

RED CENTRE



DRIVE GUIDE

DISCOVER
OUR FAVOURITE
ROUTES, CAMPSITES
AND ADVENTURES

DRIVE ROUTES

ALL THE BEST 2WD
AND 4WD ROUTES

SECRET SPOTS

LOCALS LET YOU IN
ON THEIR FAVOURITE
HIDDEN GEMS

CAMPING

MAGIC UNDER THE
STARS EITHER
GLAMPING OR IN
A SWAG

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

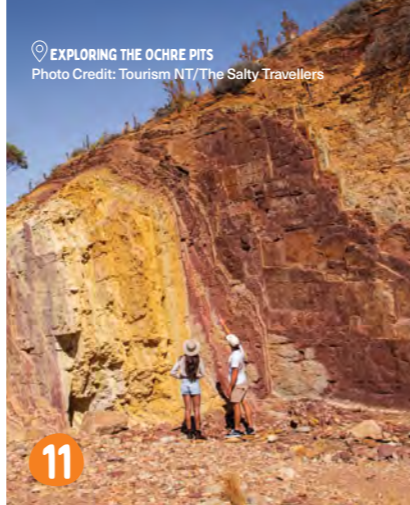
ESSENTIAL INFO TO
GET YOU OUT AND
BACK SAFELY





LOOKING OUT THE CAR WINDOW AT KATA TJUTA | Photo Credit: Tourism NT/Salty Aura

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EXPLORING THE OCHRE PITS
Photo Credit: Tourism NT/The Salty Travellers

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Photo Credit: Tourism NT/Matt Cherubino

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Get close to nocturnal wildlife and the magic of the night sky with after-dark experiences

Werte! G'day! Welcome to the Red Centre. I have lived around the world, worked on cruise ships and seen the great tourism attractions of the world, but nothing beats Central Australia. From Uluru, the West MacDonnell Ranges, Alice Springs, and up to The Barkly, there really is so much to see and experience. The region has something for everyone, amazing adventures, stunning sunsets, unique events, breathtaking scenery, heritage, art and culture, nature, and food of course! Even after living here for 16 years, Central Australia never ceases to surprise or amaze me. It is hard to know where to start, and I guess that depends on where you are coming from. I first came to the NT in 1983 and spent three years living at Uluru. It is still very special to

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me. Uluru is one of the main reasons so many people head to the Red Centre and there are so many ways to experience this incredible place. You can explore it on a bike or segway, from a helicopter or the back of a camel (my favourite). Old fashioned walking gives you time to connect with the landscape, and a guided walk with an Anangu guide provides the best opportunity to learn about the history, culture, and spiritual significance of Uluru.

If you are visiting Uluru, make sure you allow extra time to visit Kata Tjuta. Only 50 kilometres by road from Uluru, the 36 towering domes of Kata Tjuta are best explored on foot. The 'Valley of the Winds' and 'Walpa Gorge' walks allow you to meander through deep crevices between the rock formations. This is another deeply spiritual experience.

I now live and work in Alice Springs and it is a truly incredible place from which to explore Central Australia. The Larapinta Trail is recognised as one of the world's best multi-day hikes. It runs east-west through

the heart of the West MacDonnell Ranges National Park — 2,500 square kilometres of ancient rock cliffs, gorges, and waterholes that provide a tranquil sanctuary for native flora and fauna. While walking is a great way to explore, particularly in the cooler months, there are so many incredible places easily accessible in a regular car. My personal favourite is Standley Chasm, an easy 40-minute drive from Alice Springs. A four-wheel drive and suitable driving experience (and appropriate safety equipment) will get you to some remarkable places that many locals never see.

The best thing about my job is seeing the wonder in the eyes of people seeing the Red Centre for the first time, so make sure to pop into the Visitor Information Centre in Alice Springs and say "G'Day."

As well as helping you book your accommodation, tours and car hire (with unlimited kilometres), I might share a few more local secrets. Alternatively, call 1800 645 199, email info@discoverca.com.au or go online at discovercentralaustralia.com. ●

RED CENTRE ROADTRIP PLAYLIST

3+ hours of road trip music selected by the staff at Tourism Central Australia





GROUP ON A CAMEL RIDE | Photo Credit: Tourism NT/Helen Orr

ESSENTIAL INFO

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE AND THE ITINERARIES

Within these pages you'll find 11 itineraries, laying out suggested driving routes that we think highlight some of the best places to explore and adventures to experience throughout the Red Centre.

Each itinerary includes a route map, information on two-wheel drive or four-wheel drive accessibility and the difficulty of the route, an estimate of the time it will take, and suggestions for some of our favourite things to see and do along the way.

Also in this guide is some essential info to help you on your way. You'll find a rundown of essential safety info for four-wheel driving in the Red Centre to ensure you make it back safely, a guide to local services, and a handy distance grid on the back cover for planning your drives.

We've also included a number of feature articles to help you get to know the region and highlight some more experiences that you shouldn't miss. Explore timeless Trepahina Gorge Nature Park and all it has to offer adventurous four-wheel drivers, or get up and close with rarely seen nocturnal wildlife, and with the magical desert night sky on unique nocturnal experiences. You'll find a rundown of some of the best camping spots, perfect for caravanners looking to get closer to nature. You'll even find a checklist of our favourite Red Centre must-see spots, complete with a handy map so you can tick them off as you go.

Our itineraries are useful suggested routes for a great experience, but your Red Centre experience is all your own. So read this guide

carefully to learn about all the magical experiences you can have in the Red Centre, and don't be afraid to plan your own route with the experiences you're most eager to have.

Finally, scattered throughout the guide you'll

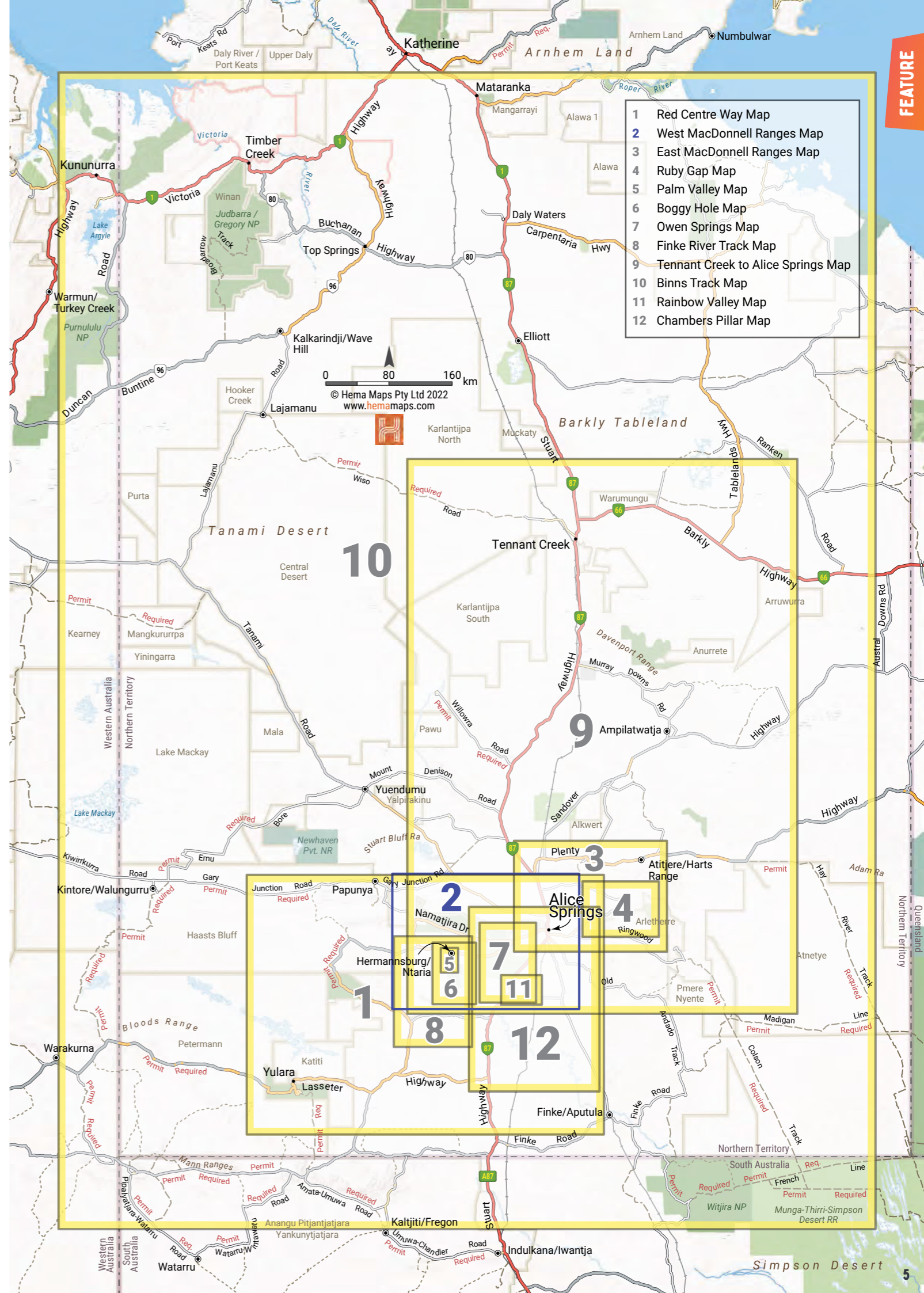
find insider tips and hidden gems from locals, like below, that will add a little extra to your journey.

Armed with the information in these pages, you'll be ready to plan your own Red Centre drive that you'll never forget.



LOCAL TIPS
BY EMILY ILGEN
Alice Springs Visitor Information Centre

"DON'T MISS OWEN SPRINGS RESERVE. A 4WD ROUTE 70KM SOUTHWEST OF ALICE SPRINGS. OFFERING PANORAMIC VIEWS OF THE WEST MACDONNELL RANGES AND A RANGE OF ITS OWN THE WATERHOUSE RANGES. THE LAND IS RICH IN HISTORY AND FILLED WITH WATERHOLES, GORGES, AND WILDLIFE. PRO TIP: FINKE RIVER ADVENTURES OFFERS AN ATV DRIVING EXPERIENCE FOR THE AVID EXPLORER!"





1 FIND YOUR NEXT
ADVENTURE

RED CENTRE WAY

Explore some of the outback's most iconic landmarks, including Uluru, Kata Tjuta, Kings Canyon, Simpsons Gap and Standley Chasm on a road trip along the Red Centre Way.

Allow at least five days to see everything along this incredible journey. You'll learn firsthand about the world's oldest living culture from traditional Aboriginal landowners, trek red desert sands, lush valleys, mulga forests and towering gorges.

Beginning in Alice Springs, head south along the Stuart Highway. If you have a four-wheel drive, you'll want to allow time to see Rainbow Valley's sandstone cliffs and bluffs. These are especially beautiful when the early morning or late afternoon sun picks out the rainbow bands.

Erlunda Roadhouse sits at the intersection of the Stuart and Lasseter Highways, and with accommodation ranging from luxury rooms to powered or unpowered caravan spots, it is a great place to spend a night. Their



PEOPLE AT DESERT MOB EXHIBITION
Photo Credit: Tourism Australia

kangaroo and emu farm will allow you to get up close with these fascinating animals and their elevated sunset viewing platform is the perfect spot to see a breathtaking Northern Territory sunset or sunrise.

Turning down the Lasseter Highway, you can visit Curtin Springs, a working cattle station and roadhouse. We suggest stopping in here either on your way to Uluru or when you head back to Kings Canyon. There are guided walks of the nearby salt lakes, and striking views of Mt Conner (you will spot Mt Conner to the left some distance before reaching Curtin Springs).

Plan for at least a day exploring Uluru and Kata Tjuta, or longer if you have the time — we promise it's worth it! Explore the icons at sunset or sunrise, on foot, camel back or bicycle. Explore Kata Tjuta on the Valley of the Winds walk, see Uluru up close with the Base Walk, and hear stories connected to Tjukurpa.

From Uluru head next to Kings Canyon within Watarrka National Park. Kings Canyon offers walking and hiking options suitable for all levels. The Rim Walk is a three-hour experience



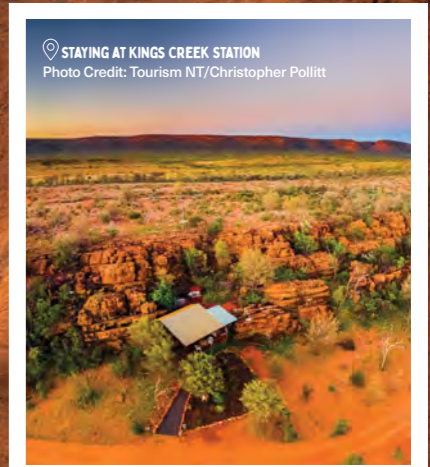
COUPLE AT RAINBOW VALLEY CONSERVATION RESERVE
Photo Credit: Tourism NT/Jess Caldwell & Luke Riddle



COUPLE RELAXING AT REDBANK GORGE | Photo Credit: Tourism NT/Jess Caldwell & Luke Riddle



WALKING AT THE BASE OF ULURU | Photo Credit: Tourism NT/The Salty Travellers



STAYING AT KINGS CREEK STATION
Photo Credit: Tourism NT/Christopher Pollitt

- **Rock Wallabies and Thai at Olive Pink Botanic Garden**
This is almost certainly the closest you will get to rock wallabies. You'll see them as you enjoy some of the finest Thai cuisine for 1500km in any direction. Please don't feed the wallabies!
- **Curtin Springs tour to check out the salt lakes**
Four different salt lakes, each with a different surface, everchanging light, and Mount Conner appearing and disappearing on the horizon
- **Camel Burger at Kings Creek Station**
Everyday is hump day at Kings Creek Station!

HIDDEN GEMS

through breathtaking 100 metre tall sandstone crevices and stunning views of the arid environment. The Kings Creek Walk is a much more relaxed journey along the canyon floor, with equally breathtaking views.

Leaving Kings Canyon to return to Alice Springs will take you on the Mereenie Loop, which includes about 130km of unsealed, often heavily corrugated road. Definitely worth it if you have a suitable vehicle. Keep an eye out for camels, wild horses and donkeys. When the unsealed section ends, drivers have a choice of either a) continuing straight ahead via Hermannsburg (149km to Alice) or b) turning left onto Namatjira Drive

(202.6km to Alice). The latter option will provide the option of visiting all the well-known West Macs spots including Redbank Gorge.

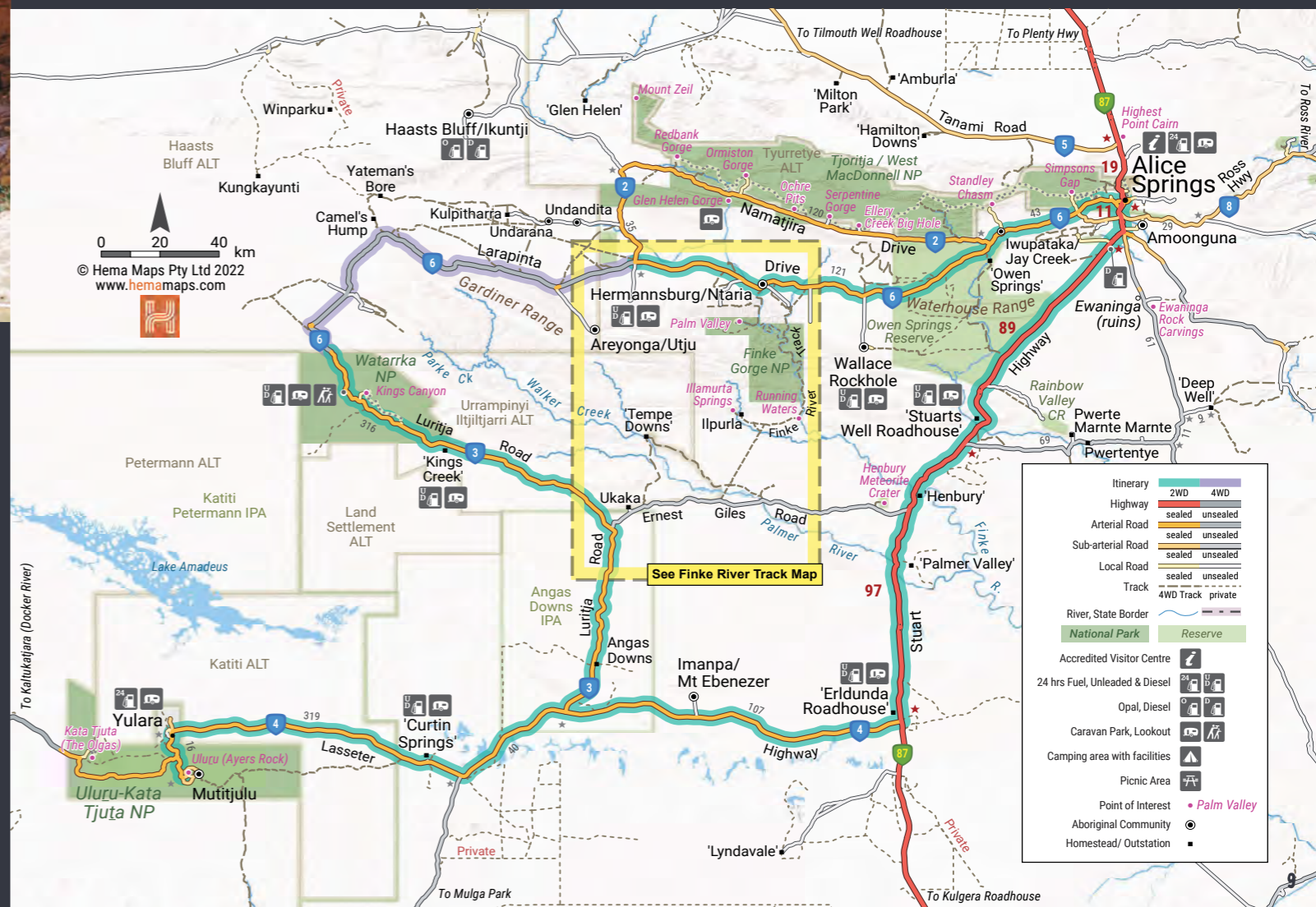
Redbank Gorge is a popular spot, and the gorge is a stunning chasm nestled at the base of Mt Sonder that acts as a refuge for many threatened species. You won't need a 4WD to access this spot, and there are basic camping facilities, moderately difficult hiking trails, and swimming in the gorge waterholes — be aware, the water is very cold year-round!

You can then loop back from here, returning to Alice Springs along Larapinta Drive. It's an excellent chance to see anything you missed

along the first leg.

Alternatively you can turn left onto Namatjira Drive and take the longer route — returning to Alice Springs via the northern-most section of the Red Centre Way, through Tjoritja/West MacDonnell National Park. This spectacular area includes chasms, gorges and waterholes to explore. Stop at Simpsons Gap, Ellery Creek Big Hole, Glen Helen, Standley Chasm and Ormiston Gorge, for hiking trails, swimming spots and unique wildlife.

Back in Alice, be sure to budget some time to visit the internationally renowned art galleries before wrapping up your trip. ●



LARAPINTA DRIVE - WEST MACDONNELL RANGES



COUPLE AT SIMPSONS GAP
Photo Credit: Tourism NT/Jess Caldwell & Luke Riddle

Running west from Alice Springs (Mpartwe) to Hermannsburg (Ntaria), the Larapinta Drive interconnects a number of incredible must-sees in the region.

Wondering how this drive got its name? Larapinta is the local Arrernte name for the Finke River — purportedly the oldest river in the world, and a significant source of water in Central Australia.

Road conditions on the Larapinta Drive are generally very good, and the entirety of this drive is on sealed road — meaning a 2WD can get the job done just fine.

Allow plenty of time for Alice Springs Desert Park, just out of the Alice

township. Situated on 1300 hectares, you can get up close and personal with endemic wildlife and flora, as well as learn all about the culture of the local Arrernte people. On the way to the Desert Park, keep an eye out for stunning Mount Gillen on the left.

You'll then have a chance to stop by Simpsons Gap (Rungtutjirpa) and Standley Chasm (Angkerle Atwatye), both geological marvels that will instil you with a sense of just how unique the Red Centre really is.

Up next is Owen Springs Reserve; a beautiful reserve with rocky gorges, waterholes, and red sands emblematic of the Red Centre. Note that this road is only accessible via high clearance 4WD vehicles. If you feel like breaking up the drive overnight, Camping is permitted within Lawrence Gorge and near Redbank Waterhole. No facilities are provided.

When you reach Hermannsburg, enhance your knowledge of Indigenous art by checking out the Albert Namatjira Memorial and spending some time at Hermannsburg Potters — an Indigenous-owned, not-for-profit gallery showcasing beautiful works of art.

Beyond Hermannsburg, the sealed road continues about 43km where you can continue via the unsealed Mereenie Loop to Kings Canyon or turn right on to the sealed Namatjira Drive.

A cornerstone of any Central Australia adventure, tackling the Larapinta Drive will leave you wanting more. Luckily, there's the Namatjira Drive as well — check out the next page. ●



LOCAL TIPS

BY STEVE SHEARER
Thrifty car rental

"GRAB A RENTAL CAR AND HEAD OUT THROUGH THE AWESOME WEST MACDONNELL RANGES. MORNING SMOKO AT STANDLEY CHASM GREAT WALK AND FOOD, ONTO ORMISTON GORGE, THEN GLEN HELEN FOR LUNCH WITH A SPECTACULAR VIEW. CONTINUE ON THROUGH TYLERS PASS WITH VIEWS OF GOSSE BLUFF STOPPING AT HERMANSBURG TO VISIT THE HISTORICAL PRECINCT AND ENJOY WORLD FAMOUS STRUDEL IN THE TEA ROOMS, A BIG DAY ALL ON SEALED ROADS. ENJOY THE DRIVE!"

● Inarlanga Pass
A short 1 hour hike in from the Ochre Pits in the West Macs, this is an approachable and enjoyable way to get a taste of the Larapinta Trail. This is an in and out hike.

● Roma Gorge
Probably the least visited gorge in the West Macs. A high-clearance 4WD is definitely required.

● Sunrise from Mt Sonder
A 14 kilometre return walk from Redbank Gorge carpark - start at 3am to catch the sunrise.



WALKING AT THE MOUNT SONDER LOOKOUT
Photo Credit: Tourism NT/Salty Aura

● Standley Chasm to Angkale Junction (1 hr walk)
Your chance to try part of the Larapinta Trail, along Section 3 — a 3km walk from the Standley Chasm to Angkale Junction and back.

● Apple Strudel at Hermannsburg
When exploring the art and culture at Hermannsburg Historic Precinct, make sure you allow time to enjoy the apple strudel at the Kata Anga Tea Room.

● Birthday Waterhole
A semi-permanent waterhole on the Hugh River. Not usually suitable for swimming but great for wildlife. Access requires a high-clearance 4WD. Take the Hugh River/Birthday Waterhole track roughly 10km along Namatjira Drive off Larapinta Drive.

● Mt Zeil
The highest point in the Northern Territory. Approach from Mt Zeil Wilderness Park. Recommended that only those who are well prepared and fit enough attempt the climb as it traverses over rugged terrain, harsh spinifex and steep inclines.

HIDDEN GEMS

NAMATJIRA DRIVE - WEST MACDONNELL RANGES

Much like the Larapinta Drive (see page 14), the Namatjira Drive also runs west from Alice Springs. Namatjira Drive makes for a great companion drive to the Larapinta Drive, intersecting with an even greater number of Central Australia essentials. Customise your Namatjira Drive itinerary by doing some research on what you can see and do along the way — unless, of course, you want to try to fit everything in!

Named after famed Indigenous artist Albert Namatjira, this drive consists of sealed roads, meaning you won't need a high clearance 4WD unless you plan on visiting certain spots en route. The drive starts from Alice Springs on the Larapinta Drive where you can visit Simpsons Gap and Standley Chasm before turning right onto Namatjira Drive.

The turnoffs to Simpsons Gap

(Rungtutjirpa), Standley Chasm (Angkerle Atwatye), Neil Hargrave Lookout, the Ochre Pits, Ormiston Gorge (Kwartatuma) and Mt Sonder Lookout are all sealed and accessible via 2WD.

The turnoffs to Point Howard Lookout, Ellery Creek Big Hole (Udepata) and Glen Helen are corrugated dirt roads but are still accessible via 2WD. The turnoffs to Serpentine Gorge, Redbank Gorge (Rwetyepme), and Roma Gorge Lookout (with a great view towards Gosse Bluff) are recommended for high clearance 4WDs only.

Picturesque camping options include Ormiston Gorge Campground, with hot showers and a handy kiosk, and Ellery Creek Campground, featuring the site's spectacular waterhole.

Glen Helen Discovery Park has comfortable motel rooms as well

LOCAL TIPS

BY DANIAL ROCHFORD
Tourism Central Australia

"WHEN DRIVING THROUGH THE WEST MACDONNELL RANGES ON NAMATJIRA DRIVE, TAKE SOME TIME TO STOP AT EACH OF THE 'LOOKOUT' REST AREAS: POINT HOWARD, NEIL HARGRAVE, MOUNT SONDER AND TYLERS PASS. IT IS NOT BY CHANCE THAT THEY EACH HAVE SPECTACULAR VIEWS."

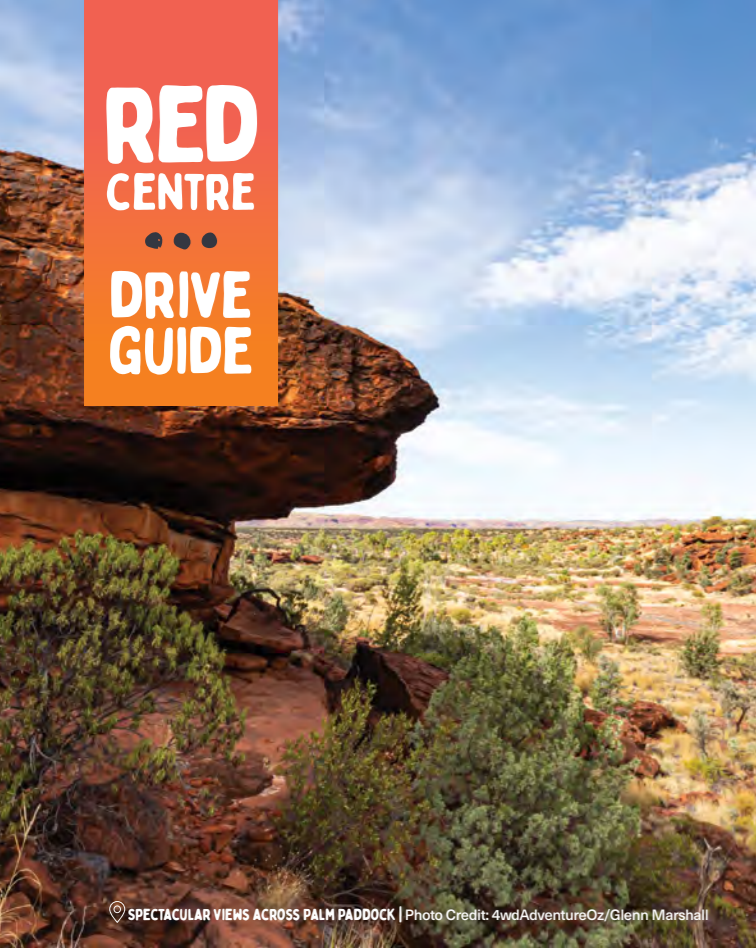
as campsites, a restaurant/bar, a swimming pool and an outdoor terrace overlooking the stunning Glen Helen cliffs.

Many people just go as far as Glen Helen, but you can continue on, past Gosse Bluff and loop back to Alice Springs via the Larapinta Drive. The total round trip from Alice Springs via the Namatjira and Larapinta Drives back to Alice Springs is 354km. To see everything that this drive has to offer we suggest taking at least two days out of your itinerary. ●



Itinerary	2WD	4WD
Highway	sealed	unsealed
Arterial Road	sealed	unsealed
Sub-arterial Road	sealed	unsealed
Local Road	sealed	unsealed
Track	sealed	unsealed
	4WD Track	private
River, State Border		
National Park		Reserve
Accredited Visitor Centre		
24 hrs Fuel		
Unleaded & Diesel, Diesel		
Caravan Park		
Point of Interest		Palm Valley
Aboriginal Community		
Homestead/Outstation		





SPECTACULAR VIEWS ACROSS PALM PADDOCK | Photo Credit: 4wdAdventureOz/Glenn Marshall



OVERVIEW OF PALM VALLEY | Photo Credit: Tourism NT/Steve Strike

5 FIND YOUR NEXT ADVENTURE

FINKE GORGE NATIONAL PARK - PALM VALLEY

Looking for a new 4WD adventure? The Finke River National Park drive to Palm Valley is a fantastic route to one of the most impressive places in Central Australia. Driving alongside the oldest river in the world, Palm Valley is a maze of sandstone amphitheatres, pinnacles and gorges, as well as home to its namesake, the Red Cabbage Palm. The surrounding areas are also of great cultural significance to the Western Arrernte people, so it's a great place to visit, go on a walk and set up camp for the night.

An easy 127km, two-hour drive on the bitumen of Larapinta Drive gets you to Hermannsburg. Take some time to explore this incredible Historic Precinct and have a coffee and apple strudel at the Kata Anga Tea Rooms — the back deck looks out over the Finke River. Back on the road, cross the Finke River, and turn left. The last 16km of this road is along the river bed of the Finke River, making it 4WD accessible only. Though predominantly dry, there are some deep and sandy sections to cross. Further, heavy rains in this region can cause this section to be impassable, so check before you head out — otherwise, Palm Valley is accessible year-round, and is a class 1 campsite with showers — charges as per Parks and Wildlife NT. There's a 4.5km track down to the Palm Valley Park area from the campsite, passing Cycad Gorge, which is great for beginner 4WDers.



6 FIND YOUR NEXT ADVENTURE

FINKE GORGE NATIONAL PARK - BOGGY HOLE

The **Finke Gorge National Park** is a popular tourist destination just south of Hermannsburg. Central to the appeal of the Finke Gorge National Park is the Finke River, which is believed to be one of the oldest rivers in the world. The Hermannsburg to Ilpurla route encompasses the Finke Gorge National Park. While the road from Alice Springs to Hermannsburg can be undertaken by 2WD, the tracks in the National Park require a high-clearance 4WD. For those without a 4WD, the park can be accessed via tours based in Alice Springs.

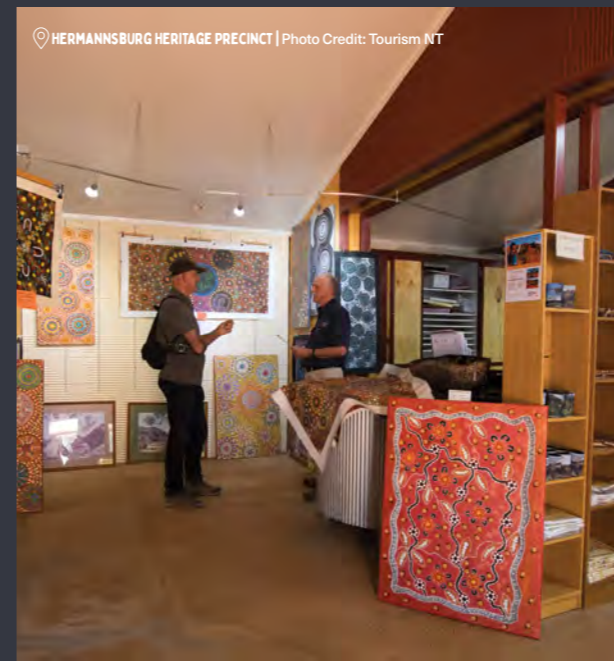
Accessible all year round, except when the Finke River is in flood, Boggy Hole (and the Boggy Hole track) also require 4WDs to access. Boggy Hole is a stunning permanent waterhole just a few hours' drive from Hermannsburg and located across from a historic police camp. When it closed between 1893 and 1912 it became an administration centre that distributed rations to Aboriginal people.

Finke Gorge National Park is considered a place of Indigenous cultural significance, due to the many Aboriginal sites contained within it. Why not traverse one of the many walking tracks in the 46,000-hectare National Park? Palm Valley is also nestled within the park. The rare Red Cabbage Palm can only be found within Finke Gorge National Park, making it another popular sight.

The route down to Ernest Giles Road will take you past Running Waters and Illamurta Springs. For the adventurous, experienced and well-prepared, this is a great way to get to Kings Canyon and/or Uluru. Make sure you have plenty of fresh drinking water and a satellite phone.



FINKE RIVER GORGE TRACK | Photo Credit: Matt Williams



HERMANSBURG HERITAGE PRECINCT | Photo Credit: Tourism NT

8 FIND YOUR NEXT ADVENTURE

TENNANT CREEK TO ASP

Tennant Creek is a wonderful place in which plenty of things will catch your eye. Community-minded and self-reliant, the town is certainly worth a visit. With perfect weather and an intriguing history, Tennant Creek has something for everyone.

Tennant Creek has many seasonal activities and festivals. The Desert Harmony Festival celebrates artists from the Barkly region and is held on the NT Picnic Day Long Weekend annually the beginning of August.

Located on the edge of the Barkly Tableland, a vast area of grassland dominated by large cattlestations, Tennant Creek can act as a base to visit many different places. You can visit Karlu Karlu, the Devils Marbles. These ancient granite marbles seem to defy gravity and are a must-see. The Davenport Ranges, which is a 4WD paradise, or the Battery Hill Mining Centre, the site of Australia's last gold rush, are also worthy of a visit. Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre is a great place to view and buy the art of the local Warumungu people.

Located on Stuart Highway, Tennant Creek is also an ideal place to begin the iconic trip to Alice Springs. Along the way, why not stop and explore the towns scattered along the way? The trip takes you through Wauchope, Wycliffe Well, Barrow Creek, Ti Tree, and Aileron, and there are numerous points of interest en route — Bonney Well, the Teamster Memorial, Ryan Well, Connor Well, and the Peter Egerton-Warburton Memorial, among many others. The Stuart Highway is sealed, so a 4WD is only required if you're planning to take a detour to the Davenport Ranges.

Alice Springs perfectly encapsulates the spirit of the outback and will fill your itinerary with a brilliant mixture of natural and cultural must-sees.

An excellent base from which to explore the East and West MacDonnell Ranges and other scenic beauties, such as Alice Springs Desert Park. Alice is fringed by the MacDonnell

Ranges, why not take a camel ride at sunset and see this landscape at the peak of its natural glory?

Art enthusiasts will find loads to be excited about — from the Alice Springs Telegraph Station, School of the Air, Royal Flying Doctor Service, Womens Museum of Australia, and the National Road Transport Hall of Fame plus more, there's something exciting for everyone.

The Olive Pink Botanic Gardens are another lovely way to spend some time — meander through the scenic gardens and finish the trip with a coffee and bite to eat from the cafe.

Alice Springs is also known for its challenging golf course. Equipped with motorised buggies, the course caters to tourists and residents alike.

Another way to see the town is by hot air balloon during sunrise, a helicopter flight, or by glider. These are popular activities among tourists and an incredible sight to behold. ●

COUPLE EXPLORING DEVILS MARBLE | Photo Credit: Tourism NT/Helen Orr



HIDDEN GEMS

- **UFOs at Wycliffe Well**
The UFO Capital of Australia.
- **Davenport Ranges**
1,120 square kilometre National Park. Great for four-wheel driving. Includes Old Police Station Waterhole.

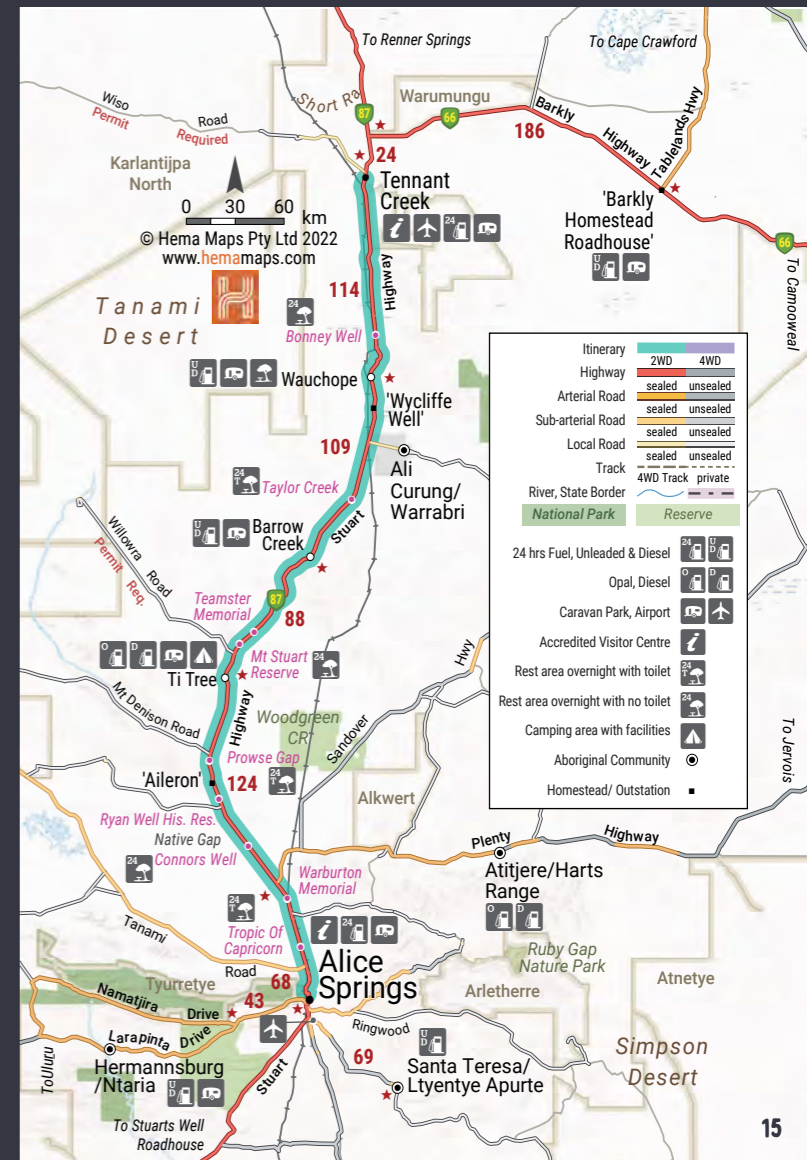
HISTORY OF THE RFDS
Photo Credit: Tourism NT/Shaana McNaught



TIANPI DESERT WEAVERS
Photo Credit: Tourism NT/Elise Derwin



ALICE SPRINGS STREET ART | Photo Credit: Tourism NT/Elise Derwin



9 FIND YOUR NEXT ADVENTURE

BINNS TRACK

Plan an adventure through the foreign yet spectacular scenery of the Binns Track, one of Australia's best 4WD tracks. Named after Bill Binns, a ranger who worked with NT Parks and Wildlife for 32 years, this 2,191km adventure road trip from Mt Dare to Timber Creek shows you what driving through Central Australia has to offer. The challenging track is quite remote, so make sure you come prepared, especially with road conditions always changing. Access is often limited from December through May.

After a stunning sunrise at Mt Dare, it's 421km along Old Andado Track to Alice Springs, driving through destinations like the Finke River flood-out, Molly Clark's Old Andado Homestead and Santa Teresa — an artistic Aboriginal community. The amount of dust here can make it difficult to drive. You'll visit N'Dhala Gorge on day two, and this 97km route crosses the Ross River multiple times which is impassable after heavy rain. Experience the gold rush at Arltunga Historical Reserve, then slowly drive 2.5 hours east, 38km, to Ruby Gap Nature Park.

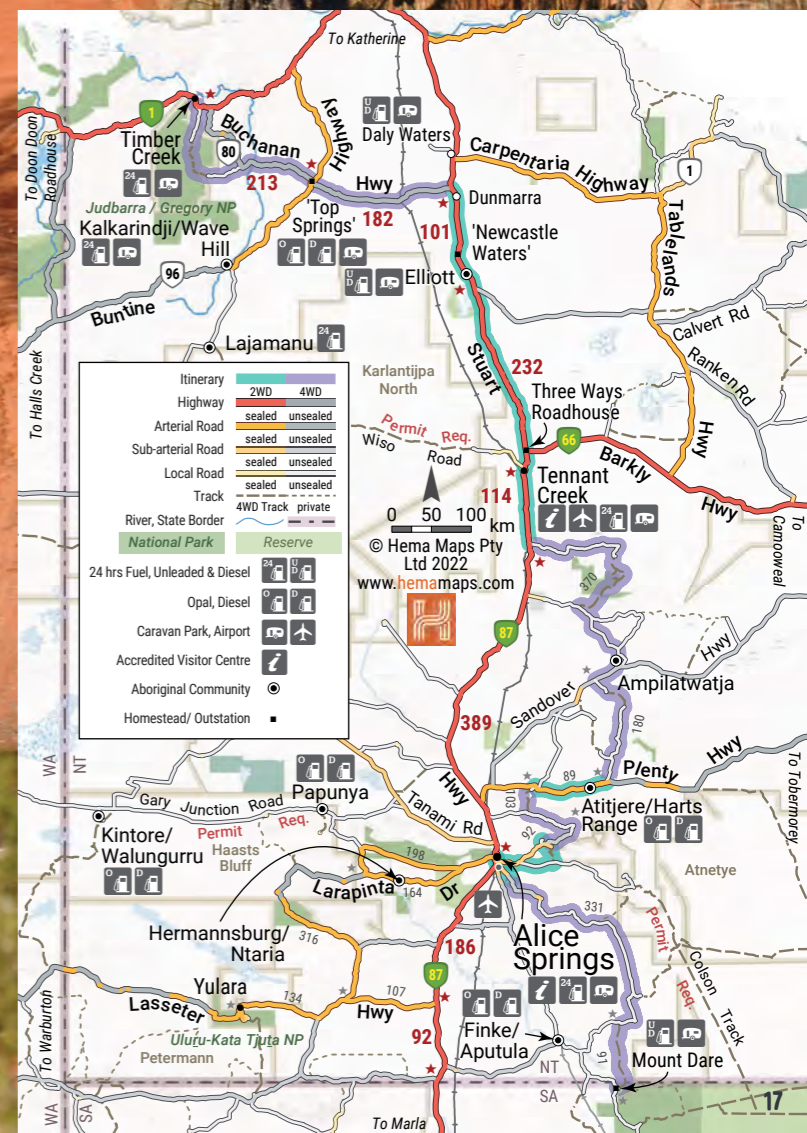
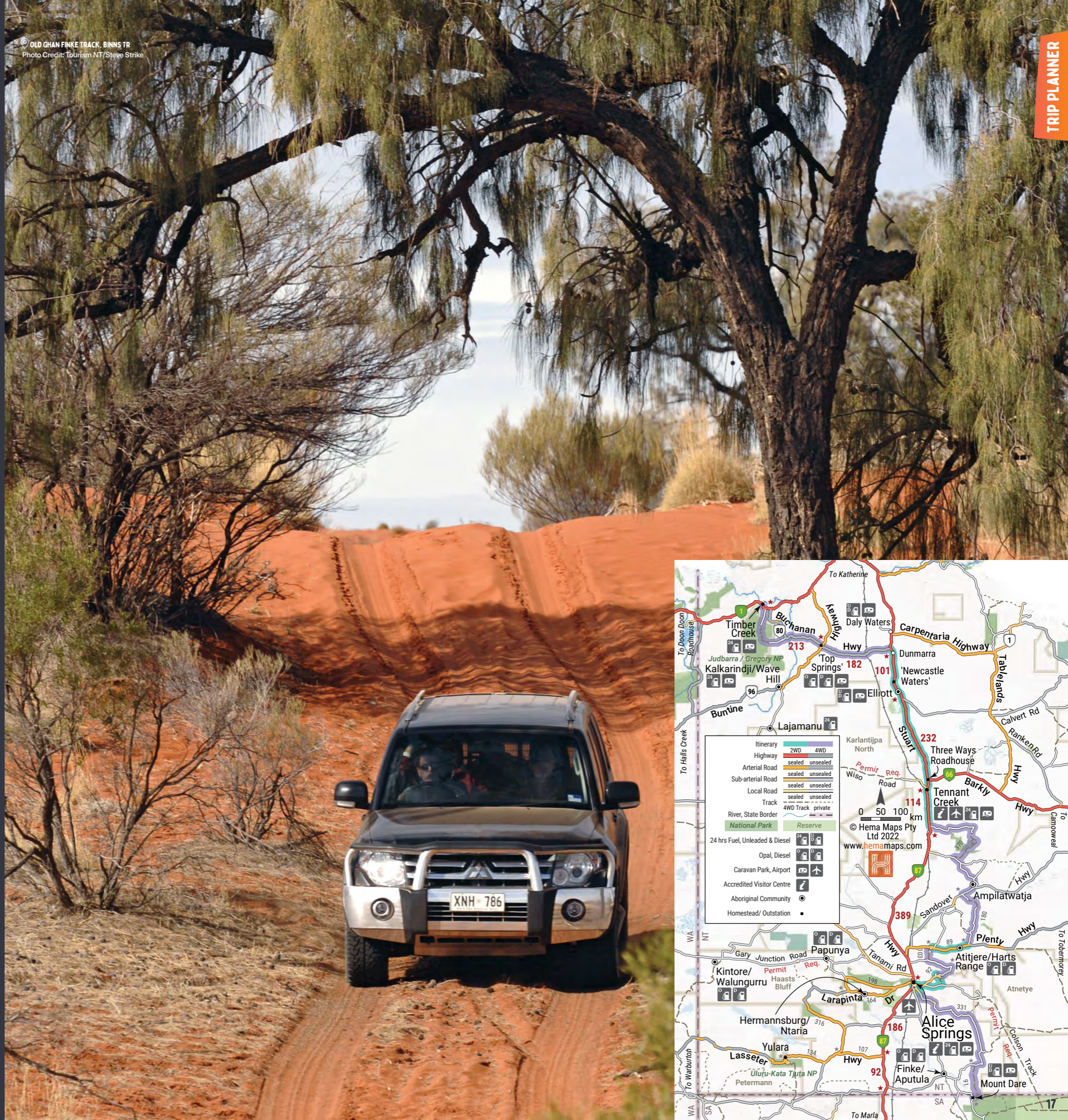
Head for Gemtree on day 3 along Pinnacles Track, offering fantastic views of the Harts Ranges. Gemtree Caravan Park is your campsite, 95km from Arltunga, and here you can

fossick for semi-precious stones. Gemtree to Davenport Ranges on day 4 will require your offroading skills as you travel through outback cattle stations 94km east along the Plenty Highway. Then, head north to Old Police Station Waterhole via Hatches Creek and the Frew River Loop.

On day 5 you'll encounter a challenge in the form of steep climbs up loose surfaces 9km along the Frew River Loop to the main access road to Epenarra. Then drive 81km to Whistleduck Creek, the track for which continues 90km west to the Stuart Highway, right near the Devils Marbles where you can set up camp and explore the reserve. On day six, after a photoshoot with the Marbles, drive 90km north to explore Tennant Creek and its music and Indigenous culture. The Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre is a great place to learn about the Warumungu people's connection to the land.

On day 7 you'll pass Threeways Roadhouse before driving another 255km on the Stuart Highway to Newcastle Waters — a deserted ghost town — and heading 78km north to Dunmarra Wayside Inn, your campsite. The Red Centre region ends here, but if interested, continue exploring for a few more days up to Timber Creek. ●

OLD GHAN FINKE TRACK, BINNS TR
Photo Credit: Tourism NT/Steve Strike



RAINBOW VALLEY IS A MUST-SEE | Photo Credit: Getty/TonyFeder

10 FIND YOUR NEXT ADVENTURE

RAINBOW VALLEY

The Rainbow Valley

Conservation Reserve is known for its beautifully coloured sandstone bluffs and cliffs as well as its biodiversity with hundreds of plant species and a wide variety of animal and bird life. Part of the James Range, Rainbow Valley is 97km south of Alice Springs making it an easy day trip. This spot is particularly beautiful in the

early morning or after rain, when pools of water reflect the unique coloured rock landscape.

From Alice Springs, drive 75km south along the Stuart Highway. From this turnoff point there is a further 22km of unsealed road to travel, best suited to 4WDs.

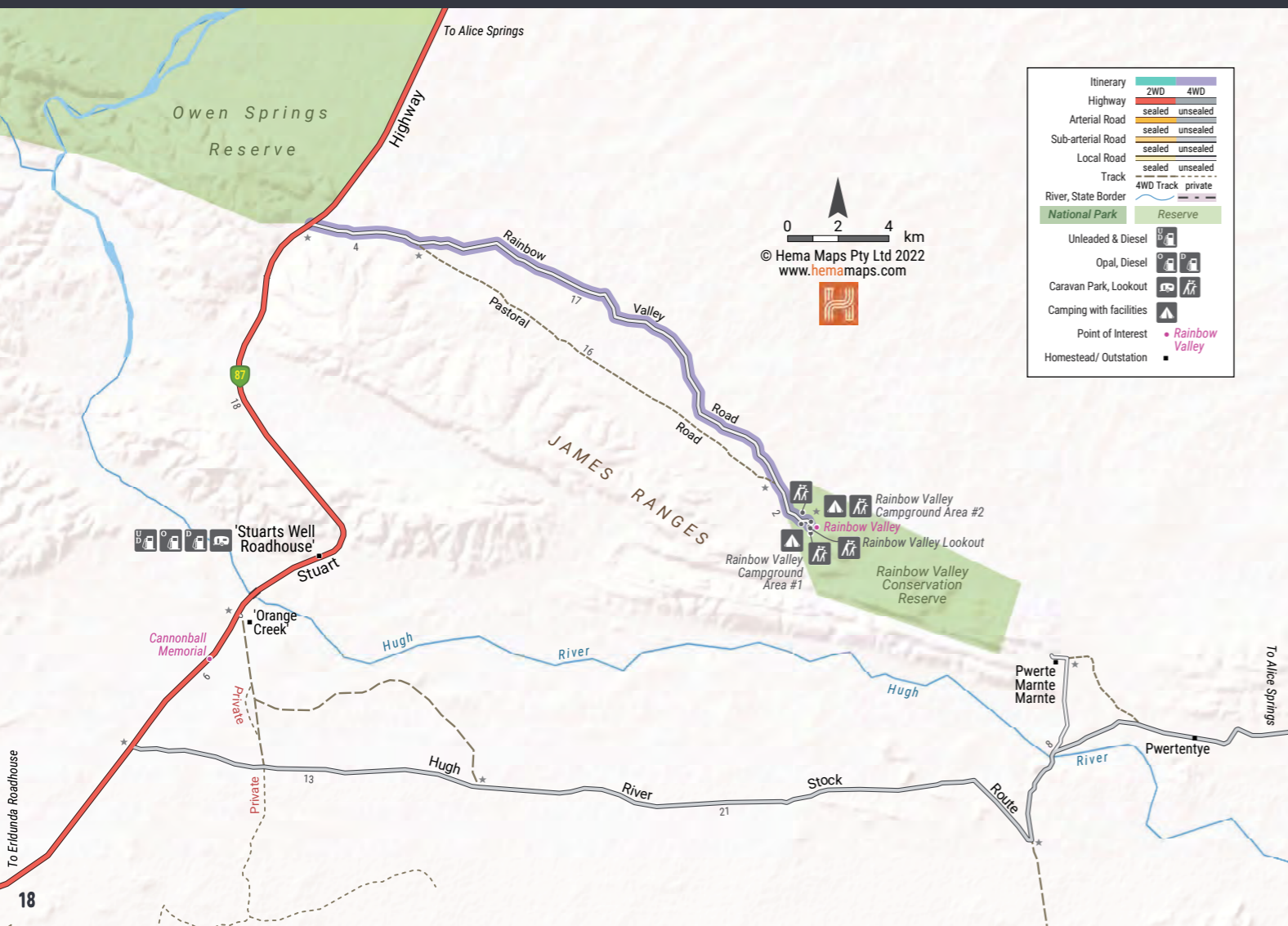
Once at the Reserve, check out Mushroom Rock and enjoy a walk around the

base of this amazing rock formation, named for its unusual appearance caused by millions of years of wind and erosion. The walk is particularly scenic during wildflower season in spring.

This region has significant cultural significance and the area is strongly connected to the Southern Arrernte people, known to them as Wurre. The rocks feature

ancient petroglyphs (rock engravings) and other forms of rock art. Cultural tours of the area are offered, leaving from Alice Springs.

The Reserve features picnic facilities, toilets, gas barbecues and camping options. Fire pits are also provided, however collecting wood from the Reserve is not permitted so you'll need to bring your own. ●



11 FIND YOUR NEXT ADVENTURE

CHAMBERS PILLAR



THE LONE PILLAR IS UNMISSABLE | Photo Credit: Matt Williams



Spend the night at one of the two campgrounds admiring the clear skies and outback stars at Chambers Pillar Historical Reserve. Located 160km south from Alice Springs, this lone pillar is striking against the deep blue of the sky with its red and white rock walls.

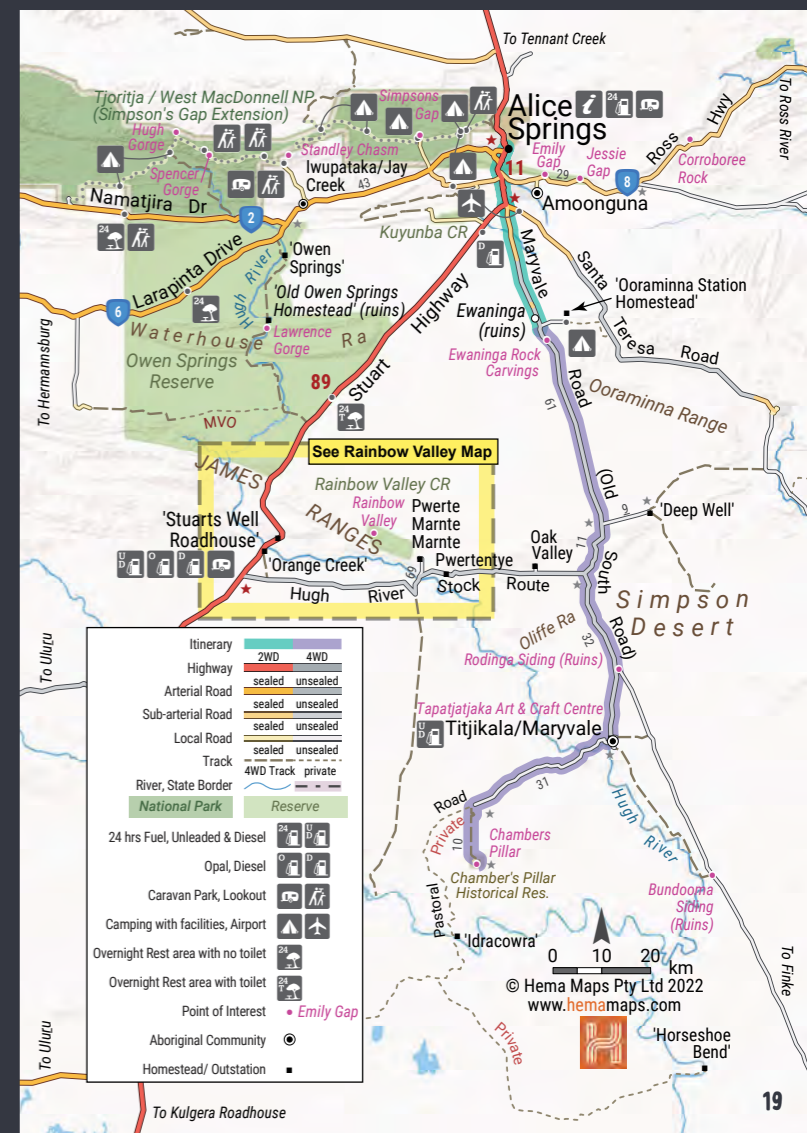
The drive here would be considered moderate, although a high clearance 4WD is needed. From Alice Springs, drive south through the Gap and pass the Stuart Highway/ Adelaide turn off, where you'll see another right hand turn along Old South Road to Maryvale and Chambers Pillar. From here the road is unsealed, with conditions subject to change at certain times of the year due to corrugations, rain, bull dust, and erosion gullies. The road will be at its worst after the Finke Desert Race in June.

Along the Old South Road, 39km from Alice Springs, stop off at

Napwerte/Ewanings Rock Carvings Reservation which protects rock engravings made by the early Arrernte people, known as petroglyphs. The 680m walking track allows you to view one of the best petroglyph sites and offers you a new understanding of an ancient culture.

From here, it's 107km on a gravel road to Maryvale where you then follow the signs and drive another 42km to the Pillar. This final stretch has severe corrugations, bull dust ruts and deep sand, so an offroad caravan is not recommended.

There are actually three rock formations at the Pillar, each a sacred site for the Lower Southern Arrernte, Pertame and Luritja people, and there are plenty of walking tracks, birdwatching and photography opportunities and history to explore — it's pretty striking at sunset. ●



4 FIND YOUR NEXT ADVENTURE

EAST MACDONNELL RANGES

If the West MacDonnell Ranges are the jewel in the Central Australian crown, then the East MacDonnell Ranges are the hidden gem. Sights to see within the East MacDonnell Ranges include Emily and Jessie Gaps and Corroboree Rock, which feature rock art and white lime paintings. Trepkina Gorge is also part of the East MacDonnell Ranges. Marvel at the 300-year-old ghost gum on the banks of the gorge and make use of the five walking tracks around the gorge. If you have a high clearance 4WD the

John Hayes Rockhole is worth the 9km detour. The East MacDonnell Ranges are an important part of the Dreaming for Eastern Arrernte Aboriginal people, so the region is culturally significant. However, it is not just nature and culture that make these formations so meaningful. The East MacDonnell Ranges also has historical meaning — Arltunga was the site of early European gold mining and is considered to be the first town in the Northern Territory. Need a place to stay? Ross River

CORROBORREE ROCK | Photo Credit: Matt Williams



TREPKHINA GORGE NATURE PARK
Photo Credit: Tourism NT/Shanaa McNaught



John Hayes Rockhole
A nine kilometre 4WD track leads to this hidden waterhole with steep rock walls. John Hayes is a popular swimming location during warmer months.

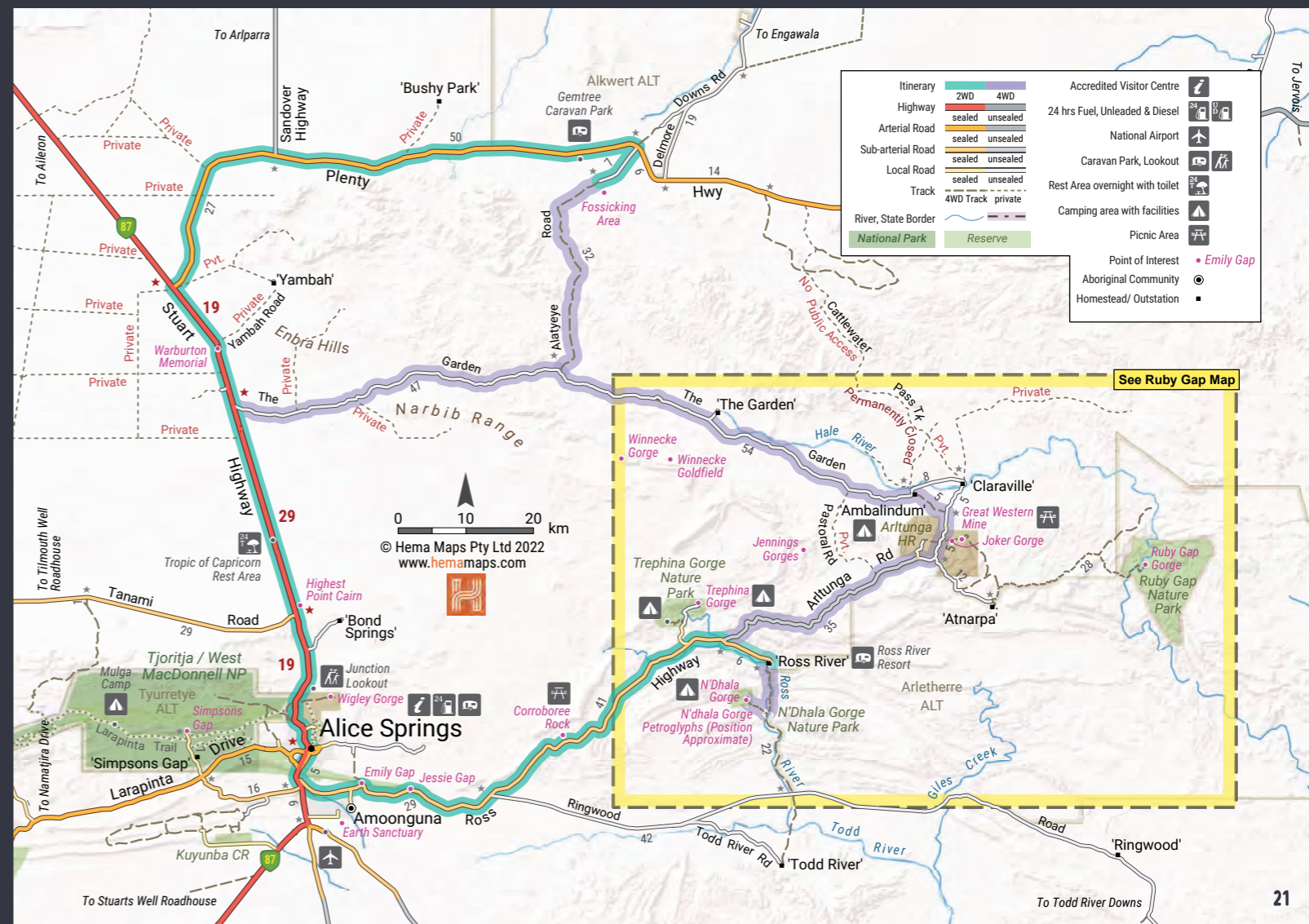
HIDDEN GEMS



CHAIN OF PONDS WALK AT JOHN HAYES ROCKHOLE
Photo Credit: Getty/Karel Stipek

Resort can be found 83km east-north-east of Alice Springs by sealed road and offers a variety of accommodation options including camping and rustic cabins — there's even a swimming pool so you can cool off after your drive. Wind a little further through the ranges, up the Binns Track 115km north east of Alice Springs (note: Binns Track is 4WD-accessible only) and you'll come to Hale River Homestead, offering camping with fire pits and hot showers or self-contained properties if tents and caravans aren't your style. You can loop back to Alice Springs via 'The Gardens Road' or via Gemtree Roadhouse on the Plenty Highway.

If exploring the East MacDonnell Ranges on foot or by 4WD isn't a possibility, you can do it in style from the air. Helicopter tours of the Ranges are available, leaving from Alice Springs. By air, foot, or car, the East MacDonnell Ranges are ripe for exploration.



7
**FIND YOUR NEXT
ADVENTURE**

ALICE TO ULURU 2WD



SPECTACULAR FIELD OF LIGHT INSTALLATION
Photo Credit: Tourism NT/Salty Aura

Red dirt tracks are an iconic image when we think of Central Australia, but that doesn't mean that you can't explore the Red Centre without a four-wheel drive — these days there are plenty of iconic experiences that can be reached from sealed roads. You can drive all the way from Alice Springs to Uluru with a two-wheel drive and explore some of the Red Centre's most iconic sights.

Soon after leaving Alice Springs on the Stuart Highway heading south, you can take a detour to the Napwerte/ Ewaninga Rock Carvings Conservation Reserve. The road is sealed for the first 23km and is usually suitable for two-wheel drive vehicles, with the only exception being after heavy rain, when it can become impassable. This reserve protects rock engraving petroglyphs sacred to the Arrernte Aboriginal people.

Outcrops of sandstone beside a small claypan form natural galleries for

this sacred art. Much of the meaning of the petroglyphs is considered too dangerous to reveal to people not initiated in Aboriginal law, but visitors are welcomed to wander around the site. The custodians only ask that you don't climb over, touch or photograph the rocks and their sacred carvings. A marked 680m walking track will help you view the best petroglyph sites.

Stuarts Well Roadhouse is about 90km south, nestled into the James Ranges. Continue south along the Stuart Highway for about 185km until you turn west at the Lasseter Highway. The Erldunda Roadhouse sits at this intersection, with accommodation available as well as powered and unpowered caravan spots. Erldunda Roadhouse's emu and kangaroo farms include up close experiences. You can also take in a beautiful Red Centre sunrise or sunset from the elevated sunset viewing platform.

From Erldunda Roadhouse head west on the Lasseter Highway. A short way before arriving at Uluru, you can view Mt Conner, often referred to as "Fool-uru" because of how often it is mistaken for Uluru. Shortly afterwards you'll reach Curtin Springs which has accommodation, a working cattle station and a roadhouse. Here you can take guided walks of the nearby salt lakes or try a paper making class using native grasses.

Finally, the region of Uluru and



EARLY MORNING HOT AIR BALLOON FLIGHT IN ALICE SPRINGS
Photo Credit: Tourism NT/Daniel Tran



STUART HIGHWAY | Photo Credit: Matt Williams



LOCAL TIPS

MARK SWINDELLS
Uluru Segway Tours

"RUBY GAP: YOU WILL NEED TWO DAYS TO SPARE, A SWAG AND MODERATE 4WD SKILLS. IT'S A FOUR HOUR DRIVE FROM ALICE TAKING IN THE SIGHTS, STUNNING SCENERY, MAGNIFICENT CLIFF, BEAUTIFUL SUNSET, BIG RIVER GUMS AND SOMETIMES POOLS OF WATER. AND IF YOU'RE REALLY LUCKY, YOU MAY HAVE IT TO YOURSELVES!"

the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park (UKTNP) encompasses a vast range of activities to explore. You will reach Yulara (or Ayers Rock Resort) before you get to the National Park and this is where many people stay in a variety of accommodations. Walking, bicycle or camel tours are available, often at sunrise or sunset when the temperatures are cooler and changing light plays its magic across the landscape. Why not try a scenic flight over the rock, either in a helicopter or a light plane? You can hear the Anangu people's stories of Tjukurpa, see sites sacred to their culture and explore Uluru up close with the Base Walk. Just 50km west of Uluru, explore Kata Tjuta (formerly known as The Olgas) on the Valley of the Winds Walk. If you have the time, plan for multiple days in the area. ●

📍 YOUNG COUPLE PARKED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DESERT IN RED CENTRE
Photo Credit: Tourism NT/Jake Appleby



ESSENTIAL INFO 4WD Safely
4WD BASICS FOR THE RED CENTRE

When visiting the Red Centre, why not take advantage of the many 4WD tracks available for exploration? To visit the following areas, you'll need a 4WD and an adventurous spirit. Please note that Aboriginal Land Permits may also be required to visit some of these places.

- Ernest Giles Road
- Mereenie Loop (permit required)
- Chambers Pillar Historical Reserve
- Rainbow Valley Conservation Reserve
- Palm Valley and Finke Gorge
- N'Dhala Gorge Nature Park

- Arltunga Historical Conservation Reserve
- Ruby Gap Nature Park
- Serpentine Gorge
- Serpentine Chalet
- Redbank Gorge
- Gosse Bluff (Tnorola)

Safety is number one
When four-wheel driving in the Red Centre, it's always important to carry plenty of drinking water, but there's a lot more to staying safe than just water. Here are some things to consider before you take the plunge.

- Ensure you have rated recovery points on your 4WD. A rated recovery point is stamped and made from thicker steel

- than a basic recovery point. Also, ensure that you have a rated recovery point at the rear of your vehicle.
- Recovery gear is essential should you become bogged in sand or stuck in some other way. Your local 4x4 accessories business should have all the gear you need and it's an excellent time to get expert advice.
- Always carry a first aid kit, and if possible, take a first aid course before you begin your Red Centre journey. You never know when a medical emergency may arise so it's best to be prepared.
- Consider carrying a

personal locator beacon. In the event that you become lost, you can activate the beacon and make it easier for help to find you. A satellite phone is another alternative, however this can be pricey. Another option is to hire a satellite phone, which makes it more affordable. If safety is a major concern for you, there are companies in the Red Centre that offer guided 4WD tours, so you can kick back and enjoy the challenge of four-wheel driving without the worry of recovery gear and other safety factors. ●

TOP FIVE

RED CENTRE CAMPING SPOTS



THE RED CENTRE IS PACKED FULL OF EXCELLENT CAMPER DESTINATIONS AND HERE ARE A FEW THAT WILL GET YOUR JUICES FLOWING.

Remote camping, orange sand, dry riverbeds, serenity, history and culture. This is what camping in this part of Australia is all about. A camera is a must, as is a sense of adventure as the destinations below allow you to discover some amazing places. If you haven't been to any of these places before, chuck 'em on your bucket list and start planning a Red Centre expedition.

RAINBOW VALLEY

Keen photographers will fall in love with the colourful sandstone bluffs and cliffs at Rainbow Valley. The road into the conservation reserve is compacted sand, with corrugated sections along the way and is signposted as 4WD only.

Closing in on the reserve, you start seeing the first glimpses of the geological formations, making you think about how fantastic and diverse the landscape is in the desert. The best times to view Rainbow Valley is in the soft morning light or golden hour around sunset.

Rainbow Valley is important to the Upper Southern Arrernte people, who still use it as a place to camp and teach the kids about looking after Country. They call this place Wurre.

Boardwalks lead to the salt pan, which lies before the main section of Rainbow Valley. Pay your respects and always stick to the walking trail. With your camera at hand, there are plenty of spots to wait for the right shot, and as the sun begins to set below the dunes over your shoulder, the sandstone bands will begin to change colour from ochre red to orange and purple that match perfectly with the explosions of colours in the skies above. Camp overnight

and catch the sunrise here too. We highly recommend checking this place out.



📍 EVEN IN THIS LIGHT, THE SANDSTONE LOOKS SPECTACULAR | Photo Credit: 4wdAdventureOz/Glenn Marshall

DESTINATIONS DETAILS

- REGION:** Rainbow Valley Conservation Reserve
- NEAREST TOWN:** Alice Springs is 160km north via the Old South Road. Maryvale has a store with limited supplies.
- WHEN TO GO:** The cooler months from April to September are the best times, but the roads may close after heavy rain.
- CAMPING:** Two designated campgrounds with free gas BBQs, fire pits and pit toilets. The campsites are dispersed and for \$4 per night for adults, \$2 per child and \$10 per family, it's value great for the money. Cash payments only with fees paid at the campground's honesty box.
- WHAT TO TAKE:** A compressor and tyre gauge, firewood, food and water. Take out what you take in.
- DIFFICULTY:** The 45km track from Maryvale into Chambers Pillar can be accessed by 4WD vehicles and off-road campers and vans. Carry extra food and water, vehicle equipment, recovery and safety gear as the roads may be closed after rain.
- CONTACTS:** NT Parks and Wildlife

📍 THE ROAD INTO RAINBOW VALLEY IS 4WD ONLY | Photo Credit: 4wdAdventureOz/Glenn Marshall



RED CENTRE DRIVE GUIDE

📍 YOUNG COUPLE PARKED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DESERT IN RED CENTRE
Photo Credit: Tourism NT/Jake Appleby



PALM VALLEY

Access to the Palm Valley campground is only suitable for high clearance 4WD vehicles. Drop some air from your tyres and only tow an offroad camper or caravan, as the Finke River sand is often deep in places.

The track from the campground to Palm Valley has been modified in recent years, making it less gnarly, but high clearance will help you over the rocks that litter the track. From the car park, there are two walking options, both offering great views of the ancient Red Cabbage Palms and the valley. The palms are only found in this section of Central Australia.

The 5km Mpulungkinya loop walk climbs high up onto the sandstone plateau above the palms and leads to views across Palm Paddock before dropping down deeper into the valley. The Arankala walk is a shorter 2km walk along the valley floor and amongst the palms before a shorter climb up onto the plateau and then loops back to the car park.

Not far from the campground is the Kalarranga Lookout, a short climb that offers extraordinary panoramas of



📍 A HIGH CLEARANCE 4WD VEHICLE IS NECESSARY TO ACCESS PALM VALLEY
Photo Credit: 4wdAdventureOz/Glenn Marshall

the remarkable weathered sandstone hills. I can recommend the 5km loop Mpaara Walk that envelops you into the Aboriginal Dreamtime by following the story of Mpaara, the Tawny Frogmouth-man and the Pangkalanga Devil Man.

DESTINATIONS DETAILS

REGION: Finke Gorge National Park

NEAREST TOWN: Alice Springs is 138km east via Larapinta Drive.

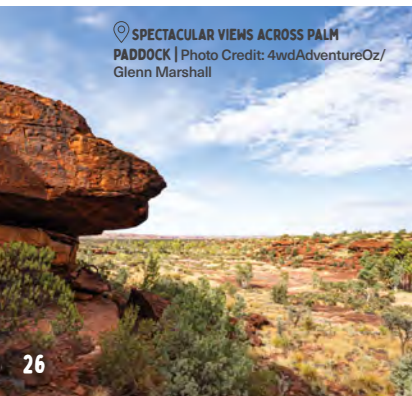
WHEN TO GO: The cooler months from April to September are the best times, but the roads may close after heavy rain.

CAMPING: Camping costs \$10 per adult and \$5 per child, or \$25 for families. Cash payments only with fees paid at the campground's honesty box. There are flushing toilets, solar-heated showers, LPG BBQs and burners and communal fire pits. During peak times rangers hold informative talks around the campfire.

WHAT TO TAKE: A compressor and tyre gauge, firewood, food and water. Take out what you take in.

DIFFICULTY: The 16km track into Palm Valley and campground can be accessed by high clearance 4WD. Carry extra food and water, vehicle equipment, recovery, and safety gear.

📍 SPECTACULAR VIEWS ACROSS PALM PADDOCK | Photo Credit: 4wdAdventureOz/Glenn Marshall



OWEN SPRINGS RESERVE

Once a thriving cattle station covering 1570km², Owen Springs opened as a reserve in 2003 and has become popular with overlanders searching for a great place to camp, away from the hordes. Besides the incredible bush camping, the reserve has a historic back story, as well as reminders of its pastoral heritage, best experienced on the 50km Owen Springs Self-Drive.

While the track can be driven in either direction, I've written this as travelling from north to south. The Homestead, now ranger station is the first set of structures you'll come across, with the old Aboriginal quarters nearby. You can explore the quarters, although most of the "buildings" have disappeared. The Aboriginal stockmen were extremely important to the property as they were often skilled horsemen and fencers.

Crossing open plains as you close in on the Waterhouse Range, an old set of redgum yards and branding yard can be found on your left. A little further on is the Old Homestead site. William Gilbert built two log cabins in late 1873, the first homestead to be built in Central Australia. The stone homestead was built from 1886 with the operations gradually moved to the north, to Milner's Well in the 1950s.

As you enter Lawrence Gorge, it's easy to spot the signposts signalling where

camping is permitted. The next stop is the old Haunted Tree bore, where the cattle would often be spooked when the limbs of nearby gums rubbed in the wind. The tank was washed away by a recent flood and can be found a short way downstream as you continue the drive.

Once out of the gorge, enjoy the views across the desert plains with burnt orange sand, golden grasses and mulgas. Crossing the Hugh River, the track to Redbank Waterhole soon appears on your right. There are several areas suitable for bush camping on both sides of the river with the waterhole often dry if the river hasn't flowed for some time.

DESTINATIONS DETAILS

REGION: Owen Springs Reserve
NEAREST TOWN: Alice Springs is 66km north via the Stuart Highway or 50km east via Larapinta Drive.

WHEN TO GO: The cooler months from April to September are the best times, but the roads may close after heavy rain.

CAMPING: There are two remote bush camps, one between the signposts within Lawrence Gorge and at Redbank Waterhole. Most campsites require high clearance 4WD to reach them. You need to be self-reliant as there are no facilities.

WHAT TO TAKE: A compressor and tyre gauge, firewood, food and water. Take out what you take in.

DIFFICULTY: A high clearance 4WD is essential with some sections of the 50km self-drive track following or crossing the sandy riverbed of the Hugh River. Carry extra food and water, vehicle equipment, recovery, and safety gear.



📍 OWEN SPRINGS RESERVE | Photo Credit: 4wdAdventureOz/Glenn Marshall



📍 IT ALWAYS FEELS WEIRD STANDING ON THE EDGE OF A METEORITE CRATER AS IT'S BEEN CAUSED BY SOMETHING FROM OUTERSPACE | Photo Credit: 4wdAdventureOz/Glenn Marshall

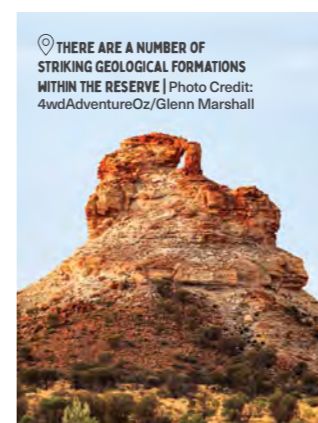
HENBURY METEORITE CRATERS

It's hard to imagine what the Arrernte people thought when a large meteorite travelling at over 40,000 kilometres per hour broke up before hurtling into the surface of the earth around 4000 years ago. The noise would have been deafening and the shock waves that ran through the earth would have startled the native animals, as well as the local inhabitants. No wonder it's a sacred site.

Access to the Henbury Meteorite Conservation Reserve is via the unsealed Ernest Giles Road that runs between the Stuart Highway and Luritja Road, with the turnoff 15km from the highway. It is then 5km to the campground on a very corrugated road.

These days the conservation reserve is a protected area, with over 12 craters and an area that still contains meteorite fragments. Visitors are free to explore the crater field, using the walking track that leaves from the campground, and please, leave only footprints and take only photographs as the fragments you see lying all about the ground are protected.

The geological structure of the craters has helped in interpreting features on planets such as Mars, and US astronauts visited the area to prepare for moon



📍 THERE ARE A NUMBER OF STRIKING GEOLOGICAL FORMATIONS WITHIN THE RESERVE | Photo Credit: 4wdAdventureOz/Glenn Marshall

landings. Over the years, erosion has started to wash soil into the craters, however the Aboriginal people wouldn't drink rainwater that collected, fearing they'd be filled with iron.

DESTINATIONS DETAILS

REGION: Henbury Meteorites Conservation Reserve
NEAREST TOWN: Alice Springs is 145km northeast via the Stuart Highway.

WHEN TO GO: The cooler months from April to September are the best times, but the roads may close after heavy rain.

CAMPING: Remote bush camping with a small number of designated sites. Costs \$4 per adult per night and \$2 per child and \$10 for families. Cash payments only with fees paid at the campground's honesty box. There are pit toilets, fire pits and shelters with tables.

WHAT TO TAKE: Firewood, food and water. Take out what you take in.
DIFFICULTY: Ernest Giles Road is an unsealed and dry weather only road. The track into Henbury Craters and campground can be accessed by 2WD vehicles. Carry and drink plenty of water and slip, slop, slap.



📍 CAPTURING THE PILLAR AT SUNSET | Photo Credit: 4wdAdventureOz/Glenn Marshall

CHAMBERS PILLAR

Explorer John McDouall Stuart arrived at this stunning landmark on 6th April 1860 naming it Chambers Pillar after a mate. Stuart didn't leave his tag on the rock, but those that followed did. William and Mary Hayes took up land at Deep Well, Warne and Randle worked on the Overland Telegraph, storekeepers, coppers, scientists have all carved their names in the rock. Thankfully it is now illegal.

Getting to Chambers Pillar is a little easier on vehicles and drivers these days, with money having been spent improving the road. Following the South Road out of Alice Springs, you'll notice another track running beside you. This is the Old South Road, and is used for the annual Finke Desert Race. Take the turnoff to Maryvale Station, and don't forget to spend some cash in the store to help a small business out.

The walking track to the Pillar leaves from the campground. Climbing the sandstone steps up to the base of the pillar provides

360 degrees views of the surrounding landscape and a walkway has been erected to allow easy viewing of the rock and to protect the fragile sandstone from erosion.

DESTINATIONS DETAILS

REGION: Chambers Pillar Historical Reserve

NEAREST TOWN: Alice Springs is 160km north via the Old South Road. Maryvale has a store with limited supplies.

WHEN TO GO: The cooler months from April to September are the best times, but the roads may close after heavy rain.

CAMPING: Two designated campgrounds with free gas BBQs, fire pits and pit toilets. The campsites are dispersed and for \$4 per night for adults, \$2 per child and \$10 per family, it's value great for the money. Cash payments only with fees paid at the campground's honesty box.

WHAT TO TAKE: A compressor and tyre gauge, firewood, food and water. Take out what you take in.
DIFFICULTY: The 45km track from Maryvale into Chambers Pillar can be accessed by 4WD vehicles and off-road campers and vans. Carry extra food and water, vehicle equipment, recovery and safety gear as the roads may be closed after rain.

CONTACTS: NT Parks and Wildlife. ●



LOCAL TIPS

BY FRANCA FREDERIKSEN
Sustainable Couture

"PACK YOUR FAVOURITE SUNDOWNERS & DRIVE 10 MINUTES EAST OF ALICE SPRINGS ALONG UNDOOLYA ROAD TO THE ROCKY OUTCROPS SCATTERED ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE. CHOOSE ANY ONE OF THESE, SET UP YOUR TREATS & CHARGE YOUR GLASSES IN TIME TO TAKE IN THE SUNSET'S PINK, BLUE & PURPLE CANVAS FEATURING MT UNDOOLYA AND SURROUNDS. AND IF YOU'RE AN EARLY BIRD, ENJOY SUNRISE'S PALETTE OF COLOURS."

ESSENTIAL SERVICES & INFO

THE BASICS

The incredibly remote location of the Red Centre means that being prepared for an emergency is imperative, especially if you're planning to roam around every day. Here, we've compiled some useful information to keep on hand before and during your trip.

IMPORTANT CONTACT NUMBERS

• **Police, Fire, and Emergency Services**
P: 000

• **24-hour Police Response:**
P: (08) 8951 8888
P: 31 444

• **Alice Springs Police:**
P: (08) 8951 8822

• **St John Ambulance Australia (NT)**
A: Telegraph Tce, Alice Springs NT, 0870
P: (08) 8951 6616

• **Fire station**
A: Lot 7728, Telegraph Tce, Alice Springs NT, 0870
P: (08) 8951 6688

WEATHER

• The climate of Alice Springs is arid, meaning it experiences extremes in both summer and winter. From May to September, night temperatures can dip to -4 degrees Celsius, while the days are cool and crisp. In summer, maximum daily temperatures can rise up to 40 degrees on some days, and occasionally higher. The annual average rainfall recorded in the region is 286mm.

• Summer temperatures range —30 to 45 degrees

Celsius

• Winter temperatures range — 4 to 25 degrees Celsius

• Be prepared for the weather to change rapidly, no matter the season — wherever you're headed and no matter the forecast, take sunscreen, easily removable layers, plus some warm and waterproof clothing.

• It's also a good idea to tell someone where you are going and what time you should be back in case things go wrong.

MONEY

There are plenty of ATM machines in several areas of Alice Springs and Yulara, though it's advised to exchange your currency before arriving at Alice Springs if you don't already have Australian dollars.

ALICE SPRINGS STANDARD TIME ZONE

Alice Springs falls into Australian Central Standard Time: GMT + 9:30

MEDICAL CARE AND OTHER USEFUL SERVICES

• **Discover Central Australia**
W: discovercentralaustralia.com.au

P: 1800 645 199
E: info@discoverca.com.au

• **Northern Territory (general information on the region, including trip ideas and planning)**
W: northernterritory.com
E: generalservices.tourismnt@nt.gov.au

• **Alice Springs Town Council (community, recreational, and general services)**
W: alicesprings.nt.gov.au
E: astc@astc.nt.gov.au
P: (08) 8950 0500

• **Alice Springs Hospital**
A: Gap Road, Alice Springs NT, 0870

P: (08) 8951 7777
Opening hours: 24 hours, 7 days per week

• **Central Clinic Alice Springs (medical centre)**
W: centralclinic.net.au
A: 8 Gregory Tce, Alice Springs NT, 0870
P: (08) 8952 1088
Opening hours: Monday-Friday from 8am to 8pm, Saturday-Sunday from 8am to 4pm

• **Alice Springs Visitor Information Centre**
P: (08) 8952 5800
Opening hours: 8am to 5pm Monday-Friday, 9:30am to 4pm Saturday-Sunday ●



IT'S TIME TO TRY TREPHINA



LOCATED IN THE EAST MACDONNELL RANGES, TREPHINA GORGE NATURE PARK FORMS AN EXCELLENT BASE FOR 4WD ADVENTURERS TO EXPLORE THE RED CENTRE BY WAY OF ITS OTHERWORLDLY LANDSCAPES, UNIQUE FLORA AND FAUNA, AND WILD SWIMMING SPOTS

WORDS SINEAD REILLY



Trephina Gorge Nature Park, or Alherrkentye, is a cornerstone destination of Central Australia located inside the East MacDonnell Ranges — which are often quieter and less crowded than their West MacDonnell counterparts. Famed for its enormous cliffs of quartzite and watercourses lined with river red gums and ghost gums, these features form unearthly and singularly beautiful landscapes that will inspire a deep sense of awe and gratification that only comes from getting well away from the beaten track and discovering Trephina for yourself.

Trephina Gorge is approximately a one hour drive east of Alice Springs (Mparntwe) on the Ross Highway. The Nature Park itself contains two gorges — Trephina and John Hayes Rockhole (Atneperrke) — and offers travellers an excellent range of walking and driving must-dos, as well as several campsites from which you can base yourself and venture out on some East MacDonnell adventures.

The MacDonnell Ranges and Trephina Gorge Nature Park are both significant sites for the Eastern Arrernte Indigenous people. The latter re-obtained the land from the Northern Territory government in 2008, and now lease the area back to the state government so it may be run as a nature park.

GETTING THERE

Trephina Gorge Nature Park is accessible to all vehicles via the sealed Ross Highway, and the dirt road into the gorge is generally in good condition. Access to John Hayes Rockhole however is 4WD only, being on a rough track requiring a high-clearance vehicle (see more detail below). Conditions should be checked after periods of heavy rainfall, as this can cause all roads in the area to become impassable.

Trephina Gorge Nature Park is open year-round, though the best time to visit is generally considered to be from April–September, when temperatures fall to the cooler side.

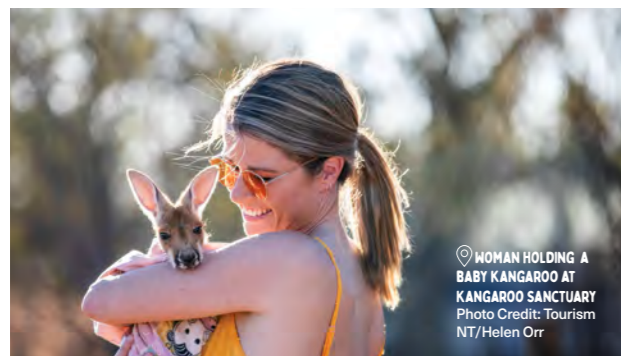
EXPLORING TREPHINA

This region is a must-visit for any avid walker, and one of the best ways to explore Trephina Gorge Nature Park is undoubtedly on foot. A couple of the shorter walks can be completed on the same day. It's recommended to tackle these walks either early in the morning or in the evening, when the heat of the day will be less intense.



BLUFF CAMPGROUND | Photo Credit: Matt Williams

Trephina Gorge Walk is an easy 2km loop trail that allows walkers to explore Trephina's sandy creek beds, and climbs above the gorge for a short while. Keep a lookout for shy black-footed rock wallabies amid the rocks, especially at sunset. Panorama Walk, also a loop trail, leaves from the same trailhead as Trephina Gorge Walk and is rated moderate, involving some steep gradients at the beginning. The trail crisscrosses creek beds and climbs up to the top of the gorge, where a lookout over the bluff forms one of the most gorgeous panoramic views in the Red Centre that will



WOMAN HOLDING A BABY KANGAROO AT KANGAROO SANCTUARY
Photo Credit: Tourism NT/Helen Orr

ESSENTIALS

- All historic, cultural items, and wildlife in Central Australia are protected
- Stick closely to all designated roads and tracks
- Follow the guidelines on park safety signs
- Firewood collection is not permitted
- Fires are only permitted in designated fire pits
- Bins are not provided in any of these areas take all rubbish with you
- Pets are not permitted in any of these areas
- Generators are not permitted
- Drones are not permitted in any of these areas
- If you're swimming, bear in mind that most swimming holes are very cold — long exposure (even in high temperatures) can lead to hypothermia
- Be mindful of your level of health and fitness when considering hiking/walking
- Temperatures and humidity levels in Central Australia during summer can be extremely high — take plenty of water with you while walking and avoid high-intensity activities throughout the day

take your breath away — if the walk hasn't already done so. Once you reach the top, keep your eyes peeled for Mordor Alkaline Igneous Complex (MAIC), or Mordor Pound, in the distance — a valley formed roughly a billion years ago.

Chain of Ponds Walk is a 3.5km walk rated moderate-hard, and commences at John Hayes Rockhole — meaning it's only accessible via high-clearance 4WD. The trail eventually meets up with the longer Ridgetop Walk (see below) and involves some challenging rock-hopping and climbing throughout the gorge at the tail end of the walk. Clearly marked arrows will guide the way.

For hiking enthusiasts, the 10km (one-way) or 18km (loop) trail dubbed the Ridgetop Walk will be a major drawcard to the Nature Park. Graded hard, this day hike is considered one of the best in Central Australia, and will doubtless instil you with both exhilaration and marked appreciation of the land. Follow the Trephina Gorge Walk until you reach a turnoff for the Ridgetop Walk to the left. The ridge climbs steadily upward and, if you can't get enough of the views, after 5km you'll have the option to trudge an extra 400m to check out Turners Lookout. The Ridgetop Walk encompasses the only location in the Northern Territory where you will see Thozet's box (*Eucalyptus thozetiana*).

Aside from hiking, four-wheel driving around Trephina is an adventure in itself. The drive to John Hayes Rockhole (Atneperrke) strictly requires a high-clearance 4WD, being a 4km track that zigzags across a rocky creek and is narrow in some spots. Other sections are very sandy and muddy, posing challenging conditions even for an experienced four-wheel driver. It's best to be prepared when heading here, and to plan ahead as John Hayes Rockhole (Atneperrke) may not always have water in, meaning swimming is only possible after a good rain, while the tracks in may be affected.

STAYING AT TREPHINA

You do not require a park pass to access the Nature Park, although camping fees — \$4 per adult, \$2 per child, or \$10 for a family of up to two adults and four children — do apply if you're planning an overnight or multi-night stay. Payments are to be made via the boxes on site, so be sure to bring sufficient cash along to cover your camping fee.

There are four campsites within Trephina Gorge Nature Park — The Bluff, Panorama, Gorge Campgrounds, and Rockhole Campground. The first three are all located close by Trephina Gorge, while Rockhole Campground is located near John Hayes Rockhole, meaning it requires a high-clearance 4WD to enter. The campgrounds all have pit toilets, communal fire pits, and gas barbecues making them fantastic spots to setup a base for a few days and enjoy the wild swimming and hiking opportunities to their fullest extent. Drinking water is not available at Rockhole Campground, but is at the other sites, so organise your supplies accordingly.

N'DHALA GORGE NATURE PARK (IRLWENTYE)

From your base at Trephina, it's only a 35-minute drive to N'Dhala Gorge Nature Park, or Irlwentye — an essential spot for your Red Centre itinerary for anyone with an interest in art and Indigenous history. N'Dhala contains 6000 petroglyphs, or rock carvings, at 438 sites in the main gorge and 240 sites in the side gorge, some possibly being as old as 10,000 years. According to the Indigenous custodians of this site, residing in Santa Teresa (Ltyentye Apurte), some of the petroglyph designs are connected with the local Caterpillar Dreaming story. There are also numerous shelter areas and other sites of great cultural significance. Much like the hikes

mentioned above, discovering places like N'Dhala Gorge will leave you with an enhanced sense of Australian belonging and connectedness to the land.

The Traditional Owners, the local Arrernte people, ask that you respect the park and its artefacts — take all rubbish with you, and do not touch the petroglyphs.

As well as the Indigenous art, there's also a 1.5km walk through N'Dhala Gorge where you'll see an abundance of rare flora endemic to the region, including the sickle-leaf wattle and white cypress pine.

RUBY GAP NATURE PARK (TYWELTHERREME)

From Trephina Gorge, Ruby Gap Nature Park, or Tyweltherreme, is a 1.5 hour drive east. As with N'Dhala Gorge, access to Ruby Gap requires a high-clearance 4WD vehicle — this area is a 4WD dream. Entry is possible via Arltunga Historical Reserve or the Binns 4WD Track, but check conditions before you leave — the track is difficult in the last 50km, involving a lot of sandy and dry creek beds.

Ruby Gap is closely linked to the first mining rush in Central Australia, when in 1886 explorer David Lindsay came across what he thought were rubies in the Hale River (Arletherre). This led to an influx of prospectors to the region. By 1888 it was discovered that the 'rubies' were only high-grade garnets, resulting in the demise of this short-lived boom. Eastern Arrernte (Ulpmerre arenye) peoples assisted the ruby miners by way of guiding, tracking, and sorting gemstones.

Again an excellent place for experienced hikers, there are no marked trails in Ruby Gap. Hikers can follow the riverbed

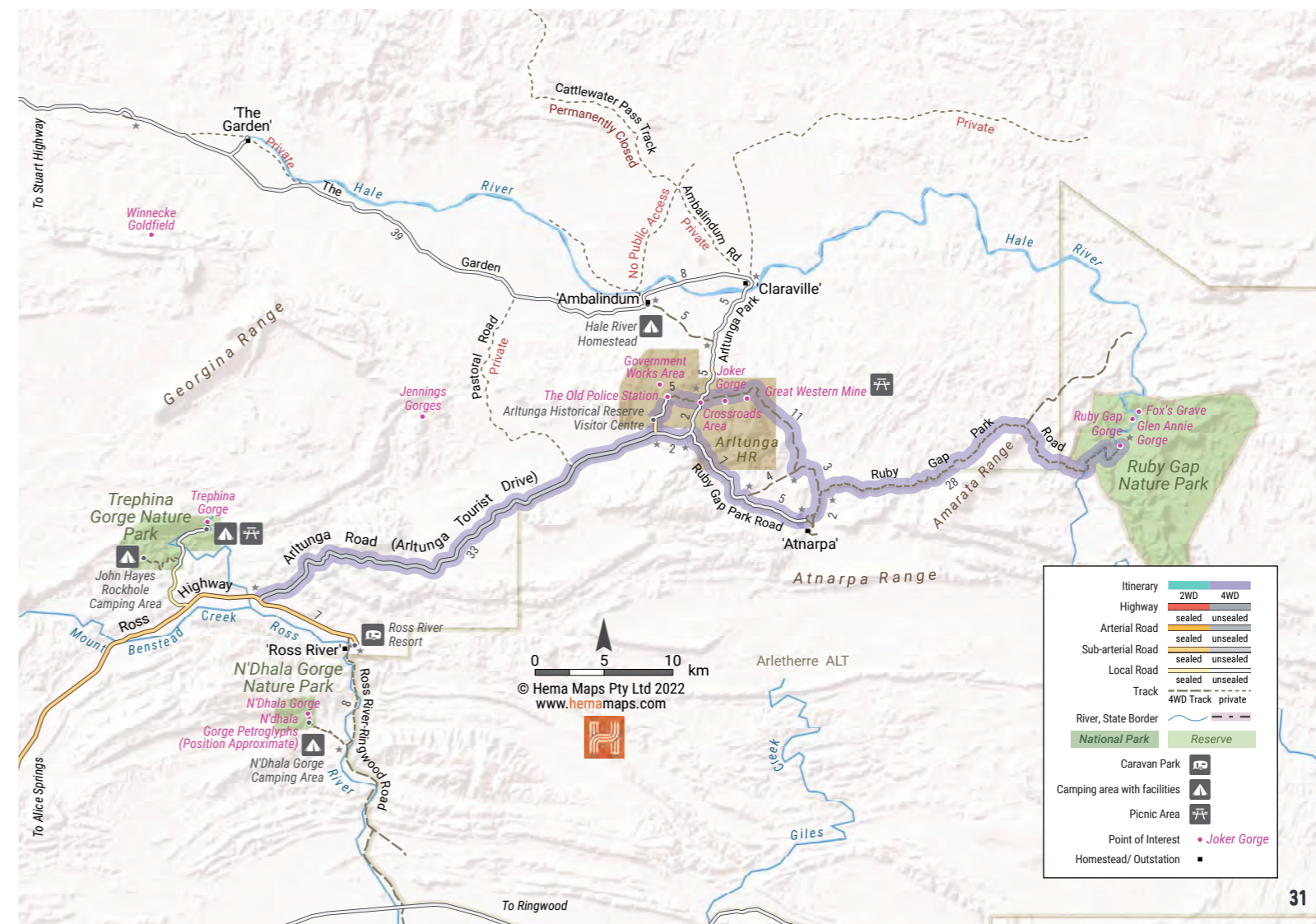
and track upstream for 4km on a two-hour return walk to Glen Annie Gorge, or for 8km on a four-hour return walk to Fox's Grave via Glen Annie Gorge. Ecologically important plants that you can spot include mulga, the threatened MacDonnell Ranges cycad, and austrostipa, while keen birdwatchers may spot Australian reed-warblers and bush stone-curlews among many others. Untouched waterholes are peppered around this area for those willing to brave the cool waters. Note that the best time for swimming follows periods of rainfall, as waterholes in this region often dry up after extended dry spells. ●



LOCAL TIPS

BY KIMBERLEY MORGAN
Wild Honey Travels

"A RARE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPERIENCE WILD MEDICINAL PLANTS COLLECTED ON INDIGENOUS LANDS SURROUNDING ALICE SPRINGS TOWN. BUSH BALMS IS A NEW AND EXCITING SOCIAL ENTERPRISE SITUATED ACROSS THE TODD RIVER, A FEW BLOCKS WALK FROM THE TAVERN. A UNIQUE GIFT, AN EXPERIENCE THAT WILL REMIND YOU OF THE CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN BUSH AND ITS PEOPLE."



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THINGS TO SEE & DO TICKLIST

THE RED CENTRE HAS SO MANY INCREDIBLE EXPERIENCES, YOU COULD RETURN TIME AND AGAIN TO SEE AND DO EVERYTHING. HERE ARE SOME OF OUR MOST ESSENTIAL EXPERIENCES.



WEST MACDONNELL RANGES

- HIKING
- SWIMMING
- MOUNTAIN BIKING
- CAMPING
- CULTURAL TOURS
- ART

EAST MACDONNELL RANGES

- CAMPING
- FOUR-WHEEL DRIVING
- FOSSICKING
- HIKING

KINGS CANYON

- HIKING
- HELICOPTER FLIGHTS
- ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLE
- CULTURAL TOURS
- GLAMPING
- DINING

ALICE SPRINGS

- CYCLING
- DINING
- MUSEUMS
- HOT AIR BALLOONING
- GLIDING
- MOUNTAIN BIKING
- CAMEL TOURS
- NIGHT SKY/ASTRONOMY
- GOLF
- BIRDWATCHING
- WILDLIFE
- ART GALLERIES
- SCENIC FLIGHTS
- WALKING
- HORSE RACING

ULURU

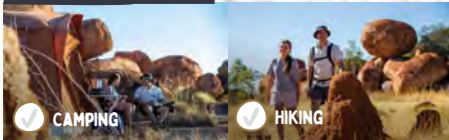
- CAMEL TOURS
- SEGWAY TOURS
- CULTURAL TOURS
- DINING
- NATURE
- SCENIC FLIGHTS
- ART GALLERIES
- NIGHT SKY/ASTRONOMY
- MOTORCYCLE TOURS
- CYCLING

HIDDEN GEMS

● **Newhaven Wildlife Sanctuary**
Spectacular scenery and a hotspot for wildlife including Black-footed Rock-wallaby, the Brush-tailed Mulgara and 175 species of birds.

● **Kunjarra/The Pebbles**
An outcrop of granite boulders located 11 kilometres north of Tennant Creek. A sacred site for the Warumungu people. The best time to visit is at sunset.

DEVILS MARBLES



✓ CAMPING

✓ HIKING

TENNANT CREEK



✓ 4 WHEEL DRIVING

✓ MINE TOUR

✓ ART & CULTURE

✓ CYCLING

DAVENPORT RANGES



✓ 4WD

✓ NATURE

✓ SWIMMING

ALI CURUNG



✓ ART

GEMTREE



✓ FOSSICKING

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ALICE SPRINGS | Photo Credit: Matt Williams



ESSENTIAL INFO CAMPING

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO CAMP IN THE NT

It's no longer a secret that the Red Centre offers some of the best camping locations and adventure experiences in the country. It's therefore vital that we work together to protect this beautiful environment, maintain these locations and avoid damage to the land, sacred sites and other places of production, cultural or natural significance.

Please respect the traditional lands of the Red Centre and **only camp in the designated areas**, such as tourist/camping parks and structured campsites. Sacred sites are places within the landscape that have a special meaning or significance under

Aboriginal tradition, such as hills, rocks, waterholes, trees and other natural features. They may include an unassuming area just off a track or over a sandhill. Please be aware that it is an offence to camp in or disturb a sacred site in the Northern Territory and penalties do apply.

Most of the landscape you are travelling through is private property, such as cattle stations. There are penalties for trespassing on this land. It is also an offence to camp on a road or a road-related area in the Territory. A road-related area includes:

- an area that divides a road
- a footpath or nature strip

- adjacent to a road and that is open to the public and designated for use by cyclists or animals
- an area that is not a road and that is open to or used by the public for driving, riding or parking vehicles

Be aware that there are different weather conditions at different times of year (extreme cold can be just as dangerous as extreme heat) so stay updated and prepare carefully.

Also check any road and campsite updates where you plan to travel. Make sure your vehicle is suitable for the conditions and you have the equipment and supplies you may need in the event of an emergency. Finally, always tell someone where you are going and when you expect to return.

Please take all your rubbish with you — including food scraps, bush bathroom waste, general litter and vehicle debris. Leave no trace.

For more information on camping locations and fees you can contact Tourism Central Australia:
Web: www.discovercentralaustralia.com
Phone: (08) 8952 5800 or 1800 645 199
Email: info@discoverca.com.au

BEYOND THE EVERYDAY WITH A 4WD TOUR IN THE RED CENTRE

ALICE IS A BEAUTIFUL PLACE, AND WHAT BETTER WAY TO SEE IT THAN FROM THE COMFORT OF A 4WD? WE SPOKE TO THREE TOUR OPERATORS WHO SPECIALISE IN 4WD TOURS, BOTH SELF-DRIVEN AND GUIDED, ABOUT THE UNIQUE EXPERIENCES ON OFFER.

Red sands, amazing sunsets, and unique wildlife — to really get under the skin of the Red Centre and beyond the everyday, all you need is a 4WD and an adventurous spirit. Not everyone who visits the region will have the latter, but there are luckily a range of tours where you can discover the concealed spots for yourself.

Tony Wardrobe from Central Australia Tag Along Tours — which allows you to explore in your own 4WD with a guide in the head vehicle — says the beauty of 4WD touring is the ability to make the experience your own. “Driving your own 4WD allows you to experience the isolation your own way — your company, your soundtracks. You can take your guide’s advice about points of interest, or you can explore on your own. It’s a great way to have a real adventure, with the security of an experienced local guide on hand.”

John Stafford from Alice Springs Expeditions — which offers fully guided, bespoke tours — agrees that guided tours can take you off the beaten track. “There’s the ability for us to move into areas that many people can’t. We do the standard tours, but really, we specialise in taking people to areas that are more exploratory, where we don’t see many other people, and where we camp in isolation and give you that really authentic Central Australian glamping experience in spectacular locations.”

Bill Wilcox from Sandrifter Safaris offers small, personalised tours. “A lot of the tours we do are fully tailored to the client’s requirements. We fully escort people, so if people want to do walks, I walk with them. Our itinerary is flexible. Some are happy to look out the window from an air conditioned 4WD, others are the opposite. We’re very attentive in that respect.”

SAFETY IN NUMBERS

The dangers of travelling in remote areas is mitigated by the expertise of tour operators.

John takes recovery and communication gear on all tours. “I carry everything. A lot of the time, you’re travelling solo, so the essential gear is water and communication. We carry a lot of recovery equipment like MaxTrax and shovels, but the biggest challenges are flat tyres!”

Tony is also thoroughly kitted out. “We drop tyre pressures to suit the terrain, and the lead vehicle is fitted with a winch, MaxTrax, and the latest tech — kinetic ropes and soft shackles — in our recovery kit. A satellite phone and first aid kit are carried in the lead vehicle.”

Bill also carries recovery gear. “We do carry recovery gear, but it hasn’t been required very much.”

CULTURAL AWARENESS

Cultural awareness is important to all three providers. According to John, “It always comes up. We get questions about the surface issues, but eventually the trickier questions surface. It’s very important. There’s great responsibility in interpreting issues respectfully and appropriately.”

Tony also rates cultural awareness as a priority. “It’s really important to us on and off tour. People are interested and want to learn. On our tours we’re always respectful and do our utmost to tread with minimal impact.”

Bill agrees, and states that like most things on his tours, he gears it towards those travelling with him. “Some people are really curious about Indigenous culture. We talk about big-picture stuff, the Dreaming of Central Australia and Alice Springs.”

SKILLS AND CHALLENGES

Some 4WD tours can be

more challenging than others depending on the conditions. However, John believes that a 4WD course isn’t necessary if you’re travelling with expert guides. “It’s not required for a tour like this. They’re either with me, or larger groups have a car at the front and back. We’ve got the knowledge and abilities. Myself and my contractors have all done 4WD courses and are sticklers for safety.”

Tony agrees that challenges on a tag along tour are overcome by the guide’s expertise. “That’s the beauty of a tag along. When the going gets tougher, you’re guided through safely, with minimal impact to the environment.”

According to Bill, “Some of the base tours, for example the MacDonnell Ranges tour, are all on bitumen. In four hours, we barely get the car dirty. Other trips — Palm Valley, Chambers Pillar, and Rainbow Valley — have some challenging parts. Cars that aren’t high clearance can sustain damage there. It’s part of the allure, especially if you’re travelling with a guide. You can watch them sweating bullets over the steering wheel and think ‘At least that’s not me!’”

EXPERT ADVICE

Ready for some personal recommendations? John highly recommends the Simpson Desert and Finke River trail. “You’re literally driving between cliffs of red sandstone. It’s spectacular.”

Tony recommends the two-day Ruby Gap and East Macs tour. “The East MacDonnell Ranges showcase beautiful gorges and Indigenous culture. Spending a night camping under the stars at Ruby Gap is an experience that simply stays with you.”

Bill’s personal favourite is the Chambers Pillar tour. “It’s something quite different. It’s an obelisk, a sandstone pillar, in the middle of nowhere. It’s a challenging drive, and the country changes a



A DIRT ROAD IN CENTRAL AUSTRALIA | Photo Credit: Tourism NT/Matt Cherubino

lot. We go through several cattle stations, then the road changes from sandy to gravelly and harsh, and then sand dunes. The Pillar itself is spectacular.”

Birdlife, according to John, can depend heavily on the previous year’s rainfall. There always the chance that you’ll spot birds or the occasional wild camel or horse, but it’s not guaranteed.

Bill says this year has been excellent in terms of wildlife and wildflowers. “There

was a La Niña weather pattern last summer, so we’ve had explosions in bird populations. It looks like next year will be a ripper as well.”

Alice Springs has a pull to both guides and travellers. Perhaps it’s best summed up by John, who states that it has a ‘spiritual’ feel to it. So, give in to the pull, fuel up your 4WD, and begin your 4WD adventure. It’s time to get out there in the Red Centre.

For more information, see:
alicespringsexpeditions.com.au
sandrifter.com.au
centralaustraliatagalongtours.com.au



LOCAL TIPS
BY DEB ZERNA
Tourism Central Australia

“WHILE STAYING AT ANY OF THE THREE CARAVAN PARKS OUTSIDE OF ALICE SPRINGS, BE SURE TO POP INTO ALICE SPRINGS HOME GROWN BREWING CO AND TRY OUT SOME OF THE CRAFT BEERS, GINGER BEER, AND GIN DELIGHTS. ADD A PLATE OF SPICY HOT WINGS OR PITA BREAD PIZZA TO COMPLETE THE EXPERIENCE.”



ALICE SPRINGS EXPEDITIONS | Photo Credit: Tourism NT



PEOPLE ENJOYING DINNER AT SOUNDS OF SILENCE | Photo Credit: TOURISM NT/HELEN ORR

LOVE THE NIGHTLIFE

THE NIGHT SKIES IN CENTRAL AUSTRALIA ARE A SIGHT TO BEHOLD AND THE KEY TO UNLOCKING THE LOCAL CULTURE AND NATURE OF THE REGION. WE SAT DOWN WITH ASTRONOMY AND NOCTURNAL TOUR PROVIDERS FROM ACROSS THE RED CENTRE TO FIND OUT WHAT MAKES STARGAZING AND NIGHT TOURS IN ALICE SPRINGS AND AROUND ULURU AN UNMISSABLE EXPERIENCE.

STARGAZING

The spectacular sight of the Milky Way is undoubtedly one of the jewels in the Central Australian night sky. But what makes this region so perfect for stargazing?

We spoke to Dan Falzon from Earth Sanctuary, Alex Revithiadis, Manager of Guest Activities & Touring at Voyages Ayers Rock Resort, and Bronte Stray of Alice Springs Desert Park for more information on the Central Australian nightlife.

“Voyages Ayers Rock Resort and Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park are a stargazer’s heaven, being located over 400km away from the closest regional town. The dry environment coupled with minimal rainfall and very little light pollution gives you the perfect view for dark sky chasers,” Alex asserts.

The lack of light pollution also gives stargazers at the Earth Sanctuary, a facility that offers astronomy tours and dining experiences, a clear view of the night sky. “Light tends to come with development. We’re obviously not starved of beautiful nighttime skies in the outback,” says Dan.

Bronte Stray from Alice Springs Desert Park, a conservation park showcasing desert ecosystems, offers different types of nocturnal experiences. “The most popular nocturnal experience at the Park is the Nocturnal House — one of the largest

in the southern hemisphere. Here, you can see a huge variety of reptiles and insects, both diurnal [active during the day] and nocturnal, as well as nocturnal birds and mammals. Sadly, most of the mammals no longer exist in Central Australia, but it is still an eye-opening experience,” Bronte says.

Alice Springs Desert Park also offers nocturnal tours, where you can see most of the nocturnal species naturally in the environment. Bronte says, “It’s amazing to see the animals doing what they do best, and no two tours are the same. From Echidnas walking over your feet to spotting a bilby or a Mala, with a little joey poking its head out and — if you are really lucky — seeing a joey take its first steps.”

THE PULL OF ALICE

Dan from Earth Sanctuary and his family have been providing nocturnal experiences in Central Australia for over 20 years.

His night sky education began as a youth, when he and his brother opted to sleep outside the family home in swags.

“I think Mum and Dad thought we’d be back after one night, but we didn’t. We fell in love with the night sky and didn’t return to a normal way of living for 10 years.

We learnt about the skies from a visual perspective and

so everything we did and learned was pure education under the stars.”

Alex was drawn to Alice by the opportunity to conduct astronomy tours.

“To start with, the chance to deliver astronomy tours under the Central Australian night sky was irresistible. Once I arrived and began to learn about the local Indigenous culture and natural history of the area, I was hooked.”

Bronte was drawn in by the opportunity to work so closely with the wildlife. “There are not many zoos in Australia where you are so involved in conservation programs that are helping the immediate environment,” she says.

A CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

Indigenous culture is a significant part of the star gazing experience. According to Alex, who is from Uluru, “There are many constellations visible, each with their own unique story. Indigenous Australians have been passing down these stories through the stars for generations, and we’re very lucky that some have been shared with us so our guides can pass these onto guests.”

It is this connection that makes cultural awareness so important for both operators. Alex says, “Cultural awareness is very important for both our Indigenous and non-Indigenous guides. We take steps to educate our guests about local Anangu culture [Anangu are the Traditional Owners of the area surrounding Uluru]. We begin our evening presentations with an Acknowledgement of Country, and Indigenous perspectives are key to our tours.”

Dan is equally aware of the cultural significance of stargazing to the local Arrernte people of Alice Springs. “We all come from the stars, from tribes, and communities that respected the sky for navigation and

understanding the seasons. Many cultures refer to what we call star civilizations. Indigenous people in Australia have an ancestral and spiritual link to Pleiades, for example.”

Bronte has a similar perspective. “The Desert Park prides itself on showing the rich culture of the Arrernte people of the area and educating people on cultural awareness. Culturally significant plants and landmarks need to be protected. As with travelling anywhere, it’s essential to research the background of an area, alongside dos and don’ts,” she explains. There’s also a safety element intertwined with this. “Indigenous culture has significant aspects of environmental protection, as well as safety, and being unaware can get you into trouble.”

WINTER WONDERLAND

While the Central Australian skies are beautiful year-round, there are certain times of year in which the conditions are ideal for stargazing.

Alex explains, “The winter months are better. We lose the Southern Cross for three months in the evening in summer, while cooler weather produces slightly less pollution in the atmosphere.

Also, the ‘dark emu’ [an Indigenous constellation outlined by dark areas of the sky, not stars] and the centre of the galaxy are more prominent in winter.”

Dan agrees, stating that night skies stabilise between April and October. “Outside that period, we’re dealing with clouds. The ideal time is between 7 to 9pm.”

These wintry conditions make Earth Sanctuary’s Dark Sky Festival in May highly popular. “This is our second year running the festival,” says Dan. “Just as we come out of summer, we find a two-week gap when the moon won’t influence our

stargazing. It’s a stunning time to be here.”

The Dark Sky Festival is scheduled for 25-29 May 2022.

Alex cites the Sounds of Silence dinner as the group’s most popular offering at Uluru. “Our award-winning, world-renowned Sounds of Silence dinner has been going strong for over 20 years, so that comes in at the top of the list. A journey through the night sky is included in Sounds of Silence, which is offered daily at Voyages Ayers Rock Resort.”

According to Alex, Tali Wiru also draws in the crowds. “Tali Wiru — our Indigenous, outdoor fine dining

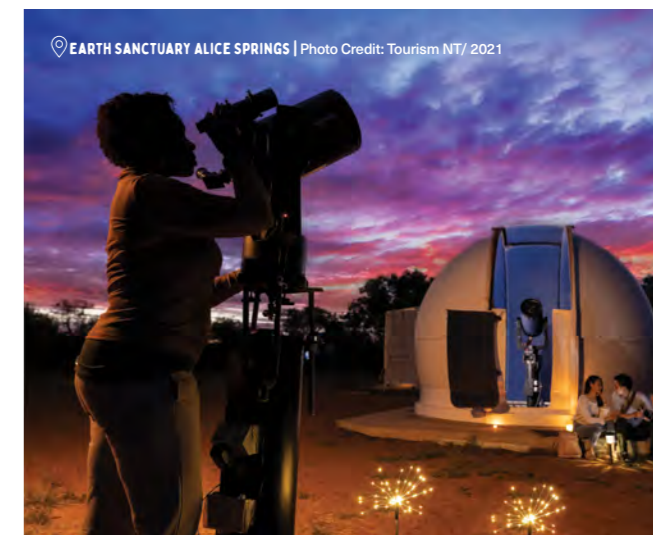
experience — also includes stargazing and is popular for smaller groups.”

Bronte also believes winter is best.

“Between April and October is a really good time to come, as the days are sunny and perfect temperature, and the nights cool down.”

Whatever time of year you visit, searching the night skies in Central Australia offers a wholly unique experience. Bronte concludes, “The climate and landscape here can seem harsh and uninhabitable, but when people realise how much life comes out after dark, it can be shockingly beautiful to experience.”

For more information, check out: alicespringsdesertpark.com.au earth-sanctuary.com.au ayersrockresort.com.au



EARTH SANCTUARY ALICE SPRINGS | Photo Credit: Tourism NT/ 2021



LOCAL TIPS

BY DALE MCIVER
Alice Event Management

“OUR LANDSCAPES ARE SIMPLY STUNNING AND A DRIVE THROUGH THE CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN OUTBACK IS DEFINITELY A BUCKET LIST ITEM FOR MANY TRAVELLERS. MY TOP TIP FOR TRAVELLERS IS TO SLOW DOWN, TAKE THE TIME TO STOP AND REALLY HAVE A LOOK AROUND. THE GEOLOGY, THE PLANTS, THE WILDLIFE AND THE RICH RED SOIL IS TOTALLY WORTH TAKING THE TIME OUT OF YOUR JOURNEY. A SIMPLE ROADSIDE STOP AND WALK AROUND CAN LEAD TO MANY HIDDEN GEMS AND WONDERS OF CENTRAL AUSTRALIA.”

RED CENTRE DRIVE GUIDE

📍 COUPLE AT THE KINGS CANYON RIM WALK | Tourism Australia/Nicholas Kavo



DISTANCE GRID

SHOWN IN KILOMETRES APPROX DISTANCES ONLY	ADELAIDE	ALICE SPRINGS	BARKLY HOMESTEAD	BARROW CREEK	CAIRNS	DALY WATERS	DARWIN	DUNMARRA	ELLIOTT	ERLDUNDA	KATHERINE	KULGERA	KUNUNURRA	RENNER SPRINGS	TENNANT CREEK	THREWAYS	TI TREE	WAUCHOPE	WYCLIFFE WELL	YULARA
ALICE SPRINGS	1531																			
BARKLY HOMESTEAD	2249	719																		
BARROW CREEK	1833	286	456																	
CAIRNS	2969	2418	1662	2132																
DALY WATERS	2443	914	605	627	2267															
DARWIN	3027	1497	1190	1211	2850	589														
DUNMARRA	2396	866	556	580	2219	48	631													
ELLIOTT	2292	762	456	475	2115	152	736	104												
ERLDUNDA	1331	200	919	491	2618	1113	1696	1065	961											
KATHERINE	2711	1181	875	895	2534	273	316	315	420	1380										
KULGERA	1268	286	1005	572	2704	1199	1783	1152	1047	87	1467									
KUNUNURRA	3225	1695	1349	1408	3048	786	829	829	933	1894	514	1980								
RENNER SPRINGS	2199	678	371	383	2023	244	828	196	92	869	512	955	1025							
TENNANT CREEK	2038	508	211	222	1910	405	989	358	253	708	673	794	1186	161						
THREWAYS	2063	533	219	246	1886	381	964	333	229	732	649	818	1162	137	25					
TI TREE	1724	194	566	93	2224	719	1303	672	568	393	987	480	1501	476	314	339				
WAUCHOPE	1925	397	363	88	2024	515	1100	466	366	573	784	673	1299	281	111	143	203			
WYCLIFFE WELL	1906	376	344	89	2043	538	1121	490	386	575	806	662	1319	294	133	157	182	20		
YULARA	1576	446	1164	731	2864	1359	1942	1311	1207	246	1626	332	2140	1114	953	978	639	841	820	



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