

World Heritage Places - Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park



Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park was inscribed on the World Heritage List in two stages, initially for its outstanding universal natural values in 1987 and then for its outstanding universal cultural values in 1994.

Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park was one of 15 World Heritage places included in the National Heritage List on 21 May 2007.

The immense rock formation of Uluru and rock domes of Kata Tjuta are remarkable geological and landform features set on a sand plain. They have special significance to the Anangu people as their Tjurkurpa (traditional law).

The *Tjurkurpa* is an outstanding example of an Indigenous philosophy. It is founded upon a time when heroic beings, who combined the attributes of humans and animals, camped and travelled across the landscape. As they did, they shaped and created the features of the land. The actions of the heroes established the code of behaviour, followed by Anangu today, which regulate all aspects of life, from foraging behaviour and management of the landscape to social relationships and personal identity. It is expressed in verbal narratives, through lengthy *inma* (song cycles and associated ritual), through art and through the landscape itself. For Anangu the landscape is the narratives, songs and art of the *Tjurkurpa*.

Uluru is a huge, rounded, red sandstone monolith 9.4 kilometres in circumference rising to over 340 metres above the plain. Rock art in the caves around its base are further evidence of the enduring cultural traditions of Anangu.

About 32 kilometres to the west of Uluru lie the 36 steep-sided domes of Kata Tjuta. The domes cover an area of 3500 hectares with Mount Olga, the highest feature, rising to a height of 500 metres. This area is sacred under Anangu men's law and, as such, detailed knowledge of it is restricted.

The first European to sight Uluru was the explorer William Gosse in 1873 who named it Ayers Rock. The year before, Ernest Giles had named Kata Tjuta the Olgas, after Queen Olga of Wertemberg.

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More information (#a1)

Location

The park covers 1,325 km² of arid ecosystems and is located close to the centre of Australia in the traditional lands of Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara Aboriginal people (locally known as Anangu).

Description of place

The huge rock formations of Uluru and Kata Tjuta are remarkable geological and landform features, set in a contrasting, relatively flat, sand-plain environment. They are a part of an important cultural landscape and have special significance to Anangu.

The features of Uluru, Kata Tjuta and the surrounding landscape are physical evidence of the actions, artefacts and bodies of the ancestral heroes (*Tjukuritja*) who travelled the earth in creation times. These heroic beings, who combined the attributes of humans and animals, journeyed across the landscape creating not only its features, but also *Tjukurpa* (the law) - the code of behaviour followed by Anangu today. *Tjukurpa* regulates all aspects of life, from foraging behaviour and management of the landscape to social relationships and personal identity. It is expressed in verbal narratives, through lengthy *inma* (song cycles and associated ritual), art and the landscape itself. For Anangu the landscape is the narratives, songs and art of *Tjukurpa*.

Anangu learned how to patch burn the country from *Tjukurpa* of *lungkata*, the blue tongued lizard. Now, in conjunction with modern methods, the cool season practice of lighting small fires close together leaves burnt and unburnt areas in a pattern like a mosaic. This traditional knowledge is adopted as a major ecological management tool in the park. *Tjukurpa* also teaches about the location and care of rock holes and other water sources. Uluru is a huge, rounded, red sandstone monolith 9.4 kilometres in circumference rising from the plain to a height of over 340 metres. Rock art in the caves around its base provides further evidence of the enduring cultural traditions of Anangu.

About 32 kilometres to the west of Uluru lie the 36 steep-sided domes of Kata Tjuta. The domes cover an area of 35 square kilometres, with the highest rising to 500 metres above the plain. This area is sacred under Anangu men's law and detailed knowledge is restricted. These huge rock formations, their creek lines, waterholes and the surrounding sand country vegetation is an arid environment of enormous diversity.

The landscape is dominated by spinifex and low shrubs, with large desert oaks dotted on the sand dunes and plains. Sizeable areas of mulga woodland and other low shrubs also occur on dunes and swales. The alluvial flow areas at the base of the major rock formations support large bloodwoods, acacias and native grasses. Water holes and soaks provide restricted habitats for a number of rare and unique plant species. Larger stands of mulga and other acacias dominate the harder, wide, sand plain surrounding Uluru and Kata Tjuta.

Anangu's traditional ecological knowledge is critical to the ongoing scientific management of the species found in these habitats. The park is home to more than 150 species of birds and many reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates adapted to arid environments. A number of rare mammals are found here, including the hairyfooted dunnart, the sandhill dunnart and the mulgara. The mala, a significant *Tjukurpa* species, has recently been re-introduced. Reptile species are well adapted to this arid environment and are found in numbers unparalleled anywhere else in the world. Lizard species include the rare giant desert skink and Australia's largest lizard, the perentie, which can grow to a length of 2.5 metres.

The huge rock formations of Uluru and Kata Tjuta are remarkable geological and landform features set in a contrasting, relatively flat, sand-plain environment.

Management of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park

The inalienable freehold title to Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park was handed back to the traditional owners in 1985 and is held by the Uluru-Kata Tjuta Aboriginal Land Trust. The park is leased back to the Director of National Parks and is jointly managed under the direction of a Board of Management which has an Aboriginal majority representing the traditional owners. Day-to-day management is carried out by Parks Australia, a division of the Australian Government Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts.

Outstanding Universal Value (#a2)

- [World Heritage Committee information for Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park](http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/447) (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/447>)

World Heritage sites are places that are important to and belong to everyone, regardless of where they are located. They are an irreplaceable legacy that the global community wants to protect for the future.

The common feature of all properties inscribed on the World Heritage List is that they meet the requirement of Outstanding Universal Value. Outstanding Universal Value is defined as cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity.

The Australian Government worked with the Traditional Owners, the Anangu, and technical advisory bodies to the World Heritage Committee (IUCN and ICOMOS) to develop a retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value for Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. The World Heritage Committee adopted the retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value at its 44th session in July 2021 - [Decision: 44 COM 8E](https://whc.unesco.org/archive/2021/whc-21-44com-18-en.pdf) (<https://whc.unesco.org/archive/2021/whc-21-44com-18-en.pdf>).

Fact sheet

- [Understanding World Heritage: what is Outstanding Universal Value?](https://parks-heritage/heritage/about/world-heritage/outstanding-universal-value) ([/parks-heritage/heritage/about/world-heritage/outstanding-universal-value](https://parks-heritage/heritage/about/world-heritage/outstanding-universal-value))

A Statement of Outstanding Universal Value is the official statement adopted by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee (WHC) identifying the criteria under which the property was inscribed, including the assessments of the conditions of integrity or authenticity, and of the protection and management in force. The primary purpose of a Statement of Outstanding Universal Value is to be the key reference for the future effective protection and management of the property. When the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park was listed in 1987 and 1994 a Statement of Outstanding Universal Value was not required.

Brief Synthesis

Ananguku Tjukurpa kunpu pulka alatjitu ngaranyi. Inma pulka ngaranyi munu Tjukurpa pulka ngaranyi ka palula tjana-languru kulini munu uti nganana kunpu mulapa kanyinma. Miil-miilpa ngaranyi munu Ananguku Tjukurpa nyanga pulka mulapa. Tjukurpa panya tjamulu, kamilu, mamalu, ngunytjulu nganananya ungu, kurunpangka munu katangka kanyintjaku.

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There is strong and powerful Aboriginal Law in this Place. There are important songs and stories that we hear from our elders, and we must protect and support this important Law. There are sacred things here, and this sacred Law is very important. It was given to us by our grandfathers and grandmothers, our fathers and mothers, to hold onto in our heads and in our hearts ©

Nintiringkula kamila tjamula tjanalanguru. Wirurala nintiringu munula watarkurinytja wiya. Nintiringkula tjilpi munu pampa nguraritja tjutanguru, munula rawangku tjukurpa kututungka munu katangka kanyilku. Ngura nyangakula ninti – nganana ninti.

© **Barbara Tjikatu**

We learnt from our grandmothers and grandfathers and their generation. We learnt well and we have not forgotten. We've learnt from the old people of this place, and we'll always keep the Tjukurpa in our hearts and minds. We know this place – we are ninti, knowledgeable. ©

The sandstone monolith of Uluru and the conglomerate domes of Kata Tjuta, rise abruptly, to over 300 metres in height, above the relatively flat surrounding sandplains and woodland. Their changing colours provide dramatic views for visitors, shifting from different tones of red, violet and orange as sunlight, shade and rain wash across their flanks.

Far from coastal cities, the rich red tones of Uluru and Kata Tjuta epitomise the isolation, starkness and beauty of Australia's desert environment. When coupled with the profound spiritual importance of many parts of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, the natural qualities convey a powerful sense of the very long evolution of the Australian continent.

Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park has been home to Anangu people for tens of thousands of years, and contains significant physical evidence of one of the oldest continuous cultures in the world. Anangu is the term that Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara Aboriginal people, from the Western Desert region of Australia, use to refer to themselves. Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara are the two principal dialects spoken in UluruKata Tjuta National Park.

Traditional Anangu law, the Tjukurpa, is the foundation of the Anangu living cultural landscape associated with Uluru Kata Tjuta National Park. The Tjukurpa is an outstanding example of traditional law and spirituality and reflects the relationships between people, plants, animals and the physical features of the land. Tjukurpa was founded at a time when ancestral beings, combining the attributes of humans and animals, camped and travelled across the landscape. They shaped and created all of the features of the land and its landscapes. The actions of these ancestral beings also established a code of behaviour that continues to be followed by Anangu today. This code regulates all aspects of life, from gathering food and management of landscape to social relationships and personal identity. It is expressed in verbal narratives, lengthy Inma (ceremony and associated rituals and song lines), art and the landscape itself.

The landscape is imbued with creative powers of cultural history through Tjukurpa and related sacred sites. Powerful religious, artistic and cultural qualities are associated with the cultural landscape created by Mala, Lungkata, Itjaritjari, Liru and Kuniya ancestral beings. Within this landscape there is a gender-based cultural knowledge and responsibilities system, where Anangu men are responsible for looking after sites and knowledge associated with men's law and culture, and equally Anangu women are responsible for looking after sites and knowledge associated with women's law and culture.

Criteria

Criterion (v) to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change

The cultural landscape of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park is an outstanding living reflection of indigenous Anangu traditional hunting, gathering and other practices of great antiquity that have created an intimate relationship between people and their environment.

Criterion (vi) to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria)

The cultural landscape is of outstanding significance for the way it is perceived as the creation of Mala, Lungkata, Itjaritjari, Liru and Kuniya - these are heroic ancestral beings of the Tjukurpa. The landscape is read as a text specifying the relationship between the land and its Indigenous inhabitants, as laid down by the Tjukurpa. The monoliths of Uluru and Kata Tjuta are seen as living proof of the heroes' actions and their very being.

Criterion (vii) to contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance

The huge monolith of Uluru and multiple rock domes of Kata Tjuta (32 kilometres to the west of Uluru) have outstanding scenic grandeur, contrasting with each other and the surrounding flat sand plains. The monolithic nature of Uluru is emphasised by sheer, steep sides rising abruptly from the surrounding plain, with little or no vegetation to obscure the silhouette. The exceptional natural beauty of the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park landscape is also of cultural importance to Anangu.

Criterion (viii) to be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features

The inselbergs (steep-sided isolated hills rising abruptly from the earth) of Uluru and Kata Tjuta are outstanding examples of tectonic, geochemical and geomorphic processes. Uluru and Kata Tjuta reflect the age, and relatively stable nature, of the Australian continent.

Uluru and Kata-Tjuta demonstrate ongoing geological processes of remarkable interest. The sides of Uluru are marked by a number of unusual features which can be ascribed to differing processes of erosion. For example, the colossal geological feature described as Ngaltawata, a ceremonial pole associated with Mala Tjukurpa, is ascribed to sheeting of rock parallel to the existing surface. During rain periods, the runoff from Uluru cascades down the fissures forming waterfalls, some up to 100 metres high. Caves at the base of Uluru are formed by a widespread arid zone process of granular disintegration known as cavernous weathering.

Integrity

The geological values of Uluru and Kata Tjuta remain in excellent condition. Human impacts are largely confined to tourism activity around the base of Uluru and along the former path to its summit, as well as in residential areas. Invasive species (feral animals) are present, but management measures assist in containing them. Prescribed burning activities, guided by Anangu, help to maintain ecosystem integrity and cultural values and also reduce the likelihood of intense and large-scale wildfires.

Mining is not allowed in Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park.

Reintroduction programmes for threatened native species are being pursued to enhance the integrity of the property. The Mala or Rufous Hare-wallaby, an important species associated with the cultural landscape of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park and considered extinct within the park at the time of nomination, has been reintroduced.

Anangu living in the park help to maintain the landscape and Tjukurpa. The integrity of Anangu cultural processes, such as fire practices and bush food use is strong. Other associations, such as Inma (ceremony and associated rituals and song lines), stories, traditional skills and knowledge, health and healing practices and Anangu family and community connections are actively sustained. Places in the landscape related to these associations are also maintained, including the paths or tracks of ancestral beings, particular sacred sites, waterholes, rock art, places where Anangu lived long ago and sites connected to historic events or people.

The 1986 nomination file stated that both Uluru and Kata Tjuta were in a relatively pristine condition.

Some natural deterioration and some human impacts were noted in relation to some of the rock art and cultural sites at the time of nomination of the property under cultural criteria.

Authenticity

Tjukurpa, Anangu law and culture, has remained in place despite other changes since European settlement. Anangu culture remains strong because the Law is embodied in Tjukurpa through Inma, stories, songs, language, knowledge and other practices to look after the country. These elements continue to define the Anangu relationship to their land and each other.

Sustaining the authenticity of the property is related not only to these physical sites but also to the processes of interaction of Anangu with their environment, and to ensuring that visitors understand and respect these traditions. Tourist infrastructure impacts minimally on the landscape.

Anangu cultural heritage extends beyond Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park and working together with the traditional owners of the surrounding lands is critical for maintenance of the living cultural landscape and Tjukurpa, within and outside the Park.

Management and protection requirements

Joint management is the term used to describe the working partnership between the Anangu traditional owners and the Director of National Parks as lessee of the park. Joint management is based on Aboriginal title to the land and the terms of the lease of the land to the Director of National Parks, which are supported by a legal framework laid out in the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act). Under these arrangements Tjukurpa continues to help guide the management of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park.

Through joint management, traditional knowledge forms a key part of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park's management practices. This includes the use of traditional fire management to protect sacred sites, encourage regeneration of plants and provide food for animals. Water sources are also maintained using traditional practices.

The Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park Board of Management was established under the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1975 and continues under the EPBC Act. A majority of Board members must be Indigenous persons, nominated by the traditional Aboriginal owners of land in the park. The functions of the Board are to make decisions relating to the management of the park and, in conjunction with the Director of National Parks, to prepare management plans, monitor the management of the park and advise the Minister on all aspects of the future development of the park.

Australia has national legislation to directly protect its World Heritage properties through the EPBC Act. Since joint management arrangements began, significant historical management issues have been addressed in the management plan and management arrangements. This includes locating tourist accommodation and airport facilities outside of the Park. Access roads have been redirected so that visitors approach Uluru and Kata Tjuta from the "right way" providing culturally appropriate access. Interpretive materials and appropriate infrastructure protect the sacred places around the base of Uluru and at Kata Tjuta.

As a result of their significance, many of these cultural sites are protected from unauthorised entry and viewing, and there are guidelines in place on commercial filming and photography.

Climate change has emerged as a potential threat to Uluru-Kata Tjuta's World Heritage values and is likely to bring extreme weather and increase the risk of wildfire. Biodiversity, human health and Indigenous use of the park are all likely to be affected. Park managers are implementing some key measures to help mitigate the impacts of climate change, particularly through the fire management program. As part of these measures, the maintenance of Tjukurpa, including passing on this detailed knowledge, will be crucial.

Resources (#a3)

- [Location/Boundary plan \(PDF - 227.2 KB\)](#)
(/sites/default/files/env/pages/d285fa76-222b-4531-8914-964c55851332/files/105687.pdf)
- [Gazettal notice \(PDF - 67.56 KB\)](#)
(/sites/default/files/env/pages/d285fa76-222b-4531-8914-964c55851332/files/10568701.pdf)
- [Australian Heritage Database record for this place](#)
(https://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/ahdb/search.pl?mode=place_detail;place_id=105040)

- [Uluru-Kata Tjuta factsheet \(PDF - 855.59 KB\)](#)
(/sites/default/files/env/pages/d285fa76-222b-4531-8914-964c55851332/files/uluru-factsheet.pdf)
- [Map \(PDF - 225.13 KB\)](#) (/sites/default/files/env/pages/d285fa76-222b-4531-8914-964c55851332/files/uluru-map.pdf)
- [Protected Planet Database - Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park World Heritage Site](#)
(http://www.protectedplanet.net/sites/Uluru_Kata_Tjuta_National_Park_World_Heritage_Site)
- [Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park](#) (https://parksaustralia.gov.au/uluru/index.html)
- [World Heritage Committee information for Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park](#) (http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/447)
- [World Conservation Monitoring Centre](#) (http://www.unep-wcmc.org/protected_areas/data/wh/uluru.html)

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