



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 the wild Burketown nor the history of Normanton. Few National Parks are as beautiful and enchanting as Kakadu and Lawn Hill Gorge. Few caves are as expansive as Chillagoe or the network of the Undara Lava tubes. This journey will take you to the real Australia as you 4wd between North Australia's most popular destinations. Also available in reverse direction, with Cairns extensions or a detour to Ululu (Ayers Rock).

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)

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 Murrumbidgee 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

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. 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. (Shower and toilet)(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 10km on to Twin Falls to the access point. You walk 10 minutes and swim up the gorge (best to have an air bed for this trip). After a great day of waterfalls you return to

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

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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 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 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

Bushcamp 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, so check out if access is available. Veer left near Billengarra Station and on to your

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

Day 9 Borroloola to Hell's Gate

Borroloola and make a stop at the Historical museum as this outpost was the 'Timbuctu of Australia'. Have a look at the mighty McArthur River and pick up any last minute supplies. Beware of the world's longest roadtrains that ply this route! Take the road to Burketown and travel through to Wollgorang, near the Qld border. Continue on over the border to stop at

Hells Gate Roadhouse for your 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) to follow signs to the camp. Afternoon options include fishing, boating and exploring nearby gorges.

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

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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 at 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 today 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 and make an afternoon stop. 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 may be 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 at Lava Lodge. (Full facilities) (230 km (3 & 1/2 hours) driving)

Day 16 Undarra 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 Rivers 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 at the 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. 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 – TopEnd 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

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

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