



# The KARIJINI experience

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BY DAN AVILA

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*The rugged red rocks and pure-fed waterholes of Karijini National Park are a photographer's dream.*







**K**arijini National Park is a little like Western Australia's own Grand Canyon, except without the crowds. A national park in the heart of WA's Pilbara, Karijini is an ancient landscape of gorges, waterfalls, cultural heritage and beauty within an otherwise inhospitable arid landscape.

'The Karijini Experience' is an annual event that showcases this beauty and biodiversity and brings together the traditional owners and all manner of guests for an intimate and life changing experience.

The event runs for a week coinciding with the April school holidays. The 2016 Karijini Experience was my first and it was an utterly memorable escape from hectic, modern life to the world's oldest landscape where I was warmly hosted by the wonderful traditional owners of this region and the passionate and dedicated event organisers from *Nintirri*.

As part of the 2016 Karijini Experience program, I had the pleasure of hosting two photography workshops in Dales Gorge and Fortescue Falls. Walking down into the gorge there is a complete transformation from a hot and arid Pilbara landscape to a verdant green biosphere with an enormous waterfall and terrarium-like environment. The gorges are magnificent places to take photographs. They are dramatically beautiful and teeming with life. During the Dales Gorge workshops, we enjoyed a very close encounter with a docile and well behaved King Brown snake (the world's deadliest) that meandered through our group while we took photos in the area around its home before we respectfully moved on to Fern Pool with an enormous olive python perched below a colony of flying foxes.

The Karijini Experience program has so many highlights that showcase this beautiful place and the traditional owners that generously share its secret. One of the standouts for me was a long table degustation meal under candle light in the bush. This was Michelin Star quality fine dining under the stars with the chefs serving amazing dishes using locally foraged and sourced ingredients and other traditional offerings including puffed crispy barramundi swim-bladder, emu tartare, kangaroo fillet and crocodile feet.

Kalamina Gorge proved a unique and acoustically resplendent amphitheatre for an evening of Opera in the Gorge by internationally acclaimed indigenous performers. There were also multiple opportunities to spend time engaging with local elders who delighted in sharing their accumulated knowledge of the area with guests from around the world.

The 2017 Karijini Experience runs from Tuesday 11 April to Saturday 15 April and is the perfect time to experience everything this magical and mystical place has to offer. •

*Dan used a pair of Canon 5D Mark III's with four lenses; Canon 70-200mm L f/2.8 II IS, Canon 24-70 L f/2.8 II, Canon 17mm L TS-E f/4 tilt-shift and Zeiss Otus 85mm f/1.4. Together with NISI filter system, Sunway L brackets and the SIRUI waterproof carbon tripod.*

**Opening image:** Magnificent 'Spa Pool' at the top of Hamersley Gorge.

**Top:** Dawn colours of the Pilbara in Karijini National Park.





**Clockwise from top:** Mt Bruce, the second highest peak in Western Australia, is a rewarding hike with spectacular views; The campsite hub of the annual Karijini Experience; Almost impossible to spot until it moves, the camouflage of the desert dragon is used for stealthy predation and defence; The cascading falls at the beginning of Joffre Gorge amphitheatre.





**Clockwise from top:** The reflective beauty of Hamersley Gorge; Lookout over Hancock Gorge; Kids from the Yinhawangka, Banyjima and Nyiyaparli community getting cooking lessons from Australian celebrity chef, Mark Olive.

## travel facts

### FURTHER INFORMATION

- Karijini Experience: [karijiniexperience.com](http://karijiniexperience.com)
- Australia's North West: [australiasnorthwest.com](http://australiasnorthwest.com)
- Nintirri Centre: [nintirri.org.au](http://nintirri.org.au)