

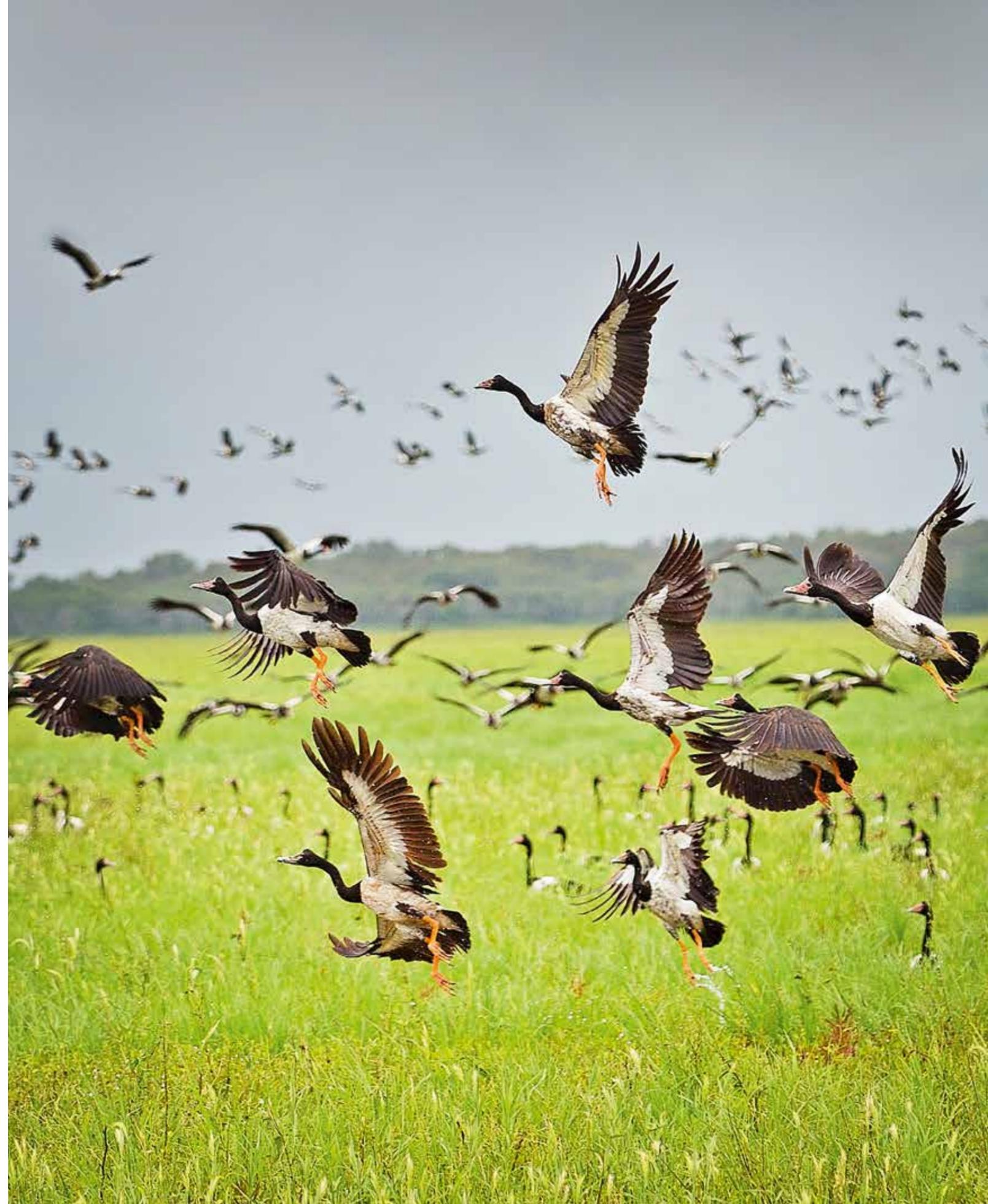
# BAMURRU PLAINS

IT HAPPENS QUITE SUDDENLY. WHEN YOU'RE FLOATING out across the Mary River floodplains with the wind in your face and a pair of black buffalo galloping beneath a rising flock of magpie geese ahead. That's when the realisation abruptly hits: there's nowhere else like this in the country. Although you get a sense of it from the moment you arrive at Bamurru Plains, it's not until you're actually racing across the wetlands on an airboat that you realise the true scale and magnificence of this place. When the sky fills with clouds of black and white geese, when a white-bellied sea eagle takes off from an old fence post nearby, when a big bull buffalo turns his horns towards you in defiance, and when a flash of water and grass alludes to the ancient reptiles lurking beneath.

Located on a private buffalo property on the western edge of World Heritage-listed Kakadu National Park and three hours' drive east of Darwin, Bamurru Plains is a wilderness wonderland. It stretches across 300 square kilometres and incorporates vast coastal floodplains, savannah woodlands and magical paperbark swamps. The property's 10 luxurious safari bungalows sit on the edge of the wetlands, while the open-sided central lodge is a stunning example of contemporary tropical architecture.

Wallabies, buffalo and birds are a constant around the bungalows and lodge, creating a sense of safari more commonly associated with Africa. Manager and veteran Top End guide John Cooper says Bamurru Plains epitomises owner Charlie Carlow's quest for 'wild bush luxury'. "The thought process behind the property is for guests to immerse themselves in the environment," John says. "That's highlighted by your ability to lay back in your bungalow and watch the wildlife around you."

*Magpie geese launch en masse from the floodplains.*





Sustainability is key at Bamurru, with buildings carefully designed to minimise impact on the fragile ecosystem. The majority of power – and all hot water – is solar generated, drinking water is sourced from groundwater bores and filtered on-site, and waste is recycled wherever possible. With no mobile phone reception or wi-fi access, guests are encouraged to get to know each other and share the experience. “We’re one big family while you’re here,” says John, pointing out the lodge’s long communal table, the focus of evening meals. “That big table brings people together from all walks of life and from all around the world, and it’s amazing to see the number of lifelong friendships formed around it.”

The Bamurru experience is defined by the annual monsoon. From February to April, the property operates as an exclusive fishing lodge, while the months of May to October mark the leisure travel season. No matter what time you visit, whether you’re here for the big storms of the wet or the clear, warm days of the dry, the wilderness and wildlife always take centre stage. With laid-back but exceptional service, Bamurru prides itself on educating guests about the region’s history, environment and wildlife. “We try to bring those aspects to life for our guests,” John says. “The sights, the sounds and the smells; to me this is the real Australia, and something that very few people get to experience.”

Food served at Bamurru reflects the region, with a focus on locally sourced meats and fish, with crocodile, prawns, wallaby, barramundi, beef and buffalo complemented by native flavours, including red bush apple, pandanus nut, lemon myrtle, green ants, water lotus and quandong.

*CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT: Chef I Made Mustika puts the finishing touches to a meal in the lodge kitchen; mains include dishes such as Black Angus eye fillet with potato rosti; manager John Cooper explores the wetlands by airboat; the lodge’s infinity pool offers impressive wetland views.*





Breakfast is generally a simple affair taken early to cater for morning wildlife excursions, while lunch and daily three-course dinners offer a truly gourmet experience. For lunch, expect something like double-smoked ham, spinach and tomato frittata, accompanied by lemon myrtle seasoned duck breast with vino cotto and a red bush apple salsa, served on the outdoor deck. Dinners are likely to feature offerings such as canapés of beer-battered barramundi with house-made dipping sauce; and mains such as Black Angus eye fillet with potato rosti, spinach, bush tomato and pink peppercorns; or crispy skinned salmon with dill aioli, steamed broccoli and capers.

Catering for a maximum of 20 guests, Bamurru's 10 ensuited safari bungalows are nestled among native pandanus palms and provide the ultimate in secluded bush accommodation. Outback touches include hurricane lamp light fittings, tree-stump showers and wooden towel rails. Dark timbers and corrugated iron nod to the pastoral heritage, while mesh screen ceiling-to-floor walls provide an experience in which you can hear, see and almost touch the wildlife and wilderness around you. In the evenings, as you lie down to sleep, nature's full ensemble reveals itself, with frog calls punctuating the gentle hum of insects, and the shuffle of nearby wallabies adding to the murmur of a gentle breeze.

The main lodge architecture features a vaulted roof, thatched ceilings, rough-hewn timbers, weathered iron and polished floorboards. Cane furniture and lounges, along with the sprawling communal dining area and open bar, create a sense of relaxed bush luxury, while crocodile skulls, didgeridoos and Indigenous art add a subtle artistic touch. Outside, two large undercover decks provide an airy escape from the heat of the day or the perfect vantage point from which to view storms rolling over the floodplains. The wet-edge pool is the ideal setting for sundowners as you watch the daily migration of buffalo returning from the wetlands to dry ground for the night.

*CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Cane lounges create a tropical atmosphere in the main lodge; one of Bamurru's safari bungalows; guests wake up to uninterrupted wetland views; ensuite in Bamurru's bungalows are outback rustic with tree-stump showers a key feature.*





BAMURRU PLAINS

**LOCATION**

About 230km by road east of Darwin, via the Arnhem Highway.

**GETTING THERE**

The drive from Darwin takes about three hours by 4WD vehicle, but most guests charter a flight from Darwin, which takes 30 minutes. Luggage is restricted to 15kg.

**WHAT'S INCLUDED**

Accommodation, food, drinks, a range of premium wines and spirits, and quality fishing gear during the fishing season. Packages are available that include guided wilderness activities.

**WHAT TO BRING**

Swimwear, sunscreen, binoculars, light casual clothing and good walking shoes for exploring. A warm top is suggested for the cooler months.

**WHEN TO COME**

The Top End climate is warm year-round, however mornings and evenings can be cool between April and July, with early fogs common. The months of March and April offer the best fishing.

**CONTACT**

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Wilderness and wildlife are the key attractions at Bamurru. Daily activities include croc-spotting river cruises by airboat, four-wheel-drive safaris, wildlife viewing and walking expeditions. Buffaloes, wallabies and kangaroos are in abundance, and wild pigs are often spotted on safari. Guides will stop to point out native bush-tucker plants such as red bush apples, or to pluck a green ant nest from a tree to introduce guests to the citrus flavour and medicinal qualities of the bush ant.

Home to more than 230 bird species, the Mary River floodplain system is a highlight of any visit. In addition to the ubiquitous magpie geese, the wetlands are brimming with whistling ducks, egrets, ibis, brolgas and jabirus. The entire coastal area north of Bamurru is closed to commercial net fishing and the floodplains act as a huge barramundi nursery. Fishing is conducted as a guided-only experience, with river excursions on the Sampan Creek also available. River trips offer guests a close view of one of the largest populations of estuarine crocodiles on the planet.

For a truly exclusive experience, enjoy the seclusion of Bamurru's six-metre-high bird hide. The Hide, a short distance from the lodge, is the ultimate place for birdwatching, an afternoon picnic, or an overnight treetop sleep-out. Scenic flights and guided daytrips to Kakadu National Park can also be arranged.

Whatever you choose to do on Bamurru, it's unlikely you'll leave the same as you arrived. "I've taken guests into areas on the floodplains in the airboats where I've had people start to cry," John says. "You get inside those giant melaleuca forests and they are simply stunning. It gets into your blood."

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT: Green ants are harvested from a nest; a water buffalo watches guests pass in an airboat; quad bikes are another way to explore the surrounding landscape; four-wheel-drive safaris are a highlight of a stay at Bamurru Plains.