

# Natural Areas of **Australia**

Most of **Australia's** natural areas that are relatively undisturbed by people are declared nature reserves or National Parks, so that they can be protected. These are areas where the landscape, **plants** and **animals** can live and human constructions (such as buildings and roads) are kept to a minimum. There are many of these areas in **Australia**, but they still represent a tiny fraction of the natural **environment** that was present before Europeans arrived. Each of these areas has its own special and unique characteristics and is important to its own communities of **plants** and **animals**. A few of the more well-known examples are described here.



## Great Barrier Reef

*Humpback whale. Image by Whit Welles.*

The Great Barrier Reef is the world's largest **coral** reef system and lies off the north-eastern coast of Queensland. It is more than 2,300 km long and includes more than 900 **islands** and more than 2,900 reefs. The Great Barrier Reef was listed as a World Heritage Site in 1981. Many, many kinds of **fish**, **birds** and **sea animals** live in the Great Barrier Reef, some live nowhere else. There are more than 30 species of **dolphins**, **whales** and **porpoises**. Humpback **whales** have their babies in the **waters** of the Great Barrier Reef. There are 6 species of **marine turtle** in the Great Barrier Reef and only 7 in the whole world. There are 242 species of **birds**, over 1,500 species of **fish** and over 4,000 species of shellfish.



*Green Sea Turtle. Image by Brocken Inaglory.*



The Great Barrier Reef has a lot of smaller **environments** within it. A few of these are shallow **coral** reefs, deep **coral** reefs, **sandy beaches**, rocky **beaches**, **sand** banks, **coral** cays, **mangroves** and mudflats. It is a very popular place for people to visit, especially for snorkelling and diving, but also to stay on the **islands** and visit the **beaches** and rocky shorelines. The Great Barrier Reef has been affected by pollution, shipping passing through it (which sometimes breaks the **coral** or spills nasty things into the **sea**), overfishing and the Crown of Thorns Starfish, which sometimes occurs in large numbers and eats the **coral**. The Great Barrier Reef has been affected by warmer **water** and an increase of carbon dioxide in the **water** in recent years. People are trying to find ways to protect the reef and measure how much is damaged and work out what damages it, so that it can be managed to preserve it.



*Kakadu National Park. Image by Tourism NT.*

## **Kakadu National Park**

Kakadu National Park is in the Northern Territory, near Darwin. It is very big and stretches more than 200 km from north to south and more than 100 km from east to west. The name comes from the name *Gaagudju*, one of the local Aboriginal languages from Arnhem Land. Two of the oldest archaeological sites in **Australia** are in Kakadu, showing that people lived here from soon after they arrived in **Australia**, about 60,000 years ago. Kakadu has several main **rivers**, flat plains that **flood** in the **rainy** season and areas of **rocky** outcrops. These different **environments** mean that it is a very good home for **plants** and **animals** and has a wide diversity (many, many different kinds) of **plants**, **animals**, **birds**, **insects**, **fish** and reptiles. There are more than 280 species of **birds**, 117 species of reptiles and 10,000 species of insect. Two species of crocodiles, quolls and flatbacked **turtles**, as well as tree



frogs, are some of the **animals** in the park.

Kakadu not only has a diversity of smaller **environments**, but it also has extremes of climate. The dry season is very dry and the wet season is very wet. **Plants** and **animals** that live there have to adapt to these changing landscapes. Local Aboriginal people recognise 6 different seasons: hot weather with afternoon storms; monsoon weather with heavy



*Kakadu billabong. Image by Tourism NT.*

thunderstorms and lots of **rain**; a season where **floodwaters** start to lower, but it can still be very windy; cooler and drier; cool and dry; hot and dry. Kakadu has been affected by introduced **animals**, like **water** buffalo, wild pigs and cane toads; introduced weeds and also by mining. The park surrounds an uranium mine and sometimes people try to get permission to build more mines in and around the park.



## Uluru

Uluru, or Ayer's Rock, is a recognisable landmark in **Australia**. It is in the middle of **Australia** and surrounded by Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. The national park includes Kata Tjuta, also known as The Olgas, rock formations 25 km west of Uluru. The local Aboriginal people are the Anangu (Pitjantjatjara) People, who regard Uluru as an important sacred site. The mulgara, a small marsupial carnivore, lives in the park, as well as a marsupial mole, the woma python and the great desert skink. Some **animals** that used to live in the park have gone extinct and some people want to reintroduce them.



*Mulgara. Painting by Joseph Smit.*

Most of the threats to the park are from the huge numbers of people which visit every year, causing erosion and a strain on local resources. The local Aboriginal people ask visitors not to climb the rock, but people still do climb it.



## The Twelve Apostles

In the [sea](#) on the southern coast of Victoria are a set of rocks called the Twelve Apostles. The cliffs are made of a soft rock called limestone, which is eroded by the [sea](#). The [sea](#) created a series of arches in the rock a long time ago. Then the top of the arches collapsed, leaving a series of pillars of rock. Some of these collapse from time to time too. Despite the name, there were only 9 pillars (and some have since collapsed).



*Twelve Apostles, Victoria. Image by Michael Stirling.*

Local fishermen blocked the formation of a national park, but the area is known for kangaroos, wallabies, echidnas, sugar gliders and antechinus, as well as more than 50 species of bird. Southern Right Whales are seen in the ocean at certain times of year.

The main threat to the Twelve Apostles is from the constant erosion by the [sea](#). The Victorian State Government does try to protect the [marine](#) and [land environment](#), which was why they proposed a national park.

