

An aerial photograph of a vast, arid landscape in the Northern Territory of Australia. The terrain is characterized by deep red soil and sparse, low-lying vegetation. A winding road or path cuts through the landscape, leading towards a small cluster of buildings or a settlement in the distance. The sky is clear and blue, suggesting a bright, sunny day.

# Remote Ready

**PREPARING FOR WORK IN REMOTE LOCATIONS  
OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY**

**Judith Austin**

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King's Canyon, Central Australia. Photo courtesy Tourism NT.

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# Introduction – WHY GO?

Why would anyone choose to live and work in remote parts of this vast continent?

Right now, there are talented, courageous, committed and smart people working and living in very remote parts of Australia. Why?

Firstly, it is important to develop an understanding of the term 'remote'.

While most of the Australian population huddles along the eastern and southern coastlines of the country, a small proportion of people are scattered across thousands of kilometres far away from metropolitan centres.

In the Northern Territory, when we talk about 'remote' we are not referring to areas a couple of hundred kilometres from a capital city.

No, 'remote' in the Territory, and parts of WA, SA, Qld and NSW, means big, big distances and, generally, small populations.

In some instances, remote is 'home'. Indigenous people make up a significant proportion of the population in remote areas of Australia and many maintain a desire to remain in areas with important personal and cultural ties.

Others relocate from other parts of the country, or the world, to work in possibly unfamiliar, but potentially beautiful locations, many, many kilometres from metropolitan lifestyles.

Opportunities for various types of work exist in a range of occupations and industries.





The pay can be good – to compensate for the remote nature of the work. But, often the pay is not the main reason why people choose to go 'Bush'.

While the motivations will vary, some people talk about wanting a challenge. Others cite opportunities for skill development and the capacity to undertake leadership positions that may not be available in metropolitan locations.

Many will talk about a desire to make a 'contribution'.

Indigenous communities in the Territory continue to work to re-establish identity and culture after years of dislocation. Some occupations will require a heightened awareness of Indigenous culture and sensitivity to appropriate interactions within Indigenous communities.

So what draws people to work in remote areas and what causes some to flee?

This booklet aims to outline some of the issues to take into consideration when contemplating work in remote locations.

You may be thinking of working in the Bush (which, in fact, can be desert) as a nurse, as a teacher, as an engineer or in one of the many other occupations associated with life in remote areas of the Territory.

However, whatever your occupation, can you really be prepared for an experience that touches everyone in different ways?



## "So what draws people to work in remote areas and what causes some to flee?"

In a way, this booklet aims at the impossible. It will try to provide insight into an experience that will be unique to each person's circumstances.

Above all, if you are from elsewhere, it is about asking you to consider your individual experiences and qualities so you can weigh up your capacity to adapt to and embrace the journey (sometimes a bumpy ride, literally and metaphorically), that a Territory experience can offer.

## Section 1- THE JOURNEY BEGINS . . .

A journey through the 'Territory' is likely to be memorable. Even short visits to the tropics of the north or the deserts in the centre can leave vivid impressions – generally of extremes.

There is extreme distance and extreme climate. Darwin to Alice Springs is 1,500 km and approximately 17 hours (non-stop) by road. What may appear short distances on a map can become time-consuming journeys negotiating rough terrain and a variety of obstacles. The extreme heat in both the tropics and the desert can be overwhelming, if not deadly.



The extreme isolation can play havoc with expectations and emotions. Once the excitement of travelling to a remote area has abated it can be difficult to adjust to the reality of living and working in an area with restricted access to familiar comforts.

However, despite the challenges and potential dangers, there are many who see beyond these factors and 'get' the extreme beauty of the landscape and its associated lifestyle.

In the Territory, the environment has major impact and is unavoidable. It is a source of discomfort but also of great pleasure. It is this beauty that attracts recurring visitors (some of whom choose to stay) to the amazing Territory.

Initially, there are the practicalities. These are important. The demands of the environment mean that much consideration needs to be given to the basics of transport, food, accommodation, telecommunications and personal health. Discomfort, if not death, can result as a consequence of complacency or naivety regarding these very practical matters.

However, the journey will also be a journey into self. Out of your usual environment you may make new discoveries about yourself as a person.





## Section 2 – HOT & COLD, WET & DRY

It has to be done. We have to talk about the climate and physical conditions before anything else. It dominates and dictates so much of the human activities and can be a source of both pleasure and pain.

In Central Australia there is a summer and winter. The summer temperatures are regularly over 40 degrees Celsius. It's hot and dry. In the winter, temperatures at night can drop below zero. The winter days may still be sunny and result in sunburn. So, in an apparent contradiction, it is necessary to have both winter woollies and sun protection (plus drink plenty of water).

A word of warning, the dry heat plays havoc with your skin sucking out the moisture and leaving a thin papery texture. Moisturise, moisturise, moisturise!

In the Tropical North, there is no need to use moisturiser. In fact, it is hard to keep skin dry.

Simplistically, the Tropical climate has two main seasons: the Wet and the Dry.

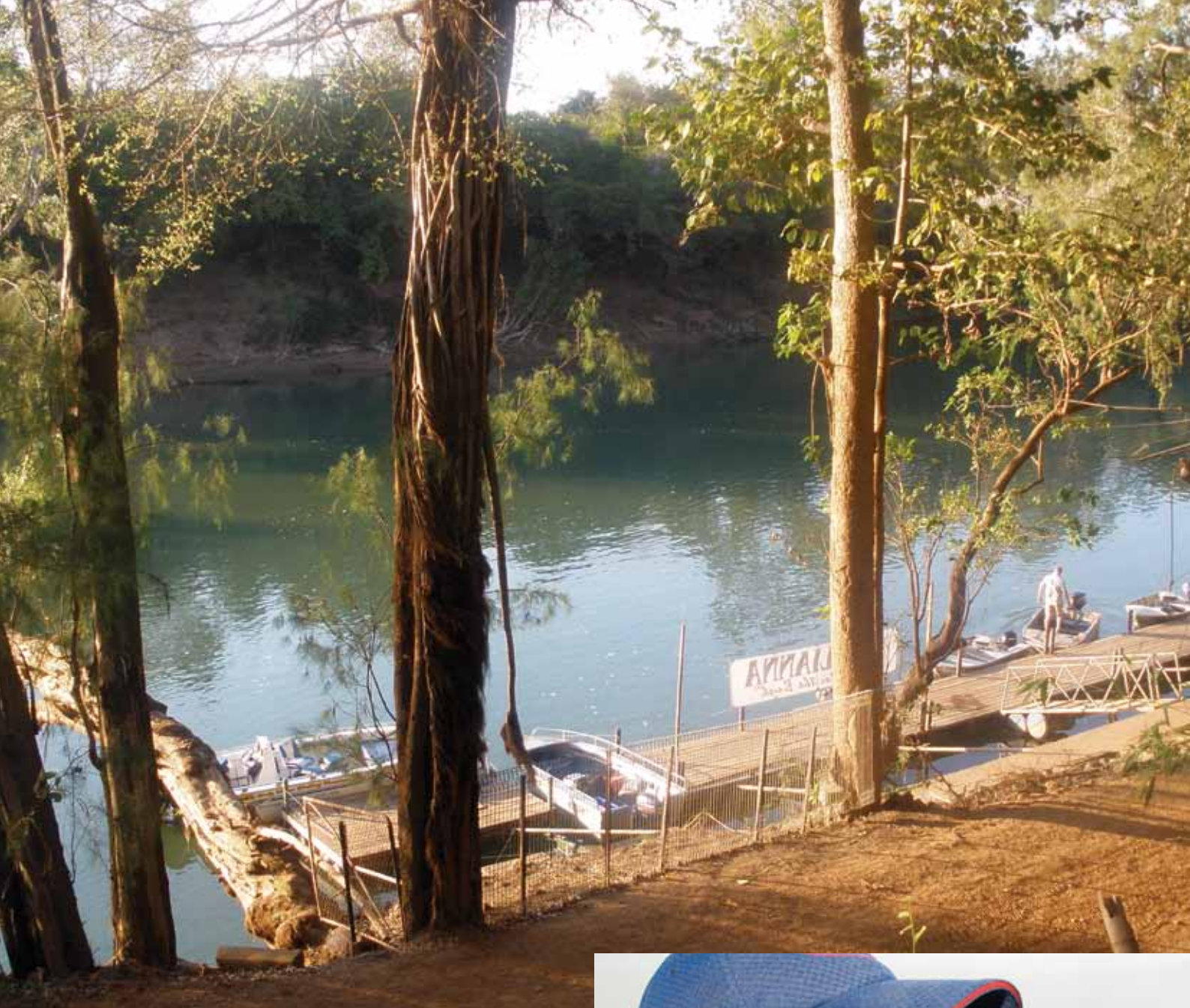
However, traditional Indigenous cultures have recognised the subtle changes in the weather patterns and have a more sophisticated system of naming the seasons.

The Dry season in the Tropics is exquisite – cool nights and warm days. The Wet season is hot with, beyond belief and unrelenting, humidity. Drink plenty of water.

During the Wet season the Tropical coastline of the North is under constant threat of cyclones. Flooding across the Top End causing road closure is routine.







The upside of the hot climate is the amazing potential for an 'outdoor' lifestyle. People who enjoy outdoor activities such as: camping, fishing, boating, swimming (in croc safe waters), hunting and bushwalking embrace Territory living with enthusiasm.

There are wonderful opportunities to be close to an unequalled environment.

Health conditions, work habits, relationships are all affected by the climate – don't underestimate its power.

For more details about the Territory climate try -

<http://www.theterritory.com.au>





## Section 3 – GETTING ABOUT

Travel in the Territory may involve road, air, sea or limited train travel. Vast distances, affected by seasonal conditions, can result in costly or difficult travel arrangements. Expect the unexpected...

### **Roads**

The NT has bitumen roads, dirt roads and no roads. All have inherent hazards.

If you've never driven a 4WD, haven't heard of an EPIRB or used a satellite phone, it may be useful to start making enquiries about what and why these are necessary in the Bush. Remember big distances.

Common causes of injury include: rollovers (soft edges), wandering stock (cattle, kangaroos, buffalo, horses, camels and pigs), tyre blowouts (large rocks/potholes on unsealed roads), vehicle breakdown, flooded causeways/river crossings and getting bogged in sand or mud.

There is a reason why people travel with shovels, kangaroo jacks and winches. If you get stuck, it is likely you will need to get yourself out.

Are you comfortable carrying cans of petrol or diesel in or on top of your vehicle? This is likely to be necessary in many areas where fuel availability is limited. And, by the way, carry a fire extinguisher.







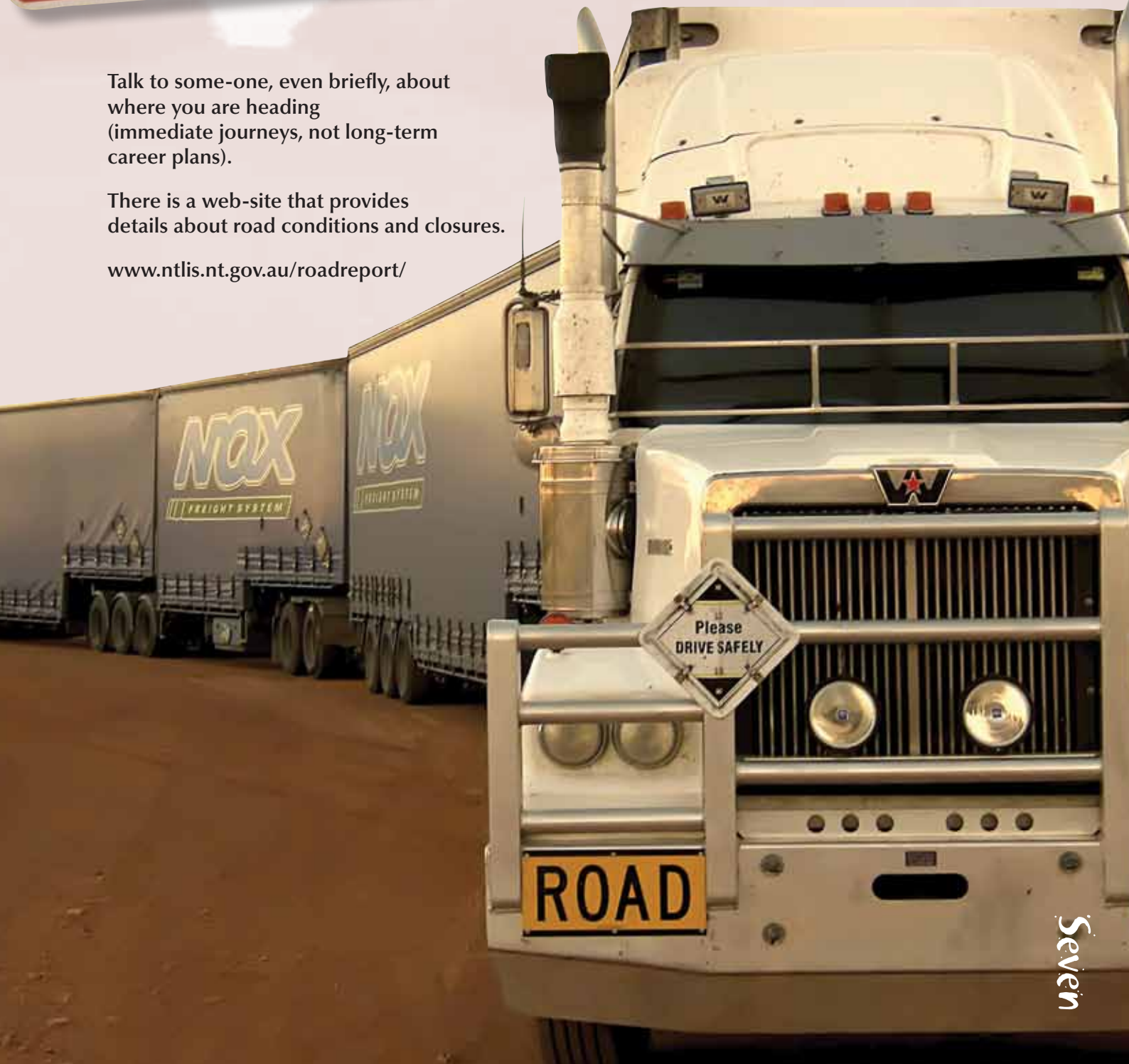
There are a whole set of rules about negotiating 'Road Trains' on highways. As the name suggests they are basically multiple trailers that are hauled by a truck on ordinary roads. They are very long vehicles – approach with care.

The 'bush telegraph' can be very efficient. However, if no-one knows you are heading out on long stretches of isolated, bone-jarring roads, no-one will come looking for you if you don't arrive at your destination. It may be days before you see another vehicle.

Talk to some-one, even briefly, about where you are heading (immediate journeys, not long-term career plans).

There is a web-site that provides details about road conditions and closures.

[www.ntlis.nt.gov.au/roadreport/](http://www.ntlis.nt.gov.au/roadreport/)





## Permits

It may come as a surprise to you but you do not have automatic right of passage on some roads in the Territory. A number of roads located on Aboriginal-owned land require that you seek permission and obtain a permit before using them.

In the Top End, permits must be obtained from the Northern Land Council - [www.nlc.org.au/](http://www.nlc.org.au/)

In Central Australia, it is necessary to apply for permits from the Central Land Council - [www.clc.org.au/](http://www.clc.org.au/)

Sometimes roads will be closed for ceremonial reasons. This can happen at short notice. Always check with the relevant Land Council and obey the restrictions.

The Land Councils will also be a good source of information about Indigenous cultural issues.

In some areas, your employer may have arranged permission to use certain roads. If you decide to travel to other areas you may need to obtain a permit.

These requirements also apply to Indigenous people from other parts of the country.

## Air

Some areas can only be accessed by air, helicopter or light plane.

In many cases the airstrip will be just that – an airstrip, no airport (not even a tin shed). Access to many areas will require charter flights (can be expensive) and will depend on weather conditions.



Check how far the airstrip is from your workplace or accommodation. Are there arrangements in place for getting your belongings to your accommodation? Taxis will be a rare sight in the Bush.



## Water

In some remote coastal areas of the NT, the main access can be via water, either the sea or rivers. Consequently, everything including: food, furniture, clothing and medical supplies may need to be shipped in by 'barge'.

The changing seasons, tides and threat of cyclone can affect shipping timetables.

Tide charts are available from the Bureau of Meteorology

[www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au)

So, are you good at planning menus weeks in advance? You will need to plan ahead to have adequate stores delivered in time to keep you going. It will be a problem if you don't plan and forget to order.

## Rail

The legendary, romantic 'Ghan' traverses the continent from North to South – straight up the middle. So, if you need to travel from Darwin, stopping at Katherine and Alice Springs, or vice versa, the Ghan may be an option for travel.

However, most remote locations don't boast the availability of rail (or for that matter, bus or taxi) as a means of travel. This is a limited option for travel.





## Section 4 – SOMEWHERE TO STAY

Think realistically about the types of accommodation you may find in remote areas. Luxury villas on man-made water channels – well, not likely.

Think about the challenges of transporting building materials over vast areas (land or water). Think about the challenges of getting tradespeople into those areas to complete building work – it's hard enough in metropolitan areas.

So, lower your expectations about the potential accommodation – then lower them again.

The climate is harsh (tropical or arid). Wear and tear due to a variety of factors can be significant.

In the Tropics, electrical appliances seem to have short life-spans (on top of the built-in obsolescence). The sound of an electrical 'psst' as yet another appliance downs tools and announces that it can't work under these damp conditions becomes commonplace.

Therefore, think heat. Think remoteness. Think air-conditioning. Think air-conditioning may not be working and cannot be fixed until the 'Dry Season' when the roads are open and can be accessed by the relevant fix it person (assuming availability). This may also apply to doors, windows, plumbing and other basic amenities. Stuff breaks down.

Wildlife such as: snakes, geckos, spiders, termites and possums may wish to keep you company in your appointed accommodation. Really, if you don't like wildlife, including reptiles, you may find living remote a little disturbing.

Geckos are lovely; they just make a lot of noise. Also, watch out if they happen to take up residence in your toaster or electric bug zapper.







'Distressed' takes on a whole new meaning when referring to furniture and fittings in remote areas.

In challenging occupations, time out in your 'home' may be vital. Therefore, consider ways in which you can make your home your sanctuary. Personal items and memorabilia can be comforting. Check bag and weight limits if you need to transport your personal items by air.

However, be careful of high value items. The climate and conditions can wreak havoc. Think carefully about

how you would feel if moths merrily ate their way through clothes or a cyclone obliterated your possessions. There is enough to deal with in remote areas without the grief associated with loss of prized material possessions.

Remember there will be a huge variety in the living conditions across remote locations. Circumstances and conditions of accommodation will vary between different locations.

Ask before you go: What type of accommodation will be available? Is it furnished? Will I be sharing with others? Do I need insurance? Who do I call for phone connections or general repairs? Am I able to take pets? How do I get there? Is the accommodation provided by my employer?

It is probably not a good idea to ask about bathroom colour schemes so that you can buy towels to match the décor. Such questions are likely to raise eyebrows and questions about your understanding of remote living accommodation.

In the end, realistically, don't expect luxury. Most accommodation will be adequate and meet basic requirements.

However, some areas may experience difficulty in supplying well functioning accommodation for a variety of reasons. Be prepared if you have to rough it.





## Section 5 – FOOD/SHOPPING

Shopping facilities will vary depending on your remote location. Basically, there are no department stores and very limited (if any) café/restaurant options.

A local store may stock some basic necessities but there will be limited choice and items are likely to be expensive.

In some areas, it is possible to arrange 'Bush Orders' through Coles or Woolworths, which are then freighted to your location.

In other areas, you may need to wait for the weekly truck or barge (depending on shipping conditions) or travel to a regional centre to stock up on supplies.

In many remote areas it is unlikely that there will be services such as hairdressers, dentists, pharmacies and other facilities usually found in larger towns and cities. Health needs are catered for by the local Health Centre. Other services require travel to a larger regional centre.

Attention to food needs requires forethought and planning. Consider your skills in planning ahead for meals and basic requirements. It can be a long, hungry wait for the next truck, plane or barge to bring supplies if you have omitted to submit your order. Also, what are you going to do if the truck gets bogged and can't get through – what is your back-up plan?

Others may be reluctant to share their limited resources just because you didn't plan ahead with your shopping.



*Remote shops may not be as well-stocked as this store.*

**"It is unlikely that there will be services such as hairdressers, dentists, pharmacies and other facilities"**



## Section 6 – PHONES, INTERNET & TV

While many areas do not have mobile phone coverage, most have landline facilities. In the not-so-distant past, even landline phones were, in some areas, unavailable, unreliable or expensive. Now, there are reasonable phone facilities.

Telstra provides details of Australia wide mobile telephone coverage:  
<http://www.telstra.com.au/mobile/networks/coverage/>



The www is a wonderful thing. Many remote areas now have internet access and this is transforming the options for communication with absent friends or family.

The availability of television channels will vary. If you cannot live without a favourite TV program find out which channels are received in your intended destination.

## Section 7 – WHAT SHOULD I WEAR?

Yes, even in the Bush this is a pertinent question.

An error that some people make is to assume that no-one will notice or care about issues of appearance in the Outback. Not so.

Yes, the climate dictates that sensible, comfortable clothing is required. Natural fabrics that protect from sunburn will help in the heat. Comfortable shoes that provide some protection from the terrain are also a good idea. High heels will be absurd and should be kept in the 'Dress Up' box.

However, excessive untidiness or exposure of flesh (particularly legs and midribs) can cause offence in local communities. With certain occupations there can be an expectation of higher standards of dress. Be conscious of these expectations and sensitivities about respectful behaviour towards others in the community.

Dress comfortably but do attend to hygiene and the expected dress standards of your occupation and employer.





## Section 8 – MICROBES & MONSTERS

Hazards in the Territory come in all shapes and sizes.

Territorians love a good 'croc' story and love to laugh at the stupidity of people who take risks around crocodiles. Monster crocodiles exist in large numbers in many parts of the Territory. During the 1970s they were hunted almost to extinction. However, protection from hunting has resulted in a rapid growth in the population and they can and do eat people.

Take care, obey the signs and don't dance on top of crocodile traps.

In addition to monster size reptiles, there are a number of interesting smaller organisms that can be equally, if not more, deadly than the cheerful croc.

It is extraordinary that gardening in the Tropics can be fatal. Bacteria living in the soil can cause a disease called Melioidosis. People working in the garden with no shoes or gloves (as is common because of the heat) can pick up the bacteria through cuts or cracks in their skin. At least two or three people die each year in Darwin due to Melioidosis. Gardening can kill!

In addition to Melioidosis, mosquito bites can cause Ross River Fever and Barmah Forest Fever. Dengue Fever lurks in Queensland. Biting midges or sandflies can cause great discomfort in tropical areas. Bites from these virtually invisible insects can cause tremendous itching and result in sores from constant scratching.





Box Jelly Fish in northern sea waters will cause painful and possibly life-threatening stings. So, regardless of the heat, don't go swimming in the sea – it's too dangerous.

And then there are the tropical ulcers. Of course, you are thinking that ulcers are something that only affects old people. Remember the heat and humidity - wonderful breeding conditions for bacteria. What might start as a small sore can quickly turn to a gaping, painful, pus-filled wound that grows daily and will not heal without medical treatment.

Skin rashes are common place and prickly heat can be debilitating. Those prone to eczema or have sensitive complexions may be very uncomfortable in the tropics.

Apart from bacteria and viruses, there are the creepy, crawly parasites that can invade the skin and hair. Some of these parasites, like head lice and scabies, are an Australia wide problem. However, remember that some climatic conditions can provide ideal conditions for growth and infection.

Also, don't forget the less exotic and humble fly. Flies have been known to drive people to distraction and, ultimately, back to the city (where the flies are more sophisticated going to the theatre, art galleries etc).

So if you are thinking of working in the tropics or in the Outback, be prepared to pack up your immune system, review your hygiene practices and take extra care with your health, physical and mental.





## Section 9 – FUN, FITNESS & LAUGHTER

The availability of sporting, community and social activities may play an important role in your adjustment to remote living. Opportunities will vary considerably between different locations and areas. Some locations may have well established sporting facilities and programs. Others may have very little.

Check facilities in advance particularly if you regularly pursue a sport or hobby that requires specialist facilities or equipment.

Living in bush communities will require a level of self sufficiency in entertainment. It will help if you have a capacity to make your own entertainment and not rely on theatres, dining out and regular contact with friends.

At the same time, however, it may be possible to establish social activities with co-workers and other members of the community. Those who make some effort to develop appropriate and meaningful connections with the community are more likely to maintain positive social and emotional health.

Stress can be a big issue in remote work. Read up about warning signs, prevention and management. Think very, very carefully about going remote if you are prone to stress.

If you can, laugh a lot. Dealing with any challenging or new experience will be helped if you don't take yourself or the situation too seriously. Remoteness can lead to quirky adaptations to usual activities. If you enjoy 'quirky' this is a good sign.

Fixed, rigid attitudes will not be helpful particularly regarding matters over which you are likely to have little control.





## Section 10 – ISOLATION & CABIN FEVER

If you have never experienced living outside a metropolitan area, it may be difficult to conceptualize remoteness.

In some areas, factors such as flooding or distance can severely restrict mobility. These restrictions can hit hard if there is an urgent need to return to 'home' due to family ill health, bereavement or other issues.



You've probably heard of the term 'Cabin Fever'. More than likely it is not an official medical term. However, it is worth noting some of the anecdotal symptoms of being physically confined to one area.

Some people report a sense of claustrophobia, boredom, anger and irritability. Tempers flare. It can be particularly frustrating if planned holidays are thwarted by climatic conditions or other factors.

At times you will have no choice but to stay – you can't get out. It won't be possible to 'complain to the Manager' and demand better service. It just won't happen. The climate and conditions will dominate and prevail. How are you going to deal with this powerlessness?

Again, underlying problems with stress, depression or other mental illness may well be exacerbated by isolation. Think about how this may affect your health and the health of those around you.



## Section 11 - LIVING IN A DUSTY FISHBOWL

Small communities often mean that, for want of other 'entertainment', your actions and activities may be closely scrutinized.

There you are, seemingly 'isolated', but finding that all your movements are noticed by others within the community. This can be disconcerting for those accustomed to their privacy or those who just 'want to be alone' in their free time.

Shutting yourself away in your home is one option but is likely to reflect social and emotional ill health with people probably thinking you're a bit weird.

Choice of friends and companions can be limited. People with high social needs may find it difficult to fill the large chunks of time when there are few social events on the calendar.

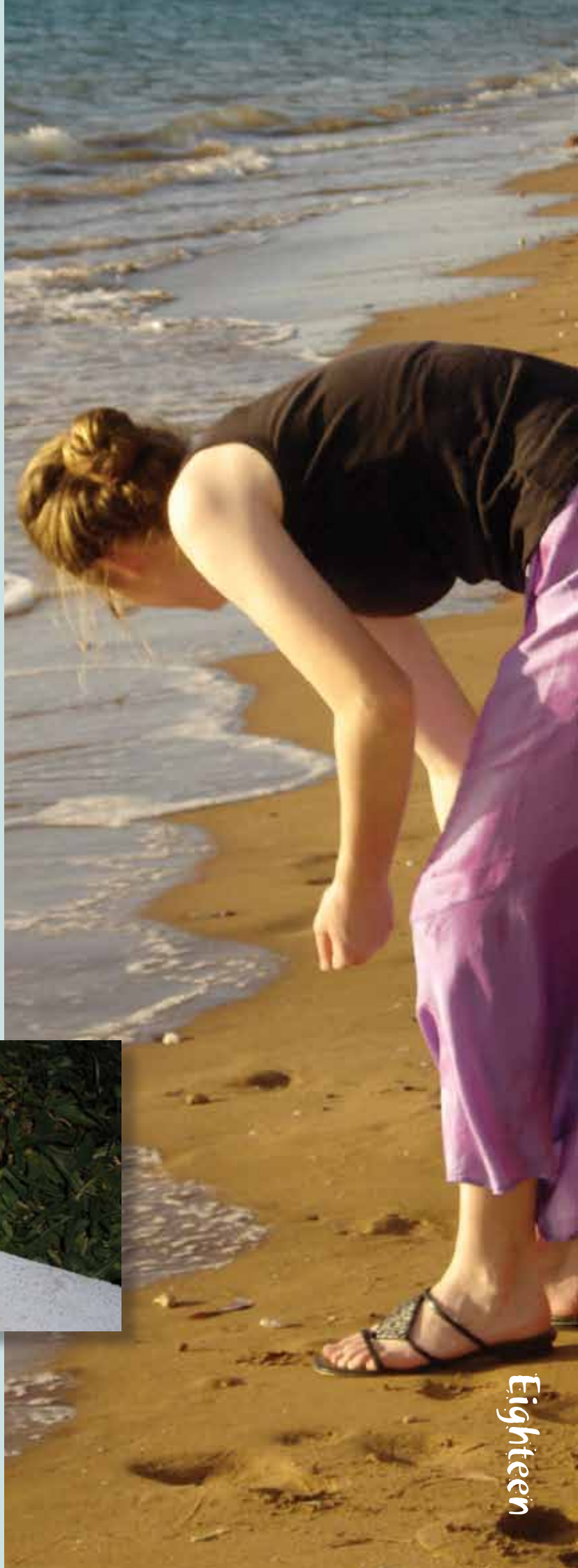
So again, in apparent contradiction, you will need to be content with you own company but also willing to participate in local social opportunities. These interactions may also be with people who would not, under other circumstances, be part of your social circle.

A quick word about romantic liaisons.

Yes, romance is always a possibility in any situation. However, again remember that your actions will be noticed.



Think about appropriate behaviour. Think about whether the relationships you develop would withstand relocation to other contexts.





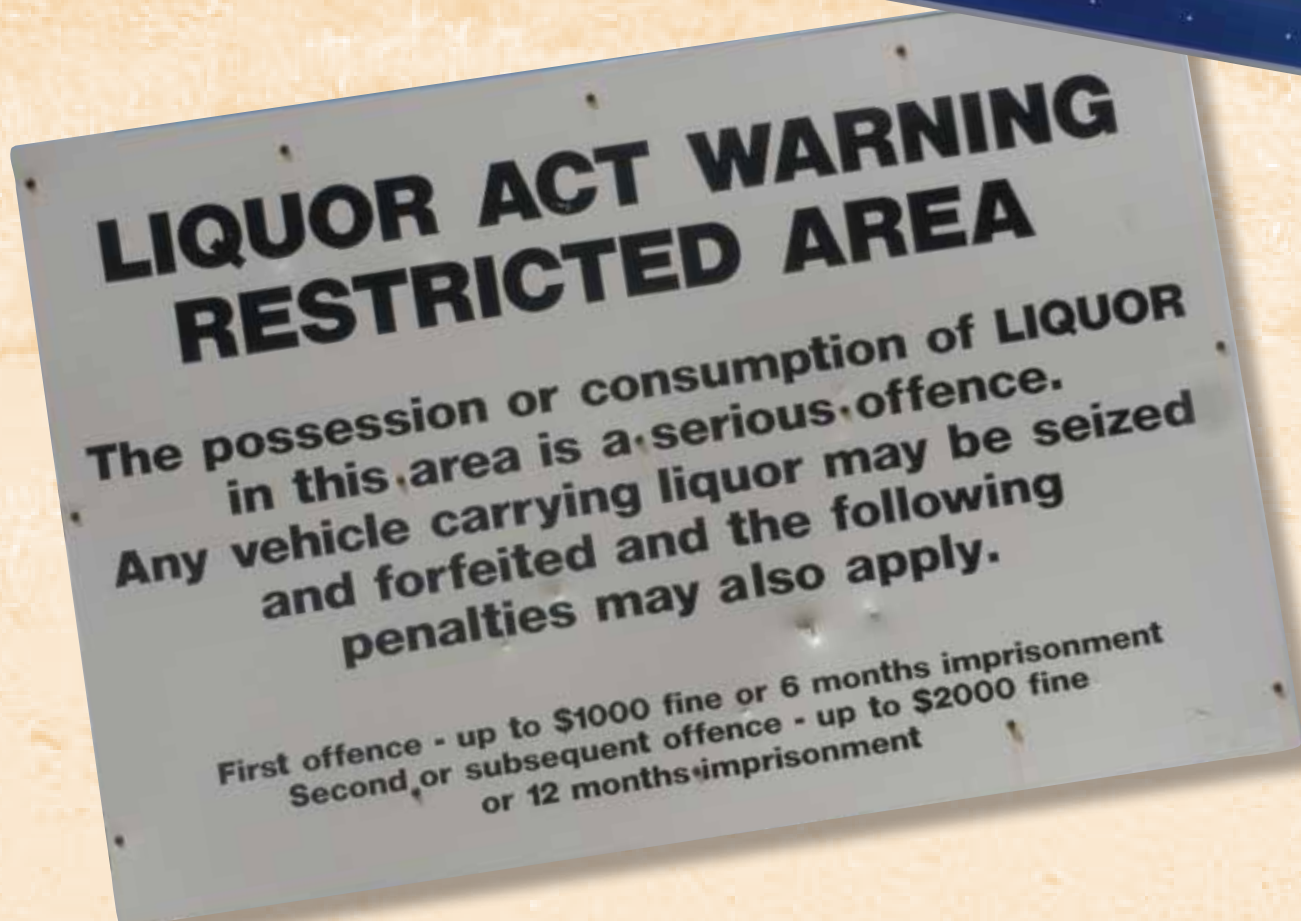
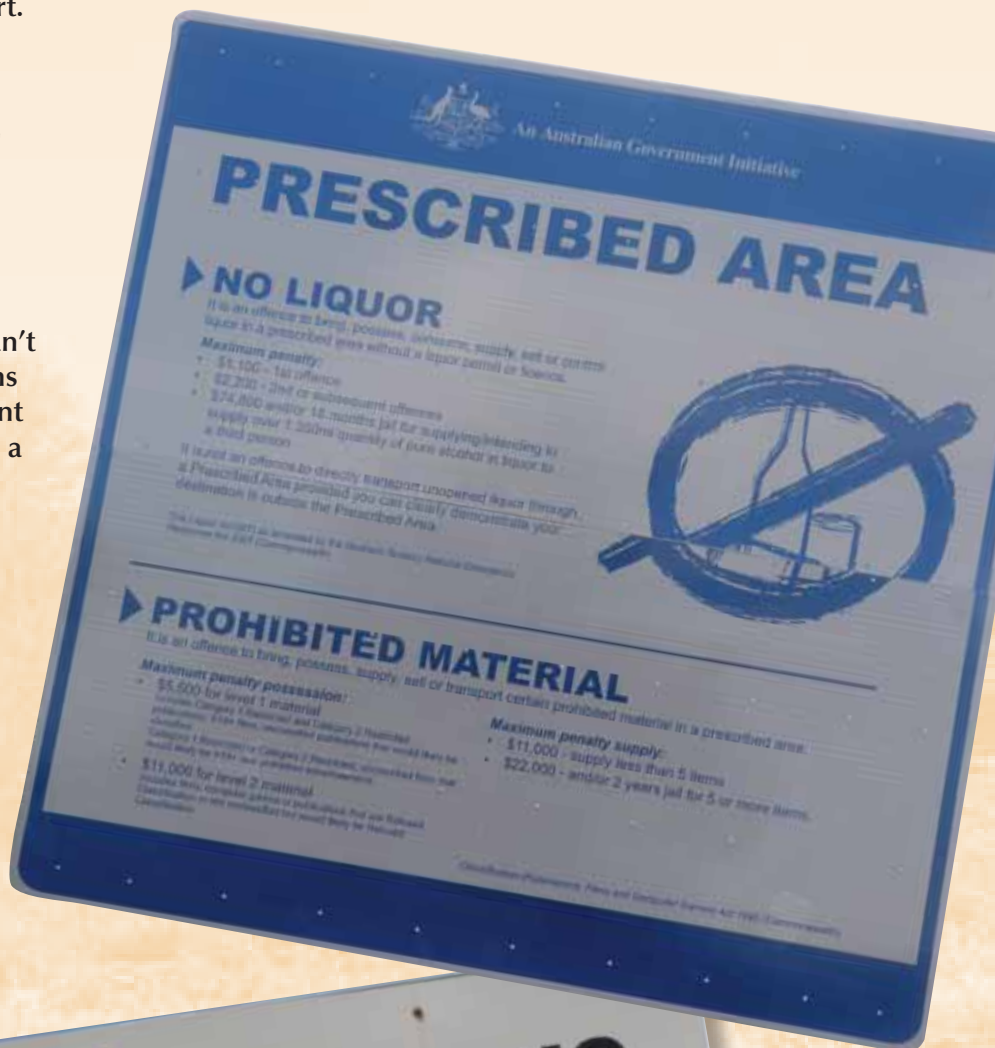
## Section 12 – DRY AREAS

No, I am not referring to the desert.

If you have a close and familiar relationship with alcohol you may have difficulty in maintaining your friendship with the substance in some parts of the Territory.

Some areas within the NT have restrictions on the sale and consumption of alcohol. If you can't go a day, a week, or several months without a drink, it will be important to find out if your destination is in a 'Dry' area.

Severe penalties along with social criticism will be imposed if you breach alcohol restrictions.





## Section 13 – CHEEKY DOGS

Along with the wildlife, some remote communities can have a significant number of camp dogs. These dogs can be in good or poor health.

Some people with a heightened sensitivity to animal welfare issues can become distressed by the condition of some camp dogs.

Dogs that are becoming a bit aggressive can be referred to as 'cheeky'.

Carrying a stick to ward off unwanted attention from cheeky dogs may be necessary in some communities.



*This is a dingo not a camp dog.*



## Section 14 – CHANGING PERSPECTIVES

Working in remote areas will be a journey into possibly quite different physical, social and cultural environments.

Remote experience is likely to expose you to different ways of life and different ways of doing things. This can be rewarding but also confronting and challenge previously held beliefs.

If you have not travelled outside metropolitan areas of Australia, it can come as a bit of a surprise to find that others may have different approaches to life.

Over your lifetime you may have developed life skills and strategies that work for you. When others choose different strategies or have different lifestyles, it can be difficult to understand why they don't adopt your way of doing things.

If you are non-Indigenous and intend to work in an occupation within an Indigenous community, it is possible that your way of life and way of doing things will not be the dominant views of that community.

You will be part of a minority and your views, values and professional expertise may not automatically be viewed as the best way of doing things.

Learning about Indigenous culture will be an essential element of learning to adjust to living in remote areas of the Northern Territory.







‘The Little Red Yellow Black Book’ prepared by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies is a useful starting point for greater understanding of Indigenous culture in Australia.

There are likely to be many opportunities to participate in cultural awareness training activities. However, mere awareness may not be sufficient. The aim ultimately will be to become culturally competent – able to function effectively in Indigenous cultures. Identifying a potential cultural ‘mentor’ may assist with this learning.

Considerable reflection about your own culture, values, personality and previous experiences may be useful to providing clues about your capacity to work collaboratively with the variety of people you will meet in the Bush.

Whatever happens, your perspective on life will be stretched. This is a good thing.



## Section 15 – LOOK & LISTEN

Scenario – You invite a guest into your home, someone you have only just met. Your guest immediately and very loudly in an opinionated manner, advises you on everything that is wrong with your home and how you are managing your life. The guest then leaves saying he/she doesn't want to visit you anymore.

How do you react? Ignore the guest? Tell the guest to, "Go away"? Take pity on the guest's ignorance and insensitivity?

Arguing with the guest is not an option as the guest is so fixed in his/her opinions.

If you go Bush, are you going to be the insensitive, ignorant guest?

Initially, look, listen and keep your opinions to yourself until you have a real understanding of the nature of the work, the environment and the people you meet.

It can take months, or a lifetime, for you to really understand the basic issues about people and place.





## Section 16 – PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Will the nature of the work be different in remote areas? Yes and No.

Nurses often report that they are more autonomous in their work in remote Health Centres. They also commonly feel more valued as part of a team because the remoteness requires reliance on pooled expertise in challenging isolated circumstances.

It can also mean that their clinical knowledge must be very broad – they need to be across a broad range of clinical issues, procedures and medications.

Autonomy has its drawbacks. While some people thrive on increased responsibility, others can find it daunting to be required to deal with issues that can be beyond their usual level of expertise.

Often the hours can be long as the nurse may be the only person available to assist with medical (and sometimes veterinary) issues. The nursing role can be stretched beyond usual practice. Consultations may need to be conducted over the phone and there can be a need to complete full health assessments. Will you be OK with this? Out Bush, the clinical practice will be full of variety – don't expect hum-drum and boring.



Experienced remote practitioners cite good listening skills as being important in remote practice. Attitudes that are tolerant and not condescending are also important. The skill in judging when and when not to compromise will be invaluable.





Teachers who teach in Indigenous communities may find that skills in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) will be required. Regular class attendance by some students can be an issue, along with very diverse needs within the classroom. Have you had some real experience in dealing with diversity, and a range of learning needs?

Additionally, teachers may need to engage effectively with Assistant Teachers in a collaborative manner. Sometimes this can be a challenge for teachers who are used to being in 'charge' or insisting on being the dominant authority. The capacity to collaborate with others will be an important skill to develop.

It helps if you have consolidated your teaching skills after graduation with classroom experience. New graduates can feel overwhelmed with the challenge of living remotely, teaching students with ESL needs as well as the usual settling into the profession.



### **Support**

Mutual professional support can be a critical coping strategy. Don't be shy in establishing your own networks, as well as accessing the formal support structures. Sometimes a simple phone call can make a huge difference to how you deal with an event, an incident or just the general day-to-day issues of isolation.

Increasingly, more sophisticated professional development and support services are available to teachers and nurses out Bush. Find out about the various avenues for professional and emotional support, along with the support available for general living issues.

While you may be physically isolated you will not be alone in your profession. People also often develop strong bonds with co-workers through the shared, unique experience.

### **Professional Boundaries**

Regardless of your profession, it will be useful to develop a fairly clear concept of the boundaries of your role within any given community.

Generally, it is advisable not to get too involved in local politics or community issues. Likewise, it's not good to become too emotionally involved in the lives of patients or students as this can create difficulties in your professional practice. Always remember your primary purpose which is your occupation/profession.

Rigid aloofness is not appropriate but be careful about becoming too immersed in daily issues.

Expect to work hard. It is hard work and, at times, hard living. However, the rewards can be immense and last a lifetime. Inherent rewards can be experienced if you are the catalyst for even small progress in your students or patients.



## Section 17 – MOTIVATIONS

Exploring your motivation for wanting to go to remote areas may be illuminating.

As mentioned, many people want to 'make a difference'. This is a noble reason but needs some qualification.

The negative side to making a difference is exhibited by those who 'want to change the world'. Experienced practitioners shake their head and sigh when referring to people who demonstrate excessive zeal in their desire to make changes.

Those who want to change the world often crash and burn in the face of the layers of complexity relating to living in remote areas of Australia.

Be prepared to be content with miniscule achievements of change. If you can make a difference to one person's life through diligent professional conduct be satisfied with that important contribution. It is unlikely, and undesirable, for you to try to change entire social and political systems.

The Bush can also be appealing to those who wish to 'run away and hide'. Some people with a difficult past or poor social adjustment can sometimes mistakenly believe that remote living will provide less scrutiny of their lives. Yeah, right! At some point, those behaving oddly will come to the attention of their employer or the community.

Is it the money that is attractive about work in distant parts of the country? Well, yes, there is compensation for remote work. However, will this motivate you to maintain high professional standards in challenging circumstances? Probably not. People who just want to exploit the situation for financial gain will also not go unnoticed and are unlikely to last long in the Bush.





Some people report that they love being part of a community. They like being recognised, known (and liked) by others in a small community. Not all people are accepted and liked. It can take some time for you to develop your credentials so don't expect instant acceptance.

For some people going remote provides an ideal opportunity to complete further study (as long as there is good computer/internet access). The long periods of isolation can be filled by cramming the cranium and accumulating more qualifications.

Those who have experienced mental health issues should consult medical advice before heading out to an environment that is likely to be tough on mind and body. The medical advice should come from a practitioner who has detailed knowledge of the nature of remote work.

It may be difficult to access appropriate medical support for mental health issues in remote areas of the country and this is likely to cause difficulties for both you and those around you.

In the end, aim to be one of the good practitioners - altruistic but also realistic.





## Section 18 – LET'S TALK ABOUT YOU

Practicalities aside, it will be important to think about your unique qualities as a person.

What type of person adapts well to work in remote areas? Are you the type of person who will survive and thrive?

Long-term practitioners with many years of experience observing the comings and goings of various professionals refer to some key characteristics.

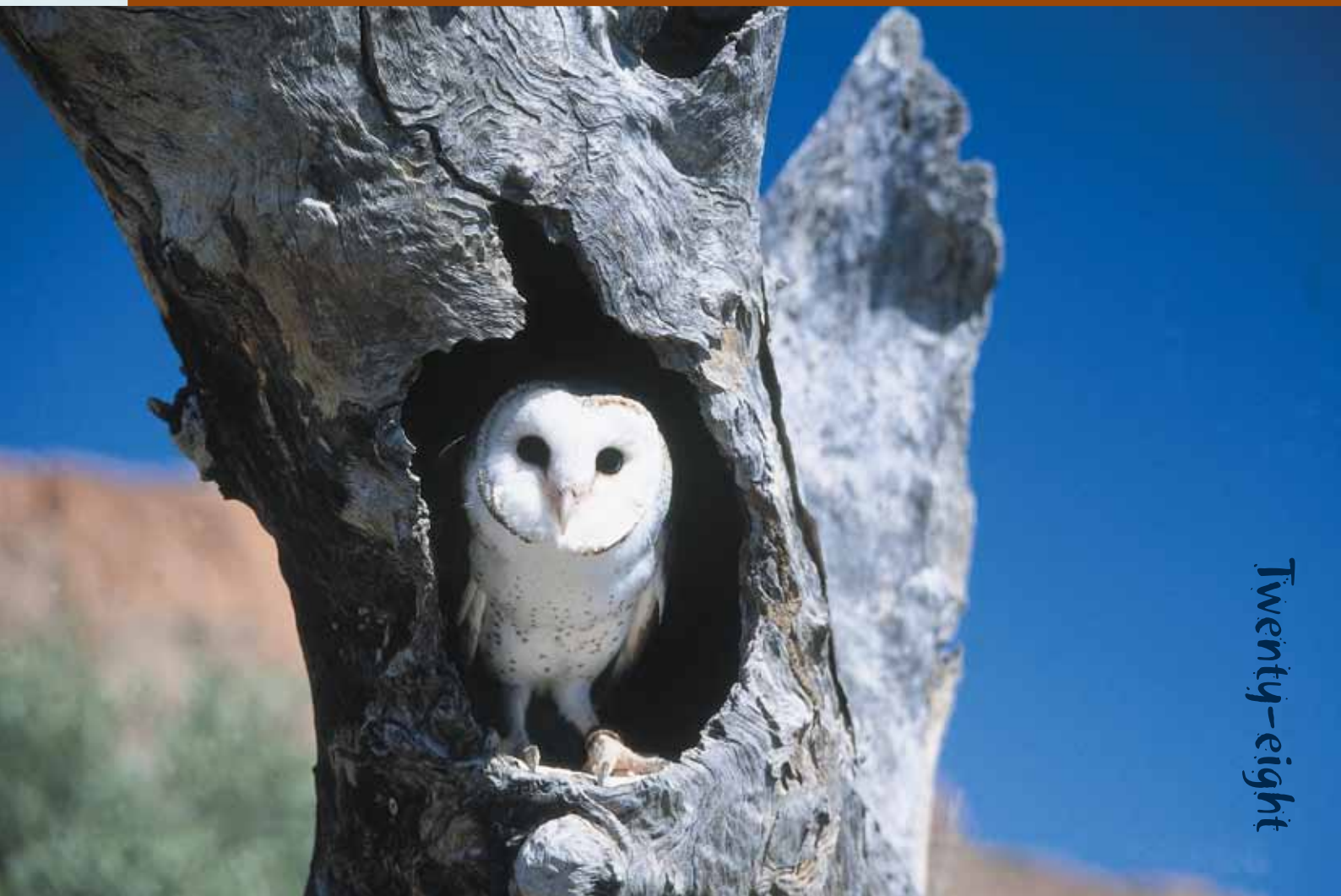
Adaptability and flexibility top the list. Rigid views, rigid expectations, rigid plans are likely to come unstuck in the Bush. Are you easily upset if things don't go to plan?

The big 'R' is mentioned frequently – resilience, the capacity to bounce back after set-backs that could be personal, professional or social. How easily do you pick yourself up if things aren't going your way?

Being organised is up there too. It may seem to contradict adaptability and flexibility but planning can actually help in the preparation for unexpected events. Do you live in the moment or do you have an eye for what will be happening next week, next month or next year?

A strong sense of self and a positive self image. Being aware of your personal qualities and being OK with yourself is helpful. Without a strong sense of self, you are likely to get buffeted by the effects of isolation and challenge.

Along with a strong sense of self is a genuine respect for others and other cultures. It just won't work if your sense of social justice is superficial or only applies when you are in your comfort zone.







Often those who do well in remote areas are capable of seeing options and alternative ways of doing things (are creative) rather than imposing solutions that suit other contexts.

Practical skills will come in handy. Theorizing and talking about changing a tyre will not get the job done.

It can be difficult to predict who will meet the challenge of work in remote areas. Sometimes the most unlikely people can function well and succeed in making a difference or making a contribution.

Remote work requires special qualities and skills.

Dig deep and think carefully about the choice you are about to make.





## Conclusion

So, are you game? Are you adaptable, resilient, independent, sensitive, practical, strong in heart and mind, tolerant, organised, respecting of others, resourceful and a lateral thinker?

Then give it a go. Go Bush. Go Outback. Go to the Red Centre. Go to the Tropics (but don't go Troppo).

If possible, have a go before you go. If you are able to complete a remote placement as an undergraduate, seize the opportunity. Remember though, not all areas are the same. The insight gained from one experience may not translate to another location.

Ask questions (of yourself and others) before you go. Examine your lifestyle and assumptions about availability of goods and services. Don't assume anything and develop a checklist. Get basic and think of fundamental needs: food, water, shelter, hygiene, communication and transport. Ask before you go. Visit if you can.

Have an idea of what it's going to be like but expect that you won't really know until you get there.

If you do go, your life will be richer. Hopefully, you will enrich the lives of others.







*Respect local knowledge with regard to potentially dangerous conditions.*

#### FURTHER READING:

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (2010) *The Little Red Yellow Black Book*. Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra

<http://lryb.aiatsis.gov.au/>

Web-site includes useful educational resources.

Howard, D. and Ferguson, A. (1999). *More than Just a Nurse*. Territory Health Services, Darwin

Kelly, Kerrie. (2002) *Avoiding Burn-Out in Remote Areas: Surviving the Day to Day Hassles: A Guide for Remote Health Practitioners*. Council of Remote Area Nurses of Australia Incorporated. Asprint Alice Springs

National Rural Health Students Network (2008). *When the Cowpat Hits the Windmill* Melbourne

Shaw P, (2009) *Seven Seasons in Aurukun*. Allen & Unwin, Sydney

#### WEBSITES:

Charles Darwin University  
Northern Territory Department of Education & Training  
Northern Territory Department of Health & Families

[www.cdu.edu.au/careers](http://www.cdu.edu.au/careers)  
[www.det.nt.gov.au/](http://www.det.nt.gov.au/)  
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