



Up the Track – Alice Springs to Darwin – 14 Day Self-Drive Adventure

Waterfalls and Aboriginal Art, Birdlife and Gorges. These are the scenic delights awaiting the 4wd exploration of Kakadu and The Red Centre. Visiting two of the most dramatic scenic and culturally rich areas of Australia, you travel via the Mereenie Loop Road to King's Canyon, Uluru and Chamber's Pillar. Head 'up the track' via the Devil's Marbles and on to Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park to explore. Kakadu and Litchfield National Parks are the highlights of the NT leg as you finish in Darwin at the end of a great adventure.

Suggested Itinerary

Day 1 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 Trephina Gorge for lunch, a walk and swim. If you wish, you may continue on to Arltunga, 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)

Day 2 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 at 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 3 Glen Helen to Kings Canyon

Pick up your permit to travel through Aboriginal Lands on the Mereenie Loop Road before departure. The vertical walls of Redbank Gorge, with its icy pools, makes an enjoyable, if somewhat chilly diversion. Continuing along the highway, we 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)

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Day 4 Kings Canyon to Uluru (Ayers Rock)

This morning we 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 turn right to the Kata Tjuta (the Olgas). Walk up Olga Gorge between the huge domes before making your way back for one of Australia's most iconic sunsets- sunset on Uluru.

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

Day 5 Uluru to Rainbow Valley

This morning you awaken early and watch the day dawn golden on the rock. You make your way to the base of the 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 have explained its significance.

Departing Uluru, you return along the Lasseter Highway to the Stuart Highway at Eriunda and head north. A detour of 16km to the left can be made to the Henbury Meteorite Craters and a stop made at the Virginia Camel Farm. Head 15km further up the Stuart Highway before turning right for 24km to

Rainbow Valley for your overnight camp. (No facilities) Ensure you get there for sunset! (452km (6 hours) driving, 2 hours walking)

Day 6 Rainbow Valley to Alice Springs

Return to the Stuart Highway and head south (left). 10km past the camel farm, turn left along the Hugh River track and make your way 38 km along the sandy track to the Hugh River and New Ghan Railway crossing. After a further 33km, you will arrive at the Old South Road and you turn right to Maryvale. Another 45km will take you through to the remarkable Chambers Pillar.

Retrace your steps back to the Hugh River Track along the Old Ghan Railway Line and continue north to the Erwinga Rock Carvings. Rejoin the Stuart Highway south of Alice Springs and turn right. Drive to Heavitree Gap and complete your Central Australian circuit with another great NT adventure about to begin.

Overnight camping Heavitree Gap Caravan Park, Alice Springs. (Full facilities) (360km (5 hours) driving 1 hour walking)

Day 7 Alice Springs to Tennant Creek

Head north from Alice Springs and cross the Tropic of Capricorn. Continue north to the Ti tree store, where Aboriginal Artefacts can be purchased, and past Central Mt Stuart, thought once to be the centre of Australia. Make a stop at Barrow Creek hotel, a colourful local pub and explore the restored repeater station. Continue north through Wauchope and on the Devils Marbles. After a good explore of the area, continue north to your

Overnight camping at the Caravan Park in Tennant Creek. (Full facilities) (531km (6 hours) driving. 1 hour walking)

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Day 8 Tennant Creek to Mataranka

Head north to 3 ways and reflect on the memorial to Flynn of the Inland, the founder of the RFDS. Continue north past Churchill's Head and Attack Creek, where one of John MacDouall Stuart's expeditions was terminated, and on to Renner Springs. Just south of Renner Springs, you pass Lubra Lookout on the right, a feature that marks the demarcation point between the Arid and the Torrid Zone. Continue north to Elliot and Newcastle Waters and on to Daly Waters for lunch. The old pub has heaps of character and also of interest is JM Stuart's Tree.

Travel north through Larrimah and detour to see the graves of the Elsey Station, containing characters from Jeanie Gunn's book 'We of the Never Never.' Continue through to Mataranka and head out to the Thermal Pool for

Your overnight camp at Mataranka Resort. (Full facilities). (585km (6 hours) driving, 1 hour walking.)

Day 9 Mataranka to Katherine

Spend some time this morning swimming and relaxing in the wonderful thermal pool. Continue up the Stuart Highway and on to Katherine, making a stop in town before heading left out to the Gorge to set up camp and use the rest of the day to explore Katherine Gorge by foot, canoe or cruise on the gorge.

Overnight camping Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge.) (Shower & toilet) (150km (1&1/2 hours) driving, 3 hours walking.)

Day 10 Katherine to Kakadu

Making your way back to Katherine, you turn right and head north. The detour to the right to Edith Falls is a well-worthwhile stop for a swim and explore. Return to the Stuart Highway and head north to Pine Creek, where you take the Kakadu Highway to the right. Follow the signs to Gunlom to the right and enjoy lunch at this delightful waterhole.

Return to the Kakadu Highway and stop to pay your park entry. Make your way to Coinda and book in for the sunset cruise on Yellow waters. After the cruise, make your way to

Mardugal campsite for overnight camping. (Shower & toilet facilities) (220 kms (4 hours) driving, 1 hour walking,)

Day 11 Mardugal to Jim Jim Falls

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

Our overnight camp at Jim Jim Falls campsite. (Shower and toilet) (250km (5 hours) driving, 1&1/2 hours walking.)

Day 12 Jim Jim to Ubirr

Returning to the Kakadu Highway and deviate to Barramundi Gorge to take a walk to the gorge for a swim. Continue on to Nourlangie Road and visit the Anbangbang rock shelter and Nourlangie Rock. 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 Annabangbang Billabong site is where the famous shaving scene in Crocodile Dundee was filmed. After lunch you can make a stop at the Ranger station and then deviate to Jabiru if you wish. Make a stop at Cahill's Crossing on the South Alligator River, the border of Arnhemland. You then head to Ubirr and set up camp at

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Merl Campsite. (Shower & toilet) (110 kms (2&1/2 hours) driving, 2 hours walking.)

Day 13 Ubirr to Lake Bennet

Make your way up to Ubirr to walk and view the X-Ray Aboriginal art here. Return to the Arnhem Highway and turn right. Continue to the Bark Hut Inn for a break. About 2 kilometres past Corroboree Park tavern, turn left down the Marrakai track. You traverse the Marrakai Plains for about 60km before arriving at the Lake Bennet and setting up for the overnight camp.

Overnight camping Lake Bennett (Shower and Toilet) (300kms (5 hours) driving, 1 hour walking)

Day 14 Lake Bennett to Darwin

This morning you head back to the Stuart Highway and turn left. After a few kilometres, turn right to Litchfield National Park. Stop to view some magnetic and Giant Termite mounds and visit Florence Falls for a walk through the rainforest to view the fall. After a stop at Buley Rockholes for a swim, continue on to Wangi Falls for a swim over lunch and walk to the lookout above the falls.

This afternoon you detour to Tolmer Falls before making your way back to the Stuart Highway. Turn left and continue through to Darwin. Alternatively, there is a back road that continues on from Wangi Falls. Arrive in Darwin late afternoon and perhaps take in a sunset from Mindil Beach to celebrate the end of a wonderful Kimberley and Top End experience. (220km (4 hours) driving, 2 hours walking.)

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 references be consulted or purchased prior to departure.

Road Conditions

It is important to seek up to date advice on road conditions as things can change rapidly.

Map

Hema Maps – The Kimberley and Top End

Guide Book

Discover Australia by 4WD by Ron and Viv Moon.

Background Reading

The Territory by Ernestine Hill

The Australian Geographic Guide to the Kimberley.

The Explorers by Tim Flannery

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

Outback tracks information -

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

Uluru, Nitmiluk and Kakadu- www.ea.gov.au/parks/index.html

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