

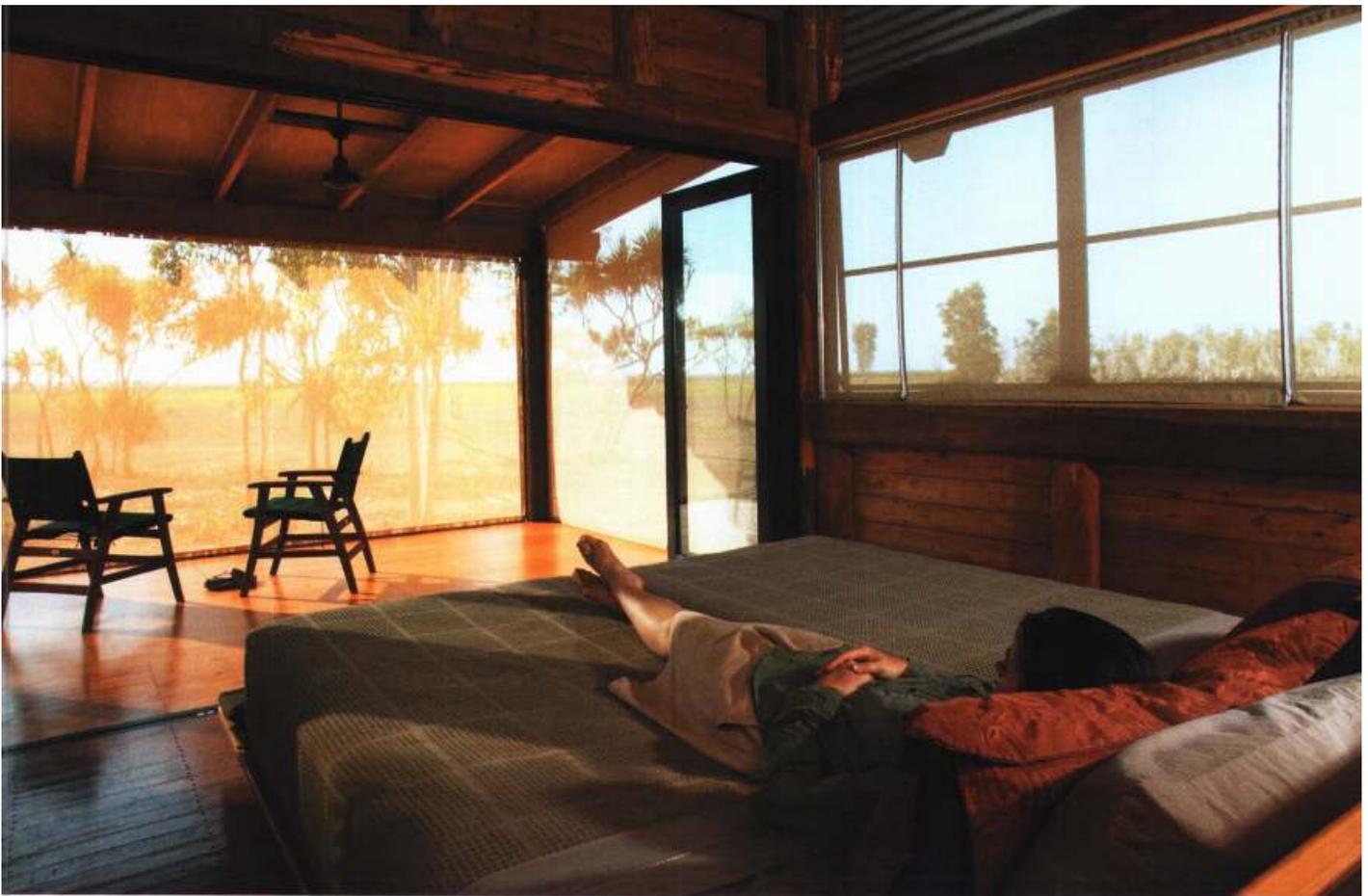
bamurru plains

echos of Africa

Offering wild bush luxury, exclusivity and a new wilderness experience, Bamurru Plains is a getaway to remember.

WORDS INGRID SAUNDERS IMAGES PETER EVE





Serenity: With no televisions or in-room telephones, Bamurru Plains is a luxury bush getaway just perfect for total relaxation. Photographs: Peter Eve.

As the sun settles, bathing the landscape in an orange hue, large beasts graze in the lush pasture of the Mary River floodplain. From the distance comes the sound of thousands of magpie geese.

Brilliant lush green growth carpets the earth, a large body of water sparkles as it catches the late afternoon light and mottled cloud formations begin to glow.

Nor an African vista, but the scene from the deck of the Northern Territory's latest venture in exclusive bush luxury accommodation – Bamurru Plains, on the coastal floodplains of the Mary River Delta approximately two hours' drive north-east of Darwin.

Sydney-based businessman Charles Carlow, who saw a need in the market for accessible

upmarket accommodation in the Northern Territory, set up Bamurru Plains in 2006.

He wanted somewhere guests didn't have to fly into, a place remote yet close enough for guests to drive to from Darwin without too much stress. And so the concept of wild bush luxury at Bamurru Plains was born. And it's already gathering international accolades, being named one of 2007's hottest new properties by Britain's prestigious *Condé Nast Traveller* magazine.

Bamurru is in the centre of a piece of pastoral land called Swim Creek Station, home to thousands of water buffalo farmed for the export market.

These large animals, free to roam around Bamurru Plains and posing little risk to visitors, most certainly provide a talking point. Charles

says the buffalo are more interested in scratching their backs on the woodwork than disturbing the visitors.

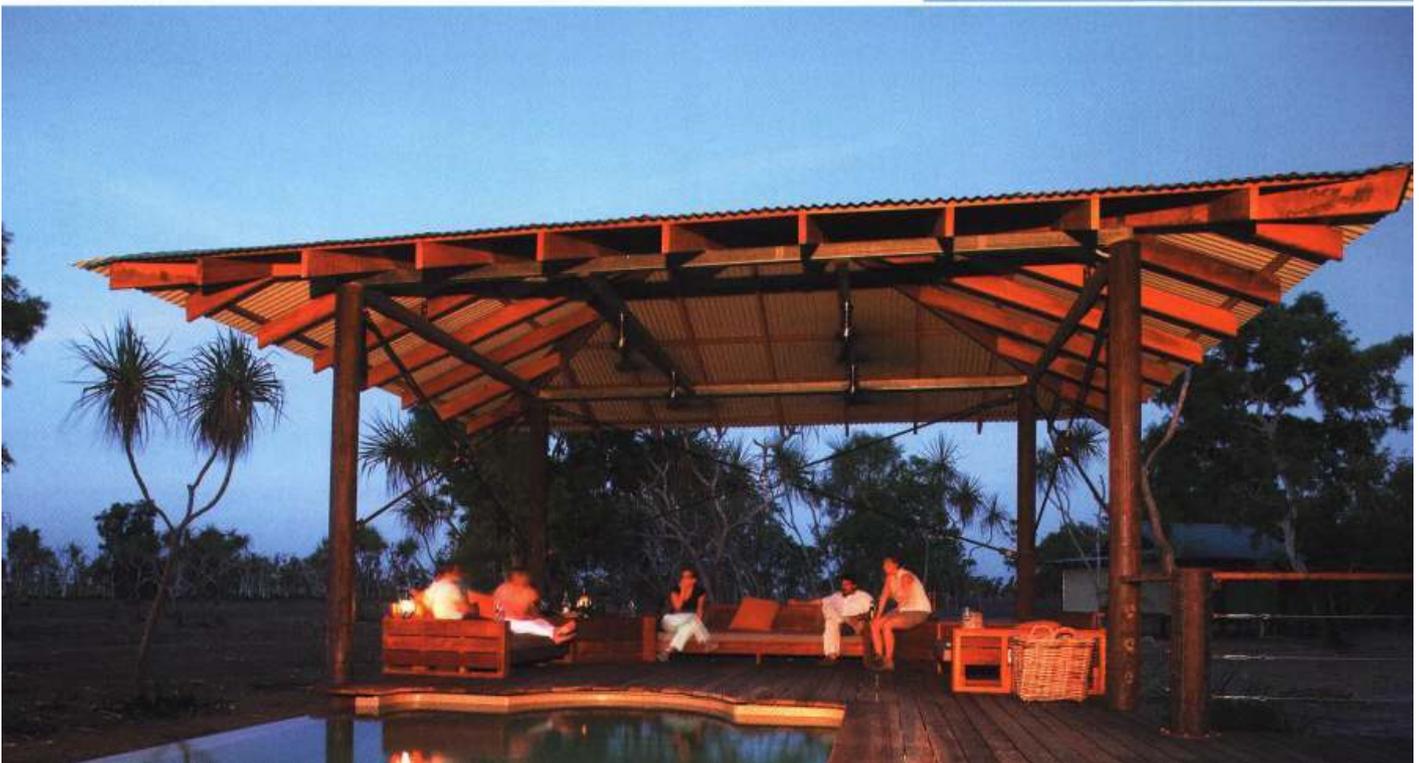
Officially opened in February this year, Bamurru Plains is the latest and greatest addition to the Northern Territory's luxury accommodation market. It was created to provide the affluent adventurer with an authentic Australian wilderness experience.

There are no in-room telephones, minibars or televisions; these mod cons are viewed as distractions from the beauty and calmness of the surrounds. Instead all attention during a stay at Bamurru is focused on the surrounding environment, and visitors housed in free-standing ensuite rooms are encouraged to explore the magnificence of the landscape.



Every aspect of Bamurru, particularly its design, captures and incorporates environmentally friendly practice.

The Bamurru Plains experience blends in totally with the natural environment.





Chef Darren Powell, who formerly worked at Darwin's Parliament House cooking for the Territory's elite, is on hand to prepare and serve breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks.

Along with the three bungalows, there is also a main lodge area that offers a well-stocked library, comfortable reading chairs, kitchen, bar and gorgeous day bed. If you enjoy sitting and listening to the sounds of nature there is no better place to relax.

Chef Darren Powell, who formerly worked at Darwin's Parliament House cooking for the Territory's elite, is on-hand to prepare and serve breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks. The food is creatively presented and prepared in line with the wild bush luxury concept.

Platters of Australian fare such as kangaroo, buffalo and barramundi are infused with native herbs and spices and presented on paperbark and pandanas leaves, and the menu can be tailored to meet guests' dietary requirements.

Bamurru's friendly, down-to-earth staff make guests feel welcome and at ease. Customer service manager Roberta Fraser is passionate about providing a high level of service and is keen to ensure guests have everything they need, from cold water during outings to their favourite beer while relaxing.

Roberta keeps a close eye on the staff, guiding and encouraging them to chat with guests and pass on books to those who may be interested in a particular subject such as bird watching or

Indigenous uses of local plants.

She is passionate about the surrounding environment, its wildlife and landscape and says she loves to teach visitors about the Territory.

"If everyone goes home and remembers just one thing I tell them about, for example, the use of pandanas leaves for making woven baskets or the Aboriginal name for crocodile (Ginga), then I feel happy about the job I'm doing," she says.

Every aspect of Bamurru, particularly its design, captures and incorporates environmentally friendly practice. From energy usage to waste disposal, each has been planned to minimise the property's impact on the land.

The comfortable bungalows are designed to bring visitors close to nature. The walls are airy screens that allow breezes to permeate the room. In the bathroom, a tree trunk protrudes through the floor up to the roof with a showerhead the size of a large dinner plate ready to drench you in seconds.

There's a selection of locally produced natural soaps and herb-infused hair products that will leave you refreshed. Although the bungalows are fully screened to let the fresh breeze roll in, sliding doors can close off the bedroom area if you prefer airconditioned comfort.



There are only a few places in the world where you can go airboating – it's an awesome experience.



The screens also allow you to sit and relax on the deck of the bungalow while gazing out at the floodplains at the birds flying past. At night, turn off the lights and see a carpet of stars twinkling above. When guests aren't out touring, the large wet-edge pool is an ideal place to whittle away a few hours and cool off during the heat of the day.

There is also a fully stocked bar, included in the tariff, where guests can help themselves. The bar has a quality selection and range of beer, wines, spirits and non-alcoholic drinks to sip while watching the wallabies grazing on the green shoots nearby.

Bamurru's guests could be forgiven for lounging by the pool enjoying the delicious morsels of food prepared by the talented chef, but there is plenty to do and see in the surrounding area.

Touring the area

There is a light aeroplane strip at Bamurru Plains from which you can fly to and from Darwin, but it is also handy for day trips to nearby Kakadu National Park, famous for its thundering waterfalls, colourful large stone escarpments, Aboriginal culture and enormous diversity of flora and fauna.

A 20-minute flight will have you in the Kakadu's central township of Jabiru. From here, many touring options await.

Whether a cruise on the famous Yellow Water billabong to see large saltwater crocodiles and birdlife, viewing Aboriginal art galleries more than 40,000 years old at Nourlangie Rock, climbing to the top of Ubirr to catch a breathtaking glimpse of the Kakadu escarpment, or a trip across the East Alligator River to experience Aboriginal art and culture at Injalak Hill in Arnhem Land, it's all at your fingertips.

What's not to miss at Bamurru

There are four touring activities on the property, including airboat rides, walking, 4WD safari nature tours and a scenic boat tour on the Sampan River. Guests are encouraged to stay for two nights at Bamurru, which allows plenty of time to fit in each of the touring options along with a chance for rest and relaxation by the pool, reading a book in the comfort of the lodge, or taking an afternoon nap.

AIRBOATS

Airboats are one of the best ways to see the many species of birdlife around the lodge and are also lots of fun. You'll see large and noisy flocks of magpie geese and small wrens darting through the tall grasses and pandanas trees. High in the sky visitors are often treated to views of solitary whistling kites, a common and majestic sight in Territory skies.

Skimming over the waters filled with colourful lilies and plant life at up to 40kmh on an airboat is exhilarating, but be sure to keep your arms inside the boat – below the water lurk dangerous saltwater crocodiles, which according to Roberta, take their fare share of buffalo for dinner each year.

There are only a few places in the world where you can go airboating – it is pretty noisy in the boats and guests are given earmuffs to wear while scooting across the floodplain, but it's an awesome experience. It almost feels like you are out of control, skating across the top of the shallow water. Grasshoppers and dragonflies fly out of the way (most of the time) and sometimes the boat floats over what can only be millimetres of water. It's a great way to see the extraordinary diversity of the local wildlife.

There aren't many other activities where an enormous fan propels you across the water and the great thing is it's low impact on the environment.

Because the force of motion is created by air, there is minimal pollution and no tracks or drag marks as you move through the aquatic environment.



In a nutshell

Bamurru Plains is on Swim Creek Station on the floodplains of the Mary River Delta.

You can get there by air, which takes 20 minutes in a light plane from Darwin or Jabiru, Kakadu, or by road. The road trip is two-and-a-half hours from Darwin. The road is fully sealed until the turn-off at the Bark Hut and is unsealed part of the way to the lodge. Major airlines including Jetstar, VirginBlue and Qantas fly to Darwin. A stay at Bamurru Plains costs \$850 per person per night. A two-night stay is recommended. All meals, drinks and touring are included in the tariff. There are three private free-standing ensuite bungalows. Work on another six bungalows, due to open in February 2008, will start later this year. The lodge is open from February 1 to October 31 (closed for the wet season).

Web: bamurruplains.com

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Seasons

March to May

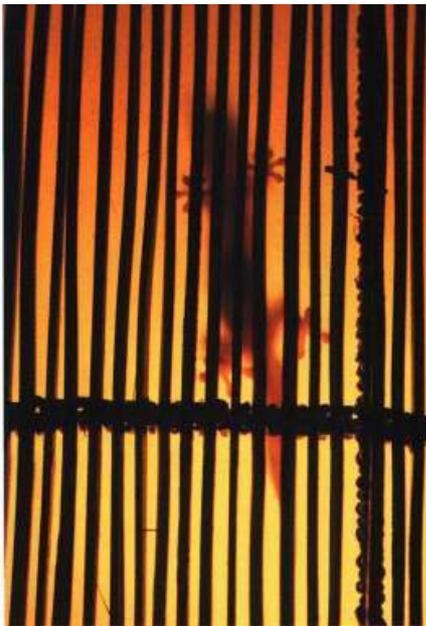
As the waters recede from the floodplains, the magpie geese and brolgas start to tend their newly hatched young and the shallower areas of water attract a variety of waterbirds (cormorants, pelicans, egrets, spoonbills, herons and ibises). Waterlilies and other perennial waterplants are in bloom during these months. Although the wet is officially over by March, an occasional storm can occur.

May to July

Cooler day and night temperatures and lower humidity make this period a comfortable time of the year to visit the Top End. Grassfires are a feature at this time of year that provide an opportunity to spot a variety of raptors, kites especially, but also brown falcons and sea eagles.

August to October

The days are warmer and the nights not so cool. Greater concentrations of birds are evident on the billabongs as the waterways and floodplains dry out. Tropical woodland plants flower at this time of year producing an abundance of nectar. Flowering cluster figs bring in a variety of species, including northern brushtail possums and the black flying fox. The dry floodplains are susceptible to fire at this time of year but nevertheless provide the opportunity to visit the coastline across the spectacular tidal mudflats.



FOUR-WHEEL DRIVE SAFARIS

Four-wheel drive safaris are another way to explore Bamurru. The lodge's Landcruiser has a cut-off roof, especially designed for safari trips. With a distinctly African feel, 4WD adventures take visitors through thick woodland, past termite mounds on grassy plains, into pandanas forests and in the dry season (May to October) across dry, cracked, mud pans.

Along the way, visitors will see loads of agile wallabies that dart away from the four-wheel drive at the last minute. Binoculars are handed out to spot saltwater crocodiles in the river shallows. The thick pandanas aquaticus forests are home to hundreds of small finches and wrens. The journey also reveals bush tucker and plants used for medicinal purposes by the Aboriginal people over the past 40,000 years.

Morning 4WD trips are worth the effort, despite the early start. On these trips you can see and hear the local birds and animals preparing for the day ahead.

You might see families of wild boars running through the scrub, brumbies, or the elegant grey brolga performing its mating dance. You are assured of the sight of water buffalo and their young wallowing in the mud, coating their hides with thick, grey dirt getting ready for the heat of the day.

BOATING

A scenic boat tour on the Sampan River

usually gives visitors a glimpse of the saltwater crocodile in its natural habitat. The 7m vessel has a shade canopy over the top and seating for 12 guests. Usually there are no more than six on the tour, so everyone has prime viewing of local wildlife and a "window" rather than isle seat.

Along with most things at Bamurru, no expense has been spared and the boat, specially designed for the local environment, is brand new. The tour runs for a couple of hours, and the distance the boat travels depends on what wildlife is active. Along the way, a delicious selection of gourmet drinks and snacks are served; you won't go hungry or thirsty during your stay at Bamurru. There are some large crocodiles in the Sampan River, but you are also likely to see some smaller animals such as goannas and water monitors. It is an untouched environment, devoid of any human influence, other than the occasional fisherman hoping to land a barramundi.

GUIDED WALKS

In order to gain the utmost appreciation of this area, a scenic guided walk through the bush brings guests one-on-one with the natural environment.

Guides explain the vegetation and different habitats, what species are living in which habitat and the impact of human presence on the area. The walks are all about looking at the smaller things of the bush and understanding them. 4