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Sunday Telegraph

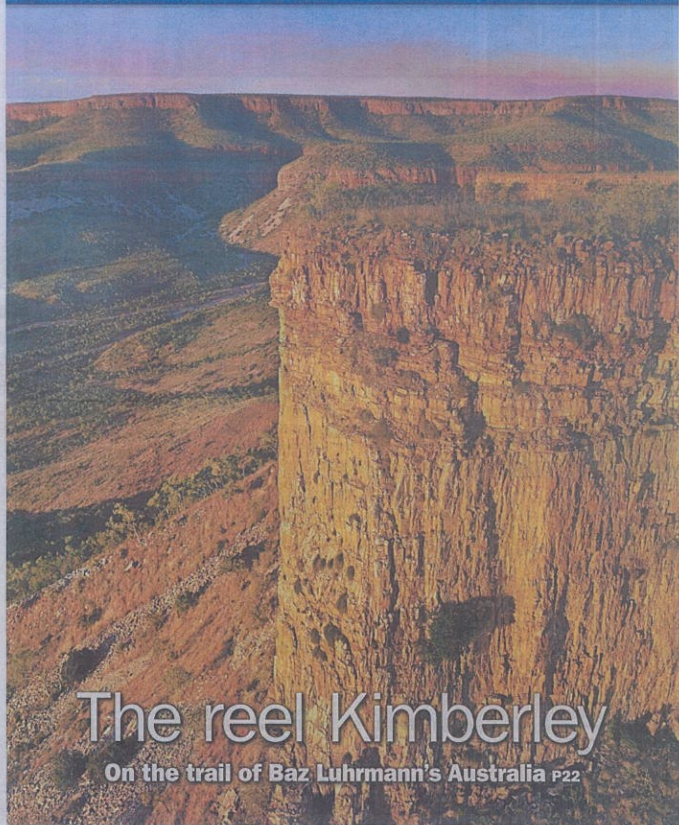
# escape

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November 2, 2008



## The reel Kimberley

On the trail of Baz Luhrmann's Australia P22



# Magnificent bac

**Sally Macmillan visits some of the locations that will be seen in Australia's latest blockbuster movie.**



Movie moment: Nicole Kidman and Hugh Jackman in Baz Luhrmann's *Australia*

As *Outback* yarns go, it's epic: "There Nicole (Kidman) is, just lolling away like, well, like a beautiful water nymph, all pale and fragile-like. Out of the corner of my eye I see this big buggler of a croc getting ready to alight in for the kill. So what's a man to do? Go the hero bit, of course, wrestle him down..."

We gaze into the rock pool with trepidation, and the laconic storyteller laughs. "Meh, mate. Crocs happened somewhere, but it didn't. Hey, but I did meet her riding double on set. And git on in—there's no crocs here!"

Here is the famed El Questro Wilderness Park, one of the location sites for Baz Luhrmann's forthcoming frontier western movie, *Australia*.

There are crocs, freshwater and salties, in the rivers and pools of these vast realms — just not right here at the Emma Gorge waterfall and rock pool, where Kidman's character in *Australia* has a romantic encounter.

The tall-tale teller is David Charles Chittott — that's *Chilli* to you and me —

El Questro ranger, guide and jack of all trades. He is but one of the bigger-than-life characters you happen upon in *The Kimberley*.

Like so many others in this awesome, mystical landscape, Chilli is a been-everywhere-man of the *Outback*, with a ripper of a yarn for all occasions, be they tall, true or somewhere in between.

*Australia* was also filmed in Bowen and Darwin, but the location that inspired the look and feel of the movie is the vast, sun-scorched Kimberley.

In this entire rock and landscape you won't hit one traffic light.

And you'll bounce along red earth and white dust tracks that rock your ribs into a jungle beat.

We begin in Kununurra.

A split on the map with a population of a mere 2000, Kununurra is today an inland oasis — lush food bowl of the northwest, frontier lands, leaping forward with new irrigation areas and big cash crops on the way — after decades of being derided as a white elephant.

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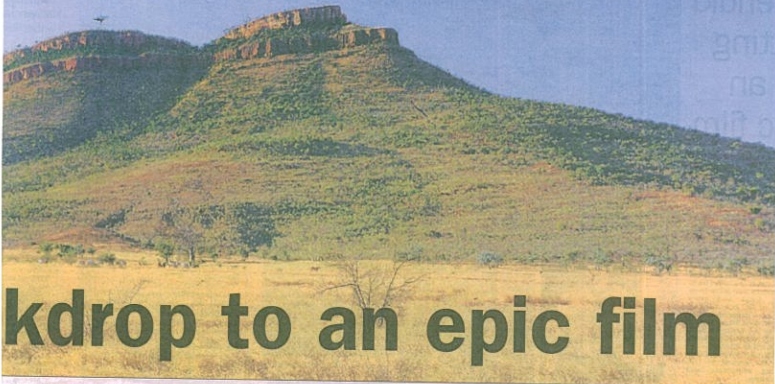
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Ever-evolving since its birth in the 1960s with the Ord River irrigation scheme, this gateway to the East Kimberley (Kununurra means meeting of big waters) now has millionaire rows of mansions along the Upper and Lower Ord River banks.

It was down the lower reaches of Riverlana that Lohmann, Kidman and layseed husband Keith Urban, actor Hugh Jackman and wife Deborah-Lee Furness and their children resided waterfront mansions as their base while on location for Australia.

Now, on the eve of Australia's November 26 release, hopes are running high for a tourism bonanza.

Kununurra and its far-flung outposts provide many of the panoramic backdrops to the story of British aristocrat Lady Sarah Ashley (Kidman), who travels to meet her philandering husband, only to find him dead.

She teams up with a rough-hewn drover (Jackman) and fights to save her Faraday Downs cattle station from local cattle barons.

Locations used within the Kimberley's 122,000sq km include El Questro Wilderness Park, Home Valley Station, the Cockburn Range, the Bungle

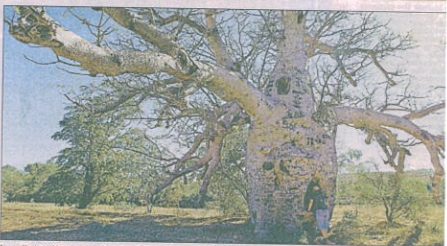
Bungle Range, Carlin Hill Station, Digger's Rest Station and King George Falls near Faraway Bay.

More than 400 cast and crew spent a month marinating in searing heat. On occasions they camped at remote locations, with Kununurra the base.

They roamed the small town centre and bought up at Kimberley Pine Diamonds and Lovell Gallery, stayed at the Kimberley Grande, drank at the Kununurra Hotel and Kununurra Country Club, hung out at the coffee and bar wireless spot Boab Rock Cafe, worked out at the local gym, chatted and mingled with locals.

From Kununurra you can take a chopper or light plane to the tiger-striped, beehived Bungle Bungles. Touch down, stay and trek through, or fly back to town; tour the monstrous Argyle Diamond Mine; take a cruise on Lake Argyle, the southern hemisphere's biggest man-made freshwater lake, or take a cruise boat or a canoe into the gorges of the Ord River.

Back on terra firma, take a 4WD foray and drink up the yawning blue



To Page 24 Long limbs of justice: The famous Prison Boab Tree near Diggers Rest

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# escape

## Splendid setting for an epic film

From Page 23

skies, rich red rock and rugged bush landscape, with its hidden plunging gorges, waterfalls and thermal pools.

Cast and crew were choppered and driven out through red earth country and boob tree clusters to reach one set at the Packer family's 3700km Carrara Hill Station, about 50 minutes drive from Kununurra, and location for the film's Paraway Downs homestead.

Digger's Rest is a rustic working cattle station on the banks of the King River. It is about 110km from Kununurra and 55km from Wyndham. Cast and crew camped out in 3x2 but still had the energy for a game of cricket on the claypan flats. Here you can doze down as the Australia mob did, hang out at the homestead, fish and ride out to muster.

On to El Questró, which is also a location for several of the cattle-driving sequences and aerial panoramas.

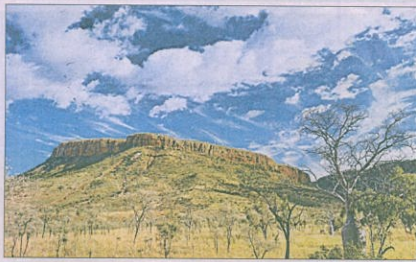
The accommodation choices at El Questró include the exclusive Homestead, the luxury tents of Emma Gorge Resort and the hub of the Townships' river bank bungalows, cabins and camping.

El Questró is running a Big Day Out tour, which takes in Australian locations such as Emma Gorge, the flats of the cattle stampede with the Cockburn Ranges as backdrop, river crossings and drought scenes.

The tour circumnavigates the awesome Cockburn — a never-ending mesa fortress that marches rampant across the landscape, rising more than 600m above the plains — follows the drovers' footprints on the Karungie track mud-flats and heads to Wyndham.

There's a visit to the Hoah Prison tree, plenty of wild cattle (cassinkas) and no so wild brabman and shorthorns, a lunch prepared by Homestead chef, Alan Groom, and a return along the banks of the Pentecost River. The Kimberley booms, some more than 1000 years old, are quite a sight, their immense swollen trunks measuring 10m across.

From El Questró you swell the



Pentecost River on the way to Home Valley Station at the exact point where Klidman drove a battered 1977 Chevy bullockhealer.

Home Valley still has the vehicle and another one used in the film. Home Valley HYV is a working station and tourism operation. Owned by the Indigenous Land Corporation, it is 120 home-jirring kilometres west of Kununurra.

Luhrmann filmed scenes here that incorporated the distant Cockburn Ranges and the Pentecost River.

The top level stay here are the eight Grass Castles: luxury bungalows on the banks of Bindoola Creek that lead to the Pentecost. There are also 28 stockman-styled guest suites set around one of the station's two resort pools;

four Sandcastle eco-tents. Or you can camp or park a caravan.

A fresh addition is the HYV Station Australia Movie Tour that takes in such locations as Nyall lagoon, Bindoola Falls and HYV's Private Lookout; out to the Cockburn. At the latter you can sip bubbly as the ranges turn pink, blue and purple.

Birbath, swim in the lagoons,

### DESTINATION >>>



### East Kimberley

Getting there: The writer flew Casula to Perth and connected to Kununurra via Broome.

Stay: El Questró Wilderness Park, 110km west of Kununurra; open April to October, www.elquestro.com.au, (08) 9168 1777

Home Valley Station, 120km west of Kununurra. Open all year. Guests choppered in from Kununurra during the wet, www.homevalley.com.au, (08) 9161 4322

Digger's Rest, 126km west of Kununurra, 40km Wyndham, www.diggersrest.com.au, (08) 9161 1029

The Kimberley Grand: Kununurra, (08) 9166 5600, www.thekimberleygrand.com.au

Doc Mack's Baria Camp, www.mackandsons.com.au

Alligator Airways, www.alligatorairways.com.au

Trips J Cruises - On River, www.tripsjcruses.net.au

More: Tourism WA has a number of self-guide suggestions; see www.westernaustralia.com

billabongs and waterfalls and gorges; fish; croc spot (watch out for old Croc); the resident jounkers; ride one of the 30 horses down to the river; take part in the weekly cattle muster, or just loiter around the sprawling homestead itself that offers eight Grass Castles (aka bungalows) — on the banks of the Bindoola Creek; stockman-styled guest suites; Sandcastles (eco tents); landscaped camping grounds; two resort pools and huge restaurant and bar.

The station's Chris Pennech says they're having a bit of fun reimagining some sites. If you visit, don't be surprised if you come across Luhrmann's Leg, Jackson's Jump-up and Klidman's Crossing.

■ The writer was a guest of Tourism WA.

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### CORRECTION

Harvey World Travel wishes to correct the CORRECT OF THE COOL advertisement which was published on page 24 in the Sunday Telegraph (Space Travel Magazine, Sunday 19 October 2008). The advertisement incorrectly indicated that airfares and taxes were included. However, the published price of \$2000 was for the base air only and should have included airfare, taxes and airport fees. Harvey World Travel apologises for the error and any inconvenience it caused. The correct advertisement was published in Sunday Telegraph (Space Travel Magazine) on Sunday 26 October 2008.

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