

DRAFT: Kakadu Highlights No. 2: February 22 - March 7, 2009

Note: This is a substantial revision of our original itinerary which was offered through 2005. The first section has been lengthened and a night's accommodation has been added. Section two is a special walk accompanied by an Aboriginal guide. The addition of the accommodation and the Aboriginal guide means that the price will have to rise. Our current estimate is \$1950 for the full trip, \$1250 for section one, \$950 for section two. Anyone booking before we announce the final price will get the lower of our estimate and the new price.

Section 1: Motorcar and Kurrundie Creeks: February 22 - March 2

The Motorcar-Kurrundie loop is the best, easily accessible walk in southern Kakadu at this time of year. The new schedule allows us to travel at a more leisurely pace, include more walking without full packs and see a few special places we would not have been able to include in the original itinerary.

The walk begins at the Yurmikmik car park in the southern part of Kakadu, about 310 kilometres and four to five hours from Darwin. We start with a fairly flat 45 minute walk along a marked trail to the main falls and pool on Motorcar Creek — a beautiful spot and our first swim stop. From here we may decide to set up camp and do a day walk or move directly to the upper part of Motorcar Creek.

Motorcar Creek splits into several branches not far above the falls. These offer one of the most concentrated collections of small waterfalls and pools in Kakadu. We gradually work our way up along one or more of these branches, stopping for a swim any time a pool is just too inviting to resist. We may do some of these with full packs. We will almost certainly spend at least one day exploring without full packs.

The central section of Kurrundie Creek is beautiful, with a number of deep pools and nice waterfalls. The walking is, however, fairly difficult. Depending on the wishes of the group, we may do a short walk to Kurrundie and follow it down to the main falls or we may follow a different branch of Motorcar back to the main falls.

The lower loop, which we may do with day packs or full packs depending on where we decide to camp takes us through lower Kurrundie Gorge with its steep walls and long pools and along the lower section of Motorcar Creek with its lovely waterfall.

Whichever route we have chosen, a short walk on the final day brings us back to the vehicle for the drive to Pine Creek where we spend the night in budget accommodation. (If no one is joining section two, we may stop at Mary River instead.)

Maps. 1:50 000 Callanan or 1:100 000 Ranford Hill topographic.

Section 2: Edith-Stow Loop: March 2-7

This is the first time in many years that we have been able to offer this walk, the first time ever that we will be accompanied by an Aboriginal guide.

After meeting anyone joining this section in Pine Creek on the evening of the sixth, we drive to Edith Falls where we meet our Aboriginal guide. We follow the river upstream past the falls to our first camp site near a long pool. The following morning we head up a broad valley, over a small plateau and down to a creek which brings us to Stow Creek and a magnificent series of four waterfalls. We spend a full day here before following Stow downstream for some distance before turning across the plain and back to Edith Falls where we drop off our Aboriginal guide before returning to Darwin.

Maps. 1:50 000 Edith River or 1:100 000 Katherine topographic.

Notes on section two.

Depending on the wishes of the Aboriginal guide, we may cut a day off this section and add it to the first.

Terrain and Difficulty

Overall Level 3

Climate Level 5. It will be hot (although not as hot as you might think) and it will be humid. 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 3-4.

Section 1. Whichever route we choose, the beginning of the walk is fairly flat and straightforward. There is a short but sharp climb up at Motorcar Falls and a similar climb down at Kurrundie. There will be a substantial amount of rock hopping along the creeks. The creeks are likely to be low enough so that swimming across with packs will not be necessary. Exceptional rain could cause this to change.

Section 2. The first short section of the walk is on a marked and maintained trail. Much of the rest of the walk is relatively flat, but there are some short, steep climbs and some rock-hopping. As with the first section, exceptionally heavy rain could mean we have to swim our packs across a flooded creek.

Both sections. Even in the boggiest of seasons, Kakadu and Nitmiluk 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 sections.

None of the walking 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 2-4. 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.

The spear grass normally reaches its peak in March, often three or four metres tall in some areas (much shorter in others). We are likely to 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 as much as later in March.

Hours Generally 4-6 hours. A few days might be longer. Section two rates as level four because of the long first day. Those who have already done section one seldom find it particularly difficult.

Packs **Pack weight** - level 3. You need to carry a week's food. This will include about 2½-3½ kg of the evening meals. You do not need a sleeping bag but you do need a tent and fly.

Art We visit a number of art sites, but not as many as on some of our other trips.

Campsites Mix of sand and rock ledges. Most sites are good to excellent but we have to avoid some of our dry season campsites which could get flooded. You are unlikely to see anyone else anywhere along most of the routes.

Swims	This is the best time to see Kakadu's waterfalls. We will have good pools at almost every campsite and lunch spot.
Lowlights	Heat and humidity. Possible lack of rain can make it more uncomfortable than normal. Exceptional rain can slow us down. Carrying food for a week.
Highlights	Aboriginal guide. Several waterfalls seen at their spectacular best. Great swimming. 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.
Fishing	Not permitted on section one. Possible on part of section two.

Notes — both sections.

Rain is very likely at this time of year. It is very important that you pack well enough so that you can keep most things in your pack dry, even if you have to pack a wet tent or other wet items. A pack liner is essential at this time of year. Garbages are not satisfactory.

Extreme wet season rains can close roads. There is a small chance that our return to Darwin will be delayed. We recommend not booking a flight the night you are scheduled to return.

Those doing both sections of the trip will have to carry only what they need on each section. Additional food and clothing can be left in the vehicle during the walks.

You should keep a water bottle, your lunch and some money with you in the car during the drives as it may be difficult to get into your pack before the end of the journey.

Itinerary: Kakadu Highlights No. 2

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 All itineraries may be subject to change.

Section 1 Motorcar and Kurrundie Creeks

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 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 Darwin Transit Centre at 69 Mitchell Street. Drive to Kakadu via Pine Creek. There will be a stop along the way to buy cool drinks, etc. Begin the walk. Bush camp, carrying full packs.

Day 2-8 Bush camping, carrying full packs some days, day packs others.

Day 9 Return to vehicle and drive to accommodation, arriving mid to late afternoon.

Day 10 Those finishing here catch a bus back to Darwin.

Section 2 Edith-Stow Loop

Day 9 Those beginning with this section meet group at our accommodation in Pine Creek. To make the connection, you can catch a Greyhound bus to Pine Creek. Check timetable when you book. Any arrival is satisfactory.

Day 10 Drive to Edith Falls, meet Aboriginal guide, begin walk. Bush camp.

Day 11-13 Bush camping, carrying full packs.

Day 14 Return to vehicle, drive back to Darwin. Drop off at your accomm late afternoon.