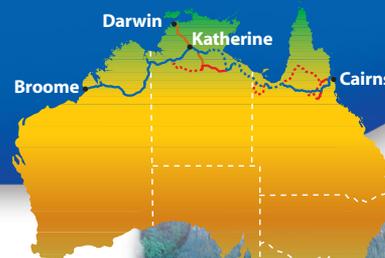




## Australia's Adventure Drive

# FACT SHEET



### Indigenous Culture

The tropical savannas are also home to a rich indigenous culture. Aboriginal people have a connection with the land dating back tens of thousands of years and Aboriginal land covers substantial parts of the region. Local people are involved in all aspects of land use in northern Australia: they are pastoralists, miners, tour guides, park rangers, entrepreneurs and community leaders.

### Facts of Nature

- **Wedge-tailed eagles** are impressive birds. The largest eagles in Australia, and among the largest in the world, they have wingspans of up to 2.5 metres. The wedge-tailed eagle once carried a bounty on its head. Between 1927 and 1968, 150,000 bounties were paid in Western Australia and ten thousand were paid in Queensland in a single year.
- The first camel was imported into Australia from the Canary Islands in 1840, then in 1860 for the ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition. There are now an estimated 150,000 to 200,000 **feral camels** in the Northern Territory alone (conservative 2001 census projections) – almost half of all feral camels in Australia. Feral camels double their number about every 6 to 10 years.
- The bulbous **boab tree** found in the remote Kimberley region of Western Australia stores water and only sheds its leaves when there is no water. The boab's nearest relatives are far away in Africa and Madagascar.

### Industry

Northern Australia is a diverse region of developing economic importance with multi-million dollar mining operations, thriving grazing and aquaculture industries, and strong tourism growth. While all major centres boast modern telecommunications, all weather road access, schools and hospitals, they retain their heritage.

The **Gulf Savannah** has a long history of **mining** commencing with the gold rush of the 1870's with discoveries at Cumberland (Georgetown). Nearby Croydon boomed as the gold business flourished until it was Queensland's second largest inland town

in 1890. The area around Forsayth / Georgetown is very popular with fossickers using metal detectors and many a fine nugget has been unearthed. **The Century Mine**, 120 kilometres south of Burketown owned by Pasmaico is rich in history as well as minerals. The first mining lease in the region was granted over 100 years ago, when silver was the main attraction for prospectors. Today Century's deposit, rich in zinc, has proved to be the most valuable resource. Now closed, the Kidston open cut gold mine was one of the largest gold bearing mines in Australia. The mine produced in excess of 200,000 ounces of gold per annum, with an estimated worth of 130 million dollars per year.

The **Northern Territory** is also home to some of the largest **cattle stations** in Australia – some of which are larger than several European countries. The whole of Northern Australia has a rich history, featuring legendary stations like Victoria River Downs. Pastoralists in northern Australia contend with variable climate, often poor soils, and threats such as invading weeds and changed fire regimes.

The **Paspaley Pearling Company** is a family-owned enterprise that began in the remote north-west of Western Australia in the early 1930s. The Kimberley's **pearling industry** has become Western Australia's most lucrative aquaculture industry with production estimated at \$200 million per annum. As well as pearls the Kimberley boast the **Argyle Diamond Mine**, the world's largest single producer of diamonds. Argyle is synonymous with the pink diamond, the world's most rare and valuable diamond, producing 95% of the world's supply. The legend of Argyle pink diamond has grown over the past ten years. Privately, Argyle has sold pink diamonds for up to \$1 million a carat.

### Tourism

Aboriginal culture, the cattle station lifestyle and the natural environment are all major attractions for the Savannah Way – Australia's Great Adventure Drive. Travellers along the way come from all walks of life and cultures, but all have a common dream to explore Australia's Top End. From retirees seeing the country on extended self-drive trips to backpackers exploring the breadth of the country, all are welcome along the Savannah Way.

