

# Minimal impact techniques

## MIMIMAL IMPACT

For generations, the people of Uluru and Kata Tjuta have lived in a delicate balance with the natural environment by adhering to laws laid down in *Tjukurpa*. It is for this reason that the Park is World Heritage listed today.

Many elderly *Anangu* remember growing up before contact with Europeans, and by visiting the Cultural Centre first, visitors can hear their stories and learn some of the local *Tjukurpa*. These laws ensure that the balance between human beings and the environment is maintained. The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* recognises and respects *Tjukurpa* and the Park's Plan of Management puts *Tjukurpa Katutja Ngarantja* (above all else).

People visiting the Park are asked to be respectful of the Park's importance in local *Anangu* culture, as well as its natural significance, both of which are internationally recognised.

Despite excellent visitor infrastructure, the number of visitors drawn to Uluru–Kata Tjuta takes its toll on the precious desert environment. For this reason all visitors are asked to apply minimal impact techniques while exploring the Park. These techniques can be applied as much to the landscape as to interactions with *Anangu*.

## ECOTOURISM

The term ecotourism has come into use in recent years to address the practical question of how the tourism industry applies minimal impact techniques to develop ecologically sustainable ventures.

The industry group Ecotourism Australia, established in 1991, defines ecotourism as 'ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation'. Ecotourism Australia see their role as fostering environmental sustainability, economic viability, and social and cultural responsibility in the tourism industry.

This approach to tourism is consistent with the Park's purpose, set out under the EPBC Act, which is to manage the environment of the region for the benefit of all people, present and future.

Ecotourism Australia offers the EcoGuide Certification Program for tour guides who are committed to providing authentic and professional ecotourism experiences.

## CULTURAL IMPACT

People who visit Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park to develop their understanding and foster respect for Indigenous culture play an important part in maintaining *Anangu* culture.



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For *Anangu*, a person's place in society is based on the responsibilities allocated to them under *Tjukurpa*. This role is determined by age, gender, place of birth, family relationships and the amount of traditional schooling (law) they have done. Upholding *Tjukurpa* (and therefore one's place in society) involves ensuring everything is done in the proper way which includes maintaining the significant sites that the person is responsible for, and sharing the law of these places with appropriate people in the proper way.

Visitors can demonstrate respect for *Tjukurpa* and *Anangu* culture by choosing not to climb Uluru, by staying out of and not photographing sacred sites, and by learning some *Anangu* language and cultural etiquette. These simple actions all minimise cultural impact.

Guides and visitors also need to be alert to the 'us and them' mentality which commonly occurs when generalising about groups of people. This can lead to the stereotyping of individuals, which gives rise to such ideas as the noble savage (mythic personal, cultural or spiritual purity) – ideas which severely impact on living cultures by removing their human element.

*Anangu* are, and have always been, human beings subject to the worldwide principles of cause and effect; and like all the peoples of the world have their share of law-keepers and law-breakers, participants and pikers, spiritualists and materialists. By treating *Anangu* with personal respect and by acknowledging and accepting that they can have very different economic and cultural values, visitors and guides further minimise their cultural impact.

At its core, minimising cultural impact centres on the attitude of respect for others and their ways. The following list provides practical examples of a few simple actions that can be taken to demonstrate respect and minimise cultural impact:

- Making a conscious decision not to climb Uluru;
- Not entering sacred sites or the Muṯitjulu community;
- Protecting rock art by not touching it;
- Leaving all cultural artefacts alone;
- Not photographing, videoing, painting or otherwise visually rendering any sacred site or the Cultural Centre;
- Ensuring you have a permit for any images of Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park that you wish to publish; and
- Seeking permission to take a person's photograph, and not photographing people without their permission. (Unsurprisingly, Aboriginal people and other Park staff don't often like regularly having their photos taken by complete strangers.)

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Erosion along walking and vehicle tracks, the spreading of weeds, damage to vegetation, degradation of the area around visitor sites, uncontrolled bushfires, rubbish and toilet paper in the bush or in waterholes and the removal of artefacts – all these things impact on the natural environment of Uluru–Kata Tjuta.

Minimal environmental impact techniques involve many commonsense practices such as staying on marked tracks and roads, taking rubbish home, respecting cultural sites, not transporting weeds or firewood, picking up cigarette butts and not damaging plants – even for flyswats.

Another of the most critical aspects of minimal impact in the delicate desert ecosystem is to ensure that visitors use only the toilet facilities provided. The environmental effect of human waste from such large numbers of visitors causes major imbalances and leads to a degradation of the Park's ecosystem.

This is especially true for those who climb Uluru as neither water nor toilet facilities are available on top of Uluru. Those toileting on top of Uluru harm the water quality in places of high cultural significance as well as impacting on the health of the animals that rely on these water sources.

Ensuring that the Park's native animal population remains wild is another critical aspect of minimal impact. Animals in the Park should not be given food, as this can encourage dangerous interactions between animals and humans. Animals also become dependent on the food given by people and can die because the food either does not contain sufficient nutrients for survival, or they eat plastics and the like, which wreck their digestive systems.

Minimal impact techniques can be achieved by following the directions of signs, printed materials and Park staff, as well as the list of instructions below. The EPBC Act and Regulations require all visitors to adhere to these minimal impact responsibilities:

## MINIMAL IMPACT RESPONSIBILITIES

- Leave everything as you find it – including branches on trees, sand and rocks.
- Take your litter away with you and dispose of it appropriately.
- No camping is permitted within the Park.
- The lighting of fires is prohibited within the Park (gas barbecues are allowed, and available at the Cultural Centre).
- Do not feed animals – let all native animals live naturally.
- Leave your pets at home – no pets are permitted in the Park.
- Do not bring weeds or firewood into the Park.
- Leave chainsaws, firearms and other potential weapons outside the Park.

- Visit the Cultural Centre first – encourage your clients to use the toilet facilities there – instead of the Mala Carpark toilets.
- Ensure everyone has plenty of water and let visitors know that water is a very precious resource in Central Australia.

## ROADS AND TRACKS

- If choosing to climb Uluru, only do this when the path is open.
- To protect endangered native vegetation and prevent erosion, use only the marked walking tracks or roads and park in the designated car parks.
- Only walk the Valley of the Winds track when open.
- Observe speed limits and other road laws.
- Do not park or overtake where single yellow lines on the road edge are present.

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

By making a conscious effort to minimise your impact when visiting Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park, you will be assisting in the maintenance and protection of the Park’s unique nature and culture for generations to come.