



INSIDER ACCESS WITH

LORDS

KAKADU & ARNHEMLAND SAFARIS

BY: TATYANA LEONOV



Explore the Sacred Mikinj Valley with Sab Lord

RELATED EXPERIENCE:

Four Day Kakadu & Arnhemland

4 DAYS / 3 NIGHTS (PRIVATE)



CONSERVATION IN ACTION

- Assist in monitoring equipment to control feral species around the Lords Camp.



There's only one tour company that is permitted to enter and explore the Mikinj Valley, and that is Lords Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris. "I've spent decades working closely with local Aboriginal clan groups, and we're fortunate that the members of the Nayingguls family are happy for me to show my guests this beautiful expanse of billabongs and escarpments," says Sab Lord, who founded and co-owns Lords Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris with his wife, Ann-Maree Grant.

"I have known the Nayingguls family since the 1960s, and this strong connection to the land and its rich history is something that we are all able to share with safari guests."

The Mikinj Valley is a seldom visited area on Manilgarr country in Arnhemland, with vistas that feel like they belong in a movie. Some days the clouds drifting high in the sky look like puffy pillows... and if they were, they would provide a perfect vantage point to

take in the rivers and creeks, the boulders and grasslands – a colourful patchwork of bright blues, emerald greens and mellow yellows as far as the eyes can see.

"It's high country here, and the scenery is truly spectacular," Sab says. "The view from the top of the Hamish Dreaming – looking out across the floodplains and the Arnhemland escarpment – is simply breathtaking."

Sab explains that, although there is plenty to see and do in the area, visitor numbers are small and there are only a few individuals who know where the most interesting sights are. "The majority of people who come here want to see a couple of good waterfalls and experience the landscape," Sab explains.

"I know where to take them, and since the area is exclusive to us, it's really only myself and the local Aboriginal people who know where to go. It's our secret sanctuary."

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Top End Birdwatching Expedition with Dean Hoath

RELATED EXPERIENCE:

Kakadu Birding Tour

3 DAYS / 2 NIGHTS (PRIVATE)



It's hard for Dean Hoath, longstanding guide at Lords Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris, to name just one favourite bird. "I love all birds, but one of my favourite birdwatching experiences is when we stay at the Lords Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris permanent bush camp in Kakadu National Park," he says.

"We have a family of about nine Blue-winged Kookaburras that hang out on the camp grounds; Black Cockatoos often come to visit; bright-blue Azure Kingfishers pop by; and watching the Great Bowerbirds attempt to dance is always a highlight. The Great Bowerbird dance is more like a hop with a broken leg, and the plume of purple he shoots out of its head when he finds a mate is interesting."

Dean could talk about birds all day... and he does when leading any tour where birds are the focus. "We travel through a big variety of ecosystems, so we are always exposed to different kinds of birds every day," he says. "We have over 280 species of birds in the region."

As the landscapes change, so too do the birdwatching experiences. At the camp, the bird encounters are on a smaller scale, whereas at Bamurru Plains witnessing birds en masse can take one's breath away.

"Some guests have never seen so many birds in one place and on such

a scale. We're talking thousands and thousands of birds at the one time," Dean explains. "We see thousands of Whistling Ducks taking off and filling the sky like a cloud. Then we turn a corner and see the Magpie Geese, also in their thousands. The enormity and scale of it is awe-inspiring."

Although Dean is privy to seeing birds on such a scale on a daily basis during the dry season, he is still humbled by the sight. "Fogg Dam is another location where we often see birds en masse, and it's a very

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interesting setting because it's a dam wall, with lush wetlands on one side and dry wetlands and grasslands on the other," Dean says. "Ducks and ibises abound in huge numbers in the wetlands, while Magpie Geese, spoonbills, brolgas and jabirus are easily spotted on the dry side."

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Airboating Across Bamurru Plains with Sab Lord

RELATED EXPERIENCE:

Ultimate Luxury Safari Experience

6 DAYS / 5 NIGHTS (PRIVATE)



Thousands of Magpie Geese lift off into the candy-pink sky as the airboat skims along the mud-spattered surface of a gigantic floodplain. To the right, a Saltwater Crocodile lurks just under the water, its beady eyes popping up ever so briefly. To the left, water buffaloes stomp through the shallows, stopping often to drink the same water they tread in.

Sab Lord, founder and co-owner of Lords Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris alternates between talking guests through the sights and letting them soak up the wonders silently. "We have wild horses, pigs, buffaloes, and an amazing array of birdlife here," Sab says. "I want to talk to guests about this wetland environment, but I also want them to also appreciate the sights and sounds."

on their nests – and even young goslings hatching – around April (dependant on when the wet season ends). Seeing that from the airboat is amazing," Sab says.

Bamurru means Magpie Geese in one of the local Aboriginal languages, and up to 200,000 geese (come October) reside in the area, which spans 100,000 hectares at any one time. There are plenty of other birds, too, with around 100 species calling the vast floodplain home.

"We see White-bellied Sea Eagles, jabirus, jacanas, five species of ducks, three species of ibises, four species of egrets... just to name some of the birds we might come across. I chat to guests about the birds, and also talk about the impact various introduced feral

"I want to educate people for as long as I am able to. We only have one environment and if we don't care of it, what are our kids going to have?"

Although Bamurru Plains can be accessed throughout most of the year and is spectacular both during the wet season and the dry season, there are certain times that are truly astounding. "Magpie Geese build their nests when they know the wet season has finished, and we tend to see them sitting

species – such as cats and foxes – have on both the birds and the environment," Sab says. "I want to educate people for as long as I am able to. We only have one environment and if we don't care of it, what are our kids going to have?"

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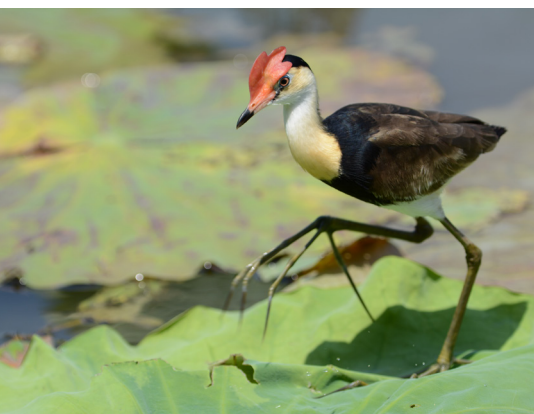
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Take a Private Yellow Water Cruise with Bianca Di Nuzzo

RELATED EXPERIENCE:

Three Day Kakadu & Arnhemland

3 NIGHTS / 2 DAYS (PRIVATE)



A Yellow Water Cruise along the Yellow Water wetlands is one of those must-do experiences when visiting Kakadu, with seasons – and even times of the day – offering different perspectives.

Bianca Di Nuzzo, who recently joined the Lords Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris team, explains that's the beauty of the ever-changing waterway. "During the wet season the billabongs are flooded and pour into each other, and the bird and plant life is abundant and vast," Bianca says.

"We see White-bellied Sea Eagles, jabirus and crocodiles, to name just a few of the wildlife highlights and, as we cruise, I chat about the native wildlife, behavioural patterns of specific species, and help guests with the spotting and identifying."

Bianca explains that Yellow Water cruises take place year-round and that any month is a great time to visit, with different seasons offering different sights and experiences. "There's a vast difference in the ecosystem throughout the seasons and it's amazing to be able to watch the changes first hand with our guests," she says.

"The wildlife is generally concentrated on the remaining wet areas once the dry season is in full swing, and one of my favourite birds to spot and talk about is the jacana. Interestingly, it's the male jacanas

that look after their young. They are known to cradle their chicks under their wings as they run across the big lily pads to escape danger. It's quite a sight!"

"There's a vast difference in the ecosystem throughout the seasons and it's amazing to be able to watch the changes first hand with our guests."

While guests can spot crocodiles and birds themselves, Bianca adds another element to the tour by offering a more immersive experience to those on board. "I can help with more precise spotting as I know where to look," Bianca notes. "A private Yellow Water journey is a very special element of a Kakadu safari for our guests. It allows us to get up close to the magnificent wildlife and scenery of these expansive wetlands in the tranquil comfort of the cruise boat."

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Gaze in Wonder at 8,000-year-old rock art at Injalak Hill with Dean Hoath

RELATED EXPERIENCE:

Three Day Kakadu & Arnhemland

3 NIGHTS / 2 DAYS (PRIVATE)



When Dean Hoath, one of the lead guides with Lords Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris, takes guests to admire rock art at Injalak Hill, he is always accompanied by an Aboriginal guide. "In the township of Gumbalanya, which we visit before we begin our walk, we pop into Injalak Arts to see artists producing their art, whether that be fabric, weaving or painting, after which a guide joins the group to travel to the hill."

The drive to the base of Injalak Hill only take 15 minutes, then the group begins the ascent to the rock art site. "We're away from the main tourist sites here," Dean explains. "Which makes it all the more special. Even the trail we use is barely visible."

When the group reaches the rock art site, Dean usually allocates some time for everyone to grasp the enormity of the art around. "We're looking at drawings that are thousands and thousands of years old, so that's older than any art hanging on the walls of galleries. Then physically the area where the rock art is found is big, too. The rock itself is about one kilometre long, and although we spend three to four hours walking around, we only see a small part of it," he says.

Both Dean and the Aboriginal guide accompanying the group talk about the various depictions they see, their discussions spanning everything from cultural significance and dreamtime stories to the

types of ochres used. "Interestingly, there's a good number of food [animals] painted on this site, and a huge number of spiritual story representations," Dean says. "One of the important paintings here is of Eingana, the creation mother. The Galiwin'ku people believe that the first spirit was a woman who came walking out of the ocean, with a whole lot of dilly bags (traditional bags made from reeds or grasses) full of food which she scattered over the landscape. There's a very famous painting here depicting that."

"The rock itself is about one kilometre long, and although we spend three to four hours walking around, we only see a small part of it."

To seal the deal, lunch is served in one of the most incredible settings. "Our lunch stop is my favourite lunch stop ever," Dean says. "I set the picnic up in a rock shelter and we all dine together admiring vistas over the wetlands and rock art above our heads. There's nowhere else like it."

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Active Safari Across Kakadu National Park with Bianca Di Nuzzo

RELATED EXPERIENCE:

Four Day Kakadu Active Safari

4 DAYS / 3 NIGHTS (PRIVATE)

“Maguk is magical,” Bianca Di Nuzzo, the newest guide to join the respected team at Lords Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris says. “It’s a really interesting location to show guests, with a big and beautiful water hole positioned at the base of steep gorge walls, and top pools that always look so inviting.”

Bianca explains that although the walk to Majuk is short, it’s one of her favourite hikes to introduce guests to. “The walk to the main plunge pool follows mainly low-lying pathways and weaves its way alongside streams and small rivers, so you are essentially meandering through a monsoonal rainforest,” she says.

“When you’re moving in nature you hear the birdlife, insects and lizards all going about their business and you can’t help but feel grounded and close to the earth.”

Some walks are more challenging than others, so Bianca always ensures that guests know what’s ahead. “To get to Jim Jim Falls, for example, the walk through the subtropical rainforest is more clambering over and around rocks than hiking,” she says. “But although it can be challenging, we walk at a

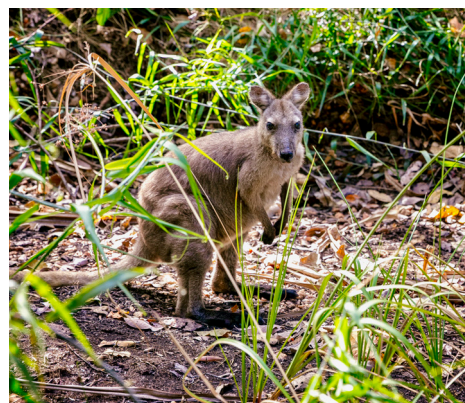
pace that suits the group. Twin Falls gorge is nearby, too, and to get here we first travel 12 kilometres by 4WD, then take a boat cruise, before hiking to the base of the falls.

Guests usually enjoy taking a moment to appreciate all the scenery on the white sandy beach at the base of the falls. The contrasting colours of the plant life against the sand and rocks are striking; the escarpment rising up 150 metres is breathtaking; not to mention the cascading waterfall itself.”

Koolpin Gorge, also located in Kakadu National Park (and touted by some as one of the park’s best-kept secrets) is somewhere that active types can undertake more bouldering and hiking. “The Aboriginal name of Koolpin Gorge is Jarrangbarnmi (jarrang meaning flood or big water flow, and barn meaning rift or gap) in the Jawoyn language,” Bianca explains.

“Jarrangbarnmi is part of the Jawoyn creation story, so the area is spiritually very special. The Jawoyn people have restrictions on visitor numbers, so the Lords Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris team and our guests are very lucky to have access to such an amazing place.”

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