

# Northern Territory

The Northern Territory delivers the Australia promised in postcards and calendars. Vast central deserts of red sand and timeless, weathered ranges merge with a tropical Top End where steaming (and crocodile-teeming) floodplains are backed by fissured escarpments that hold ancient art and primeval mystery. There are national parks that are World Heritage listed and others that are little known, even within Australia. Walking this challenging prehistoric terrain, you are aided by a sophisticated infrastructure of well-marked trails, solar-powered emergency phones and a walker registration system. What's more, national parks are co-managed with the land's traditional owners, helping walkers maximise their cultural experience.

The environments of the Top End and the Red Centre are starkly different, yet walking in either is a highly seasonal proposition. In the Top End you will be walking through diverse woodlands and rustling tall speargrass or up a craggy escarpment and across an exposed sandstone plateau. Water can be plentiful but the heat and humidity will challenge the fitness of walkers. The highlight of most Top End walks is the chance to plunge into a crystal clear pool or under a pummelling waterfall after a steamy workout. In the Centre, pleasant winter temperatures, which belie the unforgiving summers and the deserts' harsh reputation, encourage walkers to explore majestic ranges where pastel-hued panoramas, serene waterholes and perfect isolation are just part of the reward.

Wherever you go in 'the Territory' the horizons are vast and settlement is sparse. If you crave unpopulated vistas, unblemished starry nights and the exhilaration that only a remote and challenging location can awaken, then the Territory beckons.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Enjoying the high ridges and stunning chasms of the West MacDonnell Ranges along the demanding **Larapinta Trail** (p322)
- Reaching each day's camp site and its refreshing swimming hole on the exceptional **Jatbula Trail** (p315) in Nitmiluk National Park
- Exploring the amazing rock art at Nourlangie while tackling the **Barrk Sandstone Bushwalk** (p312) in Kakadu National Park
- Experiencing the peaceful grandeur of **Ormiston Gorge** and the textures and colours of **Ormiston Pound** (p321) in West MacDonnell National Park

■ TELEPHONE CODE: 08

■ [www.nt.gov.au/nreta/parks/](http://www.nt.gov.au/nreta/parks/)

■ [www.travelnt.com](http://www.travelnt.com)

## ENVIRONMENT

The majority of the Northern Territory is in the tropics, but only the northern quarter, the Top End, experiences the full impact of the monsoonal wet season, complete with spectacular electrical storms and flooding rains. This challenging climate has weathered the land for aeons, creating diverse habitats of woodland, rainforest, heath and expansive wetlands. While rainfall is highly seasonal, the great sandstone plateaus of Kakadu, Nitmiluk, Litchfield and Arnhem Land absorb sufficient water to release life-sustaining flows throughout the year.

Much of the rest of the Territory is classified as desert or semidesert: and it is mostly flat. Where there is topographical relief, the effect is dramatic. The archetypal outback of red sand, muted blue ranges and stark-white ghost gums belongs to the true Centre, around Alice Springs, with its temperate climate of low humidity and scant rainfall. The rivers are usually dry, their courses traced by majestic river red gums whose deep roots tap age-old soaks. Sheltering under rocky ramparts are isolated waterholes; these true oases secreted in the spare ranges are vital refuges for wildlife and hold significant cultural importance for traditional owners.

## INFORMATION When to Walk

Walks in the Top End are best undertaken from May through to September. There

will be more water around in autumn, and temperatures and humidity will be most tolerable during winter. June and July are also the peak tourist times, though crowding on the trails is usually not a problem. The build-up to the Wet begins in October with increasing temperatures and humidity. During the wet season many walking trails and even access roads to parks may be cut by floodwaters and many trails are closed to walkers.

The best time to walk in the Centre is from April through to September when maximum temperatures range between a comfortable 20°C and 25°C. Overnight minimums are often below 0°C and significant rainfall is rare. Summer temperatures are extreme (40°C plus), which, combined with the scarcity of water, makes walking a potentially dangerous proposition.

## Maps

**MapsNT** ([www.ipe.nt.gov.au/whatwedo/landinformation/mapsnt/](http://www.ipe.nt.gov.au/whatwedo/landinformation/mapsnt/)) produces a comprehensive 1:50,000 map series and a series of larger-scale topographic maps with a more limited coverage. MapsNT has offices in Darwin and Alice Springs, and the more popular sheets are often available in outdoor equipment shops in these cities. The 1:50,000 topographic sheets produced by **Geoscience Australia** ([www.ga.gov.au](http://www.ga.gov.au)) are also satisfactory. For maps covering individual walks, see Planning in the introduction to each walk.

## TOP END'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 its effect on plant growth and animal behaviour.

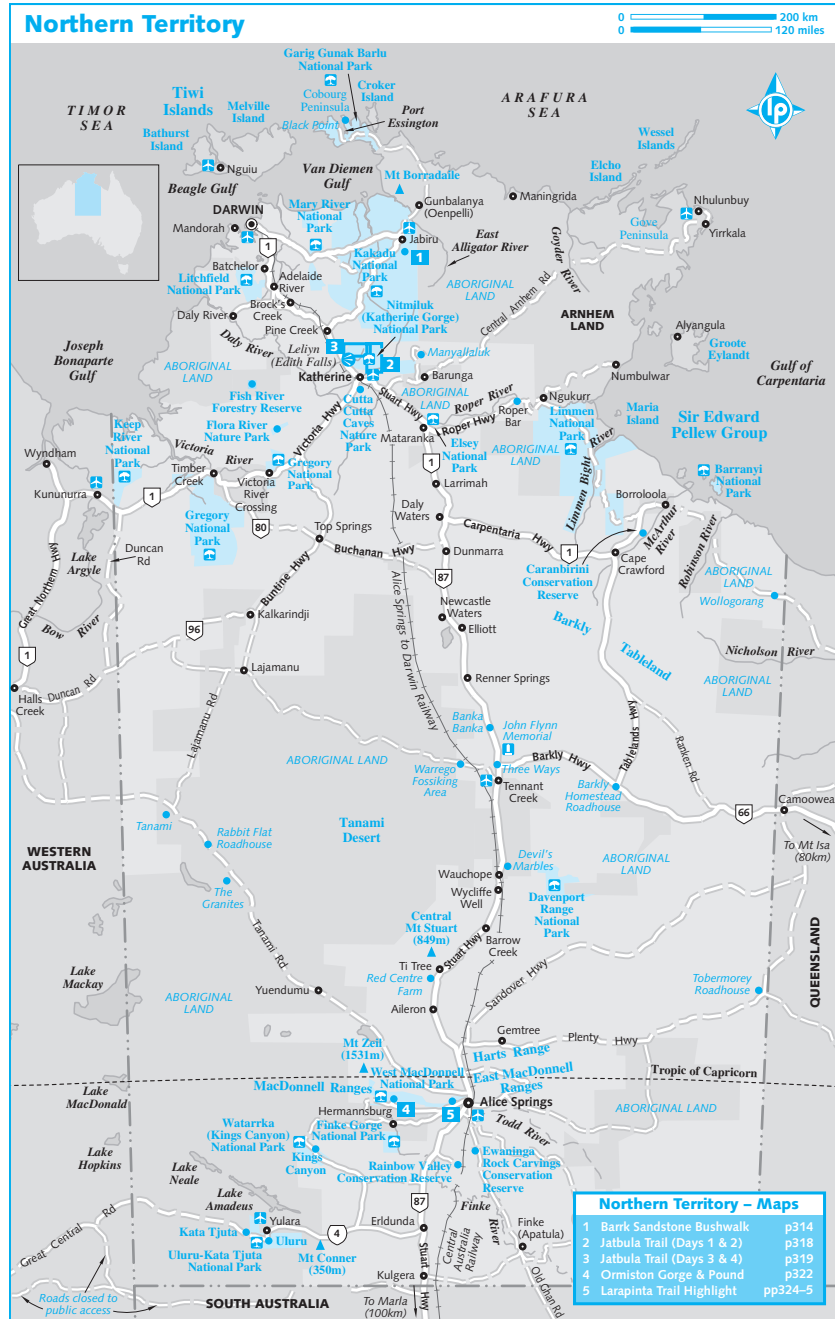
**Gunmeleng** This is the build-up to the Wet, and starts in mid-October. Humidity increases and temperatures rise to 35°C or more – and the number of mosquitoes, always high near water, rises to near plague proportions. By November, the thunderstorms have started, billabongs are replenished and waterbirds 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.

**Bangereng** In April, storms (known as 'knock 'em down' storms) flatten the speargrass, 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. The first firing of the countryside begins.

**Wurrngeng & Gurrung** The most comfortable time to visit the Top End is during the late Dry, in July and August. This is when wildlife, especially birds, gathers in large numbers around shrinking billabongs.



## Books

Lonely Planet's *Northern Territory & Central Australia* is highly recommended for more detailed information about the Northern Territory, while *A Field Guide to Central Australia* by Penny van Oosterzee is a comprehensive guide to the plants and wildlife of the Centre.

## Information Sources

**Tourism NT** (☎ 13 67 68; www.travelnt.com.au) operates several interstate and overseas information offices in addition to a comprehensive website. Regional tourism associations run very helpful visitor centres in Darwin (see p308) and Alice Springs (see p310).

The Northern Territory **Parks & Wildlife Service** (PWS; www.nt.gov.au/nreta/parks/) has its head office in Palmerston (see p308), near Darwin, and regional offices in Alice Springs (see p310) and Katherine (see p316). A lot of national park information is also available from Tourism NT offices and on the PWS website.

There are two main bushwalking clubs: the **Darwin Bushwalking Club** (☎ 8985 1484; www.bushwalking.org.au/dbc/; PO Box 41568, Casuarina 0811), which charges \$30 for associate membership (6 months) before inviting you to join a walk; and the **Alice Springs Bushwalkers Association** (http://home.austarnet.com.au/longwalk/), an

informal group that welcomes visitors to join walks.

## Permits & Regulations

Permits must be organised in advance for the Jatbula Trail in Nitmiluk National Park (see p315) and for overnight walks in Kakadu National Park (see p312).

The voluntary **Overnight Walker Registration Scheme** (☎ 1300 650 730) is in operation across the state (except Kakadu, Nitmiluk and Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Parks) and is recommended for all overnight walks. You pay a \$50 refundable deposit (or \$200 a group) by credit card over the phone and tell them your walk details. Then, if you don't check out by noon of the day following your nominated completion date, they organise a search party.

During days of Total Fire Ban (see p54), all fires are forbidden, even fuel stoves.

## Guided Walks

For guided walks on the Larapinta Trail see p323.

**Willis's Walkabouts** (☎ 8985 2134; www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au) has a worldwide reputation and is probably one of the best organised and most original walking outfits in Australia. Walks from one to two weeks and longer in duration are tailored to the

## ABORIGINAL ART & THE TOP END

Australian Aboriginal society has the longest continuous cultural history in the world, dating back at least 50,000 years, and walkers in the Top End are privileged to see first-hand a remarkable artistic heritage – the fascinating rock art of Kakadu and Arnhem Land.

Kakadu's Barrk Sandstone Bushwalk (p312 Kakadu National Park/Barrk Sandstone Bushwalk) boasts excellent art sites with examples of several artistic styles. Walkers can also see wonderful rock art at the Amphitheatre on day two of the Jatbula Trail (p315) in Nitmiluk National Park.

Kakadu alone contains over 5000 recorded art sites, some contemporary, some at least 20,000 years old. They record a changing world of animals long extinct, seasonal food sources, the arrival of Indonesian and European sailors, important ceremonies and the intriguing creation ancestors, such as the hauntingly beautiful *mimi*. The paintings have been classified into three roughly defined periods: Pre-estuarine, which is from the earliest paintings up to around 8000 years ago; Estuarine, which covers the period from 8000 to 2000 years ago, when rising sea levels flooded valleys, the climate warmed and the familiar X-ray art began; and Freshwater, from 2000 years ago, which includes the so-called contact art featuring Macassan and European subjects from about 500 up to 100 years ago.

For the local Aboriginal people the rock-art sites are a major source of traditional knowledge and a historical archive. The most recent paintings, some executed as recently as the 1980s, connect the present-day community with communities past. Older paintings are believed by many Aboriginal people to have been painted by spirit people, and depict creation legends and the development of Aboriginal law.

ability and the comfort expectation of the clients. Costs vary accordingly – from \$1000 to over \$3000 depending on logistics.

## GATEWAYS Darwin

☎ 08 / pop 71,350

Darwin's lively cosmopolitan character stems from its proximity to Asia and its standing as an essential watering hole on the traveller circuit. There are plenty of good restaurants and clubs where you'll enjoy the best food and nightlife in all of the Territory. Spend a few days here catching the markets and the other sights before heading to the bush.

## INFORMATION

**Tourism Top End** (☎ 8936 2499; www.tourismtopend.com.au; cnr Knuckey & Mitchell Sts; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) Stocks numerous brochures and can book tours or accommodation. Free publications include *Destination Darwin & the Top End*, published twice yearly, and the annual *Top End Holiday Guide*. A full range of park notes on Top End national parks is available.

**MapsNT** (☎ 8999 7032; 1st fl, cnr Cavenagh & Bennett Sts; www.ipe.nt.gov.au/whatwedo/landinformation/mapsnt; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) Sells a full range of map products including large-scale topographic maps.

**Parks & Wildlife Service (PWS)**; (☎ 8999 4555; www.nreta.nt.gov.au/parks//; 25 Chung Wha Tce, Palmerston) This head office and information centre is 18km south of Darwin. Tourism Top End in Darwin also has PWS information (though not the same expertise) and is more convenient.

## SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

**NT General Store** (☎ 8981 8242; 42 Cavenagh St) stocks a good range of camping equipment, books and some maps and is centrally located. **Trek & Travel** (☎ 8985 4777; 1 Travers St, Coconut Grove) is about 7km north of the CBD and stocks the latest gear.

For self-catering there are three supermarkets in town. **Coles** (Mitchell Centre, 55-59 Mitchell St) is open 24 hours, while **Woolworths** (cnr Cavenagh & Whitfield Sts) is open to midnight most nights. There's another **Woolworths** (56 Smith St) near the corner of Smith and Knuckey Sts.

## SLEEPING & EATING

There are plenty of caravan parks around Darwin but one of the best and closest is **Shady Glen Caravan Park** (☎ 8984 3330; www.shady

## WARNING

Whether you are in the Top End or the Red Centre, heat exhaustion and/or dehydration are a possibility even on short walks. They are best avoided by not overexerting, especially in the hottest part of the day. Always carry sufficient water (see p305) as water sources in the Northern Territory, particularly in the Centre, are seasonal and should never be relied on. Don't camp in dry creek beds, which can suddenly become raging torrents after rain upstream.

Biting insects in the Top End can carry serious diseases such as scrub typhus and Ross River fever, so cover up and wear insect repellent. Larger animals worth special mention include crocodiles and wild cattle. Always heed crocodile warning signs in the Top End, and be aware that many national parks have populations of feral cattle and buffalo. These are usually benign, but bulls can have attitude to match their bulk.

glen.com.au; cnr Farrell Cres & Stuart Hwy; unpowered/powered sites for 2 \$24/26, cabins from \$75; ☎ ☎ ☎), which is indeed a shady park with immaculate facilities, camp kitchen, licensed shop and friendly staff.

As well as being host to numerous restaurants and bars, Mitchell St is the hostel and backpackers hot spot. **Darwin International YHA** (☎ 8981 3995; darwinya@yhant.org.au; 69 Mitchell St; dm per YHA member/non-member \$19-21/23-25, tw & d \$53-70; ☎ ☎ ☎) is a popular, convenient and friendly hostel adjacent to the Transit Centre. Across the street, **Melaleuca on Mitchell** (☎ 1300 723 437; www.melaleucaonmitchell.com.au; 52 Mitchell St; dm \$30, s or d \$95; ☎ ☎ ☎) is a modern backpackers with characterless rooms but a great rooftop bar and pool area in which to unwind.

The quieter **Barramundi Lodge** (☎ 8941 6466; www.barramundilodge.com.au; 4 Gardens Rd, The Gardens; s/d \$55/95; ☎ ☎ ☎) has spacious, old-fashioned rooms with TV and kitchenette; note that the bathrooms are communal.

Moving upmarket, the **Cherry Blossom Hotel** (☎ 8981 6734, fax 8941 3620; 108 The Esplanade; d \$99; ☎ ☎ ☎) represents good value on the ritzy Esplanade. It is a friendly boutique hotel of 19 rooms, each with a double bed and a single. **Botanic Gardens Apartments** (☎ 8946 0300; www.botanicgardens.com.au; 17 Geranium St, Stuart Park;

d from \$140, apt \$190-300; ☎ ☎ ☎) has spacious motel rooms and apartments overlooking the botanic gardens. The three-bedroom apartments sleep up to six and boast a balcony, full cooking facilities and a laundry.

Darwin is easily the best place to eat in the Territory. Cullen Bay has a hip waterfront dining scene, while the food centre at Stokes Hill Wharf provides economical fish and chips and Asian stir-fries. However, no mention of Darwin dining could omit the tasty delights available at the **Mindil Beach Sunset Market** (☎ 8981 3454; off Gilruth Ave; ☎ 5pm-10pm Thu & 4-9pm Sun May-Oct), a Darwin institution that draws huge crowds for its multicultural (especially Asian) street food.

Mitchell St has plenty of eateries for all budgets. For starched linen, enticing aromas and innovative Indian and Thai dishes follow your nose to **Hanuman** (☎ 8941 3500; 28 Mitchell St; mains \$15-25; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri & dinner daily). For alfresco waterfront dining try **Buzz Café** (☎ 8941 1141; The Slipway, Cullen Bay; mains \$16-30; ☎ lunch & dinner), a chic café/bar/restaurant furnished in polished teak and lava which makes a lovely spot for an afternoon drink and fusion fare.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

Darwin International Airport receives international flights and is worth considering as a port of entry (see p372).

Domestic flights connect Darwin with all other Australian capital cities, as well as Alice Springs, Broome, Cairns, Kununurra and various regional destinations throughout the Top End.

**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 direct daily to/from Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane for very similar prices.

The airport is 12km south of town. It's a \$20 taxi ride or the **Darwin Airport Shuttle** (☎ 1800 358 945, 8981 5066) will pick up or drop off almost anywhere in the city centre for \$8.50/17 one way/return.

### Bus

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). Buses depart from the rear of the Transit Centre.

Darwin is serviced by daily services along three routes: the Western Australia route to/from Kununurra via Katherine; the Queensland route to/from Mount Isa via Three Ways (near Tennant Creek); or the central route to/from Alice Springs and Adelaide. Sample fares and times on the daily service to Adelaide (\$496, 43 hours) are: Batchelor (\$38, 1½ hours), Katherine (\$70, 4½ hours), Tennant Creek (\$185, 14 hours) and Alice Springs (\$255, 22 hours).

For further information on interstate bus travel see p375.

## Train

The *Ghan* operates twice weekly between Darwin and Adelaide via Alice Springs, with a third service in operation from May to July. The Darwin terminus is located on Berrimah Rd, about 18km from the city centre. A taxi fare into the centre is about \$30, and there is a shuttle service to/from the Transit Centre for \$10.

Adult fares for the service from Darwin to Alice Springs (12 hours) via Katherine are \$240/880/1150 one way for day-nighter seats/sleeper cabins/1st-class (Gold Kangaroo) sleepers; Darwin-Adelaide (24 hours) fares are \$440/1390/1830. Bookings can be made through **Trainways** (☎ 13 21 47; www.trainways.com.au). Discounted fares are sometimes offered.

## Car

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

**Avis** (☎ 8981 9922; 89 Smith St)

**Britz: Australia** (☎ 8981 2081; 44 Stuart Hwy, Stuart Park) Campervan & 4WD specialists.

**Budget** (☎ 8981 9800; cnr Daly St & Doctors Gully Rd)

**Europcar** (☎ 8941 0300; 77 Cavenagh St)

**Hertz** (☎ 8941 0944; cnr Smith & Daly Sts)

**Nifty Rent-A-Car** (☎ 8941 7090; 86 Mitchell St) Usually has cheap deals.

**Thrifty** (☎ 8924 0000; 64 Stuart Hwy, Stuart Park)

## Alice Springs

☎ 08 / pop 28,200

From a lonely telegraph station in the desert, Alice Springs, or 'Alice' as it's affectionately called, has grown into a thriving city (some

would say 'town') and the launching point of many an outback adventure. Uluru is five hours away, but it's the beautiful and adjacent MacDonnell Ranges that are the attraction for walkers.

## INFORMATION

### Central Australian Tourism Industry Association

(Catia; ☎ 8952 5800; [www.centraustralia.com.au](http://www.centraustralia.com.au); 60 Gregory Tce; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun) Stocks maps, brochures and PWS park notes.

**MapsNT** (☎ 8999 7032; [www.ipe.nt.gov.au/whatwedo/landinformation/mapsnt/](http://www.ipe.nt.gov.au/whatwedo/landinformation/mapsnt/); 1st fl, Alice Springs Plaza, Todd Mall; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) Stocks all kinds of maps including topographical sheets.

**Parks & Wildlife Service** (PWS; ☎ 8951 8250; [www.nt.gov.au/nreta/parks/](http://www.nt.gov.au/nreta/parks/); Tom Hare Bldg, Arid Zone Research Institute, South Stuart Hwy; ☎ 8.30am-4.20pm Mon-Fri) Has expert staff, maps and park notes.

## SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

**Lone Dingo** (☎ 8953 3866; 24 Parsons St) is the best and most central of Alice's outdoor stores.

There are several supermarkets around the centre including: **Coles** (cnr Gregory & Railway Tces; ☎ 24hr), **Woolworths** (Yeperenye Shopping Centre, cnr Hartley & Bath Sts; ☎ 7am-midnight Mon-Sat, 7am-10pm Sun) and **Bi-Lo** (Alice Plaza; ☎ 7am-9pm) at the north end of Todd Mall.

## SLEEPING & EATING

The best-kept park in town is **MacDonnell Range Holiday Park** (☎ 8952 6111, 1800 808 373; [www.macrange.com.au](http://www.macrange.com.au); Palm Pl; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$25/30, budget rooms \$60, cabins \$85-125, villas \$135-150; ☎ ☎ ☎) with grassy sites, spotless amenities and good camp kitchens.

Right in the centre of town, **Pioneer YHA Hostel** (☎ 8952 8855; [www.yha.com.au](http://www.yha.com.au); cnr Leichhardt Tce & Parsons St; dm \$23-27, tw & d \$65, q \$80; ☎ ☎) is clean, friendly and well run with a spacious kitchen, common room and outdoor area. Also convenient, inexpensive and just a short walk to the town mall, the **Desert Rose Inn** (☎ 8952 1411; [www.desertroseinn.com.au](http://www.desertroseinn.com.au); 15 Railway Tce; budget s/d \$50/60, motel s/d \$60/95; ☎ ☎) has budget rooms that share bathrooms, as well as standard motel rooms.

The **Gallery** (☎ 8953 3514; [thegallery@outbacktravelshop.com.au](mailto:thegallery@outbacktravelshop.com.au); 16 Range Cres; s/d \$120/150) is a beautiful stone B&B overlooking the golf course in a quiet part of town. There are three rooms with shared facilities and the owners speak five languages and are a mine of local knowledge. If a private tropical-style villa appeals,

then the **Desert Palms Resort** (☎ 8952 5977, 1800 678 037; [www.desertpalms.com.au](http://www.desertpalms.com.au); 74 Barrett Dr; d/tr/q villas \$120/135/145; ☎ ☎ ☎) with its rows of self-contained villas secluded behind palms and bougainvillea is an excellent choice. For a well-appointed private room in a central hotel, though, the **All Seasons Diplomat** (☎ 8952 8977; [www.accorhotels.com.au](http://www.accorhotels.com.au); cnr Gregory Tce & Hartley St; budget/standard/deluxe d \$70/135/155; ☎ ☎ ☎) is your best option.

There are plenty of cafés in and around Todd Mall, including the **Lane** (☎ 8952 5522; 58 Todd Mall; mains \$12-28; ☎) lunch & dinner Tue-Sun, which serves for a casual lunch or intimate dinner. Try the tapas and wood-fired pizzas, or choose from the modern-Med menu. There's live entertainment on weekends.

For outback atmosphere head to **Bojangles** (☎ 8952 2873; 80 Todd St; mains \$11-22, roast \$13; ☎) lunch & dinner) with its 'gourmet Territorian' menu, including kebabs of croc, kangaroo, camel or emu served with quandong sauce. For more Australiana the **Overlanders Steakhouse** (☎ 8952 2159; [www.overlanders.com.au](http://www.overlanders.com.au); 72 Hartley St; mains \$19-29; ☎) dinner) is an Alice institution. The ambience, like the king-size steaks and Darwin stubbies, is 'over the top'.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

**Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13, 8950 5211; [www.qantas.com.au](http://www.qantas.com.au); cnr Todd Mall & Parson St) and **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89; [www.virginblue.com.au](http://www.virginblue.com.au)) operate daily flights to/from other capital cities. One-way fares from Alice include Adelaide (from \$200), Brisbane (\$270), Darwin (\$300), Melbourne (\$270), Sydney (\$230), Perth (\$300) and Hobart (\$380). Check websites for latest timetables and fare offers.

The airport is 15km south of town, a \$30 taxi ride or \$12 with the **airport shuttle** (☎ 8953 0310).

### Bus

**Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 14 99; [www.greyhound.com.au](http://www.greyhound.com.au); Shop 3, 113 Todd St; office ☎ 6am-4pm Mon-Sat) has a daily service from Alice Springs to Yulara (for Uluru) and Adelaide, and a daily service to Darwin. Buses arrive at, and depart from, the office in Todd St, opposite Melankas.

Sample fares and times to various points include: Adelaide (\$230, 21 hours), Tennant Creek (\$130, 6½ hours), Katherine (\$210, 15 hours), Darwin (\$255, 22 hours) and Yulara (\$85, 5 hours).

## Train

The *Ghan* runs between Adelaide, Alice Springs and Darwin and 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, and a third service from May to July. Heading north to Darwin, the train stops at Katherine for four hours, 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](http://www.trainways.com.au)), or book through **Travel World** (☎ 8953 0488; Todd Mall). The **train station** (☎ noon-4.30pm Mon, 9am-1pm Thu, 10am-2pm Sat) is at the end of George Cres off Larapinta Dr.

## Car

Alice Springs is a long way from anywhere and flying in and renting a car makes sense. All the major companies have offices in Alice Springs, and Avis, Budget, Hertz and Thrifty also have counters at the airport.

A conventional (2WD) vehicle will get you to trailheads in the MacDonnell Ranges (and out to Uluru and Kings Canyon).

**Alice Camp 'n' Drive** (☎ 8952 0099; [www.alicecampn drive.com](http://www.alicecampn drive.com)) Provides vehicles fully equipped for camping with swags (or tents), sleeping bags, cooking gear etc.

**Avis** (☎ 8953 5533; 52 Hartley St)

**Budget** (☎ 8952 8899; Shop 6, Capricornia Centre, Gregory Tce)

**Europcar** (☎ 13 13 90; 10 Gap Rd)

**Hertz** (☎ 8952 2644; 76 Hartley St)

**Outback Auto Rentals** (☎ 1800 652 133; [www.outbackauto rentals.com.au](http://www.outbackauto rentals.com.au); 78 Todd St) Local company with cheap deals from \$55 a day.

**Thrifty** (☎ 8952 9999; cnr Stott Tce & Hartley St)

# KAKADU NATIONAL PARK

Kakadu National Park is one of Australia's greatest national assets. At almost 20,000 sq km it is the largest park in Australia, protecting a spectacular tropical ecosystem as well as an important concentration of Aboriginal rock art. Kakadu is more than a nature reserve; it is an acknowledgement of the traditional Aboriginal custodians and a leading example of the approach that combines the cultural interests of traditional owners with nature conservation. In 1992 the entire park attained World Heritage listing for cultural and ecological importance.

Throughout the park short, marked trails lead through different habitats to a variety of attractions – bird-filled billabongs, rock art and spectacular lookouts. There are also many possibilities for extended walks; however, there are no marked long-distance trails and a strict permit system regulates all overnight walks (see p312). What's more, publicity about possible routes is minimised, so the excellent 12km Barrk Sandstone Bushwalk described here is one of the longest marked trails in the park, and

## BUSHWALKING & ABORIGINAL LAND

When the British arrived in Australia they colonised the continent on the basis of *terra nullius*, a British legal doctrine which claimed so-called 'unoccupied', or 'empty', land for the British Crown. It wasn't until 1976, and the Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act, that Aboriginal people could stake a claim on their traditional lands. At present almost half of the Territory has been claimed or is being claimed on behalf of the traditional owners.

It's important to realise that this is not about land ownership in a Western European sense. It's about having access to, and protection over, land which you have a spiritual and physical connection with. If a walker wanders into an art site meant only for clan Elders to see, or swims at a sacred site, there can be great and far-reaching repercussions. What's more, Aboriginal Elders feel personally responsible for the people on their land, including white folks wandering about in it. If a stranger out walking were to die, some Elders would take the view, 'I let the white fella onto our land, it's therefore my fault he died, I won't let it happen again'.

So it's important to obey the rules about walking on Aboriginal land. If you're asked not to visit or photograph a certain site, then don't. If you have to wait months for a permit to be approved, it's to stop you making a cultural gaffe that may not affect you very much, but could have deep repercussions for others.

a small taste of what's possible with a little more effort.

## HISTORY

Kakadu is home to a number of different Aboriginal clans who have lived here for at least 23,000 years and possibly as long as 50,000 years. The name Kakadu comes from Gagadju, one of the languages spoken in the north of the region. 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 for its natural importance. Stage Three, in the south, was finally listed in 1991, bringing virtually the whole of the South Alligator River system within the park.

## ENVIRONMENT

Forming a spectacular backdrop, the extensive Arnhem Land escarpment marks the boundary of the broad floodplains and the elevated Arnhem Land plateau. Depending on the season, water gently tumbles or explosively roars off the plateau to feed the rivers and floodplains below. These plains are covered in a patchwork of eucalyptus woodland, tall grasses and ephemeral billabongs and comprise 80% of the park. The seasonal wetlands are of international importance as feeding and breeding grounds for local and migratory birds. There are over 60 species of mammal in the park and, while many are small, nocturnal or shy, you are likely to see some of the six

species of kangaroo and wallaby, including the beautiful black wallaroo, that inhabit the park. Among the numerous reptiles that live here, the potentially harmful crocodiles, both the freshwater and estuarine (or saltwater) species, are worthy of special mention and respect.

## BARRK SANDSTONE BUSHWALK

<b>Duration</b>	5–7 hours
<b>Distance</b>	12km
<b>Difficulty</b>	moderate–demanding
<b>Start/Finish</b>	Nourlangie Rock car park
<b>Nearest Town</b>	Jabiru (p313)
<b>Transport</b>	private

**Summary** An excellent introduction to walking in Kakadu National Park, this walk links two important Aboriginal rock art sites via a rugged and challenging route up and over Nourlangie Rock.

This walk links Anbangbang and Nangulwur, two of the most important Aboriginal rock art sites in Kakadu. These sites offer a visual record of traditional life and ceremony. Paintings show seasonal food sources, creation ancestors and the arrival of European sailors. Some paintings are contemporary, others possibly 30,000 years old.

The trail is well marked with orange triangle markers. This is just as well as the route across the top of the rock is full of small gullies and rocky hillocks, descents, climbs and geological mazes that are impossible to show on the map. Start walking

## OVERNIGHT WALKS IN KAKADU

Permits are required for all overnight walks in Kakadu. Contact the **Permits Officer** (☎ 8938 1100, fax 8938 1115; PO Box 71, Jabiru, NT 0886) at Bowali visitor information centre for a permit application form, which should be returned with a copy of a topographical map (1:100,000 or 1:50,000) showing your proposed route and camp sites. No clues as to routes will be given by parks staff, but a number of recognised, unmarked routes lie along dry gorges and creeks in the sandstone plateau country southeast of Jabiru.

It takes at least seven days to process permits. June and July are the busiest times. Alternative routes are often worked out if there's a problem. Permits and bush camping are free.

Within 24 hours of finishing your walk, notify rangers on ☎ 8938 1179 (a dedicated line) and leave your name, date and permit number.

All walks are fuel stove only. Sleeping under a mosquito net is ideal in the Dry, when you'll also need a sleeping bag, while after September a tent and waterproof gear are necessary. Insect repellent is mandatory at all times.

early in the morning and carry at least 4L of water per person. Also note this is a one-way walk and the markers are not visible if you decide to turn around and backtrack.

When walking in the Nourlangie area, keep an eye out for black wallaroos (males are called barrks), which occur only in Kakadu and Arnhem Land. Also endemic to this region is the chestnut-quilled rock-pigeon. Listen for the whirr as they flee your arrival.

## PLANNING

### When to Walk

The dry season from April to September is the best time for visiting, and walking is best between May and July when temperatures are lower.

## Maps & Books

The booklet *Kakadu National Park Visitor Guide and Maps* is available at Tourism Top End in Darwin and from the Bowali visitor information centre. Hema's 1:390,000 *Kakadu National Park* map and Auslig's 1:250,000 *Kakadu* map are good for planning and are widely available.

The whole park is covered by MapsNT's 1:50,000 series, available at the Bowali visitor information centre. The *Nourlangie Creek* map covers the Barrk Sandstone Bushwalk, but the relevant park notes are of more practical use.

*Kakadu* by Ian Morris gives an excellent background to the park, its wildlife, culture and people.

## Information Sources

The **Bowali visitor information centre** (☎ 8938 1121; Kakadu Hwy; ☎ 8am–5pm), 2.5km south of the Arnhem Hwy intersection, is open daily and has a café (with real coffee!), gift shop, library and film screenings. There are informative park notes for all the marked trails, topo maps, plus information on permits for overnight walks.

## NEAREST TOWN & FACILITIES

### Jabiru

☎ 08 / pop 1780

Jabiru, 260km from Darwin and 36km from Nourlangie Rock, on the Arnhem Hwy, is the service centre of Kakadu National Park. It has accommodation and a supermarket, post office and bank.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Kakadu Lodge & Caravan Park** (☎ 1800 811 154; www.aurora-resorts.com.au; Jabiru Dr; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$20/25, dm \$31, lodge rooms \$130, cabins \$195–230; ☎ ☎ ☎) is an impeccable resort with shade, gas barbecues, camp kitchens and a kiosk with Internet access, groceries and ice. The dorms and lodge rooms sleep four, while the comfortable cabins have en suite and kitchenette and sleep up to five. Overlooking the excellent pool is a good bistro.

**Lakeview Park** (☎ 8979 3144; www.lakeview.kakadu.com.au; 27 Lakeside Dr; r for up to 4 people \$85, d \$110, cabins \$180; ☎ ☎) Aboriginal-owned Lakeview Park is a good option for families and groups offering a range of tropical-designed bungalows. The fan-cooled budget rooms are also available to YHA members for \$20 a bed. The doubles share a communal kitchen, bathroom and lounge, but have their own TV and fridge. The two-bedroom cabins sleep up to five people.

The odd-looking **Gagudju Crocodile Holiday Inn** (☎ 8979 9000; www.gagudju-dreaming.com; Flinders St; d \$170–285; ☎ ☎ ☎) is designed to resemble a crocodile when viewed from the air. The rooms are clean and comfortable if a little ordinary for the price. Try for one on the ground floor beside the central pool.

Self caterers will find the **Jabiru Foodland** (Jabiru Plaza; ☎ 9am–5.30pm Mon–Fri, 9am–3pm Sat, 10am–2pm Sun & public holidays) supermarket is well stocked and even has a range of inexpensive camping equipment.

The **Kakadu Bakery** (☎ 8979 2320; Gregory Pl; ☎ 7am–2pm Mon–Fri, 7am–1pm Sat) has fresh bread, cakes and pies; and you can get tasty fast food from the **Lightning Strike** (Civic Dr; ☎ 10am–5pm Thu–Sun; meals \$5–10), a tiny van parked down by the lake. The **Escarpment Restaurant** (Gagudju Crocodile Holiday Inn; ☎ 8979 9000; Flinders St; mains \$25–30; ☎ ☎ ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) serves inspired buffet and à la carte meals seasoned with bush ingredients, as well as delectable desserts.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

**Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) has a daily service between Darwin and Cooina via Jabiru. The bus leaves Darwin at 6.30am, Jabiru at 10.15am, and arrives at Cooina at 12.30pm. It departs Cooina at 2.30pm, Jabiru at 4.10pm, and arrives in Darwin at 7pm. Fares from Darwin to Jabiru cost \$43/82 one way/return.

## URANIUM

Uranium was discovered in the Kakadu region as far back as 1953. Twelve small deposits in the southern reaches of the park were worked in the 1960s, then in 1970 three huge deposits, Ranger, Nabarlek (Arnhem Land) and Koongarra, were found, followed by Jabiluka in 1973. Scan any map of Kakadu and you will see the neat excisions of the Jabiluka, Ranger and Koongarra leases. The Ranger Uranium Mine started producing ore in 1981 and there followed an agreement to mine at Jabiluka negotiated with local Aboriginal people. Mine development at Jabiluka was delayed until 1996, however, due to oscillating Federal Government mining policy and growing concern that Aboriginal Elders had been coerced into signing the agreement.

The Jabiluka mine became the scene of sit-in demonstrations during 1998. 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, and is allowed to ask for the re-opening of the mine every four years, beginning in 2006. Though it's unlikely the Mirrar will change their position, which is based on cultural and environmental concerns, the closure of the Ranger mine in 2010 will put the Mirrar under considerable pressure to find alternative sources of income.

## Camping Grounds

**Muirella Park** (adult/child \$5.40/free) is a national park camping ground 6km off the Kakadu Hwy and 7km south of the Nourlangie Rock turn-off. It's on an abandoned airstrip beside a paperbark-lined billabong. There are shaded barbecues and excellent amenities.

About 16km south of Jabiru on the Kakadu Hwy are the free **Malabanjbanjdju** camping grounds – one for caravans and one for tents. They are basic, with pit toilets the only amenities.

## GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

The turning for Nourlangie Rock is 21km south of Bowali Visitor Centre off Kakadu Hwy. The 12km sealed access road (open from 7am until sunset) leads to a car park (and toilet) close to the Anbangbang Gallery, at the start of the trail.

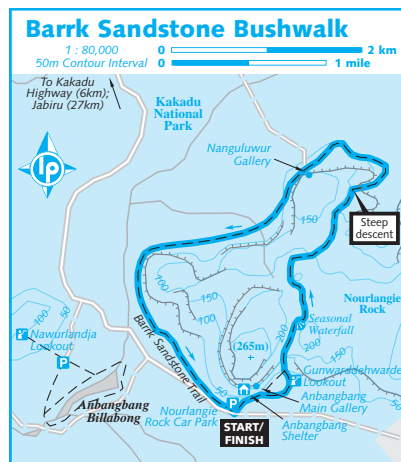
## THE WALK

From the car park at the base of **Nourlangie Rock** (Burrungui) follow the art sites trail past the **Anbangbang Shelter** to the **Anbangbang Gallery**. Don't miss any of the attractions while here; the art is superbly interpreted.

Just beyond the Anbangbang Gallery the trail forks. Go right following orange triangle markers steeply northeast up a rocky rise to **Gunwarddeharde Lookout**. Bear right

off the little peak, before turning northwest down to a junction. Turn right and climb northeast up a gully before cutting right between two large rocks to a cliff – a waterfall in the Wet. Turn right (northeast) and begin the rocky climb to a stunning **lookout** with vistas of the floodplains and the escarpment (about 45 minutes from the start).

Head north across a low, wooded valley encircled by boulders. The path bends left, weaving across a boulder-strewn saddle



then heads west through sandstone pillars and conglomerate boulders south of the highest point of the rock (keep your eye on the orange markers). After passing a great **lookout**, the trail continues northeast, descending then climbing before threading between two huge boulders and dropping to a narrow gully. Turn left and head north to a wooded area hemmed in by stony hillocks. The trail continues north of the hillside, bearing right across the eastern flank before passing between a large outcrop and a precariously balanced boulder onto a saddle.

The trail then cuts back north before traversing northeast below the summit cliffs to a long, sloping slab of rock. Descend steeply east then turn left (northeast) and head through open woodland to a large cliff face, its base rutted with small caves. Turn right (east) along the cliff face and follow the dry creek east, then northeast, down to the valley floor.

The trail heads north across flat land into open eucalyptus woodland, then slowly swings west then southwest past the end of a dirt track to a T-junction. Take the left turn, leading to **Nanguluwur Gallery**, a long overhanging cliff which displays 30,000 years of Aboriginal rock art. Huge barramundi are displayed in X-ray style along with 'contact art' of sailing ships. Stencilled hand prints also feature here.

Continue southwest along the trail, which slowly curves west and after 30 minutes leads through a maze of boulders. Shortly afterwards the trail bears left (due south) then cuts up a rocky spur spread with sharp spinifex. After a short climb descend into a stone-scattered valley with great views of the Nourlangie's fiery red western cliffs.

Head southeast, crossing a stream 100m from the base of the cliffs, and after 10 minutes' walking through woodland the road becomes visible. Weave through several large rocks close to the road to return to Nourlangie Rock car park.

## NITMILUK NATIONAL PARK

Originally called Katherine Gorge National Park, the area was renamed Nitmiluk (meaning 'Cicada Place') in 1989 when the

Jawoyn Aboriginal people gained title to the land. They now jointly manage the park with the PWS.

Nitmiluk is a popular park, with the 13 sandstone sections of Katherine Gorge and the beautiful Leliyn (Edith Falls) its main attractions. A series of walks, some overnight, lead to various points along Katherine Gorge – which is perfect for exploring by canoe – and there is also a series of trails around Leliyn. However, there's much more to this 2920 sq km park, particularly some fine Jawoyn art sites and a variety of habitats, which can best be experienced on the Jatbula Trail linking Katherine Gorge to Leliyn.

## JATBULA TRAIL

<b>Duration</b>	4 days
<b>Distance</b>	66km
<b>Difficulty</b>	moderate
<b>Start</b>	Nitmiluk Centre
<b>Finish</b>	Leliyn (Edith Falls)
<b>Nearest Town</b>	Katherine (p316)
<b>Transport</b>	shuttle

**Summary** A well-marked trail leading through varied woodland along the Arnhem Land escarpment in the heart of Jawoyn country. Attractions include rock art, tremendous waterfalls and perfectly positioned camp sites.

The Jatbula Trail links Katherine Gorge and Leliyn along the edge of the Arnhem Land escarpment, passing spectacular scenery, waterfalls, secluded swimming holes and Aboriginal art sites. Extra days are worth budgeting for as the camp sites en route have tremendous locations.

## PLANNING

### When to Walk

May (when there's plenty of water around) through to early September is the best time for walking. It's dry, with temperatures around 10°C overnight and 27°C during the day. From October to December it gets steadily hotter (up to 45°C) and more humid, with torrential storms a constant threat; the flies at this time can be maddening.

The Jatbula Trail may close for periods between October and April due to seasonal flooding.

## What to Bring

Bring along a swimming costume for the crystal-clear and fish-teeming swimming holes. Sleeping under a mosquito net is ideal in the Dry, when you'll need a sleeping bag. Insect repellent is standard issue at all times, and after October a tent and waterproofs are required.

## Maps & Books

MapsNT's 1:50,000 *Nitmiluk National Park* (widely available locally) displays the whole trail and is the only map you should need. However, you could also carry MapsNT's 1:50,000 *Katherine, Seventeen Mile*, and *Edith River* topo maps as a precaution.

The pocket-sized *Jawoyn Plant Identikit*, available in the Nitmiluk Centre, gives a fascinating insight into common plant use and is well worth carrying.

## Information Sources

The **Nitmiluk Centre** (☎ 1800 089 103, 8972 1253; ☎ 7am-7pm Apr-Sep, 7am-5pm Oct-Mar), 30km northeast of Katherine in the entrance to Katherine Gorge, has excellent displays and information on the park's geology, wildlife, traditional owners and recent history. It is also the office of **Nitmiluk Tours**, which runs gorge tours and wet season access to the start of the Jatbula Trail. There's also a desk at the centre for the **Parks & Wildlife Service** (☎ 8972 1886), which has information sheets on a wide range of marked walking tracks.

## Permits & Regulations

Permits aren't required for day walks, but are required for all overnight walks, along with a \$50 deposit per party. (Note this is different to the *voluntary* Overnight Walker Registration Scheme.) Registration for overnight walks and camping permits (\$3.30/night) are only available at the Nitmiluk Centre from 7am to 1pm. Camping permits are subject to availability and available only at the PWS desk at the Nitmiluk Centre, so apply well in advance. The Jatbula Trail can only be walked one way, from Katherine Gorge to Leliyn. The deposit is redeemable at Edith Falls Kiosk at the trail's end.

Checkpoints are dotted along the trail. Write your permit number, time of arrival and destination in each one. Use emergency call devices (ECDs) in an emergency only. Rangers actively discourage anyone start-

ing the Jatbula Trail after about 1pm or walking alone.

## NEAREST TOWN & FACILITIES

### Katherine

☎ 08 / pop 6720

On the junction of the the Stuart Hwy and Victoria Hwy (which stretches all the way to the Kimberley), Katherine is the gateway to spectacular Nitmiluk National Park and a busy regional centre. It is the biggest town between Darwin and the Alice and a good place to buy supplies. The Katherine River, which cuts through the sandstone gorge at nearby Nitmiluk, flows through the town and represents the first permanent water north of Alice Springs.

The **Katherine Region Tourist Association** (☎ 8972 2650; www.krta.com.au; cnr Stuart Hwy & Lindsay St; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm (5pm dry season) Sat & Sun) stocks information on all areas of the Northern Territory, including PWS park notes. For further parks information visit the **Parks & Wildlife Service** (☎ 8973 8888; 32 Giles St).

**Outback Disposals** (☎ 8972 3456; 58 Katherine Tce) stocks a good range of camping gear.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Kookaburra Lodge Backpackers** (☎ 1800 808 211, 8971 0257; www.kookaburrabackpackers.com.au; cnr Lindsay & Third Sts; dm \$19, s, d or tw \$50; ☎ ☎ ☎) is a well-run place a few minutes' walk from the transit centre. There's a kitchen in each dorm and the doubles have a TV and fridge. A free breakfast, bike and canoe hire, and YHA/VIP discounts are available.

On the road towards the gorge, **Knotts Crossing Resort** (☎ 8972 2511; www.knotscrossing.com.au; cnr Cameron & Giles Sts; unpowered/power sites for 2 \$18/22, d from \$110, cabins from \$58; ☎ ☎) is set amid lush gardens. All powered sites have private bathrooms and there are spacious family rooms with kitchens, plus the excellent Katie's Bistro.

The friendly **Maud Creek Country Lodge** (☎ 8971 1814; www.maudcreeklodge.com.au; Gorge Rd; s/d \$110/132, cottage d \$165; ☎ ☎) is just 6km from the gorge on a former cattle run where you can go walking, bird-watching and fishing, or just relax on the shady veranda. There are motel-style rooms and a self-contained cottage. A continental breakfast is supplied with all tariffs and the minibar is pegged at town prices.

If you're self-catering, **Woolworth's** (Oasis Shopping Centre; Katherine Tce; ☎ 7am-10pm) is the cheapest place for hundreds of kilometres around to stock up on supplies.

**Kumbidgee Lodge Tea Rooms** (☎ 8971 0699; Gorge Rd; mains \$7-18; ☎ ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner), 10km out of town towards the gorge, is a great spot to indulge in a hearty 'bush breakfast' (\$12). The welcoming **Diggers Den Tavern & Restaurant** (☎ 8971 0422; 7 Victoria Hwy; mains \$9-20; ☎ ☎ lunch & dinner) has a small all-day menu till 6pm, then cranks up the kitchen with pizzas, pastas, steaks and, on Thursdays, a \$10 buffet.

**Katie's Bistro** (☎ 8972 2511; Knotts Crossing Resort, cnr Giles & Cameron Sts; mains \$19-28; ☎ ☎ dinner) is regarded as Katherine's best restaurant. The dozen or so main courses may include Japanese hotpot or seared buffalo fillet as well as barra, steaks and one or two vegetarian options.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

**Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) buses between Darwin and Alice Springs, Queensland or Western Australia stop at Katherine's **Transit Centre** (☎ 8971 9999; 6 Katherine Tce). Typical fares and travel times for daily connections from Katherine are: Darwin (\$70, 4½ hours), Alice Springs (\$206, 15 hours), Tennant Creek (\$135, eight hours) and Kununurra (\$106, 4½ hours).

## Nitmiluk National Park

At Katherine Gorge **Nitmiluk Caravan Park** (☎ 8972 1253; Nitmiluk Centre; unpowered/power sites for 2 \$19/23) has plenty of grass and shade and is well equipped with hot showers, toilets, barbecues and laundry. The licensed **Nitmiluk Bistro** (☎ 8972 1253; Nitmiluk Centre; mains \$12-20; ☎ ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) serves breakfasts, snacks and lunches, and occasionally puts on evening meals in the Dry.

At Leliyn (Edith Falls) the PWS **camping ground** (☎ 8975 4869; adult/child/family \$8.80/4/19.50) 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.

## GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

**Travel North** (☎ 8972 1044; Transit Centre, 6 Katherine Tce) 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. The adult one-way/return fare is \$15/22; children travel at half price. During the Wet walkers are ferried across the river by Nitmiluk Tours (see p315).

Things are more difficult from Leliyn, which is 20km from the Stuart Hwy and 60km north of Katherine. Contact **Dennis** (☎ 8971 0193, 0411 858 752), who does a shuttle (\$40 one way for four people) from Leliyn to the gorge specifically for Jatbula Trail walkers. Otherwise contact the **Katherine Region Tourist Association** (☎ 8972 2650) for information on other local tour operators, or make inquiries at the kiosk.

## THE WALK

### Day 1: Nitmiluk Centre to Crystal Falls

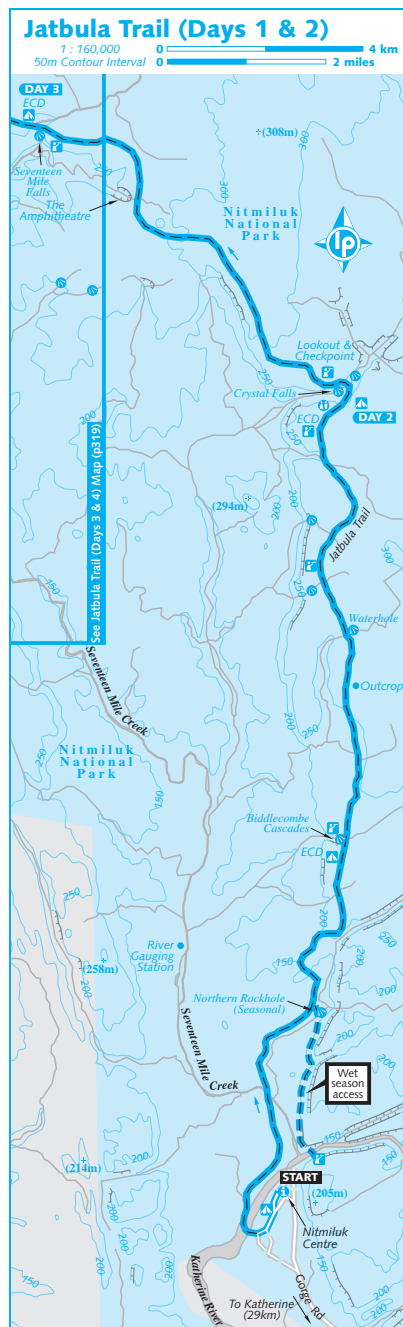
5½-6½ hours, 23.5km

From the petrol station follow the sealed road east past the Youth Group Area then turn right onto the **Jatbula Trail**, following the blue triangle markers down to the Katherine River. Head upstream to a footbridge. Follow the 4WD track up the bank and then bear right onto a footpath leading northeast a short distance before turning north and arriving back on the 4WD track at the crossing of **Seventeen Mile Creek** in 30 minutes.

Cross to the east bank and follow the 4WD track through the open woodland of Seventeen Mile Valley to the right turn for **Northern Rockhole**, a spectacular seasonal waterfall 10 minutes away. Keep on the track as it climbs steadily up towards the escarpment, cutting east round a hill strewn with boulders and north over a pronounced gully. About 2¾ hours after setting out, and after passing the camp toilets, **Biddlecombe Cascades** is reached. Just 100m before the falls is the ECD and camp site (with barbecues), a good first-night stop if you've left in the late morning.

Crystal Falls, the next reliable water stop, is 12km away. From Biddlecombe Cascades move northwest along a trail leading upstream across some boggy ground to a boardwalk that leads across the creek - if there's been rain you may have to wade.

The trail now heads north, climbing gradually across open, flat ground strewn



with boulders. After 45 minutes a corridor of rock is reached, and there are a few rocky sections to climb over as the trail follows a series of small creeks north, past a number of seasonal waterholes to an impressive rock outcrop.

Twisting and turning, the trail works its way over a series of gullies and hillocks and then drops down to cross a stream. Before the crossing, a sign points right to a beautiful waterhole 100m away. Ford the stream and continue heading northwest. In 30 minutes a faint path leads (left) to a **lookout**, after which the trail cuts northeast across a couple of (usually dry) creeks until it descends northwest to a permanent stream. Follow it downstream for a short while before crossing and heading northwest uphill to a **lookout**, ECD and toilet. Fifteen minutes on is **Crystal Falls** and a shady camp site (with barbecue) beside an excellent swimming hole.

### Day 2: Crystal Falls to Seventeen Mile Falls

2½–3 hours, 11.5km

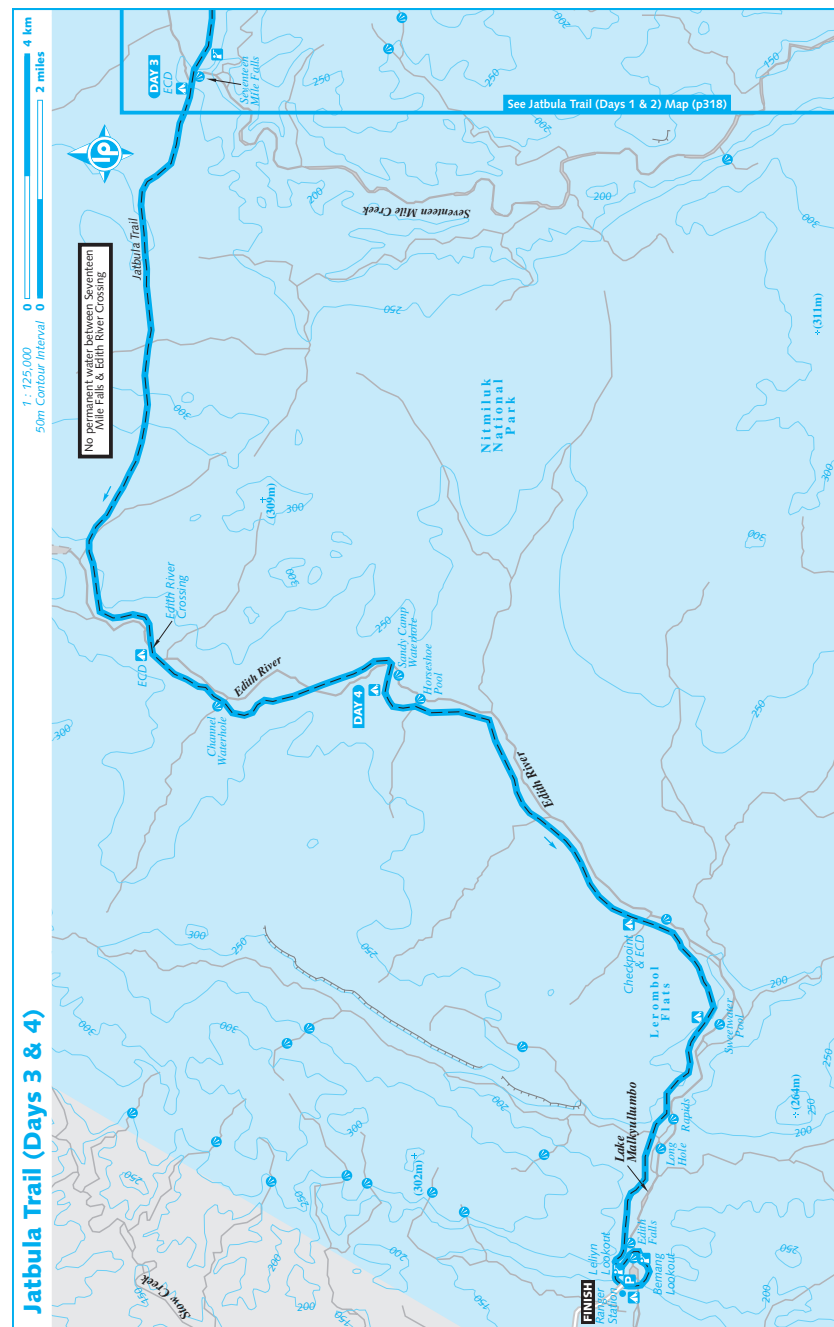
Cross the river downstream from the camp site and follow the trail up to a lookout and checkpoint above the 30m Crystal Falls. The trail climbs north then northwest to the summit plateau, before gradually bending west for the next hour through a series of shallow valleys, grassland and tall woodland. Eventually you will reach a sign directing you left down to the **Amphitheatre**. This wonderful curving rock art site is perched above a reliable stream and a remnant of monsoon rainforest sheltering huge numbers of birds and the occasional euro.

Seventeen Mile Falls is 3.5km away. From the Amphitheatre, the trail joins a rough 4WD track that heads west along, and then across, a creek. Five minutes later the trail bears left to a fantastic view point overlooking **Seventeen Mile Falls**. Continue north to Seventeen Mile Creek then go downstream to the falls. Cross to the true right bank and climb up to the camp site (with an ECD and barbecue but no other facilities).

### Day 3: Seventeen Mile Falls to Sandy Camp Pool

5½–6 hours, 16.5km

The next 11km section to Edith River Crossing has no permanent water sources, so stock up at Seventeen Mile Falls.





After initial bursts of heading west then north, the trail rolls west across gently sloping valleys and through patches of dense woodland. After about 90 minutes the top of the climb is reached and a descent into more rocky country begins, the trail making a sharp right turn (northwest) down among the tributaries of **Edith River**. With the presence of water the vegetation becomes lush, speargrass and spiral pandanus become common, and bird life is more evident. Upon reaching a sandy, seasonal creek, head south (downstream) to the rocky **Edith River Crossing**. Stepping stones lead across Edith River to a checkpoint and ECD. The camp site is nothing special, so it's better to continue to Sandy Camp, 5.5km to the south.

Follow the trusty blue triangles along the river bank for 200m and then up and over a series of rocky slopes to **Channel Waterhole**, a deep, narrow pool cut into the sandstone. Continue roughly south, close to the river, as the trail enters low dense woodland and then grassland. After about 45 minutes the river makes a sharp turn right (west) and the trail crosses it at the apex. Walk south between the river (on right) and a rocky outcrop (on left) through lush, dense woodland, soon to emerge into open grassland. **Sandy Camp Waterhole** is a short distance away – watch out for freshwater crocodiles in this superb, delightful spot. The best camp site is behind the western bank of the pool.

#### Day 4: Sandy Camp Waterhole to Leliyn 4–4½ hours, 14.5km

Head west, then south, following Edith River for 90 minutes as it bears southwest to Edith River South, where there's a checkpoint and ECD. The trail continues southwest, weaving past rocky outcrops and hills into **Lerombol Rainforest**, the largest pocket of rainforest along the Edith River. Forty-five minutes from Edith River South the trail swings west across a muddy stream and cuts south through boggy ground to the bank of Edith River. Turn right and walk across the slabs of rock to **Sweetwater Pool**. If you're lucky you may see the resident freshies in the beautiful, wide pool. The water channels through the top end are quite spectacular and at the southern end is a great camp site. There are barbecues and a toilet. Although Leliyn is only 4.3km away, it's well worth spending an extra night here.

The well-defined trail edges along the river to reach **Long Hole**, another good swimming spot, in 30 minutes. The trail then continues downstream for another 15 minutes (avoid the service trail on the right) before turning right to begin a short, sharp climb away from the river. Turn sharply left (west) at the top and ride out the now zig-zagging trail to a rocky saddle and T-junction with a wide, easy tourist trail. Turn right for an unexceptional 630m descent to the car park or left onto the Leliyn Trail leading to Leliyn Lookout (a little 20m side track), down through **Upper Pool** (you can swim here) and up to **Bemang Lookout**, which gives great views of the whole, dramatic Leliyn area. The camp site is 1km from here.

The large pool at the base of **Leliyn** (Edith Falls) is great for swimming and fish-watching, but closed between 7pm and 7am, so no late-night skinny dipping.

## WEST MACDONNELL NATIONAL PARK

Encompassing an unbroken section of the MacDonnell Ranges from the Stuart Hwy just north of Alice Springs to Mt Zeil, 170km to the west, this outstanding park protects 1333 sq km of varied arid habitats. Jagged, sparsely vegetated ridges, deep gorges, spinifex plains, dry creeks and permanent, tree-lined waterholes afford a ruggedly beautiful setting. Tourism is concentrated at 10 small 'sights', where it is easy to lose the crowds on short trails or launch onto the superb Larapinta Trail (see p322) to experience the heart of the ranges.

### ENVIRONMENT

The vivid landscape of the West MacDonnell Ranges was formed 350 million years ago when massive earth movements created a mountain range of quartzite several kilometres high. Although significantly weathered and eroded, Mt Zeil (1531m), in the far northwest of the park, remains the highest point in the Territory.

The usually dry creeks, their banks shaded by stately river red gums, weave between stony ridges and through wide valleys carpeted in yellowing spinifex, soft to the eye but sharp to touch. Spinifex provides

food and shelter for numerous mammals, including common wallaroos, tiny dunnarts and spinifex hopping-mice, as well as birds such as zebra finches, spinifex pigeons and rufous-crowned emu-wrens. Deep in the ranges, secluded gorges shelter moisture-loving plants such as ferns and the MacDonnell Ranges cycad, relicts of a wetter climate 22 million years ago.

With permanent water and diverse flora and fauna, the area has supported the Western Arrernte Aboriginal people for thousands of years. The Western Arrernte maintain a strong link with the park, and the waterhole at Ormiston Gorge (Kwartet-wenne) is just one of many sacred sites.

### PLANNING When to Walk

The ideal time to walk is between April and September when maximum daily temperatures hover around 20°C; you should walk before 11am and after 3.30pm at either end of this period. It gets incredibly hot (40°C-plus) between October and March. June and July are the coldest months (-10°C has been recorded), although nights are cold even in summer. Statistics will tell you that most rainfall occurs in the summer, but rainfall is low and unreliable.

### What to Bring

The terrain is rocky, so sturdy boots will save your feet. In winter bring warm clothes and a sleeping bag comfortable below 0°C – you'll need a fleece jacket year-round. Sun protection is essential and a swimming costume is recommended.

### Maps

The ranges from Alice Springs to Standley Chasm are covered by MapsNT's 1:50,000 *Alice Springs, Simpsons Gap and Brinkley* topographic maps (laid over aerial photographs). The 1:50,000 coverage does not stretch to Ormiston Gorge, although Ormiston Pound and Mt Giles are covered by an accurate sketch map available with park notes from PWS offices (see above) and the PWS website (see p323).

MapsNT's 1:250,000 *West MacDonnell National Park* map covers the park and includes blow-ups of the main tourist areas. For map recommendations for the Larapinta Trail see p323.

### Information Sources

There are PWS visitor centres at **Ormiston Gorge** (☎ 8956 7799; ☎ 5am–8pm) and **Simpsons Gap** (☎ 8955 0310; ☎ 5am–8pm) where you can register, find the latest information and catch evening talks and slide shows between May and October. A number of water tanks have been installed in the park, but check with the rangers on their levels, as well as the levels of the numerous waterholes and springs.

### Permits & Regulations

If you plan to walk for more than a day in the West MacDonnell Ranges, you should use the voluntary Overnight Walker Registration Scheme (see p307).

Fuel stoves are encouraged and fires may be banned between October and April. There are free camp sites throughout the park, but camping is banned – or discouraged – at sites of significance to Aboriginal people and at major wildlife watering holes (eg Fish Hole, Spring Gap and Bond Gap).

## ORMISTON GORGE & POUND

<b>Duration</b>	3½–4 hours
<b>Distance</b>	7.5km
<b>Difficulty</b>	easy–moderate
<b>Start/Finish</b>	Ormiston Gorge visitor centre
<b>Nearest Town</b>	Alice Springs (p309)
<b>Transport</b>	shuttle

**Summary** A beautiful short walk that offers great vistas of the stunning natural basin of Ormiston Pound before returning via permanent waterholes under the red ramparts of spectacular Ormiston Gorge.

Ormiston Gorge is one of the main attractions in West MacDonnell National Park. There's a large waterhole suitable for swimming, it's a dramatic (short) walk into the gorge and facilities are good. Day visitors, however, rarely wander into the arid Ormiston Pound east of the gorge, where a fascinating landscape awaits.

The walk described is easily completed in half a day, but you can overnight at Bowmans Gap, a short detour off the marked Pound Walk. Set off early for a great view of the sunlit gorge. Alternatively, the afternoon's soft light on the Pound is also worth

the walk. Remember to carry a full day's supply of water. Through this habitat flows Ormiston Creek, a tributary of the 100 million-year-old Finke River, which flows south into the Simpson Desert and is one of the oldest rivers in the world.

## NEAREST TOWN & FACILITIES

See Alice Springs (p309).

## Ormiston Gorge

The gorge is 140km west of Alice Springs via the Larapinta and Namatjira Drives. Close to Ormiston Gorge, **Glen Helen Resort** (☎ 8956 7489; www.glenhelen.com.au; Namatjira Dr; unpowered/power sites for 2 \$20/22, dm without/with linen \$20/30, d \$160) has a range of accommodation, an idyllic back veranda, occasional live music and the excellent **Namatjira Restaurant** (mains \$21-29).

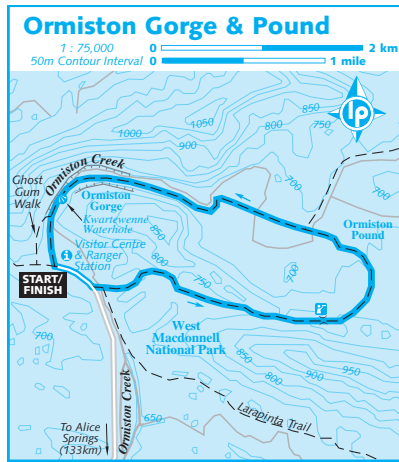
**Ormiston Gorge camping ground** (adult/child/family \$6.60/3.30/16), adjacent to the gorge car park, has hot showers, toilets (with disabled facilities), picnic tables and free gas barbecues. Get here early for the best sites.

**Alice Wanderer** (☎ 8952 2111; www.alicewanderer.com.au; seat on existing tour \$55, private shuttle for 1 or 2 \$200) and **Emu Run** (☎ 8953 7057; www.emurun.com.au; seat on existing tour \$99) offer transfers from Alice Springs. **Glen Helen Resort** (☎ 8956 7489; www.glenhelen.com.au) also runs transfers from Alice Springs to Glen Helen and other trailheads in the park.

## THE WALK

From the visitor centre walk southeast beside the access road, crossing Ormiston Creek after five minutes to follow yellow trail markers for the Pound Walk. Head 20m downstream before turning left, off the Larapinta Trail (marked with blue triangles), and heading uphill through a network of dry gullies and over small rocky hillocks to a saddle, the gateway to **Ormiston Pound**, reached in 45 minutes. From the saddle, there's a 100m scramble up to a fantastic view point (signposted) on the exposed ridge to the north.

From the saddle, descend east, bearing right (south) behind and around the pronounced hillock and then turn north dropping down into the Pound. After 20 minutes weaving through spinifex and low scrub **Ormiston Creek**, with a 'guard of honour' of river red gums, is reached. It's



usually dry, but waterholes will persist after heavy rains. At this point you could turn off the Pound Walk and head upstream (north-east) towards Bowmans Gap. Otherwise, head towards the looming red gorge – you may find the yellow-on-white trail markers hard to spot in this section – crossing over a large meander in Ormiston Creek and then along the creek's rocky left bank into the brick-red **Ormiston Gorge**. After about 40 minutes the creek swings left to the large waterhole, Kwartetwenne. The visitor centre is five minutes south. Alternatively, go via the Ghost Gum Walk (on the right, west) which leads up to a view point.

## LARAPINTA TRAIL HIGHLIGHT

<b>Duration</b>	2 days
<b>Distance</b>	38.6km
<b>Difficulty</b>	moderate
<b>Start</b>	Standley Chasm (p324)
<b>Finish</b>	Simpsons Gap
<b>Nearest Town</b>	Alice Springs (p309)
<b>Transport</b>	shuttle
<b>Summary</b>	Sample one of Australia's finest long-distance trails, crossing between two of the West MacDonnell's most popular natural attractions.

Simpsons Gap and Standley Chasm are among the most famous of the multitude of West MacDonnell gorges but they are also bookends to a chain of peaks, gorges

and waterholes – classic central Australian imagery – accessible only to those prepared to walk.

The route described here covers sections two and three of the Larapinta Trail, in reverse. This direction has been selected because it places the afternoon sun at your back, rather than in your face. As a snapshot of the greater Larapinta, there are few better or more accessible sections of trail to sample. The route scrambles along a creek bed, up to a ridge with views that seem eternal, and through castaway gorges that you could have to yourself for days. In between you'll pass through the sort of spinifex, mallee and mulga country that furnishes the entire trail.

Begin early from Standley Chasm on day one and there's a chance to see black-footed rock wallabies along Angkale Creek.

## PLANNING Maps

The most useful maps can be downloaded free from the **Parks & Wildlife Service** website (www.nt.gov.au/nreta/parks/walks/larapinta.html). Hit the 'Walking the Trail' link to access maps and information sheets on each section. The maps look like black blurs on screen but they print well and are better than Map-NT's topographic maps, which don't show the trail.

## Guided Walks

**Trek Larapinta** (☎ 8953 2933; www.treklarapinta.com.au; 3 days \$550, 5 days \$990, 8 days \$1584) Offers an end-to-end walk (20 days, \$2970) once a year.

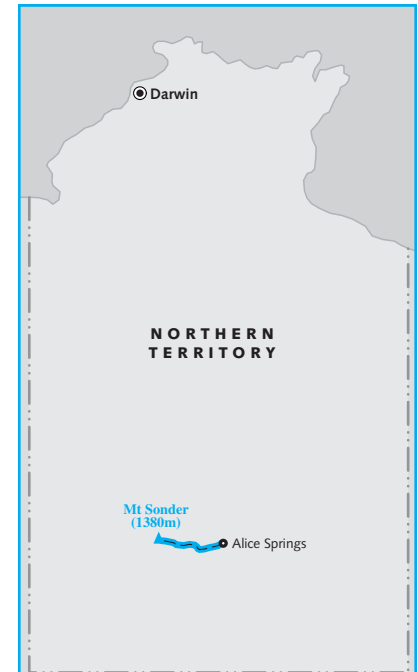
**Willis's Walkabouts** (☎ 8985 2134; www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au) An eight-day Larapinta East walk (\$1050) and a seven-day Larapinta West Walk (\$1125), or the two combined (\$1850).

## LARAPINTA TRAIL

Completed in 2002, the Larapinta Trail is the newest, and certainly among the finest, of Australia's long-distance walking tracks. Meandering between and along the parallel ridges that form the West MacDonnell Ranges, it extends 223km from the Alice Springs Telegraph Station to Mt Sonder (1380m), the ranges' most prominent peak. Switching between the desert plains, dolomite foothills and sharp quartzite ridges of the ranges, the trail is the most intimate way to experience the Red Centre.

Divided into 12 sections of between 13km and 31km in length, with water sources no more than 33km apart, the trail doesn't require Herculean strength or marathon endurance to complete. Many sections end beside one the ranges' popular gorges, creating a selection of possible trailheads and making it possible to sample the trail on day walks or overnight wanders, or to stretch it out to around 16 fairly comfortable days. Food drops can be made at the Standley Chasm and Ormiston Gorge kiosks, Glen Helen Resort and a shed at the Serpentine Gorge camp site, while it's also a simple task to bury a box of food in the sandy creek bed below Ellery Creek Big Hole. The trail is marked throughout with blue triangles and kilometre posts.

Alice Wanderer and Emu Run (see p322) offer transfers to points along the trail, as does **Glen Helen Resort** (☎ 8956 7489; www.glenhelen.com.au).



**World Expeditions** (☎ 1300 720 000; www.worldexpeditions.com.au; 8 days \$1750, 14 days end-to-end \$2990)

## NEAREST TOWN & FACILITIES

See Alice Springs (p309).

## Standley Chasm

**Standley Chasm** (☎ 8956 7440; entry \$7, camping per person \$3) has walker-only camping on a small, uneven grassed area at the edge of the visitor car park. Tents are not allowed up between 8am and 5pm. The kiosk sells drinks, hamburgers and other fat and sugar fixes.

**Alice Wanderer** (☎ 8952 2111; www.alicewanderer.com.au; seat on existing tour \$30, private shuttle \$95) and **Emu Run** (☎ 8953 7057; www.emurun.com.au; seat on existing tour \$30) offer transfers from Alice Springs.

## GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

For details on getting to Standley Chasm, see p324. From Simpsons Gap, Alice Wanderer can also deliver you to Alice Springs (seat on existing tour \$25, private shuttle \$75). You can walk to Alice from Simpsons Gap by continuing along section one of the Larapinta Trail, which offers great views from Euro Ridge. It's 23.8km to the telegraph station and another 4km into Alice.

## THE WALK

### Day 1: Standley Chasm to Jay Creek

4–5 hours, 14.1km

From the car park, follow the Standley Chasm trail north along Angkale Creek. In a

few minutes, the signposted Larapinta Trail turns sharply uphill, leaving you a choice of routes. The trail proper ascends sharply to **Larapinta Hill** for views of the creek and the ranges to the south, before returning to the creek bed after about 30 minutes.

If you're feeling dexterous, the more interesting route is through **Standley Chasm**, turning left up the creek bed at its end. Scramble over boulders and wobble up a dead tree-cum-ladder to enter a second, narrower **chasm**. At its end, climb the polished chute of rock, drop your pack and squirm through the narrow hole in the rockfall, pulling your pack up behind you. About 100m upstream, and 30 minutes from the car park, you rejoin the Larapinta Trail and almost immediately come to Angkale Junction.

Turn northeast (right), ascending to a saddle then dropping back down into a wide valley. A stony creek bed becomes your path, threading through a set of rock outcrops. At the first outcrop, the trail skirts a 10m-high waterfall (almost certainly dry) by edging left along the top of the shelf before descending in steps on the rougher rock at the edge. At a smaller waterfall in the second outcrop, the easiest route down is to the right of the main drop.

Continue along and beside the creek bed (which is overgrown with scrub and MacDonnell Range cycads, a fern-like relict that once rubbed fronds with the dinosaurs) to reach **Millers Flat** (1¼ hours from Angkale

Junction). Set between rocky peaks, Millers Flat is a great camp site if you fancy a short day, though you'll need to carry in water from Standley Chasm.

At the signposted junction at Millers Flat, you again have a selection of routes: low or high. The low route (4km, one to 1½ hours) continues along the creek bed to a saddle, but unless you have a real aversion to great views and a bit of climbing, the ridge-top trail is recommended. This route heads north (left), climbing 200m through the prominent **Mesic Gully**. Pinched between red walls and thick with cycads, it's more like a steep gorge than a humble gully. Turn east (right) at the small saddle at its head, and continue climbing through the bluffs.

As you walk along the ridge, look behind to watch the rugged Chewings Range emerge into view. The rounded summit of Brinkley Bluff – the key feature of section four of the Larapinta Trail – is the most prominent peak. To the north, on the plain, the buildings of Hamilton Downs Youth Camp also come into view.

Thirty minutes from the top of Mesic Gully you reach the ridge's **high point** (1148m) and a spectacular view. To the southeast, below the sharpened point of an escarpment ridge, Alice Springs is just visible. The tilted escarpment of Arengue Bluff is to its left.

Continue along the ridge until the trail drapes away southeast, descending 350m on a spur to rejoin the low route at Tangentyere Junction, about one hour from the lookout.

Turn east (left) and walk through mulga woodland interspersed with ghost gums and bloodwoods, rounding the range and climbing first above and then into a gorge at the northern end of **Fish Hole** (45 minutes from Tangentyere Junction). This waterhole is significant to the local Aboriginal people, who request that you leave no trace of your visit. Camping isn't allowed. Follow the creek bed north as it bends through the range, emerging on to the plain and the **Jay Creek camp site**, with water tanks, after about 30 minutes.

## Day 2: Jay Creek to Simpsons Gap

6½–7½ hours, 24.5km

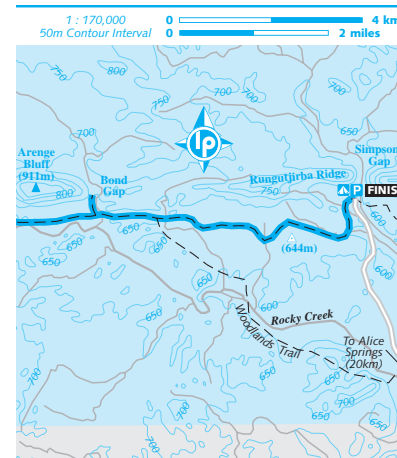
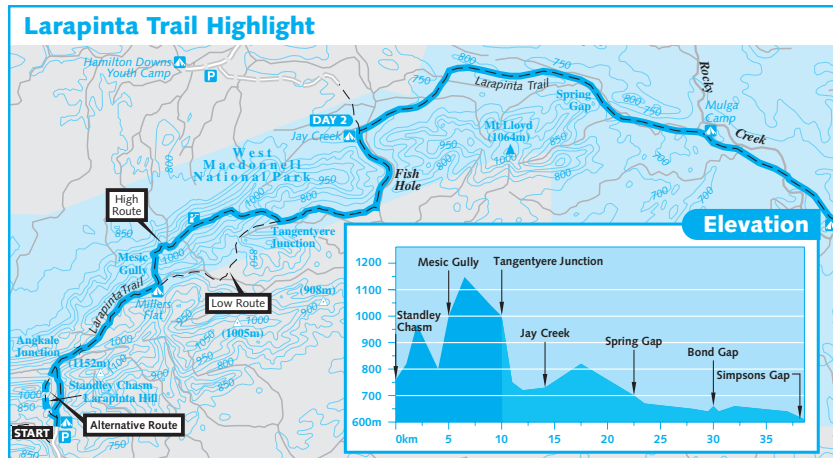
From Jay Creek the track heads east, along the foot of the Chewings Range, climbing gently through mulga and the red, tubular flowers of the desert fuchsia. After about 40 minutes it turns on to a more substantial line of hills, briefly doubling back then continuing east along the low ridge, with good views across to the Chewings Range.

Amble along the ridge for about an hour until the track drops away southeast and into the small gorge at **Spring Gap** (1¼ hours from Jay Creek). There's a wonderful spring-fed pool inside the gap but with water tanks just 3.5km ahead at Mulga Camp, it's unlikely you'll need it as a drinking source. It's also an important wildlife refuge, so camping is prohibited.

Beyond the pool, the path follows the west (right) side of the gorge, returning you to the southern side of the Chewings Range and following the creek and its river red gums for about 30 minutes. It then crosses through mulga-covered hills for another 30 minutes to the water tanks, picnic tables and toilet at **Mulga Camp**, set unsurprisingly in a tall stand of mulga trees on an alluvial flat. As you approach the camp you'll see the impressive Arengue Bluff beginning to appear over the ridge lines.

The trail follows Rocky Creek southeast out of the camp before crossing through woodland again. Atop low cliffs above Rocky Creek, it rounds the southern flank of **Arengue Bluff**, with its imposing escarpment, to reach a burr-filled camp site about one hour from Mulga Camp.

Climb back above the creek and beside Arengue Bluff as it slopes away towards **Bond Gap**, reached 30 minutes from the camp site.



The trail cuts south of the gap but a side track leads to the reedy pool at its entrance. Camping is discouraged here in order to protect wildlife.

Return to the main trail, which rolls east through a rocky landscape, slowly edging away from the sharpened tip of Rungutjirba Ridge, which is a continuation of the escarpment that began at Arengue Bluff. As the trail draws level with the obvious gap in the range it swings north, skirting a small hill and passing the walkers' camp site to arrive at **Simpsons Gap** (two to 2½ hours from Bond Gap).

## MORE WALKS

### LITCHFIELD NATIONAL PARK

#### Table Top Track

This 39km, three- to five-day circuit takes in Litchfield's major sights and is rated moderate–difficult. However, shorter walks are possible, with alternative access points and designated campsites located at Florence Falls, Greenant Creek, Wangi Falls and Walker Creek. Overnight walkers are encouraged to register (see p307). Up-to-date information is available from the Batchelor office of the **PWS** (☎ 8976 0282) and the Darwin visitor information centre. The track is closed in the Wet – usually starting at the end of September – and the re-opening date depends on rainfall and is highly variable. MapsNT's 1:30,000 *Litchfield National Park* and 1:50,000 *Mt Tolmer and Rum Jungle* maps cover the area.

### WEST MACDONNELL NATIONAL PARK

#### Mt Giles

This two- to three-day walk from Ormiston Gorge visitor centre is roughly 18km each way, with the last 3km a difficult climb to the peak of Mt Giles (1389m). It's graded as demanding and is suited to experienced walkers only: once you're off the marked Pound Walk track that leads into Ormiston Pound, it's up to you. There's an unreliable water source at the base of the mountain close to the best camp site – certainly don't

depend on it. It is possible – and rewarding – to camp on the summit of Mt Giles, but you'll need to hump all your water up there. A detailed map showing the suggested route west through the Pound, camp sites, and recommended routes up the southern spur is available from PWS offices (p308) and the PWS website ([www.nt.gov.au/nreta/parks](http://www.nt.gov.au/nreta/parks)).

### Redbank Gorge to Mt Sonder

This route, 8km in each direction, takes you from beautiful Redbank Gorge to the summit of the West MacDonnells' most striking peak (and its fourth highest at 1380m). It's the final (or first) stage of the Larapinta Trail but is worth the walk in its own right. The climb follows a wide ridge, shaped like the figure of a sleeping woman when seen from many points, most of the way to a view that incorporates many of central Australia's finest features: Mt Zeil, Haast Bluff, Gosses Bluff, Mt Giles, the Napperby Salt Lakes and Glen Helen Gorge. There's a camp site (with water tank) beside the trailhead, on the bank of Redbank Creek. From here the Larapinta Trail heads east to Glen Helen Gorge and Ormiston Pound (two to three days). The best map is the one for section 12 downloadable from the PWS website ([www.nt.gov.au/nreta/parks](http://www.nt.gov.au/nreta/parks)).

### WATARRKA NATIONAL PARK

#### Giles Track

Although this park, about 300km southwest of Alice Springs, is something of a tourist magnet, it contains an excellent one-way overnight walk. From Kathleen Spring the Giles Track traverses 22km northwest below the George Gill Range before descending into the 'Garden of Eden' in Kings Canyon. Camping is above Lilla (Reedy Creek) and there are a number of semipermanent springs en route. Contact the **PWS ranger** (☎ 8951 8250) for detailed track notes and sketch map (not available on the PWS website). As well as camping, **Kings Canyon Resort** (☎ 1300 134 044) provides budget and luxurious accommodation. You will need your own transport to reach the park.

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