



AUSTRALIA'S king of canyons

ULURU OFTEN STEALS THE LIMELIGHT IN AUSTRALIA'S RED CENTRE, BUT THE MAJESTIC KINGS CANYON SHOULDN'T BE OVERLOOKED.

STORY EMILY McAULIFFE | PHOTOS TOURISM NT & KINGS CANYON RESORT

OF ALL THE animals that roam, creep and crawl across Australia's outback, Marcus Goater says the only one he's fearful of is the wild camel.

As Marcus tells me of his many outback adventures – including tales of three-month-long stints wandering through the bush – he bounces across rocks like a kangaroo, guiding me up and around the rim of the Northern Territory's mighty Kings Canyon at sunrise.

"People say, 'Oh you must have done this walk thousands of times'. But really, I've only done it around 800," Marcus

Camel riding at Kings Creek Station.

joked. He has been a guide with AAT Kings for four years, taking guests from Kings Canyon Resort on the 6km rim walk to marvel at 300m-high sandstone walls, some so sheer they look to be machine cut and polished, domes of jagged rock that resemble giant beehives, and peaceful palm-fringed waterholes.

Marcus' brain is an encyclopedia (if it comes to it, I now know how to make glue out of spinifex) and if you're into photography, he knows all the best spots.

As Marcus points out plants, fossils and rock formations in the canyon, I feel like I'm ever so slightly getting a grasp on the wonders of this vast land, beyond the obvious spectacular views that keep unfolding in front of me.

This is in part because the guided walk is compounding what I learnt the previous

afternoon on a Karrke Aboriginal cultural tour.

The Karrke experience, which will bump up your knowledge of bush food and medicine along with a range of local cultural practices, is led by Peter Abbott and Christine Breden.

The couple and their family are from one of the three Aboriginal outstations within Watarrka National Park and, with the blessing of their community, share their local culture with visitors on a one-hour tour.

As we move around a series of stations laid out on the bright orange sand, Peter and his sister Natasha take turns explaining traditional baking, cultural ceremonies and weapons, how to get the best sound out of clapping sticks, and how to pierce seeds and nuts to make jewellery using a scorching rod heated by fire.

Finally, we let the cleansing smoke of burning rock fuschia and weeping emu bush wash over us as we learn about the

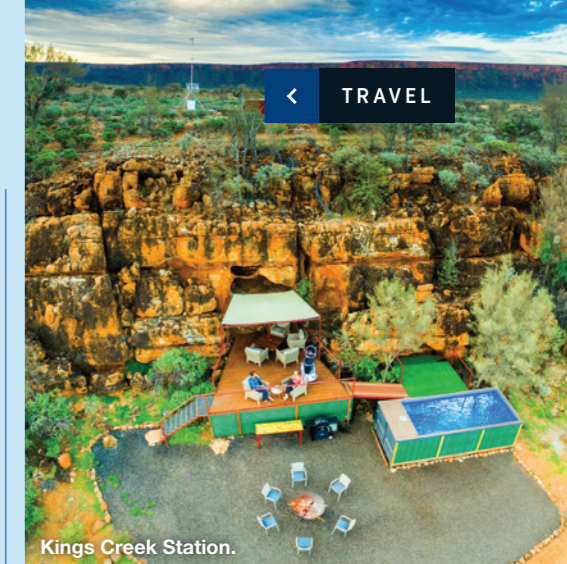
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Couple hiking in Kings Canyon.



Glamping at Kings Canyon Resort.



Kings Creek Station.

“Sunsets are a big thing in this part of the world, and for good reason. As the sun sinks, the escarpment before us shifts from bright orange to intense red to dusty pink.

would be a godsend, when temperatures can climb into the 40s.

At Kings Canyon Resort, the other major accommodation option in the area, there's a similar offering – a campground plus six glamping tents, with the addition of simple hotel-style rooms.

Unfortunately, the Under a Desert Moon outdoor fine dining experience wasn't running when we visited the resort, so instead we followed the throbbing beat of

live music to the Outback BBQ & Grill.

Kings Canyon may be remote – it's more than 300km from the nearest town – but it still knows how to party.

As I look around, with a giant steak in front of me, I notice that all guests, young and old, seem unable to resist some hand clapping or toe tapping to classics like *Jolene* and *The Horses*.

The following evening we dine at the Thirsty Dingo, which is essentially the same venue, just with a different name and different menu, but not before watching the sun throw an intense glow over the canyon before it checks out for the evening.

We follow a trickle of people heading to the resort's sunset viewing platform.

Sunsets are a big thing in this part of the world, and for good reason. As the sun sinks, the escarpment before us shifts from bright orange to intense red to dusty pink.

Then there's quiet, and then there are stars.

Kings Canyon is definitely one to add to your list. ■



Relaxing at Kings Creek Station.

THE RED CENTRE WAY

VISIT KINGS CANYON while driving the Red Centre Way loop from Alice Springs to Uluru. This drive is typically done over five days, however you can certainly linger and take it much slower, particularly if you want to throw a few hikes into your itinerary. Heading out of Alice Springs, you can visit gorges, lookouts and waterholes in Tjoritja/West MacDonnell National Park. Ducking off the loop road to visit Hermannsburg – birthplace of artist Albert Namatjira – is also recommended. After visiting Kings Canyon, continue to Uluru and Kata Tjuta.