

***This article was written mid-2018 and recent years have seen changes to swimming areas and access. Special thanks to our reader, Paul, for highlighting these for us. Full details from Paul can be found in the comments thread on this post.*

- *You can no longer swim everywhere.*
- *Circular Pool and Handrail Pool are now permanently closed, including their access tracks.*
- *Camping must be booked online but the system is not an accurate measure of what's available - this is possibly due to current travel restrictions.*

There are a lot of people travelling around Australia right now. There's also a lot of people who've done the big lap at one time or another, so getting information about amazing places to visit and stay at is now easier than ever. If you asked a handful of people who've been around Australia where their favourite spots were, I guarantee you the word Karijini will come up at least a couple of times.

Often referred to as Australia's best national park, Karijini is a unique, picturesque and brilliant place to spend a few days exploring. If you have a sense of adventure and an appreciation for some of Mother Nature's best, you'll love Karijini.

Karijini is known for having some of the most beautiful gorges in Australia.

Where is Karijini?

You'll find Karijini National Park in Western Australia, about 200km northwest of Newman, and 1400km northeast of Perth. It's 100km from Tom Price, and about 340km from the coast, directly south of Port Hedland.

How do you get there?

Karijini is accessed by vehicle, driving in from one of the locations mentioned above. The park itself is 6300 square kilometres and is connected via a series of gravel roads.

This park has so many beautiful sights to see.

Do you need a 4WD?

The road condition varies a lot at Karijini and can become quite corrugated in peak season when the grader hasn't been through recently. That said, you will easily get a 2WD vehicle into the park and around the place. There are no water crossings to be aware of and only a few sections of road where you need to slow down to a crawl. Mind the signs, pay attention to the changing road and you'll be right.

That said, a 4WD will handle the roads much easier and more comfortably, but you will get a 2WD vehicle around. Take it slowly, adjust your tyre pressures accordingly and enjoy the amazing scenery.

The roads that take you to the park are usually in pretty good condition.

When's the best time to visit?

You can visit Karijini almost year round, except when there are fires and after very heavy rainfall. This is because the water levels can rise up to 15 metres in the gorges extremely quickly.

However, the best time to visit, and most popular, is the same as the dry season further north - in between May and September. The later you go, the warmer the weather and the less water around the place.

Be aware that this is also the most popular time to visit, and unless you are getting up extremely early, you'll likely be sharing walks and swims with other people. That said, the park is easily big enough to share with others.

May to September is the best time of the year to visit Karijini.

What's the attraction?

Karijini is full of amazing gorges, creeks and stunning wildlife. You can swim everywhere, and explore the huge area - admiring and marvelling at the incredible location. Like the rest of the Pilbara, Karijini is home to the rough and rugged red rocks that come in so many shapes and varieties that it's almost mind-boggling.

Couple it to some of the best places to swim in Australia, incredible hikes, stunning views and lots of adventure and you have a super popular place.

The red rock formations of Karijini are what make it such a uniquely incredible place.

Getting around the National Park

There are a number of gravel roads that take you out to each gorge, and the best thing to do upon arrival, aside from setting up camp, is to head to the visitor's centre. They will give you a fantastic map and a good idea of what you can and can't do.

It's quite literally just a case of picking where you want to go and driving out there. Be aware that it does take a fair bit of time to get from one side of the park to the other. So, if you are staying in the one place, plan your days accordingly.

You can even plan to go abseiling in the park.

How long do you need?

I wouldn't stay at Karijini for less than 3 days. There are a lot of amazing gorges to see and you can only see them so fast. We found two gorges a day was about the maximum you'd want to do, without feeling completely exhausted afterwards.

That said, depending on how fit you are, whether you have kids to worry about and what you want to see, you may be able to check a few amazing gorges out in 2 or 3 days, and head on.

You'll need at least a couple of days to properly experience Karijini.



Are there any crocodiles?

Being so far inland, and far enough south, you won't see a single crocodile at Karijini. No fresh water ones, and most importantly, no saltwater crocs. The only risk of swimming here is the temperature of some of the water.

Circular pool for example only sees the sun for a few hours per year and is probably the coldest place I've ever swum. I think I just about walked on water there, but it was a lot of fun.



The incredible pools and bodies of water in the park do not have any crocodiles.

Get up early

If there's one piece of advice that will make or break your visit to Karijini, it's to get out of bed early. I promise you'll have a substantially better visit there than staying snuggled in your bed well after the sun has risen.

Getting up early does two things - you beat the crowds, which makes enjoying the gorges at least 3 times better, but more importantly, you beat the heat. There were a few times where we walked back from a gorge in the middle of the day, and even after a nice swim, that it didn't take long before we starting feeling pretty average.

The temperatures get very warm, and hiking in that sort of temperature unless you are in the shade (thankfully a lot of gorges are!) isn't a whole lot of fun.



All of the walking trails are classed and signed.

How's the hiking difficulty?

One of the great things about Karijini is that all of the walks are graded in difficulty. You can pick walks that are easy, if that is all you are up to, or you can be more adventurous.

The grades run from 2 - 5 and are well described in terms of what level of fitness and adventure level you need. Interestingly, we found the walks to be quite tame compared to what they were graded as, and some of those in our group were not overly fit!

The trails are well marked, with plastic dots stuck to the rocks as you walk. They also have ladders and stairs in places where they are really needed, and from there you just need a sense of adventure.

Some of the trails will require you to get wet, at least up to your hip in some cases. The water is cold, you'll want shoes that you can take off or get wet (like the aqua boots) and to scramble over rocks from time to time. We just took our shoes off and tied them to our backpacks, but it isn't the most comfortable feeling walking on rocks without any shoes. So, do what you feel is best.

Make sure you put plenty of sunscreen on, wear a decent hat and take plenty of water with you.




Scrambling on one of the walks in the park.

Do I need to be young and fit?

No, not really. I was very pleased to see a number of elderly people doing some of the walks. The smaller trails with a lower grade (like to Fern Pool) are not difficult and are well and truly worth a look.

Even younger children, once you can trust them to stay on the path will do most of the walks with ease, and have an amazing time whilst doing so.


The spider walk involves a slightly higher fitness level.

What temperatures can I expect?

In between May and September, the daily average is not normally above 33 degrees. At night time it will drop to anywhere between 10 to 15 degrees.


The Eco retreat is one of the accommodation options in the park.

Where can I stay?

If you want to stay in the National Park, you have two choices. There's the Dales Campground, which is run by the department of parks and wildlife and as of recently, requires booking online which you can check out [here](#). Or, there's the eco-retreat at the other end of the park. These are permanent tents that are set up and have a bit of added luxury. You can also camp at the Eco Retreat if you prefer.

Dales Campground has an overflow area, but it does get busy. The sites are gravel, easily accessible and van friendly. There are lots of toilets around the place, but no showers. If you want to have a shower, head to the visitor's centre and just next door is a range of bathroom facilities.


Dales Campground is the other choice in the park.

What's the best place in Karijini?

You'll get different opinions here. There's something about Fern Pool which I well and truly fell in love with (and visited it on several occasions due to the short walk), and the spider walk is a lot of fun too. No matter what gorge you visit, you'll get an overwhelming sense of beauty. It really is an incredible place.


My favourite place to visit was Fern Pool.

Where's the nearest fuel?

Fuel can be purchased from Newman or Tom Price. Both sell diesel and unleaded.



Other nearby attractions

If you are keen on exploring other places, Millstream National Park is also beautiful. Newman has some incredible water holes and camping spots. Karratha and Cleaverville are unreal and the asbestos-contaminated former mining town of Wittenoom, which is an interesting (though dangerous) place to explore.

If you haven't been to Karijini, put it on the bucket list. It really is one of the best places you'll ever visit in Australia. See you out there!

Have you explored anywhere else in this region that blew you away?