

DESTINATION CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

Alice Springs Area - Northern Territory

Everyone knows about Uluru (Ayers Rock), which is one of the world's best known tourist attractions. However, the Rock is just one of dozens of brilliant sites in Australia's Red Centre and many 4x4 visitors don't leave themselves enough time to see them all.



You can fly through all the bitumen-road sites on Namatjira Drive, out west of Alice Springs in a day, or you can spend three days and see more than you expected.

For example, after stopping off for the short walks to Simpson's Gap, Standley Chasm, Ellery Creek Big Hole and Serpentine Gorge you can whiz straight to Glen Helen Resort for the night, or you can bush camp at the subtly signposted Serpentine Chalet site.

Ormiston Gorge camping is 'squeezy', but there's an alternative site at the Woodland campground at Redbank Gorge. Only five kilometres from the Redbank Gorge turnoff from Namatjira Drive is an almost hidden sign to Roma Gorge, which isn't on most maps. The turnoff is easily missed, being on a causeway over a creek bed.

Roma Gorge is at the end of an 8.5km drive up a sandy and stony, dry creek bed. It's remarkable for having some of the best rock carvings – petroglyphs – in Central Australia.

After Roma Gorge it's only a short bitumen drive to the lookout that provides spectacular views of Tnorala (Gosse Bluff). From this vantage point it's possible to see the central point of a comet strike that occurred around 142.5 million years ago. The projecting rocks visible today were originally deep in the earth's crust and the original crater was 20km across.

The Red Centre Way is generally poorly maintained gravel with large corrugations, but from Kings Canyon to Yulara the surface is sealed. There's no off-roading on this stretch, but there is a brilliant four-hour walk around the rim of Watarrka (Kings Canyon).

Obviously, there's no off roading near Uluru or Kata Tjuta (The Olgas), but halfway along the return journey north towards Alice Springs there's a turnoff onto the Ernest Giles Road and that leads 38km to a poorly signposted track to the left. Welcome to Finke Gorge National Park and Boggy Hole.

The main track is compacted and is also stony in places, so it's easily driven, but the sandy river banks are fraught with danger. Most people who drive the Finke Gorge track get stuck at some spot or other; usually when looking for a campsite. If you're travelling in a solo vehicle don't stray far from the main track when camping.

There's a very good general store and a servo at Hermannsburg, if you need to top up supplies before heading into nearby Palm Valley. The turnoff is only a few hundred metres to the west, on Larapinta Drive.

Camping at Palm Valley is well organised, but crowded during the cooler months. There are toilets and showers, but firewood needs to be collected on the way in - well before the entrance to the National Park.



**Bridgestone's
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is our tyre choice
for this trek

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**Minimum time needed around The Alice:
three weeks**

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