



# Bamurru Plains

Where else can you watch grazing water buffalo over cocktails and sample food as wild as the landscape? Toss aside the bowties, guidebooks and stilettos and head to Australia's Northern Territory for true bush luxury.

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Sitting under an airy, fan-cooled pavilion, ice-cold Bombay Gin and tonic in hand and with dinner roasting on a nearby stone-oven campfire, life seems about as idyllic as one could hope for in any rugged landscape. Until nature takes it one step further with a Noah's Ark-like procession of wildlife, passing just metres in front of the luxury lodge as a peach-plum sun makes its daily descent below the horizon.

Bamurru Plains, arguably the Territory's most luxurious game lodge, can't actually take credit for the conga-line of wild boar, water buffalo and brumbies, but it's the remote camp's marriage with its stunning surroundings that makes spotting wildlife here a certainty rather than a sporadic novelty.

Located not far from the Top End coast, on the edge of the Mary River flood plains, Bamurru Plains offers the ultimate in wild bush luxury accommodation. Indeed, it's the perfect place to escape traffic jams, supermarket queues and deadlines.

Situated on what Territorians would refer to as a "lifestyle block", the 300-plus-square-kilometre station plays host to all manner of wildlife along with its indigenous and European residents. In typical Northern Territory fashion, it's a minimum 20-minute drive from front gate to front door. Though many of the station's well-to-do guests choose to arrive via helicopter or light plane directly to the property's landing strip, others take the overland route, a dust-blown highway that cuts across the ▶

## GETAWAY



brutally harsh landscape from Darwin, on which everyone is a visitor.

After bumping over rutted roads reshaped after the annual flooding, past herds of sun-worshipping Brahman cattle and the odd inquisitive water buffalo, we arrive at our accommodation. Forget tents, or prefabs reminiscent of inner-city school add-ons: these are genuinely luxurious cabins, each perched on the edge of the flood plain, close enough to the main lodge to call for help if your sauvignon blanc runs low but distant enough not to interrupt your environmental voyeurism.

Indeed, the design of the lodge is all about nature, bringing guests to the very brink of the Territory's famed wildlife terrain.

Don't fret: each cabin has proper beds, air-conditioning if requested in advance, fans and a lavish bathroom incorporating a shower with stone floor that lends an outdoorsy feel without the great outdoors' unwelcome visitors.

The cabins' most important feature, however, is the incorporation of some smart technology. Thanks to an innovative mesh fabric sheathing the safari-bungalow walls, guests can enjoy the cool privacy of their rooms while viewing the native fauna and birdlife for which the station is renowned.

It's sunrise, and coffee and wattle-seed muffins are delivered by John, one of the knowledgeable team to whom city-slickers cling when venturing beyond the infinity pool and the fan-cooled comforts of the lodge. Many guests take their morning cup of Joe in their cabin's private "viewing gallery", a little sunroom off each main bedroom from which they'll likely see tiny, shy wallabies loping around the stilts beneath the cabin and, a short distance away, water buffalo splashing through the waters of the flood plain, young trailing behind them. Patient, silent watchers will be rewarded most times with ▶

**Previous page:** John pilots one of the station's airboats across the floodplains.

**This page, clockwise from top left:** Wild flowers grow in abundance; The monsoon months bring migrating birds to the station; The station's menu is as wild as it's inhabitants - fresh local catch on the sun terrace.

**Next page, left to right:** The cabin feature their own little wildlife viewing areas; Magpie geese take off in mass.



up-close-and-personal wildlife encounters, the likes of which few will have experienced.

Another unique aspect about staying at Bamurru Plains is climbing aboard a real airboat (as seen on the TV series *Miami CSO*). Bamurru is one of the only places in the Territory where tourists can ride in such a vessel – and it's the ride of a lifetime, as the airboats take guests (and only guests) to the farthest reaches of the floodplains. Better still, airboat rides and most other scheduled activities are included in Bamurru's accommodation packages.

With a roar that echoes even under the air-protectors, the massive Chrysler engine gathers momentum and propels the Teflon-coated hull across the flooded landscape. Crowds of black, squawking magpie geese

climb sluggishly from their hidden nests among the reeds and chatter from the branches of half-drowned trees. The airboat glides effortlessly across the emerald-green flood plain, which looks for all intents and purposes like solid ground – as indeed it is for half the year. But as the annual floods wash trillions of litres of water toward the Top End coast, they create a very special ecosystem that draws a myriad birds and an array of other wildlife to this place.

In the shade of ancient paperbark gums, guests bob on the surface of the still, swampy water that is John's favourite picnic spot. The water shimmers like charcoal silk – and under it lurk some of the station's largest crocodiles, so it's all hands inside the boat. According to John, they tend to stay in the shadows cast by

partially submerged trees and wait, not for tourists, but for fat barramundi to swim by.

While watching for crocs, we feast on sundried-tomato quiche and thick sandwiches filled with cheese and roasted capsicum. Food plays a pivotal role in life at Bamurru, with multi-course dinners held every night. Breakfasts are as big as your imagination and there are adventurous lunch options – such as terracotta pot pies filled with camel and water-buffalo meat, and local scallop and crayfish dishes. Canapes are served with sunset drinks on the lodge's sprawling deck as the day's warmth ebbs. You might end the day's dining with a particularly stubborn but ultimately delicious beggar's chicken.

Darren, the lodge's chef, formerly executive chef at Darwin's Parliament House, brings ▶

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innovation and flair to Bamurru's menus: rest assured that the local "bush tucker" is never served as typical or clichéd fare.

Aboriginal bush tucker is one of many topics you'll discuss on outings from the lodge – and there are plenty from which to choose, including tours of the environs in a rugged little 4x4 that tumbles and grumbles through the bush like a mechanical water buffalo. On these excursions, guests get 'insider' glimpses into daily life on a remote Top End station and the chance to learn lots about their newly adopted surrounds.

Under our guide's attentive stare, we take turns plucking the bulbous green "business ends" off native ants and tasting their limy zest – the ancient equivalent of sucking a lemon wedge after a tequila shot, I'm guessing. We also learn how to smoke fish in bark, and which bush berries spell certain death. This is real boy-scout stuff and the guests love it.

Our two days at Bamurru speed past and before we know it, our party of guests is climbing aboard a dusty "troopy" to hit the road back to Darwin. We depart, like so many of Bamurru's guests, with a better understanding of this extraordinary pocket of our wide brown land, an appreciation of the harsh realities of Top End life – and a definite preference for cocktail hours with wildlife on the side. ■



## FACT FILE

### HOW TO GET THERE

Bamurru Plains is located on the edge of the Mary River floodplains just a short distance from the coast and the western boundary of Kakadu National Park. It is 3 hours' drive from Darwin, or 20 minutes flight by light aircraft from Darwin airport.

### WHAT TO TAKE

Most items are provided on site – but pack clothing that is suitable for hot days, cool nights and plenty of sun.

### WHEN TO TRAVEL

May is the beginning of the 'dry' season, the most comfortable time of year to visit the Territory. From May to August, you'll typically enjoy cooler temperatures without monsoonal rain.

### BAMURRU PLAINS

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