



12 Day Gunbarrel Highway 4wd Self-drive Adventure

Stark, white ghost gums contrasted against red, sandstone gorges reflecting the last rays of the afternoon sun are the images that make Central Australia a must for visitors. The gorges of the Western MacDonnells and Kings Canyon give way to the red sand dunes of the desert, as you make your way to Uluru (Ayers Rock), Australia's red heart. Returning to the Stuart Highway, you explore the remote Chambers Pillar and Rainbow Valley before completing the loop to Alice Springs.

Itinerary Suggestion

Day 1 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 Simpson's 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 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- shower, toilet and washing machine) (170km (3 hours) driving, 2 hours walking)

Day 2 Glen Helen to Kings Canyon

Pick up your permit to travel through Aboriginal Lands on the Mereenie Loop Road before departure. The vertical cliffs of Redbank Gorge, with its icy pools, 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, so be very careful. 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 3 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 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 learn its significance to this ancient culture. Making your way back to the sunset viewing point 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)

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Day 4 Uluru to Hull River

This morning you awaken early and watch the new day dawn on the rock. Depart Yulara and make your way towards Uluru. Make a stop at the Cultural Centre and Arts Centres, where you can happily spend a few hours. Turn to Kata Tjuta (the Olgas). You have the option of a longer walk in the Valley of the Winds or a shorter walk up Olga Gorge between the huge domes (or both). Take plenty of water and sun protection. Return to the Warburton Road and head west. You are now on the Great Central Road. This road has replaced much of the original Gunbarrel Highway. While it is still possible to travel on some sections of the old Gunbarrel Highway, it is very rough and a remote and dangerous proposition. After about 140km, you will come to the Hull River and Lasseter's Cave. Here the prospector Harry Lasseter was stranded and died, while searching to relocate his famed Lost Reef. Water and

Overnight bush camping is available here at Lasseter's Cave. (No facilities) (189km (3 hours drive, 2 hours walking)

Day 5 Hull River to Warburton Roadhouse

After more of a look around the desert oaks in the area in the morning, continue along the Peterman Ranges. Stop at Docker River to ring Giles Weather Station if you want to visit Giles Weather Station. (see recommended references below) Cross over the border into WA and past the Sandy Blight Junction. After another 49km, the original Gunbarrel Highway joins from the left. Continue through to Warakurna Roadhouse and detour to Giles Weather Station, a lonely outpost with remnants of the Gunbarrel Construction Company, who first built these roads. After 15km, an abandoned section of the Gunbarrel leaves to the right. After a further 87 km, you pass through a striking mountain Range where a stop to explore a large cave is rewarding. Continue on to your

Overnight camp at Warburton Roadhouse. (Shower and toilet) (373 km (6 hours) driving)

Day 6 Warburton Roadhouse to Beegul Waterholes Bushcamp

Continuing along the Great Central Road, travel past the Connie Sue Highway and on past a series of natural rockholes, lifelines for the Aboriginal people of the desert. After a stop at Tjukayirla Roadhouse, continue past the Hunt Oil Road and on to a

Bush camp at Beegul Waterholes and caves. (No facilities) (340km (6 hours) driving.)

Day 7 Beegul Waterholes to Leonora

Continue down past the Eurothurra Rockhole and the Newland Range and on to the Aboriginal Community of Cosmo Newberry. After a stop, continue through the Adam Range and on to the mining town of Laverton and the completion of the desert trek. After a stop and look around Laverton, continue through to the Gold Mining town of Leonora. Drive out to the ghost town of Gwalia where there are some fine restored buildings and Mining museum before returning for your

Overnight camp at the Leonora Caravan Park. (Full facilities) (228km (5 hours) driving.

Day 8 Leonora to Kalgoorlie

Travelling south through Menzies, you make your way to the famous mining town of Kalgoorlie- Boulder. This afternoon you can explore the area around this fascinating Gold mining area. Stately old buildings such as the Town Hall are wonderful examples of the glorious hey-day of Kalgoorlie. Museums also are fascinating, with the WA Museum, the Prospectors and Miners Hall of Fame and the Mineral Museum attached to the School of Mines. And speaking of schools, take a visit to the site of Australia's only legal Two-up School. The Mt Charlotte Reservoir and Lookout are a tribute to CY O'Connor and his vision in piping water from near Perth and has great views. The infamous Red Light District of Hay St should be investigated and the curious can actually tour a new Bordello called Langtrees.

Overnight camping, Caravan Park Kalgoorlie. (Full facilities) (275km (3 hours) driving)

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Day 9 Kalgorlie to Hyden

Head off West across the Eastern Highway to the earlier Gold Mining centre of Coolgardie. There are a number of museums that can also be visited here, including the Pharmacy Museum, the Goldfields Exhibition Museum, Railway Station Museum and the magnificently restored Warden Finnerty's Residence. Perhaps also visit the Camel Farm before continuing west to Southern Cross. Head south to Frog Rock and continue on to the wonderful Wave Rock, near Hyden. Set up your

Overnight camp at Wave Rock Resort and Caravan Park. (Full facilities) (400km (5 hours) driving, 1 hour walking)

Day 10 Hyden to Albany

Proceed south to Lake Grace and on towards Albany. After you have entered the Stirling Range National Park, turn left to Bluff Knoll and take the exhilarating climb to the top. Return to the Chester Pass road and turn left. To get a really good overview of the range, turn right into Stirling Range Drive and make your way through to the Albany Highway. The wildflowers are amazing in Spring. Turn left to Albany and your

Overnight camping in the Caravan Park. (Full facilities) (390km (5 hours) driving, 5 km (3.5 hours) walking)

Day 11 Albany to Margaret River

A former Whaling Station, Albany was the first European settlement in WA. In addition to Whale World at the Old Whaling Station, the wind farm is a worthwhile visit with 12 100-metre high wind turbines. Have a look also at the Old Farm, Strawberry Hill. Drive to Middleton Beach, a delightful drive via Marine Drive with the striking Dog Rock En-route. The blowholes and gorge are also very good, especially in rougher seas. Head west to the up the Highway to Denmark, a delightful town that boast some wonderful wineries and craft shop and is known as where the forest meets the sea. After a look around town, take the Scotsdale Scenic Drive through for forests, Art and craft shops and wineries. A winery for lunch would be pleasant. This afternoon, visit the Valley of the Giants Treetop walk, where you are 40 metres off the ground in the canopy. Continue on through Walpole to Pemberton for an afternoon stop. Make your way to

Margaret River and your overnight camping in the Caravan Park. (Full facilities) (370km (5 hours) driving, 2 hours walking).

Day 12 Margaret River to Perth

Travel west towards Cape Mentelle. While there are many wineries in the region, this is one of the best. Head north up the Caves Road to the main Margaret River wine area, where there are numerous wineries to choose from. Continue north to the caves at Yallingup for a visit and perhaps a side trip to Cape Naturaliste. Head east through Dunsborough, Busselton and on to Bunbury. Travel up the coast through Mandurah and Rockingham and on to Perth at the conclusion of a marvellous trip from the centre to the west. (331km (5 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 – Central Australia.

Guide Book

Discover Australia by 4WD by Ron and Viv Moon.

Ringling Giles Weather Station

1. Dial (08) 8956 7358
2. Wait about 20 seconds for a different dial tone
3. Dial 405 and ask to speak to the Officer in charge.

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Background Reading

The Explorers by Tim Flannery

A Town like Alice by Neville Shute

Too long in the Bush by Len Beadell (or any of his books)

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

Uluru (Ayers Rock)- www.ea.gov.au/parks/index.html

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

WA National Park Information- www.calm.wa.gov.au/national_parks/index.html