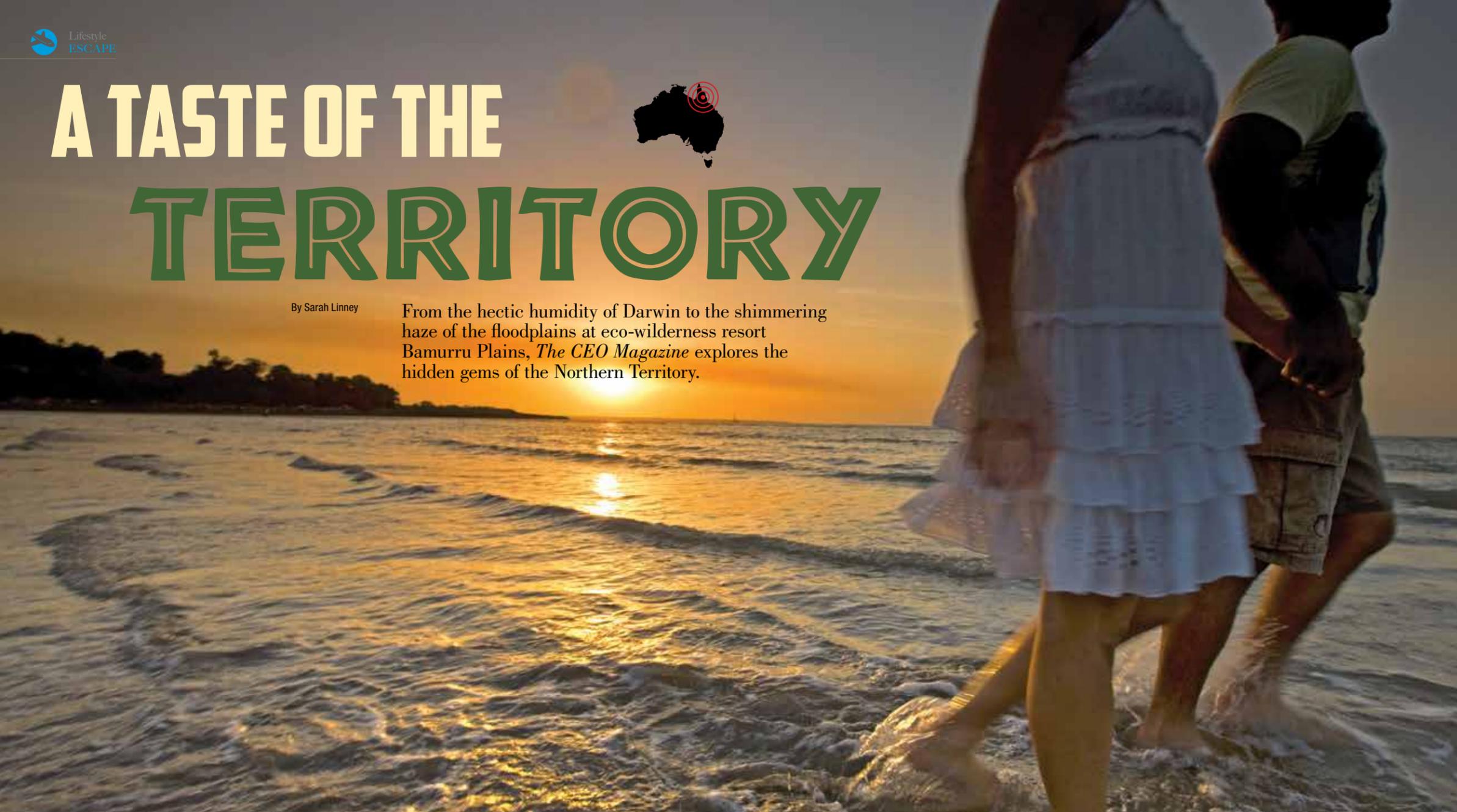


# A TASTE OF THE TERRITORY



By Sarah Linney

From the hectic humidity of Darwin to the shimmering haze of the floodplains at eco-wilderness resort Bamurru Plains, *The CEO Magazine* explores the hidden gems of the Northern Territory.



film, newspaper clippings, photographs, and artefacts from World War II. Guests can also walk through the tropical grounds of the outside exhibit at East Point Reserve and view trucks, anti-tank guns, anti-aircraft guns, and military equipment from the war.

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For those looking for more insights into Darwin's history, the Museum and Art Galley of the Northern Territory is located in beautiful Fannie Bay. Once you enter the facility, Indigenous Australian artwork, information, and tools bedeck the walls. A range of exhibits and galleries are on display, including life-size models of the variety of wildlife found in the Northern Territory.

One must-see exhibit is an in-depth look at the ferocious impact Cyclone Tracy had on Darwin. The exhibit features photographs, newspaper clippings, models, and a short film shot by a local ABC reporter after the cyclone passed. In the film, the reporter explains his reaction to the aftermath and the experience of filming such devastation.

After wandering through the different exhibits and galleries at the museum, you unwind at the Cornucopia Museum Café. With views of Fannie Bay and trees ►

pool, you head to Endota for a one-hour organic facial. Utilising Endota's certified organic products, your therapist starts with a soothing billabong footbath, where she carefully exfoliates and moisturises your feet and lower legs. The facial itself is a truly relaxing experience. Your therapist's hands are light and gentle as she uses a plethora of products to massage your face, scalp, neck, and upper back. As a facial mask seeps into your pores, she massages and moisturises your hands.

The next day, after an energising sleep and a quick breakfast, you reluctantly leave SKYCITY and

head to the famed Parap Village Markets. Here, a kaleidoscope of clothing, jewellery, and food is on offer. The Asian influence on Darwin is on delicious display, with laksa, rice paper rolls, pho, and paw paw salad sold at numerous stalls. For a refreshing break, try one of the markets' fabled mango smoothies.

Following the bustle of the markets, the air-conditioned comfort of the Defence of Darwin Experience is a welcome reprieve. Several multimedia displays are located around the museum, including voice recordings of eye witnesses of the Darwin bombings,

directly from their room. Across the water, Cove, a swim-up bar and restaurant, provides guests with stunning tropical cocktails and an array of light meals.

Beside Cove lies Endota Spa. This renowned name has seamlessly incorporated the tropical aesthetic of SKYCITY throughout its calming facilities, with a lush garden and courtyard forming the relaxing heart of the spa. Off this courtyard lie several treatment rooms for facials, massages, body treatments, and day spa packages.

After settling into your room and enjoying a quick dip in the lagoon

member transports you and your luggage to one of the 32 new rooms that surround a massive, aquamarine lagoon. This \$40-million redevelopment has expanded the resort and provided guests with a deluxe accommodation alternative to SKYCITY's main hotel, which connects to its busy casino.

In your room, a white king bed is surrounded by elegant, casual furnishings in shades of blue, green, and beige. Sliding doors open to a private balcony and deck, where sun lounges perch on the edge of the lagoon and a convenient step ladder allows guests to swim

Gazing out across Mindil Beach to the sweep of shimmering horizon, with the hot sun emanating its last rays upon your face and the hint of a cool breeze lightly rustling the nearby palm trees, you watch as the sun sets on Darwin. Perched on the balcony of Lotus Bar at SKYCITY resort, you sip an espresso cocktail and listen to the soft strains of the band playing in the courtyard below.

After a long flight from Sydney and a quick 20-minute drive from the airport, arriving at SKYCITY is a refreshing relief. A friendly staff



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surrounding the wide deck, the café provides visitors with a chance to decompress and discuss the museum.

Following a light lunch, you head into the heart of Darwin towards its renowned Esplanade. From Char Restaurant at Admiralty House to Deckchair Cinema and the colonial splendour of Parliament House, the thoroughfare presents a variety of accommodation, leisure, and dining options.

One property that provides a luxurious alternative to the raft of hotel chains is Mandalay Luxury Stay. Surrounded by a white picket fence and obscured by a wealth of tropical vegetation, Mandalay is a self-contained, fully equipped facility.

From the wide wooden balcony that offers panoramic views of Darwin Harbour to the sumptuous furnishings, Mandalay is an eclectic mix of colonial charm and Asian antiques. With three bedrooms, two bathrooms, full kitchen facilities, a barbecue, pool, library, and a TV and DVD player in the lounge and in each

bedroom, guests can enjoy their holiday exactly as they wish.

To escape the heat, visitors can explore the Darwin Waterfront Precinct, located five minutes from the Esplanade. With restaurants, shops, and wide grassed areas, the Darwin Waterfront Precinct is a bustling hub for locals and visitors alike. A protected ocean swimming area ensures that no crocodiles or jellyfish disturb swimmers, and the nearby wave pool provides guests with long wave sessions and inflatable tubes to while away the afternoon before dinner.

Following a decadent, al fresco meal at Char Restaurant, which can be explored in greater detail in the upcoming August 2013 issue of *The CEO Magazine*, you walk to Deckchair Cinema. This unique cinematic experience is open during the dry season, when moviegoers can be assured of a pleasant, rain-free experience beneath the stars.

With rows of deckchairs, director chairs, and tables, the cinema's on-site café offers couples and families drinks and food to accompany an evening at the movies. Boasting a schedule of mainstream, foreign, and independent films, Deckchair Cinema is a cultural haven in the centre of the city.

With two comfy cushions, you recline in your deckchair to watch renowned French-Canadian film *Monsieur Lazhar* and documentary thriller *The Imposter*, each proving to be engrossing and engaging.

With restaurants, shops, and wide grassed areas, the Darwin Waterfront Precinct is a bustling hub for locals and visitors alike.

After a deep sleep amidst the luxury of Mandalay, you delve into the breakfast basket in the gleaming kitchen and gather your strength for the day's activity: a visit to Crocosaurus Cove and the ominously titled 'Cage of Death' experience.

Crocosaurus Cove offers a variety of activities for visitors, from feeding the fish and big crocs to holding a baby crocodile and meeting the reptiles. The infamous 'Cage of Death' experience involves one or two people climbing into a Perspex cylinder and slowly being lowered into a crocodile's enclosure.

For today's experience, you tentatively climb down the ladder into the cylinder. Grates at the bottom of the tube and small, thin openings along the sides allow water into the enclosed space. After a few photos are taken, the cylinder is lowered into the enclosure of Chopper, a huge crocodile whose name fits him well.

As the cylinder steadily fills with water, Chopper nonchalantly suns himself in a shallow area of his enclosure. Laying on rocks a few metres from you, he seems completely nonplussed about the addition of two humans into his home. As you acclimate to the situation and enjoy the cool water lapping around you, you start to splash and yell out to attract the attention of Chopper—something no sane person would ever normally do.

When the crocodile handler blows a quick stream of bubbles around

Chopper, the mammoth reptile finally stirs in a shocking, sudden movement. Once your screams and the water spray have died down, you realise that Chopper has swum over to the cylinder and encircled his ridged, reptilian body around it.

Although the handler tries to excite Chopper again, he seems determined to float serenely in his enclosure. However, the myriad scratches across the surface of the cylinder demonstrate the fact that the crocodiles are not always so sedate.

After drying off, you look over the photos of the experience; the terror and excitement evident in your eyes elicits much laughter. While you're there, you also get the chance to hold a baby crocodile, whose jaw is safely secured. You carefully hold the neck and body of this beautiful animal as a photographer snaps away. It seems impossible that this tiny creature will one day grow to the size of Chopper.

After watching the fish and big croc feeding sessions, you head to Darwin Airport for your light aircraft flight to Bamurru Plains. With a fleet of more than 20 light aircraft, Air Frontier transports guests to and from Bamurru Plains daily. The pilots are friendly and chatty as you soar over the green swathes of wilderness that have sprung up after the recently

finished wet season. Following a smooth landing at a rustic outback station on the property, the camp's friendly manager John drives you to the safari camp in an open-top four-wheel drive.

Located on Swim Creek Station, a 303-square-kilometre coastal buffalo pastoral property in the Mary River region, and near the western boundary of Kakadu National Park, Bamurru Plains is an intriguing location.

With a varied habitat including vast river frontage, coastal floodplains, savannah woodland, and paperbark swamps, Bamurru Plains immerses guests in the outback. As you drive up to the property, it is immediately apparent how the lodge and the surrounding safari bungalows have been seamlessly integrated into the bushland.

Walking up the wide, wooden ramp to the central lodge you are offered a refreshingly cool lemonade, a blissfully cold hand towel, and a smile from a waiting staff member. "Welcome home", they say as you enter the shaded lodge. Inside, the marriage of nature and luxury persists, with wooden floors and beams, and elegant, casual furnishings situated



around the room. A large dining table dominates one area of the lodge for communal meal times.

You catch a glimpse of the infinity pool leading to sweeping views of the floodplains, and two lounge areas for relaxation. Walking out onto this deck is truly a breathtaking experience.

In a wide grassed area before the floodplains, wallabies and buffalo graze, and birds call out to each other. While the lush green of the surrounding floodplain will fade to brown as the dry season progresses, the abundance of wildlife will remain constant at this stunning resort. ▶



Nine safari bungalows are spaced throughout the pandanus vegetation on the edge of the wetlands. These structures further emphasise Bamurru's intricate integration of bush and luxury, with one-way transparent shade cloths stretched across the sides of the bungalows that allow guests to privately soak in the vistas.

Inside the bungalow, a simple yet comfortable bed with quality linen of 100-per-cent cotton dominates the room, while two deckchairs bookend the bed for reading and watching the wildlife.

Throughout the bungalow, corrugated steel, tree branches, wooden floorboards, and tones of beige and brown are flawlessly woven together to combine the bush aesthetic with understated luxury.

At the rear of the bungalow is a bathroom offering slightly more than the bare necessities. The waterfall shower is the highlight, with its pipes and taps supported

by a tree that sprouts from the floor and brushes the peak of the bungalow. Wide stones form the basis of the shower, with no glass panels or curtains to shield you. This sense of openness and space is a theme that runs throughout the entire property.

Once settled in and after a quick, glorious shower, you climb into an open-top four-wheel drive. Weaving through overgrown paths, with leaves and branches brushing your side as the vehicle lurches through the bush, it's clear that the staff at Bamurru have taken great pains to limit their impact on the environment.

After only a few minutes you drive onto a raised mud shelf that separates the safari camp from the floodplains and acts as a makeshift landing spot for the camp's airboats. Buffalo frolic happily in the mud and you spot a number of

mothers and their newborn calves slowly walking on shaky legs into the shallow water. While the buffalo notice your presence and stare at you, they seem mostly unfazed by the new people in their midst.

You disembark the four-wheel drive and board an airboat propelled by large blades at the rear. You position your orange earmuffs to dull the deafening sound as the airboat roars to life, seeming to float above the water as it flies across the floodplains.

Despite the sound of the engine, the experience is overwhelmingly peaceful. With the necessity of earmuffs you have no distractions; you simply gaze at the view and watch in wonder at the plethora of wildlife erupting from the dense vegetation around you. After the wet season, endless swathes of grass sway in the breeze and hundreds of trees seem to sprout from the water.

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As the airboat races across the surface, flocks of birds take flight. The more daring birds continue to pick their way through the vegetation and hunt bait fish. The airboat enters a wide stretch of water and encounters a crocodile sunning itself. Cameras and binoculars are immediately drawn, but the crocodile pays no attention to the boat located just 5 metres away.

Following the airboat trip, guests have the opportunity to shower and change before congregating on the pool deck for antipasto and wine. After watching the sun sink beyond the floodplains, you move inside for a communal dinner.

For the first course you enjoy rare kangaroo resting on a macro Greek salad with Spanish onion jam. This is followed by roast beef, French Province style, resting on duck fat potatoes with Sava Béarnaise. To finish, apple and butterscotch crumbles are served in ramekins. This rich and filling meal is a very satisfying end to a long day.

Falling asleep in your safari bungalow is a surreal experience. Beyond the cloth walls, wildlife rustles and scratches in the bush. No streetlights shine into your room, no cars beep in the distance, and no televisions can be faintly heard. The complete darkness and foreignness of the situation really hits you when you are lying in bed. Despite this absence of normality, the soft bed and the quietly whirring fan quickly lull you to sleep.

In the morning, guests wake early for a 7 o'clock airboat trip. This time the airboat travels to another

area of the floodplains and experienced staff members point out different species of birds. Everyone feels the serenity of the experience, with guests and staff speaking in soft tones as a cool breeze wafts over the floodplains and the sun climbs into the sky.

Back at the lodge, dedicated staff offer freshly cooked bacon, tomato, and eggs for the ravenous guests. Cereal, muesli, and fruit are also on offer with guests helping themselves to tea, coffee, and juice. After the early start and excitement of the airboat trip, some guests go back to their bungalows to relax, nap, and read. Others stay around the infinity pool and gaze out at the floodplains.

From the pool, buffalo, brumbies, and wallabies can be seen grazing only 10 metres away. Shaded lounges are situated at either end of the pool, allowing guests to alternate between swimming, reading, and napping. During the heat of the day, this slow, relaxed pace is perfect.

Following a light lunch of salmon quiche, and salad, guests are taught how to crack whips. Gleeful exclamations and sharp whip cracks are heard across the grass as whips are energetically swung overhead.

Later in the afternoon, guests are taken on a guided four-wheel drive tour of Swim Creek Station, where different trees and species of wildlife are pointed out. Guests learn about the traditional Indigenous Australian uses for different trees and plants, and the variety of birds that can be found in the area. Stopping next to a large billabong, guests enjoy wine,



beer, and antipasto before heading back to Bamurru.

Dinner is another communal affair with the first course consisting of delicious king prawns poached in herb and garlic butter. Twice-roasted pork belly with caramelised onions and star anise jus serves as a rich, satisfying main. Finally, a decadent chocolate fondant with vanilla pod parfait ends another sumptuous meal.

Following a 9-hour sleep, you wake for a guided walking tour of neighbouring bushland before enjoying a well-deserved breakfast. After packing and taking a few more photos of the impossibly lush floodplains, you are driven to the nearby airstrip for your flight back to the real world.

Driving through the dense vegetation, you catch your last, fleeting glimpses of wallabies leaping through the bush and buffalos grazing beside the path. The peace and serenity of Bamurru Plains, with its vast vistas and abundance of wildlife, is an experience that will linger long after the resort has faded behind you. ●