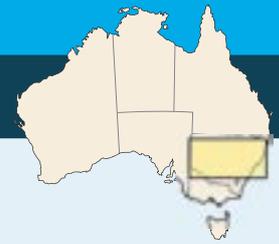


Your great Australian journey starts here

COUNTRY NSW



Length: 7–12 days Fly/drive option: Broken Hill, Sydney

From the Blue Mountains to the red plains, this tour takes in spectacular sandstone escarpments and then rolls towards Broken Hill, where you can surround yourself in outback-inspired art. Turning south from the Silver City you'll pass through an unearthly landscape at Mungo National Park before journeying alongside two of Australia's mightiest rivers, the Murray and Murrumbidgee, for the drive back towards the coast.

Country NSW – Travel Times	
Route	Distance Duration
Sydney – Dubbo	423 km 5hrs 40mins
Dubbo – Cobar	296 km 4hrs
Cobar – Broken Hill	454 km 6hrs
Broken Hill (via Pooncarie) – Mildura	394 km 5hrs
Mildura – Wagga Wagga	572 km 7hrs 30mins
Wagga Wagga – Sydney	437 km 6hrs



Travel tips

Autumn and spring are the main tourist seasons in the NSW outback. Summers can be searing, but the parched conditions can make for some of the best bird-watching among the lakes of Kinchega National Park.

Underground stays at White Cliffs are very popular, and motels and B&Bs few, so book ahead.

Websites

- www.riverinatourism.com.au
- www.visitoutbacknsw.com.au
- www.austrialbluemountains.com.au
- www.visitbrokenhill.com.au
- www.visitmildura.com.au
- www.visitthay.com.au
- www.visitnsw.com.au

A Blue Mountains

This drive begins in great style, climbing into the World Heritage-listed Blue Mountains (www.austrialbluemountains.com.au). The true blue art here is as colourful as the Blue Mountains' name; try the **Norman Lindsay Gallery** (www.normanlindsay.com.au) in Falconbridge, and the paper and ceramics collections at Falls Gallery (www.fallsgallery.com.au) in Wentworth Falls.

For natural art, see the falls that give Wentworth Falls its name, spilling 300 m down the escarpment. Ahead, near Blackheath, is Bridal Veil Falls, the highest in the Blue Mountains.



Blue Mountains

The road across the top of the Blue Mountains threads between the Jamison Valley and Grose Valley, each framed in high sandstone escarpments, and there are myriad opportunities to experience **classic views**. You can admire the rocky prongs of the Three Sisters from Echo Point, take your pick of breathtaking **walking tracks** (www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au),

or ride the world's steepest incline railway and world's steepest cable car in and out of the Jamison Valley (www.scenicworld.com.au). Beyond this, there are activities and adventure aplenty, including **canyoning, abseiling, rock climbing and mountain biking** (www.visitbluemountains.com.au; www.bluemts.com.au).

After the Great Western Highway climbs to its high point at Victoria Pass, the descent towards the outback begins. Beyond Hartley you can veer south to the **Jenolan Caves** (www.jenolancaves.org.au), where there are nine show caves and a wealth of underground features.

From Lithgow it's a short detour to another Blue Mountains wonder: the **Zig Zag Railway** (www.zigzagrailway.com.au). Built in the 1860s, it descends in a series of Z-shaped sloping tracks, with reversing stations. The train runs daily.

B to **C** Lithgow to Broken Hill

It's a direct drive west from Lithgow to Bathurst (www.bathurst.nsw.gov.au), where you can admire the city centre's Victorian styling, visit the home of former prime minister Ben Chifley or, if Bathurst invokes images of V8s, pay homage at the **National Motor Racing Museum** (www.nmrm.com.au) beside the Mt Panorama circuit.

For a couple of great outings from Bathurst, venture north to the former gold towns of Sofala and Hill End – the latter wonderfully preserved, the other all but abandoned – or south to the Abercrombie Caves (www.jenolancaves.org.au).

There are more gold-rush reminders in Ophir (www.orange-nsw.com), the site of Australia's first real gold rush. You can fossick through the recreation reserve, where nuggets are still occasionally found.

Orange (www.orange-nsw.com) is known as Australia's Colour City for the beauty of its autumn deciduous hues. If the colours you prefer are red and white, there are also around 20 **wineries** in the area.

Take another subterranean stop at the **Wellington Caves**. Cathedral Cave – one of two show caves – contains one of the largest stalagmites in the world.

In Dubbo (www.dubbotourism.com.au), the standout attraction is the **Western Plains Zoo** (www.zoo.nsw.gov.au), containing more than 1000 animals from across the planet. You can spend the night in wild company with a Roar and Snore sleepover or a stay in the African-style Zoofari Lodge.

The country opens up beyond Dubbo, with Nyngan, Cobar and Wilcannia like stepping stones west. At the Nyngan Museum (www.nyngan.com), you can relive the massive 1990 flood, and beyond the copper-mining town of Cobar (www.cobar.nsw.gov.au) you can explore **rock art** in the overhangs at Mount Grenfell Historic Site (www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au).

At Wilcannia, a former river port on the banks of the Darling River, turn north off the Barrier Highway, driving for an hour through classically dry outback country to White Cliffs (www.centraldarling.nsw.gov.au).



Western Plains Zoo



Mutawintji National Park

In this character-filled opal town, you can sleep in an **underground motel** or B&B, and tour the solar power station and the underground homes open to the public. Don't miss Jock's Place on Turleys Hill.

The unsealed drive from White Cliffs to Broken Hill skirts the flame-red land of Mutawintji National Park (www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au). Entry to the Mutawintji Historic Site, containing some of the country's finest **rock art**, is by guided tour only: Mutawintji Heritage Tours (08 8088 7000) are conducted on Wednesday and Saturday. There is a park **campground** near the visitor centre.

C Broken Hill and surrounds

Continue south to Broken Hill (www.visitbrokenhill.com.au), the Silver City, an outback icon and art treasure in one. The city offers a great window on outback life, with **tours** available of the Royal Flying Doctor Service and School of the Air. You can also venture underground once more, this time into Delparts Mine for a glimpse at Broken Hill's subterranean raison d'être.

In more recent times Broken Hill has become a thriving arts centre, supporting more than 20 **galleries**, including the Pro Hart Gallery and Jack Absalom's Gallery. Outside town you can wander the whimsical art shapes in the open-air Living Desert Reserve. There's even art on the walls of a pub – Mario's Palace, immortalised in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*.

Venture out to Silverton, 25 km north-west. Once a thriving town, it's enjoying a silver-screen renaissance –dubbed 'Hollywood of the Outback', with films such as *Mad Max II*, *A Town like Alice* and *Dirty Deeds* filmed here. You'll find a list of every film shot here in the Silverton Hotel, as well as photos of the shoots and a vehicle from *Mad Max*.

Check out the galleries around town and tour about on **camelback**; treks from a few minutes to a couple of days are operated by Silverton Camel Farm (08 8088 5316).

C to D Broken Hill to Mildura

The journey back towards Sydney begins with Menindee and **Kincheha National Park** (www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au), which embraces the Menindee Lakes and the Darling River. Menindee is famed as Burke and Wills' last civilised stop on their ill-fated expedition. Toast their bravado at the Maidens Hotel, where they stayed.

Kincheha is a watery magnet for birds – its lakes and river attract more than 180 recorded bird species. Be sure to check out the Kincheha homestead and woolshed, remnants of the former Kincheha Station. **Accommodation** is available in the shearers' quarters (08 8080 3200), or there's great lakeside and riverside **camping**.

Turn south for **Mungo National Park** (www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au) and you'll witness one of the country's most unearthly landscapes: Lake Mungo's 33 km dune-crescent topped with eroded clay towers. Known as the Walls of China, it's both beautiful and remarkable, yielding some of the country's finest prehistoric finds – bones of giant creatures as well as the 40,000-year-old remains of Mungo man and Mungo woman.

For more recent history, there's Mungo Woolshed, constructed from termite-resistant white cypress. There are two **campgrounds** within the park, or you can stay just outside the park at Mungo Lodge (03 5029 7927).

It's a short journey south from Mungo to Mildura (www.visitmildura.com.au) and the Murray River.



Mungo National Park

D to **E** Mildura to Hay

Celebrate your arrival at Australia's most famous river with a **paddle-steamer cruise** (www.visitmildura.com.au) or a few days on a **houseboat** (www.visitmildura.com.au). At the Regional Art Gallery (www.milduraarts.net.au) you can see one of regional Australia's finest collections, with works from Frederick McCubbin, Arthur Streeton and even an Edgar Degas pastel.

The lakes of **Hattah-Kulkyne National Park** (www.parkweb.vic.gov.au) are nearby. If you're after a different-coloured fluid, **Mildura Brewery** (www.mildurabrewery.com), inside the former Astor Theatre, produces four naturally brewed beers.

Journey east along the Murray River to Robinvale, a town all but encircled by the river, picking up necessities for the drive ahead at Robinvale Organic Wines (www.organicwines.com.au) and Kyndalyn Park Almond Farm, the country's largest **almond farm**.

At Hay (www.visithay.com.au), set amid the saltbush of the famously flat Hay Plain, you can comb through the displays at **Shear Outback** (www.shearoutback.com.au), which includes the Australian Shearers' Hall of Fame, or venture north to the former One Tree Hotel, among the loneliest and most evocative of outback buildings.



One Tree Hotel

E to **F** Hay to Goulburn

From Hay the drive follows the Murrumbidgee River into Narrandera (www.narrandera.nsw.gov.au) and Wagga Wagga (www.tourismwaggawagga.com.au), NSW's largest inland town, where you can watch Clydesdales strut their stuff at the Aurora Clydesdale Stud (02 6928 2224) or view Australia's most comprehensive collection of studio glass at the **National Art Glass Gallery** (www.waggaartgallery.org).

Pay a visit to Wagga Wagga Winery (www.waggawaggawinery.com.au) or, for an educated drop, the **cellar door** at Charles Sturt University Winery (www.csu.edu.au/winery/).

Complement the culinary experience with a quick trip north to the Junee Licorice and Chocolate Factory (www.greengroveorganics.com).

Swinging onto the Hume Highway, the drive passes through Gundagai and Yass. In Gundagai (www.gundagai.nsw.gov.au), pay respects to the mighty Dog on the Tuckerbox and wander across Prince Alfred Bridge, the country's longest timber viaduct. For an unexpected bush treasure, check out Rusconi's Marble Masterpiece, a model cathedral made from more than 20,000 pieces of marble, in the Gundagai Tourist Centre.

Yass (www.yass.nsw.gov.au) was once the home of explorer Hamilton Hume, and you can visit his long-time home, Cooma Cottage, and the Hamilton Hume Museum, or you can stride out on the long-distance **Hume and Hovell Walking Track** (www.lands.nsw.gov.au).

If you're taken by historic characters, venture north to the charming village of Binalong, where A.B. 'Banjo' Paterson spent his early childhood. His father's grave is in the village cemetery.

F to **G** Goulburn to Sydney

You'll know you've hit Goulburn central (www.igoulburn.com) when a 15 m high merino stares down at you. Climb inside the Big Merino to view the city from the windows that are its eyes.

Goulburn boasts some fine colonial architecture, from its Classical Revival courthouse to the Old Goulburn Brewery, dating to 1836. **Brewery tours** are available and you can sample the real ales still brewed here.

The drive into Sydney is across the Southern Highlands (www.southern-highlands.com.au), which offer plenty of reasons to delay finishing the journey. Near Moss Vale, detour to the impressive Fitzroy Falls, which tumble 82 m over the sandstone escarpment. Wander the **walking tracks** atop the cliffs for a variety of views onto the falls.

Nearby is Berrima, a tiny town with big ideas, as evidenced by its striking courthouse, the Surveyor General Inn (said to be Australia's oldest continuously licensed pub), and one of Australia's largest bookstores, the Berrima Book Barn (www.berkelouw.com.au), with around 300,000 second-hand books.

Bowral equals Bradman, and you can journey through the Don's life and remarkable cricket achievements at the Bradman Museum. (www.bradman.org.au). If you're in Bowral in spring, check out the Tulip Time festival (www.tuliptime.net.au) in the Corbett Gardens.

Take the road out from Bowral over Mount Gibraltar for **great views**, before returning to the Hume Highway and the final drive back into Sydney. ■