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The Simpson Desert

Preliminary Information for All Participants.

Our remote area programs will have most participants traveling in our desert equipped Landcruisers while some (tagalongs) will be traveling in their own vehicles. These programs provide expedition travel to some of the most remote and isolated parts of inland Australia. To safely complete the program a lot of consideration and planning goes into vehicle preparation and ensuring that we have adequate fuel, water, food and protection for a safe and enjoyable experience. To this end we need to carry only essential items and possibly forego many of the daily trappings of our normal daily life. If you are used to having a daily shower and washing in many liters of water this will not be possible for most of the program – although you should be able to shower at least every few days. If you like a complete change of clothing each day this may not be possible either! Sounds terrible - but if you are looking forward to real adventure travel there are many alternatives to these comforts and the rewards in this part of Australia are certainly worth a few deprivations. As you know the program involves a high proportion of travel in desert that is typically dry. Although there are several known points where we can fill up with water these can be unreliable and quality cannot be guaranteed. We always ensure our drinking water is first class. Outback travel presents challenges beyond the norm.

Our vehicles are forward seating air-conditioned Toyota Landcruisers. We seat three in the back and one in the front, using the third middle rear seat means we can keep our prices down. There is slightly more legroom in the back than economy air seats. Each day you will sit in a different seat, moving through the convoy, so that on an expedition you will sit in every seat at least once.

Sometimes we have to divert our itinerary due to flooding, track closures, Aboriginal business, mechanical or safety issues—or to witness incredible events like wildflower shows or wildlife events. You need to have a flexible attitude. The outback is a big place and you can expect some very rough travel on tracks that have no maintenance. This program is NOT suitable for people with lower back problems or people unable to withstand long periods sitting in a vehicle. You also need to be aware that there are places where prompt medical evacuation is not possible. Areas of the Simpson Desert are too remote for helicopters and there are no landing strips for Flying Doctor planes. The only evacuation is by vehicle and in an emergency this can still take some days.

The success of any expedition relies on the group dynamic. You are likely to be travelling with people from other countries, different socio-economic backgrounds and different takes on life, politics etc. That is one of the wonderful things about humanity. If you are intolerant of other people you may need to reconsider participating, as you will be in close quarters with other people for the duration of the expedition.

Your expedition crew:

Your Expedition crew has years of experience traveling through remote parts of Australia and the mechanical knowledge necessary in the case of emergency. They also have remote area first aid training. They have extensive experience in leading groups in inland Australia and have a broad knowledge of landscape features so will be able to assist participants to interpret these. We carry a number of reference books and maps for inland Australia and will be responsible for participant welfare and the “learning for fun” part of the program. During travel time we maintain commentary both in the Diamantina vehicles and by radio for self

drive participants. Your crew is committed to ensuring you have a safe and enjoyable expedition.

Personal Hygiene:

On a daily basis you will find yourself coping with a limited amount of washing water. We can provide a liter or so of hot water when in camp. Bring a small Tupperware tub for this. You'd be surprised how creative you can be. We traveled with a hairdresser once who washed and conditioned her hair with one cup of water!!!!

Bring your own cup for tooth brushing. 'Wet-ones' or 'Huggies' are a great substitute for a shower. We recommend you bring a couple of packets. There will occasionally be time for you to hand wash and dry clothes, however pack sensibly to minimise the need to. Please bring bio degradable eco soap. Bring a supermarket bag to store wet clothes while we are travelling that you can hang out to dry in camp. Do bring adequate deodorant. You will be travelling in close quarters and your fellow travelers will be eternally grateful for this courtesy. If you want to be indulgent, superfine marino socks and undies (icebreaker) are excellent as they can be worn for several days without requiring washing. Showers can be purchased, usually for around \$5.00 at Birdsville and Leigh Creek. There is a cold shower or a warm swim at Dalhousie. We recommend a pair of thongs to wear in the shower.

Toilet is usually a shovel and a toilet roll (which we provide- with a box of matches to burn the paper). For a humorous tutorial on toileting in the bush check out <http://bit.ly/bushcrapper>. In camp we have two tubs of water and antiseptic, one for after toilet and the other for general hand washing, and the vehicles all have antiseptic hand cream pump packs in the door pockets for daytime use. You may want to bring your own hand towel.

Clothing:

When thinking about clothing, remember there are significant climate variations —You will experience all kinds of weather. The weather in the Simpson Desert can range from below freezing to high 30s. Modern outdoor adventure wear is ideal, it protects you from UV, wicks moisture away from your body, minimizes body odour and packs away to nothing. We really like icebreaker super fine marino gear. You need to have clothing you can peel off as the day warms up. You also need to be mindful of the size of your bag, so think about bringing one jumper or polar fleece and perhaps a ice breaker t-shirt to wear under your shirt. Modern waterproof jackets are not bulky and are extremely water resistant. Icebreaker socks can be worn for several days without smelling provided you hang them to air at night, saves packing piles of socks. Make sure your boots are worn in and comfortable. Whilst this is not a hiking tour, there are plenty of walks during the day over rough terrain, so you need something that is both sturdy and comfortable. We do not recommend sandals or thongs in camp, as there are burrs, sharp acacia that can cause puncture wounds, and it is unsafe to have open footwear around an open fire.

Packing List:

Following is a recommended list of items to pack, it is not prescriptive. You are permitted to bring a **SOFT travel bag NOT weighing more than 15kg fully packed**. This will be loaded onto the roof or a ute tray, so ideally it is weatherproof and rugged and not your finest Gucci or Louis Vuitton. Your day pack is carried with you in the vehicle. **Don't use it as a substitute suitcase**, it should be light and small and only carry items you will need during the day, as it will be on your knee or on the floor at your feet. Some people turn up with huge day packs which just make it uncomfortable for them and their fellow travelers. Your swag is pretty warm, but everyone sleeps differently, so if you really feel the cold, think about bringing a set of thermals and using them as your PJs.

Two sets long pants/2 short
Light shirts with collars and sleeves
Jumper or Polar-fleece
Waterproof jacket/windcheater
T-shirt or two
Wide brimmed hat and beanie
Boots or walking shoes
Runners for around camp
Socks and Undies – whatever you think is a fair thing.
Pyjamas (optional). Thermal underwear is a good alternative
Swimming costume (optional but good when having a bush shower)
Thongs or crocs for shower
Toilet bag (soap, comb, brush, toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, shampoo)
Clothes washing soap, line and pegs
Spare glasses
Medicines (tablets, potions, lotions)
Towel—micro fiber is good

Sun cream
Insect repellent
Face Washer
Small bowl for washing (eg tupperware)
Wet ones/baby wipes
Water bottle for drinking – not a used PET, make sure it has a wide mouth for refilling – camelbak are good
Camera ,spare film and batteries
Torch and spare batteries – we recommend
an LED head torch
Spare plastic bags
Needle and thread
Pair of gardening gloves – handy for collecting wood etc

Small daypack to carry your day to day
Items like
Pen, diary
Money and credit cards
Tickets
Fly net, Camera
Remember to pack lightly, this is an expedition, not a tour.

A great Souvenir:

Since fossils and Aboriginal artifacts are off limits by law, and the usual assortment of tea towels and spoons are as tacky as always, you may like to bring along a packet of zip lock glad sandwich bags. Fill them with different coloured sands en route, and when you get home, layer them into a spaghetti jar. We will visit the Art Gallery at Santa Theresa.

Communication with the Outside World:

Whilst some come to get away from friends and family, others like to stay in touch. There is Telstra mobile coverage in Alice Springs, Birdsville, Leigh Creek and south of Quorn. Otherwise for most of the expedition we do not have mobile reception. If there is an emergency at home while you are away and you need to be contacted we have a satellite phone for emergencies only. The number to call is 0418561890. Messages to this phone are passed on daily.

Charging Devices:

Your vehicles have USB charge plugs and cigarette lighters. We also carry a 240 volt inverter. Make sure your portable device batteries are in good order. Older ipads can take several hours to charge, which can log jam the system. Be sure to bring lots of batteries and spare SD cards for your camera.

Food:

Provisioning for a remote area desert expedition requires careful menu planning. Once we are on the road there are limited opportunities for re-provisioning. We serve modern contemporary cuisine from all over the world including Greek, Italian, Thai etc. Do not expect just meat and three vegetables. You can expect to eat very well. If you have any food allergies or dislikes you must advise us at least three weeks prior to travel. **We are unable to amend the menu or make special dietary considerations once we are on the road.** Breakfast is a continental spread. A choice of corn flakes, nutri grain, wheat bix, or our home made muesli with stewed fruit and yoghurt, organic sourdough toast with butter and a selection of spreads, fresh brewed coffee and billy tea. Lunch is usually a wrap or roll with sweet biscuit, fresh fruit and cordial served on the road. The evening meal is at a set table and is the main meal of the day. We do not serve desserts or snacks, so if you are a snacker or a sweet tooth, BYO. There are limited opportunities to restock en route. Breakfast is served at sunrise each day, lunch is when the sun is high and the evening meal is served between one and two hours after sunset.

Beverages:

Our drinking water in camp is rainwater or potable bore water, we are pretty fussy about quality. There is no need to bring plastic bottled water. We also provide cordial with lunch, tea and coffee whilst in camp and a glass of table wine with dinner. If you wish to bring something else to drink please feel free. We have 12 volt refrigeration to store beer and soft drinks and room to store spirits. You can stock up on soft drinks at Birdsville, Marree and Leigh Creek/Copley. Alcoholic beverages should be brought with you from Alice Springs or Adelaide, however remember there are some restrictions on the sale of alcohol in Alice. Wine casks can be hard to purchase and casks of port are not for sale. You can restock at Birdsville but it is expensive. We find that people tend to drink more than they think they will, so err on the side of indulgence rather than temperance. Whilst this is in no way intended to suggest we encourage the consumption of alcohol, the desert climate, combined with balmy evenings under the stars is certainly conducive to a moderate tippie if you are that way inclined. Make sure the beverages you are bringing with you are stored in glass or plastic. Modern cans don't stand up to the vibration caused by corrugated roads and tend to break. For wines, ensure your boxes have large cardboard separators.

Accidents can happen:

We are traveling into some of the most remote country in the world, and have to be well prepared. Your tour guides are trained in advanced and remote area first aid and we carry extensive first aid equipment, however we are not a mobile dispensary, nor do we carry pain killers for everyday use. We are not permitted to provide you with any medication so we recommend you bring the following.

Adequate personal medication you may need including Band-Aids or Elastoplasts
Paracetamol or Aspirin
Stingose, adequate supplies of any personal medication.

Camp duties:

As a member of the expedition you will be expected to assist in camp duties including washing dishes, food preparation, collecting firewood and assisting in packing and unpacking of vehicles. This is part of being a team member and will contribute to both the success of the expedition and your enjoyment.

Sleeping arrangements:

Shortly after we first started running outback expeditions in the early 90s we dispensed with tents. Cumbersome, tedious to set up and pack up every day, and basically unnecessary. We recognised that none of the local station people or indigenous people used them, there had to be a reason why. Universally the swag is used in the outback. Our swags sit on a fold out stretcher like a normal bed. The swag itself comes fully made with a down doona, sheet, pillow and case. It comes replete with a fly screen and can be fully zipped up or left open to gaze at the Milky Way, and in case of inclement conditions each swag comes with a waterproof tarpaulin. As far as modesty, we have a rule that no-one can camp within 50 meters of the fire, and there are always plenty of trees and bushes to set up beneath, and if you struggle setting up, there is always a friendly member of staff to assist you. For more on our swags go to <http://bit.ly/swagtute> A good idea is to bring along a small LED light that you can attach to your swag at night making it easy to navigate back to in the dark.

Pick Up and Drop Off:

We pick up at all Adelaide and Alice Springs hotels. We do not pick up or drop off in Glenelg. Please be waiting outside with your bags at 6.50 am in Adelaide or 08.50 am in Alice Springs and ensure you have completed check out formalities. The different Diamantina vehicles will be travelling around town to several other hotels, however we will usually be within 10 minutes either side of 6.00am. We drop off on the last day around 3 pm.

Information for Tagalong participants:

On a regular day of travel the Expedition Leader travels in the lead vehicle with the main convoy behind spaced apart at safe distances, usually behind the dust trail of the preceding vehicle. The order of travel is at the discretion of the tour leader, and will change during the trip. The rear vehicle is always a tour company vehicle for safety. In addition to the inclusions mentioned elsewhere for all participants, self-drive, tagalong participants are assured of satellite phone support for emergency situations, mechanical assistance and back up, knowledge of the area and practical advice for the unskilled four wheel driver. We do NOT provide vehicle recovery if we cannot get the vehicle moving. Recovery is YOUR responsibility in the event that we cannot repair the vehicle. It is a requirement that all self drive participants follow directions of the tour leader as to safe traveling speeds and general convoy etiquette. As a team member you will need to operate your vehicle as a member of the convoy as a whole. On arrival in camp you will be directed where to park your vehicle.

Vehicles:

Only high clearance 4X4s are suitable for the Simpson Desert ie: Toyota Landcruisers,

Nissan Patrols etc. SUVs are not suitable vehicles for this application. Your vehicle should also have a front and rear anchor point in case we need to recover your vehicle with our winches or straps.

*Special note for Landrover, Range Rover and Discovery owners. In the past we have regularly had trouble with Land Rovers, Range Rovers and Discoverys. They don't seem to like the extended travel on huge corrugates and the suspension seems to go down to highway mode and stay there. If you have one of these ensure your electronics and suspension system has been thoroughly checked prior to departure. Also there is no availability of rims for these vehicles in the outback. We recommend you bring an extra rim.

Vehicle Preparation:

Do not overload your vehicle. Be prudent when packing. Store everything in sturdy containers. Keep liquids in plastic, and pack everything tightly in your vehicle so nothing moves around. Anything that can spill will as the terrain is very rough. An overloaded vehicle will just put more pressure on your running gear and make it harder for you. We provide tables, lighting in camp and all catering equipment. You need to bring a swag or tent. Also you will need comfortable fold out chairs for around the fire.

Vehicle Service:

Ensure that your vehicle has had a complete service prior to traveling and is in top shape. Bring along any spares. If your vehicle is over 3 years old or out of dealer service warranty we will require proof that your vehicle has been fully checked over by a qualified mechanic and is in top condition suitable to take on the Simpson Desert. Vehicle recovery in the Simpson is hugely expensive. Whilst we will attempt to assist you to get you going, we can only provide rudimentary bush mechanic skills and may not be able to recover your vehicle in the event of major breakdown. It is imperative your vehicle is in tip top shape.

Vehicle Inspection:

Each vehicle will be required to be inspected a minimum of three weeks prior to departure to check mechanical condition and suitability for the terrain which will include a lot of dune crossings, gravel roads, creek crossings and possibly muddy conditions. Inspection can be performed with any approved vehicle service agency or qualified mechanic, and can be performed at the time of service. Please bring with you written proof of vehicle condition. This is a necessary requirement due to the remote and isolated areas we cover. If your vehicle is from 4X4 hire this is not necessary, however, if you do hire a vehicle, carefully inspect spare wheels, jacks, hoses, and have a good look over your vehicle prior to travel. Check for oil leaks. Do not trust the hirer to be providing you with a first rate vehicle! We cannot emphasise enough how important it is your vehicle is in top shape; this is no walk in the park!

Tyres:

Our program route covers the most demanding types of terrain including sand, stones, gibber, mud and bitumen. Therefore tyres should be in top condition, 3/4 tread or more. Tubeless tyres are preferable however split rims are OK. In sand you will need to deflate your tyres to 16-20psi. You will need to bring a tyre gauge and a 12-volt pump. Bring at least one spare tyre in top condition as well as plugs and patches. We provide bead breakers but we do not operate a tyre repair service, you will need to be proficient at repairing your own tyres. Many tyre service personnel use rattle guns to tighten wheel nuts. The result of this careless practice is when you are in the bush and need to crack the nuts off they can break at the stud. Before departure crack off all your wheel nuts and hand tighten them with a cross brace. Check tightness regularly.

Roof Rack:

If you have a roof rack we recommended that it should be steel and of an approved type. Do not overload your roof rack. Ensure that all mounts and brackets are tight prior to leaving home and monitor them regularly en route. Keep your centre of gravity as low as possible. Heavy tool boxes and other heavy items like fuel cans should be stored low in your vehicle and not on your roof rack.

Bull Bar:

Ensure your bullbar is of solid construction. It is essential that you or your mechanic thoroughly check all the mounting bolts prior to departure and ensure they are tight.

Fuel:

This varies greatly depending on the terrain and the track conditions. For example, when sand is hot it is more fluid and therefore you burn more fuel on dune crossings. Conversely if the sand is wet it packs like cement, however the interdunal corridors can be muddy and you will burn more fuel. On the Simpson you will need to carry 150 liters plus of fuel for a standard 4X4 vehicle, like a Nissan Patrol or Toyota Landcruiser. Fuel can be purchased en route and all fuel suppliers accept eftpos. All suppliers stock Opal ULP as well as diesel. The longest stretch without fuel will be from Mt Dare to Birdsville, allow for 650kms. Carry your extra fuel in sealed, approved fuel containers that are anchored to your vehicle, preferably low to your centre of gravity. Make sure the lids are always tightly screwed on.

Communications:

The lead vehicle carries a satellite phone along with a UHF CB radio. It is essential for all vehicles to be fitted with a UHF CB radio to keep in contact with the Expedition Leader's vehicle. Any good brand of UHF CB will be appropriate; however a hand held unit is not suitable as they are difficult to hear whilst travelling. Ensure you have a sturdy antenna; one that will tolerate long periods of intense vibration due to corrugates. Ensure that your broadcast and receive signal is strong, that all solders are strong and the set is earthed. Carry spare fuses and we advise you bring a temporary magnetic based antenna and some co-ax in case your antenna breaks. This is a common occurrence. We use UHF Channel 16 and in the Simpson Desert we switch to Channel 10.

Generators:

We do not permit the use of 240-volt generators therefore allowing all to enjoy the peace and quiet of the outback and wilderness. We use battery lighting for the main camp area. We suggest you carry 12 volt LED lighting and/or a good torch. By all means play plenty of music in your vehicle during the day, however please do not have music playing in camp. Many people come to the outback for solitude and quiet, and musical tastes can be highly subjective.

Sand Flags:

It is mandatory that all vehicles use a sand flag whilst in the Simpson Desert.

Recovery Gear:

We carry a large selection of recovery gear. Bring along a snatch strap and some D shackles, we will look after the rest.

Recommended Spares:

Since this program covers difficult and remote areas, please think carefully before omitting any of the items listed below. Of course any spares will be specific to your vehicle and remember to be selective when packing so as not to overload your vehicle, but remember you will be a long way from any assistance, and it can take weeks to bring in spare parts. Due to corrugations, shock absorbers take punishment. We recommend you carry a spare.

radiator hoses
fan belts
heater hose
1 liter gear oil
5 liters engine oil
oil filter
brake fluid
fuel filter
points
insulation tape
distributor cap
rotor button
jumper leads
spark plugs
condenser
coil
.5 metre wire with hook to remove spinifex from undercarriage

spare globes and fuses
wire
5-minute araldite or similar
fuel tank sealer
radiator sealer
puncture repair kit
can CRC or similar
universal joint
tyre pump
pressure gauge
spare wheel complete
spare tubes or wheel complete
spare ignition key
fire extinguisher
shade mesh to tie up under your vehicle and over radiator to protect from spinifex seed
shock absorber

Other essentials:

tent or swag
bucket
12 volt LED light or torch
first aid kit and other items as listed for all participants
containers for water for personal use and an emergency supply
also 2 X 20 liter plastic water containers for use in the communal kitchen
jack and board to place jack on (in sand), shovel (long handled is better).
basic tool kit including appropriate tools for tyre changing.
tubeless plug tyre repair kit is handy for tubeless tyres.

Tag-along vehicles may be required to carry a box or two of food materials in their vehicle for group use. Please allocate and allow for this space during vehicle preparation. Your tour staff will allocate and distribute these items at either Alice Springs or Adelaide. They could be a sack of spuds, a box of cans etc. We will contact you as to where to meet in Alice Springs or Adelaide.

Refrigeration space is always at a premium, so if you have a 12-volt refrigerator and are happy to bring it along we will be eternally grateful.

Permits:

You will require a Desert Parks Pass. As a guest of Diamantina we will provide you with one of these free of charge.

Water availability and conservation:

This program involves a high proportion of travel in desert, which is typically dry. Although there are known points where we can fill up with water these can be unreliable and quality cannot be guaranteed. Safe travel requires that water from different sources is not mixed, that water is used sparingly and that, except in cases of emergency, reserves are always kept. See the note above re carrying water for common use in addition to personal needs. It is also important that any soap you bring is biodegradable. All rubbish must be taken with you, if you bring it in you can carry it out. As Advanced Eco Tourism Accredited operators, we take our conservation and land management principles seriously.

REMEMBER THE SECRET OF A SUCCESSFUL AND ENJOYABLE EXPEDITION IS GOOD VEHICLE PREPARATION.