

DRAFT: Kakadu Light Special: February 9-18, 2012

Walk the wonder of Kakadu in the Wet, mostly without a full pack. Enjoy the waterfalls and wildflowers by day. Relax in comfortable accommodation at night. This trip is a special one combining two of Russell's favourite short overnight walks with some excellent day trips.

The original dates had to be modified so that they did not conflict with an important meeting in Kakadu. This itinerary has been specifically designed to allow Walkabouts owner Russell Willis to share his favourite wet season short walks with whoever might book.

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 time and conditions permit, we may 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 wealth of displays including a multi-screen slide show that takes you through the six seasons that the park experiences each year. We plan to spend at least an hour and a half here, perhaps longer. We then continue to Jabiru where we spend the night at Lakeview. See www.lakeviewkakadu.com.au for more information about Lakeview.



Spoonbills at Fogg Dam, February 2011



Lunch at Ubirr, lush, green and only six people there.

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. This is a totally different experience to visiting in the dry season when you would often have to share it with more than 100 other people. If the Guluyambi cruise is not running, we will substitute a short walk or two at Nourlangie Rock, the most visited area in Kakadu. Few of those who visit do so at this time of year when the land is lush and green and the billabongs are full. We visit a number of art sites and enjoy some magnificent views out across the surrounding plains.

We return to Jabiru and Lakeview where you have the late afternoon free to relax and enjoy the pool or do a scenic flight.

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. Weather permitting, we will make sure that those who wish to do a flight have the opportunity to do so sometime in the first two days.

On the third day, we head off early to Gubara (Baroalba Springs) and the first of our overnight walks. A short walk along an old 4WD track (or a somewhat longer walk if the road is flooded) brings us to the springs and the first of our swims for the day.



Crossing the creek near the start of the Baroalba walk.

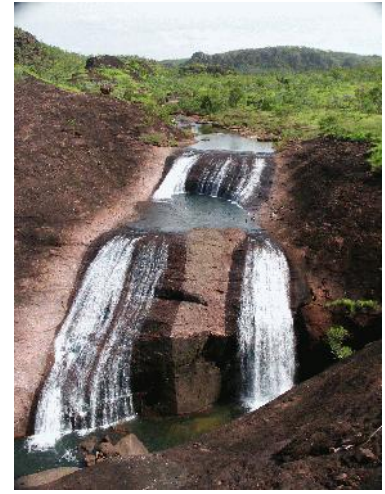


Enjoying one of the many swims on the Baroalba walk.

From there, it's about two hours to our camp site. Spending two nights there allows us to visit some of the amazing art sites which cannot be seen on a day walk.

The following day we visit some of the upstream the art sites, stopping for a number of swims on the way.

The next day brings a 2-3 hour walk back to the car and a moderately long drive to the Yurmikmik walk which brings us to the largest of the waterfalls which is reasonably accessible during the monsoon



With no walking track to get there, we have Lower Motorcar Falls to ourselves.

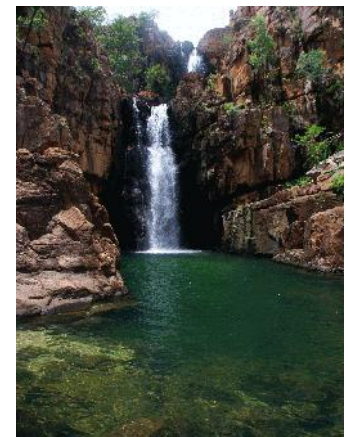
season. We follow the track to Motorcar Creek Falls where we stop for the first of many swims. A relatively short walk there, brings us to our campsite. We spend most of the next day exploring Motorcar and/or Kurrundi Creek before returning to the vehicle and driving to Katherine, our base for a visit to Nitmiluk National Park.



High view over Katherine Gorge, February

Although Nitmiluk is nowhere near as large as Kakadu, the drive from one end to the other is still over 100 kilometres. We begin with an early morning drive to the park where we explore the lower portion of Katherine Gorge. Our normal choice is following the marked trail to Windolf Falls, then hiking overland back to the gorge. This gives us some spectacular views. It is, however, as rugged as any other walk we do on the trip. If time

permits, we may be able to fit in a boat cruise up the lower gorge as well. We return to our vehicle and drive to our next accommodation.



Windolf Falls, February



Depot Creek cascades

The next day we head to Depot Creek Gorge. This small gorge is a favourite of the local bushwalkers. Exactly what we do will depend on the condition of the track and how far we have to walk to get to the start of the gorge. If the road to Yurmikmik is closed, this could be an overnight alternative.

Next comes Litchfield National Park. We may spend the night in Batchelor or we may spend it somewhere in Litchfield. Continuing developments mean that we can't be certain what will be available until closer to the date.

Litchfield contains incredible collection of waterfalls. We plan to spend the entire next day visiting some of these before moving on to the small town of Batchelor where we spend our final night at the Batchelor Resort.

On the final day, we drive to Darwin via the Territory Wildlife Park. Here you can see all of the animals, including the nocturnal ones, that have been unseen around you for most of the last nine days. We spend half a day there before returning to Darwin where you are dropped off at your accommodation. We will be back in time for evening flights for those who wish to fly out that day.

Notes

Exceptionally severe flooding can mean that we have to walk a portion of the vehicle track leading to the Baroalba car park. It can also close the track to Yurmikmik. If that happens we will substitute a walk near the all weather road.

Extreme conditions such as when Cyclone Carlos hit Darwin during this trip in 2011 can force major changes to the itinerary. We have alternatives for **almost** anything that Mother Nature may provide.

Exceptionally dry conditions such as we had in 2002 and 2005 could mean that the Guluyambi Cruise is not running. If this is the case, we will either substitute another tour or move on to a different walk.

The scenic flight costs about \$120 per hour. You can choose from a variety of different flight paths and durations. In 2005, most of the group decided to do a helicopter flight instead.

The road between the town of Katherine and Katherine Gorge is often closed by flooding at this time of year. When this happens, there is normally a boat which can take us across the water and a bus which can bring us into the park. If a sudden flood catches the operator unaware, as happened in 2002 when exceptionally dry conditions suddenly turned into exceptionally wet ones (the depth of the Katherine River went from 4.5 to 17.4 metres while we were there), it may not be possible to do this.

Maps. The 1:250 000 Kakadu park map shows all areas. The 1:50 000 Nourlangie Creek shows the area at Baroalba Creek and Nourlangie Rock. The 1:50 000 Callanan map shows the Yurmikmik walk area. The Nitmiluk and Litchfield Park maps show all the areas where we walk in those parks.

Terrain and Difficulty

Overall Level 0 – you don't carry a full pack at any time.

Climate Level 4. It will be hot (although not as hot as you might think) and it will be humid. The only reason this is not rated as level 5 is that you spend the nights in air conditioning.

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 1-4. Although some sections of these walks are fairly flat and straightforward, most of the walking is off-trail. There are some longish sections of rock scrambling and a couple of short but sharp climbs. If you have never done this before, you may find this fairly difficult. Most of the walking is through open woodland with a spear grass understorey.

Even in the boggiest of seasons, Kakadu and the Top End have 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.

Little of the walking on section one 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 1-4. 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. Much of section two is on trails where the vegetation is not much of a problem. 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, not including breaks. A few days might be longer.
Packs	Pack weight - level 1. Maximum of two nights. No sleeping bag needed.
Art	We visit a variety of art sites., mostly on section one.
Campsites	The two campsites will be next to pools. We will have a group fly which you can sit under during dinner if it is raining.
Swims	This is the best time to see Kakadu's waterfalls. There will be a chance for several swims per day. Many of these will be in pools we have all to ourselves. Ear infections are more likely at this time of year when you spend so much time swimming. If you have even the slightest symptom of an ear ache, make sure you tell the guide immediately. Prevention is easier than cure.
Lowlights	Heat and humidity. Possible lack of rain can make it more uncomfortable than normal. Exceptional rain can force a change of itinerary.
Highlights	Several waterfalls seen at their spectacular best. 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 Kakadu cruises may give you a chance to see one or more large crocodiles but they are harder to spot at this time of the year than during the cooler months.
Fishing	Not permitted on this walk.

Cooina and Jabiru

Cooina is a resort situated in the heart of the Kakadu wetlands. This is an area noted for its wildlife — and mosquitoes. The former make it a great place to visit, the latter make it an uncomfortable place for an overnight walk. The wet season attractions at Cooina are the Yellow Waters cruises and the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre.

The Yellow Waters cruise provides the best way to see the wetlands and allows you to approach the wildlife much closer than you could do on foot. Even if you have done a dry season cruise at Yellow Waters, it is well worth doing again so that you can gain an appreciation of just how much the landscape changes from season to season.

The cultural centre is a few hundred metres from the hotel and campground and provides an insight into the lives of the Aboriginal traditional owners of the park.

Both the cultural centre and the shop offer a variety of souvenirs for sale. Bring extra cash or a credit card if you think that you might wish to purchase anything beyond the drinks, ice creams and lunches that most people purchase there.

In late 2001, the Cooina management decided to close the resort for the wet season and eliminate the first and last cruises of the day. We changed our original itinerary to suit the new times. If they decide to change back, we may change our itinerary again to give you the best experience possible.

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 a caravan park which has a number of bungalows. We believe it is the best value in the town.

We will eat in local restaurants most of the time but we may cook one or more meals at our accommodation. Dinners, including those in restaurants are included in the price of the trip. The cost of drinks is not.

Other Accommodation

Katherine. We will stay in one of the local motels, probably Knotts Crossing. There will be time to shop in the local supermarket.

Batchelor and Litchfield. At the time of writing, we had not made a final decision as to where we will stay.

If you would like to find out more about what the trip is like, go to our website, www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au and click onto Trip Reports on the top menu and click onto Kakadu Light 2002 and/or Kakadu Light February 2007. If you click on Galleries on the top menu and go to Kakadu, you can see more photos from our 2002 and 2005 trips.

Itinerary: Kakadu Light

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 This itinerary is subject to change. Extreme conditions such as we had when Cyclone Carlos hit Darwin in 2011 can force major changes.

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. There will be a stop on the way to do short walks and to buy cool drinks, etc.
Visit Park Headquarters. Optional flight over Jim Jim and Twin Falls. **Overnight at Lakeview**, Jabiru. Phone 8979 3144
Bring clean clothes for showers, money for drinks.

Day 2 Aboriginal cultural tour and billabong boat cruise or walk at Nourlangie. Return to **Lakeview** in Jabiru.

Day 3-4 Two night walk up Baroalba Creek above the Springs.

Day 5 Return to car, Drive to Yurmikmik. Begin Motorcar Creek waterfall walk. Overnight camp near pool.

Day 6 Finish Yurmikmik walk. Drive to Katherine. Overnight at **Knotts Crossing**.

Day 7 Depart Katherine early morning. Drive to Katherine Gorge. Gorge walk, boat cruise if time permits. Return to Katherine accom at Knotts Crossing or move north to Emerald Springs.

Day 8 Drive to Depot Creek, long day walk. Drive to Batchelor after Depot Creek Walk. Overnight in Batchelor or somewhere closer to Litchfield.

Day 9 Drive to Litchfield. Waterfall day walks. Overnight in Batchelor accommodation.

Day 10 Return to Darwin via the Territory Wildlife Park. Arrive mid to late afternoon

A final note. We strongly recommend that anyone booking this trip have a look at our new (November 2011) wet season page, www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/wet.shtml This links to two other pages, The Wet Season — What to Expect and The Wet Season — Preparing for Your Trip. Please make sure you study them all.