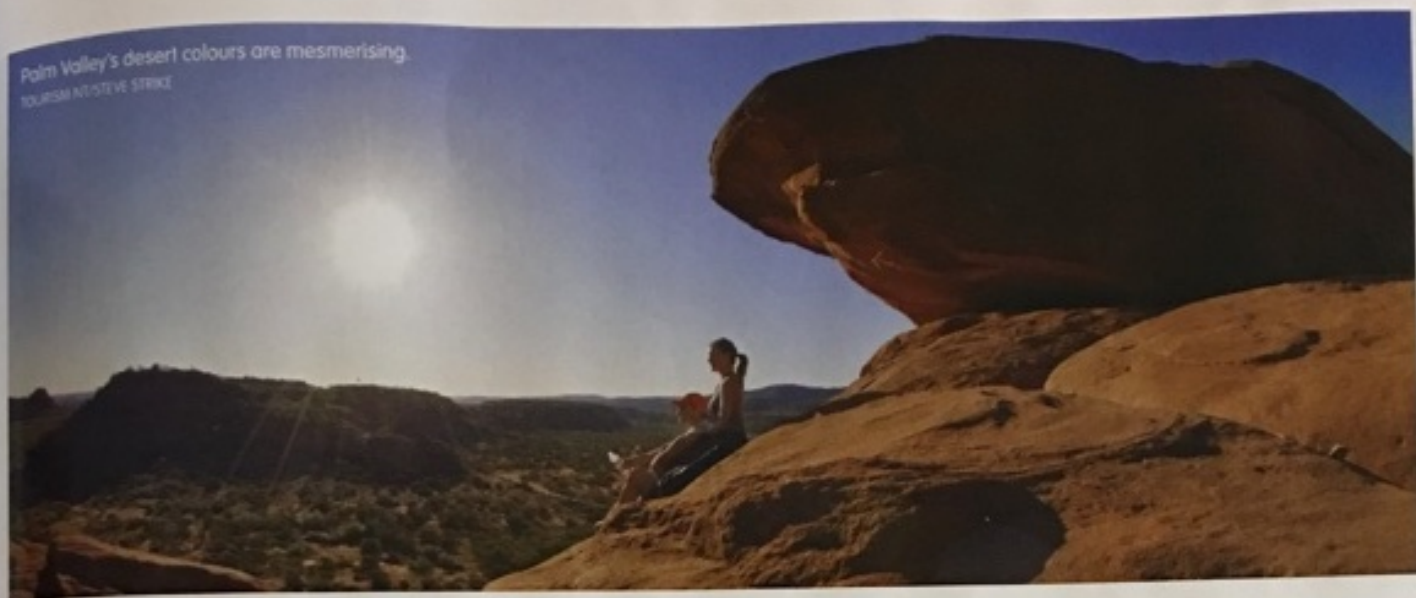


Palm Valley's desert colours are mesmerising.
TOURISM NT/STEVE STRICK



PERFECT PANORAMAS

Great Walks discovers a canvas of desert colours on a Palm Valley day walk.

WORDS **LINDA BOTTING**

CENTRAL Australia holds many mysteries; such as the exotic palm trees of Palm Valley, a 2hr, west of Alice Springs. However, the valley is only accessible in a high clearance 4WD so you can navigate the rocky offroad terrain through Finkle Gorge NP. Once in the valley, there are three trails which vary in length for a beginner, and can easily be included on a day trip.

Your first stop is Kalarranga lookout, a 1.5 km uphill walk which takes about 40 minutes. It's not too steep, but it prepares you for the Palm Valley trails. Once at the top, 360° views of the amphitheatre are your reward as you try to spot the Pangkalanga Devil Man, an Arrernte Dreaming character, hidden in the sandstone rockface.

The Arankaia and Mpulungkinya walks both start another half an hour away. At the day use area, leave your 4WD, and head off onto the trails clearly distinguished by coloured arrows; orange for Arankaia and blue for Mpulungkinya. Give your quadriceps a workout as you start up a 45° angle of sandstone rock.

The Arankaia (fan palm) Trail takes you along the rim of the valley where you can look down onto the mysterious red cabbage palms (*Livistona mariae*) lining the Finkle River. You will come across several noticeboards along the trail which provide information on how the land was a gathering place for the Aboriginal people.

A few metres along, another noticeboard talks about the European explorers who passed through the valley of palms likening it to a botanical garden. Keep a look out for native animals that wander freely in the area; including land snails, carpet pythons and emus.

Several metres along you will come to the Mpulungkinya Trail junction, signposted by a blue arrow. You have a choice to make; left or right? Left will take you the longer way around through a landscape of green and grey bushland.

The native ghost gums you pass under complete a picture perfect canvas which inspired Aranda artist Albert Namatjira, the first internationally recognised Aboriginal artist from Central Australia, to paint his watercolour masterpieces.

Watch your step as you again give your legs a workout down moderately steep, rocky terrain to the valley floor. This is where you meet the Arankaia Trail again to walk under large, green, fan shaped leaves which can grow up to 2m long. The palm trees grow to 25m high and more noticeboards tell you how they came to be in such an arid climate. It was not until 2012 when researchers from the University of Tasmania discovered the palms were the same species as those in North Queensland and Mataranka near Katherine.

Their findings confirm notes made in 1894 by Carl Strehlow, a German missionary from Hermannsburg. Strehlow accurately documented Aboriginal lore of how the Aranda and Arrernte people returned to

WALK NOTES

PALM VALLEY, FINKE GORGE NATIONAL PARK, NT

The Kalarranga Walk: 1.5km loop/easy

The Arankaia Walk: 2km loop/easy

The Mpulungkinya: 5km loop/easy-moderate



Central Australia after the Ice Age, bringing with them palm seedlings to plant.

The trail continues 2km passed the sea of palms and it is like walking through a peaceful landscape of ochre, sandstone and red splashed with shades of green. Your walk ends back at the carpark to retrieve your 4WD, the mysterious red cabbage palms no longer a mystery. ☺

Need to know: nt.gov.au/leisure/parks-reserves