Central Australia

02 - 12 August 2017 (10 nights)

Highlights

• Learn the natural & geological history at the Museum of Central Australia
• Walk through desert rivers, sand country and woodland habitats in Alice Springs Desert Park
• Visit the Ochre Pits in West MacDonnell National Park & explore waterholes at Simpsons Gap, Ellery Creek Big Hole & Ormiston Gorge
• Walk sections of the Larapinta Trail including Finke River, Redbank Gorge & Mt Sonder
• Explore Standley Chasm, Roma Gorge, Glen Helen Gorge, Tnorala (Gosse Bluff), Palm Valley, Hermannsburg, Emily Gap, Trephina Gorge & N’Dhala Gorge
• View Aboriginal rock art & participate in cultural conversations

Journey with us to the ancient red heart, walk parts of the famous Larapinta Trail and explore some of the lesser known parts of Central Australia. Alice Springs is the perfect starting point introducing us to the pioneering and Aboriginal history of this beautiful area. This unique town is shaped by its mythical landscapes, shifting hues, Aboriginal culture and tough pioneering past. The surrounding area is a geological wonder of spectacular gorges, chasms and prominent waterholes that support diverse native fauna and flora. The mesmerising MacDonnell Ranges stretch east and west from the town centre and we discover ochre-red gorges, pastel-hued hills and ghostly white gum trees. Our second base is Glen Helen and we stop en route for walks at Standley Chasm, Ellery Big Hole and the Ochre Pits, still used by local Aranda people. During our stay at Glen Helen we will walk parts of Ormiston Gorge, Finke River (said to be one of the world’s oldest rivers), Roma Gorge, Glen Helen Gorge, Mt Sonder and Redbank Gorge. On our return to Alice Springs, we take in the view at Gosse Bluff and enjoy walks at Palm Valley and Hermannsburg. We then spend time in the east MacDonnell Ranges based at the Ross River Homestead and enjoy walks at Emily Gap, Trephina Gorge and Airltunga historical reserve (officially Central Australia’s first town). You may like to extend your time in the centre with a trip to Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park.

DETAILS

Price: Twinshare / person (ex Alice Springs)
Early Bird: A$4,750 until 4/04/2017
Regular: A$5,050
Single Supplement: A$730

Note: For single people who prefer to share, we will try to find a suitable roommate, but if this is not possible the sole-use surcharge will apply.

Minimum Group size: 6 guests
Special Interest: Wildlife, Culture, History, Botanical, Art

For bookings call 1300 197 201 | visit www.parktours.com.au | or email info@parktours.com.au
Central Australia - Desert Dreaming

02 - 12 August 2017 (10 nights)

WALK RATING

Moderate: 2 - 10km per walking day with some shorter or challenging options (dry heat). Age is not necessarily as important as your fitness and recent walking experience, and anyone of reasonable fitness should be able to join this tour. We reserve the right to be flexible with the itinerary to allow for unforeseen circumstances including weather conditions and group fitness.

FAQ’S

How & when to book?
Our biggest message to you is BOOK EARLY!! Many tours book out very quickly so the moral of the story is the early bird catches the worm! To qualify for any of the early bird prices, you simply need to send a completed booking form and deposit of $400 per person per tour, by the early bird dates listed at the front of the tour itinerary. We offer $500 discount per person if you book by the Advanced Early Bird date and $300 discount per person if you book by the Early Bird date. If your deposit arrives after any of the early bird dates, the tour balance will be at the regular price. To place your booking, simply visit www.parktours.com.au to pay your deposit and book online, or complete a Tour Booking Form, and post / fax / email it to us with your deposit. Once you have booked on a tour, we will stay in contact with regular mailings (see below).

What information and contact can I expect?
When you send your initial deposit, we will contact you to confirm your booking. Once the tour has been confirmed to depart, a comprehensive information pack will be sent to you, including a Tour A-Z, suggested packing list, medical questionnaire, balance of payment invoice, and pre / post accommodation options. We can assist you with flight arrangements but please don’t book flights until our office contacts you to confirm that your tour has been confirmed to depart. The final mailing is sent out approximately three weeks before departure and includes final tour documents, address list for family and friends, meeting points, and any final travel information.

What is the group size?
We specialise in small group travel with an average group size of around 10-20 guests. Please see the front page for details on the minimum group size for this particular tour. All tours need a minimum number of passengers to operate at the price listed in the itinerary. If the minimum number is not reached, a tour may still operate with a surcharge.

How fit do I have to be?
When you are assessing your ability and agility to participate, age is not necessarily as important as your fitness and recent walking experience. Please read the tour walk rating and the day by day walking descriptions in the itinerary to determine if the tour is suitable for your fitness. If you have any queries, we are happy to put you in touch with either the tour coordinator or tour leader to discuss your fitness in more detail.

What gear and equipment do I need to take?
Because we focus on half and full day walks, returning to our accommodation in the afternoon, you don’t need to carry any more than a daypack with rain wear, sunscreen, drinking water, camera and lunch. A few tours include an overnight hike where you will need to carry personal gear for the journey. We recommend hiking boots on most of our tours as they offer good ankle support and grip. A detailed packing list is included with your tour’s information pack.

INCLUSIONS

- 10 nights twin share accommodation - hotel and lodge accommodation (some basic accommodation due to remote location)
- Meals include - 10 Breakfasts, 6 Lunches, 8 Dinners
- Vehicle transfers are by 4WD troop carrier (low comfort level – but necessary to access remote areas on this tour)
- National park and museum entry fees
- Professional tour leader assisted when required by local tour guides
- Basic group tips where required
- Pre-departure material including background & personalised A-Z tour information and destination tour companion

EXCLUSIONS

- Airfares & taxes to start / from end of tour
- Airport transfers
- Passport & visa expenses
- Heavy or excess baggage
- Travel insurance
- Personal expenses e.g. drinks (water, alcohol, tea & coffee), laundry, telephone, or optional tours / excursions

TOUR LEADER

Ronny Hickel is the creator of the Central Australia – Desert Dreamin walking holiday which winds its way through the sacred red heart of Australia. Ronny has extensive experience leading walking trips, particularly on the Larapinta Trail and is also a specialist guide on yoga and meditation walks. Trained as an outdoor recreation guide and psychotherapist involved in adventure base youth work, his love for the outdoors has kept him in this field. Over the years he has furthered his naturalist knowledge. His familiarity of the history and connections with the people of the region, combine to make this a unique tour of this vastly beautiful area of Australia, known by many but accessible to the few who dare to venture there.
Day 1 – Wed 02 Aug | Alice Springs
On arrival into Alice Springs, please make your way to our centrally located group hotel. We meet our tour leader Ronny Hickel in the hotel lobby at 6.30pm for introductions and a tour briefing followed by a welcome dinner.
Meals: D
Walks: none

Day 2 – Thu 03 Aug | Cultural Museum / Alice Springs Desert Park / Simpsons Gap
After breakfast, our first stop is the cultural museum located at the Alice Springs Cultural precinct. We then make our way to Alice Springs Desert Park which unravels ancient cultural stories and features the flora and fauna of three major desert habitats - Sand Country, Woodland and Desert Rivers. In the afternoon, we travel to Simpsons Gap, one of the most prominent landforms in the West MacDonnell Ranges. Simpsons Gap is renowned as a place to often see Black-footed Rock-wallabies along the short walking track. The Simpsons Gap area incorporates large areas of Mulga and is a major stronghold for over 40 rare and relic plants. The area is an important spiritual site to the Aranda Aboriginal people, where several dreaming trails and stories cross. Dinner is at your leisure this evening and our hotel is within walking distance of the many restaurants.
Meals: B
Walks: 500m, 30min, no elevation, easy walk

Day 3 – Fri 04 Aug | Standley Chasm / Ellery Big Hole / Ochre Pits
This morning we leave Alice Springs and make our way to Standley Chasm in time to see the area at its most dramatic - an hour either side of noon. It is during this time that the sheer walls glow from reflected sunlight to create a breath taking display of stark form and rich colour, when the walls blaze into an unbelievable display of reds and oranges. The walking track into the Chasm provides an entirely different experience with flora ranging from delicate ferns to tall gums and cycad palms. This path follows a creek where spring-fed pools attract a great variety of wildlife, particularly birdlife and the small Black-footed Rock wallabies. We will stop for lunch here and a cultural conversation with one of the local indigenous spokespersons. Our next stop is Ellery Creek Big Hole, located 80km west of Alice Springs. This spectacular waterhole is in the mighty Ellery Creek which cuts through a gorge in the West MacDonnell Ranges. Thousands of years of massive floods have carved out this beautiful waterhole and unlocked some amazing geology. From Ellery Big Hole we continue our journey to the Ochre Pits. The pits consist of several layers of multi-coloured, layered rock that was traditionally used by the Aranda Aboriginal people. We base ourselves for the next 4 nights at Glen Helen Resort.
Meals: B, D
Walks: Standley Chasm: 900m, 30min return, no elevation, moderate walk

Day 4 – Sat 05 Aug | Ormiston Gorge / Finke River
Ormiston Gorge is our destination this morning. Massive geological forces created the towering red walls of Ormiston Gorge and Pound, located within the West MacDonnell National Park. Within the gorge is a permanent waterhole, estimated to be at least 14m deep. The 7km long Ormiston Pound walk is a full circuit from the visitor centre across the rocky slopes, onto the flat floor of the pound and returns along the gorge via the main waterhole which provides an opportunity to take a refreshing swim. After lunch at Ormiston Gorge we make our way to visit the source of the Finke River. The Finke River is known to the local Aranda Aboriginal people as Larapinta. The river passes to the west and south of Alice Springs and is one of the oldest rivers in the world. It cuts through a series of east-west ridges and ranges and continues south into the duricrust plains and sand-ridge deserts on its way to Lake Eyre. It sinks into sand dunes on the edge of the Simpson Desert. The river has cut spectacular gorges through the MacDonnell Ranges, Krichauff Range, and James Range, where it has cut deeply into bedrock. The Finke is ephemeral and...
TOUR ITINERARY continued...

02 - 12 August 2017 (10 nights)

so flows only after heavy rain.

Meals: B, L, D
Walks: Ormiston Gorge: 8.4km, 4hr loop, elevation gain +150/-150, moderate walk

Day 5 – Sun 06 Aug | Roma Gorge / Glen Helen Gorge

After breakfast we make our way to Roma Gorge which is situated at the end of an 8.5km drive up a sandy and stony, dry creek bed. This gorge is remarkable for having some of the best rock carvings – petroglyphs – in Central Australia. The ‘pecked’ carvings have been dated between 6000 and 8000 years of age. The section of the Gorge that’s the most decorated was formerly used for ‘men’s secret business’. Part of the gorge is still considered sacred by the local Aboriginal people and is off limits to visitors, but much of the old initiation area is open to visitors’ inspection. At Glen Helen Gorge we can view the West MacDonnell Ranges, take a cool dip, and is also known as an important refuge for local wildlife. The landscape around Glen Helen is spectacular - towering sandstone wall is the first thing you see as you arrive and views of Mount Sonder, one of the highest points in Central Australia, which changes colours with the light.

At Glen Helen Gorge, the ranges part to make way for the Finke River. The permanent Finke River waterhole is an important refuge for fish and migrating waterbirds in the hot summer months.

Meals: B, L, D
Walks: Roma Gorge: 1km, 30mins, no elevation, easy walk. Glen Helen Gorge: Short easy 10min walk to water hole. There are a number of walk options at Glen Helen Gorge. Your tour leader will discuss some of these options with you on site

Day 6 – Mon 07 Aug | Mt Sonder / Redbank Gorge

Redbank Gorge, sits in the shadow of Mt Sonder, the best known, most photographed, painted and loved mountain in the West MacDonnell Ranges (just ask any Central Australian!). Mt Sonder (Rrewtyepme) and Redbank Gorge (Yarretyeke) are sacred sites for the western Aranda Aboriginal people with their Dreaming Stories connected to the Euro (small kangaroo) ancestor who travels through the area. Redbank Gorge is also an important refuge for plants and animals, due to it’s a permanent waterhole attracting Rock wallabies, kangaroos, birds and frogs. The mountain can be seen for the western half of the Larapinta trail, up to Ormiston Pound, which obscures it from then on. A clearly defined walking track exists up the western side of Mt Sonder. The view from the top boasts the taller Mount Zell to the west, the West MacDonnell Range to the east, and Gosses Bluff to the south west on a clear day. Mt Sonder is at the end of the Larapinta Trail and the highest point of the entire trail.

Meals: B, L, D
Walks: Redbank Gorge: 2.6km, 1hr return, no elevation, easy walk. Mt Sonder: 15.8km, 6 hr, elevation gain = 710m/-710m, challenging walk

Day 7 – Tue 08 Aug | Gosse Bluf / Palm Valley / Hermannsburg

We make our way back to Alice Springs today stopping first at Gosses Bluff (Tnorala) which is thought to be the eroded remnant of an impact crater. The original crater is thought to have been formed by the impact of an asteroid or comet approx. 142.5 million years. The site located in the Tnorala Conservation Reserve, is a sacred place. From Gosses Bluff we travel on to Palm Valley, within the Finke Gorge National Park. Palm Valley and the surrounding area is the only place in Central Australia where Red cabbage palms survive. The nearest specimens are 850km away in Queensland. Although the gorge usually appears dry, there are some small pockets of semi-permanent spring-fed pools that allow the unique flora in this region to survive. It had been assumed that the cabbage palms were remnants of a prehistoric time when the climate supported tropical rainforest in what is now the arid inland of Australia. We move on to Hermannsburg (Ntaria), an Aboriginal community beside the Finke River within the rolling hills of the MacDonnell Ranges. It was established
as an Aboriginal mission in 1877 by two Lutheran missionaries of the Hermannsburg Mission from Germany. The mission land was handed over to traditional ownership in 1982. The Hermannsburg Historic Precinct was included on the Australian National Heritage List in April 2006. Much of the historic township is now protected by the National Trust.

Meals: B, L
Walks: Palm Valley: 3-4km, 2 hr, elevation +100/-100, moderate walk

Day 8 – Wed 09 Aug | Emily Gap / Trephina Gorge
We leave Alice Springs this morning bound for Ross River Homestead stopping first at Emily Gap in the Heavitree Range. Emily and Jessie Gap Nature Park is an example of the Parks and Wildlife Commission’s commitment to the Northern Territory’s rich and diverse Indigenous culture. The park protects sacred sites and galleries of rock painting significant to the Aranda Aboriginal people and associated with the Yeperenye (caterpillar) and other dreaming’s. Many places in the landscape are associated with the same dreamtime story. Together these places form a ‘Dreaming Trail’. The first Europeans to see Trephina Gorge were the forward survey party for the Overland Telegraph Line, led by John Ross. Water holes in this area attract a lot of wildlife, including a diverse range of bird life. The uncommon Black-footed Rock-wallaby is ironically the most commonly sighted mammal here. Not so easily seen amongst the spinifex along the rocky ridges are the nocturnal Fat-tailed antechinus and the large Knob-tailed gecko. The Park contains the largest Ghost Gum in Australia, set alone in a saltbush flat. We check in to Ross River Homestead, our base for the next two nights.

Meals: B, D
Walks: Emily Gap: 6km, 4hr, elevation +100/-100, moderate walk

Day 9 – Thu 10 Aug | Arltunga Historical Reserve
Today we head out to spend the day exploring Arltunga, officially central Australia’s first town, born out of a gold rush after alluvial gold was discovered in the area in 1887. At the visitor centre you will be introduced to Arltunga’s colourful past and wild characters. The town is located on the 5,000ha Arltunga Historical Reserve, established in 1975. At the reserve you’ll find a complete ghost town - with the remains of mines, mining camps and stone buildings. The police station and gaol have been completely restored and there are even old mines you can walk through.

Meals: B, L, D
Walks: Arltunga; short strolls around the reserve

Day 10 – Fri 11 Aug | Alice Springs / N’Dhala Gorge
N’Dhala Gorge Nature Park is located in the East MacDonnell Ranges. The Gorge is a cultural treasure house, with thousands of rock carvings (petroglyphs), several art sites, shelter areas and other sites of cultural significance which express the art and stories of the eastern Aranda Aboriginal people. The Park is jointly managed between Traditional Owners and Parks and Wildlife. For Traditional Owners the area is called liwentje and is an important part of their living cultural landscape. The abundance and diversity of engravings are unparalleled in the southern portion of the Northern Territory and is listed on the Northern Territory Heritage Register. It is difficult to estimate the age of the art, but most were done within the past 2,000 years, but some could be as old as 10,000 years. The gorge is also an important site for fire sensitive plants including Hayes wattle acacia and White cypress pine.

Meals: B, L, D
Walks: N’Dhala Gorge: 4km return, 2hr, no elevation, moderate walk

Day 11 – Sat 12 Aug | Tour end
Your tour ends after breakfast.

Meals: B
Walks: none
WHY TRAVEL WITH US?

InterNATIONAL PARKtours have been leading small group walking holidays since 1975. Our like-minded guests bond easily and often create reunions, celebrations and friendships, many of them life-long. Our tours are active with regular half and full day walks. Aside from walking, we also spend time meeting local people, tasting regional food and immersing ourselves in the culture and history of a destination. Our flexibility enables us to adapt to the likes, dislikes and agility of our travellers, and changing situations such as weather and unforeseen circumstances. In most locations, we stay 2-3 nights and sometimes longer. This allows us to slow down, unpack our bags and enjoy the local atmosphere at different times of the day. Accommodation is comfortable, unique plus locally owned and operated where possible.

Our guides are dedicated, informative people who share their passion and knowledge on local history, culture, wildlife & topography. Our journeys are designed to safeguard the ecosystems; benefit the communities we visit and contribute to the sustainability of destinations. Travel is a chance to change your perspective. Nature always provides a new view if we take the time to look.

“IPt offers great value for money with their programmes. There is minimum spending money needed once on tour and there are no hidden extras along the way.”

Judy & Peter Hughes

Responsible Travel

For your protection, we are allied members of the Australian Federation of Travel Agents. Your payments are kept in a trust account until required for payment of your tour. We are accredited with ATAS, a national accreditation scheme, endorsing travel agents who have met strict financial and customer service criteria. We also have advanced accreditation with Ecotourism Australia and are members of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council

Serendipity of travel

Our guides will work 24/7 on your behalf to make sure that we are doing all we can to ensure your enjoyment. We have planned an intimate adventure, but adventure cannot be guaranteed. If indeed it could then it would lose its appeal.

Though we do the best we can to plan a smooth journey, sometimes things change at short notice. Some things may take longer than anticipated, transport and accommodation arrangements may alter, and you may experience occasional shortcomings and be frustrated by the ‘manana’ attitude; at other times you will be amazed by local efficiency. Tour itineraries may need to be modified but this is done so with your needs in mind and to provide the best tour experience.

So, be flexible, surprised and delighted with the serendipity that comes from being open to the unexpected. Your enjoyment of this journey is ultimately up to you.

Disclaimer of Liability

Although interNATIONAL PARKtours has prepared the Information contained in this itinerary with all due care and updates the Information regularly, interNATIONAL PARKtours does not warrant or represent that the Information is free from errors or omission. Whilst the Information is considered to be true and correct at the date of publication, changes in circumstances after the time of publication may impact on the accuracy of the Information. The Information may change without notice and interNATIONAL PARKtours is not in any way liable for the accuracy of any information printed and stored or in any way interpreted and used by a user.

Itinerary Updated: October 19, 2016 9:44 AM