

Outback Photography Dreamtime

By Donna Zempel

Imagine flying across the Australian Outback and seeing not only its most famous icons, like Uluru and The Bungle Bungle Range; but also exploring some of its most remote locations that can't be reached by road. Now imagine travelling with a very small group of less than ten people and avoiding other tourists. Add in a private plane, where everyone gets a window seat to see amazing aerial views of the Outback, and your own pilot for the trip. Include a personal tour guide who has handled all of your itineraries, expeditions and planning. And, of course, the ultimate dream for any photographer would be the opportunity to work alongside a professional photographer to help you capture the very best shots of this once-in-a-lifetime journey.

John Dyer, Managing Director of Air Adventure Australia, has teamed up with Ewen Bell, Professional Photographer and Travel Journalist, to make this dream a reality. My husband and I had the amazing opportunity to travel on their maiden voyage in June of this year and were absolutely thrilled with the experience! There were several of us who were continually pinching ourselves throughout the two weeks to make sure that it really was more than just a dream!

I can only think of two areas of photography that would not be well suited to this trip, so if you are passionate about only architecture or sports photography, you might want to stay in the city! However, I'd definitely recommend a trip like this for anyone who wants to grow in any other field of photography, no matter what level of experience they have – from novice right through to the professional level. As an instructor and mentor, Ewen was humble and very approachable. We had only four shutter bugs in our small group, so we each had plenty of one-on-one time with Ewen to discuss our individual needs, questions and concerns. It was really left up to each of us to determine how much we wanted to draw from his experience and Ewen was very sensitive in approaching us according to our different backgrounds and what we each wanted to get out of our photography.

We had all of the vast and inspiring Australian Outback as our classroom. Different topics seemed to come up every day and were almost as diverse as the scenery. Landscape photography would be the first thing to come to mind on a trip like this and we certainly had plenty of opportunity in this area. John and Ewen planned our excursions specifically for capturing these amazing places in their very best light, so most of these shoots were early morning or late in the day. On our earliest morning we met at 4:15AM to see the Bungle Bungle range at sunrise. We also had many gorgeous sunsets including the Breakaways at Coober Pedy, Kings Canyon, the Mary River, Faraway Bay, and Uluru.

Nature photography was at its best in the Mary River Wetlands, near Kakadu National Park. We spent an entire morning on a boat with shutter speeds turned up higher to capture a wide variety of birds, as well as wallabies and those awesome crocs. We also had a walk through the rain forest where we focused on macro-photography with butterflies, dragonflies, green ants and other flora and fauna.

Every day presented opportunities for portrait photography using the other members in our group as well as our colorful guides and hosts at various locations. Bathurst Island, off of the coast of Darwin, gave us an entire day devoted to portrait photography as a part of travel, in addition to an intriguing cultural experience. Ewen was very careful to discuss the importance of being a responsible travel photographer and how much it can enhance our images when we first take the time to connect with the people we are photographing. And, as with other situations, we also discussed how to best utilize the existing lighting to illuminate our “models.”

At Home Valley Station, near the Pentecost River in Western Australia, John made arrangements for us to photograph the stockmen with their horses. We had hoped to do a cattle shoot here as well, but animals cannot always be counted on to cooperate, and they couldn't seem to be found on this huge station on that morning! But, there was still a lovely billabong with a fantastic sky and several birds to keep us busy with our cameras!

Ewen constantly tried to push each of us to do more in the area of still-life photography. We had a great day to really focus on this early on, when we took a long walk along the rim of Kings Canyon. This was the only day that the weather really didn't cooperate, and since it was so overcast in the morning, it was a good time for us to look for shapes and textures to photograph. There was also ample opportunity at all other locations, but especially while we were waiting for that “perfect” end-of-day colour.

The favorite stop for my husband and me was probably Faraway Bay, in the Kimberley. This truly remote resort can only be reached by private plane or boat. The scenery along the river gorge leading up to King George Falls was absolutely breathtaking, the service was top notch, the food was prepared by a gourmet chef, and the staff was warm and friendly. They cater to small groups with just twelve cabins, each with an awesome view of the bay and bluffs. There were very serious discussions on our last day here about helping the pilot “lose” the keys to the plane in order to prolong our stay!

In addition to the four photographers in our group, two of us brought along spouses, and they would both agree that this trip was just as enjoyable for them. There were plenty of other activities for us to participate in along the way, including fishing for Barramundi, learning about ancient Bradshaw art, visiting a responsible Aboriginal art gallery, shopping for opals, relaxing at a Billabong, stargazing, hiking, and swimming. And getting to learn about each diverse member of our group was just as enjoyable as the other adventures along the way!

Another trip is being planned for June 2010, and I would recommend signing up early to make sure you are included. Of course, Air Adventure Australia also does trips across other parts of Australia and Ewen holds photography trips all over the world. So, check out their websites if you'd like to learn more and to see additional photos from our journey!

<http://www.airadventure.com.au/>

<http://ewenbell.com/>