



Tanami Desert – The Kimberley – Top-End Trek – Alice Springs to Darwin – 27 Day

From the desert country of the Tanami and Canning Stock Route to the gorges and waterfalls of the Kimberley, this trek takes you through some of the remotest regions of Australia. Interaction with Aboriginal guides and Traditional Aboriginal people will allow a perspective on the country that is unable to be gained on a standard holiday. Waterfalls and Aboriginal Art, Birdlife and Gorges- these are among the scenic and cultural riches awaiting this 4wd exploration. Travelling east through Kununurra and on to Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park. 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 Alice Springs to Rabbit Flat

Head north from Alice Springs up the Stuart Highway turn left along the Tanami and travel alongside the MacDonnell Ranges to a morning stop at Tilmouth Roadhouse. Continue on to Yuendumu Aboriginal Community for lunch. Continue north-west for an afternoon stop at a rest stop past Chilla Well (a possible bush camp if desired). Pass the Granites Mine gold mine and on to an

Overnight camp at Rabbit Flat Roadhouse. (Shower and toilet) (581km (8 hours) driving). Ring ahead to Balgo and Mulan Communities to organise permits and camping.

Day 2 Rabbit Flat to Lake Gregory

Resume the Tanami trek and stop at the old Tanami Mine ruins to have a look at the old machinery and ruins and travel through the Tanami Desert. Crossing the border into Western Australia, you pass through the low Killi Killi Hills. After 86km, turn right to the Aboriginal Community of Balgo, well off the beaten track for most Tanami Track travellers. Renowned for its Desert Art, the Warlayirti Art and Cultural Centre is a wonderful display where extraordinary Aboriginal art can be purchased. Continue on through 'The Pound' to Mulan Community and call into the store. Ensure you have a copy of the 'mudmap' to take you around to Billiluna via the Canning Stock Route before heading out to the freshwater expanse of

Lake Gregory for your overnight bush camp. (Toilet facility) You may also like to enquire about having some Traditional Owners take you out looking for Bushtucker. (278km (5 hours) driving)

Day 3 Lake Gregory to Sturt Creek

Today is a wonderful journey in a very remote region so ensure you are well prepared. Follow the 'mudmap' carefully as you drive around the huge freshwater lake. As you are now travelling through the Great Sandy Desert, you may encounter wild horses, camels and wonderful birdlife. Reaching the Canning Stock Route, double back to Well 50 as it is an example of Alfred Canning's famous network of wells and follow the stock route north past wells 51 and 52, which can also be explored. Continue on to your

Overnight bush camp on Stretch Lagoon. (No facilities) (140km (6 hours) driving, 2 hours walking.)

Day 4 Sturt Creek to Halls Creek

Continue on the final leg of the Canning journey through to the Aboriginal Community of Billiluna. Turn left at the Tanami Track and travel north to the turn-off to Wolfe Creek Crater to the right. Walk to the top of the crater for a fantastic vista of the world's second largest meteorite crater and explore below. Return to the Tanami and turn right. A creek crossing on the right makes a favourable lunch spot before reaching the Great Northern Highway. Turn right to Halls Creek and spend the afternoon visiting Old Halls Creek and the China Wall before setting up

27 Day Alice Springs to Darwin 'Tanami to the Kimberley' Trek.

Camp at the Caravan Park in Halls Creek. (Full facilities) (290 km (4 hours driving, 2 hours walking))

Day 5 Halls Creek to Fitzroy Crossing

Ensure the cruise is booked for this afternoon. Return to the highway and turn left before continuing along the highway to Ngumban Cliff (lookout to left). Continue to Fitzroy Crossing and out to Geikie Gorge for lunch. A delightful afternoon can be spent with Darnku Heritage Cruises, cruising and walking Geikie Gorge in the company of Bunaba Traditional Owners. The whitewashed cliffs and limestone eroded by massive Fitzroy River Floods are quite spectacular.

Overnight camping Fitzroy River Lodge. (Full facilities) (4 hours (340km) driving and 1 hour (3km) walking.)

Day 6 Fitzroy Crossing to Broome After a look around the Old Town and crossing, continue through Kimberley cattle country to a stop at Willare and the mighty Fitzroy River. Deviate to the right to the Willie Creek Pearl farm for a tour before arriving at Broome, the Pearl of the North. Take in a glorious sunset from Cable Beach before your

Overnight camp at Palm Grove Caravan Park. (Full facilities) (5 hours (400 km) driving)

Day 7 Broome

After an active exploration of the desert country, it is time to relax. What better place is there to do this than Cable Beach. Also visit Gantheume Point and the Japanese Cemetery.

Overnight camping at Palm Grove Caravan Park. (Full facilities)

Day 8 Broome to Windjana Gorge National Park

After departing from your accommodation early, travel up the Great Northern Highway to Derby. Ensure you have adequate alcohol supplies for the next 7 nights before leaving Derby. Walk and view the circular wharf, presiding over the 2nd greatest tidal variance in the World, and the Prison Boab Tree before heading off down the Gibb River Road (GRR) and turn right (signposted) towards Windjana Gorge. Deviate for the afternoon to explore Tunnel Creek, a 3/4-km subterranean passage through the Napier Range. Torches are needed but it's a cool place for the afternoon! Retrace your steps to Windjana Gorge turn off (signposted) to right, after a stop on the right at the ruins of Lillilmooloora, and set up camp for the evening.

Overnight camping Windjana Gorge National Park. (Toilet & shower.) (6 hours (451 km) driving, 1 hour (2 km) walking.)

Day 9 Windjana Gorge National Park to Bell Gorge National Park

A morning walking into Windjana Gorge will be very rewarding as you explore this ancient fossil reef forming imposing walls and see crocodiles basking in the sun. The Gorge is nearly 5km long and the energetic may wish to walk right to the end. Return to the GRR and turn right, Make your way to the Lennard River, where you may be able to stop for a swim. Travel past the Queen Victoria's Head Rock formation as you pass through the Napier Range before turning left to Lennard Gorge (signposted) in the afternoon and soak in the impressive scenery, although the track is usually very rough. Return to the Gibb, turn left and continue down to the Bell Gorge (signposted). Turn off to the left and make your way to camp.

Overnight camping Silent Grove, Bell Gorge. (Toilet & shower) (3&1/2 hours driving (140 km), 2 hours (4 km) walking)

27 Day Alice Springs to Darwin 'Tanami to the Kimberley' Trek.

Day 10 Bell Gorge National Park to Manning Gorge

After a drive to the Carpark and a morning walk into Bell Gorge, retrace your steps to the GRR. Head off left down the GRR to your next stop, picturesque Galvans Gorge (signposted) on the left for a lunchtime interlude. Park at the gate and walk to the fall. After a stop at Mt Barnett Roadhouse to pay camp fees, make your way to Lower Manning Gorge. You can walk that afternoon to beautiful Manning Gorge to see the waterfall and some Aboriginal Gwion (Bradshaw) figures. For the less energetic, you can stop for a swim and relax beneath shady paperbarks and perhaps take the walk in the morning.

Overnight camping Manning Gorge. (Toilet facilities.) (3 hours (155 km) driving, 3 hours (9 km) walking)

Day 11 Manning Gorge to Miners Pool

After a morning stop at Mt Barnett Roadhouse, turn left back on the GRR and cross the Barnett River. Turn left to (signposted) Barnett River Gorge. Keep veering right until you get to the carpark or stop at the rocky creek crossing and walk from there. Time can be spent at Barnett River Gorge before heading left on down the road towards the Kalumbaru turn-off. Proceeding straight ahead and leaving the GRR, you can make a stop and perhaps a swim at Gibb River. Journey northwards for an hour to Drysdale River Station (signposted) to the left for fuel and to pay camp fees. Return to the Kalumbaru road, turn left and take the right track before the river crossing (signposted) to Miners Pool to set up camp for the evening and a swim.

Overnight camping Miners Pool. (Toilet facilities) (5 hours (320 km) driving, 1 hours (2 km) walking.) It is also possible to camp at Drysdale River Station to have shower facilities as well.

Day 12 Miners Pool to Mitchell Falls

Return to the Kalumbaru road, turn right and cross the Drysdale River. Turn left (signposted) to Mitchell Plateau and make a stop at King Edward River to inspect the crossing before attempting it. Turn immediately left and park in the carpark and walk to the Wandjina and Gwion (Bradshaw) art. Retrace your steps to the Plateau track and turn left. Turn right to the main King Edward River camping area and stop for a swim and lunch. Ascending the Mitchell Plateau, you enter a world of forests of Livistona Palms, ancient Aboriginal Wandjina and Bradshaw art, magnificent waterfalls and isolated swimming holes. The track can be quite rough all the way. Your overnight camp is on water at Merton Creek.

Overnight camping Mitchell Falls. (Toilet facilities.) (4 hours (139 km) driving, 1 hour (3 km) walking)

Day 13 Mitchell Falls

A full day is available to fully explore this magnificent waterfall and its associated aboriginal art. Call in with the Helicopter pilots camp at the start and arrange a 'taxi' from the falls back to the carpark (about \$60), departing the falls about 3pm, or a longer scenic flight. Walk from the carpark to Little Merton Falls (down the hill to the left) and see wonderful Aboriginal art in overhangs under the falls. Continue through open woodland to another Gwion (Bradshaw) artsite, visible across the creek to the left. After a stop at impressive Big Merton Falls, you arrive at Mitchell Falls and spend time swimming and exploring this magnificent area. Cross the river and walk past the heli-pad to the wonderful lookout facing the falls. For the adventurous, you may find the track near this lookout down the other side of the hill to the river. Aboriginal Art may be found down the bottom on the other side of the river in overhangs. Walk or fly back to the carpark.

Overnight camping Mitchell Falls. (Toilet facilities). (3 hours (6km) walking, (the helicopter can usually be taken one way from the falls.)

27 Day Alice Springs to Darwin 'Tanami to the Kimberley' Trek.

Day 14 Mitchell Falls to Gibb River

Retracing your steps back to the Kalumbaru Road, stop for a leg stretch at the Lawley Lookout on the left. Continue off the Mitchell Plateau and stop and view more galleries of Aboriginal Bradshaw Art down a track off to the left when you come down off the Plateau. Stop again at King Edward River and relax for a while at its refreshing waters. Recross the river and turn right at the Kalumbaru road. If you were taking a Kalumbaru extension, you would turn left here. Continue back past Drysdale River Station, where you will need to fuel. Proceed on down to the Gibb River for a bush camp. Stop at Miners Pool or Drysdale Station if you prefer the facilities.

Overnight Bush Camp Gibb River. (No facilities) (6 hours (250 km) driving.)

Day 15 Gibb River to El Questro

Returning to the Gibb River Road, turn left and continue the Gibb River Road Trek. Cross the Durack River (Check depth early in the season). After stopping to view the magnificent Cockburn Range at the lookout on the right, descend the range and ford the Pentecost River. Continue on to Emma Gorge (signposted to left) and call in to the office to purchase a wilderness pass and get a station map. Walk to the gorge and droplet waterfall for a refreshing swim. Retrace your tracks to the El Questro turn-off (signposted to left) and make your way through to the station. There are choices of riverside camping areas. Black Cockatoo at the Station is best if you want facilities.

Overnight camping El Questro Station. (Full facilities- laundry, toilet & shower.) (5 hours (281 km) driving, 2 hours (3km) walking)

Day 16 El Questro

Set off this morning to explore beautiful Zebedee thermal springs (signposted) to right to relax in the tropical surroundings. The energetic then have the opportunity to walk up El Questro Gorge before returning for lunch. This afternoon, hire an electric motor from the store and drive to Chamberlain Gorge (signposted) to give you an opportunity to view the Station Homestead from a distance. Take an electric boat up Chamberlain Gorge to see the Aboriginal Art at the end or do a spot of Barramundi fishing. Alternatively, arrange a boat cruise. Return towards the store and turn left to Branco's Lookout (signposted) for a sunset before returning to camp.

Overnight camping El Questro Station. (Full facilities) (1 hour (50 km) driving, 2&1/2 hours (6km) walking.)

Day 17 El Questro to Bungle Bungle

Retrace your steps to the GRR and turn right. Make your way down the Gibb River Road to a right turn to MB Rocks and some Aboriginal Art. Completing your traverse of the Gibb River Road, you reach the Great Northern Highway and turn right and travel for a few km to the Great Northern Highway turn-off and turn right. After 50km, you come to the Ragged Range lookout to the left (signposted) for a detour down the old highway. Continue on to Warmun (Turkey Creek) and make a stop at the roadhouse. If you wish, ask directions at the roadhouse to the Warmun Aboriginal Art Centre. 52km along the Great Northern Highway turn left to the Purnululu National Park (signposted) before hitting the dirt to head west 55km to the Bungles. This road has many rough wash-aways at creek crossings. Travel through the Osmond Ranges to Calico Springs, with permanent water, which makes a pleasant stop. Stop at the Ranger Station and pay camp and entry fees. Turn left at 3 ways and make your way to Kurrajong Camp. Walk up the limestone ridge behind the camp for sunset.

Overnight camping Purnululu (Bungle Bungle) National Park. (Toilet facilities) (6 hours (322km) driving, 2 hour sightseeing and exploring.)

27 Day Alice Springs to Darwin 'Tanami to the Kimberley' Trek.

Day 18 Bungle Bungle

Head off in the morning to the southern side of the massif to allow time to fully explore and appreciate the magnificent domes area of Piccaninny Creek. On the way, drop into the airstrip (signposted) to the right and arrange a time for optional helicopter flights, preferably lunchtime. An easy-paced walk up the creek flanked by the curious, striped Bee hive domes brings you to hidden gorges and a wide array of vegetation. Time can be spent wandering around these awe-inspiring, striped, beehive-shaped domes before an optional helicopter flight (app \$190) and lunch. This afternoon you can travel around to the northern side of the massif and explore Echidna Chasm. If time allows, also visit Froghole Gorge.

Overnight camping Kurrajong Camp, Purnululu National Park. (Toilet facilities.) (3 hours (100 km) driving, 3 hours (6 km) walking)

Day 19 Bungle Bungle to Kununurra

This morning you revisit the northern side to Minipalms Gorge. The longish walk is rewarded with an amazing gorge blessed with an abundance of small palms in the gorge floor. Retrace your tracks to the Great Northern Highway and turn right and continue on to Turkey Creek. Retrace your tracks to Kununurra and return to Kimberleyland Caravan Park.

Overnight camping Kimberleyland Caravan Park. (Full facilities.) (7 hours (492km) driving and 1/2 hours (1km) walking)

Day 20 Kununurra

Today is a good opportunity to explore this Irrigation town. The morning can be spent shopping for Argyle Diamonds or optional touring of the Diamond Mine, touring the agricultural area before an afternoon Ord River Cruise.

Overnight camping Kimberleyland Caravan Park (Full facilities)

Day 21 Kununurra to Timber Creek

Start your journey along the Victoria Highway with a visit to Hidden Valley National Park. Detour to Lake Argyle to marvel at the inland sea, many times the size of Sydney Harbour. Stop and view some Aboriginal Art on the right after you cross the Spillway Creek and make your way on to the NT border. A deviation to the Keep River National Park will be rewarding before finally ending up in Timber Creek for the evening.

Overnight camping Timber Creek. (Full facilities) (220 km (4 hours) driving, 1 hour walking)

Day 22 Timber Creek to Katherine

This morning you have the opportunity for a cruise on the Victoria River. You then head east along the Victoria Highway to Victoria River Crossing, travelling through the Gregory National Park. Continuing on to Katherine, you can make a stop in town before heading left out to the Gorge to set up camp and taking an afternoon cruise on the gorge.

Overnight camping Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge.) (Shower & toilet) (310km (3&1/2 hours) driving.)

Day 23 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 Cooida and book in for the sunset cruise on Yellow waters. After the cruise, make your way to

27 Day Alice Springs to Darwin 'Tanami to the Kimberley' Trek.

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

Day 24 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 air bed 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 25 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

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

Day 26 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 27 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 – Central Australia, The Kimberley and TopEnd

27 Day Alice Springs to Darwin 'Tanami to the Kimberley' Trek.

Guide Book

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

Background Reading

Kings in Grass Castles by Mary Durack
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

Kimberley National Parks-www.calm.wa.gov.au/national_parks/index.html

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

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

Aboriginal books- www.magabala.com.au

Darngku Heritage Cruise- www.darngku.com.au