CENTRAL QUEENSLAND OUTBACK DRIVE

LONGREACH TO LONGREACH

Duration: 7 days / 0 km

Experience the best of the diverse Queensland outback in this fully sealed drive that is suitable for most vehicles. Keep you eyes peeled for native animals, vibrant wildflowers, colourful characters and historic architecture.

This nine day Central Queensland Outback Drive follows the Tropic of Capricorn west from Rockhampton, the beef capital of Australia. It takes you through Emerald and Barcaldine and the Sapphire Gemfields, to the central Queensland hub of Longreach and Springsure in Queensland's outback. Return to the coast and Rockhampton via the magnificent Carnarvon Gorge National Park.

Experiences: Major Drive Routes

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Longreach to Springsure

Day: 1

Start: **Longreach** End: **Springsure**

Today's drive will take you along the Matilda Highway to Blackall, where a town tour reveals the original 'Black Stump' and a memorial to the famous shearer Jack Howe. Join a tour of the Blackall Woolscour, where local characters bring the Golden Age of Wool to life.rnrnFurther south on the Matilda Highway is the township of Tambo, where you can step back in time on the Tambo Heritage Walk. Watch as sheepskin teddy bears are created. Named after local properties, Tambo Teddies make an adored and cuddly souvenir for young intrepid travellers or those waiting at home. rnrnTurn off the highway and head east to Springsure, a quaint hamlet that sits in a delightful valley surrounded by a spectacular mountain range, which acts as the backdrop to the famous Virgin Rock, so named for its remarkable resemblance to the Virgin Mary. A visit to the Old Rainworth Fort will give you a chilling insight into the courageous and violent Aboriginal resistance to the encroachment of Europeans in 1860s.

Springsure to Carnarvon Gorge, Carnarvon National Park

Day: 2

Start: **Springsure** End: **Carnarvon Park**

About 71 kilometres south of Springsure is the tiny township of Rolleston, which is the best access point to the remarkable Carnarvon National Park. The route from Rolleston to the park is 110 kilometres and includes about 20 kilometres of unsealed road that is generally in very good condition. rnrnIf you've got the time, spend a couple of days exploring the 30 kilometre chasm of Carnarvon Gorge with its stunning white sandstone cliffs that give shelter to tropical plants including cycads and palms. Look out for Aboriginal rock art, waterfalls and rock pools that make this national park one of Queensland's native treasures. rnrnIf you arrange it in advance with the park ranger, you may be able to camp in the national park, which is more than worth it for the blanket of stars in the night sky alone. Campers must be fully self-sufficient and will need to walk nine kilometres from the car park into the national park, which itself is a brilliant nature walk. For alternative accommodation, you can take cars and caravans as far as Takarakka where there are powered and unpowered sites and some cabin accommodation.

Carnarvon Gorge, Carnarvon National Park to Biloela

Day: 3

Start: **Carnarvon Park** End: **Biloela**

The drive to Biloela will take you back through Rolleston, then east along the Dawson Highway. You will pass through Moura, originally a farming service centre that has developed into one of central Queensland's most famous mining towns. About 4 kilometres east of Moura, you'll come across the 150th Meridian Marker that shows the position of the imaginary line (150 degrees east) on which Queensland's eastern standard time is based. Take a stroll through the history of Moura at the Museum, located in Gillespie Street and head to the Gibihi Road viewing platform to see a dragline in action in one of the many mining pits.rnrnFrom Moura, it's 45 minutes to Biloela, passing through the township of Banana. Rather than the fruit, the town is actually named after a particularly famous bullock used as a decoy to lure wild cattle into pens. This is the agricultural heart of central Queensland and crops include cotton, sorghum, wheat, herbs and lucerne. There is also a huge cattle industry and the Banana Shire boasts the largest number of head of cattle of any shire in Queensland. Local farmstay accommodation is an excellent way to gain an insight into some of these industries.

Biloela to Rockhampton

Day: 4

Start: **Biloela** End: **Rockhampton City**

In Biloela, visit Greycliffe Station, a beautifully preserved slab hut dating back to the 1870s that's been converted into a museum. The Queensland Heritage Park offers educational tours and a chance to get up close to a variety of farm animals ranging from donkeys to ostriches.rnrnAbout 12 kilometres south of town is Mount Scoria, a strange basalt formation about 150 metres high with symmetrically shaped rocks that look like a giant staircase. Nearby, the Callide Power Station offers guided tours of the complex. Just east of Biloela is Kroombit Tops National Park, worth a side-trip if you have a four-wheel-drive (check with the local visitor information centre as a two-wheel-drive vehicle may be permitted if the road is in good condition). rnrnOriginally a penal colony, Gladstone now boasts Queensland's largest port. Take a drive up to the William Golding Memorial Lookout atop Auckland Hill for a view over Port Curtis and the Gladstone Marina. Walk through Gladstone's Tondoon Botanic Gardens for a dose of fresh air and rare species of plants. rnrnBefore the final leg of the round trip, dawdle through the Port Curtis Historic Village, located on the Bruce Highway, for one last dose of Australia's rural heritage.

Rockhampton to Emerald

Day: 5

Start: **Rockhampton City** End: **Emerald**

Rockhampton, the Beef Capital of Australia, is marked by the Tropic of Capricorn Spire at the visitor centre on Gladstone Road. Visit Mount Archer, and the restored Archer Park Railway Station for a dose of nature and history before heading west through Duaringa to Dingo which is famous for the World Championship Dingo Trap Contest held a ually. rnrnIf you've got time, detour 11 kilometres to the Blackdown Tableland National Park. This park protects spectacular sandstone scenery with magnificent gorges and waterfalls. The nearby Blackwater is the heart of coal production in Central Queensland. rnrnEmerald is the hub of the Central Highlands and the gateway to the Sapphire Gemfields. It offers shopping, restaurants and a range of accommodation. Local sights include the historic Emerald railway station, the Botanic Gardens, Pioneer Village and Museum, an art gallery or two, Town Hall's fossilised tree and the huge reproduction of Van Gogh's 'Sunflowers'.rnrnVisit Lake Maraboon, formed by the huge and intimidating Fairbairn Dam, which is a 30 minute drive from Emerald. The lake is three times the size of Sydney Harbour, so there is plenty of space for picnics and watersports.

Emerald to Barcaldine

Day: 6

Start: **Emerald** End: **Barcaldine**

It's best to get an early start for a morning at the gemfields. At Rubyvale and Sapphire you're amongst the largest sapphire fields in the Southern Hemisphere, so make time to fossick for your own gems.rnrnHeading west from the gemfields, traverse the Great Dividing Range, which reaches 444 metres above sea level between the townships of Alpha and Jericho. Alpha's striking street murals and art gallery are always popular attractions, whilst Jericho takes pride in the sculpture of the Crystal Trumpeters in the main street and the Redbank Nature Reserve.rnrnBarcaldine holds a significant place in Australia's history. In the great shearer's strike of 1891 Barcaldine became the rallying point, and that led to the formation of the Australian Labor Party. The Tree of Knowledge is a monument to these times, and the Australian Workers Heritage Centre plays a key role in defining our national character. Bicente ial Botanical Park and the September Bougainvillea Garden competition compliments Barcaldine's title as the 'Garden City of the West'.

Barcaldine to Longreach

Day: 7

Start: **Barcaldine** End: **Longreach**

Today's drive will take you though Ifracombe, a small western Queensland township of less than 350 people, which was once one of Australia's great wool growing districts. Make time to inspect the row of restored old machinery alongside the road, referred to locally as 'machinery mile'. rnrnIn Longreach, take a tour through the pastoralist town on a historic Cobb and Co. Coach, and make time to head just out of town to visit a working sheep and cattle station. The Stockman's Hall of Fame is a dynamic tribute to Australia's rural history and will take hours to explore thoroughly. The Qantas Founders Museum pays homage to the humble begi ings of Australia's national airline, and it's right opposite the Longreach School of Distance Education, which offers daily tours, that provides a quality education to primary and secondary students within a 1000 kilometre or more radius via satellite internet.
