

Welcome to Central Australia

Explore Australia's epic heartland: from the cold Southern Ocean, through South Australia's wine valleys, beyond Uluru in the central desert and into the tropical Top End.

National Parks

Central Australia is flush with iconic natural landscapes. Whether it's counting pelicans in the Coorong, ogling the crags of the Flinders Ranges, ticking Uluru and Kata Tjuta off your 'must-see' list, paddling the gorges at Nitmiluk, or marvelling over ancient Aboriginal rock art in Kakadu, the national parks here are nothing short of astonishing. Planning your journey around them is the perfect way to experience the outrageous diversity of this ancient region.

Wine & Food

It seems unnecessary to introduce South Australia as one of the world's key wine producers, but indeed it is! Big-ticket regions such as the Barossa Valley, McLaren Vale and the Coonawarra have been bottling blockbuster reds for decades, while boutique areas such as the Clare Valley and Adelaide Hills are self-assured viticultural success stories. Hungry? Along the road you'll find gourmet cheeses, fabulous organic beef and lamb, multicultural food markets, buzzy eat streets and seafood worth jumping out of the boat for. Don't miss trying some classic outback game (emu, crocodile, kangaroo or camel, anyone?) and Aboriginal bush tucker: traditional native fruits, herbs and meats.

Indigenous Culture

You'll find Aboriginal culture more accessible and mainstream in central Australia than it is in east-coast cities. This isn't just by virtue of numbers – Australia-wide indigenous people comprise around 2.5% of the population; in the Northern Territory it's closer to 30% – but it also illustrates how indigenous people themselves interact with the tourist market here. Right across SA and the NT you can take an indigenous-run tour, shop for Aboriginal art, catch an indigenous cultural performance or festival, visit galleries, hear Aboriginal Dreaming stories and try some bush tucker.

Cities & Towns

When you conjure up images of central Australia, Adelaide and Darwin mightn't leap into your consciousness. But they should! All sandstone orderliness, Adelaide remains at Australia's cultural high-water mark, unleashing a torrent of creative energy through its amazing festivals, arts scene, pubs and foodie culture. Darwin is an anything-goes northern upstart, fuelled by a current natural-gas boom: like the apartment towers going up, this is a city on the rise. In between are kooky outback outposts, hip wine towns and vacant desert pit-stops.



Why We Love Central Australia

By Charles Rawlings-Way & Meg Worby, Coordinating Authors

Meg first saw Uluru when she was three, but Charles didn't visit the outback until he was 30-something, on a trip with Meg. Climbing down off the *Ghan* train in Alice Springs, we exchanged looks that said, respectively, 'See what I mean?' and, 'Ohh, now I get it!'. The air out here is charged with desert ions; the night sky is milky with stars – outback camping is an unmissable experience. And then there's our ongoing love affair with South Australia's wineries, pubs, beaches, festivals...and our home among the Adelaide Hills stringybarks.

For more about our authors, see p296