

Course Description

Australia Backpacking

Features of this Course

- NOLS core curriculum
- Cross-cultural experience
- Backpacking in the Australian outback
- Course length of 35 days
- Hiking route approx. 155 km (100 miles)
- Avg. Pack Weight: 45 % of body
- Unique Australian flora and fauna
- Minimum age: 18
- Off-trail hiking on uneven terrain
- Average Age: 20
- Possible independent student travel options
- Avg. Group Size: 12 Students : 2 Instructors

The Expedition

The Australia Backpacking Expedition involves 35 days spent in the outdoors, exploring the land "Down Under", developing skills, meeting people, pushing yourself and having fun. This course is set in the Kimberley, one of the most remote parts of the Australian continent. It is slightly smaller than California and much larger than Great Britain, with a population of only about 23,000. Largely unchanged from when it was part of Pangaea 200 million years ago, this ancient land provides ideal terrain for teaching you a wide variety of expedition skills.

You will meet your instructors in Broome and spend one to two days preparing for your course at our base. This is a busy time that includes organizing all your rations, checking all your personal gear with instructors, issuing personal and group equipment, and an orientation and introduction to your course. Schedule permitting, you will have the opportunity to go on a snake or crocodile tour to learn more about these creatures. When intown preparations are complete you will travel by four-wheel drive, bus or small plane to a remote region of the Kimberley (approx. six to twelve hours away). For four weeks, you will backpack through this area, learning the ins and outs of camping and traveling in this tropical environment. The terrain varies from rocky and sparsely vegetated plateaus, tight water-filled canyons, to cane grass and woodland plains. The Kimberley is home to amazing and unusual varieties of birds, marsupials, insects and reptiles.

In the beginning, instructors will focus classes and activities on basic outdoor living skills. Campsite selection, cooking and baking with stoves, Leave No Trace travel and camping techniques will be emphasized. Additionally, map reading, compass use, route finding, outdoor hygiene and sanitation methods, expedition behavior, and outdoor leadership will be addressed. You will also be expected to teach classes to help develop your teaching techniques and presentation skills. As the course progresses you'll have classes and discussions on first aid skills, emergency procedures, location-specific hazard evaluation, conflict resolution techniques, communication styles, group evaluation techniques, local flora and fauna, natural phenomenon, and environmental issues.

During your course you will live with two or three other students in a "cook group". These small groups help disperse impact on the land and enable you to master the art of backcountry cooking and living. You will also travel in small groups, usually of four to six, again to disperse impact and to enhance learning. You will generally receive a re-ration of food every 8-10 days depending on your route.

A typical day on the Australia backpacking course starts early, (i.e. 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, hiking in smaller groups of 4 to 6. This 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 day's travel, debrief leadership teams, then set up camp. You will generally meet later for classes, discussions and activities, choose new student leaders and plan for the following day's activities. You will then cook dinner with your cook group and possibly meet again before retiring for the night under the stars.



At the start or towards the end of your course you will spend 1 to 3 days with local Aboriginal people. This will give you the opportunity to experience and learn first hand more about their culture and lifestyles. Our Aboriginal guides will accompany you for these days. Schedules permitting, your course may also be visited by land managers or station (ranch) staff. Their classes will broaden your knowledge of the cultural history and current issues in the Kimberley.

Finally we will finish our expedition by taking you back to our base in Broome, where we will complete the end of course formalities, dropping you off in town by 4pm on the last day of your course.

Weather And Other Challenges

Located 16 degrees south of the equator, this area lies within the tropics and has the requisite tropical weather and heat. At night it can get cool, getting down to 5°C (40°F), and during the day temperatures can occasionally get hotter than 37°C (100°F), but typically hover around 30°C. Dehydration, sunburn, heatstroke and other related heat injuries will always be a major focus. Learning to live and work in this environment safely and with a smile is a foundation of outdoor leadership.

Hiking here can be tough. Your hiking will normally be off-trail over rugged and rocky uneven terrain, and through sharp spinifex grass and at times through tall cane grass. You'll work hard and you might ache after hours of carrying your 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 fly and mosquito swarms.

Throughout the course we are in areas that are habitat for freshwater crocodiles, saltwater crocodiles, and a variety of venomous snakes. 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 animals' 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 will be able to keep your exposure to mosquitoes to a minimum.

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 and safe 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 met before. They care about others, put the welfare of the group before their own, and understand that an expedition succeeds when all its members complete each day safely. To help ensure a safe and healthy environment for all, we ask that people not smoke. 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.

Student Independence

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 four 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 1 to 5 days. Students are aware of where the instructors and the other student groups are planning to travel and camp. The instructors may be up to 24 hours away from the students. Our students often say the student expedition was the highlight of their course.



Fasting is an optional part of the curriculum for 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 solo. Rations will be available to allow students to eat in the event of an emergency.

On all NOLS courses students will be independent (that is unaccompanied by instructors) at various times. This includes 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.

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/>

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 safety and ethics of your peers and potential clients.

Course Objectives

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:

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, with particular consideration for the remoteness of the expedition.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the hazards encountered by the expedition, including, but not limited to, loose rock, high rivers, cliff edges, sun exposure and harmful animal.
- 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 safety 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.

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.

