A SHARED VISION FOR TOURISM IN **KAKADU NATIONAL PARK**
"My children got to hang onto this story,
This important story
I hang onto this story all my life
My father tell me this story
My children can’t lose it
Our story is in the land
It is written in those sacred places…"
Bill Neidjie
“Aboriginal people should start slowly walking to the future, now.” Jacob Narjingga
KAKADU’S PRISTINE country stretches over 20,000 square kilometres, from the mangrove-fringed tidal plains in the north to the vast flood plains, the lowland hills and the sandstone cliffs of the Arnhem Land escarpment. Teeming with wildlife in the water, on the land and in the air, the country displays a range and concentration of species seen nowhere else. The evolving landscape takes on different forms and colours with the passing of each of its six seasons. This enduring cycle spans millions of years.

Kakadu has been home to Aboriginal people for more than 50,000 years. Here a culture rich in spirituality, tradition and respect has cared for the land. Sharing and looking after country have always been part of the Kakadu story.

The Aboriginal people of Kakadu are known as Bininj in the north and Mungguy in the south. They have leased their land to the Australian Government for a national park, showing the world how ‘joint management’ can combine ancient culture and modern practice. When the park was named a World Heritage Area it became known internationally as a special place. People from all over the world realised that this extraordinarily beautiful land, its ancient cultural heritage and its wildlife must be respected and protected forever. They also wanted to experience the wonder that is Kakadu.

In the last 30 years tourism has brought millions of visitors to Kakadu. During that time much has been learnt by the Traditional Owners, park management and the tourism industry. The time has now come to create a long term tourism vision for Kakadu—one which will protect and manage its priceless natural and cultural heritage, deliver more rewarding experiences for visitors and bring ongoing benefits to Bininj/Mungguy.

At the core of the new vision is an understanding that Bininj/Mungguy culture, country and customary law are one and indivisible—and that respect for customary law and tradition will underpin all tourism decisions.

The Fifth Management Plan will be the key vehicle for carrying the tourism vision forward.

Our land has a big story
Sometimes we tell a little bit at a time
Come and hear our stories, see our land
A little bit might stay in your hearts
If you want more, you come back...' Jacob Naringgul
RESPECT FOR COUNTRY & PEOPLE

IN CREATING the shared tourism vision, ten key principles were identified:

1. Kakadu is first and foremost home to Bininj/Mungguy. They will influence, manage, encourage and participate in the development of tourism from which they gain economic and social benefit.

2. Bininj/Mungguy have leased their land to the Australian Government to be jointly managed as a National Park to protect and manage its priceless natural and cultural heritage.

3. All parties will recognise and enhance the protection of Kakadu's diverse landscapes, internationally important wetlands and spectacular plants and animals.

4. Tourism should not be boss of country. Aboriginal people will determine how and when they will be involved in tourism.

5. The pace and level of tourism development in Kakadu will be guided by the Traditional Owners.

6. Respect for customary law and traditions will underpin all tourism decisions.

7. All parties will respect the need for Bininj/Mungguy to retain their privacy, to use their land for hunting, fishing and ceremony and to protect and hold private their sacred stories and sites.

8. Aboriginal culture and the land on which it is based will be protected and promoted through well-managed tourism practices and appropriate interpretation.

9. The travel and tourism industry will have security of tenure, profitable investment and the opportunity to provide authentic and memorable visitor experiences, whilst respecting culture and country.

10. Kakadu National Park will be globally recognised as one of the world's most significant natural and cultural World Heritage Areas, offering visitors a range of enriching and memorable experiences.

“This is home... Mirrar taud here, my home. Bininj culture really strong... very strong for us Bininj. When I was a girl my grandmother, I learn, same thing I do with younger generation. You have to look after country, for your grandfather country, like mother country, take care.”

Yvonne Margarula
BUILDING THE VISION

THE VISION for tourism addresses five key areas of need:

PROTECTION
Protect and preserve the park for future generations | Protect sacred sites | Protect the park from overdevelopment | Protect the park from the potential harmful impacts of tourism.

RESPECT
Respect the wishes of the many Aboriginal people who live in Kakadu to safeguard their culture, lifestyle and privacy | Respect that authenticity and storytelling are integral to Aboriginal culture and should be included in visitor programs, which interpret Aboriginal stories of the park | Respect that the true essence of Kakadu’s image is both the beauty of the land and the spiritual Aboriginal culture.

INVOLVEMENT
Bininj/Mungguy have expressed a strong desire to become involved in tourism and to move forward—but not too quickly. Tourism is seen as a way of sharing and protecting culture and providing economic benefit and employment for current and future generations | Involvement will vary from clan to clan. Some seek full ownership of tourism businesses, others partnerships with non-Indigenous operations, others want programs which require minimal input and some do not want to be involved in tourism at all | Involve the tourism industry in tourism management, visitor services and creation of new visitor experiences—the park needs their participation in these areas.

People ask me if we still have our culture and still eat our bush tucker. And I say we still do have that and we like to pass it on to our kids,” Denise Williams
“Most tourists—they want to experience Aboriginal people, meet them, say g’day, see how we live our lives in this country. And also to learn about the magnificent art works.” Johnny Reid

**MANAGEMENT**

A strong tourism development arm of Kakadu National Park is needed to work closely with the park management, the tourism industry and the Traditional Owners.

The quality of tourism businesses operating within the park needs to be better managed through accreditation programs.

Tourism operators need longer contracts with the park so they have the time and security to develop their investment.

New visitor experiences need to be developed and existing ones enhanced.

The level of park red-tape needs to be reduced.

The park needs tourism programs which focus on smaller groups who will pay more for a quality experience. These programs should encourage visitors to stay longer within the park and do more—but in a controlled way so that no damage occurs. Kakadu is not a place for mass tourism.

**PROMOTION**

Kakadu is known for its natural beauty, but Aboriginal culture and spirituality, and its status as a World Heritage Area, should become a stronger part of its image.

Promotion needs to better reflect the available visitor experience.

The support of the people of Darwin is vital for the park’s future. Better understanding and pride in the park needs to be created through promotional and information campaigns.
OUR VISION

KAKADU NATIONAL Park is one of the great World Heritage Parks, recognised universally as a place with:

- a living Aboriginal culture—home to Bininj/Mungguy
- extraordinary natural landscapes and a rich variety of plants and animals
- enriching and memorable experiences for visitors
- a strong and successful partnership between Traditional Owners, governments and the tourism industry, providing world’s best practice in caring for country and sustainable tourism.

“People need to come here and relax, sit on the country, feel the spirits of this country and go home and feel the same way.” Natasha Nadji
MAKING IT HAPPEN

THE FOLLOWING ideas will help to achieve Kakadu’s vision for tourism. Some are actions that can move ahead immediately, others will take longer to implement.

Responsibility for considering and implementing these ideas should be with the Kakadu Board of Management with the strong support of both the Australian and Northern Territory governments. This support should be formalised in a clear and joint statement committing to the future of tourism in Kakadu National Park.

There are significant cost implications arising from the ideas and funding will be required over a number of years to make them happen. The ideas are:

**A TOURISM PLAN**

The Board of Management to develop a Tourism Plan in consultation with the Traditional Owners, the tourism industry and other stakeholders. The plan should detail:
- Experiences
- Facilities
- Future Access
- Commercial opportunities
- How the park can be protected from adverse tourism impacts
- How tourism can support management of the park
- How tourism can meet the aspirations of Traditional Owners

**A NEW ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE AND CULTURE**

The park administration to develop a new operational arm focused on tourism, visitor services and satisfaction, presentation of the park and business development. This new arm should be managed by tourism professionals with appropriate skills.

“I can feel the cultural side of it. I sit down by myself and always I see the old people are watching me, over me.” Jeffrey Lee
INCREASE INVOLVEMENT OF TRADITIONAL OWNERS

Through provision of practical assistance that includes:

A Resource Centre
The establishment of a ‘one stop’ Resource Centre in Kakadu to assist Aboriginal communities to:
- Develop a greater understanding of tourism and its benefits
- Gain appropriate business skills
- Receive relevant advice and support
- Access commercial partnership and sources of finance

A Mentoring Program
Support Aboriginal business development by developing a mentoring program to assist transfer of knowledge and specialist tourism skills.

Schools & Youth Programs
Special assistance to younger members of the Aboriginal community to help entry into tourism related activities. This could include programs with the Jabiru Youth Centre, tourism studies in local schools, and Parks Australia’s Seasonal Ranger Program.

Broader Aboriginal Participation
The vision could create opportunities for related groups of Bininj/Mungguy from the wider region to share their experience and gain employment.

IMAGE AND PROMOTION (BRAND)

New Logo
Create a new logo that better represents the park. Designed by local artists it should be a symbol of the land, the seasons and Aboriginal culture. License it to Parks Australia and the tourism industry, develop merchandise which features the Kakadu logo, encourage local groups to establish small businesses to produce and sell different items.

Advertising
Undertake ongoing campaigns to promote Kakadu National Park in Australia and overseas in line with these new directions. These should be co-operatively funded by the Australian and Northern Territory Governments, tourism associations and tourism businesses.

“Aboriginal people have been living here for so long—generation after generation looking after country, making the country what it is—and it’s spectacular, Kakadu.” Russell Rabitto
INFORMATION AND INTERPRETATION

Storytelling
Storytelling is part of Aboriginal life and should be the approach used to help visitors understand Kakadu. Kakadu stories are about the ancestors and the origins of plants and animals, country and people, about history and culture and about today.

Tools
Enhance storytelling to visitors by using audiotapes, DVDs, web sites, signage and personal interaction.

To ensure visitors are better informed before they visit the park, encourage widespread distribution of multi-lingual information through central locations in Darwin, Katherine, Alice Springs and other places.

Trained Guides
Make sure that the accreditation and permit system for tour operators requires guides to be well trained in interpreting Kakadu’s natural and cultural heritage. If a tour is led by someone who doesn’t meet these standards then the operator must employ a guide who does.

DEVELOPMENT OF EXPERIENCES

Quality not Quantity
Target different market segments of visitors who enjoy and are willing to pay for a better quality experience. They will yield higher profits and minimise potential damage to the park caused by mass tourism.

Experiences not Sightseeing
Place more emphasis on memorable visitor experiences that incorporate local culture and storytelling and are strongly associated with Kakadu. These could include:
- Night wildlife tours
- Aboriginal storytelling, evening dining and night sky talks
- New and extended walking tracks with overnight cabins
- Bird watch tours
- Bush tucker tours
- Eco camps
- Cultural camps

Develop a new range of accommodation—consider luxury camps, small lodges and quiet relaxation sites. They should all have minimal impact on the environment.
**Iconic Experiences**
Develop and promote Kakadu’s more unique and popular experiences as ‘iconic’ experiences—those which truly symbolise Kakadu and form a focus for visitor perceptions.

**Manage Visitor Expectations**
Promote Kakadu realistically so that visitors appreciate that the park’s unique or iconic attractions offer different experiences according to the seasons.

**Events**
Develop an annual or biennial cultural festival to promote sharing of culture and provide a source of income for local Aboriginal people.

**SEASONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

**Six Seasons—Not Two**
Extend seasonal visitation to Kakadu by generating new experiences that attract people at different times of year. The six seasons, unique to Kakadu, offer many opportunities for small-scale programs. They could include wet season boat tours or spectacular lightning tours combined with Aboriginal storytelling. This concept must be developed through consultation with Traditional Owners, and must respect their views on resting the country.

**Access and Certainty**
With sensitive consultation and management, there is room for wider exploration of Kakadu’s undiscovered diversity of landscapes, flora and fauna.

Consider opportunities for better access to areas of the park during the wet season and investigate what infrastructure needs to be provided.

**TOUR OPERATIONS**

**Permits**
Extend permits to tour operators to a minimum five year period, subject to accreditation and satisfactory performance levels, to encourage them to increase investment in development of their tours.

Permits remaining inactive for 12 months should automatically lapse.

Explore opportunities for the development of exclusive or limited access tours and experiences. These opportunities should attract a higher than standard fee and where appropriate, a proportion should go directly to the relevant Traditional Owners.
"This is a very special place here and if we help look after it by respecting it, it'll always be here for the next generation."
Ryan Barraclough
Joint Ventures
Where there is a clear desire on the part of Traditional Owners, encourage tour operators to enter joint venture partnerships or employ Bininj/Mungguy in the development and guiding of tours and experiences.

THE FUTURE OF JABIRU
Consult with Traditional Owners about the development of Jabiru as a tourism centre, to provide services to park visitors and to ensure its ongoing viability as a local community centre after the Ranger mine has closed. Its tourism role may include an arts and cultural centre, a tourism school or college and a base for tour operations.

LOCAL AWARENESS & SUPPORT
Foster Ownership
Undertake a public awareness campaign in Darwin and extend it throughout the Northern Territory to foster a sense of pride in Kakadu and to encourage local residents to visit. To achieve a long-term vision for Kakadu it is essential that public opinion is positive and supportive. The future prosperity of Darwin is linked to Kakadu’s success as a major tourist attraction to the region.

Keep the media, tourism industry and the wider public informed of plans, issues and development within the park on an ongoing basis. Consult and involve affected parties regarding tourism opportunities.

IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS
Develop a communication strategy to share understanding of opportunities and issues in Kakadu.
"I don’t think that many people know that this is Aboriginal land. This is our home... our backyard. We live here. It’s wonderful for us when people respect that.” Mandy Muir