

**Darwin is the capital city of the Northern Territory. Situated on the Timor Sea, Darwin has a population of 114,368, making it by far the largest and most populated city in the sparsely peopled Northern Territory. It is the smallest and most northerly of the Australian capital cities, and acts as the Top End's regional centre.**

Over time Darwin has grown from a pioneer outpost and small port into one of Australia's most modern and multicultural cities. Its proximity to Asia makes it an important Australian gateway to countries such as Indonesia and East Timor. Darwin is a tourist mecca and it gets extremely busy in the dry season, so there are many types of accommodation on offer, from camping sites to backpacker hostels to five star hotels and apartments.

The city of Darwin is built on a low bluff overlooking Darwin harbour, flanked by Frances Bay to the east and Cullen Bay to the west. The remainder of the city is flat and low-lying, and coastal areas are home to recreational reserves, extensive beaches, and excellent fishing. Darwin is closer to the capitals of five other countries than to the capital of Australia. Dili in East Timor, Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea, Jakarta in Indonesia, Bandar Seri Begawan in Brunei and Melekeok in Palau are all closer to Darwin than Australia's own capital, Canberra, 3 144 kilometres away. This closeness to Australia's northern neighbours is reflected in the town's relaxed, cosmopolitan, multicultural and tropical atmosphere.

Along with its importance as a gateway to Asia, Darwin is also the main point from which to visit Kakadu National Park, Arnhem Land, and the islands Groote Eylandt and the Tiwi's. The city is the largest in the area, and provides services for these remote settlements.

## History

On 9 September 1839, the HMS Beagle sailed into Darwin harbour during its surveying of the area. John Clements Wickham named the region "Port Darwin" in honour of former shipmate, famed scientist Charles Darwin. This was the beginning of white settlement in the area. The original inhabitants of the greater Darwin area are the Larrakia people. Unfortunately, like most other white settlements in Australia, the establishment process was quite violent and troubled as the Aboriginal people tried hard to resist the takeover of their land. By the early 20th century, most of the Aboriginal people who had inhabited the land which had become Darwin city were confined to government reserves or Christian missions, or were living on cattle stations working as stockmen or domestic help.

In 1871, gold was discovered at Pine Creek, 200 kilometres south of Darwin and this accelerated the growth of the city markedly. Once the gold rush had run its course, Darwin's development slowed down due to the harsh, unpredictable climate (including occasional cyclones) and the difficulty of communicating with other Australian cities. Darwin saw the most action of all Australian cities during WWII, when it became

an important military base for Allied action against the Japanese in the Pacific. The city was actually attacked 64 times during the war, with 243 people killed and many of the city's buildings suffering extensive damage.

By the 1970's, Darwin was growing steadily, with a population of 48,000 that was developing new suburbs rapidly. However on Christmas morning in 1974, Darwin suffered the worst cyclone, anywhere in Australia had ever experienced. Cyclone Tracy killed 71 people in six hours and flattened 70% of the city, with half the population needing to be airlifted to safety. During the late 1970's Darwin was subsequently rebuilt with newer materials and techniques. As Darwin was nearly entirely rebuilt twice, once due to the Japanese air raids in WWII, then again after Cyclone Tracy, the city is now known as one of the most modern of all capitals in Australia. Darwin has many museums and historical sights, reflecting its colourful modern history, so make time for a visit if you can.

## Sights & Attractions

Make sure you visit the famous Mindil Beach Sunset Markets every Thursday and Sunday during the dry season for all sorts of local arts and crafts and to taste the many different foods made by the multicultural locals. There's also the Parap Markets, Nightcliff Markets and Rapid Creek markets.

As Darwin is one of the most multicultural cities in Australia, it boasts a number of festivals. The Darwin Festival is held each year and includes comedy, dance, theatre, music, film and visual art and the NT Indigenous Music Awards. There's also the Glenti festival, which showcases Darwin's large Greek community, and India@Mindil, a similar festival held by the Indian community. The annual celebration of The Chinese New Year highlights the Asian influence in Darwin.

Darwin has many beaches including the popular Mindil Beach and the nudist beach at Casuarina if you're feeling up to it! Unfortunately the box jelly fish makes its home in these waters from October to May, so it's best to avoid the water at these times. Also saltwater crocodiles are very common in all waterways surrounding Darwin and are even occasionally found swimming in Darwin Harbour and on local beaches, though you may see some keen locals having a dip. There are a few lakes around Darwin where you can swim safely, so don't worry you can escape the heat somehow!

Darwin has extensive parks and gardens. These include the George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens, East Point Reserve, Casuarina Coastal Reserve, Charles Darwin National Park, Knuckey Lagoons Conservation

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Reserve, Leanyer Recreation Park, the Nightcliff Foreshore, Bicentennial Park and the Jingili Water Gardens.

Darwin is the main place from which to start your travel to Kakadu, Litchfield and Nitmiluk National Parks. You'll find a huge range of different ways to explore the parks from 4 wheel drive tours to car rental. During the dry season (April to October) tours are very busy, so we highly recommend booking in advance. If you can, try to plan your travel up here for the dry season, as the wet (December to March) can be as it sounds very wet with frequent thunderstorms and monsoonal down pours every day, also the humidity can get to unbearable levels.

One of the popular local things to do is feed the fish at Aquascene. At high tide, loads of fish turn up for a free feed. For more up close and personal experiences with wildlife a visit to Territory Park is worthwhile. It's about 50 minutes drive from the city and while you're there, you can swim in the pretty Berry springs (next door.) To get up close with over a thousand crocodiles a visit to Crocodylus Park is a must! The park has all sorts of information and exhibits on these scary creatures, plus a host of other local wildlife. The Darwin Wharf Precinct is also a great place to spend some time shopping, wining and dining. There is also various pearling and marine exhibitions on at different times.

## Climate

Darwin and the surrounding region, like the rest of the Top End, has a tropical monsoonal climate, with distinct wet and dry seasons. The dry season runs from April to October (winter in most southern parts of Australia). At this time the weather is warm and sunny, but not too humid, with little rainfall. The average temperature in the dry is in the mid to low 30's (°C). The wet season starts in December, after a short buildup period over October and November. Heavy rainfall, high humidity, spectacular lightning shows and hot temperatures, characterize the wet season. If you're not used to such heat, the weather can be quite uncomfortable. Also at this time of the year, the huge amounts of rainfall mean many of the waterholes in the national parks are closed or inaccessible. Therefore the 'dry' is the most popular time of year to visit this region.