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Helping travellers since 2003 find the best deals on campervan and car rental

RAIL AND ROAD TRIP · THE GHAN, THEN 11 DAYS BY CAMPERVAN

Adelaide to Darwin by Rail and Road

Travel Australia from bottom to top with this extravaganza from Adelaide to Darwin, taking in all the highlights of the Outback: by train with the Ghan to Alice Springs, and then to Darwin in a campervan.

DISTANCE	DAYS	ROUTE	DRIVING TIME
About 3,240 km	14 days, 8 drives	The Ghan to Alice Springs, then one way to Darwin	About 47 h 30 min by campervan

LONGEST DRIVE	VEHICLE
770 km, Alice Springs to Elliott	Campervan

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



On the Ghan to Alice Springs, day 3 · Illustrative image



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

One way from Alice Springs

Apollo, Britz, Maui, Maui Elite and Mighty charge $310 for a one-way hire from Alice Springs picked up from 1 April 2027 ($300 for pick-ups in November 2026), with a 7-day minimum to Darwin. Campervan Village also has a 7-day minimum to Darwin, and shows its fee when you book. The drive in this itinerary is 11 days, so it meets the minimum. The fee is in

When you can go

Apollo, Britz, Maui and Mighty close their Alice Springs and Darwin branches from 1 December to 31 March, so their one-ways run from April to November. See who's open over summer.

the total we quote: compare totals, not daily rates. More on one-way from Alice Springs.

Picking up off the Ghan
The Ghan gets into Alice Springs at about 1:45pm. On weekdays both branches hand over vans until 3pm, and Apollo, Britz, Maui, Maui Elite and Mighty ask you to be there at least an hour before they close. If that's too tight, stay the night in town and collect the van next morning (pick-up times).

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. This itinerary keeps to sealed roads: between Kings Canyon and Alice Springs it takes the highways, not the partly unsealed Mereenie Loop.

Park passes
Visitors from outside the Territory need an NT Parks Visitor Pass for parks such as Watarrka (Kings Canyon), Karlu Karlu, Nitmiluk and Litchfield. Uluṟu-Kata Tjuṯa and Kakadu have their own park passes. More on park passes in the Northern Territory.

DAYS 1–3

The Ghan

NO VAN YET

DAY 1

Adelaide

Arriving in the city of churches and the region of wine, why not spend a day or two getting to know this charming city? A visit to the Adelaide Central Market is a must, full of fresh produce and stores selling fun and quirky items. Then wander over to a traveller's favourite, the Art Gallery of South Australia, before choosing from an array of restaurants.

NO VAN YET

DAY 2

Adelaide

Whilst in the superb region, make sure you join a winery tour or hire a car and journey out yourself. With the Barossa Valley and McLaren Vale producing some of Australia's best wines, it is sure to be a stunning day out.

ON THE GHAN

DAY 3

The Ghan Train Exploration

Departing Adelaide every Sunday and Wednesday at 12:15pm, The Ghan will have you in Alice Springs by about 1:45pm the following afternoon. Whilst on board, you will be treated to luxurious cabins and tasty meals as you soar past the magnificent scenery that central South Australia has to offer.

Book ahead:
The Ghan departs Adelaide on Sundays from March to November, and on Wednesdays too from April to October. Book it directly with Journey Beyond (https://www.journeybeyondrail.com.au/guest-information/timetables/the-ghan-2026-timetable/), and check the timetable for your dates.

DAYS 4–14

The Middle Self-Driving Tour

Picking up in Alice Springs

Campervan Village is about 15 km from the airport, and the branch for Apollo, Britz, Maui, Maui Elite and Mighty about 18 km. On weekdays, both hand over vans until 3pm. Campervan Village is open until 11am on Saturdays and closed on Sundays (pick-up times). More on campervan hire in Alice Springs: 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 Alice Springs branches. Running late? See late pick-ups.

PICK-UP DAY IN ALICE SPRINGS

DAY 4

Alice Springs

PICK-UP

Welcome to Alice Springs, the vibrant town in the middle of the Red Centre. Once you have collected your campervan, spend the rest of the day soaking up what this town has on offer. For the animal lovers, a visit to The Kangaroo Sanctuary or the Alice Springs Desert Park is a must! Or for those interested in the town's varied history, perhaps pay a trip to the Alice Springs Telegraph Station Historical Reserve or the Alice Springs School of the Air Visitor Centre. Then settle in for an early night, ready for the next day's adventures.

Check first:
The Kangaroo Sanctuary is visited only on its booked sunset tours, which run Wednesday to Friday and stop from December to February. Book ahead.

Stay Discovery Parks – Alice Springs (formerly BIG4 MacDonnell Range Holiday Park)

DRIVE

555 km from Alice Springs | **about 8 h** by campervan

Via **Stuart and Lasseter highways**

DAY 5

Kata Tjuṯa to Uluṟu

Rising early, begin your first journey of the day out to the stunning site of Kata Tjuṯa. Enjoy lunch before wandering through these ancient natural dome and rock formations. Now venture over to Uluṟu in time for sunset and watch how the rock's colours change before your eyes.

Check first:
This is a long day, about 8 hours by campervan without stops. Start early and share the driving.

Stay Ayers Rock Campground

DRIVE

305 km from Uluṟu (Yulara) | **about 4 h 15 min** by campervan

Via **Lasseter Highway**

DAY 6

Uluṟu to Kings Canyon

For another stunning perspective on the heart of our land, make sure that you wake early to watch the remarkable sunrise over the rock. If interested, you could always join a guided walk around the base of the rock, enabling you to see up close and personal how much it means to the ancestors of the land. Leaving Uluṟu, you can now begin your trip over to Kings Canyon.

Stay Kings Canyon Holiday Park (Discovery Resorts, at Kings Canyon Resort)

DRIVE

480 km from Kings Canyon | **about 6 h 30 min** by campervan

Via **Luritja Road, Lasseter and Stuart highways**

DAY 7

Kings Canyon to Alice Springs

Ready for another day of awe-inspiring adventure, you had best make sure you have packed your walking shoes. Head out to the Rim Walk, where you can peer down into the amphitheatre as you walk past the towering columns that make up the canyon. Halfway round, stop at the Garden of Eden waterhole; it's a sacred site, so swimming isn't allowed. Then make your way back to Alice Springs.

The way back is on sealed roads: Luritja Road, the Lasseter Highway and the Stuart Highway through Erldunda. The Mereenie Loop along Larapinta Drive is shorter, but its unsealed section is off limits in 2WD vans. In a 4WD, Apollo, Britz and Mighty need their permission at pick-up and Campervan Village its written permission, and you also need a Mereenie Tour Pass. See outback and unsealed roads.

Stay Discovery Parks – Alice Springs

DRIVE

770 km from Alice Springs | **about 10 h 30 min** by campervan

Via **Stuart Highway**

DAY 8

Alice Springs to Karlu Karlu (Devil's Marbles)

LONGEST DRIVE

A long day of driving ahead, but one that is most certainly worth it! Leaving Alice Springs, you will make your way to the sacred site of Karlu Karlu. After lunch in the shade, continue driving up the Stuart Highway to the small roadside station of Elliott where you will spend the night trying to count the endless stars.

Check first:
This is the longest day, about 10½ hours by campervan without stops. Start early and share the driving. To split it, stay a night near Karlu Karlu, about 400 km from Alice Springs, and add a day to your hire.

Stay Midland Caravan Park

Check first:
We couldn't confirm that Midland Caravan Park is still open: check it's open before you go.

DRIVE

420 km from Elliott | **about 5 h** by campervan | Via **Stuart Highway**

DAY 9

Elliott to Katherine

After a morning drive into Katherine, make sure you join a cruise along Katherine Gorge, located within the heart of Nitmiluk National Park. Here you will be able to soak up the natural beauty of the region, one incredibly different from the desert region you just left!

Stay BIG4 Breeze Holiday Parks – Katherine (formerly Big 4 Katherine Holiday Park)

DRIVE

295 km from Katherine | **about 5 h 30 min** by campervan

Via **Stuart and Kakadu highways**

DAY 10

Katherine to Kakadu

Leaving the sleepy town of Katherine this morning, pop into Edith Falls (Leliyn) for a relaxing swim in this massive clear water rock pool, when the swimming area is open. To gain an exceptional view of the region, put on some walking shoes and take the walking trail to the top of the falls. At the top, you will be greeted with more crystal clear water. After a morning of swimming, head into Kakadu National Park. You need a Kakadu park pass (https://kakadu.gov.au/plan/passes/).

Stay Cooinda Lodge, Ngurrungurrudjba (Yellow Water) Campground

A DAY IN KAKADU

DAY 11

Kakadu

2 NIGHTS

Enjoy a well-deserved sleep in or rise early and join a Yellow Water Cruise straight from your campsite. As you sail out onto the serene waters of the billabong, you will spy birds flying high and crocodiles lazily

sunning themselves on the banks. After (or before your cruise), journey to one of the world famous rock sites that the park is known for; Ubirr and Nourlangie Rock (Burrungkuy). Make sure you have your walking shoes on so that you can trek your way through the rocks as you see ancient rock art, untouched for thousands of years! Each is about a 1½-hour drive from Cooinda.

Stay Cooinda Lodge, Ngurrungurrudjba (Yellow Water) Campground

DRIVE

310 km from Cooinda | **about 5 h 45 min** by campervan

Via **Kakadu Highway**

DAY 12

Kakadu to Litchfield

Back out on the open highway, today you will make your way to a favourite of the locals; Litchfield National Park. As you enter the park, make sure you stop and check out the giant magnetic termite mounds, all with a north-south orientation. Then take your pick at which, if not all, stunning swimming holes you visit; Buley Rockhole, Wangi Falls or Florence Falls. Swimming at Wangi Falls is dry season only. The drive above runs to Batchelor; Wangi Falls is about 70 km further into the park.

If swimming is not on the cards today, enjoy a rainforest walk through Green Ant Creek before heading back to a campsite along the way, or one in the region's main town of Batchelor.

Stay Batchelor Holiday Park

DRIVE

110 km from Batchelor | **about 1 h 50 min** by campervan

Via **Stuart Highway, through Berry Springs**

DAY 13

Litchfield to Darwin

Before finally journeying back into the Northern Territory's capital of Darwin, make sure you stop by Berry Springs. Walking into the park will feel like you have just entered your own rainforest oasis. Pack a picnic lunch and lay under the shade of the tall trees, enjoying the cool morning.

Arriving back into Darwin, make sure you arrive on Thursday to Sunday allowing you to feast your eyes and your bellies at some of the markets; Mindil Beach Sunset Markets fall on a Thursday and Sunday night or Parap Market on a Saturday morning. Mindil runs from the last Thursday in April to the last Thursday in October.

Stay BIG4 Hidden Valley Holiday Park (formerly Hidden Valley Tourist Park)

RETURN DAY IN DARWIN

DAY 14

Darwin

RETURN

On the last day of your trip, explore the region's capital known for its laid back lifestyle. If you are in need of the sea side after your journey through the centre, head down to Casuarina Beach and marvel at the cliffs that wrap the shore. Then head down to the wharf for lunch or dinner, but get in early because tables fill up fast!

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. Fill up near your branch before you return the van, with the fuel type your rental company specifies (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 trip from the bottom of Australia to the top.

Traditional Custodians

Adelaide: Kaurna People of the Adelaide Plains (City of Adelaide (https://www.cityofadelaide.com.au/about-adelaide/our-city/reconciliation/))
Alice Springs (Mparntwe): Central Arrernte people (Alice Springs Town Council (https://www.alicesprings.nt.gov.au/residents/community/culture-history/local-culture.aspx))
Uluṟu-Kata Tjuṯa: Aṉangu (Uluṟu-Kata Tjuṯa National Park (https://uluru.gov.au/about/joint-management/))
The Barkly region: Warumungu, Mudburra, Jingili, Wakaya, Wambaya, Waanyi, Warlpiri, Warlmanpa, Alyawarr, Anmatyerre and Kaytetye (Barkly Regional Council (https://www.barkly.nt.gov.au/))
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))
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))
Darwin (Garramilla): Larrakia people (City of Darwin (https://www.darwin.nt.gov.au/community/about-darwin))

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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