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NATIONAL PARKS ROAD TRIP · 7 DAYS FROM DARWIN AND BACK

Top End Loop - Darwin and the National Parks 7 Days

This 890km loop of the Top End takes in some of the highlights of the Northern Territory covering the 2 great National Parks and Katherine Gorge. As with any trip to the Top End the best time to travel is June through to September during the Dry Season when roads are open and not impacted by the Wet. Outside the Dry Season, road restrictions and closures can apply at short notice.

DISTANCE	DAYS	ROUTE	DRIVING TIME
About 890 km	7 days, 4 drives	Round trip from Darwin	About 13 h 30 min by campervan

LONGEST DRIVE	VEHICLE	BEST TIME
305 km, Jabiru to Katherine	Campervan	June to September (the Dry Season)

This trip crosses the Country of the Larrakia, Bininj, Mungguy, Jawoyn and other First Nations peoples. Traditional Custodians



Planning overview, not navigation. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors · coastline Natural Earth · relief Terrain Tiles (Geoscience Australia, SRTM).

> Special caution and planning should be taken when travelling in remote areas to ensure sufficient provisions, fuel and prescribed medicines are carried. Weather conditions can make sealed roads impassable, particularly during the northern Wet season.

BEFORE YOU BOOK

Hiring a campervan for this trip

When you can go

Apollo, Britz, Maui and Mighty close their Darwin branch from 1 December to 31 March. Other brands open over the wet season: see which branches open in the wet season.

2WD or 4WD

A 2WD van suits the highways and the best-known sights on sealed roads. Apollo, Britz, Maui and Mighty 2WD vans may never go to Jim Jim Falls, Twin Falls, the Gunlom area or

Litchfield's Lost City. Apollo, Britz and Mighty 4WD campers need permission for remote unsealed roads, which you ask for at the branch on the day of pick-up. Their terms don't name Gunlom or the Lost City, so tell the branch you plan to go, and check with us before you book. See Kakadu and Litchfield in a 2WD or 4WD.

Your route

All rental vendors in Australia have restrictions on where their vehicles can be taken, so discuss your planned route with the rental company when you pick up. Get the rental company's permission before taking the vehicle somewhere it restricts. If you take it there without permission, you may lose your excess reduction and be fully responsible for any damage. You may also have to pay for towing and recovery, and for damage to other people's property. See road restrictions and when you are fully responsible.

Park passes

You need a Kakadu park pass (https://kakadu.gov.au/plan/passes/) (free for Northern Territory residents). Visitors from outside the Northern Territory need an NT Parks Visitor Pass for Nitmiluk and Litchfield.

Picking up in Darwin

Most Darwin branches hand over vans until 3pm; at weekends, hours are shorter or branches are closed (pick-up times and late flights). If your flight lands after late morning, it's often easier to stay the night and collect next morning. More on campervan hire in Darwin: branches, hours and each brand's rules.

Allow plenty of time at the branch for the paperwork, the vehicle inspection and the van demonstration, and bring every driver's licence. See what to expect when you pick up your campervan: choosing a pick-up time, the inspection and demonstration, the documents to bring and online check-in, and the Darwin branches. Flying in? See airport pick-ups and what to do about late pick-ups.

DAYS 1–2

Kakadu

DRIVE

255 km from Darwin | **about 3 h 30 min** by campervan

Via **Stuart Highway**

DAY 1

Darwin to Kakadu

PICK-UP

Collect your car or campervan in Darwin. If you are collecting a campervan or motorhome, allow plenty of time at the depot so the rental company can show you how it works before you leave. Pick up in the morning if you can, so you reach Jabiru in daylight. Before commencing your journey across the Top End ensure that you stock up with supplies and water — with 255km to Jabiru, plan your fuel stops carefully. There are supermarkets at Palmerston and Coolalinga on the Stuart Highway, about 22kms south of Winnellie.

Head south on the Stuart Highway and turn left along the Arnhem Highway for a 2 day stop-over in Jabiru.

Stay	Aurora Kakadu Lodge, Jabiru - Cabins, Powered and Unpowered sites, great Pool, bistro & bar
No bookings	Aurora Kakadu Lodge doesn't take forward bookings for its caravan park, so arrive in good time.

A DAY IN KAKADU

DAY 2

Kakadu

2 NIGHTS

Check out Yellow Water, Mamukala, Iligadjarr, Ubirr and Bubba wetland. Some sites and walks close at short notice, especially from November, so check Kakadu's access and alerts (https://kakadu.gov.au/news/access-and-alerts/) page before you go.

Jim Jim Falls, Twin Falls and Karnamarr campground are closed for all of 2026 while damaged roads are repaired, at the request of Traditional Owners. Parks Australia expects them to reopen for the 2027 dry season. In other years, the road to them is 4WD only, and rental companies restrict it, so check your rental terms or join a tour from Jabiru.

Other great trips from Jabiru include jumping on a tour into Arnhem Land to see Rock Art, or take a scenic flight over Kakadu from Jabiru airport.

Stay Aurora Kakadu Lodge, Jabiru

DAYS 3–4

Katherine and Nitmiluk

DRIVE

305 km from Jabiru | **about 5 h 45 min** by campervan

Via **Kakadu and Stuart highways, through Pine Creek**

DAY 3

Jabiru to Katherine

Depart this morning and head south for Katherine. Travel along the Kakadu Highway and back onto the Stuart Highway via Pine Creek. Checkout lunch at the Lazy Lizard in Pine Creek and fill up with fuel before the drive south to Katherine, about 1 hour 10 minutes by campervan.

The Katherine River flows through 13 separate gorges that carve their way through the Arnhem Land Plateau. You can canoe, cruise and swim between sheer cliffs to the sandy freshwater beaches of the main gorges, and view ancient Aboriginal rock paintings high on the rock faces. Waterfalls and rock pools are found along over 100 kilometres of walking tracks, beginning at the park's visitor centre.

Stay BIG4 Breeze Holiday Parks – Katherine (formerly Big 4 Katherine Holiday Park) - powered sites, great park, fully equipped kitchens, showers, bar-bistro, and excellent pool and spa

A DAY IN KATHERINE

DAY 4

Katherine

2 NIGHTS

Katherine offers a wide range of accommodation, facilities and attractions, including museums, art galleries, character-filled pubs and historic sites. Other attractions within easy reach of the town include Katherine Hot Springs and Leliyn (Edith Falls). Cutta Cutta Caves Nature Park, about 30kms south of Katherine, is closed for 2026 while its cave lighting is upgraded and is expected to reopen in 2027.

Stay BIG4 Breeze Holiday Parks – Katherine

DAYS 5–7

Litchfield

DRIVE

235 km from Katherine | **about 3 h** by campervan | Via **Stuart Highway**

DAY 5

Katherine to Litchfield Park

Travel back up the Stuart Highway to Batchelor – 12kms off the highway on the left and the gateway town to Litchfield Park.

Stay Batchelor Holiday Park (formerly Big 4 Batchelor Park) - leafy and picturesque, has everything you need

A DAY IN LITCHFIELD

DAY 6

Litchfield Park

2 NIGHTS

Two nights with a full day in Litchfield Park is probably enough time. Visit the Magnetic Termite Mound Fields – looking like a sea of abstract people, Buley Rockhole – get there early to enjoy a quiet swim – and Florence Falls, off the same road as Buley Rockhole. Head further into the park for the stunning Wangi Falls, about 70kms from Batchelor, where swimming is dry season only.

Stay Batchelor Holiday Park

DRIVE

97 km from Batchelor | **about 1 h 30 min** by campervan | Via **Stuart Highway**

DAY 7

Batchelor to Darwin

RETURN

Return to Darwin in about 1 hour 30 minutes by campervan – remember to fill up with fuel before returning your vehicle and empty waste water and toilet cartridges. Allow time for the return inspection. Return it by the time on your booking. Rental companies charge for late returns.

Returning in Darwin

Drop-off times are often earlier than people expect, so check yours. Apollo, Britz, Maui, Maui Elite and Mighty have no toilet or grey-water emptying service in Darwin, so return their vans with both emptied (returning the van). With an early flight, returning the van the day before can take the pressure off.

Plan your last day around your branch's drop-off time. See returning your campervan: choosing a drop-off time, late returns and early returns, and the Darwin branches.

Enjoy the Top End.

Traditional Custodians

Darwin (Garramilla): Larrakia people (City of Darwin (https://www.darwin.nt.gov.au/community/about-darwin))
Kakadu: Bininj in the north and Mungguy in the south (Kakadu National Park, DCCEEW (https://www.dcceew.gov.au/parks-heritage/national-parks/kakadu-national-park))
Katherine: Jawoyn, Dagoman and Wardaman (Katherine Town Council, Municipal Plan 2024/25 (https://www.katherine.nt.gov.au/Profiles/katherine/Assets/ClientData/Documents/Municipal_Plan/Municipal_Plan_2024-25_WEB.pdf))

Country boundaries are approximate, and some are shared or contested. These names follow local councils and park managers. The AIATSIS map of Indigenous Australia (https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia) shows the wider picture.

Pay your respects to the Traditional Custodians of the land on which you are travelling, and to their Elders past, present and emerging. The Australian environment is fragile, so tread lightly: take only photos and leave only footprints.

DriveNow Disclaimer

DriveNow receives no money or commission for any holiday park, campground, hotel, restaurant, cafe, pub, tour or attraction named on this page. We include them because they suit a campervan trip, and we check them from time to time.

DriveNow's suggested itineraries help you plan your own trip. Distances and times are from mapped routes and are a guide only; campervan driving times are car times plus about 20%. Road conditions, closures, opening hours and prices change, so check them before you travel. Any reliance on this itinerary is at your own discretion.

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