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## Is the Savannah Way Australia's best Road Trip?

by Fiona Harper



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### The Savannah Way straddles Australia from Broome to Cairns. Travel writer Fiona Harper hits the highway to check it out.

The Savannah Way traverses some of Australia's most isolated country. Despite its remoteness, or perhaps because of, a road trip through northern outback Australia offers an extraordinary outback experience. It is well worth the effort. Not to mention the bragging rights that come with your return from such an adventure! Straddling the continent between Broome in the west and Cairns in the east, some would think there's little more than nothingness in between. But they would be wrong.

For hard-core long distance cyclists, the Savannah Way is an alluringly crazy challenge. With road trains the length of 10 cars or more on a highway that is sometimes little more than a goat track, it's not the sort of ride you'd tackle on a café-latte training regime. A viable alternative for riders with medium fitness is the Cairns to Karumba Bike Ride, which departs each June. Fully escorted, a catering team and mobile beer fridge follow riders over 780 km and 7 days. But by far the most comfortable (read easiest) way to do the Savannah Way is by campervan. Whether you travel in an uber plush Apollo Camper Euro Tourer 'mother ship' with all the bells and whistles (think hot shower, flushing toilet, fridge, oven, double beds etc.) or a simple yet functional Hitop Camper, a camper is the way to go. Sure, there are motels, hotels and outback pubs along the way but with the wide open spaces of the Outback your constant companion why would you want to be indoors?

Here are some of the highlights of the section between the Coral Sea and the Gulf of Carpentaria!

#### Atherton Tablelands



Leaving Cairns the Kennedy Highway twists and turns through the Kuranda Range, popping out of the rainforest onto the rolling hills and farmland of the Atherton Tablelands. At almost 900 metres above sea level, the humidity of the coastal plain gives way to cooler temperatures. Pop into Mareeba Wetlands for a potential sighting of majestic Jabirus. Enjoy the relative metropolis of Atherton (pop. 7,300) as towns grow progressively less robust. It's also a good opportunity to stock up with produce that the Tablelands are famous for like avocados, corn, mangos, bananas, macadamias and coffee.

#### Ravenshoe

Before you get to Ravenshoe you'll come to the hillside town of Herberton and the Herberton Historic Village. An entire village has been recreated in an absolute cracker of a museum! Turning onto the Kennedy highway, allow time for a soak in the warm waters of Innot Hot Springs before passing through Queensland's most elevated town, Ravenshoe (pronounced Ravens-hoe, like no not Raven-shoe like new. Get it?). Rainforest thrives at this elevation, so does the wind so it's a handy spot to position Queensland's largest wind farm.

#### Mt Garnet

By now you've left wet tropics rainforest behind and the landscape starts opening out into savannah country. Mt Garnet's name is a dead-set giveaway in relation to its origin. A former mining town, streets are named after the minerals (tin, copper, zinc and you guessed it, garnet) that encouraged early settlement.

#### Undarra Lava Tubes

Hidden within the Undarra Volcanic National Park [www.undarra.com.au](http://www.undarra.com.au) is one of Earth's longest lava flows from a single volcanic eruption almost 200,000 years ago. The park protects one of the longest lava tube cave systems in the world. Who knew! Undarra is an Aboriginal word for 'long way' and the lava tubes are actually fertile tunnels where rainforest and wildlife thrive.

#### Georgetown



least four Georgetown's in Australia and no less than 65 globally (USA take a bow, you've got at least 44 of them). Georgetown QLD doesn't stake too many claims to fame, but it can take credit for a number of notable mentions in Nevil Shute's novel A Town like Alice. Sorry Alice Springs for puncturing your balloon!

Dramatic **Cobbold Gorge** is a worthy diversion on the way out of town thanks to rugged sandstone formations fed by freshwater springs creating water holes and waterfalls.

#### Croydon

Once the centre of a gold rush Croydon was bursting at the seams with over 7,000 people attracted to Croydon in the late 1880's. Things are a little more sedate these days with a little over 300 calling the place home. The place is a veritable living museum with restored heritage-listed buildings everywhere you look. Croydon is one of two stops for the Gulflander Train, famous for being a historic train that goes from nowhere to nowhere (the terminus being Normantown). But that's a bit harsh - even if you're not a train spotter it's worth hopping on board to savour some history.

#### Normantown



Home of Big Things like Kryns the Croc and the Big Barramundi as well as the famous Purple Pub, Normantown needs little introduction. Krystina Pawlowska shot an 8.6m (think about it - that's about the same size as an adult giraffe) saltwater crocodile which has been replicated in actual size. Don't miss it for a photo bombing opportunity!

#### Karumba

Aaah Karumba. Or as Bart Simpson would spit out his first words when he stumbled upon Homer and Marge in bed (but that's another story for another time), 'ay caramba!' Casually tucked away in the south east corner of the Gulf of Carpentaria, most Australians would barely know of its existence. I'm pretty sure they would have tasted its wares though. Karumba's economy lives and breathes around the prawns and other seafood that the Gulf of Carpentaria coughs up. Fans of Red Hot Chili Peppers would do well to take notice of their 2006 song *Animal Bar* with Karumba reputedly providing inspiration. Hmmm, we're not sure if that's a good thing or not. Either way, you'll not find a better spot to top up the campervan fridge for the onward journey to Broome or the return trip to Cairns!

For more information, visit:

- [Apollo Campers](#)
- [Savannah Way](#)

Fiona Harper is a travel writer specialising in cruising, active and soft adventures. Follow her at [Travel Boating Lifestyle](#)

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