

Outback

Marc Dolman reveals how an adventure in the Outback can be both relaxing and exhilarating.

The 20-minute flight from Kununurra in Western Australia to Bullo on the edge of the Northern Territory gave me my first glimpse of this vast land of gorges, wetlands, scrub, escarpments and cascades. The raging bush fires on the horizon and the basking crocodiles on the riverbanks below only reinforced the fact that I was about to experience the true Aussie Outback. Franz Ranacher, the owner of Bullo, and old station hands Evan and Trevor greeted me on arrival and there began my rigorous introduction to outback life; an afternoon spent on the Bullo River dropping a line, sipping ice cold beers and fishing for prized Barramundi. I could get used to this!

Of course Bullo offers a great deal more than simply fishing and to stay at Bullo is to be caught up in the energetic life of a working cattle station. In fact guests are positively encouraged to engage in the station activities, but if this proves too strenuous then there are a wide range of more relaxing diversions to be had.

The following day we set out to discover some of the native wildlife which inhabits this massive half a million-acre property. Franz had told me that Bullo was like the famous Kakadu National Park but without the people and I certainly wasn't disappointed. Within moments of setting off our 4WD screeched to a halt as we avoided a huge king brown snake which was slowly meandering its way along the dirt track. It wasn't much longer before we had our next brush with Bullo's wildlife as a muscular, one-ton water buffalo came careering out of the bush to confront us; we certainly weren't about to pick a fight and beat a sensible and hasty retreat. As we progressed deeper into the bush, discovering ever more escarpments and waterholes, the wildlife became even more prolific with a stunning variety of local fauna species and a myriad of native and migratory birds all making themselves apparent. Before long though it was time to return to the open-plan homestead for a hearty meal and a run down of the day's tribulations with the family and the station hands.

After two unforgettable days at Bullo it was time to head to Jabiru in Kakadu National Park. Franz cranked up the prop plane and began picking his way through the Brahman cattle and the stock horses who had conveniently decided to have lunch on the airstrip. Meanwhile, I was simply trying to keep my long legs away from any important pedals and dials but just as I thought



Rock art at Injalak Hill, Arnhemland



Egret, Kakadu National Park



Crocodile, Arnhemland

SAFARI

I had got comfortable Franz launched his final surprise on me. “You’re now flying the plane” he nonchalantly said, ensued by brief panic on my part and then a level of concentration never previously experienced. It was truly exhilarating and the perfect way to end my time at Bullo River Station, but my journey was far from over and the experience was about to get even better.

As we landed at Jabiru (Franz safely back in control of the plane) I was met by Thomas Sebastian Lord, better know as Sab. Born in Kakadu in the late 1950s, the young Thomas’s playmates were aboriginal children who soon shortened his name to Sab. His adopted grandmother was an indigenous woman held in very high esteem and her son was the Aboriginal who signed the rights to lease Kakadu to the government for 100 years. This unique up-bringing has allowed the ebullient Sab to forge special relationships with the local Aboriginal elders which in turn gives him access to areas where others simply cannot tread.

We set off for Injalak Hill in Western Arnhem Land, site of some of the best examples of rock art in Australia. Here we were met by Wilfred, our Aboriginal guide, who regaled us with dreamtime stories before taking us to the top of the hill. The view from the top was simply breathtaking, looking out across the floodplains and around the escarpment on a landscape that seemingly goes on forever.

Following a full day exploring the billabongs and flood plains of Arnhem Land and having picked up Sab’s penchant for saying “mate” after every other word I was dropped off at the exclusive Bamurru Plains.

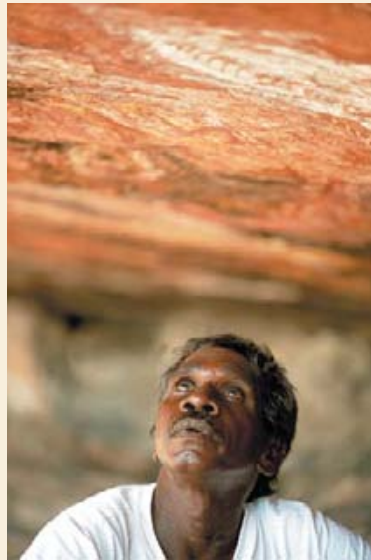
Located on the edge of the Mary River floodplains just a short distance from the coast, this unique bush camp exudes quality. Wildlife always makes itself known, from the haunting call of a whistling kite to the raucous cacophony from the blue-winged kookaburras as dawn breaks or the sound of a full grown buffalo splashing its way through the floodplains just a short distance from your bed.

Though familiar to us even before we visit, it is only by getting out into the Outback that we can appreciate how strange and wonderful a land this really is. I shall never tire of exploring it further.

Marc Dolman
Australia Specialist



Above: Jackeroo, Bullo River Station



Injalak Hill, Arnhem Land



Above and below: Bullo River Station

FACT FILE

For further information about travel to Western Australia or the Northern Territory, please contact Marc, Michael, Jenny, Lucy, Helen or Sarah on 01993 838 800.



Below: Sab Lord and friends



Boab tree, Bullo

