NATURAL LANDMARKS

Uluru and Kata Tjuta

The Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park is located within the central Australian desert in the Northern Territory. It comprises Uluru, formerly known as Ayers Rock, and Kata Tjuta, formerly known as the Olgas.

The area is deemed a sacred place and is of cultural significance to the Aboriginal people of the area—the Yankunytjatjara and the Pitjantjatjara peoples. In 1985 the area was given back to the Aboriginal people who then leased it back to the Australian government to ensure that everyone can enjoy it. To make sure it is preserved for future generations, the Aboriginal people now co-manage the park with the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Uluru

Uluru is Australia’s largest single rock monolith and probably the best-known Australian natural landmark throughout the rest of the world. The rock stands 348 metres at its highest point, and stretches 3.1 kilometres from east to west and 1.9 kilometres from north to south. It has a circumference of 9.4 kilometres.

Visitors to Uluru can climb the rock—it is 1.6 kilometres to the top, and it takes about two hours to get up and back at an easy pace. It is also possible to walk around the base of the rock. Uluru is mostly sandstone and has a high iron content—this gives the rock its rich red colour. The spectacular colours of the rock are at their most dramatic during sunrise and sunset and can change completely in the space of only a few seconds.

When it rains, Uluru is dramatically transformed. Water trickles down narrow grooves and cascades off sheer cliffs in thundering waterfalls. Numerous rock pools form around its base.

Uluru is also known for its wealth of Aboriginal rock art. These are of special significance to the Aboriginal people.

Unfortunately, due to large numbers of tourists, some of the art has been desecrated. To preserve the art and stop it being further destroyed, four of the sites are now fenced off and out-of-bounds to the public.

Kata Tjuta

Kata Tjuta is situated 36 kilometres west of Uluru. It comprises 36 huge dome-shaped rock formations separated by numerous narrow and winding valleys. The largest of these domes is Mount Olga. Kata Tjuta is the traditional Aboriginal name for the area which means ‘many heads’.

Kings Canyon

Kings Canyon, in the Watarrka National Park, Northern Territory, is the deepest gorge in the Central Australia region. It was not fully explored until the 1960s. More recently, the film The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert was filmed in Kings Canyon, and features the spectacular scenery of the area.