



Roaming nature's larder

A series of tours and an annual event allow visitors to the Northern Territory to uncover the secret riches of the land

The Yolngu people in the Northern Territory have a saying about the Australian outback, “We have a library in the land. You can’t destroy it. If you burn it, it grows again. The land is full of more knowledge than you can imagine.” Where the majority of visitors to the Northern Territory’s outback see bush, Indigenous Australians see nature’s supermarket: aisle upon aisle of natural ingredients. Aboriginal people follow a six-season calendar linked to the flowering and fruiting of plants. Passed down through generations, this knowledge determines the right times to hunt and gather.

To celebrate how Australia’s first people and the world’s oldest living culture have sustained themselves by “reading” the land for the past 65,000 years, several new restaurants and tours have opened in the state’s cosmopolitan capital, Darwin. The last few years have also seen the launch of the annual Taste of Kakadu Festival, which looks to showcase Indigenous cuisine and takes place every May in the Unesco World Heritage-listed Kakadu National Park.



THIS SPREAD, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
A DISH OF EMU CURED WITH ANISEED MYRTLE AND KAKADU PLUM WITH WATTLE SEED POPCORN; THE TASTE OF KAKADU FESTIVAL HUB OFFERS TASTY BUSH FOODS AND FUN ACTIVITIES; A DISH OF STARFRUIT AND WATER LILY; FRESHLY HARVESTED BUSH BLACKBERRIES

A TASTE OF KAKADU

Started in 2017 by traditional land owners – the Bininj people (north of Kakadu) and Munggyu (south of Kakadu) – in collaboration with Parks Australia, the now-annual **Taste of Kakadu**



celebrates the best of Indigenous Australian food and culture, and runs from **10 to 19 May** this year. The 2019 highlights include a free opening event, held at Kakadu National Park on 10 May, where guests can enjoy a ground-oven feast and a Welcome to Country ceremony. There’s also a bush food experience from **Billabong Safari Camp** where you encounter the sights and tastes of Kakadu with traditional owners on a catered two-night camp. **Animal Tracks Safari** will conduct an interpretive bush tucker walk, where you’ll learn about the Aboriginal calendar and how to identify when seasonal fruits and herbs are ready for harvest. kakadu.com.au/taste

Words by LYNN GAIL; Photos by PARKS AUSTRALIA; LYNN GAIL (Blackberries)



KAKADU NATIONAL PARK

Over half of this 20,000km² park, two hours from Darwin, is owned by the Bininj and Munggyu people. It offers a range of immersive activities, from ranger walks to discover 20,000-year-old rock art sites to gathering bush tucker with Aboriginal guides and sampling the food you gather.



Pudakul Aboriginal Cultural Tours

Located about an hour from Darwin, this tour group is operated and owned by members of the Limilngan clan, and aims to offer an introductory taster of bush tucker and herbal medicine.

The two-hour tour allows guests to sample seasonal fruits, try their hand at spear-throwing and gather plants from the bush to make dilly bags – an Aboriginal bag made from pandanus leaves and used to collect bush food. It's a session where you'll learn that Billygoat plum packs a punch when it comes to vitamin C – eating just one is equivalent to having 50 oranges – and that nibbling on some green ants, which have a sharp lemon-lime flavour, can help alleviate colds. pudakul.com.au

Aboriginal Bush Traders

Situated along the Esplanade in Darwin is this not-for-profit organisation housed within the heritage-listed Lyons Cottage, the area's first stone residence. Aboriginal Bush Traders supports several Northern Territory Indigenous artists and communities, including the Tjanpi Desert Weavers, a women's council created to enable women in remote regions to earn an income, and the Indigenous Jewellery Project, showcasing jewellery created and designed by several local artists.

An onsite café, whose profits go back into community projects, offers a diverse range of bush tucker, including *muntrie* (native cranberry), Kakadu plum and finger lime granola for breakfast. Lunch items include the saltbush dukkah, avocado and feta smash – saltbush are tiny seeds common in dry regions of Australia. For the sweet tooth, the café serves *quandong* (a native peach) lamingtons and lemon slices made with lemon myrtle (a native herb). fb.com/aboriginalbushtraders

Kakadu Kitchen

Kakadu Kitchen's co-owner Ben Tyler, who is Bininj, is passionate about his heritage. He says, "I want people to see our ancient land and not just look at it as a rock, to really think about how Indigenous people have survived here longer than any other culture."

Together with business partner Kylie-Lee Bradford, he created this catering business to champion Indigenous bush tucker through dishes like crispy cat eel tails, water yam sushi and saltbush damper, which are now favourites at the Taste of Kakadu Festival. They also put together a canapé-style menu for year-round operators at Kakadu National Park, and cater for events, providing spreads including crocodile satay, ground-oven barramundi and wild goose cooked in paper bark. fb.com/kakadukitchen