



17 Day Darwin to Cairns 4WD Self-Drive Gulf Country Explorer

Journey across the Gulf Country Savannah from Darwin to Cairns or reverse through some of the wildest and most remote regions of Tropical and outback Australia. Few towns have the flavour and character of Burketown nor the history of Normanton.

Few National Parks are as beautiful and enchanting as Kakadu and Lawn Hill. Few caves are expansive as Chillagoe or the network of the Undara Lava tubes. This journey will take you to the real Australia as you 4WD between northern Australia's most popular destinations. Also available in reverse direction, with Cairns extensions or a southern detour to Uluru (Ayers Rock).

Suggested Itinerary

Day 1 Darwin to Lake Bennett

Departing Darwin early head south on 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 falls. After a stop at Buley Rock holes for a swim and laze in the rock pools, continue on to Wangi Falls for another swim, 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 Lake Bennett. (Full facilities, shower, toilet and washing machine) (220km 4 hours driving, 2 hours walking)

Day 2 Lake Bennett to Ubirr

Your 4WD adventure begins today as you take a less-frequently-used route to Kakadu National Park. Get directions from Lake Bennett 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. Your

Overnight Camp will be at **Merl Campsite (Shower and toilet)** (300kms 5 hours driving, 1 hour walking)

Day 3 Ubirr to Cooina

Return this morning to the National Park HQ for any additional information on the Park, then continue on to the Nourlangie Road and visit the Anbangbang rock shelter and Nourlangie Rock Art site. During the dry season there are Ranger guided tours which are very good. You will find a great spot for lunch in the area around Annabangbang Billabong. Return to the Kakadu Highway and turn left to visit Barramundi Gorge. There is a short walk here but well worth the effort. Two swimming areas are available. On the escarpment or down at the base. Return to the Kakadu Highway and make your way to the Cooina Lodge to take a Yellow Water Cruise to see the beautiful wetlands.

Overnight camp Mardugal Campground (Shower and toilet. Camp sites are not powered) (110 kms 2 & 1/2 hours driving, 2 hours walking)

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Day 4 Jim Jim Falls and Twin Falls

An early start today will bring great rewards as you take the 4WD tracks to these magnificent Falls. After lunch, travel 10km on to Twin Falls to the access point. Only go if you can swim. You walk 10 minutes and swim up the gorge (best to have airbed for this trip). After a great day of waterfalls return to

Overnight camp at Mardugal Camp or you can camp at Jim Jim Falls. Check with National Parks. (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 and walk, 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 and then continue to Nitmiluk National Park (Katherine Gorge).

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 paid cruise. Later make your way back to Katherine 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 exploring, cruising, canoeing or walking)

Day 7 Mataranka to bush camp (Towns River)

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'. Return to the Roper Highway and turn right to Roper Bar. Continue along the bitumen to Roper Bar store for a stop and look at the Roper River, a famous Barramundi fishing destination. Turn right down the Nathan River road and continue on to a

Bush camp at Towns River (No facilities) (277km 4 &1/2 hours driving)

Day 8 Towns River to Borroloola

Continue over the Cox River and Limmen Bight River to Nathan River Station. This is soon to be a National Park with striking 'Lost City' formations, similar to the Bungle Bungle in Western Australia, so check out if access is available. Veer left near Billengarra Station and on to your

Overnight camp Caravan Park at Borroloola (Full facilities) (230km 5 hours driving)

Day 9 Borroloola to Hell's Gate

Make a stop at the Historical museum. See the mighty McArthur River and pick up any last minute supplies. Beware of the world's longest road trains that ply this route! Take the road to Burketown and travel through to Wollogorang, near the Queensland border. Continue on over the border to stop at

Hells Gate Roadhouse overnight camp (Shower and toilet facilities) (322km 7 hours driving)

Day 10 Hell's Gate to Kingfisher Camp

Head towards Burketown and turn right to Kingfisher Camp (signposted) and follow signs to the camp. Afternoon options include fishing, boating and exploring nearby gorges.

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Overnight camping Kingfisher Camp (Shower and toilet facilities) (2 & 1/2 hours driving)

Day 11 Kingfisher to Lawn Hill Gorge

Confirm directions with Kingfisher Camp of the route to Lawn Hill Gorge. Following signs, you come in at Adel's Grove, famous for the expansive gardens that grew there. Camping is available here if there is no room at the gorge. Continue in for 10 km to your

Overnight campsite Lawn Hill Gorge National Park. (Shower and toilet facilities) (160km 4 & 1/2 hours driving)

Day 12 Lawn Hill Gorge National Park

A wonderful day can be had with many options such as canoe hire. An ideal way to see the gorge. Walks and lots of swimming. One of Australia's top National Parks!

Overnight camping Lawn Hill Gorge National Park (Shower and toilet facilities)

Day 13 Lawn Hill to Burketown

Drive back out to Adels Grove and link up with a 1/2 trip with the Savannah guide at Adel's Grove to the Dinosaur fossil site at Riversleigh. Continue back to the Gregory Roadhouse on the Burketown Camooweal Road. Turn left and make your way to the frontier Burketown and perhaps have a drink this evening in a real Aussie pub!

Overnight camping Burketown Caravan Park (Shower and toilet facilities) (219km 4 hours driving)

Day 14 Burketown to Croydon

Take the Nardoo- Burketown Road to Leichhardt Falls and break for a morning stop but don't swim as there are crocodiles. Take the road to Normanton and stop to see the grave of Frederick Walker, the mounted policeman who led one of the expeditions to search for the explorers Burke and Wills. Turn right to visit Burke and Wills' Camp 119, the explorers' most northerly camp. Continue through to Burketown and explore the wonderful architecture of another frontier town and the wonderful old train, the Gulflander. Continue on to the gold mining town of Croydon and terminus for the Gulflander and set up

Camp at the Caravan Park. (Full facilities) (358 km 5 & 1/2 hours driving)

Day 15 Croydon to Undara Lava Tubes

After a look at the historic town of Croydon, travel on to Georgetown along the Gulf Development Road. Travel through Mt Surprise and turn left, following the signs to Undara Lava Lodge. This afternoon, take a guided tour through one of the fascinating Lava Tubes. Set up your

Overnight camp Lava Lodge (Full facilities) (230 km 3 & 1/2 hours driving)

Day 16 Undara to Chillagoe Caves

A morning walk to nearby lookouts will reward the active as you get panoramic vistas of the surrounding countryside and remnant volcanoes. Retrace your route to the Gulf Development Road and head left. Turn north and cross the Lynd River and Tate River before joining the Burke Development at Almadon, where you can stop to view the historic railway station and its lush gardens. Travel on to Chillagoe, an historic old mineral field and tour the limestone caves with a ranger before setting up your

Overnight camping Caravan Park, Chillagoe (Full facilities) (230km 3 & 1/2 hours driving)

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Day 17 Chillagoe to Cairns

Explore the surrounding mining area ruins and museum and Aboriginal art. Retrace your steps to Almaden and on through to Dimbulah and Mareeba for a stop and look around. Continue through to Kuranda and spend some time exploring this village. A stop at the base of the range at the Tjapukai Aboriginal cultural centre will be rewarding and you can also take the Skyrail back up the range to view the rainforest and Barron Falls. Continue on to Cairns at the end of an outstanding gulf experience (208km 4 hours driving, 2 hours walking)

Recommended References

The above itineraries are not intended as the sole guide to the details of your route

Road Conditions

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

Map

HEMA Maps – Top End and Western Gulf, Cape York.

Guide Book

Cape York-- An Adventurers Guide by Ron and Viv Moon

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

Web Sites

Four Wheel Drive Hire Service www.4wdhire.com.au

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

QLD National Parks www.epa.qld.gov.au/environment/park/discover