



THE AUSTRALIA WAY

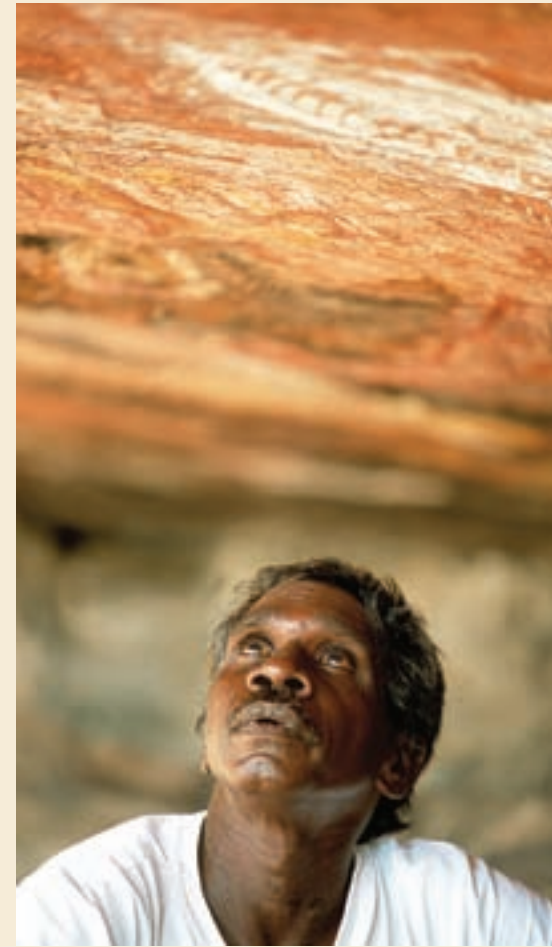
Take picture-perfect images of outback Australia: the deep ochre of a sweeping escarpment cast ablaze at sunset, the verdant green of a surprise oasis or simply an endless stretch of cloudless sky. Add an award-winning producer, two of the world's most highly regarded film-stars, an epic story and you have this year's Hollywood blockbuster, Australia, the film. Paul Done, Australia Regional Manager, shows how the movie has sparked a new route into Australia's remote northern heartlands.



Kakadu National Park, Northern Territory



The Kimberley, Western Australia



Aboriginal rock art, Kakadu/Arnhem Land region

To coincide with the release of Baz Luhrmann's *Australia* is the opening of what is sure to become one of the country's most exciting touring routes, the 'Australia Way', which has been designed to showcase many of the film's stunning natural highlights and allow travellers to easily explore the amazing diversity of this far northwest region. This journey stretches from the vibrant tropical city of Darwin in the Northern Territory to the cosmopolitan beach town of Broome in Western Australia. It takes in World Heritage-listed national parks, ancient Aboriginal culture, picturesque waterholes that teem with wildlife, and immense cattle stations, some the size of small European countries. From quaint country towns brimming with 'true-blue' characters to vast expanses of the beautiful unknown, this touring route is the perfect way to take in the highlights of this magnificent region.

Darwin is the ideal starting point for a two week adventure along the 'Way' and the city can be seen in a number of the pivotal war scenes in *Australia*, as it buckles under siege from Japanese air raids. Darwin is Australia's most culturally diverse city and its year-round warm weather creates a constant celebration of life outdoors. Catch a film under the stars in an outdoor theatre, mingle with the locals at the Mindil Beach Sunset Markets,

experience a fiery sky aboard a yacht cruise or dine in one of the many al-fresco restaurants at Stokes Hill Wharf. Darwin requires at least a couple of days to fully take in and is the perfect base to explore the nearby natural wonders of the Litchfield and Kakadu National Parks, which can be explored as part of a small group tour or independently with your own rental car.

Only an hour and a half's drive from Darwin, Litchfield National Park makes the perfect day-trip from the city. Locals flock here for its natural wonders such as rugged sandstone escarpments, spectacular spring-fed waterfalls, and enormous magnetic termite mounds. The park's meandering bushwalks afford some stunning views over the rugged landscape on every side.

Further afield lies Kakadu National Park, which has achieved UNESCO World Heritage listing for both its natural and cultural significance: it is like a country in itself with the diversity to match. Jagged peaks of towering escarpments hide pockets of lush rainforest; roaring waterfalls lie in contrast to mirrored billabongs and delicate pink lotus flowers hide the brute strength of giant saltwater crocodiles that swim silently beneath the surface. The biodiversity of Kakadu is staggering with the park playing home to about 1,000 of the country's plant varieties, over one third of its bird and a quarter of its freshwater fish species. ▶



Camp fire, Home Valley Station



Egret, Kakadu National Park



Miri Miri Falls, The Kimberley



Cattle muster, northern Australia



Garma festival, Kakadu/Arnhem Land region



Egrets, Yellow Water Billabong, Kakadu National Park

► More significantly, it is also home to a number of different Aboriginal communities who have called Kakadu home for some 50,000 years: the exceptional rock art galleries on display in this park are testament to one of the world's oldest living civilisations.

Travelling south from Kakadu your journey will take you to the outback town of Katherine and Nitmiluk National Park, which is home to the majestic Katherine Gorge and nearby Edith Falls – both famed for aboriginal rock art, cascading waterfalls and serene swimming holes. You will then traverse west towards the Western Australia border, though before you cross, those that have Barramundi fishing or cattle mustering on their mind might be tempted by the mighty Bullo River Homestead, which is a working cattle station situated an hour and a half's drive from the Victoria Highway and accessible by four-wheel drive.

Kununurra is less than an hour across the border into Western Australia and is the gateway to one of the world's last true wilderness areas, the Kimberley. Dramatic, enchanting, breathtaking – there is an endless list of superlatives to describe this region and it is said that her rich colour palette and rugged landscape were the inspiration, and frequent filming location, for Baz Luhrmann's film. From luxury coastal camps that define pristine isolation; thundering waterfalls, which plummet into the

open sea; ancient rock art and cave painting, and rugged, working cattle stations with luxury trimmings, the region is as diverse as it is immense.

From Kununurra there are various ways to take in the dramatic beauty of the Kimberley, such as small group tours, light aircraft scenic flights, and, for the more intrepid, there is also a sinuous dusty road that unravels throughout the region, begging to be explored. The 'Way' will see you travel southwest from here, and towards the World Heritage listed Purnululu National Park, which is home to the famous beehive-like mounds of the Bungle Bungle range. The 'Bungle Bungles', as they are affectionately referred to, are said to be over 20 million years old, and are one of the most significant geological landmarks in the country. Not surprisingly they also feature in several pivotal scenes in *Australia* and a flight over them in an open-sided helicopter is a memory that will last forever.

Travelling west from the Purnululu National Park the 'Way' passes through some of the Kimberley's most rugged gorge country – the dramatic Geikie Gorge with its vertiginous limestone cliffs reaching up to 100 metres and Tunnel Creek, Western Australia's oldest cave system, offering worthy side-trips to once again lure you off the main road. Your journey finishes in the sophisticated, coastal town of Broome, where a

great range of accommodation and excellent restaurants awaits your arrival. This stunning town has endless stretches of squeaky-clean, white-sandy beaches, an eclectic, multi-cultural heritage, shaped from its pearling history, and a wonderful laid back atmosphere, which make it the perfect base to either while away and relax, or indeed use it as the jumping off point to explore some of its nearby attractions. If you feel you missed anything along the 'Way', Broome also offers the opportunity to return to Darwin by sea, with several companies operating cruises along the Kimberley's stunning archipelago allowing you to explore the majestic coastline and hidden gems that no roads can reach.

The dramatic landscapes and immense diversity portrayed in Baz Luhrmann's Hollywood blockbuster *Australia* bring to life some of the country's finest natural highlights, which have now been made more accessible thanks to the launch of the 'Australia Way' that unfurls throughout the region. Linking the cultural capital city of Darwin in the Northern Territory to the cosmopolitan beach town of Broome in Western Australia, this is sure to become one of Australia's finest touring routes, long after the cameras and the film stars have gone.

Paul Done
Australia Regional Manager



Pentecost River, The Kimberley



FACT FILE

A two week trip to the rugged far northwest, including return flights starts from £2,315 per person. This includes nine days self-driving along the 'Australian Way' taking in Darwin, Kakadu National Park, Kununurra, the Purnululu National Park and Broome. Please contact our Australia specialists on 01993 838 810 for further details.

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