



MACDONNELL RANGES

The MacDonnell Ranges rise dramatically from the Central Australian desert floor, stretching east to west for 400 kilometres on either side of Alice Springs.

They provide a picturesque backdrop to the township of Alice Springs, lighting up each sunrise and sunset with a display of fiery reds, sunburnt oranges and deep purples. The Ranges are aged between 310 and 340 million years and emerged as a result of a massive earth movement that gave shape to much of Central Australia. The same earth movement also created another two Central Australian icons - Uluru (Ayers Rock) and Kata Tjuta (the Olgas). The Ranges once stood over 3000 metres before climate change and erosion formed many of the famous gaps, gorges, waterholes and chasms over time.

The traditional owners of Alice Springs, the Arrernte people, are spiritually connected to the Ranges through their Dreamtime stories. The Yeperenye Dreaming tells the story of an ancestor spirit in the form of a giant caterpillar that moved through Alice Springs creating the landscape and the MacDonnell Ranges.

The Larapinta Trail, a challenging 223 kilometre trek along the spine of the Ranges, roughly follows the Emu Dreaming and historical sites of the region's early European pioneering history are also dotted along the Trail.



In the East MacDonnell Ranges, Arltunga became the site of Central Australia's first town in 1887, after alluvial gold was discovered in the area. Further east is Ruby Gap, hailed as a rich deposit of rubies. The area experienced a mining rush which attracted over 200 prospectors. Unluckily for the fortune hunters, the stones turned out to be high-quality garnets and the site, along with Central Australia's ruby fever, was soon abandoned.

FACILITIES

Numerous camping sites are dotted throughout the MacDonnell Ranges at key interest points. Camping facilities and vehicle access varies between sites and some campgrounds charge an on-site fee for overnight visitors which are either payable to the Rangers Station or an honesty box.

Basic facilities such as fireplaces, running water, toilets and car-parking are available at Redbank Gorge, Trephina Gorge and Ellery Creek Big-Hole. Shower facilities and gas barbeques are available at Ormiston Gorge and at Arltunga Campground. Ross River Homestead provides budget accommodation, camping ground and caravan park with powered sites. Fuel, general store and kiosk are also available.

You can travel to the West MacDonnell Ranges via the sealed Larapinta and Namatijira Drives. It is possible to four-wheel-drive the Mereenie Loop to Watarraka National Park and Kings Canyon via Palm Valley and Hermannsburg.

The East MacDonnell Ranges can be accessed by taking the Ross Highway, which is sealed until Ross River Resort. From there you can travel further with four-wheel drive to Arltunga and Ruby Gap.

You can visit both East and West MacDonnell Ranges as part of a guided tour or travel in your own vehicle.

MUST DO

- Attempt a stage of the Larapinta Trail. Running 223 kilometres along the spine of the MacDonnell Ranges, the Trail is divided into twelve stages with access points open to vehicles along the track.
- Drive to Standley Chasm at noon to see the sun hit the floor of this narrow cleft in the Ranges, setting the walls aglow.
- Call into the Ochre Pits to see the source of ochre used by Aboriginal people for paintings and ceremonial body decorations.
- Marvel at the ghost gums and rugged rock walls as you take a dip at one of the many cool waterholes set in the gorges, like Ellery Creek Big Hole, Glen Helen or the spectacular Ormiston Gorge.
- Take a four-wheel drive to Tnorala Conservation Reserve (Gosse Bluff), a five-kilometre wide crater, which scientists believe was created when a comet blasted into earth 142 million years ago.
- Pay homage to the birthplace of famed indigenous artist Albert Namatjira at Hermannsburg Historical Precinct, the first Lutheran Mission established in the late 1880s.
- Fossick for semi-precious gemstones at Gemtree and have them set into jewellery onsite.

