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## **With one finger following the Stuart Highway, and the other tracing the trail walks entangling Alice Springs,**

outdoor experts Ben and Lauren mark the map with the most fascinating and culture-rich elements of Uluru and its surrounding areas. From the bitumen to the backroads, lose yourself in the outback tracks, trails, and tourist attractions of one of Australia's most remarkable and momentous landmarks.

Debuting as the first destination-based episode of the Snowys Camping Show, join Ben and Lauren as they detail the perfect points to pull in, how to handle the heat, the roads that are direct, and those that take the long way.

## **Short Cuts**

**00:00 - Intro**

**02:38 - Road-tripping**

**07:57 - Campsites**

**09:23 - Yulara**

**12:23 - National Park Bookings and Permits**

**14:04 - Ideal Travel Periods**

**17:18 - Stats**

**18:55 - Activities**

**23:39 - Budget**

**25:05 - A Few Tips**

**28:48 - Photos**

**29:04 - Uluru-Kata Tjuta**

**34:12 - Mobility**

## **Mentioned in this Episode**

### **Blogs:**

[7 Things They Don't Tell You About Visiting Uluru](#)

[Spring Adventure in the Flinders Part 1](#)

[Coober Pedy's Travel Secrets – More than just Opals & Mines](#)

[The Old Ghan Railway – North From Oodnadatta – Part 1](#)

[Travelling the Simpson Desert in the School Holidays](#)

### **Products:**

[4WD Gear](#)

[Guide to Free Campsites 2021-22](#)



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Ep18 – Camping, Waste & Leaving No Trace

## Road-tripping

For the South Aussies, the most straightforward route to the Northern Territory begins in Adelaide and follows the Stuart Highway through the centre. Pull up at plenty of serviceable towns along the way, such as Port Augusta, Coober Pedy, and Marla. With the frequent food and fuel stops also come sculptures, emus, and other wildlife.

A little longer, the Flinders route is an alternative to the Stuart Highway if time isn't a factor. Just before Port Augusta, drivers can turn due-north and travel through the eastern towns, before travelling up through the Flinders Ranges and looping back in towards Coober Pedy. On the western side of the Eyre Peninsula too, there are known to be many holiday shacks owned by those living in Alice Springs. This is because the peninsula is their closest coastal area.

Those who choose to take the Oodnadatta Track are recommended to call ahead at a roadhouse to determine its conditions. If recently graded, the road is likely to allow an easy drive – however the alternative is coarse and corrugated. Nonetheless, there are many attractions lining the Oodnadatta Track such as waterholes, campsites, and hot springs. For travellers from Perth, Victoria, or possibly Sydney, the suggested way is to pass through South Australia and travel direct from Adelaide. Another potential route from Melbourne is through the Riverlands and via Mildura. While there are alternate routes that move directly across, they require substantially more preparation and are best tackled with a 4WD – for example, those passing through the Simpson Desert.

East of Australia, Queenslanders can take the Barkly Highway across to the territory. As the only sealed road between Queensland and Northern Territory, it runs nearby Tennant Creek and above Alice Springs. From here, there's roughly 450km of travelling down to Uluru.

Most of the routes Lauren and Ben discuss are appropriate for two-wheel-drive vehicles. For example, the Red Centre region is now accessible for two-wheel-drives as well as 4WD, and all roads surrounding Yulara, The Olgas, and Uluru, are sealed. While this is so, some tracks that cover traditional Aboriginal land require permits. For example, the dirt track that travels back from Yulara, through Curtin Springs, up through Watarrka (Kings Canyon), and loops back through the West MacDonnell Ranges into Alice Springs. Docker River Road, entering through from the west, also requires a permit.

While The Olgas (Kata Tjuta National Park) is a fantastic area to explore in the southern region of the Northern Territory, two-wheel-drivers are recommended to follow the Stuart Highway for a more comfortable journey up north.

## Campsites

Our sunburnt country can stretch far and wide – but while there are many free-camps and camping grounds available, not every area permits overnight stays. Many places have closed following bushfires, as well as irresponsible behaviour such as littering and poor treatment of the land.

Those travelling from Adelaide will find the most common approach is to drive the full ten-hours to Coober Pedy on the first day, then start the seven-hour drive to Yulara the following. While those on an adults-only getaway will find this manageable, families with young children should plan for a minimum of two stops along the way.

## Yulara

A resort town 20km from Uluru, Yulara holds a collection of campsite, hotel, and cabin accommodation, interwoven with local supermarkets and shopping facilities. As the accommodation is deemed relatively expensive, Lauren recommends stocking up on supplies through standard supermarkets as a cost-effective alternative.

Other areas to pull up camp include Curtin Springs, located 100km out of Yulara. Here, travellers can stay free of charge in unpowered sites without bookings or reservations, while powered sites accept bookings, require a fee, and have limited availability.

It's important to note that any travel beyond the National Park regions or roads require permits.

## National Park Bookings and Permits

Where bookings for National Parks such as Watarrka and Uluru-Kata Tjuta require payment, the Mereenie Loop Road that travels to Alice Springs on Aboriginal land also requires a permit.

South Australia offers generic park passes for purchase that allow access to all national parks across the state – an initiative that the Northern Territory is likely to introduce by 2023. This is recommended as a future economical option for those who hope to cover the full Red Centre.

Ultimately, booking and payment requirements change frequently, so the best approach is to research current options in the lead up to your trip.

## Ideal Travel Periods

Temperatures in May and September tend to sit between twenty and thirty degrees, making these months the most ideal for outback activities around Uluru. For this reason, it's wise to beware of festivals and large events unfolding in the Alice Springs area during peak tourist periods.

Alternatively, some like to travel in the off-season, particularly heading into Winter. This not only helps in avoiding high-volume foot traffic, but lowers the overall cost of the trip due to cheaper off-peak rates. That said, prices tend to be lower when the temperatures are higher –



but while hotter seasons are also quieter, it's usually rare to tour this part of Australia at any point of the year without the company of other adventurers. Those who find they're experiencing too much solitude are in the minority!

Despite the significant drop in temperature during the evenings – don't underestimate how the hot, dry weather can affect outdoor activity throughout the day. When venturing along the Uluru loop, it's highly advised to select a cooler day to do so – and like any outback endeavour, be sure to slap on a hat and fasten your flynet.

## Stats

One of the world's largest monoliths, Uluru measures 348m high and 550 million years old. It sits proudly within the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, and its traditional landowners are the Anangu people.

Vastly sacred to the Indigenous Australians, tourists are encouraged to remain conscious, respectful, and open to learning the various facets of Uluru's cultural significance. This includes refraining from collecting both photo and video content when exploring the area. Some pockets of space surrounding Uluru are more culturally significant than the rock itself, further preserving the rich, valuable culture of the ancient Australian landmark.



*One of the world's largest monoliths, Uluru measures 348m high and 550 million years old.  
Credit: Sputnik*

## Activities

While trekking the rusty tracks at the foot of Uluru is surreal, experiencing the attraction from afar is just as breathtaking. As the sunlit landscape and contours of the rock change colour with the sky, Uluru looks alive and its sheer magnitude is overwhelming. Yulara- and Uluru-based sites have viewing platforms from which tourists can survey at sunrise and sunset. Ben recommends viewing the spectacle from afar over a cheese board and a bottle of wine.

Uluru is also home to rock art detailing the history-rich culture of the Indigenous Australians. This can be found at various points around the rock, with guided tours available that describe the cultural significance behind certain traditions, such as food. Again, photography here is prohibited.

At the cultural centre too, immerse yourself in the history of Uluru through creation stories, and arts and craft.

For a desert dining experience like no other, couples or groups can enjoy dinner at sundown paired with a guided tour of the stars. After a cheeseboard entrée, guests are escorted to a silver-service buffet where they dine at tables draped in white cloth – a striking contrast against the rusty red sand dunes.

Experience the desert in a dazzling brilliance with Bruce Munro's Field Of Light installation. Larger than 70 footy fields, Munro's masterpiece is a mass of 50,000 lights speckled about the red desert. At \$44 per night, it's a special kind of splurge for you and your somebody.

For those who are never tired (pun intended), the Uluru Bike Ride is perfect for families. The track runs for 15 kilometres and covers experience levels from amateur to expert. With the bike comes a helmet and three hours to complete the loop, plus return bus transfers to and

from Uluru.

## Budget

Bound by a budget? Until you're not, the Uluru experience should remain bookmarked in your browser history. With the various sights, scenic tours and experiences, it's best to allow financial room to move and make the most of what there is to do and see. Like a trip to the snow, venturing to the Northern Territory – namely Uluru – is a classic Aussie adventure that won't deliver to its full potential if approached as merely a shoestring option.

Unlike pasta from scratch, a wooden bench, or a birthday card – experiencing Uluru isn't best done as a DIY effort. The memories made will last you well beyond the curling, dog-eared pages of a photo album – so for the experience of a lifetime, it's well worth the time to save, invest, and plan.

## A Few Tips

Outback adventuring in our own backyard may seem like low maintenance, but Ben and Lauren have recommendations for how to optimise your experience even more.

The hot, sunbaked sand of the Northern Territory is likely to destroy any pair of shoes that lack durability or weather protection. Take a sturdy pair that can withstand extreme heat, hard ground, and rocky terrain.

Where the base walk around Uluru allows for both wheelchair and bike access, there is minimal shade. Hats and hydration are therefore key, where water stations dotted along the loop are for emergency purposes only. It's worth noting too that while walking and biking are allowed, climbing the rock is no longer.

Within Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, the Valley of the Winds walk is of a moderate to high difficulty level, and well worth the four-hour trek amongst the Kata Tjuta domes. Other walks include the Walpa Gorge Walk and those within Watarrka (Kings Canyon). When travelling back up to Alice Springs, Ben and Lauren recommend following the Stuart Highway and turning off to Rainbow Valley – a protected area located south of Alice Springs comprising of stunning sandstone cliffs and bluffs that radiate in softer sunlight. Along the Mereenie Loop, the Rim Walk at Kings Canyon within Watarrka National Park is also worth exploring.

With these escapades in mind, two weeks in the Northern Territory is merely skimming the surface. Ben and Lauren recommend a full week in Yulara, and another purely devoted to exploring the surrounding areas of Alice Springs.

## Photography

As hinted throughout the podcast, photography is prohibited within most culturally significant and tourist areas, and this includes drones. For those ever in doubt, relevant areas are well signed and indicative of where not to take photo or video content.

## Uluru-Kata Tjuta

Located only 40 kilometres from Uluru, you wouldn't consciously visit Uluru without also exploring Kata Tjuta. Uluru-Kata Tjuta offers a completely immersive experience including trail walks, guided tours and cultural insights to Indigenous Australia. Like many places in rural Australia, Kata Tjuta is rich with cultural meaning and for this reason appeals utmost respect and care.

Entry is via payment into the Kata Tjuta National Park. With a carpark, interactive information centre, and barbeque facilities, the park is perfect for a day-trip experience for those based out of Yulara.

As mentioned earlier, Watarrka National Park in Kings Canyon is home to the Rim Walk – undoubtedly as dangerous as it is fascinating. An open trail, walkers are unrestrained right to the edge before the sudden, steep drop.

Travelling back up to Alice Springs along Stuart Highway, tourists can either veer to the West MacDonnell or East MacDonnell Ranges. Along with Ellery Creek Big Hole, Ormiston Gorge, and Glen Helen, there's much to do and see between Yulara and Alice Springs.

With such surreal scenes of our sunburnt country, adventurers are likely to pay a premium price for occasional sub-par service due to the struggles involved in keeping the attractions afloat. For this reason, the best approach to ensure the optimum outback experience is to not sweat the small stuff (regardless of the heat)! Learn to adopt a 'she'll be right' attitude and appreciate the natural beauty living at the heart of Australia. After all, the centre of everything you're experiencing is you – literally!

## Mobility

While some walks mentioned throughout this episode have wheelchair access, others do not. Uluru's base walk is flat and wheel-chair friendly, likewise throughout The Olgas and a portion of the Rim Walk. On the contrary, the Walpa Gorge Walk in Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park does not offer this service.

## Thanks for listening, tune in again for next week's episode!

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If you have any questions for Ben and Lauren, make sure you head over to our [Facebook group](#) and let us know as we'd love to hear from you.

Catch you out there!