

# BULLO RIVER STATION

FROM THE AIR, THE MAGNITUDE AND spectacle of Bullo River Station is jaw-dropping. At 1627 square kilometres, this cattle station along the coffee-coloured Victoria River seems to be a perfect slice of the Kimberley. Buffalo, boabs, barramundi and crocodiles, tidal river systems and an amphitheatre of ancient Aboriginal rock art: Bullo River Station has it all. Guests receive a sumptuous initial taste of these East Kimberley ingredients as they travel to the station during a half-hour flight east from Kununurra.

Bullo is a working cattle station with approximately 7000 Braham-cross cattle, peppered with 700-odd wild buffalo, spread across terrain that varies from river flats and verdant pastures to tall spear grass and steep gorges. It's tough country, but considered highly productive for cattle, thanks to the availability of water. "Bullo has it all," says Daniel Cooper, who manages the station and its tourism operation with his wife Sarah and their three young daughters.

In their thirties, Daniel and Sarah are wonderful hosts who love ensuring that Bullo guests get to cross items off their Kimberley bucket lists. "The rock art is always a big hit," Daniel says. "I sometimes forget how much of an impact it has on people when they see it for the first time – they are simply blown away".

*Bullo River Station features spectacular waterfalls and gorge country.*





Access to the ancient rock-art galleries is typically via all-terrain vehicle. These six-seater buggies are almost unstoppable, despite monsoonal rains that can turn red dust into flowing creeks and deep mud in a matter of minutes.

After a 45-minute buggy ride from the homestead, through densely vegetated flats dotted with ancient boabs and stands of 3-metre pandanus, a change in terrain to red cliffs and ridge lines signals that the art site is close. Guests follow Bullo guide Stuart Wilson along a track for about 100m to the base of the cliff face. There, like the secret entrance to the walled city of Petra in Jordan, a small opening emerges to a narrow passage inside the cliff. In a scene reminiscent of the Indiana Jones movies, the narrow pass gives way to a long corridor with a cliff-face gallery of rock art on one side and multi-level rock ledges on the other. The flat rock surfaces are covered with grinding stones and crucibles. Almost all of the rock has a smooth patina, resulting from thousands of years of use. “It’s just like we walked into an ancient living room,” Stu says. “All the grinding stones, cutting tools and rock murals are here – just like they have been for millennia.”

On the way back to the homestead the group detours off-road to a small clearing with a picnic site set up under trees next to a cascading stream. The stream spills over a small rock wall into a delightful circular pool, shaded by trees. “That’s a crocodile-free swimming pool,” Daniel says, with a broad smile. “Enjoy the spa.” Guests imbibe in some homemade treats and a cup of tea, and enjoy a cool down in the ‘spa’ before heading back to the homestead.

*CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Managers Daniel and Sarah Cooper with their daughters, Scarlett, Eva and Josie; an Aboriginal rock-art gallery on the property; Bullo’s accommodation offers all the comforts of home; river crossings are no obstacle in the station’s all-terrain vehicle; Marlee Bath is one of Bullo’s spring-fed swimming holes.*





The homestead is near the convergence of the Bullo and Victoria rivers. From there, it is about 65 kilometres to the Timor Sea. The Victoria River and lower reaches of the Bullo are tidal and saltwater, which makes the area a highly productive fishing location.

“Our chef Alan Bence is a mad-keen barramundi fisherman,” Daniel says. “That works out well, because his oven-baked barra fillets are sensational.” Daniel, Stu and Alan are all accomplished anglers and ensure that everyone from complete novices to seasoned pros gets the opportunity to do battle with northern Australia’s iconic sports fish. Each night Stu takes a count of all those that want to rise before dawn to be onto the best fishing spots at first light.

“Beef and barramundi, that’s what Bullo is known for,” Alan says, as he spreads out the hot coals of a barbecue in preparation for dinner. “Because our barramundi is a wild-caught, saltwater fish, it cannot be compared to a freshwater or farmed fish. Our beef comes from prime Brahman-cross yearlings – grass-fed, grass-finished.” Alan’s cooking style celebrates these noble core ingredients with techniques that don’t overshadow the wonderful produce. “You just can’t beat this barramundi,” Alan says as he prepares a tray of perfectly cut fillets. “I like to top the seasoned fillet with some fresh shallots and fine-cut bush tomato before a good dash of white wine and butter. I bake these fillets in a hot oven just until a knife meets no resistance when pushed into the fillet.”

The homestead has an inviting, casual feel, much like staying at a friend’s house. Accommodation is in a separate building that has just 12 rooms, which means the homestead and station never feel crowded. There is a well-stocked bar open to guests at any time, and all meals and drinks and most activities are included in the tariff.

*CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Dinner is banquet-style at the homestead; the homestead is flanked by mighty boab trees; chef Alan Bence serves baked barramundi; wattleseed and macadamia nut pavlova roulade with mixed berry compote for dessert.*





**LOCATION**

*Bullo River meets the Victoria River just inside the Northern Territory border with Western Australia, a 200km drive east of Kununurra. The nearest town is Timber Creek, on the Victoria Highway.*

**GETTING THERE**

*Charter plane or helicopter from Kununurra (30 minutes) or Darwin (90 minutes) provide the best access to the station. The homestead is about three hours' drive from Kununurra.*

**WHAT'S INCLUDED**

*Accommodation, meals, beer and wine. Activities include fishing, cattle work, gorge cruises, Aboriginal rock-art tours, horseriding and daily guiding. Helicopter tours available at additional cost.*

**WHAT TO BRING**

*Sunscreen, swimmers, hat, comfortable clothing, walking shoes, binoculars and a camera.*

**WHEN TO COME**

*It's open March-October but the best times to visit are from May-September during the Kimberley dry season, when it's cool and sunny.*

**CONTACT**

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Activities range from the tranquil to the adventurous. Cattle mustering is an option if guests time their trip right, but it isn't for the faint-hearted. The station's bull-catchers are roofless four-wheel-drives, with solid armour-plating on all sides. On the front of each is a hydraulic arm controlled by the driver. When the helicopter spots and drives the bulls onto the flats, Daniel gives chase in one of the vehicles, simultaneously dodging vegetation and termite mounds to come alongside the galloping bull and deftly snare it, before carefully leading it back to the truck for shipping to market.

For those guests looking for a more relaxed activity, guided horseriding is a beautiful way to explore the station. Bullo's intelligent and resilient Australian stockhorses are well-suited to the conditions. "Horseback is one of the best ways to explore Bullo," Sarah says. "Through the dirt trails and bush in the dry season or around the billabongs in the wet, when grass is up to the belly of the horse, it's quieter than a car or buggy and easier to get close to the amazing wildlife."

Early morning comes and a few guests are up for fishing. Light filters through tropical storm clouds, highlighting a pair of white-bellied sea-eagles that have taken up their positions across the river. Agile wallabies and station cattle carefully make their way down to the river bank for a drink.

Under a massive boab by the lower Bullo, Stu points out the sandbars and rock ledges that are the haunts of big barra. And it doesn't take long before the calm is broken by the splash of a barramundi striking the lure. Just another day on Bullo River Station.



*CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT: Guests explore the station on horseback; a stunning sunrise on Bullo River; fishing guides do their best to ensure you land a barramundi; the Australian bustard, a large ground bird, can be found near the homestead.*