

Piccaninny Creek, Purnululu (Bungle Bungle) National Park: July 8-17 2012

In mid 2003, Purnululu joined the list of Australia's World Heritage locations. Here's what the Department of Environment and Heritage has to say. "Famous for the 45 000 hectare Bungle Bungle Range, with its huge expanse of striking banded beehive structures, sandstone cliffs and towers, Purnululu has been listed as an outstanding landscape that is a superlative natural phenomenon, revealing the history of its formation over hundreds of millions of years. Purnululu National Park has such outstanding universal natural values that it enriches the world and should be conserved for the benefit of all people. Before 1982, when aerial pictures were first released, it was virtually unknown except to pastoralists, scientists and the local Aboriginal community. It is now seen as one of the scenic jewels of outback Australia."

There are many tours which will take you to Purnululu. No other tour will allow you to experience as much of the park in as intimate a fashion as ours.

We avoid a drive which takes most of the day by flying direct to the Purnululu airstrip where we are met by the vehicle which will take us to the end of the track and the start of our walk.

Our walk takes us to a base camp about 12–13 kilometres up Piccaninny Gorge, where sheer red cliffs are silhouetted against the clear blue skies of the dry season. Piccaninny is by far the largest gorge in the Bungles. We spend three or four nights there using the days to explore the many fascinating side gorges.

These gorges offer a variety of delights — some are palm filled, some are very narrow and require swimming, some have caves which require the use of a torch. There is at least one gorge that allows us to reach a high point. (We cannot climb to the actual top as climbing up the domes themselves is not permitted because of their exceptionally fragile nature. We can, however, follow watercourses as far as they will take us.) No words can do justice to the beauty of the area. The only way to appreciate it is to come and see it for yourself.

On the final full day, we return to the track where we are picked up by a vehicle which brings us to the East Kimberley Bungle Bungle Bushcamp for a night's accommodation – a touch of luxury we offer only on this tour. For more info, see the EKT website, http://www.eastkimberleytours.com.au/bush_camp.html.

The following morning, we return to the airstrip to drop off anyone leaving and collect anyone joining the second section. We then drive to the end of the track and begin the second walk.

Terrain and difficulty

Overall	Level 3
Climate	Level 3. Generally dry, average daytime max 29°C (84°F), average night minimum 12°C (54°F), but can get below 5°C (41°F) on occasion. These are averages . We once had a heat wave with a couple of 35°C days in July. It has gone as low as 1°C (34°F). Rain is extremely unlikely, but not unknown.
Terrain	With packs - level 2: flat, minimal rock hopping, some ledging, some soft sand. The long walk up the Piccaninny Gorge, mainly over pebbles and sand can be quite tiring for many people. Going beyond our first base camp, done with full packs on some trips, requires some clambering over large rocks and includes edging along at least one narrow ledge. Daywalks without packs - level 4. Most of the day walks involve clambering over large rocks. Some include steep climbs. Some people find this very difficult, even without full packs. Although this difficulty is often more psychological than physical, it can be very real. The only reason this section is not rated "difficult" is that the hardest parts are done without full packs.

The climb up one of the gorges is particularly strenuous. Few groups have had every member go all the way. If you don't wish to do the rock scrambling, you need to be prepared to relax and enjoy their surroundings while the others continue. Keen birdwatchers often find this especially pleasant. Some people become uncomfortable in the absence of the rest of the group. Please keep this in mind when choosing this trip.

- Vegetation** With packs - level 1: minimal vegetation
Without packs - level 2-4: some walks include dense sections of sharp and/or sticky spinifex, gaiters essential, long trousers recommended.
- Hours** You normally walk 4-6 hours per day.
- Packs** As for section one.
- Art:** Two minor sites
- Campsites** Mostly on sand, might include rock ledges on some nights. Rain rare but could cause change of site.
- Swims** Reasonable, often fairly cold. Depends very much on the just finished wet season.
- Lowlights** Helicopters intrusive most of day, aircraft early and late. Not as bad as later in the year.
- Highlights** Incredible and spectacular gorge scenery, each one uniquely different from the others.
- Fishing** No.

Notes

Those who wish to do a half hour helicopter flight over the Bungles will have an opportunity to do so either on arrival or just before departure from the park. Which time we choose depends on when we arrive. (In 2005, the helicopter flight cost \$225.)

All this area is a stove only area. Campfires are not permitted.

You will need to bring a small bag for toilet paper as neither burning nor burying are permitted.

Maps. Kimberley Tourist map and the Turkey Creek 1:100 000 or Bungle Bungle 1:50 000 topographic map.

Bringing fresh fruit, vegetables or honey into WA is illegal whether you come by road or plane. (You cannot even bring in boxes or other containers that once contained fruit or vegetables.) Bags are checked both on the highway and at the airport. There will be time to do some shopping in Kununurra.

A day pack is useful. However, if you don't have a daypack, you can empty your main pack and carry that.

You should always keep a water bottle, your lunch and some money with you during the drives as you cannot easily get into your pack during the journey. You should have enough money to pay for your drinks at the stops.

Note. We have had to modify the itinerary since we last ran the trip. The permitted itinerary is still in flux as of the time this is being written. Please ask for further details if you are interested in this trip.

Itinerary: Bungle Bungles

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 This itinerary is subject to change.

Day 0 Section one begins in Kununurra. There are daily air and bus services between Kununurra and Perth and Darwin. Connections to the eastern states are normally made through Darwin.
Pre-trip meeting 6.30 p.m., outdoor area, Kimberley Croc Backpackers. **This meeting is important.** If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance.
Note.

Day 1 Pick up between 6.30 and 7.00 a.m. Pick up is from your accommodation in Kununurra provided you have given us the address at least a week before departure or have made other arrangements at the pre-trip meeting. If you are unable to notify us where you are staying, the pick up is from in front of the Kununurra Visitors Centre.

Fly to the Bungles, drive to the end of the track.

Begin walk, carrying full packs. Bush camp.

Day 2-9 Bushwalking. Carrying full packs some days, day packs at other times.

Day 10 Return to airstrip. Fly back to Kununurra.

Important Note **Air North**, the main airline operating into Kununurra uses relatively small aircraft and has a baggage allowance of only 13 kg on some flights. Unless special arrangements have been made, if you are flying to Kununurra and your baggage weighs more than 13 kg, it may not get on the plane with you. (This would be very unusual but it is possible.) Contact Air North for more details. Phone: 1800 627474 or (08) 8920 4000; Fax: (08) 8920 4095; email: airnorth@regionallink.com.au
Skywest began flying between Kununurra and Broome or Darwin in April 2009. Call 1300 660088 for flight dates and times or see www.skywest.com.au