



PURE, NATURAL, WILD AUSTRALIA

With its prehistoric landscape, wilderness, wildlife and sense of spirituality, Kakadu is designed for wild adventure. **BY BRIAR JENSEN**



Kakadu National Park, 133 kilometres from Darwin, is Australia's largest park at nearly 20,000 square kilometres, and boasts dual World Heritage status for both cultural and natural heritage.

It's pure, natural, wild Australia and the best way to explore it is by driving – and you don't need a four-wheel drive. Good quality sealed roads mean you can do most of it in a family sedan, towing a caravan or driving a motor home.

Spend a couple of days looking around Darwin, then allow at least three days to explore Kakadu. En route stop off at the Adelaide River for a Jumping Crocodile Cruise where you can watch monster crocs leap wildly out of the water for chunks of meat. Call into Window on the Wetlands visitor centre too, where kids learn about this ecosystem through touchscreens and interactive displays. Be sure to view the immensity of the wetlands from the top floor.

To really appreciate Kakadu you need to immerse yourself in its cultural heritage.

Take time to talk to the traditional owners, whose ancestors have lived here for 50,000 years. Let the kids collect bush tucker, learn to throw a spear and go spotting crocs for a wild adventure they'll never forget.

A good place to start is Mamukala Wetlands where you can watch thousands of birds from a bird hide or observation tower, then stroll around the edge of the wetlands.

Bowali Visitor Centre in Jabiru has up-to-date information and brochures, and if finances permit, book a scenic flight over the park, including Jim Jim falls, and let the kids pretend they're Indiana Jones.

Step back thousands of years at the rock art galleries at Ubirr. During the dry season, park rangers give talks on Aboriginal art and culture and they love explaining it to the kids. It's worth climbing the rocky outcrop for a magnificent vista across the Nardab floodplains. Cruise the East Alligator River where you'll hear about Aboriginal mythology, bush survival skills and the river food chain.

Let the kids imagine living under rock



YELLOW WATER BILLABONGS



DESTINATION: NT

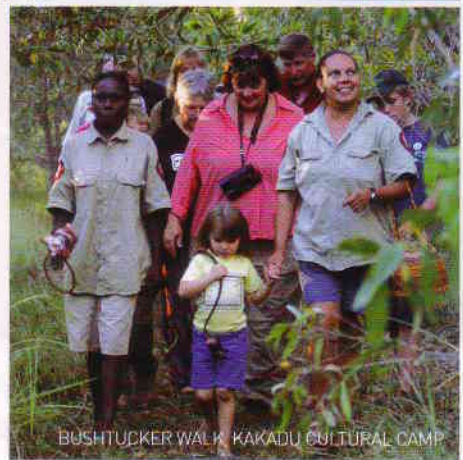
JIM JIM FALLS

shelters at Nourlangie. The 1.5-kilometre track passes stunning paintings, including 'Lightning Man', and a short climb rewards with sweeping views of the sandstone escarpment.

Another favourite with the kids is Kakadu Culture Camp at Muirella Park. Learn spear throwing, basket weaving and didgeridoo playing before a traditional campfire dinner of barramundi, buffalo and damper. Follow up with a night wildlife cruise of Djarradjin Billabong and you'll learn to 'smell' crocodiles as well as spotlight them.

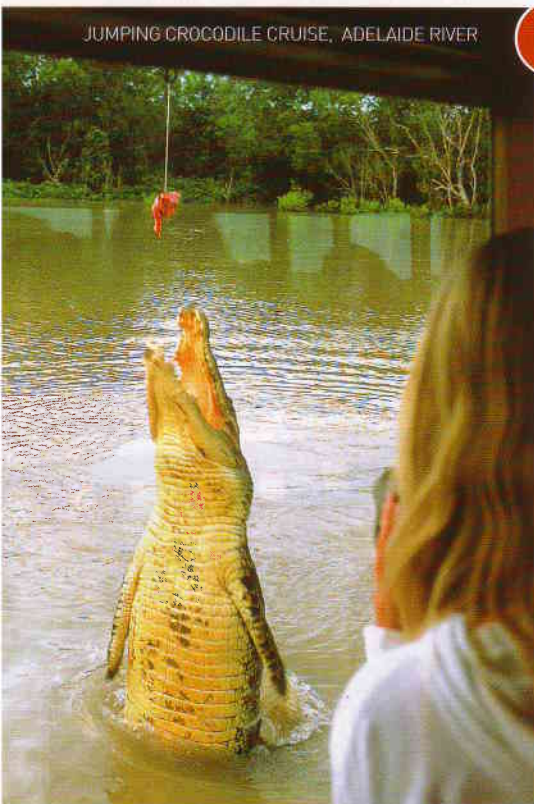
On the way to Cooinda, visit the Warradjan Cultural Centre, before taking a cruise on Yellow Water Billabong where the locals will teach you how to spot crocodiles and roosting birds. Learn about gathering food and even sample some waterlily stems.

To finish your wild adventure, head to Gunlom Falls where it feels like you're standing on the edge of the world. You can usually swim in the plunge pool here, but check there are no crocodiles trapped after the wet season! Crocs rule, after all. ■



BUSHBUCKER WALK, KAKADU CULTURAL CAMP

IMAGE COURTESY OF GLEN CAMPBELL



JUMPING CROCODILE CRUISE, ADELAIDE RIVER

i MORE INFORMATION

GETTING THERE: Flights to Darwin are available from all capital cities. Two and four-wheel drive vehicles and motor homes can be hired in Darwin.

ACCOMMODATION: There are hotels, motels, caravan and camping sites in Kakadu to suit varying budgets. It pays to book hotels and motels, but caravan and camping sites are rarely booked out. Check out the Kakadu National Park and Tourism NT websites.

OUT AND ABOUT: Buy the Beginner's Guide to Australian Aboriginal Art (\$6.95 at the Art Gallery in Darwin), which will have you and the kids interpreting paintings, rock art and Dreamtime stories in no time.

VISITOR INFORMATION: Let the kids go wild and choose their own adventures from brochures ordered through Tourism

Northern Territory or from the following websites:

Tourism Northern Territory
Ph: 13 67 68
www.travelnt.com

Kakadu National Park
Ph: 08 8938 1120
www.environment.gov.au/parks/kakadu

Kakadu Culture Camp
Ph: 08 8979 2048
www.kakaduculturecamp.com

Warradjan Cultural Centre
Ph: 08 8979 0145
www.kakadu-attractions.com

Spectacular Jumping Crocodile Cruise
Ph: 08 8978 9077
www.jumpingcrocodile.com.au