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 RESPECT TO THEIR ELDERS PAST AND PRESENT AND EXTEND THAT RESPECT TO ALL ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES TODAY.
A trip to Australia isn’t just a visit to the land down under: it’s the modern home of an ancient people; the oldest living culture on Earth, in fact. Multi-faceted and imbued with ancient wisdom, Australia’s Aboriginal people 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 culture with integrity and authenticity – a responsibility indeed.

Importantly, each of these experiences also involves the use of Aboriginal guides. For who 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.

A WELCOME TO AUSTRALIA FROM THE NATION’S FIRST PEOPLES

From adventure seekers and cultural enthusiasts to foodies and nature lovers, there really is something for everyone in this collective with over 170 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
Nicole Mitchell
Tourism Australia
+61 (0) 410 499 525
nnmitchell@tourism.australia.com
tourism.australia.com/aboriginal
australia.com/aboriginal
images.australia.com
video.australia.com

Venture North Safaris, Northern Territory

Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park, Queensland

SEIT Outback Australia, Northern Territory
CONTENTS

10 THE DISCOVER ABORIGINAL EXPERIENCES COLLECTIVE
19 DISCOVER ABORIGINAL EXPERIENCES MEMBERS
20 DISCOVER ABORIGINAL EXPERIENCES THEMATIC JOURNEYS
28 STORY IDEAS
30 Meet the oldest living culture on Earth
32 Aboriginal archaeology: Digging up evidence of the world’s oldest living culture
34 New life for an ancient culture: The rise of Aboriginal tourism
36 One continent, 300 nations: Aboriginal Australia’s diverse cultural identities
38 The Dreamtime: Exploring Australia through Aboriginal stories
40 Saving the sacred: How tourism is helping to preserve Aboriginal culture
42 Aboriginal land care: the oldest system of sustainability on Earth
44 Traditional Aboriginal healing: The ancient art of wellness
46 The answer to managing Australia’s bushfire risk could lie in traditional Aboriginal practices
48 Cultural comfort: ancient wisdom for a modern crisis
50 5 surprising facts about Aboriginal travel experiences
52 Explore Australia’s national parks with their Traditional Owners
54 Going on safari: Australia’s wildlife through an Indigenous lens
56 Hidden history: finding Australia’s ancient Aboriginal art
58 Going walkabout: an ancient means of transformational travel
60 From our family to yours: fun Aboriginal travel experiences that everyone will love
62 Culture in the city: Finding the ancient among Australia’s modern hubs
64 Sydney’s Indigenous side
66 Bringing the landscape to life: Australia through Indigenous eyes
68 Trend: The unstoppable rise of Australia’s phenomenal ancient cuisine
70 Delicious and nutritious: Indigenous ingredients to try at home
72 From lodges to glamp sites: exclusive Aboriginal accommodation like nothing else
74 Experiencing the six seasons
76 Aboriginal astronomy: Seeing the night sky through a different perspective
78 Australia’s Aboriginal languages are in need of preservation
80 Aboriginal adventure tourism is taking off big time
82 Seeing underwater through Aboriginal eyes
84 Gaining a different perspective of the outback
86 Aboriginal festivals, celebrations and events: Ancient rituals for modern times
88 Contemporary Aboriginal music: A wonderful fusion of past and present
90 The special significance of an Aboriginal smoking ceremony
92 Move to the beat at an Aboriginal dance performance
94 Modern sport meets ancient culture: Experience the Aboriginal sporting spirit
96 Aboriginal cultural traditions: Understanding men’s business and women’s business
98 Discover the rich history and meanings behind Aboriginal rock art
100 The secrets behind Australia’s Aboriginal dot painting
102 Seeing Aboriginal Australia through a photographer’s lens
104 Understanding Aboriginal etiquette
106 How tourism can help Australia’s Indigenous communities
108 How to add a little Indigenous flavour to your Australian holiday
110 5 globally sought-after travel experiences you didn’t know you could have in Australia
112 PRODUCT FEATURE STORIES
114 Adventure North Australia, Queensland
117 Culture Connect, Queensland
118 Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel, Queensland
121 Dreamtime Southern X, New South Wales
122 Go Cultural Aboriginal Tours & Experiences, Western Australia
125 Jarramali Rock Art Tours, Queensland
126 Koomal Dreaming, Western Australia
129 Kakadu Cultural Tours, Northern Territory
130 Karrke Aboriginal Cultural Experience & Tours, Northern Territory
133 Kooljaman At Cape Leveque, Western Australia
134 Koorie Heritage Trust, Victoria
137 Lirrwi Tourism, Northern Territory
138 Maruku Arts, Northern Territory
141 Melbourne Museum, Victoria
142 Narliija Experiences Broome, Western Australia
145 Nitmiluk Tours, Northern Territory
146 Ngurangga Tours, Western Australia
149 Pudakul Aboriginal Cultural Tours, Northern Territory
150 RT Tours Australia, Northern Territory
153 Sand Dune Adventures, New South Wales
154 Spirits of the Red Sand, Queensland
157 Top Didj Cultural Experience & Art Gallery, Northern Territory
158 Walkabout Cultural Adventures, Queensland
161 Wilpena Pound Resort, South Australia
162 wukalina Walk, Tasmania
165 Wuu Gura Nylinda Eco Cultural Adventures, Western Australia
166 STORYTELLERS UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL
169 Dale Tilbrook
170 Helen Martin
171 Blake Cedar
172 Margret Campbell
173 Brian “Birra” Swindley
174 Bart Pigram
175 Dwayne Bannon-Harrison
176 Lynette Kenyon
177 Bob Taylor
178 Kevin Baxter-Pilakul
179 Andrew Smith
180 Manuel Pamkal
181 Juan Walker
182 Darren “Capes” Capewell
184 JOURNEYS …
187 Sydney and surrounds, New South Wales
188 Central Australia, Northern Territory
190 Central Australia road trip, Northern Territory
192 Top End Australia, Northern Territory
194 Kakadu and Arnhem Land road trip, Northern Territory
196 Far North Queensland
198 Perth and the Margaret River region, Western Australia
200 Melbourne and surrounds, Victoria
202 IMAGE & VIDEO GALLERY
A CULTURAL EXCHANGE: THE GROWTH OF ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIAN TOURISM

Australia is home to the oldest continuous civilisation on the planet. And that ancient culture has 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 60,000 years, its people – with hundreds of distinct clans, and as many languages and dialects – have walked the Australian continent, making Aboriginal Australia the oldest continuous living culture 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 culture.

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 Nation 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 culture 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 acknowledging that with our rich cultural heritage of our Aboriginal people, 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 45) 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.

“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.”

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 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 people. “Every experience in the suite of Discover Aboriginal Experiences products is led by an Aboriginal guide,” Mitchell confirms. “So, 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.
This high standard has made Discover Aboriginal Experiences the first port of call for organisations such as AOT Inbound, the largest inbound tour operator in Australia, and its international network of wholesale agents. Based on its reputation, says AOT General Manager Cheryl Ahyck-Wong, her agents have complete confidence booking with any Discover Aboriginal Experiences member. Ahyck-Wong now relies on DAE for finding unique experiences for her clientele. “Our agents are always looking for new products, looking for something different, and that’s what Discover Aboriginal Experiences has been able to provide us.”

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.

At Spirits of the Red Sand, on Yugambeh country between Brisbane 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 Kerryn 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 eyes for the first time. Launched in 2018 in consultation with Gimuy Walabara Yidinji, Gungandji, Mandingalbay and Yirrganydji Elders, the popular tours are crewed with Indigenous rangers.

“Our Dreamtime Indigenous Rangers are extremely proud of their individual tribes and culture, so to share their Inspiring Dreamtime stories and cultural connections handed down from ancestors who lived on the coastal plains attached to the Great Barrier Reef over tens of thousands of years ago is very rewarding,” says Head of Sales Daniel Gabbert. “Stories shared from the local Traditional Owners provides travellers with a deeper cultural understanding of the diverse Sea Country ecosystem.”

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 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 45 businesses with over 170 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.
The success of Discover Aboriginal Experiences members flows profits back into Indigenous communities and improves the livelihoods of Aboriginal people through training and career advancement.

At Spirits of the Red Sand, where nearly 96 per cent of employees are Aboriginal, staff receive accreditations such as a Cert 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. Aboard Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel, Gabbert says, 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 people 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.
**DISCOVER ABORIGINAL EXPERIENCES MEMBERS**

**New South Wales**
1. Australian Museum
2. Dreamtime Southern X
3. Ngaran Ngaran Culture Awareness
4. Sand Dune Adventures
5. The Royal Botanic Garden Sydney

**Northern Territory**
6. Bremer Island Banubanu Beach Retreat
7. Davidson’s Arnhemland Safaris
8. Kakadu Cultural Tours
9. Kakadu Tourism
10. Karrek Aboriginal Cultural Experience & Tours
11. Lirrwi Tourism
12. Lords Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris
13. Maruku Arts
14. Nitmiluk Tours
15. Pudakul Aboriginal Cultural Tours
16. RT Tours Australia
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. Jarramali Rock Art Tours
28. Rainforestation Nature Park
29. Spirits of the Red Sand
30. Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park
31. Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia - Mossman Gorge Centre
32. Walkabout Cultural Adventures

**South Australia**
33. Wilpena Pound Resort

**Tasmania**
34. wukalina Walk

**Victoria**
35. Koorie Heritage Trust
36. Melbourne Museum
37. Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, Melbourne Gardens
38. Worn Gundidj @ Tower Hill

**Western Australia**
39. Dale Tilbrook Experiences
40. Go Cultural Aboriginal Tours & Experiences
41. Kooljaman at Cape Leveque
42. Koomal Dreaming
43. Narijila Experiences Broome
44. Ngurrangga Tours
45. Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures

*Information current as at October 2020
Note: Map location references are an indication only
DISCOVER ABORIGINAL EXPERIENCES
THEMATIC JOURNEYS

Walkabout Cultural Adventures, Queensland
Finding Your Ultimate Experience…

What to Expect – Thematic Journeys

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

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 and 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 Djabulukgu Association – Kakadu Cultural Tours to see crocodiles and colourful birdlife and discover the traditional uses for plants and animals.

Nature and Wildlife

View Australia’s distinctive landscapes through different eyes, helping you gain a deeper appreciation of the unspoiled country and its unique wildlife – and enjoy great fishing!
**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:** Aboriginal chef Bob Pernuka Taylor offers a Mbantua (the Arrernte word for Alice Springs) lunch or dinner tour in the West MacDonnell Ranges of the Northern Territory. Go on a bush tucker walk and tasting, or spotlight for nocturnal animals under the constellations of the Southern sky and enjoy gourmet bush tucker-inspired meals in the heart of the Outback. Join an Immersive exploration with Walkabout Cultural Adventures in North Queensland, where a Kuku Yalanji guide – whose ancestors have lived in the region for thousands of years – will take you on a deeply personal tour, culminating in a shared meal using foods foraged over the course of your journey. Or join Wadandi man Josh Whiteland on one of three Immersive Margaret River tours.

**ACTIVE ADVENTURES**

You’ll find a wide selection of exhilarating experiences on offer in Australia’s beautiful landscapes, from kayaking, quad-biking and hiking to 4WD adventures.

**Sample highlights:** Perhaps you’d care to enjoy an inspiring three-night, four-day Aboriginal-guided wukalina walk along the white sand beaches of larapuna (Bay of Fires) and wukalina (Mount William) in north-eastern Tasmania staying in domed huts inspired by the traditional homes of the palawa people. 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.

**EXCLUSIVE ACCOMMODATION**

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

**Sample highlights:** Located where the red earth meets the white sands and aquamarine waters of the Indian Ocean on the Dampier Peninsula in the northwestern tip of Western Australia is Kooljaman at Cape Leveque. This wonderful wilderness camp features diverse accommodation, including self-contained safari tents on stilts with panoramic ocean views and traditional palm frond shelters behind the beach. In the heart of the traditional homeland of the Adnyamathanha (Yura) people in the 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. Then there’s Banubanu Beach Retreat on Bremer Island – the perfect plan to unplug and reconnect with nature, just five kilometres offshore from Arnhem Land.

**COASTAL AND AQUATIC**

View Australia’s distinctive landscapes through different eyes, helping you gain a deeper appreciation of the unspoiled country and its unique wildlife – and enjoy great fishing!

**Sample highlights:** Discover the Creation story of the Great Barrier Reef with Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel’s Indigenous rangers. They will also guide you on a snorkel tour to better understand the ancient relationship between man and marine life. 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.
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 understanding of Aboriginal spirituality and connection to Country.

Sample highlights:
- Make a deep connection with the Yuin people of the South Coast of New South Wales, through Ngaran Ngaran Culture Awareness, which shares sacred ceremonies, ancient stories and traditional dancing. Travel deep into the philosophies, kinship systems, hunting practices, instrument making and basket weaving secrets of the Yolŋu Traditional Owners in East Arnhem Land with Lirrwi Tourism.
- End each day in the company of Elders, around a fire under the stars.

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 to visit places like Cave Hill, site of the Seven Sisters Creation stories, which is possibly the most significant art site in Central Australia. On a Karrke Aboriginal Cultural Tour 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.

ART AND MUSEUMS
Explore ancient rock art sites offering profound insights into Dreamtime stories or take part in artist-led workshops in contemporary art practice, helping 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 to learn about the Tjukurpa Creation symbols and then paint your own Creation story. In the Top End of the Northern Territory learn basket weaving with Pudakul Aboriginal Cultural Tours, visit some of the finest rock art galleries in the world with Davidson’s Arnhemland Safaris and learn about Tiwi Island’s famous screen-printing techniques on SeaLink NT’s Tiwi by Design tour. Or explore Maalinup Aboriginal Gallery, an Indigenous-owned art space and cultural centre just outside Perth, where visitors can immerse themselves in several aspects of Aboriginal life, from art and food to storytelling and performance.

URBAN CULTURE
Aboriginal culture is alive and well in Australia’s urban centres, with easily accessible walking tours as well as museums, galleries and cultural centres to explore.

Sample highlights:
- Explore one of the world’s most significant Aboriginal cultural collections at Melbourne Museum’s Bunjilaka Aboriginal Culture Centre. Enjoy an Aboriginal Heritage Walk in Melbourne’s Royal Botanic Gardens, stroll the length of Perth’s Elizabeth Quay with Go Cultural Aboriginal Tours & Experiences, or explore the fascinating First Nations collection at the Australian Museum in Sydney. You may also wish to embark on a coastal journey with Dreamtime Southern X, where the spiritual significance of Sydney’s famous harbour is revealed on a stunningly intimate walking tour. It’s not just the big cities where you can discover Aboriginal culture in an urban environment. Yawuru man Bart Pigram offers daily tours of historic Broome, tracing the fascinating timeline of this dynamic pearling town through a local’s lens.

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 understanding of Aboriginal spirituality and connection to Country.

Sample highlights:
- Make a deep connection with the Yumu people of the South Coast of New South Wales, through Ngaran Ngaran Culture Awareness, which shares sacred ceremonies, ancient stories and traditional dancing. Travel deep into the philosophies, kinship systems, hunting practices, instrument making and basket weaving secrets of the Yolŋu Traditional Owners in East Arnhem Land with Lirrwi Tourism. End each day in the company of Elders, around a fire under the stars.
MEET THE OLDEST LIVING CULTURE 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 culture is older than Roman ruins. It predates the Pyramids and existed long before Stonehenge; estimated to stretch back at least 60,000 years, it is the oldest continuous living culture in the world.

Yet you won’t find grand monuments dotted around Australia’s vast outback. What you’ll discover is a rich 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 people some 30,000 years ago. Earlier still, stone wall fish traps remain in place as perhaps the oldest human-made structures on Earth. Meanwhile, Aboriginal people 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 culture is to join a personalised tour of the Australian Museum’s First Nations collection, which mixes boomerang displays and didgeridoo performances with 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 ceremony inside an 800-million-year-old natural amphitheatre at the Adnyamathanha people’s Wilpena Pound Resort; and to understand connection to Country while walking in sight of skyscrapers in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Victoria, Melbourne Gardens.

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 culture’s survival by supporting employment in their often-isolated traditional Lands, ensuring their vital roots, sacred laws and kinship ties remain unbroken.
North of Adelaide, 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 people, 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, you’ll be shown sacred sites around Wilpena, including 40,000-year-old rock paintings at Arkaroo Rock, and precious rock engravings estimated to be even older.

Further north in the lands surrounding Uluru, Australia’s Red Centre is also rich in archaeological sites that highlight the incomparable age of Aboriginal culture. SEIT Outback Australia will guide you to Cave Hill, where a painted cave ceiling illustrates parts of the ancient Seven Sisters Creation story. Along the way, you’ll also gain insights into traditional food gathering, bush tucker and ancient rituals, before returning to your accommodation at Ayers Rock Resort.

But it’s in Australia’s northwest 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 Nourlangi Tours – a descendant of the Pilbara’s Traditional Owners – glimpse an insight into his 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 guiding you to some examples of these engravings, Clinton will explain the figures, fauna and symbols that they depict, as well as passing examples of bush tucker used as traditional medicine along the way.

Sixty thousand years – that’s the mind-boggling age of Aboriginal Australian culture, 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 culture might be the oldest continuous culture 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 in today’s society. Several among them showcasing archaeological evidence of Aboriginal Australia’s astonishing timeline.
Aboriginal people have an undeniable talent for storytelling. Without a written language, the sharing of knowledge is tied to their linguistic 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 60,000 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 – offers a compelling success story. Here, the trend has seen Aboriginal tourism businesses jump more than 60 per cent in international visitor participation in the 12 months to July 2017. The number of overseas travellers seeking Aboriginal cultural experiences in NSW now tops 330,000 annually, with further growth expected. The same story is being replicated around Australia.

That the world can still interact with members of this ancient culture 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 way of life. Take Adventure North Australia’s Daintree Dreaming Tour, where Kubirri-Warra brothers Linc and Brandon Walker splash you through their saltwater homeland to spear crabs that are later cooked up in their mother’s house and eaten at a shared table. Or Pudakul Aboriginal Cultural Tours, a family-run business beside a billabong in the Northern Territory, where two Elders and their daughters serve homemade damper and local knowledge between crocodile spotting and collaborative painting. Increasingly, travellers are taking advantage of these genuine windows into the world’s oldest culture.

In NSW, 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. A report released in March 2018 points to an annual growth of about 600 net new Aboriginal enterprises, across all business sectors. Not only do these businesses employ Aboriginal people and reinvest in their communities, they actively strengthen the connection to culture.

Crucially, the boost in Indigenous tourism is enabling Aboriginal people to see a bright future, one where maintaining culture, revitalising language and keeping family together – on ancestral country – is no longer a struggle.
The term ‘Aboriginal’ is used to describe Australia’s Aboriginal people from mainland Australia and Tasmania as a whole. At the time of British colonisation in 1788, there were estimated to number between 350 and 750 social groups 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 Far North Queensland to the dry central desert and across to the forested corners of Tasmania, 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 exists in the different climates and habitats. In Australia’s tropical north, 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 Narlijia Experiences Broome talks about as he walks visitors around Yawuru country, showing carved pearl shells that were used for trade between saltwater and desert people living hundreds of kilometres apart.

Meanwhile, the educational exhibition space, Koorie Heritage Trust in Melbourne’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’s main waterway.

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 people can travel through their custodial country using the song as a map, like an ancient GPS. Songlines cross the country 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 Australia’s desert country, 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 about how their Songlines are depicted in their art including the Seven Sisters story.

Creation stories are also told in Tasmania, along the Aboriginal-guided wukalina Walk. The Indigenous people living on Australia’s biggest island developed their culture with less influence from other mainland groups. In fact, it’s believed the palawa people, in the state’s north-east, 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’ 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 people 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 the West MacDonnell Ranges in Central Australia, ancestral lands of the Arrernte people, RT Tours Australia will introduce you to the significance of Songlines – Creation stories represented as elaborate Songlines, the concept of traditional storytelling with song. Songlines are fundamental to the Dreaming story of how the East and West MacDonnell Ranges were formed by three giant caterpillars that emerged out of the earth. According to Arrernte culture, the caterpillars form the distinctive ridges of the mountains which, remarkably, do bear an uncanny resemblance to giant caterpillars from the air.

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 CULTURE

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 culture has endured the ages to become the oldest living culture 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 culture 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 culture, 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 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. Lead 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 cultural significance of the dunes.

You needn’t leave city limits though, to learn about the deep spiritual connection between Aboriginal culture and the earth. In Sydney’s cosmopolitan centre, 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 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.
ABORIGINAL LAND CARE: THE OLDEST SYSTEM OF SUSTAINABILITY ON EARTH

Australia's Aboriginal 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 culture has been embracing sustainability long before it became fashionable to lower food miles and use plant-based plastics. For at least 60,000 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 people 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 people 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’s 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.

The connection goes deeper still, to the core of Aboriginal identity. 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 people 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. Bardi Jawi rangers who manage the remote, sienna-hued Dampier Peninsula in Western Australia, share their story at Kooljaman coastal wilderness camp. They were the first ranger team to start working in the vast, tropical Kimberley region, one of the world’s least touched natural environments, in 2007. There are now about 100 Indigenous rangers covering an area bigger than Germany.
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 well being of their people through food, massage, bush medicines and ceremony. Dhangal Gurruwiwi, Director of Lirrwi Tourism (more on that in a moment) puts it nicely: “If spirit is healed, the body will heal,” he says.

Aboriginal people 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. 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 witchetty grub (an insect that produces a nutty, popcorn flavour when cooked).

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 healthful 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 Djirringanj 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 Yolŋu, a language group found in the Northern Territory’s remote Arnhem Land. There, traditions are still a part of everyday life. Lirrwi Tourism’s Dilly Bag Tour for Women is one way that Yolŋu women are actively teaching and sharing their ‘women’s business’ – practices that are strictly open to that gender, staying true to the ancient culture. The experience includes a crying ceremony, a profoundly moving, communal event that mixes suffering with solace.

It’s vital that traditional remedies survive – something visitors assist in, by engaging in immersive learning.
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 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 people have used fire as a tool in the natural environment for tens of thousands of years. Today, many Indigenous tour guides double 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 and Kooljaman’s visiting rangers are both 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, Lirrwi Tourism guides in Arnhem Land, north-east of Kakadu, understand and continue to implement traditional burning in order to reduce weeds and boost biodiversity. 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.
CULTURAL COMFORT:
ANCIENT WISDOM FOR A MODERN CRISIS

First we fell in love with hygge, the Danish word that channels the delight of all things cozy and intimate. Then we got down with wabi-sabi, the Japanese term that embraces the beauty of imperfection. Now, as we struggle with feelings of helplessness generated by the COVID-19 crisis, one of Australia’s Aboriginal cultures offers up the perfect word for the times.

Wadekane is the word used by the Adnyamathanha people of the 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 people 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 connection. 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 tribal culture 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 people 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 people.

“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.”
5 SURPRiSiNG FACTS ABOUT ABORiGiNAL TRAvEL EXPERiENCES

Australia is home to some of the world’s most outstanding Indigenous tourism experiences – yet, stunningly, most Australians have never experienced them. Lingering 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’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 – while 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 with Dreamtime Southern X, during a Go Cultural stroll through Perth’s CBD, or on an Aboriginal Heritage Walk in the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, Melbourne Gardens, 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, Perth’s Elizabeth Quay and the Melbourne skyline.

Aboriginal culture is on the ocean, as well as in the desert
Few people would associate Great Barrier Reef with Aboriginal culture. But it’s there, amongst the coral and tropical fish. Aboriginal 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.

You can be part of a corroboree
Most of the time, corroborees are regarded as sacred, private ceremonies attended only by Aboriginal people. But the Laura Dance Festival in Far 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 SeaLinkNT Tiwi by Design tour, which includes making your own screen-printed textile. Meanwhile, sharpen your focus and practise mindfulness while learning Aboriginal basket weaving with Pudakul Aboriginal Cultural Tours, also in the Northern Territory. The ancient art is also shown, along with jewellery making, carving and painting at Injalak Arts centre, visited with Kakadu Cultural Tours.
EXPLORE AUSTRALIA’S NATIONAL PARKS WITH THEIR TRADITIONAL OWNERS

In Australia’s national parks, learn about the Traditional Custodians’ deep connection with 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 country with an Indigenous guide, though, and you’ll hear of more intangible layers. Landmarks are often intertwined with a Dreaming story. Perhaps you’ll hear about ancient Indigenous land-management techniques. Spirits might even be at work in mysterious ways.

Graham Kenyon is a Limilngan-Wulna man who owns and operates Pudakul Aboriginal Cultural Tours in the Northern Territory. Limilngan-Wulna lands lie between Darwin and Kakadu National Park. Graham knows the area well, after working around the territory as a park ranger for many years. “When I talk about the Indigenous stuff, it blows people’s minds,” he says. When visitors arrive on Graham’s homelands, he follows cultural protocols with a Welcome to Country – a short ceremony in which Custodians formally welcome people onto their land. Graham does this by pouring a capful of water onto visitor’s heads. “We put the water there because it shows respect for our Land,” he says. Graham remembers the time he was working in Nitmiluk National Park near Katherine, 320 kilometres (200 miles) south-east of Darwin, and a series of supernatural events gave him goose bumps.

He tells how car keys moved around his house, someone whistled behind him while he was walking a remote path, a wallaroo (a small kangaroo) stood stock-still on a cliff face night after night. Following a formal welcome from local Aboriginal people, “all those strange things stopped happening”, says Graham.

You can tap into Indigenous experiences and age-old wisdom at many of Australia’s national parks. At Mossman Gorge in the 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.

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.

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 Western Australia, Koomal Dreaming showcases the Wadandi people’s deep connection to their Country in the Margaret 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.

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 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 River region.
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.

In the tri-coloured, 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 skimming 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 birds.

Meanwhile, the guided walk through a rehabilitated wildlife reserve at Worn Gundidj @ Tower Hill in Victoria 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. Further north, in the Queensland rainforest, a traditional dance performed as part of the Pamagirri Aboriginal Experience at Rainforestation Nature Park reveals key information about food gathering and hunting, while at the park you can hold a koala or feed a kangaroo.

In the tri-coloured, 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 skimming 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 birds.

Meanwhile, the guided walk through a rehabilitated wildlife reserve at Worn Gundidj @ Tower Hill in Victoria 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. Further north, in the Queensland rainforest, a traditional dance performed as part of the Pamagirri Aboriginal Experience at Rainforestation Nature Park reveals key information about food gathering and hunting, while at the park you can hold a koala or feed a kangaroo.
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 some 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.

For Aboriginal people, 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 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 Agangu 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. You may also wish to venture into the desert landscape of Uluru with SEIT Outback Australia, where a day trip to Cave Hill offers a spectacular opportunity to discover a series of artworks relating to the legend of Seven Sisters and wicked Wati Nyiru. Conversely, the works at Janbal Gallery in Queensland 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 on screen-printing techniques before attempting your own screen-printing textile.
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 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 in to the trend of transformational travel, creating immersive, perspective-shifting experiences which are both challenging and enriching.

Tasmania’s wukalina Walk involves a conscious setting aside of time to deeply engage with the stunning 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.

Near Sydney, Ngaran Ngaran Cultural Awareness’ two-night Creation tour asks guests to walk on country with their lead guide, reflecting on Indigenous 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 rhythms of the communities, consider a multi-day itinerary with Lirrwi Tourism into Yolŋu country, where Aboriginal culture pulses strong through the veins of its people. Luxury-focused explorations are the specialty of award-winning Lords Kakadu and Arnhemland Safaris.

Tailor-made multi-day 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.
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 Far North Queensland, 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 in a mesmerising performance that every family member will learn from.

Nearby, the Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park stages theatre and dance performances, as well as fire-making ceremonies and the chance to throw a boomerang and spear, while not far away at the 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 experience, or a kayaking or Didgeridoo Dreaming night tour (in which you learn to play 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 Nhanda and Malgana people.

In Sydney, the First Nations collection at the Australian Museum has dramatic ceremonial dance masks and costumes from the Torres Strait among its artefacts; if you join a personalised tour you’ll get Aboriginal stories and storytelling too. For something a little more adrenalin-packed, head a couple of hours north and join Sand Dune Adventures, an Aboriginal cultural tour with a difference: you’ll ride aboard a quad bike, then have a go at sandboarding down the Worimi Sand Dunes, the largest in the Southern Hemisphere. Kids can share a quad bike with their parents or choose their own adventure on a quad-bike of their own.
hidden amid the trappings of modernity. 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 the art – much of which is for sale. Gain further insights into bush foods with Dale Tilbrook Experiences.

Just outside Brisbane, the Spirits of the Red Sand interactive theatre show and dinner 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.

Far North Queensland’s tropical 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. Both the Tjapukai Cultural Centre and nearby Rainforestation Nature Park offer interactive introductions to the traditional weapons, tools, bush tucker, song and dance of the area.

Then, of course, there’s Sydney, 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’s Indigenous side below.

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 unlikeliest of outdoor places – such as the middle of Melbourne in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Victoria, Melbourne Gardens. There, just two kilometres from Melbourne’s central business district, you’ll find a traditional camping and meeting place for the Boon wurrung and Woi wurrung people. 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.

There’s another significant garden to explore at the Melbourne Museum. The Millari Garden is part of the museum’s Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre and is planted with native fauna traditionally used by the Aboriginal people of south-eastern Australia for food, tools and medicine. The centre also hosts the Birrarung Gallery, a contemporary art space, and the permanent First Peoples exhibition, which shares the stories of the First Peoples of Victoria through multimedia installations and artefacts.

In Perth, 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. Take a Go Cultural walking tour along the quay with Aboriginal Elder Walter McGuire, and you’ll not only receive a traditional welcome, but observe the city through the eyes of local Noongar culture, unveiling the age-old sacred sites that are
Australia’s most famous city has grown into a multicultural metropolis of some five million residents, but Sydney’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; a presence that can be seen and felt in several ways.

To see some of Sydney’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 people on Sydney Harbour, learning about bush food, medicines and ochre bark and body painting, and gaining not just an education but a spiritual connection with the Sydney region’s First Nations 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 heritage tour and a bush foods experience. From here it’s a short walk to Sydney Opera House, where you can see a very clear sign of Sydney coming to terms with – and embracing – its Aboriginal past and present. At sunset every 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 culture at what was a traditional gathering place for thousands of years. From here, it’s also possible to walk to Sydney’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.
Standing on one of the deserted beaches that fringe the Kimberley coast, there is much to look at: the shells beached along the tideline, the birds fossicking at the water’s edge, even the mesmerising flow of the waves gently washing onto the white sand. According to Brian Lee, however, you are probably missing all of the important stuff – for instance, the ripples on the ocean that send a signal about what’s happening beneath the surface.

“We know if there is a school of fish, or a shark, or stingrays, just by looking at the water,” explains Brian, an Elder of the Bardi Jawi people who runs tours out from Kooljaman wilderness camp on Cape Leveque. He can read the bush just as easily. “You see trees; we see firewood or medicine or spears or fruit. Even from a distance, even with a quick glance, we recognise what each of those trees give us.”

An intimate understanding of the landscape lies at the core of Aboriginal culture. No matter where you are in Australia, a tour with an Aboriginal 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 culture is attuned to the constant flow of changes in the plants and animals that surround them. 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 the Flinders Ranges, for instance, the blossoming of the acacia trees signals the start of kangaroo hunting season.

It isn’t just outback tribes that know how to read the stories in the landscape. Margret Campbell of Dreamtime Southern X, who runs walking tours through the heart of Sydney, 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.”
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 unlikeliest 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 an estimated 60,000 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 new restaurants (including Brae, Attica, Orana and Bea) 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. Nearby, RT Tours Australia serves up everything from kangaroo to quandong (a native fruit) pudding in its gourmet lunch and dinner tours set in the stunning desert.

Aboriginal experiences across the nation also provide plenty of opportunities to catch and cook your own bush tucker, such as the Catch and Cook Camping Adventure hosted by Wula Gura Nyinda Eco 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, simply head to the Royal Botanic Garden for an Aboriginal Bush Food Experience right in the middle of the biggest city in Australia.
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 see 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.”

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 doesn’t just taste good, 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 heritage tours that showcase its many Indigenous plantings, including the Cadi Jam Ora First Encounters exhibit.

Josh says that Indigenous plants are easy to find these days (“the Indigenous plants in our garden are all available from nurseries,” he affirms) and 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.”

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.”
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 culture, but a stay in a truly spectacular location. At Cape Leveque’s Kooljaman wilderness camp in Australia’s far north-west, this is a given: owned and run by the Bardi Jawi people, the camp is set in a World Heritage landscape of brilliantly coloured white sand, red rocks and pristine blue water, and has an excellent bush-food-inspired restaurant as well as camping and glamping options – including a deluxe safari tent with a balcony overlooking the Indian Ocean.

Experiences range from traditional mud crabbing to cultural tours. Or you can simply just enjoy the music and atmosphere of the camp and chat with the locals. “It really depends on how much you want to get involved, but we would like everyone to leave with a better understanding of this country and Bardi and Aboriginal culture,” says Kooljaman manager Maree Menheere Thompson.

Alternatively, explore the remote beauty of Arnhem Land’s Bremer Island with a stay at Banubanu Beach Retreat in a glamping tent. The eco-sensitive retreat was built in partnership with the Yolgnu people and hosts just 20 guests at a time. By day, take part in traditional fishing and cultural experiences, and swim from the pristine beach.

Remote wilderness and Aboriginal culture also combine with dramatic effect at Mt Borradaile in the Northern Territory, 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 Arnhem Land.

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.
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 culture, 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 Indigenous people 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’s best fine diner, Wildflower, has leveraged the six seasons since it opened, using them to guide ingredient choice 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 both Whadjuk Traditional Owner, Walter McGuire of Go Cultural Aboriginal Tours in Perth, and Wadandi custodian Josh Whiteland of Koomal Dreaming, three hours’ drive south in Margaret River, explain to those joining their cultural tours. They point 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.

Lord’s Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris, Northern Territory

Choose to go fishing in Meelup Regional Park, 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 from 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. 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.
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 people were interpreting the night sky. Believed to be the world’s first astronomers, they used the universe to wayfind, 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 people 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 people 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.

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. Hear it from Capes, or on a Cave Hill tour with SEIT Outback Australia.

Aboriginal people 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 people 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.
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 700 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 20 to 50 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, culture and identity, many individuals are working to protect their spoken culture. Indigenous singer songwriter Gina Williams switched to only singing in 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 celebrates 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 and describes it as a “beautiful, musical language”.

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. North of Broome, in the ochre-hued lands leading to Kooljaman at Cape Leveque, Aboriginal rangers educate people about the various languages spoken in the area, and their role in preserving culture on the Bardi Jawi Ranger Talks.

With the Sydney Harbour Bridge in the background, a welcome 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 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 culture, its ancient ways and tens of thousands of years of history. But far from being restricted by the past, Aboriginal people 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, and their shared cultural knowledge means they can find the way to hidden spots others don’t even know about, and 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.

With Walkabout Cultural Adventures in Far North Queensland, you have permission to do something you’d never be allowed to do in real life: spear throwing. The traditional method of catching a fishy feed looks simple enough, but give it a go and it’s surprisingly challenging.

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. Then, at the northern tip of the state, you can strap yourself in for a bumpy 4WD journey around the Dampier Peninsula, foraging for bush tucker in creeks near Kooljaman wilderness camp. 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.

Sand Dune Adventures, New South Wales
Nitmiluk Tours, Northern Territory
Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures, Western Australia
Tasmania’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 has commenced new experiences which marry the fragrant Margaret River air – stung by wildflowers and the sea – with Aboriginal-guided fishing, 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 tells the stories of the original saltwater people of Broome from aboard a 42-foot catamaran on a Narlijia Tour. Listen to traditional live music and sample bush tucker while cruising the beautiful Roebuck Bay.

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 rockface 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.
Australia’s Indigenous people regard the 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 something that’s evident any time 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 and reveal the painted caves that tell ancient Creation stories, 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 Watarka National Park – home to the famous Kings Canyon – on a one-hour tour with Karrke. Christine Breaden 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 people 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.
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 people. 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 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. Both Lirrwi Tourism and Bremer Island Banubanu Beach Retreat operate nearby, allowing visitors to team the festival with other cultural experiences and accommodations.

Not all festivals are held in the bush. Sydney hosts two important events each summer: the Yabun Festival, held on January 26 (Australia Day, which is not celebrated by Indigenous people), 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 Aboriginal Heritage walk 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.
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 people 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 the country 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 Cultural Experiences around the coastal town of Dunsborough, south of Perth 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 Ngligi Cave. Here, you will experience a magical didgeridoo performance, amplified by the cave’s natural acoustics.

Some 2500 kilometres (1500 miles) further up the Western Australia coastline is Narlijia Experiences Broome, founded and operated by charismatic Yawuru man Bart Pigram. On a cultural cruise around the turquoise waters of Broome’s Roebuck Bay, Bart combines his Yawuru heritage and his family’s musical genes – his father and uncle are in a well-known band, The Pigram Brothers. On board the 42-foot catamaran, expect live traditional music performances by Bart himself, as well as captivating stories about his people’s connection to the bay, its mangrove forests and distinctive mudflats.

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 Far 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 the country’s most significant Aboriginal events.
For Aboriginal people, 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.

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 Centre in 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.

At the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, Melbourne Gardens, those joining an award-winning, Kulin-led, Aboriginal Heritage Walk are invited to be gently enveloped in smoke, before connecting with the green space’s diverse plant life and their traditional uses. While 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

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 culture is 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*. Multi-day tours through the Tiwi Islands, the so-called ‘islands of smiles’ north of Darwin, also include ceremony and music around the campfire at night.

Dances vary widely from language group to language group and destination to destination, making this part of Aboriginal culture as rich as it is deep. Dances tell the stories of the Dreamtime, or Creation period, and the close relationship Aboriginal people 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 corroboree dances at *Rainforestation Nature Park* in Far North Queensland evoke 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.

Also in Far North Queensland, there are day and night dance ceremonies performed at Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park, a centre close to Cairns on the edge of the Great Barrier Reef. After the shows, the audience is invited to ask the dancers cultural questions and interact – a rare and valuable opportunity.

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.
MODERN SPORT MEETS ANCIENT CULTURE: EXPERIENCE THE ABORIGINAL SPORTING SPIRIT

From hurling spears and wrestling to traditional ball games – sport has always been integral to Aboriginal culture. Traditional Aboriginal 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 in the Northern Territory. Here, footy fans and art lovers alike take the two-and-a-half-hour ferry from Darwin 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 Banubanu Beach Retreat, located on Bremer Island. The island’s pristine white beaches and turquoise waters are found about 1000 kilometres east of Darwin in the spectacularly remote East Arnhem Land region. Climb aboard one of Banubanu’s unforgettable fishing charters, where you can reel in migrating fish such as Spanish mackerel and tuna and tropical reef species like red emperor and coral trout. The meeting of the Gulf of Carpentaria and the Arafura Sea is one of the world’s top fishing destinations, it’s an angler’s paradise with warm, clean and lightly fished seas.

In the dazzling underwater world of the Great Barrier Reef off the coast of Far North Queensland, Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel combines ancient stories of the world-renowned coral reef 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 culture.
ABORIGINAL CULTURAL TRADITIONS: UNDERSTANDING MEN’S BUSINESS AND WOMEN’S BUSINESS

Men’s business and women’s business are integral to the Aboriginal way of life, both past and present.

It’s thought that over 500 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 culture sees these as distinctly different but equally important roles, balancing one another so as to benefit the whole community.

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 Nyakuynytjaku – 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.

Further north, Kakadu Cultural Tours offers a six-night, female-only Aborigional 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.

In the Northern Territory’s north-east Arnhem Land, home to wild coastlines, soaring escarpments and monsoon rainforests, Yolŋu culture continues to thrive. Here, Lirrwí Tourism offers a diverse line-up of cultural experiences, many of which are gender-specific. The Gay’Wu - The Dilly Bag Tour for Women, for instance, takes females on a five-day journey into Yolŋu women’s business.

Guided by local Yolŋu women, you can experience the practical skills of weaving a traditional dilly bag (used by Aboriginal women to gather food), as well as learning about its spiritual significance. You will also gain insight into other women’s business, such as philosophy and kinship, cooking and bush medicine, dancing, astrology, healing, even a crying ceremony.

Alternatively, the Crossing Country tour is an immersive five-day experience where you can join the Yolŋu community in mixed activities as well as specific men’s or women’s business. For instance, women can participate in activities such as gathering bush medicine, harvesting oysters and making jewellery, while only men may go fishing, try spear making and search for the specific eucalyptus trees used to craft gidaki, or didgeridoos.
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 and local elder Danny Woolgoodja – the man who created the Olympic Wandjina – has the honour of maintaining rock art sites.

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. 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, Kakadu Cultural Tours, or Davidsons Arnhemland Safaris.

In Far 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 an in-depth trip with Jarramali Rock Art Tours (via helicopter or four-wheel drive) or 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.
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 culture has. 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 culture, 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 ‘read’ 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 Kings Canyon.
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 culture 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 culture. “What really struck me was not just how strongly traditional culture shaped many of these communities – from what 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 this ancient culture is just extraordinary.”

James and his videographer Archie Sartracom covered a lot of ground to get their shots, usually travelling by four-wheel drive. 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.”
Did you know it’s impolite in Aboriginal culture 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 culture and, while Aboriginal people 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 people 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. 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 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. Meanwhile, family structures and the social systems that bind the Limilngan and Wulna clans are shared on Pudakul Aboriginal Cultural Tours, near Darwin, with Aboriginal guides happy to engage in conversations about cultural ways. Rather than read it in history books, in Australia, you can hear first-hand from the world’s oldest living culture.
HOW TOURISM CAN HELP AUSTRALIA’S INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

The COVID-19 crisis has rocked us all but for Aboriginal Australians it has been a particularly daunting time. Given the high levels of chronic illness among Indigenous people, 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 Aboriginal 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.

In the Northern Territory’s Arnhem Land, Lirrwi Tourism’s multi-day cultural tours take visitors out onto traditional homelands to immerse them in traditional culture. Intrepid travellers who join one of the tours not only get to explore one of the most remote parts of the country, they also provide a lifeline for these small Indigenous communities.

“Those communities are very small and secluded – they may be 100km or more away from town, where the jobs are,” says Lirrwi’s Arian Pearson. “This business model means they can stay on the Land and the Country that they are connected to.”

In some cases, tourism is helping rebuild connections that were broken by white settlement. In Tasmania, where a concerted attempt to eradicate Aboriginal culture 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. 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 along to a Spirits of the Red Sand performance who walk away with a better understanding of Aboriginal culture; the performers themselves gain a stronger connection with their 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 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 culture. How’s that for a win-win?
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 culture – 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 culture 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 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 clapsticks 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, 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.

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 culture. 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 culture on a SEIT Outback all-day tour to Cave Hill, 100 kilometres (60 miles) south of Uluru. The highlight is the magnificent cave paintings illustrating the Seven Sisters Creation story.
5 GLOBALLY SOUGHT-AFTER TRAVEL EXPERIENCES YOU DIDN’T KNOW YOU COULD HAVE IN AUSTRALIA

Australia isn’t just home to the oldest living culture 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 Australians. 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.

1. **Go sand dune sliding**
   Aboriginal life and culture 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 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.

2. **See Tasmania’s Bay of Fires through Aboriginal eyes**
   If most Australians were asked why one of Tasmania’s most famous sites is called the Bay of Fires, they wouldn’t know the answer. **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.

3. **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 were you aware they’re estimated to have been 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.

4. **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 people 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.

5. **Spot dinosaur footprints**
   Dinosaur track marks smatter the ground around Broome, in Western Australia’s Kimberley, yet few Australians know of them, and even fewer have witnessed them up close. It’s astonishing, given scientists have described the area as the Serengeti of the cretaceous period. Get face to face with some of these 130-million-year-old marvels and add another dimension by going with an Aboriginal guide. On the **Narlijia Experiences Broome** Beach to Bay walking tour, you’ll hear the ancient stories connected to the prints, while also seeing shell middens – eating zones used for tens of thousands of years, where the discarded shellfish remains beam white in the sun.
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 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 people 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 people need to stay in the rural locations their hearts, minds and spirits are tied to.

The brothers sport long locks, black wrap-around sunglasses and rugby players’ physiques, but they’re as cuddly as teddy bears – something we see first-hand when we’re invited to the family home. We wash the sand off our feet and pile under the veranda, delighted at the generous gesture that makes us feel like one of the family. There’s loud chatter and endless laughter as the crabs are boiled up for a tasting of tender, white flesh and homemade damper. Having caught it ourselves (sort of), under the guidance of members of the world’s oldest living culture, naturally makes it taste even sweeter.

SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

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

De Vos, who started working as a tour guide in Cairns in 1994, fell in love with tourism and Indigenous culture 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, Cairns and Port Douglas, and last from half-a-day to two days. “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. 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 before escorting guests back to their home, where you’ll likely meet members of the extended Walker family and share a “cuppa” (cup of tea).

There’s more culture to be had on the half-day Art Workshop tour, where guests can take 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.”
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 Reef. 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 with a deeper understanding of Traditional Owners’ connection with the sea.
A pioneering tour of one of the world’s most spectacular harbours highlights Sydney’s saltwater Aboriginal culture.

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 zipping 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’s Indigenous heritage more than two decades ago. Today, Margret – an Elder from the Dungutti Jerrinja Nation – and her team take visitors on a ninety-minute interpretive amble around one of Sydney’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 Sydney’s Aboriginal heritage, not to mention a few insights into where to have the most scenic, and spiritual, picnic in the city.
In the vibrant capital city of Perth, Aboriginal culture is palpably alive.

The notes are hypnotic. Most Australians would be familiar with the rhythms and phrasing, but few would have any idea of the meaning behind them. It is a song of the Dreaming and Walter McGuire, who is standing on the banks of Derbarl Yerrigan, the Aboriginal name for the Swan River, is singing it.

The attention of his guests is interrupted by the appearance of a pod of dolphins, their dorsal fins breaking the surface of the water behind him. This isn’t an unusual occurrence. Even at Elizabeth Quay, one of Perth’s newest redevelopments on its urban waterfront, nature is everywhere.

As a Noongar Elder, Walter knows this only too well. On his daily Go Cultural Aboriginal Tours, he shares the history of the world’s oldest living culture while pointing out the areas of the city that were once important campgrounds and hunting areas for his ancestors.

To the west is the vast Kings Park; to the north is the location of Perth’s long-lost Great Lakes, an extensive network of wetlands, swamps and lakes reclaimed during the 80 years after British occupation and now covered by the buildings and highways of the modern world. Until the 1940s, the Noongar people still used them as an important meeting place, as well as a source of food and fresh water.

While Walter sings and the dolphins swim, we’ve paused in front of a five-metre-tall sculpture by Noongar artist Laurel Nannup. It resembles a giant bird on a boat gazing out across the water. “That’s right,” Walter says, song finished for the moment: “That’s what the sails on the boats looked like to my people during First Contact – a very big bird.”

During the 90 minutes that follow, Walter – who has spent his life learning the Noongar culture and customs – leads the group around Elizabeth Quay, revealing what life on the waterfront was like for his ancestors. And what it’s like now. We sit while he shows us the tools of his people, then set off at a gentle stroll, learning about animal tracks, bush food and the sacred sites and hunting grounds where his ancestors once roamed.

It is peak summer in Australia when I join a small group of interstate and international visitors to take Walter’s tour. But for the Noongar people it is Bunuru, one of their six seasons. This is the warmest part of the year in the south-west of Western Australia; a time when, traditionally, the Noongar would have moved to the estuaries to fish. In the colder months of Makuru, they would take shelter in the hills. The seasons for them are divided not by date, but by changes in temperature and wind, the arrival of rain and the abundance of different kinds of food.

It is an all-too-brief glimpse into the oldest culture in the world – one intrinsically tied to nature, even in the most modern of urban environments.

**SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE**

- Another city, another time
- An ancient walk through a modern city
- Journey into the ancient past of Perth
- Seeing Perth through the eyes of the Whadjuk people
- Learning the first story of Perth
Jarramali Rock Art Tours, Queensland

Buckle up for a wild ride to an ancient outback art gallery.

Kuku Yalanji man Johnny Murison was working as a carpenter when he and a cousin made an astonishing discovery while out bush in northern Queensland. “We were four-wheel-driving, chasing rock art, and when we found this rock art we were like, ‘Whoa, this is awesome,’” recalls Murison. “Because of the location of this particular gallery, we were like, ‘Mate, this would rival Kings Canyon [in central Australia], flamin’ Arnhem Land and the Kimberley. We’ve got a crown jewel right here.’”

So inspired was Murison by his discovery of this ancient outback art gallery – thought by archaeologists to be 20,000 years old – he decided right then and there to launch an adrenaline-pumping tourism venture. Jarramali Rock Art Tours started in 2017 to showcase the Quinkan rock art within the so-called “Magnificent Gallery”.

The multi-dimensional journey to the site near the historic town of Laura, 330km northwest of Cairns, is usually aboard Murison’s “beast”, a 4WD that can seat 11 passengers. Along the coach road out of Laura, he points out highlights such as the pick-axe marks left by old-timers who hacked out this track from difficult, rugged country and tells Dreaming stories about how the landscape was created.

As for the Quinkan rock art, expect to see “every dietary item” depicted on the sandstone walls, along with female ancestral bodies, lore men and medicine men. The animal figures include crocodiles, kangaroos, emus, echidnas, barramundi, catfish and birds. “I can show you the whole structure of our society by looking at that gallery,” says Murison.

Certainly, it’s a completely different experience from Cape York’s star attractions of reef and rainforest. This tour involves buckling up to travel by 4WD along the historic Maytown-Laura Old Coach Road through savannah grasslands and open woodland to reach Magnificent Gallery.

Those who are driving their own 4WD – and are keen for a spot of extreme four-wheel-driving along one of Australia’s “gnarliest” roads – can also tag along from Laura on a daytrip. Needless to say, the super-practical Murison is an expert when it comes to dealing with the driving challenges presented by the dirt track. “I’ve gotten myself out of some ridiculous situations, even if it has taken hours,” he says with a laugh.

The overnight tour includes camping at a stunning spot overlooking a gorge. As dinner roasts over the coals, everyone gathers around the campfire to listen to the evocative sounds of the didgeridoo being played. As the sun rises over the escarpment the next morning, a bush breakfast is cooked on the campfire while guests admire a view of country that resembles “a mini-Grand Canyon”. On the journey back to Cairns and Port Douglas, Murison will stop at a waterhole so that anyone who’s keen for a refreshing swim can take a dip in crystal-clear waters.

The road trip can’t be undertaken during the wet season, when the track becomes impassable, but the gallery is still accessible year-round on Jarramali’s helicopter tours.
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 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 Cape Naturaliste, cooled by the maritime 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 wrap-around 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, spouting 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 bright, 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.

**KOOMAL DREAMING, WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

- 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
On the East Alligator River, a Guluyambi 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 guluyambi – from where our cruise, the Guluyambi 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 goose 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.Laizing 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.
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 Breaden 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. This 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 freely and 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.
Baling with an Aboriginal community in the serene Kimberley wilderness offers a surprisingly modern adrenaline rush.

Brian Lee is a man who lives in harmony with his land. He knows how to find mud crabs amid the roots of the mangroves, how to use a seashell to give a piercing whistle, and how to find hidden water sources by following vines back to their roots. He also loves travelling at speed.

“Let’s go!” he calls joyfully as he jumps into his 4WD and puts the pedal to the metal. We pile into our vehicle and follow suit, the wide, white-sand beach providing a natural highway. Brian’s right: speeding along the sand is exhilarating.

Brian’s Tagalong Tours are fun as well as fascinating, and can be found among a collection of cultural experiences on offer at Kooljaman, the wilderness camp operated by the local Bardi Jawi people on the Kimberley’s scenic Cape Leveque, in the tropical north of Western Australia.

Accommodation here may be simple – ranging from campsites to safari tents to ensuite cabins – but the setting, just back from the beach, is six-star natural luxury, with the white sands providing the ideal perch from which to watch a spectacular Kimberley sunset.

As well as joining a tour with Brian, visitors to Kooljaman can gain insights into Aboriginal culture through Bundy, an Elder famous for his bushfood tours, which explore the wide range of plants and protein that traditionally formed the local diet. He may even quickly whittle a spear for you and take you down to those aquamarine waters to teach you how to spear a fish.

Local Bardi man Bolo Angus, meanwhile, offers guests the option to embark on a half-day coastal exploration, on which you’ll learn to source fresh water, build a shelter and survive in the elements, as his ancestors did.

Brian’s Tagalong Tours – which start with that drive along the beach – are, he tells us, fairly freeform. “We’re not on a timetable,” he says. “It’s about having a swim and a yarn. You learn about me and I learn about you.”

After we park our cars well away from the waterline – “you don’t want to get caught out by the tide” – Brian takes us for a stroll and talks about how the Bardi people explored these salt waters, before leading us up into the untouched bush flanking the Hunter River. The wattle currently in bloom is a sign that the time is right to go hunting stingrays, he says. While we refresh ourselves in the cool river, Brian speaks some fish and roasts them over a wood fire for a fabulous lunch.

As promised, there are plenty of stories, and plenty of laughs. He tells us about his ancestors, including his white and Chinese forebears, and asks about ours. He tells us how the Bardi people preserve their customs – Brian regularly takes young men into the bush to learn traditional practices – and how the community is heading into the future.

“I love doing these tours, but you know what makes me happiest?” he asks. “That the young ones are starting to get involved. They are getting used to talking to strangers, to be more extroverted.

“For us, that’s something you need to get used to,” he laughs. “I feel good about our children becoming teachers, helping to impart the knowledge of Country to the people who come to visit.”
KOORIE HERITAGE TRUST, VICTORIA

Walk in the footsteps of Melbourne’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’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 people once practised their culture in Melbourne 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, 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. “When we walk alongside the river, we talk about its history, what the traditional landscape looked like and how Aboriginal people 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’s 2006 Commonwealth Games.

The longer Scar Tree Walk (1.5 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.

**SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE**

- Dig deeper into urban Indigenous culture
- A revealing insight into Indigenous culture in Melbourne
- A deep dive into Aboriginal culture in the city
- A journey into Aboriginal experiences in an urban setting
- Melbourne’s Aboriginal culture brought to life
Immerse yourself in the world’s oldest living culture.

We are in East Arnhem Land in the north-east Northern Territory, about as remote a place as you can access on the planet. Our small group of women have come to a deserted beach before the sun has risen to take part in a crying ceremony, led by a group of Yolŋu women, custodians of this land.

Before anything else unfolds, yellow tulipwood leaves are thrown onto a fire as part of a smoking ceremony. Guests are brushed with the fragrant smoke to clear bad energy and to allow room for protective spirits to arrive. As the darkness of the night begins to lift, one of the custodians starts to cry as she thanks the Creation ancestors for people past and present, for the sun and the stars, the birds and the crocodiles, the trees and other features in the landscape.

It’s incredibly moving, and each one of us feels tears well in our eyes as we witness this ancient ceremony in an ancient landscape, performed as it has been for millennia – the Yolŋu have one of the world’s oldest, most intact and complex living cultures.

The women’s tour is just one of the immersive experiences offered by Lirrwi Tourism in Yolŋu Country. But it’s probably one of the most emotive. “The women’s tours especially are a bonding thing,” says Anji Kemp of Cooee Traveller, which manages Lirrwi Tourism. “Guests bond with their Aboriginal hosts and with each other as well. This season we will have, for the first time, a grandma and her granddaughter doing a tour.”

Whichever experience you opt to do through Lirrwi, those who arrive to experience the Yolŋu homelands for themselves will soon discover that there’s a deeper, more mystical layer to these pristine coastal and bush landscapes than initially meets the non-Indigenous eye.

For the Yolŋu, age-old ceremonies and cultural practices take precedence over tourism. This means it’s a delicate balancing act to create reliable experiences for visitors while allowing the Yolŋu people to practise their culture unfettered. It’s a challenge that Lirrwi Tourism has embraced. Its blueprint for immersive tourism in this fascinating area of the Northern Territory involves a homelands rotation system that takes Yolŋu practices into consideration while ensuring travellers still get a taste of authentic culture.

Make the trip to East Arnhem Land and you’ll drop into a wondrous parallel world – one where the calendar is divided into six seasons, and Songlines, or Dreaming tracks, run through the landscape. It’s said that ancestral spirits followed these paths as they created the animals, land and lore.

Guests usually fly into Nhulunbuy, on the Gove Peninsula, from Darwin or Cairns. One-day tours range from visiting several coastal locations in East Arnhem Land to heading out on a 4WD adventure that includes spearfishing and crab-hunting. Art enthusiasts can visit Yirrkala’s Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre, a showcase for the region’s world-renowned artists, drawn from the surrounding 25 homelands. These artists specialise in larrakitj (memorial poles), bark painting, pandanus weaving and making yidaki (didjeridus).

To immerse yourself further into the life and rhythms of the communities, consider a multi-day itinerary where you experience dancing, storytelling and learning how the yidaki is made and played. As well as the deeply moving crying ceremony, the five-day, women-only tour might also include experiences such as gathering oysters and other bush foods, bush medicine and weaving.

Weaving a traditional dilly bag with the Yolŋu sisterhood is another highlight. These bags were not only practical – repositories for food and medicines collected in the bush – but deeply spiritual, considered as carriers of knowledge. Being led through Country by women to collect the materials to create a bag – pandanus fronds and the colourful bulbs and tubers used to dye the fibres – is an experience that will stay with you forever.
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 European 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 people 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.

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
SUGGESTED FEATURE TITLE

- Immerse yourself in stories of Victoria’s cultural history, told by its Traditional Custodians
- Hear the stories of Victoria’s Traditional Owners, told in their own voices
- Learn about the history of Victoria’s Traditional Owners in a non-traditional museum visit

Offering insider insights into the First Peoples of Victoria, Bunjilaka’s exhibition gives a personal introduction to Aboriginal culture.

At the heart of the Bunjilaka First Peoples exhibit is a giant eagle’s nest. The artfully-shaped structure – in which a darkened cinema is enclosed – represents the home of the wedge-tailed eagle Bunjil, the creator ancestor for the land where Melbourne Museum is located.

The award-winning First Peoples exhibition is a rare co-curation by museum experts and the Aboriginal Yulendj Group, 16 respected community members and Elders from across Victoria. Their knowledge and cultural authority has shaped the exhibition to represent the diversity, history and pride of Koorie people (Aboriginal Australians from around New South Wales and Victoria). It’s an excellent introduction to a fascinating journey into the land of Bunjil and the Aboriginal story of Victoria. Every afternoon, visitors can book an Indigenous guide-led tour through the exhibit to enrich their experience.

We start by admiring a rare possum cloak. Our guide explains that babies are given a pelt as Welcome to Country. They are used as a dance skirt until a woman is given her Totem and a full cloak at her coming-of-age ceremony.

At the kooyang eel-trap diorama, which showcases one of the world’s oldest aquaculture systems, Stacie describes the remarkable migrating pattern of short-finned eels. She explains how they live a full life before returning to the rivers where they are caught sustainably.

It’s evident that this philosophy permeates traditional Aboriginal life, where Elders observed the natural world to learn the connections between plants and animals, weather, tides, and stars, then told stories to pass on the knowledge, and used everything without waste to preserve food systems for the future. Outside in the Milarri Garden, which encircles a waterway filled with eels, turtles and fish, this philosophy comes to life, with common Australian trees and plants identified by their Aboriginal names, with explanations about how they were used so effectively for food, tools and medicine.

The collaboration between the museum and area’s Traditional Owners has turned the traditional ‘museum experience’ upside down. Rather than third-party observations you might read on a typical museum caption, insights here are shared in the voices of those ‘inside’ the history, both those contemporary and ancient. (The latter are shared by descendants, who have generously shared stories dating as far back as 2000 generations, to a time when dinosaur-like mega-fauna roamed the region’s plains).

The Many Nations exhibit, for instance, not only showcases 500 beautifully crafted historical and contemporary objects from across Australia but also shares personal testaments about their cultural significance and how they were used. We arrive at a new section of the museum, where the arrival of settlers – who brought with them devastation from smallpox and massacres – is told unflinchingly but without rancour. There are stories of exclusion and resilience, protest and hard work, stories of graphic violence and beautiful generosity. The exhibit ends with Gunai/Kurnai Elder Uncle Albert Mullet teaching his grandsons how to craft a stringy bark canoe in Gippsland. The canoe remains as a vessel, carrying us into the future.
The Beach to Bay tour explores Broome’s diverse landscape and its Creation stories.

We are stepping through the rocks at low tide just south of Broome when our guide, local Yawuru man Bart Pigram suddenly crouches and points at the ground. It takes a second before I see it: an immense theropod footprint, thought to have been imprinted in the sandstone 130 million years ago.

Bart explains the Djugun-Yawuru Creation story of these footprints left by Marala the Emu Man who was the creator of laws and customs and travelled up and down this Gularr coastline, otherwise known as the western side of the Dampier Peninsula. Throughout our tour, the landscape determines which stories Bart shares and his spiritual connection to this land is palpable. He follows the Aboriginal way of understanding his surrounds - what’s beneath his feet, what’s in front as well as in the distance. “I love being out on the landscape with my feet on the ground sharing information I’ve learnt from my family, Elders, historians and my own research,” he says.

It’s a fascinating insight into the Djugun-Yawuru heritage, the saltwater people of Western Australia’s south-west Kimberley region. I’ve joined Bart’s Beach to Bay tour, one of four offered through his business Narlijia Experiences. Bart is well versed in the history of the region, having grown up in Broome and worked in repatriation of the Yawuru culture. Empowered to share generational stories and traditions as a way to create a bridge between cultures, he launched the tours in 2015. He’s also an entertainer and talented musician, skills garnered growing up surrounded by the renowned Pigram Brothers music and folklore.

The Beach to Bay tour melds Creation stories with the contrasting landscapes of the peninsula’s western beaches as well as the low-slung mudflats of Roebuck Bay to the east.

We discover where to find bush tucker or Manyja balu mayi amongst the monsoonal vine thicket before we make the five-minute drive across the peninsula to Roebuck Bay. Here, Bart reveals Didirrgun, a large shell midden atop a dune and ancient site of Aboriginal occupation. In the Creation story, Didirrgun’s wife created waterholes along the northern end of Roebuck Bay and her journey can be seen from the sand dune.

Bart provides a complete picture of Broome’s beguiling and sometimes turbulent history from the mysticism of the Traditional Owners to European and Asian settlement, the early pearlimg days and the attack on the town during World War II.

As the sun sinks over the Indian ocean, lending a pink glow to the vast tract of bleached sand, I realise my postcard-perfect memories of Broome will now be forever linked to the stories and cultural significance of the Traditional Custodians of this land. I’m mesmerised by Broome’s natural wonder and the people who have cared for it for millennia. “I hope people walk away with a new outlook on Broome and how unique each Aboriginal story in each location is,” Bart says. “Revitalising Aboriginal culture is important to me. If we can meet and have a discussion it gives people a deeper understanding.”
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, 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 Nabil, 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.

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.

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
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 is no better guide to the ancient, often mysterious culture that’s 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.

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 head out on one of Walker’s bush-tucker tours. They make their way through mud, spinifex, scrub and wildflowers as they help forage for seasonal ingredients for a feast. This might include berries, wattle seeds and mud crabs; Walker might also roast a kangaroo tail in an earth oven.

During a full day tour to Millstream Chichester National Park, Walker explains about the 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.

Suggested Feature Title
- A larrkin 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
A trip with Pudakul will get you up close with Aboriginal culture... and face to face with crocodiles.

Standing on the banks of Corroboree Billabong, a row of saltwater crocodiles slowly appears, eyeballing us suspiciously from the river. It’s hard to imagine a time when you could have walked into these waters and fished or enjoyed a kayak here with friends but Graham Kenyon, local Limilngan man swears that was his childhood through and through. “This was before Australia’s ban on crocodile hunting came into force in 1971,” he remembers. “Now, we estimate there are at least 10 crocs you can’t see, for every one that you can.”

For the past 10 years, Kenyon – along with wife Lynette – has been sharing his memories, experiences and own backyard with travellers through his business Pudakul Aboriginal Cultural Tours. A wholly Aboriginal owned and operated business, Pudakul marries nature-based explorations of the Mary River Wetlands, where we are at present, with Aboriginal cultural demonstrations at his Beatrice Hill homeland, located 45 minutes’ drive from Darwin. It’s not a bad backyard when you’re in the tour operating business: the Mary River Wetlands is known to have one of the highest concentrations of saltwater crocodiles anywhere in the world, anywhere in excess of 100,000 at any given moment.

Traversing the waters of the billabong under the early morning sun, it can be difficult to keep your eyes (and thoughts) off sights of the next ‘saltie’, which can grow to upwards of four metres in length. But Kenyon does a fine job of keeping things light, both pointing out the colourful flora and fauna which dot these waters and sharing stories of what he calls the world’s original home delivery service.

“A croc will kill one animal and hang its carcass by the shore across low-hanging branches,” he explains, as we make eyes at two crocs, sunning themselves on the shore. “Then they sit back and wait for the other creatures to be lured in for a taste, before – bam! They spring into action and get a fresh meal every time.”

Back on dry land (limbs intact), it’s a short drive to Kenyon’s property for the cultural element of the tour. Led by local Aboriginal guides, we accept a small capful of water poured over our heads as a Welcome to Country – a protocol which can involve speech, dance, song or ceremony (customs vary from region to region, but each ceremony gives Custodians an opportunity to formally welcome people to their Land). Then we embark on a serious of hands-on lessons: how to find – and use – bush medicine, how to play a didgeridoo, how to make and throw a spear, and how to weave a dilly bag from the fibres of a sand palm.

The demonstrations themselves are fact-filled but perhaps more importantly, they are filled with banter, personality and easy laughter. At the tour’s completion, I am left with a sense of wanting more; it would be easy to stay a day or two here (overnight accommodation at Pudakul is already in development, as it turns out). For now though, there is damper – a simple Australian bread – served with tea, to savour, and the memories of the day to go with it.
Amid the ancient geology and mulga woodlands of Australia’s Red Centre, comes an unexpected culinary delight.

In the desert, to the east, the steep and jagged ranges that bisect Central Australia finally give up their sunset hue of deep crimson, and yield to the gathering night as stars begin to blink overhead.

Bob’s boyish grin betrays genuine excitement at this landscape, a place his Aboriginal ancestors – a language group called the Arrernte, who are connected with Country around Alice Springs – have called home for at least 35,000 years. A chef by trade and southern Arrernte by descent, Bob is connected with his father’s Country, at nearby Rainbow Valley. Bob has prepared a five-star meal of local and bush delights, all part of his popular Mbantua Dinner Tour.

Located in the spiritual heart of Australia’s outback – the aptly named Red Centre – Bob’s company, RT Tours Australia, pitches its experiences as a mixture of ‘food, country and culture’. This evening, we’ve experienced just that. First, an afternoon stroll around the historic Alice Springs Telegraph Station, an 1872 relic from early European settlement from whence messages were first conveyed along a single strand of wire all the way to Britain. We trek briefly into Simpsons Gap, a picturesque gorge cut deep into the West MacDonnell Ranges. It is a place, Bob explains, where several Aboriginal ‘Dreaming’ tracks meet. We stand and listen to the numerous birds, spy a grey kangaroo and scan nearby rocks for a glimpse of the ever-so-cute black-footed rock wallabies that frequent the tiny waterhole there, before moving on.

Bob points from his cooking fire across the acacias and mulga woodlands of the desert toward the town of Alice Springs, some 20 kilometres distant. Silhouetted on the horizon is the prominent peak of Mount Gillen, a sacred place recalled in Arrernte stories that tell of its creation in the Dreamtime.

Camp chairs and tablecloths at the edge of a sandy clearing, provide our dining room, not far from Bob’s cooking fire. It’s a surreal scene, with wattle blossoms and beefwood trees surrounding us in a geology that dips so steeply from the horizontal it seems to defy physics. And the silence is palpable, especially for guests hailing from the cities.

Tony, a 50-something cycling devotee and father of two – is one such guest. Out here, he observes, the absence of sound has been an unexpected and simple joy. More delicious still, however, is the evening’s crescendo.

In a display of some of Australia’s most exquisite native produce, Bob has served some rarely-tasted delights, including tangy bush tomatoes, hand-ground emu rissoles and mouth-watering kangaroo fillets with sweet potato fritters and saltbush. To finish, dessert is served – a steamed pudding featuring quandong (a native peach), accompanied by smokey, chocolatey, wattleseed-flavoured apricots and white chocolate.

“There’s some of the best food I have ever tasted,” says Tony, satisfied. “If I ever want to eat kangaroo fillets again, I’m going to have to come back to Alice Springs to see Bob.”

It feels true enough, and we all laugh. But our attention is swiftly diverted to Mount Gillen, to which Bob is still pointing. From the peak, rising faster than I might ever have imagined, is a fat blood moon barely one night from full. But sooner than any might hope, we must depart. And so as we bounce once again down a moonlit dirt road we farewell our spectacular glimpse of Australia’s past – one that seems not so far from its present, after all.
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. Last year, the company won Australia’s most prestigious award for Indigenous tourism. 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, Syron 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 Syron 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 bows 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.
An interactive theatrical performance is changing the way we think about Australia’s Indigenous culture.

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 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, a Spirits of the Red Sand 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 Spirits of the Red Sand 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.”
Aboriginal artist Manuel Pamkal gives a rare and personal insight into Aboriginal culture 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 people 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 1/2-hour tour, we peruse the Top Didj Art Gallery, which showcases the work of artists from the region’s Dalabon, Jawoyn and Mayali Aboriginal people, as well as pieces from Arnhem Land, the Kimberley and desert regions.

Top Didj was founded in 2009 by Alex and Petrena Ariston, who have long held a passion for Aboriginal culture 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.”
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 barbequing 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 the past 15 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 in a home where we’ll later enjoy lunch in the sun. 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 Far 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 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

WALKABOUT CULTURAL ADVENTURES, QUEENSLAND

- 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
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 culture.

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. 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 four-wheel-drive 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 550 million years. 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 culture 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.
A four-day walk along a vibrant slice of Tasmania's coast offers a rare window into Tasmania's Aboriginal culture. 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'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 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 Lord 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’s often-forgotten Aboriginal culture.

WUKALINA WALK, TASMANIA

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
An ancient pathway along the Bay of Fires
Darren ‘Capes’ Capewell loves to show the world his Country – Shark Bay on Western Australia’s magnificent coastline.

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.

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 prises 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.
STORYTELLERS
UP CLOSE AND
PERSONAL
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, to Central Australia or the red earth of the Kimberley, Aboriginal people across the country are waiting to tell their stories and share the meaning of their cultures and way of life.

Aboriginal culture dates back more than 60,000 years. It existed long before Stonehenge, predates the Pyramids and is older than the Acropolis. What’s more amazing is that this culture can be experienced today.

Who better to introduce you to the world’s oldest living continuous culture than those who live, breathe and dream it 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 people 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, whale watching, fishing, mud crabbing, hiking, taking a walking tour in a city centre or staying in a lodge on over 200 square miles of 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.

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.

Dale Tilbrook Experiences, Perth, 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 food and learn many interesting facts about the nutritional profile of bush food and medicine 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.”

Contact Information:

manager@maalinup.com.au
maalinup.com.au
Helen Martin grew up surrounded by Central Australia’s red desert, but these days she looks out upon the sparkling blues of Yolŋu sea country. Helen, an Arrernte woman from Alice Springs, runs Banubanu Beach Retreat, on Bremer Island off East Arnhem Land, together with her husband, Trevor Hosie.

In 2019, the couple completed a major upgrade of the property, which now comprises six eco-safari tents, a plunge pool and a chef-run, 30-seat restaurant. The retreat also offers day tours to visit the island from Gove, a 90-minute flight from Darwin.

It’s been a steep learning curve for Helen but one she wouldn’t change for anything. “It’s been a journey for me,” says Helen. “But I like it – this is home now – and I’m passionate about it.”

Helen is also passionate about food and cooking and is excited about incorporating the island’s native ingredients into the retreat’s new menus. She talks about how wild figs can be turned into jam, bush apples into dessert, and how salty, crunchy pigface, a succulent that grows on the beaches, makes a textural addition to salads. She plans to learn more about bush tucker from the women of the island’s Gutjaŋan community. Retreat visitors, who often say they feel like castaways from modern life, can also visit the Yolŋu sea country community for cultural experiences such as fishing, mud-crabbing and painting.

An island stay gives an insight into this rich traditional culture, as well as all that nature has to offer in this Top End paradise. Birdwatchers can look for brolgas, brahminy kites, orange-footed scrubfowl and emerald doves while anglers can fish the deep waters for coral trout, red emperor and mackerel. The island also attracts nesting leatherback, hawk’s-bill and green turtle.

“I am blessed to be living in East Arnhem Land, it is a special place that reconnects visitors to the land and sea, a place to reflect upon our journey. I love sharing this experience with visitors.”

Contact Information:
✉ enquiries@banubanu.com
 chars banubanu.com

Blake Cedar
Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel,
Cairns, Queensland

Blake has learned a lot about the various Aboriginal groups and their Dreaming stories – including the account of how the reef was formed when a hunter speared a sacred black stingray – but he also has the chance to tell guests about his own Komet cultural group, one of eight on Murray Island. “Island life is very nice – especially to be somewhere where your culture is strong, you don’t need to speak English [islanders speak Meriam Mir, a traditional language, and Torres Strait Creole], you’re relaxed and you’re living off the sea and the land,” he says. “It’s an unreal feeling – it makes you feel appreciative of what’s still left in the world.”

He might also discuss his grandfather, Eddie Mabo – the revered figure behind a landmark land rights case. The Mabo Case altered the foundation of land-rights law in Australia. “I’m royalty on my island,” says Blake. “A lot of Torres Strait Islanders are royalty on their islands because we used to have chiefs.”

Visitors are often “blown away” when he talks about his culture. Blake says it’s rewarding to educate people, including fellow Australians.

“I’ve had locals from Cairns come on the boat who can’t recognise the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags,” he says. “At first that was a little bit heartbreaking, but then I took a step back and realised I could educate them about how our Indigenous cultures are tied to the reef.”

Working as one of Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel’s Indigenous rangers is a dream job for Blake Cedar.

Blake is from Murray Island in the Torres Strait. Visitors can learn more about his island home and its unique culture when they join this recently launched day tour with a difference. Like other reef cruises, it takes visitors from Cairns to diving and snorkelling sites on the World Heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef. The twist is that this tour includes storytelling from members of four Indigenous groups – Gimuy Walubara Yidinji, Gunggandji, Mandingalbay Yidinji and Yirrganydji – whose lands stretch from Port Douglas to the Frankland Islands south of Cairns.

Contact Information:
✉ res@dreamtimedive.com
 chars dreamtimedive.com

It’s been a steep learning curve for Helen but one she wouldn’t change for anything. “It’s been a journey for me,” says Helen. “But I like it – this is home now – and I’m passionate about it.”

Helen is also passionate about food and cooking and is excited about incorporating the island’s native ingredients into the retreat’s new menus. She talks about how wild figs can be turned into jam, bush apples into dessert, and how salty, crunchy pigface, a succulent that grows on the beaches, makes a textural addition to salads. She plans to learn more about bush tucker from the women of the island’s Gutjaŋan community. Retreat visitors, who often say they feel like castaways from modern life, can also visit the Yolŋu sea country community for cultural experiences such as fishing, mud-crabbing and painting.

An island stay gives an insight into this rich traditional culture, as well as all that nature has to offer in this Top End paradise. Birdwatchers can look for brolgas, brahminy kites, orange-footed scrubfowl and emerald doves while anglers can fish the deep waters for coral trout, red emperor and mackerel. The island also attracts nesting leatherback, hawk’s-bill and green turtle.

“I am blessed to be living in East Arnhem Land, it is a special place that reconnects visitors to the land and sea, a place to reflect upon our journey. I love sharing this experience with visitors.”

Contact Information:
✉ enquiries@banubanu.com
 chars banubanu.com

Blake Cedar
Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel,
Cairns, Queensland

Blake has learned a lot about the various Aboriginal groups and their Dreaming stories – including the account of how the reef was formed when a hunter speared a sacred black stingray – but he also has the chance to tell guests about his own Komet cultural group, one of eight on Murray Island. “Island life is very nice – especially to be somewhere where your culture is strong, you don’t need to speak English [islanders speak Meriam Mir, a traditional language, and Torres Strait Creole], you’re relaxed and you’re living off the sea and the land,” he says. “It’s an unreal feeling – it makes you feel appreciative of what’s still left in the world.”

He might also discuss his grandfather, Eddie Mabo – the revered figure behind a landmark land rights case. The Mabo Case altered the foundation of land-rights law in Australia. “I’m royalty on my island,” says Blake. “A lot of Torres Strait Islanders are royalty on their islands because we used to have chiefs.”

Visitors are often “blown away” when he talks about his culture. Blake says it’s rewarding to educate people, including fellow Australians.

“I’ve had locals from Cairns come on the boat who can’t recognise the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags,” he says. “At first that was a little bit heartbreaking, but then I took a step back and realised I could educate them about how our Indigenous cultures are tied to the reef.”

Working as one of Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel’s Indigenous rangers is a dream job for Blake Cedar.

Blake is from Murray Island in the Torres Strait. Visitors can learn more about his island home and its unique culture when they join this recently launched day tour with a difference. Like other reef cruises, it takes visitors from Cairns to diving and snorkelling sites on the World Heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef. The twist is that this tour includes storytelling from members of four Indigenous groups – Gimuy Walubara Yidinji, Gunggandji, Mandingalbay Yidinji and Yirrganydji – whose lands stretch from Port Douglas to the Frankland Islands south of Cairns.

Contact Information:
✉ res@dreamtimedive.com
 chars dreamtimedive.com

It’s been a steep learning curve for Helen but one she wouldn’t change for anything. “It’s been a journey for me,” says Helen. “But I like it – this is home now – and I’m passionate about it.”

Helen is also passionate about food and cooking and is excited about incorporating the island’s native ingredients into the retreat’s new menus. She talks about how wild figs can be turned into jam, bush apples into dessert, and how salty, crunchy pigface, a succulent that grows on the beaches, makes a textural addition to salads. She plans to learn more about bush tucker from the women of the island’s Gutjaŋan community. Retreat visitors, who often say they feel like castaways from modern life, can also visit the Yolŋu sea country community for cultural experiences such as fishing, mud-crabbing and painting.

An island stay gives an insight into this rich traditional culture, as well as all that nature has to offer in this Top End paradise. Birdwatchers can look for brolgas, brahminy kites, orange-footed scrubfowl and emerald doves while anglers can fish the deep waters for coral trout, red emperor and mackerel. The island also attracts nesting leatherback, hawk’s-bill and green turtle.

“I am blessed to be living in East Arnhem Land, it is a special place that reconnects visitors to the land and sea, a place to reflect upon our journey. I love sharing this experience with visitors.”

Contact Information:
✉ enquiries@banubanu.com
 chars banubanu.com

Blake Cedar
Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel,
Cairns, Queensland

Blake has learned a lot about the various Aboriginal groups and their Dreaming stories – including the account of how the reef was formed when a hunter speared a sacred black stingray – but he also has the chance to tell guests about his own Komet cultural group, one of eight on Murray Island. “Island life is very nice – especially to be somewhere where your culture is strong, you don’t need to speak English [islanders speak Meriam Mir, a traditional language, and Torres Strait Creole], you’re relaxed and you’re living off the sea and the land,” he says. “It’s an unreal feeling – it makes you feel appreciative of what’s still left in the world.”

He might also discuss his grandfather, Eddie Mabo – the revered figure behind a landmark land rights case. The Mabo Case altered the foundation of land-rights law in Australia. “I’m royalty on my island,” says Blake. “A lot of Torres Strait Islanders are royalty on their islands because we used to have chiefs.”

Visitors are often “blown away” when he talks about his culture. Blake says it’s rewarding to educate people, including fellow Australians.

“I’ve had locals from Cairns come on the boat who can’t recognise the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags,” he says. “At first that was a little bit heartbreaking, but then I took a step back and realised I could educate them about how our Indigenous cultures are tied to the reef.”

Working as one of Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel’s Indigenous rangers is a dream job for Blake Cedar.

Blake is from Murray Island in the Torres Strait. Visitors can learn more about his island home and its unique culture when they join this recently launched day tour with a difference. Like other reef cruises, it takes visitors from Cairns to diving and snorkelling sites on the World Heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef. The twist is that this tour includes storytelling from members of four Indigenous groups – Gimuy Walubara Yidinji, Gunggandji, Mandingalbay Yidinji and Yirrganydji – whose lands stretch from Port Douglas to the Frankland Islands south of Cairns.

Contact Information:
✉ res@dreamtimedive.com
 chars dreamtimedive.com
When you meet Margret Campbell, feel free to call her Aunty Marg. In Australia, addressing an Indigenous Elder as “Aunty” or “Uncle” is a sign of respect. Aunty Marg is the founder-owner and managing director of Dreamtime Southern X, which runs tours offering fascinating insights into Sydney’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. Aunty 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, Aunty Marg’s stories will take you back to a time when this land and the harbour looked very different. Before colonisation, Indigenous people would watch out for the whales they considered a spiritual ancestor. They’d also bring fish here to cook over their campfires.

Aunty Marg is from the Dungutti and Jerrinjha nations of NSW 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 Aunty Marg will highlight how the Dreamtime still shapes the world’s oldest continuous living culture – estimated to be more than 65,000 years old – and the responsibilities of Elders in today’s society.

When you meet Margret Campbell, feel free to call her Aunty Marg. In Australia, addressing an Indigenous Elder as “Aunty” or “Uncle” is a sign of respect. Aunty Marg is the founder-owner and managing director of Dreamtime Southern X, which runs tours offering fascinating insights into Sydney’s Aboriginal Dreamtime beginnings.

“Reconciliation is not just about shaking hands and feeling welcomed into Country, reconciliation is about all peoples connecting with Aboriginal Peoples’ culture to learn how we can respect and conserve our Earth Mother that we all live and walk upon.”

Contact Information:
bookings@dreamtimesouthernx.com.au
dreamtimesouthernx.com.au

Brian “Binna” Swindley
Janbal Gallery,
Mossman, Queensland

When you sign up for an art lesson with Brian “Binna” Swindley, expect the unexpected. The only Aboriginal artist in Far 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.”

Contact Information:
info@janbalgallery.com.au
janbalgallery.com.au
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 dinosaur footprints hidden by the tides, mangroves harbouring crabs and molluscs, and pearling luggers that used to dot the horizon.

Bart, who started Narlijia Experiences in Broome in 2015, likes to take people to a spot high on the hill, where a new lookout stands. Circles have been cut through the shelter’s steel to create symbolic dot paintings on the ground. Just to the right is a spot most people miss: a clearing littered with shells that have bleached white over the thousands of years they’ve lain in the sun. This is where his people, the Yawuru, would come together to eat and watch over the bay.

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, and crushes fragrant leaves or cracks open a boab nut for a sensory experience. “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.”

Contact Information:
bart@toursbroome.com.au
toursbroome.com.au

BART PIGRAM
Narlijia Experiences,
Broome, Western Australia

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, 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.

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 one of NNCA’s experiences such as the three-day Djirringanj Dreaming Tour, which takes you on spectacular short coastal walks deep into Yuin country. 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.

Contact Information:
info@ngaranaboriginalculture.com
ngaranaboriginalculture.com

DWAYNE BANNON-HARRISON
Ngaran Ngaran Culture Awareness,
Narooma, New South Wales
LYNETTE KENYON
Pudakul Aboriginal Cultural Tours, Adelaide River Wetlands, Northern Territory

When Lynette Kenyon and her husband Graham launched Pudakul Aboriginal Cultural Tours near Darwin more than a decade ago, they had two goals. One was to be their own bosses and run a business on their traditional land; the other was to ensure that they passed their culture on to their four daughters.

“Knowing our heritage and living in today’s society, it’s like we have two toolboxes,” Lynette says. “The business lets us use both. We can keep our daughters connected to their Country while we make a living, too.”

Pudakul’s most popular tour is its two-hour Aboriginal Tour, designed to introduce guests to traditional culture. “We teach visitors about bush foods, about the way we move across the land according to the seasons, and the many ways we use the plants around us, from medicine to using the fibres to make baskets and mats,” Lynette says. And for those who just want to learn how to throw a spear, “we’re happy to help with that, too”.

Lynette and Graham are determined to keep growing the business – their most recent addition is some overnight accommodation – but what they are most proud of is the chance to show off their country. “Visitors are often amazed by how beautiful it is here in the Wetlands; they don’t know what’s in store for them until they get here.

Contact Information:
Pudakulact@bigpond.com
pudakul.com.au

BOB TAYLOR
RT Tours Australia, Alice Springs, Northern Territory

Bob Taylor runs a million-star restaurant in the desert near Alice Springs. It has no walls, but it does boast one of the world’s most extraordinary views. At night, you can admire the Milky Way and the glittering sky, thanks to the lack of light pollution in the Central Australian desert.

Bob, a Southern Arrernte man, is a professional chef who started cooking in Adelaide at 15 years old. He rattled the pans in big-city kitchens in Australia and Europe before coming “home” to the land of his ancestors – the Traditional Owners of Rainbow Valley, south of Alice Springs, where freestanding sandstone-banded cliffs and cliffs spectacularly turn from ochre to vivid orange and purple in the light at dawn and dusk.

After spending two years as a guide around Alice Springs, Bob launched his own venture – RT Tours Australia – that combines his passions for tourism and food. “Food, country and culture is my motto,” says Bob, who offers lunch and dinner tours near Alice Springs, as well as private tours further afield.

His tours typically start at the Alice Springs Telegraph Station, continue to Simpsons Gap and then to a nearby site where Bob cooks a feast over an open fire. Guests enjoy a spread that includes bread with wattleseed dukkah, an outback hotpot, sweet potato fritters with saltbush, lemon myrtle vegetables, and a dessert featuring quandong and coconut.

“I have Australian people coming on this tour who want to learn more [about Aboriginal culture] and that’s bloody wonderful,” says Bob. “I talk about Aboriginal culture and Australian culture combined. It’s walking across country and just taking a look at it in a different way.”

Contact Information:
bob@rttoursaustralia.com.au
rttoursaustralia.com.au
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, the capital of the Northern Territory, to deliver him, except that Kevin arrived early, half-way 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 began tour guiding after graduation. Seven years ago, he decided the scenery in Darwin 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 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.

“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.”

Contact Information:
salesnt@sealink.com.au
sealinknt.com.au
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. 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.

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 Ecolodge 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.

Contact Information:
-sales@topdidj.com
-topdidj.com
Juan@walkaboutadventures.com.au
walkaboutadventures.com.au
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, 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, the didgeridoo is played only by men 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).”

Contact Information:

info@wulagura.com.au
wulagura.com.au

Darren “Capes” Capewell Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures, Monkey Mia, Western Australia

Wukalina Walk, Tasmania

+ 183

DAE MEDIA KIT

DAE MEDIA KIT

DAE MEDIA KIT

DAE MEDIA KIT
JOURNEYS...
IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THE ANCIENT ON YOUR JOURNEY THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA
Aboriginal experiences offer the kind of life-changing, immersive experiences ... which 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 culture – but don’t always know how.

Here is an easy guide to immersing yourself in the ancient with a selection of experiences throughout Australia via region.

**New South Wales**
- Sydney and surrounds
- Northern Territory

**Northern Territory**
- Central Australia
- Central Australia Road Trip
- Top End Australia

**Queensland**
- Far North Queensland

**Victoria**
- Melbourne and surrounds

**Western Australia**
- Perth and the Margaret River region
- Broome and Cape Leveque region

**Sydney and Surrounds, New South Wales**

Explore Sydney and its surrounds with the Traditional Custodians of the land

Sydney may be famous for its sparkling harbour, iconic buildings and beautiful beaches, but it’s also home to a vibrant Aboriginal culture that can shed a fascinating new light on the Harbour City and surrounds.

The [Australian Museum](https://www.ozmuseum.com.au/) – Australia’s first museum – is a great place to discover Australia’s First Peoples. One of the big drawcards here is its First Nations collection. Through film, voice recordings and artworks, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people tell their stories in their own voices, alongside objects from the museum’s 40,000-strong collection, from spear tips to carved emu eggs. On a one-hour tour of the galleries – the 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 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 past and present, spirituality and connections to land and water, in the shadows of both the Sydney Opera House and Harbour Bridge. Dreamtime Southern X founder Margret Campbell is passionate about sharing her heritage and encouraging everyone to walk on Country with respect.

Aboriginal owned and operated, [Ngaran Ngaran Culture Awareness](https://www.ngaranngaran.com.au/) takes people on deep cultural immersions into Yuin country, a five-hour drive south of Sydney in Narooma. A two-day, two-night Gulaga Creation Tour, led by the business’ founder, Dwayne “Naja” Bannon-Harrison, offers the chance to see and take part in ceremonies involving dance and yidaki (didgeridoo), explore sacred Gulaga Mountain, meet the land’s Traditional Custodians, hear Creation (or Dreamtime) stories, enjoy local foods including seafood and kangaroo, and take part in yarning (talking) circles. An alternative, the Djirringanj Dreaming Tour, follows the nearby Djirringanj Dreaming trail.

What could be more fun than quad biking and sandboarding on the highest coastal sand dunes in the Southern Hemisphere? Answer: quad biking, sandboarding and learning about Worimi Aboriginal culture at the same time. [Sand Dune Adventures](https://www.sandduneadventures.com.au/) operated by the Worimi people, will take you on a 90-minute adventure that’s one-third quad biking, one-third sandboarding and one-third Aboriginal culture: visiting midden sites, digging for fresh water on the beach and discovering bush foods and resources. The Worimi dunes, rising up to 40 metres (130 feet) above sea level, are at Port Stephens, about a two-hour drive north of Sydney.

The [Royal Botanic Garden](https://www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/) 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; embark on an Aboriginal Heritage Tour with a guide to learn about plant uses and traditional culture; and join an Aboriginal Bush Food Experience, in which you’ll gather seasonal bush food and taste just how good it can be and how to incorporate it into modern recipes.
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.

Food an abiding interest? RT Tours Australia combines ancient culture with culinary delights, delivered against the backdrop of the West MacDonnell Ranges near Alice Springs. The company is owned and operated by Bob (Penuka) Taylor, a descendant of the Arrernte people, who draws on his experience as a globe-trotting chef as well as his family’s heritage to host dining experiences with an Aboriginal twist.

The Mbantua Gourmet Bush Lunch Tour, for instance, takes you on a leisurely walk to a site that is historically significant to the Arrernte people, followed by a bush tucker demonstration and a gourmet barbecue in a bush setting. Similarly, the Mbantua Starlight and Bush Dinner Tour includes an evening stroll and a cooking demonstration. Afterwards, view the sun setting behind the West MacDonnell Ranges, creating a landscape of vibrant and changing rock colours. Then indulge in a three-course dinner, cooked over an open fire and featuring native bush ingredients, while listening to Dreamtime stories about the night sky. Sample flavours might include kangaroo fillets and yam fritters with stir-fried vegetables, perhaps followed by a dessert of white chocolate, apricot and wattle steamed pudding. You may also sample local fruit, such as bush banana or quandong, a native Australian peach.

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, 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.

Deeper into the desert, SEIT can also take you to what is, arguably, one of the region’s most significant ancient art sites, Cave Hill. Hosted by Traditional Owners, the Anangu people, the full-day Cave Hill Tour takes you into the spectacular Cave, painted with important symbols that illustrate the Dreamtime story of the Seven Sisters Tjukurpa. Beyond rock art, the tour also incorporates lessons in traditional food gathering, followed by a choice of 4WD or helicopter transfers.

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 Kinarra 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.
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.

Kick start 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 poached eggs with chilli and za’atar).

Head west for a few kilometres and burn off urban delights, including Aboriginal art galleries and a burgeoning foodie scene.

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 Karke 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 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 to travel to the Talinguru Nyakunytjaku 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 Café 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.

In the late afternoon, hand over the reins to an Aboriginal guide, as you learn about 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.
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 culture.

Tropical island getaway, anyone? How about a tropical island getaway in a remote corner of Australia – with private beach, fine dining and immersion with local Aboriginal culture?

At Aboriginal-owned Banubanu Beach Resort, that’s exactly what you get. Located five kilometres (three miles) from the town of Nhulunbuy, an 80-minute flight from Darwin in the Northern Territory, the resort has capacity for just 12 guests. Be one of the very few privileged enough to stay here and sleep in beachfront bungalows, immersing yourself in the rhythm of life on a far-flung tropical island. Activities include fishing charters, watching birds and nesting turtles, and cultural arts and crafts with the island’s resident Yolŋu community.

Back on the Australian mainland (but still in the Northern Territory’s 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) in West Arnhem Land, a vast wilderness that’s home to a rich Aboriginal culture 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, 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 people 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 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 been illuminating 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.

In a little corner of tropical coastal paradise known as North-East Arnhem Land, the Yolŋu people generously share their country and culture through Lirriwi Tourism. Women and girls can join the Gay’Wu, or Dilly Bag (a traditional woven bag) Tour for Women, often described as a life-changing insight into female Yolŋu culture, from oyster gathering to crying ceremonies. All genders and ages are welcome on Yolŋu Dhukarr, or Crossing Country, in which visitors stay in the Yolŋu homelands, take part in spearfishing and storytelling – and make friends for life in what is a true cultural immersion.

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, it is deeply significant for the Jawoyn people, who own and operate Nitmiluk Tours. Head off on a self-guided canoe tour, 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.

Just a 45-minute drive from Darwin, in the Adelaide River wetlands, Pudakul Aboriginal Cultural Tours has a two-hour experience in which you learn basket weaving and dilly-bag making, throw a spear or blow a didgeridoo, play the clapsticks and discover bush food. “Spend two hours with us and you can learn so much about what it is to be Aboriginal,” says owner Lynette Kenyon. It’s followed by tea and damper (simple “bush” bread) and the sharing of stories and a good laugh. You can also stay in a cabin, then the next day join a cultural tour of Kakadu or Litchfield national parks.

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. 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. 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.
Immerse yourself in Indigenous culture 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 culture, as well as this region’s creation stories and its spiritual links to the landscape. From Darwin and the Tiwi Islands, to the Mary River, Kakadu and the Katherine area, this road trip will see you mix with cultural custodians, colour Aboriginal art, dramatic stone country, thunderous waterfalls, and wetlands awash with wildlife and wonder.

**Day 1: Darwin and the Tiwi Islands**

Wake up in the seaside town of Darwin and enjoy a tropical breakfast of soft-shell crab with chilli scramble on the deck of Saltwater Café at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory. The platform here looks out upon 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, head 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 Patakiyiljali Museum and a stunning nearby church, St Therese’s. Make sure to marvel at the Aboriginal artworks lining 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.

**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. Fifty minutes into your journey, turn into a thicket of bushland at long-neck turtle Dreaming country, Beatrice Hill, for a two-hour cultural immersion session with former park ranger and Aboriginal Elder Graham Kenyon and his family.

Here, on the banks of the Adelaide River floodplains, Budakul Aboriginal Cultural Tours operates from the verdant land encircling Kenyon’s home. Expect a Welcome to Country ceremony – complete with a small spray of water to the top of your head – and a knowledge-sharing talk that covers local Aboriginal approaches to medicine, cooking, and culture. Spear-throwing and basket-weaving sessions follow, as does a soul-warming homemade morning tea, bush tucker-style.

Back on the highway, make two further stops, firstly at Fogg Dam Conservation Area, which teems with freshwater crocodiles (shy, and generally no threat to humans), water birds and lotus flowers. Your second stop is at Spectacular Jumping Crocodile Cruises, where huge saltwater crocodiles – the more aggressive and highly dangerous kind – leap from the river to snap at buffalo meat while whistling kites drift overhead. Don’t worry – you’re kept at a safe distance within the boat.

Keeping with the crocodile theme, your evening’s accommodation at Kakadu National Park’s gateway town, Jabiru, resembles this same reptile. 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 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 Baruwei 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-spread 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 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 – 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, and again greet the city lights.
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 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 cafe.

The Magnificent Gallery is well named. About 450 images adorn the underside of a rock shelter on the Cape York Peninsula, a 5.5-hour drive north-west of Cairns. Despite being up to 20,000 years old, they are incredibly well preserved thanks to their sheltered location. And despite the fact that the Magnificent Gallery is part of the world-renowned Quinkan rock art collection, the only way to see it is with Kuku Yalanji man Johnny Murison. “These are my ancestors,” says Johnny. “This was my family camp.” Owner-operator of Jarramali Rock Art Tours Johnny takes guests on two-day, one-night 4WD adventures ex Cairns and Port Douglas that are unforgettable cultural experiences, and include a stay in an outback campsite.

It started back in 1987 with Aboriginal man Jimmy Edwards throwing boomerangs with his dog Sammi 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, which has been performed for almost 3 million visitors to the Rainforestation Nature Park, at Kuranda, 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.

You could go to Tjapukai just to watch, but it’s a lot more fun if you join in: whether taking part in a dance drawn from the local Djabugay people’s corroborees (or gatherings) or by trying your hand at basket weaving and throwing a boomerang. Far North Queensland tourism icon Tjapukai describes itself as “Where Australia begins”. Offering day and night-time experiences that include sumptuous meals, this cultural centre, a 20-minute drive from Cairns, invites guests to discover Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures through performance, guided walks, demonstrations, hands-on activities and inspiring exhibitions.

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.
Explore urban Aboriginal experiences in Perth and surrounds

In Perth, 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 Aboriginal 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.

Walter McGuire at Go Cultural Aboriginal Tours & Experiences strips back the city surface like he’s peeling an orange. As he walks visitors through the heart of Western Australia’s capital city, Perth, he paints word pictures of the natural scene covered over by modern development, revealing the practices and traditions of his Whadjuk people. The Elder explains the strength of the spiritual connection Aboriginal people have with the land, and why it continues to resonate, even among office blocks. He talks about the hunting and gathering of native foods from wetlands that once made up the city centre, and shares Dreamtime stories that connect to Perth’s meandering Swan River – a life force both in the past, and now. It will change the way you look at cities from here on.

Nearby, 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 peppercorn, 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 people; the nutritional value of many bush foods, particularly the quandong and Kakadu plum, is quite astonishing. These experiences take place at different locations around Perth including Maalinup Aboriginal Gallery and Mandoon Estate winery in the Swan Valley, or Dale can meet guests at their location of choice in Perth.

South-west of Perth, the lauded Margaret River wine region also has Aboriginal energy pulsing through it. Josh Whiteland of Koomaal 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, he guides walks along the breathtaking Cape to Cape track or takes people fishing for salmon, herring and bream inside stunning Meelup Regional Park. 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 exceptional wine.

Kooljaman, smelling, tasting and eying off native food sources. He also runs 4WD trips, including one at night that proves darkness doesn’t mean there’s nothing to see. Corals shine their colours through the water, and plenty of eating fish become visible.

Aboriginal rangers also visit Kooljaman once a week to talk about sustainably managing the land, using a combination of traditional and modern ways. Kooljaman’s history is detailed by its chairperson, Rosanna Angus, in another on-site talk, delving into how her people lived in this remote, coastal landscape for generations. Other tours include a cruise of the Buccaneer Archipelago while hearing about Wandjina Creation spirits, and a coastal 4WD journey that teaches you how to find fresh water, build a shelter and survive in the bush, just as the Bardi Jawi have for thousands of years.

About 2.5 hours’ drive north of Broome on a corrugated dirt road that’s set to be fully sealed by 2021 (or take a short, scenic flight) sits Kooljaman wilderness camp. Operated by the Bardi Jawi people, it crowns Cape Leveque, a peninsula edged with dramatic red cliffs and pale sand that’s lapped by some of the world’s largest tropical tides. As well as offering safari tents, basic cabins and campsites, it acts as a base for several Aboriginal experiences.

Bardi man Brian Lee is regarded as one of the Kimberley’s most memorable characters. On his 4WD Tagalong (convoy) tour, he stops at a creek to teach traditional spearfishing and crabbing skills while sharing the area’s colonial and Aboriginal history. The catch is later cooked on the fire, in keeping with his people’s practices.

Another local, known simply as Bundy, engages the senses on a Bush Tucker Walk around Kooljaman, smelling, tasting and eyeing off native food sources. He also runs 4WD trips, including one at night that proves darkness doesn’t mean there’s nothing to see. Corals shine their colours through the water, and plenty of eating fish become visible.

Aboriginal rangers also visit Kooljaman once a week to talk about sustainably managing the land, using a combination of traditional and modern ways. Kooljaman’s history is detailed by its chairperson, Rosanna Angus, in another on-site talk, delving into how her people lived in this remote, coastal landscape for generations. Other tours include a cruise of the Buccaneer Archipelago while hearing about Wandjina Creation spirits, and a coastal 4WD journey that teaches you how to find fresh water, build a shelter and survive in the bush, just as the Bardi Jawi have for thousands of years.

Broome & Cape Leveque region, Northern Territory

Discover dinosaur footprints and Dreamtime stories on Australia’s north-west coast

Broome and Cape Leveque, 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’ wishlists. 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, Yawuru man Bart Pigram takes people walking through the streets with Naptija Experiences Broome, sharing tales of its Aboriginal and pearling past. From opium dens to gambling houses and slave labour, some stories are rollicking, others are shocking, and all of them are revealing. Bart points out the site where his ‘saltwater’ ancestors ate shellfish for thousands of years, well before the pearl boom of the early 1900s.

Bart also runs a walking tour to some of the town’s 130-million-year-old dinosaur footprints, while sharing the Dreamtime stories connected to the ancient tracks. Along the way, he points out plants and animals, and talks about their traditional uses. Broome’s mangroves – and the creatures that live within them – provide the subject matter for another tour he runs.

4WD Tagalong (convoy) tour, he stops at a creek to teach traditional spearfishing and crabbing skills while sharing the area’s colonial and Aboriginal history. The catch is later cooked on the fire, in keeping with his people’s practices.

Another local, known simply as Bundy, engages the senses on a Bush Tucker Walk around Kooljaman, smelling, tasting and eyeing off native food sources. He also runs 4WD trips, including one at night that proves darkness doesn’t mean there’s nothing to see. Corals shine their colours through the water, and plenty of eating fish become visible.

Aboriginal rangers also visit Kooljaman once a week to talk about sustainably managing the land, using a combination of traditional and modern ways. Kooljaman’s history is detailed by its chairperson, Rosanna Angus, in another on-site talk, delving into how her people lived in this remote, coastal landscape for generations. Other tours include a cruise of the Buccaneer Archipelago while hearing about Wandjina Creation spirits, and a coastal 4WD journey that teaches you how to find fresh water, build a shelter and survive in the bush, just as the Bardi Jawi have for thousands of years.
How to immerse yourself in the stories of south-east Australia’s First Peoples in and around Melbourne.

In a city as cosmopolitan and industrialised as Melbourne, it may surprise you to learn that you don’t have to travel far to experience Aboriginal culture. Woven into the multicultural fabric of the city are insightful tours, workshops and exhibitions, promising a taste of Aboriginal history and culture in a contemporary setting.

In bustling Federation Square, the Koorie Heritage Trust is dedicated to promoting and supporting the living culture 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, and sites of cultural significance along the way.

The Melbourne Museum in nearby Carlton is home to the Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre, a permanent exhibition highlighting the vibrant culture of Victoria’s First Peoples through art and performance. The centre comprises three main spaces: Birrarung Gallery, featuring a rotation of exhibitions by contemporary Aboriginal artists; Milarri Garden, where you can discover native Australian plants that were key to traditional cultures across Victoria; and a performance space known as Kalaya.

In the green oasis that is the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria – 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. Beginning with a traditional smoking ceremony, you will 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 – 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 culture.

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 90-minute tour takes you through some of the reserve’s most beautiful scenery, while your guide provides insight into native plants that Aboriginal people used for food and medicine. WG Enterprises also hosts bush barbecues, where you can taste-test a fusion of traditional bush tucker and modern Australian cuisine. Gum-leaf ice-cream or kangaroo lasagne, anyone?

Or, for a bushwalk with a twilight twist, take the two-hour dusk tour, experiencing the sunset-silhouetted crater of Tower Hill, as well as an introduction to Australia’s nocturnal wildlife.
A great selection of images is available to download free from Tourism Australia’s image gallery. You will need a username and password to search and access the images. To register for the first time, click on the Register link on the top right-hand corner of the screen.

Once you have your username and password, you can log in via the Log in link as shown here.

How to Search
To search for Discover Aboriginal Experiences images, click in the Search box on the home page and a drop-down menu will appear.

Use the right-hand scroll bar to scroll down to Signature Experiences – Discover Aboriginal Experiences. Once you click on it, it will expand to show each operator in the Collective. You can access the images by clicking on the relevant operator name.

Alternatively, scroll down the page to the Featured Albums. Here you will find the Signature Experiences – Discover Aboriginal Experiences images.
Selecting Images
Once you have chosen the image(s) you want, click on the checkout icon (shopping basket) icon. This will add the image to your basket.

Completing your order
When you are ready to complete your order, click on the shopping basket icon in the top right-hand corner.

Order your images by clicking OK

Enter the project details and submit your order.

You will receive an email when your images are ready for download. Click on your order number.

Download your images by clicking on the Download TIFF / JPEG button.
Teambox
Teambox allows you to create a light box of images and share them with your colleagues.

Tourism Australia can send you a teambox consisting of two images for each Aboriginal operator in the Discover Aboriginal Experiences collective.

To request this teambox, please email lknowles@tourism.australia.com or nmitchell@tourism.australia.com

HOW TO ACCESS TOURISM AUSTRALIA’S IMAGE GALLERY
WWW.VIDEO.AUSTRALIA.COM

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.

You will need a username and password to search and access the videos.

To register for the first time, click on the Register link on the top right-hand corner of the screen.

Once you have your username and password, you can log in via the Log in link as shown here.
How to Search
To search for Discover Aboriginal Experiences videos, click in the Search box on the home page and a drop-down menu will appear.

Use the right-hand scroll bar to scroll down to Signature Experiences of Australia – Discover Aboriginal Experiences.

Once you click on it, it will expand to show all the available videos.

Alternatively, scroll down the page to the Featured Albums.
Here you will find the Discover Aboriginal Experiences Individual member product videos and collective show real videos.

The 30s, 60s, 90s and 180s videos can be searched by their numbers:
101822 – Discover Aboriginal Experiences 90s
101823 – Discover Aboriginal Experiences 1802
101824 – Discover Aboriginal Experiences 30s

Teambox
Teambox allows you to share videos with your colleagues.
Tourism Australia can send you a teambox consisting of two member videos for each Aboriginal operator in the Discover Aboriginal Experiences collective.
To request this teambox, please email kknowles@tourism.australia.com.

COLLATERAL
A range of resources is available to help you plan your itineraries. These include a Brochure, Media Kit, Experiences Portfolio (full summary of all the experiences) and Flyer (available in English, German & Mandarin).

These items can be downloaded from www.tourism.australia.com/aboriginal

Alternatively, scroll down the page to the Featured Albums.
Here you will find the Discover Aboriginal Experiences Individual member product videos and collective show real videos.

The 30s, 60s, 90s and 180s videos can be searched by their numbers:
101822 – Discover Aboriginal Experiences 90s
101823 – Discover Aboriginal Experiences 1802
101824 – Discover Aboriginal Experiences 30s

Teambox
Teambox allows you to share videos with your colleagues.
Tourism Australia can send you a teambox consisting of two member videos for each Aboriginal operator in the Discover Aboriginal Experiences collective.
To request this teambox, please email kknowles@tourism.australia.com.

COLLATERAL
A range of resources is available to help you plan your itineraries. These include a Brochure, Media Kit, Experiences Portfolio (full summary of all the experiences) and Flyer (available in English, German & Mandarin).

These items can be downloaded from www.tourism.australia.com/aboriginal
Lirrwi Tourism,
Northern Territory

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
Nicole Mitchell
Tourism Australia
+61 (0) 410 499 525
nmitchell@tourism.australia.com
australia.com/aboriginal
images.australia.com
video.australia.com
A flagship suite of extraordinary Aboriginal Australian experiences, showcasing the world’s oldest living culture through the cornerstones of cultural insight, authenticity and meaningful connection.