

# The Kimberley

**The Kimberley in Western Australia is a very remote region in the far north western corner of the continent, it offers some of Australia's most unique nature-based attractions and pristine wilderness. The Kimberley covers an area of 424,517 km<sup>2</sup> (163,907 sq miles) which means that the region is three times the size of England, larger than Germany and 15% larger than Japan.**

The population of the Kimberley in Western Australia is an estimated 38,000, about half of which is of Aboriginal descent. In the Kimberley driving distances are huge, no matter where you go. There is only one sealed road (the Great Northern Highway) to take, however to really see the Kimberley a 4 wheel drive vehicle is the only way to go. The majority of attractions can be found along the 'Gibb River Road' a 4 wheel drive track between Derby and Kununurra. Stunning gorges, rivers, lakes, valleys, waterfalls, national parks, and amazing rock formations can be found along this road. The Bungle Bungles also requires a 4WD vehicle to visit. The roads up here can be quite rough, so you need to make sure your vehicle is in good condition and you've many supplies, in case you should break down. Adventure camping tours are a popular way to visit the Kimberley, with the added bonus of a guide! However you travel, make sure you have all the information you need to take on this 'last frontier' of Australia. At Travel Forever we pride ourselves on our extensive knowledge of the Kimberley, so come in and see us for different ways to travel.

## Sights & Attractions

Most people tend to travel from Broome north to Darwin, when seeing the Kimberley, so one of the first places to visit is the Geikie and Windjana Gorge National Parks and Tunnel Creek National Park. These three stunning parks are all part of an ancient Devonian limestone reef system, that 350 million years ago lay under the sea. In that time much activity has occurred and the mighty Fitzroy and Lennard Rivers have carved and eroded Geikie and Windjana gorges into the amazing weathered limestone ranges we see today.

Windjana Gorge is the best place in the Kimberley to spot the harmless freshwater crocodiles, as you walk along the gorge you'll find them sunning themselves on the banks. Windjana Gorge is 3.5 kilometres long and is a pleasant easy walk, particularly at sunset when the colours of the gorge are breathtaking. There is a campsite here with shower facilities.

An hour's drive east of Windjana gorge is Tunnel Creek. Here is a 750 metre long cave that stretches through the range. During the dry season you can walk through it, which can be a little scary as it is so dark, you need a torch to see, but mostly because freshwater crocodiles live in the creek. While these crocodiles are not man eaters like their saltwater counterparts, it's not a good idea to tread on one! The views at the end of the creek and part way along, where a crack in the rock allows light in for stunning reflections, are fantastic.

Geikie Gorge is the more accessible of the national parks as it is close to Fitzroy Crossing and the other two require travel on unsealed roads. Geikie Gorge has a similar appearance to Windjana though seems much larger. You can walk the gorge yourself or go with a guide or a popular way is to take a guided boat tour by one of the aboriginal traditional land owners.

If you continue to travel up the Gibb River Road (the 'Gibb,' as it's known by the locals), there are a number of striking gorges to visit. Bell's, Barnett, Manning, Adcock and Galvan's gorge can all be found along this stretch of road. Most of these involve a hike to get to, though you're usually rewarded with a stunning water hole to swim in!

The next famous, stunning natural attraction is the Mitchell Falls and Plateau. About 400 kilometres up the Gibb River road (from Derby) is the Kalumburu Road turn off to the Mitchell Plateau. A walk across Mitchell Plateau to the Mitchell Falls is a beautiful bush walk, through an ever changing landscape, clear streams and pools, shady pockets of rainforest, majestic cliffs and waterfalls, imposing views, an experience you'll never forget. The 3 tiered Mitchell Falls are probably one of the most photographed areas of the Kimberley region, though are the hardest to get to. This is mostly due to the roads and the time taken to trek off the 'Gibb' to get there. If you don't have the time to get to the falls, you can take a scenic flight from Kununurra.

The last stop on the Gibb River Road, before you connect back to the Great Northern Highway is El Questro Station. El Questro can also be visited from Kununurra as a day trip, as it is only 110 kilometres away. El Questro Station boasts amazing natural scenery, including rugged ranges, broad tidal flats, rainforest pockets, gorges and waterfalls. El Questro Station offers luxury accommodation at its homestead, starting at a \$1000/night through to budget camping. There are many places to visit here, the most spectacular being Emma gorge, Zebedee Springs and El Questro gorge. If you have more time, make sure you take a boat cruise down Chamberlain gorge and see if you can spot some aboriginal paintings along the way.

Once you're back on the highway, many people choose to head south a few hundred kilometers, to the turn off for the Bungle Bungles, also known as Purnululu National Park. It's a 43km drive off the highway on a hard going 4WD track. The characteristic orange and black striped beehive domes of the Bungle Bungles were formed during the Devonian period. The sandstone formation of the Bungle Bungle ranges is estimated to be about 350 million years old yet was only discovered

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by white man in the 1980's. You can camp in the national park, while you spend a few days visiting some amazing sights such as Cathedral Gorge, Echidna Chasm and Piccaninny Creek. If you don't have a 4WD vehicle to drive into the national park, you can take a helicopter or plane flight from nearby Turkey Creek or from Kununurra.

Another famous sight to take in, if you head further south again is the Wolf Creek Crater. This is located once again, down a 4WD track off the highway between Hall's Creek and Fitzroy Crossing. Wolf Creek was formed by a giant meteorite that crashed into the earth 300,000 years ago. The 50,000 tonne meteorite impacted with a speed of 15 km a second leaving the second biggest crater in the world, 880 meters across. It's worth a visit as long as you're vehicle is in good condition.

## Climate

The main tourist season in the Kimberley starts in May and goes through to September/October. This is entirely to do with the weather. During the wet season, from December to March/April, there is so much rainfall that the Gibb River Road completely floods and is shut down. This is the same for many of the 4WD tracks mentioned above. Also the temperatures in the wet season are very high, in the late 30's and 40's (°C) and the humidity is nearly unbearable. However the dry season is the coolest time of the year with an average of approximately 30°C, though the humidity is very low. It's very pleasant during the days, however at night it can get cold (down to -5°C), so bring warm camping gear!