



Explorer Highway – Adelaide to Darwin – 21 Day Self-drive Adventure

A journey from the North to the South of Australia 'Down the Track' along the Explorer Highway. From the rich Aboriginal Art of Kakadu journey through the spiritual heart of the continent- Uluru, to the rugged Flinders ranges. These 14 days will show you the best the outback of Northern Territory and South Australia have to offer as you explore all major scenic icons, on and off the beaten track. Leaving the tropics, you enter a world of spinifex, sand dunes and immense rock formations as you explore the gorges of the MacDonnell ranges, Kings Canyon and Uluru and Kata Tjuta. The Oodnadatta Track takes you past Lake Eyre and on to the Flinders Ranges as you finish in Adelaide. Travel in the footsteps of the Explorer John McDouall Stuart as you cross the continent from North to South.

Suggested Itinerary

Day 1 Darwin to Lake Bennett

Departing your accommodation in Darwin at 8.00am, head south along the Stuart Highway past Palmerston and turn right to Batchelor. Stop on the right to view some Magnetic and Giant Termite mounds. Detour to Florence Falls for a walk through the rainforest to view the fall. After a stop at Buley Rockholes for a swim and laze in the rock pools, continue on to Wangi Falls for a swim over lunch and walk to the lookout.

This afternoon, detour to Tolmer Falls before making your way back to the Stuart Highway. Turn left at the Highway and then right to Lake Bennett and on to your

Overnight camp ground by beautiful Lake Bennett. (Full facilities- shower, toilet and washing machine) (220km (4 hours) driving, 2 hours walking, 4 hours sightseeing and exploring)

Day 2 Lake Bennett to Ubirr

The 4wd Adventure begins today as you take a less-frequently used route to Kakadu. Get directions from the Camp ground office. You traverse the Marrakai Plains before arriving at the Arnhem Highway. Turn right and on to the Bark Hut, where refreshments can be obtained. Cross the South Alligator River and detour to Kakadu National Park Headquarters. You can visit the township of Jabiru to pick up any supplies you may have forgotten before making our way up to Ubirr and viewing the galleries of X-Ray Aboriginal art this afternoon. Your

Overnight camping will be at **Merl** campsite. **(Showers and toilets)** (300kms (5 hours) driving, 1 hour walking, 2 hours walking)

Day 3 Ubirr to Cooina

Returning this morning to the National Park HQ, you continue on to the Nourlangie Road and visit the Anbangbang rock shelter and Nourlangie Rock Artsite. During the dry season there are ranger guided tours here for you to enjoy. You will find a great spot for lunch in the area at Annabangbang Billabong site, where the famous shaving scene in Crocodile Dundee was filmed. After lunch return to the Kakadu Highway and turn left to visit Barramundi Gorge for a swim. Return to the Kakadu Highway and make your way to the Cooina Lodge to take a Yellow waters Cruise to see the beautiful wetlands. Make your way to your

Overnight camping at Mardugal campground. (Showers and toilets) (110 kms (2&1/2 hours) driving, 2 hours walking)

Day 4 Jim Jim and Twin Falls

An early start today will bring great rewards as you take to the 4wd tracks to the magnificent Jim Jim Falls. After lunch, travel onto Twin Falls (Approx.10kms) to the access point. You walk 10 minutes and swim up the gorge (best to have airbed for this trip). After a great day of waterfalls you return to

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Your overnight camp at Mardugal camp. (Shower and toilet) (250km (5 hours) driving, 1&1/2 hours walking)

Day 5 Mardugal to Katherine

Continue along the Kakadu Highway and turn off to the left to visit a real gem- Gunlom Falls, another Crocodile Dundee film location. After a relaxing swim, leave Gunlom Falls and continue south on the Kakadu Highway via Pine Creek. Turn left onto the Stuart Highway and head south down the highway towards Katherine. Turn to the left for a visit to Edith Falls for a swim and then continue to Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) and find a spot at the nearby camping area.

Overnight camping Nitmiluk. (Full facilities) (220 kms (4 hours) driving, 1 hour walking)

Day 6 Katherine to Mataranka

Spend the majority of the day exploring Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) by canoe, on foot or boat. Later in the afternoon, make your way back to Katherine town and turn left on the Stuart Highway. After about 100km, turn left to Mataranka Hot Springs and set up camp for the evening after a relaxing dip in the thermal springs.

Overnight camping Mataranka Homestead. (Full facilities) (145km (1&1/2 hours) driving, 5 hours canoeing, cruising or walking.)

Day 7 Mataranka to Tennant Creek

After a morning relax in the Thermal Pool, return to the Stuart Highway and turn left. Detour to the left to Elsey Cemetery, containing graves of characters from Jeanie Gunn's book 'We of the Never Never'. Detour to the right at Daly Waters to check out the historic pub and the Stuart tree, blazed by the explorer John McDouall Stuart.

Continue down the Stuart Hwy over Newcastle Waters to Elliot and lunch either here or at Renner Springs. Just past Renner Springs on the left is Lubra Lookout, a striking rock formation that marks the transition from the Tropical Zone into the Arid Zone. Take the old Highway route just past Banka Banka Station to the right and stop for a photo at Churchill's Head. Another stop at Attack Creek on the left will leave you pondering over the hardships encountered by Stuart as he journeyed across the continent.

Shortly you will come to the memorial to Flynn of the Inland, the founder of the Royal Flying Doctor Service, on the left near Threeways before making your way down to

Tennant Creek for an overnight camp. (Full facilities) (578km (6 hours) driving)

Day 8 Tennant Creek to Alice Springs

A stop at the Devils Marbles will be rewarding as you explore these giant granite boulders. Continue south through Wauchope to Barrow Creek. This makes an interesting stop to enjoy the atmosphere in the old pub and to see the old Overland Telegraph Repeater Station. Further south, Ti Tree store has some interesting Aboriginal artefacts for sale before making your way into Alice Springs. Perhaps this afternoon you could explore the Award-Winning Desert Park.

Overnight camping at Heavitree Gap Caravan Park, Alice Springs. (Full facilities) (510km (5&1/2 hours) driving)

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Day 9 Eastern MacDonnell Ranges

Head out from Heavitree Gap along the Ross Highway and stop at the picturesque gorges of Emily and Jesse Gaps on the left. Stop at Corroboree Rock to explore and continue on to Trepkina Gorge for lunch, a walk and swim. If you wish, you may continue on to Arltungu, the old gold mining area to explore, although the road deteriorates from here. Return to Alice Springs and your

Overnight camping Heavitree Gap Caravan Park. (Full facilities) (158km (2&1/2 hours) driving, 2 hours walking)

Day 10 Alice Springs to Glen Helen (Western MacDonnell Ranges)

Departing Alice Springs at about 8am, head west along Larapinta Drive and stop on the left at Namatjira's Twin Ghost gums, said to be where one of his most famous scenes was painted. Continue on to a sign-posted turnoff to the right and drive down for a walk into Simpsons Gap. Hopefully there will be some Black flanked rock wallabies to see. Your next stop is for a walk into the sheer walls of Stanley Chasm, lighting up a fiery red in the middle of the day. After lunch, return to Larapinta Drive and turn right. At the road junction veer turn right onto Namatjira Drive and continue on with many optional detours available, to a turn off to the right to spectacular Ormiston Gorge and on to our overnight stop at Glen Helen Homestead. You can explore the gorge this afternoon or tomorrow morning.

Overnight camping Glen Helen Homestead. (Full facilities) (170km (3 hours) driving, 2 hours walking)

Day 11 Glen Helen to Kings Canyon

Pick up your permit to travel through Aboriginal Lands on the Mereenie Loop Road before departure. The vertical walls and icy pools of Redbank Gorge make an enjoyable, if somewhat chilly, diversion. Continuing along the highway, turn to the right and stop at Gosse Bluff, suspected to be a huge meteorite crater. Turn right at the road junction and begin the Mereenie Loop Road. This unpredictable nature of surface of this track is responsible for more road accidents than any other in the NT. There is the option here to detour to Palm Valley (64km each way). Continue through to Watarrka National Park and spend the afternoon exploring Kings Canyon. Walk up the steep access to the top and be rewarded with stunning desert Canyon views.

Overnight camping Kings Canyon Camp Ground. (Full facilities) (238km (4 hours) driving, 3 hours walking)

Day 12 Kings Canyon to Uluru (Ayers Rock)

This morning you are bound for the heart of Australia, Uluru. Continue along the Ernest Giles Road past Kings Creek Station to the Uluru turnoff and turn right down the Luritja Drive until you come to the Lasseter highway. Stop at the Mt Connor Lookout and Curtin Springs Roadhouse. Travel through Yulara and on to Uluru (Ayers Rock). The Aboriginal Traditional Owners frown on the climb up the rock so most visitors prefer to walk around the base or talk a walk with the Aboriginal guides to learn the significance of Uluru to this ancient culture. Late in the afternoon, make your way to one of Australia's most iconic sunsets- sunset on The Rock.

Overnight camping Yulara. (Full facilities) (407km (5&1/2 hours) driving, 2 hours walking)

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Day 13 Kata Tjuta (The Olgas)

This morning you awaken early and watch the new day dawn on the rock. Kata Tjuta beckons as you make your way past Uluru and head west. Kata Tjuta looks large as you approach and make your way to one or more of the many walks. Walk up Olga Gorge between the huge domes or perhaps explore the Valley of the Winds. Please ensure you have abundant water with you and sun protection. Make your way back to Yulara or perhaps stay for sunset on the Olgas.

Overnight camping Yulara. (Full facilities) (110km (3 hours) driving)

Day 14 Uluru to Kulgera

Departing Yulara, return along the Lasseter Highway to Curtin Springs for a morning stop. While an easy drive can be had by sticking to the highway, we suggest the Mulga Park Road. Turn right after 12km and travel past Mulga Park Station and left towards Victory Downs Station. This road was a part of the original Gunbarrel Highway and travels parallel to the South Australian Border and Musgrave Ranges. Emerging at the Stuart Highway, turn left and head north to Kulgera for your

Overnight camp at Kulgera Roadhouse. (Full facilities) (358km (5 hours) driving)

Day 15 Kulgera to Coober Pedy

Continue the southwards journey through to a morning stop at Kulgera. Continue through past Sundown Station and on to the town of Marla for lunch. Continue south past Cadney Park to Coober Pedy and spend some time this afternoon 'noodling' in the designated opal fields' noodling area or seeing some of the underground sights of this opal-mining town.

Overnight camping Coober Pedy. (Full facilities) (374 km (4 hours) driving)

Day 16 Coober Pedy to Coward Springs

Continue south for a few kilometres before turning left to William Creek, you travel past a lake with the longest place name in Australia, Lake Cadibarrawirracanna. Further on you pass Anna Creek Station, the world's largest cattle property. Greater in size than Belgium and half the size of England, this huge cattle station is over 30,000 square km and runs over 15,000 head.

Reaching the Oodnadatta Track, turn right and stop at, ironically, Australia's smallest town, William Creek, population 7, and its iconic bush pub. Another 7km down the road, is a left turn to Lake Eyre. This access is to one of the bleakest landscapes on Earth, which is interesting in itself, but a more interesting access is available from Marree. Continue down to

Coward Springs for your overnight camp. (Shower and toilet facilities) You can explore the old Ghan Railway, bird-watch or soak in the 29 degree artesian spa. (233km (5 hours) driving).

Day 17 Coward Springs to Muloorina

After 6km further down the Oodnadatta Track, you come to the Wabma Kabarbu Conservation Park and have the opportunity to explore the amazing Mound Springs of Blanche's Cup and the Bubbler. These artesian springs have formed their own hills and also formed a water lifeline for John McDouall Stuart as he forged a path to the Centre of Australia. Pass through the ruins of Curdimurka, on the old Ghan Railway and pass the expanse of Lake Eyre South and on to the frontier town of Marree, once an important railhead and southern terminus of the famous Birdsville Track. Head north to Muloorina Station and on to Lake Eyre, at 8000sq km Australia's largest lake, but usually a dry saltpan. Return to

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Muloorina for your overnight camp, where swimming may be available. **(Toilet facility)**
(275km (5 & 1/2 hours) driving)

Day 18 Muloorina to Brachina Gorge

Return to Marree and continue down the Oodnadatta track through the ruins of Farina, once thought to be viable for growing wheat! The town of Lyndhurst is the junction of the Strzelecki Track, another important early droving route. Continue south past the Leigh Creek coalfields to the mining town of Leigh Creek. A few km further south, a detour to Beltana is worthwhile to explore the restored historic buildings. Turn left at Parachilna and travel through Parachilna Gorge to Blinman. Turn right here and head through Gum Creek Homestead. Turn right to Brachina Gorge and find a delightful stop to bushcamp. Another option is to the north at Aroona Valley.

Overnight bush camping Brachina Gorge (No facilities) (425km (6 & 1/2 hours) driving)

Day 19 Brachina Gorge to Wilpena Pound

Travel south through Bunyeroo Gorge through the Flinders Ranges National Park. You emerge on the main road and turn right to Wilpena Pound for your overnight camp and walks through the pound. St Mary's peak is energetic but rewarding. Another day could happily be spent in the area if desired.

Overnight camping, Wilpena Pound. (Full facilities). (42km (1 & 1/2 hours) driving)

Day 20 Wilpena Pound to Burra

There are a number of 4wd Scenic Treks available in the area if you want to further explore the Ranges. Head south to Hawker and on through the small towns of Craddock and Carrieton to Orroroo. Continue through to Peterborough, where lunch may be had. As you are crossing the railway line, observe the 6 tracks denoting three different gauges used by 3 different states in their railway lines.

Head south along the Barrier Highway to Burra and spend the rest of the afternoon exploring this early copper mining town with its fascinating old buildings.

Overnight camping, Burra. (Full facilities) (251km (3 & 1/2 hours) driving)

Day 21 Burra to Adelaide

Travel south to Hanson and deviate to the right to Clare, a fertile agricultural area also renowned for its wine. There are numerous wineries that can be visited, but be careful of drink driving. There are other wine areas that can also be visited in the region. Continue south to Gawler and on to Adelaide at the end of a wonderful trip in the footsteps of the explorer John McDouall Stuart. An extension of 2-3 days can also be taken down to Kangaroo Island. (220km (3 hours) driving)

Recommended References

The above itineraries are not intended as the sole guide to the details of your route. Four Wheel Drive Hire Service recommends the following referenced be consulted or purchased prior to departure.

Maps

Hema Maps – The Flinders Ranges, Top End, Great Desert Tracks of Australia SE, Central Australia.

Guide Book

The Flinders Ranges- An Adventurers Guide by Ron and Viv Moon
Discover Australia by 4WD by Ron and Viv Moon.

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Background Reading

The Explorers by Tim Flannery

The Flinders Ranges and Beyond by Ronald Coudrey and Richard Land

A Town like Alice by Neville Shute

Websites

Moon Guidebooks- www.guidebooks.com.au

Hema Maps for an idea of the range of maps and information on suppliers -
www.hemamaps.com.au

NRMA Outback Tracks information

www.mynrma.com.au/travel/go/outback_tracks/index.shtml

SA Desert Parks- www.environment.sa.gov.au/parks

Kakadu, Nitmiluk and Uluru (Ayers Rock)- www.ea.gov.au/parks/index.html

Other NT National Parks- www.nt.gov.ai/ipe/paw/parks/index.html