

Kakadu Light: February 11-24, 2018

Walk the wonder of Kakadu in the Wet. Enjoy the spectacular waterfalls and wildflowers by day. Relax in comfortable accommodation most nights, camp next to secluded bush pools after short walks on the others.

We walk, we know. While the weather can be somewhat unpredictable at this time of year, our knowledge of these areas means we can give you the very best for whatever conditions we experience.

Section 1: Kakadu: February 11-19

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. We'll take longer because we'll be stopping.

If water levels permit, we'll show you some of the wetlands on a one hour air boat 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 and/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.

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.



Rainy view on the Barrk walk at Nourlangie



Bush tucker lesson on the Guluyambi tour



Aerial view of Twin Falls in the Wet – there's often more water than this.

You can see more photos from the Guluyambi tour on our Facebook album,

<http://www.facebook.com/mediaset/?set=a.10150643707886928.437006.205216266927&type=3>

The next day brings a short walk or two – or a single long walk – 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.



Gubara at normal wet season level – looks inviting



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

On the third day, we head off early to Gubara (Baroalba Springs). A 3 km walk along an old 4WD track brings us to Gubara and the first of our swims for the day. If water levels permit, we will carry overnight packs with us, then do another 2½ km to a two-night camp from which we can explore some of the many art sites, something which would be impossible on a day walk.

Our camp is next to our own private pool where you have a choice of sleeping on the flat rock ledges or on the sandy spots between the grass. The two photos at right are only about 50 metres apart.



Baroalba camp – sandy sites

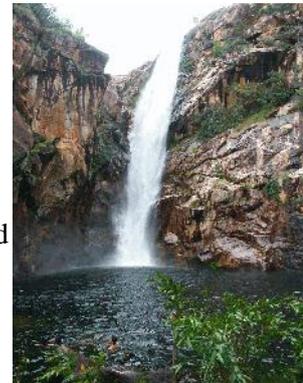


Baroalba pool and rock ledge camp

The next morning return to our vehicles and drive to Cooina,

stopping to visit the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre on the way. We finish the day with the afternoon Yellow Waters cruise. To get an idea what it's like, have a look at our Yellow Waters photo gallery. www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/galleries/oldsite/yellowgal.shtml

Every cruise is different so, if Cooina is still having their special deal on two cruises, we will do the early morning cruise before we head off to the southern part of the park and the Yurmikmik walk. This walk takes us to the largest of the Kakadu waterfalls which are reasonably accessible during the monsoon season. We follow the track to Motorcar Creek Falls where we stop for the first of many swims. If we're feeling a little bit ambitious, we can do an extra 1½ kilometres (each way) and include Kurrundie Falls.



Motorcar Falls.

Late that afternoon, we do the 180 kilometre drive to Katherine where we spend the night before going to Nitmiluk National Park.

The following morning those doing only the first section relax at the accommodation until the bus to Darwin arrives.

Notes — Section 1

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.

Exceptionally good conditions at Nourlangie might mean we can do the full 10 km Barrk walk on our day visit.

Exceptionally dry conditions such as we have had in some years could mean that neither the Carmor Plains air boat nor the Guluyambi Cruise is running. If this is the case, we will move on to a different walk.

If Cooina is still offering the two cruise special, we may do the afternoon cruise the day we arrive and the early morning cruise the next day.

The scenic flight past Jim Jim and Twin Falls costs about \$250 for a one hour. Shorter flights are available as are helicopter flights. As with the boats, bad weather can make the flights impossible.

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 Baroalba Creek and Nourlangie Rock. The 1:50 000 Callanan map shows the Yurmikmik walk area.

Section 2: Nitmiluk, Depot Ck, Litchfield & Territory Wildlife Park: February 19-24

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 do a gorge cruise and a walk to explore the lower portion of Katherine Gorge.

We can choose from a variety of different walks to different parts of the gorge. Which one we choose will depend on the interests and abilities of the group as well as on the conditions at the time. It may be possible to walk one way and catch a boat the other. Whatever we do, you will have seen far more than those who stick to the cruise or the marked trails.



Upper Edith Falls, February

The next day we head north, stopping at Edith Falls in the northern portion of Nitmiluk. Edith Falls is a series of drops over a distance of about a kilometre. Above and below the falls there are deep, inviting pools where we will spend a great deal of the day before driving on to Emerald Springs where we spend the night in their rooms.



One of Litchfield's lesser known pools

at the Litchfield Safari Camp, <http://www.litchfieldsafaricamp.com.au/>. If we spend one night, we will spend the other camped on the Tableland track, only about 3 km from where we begin. Our final night will be in accommodation in Batchelor.

On the final day, we drive to Darwin via the Territory Wildlife Park, www.territorywildlifepark.com.au/ This is a zoo with a difference as it highlights only the animals native to our region. You can see all of the animals, including the nocturnal ones, that have been unseen around you for most of the last 12 days. We spend half a day there before returning to Darwin where you are dropped off at your accommodation.



Southern Rockhole, Nitmiluk



Depot Creek swim stop

The next day we head to Depot Creek where we find a wonderful small gorge unknown even to most locals. You will learn why owner Russell Willis has run regular overnight wet season trips there for the Darwin Bushwalking club for the past few years. In a dry year, we might be able to drive all the way to the creek. In a wet one, we might need to do an extra 3 km in each direction. It's worth it. We may camp near the top of the gorge or we may move on to accommodation.

Next comes Litchfield National Park with its incredible collection of waterfalls. We'll have time to visit several of these and will spend one or two nights in tents



Up close with a wedge-tailed eagle at the Wildlife Park

Notes — Section 2

Exceptionally severe flooding can mean that we cannot cross the Katherine River to do the walk to the northern Rockhole and/or Biddlecombe. It can also close the roads to Edith Falls and Litchfield. If we cannot do the intended walks, we will substitute something else appropriate to the conditions.

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 Nitmiluk and Litchfield park maps show all the areas where we walk.

Terrain and Difficulty

Overall Level 1 – you never carry more than two day’s food and carry full packs only short distances.

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 **Section 1.** Level 3-4. 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.

Section 2. Level 1-3. Most of the walking on this section is on marked trails. Some will be off-trail and may include a bit of rock-hopping. As with section one, most of the walking is through open woodland with a spear grass understorey.

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.

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. You never carry more than two day’s food and carry full packs only short distances.

Art We visit a variety of art sites, mostly on section one.

Campsites Sandy beaches or grassy areas nearby if water levels are high.

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.



With our group fly, you can stay dry even when it's raining.

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. The two photos above were taken in Litchfield on our 2005 Kakadu Light trip. The blue winged kookaburra was unusually tame. The water monitor was about a metre long.

Fishing Not permitted in Kakadu and not good elsewhere.

Maps To get a better idea where these walks go see the links below.

The Top End showing Kakadu in relation to Darwin: www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/images/top_end_map.jpg

Kakadu National Park: www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/images/maps/kakadu_350.jpg

Cooinda and Jabiru

Cooinda 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 Cooinda 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.

Jabiru is a small mining town with the kind of shops you would expect to find in a small country town anywhere in Australia. Anbinik is a caravan park which has a variety of accommodation. 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.

If you would like to find out more about what the trip is like, you can see two trip reports on our website. Kakadu Light 2002. www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/kaklight02.shtml and Kakadu Light 2007 www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/pdf/dixon-kak-light07.pdf

Itinerary: Kakadu Light

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, 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, the taller of the two and the only one with a swimming pool. **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 Carmor Plains air boat 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** Nourlangie Rock walk or walks. Return to Anbinik.
- Day 4** Optional flight over Jim Jim and Twin Falls if not already done. Walk to Baroalba Springs and, water levels permitting, Baroalba Creek above the Springs. This means carrying an overnight pack for about 3 km on a marked trail and another 2½ km off trail. Bush camp next to our own private pool.
- Day 5** Day walk from bush camp.
- Day 6** Return to the vehicles. Drive to the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre. Afternoon cruise at Overnight at Coinda.
- Day 7** Early morning Yellow Waters cruise. Drive to Yurmikmik. Motorcar Creek waterfall walk. Return to vehicle. Drive to Katherine. Overnight in motel accommodation.
- Day 8** Section one ends. Those ending here can catch the first Greyhound bus to Darwin that morning.

Section 2 Nitmiluk, Litchfield and the Wildlife 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** Bid farewell to those finishing with section one. Depart Katherine early morning. Drive to Katherine Gorge. Gorge cruise and walk. Return to Katherine accommodation.
- Day 9** Drive to Emerald Springs via walk at Edith Falls. Overnight at Emerald Springs.
- Day 10** Begin Depot Creek walk. Bush camp or accommodation.
- Day 11-12** Drive to Litchfield. Visit waterfalls. Basic tent accommodation at the Litchfield Safari Camp.
- Day 13** Finish Litchfield walks, overnight in Batchelor accommodation.
- Day 14** Return to Darwin via the Territory Wildlife Park. You should be back in time to catch flights anytime after 6 pm.