

Course Description

Semester in Australia

Features Of This Course

- Semester starts in Broome, Australia
- NOLS Core Curriculum
- Remote tropical river canoeing
- Australian outback hiking
- Unique Australian flora and fauna
- Good fishing opportunities
- Exploring tropical marine environments
- Cross-cultural experience with Australian Aborigines and Station (Ranch) owners
- Pack weight: 45% of body weight i.e. 27 kg (60 lbs) or more
- Course Length: 75 days
- Minimum Age: 18
- Average Age: 20
- Average Group Size: 15 Students & 3 Instructors

The Expedition

Welcome to NOLS Spring Semester in Australia, an exciting course in a remarkable country.

A semester spent in the outdoors of Australia means over two months of camping out, exploring the land “Down Under,” developing skills, meeting people, pushing yourself and having fun. The NOLS Semester in Australia is a true wilderness expedition to one of the most remote areas of Australia, the Kimberley. This ancient mountain range is located in the far northwest of Australia about 16 degrees south of the equator.

The 75-day semester is divided into three sections: 39 days canoeing on the remote Drysdale River in the center of the Kimberley; 23 days backpacking in the Australian outback; and 5 to 7 days with our Bardi Aboriginal guides on the islands and coast of the Buccaneer Archipelago; or with the Jarlmadangah Aboriginal community. Up to eight weeks of the course will be spent in road-less, wilderness terrain, where your only hint of modern civilization will be the occasional airplane passing overhead. There are few places on the planet like this where you can truly be in the middle of nowhere.

Throughout the semester you'll have classes and learn through experimentation. You'll also be expected to teach classes to help develop your own teaching styles and presentation skills. You'll learn that the backcountry demands good judgment to minimize risk. Learning first aid skills and hazard assessment are constant themes in our instruction. You'll learn about leadership and teamwork, be given opportunities to lead your peers, and gain valuable insights into what it takes to make an effective leader, follower and communicator. You'll learn outdoor skills and become proficient at minimum impact camping, traveling and navigating with a map and compass. Cooking and baking with stoves and fires, and outdoor hygiene and sanitation methods will also be addressed. You'll learn about the Australian outback environment and culture. In addition, flora and fauna identification, astronomy and weather awareness, land management and cultural issues, and marine biology, are all part of the experience. By the end of your semester you'll have gained an appreciation for wilderness expeditioning that few others will ever have.

Canoeing Section

- Trip Duration: 38-40 Days
- Canoeing down a remote tropical river, through braided and treed channels
- Excellent birding
- Fishing opportunities
- Multiple portages & linings
- Canoeing Route: 220km (136 miles)
- Running flat to class II white water
- Learn Tandem and Solo canoeing skills
- Opportunities for day hikes



The Drysdale River—site of this section—is a true wilderness area. After 2 days of initial course preparations in Broome, you'll fly by light plane or drive in four-wheel drive vehicles to the Drysdale River Station. Here you'll spend a couple of days preparing canoes, learning the basic strokes and packing boats for the journey down river. You'll learn the basics of outdoor living and travel: staying comfortable and healthy in a tropical environment, shelter and stove use, cooking, selecting Leave No Trace campsites, route finding, and navigation. Throughout the course you'll be taught risk management, leadership and environmental studies. Formal classes, experiential classes, activities and practice are all means to these ends.

The upper reaches of the Drysdale meander over a hundred kilometers (60 miles) of eucalyptus plain. Native trees such as tall White River gums, Paperbarks and Pandanus line and congest the river as it flows through this terrain. Abundant bird life and fruit bats are often seen flying overhead and occasionally you may catch sight of Wallabies (small Kangaroos) as they feed in the low lying scrub and cane grass that covers the plains. The lower section of the river begins to drop, with more rapids to run (canoe through), line (walking your canoe through shallows) or portage (carrying your canoe and equipment around obstacles). This will be the most challenging part of your section, as class I and occasionally class II rapids test your newly acquired canoeing skills and you lead your group through multiple linings and portages. There may be as many as 40 such carries and they can cover up to a kilometer in length (0.6 miles). Other river features you'll canoe through include flat and moving water through treed channels, long flat pools and shallow sandbars. After five weeks and 200 kilometers (125 miles), you'll encounter the spectacular Solea Falls. From there it's only twenty more kilometers before you reach the "take out." Travel days on the Drysdale will start early, so the group can make the best possible use of available light and the cool mornings.

If possible, we will take time out from paddling to hike away from the river to explore the surrounding countryside and practice our hiking and navigation skills. These trips could be as short as a few hours or may extend to overnight hikes.

Backpacking Section

- Trip Duration: 20-24 Days
- Average Pack Weight: 40% of body weight
- Off-trail hiking through cane grass
- Travel along drainages & escarpments
- Hiking Route: 120km (75 miles)
- Small Group Expedition possibilities
- Visit to a remote Station (Ranch)

The Drysdale River National Park and Carson Escarpment serve as the site for this section. This area has terrain, fauna and flora similar to what you'll have encountered on your canoe section. There are added navigational challenges to hiking in an area with few easily identifiable terrain features and tall cane grass, sometimes up to 8 feet high. You'll leave your canoes at the Drysdale River "take out" and for 23 days will hike approximately 120 kilometers (75 miles) along creek beds and across escarpments and plains. You'll initially travel with instructors, refining your hiking, navigation and leadership skills. You'll learn how to travel efficiently in this hot, dry environment, often hiking early in the morning to make the most of the cooler temperatures.

Towards the end of this section, there may be an opportunity for students to hike for a day or up to a week without instructors. This "Independent Student Group Travel," usually consisting of five or six students, is an excellent opportunity for you to put into practice the many expeditioning skills that you have been learning throughout your semester. To complete this section you'll finish at a cattle station (ranch), which will help to familiarize you with the lifestyles of pastoralists and learn about current issues affecting this area of the Kimberley.

Independent Student Group Travel

An emphasis of this course is the development of skills that permit you to be self-sufficient in remote backcountry areas. Our teaching progression for accomplishing this is carefully planned and executed. Initially travel groups, usually of four to six students, will include an instructor who will teach travel skills and leadership. Gradually, as you gain proficiency, the instructor will allow you to take on more responsibility and make more of the decisions. When you have demonstrated the necessary competency to the instructors, you may travel in student-led groups without instructors for a day at a time as you hike from camp to camp. We call this daily independent student travel and it is an effective educational tool. It allows you to practice travel skills and leadership and gives you responsibility for the outcome while still having indirect supervision by instructors and the benefit of the NOLS support systems.



This course may culminate in a Student Expedition. After successful practice with daily independent student travel and if your instructors think your group is ready, the instructors will help you divide into student expedition groups (usually three to six students each). With instructor oversight, each group will then select a leader and carefully plan and execute a multi-day independent student led expedition. This part of the course builds on the skills you've learned and practiced and allows you to travel without instructors for up to five days. Students are aware of where the instructors and the other student groups are planning to travel and camp. Each Student Expedition group will carry an emergency locator beacon that when activated in the event of a serious emergency will initiate a response from local search and rescue agencies. The instructors with a satellite phone may be up to 24 hours away from the students. Our students often say the student expedition was the highlight of their course.

Cultural Section

- One of two cultural opportunities – Bardi or Jarlmadangah sections
- Trip duration: 5-7 days
- Learn Traditional Aboriginal skills
- Learn Aboriginal history
- Visit Aboriginal traditional lands
- Discuss contemporary Aboriginal lifestyles

Which Aboriginal section your semester participates on will be decided closer to the course start date, based on availability of our Aboriginal guides.

Option 1 - Bardi Cultural Section

After your backpacking section you'll travel by bus, four-wheel drive vehicle or small airplane to the Bardi Aboriginal Community at One Arm Point on the Indian Ocean. There you'll meet our Aboriginal guides who will accompany you by boat to Ewan (Sunday Island), or by vehicle on the Dampier peninsula. Though you will travel through and see the community, you will not spend time living in the community. You will live and spend this section living with your instructors and Aboriginal guides in a secluded setting on the peninsula.

During the following days you'll live and hike on these Aboriginal lands. Your Aboriginal guides will show you many of their traditional ways of living in this area, including various methods of fishing, food gathering, and boomerang and spear making. It is quite possible that you'll participate in a corroboree (a ceremony of storytelling through song and dance).

We'll also take advantage of living in this coastal environment to learn about the marine biology of the area. Tides and currents, wind and waves, marine ecology, reef exploration, coral formation and ecosystems, and fish and marine life identification are among a few of the classes and activities that we'll conduct.

Finally we'll complete our expedition by driving over 200 kilometers of rough, sandy roads in bus or four-wheel drive vehicles back to our base in Broome. Here we'll complete the end of semester formalities before dropping you off at the end of your course in Broome. (For the details of the last few days please see the Travel & Logistics information).

Option 2 - Jarlmadangah Cultural Section

This is a new experimental Aboriginal section. After your backpacking section you'll travel by bus or four-wheel drive vehicle to the Aboriginal community of Jarlmadangah Burru. Here you will spend a day in this remote aboriginal community learning contemporary Aboriginal lifestyles. This section takes place in and around the area of Mount Anderson, which is a small mountain range at the edge of the mighty Fitzroy River and the start of the desert country.

For the remainder of the section you will travel with our Jarlmadangah guides on foot with either vehicle or more likely camel support. This will allow us to explore traditional areas without carrying heavy packs and participate more in discussions with our Aboriginal guides. We may also get the opportunity to catch and eat traditional Aboriginal foods.

We'll complete our expedition by driving a few hours back to Broome. Here we'll complete the end of semester formalities before dropping you off at the end of your course in Broome. (For the details of the last few days please see the Travel & Logistics information).



General Information for your Semester

Student Independence

On all NOLS courses students will be independent (unaccompanied by instructors) at various times. This will include time in and around camp such as while cooking or performing camp chores. Instructors may allow students to travel away from camp. Students often have independent unsupervised time, usually in town, before and after their course starts or between sections of semesters.

College Credit

A student can earn up to 16 credit hours through the University of Utah for successfully completing this Semester. Please see college credit paperwork enclosed in your enrollment packet. Although there will be many “classes” during your semester, credit is granted for the experiential nature of learning, not for formalized class work.

Typical Day

A typical day on the Australia semester starts early (ie. 7am) to take advantage of the cooler mornings. On most days you will start the day with packing up camp and moving to your next campsite. Traveling by canoe as a full course, or hiking in smaller groups of 4 to 6, getting to your next campsite could take a few hours to all day depending on group goals and terrain. When you arrive at your predetermined meeting point you will review the days travel, debrief leadership teams, then set up camp. You will generally meet later for classes, discussions, activities, choose new leaders and plan for the following days activities. You will then cook dinner with your cook group and possibly meet again for a reading after dinner. On the Cultural section there will be less camp moving days and more time spent doing activities and classes. Personal leadership and active involvement in optional activities and talking with our Aboriginal guides will fill out your day. Most days will be full, spent breaking and setting up camp, cooking, traveling and having classes, but with guidance from your instructors you’ll be shown ways to make personal time so you can reflect on your experience.

Solos

On this course you may have an opportunity to do a "solo" when you spend one to a few days and nights alone. There is no hiking during the solo. Many people find this experience a good way to reflect on the course and immerse themselves in the environment.

Fasting

Fasting is an optional part of the curriculum for the student expedition (or optional solo if applicable) on this course. If the instructors think fasting is appropriate for the conditions and student abilities the students may chose to fast during the solo. Rations will be carried to allow students to eat in the event of an emergency.

Weather And Other Challenges

This is the Tropics, complete with tropical weather and heat. At night it may get down to 45°F (8°C) but more commonly in April and May you’ll be lying on top of your sleeping bag in 80°F (26°C) heat. During the day it can get hotter than 100°F (37°C). When you initially arrive it will be the end of the “wet” season and humidity will be high. As the course progresses the “dry” season will begin and the humidity will fall, yet you’ll be challenged to deal with the elements nevertheless. Dehydration, sunburn, heat exhaustion, heatstroke and other related heat injuries will always be a major concern. Learning to live and work in this environment with a minimum of risk, and with a smile, is a foundation of outdoor leadership.

Travel here can be tough. Often, you’ll be hiking off-trail over rugged, uneven terrain and/or slippery rock surfaces, during the canoe section. You’ll work hard and you might ache after hours in a canoe or from having to portage your boat or carry a pack. Throughout your course, you’ll be miles from the amenities of civilization. Telephones, ambulances, and hospitals may be several days away. This degree of remoteness will influence personal risk taking attitudes on the course; deliberate thought is necessary before every action. Tropical environments present a wide variety of unique challenges, ranging from strong storms, to being inundated by flies and mosquitoes.



Throughout the course we are in areas that are habitat for freshwater crocodiles, saltwater crocodiles, a variety of venomous snakes, marine animals and feral cattle. These animals pose a very real danger, but one that can be managed with appropriate camping and traveling practices. Living in crocodile territory, and with snakes, is largely a matter of common sense and understanding the animal's behavior and habits in order to minimize the possibility of an encounter. Other rare but potential hazards include two mosquito borne viruses, Ross River Virus and Australian Encephalitis. With the use of mosquito repellent, long clothing, mesh tents, and other avoidance techniques, you'll be able to keep your exposure to mosquitoes to a minimum. Other river hazards include broaching canoes and strainers in the river. The possibility of working with camels on the cultural section also carries potential risks such as falling off, bucked off, bitten, being trodden on or other unforeseen risks.

You may come to the course without much knowledge of hazard evaluation, but you'll soon receive the information you need. Living in the wilderness while learning about and managing the inherent risks and hazards is a constant theme of your semester.

More than a collection of skills, a NOLS semester is a challenging adventure shared with friends. You'll get the most out of your experience and be able to give the most to others if you arrive committed to being a positive, responsible member of the expedition.

Behavior on the Expedition

Each person's values, beliefs and actions affect those of the rest of the group. Balancing these is an important part of "expedition behavior". We want you to have a positive learning environment. Therefore we expect all students to respect the values and beliefs of other members of the expedition. The best expedition members have positive attitudes, apply new skills and ideas at the first opportunity, and come motivated to work hard with people they have never seen before. They care about others, put the welfare of the group before their own, and understand that an expedition succeeds when all individual members succeed. "Expedition Behavior" is not only an integral part of your semester experience, but also something you'll be able to adapt to your life well after your NOLS course has ended. NOLS will not tolerate harassment or the use of drugs and alcohol on any course. If you feel your values, or beliefs, are not being respected by NOLS staff or students it is essential that you speak up so the issues are addressed.

This is a true wilderness expedition in an area that has seen few visitors. Many variables exist that could alter our route or schedule. Examples of these include, but are not limited to, the following: high or low water on canoe rivers; lack of water on planned hiking routes; bush fires, heavy rain and wind from tropical storms; rough weather and seas. These factors may prevent plane, boat or vehicle travel from reaching a course, which could potentially delay a food re-supply or the end date of a course. For this reason we will need to maintain the flexibility that allows us to make appropriate and educational decisions to changing conditions.

Personal Electronics

A key element to a NOLS education is time spent in wilderness. The benefits of this include being closer to nature, time away from society and civilization, and being in an environment where natural forces predominate and students have the opportunity to develop good judgment and practice self-reliance. NOLS does not permit students to use personal cell or satellite phones or other communication devices including personal tracking devices (e.g. SPOT), while in the field. Additionally, students are not permitted to take personal music players (iPods, MP3 players, CD players, etc). Instructors will be carrying sufficient communication equipment (usually a satellite phone) to handle any emergencies that may arise.

If you have questions, please feel free to call the NOLS Admission office at 800-710-NOLS. You should also view the photos and videos of NOLS Australia at the following web addresses:

http://www.nols.edu/videos/australia_videos.shtml

<http://www.nols.edu/courses/locations/australia/>



Course Objectives

As a result of this course we expect each student to become an independent wilderness traveler and leader. You should leave with the skills and habits to oversee the health and environmental ethics of your peers and potential clients. Each course is unique due to variables such as route, group dynamics, fitness levels, environmental conditions, and logistics. Working within this context, it is our intent to accomplish the following objectives in four basic areas:

Risk Management

NOLS teaches wilderness visitors to practice responsible habits that promote the health and well being of self and others. Each student is expected to:

- Consistently demonstrate an awareness of personal limits in a river/marine and escarpment environment, with particular consideration for the remoteness of the expedition.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the hazards encountered by the expedition, including, but not limited to, river travel, boulder fields, crocodiles, heat injuries, poisonous creatures, rock fall, tides, current and other marine hazards.
- Consistently perform specific techniques to reduce or avoid hazards.
- Describe an emergency plan for a remote expedition.
- Demonstrate the ability to perform basic emergency procedures to support a patient until help arrives.
- Use experience and judgment to implement sound decisions and follow them through to completion.

Leadership Curriculum

Students are exposed to the theory and practice of outdoor leadership, teamwork, and expedition behavior. At NOLS, expedition behavior involves commitment to the group, acceptance of others, and cooperation to achieve goals. Each student is expected to:

Expedition Behavior

- Demonstrate sound expedition behavior.

Vision and Action

- Be able to craft a travel plan for a multi-day small group expedition.

Communication

- Effectively communicate on interpersonal and group levels.

Competence

- Master the wilderness living and travel skills of this course.

Judgment and Decision Making

- Demonstrate good judgment and decision-making skills.

Self-Awareness

- Understand personal tendencies, strengths and weaknesses as a leader.

Tolerance for Adversity

- Demonstrate a positive attitude and tolerance for adversity and uncertainty.

Outdoor and Backpacking Skills

NOLS students learn to live and travel in the wilderness within a framework of personal health and care of the environment. By the end of the course each student is expected to:

- Consistently practice Leave No Trace camping and traveling skills.
- Be punctual and organized.
- Do their share of camp chores.
- Cook nutritious meals and exhibit good hygiene.
- Learn to travel and navigate competently using map and compass.
- Dress appropriately for the conditions.
- Participate in the logistical preparation and cleanup necessary for an extended expedition.
- Demonstrate effective river-crossing skills.



Whitewater Canoeing Skills

Objectives include the ability to:

- Understand the design, use, outfitting and care of canoes and related equipment.
- Show competency with canoe rigging techniques.
- Demonstrate proficient canoe stroke biomechanics.
- Demonstrate canoeing skills in Class I and Class II water.
- Demonstrate basic rescue skills: self-rescue, throw ropes, and swimmer rescue.

Environmental and Cultural Awareness

An integral part of every NOLS course is to raise students' awareness of their impact on the natural world. Additionally, this expedition offers an opportunity to experience Australian natural heritage and culture through classes, discussions, written exercises and activities. We expect each student to:

- Demonstrate an understanding and respect for the course environment.
- Show an active interest in learning about Kimberley ecosystems, and local flora and fauna.
- Display a basic knowledge of Australian culture and history.
- Discuss the history, facts, and potential solutions to pertinent environmental issues.
- Reflect upon the transference of wilderness ethics and practices into daily personal and professional life.

