



SCOTTSDALE TOURS

NORTH WEST SAFARI TOUR

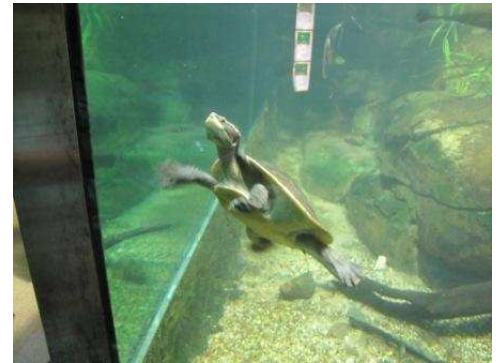
2011

After a somewhat challenging start we all finally gathered in Darwin from various directions to begin our intrepid journey down the North West Coast of Australia to Perth. Day one was a gentle look around Darwin and a quiet afternoon to recover from our long day of flying, airports and a 2am bedtime the day before. Day two we headed south through to the fabulous, well run Territory Wildlife Park where we were entertained by a variety of fish, animals and birdlife. The birds of prey demonstration was of particular delight to the audience. We had lunch in Batchelor but after much searching around with hopeful hearts, the single ladies in the group couldn't find any lonely single men hanging around waiting for them. So we headed for Katherine for our overnight stop where a sumptuous buffet dinner and a cool pool awaited us on a hot and balmy afternoon.

After a good night's sleep we were up and off just as the day's temperatures started to rise again. We stopped off beside Victoria River for a cuppa under a gorgeous sunny blue sky. The unusual escarpments and landscape caught our attention en-route to Timber Creek Roadhouse where we stopped for lunch. We took this opportunity to devour all our fruit before we went through the quarantine checkpoint on the Western Australia border. We then headed out to the Hidden Valley National Park and a quick visit to the old Durack Homestead before joining our sunset cruise on Lake Argyle. After the cruise around part of the enormous lake we pulled into a quiet bay where three hardy souls stripped off and jumped overboard into the cool clear waters. The rest of us sipped champagne, ate cheese and crackers, watched the sun go down and made generally fun of the swimmers. The sunset on the water was spectacular as most water sunsets are. Home for the next two nights was Kununarra with a lovely buffet dinner at the end of a great day.

Day five was also full on and fabulous. Most of us took the opportunity of flying over the Bungle Bungles and we were not disappointed. There was a lot of smoke from grass fires along the horizon which prevented us from the clearest of views to the horizon but the sightseeing was stunning just the same. We did a half day tour of Kununarra to finish off the day.

The most northerly port in Australia, Wyndham, was our next port of call, a most interesting place. There were lots of rivers and plenty of water up the top end of the North West which we found surprising. Lake Argyle is still well over it's normal height with



Territory Wildlife Park



Bird's of prey – Wildlife Park



Termite Mounds



Lake Argyle

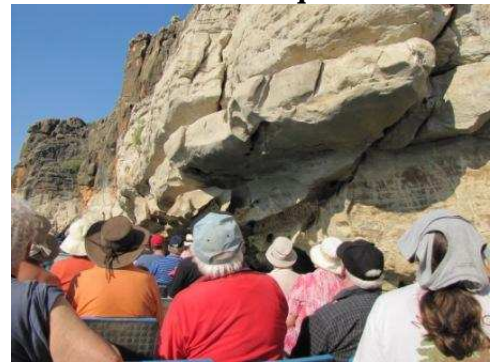
the wet season due in October. They are not sure what they are going to do with all the excess water. A rare problem in Australia. As was the norm on this trip we stopped for lunch at one of the roadhouses en-route. They are interesting, basic and varied little places, most of them well stocked and well run and on the whole the staff were very friendly, especially the many Kiwis we found working in these places. On the way to our next overnight stop we came across a rather large grass fire close to the road. Of course we had to stop and take photos, we were close enough to hear the crackle of the trees as they were engulfed in flames. It was this same fire that made news headlines that night with four severely burnt marathon runners having to be rescued by helicopter. Halls Creek was our overnight stop and what a pleasant surprise our motel turned out to be. Halls Creek is a very small settlement in the middle of nowhere and from the outside our motel looked pretty basic and ordinary. But once inside we were amazed at the snazzy, modern décor. The restaurant looked like it belonged in downtown Perth, not an outback Motel complex. The new owner has done wonders with the place and certainly has an artistic and creative flair. It would be fair to call it an 'Oasis in the Desert'. We headed off down a dusty side road next morning in search of Historic 'Old Halls Creek' mining town which has a few remnants of days gone by beside a camping ground way out in the middle of nowhere. We also found the 'China Wall' which is an amazing 6m high wall of solid quartz. Back on the main road for a while until we reached Fitzroy Crossing for lunch, another interesting but not very pretty outback town. We went out to the Geikie Gorge National Park and took a cruise on the Fitzroy River and had a look at some pretty amazing rock formations and spotted some fresh water crocs sunning themselves on the river banks. We then headed back to our accommodation at Fitzroy Crossing. Once again we were well fed and looked after and had another peaceful night's sleep. We were heading for Derby the next day and decided we would get there via Windjara Gorge and Tunnel Creek but a kilometer down the corrugated, bone rattling, teeth shaking dusty road was enough to convince us that perhaps that wasn't such a good idea after all. Much and all as Ross hates to turn around and take the road most travelled, on this occasion we were all very glad he did. We finally reached Derby and took a stroll on the circular wharf in the hot sun before gladly rejoining the air conditioned bus to continue our journey. We were fascinated by the huge Boab tree which was so big it had been used as a prison cell in times gone by. We were also amazed to see the longest water trough in Australia. Termite mounds were a constant fascination on this trip too as they changed shape, size and colour depending on their location. We were pleasantly surprised after several days in outback terrain to arrive and modern and busy Broome. We spent two lovely nights here. We had an escorted tour around the city with a stop at gorgeous Cable Beach for morning tea and a group photo. Later that evening we returned to Cable Beach with some adventurous travelers deciding to do a camel ride down the beach at sunset. What a glorious evening.



Grass Fire, Halls Creek



'China Wall' - solid quartz



Fitzroy River Cruise



Prison Boab Tree



Cable Beach, Broome

Although we travelled parallel to 80 mile beach for quite some distance the next day, we weren't actually close enough to see the beach itself. We were on our way to Port Hedland, a long day but there was enough variety in the landscape to keep us interested. It was on these long days that we handed the microphone over to our front seat passengers and asked them to tell us their life stories. This proved to be very popular and most interesting and entertaining. Port Hedland may not be pretty but the tour through the BHP Billiton Iron Ore Works and the adjacent Port were most interesting. Very helpful and friendly people here in this isolated part of the country. With red dust, wind, hot sun and flies it doesn't have a lot going for it except lots of work and plenty of money. Rents are around \$2000 per week for a basic house, covered in the main by the mining companies. The tour next morning was interesting but when we got out of the bus to have a look around it was very windy and cooler than the previous days had been. The wind would have been particularly troublesome to those trying to battle a rather large fire that we could see on the horizon spewing orange cloud across an otherwise clear blue sky. After leaving Port Hedland we made our bay through Roebuck to Karatha where we once again welcomed a local guide on board. What an eye-opener Karatha and Dampier turned out to be. These are typical mining towns where the mining companies have taken over most of the accommodation making it more and more difficult for tour companies to get a look in these days. We had to carry on down to the coastal salt producing town of Onslow to find accommodation and that turned out to be an interesting experience. They welcomed us with open arms. The town is in the throes of expanding at a great rate as new offshore gas operations are opening up there. We were lucky enough to be the first occupants of some upmarket brand new units which have been built for the workers. We opted to dine at the local hotel with the locals, bare floor boards, wooden tables and 'grab em if you can' cutlery rations. The meals were huge and caused some hilarity but it was a fun night and certainly first class accommodation. A windy but leisurely start next morning as we meandered once again down dusty side roads in search of historic places. This time we were looking for the Old Onslow townsite which we did find. It was well marked out with informative notice-boards which helped to bring the town alive in our imagination. Due to a lack of facilities we had to by-pass morning tea and instead made our way to the Nanturra Roadhouse for an early lunch. Gorgeous Exmouth was our next port of call, a lovely seaside town with plenty of beautiful beaches. Another pleasant evening followed by a bright and breezy start next morning as we made our way out to Coral Bay. Here we waded out in warm salty water to our boat moored and waiting to take us on a coral gazing excursion. Never have we seen so much coral in one place before. There was a myriad of varieties all packed in at close quarters covering huge areas of the ocean. That certainly caught our attention for a while. Once back on shore we made Minilya Roadhouse our lunch stop before stopping for the night in another lovely little town of Carnarvon. The coast road drive down to



Sunset camel ride on Cable Beach



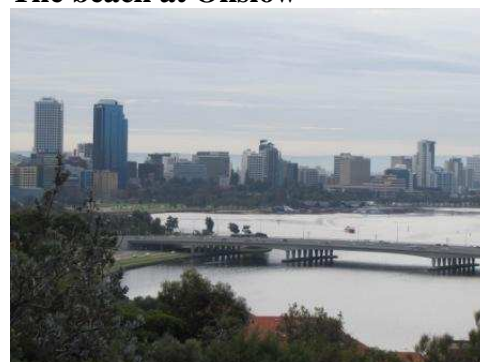
'Red Dog' statue - Dampier



Old Onslow Town ruins



The beach at Onslow



Perth

Monkey Mia next was glorious the next day with great carpets of wildflowers. With all the rain in the outback this past year, the wildflowers have been exceptionally prolific. Monkey Mia as always is a highlight on this trip with lovely accommodation and dining right beside the beach. Sadly though the famous dolphins decided they were not going to turn up for roll call the next morning disappointing the crowd who had turned up to see them. Being wild mammals in their own habitat they are not always where we would like them to be.

Another long haul to Geraldton that day but with more beautiful wildflowers to colour the landscape along the way, especially around Kalbarri where we had lunch. A highlight the next day was the pinnacles which looked like something out of a sci fi magazine. Finally we arrived at our destination, the city of Perth. It was distinctly cooler in Perth and the clear blue skies we were getting used to had clouded over but it was a chance for us to get acclimatised before returning home to cold wind and rain. We dined out at the stunning Perth Casino which was to be our last meal together. Next morning we took a tikky tour around Perth and followed this up with a cruise on the Swan River. At this point the group split into two with 14 heading off on a mad 5 day dash across the Nullarbor in the bus with Ross and the rest flying home with Susy.

A fabulous trip with a great group of people, thank you for joining us everyone, we very much enjoyed your company.

*Kind regards
Ross & Susy*



Sturt Desert Peas



Kapok tree



Wildflowers

