

NORTH WEST LOOP

CAIRNS CITY TO TOWNSVILLE CITY

Duration: 11 days / 2254 km

Embark on an unforgettable adventure through the heart of Outback Queensland with the North West Loop, a mesmerizing drive that unveils the rugged beauty and rich heritage of Australia's vast interior. This 2,000-kilometre journey encompasses a kaleidoscope of landscapes, from sweeping plains to dramatic gorges and ancient rock formations.

Starting your expedition from Mount Isa, a mining town steeped in history, the North West Loop takes you on a road trip like no other. Traverse the red dirt roads, marvel at the mesmerizing formations of the Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park, and witness the breathtaking Riversleigh World Heritage Fossil Site, offering a glimpse into the ancient fauna of the region.

As you navigate through iconic Outback towns like Cloncurry and Karumba, the route unfolds a tapestry of cultural experiences, showcasing the resilience of the communities that have thrived in this challenging environment. Immerse yourself in the living history of the Australian outback, explore indigenous art, and relish the renowned Outback hospitality at each stop.

The North West Loop is more than a road trip; it's a transformative journey through time and terrain, revealing the untamed spirit of Outback Queensland in every kilometre travelled. Prepare to be captivated by the raw beauty and indomitable spirit of the Australian Outback on this epic road adventure.

Experiences:



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Cairns to Atherton Tablelands

Day: 1

Start: **Cairns City** End: **Atherton**

Venture south west of Cairns to the fertile green pastures of the Tropical Tablelands. Visit Kuranda, famous for its markets, and Mareeba, the heart of Australia's tropical fruit and coffee industry. Visit Mareeba Wetlands, home to more than 200 bird species, this wonderful 20 square kilometre reserve includes woodlands, grasslands, swamps and the expansive Clancy's Lagoon, a birdwatchers' nirvana. Make your way to Atherton with its wealth of artists, quaint shops and Crystal Caves attraction. Pick up some local produce including coffee, wine and tea. Drop into the Visitor Information Centres en route to help choose your favourite Tableland experiences and a suitable venue to stay for a night or two.

Atherton Tablelands to Undara Lava Tubes

Day: 2

Start: **Atherton** End: **Mount Surprise**

Start your day with a coffee sourced from locally grown beans, then follow the Keedy Highway to Lot Hot Springs, natural mineral springs located between Ravenshoe and Mount Garnet. Find the perfect spot in the bubbling hot shallows of Nettle Creek and soak your cares away. As you continue along the Keedy Highway, pick up supplies at Mount Garnet for a picnic at Forty Mile Scrub National Park. Follow the short, self-guided walk through this unique forest for a chance to spot native birds and animals. Not long after leaving Forty Mile Scrub, you'll see the turn-off to a sealed road through the Whitewater Cattle station leading to Undara Experience - the largest lava tubes system on earth. Fancy a night in a restored railway carriage, then book in at Undara Resort or select from the range of accommodation styles to suit all budgets. Join a guided 'Wildlife at Sunset' tour to catch a big sky sunset and to see the insect-eating micro bats. Then at 8pm, pull up a chair at 'Round the Campfire' for an evening of bush yarns, guitar music and talks about the environment.

Undara to Georgetown

Day: 3

Start: **Mount Surprise** End: **Georgetown**

Drive 30 minutes along the Gulf Development Road to Mount Surprise, best known for its gemstones. Gem fossicking can be great fun and many travellers have been lucky to find some valuable semi-precious gems in the region. If you feel you are up for the challenge, call into Mount Surprise Gems to obtain a fossicking license, equipment and directions to the nearby O'Brien's Creek fossicking site where topaz, quartz and garnet can be discovered. If you are in Mount Surprise on a Thursday or Friday between March and December - make sure to see the historic Sava ahlander Train at Mount Surprise Railway Station. This beautifully restored silver 1960's train will take you on a nostalgic journey back to simpler times. Next stop is Georgetown on the Etheridge River, site of a gold rush in the 1870s. In its heyday, Georgetown attracted nearly 3000 prospectors all keen to make it rich. While in town, visit the TerrEstrial Centre containing the Ted Elliott Mineral Collection, a mind-boggling display of over 4500 specimens of all shapes, structures and colour from all over the world.

Georgetown to Normanton

Day: 4

Start: **Georgetown** End: **Normanton**

From Georgetown, it is 147 kilometres to Croydon, a town with a big history. A highlight of this part of the Sava ah Way is the incredible birdlife, so keep an eye out for flocks of budgies and finches as well as eagles, brown falcons, nankeen kestrels and kites. Just west of Georgetown, you'll pass the Cumberland Chimney, a large square brick chimney erected in 1889 to carry smoke from large boilers driving batteries of stampers crushing gold-bearing rock. In Croydon, make sure you visit the Croydon Heritage Precinct, complete with original kerosene street lamps from the gold rush days. Stock up on supplies at the Croydon General Store, Australia's oldest store built in 1894 - it's like stepping back in time! Your final stop for the day is Normanton, established as a port for the Croydon Gold Rush. Take a 'selfie' with Krysa, a life-size statue of the largest saltwater crocodile ever caught. Tonight, why not enjoy a counter meal in the eye-catching Purple Pub.

Normanton to Karumba

Day: 5

Start: **Normanton** End: **Karumba**

Visit the historic Normanton Railway Station where you can board the legendary Gulflander, or Tin Hare, as it is affectionately known. Join a three-hour return tour on the historic Gulflander from Normanton to Critters Camp, complete with a yummy 'smoko' of billy tea, damper and Devonshire tea. Leaving Normanton, follow the double lane bitumen road to Karumba, described by locals as 'outback by the sea'. Karumba was a base for the famous Empire flying boats on their trek from Australia to England, and it was a base for the Royal Australian Air Force during World War II. Today, Karumba is known for prawning, barramundi fishing, crabbing and live cattle exports - so not a bad spot to spend a few days if you love your seafood! Late afternoon, head to Karumba Point Beach, tuck into a fresh serving of 'barra and chips' from Ash's Takeaway, and take your seat for a magnificent Gulf sunset.

Karumba

Day: 6

Start: **Karumba** End: **Karumba**

If you are a fan of barramundi, you'll want to visit the Barramundi Discovery Centre, started by local commercial fishermen to help restock the waterways. Get 'hands on' and try feeding the fish or better still, adopt a Barra! Join a half-day cruise of the Karumba Port, spot crocs and birds, or if you are feeling keen, help out with catching and preparing the crabs for one of the freshest seafood lunches in town. Tonight, enjoy a peaceful and relaxing Croc and Crab Sunset Cruise to Karumba's 'best kept secret' the magical Sand Island. Bring your camera because this sunset promises to be awesome!

Karumba to Burketown

Day: 7

Start: **Karumba** End: **Burketown**

Travel back through Normanton this morning then follow the Burke Development Road for approximately 200 kilometres to the Burke and Wills Roadhouse. You will be travelling through mostly cattle country along this road. See the contrasting colours of this rugged landscape; the black trunks of the gidgee scrub; golden Mitchell grass; and enormous rust red termite mounds. The Burke and Wills Roadhouse offers fuel, meals and basic accommodation (cabins, campsites and powered campsites). Leaving the roadhouse, take the Wills Development Road northwest for approximately 148 kilometres to Gregory Downs before driving north to Burketown. Burketown's Artesian Bore is an ideal place to view wildlife, especially birds either early in the morning or late in the afternoon. Drilled in 1897, the bore still issues boiling water, creating a billabong effect which attracts masses of birds. The clear night skies and lack of light pollution in Burketown provide a stargazing opportunity like no other. Join the local Gangalidda-Garawa people as they share their cultural stories of the night skies on the Yagurli Stargazing Tour.

Burketown to Gregory Downs to Cloncurry

Day: 8

Start: **Burketown** End: **Cloncurry**

Follow the 120 kilometre sealed route from Burketown to Gregory Downs, a small town located near the beautiful Gregory River. The hotel motel provides meals and accommodation and has a good story to tell. Gregory Downs is the best access point for Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park. A visit to this spectacular park is highly recommended. Make sure you fuel up at the Gregory Downs Hotel and stock up on supplies before the 332 kilometre drive to Cloncurry, home to a number of important Australian innovations. According to locals, Qantas was conceived in Cloncurry, born in Winton and raised in Longreach, so it's pretty exciting for plane buffs to see the original Qantas Hangar still in use at the Cloncurry Airport. Rev John Fly established the Royal Flying Doctor Service in Cloncurry back in the 1920's. You can learn all about his legacy and this wonderful outback service when you visit the John Fly Place Museum. Enjoy a relaxing lunch in the shaded parklands of Cloncurry Unearthed Visitor Information Centre where you'll find one of Australia's most comprehensive gem and mineral collections.

Cloncurry to Richmond

Day: 9

Start: **Cloncurry** End: **Richmond**

Travel on to Julia Creek, home to the endangered Julia Creek Du art, a small carnivorous marsupial, about the size of a large mouse. The cheeky resident du arts, Donald and Duncan, are fed twice daily at the award winning Julia Creek Visitor Information Centre. It's a far cry from Sydney, but at the Julia Creek Opera House, you'll find a gallery of historical photos dating back 100 years. Leaving Julia Creek, it's about another 90 minutes to Richmond. While Richmond is about 500 kilometres from the ocean, it was once the heart of an ancient inland sea. Unlock your inner-palaeontologist and explore Australia's ancient marine past at Richmond's free fossil hunting sites. On a visit to Kronosaurus Korner, you'll see the most complete marine reptile fossils in the world from the Cretaceous period. Or why not uncover one of Richmond's best-kept secrets with Hampstead Tours featuring stunning escarpments and views of the Gregory Range. The tour includes a hearty lunch at the heritage homestead, great local stories and endless photo opportunities. Finally, take a picnic out to Lake Fred Tritton and wander the Bush Tucker Garden, which interprets the story of traditional plant use by the local Indigenous people.

Richmond to Charters Towers

Day: 10

Start: **Richmond** End: **Charters Towers City**

Set out this morning bound firstly for Hughenden - you're going to need some time in town. Make your first stop in Hughenden the Flinders Discovery Centre, home of 'Hughie' the life-size replica of a seven-metre high Muttaborrasaurus, cast from the original bones of a 110 million-year-old dinosaur found in the Flinders Shire. To fully appreciate the beauty of this expansive shire, pick up some freshly baked pastries from one of the popular bakeries for a picnic morning tea at Mount Walker Lookout, just 10 kilometres out of town. Back in town, you can learn about the region's native plants and animals as you stroll the 1.5 kilometres Eco Walk along the Flinders River. Another point of interest is the historic Coolabah Tree, which has been linked to two separate Burke and Wills search expeditions. You can still see the expedition team's tree blaze; it's purpose, something akin to a modern day GPS! Drive east along the Overlander's Way towards the gold mining city of Charters Towers. The road will take you through the small settlements of Prairie (the Prairie Hotel is a fantastic old pub filled with antiques and memorabilia from a bygone era), Torrens Creek and Pentland.

Charters Towers to Townsville

Day: 11

Start: **Charters Towers City** End: **Townsville City**

Call in to the Charters Towers Visitor Information Centre and pick up some information on the Ghosts of Gold Heritage Trail. Hear stories from the ghosts of gold rush days at historic venues included in the trail; Stock Exchange Arcade, Towers Hill Lookout and The Venus Gold Battery. Around 10 kilometres from town, Leahton Park is a massive 1100-acre property, home to the legendary Texas Longhorns! Take a horse drawn wagon ride, enjoy a camp oven billy tea and damper and visit the saddle shop. Leaving the outback behind today for the coast, watch for the prominent Townsville landmark, Castle Hill. This giant granite monolith, rising 286 metres above sea level, appears to be standing watch over this vibrant tropical city. While this is the last day of your drive, there is much to see and do in Townsville, so consider spending a few days here.
