

Your great Australian journey starts here

THE SAVANNAH WAY (KATHERINE TO BROOME SECTION)



Length: 8–14 days Fly/drive option: Darwin, Broome

Cut a line between desert and tropics as you drive through the Victoria River region and the Kimberley, exploring some of the country's most striking outback features. Rust-red cliffs sprout palms, crocodiles sunbake in gorges and boab trees look fit to burst. Take the time to explore the beehive landscape of the iconic Bungle Bungle Range in Purnululu National Park and enjoy the dreamlike perfect sand and bath-warm waters of Cable Beach.

Travel tips

The entire Savannah Way travels across three States and is popular among those driving around Australia. This dossier covers the western half.

The busiest time along the Savannah Way is during the dry season May–October. During this time Broome, in particular, becomes extremely busy, so book well ahead.

If travelling between November and March, expect dirt roads to be impassable.

The Victoria Highway can also sometimes be cut off at the Victoria River Crossing.

There are awesome bird-watching opportunities throughout much of this drive, so pack binoculars and a field guide.

Websites

- www.savannahway.com.au
- www.travelnt.com
- www.kimberleytourism.com
- www.broomevisitorcentre.com.au
- www.westernaustralia.com



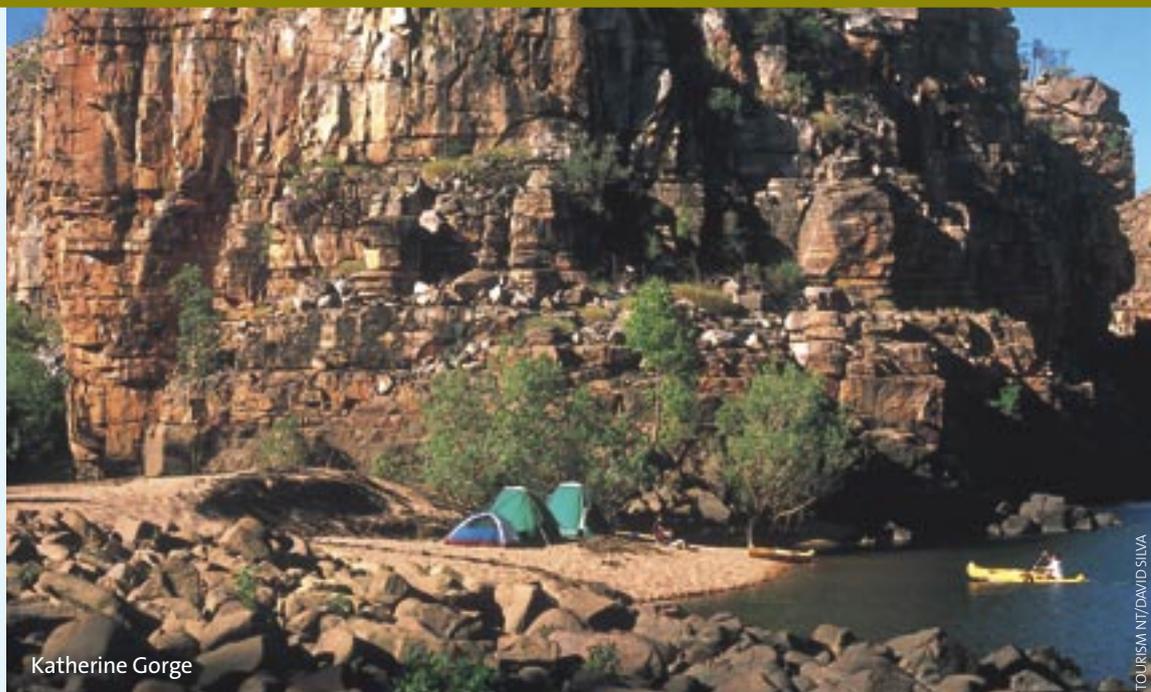
A Katherine and surrounds

Katherine's about a half-day drive south of Darwin along the Stuart Highway and there's plenty to explore around town. In Nitmiluk National Park (www.nt.gov.au/nreta), explore **Katherine Gorge**, a series of 13 connected gorges. Take a **boat tour** into the gorges or a scenic **helicopter flight** above them. **Canoes** can also be hired for a quiet paddle in the lower gorges. Upper gorges can be reached by canoe but require strenuous portages. Cruises, flights and canoe hire can be arranged through Nitmiluk Tours (www.nitmiluktours.com.au).

Dedicated **bushwalkers** might want to spend a few days along the 66 km Jatbula Trail (www.nt.gov.au/nreta) between Katherine Gorge and Edith Falls – allow 4–5 days.

There's camping at the gorge and a selection of accommodation in Katherine (www.krta.com.au).

South of Katherine, visit the limestone Cutta Cutta Caves, the NT's only cave system open to the public, or travel to Manyallaluk (08 8975 4727) for a **culture tour** led by the Jawoyn people.



Katherine Gorge

TOURISM NT/DAVID SILVA

A to B Katherine to Timber Creek

Out of Katherine the Victoria Highway undulates through open eucalypt woodland towards the Victoria River. After 86 km the highway passes a turnoff into **Flora River Nature Park** (www.nt.gov.au/nreta). This unsealed road is suitable for 2WD in the Dry and leads to one of the NT's most scenic rivers, lined by Livistonia palms, melaleuca and pandanus, and tumbling over a series of tufa dams created by deposits of calcite. The best way to see the river is by boat or canoe, with canoe portages provided over the dams to help protect them. There's a **campground** in the park.

Beyond the turnoff, the Victoria Highway enters the eastern section of **Gregory National Park** (www.nt.gov.au/nreta), dipping to spectacular Victoria River Crossing, with 250 m high red sandstone walls looming above. Near the Victoria River Roadhouse, set out on the Escarpment Lookout Walk (3 km) for **great views** into the gorge, or a short distance ahead see **rock art** and palms on the Joe Creek Walk (1.7 km). Max's Victoria River Cruise (www.maxsvictoriarivercruise.com) motors along the Victoria River at sunset and is great for spotting **saltwater crocodiles**. The tour departs from Timber Creek.

Rising out of the crossing you'll get your first look at the **boab trees** that will be your solid companions to Broome. North of the highway is the Coolibah Crocodile Farm if you fancy a closer look at thousands of crocs.

Climb through **Kuwang Lookout**, with its views of Stokes Range, and the road intersects the unsealed Buchanan Highway. This rough dirt road heads south to the permanent waterholes in Jasper Gorge, set beneath red sandstone cliffs.

A short distance further along the highway, another dirt road turns south into Gregory National Park. This road is usually open from May to November and 2WD vehicles can travel as far as Bullita Homestead, around 50 km south of the highway. The original stockyards still stand near the homestead, which was an outstation belonging to the Durack family. It's a short detour along this track to Limestone Gorge, where there are some good **walking tracks**, as well as tufa dams and stromatolites. There are **campgrounds** by the homestead and the gorge. **4WDers** can circuit the rugged Bullita Stock Route, once used to drive cattle towards the meatworks in Wyndham. Expect to take around eight hours to drive its 90 km.

The Victoria Highway rejoins the Victoria River at the township of Timber Creek (www.krta.com.au), the only settlement in the 558 km between Katherine and Kununurra. **Anglers** are drawn here (and into Gregory National Park) for the barramundi, while other visitors will want to visit the historic cemetery and old police station, now a museum.

B to C Timber Creek to Kununurra

As you drive out of town, look for the turnoff to the Gregory Tree. On this boab the explorer Augustus Gregory carved the date of his visit: '2nd July, 1856'.

Around 100 km on, through savannah and boabs, the highway passes the long entrance into Bullo River Station (www.bulloriver.com). Spread across 2000 sq. km, it offers luxury outback stays as well as **helicopter tours**, remote fishing and even the chance to participate in cattle mustering and the unique thrill of bull catching.



Gregory Tree

As you approach the WA border take the chance to visit the wonderfully quiet **Keep River National Park** (www.nt.gov.au/nreta). This park is something of a Top End highlights package, with elephantine boabs, prolific rock art at Nganalam, the deep gash of Keep River Gorge shrinking to waterholes in the Dry, extensive bird life and sandstone peaks reminiscent of the famed Bungle Bungles across the border. The national park has two **campgrounds**.

Cross the border and take the turnoff to Lake Argyle, a vast artificial lake holding around 20 times more water than Sydney Harbour. **Cruise** the lake and the Ord River (www.lakeargylecruises.com) and visit the relocated **Durack Argyle Homestead**, now a museum.

Wildlife lovers may find a rare treat at Lake Argyle Tourist Village, with the multicoloured **Gouldian finches**, one of Australia's most beautiful and elusive wild birds, sometimes seen around the village pool. Three-day self-guided **canoeing** trips from Lake Argyle to Kununurra along the Ord River can be arranged through Kununurra Backpackers Adventure Centre (www.adventure.kimberley.net.au).

Returning to the highway, it's a short drive into Kununurra (www.kimberleytourism.com), from where **scenic flights** can be arranged with Slingair Heliwork (www.heliwork.com.au) over the beehive mounds of the Bungle Bungles or the distant **Mitchell Falls**, near the Kimberley's north coast. Slingair also operates fly-in tours of the Argyle Diamond Mine. At the edge of town is **Mirima National Park** (www.naturebase.net), which carries echoes

of the Bungle Bungles but with infinitely easier access. The park has two short **walking tracks**, both with great views over the park and Kununurra.

Also at the edge of town is Lily Creek Lagoon. Come at dawn or dusk for a bird bonanza.

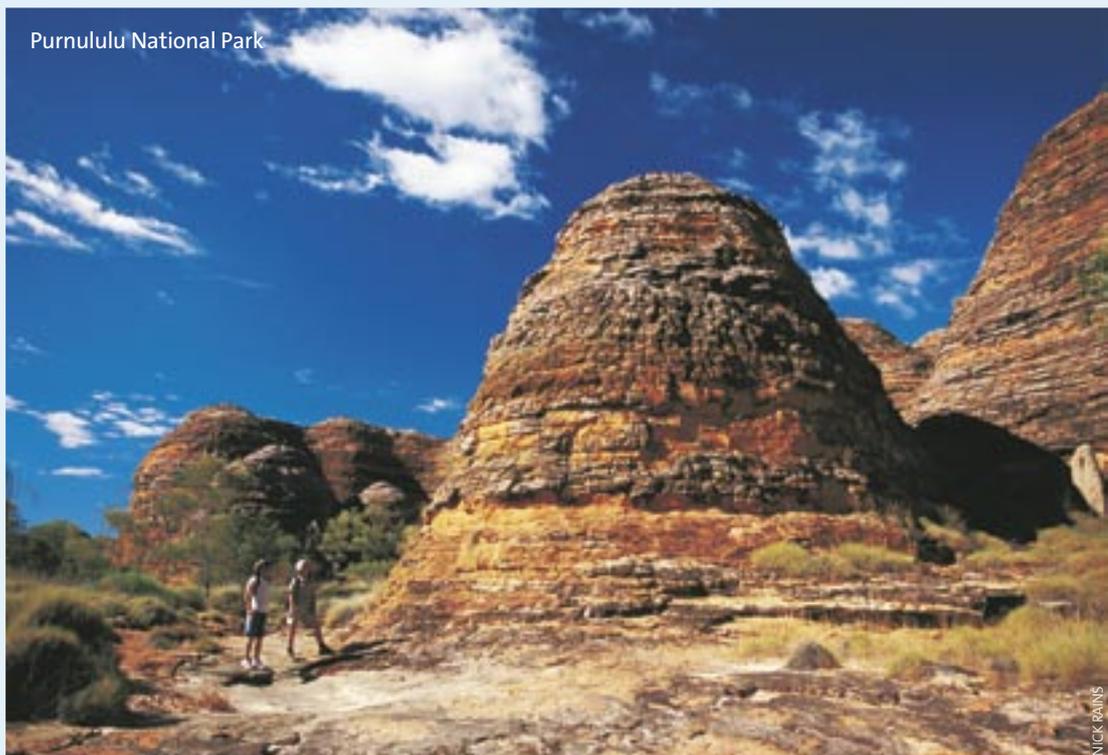
C to D Kununurra to Halls Creek

Forty-five kilometres west of Kununurra, the main drive heads south, but there are a couple of detour options to the north. In Wyndham (www.thelastfrontier.com.au), WA's northernmost town, you can climb to **Five Rivers Lookout** and look over the confluence of the King, Pentecost, Forrest, Ord and Durack rivers. Parry Lagoons Nature Reserve is one of the Kimberley's best **bird-watching** sites, while a cooling **swim** awaits in the Grotto. If travelling by 4WD, you can partake of the station hospitality at Diggers Rest, where you can also **bushwalk** along the King River or try **horse trekking**.

A second detour heads onto the Gibb River Road to **El Questro Station** (www.elquestro.com.au). If travelling by 2WD check the road condition to El Questro with the Kununurra Visitors Centre. Covering about 4000 sq. km, the station offers accommodation from tent sites through to some of the outback's most luxurious rooms. Activities on the station include **cruises** in Chamberlain Gorge, horse rides and guided **barramundi fishing** tours.

4WDers will probably prefer to continue towards Broome along the Gibb River Road, one of the country's great off-road routes, passing a multitude of gorges and threading through the twisted rock of the King Leopold Ranges.

However, the Savannah Way turns onto the Great Northern Highway towards Halls Creek. Past Turkey Creek is the turnoff into World Heritage-listed



Purnululu National Park

Purnululu National Park (www.naturebase.net), accessible only to 4WDs and often a rugged trip. The reward at the end is one of the iconic outback sights: the striped domes of the Bungle Bungle Range. There are two **campgrounds** in the park and a handful of walks into some of the steep-sided gorges. East Kimberley Tours (www.eastkimberleytours.com.au) and APT Kimberley Wilderness Adventures (www.kimberleywilderness.com.au) operate tours in the park.

At Halls Creek you can radiate out to a couple of great **swimming holes** – Sawpit Gorge and Palm Springs – or take the long journey to **Wolfe Creek Crater** (www.naturebase.net), where a meteor strike has left a crater 50 m deep and almost 1 km across.

In Halls Creek itself, stop at the **Yarliylil Arts Centre** (www.yarliylilarts.com), in the old post office building, showcasing local indigenous artists.

D to E Halls Creek to Broome

The drive continues to undulate west to Fitzroy Crossing, from where it's a day trip out to a trio of contrasting gorges. Join the daily **Darngku Heritage Cruise** (www.naturebase.net) through Geikie Gorge, led by Bunuba Aboriginal guides, or burrow through the underground passage of Tunnel Creek (www.naturebase.net).

4WDers can continue north from Tunnel Creek to Windjana Gorge (www.naturebase.net), where you can walk to the end of the gorge (7 km return) or just to the sandy banks to observe sun-seeking freshwater crocodiles.

Further along the highway it's worth diverting north to Derby (www.derbytourism.com.au), passing the bulbous Boab Prison Tree. With a 14 m girth, it reputedly was once used as a lock-up for prisoners.

Wander onto Derby's town wharf and watch the shift of the tides – Derby has some of Australia's highest, rising to around 11 m. It's such tides that create the so-called horizontal waterfalls in Talbot Bay to the north of town, with the massive tidal flows resulting in a surge of water through a narrow passage. The easiest and most spectacular way to view the falls is with a **scenic flight**. A number of companies offer flights from both Broome and Derby. Enquire at the visitor centres for details.

Cross the wide Fitzroy River once more as you make the final trek into Broome (www.broomevisitorcentre.com.au). At this legendary coastal town you'll find a wealth of attractions, from the shining fruits of its pearling industry to sunset **camel rides** on Cable Beach (www.redsuncamels.com.au).

4WDers can extend the tour by heading north on the sandy road through the Dampier Peninsula to lighthouse-tipped Cape Leveque, stopping at the Aboriginal community of Beagle Bay to see the small Sacred Heart Church with its mother-of-pearl altar.

Birdwatchers will also want to venture out to the world-renowned **Broome Bird Observatory** (www.broomebirdobservatory.com) on Roebuck Bay. Migrating shorebirds fly into Roebuck Bay from as far away as Siberia. ■

Cable Beach

