Headline: Australia’s Outback a geological playground

Deckhead: Landmarks, waterholes, majestic scenery, wildlife define desert

Synonymous with a steakhouse, the “real” Outback often doesn’t get the respect it deserves. The arid landmass comprises most of Australia. From an aerial view, it’s brown and yellow. Up close, it’s stunning and intriguing.

The Outback is more than 2.5 million-square miles of vast geological wonders. Canyons and mountain ranges grab your attention. Cliffs and waterfalls steal your senses. Hiking and camping challenge your stamina. And unique wildlife species wander the area.

Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park is one of the Outback’s prime destinations. Ayers Rock is the main attraction and one of its most recognizable landmarks. Photos may capture its beauty, but its essence is best experienced in person.

Kings Canyon is a massive gorge. Its cliff walls stand more than 300-feet high and offer majestic views in all directions. A Kings Canyon Rim Walk is essential upon visiting. It’s nearly four miles in length and requires an initial climb of 1,000 steps to the top of the canyon. There are several places to stop along the way and absorb the massive scenery.

You’ll encounter the Lost City – a series of sandstone domes – which resembles the structure of an ancient town. Cotterill’s Lookout offers amazing sights and Garden of Eden is a permanent waterhole and has one of the Outback’s most striking staircases.

Kakadu National Park is the largest of its kind in Australia. Known for its majestic waterfalls, it also has several types of landforms that include cliff walls, gorges and floodplains. Koolpin Gorge Track, Nawurlandja Lookout, Barrk Marlam Walk and Twin Falls Plateau Walk are pathways that lead to the best sights.

It only seems appropriate that the Outback would have a bizarre side to it. Devils Marbles Conservation fills that role. Round rock formations precariously sit atop one another. Erosion and weathering has changed the shapes of the granite stone to resemble marbles. Unusual, indeed.

The surprises don’t end with stone marbles. The Outback also has pristine swimming holes. Simpson Gap, Stanley Chasm, Ellery Creek and Serpentine Gorge comprise a bevy of waterholes. Cool off after an intense day of hiking and take a break from remembering you’re in a desert.

Had enough hiking? Mereenie Loop Road allows you to witness the Outback by vehicle. The road links West McDonald Range and Kings Canyon. It slices through aboriginal land. Mountainous landscapes light up your eyes from the comfort of a vehicle.

Oodnadatta Track, meanwhile, is a multi-day drive that follows the abandoned Ghan rail line with several stops, including uninhabited ruins, salt lakes and natural springs. Lake Eyre, Wabma Kadarbu Mound Springs, Coward Springs and Hergott Springs are main stops. All capture the essence of the Outback.

Centuries of erosion have added mystical colors to the low hills of Breakaway Conservation Park. The overlooks are ideal places to watch the sunset. A colorful sky rests above unique rock formations, adding flavoring to their delectable appearance.

And don’t forget to admire the wildlife. The Outback is loaded with geological features, but the animals are equally as amazing. Australian feral camels roam the territory, along with wild hogs, a variety lizards and snakes – perhaps steer clear from the snakes – crocodiles and kangaroos.

The Outback is a wondrous land. You’ll find magnificent landmarks and many species. Just don’t expect a blooming onion.

Cutline: GORGE-OUS – Kings Canyon is an overwhelming sight in the Outback. Image: boyloso. Adobe Stock.