

DRAFT: Russell's Light Wet Special: January 24-30, 2010

“**The Top End in the wet season is nothing short of hydro pornography.**” That quote is from an article that appeared in the 14 April 2007 edition of the *Weekend Australian magazine*. Being from drought afflicted southern Australia, the author couldn't believe the amount of rain he saw. Although, he was here during an exceptionally wet period, he got the gist correct – the Top End wet season is **spectacular** and, more importantly, **enjoyable**. This is, in many ways, **my favourite time of year**.

Please forgive the short rant which follows, but I find it almost impossible to convince people who haven't experienced our wet season what it's really like.

TV weather reports lie. It's impossible for them to do otherwise as the symbols they use are designed for temperate locations, not tropical ones. If you watch the weather on TV during our wet season, you'd think that Darwin was having storms every day. **Bulls..t!** Yes, there are storms around almost every day, but they don't always hit and, when they do hit, they are often short and sharp. Very sharp.

January is our wettest month. Darwin's average January rainfall is 420 mm. Compare that with Sydney's 102 mm. You'd think we were drowning. Now have a look at the truth. Other than the sunrise to sunset number which came from an Australian information website, the figures below were taken from the Australian Government Bureau of Meteorology website.

January Avg	Rainfall	Days rain	Hours sun	Hrs sun is up	% sunshine
Darwin	420 mm	18.8	5.7	12.8	45%
Sydney	102 mm	8.7	7.1	14.1	50%

Darwin gets four times Sydney's rain, but it gets 80% of Sydney's sun in spite of having fewer hours of daylight. It's sunny for 50% of the time the sun is up in Sydney, 45% of the time in Darwin. That is not the impression you get from TV weather reports.

For people who want a full-on wet season bushwalking experience, we offer a wide variety of trips, details of which are in our [trip list](#). For those who want to experience the wet without having to carry a full pack and camp out, we offer two great trips: [Green Kimberley Light in January](#) and [Kakadu Light](#) in February. Sadly, they don't often run. This trip is the answer.

If neither of the other light-pack trips runs, **I will run this one for as few as two people at no extra charge.** Even without paying myself a wage, that's a bit less than break even. I think that says how much I enjoy trips like these. (If either of the other trips runs, then I'll need our normal four bookings to run this one.)

This trip is a combination of parts of the first section of the Green Kimberley and of both sections of the Kakadu Light trip. The dates and itinerary are both flexible.

- If the dates don't suit, pick your own any time between mid January and mid February. The first two in get to pick.
- I've kept the length to a single week, but if those who book want a longer trip, I'm happy to extend it by up to three days for little extra cost.
- Two of the walks could easily be extended to overnight. This would allow us to avoid walking at the hottest time of day. Ask if you're interested in this option.
- If conditions are exceptionally dry or exceptionally wet, I'll change the itinerary below to make the most of what's available.

Coming back from the Bungles in the Wet trip in 2008, I got stuck overnight by flooding at the Victoria River. (The [web page describing this trip](#) will show you what that was like and why this is unlikely to happen again.) I had a quick look and want to go back to do it properly so we'll begin with the 500+ km drive to Victoria River. If we get there early enough, we'll do a short walk. Otherwise, dinner and bed.

We'll spend the next day doing some short walks, seeing some of the waterfalls that only flow at this time of year and visiting one of the largest Aboriginal art sites in Gregory National Park. We may spend a second night at Victoria River or we may drive the 200 km back to Katherine to give us more time at Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge). At Nitmiluk we have a number of choices: a boat trip, scenic helicopter flight over the gorge, a short walk near the gorge and a walk at Edith Falls in the northern section of the park. We spend the night at the Mary River Roadhouse as the next day is a big one.

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 Jabiru, our base for the final part of the trip.

Possible walks include long walks at Baroalba Creek and Nourlangie Rock as well as a number of short ones.

If water levels permit, we will do the full day Guluyambi Aboriginal cultural tour. 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.

If we can't do the Guluyambi tour, we'll do a morning or afternoon cruise at Yellow Waters. One way or another, you need a boat to experience the best the wetlands have to offer at this time of year.

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 last three days.

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 Level 1-4. This trip has it all, from easy marked trails to off-trail 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.

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.

Light-pack or no, this is a walking trip. 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 do any off-trail bushwalking 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 unless people choose an overnight option.

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.

Itinerary: Russell's Wet Light Special

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 This itinerary is subject to change.

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. or earlier 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 Victoria River. Short walk in the late afternoon if time permits. Overnight at the Victoria River Roadhouse motel.

Day 2 Exploring the area near Victoria River.

Day 3 Exploring Nitmiluk.

Day 4 Drive to Yurmikmik. Motorcar Creek waterfall walk. Drive to Jabiru.

Day 5-6 Walks and a cruise near Jabiru. Optional flight.

Day 7 Return to Darwin, stopping to visit a couple of places along the way.

Cost The price is \$1495. All our standard discounts apply.

If the first people who book want to extend the trip or camp out overnight, we'll adjust the price accordingly. Please contact us for details.

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