

Kakadu Circle No. 1: May 9-30, 2021

List price - \$4195 For information about our advance purchase and other discounts, see our discount page, www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/prices.shtml

Summary. This is an extended version of our most popular trip. You visit a number of spectacular waterfalls, many of which are unknown to the general public. You camp next to beautiful pools you share with no one but your walking companions. The extra time allows more time for visiting Aboriginal art sites, exploring the areas near our path or simply relaxing and enjoying our surrounds.



Koolpin Creek, campsite above gorge. We have every beautiful camp to ourselves.

Itinerary: Kakadu Circle No. 1

- Day 0** This is the day **BEFORE** departure. **Pre-trip meeting, 6.30 p.m., Pool Side Bar & Restaurant, Double Tree Hilton, 122 The Esplanade.** There are two Double Tree Hiltons next door to each other. The correct one is closer to Daly Street, the taller of the two. **This meeting is important.** If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance.
- Day 1** 8 a.m. pick up. Pick up is from your accommodation if you have notified us where you are staying at least a week before departure or have made other arrangements at the pre-trip meeting. Otherwise, pick up is from Darwin Transit Centre at 69 Mitchell Street. Drive to Kakadu. Begin walk carrying full packs. Bush camp.
- Day 2–11** Bush camping, carrying full packs.
- Day 12** Food drop. (This could be a day early or a day late.)
- Day 13–20** Bush camping, carrying full packs every day.
- Day 21** Return to vehicles. Drive to Coinda. Visit Warradjan. Drive to Jabiru. Overnight in bush bungalows at Anbinik Resort.
- Day 22** 9 am Guluyambi Aboriginal Cultural Cruise on the East Alligator River. Visit Ubirr art site. Drive back to Darwin. Drop off at your accommodation mid to late afternoon.



Walking along the Koolpin tributary



Main falls, Graveside Gorge. You can't get to this waterfall without doing a



Bush tucker lesson on the Guluyambi tour long walk.

Now for the details.



Swim stop, upper Twin Falls Creek gorge

enjoying their surroundings.

Every season has its advantages but when people ask us when they should come, we tell them, **“If you plan to come to Kakadu only once, we advise you to do it in May.”** May is normally the month when the humidity of the post wet season gives way to the Dry. It is the time when the weather finally cools off at night. Water is still plentiful and most of the waterfalls are still flowing well. Many of the 4WD tracks in the park remain closed so we can enjoy many areas without the tourist masses who arrive later in the year.

It is very unlikely that the track into Twin Falls will be open so we should have it to ourselves. This also means that it may be impossible to do only a part of the trip. See the notes at the end for more information.

If Walkabouts founder Russell Willis were told he could only do one more trip in Kakadu, this would be it. The 2006 20th Anniversary trip and the ones which followed in 2007 and 2015 were so good that none of those who took part could understand why the trip has run so seldom in recent years. We can't understand it either.

Unlike most of our trips, there may be one or more occasions when we spend two nights in one camp so that we can take a full day to explore nearby areas. Those who prefer not to go exploring may use the extra time for bird watching or photography — or just relaxing and



Lower Koolpin Falls from the ridge

Section 1: Koolpin to Twin: Approx May 9-19



Climbing the ridge at Koolpin

The walk begins at Flying Fox Crossing on the South Alligator River in the southern part of Kakadu, about 330 kilometres and four to five hours from Darwin. A relatively flat eight kilometre walk along the banks of the river and across the plain brings us to a ridge near the beginning of Koolpin Gorge. Cutting across the ridge and joining the creek above the first two waterfalls keeps us out of reach of the estuarine crocs which have begun coming into the lower reaches in recent years.

Koolpin Gorge is beautiful. The pools are perfect for swimming, the waterfalls and views a photographers delight. Aboriginal art sites tell us that this has been a special place for thousands of years. Although the gorge is only four kilometres long, it is too good to rush through. We take at least a day to reach the top.

From the top of the gorge, we normally follow Koolpin Creek, then one of its tributaries, as we search out some of the Aboriginal art sites which line the route.

A short walk through a pass brings us to a small tributary of Twin Falls Creek. The immediate area contains an abundance of Aboriginal art sites. Because this is just the beginning of the dry season, there is enough water to allow us to take at least one full day, probably two, to really get to know the area.



Walking through the pass between Koolpin and Twin



Amphitheatre Falls, inaccessible to day walkers

Not far from these sites, in a rocky area near where we first reach Twin Falls Creek, there are more excellent art sites. We spend additional time here, visiting the art sites. Continuing downstream, Twin Falls Creek passes through a mix of sandy and rocky areas for about six kilometres to the Amphitheatre Falls where the river drops 20 metres into the upper gorge. Few groups have ever been able to resist spending at least an hour here just admiring the views and enjoying the pool below the falls. Another seven kilometres past sandy beaches and more pools brings us to the top of Twin Falls.

Twin Falls consists of a series of drops of up to 20 metres and a final 80 metre plunge into the

gorge below. Here we have a break and take time to enjoy the spectacular views. If water levels are low, the route to the bottom of the lower gorge is on a marked trail, as easy as any part of the walk.

Swimming in the pool below the gorge is strictly prohibited because of the danger of large crocodiles (never a problem above the escarpment where almost of our walk takes place).

If water levels are too high to safely cross Twin Falls Creek below the gorge, we will cross above the falls and come down on the far side as we do on our wet season trips. This route is substantially more difficult and will take at least half a day. It does, however, reward you with some spectacular views of Twin Falls which are not possible from anywhere else.



Twin Falls Creek campsite

Maps. 1:50 000 El Sherana (first few km at beginning of walk), Koolpin & Jim Jim Falls or 1:100 000 Stow (1st few km at beginning of walk) & Jim Jim.

Section 2: Twin to Koolpin: Approx May 19-30

From Twin Falls, we do what is normally the longest single day's walk on any of our Kakadu trips. Fortunately, this early in the year, we have the option of stopping in places that run dry later. However, we do it, the route finishes with a climb back to the top of the escarpment where we will spend some time enjoying the views and pools at Surprise Falls.



Walking along Cascades Creek

From Surprise Falls, we continue across the plateau, passing through the largest patch of open country rainforest in the park, across the upper reaches of Koolpin Creek and over to the top of Graveside Gorge where a double waterfall drops 100 metres into a pool in the gorge below. After taking time to have a good look at Graveside, we move along to Cascades Creek and the first of its many pools and art sites. The walk down the four kilometre gorge is a slow one. There are a few places where you have the choice of edging along narrow rock ledges (close to water level, no big drops), floating your pack through the creek, or climbing up and around.

The pools and art sites are too nice to pass by, so stops are frequent as we make our way down to the cascades for which the creek is named. The last 500 metres often takes two hours or more as the deep pools and a natural water slide are much too inviting to pass by in a rush.

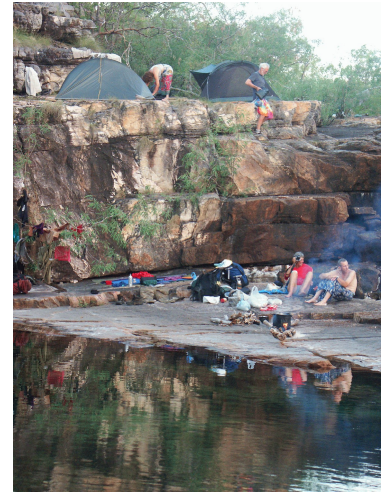


Cascades Creek water slide, irresistible to most.



Multi-trunked Gronophyllum

Next, we visit Gronophyllum Creek with its unusual multi-trunked palms, beautiful, sandy camp sites and deep, clear pools. The rugged landscape away from the creek is reminiscent of central Australia with its red rock and spinifex covered hills. A short, steep climb to the top of one of the hills presents us with an incredible panorama. Following the creek, you might walk three kilometres in an hour. Following a straight-line compass bearing, the landscape is such a jumble of broken rock that three kilometres might take you three days.



Gronophyllum Creek campsite

From Gronophyllum, we cross to the Barramundi system and its many waterfalls. Our final campsite in Barramundi Valley is on the banks of a huge, shady pool below a small waterfall. It is a beautiful spot, but there is more to come.



Top falls & pool, Barramundi

The next morning we follow Barramundi Creek to the top and cross a small pass and follow a tributary of Koolpin Creek back toward where we began.

We follow Koolpin downstream a short distance to where we leave the creek and rock hop through a series of gullies as we make our way to Freezing Gorge. Freezing Creek is much smaller than Koolpin but it has carved a deep and narrow gorge where the sun seldom reaches the water, hence the name. The pools are just as inviting as those in Koolpin, perhaps more so since very



Freezing Gorge, it's a long way up if you don't float your pack

few of the 4WD campers are aware that it exists so we seldom see anyone at any point along the creek. You need to be prepared for a short pack float as the alternative to a 30 metre swim is an hour or two of strenuous rock climbing. (You can waterproof your pack by lining it with 2 garbage bags, one inside the other, and sealing them carefully.) The walk down Freezing Creek below the gorge involves climbing over and scrambling around large boulders. A distance of about a kilometre may take two hours.



Lower Freezing Creek

Although we do not rate this walk as difficult, the one km walk down Freezing Creek below the gorge can be a daunting experience for some people. People who have never done anything like this before may find it difficult. Progress down the creek may be quite slow.

A short walk from the bottom of Freezing Gorge brings us back to where we began. We drive to Coinda. After a bistro lunch at the pub, we visit the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre before driving to Jabiru for a night in the Bush Bungalows at the Anbinik Resort. See <http://www.anbinik.com.au/> for more information about Anbinik.

Next morning, we do the Guluyambi Aboriginal Cultural cruise on the East Alligator River. This gives you a good view of the Kakadu wetlands before returning to Darwin and the airport, ready for the flight home. For more information about Guluyambi, <http://www.kakaduculturaltours.com.au/index.php/guluyambi>

Maps. 1:50 000 El Sherana (short bit of walk), Jim Jim Falls, Koolpin & Goodparla or 1:100 000 Jim Jim & Mundogic.

Notes

You need to have a package containing your breakfasts and lunches for the second half to give to the guide at the pre trip meeting. Fail to bring it and you might have to carry it.

You should also prepare a package containing a change of clothes to come out with the pick up vehicle for the final night in Jabiru. You should have enough money to pay for your drinks at the pub.

Large crocodiles have come into the pools below the escarpment during the wet season many times during recent years. Unless we are somewhere which has already been checked and opened by park authorities, there will be no swimming anywhere below the escarpment.

Unless the roads to Jim Jim and Twin Falls open incredibly early, we will be unable to visit Jim Jim Falls. This is both for safety reasons and because the time required would make the trip much more difficult.

If the road to Jim Jim is still closed, our food drop will have to come in by helicopter. If it's open, we'll have to collect it by spending a day walking from Twin to the Jim Jim car park and back.

Make sure you keep some money and a water bottle with you during the drives. It may not be possible to get at your pack until the vehicle is unloaded at the end.

All photos in these notes were taken on our May Kakadu Circle trips in 2006 and 2007. In deference to the wishes of the traditional owners of the area, we have not included any photos of the art sites in these notes.

Map. The 1:250 000 Kakadu park map shows all areas but is not suitable for navigation.

Terrain and Difficulty

Overall Level 3

Climate

Level 2-3. May is a transition month when the weather gradually turns cooler and less humid. The average daily maximum temperature is 32-33°C (90-92°F). The average nightly minimum ranges from about 17°C (62°F) in the southern part of the park to about 22°C (71°F) in the north. Averages can, however, be misleading. We have had the temperature drop as low as 10°C (50°F) in May on one of these trips. Sleeping bags are essential. Rain is unlikely, but still possible so we recommend that you bring a tent or mosquito net with a fly to ensure against getting wet at night.



Wading across Twin Falls Creek



Rock hopping along Cascades Creek

Terrain

Level 3. There are few steep climbs, none of which is over 200 m. As short as they are, these climbs are strenuous. Some may require using your hands to hold on as you climb up or down. None are technically difficult. None require ropes or other special equipment. There will be some places where you have to step from stone to stone as you walk along the edge of a creek.

The creeks are low enough so that swimming across with packs is unlikely to be necessary. It may, however, be necessary to wade across slippery rocks through waist deep water. Your guide can help if you need assistance.

None of the walking is on a marked trail. If you have never done any off-track walking through moderately rough terrain, nothing we can say can adequately describe the experience. The photos in these notes and on our website, www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au, can give you a partial picture, but they cannot substitute for the real thing. Most of those who have not had any off-track walking experience find it more difficult than those who have done it before.

Anyone who does not regularly (average twice a month) go bushwalking carrying a full pack would benefit from doing some pre-trip training. Do this and you will almost certainly enjoy the trip. If you are not an experienced off-track bushwalker and you don't do any training or any other form of strenuous physical exercise, you might feel that the trip is more



of an endurance test than the pleasure most people experience.

- Vegetation** Level 2-3. Much of the walking is through relatively flat, open woodland with a grassy understorey. Some short sections of grass may hide a broken rocky surface where you will have to be particularly careful. There may be some slow sections where you will have to pass through thick scrub. The vegetation can vary from year to year depending on when last burnt. At this time of year, the spear grass has finished seeding and dried out. Wildflowers are particularly abundant at this time of year. From left to right above: Pimelea punicia, Utricularia fulva (bladderwort), Gomphrena Canescans (bush everlasting), unknown grevillea, Banksia dentata (swamp banksia).
- Hours** Generally 4-6 hours. A few days might be longer. Some days will be shorter. This is the most leisurely and relaxing long distance Kakadu trip we offer.
- Packs** **Pack weight** - level 3. You need to carry 10 days food. This will include about 3-4 kg of the evening meals. You need a sleeping bag and a tent or mosquito net with a fly.
- Art** We visit a variety of art sites. Two areas we pass through are among the best for art in the park.
- Campsites** Mix of sand and rock ledges. Most sites are excellent. You are unlikely to see anyone else at any of the campsites.
- Swims** May is a good month to see Kakadu's waterfalls. Most creeks are still flowing well and the swimming is excellent. We will have good pools at almost every campsite and lunch spot.
- Lowlights** Carrying food for 11 days. Possible heat and humidity, especially early in the trip.
- Highlights** Kakadu's waterfalls seen early in the dry season without the dry season tourist crowds. Perfect weather. Great swimming holes. Aboriginal art sites.
- Wildlife** Birds are always present but spread out at this time of year. You are unlikely to see many large animals. The Guluyambi cruise is normally excellent for large estuarine crocodiles and gives you a good chance to see some of the wetlands birds as well. Left to right below: estuarine crocodile, dingo, rufous night heron.
- Fishing** Not permitted on this walk.

Cooinda and Bowali



Cooinda is a resort

situated in the heart of the Kakadu wetlands. This is an area noted for its wildlife — and mosquitoes. The former make it a great place to visit, the latter make it an uncomfortable place for an overnight walk. The attractions at Cooinda include the Yellow Waters cruises, the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre and a short dry season nature walk along a marked trail.

The Bowali Visitor Centre just outside Jabiru has good displays about the natural history of the park. All are worth a visit.

Warradjan, Bowali and the Cooinda hotel all offer a variety of souvenirs for sale. Bring extra cash or a credit card if you think that you might wish to purchase anything beyond the drinks, ice creams and lunches that most people purchase there.