

# Jatbula Trail

## Before You Go



## Introduction

The Jatbula Trail is one of the most popular extended walks in Australia. Situated amongst the stunning ancient landscape of Nitmiluk National Park, the 62 km walk follows the route travelled by generations of Jawoyn people, from Nitmiluk (Gorge Sector) to Leliyn (Edith Falls). Following the western edge of the Arnhem Land Escarpment, the trail traverses sandstone plateau scrub, woodlands, open forest, sandstone monsoon forest and riverine landscapes.

The trail was named after Jawoyn Traditional Owner Peter Jatbula who was instrumental in securing land rights for his people and who walked the route of the trail with his family. The Jawoyn people and Parks and Wildlife work together to provide visitors with an opportunity to walk through this ancient natural and cultural landscape.

The one-way trail starts on the eastern side of 17 Mile Creek, just a short boat ride across the Katherine River. Here walkers begin their journey on this trail through stunning scenery, with opportunities to view Jawoyn rock art and swim at pristine waterholes at each camp site.

Experiencing the Jatbula Trail is truly a must, however it is essential to be well prepared to safely enjoy the walk. It is a grade 4 trail (moderate to difficult) for those with bushwalking experience. Please be sure to read the information provided as your safety and enjoyment of the walk is important to us.



Peter Jatbula

## Booking Your Walk

Bookings for the Jatbula Trail are highly popular, with the Trail having a maximum capacity of 15 walkers departing per day. The walking season is between June 1 to September 30, please book online via the Parks booking system - [nt.gov.au/park-bookings](http://nt.gov.au/park-bookings) to secure a place.

For information you can contact the Parks and Wildlife Customer Service Team on:

Phone - 1300 281 121 (8.30 am - 4.00 pm)

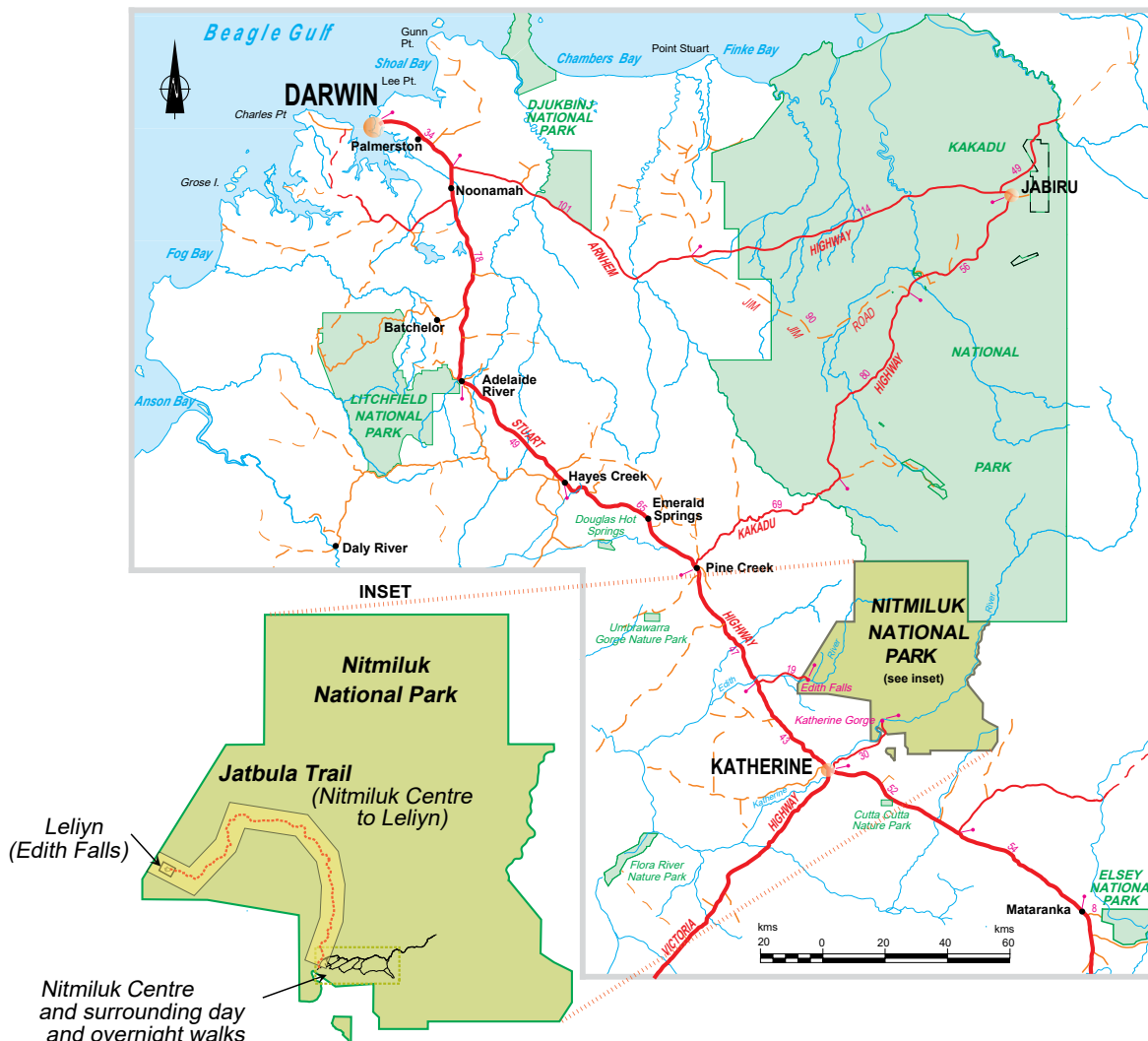
Email - [parks.onlinebooking@nt.gov.au](mailto:parks.onlinebooking@nt.gov.au) to enquire.

Access on the Trail may vary according to seasonal conditions and management practices, it is generally closed to walkers October 1 to May 31.

Please note - check the Parks online booking system for notification of opening dates.

## Planning Your Walk

The climate, terrain and length of the Jatbula Trail make it challenging. With high temperatures, strong south easterly winds from the inland, rocky unformed tracks with creek crossings to flat sections with swampy rugged terrain; the Jatbula Trail is not for the unprepared.



## Distance Graph

		Northern Rockhole	Biddlecombe Cascades Campground	Crystal Falls Campground	The Amphitheatre	17 Mile Falls Campground	Edith River Crossing	Sandy Camp Campground	Edith River South	Sweetwater Pool Campground	Leliyn (Edith Falls) Campground	
<b>Days along the Trail</b>		1	1	2	3	3	4	4	5	5	5 to 6	
Start of Trail	Nitmiluk Centre	0	3.8	8.3	19.3	25.8	29.3	41	46.1	51.7	57.2	61.7
Site to visit	Northern Rockhole		4.5	15.5	22	25.5	37.2	42.3	47.9	53.4	57.9	
Night 1	Biddlecombe Cascades Campground			11	17.5	21	32.7	37.8	43.4	48.9	53.4	
Night 2	Crystal Falls Campground				6.5	10	21.7	26.8	32.4	37.9	42.4	
Site to visit	The Amphitheatre					3.5	15.2	20.3	25.9	31.4	35.9	
Night 3	17 Mile Falls Campground						11.7	16.8	22.4	27.9	32.4	
Site to visit	Edith River Crossing							5.1	10.7	16.2	20.7	
Night 4	Sandy Camp Campground								5.6	11.1	15.6	
Site to visit	Edith River South									5.5	10	
Night 5	Sweetwater Pool Campground										4.5	
Trail End	Leliyn (Edith Falls)											

**NOTE:** *Progressive totals only as a guide. The Trail takes between 5 to 6 days to complete. Distances are in kilometres.  
\* Walkers must select at the time of booking whether to complete the trail in 5 or 6 days (camping 4 or 5 nights) and must comply with the conditions of their booking.*

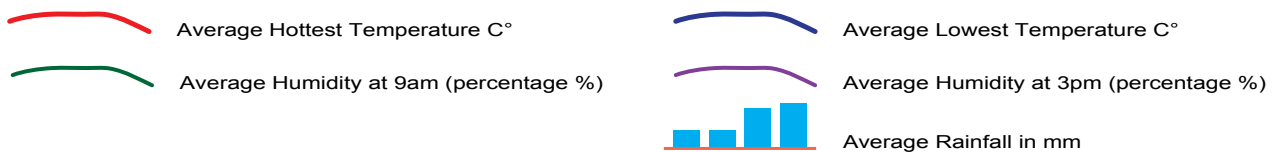
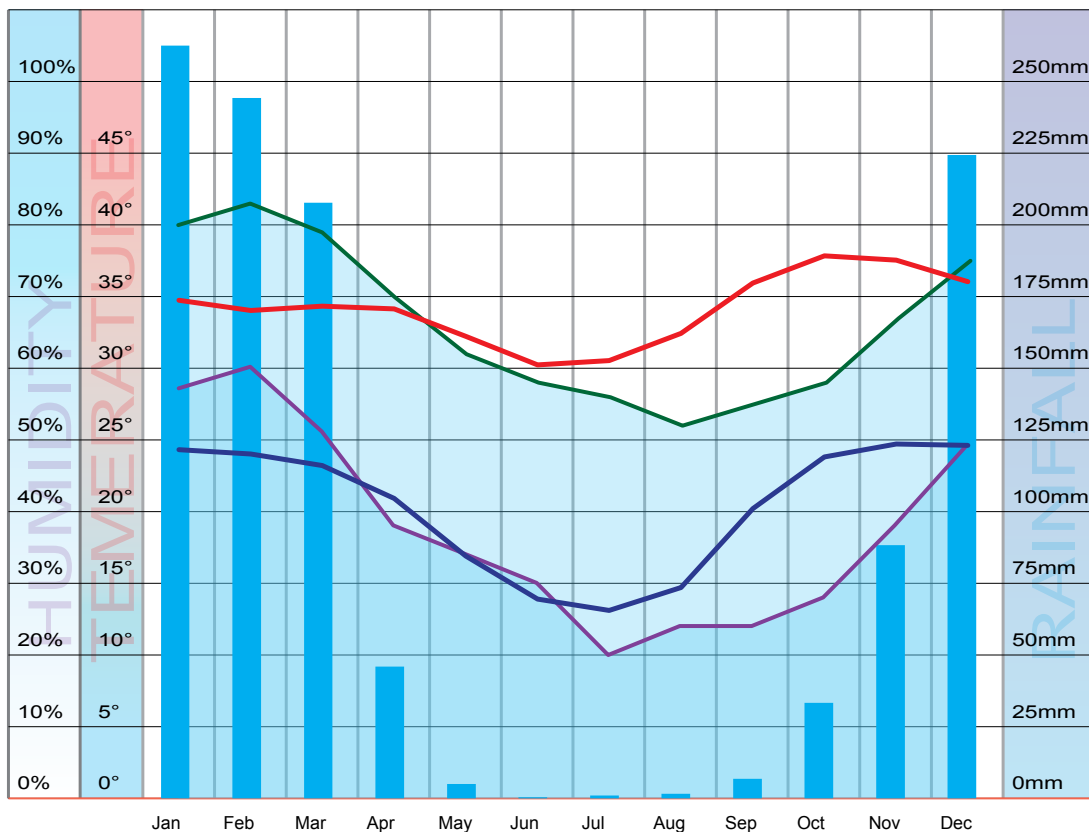


*Pandanus spiralus, nuts*

## When to Walk

The ideal time to walk the trail is in the cooler months between June and early August. During these months the temperatures range from 30° C during the day, dropping to approximately 10° C in the evening. Conditions on the Trail start to heat up during mid August.

From December through to April very high temperatures, wet season rainfall, river rises and vegetation growth can make walking difficult and uncomfortable - leading to closure. Weather forecasts for the Katherine area are available from the Bureau of Meteorology - [www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au).



Weather statistics - Katherine Aviation Museum

## Communication

As mobile phone coverage is non-existent for most of the trail, remember to leave details of your walk with someone you know, prior to departure.

Emergency Call Devices (ECD's) are located along the trail at various locations. They are only to be used for contacting a Ranger in an emergency.

It is recommended that walkers carry a Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) with a GPS receiver and/or a satellite phone as an emergency back up to ensure faster response times. Activating a PLB or calling 000 can be the fastest way to get help from emergency services and should be used in life threatening situations. For further information on PLBs please visit the Australian Maritime Safety Authorities web page :

<http://beacons.amsa.gov.au>

Useful websites for hire of satellite phones and/or PLB's include:

### Satellite phone hire:

TR Hirecom, Darwin NT

- <http://trhirecom.com.au/>

RASP - Rent a Sat Phone

- <https://www.rentasatphone.com.au/>

Satellite Hire Australia

- <https://www.satellitehire.com.au/>
- Postage required

### PLB (Personal Locator Beacon) hire:

EPIRB Hire

- [www.epirbhire.com.au](http://www.epirbhire.com.au)
- Postage required



Emergency Call Device (ECD)



Sign for an Emergency Call Devices (ECD)



Personal Locator Beacon

## Travel Insurance

Travel Insurance should be a consideration prior to departure. Each year on average, 15 walkers are evacuated from the trail due to injury or illness. The only option for walker evacuation is by helicopter. The costs of evacuations are the responsibility of the walker, which can be quite costly if not insured.

## Walk Plan

Advise a responsible adult of your plans whilst you are walking. Ensure you include details of your walk, departure and arrival dates, contact details, relevant health issues and any other information which may assist search and rescue operations. Make sure the person responsible for this information is reliable i.e. family or friend and ensure that they know what to do if you fail to return as planned.

## Clothing

Ensure that you dress appropriately for the tropical conditions. Lightweight, loose fitting long sleeved shirts and pants are most suitable (you will find that cotton is cooler than synthetics in the heat) along with a broad brimmed hat and sunglasses. Sturdy walking boots with suitable tread for rocky country and which provide ankle support are recommended.

## Solo Walkers

Ideally, for safety reasons, people should consider walking with a minimum of three people. In an emergency, this enables one of the group to find emergency assistance, and one person to stay with the injured or sick walker and apply first aid.

## Water and Heat

A minimum of 3 litres of water per day will help to prevent heat related illness. Rehydration sachets are recommended as part of your first aid supplies.

Water is available from flowing creeks - please treat before drinking. Strong and secure containers are required to carry 3 litres of water per person. A water bladder such as a Camelbak is a good option for carrying and drinking water, but it is also a good idea to back this up with strong plastic or aluminium water containers.

## First Aid

Walkers should equip themselves with first aid supplies suitable for a 4 night/5 day hike.

As with all extended walks, there are hazards that can occur along the way. Having a knowledge of first aid and safety in the bush is critical in remote areas where help may be hours away. Common health issues that occur along the trail include blisters (becoming infected), sprained ankles, heat related illnesses and pre-existing illnesses.

Wearing suitable bush walking boots (that have been worn in) with good grip can reduce the risk of ankle injury. Good hiking socks help prevent blisters, a thin 'liner' sock to wear in with these will also help.

**BEAT THE HEAT**

Even if you are an experienced walker, you must take precautions when visiting our parks. Walking in hot weather can result in heat exhaustion which may progress to a potentially fatal heatstroke.

**If you feel unwell - stop, rest in the shade and drink water.**

- ALWAYS CARRY AND DRINK WATER** (Icon: H<sub>2</sub>O)
- PLAN YOUR ROUTE STAY ON THE PATH & FOLLOW THE SIGNS** (Icon: Map)
- APPLY SUNSCREEN** (Icon: Sun and 50+)
- WEAR PROTECTIVE CLOTHING** (Icon: Hat and shirt)
- WALK EARLY OR LATE IN THE DAY** (Icon: Sun and moon)
- EAT KEEP UP YOUR ENERGY LEVELS** (Icon: Apple and banana)

## Pre-walk Health and Fitness

Ensure you are in good health and fitness prior to departure. If you become ill or are not fit leading up to your departure then consider postponing your walking plans. Should you fall ill along the trail, don't wait until you are seriously ill before seeking help. Use your initiative, know your own limitations and ensure you are equipped with a suitable first aid kit. It is recommended walkers purchase travel insurance of your choice to cover possible medical and evacuation costs.



## Fire Safety

Dangerous and uncontrolled fires can occur along the trail. In the event of fire the following steps should be observed:

- Do not panic
- Do not run uphill. Seek shelter behind a rocky outcrop or retreat to creeks to avoid radiant heat, where possible.
- If you feel there is a safety risk look for ground which has been burnt or has minimal fuel / grass and wait until the fire has passed.



## Wildlife Precautions

Freshwater Crocodiles *Crocodylus johnstoni* inhabit the waterways along the Jatbula Trail. Do not disturb these animals and they will pose no threat to you.

You may come across venomous snakes. Snakes generally will not attack humans unless provoked or disturbed. They should be left alone if sighted. It is important to have a good understanding of the snakes that may inhabit your environment.

Visit: [www.nt.gov.au/environment/animals/wildlife-in-nt/snakes](http://www.nt.gov.au/environment/animals/wildlife-in-nt/snakes) to find out more about snakes in the Northern Territory.

Feral animals such as buffalos, pigs and donkeys are present in the Park. Buffalos and pigs pose a risk to walkers however these animals usually avoid people. Should you come across a buffalo or pig, it is best to remain still and allow the animal to pass.

## Swimming

Take care when swimming in waterholes. Never jump or dive into any creeks or waterholes. Many creeks along the Jatbula Trail are fast flowing and include rapids and waterfalls. Slippery rocks, rapids and waterfalls create a hazardous remote environment and extreme care is required around all waterways.

**Don't create an oil slick.** When you swim in waterholes and creeks, be aware that sunscreen and insect repellent do have a negative impact. Have a quick wash away from the water's edge before you swim. Wildlife and other users will benefit from your actions.

**Remember that the creeks along the walk are a water source for all walkers.**



## Fire in the Top End

Fire is a natural phenomenon which has occurred throughout the Top End landscape for thousands of years. Low intensity burns are conducted throughout the Top End in the late wet season and early dry season (March to June) to create fire breaks for the ensuing fire season. Fires occurring throughout the landscape outside of these times (July to November) are usually wildfires, lit by humans or lightning strikes.

Although the fuel load and fire intensity is different to fires occurring in the southern parts of Australia they still pose a threat to people and property. For this reason, the lighting of camp fires is prohibited along the Jatbula Trail. Should you come across any fires along the trail don't panic. Follow the guidelines in "Fire Safety" in this guide on page 8.



## Keep an eye out



Jawoyn name: **Jumpatmo**  
Scientific name: *Xanthostemon paradoxus*



Jawoyn name: **Garnpilk**  
Common name: Coral Tree  
Scientific name: *Erythrina vespertilio*



Jawoyn name: **Meya**  
Common name: Banksia  
Scientific name: *Banksia dentata*



Jawoyn name: **Bamjon**  
Common name: Yellow Kapok  
Scientific name: *Cochlospermum fraseri*



Jawoyn name: **Jirrirrin**  
Common name: Red Mistletoe  
Scientific name: *Decaisnina signata*



Jawoyn name: **Nurik**  
Common name: Sundew  
Scientific name: *Drosera petiolaris*

## Maps and References

Familiarise yourself with maps and reference books prior to departure. Topographic maps and a compass are highly recommended. At least one member of your party should have the skills to use these.

A booklet of Jatbula Trail Maps is available for download. This has maps for each section of the trail. Download and print this to take it with you on the trail. It is recommended that you do a high quality colour print if possible, as this will be more useful when navigating. This is available at:

[nt.gov.au/parks/find-a-park/nitmiluk-national-park/nitmiluk-national-park-jatbula-trail](http://nt.gov.au/parks/find-a-park/nitmiluk-national-park/nitmiluk-national-park-jatbula-trail)

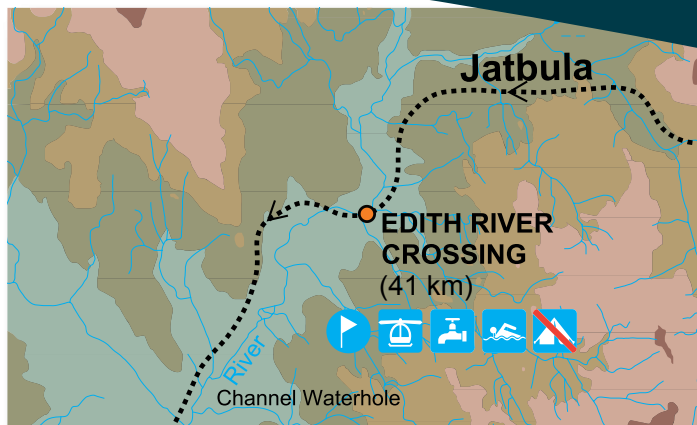
To compliment these maps and help you stay on track download the Avenza Map for the Jatbula Trail.

### NT Maps on the Go

Download the **Avenza Maps App** on your device whilst you are still in range to find the **FREE** local park map you need.



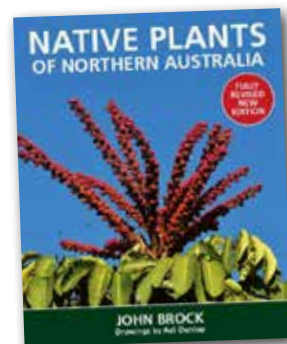
Once downloaded, the maps can be used without a network connection. Your device's built in GPS will plot your real-time location within the park onto the map. These GPS enabled maps will assist you to stay on track.



Jatbula Trail Maps

Reference books of interest include:

- 'Jawoyn Plants and Animals', NTG / Jawoyn Association, 2005
- 'Native Plants of Northern Australia', John Brock, Reed Books, 2021
- 'A Guide to Plants of Inland Australia', Philip Moore, New Holland Publishers, Sydney, Australia, 2005
- 'Common Plants of Australia's Top End', Napier et al, Gecko Books, South Australia, 2012
- 'Common Plants Victoria River District and Northern Barkly (the Territory's Savannah Way)', Napier et al, Gecko Books, South Australia, 2012.



*Utricularia fulva*

## Equipment

Suggested items to bring.

Plan to pack around 10 to 18 kg in your backpack.

- Phone (loaded with the Jatbula Avenza map), charger and portable battery pack.
- Strong and secure containers to carry three to four litres of **WATER** per person.
  - A water bladder such as a Camelbak is a good option for carrying water on the Jatbula Trail. It is also a good idea to back this up with strong plastic or aluminium water containers.
- Minimum 60 litre hiking backpack
  - This should have a good harness and be adjusted to fit the person carrying it.
- One or two person tent
  - On the Jatbula Trail a well ventilated tent is a good option.
- Light weight sleeping bag
  - It gets below 10° C at night so your sleeping bag should be rated as comfortable for 5° C.
- Sleeping mat
  - There are many great lightweight options for inflatable mats available from camping stores; an insulating foam mat is also an option.
- One or two small towels
  - A sarong is a lightweight option in the tropics.
- GPS and/or compass
  - A Satellite phone and/or PLB (Personal Locator Beacon) is also recommended for your group
- Whistle and a small mirror for attracting attention in case of emergency.
- Bush walking boots with good grip and ankle support.
  - Check the condition of your boots before you start walking. If your boots fail, you will be very uncomfortable. It is also not recommended to commence any hike with new shoes that you have not “broken in”, a very common cause of blisters.
  - It is also a good idea to carry spare cord to use as laces in case; this can also be used for all sorts of emergency repairs.
- Lightweight sandals for the end of the day.
  - These are also a ‘back up’ in case your boots do not make it.
- Broad brimmed hat
- 2 long sleeved shirts
- 2 pairs of shorts or hiking pants
- 3-4 pairs of thick socks
  - Good quality socks will improve your odds against blisters.
- A pair of gaiters
- First aid kit
- Fuel / gas stove (and matches or a lighter to light it)
- Utensils/cup/bowl
- Water purifying tablets or capacity to boil/filter water.
- Food for 5 or 6 days
  - There are many lightweight options available from good camping stores which are freeze dried or dehydrated.
  - Canned foods are not a good idea as empty cans need to be carried out with you; they are also heavier than dried foods.
- Torch with spare batteries
  - Head-torches are great as you can keep your hands free for other tasks.
- Toilet paper and trowel
- Sunscreen
- Insect repellent
- Walking poles (optional)
- Thermals, and/or a puffy insulated jacket or vest for cooler months (optional)
- Assorted plastic bags for separating personal items.
  - It is important to have spare bags with you to use for rubbish.

