River Downs, Jasper Gorge and Timber Creek (see the boxed text above).

**KALKARINGI**

pop 260

From Top Springs, the sealed Buntine Hwy heads southwest on the 170km stretch to Kalkaringi, which is pleasantly located on the banks of the Victoria River. This small town exists basically to service the Aboriginal community of **Daguragu**, 8km to the north. Daguragu was formerly known as Wattie Creek and grew out of the Aboriginal stockmen's strike of 1966 (see the boxed text p149).

For visitors, the town offers a chance to refuel and refresh, and there are limited fishing and swimming opportunities in the river. The town is a dry area and as such alcohol is not permitted.

The gravel road west to Halls Creek in Western Australia is generally good, although it can be made treacherous or even cut (usually only for short periods) by creeks during the Wet.

Facilities in the town include a **police station** (☎ 8975 0790) and **medical clinic** (☎ 8975 0785).

**Kalkaringi Service Station Caravan Park** (☎ 8975 0788; fax 8975 0855; unpowered/powerd sites

for 2 \$12/18, s/d \$50/60, cabin d \$80; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat, Sun & public holidays; 🚰) has a camping ground with plenty of grass and shade. The budget rooms have a TV and fridge, while the cabin is fully self-contained. The service station sells fuel, takeaway food and provisions, including fresh bread daily.

You can fly between Kalkaringi and Katherine with **Janami Air** (☎ 8953 5000) on Monday, Wednesday and Friday for \$250 one way.

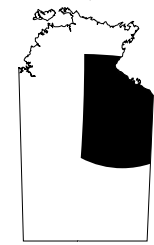
**LAJAMANU & THE TANAMI TRACK**

From Kalkaringi, the Lajamanu Rd heads south to Lajamanu (105km), an Aboriginal community in the Tanami Desert, from where it's a further 232km to the Tanami Track (p207). The country changes abruptly from grassed and lightly treed cattle country to the red spinifex plains of the Centre, as if a line has been drawn delineating desert and grazing land. The road is generally in good condition, but it does get sandy and the numerous creek-bed crossings will make it difficult for a 2WD to get through.

A permit is not required to traverse the road or get fuel and supplies here. The **Lajamanu Service Station & Store** (☎ 8975 0896; 🕒 9.30am-noon & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-noon Sat) sells fuel and supplies. Keeping separate hours are its **takeaway** (🕒 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9-11am Sat) and small **grocery shop** (🕒 5-7pm). There's also a **police station** (☎ 8975 0622) here.

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# The Barkly Region

The Barkly Region embraces a vast area: the open grasslands of the Barkly Tableland, the idyllic but rugged Gulf coast and the ochre-red terrain of central Australia. Only a few sealed roads cross this sparsely populated country, is lightly sprinkled with a handful of towns.

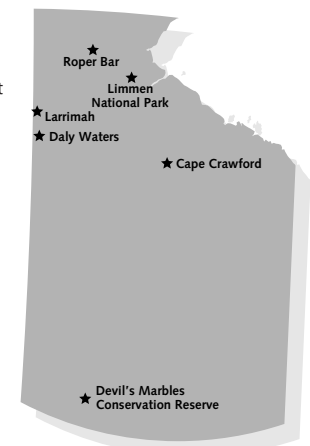
As is the case elsewhere in the Territory, the Stuart Hwy is the region's backbone, branching off feeder roads to far-flung corners of the state. Up and down the highway, lonely outposts vie for the traveller's attention and lucre. To get noticed you need an angle; it may be the bras 'n' bills adorning the Daly Waters Pub or the alien invasion at Wycliffe Well, where supernatural sightings have solved the deficit of natural attributes. However, there's nothing contrived about the intriguing Devil's Marbles – a surreal gathering of granite boulders.

Tennant Creek is the only town of consequential size. It owes its creation, like many Territory towns, to the Overland Telegraph Line, but growth was stimulated by a gold rush in the 1930s, and metal and mineral booms continue to stir it into life – albeit sporadically. Today, the town's telegraph station, mining history and Aboriginal culture are the major drawcards.

East of the Stuart, the Roper and Carpentaria Hwys direct travellers to the remote Gulf country. The testing Nathan River Rd, between Roper Bar and Borroloola, snakes through Limmen National Park – a paradise for 4WD and fishing enthusiasts, with ample bush camping and fabulous fishing spots.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Drifting among the precarious granite boulders at **Devil's Marbles Conservation Reserve** (p167) at sunset
- Camping out under the stars beside the Towns River in **Limmen National Park** (p169)
- Viewing the art, absorbing the culture and relishing the bush-tucker muffins at **Nyinkka Nyunyu** (p164)
- Rescuing tasty barramundi from the jaws of crocodiles in the **Roper River** (p168)
- Tucking in to a buffalo pie or the tempting buttermilk scones at **Fran's Devonshire Tea House** (p160)
- Recovering from a long drive at the Heartbreak Hotel in land-locked **Cape Crawford** (p172)
- Propping up the bar at the quaint and quirky **Daly Waters Pub** (p160)



■ TELEPHONE CODE ☎ 08

■ Barkly Region Tourism: [www.barklytourism.com.au](http://www.barklytourism.com.au)

■ Barkly Regional Arts: [www.barklyarts.com.au](http://www.barklyarts.com.au)

## DOWN THE TRACK

From Mataranka, the Stuart Hwy runs south to Alice Springs. There are long stretches between sights on this road, but character-filled towns and friendly roadhouses, plus a few interesting roadhouses, break up the journey.

### LARRIMAH

pop 20

The tiny settlement of Larrimah is one of many towns along the highway that served as important bases during WWII, and there are still reminders of that era around town. There's also an idiosyncratic outback pub.

### History

The North Australian Railway terminated at the settlement of Birdum Creek, 8km south of Larrimah. As Birdum was subject to flooding, the Army established Larrimah ('meeting place') as a staging camp on the highway during WWII. In 1942 the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) started work

on Gorrie Airfield, 10km north of Larrimah. It became one of the largest in the Pacific and was the base for 6500 military personnel.

Following WWII, Larrimah's population fell to less than 50. The Birdum Hotel was dismantled and moved to its current location in Larrimah, while the rest of the settlement was abandoned. In 1976 the railway line closed as it had long since become uneconomical to run.

### Sights

There's a small but excellent **museum** (☎ 8975 9771; Mahoney St; admission by donation; ♻ always open) in the former telegraph repeater station opposite the Larrimah Hotel with displays on the railway and WWII.

History buffs may find it worth looking over the remaining military buildings and the airstrip at **Gorrie Airfield**, though it's largely overgrown, and the remains of the abandoned settlement of **Birdum**.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Larrimah Historic Hotel** (☎ 8975 9931; unpowered/powered sites for 2 \$6/10, s/d \$28/40; ♻ ♻) This is

### BARKLY & GULF REGION NATIONAL PARKS & RESERVES

The Barkly and Gulf region embraces several significant conservation and historical reserves managed by the Northern Territory Parks & Wildlife Commission. Not surprisingly, the remote Gulf country parks provide excellent opportunities for getting off the beaten track. Here you can find solitude under starry skies, unspoilt rivers brimming with barra, and 4WD tracks to test your skill and courage. But don't expect much in the way of infrastructure – there are no Kakadus, Litchfields or Nitmiluks out this way.

Most travellers to this region will undoubtedly stop to stare at the mesmerising landscape at the **Devils Marbles Conservation Reserve** (p167) just off the Stuart Hwy. Likewise, the historical **Telegraph Station** (p164) at Tennant Creek is an easy and rewarding detour.

To visit other parks in the region requires a bit more preparation and planning (and often a 4WD), but the rewards are worth the effort. The **Davenport Range National Park** (p168), east of Wauchope, protects a series of permanent waterholes – an ancient, isolated watercourse that is a vital refuge for birds and mammals and a home to some hardy fish. **Limmen National Park** (p169) in the Gulf region is an extensive reserve comprising 'Lost City' sandstone formations, superb rivers and billabongs, and the chance to really get away from it all. Paradise here is pitching your tent by a river that swirls with fish and freshwater crocodiles, while the star-filled night is pierced by the haunting wail of a curlew.

Literally in the Gulf is the **Barranyi (North Island) National Park** (p171), which protects the picturesque island home of the Yanyuwa Aboriginal people, and is fringed by cliffs indented with idyllic sandy coves. **Caranbirini Conservation Reserve** (p171), 46km south of Borroloola off the Carpentaria Hwy, features yet another sandstone 'Lost City', and is home to the secretive Carpentaria grasswren and other rare creatures. While not providing any infrastructure or obvious attraction to visitors, **Connells Lagoon Conservation Reserve** (p172), east of the Tablelands Hwy, is a significant reserve of native Mitchell grass habitat – a relatively untrampled remnant of the pre-cattle ecosystem.



### THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Fran's Devonshire Tea House** (☎ 8975 9945; Stuart Hwy Larrimah; priceless; ☺ break-fast, lunch & dinner) For over 20 years Fran has been reviving weary travellers with home-made treats and fresh coffee at the Old Police Station in Larrimah – look for the jumble of blackboard signs beside the highway. Fran's wealth of knowledge on all things Territory is as much of a drawcard as her scrumptious pies, strudels and scones. Fran has answers to questions you haven't yet thought of. 'Home-made' is often over-used in catering, but not here. Everything from the soft drinks and ice cream to the delicious pastry on the buffalo and chilli pies is Fran-made. It's fresh rather than fast, and you won't find a deep-fryer or chip within cooee. Fran's is open daily except for shopping day once a fortnight. Which day? That depends on Fran's diary or whim.

a quirky outback pub with a rustic bar and a menagerie of camels, donkeys, birds, crocs and a rather bedraggled pink panther. The camping ground (with kitchen) is a little exposed, and the rooms are basic, but it's a clean and friendly place. Counter meals (mains \$12 to \$17) at lunch and dinner are served in the shady bar area or in the period dining room.

### DALY WATERS

The historical settlement of Daly Waters, just 4km west of the Stuart Hwy, is a worthwhile detour. The pub here has carved a name for itself in the Hall of Eccentric Little Places, and though it seems a little forced and touristy, the beer is cold and the patrons keep arriving.

On the highway itself, 4km south of the Daly Waters turn-off, is the Daly Waters Junction, where the Carpentaria Hwy heads 23.4km east to Borroloola and the Gulf.

The **Daly Waters Campdraft, Show and Rodeo**, in mid-September, is the social event of the year, with a dance held at the pub on the Saturday evening.

### History

On John McDouall Stuart's third attempt to cross the continent from south to north, he came across the small creek here, which

he named in honour of the then governor of South Australia.

In 1872 the Overland Telegraph Line came through and a repeater station was built. In the 1890s a pub sprang up, catering for drovers who had started using Daly Waters as a camp on the overland stock route between Queensland and the Kimberley. The current building dates from the late 1920s and, from the outside at least, looks much the same as it would have then.

In the early 1930s Qantas, then a fledgling airline, used Daly Waters as a refuelling stop on the Singapore leg of its Sydney–London run. The airstrip became one of the major stops in northern Australia.

The RAAF also used Daly Waters as a refuelling stop for its bombers en route to Singapore, and in 1942 established a base here. It was in constant use throughout the war, and the restored hangar now belongs to the National Trust.

### Sights

The **Daly Waters Pub** has the most unusual array of mementos left by passing travellers – everything from bras to banknotes adorn the walls! It also lays claim to the title of 'oldest pub in the Territory', as its liquor licence has been used continuously since 1893.

About 1km from the pub there's a sign-posted turn-off to the sorry remains of a tree where John McDouall Stuart carved a large letter 'S'. Following on from here, the **Daly Waters Aerodrome** has an aviation display in the old hangar. Among the memorabilia, you can see an old photo of the aforementioned tree in which the 'S' is clearly visible.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Daly Waters Pub** (☎ 8975 9927; www.dalywaterspub.com; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$10/14, s/d \$35/50, cabins \$65-95; ☺ ☺) Beside the pub is a grassy, well-shaded camping ground, and the accommodation, which is across the road, ranges from basic dongas to spacious self-contained cabins. Hearty meals (mains \$10 to \$30) at the bistro are served from breakfast to dinnertime, and the beef 'n' barra barbecue (\$18) in the evening is very popular. Fuel is available from 7am to 11pm daily.

**Hiway Inn Roadhouse** (☎ 8975 9925; cnr Stuart & Carpentaria Hwys; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$10/16, dm \$22, s/d \$65/80; ☺ ☺ 6am-11pm) This clean roadhouse and bar features simple dongas and

comfortable motel rooms, all set well back from the two highways. Filling roadhouse meals (mains \$15 to \$24) are available in the bar and dining room.

### DUNMARRA

The name of this roadhouse was derived from that of Dan O'Mara, a missing man whose body was never found. **Dunmarra Wayside Inn** (☎ 8975 9922; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$11/17, s/d \$65/75; ☺ ☺) has a friendly restaurant-bar (mains \$12 to \$20) and a reptile display (yes, live snakes), as well as the usual fuel, refreshments and takeaway. The standard air-con rooms have a fridge, and there are gas barbecues in the camping ground.

The Buchanan Hwy, a beef road which heads west to Top Springs and the Buntine Hwy (to Halls Creek in Western Australia), starts 8km north of town (see p155). Forty kilometres north of Dunmarra, the sealed Carpentaria Hwy heads off east towards Borroloola and the Gulf of Carpentaria.

About 30km south of town, an **historic marker** to Sir Charles Todd, builder of the Overland Telegraph Line, commemorates the joining of the two ends of the line in August 1872.

### ELLIOTT

pop 430

Most travellers bypass Elliott, which sits at the halfway point between Alice Springs and

Darwin. The town includes several roadhouses (which stock groceries), a **police station** (☎ 8969 2010) and a nine-hole golf course that boasts real grass greens. If you must stay, try the **Midland Caravan Park** (☎ 8969 2037; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$7/20, cabins \$65), which is also the post office agent. Fuel is available here from 7am to 5pm daily.

### RENNER SPRINGS

An hour or so down the track from Elliott, Renner Springs is a roadhouse on what is generally accepted as being the dividing line between the seasonally wet Top End and the dry Centre.

The often monotonous country that the highway passes through is relieved around here by the Ashburton Range, which parallels the road for some distance either side of Renner Springs.

**Renner Springs Desert Inn** (☎ 8964 4505; www.rennersprings.com; Stuart Hwy; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$15/20, d \$80-85; ☺ 7am-11pm; ☺ ☺ ☺) is housed in an army hut removed after WWII from the staging camp at Banka Banka Station to the south. It's built entirely of corrugated iron – even the bar. It's a great place to get all your road train questions answered with the drivers passing through. The camping ground is a bit exposed, though the motel accommodation is decent. The dining room (mains \$14 to \$20) is cosy and atmospheric, although it's only open for dinner.

### DETOUR

**Newcastle Waters** is a former droving town that was at the intersection of northern Australia's two most important stock routes – the Murrnanji and the Barkly. Today it is virtually a ghost town, the only permanent inhabitants being the families of employees from Newcastle Waters Station. Located 3km west of the Stuart Hwy, the turn-off is 80km south of Dunmarra and 25km north of Elliot. There are no facilities of any kind in the 'town'.

In recognition of the need for permanent water along the stock routes, Newcastle Waters was made the depot for a bore-sinking team in 1917. Once the 13 bores along the Murrnanji were operational in 1924, use of the route increased steadily.

The town site for Newcastle Waters was leased from the station by the government in 1930 and a store and pub were built, followed by a telegraph repeater station in 1942. The town's death knell was the demise of the drovers in the early 1960s, with the advent of road transport for moving stock, and the fact that the Stuart Hwy bypassed the town.

On arrival, check out the **Drovers' Memorial Park**, which commemorates the part played by the drovers in the opening up of the Territory. Only a few buildings remain on what was once the main street. The rustic **Junction Hotel**, built in 1932 out of abandoned windmills, was the town's focus. The other notable building is **Jones Store**, also known as George Man Fong's house, which was restored by the National Trust in 1988 and houses a small museum with information and photos of the town's heyday, including a few interesting anecdotes.

Breakfast, lunch and snacks can be eaten out on the wide veranda.

## BANKA BANKA

The historical Banka Banka cattle station, 60km south of Renner Springs and 100km north of Tennant Creek, makes a relaxing and welcoming stop along the Track.

**Banka Banka Station** (☎ 8964 4511; bankabanka.stn@bigpond.com; Stuart Hwy; unpowered sites for 2 \$12) is a friendly oasis that offers a grassy camping ground shaded by yellow flame trees and pristine toilet and shower blocks, including wheelchair accessible amenities. This oh-so-relaxing place has a couple of marked walking trails – one leads to an attractive waterhole with rock walls surrounded by gum trees and abundant bird life. ‘Bundy’, the station’s dog, will no doubt dive in for a dip with you. In the evening, the station master runs a slide show and talk covering all aspects of station life – from mustering and pregnancy testing to butchering the ‘killer’. The small licensed kiosk hosts a sausage sizzle in the evenings, and sells ice creams, milk and soft drinks. For meals you will need to be self-sufficient, but there are barbecues, a good camp kitchen and you can get gas refills.

## ATTACK CREEK HISTORICAL RESERVE

About 90km south of Renner Springs the highway crosses Attack Creek, and on the southern side is a memorial to John McDouall Stuart, with a shaded picnic area, water tank and barbecue (BYO wood).

On Stuart’s first attempt at a south–north crossing of the continent, in 1860, he got as far as this creek before he was forced to return to Adelaide, partly because he was low on supplies. Stuart’s version was that his party was attacked by hostile Warumungu Aboriginal men and that this forced the turn around. The attack certainly occurred, but the details seem to have been exaggerated by Stuart.

## THREE WAYS

Being the point where the Stuart Hwy meets the road east to Queensland, the Barkly Hwy, it didn’t take much wit to come up with the name Three Ways. At 537km north of the Alice, 988km south of Darwin and 643km west of Mt Isa, it’s a long way from anywhere apart from Tennant Creek, which is 26km down the Track. Three Ways

is a classic ‘get stuck’ point for hitchhikers and a ‘must stop’ point for road trains.

On the north side of the junction next to the highway there’s a construction that looks like a brick water tower. This is in fact the **John Flynn Memorial**, commemorating the founder of the Royal Flying Doctor Service, the Reverend John Flynn. It’s one of the least aesthetically pleasing monuments you’re ever likely to see.

**Threeways Roadhouse** (☎ 8962 2744; unpowered/powered sites for 2 \$14/19, dm \$20, budget s \$35, motel d \$70; ☎ 6am–11pm; ♿ ♿) is a typical roadhouse and features a grassy camping ground, budget dongas and standard motel rooms, including some wheelchair-accessible rooms. There’s an information centre, a bar and a restaurant (mains \$12 to \$20) that plates up steak, barra and schnitzels in truck-driver proportions for lunch and dinner.

## TENNANT CREEK

pop 3290

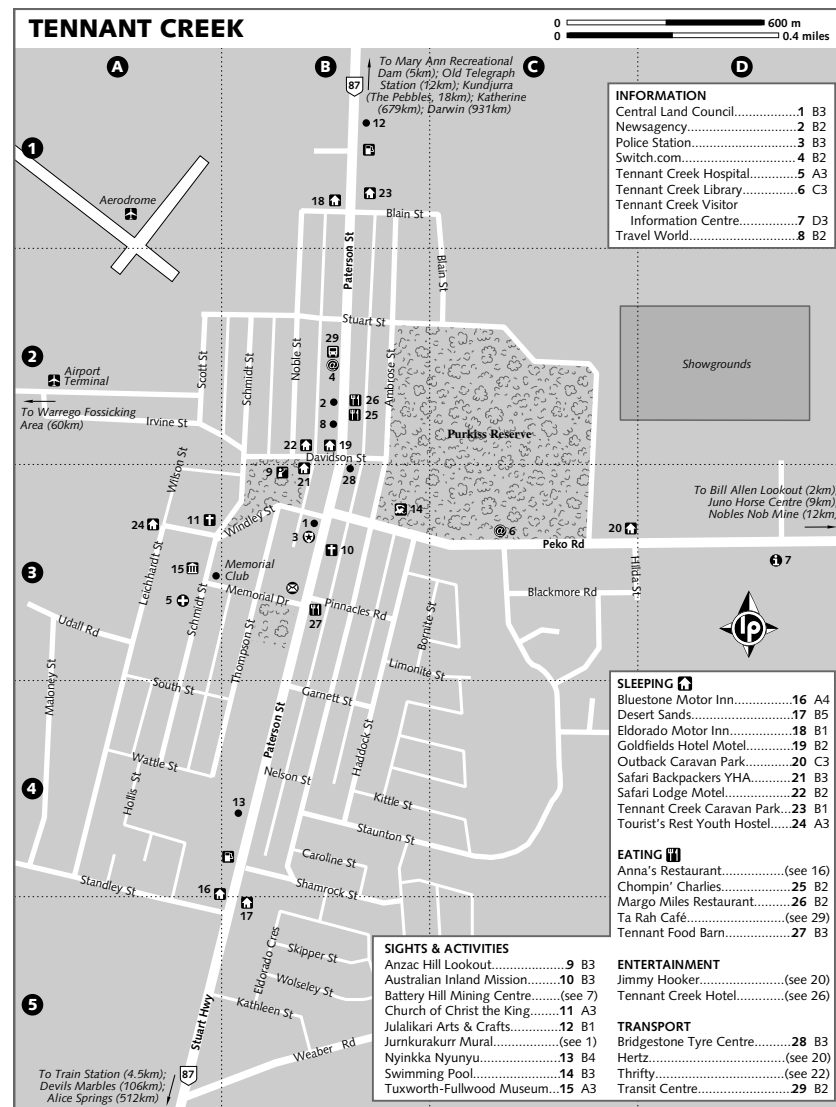
Straddling the Stuart Hwy, Tennant Creek is the only town of any size between Katherine and Alice Springs. It’s 26km south of Three Ways and 511km north of Alice Springs. Many travellers spend a night here to break up the driving and see the town’s few attractions.

## History

Known as Jurnkurakurr to the Warumungu people, Tennant Creek is at the intersection of a number of Dreaming tracks.

John McDouall Stuart passed through here on an expedition in 1860 before turning back at Attack Creek some distance north. He named the creek, which is about 10km north of town, after John Tennant, a prominent pastoralist from Port Lincoln in South Australia.

A repeater station for the Overland Telegraph Line was set up in Tennant Creek in the 1870s. The story goes that the town itself was established 10km south of the repeater station because that was where a wagonload of beer broke down in the early 1930s; rather than take the beer to the people, the people went to the beer and that’s where the town has stayed. The truth is far more prosaic: the town was established as the result of a small gold rush around the same time. In 1932, a Warumungu man found a rock containing traces of gold and showed it to a group



of men who formed a syndicate and began mining and prospecting. By WWII there were some 100 small mines in operation.

Once mining was under way, the local Aboriginal people were moved to the **Phillip Creek** settlement on the Stuart Hwy north of Tennant, where the mud brick ruins are still visible.

However, the gold rush was short-lived and the town might well have gone the way of a number of ‘boom and bust’ towns in the Territory, except that viable quantities of copper were found in the 1950s. New technology led to further mining and one mine, Nobles Nob (16km east of town) ranks among Australia’s richest. It was the

country's biggest open-cut gold mine until mining ceased in 1985. A substantial new gold-mining venture started up in 2003 at the Chariot mine, 9km west of town, and mining and exploration for gold and other resources continues in the region today.

### Orientation & Information

Tennant Creek sprawls north-south along the Stuart Hwy, which becomes Paterson St, the main drag, as it passes through town. You'll find the Transit Centre, most places to stay, a few places to eat, banks with ATMs and a supermarket along here. There are also two roadhouses, a pub and post office.

**Central Land Council** (☎ 8962 2343; 63 Paterson St) Can assist with permits to cross Aboriginal land.

**Police station** (☎ 8962 4444; Paterson St)

**Switch.com** (☎ 8962 3124; 145 Paterson St; per 20min \$2; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat; ☎) Internet access.

**Tennant Creek Hospital** (☎ 8962 4399; Schmidt St) A couple of blocks west of Paterson St.

**Tennant Creek Library** (☎ 8962 0050; Peko Rd; per 20min \$2; ☎ noon-5pm Mon, 2-6pm Tue, 10am-5pm Wed-Fri, 10am-noon Sat; ☎) Internet access.

**Tennant Creek Visitor Information Centre** (☎ 8962 3388; www.barklytourism.com.au; Peko Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm May-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri & 9am-noon Sat Oct-Apr) Located 2km east of town at the historical gold stamp battery.

**Travel World** (☎ 8962 2211; 62 Paterson St) Sells airline and long-distance bus tickets.

### Sights

**Nyinkka Nyunyu** (☎ 8962 2221; www.nyinkkanyunyu.com.au; Paterson St; adult/child \$10/5; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri & 9am-4pm Sat May-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri & 10am-2pm Sat Oct-Apr, 10am-2pm Sun year-round) is an excellent Aboriginal art and culture centre, with absorbing displays on contemporary art, traditional objects (many returned by the Victorian and South Australian museums), bush medicine and regional history. There's a landscaped garden featuring indigenous flora, which is sometimes the venue for ceremonies and performances, and the excellent Jajjikari Café, which sells espresso coffee, muffins flavoured with native flora, burgers and focaccias.

Inquire at Nyinkka Nyunyu about visiting **Julalikari Arts & Crafts** (☎ 8am-noon, Mon-Fri), also known as the Pink Palace, in the Ngälpa Ngälpa community at the northern end of town. Here you can see Aboriginal women painting traditional and contemporary art.

Gold-bearing ore was originally crushed and treated at what is now **Battery Hill Mining Centre** (☎ 8962 1281; Peko Rd; adult/child/family \$30/20/60; ☎ 9am-5pm), 1.5km east of town. There are **underground mine tours** (☎ 9.30am & 2.30pm) and surface tours of the 10-head **battery** (☎ 11am & 4pm). In addition there is a superb **Minerals Museum** and you can try your hand at gold panning. The admission price gives access to all of the above, or you can just choose one of the tours (adult/child/family \$20/12/40), visit to the Minerals Museum only (adult/family \$5/10) or go panning (\$5 per person).

The **Jurnkurakurr Mural** (63 Paterson St), on the wall of the Central Land Council building, was painted by the local Aboriginal people. It depicts Dreamings from this area – among them the snake, white cockatoo, crow, budgerigar, fire and lightning.

Across from the Memorial Club, the small **Tuxworth-Fullwood Museum** (☎ 8962 2340; Schmidt St; admission \$2.20; ☎ 3-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-1pm Sat & Sun May-Sep) dates from 1942 when it was built as an army hospital. Until 1978 it was used as an outpatients' clinic for the hospital next door. There are displays of local memorabilia and a re-creation of a miner's camp.

The 1936 **Church of Christ the King** (Windley St) and the **Australian Inland Mission** (Uniting Church; Paterson St), just south of Peko Rd, are both constructed of corrugated iron. The latter was built in the 1930s by the Sidney Williams Co. (Many corrugated-iron buildings along the track are of Sidney Williams construction; see the boxed text opposite.)

The small **Anzac Hill lookout**, off Davidson St next to the Safari backpackers, offers a good view over the town.

As you approach Tennant Creek from the north, you'll see the lovely green-roofed stone buildings of the old **Telegraph Station** just off the highway about 12km north of town. Built in 1872, it is one of only four of the original 11 stations remaining in the Territory (the others are at Barrow Creek, Alice Springs and Powell Creek). This was the most northerly station to be provisioned from Adelaide, and the supplies were brought by camel from the railhead at Oodnadatta. The station's telegraph functions ceased in 1935 when a new office opened in the town itself, but it was in use until 1950 as a linesman's residence and until 1985 as a station home-stead. It is an interesting and pleasant spot

### THE SIDNEY WILLIAMS HUT

Time and again, visitors to the Territory who have an interest in history and architecture come across corrugated-iron buildings known as Sidney Williams huts. These prefabricated buildings were supplied by a Sydney-based company that was established in the 1920s by Sidney Williams, an architect and engineer.

Initially Sidney Williams & Co specialised in windmills, but from experience gained on his travels throughout remote parts of the country, Williams realised that there was the need for a building system that was cheap, easy to transport and simple to erect. The company developed the Comet Building, a system of interchangeable steel sections that bolted together so that any configuration of walls, doors and windows could be achieved. The beauty of the steel frame was that it was not only stronger than local wood, but was also termite-proof.

Sidney Williams huts went up in all corners of the Territory from the 1920s onwards, and became very much a part of it – in 1935 the civic buildings in the new township of Tennant Creek were almost exclusively of Sidney Williams construction. The defence forces erected many Sidney Williams huts from Alice Springs to Darwin during WWII.

The company was wound up in 1988 and all records destroyed, so it is not known just how many were shipped to the Northern Territory. Many of the original buildings have been moved, often to remote locations, but many still survive – the old Inland Mission building in Tennant Creek and the Totem Theatre buildings in Alice Springs were all supplied by Sidney Williams & Co.

that's well worth a wander around. To see inside, you need to get a key (\$20 deposit) from the visitors centre, the Outback Caravan Park or Three Ways Roadhouse.

Just north of the Telegraph Station is the turn-off west to **Kundjarra** (The Pebbles), a formation of granite boulders like a miniaturised version of the better-known Devil's Marbles found 100km south. It's a sacred women's Dreaming site of the Warramungu people. Access is 6km along a good dirt road, and it's best enjoyed at sunset or sunrise.

The **Bill Allen Lookout**, about 2km east of the visitors centre, looks over the town and the McDouall Ranges to the north, and has signboards explaining the sights.

### Activities

If you're into fossicking, head for **Warrego Fossicking Area**, about 60km west of town along the Warrego road. Note that a (free) permit must be obtained from the visitors centre.

The town has a good outdoor **swimming pool** (Peko Rd; adult/child \$2.60/1.30; ☎ 10am-6.30pm).

About 5km north of town is the **Mary Ann Recreational Dam**, a good spot for a cool swim or a picnic. A bicycle track runs next to the highway to the turn-off and then it's a further 1.5km.

### Tours

**Devil's Marbles Tours** (☎ 0418 891 711) runs trips out to (you guessed it) the Devil's Marbles.

There's a day tour (\$75) with lunch, and a sunset tour (\$50).

### Festivals & Events

Tennant Creek plays host to the **Tennant Creek Show** (July), the **Tennant Creek Cup** (August), and the **Desert Harmony Arts Festival** (August/September).

### Sleeping BUDGET

**Tourist's Rest Youth Hostel** (☎ 8962 2719; www.touristrest.com.au; cnr Leichhardt & Windley Sts; dm/d \$18/38; ☎ ☎) This is a small, friendly and ramshackle hostel with clean rooms, free breakfast and YHA/VIP discounts available. The combination accommodation/Devil's Marbles trip is good value.

**Safari Backpackers YHA** (☎ 8962 2207; safari@switch.com.au; 12 Davidson St; dm \$17, tw & d \$40) Owned by and opposite the Safari Hotel, this is a big house with average four- or eight-bed dorms and private rooms with shared cooking and bathroom facilities. YHA discount is available.

**Outback Caravan Park** (☎ 8962 2459; outback@switch.com.au; Peko Rd; unpowered/powered sites for 2 \$18/22, cabins \$50-80; ☎ ☎) About 1km east of town, this is a pleasant shady park with a kiosk, 'refreshment' garden, camp kitchen, fuel and the irrepressible Jimmy Hooker (see p166). It's worth paying the few extra dollars for the en suite cabins.

**Juno Horse Centre** (☎ 8962 2783; junohorsecentre@switch.com.au; unpowered sites for 2 \$12; 🏠) A very atmospheric camping ground run by a true Territorian about 10km from town along a sealed road. Caravan sites are drive-through but not powered, and there's a unique swimming pool made out of a squatters' tank. Inquire about horse riding (not available at time of research).

**Tennant Creek Caravan Park** (☎ 8962 2325; tennantvanpark@bigpond.com.au; Paterson St; unpowered/power sites for 2 \$16/20, dm \$25, cabin d \$45; 🏠 🚻) On the northern edge of town, this is a friendly park with lots of shade, a camp kitchen and top-notch amenities.

## MIDRANGE

**Bluestone Motor Inn** (☎ 8962 2617; bluestone@switch.com.au; 1 Paterson St; s/d from \$90/95; 🏠 🚻) At the southern end of town, this 3½-star motel has comfortable standard rooms with all the expected facilities. In addition there are very spacious hexagonal deluxe rooms with queen-size beds and a sofa. There are wheelchair units, and the licensed Anna's Restaurant here is one of Tennant Creek's best.

**Desert Sands** (☎ 8962 1346; desertsands@switch.com.au; 780 Paterson St; s/d from \$70/80; 🏠 🚻) The Desert Sands offers enormous units (sleeping three to eight) each with a fully equipped kitchen, TV (with in-house movies), and a bathroom with a washing machine. This is excellent value.

**Eldorado Motor Inn** (☎ 8962 2402, fax 8962 3034; 192 Paterson St; s/d from \$100/110; 🏠 🚻) On the highway at the northern edge of town, this brick complex of 80 comfortable, well-appointed units surrounds a pool and includes a licensed restaurant.

**Safari Lodge Motel** (☎ 8962 2207; safari@switch.com.au; Davidson St; s/d \$75/85; 🏠 🚻) Part of the Budget chain, this motel is centrally located and has standard motel rooms with phone, fridge and TV. There's also a spa and laundry.

**Goldfields Hotel Motel** (☎ 8962 2030; fax 8962 3288; Paterson St; s/d \$65/75) The cheapest rooms in town at the rear of a rowdy pub.

## Eating

**Margo Miles Restaurant** (Tennant Creek Hotel; ☎ 8962 2227; 146 Paterson St; mains \$15-25; 🍴) Lunch Mon-Sat & dinner Mon-Sun) This restaurant is a pleasant change from the roadhouse dining rooms up and down the Track. Choose a drink

from the varied and reasonably priced selection in the Faye Lewis Bar, set yourself down in the period dining room, and peruse the special board or choose a steak, seafood, pasta or gourmet pizza from the menu. The pizzas are the best in town.

**Anna's Restaurant** (☎ 8962 2617; Bluestone Motor Inn; 1 Paterson St; mains \$18-28; 🍴) This is a casual licensed restaurant with a good selection ranging from Thai curries and pastas to hefty steaks. There is a user-friendly kids' menu (\$7.50) and one or two vegetarian options always available.

**Ta Rah Café** (☎ 8962 3790; Transit Centre, 151 Paterson St; meals \$6-14; 🍴) breakfast, lunch & dinner) Inside the Transit Centre, this is a spotless café, which greets bus passengers with espresso coffee, scrumptious cakes, gourmet pies, berry crepes and roast of the day. This is also the best option for breakfast in town.

**Chompin' Charlies** (☎ 8962 2399; 114 Paterson St; mains \$6-8; 🍴) dinner Tue-Sat) Near the Tennant Creek Hotel, this is a popular local take-away with monstrous burgers (from beef to barra), yiros, fish 'n' chips etc.

**Tennant Food Barn** (☎ 8962 2296; 185 Paterson St) Opposite the post office, it can supply your self-catering needs.

## Entertainment

**Jimmy Hooker** (☎ 8962 2459; Outback Caravan Park, Peko Rd; admission \$2; 🎶 7.30pm) Jimmy is a Tennant Creek institution. He is a bush poet, yarn spinner and mine of information on bush tucker, which he will bring along for you to taste.

**Tennant Creek Hotel** (☎ 8962 2006; 146 Paterson St; burgers around \$6) Jackson's Bar opens at 10am and the Faye Lewis Bar takes the evening shift with live entertainment on Thursday, Friday and Saturday night. Occasionally the Shaft nightclub kicks off on a Friday night.

## Getting There & Around

**Aboriginal Air Services** (☎ 8953 5000; www.aboriginair.com.au) flies to/from Alice Springs (from \$280 one way) three times a week. **Vincent Aviation** (☎ 8928 1366; vincentair@optusnet.com.au) flies to/from Darwin (from \$370 one way) three times a week and Alice Springs (from \$250 one way), also three times a week. Tennant Creek airport is about 2km west of town, out along Davidson then Irvine Sts.

All long-distance buses stop at the **Transit Centre** (☎ 8962 1070; Paterson St). **Greyhound**

**Australia** (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) has regular buses from Tennant Creek to Alice Springs (\$130, 6½ hours), Katherine (\$135, eight hours) and Darwin (\$185, 14 hours).

The weekly *Ghan* rail link between Alice Springs and Darwin can drop off passengers in Tennant Creek, although few people stop here and cars can't be loaded or offloaded. It's actually cheaper to travel to Darwin from here than it is from Katherine, far to the north – see p276 for details of fares and timetables. The train station is about 6km south of town and there is no shuttle service. Instead, call for **Rocky's Taxi** (☎ 8962 2522).

Car hire is available from **Hertz** (☎ 8962 2459; Outback Caravan Park, Peko Rd) and **Thrifty** (☎ 8962 2207; Safari Lodge Motel, Davidson St), while bike rental is available from the **Bridgestone Tyre Centre** (☎ 8962 2361; Paterson St; per half/full day \$5/10).

## DEVIL'S MARBLES CONSERVATION RESERVE

The huge boulders that appear beside the Stuart Hwy about 105km south of Tennant Creek and 393km north of Alice Springs are known as the Devil's Marbles, one of the most famous geological sights in the Territory. This area is particularly beautiful at sunrise and sunset, when the oddball boulders glow warmly.

How and what? Over an estimated 1640 million years a huge granite block criss-crossed with fault lines eroded into slabs roughly 3m to 7m square. The extreme desert temperatures forced the expansion and contraction of the blocks, and slabs flaked off, like the skin of an onion. With corners rounded off by eons of erosion, the result is a stunning clutch of granite eggs. Some appear to have been stacked in precarious piles, others stand alone balanced at unlikely angles – they look as if a good shove could send them tumbling.

The area is a registered sacred site known as Karlukarlu to the local Warumungu tribe. Several Dreaming trails cross the area, and the rocks are believed to be the eggs of the Rainbow Serpent.

The **self-guided loop walk** (20 minutes) starts at the car park and is enlivened with interpretive signs and diagrams. It passes an amazing 4m-high boulder that has been neatly split in half – as if by a giant carving knife.

The **camping ground** (adult/child/family \$3.30/1.65/7.70), around the eastern side of the

boulders, has remarkably hard ground and really fills up in the afternoon. There are pit toilets, a shade shelter and a fireplace (BYO firewood).

Tours to the marbles are run from Tennant Creek. If you don't want to camp, there's accommodation about 10km south of the reserve at Wauchope.

## WAUCHOPE

The settlement of Wauchope (*war-kup*) is little more than a fuel stop by the highway, though it does have some character. The pub itself dates back to the 1930s, and the 'town' owes its existence to the discovery of wolfram (tungsten) in the area in 1914. At its height, around 50 miners worked the small but rich field 12km east of here. Many more worked larger fields at Hatches Creek, about 140km to the east in the Davenport Ranges. After WWI the price of wolfram halved almost overnight as the British no longer needed it in their war effort, and the Wauchope field became unviable.

The price of wolfram revived in the late 1930s in the build-up to WWII, and it was at this time that the pub was established. For a second time a war finished and the demand for wolfram fell dramatically. Before long the fields were deserted and Wauchope became the stop on the highway that it is today.

**Wauchope Hotel** (☎ 8964 1963; Stuart Hwy; unpowered/power sites for 2 \$12/16, s \$30, d \$35-65; 🏠 🚻) is a handy place to stay near the Devil's Marbles. The budget rooms are spotless and the more expensive doubles are comfortable en suite rooms. Disabled rooms are available and camping is on lush lawn. As well as a pool, there's a tennis court and pleasant beer garden. The restaurant serves great meals (mains \$12 to \$20) – there's always a good-value special on offer and it's open for all meals. Otherwise there's a barbecue in the camping ground. Fuel is available from 6am to 11pm. Bicycle hire is available (\$10 a day) if you feel like pedalling the 10km to the Devil's Marbles.

## WYCLIFFE WELL

'Earthlings are welcome at Wycliffe Well', just 18km south of Wauchope, where a spate of UFO sightings has been claimed in recent years.

The well referred to in the name dates from 1872 and the Overland Telegraph Line, although the water quality was not all that flash. In the 1930s a bore was sunk to provide good water on the North–South Stock Route. During WWII a 2-hectare army vegetable farm was established to supply the troops further up the Stuart Hwy.

**Wycliffe Well Roadhouse & Holiday Park** (☎ 8964 1966; www.wycliffe.com.au; unpowered/powered sites for 2 \$20/25, s/d from \$50/60, cabins from \$80; ♿ ♿ ♿) is believed, by some, to be on a cross-section of ley lines (energy lines), meaning that UFOs flying around will pass through this area. In among all manner of alien critters (and for some reason, the Incredible Hulk, the Phantom, Elvis and a toy gorilla), there's an indoor pool, laundry, barbecues, camp kitchen and a pleasant restaurant (mains \$17 to \$20), which is open for all meals. You can read all about the UFO sightings while sampling the enormous variety of international beers available at the bar – and ponder the association between alcohol and aliens.

### DAVENPORT RANGE NATIONAL PARK

The ancient Davenport and Murchison Ranges east of Wauchope are included in this 1120-sq-km proposed national park. The Davenport Ranges are not the most spectacular on earth, but they are among the oldest, as their eroded peaks are all that remains of the 1800-million-year-old geological formations. The park protects a series of permanent waterholes, which harbour several species of fish and provide a vital refuge for water birds and other animals.

The **Whistleduck Creek** area and the **Old Police Station Waterhole** are the only places that can be visited. Both can be reached by 4WD vehicle from the Stuart Hwy (91km and 170km, respectively) via the track to Kurundi and Epenarra Stations, which leaves the Stuart Hwy at Bonney Well, 90km south of Tennant Creek. Otherwise, Old Police Station Waterhole can be accessed from the south (also 170km via the Murray Downs station track, which heads east off the Stuart Hwy close to where it crosses Taylors Creek, about 40km north of Barrow Creek). Access is by high-clearance 4WD only. This is very remote country and tracks are not signposted.

The camping grounds at Whistleduck Creek and Old Police Station Waterhole

have pit toilets and no other facilities. All visitors must be completely self-sufficient. Fuel is available at Kurundi, Epenarra and **Murray Downs** (☎ 8964 1958) stations. Roads can be flooded between December and March; for information about conditions phone the **police station** (☎ 8964 1959) at Ali Curung. For the latest park information contact the Visitor Information Centre at Tennant Creek (p164).

## BARKLY TABLELAND & THE GULF

To the east of the Stuart Hwy lies the huge expanse of the Barkly Tableland and, beyond it, the Gulf of Carpentaria region. It is primarily cattle country, characterised by the arid grasslands of the tableland and the open woodland country of the Gulf.

Most visitors pass through on the Barkly Hwy, which connects the Stuart Hwy with Mt Isa (Queensland). The prime attraction is the fine fishing – the Roper River, on the southern edge of Arnhem Land, and the waterways around Borroloola near the Gulf are renowned among fisherfolk.

The Barkly Tableland, named after the Governor of Victoria in 1861, comprises a relatively featureless plain dominated by tussock grasses. Only in the few creek lines do many trees occur.

Oh, and remember that crocodiles inhabit the Roper River and all the waterways in the Gulf Region.

### ROPER BAR

Just south of Mataranka on the Stuart Hwy the mostly sealed (apart from 45km) Roper Hwy strikes east for 176km to Roper Bar. The Roper River is over 100m wide and lined by huge paperbark trees at the rock 'bar', or ford, and is a popular fishing spot particularly renowned for barramundi. It's also an access point into southeastern Arnhem Land, or you can continue south to Borroloola.

In the early days, steam ships and large sailing vessels tied up at the bar to discharge cargo. The wreck of one of them, the *Young Australian*, lies about 25km downstream.

The **Roper Bar Store** (☎ 8975 4636; unpowered sites for 2 \$16, donga d \$65; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Sat, 1–6pm Sun; ♿) is all there is out here. It stocks fuel,

general supplies and takeaway food. Note that fishing tours are available, but need to be arranged before you arrive. There are dongas behind the store (the interesting smell outside is due to the cooking oil poured over the baking ground to keep the dust down), while the camping is at Leichhardt's Camping Ground about 100m from the river. The camping ground has hot showers and flushing toilets, but it's usually noisy because the anglers keep their catch cold with generators and portable fridges.

The road to **Ngukurr**, an Aboriginal community 30km away, crosses the river at the bar. Access is by permit only to this dry community. **Bobby Nungumagabar** (☎ 8975 4755) in Ngukurr can arrange a day permit and art sales.

### ROPER BAR TO BORROLOOLA

The Nathan River Rd from Roper Bar to Borroloola is part of the famous Gulf Track. Here it varies from pretty good to bloody rough – the grassy strip down the middle in parts certainly spells 'track' rather than 'road' to many drivers. A 4WD is not obligatory, but good clearance certainly is. It's advisable to carry two spares, and to slow right down on the loose and sharp shale sections.

**Limmen National Park**, through which much of the road passes, has been established to cover an area of 10,000 sq km, encompassing several rivers and associated wetlands, striking sandstone formations and some interesting history.

As the road begins to hug the southern bank of the Roper River, about 45km from Roper Bar, you may notice what appears to be a gypsy camp. This is the basic **Tomato Island** camping ground (as yet no facilities), where you can launch a boat and park a campervan. From here, giant grey termite mounds mark the 25km to old **St Vidgeon Homestead** – a lonely ruin on a stony rise that conjures up stark images of battlers eking a scant living from the hostile bush. Just behind the ruin is the superb **Lomarie Lagoon**. Fringed by paperbarks and covered by blooming water lilies, the lagoon has many birds and a peaceful atmosphere.

From the lagoon it's 40km to the beautiful **Towns River**. The official camping ground is on the southern side of the river, and provides toilets, secluded sites and a boat launching area. The number of freshwater

crocs in this stretch of the river attests to the abundance of fish.

From the Towns River it's 48km to the turn-off for **Limmen Bight Fishing Camp** (☎ 8975 9844; unpowered/powered sites for 2 \$14/15, gazebo \$25, air-con cabins \$55; ♿), reached via a 21km track. There are hot showers, flush toilets, a small shop, fuel, boat hire and a public phone. Welding and tyre repairs are available here.

The road soon crosses the Cox River and then, after weaving through a small range, the Limmen Bight River. The **Nathan River Ranger Station** (☎ 8975 8792) is reached 13km from the Limmen Bight crossing. (There may be no sign at the turn-off to the station.) The ranger station in the old homestead can provide information on camping and 4WD tracks (including a key to the Western Lost City sandstone formations) in the national park.

Six kilometres south of Nathan River is a pleasant but basic camping ground beside the beautiful **Butterfly Springs**.

For about 44km southwards from here, the road runs up narrow valleys between rugged ridges, before finally joining the sealed Carpentaria Hwy 30km from Borroloola, or you can continue on to Cape Crawford.

### BORROLOOLA

pop 770

Among fisherfolk, Borroloola is something of a mecca, but unless you've come to catch a fish there's little here of interest to a traveller. The Borroloola **Fishing Classic** at Easter draws many enthusiasts, while other annual events include a **rodeo** and **show** in August.

### History

Until 1885 there were no facilities, apart from a few scattered homesteads along the Gulf Track – a major stock route from Burketown in Queensland to Eley Station and Katherine. Then a racketeer by the name of John 'Black Jack' Reid brought a boat loaded with alcohol and supplies up the McArthur River to the Burketown Crossing, where he built a rough store (the Royal Hotel), and from this the settlement grew.

Twelve months later, the Kimberley gold rush greatly increased traffic on the Gulf Track and the new township soon had a population of 150 non-Aboriginal people: 'the scum of northern Australia', according

to one government official. A decade on, the gold rush and great cattle drives were over and only six people remained. Borroloola survives as an administrative and supply centre for cattle stations and nearby McArthur Mine, which extracts silver, lead and zinc.

Borroloola was blown away by Cyclone Kathy in 1984 and much of its old character was lost in the rebuilding.

### Information

The town's services and businesses are stretched out along the main drag, Robinson Rd, and include a post office (within Borroloola Bulk Discounts), supermarket, mechanical repairers, fuel outlets and marine suppliers.

**Gulf Mini Mart** (☎ 8975 8790; Robinson Rd) and **Borroloola Bulk Discounts** (☎ 8975 8775; Robinson Rd) act as Westpac and ANZ agents respectively and both have EFTPOS and fuel. There are public phones at Gulf Mini Mart and near the police station.

**Medical centre** (☎ 8975 8757; Robinson Rd) Opposite the police station.

**Parks & Wildlife office** (☎ 8975 8792; Robinson Rd)

**Police station** (☎ 8975 8770; Robinson Rd)

**Tourist Information** (☎ 8975 8799; Borroloola Town Council, Robinson Rd; ☎ 8am–noon, 1–4.30pm Mon–Fri) In the rear of council building complex.

### Sights & Activities

Much of the town's colourful history is on show at the **museum** (admission \$2; ☎ 8am–5pm), housed in the corrugated-iron police station, which was built in 1887. Displays weave through Aboriginal lore and trade with the Macassans, and tell wonderful tales of cattlemen and explorers through fascinating newspaper articles, old photos and bric-a-brac. You can read about local eccentrics such as the Hermit of Borroloola, who walked here in 1916 from Cunnamulla – more than 2000km away. He lived in an old water tank, and was quoted as saying: 'Man's richness is in the fewness of his needs.' The 'working lists' of burials and serving police force members may be of use to those tracing their ancestry.

The main attraction to the town is undeniably **fishing**. You can cast a line for a wide variety of fish, including barramundi and threadfin salmon, from the banks of the McArthur River in town or 40km downstream near King Ash Bay camping

ground. There are boat ramps at Borroloola and King Ash Bay, and good fishing in the river, estuary or out in the Gulf around the Sir Edward Pellew group of islands.

You can drive north to the sailing club at King Ash Bay and on to **Bing Bong**, around 44km from Borroloola. There is no access to the harbour, as it's under a mining lease, but if you're desperate to see the coast (literally metres away) there's a viewing tower to the left of the gates.

### Tours

**Borroloola Estuary Fishing Tours** (☎ 8975 8716) can organise full-day and overnight fishing tours with all gear and meals and camping equipment.

**Cape Crawford Tourism** (☎ 8975 9611; www.capecrawfordtourism.com.au; \$200; ☎ Apr–Oct) runs three-hour tours that include helicopter access and hiking, which take in the Lost City rock formations in the Abner Range (some of which tower 50m high), cool ferneries and tumbling waterfalls, none of which is otherwise accessible to the general public.

### Sleeping & Eating

In addition to the following options, there are pub rooms and a caravan park at Cape Crawford, 129km to the southwest.

Borroloola has little to choose from in the way of eateries. Takeaways are available at both of the general stores.

**Borroloola Guest House** (☎ 8975 8883; www.handr.com.au; cnr Robinson Rd & Broad St; budget r \$50, cabin d from \$80, guesthouse d \$100; ☎) This is the best (ultra clean) spot in town and has a barbecue in the peaceful garden. Also known as H&R, the budget rooms have share facilities, and the breezy guesthouse has a cosy atmosphere and good common areas.

**McArthur River Caravan Park** (☎ 8975 8734; fax 8975 8712; Robinson Rd; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$18/22, cabin d \$55–100; ☎) Just down from the pub, this is a clean and shady site with wood barbecues and good cabins. Coastal and estuary fishing tours can be organised from here, or if nothing's biting, inquire about where to buy barra and mud crabs.

**King Ash Bay Fishing Club** (☎ 8975 9861; King Ash Bay; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 per week \$70/120) This camping ground is 40km north of Borroloola, and has passable share facilities. There are also bush camps further down the river. The Groper's Grill (mains \$10 to \$15)

serves steak and burgers (dinner only), and there's always a daily special. Basic supplies, bait and ice are available from the mini-mart. There's good fishing from the river bank at King Ash Bay, with a boat ramp.

**Borroloola Hotel/Motel** (☎ 8975 8766; fax 8975 8773; s/d \$60/75; ☎) This is a rowdy pub with OK rooms and a busy kitchen (mains \$10 to \$23) churning out the usual pub fare.

**Gulf Minimart** (☎ 8975 8790; ☎ 6am–8pm) Also known as the Chicken Shop, it serves sandwiches, hot food and, if you get in early enough in the day, has fresh rotisserie chickens (\$12). By the time you are reading this you may even be able to get an espresso coffee here.

### Getting There & Away

**Savannah Aviation** (☎ 8975 8620; www.savannah-aviation.com) and **Air Ngukkur** (☎ 8945 2755; www.airngukkur.com.au) provide charter services to/from Darwin or Katherine.

### AROUND BORROLOOLA

#### Barranyi (North Island) National Park

The islands of the Sir Edward Pellew Group lie in the Gulf of Carpentaria about 30km north of the McArthur River mouth. One of the islands, North Island, is owned by the Yanyuwa people and much of it is managed by Parks & Wildlife as the Barranyi National Park.

The park features sandy beaches and sandstone cliffs, and four species of marine turtle nest there. The waters surrounding the park provide excellent fishing.

While there are no facilities in the park, it is possible to camp if you have your own gear.

Contact **Parks & Wildlife** (☎ 8975 8792) in Borroloola before heading out to the park. There is drinking water (but check situation with Parks & Wildlife) and pit barbecues at Paradise Bay. Access is only by boat via the McArthur River and Carrington Channel (35km); the closest boat ramp is at King Ash Bay, 40km north of Borroloola. Even in the Dry the waters of the Gulf can be quite rough and the 30km crossing to North Island should be attempted only by experienced skippers.

#### Caranbirini Conservation Reserve

This small reserve 46km south of Borroloola lies at the western extremity of the Buka-

lara Range, and protects a rugged sandstone escarpment, some attractive outlying sandstone spires (known as 'Lost City' formations) and a semi-permanent waterhole.

The local Aboriginal people, the Gadanji, used the reserve's waterhole as a source of food such as turtles, mussels and water-lilies, and two Dreaming trails, the Emu (Jagududgu) and the White Cockatoo (Barrawulla), have associations with the site.

There are no facilities and camping is not permitted, but there are three walking trails. A short walk takes you to a **viewing point** on the waterhole, where lots of birds congregate in the drier months. The **Barrawulla Loop Walk** (2km, one hour) takes in the 25m-high Lost City formations, and is a pleasant spot in the early morning or evening. The **Jagududgu Loop Walk** (5km, three hours) to the east is home to the rare Carpentarian grasswren; if you go looking for this bird take plenty of water and wear appropriate clothing – it's an exposed trail through rocky, spinifex country.

### BORROLOOLA TO WOLLOGORANG

From Borroloola, a good gravel road heads southeast towards Wollogorang Station on the Northern Territory–Queensland border, 266km east of Borroloola on Hwy 1. This road is best traversed with a 4WD vehicle, but conventional vehicles with high ground clearance should have no difficulty. If you plan to travel across in the wet season, check road conditions with the Borroloola police. Highlights of this stretch include some fine river crossings. The Wearyan River, 56km from Borroloola, has water and good **bush camping** just upstream from the crossing, where tall cycad palms grow.

The Robinson River, 50km further on, is a good spot for a picnic. Travellers with 4WDs can reach some good **bush camps** beside shallow flowing water. The Calvert River Crossing is 80km beyond here, and is another pleasant spot. There is some dramatic scenery along this 72km stretch to Wollogorang.

**Wollogorang Station**, established in 1881, covers over 7000 sq km and boasts an 80km frontage of pristine sandy beaches on the Gulf of Carpentaria. For many years this was an obligatory stop for travellers, with a roadhouse and accommodation. This is no longer the case and there is no fuel or



accommodation between Borroloola and the Hells Gate Roadhouse – 59km across the border in Queensland. When entering Queensland don't forget to put your watch forward half an hour.

## CAPE CRAWFORD

Despite its name, Cape Crawford is nowhere near the coast – it's at the junction of the Carpentaria and Tablelands Hwys, 113km southwest of Borroloola and 234km east of the Stuart Hwy. There's nothing here except for the Heartbreak Hotel – one of the best roadhouses in the Northern Territory, which sees very few tourists.

### Sleeping

**Heartbreak Hotel** (☎ 8975 9928; fax 8975 9993; cnr Carpentaria & Tablelands Hwys; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$12/22, dm/s/d \$40/65/75; 🚻 🚰 📶) This friendly place is a requisite stop whichever way you are heading. Pitch the tent on the shaded grassy lawn, and then park yourself on the wide veranda with a cold beer. The amenities were undergoing renovation when we visited, while the kitchen, which offers all meals (mains \$10 to \$22), and the well-used barbecue were feeding steak, chips and salad to a merry and contented bunch of ringers, miners and (lost?) campervanners. Fuel and takeaway beer is also available.

From here it's a desolate 374km across the Barkly Tablelands to the Barkly Hwy and Barkly Homestead.

## CAPE CRAWFORD TO BARKLY HOMESTEAD

This desolate route follows the Tablelands Hwy due south from Cape Crawford to Barkly Homestead, passing just one station along the way. Note that no fuel is available along this 375km stretch.

### Brunette Downs

**Brunette Downs Station** (☎ 8964 4522; Tablelands Hwy), 245km south of Cape Crawford, covers just over 12,000 sq km. It is accessible by conventional vehicles with care.

This station would be no different from any other in the region if it wasn't for the **Brunette Downs Bush Races**, held in June each year. A cast of hundreds flocks in from miles around for a lively four days that includes a rodeo and ball. There is no charge for

camping or to use the showers and toilets, and a professional caterer supplies meals and keeps the beer flowing. The race track is around 20km from the homestead.

It's a great outback event and one well worth the detour if you happen to be in the area. You can find out exact dates from [www.barklytourism.com.au](http://www.barklytourism.com.au) or the station itself. Note that the station can offer nothing in the way of facilities for travellers.

### Connells Lagoon Conservation Reserve

This lonely reserve is on Ranken Rd east of Brunette Downs Station. Here, 256 sq km of pancake-flat land was set aside to preserve undisturbed Mitchell grass habitat. It may look pretty uninspiring, but there's a surprising range of botanical diversity – 189 plant species are known to exist in the area.

The namesake lagoon doesn't amount to much and, in fact, only fills after good rains. When it does, it attracts migratory wading birds, as well as grassland species such as flock bronzewings and pictorella manikin finches. The long-haired rat forms plagues after big rains here, when grass seeds are abundant. In turn, it becomes food for predators such as owls, kites and dingoes.

There's no drinking water and there are no visitor facilities within the reserve, with the exception of an information bay on the southern side of the 4WD access track between Brunette Downs and Alexandria Stations.

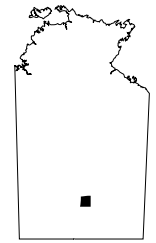
### Barkly Homestead

The **Barkly Homestead Roadhouse** (☎ 8964 4549; [www.barklyhomestead.com.au](http://www.barklyhomestead.com.au); unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$16/23, budget s/d \$65/75, motel s/d \$85/100; 🚻 🚰 📶) is the last stop before the Queensland border. As a place to stay, it's not such a bad choice – there's a licensed restaurant (mains \$15-20), which is open for all meals, clean accommodation and watered (though ant-riddled!) camping sites, and the shade trees are growing. However, it also has the most expensive fuel between the Queensland coast and Tennant Creek.

From the roadhouse, it's 210km west to Tennant Creek, 375km up the Tablelands Hwy to Cape Crawford (note: there's no petrol along this route) and 252km east to the border, followed by a further 13km to Camooweal in Queensland.

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# Alice Springs



This is Australia's most famous outback town. No matter which direction you arrive from, one minute there's an endless expanse of red dirt, low shrubs or rugged ranges; the next there's a thriving, modern town.

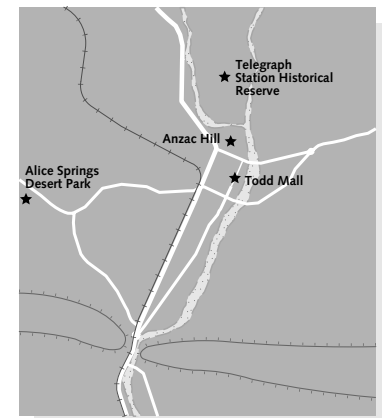
The Alice, as it's often known, began as a simple telegraph station on the Overland Telegraph Line (OTL) 130 years ago and, although famous for its remote location in the centre of Australia, this is no rustic frontier town with steel windmills, saloon doors on the pubs and farmers in Akubra hats sitting under wide verandas. Alice is a modern, low-rise town with shopping malls, fast food joints, swish hotels and a slowly growing 'urban sprawl'.

The change to modern-day Alice (pop 28,200) has happened quite suddenly, fuelled by the tourism boom of the past decade. With the Stuart Hwy and *Ghan* railway line running through it, and Uluru *relatively* close (it's a four-hour drive away!), the Alice is a natural base for exploring central Australia's attractions. The rugged MacDonnell Ranges stretch to the east and west, and you don't have to venture far to find yourself in some wild outback country.

But Alice Springs is fascinating in its own right. You could spend days exploring its historical links, cultural precinct, Aboriginal art galleries and unique places like the Royal Flying Doctor Base and School of the Air. With good shopping, hotels, pubs and restaurants, this is the place to relax, resupply and enjoy a bit of comfort in the desert.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Watching the sun set over the MacDonnell Ranges from **Anzac Hill** (p179)
- Ogling a wedge-tailed eagle in flight and learning about the desert environment at the **Alice Springs Desert Park** (p179)
- Breakfasting then taking a morning stroll along **Todd Mall** (p189)
- Floating high above the ranges at dawn in a **hot-air balloon** (p184)
- Retracing the steps of the early explorers through a sunset **camel ride** (p184)
- Browsing Aboriginal art in central Australia's best **art galleries** (p199)
- Reliving early Alice history at the **Telegraph Station Historical Reserve** (p182)



■ TELEPHONE CODE ☎ 08

■ Central Australia: [www.welcometocentralaustralia.com.au](http://www.welcometocentralaustralia.com.au)

■ The Alice Link: [www.alice.com.au](http://www.alice.com.au)

## HISTORY

Alice Springs began as a staging point on the OTL in 1871. A telegraph repeater station was built near a permanent waterhole in the otherwise dry Todd River. The river was named after Charles Todd, Superintendent of Telegraphs in Adelaide, and the waterhole was named after Alice, his wife.

The taking up of pastoral leases in the Centre, combined with the rush of miners who flocked to the gold and 'ruby' fields to the east, led to the establishment of Stuart a few kilometres south of the telegraph station in 1888. But the gold discovery didn't amount to much, the rubies turned out to be garnets and the proposed railway took another 40 years to reach the town. When the railway finally reached Stuart in 1929, the non-Aboriginal population stood at about 30, but by the time the name was officially changed to Alice Springs in 1933, it had swollen to around 400.

In WWII Alice Springs became a major military base and the administrative centre of the Northern Territory. The biggest boost to the Alice came with the sealing of the Stuart Hwy from Port Augusta in 1987, while the extension of the *Ghan* railway line from Alice to Darwin finally opened in 2004.

## ORIENTATION

The MacDonnell Ranges form the southern boundary of the town, split at the south by the narrow Heavitree Gap. The (usually dry) Todd River, the Stuart Hwy and the *Ghan* railway line all run roughly north-south through the town.

The town centre is a conveniently compact area just five streets wide, bordered by the river on one side and the highway on the other. Todd St is the main shopping street of the town; from Wills Tce to Gregory Tce it is a pedestrian mall.

Greyhound buses arrive at and depart from the terminal office on Todd St. The train station is on the western side of the Stuart Hwy in the town's light industrial area. The airport is 15km south of town through the Gap.

## Maps

**Maps NT** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8951 5344; 1st fl, Alice Plaza, Todd Mall; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) has a large range of maps including road maps and topographical sheets.

For town maps of Alice Springs and most tourist road maps, including central Australian outback tracks, your best bet is the Catia office (see Tourist Information opposite).

### ALICE SPRINGS IN...

#### Two Days

Take a trip out to the **Alice Springs Desert Park** (p179) in the morning for an up-close look at central Australian flora, fauna and eco-systems – allow a few hours. Lunch at a café on **Todd Mall** (p197). In the afternoon stroll around the shops, galleries and historical buildings of the compact town centre. Watch the sunset from atop **Anzac Hill** (p179). On day two, cycle or drive out to the **Old Telegraph Station** (p182) in the morning and visit the **Cultural Precinct** (p179) in the afternoon. Take in the **Sounds of Starlight** (p198) in the evening and a few beers at **Bojangles** (p197).

#### Four Days

Four days is enough to see most of the sights in Alice Springs. As well as the above, visit the **Royal Flying Doctor Service Base** (p182), **School of the Air** (p182) and the **Reptile Centre** (p182), take a sunset **camel ride** (p184), wander through the **Olive Pink Botanic Garden** (p182) and play a round of **golf** (p189).

#### One Week

With a week, plan to take a couple of day trips out of town. Hire a bike and cycle out to **Simpsons Gap** (p219). Drive through the West MacDonnell Ranges and camp out for a night or stay at **Glen Helen Resort** (p223), or head east to the ghost town at **Arltunga** (p238). Catch a weekend game of footy at **Traegar Park** (p199).

## MPARNTWE

To the Arrernte people, the traditional owners of the Alice Springs area, this place is called Mparntwe. The heart of Mparntwe is the junction of the Charles (Antheke Ulpeye) and Todd (Lhere Mparntwe) Rivers, just north of Anzac Hill (Untyeyetwele). All the topographical features of the town were formed by the creative ancestral beings – known as the Yeperenye, Ntyarlike and Utnerregatye Caterpillars – as they crawled across the landscape from Emily Gap (Anthwerke), in the MacDonnell Ranges southeast of town.

To the west, Mt Gillen is Alhekulyele, the nose of the wild dog creator, where it lay down after an extended battle with an intruding dog from another area. Heavitree Gap (Ntaripe) is also of significance. Being associated with men's ceremonies, women were traditionally not permitted to pass through here and had to take long detours to cross the ranges.

Alice Springs today still has a sizeable Aboriginal community with strong links to the area, and native title over the area was recognised in 2000. If you want to see what's happening in one of the town camps, Hidden Valley, check out the website [www.usmob.com.au](http://www.usmob.com.au).

## INFORMATION

### Bookshops

**Big Kangaroo Books** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 2137; Todd Mall; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat)

Excellent bookshop specialising in Australian titles: travel, novels, guidebooks and more.

**Boomerang Book Exchange** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 5843; Shop 10, Reg Harris Lane) Good assortment of secondhand titles.

**Dymocks** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 9111; Alice Plaza, Todd Mall; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) Mainstream bookshop.

**Helene's Books & Things** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 2465; Shop 2, 113 Todd St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) Piles of secondhand books to buy, sell and trade, including an Australian section.

### Emergency

**Ambulance** (☎ 8951 6633 or ☎ 000)

**Police** (☎ 8951 8888 or ☎ 000)

### Internet Access

**Alice Springs Library** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8950 0555; Gregory Tce; per 30 min \$3; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon, Tue & Thu, 10am-5pm Wed & Fri, 9am-1pm Sat, 1-5pm Sun) Internet research is free, but you pay for email.

**Internet Outpost** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 8730; 94 Todd St; per 5/30/60 min \$1/4/7; ☎ 9am-9pm)

**JPG Computer** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 2040; Coles Complex, Bath St; per hr \$6; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat)

**Todd Internet Café** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 8355; Shop 2, 82 Todd St; per hr \$4; ☎ 10am-6pm)

### Laundry

Most places to stay have laundry facilities or try **Alice 24 Store Laundromat** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 4124; 105 Todd St; per load \$3; ☎ 24hr).

## Medical Services

**Alice Springs Amcal Chemist** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 0089; Alice Plaza, Todd Mall; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm)

**Alice Springs Hospital** (Map p178; ☎ 8951 7777; Gap Rd; ☎ 24hr)

## Money

Major banks with 24-hour ATMs, including Commonwealth, ANZ and National, can be found in the town centre around Todd Mall, as well as the airport. A **Bureau de Change** (Map pp180-1; Todd Mall; ☎ 8am-8pm) kiosk in the Todd Mall exchanges cash and travellers cheques.

## Permits

**Central Land Council** (Map p178; ☎ 8951 6320; [www.clc.org.au](http://www.clc.org.au); PO Box 3321, NT 0871; 33 Stuart Hwy; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-4pm) For Aboriginal land permits and transit permits.

**Outback Gems** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 9299; Shop 2, Coles Complex, Bath St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) This is the place to get free fossicking permits and information. Permits are also available from Catia (below).

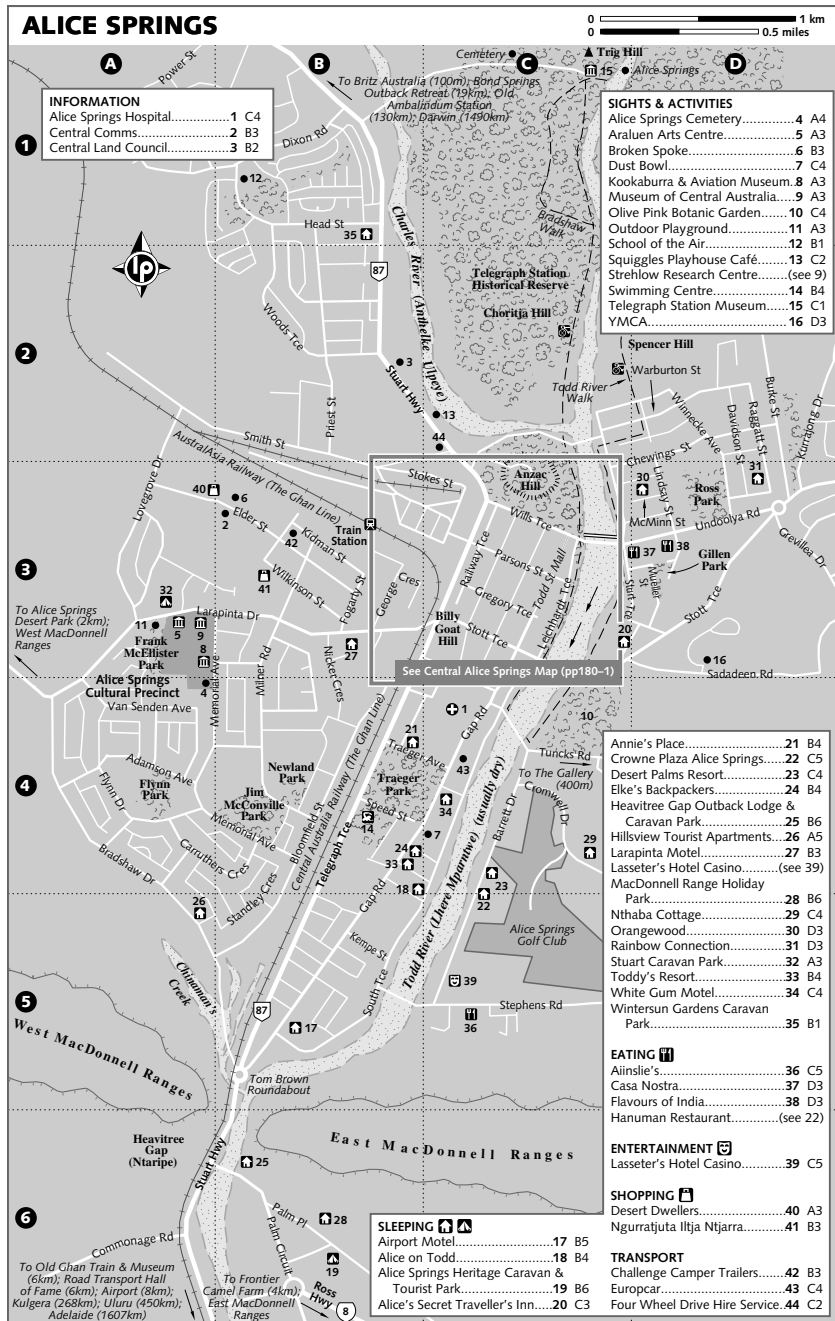
## Post

The **main post office** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 13 13 18; 31-33 Hartley St; ☎ 8.15am-5pm Mon-Fri) has a Post Shop at the front and a poste restante window down the passage on the left.

## Tourist Information

*Welcome to Central Australia* is a useful, free brochure that covers all places of interest in Central Australia.

**Central Australian Tourism Industry Association office** (Catia; Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 5800; [www.centralaustralian tourism.com](http://www.centralaustralian tourism.com); 60 Gregory Tce; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm)



**INFORMATION**  
 Alice Springs Hospital.....1 C4  
 Central Comms.....2 B3  
 Central Land Council.....3 B2

**SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**  
 Alice Springs Cemetery.....4 A4  
 Araluen Arts Centre.....5 A3  
 Broken Spoke.....6 B3  
 Dust Bowl.....7 C4  
 Kookaburra & Aviation Museum.....8 A3  
 Museum of Central Australia.....9 A3  
 Olive Pink Botanic Garden.....10 C4  
 Outdoor Playground.....11 A3  
 School of the Air.....12 B1  
 Squiggles Playhouse Café.....13 C2  
 Strehlow Research Centre.....(see 9)  
 Swimming Centre.....14 B4  
 Telegraph Station Museum.....15 C1  
 YMCA.....16 D3

Annie's Place.....21 B4  
 Crowne Plaza Alice Springs.....22 C5  
 Desert Palms Resort.....23 C4  
 Elke's Backpackers.....24 B4  
 Heavitree Gap Outback Lodge & Caravan Park.....25 B6  
 Hillsview Tourist Apartments.....26 A5  
 Larapinta Motel.....27 B3  
 Lasseter's Hotel Casino.....(see 39)  
 MacDonnell Range Holiday Park.....28 B6  
 Nthaba Cottage.....29 C4  
 Orangewood.....30 D3  
 Rainbow Connection.....31 D3  
 Stuart Caravan Park.....32 A3  
 Toddy's Resort.....33 B4  
 White Gum Motel.....34 C4  
 Wintersun Gardens Caravan Park.....35 B1

**EATING**  
 Ainslie's.....36 C5  
 Casa Nostra.....37 D3  
 Flavours of India.....38 D3  
 Hanuman Restaurant.....(see 22)

**ENTERTAINMENT**  
 Lasseter's Hotel Casino.....39 C5

**SHOPPING**  
 Desert Dwellers.....40 A3  
 Ngurratjuta Ilta Ntjarra.....41 B3

**TRANSPORT**  
 Challenge Camper Trailers.....42 B3  
 Europacar.....43 C4  
 Four Wheel Drive Hire Service.....44 C2

**SLEEPING**  
 Airport Motel.....17 B5  
 Alice on Todd.....18 B4  
 Alice Springs Heritage Caravan & Tourist Park.....19 B6  
 Alice's Secret Traveller's Inn.....20 C3

Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun), also known as Catia, is a busy but helpful place in the town centre. It has many maps and brochures, plus the free *Visitors Guide*, which has useful business listings. Updated weather forecasts and road conditions are posted on the wall and Mereenie Loop Passes (\$2) and fossicking permits (free) are also issued here. National park notes, including Larapinta Trail, are also available. Catia has a small desk at the airport.

**Travel Agencies**

**Flight Centre** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 4081; Yeperenye Shopping Centre, Hartley St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm Sat) specialises in domestic and international flights.

**SIGHTS Anzac Hill**

For an expansive view over Alice Springs, take a hike to the top of Anzac Hill (Map pp180-1), preferably about half an hour before sunset. There's a perfect 360-degree view over the modern township and down to Heavitree Gap, while the MacDonnell Ranges stretch east and west. Aboriginal people call the hill Untyeyetweleye (Onjeea-tooia), the site of the Corkwood Dreaming story of a woman who lived alone on the hill. The Two Sisters Ancestral Beings (Arrweketye Therre) are also associated with the hill.

Originally called View Hill or Stott Hill by white settlers, it was renamed Anzac Hill in 1934 in recognition of WWI soldiers. There's a war memorial at the top, along with the Australian and Northern Territory flags.

You can walk the short, sharp ascent to the top along the **Lions Walk** from Wills Tce, or there's vehicle access and parking from the western side.

At the northern foot of Anzac Hill is the RSL Club and **War Museum** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 2868; Schwarz Cres; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm), which features a collection of firearms, medals and photos of Alice Springs during WWII.

On the southern edge of the town centre you can see the small rise of **Billy Goat Hill** (Akeyulerra; Map pp180-1). Here the Two Sisters Dreaming passed on their way north through the area, and the hill is now a registered sacred site.

**Alice Springs Desert Park**

There's no better way to see what's really out there in the central deserts than to visit this fabulous **eco park** (off Map p178; ☎ 8951 8788; www.alicespringsdesertpark.com.au; Larapinta Dr; adult/seniors/concession/family \$18/13/9/40; ☎ 7.30am-6pm, last entry 4pm). Backing onto the red walls of Mt Gillen 6km west of town, the park contains the ecosystems of central Australia in a series of habitats – desert river, sand country, and woodland – linked by walking tracks.

Walk-through aviaries house water birds and desert parrots such as the magnificent princess parrot, and the excellent nocturnal house displays 20 arid-zone mammal species, half of which are endangered or extinct in the wild in mainland Australia. Once your eyes adjust to the darkness you can spot the bilby, quoll and a plethora of snakes and lizards such as the thorny devil. Don't miss the free-flying **birds of prey show** (☎ 10am & 3.30pm), featuring Australian kestrels, kites and the awesome wedge-tailed eagles. Kids will love the kangaroo and emu enclosures. To get the most out of the park, pick up a free audio guide with commentary in several languages, or join one of the free ranger talks held at various exhibits throughout the day.

There's a free barbecue and picnic area, or you can buy lunch and snacks at the **café** (☎ 9am-5.30pm). The gift shop hires out strollers and wheelchairs, and the park is wheelchair accessible (ask about the electric buggies).

If you don't have your own wheels, use **Desert Park Transfers** (☎ 8952 4667; www.desertparktransfers.com.au; adult/senior/child/family \$30/25/20/80). It operates seven times daily during park hours and the cost includes park entry fee and pick-up and drop-off at your accommodation.

**Alice Springs Cultural Precinct**

You can easily spend a few hours exploring the **cultural precinct** (Map p178; ☎ 8951 1120; www.ascp.com.au; Larapinta Dr; adult/child/family \$9/6/25), which neatly combines Aboriginal art and culture with a fascinating natural history museum, an aviation museum, the enthralling tale of the *Kookaburra* air crash and a historical cemetery. The precinct sits on the site of Alice Springs' first aerodrome, about 2km west of the town centre – you can wander around freely outside, but the 'precinct pass', available at the Araluen Arts Centre, gives entry to all the attractions here.

## CENTRAL ALICE SPRINGS

INFORMATION	36 D2	Didge Room.....57 D4
Alice 24 Store Laundromat.....1 D4	Firkin & Hound.....37 E2	Gallery Gondwana.....58 C3
Alice Springs Amcal Chemist.....(see 55)	Jolly Swagman Coffee Shop.....38 C4	Kmart.....59 C3
Alice Springs Library.....2 E4	Katachi.....39 C4	Lone Dingo Adventure.....60 C4
ANZ Bank.....3 E3	Keller's.....40 B4	Mbantua Gallery.....61 C4
Big Kangaroo Books.....4 C4	Lene.....41 C4	Papunya Tula Artists.....62 C4
Boomerang Book Exchange.....4 C4	Malathi's.....(see 50)	Springs Plaza.....63 E2
Bureau de Change.....(see 4)	Oscar's.....42 E2	Yepereny Shopping Centre.....64 D3
Catia.....6 C4	Outback Bar & Grill.....43 C4	
Dymocks.....(see 55)	Overlanders Steakhouse.....44 D4	
Flight Centre.....(see 64)	Red Dog Cafe.....45 C4	
Helene's Books & Things.....7 D4	Red Ochre Grill.....46 C4	
Internet Outpost.....8 D4	Sporties Cafe & Restaurant.....47 E3	
JPG Computer.....9 D3	Thai Room.....48 C4	
Main Post Office.....10 E3	Todd Tavern Pub Caf.....(see 31)	
Maps NT.....(see 55)	Wicked Kneads.....49 C4	
Outback Gems.....11 D3	Woolworths.....(see 64)	
Todd Internet Cafe.....12 E4		
<b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>		
Adelaide House.....13 C4		
Alice Springs Child Care Centre.....14 D3		
Alice Springs Reptile Centre.....15 C4		
Hartley St School.....16 B4		
John Flynn Memorial Church.....17 C4		
National Pioneer Women's		
Hall of Fame.....18 E2		
Old Courthouse.....(see 18)		
Outback Travel Shop.....19 C4		
Panorama Guth.....20 D4		
Residency.....21 E3		
Royal Flying Doctor Service Base.....22 D4		
RSL & War Museum.....23 E1		
Stuart Memorial.....24 D4		
Stuart Town Gaol.....25 E2		
<b>SLEEPING</b>		
Alice Springs Resort.....26 F4		
All Seasons Diplomat.....27 B4		
Desert Rose Inn.....28 D2		
Elkira Motel.....29 D3		
Pioneer YHA Hostel.....30 F3		
Todd Tavern.....31 F2		
<b>EATING</b>		
Afghan Traders.....32 F3		
Barra on Todd.....(see 26)		
Bi-Lo.....(see 55)		
Bluegrass.....33 E4		
Bojangles.....34 E4		
Cafe Mediterranean Bar Doppio.....35 C4		

**DRINKING** ☑  
Sean's Irish Bar.....50 D3

**ENTERTAINMENT** 🎬  
Alice Springs Cinema.....51 F2  
Melanka's Party Bar.....52 D4  
Sounds of Starlight Theatre.....53 C3

**SHOPPING** 🛒  
Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre.....54 D4  
Alice Plaza.....55 E2  
CAAMA Shop.....56 E4

## ARALUEN ARTS CENTRE

The **Araluen Arts Centre** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 5022, box office ☎ 8951 1122; www.araluenartscentre.com.au; ☎ 10am-5pm) has four galleries and is the town's performing arts centre. Beautiful stained-glass windows grace the foyer – the largest window features the Honey Ant Dreaming (a popular central Australian theme) and was designed by local artist Werten Rubuntja. Other windows were designed by Aboriginal students of Yirara College. A large painting by Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri was commissioned for the centre and is reproduced on the outside eastern wall.

The Albert Namatjira gallery features original paintings by Albert Namatjira,

other Hermannsburg School artists and Rex Batterbee (the European man who first introduced the young Namatjira to watercolour painting), along with early Papunya works.

Other galleries showcase art from the Central Desert region, contemporary art and travelling exhibitions. A doorway leads out to the sculpture garden.

The **West End Cafe** (snacks \$1.50-4; ☎ 10.30am-3.30pm) serves sandwiches, sweets and drinks.

On the path between the centre and the Museum of Central Australia is the walk-through Yepereny Sculpture, which tells the *story* of the Caterpillar ancestors, complete with commentary and sound effects.

**TRANSPORT**

Airport Shuttle Bus.....65 C4
Alice Wanderer.....66 C4
Asbus.....67 B3
Avis.....68 D3
Budget.....69 C4
Greyhound Australia.....70 D4
Hertz.....71 D4
Outback Auto Rentals.....72 E4
Qantas.....73 E3
Territory Thrifty Car Rental.....74 D4
Travel World.....75 E3

## MUSEUM OF CENTRAL AUSTRALIA &amp; STREHLOW RESEARCH CENTRE

Housed in a building partly constructed of a massive rammed-earth wall, the **Museum of Central Australia** (Map p178; ☎ 8951 1121; ☎ 10am-5pm) boasts a fascinating natural history collection. Among the exhibits you'll find local megafauna fossils – including the skeleton of an enormous flightless bird – geological displays such as meteorites, and Aboriginal cultural artefacts.

Housed in the same building, the **Strehlow Research Centre** (Map p178; ☎ 8951 1111; ☎ 10am-5pm) commemorates the tireless work of Professor Ted Strehlow among the Arrernte people of the district. Strehlow was born in Hermannsburg and returned years later

to study Arrernte language and culture. His legacy is the most comprehensive collection of Aboriginal spirit artefacts (known as *tjurunga*) in the country – entrusted to Strehlow for safe-keeping by the Arrernte people years ago when they feared their traditional life was under threat. Unfortunately, these items cannot be viewed by an uninitiated male or *any* female, and are kept in a vault in the centre. However, you can view a photographic exhibition and a very good multimedia display to learn about the works of Strehlow and the Arrernte people.

## KOOKABURRA &amp; AVIATION MUSEUM

Housing an interesting assortment of old planes, the former Connellan Air hangar is now a **museum** (Map p178; Memorial Ave; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun). There are exhibits on pioneer aviation in the Territory and several former Royal Flying Doctor (RFDS) planes.

The highlight of the museum, however, is in a small building outside the hangar, where you'll find the wreck of the tiny *Kookaburra*, and its tragic tale. The two-man plane crashed into the Tanami Desert in 1929 while out searching for Charles Kingsford-Smith and his co-pilot Charles Ulim, who had gone down in their plane, the *Southern Cross*. The *Kookaburra* pilots Keith Anderson and Bob Hitchcock perished in the desert while Kingsford-Smith and Ulim were rescued. The wreckage remained in the desert until 1978 when adventurer Dick Smith discovered it.

## ALICE SPRINGS CEMETERY

Adjacent to the aviation museum is the old town **cemetery** (Map p178; ☎ sunrise-sunset), which contains the graves of a number of prominent locals.

The most famous grave is that of Albert Namatjira. This interesting headstone was erected in 1994, and features a terracotta tile mural of three of Namatjira's Dreaming sites in the MacDonnell Ranges. Harold Lasseter, who perished in 1931 while trying to rediscover the rich gold reef he found west of Ayers Rock 20 years earlier, has a prominent headstone – ironically, the town's casino is named after him. Anthropologist Olive Pink is buried facing the opposite direction to the others – a rebel to the end.

### Telegraph Station Historical Reserve

Alice Springs was born out of the Overland Telegraph Line, so a visit to the old **Telegraph Station Historical Reserve** (Map p178; adult/child/family \$7/4/20; ☎ 8am-9pm, museum 8am-5pm), 4km north of town, is a step back to the town's European beginnings. Built along the line in the 1870s, the station was constructed of local stone and continued to operate until 1932. It then served as a welfare home for Aboriginal children of mixed descent until 1963. The buildings have been faithfully restored to give you a good idea of what life was like for the small community here. The main telegraph office still has working equipment inside.

Short **guided tours** (☎ 8952 3993 to confirm times; ☎ 9.15am-4.30pm Apr-Nov) operate roughly every half hour between 9.15am and 4.30pm; there's also an informative self-guided map available. Other ranger-led walks operate between June and August, and the blacksmith's shop is fired up for demonstrations on weekdays.

Nearby is the original Alice Springs, a small waterhole in the Todd River bed. It is not really a spring, but water accumulates here and can usually be found as soaks beneath the sand.

There's a grassy picnic area outside the station museum with barbecues, tables and some gum trees, and a number of **walking tracks** radiate from the reserve. The best is the 30-minute loop to Trig Hill, returning via the original station cemetery.

It's also an easy 4km walk or ride from the Alice town centre – just follow the path north along the riverbank. If you're driving, the Station is signposted to the right off the Stuart Hwy about 1km north of Anzac Hill.

### Royal Flying Doctor Service Base

The **Royal Flying Doctor Service Base** (RFDS; Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 1129; www.flyingdoctor.net; Stuart Tce; adult/child \$6.50/3; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat, 1-4pm Sun) amply demonstrates the vision and work of a service that changed the way people lived – without the fear of complete isolation – in remote inland Australia. Established in 1939, the RFDS still operates over-the-air routine medical clinics for isolated communities, covering an area the size of western Europe. It was made famous in Australia by the long-running TV drama *Flying Doctors*.

Entry to the base is by a half-hour tour, which includes a video presentation and

a peek into an operational control room. Then you can wander through the museum with nifty model planes, a cockpit simulator and some ancient medical and radio gear (including an early pedal radio).

The adjoining **café** (☎ 9am-4.45pm Mon-Sat) serves light meals, cakes and drinks in the courtyard or in cosy surrounds inside.

### School of the Air

The **School of the Air** (Map p178; ☎ 8951 6834; www.assoa.nt.edu.au; 80 Head St; adult/child/family \$4/3/14; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 1.30-4.30pm Sun), about 1km north of the town centre, is another of those innovations born out of necessity in the remote outback. Started in 1951, this was the first school of its type in Australia, broadcasting lessons to children over an area of 1.3 million sq km. While transmissions were originally all done over high frequency radio, satellite Internet connections and web-cams now mean students and teachers can study in a 'virtual classroom'. You get a guided tour of the centre and during school terms you can hear a live class broadcast from 8.30am to 2.30pm Monday to Friday, or recorded radio lessons at other times.

### Alice Springs Reptile Centre

With all 10 of Australia's most poisonous snakes, as well as frilled lizards, bearded dragons and thorny devils, the **Reptile Centre** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 8900; 9 Stuart Tce; adult/child \$8/4; ☎ 9.30am-5pm) is the place to come face to face with some of central Australia's most frightening critters. It's possible to handle a python and get a kiss from a blue-tongue lizard during the handling demonstrations (usually 11am, 1pm and 3pm). Outside is an enclosure that's home to a formidable-looking perentie (Australia's largest lizard) and Terry, a 3.3m saltwater crocodile.

### Olive Pink Botanic Garden

Just across the Todd River from the town centre, the **Olive Pink Botanic Garden** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 2154; www.opbg.com.au; Tuncks Rd; admission by donation; ☎ 10am-6pm) has a fine collection of native shrubs and trees, along with some good mini-bushwalks. The **visitors centre** (☎ 10am-4pm) has exhibits on the evolution and ecology of arid-zone plants, and their traditional use by Aboriginal people. You can also read about the life of the garden's eccentric founder, the prominent central

Australian anthropologist and botanical artist Olive Pink (1884–1975), who was an early campaigner for Indigenous rights. Pink named trees in the garden after government officials, and if any of them failed to please her, she would stop watering their particular tree. Walks from the visitors centre include **Meyers Hill Walk** (35 minutes return), which offers views over the town.

**Garden Café & Gift Shop** (☎ 10am-4pm) serves drinks, ice cream, coffee and cakes.

### Adelaide House

Built in the 1920s as the Australian Inland Mission hospital, **Adelaide House** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 1856; Todd Mall; adult/student/child \$4/3/2; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat) was the first hospital in Central Australia, designed by the founding flying doctor Reverend John Flynn, and built of local stone and timber carted from Oodnadatta in South Australia. Flynn incorporated into his design an ingenious cooling system that pushed cool air from the cellar up into the building. Since 1998 the building has been preserved as a memorial museum with displays of photographs and implements of the pioneering medical work undertaken in remote areas. At the rear of the building stands a small shed housing the original 'pedal radio'. It was here that electrical engineer and inventor of the famous 'pedal radio,' Alfred Traeger (see boxed text below), and Flynn ran transmission tests of Traeger's new invention.

### National Pioneer Women's Hall of Fame

This thought-provoking tribute to Australia's pioneering women is in the **Old Courthouse**

(Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 9006; www.pioneerwomen.com.au; 27 Hartley St; adult/child \$2.20/free; ☎ 10am-5pm Feb-mid-Dec). There are stories of the exploits and achievements of women from all over the country, including a large pictorial display on women who were 'first in their field' in politics, sport, law, the arts and other endeavours. Among the luminaries are Pat O'Shane, Australia's first Aboriginal barrister, sports stars Cathy Freeman, Evonne Cawley and Dawn Fraser, and Kay Cottee, the first yachtswoman to circumnavigate the world solo – but there are many more unsung achievers. In the old magistrates chamber is a section on 'local stories' from outback heroines such as Olive Pink, Ida Standley and Daphne Calder.

### Panorama Guth

In the strange castle-like building in the town centre, **Panorama Guth** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 2013; www.panoramaguth.com.au; 65 Hartley St; adult/concession \$6.50/4.40; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) is the life work of the late Dutch artist Henk Guth, who moved to Alice and began painting landscapes in 1966. The main attraction is the kitschy but nonetheless impressive 360-degree painted panorama framed by a three-dimensional desert scene. The adjoining gallery features many grandiose Guth paintings, some original Albert Namatjira works and a museum of Aboriginal artefacts.

### Old Ghan Train & Museum

At the MacDonnell siding, about 10km south of Alice and 1km west of the Stuart Hwy, the Ghan Preservation Society has restored a collection of *Ghan* locomotives and carriages

#### ALFRED TRAEGER & THE PEDAL RADIO

In the 1920s communication with isolated outback stations was a major problem. The Reverend John Flynn of the Inland Mission invited Alfred Traeger, an electrical engineer and inventor from Adelaide, to come to the Centre and test out some radio equipment. Outpost transmitters were set up at Hermannsburg and Arltunga, putting both places in instant contact with the radio at the Inland Mission in the Alice. But the equipment was cumbersome and relied on heavy copper-oxide batteries. Flynn employed Traeger to solve the problem, and he eventually came up with a radio set that used bicycle pedals to drive the generator.

Within a few years, sets had been installed in numerous locations throughout the Territory. The Alice Springs station officially started operation in April 1939.

Traeger's pedal sets revolutionised communications in the outback, and by the late 1930s (before which only Morse code was used) voice communication had become the norm. Long after the pedal radios became obsolete, two-way radios were often still referred to as 'the pedal'.

on a stretch of disused track. Train buffs and anyone interested in this frontier-smashing railway (originally called the *Afghan Express* after the cameleers who forged the route) will get a good picture here.

The **Ghan Rail Museum** (off Map p178; ☎ 8955 5047; www.maintraxnt.com.au; Norris Bell Ave; adult/child/family \$6/4/15; ☎ 9am-5pm) has a small, slightly ad-hoc collection of railway memorabilia, photographs and information panels in the Stuart railway station – a 1930s-style station reconstructed from plans originally intended for the Alice.

### Road Transport Hall of Fame

If you like big trucks, including a few ancient road trains, the **Road Transport Hall of Fame** (off Map p178; ☎ 8952 7161; Norris Bell Ave; adult/child/family \$8/5/22; ☎ 9am-5pm) has a fabulous collection. In a couple of huge sheds next to the rail museum are over 100 restored trucks and vintage cars, including many of the outback pioneering vehicles. Here you'll find a 1964 B61 Mack truck, Studebakers, Buicks and a 1911 Model T Ford – the oldest vehicle to make the return trip from Alice to Uluru – as well as a collection of memorabilia and a 'restoration yard' (if you're wondering where old road trains go to die and be reborn, this must be it).

## ACTIVITIES

### Hot-Air Ballooning

Floating high above the desert at sunrise is an unforgettable way to start the day and there are dawn balloon flights daily from Alice Springs. Flights take off some distance south of the MacDonnell Ranges and all include a champagne breakfast. Children pay about 30% less and there are discounts for backpackers, especially if you book through a hostel.

**Ballooning Downunder** (☎ 1800 801 601, 8952 8816; www.ballooningdownunder.com.au; 30-/60-min flight \$230/330)

**Outback Ballooning** (☎ 1800 809 790; www.outbackballooning.com.au; 30-/60-min flight \$240/360)

**Spinifex Ballooning** (☎ 1800 677 893, 8953 4800; www.balloonflights.com.au; 30-min flight \$230).

### Bowling

You can unwind with a game of pins at Alice's imaginatively named tenpin bowling alley, the **Dust Bowl** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 5051; 29 Gap Rd; adult/child \$8/7 per game; ☎ noon-late). It stays

open till the last bowlers depart and there's a kiosk and a **bar** (☎ 6-10pm).

### Bushwalking

If you really want to get to know this country, head out to the bush. Several easy walks radiate from the Olive Pink Botanical Gardens and the Telegraph Station, including the Telegraph Station to Simpsons Gap route, which is also the first stage of the Larapinta Trail (p218).

**Central Australian Bushwalkers** (☎ 8953 1956; http://home.austarnet.com.au/longwalk) is a group of local bushwalkers that schedules a wide variety of walks in the area, particularly the West MacDonnell Ranges, from March to November.

If you're keen to tackle part of the Larapinta Trail but don't have your own equipment, **Lone Dingo Adventure** (☎ 8953 3866; cnr Todd Mall & Gregory Tce) can put together packs of camping and hiking gear for hire, as well as GPS and EPIRB equipment (see p200).

### Camel & Horse Riding

Camels played an integral part in pioneering central Australia, and travellers can relive some of that adventure. At the **Frontier Camel Farm** (off Map p178; ☎ 8953 0444; www.cameltrucks.com.au) you can take a half-day ride along the Todd River (adult/child \$50/25), or take a camel to dinner or breakfast (p191).

**Pyndan Camel Tracks** (☎ 0416 170 164; www.cameltrucks.com) has one-hour rides just south of the MacDonnell Ranges (\$35), as well as half-day rides (\$80) and an overnight ride, including dinner and breakfast and a night in a swag, for \$140.

The only place for commercial horse riding in the Alice Springs area is at **Old Ambalindum Homestead** (☎ 8956 9620; tno@bigpond.com; Arltunga Gardens Rd; ☎ Wed, Thu, Sat & Sun), about 130km northwest of Alice. They offer half-hour riding lessons (\$40), one-hour rides (\$80), two-hour trail rides (\$150) and pony rides for children (\$10). Bookings are essential.

### Cycling

Alice is flat and perfect for cycling. Pedal along the excellent track beside the Todd River to the Telegraph Station, west to the Alice Springs Desert Park, or further out on the designated cycle path to Simpsons Gap.

(Continued from page 184)

**Alice Bike Hire** (☎ 0407 324 697; www.alicebikehire.com; half/full day \$12/20) Drop-off/pick-up service, mountain bikes, kids' bikes and baby seats available.

**Broken Spoke** (Map p178; ☎ 8953 8744; Shop 3, Elder St Centre, Elder St; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) Sells bicycles, parts, accessories and does repairs.

### Golf

Alice has a fine, undulating 18-hole golf course (even during dry spells the fairways are kept lovingly green) with a striking backdrop of the MacDonnell Ranges. The **Alice Springs Golf Club** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 1921; Cromwell Dr; course fees 9/18 holes \$20/30, club hire half/full set \$15/25; ☎ 6.30am-11pm) is just east of the Todd River.

### Indoor Rock Climbing

The **YMCA** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 5666; Saddeen Rd; ☎ 6am-9pm Mon-Thu, 6am-8pm Fri, 8.30am-6pm Sat, 1-6pm Sun), east of the river, has an indoor climbing wall. Climbing costs \$10.50/8 for an adult/student or child with equipment. There's also a **gym** (casual visit \$8.50).

### Swimming

Almost without exception, all places to stay have a swimming pool, although these vary in size from postage stamp to something you can actually swim in. If you want to do laps, the local **Swimming Centre** (Map p178; ☎ 8953 4633; Speed St; adult/child \$3.20/1.70; ☎ 6am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun) has three outdoor pools and diving boards.

### Quad-biking

For a thrill on four wheels you can't beat these go-anywhere bikes, which are automatic, pretty stable to ride and don't require a licence or previous experience. Pick up and drop off at your accommodation is included.

**Desert Quads** (☎ 8953 7100; www.desertquads.com.au; tours per person \$110-160) Two- and 3½-hour tours leave at least twice daily.

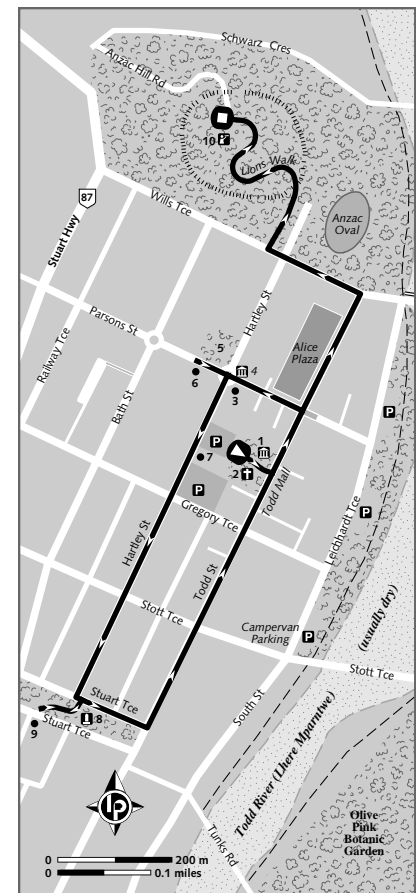
**Outback Quad Adventures** (☎ 89530697; www.oqa.com.au; tours per person \$100-330) Guided tours (minimum two hours) go out on Undoolya Station. The overnight tour (\$330) includes camping out with dinner and breakfast.

## WALKING TOUR: HISTORICAL ALICE

These days Alice Springs has a modern – some would say nondescript – town centre, but hidden among the shopping plazas are a

few interesting survivors from the days when this really was a frontier outback town. You can easily do a walk around the heritage buildings of central Alice in a couple of hours, or longer if you pause in museums along the way (and longer still if you chat with all the little old ladies who look after them).

Start in the grassy space on the Todd Mall, where you'll find Alice's original hospital, **Adelaide House** (1; p183), now an absorbing museum. Next door is the modern **John Flynn Memorial Uniting Church** (2), built in 1956. Walk up to Parsons St, turn left and head up to the low- and wide-roofed **Residency** (3; admission by donation; ☎ 10am-2pm Mon-Fri), built in 1926 as the first home of the Government of Central Australia and



(Continued on page 189)

refurbished to reflect this period. In 1963 the Queen and Prince Phillip stayed here during their royal visit. Across the road, the **old courthouse building (4)**; cnr Parsons & Hartley Sts) was constructed in 1928 as the office of the administrator of Central Australia. From the 1930s until 1980 it was used as the local court and today houses the inspirational National Pioneer Women's Hall of Fame (p183). Opposite, the small patch of green is the **DD Smith Park (5)**, dedicated to David Douglas Smith, the first resident engineer who was instrumental in constructing the Stuart Hwy.

Crossing Parsons St you'll find the oldest surviving building in Alice Springs, the tiny **Stuart Town Gaol (6)**; Parsons St; adult/child \$2.20/free; ☎ 10am-12.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-noon Sat), sandwiched between the modern police station and law courts. It was built from 1907 to 1908 with locally quarried stone and had its first guests in 1909. Most early inmates were Aboriginal men whose usual crime was killing cattle, but plenty of non-Aboriginal offenders were committed for crimes ranging from horse theft to passing dud cheques. The last two prisoners were interned in 1938 for the heinous crime of travelling on the *Ghan* without a ticket! There are murals on the wall behind.

Back on Hartley St, head south to the old **Hartley St School (7)**, which now houses the **National Trust office** (☎ 8952 4516; Hartley St; admission by donation; ☎ 10.30am-2.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm Sat). The core of the building was built in the late 1920s and it housed the original School of the Air studio.

Continuing down Hartley St and then crossing Stott Tce you come to a 'heritage precinct' where plaques identify a number of early Alice houses that mostly now house government offices. At the end of Hartley St, on the grassy strip along Stuart Tce, is the **Stuart Memorial (8)**, dedicated to pioneering explorer John McDouall Stuart. Across the road is the **Royal Flying Doctor Service Base (9)**; p182) which is definitely worth a visit to see the work and history of this unique service.

Walk east to Todd St and it's two blocks north back to the Todd Mall, where you can browse the shops and galleries before heading to the walking path (Lions Walk) that leads to the top of **Anzac Hill (10)**; p179) – a great place to watch the sunset with a fine view over Alice.

## ALICE FOR CHILDREN

Keeping kids occupied should be a breeze in Alice – if the idea of handling a 3m-long python doesn't charm them, nothing will! At the **Reptile Centre** (p182) there are regular handling shows, while the **Alice Springs Desert Park** (p179) is a captivating experience for kids and adults alike. Don't miss taking the kids to the **Heavitree Outback Lodge** (p193) any time after 4pm to handfeed the rock wallabies that climb down from the ranges.

A ride on a camel is a sure-fire winner, so visit the **Frontier Camel Farm** (p184). **Squiggles Playhouse Café** (Map p178; ☎ 8953 8066; Shop 2/39 North Stuart Hwy; children 1-14 yrs \$6.60; snacks \$2-5; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9.30am-5pm Sat, 10.30am-4.30pm Sun) is a chance to go for a coffee and a breather while the kids play in the indoor play centre.

A good **outdoor playground** (Map p178) is at Frank McEllister Park next to the Araluen Arts Centre on Larapinta Drive, with free barbecues and a BMX track.

Childcare centre places are hard to come by in Alice, so plan ahead. **Alice Springs Child Care Centre** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 4188; 53 Bath St; ☎ 7.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) is a community centre charging \$10/50 per hour/day.

If you need extra baby gear such as prams, capsules and even disposable nappies, **Baby Equipment Hire** (☎ 0413 239997; www.babyehire.com.au) will deliver just about anything baby-related to your door for short- or long-term rental or purchase.

## TOURS

Alice Springs is the hub of central Australian tourism and all roads – and tours – start and end here. There are daily trips by bus or 4WD to one or more of the major attractions: Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, Watarrka National Park (Kings Canyon), Palm Valley, and the West and East MacDonnells, with less frequent tours to places such as Rainbow Valley and Chambers Pillar. Catia tourist office has details on all sorts of organised tours from Alice Springs. You can also book most tours through your accommodation, or try the **Outback Travel Shop** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8955 5288; www.outbacktravelshop.com.au; 2a Gregory Tce).

### Town Tours

**Alice Wanderer** (☎ 1800 722 111; 8952 2111; www.alicewanderer.com.au) has town tours for \$38 and half-day tours to Simpsons Gap and Standley Chasm for \$70.

**Foot Falcon** (☎ 8953 4015; www.footfalcon.com; tours \$25-35) has excellent morning, evening and afternoon walking tours covering Aboriginal history, historical buildings and tales of the early days.

### Aboriginal Cultural Tours

**Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre** (☎ 8952 3408; www.aboriginalart.com.au; 125 Todd St; half/full day \$95/165) offers the chance to meet and interact with Aboriginal people and learn about their culture. Tours include a bush walk, Aboriginal dance performance and didgeridoo lesson (also see p199).

**Alice Wanderer** (☎ 1800 722 111; 8952 2111; www.alicewanderer.com.au) has half-day tours to the Santa Teresa Aboriginal community and Keringke art centre for \$130.

**Dreamtime Tours** (☎ 8955 5095; www.rstours.com.au; adult/child \$85/45, self-drive \$70/35; ☎ 8.30-11.30am) has the popular three-hour 'Dreamtime & Bushtucker Tour', where you can meet some Warlpiri Aboriginal people and learn a little about their traditional life. As it caters for large bus groups it can be impersonal, but you can tag along with your own vehicle.

### Dining Tours

**Take a Camel out to Breakfast or Dinner** (☎ 8953 0444; www.cameltours.com.au; Ross Hwy; breakfast adult/child \$80/45, dinner adult/child \$105/75) is a very outback experience, combining a one-hour camel ride with a barbecue breakfast or three-course dinner at the Frontier Camel Farm (p184).

**Red Centre Dreaming** (☎ 8950 4444; www.aurora-resorts.com.au; Palm Circuit; adult/child \$95/55; ☎ 7-10pm), at the Heavitree Outback Lodge (p193), is a big meal and a cultural experience – a three-course 'Territorial' buffet feed (including drinks) with Aboriginal dancing, music and *story-telling*.

### Scenic Flights

**Alice Springs Helicopters** (☎ 8952 9800; www.anh.com.au) has flights over Alice (\$95), Simpsons Gap (\$240) and West MacDonnell Ranges (\$850).

**Murray Cosson's Australian Outback Flights** (☎ 8952 4625; www.australianoutbackflights.com.au) operates flights over Alice Springs (\$110), as well as the West MacDonnell Ranges (1½ hours \$295), Kings Canyon including lunch and canyon walk (eight hours \$520), and Uluru and Kata Tjuta (full day \$660).

All prices are per person (minimum two people).

**Northern Air Charters** (☎ 8953 1444; www.flynac.com.au) operates flights from Alice Springs to Uluru from \$305 per person one way.

### Motorcycle Tours

**Alice Springs Motorcycle Tours** (☎ 1800 555 797; 8955 5797; www.aliceharley.com.au) is the one for lovers of Harleys and black leather. The 30-minute 'town tripper' costs \$55 or you can cruise the MacDonnell Ranges for two/five/seven hours for \$155/360/460.

### Tours Around Alice

The major sites of the West MacDonnell Ranges can be seen in a day and with two or more people you'll get a better deal hiring a small car than taking a tour; however, there are a few good 4WD options along here, such as Palm Valley (see p219 for details).

Heading southeast of Alice, the sites you can access with a conventional vehicle are somewhat limited, so a tour is a good option. See p235 for details on tours featuring the East MacDonnell Ranges, Chambers Pillar and Rainbow Valley.

Numerous operators run tours of two or more days to Uluru, Kata Tjuta and Kings Canyon. See p251 for further information.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

### March & April

**Alice IS Wonderland Festival** The gay and lesbian community hits the town with a week of events in this post-Mardi Gras festival.

### GAY & LESBIAN ALICE

For an outback town, Alice Springs has a surprisingly strong and diverse gay and lesbian community. A local outcry over the first **Alice IS Wonderland** gay and lesbian festival (above) in 2001 was met by even stronger local support for the concept. Your first point of contact should be Phil Walcott, the gregarious owner of **Rainbow Connection** (p195), while **Mediterranean Bar Doppio** (p197), just off Todd Mall, is lesbian-owned and a great place to mingle. Every Friday at around 5.30pm there's drinks at the bar of **Alice Springs Resort** (p195) where you can meet loads of interesting people.



## WHACKY RACES

They say if you see the Todd River flow three times in your life you're a local, but a lack of water doesn't stop the sports-and-beer-loving people of the Alice having a good time.

Every September (since 1962) the town gears up for one of central Australia's most famous sports events – the **Henley-on-Todd Regatta**. Borrowing its name from the even more famous English boat race, this whacky festival is a race along the sandy bed of the dry Todd River. The 'boats' are bottomless and the crews race barefoot with their lightweight craft hauled up around their waists. No oars, coxes or winged keels are required here, just a swift pair of heels. There are numerous race categories and the boats come in all shapes and sizes – yachts with sails, kayaks, flat-bottom boats pushed through the sand using shovels instead of oars and even a bathtub derby where contestants carry a passenger in a bathtub to the finish! Add to that a sand-ski race, a tug-of-war, and – just to flavour it with a little surf carnival atmosphere in the desert – a 'surf rescue' and iron man and woman events! (For the record, the Todd River has flooded twice in recent memory, with devastating flash-floods in 1983 and 1988 – both in March.)

But for curious visitors to the Alice, much of the real entertainment can be found outside the actual racing. Locals dress up in oddball outfits, a procession of boats and floats winds its way through the streets and, like all good outback happenings, the booze flows freely and partying goes well into the night. Entry to the event is \$10/5 (adult/child), with 10% of profits going to a different charity each year. For information and annual dates, check out the website [www.henleyontodd.com.au](http://www.henleyontodd.com.au).

Another out-there race day in Alice Springs is the **Camel Cup**, held in mid-July at Blatherskite Park, south of the Gap. As well as the races, where the gangly legs of dromedaries make a surprisingly swift bid for the finish line, there are stalls, rides, music, plenty of drinking and a carnival atmosphere. And what would a race day be without fashions on the fields and the judging for Mr and Miss Camel Cup? It's a great family day out. For more information, check out [www.camelcup.com.au](http://www.camelcup.com.au).

**Heritage Week** The emphasis is on the town's European past during this week of re-enactments, displays and demonstrations of old skills, usually in late April.

## May

**Alice Springs Cup Carnival** ([www.alicespringsturfclub.org.au](http://www.alicespringsturfclub.org.au)) The highlight of the autumn racing carnival is the Alice Springs Cup held on the first Monday in May.

**Bangtail Muster** A parade of floats along Todd Mall followed by a sports carnival, also held on the Monday holiday in early May.

## June & July

**Finke Desert Race** ([www.finkedeserttrace.com.au](http://www.finkedeserttrace.com.au)) Motorcyclists and buggy-drivers vie to take out the title of this crazy race 240km from Alice Springs along the Old South Rd to Finke; the following day they race back again! It's held on the Queen's Birthday weekend.

**Beanie Festival** ([www.beaniefest.org](http://www.beaniefest.org)) An Alice Springs festival with cult status, this event in late June/early July honours the woollen beanie with colourful entries from around Australia and abroad; there are prizes, exhibitions and workshops at the Araluen Art Centre.

**Alice Springs Show** The annual agricultural show on the first weekend in July has the usual rides and attractions, as well as displays and events.

**Naidoc Week** (National Aboriginal Islander Day Observation Committee) This is a celebration of Indigenous culture and achievements in the local community.

**Camel Cup** See Whacky Races above.

## August

**Alice Springs Rodeo** Yee-ha! Bareback bull-riding, steer wrestling, calf roping and ladies' barrel races are some of the events at the rodeo at Blatherskite Park.

**Big Screen** At the Araluen Art Centre, this is a touring Aussie film festival with a number of free screenings.

## September & October

**Alice Desert Festival** ([www.alicedesertfestival.com.au](http://www.alicedesertfestival.com.au)) This arts and cultural festival features music, dancing, exhibitions and street performers.

**Henley-on-Todd Regatta** See Whacky Races above.

**Desert Mob** Month-long exhibition of Central Desert artists.

## November

**Corkwood Festival** This annual festival, held on the last Sunday in November, is an arts and crafts festival, but there's also plenty of music and food. Craft stalls are the focus during the afternoon, while the evening is capped with a bush dance.

## SLEEPING

The Alice has the best range of accommodation in central Australia, from caravan parks and backpacker hostels to atmospheric B&Bs and luxury hotels, with plenty of standard-issue motels in between. Book ahead during the peak season (June to September) and during festivals.

## Budget

### PUBS

**Todd Tavern** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 1255; [www.todd-tavern.com.au](http://www.todd-tavern.com.au); 1 Todd Mall; d \$60; 🍷) In the heart of town at the top end of Todd Mall, the rooms above Todd Tavern are spotless, spacious and motel quality at a budget price. The only downside is the noise from the pub – mainly Thursday to Sunday – but if you're not the early-to-bed type it's great value.

### HOSTELS

There's plenty of backpacker accommodation in Alice (and a new Base Backpackers was planned for the town centre at the time of writing), but you'll still need to book ahead if you want a private room. Most places have dorm beds and motel-style doubles. Ask about VIP/YHA/Nomads discounts.

**Annie's Place** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 1549, 1800 359 089; [www.anniesplace.com.au](http://www.anniesplace.com.au); 4 Traeger Ave; dm/d \$16/60; 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷) Alice's best hostel has plenty of beds but a cosy feel and converted motel rooms (all with bathroom and fridge) around a central pool. Apart from a poky kitchen, the facilities are excellent with a real Internet café and the sociable Travellers Café & Bar (all dinner meals for guests are \$5). Some travellers have complained about a hard sell on their Uluru tours (Mulgas) and a frosty reception if you take a competitor's tour, so beware.

**Pioneer YHA Hostel** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 8855; [www.yha.com.au](http://www.yha.com.au); cnr Leichhardt Tce & Parsons St; dm \$23-27, tw & d \$65, q \$80; 🍷 🍷 🍷) In the old Pioneer outdoor cinema right in the centre of town, location is the biggest bonus here but it's clean, friendly and well run. The doubles share bathrooms. A good-sized kitchen, common room with pool table and pleasant outdoor area around a small pool make up the fairly typical YHA-type facilities.

**Alice's Secret Traveller's Inn** (Map p178; ☎ 1800 783 633, 8952 8686; [www.asecret.com.au](http://www.asecret.com.au); 6 Khalick St; dm \$18-20, s/tw/d \$38/48/50; 🍷 🍷) Just across the Todd River from town, this is a great

travellers' hostel where you can relax, have a go at a few circus tricks – fire twirling, juggling – strum a guitar or play a game of badminton in the garden. Rooms in a big old house are simple but clean.

**Toddy's Resort** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 1322, 1800 027 027; [www.toddys.com.au](http://www.toddys.com.au); 41 Gap Rd; dm \$17-18, s & d \$65; 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷) Toddy's is a big, ramshackle place with a party atmosphere, helped by the popular all-you-can-eat meals at the outdoor bar every evening. Although there are plenty of beds, the motel-style rooms are hard to get (book ahead) and the other rooms are nothing to write home about.

**Elke's Backpackers** (Map p178; ☎ 8981 6302; [www.elkesbackpackers.com.au](http://www.elkesbackpackers.com.au); 39 Gap Rd; dm \$18, d \$50-75; 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷) Next door to Toddy's, Elke's is made up of converted motel rooms and, unlike most hostels in town, doesn't mind long-term stays. Most rooms have kitchenette and en suite.

### CAMPING & CARAVAN PARKS

Most caravan parks are on the outskirts of Alice, but still relatively close to the centre. All have barbecues, a laundry, swimming pool and shop with basic provisions, as well as cabins.

**Heavitree Gap Outback Lodge & Caravan Park** (Map p178; ☎ 1800 896 119, 8950 4444; [htgl@aurora-resorts.com.au](http://htgl@aurora-resorts.com.au); Palm Circuit; unpowered site per person \$9, powered site for 2 \$20, dm \$25, d \$115-130; 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷) Although the camping area is a bit of a side issue at this resort, it's still the pick of the bunch, nestled at the foot of the ranges where rock wallabies descend for an evening feed. Good facilities, backpacker and motel rooms and a pub next door.

**MacDonnell Range Holiday Park** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 6111, 1800 808 373; [www.macrange.com.au](http://www.macrange.com.au); Palm Place; powered/unpowered site for 2 \$30/25, budget r \$60, cabins \$85-125, villas \$135-150; 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷) Probably the best-kept park in town, this has grassy sites, spotless amenities and good camp kitchens. Cabins and villas accommodate up to six people.

Also recommended:

**Stuart Caravan Park** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 2547; [www.stuartcaravanpark.com.au](http://www.stuartcaravanpark.com.au); Larapinta Dr; powered/unpowered site for 2 \$26/20, cabins \$60-80; 🍷 🍷) Opposite the cultural precinct 2km west of town.

**Wintersun Gardens Caravan Park** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 4080; [www.wintersun.com.au](http://www.wintersun.com.au); Stuart Hwy; powered/unpowered site for 2 \$25/20, cabins \$75-110; 🍷 🍷) About 2km north of the town centre.

**Alice Springs Heritage Caravan & Tourist Park**

(Map p178; ☎ 8952 3135; www.heritagecp.com.au; Ragonesi Rd; powered/unpowered site for 2 \$24/20, cabins from \$85)

**Midrange**

There's no shortage of hotels and motels in Alice, plus a smattering of B&Bs and some self-contained apartments for longer-term visits.

**HOTELS & MOTELS**

**Desert Palms Resort** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 5977; 1800 678 037; www.desertpalms.com.au; 74 Barrett Dr; d/tr/q villas \$120/135/145; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) A world away from the average motel, this is one of the most tranquil places in town, with palms positioned for seclusion and cascades of bougainvillea pouring over balconies. The rows of Indonesian-style villas add to the exotic feel, with cathedral ceilings and tropical-style furnishings. Each has a kitchenette, en suite, TV, breakfast bar and private balcony. The island swimming pool is a big hit with kids.

**Desert Rose Inn** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 1411; www.desertroseinn.com.au; 15 Railway Tce; budget s/d \$50/60, motel s/d \$60/95; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) A short walk from the town centre, the Desert Rose makes a good alternative to the hostel experience, with budget rooms that share bathrooms, as well as standard motel rooms and an inviting pool, kitchen and common area.

**All Seasons Diplomat** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 8977; www.accorhotels.com.au; cnr Gregory Tce & Hartley St; budget/standard/deluxe d \$70/135/155; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Right in the town centre, this is a large, nondescript but well-appointed motel with rooms in double-storey blocks. The upper-floor rooms have wrap-around verandas.

**Elkira Motel** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 1222, 1800 809 252; 65 Bath St; elkira@bestwestern.com.au; budget s/d \$75/85, standard s/d \$90/1000, deluxe s/d \$100/110; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Elkira is a decent mid-priced motel in a central but quiet location. The budget rooms are poky but the others are fine.

**Airport Motel** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 6611; www.airportmotels.com.au; 115 Gap Rd; s/d \$80/85, deluxe \$90/95; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) It's nowhere near the airport, but this unpretentious motel has some of the biggest rooms in Alice for this price. Prince Charles and Lady Di stayed here in 1983 – believe it or not the Todd River was flooded so they couldn't reach the swish hotels on the east side. The room Diana

stayed in is now the breakfast room, but you can sleep in Charles' old suite (now a family room) for \$115. Bargain!

**White Gum Motel** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 5144; www.whitegum.com.au; 17 Gap Rd; d \$75-85; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This ageing motel is well located and perfect if you want a reasonably priced room with your own kitchen – all rooms are fully self-contained.

**Larapinta Motel** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 7255; 3 Larapinta Dr; s/d/tr/q \$90/100/110/120; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This motel, which proudly flies the Aboriginal flag and is painted in black, yellow and red, looks after many of the Indigenous people visiting town from outlying communities, including some well-known artists. Everyone is welcome here and the rooms are spacious and clean with kitchenette, TV and en suite.

**APARTMENTS**

**Alice on Todd** (Map p178; ☎ 8953 8033; www.aliceontodd.com; cnr Strehlow St & South Tce; studio \$100, 1-/2-bedroom apt \$120/150; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This swish and secure apartment complex on the banks of the Todd offers modern, self-contained rooms with kitchen and lounge. The two-bedroom apartments sleep up to six people, and the complex has a barbecue area and games room. Stand-by and long-term rates are available.

**Hillsview Tourist Apartments** (Map p178; ☎ 0407 602 379; www.hillsviewapartments.com; 16 Bradshaw Dr; standard/deluxe apt from \$115/125; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) In a quiet location with a view across to the changing hues of the MacDonnell Ranges, there are good-value two-bedroom apartments with a full kitchen, lounge, bathroom and washing machine.

**B&Bs**

Alice has just a handful of B&Bs, but they offer an intimate and homely alternative to the motel experience, especially for couples. Children are generally discouraged.

**Gallery** (off Map p178; ☎ 8953 3514; thegallery@outbacktravelshop.com.au; 16 Range Cres; s/d \$120/150) Overlooking the golf course in a quiet part of town, this beautiful stone house is an oasis of peace. Play a game of snooker, relax in the elevated lounge or on the outdoor decking and admire the artworks on the walls. There are three guest rooms with shared facilities. The owners are a mine of local knowledge and speak five languages.

**THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE**

**Bond Springs Outback Retreat** (off Map p178; ☎ 8952 9888; www.outbackretreat.com.au; PO Box 4, Alice Springs NT 0871; 2-/3-bedroom cottage from \$230/280) This is the closest you'll come to experiencing outback station life while still being a short drive from Alice. Although you're on a working cattle station (around 3000 head of Herefords) the accommodation is exclusive and very private, with just two separate self-contained cottages (refurbished stockman's quarters). Modern comforts are matched by traditional furnishings, giving them a real country feel. A full breakfast is included but the rest is self-catering, so stock up in Alice before you arrive.

Although horses are no longer used with mustering, the old stockyards and riding equipment from the early days have been preserved, along with early stone cottages and the original station school, which operated through the School of the Air. To get here, drive 10km north of Alice along the Stuart Hwy, turn right at the sign and continue a further 6.5km.

**Orangewood** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 4114; www.orange-wood-bnb.com.au; 9 McMinn St; s/d \$180/210; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) For a cosy stay it's hard to beat Orangewood. The four comfortable rooms all have en suite and little touches like hairdryers and bathrobes. The biggest has a corner spa bath and the garden room is a self-contained private bungalow with a separate lounge room. In the main house there's a sitting room with TV and CD player (shared with resident cat, Angus) and the garden has a couple of loaded orange trees, a pool and barbecue area.

**Nthaba Cottage** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 9003; www.nthabacottage.com.au; 83 Cromwell Dr; s/d \$100/125, s/d cottage \$125/155) This quaint family home on the east side of town has a beautiful garden at the back, a separate cottage room and a room in the house, both with en suite.

**Rainbow Connection** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 6441; 22-24 Raggatt St; s/d \$140/170; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Alice's gay-friendly guesthouse has four rooms, three of which are in a separate house with its own full kitchen, lounge and bathroom (perfect for groups). The other room is a funky boutique double room with en suite, earthy tones, TV and fridge. The entertaining area comes complete with mirror ball and stained-glass windows.

**Top End**

Most of Alice's best hotels are on the eastern side of the river. Weekend deals and special rates are often available – always ask.

**HOTELS**

**Crowne Plaza Alice Springs** (Map p178; ☎ 8950 8000; www.crowneplaza.com.au; Barrett Dr; r \$150-170, ste \$250-350; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) With the fanciest lobby in Alice and first-class facilities and service,

this is at the top of the range. Choose from the garden-view rooms or the better range-view rooms – all have balcony or patio, TV, minibar, safe, free movies and bathtubs. Spacious suites all overlook the ranges. A pleasant pool and spa, well-equipped gym and sauna, tennis courts and Alice's best Thai restaurant make up the picture.

**Lasseter's Hotel Casino** (Map p178; ☎ 1800 808 975, 8950 7777; www.lhc.com.au; 93 Barrett Dr; d from \$110, ste \$310; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Despite all the flashiness of its attached casino, Lasseter's is surprisingly good value if you score one of its special deals. The 140 rooms are bright and spacious with all the mod cons, and the suites come with private spa, bar and a view of the ranges. And you get free golf at the nearby club, along with a brilliant gym, pool and tennis courts.

**Alice Springs Resort** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8951 4545; www.voyages.com.au; 34 Stott Tce; d standard/deluxe \$120/150; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) With a circle of rooms arranged around a swathe of gum trees, refurbished Alice Springs Resort is a very stylish spot. Modern rooms are spacious with TV, mini-bar and writing desk; the deluxe 'River Gum' rooms have a balcony or veranda and a bathtub. There's a cool pool-terrace area with swim-up pool bar.

**EATING**

Alice has the best eating-out scene south of Darwin and north of Uluru, and it's come a long way in the past decade since the days when a pub meal and a pizza were the top choices. As well as some stylish restaurants and casual cafés, there's a range of international cuisine. For something different, take a camel out to dinner (see Dining Tours p191).

## Restaurants

**Oscar's** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 0930; 86 Todd Mall; lunch \$13-17, dinner \$17-35; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) If you ask locals their favourite restaurant, many will say Oscar's, a friendly, informal place at the top end of the mall. It's open all day with great breakfast fare and an emphasis on Italian and Spanish cuisine (pastas, paella, risotto) in the evening.

**Overlanders Steakhouse** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 2159; www.overlanders.com.au; 72 Hartley St; mains \$19-29; ☺ dinner) A local institution for big steaks of all kinds, Overlanders is an over-the-top representation of all things outback – saddles, cowboy hats, branding irons and all. Amid the drovers' décor you can sample buffalo mignon, kangaroo, crocodile, camel, emu and barramundi. The famous 'Drover's Blowout' (\$50) is a four-course meal that includes soup, a platter of the Aussie meats, choice of steak or barra, and dessert. If you're dining alone, ask for a place at the Overlanders Table, where you can share a blowout with others. The bar is fully licensed and you can even order a Darwin stubby.

**Casa Nostra** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 6749; cnr Undoolya Rd & Sturt Tce; mains \$10-20; ☺ dinner Mon-Sat) With red-and-white checked tablecloths, plastic grape bunches hanging from the bar, and genial staff, Casa Nostra is a popular slice of Italiana just across the river from the town centre. Reliable (but not earth-shattering) pizza and pasta is the bread and butter here. There's an informal, bustling atmosphere and takeaway is available. What's more, it's BYO.

**Red Ochre Grill** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 9614; Todd Mall; light meals \$9.50-14, mains \$19-30; ☺ lunch & dinner) With innovative fusion cuisine and the perfect day-night dining combination, this is one of the classiest stops on Todd Mall. All-day brunch (burgers, sandwich melts, salads) is served in the afternoon in the semi-open-air section. Dinner in the restaurant – which is framed by superb Ken Duncan outback photography – features offerings such as spiced kangaroo fillets, grilled camel medallions, swordfish steaks or the Aussie game medley, infused with native ingredients such as quandong (native peach) and macadamias.

**Thai Room** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 0191; Fan Lane; mains \$8.50-16; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) For good, reasonably-priced Southeast Asian food, duck into tiny Fan Lane. The lunch menu of laksa, pad Thai and curry is a bargain

and this is one of the few BYO restaurants left in existence. The dinner menu is broader.

**Malathi's Restaurant** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 1858; Sean's Irish Bar, 51 Bath St; meals \$13-29; ☺ dinner Mon-Sat) An Indian restaurant in an Irish pub? Malathi's is an interesting local haunt where the Indian chef combines home cooking with Aussie ingredients: Indian tapas, kangaroo and camel shashliks, barramundi devi, laksa and the intriguing Irish chicken curry. The food is excellent, despite the steep prices for traditionally inexpensive dishes.

**Bluegrass** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8955 5188; cnr Stott Tce & Todd St; mains \$20-30; ☺ dinner Wed-Mon) Housed in the historical Country Women's Association building, this is an arty restaurant with a lovely garden setting and an eclectic, inspired menu packed with gourmet delights such as Greek-style mezes, gum-smoked rack of lamb, yabbies, kangaroo and seafood.

**Flavours of India** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 3721; 20 Undoolya Rd; mains \$11-22; ☺ dinner) The décor is far from exotic but the food is inexpensive (most mains around \$13) and includes the usual subcontinental faves of tandoori, butter chicken, rogan josh, biryani and a good vegetarian selection. Takeaway is available.

**Ainslie's** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 6100; 46 Stephens Rd; mains \$22-30; ☺ dinner) At the Novotel Outback Resort, Ainslie's is well regarded for its gourmet meals including whole baked lamb rump. The licensed restaurant is in a bright elevated area with plenty of glass for watching the sunset on the ranges.

**Hanuman Restaurant** (Map p178; ☎ 8950 8000; Crowne Plaza Alice Springs, Barrett Dr; mains \$12-28; ☺ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner) For Thai food outback-style you can't go past this swish hotel restaurant. With exotic décor, Hanuman is furnished to transport you on a journey along the spice route. Thai dishes (some with an Aussie twist such as camel salad) offer an affordable fine-dining experience.

**Keller's** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 3188; 20 Gregory Tce; mains \$17-27; ☺ dinner Mon-Sat) Where do you find Indian fish curry sharing a menu with Swiss sausage and rosti? Keller's is probably the only Swiss-Indian restaurant in the country but don't worry, there's no curried fondue on the menu! Aussie touches include home-made wattleseed ice cream and kangaroo fillet stroganoff.

**Barra on Todd** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8951 4545; Alice Springs Resort, 34 Stott Tce; mains \$16-30; ☺ lunch & dinner) The speciality here is barramundi

prepared in a variety of ways such as the tantalising chargrilled barra with risotto on a Moreton Bay bug tail.

## Pubs

**Todd Tavern Pub Caf** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 1255; 1 Todd Mall; meals \$7.50-20; ☺ lunch & dinner) The Todd Tavern is hard to beat for pub fare served the old-fashioned way – big. You can get the usual burgers and snacks throughout the day, but save an appetite for the buffet-style specials, especially the ragingly popular Sunday roast (\$10) with a mixed carvery plus potatoes and pumpkin pieces the size of footballs. It's also family friendly (children's meals around \$6).

**Bojangles** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 2873; 80 Todd St; mains \$10.50-22, roast \$13; ☺ lunch & dinner) With its big log tables made from old railway sleepers, cowhide seats and walls dripping with stockman's gear and bush memorabilia, Bo's has bags of atmosphere and a surprisingly gourmet 'Territorian' menu. Start with skewers of croc, kangaroo, camel and emu served with quandong sauce or the savoury damper, and leave room for the king-size steaks or camel and Guinness pie.

**Outback Bar & Grill** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 7131; Todd Mall; meals \$10-24; ☺ lunch & dinner, bar 11am-2am) The 'fish bowl' – with its glass tank appearance staring out at Todd Mall – does good-value meals and there's also a little courtyard at the side. Pizzas are \$10 and there is a range of burgers, including the obligatory barra burger (\$12.50) and other bar-style fillers.

**Firkin & Hound** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 3033; 21 Hartley St; mains \$10-20; ☺ lunch & dinner) The Firkin has an old-fashioned pub menu featuring staples such as bangers and mash, beef-and-Guinness pie and big steaks.

## Cafés

**Café Mediterranean Bar Doppio** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 6525; Fan Lane; meals \$6-11; ☺ breakfast & lunch) In a quiet covered arcade off Todd Mall, this little piece of Byron Bay in Alice serves up huge and wholesome portions served indoors or within the shaded arcade – there are cooked breakfasts, focaccias, curries, great coffee, fresh juices and more. The walls and windows are a fount of knowledge on the arty/alternative scene and this is a good place to plug into the local gay and lesbian scene.

## THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Lane** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 5522; 58 Todd Mall; tapas \$3-11, mains \$12-28; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) One local told us the menu here was 'a bit arty farty'. But even in outback Alice, the Lane works on every level, whether it's an intimate dinner or casual meal. Take a table inside the stylish restaurant or out on Todd Mall and dip into the tapas menu of Spanish tortilla, jamon croquettes or pickled octopus. There are also wood-fired pizzas and an à la carte menu that surpasses the usual barramundi and roo fillets. The service is excellent and there's live entertainment on weekends.

**Katachi** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 0680; 1/78 Todd St; snacks \$3-8; ☺ 9.30am-late) Walking through the door of this hyper-trendy café, you'd be hard-pressed to believe you're still in Alice. With low furniture, world music playing, the best coffee in town and sushi and sweets (muffins, cakes and desserts) on the menu, it's a soothing place to meet or chill out with a magazine.

**Red Dog Cafe** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 1353; 64 Todd Mall; meals \$3-12; ☺ breakfast & lunch) Tables on the mall and simple, hearty fare make this a good place for breakfast, with pancakes (\$7.50) and the full 'bushman's breakfast' (\$10.50).

**Jolly Swagman Coffee Shop** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 3633; Cummins Plaza, Todd Mall; dishes \$3-9; ☺ breakfast & lunch) Tucked away next to Papunya Tula, this quiet café is a winner for its stuffed damper, mushroom balls, salads and sandwiches.

**Sporties Café & Restaurant** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 0953; Todd Mall; snacks \$10-15, mains \$15-25; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) With tables on Todd Mall and a bar and restaurant inside, this is a good spot for a lunch-time feed – filling focaccias, baguettes, crepes, pasta – or just a beer or coffee. The broad menu also has steaks and pub-style meals, but the atmosphere inside is more airport-lounge than cosy dining.

## Quick Eats

**Wicked Kneads** (Map pp180-1; Todd Mall; pastries \$3-4.50, focaccias \$7.50-9; ☺ 8.30am-4pm) With some of Alice's best pies (21 varieties), quiche, cakes and pastries, this shop-front bakery on the mall does a busy afternoon trade.

The big shopping centres – Yeperenye Shopping Centre (Map pp180-1) and Alice

Plaza (Map pp180-1) – have food courts with cafés, bakeries, fast food and various ready-made dishes. Alice also has most of the big fast food chains: look for your favourite sign.

### Self-Catering

If you're stocking up for a trip into the wild, there are several large supermarkets around the city centre. All are open seven days; there's **Coles** (Map pp180-1; Coles Complex, cnr Gregory & Railway Tce; ☎ 24hr), **Woolworths** (Map pp180-1; Yeperenye Shopping Centre; ☎ 7am-midnight Mon-Sat, 7am-10pm Sun) on Hartley and Bath Sts, and **Bi-Lo** (Map pp180-1; Alice Plaza; ☎ 7am-9pm) at the north end of Todd Mall.

**Afghan Traders** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8955 5560; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat), in a lane off Parsons St behind the ANZ bank, is worth the search for its excellent range of organic and health foods.

### DRINKING

Alice has a good range of pubs, bars and cafés, all of which double as eating places. Todd St and Todd Mall are the places to start looking for a drink. Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights are busiest in the pubs.

**Bojangles** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 2873; www.boslivesaloon.com.au; 80 Todd St; ☎ 11.30am-late) Behind the swinging saloon doors you can't help feeling the 'Wild West meets Aussie outback' theme is a bit contrived, but Bojangles is easily the most popular pub in town, beloved of backpacker groups and jumping most nights of the week. Unfortunately, live music has been replaced by an in-house DJ. It's also a popular restaurant.

**Sean's Irish Bar** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 1858; 51 Bath St; ☎ 3.30pm-midnight) Sean's is a quirky local pub run by an Irish-Indian couple. There's live music here Friday and Saturday nights but the highlight of the week is the Sunday night jam session. Naturally there's Guinness on tap, and you can grab an Indian feed at Malathi's.

**Todd Tavern** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 1255; 1 Todd Mall; ☎ 10am-midnight) The bar of this long-standing pub is a local drinking hole and probably the most typically Aussie pub. There's live music on weekends.

**Firkin & Hound** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 3033; 21 Hartley St; ☎ 11.30am-1am) The Firkin is Alice's only example of those English-theme pub chains popular in Australia, but here it's

a low-key local affair rather than a pub overrun run with rabid expats and tourists (that's reserved for Bo's). Cosy snugs and a smoky bar make up what's essentially a local drinking hole, with a small dining room.

### ENTERTAINMENT

Alice is a rarity – an outback town with a pulse, at least on Friday, Saturday and possibly Sunday nights. The rest of the time it sort of hums, splutters and dies by about 10pm. The gig guide in the entertainment section of the *Centralian Advocate*, published every Tuesday and Friday, lists what's on in and around town.

### Nightclubs

**Melanka's Party Bar** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 2233; www.melanka.com.au; 94 Todd St; ☎ 5pm-4am) The only nightclub in town, Melanka's packs in a young crowd of locals and backpackers, though it doesn't get busy until after 11pm. DJs, dance floors, live bands on weekends, sticky floors and drinks in plastic cups.

### Theatre & Cinemas

**Sounds of Starlight Theatre** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 0826; www.soundsostarlight.com; 40 Todd Mall; adult/concession/family \$25/20/80; ☎ 8pm Tue, Fri & Sat Apr-Nov) Andrew Langford's didgeridoo performances have become an Alice institution with a crescendo of lights and sound effects evoking the spirit of the outback. The surprising versatility of the didgeridoo is backed by various Latin-American instruments and percussion.

**Araluen Arts Centre** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 5022; bookings ☎ 8951 1122; www.araluenartscentre.com.au; Larapinta Dr) The cultural heart of Alice, this 500-seat theatre hosts a diverse range of performers on national tours, from dance troupes to musicians and comedians. Art-house films are screened every Sunday evening (adult/child \$11/9). The website has an events calendar.

**Alice Springs Cinema** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 4999; Todd Mall; adult/child \$14/9.50, Tue \$9.50/7.50) This modern multiscreen cinema shows latest release movies between 10am and 9pm. Some hostels offer two-for-one movie ticket deals and Tuesday is discount night.

### Casino

**Lasseter's Hotel Casino** (Map p178; ☎ 8950 7777; 93 Barrett Dr; ☎ 10am-3am Sun-Thu, 10am-4am Fri & Sat,

gaming tables from 2pm) By casino standards it's in miniature, but you'll find all the flashing lights, musical beeps and garish carpets of any pokie-infested venue. Apart from weekend nights it's pretty quiet, and along with the usual games there's the classic Aussie two-up ring (open from 9pm Friday and Saturday). There's live music at the adjacent Limerick Inn (open from 4pm) a few nights a week.

### Sport

The main spectator sport in Alice is Aussie Rules football. **Traegar Park** (Map p178; Speed St; adult/concession \$7/2), just south of the town centre, is a decent oval with grandstand. A weekend game is a good chance to see budding young Aboriginal talent in action.

### SHOPPING

You can get pretty much anything you need in Alice, and it's a good place to shop for central Australian Aboriginal art, didgeridoos, bush clothing and outdoor gear. Todd Mall is the shopping hub and just off here you'll find the main indoor shopping malls, Alice Plaza (Map pp180-1) and Springs Plaza (Map pp180-1). A block away is Yeperenye Shopping Centre (Map pp180-1). For general items, Kmart (Map pp180-1) is well stocked.

### Aboriginal Arts & Crafts

Alice is the centre for Aboriginal arts and crafts from all over central Australia, and

plenty of shops along Todd Mall sell them – including a veritable forest of didgeridoos (an instrument not traditionally played in this part of the Territory).

The following places are owned and run by the art centres that produce the work on sale, which means a better slice of the pie goes to the artist.

**Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 3408; www.aboriginalaustralia.com; 71 Todd St; ☎ 9am-5pm) Established by southern Arrernte people, this is a good first stop. The small shop offers one-hour didgeridoo lessons (\$15) and has a range of authentic art and artefacts, such as T-shirts, woodcarvings, didgeridoos and paintings.

**Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association** (CAAMA; Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 9207; www.caama.com.au; 101 Todd St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) The small shop here stocks Aboriginal books, CDs and cassettes, and various products with local Aboriginal designs. Many of the CDs are recorded by Aboriginal musicians in the CAAMA studio here, which has its own radio network (8KIN FM).

**Ngurratjuta Iltja Ntjarra** (Map p178; ☎ 8951 1953; 29 Wilkinson St; ☎ 9am-3.30pm Mon-Fri) The 'many hands' art centre is a small gallery and studio for visiting artists from all over the central area. Paintings are reasonably priced here (\$100 to \$300) and you buy directly from the artists. You can see artists at work from Tuesday to Friday.

**Papunya Tula Artists** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 4731; www.papunyatula.com.au; 78 Todd St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) The Western Desert art movement began at Papunya in 1971 and today this Aboriginal-owned and -operated centre displays some of the most sought-after artworks in central Australia. Nothing is cheap here – small pieces start at around \$250 – but the bright gallery is a great place to get a feel for quality Aboriginal art. Papunya Tula works with around 150 artists, most painting in Kintore in the far west.

There are also commercial outlets for quality Aboriginal art.

**Gallery Gondwana** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 1577; www.gallerygondwana.com.au; 43 Todd Mall; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat) Quality range of works from leading Central and Western Desert artists, including examples from Yuendumu and Utopia regions.

**Mbantua Gallery** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 5571; www.mbantua.com.au; 71 Gregory Tce; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri,

### DOING THE DIDGE THING

If you've just bought a didgeridoo and have no idea what circular breathing is, several places in Alice offer lessons.

At **Sounds of Starlight** (☎ 8953 0826; 40 Todd Mall) you can learn from the virtuoso, Andrew Langford, after the show finishes (see opposite). He also sells a range of quality didgeridoos (\$100 to \$400), which come with a lesson. Ask about advanced lessons.

The **Didge Room** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 6646; 94 Todd St), in the Opal Miner shop next to Melanka's, has free beginner lessons each evening at 6pm, 7pm and 7.45pm.

At the **Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 3408; 71 Todd St) lessons (\$15) are given by the Aboriginal owners.

9.30am-5pm Sat) This privately owned art centre has the best collection of original works by Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Barbara Weir and other artists from the Utopia region. There are also some Hermannsburg pots available. The upstairs Educational & Permanent Collection (adult/child \$4.40/3.30) is a superb cultural exhibition space with panels explaining Aboriginal mythology, lifestyle, ceremonies, and customs of marriage and death. The permanent gallery includes many more works by Utopia artists, as well as watercolour landscapes from the Namatjira school.

### Outdoor Equipment

**Lone Dingo Adventure** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 3866; cnr Todd Mall & Gregory Tce; ☞ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) has all sorts of quality hiking and camping gear from rucksacks and sleeping bags to maps, GPS systems and EPIRBs (Emergency Positioning Indicating Radio Beacon). You can also hire most camping and hiking gear reasonably cheaply.

**Desert Dwellers** (Map p178; ☎ 8953 2240; 38 Elder St; ☞ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) has just about everything you need to equip yourself for an outback jaunt – swags (from \$175), tents, sleeping bags, portable fridges, stoves, camp ovens and more.

### Markets

**Todd Mall Market** (Todd Mall; ☞ 9am-1pm 2nd Sun, May-Dec) Craft markets, food stalls, clothing, Aboriginal art, jewellery and kick-knack stalls line Todd Mall every second Sunday. A colourful atmosphere with music, sizzling snacks and a few bargains.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

#### Air

Alice Springs is reasonably well connected by air, with Qantas operating daily flights to/from capital cities. Virgin Blue also operates on major routes. One-way fares from Alice include Yulara (\$125), Adelaide (from \$200), Melbourne (from \$270), Darwin (from \$300), Sydney (from \$230), Brisbane (from \$270), Cairns (from \$300), Perth (from \$300) and Hobart (from \$380). Check websites for latest timetables and fare offers.

The following airlines have desks at the airport:

**Aboriginal Air Services** (☎ 8953 5000) Three weekly flights between Alice Springs and Tennant Creek (one

way \$280) and three weekly flights to Yuendumu (\$235) continuing on to Balgo and Hooker Creek.

**Qantas** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 13 13 13, 8950 5211; www.qantas.com.au; cnr Todd Mall & Parson St)

**Vincent Aviation** (☎ 8928 1366; vincentair@optusnet.com.au) Flies to/from Tennant Creek (from \$250 one way) three times a week.

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

#### Bus

**Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au; Shop 3, 113 Todd St; office ☞ 6am-4pm Mon-Sat) has one daily service from Alice Springs to Yulara (for Uluru) and Adelaide, and two to Darwin. Buses arrive at, and depart from, the Greyhound office in Todd St, opposite Melanka's.

Destination	Duration (hr)	One-way fare (\$)
Adelaide	21	230
Coober Pedy	9	135
Darwin	22	255
Katherine	15	210
Tennant Creek	6½	130
Yulara	5	85

The quickest route from Alice to Cairns is with **Desert Venturer** (☎ 07-4035 5566; www.desertventurer.com.au) via the Plenty Hwy. The three-day coach trip costs \$350 plus \$55 for meals.

#### Car

Alice Springs is a long way from anywhere, although the roads to the north and south are sealed and in good condition.

#### CAR RENTAL

All the major hire companies have offices in Alice Springs, and Avis, Budget, Hertz and Territory Thrifty also have counters at the airport. Prices drop by about 20% in the low season (November to April).

A conventional (2WD) vehicle will get you to most sights in the MacDonnell Ranges and out to Uluru and Kings Canyon via sealed roads. If you want to go further afield, say to Chambers Pillar, Finke Gorge or even the Mereenie Loop Rd (until it is sealed), a 4WD is essential. Prices depend on the size of vehicle and length of hire, and not all companies offer unlimited kilometres. Insurance excess is also much higher for 4WD vehicles. Shop around and ask about stand-by rates.

**Alice Camp 'n' Drive** (☎ 8952 0099; www.alicecampndrive.com) Provides vehicles fully equipped for camping with swags (or tents), sleeping bags, cooking gear, chairs etc. Rates include unlimited kilometres, and vehicles are dropped off at your accommodation.

**Avis** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 5533; 52 Hartley St)

**Budget** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 8899; www.budget.com.au; Shop 6, Capricornia Centre, Gregory Tce) Also at airport.

**Europcar** (Map p178; ☎ 131390; www.europcarnt.com.au; 10 Gap Rd)

**Four Wheel Drive Hire Service** (☎ 1800 077 353; www.4wdhire.com.au) Specialises in Toyota Landcruisers (\$190 a day with unlimited kilometres).

**Hertz** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 2644; www.hertznz.com; 76 Hartley St)

**Outback Auto Rentals** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 1800 652 133; www.outbackautorentals.com.au; Todd St) Local company with cheap deals from \$55 a day.

**Territory Thrifty Car Rental** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 9999; www.rentacar.com.au; cnr Stott Tce & Hartley St)

#### CAMPERVAN RENTAL

Hiring a campervan gives you a home on wheels. It's also possible to hire camping equipment packs, including a tent, sleeping bags and cooking equipment from car rental agencies.

**Britz Australia** (☎ 1800 331 454; www.britz.com.au; cnr Stuart Hwy & Power St) Big range of campervans and motorhomes from \$90 to \$220 a day for 2WD and from \$150 to \$190 for 4WD with unlimited kilometres (excluding insurance). Includes Maui and Backpacker Rentals.

**Challenge Camper Trailers** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 7999; www.challengecampertrailers.com.au; 19 Kidman St) If you've got your own vehicle (preferably 4WD) these on-/off-road campers are a great idea.

#### Train

The *Ghan* between Adelaide, Alice Springs and Darwin is a classic way to enter or leave the Territory. There are two services weekly in each direction between Adelaide and Alice Springs throughout the year; trains depart from Alice Springs train station at 12.45pm on Thursday and 2pm Saturday. There's a third service at 10.10am on Sunday from May to July. Heading north on the newly completed rail link to Darwin there's one service a week departing on Monday at 4.10pm. This train stops at Katherine for four hours on Tuesday morning, allowing a quick visit to the gorge.

It's a popular service, especially during winter, and bookings are essential – contact

**Trainways** (☎ 13 21 47; www.trainways.com.au), or book through **Travel World** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 0488; Todd Mall).

The **train station** (Map p178; ☞ noon-4.30pm Mon, 9am-1pm Thu, 10am-2pm Sat) is at the end of George Crescent off Larapinta Drive.

### GETTING AROUND

#### To/From the Airport

Alice Springs airport is 15km south of the town, which is about \$30 by taxi – there's a free taxi phone outside the terminal. The **airport shuttle** (☎ 8953 0310; \$12 one way) meets flights and drops off passengers at city accommodation. Leaving town it departs from Gregory Tce, near the corner of Todd St (Map pp180-1), but also picks up from all accommodation; book a day in advance.

#### Bicycle

For details on bike hire, see Cycling p184.

#### Car & Motorcycle

Parking is free (with time restrictions) in Alice but the central area can get pretty congested on weekdays. The easiest places to find a space are in the car parks of the Coles and Kmart complexes (three-hour limit). Campervans and trailers can park on Leichhardt Tce just north of the Stott Tce roundabout.

#### Public Transport

**Asbus** (☎ 8950 0500), the local bus network, runs four routes that depart from outside the Yeperenye Shopping Centre on Hartley St: **West Route (No 1)** Goes along Larapinta Dr, with a daily detour (Route 1C) for the cultural precinct. Route 1C leaves at 9.45am and returns at 3.35pm.

**East Route (No 2)** East to the residential area along Undoolya Rd

**North Route (No 3)** Heads north along the Stuart Hwy and passes the School of the Air.

**South Route (No 4)** Runs along Gap Rd – past many of the hotels and hostels – through Heavitree Gap and along Palm Circuit (useful for the southern caravan parks).

Buses run approximately every 1½ hours from 7.45am to 6pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 12.45pm Saturday. The adult/child fare for all zones is \$2.20/1.10.

#### ALICE WANDERER

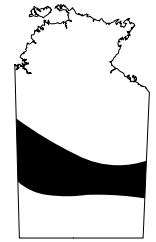
A hop-on, hop-off bus service, **Alice Wanderer** (☎ 1800 722 111, 8952 2111; www.alicewanderer.com.au;

adult/child \$38/30; ☎ 9am-4pm) covers 12 major sights, including the Telegraph Station, School of the Air, Cultural Precinct, Olive Pink Botanic Garden, RFDS Base and Ghan Museum, complete with commentary. The circuit runs every 70 minutes from the southern end of Todd Mall. You can also

arrange pick-up from your accommodation before the 9am departure.

**Taxi**

To order a taxi, call ☎ 13 10 08 or ☎ 8952 1877. Taxis congregate on Gregory Tce near the tourist office.



# North of Alice

The Stuart Hwy shoots north of Alice Springs on its long march towards Darwin, and travellers heading this way could be forgiven for thinking there's little more than a few roadhouses and oceans of red sand and desert scrub until you reach Tennant Creek.

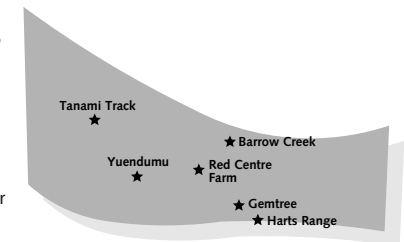
But this remote no-man's land has a story and a heart, both historical and spiritual. The desert landscape is the inspiration for, and the story behind, the world-renowned Aboriginal dot paintings and the work of the Utopia artists, as well as the growing reputation of the Warlpiri artists. The Utopia homelands – named after a station settlement on the Sandover Hwy – cover some 1800 sq km and are home to dozens of Aboriginal communities. Heading north you'll also see reminders of European exploration and history: old WWII staging camps, telegraph stations, wild camels and stock routes.

East of the highway around the Harts Range is a renowned gem fossicking area – the best place in the Territory to sift in the dirt and come up with ruby-red garnets and glittering zircons.

Travel around here usually means going somewhere else; if not north, then branching off on some of the Territory's remote desert roads – the famous Tanami Track to Western Australia, and the Plenty and Sandover highways to Queensland – which head to and beyond the state borders, all passing through vast areas of Aboriginal land. For these unsealed desert tracks a 4WD is the way to go, although the Tanami is passable in conventional vehicles if it's dry. For many travellers, this outback driving challenge tempts them away from the main highway and reveals the vastness of central Australia.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Fossicking for garnets and zircons at **Gemtree** (p211) and the **Harts Range** (p211)
- Outback driving through some of Australia's most remote country on the **Tanami Track** (p207)
- Tasting central Australian wines and mango liqueurs and ice cream at **Red Centre Farm** (p206)
- Stopping at the Aboriginal art centre at **Yuendumu** (p209)
- Exploring the best-preserved telegraph station outside Alice Springs and retiring for a beer at the quirky pub at **Barrow Creek** (p206)



■ TELEPHONE CODE ☎ 08

■ NRMA: [www.shift.nrma.com.au/travel/go/outback\\_tracks](http://www.shift.nrma.com.au/travel/go/outback_tracks)  
■ Gemtree: [www.gemtree.com.au](http://www.gemtree.com.au)

## NORTH OF ALICE



## UP THE TRACK

The Stuart Hwy heads north from Alice Springs, snaking through the low outliers of the MacDonnell Ranges before the road flattens out for the long haul north to Darwin.

About 20km north of Alice Springs is the turn-off for the Tanami Track, a gravel road connecting Alice with the Kimberley.

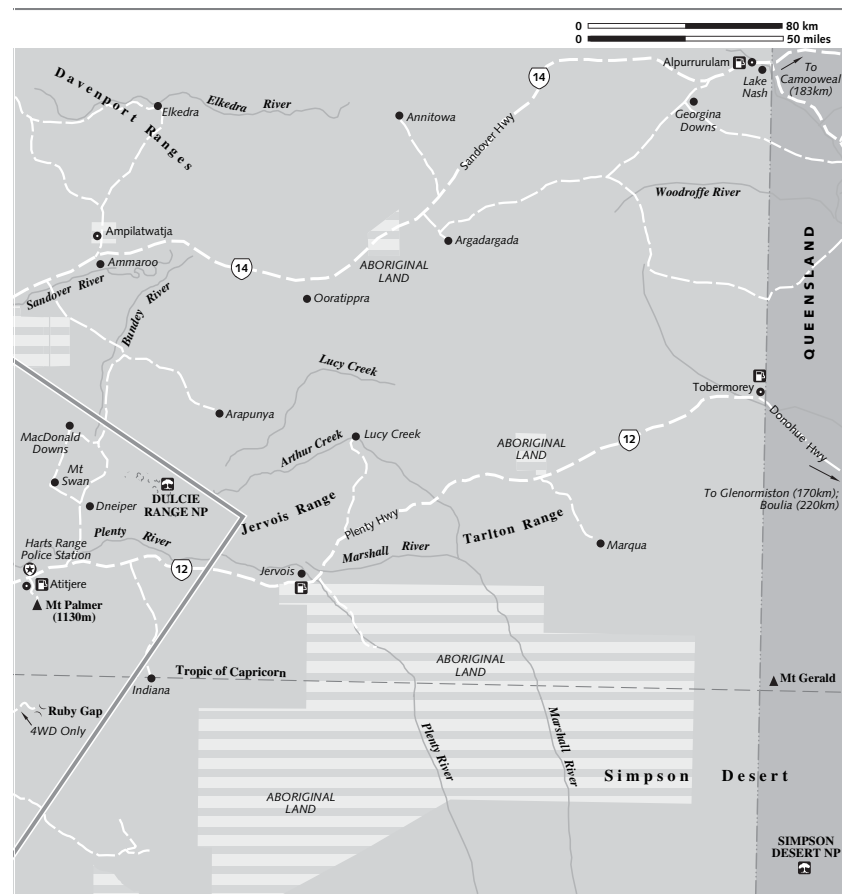
A further 11km brings you to the marker for the **Tropic of Capricorn**, a skeletal globe with some information panels. Although this marks the line of 23°44'S latitude, it's a long way north to 17°8'S before you feel the true transition from the dry Centre to the seasonally wet tropics.

The **Native Gap Conservation Reserve** is a small gap in the Hann Range, 110km north of Alice Springs. There's a rest stop on the Stuart Hwy and this is a registered sacred site, known to the local Aboriginal people as Arulte Artwayte.

After another 19km the road crosses the small **Ryan Well Historic Reserve**, which preserves the ruins of a well and the remains of an early homestead.

## AILERON

The first major stop on this part of the highway comes 138km north of Alice Springs, where the Aileron roadhouse sits next to the homestead of Aileron Station. The historical homestead now houses a surpris-



ingly large collection of some 200 works by the Namatjira family – including about 10 painted by Albert. You can look around for free and there are also dot paintings by the local Anmatyerre community. Outside you can say hello to the pet wedge-tailed eagle, which has been here for 23 years after recovering from an accident. The quirky roadhouse owner is currently building a 13m-high statue of an Aboriginal warrior on the hill behind the homestead!

**Aileron Hotel Roadhouse** (☎ 8956 9703; www.aileron.com.au; camp sites per person \$8.50, dm \$30, s/d \$80/90; 🕒 7am–10pm Mon–Sat, 7am–9pm Sun; 📶) has grassed camp sites (power available till 10pm), a 10-bed dorm, self-contained motel units and a swimming pool. The li-

censed restaurant (meals \$10 to \$22) serves counter meals and a Sunday roast (\$17), as well as takeaways. There's a bar and also a small shop and ATM. All types of fuel are available. Ask here about access to **Anna's Reservoir Conservation Reserve** to the west, a 36km drive into the station property.

## TI TREE &amp; AROUND

pop 105

The small town of Ti Tree is 193km north of Alice Springs. It's a service centre for the surrounding Aboriginal communities, including Pmara Jutunta and Utopia (200km east).

The town, originally called Tea Tree Wells after the ti-tree-lined waterhole about 300m west of the roadhouse, began as a settlement



## DETOUR

About 50km north of Alice Springs, a turn-off from the Stuart Hwy known as the **Arltunga Gardens Tourist Drive** heads east for 125km to Arltunga, the historical former gold-mining town at the eastern end of the East MacDonnell Ranges (p238). It's effectively an alternative route and means you can do a loop drive from Alice to Arltunga and back via the Ross Hwy. The dirt road passes through cattle country just south of the Harts Range. Along the way you pass through the Gardens, Ambalindum and Claraville stations. A couple of 4WD side routes off this road head north to the Plenty Hwy.

Although the road is accessible to conventional vehicles in dry conditions, a 4WD is recommended and it may be impassable after heavy rains. Allow two hours from the Stuart Hwy to Arltunga.

on the Overland Telegraph Line. In 1971 the Anmatyerre Aboriginal people won the lease of the Ti Tree Station and it's now the settlement of Pmara Juntuna.

**Red Sand Art** (☎ 8956 9738; www.redsandart.com.au; ☹ 7am-7pm), just west of the highway, is an excellent repository for artworks from the surrounding 1800 sq km Utopia homelands. Artists work in-house daily; prices for a didgeridoo run from \$100 to \$350 and dot paintings cost from \$100 to \$9000 for a large piece. There's a café (meals \$4 to \$7) serving sandwiches, rolls, pies and drinks.

**Ti Tree Roadhouse** (☎ 8956 9741; powered/unpowered camp sites for 2 \$17/11, tw/q \$45/55, motel s/d \$75/85; ☹ 6am-10pm Mon-Sat, 6am-9pm Sun; 🚰) has a range of accommodation, including motel rooms with TV, fridge and air-con. Flo's Bar – erroneously called 'the most central pub in Australia' – serves huge bistro meals (\$10 to \$18) all day and night, and has a pool table. There's an ATM here and fuel is available.

About 12km south of Ti Tree, **Red Centre Farm** (☎ 8956 9828; www.redcentrefarm.com; ☹ 9am-7pm), otherwise known as 'Shatto Mango', is an essential stop if you're interested in sampling some unique Territory wines. It's one of about a dozen farms growing table grapes and mangoes thanks to water provided by subartesian bores. The small store here sells a diverse range of mango and

grape products, including toppings, preserves, marinades and delicious mango ice cream. But the star attraction is the range of wines, ports and liqueurs, with free tastings. They sell for \$10 to \$15.

## CENTRAL MT STUART HISTORICAL RESERVE

A cairn beside the Stuart Hwy 20km north of Ti Tree commemorates John McDouall Stuart's naming of Central Mt Stuart, a hill about 12km to the northwest. The cairn is part of the historical reserve that includes Central Mt Stuart.

Stuart thought he had reached the centre of Australia (although he was a fair way off; see Lambert Centre p243 for the true geographical centre), and named the 'mountain' Central Mt Sturt after his former expedition leader and friend, Charles Sturt. The name was later changed to honour Stuart himself.

## BARROW CREEK

Historical Barrow Creek sits next to the Stuart Hwy, where the road passes through a dramatic gap in the Watt Range about 70km north of Central Mt Stuart.

It's the site of one of the few surviving OTL stations and has one of the quirkiest outback pub-roadhouses along the track. Barrow Creek received international attention in 2001 when British backpacker Peter Falconio disappeared in a high-profile murder case just north of here.

## Sights

Next to the Barrow Creek Hotel is one of four original **telegraph stations** on the OTL from Port Augusta to Darwin. Built in 1872, it operated as a repeater station and post office until taken over by Parks Australia as a heritage building in 1988. The buildings, including a blacksmiths shop and wagon shed, are well preserved, although there's nothing to see inside. In February 1874 the telegraph station, under stationmaster James Stapleton, was attacked by a group of Kaytetye Aboriginal men. Stapleton and a linesman were killed; their graves are close to the station. The attack came as something of a surprise as Stapleton had adopted a fairly enlightened (for the times) approach to the local Aboriginal population, and had provided food for those who were ill. The

South Australian government authorised a punitive expedition that led to the deaths of at least 50 Aboriginal people.

The WWII staging camp of **New Barrow**, the largest in the Territory, lies signposted 1km east of the highway, about 30km north of Barrow Creek. There's very little left to see – just a few concrete foundations and various bits of scrap metal lying around. From 1942 to 1945 the station accommodated up to 1000 troops and equipment travelling up and down the Stuart Hwy.

## Sleeping & Eating

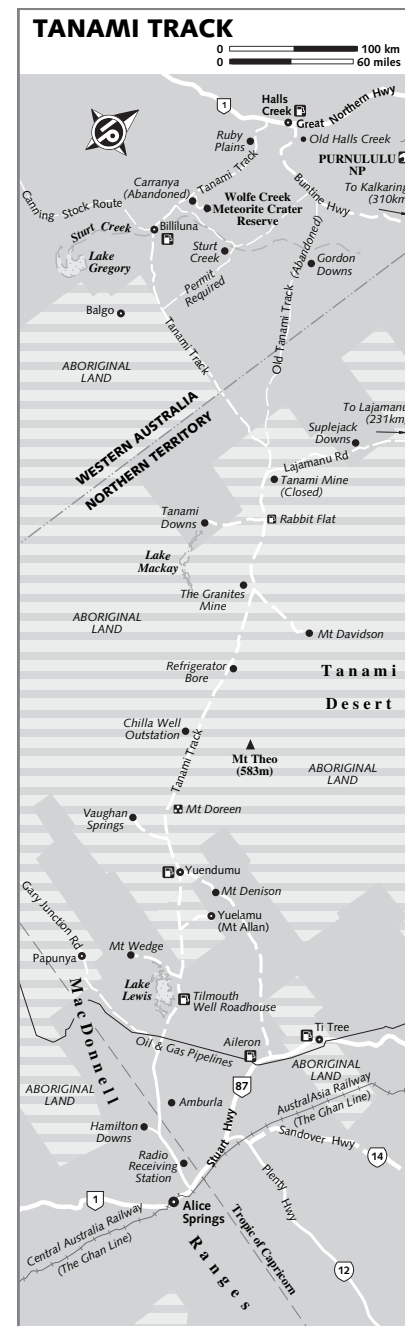
**Barrow Creek Hotel & Roadhouse** (☎ 8956 9753; Stuart Hwy; powered/unpowered camp sites for 2 \$10/6, tr \$50; ☹ 7am-midnight) One of the highway's oddball outback pubs, the crusty Barrow Creek Hotel opened in 1932. The walls are adorned with all manner of drawings, cartoons and bank notes – ringers (shearers) would leave a banknote on the wall with their name on it so that they would have enough for a drink the next time they passed through. Now travellers and passers-by follow suit. Fuel is available from 7am to 11pm, and main meals (\$8 to \$18) are served from 6pm to 8pm, but you can get snacks throughout the day.

## TANAMI TRACK

Spearing 1000km through some of the Territory's most remote country, even the name of this track conjures up images of an isolated outback driving experience. The Tanami Track connects Alice Springs with Halls Creek on the Great Northern Hwy in Western Australia and is essentially a short cut between the Centre and the Kimberley region.

Despite the remoteness – or perhaps because of it – the Tanami is an increasingly popular route for travellers who want to get off the beaten track, and in the cooler months there is quite a bit of traffic (up to 100 vehicles a day pass through Rabbit Flat) so a breakdown need not cause alarm if you're well prepared with food and water. In summer the heat can be extreme – days where the temperature hits 50°C are not uncommon – so think carefully before setting off at this time.

In dry conditions it's possible to cover it in a well-prepared 2WD vehicle. The Northern



NORTH OF ALICE

NORTH OF ALICE

## TANAMI ON TWO WHEELS

If you think tackling the Tanami on four wheels is daunting – with your low-range gearbox, 100L of water, spare tyres and esky in the back – imagine doing it on a bicycle. Alice resident Ronn Slusser and his partner Dorinda Blok did just that in 1999 as part of a 6½-week, 3100km epic ride from Alice to Darwin via Halls Creek, Fitzroy Crossing, the Gibb River Rd, Kununurra and Katherine. All for fun, of course.

Ronn says they averaged a whopping 100km a day (about 10 days' riding from Alice to Halls Creek), carrying 70kg of gear each, including tent, sleeping bags, self-inflating mattress, cooking gear, food and water. Although it was a tough trip, the pair encountered few problems on the corrugated and occasionally sandy track: 'We had to zigzag a bit to find the most comfortable line. You can hear road trains coming a mile away and move over – a bigger danger is tourists in their Britz vans!'

Ronn says the vastness of the desert scenery is ample reward for all the hard work: 'On a bike you've got plenty of time to stop and see everything in detail.' No stranger to danger, Ronn is an experienced bushwalker, balloon-pilot and reptile handler with two serious snakebites to his name! His tips for a safe cycling trip:

- Carry a good map showing water points along the way.
- Travel light, including easily prepared, high-energy meals such as dried and tinned food.
- Start early each day and ride within your limitations, setting up camp well before sunset.
- Make sure you're fit and healthy before setting out, and make a few shorter practice runs.
- Carry necessary spares including tyre, tube and repair kit.
- Avoid riding in summer.

Territory section is wide and usually well graded (sealed almost to Tilmouth Well), but between the Western Australia border and Halls Creek some sandy patches and creek crossings require care; a high-clearance vehicle is advisable. After rain (which is rare), sections of the track around Sturt Creek and Billiluna can become impassable. In any case, this is no Sunday drive, so notify someone of your plans.

The Tanami Desert is the traditional homeland of the Warlpiri Aboriginal people, and for much of its length the Track passes through Aboriginal land. Permits are not required for travel on the Tanami Track, unless you want to venture more than 50m either side of the road. You don't need a permit to visit the Aboriginal community at Yuendumu or to stop at Rabbit Flat.

Tourist sights along the track are few: there's an excellent Aboriginal art centre at Yuendumu, the quirkiness of Rabbit Flat Roadhouse and, on the Western Australian side, the detour to Wolfe Creek Meteorite Crater. It's more about the outback driving experience and the stark desert scenery of low ranges, endless spinifex grass and the odd termite mound.

Fuel is available at Tilmouth Well (188km from Alice Springs), Yuendumu (288km), Rabbit Flat Roadhouse (590km; open Friday to Monday only), Billiluna (850km; business hours only) and Halls Creek (1020km).

## Maps

The best map is Wesprint's *Tanami Track* 1:1,000,000, a double-sided sheet covering the track from Alice Springs to Halls Creek with GPS locations and places of interest. Hema's *Great Desert Tracks – North Central* 1:1,250,000 includes the Tanami, along with a large chunk of the centre, from Alice to Tennant Creek, Uluru and Warburton in Western Australia.

## History

The first European exploration of the Tanami Desert was undertaken by the surveyor and explorer AC Gregory in 1855. His party headed south from the Victoria River to what is now Lajamanu, then turned west until they came to a dry watercourse near the present Western Australia–Northern Territory border, which Gregory named Sturt Creek, after the explorer. He followed the creek southwest to a lake southwest of Balgo,

which he humbly named after himself, before returning to his Victoria River base.

Allan Davidson was the first European to explore the Tanami Desert in any depth. In 1900 he set out looking for gold and mapped likely looking areas. Gold was discovered at a couple of sites and for a few years there was a flurry of activity as hopefuls came in search of a fortune. The extremely harsh conditions and small finds deterred all but the most determined, and there were never more than a couple of hundred miners in the Tanami. The biggest finds were at Tanami and The Granites; after many years of inactivity the latter was reopened in 1986 and is still being mined today. The Tanami Mine closed in 1994.

Pastoral activity has always been precarious, although some areas are suitable for grazing. Suplejack Downs and Tanami Downs, 60km north and southwest of Rabbit Flat respectively, are two that have survived. At the southern end of the track, Tilmouth Well is on the 3500 sq km privately owned Napperby Station. In 1962, the first stock route from Alice Springs to Billiluna was opened, and over the next decade it was realigned and upgraded to form the present-day Tanami Hwy.

## TILMOUTH WELL

About 120km from the Stuart Hwy you pass the turn-off to Papunya (permit required) and from there it's 50km to the first major stop, the Tilmouth Well Roadhouse, which sits on the banks of the (usually) dry Napperby Creek at the southern end of the Napperby cattle station.

The roadhouse has fashioned itself into something of a tourist stop, with a nine-hole bush golf course, station tours, horse riding and bushwalking. You can buy a \$20 'station pass' and drive yourself around to see some of the station activities, or ask about guided tours. Also at the roadhouse, the **Wirmbrandt Gallery** displays reasonably priced Aboriginal art from surrounding communities, including Yuendumu, Yuelamu and Pmara Jutunta.

**Tilmouth Well Roadhouse** (☎ 8956 8777; www.tilmouthwell.com; sites per person \$8, s/d \$45/60; 🕒 7am–9pm; 📍 🚰 🚻) has pleasant, grassy camping, refurbished cabins with shared facilities, gas barbecues and a pool. It also has a bar and licensed restaurant with takeaways (try the

freshly ground hamburgers). Fuel and basic spare parts are available.

## YUENDUMU

pop 740

Next stop is the Aboriginal community of Yuendumu, which lies 2km north of the track, 100km on from Tilmouth Well. Yuendumu has a thriving arts community and the work put out by the Warlukurlangu artists is highly regarded.

Permits are not required to shop or refuel in Yuendumu. It's worth popping into the **Warlukurlangu Art Centre** (☎ 8956 4133; www.warlur .com; 🕒 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, by appointment Sat & Sun), an Aboriginal-owned art venture specialising in acrylic paintings, screen prints and etchings, as well as crafts from the region.

The community has a **medical centre** (☎ 8956 4030), **police station** (☎ 8956 4004), school and a couple of stores. The **Yuendumu Mining Company store** (☎ 8956 4040; 🕒 9am–2pm & 3–5pm Mon–Fri, 1–5pm Sat & Sun) has fuel and grocery supplies, while the **Yuendumu Store** (☎ 8956 4006; 🕒 8.30am–5pm Mon–Fri, 9am–1pm Sat & Sun) also sells fuel and has a fairly well-stocked supermarket. Note that Yuendumu is a dry community.

Every year on the August long weekend, the town hosts the **Yuendumu Sports Weekend**,

## YUENDUMU DOORS

Back in 1983 – some 12 years after the famous art movement had first begun in Papunya – a group of Warlpiri Aboriginal Elders agreed to share some of their *Dreaming stories* by painting them on 30 doors of the primary school in Yuendumu.

The designs represented 27 *Dreaming stories* associated with sites in the Warlpiri and Anmatyerre lands. The paintings were a way of reaffirming the Warlpiri's links to the land and passing these *stories* on, in a contemporary way, to the schoolchildren of Yuendumu. The doors are now preserved at the South Australian Museum in Adelaide, but they inspired an art movement that is highly regarded for its use of vibrant colours and rich, intricate designs.

Some of the original artists (Paddy Simms and Paddy Stewart among them) are still painting at Yuendumu. You can see their work, plus that of many other artists, at the Warlukurlangu Art Centre.

a sporting and cultural festival for Aboriginal people from all over this region. Visitors are welcome and no permits are required to visit the town over this weekend, although you will need your own camping gear.

## GRANITES GOLD MINE

Just before the gold-bearing mine called The Granites, 256km northwest of Yuen-dumu, there's a low rocky outcrop on the left of the road and a couple of **old ruins** that date back to the 1930s.

The Granites mine site was first pegged in 1927. Then the returns were small, with a yield of only about 1000 ounces per year, and the mine only operated until 1947. In 1986 it was reopened and production is currently running at around 5000kg of gold per year.

## RABBIT FLAT

Another 51km from The Granites, and just off the track, you come to the Rabbit Flat Roadhouse, probably the most famous place on the Tanami and often called the most remote pub in the country. It's nothing to rave about – a couple of breeze-block buildings, petrol bowsers from another era and a few fuel tanks – but it has a certain outback charm. Being the only place for hundreds of kilometres where thirsty locals and miners can buy a drink, on Friday and Saturday nights it can get pretty lively with all the workers in from the mines.

The roadhouse is only open from Friday to Monday, so it's worth planning your trip to pass through then, or ensure you have

### DETOUR

The Lajamanu Rd heads north off the Tanami Track at the Tanami Mine for 230km to the **Lajamanu** Aboriginal community in the heart of the Tanami Desert. Although it's not a bad road, a 4WD is recommended to get through the numerous creek-bed crossings and sandy patches. A permit is not required to transit and get fuel and supplies at Lajamanu.

This route continues on to Kalkaringi on the Buntine Hwy, then to Katherine via Top Springs. The countryside changes noticeably as you leave the red spinifex plains of the central desert and enter the grassed and lightly treed cattle country of the Top End.

enough fuel to get to the next fuel stop at Billiluna. Diesel and unleaded fuel is available at some of the highest prices in the country – more than \$2 a litre at the time of writing.

**Rabbit Flat Roadhouse** (☎ 8956 8744; camping per person \$3, showers \$3; ☎ 7am–9pm Fri–Mon) has basic bush camping, and provisions and takeaway beer are available. There is an Eftpos facility for debit accounts (no credit cards).

## RABBIT FLAT TO HALLS CREEK (WA)

From Rabbit Flat the track continues northwest for 44km to the now-defunct **Tanami Mine** (no public access).

After the Lajamanu turn-off, the Track swings west to the Western Australia border and beyond. The route between the Tanami Mine and **Billiluna** Aboriginal community was established in the 1960s by Father McGuire from what was then the Balgo Aboriginal Mission.

It is 78km from the Tanami Mine to the border, and another 86km beyond that will see you at the junction of the road to Billiluna, nearly 40km to the south. The track continues for another 48km through several floodplains to the crossing of **Sturt Creek**. Just north of here, on the western bank, are a couple of pleasant spots for camping. Further along is the turn-off to **Wolfe Creek Meteorite Crater**, the second largest of its type in the world and one of the main locations for the gory 2005 outback horror flick, *Wolf Creek*. The major T-intersection with Hwy 1, just 16km southwest of Halls Creek, marks the return to the bitumen.

## PLENTY HIGHWAY

Leaving the Stuart Hwy 70km north of Alice Springs, the 492km-long Plenty Hwy stretches across a semi-arid plain to the Queensland border at Tobermorey, where it becomes the Donohue Hwy and continues to Boulia in western Queensland. From there you can head north to Mount Isa or south to Birdsville, which makes this a rugged but convenient entry/exit point from the east.

This is very remote country and even in winter you can drive the entire route and see fewer than a dozen vehicles. Facilities are basic and a fair way apart, so you must be self-sufficient in everything (food

and water) and have a fuel range of at least 300km. Other than fossicking in the Harts Range around Gemtree, the only reason to venture out here is to get to/from Queensland and enjoy the outback experience.

The first 103km from the Stuart Hwy are sealed, but after that the road can be extremely rough and corrugated; large bulldust holes are a common hazard on the Queensland side. The unsealed section is passable only in dry weather and is normally not recommended for caravans. Fuel is available at Gemtree (140km from Alice Springs), Atitjere Aboriginal community (215km), Jervois Homestead (356km), Tobermorey Homestead (570km) and Boulia (812km).

## History

The puzzling disappearance of the German explorer Ludwig Leichhardt and his large, well-equipped party is one of Australia's great unsolved mysteries. Leichhardt vanished somewhere in the interior on his final expedition in 1846. It's possible he crossed the area of the Plenty Hwy while trying to return. In 1886 the surveyor David Lindsay, of Simpson Desert fame, found trees in the Harts Range that had been carved with Leichhardt's distinctive mark. Many years later, more marked trees were discovered along the Georgina River on Glenormiston Station (Queensland).

Henry Barclay was one of the next Europeans on the scene. In 1878, while carrying out a trigonometric survey from Alice Springs to the Queensland border, he was northeast of the Harts Range when he was faced with a critical water shortage. Barclay dug into a sandy river-bed and found ample supplies of the precious fluid, hence the name Plenty River, from where the present beef road got its name.

## Getting There & Away

**Desert Venturer** (☎ 07-4035 5566; www.desertventurer.com.au) is the only public transport on the Plenty Hwy, with a twice-weekly three-day coach trip between Alice Springs and Cairns, overnighing at Boulia and Hughenden. The one-way fare is \$350 plus \$55 for meals.

## GEMTREE

Around 70km from the Stuart Hwy you come to the Gemtree Caravan Park on the

### THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Gemtree Caravan Park** (☎ 8956 9855; www.gemtree.com.au; powered/unpowered sites for 2 \$22/18, cabins \$65; reception ☎ 8am–6pm) is an obvious stop if you are planning on fossicking. The park has a peaceful bush feel with good facilities, including pockets of shade, hot showers, a shop selling basic groceries and meat, a public telephone and fuel. Games of paddymelon bowls, with damper to follow, provide some light entertainment on Saturday nights in the cooler months. Paddymelons, squashes that look like small round watermelons, are often found beside outback roads. There's also a parched nine-hole golf course – a round costs \$5 including club hire.

gum-lined banks of Gillen Creek. This is the only tourist facility of note on the Plenty Hwy and it's close to the heart of the gemfields, where garnets and zircons can be unearthed. From here there are daily guided tag-along **fossicking trips** (two people \$60; ☎ 9am) to the **Mud Tank zircon field** 10km away and to garnet deposits on a private lease about 30km away.

The zircon field and one or two of the garnet deposits can be reached by conventional vehicles (driven with care), provided it hasn't been raining. Fossicking permits (free) can be obtained at the Gemtree Caravan Park; permits are not required for the tour.

## HARTS RANGE

Beyond the Harts Range fossicking area, high ridges and mountains keep you company for the next 40km to the **Harts Range police station** (☎ 8956 9772). The two police officers based here have the awesome task of preserving law and order over a sparsely populated area of 110,000 sq km. They're kept particularly busy controlling revellers during the colourful **Harts Range Races**, which take place here over the first weekend in August. This classic outback race day features a barbecue and bush dance on the Saturday night.

From the racecourse just south of the police station, a 4WD track leads to **Mt Palmer**. At 600m above the northern plain, this is one of the highest points in the Harts Range, and has many large cycads growing on its southern flank. It's well worth climbing – the

### THERE'S GEMS IN THEM THAR HILLS

The gemfields of the Harts Range are littered with gems and minerals such as garnet, zircon, black and green tourmaline, sphene, mica, smoky and rose quartz, aquamarine, sunstone, ruby, iolite and kyanite. Between Ongeva Creek and the Harts Range police station is central Australia's premier fossicking area, and if you're prepared to put your back into it and be patient you should be able to find something. On the downside, this area is extremely rugged and the best fossicking spots are hard to get to – high-clearance 4WD vehicles are essential for most tracks. South of the Harts Range police station is an area of old mine sites where you can fossick through mullock heaps.

You'll need a fossicking permit (free; available from Gemtree Caravan Park), a bucket, shovel and sieve (preferably two – wet and dry) for sifting out the soil, and plenty of water. Garnets and zircons are found close to the surface, so you need only dig down half a metre. For garnets, dry-sieve the soil, then wash the remaining rocks and look for a dull red colour. The best stones are a rich claret colour with a transparency when held up to sunlight. Zircons (not to be confused with cubic zirconias) are often colourless (like a diamond) but can be black, brown, yellow or green. They're much harder to spot and you'll need a board to sort potential stones on. At Mud Tank, the top 80cm of soil conceals zircons of various colours (including yellow, light brown, pink, purple and blue), ranging in size from small chips to large crystals.

If you're a novice, the best way to get started is to go on a guided fossicking tour from Gemtree, where you'll certainly unearth either garnets or zircons. If you find anything worth faceting, Gemtree's gem-cutter can turn your find into a beautiful stone for \$20 a carat (minimum \$40).

atmosphere and the sweeping panorama from the top are magnificent.

The **Atitjere Community Store** (☎ 8956 9773; ☏ 9am-noon & 3-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) sells basic foodstuffs and cold drinks, as well as fuel (unleaded and diesel). Ask here about the community's **bush camping ground** (sites for 2 \$10), which has hot showers and pit toilets.

### JERVOIS

Heading east, the first 50km from the police station are extremely scenic, with attractive tall woodlands of whitewood and weeping ironwood fronting the crumpled ranges. Mulga and gidgee dominate later. Past the ranges, scattered low ridges, flat-topped hills and occasional, beautiful, gum-lined creeks break the monotony of the endless plain.

About 130km east of Harts Range you reach **Jervois Homestead** (☎ 8956 6307), a scruffy place where you can buy fuel (unleaded and diesel) during the day; note that credit cards are not accepted. Public telephones, showers (\$2) and toilets are available here. You can camp either at the turn-off, where there's a lay-by, or at a small **camping ground** (sites per vehicle \$5) at the first gate about 1km in on the homestead access road.

For something different, you can inspect the huge rocket-proof shelter that was built at the homestead during the 1960s, when

Blue Streak test rockets were fired in this direction from Woomera in South Australia. Instead of huddling inside as they were supposed to, the station folk preferred to stand on top to watch the fireworks.

### JERVOIS TO BOULIA (QLD)

The highlight of this section is right beside the road, 50km past the turn-off to Jervois Homestead. Here a conical **termite mound** nearly 5m high rears like a breaching whale above the surrounding sea of stunted mallees and spinifex – it's an extraordinary sight.

On the Territory side of the border, **Tobermorey Homestead** (☎ 07-4748 4996; camp sites for 2 \$20, air-con cabins \$75; ☏ 8am-8pm; ☎ ) has a small shop that sells drinks, snacks, minor grocery lines and fuel (unleaded and diesel).

At the Queensland border, the road becomes the Donohue Hwy. Crossing the border grid, you'll also usually notice a dramatic change in road conditions – the Boulia Shire does its best, but it only takes a few road trains to break the surface and form deep bull-dust holes.

At 118km past the border you come to the **Georgina River**. Other than the vast expanses of empty space, this waterway is the highlight on the Queensland side. About 30km west of **Boulia** you meet the bitumen and joyous relief from the dust and corru-

gations. Boulia, an isolated township, has a good range of facilities, including a hospital, police station, post office, hotel, caravan park and two garages.

## SANDOVER HIGHWAY

Leaving the Plenty Hwy 96km from Alice Springs, the Sandover Hwy heads northeast across flat semidesert for 587km and terminates at Lake Nash Homestead, near the Queensland border. Named after the Sandover River, which it follows for about 250km, this wide ribbon of red dirt is an adventurous short cut between central Australia and northwest Queensland – from Lake Nash it's about another 200km to Mount Isa.

Prolonged heavy rain causes flooding that can keep the highway closed for days. In the late 1980s it was closed to all traffic for several months after long sections were washed away in a terrific deluge. Although often rough, when dry it's normally suitable for conventional vehicles with high ground clearance and heavy-duty suspension. However, it's definitely not recommended for caravans.

While tourist facilities along the road are nonexistent, you can buy fuel and supplies at the Arlparra Store (249km from Alice Springs) and the Alpururulam Store (643km from Alice Springs) – which means you'll need a fuel range of at least 400km.

### History

For most of its distance the Sandover Hwy crosses the traditional lands of the Alyawarra people, whose lives until recent times focused on the relatively rich environment of the Sandover River. Europeans arrived in the 1880s, when the Lake Nash and Argadargada Stations were established for sheep and cattle grazing. The loss of food resources and the fouling of precious water by cattle caused bloody conflict between pastoralists and Aboriginal people. The so-called Sandover Massacre of the 1920s resulted in the deaths of about 100 Alyawarra, who were either shot or poisoned for spearing cattle.

Atartinga Station, about 140km north-east of Alice Springs, was taken up by RH (Bob) Purvis in 1920. Known as the Sandover Alligator because of his extraordinary appetite, Purvis was contracted in the late 1920s to sink wells along the newly gazet-

ted Sandover Stock Route. The route was continued through to Lake Nash after the 1940s, but the Sandover Hwy remained, for the most part, little more than a bush track until the 1970s, when it was upgraded to a standard suitable for road trains.

### UTOPIA

Turning off the Plenty Hwy 26km from the Stuart Hwy, the Sandover crosses a vast plain of mallee, spinifex and mulga woodland with occasional patches of shady white-barked gums virtually all the way to the Ammaroo turn-off. This is marginal cattle country – the average station en route has only about 25% useful grazing land. In semidesert spinifex areas, a 10-sq-km area will support billions of termites, but only one cow.

About 127km from the Plenty Hwy you cross the western boundary of the Aboriginal-owned **Utopia Station**. Many well-known artists hail from the Utopia Homelands, but there's no art centre here and no access for tourists. The station is home to about 700 Alyawarra people, who live in 20 small outstations scattered over an area of 2500 sq km. These are governed by a council based at **Arlparra**, which you pass 27km further on. The fence 23km past Arlparra marks the boundary between Utopia and Ammaroo Stations.

The remote **Arlparra store** (☎ 8956 9910; ☏ 9am-noon & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) mainly serves the Aboriginal communities of Utopia Station. It sells fuel and has a well-stocked minimarket.

### LAKE NASH

Past Ammaroo, the undulating countryside and stony rises give sweeping views over an ocean of grey-green scrub and the southern end of the Davenport Range.

About 317km from Ammaroo, the glittering iron roofs of the **Alpururulam** Aboriginal community come into view on the left. The end of the highway is just five minutes away, at Lake Nash Homestead, the centre of the largest of the Sandover's stations at around 13,000 sq km. From here you have a choice of three routes: north to Camooweal (183km), east to Mount Isa (205km) or south to Urandangi (172km). All are minor dirt roads. Black soil sections make them impassable after rain. Signposting is poor from here and maps seldom show the roads' true positions. If in doubt,

the best approach is to fill up with fuel at Alpururulam and ask for directions and an update on road conditions.

The **Alpururulam Community Store** (☎ 07-4787 4860; 🕒 8-11am & 3-5pm Mon-Fri, 8-11am Sat) has fuel and basic food supplies. Nearby,

a **service station** (🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) sells all types of fuel and can attend to minor vehicle repairs. Although you're welcome to use these facilities, do not proceed further into the community without an invitation and permission.

# West MacDonnell & James Ranges



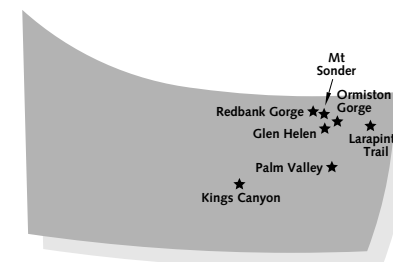
Leaving the brief 'urban sprawl' of Alice Springs, it takes only a matter of minutes to find yourself enveloped in these low-lying but spectacular ranges crawling to the west. In contrast to the flat, desolate regions further north and south, this is central Australia at its enigmatic best. Boasting three outstanding national parks and superb bushwalking, this area beckons travellers with some of central Australia's biggest drawcards. The rugged MacDonnell Ranges, rich in Aboriginal heritage, march like giant caterpillars for 400km across the vast central plain, and to the west of the Alice they open up to form spectacular natural features such as Simpsons Gap, Standley Chasm (Angkerle) and Ormiston Gorge. Stretching across these ranges is one of Australia's great long-distance walking tracks, the Larapinta Trail.

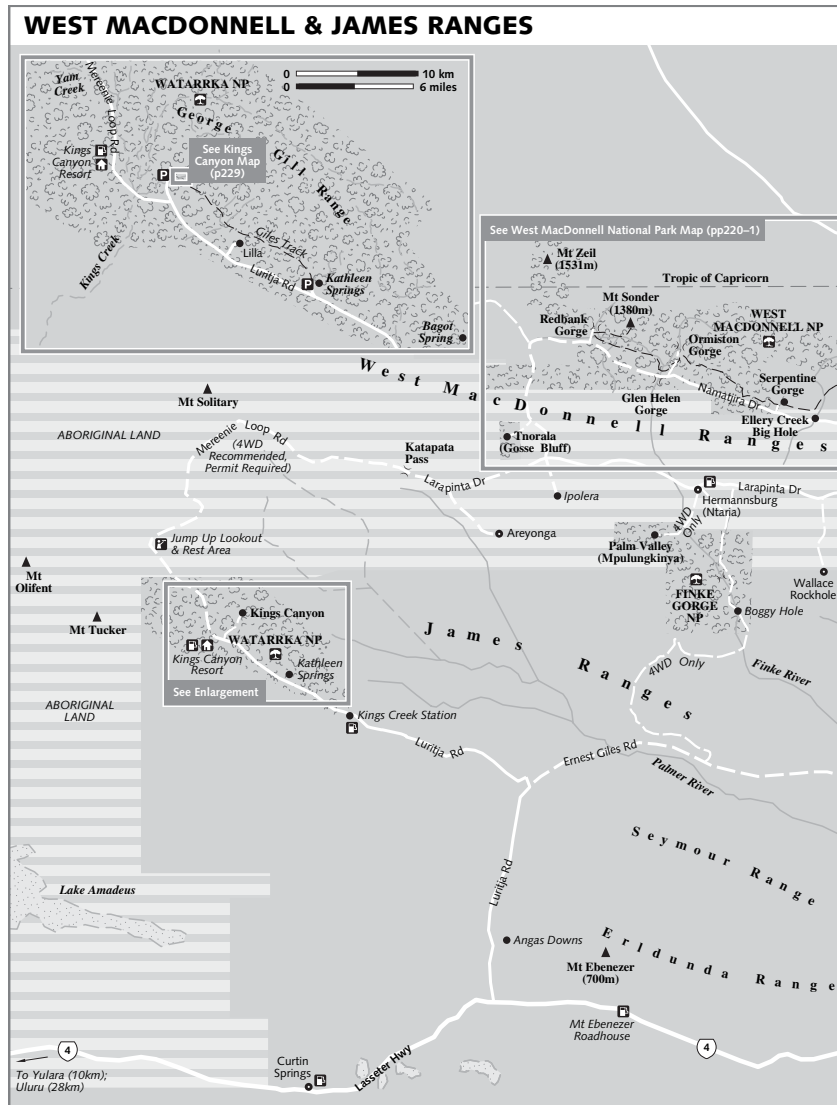
Further south, the James Ranges reach east to Watarrka National Park and the stunning Kings Canyon. In between is the luxuriant Palm Valley, part of the incredibly wild Finke Gorge National Park. Exploring these special places on foot and by 4WD gives a true sense of the rugged isolation and timelessness of the land.

A vehicle is essential to get the best out of the West MacDonnells. Most of the region is accessible by 2WD along sealed roads or maintained gravel roads, but to explore Finke Gorge National Park you'll need a 4WD. Camping is the way to go out here, but you can sleep in style at Kings Canyon and Glen Helen. Although many visitors zip through in a day or two, you could easily spend a week or more bushwalking, relaxing and enjoying the changing moods of the landscape.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Wandering around the lush palms and camping overnight at **Palm Valley** (p227)
- Walking the rim trail to stare down into the majestic **Kings Canyon** (p231)
- Rising early to watch a Namatjira painting come to life with the changing colours of dawn breaking over **Mt Sonder** (p223)
- Hiking a stage or two of one of Australia's great walks – the **Larapinta Trail** (p218)
- Enjoying a candlelit dinner and a bush band at **Glen Helen Homestead** (p223)
- Taking a quick helicopter flight over **Ormiston Gorge** (p222), then walking the superb track through the gorge and Ormiston Pound
- Floating on an air mattress through the tranquillity of **Redbank Gorge** (p224)

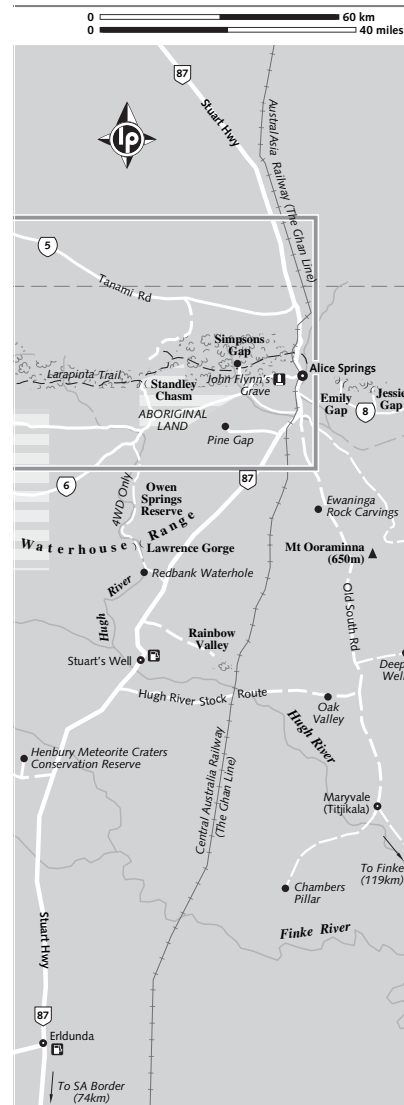




## WEST MACDONNELL NATIONAL PARK

With icy waterholes, spectacular red gorges, central Australia's longest marked walking track and all the hues of a Namatjira

painting, the West Macdonnell National Park is the jewel of the ranges. It stretches unbroken along the range from the Stuart Hwy just north of Alice Springs to Mt Zeil, 170km to the west, with short detours off the main sealed road leading to a string of beautiful gorges, camping grounds and bushwalks.



## Animals & Plants

To the casual observer the rich wildlife of the ranges can be difficult to appreciate (let alone see), but dwelling in the rocky crevices and permanent waterholes is a diverse bunch of animals – some 167 species of bird, 85 species of reptile, 23 species of native mammal, five species of frog and various fish are found in this area.

Most mammals are nocturnal and shy, although you're likely to see black-footed rock wallabies foraging on the rocks at several spots, such as Standley Chasm and Ormiston Gorge, along with euros and red kangaroos. Birds are easier to spot, and several colourful species of parrot will probably cross your trail at some point.

Although arid, the ranges are covered with a huge variety of plants, including many tall trees, with the majestic ghost gums an outstanding feature. In hidden, moist places are relics of the rainforest flora that covered this region millions of years ago.

## Information

There are national park visitors centres at **Simpsons Gap** (☎ 8955 0310; ⏰ 5am–8pm) and **Ormiston Gorge** (☎ 8956 7799; ⏰ 5am–8pm) and each main site throughout the park has information signs covering geological formations, Aboriginal lore and wildlife.

Fuel is available at Glen Helen Resort, Hermannsburg, Kings Canyon Resort and Kings Creek Station.

## GUIDED WALKS & TALKS

During the main tourist season (May to October), Parks & Wildlife rangers conduct free scheduled 'walks and talks' at Simpsons Gap and Ormiston Gorge. The programme varies, but may include walks, a themed campfire talk or a slide show – check with **Parks & Wildlife** (☎ 8951 8211) for times and locations, or check at the respective visitors centres.

## Activities

### BUSHWALKING

In dry conditions, all the attractions are accessible to conventional vehicles. Most can be visited in a long day trip from Alice, but to get the most out of the area, plan to camp along the way or stay at Glen Helen Resort for at least one night. Namatjira Drive splits off Larapinta Drive and is sealed to the Finke River crossing near Glen Helen Gorge.

Walkers will find plenty to do in the ranges, from a 10-minute stroll into Simpsons Gap to the superb two-hour Ormiston Pound walk. Don't miss the short walks into Standley Chasm or Redbank Gorge. Serious walkers should consider the tough eight-hour return walk to the summit of Mt Sonder, or plan to walk part of the Larapinta Trail.

## LARAPINTA TRAIL

The 230km Larapinta Trail extends along the backbone of the West MacDonnell Ranges and is undoubtedly one of Australia's great long-distance walks. It's split into 12 stages starting from the Old Telegraph Station at Alice Springs and following the ridge line to Mt Sonder, the fourth-highest peak in the Northern Territory. Opened in 2002, the trail is gaining popularity, but as often as not you'll find you have the ranges virtually to yourself. The first stage is the most popular, receiving around 2000 walkers a year. Along its length, the trail passes the permanent waterholes at Simpsons Gap, Standley Chasm, Ellery Creek, Ormiston Gorge and Redbank Gorge. Although this is described as a desert walk, in fact there's lots of vegetation, an artist's palette of wildflowers in the spring, amazing rocky outcrops and a booklist of birdlife.

The first day's 24km stretch to Simpson Gap is particularly spectacular, alternating between the ridge and the foot of the range and passing a number of smaller gaps and waterholes along the way. Section 3, a short 15km stretch from Jay Creek to Standley Chasm, is even better, departing the idyllic Jay Creek camping ground and following a twisting cut through the range then offering alternative high and low altitude routes, before descending the dramatically narrow, rocky and picturesque gorge that leads into Standley Chasm. Sections 4 and 5 follow high ridges with wonderful views, descending into Standley Chasm then through a series of challenging gorges. Section 6 is one of the tougher parts of the trail since there are no reliable water sources along the 31km walk. The final stages make a fitting finale to the classic walk. From Ormiston Gorge the trail leads to the Finke River before climbing to the summit of Mt Sonder with spectacular views in all directions.

There are more than 20 designated camping areas, and water sources on most stages. The trail is best walked in the cooler months from April to September since summer in the Centre can be incredibly hot and the waterholes are more likely to have dried up.

To complete the entire distance takes at least two weeks, which is far too long to carry supplies, particularly since even in winter the central Australian climate means you must carry plenty of water. It's best to walk the trail in sections with resupply points along the way.

Several companies offer organised walks of varying lengths on the trail. **Trek Larapinta** (☎ 8953 2933; www.treklarapinta.com.au), run by Charlie Carter, offers fully guided and catered walks from \$590 for a three-day walk from Ormiston to Mt Sonder, to \$1590 for an eight-day trek. The mother of all walks – the 20-day end-to-end – costs \$2970 and is scheduled once a year. Check the website for upcoming walks. **World Expeditions** (☎ 1300 720 000; www.worldexpeditions.com.au) has four-/eight-/14-day treks for \$900/1750/2990.

Detailed trail notes and maps (\$1.10 per section) are available from the Catia office in Alice Springs. Sections are graded as Class B (medium) and Class C (difficult, trail less well defined), but each stage will have some easy and some tough sections. The easiest stages are 1, 2, 7, 10 and 11.

## Larapinta Trail Sections

section	trail	distance (km)	duration (hrs)	rating
1	Alice Springs Telegraph Station to Simpsons Gap	24	9	B
2	Simpsons Gap to Jay Creek	25	9	B
3	Jay Creek to Standley Chasm	14	7	C
4	Standley Chasm to Birthday Water Hole	18	11	C
5	Birthday Water Hole to Hugh Gorge	16	9½	C
6	Hugh Gorge to Ellery Creek	31	10	C
7	Ellery Creek to Serpentine Gorge	14	6½	C
8	Serpentine Gorge to Inarlanga Pass (Ochre Pits)	20	8½	C
9	Inarlanga Pass (Ochre Pits) to Ormiston Gorge	30	21½	C
10	Ormiston Gorge to Glen Helen Gorge	13	5½	B
11	Glen Helen Gorge to Redbank Gorge	29	13	C
12	Redbank Gorge to Mt Sonder and return	16	8	C

For long-distance walkers, the problem lies in getting to or from the various trailheads. **Alice Wanderer** (☎ 8952 2111; www.alicewanderer.com.au) provides transfers to nine access points. Rates for two passengers include \$75 to Simpsons Gap, \$200 to Glen Helen Gorge and \$270 to Redbank Gorge, but you may be able to arrange a cheaper seat on a scheduled tour.

**Glen Helen Resort** (☎ 8956 7495; www.glenhelen.com.au) also runs transfers between Alice Springs and Glen Helen Gorge and the trailheads.

## Tours

**Alice Wanderer** (☎ 8952 2111; www.alicewanderer.com.au) has full day tours as far as Glen Helen Gorge, including morning tea and lunch for adult/child \$110/90, and a half-day trip to Simpsons Gap and Standley Chasm for \$70/55.

**Emu Run** (☎ 8953 7057; www.emurun.com.au) offers a recommended small-group day tour through the ranges for \$100, including lunch, afternoon tea and entrance fees.

**Ossies Outback 4WD Tours** (☎ 8952 2308; www.ossies.com.au) has excellent 4WD tours, including a three-day trip that goes through Finke Gorge National Park to Kings Canyon and Uluru. It costs from \$650 for the budget accommodation options. Another is a day trip through Owen Springs Reserve (p225).

## JOHN FLYNN'S GRAVE

About 7km west of Alice Springs along Larapinta Dr is the grave of Dr John Flynn, founder of the Royal Flying Doctor Service and the Australian Inland Mission, who died in 1951. The grave itself is topped by a red granite boulder and the information shelter here tells the interesting story of nearly 40 years of controversy. In 1952, a large round stone was brought here from the Devil's Marbles just south of Tennant Creek to mark Flynn's grave. For years afterwards the owners of this sacred women's site (Karu Karu) lobbied to have the stone returned. Eventually the local Arrernte community offered to replace the stone with one of their own, and in 1999 an official swap took place – the rock from Karu Karu was returned to its rightful place.

## SIMPSONS GAP

The first of many spectacular cracks in the ranges west of Alice, Roe Creek has exploited

## SIMPSONS GAP BICYCLE PATH

Cyclists in central Australia are usually stuck with hugging the edge of the road or tackling rough tracks, but the Simpsons Gap Bicycle Path offers the chance for a smooth and traffic-free bush ride. The sealed cycling path between Flynn's Grave on Larapinta Dr and Simpsons Gap wanders 17km along timbered creek flats and over low rocky hills. It's an easy one- to two-hour ride and, if you add the 7km by road from Alice to the start of the path, you can make the 50km return trip in a comfortable day.

There are several bush picnic spots en route, information signs and excellent views of Mt Gillen, Rungtjirba Ridge and the rugged Alice Valley. The path is open only during daylight hours, so head out in the early morning and return in the afternoon. Water is available 3.5km from the start and at Simpsons Gap; always carry a water bottle.

a fault in the quartzite Rungtjirba Ridge and gouged the red gorge and towering cliffs of Simpsons Gap, 24km west of town, and 7km along a sealed road (Darken Drive) north of Larapinta Dr.

The area is popular with picnickers and also has some good walks. Early morning and late afternoon are the best times to see the rock wallabies that live among the huge boulders in the gap. To the Arrernte people, Simpsons Gap is known as Rungtjirba, the home of Giant Goanna ancestral beings.

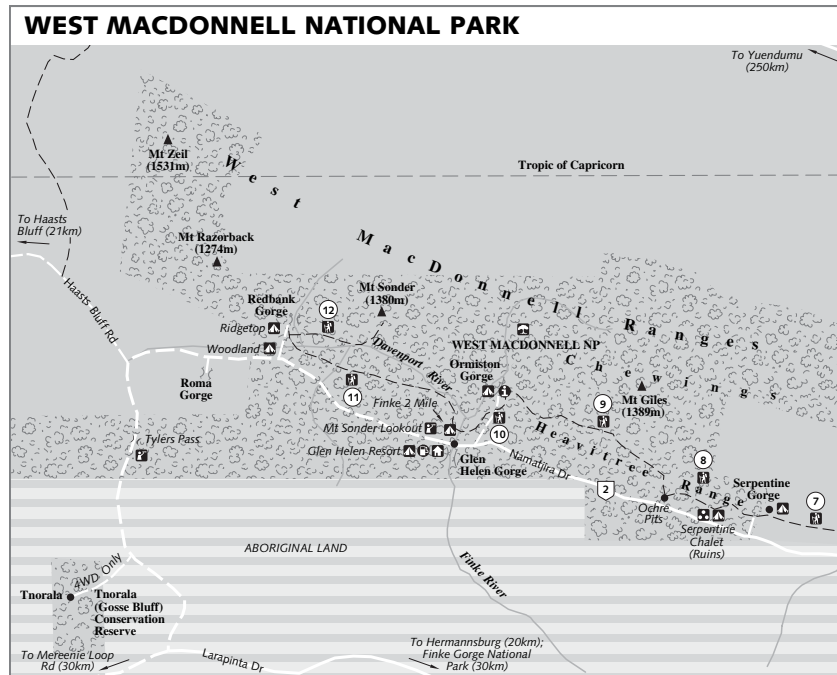
The **visitors centre** (☎ 8955 0310; ☎ 5am-8pm), 1km in from Larapinta Dr, has drinking water and displays on local wildlife. At the park entrance there are information boards, toilets, picnic tables and free gas barbecues. From here it's a 20-minute return walk along the (usually) dry creek bed to the Gap and a small waterhole.

## Bushwalking

Apart from the short walk into the Gap itself, there are some pleasant and not too strenuous walks around Simpsons Gap. You can also do day walks on the first two sections of the Larapinta Trail – peaceful **Bond Gap** (to the west) and **Wallaby Gap** (to the east) are both worthwhile.

**Ghost Gum walk** (1km return, 15 minutes, easy) This brief stroll starts at the visitors centre and is lined with





information boards describing some of the vegetation of the area, including a beautiful 200-year-old ghost gum. **Cassia Hill** (1.5km return, 45 minutes, easy to medium) About halfway between the visitors centre and the Gap, this loop walk meanders through groves of witchetty bush, mulga and senna (formerly called cassia), then up a moderate hill for fine views over the ranges. **Woodland trail** (17km return, seven hours, medium) This walk starts about 2km from the visitors centre and passes Rocky Gap.

### STANDLEY CHASM (ANGKERLE)

From the Simpsons Gap turn-off, you cross Aboriginal land for the next 30km to the sublime **Standley Chasm** (Angkerle; ☎ 8956 7440; adult/senior & child \$7/6; camping \$3; ☽ 8am-6pm). This part of the MacDonnells is owned and managed by the nearby community of Iwupataka. Its English name honours Ida Standley, the first schoolteacher in Alice Springs in 1914.

The school for Aboriginal children was moved to Jay Creek (now Iwupataka) in 1925 and Mrs Standley was the first non-Aboriginal woman to visit the chasm.

The chasm was formed where a tributary of the Finke River wore a narrow cleft

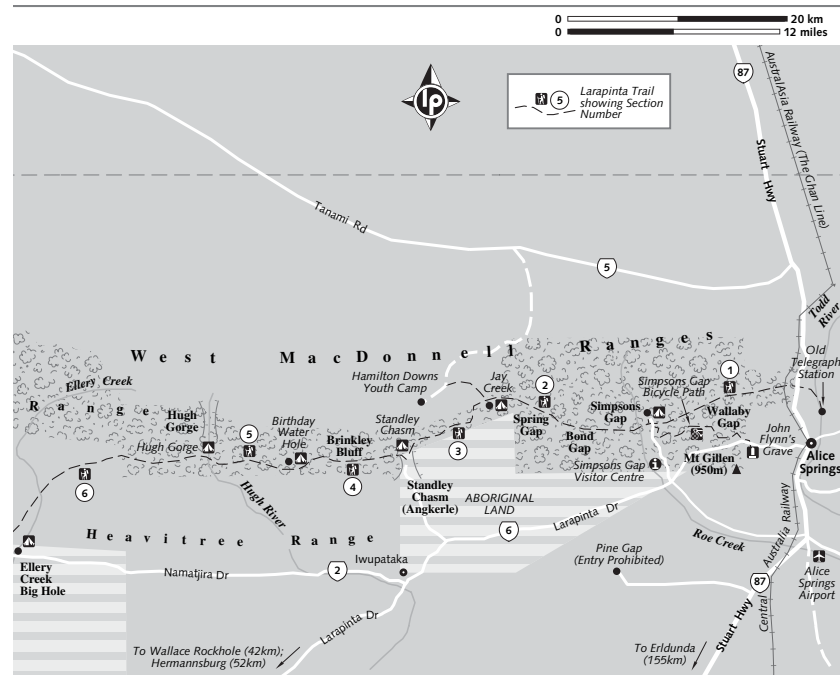
through the surrounding sandstone. In places the smooth vertical walls rise to 80m and at its widest the chasm is 9m across. It's cool and dark on the chasm floor, and for about an hour either side of midday the stone walls are lit up by reflected sunlight that causes the rocks to glow red and triggers the shutter of every camera.

The kiosk at the site sells snacks and drinks; there are picnic tables, wood barbecues (bring your own wood), camp sites and clean toilets near the car park.

### Bushwalking

**Main chasm walk** (800m one way, 15 minutes, easy) Up the rocky gully from the kiosk to the chasm, this walk is crammed with moisture-loving plants such as river red gums, cycad palms and ferns, creating an unexpected lushness in this arid world of craggy bluffs. It's one of the best walks in the area, but most visitors are in too much of a hurry to notice.

**Second chasm walk** (2.4km return, one hour, medium) Climb the rocks at the end of the main chasm. At the far end turn left, then follow the creek bed for a further 300m before returning. You need to scramble over boulders and tree trunks here, making it more challenging than the main walk.



**Larapinta Hill** (1.5km, 45 minutes return, difficult) From the main chasm track, this signposted trail – part of the Larapinta Trail – climbs to a lookout (signposted as Jay Creek).

**Loop Walk** (2.5km, one hour return, medium) Follow the signposted trail from the southern side of the kiosk and return via the main road.

### ELLERY CREEK BIG HOLE

Just under 90km from Alice Springs on Namatjira Dr, Ellery Creek Big Hole is a popular swimming hole in summer but, as it's shaded by the high cliffs of Ellery Gorge, the water is freezing for much of the year.

Ellery Creek was named by explorer Ernest Giles in 1872 after a Victorian astronomer. The Aboriginal name for the waterhole is Udepata, and it was an important gathering point along a couple of Dreaming trails that pass through the area.

The **Dolomite Walk** (20 minutes) is worth the detour. An information shelter at the car park explains the area's fascinating geological history, which is exposed in the creek banks downstream from the waterhole.

Within easy reach of the waterhole is a small, usually crowded **camping ground** (sites

per adult/child/family \$3.30/1.65/7.70) with gas barbecues, tables, a pit toilet and limited shade.

### SERPENTINE GORGE

About 11km further along Namatjira Dr a rough gravel track leads to the Serpentine Gorge car park. From here it's a 1.3km walk along the sandy creek bed to the gorge and its waterholes, which contain some rare (for this area) plant species, such as the Centralian flannel flower.

A waterhole blocks access to the entrance of the narrow gorge, which snakes for over 2km through the Heavitree Range. The stunning scenery of cycads and a second water-filled cleft can also be enjoyed from a lookout above the main entrance.

### SERPENTINE CHALET RUINS

Continuing on from Serpentine Gorge you soon arrive at the Serpentine Chalet turn-off. A rough track leads to the ruins of this early 1960s tourism venture. Visitors would travel all day from Alice Springs to reach the chalet, which was a haven of relative (though still basic) comfort in the harsh bush.

Lack of water caused the chalet to close after only a couple of years and all that remain are the concrete foundations and floor slabs. These days travellers stop in for the bush **camp sites** (free) scattered along the track to and beyond the original site. The first five sites are accessible to conventional vehicles, the last six to 4WD vehicles only.

A roadside stop between here and the Ochre Pits takes you up to a fine **lookout** over the ranges, with picnic tables, pit barbecues and a water tank.

## OCHRE PITS

A little further along the highway, a car park and boardwalk (disabled access) leads about 300m to the Ochre Pits, a site that has been used by the local Arrernte Aboriginal people for centuries. Small deposits of yellow ochre are still used occasionally for ceremonial decoration, though the remaining ochre here is generally of poor quality and modern materials have largely replaced natural ochre. Still, the swirls of dull red and yellow ochre in the walls of this little ravine make an attractive picture in the afternoon sun. The picnic area has free gas barbecues.

A three-hour-return walk takes you to scenic **Inarlanga Pass** at the foot of the Heavitree Range. The track passes through some rather uninspiring country, though there is some interest in the gorge and the old Serpentine Chalet dam, an hour's walk to the east along the Larapinta Trail.

## ORMISTON GORGE

The soaring cliffs, stark ghost gums, rich colours and a deep waterhole at Ormiston Gorge combine to form some of the grandest scen-

ery in the central ranges, and the Ormiston Pound walk is an unmissable highlight of trekking in the park. There's a **visitors centre** (☎ 8956 7799; ☎ 5am-8pm) with information panels, a **kiosk** (☎ 10am-4pm) and an excellent camping ground. Free ranger talks are given here four days a week from May to October – ask at the visitors centre for a programme.

The gorge itself features towering crags that glow red and purple in the sunlight, hemming fallen rocks and waterholes. Ormiston Gorge is a haven for wildlife enthusiasts, thanks to the variety of habitats (mulga woodland, spinifex slopes, rock faces, large river gums and permanent water) found side by side.

The waterhole is part of the Aboriginal Emu Dreaming and is a registered sacred site. Although the water is pretty cold, it's still a popular summer swimming spot. Climb the steps to the Ghost Gum Lookout for an awesome view over the gorge and ranges.

The turn-off to the gorge is 26km on from the Ochre Pits and only 4km east of Glen Helen, then a further 8km along a sealed road to the car park and camping area.

## Bushwalking

This part of the park has some of the best short walks in the MacDonnell Ranges. The *Walks of Ormiston Gorge & Pound* leaflet, available from Parks & Wildlife, gives more details.

**Water Hole** (200m one way, 10 minutes, easy) Signs along this short stroll explain Aboriginal lore and the wildlife of the waterholes.

**Ghost Gum Lookout** (2km return, 30 minutes, medium) Climb the many steps of the western cliffs to the lone

ghost gum standing sentinel at this lookout. There are superb views down to the gorge itself.

**Ghost Gum walk** (2km loop, 1½ hours, medium) Follow the track to the Ghost Gum Lookout and return along the floor of the gorge.

**Pound walk** (7km loop, about 2½ hours, medium) This superb walk climbs to an elevated spinifex-clad gap in the range, passes into remote Ormiston Pound then follows the floor of the gorge back to the camping ground. Do it first thing in the morning in an anticlockwise direction so you can enjoy a sunlit view of the big cliffs, or do the Ghost Gum walk first and link with the Pound walk; take plenty of water.

Longer walks to **Bowman's Gap** (9km, one to two days return, medium) and **Mt Giles** (21km, two to three days return, difficult), which includes a 600m ascent of Mt Giles, can be tackled by experienced bushwalkers. The view at dawn across Ormiston Pound from Mt Giles to Mt Sonder is sensational.

## Sleeping

**Ormiston Gorge camping ground** (adult/child/family \$6.60/3.30/16) The ritziest of the West MacDonnell National Park's sites, this camping ground is right next to the gorge car park. There are hot showers, toilets (with disabled facilities), picnic tables and free gas barbecues. Get here early for a site as caravans and campervans crowd out many spots.

## GLEN HELEN GORGE & HOMESTEAD

The large waterhole at Glen Helen Gorge, 135km from Alice Springs, has been carved through the Pacoota Range by the Finke River as its floodwaters rush south to the Simpson Desert. A major flood in 1988 backed up so high that it flooded the nearby resort.

To the Arrernte people the gorge is a sacred site known as Yapulpa, and is part of the Carpet Snake Dreaming. In 1872 Ernest Giles was the first white person to explore the area and the pastoral lease was first taken up by prominent pastoralists, Grant and Stokes. Their surveyor, Richard Warburton, in 1876 named the station (and gorge) after Grant's eldest daughter.

In 1901 the station was bought by Fred Raggatt and remnants from that time, such as the timber meathouse, still survive. The homestead on its current site was originally built in 1905. Past owners included Reg Ansett, founder of the former Australian

## THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Glen Helen Resort** (☎ 8956 7489; www.glenhelen.com.au; Namatjira Dr; powered sites for 2 \$22, unpowered sites per person \$10, dm without/with linen \$20/30, d \$160; breakfast & lunch \$4-15, barbecue pack \$24-32, dinner \$21-29). The looming red cliffs provide a dramatic backdrop to the Glen Helen Homestead, a popular spot on the edge of the national park. You can pitch a tent in the shady grounds, stay in a backpackers lodge, or do it in comfort in one of the modern (though overpriced) motel rooms. The back veranda makes an idyllic place to unwind, and there's a lively pub with pool table and live music (Thursday to Saturday, March to December). The excellent Namatjira Restaurant (mains \$21 to \$29) has a good à la carte menu featuring the 'bush tucker mixed grill' and 'chicken Sonder', an open fire and walls adorned with prints or originals by the Namatjira family. There are also helicopter flights from the homestead. A short flight over the gorge is \$40 and a flight over Ormiston Gorge costs \$100.

airline. In 1992 the property was purchased by the Ngurratjua/Pmara Ntjarra Aboriginal Corporation.

A 10-minute stroll takes you from the car park to the gorge entrance, where you can admire the 65m high cliffs, but if you want to go further you'll have to either swim through the waterhole or climb around it. The rugged cliffs positively radiate in the late afternoon sun – you can enjoy them over a beer from the back veranda at Glen Helen Homestead (above).

Just west of the Finke River crossing on Namatjira Dr is the turn-off to the **Mt Sonder lookout** with an evocative view of the reclining mountain made famous in Albert Namatjira's watercolours. First light illuminates Mt Sonder beautifully.

**Finke Two Mile Camping Ground** offers free bush camping sites on the Finke River, upstream from the crossing on Namatjira Drive. You'll need a 4WD to get to it and there are no facilities, but the views and atmosphere are hard to beat – it's popular with weekenders from Alice. The turn-off is un-signposted but is to the north of Namatjira Drive just past Glen Helen Homestead.

## THE MAGIC OF OCHRE

Ochre was an important commodity in local Aboriginal culture, where it was used medicinally and was also a valuable trade item. Red ochre mixed with grease and eucalyptus leaves became an effective decongestant balm, and white ochre was believed to have magical powers – it was mixed with water and then blown from the mouth, a practice which was said to cool the sun and calm the wind. Ochre was also used extensively for body decoration and in painting. Red ochre was used in important ceremonies such as the initiation of young men.

Ochre from the West MacDonnells was occasionally traded as far south as the Pitjantjatjara communities of South Australia. It was dampened and pressed into bricks or rolled into balls for easy transport.

The different coloured vertical layers of the Ochre Pits were created by layers of deposited silt containing varying amounts of iron being compressed, folded and buckled over millions of years.

## REDBANK GORGE

Well known to locals but often overlooked by visitors who have had their fill of gorges, Redbank is another scenic detour at the western end of the ranges, reached via a rugged dirt road. There are two camping grounds here and you can really get a feeling of bush solitude that is sometimes lost on the more popular spots.

The Redbank Gorge turn-off is about 20km west of Glen Helen along a dirt road, then 5km north to the car park. From here it's another 15-minute walk up a rocky creek bed to the gorge itself. Redbank Gorge is extremely narrow, with polished, multihued walls that close over your head to block out the sky. To traverse the gorge you must clamber and float along the freezing deep pools with an air mattress, but it's worth the effort – the colours and cathedral atmosphere inside are haunting. Allow two hours to get to the end. Except in summer, swimming the gorge is not recommended – the icy water can cause cramps or worse.

### Bushwalking

Redbank Gorge is the starting point for Section 12 of the Larapinta Trail to nearby Mt Sonder. The walk along the ridge from Redbank Gorge to the summit of **Mt Sonder** (16km return, eight hours, difficult) will appeal to fit, well-prepared walkers. After the constructed trail ends, markers show the way along the ridge where the track rises from

680m to 1380m. Some locals regard this as the finest walk in the West MacDonnells and a highlight of the trail. The superb view from the summit of Mt Sonder and the sense of achievement are ample reward. Camping is not permitted on the summit, so start early.

### Sleeping

There are two bush camping grounds along the rough track to Redbank Gorge.

**Redbank Woodland Camping Ground** (adult/child/family \$3.30/1.65/7.70) A few kilometres back from the gorge car park, this large camping ground is on a creek flat with shady coolababs and well-spaced sites, fireplaces (no wood provided), free gas barbecues and picnic tables.

**Redbank Ridgetop Camping Ground** (adult/child/family \$3.30/1.65/7.70) Much closer to the gorge, this is a small, intimate camping ground with stony sites and basic facilities – a single pit toilet and fireplaces.

### ROMA GORGE

Just outside the park boundary, Roma Gorge sees few visitors, partly because it's only accessible by a very rough 4WD track, partly because there are no facilities (camping is not permitted) and partly because it's hard to find – the turn-off is not properly signposted. But those with a high-clearance 4WD and a sense of adventure will find a tranquil, picturesque waterhole, and an interesting Aboriginal rock art site. The turn-off heads south off Namatjira Drive just a few kilometres west

### DETOUR

Beyond Redbank Gorge you can continue west on Namatjira Dr and do a loop drive along the sometimes rough dirt road to Hermannsburg and back to Alice Springs. En route detour to **Tnorala (Gosse Bluff) Conservation Reserve**, which preserves an ancient meteor impact crater. After about 17km the road turns south over **Tylers Pass**, where a lookout offers the awesome first glimpse of Tnorala's enormous red mass, rising abruptly from the otherwise flat surrounding landscape. This remnant of a huge crater was blasted out when a comet plunged into the ground around 140 million years ago. The power of such an impact is almost impossible to comprehend – the 5km-diameter crater you see today was originally 2km below the impact surface, and is just the core of the original 20km-diameter crater.

The crater was named by Ernest Giles in 1872 after Harry Gosse, a telegraphist at the Alice Springs Telegraph Station. Tnorala is the Western Arrernte name for the crater, and in the local mythology is a wooden dish belonging to some star ancestors that crashed down from the sky during the Dreaming. The area is a registered sacred site and is protected by a 4700-hectare conservation reserve.

Access to Tnorala is 8km along a rough track, best tackled in a 4WD, which goes right into the crater. There's a picnic ground with pit toilet, but camping is not permitted – information boards explain the story of a tragic tribal incident that occurred here.

### DETOUR

Opened to the public in 2003, the 50km 4WD route through **Owen Springs Reserve** follows the Hugh River through the old Owen Springs cattle station from the eastern end of Larapinta Drive south to the Stuart Hwy. It can easily be done as a loop day-trip from Alice Springs, a total of about 160km, or there are bush camping sites along the river.

With huge river red gums lining the sandy river bed this is a scenic route and one steeped in history – this was the original route of the Overland Telegraph Line and was first explored by John McDouall Stuart in 1860.

From Larapinta Dr the turn-off comes a few kilometres past the Namatjira Dr intersection and heads south for 17km to the ruins of the Old Owen Springs Homestead (1872), the first station homestead built in central Australia. The track continues through the Waterhouse Range and beautiful Lawrence Gorge (where you can camp; no facilities), crossing or following the sandy river bed in several places.

About 4km before you reach the Stuart Hwy there's a turn-off to Redbank Waterhole, a permanent waterhole where you can camp. Once on the highway it's an easy 45-minute drive back to Alice.

of Redbank Gorge. A rough and rocky track leads 8.5km to the gorge.

## JAMES RANGES

The low-lying James Ranges form an east-west band south of the West MacDonnell Ranges. While not as well known as the MacDonnells, the ranges border some of the Centre's top attractions: Hermannsburg, Palm Valley and Kings Canyon.

Most people visit Hermannsburg and Palm Valley on a day or overnight trip from Alice Springs, and save Kings Canyon for a separate trip that includes Uluru. However, you can save a lot of backtracking if you continue from Hermannsburg around the western end of the James Ranges on the gravel Mereenie Loop Rd, which emerges at Kings Canyon, or tackle the exciting Finke Gorge National Park by 4WD.

### HERMANSBURG

pop 460

The Aboriginal settlement of Hermannsburg (Ntaria), 125km from Alice Springs, is famous as the one-time home of artist Albert Namatjira, the birthplace of anthropologist Ted Strehlow and the site of the Hermannsburg Mission. It's well worth stopping by to visit the historical precinct, which preserves the work and lives of the early missionaries.

Although the town is sited on restricted Aboriginal land, permits are not required

to visit the mission or store, or to travel through. Groceries, fuel and takeaway food are available from **Ntaria Supermarket** (☎ 8956 7480; 🕒 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5.30pm Sun) on the main road into town. You'll also find an ATM and Internet access here.

### History

In 1876, fresh from the Hermannsburg Mission Institute in Germany, pastors AH Kempe and WF Schwarz left Adelaide bound for central Australia with a herd of cattle and several thousand sheep. Eighteen months later they finally arrived at the new mission site, having been held up by drought at Dalhousie Springs for nearly a year.

It was a nightmarish introduction to the harsh central Australian environment, but the pastors were committed to the task of bringing Christianity and 'civilisation' to the Aboriginal people. The missionaries faced many hardships, including strong opposition from white settlers to their attempts to protect Aboriginal people from genocide, and disillusionment at the lack of converts. It eventually became rundown; many of the Aboriginal residents drifted away and the mission was abandoned in 1891.

This was all turned around with the arrival of Pastor Carl Strehlow in 1894. Strehlow was a tireless worker who learnt the Arrernte language, translated the New Testament into Arrernte and wrote a number of important works on the Arrernte people. On the downside, however, he also had the touch of arrogance that

typifies missions, believing that the Aboriginal beliefs and customs were wrong.

Professor TGH (Ted) Strehlow, the youngest child of Carl Strehlow, was born on the mission and spent more than 40 years studying the Arrernte people. The Arrernte people entrusted him with many items of huge spiritual and symbolic importance when they realised their traditional lifestyle was under threat.

In 1982 the land title was handed back to the Arrernte people under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976*.

### Hermannsburg Historic Precinct

Shaded by tall river gums and date palms, the whitewashed walls of this old **mission** (☎ 8956 7402; adult/child/family \$5/4/14; 🕒 9am–4pm Mar–Nov, 10am–4pm Dec–Feb) stand in stark contrast to the colours of the surrounding countryside that were captured so eloquently by the settlement's most famous inhabitants, the painters of the Namatjira family.

This fascinating monument to the Territory's early Lutheran missionaries is a fine example of traditional German farmhouse architecture. Among the low, stone buildings are a church, a school and various houses and outbuildings. One building houses an art gallery that provides an insight into the life and times of Albert Namatjira and contains examples of the work of 39 Hermannsburg artists.

The **Kata-Anga Tea Room** (meals \$5–9; 🕒 9am–4pm), in the old missionary house, has a marvellous atmosphere, and interesting photos by eminent anthropologist Baldwin Spencer adorn the walls. Devonshire teas, sandwiches and strudel are on the menu; self-serve tea and coffee are included in the admission price. A good range of traditional and watercolour paintings and artefacts by the local Aboriginal people is on sale, including the distinctive work of the Hermannsburg Potters.

### Around Hermannsburg

Just east of Hermannsburg, is a **monument** to Albert Namatjira, the Aboriginal artist who made of this country famous. About 5km west of town is **Namatjira House**, a tiny stone cottage where Albert lived with his family for five years from 1944. There's nothing inside.

### DETOUR

The Arrernte community of **Wallace Rockhole** is 18km south of Namatjira Drive and was established in 1973 as an outpost of Hermannsburg Mission. It's a worthwhile detour for the excellent Aboriginal cultural tours and you can stay the night here. The access road is unsealed, but accessible to conventional vehicles.

Tours on offer include a 1½-hour **rock art and bush medicine tour** (adult/child \$10/8) and **bush tucker tag-along tours** (\$50; minimum 6 people).

**Wallace Rockhole Tourist Park** (☎ 8956 7993; www.wallacerockholetours.com.au; powered/unpowered sites per person \$12/10, cabins from \$130) has a pleasant camping area with grassy sites and good facilities, plus cabins with private bathrooms.

### FINKE GORGE NATIONAL PARK

Famous for its rare palms, Finke Gorge National Park is one of central Australia's premier wilderness areas. The biggest attraction is the sublime Palm Valley with its lush ribbon of tall palms and cycads, but the main gorge features high red cliffs, stately river red gums, cool waterholes and lovely walks.

For thousands of years, the Finke River formed part of an Aboriginal trade route that crossed Australia, bringing goods such as sacred red ochre from the south and pearl shell from the north to the central Australian tribes.

The area around Hermannsburg was a major refuge for the Western Arrernte people in times of drought, thanks to its permanent water that came from soaks dug in the Finke River bed. An upside-down river (like all others in central Australia), the Finke flows beneath its dry bed most of the time. As it becomes saline during drought, the Western Arrernte call it Lhere Pirnte (pronounced 'lara pinta' hence Larapinta), which means salty river. It was their knowledge of its freshwater soaks that enabled them to survive in the harshest droughts.

Since access to the park follows the sandy bed of the Finke River – Australia's oldest – and rocky tracks, a high-clearance 4WD vehicle is essential to get in here. If you don't have one, several tour operators go to Palm Valley and through the park.

The turn-off to Palm Valley starts about 2km west of Hermannsburg off Larapinta Dr, while the turn-off to Finke Gorge starts about 1km east of Hermannsburg.

### Tours

**Palm Valley Tours** (☎ 8952 0022; www.palmvalleytours.com.au; 1-2-day tours \$115/280) leads small group tours into Palm Valley and Hermannsburg. The two-day tour also includes Tnorala (Gosse Bluff) and Ormiston Gorge.

### Palm Valley

If you only have time to see one part of the park, don't miss Palm Valley (Mpulungkinya), where the slender, towering palms contrast sharply with the typical arid setting and red cliffs of central Australia.

Leaving the Finke River at its junction with Palm Creek, head west past an old ranger station and 1km further on you arrive at the Kalarranga car park. En route, a small information bay introduces some of the walks in the area. **Kalarranga**, also known as the Amphitheatre, is a semi-circle of striking sandstone formations sculpted by a now-extinct meander of Palm Creek. It's at its best in the early morning or late afternoon when the low sun makes the red cliffs glow.

From Kalarranga, you soon pass the excellent camping ground, and from here the track deteriorates into an extremely rough and rocky ride for the final 5km to Palm Valley; take it slow!

### ALBERT NAMATJIRA

Australia's first famous Aboriginal artist, Albert Namatjira (1902–59) used watercolours with distinctive purple, blue and orange hues to depict the landscape. He lived at the Hermannsburg Lutheran Mission west of Alice Springs and was introduced to the art of European-style watercolour painting by Rex Batterbee in the 1930s.

Namatjira successfully captured the essence of central Australia using a style heavily influenced by European art. At the time his paintings were seen solely as picturesque landscapes. However, it's now understood that they depicted important Dreaming sites to which he had a great cultural bond.

Namatjira supported many of his people with the income from his work, as was his obligation under traditional law. In 1957 he was the first Aboriginal person to be granted Australian citizenship. Due to this, he was permitted to buy alcohol at a time when it was illegal for Aboriginal people to do so. Remaining true to his kinship responsibilities, he broke non-Indigenous laws and in 1958 was jailed for six months for supplying alcohol to his community. Released from jail, he died the following year, aged 57.

Namatjira did much to change the extremely negative views of Aboriginal people that prevailed back then. At the same time, he paved the way for the Papunya Tula painting movement that emerged a decade after his death.

At **Cycad Gorge**, along the way, towering chocolate-coloured cliff towers overlook clumps of tall, slender palms. The gorge is named for the large number of shaggy cycads growing on and below the cliff face. About 2km past Cycad Gorge you come to Palm Valley itself. The valley is actually a narrow gorge that in places is literally choked with lush stands of red cabbage palms (*Livistona mariae*) up to 25m high.

### BUSHWALKING

The four marked walking tracks in the Palm Valley area are fairly gentle treks, all suitable for families, but the unique scenery makes them top notch.

**Kalarranga Lookout** (1.5km return, 45 minutes, easy) The view over the Amphitheatre from this huge mushroom-like sandstone knob is striking. Dawn breaks beautifully here.

**Arankaia walk** (2km loop, one hour, easy) This walk traverses the valley, returning via the sandstone plateau where there are great views over the park.

**Mpulungkinya track** (5km loop, two hours, easy) This walk through Palm Valley passes dense stands of palms and offers excellent views down the gorge before joining the Arankaia walk on the return. It's the most popular walk in the park and is a good one to tackle in the morning or afternoon when animals descend into the gorge to drink and forage.

**Mpaara track** (5km loop, two hours, medium) From the Kalarranga car park, this loop track takes in the Finke River, Palm Bend and the rugged Amphitheatre. It leads you in the footsteps of two heroes from the Aboriginal Dreaming, Mpaara (Tawny Frogmouth Man) and Pangkalanya

### PALMS FROM THE PAST

The tall, shimmering palms that grace Palm Valley seem out of place in the dry desert environment, but they are a remarkable remnant from a time when central Australia was a much wetter, tropical place.

These incongruous palms and cycads survive here only because of a reliable supply of moisture trapped within the surrounding sandstone: only 200mm of rain falls here each year, but underground springs feed the gorge. Over millions of years, the rock has folded and fractured, allowing groundwater to seep through. The tall red cabbage palms (*Livistona mariae*), found nowhere else in the world, grow within an area of about 60 sq km and are over 800km from their nearest relatives. To the Arrernte people the palms are associated with the Fire Dreaming.

There are only 1200 mature palms found in the wild, so rangers request that you stay on the marked trails out of the palm groves – the tiny seedlings are hard to see and can easily get trampled underfoot.

(Devil Man), whose various adventures are explained by signs along the way.

### SLEEPING

**Palm Valley Camping Ground** (adult/child/family \$6.60/3.30/16) Beautifully located beside Palm Creek, it has views across to the red sandstone ridges and is well equipped with hot showers, gas barbecues, fire places and flush toilets. It's a popular spot, so it's worth arriving early to secure a site, especially on weekends. Remember to collect firewood before the park entry sign. Rangers give free campfire talks here on Friday and Saturday nights between May and October.

### Finke Gorge

If you have your own 4WD vehicle and you're well prepared, there's a challenging route through the national park following the sandy bed of the dry Finke River. This is a remote and scenic drive and in dry conditions it's possible to drive all the way south to the Ernest Giles Rd, from where you can continue west to Kings Canyon (and Uluru), or east back to the Stuart Hwy. A high-clearance 4WD is essential and, since the rough track involves deep sand driving, it pays to travel

with another vehicle – plenty of people have been bogged on the way to Boggy Hole!

The track starts on the left about 50m or so before the main turn-off to Hermannsburg. It's about 22km (1½ hours) to **Boggy Hole**, a popular permanent waterhole and camping spot (no facilities). Nearby are the scant remains of a police camp set up in 1889 to protect pastoralists and stock. It was closed in 1891 after the head officer, William Henry Willshire, was charged with the murder of local Aboriginal people (as often happened at the time, he was later acquitted).

In all it's just over 100km from Hermannsburg to the Ernest Giles Rd – allow two days from Alice Springs. Check road conditions before setting out and be sure to inform a **ranger** (Finke Gorge ☎ 8956 7401, Kings Canyon ☎ 8956 7460) of your plans to travel along this track, and of your safe arrival.

### MEREENIE LOOP ROAD

The rugged Mereenie Loop Rd begins at Kata-pata Pass (Areyonga turn-off), about 26km west of where Larapinta Dr links with the dirt road to Glen Helen, and passes through Aboriginal land to Watarrka National Park. This is an excellent alternative route from Alice to Kings Canyon. In dry conditions the road is suitable for conventional vehicles with good ground clearance, though there are some sandy patches and hire vehicles will not be covered by insurance. However, the Northern Territory government is planning to seal the route between Hermannsburg and Kings Canyon, which will open it up to all vehicles and make this the road of choice for travellers between Alice Springs and Uluru. The project has been on the drawing board for a while, but was yet to begin at the time of writing. Fuel is available at Hermannsburg, Kings Canyon Resort and Kings Creek Station.

To travel along this route you need a **Mereenie Loop Pass** (\$2.20), which is valid for one day and includes a souvenir booklet with details about the local Aboriginal culture and a route map. It's available at Catia in Alice Springs, Glen Helen Homestead, Hermannsburg and Kings Canyon Resort.

The road travels through a variety of semi-desert areas with sand dunes and rocky ridges. An artificial highlight is the road sign that you pass on the southern part of the track – a rusty old 44-gallon drum carries a

warning to slow down: 'LIFT UM FOOT', soon followed by another reading 'PUTTUM BACK DOWN'!

There's a rest area at the **Jump Up Lookout** towards the southern end of the road, but camping is not permitted along the way. It takes around 3½ hours to travel the 204km from Hermannsburg to the Kings Canyon Resort.

### ERNEST GILES ROAD

The unsealed Ernest Giles Rd heads off to the west of the Stuart Hwy about 140km south of Alice. This is the shorter (but rougher) route to Kings Canyon and is often impassable after heavy rain. About 105km from the Stuart Hwy the track joins the Luritja Rd, which is sealed for the final 95km to Kings Canyon. Beyond the Henbury Meteorite Craters turn-off, the Ernest Giles Rd is not recommended for 2WDs.

### Henbury Meteorite Craters Conservation Reserve

Eleven kilometres west of the Stuart Hwy, a corrugated track on the right leads 5km to

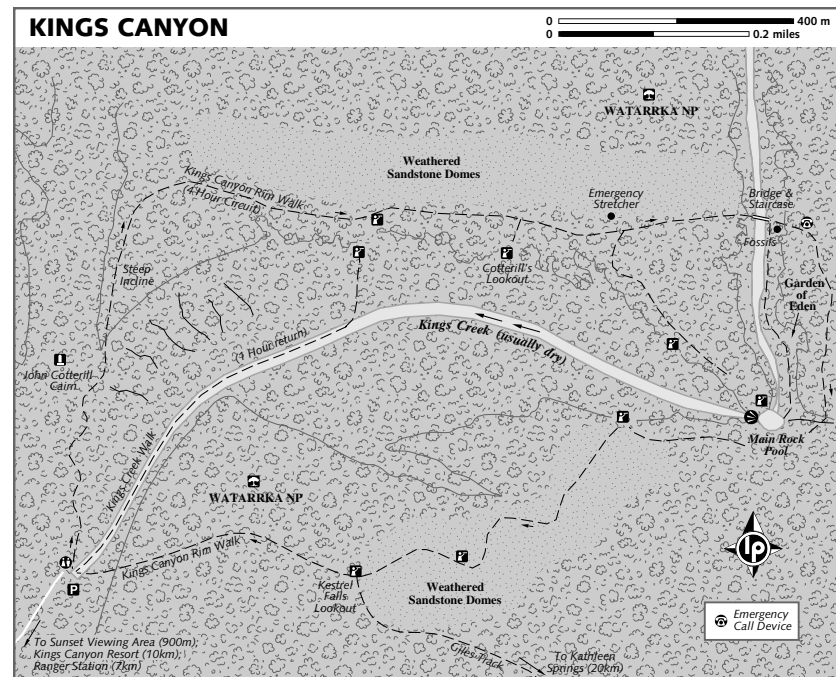
a cluster of 12 small craters in an exposed, stony plain. About 4500 years ago a meteorite clocking a scorching 40,000km per hour broke up as it entered the earth's atmosphere. The craters were formed when the fragments hit the ground – the largest is 180m wide and 15m deep, and was formed by a piece of rock about the size of a 44-gallon drum.

The facts are interesting, but it's only worth a detour if you have a deep interest in this sort of thing. NASA once used the craters for training astronauts.

The exposed **camping ground** (adult/child/family \$3.30/1.65/7.70) here is on stony ground and is pretty grim. There's no water.

### WATARRKA NATIONAL PARK (KINGS CANYON)

The western half of the George Gill Range, an outlier of the James Ranges, is protected by Watarrka National Park, which includes one of the most spectacular sights in central Australia – the sheer, 100m-high walls of **Kings Canyon**. In the headlong rush to reach Uluru, many travellers skip Kings Canyon – some unaware it even exists – but if you



have even a single spare day, this detour off the main highway is a must.

The name Watarrka refers to the area around the Kuninga (western quoll or native cat) Dreaming Trail, which passes through the park. More than 600 plant species have been recorded in the park, giving it the highest plant diversity of any place in Australia's arid zone. At the head of the 1km gorge is the spring-fed **Garden of Eden**, where a moist microclimate supports a variety of plants. The narrow, rocky bed of Kings Creek along the floor of the canyon is lined with river red gums and unusual bonsai-like trees.

The gorge is carved from a dominating sandstone plateau, covered in many places by bizarre, weathered sandstone domes.

## History

The Luritja Aboriginal people have lived in this area for at least 20,000 years and there are registered sacred sites within the park. There are also three communities of Aboriginal people living within the park boundaries.

In 1872 Ernest Giles named the George Gill Range after his brother-in-law, who also helped fund the expedition. Here he found desperately needed water sources. Giles also named Kings Creek after his friend Fielder King. William Gosse camped at Kings Creek a year later on an exploratory

trip and went on to become the first white man to see Uluru, which Giles had missed when his path was blocked by the salt pan, Lake Amadeus. Being the first European to explore the area, Giles had first option on applying for a pastoral lease, which he did in 1874. It covered almost 1000 sq miles and included the area of the present park.

Pastoralist William Liddle took up a lease and established Angas Downs Station in 1929. The first tourism venture in the area was set up by Jack Cotterill in 1960 on Angas Downs Station, and was run from here until the formation of the park in 1989.

## Information

The best place for information is the resort **reception** (☎ 6.30am-9pm), which also has an ATM. Also at the resort there's a **service station** (☎ 7am-7pm) for fuel and supplies, and **Internet access** (Desert Oaks Café; ☎ 10am-9pm). At the canyon car park, there are information boards, shelters, water and toilets. Cool snacks and postcards are on sale from a mobile **kiosk** (☎ 6.30am-5.30pm Apr-Nov). There's a **sunset-viewing area** 1km short of the canyon car park.

From May to October there are ranger-guided **walks** on Tuesday and Thursday from the Kings Canyon car park, and on Wednesday from Kathleen Springs car park.

### WALKING THE CANYON RIM

The **Kings Canyon Rim walk** (6km loop, three to four hours, medium) is a fabulous walk that not only offers an awesome view into the canyon from several angles but also takes you through a diverse range of terrain and geological features. From the canyon car park it begins with a short, steep climb up rock steps (about 20 minutes), which is the only 'difficult' part of the walk. From here the trail skirts the western rim of the canyon, passing crevices and precariously balanced gum trees, before opening out to views of the stunning sheer cliff faces of red and white sandstone. The canyon was created when a crack formed in the surface mereneie sandstone and eroded down to the softer red Carmichael sandstone.

Here you see the first of the curious 'beehive' domes: weathered sandstone outcrops which to the Luritja represent the men of the Kuniya Dreaming. A 600m detour leads to Cotterill's Lookout with spectacular views directly down into the canyon. The trail then descends down wooden stairs into the Garden of Eden, a narrow gorge leading to a lush oasis of ferns and prehistoric cycads ending at a tranquil pool. Look out for the ripple rock and fossilised jellyfish on the rock faces near the stairs of the Garden of Eden. The walk continues around the eastern side of the canyon rim with more fine views, then crosses a swarm of beehive domes before descending via stone steps (starting at Kestrel Falls lookout) to the car park.

Although the walk is not difficult, a reasonable level of fitness is required, as are plenty of water and a hat. Watch your step around the rim of the canyon – the cliffs are unfenced and the wind can be strong.

## Activities

### BUSHWALKING

The main canyon walk at Kings Canyon is one of the best short walks in central Australia – see the boxed text opposite.

**Kings Creek walk** (2.6km return, one hour, easy) A short stroll along the rocky bed of Kings Creek leads to a raised platform with amphitheatre-like views of the towering canyon rim. There is wheelchair access for the first 700m.

**Kathleen Springs walk** (2.5km return, one hour, easy)

A wheelchair accessible path leads from the car park to a beautiful spring-fed rock pool at the base of the range. This permanent waterhole was important to the nomadic Luritja people and harboured abundant food plants, such as the native fig and plum bush. There is a picnic ground with gas barbecues, shade, water and toilets.

**Giles track** (22km one way, overnight, easy) If you have more time, this lovely marked trail follows the George Gill Range from Kings Canyon to Kathleen Spring, partly in the footsteps of explorer Ernest Giles. Pick up the track at Kings Canyon (near Kestrel Falls) and walk along the exposed ridge. There's plenty of wildlife to be seen, particularly around the waterholes. It's possible to do part of this track as a day walk from Lilla (Reedy Creek), about halfway along the trail, from where you can walk back to Kings Canyon or to Kathleen Springs. You need to be fully self-sufficient in both food and water. There's a designated camping ground along the ridge above Lilla, and small campfires are permitted here.

### BIKE & CAMEL RIDES

The Kings Creek Station (right) offers **quad-biking** (30 minutes/1hr/2½hr \$60/70/150) and more sedate **camel rides** (1hr adult/child \$50/40). If you prefer two wheels, **Chrome Saddle Experience** (☎ 8955 8082; rides \$35-170), also based at Kings Creek, offers Harley rides from 15 minutes to two-hour return trips to the canyon.

### SCENIC FLIGHTS

Helicopter flights from Kings Canyon Resort cost \$100 for a 15-minute trip over the canyon, and \$220 for 30 minutes over the canyon and George Gill Range.

**Kings Creek Helicopters** (☎ 8956 7886; flights \$40-350) has flights from Kings Creek Station, including a short buzz in the local area for \$40, Petermann Pound (\$100, 15 minutes) or Kings Canyon (\$200, 30 minutes).

## Sleeping & Eating

### KINGS CANYON RESORT

Only 10km from the canyon, this slick **resort** (☎ 1800 089 622; www.kingscanyonresort.com.au; Luritja Rd; powered/unpowered sites for 2 \$31/26, dm \$38,

lodge/standard/deluxe d \$100/260/340; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) is run like a five-star hotel, but with a wide range of accommodation. The grassy camping ground has plenty of shade, a pool (with bar), laundry and barbecues. The refurbished four-bed dorms and lodge rooms share kitchen and bathroom facilities. Thoughtful design of the hotel rooms gives you the feeling of being secluded and alone in the bush – but with all the luxuries including patio spas in the deluxe rooms. The resort also has several dining options.

**Outback Barbecue** (mains \$16-28; ☎ dinner Jun-Nov) This is in a semi-outdoor area off the bar and serves various grills, salads and vegetarian options, as well as pizza to the toe-tapping tunes of live music.

**Carmichael's** (☎ breakfast & dinner) A stylish restaurant with a rich buffet for breakfast (\$24) and dinner (\$50). The dinner spread includes a carvery and seafood selection.

**Sounds of Firelight** (☎ 8956 7660; per person \$130) This intimate bush dinner is similar to the Sounds of Silence dinner at Uluru (without the view), but it's marketed as a romantic night out, restricted to six couples. A six-course meal and drinks is served under the stars around a fire.

**Desert Oaks Cafe** (mains \$5-10; ☎ lunch) Offers light meals such as burgers and focaccias.

**George Gill Bar** (mains \$8.50-17.50; ☎ 11am-11pm, dinner 6.30-9pm) The evening meeting place with pizzas and bar snacks in the pub – down a cooling drink under rafters strung with all manner of hats and Australiana.

### KINGS CREEK STATION

About 35km south of the Kings Canyon turn-off, **Kings Creek Station** (☎ 8956 7474; www.kingscreekstation.com.au; Luritja Rd; camp sites per adult/child \$13/7.50, power \$4, safari cabins per adult/child \$55/36; ☎ ☎) is a friendly, cheaper alternative to the resort, and also offers something approaching a bush experience. Pleasant camp sites are set among desert oaks. In a separate area there are 'safari cabins' (actually small canvas tents on a solid floor), which come with cooked breakfast. Amenities are shared and there's a private kitchen/barbecue area.

In peak months, there's an evening stock-camp show with billy tea and damper (\$20). Camel or quad-bike safaris and helicopter flights are also available. Fuel, ice, snacks, barbecue packs and limited supplies are available at the **shop** (☎ 7am-7pm).

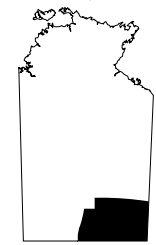
### Getting There & Away

There are no commercial flights to Kings Canyon and no direct buses from Alice Springs, but **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 14 99; [www.greyhound.com.au](http://www.greyhound.com.au)) has a daily bus service from Yulara (Ayers Rock Resort) to Kings Canyon (\$60, four hours). This trip can be done as part of their three-day Alice–Uluru tour (\$300).

If you have your own vehicle, the most interesting route from Alice Springs is the

331km via the West MacDonnells and the Mereenie Loop Rd. You can then continue on to Uluru and back to the Stuart Hwy at Erldunda. The circuit from the Alice and back is about 1200km, only 300km of which is gravel.

An even more exciting route – for well-prepared, experienced 4WDers – is through the Finke Gorge National Park via Boggy Hole, emerging on the Ernest Giles Rd from where it's another 130km to Kings Canyon.



# The Southeast

If the vast expanse of desert north of Alice Springs seems remote, cast your eyes southeast on a map. Stretching down to the South Australia border and the fringes of the Simpson Desert, much of this corner of the Territory is little-visited but beautiful desert dune country.

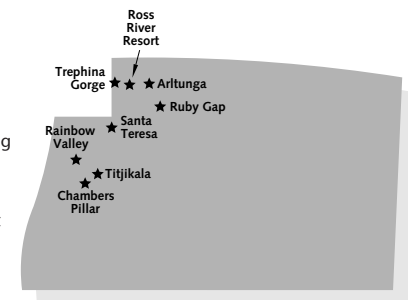
While many sights can be reached by conventional vehicle, you really need a 4WD to fully appreciate the beauty of this region. The remote Simpson Desert in the far southeastern corner of the Territory is an almost trackless region of spinifex and shifting sands that is one of the last great 4WD adventures.

But if you don't have a 4WD and a taste for desert driving, don't despair. Immediately east of Alice, the easily accessible East MacDonnell Ranges stretch in a rugged line for about 100km, the ridges cut by a series of gaps and gorges that culminate in the isolated but heavenly Ruby Gap. Just like the ranges to the west, this is lovely country with superb walks, lots of bush camping and the eerie historical ghost town of Arltunga.

To the south lies a sparsely inhabited region where rolling sand dunes are broken by incredible rock formations (Chambers Pillar is a highlight), accessible Aboriginal settlements and some great outback driving and camping under a vast desert sky. Compared with west of the Stuart Hwy, this is an untouched area and that alone makes it alluring.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Camping out like an early explorer and circumnavigating the dramatic sandstone beacon of **Chambers Pillar** (p242)
- Imagining the ghosts of the past while exploring the old gold-mining town of **Arltunga** (p238)
- Cooling off in the waterhole after trekking through tranquil **Trephina Gorge** (p236)
- Kicking back with a few beers at the bar of the **Ross River Resort** (p238)
- Tackling the tough 4WD track then camping out along the river bed at beautiful **Ruby Gap** (p240)
- Stopping in at the Aboriginal art centres at **Titjikala** (p241) and **Santa Teresa** (p242)
- Watching the setting sun light up the rich colours of **Rainbow Valley** (p243)







## EAST MACDONNELL RANGES

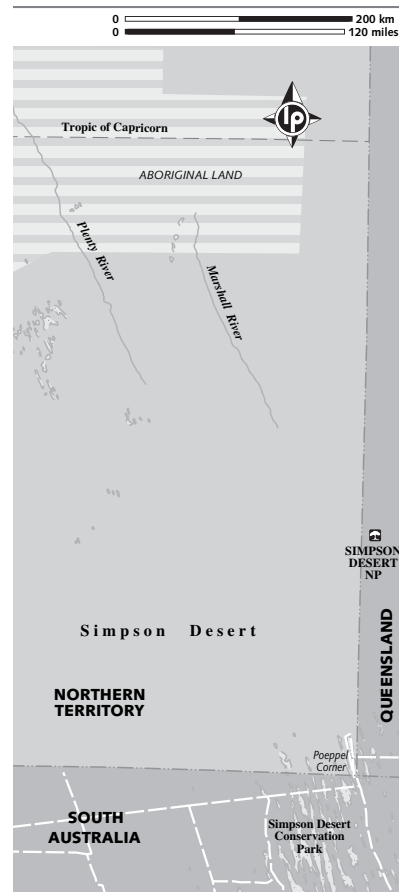
Although often overlooked in favour of the more popular West MacDonnells, the East MacDonnell Ranges are no less absorbing and fewer visitors can mean a more enjoyable bush experience. The Ross Hwy snakes east from Alice to the historical former goldmining town at Arltunga and is a very scenic drive through a jumble of high ridges and hills drained by gum-lined creeks. Along the way you pass several small parks and reserves where you can explore rugged gorges (such as beautiful Trephina),

Aboriginal culture and abandoned mining areas.

The road is sealed for the 85km to Ross River Resort. Arltunga is 33km from the Ross Hwy along an unsealed road which can be quite rough, but it's usually OK for 2WD vehicles in dry conditions. The alternative return route via Claraville, Ambalindum and The Garden homesteads to the Stuart Hwy is recommended for 4WDs only.

Access to John Hayes Rockhole (in Trephina Gorge Nature Park), N'Dhala Gorge and Ruby Gap is definitely by 4WD only.

Although most of the attractions out this way can be seen in a single day, you may find it more rewarding to take it slowly and



### REGIONAL TOURS

The following tours leave from Alice:

- Ossies Outback Tours** (☎ 8952 2308; [www.ossies.com.au](http://www.ossies.com.au); 18 Warburton St) Comprehensive range of 4WD tours, including day trips to Owen Springs and Rainbow Valley (\$95) and three-day Simpson Desert tour with Chambers Pillar, Old Andado and Mt Dare (\$650).
- Outback Experience** (☎ 8953 2666; [www.outbackexperience.com.au](http://www.outbackexperience.com.au)) Run by knowledgeable local Leigh Goldsmith, covers Chambers Pillar and Rainbow Valley in a day for \$150, and East MacDonnells for \$130.
- Path Tours** (☎ 8952 0525; [www.pathtoursadventure.com](http://www.pathtoursadventure.com)) Three-day 4WD tours to the East MacDonnell Ranges, Chambers Pillar and Rainbow Valley for \$500.

portant Aboriginal sites in the Alice Springs area, as it was from here that the Caterpillar Ancestral Beings of Mparntwe (Alice Springs) originated.

**Jessie Gap**, 8km further on, is an equally scenic gorge and a good place for a picnic. Both sites are popular swimming holes and have toilets. Camping is not permitted.

### Bushwalking

Sweeping panoramas extend from the high, narrow ridge **walk** (8km one way, 2½ hours, unmarked, medium) between Emily and Jessie Gaps. Look out for wildlife, such as euros, black-footed rock wallabies and wedge-tailed eagles. The trick is to get someone to drop you off at Emily Gap, then have them continue on to Jessie Gap to get the picnic and esky ready.

### CORROBOREE ROCK CONSERVATION RESERVE

Past Jessie Gap, you drive over eroded flats, with the steep-sided East MacDonnell Ranges looming large on your left, before entering a valley between red ridges. Corroboree Rock, 51km from Alice Springs, is one of a number of unusual tan-coloured dolomite hills that are scattered over the valley floor.

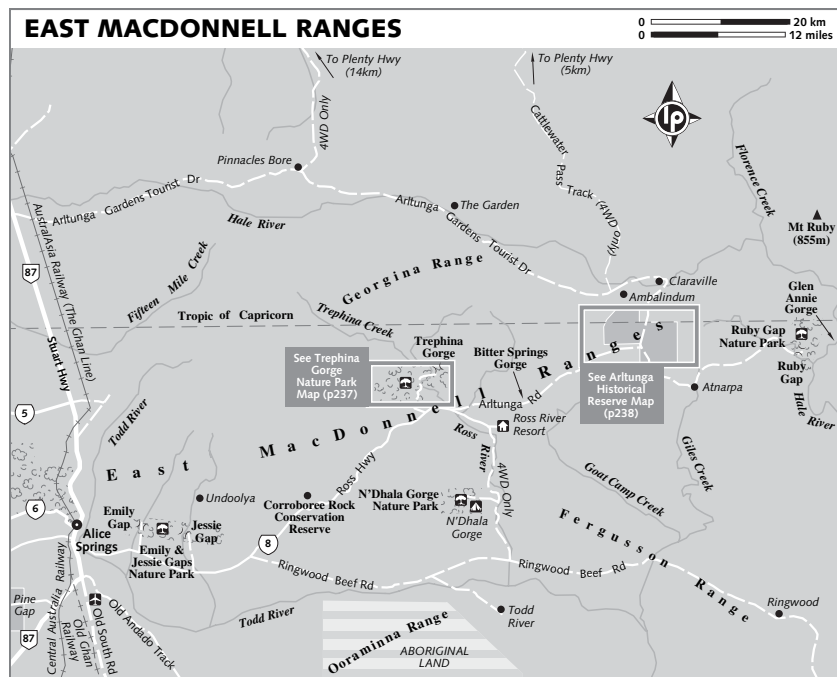
A small cave in this large dog-toothed outcrop was once used by local Aboriginal people as a storehouse for sacred objects. It is a registered sacred site and part of the Perentie Dreaming. Despite the name, it's doubted whether the rock was ever used

plan to camp overnight camp at Trephina, Arltunga or Ruby Gap. Apart from the Ross River Resort, camping is the only accommodation available.

### EMILY & JESSIE GAPS NATURE PARK

Following the Ross Hwy east of the Stuart Hwy for 10km you arrive at **Emily Gap**, the first of two scenic gaps in the range. Nobody knows for sure how they got their English names, but both gaps are associated with an Arrernte Caterpillar Dreaming trail.

The highlight here is the stylised **rock paintings** on the gorge walls, though after rain you might have to swim across the waterhole to see them. Known to the Arrernte as Anthwerkke, this is one of the most im-



as a corroboree area, owing to the lack of water in the vicinity.

A short **walking track** circumnavigates the base of the rock.

## TREPghINA GORGE NATURE PARK

About 60km from Alice Springs you cross the sandy bed of **Benstead Creek** and a lovely stand of red gums, which continues for the 6km from the creek crossing to the Trepghina Gorge turn-off.

If you only have time for a couple of stops in the East MacDonnell Ranges, make Trepghina Gorge Nature Park, 3km north of the Ross Hwy, one of them. The contrasts between the sweep of pale sand in the dry river beds, rich orange, red and purple tones of the valley walls, pale tree trunks with eucalyptus-green foliage and the blue sky are spectacular. There are also some excellent walks, deep swimming holes, wildlife and secluded camping areas. The main attractions are the gorge itself, **Trepghina Bluff** and **John Hayes Rockhole**, a permanent waterhole reached by a rough track that wanders for several kilometres and is usually 4WD only.

The area was excised from The Garden Station in 1966 and gazetted as a park to protect both the large stand of river red gums and the gorge.

Trepghina Gorge makes a great spot to set up camp for a day or so. Visit the waterhole early in the morning and you'll usually spot black-footed rock wallabies nimbly leaping about on the rock face. The area is also home to a number of rare plants, including the glory-of-the-Centre wedding bush.

There is a **ranger** (☎ 8956 9765) stationed in the park and an emergency call box at the ranger station.

## Bushwalking

There are several good walks here, ranging from a short stroll to a five-hour hike. A short signposted walk along the entrance road leads to a magnificent ghost gum, estimated to be 300 years old. The following marked trails are outlined in the *Walks of Trepghina Gorge Nature Park* brochure:

**Trepghina Gorge walk** (2km loop, 45 minutes, easy)

Skirting along the edge of the gorge, the trail drops to the sandy creek bed then loops back to the starting point.

**Panorama walk** (3km, one hour, easy) Great views over Trepghina Gorge and examples of bizarre, twisted rock strata are highlights of this walk.

**Chain of Ponds walk** (4km loop, 1½ hours, medium)

From the John Hayes Rockhole camping ground, this walk leads through the gorge, past rock pools and up to a lookout above the gorge. It requires some climbing and scrambling, and it's impassable after heavy rain.

**Ridgetop walk** (10km one way, four hours, difficult)

This marked trail traverses the ridges from Trepghina Gorge to the delightful John Hayes Rockhole, a few kilometres to the west. Here a section of deep gorge holds a series of waterholes long after the more exposed places have dried up. The walk offers splendid views and isolation. The 8km return leg along the road takes about two hours.

## Sleeping

You can pitch a tent at the small camping grounds at Trepghina Gorge, The Bluff and John Hayes Rockhole.

**Trepghina Gorge Camping Ground** (adult/child/family \$3.30/1.65/7.70) This is in a timbered gully a short stroll from the main attraction, and has 10 sites, running water, pit toilets (one with disabled access), gas barbecues, fireplaces and picnic tables. It's suitable for caravans and campervans.

**Bluff Camping Ground** (adult/child/family \$3.30/1.65/7.70) The Bluff has similar facilities (eight sites), but a more spectacular creek-bank setting under tall gums in front of a towering red ridge.

**John Hayes Rockhole Camping Ground** (adult/child/family \$3.30/1.65/7.70) This has just three remote, basic sites with toilets beside a rocky

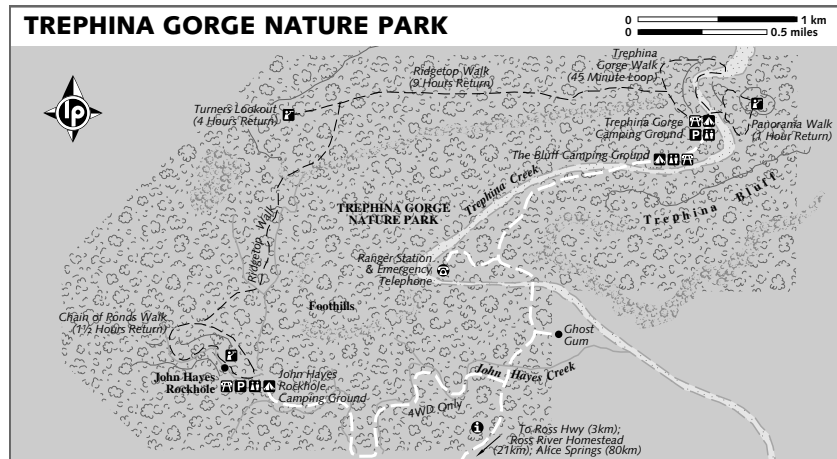
creek down from the waterhole. The rough road here gives a real feeling of remoteness. There's no reliable fresh water supply here – refill at the other camp sites.

## N'DHALA GORGE NATURE PARK

The highway continues from the Trepghina Gorge turn-off towards Ross River. Look out for the roadside shrine, complete with motorcycle and headstone, on the right. It's dedicated to a local who died in a motorcycle accident here in 1998.

Shortly before reaching Ross River you come to the 4WD track to N'Dhala Gorge Nature Park, where over 5900 ancient **rock carvings** (petroglyphs) decorate a deep, narrow gorge. The 11km access track winds down the picturesque **Ross River valley**, where a number of sandy crossings make this a bad idea for conventional vehicles. As the sign says, towing is costly.

The rock carvings at N'Dhala (known to the eastern Arrernte people as Irlwentye) are of two major types: finely pecked, where a stone hammer has been used to strike a sharp chisel such as a bone or rock; and pounded, where a stone has been hit directly on the rock face. The carvings, which are generally not that easy to spot, are thought to have been made in the last 2000 years, though some could be as old as 10,000 years. Common designs featured in the carvings are circular and feather-like patterns, and these are thought to relate to the Caterpillar Dreaming. A **walking trail**



(1.5km return, 45 minutes, easy) passes the main rock carvings, though you can continue further down the river bed.

The **camping ground** (adult/child/family \$3.30/1.65/7.70) at the gorge entrance has fireplaces (collect your own wood), tables and a pit toilet. Shade here is limited and there is no reliable water source.

## ROSS RIVER RESORT

Once the headquarters for Loves Creek Station, the old Ross River Homestead has a pretty setting under rocky hills beside the Ross River. The homestead was closed to tourists for several years but reopened in late 2005 as the Ross River Resort, and it's well worth the detour for a meal, a beer in the Stockman's Bar or a comfy bed. It's 9km along the continuation of the Ross Hwy past the Arltunga turn-off. Incidentally, if the words 'Ross River' strike the fear of fever into you, rest assured that the name was derived from Ross River in Townsville (Queensland).

With its secluded bush setting, birdlife, a range of accommodation and café, **Ross River Resort** (☎ 8956 9711; www.rossriverresort.com.au; camping per person \$10, bunkhouse \$22, d cabin \$100; ♿) offers a bit of bush comfort and a great place to hang your hat for a night. The air-con cabins have en suite, and there's a pool and spa, plus a store with fuel.

## ARLTUNGA HISTORICAL RESERVE

Arltunga is a haunting historical site of crumbling buildings, mine shafts and bat-

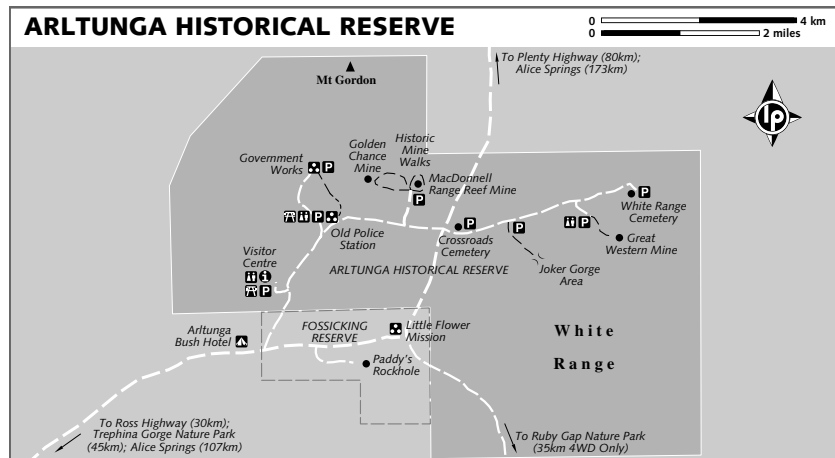
tery equipment left behind from what was officially central Australia's first town – a gold rush settlement that was once home to nearly 300 people. Spending an afternoon wandering among the ruins of this extensive reserve, it's not hard to gain a picture of the hardships and desperation of these early settlers.

The first 12km of the Arltunga Rd passes through scenic **Bitter Springs Gorge**, where red quartzite ridges tower above dolomite hills. This was the route taken by miners as they walked from Alice Springs to the goldfields at the turn of the last century. The road can be rough and is impassable after heavy rain.

About 1km before the Arltunga Historical Reserve, you pass the Arltunga Bush Hotel and camping ground, before arriving at the visitors centre in the reserve itself. The richest part of the goldfield was **White Range** but, showing remarkable short-sightedness, authorities allowed almost all the ruins and small mines that once dotted this high ridge to be destroyed during an open-cut mining operation. The White Range Mine operated for a few years in the late 1980s and was reopened in early 1996 as new technology made the area viable once more.

Fossicking is not permitted at Arltunga, but there is a **fossicking reserve** in a gully just to the south where you may (with luck) find some gold. Ask at the visitors centre.

From Arltunga it is possible to do a loop back to Alice Springs along The Gardens Tourist Drive, or to join up with the Plenty Hwy along a 4WD track.



## RUBY RUSH

**Ruby Gap** was named after a frantic ruby rush in the late 1880s. David Lindsay, an explorer and surveyor who came through this way while leading an expedition from Adelaide to Port Darwin, saw ruby red stones in the dry bed of the Hale River, glittering in the afternoon sun. The whole dream crashed overnight when it was found that the 'rubies' were relatively worthless garnets (albeit high grade), but not before some 200 hopeful prospectors had made the arduous trek from the railhead at Oodnadatta. It's easy to see how the prospectors got carried away when you see the surface of the river bed, shimmering a deep-claret colour as the sun reflects off the millions of garnet specks. They faced incredible hardships here, not least of which were the lack of water and the fierce climate.

However, the rush led to the chance discovery of alluvial gold at Paddy's Rockhole in 1887, and further exploration uncovered the reefs at White Range in 1897. The field was not particularly rich, and the miners suffered from the extremes of weather and the lack of water. In 1898, the government of South Australia constructed a 10-head gold-stamping battery and cyanide processing works at Arltunga – itself a major logistical feat as all the equipment had to be brought by camel train from the railhead at Oodnadatta, 600km to the south.

The improved facilities did little for the prosperity of the field, and even at its peak in the early 1900s there were never more than a few hundred miners working here; most of the time there were fewer than 100. By the time it closed, the battery had treated 11,500 tons of rock, yielding around 15,000 ounces of gold.

## Information

The **visitors centre** (☎ 8956 9770; ⏰ 8am–5pm) has interesting displays of old mining machinery and historical photographs. A free 20-minute slide show describes the reserve and its history. Drinking water is available and there are toilets (including facilities for the disabled).

## Sights & Activities

Arltunga's history is fascinating and the area gives an idea of what life was like for the early diggers, though it may leave you wondering how anyone could eke out a living in this parched region. The main sites are scattered over a wide area and you'll need a vehicle to get between them. Self-guided walks are scattered through the reserve; pick up leaflets from the visitors centre. Ask the rangers to crank up the old Jenkins Battery behind the centre to crush some gold-bearing ore. Ranger-guided tours are usually conducted on Sunday between June and August.

Allow half an hour to walk around the **Government works** area, where the best collection of dry-stone buildings survives. Among the ruins are the site of the Government Battery and Cyanide Works, and the partly restored Manager's and Assayer's residences. A short walk (1.5km, 15 minutes) leads to the **old police station**, or you can drive there.

Two mines are open in this area, but a torch (flashlight) is essential to explore them. At the **MacDonnell Range Reef Mine** you can climb down steel ladders and explore about 50m of tunnels between two shafts. The **Golden Chance Mine** boasts several old dry-stone miners' huts.

At the crossroads there's an old **cemetery**, plus the ruins of the old bakehouse; this was the site surveyed for the township that never eventuated. **Joker Gorge** features more old stone buildings and a good view reached by a 200m path up a hill.

Another short self-guided walk leads to the **Great Western Mine**. After climbing some steep ridges with great views to the east, the road ends at **White Range Cemetery**, the resting place of Joseph Hele, the first man to find gold here, and numerous other miners.

The remains of **Little Flower Mission** can be seen outside the Reserve. About 200 people lived here from 1942 until 1953, when the Mission moved to Santa Theresa.

## Sleeping

Camping is not permitted within the historical reserve, but the nearby **Arltunga Bush Hotel** (☎ 8956 9797; sites per adult/child \$8/4) has showers, toilets, barbecue pits and picnic tables. Fees are collected in the late afternoon. It's been a while between drinks for the hotel, but it was due to reopen as a pub

(Thursday to Monday) at the time of writing, but isn't planning to serve meals.

## RUBY GAP NATURE PARK

This little-visited and remote park, accessible only by 4WD, is a challenging but rewarding detour to some of the wildest gorge and river scenery in central Australia. The waterholes at Glen Annie Gorge are usually deep enough for a cooling dip.

It is essential to get a map from Parks & Wildlife, and to register (☎ 1300 650 730) in Alice Springs before setting out – and deregister when you return. Do not attempt the trip if you are inexperienced, especially in summer, or after heavy rain. Carry sufficient water and, as the last 5km is through boggy sand (deflate tyres), a shovel and jack may come in useful.

Leaving Arltunga, head east towards Atnarpa Homestead. Turn left immediately before the gate 11km from the Claraville turn-off. The road then deteriorates and is restricted to 4WD vehicles, thanks to sandy creek crossings and sharp jump-ups. After another 25km you arrive at the **Hale River**; follow the wheel ruts upstream (left) along the sandy bed for about 6km to the turnaround point, which is through **Ruby Gap** and just short of rugged Glen Annie Gorge.

Allow two hours each way for the trip. The park is managed by the **Arltunga ranger station** (☎ 8956 9770), so check road conditions there or in Alice before heading out here. The rangers suggest leaving the park in the event of rain – travellers in the past have had their car stuck at Ruby Gap for a month!

There are no marked walking trails, but you can make the rugged walk by the river bed to Glen Annie Gorge. Although there are no camping facilities in the park, camping is permitted anywhere along the river – bring in your own firewood and water.

## NORTH OF THE SIMPSON DESERT

The southeastern corner of the Territory eats into the edge of the vast Simpson Desert, one of the toughest, driest and most inhospitable parts of Australia. That doesn't mean it's inaccessible – with a 4WD you

can cover a lot of ground and experience some of the most challenging outback driving south of Alice. Even without a 4WD, it's possible to travel some of the way down the Old South Rd, which runs close to the old *Ghan* railway line, but the main attractions – including Chambers Pillar, Lambert Centre and the Old Andado Track – are accessible only to 4WD vehicles.

## ALICE SPRINGS TO FINKE

The Old South Rd, also known as Maryvale Rd, turns off the Stuart Hwy 12km south of Alice Springs. At Rodinga siding the road splits, continuing south to Maryvale Station, the Titjikala Aboriginal community and the turnoff to Chambers Pillar, or southeast to Finke. The road to Maryvale is rough in patches, but is fine for conventional vehicles in dry conditions. After that it's all 4WD. It's beautiful country, the road cutting through red sand dunes in places, with low mulga scrub and the occasional ghost gum dotting the landscape. At the Rodinga siding the Finke Track heads for 133km to Finke (Apatula). This forms part of the Simpson Desert Loop via New Crown, Andado Homestead and north to Alice along the Old Andado Track.

### THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Ooraminna Homestead & Bush Camp** (☎ 8953 0170; www.ooraminnahomestead.com.au; off Old South Rd; swag \$165, d incl meals \$270) This homestead is only 30km south of Alice, but offers a real outback station experience. Roll out a swag (provided) or stay in style in the secluded stone or timber cabins converted from buildings originally constructed for a movie set (one is an old jail!). The cabins have amazing four-poster beds made from desert oak, period furniture and modern private bathrooms, one with a large bath. You can relax on the veranda of the family homestead, which has a bar and dining room, take a station tour or go bushwalking. On the approach to the homestead (5km down a dirt road) you pass what looks like an abandoned town with a pub, store and windmill. It was actually the set for a film based on Ted Egan's *The Driver's Boy*, which never made it to production after funds ran out.

## Ewaninga Rock Carvings Conservation Reserve

This small conservation reserve 39km out of Alice protects an outcrop of sandstone next to a claypan sacred to Arrernte people, and known to them as Napatika. The rock carvings found here and at N'Dhala Gorge are thought to have been made by Aboriginal people who lived here before those currently in the Centre, between 1000 and 5000 years ago. The carvings, which include concentric circles and animal tracks, are chiselled into the soft rock, but their meanings are either lost in time or are regarded as too sacred for the uninitiated.

The claypan was an important source of food and water for the Arrernte during rains, and the *stories* told by the carvings are said to relate to the Rain Dreaming. There's an easy 20-minute loop walk with informative signs leading from a picnic area with wood barbecues and pit toilets.

## Oak Valley

It's worth calling in at this small Aboriginal community if you're passing between the Stuart Hwy and the Old South Rd. Check road conditions at Stuart's Well for the Hugh River Stock Route (9km south along the Stuart Hwy), which connects to the old *Ghan* line and Maryvale Station.

**Oak Valley Camping Ground** (☎ 8956 0959; sites per person \$8), run by the local Aboriginal community, is a pleasant spot among desert oaks, with shade shelters, hot showers, toilets and a wood barbecue. Call to inquire about day tours from Alice Springs or tours operating from Oak Valley which take in local rock art and fossil sites and delve into bush tucker.

## Titjikala & Maryvale Station

Continuing straight past the turn-off to Finke for 13km brings you to **Maryvale Station** (☎ 8956 0989; ☎ 9am-5pm) where you can get fuel, drinks and basic supplies.

Just past the store is the Titjikala Aboriginal community (pop 300), which you can visit without a permit. Drop into the **Titjikala Art Centre** (☎ 8956 0788; www.titjikala.com.au; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Thu) where local artists have developed a reputation not only for traditional dot paintings but also non-traditional crafts such as wire sculptures, linocuts, screen printing, batik and woodcarving.

## SLEEPING

**Gunya Titjikala** (☎ 8347 1159, 1300 135 657; www.gunya.com.au; tents \$900) If this seems like a lot of money to stay the night in a safari tent, it is. But this is one of those rare opportunities for an intimate outback experience with Aboriginal hosts. The raised canvas tents look out over the desert and Rodinga Ranges and have private bathrooms with shower and composting toilet, double bed and veranda deck. Meals are served in an adjacent tent and an Aboriginal guide will take you through the bush explaining local lore, bush tucker and culture. Thankfully, half the profits go to the Titjikala Foundation for community health and education projects.

## Finke (Apatula)

### pop 200

Back on the main track, the road turns southeast on the Finke Track at the ruins of the Rodinga siding. Now you're in real 4WD territory for the 140km to the Aboriginal community of Apatula (better known as Finke). The narrow track here follows the old railway line through red sand. You can either drive on the railway line itself, which is flatter and straighter but slow going, or on the adjacent track, which is firmer but is a bit like driving on a small rollercoaster track. This is the route followed in the annual Finke Desert Race (see Festivals & Events p191). Along the way you pass the remains of three old railway sidings, notably Bundooma (45km past Rodinga) and Engoordina (another 23km on).

Eventually you cross the wide sandy bed of the Finke River and arrive in the small town of Finke, which started life as a railway siding and gradually grew to have a European population of about 60. With the opening of the new *Ghan* line further west in 1982, administration of the town was taken over by the Apatula Aboriginal community.

The **community store** (☎ 8956 0968; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) sells fuel and basic supplies, and is an outlet for local artists' work, including carved wooden animals, bowls, traditional weapons and seed necklaces.

Apatula is linked to the Stuart Hwy, 150km to the west, by the Kulgera-Finke Rd, a reasonably well-maintained dirt road

sometimes known as the Goyder Stock Route. It's a fairly dull stretch of road, although the Lambert Centre makes an interesting diversion.

## OLD ANDADO TRACK

From Finke, you can do a long loop drive, east and then north to Alice Springs on the western edge of the Simpson Desert. An alternative route is to head south from New Crown into South Australia through Mt Dare Station and on to Oodnadatta.

Either way, this is 4WD country, with plenty of red sand, but the majority of the Old Andado Track runs between two lines of dunes and is not difficult to negotiate.

From Finke the road heads southeast for 30km to **New Crown Homestead** (☎ 8956 0969), which sells fuel (diesel and unleaded) during daylight hours; credit cards are not accepted.

Shortly after leaving New Crown, the road once again crosses the Finke River and then swings north for the 70km run to **Andado Station**. This stretch passes through beautiful sand-dune country that is ablaze with wildflowers after good rain.

From Andado Station (no tourist facilities) an 18km track leads to **Old Andado Homestead**

(☎ 8956 0812; camp site per person \$9, cabin per person \$20, with bedding \$30). It's situated in a pretty valley between two huge lines of dunes and is run by Molly Clark, one of the Centre's great battlers surviving the remote harsh conditions here. Bookings are advised for the cabins. There are no meals or fuel, and credit cards are not accepted.

The track swings north from Andado for the 321km trip to Alice, which takes at least five hours. A 10km detour leads east to **Mac Clark Conservation Reserve**, 38km north of Andado, which makes a worthwhile diversion. The 30-sq-km reserve, on a vast gravel plain, protects a large stand of tall waddy trees (*Acacia peuce*), a rare species that survives in an environment where little else can.

Continuing on from the turn-off to the reserve, the track leaves the gravel plain behind and heads northwards through dune country, looping away to the west around the Arookara and Rodinga Ranges, before arriving at the **Allambi Homestead**, 218km from Old Andado.

It's a further 20km to the Aboriginal community, **Ltyentye Apurte** – better known as Santa Teresa. Permits are not required to pass straight through, but visits to the com-

## DETOUR

From Maryvale Station (Titjikala) a rough road heads southwest for 44km to **Chambers Pillar Historic Reserve**. It's 4WD only, with some rocky sections; the last 10km is through sand drifts and dunes.

Although this is a detour of sorts, Chambers Pillar is a big destination for many travellers wanting to see this extraordinary sandstone pillar, the sort of bizarre sight that only central Australia can deliver. Towering nearly 60m above the surrounding plain, the phallic marker is all that's left of a layer of sandstone that formed 350 million years ago. Early explorers used it as a navigational beacon, and their names and the dates of their visits are carved into the base of the soft rock. Unfortunately, it also bears the work of some less worthy modern-day graffiti artists – there are hefty fines for adding your own name.

Like many central Australian sights, the pillar is at its glorious best at sunset and sunrise. Framed against a fading desert sky, it's a photographer's dream. Since it's a tough drive to get here, the best idea is to arrive an hour or two before sunset, camp overnight and enjoy breakfast in the desert with the pillar for company.

To the Aboriginal people of the area, Chambers Pillar is the remains of Irtkawara, a powerful Gecko Ancestor who killed some of his ancestors and took a girl of the wrong skin group. They were banished to the desert where both turned to stone – the girl became **Castle Rock**, about 500m away.

The **camping ground** (adult/child/family \$3.30/1.65/7.70), in an attractive grove of desert oaks, has pit toilets, tables and fireplaces – bring water and firewood.

Although Chambers Pillar is only 160km from Alice Springs, the trip takes a good four hours. There's a great view along the way from a high ridge 12km to the west of the pillar.

## DETOUR

If you think that you are in the middle of nowhere, you're wrong – you are in the middle of Australia. A signposted sandy track leaves the the Finke-Kulgara road about 23km west of Finke, and runs 14km to the **Lambert Centre**, Australia's geographical heart. To mark the spot there's a dinky 5m-high replica of the flagpole, complete with Australian flag, that sits atop Parliament House in Canberra. If you picked Australia up at its centre of gravity, it would balance here at latitude 25°36'36.4"S and longitude 134°21'17.3"E. You can add your name to the visitors' book if you like.

The track is quite sandy and narrow in patches, so a 4WD is recommended. There are two parallel tracks so stick to the left. From the turn-off it is 6km to the Mulga bore, then 8km west to the site.

munity must be arranged in advance through the **council office** (☎ 8956 0999).

The artists at **Keringke Art Centre** (☎ 8956 0956; www.keringkearts.com.au; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Thu) produce some outstanding work with striking, colourful designs a feature. Among the artworks are paintings on canvas and ceramic, carved artefacts, textiles and beadwork. Call ahead to arrange a visit to the workshop and gallery.

From Ltyentye Apurte it's about 82km to Alice Springs. The road is generally pretty rough and dusty from the community to Alice Springs airport, 15km from town, where the bitumen is a welcome relief.

## DOWN THE TRACK

South from Alice along the Stuart Hwy, apart from the turn-off to Rainbow Valley and the opportunity for camel riding at Stuart's Well, there's not much other than a couple of roadhouses till you reach the South Australia border.

## RAINBOW VALLEY CONSERVATION RESERVE

Only 100km from Alice Springs, Rainbow Valley is one of the more extraordinary sights in central Australia, though it's really only at its best around sunset. Out of

the low dunes and mulga on the eastern edge of the James Ranges rise a series of sandstone bluffs and cliffs that seem to glow in an ever-changing show of ochre red, orange and purples as the sun sets. Although colourfully named, the crumbling cliffs are mainly shades of cream and rust red, formed by the iron-rich sandstone and leached layers of soft white sandstone.

If you're lucky enough to visit after some decent rain, the whole scene is stunningly reflected in the foreground claypans – a photographer's dream.

The rocks here were formed about 300 million years ago, and weathering and leaching has led to a concentration of red iron oxides in the upper layers; lower down the stone is almost white. The reserve is important to the southern Arrernte people, and the large rock massif known as Ewerre in the south of the reserve is a registered sacred site.

There's an information board and a sunset viewing platform near the car park, where a 10-minute walk skirts the claypan and leads around the other side of the foot of the bluff to the **mushroom rock**. Look out for the high rock outcrop that looks just like a face in profile staring toward Rainbow Valley.

The small **camping ground** (adult/child/family \$3.30/1.65/7.70) has picnic tables, a pit toilet and gas barbecues. It's a bit exposed, with little shade and no water, but the setting is superb and perfectly positioned for sunset viewing.

The turn-off to Rainbow Valley is 77km along the Stuart Hwy south of Alice Springs, then 24km along a 4WD access road to the car park and camping area. A conventional vehicle might just make the trip in dry conditions, but there are a couple of deep sandy patches where you could get bogged.

## STUART'S WELL

Stuart's Well is a stop on the Stuart Hwy about 90km south of Alice Springs, where the highway passes through a gap in the James Ranges. It's well worth stopping in at the roadhouse for a beer and to browse the walls of photos and memorabilia covering the history of the development of Kings Canyon by the Cotterill family. You might also catch Dinky the famous singing dingo – rescued and raised from a pup by owner Jim Cotterill, it now entertains tourists by tip-toeing across the piano and howling along!

Otherwise, the main attraction here is **Camels Australia** (☎ 8956 0925; www.camels-ustralia.com.au), founded by central Australia's 'camel king', Noel Fullerton. It's a good opportunity to take a short camel ride (\$5 around the yard, \$30/40 for 30/60 minutes and \$85/110 for a half/full day), but the serious stuff is the extended outback safaris from three to five days (\$150 per day) through the gaps and gorges of the James Ranges. Meals, swag accommodation and camel are included.

**Jim's Place** (☎ 8956 0808; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$14/17, budget r with own swag/supplied linen \$15/25, s/d cabins with en suite \$70/85; ☎ 9am-8.30pm; 📶 🚰 🚿), next door to the camel farm, is a roadhouse run by central Australian identity Jim Cotterill. The Cotterill family, Jim and his late father Jack, opened up Kings Canyon to tourism, cutting a road through from their Wallara Ranch in the 1960s – the truck used to clear the roads now sits out front. There's a monument to Jack at Kings Canyon and Jim is a fount of knowledge on the area. It has a grassy, shaded camping ground, pool and spa, a store with basic provisions and a licensed restaurant (meals \$15 to \$20), which is open from 9am to 7.30pm.

## ERLDUNDA

Erldunda is a modern roadhouse and motel complex on the Stuart Hwy 200km south of Alice Springs, at the point where the Lasseter Hwy branches off to Uluru (244km west).

**Desert Oaks Motel & Caravan Park** (☎ 8956 0984; www.desertoaksresort.com; cnr Stuart & Lasseter Hwys; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$20/26, budget s/d/tr/q \$30/50/60/65, motel s/d \$80/100; 📶 🚰 🚿) gets a fair bit of traffic – presumably people who underestimated the distance to Uluru – and as such it's better than your average roadhouse accommodation. The shady grassed camping area has a pool, tennis court and barbecues. The three air-con backpacker cabins have four beds each with communal facilities, and the modern motel units are well equipped with TV, fridge and en suite.

In addition to accommodation, bistro meals are available in the **Ringers Inn** (mains \$12-18; ☎ dinner), there's a **pub** (☎ 10am-11pm) and the **roadhouse** (☎ 7am-8.30pm) sells takeaway food, souvenirs, groceries and vehicle parts. Fuel is available from 6.30am to 10pm.

## KULGERA

Depending on which way you're heading, the small settlement of Kulgera will be your first or last taste of the Territory. It's on the Stuart Hwy 20km north of the South Australian border, and from here the gravel Goyder Stock Route (Finke-Kulgera Rd) heads off east for the 150km trip to Finke.

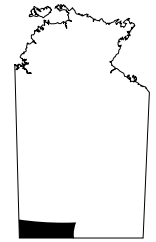
The busy pub/roadhouse and **police station** (☎ 8956 0974) here services the outlying Pitjantjatjara Aboriginal community and pastoral leases.

**Kulgera Roadhouse** (☎ 8956 0973; Stuart Hwy; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$13/20, budget r \$30, s/d \$65/80; ☎ 6am-11pm; 📶 🚰 🚿) has a large camping area, basic backpacker rooms and comfortable motel rooms with TV, fridge and air-con. The roadhouse also has a shop, pub (open 11am to 11pm), ATM and dining room, and offers takeaways.

## SOUTH TO PORT AUGUSTA

At the South Australia-Northern Territory border, 20km south of Kulgera, there's a roadside stop and **border sign** where tour groups are fond of getting their photos taken. From here, there's lots of very little to see as you head south the 900km or so to Port Augusta. The main exception is the town of Coober Pedy (391km south of the border), a fascinating outback town that should be an essential stop on this long haul south.

There are several roadhouses at intervals along the route. All sell fuel (the longest distance between fill-ups is 254km, between Coober Pedy and Glendambo) and meals during regular business hours, and accommodation is available.



# Uluru-Kata Tjuta

Sweeping spinifex, red sand plains and drooping desert oaks stretch west into the formidable Gibson Desert in this iconic corner of the Territory. For thousands of years this arid, inhospitable land has been home to the Pitjantjatjara and Yankuntjatjara Aboriginal peoples, who might well still have the place to themselves if it wasn't for one thing. Right here, slap bang in the middle of the country, is Australia's most recognisable natural wonder. Uluru (Ayers Rock) and its partner Kata Tjuta (the Olgas) draw tourists to the Red Centre like moths to a big red flame.

Uluru has long graced postcards, posters and thousands of photo albums, and a trip here is something of a pilgrimage to the heart of Australia. The first glimpse of the Rock as you round a bend on the short drive from Yulara is unforgettable, and the changing colours, light and shadows can keep you captivated for days. There's plenty to do here: learn about Anangu Aboriginal culture through the eyes of the traditional owners, take a sunset camel ride through the desert, visit the superb cultural centre and raise a glass of champagne to the glowing ember-like monolith as the sun sets.

Some may see a visit to Uluru-Kata Tjuta as a cliché, but if you think this is a long way to go to see a couple of rocks in the desert, think again. The journey alone is epic, and the reward is ample. You won't be disappointed you made the journey.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Letting 'the Rock' conquer you on a leisurely **base walk** (p254)
- Learning about Anangu traditions, culture and Tjukurpa (law), on a **tour** (p251) or at the **Uluru-Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre** (p253)
- Finding a space – and a glass of champagne – to watching glowing hues of Uluru at **sunset** (p255)
- Experiencing dinner in the desert under the stars at the superb **Sounds of Silence** (p258)
- Discovering the Valley of the Winds at sunrise in magnificent **Kata Tjuta** (p256)
- Gazing at a billion brilliant stars in the desert sky at the **Night Sky Show** (p257)
- Ending the day with a barbecue and beer at Yulara's **Outback Pioneer Hotel** (p258)



■ TELEPHONE CODE ☎ 08

- Ayers Rock Resort: [www.ayersrockresort.com.au](http://www.ayersrockresort.com.au)
- Parks Australia: [www.deh.gov.au/parks/uluru](http://www.deh.gov.au/parks/uluru)

## LASSETER HIGHWAY

The Lasseter Hwy links the Stuart Hwy with Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, 244km to the west. Named after prospector and explorer Harold Lasseter who spent half his life (and ultimately died) searching for a lost gold reef, the road is sealed and takes less than three hours to cover.

### MT EBENEZER

The first stop along the highway, Mt Ebenezer is an Aboriginal-owned station 56km west of the Stuart Hwy in the shadow of the Basedow Range and Mt Ebenezer to the north. The roadhouse is the art-and-craft outlet for the local Imanpa Aboriginal community and prices here are very competitive. A small gallery shows a picture board of local artists along with paintings (\$35 to \$65 for small pieces, or \$100 to \$700 for larger ones), wood carvings and printed T-shirts.

At **Mt Ebenezer Roadhouse** (☎ 8956 2904; Lasseter Hwy; camping free, powered sites per person \$8, s/d \$55/60; 🕒 8am-10pm; 📶 🚰 🚰), the original part of the building dates back to the 1950s, and is constructed of hand-sawn desert oak logs. The camping area is a bit parched, and there are refurbished motel-style rooms with en suite. Meals (\$12) and fuel are available and there's a bar.

### MT CONNER

Mt Conner, the large mesa that looms 350m out of the desert floor about 20km south of the highway, is the outback's most photographed red herring. On first sighting many people mistake this for Uluru, but other than being a large mass protruding from a flat plain, it bears no resemblance. With a base circumference of around 32km, Mt Conner is much larger than Uluru. There's a rest area and lookout on the highway 26km beyond the Luritja Rd turn-off, which is a good vantage point to take in the scene.

Mt Conner was first recorded by explorer William Gosse in 1873, who named it after ML Conner, a South Australian politician. It has great significance for the local Aboriginal people, who know it as Atila.

### Tours

Mt Conner lies on Curtin Springs Station and there is no public access, except by

joining an organised tour from Curtin Springs Roadhouse.

**Camel Adventure Tours** (☎ 8956 7748, 8956 2906; adult/child \$25/10) has 1½-hour morning and sunset rides from Curtin Springs out towards Mt Conner.

**Uncles Tours** (☎ 8956 2916; half/full-day tours \$85/170, two-hour sunset tour \$45, climb \$75), departing from Curtin Springs Roadhouse, has informative tours that take you out to Mt Conner, across salt pans and to the old Mt Conner homestead. The six-hour return Mt Conner climb requires a decent level of fitness.

### CURTIN SPRINGS

Curtin Springs is a further 26km from the Mt Conner rest area and is the last stop before reaching Yulara, about 80km away. The roadhouse here gets plenty of traffic and can be quite lively. It's worth a stop to see the aviary behind the roadhouse, with a colourful collection of native birds.

**Curtin Springs Roadhouse** (☎ 8956 2906; www.curtinsprings.com; Lasseter Hwy; camping free, powered sites for 2 \$15, s/d \$45/55, d/tr/q/f \$100/115/130/150; 📶 🚰 🚰 🚰) is a popular accommodation alternative for those not willing to pay the resort prices at Yulara. You can pitch a tent in a grassy camping ground for free, and the cabins are neat and well maintained. The newest ones (with en suite) had a former life in the Olympic village at the Sydney 2000 games. There's pricey fuel, a store with limited supplies and takeaway food, plus a bar.

## ULURU-KATA TJUTA NATIONAL PARK

For most visitors to Australia, a visit to Uluru is high on the list of 'must-sees', and for many Australians it's attained the status of a pilgrimage. Boasting one of the world's greatest natural attractions, this national park is one of just 11 places in Australia – and only two in the Territory – that are included on the Unesco World Heritage List.

But the park offers more than just the chance to see the Rock. Along with the equally impressive Kata Tjuta (the Olgas), the entire area is of deep cultural sig-

nificance to the local Pitjantjatjara and Yankuntjatjara Aboriginal peoples (who refer to themselves as Anangu).

Although many tour groups zip through the area in 24 hours, it's easy to spend at least the three days allowed by the park pass – there are plenty of walks and other activities, and the Rock never seems to look the same no matter how many times you see it. The service village of Yulara, which is just outside the park's boundary, offers comfortable accommodation and dining at premium prices.

### Aboriginal Heritage

Archaeological evidence suggests that Aboriginal people have inhabited this part of Australia for at least 10,000 years. According to Tjukurpa (Aboriginal *stories* and law derived from the creation period) all landscape features were made by ancestral beings, and the Anangu today are the descendants of the ancestral beings and custodians of the ancestral lands.

According to Anangu legend, Uluru was built by two boys who played in the mud after rain; it is at the centre of a number

### TJUKURPA – ANANGU STORIES

There are many creation *stories* associated with Uluru, but the most important ancestors to the Anangu are the Mala (rufous hare wallaby), the Kuniya (woma python), the Liru (brown snake) and Lungkata (bluetongue lizard), and evidence of their activities can be seen in features of the Rock.

#### Mala Wallabies

The Mala Wallabies travelled from the Yuendumu area to Uluru for ceremonies (*inma*). The men climbed to the top of Uluru to plant a ceremonial pole, while the women collected and prepared food at Taputji, a small isolated rock on the northeastern side.

During the ceremonies, the Mala were invited by the Wintalka (mulga-seed) men to attend dance ceremonies away to the west. Already committed to their own celebrations, the Mala refused and the angered Wintalka created a nasty dingo-like creature (Kurpany), which sneaked up on the women's dancing ceremonies at Tjukatjapi on the northern side of the Rock. The frightened women fled right into the middle of the men's secret ceremony, ruining it, and in the confusion a Mala man was killed and eaten by the Kurpany. The remaining Mala fled south towards the Musgrave Ranges.

#### Kuniya & Liru

The Tjukurpa tells of how the Kuniya (woma python) came from the east to hatch her young at Uluru. While she was camped at Taputji, she was attacked by a group of Liru (brown snakes), who had been angered by Kuniya's nephew. At Mutitjulu she came across a Liru warrior and performed a ritual dance, mustering great forces. In an effort to dispel this terrifying force she picked up a handful of sand and let it fall to the ground. The vegetation where the sand fell was poisoned and today remains unusable to Anangu.

The force within her remained strong and a great battle with the Liru was fought. She hit him on the head, trying to inflict a 'sorry cut', but overcome with anger she hit him a second time, killing him. The two wounds received by the Liru can be seen as the vertical cracks on the Rock near Mutitjulu.

#### Lungkata

The Lungkata (bluetongue lizard man) found an emu, which had been wounded by other hunters, at the base of the Rock. He finished it off and started to cook it. The original hunters, two Bellbird brothers, found Lungkata and asked him if he had seen their emu. He lied, saying he hadn't seen it, but the hunters did not believe him and chased him around the base of the Rock. While being pursued Lungkata dropped pieces of emu meat, and these are seen as the fractured slabs of sandstone just west of Mutitjulu, and at Kalaya Tjunta (emu thigh) on the southeastern side of Uluru, where a spur of Rock is seen as the emu's thigh.



### SPEAKING ANANGU

Visiting the Cultural Centre or taking an Anangu Tour, you'll hear a number of words in the Pitjantjatjara language, the most prominent Anangu dialect. Here's a brief glossary of commonly used words:

**inma** dance, ceremony

**itjanu** flower

**kali** boomerang

**karu** creek

**kulata** hunting spear

**Kuniya** woma python

**Kurpany** devil dog

**Liru** brown snake

**Mala** rufous hare wallaby

**miru** spear thrower

**nganampa** ours

**ngura** all of us

**Nguraritja** traditional owner

**palya** OK, hello, goodbye

**pila** spinifex plains

**piranpa** non-Aboriginal people

**piti** wooden bowl

**puli** rock

**puti** woodland or bushland

**tali** sand dunes

**tatintja** climb

**tjara** shield

**tjukuritja** creation ancestors

**Tjukurpa** creation law, stories

**walpa** wind

**wana** digging stick

**wari** cold

**wiya** no, don't

of Dreaming tracks that crisscross central Australia.

The Anangu officially own the national park, although it is leased to **Parks Australia** ([www.ea.gov.au/parks/uluru/index.html](http://www.ea.gov.au/parks/uluru/index.html)), the Commonwealth government's national parks body, on a 99-year lease. The traditional owners receive an annual rental of around \$200,000 plus 25% of the park entrance fees (about \$2 million a year). Of this, the Anangu devote about \$600,000 to community projects such as health and education. Decisions related to the park are made by the 12 members of the Board of Management, eight of whom are nominated by the traditional owners.

### European History

The first white man to venture into the area was Ernest Giles, during his attempted crossing from the Overland Telegraph Line to the west of the continent in 1872. His party had travelled west from Watarrka, and sighted Kata Tjuta, which he named Mt Ferdinand after his financier, the noted botanist Baron Ferdinand von Mueller. However, von Mueller later changed the name to Mt Olga, after Queen Olga of Wurttemberg.

The following year a party led by William Gosse set out to cross to the west. He named Mt Conner and, sighting a hill to the west, stated:

The hill, as I approached, presented a most peculiar appearance, the upper portion being covered with holes or

caves. When I got clear of the sandhills, and was only two miles distant, and the hill, for the first time, coming fairly into view, what was my astonishment to find it was one immense rock rising abruptly from the plain... I have named this Ayers Rock, after Sir Henry Ayers the premier of South Australia.

The early explorers were followed by pastoralists, missionaries, doggers (dingo hunters) and various miscellaneous adventurers who travelled through the area. Among these was one Harold Lasseter, who insisted he had found a fabulously rich gold reef in the Petermann Ranges to the west in 1901. He died a lonely death in the same ranges in 1931 trying to rediscover it.

As European activity in the area increased, so did the contact and conflict between the two cultures. With the combined effects of stock grazing and drought, the Anangu found their hunting and gathering options becoming increasingly scarce, which in turn led to a dependence on the white economy. In the 1920s the three governments of Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory set aside a reserve (the Great Central Aboriginal Reserve) for Aboriginal people. The Anangu shunned this and other reserves, preferring instead to maintain traditional practices.

By 1950 a dirt road had been pushed through from the east and tourism started

to develop in the area. As early as 1951 the fledgling Connellan Airways applied for permission to build an airstrip near Uluru, which resulted in the area of Uluru and Kata Tjuta being excised from the reserve in 1958 for use as a national park.

By the 1970s it was clear that planning was required for the development of the area. Between 1931 and 1946 only 22 people were known to have climbed Uluru. In 1969 about 23,000 people visited the area. Ten years later the figure was 65,000 and now the annual visitor figures are approaching 500,000.

The 1970s saw the construction of the new Yulara Resort some distance from the Rock, as the original facilities were too close and were having a negative impact on the environment. Many of the old facilities, close to the northern side of the Rock, were bulldozed, while some are still used by the Mutitjulu Aboriginal community. Yulara finally opened in 1983. Three years earlier, when camping was permitted near the base of the Rock, a dingo took baby Azaria Chamberlain from a tent, sparking probably the most famous legal case in Australian history – the trial and later acquittal of Lindy Chamberlain.

Increased tourism activity over the years led to Aboriginal anxiety about the desecration of important sites by tourists. The Federal government was approached for assistance and by 1973 Aboriginal people had become involved with the management of the park. In 1983, following renewed calls from traditional owners for title to the land, the Federal government announced that freehold title to the national park would be granted and the park leased back to what is now Parks Australia for 99 years. The transfer of ownership took place on 26 October 1985.

### Geology

The Rock itself is 3.6km long by 2.4km wide, stands 348m above the surrounding dunes and measures 9.4km around the base. It is made up of a type of coarse-grained sandstone known as arkose, which was formed from sediment from eroded granite mountains. Kata Tjuta, on the other hand, is a conglomerate of granite and basalt gravel glued together by mud and sand.

The sedimentary beds that make up both formations were laid down over about 600 million years, in a shallow sea in what geologists call the Amadeus Basin. Various periods

of uplift caused the beds to buckle, fold and lift above sea level; those that form Uluru were turned so that they are now almost vertical, while at Kata Tjuta they were tilted about 20°. For the last 300 million years erosion has worn away the surface rocks, leaving what we see today. Yet it's believed that the Rock extends up to 5km beneath the sand.

The sculptured shapes seen on the surface of Uluru today are the effects of wind, water and sand erosion.

### Climate

The park is in the centre of the arid zone, with an average annual rainfall of only around 220mm. The most likely time for rain and thunderstorms is during the hotter months (November to March), but drought is not uncommon and a year or two may go by without rain.

Many people are surprised at how cold it gets at Uluru in winter. Daytime temperatures from May to October can be pleasant, but if there's cloud and a cold wind around it can be bitter. Clear nights often see the temperature plunge to well below freezing – campers be prepared!

In summer it can be scorching, with temperatures peaking during February and March and reaching up to 45°C. Normally it's a mere 30°C to 35°C.

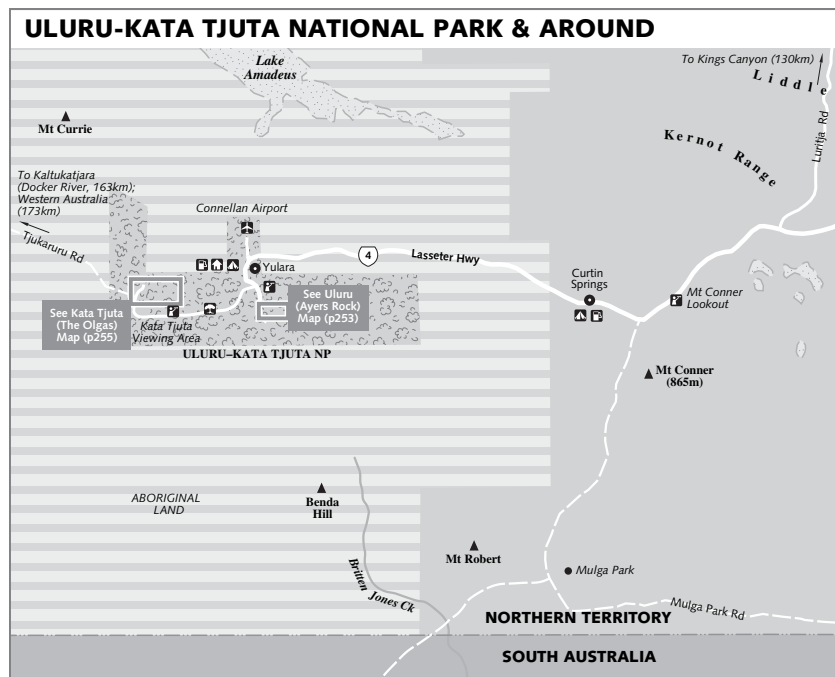
### Wildlife

#### ANIMALS

Although the arid country around Uluru doesn't look very fertile, it is home to a wide variety of animals – the fact that most of the Tjukurpa sites within the park are animal-related is evidence of that. Anangu knowledge of ecosystems and animal behaviour is essential to wildlife surveys and provides background for conservation programmes.

The most common native mammals include red kangaroos, euros, dingoes and small marsupials such as dunnarts and marsupial moles. The moles have become specialised desert dwellers – they are blind and use their short, strong limbs to burrow through the loose sand, feeding on insect larvae and small reptiles.

The once-common rufous hare wallaby is classified as being extinct in the wild, wiped out by European settlement and feral predators. However, in 2005 25 animals were re-introduced to the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National



Park, protected by a 170-hectare feral-proof enclosure. The small wallabies (known as Mala to Anangu) are an important link to the Tjukurpa creation stories. It's hoped that the wallabies, reared in an enclosure within Watarrka National Park, will successfully breed and may eventually be returned to the wild.

Most of the park's mammals are active only at night, but you're bound to see some birds. Crested pigeons are common around Yulara and while walking round the Rock you'll probably see colourful galahs, budgerigars and zebra finches. A checklist of birds found within the park is available from the Uluru-Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre.

#### PLANTS

The plants of the red sand plains of central Australia – mainly spinifex grasses, mulga bushes and desert oak trees – have adapted to the harsh, dry climate. These plants remain virtually dormant during times of drought and shoot into action after rain.

The mulga has heavy, hard wood and so was used by Anangu for firewood, and for making implements such as boomerangs and

digging sticks. Stands of desert oaks are usually found in areas of deep sand. The rough corky bark protects and insulates the trunk, giving it a level of fire protection. Except in times of severe drought, numerous grevilleas and fuchsias thrive in the sand dunes.

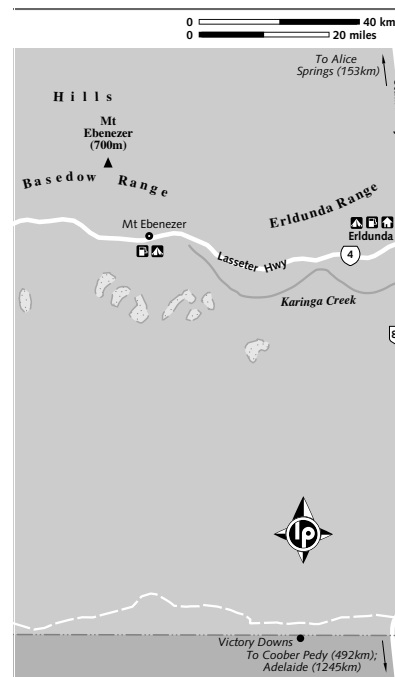
Common eucalypts found in the area include the Centralian bloodwood, the river red gum and the blue mallee.

Late winter and early spring (August to September) usually turn on a display of wildflowers with some surprisingly showy blooms.

As in the Top End, Aboriginal people in central Australia used fire to manage the land. Controlled burns encourage regrowth and limit the amount of accumulated vegetation. Large fires burn too hot over a large area and can be very destructive. These days the park managers are trying to re-create the 'mosaic' pattern of small burns that occurred before white settlement.

#### Information

The park is open from half an hour before sunrise to sunset daily (varying between



5am to 9pm in summer and 6.30am to 7.30pm in winter). Three-day entry permits to the **national park** (adult/child \$25/free) are available at the drive-through park entry station on the road from Yulara.

There are picnic and toilet facilities at Uluru (at the Cultural Centre and near the Mala car park) and at Kata Tjuta.

**Uluru-Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre** (☎ 8956 3138; 🕒 7am-6pm Nov-Apr, 7.30am-5.30pm May-Aug, 7am-5.30pm Sep-Oct; information desk 🕒 8am-5pm) Just 1km before the Rock, this should be your first stop for information on the park. Along with cultural displays and galleries, there's an information desk in the Nintirringkupai building where you can speak to park rangers and pick up informative leaflets and walking notes. Quality information packs cost \$5. See p253 for more information on the centre. **Visitors centre** (☎ 8957 7377; 🕒 9am-5.30pm) The visitors centre at Yulara is also a good source of park information.

#### Tours

##### BUS TOURS

Yulara's **Tour & Information Centre** (☎ 8956 2240; Yulara Shopping Centre; 🕒 8am-8.30pm) houses local tour operators.

**AAT-King's** (☎ 8956 2171; www.aatkings.com) has the biggest range of coach tour options around the park. You can choose from a range of guided walks and tours from Yulara, or buy a tour pass from one day (\$175) to three days (\$300). Check the website or ask at the Tour & Information Centre for details.

**Discovery Ecotours** (☎ 8956 2563; www.ecotours.com.au) has small-group day tours around Uluru for \$110 and Kata Tjuta \$80. There's also a seven-hour tour to Mt Conner including dinner for \$210.

#### CAMEL TOURS

**Uluru Camel Tours** (☎ 8956 2444; www.cameltoours.com.au; short rides adult/child from \$10/6; 🕒 10.30am-noon), owned by Anangu Tours, has a small museum and short but interesting (if you've never been on a camel before) rides. The most popular rides, however, are the Camel to Sunrise, a 2½-hour tour for \$95, and the sunset equivalent with champagne, which costs the same. At noon daily between April and October the Camel Express (\$60, 45 minutes) trudges through the desert to a view of both Uluru and Kata Tjuta.

#### CULTURAL TOURS

If you want to gain a true insight into the significance of the Rock through the eyes of the traditional owners, check out **Anangu Tours** (☎ 8956 2123; www.anangutours.com.au). Owned and operated by Anangu from the Mutitjulu community, these tours are the ultimate cultural experience at Uluru, and give you a greater understanding of Aboriginal culture.

The 4½-hour Aboriginal Uluru Tour starts with sunrise over Uluru and breakfast at the Cultural Centre, then takes in the Liru walk to the base, Aboriginal culture and law, and demonstrations of bush skills and spear-throwing. It departs daily and costs \$120/80 for adults/children.

The Kuniya Sunset Tour (\$90/65) leaves at 2.30pm (3.30pm between November and March) and includes a visit to Mutitjulu Waterhole and the Cultural Centre, finishing with a sunset viewing. Both trips can be combined over 24 hours with an Anangu Culture Pass (\$190/130). If you have your own transport you can choose to skip the preliminaries and join any of the tours at the Cultural Centre for \$60/30.

Another option is the Mala walk (\$70/50) at 9am, which starts with a vehicle tour of

the Rock then a guided Mala walk. Finally there's a three-hour dot painting workshop (\$80/60) at the Cultural Centre.

**Cave Hill Safari** (☎ 8296 8010; www.voyages.com.au; adult/child \$215/180) is a full-day cultural and adventure tour travelling by 4WD to the Cave Hill Aboriginal community, southeast of Uluru across the South Australian border, where local guides explain their creation *stories* and traditions and show rock art sites. This is a wonderful opportunity to escape the crowds and learn more about the lives of the traditional owners.

### MOTORCYCLE TOURS

Sunrise and sunset tours can also be done on the back of a Harley-Davidson motorcycle, though at a minimum \$85 for a 30-minute ride it's one for classic bike fanatics. **Uluru Motorcycle Tours** (☎ 8956 2019; ulurucycles@bigpond.com.au; rides \$85-255) offers a short trip to the Rock (sunset tour is \$155), or longer tours from one to three hours, including Kata Tjuta. Serious riders would prefer the **self-drive tours** (2/3/5/10hr \$260/340/440/650), which require a \$2500 deposit and full motorcycle licence.

### SCENIC FLIGHTS

The view from the ground is one thing, but from the air it's something else – just be aware that flights must maintain a certain distance from the Rock itself. Bookings are essential (preferably a day in advance) and flights may be cancelled if weather conditions aren't perfect. The following operators can be booked at the Tour & Information Centre in Yulara. If you're wondering whether to go up by chopper or plane, the light plane gives you more time in the air and is slightly cheaper, but the helicopter flies lower, offers a better all-round view and is certainly more exhilarating. There are no child concessions on any flights.

**Ayers Rock Helicopters** (☎ 8956 2077; arhelis@bigpond.com.au; \$100-580) offers a 15-minute buzz over the Rock (\$100), a 30-minute Uluru-Kata Tjuta flight (\$180) or longer flights to Mt Connor or Kings Canyon.

**Ayers Rock Scenic Flights** (☎ 8956 2345; www.ayersrockflights.com.au; flights \$150-600) has a 40-minute plane flight over the Rock and Kata Tjuta for \$150; Uluru, Kata-Tjuta, Lake Amadeus and Kings Canyon is \$370.

**Professional Helicopter Services** (PHS; ☎ 8956 2003; phsrock@bigpond.com; flights \$115-830) has short

### DETOUR

A lonely sign at the western end of the access road to Kata Tjuta points out that there is a hell of a lot of nothing if you travel west – it's 200km to the Aboriginal settlement of Kaltukatjara (Docker River), and about 1500km to Kalgoorlie. But the **Great Central Rd** is a short cut to Western Australia and an opportunity for some remote outback driving. Although regularly graded and not a demanding drive, the road can get chopped up after rain and you may need a 4WD to get right through. Check the road conditions before you leave, and ensure you have a permit from the Central Land Council in Alice Springs (p177).

The route passes Irving Creek (where Harold Lasseter died), Kaltukatjara (Docker River), Warburton and Laverton. The **Gunbarrel Hwy** is an alternative route that leaves the Great Central Rd at Warburton and heads north and then west to the mining town of Leonorain Western Australia. This is definitely high-clearance 4WD territory.

flights over the Rock from \$115, Uluru and the Olgas for \$220 and the works, including Lake Amadeus and Kings Canyon, for \$830.

### TOURS FROM ALICE SPRINGS

There's a whole gamut of tours to Uluru from Alice Springs from all-inclusive camping trips to more upmarket tours with hotel accommodation. Check out the company's vehicles, group size (and ages), accommodation, types of meals and whether it includes park entry (most don't) before deciding.

**Emu Run Tours** (☎ 8953 7057; www.emurun.com.au) has day tours to Uluru if you're rushed (\$195) or a two-day Uluru and Kings Canyon tour (\$390). Prices include park entry fees.

**Mulga's Adventures** (☎ 8952 1545; www.mulgas.com.au; 3-day tour \$250), departing from Annie's Place, is a popular tour with backpackers. It's certainly cheap and includes bush camping in swags and stops at Kings Canyon and a camel farm.

**Northern Territory Adventure Tours** (☎ 8981 4255; www.adventuretours.com.au) is an established outfit with a variety of vehicles and tour options including two-/three-/five-day trips for \$350/460/700. Group sizes can be larger

than some and your 'bush camping' will usually be in a camping ground.

**Ossies Outback 4WD** (☎ 8952 2308; www.ossies.com.au; 3-day tour from \$650) offers exciting 4WD tours via Finke Gorge National Park and Kings Canyon; includes resort accommodation.

**Sahara Outback Tours** (☎ 8953 0881; www.sahara.com.au) has recommended two-/three-day camping safaris (\$370/490), and a five-day safari (\$750) including West MacDonnells and Palm Valley.

**Wayoutback** (☎ 8952 4324; www.wayoutback.com.au) runs three-day 4WD safaris that traverse 4WD tracks to Uluru and Kings Canyon for \$490, and five-day safaris that include Palm Valley and West MacDonnells for \$730, bush camping in private camps along the way.

**Wildway** (☎ 8953 7045; www.wildway.com.au) has three-day Uluru and Kings Canyon tours for \$350, including park entry and meals.

### ULURU (AYERS ROCK)

Towering above the surrounding pancake-flat plains like a lone iceberg in a rust-red ocean, the first sight of Uluru will startle even the most jaded traveller. No matter how many times you've seen it in postcards, nothing quite prepares you for the real thing, with its intricate grooves, pockmarks, shadows and sheer size.

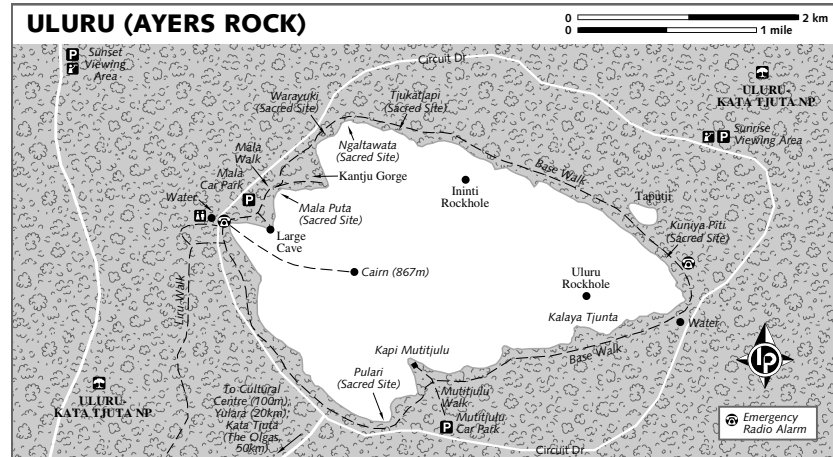
Although often touted as the world's biggest monolith (single piece of rock), that honour goes to another Australian rock, the little-known Mt Augustus in Western Australia, which is almost twice the size of

Uluru. But who cares? The landscape and the famous changing colours of the Rock (as the setting sun turns it a series of deeper and darker oranges, reds and finally a hazy purple before it fades into grey and blends into the night sky) are a photographer's dream. The dawn performance is more subtle but no less rewarding.

### Sights & Activities

#### Uluru-Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre

If you want to gain an understanding of the culture and lifestyle of the traditional Anangu owners and their relationship with the land, the superb **Cultural Centre** (☎ 8956 3138; ☎ 7am-6pm Nov-Apr, 7.30am-5.30pm May-Aug, 7am-5.30pm Sep-Oct) should not be missed. The two inspiring rammed-earth and timber buildings here represent the ancestral figures of Kuniya (woma python) and Liru (brown snake) and contained within them are two main display areas, both with multilingual information. Entering from the car park you pass murals of Anangu art and interpretive displays relating to Tjukurpa with detailed information on ancestral *stories*, ceremonies and bush foods. The next building houses the Nintiringkupai display, focusing on the modern history and joint management of the national park, as well as flora, fauna and Aboriginal tools. If you're thinking of souveniring something from the park, check out the pile of rocks and letters from people around the world who – in a fit of guilt or perhaps superstition – have returned rocks



### A QUESTION OF CLIMBING

Of the 450,000-plus visitors to Uluru each year, there are no definitive figures on how many actually climb the Rock. For many people, the climb is regarded as a rite of passage, a pilgrimage to conquer the mighty monolith and a reason to visit.

But for the traditional owners, the Anangu, Uluru is a sacred place. The path up the side of the Rock is part of the route taken by the Mala ancestors on their arrival at Uluru and has great spiritual significance – and is not to be trampled by human feet. When you arrive at Uluru you'll see a sign from the Anangu saying 'We don't climb' and a request that you don't climb either.

Apart from the cultural significance, the Anangu are the custodians of these lands and take responsibility for the safety of visitors. Any injuries or deaths that occur on the Rock (and they do occur – check out the memorial plaques at the base) are a source of distress and sadness to them. For similar reasons of public safety, Parks Australia would (unofficially) prefer that people didn't climb. It's a very steep and taxing ascent, not to be taken lightly, and each year there are several costly air rescues, mostly from people suffering heart attacks. Furthermore, Parks Australia must constantly monitor the climb and close it on days where the temperature is forecast to reach 36°C and on days of high wind.

So if the Anangu don't want people to climb and Parks Australia would prefer to see it closed, why does it remain open? The answer is tourism. The tourism industry believes visitor numbers would drop significantly – at least initially – if the climb was closed, particularly from overseas visitors thinking there is nothing else to do at Uluru. Even a small drop in numbers would cost millions.

The debate has grown louder in recent years and many believe the climb will eventually be closed for good. Until then, it remains a personal decision and a question of respect. Before deciding, visit the Cultural Centre and perhaps take an Anangu tour. You might just change your mind.

after taking them! Removing natural objects from the park is prohibited anyway.

Also in the complex are two art galleries and a souvenir shop, and there's the **Ininti Café** (snacks \$2.50-9.50; ☎ 7am-5.15pm) serving breakfast, sandwiches, hot food and drinks. You can easily spend an hour or three exploring the centre.

### WALKING

There are several walking tracks around Uluru, with an emphasis on their cultural significance. Informative walks, guided by both park rangers and Anangu Tours, delve into local Tjukurpa *stories*, plants and wildlife, and geology. Several areas of spiritual significance to Anangu are off-limits to visitors and should not be photographed – these are marked with fences and signs.

The *Insight into Uluru* brochure (\$1), available at the Cultural Centre, gives details on the self-guided Mala and Mutitjulu walks.

**Base walk** (9.4km loop, three to four hours, medium) A highlight for many. Circumnavigate the base of the Rock's mass and let it conquer you, as you peer at the caves and art sites along the way. It's an easy stroll but quite long, so plan to go in the early morning or mid-afternoon.

**Liru walk** (2km one way, 45 minutes, easy) This walking track links the Cultural Centre with the start of the Mala walk and climb, and passes a number of significant Anangu sites.

**Mala walk** (2km return, one hour, easy) From the base of the climbing point, interpretative signs explain the Tjukurpa of the Mala, which is of great importance to the Anangu. At Kantju Gorge you can either continue on the base walk or return to the car park. A ranger-guided walk along this route departs at 10am daily (8am in summer) from the car park. It's wheelchair accessible.

**Mutitjulu walk** (1km return, 45 minutes, easy) A short walk from the car park on the southern side leads to the only permanent waterhole, with links to the Kuniya and Liru Tjukurpa.

**The climb** (1.6km return, about two hours, difficult) If you insist on climbing (see the boxed text above), take note of the warnings. It's a demanding climb and there have been numerous deaths from falls and heart attacks. Plan to go early in the day, take plenty of water and be prepared to turn around if it all gets too much. The first part of the walk is by far the steepest and most arduous, and there's a chain to hold on to. After that it's a relatively easy (and safe) walk across the top of the rock to a cairn. The view is panoramic – you can easily see Kata Tjuta and Mt Conner. The climb is often closed due to strong winds, rain, mist and Anangu business, and from 8am on days forecast to reach 36°C or more.

### SUNSET & SUNRISE VIEWING AREAS

About halfway between Yulara and Uluru the **sunset viewing area** has plenty of car parking space, although in peak season you'll have to arrive early to snare a space. You can't miss it – dozens of cars and buses unload camera-toting tourists from about an hour before sunset. There's a superb view of the rock and all the colours of its changing glory from here.

The **sunrise viewing area** is generally less busy, but you'll still have to make an early start. Parking is strung out along the road on the eastern side of the rock – the quickest route is to turn right at the T-intersection past the Cultural Centre.

### Shopping

There are two art galleries and a souvenir outlet in the Uluru-Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre.

**Ininti Souvenirs** (☎ 8956 2214; ☎ 7am-5.15pm), attached to the café, sells souvenirs such as T-shirts, ceramics, hats, CDs and a good variety of books on Aboriginal culture, biographies, bush foods and the flora and fauna of the area.

**Maruku Arts** (☎ 8956 2558; www.maruku.com.au; ☎ 8am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 8am-5.30pm Oct-Mar) is an Aboriginal-owned art and craft gallery displaying dot paintings (\$700 to \$2500) and all sorts of carved wooden pieces such as *piti* (large bowls), *kulata* (hunting spears), *mirru* (spear throwers) and *wana* (digging sticks). There are also carved animals and music

sticks decorated with burnt wood designs. Everything is created in the surrounding desert regions, and you're buying direct from the artists. You can usually see artists at work each morning from Monday to Friday.

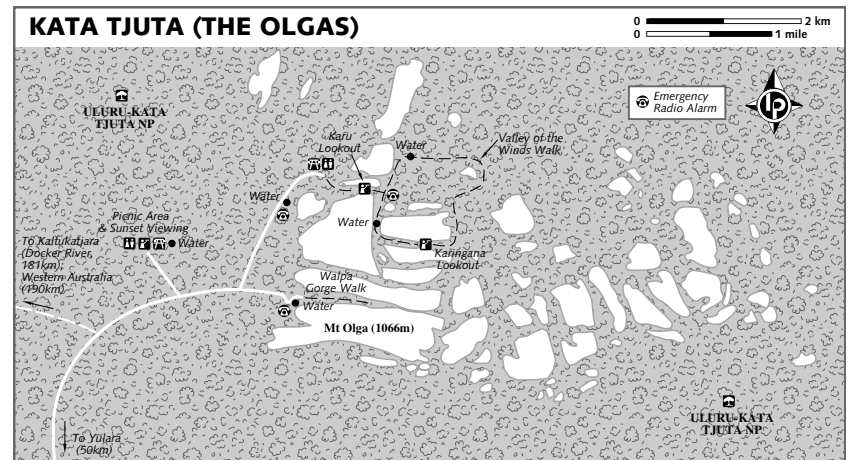
**Walkatjara Art** (☎ 8.30am-5.30pm) is a working art centre, focusing on paintings and ceramics.

### KATA TJUTA (THE OLGAS)

If you think you've seen it all at Uluru, drive the 45km or so west (53km by road from Yulara) to Kata Tjuta, a group of smaller, domed rocks (36 in all) pushed against each other to form small valleys and gorges. Though they lack the star status of Uluru, these monoliths are equally impressive and many find them even more captivating – especially without the weight of expectation. The Valley of the Winds walk is one of the most rewarding in the national park. The tallest rock, Mt Olga, at 546m, is nearly 200m higher than Uluru. Meaning 'many heads', Kata Tjuta is of great significance to Anangu and is associated with a number of Tjukurpa *stories* relating to secret men's initiation ceremonies.

The main car park, close to the western edge of Kata Tjuta, has shade shelters, picnic tables and toilets.

Just to the west is a turn-off from the main access road, where you'll find the **sunset viewing area** with picnic tables and toilets. The views here are just as colourful as Uluru as the setting sun illuminates the



domes in vibrant, rich reds – but without the crowds.

## Sights & Activities

### WALKING

There are two marked trails at Kata Tjuta, both of which are well worth the effort.

**Walpa Gorge** (Tatintjawiya; 2.6km return, 45 minutes, easy) This is a short signposted track leading to a boardwalk into the extraordinary Walpa (Olga) Gorge from the car park. In the afternoon the sun floods the gorge.

**Valley of the Winds** (7.4km loop, three hours, medium) Many rate this as the most interesting walk in the park and it's hard to disagree. The track winds through the gorges giving excellent views of the domes and traversing varied terrain. Although not difficult, it requires a reasonable level of fitness, sturdy footwear and plenty of water. Starting this walk at first light may reward you with a track to yourself, enabling you to listen to the country and appreciate the sounds of the wind and the bird calls carried up the valley. The track is closed from the Karu Lookout from 11am on days forecast to reach 36°C or more.

### KATA TJUTA VIEWING AREAS

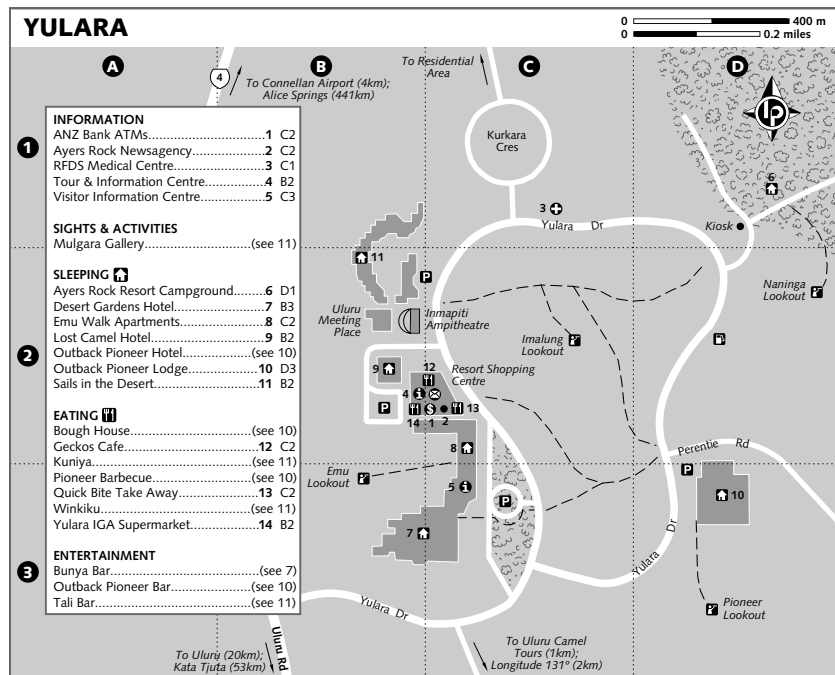
Along the road between Yulara and Kata Tjuta there is a marked **dune viewing area**.

From the car park a 300m boardwalk through the dunes leads to a viewing platform with sweeping views over the surrounding dune country, with Kata Tjuta looming to the west and Uluru visible on the horizon. This is the best place to see Kata Tjuta at sunrise. Interpretive signs here outline the features of the complex dune environment. The **sunset viewing area** is just west of Kata Tjuta (there's a signposted turn-off to the car park).

## YULARA

pop 2080 (including Mutitjula)

Yulara (the Anangu word means 'place of the howling dingo') is the service village for the national park and has effectively turned one of the world's most remote and least hospitable regions into an easy, comfortable – and in several cases luxurious – place to stay. Lying just outside the national park, 20km from Uluru and 53km from Kata Tjuta, the complex is administered by the Ayers Rock Corporation and is the closest base for exploring the area's renowned attractions.



## Information

The *Resort Guide*, with a list of facilities and a map, is a useful sheet available from the visitors centre and hotel desks. Most of the town's facilities are in the shopping centre. There's a community notice board outside the post office with local job vacancies. As well as the services listed here, there are souvenir shops, a photo lab and a hairdresser.

Wheelchair access is possible throughout the Yulara Resort.

### BOOKSHOPS

**Ayers Rock Newsagency** (☎ 8956 2177; ☎ 8am–9pm) Stocks interstate papers, magazines and some books on Australia.

### EMERGENCY

**Ambulance** (☎ 0420 101 403)

**Police station** (☎ 8956 2166)

### INTERNET ACCESS

Most accommodation has Internet access. **Tour & Information Centre** (per 6½ min \$2; ☎ 8am–8pm) Coin-operated terminals in the resort shopping centre. **Outback Pioneer Hotel** (☎ 8957 7605) Has an Internet café attached to the backpacker lounge.

### MEDICAL SERVICES

There's no pharmacy in Yulara, but the supermarket stocks basic pharmaceutical products.

#### Royal Flying Doctor Service medical centre

(☎ 8956 2286; ☎ 9am–noon & 2–5pm Mon–Fri, 10–11am Sat & Sun) This is the resort's medical centre and ambulance service.

### MONEY

**ANZ bank** (☎ 8956 2070; ☎ 9.30am–4pm Mon–Thu, 9.30am–5pm Fri) Currency exchange and 24-hour ATMs.

### POST

**Post office** (☎ 8956 2288; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–2pm Sat & Sun) Opposite the supermarket, this is also an agent for the Commonwealth and National Australia banks. Payphones are outside.

### TOURIST INFORMATION

**Tour & Information Centre** (☎ 8957 7324; ☎ 8am–8pm) The hub for booking any sort of tour in the region. **Visitors centre** (☎ 8957 7377; ☎ 9am–5.30pm) The visitors centre acts as a tourist office with helpful staff, weather forecasts, and sunrise and sunset times. There's an interesting display on the geology, flora and fauna, history

and Aboriginal lore of the region, complete with stuffed wildlife. To get the most out of it, take the free audio tour.

## Sights & Activities

When not visiting the park, most people will be content to spend their day lounging by the hotel pool, but there are some short **walking tracks** on Yulara's elevated central bushland. Also check out the **Mulgara Gallery** in the lobby of the Sails in the Desert Hotel, where quality handmade Australian arts and crafts inspired by the landscape are displayed.

Each evening there's the **Night Sky Show** (☎ 8956 2563; www.ecotour.com.au; adult/child/family \$32/24/95), an informative look into Anangu and Greek astrological legends, with views of the wonderfully clear outback night sky through telescopes and binoculars. There are trips in English at 8.30pm and in Japanese at 9.15pm year-round, with further English sessions at 7.30pm from May to August and 10.15pm from September to April.

## Sleeping

If Yulara was transplanted to practically anywhere else in Australia, no-one in their right minds would pay the accommodation prices asked here. But in the middle of the desert and within cooee of the Rock, you're stuck with it.

All of the accommodation in Yulara, including the camping ground and hostel, is owned by the Voyages Ayers Rock Resort. Even with almost 5000 beds, you should reserve all accommodation, especially during school holidays. Bookings can be made through **central reservations** (☎ 1300 134 044; www.ayersrockresort.com.au). The switchboard number at Yulara is ☎ 8957 7888.

If you have your own transport, **Curtain Springs Station** (p246) may tempt you with free camping and relatively inexpensive accommodation.

The following are high season (July to November) prices. At other times they're about 10% lower.

### BUDGET

**Outback Pioneer Lodge** (☎ 8957 7605; dm/q \$35/200; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) With a lively bar, good eating and a range of accommodation, this is the budget choice for non-campers. The complex has two 20-bed YHA backpacker dorms (sardines, anyone?) and four-bed budget cabins with fridge and TV – some with en suite.

With a cosy common room, Internet café and the village pub, this is a bit of a social hub. The communal kitchen is top notch.

**Ayers Rock Resort Campground** (☎ 89567001; camp.ground@ayersrockresort.com.au; unpowered sites adult/child/family \$13/6/37, powered sites for 2 \$31, cabins \$150; reception ☎ 7am-9pm; P ♻️ 🚰 🚰) Undoubtedly Yulara's saviour for the budget-conscious and anyone with a tent, swag or caravan, this ground is set among native gardens interspersed with manicured patches of green grass. There are good facilities including a camp kitchen, free barbecues, pool, laundry and a reasonably well-stocked kiosk. The air-con cabins are a disappointment – although they notionally sleep six, they're the size of a matchbox (no en suite) and would only really suit a young family.

#### MIDRANGE & TOP END

**Emu Walk Apartments** (☎ 8956 7714; 1-/2-bed apt \$450/540; ♻️) For a family group looking for self-contained accommodation, Emu Walk is the pick of the bunch. The apartments are not fancy, but they're bright and comfy and have a lounge with TV, one or two bedrooms (accommodating four or six people), and a fully equipped kitchen with washer and dryer.

**Lost Camel** (☎ 8957 7605; d \$403; P ♻️ 🚰 🚰) This cute boutique hotel has been completely refurbished (it was originally a backpacker lodge) as a romantic couples' hangout. The rooms are certainly compact, with an en suite squeezed in behind the bed, but the décor is funky and there's a stylish pool and bar.

**Outback Pioneer Hotel** (☎ 8957 7605; r \$410; P ♻️ 🚰 🚰) The hotel section of this complex has standard motel-style rooms with kitchenette, TV and little patios. They sleep up to four people, so for a family or group they're almost affordable.

**Desert Gardens Hotel** (☎ 8957 7714; standard/deluxe r \$450/520; P ♻️ 🚰 🚰) One of the Yulara originals, this ageing hotel is nothing special, but around 30 of the 84 rooms have some sort of Rock view – request one when booking.

**Sails in the Desert Hotel** (☎ 8956 2200; standard d \$540, deluxe spa d \$630, deluxe ste \$940; P ♻️ 🚰 🚰) Until Longitude came along, this five-star hotel was the top property in Yulara and it still maintains a high standard. The exotic pool area, with its signature sails, is exclusive to guests and there are tennis courts, a couple of good restaurants and a piano

bar. The deluxe spa rooms feature a balcony spa.

**Longitude 131°** (☎ 8957 7888; www.longitude131.com.au; d \$1800; P ♻️ 🚰 🚰) If you can afford it, this is the last word in luxury desert accommodation. The selling points are the unbeatable Rock views, which open out from your doorstep, and the intimacy. There are 15 stylish 'tents' (actually raised steel rooms with a canvas tent-style roof), each facing the northern side of the Rock. The plush lounge/dining area also offers elevated views and an open bar. All activities, meals, drinks and tours are included in the price and there's a minimum two-night stay. The secluded location is right on the national park boundary.

#### Eating

Most eateries in Yulara are attached to accommodation places. At several of those with buffets, kids eat free with a paying adult, which can cut costs for families.

#### RESTAURANTS

**Pioneer Barbecue** (Outback Pioneer Lodge; barbecue \$20-25; ☎ dinner) This do-it-yourself barbecue is easily the best informal dining experience in Yulara. Choose from kangaroo, barramundi, beef or veggie burger (or a combination), cook it up on the barbecue and help yourself to the generous salad bar (salad bar only is \$16). It's fast and filling and there's a boisterous atmosphere in the bar most nights.

**Winkiku** (breakfast buffet \$24-34, dinner buffet \$60; ☎ breakfast & dinner) In the Sails of the Desert

#### THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Sounds of Silence** (☎ 8957 7448; www.voyages.com.au; adult/child \$130/65; ☎ dinner) Snappily dressed waiters serve champagne and canapés on a desert dune with stunning sunset views of Uluru and Kata Tjuta, accompanied by the droning of a didgeridoo. Then you retire to your table in the desert for a buffet of gourmet Aussie food and wine as the night descends. Afterwards the startlingly clear night sky is dissected and explained, with the help of a telescope. The Sounds of Silence dinner is a memorable experience. The price may have you seeing stars, but here it's worth every cent. Bookings are essential and pick up/drop off from your accommodation is included.

Hotel, this casual-but-stylish restaurant does mind-blowing buffets with seafood, carvery and all the trimmings. Kids eat free, so it can work out as good value for families.

**Tali Bar** (meals \$13-20; ☎ lunch) For a light lunch or snack overlooking the luxurious pool area at Sails in the Desert, the Tali Bar serves up sandwiches, salads, barra and seafood linguini.

**Bough House** (☎ 8956 2170; breakfast/dinner buffets \$25/45; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Another smorgasbord special, this family-friendly, country-style place overlooks the pool at the Outback Pioneer and has buffet spreads for breakfast and dinner. The dinner choices feature Australian fare – kangaroo, emu, crocodile and barramundi.

**Kuniya** (☎ 8956 2200; mains \$28-50; ☎ dinner) Yulara's most sophisticated restaurant, Kuniya is the place for romantic candlelit dinners. The walls are adorned with contemporary Australian art and the inspired menu features Aussie cuisine infused with native produce. Try Northern Territory quail in coconut vinaigrette for starters, followed by barramundi with Moreton Bay bug tails and bush tomato broth (\$45). Dress smartly.

#### CAFÉS & TAKEAWAY

**Gecko's Cafe** (☎ 8956 2562; mains \$15-28; ☎ 10.30am-10pm) In the resort shopping centre, Gecko's is the only café-restaurant not attached to accommodation, so it's a popular meeting place. There's a bright air-con section and tables outside overlooking the central courtyard. There's a large range of salads, off-beat wood-fired pizzas (try the spiced prawn, banana and coriander aioli) and more substantial dishes, plus wedges and nachos for the kids. It's licensed with a full bar. The attached ice-creamery (open 10.30am to 7pm) serves shakes and gelati.

**Quick Bite Take Away** (Resort Shopping Centre; snacks \$4-10.50; ☎ 7am-9pm) This is the place for lunch on the run with a range of quick fixes such as gourmet burgers (\$6.50), sushi packs (\$7.50), pies and chicken and chips.

#### SELF-CATERING

**Yulara IGA Supermarket** (Resort Shopping Centre; ☎ 8.30am-9pm) This well-stocked supermarket has a delicatessen and sells picnic portions, fresh fruit and vegetables, meat, ice and camping supplies at surprisingly reasonable prices.

#### GROG

The local Mutitjulu Aboriginal community, near Uluru, is a dry community and, at the request of the Mutitjulu leaders, Yulara's liquor outlet has agreed not to sell takeaway grog to Aboriginal people. Visitors must show their proof of staying at the resort to buy takeaway alcohol – if you are approached to buy alcohol on behalf of Aboriginal people, the community leaders appeal to you not to do so.

Takeaway alcohol is only available from the bar of the **Outback Pioneer Hotel** (☎ 6-10pm) – you'll need a room key or camping permit to prove you're a guest at the resort in order to buy.

#### Drinking

When the sun sets on Uluru, evening entertainment can be found in a handful of hotel bars.

**Outback Pioneer Bar** (Outback Pioneer Lodge; ☎ 8957 7605; ☎ 10am-midnight) If you're after a cold beer or a game of pool in a rowdy, convivial environment, this open-air bar is the social centre of Yulara. There's live entertainment every night – usually a guitar-twanging country singer – and plenty of chances to meet travellers and locals at the long bench tables.

**Tali Bar** (Sails in the Desert Hotel; ☎ 10am-1am) At this elegant little piano bar you can try cocktails (\$14 to \$18) inspired by the landscape, such as 'Valley of the Winds' and 'Desert Storm', while listening to the tinkling ivories and overlooking the pool area.

**Bunya Bar** (Desert Gardens Hotel; ☎ 11am-midnight) The lobby bar at the Desert Gardens has chess and games tables in a rather sterile cigar-lounge setting. There's also a bar at the hotel pool.

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

##### Air

Connellan Airport is roughly 5km from Yulara. **Qantas** (13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au) has flights from Alice Springs to Yulara departing at 12.25pm daily, from \$125 one way – if you book early enough. You can also fly direct to Yulara from other major centres, including Melbourne (\$200), Sydney (\$250), Perth (\$270) and Adelaide (\$350), while other flights stop in Alice en route.

These are the lowest available at the time of writing – full fare is at least double. Check the website for the latest deals.

### Bus

If you don't have your own wheels or camel, the cheapest way to get to the Rock is to take a bus or tour. **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) has a daily service from Alice Springs (adult/child one way \$85/65, five hours).

There's no direct service between Adelaide and Yulara – strangely the timetable doesn't make a connection at Erldunda so you have to stay overnight there or carry on to Alice. The one-way fare from Adelaide via Erldunda is \$270.

From Yulara, you can head back to Alice Springs or take a detour to Kings Canyon (\$60/45, four hours).

### TOURS

Greyhound Australia offers two- and three-day tours with transport from Alice Springs to and around the main sights of Uluru, Kata Tjuta and Kings Canyon, then back to Alice Springs. The two-day tour (adult/child \$270) includes Uluru. The better-value three-day tour (\$300) adds in a visit to Kata Tjuta and an overnight stop at Kings Canyon.

### Car

Renting a car in Alice Springs to go down to Uluru and back is a reasonable option between a group, but shop around and make sure you get unlimited kilometres (or a reasonable kilometre deal – you'll travel at least 1000km). Some operators offer special two- or three-day rental deals, but expect to pay at least \$100 a day for a small car. See p200 for a list of operators. Alterna-

tively you can hire a vehicle in Yulara. **Hertz** (☎ 8956 2244), **Avis** (☎ 8956 2266) and **Territory Thrifty Car Rentals** (☎ 8956 2030) have desks at the Tour & Information Centre.

There's a **service station** (☎ 8956 2229; ☎ 7am-9pm) just up the road from the Outback Pioneer Lodge that sells all types of fuel, snacks, maps and ice, and a mechanic is on duty every day.

## GETTING AROUND

### To/From the Airport

A free shuttle bus meets all flights and drops off at all accommodation points around the resort; pick-up is 90 minutes before your flight.

### Around Yulara

A free shuttle bus loops through the resort – stopping at all accommodation points and the shopping centre – every 15 minutes from 10.30am to 6pm and from 6.30pm to 12.30am daily.

Bike hire is available at the **Ayers Rock Resort Camp Ground** (☎ 8957 7001; per hr \$7, per half/full-day \$15/20, deposit \$20; ☎ 7am-8pm).

### Around the National Park

There are two park shuttle services between Yulara and Uluru or Kata Tjuta. Fares do not include the park entry fee.

**Uluru Express** (☎ 8956 2152; www.uluruexpress.com.au; adult/child from \$35/20) Runs shuttles to Uluru and back (sunrise \$40/20). Morning shuttles to Kata Tjuta cost \$45/25; afternoon shuttles include a stop for the Uluru sunset and cost \$50/25. The three-day pass (adult/child \$140/60) allows unlimited use of the service.

**Uluru-Kata Tjuta Park Shuttle** (☎ 8956 2171; adult/child from \$30/15) Offers similar services, including sunset and sunrise shuttles and park passes (1/2/3 days \$85/105/130).

# Directory

## CONTENTS

Accommodation	261
Activities	263
Business Hours	263
Children	263
Climate Charts	264
Customs	264
Dangers & Annoyances	264
Disabled Travellers	265
Discount Cards	265
Embassies & Consulates	265
Festivals & Events	266
Gay & Lesbian Travellers	267
Holidays	267
Insurance	267
Internet Access	267
Maps	267
Money	268
Photography & Video	269
Post	269
Shopping	269
Telephone	270
Time	271
Tourist Information	272
Visas	272
Women Travellers	272

## 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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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,

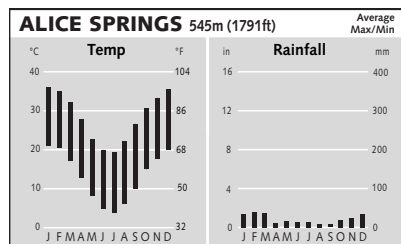
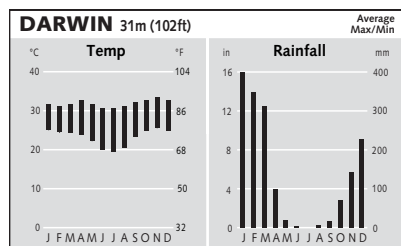
croc-jumping shows, camel riding and that first view of Uluru in the Red Centre. See Darwin for Children (p73) and Alice for Children (p190) for more ideas. There are substantial discounts for children on admission prices, transport and tours: in many cases kids under 12 or 15 are free.

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](http://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. Doves 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](http://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](http://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](http://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.

## Tippling

Tippling 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](http://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](http://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](http://www.aboriginalaustralia.com)), **Desart** ([www.desart.com.au](http://www.desart.com.au)) and **Kimberley & Arnhem Aboriginal Artists** ([www.ankaaa.org.au](http://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](http://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

## CONTENTS

<b>Getting There &amp; Away</b>	<b>273</b>
Entering the Country	273
Air – International	273
Air – Domestic	275
Land	275
Sea	278
<b>Getting Around</b>	<b>278</b>
Air	278
Bicycle	279
Bus	279
Car & Motorcycle	280
Hitching	284
Local Transport	284

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

**Rock 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	---																		
Erdand	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	---					
Alice Springs																								
Borroloola																								
Camooweal (Qld)																								
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Mataranka																								
Nhulunbuy (Gove)																								
Oenpelli																								
Roper Bar																								
Tennant Creek																								
Timber Creek																								
Yulara																								

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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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

## CONTENTS

<b>Before You Go</b>	<b>285</b>
Insurance	285
Required & Recommended Vaccinations	285
Internet Resources	285
Further Reading	286
<b>In Transit</b>	<b>286</b>
Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)	286
Jet Lag & Motion Sickness	286
<b>In Australia</b>	<b>286</b>
Availability & Cost of Health Care	286
Infectious Diseases	287
Traveller's Diarrhoea	288
Environmental Hazards	288

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](http://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/](http://www.who.int/wer/)) or **Centers for Disease Control & Prevention** ([www.cdc.gov/travel/yb/outline.htm#2](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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  
**bail 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  
**carl 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'

# Index

4WD travel 281-2, *see also* car travel, desert tracks

## A

Aboriginal, *see also* Aboriginal art, Aboriginal peoples  
 books 33  
 cross-cultural considerations 23, 30, 55  
 cultural centres 114, 141, 164, 199, 253-5  
 cultural tours 33, 74, 92, 117-18, 128, 131, 138, 144, 191, 226, 251-2  
 dance 34-5  
 history 24-6  
 Internet resources 17, 37, 40  
 land rights 25-6, 131, 148-9  
 media 33  
 music 34  
 population 29, 31  
 society 29-30  
 sports 31  
 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission 23  
 Aboriginal art 36-41, 269-70, **5, 37, 40, 185**, *see also individual arts & crafts*  
 Alice Springs 199-200  
 Daly River 104  
 Darwin 85  
 Emily & Jessie Gaps Nature Park 235  
 Ewaninga Rock Carvings Conservation Reserve 241  
 Gunbalanya 128-9  
 Internet resources 37, 38, 40  
 Kakadu National Park 114, 116, 120, 123  
 Katherine 140  
 Keep River National Park 154  
 Manyallaluk 145  
 Mt Ebenezer 246  
 N'Dhala Gorge Nature Park 237  
 Nhulunbuy 131  
 purchasing 38, 269-70  
 Roma Gorge 224-5

Tennant Creek 164  
 Ti Tree 206  
 Tilmouth Well 209  
 Titjikala 241  
 Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park 255  
 Umbrawarra Gorge Nature Park 106  
 Yuendumu 209  
 Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre 199  
 Aboriginal peoples  
 Alyawarra 213  
 Anangu 247-8, 253-4  
 Anmatyerre 206  
 Arrernte 31, 177, 181, 219, 222, 223, 225-6, 237  
 Dagoman 135  
 Gadanji 171  
 Gadjerong 154  
 Gurindji 148  
 Jaminjung 151  
 Jawoyn 31, 135, 141, 145  
 Karrangpurra 151  
 Kaytetye 206  
 Larrakiah 70  
 Luritja 230, 231  
 Mangarrayi 147  
 Mirriwung 154  
 Ngaliwurri 151  
 Ngariman 151  
 Nungali 151  
 Pitjantjatjara 244, 247  
 Tiwis 91-2  
 Wardaman 151  
 Warlpiri 191, 208  
 Warramal 123  
 Warramungu 31, 44, 162  
 Yangman 147  
 Yankuntjatjara 247  
 Yanyuwa 171  
 Yolngu 25, 130-1  
 accommodation 261-3, *see also individual locations*  
 activities 48-53, *see also individual activities*  
 Adelaide River 102-3  
 Adelaide River Crossing 93  
 Adelaide River Wetlands 92-3  
 Aileron 204-5  
 air travel  
 airfares 273-4  
 airlines 273, 275, 279

deep vein thrombosis 286  
 to/from Australia 274-5  
 within Australia 275  
 within Northern Territory 278-9  
 Alice Springs 175-202, **178, 180-1, 185**  
 accommodation 193-5  
 activities 184-9  
 attractions 179-84  
 drinking 198  
 entertainment 198-9  
 festivals 191-2  
 food 195-8  
 Internet access 177  
 shopping 199-200  
 special events 191-2  
 tourist offices 177-8  
 tours 190  
 travel to/from 200-1  
 travel within 201-2  
 Alice Springs Cultural Precinct 179-81  
 Alice Springs Desert Park 179  
 Allambi Homestead 242  
 Alpururulam 213-14  
 Anbangbang 123  
 animals 44-7, *see also individual animals*  
 Gregory National Park 151  
 Kakadu National Park 111-13  
 Keep River National Park 154  
 Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park 141  
 safety 264-5  
 Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park 249-50  
 West MacDonnell National Park 217  
 antechinus 45  
 Anzac Hill 179  
 Apatula, *see* Finke  
 Aquascene 68  
 Arafura Games 75  
 Araluen Arts Centre 180  
 area codes 270-1  
 Arlparra 213  
 Arltunga Gardens Tourist Drive 206  
 Arltunga Historical Reserve 238-40, **238, 187**  
 Arnhem Land 128-32, **108**  
 art galleries, *see* museums & galleries

arts, *see* Aboriginal art  
 Atartinga Station 213  
 ATMs 268  
 Attack Creek Historical Reserve 162  
 Australian Aviation Heritage Centre 69  
 Australian Rules football 31, 91-2, 199  
 Aviation Museum 181  
 Ayers Rock, *see* Uluru

## B

B&Bs 262  
 Back to the Never Never Festival 145  
 ballooning 52, 184  
 Bamboo Creek 101  
 Banka Banka 162  
 banteng 129  
 Barclay, Henry 211  
 bark painting 38-9  
 Barkly Homestead 172  
 Barkly region 157-72, **159**  
 barramundi 51  
 Barranyi (North Island) National Park 171  
 Barrow Creek 206-7  
 Barunga Festival 138  
 Batchelor 96-8  
 Bathurst Island 91-2  
 Batterbee, Rex 227  
 Battery Hill Mining Centre 164  
 beaches 71  
 Beanie Festival 192  
 beer 55  
 Beer Can Regatta 75  
 Benstead Creek 236  
 Berry Springs Nature Park 96  
 bicycle travel, *see* cycling  
 Billiluna 210  
 Bing Bong 170  
 bird-watching 44-5  
 Berry Springs Nature Park 96  
 Caranbirini Conservation Reserve 171  
 Connells Lagoon Conservation Reserve 172  
 Flora River Nature Park 149  
 Fogg Dam Conservation Reserve 92-3  
 Howard Springs Nature Park 89  
 Kakadu National Park 112  
 Mary River National Park 94-5  
 Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park 141  
 Window on the Wetlands 93  
 birds 44  
 Birdum Creek 158

Bitter Springs 147  
 Bitter Springs Gorge 238  
 Blyth Homestead 100  
 boat cruises  
 Adelaide River Crossing 93  
 Darwin 74-5  
 Kakadu National Park 116-17  
 Mary River National Park 95  
 Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park 143-4  
 Victoria River Crossing 150  
 boat travel 278, *see also* canoeing, sailing  
 Boggy Hole 228  
 books  
 Aboriginal culture 33  
 environment 42  
 food 54  
 health 286  
 history 24  
 literature 32  
 outback experiences 16  
 poetry 32  
 travel literature 15-17  
 boomerangs 40  
 border crossings 275  
 Borrooloola 169-71  
 Boulija 212  
 Bowali Visitor Centre 114  
 box jellyfish 265, 288  
 Brian Creek Monsoon Forest 95  
 Broadarrow 4WD Track 153  
 brumbies 45  
 Brunette Downs 172  
 Buchanan, Nathaniel 155  
 Buchanan Hwy 155-6  
 buffle grass 46  
 Buku Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre & Museum 131  
 Buley Rockhole 99-100  
 Bullita Outstation 153  
 Bullita Stock Route 4WD Track 153  
 Buntine Hwy 155-6  
 Burdulba 124  
 bus travel  
 passes 276  
 to/from Northern Territory 275-6  
 tours 276  
 within Northern Territory 279-80  
 bush tucker 54-5  
 bushfires 111  
 bushwalking 48-50  
 Alice Springs 184  
 Caranbirini Conservation Reserve 171  
 East MacDonnell Ranges 235, 236-7  
 Esey National Park 147  
 Finke Gorge National Park 227-8  
 Fogg Dam Conservation Reserve 93  
 Giles track 231  
 gradings 49  
 Gregory National Park 153  
 Kakadu National Park 114-15, 119, 120-1, 123-4, 124, 125-6, 126, 127-8  
 Keep River National Park 154-5  
 Kings Canyon Rim walk 230  
 Larapinta Trail 218  
 Leliyn Trail 144  
 Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park 142-3  
 responsible bushwalking 48  
 safety 49-50  
 tours 49, 118, 144, 170, 218  
 Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park 254, 256  
 Watarrka National Park (Kings Canyon) 230-1  
 West MacDonnell National Park 217-19, 220-1, 222-3, 224  
 business hours 263  
 Butterfly Visitor Nature Park 103  
 Butterfly Springs 169

## C

Cahill, Paddy 109  
 Camel Cup 192  
 camel riding 50, **7, 188**  
 Alice Springs 184  
 Mt Conner 246  
 Stuart's Well 244  
 Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park 251  
 Watarrka National Park (Kings Canyon) 231  
 Camooweal (Qld) 213  
 campervans 281  
 camping 261-2  
 cane toads 46  
 canoeing  
 Esey National Park 147  
 Mataranka 146  
 Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park 143  
 tours 138, 143  
 Cape Crawford 172  
 car travel, *see also* 4WD travel  
 driving licence 280  
 insurance 281

car travel *continued*  
 organisations 280  
 purchase 281  
 rental 281  
 road distance chart **280**  
 road rules 283  
 safety 282  
 Caranbirini Conservation Reserve 171  
 caravan parks 262  
 carvings 41  
 cattle stations 262  
 cell phones 271  
 Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association 33  
 Central Land Council 164, 177, 283-4  
 Central Mt Stuart Historical Reserve 206  
 Chamberlain, Azaria 28, 249  
 Chambers, James 26  
 Chambers Pillar Historic Reserve 242, 6  
 Charles Darwin National Park 70  
 Cheng Ho, Admiral 24  
 children, travel with 263-4  
 Alice Springs 190  
 Darwin 73-4  
 food 57-8  
 Christmas 56  
 cinema 16, 33-4  
 climate 14-15, 42, 264  
 Red Centre 174  
 Top End 60  
 Cobourg Peninsula 129-30  
 Cockatoo Lagoon 154  
 Connells Lagoon Conservation Reserve 172  
 conservation reserves, *see also*  
 national parks, nature parks  
 Caranbirini 171  
 Connells Lagoon 172  
 Corroboree Rock 235-6  
 Devil's Marbles 44, 167, 7  
 Douglas River Esplanade 103-4  
 Ewaninga Rock Carvings 241  
 Fogg Dam 92-3  
 Henbury Meteorite Craters 229  
 Mac Clark 242  
 Native Gap 204  
 Owen Springs 225  
 Rainbow Valley 243  
 Tnorala (Gosse Bluff) 224

consulates 265-6  
 Coober Pedy (South Australia) 244  
 Cooinda 126, **126**  
 Corroboree Rock Conservation Reserve 235-6  
 costs 15  
 Cotterill, Jim 244  
 Couzens Lookout 95  
 crafts, *see* Aboriginal arts  
 credit cards 268  
 cricket 31-2  
 crocodiles 44, 69, 89, 112, 125, **186**  
 cruises 93, 116-17  
 safety 264-5  
 Crocodylus Park 69  
 cultural centres  
 Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre 199  
 Nitmiluk Centre 141  
 Nyinkka Nyunyu 164  
 Uluru-Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre 253-5  
 Warradjian Aboriginal Cultural Centre 114  
 culture 29-35  
 Curtin Springs 246  
 customs regulations 264  
 Cutta Cutta Caves Nature Park 144-5  
 Cycad Gorge 227  
 cycling 50-1, 279  
 Alice Springs 184-9  
 Darwin 71  
 Katherine 137  
 Simpsons Gap 219  
 Tanami Track 208  
 Cyclone Tracy 28, 65

**D**  
 Daly River 104  
 Daly Waters 160-1  
 dance 34-5  
 Darwin 61-87, **64, 66-7, 72**  
 accommodation 76-9  
 activities 71-2  
 attractions 65-71  
 drinking 82-3  
 entertainment 83-4  
 festivals 75-6  
 food 79-82  
 Internet access 63  
 shopping 84-5  
 special events 75-6  
 tourist offices 65  
 tours 74-5  
 travel to/from 85-6  
 travel within 86-7

Darwin, Charles 148  
 Darwin Crocodile Farm 89  
 Davenport Range National Park 168  
 debit cards 268  
 Deckchair Cinema 84  
 deep vein thrombosis 286  
 dengue fever 289  
 Desert Harmony Arts Festival 165  
 desert tracks 283  
 Great Central Rd 252  
 Gregory National Park 153  
 Gunbarrel Hwy 252  
 Lajamanu Rd 210  
 Old Andado Track 242-3  
 Old South Rd 240-2  
 Plenty Hwy 210-13  
 Sandover Hwy 213-14  
 Tanami Track 207-10, **207**  
 Devil's Marbles Conservation Reserve 44, 167, 7  
 diarrhoea 288  
 didgeridoos 39-40  
 lessons 199  
 purchasing 270  
 dingoes 44  
 disabled travellers 265  
 diving 51, 71  
 dot painting 37  
 Douglas Daly Region 103-4  
 Douglas River Esplanade Conservation Reserve 103-4  
 drinks 55-6, *see also* beer, wine  
 driving, *see* car travel  
 Dunmarra 161

**E**  
 East Alligator River 117  
 East MacDonnell Ranges 234-40, **236**  
 economy 23  
 Edith Falls, *see* Leliyn (Edith Falls)  
 Egan, Ted 34  
 electricity 261  
 Ellery Creek Big Hole 221  
 Elliott 161  
 Elsey Cemetery 148  
 Elsey National Park 147-8, **146**  
 Elsey Station Homestead 146  
 embassies 265-6  
 emergencies, *see inside front cover*  
 Emily & Jessie Gaps Nature Park 235  
 environment 42-7  
 environmental issues 46  
 Erldunda 244  
 Ernest Giles Rd 229  
 euthanasia 28

Ewaninga Rock Carvings Conservation Reserve 241  
 exchange rates, *see inside front cover*

**F**  
 Fenton Airbase 103  
 feral animals 46  
 festivals 16, 266-7  
 Alice Springs 191-2  
 Daly River 104  
 Darwin 75  
 Katherine 138  
 Mataranka 145  
 Tennant Creek 165  
 Yuendumu 209-10  
 Finke (Apatula) 241-2  
 Finke Desert Race 192  
 Finke Gorge National Park 226-8, **8**  
 fishing 51-2  
 Barranyi (North Island) National Park 171  
 Darwin 71  
 Flora River Nature Park 149  
 Internet resources 51  
 Mary River National Park 95  
 Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park 143  
 Timber Creek 150  
 tours 118, 128, 130, 150, 151, 170  
 Victoria River Crossing 150  
 Flinders, Matthew 131  
 Flora River Nature Park 149  
 Florence Falls 100  
 Flying Fox Art & Cultural Festival 138  
 Flynn, John 162, 183, 219  
 Fogg Dam Conservation Reserve 92-3  
 food 54-8  
 books 54  
 bush tucker 54  
 etiquette 57  
 festivals 56  
 Internet resources 54  
 restaurants 56  
 tours 191  
 vegetarian 57  
 vocabulary 58  
 fossicking 52, *see also* gemstones  
 Arltunga Historical Reserve 238  
 Gemtree 211  
 Hayes Creek 103  
 permits 52, 63, 177, 179, 211, 212  
 Tennant Creek 165  
 tours 103, 211  
 Four Mile Hole 119

**G**  
 galleries, *see* museums & galleries  
 Garden of Eden 230  
 Garig Gunak Barlu National Park 129, 8  
 garnets 212, 239  
 gay travellers 267  
 Alice Springs 191  
 Darwin 75  
 gemstones 212, 270, *see also*  
 fossicking  
 Gemtree 211  
 Georgina River 212  
 Ghan 183-4, 276-8  
 giardiasis 287  
 Giles, Ernest 221, 223, 224, 230, 248  
 Giles track 231  
 Glen Helen Gorge 223  
 Glendambo (South Australia) 244  
 gold mining 163-4, 210, 239  
 gold rush 27, 105, 162-3, 169, 239  
 golf  
 Alice Springs 189  
 Darwin 72  
 Tilmouth Well 209  
 Goods and Services Tax (GST) 268  
 Gorrie Airfield 158  
 Gove Peninsula 130-2  
 Granites gold mine 210  
 Great Central Rd 252  
 Greenant Creek 100  
 Gregory, Augustus 145, 148, 150, 208  
 Gregory National Park 151-3, **152**  
 Gregory's Tree Historical Reserve 150  
 Groote Eylandt 131  
 GST 268  
 Gunbalanya 128-9  
 Gunbarrel Hwy 252  
 Gunlom (Waterfall Creek) 127  
 Gunn, Jeannie 32, 147  
**H**  
 Hale River 240  
 Harts Range 211-12  
 Hayes Creek 103  
 health 285-9  
 heat exhaustion 288  
 heatstroke 288  
 Henbury Meteorite Craters Conservation Reserve 229  
 Henderson, Sara 32  
 Henley-on-Todd Regatta 192  
 Hermannsburg 225-6  
 hiking, *see* bushwalking  
 historical reserves  
 Arltunga 238-40, **238, 187**  
 Attack Creek 162  
 Central Mt Stuart 206  
 Chambers Pillar 242, **6**  
 Gregory's Tree 150  
 Ryan Well 204  
 Telegraph Station 182  
 history 24-8  
 hitching 284  
 holidays 267  
 hollow-log coffins 41  
 Holmes Jungle Nature Park 71  
 horse racing  
 Alice Springs 192  
 Brunette Downs 172  
 Darwin 75  
 Harts Range 211  
 Tennant Creek 165  
 horse riding 50  
 Adelaide River 102  
 Alice Springs 184  
 Tilmouth Well 209  
 horses, wild 45  
 hostels 263  
 hot springs  
 Bitter Springs 147  
 Mataranka 145-6  
 Tjuwalyin (Douglas) Hot Springs 103  
 hot-air ballooning 52, 184  
 hotels 263  
 Howard Springs Nature Park 89  
 Humpty Doo 92  
**I**  
 immigration 28  
 Inarlanga Pass 222  
 Indian Pacific 277-8  
 Injalak Arts & Crafts Centre 128-9  
 insurance  
 health 285  
 travel 267  
 vehicle 281  
 Internet access 267  
 Internet resources 17  
 Aboriginal art 37, 38, 40  
 air tickets 273  
 diving 51  
 environment 42  
 fishing 51  
 food 54  
 health 285-6  
 music 34  
 Irukandji 288

itineraries 12, 18-22  
Alice Springs 176  
Darwin 62

**J**

Jabiluka mine 110  
jabiru (bird) 45, 187  
Jabiru (town) 121-2, **121**  
James Ranges 225-32  
Jarrangbarnmi (Koolpin Gorge) 127  
Jasper Gorge 156  
Jatbula Trail 142-3  
Jervois Homestead 212  
Jessie Gap 235  
jet lag 286  
Jim Jim Falls 124-6, 7  
John Flynn Memorial 162  
John Flynn's Grave 219  
John Hayes Rockhole 236

**K**

Kakadu National Park 108-28, **108**,  
**115**, **120**, **121**, **123**, **126**, 5,  
37, 185  
accommodation 118, 119-20, 121,  
122, 124, 126, 128  
bushwalking 114-15, 119, 120-1,  
123-4, 124, 125-6, 126, 127-8  
climate 113  
environment 109-13  
travel to/from 118-9  
travel within 118-9  
Kalarranga 227  
kangaroos 45, 111  
Kata Tjuta 255-6, **255**, 5, **188**  
Katherine 135-40, **136**  
accommodation 138-9  
activities 137-8  
attractions 137  
festivals 138  
food 139-40  
shopping 140  
special events 138  
travel to/from 140  
travel within 140  
Katherine Gorge, *see* Nitmiluk  
(Katherine Gorge) National Park  
Katherine Low Level Nature Park 137  
Katherine Museum 137  
Keep River National Park 154-5,  
**154**, **186**

Mary River Crossing 95  
Mary River National Park 94-5  
Maryvale Rd 240-2  
Maryvale Station 241  
Mataranka 145-7, **146**  
McKinlay, John 109  
medical services 286-7  
Melville Island 91-2  
meningococcal disease 287  
Merrepen Arts Festival 104  
metric conversions, *see inside front cover*  
Milikapiti 91  
Mindil Beach Sunset Market 80, **6**  
mining 23, 28  
gold 163-4, 210, 239  
tours 118, 164  
uranium 46, 109, 110, 127  
wolfram 167  
Mistake Billabong 95  
mobile phones 271  
money 15, 265, 268-9, *see also inside front cover*  
motels 263  
motion sickness 286  
motorcycle travel 280-4  
driving licence 280  
organisations 280  
purchase 281  
road distance chart **280**  
road rules 283  
safety 282  
tours 191, 231, 252  
Mt Conner 246  
Mt Ebenezer 246  
Mt Palmer 211-12  
Mt Sonder 223, 224  
Mud Tank zircon field 211  
Muirella Park 124  
Murray Downs 168  
Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory 65, **185**  
Museum of Central Australia 181  
museums & galleries, *see also* cultural centres  
Australian Aviation Heritage Centre 69  
Aviation Museum 181  
Battery Hill 164  
Borroloolua Museum 170  
Buku Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre & Museum 131  
Chung Wah Society Museum 70  
East Point Military Museum 70  
Fannie Bay Gaol Museum 69

L  
Lajamanu 156, 210  
Lake Nash 213  
Lambert Centre 243  
land rights 25-6, 131, 148-9  
language  
Anangu 248  
food vocabulary 58  
Larapinta Trail 218  
Larrimah 158-60  
Lasseter Hwy 246  
Leichhardt, Ludwig 26, 109, 131, 135,  
145, 211  
Leliyn (Edith Falls) 144  
Leliyn Trail 144  
lesbian travellers 267  
Alice Springs 191  
Darwin 75  
Limestone Gorge 153  
Limmen National Park 169  
Lindsay, David 211, 239  
Lingiari, Vincent 148-9  
Litchfield National Park 98-102, **99**  
literature 32, *see also* books  
lizards 44  
Lomariem Lagoon 169  
Lost City (Caranbirini Conservation Reserve) 171  
Lost City (Litchfield National Park) 100  
Ltyentye Apurte 242-3

M  
Mac Clark Conservation Reserve 242  
magnetic termite mounds 99, **185**  
Maguk (Barramundi Gorge) 126-7  
Malabanbadju 124  
mandatory sentencing 28  
Mandorah 89  
Manyallaluk 145  
maps 267-8  
markets 56  
Alice Springs 200  
Darwin 80, **6**  
Mary Ann Recreational Dam 165

000 Map pages  
000 Photograph pages

Katherine Museum 137  
Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory 65, **185**  
Museum of Central Australia 181  
National Pioneer Women's Hall of Fame 183  
Never Never Museum 146  
Old Ghan Train & Museum 183  
Pine Creek Museum 105  
Railway Museum 137  
Road Transport Hall of Fame 184  
music 34

**N**

Naidoc Week 192  
Namarkan sisters 119  
Namatjira, Albert 226-7  
Namatjira House 226  
national parks 43, *see also* conservation reserves, nature parks  
Barranyi (North Island) 171  
Charles Darwin 70  
Davenport Range 168  
Eley 147-8, **146**  
Finke Gorge 226-8, 8  
Garig Gunak Barlu 129, 8  
Gregory 151-3, **152**  
Kakadu 108-28, **108**, **115**, **120**,  
**121**, **123**, **126**, 5, 37, 185  
Keep River 154-5, **154**, **186**  
Limmen 169  
Litchfield 98-102, **99**  
Mary River 94-5  
Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) 141-4,  
**142-3**, 4  
Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park 246-60, **250-1**, **253**, **255**, 5,  
6, **188**  
Watarrka (Kings Canyon) 229-32,  
**229**, 8  
West MacDonnell 216-25, **220-1**,  
**187**, **188**  
National Pioneer Women's Hall of Fame 183  
native foods, *see* bush tucker  
Native Gap Conservation Reserve 204  
nature parks, *see also* conservation reserves, national parks  
Berry Springs 96  
Butterfly Gorge 103  
Cutta Cutta Caves 144-5  
Emily & Jessie Gaps 235  
Flora River 149  
Holmes Jungle 71  
Howard Springs 89

Katherine Low Level 137  
N'Dhala Gorge 237-8  
Ruby Gap 239, 240  
Trephina Gorge 236-7, **237**, **188**  
Umbrawarra Gorge 106  
N'Dhala Gorge Nature Park 237-8  
Nemarluk 25  
Never Never Museum 146  
New Barrow 207  
New Crown Homestead 242  
Newcastle Waters 161  
newspapers 261  
Nguiu 91  
Ngukurr 39, 169  
Nhulunbuy 131-2  
Nitmiluk Centre 141  
Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park 141-4, **142-3**, 4  
Northern Land Council 63, 284  
Noulangie 122-4, **123**  
Nyinkka Nyunyu 164

O  
Oak Valley 241  
ochre 222  
Ochre Pits 222  
Oenpelli, *see* Gunbalanya  
Old Andado Homestead 242  
Old Andado Track 242-3  
Old Ghan Train & Museum 183  
Old Police Station Waterhole 168  
Old South Rd 240-2  
Olgas, *see* Kata Tjuta  
Ooloo Crossing 104  
Ooraminna Homestead 240  
opals 270  
Ormiston Gorge 222  
Overland Telegraph Line 160, 162,  
168, 206  
Overlander 277-8  
Owen Springs Reserve 225

P  
Palm Valley 227, 8  
palms 228  
Papunya Tula 36, 199  
passports 273  
parentie 46  
permits  
Alice Springs 177  
Arnhem Land 63, 129  
fossicking 52, 63, 177, 179, 211,  
212  
Garig Gunak Barlu National Park 129

Gove Peninsula 131  
Gunbalanya (Oenpelli) 121  
Leliyn (Edith Falls) 144  
Mereenie Loop Rd 228  
Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park 141  
Tennant Creek 164  
Tiwi Islands 63, 91  
transit 283-4  
Phillip Creek 163  
phonecards 271  
photography 269  
Pine Creek 104-6  
planning 14-17, 265, *see also* itineraries  
plants 45  
Gregory National Park 151  
Kakadu National Park 109-11  
Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park 141  
Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park 250  
Watarrka National Park (Kings Canyon) 230  
West MacDonnell National Park 217  
Plenty Hwy 210-13  
Policeman's Point 150  
population 23, 29, 31  
Possum, Clifford 36  
postal services 269  
pottery 41  
pubs 56  
Pularumpi 91

R  
Rabbit Flat 210  
radio 261  
Rainbow Valley Conservation Reserve 243  
Redbank Gorge 224, **187**  
Renner Springs 161-2  
responsible travel 30  
bushwalking 48  
camping 262  
restaurants 56  
road trains 282  
Road Transport Hall of Fame 184  
Robyn Falls 103  
rock art 36-7, 5, **37**  
Emily & Jessie Gaps Nature Park 235  
Ewanninga Rock Carvings Conservation Reserve 241  
Kakadu National Park 116, 120,  
123

- rock art *continued*  
 Keep River National Park 154  
 N'Dhala Gorge Nature Park 237  
 Roma Gorge 224-5  
 Umbrawarra Gorge Nature Park 106
- rock climbing  
 Alice Springs 189  
 Darwin 72  
 Roper Bar 168-9  
 Ross River fever 287  
 Ross River Resort 238  
 Ross River valley 237  
 Royal Flying Doctor Service 182, 219  
 Ruby Gap Nature Park 239, 240  
 rufous hare wallaby 249-50, 5  
 Ryan Well Historic Reserve 204
- S**  
 safety 264-5  
 animals 264-5  
 bushwalking 49-50  
 car & motorcycle travel 282  
 hitching 284  
 sailing 72  
 St Vidgeon Homestead 169  
 Sandover Hwy 213-14  
 Sandover Massacre 213  
 Santa Theresa, *see* Ltyentye Apurte  
 scenic flights 52  
 Alice Springs 191  
 Darwin 75  
 Kakadu National Park 117  
 Katherine 137  
 Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park 144  
 Timber Creek 151  
 Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park 252  
 Watarrka National Park (Kings Canyon) 231  
 School of the Air 182  
 sculpture 40-1  
 seafood 54  
 senior travellers 265  
 Serpentine Chalet ruins 221-2  
 Serpentine Gorge 221  
 sexually transmitted diseases 287  
 shopping 269-70  
 Sidney Williams huts 165  
 Simpsons Gap 219  
 snakes 45-6, 265, 288
- special events 266-7, *see also* festivals  
 spiders 265, 288  
 sporting events 31, 75, 192, 209-10,  
*see also* horse racing  
 sports 31-2, *see also individual sports*  
 Standley Chasm 220  
 stations 262  
 Stevie's Hole 146  
 stingers, *see* box jellyfish  
 Strehlow, Carl 225-6  
 Strehlow, Ted 226  
 Stuart, John McDouall 26-7, 135, 145,  
 160, 162  
 Stuart's Well 243-4  
 Sturt Creek 210  
 sunburn 289  
 supermarkets 56  
 Surprise Creek Falls 100  
 swimming 52-3  
 Darwin 71  
 Douglas River Esplanade  
 Conservation Reserve 103-4  
 Eusey National Park 147  
 Howard Springs Nature Park 89  
 Katherine 137-8  
 Litchfield National Park 99-101  
 Mataranka 146  
 Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge)  
 National Park 141-2  
 Tennant Creek 165
- T**  
 Tabletop Swamp 100  
 Tanami Mine 210  
 Tanami Track 207-10, **207**  
 Tasman, Abel 24  
 taxes 268  
 Telegraph Station Historical Reserve 182  
 telephone codes 271  
 telephone services 270-1  
 Tennant Creek 162-7, **163**  
 accommodation 165-6  
 activities 165  
 attractions 164-5  
 festivals 165  
 food 166  
 special events 165  
 travel to/from 166-7  
 travel within 167  
 termites 97  
 Territory Wildlife Park 96  
 Three Ways 162  
 Ti Tree 205-6  
 Tilmouth Well 209  
 Timber Creek 150-1
- time 271-2  
 tipping 268  
 Titjikala Art Centre 241  
 Tiwi Islands 91-2, 40  
 Tiwi Land Council 63, 284  
 Tjaynera Falls 100  
 Tjuwaliyn (Douglas) Hot Springs 103  
 Tnorala (Gosse Bluff) Conservation  
 Reserve 224  
 Tobermorey 210  
 Tobermorey Homestead 212  
 Tolmer Falls 100  
 Top Springs 155-6  
 tourist information 272  
 tours, *see also* boat cruises, camel  
 riding, horse riding, scenic flights  
 Aboriginal culture 33, 74, 92,  
 117-18, 128, 131, 138, 144,  
 191, 226, 251-2  
 Alice Springs 190-1  
 Arnhem Land 128  
 Borroloola 170  
 bushwalking 49, 118, 144, 170, 218  
 canoeing 138, 143  
 Cutta Cutta Caves 145  
 Darwin 74-5  
 Finke Gorge National Park 227  
 fishing 118, 128, 130, 150, 151,  
 170  
 food 191  
 fossicking 103, 211  
 Gove Peninsula 131  
 Kakadu National Park 117-18  
 Katherine 138  
 Leliyn (Edith Falls) 144  
 Litchfield National Park 101  
 Manyallaluk 138, 145  
 Mary River National Park 95  
 Mataranka 146  
 motorcycle 191, 231, 252  
 Mt Conner 246  
 Southeast 235  
 Tennant Creek 165  
 Timber Creek 151  
 Tiwi Islands 92  
 Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park  
 251-3
- Towns River 169  
 Traeger, Alfred 183  
 train travel 276-8  
 travellers cheques 268  
 trekking, *see* bushwalking  
 Trephina Bluff 236  
 Trephina Gorge Nature Park 236-7,  
**237, 188**
- Tropic of Capricorn 204  
 TV 261  
 Twin Falls 124-6  
 Two Mile Hole 119  
 Tylers Pass 224
- U**  
 Ubirr 120-1, **120, 5**  
 UFOs 27, 167-8  
 Ulim, Charles 181  
 Uluru 253-5, **253, 6**  
 Uluru-Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre 253-5  
 Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park 246-60,  
**250-1, 253, 255, 5, 6, 188**  
 Umbrawarra Gorge Nature Park 106  
 Urandangi 213  
 uranium mining 46, 109, 110, 127  
 Utopia 39, 213
- V**  
 vaccinations 285  
 vegetarian travellers 57  
 Victoria River Crossing 149-50  
 Victoria River Downs 156  
 Victoria Settlement 130  
 video systems 269  
 viral encephalitis 287  
 visas 272, *see also* passports  
 von Mueller, Baron Ferdinand 248
- W**  
 Waldak Irrmbal 119  
 Walker Creek 101  
 walking, *see* bushwalking  
 wallabies 45, 111-12  
 Wallace Rockhole 226
- wallaroos 111  
 Wangi Falls 100-1  
 Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre  
 114  
 Watarrka National Park (Kings  
 Canyon) 229-32, **229, 8**  
 Waterfall Creek 127  
 waterfalls  
 Florence Falls 100  
 Jim Jim Falls 124-6, **7**  
 Leliyn (Edith Falls) 144  
 Robyn Falls 103  
 Surprise Creek Falls 100  
 Tjaynera Falls 100  
 Tolmer Falls 100  
 Twin Falls 124-6  
 Wangi Falls 100-1  
 Waterhouse River 146  
 Wattie Creek 149  
 Wauchope 167  
 Wave Hill Stockmen's Strike 149  
 weights & measures 261, *see also*  
*inside front cover*  
 West MacDonnell National Park  
 216-25, **220-1, 187, 188**  
 Whistleduck Creek 168  
 White Range 238  
 Whitlam, Gough 149  
 Wickham 4WD Track 153  
 wildflowers 45  
 wildlife 109-13, *see also individual*  
*animals & plants*  
 wildlife-watching 53  
 Adelaide River Crossing 93  
 Alice Springs Desert Park  
 179
- Aquascene 68  
 Crocodylus Park 69  
 Darwin Cocodile Farm 89  
 Kakadu National Park 111-14  
 Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge)  
 National Park 141  
 Territory Wildlife Park 96  
 Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park  
 249  
 West MacDonnell National Park  
 217  
 Window on the Wetlands 93  
 wine 55, 206  
 Wolfe Creek Meteorite Crater  
 (Western Australia) 210  
 Wollgorang Station 171-2  
 women travellers 272  
 wood carvings 41  
 WWII 27-8, 91, 135, 148, 158, 160,  
 207  
 Wycliffe Well 167-8
- Y**  
 Yellow Water 116-7, 126, **185**  
 Yuendumu 209-10  
 Yuendumu Sports Weekend 31,  
 209-10  
 Yulara 256-60, **256**, *see also* Uluru-  
 Kata Tjuta National Park
- Z**  
 zircons 212  
 zoos  
 Alice Springs Desert Park 179  
 Crocodylus Park 69  
 Territory Wildlife Park 96