Adelaide to Darwin: Red Centre Adventure

46 hrs, 30 mins
Est Driving Time

Overview

Australia is a country built for road trips. Not only does it have wide open spaces like the U.S. and Canada, but it also boasts wildly diverse ecosystems. Temperate coast, lush rainforest, baking desert - the sheer variety of environments on display is staggering. But there’s no environment that says “Australia” more clearly than the mighty Outback. This immense expanse of desert in the centre of the country has become more than just a place - it’s a symbol of the untamed spirit of this continent.

This Adelaide to Darwin road trip itinerary, designed by Motorhome Republic for campervan travel, will take you right through the centre of this land, starting from the cool coastal breezes of Adelaide to the looming presence of Uluru and the vibrant wetlands of Kakadu. Once you’ve read up on all you need to know with our Australia driving guide, you can embark on the Australian
motorhome road trip of your life: an adventure into the heart of the Outback. Now #LetsGoMotorhome!

**Leg 1  Adelaide to Port Augusta**

There’s a certain elegance to Adelaide that puts one in mind of a European city. While many of the cities on the eastern coast of Australia (Brisbane and Gold Coast especially) share a super-casual beachy vibe, Adelaide remains laid back but with an edge of old-style colonial sophistication. Make sure to set aside a few days to explore the city, because as soon as you start looking around, you’ll soon discover a whole array of things to do in Adelaide. Soak up this urbanity as much as you can because once you hit the road, you will be out of major city territory for quite awhile!

**Adelaide**

There is perhaps no better way to introduce yourself to a new city than by eating a meal there. In Adelaide, arguably the best place to start is Gouger Street. This dining precinct is home to a generous selection of international restaurants and while many come to Gouger Street for excellent Chinese food, there’s a whole array of cuisines available to the discerning foodie. Just an evening stroll down Gouger Street is a treat in itself, as delicious scents waft your way - once you’ve discovered this place for yourself, you’ll soon find that it’s irresistible.

If the weather is kind to you, a trip out to Glenelg Beach should certainly be on the cards. Located just 12 kilometres from Adelaide city centre, Glenelg is famed for its sparkling white sands and the wild dolphins which frolic offshore. You have the opportunity to do more than just peer at dolphins from a distance though - at Glenelg you can actually swim amongst them. Several different Glenelg companies offer cruises for viewing / swimming with dolphins, so do a little research to make sure you find the right tour for you - but don’t miss this wonderful opportunity.
If you’ve got kids with you, two top wildlife attractions that you’ll want to consider are Adelaide Zoo and Monarto Open Range Zoo. Adelaide Zoo is the easier option, situated just 10 minutes drive from the CBD. Home to more than 1800 animals including the adorable giant panda, you and the kids certainly won’t be lacking for creatures to see and things to do.

If you’re willing to travel a little further, there’s an entirely different wildlife experience awaiting you. 50 minutes out of Adelaide you’ll find Monarto Zoo, Australia’s largest open-range zoo. See native Australian animals and iconic African creatures from specially constructed viewing platforms that allow you to get the perfect view of these creatures without disturbing them. If the kids want to get a bit closer, there are plenty of opportunities to get up close and personal with giraffes, lions, cheetahs and more.

While Gouger Street is home to many of Adelaide’s best international restaurants, the Adelaide Central Market (known to most as simply the Central Market) presents an alternative take on food. To say that this is a popular Adelaide attraction would be a massive understatement - the Market is the most frequented place in South Australia, attracting more than 8 million visitors every year. Over 80 vendors offer fresh local produce, seafood, meat and poultry, cheeses and gourmet delicacies to those who throng the Central Market building. Some of Adelaide’s most popular eateries and cafes are found here too, making this the perfect place to come for a tasty brunch or lunch. It’s also located right in the Adelaide CBD and there are plenty of public transport options that stop nearby, so it’s super easy to get to. The Market is usually open Tuesday to Saturday, and is open later than most food markets. Just be aware that on Saturdays it closes a little earlier, at 3pm.

For those with a sweet tooth, there’s one place you won’t want to leave off your Adelaide itinerary. One of the finest chocolate manufacturers in Australia, Haigh’s Chocolates, has their factory right here in Adelaide. A tour will reveal the artisan skills at work behind the scenes to create these extraordinary confections, and of course special chocolate tastings are included. Tours are free and very popular so make sure to book ahead of time to ensure a spot on this journey of delectable discovery. You’ll find the Haigh’s Visitor Centre on the edge of Adelaide’s parklands to the south of the city centre.

Adelaide is also directly adjacent to one of Australia’s finest wine-making regions. If you have a sober driver sorted you might even be able to take a detour to Barossa Valley for some wine tasting before heading on to Port Augusta. Otherwise, there are plenty of wine tour companies that will take the driving responsibilities off your hands and make sure you have the best introduction to the region possible. South Australian wine country is world renowned for its Shiraz, so don’t forget to give this a try even if it’s not your usual tipple.

The road to Port Augusta
While there are a number of small towns on the way between Adelaide and Port Augusta, most will choose to make a straight shot through, taking the three and a half hour trip in one chunk, barring stops for food and fuel. Do keep an eye out to the right as you pass through the town of Lochiel to spot the local ‘Loch Ness Monster’ arising from the surface of the pink-hued salt lake.

If you can’t wait to dive right into the Australian wilderness experience, veer off the A1 to the east about half an hour before you’re due to arrive in Port Augusta and you’ll find yourself in the midst of Mount Remarkable National Park. This is a popular spot for bushwalking, best experienced in the mild weather months of spring and autumn. The extensive hiking trails will guide you amidst red gum groves, grassy woodlands and quartzite gorges, and if you especially observant you might spot emus, western gray kangaroos or echidnas, all of which roam at will throughout the park. Camping fees for Mount Remarkable National Park are usually paid online, so make sure to book and pay ahead of time. Once you leave Mount Remarkable, you’ll have less than a 40 minute drive to get to your final destination for this leg - the crossroads city of Port Augusta.

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**Leg 1 Highlights**

Glenelg Beach  |  Monarto Open Range Zoo  |  Barossa Valley Vineyards

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**Leg 2  Port Augusta to Coober Pedy**

This leg of the journey is your introduction to the Australian Outback. While you’ve been more or less tracing the coast up to this point, once you leave Port Augusta behind you’ll be on your way into the arid interior of the continent. Although most Motorhome Republic itineraries try to keep the driving time for each leg down to around four hours so that it can be easily tackled in one day, this itinerary is an exception. Get ready to put on your favourite road trip tunes and settle in for long stretches of cruising through the Aussie desert.

**Port Augusta**

This is the last major hub of civilisation that you’ll come across for quite some time, so make sure you stock up on essential supplies in Port Augusta before embarking on your northward journey. How much water you need to bring along will vary depending on the time of year you’re travelling.
but it’s likely to be far more than you’d expect. In very hot conditions, 10 litres of water per
person, per day is prudent - even when it’s slightly cooler, you won’t want to bring much
less. This is absolutely crucial to Outback travel. There is very little cell phone coverage
in Australia’s Red Centre - if you do want to make sure you can stay in touch, consider
hiring a satellite phone. If you’re taking this trip in winter, be aware that it can
get chilly at night time; decent sleeping bags can raise your comfort levels considerably. Port Augusta is more than just a
supply stop though: take a look around the city and the surrounding area before driving north - you might be surprised at what you’ll find to do.

Children and adults alike can get a taste for what’s to come at Wadlata Outback Centre. The
hands down highlight of this acclaimed attraction is the Tunnel of Time. Step into the jaws of Max,
the giant Ripper Lizard to find yourself on a journey from the ancient emergence of the nearby
Flinders Ranges through to modern times. There’s so much to see in the deceptively large Tunnel
of Time that you may need more than one visit to take it all in - fortunately with a ‘Pass Out’ you
can return free of charge to pick up where you left off. Wadlata also functions as a Visitor
Information Centre, and is the perfect place to ask about what else to do in and around Port
Augusta, and even book local tours.

To step back into the past in a more tangible way, consider a ride on the Pichi Richi Railway, a
carefully maintained section of track between Port Augusta and Quorn. Vintage steam
locomotives and carriages from the 1920’s will greet visitors and instantly transport them to
another age. There are several different trips you can choose from, including one that has guests
enjoying a 3 course meal on aboard first-class dining carriage. There’s no better way to find out
what Outback travel was like in the early 20th century.

The road to Coober Pedy

Once you depart from Port Augusta you’re in for the long haul. If you need to take a pitstop,
Spud’s Roadhouse Hotel in the small settlement of Pimba is perfect. Pimba lies on the
transcontinental railway line and at the junction of the Alice Springs / Roxby Downs roads. The
iconic Spud’s Roadhouse boasts a petrol station, a supermarket, a restaurant - even a bar - and is
hands down the best place to stock up with whatever you need before you reach Coober Pedy.
Glendambo, a little over an hour up the road, also has a roadhouse but most will breeze straight through this town on the way to their final destination. After Glendambo, it should take less than 3 hours to travel the final stretch through wide open desert to reach Coober Pedy.

**Leg 2 Highlights**

- Wadlata Outback Centre
- Pichi Richi Railway
- Spud’s Roadhouse

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**Leg 3  Coober Pedy to Erldunda**

At this point you’ve come to something of a metaphorical oasis in the desert. With a population of more than 1,500 Coober Pedy is practically an Outback metropolis. Once you leave this hub, you’ll be plunged once again into the deep serenity of the remote Australian wilderness. While towns and settlements are scarce along this route, that’s exactly why most choose to take this journey. There’s something hauntingly beautiful about the escape into emptiness that the endless kilometres of desert affords.

**Coober Pedy**

One of the main reasons that Coober Pedy exists today is opal. The gemstone was discovered here in 1915 and since that time the town has been steadily supplying the majority of the world’s gem-quality opal. There’s more to this town than just gemstones though; you’ll definitely want to have a look around before departing once more into the depths of the desert.
One peculiar feature about this town is that due to the extreme summer heat many **dwellings are underground**. Referred to as "dugouts" they can be far more elaborate than the term implies - there are even underground churches! One dugout that exemplifies the resourcefulness of Coober Pedy residents is **Faye's Underground Home**. Expanded from a one room hovel (which now serves as the kitchen) to a three bedroom home, this dugout includes walk in wardrobes, a living room, a wine cellar and even a swimming pool! Visitors can walk through this astoundingly elaborate underground home for a small fee, Monday through Saturday.

For an equally bizarre experience, you can practice your swing at the local golf course. Most **golf in Coober Pedy** is played at night with glowing golf balls to avoid brutal daytime temperatures. As if the experience needed to be any stranger, the course is entirely free of grass - golfers carry a small piece of “turf” with them to use when teeing off. It may not be your typical day on the green (not even close) but it certainly will make for a great story.

Once you’re ready to depart this endearingly odd town, it will be time to get back on the A87 and start making your way toward the junction homestead of Erldunda.

**The road to Erldunda**

Around two and half hours north of Coober Pedy you’ll find the small service town of **Marla**. While there’s not much of interest here it will serve admirably as a rest stop. The **Marla Travellers Rest** service station offers a supermarket, a caravan park, a pub and even a pool. Heading on from Marla, it should take you no more than two hours forty-five minutes to cross the line from South Australia to Northern Territory and arrive at Erldunda, the launching point for your Uluru adventure.

**Leg 3 Highlights**

- Coober Pedy Opals
- Dugouts
- Desert Golf
Heading due west for the first time on this journey, you’ll notice a marked difference in terrain as you make your way toward Yulara, the tourist town just outside **Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park**. Low sand ridges are common along the Lasseter Highway and here and there you’ll see desert oaks and spinifex bushes clinging to the red soil. Sometimes you’ll even see wildflowers if you travel through in spring and there have been enough winter rains.

**The road to Yulara**

You won’t be wanting to stick around in Erldunda for too long - this is really just a stopping off point; somewhere to stay the night and then move along. Around three quarters of an hour from Erldunda you will find the **Mt. Ebenezer Roadhouse**. Naturally it offers all the roadhouse services you’ve come to expect, but it also sells artworks by local indigenous artists. If you are curious to see genuine **Aboriginal art** then a quick break at Mt. Ebenezer is a must.

A further hour and a half down **Lasseter Highway** will bring you to **Curtin Springs**. If you’re hunting for accommodation that’s a little less pricey than the premium rates of Yulara, this is your best bet. It’s just over an hour from Curtin Springs to Yulara, which really isn’t that much on the scale of Outback journeys, so it’s up to you to choose between convenience or savings. If you’d rather park up for the night as close as possible to Uluru (also known as Ayers Rock) then keep driving to Ayers Rock Resort in Yulara.
Leg 4 Highlights

Leg 5  Yulara to Kings Canyon

In spite of its radically remote location Uluru still draws hundreds of thousands of visitors every year, a testament to just how remarkable this place is. There is perhaps no more iconically Australian image than the red bulk of Uluru rising abruptly from its flat desert surroundings. There’s a lot more to Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park than just one rock though, as you’ll soon discover.

Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park

The good thing about staying in Yulara is that you’re right next to Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park - the park itself is free of campgrounds to prevent the high volume of tourists from having an adverse effect on the famous environment. There’s a $25 entrance fee for those 16 years and older which is valid for 3 days and goes toward maintaining the park - a quarter also goes to the Anangu people, the traditional owners and joint caretakers of this land. All considered, it’s a small price to pay for the chance to see its world renowned natural landmarks for yourself.

Naturally the first place you’ll want to visit is Uluru itself. For the ultimate in first impressions, try to see Uluru at sunset or sunrise. Visitors are treated to a stunning show as the rock shifts and changes colour moment by moment in spectacular fashion. You’ve come this far to see Uluru, so
making the effort visit during the golden hour is well worth your time. Head along to the designated Car Sunset Viewing area where you can park up and watch the colours deepen to dusk on the massive face of the rock. Sunrise is an entirely different experience, much more serene and peaceful. The lookout at Kata Tjuta (or ‘the Olgas’) has a reputation of being one of the best places in the park to watch the sun come up.

Sightseeing is all very well but if you really want to get a grasp on the scale of Uluru then a walk around its base will certainly do the trick. A 10.6 km loop track encircles the rock - this is one of the best ways to discover the little details that make this place special. Witness for yourself the varied colours and textures of the sandstone and experience Anangu culture firsthand. Although climbing up onto Uluru is not expressly forbidden, it is considered taboo by the Anangu and they ask that visitors respect their traditions and laws. There’s really no need to climb the rock when you can get such a great view from ground level, but for those who are still keen to see the park from a height, there’s a tour just for you.

Professional Helicopter Services offer a range of tours that allow visitors to get a bird’s eye view on the area. From quick 15 minute tours to sunrise or sunset flights - even scenic packages that encompass both Uluru and the Olgas - an entirely new viewpoint is available to you. Make sure you book your helicopter tour well ahead of time as they’re very popular and it would be a real shame to miss out.

Another unique way to experience the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park is on the back of a camel. Uluru Camel Tours operate the largest camel farm in the Southern Hemisphere, located at Ayers Rock Resort. Entry to the farm itself is absolutely free - you can view their fully functioning saddlery, learn about the history of camels and cameleers in the Australian Outback and enjoy a free BBQ and picnic area. Tours include dawn and dusk options, an express daytime tour and even a journey to a sumptuous star and candle lit dinner looking out over the park.

Although we’ve mentioned Kata Tjuta - otherwise known as the Olgas - in passing, they deserve far more than just a cursory nod. This group of domed rock formations aren’t quite as famous as Uluru but they’re no less impressive - some would argue that there’s an even greater sense of wonder to be found here than the heavily commercialised Uluru. The crowds will be a lot smaller, plus at sunrise the sound of birdsong and the play of light on the rocks makes for an experience you’ll never want to forget.

The physical features of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park are incredible enough on their own, but they are also endowed with a deep significance and mythos by the indigenous traditional owners of the land. To get an authentic introduction to the culture of the local Anangu people, set aside a day to take the Cave Hill tour. Departing Ayers Rock Resort by 4WD, you’ll head deep into the desert of the Pitjantjatjara Lands. The location of Cave Hill itself has deep significance for the Anangu, connected to a creation story featuring seven sisters. Guided by an Anangu host, you will discover the ancient stories tied to Cave Hill, see magnificent cave ceiling paintings, and walk to the
top of Cave Hill to witness a glorious 360 degree view over the surrounding desert including Uluru (100 km distant) and the **Musgrave Ranges**. This tour takes between seven and eight hours and includes both morning tea and a picnic lunch - if you’re at all interested in the indigenous culture, it’s well worth setting aside an extra day to spend on the Cave Hill tour.

When the sights and stories of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park are firmly implanted in your mind, it will be time to head onward to the magnificent Kings Canyon.

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**Leg 5 Highlights**

Uluru  
Kata Tjuta  
Cave Hill

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**Leg 6  Kings Canyon to Alice Springs**

![Map of Kings Canyon to Alice Springs]

Just when you think that the Outback can’t awe you any more than it already has, you’ll come across Kings Canyon. Located about halfway between Uluru and Alice Springs, the ancient red sandstone walls of the canyon soar upward from the palm forest below. Rushing on from Kings Canyon is certainly not advisable - though Uluru may be far more famous, this is place rivals the Rock in its majesty and beauty.

**Kings Canyon**

It’s true that the towering walls of Kings Canyon are impressive, but they’re not the most
remarkable feature of the canyon. The thing that really sets this location apart from the rest is the **green oasis** that shelters at the bottom of the gorge. Permanent sources of water are so rare in this part of the desert as to be almost nonexistent, but here you’ll find a place called the **Garden of Eden**, where lush plant life surrounds a permanent waterhole.

There are plenty of opportunities to get up close to this wonderful place, so throw on a pair of hiking boots and get ready to see the gorgeous oasis up close. The **Kings Canyon Rim Walk** is a little challenging to start off, but if you can make the 500-step climb, you’ll be amply rewarded. Breathtaking views of **Watarrka National Park** await, along with a view of the Garden of Eden below. You’ll then descend into the shady oasis itself. If you’re reasonably fit and have an active lifestyle, this is definitely the best option. There’s also the option of just exploring the canyon floor if you’re after a cooler, less strenuous walk.

The **Kings Creek Walk** is another popular option. Starting with a walk up the centre of the canyon and ending up at a lookout point that provides a stellar view of the sheer cliff face at the end of the canyon, this is a much less challenging choice and should suit those with a moderate level of fitness.

You have the option of striking out and discovering these trails on your own or joining a guided tour that leaves from Kings Canyon Resort.

Those hunting for something a little more adventurous may be tempted by **Quad Bike Tour of Kings Creek Station**. These are the perfect vehicles for traversing the rugged terrain of the Outback, as you’ll soon find out for yourself should you choose to join. An experienced guide will take you on a journey through wild bush, red sand dunes and up into cattle country.

When you’re ready to continue on your way northward, get back on the 6 (Larapinta Drive, in Kings Canyon) and curve northeast to reach the town of Alice Springs.

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**Leg 6 Highlights**

Kings Canyon  
Kings Canyon Resort  
Quad Bike Tours

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**Leg 7  Alice Springs to Wycliffe Well**

- **Total Distance**: 376 km
- **Est Driving Time**: 04:45:00
After the loop detour to Uluru and Kings Canyon, you’ve returned to the Stuart Highway, northward bound once more. But before you depart once more into the stillness and open spaces of the Outback, take a little bit of time to see what Alice Springs, widely regarded as the spiritual heart of Australia, has in store for you.

**Alice Springs**

You might expect that a town set in the heart of the Outback would have little to offer in the way of attractions and entertainment, but when it comes to Alice Springs (also referred to as “the Alice” or simply “Alice”) that isn’t the case. Both within the town and in the surrounding area, there are a whole range of interesting things to do and see.

The Araluen Cultural Precinct is a great place to start your Alice explorations. The precinct incorporates a theatre and several museums and art galleries. Many of the galleries feature work by local Aboriginal artists, while the theatre shows both independent films and a range of live performances. Flight fans will want to pay a visit to the Central Australian Aviation Museum which showcases historic aircraft and other aviation memorabilia. Those curious to know more about the land itself would do well to head to the Museum of Central Australia. Meteorite fragments, fossils and interpretive displays tell the story of Central Australia’s unique natural and geological history. Central Craft could also be worth a visit, especially for those keen to support local artisans.

While you can find plenty to keep yourself busy in Alice Springs itself, it’s the opportunities for adventure in the surrounding country that are likely to appeal to most. The Larapinta Trail is one of the most highly regarded treks on the planet, following the spine of the West MacDonnell Ranges from Alice Springs Telegraph Station to Mount Sonder. While hiking the entire 223 kilometre path is a bucket list item for many diehard adventurers, most will be content to tackle merely a section of this massive trail. The trailhead can be found just a few minutes to the north of the town.

If that sounds a little too strenuous for your tastes, a hot air balloon tour over those very same Ranges may be more appealing. Outback Ballooning takes tourists aloft 7 days a week, weather permitting, on spectacular gliding journeys far above the red sands and rugged mountain ranges below. Flights start about 15 kilometres south of Alice Springs and the entire experience takes between four and five hours. After you’ve landed, you’ll be treated to a unique experience: a glass
of wine or fruit juice, accompanied by muffins, slices, biscuits and cheese - to be enjoyed at the
landing spot, in the middle of the vast desert, kilometres from the nearest road.

Back in town, kids will love the Alice Springs Reptile Centre, home to all things scaly and slithery.
Make sure not to miss lizard feeding time, or the opportunity to handle a live python. Some of the
world’s most venomous snakes are here too, safely behind glass. Many of the Reptile Centre
creatures are extremely difficult to find in the wild (and some you wouldn’t want to find, even if you
could) so a visit here is a rare opportunity to see these animals with your own eyes. From geckos to
goannas, the reptiles here make for fascinating viewing.

Another popular wildlife-centred opportunity that will appeal to young and old alike is the Kangaroo Sanctuary. You might recognise the sanctuary and the man behind it from the BBC
documentary series ‘Kangaroo Dundee’. Chris ‘Brolga’ Barnes has dedicated his life to saving and
caring for baby kangaroos, and you have the chance to take a guided sunset tour of Brolga’s 90
acre wildlife reserve to see the little bouncing bundles that now have a shot at life. Tours are
available on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. Bookings are essential so get sorted early to
make sure you don’t miss out.

The road to Wycliffe Well

As wonderful as Alice Springs can be, it won’t be long before you’re itching to hit the road again. 30
kilometres north of the town is a marker declaring that you’re about to cross the Tropic of Capricorn. There’s not too much to see here, but the marker itself makes for a good photo
opportunity if you’re so inclined. Around two and a half hours after you leave Alice, you’ll come
across the small town of Ti Tree. Although this town is still very much still in the middle of the
desert, Ti Tree is major producer of fruit and vegetables for the surrounding area, thanks to year-
round sunshine and a plentiful underground water supply. Grapes are the town’s particular
specialty; consider picking up a bunch or two as snacks for the road.

A little over an hour after you leave Ti Tree behind you will find yourself in Barrow Creek. This tiny
settlement is one of those “blink and you’ll miss it” places, so keep your eyes peeled if you want
another pitstop before Wycliffe Well. Barrow Creek was once the site of an Overland Telegraph
repeater station, an essential link in a communication network that traversed Australia and linked
to Europe. The Telegraph Station has been preserved and lovingly restored to its original state,
making it an interesting place to visit for those with a eye for Aussie history. If you need to stock up
on fuel or basic supplies, you can find what you need at Barrow Creek Hotel. From Barrow Creek it
won’t take much more than an hour to reach Wycliffe Well - the UFO capital of Australia.
Leg 7 Highlights

Larapinta Trail | Outback Ballooning | The Kangaroo Sanctuary

Leg 8  Wycliffe Well to Newcastle Waters

This leg of your journey is the last that you’ll spend in the Outback, but that doesn’t mean that your travels are winding to an end just yet. From the **UFO Capital of Australia** to the point where the desert begins to relinquish its grip on the land, take the opportunity to bask one last time in the harsh, elegant simplicity of Australia’s Outback landscape.

**Wycliffe Well**

‘UFO Capital of Australia’ may seem like a dubious distinction but it’s certainly one that Wycliffe Well is proud of. **Hundreds of UFO sightings** have been reported here since World War II; locals claim that sightings are so common that if you stay up all night looking, you’d be unlucky not to see something unusual. Whether you’re a believer or a skeptic, there’s no denying the phenomenon adds a bit of spice to the experience of staying at Wycliffe Well.

**The Devils Marbles**

Take a slight detour just half an hour north of Wycliffe Well to discover the huge granite boulders known as the Devils Marbles. Created by erosion over the course of millions of years, many of these rocks balance precariously on top of one another, seemingly in defiance of the laws of gravity.
These giant granite boulders have great traditional significance for the local Aboriginal peoples, and almost the entire Karlu Karlu / Devils Marbles Conservation Reserve has been registered as a sacred site, so treating the area with care and respect is paramount. A short self-guided walk among the marbles will allow you to discover more about their formation and the local myths and legends associated with the rocks, thanks to signs along the way.

**Tennant Creek**

Although it was the construction of a telegraph station that first brought European settlers to Tennant Creek, it wasn’t until the discovery of gold here during Australia’s last gold rush in the 1930’s that the town really took off. The population swiftly grew from next to no one to more than 600 souls, most of whom were involved in the gold mining industry in one way or another. Today, although Tennant Creek continues to function as a mining centre (bringing up manganese as well as gold) a bigger emphasis has been placed on the tourism industry.

The **Battery Hill Mining Centre** gives visitors a superb insight into what life was like during the gold rush of the 1930’s. Underground mine tours, a dazzling Minerals Museum and the opportunity to do a little gold panning of your own make this a top priority attraction, particularly for families.

If you want to seize one last chance to really immerse yourself in the Outback, **Kelly’s Ranch** is the place to go. Local Warumungu man Jerry Kelly takes horseback trail tours through spectacular Outback scenery. This encompasses far more than just a scenic horse ride though - Jerry is passionate about sharing his knowledge of bush tucker, bush medicine and bush life, making this a fascinating, in-depth and very authentic Outback experience.

Leaving Tennant Creek, you’ll be heading once again into wild country. Take the opportunity to stock up on whatever food and fuel you’ll need for the rest of the day at Tennant Creek, because once you pass the crossroads roadhouse of Three Ways 20 minutes to the north of Tennant Creek there will be precious little in the way of civilisation for the rest of your day’s journey. Even **Newcastle Waters**, your stop for the night, is little more than a place to park up your campervan - there are no facilities here. Fortunately, as long as you’ve prepared adequately, your motorhome will allow you to spend the night as comfortably here as you would in a much larger town.

**Leg 8 Highlights**

- UFO Memorabilia
- The Devils Marbles
- Kelly’s Ranch
Although you’ll begin to notice a little more greenery to either side of you, the journey from Newcastle Waters to Katherine still takes you through remote country, with only tiny towns dotted along the way. Think of it as the perfect way to ease yourself slowly out of the Outback and into a land that will become increasingly heavily populated and rich with vegetation.

The uninhabited town of Newcastle Waters will hold little interest for any but the most dedicated of antiquarians, so getting an early start to avoid the heat of the day will be the best choice for most.

After about an hour you’ll pass through Dunmarra, a roadhouse stop that can supply you with basics like fuel, food and a cool drink before you continue on your way north. You may want to delay your pitstop until you reach Daly Waters, just 48 kilometres further up the road. The main attraction here is the Daly Waters pub, where travellers are encouraged to “leave their mark”. Past visitors have left everything from signed banknotes to bras to an Irish hurling stick! The walls (and ceiling) are heavy with memorabilia, making for a quirky and occasionally astounding display. Don’t forget to leave something of yourself here to carry on the odd but endearing tradition.

As you pass through Larrimah, a tiny hamlet 90 kilometres north of Daly Waters, look out for the Big Stubby (a giant beer bottle) and the pink panther that lounges in a deck chair next to it.

Once you’ve driven through Larrimah you’ll only have just a little over an hour to go before you reach the town of Katherine.
Katherine to Kakadu National Park

With a population of around six or seven thousand, Katherine isn’t exactly a bustling metropolis, but it will probably feel like it after the time you’ve spent in amidst the red empty spaces and tiny towns of the Outback. The town offers many attractions (most of them nature based) and is also the gateway to one of Australia’s best loved national parks: Kakadu.

Katherine

Like many other central Australian towns, Katherine was founded as an outpost for the Overland Telegraph line, but it has since grown into the fourth largest settlement in Northern Territory, a destination in its own right. Its close proximity to Nitmiluk National Park attracts many nature loving visitors each year, and Katherine also gets its fair share of anglers coming here for the barramundi.

After the long and dusty drive from Adelaide, a relaxing soak in naturally heated springs probably sounds like heaven. Fortunately, Katherine can supply you with just that. Katherine Hot Springs is tucked away in the Katherine River bed just off Victoria Highway about five minutes from the centre of town. Just be aware that the term ‘hot springs’ may be a little deceptive - the water here
is pleasantly warm rather than steaming hot, which makes it perfect for taking a dip on a sunny day then picnicking on the lovely grassy area nearby. It’s also worth noting that many swimming spots around Katherine (including the Hot Springs) are likely to be closed in the wet season due to flooding.

A visit to Katherine wouldn’t be complete without venturing into Nitmiluk National Park. Based around a series of gorges on the Katherine River, the closest entrance to Nitmiluk is 30 kilometres northeast of Katherine, via a sealed road. May through September are the best months to visit the park. Of course, the park is open year round, but the coming of the wet season brings floods to the Katherine River and can restrict some activities. If you only have time to visit one section of Nitmiluk, make it Katherine Gorge. This is the main attraction of the park, a series of thirteen gorges carved by the Katherine River. There is an abundance of ideal swimming spots throughout the gorge and canoeing is also a popular pastime here.

If you have a fair bit of time to spend in this beautiful national park and feel like breaking out your hiking boots then the Jatbula Trail is an essential experience for you. The trail follows a route trod by generations of indigenous Jawoyn people through woodlands, sandstone plateau scrub, open forest and riverine landscapes. Walking the trail will take between 5 and 6 days and there’s a $3.30 camping fee applicable per person per night. The recommended walking season for Jatbula is between June 1st and September 30th - although it is possible to tackle the trail outside of this timeframe, it’s recommended for experienced hikers only, as temperatures can be extreme and there’s a high likelihood of flooding. Booking is essential so make sure you’ve sorted things out in advance if you plan to follow in the footsteps of the Jawoyn.

Back in Katherine itself, the Top Didj Cultural Experience is a one-of-a-kind hands on opportunity to learn about indigenous culture directly from indigenous artists from the Katherine and Red Centre regions. This isn’t just the standard ‘listening to stories’ although it includes that too. Test out your throwing arm with lessons in spear and boomerang hunting, learn to make a fire from sticks and make your own piece of indigenous artwork to take home. With a reputation for authenticity and fun for all ages, the Top Didj Cultural Experience is great pick for artists, families and those who’d love to learn more about the first people of Australia.

Katherine is a lovely town, with even more beautiful surroundings, but don’t delay here too long. After all, Kakadu National Park is less than two hours away...
Leg 10 Highlights

Katherine Gorge  Jatbula Trail  Top Didj Cultural Experience

Leg 11  Kakadu National Park to Darwin

This may be the final leg of your journey, but your trip is far from over. The natural riches of Kakadu National Park and the urban delights of Darwin are still ahead of you, so get ready to discover some of the most amazing sights in the whole of Australia. There are also more parks to discover in the area (Litchfield National Park, for one) if you have time to spare!

*Naturally if you want to start your trip in Darwin instead of Adelaide, there's absolutely nothing stopping you! Just make sure to book a Darwin campervan rental.

Kakadu National Park

Australia is a country that brims with national parks and wilderness areas - in fact, the continent is mostly wild aside from coastal cities. So why does Kakadu remain one of the country’s most loved national parks? Perhaps it’s the incredible variety of environments found here. Or the richness of its animal life. Or the fact that this beautiful wilderness is a third the size of Tasmania. Or maybe it’s because humans have been living here for 40,000 years and you can still see art created tens of thousands of years ago. But more likely it’s a combination of all these factors that makes Kakadu such a popular destination with international and domestic tourists alike.

What you do in Kakadu largely depends on how much time you’ve set aside to spend here. You
need three days at the absolute minimum to begin exploring the park, but five or even seven days would be better. The great thing about travelling in a motorhome is the fact that you can easily move from place to place and enjoy cheap accommodation without having to set up and pack down a tent each time.

If you’re wanting to strike out on foot and go exploring, you’ll certainly be spoiled for choice. Climbing to the rocky Ubirr lookout will treat you to stunning views of the surrounding area, particularly gorgeous at sunset. On the way up you’ll have a chance to see ancient Aboriginal rock art - if you visit between May and October there will even be rangers there to give free talks about indigenous art and culture. The hour long loop track is moderately strenuous, suited to those with at least a medium level of fitness.

You don’t have to be able to pronounce the Bardedjilidji Sandstone Walk to be able to enjoy it - walk through vine forest and massive sandstone pillars on one of Kakadu’s most visually unique trails. Again, from May to October rangers will be giving free talks about the area. Nourlangie Rock is the next place to go if you’re intent on seeing all the ancient art that Kakadu has in store. Take a circular route past an early Aboriginal shelter and striking examples of indigenous rock art.

There are dozens of different trails to choose from in Kakadu - to figure out for yourself which ones are best for you, head to the Parks Australia webpage specially created for people like yourself.

As amazing as they are, Kakadu’s diverse landscapes are only one part of the park’s charm. Many come to Kakadu National Park to see for themselves the wildly varied animal life. 74 different kinds of mammals, 280 bird species, thousands of types of insect - listing numbers really doesn’t do justice to incredible display of biodiversity in Kakadu.

One of the creatures most commonly sought out by tourists here is the crocodile. It’s not hard to spot crocs in Kakadu but you need to be aware that there are safety issues when you’re around places where crocodiles hang out. While freshwater crocs are generally harmless to humans, larger and more aggressive saltwater crocs will sometimes frequent Kakadu during the wet season. Any crocodile should be viewed only from a safe distance - and it should be assumed that any body of water in the park may contain potentially dangerous crocs. Cahill’s Crossing, on the border between Kakadu and Arnhem Land, is one of the best places to see these deadly reptiles. Head to the viewing platform or the downstream boat ramp - just remember to stay well away from the edge of the water. If you happen to be visiting in August or September, you’re in for a real treat: head to Cahill’s at high tide to watch the crocs line up and catch the mullet that are swimming upstream.

Birdwatching is also a huge draw for visitors to Kakadu National Park. It’s hard to find somewhere in the park where you won’t see an incredible variety of winged wonders, but taking a boat cruise on the Yellow Water billabong is one of the absolute best ways to make the most of the park’s
birdwatching potential. Yellow Water Cruises operates year round and offers several cruises a day. From July to November, you also have the option of striking out on foot along the boardwalk and billabong walk.

This itinerary barely even scrapes the surface of what Kakadu has in store for you - the park could have an itinerary all of its own and you still wouldn't be able to list all the fascinating things you can see and do. When your time is up in this beautiful national park, your final destination awaits - Australia’s northernmost city, Darwin.

**Darwin**

The smallest capital city in Australia, Darwin is still plenty big enough to offer you a taste of urban excitement after your long sojourn in the wilderness. This coastal city with perennially warm weather is a brilliant spot to round off your journey, balancing myriad leisure opportunities with lots of chances to dive into the city’s past and enjoy its present offerings.

The best place to go to get an insight into the history and cultural background of this region is the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory. Both kids and adults will find plenty to catch their interest - interactive exhibitions are common, perfect for children who are keen to take a hands on approach to learning, while adults can discover everything from Southeast Asian artifacts to indigenous art to Sweetheart, a 5.1 metre stuffed crocodile which terrorised NT residents in the 1970’s.

Don't forget though that Darwin is a coastal city - which means it’s time for a trip to the beach. Located near the Darwin CBD, Mindil Beach is famous for its Sunset Markets which run during the dry season every Thursday and Sunday night from the last Thursday of April to the last Thursday of October. You’ll find cuisine from almost every corner of the world, magicians, live street theatre, local and international musicians and of course the wide range of jewelry, leather goods and clothes that you’d expect from a top-shelf market. Enjoy a picnic dinner on the beach or just stroll among the kaleidoscopic stalls soaking up the festive atmosphere.

If the bustle of the city proves a little too much for you after the silence of the Outback, you can recapture some of that serenity at the George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens. Covering 42 hectares of land just north of the Darwin city centre, this looks distinctly different to most traditional gardens thanks to its location in the tropics. It’s also the only of the only botanic gardens in the world that has marine and estuarine plants growing in its grounds. While the flora may be new and unknown, the sense of relaxation and peace to be found here will be familiar to anyone who’s ever sought peace in a beautiful green space.

Aquariums aren’t hard to find in any decent sized city, but Darwin has gone one better and offers a marine exhibition that is far more impressive than your standard collection of fish tanks. Indo Pacific Marine exhibits fully functioning coral reef based ecosystems. Though they are based
onshore, there is little to no human interference with the creatures and their environment: no feeding, filtration or water changing takes place - every system is wholly self-supporting. This allows visitors the most authentic view of the beautiful yet fragile Northern Territory marine environment possible, short of diving on the reefs themselves. There are even night tours where visitors can observe what the reef ecosystem does when the sun goes down - an experience all but impossible to find anywhere else.

Another unique Darwin experience is seeing a film at the Deckchair Cinema. Situated on the edge of Darwin Harbour, you can watch the sun sink beneath the sea and savour a meal and drink in the midst of a tropical garden - and that’s not even the feature entertainment! There are food vendors on site, but there’s also the option to pack your own picnic. There’s no BYO alcohol permitted, but you can pick up a wine or beer to enjoy with the film from Deckchair Cinema’s kiosk. Screening an eclectic mix of family movies, Australian cinema and foreign films, Deckchair is the perfect way to spend a lazy Darwin evening. Remember to bring a few pillows to increase the comfort of the supplied deckchairs.

You could spend several weeks exploring all that Darwin and its surrounding areas have to offer, but eventually it will be time for you to turn in the keys to your campervan and head home. No matter how far you go from the Red Centre of Australia however, you’re unlikely ever to forget the incredible sights and experiences you’ve been treated to on this road trip.

Leg 11 Highlights

Ubirr Rock Art  Kakadu Croc Spotting  Mindil Beach Sunset Markets