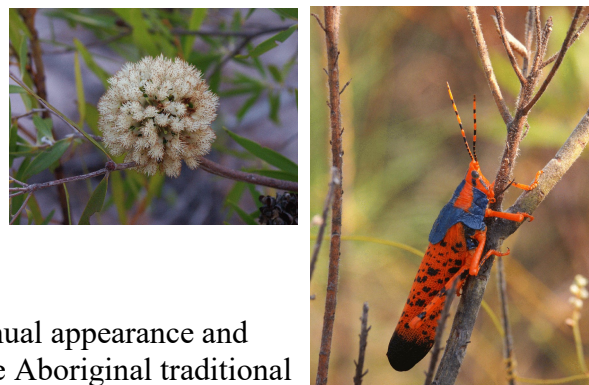


## Kakadu Highlights No. 10: October 18-31, 2020

**Gunumeleng – The Build Up.** As the year progresses, the hot, dry weather of September turns into the hotter, more humid weather of October and November. All but a few creeks have completely disappeared. Major rivers are reduced to a series of isolated waterholes. The land lies brown and parched, waiting, still, silent and sweltering.

Suddenly, a wind springs up. In a matter of minutes, the temperature drops five or even ten degrees. The first few drops of rain turn into a torrent as lightning flashes and thunder roars. Then it is over and still once more. Then the frogs began to call and the birds begin to sing. The land turns green again, almost as you watch. All nature rejoices in the change.



This is when the Leichhardt grasshopper makes its annual appearance and some of the wildflowers put on their best displays. The Aboriginal traditional owners from this region call the grasshopper Al-yurr, meaning children of the lightning man, Namarrgon, a powerful ancestral being. The country around Darwin and across to Arnhem Land has one of the highest incidences of lightning in the world. Namarrgon is commonly depicted in the regions rock art with axes hanging from his body, which he uses to strike the clouds. Around Kakadu the axes on his head represent grasshopper's antennae.

Even in this, the hottest time of year, there are a few beautiful, cool, shady creeks and gorges where the bushwalker can relax and watch the birds as they come in for a drink or listen to the cicada chorus which announces the coming change. Knowledgeable locals head bush at every opportunity, leaving the ignorant to swelter in the city. Our routes have been chosen with relaxation, swimming and shade in mind. Walking will generally be restricted to early in the morning and late in the afternoon. The hot middle part of the day will devoted to taking it easy and soaking up the sights and sounds of the environment around us. Wherever possible, we will start walking early in the morning and have long lunch breaks where you can read, relax, swim and enjoy the bush around you.

For more information about walking at this time of year, please see our Build Up web page, <https://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/gunumeleng---the-build-up---what-to-expect>

### Section 1: Ubirr and the Mary River: October 18-20

In order to give people time to acclimatise, we begin with the easiest part first – a night in a houseboat on the Mary River, the most comfortable wetland experience we can offer. After a leisurely drive from Darwin, we board the boat and cruise slowly along the Mary, watching the hundreds of birds that line the river banks and enjoying the changing scenery.



Saltwater croc seen from our boat.



Two brolgas and a magpie goose, some of the hundreds of birds we see on the houseboat cruise.

Those who wish to try their hand at catching a barramundi have a chance to do so. The next morning, we cruise back to where we began and get into the vehicles for the drive to Ubirr.

Ubirr is the site of one of the best collections of Aboriginal art in Kakadu. For most of the year, it is completely overrun with bus loads of tourists. By late October, most of these are gone. We will time our visit for dusk when we will have it almost to ourselves. If time permits, we will do one of the short nature walks in the area. But if we can't have a swim, we can enjoy a shower and a cool drink as we listen to the dawn and dusk choruses of the birds. We spend the night in accommodation in Jabiru.

**Note 1.** We cannot book the boat until we have bookings on the tour. If we do not get early bookings, we may not be able to do the cruise as scheduled.

**Note 2.** If we cannot do the Mary River houseboat cruise, we will substitute a Aboriginal guided Guluyambi cruise on the East Alligator River.

**Maps.** 1:100 000 Mary River

**Terrain and Difficulty** (more info in the general description after this final section)

<b>Overall</b>	Level 0.
<b>Terrain</b>	Level 0. The only walking is getting on and off the houseboat.
<b>Vegetation</b>	Level 0. No vegetation on the river, but we pass through a variety of habitats on the shores.
<b>Hours</b>	4-6 hours most days.
<b>Packs</b>	None.
<b>Art</b>	None.
<b>Campsites</b>	A bed on the boat.
<b>Swims</b>	None. Large crocodiles inhabit this section of the Mary River.
<b>Lowlights</b>	Hot, sticky weather. Not being able to swim.
<b>Highlights</b>	Wildlife and a wonderfully relaxing way to begin two weeks in the bush.

## Section 2: Barramundi Creek: October 20-25

The drive from Cooida normally takes a bit over an hour. From the end of the track, a short walk takes us to the main falls and the climb to the upper gorge. A walk through the upper gorge brings us to the first possible camp site. We should, however, have plenty of time to continue to an even better one.



Swim stop, Emerald Pool, Barramundi Creek.

When we leave the gorge, we find ourselves in a broad sandy valley. The only visible water is in a few isolated pools. All the flow is through the sand below our feet. After about five kilometres, we turn off into a side valley and suddenly find flowing water. Another kilometre brings us to a beautiful, deep, clear, shady pool where we can relax and enjoy a swim. A short climb to the top brings us to more beautiful pools and waterfalls. We plan to camp near here.

Next day, a walk across the plateau and down to the valley brings us to the largest pool in the entire Barramundi system. Huge *Allosyncarpia* trees give deep shade on the wide sandy banks of the pool, another exceptional camp site.



Beach campsite, Barramundi Creek



Top pool, Barramundi Creek.

If we have taken two days to get to this point, we will probably spend a second night there, doing another day walk without full packs. If we have taken three days, we will begin working our way



back down the main valley, sometimes in the deep shade of a patch of monsoon forest, more often in the open woodland, stopping for the occasional swim along the way.

Our final campsite is normally at a pool near the top of the upper gorge.

On the final day of this section, we return to the vehicles for the drive to Cooina. After lunch, we plan to visit the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre and perhaps Nourlangie Rock or just relax or whatever the group wishes. If the two cruise special is still on offer, you can do the late afternoon cruise for a small additional charge.



Dawn on Yellow Waters

The day finishes with a bistro meal at the pub and a night in the Cooina campground. Accommodation is available at an extra cost. This section finishes with the 6.45 a.m. Yellow Waters Cruise the following morning. The cruise gives you the opportunity to see the wetlands wildlife at close range, far closer than you could approach on foot. The early hour ensures that you see far more of the wildlife than those who do the midday cruises. Better still, you get a buffet breakfast afterwards.

**Maps.** 1:50 000 Goodparla or 1:100 000 Mundogie.

**Terrain and Difficulty** (more info in the general description after section four)

**Overall** Level 3.

**Terrain** Level 3. The first part of the walk is along a marked track. The next several kilometres are quite well defined and generally easy going although there is a bit of scrambling over river stones. Most of the terrain up to the large pool mentioned in paragraph three is fairly flat and relatively easy. There are, however, a couple of short but steep climbs at the beginning and end.

**Vegetation** Level 2-3. Mostly open woodland or open areas along the creek.

**Hours** 4-6 hours most days.

**Packs** **Pack weight** - level 2. You need to carry four days food. You can probably leave your sleeping bag at home but we do recommend a well ventilated tent or mossie dome with fly.

**Art** There are a few minor sites that we may visit.

**Campsites** Sand or rock ledges. Excellent sites near the water. We should have them to ourselves.

**Swims** Swimming is excellent. Good pools all along both creeks.

**Lowlights** Possible tourist crowds at the start of the walk. Hot, sticky weather.

**Highlights** Relaxing next to two of the most beautiful pools in Kakadu.



On the track to Graveside

### Section 3: Graveside Area: October 24-31

This section overlaps the second with the meal and night at Cooina plus the early morning Yellow Waters cruise.

The walk takes you into the greatest concentration of permanently flowing creeks we have yet found in Kakadu. You see a variety of landscapes, deep gorges, beautiful swimming pools and cascades as well as a number of little known Aboriginal art sites.

Although the drive from Cooina to the start of the walk is less than 100 kilometres, the last 45 kilometres is on a 4WD track which is so rough that it can take over two hours on its own. From the

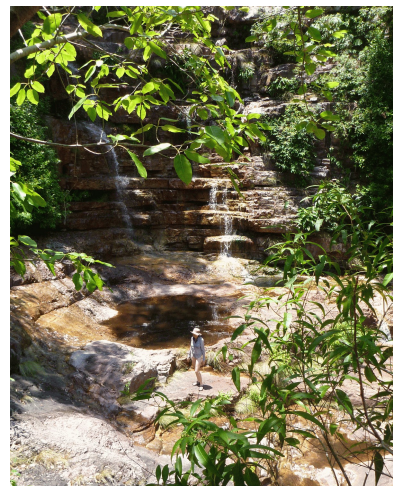
parking area, a relatively easy three kilometre walk across some fairly flat ground brings us to a lovely pool and our first camp site.

During the next five days, we visit Graveside Gorge, Cascades Creek and, if time permits, Gronophylum Creek. The two main gorges at Graveside contain some of the nicest monsoon forest in Kakadu.



The pool above the main Graveside falls isn't very wide, but it is very deep.

The two main gorges at Graveside contain some of the nicest monsoon forest in Kakadu. We usually spend two nights at our first camp and do a long day walk exploring the gorges, enjoying the shade and relaxing in and around the large pools. This allows people to acclimatise and gives them plenty of time to enjoy the shade and pools.



Waterfall in the main gorge.

A short, steep climb the next morning gets us onto the plateau where we have a look at the upper reaches of the two creeks we explored the day before. At this time of year, the flow is down to a trickle but there are still plenty of pools where we can cool off and relax in the midday heat.



The walk between Graveside and Cascades Creeks takes us through the open woodland of the plateau, yet another landscape to enjoy.



Dramatic Build up sky. We didn't get rain that night, but we did on another afternoon.

As hard as it gets. On this trip an 8 year old had done the same step a few minutes earlier.

Cascades Creek is noted for its many pools, cascades and Aboriginal art sites. It is so pleasant that our trip up or down

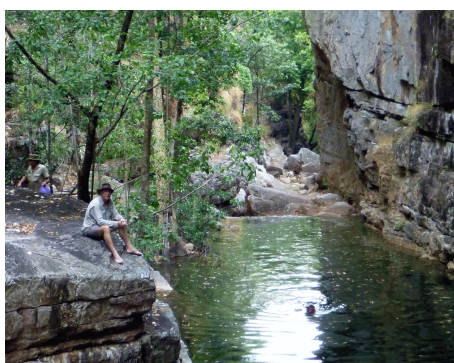
the four kilometre gorge normally takes a full day. There are a few places where you have the choice of edging along narrow rock ledges (close to water level, no big drops), floating your pack through the creek, or climbing up and around. The last 500 metres alone often takes two hours or more as the deep pools and a natural water slide are much too inviting to pass by in a rush.



Age 8 or 80, almost no one we've taken past the slide can resist having at least one go. Most have several.

We return to the vehicles through tall paperbarks and other trees which line the creek that drains the main valley.

Very fast groups might also visit Gronophylum Creek with its unusual palms, beautiful, sandy camp



Relaxing at a pool in the side gorge

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 you with an incredible panorama. Following the creek, you might walk three kilometres in an hour. Following a compass bearing, the landscape is such a jumble of broken rock that the same three kilometres might take you several days.

Early on the final day, we walk back to the vehicle and begin the drive back to Darwin, arriving mid to late afternoon.



**Maps.** 1:50 000 Koolpin or 1:100 000 Jim Jim.

## **Terrain and Difficulty** (more info in the general description after section 3)

<b>Overall</b>	Level 2.
<b>Terrain</b>	Level 2-3. The terrain ranges from open woodland to narrow rainforest gorges. Parts are flat and easy. Other parts require scrambling over river stones of a variety of sizes. There are a few steep, but short climbs. You walk through almost every type of terrain that it is possible to find in Kakadu.
<b>Vegetation</b>	Level 2-3. Mostly open woodland or open areas along the creeks. Some short sections of thick scrub along Cascades Creek
<b>Hours</b>	4-6 hours most days.
<b>Packs</b>	<b>Pack weight</b> - level 2-3. You need to carry six days food.
<b>Art</b>	There are a number of interesting art sites along this route.
<b>Campsites</b>	Sand or rock ledges. Excellent sites near the water. We should have most or all of them to ourselves.
<b>Swims</b>	Swimming is excellent. Good pools all along all creeks.
<b>Lowlights</b>	Long, rough 4WD drive at the beginning and end. .
<b>Highlights</b>	The magical cascades and waterslide on Cascades Creek. Spectacular Graveside Gorge.

**Note for section 3.** Many groups begin with Cascades Creek and finish with Graveside Gorge. The guide will decide which to visit first based on the conditions at the time.

## **General Terrain and Difficulty for all sections**

<b>Terrain</b>	Little or 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 on our website, <a href="http://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au">www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au</a> , 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 more than if you do not. The relatively easy nature of sections one and three means that they should suit almost anyone who meets our minimum level of fitness. Anyone who has already done section two should find that section three is easier than it would have been if they were beginning with section three.
<b>Climate</b>	October is of the hottest months of the year with an average daily maximum of 38°C (100°F). The average minimum is 24-25°C (75-77°F). Temperatures below 20°C (68°F) have been known to occur, but they are rare. Leave your sleeping bag at home. Bring thermals for insurance if you want to insure against a chilly night. We tailor our walking to the climate, starting early and having long breaks next to pools in the middle of the day. If you accept the climate, you should have a wonderfully relaxing holiday. If you want to march on regardless of the weather, you may find it frustrating. Thunderstorms are fairly likely so we recommend that you bring a lightweight tent or mossie dome with fly.
<b>Wildlife</b>	Birds are concentrated near the waterholes at this time of year. You will see thousands at Yellow Waters and on the Mary River. The Yellow Waters and Mary River cruises give you a good chance to see large estuarine crocodiles.

**Fishing** Not permitted on the last two sections. Fishing can be good from the houseboat. Barramundi can sometimes be caught from the boat.

## Notes

Those doing more than one section of the trip will have to carry only what they need on each section. Additional food and clothing can be left in the vehicle during the walks.

If you meet us in Kakadu, you will have to purchase a park entrance ticket on your way into the park. Our guide(s) should reimburse you automatically. Please remind them if this is not done soon after you meet.

Make sure you have your lunch, a water bottle, and some money with you in the vehicle during the drives as it may be difficult to get into your pack during the journey.

A day pack is useful on all sections.

Bring a book or two if you'd like to read during the long breaks, especially on the houseboat. Flies can be a nuisance at this time of year so it's a good idea to bring a lightweight insect net for use during the breaks.

It is a good idea to have a change of clothes and a towel to take advantage of the hot showers at Cooinda. You should have enough money to pay for your drinks at the pub.

Cooinda no longer offers budget accommodation. October is the shoulder season so the rooms are not as expensive as during the peak season, but they were still \$199 for a double or \$269 for a family room when we checked in October 2019. If you would prefer accommodation to camping, please let us know and we can arrange it for you.

If you wish to do some fishing on the first section, you will need to bring your own fishing gear.

Flies are sometimes particularly bad at this time of year. Bring plenty of repellent. You might also wish to hang a lightweight mosquito up at lunchtime as well.

**Map.** The 1:250 000 Kakadu park map shows all areas in Kakadu.

## Cooinda

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.



Magpie geese flying over Yellow Waters

The Yellow Waters cruise provides the best way to see the wetlands and allows you to see the wetlands wildlife (especially crocodiles and birds) at close range, far closer than you could approach on foot. The early/late hour ensures that you see more of the wildlife than those who do the midday cruises. The cultural centre is a few hundred metres from the hotel and provides an insight into the lives of the Aboriginal traditional owners of the park. The nature walk offers a pleasant way to spend an hour or two, especially early in the morning or late in the afternoon.

Both the cultural centre and the hotel 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.

# Itinerary: Kakadu Highlights No 10

**Note 1** Day 0 is the day before departure.

**Note 2** All itineraries may be subject to change.

## Section 1 Ubirr & Mary River

**Day 0** **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** 7:30 to 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 the Mitchell Street Tourist Precinct at 69 Mitchell Street.  
Drive to Mary River. Begin houseboat cruise.

**Day 2** Finish cruise. Drive to Ubirr to do short walk and visit art site. Drive to Jabiru. Overnight in accommodation.

**Day 3** Anyone finishing here can catch a bus to Darwin.

## Section 2 Barramundi Creek

**Day 2** Anyone joining for this section needs to catch a bus to Jabiru to meet the group.

**Day 3** Drive to the start of the walk. Begin walk carrying full pack. Bush camp.

**Day 4-6** Bush camping, mostly carrying full packs. May include day walks without full packs.

**Day 7** Return to vehicles. Drive to Cooina, arriving about lunch time. Overnight in the campground. Accommodation option for an extra charge. Bring towel and toiletries and money for drinks. Bistro meal at the pub.

**Day 8** 6.45 a.m. Yellow Waters cruise. Buffet breakfast. Section ends.  
Those ending here can catch an AAT Kings tour bus back to Darwin.

## Section 3 Graveside Area

**Day 7** Those beginning with this section catch a bus from Darwin to Cooina. See the note at the end for details.  
On arrival, wait in the open air pub and meet the group there about lunch time. Due to the fact that the members of the group are finishing a walk that morning, we cannot be more specific about the arrival time than to say it will be about lunch time.  
Book into budget accommodation. Violet Lawson's bush culture walk late afternoon.  
Opportunity to wash clothes and have hot shower. Bring towel and toiletries and money for drinks. Bistro meal at the pub.

**Day 8** 6.45 a.m. Yellow Waters Cruise. Buffet breakfast.  
Drive to Graveside. Begin walk, carrying full packs. Bush camp.

**Day 9-13** Bush camping, carrying full packs most days, possibly day packs on one or more days.

**Day 14** Return to vehicle and drive back to Darwin.

**Note** **Cooina or Jabiru Bus.** The cost of getting to or from Cooina or Jabiru is not included in the cost of the tour for those not doing the full trip. Greyhound has a service from Darwin to Jabiru on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. To get to Cooina or to Jabiru on a different day, you should be able to book a seat on an AAT Kings tour bus, (08 8923 6555). Do not call the 1800 national number as they do not normally make the non-tour booking.