

# Dreaming of Karijini

As the cascading waterfall flows around him in the first ancient amphitheatre of Joffre Gorge, it becomes completely clear to **DAN AVILA** why Karijini National Park is the undisputed jewel of The Pilbara.

**T**o me, the ideal caravanning and camping location needs to be remote enough to create a sense of adventure. In Western Australia, that's not too hard, given the sheer scale of the state, so a trip to Karijini from pretty much anywhere is an adventurous undertaking. Driving here through the dramatic expanse of the Pilbara scrub, the landscape is iconic WA outback with flat iron-red expanses set against deep blue skies. On reaching the Hammersley Range, the change in landscape is distinct and signals the approach to Karijini National Park. Approximately 6200 square kilometres and the second largest in the state, the park is daunting in its size.

I'm heading to Karijini Eco Retreat and the sight of majestic Mount Bruce, the second highest peak in WA, signals that the turn-off is close. This is my wife's first trip to the Pilbara and it was an easy sell – in part because the **Karijini Eco Retreat** pulls off the perfect blend of respectful and delicate connection to the landscape – but mostly because there are 'glamping' options, including timber-floored eco-tents with hotel linens and ensuites. In the context of other local no-frills camping grounds, this place is positively decadent.

This is a wild desert environment, so there are a few things to remember if you are staying in the eco-tents. Keep the screen zipped up as there are many reptiles in the park. A racehorse goanna scratching around on top of the tent at night might wake you up, but a python in your suitcase is a different kettle of fish. Also, there is a sign in

the ensuite reminding you to keep the toilet lid down. Do it, as the eco-toilet is like a funpark for frogs.

Dining options this far from town are simple, but not at the retreat. The al fresco restaurant is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner and puts on a substantial spread. It's not deep-fried roadhouse tucker either; offering dishes such as grilled lemon pepper crusted tofu with macadamia nut coleslaw, red desert dusted salmon or barbecue scotch fillet. This is my kind of camping. The best time to visit Karijini National Park is from March to October. If there has been a solid wet season in WA's northwest, there's a good chance the gorges will be powering with substantial water flows. However, even in dry years there is guaranteed water in numerous gorges. The retreat is open year-round, but the summer months can be extremely hot. On the plus side, there will be very few people to contend with and great deals to be had.

## The Karijini Experience

The Karijini Experience is an annual event held by Nintirri, a not-for-profit community organisation based in nearby Tom Price. The event started in 2013 and has grown into a major festival and celebration of all things Karijini. The 2017 Karijini Experience is on from 11 to 15 April. This is peak time for Karijini Eco Retreat, so booking early is highly recommended.

The Karijini Experience allows the discovery of Karijini in unexpected ways, with a guided immersion into the landscape, culture and sensual joys of the region. The week-long programme is designed to engage families with personalised workshops, performances, tours and social events. Kids are kept enthralled, actively

## TOP TIPS

- 1 Book the Karijini Eco Retreat early as it can book out at various times during the year
- 2 Pack warm clothing options as night temperatures can fall to below freezing mid year
- 3 Water shoes are best for a number of gorge walks
- 4 Check road conditions with the Department of Parks and Wildlife or the Eco Retreat before setting off – and a 4WD vehicle is almost always essential

[www.dpaw.wa.gov.au](http://www.dpaw.wa.gov.au)

participating in painting with Indigenous artists, making traditional tools, entering in outback fun runs and exploring the bush with Aboriginal elders. I came away with a renewed respect and admiration for the Banjima, Kurrama and Innawonga traditional owners and their willingness to welcome and share with such generosity.

*“The landscape is iconic Western Australia outback with flat iron-red expanses set against deep blue skies”*

### The majesty of the gorges

Karijini National Park is the perfect antidote to a plasticised theme park. It is raw, untamed and cries out to be explored. Even in 'peak' times such as mid-year school holidays, it always feels sparsely populated. The must-do attractions in Karijini are, without a doubt, the gorges. Even seasoned explorers who have ventured through many wild Australian landscapes will be awed. Of the ones we visited, my three top picks are Joffre, Kalamina and Dales gorges.

Located just a five-minute walk from the Karijini Eco Retreat, Joffre Gorge requires some climbing to get to the bottom, but the prize is worth the work. The gorge flows for hundreds of metres through narrow passes and sheer cliffs. It is simply stunning. Upstream, there is a narrow pass that expands to an enormous amphitheatre with a cascading waterfall that begs you to jump in and splash around. This was my first gorge experience – sitting in the tiered waterfall, the water warm (due to contact with the hot desert rocks) cascading over me into the cool pool below.

About a 30-minute drive from the retreat, Kalamina Gorge has a Jurassic Park feel and walking through it is otherworldly. This safe and beautiful place is suitable for all fitness levels and hours can be lost exploring it.

Also a 30-minute drive from the retreat, Dales Gorge flows year-round. Fortescue Falls provide a dramatic site as you walk down into the gorge. A small bush track leads through a verdant greenery to Fern



02

Pool, which is very deep and fed by a small waterfall spilling over a rock overhang. Along the short walk there, we had to wait for a very large king brown snake to meander off the path before we arrived to find an even larger olive python perched in a tree above waiting for a flying fox to act carelessly.

After a week or so, the initial majesty of the gorges subsides, allowing Karijini's stillness, sheer size, the openness of the landscape and the dingoes howling at night to become more apparent. At the end of the week, I was not yearning to move on to the next spot or looking forward to anything else. I was quietly mourning the prospect of leaving this enormous and ancient landscape that had genuinely touched us. We fell in love with this place and I dare you to try not to. ●



05

## KARIJINI REPORT CARD



### Information

[karijinixperience.com](http://karijinixperience.com)

### Getting there

Qantas offers direct flights to Paraburdoo. [www.qantas.com.au](http://www.qantas.com.au)

### Getting there

4WD vehicles are available from the airport from Avis, Hertz and Budget.

### Stay

[www.karijiniecoretreat.com.au](http://www.karijiniecoretreat.com.au)

### Do

For hosted tours of Karijini, contact West Oz Actives and Les Tok Tours. [www.westozactive.com.au](http://www.westozactive.com.au)  
[lestoktours.com.au](http://lestoktours.com.au)

01 Awe inspiring beauty 02 Typical WA outback  
03 Getting hands-on at The Karijini Experience  
04 Try your hand at painting 05 Karijini cooking



03



04

# KARIJINI ECO RETREAT



## Designed with the environment in mind

- Deluxe and dorm style eco tents and cabins
- Outback restaurant & bar • 15 min. walk trail to Joffre Gorge
- Campground with BBQ facilities, showers / WC
- Easy access - only 3km unsealed (via Bunjima Drive)

**ecoretreat**  
karijini  
[www.karijiniecoretreat.com.au](http://www.karijiniecoretreat.com.au)



Karijini National Park, Western Australia | T: (08) 9425 5591 | E: [reservations@karijiniecoretreat.com.au](mailto:reservations@karijiniecoretreat.com.au)



## CIL Insurance is Australia's leading specialist Caravan and RV insurer - offering the broadest caravan, RV and contents cover.

### CIL Caravan specialist policies include:

- Cover for flood, storm, hail and fire at no extra cost
- Automatic agreed value cover
- New replacement of your caravan or motorhome in the event of a loss within 2 years of its first registration
- Automatic \$1,000 worth of contents cover, with option to increase cover
- Flexible excess options to reduce your premium
- Pay by the month at no extra cost

Call 1800 112 481 for a Quote  
Visit [cilinsurance.com.au](http://cilinsurance.com.au)

Insurance is issued by AAI Limited ABN 48 005 297 807 trading as CIL Insurance. Read the Product Disclosure Statement before you make any decisions regarding our products. Contact us for a copy. \*For motorhome you must be the first registered owner.

