



transformed into a vast sea during the Wet as the inland rivers empty their contents into the Cambridge Gulf.

THE DETAILS Qantas and Virgin Blue have regular flights to Darwin and Perth. Both Airnorth and Skywest service the Darwin-Kununurra route and the Perth-Broome-Kununurra route. You can rent a 4WD in Kununurra; Europcar has a large selection (europcar.com.au). El Questro Wilderness Park is open from April 1 to October 31. The Cockburn Range 4WD circuit tour costs \$227 per person; 30-minute scenic helicopter flights cost from \$185 per person (08 9169 1777; elquestro.com.au). Willis's Walkabouts (08 8985 2134; bushwalkingholidays.com.au) offers a two-week Green Kimberley tour, which includes seven days bushwalking in the Cockburn Ranges. — SALLY WEBB

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BARRINGTON TOPS, NEW SOUTH WALES

WHAT IS IT? With steep ridges, wild streams, and rainforest wilderness, Barrington Tops National Park is a deserving recipient of its World Heritage status. The 74,000-hectare national park lies close to the well-travelled Pacific Highway, but the hour-long detour is far enough for the park to be bypassed by most travellers.

WHY IS IT OVERLOOKED? The Blue Mountains are a better-known World Heritage alternative, but those willing to go the extra distance, literally, will find the Barrington area reaps equal rewards, without the crowds.

WE LOVE IT BECAUSE ... even if it were filled with visitors, Barrington's natural environs would be worth the effort for a weekend or longer, any time from September to May. Crisp, clear waters tumble down from the 1500m-high plateau, the thick rainforest is magically still, and the lack of competition for the trails is a positive. From the Dungog entrance, Burruga Swamp,

tucked away high up in the hills, may be the jewel in Barrington's crown. Tree ferns and towering Antarctic Beech trees greet walkers on the short (30-minute return) trail, which turns more Tolkien-esque the further you go. The Williams River day area offers short tracks and swims in the crisp, clear waters. Hardier types should leave one car here and drive up Lagoon Pinch Road for the 7km, muddy, leaf-littered, Rocky Crossing walk. Allowing time for plenty of detours down the side tracks to the Pool of Reflection or Rocky Crossing itself captures the best of this trail, and a relative abundance of rare lyrebirds will reward many visitors to the whole Williams River area.

HOW TO GET THERE Fly to Newcastle where you'll need to rent a car (two-wheel-drives are sufficient) on arrival. From New Zealand, fly into Sydney, rent a car, and make the three-and-a-half hour drive north along the Sydney-Newcastle expressway (F3). Follow the Pacific Highway through Raymond Terrace to reach the park's entry points.

WHERE TO STAY Camping and bed and breakfasts are the best options. **Yeranda Cottages** (02 4992 1208; yeranda.com.au) are ideal for exploring the southern half of the park. Elouera (\$50-\$80 per person per night) is the most popular of Yeranda's four cottages. **Sunrise Cottage** (02 6559 1228; jacksonsfarmstay.com; doubles from \$150) is 30 minutes from Gloucester with visitors renting this three-bedroom house enjoying 607 hectares in which to relax. **Eaglereach Wilderness Resort** (02 4938 8233; eaglereach.com.au; doubles from \$210) is an upmarket alternative though it's more than an hour's drive into Dungog or Gloucester to the park.

DON'T MISS About an hour's drive from Gloucester through the rainforest park, Devils Hole Lookout offers magnificent views over the sweeping Barrington Plateau. In winter, the 1400-metre-high site (and its much appreciated barbecue area) receives snow, so check if the snow gates are locked before you visit.

THE DETAILS Qantaslink, Jetstar and Virgin Blue fly to Newcastle. Both Tourism NSW (visitnsw.com) and the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (nationalparks.nsw.gov.au) have extensive information on the National Park. **Barrington Outdoor Adventure Centre** (126 Thunderbolts Way, Gloucester; 02 6558 2093; boac.com.au) offers guided trips and bike, canoe and kayak rental. One-day tours cost \$130 per person.— SUE WHITE »

This page and opposite: the lush ethereal setting of Barrington Tops.

