

Coober Pedy

Coober Pedy is an opal mining town located on the Stuart Highway in the tough outback of South Australia. Coober Pedy is renowned for its underground living, due to the harsh climate of the region and for being the largest producer of opal in the world. Coober Pedy can be found 850 kilometres north of Adelaide and 680 kilometres south of Alice Springs. Coober Pedy has a population of approximately 4000 people, 80% of whom live in underground dwellings. There are approximately 400 aboriginals living in Coober Pedy, who originally named the town, the translated meaning is 'white man's burrow'. There is a number of underground motels and hotels for travelers to stay, for an extremely unique experience.

Coober Pedy is known as the 'opal capital of the world' and is by far the largest mine in Australia. The Coober Pedy Precious Stones Field, from which the opal is mined, covers an area of 4,954 square kilometres, with approximately only 10% of the total area having been mined. The size of the mining area is the reason for the diversity of the people, as those from all cultures have made their home here, to try their luck mining.

Many people will visit Coober Pedy enroute between Alice Springs and Adelaide. Many tours travel this route and the greyhound bus also passes through Coober Pedy frequently. The Ghan does not stop here, so visiting with the train is difficult, unless you can find someone to drive to the train, meet you and pick you up.

Sights & Attractions

About 80 per cent of the population of Coober Pedy now live underground. The reason for this is that the temperature can rise to 50°C in summer and it has been known to rise to 60°C. This adds an interesting dimension to the town, with many of the attractions also found underground.

Opals were discovered in Coober Pedy by a teenager, Willie Hutchison in 1915, and by the following year, miners had well and truly moved in. The story goes, that the first miners living underground here were ex soldiers from World War 1, who were used to living in trenches and knew the benefits for escaping the extreme heat and cold, by living underground.

Many tour companies will spend a few hours visiting Coober Pedy and the local sights, and often spend a night at one of the underground accommodations. However if you do come here on your own a town tour is a great way to check out the sights. Some of the town sights include the Coober Pedy underground Catacomb Anglican Church, made from interesting local materials. The Big Winch (gift shop) and the Old Timers mine is an original mine displaying underground mining techniques and some of the equipment they used in the old days. There's also an opal reef in display, that's fascinating to see. The Umoona Opal Mine and Museum is an underground museum with detailed historical information and an Aboriginal Interpretive Centre. The Coober Pedy golf course is also a favourite stop on the tourist trail as its more like a desert, than golf course, with no grass in sight!

For more natural sights in the region, Moon Plain can be found 15 kilometres north of Coober Pedy. This bizarre lunar like landscape has been the popular set for many movies including, Mad Max Beyond, Priscilla Queen of the Desert and Thunderdome. Another spectacular local landscape is the Breakaways, located 33 kilometres north of Coober Pedy. This flat topped plateau and the stunning surrounding desert are remnants of millions of years ago and provide a wealth of geological interests.

Climate

Summers in Coober Pedy are very hot with temperatures ranging from 35°C to 48°C, and there is the occasional dust storm. Coober Pedy has a typical semi desert climate, with sunny days and cold nights between April and October, this is the better time of year to visit. The annual rainfall of Coober Pedy is minimal with only 175mm per year and this can fall at any time during the year.

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