

# Swimming with Crocodiles

Northern Territory  
Australia



So there we were. Alone and wet with a 4.5 metre dinosaur looking at us

by Keith Cardwell



I packed my spare shirt and undies, camera and toothpaste and went on holiday to a place thin on dive shops and scuba stuff. As much as a scuba addict as I know I am, every now and then I try and get well away from toggling up to blow bubbles and head for the hills. Or the outback at least. This time around I compromised and went to Kakadu via Darwin.

Darwin, at the top end of Australia has many things going for it but one of its most recent attractions, nestled in the heart of the main township is a place

called Crocosaurus Cove. This is made up of several aquariums, pools and a gift shop.

After entering there's a walkway that imitates a grotto with an aquarium of the local (huge) freshwater fish like barramundi and sawfish. This comes out into daylight showing a line of pools containing several of the most feared animals in Australia; the salt water crocodile or 'saltie'. For bringing on that spine chilling dread of imminent death when seen close up, snakes in comparison come about as close to this as an irritating mozzie.

So I just had to swim with one. Sort of. In this factory of living dinosaurs you can be lowered into a series of pools, each occupied by a huge 'saltie'. Although assured by the staff that the 'cage of death' we were to be swimming/snorkelling in was made of thick, transparent but unbreakable material, the clearly ambitious scratches on the sides made me think ... 'well of course they'll say that'.

The first couple of minutes found us gritting our teeth and before being lowered in we spent time giving the 'cage' a visual check-over that a paranoid building inspector

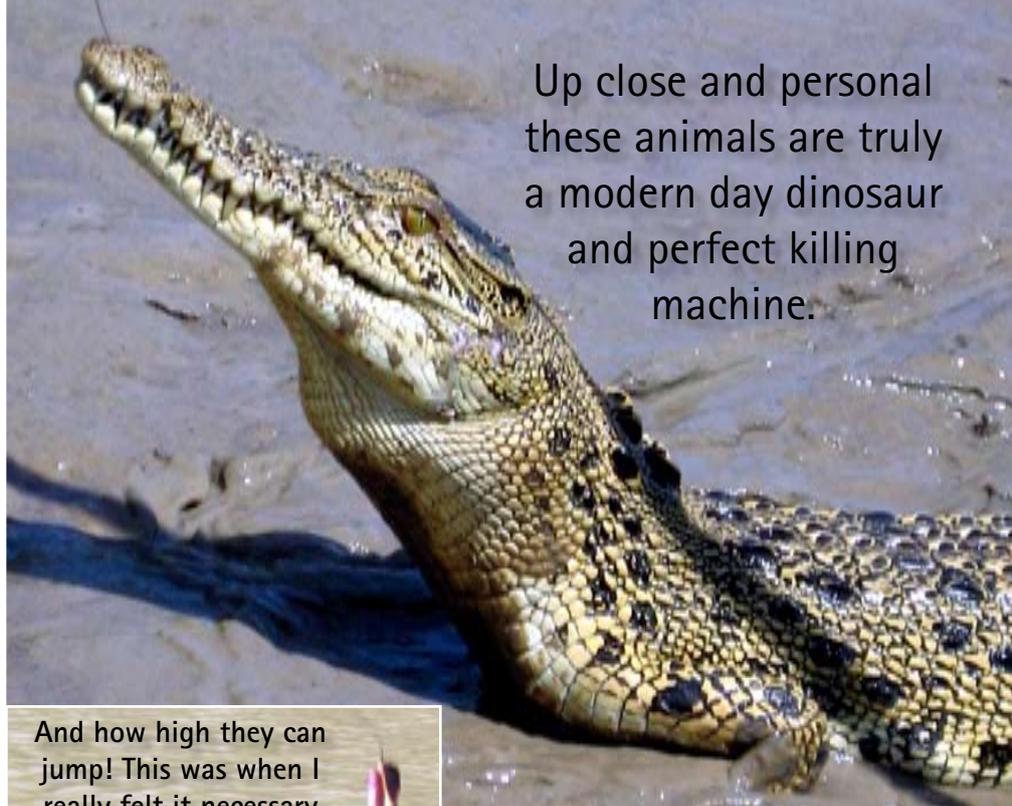
would have been proud of. Solid bolts here, thick enough chain there, and if it broke, would the top stay on, would we drown or have to swim for it? The mind boggled.

So there we were. Alone and wet with a 4.5 metre dinosaur looking at us. Moving lazily off the bottom it meandered around the cage looking deceptively as harmless as my Labrador dog, obviously curious but in no way hostile.

The other two pools we were lowered into were crocodiles that were giving a fair impression of being dead and could obviously tell that we weren't an easy lunch. It was about this stage that the gritted teeth we started with were making way for loud insults about their sleeping habits and the gentle testing of the walls we'd made earlier gave way to bashing them in an attempt to get some activity. All fear was gone; replaced by the insane desire to be wanted for lunch after all.

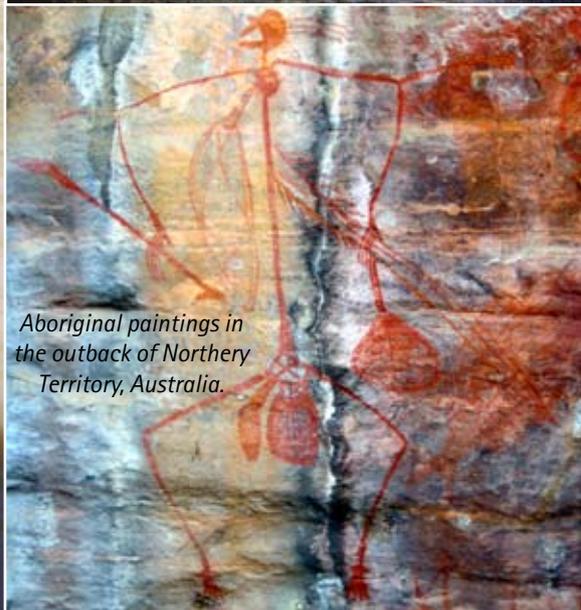
With activity all but stopped we moved on. Our journey continued as we went on to check out what these blighters were like in their own (real) habitats. Choosing a company that is still entitled to toss these little darlings titbits in the wild and essentially tampering with the natural order of things, we went on the hunt for crocodiles that wanted to trade food scraps for photos. They didn't let us down. And how high they can jump! This was when I really felt it necessary to keep my limbs well inside the boat and vowed that I'll be even more circumspect when diving the freshwater waterways that I've become so fond of in the far north of Queensland. Up close and personal these animals are truly a modern day dinosaur and perfect killing machine. You wouldn't have a chance.

So for a change of pace, if you ever want to come face to face with what must be the most frightening animal on earth (besides that bank manager you owe money to), pack your bags and head for the 'top end' of Australia. And unless you are in a boat with high sides and your limbs well tucked in, don't get too close to the edge of any waterway.



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