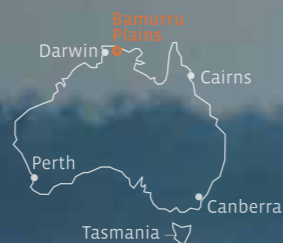




# INTO THE WILD



Where else can you view grazing water buffalo over cocktails or sample food as wild as the landscape itself? Time to toss aside the bow-ties, guide books and stilettos and head off to Australia's Northern Territory for some true bush luxury. Nick Walton explores the wilderness.

Ingin menyeruput koktail sembari menyaksikan kerbau merumput? Lemparkan dasi kupu-kupu, buku panduan wisata, atau sepatu berhak tinggi, lalu meluncurlah ke Northern Territory guna menikmati kemewahan padang semak yang sejati. Nick Walton menceritakan petualangannya.

Water buffalo stalk the dawn on the floodplains | Kawanan kerbau air membelah padang rumput floodplain di kala fajar.





## SITTING UNDER A FAN-COOLED, BALINESE-STYLE PAVILION, ICE COLD BOMBAY AND TONIC

in hand and with dinner roasting on a nearby stone campfire, life's about as idyllic as can be hoped for in a rugged landscape such as this. Until nature takes it one step further of course, with a Noah's Ark like procession of wildlife passing just metres away out in front of our luxury lodge, just as the peach plume of the sun settles into the dust.

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 Brumbies (wild horses), however the camp's intimate marriage with its stunning surroundings make wildlife spotting here, miles from anything, a certainty rather than a novelty.

Bamurru Plains is perched on the cusp of the Mary River Floodplains, which are located just off the Top End coastal area of the Northern Territory, the second northernmost point on the continent. Bamurru Plains offers the ultimate in wild-bush luxury and is the perfect place to escape to when the traffic jams, su-

permarket queues and deadlines all become a bit too much to handle.

Situated on what Territorians refer to as a "life-style block", the 305sq km station is home to all manner of indigenous wildlife and permanent residents. Moreover, in typical NT fashion, it's a good 15-minute drive from front gate to front door, although many of the station's well-to-do guests choose to arrive via helicopter or light aircraft, taxiing to a halt on the property's landing strip. Many choose to take the overland route though, a dust-blown highway which cuts across the brutalised landscape from Darwin, where everyone is a visitor and where the notion of man venturing into the rugged wilds of nature is epitomised.

After bumping over rutted roads reshaped after the annual flooding, past herds of sun-worshipping Brahmin cattle and the odd inquisitive water buffalo, we finally arrive at our rather unique accommodation. Forget tents or prefabs more reminiscent of an inner-

FROM LEFT: Airboats greet the new morning | Mengisi pagi dengan safari airboat; A huntsman spider rests on a shaded leaf | Laba-laba huntsman bersantai di atas daun teduh. OPPOSITE PAGE: Cruising across the floodplains | Menyusuri medan floodplain.



city primary school. Oh no. Instead, luxurious cabins are perched above the verge of the floodplain, close enough to the main lodge to call for help when your Sauvignon runs low but far enough away not to interfere with your environmental voyeurism.

In fact, the design of the lodge is all about nature and brings guests to the very cusp of the Territory's famed wildlife. Don't fret though, as there are proper beds here, as well as air conditioning, fans and a lavish bathroom that features a cobble-stone shower that offers an outdoor feel. The most impressive element of the setup here though is the cabin's unique stealth technology! Through the use of an innovative new fabric, guests can enjoy the cool, privacy of their cabin while still being able to view the wildlife clearly.

effortlessly across the emerald-green floodplain which looks, for all intents and purposes, like solid ground, which is exactly what it is for half the year. When the floods arrive and wash trillions of litres of water down towards the coast though, a very special ecosystem is created, one that is loved by a wealth of 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, so it's strictly hands inside the boat. According to John, these beasts lurk in the shadows cast by the partially submerged trees just waiting, not for tourists but for fat Barramundi to swim by.

Aboriginal bush tucker is one of the many topics discussed during the regular outings. Everything

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It's sunrise, and coffee and wattle-seed muffins are delivered by John, a member 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", the little sunroom that sits off the main bedroom of each cabin. Tiny, shy wallabies lope around the stilt foundations of our cabin and a short distance away, a female water buffalo splashes through the waters of the floodplain, her young trailing behind her, never more than a few metres from her protection. For the patient, silence will be rewarded with an up-close wildlife encounter the likes of which few have experienced.

Another unique experience can be enjoyed by climbing aboard a real airboat of the kind seen in "CSI: Miami". Bamurru is the only place where the common tourist can climb aboard for the ride of a lifetime and the airboats, which are incorporated into the lodge's packages, take guests 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 airboats glide



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Picnic in a billabong | Piknik di billabong; The 4WD vehicle is standard in the outback | Kendaraan 4WD adalah alat transportasi standar di outback; Water buffalo are drawn to the floodplains to feed | Kerbau-kerbau air mencari makan di floodplain; John pilots one of the airboats | John mengendarai salah satu airboat.





from the aforementioned airboats through to the rugged little Toyota cutaway 4x4s that tumble and grumble their way through the bush are employed as guests get to experience the true life of the station and learn a little about their newly adopted surrounds. Guests take turns plucking the bulbous, green, business ends of native ants, under our guide's attentive eye, and taste their tangy lime-like zest, the ancient equivalent of the lime after the tequila shot I'm guessing. Visitors also learn how to smoke fish in bark, as well as which berries spell certain death. It's real Boy Scout stuff and guests absolutely love it!

**How to get there**

Bamurru Plains ([www.bamurruplains.com](http://www.bamurruplains.com)) is located just to the west of the Kakadu National Park. It can be reached in 20 minutes by light aircraft from Darwin airport, or in three hours by car from Darwin. Please contact Garuda Indonesia's Darwin office (1300-365-333, [www.garuda-indonesia.net.au](http://www.garuda-indonesia.net.au)) if you need more assistance on visiting Darwin.

## TEROKA SEMAK UTARA

Saya duduk di pendopo bergaya Bali yang disejukan kipas angin sembari ditemani Bombay dan tonik dingin, serta asap dari makanan yang sedang dipanggang di tungku batu. Inilah mungkin kemewahan pariwisata yang bisa dinikmati di alam liar. Persis ketika warna-warna jingga mentari senja mengendap dalam debu, kawanan hewan melintas di depan penginapan, layaknya parade menuju bahtera Nabi Nuh.

Parade babi hutan, kerbau, atau *brumbies* (kuda liar) adalah fenomena harian di tempat ini. Tidak ada hubungannya dengan kehadiran Bamurru Plains. Yang membuat pondokan luks di Northern Territory ini spesial adalah, ia melebur dengan lingkungan sekitarnya, hingga tamu bisa menyaksikan aktivitas hewan secara natural, tanpa rekayasa atau pancingan.

Bamurru berada di persimpangan Mary River Floodplains di dekat wilayah pesisir Top End, satu dari dua titik paling utara di Benua Australia. Ia menawarkan kemewahan padang belukar yang sulit ditandingi, dan kawasan tempatnya berdiri merupakan suaka

FROM LEFT: Barracuda baked in paperbark | Ikan barakuda dimasak di hutan *paperbark*; Magpie geese rise from the floodplains | Angsa *magpie* beterbangan melintasi *floodplain*. OPPOSITE PAGE: The waters bring life to the desert | Air menciptakan kehidupan di padang tandus.





yang sempurna bagi Anda yang jenuh dengan kemacetan, antrean di supermarket, atau *deadline* pekerjaan.

Bamurru Plains mencakup lahan seluas 305 kilometer persegi di area yang dijuluki "*lifestyle block*" oleh warga Northern Territory. Datang lewat jalur darat dari Darwin, Anda akan menyusuri jalan berdebu yang membelah lanskap buas, di mana manusia berstatus tamu dan pengalaman safari terasa spektakuler.

Untuk mencapai penginapan, saya meniti jalan yang telah banyak berubah bentuk akibat banjir tahunan, lalu melewati kawanan sapi Brahmin yang sedang berjemur di bawah matahari dan beberapa ekor kerbau air yang selalu menunjukkan wajah penasaran. Pondokan di Bamurru didesain sangat unik. Lupakan kemah atau bangunan kompak di dalam kota. Alih-alih yang tersaji adalah kabin-kabin premium yang

bertengger di tepian *floodplain* (daerah tepi sungai yang kering sepanjang musim panas dan terendam air di musim hujan).

Jarak kabin cukup dekat dari bangunan utama, sehingga tamu bisa berteriak jika botol wine Sauvignon telah kering. Tapi juga cukup jauh agar privasi tamu saat melebur dengan alam tetap terjaga.

Kabin di Bamurru memang didesain untuk menyatu dengan alam, tapi fasilitasnya cukup lengkap. Ada kasur yang nyaman, pendingin udara, kipas angin, serta kamar mandi elegan yang dilengkapi *shower*. Tapi elemen yang paling penting dan mengesankan adalah teknologi kamuflase di tubuh bangunan! Pengelola melekatkan materi kain inovatif yang memungkinkan tamu menyaksikan alam dari ruangan yang nyaman, tanpa terdeteksi oleh para hewan.



**BISA MELIHAT HEWAN-HEWAN INI DALAM JARAK DEKAT ADALAH PENGALAMAN YANG LANGKA, DAN RESEP UNTUK MENGALAMINYA SEBENARNYA SANGAT SEDERHANA—KESABARAN.**

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM RIGHT: Sunset from the back of a 4WD Troopie | Matahari terbenam di belakang Troopie; Flooded billabongs are the favoured haunts of crocodiles | Genangan di *billabong* adalah markas favorit buaya; A magpie goose caught in flight | Angsa *magpie* tertangkap kamera dari jarak dekat; A special, in-cabin "hide" sundeck; *Sundeck* tersembunyi di kabin.





FROM LEFT: Wild landscapes meet fine dining at Bamarru | Kombinasi alam liar dan fine dining di Bamarru; A water lily blooms | Bunga teratai merekah.

**Mentari baru terbit.**

Kopi dan *muffin* yang dihiasi biji *wattle* diantarkan oleh John, staf properti yang sangat mengenal medan.

Mayoritas tamu menyeruput kopi pagi di “*viewing gallery*”, semacam *sunroom* yang bertengger di luar kamar tidur utama di tiap kabin. Beberapa ekor *wallaby* (kanguru kecil) pemalu berseliweran di seputar fondasi bangunan. Tak jauh dari mereka, seekor kerbau betina bersama anaknya menerabas kubangan di lembah. Bisa melihat hewan-hewan ini dalam jarak dekat adalah pengalaman yang langka, dan resep untuk mengalaminya sebenarnya sangat sederhana—kesabaran.

Ingin sensasi yang lebih ekstrem? Silakan mencoba “*airboat*”, sejenis perahu rawa bertenaga baling-baling besar yang mungkin pernah Anda saksikan di film “*CSI: Miami*”. Bamarru bisa jadi adalah satu-satunya tempat di mana turis reguler dapat menaikinya. *Airboat* (biaya

**How to get there**

—Bamarru Plains ([www.bamurruplains.com](http://www.bamurruplains.com)) berlokasi di sisi barat Taman Nasional Kakadu. Anda bisa menjangkaunya menggunakan pesawat ringan selama 20 menit dari Bandara Darwin atau berkendara selama tiga jam dari kota Darwin. Silakan hubungi kantor Garuda Indonesia di Darwin (1300-365-331, [www.garuda-indonesia.net.au](http://www.garuda-indonesia.net.au)) jika Anda membutuhkan informasi tentang cara menuju Darwin.



sudah termasuk dalam harga penginapan) akan meluaskan penumpang hingga tapal batas *floodplain*.

Suara mesin menderu dan menembus penutup telinga saat *airboat* bergerak kian cepat dan melintasi lanskap yang tergenang air. Bagaimana awan hitam yang berarak, kawanan angsa *magpie* terbang lambat dari sarang mereka yang tersembunyi di antara alang-alang, lalu hinggap di dahan-dahan pohon yang sebagian tubuhnya terbenam air.

Perahu berlapis teflon dengan mudahnya menyeberangi hamparan air berwarna hijau zamrud yang tampak seperti tanah padat. (Di musim panas, hamparan ini memang berubah jadi tanah padat.) Di musim hujan, saat banjir datang dan menggelontorkan miliaran liter air ke arah pantai, sebuah ekosistem baru tercipta di tempat ini dan kehidupan pun merekah.

Dalam rimbunan hutan *paperbark*, para tamu terapung di atas rawa tenang—tempat piknik favorit John. Permukaan air terlihat mengilat layaknya sutra hitam, tapi di bawah keindahan itu bersarang buaya-buaya buas. Agar sang predator tetap di sana, tangan dan kaki penumpang harus tetap di atas perahu.

Petualangan di Bamarru—mulai dari *airboat* hingga *off-road*—dirancang agar para peserta dapat menyelami pola hidup lokal. Salah satu materi yang menarik dipelajari adalah makanan semak gaya Aborigin. Di bawah pengawasan pemandu, kami bergantian mencabut bagian pantat semut hijau, kemudian mencicipi rasanya yang asam dan tajam—mirip rasa limau setelah menenggak segelas tequila. Kami juga mendapatkan kesempatan mengasap ikan dengan kulit kayu dan mengenal buah beri beracun. Kelas-kelas bergaya Pramuka ini sangat disukai para tamu.

Dua hari di Bamarru lewat terlalu cepat dan pagi terakhir segera tiba. Sebuah Land Cruiser Troopi berdebu mengangkut para tamu kembali ke Darwin. Saya beranjak dari tempat ini dengan membawa pemahaman yang lebih baik atas alam Top End yang menawan sekaligus keras. Satu pengalaman yang pastinya sulit dilupakan adalah sesi minum koktail seraya menyaksikan parade hewan.

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