

7 days in KUNUNURRA

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A trip to the Kimberley is high on many 4W driver's list, and Kununurra is a great base for experiencing its east. When an abundance of waterways and spectacular landscapes surround the town, there's endless opportunities to get out and explore. Let's look at some things you can add to your Kimberley trip itinerary when you spend a week in Kununurra.



LOCAL 4WD TRACKS

The good news is you don't have to go too far from Kununurra to hit the dirt. One of our favourites tracks in the Kimberley's east is the Old Halls Creek Road. Better described as a single lane track, it runs between the Parry Creek Road and the Great Northern Highway by Wyndham. During the goldrush era of the late 1800s, it was this track that linked the towns of Wyndham and Old Halls Creek. While this 15 kilometre section of the track is only a portion of the original road, we absolutely love it. You can easily

see the track's 100+ year old hand-laid stones, plus there's a few other relics from yesteryear scattered around the place. We've generally found a bit of water laying around in creeks and lagoons each visit, so it makes the area a bit of a haven for wildlife as well. The Old Halls Creek Road is by no means a difficult track and could easily be completed in an hour or two. Not that we do that, and we hope you don't either! It's the type of track where you could easily make a day of it by including a visit to a few of the other attractions that are covered shortly.



We came across this couple on the Karunjie Track who were just about to give up and walk for help .



Some of the best sunsets happen around Kununurra.



Not the best place to have taken a wrong turn ... yes, that's us!



The hand-laid stones along the Old Halls Creek Road.

Another one of our local picks a bit further afield is the Karunjie Track. This too has a long history dating back to the 1800s, when it was originally designated as a stock route. As the track includes major tributaries like the King and Pentecost Rivers, these helped outlying stations to be able to water their cattle when being walked into the port at Wyndham. While the practice of walking cattle along here has long gone, it's a top track for today's four wheeling community. From Kununurra, you'll need to allow just over an hour to get to the track that's located off the Great

Northern Highway by Wyndham. About 10km south of Wyndham, turn onto the King River Road. Not far from that turnoff is Mochalabra Dam (Wyndham's water supply), plus an old prison boab tree. It's worth checking these out on the way to the Karunjie Track if you're not in any hurry.

There's a gate at the entrance to the track and a sign indicating the track isn't a gazetted road. From here you'll be passing through station properties, so it goes without saying that gates need to be left as you find them. The track is around 80 kilometres and consists of a combination of rocks, dirt and sand, although there's around 20 kilometres of flat-as-a-tack mudflats as well. Here, it's possible to find inch wide cracks in the dry mud from being starved of wet season moisture. It's an eerie yet beautiful landscape to experience. As you follow the track further west, it hugs the Cockburn Range as it wends its way

to the Pentecost River. Some of the most spectacular scenery in the east Kimberley can be experienced along here, so take your time. The end of the track is just east of the Pentecost River crossing. Taking a left turn here will get you back on the Gibb River Road bitumen in no time. In an hour or so, you can be back in Kununurra to wash off the dirt and relax with a sundowner. Keep in mind the track isn't maintained, so it can get muddy in sections if it's wet. If that's the case and you come across any muddy patches, you'll need to be prepared!

NO SHORTAGE OF WATER

When the Kimberley in general gets more than its fair share of rainfall each year, you can pretty well take your pick for choosing some fabulous spots to visit around Kununurra. One of the area's highlights is the Ngamoowalem Conservation Park. It's a quick 15km run west along the Victoria Highway before turning off onto Valentine Spring Road. From here, it's just a short distance to Valentine Springs where you can dip your toes and grab a bit of shade.



Time to get swimming at Molly Springs.

As you continue, the road meets up with the Parry Creek Road that leads to Middle Springs and Black Rock Falls. These too are good spots to visit, but the falls generally peter out late in the wet season. Aside from these, Molly Springs is another attraction that's located in the conservation park. While it's still accessed from the Victoria Highway, these natural springs are a little further out (30km west of Kununurra). The water has been flowing here each time on our previous visits, so they've become another one of our east Kimberley favourite attractions.



Taking it all in at Valentine Springs.

Another fabulous place that's located off the Parry Creek Road is Marlgu Billabong. As part of the Parry Lagoon Nature Reserve, the billabong sits on the edge of the Ord River floodplain. It's a popular spot for a wide range of bird varieties, some of which are known to be migratory. Our tip for visiting is to arrive early in the morning or just before sunset, as it's generally the time of day when bird activity is at its best. Keep in mind there's saltwater crocodiles that lurk in the water here, so no swimming.

Further towards Wyndham, the Grotto is only a couple of kilometres off the Great Northern Highway. Here, walls of water spills over the rocks and down into the deep amphitheatre during the height of the wet season. Even if the water has stopped flowing, you can walk down the steps to cool off. There's 140+ steps each way, so you'll probably need it! Closer to Kununurra, it's hard not to be impressed by Ivanhoe Crossing. It's only 10km out of town and the one place where water flows 24/7. The crossing over the Ord River was put in place almost 70 years ago in 1953.



Freshie or saltie ... you still need to be croc-wise around Kununurra.

It was the original major crossing for the road between Wyndham and Darwin before the Victoria Highway between Wyndham and Kununurra was built.

DANGLING A LINE

If you've packed a rod or two into the fourby and dreamt of bagging a barra, there's a few spots you can try turning that dream into reality. There's the waterway by Ivanhoe Crossing that's always popular with anglers, but watch where you stand so you don't end up as croc fodder. However,

if you've got a tinny and prefer to get onto the water rather than standing near it, you can launch a boat at Mambi Island boat ramp. The salties around here aren't the smallest going around either, so you'll want to make sure your boat is up for it. Further away by the Gibb River Road, your best bet to wet the line is from stations like Home Valley, Diggers Rest and El Questro. Other than these, you can always get yourself onto a tour. Having that local knowledge could just mean the difference between feeling like you've won the lottery, or going home empty handed.

HIT UP A LOCAL

If you really want to immerse yourself in a place, we think it's hard to go past jumping on a tour. And when Kununurra is the hub of the east Kimberley, it's a sure way to be able to get to heaps of cool things. In the past, we've jumped on a tagalong tour with Kununurra local and fellow *Western 4W Driver* contributor, Ben Smith (kimberleydreaming.com.au). Ben's



Hitting some 4WD tracks around Kununurra with Ben.

backyard is both spectacular and big, and his local knowledge of the area is second to none. As we found from jumping on one of Ben's tours, he can get you to some off the beaten track destinations that you otherwise wouldn't be able to visit as an independent traveller.

It would be remiss not to include a Lake Argyle cruise here (there's a few to choose from) when there's little else to compare it to around the country. To help explain the magnitude of the lake, let's say size wise, it's not uncommon for a Kimberley



The tranquil waters at Marlgu Billabong.



Ivanhoe Crossing is popular with tourists and locals.



Time for a de-briefing before taking to the skies.



Enjoying a Lake Argyle cruise.



Venturing to one of the lookouts for sunset.



An inquisitive visitor by Wyndham.



Josh from the Gourmet Camp Oven Experience at Lake Argyle .

do. We also like how the tour focuses on using local products and bush tucker for meals. This tour is fine dining Kimberley style, and all under a million star-lit sky.

When it comes to seeing the region from the air, the choices are almost endless. There are short scenic style flights (helicopter and fixed wing) that last a couple of hours, through to tours that will fill up the day. With such an abundance of water in almost every direction around Kununurra, a float plane tour is a unique way to experience the countryside. Being able to see the region from both air and water levels gives you the best of both worlds. Choosing a tour will really boil down to where your interests lie, and more info is available at the visitor information centre.

CHEAP & CHEERFUL

Thanks to good climatic conditions and an abundance of water, Kununurra is known as the Kimberley's food bowl. In fact, it has some of the best produce in Australia's north. Markets are held in town each Saturday morning, so it's the best place to tap into a selection of locally grown produce. Depending on the season, you'll find fruits such as bananas, mangoes, pawpaw, plus a variety of melons in the mix. Other things available include honey, zucchini, tomatoes, cabbage, lettuce, okra, squash, chillis, capsicum, pumpkins, herbs, plus plenty more! The markets aren't purely produce related though, as stalls of local art and craft, tourism info, entertainment, and food and drinks are also featured.



The view from Wyndham's Five Rivers Lookout.



Might have to stock up here!

formations. Sunset views from Kelly's Knob are also another local attraction not to miss. The views from atop overlook the township of Kununurra below, while the sunset to the west can be pretty specy from here. Wyndham too has spectacular views from its Five Rivers lookout atop the Bastion. As the name suggests, five major Kimberley rivers converge into the gulf, providing uninterrupted views as far as the eye can see.

SHOP LOCAL

We've always found another way to familiarise yourself with what goes on in the local area is to hit the shops. Just out of Kununurra, the Hoochery is a local family-owned business that's been producing Australian rum for more than 20 years. As avid distillery visitors (yes, we love their rum), the family produces a range of rum, whiskey, gin, and my favourite, a rum liqueur. It's a great topping over ice cream! The cellar door is the place to do some tastings, and you can also join a tour of the distillery. And you won't go away hungry when you can finish the visit off in their onsite café. Take it from us when we say the rum cheesecake is to die for! Get in early though, as it can sell out quick. Down the road from the Hoochery is the sweet-smelling Sandalwood Shop. Sandalwood has been grown in Kununurra for more than two decades now, with its oil used in a range of fragrances, skin care and other products. If you time your Kununurra visit just right, you may even catch a glimpse of the sandalwood being harvested at one of the blocks on Weaber Plains Road.



◀ We can highly recommend frozen mango from the Kununurra markets!

SUMMING UP

Kununurra is an adventure destination and finding the time to fit in everything you'd like to do in the area can be quite a challenge. We've only scraped the surface here with some ideas to help kick start your itinerary. But the bottom line is to allow plenty of time ... because if you're anything like us, you'll most certainly find seven days in Kununurra is far from being long enough!

INFORMATION BAY

BEST TIME TO VISIT

April to September.

RECOMMENDED VEHICLE

4WD to help get you to the good spots.

TERRAIN

A mix of bitumen and dirt roads can be expected to get to the destinations listed.

PERMITS

A National Parks permit is required for Mirima (Hidden Valley National Park).

Go to: exploreparcs.dbca.wa.gov.au/park/mirima-national-park

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Kununurra Visitor Centre
www.visitkununurra.com

WHERE TO STAY AND EAT

When looking to throw down the swag and camp, glamp, or perhaps spoil yourself (or a loved one) rotten, Kununurra and its surrounds have the full gamut of accommodation offerings. Around town, caravan parks are aplenty, plus there's Wyndham's caravan park and Lake Argyle Resort further afield. Kununurra also has hotels, motels, and apartments that offer a range of facilities. Station type stays that are close to Wyndham include Parry's Creek Farm and Diggers Rest Station. Alternatively, you can always bush camp at places like Mambi Island boat ramp that offers a bit of seclusion yet isn't far from town.

Kununurra isn't the place where you'll go hungry either. Plenty of hotels and cafes offer a range of meals and snacks, plus there's the Country Club and the Pumphouse for something a little more upmarket. We found during our last visit the bakery periodically offers up pizzas at night times as well, so that's something a little different. For a good coffee, our pick is Spilled The Beans located onsite at Kimberleyland Caravan Park. Heading west, there's the Wyndham Bakery if you're heading up that way, and Lake Argyle Resort dishes up a mean burger if you're going east.



The spectacular water views from Kimberleyland Caravan Park.

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