

# GETTING TERRITORIAL

BY KRISTY ALPERT

The Northern Territory (NT) was a bit of a mystery to me before coming to Australia ... except for that one simple “fact” about what to expect upon arrival in the Outback. Guidebooks focused on how to survive a snakebite, blogs described why you should look under the toilet seat before getting too comfortable, and most travel tales started with stories of saltwater crocodile attacks.

It seemed obvious that anyone traveling to the NT would probably not return. But I trekked on anyway and soon discovered the only thing trying to plot my death was a middle-aged author in town researching characters and destinations for his next book in his gruesome *Two Heart Conspiracy* series. I met author Greg Rudd at a lavish gourmet dinner held beneath the stars at the base of Uluru (Ayer’s Rock), and, as he graciously asked my permission to use me as a character (and kill me off) in his next novel, ... I gazed up at the stars twinkling above that magnificent crimson rock—Champagne glass in hand—and decided ... this may not be such a bad place to die after all.

---



The NT sits at what Aussies refer to as the Top End, occupying the space between Queensland and Western Australia. It runs from the border of South Australia through the center of the country, and up to the tip of the country where it stretches along the coasts of the Timor Sea, Arafura Sea and the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Despite being Australia's third largest federal division, it is the least populated of the territories, with half as many people living there as in Tasmania. The sparse population of passionate entrepreneurs, adventurous settlers, and local indigenous people has seasoned the territory with a unique flavor all its own. There's a very real and beautiful reality around the NT that life is dictated by the elements. In fact, it's that sobering sense of awareness that has seasoned every viable aspect of this destination, from the super-luxury glamping outfits in the Outback to the vibrant and resilient businesses in the city.

The Northern Territory is more of an experience than it is a destination, and it's one that is best embraced with a willingness to explore. There are few places left in this world so raw and untouched that can offer travelers the rare experience to feel what it's like to discover a place for the first time. Each of the seven regions offers a breathtaking immersion into this rugged territory, but when it comes to traveling comfortably before, during or after business, the main districts of Darwin and Uluru offer the best accommodations to unwind in Australia's Outback.



Couple at Ayers Rock, Northern Territory, Australia



Refreshments at Longitude 131°, Northern Territory

## ULURU

This region is generally known as the Red Centre and is regarded as the spiritual heart of Australia. Traces of modern and ancient Aboriginal rock paintings and sacred places freckle the entire landscape, but no other sacred Aboriginal site is more prominent than Uluru. Once renamed as Ayer's Rock, the ancient monolith is now more popularly referred to by its original Aboriginal name of Uluru. The rock stands 348 meters above ground, and stretches 3.6 km long and 1.9 km wide. Uluru is a

World Heritage Site, and visitors can walk around the base (10 km), but the best way to take in the beauty of the rock is by booking a Sounds of Silence dinner where you'll be escorted out to a special view point to sip Champagne and watch the sunset alter the shade of the rock's vibrant red hue before progressing to a glamorous dinner under the stars.

Not surprisingly, most of the activities revolve around the Uluru-Kata-Tjuta National Park, with the Ayers Rock Resort acting as the launch pad for most of the area's events and excursions. This

eco-sensitive resort has more than five different accommodation options (from a five-star hotel to powered campsites) and is home to a shopping center, an art gallery, a conference center, a full-service Red Ochre Spa, and more than 15 dining options around the property. From the resort, it's easy to hop on any excursion around the area, from sunrise camel rides to guided hikes and aerial tours of the landscape.

For the utmost in Outback accommodations, Longitude 131° is a luxurious option that offers respite from the rustic terrain with its high-end campsite on the outskirts of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. The lodge is part of the Baillie Lodges collection of unique luxury lodges, and has played host to names like Oprah Winfrey and Kate Middleton in recent years. Each luxury tent is perched high above the sand and the spinifex (Australian grasses) to provide uninhibited views of Uluru. There's nothing quite like waking up in a bed of sumptuous linens to the dancing colors of sunrise as the morning sheds light on that stunning rock.

*... I gazed up at the stars twinkling above that magnificent crimson rock—Champagne glass in hand—and decided ... this may not be such a bad place to die after all.*



## DETAILS

### WHERE TO STAY:

- Sails in the Desert at Ayers Rock Resort
  - Longitude 131°
  - SKYCITY Darwin

### WHERE TO EAT:

- Sounds of Silence
  - The Dune House at Longitude 131°
    - EVOO
    - Il Lido

### CONCIERGE CORNER:

A tip from **Meggan Gardner**, Guest Services Manager at Sails in the Desert Hotel.

"Don't miss out on the very best that the Red Centre has to offer; Tall Wiru is the ultimate must do outdoor dining experience. Set on a secluded sand dune, this evening captures you with a four-course menu infused with native spices, where each dish is perfectly matched with a premium Australian wine while you listen to the haunting sounds of the didgeridoo. Exclusive and capped at 20 people, we suggest you book ahead as this is not to be missed." "Of course a trip into the UNESCO listed Uluru Kata Tjuta National Park is a must. And there is no better way to do it than my absolute favorite way: on the back of a Harley Davidson with Uluru Motorcycle Tours for a quick spin to the very heart of Australia!"

## DARWIN

Originally settled as a pioneer outpost, Darwin has become the largest city in the Northern Territory and there is a distinctly urban and young vibe to this tropical metropolis. As the capital of the territory, Darwin acts as the cultural hub for the region with a university and research center fueling a constantly evolving melting pot of eager entrepreneurs and budding businessmen.

Darwin is a great bouncing off point for weekend tours to Kakadu National Park, Litchfield National Park, and the Katherine Gorge, but you don't have to leave town to see why this city is an up-and-coming tourist destination. During the day is the best chance to catch sight of one of the famous giant saltwater crocodiles with trips to either Crocodylus Park or Crocosaurus Cove, and, although the city is located on the coast, it's best to skip any open-water swimming during the months of October-May due to the box jellyfish season.

The quaint shops along the pedestrian-only strip of Smith Street in the central business district make it easy to shop for Aboriginal art, local handicrafts, and boutique fashions. Although, if you can wait until the dawn on either a Thursday or Sunday, the Mindil Beach Sunset Market that runs from April 25 to October offers all that and more, with local cuisine,



Sails in the Desert Hotel at Ayers Rock Resort

entertainment, and a great chance to soak in the Territorian culture.

A little outside the city center, the resort and casino combination at SKYCITY Darwin makes for a great option for anyone looking to have everything at his or her fingertips. SKYCITY is primed for meetings and events with free Wi-Fi and 24-hour entertainment options, but it is also the site of Darwin's only five-star beachfront resort and one of the city's finest gourmet dining establishments, EVOO.

Closer to the business district, the Vibe Hotel Darwin Waterfront is located within walking distance

to the city's convention center and is the perfect home base for exploring the nightlife and urban scene of the city. The hotel features a modern and clean design with hardwood accents and contemporary decor throughout the rooms. The hotel is a part of the trendy Waterfront Precinct, where all the hottest shops and restaurants can be found. After a long day touring the city or sitting through meetings, there's nothing that could compare to sipping a beautiful glass of Penfolds Bin 128 on the patio of Il Lido before heading inside to the open-air kitchen for a taste of the local cuisine.

*After a long day touring the city or sitting through meetings, there's nothing that could compare to sipping a beautiful glass of Penfolds Bin 128 on the patio of Il Lido before heading inside to the open-air kitchen for a taste of the local cuisine.*



Smith Street Shopping in Darwin, NT



Crocosaurus Cove "Cage of Death"