

# Kakadu

*A land of spiritual richness and ancient history*

A UNIQUELY AUSTRALIAN INVITATION

**K**akadu – Australia’s largest terrestrial national park – lies at the northern fringe of the Northern Territory, framed by the ancient Arnhem Land Escarpment which rises to 330 metres above the plains.

This landscape is so vast that its 19,000 square kilometers are divided into seven distinct regions. It includes high stone plateau and forest woodland, monsoon rainforest and flood plains, mangrove-fringed estuaries and the beaches of the Arafura Sea.

In Aboriginal legend, spirits shaped Kakadu during the dawn of creation, known as the Dreamtime. These spirit ancestors journeyed across the country creating landforms, plants, animals and the Bininj/Mungguy people. The tracks left by these ancestors are known as Dreaming tracks.

These ancestors also created laws to live by. They defined kinship, created language, and taught the people how to look after their country and become the land’s custodians.

Kakadu’s human history dates back at least 50,000 years. The region has a very high concentration of Indigenous cave paintings, rock carvings and archaeological sites, with many Aboriginal artefacts found in the escarpment and floodplain country. These archeological finds illuminate the life led by the Kakadu’s original inhabitants, whose descendants still live in the region today.

Kakadu is not only a place of cultural and historical significance; it is a biological wonderland, teeming with mammal, reptile, bird and insect life. At its heart is the South Alligator River, so named by a 19th century explorer who mistook the native crocodiles for alligators.

There are nearly 60 species of mammals living in the park, including kangaroos, dingoes, possums, bats and dusky rats. The park is famous for its reptiles. Salt and freshwater crocodiles are common; so too are frill-necked lizards and large monitor lizards called goannas.

Kakadu is a paradise for bird watchers, with more than 280 species of birds in residence. Thousands of water birds, pelicans, egrets, herons, ducks, spoonbills, sea eagles, and dancing brolgas congregate on Kakadu’s flood plain to breed and feed.

Kakadu’s Aboriginal people recognise six separate seasons throughout the course of the year. At opposite ends of this life cycle are the wet and dry seasons, characterised by torrential rain and mud-cracking drought.

Sometimes, lightning strikes Kakadu up to 80 times a day; and the rains, when they come, last for 100 days. Kakadu’s animals and birds congregate and disperse on the flood plains as the billabongs fill and then empty again.

The United Nations has conferred double World Heritage status on Kakadu, in recognition of its natural and cultural attributes. Kakadu is also an outstanding example of sustainable tourism, representing an effective partnership between traditional owners, governments and the tourism industry.

Take time to explore the wonders of Kakadu. Its spiritual richness and its history command respect and inspire enlightenment and adventure.

## Key facts

- Kakadu National Park covers 19,804 square kilometres within the Alligator Rivers region of the Northern Territory. The park’s southern axis runs 150 kilometres from the coast to the southern hills, and 120 kilometres east from the Arnhem Land sandstone plateau to its western boundary.
- The Aboriginal Land Rights Act of 1976 ensures that around 50 per cent of the land in Kakadu National Park is Aboriginal owned. The land is leased back to the Australian Government so that it can be used as a national park.
- Kakadu National Park first received World Heritage listing in 1981.
- The park was expanded and re-listed in 1987, and again in 1992.
- Kakadu is proclaimed under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act of 1999 and listed on the Register of the National Estate because of its national significance to the Australian people.

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- The wetlands of Kakadu are recognised for their international significance under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (known as the Ramsar Convention).
- Aboriginal people have lived in the Kakadu region for at least 50,000 years. There are more than 5,000 Indigenous art sites in Kakadu National Park.

## Things to see and do

- Drop into the Bowali Visitor Centre near Jabiru for advice on what to see and where to stay.
- Discover ancient Aboriginal rock art in its original setting at Nourlangie Rock and Ubirr.
- Climb up to the lookout at Ubirr at sunset for spectacular views over the Nardab floodplain.
- Trade five stars for five million stars and camp out at one of the many sites in the national park.
- Walk through the fascinating wetlands of *Mamukala* with its brilliant bird life. Walk through monsoon forest and woodlands along a billabong on the *Gu-ngarre Walk*.
- Fly over Kakadu's waterfalls during the wet season.
- Spot crocodiles on the East Alligator River during the dry season, or on Magela Creek during the wet season.
- Explore the Jim Jim area by 4WD during the dry season or take a boat shuttle ride to Twin Falls.
- Explore the spectacular wildlife along the walking trails and boardwalks of the Yellow Water Wetlands.
- Take a dip in the clear waters at Gunlom. It featured in the movie *Crocodile Dundee*.
- Absorb the spirituality of the area's living culture at the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre.
- Join a tour with an Aboriginal guide through wetlands and spectacular escarpments to Gunbalanya in Arnhem Land.

## Suggested itinerary

Kakadu National Park is 171 kilometres east of Darwin, the capital of Australia's Northern Territory. The Arnhem Highway links Kakadu to Darwin, while the Kakadu Highway links Pine Creek and Katherine.

Visit the Mamukala wetlands, just east of the South Alligator River on the Arnhem Highway. Thousands of magpie geese congregate to feed here between September and October. Enjoy a walk on the Gungarre trail, a two-hour circular track through monsoon forest and woodlands.

Continue on to Jabiru. Daily commercial flights from Jabiru's airport provide a bird's eye view of Kakadu and its varied habitats.

The Bowali Visitor Centre, approximately five kilometres west of Jabiru, offers a wealth of information about the region. 4WD tours, boat tours and Arnhem Land tours can be booked from here.

Further south are the Yellow Water wetlands, part of the South Alligator River floodplain. Commercial boat cruises offered throughout

the year provide an excellent opportunity to see the varied birdlife. The Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre, built in the shape of the local pig-nosed turtle, provides detailed information about Aboriginal culture in Kakadu.

Gunlom is the main attraction of the Mary River area. Climb to the top of Gunlom Falls for spectacular views of the escarpment and surrounding countryside. A two-hour walk leads to the Maguk Plunge Pool. A series of interconnected walking tracks called the Yurmikmik Walks provide an excellent wet season experience.

The Jim Jim Falls area is only accessible by 4WD in the dry season. It is located 43 kilometres east off the Kakadu Highway south of the Bowali Centre. Don't miss the Twin Falls Gorge and Budjmi Lookout, as well as the Jim Jim Falls Plunge Pool.

Access to Twin Falls is by a boat shuttle service. The best way to see the falls in all their glory is via a scenic flight in the wet season.



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