

# CICADA LODGE

KATHERINE GORGE, OR NITMILUK AS IT IS known as in the local Jawoyn language, is one of the wonders of northern Australia and Cicada Lodge is the perfect base from which to explore it. The luxury lodge, set on a cliff top above the gorge, is Aboriginal-owned and run (it's a joint venture between the Jawoyn people and the Indigenous Business Australia).

Guest services manager Charlie Gourley is passionate about Nitmiluk. "I love its rugged landscape and natural beauty," he says. "My favourite part is witnessing the seasons. I love watching the gorge completely reinvent itself during the wet season."

Jawoyn rangers carefully monitor Nitmiluk's gorge system, advising on water levels, and available activities. While saltwater crocodiles have been known to make their way into the gorge, they are not usually in residence. Rather, it's the relatively harmless and timid freshwater crocodile found in these waters.

Nitmiluk is a haven for all kinds of wildlife. There are more than 190 species of birds, including red-collared lorikeet, red-winged parrot, northern rosella and blue-winged kookaburra, as well as birds of prey such as the red goshawk and peregrine falcon. Agile wallabies, antilopine wallaroos and euros can be seen bounding across the rocks within the gorge. Dingos are also occasionally seen in the national park.

The Jawoyn people provide exclusive visiting rights to hidden cultural gems within the park for guests of Cicada Lodge. Eco-accredited guides take guests by four-wheel-drive vehicle or helicopter to areas of natural beauty and cultural significance.

*Nitmiluk National Park in the dawn light.*





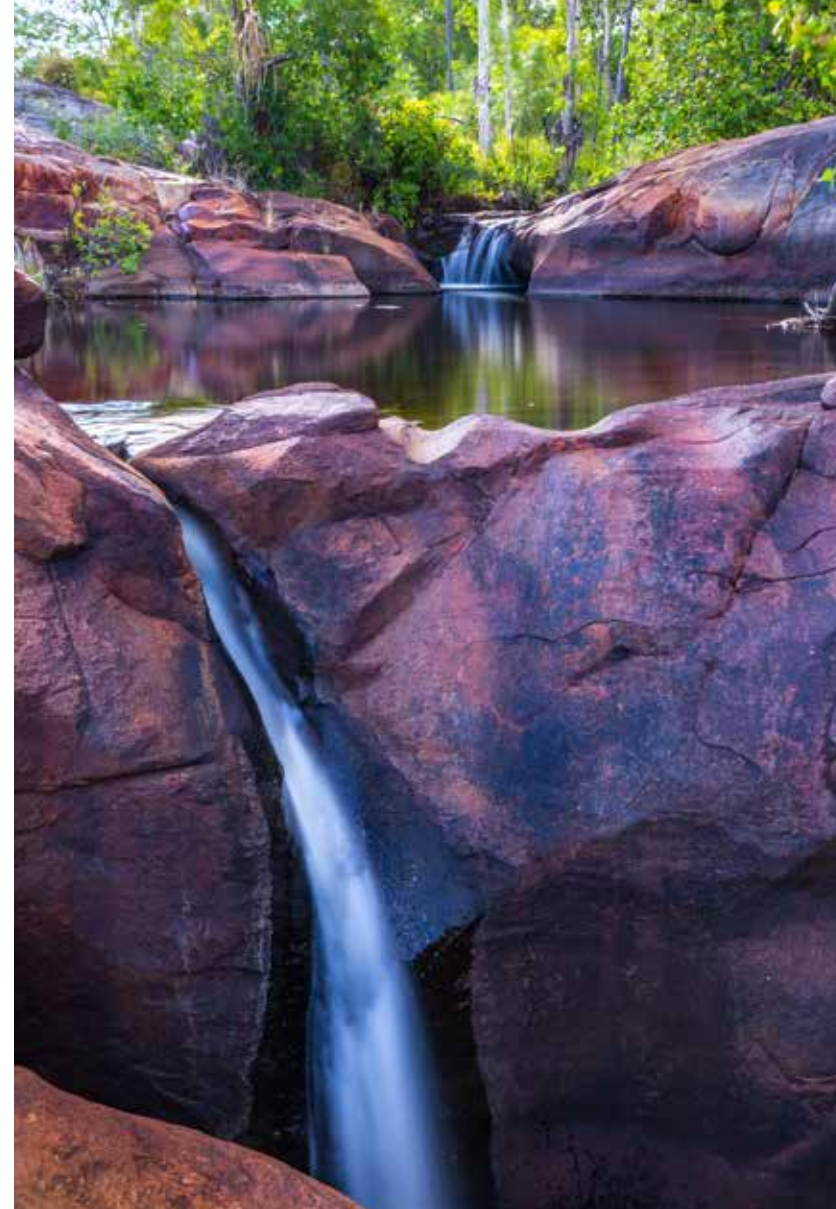
Cicada Lodge consists of accommodation for 36 guests in 18 rooms, which feature local indigenous art and full-length views across the bush beyond. At the centre of the lodge is a restaurant, bar and pool, and every evening guests are served sunset drinks and canapes on the pool deck. Dining is an important element of the Cicada experience. The restaurant menu is 'modern Australian fusion', showcasing seasonal, local and traditional ingredients.

The Nabilil Dreaming Sunset Dinner Cruise on the mighty Katherine River is not to be missed. As they cruise down the river sipping champagne, wine and cocktails, guests observe the wildlife as animals emerge from hiding in the cool of the evening. This is an immersive experience; the delightful aromas coming from the open kitchen as the chefs prepare dinner complement the tranquility of the gorge in the late afternoon light.

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*CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Tour guide Suzanne Andrews with some of the region's handicrafts; Cicada's rock-art helicopter tour takes guests to pristine waterfalls and ancient rock art; a helicopter flight is the best way to explore the Nitmiluk's gorges; the lodge pool offers a welcome respite from the Top End heat.*





Cicada Lodge is located right on the banks of Katherine Gorge, so guests have great access to activities on and around it. Well-marked walking tracks range from a kilometre to full-day hikes, and all reward with scenic lookouts at spectacular locations. For a comfortable walk with little chance of seeing another person, head off before daybreak. Arriving at a lookout as the sun washes over the sheer walls of the gorge is worth the effort. The early morning view is breathtaking.

The best way to experience the magnitude of the gorge and its wild surrounds is by air. Cicada Lodge offers both standard and bespoke helicopter tours that take guests into some of the most beautiful country in the Top End. All of these tours include a flight over the 13 gorges of the Nitmiluk system; whether guests opt for the rock-art tour or the adventure-swim tour, getting there and back is an awe-inspiring experience. “You never know what your going to find on a flight out here,” says helicopter pilot Mathew Humphrey. “Keep your eyes open for buffalo, especially around the water holes.”

On a mid-afternoon flight to explore the remote treasures of Nitmiluk National Park, Mathew deftly lands the helicopter in a beautiful gorge in what feels like the middle of nowhere. Cascading waterfalls flow from pool to pool, before finally landing in a deep pool within a rock amphitheatre. In a wonderful fusion of nature and culture, you can cool off under a waterfall while gazing at a vast gallery of Aboriginal rock art, some of which dates back 40,000 years. “I love showing this place to people” Mathew says. “It is such a spiritual place and everyone is just blown away.”

On the return flight in the late afternoon, the colours and textures of the Nitmiluk landscape are etched into the rock by the golden light. And, as you approach Cicada Lodge, its special location in the heart of the gorge country becomes evident.

*CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Agile wallabies are a common sight in the gorge; guest rooms are modern and bright; boat cruise along Katherin River; spinach and ricotta with pepperberry ragout and salsa verde; molten chocolate pudding with hibiscus berry compote and wattleseed chantilly cream.*



**LOCATION**

*Nitmiluk National Park is 350km south of Darwin.*

**GETTING THERE**

*Drive from Darwin, or catch the Ghan train from Darwin or Alice Springs. Alternatively, transfers by vehicle or helicopter from xxxxxx can be arranged.*

**WHAT'S INCLUDED**

*Accommodation, champagne on arrival, sunset drinks and canapes by the pool and gourmet breakfast.*

**WHAT TO BRING**

*Hiking shoes, swimmers, binoculars, camera, hat and comfortable, loose fitting clothing.*

**WHEN TO COME**

*Cicada Lodge is open year-round. The dry season (May–September) is coolest, but the wet season (December–March), while hot and humid, rewards visitors with dramatic water flows through the gorge.*

**CONTACT**

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Back on the ground, Cicada Lodge delivers on its strong commitment to the employment and training of local people, with experienced Jayown guides leading tours in and around the gorge. Jayown guides explain much more than the area's natural features; they give firsthand accounts of growing up here, covering all aspects of living here. This includes knowledge of hunting and harvesting for food and crafts, as well as the spiritual significance of the gorge systems, all of which they share with passion and humour. This is all part of the appeal of Cicada Lodge – its engagement and collaboration with the Jayown people ensures its connectivity and access to the wonderful country on which it sits.

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*CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Guided gorge cruises set off daily from the lodge; the sunset dinner cruise is a highlight of a Cicada stay; the lodge blends into the bush.*