

Kakadu Highlights No. 11: October 4-17, 2009

This is a lazy trip for a hot time of year. Wherever possible, we will start walking early in the morning and have long lunch breaks where you can read, relax, swim and enjoy the bush around you.

Section 1: Twin Falls Creek: October 4-6

This is one of the easiest walks we offer, minimal pack carrying combined with day walks and swim stops along one of the most scenic creeks in Kakadu.

The 350 kilometre drive from Darwin to Twin Falls normally takes most of the first day. If possible, we will climb up and camp at the top of Twin Falls as the camp below Twin Falls is in an area where swimming is neither safe nor permitted. The walk to the top goes up a fairly steep hill, through an interesting sandstone maze and out to the creek above Twin Falls.

If we arrive early enough, it may be possible to take a boat up the gorge and visit the base of the falls with an Aboriginal guide. There will be an extra charge for this.

Once at the top of the falls, we stop, have a break and take time to enjoy the views. A simple side trip is a climb to an Aboriginal art site on a high point for more views. We spend the rest of the day and the following one exploring and enjoying the shady rock ledges, sandy beaches and cool pools that we find in the seven kilometre long upper gorge. This section finishes with the climb back down to the vehicle and the drive to Cooina.

If no one is leaving or joining at this point, we will move straight to Jim Jim without going to Cooina. If the guide does go to Cooina to drop someone off or pick someone up, those continuing on to section two will have the option of remaining at Jim Jim Gorge.

Maps. 1:50 000 Jim Jim Falls or 1:100 000 Jim Jim.

Terrain and Difficulty (more info in the general description after section four)

Overall	Level 1
Terrain	Level 1. The climb to the top of Twin Falls is steep but straightforward along a well defined track. The walk along Twin Falls Creek is mostly flat and easy with a minimal amount of rock hopping. This is one of the easiest walks we offer.
Vegetation	Level 1-2. Mostly open woodland or open areas along the creek.
Hours	You carry your full pack for only 1-2 hours on the way up and again on the way back. Day walk will be fairly long.
Packs	Pack weight - level 1. You need to carry only 2 days food. You need a sleeping bag but are unlikely to need a tent.
Art	We may visit a couple of minor sites on this walk.
Campsites	Sand or rock ledges. Excellent site near the water. We should have it to ourselves.
Swims	Swimming is excellent. Good pools all along the creek.
Lowlights	The very long drive to the start of the walk. Possible tourist crowds at Twin Falls.
Highlights	View from the top of Twin Falls. Good weather. Great swimming holes. Light packs.

Maps. 1:50 000 Jim Jim Falls or 1:100 000 Jim Jim.

Section 2: Jim Jim and Rainforest Gorge: October 6-11

The drive from Cooina to Jim Jim is less than 100 kilometres but may take more than two hours due to the rough nature of the final ten kilometres of the track. After a swim at Jim Jim Creek, we begin the four kilometre walk to the entrance to the one of the longest rainforest gorges in Kakadu. Although it is much smaller than nearby Jim Jim and Twin Falls Creeks, the creek which created this gorge continues to flow long after its neighbours have stopped.

As camping is not permitted in Rainforest Gorge, we normally camp at the base of the gorge. The walk up the gorge is only six kilometres long but it is strenuous — a continuous scramble over boulders and rocks of all sizes. However, it is very shady and the gorge contains several good pools where we can stop for a swim so we normally take a full day for the walk. However, if the drive to Cooina proves unnecessary, we may decide to do the walk to the top of the gorge on the first day.

The camp site on the flat rock ledges at the top of the rainforest gorge is magnificent. Beautiful waterfalls cascade through a series of inviting pools under a shady rainforest canopy. If time permits, we will spend at least half a day here before pushing on across the plateau to Jim Jim Creek. A lack of landmarks along the way means that we never take the exact same route. A lack of water means that we must reach the pools on Jim Jim Creek that day.

Once at Jim Jim, we have a choice. We may decide to head upstream to get further from the marked trail or we may camp near where we hit the creek. Whichever we choose, the area near Jim Jim Creek is fairly flat so the walking is relatively easy. If time permits, we will spend a day walking upstream to the monoliths, four large rock pillars on the edge of a large pool. Along the way, we stop to examine some Aboriginal art and cool off with a swim or two along the way.

We then head back downstream to the top of Jim Jim Falls, over 200 metres from top to bottom with a final sheer drop of 160 metres, we enjoy spectacular views down the gorge and across the plains to the distant escarpment on the horizon. If time permits, we climb down to the top of the main drop so that we can enjoy another pool and experience what it feels like to look over a sheer 160 metre drop.

On the final morning we follow the marked trail down to the bottom of the gorge below the falls. After one last swim, we climb into the vehicles for the drive to Cooina.

After lunch, if people are interested and if time permits, we can go and see the art sites at Nourlangie Rock. The day finishes with a bistro meal at the pub and a night in budget accommodation. This section finishes with the 6.45 a.m. Yellow Waters Cruise the following morning. The cruise gives you the opportunity to see the wetlands wildlife at close range, far closer than you could approach on foot. The early hour ensures that you see far more of the wildlife than those who do the midday cruises.

Maps. 1:50 000 Jim Jim Falls or 1:100 000 Jim Jim.

Terrain and Difficulty (more info in the general description after section four)

Overall	Level 3.
Terrain	Level 3-4. Most of the walk is relatively flat and fairly easy. There is a steep part along a marked track to Jim Jim Creek below the falls. The walk up or down the rainforest gorge requires a lot of rock hopping and scrambling over boulders the size of small trucks. It is quite strenuous. Some of our clients who had never walked in this kind of terrain considered it to be one of the most physically demanding things they had ever done.
Vegetation	Level 2-3. Mostly open woodland or open areas along the creek. Dense forest in Rainforest Gorge makes for slow going.
Hours	4-6 hours most days.
Packs	Pack weight - level 2. You need to carry four days food. You can probably leave your sleeping bag at home but we do recommend a well ventilated tent or mossie dome with fly.
Art	There is one major site that most groups visit as well as several minor sites we might see.
Campsites	Sand or rock ledges. Excellent sites near the water. We should have them to ourselves.
Swims	Swimming is excellent. Good pools all along both creeks.
Lowlights	Possible tourist crowds at Jim Jim.
Highlights	The view at the top of Jim Jim Falls. Perfect weather. Great swimming holes. Rainforest Gorge and Falls.

Note for section 2. Some groups do the walk in the reverse direction, Jim Jim Creek followed by Rainforest Gorge. The walk up the rainforest gorge is so strenuous that some groups choose to miss the walk up the gorge and walk over and back from Jim Jim Creek. This drops the walk to level 2.

Maps. 1:50 000 Jim Jim Falls or 1:100 000 Jim Jim.

Section 3: Barramundi Creek: October 10-15

This section overlaps the second. It includes the barbecue meal, night at Cooina and Yellow Waters cruise. If seats are available, it may also include the trip to Nourlangie Rock. If seats are limited, those who have done the preceding section have priority.

After the cruise we bid farewell to anyone not continuing and do about an hour's drive to Barramundi Gorge. A short walk from the car park brings us to the main falls and the climb to the upper gorge. A walk through the upper gorge takes us to a lovely camp site. The next good spot is about two hours away so we may decide to have a lazy day and stop here for the night.

When we leave the gorge, we find ourselves in a broad sandy valley. The only visible water is in a few isolated pools. All the flow is through the sand below our feet. After about five kilometres, we turn off into a side valley and suddenly find flowing water. Another kilometre brings us to a beautiful, deep, clear, shady pool where we can relax and enjoy a swim. A short climb to the top brings us to more beautiful pools and waterfalls. We may camp near here or we may decide to push on across the plateau and down to the largest pool in the entire Barramundi system. Huge *Allosyncarpia* trees give deep shade on the wide sandy banks of the pool, another exceptional camp site.

If we have taken two days to get to this point, we will probably spend a second night there, doing another day walk without full packs. If we have taken three days, we will begin working our way back down the main valley, sometimes in the deep shade of a patch of monsoon forest, more often in the open woodland, stopping for the occasional swim along the way. Our final campsite is normally at a pool near the top of the upper gorge.

Early on the final day, we walk back to the vehicle and continue to Cooinda or Jabiru where we drop off those finishing with this section.

Maps. 1:50 000 Goodparla or 1:100 000 Mundogie.

Terrain and Difficulty (more info in the general description after section four)

Overall	Level 3.
Terrain	Level 3. The first part of the walk is along a marked track. The next several kilometres are quite well defined and generally easy going although there is a bit of scrambling over river stones. Most of the terrain up to the large pool mentioned in paragraph three is fairly flat and relatively easy. There are, however, a couple of short but steep climbs at the beginning and end.
Vegetation	Level 2-3. Mostly open woodland or open areas along the creek.
Hours	4-6 hours most days.
Packs	Pack weight - level 2. You need to carry four days food. You can probably leave your sleeping bag at home but we do recommend a well ventilated tent or mossie dome with fly.
Art	There are a few minor sites that we may visit.
Campsites	Sand or rock ledges. Excellent sites near the water. We should have them to ourselves.
Swims	Swimming is excellent. Good pools all along both creeks.
Lowlights	Possible tourist crowds at the start of the walk. Hot, sticky weather.
Highlights	Relaxing next to two of the most beautiful pools in Kakadu.

Section 4: Ubirr and the Mary River: October 15-17

After a brief stop in Cooinda or Jabiru, we drive to Ubirr, site of one of the best collections of Aboriginal art in Kakadu. For most of the year, it is completely overrun with bus loads of tourists. By late October, most of these are gone. We will time our visit for dusk or dawn the next morning when we will have it almost to ourselves. The rest of our time will be spent relaxing and doing one of the short nature walks in the area. Perhaps we will be lucky enough to spot one of the large crocodile which inhabit the East Alligator River. No swims here! But if we can't have a swim, we can enjoy a shower and a cool drink as we listen to the dawn and dusk choruses of the birds.

The Yellow Waters cruise and the area near the East Alligator River will have provided us with a taste of what the Top End wetlands have to offer. Our trip finishes with the most comfortable wetland experience we can offer — a day and night aboard a houseboat on the Mary River.

We cruise slowly along the Mary, watching the hundreds of birds that line the river banks and enjoying the changing scenery around us. Those who wish to try their hand at catching a barramundi have a chance to do so. We pull in to shore for the night and enjoy a relaxing final meal in the bush as we listen to the night sounds around us. The following morning, we cruise back to where we began and get into the vehicles for the drive back to Darwin. The trip is over, but the memories will linger on.

Note. We cannot book the houseboat until we have bookings on the tour. If we do not get early bookings, we may not be able to do the cruise as scheduled.

Maps. 1:100 000 Mary River

Terrain and Difficulty (more info in the general description after this section)

Overall	Level 0.
Terrain	Level 0. The only walking is getting on and off the houseboat.
Vegetation	Level 0. No vegetation on the river, but we pass through a variety of habitats on the shores.
Hours	4-6 hours most days.
Packs	None.
Art	None.
Campsites	A bed on the boat.
Swims	None. Large crocodiles inhabit this section of the Mary River.
Lowlights	Hot, sticky weather. Not being able to swim.
Highlights	Wildlife and a wonderfully relaxing way to finish two weeks in the bush.

General Terrain and Difficulty for all sections

Terrain Little or 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 more than if you do not. The relatively easy nature of sections one and three means that they should suit almost anyone who meets our minimum level of fitness. Anyone who has already done section two should find that section three is easier than it would have been if they were beginning with section three.

Climate October is one of the hottest months of the year with an average daily maximum of 38°C (°F). The average minimum is 24°C (75°F). Temperatures as low as 15°C (about 60°F) have been known to occur, but they are rare. Leave your sleeping bag at home. Bring thermals for insurance if you want to insure against a chilly night. We tailor our walking to the climate, starting early and having long breaks next to pools in the middle of the day. If you accept the climate, you should have a wonderfully relaxing holiday. If you want to march on regardless of the weather, you may find it frustrating.

Thunderstorms are likely enough so that we recommend that you bring a lightweight tent or mossie dome with fly.

Wildlife Birds are concentrated near the waterholes at this time of year. You will see thousands at Yellow Waters and on the Mary River. The Yellow Waters and Mary River cruises give you a good chance to see large estuarine crocodiles.

Fishing Not permitted on the first three sections. Fishing can be good from the houseboat. Barramundi can sometimes be caught from the boat.

Notes

Those doing more than one section 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.

If you meet us in Kakadu, you will have to purchase a park entrance ticket on your way into the park. Our guide(s) should reimburse you automatically. Please remind them if this is not done soon after you meet.

Make sure you have your lunch, a water bottle, and some money with you in the vehicle during the drives as it may be difficult to get into your pack during the journey.

A day pack may be useful on all sections, especially on sections one and three.

Bring a book or two if you'd like to read during the long breaks. Flies can be a nuisance at this time of year so it's a good idea to bring a lightweight insect net for use during the breaks.

Map. The 1:250 000 Kakadu park map shows all of the first three sections.

Cooinda

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 attractions at Cooinda include the Yellow Waters cruises, the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre and a short dry season nature walk along a marked trail.

The Yellow Waters cruise provides the best way to see the wetlands and allows you approach the wildlife (especially crocodiles and birds) much closer than you could do on foot. The cultural centre is a few hundred metres from the hotel and provides an insight into the lives of the Aboriginal traditional owners of the park. The nature walk offers a pleasant way to spend an hour or two, especially early in the morning or late in the afternoon.

Both the cultural centre and the hotel 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.

Itinerary: Kakadu Highlights No. 11

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 This itinerary is subject to change.

Section 1 Twin Falls Creek

- 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 the Mitchell Street Tourist Precinct at 69 Mitchell Street. Drive to Kakadu. Begin walk carrying full packs. Bush camp.
- Day 2** Bush camping, day trip with day packs.
- Day 3** Return to vehicles. Drive to Cooina, to pick up and drop off or straight to Jim Jim if not required. Those ending here can catch a bus bus to Darwin. See the note at the end for details.

Section 2 Jim Jim Creek & Rainforest Gorge

- Day 3** Those beginning with this section catch a bus from Darwin to Cooina. See the note at the end for details. On arrival, wait in the open air pub and meet the group there. Due to the fact that the members of the group are finishing a walk that morning, we cannot be more specific about the arrival time than to say it will be about lunch time. Drive to Jim Jim. Begin walk, carrying full packs. Bush camp.
- Day 4-6** Bush camping, possibly carrying full packs for part of day.
- Day 7** Return to vehicle. Drive to Cooina, book into budget accommodation. Opportunity to wash clothes and have hot shower. Bring towel and toiletries and money for drinks. Dinner at the pub.
- Day 8** 6.45 a.m. Yellow Waters Cruise. End of section two. Those ending here can catch a bus bus to Darwin. See the note at the end for details.

Section 3 Barramundi Creek

- Day 7** Those beginning with this section catch a bus from Darwin to Cooina. See the note at the end for details. On arrival, wait in the open air pub and meet the group there about lunch time. Due to the fact that the members of the group are finishing a walk that morning, we cannot be more specific about the arrival time than to say it will be about lunch time. Book into budget accommodation. Opportunity to wash clothes and have hot shower. Bring towel and toiletries and money for drinks. Bistro meal at the pub.
- Day 8** 6.45 a.m. Yellow Waters cruise. Drive to Barramundi Gorge. Begin walk carrying full packs. Bush camp.
- Day 9-11** Bush camping, mostly carrying full packs. May include day walks without full packs.
- Day 12** Return to vehicle. Drop off those finishing with this section. Drive to Ubirr.

Section 4 Ubirr and the Mary River

- Day 12** Those beginning with this section catch the Greyhound bus from Darwin to Cooina or Jabiru (their choice) at about 6.30 a.m. There is only one bus per day. Check the current timetable when you book. The cost of the bus is not included in the cost of the tour. Meet the group about lunch time and drive to Ubirr. Afternoon walk.
- Day 13** Dawn walk near Ubirr. Drive to Mary River and begin houseboat cruise.
- Day 14** Finish houseboat cruise. Drive back to Darwin. Drop off at your accommodation.

Note **Cooina Bus.** The cost of getting to or from Cooina is not included in the cost of the tour for those not doing the full trip. Greyhound ran a scheduled service on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays to Cooina at the time these notes were written. Check the current timetable when you book. If you can't make the connection to Cooina with Greyhound, you should be able to book a seat on a tour bus. The three companies to try are: Top End Escapes (1300 736 892), AAT Kings (08 8923 6555) and APT (08 8984 2999).