

Scene the outback?

You've seen the films, now see the real thing.

Lee Atkinson reports on our top movie locations.

All the world's a stage, it seems, or at least a good part of the Australian countryside is. And we're not just talking about Baz Luhrmann using Bowen in North Queensland and the Kimberley in Western Australia as the set for his soon-to-be-released film *Australia*. Follow in the footsteps of the movie world's A-list and discover the locations featured in some of our classic films. If you loved the movie, here's how to see the real thing.

Western Australia

Everyone's been talking up the potential for *Australia* (the movie) to put Australia (the wide brown land) on the map. As well as a multimillion-dollar tourism advertising campaign that piggybacks on the (hoped for) success of Baz Luhrmann's epic, there has also been a boost from Nicole Kidman's recent declaration that the waterfalls and waterholes near Kununurra helped her, and several others working on the film, conceive.

"There is something up there in the Kununurra water," she was reported as saying, "because we all went swimming in the waterfalls, so we call it the fertility waters now." Now hopeful parents-to-be are flocking to places such as El Questro (voyages.com.au), a million-acre cattle farm and tourism complex.

Just next door is Home Valley Station (homevalley.com.au), another film location where you can recreate some of the dramatic cattle-muster scenes on a three-hour trail ride beside the Cockburn Ranges.

Tourism WA is not so keen about promoting that other great Western Australian movie location, Wolfe Creek (in the Wolfe Creek Meteor Crater National Park, 1800 kilometres north-east of Perth), where the 2005 horror movie of almost the same name turned many potential campers off the outback for life.

Queensland

Sleepy Bowen in the Whitsundays was transformed into a self-styled "Bowenwood" during the filming of *Australia*, with movie magic recreating 1940s Darwin for the bombing scenes. Many of the existing buildings were in the film, including Customs House and the Grandview Hotel, embellished somewhat to resemble a typical 1930s hotel. The only set still standing is the facade of the "1894 Police Station" – the large, flat grassy area in front was where the township of Darwin was built. The 16-acre set is believed to be one of the largest outdoor sets ever made.

It's not the first time Nicole has worked in the Whitsundays. The movie that helped launch her career, the 1989 thriller *Dead Calm*, which also starred Sam Neill, was filmed in the Whitsunday passage. The yachting holiday-turned-nightmare flick about picking up a stranger who intends a couple much harm is quite possibly enough to turn you off bare-boat charters for ever. Lovely scenery though.

Hugh Jackman's also no stranger to Queensland, or the outback, combining both when he filmed the 1999 feel-good romance *Paperback Hero* with Claudia Karvan in the tiny one-horse town of Nindigully (population six), 160 kilometres west of Goondiwindi. Hugh played a romance-writing truck driver and most of the action was set in the Boomerang Café, which in real life is the Nindigully pub, whose real claim to fame is that not only is it Queensland's oldest pub but it also serves some of the biggest steaks you'll find anywhere.

NSW

NSW saw some movie action with the Snowy Mountains town of Jindabyne starring, alongside Abbie Cornish and Sam Worthington, in 2004's *Somersault* and Ray Lawrence's dark

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2006 drama *Jindabyne*. Hitch a ride with the Riverboat Postman (hawkesburyriverferries.com.au) on a four-hour run up the Hawkesbury River delivering mail to isolated communities and oyster farmers and you'll experience a slice of the river life evocatively filmed for 2004's *Oyster Farmer*.

The Dish introduced the delights of Parkes and its radio telescope to a much wider world beyond that occupied by boffins and science geeks, even though much of the movie was actually filmed in nearby Forbes. You can take a free tour of the facility (parkes.atnf.csiro.au) but sadly you won't be able to recreate the famous cricket game on the dish itself. Likewise, the smash hit *Babe*, about a pig raised by sheepdogs, showcased the rural delights of the Southern Highlands to families who still flock to the bucolic green hills around the tiny town of Robertson.

The most famous of all movie locations in NSW is Silverton near Broken Hill. It was pretty much a ghost town until it became the set for *Mad Max II* back in 1981 and literally dozens of commercials and films have followed, including *Razorback*, *A Town like Alice*, *Dirty Deeds* and *The Craic*, making it perhaps one of the most recognisable small towns in the country. Drop in and have a cold drink at the Silverton pub and you'll hear all about them – on average, a commercial is shot there every five weeks. A replica of Mad Max's V8 Interceptor is parked outside.

South Australia

Priscilla, Queen of the Desert and *Mad Max* both made a splash in Coober Pedy as well, where most of the action took place on Moon Plains, just out of town.

The desert landscapes of South Australia are very popular with the movie set, with the Flinders Ranges serving as the stunning location for *Holy Smoke*, the Kate Winslet-Harvey Keitel drama about religious manipulation. Despite being set in remote WA, the 2002 film about an amazing journey on foot across the outback by three

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Aboriginal girls in 1931, *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, was actually filmed near Parachilna, also in the Flinders Ranges. Spend a night at the Prairie Hotel (where all the stars stay) and try the hotel's signature dish, the Feral Mixed Grill of emu, kangaroo, goat and camel (prairiehotel.com.au).

For a bit of romance and mystery, spend a long weekend at Martindale Hall near Mintaro in the Clare Valley (martindalehall.com), a beautiful, historic B&B that doubled as the elite private girls' school Appleyard College in the 1970s classic

Picnic at Hanging Rock.

Victoria

The mysterious disappearance of three schoolgirls during a Valentine's Day picnic in 1900 may be fiction but the place is real. Hanging Rock, north of Mount Macedon, is a mound of massive granite tors riddled with caves, tunnels and overhanging boulders, its shapes and acoustic echoes enhancing its already spooky reputation.

If it's serenity you're after, then where better to visit than Bonnie Doon on the edge of Lake Eildon, made famous as the holiday spot with the lot in the 1997 smash hit *The Castle*? There are plenty of tranquil waterfront places to stay and it's as popular with water- and power-skiers as it ever was (bonniedoon.net).

Victoria's most famous movie location however, Craig's Hut, seems to have taken on a life of its own, way beyond its use in the 1981 movie *The Man From Snowy River*. Clinging to the cliff-like mountain edge between Alpine National Park and Mount Stirling and rimmed by countless hazy blue peaks, the wooden-slab hut looks and feels like the real thing.

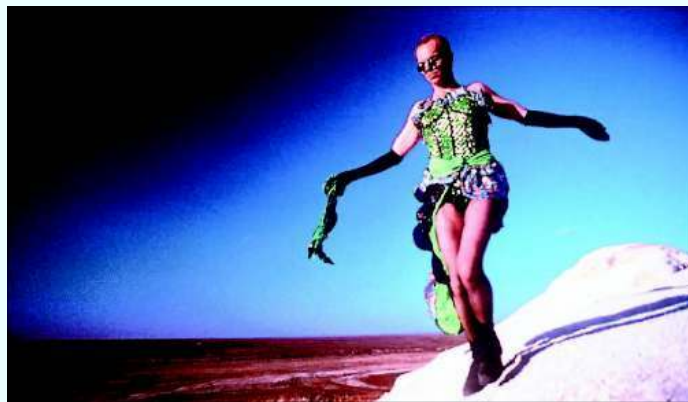
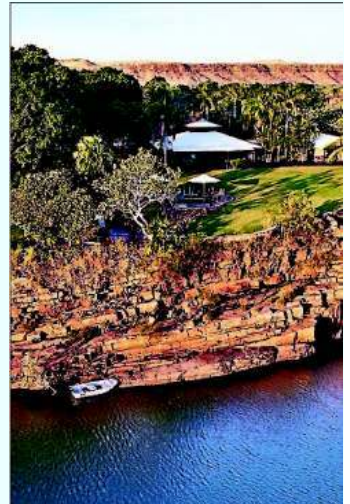
Inside, you can almost hear the 100-year-old walls whisper stories of wild mountain rides and the dirt floor and huge fireplace conjure up cosy images of shared meals while the wind moans outside.

The original 1981 hut was built as a mere facade and it quickly fell into disrepair once

filming finished. It was rebuilt in 1993 for the second *Man From Snowy River* film, became one of the biggest tourist attractions in the area, was burnt down by bushfires in 2006 and rebuilt yet again last summer (mansfield-mtbuller.com.au).

Northern Territory

Just last year the horror flick *Rogue*, about a travel writer and some tourists being stalked by a crocodile, brought into the limelight the wildlife at Kakadu National Park (even though the nocturnal scenes were actually shot on a specially built island in the middle of a lake in Victoria), but you'd still be best advised not to try and recreate the swimming scene. But of all the truly great moments in Aussie film, who can resist replicating that famous scene from *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* on the edge of the 100-metre-high cliffs at Kings Canyon, 330 kilometres south-west of Alice Springs? Just make sure you've got the right frock.



On location ... (clockwise from top left) Victoria's Lake Eildon appeared in *The Castle*; WA's Cockburn Ranges appear in *Australia*; as does El Questro homestead; *Priscilla* star Hugo Weaving dances through Coober Pedy; QLD's Nindigully pub, from *Paperback Hero*; Babe frolics in NSW; and a *Jindabyne* scene. Photos: Tourism Victoria. Tourism WA. Tourism QLD. AP