

Kakadu Highlights No. 2: February 18 - March 3, 2018

Experience the wonder of bushwalking in the Wet the easy way. Each part of this trip has been chosen to show you the best that Kakadu has to offer at this time of year. We begin with easy acclimatisation day walks followed by a short two-night walk and finally an eight-night expedition. But even here, we don't carry packs long distances and do day walks from a base camp or two along the way.

Section 1: Warming Up: February 18-23

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 begin with the 300 km drive from Darwin to Kakadu which normally takes three to three and a half hours.

If water levels permit, we'll show you some of the wetlands on a one hour airboat tour at Carmor Plains. To get an idea what it's like, have a look at their photo gallery, <http://www.australiawidesafaris.com.au/photo-galleries/air-boat-tours/>

If time and conditions permit, we may also do a short nature walk at Fogg Dam or the Mamukala Billabong on the way. After lunch, we continue on to the Bowali Centre at Park Headquarters which contains a variety of interesting displays. We then continue to Jabiru where we spend the night at Anbinik. See www.kakadu.net.au/ for more information about Anbinik.



Bush tucker lesson on the Guluyambi tour

If water levels permit, we will do the Guluyambi Aboriginal cultural tour the next day. This tour combines a wetland cruise and a visit to Ubirr. Guluyambi brings you the relationship between Aboriginal people and their land, their culture. This particular tour is only offered for about two months per year when high water on the Magela floodplain gives access to a wetland seen by only a few. The boat dodges and weaves past majestic paperbarks, then glides across shallow floodplains where grasses and lily pads stretch for the surface of the pandanus and mangrove lined wetland. Wildlife, often difficult to spot, is abundant in this rich, secluded environment. Normally, there are two crew, a skipper (who may or may not be Aboriginal) and an Aboriginal guide. The guide will talk of past and present traditional ways, describe bush tucker, demonstrate how hunting tools were made and tell tales of the dreamtime. The guides are proud of their heritage and welcome your questions.

From the boat, we continue by bus to Ubirr, arguably Kakadu's best Aboriginal occupation site. This area is rich in ecological variations and has inspiring panoramic views. Visiting Ubirr at this time of year gives a greater understanding of traditional Aboriginal life as this is the season that the shelters were occupied, the time when traditional food supplies were especially abundant. With tourist crowds and buses gone, we will have the site almost to ourselves. We return to Jabiru and Anbinik where you have the late afternoon free to relax and enjoy the pool or do a scenic flight.

You can see more photos from the Guluyambi tour on our Facebook album, <http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10150643707886928.437006.205216266927&type=3>

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 three days.



Jim Jim Falls from the air



Twin Falls from the air

If anyone wishes to do the scenic flight over Jim Jim and Twin Falls, we will do this on the third morning if we haven't already done it.

From Jabiru, we head off to Gubara (Baroalba Springs). We don our packs and do a short walk along an old 4WD track (or a longer walk if the road is flooded) to Gubara and the first of our swims for the day.



Gubara at normal wet season level – looks inviting



Gubara in full flood. Spectacular, but swimming not recommended.



Gubara camp – a big pool, small sandy beach and plenty of high flat ground in case of a flood.

After the swim, a short, steep climb brings us onto the plateau.

From there it normally takes about an hour and a half to get to our campsite next to a pool which we should have to ourselves. **But**, this is the wet season. If water levels are as shown in the photo at right above, we can wait for them to drop or move on and do something else. Fortunately, floods like this seldom last for very long.

The following day, we leave our packs and do a walk upstream to enjoy more pools and have a look at a few of the many art sites for which the area is famous. In keeping with the wishes of the Aboriginal traditional owners, we do not publish photos of those sites in these notes.

The next day is again an easy one. We put on our packs and retrace our steps to the car. We then drive to Cooina where we visit the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre before doing the late afternoon Yellow Waters cruise.

We spend the night in accommodation at Cooina. The next morning, if the special offer is still in place, we do the early Yellow Waters Cruise. This is the best way to experience Kakadu's wetlands – great to look at but not the best place for a bushwalk.

Maps. 1:50 000 Nourlangie Creek or 1:100 000 Cahill.



Yellow Waters cruise. In the dry season, every seat would be full.

Section 2: Barramundi and Waterfall Creeks: February 22 - March 3

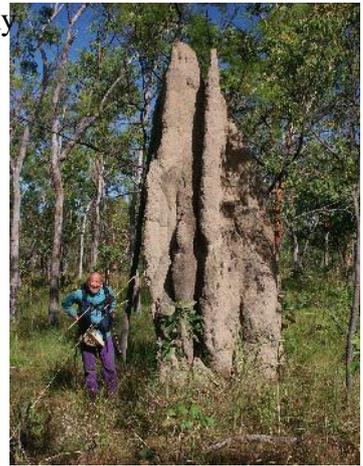
We may do a loop walk up and back from Maguk or we may do a through walk beginning at the bridge over the South Alligator near Gunlom and finishing at Maguk. We may not know which we will do until shortly before departure. The following description is based on the through walk.

The drive from Cooina to the South Alligator bridge is about 150 km, the last 30 of which is on gravel. Beyond this point, the road is closed so we have a somewhat tedious walk along the road to the Gunlom campground. Great views but at this time of year, large crocodiles could be there so we climb to the top where we can finally enjoy a safe swim. With no one else in the area, we can camp as near to the top of the falls as we'd like.



Gunlom as the dry season visitors never see it

From the top of the falls, it's only four kilometres us to the end of a rocky section after which it flattens out. Another six kilometres across a flat plain to the base of the next escarpment. Along the way, we pass the largest termite mounds we have found anywhere on the plateau. Here we find a good pool and a possible campsite.



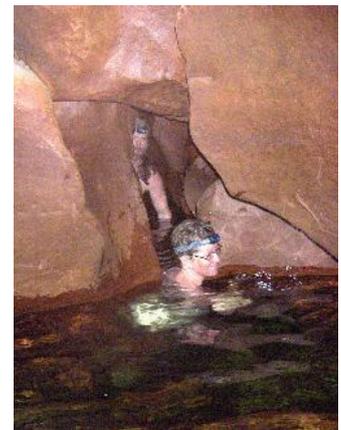
Plateau termite mound



On the first level above the plateau

We may stop here or we may move to first level above where we find some good views, a fascinating swim-through cave and pockets of monsoon forest where you can experience a very different environment.

Everyone who has been through the cave has thought it was an amazing experience. We've even had people come back just so they could do it again. This, however, the wet season. It would be a disaster to get caught in a flash flood so if it looks as if there is any chance of rain in the next hour, we'll have to give it a miss.



Exploring the cave.

The climb to the top of the ridge separating Waterfall and Barramundi Creeks the following morning is the most strenuous of the trip. However,



View from the high point between Waterfall and Barramundi Creeks

we have all day to go about two km, so there is no need to push. Along the way, we find interesting rock forms, more monsoon forest and some of the best ridgetop views in Kakadu.

We finish the day's walk with the descent into Barramundi Valley and a one kilometre walk to a large pool surrounded by huge, shady trees, a great campsite, so nice that we might choose to remain for two nights.



Big pool at upper Barramundi. We camp under some huge shady *Allosyncarpia* trees near the pool.

But there's still more to come. A relatively short walk the following day brings us to another one of the Barramundi tributaries, more beautiful pools, waterfalls and our campsite. The two photos at right show you just how different it looks in the Wet and Dry.



Barramundi side falls, January. The red x shows where the people in the August photo were standing.



Same waterfall as left, August.

From here we walk down to the upper Barramundi Gorge for a final swim. As wandering crocodiles mean it is not safe to cross Barramundi Creek below the falls at this time of year, we cut cross country on the wet season route before dropping down to meet the vehicle track. We meet our vehicle at a locked gate about 5 kilometres in from the main road.

Maps: 1:50 000 Goodparla or 1:100 000 Mundogie. The 1:250 000 Kakadu map shows the whole park but is not suitable for navigation.

Terrain and Difficulty

Overall Level 3 for those who have done section 1. Level 4 for those who have not.

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 3-4.

Section 1. The first short section of the two-night walk is on a marked and maintained trail. This is followed by a short but steep climb after which it flattens out. The day walk will include a substantial amount of rock hopping as well as wading across the creek. Exceptionally heavy rain while we are on the walk could mean we have to swim our packs across a flooded creek on the way back.

Section 2. Whether we do a loop or through walk, the beginning follows a 4WD track. This is followed by a steep climb, on a marked trail at Gunlom, with no track at Maguk. Most of the walk is relatively flat but there are a few steep climbs, all of which are less than 200 metres. 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.

Both sections. 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 places.

None of the walking is on a marked trail. 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 2-4. 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 are likely to 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 as much as later in March.

Hours	Generally 4-6 hours. A few days might be longer, some shorter. Section two rates as level four because of the long first day. Those who have already done section one should not find it particularly difficult.
Packs	Pack weight - level 3. You need to carry up to eight days food. This will include about 2½-3½ kg of the evening meals. You do not need a sleeping bag but you do need a tent and fly.
Art	We visit a number of excellent art sites.
Campsites	Mix of sand and rock ledges. 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	This is the best time to see Kakadu's waterfalls. We will have good pools at almost every campsite and lunch spot.
Lowlights	Heat and humidity. Possible lack of rain can make it more uncomfortable than normal. Exceptional rain can slow us down. Carrying food for a week.
Highlights	Aboriginal guide. Several waterfalls seen at their spectacular best. Great swimming. 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.
Fishing	Not permitted on section one. Possible on part of section two.

Notes — both sections.

We strongly recommend that anyone interested in this trip have a good look at all three of our **Walking in the Wet** pages beginning with www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/wet.shtml

Rain is very likely at this time of year. It is very important that you pack well enough so that you can keep most things in your pack dry, even if you have to pack a wet tent or other wet items. A pack liner is essential at this time of year. Garbages are not satisfactory.

Extreme wet season rains can close roads. There is a small chance that we might have to change one or both of the walks. There is even a small chance that our return to Darwin will be delayed. We recommend not booking a flight the night you are scheduled to return.

Those doing both sections of the trip will have to carry only what they need on each section. Additional food and clothing can be left in the vehicle during the walks.

You should keep a water bottle, your lunch and some money with you in the car during the drives as it may be difficult to get into your pack before the end of the journey.

Itinerary: Kakadu Highlights No. 2

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 All itineraries may be subject to change.

Section 1 Warming Up

Day 0 **Pre-trip meeting, 6.30 p.m., Pool Side Bar & Restaurant, Double Tree Hilton, 122 The Esplanade.** There are two Double Tree Hiltons next door to each other. The correct one is closer to Daly Street and the taller of the two. **This meeting is important.** If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance. Both Double Tree hotels were Holiday Inns until early 2013.

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. If water levels permit, we'll do the Carnor Plains airboat tour on the way. There will be other stops on the way to do short walks and to buy cool drinks, etc. Visit Park Headquarters. Overnight at Anbinik, Jabiru. Bring money for drinks.

Day 2 Guluyambi Aboriginal cultural tour. Billabong boat cruise. Return to Anbinik in Jabiru.

Day 3 Optional flight over Jim Jim and Twin Falls if not already done. Carry packs to Gubara (Baroalba Springs) and up to a base camp above the springs.

Day 4 Day walk above the camp site.

Day 5 Return to vehicle. Drive to Cooina. Visit to Warradjan Cultural Centre. Late afternoon cruise

Day 6 Early morning Yellow Waters cruise. Section 1 ends. Anyone doing only this section catches a bus back to Darwin.

Section 2 Barramundi and Waterfall Creeks

Day 5 Anyone beginning with this section needs to catch a bus to Cooina to meet the group. If they arrive in time, they can join the Cultural walk with senior Aboriginal traditional owner if available. Afternoon cruise at Yellow Waters if not. Overnight at Cooina.

Day 6 Early morning Yellow Waters cruise. Drive to the start of the walk and begin walk.

Day 7-13 Bush camping, carrying full packs most days. Depending on conditions, there might be one or two days where we carry only day packs.

Day 14 Return to vehicle, drive back to Darwin. Drop off at your accom late afternoon.