



### Wizard of Oz

Published: 20 Dec 2008

BAZ LUHRMANN's blockbuster *Australia* has just had its UK premiere and will open across the country on Boxing Day. Shot in locations all over Australia, the film shows the country at its stunning best. It's the story of an English aristocrat, played by Nicole Kidman, who goes to Oz and meets a rough local (Hugh Jackman). They join forces to save some land she's inherited and begin an epic journey across the outback. PETE BELL tells you how to follow in their footsteps and get the most from Oz.

THE location at the heart of Australia the film is the **Home Valley Station**.

It's the cattle ranch that inspired Baz Luhrmann to make the film, and was the backdrop for some pivotal scenes.

During filming the small outback town of **Kununurra** — a short (in Australian terms) hop of 65 miles away — was the base for many of the 400 cast, who tackled the daily journey in four-wheel drive trucks.

The ranch takes guests, and you can stay in complete luxury in their "Grass Castles" on the edge of Bindoola Creek or unroll your swag and sleep under the stars in the ranch's campsite. They also provide safari-style "Sand Castle Eco Tents" in a quiet bush setting.



**Epic ... Hugh Jackman and Nicole Kidman star in Australia**

While you are there you can cross what has been renamed Jackman's Jump-Up on the Gibb River Road, and cross the Pentecost River at a place locals now call Kidman's Crossing. You can also take guided horse rides across the dusty red terrain that dominates the film.

Sand Castle Eco Tents are from £41 per person per night, room-only based on twin share.

Homestead Guesthouse Rooms are from £50 per person per night, room-only based on twin share. Grass Castles are from £89 per person per night, with breakfast based on twin share.

BA offer return flights from London Heathrow to Sydney from £697.50 per person and to Melbourne from £695.50 per person (including all UK taxes).

For reservations visit [ba.com](http://ba.com) or call BA on 0844 493 0787.

A nine-day four-wheel drive through the **Kimberley** region takes in the best sights of Western Australia's far north.



#### Friendly local ... Koala bear

The trip departs from Broome, making stops for swimming and hiking in remote destinations before spending a day exploring the amazing rock formations of the Bungle Bungles.

Then it's time to motor across to Kununurra, home of the waterfalls that Nicole Kidman claimed helped her fall pregnant after she swam in them.

Then it's back into the Northern Territory and on to **Darwin** via the **Victoria River** and **Katherine**.

The trip costs £815 per person excluding flights and has departures between April and November 2009. See [ozxposure.co.uk](http://ozxposure.co.uk) or call 020 8772 3770. Visit [cheapflights.co.uk](http://cheapflights.co.uk) for flights from £559 return.

If you want a cheaper option then base yourself in Darwin to explore the Northern Territory. The city features in the climax of the movie when it is bombed by the Japanese.

You'll be ideally placed to visit the amazing **Kakadu National Park** with its hot, red earth and rough outback. The park is co-managed by its Aboriginal owners and is a great place to see pre-historic rock art. And **Uluru** — formerly known as **Ayers Rock** — is right on its doorstep.

Stay room-only at the five-star Skycity from £35 per night. See [go4travel.net](http://go4travel.net) for details.

Virgin Atlantic fly from London Heathrow to Sydney daily. Fares start from £849. See [virginatlantic.com](http://virginatlantic.com) or call 08705 747 747.

If you want to a trip with a more urban feel, then try a 12-day tour from **Sydney** to **Brisbane**.



**Into the wild ... Crocodiles can be found in Northern Australia**

It takes in the stunning **Hawkesbury River** in coastal New South Wales — where some of the film's most stunning scenes were shot — the Hunter Valley wineries, a farm stay, national parks and the northern New South Wales hinterland. Travel on the postal ferry, try wine touring by mountain bike, an Aussie sheep station experience and relax in the alternative-lifestyle towns of Bellingen and Byron Bay. It costs from £1,175 excluding flights. See [responsibletravel.com](http://responsibletravel.com) or call 01273 600030.

And visit [Cheapflights.co.uk](http://Cheapflights.co.uk) for flights from £559 return. If you fancy seeing Australia in style, try a 22-day rail tour — and take in New Zealand too. Take the Ghan train from Darwin through the outback Kidman and Jackman's characters conquered to the southern city of **Adelaide**.

Then cross the **Dandenong Ranges National Park** aboard the famous Puffing Billy steam railway, hitting **Melbourne** and then Sydney. The tour then continues in New Zealand, from Auckland to the bubbling geysers of Rotorua and through Tongariro National Park. Prices start at £4,865 including flights. The trip leaves on February 14. Call 01766 772030 or see [festtravel.co.uk](http://festtravel.co.uk) .

If you have less time and cash to spare, try an 11-day City, Rock and Reef tour. You'll take in Sydney, Ayers Rock, **Cairns** and the **Great Barrier Reef**, as well as sightseeing tours and experiences ranging from guided walks and a private visit to a wildlife park, to sunset dining at Ayers Rock and a catamaran cruise of Michaelmas Cay. Prices are from £2,536 between January 16 and March 31. This includes return flights, air transfers, overland transport, accommodation with some meals, plus excursions and activities. Call 01494 432 747 or see [all-ways.co.uk](http://all-ways.co.uk) . For more information, see [australia.com](http://australia.com).