



Gurrambalk Accommodation

Gapuwiyak and Yolŋu Cultural Protocols

While in Gapuwiyak and staying or working at Gurrambalk Accommodation, you are requested to observe and work within Yolŋu protocols.

Remember you are a guest on Yolŋu land.

DIFFERENT WORLD VIEWS

Yolŋu perceptions, priorities and preoccupations are different from those of mainstream Australia. Be patient, and try to leave at home your expectations of how things are learnt, and how events should run. Traditionally Yolŋu learn by observation, by looking and listening. Asking too many questions can be seen as being lazy, invasive or inappropriate. So, when you have questions, choose them carefully and thoughtfully.

OLD PEOPLE

Treat the old people with the greatest of respect – they hold the knowledge and the power.

DRESS

Please be conscious that dress standards in Gapuwiyak may often vary from what is considered acceptable at your home. By dressing conservatively, you will avoid the possibility of causing offence.

Too much skin on display or tight clothing can draw inadvertent attention that is not appropriate. Women generally wear longer, loose and flowing skirts with a singlet or t-shirt.

It is also important to protect yourself from sunburn, sunstroke and dehydration. Plan a sensible wardrobe, practical and covered shoes and include a hat and sunscreen to protect you from the elements.

VISITING HOMES

Respect Yolŋu people's personal space. If visiting someone's home it is polite to approach slowly and to call out from the gate.

People usually will not enter someone's yard unless they have been invited to do so. Walking a little way into the yard in order to be heard is usually OK but be aware there may be cheeky dogs who do not take kindly to strangers. It is best to be accompanied by a Yolŋu person when visiting.

It is usually regarded as invasive and rude to walk straight up to the front door and knock.

WALKING AROUND

Sticking to the roads and walking paths is important to ensure you're not stumbling across cultural space. Ask if there are any restricted areas.

It is unusual for a Yolŋu person to go for a walk on their own. Usually people have a 'bamara' or companion with them. If you want to walk for exercise, it is always best to go with someone.

This is about showing respect for culture and the land and it is also a safety issue. Wild buffalo wander in the bush around Gapuwiyak and sometimes in the town itself, and there is almost always the possibility of crocodiles near waterways.

WALKING OR JOGGING FOR EXERCISE

If you want to walk, jog or run for exercise, most people walk or jog around the airstrip. It is about 3 km around the outside. It is always a good idea to exercise with a companion, and to wear loose and discrete clothing e.g. wear loose, longer shorts even over bike pants and/or a long, baggy t-shirt. It is also a good idea to carry water with you.

THE LAKE

Usually you may walk and sit freely on the community lawn area in front of the lake but do not to walk around the lake unless you are accompanied by a Yolŋu or local person. Ask first if you are not sure.

Some parts of the lake are sacred. Although children sometimes swim in the lake, it is not generally not regarded as a good idea. This is for a number of reasons including the possibility of crocodiles, the quality of the water, and out of respect for the land and water of the lake.

ROAD BLOCKS

Roads may be blocked for ceremonial purposes. This can happen in the town and also out bush. In the township, there will often be a sign saying 'Ceremony' – but not always. Road blocks may be wheelie bins or a log across the road. Never drive around a purposefully built road block. If you are not sure – ask a Yolŋu person before you proceed.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Please exercise courtesy and sensitivity when taking photographs. Always seek the permission of the subjects if taking close-ups, or photographs of small groups. Do not photograph children unless a parent or adult has given you permission. Never upload photos onto the internet or social media without express permission.

DRIVING, SWIMMING OR FISHING IN NEARBY AREAS

You should always check and ask permission of land owners before you venture onto their country. If you want to go out bush, it is best to go with a Yolŋu person or family. Make sure you have local permission to be on country, even if you have a permit from the NLC.

There are some good fishing spots and nice freshwater swimming places nearby that you can visit. Ask a local and follow their directions and advice. Again, it is always best to go with a local, especially the first time.

Always ask if there are any crocodiles in the area.

CROCODILES

Crocodiles inhabit freshwater and saltwater areas in Arnhemland.

Always take great care when near waterways. If you don't know, ask and check about crocodiles before going to a swimming or fishing hole.

There is always the chance of crocodiles in Arnhemland water ways – BOTH freshwater and saltwater crocodiles inhabit freshwater billabongs, swamps, creeks and rivers.

Saltwater crocodiles are also found in mangrove areas, estuaries, beaches and the sea.

CHEEKY DOGS

Dogs pretty much rule the roads in Gapuwiyak and will not move for anyone. So be careful if you are driving around.

There are some 'cheeky dogs' in Gapuwiyak. These dogs can be aggressive towards people walking past. It's a good idea to ask Goŋ-Däl or local people if there are any cheeky dogs around you need to be aware of. Nearby locals or owners will usually intervene and help control the behaviour of 'cheeky' dogs. Ask people for advice or assistance if you are worried. You can carry a thin 'walking' stick as a deterrent but the best way to avoid cheeky dogs is to drive.