

Safe Outback Travel

The Australian Outback offers spectacular scenery and the chance for great adventure. But it is important to be ready for the rigours of travelling in isolated areas.

Unfortunately, up to a quarter of the emergency medical evacuations that we carry out each year are the results of travellers who get into trouble on their Outback adventure.

Preparation

- Make sure you have good quality maps and plan your route
- Be careful of how much you pack on your roof rack; a heavy load on top increases the chances of a roll-over
- Store water in small containers instead of one large tank; check all water containers for leaks; if you're unused to the Outback, you may need one litre of water every hour; if active (eg walking, climbing etc) you will need to consume additional water at regular intervals (remember: don't wait to feel thirsty before taking a drink!); most towns have water but, at some places, you may not be able to get drinking water; we recommend that in very hot conditions you carry 10 litres of water per person per day; don't rely on waterholes, dams, bores, mills, tanks or troughs; soap or detergents should not be used in any natural water course or stock watering point
- Carry enough food for each person for two days
- Bring matches or a lighter
- Pack a fire extinguisher
- Make sure you have a summary of your medical history and bring all medication and repeat scripts with you
- Make sure you are familiar with first aid and pack a first aid kit
- Take a hat, sunscreen and insect repellent
- Wear clothing suitable for the climate; wear good walking shoes; take warmer clothes for the evenings
- Try to avoid travelling in the hottest part of the year
- If you are an overseas visitor you are encouraged to take out adequate travel insurance when travelling in Outback Australia

Safety on unsealed roads

- Reduce speed on unsealed roads because traction often decreases and braking distances increase
- Beware of hidden dangers (dust filled holes, soft and sloping edges); when overtaking, beware that dust obscures vision and dangers may be hidden
- Slow down before making a turn to avoid sliding
- Check road conditions before travelling; the condition of unsealed roads varies according to weather, usage and grading; to check on road conditions, closures and restrictions contact the nearest tourist association or Parks and Wildlife office
- Watch out for animals, particularly at dawn, dusk and night
- Engage 4 x 4 if travelling in a 4WD which has a high centre of gravity and control can be affected by strong winds

Relevant Dangers

- Fatigue: driving long distances can cause driver fatigue; stop, revive, survive every two hours
- Speed: speed limits vary from State to State; in some areas (the Northern Territory), this is no speed limit on open roads, but you must drive at a speed that allows you to stop safely
- Stock and wildlife: beware of sheep, cattle, kangaroos, emus. Dawn, dusk and night driving are the most dangerous time to travel
- Road trains: always give trucks and road trains (which can be up to 50 metres in length) plenty of room; if overtaking, allow at least 1km of clear road ahead
- Floods: never attempt to cross flooded bridges or causeways unless you are absolutely sure of the depth and road damage; most flash floods recede within 24 hours

General information for Outback travellers

Sacred Sites: there are a number of places or objects that hold special significance for Aboriginal people; visitors are welcome but respect must be shown for these sites; some are protected by law and there are penalties for trespassing; permit applications and general enquiries must be directed in writing to the relevant Land Council.

Truck parking bays: never park in truck parking bays which are provided exclusively for the use of trucks and road trains; these rigs need room to maneuver their trailers and often need to run noisy refrigeration units

Rest areas are provided for regular fatigue breaks and there are camping and caravan park facilities for overnight stops

Pets: dogs and cats cannot be taken into National Parks

Exploring on foot

Before you set out anywhere, get local advice about conditions and what you should know about where you intend to go. Advise people of your intended trip, where you will be going, when you'll be leaving, when you think you'll be back, so if you're not back, they can sound the alarm

In an emergency

If well planned, your trip should go smoothly and safely, but, if you get into difficulty, there are a few key things to remember:

If your car breaks down or you become lost, never leave your vehicle; use it for shade and shelter and remember it is easier to locate a missing vehicle than a missing person in the vast Outback

If you become lost while out walking, sit down and study your maps; determine where you came from and slowly take that route back; if you can't find the way back, move to higher ground

Light a small smoky fire with green leaves during the day and a small bright fire with dry materials at night

Snake bites

Of the world's 25 most deadly snakes, Australia is home to 21 of them! The perceived threat of snake bites is one of the most common fears for people planning to travel in the Outback, however, contrary to popular belief, snake bites are not a major cause of death for people in Australia.

However, it is important for everyone to know what action to take after a real or suspected snake bite. The action taken immediately is crucial for the patient's recovery.