

Where else can you watch grazing water buffalo whilst sipping cocktails or sample food as wild as the landscape? Toss aside the bow-ties, guide books and stilettos and head to Australia's Northern Territories for true bush luxury.



Sitting under a fan-cooled, Balinese-styled pavilion, with an ice cold Bombay and tonic in hand and dinner roasting on a near-by stone camp fire, life at Bamurru Plains is about as idyllic as you can hope for. Here, the nature takes this magical experience one step further with a Noah's Ark like procession of wildlife passing just metres in front of the luxury lodge, just as the peach sun settles into its daily decent.

Now Bamurru Plains, arguably the Territory's most luxurious game lodge, can't take credit for the conga line of wild boar, water buffalo and Brumbys (wild horses), but it's the camp's marriage with its stunning surroundings that make wildlife sightings here, miles from anything, a certainty rather than a novelty.

Located just off the Top End coast of the Northern Territories, and perched on the cusp of the Mary River flood plains, Bamurru Plains offers the ultimate in wild bush luxury and is the perfect place to escape to when the traffic jams, supermarket queues and deadlines become a bit much.

Situated on what Territorians would refer to as a "lifestyle block", the 305 square kilometre station plays home to all manner of wild life, indigenous and permanent residents; in typical NT fashion, it's a good 15 minute drive from front gate to front door. Guests can tackle the dust blown highway from Darwin by 4x4, or fly into the lodge's own landing strip for the ultimate escape.

Accommodation at Bamurru Plains is hardly roughing it as well. Nine luxurious cabins feature comfy beds, air conditioning and outdoor showers, and are grounded above the verge of the flood plain, close enough to the main lodge to call for help when your Sauvignon runs low, but far enough not to interfere with your environmental voyeurism.

At sunrise, coffee and wattle seed muffins are delivered by John, one of the knowledgeable team that city slickers tend to cling to when venturing beyond the infinity pool and fan-driven comforts of the lodge. Many guests take their morning cup of Joe in the "viewing gallery", a little sun room off each cabin with a unique one way fabric that allows some great early morning wildlife spotting. For the guests, silence will be rewarded with an up close and personal wildlife encounter that few have experienced.



Another unique aspect is climbing aboard an air boat akin to something straight out of Miami CSI. Incorporated into the lodge's packages, Bamurru is the only place where the common tourist can climb aboard one of these boats, for the ride of a lifetime to the furthest reaches of the floodplains.

With a roar that echoes even under the air protectors, the massive engine gathers momentum and propels the Teflon-coated hull across the flooded landscape. Clouds of black, squawking magpie geese climb sluggishly from their hidden nests amongst the reeds and gossip from the branches of drowned trees. The air boats glide so effortlessly across the emerald green flood plain which looks, for all intents and purposes, like solid ground, exactly as it is half the year. But when the floods wash trillions of litres of waters down towards the coast, it creates a very special ecosystem, loved by myriad wildlife.

In the shade of an ancient paperbark forest, guests bob on the still, swampy water of John's favourite picnic spot. The water shimmers like charcoal silk and is home to some of the station's largest crocodiles. According to John, they lurk in the shadows cast by the partially submerged trees, waiting, not for tourists, but for fat Barramundi to swim by.

Would-be explorers feast on sun dried tomato quiche and thick sandwiches of cheese and roasted capsicum; food seems to play a pivotal role at Bamurru, with multi-course dinners every night and breakfasts as wide as your imagination. Menus can be rather adventurous; lunch on the likes of terracotta pot pies filled with camel and water buffalo and by evening dine on local scallops and crayfish on the lodge's sprawling deck as the day's warmth ebbs off.

Aboriginal bush tucker is one of the many topics discussed during the regular outings; from air boats through to the rugged little Toyota cutaway 4x4s which tumble and grumble through the bush like a mechanical water buffalo, guests see the true life of the station and learn about their newly adopted surrounds. Guests learn how "lime" ants taste, recognise potentially fatal berries, and smoke fish in bundles of paper bark in a real boy scout experience that is popular with visitors of all ages.

Days at Bamurru drift pass far too quickly before climbing aboard a dusty "troop" for the road back to Darwin. But you will leave with a better understanding of a stunningly beautiful land and the harsh realities of the top end, and a definite preference for cocktail hours with a Noah's procession.



How to Get There: Fly Cathay Pacific (www.cathaypacific.com) to Cairns and connect with Qantas (www.qantas.com) on to Darwin.

Where to Stay: Bamurru Plains offers uniform accommodation across its nine beautifully-appointed cottages. Each boasts a bedroom, living room and spacious outdoor bathroom. www.bamurruplains.com

Getting Around: Bamurru Plains can organise 4x4 transfers between the wilderness lodge and the airport or your accommodation in Darwin. Alternatively the lodge can also organise helicopter transfers from Darwin International Airport direct to the property. If Bamurru Plains is one stop on your Northern Territories adventure, several hire car companies have offices at Darwin, including Avis, Europcar, Hertz and Thrifty. For more info go to <http://darwinairportcarhire.com.au>