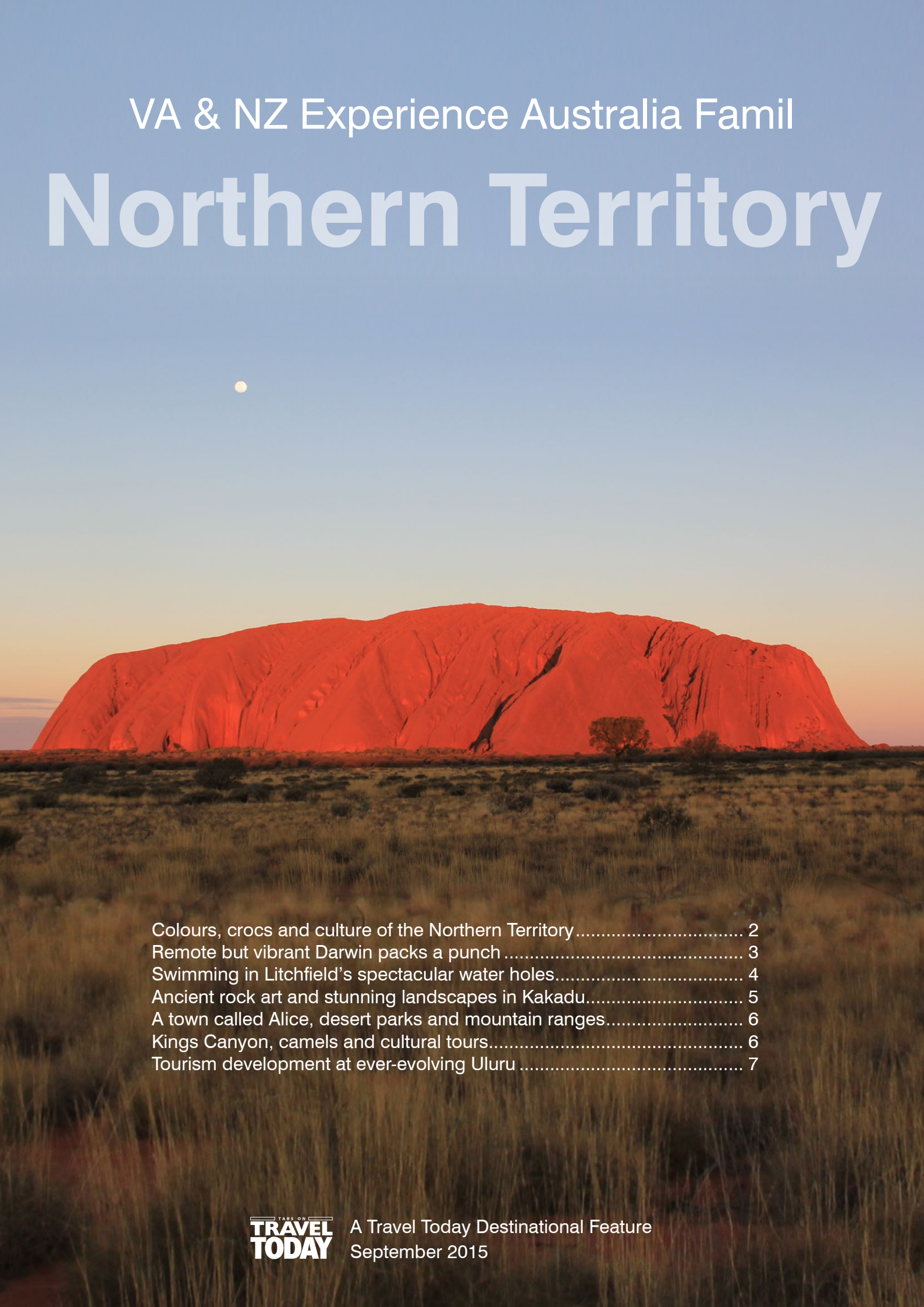


VA & NZ Experience Australia Famil

Northern Territory



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The NT: Colours, Crocs and Culture

Virgin Australia and Air New Zealand launched their Experience Australia famils with one of the most sought-after but least-visited states this week, the Northern Territory.

Traditionally something of a bucket list destination, as Australia continues to grow in popularity with the New Zealand market the NT is benefiting as Kiwi travellers look further afield than their traditional holiday hot spots.

The state's regions include Darwin,

Virtual Journey

Agents can experience a 'virtual famil' of the Northern Territory with the new NT Virtual Journeys digital training platform. The site features new footage of more than 100 attractions, activities and experiences throughout the NT, plus supplier videos agents can build into itineraries to share with colleagues, friends and clients. See virtualjourneys.travelnt.com

Kakadu and the Red Centre, all of which the famil group will be experiencing this week thanks to the VA domestic network.

... Darwin

The remote but vibrant city of Darwin, which is closer to the capitals of three other countries than to Australia's capital, was first on the itinerary. Darwin is sometimes called Australia's most modern city because it was largely wiped out by Cyclone Tracey in the 1970s and had to be completely rebuilt.

It's a small, pretty city with a recently revitalised waterfront precinct where clients can stroll along a promenade lined with bustling bars, plenty of sunbathers, a wave pool and lagoon, and a huge range of dining options. With a population of around 127,000 it's a fraction of the size of Sydney or Melbourne, but this just serves to give it a welcoming feel—and makes it easy to get around on foot.

For a virtual journey of Darwin's waterfront, [CLICK HERE](#).



Swimming With Crocs At Crocosaurus Cove

Darwin and the Northern Territory is pretty synonymous with crocodiles, but it's obviously a little tricky to see them up close. The best way to do it is in the Cage of Death at Crocosaurus Cove, which puts you about as close as you'll ever get to a monster crocodile without being eaten. Visitors are secured in a clear 'cage' and lowered into a tank with a crocodile, which is fed next to them. They can hang around in the water with the croc for 15 minutes all up—plenty of time to get some amazing photographs—and it's a unique and remarkable way to see such a powerful beast. It costs AUD125pp for two people, or AUD165pp for one, including entry to the park. For those not so keen on getting into the water, there's still plenty of smaller crocodiles to watch from the safety of land, and there's also photo opportunities with baby crocodiles. Pictured is Felicity Gill, Flight Centre, with Will the Croc. For more, see crocosauruscove.com.

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Tue 25 Aug 15 p3

Exploring The Spectacular NT

The Northern Territory is home to spectacular scenery, including national parks right on Darwin's doorstep.

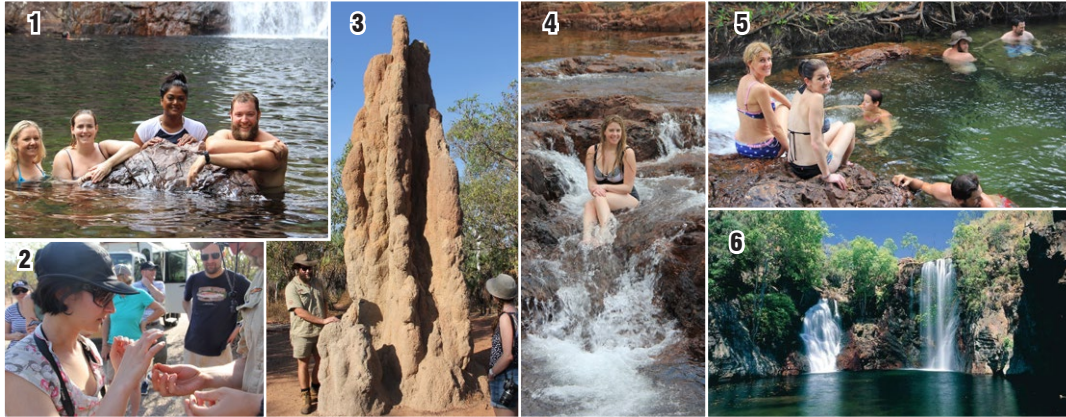
On Sun, the famil group spent the day exploring the many swimming holes and waterfalls of Litchfield National Park, around 1.5 hours' drive from the city, with Adventure Tours Australia.

The park is centred on a sandstone plateau and covers around 1500 sq km. It features walking and 4WD tracks, a number of waterfalls and springs, and unusual cathedral and magnetic termite mounds.

In Darwin's heat, the swimming holes are unsurprisingly a big draw-card with locals and tourists alike,

so it's worth clients heading there on weekdays if they can—although a busy day in Darwin is still pretty quiet by most standards and there's plenty of room for everyone.

Adventure Tours Australia offers a number of tour options featuring the park. For more details see adventuretours.com.au



1 Pictured having a dip at Florence Falls is Anna-Marie Kenna, Flight Centre; Erika Stewart, Tourism NT; Felina Wright, VA; and Adventure Tours Australia guide Brad. There's around 135 steps to get to the waterhole so you need a reasonable level of fitness. **2** Felicity Gill, Flight Centre takes an ant from guide Brad for a taste test—the ants have green bodies which taste of sour lemon lime if you lick them. **3** Termite mound pics: Litchfield National Park is home to two kinds of termite mounds—magnetic and cathedral mounds, like this one pictured, which is estimated to be around 60-70 years old. Buley Rockhole is a particularly stunning set of watering holes situated along a creek, with flat rocks around for clients to sun themselves on between swims, and it's easy to get to. Pictured at Buley is **4** Katrina Vowles, Flight Centre. **5** HOT's Jennifer Nilsson and Morgan Wright. **6** The picturesque Florence Falls.



Sunset Beach Markets

After a day exploring Litchfield, the famil group was whisked away for VIP seats and treats at Darwin's Mindil Beach Markets. Each Tue and Sun evening during the dry season (Apr-Sep) locals and tourists alike flock to the markets, which feature more than 200 stalls offering food, arts and crafts (including crocodile skins and purses made of cane toads). Clients should aim to be seated on the beach in time for the sunset, which is definitely not to be missed. See mindil.com.au

Pictured at the markets on Sun is:

1 Enjoying Mindil's one-in-a-million sunset is Jennifer Nilsson, HoT; and Erika Stewart, Tourism NT. **2** Flighties Anna-Marie Kenna and Katrina Vowles sample the spiral potatoes on sticks.

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The Heritage And Beauty Of Kakadu

The 20,000sq km Kakadu National Park is one of the few places in the world that's world heritage listed for both its natural beauty and culture, and it's got both in spades. The park is a few hours' drive from Darwin and is renowned for attractions including stunning waterfalls, as well as culture like Aboriginal art that dates back thousands of years. Clients can opt to self-drive or go with a guide, but self-drivers should be aware that the park is huge and some is accessible only by 4WD. There's also risks including knowing

where it's safe to swim, where to find water and which of the walking tracks are likely to be too difficult, so it's worth having a guide. A guide will also give them insight into everything from where a crocodile can be found through to pointing out a 6000-year-old rock painting. The famil group travelled with Way-outback Australian Safaris, and the guide was extremely knowledgeable and passionate about the region. The company is also one of the few that operates in the wet season as well as dry. See wayoutback.com



Jim Jim Falls Video
For video highlights of the falls, check out Tourism NT's virtual journey [HERE](#)

Swimming & Spirituality At Jim Jim And Twin Falls

Jim Jim Falls and Twin Falls are both important spiritual areas for the local Aboriginal people. They're not easy to access—clients will need to head down 50km of bumpy unsealed road, only accessible by 4WD. Jim Jim generally only flows for about six weeks around Jun, and to get to the plunge pool at the foot of the falls it's a strenuous climb over rocks, so clients need a good level of fitness if they intend to attempt it. Twin Falls are accessed by a short boat cruise (AUD12.50) but there's strictly no swimming there—anyone who breaks that rule and isn't eaten by crocs will face an AUD8500 fine.

Jim Jim Falls: **1** Brad Sidley, Air NZ Holidays cools off in the plunge pool at the bottom of Jim Jim Falls. **2** HoT's Morgan Wright; Anna-Marie Kenna, Flight Centre; Gina McCarthy, United Travel; and Felina Wright, VA. **3** Felicity Gill of Flight Centre.

Twin Falls: **4** Morgan Wright, HoT; Erika Stewart, Tourism NT; and Katrina Vowles, Flight Centre. **5** Cruising to the falls is Gina McCarthy, United Travel; Brad Sidley, Air NZ Holidays; Deborah Knox, NZ Travel Brokers; and Jennifer Nilsson, House of Travel.



Discovering Ancient Rock Art In The Kakadu

The stunning Ubirr is where clients should head to see ancient Aboriginal rock art as well as one of the best views of Kakadu.

1 On top of Ubirr is (back) Dave Whitaker, Mondo Travel; Brad Sidley, Air NZ Holidays; and Gina McCarthy, United Travel; with (front) Morgan Wright, HoT; Anna-Marie Kenna, Flight Centre; Felina Wright, VA; and Jennifer Nilsson, HoT. **2** Enjoying the view is Gina McCarthy, United Travel; Erika Stewart, Tourism NT; and Felina Wright, VA. **3** Learning about Aboriginal rock art is Jennifer Nilsson, HoT; Dave Whitaker, Mondo Travel; Brad Sidley, Air NZ Holidays; Felicity Gill, Flight Centre; and Deborah Knox, NZ Travel Brokers. **4** Brad Sidley, Air NZ Holidays and Dave Whitaker, Mondo Travel, the only two men on famil, check out Ubirr's Man Cave.

NT Mary River Wetlands Croc Cruise

On the way to Kakadu, the famil group stopped at the Mary River Wetlands, home to one of the highest concentrations of saltwater crocodiles in the world. A Mary River Wetlands Cruise will take you on a gentle ride along the waterways, which, with their waterlilies and abundant birdlife, are deceptively peaceful. However guests are told to keep their hands inside the boat at all times, and if someone was to fall overboard their chances of survival are slim. There's plenty of crocs to spot lazing on the banks and in the water, but if clients want to see them leaping out of the water for bait they'll need to head to the Adelaide River (and be aware, it's a tourism practise that's frowned upon by many). See [pointstuart.com.au](#)

Pictured on the cruise is Morgan Wright, HoT.



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Exploring A Town Called Alice

Alice Springs was once a key stop for visitors to Uluru but the town has fallen off the trail a little for tourists who opt to fly straight to the rock—and it's to their detriment, as they're missing out on a stunning region.

Located a short two-hour flight from Darwin, Alice Springs is almost as far from Adelaide as it is from Darwin, putting it bang in the middle of Australia.

The local tourism industry is keen to see more Kiwis head their way and dispel any misconception they might

have that it's simply 'a couple of sheds in a red desert'.

In fact, the town of Alice itself is actually a busy place, with restaurants, galleries and tourist attractions.

Surrounding the town is the beautiful MacDonnell Ranges and a desert that is far from a featureless expanse of red sand—it's actually home to a huge range of plants and animals who have adapted themselves to the desert climate in fascinating ways.

The famil group toured highlights with Tailormade Tours, see tailormadetours.com.au



Check out a virtual journey of the Alice Springs Desert Park [HERE](#)

Alice Springs Desert Park

From wildflowers to silver beech trees and dingoes to 2.5m long lizards, there's plenty of life to be discovered in Alice Springs, and a great place to get insight into the area is at the Alice Springs Desert Park. The ever-evolving centre represents a variety of desert habitats of the area, complete with plants and animals, and there's fantastic guides who can delve a little deeper into what's there. They can also provide some great insight into Aboriginal culture and history, and there's regular demonstrations such as bush food, medicine and hunting techniques. If you're lucky they'll share some Dreamtime stories. See alicespringsdesertpark.com.au

1 Felina Wright, Virgin Australia tastes eucalyptus 'candy' (actually the nest of an aphid). **2** The birds of prey show was a hit. **3** Anna Kenna, Flight Centre and Gina McCarthy, United Travel meet a quoll. **4** Guide Damien plucks an aphid nest from eucalyptus. **5** Guide Damien demonstrates how Aboriginal art communicates stories and messages. **6** Pure-bred dingoes like these are hard to find as most have bred with dogs.



MacDonnell Ranges

There's a species of caterpillar in Alice Springs that follow each other nose to tail in long chains, and local Dreamtime story says the MacDonnell Ranges were once those caterpillars. It's exactly what the towering mountain ranges represent, and they're impossible to miss while travelling around Alice. Stretching east to west through Alice Springs, there's more than 640km of ranges and they're thought to be around 340 million years old. There's plenty of places to get up close to the mountains, as well as walking and cycling tracks to explore. The easiest site to access is Simpsons Gap, around 25km from town. Standley Chasm is also stunning and easy to access, an entry fee is required.

At Simpsons Gap: **1** Testing out the selfie stick. **2** The dry riverbed in the gap. **3** Jennifer Nilsson, HoT and Deborah Knox, NZ Travel Brokers in front of Simpsons Gap. **4** Rock wallabies. **5** Katrina Vowles, Flight Centre at Simpsons Gap.

At Standley Chasm: **6** Standley Chasm. **7** Wandering among gum trees to the chasm. **8** Anna Kenna, Flight Centre looks up into the chasm. **9** Anna Kenna, Flight Centre makes friends with some park rangers. **10** Felina Wright, VA drags an exhausted Jennifer Nilsson, HoT after an action-packed few days. **11** Stretching across the chasm is Gina McCarthy, United Travel; Morgan Wright, HoT; Katrina Vowles, Flight Centre; Felicity Gill, Flight Centre; and Felina Wright, VA.

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Kings Canyon, Culture & Camels



For a virtual journey of Kings Canyon, [CLICK HERE](#)

Located around halfway between Alice Springs and Uluru, Kings Canyon is well worth a visit for clients making the drive, or as a day trip from either destination.

The canyon itself is hundreds of millions of years old and features sheer cliff faces which can be viewed from below but are better seen from the canyon rim.

The 6km rim walk begins with a steep set of stairs which are no easy task but once they're over it's a relatively easy walk around the canyon, and the views are fantastic and highly worth the climb.

The area is also home to the Karrke Aboriginal Cultural Tour, Kings Creek Station and Kings Canyon Resort. The famil group toured the Red Centre with SEIT Outback Australia,



see seitoutbackaustralia.com
Pictured: **1** Jennifer Nilsson, HoT after hiking to the top. **2** Katrina Vowles, Flight Centre gets zen.

Under A Desert Moon

After a 6km hike there's nothing quite like being rewarded with champagne and canapés as the sun sets over the mountain you just climbed, followed by a five-course gourmet meal under the stars. The famil group were treated to an Under the Desert Moon gourmet experience as part of their stay at the Kings Canyon Resort, with a degustation menu featuring items like confit pork belly, wagyu beef and barramundi fillet. The experience costs AUD99pp (drinks are extra) and is limited to no more than 10 couples. See kingscanyonresort.com.au



Cultural Experience Tour

Karrke, Central Australia's newest Indigenous cultural product, is a great way to learn about Aboriginal culture from the people themselves. Located near Kings Canyon, Karrke offers a one-hour cultural tour where visitors can learn about bush tucker and taste a witchetty grub, find out about weapons including spears and boomerangs, and see how traditional jewellery is made. The tour is priced from AUD60pp, for details, [CLICK HERE](#)

Pictured is: **1** Learning about Aboriginal foods. **2** Traditional jewellery making. **3** Felicity Gill, Flight Centre about to taste a witchetty grub. **4** Brad Sidley, Air NZ Holidays and Dave Whitaker, Mondo eye up a still wriggling grub.



Camels At Kings Creek

Kings Creek Station is around 35km from Kings Canyon and is a great place to stop for a camel ride (or a camel burger), a spot of shopping or adventure activities like 4WD. It's a 2000sq km ranch that's owned and operated by locals, and a great way to get some insight into outback life.

Pictured at the station is: **1** Gina McCarthy, United Travel with a baby camel. **2** Katrina Vowles, Flight Centre and Felina Wright, VA make a new friend. **3** Morgan Wright, HoT with a baby camel.



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Big Ideas For Ever-Evolving Uluru

It's already on the bucket list of many travellers but both the government and Voyagers Ayers Rock Resort aren't resting on their laurels when it comes to building tourism to Uluru.

In Jul, the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park and Minister for the Environment Bob Baldwin announced they were looking for 'big ideas' for new tourism businesses in Uluru.

At Ayers Rock Resort, which is in the middle of a refurbishment programme of all of its properties, they're also in constant negotiations with new tour operators and to open new attractions.

In the last 12 months there's been new developments like Ayers Rock Skydive and Outback Cycling (where clients can hire bikes and cycle around Uluru), and there's

more to come, says the resort. Ayers Rock Resort has seen huge increases in visitation this year, and recently unveiled the latest property to be refurbished, the Emu Walk Apartments.

When it was taken over by the Indigenous Land Corporation in 2011, the company pledged that for the first seven years all profits would be put back into the resort as part of the rejuvenation process.

Sails in the Desert was first, with a property-wide refurbishment in 2012, and at the same time a conference facility was built. Emu Apartments were completed in Mar and next up will be Desert Gardens, beginning with 130 standard rooms starting in Nov.

The Outback Pioneer Hotel will be the final property to be refurbished. There's no date for that as yet.



Learning Aboriginal Dot Painting

The final morning in the Northern Territory was spent with the agents trying their hands at the Aboriginal art they had been admiring throughout the trip. Maruku@Uluru is owned and controlled by the Anangu Aboriginal people, and its artworks are sold in the Uluru-Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre at the base of Uluru as well as in the Ayers Rock Resort Town Centre. It was here the group took part in a workshop and learned to tell their own stories through dot painting. See maruku.com.au

Letting their creative juices flow are: **1** Katrina Vowles, Flight Centre. **2** Morgan Wright, House of Travel. **3** Dave Whitaker, Mondo and Brad Sidley, Air New Zealand Holidays show off their works of art.

The Air New Zealand and Virgin Australia Experience Australia famil wrapped up with a few days at Uluru, including a walk at the base, sunset champagne, morning walk at nearby Kata Tjuta, and a Sounds of Silence dinner.

1 Deborah Knox, NZ Travel Brokers; Virgin Australia's Felina Wright; Anna Kenna of Flight Centre; and Felicity Gill, Flight Centre at Sounds of Silence. **2** Katrina Vowles, Flight Centre; Brad Sidley, Air New Zealand Holidays; and Gina McCarthy, United Travel at Sounds of Silence. **3** Brad Sidley, Air New Zealand Holidays; Jennifer Nilsson, House of Travel; Dave Whitaker, Mondo; and Deborah Knox, NZ Travel Brokers in front of Uluru.

4 Katrina Vowles and Anna Kenna of Flight Centre at Uluru. **5** Enjoying champagne thanks to SEIT as the sun sets over Uluru. **6** Gina McCarthy, United Travel and Virgin Australia's Felina Wright enjoy a champagne as the sun sets on Uluru.

Connect Not Conquer: Why Not To Climb

When Uluru was handed back to the Aboriginal people in 1985, it was immediately leased back to the government, and included a clause that people could climb on it.

While it's technically allowed, the practise is actually highly offensive to the local people, as it's a very spiritual place. It's sometimes described as 'like visiting the Louvre and wiping your feet on Mona Lisa', and a sign at the bottom asks guests to 'connect not conquer'.

There's a big drive to stop guests climbing Uluru—it's been removed from promotional pamphlets and tour operators won't encourage guests to do it—and ultimately, the plan is to have the practise outlawed.

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