

DISCOVER ABORIGINAL EXPERIENCES

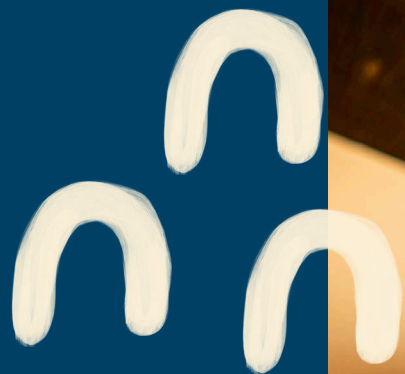
MEDIA KIT



DISCOVER
ABORIGINAL
EXPERIENCES

Signature

EXPERIENCES OF AUSTRALIA



**IN THE SPIRIT OF
RECONCILIATION, TOURISM
AUSTRALIA ACKNOWLEDGES
THE TRADITIONAL
CUSTODIANS OF COUNTRY
THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA
AND THEIR CONNECTIONS
TO LAND, SEA AND
COMMUNITY.
WE PAY OUR RESPECTS
TO THEIR ELDERS PAST,
PRESENT AND EMERGING,
AND EXTEND THAT RESPECT
TO ALL ABORIGINAL AND
TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER
PEOPLES TODAY.**







Venture North Safaris, Northern Territory

A WELCOME TO AUSTRALIA FROM THE NATION'S FIRST PEOPLES

A trip to Australia isn't just a visit to the land down under: it's the modern home of ancient peoples – the oldest living cultures on Earth, in fact. Multifaceted and imbued with timeless wisdom, Australia's Aboriginal peoples are warm, welcoming and extremely generous of spirit; getting to know their approach to life may well be one of the richest travel experiences available.

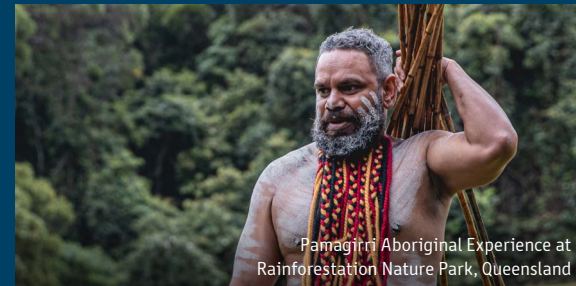
Over the following pages, you'll read of a carefully curated selection of Australia's signature Aboriginal travel offerings: the Discover Aboriginal Experiences collective. Recognised not just by stringent official selection process but by peers, competitors

and the industry at large, each member of this collection is considered a world-class leader in Aboriginal tourism, representing local Aboriginal cultures with integrity and authenticity – a responsibility indeed.

Importantly, each of these experiences also involves the use of Aboriginal guides. For whom better to show you around than a Traditional Custodian of the land? Aboriginal guides don't just afford a unique means of bringing Australia's landscapes to life. As the owners of the stories they share with you, they offer a means of connecting with Australian places and cultures quite unlike anything else you'll find.



SEIT Outback Australia, Northern Territory



Pamagirri Aboriginal Experience at
Rainforestation Nature Park, Queensland



SeaLink NT – Tiwi Islands,
Northern Territory

From adventure seekers and cultural enthusiasts to foodies and nature lovers, there really is something for everyone in this collective, with more than 160 experiences on offer. No matter where you choose to go, you'll be sure to find a meaningful, memorable experience.

The Discover Aboriginal Experiences collective is part of Tourism Australia's Signature Experiences of Australia program that promotes outstanding tourism experiences within a variety of special categories.

We look forward to welcoming you.

For further information

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Tourism Australia provides this publication as information only and is correct at the time of printing. Please use this document as guide and check each businesses' website for the most up-to-date information.

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THE DISCOVER ABORIGINAL EXPERIENCES COLLECTIVE



Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia - Ayers Rock Resort, Northern Territory



Karrke Aboriginal Cultural Experience & Tours, Northern Territory



Venture North, Northern Territory

A CULTURAL EXCHANGE: THE GROWTH OF ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIAN TOURISM

Australia is home to the oldest continuous civilisation on the planet. And these ancient cultures have found voice through a leading government initiative that's producing meaningful results, writes journalist Krysia Bonkowski.

Nowhere in the world can claim a cultural legacy quite like Aboriginal Australia. For at least 65,000 years, its peoples – with hundreds of distinct clans, and as many languages and dialects – have walked the continent, making Aboriginal cultures the oldest continuous living cultures on the planet.

But – in this modern age – how does an ancient culture preserve, champion and celebrate its voice?

As travellers seek out greater authenticity and cultural engagement, interest in Indigenous tourism continues to grow. For the world's Indigenous communities, tourism can be a powerful driver for positive change and the sustainability of cultures.

In Australia, approximately 1.4 million international visitors took part in Indigenous tourism experiences during 2019, according to Tourism Research Australia's International Visitor Survey. Since 2010 that figure has increased by 6 per cent per year, and it is estimated 17 per cent of all international visitors to Australia take part in an Indigenous experience.

Approximately 1 million domestic travellers took part in Indigenous tourism experiences during 2019 according to Tourism Research Australia's National Visitors Survey (NVS). Since 2013, that figure has climbed by approximately 13 per cent a year.

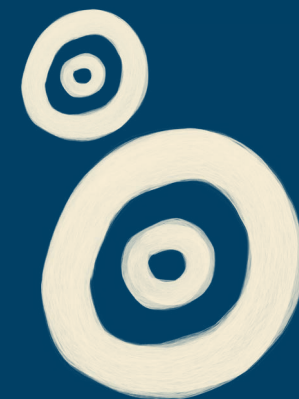
Tourism Australia recognised the opportunity to connect with the oldest living cultures on Earth through our many incredible Aboriginal guides across the country, offering visitors an authentic connection with Australia as a place, through the stories of its people and their unique connection to the land.

That's why Tourism Australia launched their Discover Aboriginal Experiences (DAE) collective in 2018, building on its existing work in promoting Aboriginal tourism but also acknowledging that with our rich cultural heritage of our Aboriginal peoples, it is

something that truly sets our country apart from other destinations in the world.

"Being able to share these Aboriginal experiences with visitors when they are in Australia offers the kind of life-changing, immersive moments which create memories to last for a lifetime. Delivering these memorable moments for visitors when they are here, while also supporting the continuation of our rich Aboriginal heritage, is incredibly important to our organisation," explains Tourism Australia's Managing Director, Phillipa Harrison.

Designed to support the local Aboriginal tourism industry and ensure cultural preservation, the [Discover Aboriginal Experiences](#) program has flourished into a compelling case study of Indigenous cultural empowerment, and the power of responsible tourism.





Harrison comments, “One of the truly beautiful things about tourism is that it can be an incredibly powerful force in building and supporting new creative, cultural, economic and social opportunities – particularly for Aboriginal communities – so we’re very excited about the Discover Aboriginal Experiences collective in this regard.”

The program has been designed to support smaller and owner-operated tourism businesses – especially in remote areas where the barriers of operation can be extremely high. International marketing can be challenging, costly and time consuming for individual operators; however, via Discover Aboriginal Experiences, businesses can continue to deliver their exceptional experiences on Country whilst marketing activity is being undertaken at the same time through their membership of the collective, explains Nicole Mitchell at Tourism Australia.

Mitchell, who oversees the initiative, works directly with the program’s group of members (currently numbering 46) as liaison between their operations domestically, and the wider tourism industry internationally. “The Discover Aboriginal Experiences program acts as an international umbrella brand, competing externally on the world stage as a marketing body and industry representative while internally acting as a champion of great business and support,” she explains.

A key point of difference for this initiative is its rigorous membership selection process. When Tourism Australia formed the collective in early 2018, it was in close consultation with state and territory tourism organisations, each briefed to identify tourism businesses that would be able to deliver an



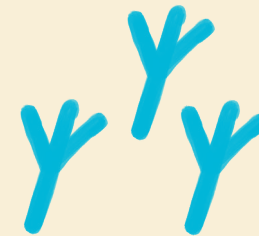
Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures,
Western Australia

export ready product, befitting the title of a ‘[Signature Experience](#)’ (a larger government program, based on an identified collection of outstanding Australian tourism experiences).

“We wanted to showcase Australia’s premium Aboriginal tourism experiences,” Mitchell says. “But by premium I don’t necessarily mean the most luxurious. Rather, we were looking for experiences that really hit the mark in terms of delivering cultural authenticity, offering

diversity of high-quality experiences, and meeting the expectations and needs of the international travel trade.”

The selection process also involved a rigorous examination of cultural representation, including an insistence that the stories of Aboriginal Australia are told – as they should be – by Aboriginal peoples. “Whatever form your encounter takes – whether that’s a walking tour through the heart of Australia’s urban hubs, or



a wildlife safari in the distant reaches of the outback – you walk away with a more authentic connection to Aboriginal Australia. Every place in Australia has a different story and it’s about learning those stories so that you understand a bit more.”

“It’s about the person who owns the story, telling the story.”

Helping members reach that all-important international market, Discover Aboriginal Experiences provides invaluable cost-free support in marketing, communications and training – providing everything from industry-standard photographic assets to social media strategy. By creating a single point of contact for a suite of world-class products, Tourism Australia is also able to advocate for members through its channels and at major trade shows and events.

“While the Aboriginal businesses involved in the program existed before joining Discover Aboriginal Experiences, bringing them together as a suite of extraordinary cultural experiences to market to international visitors via the new membership has delivered greater reach and great marketing exposure globally for the businesses involved,” says Phillipa Harrison. “In many ways we are seen as an extension of their sales force and promotional activities.”

The key aspects of DAE such as the authenticity of the experiences, partnering with local Indigenous businesses and the resulting win/win outcomes, attracted Insight Australia Travel’s Managing Director, Birgit Bourne. “Authentic, Indigenous, cultural experiences are highly sought-after and valued by many travellers who wish to travel with purpose and get to know the ‘real’ Australia,” says Bourne.



Kakadu Cultural Tours, Northern Territory

Bourne has been arranging Indigenous cultural experiences for international tourists for over 20 years and now also offers authentic, respectful Indigenous immersions under the Australian Geographic Travel brand as well. “Working with DAE is not only convenient with so many experiences easily accessible, but the range of product is also highly inspiring. DAE offers us amazing insight into the enormous legacy of Aboriginal cultures – their complexity and spiritual depth – which we then proudly share with our travellers.”

Liam Maher, manager of [Kakadu Cultural Tours](#), described once feeling like a “minnow” in the ocean of the international tourism industry. With Discover Aboriginal Experiences in his corner, he’s tapped markets he believes they were years from being able to reach, if ever. “They allow you to punch above your weight,” he says. This has translated directly into sales for the business – which offers immersion in the wilds of Kakadu National Park through its river cruises, 4WD adventures, cultural excursions and wilderness lodgings – with a dramatic uptick in direct and trade bookings.

It’s a benefit felt keenly by Kuku Yalanji man Juan Walker, whose Queensland-based business, [Walkabout Cultural Adventures](#), started as a one-man venture. “Being a small business, we don’t have the personnel and funds to attend events and sales trips,” Walker says.

“To be in this collection has helped to maintain and strengthen our relationship and awareness in the international travel market.”

When the collective was surveyed in 2022, asked if being part of the Discover Aboriginal Experiences was valuable, every member responded 100 per cent in the affirmative, and this 100 per cent score has been achieved every year since the inception of the collective in 2018. Many members also speak about a close camaraderie within the collective, with operators quick to recommend each other to the many visitors inspired to seek out further experiences. “Personally, it makes me feel really proud to think that I’m part of that group,” says Walker. “To be considered a leader in Aboriginal tourism in Australia.”

The homogenisation of Indigenous cultures is one of the greatest barriers to cultural exchange with Indigenous people worldwide – another challenge the program sought to redress. Recognising the vast diversity of Aboriginal Australia, Discover Aboriginal Experiences members are as varied as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures they represent.

At [Spirits of the Red Sand](#), on Yugambeh Country between Brisbane/Meeanjin and the Gold Coast, the power of storytelling is used to full impact during a roving performance exploring colonisation through Indigenous eyes. “Storytelling has been handed down for generations upon generations,” says Eddie Ruska, co-founder and a respected Elder. “The sharing of stories is sharing our culture.” Despite the pain implicit in this story, Ruska says the telling of it is a healing way for his young performers to honour what those before them endured. Marketing director Kerry Collins agrees: “It’s telling our stories, which heals the past for a brighter future. It brings cultures together.”

Further up the Queensland coast, [Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel](#) is helping visitors see the world-famous Great Barrier Reef through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eyes for the first time. Launched in 2018 in consultation with Gimuy Walubara Yidinji, Gunggangdji, Mandingabay and Yirrganydji Elders, the popular tours are crewed by Indigenous rangers.

“Dreamtime Dive and Snorkel is the only Indigenous-led sea country tour on the Great Barrier Reef,” says CEO and Executive Director, John O’Sullivan. “Our Indigenous Guides are extremely proud of their culture and enjoy sharing their stories, which have been handed down through generations, to provide our guests with a deeper cultural understanding of the diverse Sea Country ecosystem.”



Dreamtime Dive and Snorkel, Queensland



Walkabout Cultural Adventures, Queensland

Juan Walker shares his deep connection to the land around the meeting of the World Heritage-listed Daintree Rainforest and Great Barrier Reef on Walkabout Cultural Tours. For Walker, his people do not own the land: “we belong to it”. By creating a meaningful connection to Country for his guests, he says, he hopes to build respect – not just for the land, but for each other. “I think it’s really important that more people learn about the land and learn about the environment and gain a bit of respect for it. Because if we connect to it, we can respect it, and if we respect it, we can start to learn and respect each other a lot more.”

Tourism is one of the largest employers in Australia, especially in regional and remote Australia. As Aboriginal tourism blossoms, the ripple can be felt across the industry. Mitchell describes Discover Aboriginal Experience as having a ‘halo effect’. “Whilst Discover Aboriginal Experiences has 46 businesses with over 160 experiences, our members also work with another 1,815 businesses,” she says, with fellow tour operators, National Parks, transport companies, artists and countless others seeing the benefit. “So, the effect of Discover Aboriginal Experiences is that it not only supports the members but the tourism industry at large,” Mitchell says. Maher of Kakadu Cultural Tours testifies to this fact – as a result of the boost to the business he attributes directly to the program, they have been able to benefit industry partners and provide ongoing contract work for smaller local Aboriginal operators.



Kakadu Cultural Tours, Northern Territory

The success of Discover Aboriginal Experiences members flows profits back into Indigenous communities and improves the livelihoods of Aboriginal peoples through training and career advancement.

At Spirits of the Red Sand, where most employees are Aboriginal, staff receive accreditations such as a Certificate III in Hospitality and Tourism as standard. But Ruska and Collins have found that, as team members build confidence, they find their voice to ask for and receive further specialised training. For example, aboard Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel, Indigenous sea rangers have been supported to become marine biologists, engineers and skippers of the vessel itself.

Crucially, with more long-term careers created in and through Aboriginal tourism, meaningful employment opportunities are created on Country. Since the epoch-changing 1992 Mabo decision, Traditional Owners have gained increasing autonomy over the management and care of ancestral lands. For many of these communities, tourism can present significant economic opportunity while letting native title owners share the story of their land.

It's a step towards an ideal future for Aboriginal business owners such as Walker, of Walkabout Cultural Tours. "I would love to see all Indigenous tourism products around the country, owned and operated by the people of that land," he says. "It is a great way for people to be on Country, making a living while at the same time looking after and preserving Country and culture."

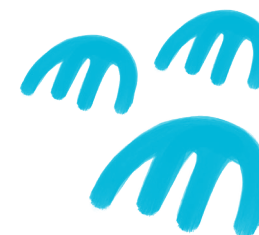
This is already in action at Kakadu Cultural Tours, where the 30-plus employees, most from Country, are encouraged to excel across all areas of the business. In the same way Kakadu Cultural Tours is able to provide opportunities for its staff, says Maher, so too does Discover Aboriginal Experiences for the business. "That's what Nicole's mob do –they provide doors of opportunity; they open them for you."

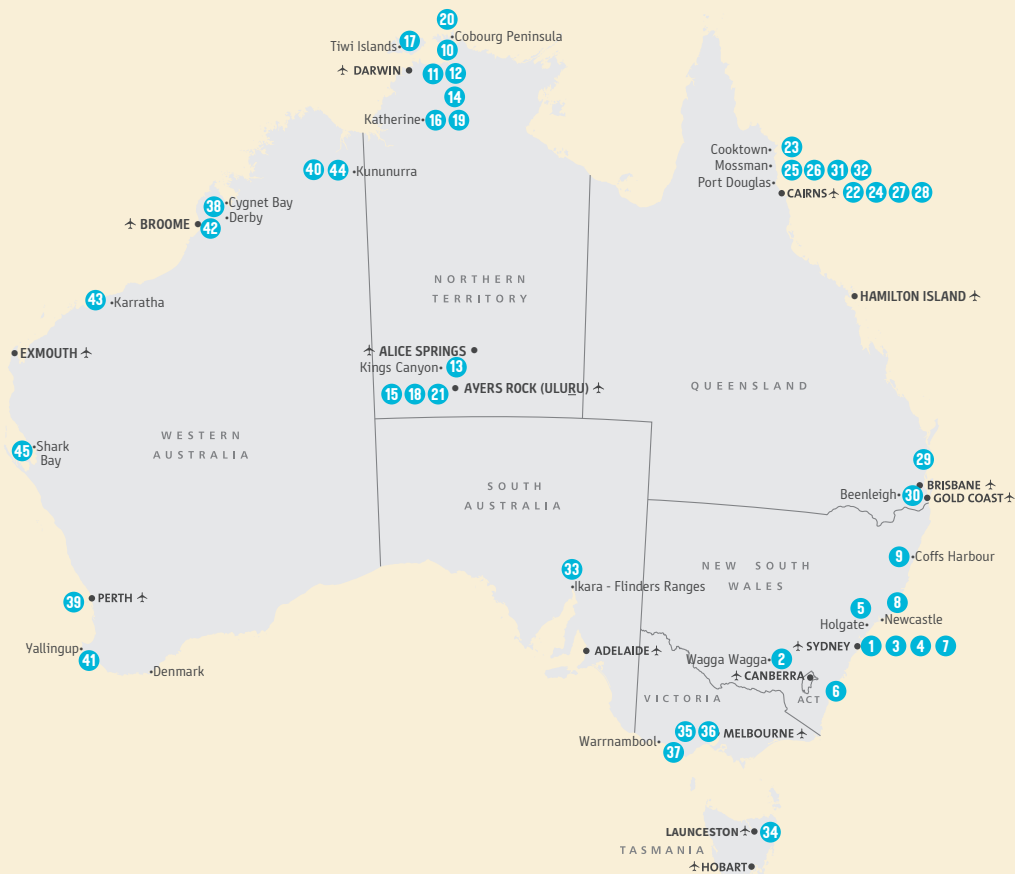
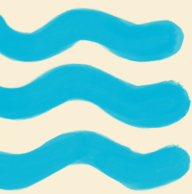
By empowering Aboriginal peoples to showcase the breadth and diversity of their culture, Discover Aboriginal Experiences has added another rich strand to Australia's unparalleled tourism offering and become a case study in the transformative power of authentic Indigenous tourism. Each member of the Discover Aboriginal Experiences collective has their own story to tell, but together they create the tapestry that is Aboriginal Australia.

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DISCOVER ABORIGINAL EXPERIENCES MEMBERS

New South Wales

- 1 Australian Museum
- 2 Bundyi Cultural Tours
- 3 Burrawa Indigenous Climb Experience
- 4 Dreamtime Southern X
- 5 Firescreek Botanical Winery Aboriginal Experiences
- 6 Ngaran Ngaran Culture Awareness
- 7 The Royal Botanic Garden Sydney
- 8 Sand Dune Adventures
- 9 Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure Tours

Northern Territory

- 10 Davidson's Arnhemland Safaris
- 11 Kakadu Cultural Tours
- 12 Kakadu Tourism
- 13 Karrke Aboriginal Cultural Experience & Tours
- 14 Lords Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris
- 15 Maruku Arts
- 16 Nitmiluk Tours
- 17 SeaLink NT – Tiwi Islands
- 18 SEIT Outback Australia
- 19 Top Didj Cultural Experience & Art Gallery
- 20 Venture North Safaris
- 21 Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia – Ayers Rock Resort

Queensland

- 22 Adventure North Australia
- 23 Culture Connect Australia
- 24 Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel
- 25 Flames of the Forest
- 26 Janbal Gallery

- 27 Mandingalbay Ancient Indigenous Tours
- 28 Pamagirri Aboriginal Experience at Rainforestation Nature Park
- 29 Saltwater Eco Tours
- 30 Spirits of the Red Sand
- 31 Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia – Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre
- 32 Walkabout Cultural Adventures

South Australia

- 33 Wilpena Pound Resort

Tasmania

- 34 wukalina Walk

Victoria

- 35 Koorie Heritage Trust
- 36 Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne
- 37 Worn Gundidj @ Tower Hill

Western Australia

- 38 Borrogoron Coast to Creek Tours
- 39 Dale Tilbrook Experiences
- 40 Kingfisher Tours
- 41 Koomal Dreaming
- 42 Narlijia Experiences Broome
- 43 Ngurrangga Tours
- 44 Waringarri Aboriginal Arts & Tours
- 45 Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures

*Information current as of February 2023

Note: Map location references are an indication only



DISCOVER ABORIGINAL EXPERIENCES THEMATIC JOURNEYS

DAE MEDIA KIT + 20



21 + DAE MEDIA KIT

FINDING YOUR ULTIMATE EXPERIENCE... WHAT TO EXPECT – THEMATIC JOURNEYS

From exploring labyrinths of ancient and contemporary rock art, to adventurous expeditions in mesmerising natural wilderness, a rich array of experiences is on offer in the Discover Aboriginal Experiences collective. While these themes preview the range of activities available, it is worth noting that all operators are able to cater to specific guest requirements, including tailor-made experiences and private tours.



Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia - Mossman
Gorge Cultural Centre, Queensland



Maruku Arts, Northern Territory



Worn Gundidj @ Tower Hill, Victoria

NATURE AND WILDLIFE

View Australia's distinctive landscapes through different eyes, helping you gain a deeper appreciation of the natural environment and the nation's unique wildlife – and enjoy great fishing!

Sample highlights: Near the Great Ocean Road in Victoria, you can take an Aboriginal-guided tour with Worn Gundidj @ Tower Hill to discover a nature reserve inside a dormant volcano where kangaroos, wallabies, emus, koalas, echidnas and hundreds of bird species roam freely. Alternatively, explore lush, fertile wetlands in the heart of Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory with Kakadu Cultural Tours to see crocodiles and colourful birdlife and discover the traditional uses for plants and animals. In New South Wales, Wiradjuri man Mark Saddler brings the magnificent landscapes of the Riverina region to life on his suite of Bundy Cultural Tours. Spot kangaroos and other native wildlife as you explore sites of cultural significance. And in Tropical North Queensland, the well-camouflaged critters of the lush Daintree Rainforest are best spotted with the help of Indigenous guides. On a Dreamtime Walk run by the Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre, you might be lucky enough to admire a beautiful Boyd's forest dragon.



Walkabout Cultural Adventures, Queensland



Burrawa Indigenous Climb Experience, New South Wales



Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures, Western Australia



wukalina Walk, Tasmania

CULINARY EXPERIENCES

Guided bush tucker walks reveal the surprising fecundity of the Australian landscape, while outback dining, infused with the unique flavours of the Australian bush, offers a deliciously immersive experience. Alternatively, try your hand at traditional hunting.

Sample highlights: Join an immersive exploration with Walkabout Cultural Adventures in Tropical North Queensland, where a Kuku Valanji guide – whose ancestors have lived in the region for tens of thousands of years – will take you on a deeply personal tour. Or join Wadandi man, Josh Whiteland, from Koomal Dreaming on one of his immersive tours in Western Australia's Margaret River region and forage for bush tucker such as saltbush and bush celery along the Cape to Cape walking track. On the New South Wales Central Coast, take an alternative winery tour with respected Elder Kevin 'Gavi' Duncan from Firescreek Botanical Winery Aboriginal Experiences. Taste native flora and learn about local Aboriginal culture before sampling the botanical winery's distinctive beverages. Or try your luck catching one of the Northern Territory's famed barramundi on a fishing tour with Kakadu Tourism.

ACTIVE ADVENTURES

You'll find a wide selection of exhilarating experiences on offer in Australia's beautiful landscapes, from paddling, quad biking and hiking to 4WD adventures and a bridge climb with a difference.

Sample highlights: Perhaps you'd care to enjoy an inspiring four-day, three-night Aboriginal-guided wukalina Walk along the white sand beaches of larapuna (Bay of Fires) and wukalina (Mount William) in north-eastern Tasmania/ lutruwita staying in domed huts inspired by the traditional homes of the palawa people, Tasmania/lutruwita's Traditional Custodians. Or maybe you'll take a tailor-made safari with Lords Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris to explore some of the Northern Territory's towering red escarpments, dramatic waterfalls and expansive wetlands, as well as discover remarkable rock art. In New South Wales, explore Aboriginal connections to the Coffs Coast on a thrilling cultural paddle along culturally significant waterways with Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure Tours, or scale Sydney Harbour Bridge in the company of an Aboriginal storyteller on the Burrawa Indigenous Climb Experience, which reveals glimpses of sacred sites and fascinating insights into the Aboriginal significance of the city.

COASTAL AND AQUATIC

Aboriginal cultures are not only connected with the outback but also with Australia's spectacular coastal regions. Sail, fish, search for mud crabs, snorkel, kayak and swim in beautiful beaches and aquamarine waterways.

Sample highlights: Discover the Creation story of the Great Barrier Reef with Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel's Indigenous sea rangers. They will also guide you on a snorkel tour to better understand the ancient relationship between humankind and marine life. Also departing from Cairns/Gimuy in Tropical North Queensland, cultural tours with Mandingalbay Ancient Indigenous Tours begin with a scenic cruise to Mandingalbay Yidinji Country, where you will experience the ultimate taste of local traditions. Further south, forge a new connection to Queensland's Sunshine Coast as you cruise the serene Mooloolah River on a century-old sailing boat with Indigenous owned and operated Saltwater Eco Tours. Go on a kayaking adventure with Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures to explore Gutharraguda (the Aboriginal name for UNESCO World Heritage-listed Shark Bay in Western Australia) to learn how the Country talks to you. Or hop on a quad bike with Sand Dune Adventures in Port Stephens, New South Wales, and dig for fresh water, discover Aboriginal midden shell sites, and ride the Worimi sand dunes – the longest moving coastal sand dunes in the Southern Hemisphere.

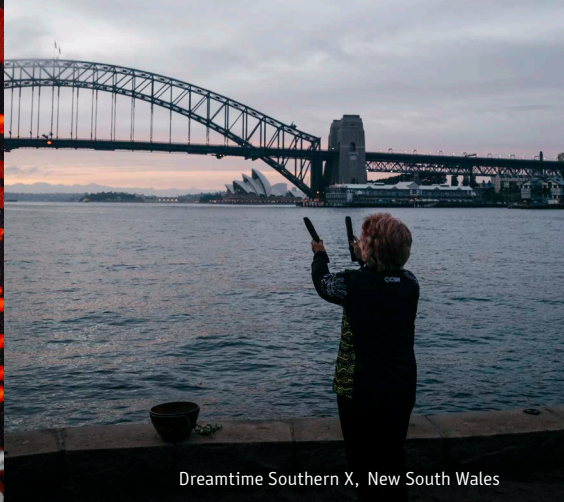
EXCLUSIVE ACCOMMODATION

When you want to immerse yourself fully in Australia's remarkable and remote landscapes, unique Aboriginal-owned accommodations, including wilderness retreats, safari tents and architecturally designed huts make your experience all the more special.

Sample highlights: In the heart of the traditional homeland of the Adnyamathanha (Yura) people in the spectacular Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park in South Australia, Wilpena Pound Resort is set inside an extraordinary 800-million-year-old natural amphitheatre and offers 'glamping' safari tents as well as hotel rooms and camping. Then there's Davidson's Arnhemland Safaris' remote wilderness lodge nestled against the majestic Arnhem Land escarpment in the Northern Territory's Top End – the perfect place to unplug and reconnect with nature while exploring the Aboriginal cultural landscape surrounding the ecolodge. And on the transformative Aboriginal-guided wukalina Walk in Tasmania/ lutruwita, you'll spend the first two nights in architect-designed huts inspired by the half-dome shelters traditionally used by palawa people, the state's Traditional Custodians.



Maruku Arts, Northern Territory



Dreamtime Southern X, New South Wales



Karrke Aboriginal Cultural Experience & Tours, Northern Territory



Venture North Safaris, Northern Territory

ART AND MUSEUMS

Explore Australia's excellent Aboriginal art galleries and museums, visit ancient rock art sites offering profound insights into Dreaming stories, or take part in artist-led workshops in contemporary art practice. All help you understand the fundamental role of art in the transmission of culture.

Sample highlights: Join a Maruku Arts dot-painting workshop at Ayers Rock Resort in Australia's spectacular Red Centre to learn about Tjurkurpa Creation symbols, and then paint your own Creation story. Visit some of the finest rock art galleries in the world with Davidson's Arnhemland Safaris in the Top End of the Northern Territory and learn about the distinctive screen-printing techniques used by the artisans of the Tiwi Islands on SeaLink NT's Tiwi by Design tour. Or take an interactive tour of Waringarri Aboriginal Arts & Tours, a creative hub in Western Australia's Kimberley region where local artisans also guide you into the epic landscapes that inspire their works. You can also explore one of the world's most significant First Nations collections at the Australian Museum in Sydney/Warrane and admire ever-changing First Nations art exhibitions at the Koorie Heritage Trust in Melbourne/Narrm.

URBAN CULTURE

Aboriginal cultures also thrive in Australia's urban centres, with walking tours as well as museums, galleries and cultural centres offering easily accessible ways to connect with Indigenous cultures.

Sample highlights: Enjoy an Aboriginal Heritage Walk in the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, be immersed in Aboriginal histories and cultures at the Aboriginal Dinner Show hosted by Spirits of the Red Sand on the Gold Coast, or explore the fascinating First Nations collection at the Australian Museum in Sydney/Warrane. You may also wish to embark on a coastal journey with Dreamtime Southern X, where the spiritual significance of the New South Wales's capital's famous harbour is revealed on a stunningly intimate walking tour. Or ascend the Sydney Harbour Bridge accompanied by an Aboriginal storyteller on the Burrawa Indigenous Climb Experience, learning about the city's lesser-known history en route. It's not just the big cities where you can discover Aboriginal cultures in an urban environment. Yawuru man Bart Pigram offers a walking tour of historic Broome's mangroves and mudflats, highlighting the impact this unique ecosystem had on the history and settlement of this dynamic pearling town.

BUSH & OUTBACK

The Australian outback is a wild, ancient place. With an Aboriginal guide, explore working cattle stations, outback gorges, ancient rock art galleries and waterholes, and learn about the bounties a seemingly barren desert can provide.

Sample highlights: After you've explored the famous sites at Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, go deep into the heart of the Red Centre with SEIT Outback Australia and join the traditional Uluru family in their homelands. On a Karrke Aboriginal Cultural Experience & Tours experience in the Northern Territory's Watarrka National Park, you can immerse yourself in the Luritja and Pertame language and culture. Discover native foods such as bush plum and honey ants, learn more about dot painting and see how mulga wood can be transformed into weapons and artefacts during this hands-on one-hour experience. You can also explore the far reaches of Western Australia's breathtaking Kimberley region with Kingfisher Tours, which whisks guests to remote attractions – including World Heritage-listed Purnululu National Park and its famous Bungle Bungle Range – by plane, with ground tours led by Aboriginal guides.

IMMERSIVE JOURNEYS

Go off the beaten track and you'll soon learn that there is not one, but many Aboriginal cultures, each with its own language, belief system and powerful connection to place. On an immersive journey, you'll gain both insight into the world's oldest living cultures and an understanding of Aboriginal spirituality and connection to Country.

Sample highlights: Make a deep connection with the Yuin people of the New South Wales South Coast through Ngaran Ngaran Culture Awareness, which shares sacred ceremonies, ancient stories and traditional dancing. Wander to the heart of Purnululu National Park, where the Bungle Bungle Range is as imposing as it is inspiring. Or join a multi-day 4WD adventure in the Northern Territory with Venture North Safaris. On your journey from Darwin/Gulmerrdgen to the Cobourge Peninsula, one of Australia's wildest corners, you'll visit one of Arnhem Land's most significant rock art sites with an Aboriginal guide. It's impossible not to feel moved by the spirituality of this sacred place as you learn about how this spectacular landscape has sustained the Aboriginal communities of the Gunbalanya region for millennia.





Wilpena Pound, South Australia

MEET THE OLDEST LIVING CULTURES ON EARTH



Australia is often thought of as a young country. After all, it was colonised by the British as recently as 1788. But consider this: Aboriginal cultures are older than Roman ruins. They predate Egypt's pyramids and existed long before Stonehenge. Estimated to stretch back at least 65,000 years, they are the oldest continuous living cultures in the world.

Yet you won't find grand monuments dotted around Australia's vast outback. What you'll discover is a rich tapestry of culture that has always lived softly. Deeply connected to nature, its historical footprint exists through rock paintings that date back tens of thousands of years; through dancing grounds used for generations, and through stories laden with acute wisdom, which continue to be told today.

While the term "Aboriginal" is used as a collective for the civilisation, at the time of colonisation there were more than 300 different Aboriginal "Nations" within Australia, with at least as many languages – most of which are now highly endangered.

The skill and sophistication of these societies is still being recognised. The invention of baking, for example, is often attributed to the Egyptians, but there's evidence of seed grinding by Aboriginal peoples some 65,000 years ago. Earlier still, stone-wall fish traps remain in place as perhaps the oldest human-made structures on Earth. Meanwhile, Aboriginal peoples were developing complex farming practices about 6000 years ago and became masters of leveraging fire for land management.

They are also regarded as the world's first astronomers, using the stars to predict seasonal change and food sources. One way to garner insight into the complexity of Aboriginal cultures is to join a personalised tour of the Australian Museum's First Nations collection, which features the largest natural history and cultural collection in the country.

As they represent less than four per cent of Australia's current population, an everyday interaction with Australia's First Peoples is not a given for most visitors. Entering their world, sharing their culture and seeing the land through their eyes is a rare privilege. That is why the Discover Aboriginal Experiences (DAE) collection has been created: to enable you to learn from Koomal Dreaming's Josh Whiteland about the six seasons used to guide bush hunting and gathering; to experience a traditional Welcome to Country ceremony inside an 800-million-year-old natural amphitheatre at the Adnyamathanha peoples' Wilpena Pound Resort, and to understand connection to Country while walking in sight of skyscrapers in the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne.

The initiative, part of Tourism Australia's Signature Experiences of Australia, highlights Aboriginal businesses that are owned by, or strongly connected to Aboriginal communities. In supporting these ventures, we contribute to the cultures' survival by supporting employment in their often-isolated traditional Lands, ensuring their vital roots, sacred laws and kinship ties remain unbroken.



Koomal Dreaming, Western Australia



Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, Victoria



Wilpena Pound, South Australia

ABORIGINAL ARCHAEOLOGY: DIGGING UP EVIDENCE OF THE WORLD'S OLDEST LIVING CULTURES

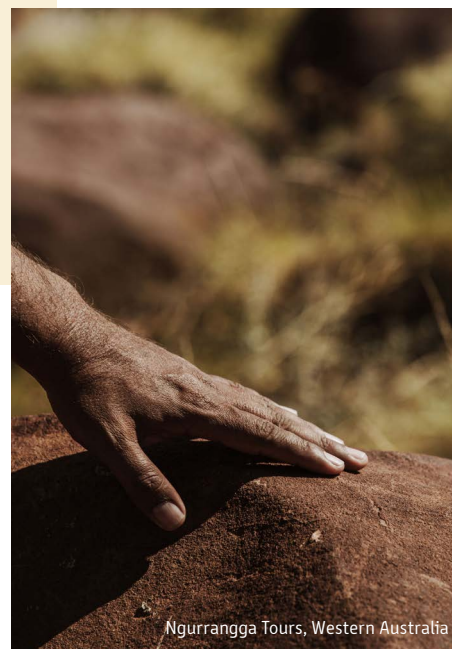
Sixty-five thousand years – that's the mind-boggling age of Aboriginal Australian cultures, a number based on the archaeological backdating of enduring sites. To put that into context on a world stage, Australia's First Peoples lived, thrived, traded and recorded their Dreamtime stories on rock faces tens of thousands of years before the great Pyramids of Giza were even thought of.

Aboriginal Australian cultures might be the oldest continuous cultures on the planet, but even with such a far-reaching history, a staggering range and breadth of sites, customs, stories and experiences remain alive and accessible today. Several among them showcasing archaeological evidence of Aboriginal Australia's astonishing timeline.

North of Adelaide/Tarntanya, in outback South Australia, rises Wilpena Pound – a natural ring of mountains (not dissimilar in appearance to a giant crater). Home to rugged mountain vistas and 500-million-year-old fossils (believed to be remnants of prehistoric sea life), Wilpena Pound also remains an enormously significant place to Adnyamathanha peoples, who have lived in the surrounding Flinders Ranges for tens of thousands of years. Learn how the other-worldly landscape came to be according to a Dreamtime Creation story on board one

of [Wilpena Pound Resort's](#) Aboriginal cultural tours. Lead by an Adnyamathanha guide, tours visit sacred sites around Wilpena, including 40,000-year-old rock paintings at Arkaroo Rock, and precious rock engravings estimated to be even older.

But it's in Australia's north-west corner, where terracotta earth meets turquoise seas on the Pilbara's Burrup Peninsula, where you'll find what is believed to be the highest concentration of rock engravings, and the earliest examples of art in the world. Best explored with Clinton Walker from [Ngurrangga Tours](#) – a descendant of the Pilbara's Traditional Owners – or one of his knowledgeable guides, glimpse an insight into their ancestral heritage as you explore an area housing up to a million Aboriginal rock carvings, known as petroglyphs, some dating back 40,000 years. While showing you some examples of these engravings, your guide will explain the figures, fauna and symbols they depict, and pass around examples of bush tucker used as traditional medicine along the way.



Ngurrangga Tours, Western Australia



Wilpena Pound Resort, South Australia

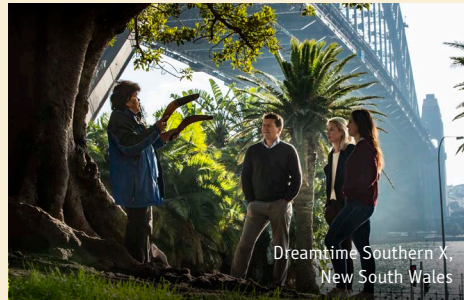




Aboriginal peoples have an undeniable talent for storytelling. Without a written language, the sharing of knowledge is tied to their verbal powers. Tales that unravel quietly, slowly and deliberately teach the audience the skill of listening; sit down with an Aboriginal person and you'll find yourself hanging on every word.

This master storytelling ability is one of the drivers behind accelerating demand for authentic Aboriginal experiences with Indigenous guides. Who better to introduce you to Australia's vast wilderness areas and peel back its pulsing urban centres than those who know 65,000 years' worth of the country's backstory?

The state of New South Wales – Australia's biggest state economy and home of the city of Sydney/Warrane – offers a compelling success story. Here, the trend has seen Aboriginal tourism businesses jump more than 53 per cent in international visitor participation from 2014 to 2019. The number of overseas travellers seeking Aboriginal cultural experiences in New South Wales now tops 332,800 annually, with further growth expected. The same story is being replicated around Australia.



That the world can still interact with members of these ancient cultures is an extraordinary privilege. Aboriginal society is based on a structure of sharing, and this giving nature is extended to those wanting to witness cultural ceremonies, visit select sacred sites and gain insights into the Aboriginal ways of life. Join Adventure North Australia's Daintree Dreaming Tour, where Kubirri-Warra brothers Linc and Brandon Walker splash you through their saltwater homeland to spear crabs and search for bush tucker.



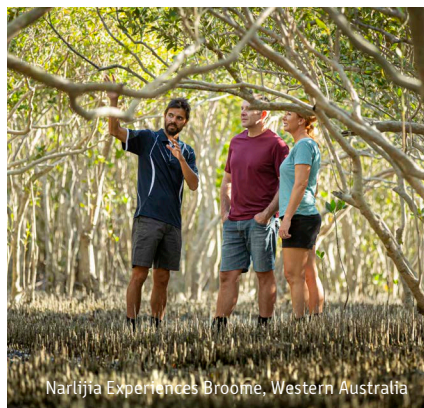
Or take a fascinating tour of the New South Wales Riverina region with Bundiy Cultural Tours, where Wiradjuri man Mark Saddler will show you "scar trees" carved by his ancestors to craft canoes. Increasingly, travellers are taking advantage of these genuine windows into the world's oldest cultures.



In New South Wales, Sand Dune Adventures' creative marrying of quad-bike adventuring with Worimi history has struck a chord – the growth it has recorded since joining the Discover Aboriginal Experiences collective has been exponential. Motivated by booming interest, more Aboriginal tourism businesses are opening every year. Not only do these businesses employ Aboriginal peoples and reinvest in their communities, they actively strengthen the connection to culture.

Crucially, the boost in Indigenous tourism is enabling Aboriginal peoples to see a bright future, one where maintaining culture, revitalising language and keeping family together – on ancestral Country – is no longer a struggle.

ONE CONTINENT, HUNDREDS OF NATIONS: ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA'S DIVERSE CULTURAL IDENTITIES



Narljia Experiences Broome, Western Australia

The term 'Aboriginal' is used to describe Australia's Aboriginal peoples from mainland Australia and Tasmania/lutruwita as a whole. At the time of British colonisation in 1788, there were hundreds of nations and a similar number of languages, however many of the languages once spoken are now endangered.

Marvel at a [map](#) marking their areas of custodianship – it's like confetti has been sprinkled across Australia. In comparison, the modern-day continent of Europe, which is similarly sized, has 44.

From Tropical North Queensland to the dry central desert and across to the forested corners of Tasmania/lutruwita, today's communities bear distinct differences. For a start, they use different languages and dialects. Ceremonial dress and body paint markings also take many forms, as do art styles. Each group's diet is diverse, reflecting the plants and wildlife that exist in the different climates and habitats. In Australia's northern tropics, Kakadu plum is consumed, while in the centre, witchetty grub is on the menu.

Environmental surrounds also dictate identity, with coastal groups referring to themselves as "saltwater people", whereas river folk are "freshwater people" and those in Australia's centre are "desert people". It's something Bart Pigram of [Narljia Experiences Broome](#) talks about as he walks the mangroves and mudflats of Yawuru Country, explaining the traditional saltwater lives of the Yawuru and their connection to Country.

Meanwhile, the educational exhibition space, [Koorie Heritage Trust](#) in Melbourne/Narrm's city centre, reveals how the Koorie differ from those in other parts of Australia. After wandering through the museum's artefacts, walk around the metropolis with an Aboriginal guide to learn how their ancestors lived along what is now Melbourne/Narrm's main waterway.

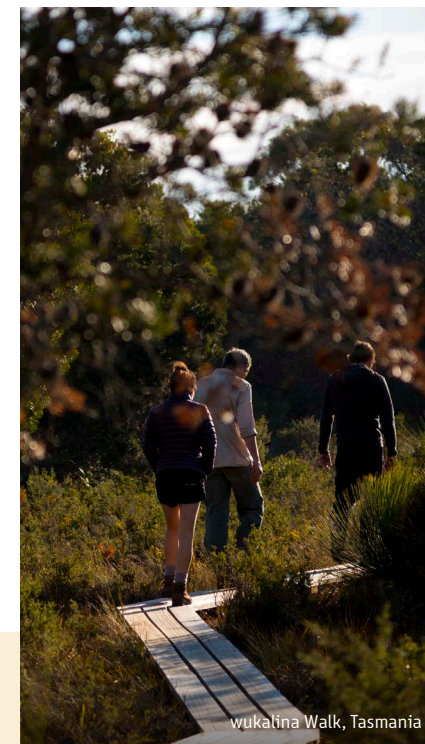


Koorie Heritage Trust, Victoria

Creation beliefs vary greatly across Australia, and many of the Creation stories are represented as elaborate Songlines, the concept of traditional storytelling with song. Aboriginal peoples can travel through their custodial Country using the song as a map, like an ancient GPS. Songlines cross the continent including the Songline for the Seven Sisters story that travels through many different language groups, and different sections of the narrative are recognised in different parts of the country. In Central Australia, Anangu culture is anchored by [Tjukurpa stories](#), which provide verbal maps of their custodial Country and also explain the creation of the earth and sky. Talk to the artists at [Maruku Arts](#) in Uluru about how their Songlines are depicted in their art including the Seven Sisters story.



Maruku Arts, Northern Territory



wukalina Walk, Tasmania

Creation stories are also told in Tasmania/lutruwita, along the Aboriginal-guided [wukalina Walk](#). The Indigenous peoples living on Australia's biggest island developed their culture with less influence from other mainland groups. In fact, it's believed the palawa people evolved in isolation for more than 10,000 years after sea levels rose and cut them off from the continent. Yet, like so many other saltwater people, they feasted on shellfish and left piles of shells at camp sites, the scattering white remnants still there, hundreds of generations later.

THE DREAMTIME: EXPLORING AUSTRALIA THROUGH ABORIGINAL STORIES



Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures, Western Australia



Kakadu Cultural Tours, Northern Territory

The “Dreamtime” is the defining heart of Australia’s Aboriginal cultures. For thousands of years Aboriginal Australians have developed a highly complex belief system that interconnects the land, spirituality, lore, culture and care of Country. Central to this belief is the concept of the Dreamtime or Dreaming. Neither of these English words capture the true meaning or nuanced sophistication of this Aboriginal belief-system.

While Aboriginal groups may have their own word and stories for the Dreamtime, it is broadly understood as the time when spiritual ancestors created the world, and everything that exists. It is the summation of all knowledge that explains how the land came to be and defines the complex relationships between flora, fauna, people and the land and the rules (lore) to ensure the continuity of all living things. Aboriginal spirituality can change and adapt to include elements of the environment Aboriginal peoples live in.

To hear a Dreaming story is to gain privileged insight into a living legacy of spiritual knowledge shared through rituals, dance, art and stories either in more traditional settings or through contemporary expression. No matter where you are in Australia – city or rainforest, coast or desert – their stories are being told across many art forms.

Halfway up the West Australian coastline, at stunning Shark Bay (also known as Gutharraguda, meaning “two waters”, in the local Malgana language), Darren “Capes” Capewell, a guide with [Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures](#) will tell you that Dreamtime stories speak to more than just the landscape. At their heart, they’re about respect for the land. Paddle a kayak out into the bay on one of Capes’ water-based adventures and he’ll likely tell you one of his favourite Dreaming stories, featuring a local lizard known as the thorny devil.

“The lizard was drinking too much and, as a result, he got punished for not respecting Country,” he says. “He used to be handsome and fast, but now he’s slow and he’s got thorns all over his body as a reminder.”

In Western Australia’s Purnululu National Park, the ancestral lands of the Gija and Jaru peoples, Traditional Custodian guides from [Kingfisher Tours](#) will introduce you to the significance of Songlines – ancient routes through the landscape that continue to be shared via story and song.

Songlines are fundamental to the Dreaming story of how the national park’s unique rock formations came to be. On a tour with head guide Bec Sampi, she’ll tell you how the Bungle Bungle Range was formed by a fight between a cockatoo and a galah. When the birds came to blows, they whirled around and around, creating a whirlwind that formed the now-iconic sandstone domes. The cockatoo spilt orange blood, and the galah spilt black

blood, forming the coloured rings around the domes you’ll see from the air on your flight into the park.

One of the best-known Dreaming stories is that of the Rainbow Serpent, which slithered across the land, gouging what would become the rivers and streams. In the Northern Territory’s Kakadu National Park, Liam Maher, CEO of [Kakadu Cultural Tours](#), explains the Dreaming story unique to his Country. “In this region, the Rainbow Serpent is known as Ngalyod,” he says. “We believe it still exists in the deep pools below waterfalls across the area, so most Aboriginal people will not swim there for fear of disturbing Ngalyod.” Dreamtime stories have given Aboriginal Australians a profound understanding of the landscape, he says. “Our land is our life, and these stories provide knowledge on how and when to seasonally burn and how to use each resource sustainably, along with kinship and regional clan relationships.”

SAVING THE SACRED: HOW TOURISM IS HELPING TO PRESERVE ABORIGINAL CULTURES

Steeped in Creation stories that interconnect spirituality, the land, lore, social life and care of the environment, passed down for tens of thousands of years – Aboriginal cultures have endured the ages to become the oldest living cultures on the planet today. What's even more remarkable is that – far from making use of a printing press, or other forms of written language – the preservation of Aboriginal cultures is largely attributed to the art of oral storytelling through verbal teachings, song, music, art, dance, ceremony and ritual.

But with the arrival of Europeans to the continent and ongoing modernisation, ancient storytelling and sharing of culture has evolved and diversified, even if the stories themselves have not. While storytelling remains at the heart of sharing Aboriginal cultures, today it takes many forms, incorporating modern technology, tourism and digital media, creating a wealth of unique cultural experiences across the continent that ensure the past continues into the future.

In the Northern Territory's heartland, near the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Uluru (formerly Ayers Rock), [Maruku Arts](#) has been contributing to cultural sustainability for over 30 years, helping to preserve Aboriginal practices like painting, drawing and carving through sharing these traditions with visitors and local employment. Owned by Anangu (Aboriginal people from the Western and Central Deserts of Australia), here you can peruse an extensive range of paintings and distinctive punu (wooden carvings) by some 900 Anangu artists, depicting Creation stories and places. Beyond the retail gallery, this outback art centre offers hands-on dot-painting workshops, where you'll be guided by a local Anangu artist to learn about the traditional art form, symbols and tools, creating your own artwork.

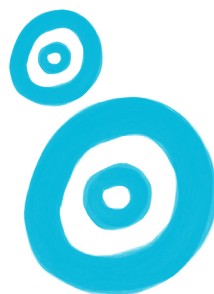
From the desert to the sea, just north of Sydney/Warrane in picturesque Port Stephens, [Sand Dune Adventures](#) combines uniquely cultural preservation with quad biking in their high-energy tours of Stockton Beach sand dunes – the largest coastal sand dunes in the Southern Hemisphere. Led by local Aboriginal guides, the tour gives you exclusive access to Aboriginal land, taking you on an unforgettable journey through bushland, in and around enormous sand dunes, where you'll learn about traditional Aboriginal food and history, as well as the dunes' cultural significance.

You needn't leave city limits though, to learn about the deep spiritual connection between Aboriginal cultures and the earth. In cosmopolitan centre of Sydney/Warrane, [Dreamtime Southern X](#) leads guided walking tours that showcase the city's ancient heritage, with 29 clan groups belonging to the metropolitan area, referred to collectively as the Eora Nation. The Rocks Aboriginal Dreaming Tour, Illi-Langi - The Rocks Aboriginal Dreaming Tour for instance, takes you on a leisurely stroll around the famous Rocks precinct, while your Aboriginal guide shares passed-down knowledge about the cultural significance of Sydney Harbour, its foreshores and adjoining waterways, explaining the connection between the natural world and the spiritual world, even in a modern-day metropolis.

Quite aside from helping to share and sustain the lives of Aboriginal stories, modern-day tourism also provides important economic benefits to local Indigenous communities.



Maruku Arts, Northern Territory



ABORIGINAL LAND CARE: THE OLDEST SYSTEM OF SUSTAINABILITY ON EARTH

Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples don't see a piece of land as something to fence off and own. Nor do they look at the bush as a place to extract as many resources as possible. They don't regard waterways as reservoirs to feed mass plantations. Instead, they see themselves and the land as one.

The world's oldest living cultures have been embracing sustainability long before it became fashionable to lower food miles and use plant-based plastics. For at least 65,000 years they have lived in harmony with the environment, adhering to a reciprocal relationship that honours, rather than exploits the land. The Earth is their mother, a force that enables their existence in return for care and respect.

In keeping with this, Aboriginal peoples believe the land owns the people, rather than the people owning the land. Everything within it is regarded as living, even rocks, and everything has equal value. When the land is hurt – for example in Australia's 2019/2020 mass bushfires – Aboriginal peoples hurt, too. There is grief at the loss of place, and everything from the memories to the sacred sites and native creatures contained in it.

This perspective of nature has led to a language rich in words and concepts that have no English equivalent. It has also resulted in seasonal calendars far more detailed than summer, autumn, winter and spring. On a walk with Josh "Koomal" Whiteland of [Koomal Dreaming](#) in Western Australia, his people six seasons are explained as a noticing of subtle changes in the land, which set in motion a new diet and activity. Certain flowers blooming might indicate that wallabies are plump for eating; or when a particular fruit is ripe, it may coincide with a salmon run. On the Tiwi Islands, off the Northern Territory coastline, there are up to 13 seasons, something you can ask about on a [SeaLink NT](#) – Tiwi by Design Day Tour.



Koomal Dreaming, Western Australia

The connection goes deeper still, to the core of Aboriginal identities. When a newborn enters the world, it is assigned a Totem – a living creature, water, tree or geographical feature – and from that moment on, it's their job to ensure the Totem is protected. Juan "Karanba" Walker of [Walkabout Cultural Adventures](#) teaches young people in Far North Queensland's Daintree Rainforest region about their Totems. He will tell you about it as he helps you spear crabs the traditional way – a thoughtful craft that ensures you only catch as much as you'll eat.

Traditionally, Aboriginal peoples also adhere to a kinship system, where they belong to a piece of land (not the other way around) and must care for it. In modern times, this role is also given to Indigenous rangers, tasked with using a combination of cultural practices and modern science to conserve their environment. Balnggarrawarra rangers Vince and Dylan Harrigan, Traditional Owners of the remote Normanby Station near Cooktown in Tropical North Queensland, share their story on [Culture Connect tours](#). On the 4WD Rock Art & Ranger Day Tour, gain an insight into the link between the rangers' erosion control projects and the health of the Great Barrier Reef.



Culture Connect, Queensland



Mandingalbay Ancient Indigenous Tours, Queensland

EXPERIENCE REGENERATIVE TRAVEL ON AN ABORIGINAL TOUR

Described as leaving a place better than you found it – or the next step in sustainable travel – regenerative travel is a rising trend. So how can you get involved in Australia? If you've taken an Aboriginal tour, you've likely experienced regenerative travel without even knowing it.

Giving back to nature after benefiting from its bounty is a cornerstone of Aboriginal cultures. Near Cairns/Gimuy in Tropical North Queensland, Victor Bulmer, a Djunbunji Land and Sea Ranger and a guide with [Mandingalbay Ancient Indigenous Tours](#), takes guests to an ancient midden on the company's Hands on

Country Eco Tour. This, he'll tell you, is one of the world's earliest forms of conservation – shells and bones discarded here indicated to visiting Aboriginal groups which recently-consumed produce should be avoided to maintain a healthy ecosystem. By taking a tour with Victor or one of his fellow rangers, visitors can help to support their work preserving sacred sites like middens – and the important lessons they continue to teach us all.

Aboriginal tours also reveal that many traditional Aboriginal regenerative techniques continue to play important roles in safeguarding Australia's delicate ecosystems

today. On the immersive Yuin Retreat hosted by [Ngaran Ngaran Culture Awareness](#) on the New South Wales South Coast, you'll learn how cultural burning developed by your Yuin guides' ancestors is now being harnessed to prevent destructive fires on this picturesque stretch of coast.

On a Rock Art and Ranger Tour with [Culture Connect Australia](#) near Cooktown, in sultry Tropical North Queensland, your guide will explain how Indigenous Land and Sea Rangers are using traditional techniques, also including cultural burning, to restore traditional land eroded by more than a century of cattle farming. This work is not only helping to heal the land, but also the Great Barrier Reef by reducing the flow of sediment to the reef that promotes the growth of invasive crown-of-thorns starfish. "It [the ecosystem] is one big circle for us," says Balnggarawarra man, Indigenous Ranger and Culture Connect guide Vince Harrigan. "If you're not looking after one thing here, you're missing out on the other thing, you know, on the other side of the fence."

Regenerative tourism isn't just about regenerating the natural environment, as you'll discover at [Waringarri Aboriginal Arts & Tours](#). Its art centre plays a part in preserving and regenerating the Miriwoong language, which has fewer than 20 fluent speakers remaining, by providing a place for Miriwoong artists to gather to work on their craft and share their language and culture.



Waringarri Aboriginal Arts & Tours, Western Australia

All Aboriginal experiences, in fact, can be described as regenerative travel. At a time when positive-impact travel has never been more important, engaging in Aboriginal tourism offers myriad opportunities to pay it forward.



Culture Connect Australia, Queensland

DIVE INTO INDIGENOUS CULTURES IN CAIRNS



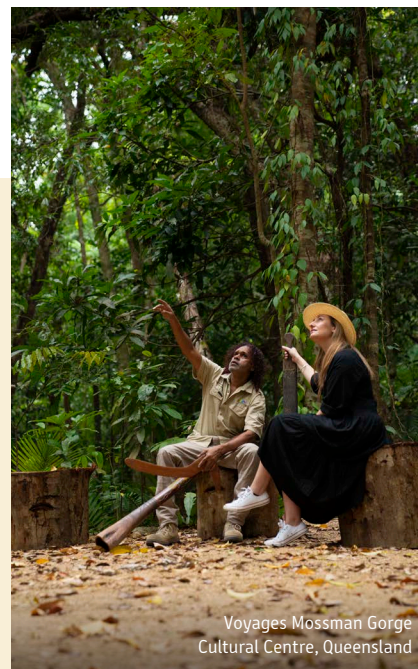
Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel, Queensland

Straddling the World Heritage-listed Daintree Rainforest and the Great Barrier Reef, Cairns/ Gimuy doesn't just brim with natural beauty. This buzzing Tropical North Queensland city is also rich in Indigenous histories and cultures, with each and every Aboriginal tourism operator offering unique opportunities to experience them.

Admire the world's largest living organism from a fresh perspective on a day trip from Cairns with [Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel](#). As you cruise to the Great Barrier Reef, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sea Rangers share its Creation story, deepening your cultural understanding of this special place before you dive in to explore a vibrant aquatic wonderland on a guided snorkelling tour, with scuba diving also available on selected departures.



Janbal Gallery, Queensland



Voyages Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre, Queensland

Also departing from Cairns are cultural experiences on Aboriginal land run by [Mandingalbay Ancient Indigenous Tours](#). From hands-on foraging for bush tucker and native medicines, to storytelling sessions hosted by Traditional Owners around a crackling fire, all tours offer a rare glimpse into the region's sacred and spiritual Mandingalbay Yidinji culture.

North of Cairns lies Kuku Yalanji Country. Discover how these rainforest people have lived in sync with the Daintree Rainforest for more than 40,000 years on an Indigenous-guided Dreamtime Walk run by the [Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre](#). Proud Kuku Yalanji man Juan Walker and his team from [Walkabout Cultural Adventures](#) also visit the magnificent Mossman Gorge and similarly lush Cape Tribulation



on their half- and full-day cultural Daintree tours, with guides sharing their own ancestral knowledge of the land's stories, bush tucker and medicines along the way.

The region's verdant rainforest also provides a magical backdrop for [Flames of the Forest's](#) Aboriginal Cultural Experience. As you savour a tropical alfresco dinner near Port Douglas, two Kuku Yalanji brothers share their remarkable culture through storytelling, music and song. In nearby Kuranda, [Pamagirri Aboriginal Experience at Rainforestation](#) also invites you to engage with Aboriginal cultures via a number of experiences including the Pamagirri Aboriginal Dance Performance and Dreamtime Walk, with both revealing fresh insights into local First Nations traditions and beliefs.

Get your creative juices flowing during an Aboriginal Art Workshop at [Janbal Gallery](#), where renowned Aboriginal artist Brian 'Binna' Swindley will teach you how to create your own piece of Australian art using Aboriginal techniques. Workshops with Binna can also be included as part of private, Indigenous-led tours departing Cairns and Port Douglas with [Adventure North Australia](#). Even if you're lucky enough to experience every Indigenous tour in Cairns, you can bank on learning something new every time.

A TASTE OF PLACE: ABORIGINAL DINING EXPERIENCES THAT ELEVATE NATIVE PRODUCE

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities around Australia, the bush is a veritable supermarket – if you know where to look. There's wattleseed that can be used to make damper, Kakadu plum to deliver a hit of vitamin C, finger lime for a citrusy zing, and saltbush to season and enhance flavours. But all too often, we walk right past this native bounty, unaware how it grows, in which part of the country it exists, and how it can be used to elevate a dining experience.

That's where Indigenous fine dining comes in, offering the chance to experience bush flavours in nuanced dishes and dreamy settings. Take Ayers Rock Resort's [Tali Wiru](#) experience, where your open-air dining room comes backdropped by the natural drama of Uluru. Each dish in your four-course meal presents native produce in an innovative way. Think: pretty plates of pressed wallaby with fermented quandong; or roasted toothfish nestling beside coastal greens, desert oak and fermented muntries.

Meals are just as memorable at Flames of the Forest's [Aboriginal Cultural Experience](#), where chefs serve seasonal specialties that might include smoked crocodile rillettes with salsa verde, and lemon-myrtle-infused kangaroo loin on a bed of wild rocket and toasted macadamias. Your setting, however, shifts from the outback to the rainforest – you'll think you've been transported to the pages of a fairytale while dining amid thousands of twinkling lights and candles amid the Wet Tropics of Queensland outside Port Douglas.

Nearby in Cairns/Gimuy, the [Mandingalbay Ancient Indigenous Tours](#) team host their [Deadly After Dark – Sunset](#), Canapes and Culture experience under a canopy of ancient melaleuca trees. There's a traditional welcome and inspired bites: green ant salmon gravlax with desert lime salsa, mud crab drizzled with lemon aspen mayo and perfectly seared Queensland scallops.



Saltwater Eco Tours, Queensland



Tali Wiru, Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia, Northern Territory



Flames of the Forest, Queensland

Further south, on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, Indigenous owned and operated [Saltwater Eco Tours](#) offers several immersive – and tasty – sailing experiences hosted on the peaceful waterways of Mooloolaba. Sign up for the Native Bushfood and Seafood Cruise and over lunch, or as the sun sets, you'll be served ocean-fresh prawns and oysters, the latter perhaps served with a macadamia and mango mornay. Then there are the kangaroo koftas with bush-tomato relish, and prawn skewers with lemon myrtle aioli.

Even further south in Beenleigh, near Queensland's Gold Coast, [Spirits of the Red Sand's Aboriginal Dinner Show](#) offers a deep dive into Aboriginal cultures through a 'roving theatre' experience. A post-show highlight is having the chance to meet the actors and hear their stories over dinner. There's nothing quite like sharing an indulgent native-produce-inspired meal – damper served with bush dukkah; skewers of emu, kangaroo and crocodile; seriously indulgent lemon myrtle cheesecake – to get the conversation flowing.



Pamagirri Aboriginal Experience at Rainforestation Nature Park, Queensland

5 ABORIGINAL EXPERIENCES PERFECT FOR KIDS

Every Aboriginal experience you participate in is educational and eye-opening, but some are more contemplative than others. And for good reason – you're often visiting spiritual sites with Elders, and hearing revered sacred stories and perhaps also sobering histories. But there are other experiences that encourage you to have serious fun while gaining an appreciation for Aboriginal cultures. And many of these experiences are targeted at kids – and the young at heart.

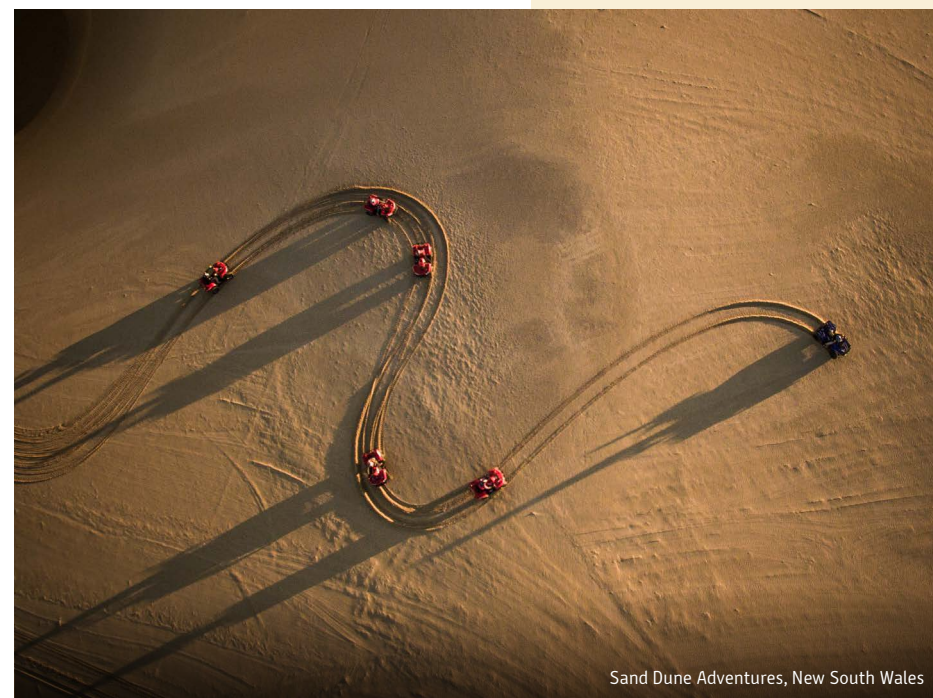
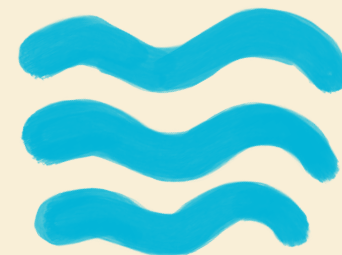
There's something about zooming down the largest shifting sand dunes in the Southern Hemisphere that makes young travellers get why Port Stephens, a two-hour drive north of Sydney/Warrane, is such a special place, and has been to the Worimi Aboriginal people for millennia. Here, [Sand Dune Adventures'](#) adrenaline-pumping quad-bike tours take kids young and old (kids aged 16 and above can ride their own bike; younger kids can double with a rider over 16 years) across Stockton Bight Sand Dunes in the Worimi Conservation Lands, covering some 4,200 hectares. This part of New South Wales is off-limits to most people

– unless you're with a Worimi guide and have good screaming lungs. Book the 1.5-hour tour for the thrilling chance to try sandboarding, too.

Little ecologists are also known to squeal in delight when they spy enormous saltwater crocodiles on tour with [Kakadu Tourism](#). Their Yellow Water Cruises offer a front-row seat to the Northern Territory's wildlife, which includes some 2,000 plant species, 280 types of bird and 60 different mammal species. How do you compress that into show-and-tell?

You can head out on the water less cautiously with [Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures](#) in Western Australia, where kid-friendly kayaking around the azure Shark Bay comes minus the crocs. This World Heritage Site is one of Australia's great wilderness areas, a place where pindan soil fades into powdery sand and opaline water, perfect for paddling about with kids while on the lookout for turtles. This lesson in marine life – and its connections to Aboriginal cultures – is something your children won't find in any textbook.

Hands-on activities make learning more fun for kids. And that's exactly how kids learn about Aboriginal cultures on the [Pamagirri Mini Mob](#) experience at Rainforestation Nature Park near Cairns/Gimuy in Tropical North Queensland, which includes opportunities to forage for native plants, learn how to play the didgeridoo and discover Aboriginal weapons – in a safe environment. Kids can also channel their inner artist in painting sessions, an experience also on offer at [Janbal Gallery](#) in Mossman, north of Cairns/Gimuy. Here, kids can get their kicks painting canvases or boomerangs under the guidance of Brian 'Binna' Swindley, the gallery's owner and a talented artist in his own right. At the end of the lesson, they'll have their very own piece of Australian art to take home – along with a memorable taste of Kuku Yalanji culture.



Sand Dune Adventures, New South Wales

CRUISE INTO ABORIGINAL CULTURES



Kakadu Tourism, Northern Territory

More crocs are in your sights on [Kakadu Tourism's](#) Yellow Water Cruises, where a sunset experience casts dazzling light over this Northern Territory billabong. This bewitching time of day is like happy hour for animals that come out to play – crocs aside, there are water buffaloes grazing along the shore, not to mention a cacophony of birds. In fact, around one third of Australia's bird species can be found in Kakadu National Park, with at least 60 species in the wetlands. Which means you'll likely spot whistling ducks and magpie geese alongside brolgas, jabirus and eagles, the latter circling overhead in search of prey.

There's something special about being on a boat. Perhaps it's the immersion in nature, or the calming effect of gliding across the water. Maybe it's the prospect of spotting wildlife that calls the local marine environment home. Joined by an Aboriginal guide, the experience isn't just relaxing and restorative, it's also informative and educational.

[Mandingalbay Ancient Indigenous Tours'](#) Djunbunji Land and Sea Rangers navigate boats along Trinity Inlet, a serene tropical waterway fringed by mangroves that, in recent years, has been in environmental decline due to overworked land and the introduction of invasive species. On the Hands On Country Eco Tour departing from Cairns/Gimuy, you'll learn how the rangers have collaborated with scientists to bring the ecosystem back to life. Your ranger guides hold encyclopaedic intel of the inlet and know all the top vantage points to spot birds, fish and saltwater crocodiles.



Saltwater Eco Tours, Queensland



Mandingalbay Ancient Indigenous Tours, Queensland

Sunset is also a beautiful time of day to cruise the peaceful waterways of Mooloolaba on Queensland's Sunshine Coast with [Saltwater Eco Tours](#). Hosted on the beautifully restored, historic Spray of the Coral Coast, the company's tour options include opportunities to learn about local Gubbi Gubbi/Kabi Kabi culture as well as Indigenous co-owner Simon Thornalley's own Sea Country connections, all the while enjoying a cocktail infused with lemon myrtle, perhaps, or a kangaroo skewer doused in macadamia satay sauce.

Back in Cairns/Gimuy, [Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel's](#) catamaran tours offer eye-opening Indigenous perspectives on the Great Barrier

Reef. As you cruise towards the World Heritage-listed ecosystem, the company's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sea Rangers share its evocative Creation story. When you drop anchor at Moore Reef, 47 kilometres (29 miles) offshore, there's the chance to flipper among some of the 1,625 species of fish that call the Coral Sea home. Drifting between bomboras and coral fans you'll spot cardinal fish, moray eels, clownfish and turtles – back on board, your guides will regale you with tales about the importance of these species to Indigenous cultures.





Firescreek Botanical Winery Aboriginal Experiences, New South Wales

FEEL THE RHYTHM OF ABORIGINAL INSTRUMENTS

Fancy yourself as a bit of a musician? Put your skills to the test during an experience that spotlights Aboriginal instruments in all their glorious diversity. Talented performers across Australia make it look easy, but the skill required to master some traditional instruments demands decades of practice. Take the didgeridoo, its haunting sounds ranging from a basic drone to rhythm-setting and trumpeting.

On the lush grounds of Firescreek Botanical Winery on the New South Wales Central Coast, Aboriginal Elder Kevin 'Gavi' Duncan will have you in a trance from the moment he picks up his didgeridoo as part of the property's [Aboriginal Storytelling and Wine Tasting Experience](#).

The technique, he says, requires circular and wobble (pulse) breathing. If you're not familiar with either, you might find yourself spluttering into the didg when you're invited to give it a go. But Gavi is encouraging and will keep pace with wooden clapsticks.

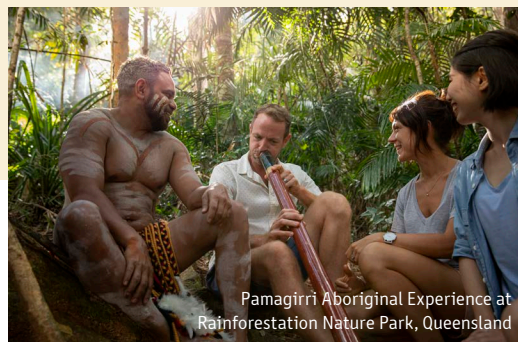
It's a similar story on a [Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures](#) tour in Western Australia's Shark Bay region. The Didgeridoo Dreaming Night Tour with owner and guide Darren 'Capes' Capewell is at once fun and moving, informative and relaxed. Spend two hours beside a campfire with Capes, who will regale you with Dreaming stories before belting out a couple of tunes on his didgeridoo, its resonant and tribal tones echoing across the star-bedazzled sky. It's your turn next, so pay attention.

It's important to be sensitive to cultural norms when reaching for a didgeridoo, as in some Aboriginal communities playing the instrument is off-limits to women. Be mindful that a woman, given permission to play, should not be photographed or videoed doing so. Similar etiquette may apply to other instruments, including the bullroarer, which makes a distinctive whirring sound when played, only

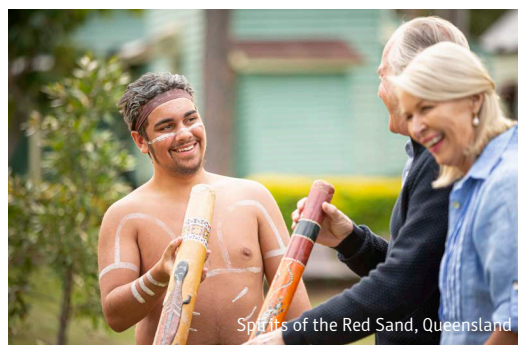
by men, during initiation ceremonies and other rituals, and at sacred sites. If you're unsure whether it's appropriate to play, just ask.

A virtual orchestra of didgeridoos echo through the rainforests of Tropical North Queensland during the [Pamagirri Aboriginal Experience](#) at Rainforestation Nature Park near Cairns/Gimuy. Talented musicians can imitate the sounds of kangaroos and kookaburras – after the show, you can have a go at doing the same; or try the gum leaf, its vibrational sound imitates birds.

You may want to stick with clapsticks, which also keep the pace at the Spirits of the Red Sand's [Aboriginal Dinner Show](#) in Beenleigh, between Brisbane/Meeanjin and the Gold Coast in Queensland. This 'roving theatre' experience is a dramatic union of song, dance and acting. And at the end, you sit down with performers who demonstrate how to play a variety of instruments, from drums and hollow logs to seed rattles.



Pamagirri Aboriginal Experience at Rainforestation Nature Park, Queensland



Spirits of the Red Sand, Queensland



Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures, Western Australia



AUSTRALIAN PLACES YOU CAN ONLY VISIT WITH AN ABORIGINAL GUIDE

As vast and open as Australia is, pockets of the country are inaccessible because their sacred status requires they be visited only with an Aboriginal guide. This not only offers exclusivity, but also takes you on an immersive journey into Indigenous histories and cultures, with insights that reveal just how wide, wonderful and ancient Australia really is.

The Yuin Traditional Owners of [Ngaran Ngaran Culture Awareness](#) created their motto – ‘give it away to keep it’ – in the understanding that sharing their knowledge and Country was the ultimate way to expand visitor horizons. The organisation offers experiences that take you to parts of Gulaga (Mount Dromedary) on the New South Wales South Coast – culturally significant places you couldn’t visit or truly comprehend without a Yuin guide. The forested mountain is not only beautiful, but also extremely sacred, and your expedition here on a two-night Yuin Retreat reveals moving Dreaming stories that will change the way you see this special area.

Further north in New South Wales, [Sand Dune Adventures](#) is owned and operated by the Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council, with the ultimate goal of preserving stories, culture and heritage across this part of the state. While Traditional Owners allocate some concessional permits that allow other operators to visit the Stockton Bight Sand Dunes here, the only other way to experience the longest moving sand dunes in the Southern Hemisphere is on an exclusive dune-bashing experience with Sand Dune Adventures. On quad bikes you’ll zip across some of the 4,200 hectares (10,400 acres) of sacred coastal land, all the while learning why it is so special to the Worimi people.

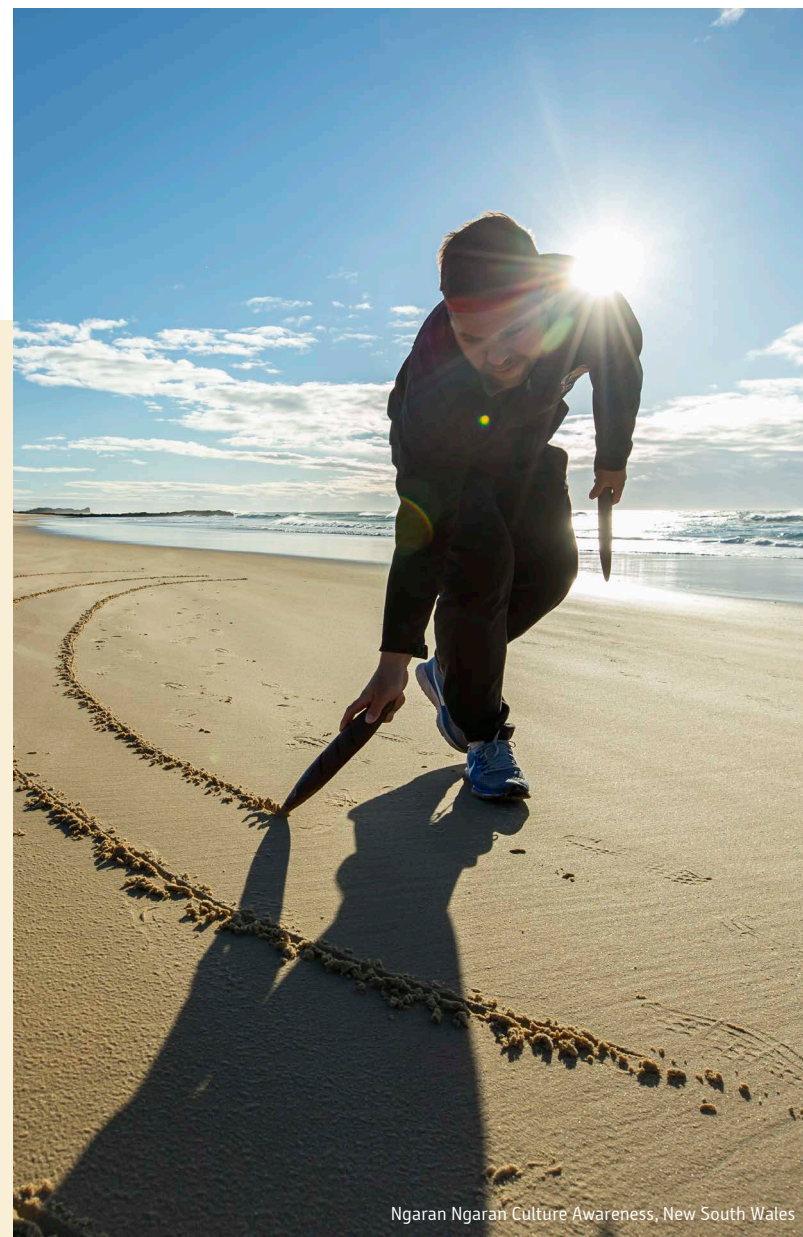
On its tours across remote Arnhem Land and the Cobourg Peninsula in the Northern Territory, [Venture North Safaris](#) pauses at Injalak Hill, home to some of the world’s most significant rock art. The only way to visit the main rock-art site is with an Indigenous guide from Injalak Arts. This not only ensures the protection of the art for future generations,



Venture North Safaris, Northern Territory

but also gives the work integrity and context – your guide is an artist and able to decode the work you see while you wander.

Sab Lord, the son of a buffalo and crocodile hunter and owner of [Lords Kakadu and Arnhemland Safaris](#), grew up in Kakadu alongside local Aboriginal clans, through which he formed lifelong connections. Thanks to these relationships he has permission to take his private charters on otherwise restricted cultural lands.



Ngaran Ngaran Culture Awareness, New South Wales

STEP INTO NATURE'S PHARMACY ON AN ABORIGINAL TOUR



Kingfisher Tours, Western Australia

There's no denying the convenience of visiting a local pharmacy to pick up cough syrup, anti-inflammatories, toothpaste or soap. But for millennia, Aboriginal communities have used natural health and medicinal alternatives, found in the Australian bush.

"All this, everything around us, has a purpose," says Wiradjuri man Mark Saddler on his [Bundiyi Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge](#) tours around Wagga Wagga, in the Riverina region of New South Wales. "If you know where to look, you'll discover that the bush is like nature's pharmacy."

Indeed, you don't have to look far to find wild old man saltbush – it's tasty when consumed raw or cooked, and it can also be crushed and applied as a salve to cuts and stings. Along the



Bundiyi Cultural Tours, New South Wales



Maruku Arts, Northern Territory

the root juice from the same plant relieves it. This, the Wet Tropics of Queensland, is one of the most biodiverse pockets of Australia, home to thousands of plants that have endless medicinal properties. Certain clays can be eaten to strengthen bones, pandanus fruit sap may relieve cuts and bites, and cheese fruit can soothe an upset stomach.

In Western Australia's Kimberley region, [Kingfisher Tours'](#) head guide Bec Sampi knows the Purnululu countryside intimately. On her tours you get the chance to sample bush medicines, then can take some home in the form of soap – Bec hand-makes bars under the label Garingbaa Native Bush Botanicals, each packed with skin-nourishing coconut oil and native lavender.

The [Royal Botanic Garden Sydney](#) and [Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne](#) grow a wealth of native plants, and both offer Aboriginal-guided tours that decode how they might be used for healing purposes. Tea tree as an antiseptic; kangaroo apple in a poultice for joint pain; sticky hop-bush leaves to relieve toothaches and stings; calcium-rich lemon myrtle to strengthen bones; hop goodenia to stave off diabetes and help you sleep. Tried and tested for 65,000 years, it's knowledge that may well come in useful one day.

banks of the Murrumbidgee River, Mark plucks river mint, which, when infused in boiling water, provides relief for coughs and colds.

Aboriginal communities across Australia have various remedies for treating the common cold. Sign up for a Bush Medicine workshop with an Anangu woman from [Maruku Arts](#) at Uluru and you'll discover how scented emu bush might be used to ease cold symptoms or applied topically to soothe sore joints. And rather than reaching for the orange juice, Aboriginal communities here would eat vitamin C-rich Kakadu plums.

Kuku Yalanji guides at the [Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre](#) are well versed in plants that can heal you – and help save your life. The heart-leaved stinging bush gympie-gympie has fine hairs that can sting the skin for months;



DISCOVER THE WORLD'S OLDEST CULTURES WHILE YOU LEARN A NEW SKILL

On any Aboriginal experience, you'll come away with a new appreciation for the world's oldest cultures. And on some, you'll also depart with a new skill. Starting a fire, sans matches; throwing a boomerang; or crafting an Indigenous-inspired work of art, perhaps a woven basket or a painting.

There's nothing quite like being handed the challenge to catch (not simply make) your own lunch. On his [Walkabout Cultural Adventures](#) in Tropical North Queensland, Kuku Yalanji man Juan Walker does just that. While exploring Cooya Beach near Port Douglas, he hands you a spear and sets you loose to hunt for mud crabs. Relax – Juan's a talented and experienced hunter and provides guidance on how to best capture the delicious crustaceans that scuttle through the mangroves here.

Your arms also get a workout on a [Pamagirri Aboriginal Experience](#) held nearby at Rainforestation Nature Park. Here, your hosts greet you with a Welcome to Country ceremony and traditional performance, then point you in the direction of spears and boomerangs to fling over people-free fields. It's not as easy as it looks, but you may just become a pro.

Your hosts are also talented musicians, and can teach you how to belt out a few notes on the didgeridoo – it's a skill that a number of Aboriginal tour operators around Australia have perfected and can help you hone, including Kevin 'Gavi' Duncan, host of the [Firescreek Aboriginal Storytelling and Wine Tasting Experience](#) in New South Wales; and Darren 'Capes' Capewell of [Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures](#) in Western Australia. If you sign up for a Didgeridoo Dreaming Night Tour with Capes, he'll also show you how to start a fire without using a single match – a handy life-saving skill to have up your sleeve.



Pamagirri Aboriginal Experience at Rainforestation Nature Park, Queensland

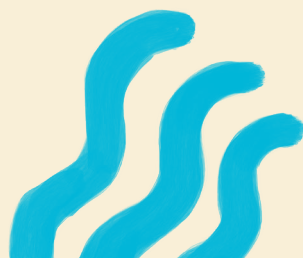
While art may not save your life, it may well enrich it. A number of Aboriginal experiences around Australia offer insights into Indigenous art – whether dot painting, contemporary printing or weaving – then encourage you to create a masterpiece.

Drawing upon the skills of 20 remote Northern Territory communities, you can channel your inner artist on a Dot Painting Experience with [Maruku Arts](#), located in Uluru. Your dramatic surrounds provide plenty of inspiration.

Meanwhile, the Daintree Rainforest inspires the work of Kuku Yalanji man Brian 'Binna' Swindley, who also hosts creative workshops at his [Janbal Gallery](#) in Mossman, just north of Cairns/Gimuy. Paint a boomerang or canvas, then walk away with knowledge and skills that will provide endless enrichment.



Janbal Gallery, Queensland





RAINFOREST DREAMING: ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVES OF THE WET TROPICS OF QUEENSLAND

Walkabout Cultural Adventures, Queensland

The World Heritage-listed Wet Tropics of Queensland stretches for 450 kilometres along Australia's north-east coast. It's a place where rivers charge through gorges, waterfalls drop from vertiginous escarpments, and thousands of plant and animal species – many of them endemic – thrive in one of the country's oldest wilderness areas. Home to the Daintree Rainforest, its global significance is undeniable, but this ecosystem holds a particularly important place in Aboriginal cultures and traditions, and has done for millennia.

The Kuku Yalanji, whose Country lies north of Cairns/Gimuy, have a spiritual connection to the rainforest, says Traditional Custodian Juan Walker on his [Walkabout Cultural Adventures](#) tours through the verdant Daintree around Port Douglas. Having lived here his entire life, Juan knows every nook of the rainforest –



Pamagirri Aboriginal Experience at Rainforestation Nature Park, Queensland

hidden waterholes to swim in, where Ulysses butterflies like to show off their iridescent blue wings, and what native plants you can consume, like the luminous lime-green ants clinging to leaves of a bush. Most people wouldn't even notice them, but Juan encourages guests to give them a lick – they taste sour and lemony.

Indigenous Dreaming stories reveal just how deeply significant the Daintree is to Kuku Yalanji culture. And these Dreaming stories are ancient – your guide on a tour from the [Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre](#) will gently remind you that you're exploring the world's oldest rainforest with a First Nations member of the oldest continuously living cultures on the planet. You may hear the story of why the region's cassowaries have a hard helmet on their heads, and how the rainforest was formed millions of years ago. You'll also discover the

rare fauna species that make the Daintree so special, like the Thornton Peak melomys and Bennett's tree-kangaroo.

Ancient stories will also bring the rainforest to life during a Dreamtime Walk as part of the [Pamagirri Aboriginal Experience](#) at Rainforestation Nature Park outside Cairns. Your guide will describe the role of the Rainbow Serpent and demonstrate how local Aboriginal communities used spears and boomerangs to hunt for food.

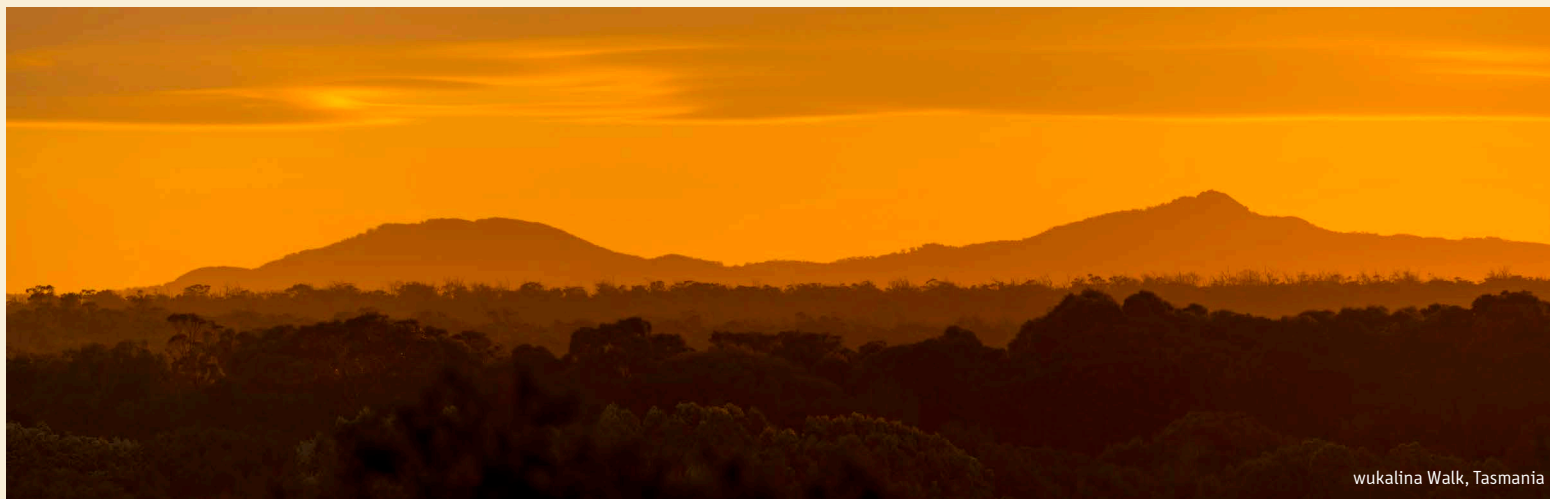
The Mandingalbay Yidinji have sustained the land and water south-east of Cairns for millennia. But recent overuse and the introduction of foreign floral and faunal species saw biodiversity decline, a situation that Djunbunji Land and Sea Rangers were determined to reverse. They've spent years working with scientists to catalogue plants, animals and culturally significant sites, which you'll discover on a Djunbunji ranger-guided Hands On Country Eco Tour with [Mandingalbay Ancient Indigenous Tours](#). As a result of the rangers' protection efforts, the rainforest region is once again thriving, and your eagle-eyed guide will point out the birds, fish and saltwater crocs that you'd likely cruise right past without a Traditional Owner at your side.



Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia - Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre, Queensland

GOING WALKABOUT: AN ANCIENT MEANS OF TRANSFORMATIONAL TRAVEL

Going walkabout is the Aboriginal version of mindfulness: you leave your everyday worries and responsibilities behind in order to reconnect with Country and culture, returning to the basics and becoming centred as you travel lightly through Australia's diverse landscapes. The practice has been used for tens of thousands of years, traditionally as a rite of passage for young men who journey alone – on foot and guided by spirits – for extended periods of time, but also by those travelling to ceremonies and family obligations. Walkabouts often trace ancient paths known as Songlines, a network of orally shared routes marked out by



wukalina Walk, Tasmania



Lords Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris, Northern Territory

the stars and set by Creation ancestors during the Dreaming. Interestingly, many Songlines have ended up forming major transport highways across post-settlement Australia.

Today's walkabouts tap into the trend of transformational travel, creating immersive, perspective-shifting experiences which are both challenging and enriching.

Tasmania/lutruwita's [wukalina Walk](#) involves a conscious setting aside of time to deeply

engage with the stunning larapuna (Bay of Fires) and the island-faring palawa people – the only culture to evolve in isolation for more than 10,000 years. You'll also follow in the footsteps of ancestors of the Kuku Yalanji Rainforest Aboriginal people with [Walkabout Cultural Adventures](#) where, pattering through the Daintree, you'll see directional markers subtly crafted into tree branches by hunters and discover bush medicine growing under your nose. Take the multi-award-winning [Dreamtime](#)



[Walk](#) through Mossman Gorge for another perspective on Kuku Yalanji culture; your Aboriginal guide will walk you through local lore concerning bush foods, sacred ceremonies and connection to the land.

Down the coast from Sydney/Warrane, Ngaran Ngaran Cultural Awareness' two-night [Yuin Retreat](#) asks guests to walk on Country with their lead guide, reflecting on Aboriginal wisdom at several important places.

Extend the transformation with other multi-day journeys, such as [Venture North Safaris](#)' wildlife, rock-art and remote-culture expeditions through Kakadu, Arnhem Land and the Cobourg Peninsula. Additionally, to immerse yourself further into the life and



Ngaran Ngaran Culture Awareness,
New South Wales

rhythms of the communities, consider a multi-day itinerary with award-winning [Lords Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris](#). Tailor-made luxury experiences are run by long-time local character and guide Sab Lord, who has the blessing of local Aboriginal people to take these private charters on otherwise restricted cultural lands.



HOW TO PURCHASE ABORIGINAL ART ETHICALLY

Maruku Arts, Northern Territory

It seems like such a simple exchange, buying a piece of art from an Aboriginal artist. But there's so much behind it, with far greater impacts than most people realise.

Without art, many remote Aboriginal communities wouldn't survive. Art is a life source, both culturally and economically, with sales allowing Aboriginal people to remain on their traditional homelands – where other employment opportunities can be scarce – and share culture through their art.

That's why ensuring you make an ethical purchase is so important: it can be the difference between whether that artist gets to continue to create, or not.

Cathy Cummins, manager of [Waringarri Aboriginal Arts & Tours](#) in Western Australia's Kimberley region, says there are a number of ways you can feel confident you're making an ethical purchase, where the work is genuine

and the artist is fairly paid. "A good way of knowing is asking if the seller is connected to the Indigenous Art Code [a system designed to preserve ethical Indigenous art sales], especially if it's a city gallery," she says. "They need to be able to tell you how much the artist will get. At most art centres, an artist would receive about 60 per cent of the sale." Ethical dealers will be comfortable discussing such topics.

Another thing to check for, Cummins says, is an authenticity document, or a digital label. "We always offer a provenance certificate; it comes with every artwork. It gives you information about the artist and a story about that artwork," says Cummins. In some centres, scannable QR codes are being used for authentication; from 2021 to 2025, the Australian Government is supporting a wide rollout of the new technology to safeguard Aboriginal art.



Waringarri Aboriginal Arts & Tours, Western Australia

The other thing to consider is whether you buy from a gallery, or from a community-owned art centre like Waringarri Aboriginal Arts & Tours, or [Maruku Arts](#) near Uluru in the Northern Territory.

"Art centres employ local Aboriginal people as arts workers and support the continuation of culture in the community," says Cummins. Purchasing art at one, Cummins adds, "Gives you the opportunity to support Indigenous communities and to help them develop economic independence. You're not just buying the piece of art, you're purchasing the opportunity for the whole community to be employed, because most art centres give 40 per cent of art sale proceeds to the community."

Here's what to ask before you buy Aboriginal art:

- What can you tell me about the artist?
- How did the artwork or product come to be in your art centre, gallery or shop?
- How is the artist paid for their work?
- Is your gallery a member of the Indigenous Art Code?

5 UNIQUELY AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCES FOR CULTURE-LOVING COUPLES



Venture North Australia, Northern Territory

Date night in Australia isn't limited to dinner and a movie. If you're looking to spice things up, grab your partner and try one of these experiences spotlighting Indigenous cultures.

Spirits of the Red Sand, Queensland

Between Brisbane/Meeanjin and the heart of Gold Coast lies Beenleigh, its impressive Historical Village the backdrop for [Spirits of the Red Sand](#). This progressive theatrical performance unfolds across different set locations after dark, allowing Aboriginal actors to tell stories of colonisation from inside an Anglican church, outside a general store or beside a bonfire. "Everyone involved is passionate about the tale," says Shannon Ruska, the show's co-founder. It's a passion you can't help but absorb, particularly when enjoying a post-show dinner and chat with Shannon and the cast.

Firescreek Botanical Winery Aboriginal Experiences, New South Wales

Forget chardonnay and pinot noir – when you visit Firescreek Botanical Winery, expect a wine tasting with a difference. Across a hectare in Holgate on the Central Coast, Nadia and Francis O'Connell grow fruits, flowers and herbs, much of their bounty spotlighting native produce. Davidson plums, mountain pepper and riberry are some of the botanicals infused into their distinctive drops, sample-ready at the cellar door. A more memorable way to gain an understanding of the produce is on respected Elder Kevin 'Gavi' Duncan's [Aboriginal Storytelling and Wine Tasting Experience](#). Held every afternoon on the estate, this mouth-watering discovery of Indigenous ingredients culminates with a tasting of Firescreek's wines.



Kingfisher Tours, Western Australia

Venture North Safaris, Northern Territory and Western Australia

Is there anything more romantic than freshly shucked oysters and a flute of bubbles at sunset? It's just one of many moving moments you'll experience on a Top End expedition with [Venture North Safaris](#). Along with end-of-day treats served at your seaside eco-retreat, you'll get to splash about at the base of Kakadu's blissful Barramundi Falls, tour one of Australia's most exquisite rock art sites with an Aboriginal guide, and much more. It's a trip that doesn't only inspire connection with your significant other, but also with the world's oldest living cultures.

Kingfisher Tours, Western Australia

Close your eyes and picture the colours of Australia: ochre soil, wide blue skies, dusty greens of eucalypt forest – these await in the Kimberley. [Kingfisher Tours'](#) Aboriginal guides lead tours on Country here, revealing landscapes that cleave off the edge of the Earth. Squeeze your partner's hand on a scenic helicopter flight over immense gorges painted with 40,000-year-old rock art. And chopper low over Western Australia's most dramatic waterfalls, pausing to cool off in a remote waterhole you'll likely have to yourself.

wukalina Walk, Tasmania/lutruwita

Snuggle in your architect-designed pod on the northeast coast of Tasmania/lutruwita, and sleep to the sound of the waves tumbling toward Cod Bay. This is krakani lumi ('place of rest'), your stylish campsite for two nights while on the [wukalina Walk](#). This four-day guided trek (Tasmania/lutruwita's first Indigenous-owned tourism experience) reveals the state's width and wonder. Days are spent hiking to sacred middens, clambering up mountains and padding barefoot along a Tiffany-blue coastline toward the Bay of Fires. Nights at the communal lodge pair saltbush chips with scallops cooked over the fire, and serious Southern Hemisphere stargazing.



wukalina Walk Tasmania



TRADITIONAL ABORIGINAL HEALING: THE ANCIENT ART OF WELLNESS

Dale Tilbrook Experiences,
Western Australia

Think wellness is protein shakes, superfoods, day spas and mindfulness? Aboriginal cultures put another spin on what we perceive as a modern trend. Practised for tens of thousands of years, Indigenous healers have nurtured the physical, emotional and social wellbeing of their people through food, massage, bush medicines and ceremony. If the spirit is healed, the body will heal.

Aboriginal peoples regard food as medicine, and a closer look at the produce they pluck from the bush reveals astonishing health qualities. The popular Kakadu plum, which grows in northern Australia, has the highest vitamin C content of any fruit in the world, offering up to 100 times the level of vitamin C found in oranges.

Meanwhile, native Australian herb lemon myrtle is rich in calcium, and endemic wattleseed is exceptionally high in protein, iron and zinc.

You can taste this wondrous bush tucker with [Dale Tilbrook Experiences](#) at a gallery or a winery outside Western Australia's capital city, Perth/Boorloo. Tilbrook will also proffer emu and goanna oils, which have long been rubbed on arthritic and sore joints. A one-hour tour with [Karrke Aboriginal Cultural Experience & Tours](#), near Kings Canyon in the central Northern Territory, also exposes you to such things, as well as the witchetty grub (an insect that produces a nutty, popcorn flavour when cooked).

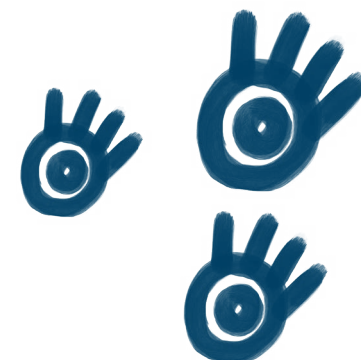


Karrke Aboriginal Cultural Experience & Tours,
Northern Territory

On the south coast of New South Wales, Dwayne Bannon-Harrison is proud to continue the oldest food culture in the world. As well as managing an Indigenous foods catering company where healthy eucalypt, tea tree and paperbark leaf are used, he runs [Ngaran Ngaran Culture Awareness](#). Along with introducing people to medicinal plants, he shares Aboriginal healing methods. In line with his ancestors, he uses meditative vibration and song as a form of sound therapy, while smoking ceremonies act to cleanse those who move through the scented wafting air. His traditional Djiringanj sunrise ceremony recognises that each day is unique and must be lived well – a ritual that speaks to the mindfulness so many of us now practice.

Ceremony and bush healing are also key to the Anangu, whose spiritual homeland is around the Northern Territory's soul-stirring monolith, Uluru. There, traditions are still a part of everyday life, and guide everything from diet to storytelling.

It's vital that traditional remedies survive – something visitors assist in, by engaging in immersive learning.



CORPORATE CULTURE, ABORIGINAL LANDSCAPES: THE INDIGENOUS EXPERIENCES FOSTERING MODERN CONNECTION



Walkabout Cultural Adventures, Queensland



Spirits of the Red Sand, Queensland

More than 1,100 Australian companies and organisations have a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), to integrate the principles of reconciliation into their business. It's a small step: embracing cultures and knowledge of Indigenous communities and cultivating pride in connecting with at least 65,000 years of storytelling, resilience and innovation is not a difficult task. Particularly given the wealth of forward-thinking Indigenous-owned and -operated organisations across the country. And it's a step bearing enormous rewards, positively impacting three million Australian workers daily.

Of the four official Reconciliation Action Plans you can adopt in partnership with Reconciliation Australia – Reflect, Innovate, Stretch and Elevate – each takes you one step deeper in your reconciliation journey. And each bears a common goal: developing relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, engaging staff and stakeholders in reconciliation, and innovating to empower Indigenous communities.

Such opportunities abound, from workshops and tours in Arnhem Land to hikes around Tasmania/lutruwita, you don't have to go far to have immediate impact. Even if you're unsure about establishing an official RAP, Indigenous-led experiences enable corporate teams to reconnect with each other, and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

In Sydney/Warrane, the [Burrawa Indigenous Climb Experience](#) gives your team a fresh perspective of the city, taking you 134 metres above the sea to the summit of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Just tackling the 1,332 steps is a bonding experience – but doing it in the company of an Aboriginal guide makes it compelling. Discover where an ancient, three-metre-high midden once stood and was later ground to lime to build the colony; and scan the horizon for Manly Cove (Kaimay), where Wangal man Woollarawarre Bennelong was recruited to act as an interpreter and mediator for then-governor Arthur Phillip. You will return inspired to seek out the city's many other secrets.

For a meaningful night out with your team, head to the Historical Village in Beenleigh, roughly halfway between Brisbane/Meeanjin and the heart of the Gold Coast, to learn the tale of Queensland's colonisation through [Spirits of the Red Sand](#). This progressive theatrical performance unfolds across different set locations, inviting audience members to get up close and personal during the show – and afterwards over a dinner shared with performers. Conversations are open, honest and insightful, sparking workplace discussions long after the experience.

Further north in Queensland around Mossman Gorge, Kuku Yalanji man Juan Walker offers a suite of cultural engagement experiences specifically tailored to corporate groups through [Walkabout Cultural Adventures](#). Whether a brief Welcome to Country smoking ceremony, or half a day immersed in interactive, team-building experiences, Juan's offerings highlight how Indigenous communities have cooperated in harmony for millennia...and how your company can follow suit.

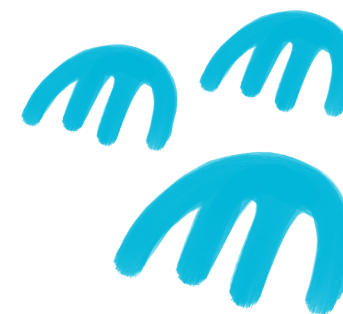


Burrawa Indigenous Climb Experience,
New South Wales

THE ANSWER TO MANAGING AUSTRALIA'S BUSHFIRE RISK COULD LIE IN TRADITIONAL ABORIGINAL PRACTICES



Narlijia Experiences Broome,
Western Australia



Ngaran Ngaran Culture Awareness,
New South Wales

Australia's catastrophic bushfires during the summer of 2019/2020 wreaked havoc Down Under. More than six million hectares of land were burned across six states, leading to the loss of an estimated one billion animals.

The event has boosted calls for a new approach to fire and land management. But rather than come up with a fresh strategy, Australia may only need look to the past.

Aboriginal peoples have used fire as a tool in the natural environment for tens of thousands of years. Today, many Indigenous tour guides also work as park rangers who use the generations of fire knowledge passed down to them. If asked, they'll tell you that as their ancestors walked the land they would burn, lighting flames to lure animals out for hunting, as well as for traditional ceremonies

and cultural practices. Timing was everything: rather than spark flames when the land was crisp, Aboriginal forebears would only burn at the beginning of the dry season. That way, plenty of green growth would slow a fire's spread. The fires were also deliberately small, so they wouldn't get out of control. This careful method resulted in a mosaic style of burning that preserved wildlife habitats. It also triggered a gentle regeneration of the bush.

Mainstream interest in traditional measures is growing, but a combination of modern and ancient fire management is already used in many areas of the outback. In Western Australia's vast Kimberley region, where [Narlijia Experiences Broome](#) operates, such practices are commonplace. Narlijia guides are familiar with these collaborative fire management activities, as well as the skills

used in the past, and are happy to share what they know.

In the Northern Territory, where [Kakadu Cultural Tours](#) operates, local rangers also create fire breaks and burns to keep their country healthy. That means reducing dense patches of dry plant matter; Australia's oil-rich eucalyptus trees are particularly combustible. While exploring the World Heritage area of Kakadu National Park, guides are able to explain traditional fire practices to those with curiosity.

Similarly, [wukalina Walk](#) guides in northeast Tasmania, understand the necessity of implementing traditional burning to reduce weeds and boost biodiversity – a strategy used by palawa Elders for millennia. Much of the Australian environment responds positively

to fire, with some species only blooming and seeding after burning has occurred. The same new growth serves as an enticing food source for wildlife – making hunting easier – while ashy ground reveals animal footprints and burrows, reducing the effort in food sourcing. Ask, and you'll learn more.

Meanwhile, Dwayne Bannon-Harrison of [Ngaran Ngaran Culture Awareness](#) experienced Australia's devastating major bushfires firsthand. His business on the far south coast of New South Wales was within the impact zone. He can offer a personal insight to this shocking event, while also explaining his culture's long-held fire techniques and uses. Dwayne, like so many other Aboriginal people, knows that while looking ahead is important, we can also learn much from listening to the past.

WHAT ABORIGINAL TOTEM SYSTEMS CAN TEACH US ABOUT CONSERVATION

Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel,
Queensland

Imagine you were bestowed a plant, an animal or a geographical feature that protects you for your entire life – you're not permitted to hurt or damage that object in any way. Ever. In fact, it's your job to protect it. Now imagine if everyone around Australia was given the same task...

"It's a Totem, and it's a simple way to care for our Country," says Jai Singleton, a guide on [Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel's](#) cruise expeditions from Cairns to the Great Barrier Reef.

"Having a Totem is the most basic form of conservation ever," Jai says. "It's a simple concept – yet so effective." So effective it has been practiced for millennia. "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have always had Totems. It might be one of the fundamental reasons why the country is still so biodiverse today," says Jai.

Jai's Totem is the turtle, which is fitting, given that six of the world's seven species of marine turtles call the Coral Sea – Jai's backyard – home. He was assigned his Totem at birth, and from that moment it has been his job to protect it. He cannot eat it or harm it and, if given the opportunity, must go out of his way to nurture it. Sustainability 101.

Across Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples protect flora and fauna pertinent to their lands. And this special relationship with nature extends beyond the physical realm.

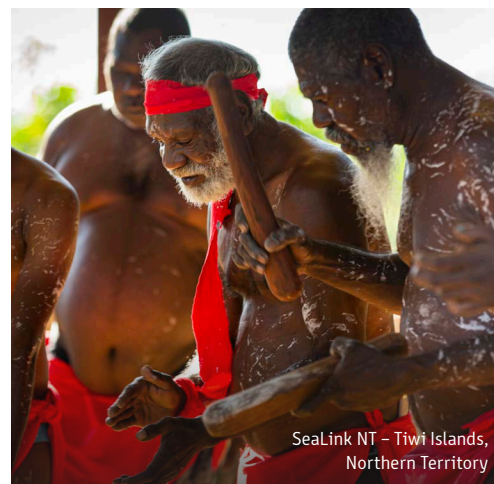
At Mossman in Tropical North Queensland, artist Brian "Binna" Swindley owns [Janbal Gallery](#), a place to showcase his own art as well as works from other Indigenous creatives. Binna's Totem is the cassowary – a large, elusive



bird that lives in the surrounding rainforest. The cassowary appears in his paintings, and it also impacts his interactions with the world – at times Binna's "spirit animal" guides him through the wilderness.

Travel to south-western New South Wales, where Wiradjuri man Mark Saddler of [Bundi Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge](#) in Wagga Wagga *dreams* about his Totem – the blue-tongue lizard. "One night I had a dream about her," he says. "The next morning I woke up, and my wife told me she [my lizard] had showed up and was waiting for me outside. I should not be surprised – our Totems connect us back to the Country," Mark explains. "We protect it, look after it, and never eat it. It's a kind of land management we've been doing for 65,000 years."

Many communities also pay homage to their Totems through performance. Take a [Tiwi by Design tour](#) with SeaLink Northern Territory, for example, and your journey through the Tiwi Islands north of Darwin/Gulmerrdgen reveals artists telling their Totem tales through dance, song and music; depicting the animals and plants that have sustained the community for millennia.



CULTURAL COMFORT: ANCIENT WISDOM FOR THE CURRENT ERA

First we fell in love with *hygge*, the Danish word that channels the delight of all things cosy and intimate. Then we got down with *wabi-sabi*, the Japanese term that embraces the beauty of imperfection. Now, as we collectively navigate a new era of uncertainty around the world, one of Australia's Aboriginal cultures offers up the perfect word for the times.

Wadekane is the word used by the Adnyamathanha people of South Australia's Flinders Ranges to describe the ability to sit in the moment, to wait for the next thing without worrying about how to make it happen, or when it will occur.

"It means something like 'wait on,'" explains Mick McKenzie, an Adnyamathanha Elder and a guide at [Wilpena Pound Resort](#). To illustrate the point, he explains that the dry riverbeds in his country often fill with fallen branches from the big gums that line the banks. Rather than clearing them out, the Adnyamathanha wait to see what happens. "A big flood will come soon, or perhaps a fire – something will clear it out in time," says Mick.

This ability to allow things to unfold is part of the wisdom of Aboriginal Australia, born of a peoples who have mastered the art of surviving in a sometimes harsh landscape.

"Wadekane is a bit like the idea of karma – what's supposed to happen will happen."

Another of their rich lessons is the importance of maintaining strong relationships. During the COVID-19 crisis, many experts stressed that strong relationships are vital for making it through during difficult times. Aboriginal Australians have always treasured close family ties. In traditional culture, families are the networks through which lore is spread and through which identity is established.

"Your family is who you are," says Juan Walker of [Walkabout Cultural Adventures](#), located in the Queensland town of Port Douglas. "Your family keeps you grounded,



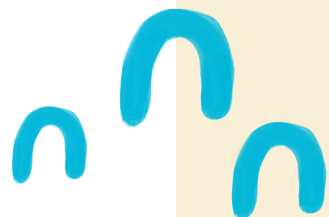
keeps you real. If I'm stuck, my family will help me, and I will help them."

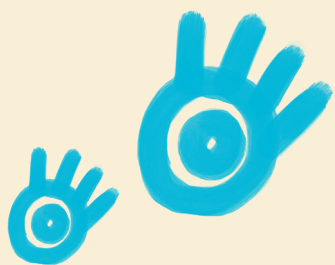
The idea of family – *jawun-karra* in the Kuku Yalanji language – is at the heart of Aboriginal cultures and extends beyond immediate relatives. "Everyone is close: I regard my cousins as my brothers," says Juan. "*Jawun-karra* includes friends as well as family – somewhere along the line, we're all *jawun-karra*."

Aboriginal peoples draw strength not just from their connection with family but also

their connection with the land. Like other Indigenous cultures around the world, they have an intimate relationship with the landscape around them. Scientific evidence increasingly shows that connecting with nature brings major stress relief. That is not news to Aboriginal peoples.

"The land gives us everything, from food to medicine," says Juan. "It nurtures us. Even when we are troubled, being on Country always helps us feel better."





DECODING ANCIENT MESSAGES IN THE LANDSCAPE WITH AN ABORIGINAL GUIDE

Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities know how to read the land – they've been making decisions based on the behaviour and abundance of native flora and fauna for more than 65,000 years. And they've left messages for future generations across the country, whether to preserve traditions, to point toward food or to indicate underground water. Case in point: the “scar trees” characterising the plains around Wagga Wagga.

This New South Wales Riverina city is flanked by three of the state's mightiest rivers. There was probably more water here a few hundred years ago, when Wiradjuri communities carved canoes from the trunks of trees – leaving “scars” – as a means of transport through now-dry plains. Most visitors wouldn't glance twice at these still-thriving eucalypts, but with Wiradjuri man Mark Saddler as your guide on a [Bundy Cultural Tour](#), these clues to the past come into firm focus. “You just need to know where to look,” says Mark.

The banks of Wagga Wagga's Murrumbidgee River tell another story of Wiradjuri heritage. Historically, clans feasted on freshwater mussels and native fauna, leaving behind piles of bones and shells known as middens. The idea, Mark says, was to inform subsequent visitors about what had been consumed, and what should thus now be avoided – an early conservation strategy that allowed animal species to regenerate.

Some middens are sacred and protected; other Indigenous communities welcome visitors to these sites, including palawa (Aboriginal Tasmanian) guides on Tasmania/lutruwita's [wukalina Walk](#). Participants on this three-night hike across the state's north-east are invited



Bundy Cultural Tours, New South Wales



Walkabout Cultural Adventures, Queensland

to explore an enormous midden on the Cod Bay coast, the spot revealing the diet of palawa communities past and – given its size – their proclivity to return regularly.

In Tropical North Queensland, the Daintree Rainforest reveals where Kuku Yalanji communities searched for food. On a tour with [Walkabout Cultural Adventures](#), guide Juan Walker shows how his ancestors marked their trail through dense foliage by bending young saplings. “The trees heal and continue to grow in a particular direction, creating a ‘path’ through the forest, directing future wanderers toward food,” he says.

Turtles, kangaroos and barramundi were that food for Balnggarawarra man Vince Harrigan's ancestors, whose rock art paintings span cave walls at Normanby Station. On a half-day or full-day tour with [Culture Connect](#), you'll head off from coastal Cooktown on Queensland's Cape York Peninsula to gaze at the collection of well-preserved paintings hidden on private Aboriginal land. “We're still finding Aboriginal art and artefacts on Country,” says Vince. Like scar trees, middens and rainforest markers, these paintings were designed by their artists to benefit future generations – and like so many beneficiaries over millennia, we remain in their debt.



Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel, Queensland

EXPLORING ABORIGINAL CONNECTIONS TO WATER

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia feel a strong connection to the land and sea. Their relationship with Country is reciprocal – they relate to nature in a holistic way and the living environment is a fundamental part of their identity. By taking an immersive, water-based tour led by an Indigenous guide, you'll gain a greater understanding of these shared living cultures while developing a more meaningful connection to the water that surrounds – and flows through – our island home.

The Gumbaynggirr people of the New South Wales Mid North Coast have been paddling its waterways for tens of thousands of years, their ancestors using their knowledge of the tides to travel long distances in dugout canoes carved from hollowed tree trunks. [Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure Tours](#)' owner-operator Clark Webb, a Gumbaynggirr/Bundjalung man, says Elders often refer to major tributaries and waterways as “old highways”.

The Gumbaynggirr are saltwater people, and you'll learn about their connection to the water

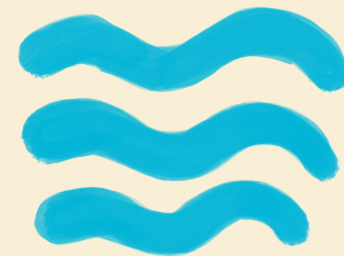
on Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure Tours' 2.5-hour stand-up paddleboarding tours, which are held on three idyllic waterways within the Solitary Islands Marine Park: the Coffs, Moonee and Red Rock Creeks. While paddling, you can admire the fish darting through crystal clear waters as your Aboriginal guide brings the Dreaming to life, and introduces you to some coastal bush tucker.

On the other side of the country in Western Australia, explore the World Heritage-listed Shark Bay – where the red desert meets the clear turquoise waters of the Indian Ocean – with [Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures](#). Stand-up paddleboard along the region's network of waterways and lagoons or kayak in the bay, where you'll share the ocean with intriguing marine life including rays, dugongs and turtles – many of which have cultural significance to the Nhanda and Malgana peoples.

In another World Heritage-listed area, this time in Queensland's tropical north, [Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel](#) takes visitors from Cairns to the spectacular Great Barrier Reef. As you cruise

to your destination, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sea rangers share the Great Barrier Reef Creation story, deepening your cultural understating of this diverse ecosystem before you dive in to explore a vibrant aquatic wonderland on a guided snorkelling or scuba diving tour.

Prefer a bit less physical activity? Float down the Northern Territory's East Alligator River, spotting saltwater crocodiles from a safe distance, on [Kakadu Cultural Tours' Gulu Yambi Cultural Cruise](#). As you glide through the ever-changing landscape of monsoon rainforest and sandstone escarpments, your Aboriginal guide will point out native plants with medicinal uses, share Creation stories and educate you on the correct spear to use for catching the various fish that have fed the region's Traditional Owners for millennia.



Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure Tours, New South Wales



**INDIGENOUS SEAFOOD EXPERIENCES:
SAMPLE THE SEA'S BOUNTY IN A NEW WAY**

Walkabout Cultural Adventures, Queensland



If you're lucky enough to catch one, your Kuku Yalanji guide will cook it up the traditional way, with the taste of sweet, pale meat lingering in your memory long after worries of getting your toes nipped have disappeared.

After following the footsteps of palawa Elders on the multi-day [wukalina Walk](#) in north-east Tasmania/lutruwita's Bay of Fires, you're nourished with a special dinner inspired by traditional coastal fare. Shellfish like abalone, mussels, oysters and limpet were popular in these parts, with discarded shells still visible in ancient middens – some among the world's largest.

Seafood also plays a starring role on experiences hosted by [Saltwater Eco Tours](#) on Queensland's Sunshine Coast. Feast on fresh Mooloolaba prawns and oysters, and other bush tucker-inspired treats, on the Traditional Owner-led Saltwater Cultural Cruise as you learn how the local Gubbi Gubbi/Kabi Kabi people have lived in harmony with these waterways for millennia. Or join Indigenous co-owner Simon Thornalley for a relaxed seafood-focused feast and a chance to learn about his own Sea Country connections on the Native Bush Food and Seafood Cruise.

Think of fishing and chances are you'll picture a rod, line and hook. But spend some time with a Traditional Custodian and soon you'll be seeing pronged spears gliding through the air to land with a crack in the carapace of a mud crab. You'll discover toxins in native plants that can be used to stun fish in the water. And you'll learn about ancient stone fish traps laid across waterways, sharp hooks made from shells, and even fishing lines spun from vegetable "hair".

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have harvested marine life for tens of thousands of years. The act is as cultural as it is sustaining, often guided by rules contained

in Dreaming stories: when to fish, who can fish, what can be taken and how much can be harvested. Indigenous fishing practices also smash modern fishing stereotypes – in New South Wales, women have historically been the chief fishers, balancing babies and handlines as they fished from canoes, often cooking their catch while still out on the water.

Coastal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples did, and still do, have a varied seafood diet dictated by nature. Turtles and dugongs have traditionally featured on Torres Strait Islander menus, for example, while the beaches of Victoria have long been a popular

spot to forage for pipis, edible seaweeds and more. By learning about traditional fishing practices, and in some places re-enacting them, you can savour Australia's ocean fare in a whole new way.

North of Broome in Western Australia, you'll learn how to pop open oysters that are still stuck to rocks, using only spinifex grass and fire. The trick delivers an instant treat – just the way Bardi man Terry Hunter, of [Borrgoron Coast to Creek Tours](#), likes it.

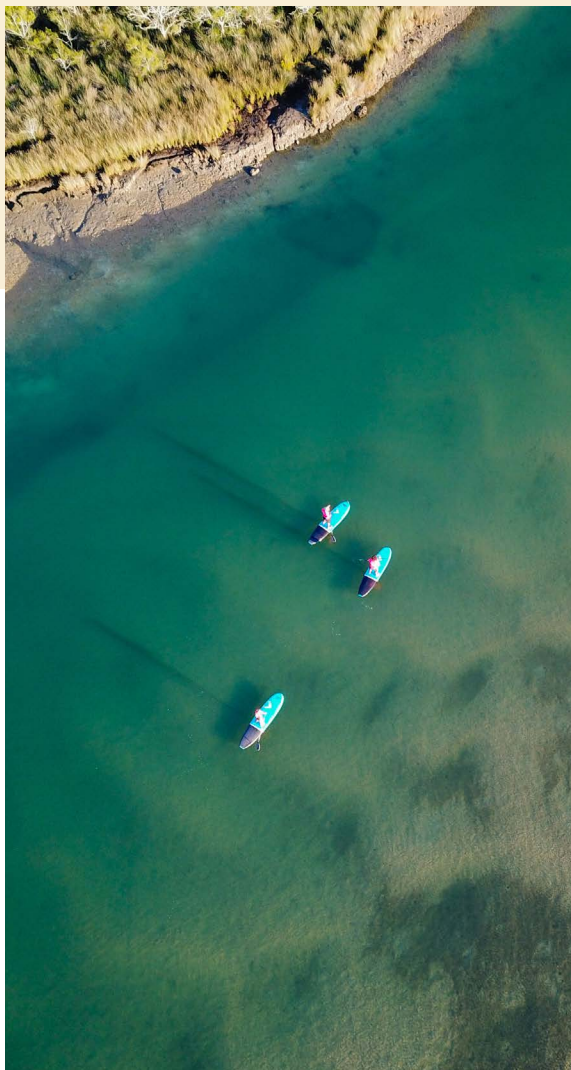
In Tropical North Queensland, take lessons on how to spear mud crabs in the mangroves with [Walkabout Cultural Adventures](#).

ISLAND DREAMING: LEARN THE UNIQUE STORIES BEHIND AUSTRALIA'S ISLANDS

The Dreaming is often connected to the creation of natural wonders: sacred places that hold special cultural significance for local Aboriginal communities. Many Dreaming stories see ancestral spirits visit Earth in human form – to create Australia's native animals and plants, waterways and landscapes – before transforming into a part of the landscape themselves. On a tour with a coastal Custodian, you'll learn that in some of the most evocative stories, these spirits become islands.

"In one of our Dreaming stories, two sisters made the ocean and then they rested on Split Solitary Island, which we call Wirriiga," says Gumbaynggirr/Bundjalung man Clark Webb, who owns and operates [Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure Tours](#) on the New South Wales Coffs Coast. "They placed their digging sticks in the shape of an 'X' and rested on either side of it – the younger sister on the northern side and the older sister on the southern side – before turning themselves into stone and becoming Split Solitary Island. They then made off into the night sky and became part of the Pleiades star formation, or the Seven Sisters."

This is just one of the captivating Dreaming stories you'll learn on a stand-up paddleboarding or kayaking tour with Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure Tours, which take place on three culturally significant waterways in the Solitary Islands Marine Park. Feel the magic of the landscape as your Aboriginal guide brings the Gumbaynggirr Dreaming to life.



Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure Tours, New South Wales



Ngaran Ngaran Culture Awareness, New South Wales



From the two sisters to the two sons: [Ngaran Ngaran Culture Awareness](#) founding director Dwayne Bannon-Harrison, a Yuin/Ngarrugu descendant, says the Creation story of Barunguba (Montague Island) is central to his company's immersive guided experience on the New South Wales South Coast.

The Dreaming story, he says, is about Mother Gulaga (Mount Dromedary) – a sacred mountain within Gulaga National Park, in *Djiringanji/ Yuin* Country – and her two sons. When Mother Gulaga's eldest son, Barunguba, wanted to move away and explore his independence, she entrusted him with the responsibility of holding the connection between saltwater and the land. He thus became the island that bears his name. But when her younger son Najanuga wanted to follow suit, Mother Gulaga insisted he shouldn't venture into the sea, so he became Najanuga (Little Dromedary mountain).

In Tropical North Queensland, Kuku Yalanji man Juan Walker believes Dreaming stories are best told on Country by an Indigenous guide. Book a tour with his company [Walkabout Cultural Adventures](#), based near Port Douglas, and your Kuku Yalanji guide will happily share the evocative Creation story of Snapper Island, which is part of their traditional Sea Country in this lush corner of Australia. Just remember to keep an eye out for crocs while you're soaking up the fascinating stories.

5 SURPRISING FACTS ABOUT ABORIGINAL TRAVEL EXPERIENCES



Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, Victoria

Australia is home to some of the world's most outstanding Indigenous tourism experiences – yet, stunningly, most Australians have never experienced them. Lingerin myths, misconceptions and even a simple lack of familiarity hold people back from embracing our incredible suite of Indigenous travel experiences; most of which are better known by the global travel community than by Australians. Lean in, try something new and discover that the still-rare cultural exchange offered by Aboriginal travel isn't necessarily what you think it is.

You don't have to rough it

There's a misconception that overnight Aboriginal experiences mean back-to-basics digs. In fact, you can be immersed in genuine cultural enrichment while still coveting comfort. After hiking through the Bay of Fires on Tasmania/lutruwita's [wukalina Walk](#), snuggle in beneath dome-shaped huts crafted from native blackwood, which have an arresting, architectural aesthetic. At Uluru, the five-star [Sails in the Desert](#) hotel, run by Aboriginal-owned [Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia](#), intertwines Anangu culture with luxe, resort-feel amenities such as a day spa and tree-rimmed pool. In South Australia's Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park, [Wilpena Pound Resort](#) delivers glamping-style safari tents as well as simple hotel rooms, all encircled by an 800-million-year-old natural amphitheatre.

Culture lives in capital cities, too

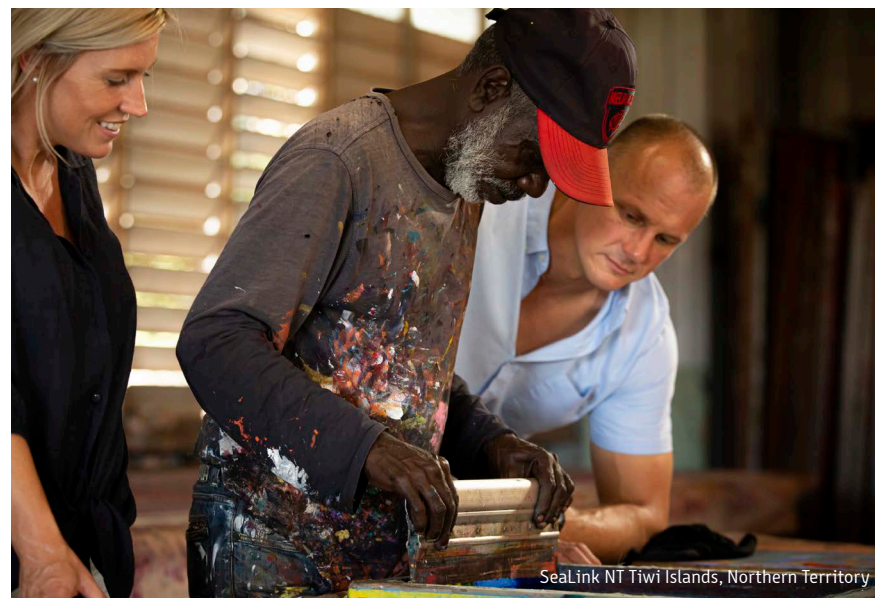
The outback isn't the only place to connect with Australia's Indigenous culture. Aboriginal people have lived in the places where our major cities now stand for tens of thousands of years, and even though the natural landscapes of those areas has changed somewhat, their connection to Country remains strong as ever. Invoke your own bond to this rich heritage on a walkabout through The Rocks in Sydney/ Warrane with [Dreamtime Southern X](#), or on an Aboriginal Heritage Walk in the [Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne](#), a significant cultural site for the Eastern Kulin nation. You'll see that despite layers of concrete and glass, stories remain and wisdom lives on, shared in sight of Sydney Harbour and the Melbourne/Narrm skyline.

Aboriginal cultures are on the ocean, as well as in the desert

Few people would associate the Great Barrier Reef with Aboriginal cultures. But it's there, amongst the coral and tropical fish. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sea rangers travelling aboard [Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel's](#) boat unveil this aquatic environment's Indigenous Creation story, allowing you to see far beyond the view in your snorkel mask. In the equally captivating Shark Bay World Heritage Area, [Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures](#) remind us that the First Nations don't have to stick to wooden canoes or barefoot walking. Tours use kayaks and stand-up paddleboards to coast over dugongs and turtles while sharing Aboriginal heritage.



Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel, Queensland



Sealink NT Tiwi Islands, Northern Territory

You can be part of a corroboree

Most of the time, corroborees are regarded as sacred, private ceremonies attended only by Aboriginal peoples. But the [Laura Dance Festival](#) in Tropical North Queensland opens up the performances on a 40,000-year-old bora dance ground to everyone. Dancers from 20 language groups coat their bodies in emu feathers, sport towering paperbark hats, wear grass skirts and paint their skin in this remarkable, fiercely authentic show of culture that they openly share. Get a deeper insight into it with [Culture Connect](#) and fully embrace what's believed to be the longest-running Aboriginal cultural festival in Australia.

Not all art is on canvas

Aboriginal art is far more varied than most people realise. On the Northern Territory's [Tiwi Islands](#), artists screen-print distinctive patterns in myriad block colours as part of their daily practice. The remote culture also carves incredibly hard ironwood into sculptures and paints in natural ochres. Discover it on a [Sealink NT Tiwi by Design](#) tour, which includes making your own screen-printed textile. Meanwhile, browse the collections of intricately woven baskets and beautiful pearl shell jewellery along with more modern ghost net art created by Australia's First Nations peoples at the Australian Museum in Sydney/Warrane. The ancient art of basket weaving is shown along with jewellery making, carving and painting at [Injalak Arts](#) centre in Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, visited with [Kakadu Cultural Tours](#).



Lords Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris, Northern Territory

WHY EVERY AUSTRALIAN SHOULD BOOK AN ABORIGINAL TOUR

Did you know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are widely regarded to be the world's first astronomers? Or, that they were baking bread around 18,000 years before the ancient Egyptians? How about that some Aboriginal rock art is so old, it depicts megafauna that became extinct at least 40,000 years ago?

The depth of Indigenous Australian historical knowledge is unparalleled in any of the world's living cultures – and it's right here on our doorstep. As locals, we may have grown up tasting billy tea and damper, reading Dreamtime stories, and trying to play a didgeridoo, but there's so much more to know. And there's no better teacher than an Indigenous guide.

Spend time in Western Australia's World Heritage-listed Purnululu National Park (home to the iconic Bungle Bungle Range) with an Aboriginal guide from [Kingfisher Tours](#), and



Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure Tours, New South Wales

discover that rock art doesn't just represent things people observed; the paintings also contain vital messages. Some serve as warnings, while others indicate which foods can be sourced locally. Meanwhile, at Mt Borradaile in Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, rock art depicts the arrival of Europeans – see tall-masted ships painted on rock walls with [Lords Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris](#), which has special permission to enter this land. In Western Australia's Pilbara region, Ngurrangga Tours can show you engravings of emu prints that once taught children how to hunt the flightless birds.

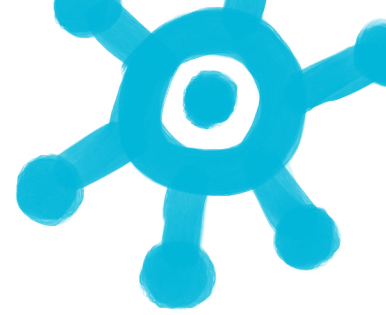
Aboriginal knowledge shared on tours often includes ingenious bush survival skills that, as Australians, we'd do well to know. For starters, how do you eat wild oysters when you don't have a tool to prise them off the rocks? With [Borraboron Coast to Creek Tours](#), you'll discover that a handful of spinifex grass and a flame is all the Bardi Jawi people have ever needed to prepare a delicious meal. In Tropical North Queensland, your [Walkabout Cultural Adventures](#) guide will show you how the Kuku Yalanji people have traditionally bent trees in arrow-like forms to mark pathways through the dense Daintree Rainforest.

Discovering the harmonious relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the land is just as inspiring. On a tour of New South Wales' Riverina region with [Bundji Cultural Tours](#), you'll learn how the Wiradjuri people have cared for nature in a mindful way as you smell native blossoms, listen to birdsong and feel the winds – making for a transformative experience.



Borraboron Coast to Creek Tours, Western Australia

Finally, banish any misconception that all Aboriginal tours are serious. Fun is at the heart of [Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure Tours'](#) stand-up paddleboarding excursions in the Solitary Islands Marine Park on the New South Wales Mid North Coast. As you paddle the waterways of Gumbaynggirr Country, your Aboriginal guide will introduce you to local bush tucker, teach you some Gumbaynggirr words, and regale you with Dreaming stories connected to your exquisite surroundings. It's yet another way to broaden your own knowledge of Aboriginal Australia.



THE PLAYFUL SIDE OF ABORIGINAL CULTURES

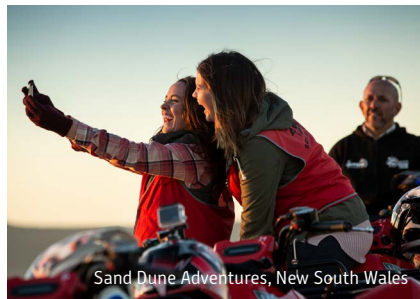


Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures,
Western Australia

When you're skidding down the largest moving coastal sand dunes in the Southern Hemisphere on a 400cc quad bike, wind in your hair and "whoop whoops!" in the air, it's hard not to feel on top of the world. Combining culture with an adrenaline rush was Andrew Smith's goal when he launched not-for-profit [Sand Dune Adventures](#), owned and operated by the Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council, for which Smith is the CEO.

The sand dunes of Stockton Beach – in the Worimi Conservation Lands of Port Stephens, on the New South Wales North Coast – are the stuff of legend. They cover 4,200 hectares, reach 30 metres high, and deliver inclines of up to 60 degrees. That equates to serious speed when you're hurtling towards the sea on a sandboard or quad bike. "People say, 'Wow, riding the bikes was great,'" says Smith. "But even better was the Aboriginal component. This is the best thing since sliced bread!" Our culture is about relationships, family and fun. People turn up as strangers, but leave as friends."

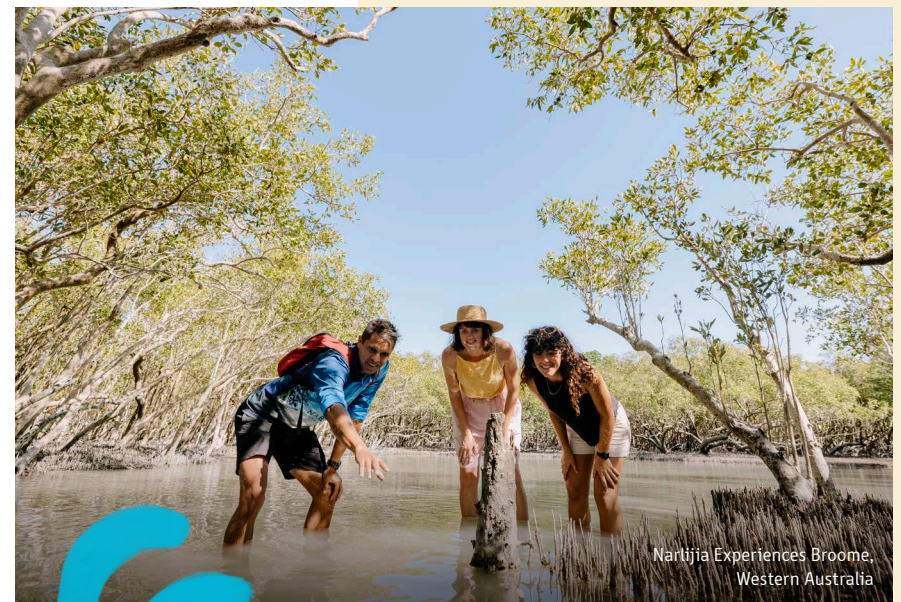
Australia's most respected Aboriginal policy maker, Gumbaynggirr man Dr Aden Ridgeway, agrees that while Indigenous tourism should be educational, there's no reason it can't be ridiculously entertaining. "Aboriginal cultures are sometimes portrayed as very serious and spiritual. Although it does have this meaningful side to it, Aboriginal peoples are pretty down to earth. It's the mix of the practical with the humorous that makes the experience meaningful."



Sand Dune Adventures, New South Wales

Over on the west coast of Australia, ex-football player Darren 'Capes' Capewell loves entertaining his guests on his [Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures](#) around Shark Bay and Monkey Mia, home of the Nhandu and Malgana people. When Capes plays his didgeridoo and kids start to dance, he joins in. He jokes about the local birds being gossips. And in the same breath, he tells you how they can predict the weather. In just a few hours, you'll dip your toe into tens of thousands of years of history – and come away remembering, perhaps most of all, Capes' distinctive laugh.

It's a similar story in the coastal town of Broome further north, where Yawuru man Bart Pigram is quite possibly Western Australia's top entertainer. Well, apart from his father Stephen Pigram, who happens to be one of the country's most revered musicians. He's even penned a song that spotlights the soup his mum used to make, and which Bart has shown local restaurateurs how to (almost) replicate, so you can taste it yourself. That is, after you eat pretty much every plant lining the coastline, and meet every other Broome resident on his [Narljia Experiences Broome](#) tours – Bart is a bit of a celebrity in this corner of the Kimberley.



Narljia Experiences Broome,
Western Australia



THE RISE OF AUSTRALIA'S NATIVE-INGREDIENT BEVERAGES

Mandarin and lemon myrtle. Zingy riberry. These are just some of the wine flavours that Nadia and Francis O'Connell are currently experimenting with at their dreamy Firescreek Botanical Winery on the Central Coast of New South Wales. All manner of flowers, herbs and fruits infuse their distinctive beverages, with everything grown organically on their lush one-hectare property.

Having consulted with Indigenous growers, the duo now nurture mountain pepper, Davidson plums and aspen, among a bounty of other native ingredients. "I really want passionfruit gum as well," says Nadia, her wines the perfect accompaniment to the [Firescreek Aboriginal Storytelling and Wine Tasting Experience](#) hosted on the grounds.

Respected Elder Gavi Duncan leads the afternoon session, providing insights into how the O'Connells' plants were traditionally used for nutrition and medicine by Indigenous communities. "They taste just as good in wines today," he laughs. Gavi will also tell you about the Aboriginal rock art and sacred sites surrounding the winery, with each revealing lesser-known stories about Australia's wine country.



Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia
– Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre, Queensland



Firescreek Botanical Winery Aboriginal Experiences,
New South Wales

The Firescreek estate was – and still is – a pioneer when it comes to infusing wine with native botanicals, not to mention showcasing them through an Indigenous lens. All manner of distilleries and drinks purveyors have followed their lead, including a collection of Aboriginal-owned companies like Lore, which makes kombucha infused with lemon myrtle and finger lime, or strawberry gum and lilly pilly. And Sobah, which brews a delicious non-alcoholic pepperberry IPA.



Dale Tilbrook Experiences,
Western Australia

But you don't have to go to the supermarket (or a bar) to sip and savour native ingredients. In the Wagga Wagga region of southern New South Wales, Wiradjuri man Mark Saddler operates [Bundiyi Cultural Tours](#) around significant Riverina sites. En route, morning break might be a steaming mug of lemon myrtle tea, paired with Mark's own wattleseed damper slathered with Indigiearth Kakadu plum jam. "There are so many surprising native flavours in Australia. All the better if they're doing you good," says Mark.

Lemon myrtle tea is also served during [Spirits of the Red Sand's Aboriginal Dinner Show](#) on Queensland's Gold Coast. Crocodile, kangaroo, emu and native dukkah are all on the menu as well.

In Western Australia, Wardandi Bibbulmun woman [Dale Tilbrook](#) is from the Margaret River region, but today hosts eye-opening bush tucker experiences across her property in the Swan Valley, outside Perth/Boorloo. Say hello to the resident emus, then discover all manner of native fruits, herbs and vegetables before Dale sits you down with a mug of tea infused with rosella flower or strawberry gum, perhaps. In Tropical North Queensland, the [Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre's](#) guided Dreamtime Walks through World Heritage-listed rainforest end with bush tea and damper.

EXPLORE AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL PARKS WITH THEIR TRADITIONAL OWNERS

In Australia's national parks, learn about the Traditional Custodians' deep connection to Country, from Dreaming stories to bush lore. Stroll through an Australian national park and you might note the flora and fauna, the heave of a hill and the sparkle of a stream, the intoxicating scent of eucalyptus leaves or the trill of a nearby bird.

You wipe the sweat from your brow and rehydrate while tucking into a packed lunch. All five senses will be well and truly alive. Walk through that same region with an Indigenous guide, though, and you'll learn of more intangible layers. Landmarks are often intertwined with a Dreaming story. Perhaps you'll hear about ancient Indigenous land-management techniques. You may even dip into the spirit world.

After whisking you into Western Australia's Purnululu National Park by small plane, [Kingfisher Tours](#)' experiences begin with a Welcome to Country ceremony to ensure the safe passage of everyone present. During your exploration of this UNESCO World Heritage-listed Kimberley landscape, you might be lucky enough to experience the incredible natural acoustics of Cathedral Gorge as head guide Bec Sampi, a Gija woman, sings in language to the rhythmic beat of traditional clap sticks. On the company's Punamii-Uunpuu (Mitchell Falls) experiences, your local Aboriginal guide will point out ancient rock art depicting spirit figures that are tucked behind the waterfalls of Mitchell River National Park.

You can tap into Indigenous experiences and age-old wisdom at many of Australia's national parks. At [Mossman Gorge](#) in the



Kingfisher Tours, Western Australia

southern part of Queensland's Daintree National Park, join a guided Dreamtime Walk that begins with a smoking ceremony to cleanse and ward off bad spirits.

You'll hear stories about the culture of the Kuku Yalanji Traditional Owners, learn about bush foods and which plant can be used as soap, and finish with tea and damper.

In Tropical North Queensland, head out to explore the Great Barrier Reef from Cairns with [Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel](#). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sea rangers accompany the day tour to two outer reef sites where passengers can dive and snorkel among the

reef's incredible marine creatures. While on the boat ride (which starts with an Indigenous welcome), you'll hear the Great Barrier Reef Creation story.

South Australia's Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park is home to Wilpena Pound – a stunning natural amphitheatre. [Wilpena Pound Resort](#) offers a nightly Welcome to Country in the language of the area's Traditional Owners, along with a cultural walking tour that gives an Indigenous perspective on the landscape and its biodiversity. In Western Australia, [Koomal Dreaming](#) showcases the Wadandi people's deep connection to their Country in the Margaret



Koomal Dreaming, Western Australia



Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel, Queensland

River region. See the coastal landscape surrounding Cape Naturaliste Lighthouse, a landmark within Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park, through the eyes of an Aboriginal guide, before inspecting artefacts and listening to the thrum and whoops of a didgeridoo.



Davidson's Arnhemland Safaris, Northern Territory

HIDDEN HISTORY: FINDING AUSTRALIA'S ANCIENT ABORIGINAL ART

Aboriginal art is much more than dot paintings on canvas. Hidden ochre depictions of spirits, animals, European explorers and masted ships coat rocky surfaces in the lodge grounds of [Davidson's Arnhemland Safaris](#) on the sacred Mt Borradaile ranges. UNESCO World Heritage-listed Kakadu National Park is another [rock art](#) hotspot, with around 5000 sites recorded and some 10,000 more believed to exist, with works dated at up to 20,000 years old. Must-see paintings include the Lightning Man at Nourlangie and those depicting X-ray fish, a now-extinct Tasmanian tiger, a white fella hunter and the Rainbow Serpent Creation ancestor in the outdoor galleries at Ubirr. Beyond, an [Arnhemlander Cultural and Heritage Tour](#) with Kakadu Cultural Tours reveals hard-to-access rock art atop an

outback hill before introducing you to today's Aboriginal artists – basket weavers, painters, carvers, jewellery makers and more – inside the Injalak Arts centre. There are even art sites in Australia's major cities: ochre hand stencils and engravings can be seen at locations such as the [Aboriginal Heritage walk](#) in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, north of Sydney/Warrane.

For Aboriginal peoples, art is an expression of cultural identity and reflects their connection to Country, but it's often the act of creating art that holds equal or greater importance than the finished piece. This is why in the past rock art works have been painted over without causing upset – a fascinating nugget of information usually misunderstood without the insight of an Aboriginal guide. The interpretations offered by guides connect the



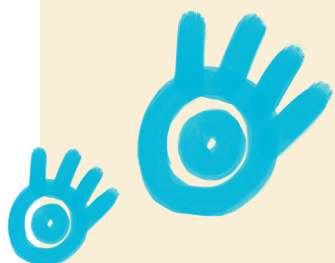
Janbal Gallery, Queensland

viewer to the history behind the work and the story it is telling – something you won't deduce on your own or with a history book.

Trying your hand at producing your own piece of Aboriginal art is another way to deepen your appreciation for it. Give it your best shot on a [Top Didj Cultural Experience](#) in Katherine, or take a hands-on workshop with the Anangu people – the Traditional Owners of Uluru – where you'll create desert dot paintings and wood carvings at [Maruku Arts](#), a corporation representing some 900 artists from over 20 desert communities. Conversely, the works at [Janbal Gallery](#) in Tropical North are understandably hooked in reef and rainforest culture; here, paint a boomerang or canvas, share stories with artists and observe the many works. You

can also get to know Polynesian-influenced Aboriginal culture on a [Tiwi by Design](#) tour with Sealink NT – watch a demonstration of screen-printing techniques before attempting your own screen-printing textile.





FROM OUR FAMILY TO YOURS: FUN ABORIGINAL TRAVEL EXPERIENCES THAT EVERYONE WILL LOVE

Few and far between are the cultural experiences that make the grade for kids – the toughest critics of all when it comes to educational excursions. But in Australia, guides bring an ancient culture to life amid outdoor adventures, wildlife safaris and interactive lessons the whole family will remember for a lifetime.

In Tropical North Queensland, guests can be introduced to the Kuku Yalanji people and remarkable World Heritage-listed tropical rainforest during a candlelit open-air dinner at [Flames of the Forest](#). Under a silk canopy dotted with hand-made chandeliers, be served a seven-dish banquet dinner as storytelling, didgeridoo and song are seamlessly melded into a mesmerising performance that every family member will learn from.

Based nearby, [Walkabout Cultural Adventures](#) offers the chance to spear your own mud crab on a tour of Kuku Yalanji Country, while not far away at Rainforestation Nature Park, the [Pamagirri Aboriginal Experience](#) also provides some basic weapons training on a Dreamtime Walk, along with traditional song and dance.

Western Australia's Shark Bay area likewise offers Indigenous adventure: join an Aboriginal-led paddleboarding or kayaking experience, or a Didgeridoo Dreaming night tour (in which you learn about the didge and eat bush tucker or seafood cooked over an open fire) with [Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures](#). Shark Bay is a World Heritage area of red sand and turquoise waters and holds great cultural significance for the Nhandu and Malgana people.

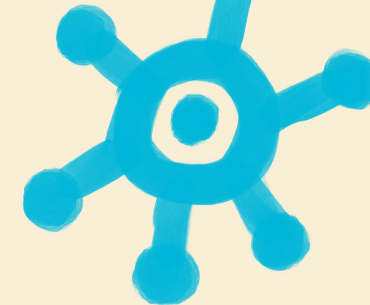


Pamagirri Aboriginal Experience at
Rainforestation Nature Park, Queensland



Sand Dune Adventures, New South Wales

In Sydney/Warrane, the First Nations collection at the [Australian Museum](#) has dramatic ceremonial dance masks and costumes from the Torres Strait Islands among its artefacts; if you join a personalised tour you'll get Indigenous stories and storytelling, too. For something a little more adrenaline-packed, head a couple of hours north and join [Sand Dune Adventures](#) for an Aboriginal cultural tour with a difference: you'll ride aboard a quad bike, then have a go at sand-boarding down the Worimi Sand Dunes, the largest in the Southern Hemisphere.



THE POWER OF CONNECTING WITH YOUR INDIGENOUS ROOTS

Spirits of the Red Sand, Queensland

In an era when personal connections have taken on new meaning, ancestral travel has become a global trend. While technology has made it easier than ever to trace our roots, Indigenous Australian lineage is predominately taught on Country through storytelling, art, language, and dance. And Indigenous tourism provides an incredible platform to understand it.

As a proud Torres Strait Islander, I am privileged to have been born and raised on Country. My Torres Strait culture is deep rooted and well-practised. However, I'm also an Aboriginal Wuthathi woman through my paternal grandmother. This part of my identity, while acknowledged in my family, remained unexplored in my life – until I experienced Aboriginal tourism.



Spirits of the Red Sand, Queensland

Aboriginal guides and cultural practitioners have since become my unofficial history teachers, culinary instructors and translators, sharing their cultural wisdom like sharing pieces of their soul. While every bush tucker experience and on-Country pilgrimage I've embarked on has addressed Australia's European settlement, it was at [Spirits of the Red Sand's Aboriginal Dinner show](#) that I forged a deeper connection with this part of my heritage.

Based on true events, Spirits of the Red Sand is a powerful and gritty interactive theatre show. It tells the story of Aboriginal man Jarrah, his brothers and their brutal treatment by British settlers in 1800s Australia. While the tale is confronting, it's necessary for truth-telling – a process of openly sharing historical truths after periods of conflict – and accepting Australia's full history.

As I sat in the pew of a replica Anglican church, my heart ached for an Aboriginal cast member perched beside me in rags and heavy chains. Later, I emerged from that church with a deeper respect for my ancestors' strength and resilience.

In the final act, cast members danced around a crackling fire under the night sky on Queensland's Gold Coast. As their shadows flickered through the flames, I looked around at an audience just as captivated as I was. In that moment, our nationalities and cultural backgrounds didn't exist – we all knew that this experience would stay with us for the rest of our lives.

During the post-show dinner, I found myself gorging on traditional bush foods and chatting with the cast. This helped me to digest the performance and talk about Aboriginal history in a safe space. It's a great opportunity for all guests to ask questions, with cast members happy to share their perspectives.

Whether you experience Spirits of the Red Sand, walk side-by-side with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander guide, or paint alongside an Indigenous artist, you'll leave Australia with a stronger connection to the world's oldest living cultures. And you don't need to be Indigenous to feel how powerful that can be.



Spirits of the Red Sand, Queensland



Dale Tilbrook Experiences, Western Australia

CULTURE IN THE CITY: FINDING THE ANCIENT AMONG AUSTRALIA'S MODERN HUBS

Australia's Aboriginal heritage isn't relegated to wild places – its heartbeat echoes through the centre of the nation's most vibrant precincts. You can experience this extraordinary juxtaposition on urban walking tours, short tours, day trips, at museums, galleries and cultural centres, and in the unlikelyst of outdoor places – like the middle of Melbourne/Narrm in the [Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne](#). There, just two kilometres from Melbourne/Narrm's city centre, you'll find a traditional camping and meeting place for the local First Peoples. Join an Aboriginal guide on a walking tour of the gardens – one of the most impressive urban landscapes in the Southern Hemisphere – and take lessons in plant lore, medicine, tools and ceremony, while learning more about the ancestral traditions that evolved on this picturesque patch of Earth.

In Perth/Boorloo, local Aboriginal heritage is waiting to be uncovered in the most urban of landscapes. At Yagan Square, a landmark new precinct in the centre of the city, contemplate the statue that honours Aboriginal warrior,

Yagan. This nine-metre-tall creation is named "Wirin", which means "spirit" in Noongar language. Nearby, at the brand-new Elizabeth Quay precinct, the "First Contact" artwork by Indigenous artist Laurel Nannup welcomes visitors to the shores of the Swan River. In the nearby Swan Valley, you'll find the fittingly named [Maalinup Aboriginal Gallery](#) ("maali" means "black swan" and up means "place" to the people of Wardandi Country). An Aboriginal-owned and -run enterprise, Maalinup has emerged as one of Western Australia's most fascinating cultural hubs, where visitors can immerse themselves in Aboriginal activities, cultural performances and talks; sample bush tucker treats made with local native ingredients and, of course, browse and buy art. Gain further insights into bush foods with [Dale Tilbrook Experiences](#).

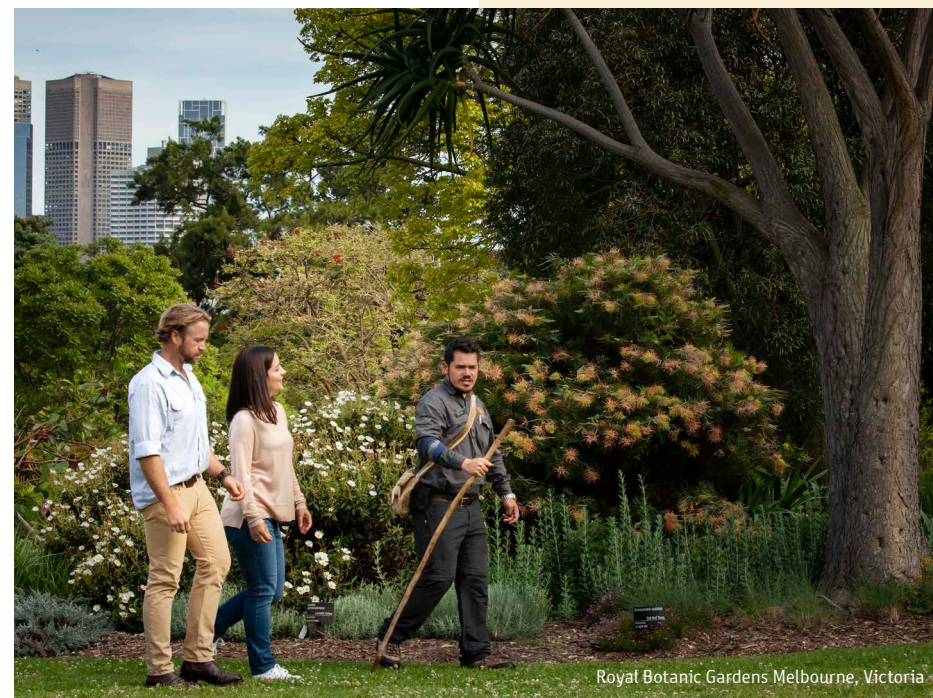
Just outside Brisbane/Meeanjin, the [Spirits of the Red Sand's Aboriginal Dinner Show](#) is another great example of that desire to share the Aboriginal experience. A live performance with song and dance that passes through a 19th

Century village complete with gunyah dwellings (traditional huts), it tells the story of Jarrah and his brothers as they meet Europeans for the first time and is performed by descendants of the Aboriginal people who lived here in South-East Queensland back in the 1800s.

Tropical North Queensland's city of Cairns might be best known for its proximity to the Great Barrier Reef, but it also allows privileged access to local Aboriginal heritage, which is alive and thriving in the local communities. The [Pamagirri Aboriginal Experience at Rainforestation Nature Park](#) in nearby Kuranda offers interactive introductions to the traditional weapons, tools, bush tucker, song and dance of the area, while a tour with [Walkabout Cultural Adventures](#) will reveal how Kuku Yalanji people have lived in harmony with the tropical coastal landscape for more than 65,000 years.



A diverse range of Aboriginal experiences are available in the regional cities of New South Wales, from Aboriginal-guided stand-up paddleboarding tours in Coffs Harbour with [Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure Tours](#), to captivating cultural tours of the Wagga Wagga region with Wiradjuri man Mark Saddler of [Bundy Cultural Tours](#). Then, of course, there's Sydney/Warrane, where you'll find the walking tours of [Dreamtime Southern X](#), the fascinating First Nations collection at the [Australian Museum](#), and the Aboriginal tours of the [Royal Botanic Garden Sydney](#). Read more about Sydney/Warrane's Indigenous side below.



Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, Victoria



Dreamtime Southern X, New South Wales



The Royal Botanic Garden Sydney, New South Wales

THE INDIGENOUS SIDE OF SYDNEY/WARRANE

Australia's most famous city has grown into a multicultural metropolis of some five million residents, but Sydney/Warrane's first citizens – the 29 clans of the Eora Nation – have inhabited the area's beaches, hills, rivers and harbour for tens of thousands of years. Theirs is a presence that can be seen and felt in several ways.

To see some of Sydney/Warrane's most famous sites from an alternative view, join a [Dreamtime Southern X](#) tour of The Rocks precinct. Wander the city's foreshore in view of the Sydney Opera House and Harbour Bridge, and gain insight into everything from Dreamtime Creation stories to traditional fishing techniques employed by Aboriginal peoples on Sydney Harbour. You'll

also learn about bush food, medicines and ochre bark and body painting, gaining not just an education but a spiritual connection with the Sydney/Warrane region's First Nations peoples as you go.

Their presence can also be felt in the [Royal Botanic Garden Sydney](#), 30 hectares of green in the heart of the city, which has long been a significant site for the Gadigal people. The garden runs an Aboriginal Harbour Heritage Tour and a Bush Tucker Tour. From here it's a short walk to Sydney Opera House, where you can see a very clear sign of Sydney/Warrane coming to terms with – and embracing – its Aboriginal past and present. At sunset every



Australian Museum, New South Wales

day, the sails of the Sydney Opera House are lit with a seven-minute light show, [Badu Gili](#) ("Water Light" in the language of the Gadigal), which celebrates Aboriginal cultures at what was a traditional gathering place for millennia. From here, it's also possible to walk to Sydney/Warrane's hottest precinct, [Barangaroo](#) – so named after a woman of the Cammeraygal clan, who lived here in the 18th century. A world-leading urban renewal project on some of the most expensive real estate in the world, Barangaroo wasn't just transformed into a thriving neighbourhood precinct, but also the Barangaroo Reserve. This breathtaking expanse of greenery, planted exclusively with native flora, was hotly pursued by several multinational corporations for development before ultimately being devoted to recreating the natural landscape – one similar to that which the Eora people would have enjoyed before European settlement.



Venture North Safaris, Northern Territory

WHY EVERYONE SHOULD VISIT AUSTRALIA'S REMOTE ART CENTRES

An artist in the Tiwi Islands mixes pigments drawn from the earth, preparing to paint the Country she grew up in. She blends the iron oxide stained ochre with water, stirring it with a twig in an old tin. As she creates, she talks with onlookers, inviting them into this practice that's been continued for some 65,000 years. It's an acutely authentic experience: one you're unlikely to have anywhere other than a remote Aboriginal art centre.

While the wording is subtle, art centres are distinctly different from art galleries. Owned and run by the local community, they provide a place for artists in far-flung destinations to gather to work on their craft and share their culture. They're able to share rarely spoken languages and circulate ancient stories, which is essential to preserving them.

"Going to an art centre gives you this incredible insight into the positives and the cultural strength of Aboriginal peoples in remote Australia," says Cathy Cummins,

who manages [Waringarri Aboriginal Arts & Tours](#) in Western Australia's Kimberley region. "They maintain culture, as our senior Elder artist Peggy Griffiths says, 'So that our children's grandchildren's grandchildren will know their culture'."

Within sight of Uluru in the Northern Territory, Anangu artists from [Maruku Arts](#) teach dot painting workshops and lead walks revealing fascinating stories linked to the sacred monolith. The art centre also holds art markets, selling works by the 900-odd outback artists it represents. Further north in the Tiwi Islands, visited with [SeaLink NT](#), artists screen print in open studios or paint and carve outdoors. What this means for the visitor is the chance to purchase one-off pieces directly from the creator. Not only is there a connection made with the artist, but the contribution also allows artists to stay in their homelands, where employment is otherwise scarce. Any purchase you make is a step towards economic independence and pride for the artist.

Injalak Arts, in the Northern Territory's Arnhem Land, is one of Australia's most remote art centres; a haven for Aboriginal artists creating colourful weavings, paintings and screen prints while 'yarning' (talking) to observers brought there by [Venture North Safaris](#). Usually, about



Waringarri Aboriginal Arts & Tours, Western Australia



SeaLink NT – Tiwi Islands, Northern Territory

60 per cent of each sale goes back to the artist, with the remainder shared between the community and the centre, which employs local Aboriginal people and supplies art materials. Cathy Cummins at Waringarri sees sales impact the buyer's emotional value in the piece, too.

"When people see the Country and then meet the artist, that memento they've purchased – whether it's a small piece or a \$20,000 piece – it has an incredible impact on the person," she says. "They see it in their home and it's a direct link back to that experience."



Kakadu Cultural Tours, Northern Territory

BRINGING THE LANDSCAPE TO LIFE: AUSTRALIA THROUGH INDIGENOUS EYES

On a stroll alongside the Murrumbidgee River in the Wagga Wagga region of New South Wales, there is much to look at: sandy river beaches glistening in the sunlight, majestic river gums lining the banks, perhaps a flash of turquoise as a kingfisher swoops to snatch its prey. According to Wiradjuri man Mark Saddler, however, you can't fully connect to this incredible landscape until you commit all your senses to the experience.

"We encourage people on our tours to look, listen, smell, and use another sense most people don't even think they have, and that's feeling the landscape without even touching it," says the owner of Bundy Cultural Tours. When you're at one with the landscape, Mark adds, it reveals its secrets.

"On a recent tour I noticed a ring tree I hadn't seen before," Mark says. "We used these trees (with their limbs twisted to form a ring shape) as territory boundary markers. This particular

tree was about 800 years old, and the tour group helped me to document it."

An intimate understanding of the landscape lies at the core of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. No matter where you are in Australia, a tour with an Indigenous guide will change your perspective.

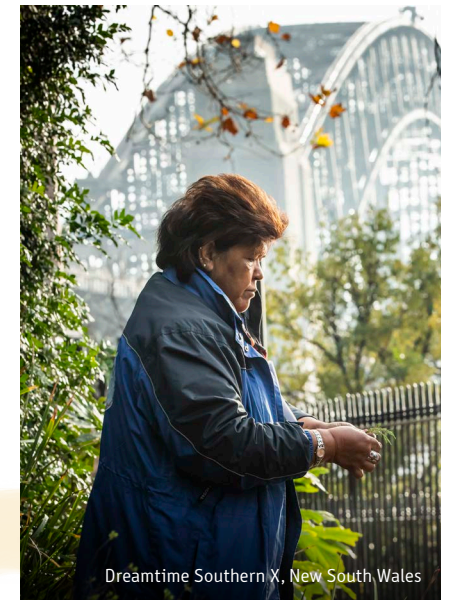
In Nitmiluk Gorge in the Northern Territory's Top End, for instance, a Jawoyn guide with [Nitmiluk Tours](#) will point out ancient rock art hidden in plain sight. At Uluru, on tour with [SEIT Outback Australia](#), the rock is seen through the eyes of the Anangu people; guests learn the Creation story of how its caves and hollows have been transformed into scars, left by the battle between Kuniya, the [woma python](#), and Liru, [the poisonous snake](#).

To read the landscape fluently, you must also understand the cycles of the natural world. Aboriginal peoples are attuned to the constant flow of changes in the plants and animals that surround us. Many tribes note these changes so carefully that they can discern six separate seasons rather than four. The harbingers of each season vary with the locality – at [Wilpena Pound](#) in South Australia's Flinders Ranges, for

instance, the blossoming of the acacia trees signals the start of kangaroo hunting season.

It isn't just outback Aboriginal groups who know how to read the stories in the landscape. Margret Campbell of [Dreamtime Southern X](#), who runs walking tours through the heart of Sydney/Warrane, shows her guests that despite the skyscrapers and the highways, ancient landscapes survive – even in the shadow of the Harbour Bridge itself.

"Right next to the bridge, you can stand on this bedrock of sandstone strata which is billions of years old. It's what the city is built on – strip off the tar and concrete and there's the sandstone, with the saltwater running down it," she says. "And when you know where to look, you can see trees that still grow out of the ancient bedrock. That story is sitting right there – but most people can't see it."



Dreamtime Southern X, New South Wales

BEYOND ROCK ART: THE DIVERSITY OF ABORIGINAL CULTURAL SITES

Australia is home to some of the oldest and most extensive collections of rock art in the world. But these vivid paintings and engravings created by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at least 17,300 years ago are not the only way their knowledge has been preserved. Across Australia, a range of cultural sites reveal how Indigenous communities have thrived for millennia.

“Middens are the earliest form of conservation,” says Mark Saddler, owner of [Bundiyi Cultural Tours](#), who leads tours to freshwater middens on the banks of the Murrumbidgee River near Wagga Wagga in south-western New South Wales. Ancient piles of shells and bones, middens, Mark explains, are a marker of where Aboriginal communities set up seasonal camps and what they ate, showing future visitors which foods they should avoid to ensure the regeneration of specific species.

On Tasmania/lutruwita's [wukalina Walk](#) in the company of a palawa (Aboriginal Tasmanian) guide, guests experience an enormous midden on the state's north-east coast, where scallop and oyster shells have been decaying for thousands of years. “Imagine the Dreamtime stories told around a fire cooking up scallops,” says guide Carleeta Thomas. Visitors on the three-night hike still enjoy a similar seafood bounty, thanks in part to those early conservationists.

Back in Wagga Wagga, Mark's guests also visit “scar trees”: native trees with part of their trunk removed to create shields or canoes. “When you see a scar tree, you can tell this was a hunting area, or was flooded in the past,” says Mark.



Koorie Heritage Trust, Victoria



Bundiyi Cultural Tours, New South Wales

To find these cultural sites hidden in plain view, “you just need to know where to look,” says Rob Hyatt from the [Koorie Heritage Trust](#) in Melbourne/Narrm. “Most people walk past scar trees along the Yarra River every day and have no idea of the history they hold.”

It's a similar story for ancient grinding stones used for everything from grinding grain into flour, to crushing clays to make artistic pigments, which were often left in situ for communal use.



Venture North Australia, Northern Territory

You'll see some on [Venture North Safaris'](#) tour to the Cobourg Peninsula in Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory. [Ngurrangga Tours](#) in Western Australia's Pilbara also share how local Aboriginal communities used similar tools to prepare food and communicate through art. It's a tradition preserved today thanks to knowledge purposefully passed down over centuries.



TREND: THE UNSTOPPABLE RISE OF AUSTRALIA'S PHENOMENAL ANCIENT CUISINE

Slow food. Farm-to-fork. Food mileage. Provenance. The international interest in conscious food consumption has reached fever pitch, and Australia's food scene is no exception. But here, a different spin on the trend has emerged from the unlikelyst of places: the outback. Foods such as saltbush (a desert shrub with a beautifully clean umami) and Kakadu plum (a fruit packed with vitamin C and antioxidants) have been

sustaining Aboriginal Australians for more than 65,000 years. Today, these special ingredients – complete with time-honoured approach to preparation – are once again embraced, albeit with a very modern twist. Dine on them in some of the world's most acclaimed restaurants (including Melbourne's [Attica](#)) for insight into Australia's emergence as a leading food destination, or escape the bright lights for Australia's bush tucker

capital, [Ayers Rock Resort](#). A hotbed of native food celebration and innovation, the resort offers a wide-ranging program of native food experiences which includes everything from free, accessible cooking demonstrations to the famous [Sounds of Silence](#) dinner, which will see you enjoy a bush tucker-inspired meal under the stars while a resident "star talker" decodes the twinkling canopy above you.



Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures, Western Australia



The Royal Botanic Garden Sydney, New South Wales

Aboriginal experiences across the nation also provide plenty of opportunities to catch and cook your own bush tucker, such as the Wilubidy (Francois Peron National Park) Camping Safari hosted by [Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures](#) in Western Australia's Francois Peron National Park.

Then again, you don't have to travel the length and breadth of Australia or spend a fortune to get a bush tucker education. If you're in Sydney/Warrane, simply head to the [Royal Botanic Garden](#) for an Aboriginal Bush Tucker Tour right in the middle of Australia's biggest city.

DELICIOUS AND NUTRITIOUS: INDIGENOUS INGREDIENTS TO TRY AT HOME

Open up most pantries in Australia and you will find ingredients from around the world, from Thai curry pastes to South American quinoa. Few of us, however, have cooked using native bush foods – and that is something [Mark Olive](#) would like to change.

“We have embraced every other food culture; I’d like to see us champion our uniquely Australian flavours, to start experimenting with them in our kitchens,” says the Indigenous chef and TV presenter. “Do a bit of research online and you will find there are Indigenous growers out there producing these ingredients. We need to support them.”



Dale Tilbrook Experiences, Western Australia

Many of our native ingredients are remarkably versatile. Wattleseed, for instance, can have very different flavours, depending on whether it has been ground or roasted.

“Green wattleseed tastes almost like peanut satay – it’s terrific in vinaigrettes, and adds a nice bit of texture and crunch,” says Mark. “Roast wattleseed has a lovely coffee-chocolate flavour; try adding it to Anzac biscuits or tiramisu.”

Wattleseed isn’t just delicious, it’s also remarkably good for you. “Wattleseed is high in protein, iron, zinc and fibre, and it’s naturally low GI,” says Dale Tilbrook of [Dale Tilbrook Experiences](#) in Western Australia, which champions bush foods. “Many of our bush foods are also packed with antioxidants, including quandong (also known as native peach) and muntrie berries, which have even more antioxidants than blueberries.”

Try them during Dale’s Bush Tucker Tasting and Talk experiences, where you will learn how to use these ingredients in simple recipes while listening to some of Dale’s best bush yarns. Alternatively, you can learn more at your local botanic garden. The [Royal Botanic Garden Sydney](#), for instance, offers [Aboriginal cultural tours](#) that showcase its many Indigenous plantings, including the *Cadi Jam Ora: First Encounters* exhibit.

“All bush foods have very distinct, powerful flavours, some of which are really surprising,” says Josh Brown, the Gardens’ manager of Aboriginal Strategy. “Take the native raspberries – they actually taste like watermelon.”



Royal Botanic Garden Sydney, New South Wales

Josh says that Indigenous plants are easy to find these days: “The Indigenous plants in our garden are all available from nurseries,” he affirms. They’re also easy to grow. “Unlike European plants, they are designed to survive in our climatic conditions. Some can even grow so prolifically, they’ll get out of control if you’re not careful,” Josh adds.

Among the latter are warrigal greens: a leafy, spinach-like vegetable found on the menus of top restaurants across the country. “Just be aware that you need to blanch warrigal greens before you eat them in large quantities,” says Josh. “Otherwise you could get an upset stomach.”

The bush food that most visitors fall in love with is lemon myrtle, says Josh – a citrus-scented plant that makes a great addition to cakes and pastries. “Guests love smelling it,” he says. “When you crush up the leaves and breathe in, it’s as if the whole world has suddenly changed for the better.”



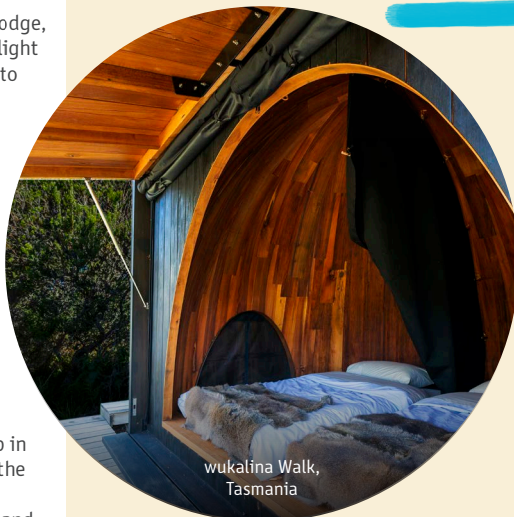
Ngaran Ngaran Culture Awareness, New South Wales



FROM LODGES TO GLAMP SITES: EXCLUSIVE ABORIGINAL ACCOMMODATION LIKE NOTHING ELSE

For many people, a stay in an Aboriginal lodge, wilderness camp or glamp site is the highlight of their trip Down Under, thanks not only to an immersion in the world's oldest living cultures, but a stay in a truly spectacular location.

Remote wilderness and Aboriginal cultures also combine with dramatic effect at Mt Borradaile in West Arnhem Land, where [Davidson's Arnhemland Safaris](#) runs an eco-tour, fine dining and lodge experience amid the remarkable wetlands, billabongs, sandstone escarpments, catacombs and rock art galleries of the sacred landscape. It's a similar story at Lords Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris' permanent bush camp in the heart of Kakadu National Park, also in the Northern Territory's Top End, where solar-powered glamping tents with raised floors and



twin beds offer an opportunity to connect deeply with the natural and cultural landscape surrounding you in comfort.

Meanwhile, in South Australia's Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park, you'll find [Wilpena Pound Resort](#). A natural amphitheatre estimated to be 800 million years old, Wilpena Pound is an awe-inspiring landscape, and the traditional home of the Adnyamathanha (or Yura) people who, since 2012, have also owned the resort – the only accommodation in the park. Take part in a Welcome to Country ceremony and mix with Yura locals, and make sure you join one of the

resort's Aboriginal cultural tours to see this impossibly ancient land through the world's oldest, and perhaps wisest, eyes.

Further south, on Tasmania/lutruwita's Aboriginal-guided [wukalina Walk](#), you'll spend your first two nights in architect-designed huts inspired by the half-dome shelters traditionally used by palawa people, the island state's Traditional Custodians. Spend an evening around the fire in conversation with Elders and guides before snuggling up under a wallaby-fur throw and allowing the sound of the nearby ocean to lull you to sleep.



Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures, Western Australia

EXPERIENCING THE SIX SEASONS

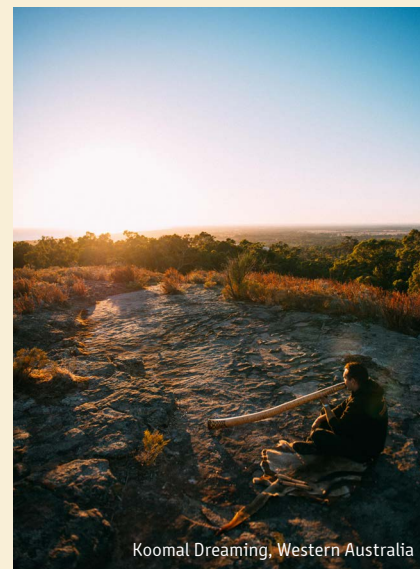
Summer, autumn (fall), winter and spring might be the most common descriptions of the seasons, but they're not the only method of dividing up the year and its weather patterns. In Aboriginal cultures, many groups live by a six-season calendar, breaking up the months by the flowers that bloom, the fruits that ripen, the animals and fish that reach prime condition, and the ways the skies behave. The seasons don't change because of a date on a calendar; instead, the switch is closely observed in nature, and felt intuitively as conditions change. Far from being guesswork, science is increasingly recognising this [traditional knowledge](#), with the CSIRO (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation) and Australia's Bureau of Meteorology working with numerous Indigenous groups to [document](#) their six seasons. Used by generations upon generations of First Nations peoples across Australia, each localised system plays to nuances and awakenings that don't necessarily fall neatly into four distinct seasonal categories.

Modern Australia is embracing this knowledge in other ways. Perth/Boorloo's best fine diner, [Wildflower](#), has leveraged the six seasons since it opened, using them to choose ingredients based on what's naturally available. This method allows the restaurant to ensure the sustainability of the food sourced, just as the Noongar people have done for thousands of years. As the year flips between the seasons birak, bunuru, djeran, makuru, djilba and kambarang, the menu changes; each new culinary creation is inspired by the characteristics of that season.

It's a system that Wadandi custodian Josh Whiteland of [Koomal Dreaming](#), three hours' drive south of Perth/Boorloo in Margaret River, explains to those joining his cultural tours. He points out that as well as determining what's best to eat at any particular time, the six seasons also indicate which medicinal plants are growing and right to use – knowledge that could save a life.



Lords Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris, Northern Territory



Koomal Dreaming, Western Australia

Walk around the rocky tip of Cape Naturaliste or, for groups of 10 or more, take part in a native food tasting and barbecue with Josh Whiteland [Koomal Dreaming](#).

Being a different language group, the words for each season differ to those used in Western Australia, as they do in [Kakadu National Park](#), where a locally appropriate version of the six seasons is observed. In April, for example, it's banggerreng – otherwise known as “knock 'em down” storm season – when windy weather flattens the region's spear grasses. Local guide Sab Lord of [Lords Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris](#) knows the seasons intimately and reveals them on his tailored experiences of this World Heritage-listed natural reserve.

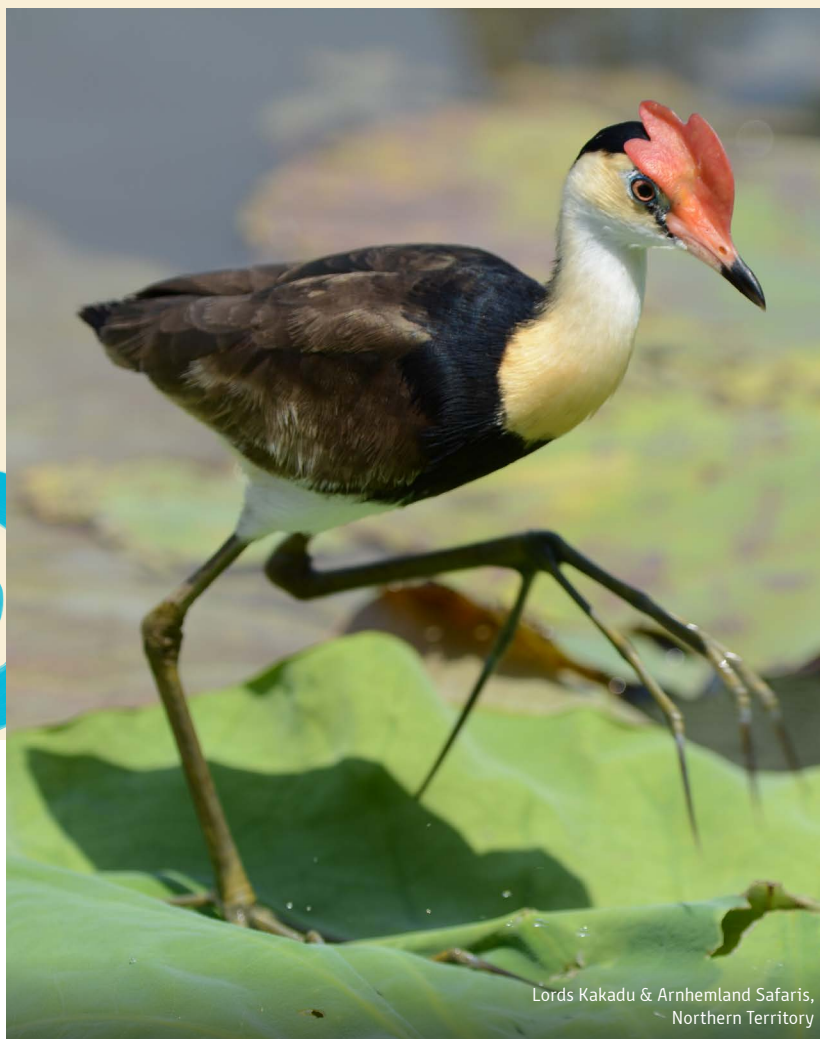
GOING ON SAFARI: AUSTRALIA'S WILDLIFE THROUGH AN INDIGENOUS LENS

Koalas. Kangaroos. Echidnas. Wombats. Without an Aboriginal guide, they're fascinating creatures only found in Australia. With one, they become cultural Totems, food sources, the bearers of wisdom and guides to the seasons.

Australia's unique wildlife and stunning natural attractions draw almost 70 per cent of the nation's visitors, or about five million people each year, according to research, and nature is named as the most influential trip-planning factor for almost 40 per cent of inbound visitors. Experiencing both through the lens of an Aboriginal guide adds a layer of understanding that's unobtainable in any other way.



Worn Gundidj @ Tower Hill, Victoria



Lords Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris,
Northern Territory

In the tricoloured, World Heritage-listed landscape of Shark Bay, [Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures](#) provides a unique take on the dugongs, whales, dolphins and, yes, sharks clustering below the West Australian waterline. As the red earth merges with bone-hued sand and turquoise ocean, guide Darren Capewell leads skimmy kayaks or stand-up paddleboards across bountiful waters, sharing his people's unbreakable spiritual connection to the ecosystem that has long provided their life source. His purpose is to get you to feel the country, rather than just see it.

Local guides enhance Kakadu Tourism's [Yellow Water cruises](#) with their passed-down knowledge of the life cycles of the fauna living in the spectacular wetlands. They share stories as saltwater crocodiles emerge from motionless water in golden dawn light to the cackle of some of the 60 species of native bird.

Meanwhile, the guided walk through a rehabilitated wildlife reserve at Victoria's Tower Hill with [Worn Gundidj @ Tower Hill](#) allows for up-close encounters with iconic Australian animals such as kangaroos, emus, koalas and wallabies. As they roam freely, you learn about bush foods and handle Aboriginal tools that were once a part of daily life in the dormant volcano surrounds.



Kakadu Tourism, Northern Territory

ABORIGINAL ASTRONOMY: SEEING THE NIGHT SKY THROUGH A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

Well before Galileo and the ancient Greek astronomers gazed upon the stars, Australia's Aboriginal peoples were interpreting the night sky. Believed to be the [world's first astronomers](#), they used the universe to navigate, read the seasons, predict weather patterns and explain the creation of the earth and the universe.

There's evidence of their sophisticated knowledge in the state of Victoria, at a stone-strewn astronomical observatory estimated to date back some 11,000 years. The site, called Wurdi Youang, tracked the setting sun at the solstices and equinoxes, accurate to within a few degrees, well before the creation of Stonehenge.

It's astounding to see the level of comprehension that existed amongst Aboriginal peoples tens of thousands of years ago, and which continues to be passed down. For example, the changing position of the sun and the stars has long been linked to the [cycles](#) of edible creatures and plants, signalling times of migration, breeding and birthing. It was also recognised that planets move differently from stars. Some Aboriginal groups worked out that moon haloes could help predict rain, while others observed star [twinkling](#) to forecast various weather events. Eclipses are mentioned in ancient storytelling, as well as the link between the moon and the tides.

The Creation stories and spirituality of Aboriginal Australians originate from the world around them, including the stars. It wasn't just the stars that were watched; Aboriginal peoples also looked into the dark patches of the Milky Way and made out a giant [celestial emu](#). A shift in its position would indicate when it was time to hunt emu or collect its eggs. Meanwhile, the footprint of this emu is marked by Australia's best-known constellation, otherwise known as the Southern Cross.



Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures, Western Australia



SEIT Outback Australia, Northern Territory

On night tours, Darren "Capes" Capewell of [Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures](#) points out the emu and shares its stories, as well as other lessons taught when certain constellations emerge. The Seven Sisters Creation story, which tracks a fraught journey across Australia as the girls are pursued by an ancestral being, connects to the star cluster known as the Pleiades.

Aboriginal peoples also used the stars to navigate their travels across the land. They created an extensive network of unmarked routes used for trade and storytelling, well before Europeans set foot on their Country.

These routes could stretch for hundreds, or even thousands of kilometres, and could be navigated by people who'd never used them, with the help of memory-jogging [star maps](#) that represent the landmarks, waterholes and turns on the route. Early explorers and settlers used Aboriginal peoples as guides, and it's believed that they would've been taken on these established routes – the best and easiest ways – leading to the creation of marked tracks. These turned into a number of what are now Australia's main roads and highways. Few know they follow paths mapped out thousands of years ago.

AUSTRALIA'S ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES ARE IN NEED OF PRESERVATION

There are less than 300 people who speak the Noongar language in Western Australia. On the Tiwi Islands, only about 1700 native speakers are counted. In Central Australia, fewer than [3000 people](#) still speak Pitjantjatjara. The numbers create a clear picture: that Australia's Aboriginal languages are highly endangered, and in need of preservation.

At the time of Australia's colonisation in the late 18th century, at least 250 different Aboriginal language groups were counted, with an estimated [800 native dialects](#) in use. Today, the estimate is put at around [120 existing Indigenous languages](#), with most Aboriginals adopting English, or the blended Australian Aboriginal English as their first or second language; some also mix their mother tongue and other Indigenous dialects in a form of pidgin or Kriol.

Many older Aboriginals still speak numerous Indigenous languages, yet it's estimated that only [13 to 20 languages](#) can be described as "healthy", in that they're being learnt by younger generations.

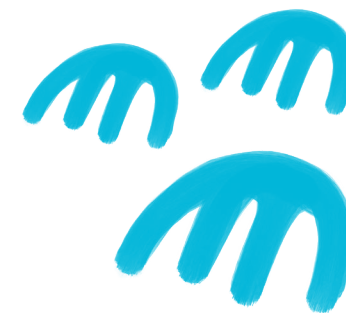
In the face of this loss of language, and with it, cultures and identities, many individuals are working to protect their spoken cultures. Indigenous singer songwriter [Gina Williams](#) switched to only singing in the Noongar language in 2013 and has been sharing the beauty of her ancestral tongue with concert halls and music festivals ever since. In 2016, she collaborated with [The Church's](#) Steve Kilbey to translate the 1988 global hit, [Under the Milky Way](#), which they went on to perform together (the song celebrated its 30th year in 2018). Williams, who was a foster child, connected with her cultural backstory by learning the Balladong Noongar dialect at TAFE college in Perth/Boorloo and describes it as a "beautiful, musical language".



Dreamtime Southern X, New South Wales



Maruku Arts, Northern Territory



Meanwhile, in the lands surrounding Uluru, interpreters are used to link visitors with Anangu artists – who speak Pitjantjatjara – at [Maruku Arts](#), enabling the symbols, motifs and cultural methods to be translated across cultures and unlocked for modern appreciation. Similarly, [Waringarri Aboriginal Arts & Tours](#) in the Northern Territory's Kimberley region provides a space where artisans can practice culture including the Miriwoong language, which has fewer than 20 fluent speakers remaining.

With the Sydney Harbour Bridge in the background, a Welcome to Country ceremony delivered in language acts as a link between visitors and the area's Traditional Owners. The [Dreamtime Southern X](#) team explains Aboriginal language origins – Sydney/Warrane once had five Indigenous languages, now there are two – and reverts to language in stories and songs throughout its tours.

Plenty of Indigenous words are used in everyday Australian English vernacular, too. Kangaroo, galah, yabby and barramundi describe native fauna, while boomerang, willy willy, billabong and humpy are common names for objects and the environment. These words are a small, yet significant part of Australian culture, and point to the value of preserving the Indigenous languages that produced them.

ABORIGINAL ADVENTURE TOURISM IS TAKING OFF BIG TIME

From quad biking to spear throwing, Australia's Traditional Owners are offering tourists unrivalled adventure experiences.

It might be tempting to presume all Aboriginal experiences involve a serious appreciation of Indigenous cultures, its ancient ways and tens of thousands of years of history. But far from being restricted by the past, Aboriginal peoples are using their cultural backstories to enhance the fun of an ever-growing list of adventure activities. As nature-loving, outdoorsy people, they relish the fast-paced action of quad biking, the gritty thrills of sand boarding, and the centring peace of kayaking as much as anyone. Yet they hold an ace up their sleeves: often, traditional land rights mean they have access to secret corners where others can't go to; their shared cultural knowledge means they can find the way to hidden spots others don't even know about, and they can see things others overlook. For Aboriginal guides and those who join them, it allows people to walk among rarely seen rock art, spear and eat mud crabs using traditional tools, visit Aboriginal communities in remote areas and explore national parks in ways others simply can't.

Take New South Wales-based [Sand Dune Adventures](#), who rev 400cc quad bikes over the highest coastal sand dunes in the Southern Hemisphere – measuring 12 to 30 metres (40 to 100 feet) high – and then invite you to sand-board down them. Tours weave in stories about the Worimi people and their long-running connection to the land, adding context to the adventure.



Sand Dune Adventures,
New South Wales



Nitmiluk Tours, Northern Territory

With [Walkabout Cultural Adventures](#) in Tropical North Queensland, you have permission to do something you'd never be allowed to do in real life: throw a spear. The traditional method of catching a fishy feed looks simple enough, but give it a go and it's surprisingly challenging. Then put your new skill to use in the nearby mangroves, where a mud crab feast awaits nimble hunters.

A tranquil sea kayak in Western Australia with [Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures](#) becomes a wildlife education as you paddle above turtles, rays, sharks and perhaps even an elusive dugong in the World Heritage-listed waters. And peering into the rocky clefts and crevasses of Nitmiluk Gorge, in the Northern Territory, from a scenic cruise is one thing, but getting so close you can touch the age-sculpted

wilderness from a [Nitmiluk Tours](#) canoe – then plunge into the water for a swim – is quite another. Or, raise the bar even higher by glimpsing the 70-metre-high landforms from a helicopter. Then, in the state's tropical wetlands, the crocodilian inhabitants become completely accessible on an aquatic safari. It's a fitting introduction to lands where some of the most extraordinary rock art galleries in Australia are hidden in caves, visible only through [Davidson's Arnhemland Safaris](#) guides, who have special permission to share them. Aboriginal adventure tourism adds extra layers, making experiences as meaningful as they are memorable.



Davidson's Arnhemland Safaris,
Northern Territory



SEEING UNDERWATER THROUGH ABORIGINAL EYES

Tasmania/lutruwita's Bay of Fires is arguably one of Australia's most extraordinarily arresting sites. Its glass-like water, rusty boulders and blindingly white sand is the subject of countless photographs. Delve beneath its surface beauty, however, and discover the Indigenous stories that hide in the rich earth, in the ancient rocks and in the elegant bushland, transforming the place into a living natural museum. Those stories are unlocked on a four-day guided tour known as the [wukalina Walk](#), led by the palawa people. Time spent with this Aboriginal group is particularly astonishing: they're the only group of humans to evolve in isolation for more than 10,000 years, developing a culture that's unique in the world. Their insight into the surrounding ocean, its islands and the magical coastline is transformative, and unobtainable in any other way.

A similarly immersive dive into the New South Wales coastland comes via a ninth generation Yuin guide, who shares his homeland through a number of traditional Aboriginal ceremonies over two days. From a welcome dance to a sunrise beach ceremony, a yarning circle and a farewell whale dreaming ceremony, [Ngaran Ngaran Culture Awareness](#) offers saltwater interactions that simply don't exist elsewhere.

Well-known operator Josh Whiteland from [Koomal Dreaming](#), offers experiences that marry the fragrant Margaret River air – stung by wildflowers and the sea – with coastal foraging and an education into the ecology of this rugged coastline. The Noongar connection to the beaches, cliffs and capes is drawn both from the past, ongoing traditions and a present-day appreciation for the natural bounty of this water-lapped area.

At the other end of Western Australia, Yawuru man Bart Pigram, from [Narlijia Experiences Broome](#), tells the stories of the original saltwater people of Broome on his Mangrove Discovery Experience.

A canoe-bound perspective of the Katherine River is granted by [Nitmiluk Tours](#), bringing the grand waterway to life through the eyes of the Jawoyn. Most who approach the national park's 70-metre-high rock face will see only its grandeur: with an Aboriginal guide, you'll spot the rock art hiding near the water's surface. A remarkable, and remarkably unusual way to experience Australia's aquatic landscapes.

Of course, one of Australia's greatest underwater experiences is visiting the Great Barrier Reef, and [Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel](#) offer an enlightening perspective on this national treasure. A cruise presents a unique opportunity to hear Dreamtime stories about the reef told by Traditional Owners, while a guided snorkel tour allows you to get up close to the reef's marine life and better understand the cultural significance of this diverse ecosystem.

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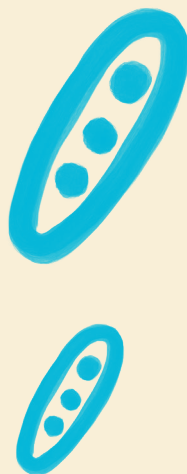
wukalina Walk, Tasmania



Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel, Queensland



Karrke Aboriginal Cultural Experience & Tours,
Northern Territory



Venture North Safaris, Northern Territory

GAINING A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE OF THE OUTBACK

Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples regard their Country as family. It is loved, cared for and respected, with a lifelong connection formed from birth. There's no exclusive possession, no fences, no development and no exploitation: people and earth live in harmony, inseparable from one another.

That deep connection to the natural environment is evident anytime you're experiencing the bush and the outback with an Aboriginal guide. Get an understanding of that connection with a [SEIT Outback Australia](#) tour led by Uluru's Anangu people. Your guides

will share the desert dunes of their homeland, plus take you off-road in a 4WD vehicle to parts of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park that most never see.

You'll also gain a different perspective of Watarrka National Park – home to the famous Kings Canyon – on a one-hour tour with [Karrke Aboriginal Cultural Experience & Tours](#). Christine Breden and Peter Abbott teach visitors about the history and significance of dot painting, weapons, bush tucker and medicinal plants as a way to share and perpetuate their Luritja and Pertame (Southern

Arrernte) cultures. The chance to touch and experience plants and artefacts enables a deeper appreciation and understanding of the outback; suddenly, you see it differently.

In South Australia, be introduced to Wilpena Pound's 800-million-year-old natural amphitheatre with a traditional Welcome to Country ceremony, followed by an Aboriginal guided walk that shares the importance of Dreaming to Indigenous culture and spirituality. The Yura people, who own and run [Wilpena Pound Resort](#), will also point out otherwise overlooked bush shrubs that

change with the seasons and gorge fossil layers that defy comprehension.

Having disconnected from the “real world” for four or five days on a [Venture North Safaris](#) journey through Kakadu, Arnhem Land and the remote Cobourg Peninsula, you'll start to perceive the land as family, as Aboriginal peoples do. Treasuring the one place that provides everything you need, from food and water to shelter, warmth and beauty, begins to make perfect sense. You'll wonder why you ever saw it any other way.



Garma Festival, Northern Territory

ABORIGINAL FESTIVALS, CELEBRATIONS AND EVENTS: ANCIENT RITUALS FOR MODERN TIMES

Many Aboriginal ceremonies are still regarded as fiercely sacred and are open only to Australia's Aboriginal peoples. Others are more public, and readily shared with a wide audience through festivals that bring together song, music, dance, body decoration, sculpture and painting.

These events – sometimes known as “corroborees” – are a coming together of people to dance, sing, teach and talk. Performers are often decorated in paint, feathers, bark, headdresses, grass skirts and other cultural costumes. Whatever's on the schedule, they offer one of the best ways to connect to Australia's Indigenous cultures.

In northern Queensland, a circular dance ground is believed to have been in use for some 40,000 years. One of Australia's oldest cultural festivals, the [Laura Dance Festival](#) now invites people of all backgrounds to immerse themselves in the ancient practices of 20 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, some of whom travel for days to perform. Visitors cluster around the ground as the rhythmic banging of feet causes brown dirt to rise into the air. The event is the highlight of a [Culture Connect](#) trip that also observes the globally significant Quinkan rock art and passes through the World Heritage-listed Daintree National Park with a Traditional Owner.

[Garma Festival](#) is Australia's highest profile cultural exchange, drawing Elders, politicians, artists, international travellers and the general public with its line-up of traditional performance, knowledge sharing and open conversation. Held in far-flung Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, it's coveted for the

deep immersion and interactions that occur. [Davidson's Arnhemland Safaris](#) operates nearby, allowing visitors to attend the festival then take a deep dive into other Indigenous cultural experiences and accommodations.

Not all festivals are held in the bush. Sydney/Warrane hosts two important events each summer: the [Yabun Festival](#), held on January 26 (Australia Day, which is not celebrated by all Indigenous peoples), and [Dance Rites](#), which is staged outside the Sydney Opera House each November. Each bring cultural traditions to the city, but if you can't make them, the city's Dreaming tour, held by [Dreamtime Southern X](#), and the immersive Harbour Heritage Tour through [The Royal Botanic Garden Sydney](#) both run year-round.

Some are traditional festivals where music, song and dance tell the stories of ancestral heroes containing the blueprints for living within Aboriginal cultures and law (known as “lore”). Other festivals provide a contemporary fusion of music and dance, featuring high profile modern-day artists. Sport is also widely embraced by Indigenous communities and is a feature event at some festivals including the Tiwi Islands Football Grand Final and Art Sale accessed via [Sealink NT](#).

All ages are involved at Aboriginal festivals. Little children are “painted up” and brought out to dance with their relatives. Elders sit around the dance circle to sing, chant and clap sticks together. The communal spirit is palpable, something often absent from Western society.



Laura Dance Festival, Queensland



Koomal Dreaming, Western Australia



Flames of the Forest, Queensland

CONTEMPORARY ABORIGINAL MUSIC: A WONDERFUL FUSION OF PAST AND PRESENT

Aboriginal songs and music have been passed down for generations and tell the stories of ancestral heroes. Today many Aboriginal musicians mix traditional music with contemporary forms, producing a world-renowned unique fusion. Traditional Aboriginal music is so much more than a mere melody or a catchy chorus – it is a deeply engrained aspect of culture, which has been handed down through generations for tens of thousands of years.

Aboriginal songs have been sung not only to bring people together, but to maintain Indigenous knowledge. Songs tell the story of

Creation, of how the sun, sky, sea and land – and people – came to be and the rules (lore) given by the ancestral spirits to ensure the continuity of all living things. There are songs to heal the sick, bring harm to the enemy and influence weather patterns.

Many of the Creation stories are represented as elaborate Songlines, the concept of traditional storytelling with song. Aboriginal peoples can travel through their custodial Country using Songlines as a map, like an ancient GPS.

This unparalleled connection to music has endured well into the 21st century. But beyond chart-topping performers such as Dan Sultan, Kev Carmody and Jessica Mauboy, musicians all around Australia are evolving the way you can experience the power of Aboriginal song and, in turn, culture.

Among them is Josh Whiteland, a musician, dancer and didgeridoo player, who runs [Koomal Dreaming](#) around the coastal town of Dunsborough, south of Perth/Boorloo in Western Australia. A Wadandi man – one of several Aboriginal groups in the area known collectively as Noongar – Josh draws on his deep understanding of Country to share Noongar culture and lore in the form of tours where music is a central component.

On a guided bushwalk through his ancestral lands, Josh will show you native foods and plants used for traditional medicine and explain the unique Noongar seasons as you head towards the spectacular Ngilgi Cave. Here, you will experience a magical didgeridoo performance, amplified by the cave's natural acoustics.

One of the most iconic Aboriginal instruments is the didgeridoo. Its resonant sound will set

your senses alight at Australia's only rainforest dining experience, [Flames of the Forest](#), set under the canopy of the Daintree Rainforest in Tropical North Queensland. Here you'll be served a seven-course gourmet dinner while local Aboriginal musicians play the didgeridoo and perform traditional songs.

Want to get a deeper understanding of this traditional men's instrument? Explore the Northern Territory's remote Arnhem Land region, where the didgeridoo is said to have originated. The yidaki – didgeridoo in the local Yolŋu language – is a profound part of Yolŋu culture, and is celebrated at the annual [Garma Festival](#), one of Australia's most significant Aboriginal events.



THE SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF AN ABORIGINAL SMOKING CEREMONY

For Aboriginal peoples, the power of fire and smoke stretches well beyond the obvious uses of heating and cooking. For thousands of years, the two have been combined in traditional smoking ceremonies, a custom whereby native leaves and wood are burnt to produce wafts of pale smoke scented by the Australian bush.

A ceremony signifies many things, depending on the occasion. Most commonly, it's used to cleanse an area of bad spirits, offer healing and wish wellbeing upon those present. The ancient blessing is delivered as smoke wafts over each person, symbolising goodwill and generosity. The traditional practice is also used to pay respect to ancestors, the land and sea, and can be a sign of forgiveness for past wrongs.

Smoking ceremonies bring people together for celebrations, including marriages and births, for initiations or separate men's and women's business, but equally for solemn events, such as the end of a treasured life. In modern-day Australia, contemporary smoking ceremonies are regularly performed at public, urban events both in language and English as a Welcome to Country. They're seen as a sign of respect to the land's Traditional Owners, recognition of the Country's history, and of conscious social inclusivity.



Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia – Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre, Queensland



SeaLink NT – Tiwi Islands, Northern Territory

Far from just lighting a fire, both the leaves and wood used are carefully selected for the different smoke they produce. Some woods are dampened to slow burning, or larger pieces are selected. Certain woods are believed to have cleansing properties, releasing natural oils as they burn. The plants used differ from region to region, and from clan to clan. At [Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre](#) in Tropical North Queensland, the Kuku Yalanji people perform a smoking ceremony to introduce guests to their Land and culture at the start of their Dreamtime Gorge Walks.

On a [SeaLink NT](#) tour of the Tiwi Islands, a smoking ceremony will drive away any bad spirits you've brought to the island from the big city. As each smoking ceremony is performed, a gift is released from one culture and offered to another; as the smoke clears, it's hoped the gift is wholeheartedly received.

MOVE TO THE BEAT AT AN ABORIGINAL DANCE PERFORMANCE



Pamagirri Aboriginal Experience at Rainforestation Nature Park, Queensland



Close your eyes and listen out for the sharp, flinty sound of wooden clap sticks as they're rhythmically hit together. Hear the song of an Aboriginal Elder singing in language, and the drone of a didgeridoo reverberating through the air. Then, tune your ears in to the softer, regular pounding of heels on ground. Aboriginal dance takes many forms, but the most common element is the "shake a leg" style of raising and lowering limbs to an earthy beat.

To an observer, traditional dance can feel all-encompassing. Rarely performed without music and song, it has been used for generations to share information. Aboriginal cultures are dominated by oral storytelling and many of the stories relate to native Australian animals. Bodies twist, turn, bend and dart as they morph into emus, brolgas, kangaroos and snakes. The movements are so expressive and so accurate, you can forget for a moment that you're watching a person.

Performers often dance their Totem (such as an animal species) – something they are assigned at birth and must look after for life. Totem dances are performed during a smoking ceremony to welcome guests on a Tiwi by Design tour with [SeaLink NT](#).

Dances vary widely from language group to language group and destination to destination, making this part of Aboriginal cultures as rich as it is deep.

Dances tell the stories of the Dreamtime, or Creation period, and the close relationship Aboriginal peoples and their ancestors have with the land. Aboriginal law, or lore, is also communicated through dance, with many teachings assisted by tales of evil spirits. There are also weather dances and medicine dances, as well as ceremonial dances for weddings, funerals, special gatherings and more.

[The Pamagirri Aboriginal Experience at Rainforestation Nature Park](#) in Tropical North Queensland evokes long-passed-down teachings on hunting and gathering. The ritual, in a rainforest amphitheatre, is coupled with a Dreamtime walk, as well as spear and boomerang throwing.

Traditional Aboriginal dance is still performed today, but modern forms of dance are also being embraced. Younger generations have found particular connections to hip-hop and reggae, expressing their link to the land in new ways, and not just in an urban setting. Artistic contemporary dance is also performed by the internationally regarded [Bangarra Dance Theatre](#), with professionally trained Indigenous dancers forming a bridge between 65,000 years of history and the modern era.



Spirits of the Red Sand,
Queensland

MODERN SPORT MEETS ANCIENT CULTURE: EXPERIENCE THE ABORIGINAL SPORTING SPIRIT



Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel, Queensland

From hurling spears and wrestling to traditional ball games – sport has always been integral to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Traditional Indigenous games were a source of entertainment, socialising and an opportunity to finesse skills, with hunting tools often doubling as sporting equipment. While many of these games were largely lost with the arrival of Europeans to the continent, sport remains integral to Aboriginal life.

Chief among these is Australian Football League (AFL), which some historians suggest was even influenced by traditional Aboriginal games. AFL began to emerge in the 19th century as white settlers adapted British codes such as rugby into a new form. Many believe that Indigenous

sportsmen joined in around this time, bringing with them unique skills that saw AFL evolve into its own distinct game of football.

One of the greatest places to watch AFL in action is at the Tiwi Islands Football Grand Final and Art Sale, just off the coast of Darwin/Gulumerdgen in the Northern Territory. Here, footy fans and art lovers alike take the two-and-a-half-hour ferry from Darwin/Gulumerdgen to Wurrumiyanga on the Tiwi Islands. Follow the art trail to various sale locales, learn about traditional Tiwi culture, and peruse (or purchase) a vast array of authentic paintings, carvings and textiles from across the islands. Then, in the afternoon, watch the Tiwi Islands Grand Final kick-off, promising incredible power

and strength on the field and zealous fans cheering from the sidelines. If you can't make the Grand Final, they are sure to also be up for a chat about football on their [Tiwi by Design Day Tour](#).

Aboriginal athleticism of a different kind can be explored on a stand-up paddleboarding experience with [Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure Tours](#), on the New South Wales Coffs Coast. The Gumbaynggirr traditionally used dugout canoes to navigate the idyllic waterways that now form part of the Solitary Islands Marine Park. Today, Aboriginal guides lead you on an energising paddle through this cultural landscape using a more modern form of watercraft, sharing Creation stories and sampling bush tucker as you go.

In the dazzling underwater world of the Great Barrier Reef off the coast of Tropical North Queensland, [Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel](#) combines ancient stories of the world-renowned coral reef system with eco-certified diving and snorkelling safaris, which bring you face-to-fin with some of Australia's most amazing marine life. With the expertise of an on-board marine biologist and Aboriginal sea rangers, gain an in-depth understanding of the reef's diverse ecosystem and its connection to Indigenous cultures.

ABORIGINAL CULTURAL TRADITIONS: UNDERSTANDING MEN'S BUSINESS AND WOMEN'S BUSINESS

It's thought that over 300 Aboriginal clans or "nations" once existed across the continent of Australia – each with differing customs and cultural nuances – but one commonality to them all is the distinction between men's business and women's business. That is, the division of responsibility, of work, of insight and customs, practised by one sex but not the other, and vice versa. Aboriginal cultures see these as distinctly different but equally important roles, balancing one another so as to benefit the whole community. The division is neither discriminatory nor sexist – it focuses on cooperating so everyone lives in harmony.

Customarily, men are responsible for making tools and hunting larger game, while women take the lead gathering water and bush foods, and hunting smaller animals. But women's business goes above and beyond these day-to-day tasks: female Elders maintain law, the land, relationships, family, stories, healing and history.

You can learn about men's and women's business in several fascinating experiences across the country. In the Red Centre, for instance, whilst staying at Voyages Ayers Rock Resort, two guided walks to Talinguru Nyakuntjaku – the spectacular sunrise viewpoint over Australia's most iconic natural landmark, Uluru – will give an insight into the distinction according to local Anangu culture.

On the Minymaku Walk (Women's Walk), discover how Anangu girls and women were taught to track animals, hunt and prepare bush medicines. Meanwhile, on the Watiku Walk (Men's Walk), deepen your understanding of how only Anangu men made traditional tools and used fire to hunt. Both men and women are welcome on both walks.



On many experiences, Indigenous women welcome everyone, regardless of gender, to learn about the world's oldest living cultures through their eyes. Enter Aunty Margret Campbell, who pioneered Indigenous tourism in Sydney/Warrane in the 1990s. Today, she runs [Dreamtime Southern X](#), a company offering tours around The Rocks region of Sydney/Warrane. She doesn't sugar-coat history, but also uses her experiences to highlight the positives: the heritage her Elders left, the generational stories they relayed, the hidden bush tucker and ancient art around every corner.

Across the country in Western Australia's Swan Valley, [Dale Tilbrook](#) has become one of Australia's premier founts of bush-tucker knowledge. Her beautiful property, home to a mob of friendly emus, is ripe with native produce – fruits, nuts, seeds, herbs and leaves – which vary over the six seasons in local

Aboriginal cultures. This means what you sample is a surprise. Her stories about growing up in the state as an Aboriginal woman are intimate and revealing, and demonstrate how she became a bush foods aficionado.

Further north, Gija woman Bec Sampi is the head guide at [Kingfisher Tours](#), where she reveals secrets of the Kimberley region in a way possible only for someone born, raised and educated with at least 65,000 years of intergenerational stories here. The landscapes you visit with her are out of this world, but Bec's knowledge and stories, as well as her female perspective, bring this fragile environment into focus.

In some circumstances, men are not permitted to know what happens in women's business, and vice versa. If you are female and want to find out why, sign up for Kakadu Cultural Tours' six-night, female-only [Aboriginal Weaving Experience](#) in the vibrant World Heritage-listed Kakadu National Park. Weaving is considered women's business in traditional Bininj culture, and in this multi-day workshop, Aboriginal weavers will share their knowledge, skills and stories handed down over generations. You'll collect pandanus and other plants on bushwalks, dye and prepare fibres for weaving, plus experience the pristine wilderness of East Alligator River on a leisurely cruise.



Dale Tilbrook Experiences,
Western Australia

DISCOVER THE RICH HISTORY AND MEANINGS BEHIND ABORIGINAL ROCK ART

Just as impressionism, cubism and traditional realism mark different styles of Western art, so too does Aboriginal rock art vary. Across Australia's Top End, from Western Australia's Kimberley to Kakadu in the Northern Territory, and beyond to Queensland's Cape York Peninsula, rock art bears fascinating differences.

In the [Kimberley](#), Wandjina art is tucked away beneath stone platforms, in caves and on gorge walls. The Wandjina is the Creator spirit, painted in ghost-like white ochre and characterised by saucer-like eyes, a haloed head, absent mouth and wide shoulders. Many would recognise the spirit from the Sydney Olympics in 2000; an enormous, 12-metre-tall Wandjina was part of the opening ceremony.

The Kimberley bears another style of rock art which has largely been disclaimed by local language groups, calling into question whether it is of Indigenous origin or created by another prehistoric culture. Bradshaw art, identified by pastoralist Joseph Bradshaw in 1891 and otherwise known as Gwion Gwion, is recognisable for its long, slender human figures wearing headdresses and body adornments. Usually painted in dark, cinnamon-hued ochre, it's believed to be some of the earliest figurative art in the world. The latest research points to a cluster of work done 12,000 years ago, although many other experts have claimed the works may date back 50,000 years. That's far older than Wandjina art, which is dated to 4000 years.

Only a handful of Kimberley rock art sites are accessible to the public, but artists at [Mowanjum Aboriginal Art & Cultural Centre](#), just outside Derby, still paint sacred Wandjina art.



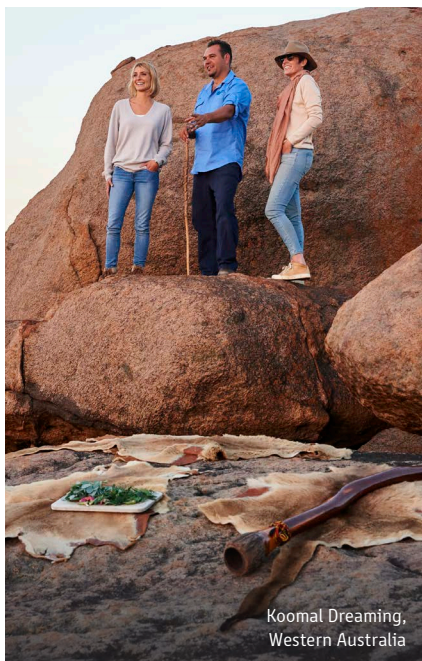
To learn more about the region's art styles, speak to Yawuru man Bart Pigram at [Narljia Experiences Broome](#) who worked as a curator for years before launching his cultural tours business. Or the artisans at [Waringarri Aboriginal Arts & Tours](#) in Kununurra, some of whom lead fascinating tours into the dramatic landscapes that inspire their contemporary works.

Meanwhile, in [Kakadu National Park](#), the rock art is so prolific, it's described as an outdoor gallery. Long rock walls of rich, ancient work are open to the public in the World Heritage-listed wetland, 150km south-east of Darwin/Gulmerrdgen. At [Ubirr](#), the works incorporate the X-ray style, where fish and animals are painted with skeletons and insides visible, much like an X-ray. Most has been created in the past 1500 years. There are also handprints, where paint is spat over the hand to leave its outline, and Mimi spirits – bewitching creatures said to hide in rock cracks. Witness them on a tour with [Venture North Safaris](#) or [Davidson's Arnhemland Safaris](#).

In Tropical North Queensland, the Quinkan rock art found outside the town of Laura is regarded by UNESCO as among the world's top 10 rock art sites. Some five-and-a-half hours' drive north of Cairns, the galleries are defined by images of Quinkan spirit figures, some tall and slender, others stout and estimated to be 15,000 to 30,000 years old. There's also contact art, recording the first contact between Europeans and Aboriginal people. Viewing it on a tour with [Culture Connect](#) brings it to life. Regardless of the type and variety experienced, however, the continent's exceptional rock art offers stunning insight into Australia's rich Indigenous cultural heritage.



A LITERARY JOURNEY AROUND ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA: 5 BOOKS



Koomal Dreaming,
Western Australia

The beauty of books is that they can take you anywhere from your armchair. Books also have the power to enhance your real-life experience beyond measure. Aboriginal literature doesn't only inspire adventure to Australia's faraway corners, it also arms you with cultural knowledge that will serve you well during your trip. Here are five books to stoke your wanderlust, and the operators who can take you there.

The Yield, by Tara June Winch

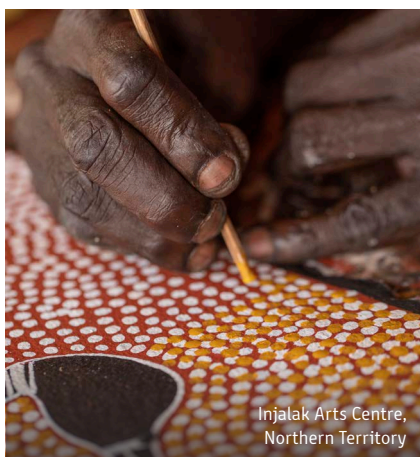
The acclaimed Wiradjuri writer's evocative novel about one man's determination to pass on his people's language and culture won the lauded 2020 Miles Franklin Literary Award. Explore its Wiradjuri Country setting with Traditional Custodian Mark Saddler of [Bundji Cultural Tours](#), whose tours take you to a range of culturally significant places in the Wagga Wagga region of New South Wales.

Loving Country: A Guide to Sacred Australia, by Bruce Pascoe and Vicky Shukuroglou

In this unique travel guide, multi-award winning author of *Dark Emu* and other important cultural works Bruce Pascoe joins forces with Vicky Shukuroglou, revealing Aboriginal Australia through 19 sacred places and the stories connected to them – including the whale story of Margaret River. Gain a deeper understanding of this corner of Western Australia with [Koomal Dreaming](#) on tours that feature didgeridoo playing, fire-making, native food tasting, wildlife viewing and more.

Fire Country: How Indigenous Fire Management Could Help Save Australia, by Victor Steffensen

Hearing from an Aboriginal land management expert about the environmental challenges Australia faces makes for a fascinating read, particularly following the 2019-20 bushfires. The devastating blazes renewed interest in Indigenous fire practices – something you can ask more about on an on-Country experience with [Ngaran Ngaran Culture Awareness](#) on the New South Wales South Coast, which felt the full force of the 2019-20 fires.



Injalak Arts Centre,
Northern Territory



Nitmiluk Tours, Northern Territory

Welcome to Country: A Travel Guide to Indigenous Australia, by Marcia Langton

Knowing cultural etiquette helps to ensure a positive cultural interaction, and this guide offers plenty of helpful tips, along with insights into Aboriginal languages and customs, and explanations on storytelling, native title and art. This knowledge will come in handy when visiting a far-flung location like the renowned Injalak Arts Centre in Gunbalanya on a tour with [Venture North Safaris](#). It's in Arnhem Land, home to deeply traditional cultures.

Australia Day, by Stan Grant

In this excellent backgrounder on Aboriginal Australia, the Wiradjuri man and acclaimed journalist tackles the uncomfortable truths of Aboriginal history, the ongoing struggle for belonging and identity faced by Aboriginal peoples, and what it means to be Australian. Use the insight it offers while getting to know Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory. Visit the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre then choose a wetland cruise, 4WD adventure or fishing trip with [Kakadu Tourism](#) and observe Australia's many cultures working side-by-side with its Traditional Custodians.

SEEING ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA THROUGH A PHOTOGRAPHER'S LENS

Arnhem Land, early evening. The sun is sinking spectacularly into the ocean, staining the sky shades of apricot and eggplant, but that is not what has caught [James Fisher](#)'s attention. His eye, and his camera, are focused on the children playing on the beach: boys doing backflips, girls singing cheerfully.

"They were having these amazing dance-offs, totally unchoreographed, fusing traditional dance and Michael Jackson moves," James remembers. "I loved their creativity, and the way that their traditional culture was woven into their everyday life."

The Australian photographer's globetrotting career has seen him work with stars like Nicole Kidman and Eddie Redmayne. His latest assignment for Tourism Australia, however – meeting and photographing some of the many Indigenous tour operators making their mark on Australia – kept him much closer to home. It was an eye-opening experience, he says.

"Like many people in Australia, growing up I was unaware of the incredibly long history that exists in this country," says James. "We tend to go overseas in search of culture, but this is a country where there were once more than 600 languages and dialects, and 60,000 plus years of human habitation. Each community we visited had its own way of speaking, its own way of feeling. It felt like a completely distinct culture."

James' first encounters with Indigenous cultures came more than a decade ago, when he spent time at Kununurra as the on-set photographer for Baz Luhrmann's film, *Australia*.

This more recent assignment, which involved shooting approximately 60 different communities on behalf of Tourism Australia's [Discover Aboriginal Experiences](#) program, let James immerse himself more deeply in Aboriginal cultures. "What really struck me was not just how strongly traditional culture shaped many of these communities – from what



Top Didj Cultural Experience & Art Gallery, Northern Territory

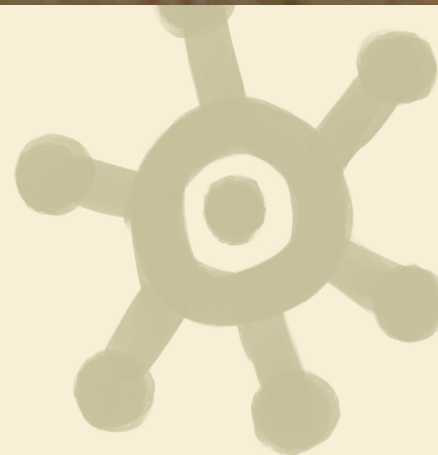
they eat to how they relate to the land – but how willing they were to share that culture," says James. "Whether you head up to Arnhem Land or somewhere like Shark Bay in Western Australia, where the red desert sands meet the white sand dunes that front the ocean, to be immersed in these landscapes and these ancient cultures is just extraordinary."

James and his videographer Archie Sartracom covered a lot of ground to get their shots, usually travelling by 4WD vehicle. Reaching some of the more far-flung locations occasionally required jumping on a plane, or – in some cases – a boat. "If you want to visit some of the more remote communities in the wet season, that's the only option," he says.

Shooting in the outback is very different from shooting in a studio, and James says a

flexible approach is essential. "Archie and I do it all – we drive the truck, we set up camp and start the fire, we do the shoots and do the interviews," he explains. "On occasion, we've even had to herd camels."

The most rewarding part of the experience, he recalls, was the opportunity to connect with such extraordinary Australians. "I met so many special characters," says James. "One Elder I met – Manuel Pamkal at [Top Didj Cultural Experience & Art Gallery](#) – you could tell he'd had a tough history, but he had such a generous heart and such a willingness to share his culture. The energy emanating from him was just gorgeous. That a government initiative exists, specifically to foster connection between ordinary Australians like me and so many extraordinary experiences and people, is really quite special."



THE SECRETS BEHIND AUSTRALIA'S ABORIGINAL DOT PAINTING

Ever wonder why you've never seen an Aboriginal dot painting on a rock face? The style may be synonymous with Aboriginal art and is often thought of as being of ancient origin. Yet dot paintings haven't been around for tens of thousands of years, as much of Aboriginal Australian cultures have. In fact, the artistic practice was only developed in the early 1970s, in Australia's Central Desert region.

Its origins can be traced back to an art teacher named Geoffrey Bardon, who was working with Aboriginal children in the outback settlement of Papunya (around three hours' drive from Alice Springs) during this era. Bardon invited the children to paint a mural depicting traditional Dreamings (Creation stories), which drew the attention of the rest of the Aboriginal community. Shortly afterwards, adults began to embrace the practice of painting on permanent surfaces – first on cardboard and wood, before moving to canvas.

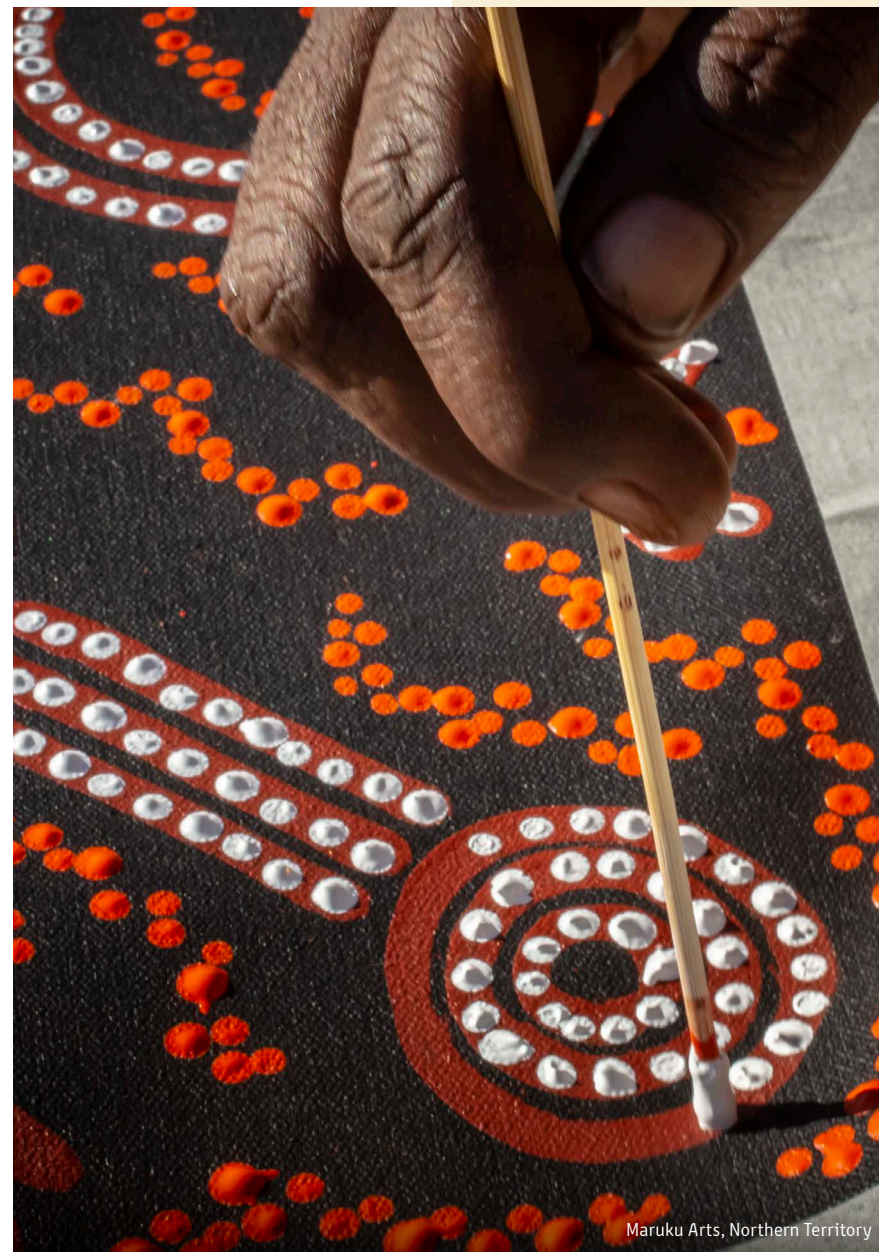
In Aboriginal cultures, tribal knowledge is enshrined in ritual and secrecy. To ensure that sensitive knowledge remains protected, sacred symbols are typically expressed on temporary surfaces. Some are traditionally drawn in sand and rubbed out or covered up afterwards; others are painted onto bodies for corroborees, and later washed off so that the uninitiated do not see.

Adopting these permanent surfaces therefore posed a problem for the Aboriginal community of Papunya – namely, that outsiders may be able to learn their tribal knowledge. To insure against this, the painters started layering, abstracting and camouflaging their sacred symbols with dots, so that only their mob could understand them. It's a secret to dot paintings that few know – rather than tell stories, dot paintings hide them. The method sparked what's now known as the Papunya Tula Art Movement.

Dot paintings have changed significantly over the years. While in the early days, artefacts, ritual objects and spiritual ceremonies were clearly represented, and earthy pigments such as red, yellow, black and white dominated, now works are less figurative and use a wide spectrum of colours. In the early days, the canvases were never intended to be sold, whereas now, works have become highly collectable. In 2017, a large dot painting by the late artist Emily Kame Kngwarreye sold for \$2.1 million. She first began painting on canvas when she was nearly 80 years old.

In Aboriginal communities, dot painting has become a social activity. More than 20 desert communities are part of [Maruku Arts](#), a creative centre in sight of Uluru in the Northern Territory. Here, you can produce your own dot painting, guided by a local Anangu artist and their interpreter. This intimate, one-on-one discovery of the local Tjukurpa Creation symbols will allow you to better decode the works at a nearby art market.

Just over three hours' drive from there, a [Karrke](#) Aboriginal cultural experience will go into depth about the history, culture and identity tied into dot painting. Questions are welcomed while walking through the national park surrounding Watarrka (Kings Canyon).



Maruku Arts, Northern Territory



Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures, Western Australia



SEIT Outback Australia, Northern Territory



UNDERSTANDING ABORIGINAL ETIQUETTE

Did you know it's impolite in Aboriginal cultures to look someone directly in the eye? Or that shaking hands isn't always the done thing? How about that it's taboo for women to play the didgeridoo?

Just as in Japan, where diners slurp loudly to indicate satisfaction with a meal, and in Malaysia, where people point with the thumb rather than the index finger, there are customs unique to Aboriginal cultures and, while Aboriginal peoples have adopted or become accustomed to numerous Western behaviours, there are deep cultural insights to be gained by learning about theirs.

A little knowledge aids positive interactions. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples often take long pauses before responding to a question for example, comfortable with the silence as they consider their response. They may speak quietly, and if there's a question they'd rather not answer, they may say that it's secret men's or women's business, or gently

divert your attention elsewhere. Respectful of their Elders and their cultures, they're eager only to offer what they know, or what's appropriate for them to share.

In Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, [SEIT Outback Australia](#) guides explain customs on their off-road 4WD tours. Visitors learn that the local Anangu don't make eye contact when they talk, and don't shake hands (that's reserved for funerals); a simple hello is more appropriate. There's also a chance the Aboriginal people may not be there. They have extensive family networks, and culturally, everything is shared – be it cars, houses or food. If something or someone is needed, Aboriginal people will leave immediately.

In Queensland's Daintree Rainforest, [Walkabout Cultural Adventures](#) leads visitors along a path near a waterfall, but only women can enter the cascades, as it's a place for secret women's business. Male guide, Juan Walker, doesn't have

the right to talk about what goes on there, nor would he even know. Across the country in Western Australia's Shark Bay, only men are invited to learn how to produce the warble of a didgeridoo around the campfire, on the Didgeridoo Dreaming Night Tour with [Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures](#); culturally, it's not something women are permitted to try. Rather than read about Aboriginal cultural ways in history books, in Australia, you can hear first-hand from the world's oldest living cultures.



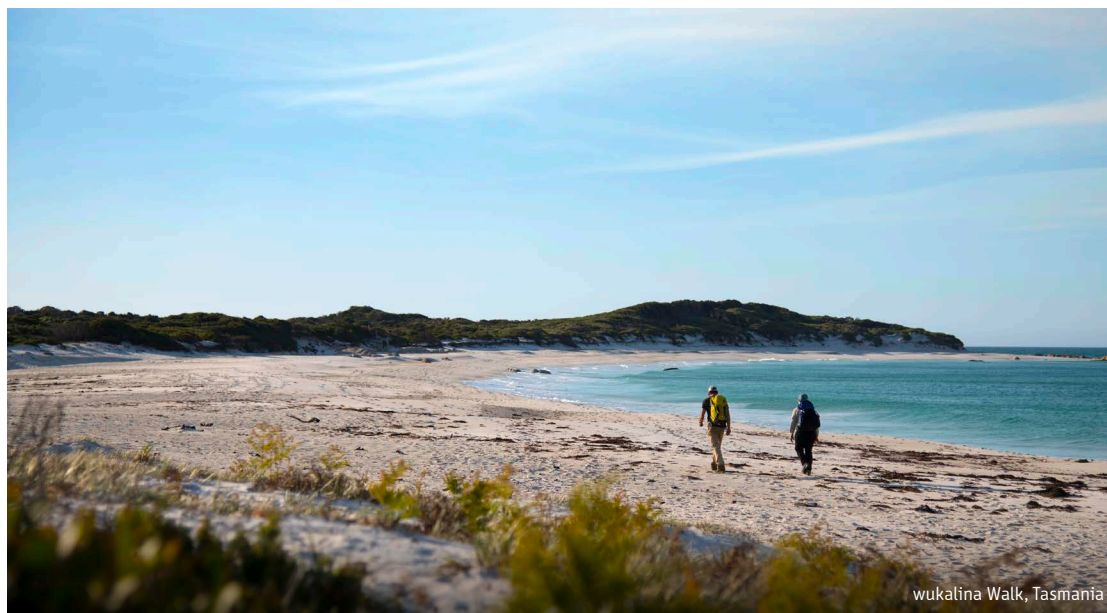
Walkabout Cultural Adventures, Queensland



HOW TOURISM CAN HELP AUSTRALIA'S INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

The COVID-19 crisis has rocked us all but for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians it has been a particularly daunting time. Given the high levels of chronic illness among Indigenous peoples, the virus posed a particularly big risk for Aboriginal communities. Many had no choice but to go into total lockdown to prevent the virus taking hold.

Now that the worst is behind us, those communities are once again accepting bookings, and preparing to welcome visitors. For many First Nations communities, particularly those in remote areas with few other sources of income, tourism is not just a financial lifeline – it's also a chance to help reclaim their identity and help rebuild connections that were broken by white settlement. In Tasmania/lutruwita, where a concerted attempt to eradicate Aboriginal cultures saw Indigenous people removed to offshore islands, the multi-day [wukalina Walk](#) in the state's north-east has helped a community get back in touch with their Land.



"The government moved our people off our Land. For us to get back onto our Country, it makes us strong," says wukalina's Clyde Mansell. As well as providing local Indigenous people with an income, the wukalina Walk also gives staff a sense of connection with their Land.

"You can see the pride our guides have at being about to tell the stories about our landscape in that landscape," says Clyde. "We come from the Land, we were made from it; we will always be connected to it."

Even more valuable than the income generated by such businesses is the sense of cultural pride that accompanies it. Elder Uncle Eddie Ruska helped establish the [Spirits of the Red Sand](#) performance troupe in Beenleigh, just south of Brisbane/Meeanjin. He first began teaching traditional song and dance 25 years ago in a

program designed to get youth off the streets and says that the difference in young people who go through the program is remarkable.

"It teaches the boys to stand up and be proud," he says. "I've had old fellas that have gone through the program and got different jobs, and they come back now and encourage their own kids to get involved."

Eddie says that it's not just the audiences who come come along to [Spirits of the Red Sand's Aboriginal Dinner Show performance](#) who walk away with a better understanding of Aboriginal cultures – the performers themselves gain a stronger connection with their own culture. "When I was young, culture was hidden – a lot of people were afraid to come out and talk about it. Now our people are learning to speak up. It's very satisfying; it makes us feel complete."

One upside of the COVID-19 crisis is that we all have a better understanding that communities are stronger when they work together. Choosing to spend your holiday dollar with an Indigenous-owned business brings big benefits to some of our most vulnerable communities by preserving jobs, boosting the local economy, and helping stoke a sense of cultural identity. All that, and you also get to immerse yourself in the planet's oldest living cultures. How's that for a win-win?





Walkabout Cultural Adventures,
Queensland



Dreamtime Southern X, New South Wales

HOW TO ADD A LITTLE INDIGENOUS FLAVOUR TO YOUR AUSTRALIAN HOLIDAY

Aboriginal experiences offer the kind of life-changing, immersive experiences ... which make a great itinerary awesome and, most of all, memorable. Overseas travellers want to experience Australia's fascinating Indigenous cultures – but don't always know how. Here's an easy guide to immersing yourself in the ancient.

Aboriginal guide Juan Walker's guests once included an American couple travelling with their teenage granddaughter, who wanted to learn more about Indigenous cultures on a dream birthday trip to Australia. Juan took them on a day out with [Walkabout Cultural Adventures](#) and showed them around Kuku Yalanji Country near Port Douglas, north of Cairns. Over the morning, the multi-generational family learned which plants make good bush medicine. On a remote beach, they twisted their feet into wet sand to unearth pipis – small shellfish that would go into their lunch.

At Juan's home town of Cooya Beach, they picked up bamboo spears and cruised through the saltwater shallows towards a lone mangrove, scanning the clear water for mud crabs lurking on the rippled sand. They soon discovered spearing crabs isn't as easy as Walker makes it look. After several crabs were bagged, everyone scrubbed their hands with silver wattle (or soap bush) and headed to watch Juan cook their lunch they'd gathered through traditional hunting practices.

Adding an unforgettable Aboriginal experience like Walkabout Cultural Adventures to an Australian holiday itinerary is not as daunting as it may first seem. For first-time visitors to Australia – who tend to explore the “golden triangle” of Cairns, Sydney/Warrane and Uluru – here are some suggestions on how to include a layer of ancient knowledge from each place while ticking off the must-see sights of rainforest, reef, city and desert.

Tropical North Queensland is also home to [Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel](#). Departing from Cairns for the world-famous Great Barrier Reef, the day tour includes storytelling

from Indigenous rangers drawn from local Aboriginal groups and the Torres Strait Islands (scattered between Australia's northern tip and Papua New Guinea). The rangers share their connection to Sea Country and show passengers the tools used for hunting and making fire, as well as clap sticks played in ceremonial dances. The tour takes you to two Outer Reef sites where you can dive or snorkel and there's also an optional helicopter ride over Moore reef.

In Sydney/Warrane, you can learn about the Aboriginal peoples' spiritual connection to the harbour and its surrounds in a 90-minute morning tour around the historic Rocks precinct with [Dreamtime Southern X](#).

Ochre is smeared onto your hand at the start of the tour and you'll learn about the role of ochre in Indigenous ceremonies and the deep relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the land, water and seasons.

Uluru, formerly known as Ayers Rock, is the landmark that symbolises Australia's geographic and spiritual heart. The destination offers a multitude of ways to connect to desert cultures. At [Ayers Rock Resort](#), you can join a dot-painting workshop run by [Maruku Arts](#), the gallery that represents more than 900 desert artists. Under a blue outback sky, learn the meaning of symbols used in this art form from an Aboriginal artist before creating your own souvenir artwork. Journey deeper into desert cultures on a [SEIT Outback Australia Patjji tour](#) where you will join the traditional Uluru family and hear how they survived in this desert environment before the advent of tourism in the region.

5 GLOBALLY SOUGHT-AFTER TRAVEL EXPERIENCES YOU DIDN'T KNOW YOU COULD HAVE IN AUSTRALIA

Australia isn't just home to the oldest living cultures on Earth: we also lay claim to an exceptionally rare suite of Indigenous tourism experiences. But incredibly – despite being highly sought after by global travellers – many of these activities are virtually unheard of by most locals. Here, find five of the little-known activities on offer: just a handful of the vibrant, contemporary and surprising Aboriginal travel experiences found in our backyard.



Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures, Western Australia

1 Gaze at a new map of the night's skies

There are astronomy tours, and then there are Aboriginal astronomy tours. Turns out, there's more than one map of the night sky, and learning to look at the universe's dark patches for meaning, as well as the twinkling stars, is surprisingly revealing. Aboriginal peoples are believed to be the world's first astronomers – another fact few have heard – and have long used the stars as navigation tools. Get a new astral view with [Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures](#) in World Heritage-listed Shark Bay.



Sand Dune Adventures, New South Wales

2 Go sand dune sliding

Aboriginal life and cultures are rarely perceived as also being exhilarating and adventurous.

[Sand Dune Adventures](#) turn this misconception on its head by putting guests on quad bikes and riding through the longest moving coastal sand dunes in the Southern Hemisphere, just 2.5 hours north of Sydney/Warrane near Port Stephens. Aboriginal stories are shared while on exclusive Worimi land, inaccessible any other way. Deep connections are shared while gazing over the vast coastline, travelling through bush and sliding over sand.

3 See Tasmania/lutruwita's Bay of Fires through Aboriginal eyes

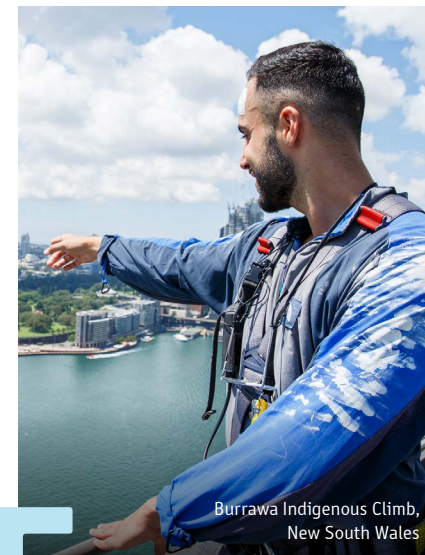
If most Australians were asked why one of Tasmania/lutruwita's most famous sites is called the Bay of Fires, they wouldn't know the answer. The Aboriginal connection is barely known, despite the countless postcard images of the glass-clear blue waters and sienna-hued rock tumbles. The name comes from the many fires lit by Aboriginal peoples along the coastline – the first and lasting impression of an explorer in 1773. Immerse yourself in the history, culture and traditional lands of the palawa people, who call the area larapuna, and follow their forebears' footsteps on the unforgettable [wukalina Walk](#).



Ngurrangga Tours, Western Australia

4 Explore the world's largest concentration of petroglyphs

You might have heard that rock engravings pepper the Burrup Peninsula in Western Australia's vast, red Pilbara region. But did you know they were etched into some of the hardest stone on Earth some 20,000 to 50,000 years ago? The engravings are an extraordinary time capsule of the Earth's evolution. Spend a day with [Ngurrangga Tours](#) and travel back to before the last Ice Age, seeing depictions of megafauna that's long extinct, marine species that arrived after sea levels rose and turned the site into an island, and animal footprints that were used to teach youngsters how to hunt.

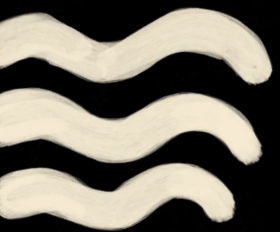


Burrawa Indigenous Climb, New South Wales

5 Climb the Sydney Harbour Bridge with an Indigenous storyteller

Climbing the Sydney Harbour Bridge is at the top of the list for many visitors to the New South Wales capital. For a truly memorable experience, make the climb with an Indigenous storyteller on the [Burrawa Indigenous Climb Experience](#). As you take in sparkling views, your guide will share fascinating stories about Sydney/Warrane's rich Aboriginal heritage. Like where a three-metre-high midden (ancient pile of shells) once stood, revealing stories of intergenerational conservation. And how Cammeraygal woman Patyegarang became Australia's first Aboriginal language teacher, instructing botanist and explorer William Dawes from a base at Tallawoladah (The Rocks). Taking you to the top of 'The Coathanger' (as the bridge is known to locals), the experience is the ultimate introduction to Sydney/Warrane.





ADVENTURE NORTH AUSTRALIA, QUEENSLAND

Mud-crabbing offers a taste of tradition in the Daintree.

Linc Walker's smile is as wide as the horizon. It's low tide at Cooya Beach, the traditional fishing grounds of the Kuku Yalanji people. The ocean shallows ripple like the bed of sand beneath them, the water too cloudy to see the mud crabs we're hunting. We carry traditional spears, hesitantly raising them in anticipation of a sidestepping crustacean that might come our way. But whenever one does, each of us would-be hunters lets out a screech, jabs blindly then hops on each foot, fearful that our sharp-pincered target might take revenge on our toes.

It must be a funny sight, one that never gets old for our guides, Linc and his brother Brandon. The pair grew up in this saltwater Country at the feet of the lush Daintree Rainforest, a 20-minute drive north of Port Douglas. To them, spearfishing is a way of life – a tradition passed down by their ancestors, and one they keenly want to keep alive. It's what motivates them to share their culturally inherited skills as they introduce curious visitors to their home, one story at a time. As they talk, it's clear the brothers feel such a sense of connection to this beach, its mudflats and nearby mangroves, that it's indivisible from their identity.

I spy movement beneath the water and raise my arms as Linc has taught me, trying to affect a stalking pose. But instead of cleanly spearing crab shell, I miss. The crab retaliates, raising its powerful, storm cloud-coloured claws and latching on to my spear with breathtaking strength. As I try to lift our dinner into a bucket, it releases and scampers free. Cue more laughter from Linc.

Fortunately, their talent for mud-crabbing ensures our communal buckets are soon full – but not overflowing. One of the distinct

messages of this experience is the importance of living in harmony with nature and treasuring its resources.

Time spent with one or both of the charismatic brothers is part of [Adventure North Australia's Daintree Dreaming Tour](#) which also includes venturing into Mossman Gorge for a traditional Welcome to Country smoking ceremony by [Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre](#) and lunch.

In keeping with the Aboriginal custom for sustainable living, we take only as much as we need. It's an intelligent approach that has allowed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to step lightly throughout Australia for tens of thousands of years. Now, Linc hopes the sharing of these inter-generational teachings will ensure he, and other Kuku Yalanji people, will be able to remain on Country. Tourism, he says, provides the employment Aboriginal peoples need to stay in the rural locations their hearts, minds and spirits are tied to.

The brothers sport long locks, black wraparound sunglasses and rugby players' physiques, but they are big softies – something we experience first-hand when they invite us to feast on homemade damper and the tender, white flesh of the crabs. Having caught it ourselves (sort of), under the guidance of members of the world's oldest living cultures, naturally makes it taste even sweeter.



Adventure North Australia, Queensland

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- A cultural connection in Tropical North Queensland
- Fishing and gathering in Tropical North Queensland
- Catch your own tucker in Tropical North Queensland
- The art of fishing in Tropical North Queensland
- An ancient foodie feast



Borggoron Coast to Creek Tours, Western Australia

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- The ultimate oyster experience
- Pearls of wisdom: A bush tucker walk with a difference
- The Aboriginal connection to Australia's pearling industry
- Learning the ancient secrets of the Kimberley tides
- Sustainability secrets of the First Australians

BORRGORON COAST TO CREEK TOURS, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Bush magic takes many forms in the beguiling Kimberley region – as you'll discover on a tour with a Traditional Custodian.

Our guide Terry Hunter gathers handfuls of spinifex grass, layering the long, thin stalks over a rock encrusted with oysters. As he lights the grass and it bursts into flames, his face breaks into a cheeky grin as he anticipates our imminent surprise.

Pop! Pop, pop! The molluscs burst open, their mineral-rich brine sizzling in the handmade bush barbecue. For the youthful Bardi man who grew up along this remote Kimberley shore, it's a common-sense way to access a fresh feed without the need for tools and exertion. To us, it's like witnessing bush magic. And the oysters are absolutely delicious.

Terry's [Borggoron Coast to Creek Tours](#) walking tour is a two-hour transportation into another world – one that exists parallel to our own, yet is unknown to most non-Indigenous people. Exploring Bardi Jawi country, where red earth and saltwater meet, reveals as much about Terry's day-to-day life as it does his Aboriginal culture and the local pearling trade his family has been part of for four generations.

Terry's father taught him how to source fresh water in this salty seascape, but as he leads us along tidal beach flats, it seems impossible that we'll find any here. Yet he squats at one of the many rockpools that dot the landscape, cups his hands and scoops up liquid. As Terry drinks, we wait for a salty grimace, but he just flashes that megawatt smile again. As a young child he was shown this spot, where spring water bubbles up at low tide. We drink too, disbelieving until we taste purity.

Terry's people decree that you take only what you need, and care for what you have. This ancient sustainability practice has granted the land a sense of being untouched – it's raw, wild and alive. We feel it as we walk alongside mangroves, as Terry shows us just how far the largest tropical tides on the planet come in. He reveals how his ancestors used a species of local mangrove to create rafts that would float them out to faraway islands; they were experts at harnessing these tides to trade and commune with other saltwater clans. Today, those same tides bring minerals to the pearl oyster beds owned by Cygnet Bay, Australia's oldest continuously operating pearl farm.

Terry has watched the farm evolve alongside his best mate James Brown, who now runs the property. He tells us the two learnt outback skills from Bardi Jawi Elders, spending as much time foraging, fishing and skylarking as they did in the tiny farm's tin-shed school. The pearl farm opened to visitors in 2009 and, after being pegged as a storyteller by his family, Terry began leading tours, sharing the 22,000-year connection the local Aboriginal people have with pearl shells. Having worked just about every role on the farm, from cleaning boats to grading pearls, Terry – and his guests – reckons he's found his calling.

BUNDYI CULTURAL TOURS, NEW SOUTH WALES

“I share from my heart,” says Mark Saddler, just minutes after we meet on the banks of the Murrumbidgee River in Wagga Wagga. His sentiment sets the tone for the rest of our four-hour tour, which is as personal and moving as it is educational.

A Wiradjuri man, Mark has spent most of his life in this pocket of New South Wales, around 460 kilometres south-west of Sydney/Warrane in the state’s Riverina region. His knowledge of the land is encyclopaedic – not surprising given his ancestors have had a connection with, and shared stories of, the Wagga Wagga countryside for more than 65,000 years. Despite this, Mark is incredibly humble about his presence here. “We don’t own this place,” he tells me. “We belong to it. I talk to the land, I really feel it, so I keep my connection to Country.”

While we wander the banks of the Murrumbidgee, Mark points in the direction of sacred middens: blackened earth discoloured by centuries of decomposing shells and bones. This is where local Wiradjuri people would feast, leaving behind piles of remains to show visitors what had been consumed and, as a result, what should be avoided. “Middens are like the earliest form of conservation,” Mark says. “If the next mob found mussel shells piled up, they would avoid mussels, so the population could regenerate, and eat another food instead.”

From here, our drive west to Galore Hill Scenic Reserve takes an hour, but Mark fills every minute with fascinating stories of exploring the surrounding bushland. Most people, he says, pass by roadside “scar trees” without a second glance – these living eucalypts are missing a hunk of trunk, respectfully cut (and with the tree’s permission) by Wiradjuri people centuries ago to craft canoes. “You’d be unwise to build a house around a canoe scar tree like

this,” Mark says when we pull up beside a grey box gum. “The area clearly floods.”

At the top of Galore Hill we linger for soul-reviving views over Wiradjuri-stewarded land, the scenic reserve home to 850 species of native plants. During my spring visit, it’s a colourful patchwork of wattles, grevilleas, hakeas and flowering eucalyptus. Much of the bounty is edible if properly prepared, says Mark, including old man saltbush and nardoo – a desert fern resembling a four-leaf clover that the Wiradjuri would traditionally grind and bake.

“It’s really a supermarket out here,” says Mark, who used some of the surrounding produce in our morning tea. His still-warm, home-baked damper is infused with roasted wattleseed, river mint and lemon myrtle, and slathered with tart Indigiearth quandong jam.

On our way back to Wagga Wagga, we pass The Rock Nature Reserve – Kengal Aboriginal Place, a spiritual Dreaming and ceremonial location included in some of [Mark’s tours](#).

“That enormous ridge was created by Baiame – the Maker of all things,” Mark tells me. Legend has it that The Rock’s hills are Baiame’s dingo companions, which he left here when he ascended into the sky. “I love telling these stories and explaining our culture,” Mark says. “It connects everyone back to who we really are, and is empowering for our Country and our people.”



Bundy Cultural Tours, Queensland

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- See Wagga Wagga in a new way with Wiradjuri man Mark Saddler
- Get a different taste of the New South Wales Riverina
- Scar trees and other secrets of the New South Wales Riverina
- Learn how to decode ancient messages in the landscape with an Aboriginal guide
- River Dreaming: learn the Aboriginal stories of the New South Wales Riverina



Burrawa Indigenous Climb Experience, New South Wales

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- Reaching new heights to see Sydney/Warrane through Indigenous eyes
- A First Nations view of Sydney/Warrane from the top of the Sydney Harbour Bridge
- Climbing the Sydney Harbour Bridge puts Indigenous cultures into perspective
- Learn Sydney/Warrane's Aboriginal story on a bridge climb with a difference

BURRAWA INDIGENOUS CLIMB EXPERIENCE, NEW SOUTH WALES

Discover Aboriginal heritage while scaling the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

I've climbed the Sydney Harbour Bridge several times, once at dawn as the sun was peeking over the Pacific Ocean to the east, and once at dusk, when the city's sky reflected an artist's palette of fiery colours. Both ascents were unforgettable, but only when I signed up for the [Burrawa Indigenous Climb Experience](#) did I truly see Sydney/Warrane in a new – and overdue – light.

BridgeClimb Sydney's latest addition to its portfolio, Burrawa was conceptualised by Wesley Enoch AM – the Sydney Festival's artistic director from 2017 to 2021. It was then developed in consultation with not-for-profit organisation Tribal Warrior; a portion of my ticket price supports the group's community projects.

The combined goal was to step through at least 65,000 years of history, revealing the city through Indigenous eyes and explaining what the surrounding landmarks mean to the Eora Nation.

My lead guide is Shona Davidson, who worked for BridgeClimb before Burrawa was a twinkle in Wesley's eye – she not only knows every nook of the city, but also the Aboriginal stories defining them.

As we climb, harnessed to the enormous steel arch, Shona teaches us a few Indigenous words, including burrawa, meaning 'above' or 'upwards' in the local Aboriginal language. It's fitting that we learn this in view of Dawes Point in Tallawoladah (The Rocks), where Cammeraygal woman Patyegarang became Australia's first Aboriginal language teacher, instructing botanist and explorer William Dawes.

The pearly sails of the Sydney Opera House are always in view as we continue up the 1,332

steps. As we pause for breath, Shona points out where a three-metre-high midden (ancient and sacred pile of shells) once stood on Bennelong Point. For the Eora Nation, middens were an important inter-generational conservation story, speaking of what had been eaten, and what needed preservation. When Europeans arrived, she told us, the shells were burnt to lime and used to build the colony.

When we reach the summit, 134 metres above the water, Shona takes our obligatory selfies and we gaze at ferries zipping across the harbour from Circular Quay to Manly Cove (Kai'ymay). This, says Shona, is where 18th-century Wangal man Woollarawarre Bennelong lived when the colony first arrived in Sydney/Warrane. He was recruited to become a mediator and interpreter for then-governor Arthur Phillip, and was the first Aboriginal man to travel to Europe and return.

His wife, Cammeraygal woman Barangaroo, was an equally powerful leader, and today Sydney/Warrane's newest inner-city precinct bears her name. The enormous spire of Crown Sydney dominates the skyline here, but Shona explains that at ground level, expansive parklands are planted with native trees in homage to the district's namesake.

As we descend, Shona points to where the Tank Stream once flowed below Sydney/Warrane's central business district. It's a trickle today, but this freshwater supply once supported the Gadigal people for millennia, and was the main reason Captain Phillip chose this spot as the foundation for European settlement in Australia.

Three hours and countless eye-opening stories later, we're back at ground level. I can't help but wonder what other Indigenous secrets Sydney/Warrane holds.

CULTURE CONNECT AUSTRALIA, QUEENSLAND

Only one tour company can open the gates to Normanby Station's riches.

Normanby Station is massive – some 31,000 sprawling hectares (76,000 acres) of cattle country. But walking along a creek and bush tracks with Traditional Owner Dylan Harrigan, the property suddenly seems much more intimate, as he shares stories about Country handed down to him from his grandfather.

Soon enough, Harrigan leads us to what we've all come here to see – incredible galleries of rock art. As photography is not permitted at some of the galleries, it is the first time we've encountered the wonderfully stylised and spiritually significant creatures etched into the rock. Looking at the turtles, dingoes and barramundi created over centuries is an unforgettable moment.

"Goosebumps just appear because people don't expect to see something so strong as far as spirituality goes," says Roger de Vos, whose [Culture Connect](#) is the only company to have access to the incredible rock art riches of the property, 70km (45 miles) from Cooktown in Tropical North Queensland.

De Vos, who started working as a tour guide in Cairns in 1994, fell in love with tourism and Indigenous cultures as a teenager. He was inspired to start Culture Connect after seeing how deeply guests connected with Traditional Owners and their stories while on their land. "These Owners also feel empowered getting their stories out there and taking pride in sharing their culture with people," he says.

Through Culture Connect, he has curated a selection of experiences that give travellers an insight into the fascinating Indigenous cultures

of northern Queensland. Today, his portfolio of small-group tours departs from Cooktown, and last from half-a-day to a full day. "Each experience is authentic," says de Vos. "It's done the right way with Traditional Owners on-Country." That includes Normanby Station's Harrigan brothers, Vince and Dylan, born and bred cattlemen who are the Traditional Owners of these Balngarrawarra homelands.

The most popular ways to visit Normanby Station are by taking the half-day Aboriginal Rock Art Experience or the 4WD Aboriginal Rock Art and Ranger full-day tour (both depart Cooktown three times a week from April to November). The company can also tailor a tour specifically for rock-art enthusiasts, which allows for more viewing time and access to otherwise-unseen galleries.

There's a very different experience to be had on Cooya Beach north of Port Douglas, where another pair of Indigenous brothers, Linc and Brandon Walker, share their traditional Kuku Yalanji coastal culture with guests on private tours offered by Culture Connect.. That means getting your feet wet as you wander the mudflats and shallow waters of Cooya Beach, spear in hand, searching for a north Queensland delicacy: mud crabs. The brothers also reveal the coastal plants that make good bush medicine.

Also available as part of a private tour package from Cairns/Gimuy or Port Douglas is an art class with renowned Kuku Yalanji artist Brian "Binna" Swindley at [Janbal Gallery](#) in Mossman. Binna means "ear" in traditional language, says de Vos – a reference to the fact that the artist is deaf. "He's a quirky character and loves a yarn," says de Vos. "He loves telling people about his family history."



Culture Connect Australia, Queensland

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- Exclusive access to spine-tingling rock art
- Connecting with traditional cultures in the tropical north
- Rock art and mud crabs: welcome to Queensland's fascinating tropical north
- How to connect with Indigenous cultures in Tropical North Queensland



Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel, Queensland

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- Travel back to the Dreamtime on a Barrier Reef cruise with a difference
- Take a cruise into the Dreamtime on a unique Barrier Reef trip
- See the Barrier Reef through Indigenous eyes
- See the Barrier Reef differently on an Indigenous-led cruise
- Immerse yourself in the Creation story of the Great Barrier Reef

DREAMTIME DIVE & SNORKEL, QUEENSLAND

The natural wonder of the Great Barrier Reef is perhaps seen most memorably through the snorkel mask of an Aboriginal Australian.

A spotted ray digs itself into the sand below as I hover above it, flukes fluttering like butterfly wings, sending clouds of sand adrift into the current. “We call her Millie,” sea ranger Sissy Myer says later, when I’ve described my encounter. “Did you see the turtle?” I shake my head, no, and she looks disappointed. There was plenty else to gaze upon through my snorkel mask, though: parrot fish, clams and iridescent blue staghorn coral, as well as giant clams the size of my torso, their luminescent speckled mantles wedged into the seabed.

Sissy is one of 15 Aboriginal crew employed by Reef Magic on their [Dreamtime Dive and Snorkel](#) cruise. These sea rangers provide a connection between visitors to the Great Barrier Reef, and the area’s Traditional Owners, whose Sea Country extends from the Frankland Islands just south of Cairns to the Torres Strait Islands 850km away in Queensland’s far north.

Sea Rangers from four Traditional Owner groups, the Gimuy Walubara Yidinji, Gunggandji, Mandingalbay and Yirrganydji people, as well as Torres Strait Islanders, mingle with passengers as we steam towards the reef’s outer boundary, some two hours from the Australian coastline.

We’re passing Cape Grafton when sea rangers Fred Mundraby and Tim Creed sit down beside me. Creed explains the importance of fire to his people while Mundraby starts rapidly spinning a firestick in a hole gouged into a block of wood. Despite the 20-knot headwind, he has the beginnings of a fire in his lap. He presses the tip of the stick into my palm so I can feel the heat. “Fire is everything,” Creed asserts. “We use it to make spears, hardening the barb by heating it in hot coals. We use fire to manage the bush. And we cook roo tails on it too!”

Looking back towards Cape Grafton, he points out the distinct outline of a saltwater crocodile whose head, neck and shoulders are obvious as the light catches the contours of the ridge. He then demonstrates how the silhouetted peaks of Fitzroy Island line up with the profile of his cupped hand. “No need for a GPS out here,” he says. “We know where we are from the shape of the landmarks.”

Creed and fellow sea ranger Lazarus “Laz” Gibson-Friday take us on a glass bottom boat tour of Dog’s Paw Reef, one of the 2900 individually named coral reefs that make up the Great Barrier. Lazarus introduces us to the Great Barrier Reef Creation story. “You see all this water around us?” he asks, sweeping his arms wide. “This was once rainforest. Where those breaking waves are on the horizon, my ancestors hunted kangaroos. When the sea rose and the Great Barrier Reef was formed, they hunted turtles.”

The Great Barrier Reef Creation story begins with a respected hunter spearing a sacred stingray which infuriated the spirit of the ocean. The sacred stingray flapped its wings, creating large waves and strong winds which caused the sea to rise. The spirit of the ocean unleashed a ferocious storm that threatened to wipe out the hunter’s tribe. His people heated up rocks and boulders with fire and rolled these into the ocean. This barrier they formed appeased the spirit who subsequently calmed the sea which now covers the Great Barrier Reef. “The Gimuy Walubara Yidinji Dreamtime story is 10,000 years old,” Lazarus comments. “Sir David Attenborough figured out that the coral beneath this boat was 9,000 years old.” Returning to Cairns, I have a deeper understanding of Traditional Owners’ connection with the sea.

DREAMTIME SOUTHERN X, NEW SOUTH WALES

A pioneering tour of one of the world's most spectacular harbours highlights Sydney/Warrane's saltwater Aboriginal cultures.

I've lost count of the number of times I've wandered around the Sydney Harbour foreshore, perhaps stopping under that bridge to gaze up in wonder; sometimes sitting under century-old fig trees for a picnic with enviable views of the Opera House, watching yachts and ferries zip past.

This part of the city never fails to dazzle. But I've never fallen quite so in love as when on a Rocks Aboriginal Dreaming Tour with [Dreamtime Southern X](#).

Many credit the company's founder, Margret Campbell, with being the pioneer of Aboriginal tourism experiences in Australia, having launched expeditions to spotlight Sydney/Warrane's Indigenous heritage more than two decades ago. Today, Margret – an Elder from the Dughutti Jerrinja Nation – and her team take visitors on a 90-minute interpretive amble around one of Sydney/Warrane's most historic neighbourhoods, The Rocks, adding depth and context by telling stories and highlighting important Aboriginal landmarks.

Our tour begins at Heritage-listed Cadmans Cottage, in a pocket of the city that belonged to the Gadigal Aboriginal community when the British First Fleet landed in Australia in 1788. My guide for the day is Margret's niece, Dalara Williams, who welcomes us to her land and acknowledges the Earth Mother by adding a symbolic smear of ochre to every visitor's hand.

A large part of Dalara's tour focuses on her saltwater ancestors' "good manners" practices, relating to the environment and seasonal food sustainability.

"Aboriginal people are the world's earliest conservationists," she says as we wander under the Harbour Bridge. "From the beginning we knew about the importance of rotating the land and not overfishing. We'd use middens [piles of discarded shells and bones] as a sign to show what had been consumed at a particular campsite. If there were oyster shells, the next mob would know to eat scallops instead, to make sure the oysters could regenerate. We'd never take more than we needed."

Dalara's insights into Aboriginal saltwater traditions are as engaging as they are informative. "It's about demystifying," she says, "and showing that our culture is not just about the outback and corroborees [Aboriginal ceremonies]."

While we walk, Dalara points out native medicinal plants – who knew they grew in the middle of Australia's largest city? – and speaks of the link between nature and Indigenous art. We stroll along the foreshore, pausing under a huge Port Jackson fig tree that casts dappled light on the grass. Dalara passes around Aboriginal artefacts, regaling our group with mesmerising tales of Indigenous Totems and Songlines, which she describes as "a type of spiritual musical poetry to recount and keep alive history and traditions".

Because each of Margret's guides has a unique history and connection to the water and land, no two Dreaming Tours are alike: different stories are shared, and there are varied diversions along the way.

But regardless of who's at the front of the pack, you will walk away from this experience with a newfound appreciation for the Aboriginal heritage of Sydney/Warrane, not to mention a few insights into where to have the most scenic, and spiritual, picnic in the city.



Dreamtime Southern X, New South Wales

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- Modern city, ancient heartbeat: seeing Sydney/Warrane through Aboriginal eyes
- Exploring Sydney/Warrane's exceptional history on foot
- Immerse yourself in Sydney/Warrane's ancient Aboriginal history
- A city walking tour with a difference
- Experiencing Sydney/Warrane's incredible Aboriginal heritage



Firescreek Botanical Winery Aboriginal Experiences,
New South Wales

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- A tantalising taste of the New South Wales Central Coast
- Bush tucker and wine? Find the perfect pairing on the Central Coast
- Discover Aboriginal cultures on the Central Coast
- A Central Coast winery tour with a difference
- Dive deep into Aboriginal cultures on an Elder-guided tour

FIRESCRECK BOTANICAL WINERY ABORIGINAL EXPERIENCES, NEW SOUTH WALES

Aboriginal culture is perfectly paired with botanical wine on the Central Coast.

Uncle Kevin 'Gavi' Duncan is a bit of a celebrity on the New South Wales Central Coast. A member of the Darkinjung Land Council, he is a passionate supporter of protecting the region's waterways, and an active tour guide, revealing the thousands of ancient Aboriginal sites scattered around this part of the state. He's also a talented musician, as I discover when I arrive at Firescreek Botanical Winery one balmy afternoon.

The wind recedes to a whisper when Gavi pulls out his didgeridoo and clapsticks, serenading us with haunting notes that reverberate through my bones. A respected Elder, Gavi's refined skill for circular breathing – the secret behind playing the 'didge' – is not easily acquired, as I quickly learn when I try to make a noise through the wooden instrument and instead sound like I'm blowing up a balloon. Note to self: stick to the clapsticks.

This is just one of the immersive and interactive experiences we enjoy over the 1.5-hour [Firescreek Aboriginal Storytelling and Wine Tasting Experience](#), held on the lush Firescreek estate in Holgate, 90 kilometres north of Sydney/Warrane. The property's owners, Nadia and Francis O'Connell, discovered that this part of the Central Coast was the ideal environment to grow all manner of fruits, flowers and herbs, with much of their bounty now native: think mountain pepper, Davidson plum, lemon myrtle and riberry.

Gavi's ancestors survived eating these plants for millennia, recognising not only their bold taste, but also their immense medicinal and

nutritional value – did you know the Davidson plum is a rich source of calcium? Or that riberry contains an antioxidant thought to aid cognitive function? You will, following your afternoon at Firescreek.

These are some of the insights Gavi provides as we sample the seasonal produce he's carrying in his coolamon, this traditional wood-carved vessel the perfect showcase for Indigenous ingredients.

While Gavi can speak a number of Aboriginal languages – he welcomes us to Country with yaama, a Gamilaraay word for 'hello' used in northern New South Wales – he tells us that sadly the Darkinjung no longer have a spoken tongue. But revival projects are underway, with researchers working to document vocabulary, and in doing so bring about a renewed sense of pride and belonging among the community. Language is crucial in self-determination, Gavi says, which is why the Indigenous tours I've enjoyed always involve teaching participants a few Aboriginal words.

While we wander the Firescreek grounds, Gavi tells us Dreaming stories about how this land and the sky was crafted by Baiame, the Creator spirit. Then, under lemon-scented gums, we're met by Nadia and Francis, who not only own the estate but also make the wines we're about to sample. These are no ordinary tipplers – the duo use many of the estate's botanicals to create up to 25 different drops. We get to sample a seasonal selection, including chilli citrus, and a sweet pomegranate and apple.

It's a sip I'll never forget – a bit like this whole afternoon, really.

KAKADU CULTURAL TOURS, NORTHERN TERRITORY

On the East Alligator River, a Gulyambi Cultural Cruise offers a different perspective on an ancient landscape.

“What’s that you see ahead of us?” asks our guide Hilton Garnarradj, gesturing towards the riverbank as our tender cuts through the water. The answer seems obvious: a copse of paperbarks, untidy-looking trees that get their name from the ribbons of pale bark that unfurl from their trunks. To Hilton and his fellow Aboriginal Australians, however, this is more than just another stand of trees.

A paperbark tree is the equivalent of a supermarket: a one-stop shop where you can pick up all sorts of daily necessities. As Hilton peels off long strips of bark, he demonstrates the many uses his people find for the tree. That soft bark can be used to swaddle a baby, provide soft bedding, or wrap up fish to cook in a ground oven, adding paperbark leaves for a kick of flavour.

“This Country, it looks after us,” he says happily.

It doesn’t stop there: the waterproof bark can also be twisted to form a drinking vessel, or layered in large sheets over branches to create a simple raft, or gulyambi – from where our cruise, the Gulyambi Cultural Cruise, gets its name. It’s one of several experiences on offer from [Kakadu Cultural Tours](#).

There is much more to learn as we cruise along the East Alligator River, bathed in late-afternoon sunlight. As we trace each bend, we are greeted by a series of different landscapes, from monsoonal rainforest to towering sandstone escarpments.

Traditionally, these diverse environments offer the local Aboriginal people a rich range of bush tucker, from barramundi fish to magpie geese eggs to water lilies. “The stems, they are delicious; taste like celery,” Hilton says. He also points out the area’s rich bird life, from sea eagles soaring above to egrets and cormorants

frolicking in the water, and tiny flashes of blue that disappear almost before we see them, which, he tells us, are azure kingfishers.

And then there are ginga, or saltwater crocodiles – plenty of them. Lazing on the banks, or semi-submerged in the water, these fearsome salties are as relaxed as only apex predators can be. Safe in our boat, we thrill at the close encounters.

As we drift along, Hilton happily answers questions about everything from Creation stories – which trace the adventures of Ngalyod, the Rainbow Serpent, and Namarrgon, the Lightning Wielder – to how the area’s Aboriginal inhabitants live today. He even gives us a crash course in spear technique, letting us handle a range of spears to appreciate the way each one is formed for a specific purpose.

“You want to hunt a buffalo, you need a heavy spear,” he says, before handing over a much lighter option. “This one we use for fishing.”

“Why is it so light?” someone asks. Hilton flashes his radiant smile again. “So it floats, of course!”

By the time we pull up to the dock and say our goodbyes to Hilton, it’s late afternoon. We take the five-minute drive to the nearby Ubirr – home to some of the most exceptional rock art in the world, including depictions of first encounters with white Europeans – for yet another memorable experience, exploring these ancient paintings and the interpretive signage accompanying them. Finally, we conclude the day with the short ascent up Ubirr rock – a famous lookout, offering spectacular 360-degree views of the surrounding floodplains and rock escarpments. Ending our time here, with a spectacular sunset for company, is a rite of passage for all Kakadu visitors – and all the more poignant for our deeper understanding of the people who have lived here for so many thousands of years.



SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- Crocodiles, rock art and ancient culture: cruising Kakadu
- Cultural connection on an Aboriginal Kakadu cruise
- Exploring Kakadu’s ancient Aboriginal heritage
- Experiencing the Kakadu landscape through Aboriginal eyes
- An Indigenous introduction to Kakadu National Park



Karrke Aboriginal Cultural Experience & Tours, Northern Territory

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- Cultural flavours of Australia's Red Centre
- A cultural connection to "desert country"
- A modern taste of ancient culture
- Bush tucker in Australia's exquisite Red Centre
- A taste of Central Australia's Aboriginal cultures

KARRKE ABORIGINAL CULTURAL EXPERIENCE & TOURS, NORTHERN TERRITORY

Taste a witchetty grub and discover Aboriginal culture near Kings Canyon, in Australia's Red Centre.

A plump white witchetty grub wriggles in the hot ashes of the campfire. A few seconds later it is cooked and ready to eat.

Aboriginal tour operator Christine Breden holds the delicacy out to me encouragingly. I hesitate, unsure I want to taste this particular example of bush tucker: the larva of a moth found in the Central Australian desert. But curiosity wins, and I tentatively bite, chew and swallow. It's a little bit eggy, a little bit nutty, and definitely not as unpalatable as it looks.

Christine and her partner Peter Abbott live on the land of their ancestors in the Aboriginal community of Wanmarra (population 10), just inside Watarrka National Park in Australia's Red Centre, about three and a half hours' drive north of Uluru, or four hours' drive south-west of Alice Springs on the sealed highway. (Alternatively, you can explore the area over several days, with stops and diversions, if you take the Red Centre Way, for which a 4WD is essential.)

Christine is a Luritja woman and a Traditional Owner of the Wanmarra community, and Peter is a Western Aranda/Pertame (Southern Aranda) man, also from Central Australia.

They run [Karrke Aboriginal Cultural Experience & Tours](#), introducing visitors to their ancient culture and Creation story, and teaching them about traditional foods and medicines used by the Luritja and Pertame people, as well as hunting skills, dot painting and carving with fire.

After a traditional smoking ceremony to welcome us, we are soon immersed in stories of the Dreamtime, Aboriginal culture and living on Country.

The business, we learn, takes its name from the western bowerbird, or "karrke" in the Aranda language. The male of this beautiful species,

found in this part of Central Australia, is noted for the pink plume on top of his head. Like other bowerbirds, he collects and decorates his bower with shiny things – flowers, berries and anything else that catches his eye – to attract a mate.

The name was chosen because it conjured for Christine an image of visitors "flying away to share their experiences with their friends" and attracting them to pay a visit here themselves.

There is more bush tucker: Christine shows us how to use large stones to grind mai, or food, in the form of edible tree and grass seeds, and explains how they have been used by countless generations of hunters and gatherers. We lick the sweetness from tjala (live honey ants), and try seasonal fruits including wild passionfruit, quandong, desert raisins, bush plums, wild figs and onions.

We emulate the light taps and the rhythm that Peter sets with the clap sticks before throwing a spear and a non-returning boomerang (with mixed results).

Sitting on the red earth, we marvel at a vivid expanse of seeds from a bats-wing coral tree. Laid out on the ground, they reflect the colours of this Country: green, red, yellow, orange, brown and dark purple.

An accomplished and multi-talented artist, Christine shows us how seeds are used to make bracelets and necklaces for the women, explains the cultural symbols and shapes found in dot painting, and demonstrates fire branding.

The wealth of information – provided generously over the hours of our time together – is worth noting, but it's the warmth and positivity of our hosts that proves the most exceptional aspect of this experience. Peter and Christine's quiet devotion to their heritage, and willingness to share it open-heartedly, sets the tone for a rich and rewarding few hours, that leaves each visitor feeling closer to the land.

KINGFISHER TOURS, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Travel deeper into to the heart of the Kimberley with the region's Traditional Custodians

The rhythmic sound of clap sticks fills the cavernous space of Cathedral Gorge, and my skin prickles. As Gija woman Bec Sampi adds her lone voice to the sharp, flinty beat in this naturally formed theatre, goosebumps spread across my entire body. Bec's song – delivered in her native tongue – resonates in this vast yet intimate space, amplified wondrously by nature.

Bec is the head guide with [Kingfisher Tours](#), a small-group tour company that employs only Aboriginal guides to lead its immersive journeys in Western Australia's spectacular Kimberley region. And today she's showing us the wonders of Purnululu National Park – a World Heritage-listed marvel deep in the dusty red outback, a nine-hour drive from the tourism hub of Broome, or a much shorter scenic flight. It's famous for the Bungle Bungle Range, rocks weathered into their unusual domed shapes over 20 million years. Our first glimpse is from above; we fly low over the outcrop in a light plane, gazing with jaws agape at the ribboning formations. Now on the ground, we gain an entirely different perspective as we wander between them, touching their textured surfaces and gazing up to their 300m-high peaks, feeling the cool of their shadows.

Bec first came here with her grandmother as a 13-year-old, before planes and helicopters could whisk you in. Purnululu, which loosely

translates to “sandstone” in the Gija language, is their Country, shared with the Jaru people. The pair camped on a riverbed for two weeks, catching fish with spinifex grass, looking at Dreaming paintings on rock walls and walking to the hidden spots Bec now shows visitors.

At the entrance to Cathedral Gorge, Bec points out bush lavender, a fragrant plant used by Aboriginal peoples to treat colds and coughs. As we leave, we pass caves and Bec suggests we look for warning signs. With her guidance, we see boomerangs long ago painted on rock walls. They were used as fighting sticks, she says, and their images are like signposts, pointing to the warriors that would've been positioned up high, guarding this place. Permission to pass would be granted only after connections were made: you'd need to acknowledge the local people and Country you're walking on, and talk about who you are and where you're from, says Bec. It seems like a good approach to life.

There are many lessons to be learned on Bec's tours. Spending an afternoon – or a few days – with her is not only an education in bush tucker, rock art, outback medicine, astrology and Aboriginal spirits, it's also an invitation to see the world differently, to think openly and to appreciate nature's beauty. As we gather for sunset drinks atop a lookout, watching the Bungle Bungles morph from deep red to purple in the fading light, I feel incredibly lucky to be here.



Kingfisher Tours, Western Australia

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- Learn the secrets of the Kimberley with an Aboriginal guide
- Beyond Broome: The ultimate Kimberley day trip
- Exploring the Songlines of the Kimberley
- Chasing waterfalls in the Kimberley
- Why you need to see the Bungle Bungles from the air



Koomal Dreaming, Western Australia

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- Discover nature's subtle thrills on a Cape Naturaliste walking tour
- Experience nature's secret thrills on a Cape Naturaliste walking tour
- Experience nature's secret thrills on a spectacular coastal walking tour
- Immerse yourself in the natural beauty and Indigenous history of Cape Naturaliste

KOOMAL DREAMING, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The Indigenous heritage of Australia's bucolic Margaret River wine region warrants closer inspection with [Koomal Dreaming](#).

I never knew you could make a bird sound by blowing on a peppermint leaf. Or mimic the warble of frogs while playing a didgeridoo. Or clap boomerangs together to make a sharp, flinty sound that keeps the beat in a communal, traditional music session.

Josh Whiteland's "Kaya" Cape Naturaliste walking tour is as much an aural experience as it is a lesson in the Aboriginal relationship with the bush. As we walk together towards the tip of the cape, cooled by the ocean breeze blowing over the Margaret River coastline, the Wadandi man stops and plucks a slender green leaf from a tree. He places it between his thumbs, brings his lips close and lets out the head-turning bird call. Just as swiftly, he rubs leaves from the same tree on his skin, telling us the oils released will keep away pesky mosquitoes. The native peppermint tree is incredibly versatile, we learn: you can make rope from its bark and fishing spears from its saplings. Our eyes roam over the twisted trunk with new appreciation.

We continue our stroll up the rugged, scrub-smothered point, reaching a wide deck that grants wraparound views of the azure Indian Ocean, stretching until it melts into a blue haze on the horizon line. "My people call this place Kwirreejeenungup," Josh says. "It means place of beautiful scenery."

From September to December, thousands of whales migrate past this point, the playful humpbacks clearly visible as their bodies break the surface, spurting water into the air. Several species visit these waters, including the world's largest animal, the blue whale. "This is one of the only places where you can see blue whales off the rocks," says Josh.

The constant changes in nature correspond with the six-season calendar that Josh's people live by. The start of the new year is Birak season, he tells us. It's when native Christmas trees bloom with bright orange flowers, signifying the celebration of Aboriginal ancestors. It's also when berries are ripe for the picking, abalone can be prised from the rocks, crayfish are best for eating and Indigenous greens such as dune spinach, sea celery and coastal figs should be foraged.

As we turn towards the cape's stout lighthouse that Josh's grandfather used to manually light, he tells us kangaroos may be sleeping beneath the tight, green shrubs beneath the boardwalk. Apparently, they can't sweat, so they only come out at night – yet another thing I never knew.

Josh leads us to what he calls his "meeting place", a sheltered spot hidden in the bush. There, wooden tools are spread out on kangaroo skin. He shows us how a firestick works, using a dried banksia flower as kindling, then passes around several boomerangs. The different sizes indicate different uses: a large one might fell an emu, while a smaller one can be thrown into water to stun a school of fish. The way it's carved and shaped affects the way it flies. He also shows us how a kangaroo skin can be turned into a bag, using the tail as a handle; in traditional times, sinew and bones were used to knit the sides together. That's when the didgeridoo comes out and together we create music and share culture. Blending traditional instruments and tools with a modern jam session builds a bonding bridge that we'll all remember.

KOORIE HERITAGE TRUST, VICTORIA

Walk in the footsteps of Melbourne/Narrm's Aboriginal clans.

So many of Australia's absorbing Indigenous experiences happen against a backdrop of red dirt or blue ocean, but the country's Aboriginal history is just as compelling in the cities as it is in the outback.

Melbourne/Narrm's [Koorie Heritage Trust](#) offers "a different type of Aboriginal experience", says the trust's cultural education manager, Rob Hyatt – one focused on urban Indigenous culture, and providing a deeper understanding of both the past and present.

Some international visitors have "been there, done that" and experienced a little Indigenous culture, says Hyatt, and "now they want to know what happened".

"Knowing the story is becoming really important to people," he says, explaining how the Trust can provide a deeper look into Aboriginal Australia within an urban setting. "They like getting the personal story and engagement rather than just sitting down to watch a show."

The not-for-profit Trust offers several ways for people to gain insight into how Aboriginal peoples once practised their cultures in Melbourne/Narrm and are keeping it alive today.

For one, you can simply drop into the Trust (entry is free), located in Federation Square, to browse its museum-style collection, which includes pre-colonisation artefacts such as hunting tools and shields and post-Colonisation pieces such as items from the old missions. It also charts the transition of some items – such as weaving and boomerangs – from being merely functional items to revered art forms. A gallery space hosts exhibitions that change every three months.

But it's the guided walks that offer an absorbing, and often deeply personal, take on

Aboriginal culture in Melbourne/Narrm, with Indigenous guides sharing some of their own story as they lead guests through the city.

The one-hour Birrarung Wilam (River Camp) Walk heads from Federation Square to the banks of the Yarra River that flows through the heart of Melbourne/Narrm. "When we walk alongside the river, we talk about its history, what the traditional landscape looked like and how Aboriginal peoples lived in the area, as well as the impact of colonisation on the land itself, and the impact on the people," Hyatt says.

Walkers continue to the Birrarung Wilam art installation that celebrates the physical and spiritual connection between Indigenous people and place. "That gives us a chance to talk about the Aboriginal lifestyle on the river," says Hyatt of the artwork that was installed in the lead-up to Melbourne/Narrm's 2006 Commonwealth Games.

The longer Scar Tree Walk (90 minutes to two hours) includes this route, continuing to the William Barak Bridge connecting Birrarung Marr (an 8.3-hectare park neighbouring Federation Square) and Yarra Park. Barak, born into the Wurundjeri clan, became a 19th Century leader who worked to bridge the divide between settlers and Aboriginal inhabitants. "He was probably one of Australia's first Aboriginal activists," says Hyatt.

At the Melbourne Cricket Ground, known as the MCG, participants will see the so-called "scar trees" outside Gate 4. "They're canoe trees and a culturally protected site," says Hyatt. "They're remnants of Aboriginal occupation prior to Europeans arriving in the Melbourne area."

The area was traditionally a ceremonial ground and Aboriginal Elders still practise ceremony at the MCG during major events such as the Australian rules grand final with a Welcome to Country, an ancient protocol for welcoming visitors to the land.



Koorie Heritage Trust, Victoria

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- Dig deeper into urban Indigenous cultures
- A revealing insight into Indigenous cultures in Melbourne/Narrm
- A deep dive into Aboriginal culture in the city
- A journey into Aboriginal experiences in an urban setting
- Melbourne/Narrm's Aboriginal cultures brought to life



Mandingalbay Ancient Indigenous Tours, Queensland

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- How traditional knowledge is protecting the Wet Tropics of Queensland
- An eye-opening walk on Country in Tropical North Queensland
- A Tropical North Queensland safari on Aboriginal land
- Connecting with Indigenous cultures in Tropical North Queensland
- Experience Aboriginal cultures in Cairns/Gimuy

MANDINGALBAY ANCIENT INDIGENOUS TOURS, QUEENSLAND

A new appreciation for the world's oldest rainforest comes easily in the company of a Traditional Owner.

It's hard to comprehend just how ecologically diverse and important Tropical North Queensland is globally – this pocket of Australia is home to a staggering 3,000 plant species, 400-plus different birds and more than 100 mammals, many of which are found nowhere else on Earth. It's a bounty that Djunbunji Land and Sea Rangers have been actively tracking and recording for over a decade, imparting their immense knowledge to guests who sign up for deeply immersive experiences hosted by Mandingalbay Ancient Indigenous Tours.

My guide for the Hands On Country Eco Tour, Djunbunji Land and Sea Ranger Victor Bulmer, tells me while a decade of research may sound impressive, in the scheme of things, it is nothing – his Mandingalbay Yidinji ancestors, the native title holders of this Country southeast of Cairns/Gimuy, have been nurturing and developing an understanding of this part of Australia for tens of thousands of years.

They know every nook and nuance of this special area, where the rainforest meets the sea, and saltwater meets fresh. Over generations, they have also developed an intimate relationship with every insect, bird, reptile, mammal and plant. Victor tells me that this setting we're walking through is at once an Indigenous bush supermarket, pharmacy and hardware store.

After zipping away from Cairns Marlin Marina, we venture along Trinity Inlet to explore Grey Peaks National Park and East Trinity Reserve – a vibrant, tidal wetland where kingfishers dive, egrets patrol and powerful stories unfold.

Victor leads us into lush rainforest, pausing along a trail to reveal the healthful properties of the plants we pass. Like the cocky apple, with anaesthetic properties appreciated by teething babies. And the red beech tree, which (when ingested) will get your heart started just as fast as a cup of coffee.

Next, we follow him to a rocky overhang where he shows us a pile of long-ago discarded shells, commonly known as a midden. This, he tells us, is one of the world's earliest forms of conservation – shells left behind by Victor's ancestors showed future visitors what type of produce had recently been consumed, and what should be avoided to keep the local ecosystem in balance.

Being here, among the World Heritage-listed Wet Tropics of Queensland rainforest, is like a salve for the soul – there's nothing more humbling than having the story of the world's oldest rainforest decoded by a member of the world's oldest civilisation. It's an unforgettable connection to the land, sea, animals and plants.

Victor is a direct descendant of the region's lead warrior Jabulum Mandingalpai, who was born around 1858 and survived the era's occupation and settlement of Australia. But as told by Victor, Jabulum's story is not a political one – it's a tale of how we can work together to make the land a better place, and it's something Victor inspires us all to do during the three-hour tour.

MARUKU ARTS, NORTHERN TERRITORY

An open-air “classroom”, in sight of Uluru, provides an unforgettable introduction to Aboriginal art.

Under a bright mid-morning sun, Ayers Rock Resort guests gather outdoors for what might be one of the world’s most unusual art lessons. As we watch, an Aboriginal desert artist sits in the red sand, drawing concentric circles with a fingertip to signify the waterhole, campsite or fire that will be the centrepiece of the story she’s about to paint.

Other symbols that depict “Creation time” (Tjukurpa) stories are revealed, as an assisting interpreter translates what the artist is saying in her Pitjantjatjara language. Parallel lines, we learn, indicate a journey. A U-shape is the imprint of a human backside sitting in the sand. Deft movements of the hand, fingers and knuckles reveal more still: here’s the slink of a full-bellied python on the move, the paw prints of a dingo; from more recent Australian history come the squelchy pads of camels, an animal introduced to Australia by 19th-century settlers.

The experience is an unforgettable introduction to both Aboriginal art and the culture of the Anangu people, who have lived in this desert for tens of thousands of years. With Uluru looming large on the nearby horizon, there is plenty of inspiration for the dot paintings guests will now sit down to create, illustrating their own life story in acrylics on canvas.

The daily morning and afternoon art workshops, held near the resort’s Town Square Lawn Area, are run by artists and staff from the [Maruku Arts](#) collective. The name means “belonging to black” – reflecting the fact the not-for-profit art and craft organisation is owned and operated by the Anangu (Aboriginal peoples

from Australia’s Central and Western deserts). Maruku doesn’t just offer painting workshops, it sells work from some 900 artists living in 20 remote communities from throughout the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia.

Maruku has a warehouse at Mutitjulu, an Indigenous community near Uluru that’s off limits to tourists, and a retail gallery at the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park’s Cultural Centre that showcases a broad range of paintings to suit every budget and the decorated wooden carvings known as *punu*.

A smaller selection of works is also sold at an art market near the site of the dot painting workshops. Artists who have earlier demonstrated their methods to the workshop students sometimes take a seat at the market stall and continue to make work, dotting the paint onto canvas with tiny sticks, throughout the day. They natter to each other in language, sometimes sharing a broad smile with a curious visitor who comes by for a closer look.

After the art lesson, it can be easier to “read” the paintings on display at the market stall. No longer abstract thanks to these insights, they now tell fascinating stories of life in Australia’s spiritual and geographic centre. Flip over some of the unframed canvases and it’s likely you will see traces of red dust. Perhaps there’s a waft of campfire smoke as well. It’s certainly an evocative souvenir to take home.



Maruku Arts, Northern Territory

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- Experience a Dot Painting Workshop in Ayers Rock
- An art lesson with a difference
- Up close and personal with an Aboriginal desert artist
- A first-hand experience of Aboriginal art
- See Aboriginal art brought to life before your eyes



Ngurrangga Tours, Western Australia

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- A larrikin guide with a foot in two worlds
- See the rugged Pilbara region through Clinton Walker's eyes
- Rock art, bush tucker, Songlines: welcome to the Pilbara
- The guide who shares his love of Pilbara country with the world

NGURRANGGA TOURS, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Look for rock art, bush foods and stories in the sky with an incredible guide.

Ngurrangga Tours' Clinton Walker bridges the divide between modern and traditional cultures with an easy humour. On his company's Instagram feed, for instance, he posts a video of a goanna (his favourite bush tucker and the first animal he learned to track and catch) that suddenly scrambles into action, racing away from the crunch of his approaching boots. "That's what us blackfullas like to call fast food," he jokes in the caption.

When we catch up on the phone, Walker, who started his tour company in 2013, has just emerged from spending a month on-Country initiating his son into the responsibilities of adulthood as an Aboriginal lawman – a process that was documented on social media. "I wanted to give people an insight into what we do in the off-season with our ceremonies and stuff like that," Walker says.

There are no better guides to the ancient, often mysterious cultures that are still very much alive in this remote part of Australia than Walker, a descendant of the Ngarluma and Yindjibarndi people, Traditional Owners of Western Australia's West Pilbara region encompassing the city of Karratha, Dampier Archipelago and Murujuga and Millstream Chichester National Parks, and his team from Ngurrangga Tours.

It's estimated up to a million rock-art images are scattered throughout the Burrup Peninsula and Dampier Archipelago. Walker's tour of Murujuga National Park, home to the world's highest concentration of rock art, shows off some of the stunning images that document everything from first contact with Europeans to megafauna and other extinct species.

Guests who are happy to get a little dirty can combine rock art with bush tucker on Ngurrangga Tours' Bush Tucker and Rock Art tour. After

admiring rock-art images estimated to be at least 40,000 years old, you'll make your way through mud, spinifex, scrub and wildflowers to help forage for seasonal ingredients. This might include berries, wattle seeds and mud crabs.

On any of his tours, Walker may tell you about Songlines running through this striking outback region. "A Songline is a series of stories connected to various landmarks and each landmark has a song attached to it," he says. One of the key stories tells how the Warlu (Rainbow Serpent) created the Fortescue River that irrigates the Millstream Chichester National Park – a picturesque oasis in the desert. The park is an oasis in the middle of the desert, nestled within the chocolate brown rocks of the Chichester Range. Permanent pools are fed by springs that draw water from the underground aquifer within porous dolomite rock.

Many of Walker's former guests return wanting a longer tour and opt for an overnight experience that includes camping near the park and the Hamersley Range, and learning the Dreaming stories associated with the constellations. "You can actually see the Songlines in the sky," he says. "The stories don't end during the day – they go on into the night." This favourite spot of Walker's is also a repository of artefacts such as stone axes and knives, spearheads and grinding stones.

For guests who say to Walker, "I want to do everything you've got", he can combine individual tours into a super-tour that unfolds over three days. Those with their own 4WD can also do a tag-along tour. "Some 4WD enthusiasts chase the wet season," Walker says. "With the rain comes the waterfalls and the river crossings."

Wet or dry, it's Country that has a fascinating story to tell – and storytellers don't come any better than the affable and deeply knowledgeable Walker.

NITMILUK TOURS, NORTHERN TERRITORY

A river cruise through an ancient gorge leaves a lasting impression.

On a crisp dry season day, the Katherine River cuts an emerald path through the cliffs of Nitmiluk Gorge. I've arrived to bed down in one of the outback's most luxurious stays, gaze at ancient art sites, swim in rock pools and, importantly, take a cultural cruise along the waterways of Nitmiluk National Park, which connect a total of 13 sandstone gorges, like the beads of a necklace.

So far, it's easy to see why locals rave about Nitmiluk Gorge (previously known as Katherine Gorge). Located three hours' drive south of Darwin/Gulumerdgen, this Aboriginal-owned natural playground attracts less hype than its better-known cousin, Kakadu. Yet that only adds to its appeal; Nitmiluk feels like a well-kept secret, albeit one that teems with spiritual significance, owing to an association with the 17 clans that make up the local Jawoyn people.

It's still early in the morning. After dropping my bags at [Cicada Lodge](#), I walk the one-kilometre trail to a lookout perched above the first gorge. The rising sun paints the sky in a tropical cocktail of colours – orange, red and pink. I gaze down upon the river, where rainbow bee-eaters soar above the water's surface. On either side of the banks, walls of florid foliage sway in sync with the breeze.

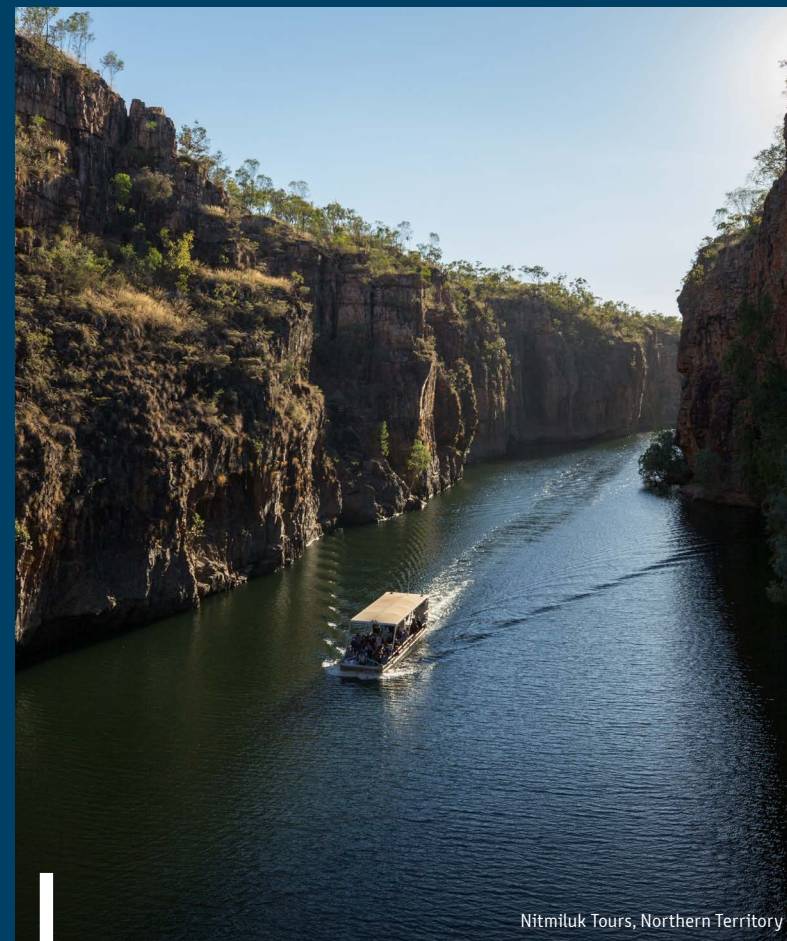
A small array of travellers has gathered to take the river cruise, which glides along the first gorge en route to ancient rock art galleries. Our Aboriginal guide explains that

the name "Nitmiluk" was bestowed upon the park by Nabilil, a figure from the time of Nitmiluk's creation – commonly called the Dreaming. Beside the gorge, Nabil heard the song of the cicada, a chorus of "nit, nit, nit!" He then crowned the park a place of Cicada Dreaming. We pause for an art fix, and our group wanders around cliff-face galleries filled with ancient etchings.

After floating along the second gorge, it's time to return to the first for our water-borne finale. Southern Rockhole offers an idyllic swimming spot, tucked away from view. A short walk up the riverbank leads us to a tumbling waterfall that tips into a clear pool. I dive in and spot silver fish swimming beside me. "Nitmiluk is alive with delicate creatures," I say to the guide. "It is," he replies, "but there are complex rules as to what we can hunt and what we must leave behind to appease our Creation ancestors." The park, he explains, is governed by a mystical and deep lore and history.

As daylight starts to fade, I return to the lodge, set amid a blooming native garden – one that swirls with wattle, bottlebrush and banksias. Here, 18 discrete units encircle a poolside outdoor dining area, where the friendly staff serve the evening's three-course meal prepared using local bush foods. Beyond my table, a cicadas' chorus starts up. "Nit, nit, nit!" The song chimes in with the sinking sun.

Nitmiluk's dreaming stories seep into my sleep that night, and they continue to do so long afterwards – when, like clouds, my visit here reshapes into dream-like memory.



Nitmiluk Tours, Northern Territory

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- Outback dreaming on the Katherine River
- Journey through the ancient Nitmiluk Gorge
- A cultural cruise through Nitmiluk Gorge
- Welcome to Nitmiluk – the place of Cicada Dreaming
- Soaking up the spiritual significance of Nitmiluk Gorge



Saltwater Eco Tours, Queensland

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- Cruise into Indigenous cultures on the Sunshine Coast
- Forge a cultural connection to the Sunshine Coast
- Get a taste of Indigenous cultures on a Queensland cruise
- A delicious way to experience Queensland's Saltwater Country
- Pair fine food with Indigenous cultures on the Sunshine Coast

SALTWATER ECO TOURS, QUEENSLAND

Indigenous cultures and bush food-inspired cuisine come together on a Sunshine Coast cruise with a difference.

The sky is blushed crimson when we set sail down the Mooloolah River with Simon Thornalley, skipper and co-owner of Saltwater Eco Tours, at the helm. As I settle in on the deck of the Spray of the Coral Coast, Simon reaches for his didgeridoo while his wife Jenna takes the vessel's wheel.

The water is flat, gleaming like galvanised steel, as Simon walks slowly to the ship's bow, calm and purposeful, where he sits, cross-legged, and brings the instrument to his lips. Minutes pass as we sit listening to the deeply resonant music produced by Simon, who uses the ancient instrument to great effect. As the rhythm, timbre and volume builds to a crescendo, he asks us to close our eyes and imagine his ancestors, preening and dancing, their silhouettes stepping in and out of the light.

As the sun sinks below the horizon, a festive mob of kookaburras perched in the trees on the riverbank starts laughing uproariously. Suddenly Simon flashes a wide grin and bounds to his feet, bending over the bow of the boat to point to a turtle. "The turtle is one of my family Totems," he says. "I have two Totems. One is the turtle and one is the dugong. They are significant animals for saltwater people."

Everything from the staff T-shirts to Saltwater Eco Tours' website logo features the green turtle. It's an animal Simon saw a lot of as a child while sailing around Tropical North Queensland with his family, including the Torres Strait, where his maternal grandmother is a respected Kaurareg Elder and his great-great-grandfather owned a fleet of pearl-

lugging boats. Guests onboard the 58-foot ketch (two-masted sailing boat) for today's Native Bushfood and Seafood Cruise listen intently to stories about Simon's Indigenous heritage while sipping signature lemon myrtle cocktails made from gin produced by BeachTree Distilling Co., one of the many local Indigenous businesses showcased on the two-hour cruise. As Simon returns to the helm, Jenna and their team produce a tray neatly arranged with skewered prawns served with a lemon myrtle and native chilli aioli, oysters mornay made with macadamia cheese, as well as slow-cooked kangaroo served on tacos with a coleslaw and bush tomato relish from another local Indigenous business, My Dilly Bag.

Simon leans both arms on the wheelhouse as the dusk fades to an orange afterglow, and the river becomes like a shiny road that we follow back to Mooloolaba's wharf.

As well as stitching his story of Indigenous and seafaring heritage together as we cruise the protected waterways of Mooloolaba, Simon, a former commercial diver, touches on some meaningful maritime history relating to the beautifully restored historic vessel we cruise on.

"There is something unique about this boat. As well as being more than 100 years old, the boat was copied from a blueprint of a ketch owned by Joshua Slocum, who was the first person to sail solo around the world," says Simon.

"Joshua's spirit lives on with this vessel," he adds. "I also come from Sea Country, so this boat celebrates my own personal journey and everything in my life that has led me to here.

SAND DUNE ADVENTURES, NEW SOUTH WALES

A quad bike tour across the spectacular dune system of Stockton Bight is full of excitement and cultural insights.

Though we're still getting used to our quad bikes as we enter the sand dunes of Stockton Bight, near Port Stephens, New South Wales, we already know we are in a special place. Spread out ahead, the dunes rise and dip like the swell in a caramel-hued velvet ocean, patches of glinting shells appearing like flotsam on the surface. The discarded shells belong mostly to pipis, edible clams, and are the main component of many middens (feasting sites), visible in the dunes, covered and exposed, over time.

"This place is sacred to the Worimi," says guide Rachel Syron, a member of the Worimi community herself, as we pause beside a large midden. "An underground freshwater table runs beneath the dunes here, making it a perfect spot to gather and eat, both pipis, foraged by our women from the seashore, and kangaroo hunted by our men, inland." As well as middens, there are significant burial sites secreted in the private Worimi conservation lands we are travelling through. So, the pre-tour plea to stay on existing tracks, in order to avoid damaging sacred spots, is as important as the safety briefing.

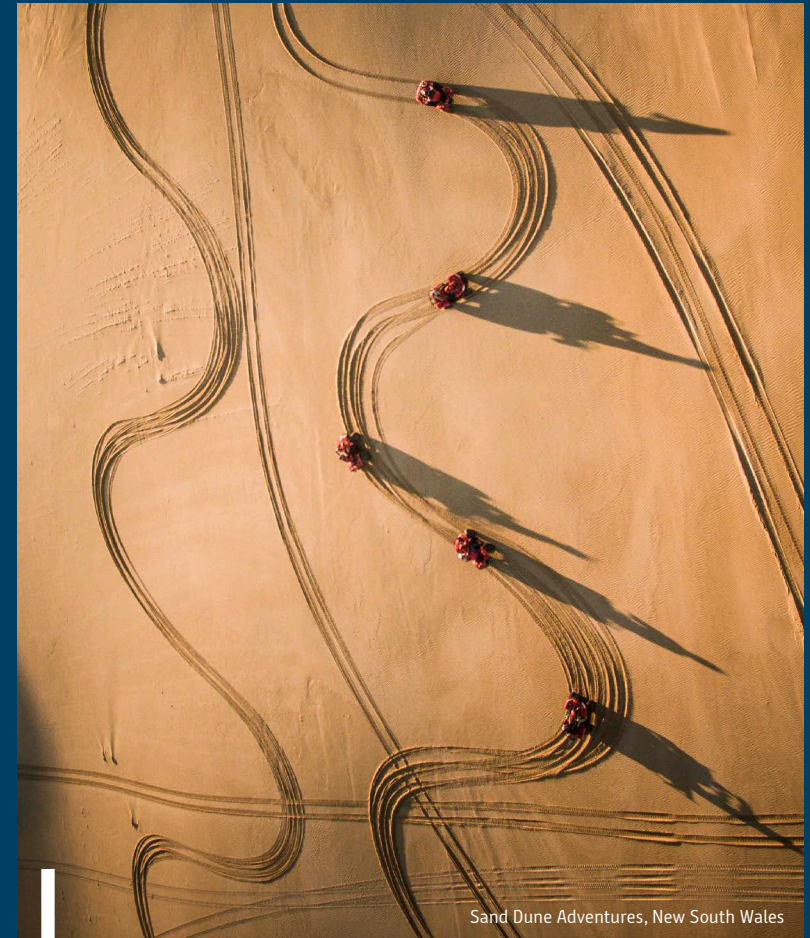
Begun nine years ago with eight quad bikes, [Sand Dune Adventures](#) is a venture staffed entirely by local Aboriginal people, mostly from the Worimi community, whose nation is bound by the Hunter River (further south), and the town of Taree to the north. It now has around 100 bikes.

What's impressive is how tours deftly deliver cultural insights along with the adrenalin-pumping fun of riding quad bikes across an otherworldly Mad Max-like landscape. At one point, Rachel leads us to the summit of a 20-metre dune before giving us the option to plunge down its sheer slope. "Now, don't use the brakes and try to keep straight," she advises as I survey the drop, trepidation jangling in my stomach, before I counter-intuitively manoeuvre the bike over the edge.

We are soon confident on the sturdy red machines, and after that it feels like we're gliding over the lithe, curvaceous body of Mother Earth. It's a constantly changing scene; the entire dune system is moving inland at 4.5 metres per year. One 15-metre dune halved in size over the past month.

Our one-hour adventure concludes with Rachel revealing the many uses the Worimi have for coastal vegetation. Wattleseed is used to make damper bread; the paperbark of melaleuca trees can be grafted off to create perfectly waterproof bowls or coolamons (a dish with curved sides, for which Aboriginal Australians have many uses). Its leaves can also be used as anaesthetic.

Flying out of nearby Newcastle airport after the tour, I glance out of the window and see for the first time the extent of Stockton Bight, which reaches for 32 kilometres along Australia's east coast. Then, in one corner, I spot a looping trail of tiny beetle-like quad bikes, and wish I could still be down there, exploring the extraordinary dune system, with the people who've called it home for thousands of years.



Sand Dune Adventures, New South Wales

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- Saddle up for a family adventure: quad biking on giant sand dunes
- Expect thrills galore riding the giant sand dunes of Stockton Bight
- Ride the coastal dunes of Stockton Bight on a quad bike
- Thrill-seekers apply here: ride giant sand dunes on a quad bike
- Action-packed adventure: quad biking on sand dunes



Spirits of the Red Sand, Queensland

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- Experience true stories of Aboriginal history, told through dance
- The Aboriginal dance performance helping bring cultures together
- An Aboriginal dance performance designed to unify cultures and heal rifts
- Experience an Aboriginal dance performance that's designed to heal
- An Aboriginal dance performance helping bring cultures together

SPIRITS OF THE RED SAND, QUEENSLAND

An interactive theatrical performance is changing the way we think about Australia's Indigenous cultures.

It's 7pm on a weekday and I am sitting beside a campfire, while members of the Nunukul Yuggera dance troupe move in enchanting circles around the lawn. We're in the heart of Beenleigh, a town halfway between Brisbane/Meeanjin and the Gold Coast, known for its rum distillery and not much else. Until now.

The Aboriginal dancers are part of Spirits of the Red Sand, a progressive theatrical performance that unfolds across different set locations in the Beenleigh Historical Village. The site's collection of heritage buildings is filled with artefacts from the 1860s to today. It's a stellar setting for the show, allowing Indigenous actors to tell their stories from inside an Anglican church with audience members in the pews, on upturned logs outside a general store, or on stools beside a bonfire. Gazing around at others watching on, faces cast aglow by flames, I notice that every single person is captivated, wanting to hear more about Jarrah and his mob and their often brutal treatment by early white settlers in this part of the country.

The tale is not a happy one, and the stories cast members re-enact are at times confronting, often upsetting and entirely moving. "I know there's a lot to process, and it's not always enjoyable," Shannon Ruska, an Aboriginal Dinner Show performer and co-founder, observes afterwards. "But we're not about creating guilt here – it's about acknowledging and moving forward, bringing our cultures together."

The script was more than three years in the planning, a joint production between Shannon's father Eddie and Mike Tamaki, owner of Rotorua's Tamaki Maori Village.

The show's current director, Eddie knows a thing or two about using performance to inspire a connection with culture: in 1995, he launched Nunukul Yuggera Aboriginal Dancers to help Indigenous kids become passionate about their heritage again. Over the years, hundreds of youth have performed in Nunukul shows, and many of them now star on the many stages of Spirits of the Red Sand.

Mike and Eddie perfected the play's dialogue through extensive consultation with community Elders, ensuring that the story, based on true events, is told in a way that is at once educational and inspiring. "Everyone involved is very passionate about the tale," says Shannon. "They've lived these experiences. It's empowering to tell the Aboriginal story in this way."

Narrative aside, what makes the Aboriginal Dinner Show so special is that fact that after the last bow has been taken, performers and audience members are given the chance to mingle over dinner served on the homestead's broad patio. I find myself sitting next to Shannon and his wife Kayleen O'Chin (the show's storyteller), who talk honestly and openly about their experiences growing up in Queensland. Shannon passes around damper with wattleseed dukkah, as well as kebabs loaded with emu, crocodile and kangaroo.

"I think people are finally realising there's a massive gap in their knowledge when it comes to Australia's Indigenous heritage," Shannon tells me as dessert, a lemon myrtle cheesecake, is served. "Most people know more about the Holocaust than they do about Australia's Aboriginal heritage. That has to change, and hopefully what we're doing here is helping that change take place."

TOP DIDJ CULTURAL EXPERIENCE & ART GALLERY, NORTHERN TERRITORY

Aboriginal artist Manuel Pamkal gives a rare and personal insight into Aboriginal cultures in this hands-on, family-friendly experience.

As Manuel Pamkal welcomes us with the low humming sound of his didgeridoo, a fluffy grey kangaroo joey hops between us. It sniffs at people's feet and bags, stopping to lick my toes before bouncing off into the nearby bush. Manuel is unperturbed; he's used to kangaroos trying to upstage him during his twice-daily tours at [Top Didj Cultural Experience & Art Gallery](#), near the town of Katherine, in the Northern Territory.

With his curly dark hair, wiry grey beard and moustache, and warm, wide smile, Manuel is one of those characters that you will only meet in Australia's outback. We sit, enthralled, as he tells us stories of his life, which began when he was born under a paperbark tree, just 40 kilometres (25 miles) away – though he's not sure exactly when (he suspects he's in his mid-60s). When he was a child his parents would hunt for food, such as emus, wallabies and crocodiles; he witnessed corroborees and other ceremonies on a daily basis. He was “five or six”, he reckons, “before I saw my first whitefella”.

During his teens, Manuel's father told him Creation stories (also known as Dreamtime stories), and taught him to do traditional bark painting, showing him how to harvest and burn stringy bark, straighten it with sticks and prepare it for painting. Now, Manuel passes the custom onto us. We use paintbrushes made from reeds from a nearby billabong (waterhole) to paint a small picture of animals, including fish, birds and turtles, with abstract patterns and designs. It is a souvenir I will treasure forever.

In the days before matches and lighters, Aboriginal peoples would rub two sticks together to make fire. We take turns trying this ancient practice, but find it is much harder than it looks. Eventually one man manages to get the wood to smoke, and an ember appears. Manuel urges him to blow the ember in the grass until it starts to flame, and we all clap. Hunting is the last skill to master, and we line up to try our hand at throwing spears at a large fake kangaroo.

After the 2.5-hour tour, we explore the Top Didj Art Gallery, which showcases the work of artists from the region's Dalabon, Jawoyn and Mayali Aboriginal peoples, as well as pieces from Arnhem Land, the Kimberley and desert regions.

Top Didj was founded in 2009 by Petrena and the late Alex Ariston, who had long held a passion for Aboriginal cultures and artwork. Having previously run an art gallery in the town of Katherine, they recognised the need for an experience offering cultural interaction with the local Aboriginal people and recruited Manuel to lead the tours during the dry season, from May to October.

“Some Aboriginal people are shy, but for me, I'm a good fella, I like to share,” Manuel says. “I like to share my story with visitors from around the world about how my people used to live and survive, because they've never seen a blackfella or talked to one before. I like to teach people who come from other countries. They make me happy, and I make them happy.”



Top Didj Cultural Experience & Art Gallery, Northern Territory

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- Ancient cultures, modern stories: Aboriginal storytelling through art
- Connection, culture and Aboriginal Creation stories
- The ancient art of storytelling: experiencing Aboriginal cultures through paint
- Spear-throwing and storytelling: a very Aboriginal art gallery
- An artful afternoon of Aboriginal storytelling



Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure Tours, New South Wales

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- A stand-up paddleboarding tour with a difference
- Discover ancient Aboriginal connections to the sea
- Paddle into the Dreaming with Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure Tours
- The paddleboarding tour helping to revive Aboriginal language
- See the Coffs Coast through Aboriginal eyes

WAJAANA YAAM GUMBAYNGGIRR ADVENTURE TOURS, NEW SOUTH WALES

Take a tour with the descendants of Australia's first paddlers in the idyllic waterways of the New South Wales Mid North Coast.

"In one of our Dreaming stories, two sisters made the ocean and then they rested on Split Solitary Island," says [Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure](#) Tours owner-operator Clark Webb. "They placed their digging sticks in the shape of an 'X' and rested on either side of it – the younger sister on the northern side and the older sister on the southern side – before turning themselves into stone and becoming Split Solitary Island. They then made off into the night sky and became part of the Pleiades star formation, or the Seven Sisters. On our Moonee paddling tour, guests can actually see this island that we're talking about while we tell the story."

It's location-specific Aboriginal Creation stories like this – shared by Webb, a Gumbaynggirr/Bundjalung man, or one of his fellow guides, all of whom are Aboriginal people with strong familial ties to Gumbaynggirr Country – that make a tour with Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure Tours such a meaningful experience.

The Gumbaynggirr are saltwater people, which inspired Webb to launch 2.5-hour stand-up paddleboarding and kayaking tours in three serene waterways within Solitary Islands Marine Park: Coffs, Moonee and Red Rock Creeks. From the Moonee Creek meeting point, guests paddle about 800m downstream with the gently flowing tide towards the welcoming aquamarine waters of Moonee Beach; your elevated perspective provides the perfect vantage point for spotting various species of fish, from stingrays to flathead, as they dart through the crystal-clear creek.

During each tour, Aboriginal guides identify native flora and fauna, reveal the traditional uses of various plants, and collect seasonal bush tucker for your group to sample.

"Bracken fern's just for pharmaceutical use; you can rub it on stings and bites," Webb says. "And paperbark has heaps of uses: you can get fresh water out of it, you can boil up the leaves to make your bush tea, and also when it flowers it tells us there's heaps of mullet around. Then on the beach we have what they call pigface, and that's edible in summer."

It's likely that the soothing sound of paddles moving through water will be momentarily interrupted by the squawk of a cockatoo or two. And Webb recommends keeping a keen eye out for the dollarbird, so-named because of the prominent white spot that resembles a coin and decorates each teal-blue wing, only visible when this beautiful bird is in flight.

As Split Solitary Island drifts into view, paddlers pause to soak up this significant place while your Aboriginal guide brings the Dreaming to life. If a sea eagle soars overhead, your guide will delight in teaching you how to pronounce "Waranggarl" – the Gumbaynggirr word for this majestic bird of prey.

Webb's passion for the revitalisation of Gumbaynggirr language and culture runs deep, with a proportion of Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure Tours' proceeds invested into the not-for-profit Bularri Muurlay Nyanggan Corporation (BMNAC), which he set up in 2010 to help uplift Aboriginal youth.

WALKABOUT CULTURAL ADVENTURES, QUEENSLAND

At the only place on Earth where two World Heritage sites collide, a poignant exercise in cultural connection unfolds.

It's mid-morning, and I'm knee-deep in the ocean. Thankfully, we're in the tropics, so being partially submerged is more like a warm hug than a wake-up-call. Also, thankfully, I have a bamboo-and-steel spear in my hand, which makes me feel a little less concerned about the fact that the surrounding mangroves have been known to host the occasional crocodile. Our host and guide, Juan Walker, certainly isn't fazed by the notion however, smiling broadly as he wades through the water, showing us how to throw the spear to catch mud crabs and fish.

Walker has been hunting on and around two-kilometre-long Cooya Beach his entire life, following the traditions of his Kuku Yalanji ancestors, who've had a presence here for more than 50,000 years. This pocket of Queensland, just north of popular holiday destination Cairns, is where the Daintree Rainforest meets the Great Barrier Reef – two World Heritage sites responsible for nurturing some of Australia's most incredible flora and fauna. It's hard to imagine a more blissful, and emblematic, Australian setting: an opaline fringing reef on one side, dense jungle on the other, the aroma of barbecuing seafood and baking damper on the breeze. Little wonder this has been the picture-perfect backdrop for Walker's half- and full-day [Walkabout Cultural Adventures](#) for over 20 years.

From the sand we can hear an orchestra of birds chattering in the treetops. Walker identifies the notes of noisy pittas and varied trillers, and points to what he's just sighted: the elusive cassowary, an endangered flightless Australian bird foraging on the forest floor.

Aside from sharing hunting tips – which do nothing to improve my wobbly spear throwing technique – Walker tells us stories of his grandparents and parents, who happen to live nearby. Over the course of the day, Walker shows us how to forage for pipis, crack open almonds and decode bush medicine, guiding us through some of Tropical North Queensland's most significant cultural sites around Cape Tribulation and this pretty stretch of beach.

We also visit Mossman, a tiny, sugar-cane-laced town that happens to be the gateway to one of the state's most sacred Kuku Yalanji sites, Mossman Gorge.

Our day ends at the Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre, browsing the eye-popping artworks of Kuku Yalanji people, who often paint using natural pigments sourced from the surrounding countryside. But my mind remains where I left it moments earlier, at the gorge itself. An immensely spiritual place, where the Mossman River tumbles over granite boulders into freshwater swimming holes, it's a beautiful place for a dip.

As we floated in the water, a giant Ulysses butterfly drifted past on the breeze – a graceful electric-blue creature thought to be a returned ancestor, according to Walker, looking over those who remain on this earthly plane. After hours of Dreamtime tales, learning about Aboriginal legends and lore in this heavenly place, it doesn't sound implausible at all.



Walkabout Cultural Adventures, Queensland

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- Discover the natural wonders of the Daintree
- Discover the Daintree: where the rainforest meets the reef
- Go walkabout in Queensland's Daintree Rainforest
- Get into nature in the Daintree
- Immerse yourself in nature in Queensland's Daintree Rainforest



Waringarri Aboriginal Arts & Tours, Western Australia

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- Is this Australia's best Aboriginal art tour?
- On Country with the Kimberley's Aboriginal artists
- An immersive Aboriginal art tour in the Kimberley
- The innovative Aboriginal arts centre you shouldn't miss in the Kimberley

WARINGARRI ABORIGINAL ARTS & TOURS, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Aboriginal artists reveal the landscapes that inspire them on intimate tours of the outback.

The didgeridoo isn't just something to be heard. It's something that is felt. There's a rumbling vibration that dances over the skin and beats deep within your chest. Here, in Western Australia's Kimberley region, its tactile sound fills the air just as the sun kisses the horizon and amber light illuminates the rusty red rock formations of Mirima National Park.

Within sight of this lone viewpoint is [Waringarri Aboriginal Arts & Tours](#), an art centre that draws more than 100 Miriwoong artists in to practice their craft, yet offers far more than artworks alone. A number of the artists and arts workers lead tours of the country that fuels them, sharing traditions such as bush foraging and Dreaming storytelling, while they reveal their home.

The Mirima sunset tour begins at the art centre with a traditional welcome, called a muntha: you're greeted in language as wet leaves are flapped over your head, hands and feet to ensure you're kept safe from ancient spirits. You meet artists – aged 20 to 80 years old – as you're led through the centre's gallery and working studio spaces, hearing about its rich history as the first wholly Indigenous-owned art centre established in Western Australia. The centre opens onto the cultural knowledge garden, where you discover the symbolism of kangaroo and crocodile sculptures, identify useful bush figs and taste the chalky, citric flesh of a boab nut. From there you're driven to Mirima – and

nature's light show begins.

There's a similar daytime tour, which sees you walk through Mirima's rounded, curving formations that are said to echo the towering domes found in UNESCO World Heritage-listed Purnululu National Park and the Bungle Bungle Range, several hours' drive away. As you gaze at an Aboriginal rock art site, you might see a wallaby hop past, or spot a lizard warming itself, then crush fragrant leaves in your hand and learn how they're adapted for bush medicine. It's a sensory experience finished with a roam through the multimedia art centre.

Waringarri's half-day tour takes you deeper into traditional lands, to where huge boab trees loom. It starts with an exhilarating drive over the gushing Ord River causeway, stopping as the muntha is performed. At one of the sites, you cook Aboriginal bread, called damper, and try carving intricate scenes into a boab nut – an artform that's unique to the Kimberley. You'll hear Ngarrangarni, or Dreaming stories and tales from days spent working on vast cattle stations. Many visitors have an 'aha' moment as they explore the landscape, seeing firsthand the links between the art and the environment that is so central to Aboriginal identity. Returning to Waringarri, the pieces inside bear a greater significance to those viewing them with more educated eyes. You choose to take a meaningful artwork with you, knowing its purchase will help to keep this important culture alive.

WILPENA POUND RESORT, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

In South Australia's Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park, the Adnyamathanha people share their extraordinary Country.

"How can we expect people to understand us if we don't share our culture with them?"

These simple words, spoken by Aboriginal Elder Mick McKenzie, underscore the wish of the Adnyamathanha (or 'rock people') of South Australia's Flinders Ranges to teach others about the rich history and mystique of ancient and contemporary Aboriginal cultures.

I join Mick on a guided walk through his land, at [Wilpena Pound Resort](#) in the Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park, about 400 kilometres north of Adelaide/Tarntanya. The leisurely three-kilometre walk meanders along a creek to [Old Wilpena Station](#), one of the State's best-preserved pastoral settlements, dating back to the 1850s. The once 200,000-hectare working station is today just a cluster of old farm buildings, including the original homestead and a cemetery for the working dogs that were always part of the family.

Mick takes us through the intertwining histories of Aboriginal and European cultures as we take our seats at the Ikara meeting place, a public art space that tells the story of his people and the impact of settlement and pastoralism. The early European settlers, lacking the knowledge and wisdom of those who lived on this land before them, struggled to cope with the drought and frequent floods, he explains. Their farms, inevitably, failed. Eventually, the stock fences came down and properties like Old Wilpena Station became part of the [Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park](#), co-managed today by Traditional Owners.

The next day we hear more of the impact of European settlement during a half-day drive with Adnyamathanha guide Jimmy Neville.

During the [Time Travel and Gorgeous Gorges](#) 4WD tour, we spot the beautiful but elusive yellow-footed rock wallaby whose existence was threatened, first by fur hunters, and then by introduced species such as goats, foxes and rabbits who compete for precious resources. An eradication program is now underway to clear the park of the non-native species.

We travel through creek beds, past ancient gnarled river gums and dramatic gorges to a remote fossil site deep in the park. The exact location is kept secret because of fears of looting, so Jimmy and his fellow guides are among the few entrusted to bring people here. Jimmy explains that what we are looking at is not just a sandstone rock but a snapshot of the sea floor from 550 million years ago.

Preserved here is the first evidence of multi-celled animals (Ediacaran Fauna) on Earth. The fossil imprints were discovered in 1946, the first time the fossilised remains of an entire community of soft-bodied creatures have been found in such abundance anywhere in the world.

We realise how privileged we are to see it and standing in one of the oldest landscapes on Earth with a proud member of the oldest living cultures on Earth only deepens the experience.

Home for the night is the solar-powered [Wilpena Pound Resort](#), whose spacious safari tents overlooking the escarpment give you the experience of camping without having to touch a tent peg or pole. I awake in the morning to find kangaroos and an emu with his chicks grazing on the grass just metres away. It's a wonderful reminder of just how exquisite this Adnyamathanha Country really is.



Wilpena Pound Resort, South Australia

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- Walking Country with South Australia's "rock people"
- Walk the stunning landscapes of Wilpena Pound
- Be wowed by one of the oldest landscapes on Earth
- Led by the ancients: a journey into Wilpena Pound
- Glamp in one of the oldest landscapes on Earth



wukalina Walk, Tasmania

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- Culture and nature in the Bay of Fires
- Hike into an ancient culture in the Bay of Fires
- Middens and marvels in the Bay of Fires
- Beaches and bush tucker in north-east Tasmania/lutruwita
- An ancient pathway along the Bay of Fires

WUKALINA WALK, TASMANIA/LUTRUWITA

A four-day walk along a vibrant slice of Tasmania/lutruwita's coast offers a rare window into Tasmania/lutruwita's Aboriginal cultures.

It's a dining table that time has turned into a sand dune, an Aboriginal midden so deeply layered with shells that it rises metres above my head. If I was to hike past it alone, I might barely notice it among the other dunes along the gleaming Bay of Fires coastline, but I'm here hiking with the [wukalina walk](#) – the first tourism venture from Tasmania/lutruwita's palawa (Aboriginal) community.

Suddenly this dune is far more than a lump of sand and discarded shells. It's a timeline of seafood dinners – so many thousands of them that it's almost beyond comprehension.

"It hurts my brain to think of how many meals had to be eaten to make a midden this size," says guide Ben Lord.

It seems appropriate that this ghost of meals past is just steps from the wukalina walk's krakani lumi camp, where last night I'd been welcomed to the end of my first day of hiking by a fire-grilled dinner of wallaby (the smaller cousin of a kangaroo) and native mutton bird.

For two nights this camp will be my home, albeit it's more home than "camp". Wooden sleeping pods dot the scrub, with walls that winch open to reveal safari-tent-style accommodation and beds draped with wallaby skins. In the large central hub, a domed living area is designed to reflect the shape of the palawa shelters that once lined this coast. Fruit sits in kelp baskets made by palawa Elders, and beanbags and more wallaby skins dot the wooden floor.

For four days I will walk this coast, rising over low Mt William ("wukalina" to the palawa people) and following the dazzling white beaches of the larapuna (Bay of Fires) to the lighthouse on Eddystone Point.

Through the bush behind the beaches, I feel as though I'm wandering the aisles of an ancient grocer as Ben and fellow guides Jacob and Janaha point out edible plants such as pigface, currant bush, she-oak apples, lettuce weed, and the hearts of grass trees. Where once I saw only scrub, I now see a wild pantry.

On the beaches, nature catches up with culture. As we walk for a full day between krakani lumi and Eddystone Point, it's a journey along a stretch of coast so brilliantly beautiful – blue seas, white sands, the Bay of Fires' signature orange lichen – and yet so empty of people. Granite boulders cluster between the beaches, and the fine-grained sand is so white it's like hiking on a sheet of paper, but we walk only in the company of seabirds.

At Eddystone Point, I spend my final night sleeping in the refurbished lighthouse keeper's cottage. Wombats dawdle across the lawns outside, and it's a short walk to a second midden, sprinkled with stone tools, that seems to cling to the edge of the point as it tips away into the Tasman Sea.

From the midden, I look south along the coast, where the beaches continue as bright white streaks. But this beautiful place is now more than just a view. It's also a living tale about Tasmania/lutruwita's often-forgotten Aboriginal cultures.

WULA GURA NYINDA ECO CULTURAL ADVENTURES, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Darren “Capes” Capewell loves to show the world his Country – Shark Bay on Western Australia’s magnificent coast.

We’ve barely ventured into the Francois Peron National Park when an emu halts our progress. Against pindan red sand, a colour synonymous with the north of Western Australia, the emu parades in front of us with her chicks. There’s a flurry of excitement as our guide, Darren “Capes” Capewell explains they’re likely just six weeks old – and the adult, which we all assume is the mother, is actually the father.

We’re with Capes on one of his [Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures](#) tours, exploring Gutharraguda (meaning “two waters”), the Malgana name for Shark Bay, a World Heritage site around 800 kilometres north of Perth/Boorloo.

As we bounce along the red unsealed road that spears the Peron Peninsula, Capes, a Malgana and Nhanda man, says that Wula Gura Nyinda combines his great passions of culture and Country and is a way to keep his language alive. As we drive, he speaks loudly in language, sometimes rising to a call through the open window. “To our ancestors, to let them know we’re here,” he says with a smile.

Capes reminds us constantly to “look, listen and smell”. Our encounters throughout the day are a reminder that most of us are not exposed to the natural world daily, and that we fail to notice much. Being with a guide, so connected to his ancestral Country, provides profound insights. “Up ahead,” Capes says at one point, before pulling up and sitting back a moment. We scan the red road and the bush. “Tawny Frogmouth

[an owl-like native Australian bird] up there on the nest,” he says. Again, we scan. He points, saying, “You see that branch?” I do, as the branch moves ever so slightly; the nocturnal creature is a master of camouflage.

On a dune above a sheltered bay, Capes gestures towards the ocean and talks of the seagrass and its importance to Gutharraguda. There’s 4500 square kilometres of it supporting the precious marine ecosystem here and it’s vital for the wildlife, which includes dugongs, dolphins, loggerhead turtles and abundant birdlife. There’s a meeting of Aboriginal respect for Country and science as Capes explains that up to 30 per cent of the seagrass has been lost due to environmental factors and discusses the successful efforts by the University of Western Australia to replant and rejuvenate the species.

As he stops to collect saltbush – an edible coastal herb – and sandalwood nuts, Capes likens Country to “one big supermarket”, with one essential proviso: “When nature is talking, we are listening. If you understand how nature can talk, then you know where to find food medicine and water.”

On a deserted beach where vivid red cliffs meet a brilliant white strip of beach, Capes leads our small group to rock pools. He prizes native oysters from the rocks and opens them: we gladly slurp them, the intense saline hit a taste of the coast and its traditional food. Taking dry driftwood and scrub, Capes builds a small fire – forbidden to all but Traditional Aboriginal Owners – and gently cooks the remaining oysters while we take the plunge into the gentle Indian Ocean waves.



Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures, Western Australia

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- Look, listen, smell: how to really explore Western Australia’s Shark Bay
- Exploring the stunning ecosystem that is Western Australia’s Shark Bay
- Emus, dugongs, saltbush: welcome to Western Australia’s Shark Bay
- Immerse yourself in Western Australia’s Shark Bay with a local legend
- Red dirt, blue ocean: the incomparable Shark Bay in Western Australia



STORYTELLERS UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

218 + DAE MEDIA KIT

219 + DAE MEDIA KIT

STORYTELLERS

A visit to Australia without an Aboriginal tourism experience is like going to Bondi without a surfboard. Or going outback and never seeing a kangaroo.

From gateway destinations like Sydney/Warrane, to Central Australia or the red earth of the Kimberley, Aboriginal peoples across the country are waiting to tell their stories and share the meaning of their cultures and way of life.

Aboriginal cultures date back more than 65,000 years. They existed long before Stonehenge, predate the Pyramids and are older than the Acropolis. What's more amazing is that these cultures can be experienced today.

Who better to introduce you to the world's oldest living continuous cultures than those who live, breathe and dream them every day – Aboriginal guides who call this vast continent their home.

Whether it's through feeling the light strip of ochre across the forehead or walking along the beach with an Aboriginal Elder who can read the tides by how the birds call, Aboriginal peoples bring another side of Australia to life.

Every part of Australia is Aboriginal Country and every part of that Country has a series of unique stories and experiences. The Discover Aboriginal Experiences collective offers

an exciting array of activities, tours and accommodation; from exploring labyrinths of ancient and contemporary rock art, quad biking, kayaking, fishing, mud crabbing, hiking, taking a walking tour in a city centre or staying in a lodge on lily-laden flood plains teeming with wildlife.

It's often who you meet when you travel to Australia that stays with you. Aboriginal guides are no exception. They bring a unique cultural insight to the land and history of Australia through their stories and way of life. Meet just a few of Australia's notable Aboriginal guides to see just what makes them so unforgettable.

MORE INFO

For more information on any of these experiences, including famil opportunities, high-res imagery or to arrange interviews, reach out to:

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AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM – EMILY JOHNSON

Sydney/Warrane,
New South Wales



"In recent years, we've seen a lot more demand to have Indigenous authenticity," says Emily Johnson, the First Nations Creative Producer at the Australian Museum in Sydney/Warrane. "People are really hungry to hear about our 65,000 years of history, and to hear it from people who know it first-hand."

"Visitors to the Australian Museum are always surprised about how diverse Indigenous stories and experiences are."

A Barkindji, Latjilatji, Waka Waka, Birri Gubba woman, Emily has extensive experience telling these stories through creative mediums, working as an events producer and program coordinator within the arts, education and community sectors.

"I love that in my current role I get to keep promoting the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples around the country – to show the broader community that they are still here, and that their culture is still happening and still strong."

The Australian Museum has one of the world's most significant First Nations collections, representing cultures from across the country via artworks, technologies and objects in the new learning space (Burra) as well as permanent exhibitions Garrigarrang (Sea Country) and Bayala Nura (Yarning Country). Emily says it makes such a difference to have the spaces now curated by Indigenous gallerists. "You can see how the items fit a space and tell a story, rather than being passively displayed."

Emily says that her ultimate goal at the museum is to encourage collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in the arts, and also draw people into the conversation around First Nations communities, conservation and climate change.

"There's an inherent link, but a lot of people don't connect those dots. For example, middens [piles of shells and bones] would communicate between communities what had been eaten and what should be avoided, and rock fish traps were constructed to ensure smaller fish were not caught.

"It's eye-opening to think this has been going on for millennia."

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BORRGORON COAST TO CREEK TOURS – TERRY HUNTER

Dampier Peninsula,
Western Australia



Terry Hunter is the fourth generation of his family to work in the pearling trade, but the first to become a tour guide. The proud Bardi man grew up on a remote pearl farm in Western Australia. His home, 220km from the nearest town of Broome, is part of the state's famed Kimberley region.

To many visitors, it's a vast, raw wilderness, where dusty red deserts meet empty beaches lapped by the world's largest tropical tides. For a young Terry, it was the ultimate playground, where he and his best mate James Brown grew up practicing Aboriginal skills such as foraging for bush tucker, sourcing water on salty tidal flats, and carving pearl shells – all learnt from Terry's father and other Bardi Jawi Elders. The pair went to school in a basic tin shed on the pearl farm with only a handful of other kids, before each was sent off to boarding school in Perth/Boorloo. But neither was destined for city life.

Now James is the managing director of Cygnet Bay Pearl Farm – Australia's oldest continuously operating pearl farm – and Terry runs Borrgoron Coast to Creek Tours. On his signature two-hour walking tour, Terry shares stories of his childhood, his culture and his deep knowledge of these lands. But it's not just Terry's guests who gain a better understanding of his Country, it's also his own extended family – and he hopes to inspire them to preserve the Hunter connection to Cygnet Bay for generations to come.

"I love to share my home, share our culture, and see guests' reactions as they get a better understanding of Aboriginal culture, knowledge and heritage. It's all about sharing with me."

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BUNDYI CULTURAL TOURS – MARK SADDLER

Wagga Wagga,
New South Wales

"Yamandhu marang mudyi?" This is how Mark Saddler welcomes visitors to the banks of the Murrumbidgee River. He's asking if you're well, in his Wiradjuri dialect. "When you start to learn the language of the Country you're in, you start to learn the Country itself," he says.

This particular Country is Wagga Wagga in the Riverina region of south-western New South Wales, Mark's homeland and the base for his tours by bus, van, motorbike and on foot. "My goal is to get people to see the land differently," Mark says. "We visit places that are very special to the Wiradjuri community, and where few others get to go. It should open your eyes and your mind."

Mark's Bundyi ("share") tours are indeed personal and eye-opening, lasting from two hours to a full day. "I share from the heart. It's the only way I know how," says Mark, who is also a member of the New South Wales Aboriginal Tourism Operators Council (NATOC). "It comes from 100 per cent genuine experiences across 65,000 years of my people teaching me how to bundyi with people today."

Mark is on a mission to get people to slow down and reconnect with the land. "You may go to a place where you feel a bit special and you don't know why – non-Aboriginal people can feel the same way, because we're all connected to Mother Country," he says.

"And if we don't connect back to Mother Country, we might as well be on the next shuttle to Mars," Mark adds. "We've done a pretty poor job of protecting her over the last couple centuries. Hopefully, through education and tourism, we can change that process and make sure we stay around a little longer."

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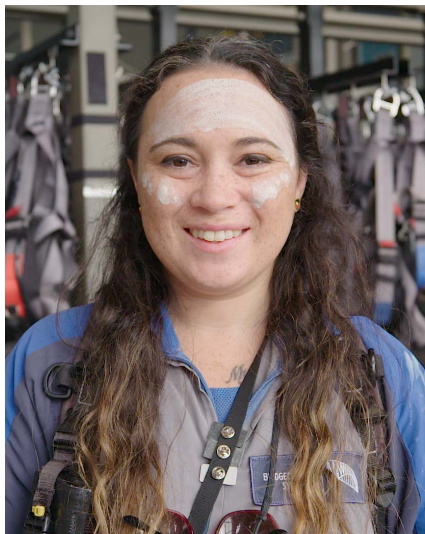
🌐 bundyiculture.com.au



"Aboriginal peoples have been doing land management for 65,000 years. We watch the animals to learn how the land's going and watch the plants to time the seasons."

BURRAWA INDIGENOUS CLIMB EXPERIENCE – SHONA DAVIDSON

Sydney/Warrane,
New South Wales



"I flew from Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) in Queensland to New South Wales in 2018 to become a guide for BridgeClimb Sydney," says Shona Davidson. "Little did I know that a few years down the track, Wesley Enoch AM – also from my island – would conceptualise an experience to showcase Sydney's Indigenous cultures in all their glory. It's a small world, but also a big world," she says.

Shona is one of the storytellers on a tour that Enoch (the Sydney Festival's artistic director from 2017 to 2021) developed to offer guests not only a bird's-eye view of the city – 360-degree panoramas from the top of the Sydney Harbour Bridge – but also countless insightful Indigenous observations.

Traversing 1,332 steps, Burrawa Indigenous Climb Experience gives you plenty of time to pause and take in Australia's largest city through Aboriginal eyes. "It still amazes me that there were three-metre-high, 65,000-year-old middens [ancient piles of shells] at Bennelong Point until the late 1700s," says Shona. "The fact they were burnt to lime to build the colony is astounding."

Shona is a natural storyteller, both of Creation tales and of Australian history. "A lot of people on the Burrawa climb are surprised by how much Indigenous culture still remains here," she says. "Telling our stories, making sure they are heard, means they are preserved for generations."

"I am so happy I get to inspire people every day – and not just with the view."

"People climb the Sydney Harbour Bridge with me and then say, 'Well, now I have to go do a behind-the-scenes-tour of the Opera House and hear its Indigenous history.'"

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CULTURE CONNECT – DYLAN HARRIGAN

Cooktown,
Queensland



Dylan Harrigan's life straddles two worlds – he and his brothers own and manage 31,400-hectare Normanby Station, a working cattle farm near Cooktown. They also share tour-guide duties of the vast property through an exclusive partnership with Culture Connect.

A Balnggarrawarra man, Dylan was born and raised in this part of Queensland's Cape York Peninsula. "We have traditions here that go back millennia," he says, at the same time noting more recent history as told to him by his grandfather, who lived on the station during colonial settlement.

"One road on the property is called Battlecamp Road and it's the site of a massacre of Indigenous people. We thought hard about including that detail on our tour but decided we didn't want to hide the truth. We want to tell the story through the eyes of our grandfather, and not through books. Me and my brothers speak about what we know, and then we open the door to questions."

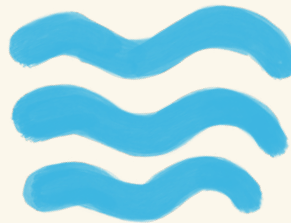
The massacre site is just one place of historical significance you visit on a Culture Connect tour to Normanby Station. You also have the opportunity to admire jaw-dropping rock art. "The rock art tells the story of our connection to the Land," says Dylan. "There are pictures of animals, like wallabies, barramundi and turtles. But also, stingrays – this tells us that our people once saw saltwater life this far up the Normanby River. We don't see stingrays now, but we still see saltwater crocs – our Totem – up in Freshwater Country. The crocs tell us so much about the land. If we see a saltie nesting high on a riverbank, we know that there's going to be a severe wet system and that rivers will flood."

Dylan says his tours are only small-scale when you look at Indigenous culture as a 65,000-year-old whole. "But sometimes," he adds, "All it takes is something small to change the way we think about the world."

"We have people leaving the tour in tears. For many Australians, it's a big wake-up call to see what has been going on in their own backyard."

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DALE TILBROOK EXPERIENCES – DALE TILBROOK

Perth/Boorloo,
Western Australia



After returning from 10 years overseas Dale's journey in Aboriginal tourism began 25 years ago starting with a boomerang and artefact-making enterprise with her brother, then an Aboriginal art and gift gallery with some bush food products. From there Maalinup Gallery was developed where activities around bush tucker, culture and Aboriginal art are promoted.

Dale expanded her work with Maalinup Gallery and created Dale Tilbrook Experiences. Today Dales two signature experiences focus on taking guests on an in depth, hands on journey into Aboriginal native edibles as food and medicine. "Food is our medicine," Dale explains. During these experiences guests are able to eat the bush foods and learn many interesting facts about their nutritional profile and medicinal plants. Dale also reveals some remarkable insights into Aboriginal food traditions such as the yam garden along the Swan River, the Noongar six seasons and sustainable hunting and gathering. In her art experience, the history of Aboriginal art and dot paintings is explored and participants create their own piece to take home. Dale's storytelling skills come to the fore when she delivers her Local History and Culture experience.

"People call me the Bush Tucker Queen as I have a passion that borders on obsession regarding native edible plants and their pharmaceutical and nutraceutical qualities. This obsession has continued to build for the last 20 odd years and is something I never tire of."

Dale Tilbrook needs little prompting to discuss her favourite topic, the native foodstuffs Australians call "bush tucker". "People regard lots of them as superfoods because of their nutritional make-up. Kakadu plums have the highest vitamin C content of any fruit in the world," says the Wardandi Bibbulmun Elder and chef. "If something interests me, I'm like a big sponge – I suck it all in and retain it."

Today, Dale is such an expert on Indigenous bush foods that she's in high demand to talk about them and cook them in far-flung countries such as Italy. That makes her one busy woman as she also runs Dale Tilbrook Experiences in Perth/Boorloo.

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DREAMTIME DIVE & SNORKEL – QUINN ROSS-PASSI

Cairns/Gimuy,
Queensland



The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander man was born and raised in Cairns, where he was "lucky" to be part of a six-month dive traineeship in 2019. This included a stint on the Dreamtime boat, just after the experience launched.

"I was on board for about two weeks and loved it." He joined the crew of Indigenous sea rangers soon after.

Day trips to the outer reef weave together Dreamtime stories, clapstick and didgeridoo playing demonstrations and dance. "It's the hook that draws people in," says Quinn.

On snorkelling and diving expeditions, he points out the pageant of fish and coral in the Creation story of the reef. "The bombora [submerged rock shelves] were the boulders that the angry spirits rolled out into the ocean. It means standalone and they're huge," he says. "They're just a small part of this immense natural wonder that has sustained and inspired Indigenous communities for millennia."

"A lot of our people go out and hunt fish, turtles and dugongs, but we do it sustainably. If there's a big wedding, it's a lot easier to get a dugong than 300 fish. If it was a turtle, you wouldn't use one part and chuck the rest of it away. It's something that's frowned upon in Indigenous cultures."

Looking up from the vibrant depths of the Great Barrier Reef is what first hooked Quinn Ross-Passi on scuba diving. It's something he shares with day-trippers on a Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel cruise, a unique Indigenous tour taking visitors across the World Heritage-listed reef in a catamaran before pausing to allow guests to dive in and explore the underwater world.

"It's like looking into a stained-glass window. It has all those waves in it, but it's not static: it's moving. It's just like the whole world around you is moving at the same time," says Quinn.

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DREAMTIME SOUTHERN X – MARGRET CAMPBELL

Sydney/Warrane,
New South Wales



When you meet Margret Campbell, feel free to call her Auntie Marg. In Australia, addressing an Indigenous Elder as “Auntie” or “Uncle” is a sign of respect, although it’s polite to ask for permission before using these terms. Auntie Marg is the founder-owner and managing director of Dreamtime Southern X, which runs tours offering fascinating insights into Sydney/Warrane’s Aboriginal Dreamtime beginnings.

You might encounter her – or one of her guides – cradling a tiny pot of ground ochre while standing in The Rocks waiting to welcome you to the 90-minute walking tour. The pale paste is dabbed onto your wrists to connect you to Earth Mother and the sandstone lying beneath your feet. Auntie Marg might also draw symbols on herself with the ochre paste, which dries in the sun as she talks.

As you stand in front of modern wonders such as the Sydney Opera House and the Sydney Harbour Bridge, Auntie Marg’s stories will take you back to a time when this land and the harbour looked very different. Before colonisation, Indigenous peoples would watch out for the whales they considered a spiritual ancestor. They’d also bring fish here to cook over their campfires.

Auntie Marg is from the Dughutti and Jerrinjha nations of New South Wales, but has 10 other ways of identifying herself, including various animal Totems. These all link her into a deep network of kinship and connection. Spending time with Auntie Marg will highlight how the Dreamtime still shapes the world’s oldest continuous living cultures – estimated to be more than 65,000 years old – and the responsibilities of Elders in today’s society.

“Reconciliation is not just about shaking hands and feeling welcomed into Country. Reconciliation is about all people connecting with Aboriginal peoples’ cultures to learn how we can respect and conserve our Earth Mother that we all live and walk upon.”

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FIRES CREEK BOTANICAL WINERY ABORIGINAL EXPERIENCES – KEVIN ‘GAVI’ DUNCAN

Central Coast, New South Wales



While Gavi is a well-known face on the New South Wales Central Coast – a member of the Darkinjung Land Council, passionate supporter of protecting the region’s waterways, and an active guide – perhaps his most fun role is at Firescreek. In Holgate, just 90 minutes north of Sydney/Warrane, Gavi captivates visitors with a showcase of Aboriginal artefacts and instruments, followed by a tasting of bush tucker and the estate’s botanical wines.

“There are so many beautiful medicinal and nutritious native Australian foods,” he says. “And they’re just now being appreciated across the country and around the world. I would love to have knowledge of this bounty embedded into Australian school curricula – to take kids through the bush and show them how amazing and sustaining the land is.”

For visitors to Firescreek, Gavi has a simple goal: “To teach people who the local Aboriginal people are, and have them understand our spiritual culture. I want people to appreciate the native plants that have been sustaining Indigenous communities for millennia. Talking to people on Country is by far the best way to get the message across. It really is a spiritual and life-changing experience.

Uncle Kevin ‘Gavi’ Duncan is the kind of person you meet and never forget. The respected Elder’s stories sear into your memory. As do the haunting tunes he plays on his didgeridoo, with notes that reverberate through your soul for weeks – even years – after you leave the Firescreek Botanical Winery where Gavi hosts an Aboriginal Storytelling & Wine Tasting Experience.

“Indigenous cultures in Australia date back more than 65,000 years. But we’ve only been allowed to tell it for the last 50 years. There’s a lot of catching up to do.”

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JANBAL GALLERY – BRIAN “BINNA” SWINDLEY

Mossman,
Queensland

When you sign up for an art lesson with Brian “Binna” Swindley, expect the unexpected. The only Aboriginal artist in Tropical North Queensland to own his own gallery – Janbal Gallery in the town of Mossman, in the shadow of the Daintree Rainforest – Binna runs his painting workshops his own way. So instead of using a paint brush, for example, you might be wielding a bamboo stick. “They’re great for dot paintings,” he says.

Binna is a contemporary artist who respects tradition. Much of the detail in his paintings comes from painstakingly applied dots, a traditional technique of his people. “We belong to the rainforest; the dots represent the raindrops,” he says.

Binna first learned to paint from his uncles, who belong to the local Kuku Yalanji tribe. “They painted didgeridoos and boomerangs and bark paintings; I’ve never painted on bark in my life,” Binna says, laughing. “Things always change. You can’t go backwards, you have to go forwards. How I paint changes every year.”

What doesn’t change is Binna’s dedication to his art, which, he says, is a reflection of his life. “My art is about me – what I’m hunting and what I’m gathering, what I see and what I feel,” he says. His paintings are filled with local flora and fauna, especially the cassowary, a large flightless bird that lives in the rainforest. “That’s my Totem bird – it’s very special to me.



“Red and yellow and white – the colours of ochre that our ancestors used – are the oldest colours in the world, and those are still colours that we still use today.”



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KAKADU CULTURAL TOURS – NEVILLE NAMARNYILK

Kakadu National Park and Western Arnhem Land,
Northern Territory



It’s a story Neville recounts as a guide on the [Guluyambi Cultural Cruise](#), a journey that sluices through the murky, crocodile-infested waters of the East Alligator River, deep in the heart of the Northern Territory’s World Heritage-listed Kakadu.

“I say to people, see those melaleuca trees? I was born in the bush, wrapped in that paperbark and my umbilical cord cut with a mussel shell,” he says.

Neville spent his formative years in Kakadu, learning to hunt by the seasons. “June, July and August – there’s barramundi, black bream, snakes, water monitors, water chestnuts and water lilies. In September, it’s bush apples and plums. In December, bush carrots and bush potatoes [yams].”

He eventually trained as a plumber, working in both Darwin/Gulumerddgen and Jabiru (the park’s main township), before switching gears. He joined Kakadu Cultural Tours as a guide in 2010. “I have good memories growing up. I learnt from my parents, my nana and poppy. I was always watching and listening. Now I get to share my knowledge of Country and storytelling,” he says.

On cruises, Neville recounts his earliest childhood memories. “It was all Arnhem Land. There was no tourism. Nobody came in. I’ve been living off the land since I was 13 years old.”

There was no Kakadu National Park when Neville Namarnyilk was born. The East Alligator River formed a semi-permanent divide between what is now one of the country’s largest national parks, and spiritual Arnhem Land. When the river flooded, members of Neville’s clan would be cut off from one another.

“I can still remember watching my father engraving a message stick [a letter carved into a tree branch], in the same way our people have done for more than 65,000 years. He gave it to another fella to take to West Arnhem Land. Today we have mobile phones. There’s no more message sticks.”

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KARRKE ABORIGINAL CULTURAL EXPERIENCE & TOURS – NATASHA ABBOTT

Watarrka National Park, Northern Territory



“Our bush foods are seasonal. The majority are spring and summer. We have berries, fruit, natural honey and acacia tree saps. Our people grind the seeds from prickly wattle and make a damper. We eat lizards.”

The Aranda woman worked in mining and land rights, before joining Karrke in 2014 as a guide and operations manager. “It was a way to give back to my community,” she says. “My brother is an Aranda man. His wife is a Luritja woman. Together they are preserving the language of Watarrka.”

Early tours were held “under the shade of the trees”. Today, people wind between huts to listen to the Aranda language and learn about bush medicine and the beauty behind dot paintings. “It’s how we show spirit beings who still live in their land.”

Bush tucker plays a big part. “We show how our people winnowed acacia seed pods using the wind and their hands to make a round-shaped patty they cooked in hot ash. It was bland, but our people ate it.” It’s something that resonates with guests. “People write back and say: “On my drive back, all I could do was look for the acacias.”

“People always question how we survive in this harsh country,” says Natasha Abbott, nodding to the rugged ranges and semi-arid desert of Watarrka National Park, near Kings Canyon in Central Australia. “Our people have been coming to this land for tens of thousands of years.

“When people experience us, they get a deep appreciation that everything has a purpose – every rock, every tree, every animal and being. Jukurrpa, our Creation beings, are always still in the land and they watch over us.”

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KINGFISHER TOURS – BEC SAMPI

The Kimberley,
Western Australia



sandstone domes during a cultural immersion trip with her grandmother. The pair camped in the bush, with Bec learning how to read hidden messages in Aboriginal rock paintings, find plants that serve as bush medicine, catch fish using spinifex grass, and understand cultural Songlines that reveal ancient, unmarked paths through the wilderness.

Bec, a former schoolteacher who is fluent in the Gija, Wola and Kriol Indigenous languages, shares much of this knowledge on her tours of Purnululu, home to the extraordinary Bungle Bungle Range. As the head guide with Kingfisher Tours, she blends modern science with traditional education to provide fascinating explanations for how the formations in her homeland came to be, woven together with song and softly spoken truths.

Gija woman Bec Sampi grew up in Woolah Country (also known as Doon Doon), a tiny outstation community near Western Australia’s World Heritage-listed Purnululu National Park. It’s a wonderfully remote place, nine-odd hours’ drive east of the Kimberley region’s tourism hub of Broome. This remoteness has informed Bec’s personality: her observational skills, her ability to connect with Country, her comfort in isolated, outback locations. As a 13-year-old, she explored Purnululu’s curious landscape of red rock boulders and rounded

“The way you see my Country is different to how I see it. Some people are amazed, because they only had an impression of Aboriginal peoples on the street. I see this as a reconciliation tour; you’ll see we’re First Nations peoples and we’ve lived through hard times.”

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KOOMAL DREAMING – JOSH WHITELAND

Margaret River,
Western Australia



As the only Aboriginal guide in the Margaret River, Yallingup and Dunsborough regions south of Perth/Boorloo, Josh has the stunning south-west of Western Australia in firm focus.

Cultural tours to Cape Naturaliste trace the dazzling blue coastline. “There’s always something moving on the water,” he says. In February, schools of fat salmon make their annual run up the coast. “Our people would retell that in song and dance.” Come July, it’s migrating whales. “They come right up to the rocks,” says Josh. “We tell the Creation story of mamang, the whale.” This story tells of a young Noongar man who travels to new lands in its belly.

Walking tours are a chance to share bush medicine and bush tucker. “We use peppermint leaves for whistling different bird calls or lighting fire the traditional way, with sticks from the bush.”

When Josh Whiteland began Koomal Dreaming back in 2010, he didn’t need to look far for inspiration. “I wanted to share all the things I loved doing on Country. Noongar people are saltwater and forest people. My tours move between the two. I share a lot of our language and traditional stories. People love that connection to place, identity and native foods.”

“You’re not talking about someone else’s stories; you’re talking about your own stories and experiences. You’re sharing knowledge that’s been passed down through generations. You can’t get that anywhere else in the world.”

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KOORIE HERITAGE TRUST – ROB HYATT

Melbourne/Narrm,
Victoria



The trust began in 1985 at the Melbourne Museum as a way to “give Aboriginal peoples a voice on how artefacts are displayed, in a cultural rather than anthropological way,” says Rob. It has since become an independent not-for-profit, housing more than 6,000 items from pre-colonisation to today, and covering everything from photographs to oral stories told by Elders.

“It’s just one of the ways we’re able to show the diversity of Aboriginal cultures in both Victoria and Australia,” says Rob, who spends a lot of his time curating cultural competency workshops for government and corporate groups. “We have this amazing opportunity to talk about our collective history and the impact of colonisation, and what that means today,” he says. “It’s truth telling, but without any attached blame or guilt.”

Rob and his team also run tours around Melbourne/Narrm, revealing the city and its stories through Aboriginal eyes. “Every tour is unique, because the guides tell their own stories – having an individual expression of culture is really important,” he says. “People get to see our heritage on display, including ‘scar trees’ and cultural sites. It makes our heritage feel tangible.”

“A lot of visitors to the Koorie Heritage Trust have no idea what Aboriginal cultures look like in an urban setting,” says Rob Hyatt, the organisation’s education and visitor experience manager. They enter the Aboriginal-operated trust’s architecturally dramatic gallery and cultural centre at Federation Square in the heart of Melbourne/Narrm, he says, and are “somewhat taken aback by what they discover.”

“Visitors sometimes ask us, ‘Where are the real Aboriginal people?’ Our role is to educate that diversity is us – we’re all different because we all have individual cultures and experiences.”

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MANDINGALBAY ANCIENT INDIGENOUS TOURS – VICTOR BULMER

Cairns/Gimuy,
Queensland

"I've always been involved in issues concerning our people, and how we connect through our Songlines, Storylines and Dancelines," says Victor Bulmer, a Djunbunji Land and Sea Ranger and guide with Mandingalbay Ancient Indigenous Tours. "I was pretty much raised to be a ranger and share my story."

A Mandingalbay Yidinji man, Victor knows his Country south-east of Cairns/Gimuy intimately and saw an opportunity to launch the Djunbunji Land and Sea Ranger program in 2010 to give back to the community he has such an affinity for. Its goal is to not only ensure the conservation of the land, but also provide training and employment opportunities for the Indigenous community. The Mandingalbay tours came later in 2015, to share the story.

"I've seen a huge growth in interest in Indigenous tourism since we launched," says Victor. "People who take our tours cannot believe what they are seeing – we give them a fresh perspective of the land."

"We have people who have lived here their whole lives and didn't know these ecosystems existed and that this area had an Indigenous history and was a food bowl for our ancestors. I meet botanists who come on tours and had no idea that the plants we see had nutritional and medicinal uses."

The tours have clearly been a hit, as Victor and the Mandingalbay Ancient Indigenous Tours team are in the process of expanding.



Victor says there are plans to develop a new eco-centre replete with viewing towers, ziplines and a cultural hub, offering insights into the region's Indigenous heritage – before visitors get to hear it all first-hand on a tour with Victor at the helm.

"I grew up on Country knowing my strong connection to the land and community from both my maternal and paternal sides of the family."

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MARUKU ARTS – SARAH DALBY

Uluru,
Northern Territory

It's not easy to capture the immensity of landscapes and legends that surround Uluru, a place as spectacular as it is sacred to Anangu communities. But this is Sarah Dalby's life's work, and she's now helping others grasp it all, as a tour guide and art teacher with Maruku Arts – an Anangu-owned regional gallery and cultural centre, near the base of Uluru in Australia's Red Centre.

"I learnt [to paint] from my aunty in Ernabella, a long time ago," says Sarah, who started painting on canvas at Ernabella Arts – Australia's oldest continuously running Indigenous art centre, in north-west South Australia.

"I paint Tjukurpa [the Creation period, or Dreaming]," she explains. "Sometimes Kuniya Liru [a legend about a woma python woman and poisonous snake man]; Puli Mankurpa [three landmarks of Central Australia]; Kapi Tjukurla [waterholes], and Kungkarangkalpa [the Seven Sisters Creation story]. I like to watch the environment and paint what I see."

It's a sentiment Sarah – a *minyma* Anangu woman from Australia's Central and Western Desert, whose own art sells fast among collectors – encourages among Maruku Arts visitors who sign up for one of her workshops to discover Aboriginal painting styles and techniques, and hear the stories behind them.

"I tell people to draw small stories. I show them symbols of my home and share my Tjukurpa. They show me their stories, their Tjukurpa. Sometimes I get them to paint the walks they've done, their footprints."



"I like teaching others about Tjukurpa, about my Country and how to paint... It makes me happy."

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NARLIJIA EXPERIENCES – BART PIGRAM

Broome,
Western Australia

When Bart Pigram gazes across the flat, Tiffany-blue expanse of Roebuck Bay in Broome on the Kimberley coast of Western Australia, he doesn't just see water. He sees mangroves harbouring crabs and molluscs, and pearly luggers that used to dot the horizon.

Bart, who started Narlijia Experiences in Broome in 2015, takes people on an engaging walk through the mangroves and mudflats which come to life with mud crabs, mudskippers and abundant birdlife at low tide. He recounts ancient stories of the saltwater Yawuru people giving his guests a greater appreciation of Broome's natural environment, marine life and a complete understanding of Aboriginal history and settlement of the town.

Bart embodies the rich multiculturalism that runs through Broome. He has Aboriginal, Asian and European heritage, and he uses it to express the way locals embrace cultural diversity. His family history also links back to the pearling boom at the turn of the 20th century, enabling him to share both fascinating and sinister stories of the past on his walks between bays, along the mangroves and through the town.

He weaves Dreaming stories through his well-researched talks, as he points out ancient shell middens or plucks an amazing oyster fresh off the rock. "I'm close to this area," he says. "My people's language, our understandings, our Creation stories all come from here. I believe the environment here is among the best in the world and my culture belongs here."



"I want to get people grounded when they get to Broome and reveal all the secrets and all the history. The good, the bad, all of it – and give them a true experience of what it's like here."

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NGARAN NGARAN CULTURE AWARENESS

– DWAYNE BANNON-HARRISON

Narooma, New South Wales



Unable to resist the pull any longer, he sold his house and business, packed up his young family, and moved 400 kilometres (250 miles) south-east to the coastal town of Narooma. There he was welcomed back to Yuin Country by his grandfather, a renowned Elder, who quickly became Dwayne's cultural mentor.

"Because I was his eldest grandson, he really took me under his wing to teach me the ways. You've got to be chosen to receive that kind of in-depth teaching," explains Dwayne.

At 26, the transformative experience was so profound that it inspired Dwayne to establish Ngaran Ngaran Culture Awareness (NNCA), an Aboriginal-owned and operated cultural training service, that today shares Yuin culture in the form of immersive travel experiences.

You can learn about the Yuin way of life by joining NNCA's Yuin Retreat experience. Hear sacred Dreaming stories passed down for tens of thousands of years, and bear witness to traditional ceremonies, song and traditions; at night, retire to your lavish "glamping" tent, complete with plush bedding, ensuite bathroom and gourmet catering that showcases native ingredients.

Dwayne Bannon-Harrison, a descendant of the Yuin people of New South Wales' far South Coast, was an accomplished football player and a plasterer by trade in Bathurst, west of Sydney/Warrane, before experiencing what he describes as his "call back to Country".

"In 2010 everything really turned on its head. I was all set up in Bathurst but I had a really strong urge to return to the New South Wales South Coast, like I was being spiritually called back," says Dwayne, who hadn't lived on his ancestral land since he was a very young child.

"I believe that's why I had the calling to come home, to create a vehicle to continue the traditional teachings of our bloodline."

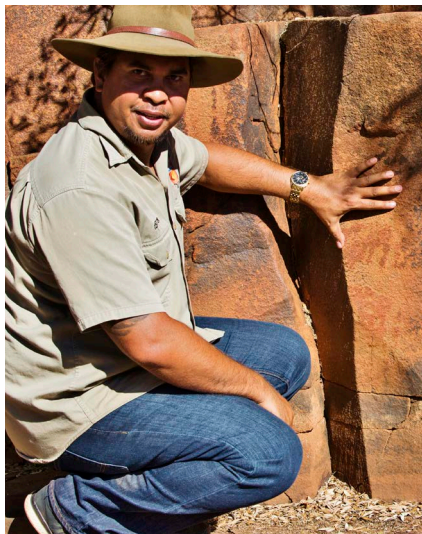
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NGURRANGGA TOURS – CLINTON WALKER

Pilbara,
Western Australia



“I want to educate people about my ancestry and protect what’s here.”

“We’ve been here forever and a day, probably longer,” says Clinton Walker, who estimates his family has lived in the Pilbara region of Western Australia for more than 2,500 generations. A descendent of the Ngarluma and Vindjibarndi people, Clinton has thousands of years of cultural knowledge at his fingertips and he’s passionate about using it. Leaving behind a career in the state’s mining industry, the former mechanic now channels his energy into sharing Aboriginal stories through his tourism company, Ngurrangga Tours.

Containing one of the world’s largest concentrations of petroglyphs (rock engravings), his Burrup Peninsula backyard (part of an area known as Murujuga, which means “hipbone sticking out”) is the perfect setting. When Clinton approaches a rubble of boulders etched with images of animals, fish, footprints, symbols and people, he stops to greet the Spirit Ancestors in his language, requesting safe passage through this sacred spot. Then, he picks his way to a rock face depicting long-gone megafauna, such as a giant kangaroo. “They went extinct 30,000 years ago, so the rock art is, at a minimum, that old,” Clinton says. It’s believed there are more than a million engravings in Murujuga National Park, 1800 kilometres (or a two-hour flight) north of Perth/Boorloo.

Clinton’s tours follow the Songlines of his ancestors. Songlines are ancient wayfaring pathways shared through stories and songs, using landmarks as guideposts. Clinton’s hope is that by teaching others about these Songlines, his beloved history, culture, and Country will be preserved for another 2,500 generations – and beyond.

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NITMILUK TOURS – JAMES ‘BROOKSY’ BROOKES

Nitmiluk,
Northern Territory



“No two days are ever the same,” he explains. “I love the changing seasons of Nitmiluk and the variety of guiding conditions, some more challenging than others.

“I also get to meet amazing people – there’s something about this part of the Northern Territory that attracts visitors with a spirit for adventure.”

It also draws people with a thirst for knowledge.

“When I started in the role there was not a lot of information out there on the Jawoyn people,” Brooksy says. “In fact, there was nothing written down at all; I had to rely on my knowledge passed down through generations. Now, visitors are really interested in the First Nations peoples and how we manage Country here.

“The focus of conversations I have has also changed. In the past it was just about wildlife. Now, people are not afraid to ask about Aboriginal cultures and history. Plus, there’s a huge interest in Indigenous art. I love showcasing this side of Jawoyn heritage.”

“I never tire of seeing the excitement on people’s faces when they see the gorge, and then learn its history. You can’t learn the stories we tell you in guidebooks.”

Born and bred in Katherine in the Northern Territory, Jamie ‘Brooksy’ Brookes knows a thing or two about Australia’s most remote wilderness areas. His formal education came courtesy of School of the Air, although his family taught him everything he needed to know about the Jawoyn people and life on the land.

Still, despite being a local, Brooksy didn’t actually glimpse Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) – a string of 13 ancient sandstone gorges – until he was 19. The same year he got a job as a guide with Nitmiluk Tours; that was more than 25 years ago. But Brooksy’s passion for his role hasn’t waned.

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PAMAGIRRI ABORIGINAL EXPERIENCE AT RAINFORESTATION NATURE PARK – WILLIE ENOCH-TRANBY

Kuranda, Queensland

Willie Enoch-Tranby helped create Pamagirri Aboriginal Experience at 13, when most teens were playing with their friends. “I was a young fella then, learning about my culture. My granddad Lyn Hobbler, a Djabugay Elder, was guiding my cousin and me on the cultural side of things,” he says.

Weekends were spent dancing at Rainforestation Nature Park, near Kuranda in Tropical North Queensland. It wasn’t long before Willie was also guiding Dreamtime walks at this expansive park, designed to immerse visitors into Indigenous traditions of the area. “They liked that I was this young fella and could do both the walks and the dancing, just like the senior guys.”

After high school, Willie pursued a professional football career in Sydney/Warrane and Brisbane/Meeanjin, before returning to Rainforestation and the CaPTA Group in 2007 in a sales and marketing role. These days, the Djabugay man works in cultural development, a role that has seen him rise to become one of Queensland’s young tourism leaders.

Covid-19 saw him pivot. “People wanted to know more about my culture, so we added the cross, U-shaped and Y-shaped boomerang to the Dreamtime walk. They are just in the rainforest region. They’re all for hunting birds, so they all return.” On the dance, he gets people up to do the warran jarra. “It means shake a leg, and it’s fun.”



“In our yarning circle, people can ask questions without judgement. Our fellas get to talk about their clan, their great grandparents born in the bush, their Dreamtime, tribal law or their language. It’s a quiet place to share culture. It’s the same way our people sit around the fire, listening and learning.”

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SALTWATER ECO TOURS – SIMON THORNALLEY

Mooloolaba, Queensland

Simon Thornalley spent the formative years of his childhood sailing around the turquoise seas of Tropical North Queensland with his parents. It was this experience of living on a yacht and exploring coastal Queensland that he says gave him a lifelong yearning to stay connected to the sea – and his culture.

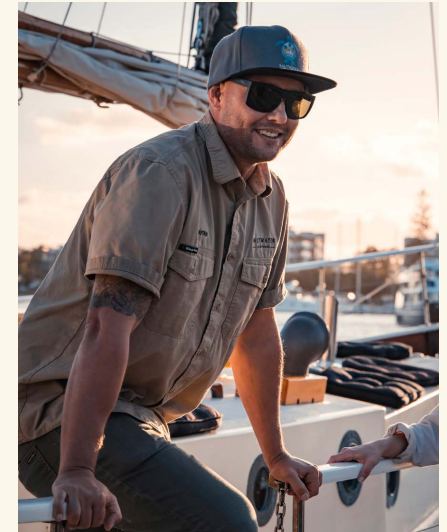
Simon’s father hails from Lincolnshire in the UK and his mum has Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal heritage. His parents met in the Whitsundays, where his dad worked as a boatbuilder and his mum as a sailor.

“Mum and Dad bought an old timber boat and cruised up and down the coast,” says Simon. “I was almost born on that boat. Dad and Mum had to come ashore in Tin Can Bay and hustle to hospital in Gimpi Gimpi [Gympie].”

His family later settled on the Sunshine Coast, and after finishing school, Simon, too, pursued a career at sea, including stints as a commercial diver and six cruises to Antarctica as a first officer on a charter vessel. His work eventually brought him back home to the traditional lands of the Gubbi Gubbi/Kabi Kabi people where, in 2020, he and his wife Jenna bought a century-old timber sailing boat and co-founded Saltwater Eco Tours in Mooloolaba.

“I belong to the saltwater people,” says Simon, who shares stories about his own Sea Country connections on his unique marine experiences hosted on the Spray of the Coral Coast.

“My most treasured memories revolve around being able to visit remote islands, go to shore on a sandy beach looking for coconuts, and catching fish for dinner,” he adds with a smile.



“I get to combine all of my passions: eco-tourism, sustainability, and Indigenous culture and share that with visitors and see the satisfaction of what people take home from that experience.”

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SAND DUNE ADVENTURES – ANDREW SMITH

Port Stephens,
New South Wales

Andrew Smith is the boss of a thrilling venture that combines high-adrenaline quad biking with ancient Indigenous coastal culture. The CEO of Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council, which operates Sand Dune Adventures at Port Stephens on the New South Wales North Coast, was a long-time Australian Taxation Office employee when the opportunity arose in 2006 to do something completely different.

“I didn’t know anything about quad bikes or Aboriginal tourism or tourism in general,” he says. He did know a lot about governance and accountability, though – expertise that helped as he pondered how to turn the Southern Hemisphere’s largest moving sand dunes into a viable business that supported his community as a not-for-profit social enterprise. “We were asset-rich but cash-poor,” he says.

When Andrew started developing the business, he had only eight quad bikes and “stood by the side of the road waving signs at passing cars hoping they would come”. Tourism Australia backed the venture, naming it an Indigenous Tourism Champion. Business mentorship, along with great word of mouth, also helped turned Sand Dune Adventures into a thriving enterprise within just a few years.

Profits are poured back into the local Indigenous community, funding employment, housing, education, health and Elders’ programs. “It’s about the growth and empowerment of our community,” Andrew says.

Quad-bike riders journey up to 20 kilometres over the awe-inspiring dunes – some of which are more than 30 metres high.



“About 95 per cent of people who come on our tours are really after the quad bikes, but every single tour gets exposed to the occupational history and Aboriginal culture of the area.”

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SEALINK NT – KEVIN BAXTER-PILAKUI

Tiwi Islands,
Northern Territory



Kevin Baxter-Pilakui was born in the air, way above his remote island home. His mother was flying from the Tiwi Islands to hospital in Darwin/Gulumerdgen, the capital of the Northern Territory, to deliver him, except that Kevin arrived early, halfway between both. He jokes that he’s from no-man’s land, but in truth, Bathurst Island (which is 60 kilometres off the mainland) has always had his heart.

He lived on Bathurst Island until he was 12, when schooling in the big smoke called, and he started guiding tours after he graduated. Seven years ago, he decided the scenery in Darwin/Gulumerdgen was no match for the “islands of smiles”. He wanted to return to his ocean-lapped roots to help share its culture.

Now, the former football player leads SeaLink NT’s Tiwi by Design tours. He introduces visitors to smoking ceremonies, where wafting plumes from native leaves rid people of bad spirits and feelings. He takes them through the island’s lauded screen-printing art centre, where iconic designs make their way onto colourful materials. He teaches them about sourcing ochre pigments from the island and mixing them for painting.

He also shows off the hard, heavy ironstone used for carvings of birds and towering pukamani poles, the sacred, decorative posts placed at burial sites during a traditional ceremony. Kevin also loves to surprise his guests with the news that neither the didgeridoo nor the boomerang is found on the islands – revealing the differences between them and greater Australia.

“There are some 900 to 1000 different dialects across the Northern Territory, and sometimes it’s taboo for the mainlanders to share parts of culture, but the Tiwi Islands and our culture are open to the world. For us, it’s important to share.”

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TOP DIDJ CULTURAL EXPERIENCE & ART GALLERY – MANUEL PAMKAL

Katherine,
Northern Territory

Manuel Pamkal was born in a Northern Territory community so remote that the first time he saw a white person, he thought he was looking at a ghost. When he first arrived at school (as a teenager, having never sat on a chair or held a pen), the principal guessed his birth year as 1966. Manuel is more inclined to believe a whitefella who married into his family and saw him as a baby – he says 1963.

Today, the charismatic Dalabon man tells his fascinating life story to visitors at Top Didj Art Gallery near Katherine, 320 kilometres (200 miles) south-east of Darwin/Gulamerddgen. It starts with his childhood spent hunting goannas and lizards and digging for yams.

After a near-death experience as an adult (detailed in an episode of the ABC television program, *Australian Story*), Manuel turned his life around, quitting alcohol to become a role model for his community.

At Top Didj, he shows visitors how to throw a spear, light a fire and paint – while telling a few jokes along the way. He welcomes people by playing the didgeridoo and singing a song in Dalabon – a central Arnhem Land language that experts say is now spoken fluently by less than half-a-dozen people.

Manuel is a talented artist who specialises in rarrk (cross-hatching) painting. His fine brush is made from billabong reeds and his preferred medium is acrylic on canvas. “I’ve been painting all my life, from young up until now,” he says.



“I really love my job – I meet people from everywhere,” says Manuel. He’s chatting during his lunchbreak after entertaining a “big mob” of 42 visitors. “I want to work here until I retire.”

INJALAK ARTS CENTRE (VENTURE NORTH) – JOEY NGANJIMIRRA

Arnhem Land,
Northern Territory

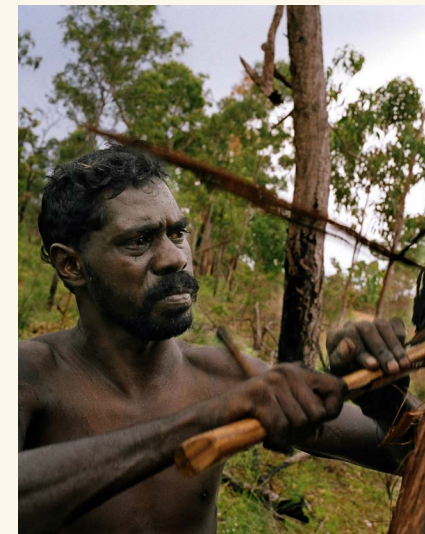
On its tours across the Northern Territory’s remote Arnhem Land and the Cobourge Peninsula, Venture North Safaris pauses at Injalak Hill, one of the world’s most significant rock-art sites. The only way to visit is with an Indigenous guide from the Injalak Arts Centre in Gunbalanya, someone in-the-know like Joey Nganjmirra.

A talented artist himself, Joey has been revealing the stories behind the sacred sites here for more than 20 years. “It’s mind-blowing to think there are more than 50,000 rock-art sites in the region, dating back 20,000 to 30,000 years,” he says.

Visiting the hill is a powerful experience, says Joey, referencing the many different layers of history: the ancient tunnels, paintings of spirit figures, caves, burial sites. And everything is raw – there are no formal pathways here, no signs.

“I tell people about the animals depicted in the art, and how this tells a story of what communities saw on the land and conservation. There are also different layers of art from different communities, which means different styles,” Joey says. “The art of West Arnhem Land is very unique – it has its own style and tells its own story through language.”

You can see Injalak Hill from the Arts Centre, just across the billabong, where Joey and his team greet visitors before heading to the rock-art site. “There’s so much more interest in meeting and hanging out with Indigenous people these days,” he says. “It’s so important to reach out and engage. This is how our knowledge and understanding spreads.”



“It always amazes people that there is such an important piece of history in such a remote part of the country.”

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VOYAGES INDIGENOUS TOURISM AUSTRALIA – MOSSMAN GORGE CULTURAL CENTRE – ROBERT LAFRAGUA

Mossman, Queensland



“When the blue ginger flowers, that’s the time the cassowary starts hanging around. It also tells us the brush turkeys are laying their eggs, so we need to look for their nests,” says Robert ‘Skip’ Lafragua.

The seasonal floral and faunal calendar is among the knowledge bounty the Kuku Yalanji man shares on Ngadiku Dreamtime Walks at Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre, 20 kilometres (12 miles) north of Port Douglas in Tropical North Queensland. “It’s a way to respect the rainforest and keep our knowledge and culture alive,” he says.

The Daintree Rainforest’s lush, boulder-strewn Mossman Gorge was Robert’s backyard

growing up. “I used to sit around the fire with the Elders, especially at night, and they’d tell me stories I now share,” he says.

Robert was working in tourism in 2007 when Uncle Roy Gibson asked him to become part of the Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre project. “He took me for a walk, and said ‘What plants do you know?’ Twenty minutes later he asked, ‘Look, you want a job?’.”

Mossman Gorge was a very different place back then. “We’d get up to 1,000 cars a day,” says Robert. Thanks to Uncle Roy, in 2011 the road was closed to private vehicles between 8am and 6pm daily, with electric shuttles instead carrying visitors to the Centre, which opened in 2012. “We started to see more animals come out,” says Robert, noting he even spotted a rare bush kangaroo not seen in these parts for 30 years.

Plants are Robert’s greatest passion. “It can change your outlook of the rainforest by knowing the purpose of trees,” he says. “I point out the stinging tree first. It has a heart-shaped leaf with prickly edges like fibreglass. The trick: you take the spikes out with the root of the tree.”

“The buff-breasted paradise kingfisher is our meteorologist. When it flies here from Papua New Guinea, we know the wet season is coming.”

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WAJAANA YAAM GUMBAYNGGIRR ADVENTURE TOURS – CLARK WEBB

Coffs Harbour,
New South Wales



“Our language is our soul, so when we speak our language in Coffs Harbour – when we speak Gumbaynggirr – we’re making our soul strong again.”

Gumbaynggirr/Bundjalung man Clark Webb doesn’t do anything by halves. After becoming Coffs Harbour High School’s first Aboriginal school captain in 2002, Clark went on to set up the not-for-profit Bularri Muurlay Nyanggan Aboriginal Corporation (BMNAC) in 2010, which works to uplift Aboriginal youth. Now, a proportion of profits from his ecotourism business, Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure Tours, is invested back into language teaching programs and other projects run by the BMNAC.

“I’m really passionate about the revitalisation of our language and culture, so that is what drives Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure Tours,” says Clark, who has been learning the Gumbaynggirr language for 14 years. Clark loves a good yarn and will happily share the Gumbaynggirr word for any marine life, animals or native plants that guests spot during one of Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure Tours’ guided stand-up paddleboarding/kayaking or walking tours, which are conducted at three spectacular locations within the Solitary Islands Marine Park on the New South Wales Mid North Coast. Clark and his team are passionately doing their bit to make the Gumbaynggirr language accessible and keep it alive, even though a lot of it was lost.

“When we can’t find a word for a certain plant or an animal, it’s part of the disruption that happened to our culture,” Clark says.

But that doesn’t stop Clark from bringing the Dreaming to life on his fascinating stand-up paddleboarding trips, with his contagious smile and welcoming nature putting you immediately at ease, even if you’re paddling for the first time.

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WALKABOUT CULTURAL ADVENTURES – JUAN WALKER

Port Douglas/Daintree,
Queensland

Juan Walker was a shy young man considering an electrician's apprenticeship at a mine when relatives talked him into staying on Country in Tropical North Queensland. The Kuku Yalanji man can thank his grandmother for directing him onto a different path when she found him a job as a tour guide with Daintree Ecotour in 1999. "It took me a while to be able to talk to strangers – that was the hardest part, getting over that shyness," says Juan. Today he runs his own business, Walkabout Cultural Adventures, from his Cooya Beach base near Port Douglas.

There's no trace of that shyness now as Juan leads visitors through the landscape he knows so well. In the mangroves and shallows, he demonstrates how to spear a mud crab and dig for pipis in the sand. In the World Heritage-listed Daintree Rainforest, he shows visitors the lush layers where cassowaries roam.

"It's one thing to learn about Aboriginal history through textbooks, sitting down in a classroom, but out on Country, it makes things a whole lot more real," he says. "It's a lot more hands-on – you can see how we know about bush medicine and bush tucker."

You'll also see his Country through new eyes, as just about every landmark comes soaked in myth and legend. Juan can tell you, for instance, a Dreamtime story about how a hungry snake slithered down from the mountains towards the coast to look for food, its body carving out the sinuous Daintree River along the way.



"I tell my kids Dreamtime stories at night for their bedtime stories," he says.

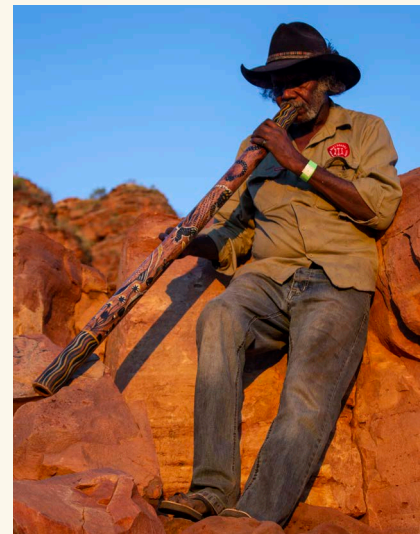


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WARINGARRI ABORIGINAL ARTS & TOURS – YUMBUN

Kununurra,
Western Australia



Yumbun was born on Carlton Hill Station, a vast cattle farm that became famous when blockbuster Australia was filmed there in 2007. Station life is in the Miriwoong Elder's blood, staying potent even after he was sent away for schooling, first to a remote outback mission and then to Perth/Boorloo, some 3000 kilometres away. Also known by his English name, Ted Carlton, Yumbun returned to work as a stockman, riding horses and mustering cattle until pastoral laws changed, upending his life.

"The old people used to tell us stories about bush times and station times, bush tucker and bush medicine. It really hit our people hard when we got pushed off the stations – our

traditional homelands – and into town," he says. "Our bush life became second-in-line to jobs and school. We had to teach our young people about our traditional lifestyle: painting, storytelling, hunting, gathering and corroboree. It's really important stuff."

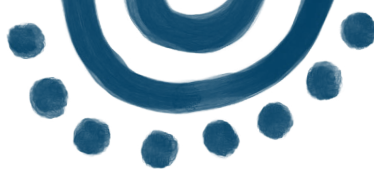
Waringarri Aboriginal Arts & Tours, the art centre where Yumbun now works, is in many ways his legacy. He helped to get the centre started during his time with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. The aim is to preserve and continue the Miriwoong culture, which has fewer than 20 fluent speakers remaining, making it a critically endangered language. Yumbun heads the guiding team, leading tours through the galleries and out onto the Country he is still so deeply connected to. Often, the emerging artist will play the didgeridoo and dance, or show his drawings of station life. He particularly loves the cross-cultural exchange he has with visitors.

"I know if they ask a lot of questions, they're really interested and I'm really proud of that," he says.

"Everyone talks about bridging the gap and closing the gap. Our tours are really important for that, to engage with the white audience, to show them history about our mob, our culture and our challenges as well."

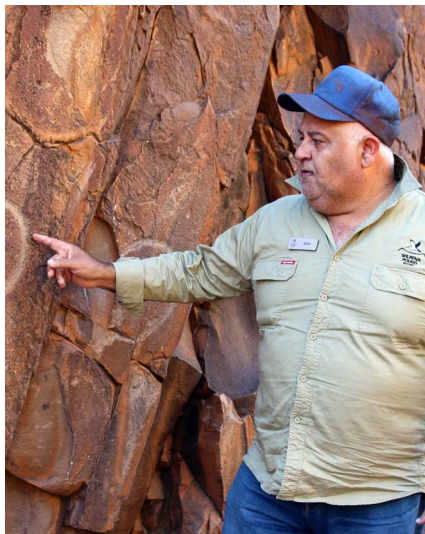
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WILPENA POUND RESORT – MICK MCKENZIE

Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park, Flinders Ranges,
South Australia



“My late grandfather said to me back in the 1940s, ‘How can we teach our culture if we don’t share it?’,” says Mick McKenzie. The Adnyamathanha Elder and guide draws on 65,000 years of wisdom at Wilpena Pound Resort, an Indigenous-owned and -operated retreat in South Australia’s majestic north Flinders Ranges, 440 kilometres (275 miles) north of Adelaide/Tarntanya.

On walking tours around Wilpena Pound – a natural amphitheatre covering more than 8,000 hectares (19,770 acres) – Mick gives visitors the chance to glimpse the land through Indigenous eyes. “My father used to say you have to crack open your intellectual box, your mind, to see the world spiritually,” he says.

“You could be coming here for 30 or 40 years, but until I say, ‘See those two serpents lying down?’, you might not see them,” he says of the pair of powerful Akurra serpents whose bodies today form the sides of Wilpena Pound.

Mick worked as an archaeologist before joining Wilpena Pound Resort in 2016. He began running cultural tours soon after, just as the surrounding national park was renamed Ikara-Flinders Ranges, ikara being the Adnyamathanha word for ‘meeting place’.

As one of the Custodians of Ikara-Flinders Ranges, Mick sees his role as an interpreter of the land. While hiking to spiritual Arkaroo Rock, he tells the Creation story of Wilpena Pound, depicted in ochre and charcoal on cliff walls visitors pass by. “Adnyamathanha is made up of two words: adnya means rock and matha is people. We are the rock people.”

“Our Adnyamathanha country is very rich in history. Our people have been connected with the land since times began. We’re walking and talking and seeing 800 million years of Creation.”

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WUKALINA WALK – CARLEETA THOMAS

Bay of Fires,
Tasmania/lutruwita



As a young girl, Carleeta Thomas went muttonbirding, foraged for abalone and learnt to fish and dive off the rocks of Cape Barren Island, a tiny Aboriginal community in Bass Strait, off the north-east coast of Tasmania/lutruwita.

It’s this connection to Country that shines on the wukalina Walk, a breathtaking four-day, three-night journey through wukalina (Mount William National Park) and larapuna (Bay of Fires), home to the palawa people for up to 65,000 years. Fittingly, muttonbird is served on day two of the walk. “We also do rock wallaby,” says Carleeta. And then there are scallops cooked in the shell over the fire, and a mean damper [bush bread].

Carleeta, a young palawa woman, was approached to become a guide on the experience – the first Aboriginal-owned tour in Tasmania/lutruwita – fresh out of high school. “I was really lucky for the Elders to see something in me at such a young age,” she says. “Being on Country is powerful. Learning about my culture and being able to share what I know and what I learned growing up on Cape Barren has been amazing.”

For Carleeta, wukalina is a chance to walk in the footsteps of ancestors. “We’ve had signs from the old fellas,” she says. Yellow-tailed black cockatoos often appear when they speak about chief Mannalargenna. “It was his Totem,” she says. It’s the same when they tell the fire Creation story. “Kaylarunya [the black swan] doesn’t fly at night,” says Carleeta. “But the last few times we mentioned her name, she swooped over the campfire.” When the embers fade, visitors retire to architect-designed huts, the waves a lullaby inducing sound sleep.

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WULA GURA NYINDA ECO CULTURAL ADVENTURES

– DARREN “CAPES” CAPEWELL

Shark Bay, Western Australia



Darren “Capes” Capewell once played Australian Rules football for East Fremantle, but these days he’s kicking different kinds of goals. Capes, as he’s universally known, is now sharing the Indigenous history of Shark Bay – the land of his ancestors. The World Heritage-listed region, 800 kilometres (500 miles) north of Perth/Boorloo, is the Australian continent’s westernmost point. Among Shark Bay’s highlights is Monkey Mia, famous for its wild dolphins. It’s also home to Francois Peron National Park, where acacia-covered red sand dunes contrast vividly with turquoise waters that are home to manta rays, dolphins and elusive dugongs.

Capes came home from the big city in 2000 and started his tourism venture in 2004. “Apart from my family, it combines two of my greatest passions – and that’s the environment and my culture,” he says.

Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures will take you kayaking through the region’s stunning bays. Along the way, you learn about the strong spiritual connection between this land and its Traditional Custodians. You can also slip from the double kayaks into crystal-clear waters to snorkel and swim with rays, fish and turtles.

Capes also runs a Didgeridoo Dreaming night tour – a didgeridoo meditation around an open campfire. Bush tucker and fish are cooked over the fire, and males can try their hand playing the timeless instrument. Traditionally, only men play the didgeridoo, but females on the tour can try coaxing music from a conch shell. On a 4WD tour of Francois Peron National Park, you might spot the thorny devil – a spiky lizard that stars in one of the region’s Dreamtime stories.

“When you visit places it is easy to ‘see’ Country, but to truly take something away with you – you need to feel the spirit of Country. This is what I share with visitors. People walk away with a deeper appreciation of what Country means to my people, here in Gutharraguda (Shark Bay).”

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Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures, Western Australia



JOURNEYS ...
IMMERSE YOURSELF
IN THE ANCIENT ON YOUR
TRIPS ACROSS AUSTRALIA

IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THE ANCIENT ON YOUR TRIPS ACROSS AUSTRALIA



Kakadu Cultural Tours, Northern Territory

Aboriginal experiences offer the kind of life-changing, immersive experiences that make a great itinerary awesome and, most of all, memorable. Flavour your Australian journey with Aboriginal-guided experiences to bring the landscape to life.

Travellers want to experience Australia's fascinating Indigenous cultures – but don't always know how.

Here is an easy guide to immersing yourself in the ancient with a selection of experiences throughout Australia by region.



New South Wales

Sydney/Warrane and surrounds

Northern Territory

Central Australia

Central Australia Road Trip

Top End Australia

Kakadu and Arnhem Land Road Trip

Queensland

Tropical North Queensland

Victoria

Melbourne/Narrm and surrounds

Western Australia

Perth/Boorloo and the Margaret River region

Broome/Rubibi and Kimberley region

SYDNEY/WARRANE AND SURROUNDS, NEW SOUTH WALES



Explore Sydney/Warrane and its surrounds with the Traditional Custodians of the land

Sydney/Warrane may be famous for its sparkling harbour, iconic buildings and beautiful beaches, but it's also home to vibrant Aboriginal cultures that can shed a fascinating new light on the Harbour City and surrounds.

The First Nations collection at the [Australian Museum](#) is a great place to discover Australia's First Peoples. Through film, audio recordings and artworks, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples tell their stories in their own voices, alongside objects from the museum's 40,000-strong collection. On the one-hour Waranara: First Nations Tour, an Aboriginal guide offers deeper insights into the Aboriginal experience, including stories from their own Country.

The Rocks neighbourhood on Sydney Harbour is often referred to as the city's oldest district because of its colonial history. But the Aboriginal people of the Eora Nation were living in Sydney/Warrane tens of thousands of years before the First Fleet arrived in 1788. Join [Dreamtime Southern X](#) for a 90-minute Rocks Aboriginal Dreaming Tour (Illi Langi) to learn all about Aboriginal life past and present, spirituality and connections to land and water, in the shadows of both the Sydney Opera House and Harbour Bridge.

You can also appreciate the city's Aboriginal heritage from atop the Sydney Harbour Bridge, New South Wales on the [Burrawa Indigenous Climb Experience](#), which pairs urban adventure and sparkling views with evocative Aboriginal storytelling.

Aboriginal owned and operated, [Ngaran Ngaran Culture Awareness](#) takes people on a deep cultural immersion into Yuin country, a five-hour drive south of Sydney in Narooma. The two-night Yuin Retreat experience offers the chance to take part in ceremonies involving dance and yidaki (didgeridoo), explore sacred Gulaga Mountain or Djiringanj Dreaming trail, meet the land's Traditional Custodians, hear Creation (or Dreamtime) stories, enjoy local foods, and take

part in yarning (talking) circles.

In Wagga Wagga, a five-hour drive south-west of Sydney/Warrane in the Riverina region, Wiradjuri man Mark Saddler reveals messages in the landscape left by his ancestors on his [Bundy Cultural Tours](#). While 5.5 hours north of Sydney/Warrane, you can learn about the cultural significance of the Coffs Coast's idyllic waterways on an Aboriginal-led stand-up paddleboarding tour with [Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure Tours](#).

What could be more fun than quad biking and sand boarding on the highest coastal sand dunes in the Southern Hemisphere? Answer: quad biking, sand boarding and learning about Worimi Aboriginal culture at the same time. [Sand Dune Adventures](#) – located at Port Stephens, a two-hour drive north of Sydney/Warrane – will take you on a 90-minute adventure that's one-third quad biking, one-third sand boarding and one-third Aboriginal culture: visiting midden sites, digging for fresh water on the beach and discovering bush foods and resources.

Less than 90 minutes' drive north from Sydney/Warrane on the New South Wales Central Coast, boutique wine and Aboriginal culture come together on the [Firescreek Aboriginal Storytelling and Wine Tasting Experience](#). Join Aboriginal Elder Kevin 'Gavi' Duncan for a fascinating deep-dive into Aboriginal cultures and traditions in the serene setting of Firescreek Botanical Winery before joining the winemakers for a tasting experience, learning how native botanicals, also important to Aboriginal cultures, are used to make their unique wines.

In Sydney/Warrane, the [Royal Botanic Garden](#) is an oasis of 30 hectares (74 acres) right next to the Opera House. It's also a means of exploring Sydney Cove's history from the point of view of its Traditional Owners, the Gadigal people. Explore the Cadi Jam Ora – First Encounters Garden, on the site where Europeans first cleared native land or embark on an Aboriginal Harbour Heritage Tour or Bush Tucker Tour to learn about plant uses, traditional culture and seasonal bush foods.

CENTRAL AUSTRALIA, NORTHERN TERRITORY



Aboriginal cultural experiences at the heart of the Red Centre

It's an authentic journey of discovery when you travel to the heart of Australia's Red Centre with the land's Traditional Custodians.

Central Australia, also known as the Red Centre, is the Northern Territory's southernmost region, and a vast expanse surrounding the outback city of Alice Springs. At its heart sprawls one of the country's best-known attractions – the sacred sandstone monolith that is Uluru (formerly known as Ayers Rock). Beyond this UNESCO World Heritage-listed icon, Central Australia is brimming with culturally significant landmarks, incredible Aboriginal art, dramatic landscapes, and a wealth of travel offerings that ensure your exploration of the Red Centre is memorable.

North of Uluru is the surprisingly lush Kings Canyon National Park, known as Watarrka to its Traditional Custodians. Here you can gain first-hand insight into the cultural importance of this outback oasis with [Karrke Aboriginal Cultural Experience & Tours](#). On a one-hour guided bushwalk, learn about the traditional Aboriginal food known as bush tucker, as well as native plants used as ancient medicines for spiritual and physical healing, and

sample the unusual (and surprisingly good) witchetty grub, a native insect that tastes like popcorn when cooked. You will deepen your understanding of the cultural significance of dot painting – the now world-renowned art style that originated in Central Australia – as well as learn how traditional timber implements like clapping sticks and weapons were created.

No cultural exploration of the Red Centre is complete without a visit to the not-for-profit art and craft corporation [Maruku Arts](#). Owned and operated by Anangu people (Traditional Custodians of Australia's central deserts) for more than 30 years, Maruku exhibits works from some of the 900 Anangu artists in its collective. At its retail gallery at [Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park Cultural Centre](#), browse (and buy) some of Maruku's extensive range of artworks, primarily paintings and wood carvings known as punu. You can also experience traditional ceremonies here, along with demonstrations and workshops, where you can create your own masterpiece to take home.

To really see, touch and feel the drama and scale of Central Australia's rich culture, [SEIT Outback Australia](#) takes you to some of the region's most magnificent and sacred landforms. SEIT's [Patji tour](#), for instance,



SEIT Outback Australia, Northern Territory

named after the Aboriginal land it explores, takes you on an exclusive off-road adventure just south of Uluru. Travelling through Patji by 4WD with an Aboriginal guide, expect to learn about the cultural and historical significance of the area, as well as stories passed down for generations about how the Traditional Owners survived in this desert landscape. You may also have an opportunity to forage for witchetty grubs and other bush tucker and medicinal plants along the way.

SEIT's cultural tours can also be booked through [Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia](#), offering an impressive portfolio of Aboriginal experiences around one of their most widely known properties, Ayers Rock Resort. Voyages is owned by the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation, so profits are reinvested into Aboriginal training and development across Australia.

Situated at the gateway to Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, [Ayers Rock Resort](#) offers a wide array of accommodation, from spectacularly located camping to the upmarket [Sails in the Desert hotel](#). Partnering with local people and operators, the resort can also arrange memorable cultural experiences, from bush tucker walks to helicopter tours. However,

one of the most decadent selections is dinner at [Tali Wiru](#), the resort's open-air restaurant overlooking Uluru and the domes of Kata Tjuta beyond. While a local Aboriginal storyteller shares insights about Anangu culture and history, you'll be served a sumptuous four-course dinner, showcasing native flora and fauna and ancient herbs and spices.

Another iconic property overlooking Uluru is [Longitude 131°](#), which sits atop red sand dunes, made up of 16 tented pavilions, each with a king-sized bed, custom furnishings, work by local Indigenous artists and all the trimmings you'd expect of a five-star boutique hotel. The treatments available at the lodge's [Spa Kinara](#) use products native to Central Australia, including Kakadu plum, desert lime and Australian yellow clay.

Longitude 131° can also arrange an array of bespoke cultural experiences, including a fascinating full-day private tour of [Ernabella Arts](#) – the oldest, continuously running Indigenous arts centre in Australia. With exclusive access to the closed community of artists, you can gain insight into the ancient techniques, symbols and stories that inspire their artworks, which promise to be as colourful as the art itself.



Karrke Aboriginal Cultural Experience & Tours, Northern Territory

CENTRAL AUSTRALIA ROAD TRIP, NORTHERN TERRITORY



Outback awakening: Aboriginal Australia and the Red Centre Way

From the desert town of Alice Springs to the towering undulations of Uluru, one of Australia's most iconic outback routes, the [Red Centre Way](#), is a road trip that takes in Aboriginal cultures, from galleries to forested canyons. Devote at least five days to it.

Day 1: Alice Springs

Wake up to the call of sulphur-crested cockatoos in Alice Springs. Ringed by purple-hued mountains, Alice may be small (with a population of about 25,000), yet it's rich in urban delights, including Aboriginal art galleries and a burgeoning foodie scene.

Kickstart your morning inside [Olive Pink Botanic Garden](#). This beautifully calm space, an Australian arid region flora reserve, was founded more than 60 years ago by Indigenous-rights activist Olive Pink. The garden features a rustic outdoor eatery, the [Bean Tree Café](#), known for its delectable coffee and fresh fare (try the shakshouka eggs with chilli and zaatar).

Head west for a few kilometres and burn off breakfast by exploring [Alice Springs Desert Park](#), a sprawling 1300-hectare space dedicated to Central Australia's desert cultures and environment. Resident animals include princess parrots, bilbies and the 50-centimetre-tall mala, or rufous hare-wallaby, which is a key Creation figure for the Traditional Owners of Uluru.

Spend a lazy afternoon browsing Aboriginal art in Alice's many galleries, being sure to include a visit to the Araluen Arts Centre, where the excellent Aboriginal art collection includes works by renowned watercolourist Albert Namatjira and contemporary Western Desert art pioneer Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri. Grab a coffee or a light snack at the onsite Yaye's Café, named after the Arrernte word for "sisters".

Bed down at [Vatu Sanctuary](#), a private villa curated by a former gallery owner.

Day 2: MacDonnell Ranges to Kings Canyon

Hit the road and set out on the [Red Centre Way](#). About 90 kilometres west of Alice you'll find Ellery Creek Big Hole, a swimming spot that cuts through a red-toned gorge in the West MacDonnell Ranges. The accompanying scenery is like a painting – replete with ochre soil, soft green eucalypts and, typically, skies ablaze in electric blue.

From here, drive the unsealed road to Watarrka National Park, and keep your eyes peeled for [Karrke Aboriginal Experience & Tours](#), about a three-hour drive from the swimming hole, and 2km from Kings Creek Station (its signage features a bowerbird). Sit among a thicket of bright-green plants beside husband and wife team, Peter Abbott and Christine Breaden. The couple's one-hour chat covers bush food, medicine, hunting weaponry, art and Luritja and Pertame language and culture – knowledge they delight in sharing.

With sunset drawing nearer, embark on the 6km rim walk at Kings Canyon, where a 100-metre ascent over rose-coloured rocks and boulders gives way to lush bush, including the Garden of Eden, a peaceful pool flanked by ferns and cycads.

Spend the night at [Discovery Kings Canyon \(Resort\)](#).

Day 3: Uluru and Kata-Tjuta

Pack up and set off on the 3.5 hour drive to Uluru. Once at [Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park](#), 325km from Kings Canyon, you've reached the beating heart of the Red Centre. This region is the Dreaming site for the Anangu people, Uluru's Traditional Owners, who see these lands as a living map of ancestral heroes' births, battles and deaths. Little compares to the jaw-dropping experience of witnessing this glowing monolith up close.

Check into Ayers Rock Resort's [Sails in the Desert](#), so-called because of the white, sail-shaped awnings that line the property's outdoor spaces. These add to the breezy, open feel of

the hotel, which boasts an abundance of natural light. Airy rooms arc around a shaded pool, while other facilities include a tennis court, day spa and sun-drenched restaurants. Opt for a room with views of the Rock.

Later that afternoon, drive the 40 minutes to Kata Tjuta. With a name meaning "many heads", this collection of 36 red domes rivals the beauty of Uluru. Wander to its western side for a stroll through Walpa Gorge, a men's sacred ceremonial area, before watching as the sun sets over Kata Tjuta, setting it aglow.

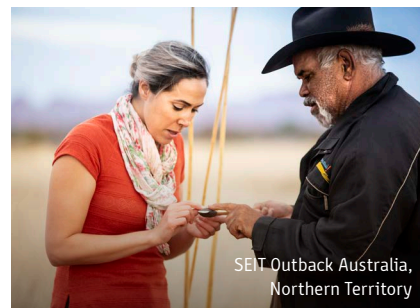
Back at the resort, visit in-house restaurant Ilkari, which features Indigenous flavours and offers an extravagant three-course buffet that includes seafood, Asian dishes, roasts, a selection of cheeses and, perhaps best of all, a chocolate fountain.

Day 4: Uluru

Rise early and travel to the [Talinguru Nyakunytyaku](#) sunrise viewing area to witness Uluru at dawn. With a height surpassing the Eiffel Tower's, plus a circumference of nearly 10km, Uluru is quite the spectacle, and you'll need a bit of distance to fully appreciate its scale – not to mention its changing colour palette, which shifts from maroon to ochre.

At 7.30am, the doors of [Kulata Academy Cafe](#) swing open, staffed by members of Ayers Rock Resort's National Indigenous Training Academy. Here you'll taste some of the best coffee in Yulara village (home to Ayers Rock Resort) and find sandwiches and salads to stock your backpack for the rest of your day.

Kick this off in earnest with a ranger-guided [Mala walk](#), beginning at the Mala carpark.



SEIT Outback Australia,
Northern Territory



Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia – Ayers
Rock Resort, Northern Territory

The free 1.5-hour walk delves into the rock's Anangu Creation stories, or Tjukurpa, as well as its geological features (such as the fact that only a small portion of Uluru pokes above land, with the rest of it descending 2.5km underground).

Next, get creative and craft your own dot painting at [Maruku Arts](#). At twice-daily workshops, an Anangu artist – speaking through an interpreter – will help you work some magic onto your canvas, while introducing you to traditional art, symbols and tools (as well as a few Pitjantjatjara words).

In the evening after a leisurely afternoon at the resort, return your gaze to Uluru at a [Tali Wiru](#) dinner. Relax among sand dunes over a glass of sparkling wine, enjoy a decadent four-course meal infused with ancient native herbs and spices, and exhale as an Indigenous storyteller shares stories of this sacred land.

Day 5: Uluru

Meet up with [SEIT Outback Australia](#) at the entrance of Ayers Rock Resort and accompany the Traditional Owners to their homelands south of the Rock on the Patji day-tour. Just outside the limits of the National Park, explore the Patji homelands by 4WD in the company of an Aboriginal guide, as you learn about the history of the Anangu.

Over afternoon tea, hear stories detailing Paddy Uluru's fight for Indigenous recognition in the park, as well as an overview of centuries-old bush survival techniques.

From atop a private sand dune, farewell your day by witnessing a final exquisite, multicoloured sunset against the silhouettes of Uluru and Kata Tjuta. This Red Centre journey has reached its finale.

TOP END AUSTRALIA, NORTHERN TERRITORY

Explore the Top End through the eyes of the land's Traditional Custodians

The northernmost part of Australia's Northern Territory – known as the Top End – is the perfect place to get to know the world's oldest living cultures.

In the wilderness of the Top End, [Davidson's Arnhemland Safaris](#) offers a rare opportunity: the chance to stay overnight at an Aboriginal sacred site. This remote eco-lodge is on a registered sacred site at Mt Borradaile (a 50-minute flight east of Darwin/Gulumerdgen) in West Arnhem Land – a vast wilderness that's home to a rich Aboriginal cultures and astonishing natural beauty. Small-group tours from the eco-lodge explore rock art sites, cruise billabongs, spot crocodiles, roam through rainforest and delve into catacombs (home to ancient burial sites) to discover the country and culture of Mt Borradaile's Traditional Owners, the Amurdak people.

Closer to Darwin/Gulumerdgen, Kakadu National Park comprises almost 20,000 square kilometres (about half the size of Switzerland) of raging waterfalls, wetlands teeming with birdlife and 10,000 pairs of crocodile eyes peeking from rivers. Home to Aboriginal peoples for more than 65,000 years, it is World Heritage listed for both its natural and cultural significance. [Kakadu Cultural Tours](#), owned and operated by Traditional Owners, hosts 4WD tours of northern Kakadu and Arnhem Land, cruises down East Alligator River and offers multi-day adventures to Cannon Hill, a restricted, sacred area of Kakadu. Learn traditional survival skills, discover ancient rock art, meet artists and soak up sunsets that have illuminated these unchanged escarpments for thousands of years.

Whether you want to spot crocs, climb rocks or fish for barramundi, touring Kakadu with its Traditional Owners is the best way to get to know this area's unique culture as well as its natural beauty. [Kakadu Tourism](#) is an Aboriginal-owned collection of 4WD tours, wetland cruises, cultural experiences and



accommodation. Stay in the croc-shaped Mercure Kakadu Crocodile Hotel, spot the real thing on a Yellow Water billabong cruise and catch a pop-up art workshop at the Warradjan Culture Centre, all within Kakadu National Park.

Sab Lord, the son of a buffalo and crocodile hunter, grew up in Kakadu alongside local Aboriginal clans, through which he formed lifelong connections that help make his [Lords Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris](#) as culturally insightful as they are entertaining. A great Aussie outback character, Sab and fellow guide Dean Hoath offer private tours only: from one-day trips to bespoke multi-day safaris. Guests venture into Kakadu and Arnhem Land, stay overnight in luxury lodges or a bush glamping site and visit Aboriginal communities. "You really see people's attitudes change," says Sab. "They walk away with a more open mind."

Nitmiluk Gorge, also known as Katherine Gorge, winds for a spellbinding 12 kilometres (7.5 miles) between sheer sandstone walls that reach more than 70 metres high (230 feet). About a 3.5-hour drive south of Darwin/Gulumerdgen, it is deeply significant for the Jawoyn people, who own and operate [Nitmiluk Tours](#). Head off on a self-guided canoe tour, take a boat cruise through its magnificent gorge, or take a helicopter ride that stops at rock art sites and secluded swimming holes. If you want to base yourself here for longer, book into Nitmiluk's Cicada Lodge, where all the rooms feature Aboriginal artwork and the restaurant combines traditional herbs and fruit with fresh local fare.

If you think you know what Australia's Indigenous cultures are all about, think again. On the Tiwi Islands, a unique culture has evolved independently from the mainland. With carved pukamani burial poles, renowned screen-printed fabrics, an obsession with Aussie Rules football and a famously warm welcome, the Tiwis (comprising Bathurst and Melville islands) are well worth the 2.5-hour boat ride from Darwin/Gulumerdgen. [SeaLink NT](#) operates ferries to Bathurst Island and offers day tours

with Tiwi guides that include a Welcome to Country smoking ceremony, a visit to a remarkable church that combines Christianity with Dreamtime beliefs and a behind-the-scenes art session.

Manuel Pamkal learnt to paint using bark from the stringybark tree when he was 15. Today, visitors learn from him at the [Top Didj Cultural Experience & Art Gallery](#) just outside Katherine, a three-hour drive south of Darwin/Gulumerdgen. Manuel shares stories about growing up in the bush and his tribal life, demonstrates traditional fire lighting and spear throwing, before teaching the rarrk (cross-hatching) painting technique, in which painters use pieces of billabong grass to make long

parallel lines. Visitors then get to create their own work of art to take home.

On a small-group intimate tour with [Venture North Safaris](#), you'll head into some of the most remote and pristine parts of the Top End. A five-day tour of Kakadu, Arnhem Land and the Cobourg Peninsula includes traditional mud-crabbing at a spectacular Cobourg Peninsula coastal camp, at the northernmost tip of Arnhem Land, and a visit to the Gunbalanya community, where artists produce traditional works inspired by the Dreamtime. Some of Australia's most significant rock art, painted by their ancestors, adorns nearby Injalak Hill.



Davidson's Arnhemland Safaris, Northern Territory

KAKADU AND ARNHEM LAND ROAD TRIP, NORTHERN TERRITORY



Immerse yourself in Indigenous cultures on a road trip through the Top End

Cruise to tropical islands, go croc watching and indulge in bush tucker in Australia's Northern Territory.

Set aside five days to delve deeper into the Top End's Aboriginal cultures, as well as this region's Creation stories and its spiritual links to the landscape. From Darwin/Gulumerdgen and the Tiwi Islands, to the Mary River, Kakadu and the Katherine area, this road trip will see you mix with cultural custodians, colour-soaked art, dramatic stone country, thunderous waterfalls, and wetlands awash with wildlife and wonder.

Day 1: Darwin/Gulumerdgen and the Tiwi Islands

Wake up in the seaside town of Darwin/Gulumerdgen, grab a tropical breakfast, then head to the [Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory](#). After exploring its many intriguing exhibits, head to its outdoor deck for views of the Arafura Sea – an azure-toned body of water that links the homes of local Larrakia and Tiwi Aboriginal people. To discover more about the latter, go to Cullen Bay, near the city centre, to board the [SeaLink NT](#) ferry to Bathurst Island. This two-and-a-half-hour trip cuts a path to one of the main townships within the 11-island collective comprising the Tiwi Islands, Wurrumiyanga.

Arriving at Wurrumiyanga, take a seat inside art production house-cum-gallery [Tiwi Design](#) for a traditional smoking ceremony and totem dances performed alongside a morning tea service. Tiwi people are known for their friendliness and pride in their culture ("Tiwi" means "we, the only people" and the archipelago is nicknamed the "islands of smiles"), so – for a more personal window into the islands – chat to any of the ever-present Tiwi locals floating around these gallery spaces.

Next, your Aboriginal guide will lead you over the road to explore the stunning nearby church,

St Therese's, where Aboriginal artworks line the walls of the front altar. As afternoon arrives on the island, return to Tiwi Design to try your hand at screen-printing, before setting sail for the return trip to Darwin/Gulumerdgen.

Day 2: Adelaide River

In your hire car, head east from the city along the Arnhem Highway, a road flanked by wetlands and paperbark forests. About 45 minutes into the trip, make your first stop at the Fogg Dam Conservation Area, which teems with freshwater crocodiles (shy, and generally no threat to humans), waterbirds and lotus flowers. Next, take a thrilling [Wildlands 45-minute Airboat Safari](#) across the seemingly endless floodplains of the Mary River wetlands system where you will discover a vast array of native wildlife and amazing flora. This is a truly unique experience which takes you into privately owned areas that no one else can access.

Your evening's accommodation at Kakadu National Park's gateway town, Jabiru, will see you enter the [Mercure Kakadu Crocodile Hotel](#) through the croc's mouth and cool down at a pool planted firmly inside the inanimate creature's belly. You have to see this kitsch hotel from an aerial view to truly appreciate its architectural splendour – perhaps on a scenic flight with [Kakadu Air Services](#).

Day 3: Kakadu's Ubirr Rock + Arnhem Land

One of this park's most peaceful views erupts every sunrise and sunset at Ubirr Rock in the northern section of Kakadu. Rise early and travel into stone country where artful rock formations dot the landscape and 20,000-year-old artworks decorate natural galleries and cave walls (keep an eye out for those depicting the story of Kakadu Creation story spirit, the Rainbow Serpent).

After you've climbed your way onto the main rock face to soak up vistas of Arnhem Land beyond, join an all-day 4WD tour with [Kakadu Cultural Tours](#). Your Aboriginal guide will lead you through private art sites and introduce you to [Injalak Arts](#). Here, you'll meet local artists



Kakadu Tourism, Northern Territory

and enjoy a lesson in bush tucker preparation.

That evening, continue down Kakadu Highway and bed down in a glamping tent at [Cooinda Lodge](#). This is the site of Kakadu's first general store, and later its first accommodation site. The lodge rests beside Yellow Water Billabong, a magical mix of water and wildlife.

Take a [Yellow Waters Cruise](#) here with [Kakadu Tourism](#) at sunset or sunrise, keeping an eye out for giant sea eagles, artfully coloured forest kingfishers, and – of course – the Northern Territory's favourite mascot, the croc.

Day 4: Kakadu's waterfalls + Nitmiluk

Further south in the park, the landscape transitions from stone country and wetlands into more dramatic terrain: towering waterfalls. Some of the most stunning sites are Gunlom, Twin Falls, Jim Jim Falls, and Maguk. Make sure to sample at least one of these roaring treasures – preferably in a swimming costume – before exiting Kakadu for Nitmiluk National Park.

Sitting further south, just outside the township of Katherine, Nitmiluk is jointly operated by government and Aboriginal Traditional Owners (just like Kakadu). The park is named after the sound of the cicada ('nit, nit!') and its crown jewel is a network of 13 gorges, alive with freshwater crocodiles, fish and sky-patrolling black cockatoos. Combine an on-water experience here with a hike. Hire a canoe from [Nitmiluk Tours](#), or join a dinner cruise along the first gorge. Then complement either activity with the two-kilometre return trek to Baruei Lookout for a bird's-eye view

of this Top End haven.

When night beckons, bed down at Aboriginal-run Cicada Lodge for a touch of luxury (and a dip in its pretty, gum tree-flanked pool) or book in at a cabin set beside the main campsite – all options are housed within tranquil bushland.

Day 5: Katherine and Litchfield

End your trip as you started it, with some Aboriginal art-making – this time in Katherine and under the watchful eye of cultural maestro, Manuel Pamkal. A big and joy-spreading identity around town, Manuel is an Aboriginal artist who grew up in nearby parkland. Spend the morning hearing his compelling personal story, as well as a broader account of his people's customs at [Top Didj Cultural Experience & Art Gallery](#).

With your own painted artwork now in hand, stop in for the best coffee in Katherine at [The Finch Café](#) (its staff make scrumptious toasties and salads, too), then glide on towards Darwin/Gulumerdgen – leaving ample time for a late afternoon side-trip into Litchfield National Park.

If you enjoy just one swim here, make it at Wangi Falls – a jaw-droppingly beautiful waterhole where twin falls plunge into an emerald-toned pool and small natural 'spa' below the cliff face, which once served as a fertility site for the park's Aboriginal ancestors. Spiritually recharged and mentally refreshed, you're ready to make the return drive to Darwin/Gulumerdgen, and again greet the city lights.

TROPICAL NORTH QUEENSLAND



Experience the land and sea Country of Tropical North Queensland

Tropical Far North Queensland is about more than the Great Barrier Reef. It's a place for diving deep into Aboriginal cultures.

Tropical North Queensland is a stunning region and one of the few places in the world where two natural World Heritage sites meet: the renowned Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics. Both the rainforest and reef are striking features on their own – but both also offer incredible opportunities to immerse yourself in the Aboriginal cultures of northern Queensland.

The Daintree Rainforest is part of the Wet Tropics, and is one of the oldest rainforests on Earth, with one of the planet's most diverse ecosystems. It's also home to a fascinating Aboriginal culture – the Kuku Yalanji people have lived here for more than 40,000 years. On a Daintree Dreaming day tour, join local brothers Linc and Brandon Walker on their daily hunt for mud crabs, fish and mussels at Cooya Beach, just north of Port Douglas. After a Welcome to Country ceremony and lunch, you

will head into the forest for a guided walk that will help you interpret the Daintree through the eyes of the people who have known it the longest. It's one of a range of small-group tours from [Adventure North Australia](#).

North of the Daintree is Cooktown, where British explorer Captain James Cook pulled in for repairs after hitting a reef in 1770. About 70 kilometres (45 miles) north-west you will find Normanby Station, an Aboriginal-owned cattle property in tropical savannah country. With its river providing food and caves offering shelter, this has long been an important site for the Balnggarwarra people, whose culture you can discover through half or full-day tours departing from Cooktown with [Culture Connect](#). Aboriginal guides will lead you on a creek walk to a cluster of rock-art cave galleries. "Not many people have been here; it's pretty much untouched," says Culture Connect director Roger de Vos.

Discover the Great Barrier Reef from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective on a [Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel](#) tour from Cairns, with on-board Indigenous sea rangers who work to conserve both their

culture and the reef. As well as spending a generous five hours at outer reefs – where you can snorkel, scuba dive or admire all that underwater beauty from a glass-bottomed boat – you will hear reef Creation stories, experience traditional dances and didgeridoo playing, and get to know not just the underwater world, but the people who call this their Sea Country.

Cultural experiences with Indigenous owned and operated [Mandingalbay Ancient Indigenous Tours](#) also depart Cairns Marlin Marina, beginning with a guided river cruise across the serene Trinity Inlet to the Mandingalbay Yidinji Indigenous Protected Area. Here you'll experience Mandingalbay Yidinji traditions passed down through generations, which could include everything from discovering the many uses for local resources to feasting on seasonal local delights.

The [Flames of the Forest](#) Aboriginal Cultural Experience is a remarkable evening, less than 10 minutes outside Port Douglas, or a one-hour drive from Cairns. The rainforest setting is magical: you're seated beneath a black, silk-lined marquee illuminated by handmade crystal chandeliers. The banquet itself is similarly exceptional: a seven-course progression of modern, mostly locally sourced, Australian flavours with an Indigenous ("bush tucker") twist. And the Kuku Yalanji are the perfect hosts, offering a blend of intimate storytelling, didgeridoo and song, as well as inviting guests to enjoy soaking up the sounds of the rainforest.

Deaf Kuku Yalanji man Brian "Binna" Swindley established [Janbal Gallery](#) at Mossman, an hour north of Cairns, in 2008. Rainforest art has its own unique meanings – dots represent raindrops, for example – and Binna (so-called because of his hearing impairment; it means "ear" in Kuku Yalanji) draws inspiration from the forest, beach and reef, as he blends tradition with his own style. "It's about what you see when you look around," he says. "What you feel. What you eat and what you taste." Shop for art and artefacts, and join a 90-minute workshop, in which Binna will teach you how to paint a boomerang or canvas.

The backdrop to stunning [Mossman Gorge](#) in the Daintree Rainforest, is Manjal Dimbi, or "mountain holding back". According to

Kuku Yalanji beliefs, this is the rock form of Kubirri, who is holding back the evil spirit, Wurrumbu. While the rock is standing, the Kuku Yalanji will live in peace. You can explore the gorge – and Kuku Yalanji cultural beliefs – on a Dreamtime Walk in the rainforest from the Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre, which is managed by Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia. The 90-minute walk, with an Aboriginal guide, includes demonstrations of traditions such as ochre-paint making, as well as a smoking ceremony, and tea and damper (simple "bush" bread). The centre also has an art gallery, gift shop and café.

It started back in 1987 with Aboriginal man Jimmy Edwards throwing boomerangs with his dog Sammy while people waited to board an amphibious World War II Army Duck for a tour of the rainforest. Over time, that evolved into the [Pamagirri Aboriginal Experience at Rainforestation Nature Park](#), a 30-minute drive north of Cairns. It's an hour of dance performance in a rainforest amphitheatre and a Dreamtime walk involving didgeridoos, boomerangs and some impressive spear throwing (a couple of the guides are world-record holders). The nature park also offers a Pamagirri Rainforest Walkabout, Army Duck tours and the Koala & Wildlife Park.

Kuku Yalanji man Juan Walker set up [Walkabout Cultural Adventures](#) in a bid to share his culture and country. Through his small-group, personalised day tours of the Daintree Rainforest, Juan and his fellow Aboriginal guides help visitors catch mud crabs and collect shellfish, throw boomerangs and spears, discover bush tucker foods and medicine, and gain a deeper understanding of Kuku Yalanji customs and beliefs. For Juan, and other Kuku Yalanji people, the Daintree is more than just a remarkable World Heritage landscape – it is family, culture and identity all rolled into one.



Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia - Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre, Queensland

PERTH/BOORLOO AND THE MARGARET RIVER REGION, WESTERN AUSTRALIA



Explore urban Aboriginal experiences in Perth/Boorloo and surrounds

In Perth/Boorloo, the flourishing capital of Western Australia, discover urban experiences that resonate with Aboriginal history.

Before there were skyscrapers, cities and towns throughout Australia, the country's Traditional Owners inhabited the wide, expansive land. More than 200 years after colonisation, descendants of those communities are still practising their culture, and not just in the outback. They also move between concrete and glass, remembering the wetlands, springs and bush that lay beneath modern urban settings. Despite the hum of traffic and buzz of the metropolis, Aboriginal culture and teachings can still be accessed in an authentic way.

Near Perth/Boorloo, [Dale Tilbrook Experiences](#) introduces guests to Aboriginal culture, art and stories with an emphasis on Australian bush tucker and its medicinal qualities. Noongar Elder (and company namesake) Dale Tilbrook makes use of all the senses during her hands-on experiences. Visitors are invited to smell and taste native produce like intensely tangy lemon myrtle or piquant pepperberry, as well as rub ointments such as emu oil onto the skin,

while hearing about Indigenous farming methods and how full of resources the bush is. She's rightly proud of what the earth has long offered up to Aboriginal peoples; the nutritional value of many bush foods, particularly the quandong and Kakadu plum, is quite astonishing. These experiences take place at Mandoon Estate Winery in the Swan Valley or Dale can meet guests at their location of choice in Perth.

South-west of Perth/Boorloo, the lauded Margaret River wine region also has Aboriginal energy pulsing through it. Josh Whiteland of [Koomal Dreaming](#) likes to team culture and place with his enlightening experiences – he plays didgeridoo inside the spectacular Ngilgi Cave amphitheatre; he walks through bush in search of medicinal plants; he demonstrates traditional fire making and he guides walks along the breathtaking Cape to Cape track. Traditional foods such as kangaroo, emu, quandong, emu plum and saltbush can be tasted during a gourmet lunch option. He also explains how and why the Noongar people recognise six, not four, seasons in the year, and shares why so many of the area's town names end in “up”. It's a fascinatingly different way to experience a region best known for its exceptional wine.



Dale Tilbrook Experiences, Western Australia

BROOME/RUBIBI & KIMBERLEY REGION, WESTERN AUSTRALIA



Discover mangroves and Dreamtime stories on Australia's north-west coast

Broome/Rubibi and the Dampier Peninsula, on the Kimberley coastline of Western Australia, combine stunning natural beauty and fascinating Aboriginal history.

Often, people associate Aboriginal communities with Australia's desert heart. In fact, Indigenous groups live all over this vast country, including along some of its most stunning coastline.

Western Australia's Kimberley region regularly tops travellers' wish lists. It combines endless beaches with rugged cliffs, gorges fed by waterfalls, tropical bush and thousands upon thousands of uninhabited islands. Its remote, isolated and sparsely populated location – combined with the numerous Aboriginal communities that live here – offer ideal conditions for alluring and authentic travel experiences.

In the outback holiday beach town of Broome, known for its mesmerising Cable Beach sunsets, Yawuru man Bart Pigram escorts people along Broome's coastal peninsula, and through mangrove forests and mudflats with [Narljia Experiences Broome](#), sharing tales of its Aboriginal and pearling past. Learn the Aboriginal names of the critters that inhabit this significant ecosystem, and perhaps even taste some of them along the way.

A 2.5-hour drive north of Broome on the stunning Dampier Peninsula, Bardi man Terry Hunter of [Borraboron Coast to Creek Tours](#) leads a captivating walking tour through the mangrove-rich landscape surrounding Cygnet Bay Pearl Farm. The two-hour tour combines stories of Terry's childhood exploring the remote bay, the teachings of Aboriginal culture and bush knowledge, and reveals how his family history is tied to the pioneering beginnings of the region's pearl trade. You'll also learn an ingenious way to sample oysters, passed down by Terry's ancestors over generations.

[Kingfisher Tours](#) also offers an opportunity to explore beyond Broome by whisking you from the coastal hub to some of the Kimberley region's top sights by small plane. Day trips from Broome include an Aboriginal-guided visit to Purnululu National Park – home of the magnificent beehive-shaped Bungle Bungle Range – and a tour of the iconic four-tiered Punamii-Uunpuu (Mitchell Falls), with overnight and bespoke tour options also available. You could also customise your tour to include a visit to [Waringarri Aboriginal Arts & Tours](#) in Kununurra, which hosts a range of immersive Aboriginal-led experiences.



Kingfisher Tours, Western Australia

MELBOURNE/NARRM AND SURROUNDS, VICTORIA

How to immerse yourself in the stories of south-east Australia's First Peoples in and around Melbourne/Narrm.

In a city as cosmopolitan and industrialised as Melbourne/Narrm, it may surprise you to learn that you don't have to travel far to experience Aboriginal cultures. Woven into the multicultural fabric of the city are insightful tours, workshops and exhibitions, promising a taste of Aboriginal history and cultures in a contemporary setting.

In bustling Federation Square, the [Koorie Heritage Trust](#) is dedicated to promoting and supporting the living cultures of south-east Australia's First Peoples. Visit the centre to see the latest Indigenous art exhibition on display, the huge permanent exhibition of photography, oral history and artefacts, or, if time allows, embark on a two-hour guided [Aboriginal Walking Tour](#), taking in the iconic Yarra River that threads through Melbourne/Narrm and sites of cultural significance along the way.

In the green oasis that is the [Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne](#) – said to be one of the world's leading botanic gardens – you can tour the ancestral lands of the eastern Kulin nation, led by an Indigenous guide on the [Aboriginal Heritage Walk](#). Deepen your understanding of Aboriginal customs by learning about traditional uses of plants for food, tools and medicine.



For a great day-trip out of the city, visit [Tower Hill](#), an inactive volcano that became Victoria's first national park in 1892. Situated in the heart of the Great Ocean Road region near the iconic Twelve Apostles – about a three-hour drive from Melbourne/Narrm – this unique landscape is also geologically significant, carved out by a volcanic eruption some 30,000 years ago. Today, in its place, you'll find a vast crater stretching four kilometres wide, home to an impressive lake, an abundance of native wildlife and rich Aboriginal cultures.

The best way to explore the reserve and dive deeper into its history is on a guided nature walk with [Worn Gundidj @ Tower Hill](#), a local Aboriginal cooperative. The two-hour tour takes you through some of the reserve's most beautiful scenery, while your guide provides insight into the native plants Aboriginal peoples used for food and medicine. Worn Gundidj @ Tower Hill also hosts bush barbecues for groups, where you can taste-test a fusion of traditional bush tucker and modern Australian cuisine. Gum-leaf ice-cream or kangaroo lasagne, anyone?



Royal Botanic Gardens, Victoria



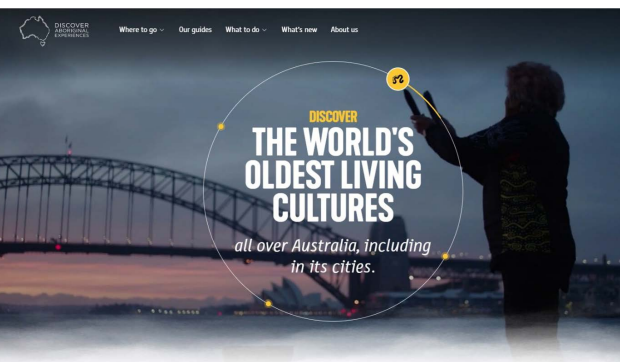
Worn Gundidj @ Tower Hill, Victoria



FIND OUT MORE

HOW TO ACCESS THE TRADE AND MEDIA PORTAL ON THE DISCOVER ABORIGINAL EXPERIENCES WEBSITE

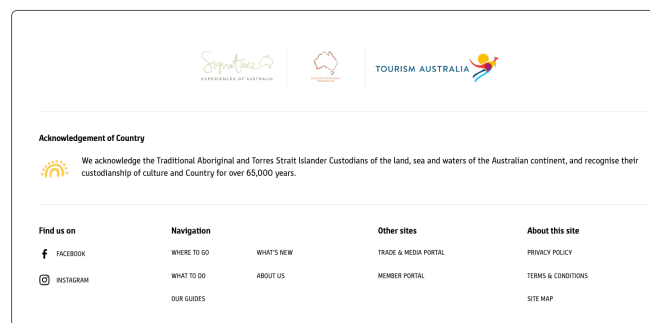
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The Discover Aboriginal Experiences website showcases the rich diversity and depth of Aboriginal experiences offered by the Discover Aboriginal Experiences member operators. Experiences can be searched by location or experience type.

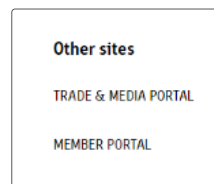
Trade and media can access information on each operator in the collective as well as images and logos from the Trade and Media section of the website.

Access the website here.



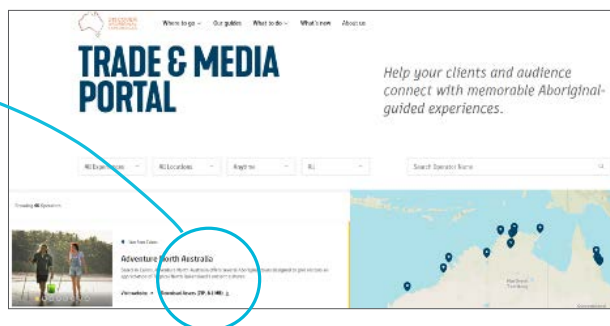
Scroll down to the bottom of the page.

Click on Trade and Media Portal under Other sites



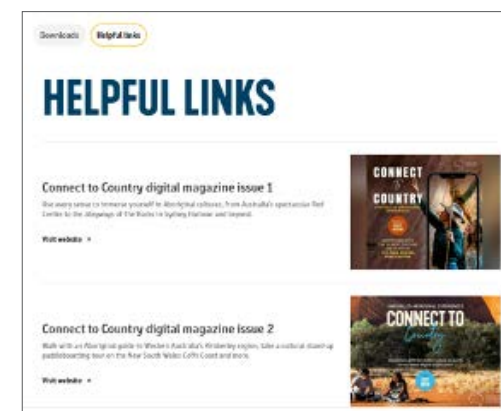
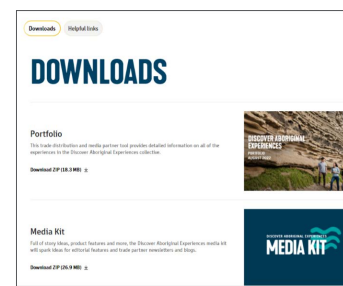
Alternatively, you can access the Trade and Media Portal directly here.

Download Assets for operators by clicking on the Download Assets zip.



Or access their website.

Other Downloads are also available by clicking on Downloads.



The following items are available to download:

- Trade Portfolio
- Media Kit
- Consumer Brochure
- Flyers
- Storytellers
- Business Events Flyer
- Operator contact details
- Itineraries
- Member map
- Past issues of the Trade and Media newsletter
- Image and video gallery instructions
- Signature Experiences of Australia Flyer

Helpful links will take you to a number of different sites:

- Connect to Country digital magazines
- Aussie Specialist Program website
- DAE YouTube playlist
- Tourism Australia's image and video galleries
- Aussie Specialist Training webinar on Discover Aboriginal Experiences
- Australia.com
- Latest news from Tourism Australia
- Signature Experiences of Australia website
- Australia 365 on-demand
- Trade Resources hub

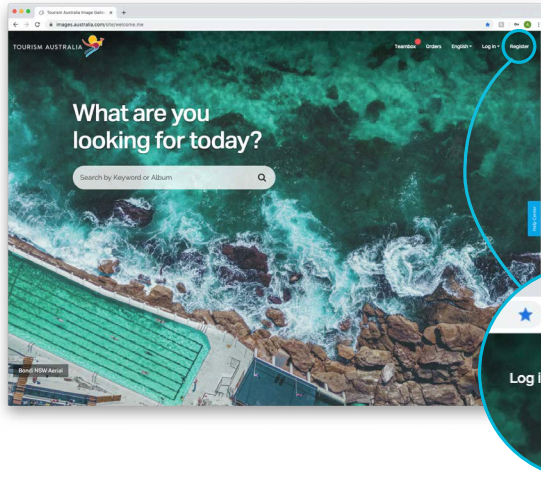


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The Trade and Media Portal page will also take you to the sign up page to receive trade and media updates or you can access the page by clicking here.

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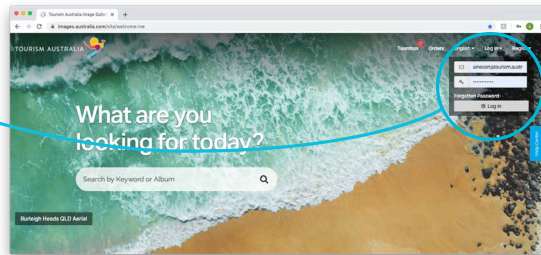


A great selection of images is available to download free from Tourism Australia's image gallery.

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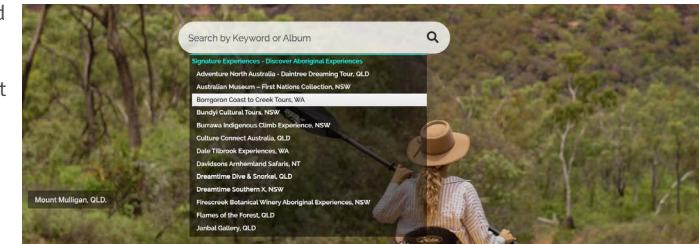
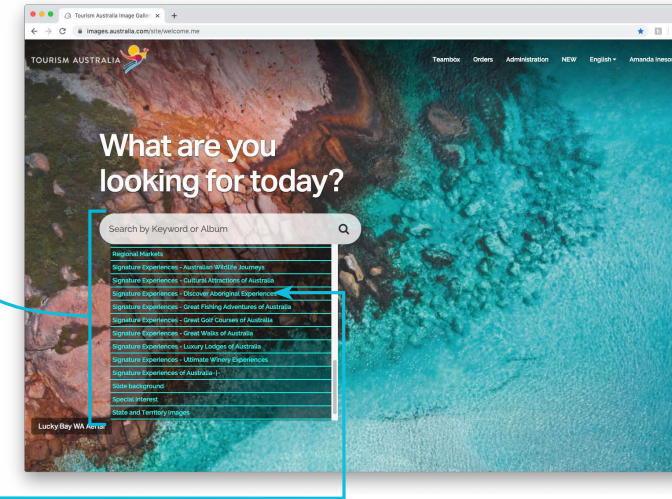


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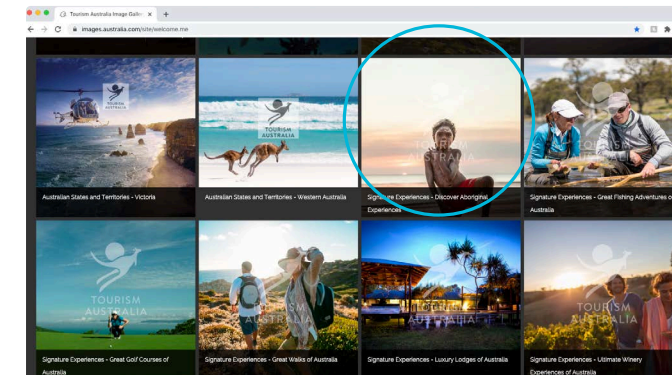
Use the right-hand scroll bar to scroll down to Signature Experiences – Discover Aboriginal Experiences.

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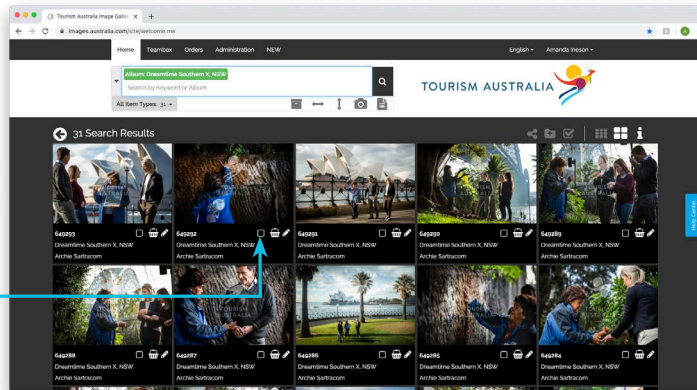
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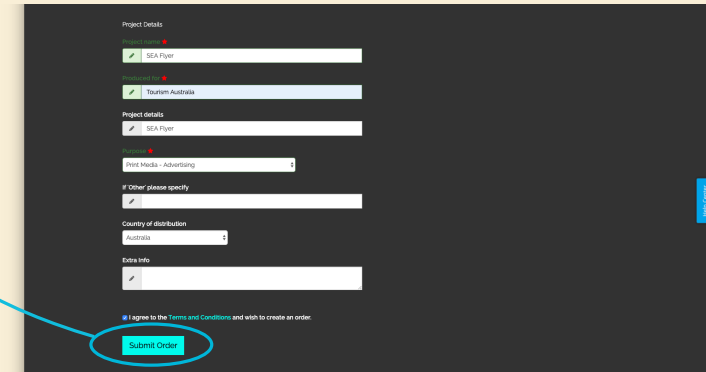


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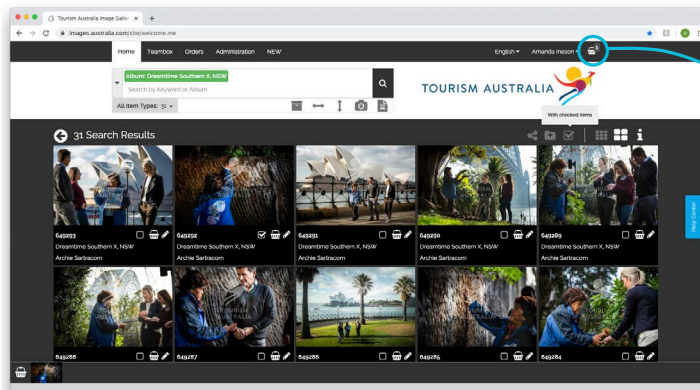


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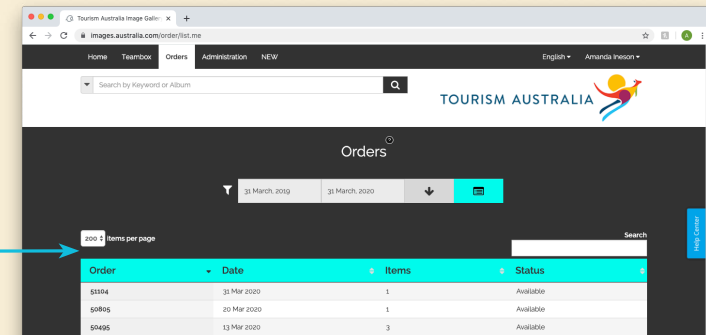
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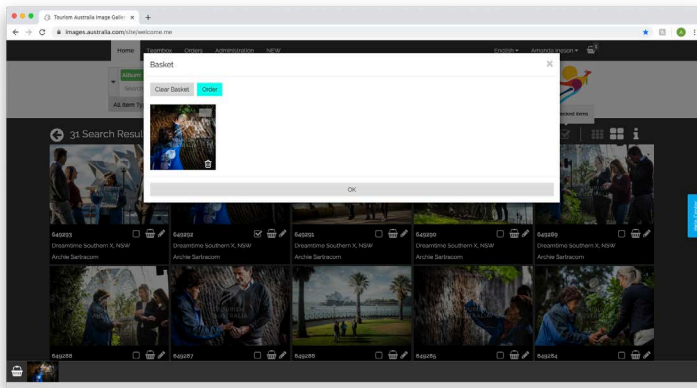


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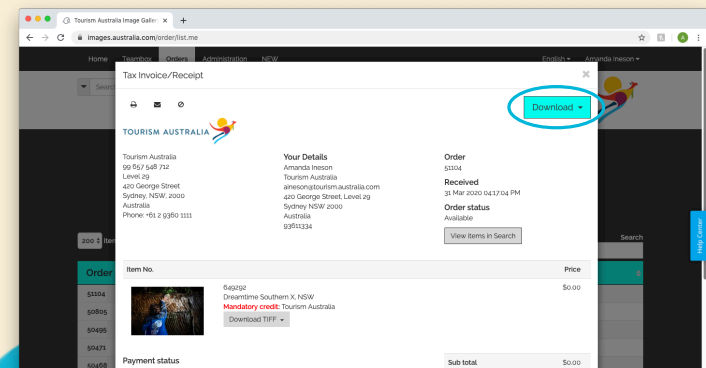
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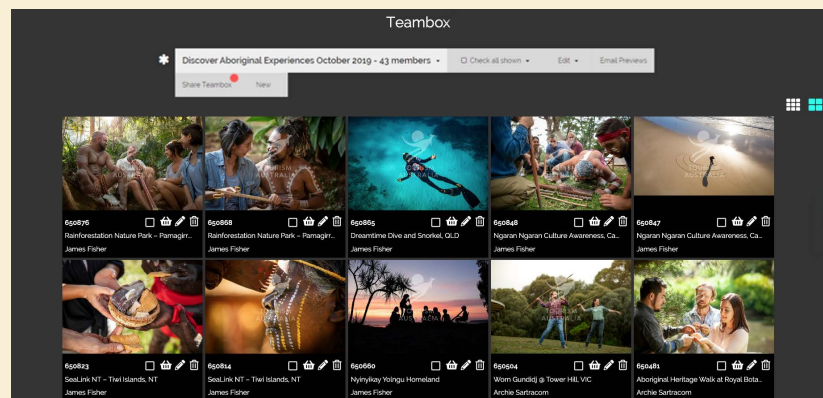


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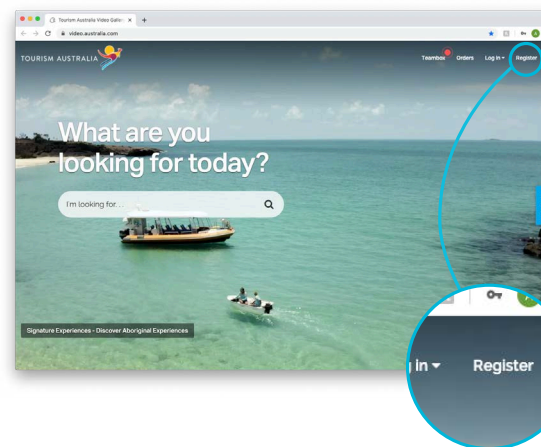


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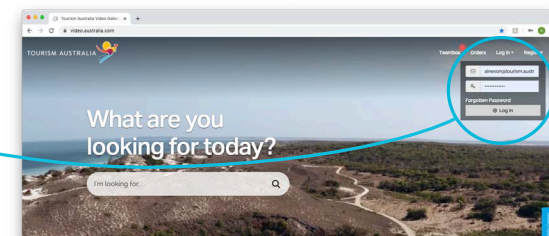
Individual member videos and a 30s, 60s, 90s and 180s video on Discover Aboriginal Experiences are available for download via our Video gallery.

Videos for other collectives are also available on the gallery.

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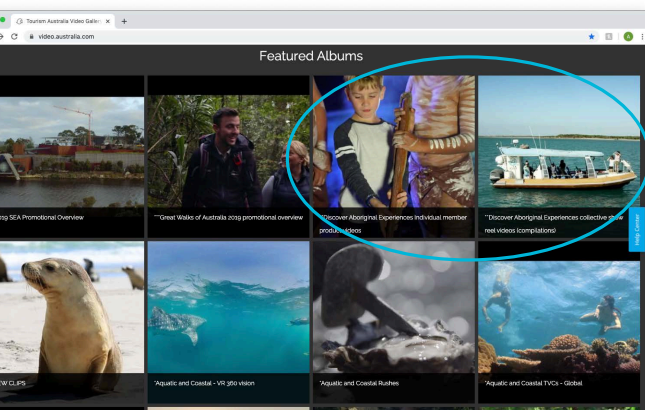
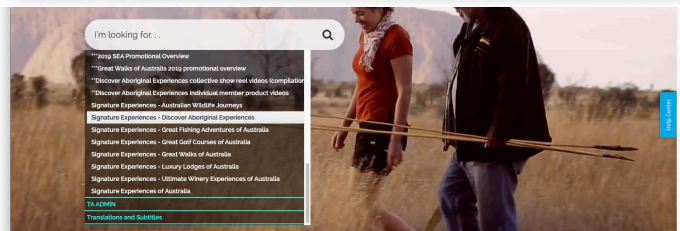
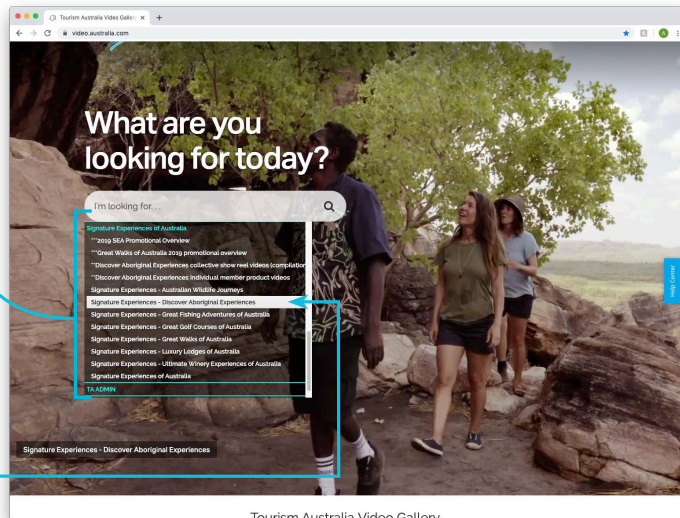


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Use the right-hand scroll bar to scroll down to Signature Experiences of Australia – Discover Aboriginal Experiences.

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Alternatively, scroll down the page to the Featured Albums.

Here you will find the Discover Aboriginal Experiences individual member product videos and collective showreel videos.

The 30s, 60s, 90s and 180s videos can be searched by their numbers:

101821 – Discover Aboriginal Experiences 60s

101822 – Discover Aboriginal Experiences 90s

101823 – Discover Aboriginal Experiences 180s

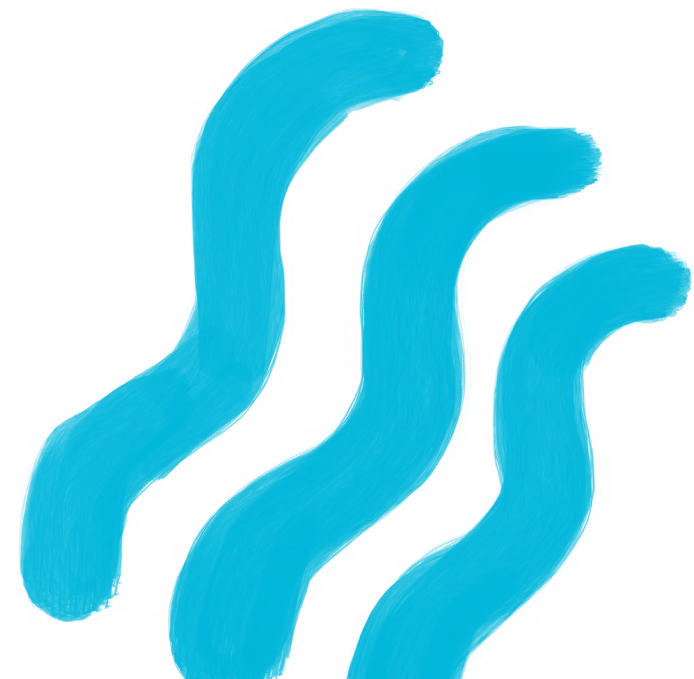
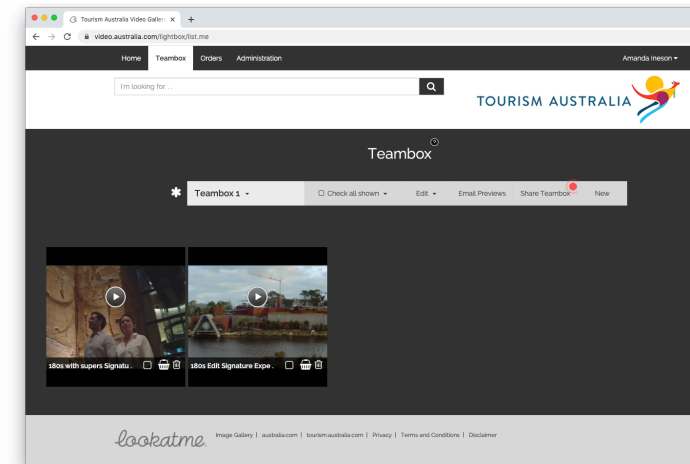
101824 – Discover Aboriginal Experiences 30s

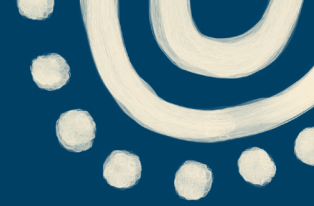
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DISCOVER
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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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Pamagirri Aboriginal Experience
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