



# OUTBACK AUSTRALIA

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## ROAD TRIPS

This edition written and researched by

**Anthony Ham,  
Carolyn Bain, Alan Murphy,  
Charles Rawlings-Way and Meg Worby**

# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

## Reviews

### In the Destinations section:

**All reviews** are ordered in our authors' preference, starting with their most preferred option. Additionally:

**Sights** are arranged in the geographic order that we suggest you visit them and, within this order, by author preference.

**Eating and Sleeping reviews** are ordered by price range (budget, midrange, top end) and, within these ranges, by author preference.

## Map Legend

### Routes

- Trip Route
- Trip Detour
- Linked Trip
- Walk Route
- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed Road
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian Overpass
- Walk Track/Path

### Boundaries

- International
- State
- Cliff
- Wall

### Population

- Capital (National)
- Capital (State)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

### Transport

- Airport
- Cable Car/Funicular
- Parking
- Train/Railway
- Tram
- Underground Train Station

### Trips

- Trip Numbers
- Trip Stop
- Walking tour
- Trip Detour

### Route Markers

- National Highway
- State Route

### Hydrography

- River/Creek
- Intermittent River
- Swamp/Mangrove
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Glacier

### Areas

- Beach
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Park
- Forest
- Urban Area
- Sportsground

*Note: Not all symbols shown here appear on the maps in this book*

## Symbols In This Book

- Top Tips
- Link Your Trips
- Tips from Locals
- Trip Detour
- History & Culture
- Family
- Food & Drink
- Outdoors
- Essential Photo
- Walking Tour
- Eating
- Sleeping

- Sights
- Beaches
- Activities
- Courses
- Tours
- Festivals & Events
- Sleeping
- Eating
- Drinking
- Entertainment
- Shopping
- Information & Transport

**These symbols and abbreviations give vital information for each listing:**

- Telephone number
- Opening hours
- Parking
- Nonsmoking
- Air-conditioning
- Internet access
- Wi-fi access
- Swimming pool
- Vegetarian selection
- English-language menu
- Family-friendly
- Pet-friendly
- Bus
- Ferry
- Tram
- Train
- apt apartments
- d double rooms
- dm dorm beds
- q quad rooms
- r rooms
- s single rooms
- ste suites
- tr triple rooms
- tw twin rooms

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## ROAD TRIPS

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# Road Trips

1

## **Uluru & the Red Centre, 10–14 days**

Uluru, the Olgas, Kings Canyon and the MacDonnell Ranges. Need we say more? (p17)

2

## **Alice Springs to Darwin, 5–7 days**

Drive from desert to the tropics in one big road trip. (p25)

3

## **Alice Springs to Adelaide, 7 days**

Journey south through the heart of the continent via Coober Pedy. (p33)

4

## **Outback New South Wales, 10–14 days**

This road joins the Sydney hinterland with the best of the NSW outback. (p41)









# Destinations

## **Uluru, Alice & the Red Centre (p50)**

Visit stunning Uluru and Kata Tjuta, or explore the awesome gorge of Kings Canyon in Watarrka National Park.

## **North to Darwin (p70)**

From the deserts to the tropics, the Northern Territory is a splendid place to be during Australia's winter months.

## **South to Adelaide (p88)**

The road south will take you through Coober Pedy, where opal-crazed locals beat the desert heat in 'cool' underground houses.

## **Outback New South Wales (p104)**

Explore this remote pocket of New South Wales, full of sleepy towns and dazzling displays of nature.



# Driving in Australia

*With more than 350,000km of paved roads criss-crossing the country, Australia is an infinitely fascinating road movie come to life.*

## Driving Fast Facts

- ➔ **Right or left?** Drive on the left
- ➔ **Blood alcohol concentration limit** 0.05 (0.00 for learners and probationary drivers)
- ➔ **Signature car** Holden Commodore

## DRIVING LICENCE & DOCUMENTS

To drive in Australia you'll need to hold a current driving licence issued in English from your home country. If the licence isn't in English, you'll also need to carry an International Driving Permit, issued in your home country.

## INSURANCE

**Third-party insurance** With the exception of NSW and Queensland, third-party personal-injury insurance is included in the vehicle registration cost, ensuring that every registered vehicle carries at least minimum insurance (if registering your own car in NSW or Queensland, you'll need to arrange this privately). We recommend extending that minimum to at least third-party property insurance – minor collisions can be amazingly expensive.

**Rental vehicles** When it comes to hire cars, understand your liability in the event of an accident. Rather than risk paying out thousands of dollars, consider taking out comprehensive car insurance or paying an additional daily amount to the rental company for excess reduction (this reduces the excess payable in the event of an accident from between \$2000 and \$5000 to a few hundred dollars).

**Exclusions** Be aware that if travelling on dirt roads, you usually will not be covered by insurance unless you have a 4WD (read the fine print). Also, many companies' insurance won't cover the cost of damage to glass (including the windscreen) or tyres.

## HIRING A CAR

Larger car-rental companies have drop-offs in major cities and towns. Most companies require drivers to be over the age of 21, though in some cases it's 18 and in others 25.

Suggestions to assist in the process:

- ➔ Read the contract from cover to cover.
- ➔ Some companies may require a signed credit-card slip as a bond, others may actually charge your credit card; if this is the case, find out when you'll get a refund.
- ➔ Ask if unlimited kilometres are included and, if not, what the extra charge per kilometre is.



## Road Trip Websites

**Australian Bureau of Meteorology** ([www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au)) Weather information.

**Department of Planning, Transport & Infrastructure** (☎1300 361 033; [www.transport.sa.gov.au](http://www.transport.sa.gov.au)) SA road conditions.

**Green Vehicle Guide** ([www.greenvehicleguide.gov.au](http://www.greenvehicleguide.gov.au)) Rates Australian vehicles based on greenhouse and air-pollution emissions.

**Live Traffic NSW** (☎1300 131 122; [www.livetraffic.com](http://www.livetraffic.com)) NSW road conditions.

**Main Roads Western Australia** (☎13 81 38; [www.mainroads.wa.gov.au](http://www.mainroads.wa.gov.au)) WA road conditions.

**Motorcycle Council of NSW** (☎1300 679 622; [www.mccofnsw.org.au](http://www.mccofnsw.org.au)) One of many such organisations around Australia.

**Road Report** (☎1800 246 199; [www.roadreport.nt.gov.au](http://www.roadreport.nt.gov.au)) NT road conditions.

**Traffic & Travel Information** (☎13 19 40; [www.transport.sa.gov.au](http://www.transport.sa.gov.au)) Queensland road conditions.

➤ Find out what excess you'll have to pay if you have a prang, and if it can be lowered by an extra charge per day (this option will usually be offered to you whether you ask or not). Check if your personal travel insurance covers you for vehicle accidents and excess.

➤ Check for exclusions (hitting a kangaroo, damage on unsealed roads etc) and whether you're covered on unavoidable unsealed roads (eg accessing camp sites). Some companies also exclude parts of the car from cover, such as the underbelly, tyres and windscreen.

➤ At pick-up inspect the vehicle for any damage. Make a note of anything on the contract before you sign.

➤ Ask about breakdown and accident procedures.

➤ If you can, return the vehicle during business hours and insist on an inspection in your presence.

The usual big international companies operate in Australia (Avis, Budget, Europcar, Hertz, Thrifty). The following websites offer last-minute discounts and the opportunity to compare rates between the big operators:

➤ [www.carhire.com.au](http://www.carhire.com.au)

➤ [www.drivenow.com.au](http://www.drivenow.com.au)

➤ [www.webjet.com.au](http://www.webjet.com.au)

## MAPS

Good-quality road and topographical maps are plentiful and readily available around Australia. State motoring organisations are a dependable source of road maps, including road atlases with comprehensive coverage of road networks.

Hema's *Australia Road Atlas* is a good general road atlas covering the entire country, and it also offers a range of smaller fold-out maps on specific destinations.

## ROADS & CONDITIONS

Australia's roads are generally in excellent condition, but never discount the possibility of potholes, especially in rural areas that receive heavy truck traffic.

### Overtaking Lanes

If you've spent any time in Europe, you'll be underwhelmed by Australia's dearth of dual carriageway roads. Apart from the Hume Fwy connecting Sydney and Melbourne (the inland route, not the coast road), most motorways are restricted to a 100km (or less) radius around major cities. Although there are regular overtaking lanes on many roads and traffic flows generally maintain a reasonable speed, there are times when you'll become frustrated as you wait to pass a slow caravan, truck or old man in a hat out for a Sunday drive. The only sensible response in such circumstances is patience.

## Unsealed Roads

At last count, Australia was so vast that it had 466,874km of unsealed roads – that's significantly more than the distance from earth to the moon! While many of these are suitable for 2WD vehicles when conditions are dry, many more are not, and most become treacherous or impassable after even a little rain. Others peter out into the sand. The simple rule is this – never leave the paved road unless you know the road, have checked recent weather conditions and asked locals for their advice.

## Toll Roads

Toll roads are restricted to freeways within major cities such as Melbourne and Sydney. If you're travelling in a rental vehicle, it should have the necessary electronic reader and any tolls will be charged when you return your vehicle. Either way, take note of any numbers to call at the tollpoints to make sure you don't get hit with a fine for late payment – you usually have between one and three days to make any payment.

## ROAD RULES

**Give way** An important road rule is 'give way to the right' – if an intersection is unmarked (unusual) and at roundabouts, you must give way to vehicles entering the intersection from your right.

**Speed limits** The general speed limit in built-up and residential areas is 50km/h. Near schools, the limit is usually 25km/h (sometimes 40km/h) in the morning and afternoon. On the highway it's usually 100km/h or 110km/h; in the NT it's either 110km/h or 130km/h. Police have speed radar guns and cameras and are fond of using them in strategic locations.

**Seatbelts and car seats** It's the law to wear seatbelts in the front and back seats; you're likely to get a fine if you don't. Small children must be belted into an approved safety seat.

**Drink-driving** Random breath-tests are common. If you're caught with a blood-alcohol level of more than 0.05% expect a fine and the loss of your licence. Police can randomly pull any driver over for a breathalyser or drug test.

**Mobile phones** Using a mobile phone while driving is illegal in Australia (excluding hands-free technology).

## FUEL

**Fuel types** Unleaded and diesel fuel is available from service stations sporting well-known international brand names. LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) is not always stocked at more remote roadhouses; if you're on gas it's safer to have dual-fuel capacity.

**Costs** Prices vary from place to place, but at the time of writing unleaded was hovering

## Driving Problem-Buster

**What should I do if my car breaks down?** Call the service number of your car-hire company and a local garage will be contacted.

**What if I have an accident?** Your first call should be to the insurance company and you should make sure that you have the contact details (at the very least) of the drivers of all other vehicles involved. Never admit fault unless instructed to do so by your insurance company. For minor accidents you'll need to fill out an accident statement when you return the vehicle. If problems crop up, go to the nearest police station.

**What should I do if I get stopped by the police?** The police will want to see your driving licence, passport (if you're from overseas) and proof of insurance.

**What if I can't find anywhere to stay?** If you're travelling during summer and/or holiday periods, always book accommodation in advance as beds fill up fast. If you're stuck and it's getting late, motels and motor inns line the roadside in even small Australian towns, while in outback areas the nearest roadhouse (a one-stop shop for accommodation, food and fuel) is likely to be your only option.



**NSW Wildlife Information, Rescue & Education Service** (WIRES; ☎1300 094 737; [www.wires.org.au](http://www.wires.org.au)) NSW.

**Parks & Wildlife Service** (after hours ☎03-6165 4305, 1300 827 727; [www.parks.tas.gov.au](http://www.parks.tas.gov.au)) Tasmania.

**Wildcare Inc NT** (☎0408 885 341, 08-8988 6121; [www.wildcarent.org.au](http://www.wildcarent.org.au)) NT.

**Wildlife Victoria** (☎1300 094 535; [www.wildlifevictoria.org.au](http://www.wildlifevictoria.org.au)) Victoria.

## Behind the Wheel

**Fatigue** Be wary of driver fatigue; driving long distances (particularly in hot weather) can be utterly exhausting. Falling asleep at the wheel is not uncommon. On a long haul, stop and rest every two hours or so – do some exercise, change drivers or have a coffee.

**Road trains** Be careful when overtaking road trains (trucks with two or three trailers stretching for as long as 50m); you'll need distance and plenty of speed. On single-lane roads get right off the road when one approaches.

**Unsealed roads** Unsealed road conditions vary wildly and cars perform differently when braking and turning on dirt. Don't exceed 80km/h on dirt roads; if you go faster, you won't have time to respond to a sharp turn, stock on the road or an unmarked gate or cattle grid.

## OUTBACK DRIVING

In 'Power & the Passion', Midnight Oil's damning ode to the Australian suburban condition, Peter Garrett sings, 'And no one goes outback that's that.' It really is amazing how few Australians have explored the outback. To many, it's either a mythical place inhabited by tourists and Indigenous Australians, or something for the too-hard basket – too hot, too far to drive, too expensive to fly, too many sand dunes and flies... But for those who make the effort, a strange awakening occurs – a quiet comprehension of the primal terrain and profound size of Australia that you simply can't fathom while sitting on Bondi Beach.

## About the Outback

The Australian outback is vast, blanketing the centre of the continent. While most Australians live on the coast, that thin green fringe of the continent is hardly typical of this enormous land mass. Inland is the desert soul of Australia.

Weather patterns vary from region to region – from sandy arid deserts to semi-arid scrublands to tropical savannah – but you can generally rely on hot sunny days, starry night skies and mile after mile of unbroken horizon.

## Australia Playlist

'Flame Trees' (Cold Chisel; 1984) Small town, big song.

'Back In Black' (AC/DC; 1980) The greatest guitar riff ever?

'Wide Open Road' (The Triffids; 1986) Road-tripping melancholia.

'Beds Are Burning' (Midnight Oil; 1987) Aboriginal land rights anthem. Any Midnight Oil would be a fine thing to have in your glove box.

'Under The Milky Way' (The Church; 1988) Arty haircuts, pointy shoes, jangly guitars.

'Nullarbor' (Kasey Chambers; 2010) Poignant understatement from Australia's first lady of alt-country.

Great albums to have on hand are:

- *Diesel & Dust* (Midnight Oil)
- *Circus Animals* (Cold Chisel)
- *Neon Ballroom* (Silverchair)
- *Kick* (INXS)
- *Woodface* (Crowded House)
- *The Boatman's Call* (Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds)
- *Songs From the South: Paul Kelly's Greatest Hits* (Paul Kelly)



## Type of Vehicle

**2WD** Depending on where you want to travel, a regulation 2WD vehicle might suffice. They're cheaper to hire, buy and run than 4WDs and are more readily available. Most are fuel efficient, and easy to repair and sell. Downsides: no off-road capability and no room to sleep!

**4WD** Four-wheel drives are good for outback travel as they can access almost any track you get a hankering for. And there might even be space to sleep in the back. Downsides: poor fuel economy, awkward to park and more expensive to hire or buy.

**Campervan** Creature comforts at your fingertips: sink, fridge, cupboards, beds, kitchen and space to relax. Downsides: slow and often not fuel-efficient, not great on dirt roads and too big for nipping around the city.

**Motorcycle** The Australian climate is great for riding, and bikes are handy in city traffic. Downsides: Australia isn't particularly bike-friendly in terms of driver awareness, there's limited luggage capacity, and exposure to the elements.

## Outback Driving & Safety Checklist

You need to be particularly organised and vigilant when travelling in the outback, especially on remote sandy tracks, due to the scorching temperatures, long distances between fuel stops and isolation. Following are a few tips.

### Communication

- ➔ Report your route and schedule to the police, a friend or relative.
- ➔ Mobile phones are practically useless in the outback. A safety net is to hire a satellite phone, high-frequency (HF) radio transceiver equipped to pick up the Royal Flying Doctor Service bases, or emergency position-indicating radio beacon (EPIRB).

➔ In an emergency, stay with your vehicle; it's easier to spot than you are, and you won't be able to carry a heavy load of water very far. Don't sit inside your vehicle as it will become an oven in hot weather.

➔ If you do become stranded, set fire to a spare tyre (let the air out first). The pall of smoke will be visible for miles.

### Dirt-Road Driving

- ➔ Inflate your tyres to the recommended levels for the terrain you're travelling on; on desert dirt, deflate your tyres to 25psi to avoid punctures.
- ➔ Reduce speed on unsealed roads, as traction is decreased and braking distances increase.

## Road Trains

On many outback highways you'll see thundering road trains: huge trucks (a prime mover plus two or three trailers) up to 50m long. These things don't move over for anyone, and it's like a scene out of *Mad Max* having one bear down on you at 120km/h. When you see a road train approaching on a narrow bitumen road, slow down and pull over – if the truck has to put its wheels off the road to pass you, the resulting barrage of stones will almost certainly smash your windscreen. When trying to overtake one, allow plenty of room (about a kilometre) to complete the manoeuvre. Road trains throw up a lot of dust on dirt roads, so if you see one coming it's best to just pull over and stop until it's gone past.

And while you're on outback roads, don't forget to give the standard bush wave to oncoming drivers – it's simply a matter of lifting the index finger off the steering wheel to acknowledge your fellow motorist.

## Automobile Associations

Under the auspices of the **Australian Automobile Association** (☎02-6247 7311; [www.aaa.asn.au](http://www.aaa.asn.au)) are automobile clubs in each state, handy when it comes to insurance, regulations, maps and roadside assistance. Club membership (around \$100 to \$150) can save you a lot of trouble if things go wrong mechanically. If you're a member of an auto club in your home country, check if reciprocal rights are offered in Australia. The major Australian auto clubs generally offer reciprocal rights in other states and territories.

**AANT** (Automobile Association of the Northern Territory; ☎13 11 11; [www.aant.com.au](http://www.aant.com.au))

**NRMA** (National Roads & Motorists' Association; ☎13 11 22; [www.mynrma.com.au](http://www.mynrma.com.au)) NSW and the ACT.

**RAC** (Royal Automobile Club of Western Australia; ☎13 17 03; [www.rac.com.au](http://www.rac.com.au))

**RACQ** (Royal Automobile Club of Queensland; ☎13 19 05; [www.racq.com.au](http://www.racq.com.au))

**RACT** (Royal Automobile Club of Tasmania; ☎13 27 22; [www.ract.com.au](http://www.ract.com.au))

**RACV** (Royal Automobile Club of Victoria; ☎13 72 28; [www.racv.com.au](http://www.racv.com.au))

- ➔ Dirt roads are often corrugated: keeping an even speed is the best approach.
- ➔ Dust on outback roads can obscure your vision, so always stop and wait for it to settle.
- ➔ If your vehicle is struggling through deep sand, deflating your tyres a bit will help. If you do get stuck, don't attempt to get out by revving the engine; this just causes wheels to dig in deeper.

### Road Hazards

- ➔ Outback highways are usually long, flat ribbons of tarmac stretching across the red desert flats. The temptation is to get it over with quickly, but try to keep a lid on your speed.
- ➔ Take a rest every few hours: driver fatigue is a real problem.
- ➔ Wandering cattle, sheep, emus, kangaroos, camels etc make driving fast a dangerous prospect. Take care and avoid nocturnal driving, as this is often when native animals come out. Many car-hire companies prohibit night-time driving.
- ➔ Road trains are an ever-present menace on the main highways. Give them a wide berth – they're much bigger than you!

### Supplies & Equipment

- ➔ Always carry plenty of water: in warm weather allow 5L per person per day and an extra amount for the radiator, carried in several containers.
- ➔ Bring plenty of food in case of a breakdown.
- ➔ Carry a first-aid kit, a good set of maps, a torch and spare batteries, a compass, and a shovel for digging if you get bogged.

### Weather & Road Conditions

- ➔ Check road conditions before travelling: roads that are passable in the Dry (March to October) can disappear beneath water during the Wet.
- ➔ Check weather forecasts daily.
- ➔ Keep an eye out for potholes, rough sections, roads changing surfaces without notice, soft and broken verges, and single-lane bridges.
- ➔ Take note of the water-level markers at creek crossings to gauge the water's depth before you proceed.
- ➔ Don't attempt to cross flooded bridges or causeways unless you're sure of the depth, and of any road damage hidden underwater.

## Your Vehicle

- ➔ Have your vehicle serviced and checked before you leave.
- ➔ Load your vehicle evenly, with heavy items inside and light items on the roof rack.
- ➔ Check locations and opening times of service stations, and carry spare fuel and provisions; opportunities for fill-ups can be infrequent.
- ➔ Carry essential tools: a spare tyre (two if possible), a fan belt and a radiator hose, as well as a tyre-pressure gauge and an air pump.
- ➔ An off-road jack might come in handy, as will a snatchem strap or tow rope for quick extraction when you're stuck (useful if there's another vehicle to pull you out).
- ➔ A set of cheap, high-profile tyres (around \$80 each) will give your car a little more ground clearance.



### MEG WORBY

In researching this title, this was Meg's 780th re-entry into her most habitable home state of South Australia. She is a former member of Lonely Planet's languages, editorial, web and publishing teams in Melbourne and London.



# OUR WRITERS



## ANTHONY HAM

Anthony was born in Melbourne, grew up in Sydney and has spent much of his adult life travelling the world. He recently returned to Australia after 10 years living in Madrid and brings to this guide more than 15 years' experience as a travel writer. As a recently returned expat, Anthony is loving the opportunity to rediscover his country and indulge his passion for wilderness. He brings to the book the unique perspective of knowing the land intimately and yet seeing it anew as if through the eyes of an outsider. Check out his website, [anthonyham.com](http://anthonyham.com).



## ALAN MURPHY

Alan has travelled extensively across Australia and worked on several Australian guidebook titles for Lonely Planet. The Northern Territory, with its ancient landscapes, outback characters and Indigenous culture holds a special place in his heart. On this research trip he criss-crossed the enormous expanse of the Territory and loved discovering new places. Alan has also written several online articles on the NT's Indigenous Australians and feels privileged to have had the opportunity of learning more about their culture on this trip.



## CAROLYN BAIN

Every summer of her childhood, Carolyn's family whizzed through regional NSW (twice) on the 3500km return journey from their home near Melbourne to the beaches of the Gold Coast. On this research trip Carolyn had considerably more time to explore, and covered 6500km of glorious NSW scenery under big blue skies, from the scorching sands of Mungo to the vineyards of Mudgee. The outback's 40°C temps made a change from her usual travel-writing stomping grounds of Iceland and Denmark. Read more at [carolynbain.com.au](http://carolynbain.com.au).



## CHARLES RAWLINGS-WAY

As a likely lad, Charles suffered in shorts through Tasmanian winters, and in summer counted the days til he visited his grandparents in Adelaide. With desert-hot days, cool swimming pools and four TV stations, this flat city held paradisiacal status. Charles has penned 20-something Lonely Planet guidebooks.



## MORE WRITERS

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