

DRAFT: Kakadu Light: February 5-14, 2009

Walk the wonder of Kakadu in the Wet without a full pack. Enjoy the waterfalls and wildflowers by day. Relax in comfortable accommodation at night. This is the only monsoon season trip we offer in Kakadu where you do not need to carry a full pack and camp out at night.

Section 1: Kakadu: February 5-10

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.

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 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. 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 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 swims for the day. We spend the rest of the day exploring the area near the springs before returning to Lakeview. We should get some and spectacular views and visit at least one major art site. Exactly where we go will be determined by the water levels as well as the interest and energy of the group.

The next day brings 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.

From Nourlangie, we move to Cooina where we do a wetlands cruise and visit the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre. From Cooina we drive to the southern edge of the park where we spend the night at the Mary River Roadhouse.

The next morning we drive to the Yurmikmik walk which brings us to the largest of the waterfalls which is reasonably accessible during the monsoon season. We follow the track to Motorcar Creek Falls where we stop for the first of many swims. We spend most of the rest of the day walking along Motorcar and/or Kurrundie Creeks, enjoying the pools and scenery of southern Kakadu. We then return to the vehicle for 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 from Katherine.

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 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.

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, Litchfield and Territory Wildlife Park: February 9-14

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. 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.

The next day we get a lift across the river and explore one or two of the waterfalls that line the northern escarpment. Those who do the walk during the dry season can hardly imagine the beauty of the Rockhole Falls and pool in the Wet. It is such a wonderful place that we may decide to spend the day there or we may double our distance and visit Biddlecombe Falls and Gorge. Whichever we choose, you will have a wonderful day to remember. We return to Katherine and our accommodation that night.

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 Litchfield National Park. We spend the night in the safari tents at the Monsoon Café camping area. Although there is no airconditioning, the safari tents are well ventilated and give you one night to get the feel of what it is like for those who live here without air conditioning.

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.

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 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 **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 0. Day pack only.

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

Campsites None. You are in accommodation every night.

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.

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.

In late 2001, the Cooinda 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 airconditioned, two bedroom 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

Mary River Roadhouse. This is a small resort situated at the southern entrance to Kakadu. There are dorms, budget twins (shared bath) and standard motel rooms. We plan to use the budget twins. You can upgrade to standard motel rooms for an additional charge.

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

Batchelor and Litchfield. If conditions change at the places named above, we may change where we stay.

If you would like to find out more about what the trip is like, go to our website and click onto Trip Reports page and click onto Kakadu Light 2002. www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au

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, 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. Overnight at Lakeview, Jabiru.
Bring towel & toiletries for showers, money for drinks.

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

Day 3 Day walk to Baroalba Springs and Baroalba Creek above the Springs.
Return to Lakeview

Day 4 Optional flight over Jim Jim and Twin Falls if not already done. Nourlangie Rock walk or walks. Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre. Afternoon cruise at Yellow Waters Drive to Mary River Roadhouse.

Day 5 Drive to Yurmikmik. Motorcar Creek waterfall walk. Drive to Katherine.
Overnight in motel accommodation.

Day 6 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 5 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 6 Bid farewell to those finishing with section one. Depart Katherine early morning. Drive to Katherine Gorge. Gorge walk. Return to Katherine accommodation..

Day 7 Catch a boat across the river and do a day walk to the Rockhole and possibly Biddlecombe Cascades. Return to Katherine accommodation.

Day 8 Drive to Batchelor via Edith Falls. Walk at Edith Falls. Overnight on Litchfield border.

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

Day 10 Return to Darwin via the Territory Wildlife Park.