



by **Christopher Wilson** Australia specialist

Family-Friendly Australia

With its stunning landscapes, friendly cities, exotic wildlife and unique indigenous culture, Australia makes an ideal destination for a family holiday. But its vast proportions, diverse activities and profusion of options make it difficult to know where to go and what to do. In my experience, the perfect family trip satisfies both children and adults and includes the country's greatest highlights as well as a couple of less obvious attractions to impress the folks back home.



Eastern grey kangaroo, Cape Otway National Park, Victoria

My highlights

Learn to Surf at Bondi Beach

A morning's tuition under the expert instruction of experienced and passionate surfers on Bondi Beach will, at the very least, boost everyone's credibility at home as you proudly show off your skills at Australia's national youth sport.

South Australian Wildlife

Sit down for a few minutes in front of children's television and you will be amazed at just how many Australian animals make it onto the small screen, there's no doubting that wildlife down under is a huge hit. Experiencing it up close and personal is even better; eye balling a koala in the tree tops and feeling the breath of a young seal pup on your face are memories to treasure forever.

Aboriginal Dream Time Stories

The cultural significance of Aboriginal story telling is immense and although the tales and legends can be complex, they were devised as a means to teach students of all ages. The ultimate dreamtime tour is probably with the gifted guides of the Guurbii peoples in northern Queensland, which will leave you and your children in awe of their rich history and culture.

After ten years' experience of organising trips to Australia, I've put together my perfect three-week family holiday down under.

Days 1 to 2: Getting There

For many parents the thought of 24 hours in a confined space with their children has been enough to put them off a trip down under, but really there's no longer any need to be daunted by the distance involved. Modern aircraft and enhanced services and entertainment for younger travellers have made all the difference and combined with swift connections in Asia it's now a much more simple and comfortable experience. For families, midday departures from Heathrow are the best bet. You'll arrive into Sydney in the early evening of the following day and can check straight in to your accommodation. After a good night's sleep everyone will be ready to enjoy the first day of their big adventure.

Days 3 to 5: Sydney

There are so many iconic things to see and do in Sydney (1) that it can be hard to know where to start. I'd recommend a lazy first morning with a walk to Circular Quay for breakfast overlooking the harbour. Then hop on a guided motor yacht cruise to tour the harbour and get your bearings. A picnic lunch is included and you can even have your first Aussie swim on one of the secluded local beaches.

Next up I'd recommend a surfing lesson on Bondi's famous beach. If the weather is a bit colder, I'd opt for a guided cycle tour of the city with the experts at Bonza Bikes instead. Either way you'll have a quintessential Aussie experience and help clear the mists of jet lag while you're at it.

Days 6 to 8: Melbourne

The 'cultural capital' of Australia (2) prides itself on having the finest museums and art galleries in the country and also boasts a laid-back cafe lifestyle. Melbourne is a wonderfully relaxed city filled with small boutiques, galleries and theatres linked by a lumbering tram system.

Arrive in time for an alfresco lunch at one of the restaurants along the south bank of the Yarra River then take a walk through the myriad shop-lined alleyways known as 'The Lanes'. Sports fans should consider reliving the scenes of British jubilation and sorrow at the Melbourne Cricket Ground and the nearby Rod Laver Arena, both of which are a refreshing walk east of the city centre.

A good bet for your second afternoon in Melbourne is a visit to Phillip Island. The charming Little Penguins here are some of Victoria's best known residents and are an instant hit with children. See them close up with a ranger guide then head for the nearby Koala Conservation Centre where you can walk with koalas through the treetops.

Days 9 to 11: Adelaide and Kangaroo Island

Adelaide (3) is a very family-friendly city well worth exploring by bike. Fly in early in the day, ideally at the weekend, and take advantage of



Learning to surf



Sab Lord with locals in Arnhem Land

the network of free bike centres and the cycle paths running along the Torrens River to the beach at Glenelg. The city is also the gateway to incredible Kangaroo Island (4), a wildlife haven just a short flight away. It's a good idea to take a tour with the expert nature guides on the island who can lead you off road into the unspoilt landscape to see the seal and sea lion colonies, visit the 'Remarkable Rocks' and introduce you to the local gourmet food and wines. There are some wonderful new family properties on the island and I'd recommend a package with a two or three day stay in a villa on one of the northern beaches.

Days 12 to 16: Darwin Northern Territory

Head on to Darwin (5) for an overnight stay and a waterfront dinner before picking up a hire car and setting out for the wonder that is the Kakadu National Park (6). Crossing crocodile infested rivers should give everyone a thrill, but Kakadu is most famous for its incredible landscapes, diverse wildlife and strong Aboriginal culture.

The indigenous people are gradually opening their land to sensitive environmental tourism and a highlight of a visit has to be a day tour to Injalak Hill, home to one of the most

important rock art sites in northern Australia. This area was previously only open to determined long-stay visitors and locals but now thanks to our favourite guide Sab Lord, the fit and adventurous can climb the hill on a day tour from Jabiru and be back in the pool before sunset.

Jabiru is Kakadu's township and you'll find comfortable air-conditioned lodgings here. The town also offers easy access to the great waterfalls at Jim Jim, Twin Falls and Gunlom, and is a good base for cruises on the wetlands at Yellow Water billabong or scenic drives to Ubirr on the edge of Arnhem Land (7).

You'll be spoilt for choice for ways to spend your time in Kakadu. You can join a day tour to the Kakadu Escarpment or drive south to the spectacular Katherine Gorge (8) but perhaps the ultimate self-drive experience is to continue by four-wheel drive to the western borders with the Kimberley and the incredible cattle station at Bullo River, Timber Creek (9).

Bullo River Station is the essence of Outback Australia and offers a glimpse of the frontier lifestyle and a memorable stay to horse riders and would-be cattle musters alike. From here you can also take a flight to the unique and remote (Purnululu) Bungle Bungle Range.



Baby koala, Kangaroo Island

Days 17 to 21: Northern Queensland

A trip to Kakadu is full of adventure and it's a good idea to follow it with a few days relaxing in Port Douglas (10), one of Queensland's most stylishly developed stretches of coastline. It's a short flight from Darwin and if you leave early in the morning you can pick up a car at the airport and within 45 minutes be relaxing by the pool or on Four Mile Beach.



▶ Just over the horizon is the Great Barrier Reef. There are numerous ways of exploring this incredible area and it's well worth travelling to one of the smaller, less crowded reefs to appreciate its splendour. Port Douglas is also home to Queensland's own Doctor Dolittle, David Armbrust, whose guided tours of the temperate rainforests are legendary.

From Port Douglas continue on to Cooktown (11) and Mungumby Lodge, a haven of rare wildlife including the endangered tree kangaroos which so captivated David Attenborough on a recent visit. The whole family should enjoy the night time forest walks and guided tours of the remote Quinkan Country that depart from the lodge. While here it's also worth seeking out the remarkable Willie Gordon for a journey into Rainbow Serpent Cave, the home of Aboriginal ancestral rock art.

The Aboriginal people describe their incredible landscape in terms of songlines, tracks of dreams across the land and sky and it's impossible to argue with their logic. A trip to Australia will leave you with dreams fulfilled and the fuel for the fondest of memories.

When to go

One of the best times to visit Kakadu National Park, Port Douglas and Cooktown is during the Autumn and Winter seasons between May and October when the weather is dry, sunny and less humid. Visiting Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Kangaroo Island during this time offers bright days but with much lower temperatures.

FACTfile

Chris's 21 day family holiday costs from £4,855 per adult and £4,635 per child based on two adults and two children (under 11) travelling in the British summer holidays. and includes economy class flights, car hire, tours and activities. Shorter two week trips including, Sydney, Uluru and the Great Barrier Reef start from £2,750 per adult and £2,600 per child. For more information call our Australia specialists on 01993 838 800.

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The Great Barrier Reef