
Destination Top End

Recent Updates (March 2010)

I had not previously visited the Crocodylus Park or the Crocosaurus Cave in Darwin. (I have seen enough crocodiles in parks and in the wild over the last 15 years.) However, on this trip I visited both to be able to tell you more about them.

I think both are great, both have huge crocodiles, both have lots of other animals as well, and at both you can learn a lot about our crocodiles. Personally I much prefer the Crocodylus Park, a large outdoor park, to the multi story concrete building of the Cove.

Here is what the guide says about them:

P. 35: The **Crocosaurus Cove** is home to some of the largest saltwater crocodiles on display in the world. (Some of these fellows used to live on the Darwin Crocodile Farm, which is now closed to tourists.)

(Where in the past the ultimate thrill was to walk past the pools and enclosures and maybe watch a feeding, the Crocosaurus Cave takes things up a few notches. Don't forget your bathers, because here you can swim with the younger crocs, or rather have a dip in a small pool next to them, separated only through a glass wall. The kids also get a chance to feed the crocs they've been swimming next to, by dangling food with fishing rods from a raised platform.

And if you book it early enough, you may even get a chance to be lowered inside the pools of the big fellows, safely inside the "Cage of Death". (To be honest, none of this stuff is my cup of tea, but as you can imagine, it's insanely popular.) Also on site is the largest display of Australian reptiles in the world (during the reptile show you may get to feed a lizard or hold a python), a two storey fresh water aquarium and a turtle sanctuary.

Crocosaurus Cove, 8981 7522, www.croccove.com.au

On the corner of Mitchell St./Peel St. Open daily 8am – 8pm, last entry at 6 pm. Entry \$28.00, children \$16.00. Cage of Death \$120 for one or \$160 for two. Several presentations and feedings are on over the day, the croc feeding is at 11.30am and 2.30pm.

P. 37: The **Crocodylus Park** (on McMillans Rd, Berrimah, just after the Vanderlin Drive roundabout) is a zoo and research facility which houses not only crocodiles but also big cats, monkeys and more. I am not sure what the eclectic mix of other animals is doing there, but I am sure that you will learn a lot about crocodiles if you visit this park.

Prof. Grahame Webb, the driving force behind the park started researching saltwater crocodiles in 1973. He founded the Wildlife Management International Pty Limited (WMI) in 1977, which soon established itself as the world leader in crocodile conservation, research and management. Of all crocodile researches in the world, these guys are the probably the most experienced and knowledgeable. And in the comprehensive crocodile museum at the park you have access to the results of their over three decades of research on saltwater crocodiles.

The research is ongoing, but to help with the funding the scope of the Crocodylus Park is much broader. The park also breeds crocodiles for their skins and meat and it is a tourist attraction. Feeding tours happen several times a day. You can watch the younger crocodiles launch themselves out of the ponds for their feeds and you get to feed the

really big monster crocodiles yourself! If you want to, that is. Everyone also gets a chance to hold a young saltie and take pictures with it.

Crocodylus Park, 815 McMillans Rd, 8922 4500, www.crocodyluspark.com
Guided feeding tours at 10am, 12pm, 2pm, 3pm. Entry adults \$30, children \$15, family of four \$80.

(Sorry to everyone who downloaded the guide between the 3rd and the 5th of March. I had a bad typo in the prices.)

P. 58: The **Dam Wall Walk at Fogg Dam** has been closed to walkers. A big crocodile that has been known to live in the dam for years has taken to sitting on the dam wall occasionally and the authorities are a bit concerned. You can still drive across and stop at the viewing platforms on the way.

P. 79/80: This has been added/updated in the section about Nourlangie:

(...) There is another large art gallery on the opposite side of the rock, called Nanguluwur. You can access it by driving 5 km back towards the highway and taking the turn off to the Gubara Pools (more below). Look for the car park for the art site on your right after about one kilometre. The walk to the art site is 2 km long.

A walk that stands out amongst the dozens that are available in Kakadu National Park is the **Barrk Bushwalk**, often rated as the best walk in Kakadu. I agree, it is by far the best of the marked walks. As ultra busy as the Nourlangie area gets, chances are that you will have this walk more or less to yourself. The reason is obvious: the distance is 12 km and the terrain is not easy. There just aren't too many serious hikers amongst the over 200,000 tourists that descend on Kakadu each year.

The very diverse, circular walk branches off from the main path at Nourlangie Rock (near the lookout) and it takes you all around the rock, up a steep gully, across the plateau, through monsoon forests, flood plains, woodlands, stone country and sandstone outcrops. It is great any time of the year, but as so many places it is at its best in the wet season or just after. Luckily it is one of the few places that you can usually access during the wet season.

The steepest and most difficult section (with some climbing/scrambling thrown in) is right at the start, so you get that bit out of the way early in the morning while it's still cool. I promise the climb is worth it!

If you feel that the whole 12 km would be too much for you, just walk up a bit, as far as you want to, and turn around. The best parts of the walk are the climb up the gully in the beginning and crossing the top of the plateau. I also like the second half (very easy walking around the base of the rock) but imagine that during the dry season it might be a bit open and boring.

The ideal way to do only part of this walk would be with two cars, leaving one at the main Nourlangie car park, and another on the other side of the rock, in the car park for the Nanguluwur art site. The art site is situated half way along the Barrk walk and a track branches off the main track.

The 2 km hike allows people to walk in to view the art gallery on that side of the rock, and allows you to walk out to that car park (on the road to Gubara Pools, see below). Be aware that cutting the distance in half does not cut the required time in half. The second part of the walk is a lot easier and last time only took us 70 minutes.

Do pick up an information leaflet from the Bowali Visitor Centre before you go, allow 4 to 8 hours (it takes me four without pushing it, the official recommendation is 6 to 8 hrs) and make sure you have a hat, sunscreen and enough water. (...)

P. 129: Pine Creek has a brand new resort. I also added a listing for a low cost option for campers:

Pine Creek Railway Resort, 1 Railway Tce, 8976 1001 or 0428 100 964,
www.pinecreekrailwayresort.com.au

The brand new resort offers self contained studios and units for up to four people. The place looks spacious and neat, with good sized covered verandas and a pool. There also seemed to be more vegetation than the photos on their website make you believe.

Pussycat Flats, Kakadu Hwy, 8976 1355 (after 4pm)

The very affordable campground (\$6.50 pp) at the local turf club. Has a 9 hole golf course. Not directly in Pine Creek but on the other side of the Stuart Highway. Turn onto the Kakadu Highway and the Turf Club is on your left.

P. 136: The **Railway Station Museum** in Katherine is no more (the old building is still there and you can still walk over to and across the old Railway Bridge) and the **Jurassic Cycad Gardens** should re-open in April (Joe is adding a restaurant).

P. 164: (Timber Creek) For good views over the escarpments and the town drive up to the **lookout**. The turn off is about 6 km west of town. The scenic 4.5 km drive winds up the hill and passes several picnic sites and view points before ending in a loop.

No matter what the time of the year, the secret rockhole at Kakadu never disappoints!



And that's it for this round.

Happy travels!
Birgit