

# Kakadu Highlights No. 11: November 7-20, 2021

List price - \$2795

For information about our advance purchase and other discounts, see our discount page, [www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/discounts](http://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/discounts)

**Summary.** This trip is designed to run at a slow pace to suit this time of year. It consists of two separate walks either of which can be done on its own. Lots of waterfalls, lots of swimming and plenty of time for relaxing by the pools. In between the two sections, you spend a night at Cooinda where you do a Yellow Waters cruise.



Central Falls, Graveside Gorge

## Itinerary

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

**Note 2** This itinerary is subject to change.

### Section 1 Graveside +

**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. **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 as arranged at the pre-trip meeting. Drive to Kakadu. Ubirr & Mangarre Walk. Overnight at Anbinik.

**Day 2** Leave Jabiru about 6:30 AM & drive straight to Graveside. Track will close for a week beginning at 11 AM that day. Walk to base camp in gorge.

**Day 3** Day walks up the two lower gorges.

**Day 4** Early start. Climb to top. Stop at the waterfalls. Lunch above first gorge. Move upstream to sandy camp. Water won't be flowing but there will be enough for a camp and a soak.

**Day 5** Early start. Cross to Cascades Creek. Explore upstream without packs. Camp just below top falls. Good shade & swimming.

**Day 6** Walk down gorge. Camp near cascades. This is probably the hardest day of the trip but there isn't much shade for the last half of the walk.

**Day 7** Time to play at the waterslide. Possible climb to high view. Move down the main valley, stopping to do day walk up side creek coming in from the north. More swims & falls. Shady lunch. Sandy camp.

**Day 8** Leisurely walk down the main valley to camp site about half an hour's walk from vehicles.

**Day 9** Leisurely start. Walk out to car arriving about 11 AM when the track opens. Drive to Cooinda. YW cruise. Camp or accom. (Low season rates begin on 1 Nov).

**Day 10** Possible 2<sup>nd</sup> cruise. Drive to Maguk. Walk to first camp.

**Day 11** Walk to Emerald Pool & Piccaninny.

**Day 12** Walk to Buff Pool, afternoon rest.

**Day 13** Return to 1<sup>st</sup> camp.

**Day 14** Walk down to car. Return to Darwin. Drop off late afternoon or early evening.

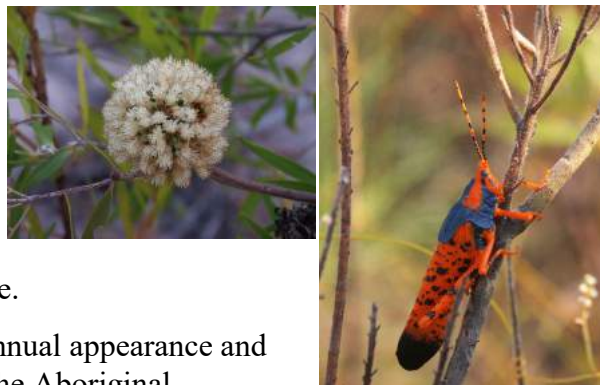


Pool next to a Barramundi campsite

## *Now for the details*

**Kunumeleng – 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: Graveside + : 7-16 November**

We begin with a leisurely acclimatisation day, driving to the park, visiting the famous art sites at Ubirr and doing the Mangarre rainforest walk near Ubirr. We finish with a night at the Anbinik Resort. <https://www.anbinik.com.au/>

The next morning, we need to make a very early start as the Graveside track will be closed for a week beginning at 11 AM so that the Aboriginal traditional owners can make use of the area. Going in so early allows us to miss the worst of the heat of the day which normally keeps this area closed at this time of year.

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 4-5 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.



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





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 po 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.

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the large pools. This allows people to acclimatise and gives them plenty of time to enjoy the shade and pools.

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.

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



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

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.

We return to the vehicles through tall paperbarks and other trees which line the creek that drains the main valley and drive to Cooinda. After lunch, we plan to visit the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre and perhaps Burrunkuy (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.

The day finishes with a bistro meal at the pub and a night in the Cooinda 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



Relaxing at a pool in the side gorge



Cascades Creek pack float



Dawn on Yellow Waters

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.

## Section 2: Barramundi Creek: 15-20 November

The drive from Coinda 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

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. From there, we walk back to the vehicles and drive back to Darwin arriving late afternoon.

## Terrain and Difficulty for all sections

**Overall** Level 3

**Terrain** Level 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.

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, [www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au](http://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 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.



**Climate** November is one of the hottest month of the year with an average daily maximum of 37°C (98°F). The average minimum is 25°C (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.

**Vegetation** Level 2-3. Mostly open woodland or open areas along the creeks. Some short sections of thick scrub along Cascades Creek

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

**Packs** **Pack weight** - level 2-3. You need to carry six days food.

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

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

**Lowlights** Long, rough 4WD drive into and out of Graveside. Heat and humidity.

**Highlights** Swims, swims and more swims in natural pools. The magical cascades and waterslide on Cascades Creek. Spectacular Graveside Gorge.

**Art** There are a number of interesting art sites along this route.



[On the track to Graveside](#)

**Wildlife** Birds are concentrated near the waterholes at this time of year. You will see thousands at Yellow Waters. The Yellow Waters cruise give you a good chance to see large estuarine crocodiles.

**Fishing** Not permitted.

**Maps** 1:50,000 topo. Section 1: Koolpin. Section 2: Goodparla. The 1:250 000 Kakadu park map shows all areas in Kakadu but is not suitable for navigation.

## 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 both 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. November is the lowseason so the rooms are not as expensive as during the peak and shoulder seasons, but they were still \$159 for a double when we checked in July 2021. If you would prefer accommodation to camping, please let us know and we can try and arrange it for you.

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.

## 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.

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.



Magpie geese flying over Yellow Waters

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.