

Australia's Red Centre

The physical and spiritual heart of Australia's Outback

A UNIQUELY AUSTRALIAN INVITATION

The arid beauty of Australia's Red Centre is intensified by this landscape's natural monuments and their spiritual power.

The Red Centre is the physical and metaphoric heart of Australia. It encompasses the World Heritage-listed Uluru and Kata Tjuṯa National Park, Alice Springs, the ancient MacDonnell Ranges and the wonders of Watarrka National Park (Kings Canyon).

The red rock monolith of Uluru and the mysterious shapes of Kata Tjuṯa rise above the surrounding pancake-flat plains. These towering sentinels show a different aspect from every angle.

The traditional custodians of this land, the Anangu, believe the Central Australian landscape was created at the beginning of time by their ancestors. Their descendants have been protecting these sacred lands for thousands of generations since.

Not only is the Red Centre steeped in human history; it contains distinctive desert fauna and many rare species of mammals, birds and reptiles.

A few hundred kilometres north-east of Uluru is the Watarrka National Park, best known as the home of Kings Canyon, a mighty chasm cleaving deep into the earth.

Derived from a local indigenous word for umbrella bush that thrives there, Watarrka National Park has been home to the Luritja people for more than 20,000 years. The area was unknown to Europeans until 1872 when the first white man explored the region.

Uluru-Kata Tjuṯa and Watarrka National Parks have a remarkable geological history. Five hundred million years ago, the entire area was covered by an inland sea. Over many centuries, a spectacular environment of inland lakes and tropical woodlands evolved, some of which remain in the so-called Garden of Eden on the canyon floor. Cycad ferns dating back to the time of the dinosaurs thrive here, along with hundreds of species of other plant life.

Alice Springs is an iconic Outback town, surrounded by a red desert the size of Europe and framed by the MacDonnell Ranges.

Alice Springs played a critical role in the construction of Australia's first overland telegraph line. Its history is populated by a colourful cast of characters that include gold-diggers, outback pioneers and Afghan

cameleers. This is also the home of the Royal Flying Doctor Service – the first aerial medical organisation of its type in the world.

To the east and west of Alice Springs are the MacDonnell Ranges. This japed and rocky spine stretches for hundreds of kilometres, harbouring gorges and permanent rock pools carved by prehistoric rivers. The Traditional owners of this area, The Arrernte people, believe Giant caterpillars called the Yeperenye became the MacDonnell Ranges – entering this world through one of the dramatic gaps in the escarpment.

The Larapinta Trail is a walking track that extends more than 220 kilometres along the West MacDonnell Ranges, crossing steep ranges and deep chasms. The Red Centre Way is a magnificent Outback drive that connects many of the Red Centre's natural wonders.

From the early 1900's, fortune-seekers searched the Central Australia desert for rubies and gold. Natural riches of all kinds exist in this ancient landscape: you just have to know where to look.

Key facts

- Uluru-Kata Tjuṯa National Park is dual World Heritage listed for its outstanding natural and cultural values. The traditional owners of the park are Yankunytjatjara and Pitjantjatjara people who refer to themselves as Anangu and would like you to use that word too.
- Uluru is the world's largest monolith. It is 3.6 kilometres long, 2 kilometres wide, 348 metres high and 9.4 kilometres at its circumference. The massive rock domes that form Kata Tjuṯa (meaning 'many heads' in Pitjantjatjara) are 500 million years old with the highest dome being 546 metres high.
- Watarrka National Park is synonymous with Kings Canyon. The Canyon sandstone walls, carved out by the elements, rise up 100 metres into a series of rocky domes. The rock holes and gorges in Kings Canyon provide refuge for more than 600 species of plants and native animals.
- The drive from Alice Springs through the West MacDonnell Ranges to Glen Helen includes many natural attractions such as Simpsons Gap, Standley Chasm and Ormiston Gorge.





Things to see and do

- Learn about Tjukurpa at the Uluru and Kata Tjuṯa Cultural Centre. Tjukurpa is the traditional law guiding the Anangu people.
- Walk around the base of Uluru with an Aboriginal guide. Follow in the footsteps of the ancestral beings and discover sacred sites. Marvel at the way the colours of Uluru change at different times of the day.
- Enjoy a guide walk through the Valley of the Winds in the Uluru and Kata Tjuṯa National Park.
- Alice Springs enjoys a large number of Indigenous art galleries. View and purchase a unique piece of Central Desert art.
- Drive the Red Centre Way from Alice Springs to Uluru.
- Visit the National Road Transport Hall of Fame in Alice Springs, home of mechanic inventions including the first motorised road train.
- Meet colourful Outback characters in the local pubs; visit the home of the Royal Flying Doctors Service and take a peddle radio lesson at the School of the Air.
- Visit Palm Valley, an amazing oasis in the desert.
- Camp out under the stars on the Larapinta Trail or take in the 360 degree views from Mt Sonder.
- Become a jackaroo or jillaroo at Kings Creek Station, an 1,800 square kilometre cattle station near the Watarrka National Park.
- Fossick for gems in the gold-rush ghost town of Arltunga in the East MacDonnell Ranges.
- Take a scenic flight in a light aircraft, hot air balloon or helicopter. Enjoy unsurpassed views of this seemingly infinite landscape.
- Take the 1500 kilometre historic train journey from Alice Springs to Darwin aboard The Ghan.
- Visit the old Telegraph Station at Alice Springs, built in 1872 to relay messages between Darwin and Adelaide and overseas.

Suggested itinerary

The town of Alice Springs is the gateway to the Red Centre. Enjoy at least two days in Alice Springs itself. It has a plethora of attractions to explore. Experience the towns' history, its landscape, flora and fauna and local art, a lot of which is indigenous. Alice can be reached by plane, train, coach and car.

The Red Centre Way (formerly Pioneer's Way) links Australia's Northern Territory landmarks of Uluru, Kata Tjuṯa, Watarrka National Park (Kings Canyon), the West MacDonnell Ranges and Alice Springs. Allow yourself some time to explore the many features along the Red Centre Way. Seven to ten days would be a minimum.

The drive from Alice Springs through the West MacDonnell Ranges to Glen Helen includes many natural attractions. Be sure to stop at Simpsons Gap, Standley Chasm and Ormiston Gorge along the way. It would be recommended to stay at least one or two nights in the West MacDonnell Ranges.

The Mereenie Loop Road is an unsealed road between Glen Helen and Watarrka National Park (Kings Canyon). It crosses through Aboriginal land, so visitors should first secure a permit from the Central Australia Visitor Information Centre.

On the way to Watarrka National Park (Kings Canyon), stop at Redbank Gorge and Tnorala (Gosse Bluff) Conservation Reserve.

At Kings Canyon in the Watarrka National Park, 100-metre sheer cliff faces and a palm-fringed swimming hole are special highlights. There's a three-hour rim walk around Kings Canyon, which takes in the domed rock formation of the Lost City and the lush valley of the Garden of Eden. One or two nights can easily be spent here.

From the Watarrka National Park (Kings Canyon), drive a further 300 kilometres to Uluru. Plan to spend a day or two near Uluru so that you experience sunrise over the monolith and witness the way Uluru's colours change throughout the day. Continue on the road to Kata Tjuṯa.

Return from Uluru to Alice Springs via a stop at Rainbow Valley. The drive between Uluru and Alice Springs takes approximately five hours.

Air Services link most major Australian cities with Alice Springs as well as express coaches from most capitals. There are also direct flights to Uluru from Sydney, Perth and Cairns.



For further information please contact:

Tourism Australia
Global Public Relations
 GPO Box 2721
 Sydney NSW 1006
 Phone: +61 2 9360 1111
 Email: internationalmedia@tourism.australia.com

www.australia.com
www.media.australia.com



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