



## EL QUESTRO WILDERNESS PARK

*“El Questro encompasses some of the Kimberley region's most breathtaking and untouched scenery - much of which features in the movie 'Australia'. The landscape is diverse to say the least - from rugged ranges and broad tidal flats, to rainforest pockets, gorges and waterfalls. Stay awhile and indulge at the internationally acclaimed El Questro Homestead, or just pitch a tent.”*

*Weekend Australian*

### **ORIENTATION**

El Questro Wilderness Park is a vast and raw landscape of just under a million acres in the heart of the ancient Kimberley region in far north Western Australia.

El Questro encompasses so much of what the Kimberley is about; it has become synonymous with it, injecting a sense of style and comfort without ever trying to shake off that sense of remote wilderness.

Situated in the East Kimberley, El Questro is located 110km from Kununurra, almost half of which demands 4WD vehicles thanks to the Gibb River Road: an unsealed and corrugated dirt artery extending 700km to Derby near the West Australian coast above Broome.

El Questro was first owned by Torrance McMicking who, in 1958, lodged a pastoral claim and named the property. Several owners later, Celia and her husband Will Burrell purchased the lease in 1991, opening Emma Gorge after the wet and launching it as a wilderness resort in May 1992. The now-famous Homestead, with its spectacular location overlooking the Chamberlain River, was opening in September 1992 followed by the Station Campground and Bungalows a year later in May 1993.

Voyages, in partnership with parent company The GPT Group, acquired El Questro in July 2005 for \$17.5 million, including re-construction costs of \$3.25 million for Emma Gorge Resort which was destroyed by floodwaters from Severe Tropical Cyclone Ingrid.

Delaware North Australia Parks & Resorts took ownership of El Questro Wilderness Park and Homestead in March 2010 as part of their overall acquisition of a number of Voyages properties, including Lizard Island, Heron Island and Wilson Island in Queensland's World Heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, and Kings Canyon Resort in the Northern Territory.

Today, cattle still roam the northern flats of El Questro Wilderness Park while tourists enjoy a range of accommodation and experiences suited to any style or budget: from the campground and bungalows in the Station Township, to deluxe tents in Emma Gorge and the luxurious Homestead overlooking the Chamberlain River.

## **The Kimberley**

The Kimberley region in far North Western Australia is one of the world's last frontiers. Like the Pilbara to the south, it is one of the most evocative place names the continent has to offer, a distillation of the rawness, the vast scale, the splendour and the sheer wild beauty of this far flung corner of Australia.

Its ancient rock formations and meteorite craters, its whirlpools, its surreal tides, bottle shaped boab trees and the beehive domes of the Bungle Bungles, make the Kimberley feel as if it exists in a dimension of its own.

Situated in the north western corner of Australia, between Darwin in the Northern Territory and Broome on the coast of Western Australia, the Kimberley covers an expanse of nearly 423,000 square kilometres.

The Kimberley is also home to the \$430 million Argyle Diamond Mine, the world's largest and renowned for its superb pink gemstones. Lake Argyle, 70km south of Kununurra, is Australia's largest man made lake and has created its own diverse ecosystem as a result of the Ord River Dam.

## **AT A GLANCE**

- El Questro Wilderness Park offers four distinct accommodation styles, each different in budget, ranging from the internationally acclaimed El Questro Homestead to Emma Gorge Resort, the Station Bungalows and Riverside Campground to the Mount Cockburn Safari.
- The Homestead and Emma Gorge Resort feature swimming pools, with the Station Township offering a swimming hole. Fuel and food supplies are also available at the well stocked General Store in the Township.
- All guests must purchase an El Questro Wilderness Park permit for \$17.50 (children under 15 years free-of-charge) and valid for seven days.
- Touring experiences include cruises along the Chamberlain River, barramundi fishing, scenic flights, Zebedee Thermal Springs, Aboriginal rock art, bird watching, bush tucker and the history of El Questro, horse riding and much more.
- The acclaimed Bungle Bungles are situated in the World Heritage listed Purnululu National Park, south east of El Questro.

- El Questro Homestead is all inclusive of luxury accommodation, meals, a selected range of premium alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages and activities.
- The wilderness park covers approximately 1 million square acres.
- Open between April 1 and October 31 only: closed from November 1 to March 31 due to wet season and impassable roads.

## **GETTING THERE**

For full information, **visit** [www.elquestro.com.au](http://www.elquestro.com.au)

### **By air**

Regular flights are available from all major Australian capital cities to Kununurra via Perth or Darwin with [Qantas](#) Visit [www.qantas.com.au](http://www.qantas.com.au), [www.airnorth.com.au](http://www.airnorth.com.au) or [www.skywest.com.au](http://www.skywest.com.au) for more information about flights into Kununurra.

Private VIP jet services are available from Sydney and Melbourne, direct to Kununurra. For more information, please contact the Reservations office.

The following information details air strip and charter options directly into the property from Darwin and Kununurra. Prices ex Broome, Ayers Rock and Alice Springs price on request.

### **El Questro Airstrips**

El Questro has two airstrips, the smaller strip at Emma Gorge Resort, the other close to the Station Township and Homestead facilities.

#### **Station Township Air Strip**

Position: 127.58.50E 16.00.30S

Elevation: 300ft

Direction: 14/32

Length: 1,400m-gravel-flat

#### **Emma Gorge Resort Air Strip**

Position: 128.07.30E 15.55.30S

Elevation: 300ft

Direction: 12/30

Length: 900m-gravel-sloping

Please ensure you contact us prior to arrival for up-to-date airstrip conditions on 08 9169 1777 or 08 9161 4318 (Station)

## **By Road**

El Questro is situated in the East Kimberley, 110 kilometres west of Kununurra by road - 58 kilometres on the sealed Great Northern Highway towards Wyndham, with the remainder on the unsealed and corrugated gravel Gibb River Road.

Up-to-date road conditions and information are available 24 hours a day on 1800 013 314.

We strongly recommend hiring a 4WD vehicle for the duration of your stay at El Questro, so you have the opportunity to explore the property at your leisure. All major car rental companies have offices in Kununurra. Our reservations team will be happy to arrange this on your behalf.

## **Coach**

AAT Kings, APT and Scenic Tours operate extended coach tour series throughout the Kimberley, including two night stays at El Questro Wilderness Park.

For more information, visit the following websites:

[www.aatkings.com.au](http://www.aatkings.com.au)

[www.aptouring.com.au](http://www.aptouring.com.au)

[www.scenictours.com.au](http://www.scenictours.com.au)

## **Transfers between Kununurra to El Questro**

*Visit*, [www.elquestro.com.au](http://www.elquestro.com.au) for information regarding transfers between Kununurra and El Questro.

## **ACCOMMODATION**

From the internationally acclaimed El Questro Homestead to Emma Gorge Resort; the Station Township Bungalows and Riverside Campground, El Questro offers four distinct accommodation styles perfectly suited to any budget or taste.

### **El Questro Homestead**

The Homestead is an exclusive retreat cantilevered over the magnificent Chamberlain River: six luxurious suites set amidst the rugged Kimberley landscape.

Receiving a \$1.9 million refurbishment in 2008 by leading interior architects Pike Withers, the Homestead has been given a contemporary feel, mixing modern pieces with rustic Australian furnishings. The Homestead offers romantic dining areas on rock platforms above the river, tropical gardens and - for good measure – tennis court, the Homestead is the exclusive and intimate part of El Questro, off limits to everyone bar its small number of guests and the dedicated staff.

It is possibly the only place in the world to spot crocs from the shower. They come drifting down the river as slowly and inexorably as the tide, stealthily taking up their positions before the nightly feeding session. The acclaimed Chamberlain Suite also features a double bath on the verandah jutting out from the cliff's edge. Naturally, this room is one of the most sought after by guests.

### **Emma Gorge Resort**

Hidden within the fiery red of El Questro's Cockburn Ranges, lies the spectacular Emma Gorge Resort. Conveniently located close to some of El Questro's major attractions, Emma Gorge is just 2kms from the Gibb River Road turn off and one hour drive from Kununurra.

Emma Gorge features 60 deluxe safari tents, nestled between pandanus palms and with gravel paths linking all areas of the resort; from the restaurant, bar and reception, to the swimming pool, landscaped gardens and Emma Gorge itself.

Raised above the ground, the canvas tents filter the tropical sounds and scents and are fitted with crisp linen, feather pillows, 240v power and fans for the warmer nights. Each tent includes a queen size bed and two singles, together with en suite bathroom facilities.

A retractable restaurant roof ensures dinner is a unique and memorable experience.

Emma Gorge Resort underwent a \$3.25 million re-construction following flood damage by Severe Tropical Cyclone Ingrid in March 2005.

### **The Station**

12 Bungalows are located on the banks of the Pentecost River and are ideal for those travellers who wish to be at the hub of the action, within easy reach of El Questro's numerous activities as well as the Steakhouse Restaurant and Swinging Arm Bar.

The Bungalows are great for families, or budget conscious guests who prefer some extra comforts of home. Air-conditioned with private bathroom facilities, a number of new Bungalows have recently been built, tastefully decorated with polished floorboards and balconies overlooking the river.

A tranquil swimming hole is located nearby, offering guests respite from the tropical heat or a refreshing end to a day full of outback touring.

### **Campground**

El Questro has two distinct camping experiences. The first at a location known as the "Black Cockatoo"; centrally located and close to guest showers, bathrooms and the Station Store.

Alternatively, there is a selection of private sites, all secluded and out of eyesight or earshot; located a short 10 minute drive from the communal facilities.

## **ACTIVITIES**

For some, the Kimberley is a Mecca for anglers, especially when it comes to the legendary, fighting barramundi. That said, not everyone is out to snare a “barra” so there’s plenty on the exploration menu to suit any length of stay.

There are enough crocs, eagles and cockatoos, and even more kangaroos and goannas than you could poke David Attenborough at. The area also resonates with ancient Aboriginal culture, powerfully represented by the mouthless spirits of Wandjina art and, even more ancient, the dynamic, haunting figures of the Bradshaw paintings.

Full day and half day guided tours span the spectrum, from leisurely cruises along the Chamberlain River and soaking in hot springs, to hiking through gorges and tackling the wilderness of the Emma Dreaming Trail. Explore by boat, 4WD, horseback or – to get a better grasp of the sheer scale of the property – by helicopter.

Then there are the pools. From the resurrected Emma Gorge, a short path threads its way beneath luminous walls of ochre-coloured stone to where a waterfall tumbles past the rapunzel-like tangles of fig roots into an amphitheatre of rock, feeding a turquoise pool.

Another gorgeous spot for swimming is El Questro Gorge, where the water flows beneath clouds of butterflies and gorge walls cloaked in ferns and mosses. It’s so clear it looks as if the colourful native fish that live there are hovering in mid air.

For those who prefer to take the waters in an even more leisurely fashion, there’s always Zebedee Springs, where guests can soak beneath a canopy of Livistona palms in thermal water that spills from orange sandstone cliffs.

Most activities at El Questro are an extra cost, however, there are some free nature walks.

A range of private tours are included in the Homestead experience, including exclusive access to Zebedee Springs, Chamberlain Gorge Cruise, Bushtucker and El Questro History, Amalia Gorge, El Questro Gorge, Champagne Springs, barramundi fishing, and horse-riding.

Detailed trail maps are provided for all guests.

### **Zebedee Thermal Springs**

Zebedee is an oasis, a natural day spa available for all guests after a gorge trek or a horse ride, or simply to be intoxicated by the thermal waters whilst watching the butterflies play amongst the palms. Thermal water consistently rises from deep beneath the earth's tectonic plates, travelling from as far as New Guinea. Private thermal pools are hidden amongst sheer cliffs and ancient Livingstonia palms.

Exclusive access to the Springs is provided to El Questro Homestead guests at certain times of the day.

### **Guided Emma Gorge Tour**

Emma Gorge is El Questro's most famous gorge, characterised by massive scree slopes and cliff face escarpments that reach 120m on either side. At the end of a scenic trail through Savannah woodland and Kimberley rainforest, and past "ripple rocks" created by shallow tidewaters millions of years ago, a cool reward waits. Guests can enjoy a pristine swimming hole in the shadow of a 200ft waterfall.

### **Bushtucker & El Questro History Tour**

Learn about the culinary delights of the local Aboriginal people and bushtucker that has sustained them for tens of thousands of years. This tour delivers an insight into the pioneering heritage and characters of El Questro, from when it was a working cattle station to its current status as an internationally acclaimed Wilderness Park.

For a full list of activities, visit [www.elquestro.com.au/activities](http://www.elquestro.com.au/activities)

## **FILM & PHOTOGRAPHY**

### **Resort Film & Photography Guidelines**

Media capturing images within Emma Gorge Resort, the Station Township and/or the Homestead must be accompanied by a staff member at all times.

Access to the Homestead, if staying at Emma Gorge or the Station Township, is restricted to protect guest privacy.

When travelling to far flung reaches of the property, we ask that media confirm their travel movements and expected time of return to resort staff.

## **WEATHER CONDITIONS**

El Questro experiences distinct wet/dry seasons with an average year round maximum temperature of 33° C (91.4° F) and a minimum of 19° C (66.2° F). The Resort operates during the dry season only, between April and October each year.

*Wet season occurs November to March.*

For the current weather, visit <http://www.bom.gov.au/>

Average monthly maximum temperatures for El Questro Wilderness Park:  
(degree Celsius and Fahrenheit)

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
34	32	32	31	28	26	26	28	30	33	34	35
93	90	90	88	82	79	79	82	86	91	93	95

## CULTURE

The Wandjina Aboriginal people of Australia's East Kimberley region have a connection with the land dating back over 50,000 years, to when man first settled on the Australian continent. As well as being one of the first areas settled, the Kimberley was also to become one of the last frontiers explored by early Australian pioneers: when Alexander Forrest ventured into the region in 1879.

Today, about 11 500 Aboriginal people live in the Kimberley, almost 40 percent of the regions population and almost one quarter of the total Aboriginal population in Western Australia. There are about 198 Aboriginal communities in the region and many Aboriginal people also live in the towns such as Kununurra.

Strong cultural links exist, with an annual round of traditional ceremonies and some 34 distinct languages spoken. El Questro is adjacent to Traditional Homelands, in particular two Aboriginal owned cattle stations – Doon Doon and Home Valley.

One of the most prominent aspects of Aboriginal culture in the Kimberley is its art. El Questro forms the eastern edge of one of the world's most prolific areas of rock art, with some of the works estimated to be over 30,000 years old. The best examples discovered include Chamberlain Gorge, Gningling Rock, Nimberline Gallery and the Cockburn Dreaming Trail.

Two styles are prevalent, the Bradshaw and Wandjina. Bradshaw rock art, so named after the explorer Jospeh Bradshaw who discovered the paintings in 1891, predates Wandjina art by tens of thousands of years. Its exact origins are unknown, but according to local mythology the paintings were made by a small bird (gooyorn) which pecked at the rocks until its beak bled, using the blood as paint which it applied with its beak and feathers.

Bradshaw work is distinguished by fine lines and great detail: faces are usually shown in profile, wearing elaborate head-dresses with tassel adornments on the waist, arms and legs. The elegant, slender forms are usually animated and often portrayed dancing with ceremonial accoutrements or hunting with weapons.

Wandjina rock art is unique to the Kimberley. The Aboriginal people of the region believe that Wandjina are spirit-ancestors who came out of the sky to control the elements. In stark contrast to the Bradshaw paintings, these works are painted with broad strokes in red, yellow, white and black. The stylised, anthropomorphic figures are large, stolid, static and often surrounded by plants or animals.

Some Wandjina paintings have retained their intensity and clarity because they have been restored in the past, before each wet season to ensure the continuing influence of the spirit-ancestors and their power over the forces of nature.

*Source: El Questro, A million acres of outback in the Kimberley wilderness, Celia Shelmerdine*

For more information on Aboriginal culture in Western Australia, visit [www.dia.wa.gov.au](http://www.dia.wa.gov.au)

## **HERITAGE**

The Kimberley is a remote and vast region, covering approximately 425,000 square kilometers, with a population of some 34,000 people. The region was officially named in 1870, in honour of Colonial Secretary John Wodehouse, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Kimberley. It then became home to legendary explorers and pastoralists such as Alexander Forrest, Nat Buchanan, and the Durack.

El Questro was discovered in 1958 when Torrance McMicking lodged a pastoral claim and named the property. The lease changed hands several times before 1991 when Will and Celia Burrell assumed ownership and turned the property into the renowned tourist destination it is today.

Why Torrance McMicking named the property El Questro remains something of a mystery. One story has it that the landscape reminded McMicking of the bright-red bluffs of New Mexico and that a friend found and wrote a Spanish word which meant something along the lines of *land of great beauty and big mountains*.

Before he had a chance to lodge the land claim, it is rumoured that McMicking went on a rum drinking spree and promptly lost the piece of paper and invented the name El Questro. Other stories relate to interpretations such as *land of the four-horned bull* or *land of man's great quest*.

*Source: El Questro, A million acres of outback in the Kimberley wilderness, Celia Shelmerdine*

## **GEOLOGY**

The land exposed in the Kimberley region records a geological story of approximately 1850 million years and is home to some of the best preserved pre-Cambrian rocks in the world.

The mountains, valleys, gorges and plains of El Questro are the product of continual and dramatic natural forces – volcanic eruptions, the folding and fracturing of rock, sedimentary build up, and relentless erosion.

Thanks to an annual rainfall of between 750 and 1200 millimetres the Kimberley landscape is forever changing. From massive king tides to roaring falls, tiny springs to broad rivers, lazy billabongs to whirling thermal pools, water continuously sculpts the environment.

*Source: El Questro, A million acres of outback in the Kimberley wilderness, Celia Shelmerdine*

## **FLORA**

El Questro is place of extremes, where the land changes dramatically from one turn to the next. In the north of El Questro, extending almost 25km, king tides occur twice a year that flood the plain with waters reaching as high as 8 metres: leaving behind mud flats too salty and parched for anything to grow.

Elsewhere, the environment is rich and diverse. There are far reaching plateaus with sprinklings of eucalypts and stands of melaleucas, and where boabs form exclamation marks against the horizon. Large paperbark, fig and ghost gum trees drink from broad rivers and spring-fed pools, with deep gorges and chasms offering the perfect stage for patches of impregnable rainforest to thrive.

The colours of El Questro are made up of a variety of plant life, including the bright yellow flowers of the kapuk bush, the blues pinks and purples of waterlilies, and the coral-red of the kurrajong (known locally as the Kimberley rose).

At first glance the savannah appears to be little more than endless plains of Spinifex grasses and red rock. Upon closer inspection, however, the landscape reveals an astonishing array of more than 700 plant species. Dominating the plains are boab trees, acacias, grevilleas, eucalypts, while pandanus palms, ferns and vines thrive in the humid gorges and rainforest areas. Wildflowers include bachelor's buttons, purple mulla-mullas and native cotton.

*Source: El Questro, A million acres of outback in the Kimberley wilderness, Celia Shelmerdine*

## **WILDLIFE**

A naturalist's delight, El Questro is also home to nearly half of Australia's 780 bird species. Brolgas and jabirus, as well as red tailed black cockatoos, blue-winged kookaburras and the chattering corella are common during the day. At night, listen for the dog-like call (often mistaken for a dingo's howl) of the aptly named barking owl.

The less audible and visible mammal species number over 60 and are largely nocturnal, preferring to avoid the heat of the day (and their predators). Rock wallabies, dingoes, fruit bats, flying foxes and euros are found throughout the property.

Reptiles also have a home at El Questro, from turtles and frill-necked lizards to formidable pythons. The most feared, however, is the saltwater crocodile: a dangerous apex predator of ancient lineage. The freshwater crocodile is also found in billabongs, timid and relatively harmless unless provoked.

El Questro's status as a pastoral lease means that cattle are still found on the property, although concentrated in the far northern reaches where rivers and mountain ranges act as natural stockyards, corralling the herd from the rest of the property.

*Source: El Questro, A million acres of outback in the Kimberley wilderness, Celia Shelmerdine*

## **INTERESTING FACTS**

Lake Argyle is the largest man made dam in the Southern Hemisphere and a veritable inland “sea” of freshwater that has spawned its own eco-systems and host of tourist activities. Debate rages as to its actual volume, with claims ranging between 12 and 50 times the size of Sydney Harbour.

Aboriginal rock art of the Kimberley is emerging as potentially the oldest in the world: dating back at least 30,000 years.

20 million years of weathering has produced the eroded sandstone towers and banded beehive structures of the Bungle Bungles.

Zebedee Springs is named after the cult children’s television show The Magic Roundabout.

## **RATES & PACKAGES**

For full list of current rates and packages, *visit*  
[www.elquestro.com.au/stay](http://www.elquestro.com.au/stay)

## **CONSUMER BOOKINGS**

Reservations:

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Web/online: [www.elquestro.com.au](http://www.elquestro.com.au)

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