

Kakadu & Nitmiluk Photographic Special: January 6-19, 2008

This is a special photographic tour which will be led by photographer Paul Benjafield. If you are unfamiliar with Paul's work, please see his website www.wildprint.com.au. By walking into the wilderness and camping away from campgrounds, you will be able to get the best possible early morning and evening light for your photographs. Paul will assist you with advice as to how to take the best possible photos in conditions which are both exceptionally scenic and exceptionally challenging.

Section 1: Kakadu: January 6-13

With maximum temperatures in the mid 30's and nightly minimum temperatures in the mid 20's, our first day will be an easy one to allow the group to acclimatise. We leave early and begin with the 70 km drive from Darwin to Fogg Dam, famous for its birdlife. We then continue into Kakadu, possibly stopping to do the short nature walk at the Mamukala Billabong if conditions permit. From there, we continue on to the Bowali Centre at Park Headquarters which contains a wealth of displays including a multi-screen slide show that takes you through the six seasons that the park experiences each year. We move on to Nourlangie Rock for late afternoon photos before returning to Jabiru where we spend the night at Lakeview or other budget accommodation.

The following morning we make an early departure to get to Coinda in time for the first cruise of the day. This gives you the chance to experience Kakadu's wetlands at their best. We then head off to Baroalba Springs. A short walk along an old 4WD track (or a longer walk if the road is flooded) brings us to Baroalba Springs and the first of our many swims for the day. We spend the rest of the day exploring Baroalba Creek above the springs before returning to Jabiru.

This is the time of year when Kakadu's waterfalls are at their most spectacular. However, unless you are prepared to do a three week walk, a scenic flight is the only way you can see them. We will make sure that those who wish to do a flight have the opportunity to do so sometime in the first two or three days.

By day three you should be reasonably acclimatised so we drive to the southern end of the park and begin the Yurmikmik walk to Motorcar Creek Falls, the largest waterfall reasonably accessible at this time of year. We spend most of the next five days walking along Motorcar and/or Kurrundie Creeks, enjoying the many waterfalls and looking for the best possible light to photograph them. We expect to spend two or three nights in one campsite, perhaps two nights in two different camp sites so that we can maximise our chances of taking the best possible photographs along the watercourses in this spectacular, rocky landscape.

On the afternoon of the final day, we drive to Katherine where we spend the night in accommodation before moving on to Nitmiluk National Park. Anyone finishing with this section has the choice of catching a bus back to Darwin, south toward Alice Springs or west toward Kununurra.

Notes: Section 1

The scenic flight costs about \$100 per hour. You can choose from a variety of different flight paths and durations. You can also choose to fly by helicopter.

If we have a large enough group, we can charter our own boat at Yellow Waters, go at the best possible time and stop the boat wherever and whenever we find a particularly good photo opportunity. (Cost to be advised.)

Maps. The 1:250 000 Kakadu park map shows all areas. The 1:50 000 Nourlangie Creek and 1:100 000 Cahill map show the area at Nourlangie Rock. The 1:50 000 Callanan map shows the Yurmikmik walk area.

Section 2: Nitmiluk National Park: January 12-19

Anyone joining this section needs to make their way to Katherine and meet the group on the evening of the first day.

Tens of thousands of people flock to Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park every year. The vast majority spend about half a day doing a boat cruise through a small part of the gorge system before moving on. A few do a longer cruise, hire a canoe or take a short walk on one of the marked trails. Not one in a hundred would put on a pack and do an overnight walk. Fewer still would go for a walk in the wet season when the gorge is at its most spectacular.

If conditions permit, we will do our big walk on the first day, going all the way to the Jawoyn Valley. From here, our pace slows down as we slowly work our way back to the start, spending two or even three nights in two or more camp sites. We camp well above the flood lines in places where there is no water later in the year. You get multiple chances to get the best possible photographs of one of the most stunning gorges in Australia. We may move so slowly that it takes us the full week to get back to where we began. Or we may move more quickly, get back with a couple of days to spare, catch a boat across the river and do a walk to some of the waterfalls on the northern walk. It will be your choice.

Notes: Section 2

The road between Katherine and Katherine Gorge can be cut by floods. If so, there is normally a boat and bus shuttle service that will get us to the gorge. Exceptionally sudden rains can, however, cut the road without giving the operator of the shuttle service time to set it up. If this were to happen we would substitute the best possible alternative.

Maps. The Nitmiluk Park map shows all areas and the walking trails. The 1:50 000 Katherine and Comoye maps show the walk(s) and are better for the off trail sections.

Notes: Full Trip

Exceptionally severe flooding can mean that some areas become inaccessible. If that happens we will substitute the best possible alternative.

The minimum level of fitness required for this trip is to be able to comfortably walk ten kilometres on level ground while carrying a day pack containing lunch and a one litre water bottle. You will not have to walk this fast on the trip but your ability to do so is a good indicator of your ability to walk over the rougher ground you will encounter on the walks.

A day pack is essential on both sections. Please let us know if you need us to provide one for you.

All park fees are included in the cost of the trip.

You will have to carry only what you need on each walk. Additional clothing, food, etc can be left in the vehicle during the walks. Do not plan to leave expensive camera gear in the cars. Any loss would be uninsured.

It is very important that you pack well enough so that you can keep most things in your day pack dry. A soggy lunch is no fun. In most cases, a wet camera is a ruined camera.

Make sure you keep some money and a water bottle with you during the drives. It is unlikely that you will be able to easily get things out of your luggage during the day.

You will almost certainly get rained upon. Monsoonal rains are not cold rains. As long as you can keep most of your things dry, you are likely to be more comfortable getting wet without a raincoat than getting hot, steamy and just as wet while wearing one.

During the drives, your luggage may be on a roof rack. Even with a tarpaulin on top, rain can sometimes get in. Pack so that things in your luggage will stay dry even if the outside gets wet.

If we get exceptionally severe monsoonal flooding, we may have to drop some venues and add in others. Our tours ran straight through the four wettest seasons on record. Those who took part in those trips looked on the flooding as a positive experience as they got to see the rivers and creeks at their awesome best.

We will have a group fly to provide shelter during meal times.

We recommend that you bring a good quality, collapsible umbrella so that you can take photos in the rain. By assisting each other and covering cameras everyone will get the chance to get some truly exceptional wet season photographs.

If more than six people book, we plan to provide a second guide so that Paul would be able to spend more time working with you and your photography. Unfortunately, providing a second guide for a small group would increase the price of the trip to a prohibitive extent.

Additional Info **B** from us and from you. We will provide a special check list to help you with your preparation. We will also ask you to fill in a short form detailing your photographic experience and what equipment you will be using.

Jabiru

Jabiru is a small mining town with the kind of shops you would expect to find in a small country town anywhere in Australia. Lakeview is, in our opinion, the best value accommodation in the town. See www.lakeviewkakadu.com.au for more information about Lakeview.

If you do not wish to share, you can pay a surcharge and upgrade to having a room to yourself or transferring to the nearby Crocodile Hotel.

We may cook some of our own evening meals and may eat in local restaurants at other times. Dinners, including those in restaurants are included in the price of the trip. The cost of drinks is not.

Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre

The Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre has a collection of displays giving information about traditional Aboriginal life in Kakadu. It also has a variety of souvenirs for sale. Make sure you bring some money and/or a credit card if you think you might be interested in making a purchase. Photography is permitted in the Cultural Centre.

Terrain and Difficulty

Overall Level 3, moderately difficult

Climate Level 5. It will be hot (although not as hot as you might think) and it will be humid.

The average daily maximum is 33-34°C (91-94°F). If we get a spell of relatively dry weather, the temperature could reach 40°C (104°F). The average minimum is 24°C (75°F). Sleeping bags are not needed. Rain is almost certain.

On average it will rain two days out of three, mostly in short, sharp bursts. Averages can, however, be misleading. Occasionally, it might rain for days at a time. (This makes it somewhat harder to walk but it also makes the waterfalls more spectacular and keeps it relatively cool.) Occasionally, it may rain very little. This makes it substantially hotter than normal. There will be many opportunities to swim and cool off, but you must be prepared for hot, humid conditions.

Terrain Level 3, mostly fairly flat but includes somewhat more soft sand, rough terrain, rock hopping and/or steep climbs than level two.

Section 1. Whichever route we choose, the beginning of the walk is fairly flat and straightforward. There is a short but sharp climb up at Motorcar Falls and a similar climb down at Kurrundie. There will be a substantial amount of rock hopping along the creeks.

Section 2. Highly variable. The beginning of the walk is on a 4WD track. Some of it is, however, off track through rough, rocky country.

Both sections. The creeks are likely to be low enough so that swimming across with packs will not be necessary. Exceptional rain could cause this to change.

Even in the boggiest of seasons, Kakadu has nothing that can compare with the mud of Tasmania. However, if you have a particularly wet year, you may find yourself sinking up to mid calf regularly on some sections.

Much of the walking is off-track. If you have never done any off-track walking through moderately rough terrain, nothing we can say can adequately describe the experience. The photos on our website, www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au, can give you a partial picture, but they cannot substitute for the real thing. Most of those who have not had any off-track walking experience find it more difficult than those who have done it before.

Anyone who does not regularly (average twice a month) go bushwalking carrying a full pack would benefit from doing some pre-trip training. Do this and you will almost certainly enjoy the trip. If you are not an experienced off-track bushwalker and you don't do any training or any other form of strenuous physical exercise, you might feel that the trip is more of an endurance test than the pleasure most people experience.

Vegetation Level 2-3. Much of the walking is through relatively flat, open woodland with a grassy understorey. Some short sections of grass may hide a broken rocky surface where you will have to be particularly careful. There may be some slow sections where you will have to pass through thick scrub. The vegetation can vary from year to year depending on when last burnt.

The spear grass normally reaches its peak in March, often three or four metres tall in some areas (much shorter in others). We may encounter short sections of partially collapsed and seeding spear grass during some portion of the trip, but this early it is unlikely that there will be much.

Hours Generally 4-6 hours. A few days might be longer so that you can get to the right place for the best light for photography.

Packs **Pack weight** - level 3. You need to carry a week's food. **This will include about 22-32 kg of the evening meals.** You do not need a sleeping bag but you do need a tent and fly.

Art Minor sites on section one. Section two includes one of the best in Nitmiluk.

Campsites Mix of sand and rock ledges and grassy flats. Most sites are good to excellent but we have to avoid some of our dry season campsites which could get flooded. You are unlikely to see anyone else anywhere along most of the routes.

Swims We will have good pools at almost every campsite and lunch spot on the overnight walks. You might have to float your pack across one or more flooded creeks. If you can't swim, you should not consider this trip.

Lowlights Heat and humidity. Possible lack of rain can make it more uncomfortable than normal. Exceptional rain can slow us down. Carrying a week's food.

Highlights An incredible photographic experience. Wet season waterfalls. Great swimming. Aboriginal art sites. The lush green landscape that dry season visitors can only imagine.

Wildlife Birds are always present but spread out at this time of year. You are unlikely to see many large animals. The Yellow Waters cruise is excellent for birds, many of which you are unlikely to see on the walk. It also gives you a good chance to see large estuarine crocodiles.

Fishing Not permitted on this walk.

Who should consider this tour?

This is a photographic tour. It is designed for people who are interested in learning how to improve their photography in capturing images in areas not commonly visited as well as some popular spots e.g. Nourlangie Rock in Kakadu. If you are not a keen photographer (amateurs welcome), you would probably be better off on one of our standard tours.

Guests are required to supply and carry their own equipment although the guide may make some of his equipment available for use. Recommended equipment at a minimum includes a 35 mm film or digital camera body with at least two lenses or one zoom that covers a wide angle for landscapes and a telephoto for wildlife. Paul has extensive digital (SLR) photography experience and will happily assist you to use your equipment. For landscapes a tripod is very important and this should be as light as possible if you are intending on carrying it on the walks. The landscapes visited are ideal for photographers using medium and large format cameras. Those who are willing to carry this type of equipment will benefit greatly from this opportunity (those using 35 mm or digital gear will certainly not be disadvantaged). Guests attending this tour will see how the wet season produces beautiful vegetative growth and superb light for landscape photography with an abundance of water. The light and textures also strongly suit black and white photography. Paul can also quote to provide photographic prints from images you have taken and have them delivered to you.

This tour is in the tropics. This means tropical rains and lightning storms. These can be a great source of photo fodder but can also prove difficult if not heart breaking to the unprepared. Camera equipment should be protected against HEAVY rain and potential pack floats (both of these will be avoided but may happen). For ease of access while walking it is handy to have your 35 mm system clipped to your pack straps at your chest. This will need to have some sort of rain protection. In most cases, a wet camera is a ruined camera.

The tour will be structured around being in the best place at the best time within logical reason. This will mean the walk(s) may have times of exertion to get us to locations and allow for long periods of photographic investigation, e.g. Katherine Gorge.

Among many others, some of the topics which will be covered include:

- Wide angle photography
- Long lens photography
- The digital imaging process, from camera to framed print on your wall
- Macro photography
- Composition

"In summary, this trip is designed to provide a range of photographic opportunities in a spectacular part of the world. My enthusiasm for the natural environment and the photography of it will no doubt rub off on you. I look forward very much to sharing my knowledge with you and helping you to get some great shots." Paul Benjafield

Subject matter potentially available to photograph includes:

Fauna: Crocodiles Black Necked Stork (Jabiru) Buffalo
Wallabies Wild horses and Donkeys Various egrets and herons
Birds of prey e.g. Whistling Kites, Black Kites
Large monitor lizards e.g. Sand Goannas, Water Monitors
Small fauna such as frogs and lizards

Please note. No specific animal sightings can be guaranteed but the guide is very experienced in spotting wildlife and will do his best to find them and point them out for photographs.

Flora: Paperbark swamps Water lilies Spear grass
An amazing variety of wild flowers

Landscapes: Kakadu Escarpment and outcrops Large water bodies e.g. wetlands and dams
Tidal Estuaries Waterfalls and associated creeks
Woodland Grasslands
Katherine Gorge

Film can be pre-ordered and purchased and will be waiting for you at the pre-trip meeting. Please ask for a quote if you would like to take advantage of this offer.

Colour Transparency (E6 B slide) Films:

Velvia 50 iso - 35 mm - 36 exp

Provia 100 iso - 35 mm - 36 exp

Velvia 50 iso B120 mm

Provia 100 iso - 120 mm

Velvia 50 iso - 5@x 4@(10 sheet box)

Provia 100 iso - 5@x 4@(10 sheet box)

Black and White Neg: (please ask if interested in black & white film)

Itinerary: Kakadu & Nitmiluk Photographic Special

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 This itinerary is subject to change.

Section 1 Kakadu

Day 0 Pre-trip meeting, 6.30 p.m., Pool Side Bar & Restaurant, Holiday Inn Darwin, 122 The Esplanade. **Note.** There are two Holiday Inns next to each other on the Esplanade. The meeting is in the taller one, closer to the roundabout at the end of the street. **This meeting is important.** If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance.

Day 1 Acclimatisation day. 8 a.m. pick up. Pick up is from your accommodation if you have notified us where you are staying at least a week before departure or have made other arrangements at the pre-trip meeting. Otherwise, pick up is from the Mitchell Street Tourist Precinct at 69 Mitchell Street.

Drive to Kakadu via Fogg Dam. Visit Park Headquarters.

Bring towel & toiletries for showers, money for drinks.

Day 2 Yellow Waters cruise and day walk. Overnight in Jabiru accommodation.

Day 3 Drive to Yurmikmik. Motorcar Creek waterfall walk. Begin walk carrying full packs. Bush camp.

Day 4-6 Bush camping, carrying full packs some of the time, day packs at other times.

Day 7 Return to vehicle and drive to Katherine. Overnight in accommodation.

Day 8 Anyone finishing with this section catches a bus back to Darwin.

Section 2 Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge National Park)

Day 7 Those beginning with this section will have to catch a bus from Darwin to Katherine where they will meet the rest of the group at the accommodation that evening.

Day 8 Drive to Nitmiluk and begin walk. Bush camp.

Day 9-13 Bush camping, carrying full packs some days, day packs on others.

Day 14 Finish walk. Drive back to Darwin.