

AD FEEDBACK

Travel and Adventure by Various Travel Authors

Lifestyle > Travel > Travel And Adventure > Exploring The Legends In A Red Rock



Exploring the Legends in a Red Rock

 Like  Sign Up to see what your friends like.

 Tweet  +1  Comment

By Steve Murray

Visitors have to get up early to see an Uluru sunrise. Buses pull away from hotels with their still-sleepy passengers and drive through a featureless night to reach the public viewing area. There's not much talking on the way, and it's still quiet after arrival as people sip the hot chocolate offered by their guides and try to wake up. It is [easy](#) to feel alone in the dark, but the inching light soon shows just how crowded the viewing area is. Many languages carry across the dry air and cameras click as morning sunlight gives definition to the Australian outback.

Uluru is imposing in the weak dawn, rising 1,200 feet above the surrounding desert floor. This isn't just another side-of-the-highway attraction. The rock lies in the middle of the continent, the Red Center, physically and spiritually a long way from anywhere. Visitors make a special effort to be here for the sunrise that will [reveal](#) the famous colors of Uluru.

Curled like a sleeping cat, the rock turns from a drowsy gray to a reddish-brown to a bright, alert orange. Uluru is awake for the day. After sunrise some visitors head back for breakfast and sleep, but the more ambitious recognize that the sun is still low and the temperature hasn't yet started to climb. This is the best time to explore the history and spirit of Uluru.

It takes a closer look to see the unchanging features left by generations of nomadic Aboriginal people. This contrast between natural and human history gives more than 400,000 visitors a year the reason to make the pilgrimage to this rock.

Recently

> [Life on the Rocks in Sydney, Australia](#)

By Steve Murray Both wall hangings look great: an aboriginal image in brown, ochre and white and a silver ceramic of Ned Kelly's body armor. The young artist who made them is standing nearby as the clean scent of eucalyptus drifts up from the next ...

> [Read more.](#)

> [Up on Wine in Baja California](#)

By John Blanchette It was

2 a.m. my last night in Baja. I stood on the veranda of my hotel room on Rosarito Beach watching the full moon illuminate the slate-gray ocean and the phosphorescent white glow in the foaming waves as they ebbed and receded ...

> [Read more.](#)

> [A Different Way to Discover Hawaii](#)

By Jim Farber When it comes to visiting the Hawaiian Islands, most travelers arrive by plane, check into one of the many resorts or go aboard massive cruise ships the size of floating cities. There is, however, another, more intimate, more ...

> [Read more.](#)

> [Vacationing With a Child in Maui](#)

By Erica Dror Zeitlin I had always dreamed of going to Maui for a romantic holiday. But marriage came and went before I could get there. So when my sister, Carla, offered to accompany me to Maui – along with her son – I knew it would be ...

> [Read more.](#)

[more articles](#)

make the pilgrimage to this rock.

Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park was established in 1958, although tourists have been coming to the site since 1936. The first European discovery in the area was a formation of giant rock hillocks 16 miles west of Uluru. The find was made in 1872 and named Mount Olga. The following year Uluru itself was discovered and named Ayers Rock after the chief secretary of South Australia. Although the park was first established with its European names, it was returned to Aboriginal ownership in 1985 and regained its Aboriginal names in 1994. Visiting the park is an encounter with the heart of an ancient people, which is why UNESCO designated Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park a World Heritage Site.

The park sits on land that was crossed by Aboriginals for millennia, and Uluru has been sacred to them since unrecorded time. To the Aboriginal Anangu, Uluru is a place of Tjukurpa (pronounced chook-orr-pa), a word that has many meanings: creation story, world view and traditional law. Uluru shows this story in its natural features and its petroglyphs.

The Anangu use the rock fissures, caves, rock shapes and vernal pools of Uluru to tell stories of how the world came to be through the wanderings of creator peoples. To the Anangu, these features are physical evidence of past events. And, unlike some places in the world where connecting legends to geological formations requires a lot of imagination, the stories of Uluru are easy to see in the rock.

Uluru is still used by the Anangu to teach stories, hold ceremonies and obtain guidance when making decisions. Petroglyphs around the base of the rock show the remains of countless layers of paint as generations of Anangu have stopped to pass on their stories.

Walking paths with interpretive signs surround the rock, but interpretive signs can't possibly answer all the questions about Uluru. Guided tours, including a free tour conducted daily by park rangers, can provide many more insights. But even guides can only explain so much. The Anangu reserve certain areas of the rock, including parts of Kata Tjuta, for meanings and ceremonies known only to them.

It's possible to climb to the top of Uluru on a designated route. Although the rock and the climb route are sacred to the Anangu, they were forced to allow climbing by tourists as a condition for return of the park to Aboriginal ownership in 1985. Climbing Uluru is tolerated but discouraged, so the practice remains controversial among both Australians and the tourism community.

The climb can be strenuous, and several people die each year trying to reach the top, often from heart failure. Nevertheless, the path is available when temperature and wind conditions permit.

The park also contains an interpretive cultural center near the base of the rock. Operated by the Anangu, who also helped [design](#) its layout and displays, the center offers some important context regarding Anangu culture and park history. A stop is included in most tours and is well worth the time.

Sunset at Uluru offers a distinctly different



experience from sunrise, as the rock is viewed from a separate area with its own perspective and mood. Visitors gather about an hour before sunset to watch the color changes run in reverse. [Cars](#)  squeeze into whatever parking spaces are left by a phalanx of tour buses, and tables are set up with snacks, coffee and champagne to enhance the experience.



[AD FEEDBACK](#)

Dwindling light shifts the sandstone faces of Uluru from bright orange to red, pale violet and finally to muted gray. Sunset over the desert can last for a while, so people continue talking and taking pictures right up until the buses are ready for boarding in the dark.

WHEN YOU GO

The summer (December to February) high temperature average is 100 degrees, but it has reached 113. The winter (June to August) low temperature average is 40 degrees but has reached 20 degrees. Winter and spring (September to November) provide the best temperatures and the clearest weather.

Most people spend less than two days at Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, and some tours rush people through in as little as 24 hours. If you want to include visits to Kata Tjuta or Kings Canyon or to try some of the other outdoor activities, you should plan a minimum three-day stay.

Unless included in a package tour price, park admission, which is good for three days, is about \$25. The prepared trails around Uluru are wheelchair accessible.

For Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park information: www.environment.gov.au/parks/uluru/index.html

Where to stay: Voyages Travel Center: www.voyages.com.au

Most visitors stay at Ayers Rock Resort, which has several hotels in a wide range of prices and a good campground. Although hotels have restaurants, the resort complex has additional dining spots and several stores. A complimentary shuttle runs within the resort, but facilities are close enough for comfortable walking.

High-season pricing is applied from Sept. 1 to Nov. 30; low-season pricing is applied from Dec. 1 to March 31. Intermediate pricing is applied at other times

Qantas Airlines has flights to Ayers Rock Airport from Sydney, Alice Springs, Cairns and Perth. Virgin Australia also offers flights from Sydney. A complimentary shuttle bus runs a regular schedule between the airport and resort hotels. The trip takes between 10 and 15 minutes.

Ground travel can be arranged from Alice Springs via rental [car](#)  or motor coach. Driving time is between four and five hours. Motor-coach travel is an opportunity to see more of the Australian outback, and drivers narrate points of interest along the way.

Tour operators provide hotel pickup and drop-off for scheduled activities.

Hertz, Thrifty and Avis rental cars are available at the airport or at Ayers Rock Resort but should be

Local tours can be arranged through hotels, but because the distance from most people have their activities booked before leaving home. Many add-site. Among these are dinners or breakfasts near Uluru, helicopter and balloon rides around Uluru, backpacking and caravanning tours, and "A Town Like Alice"

Voyages Travel Center is a good place to start, but check the Internet and explore all options and prices.

Steve Murray is a freelance writer. To read features by other Creators Syndicate writers visit the Creators Syndicate website at www.creators.com.

COPYRIGHT 2012 CREATORS.COM



Already have an account? [Log in.](#)

New Account

Your Name:

Your E-mail:

Your Password:

Confirm Your Password:

Please allow a few minutes for your comment to be posted.

Enter the numbers to the right:

42652

[Creators.com comments policy](#)

Preview

Post Message

Business and Finance

Fashion and Entertainment

Food and Cooking

Home and Garden

Humor

Creators Classics

Travel

Astronomy

Green Living

Aging

Books and Music

Pets

Inspiration

Collectibles

Wine

Automotive

Sports

creators.com
A SYNDICATE OF TALENT

© 2013 Creators Syndicate.

[About Creators](#)