



Guts and glory in the outback

A new, immersive tour program has kicked off in Western Australia's outback Kimberley region, designed to recapture the glory days of pioneering settlers and the hardy lifestyle of Australia's legendary stockmen. Craig Sinclair reports.

THE CATTLE DRIVE TOUR is set in the same spectacular east Kimberley region that served as a backdrop for Baz Luhrmann's *Australia the Movie*.

Based within the boundaries of the expansive, Home Valley Station and its neighbouring outstations, guests travel with stockmen and cattle along the old stock routes, recreating the experience of the great Australian cattle drives of the early 1900s. The new *Kimberley Heritage Cattle Drive* takes guests on an authentic journey into the past, retracing the old stock routes and using the same stock camp locations as the pioneers did when moving cattle across the Kimberley, through to the port of Wyndham.

Home Valley Station's, Chris Fenech, said the event showcases a fascinating piece of Australian heritage. "This cattle drive opens a window into the past to experience a way of life that is now a great part of our cultural heritage," a quote he attributes to John Rodney, Home Valley's Pastoral Manager.

The program begins with a transfer from Kununurra to the famous Home Valley Station, where guests can enjoy the station lifestyle and take a refreshing swim in the pool, before being treated to a sumptuous outback dinner with entertainment provided by local Aboriginal musicians.

After a hearty country-style breakfast, the group then travels along the famous Gibb River Road for their first lessons in herding cattle and stock-horse handling, before taking to the trail accompanied by experienced drovers who are there to help fine-tune riding skills and point out local points of interest along the route. Nights are fun-filled and relaxed with an opportunity to refuel with a good meal and live entertainment, while sharing campfire stories, before turning in for the night in classic outback-style accommodation – a comfortable swag under a blanket of stars. The next three days are spent in the saddle, mustering cattle along the old Barclay Stock Route, through the breath taking New York Valley and Karunjie Track to the port of Wyndham. Along the way, stockmen recall tales of pioneering heritage, while Aboriginal drovers tell stories of the meaning of the land.

At the end of the drive, the weary but happy novice musterers are returned back to Home Valley Station for a final evening of celebrations, to recall their experiences and farewell new friends. "This is more than just an ordinary cattle drive, it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to learn new skills, discover things about yourself and get a rare insight into a part of northern Australia that very few others will ever get to see.

"It's a rare experience to be able to recreate history like this, while enjoying a very personal encounter with this little-visited part of Australia," said Fenech. "This drive is an all-new event, and interest to date would suggest it will become an annual iconic Australian experience."

The drive is limited to a maximum of 20 riders on each leg of the sector of the cattle route, so bookings are essential.

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