NT Military Tourism Plan 2035



TOURISM & EVENTS NORTHERN TERRITORY



Darwin Military Museum

Nowhere else in Australia can visitors experience military history quite like they can in the Northern Territory (NT).

The NT's military story is not confined to museums or memorials. It is embedded in the landscape – in the airfields, bunkers, gun turrets, oil storage tunnels, crash sites and heritage precincts. It is a story of attacks on Australia soil, of service and sacrifice, of communities enduring extraordinary hardship and men and women who helped to defend Australia.

During World War II, the NT became Australia's frontline. Darwin and the Top End were transformed - military bases, airfields, camps, hospitals and defence infrastructure were established. The Bombing of Darwin brought war directly to Darwin and extended through Adelaide River, Batchelor, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs.

The story continues today. The NT plays a critical strategic role in national and regional security through its defence bases, international engagement and large-scale exercises such as Pitch Black. Few destinations can connect Australia's wartime past with its contemporary defence story in such an immediate and authentic way, shaped by events ranging from the Bombing of Darwin in World War II to the development of critical military infrastructure.

This creates an opportunity to establish military tourism as a distinctive part of the NT visitor experience – encouraging visitors to explore more of Territory, stay longer and spend more, while ensuring these nationally significant stories are preserved and shared with future generations.

This plan sets out a clear, long-term approach to realising that opportunity and establishing the NT as Australia's leading military tourism destination. The plan seeks to turn the NT's extraordinary military history into a stronger driver of visitation.

The Opportunity

The strength of the opportunity lies not only in attracting visitors with an existing passion for military history, but in making the NT's extraordinary military stories and experiences accessible to a much broader audience.

The NT has a significant opportunity to build military tourism into a distinctive and compelling part of the broader visitor experience. Unlike many destinations, the NT already has an established foundation of military tourism assets, including military heritage sites, museums, memorials, commemorative events, guided tours and digital storytelling initiatives. Together, these assets tell nationally significant stories spanning World War II, the Bombing of Darwin, Aboriginal contributions to defence and The NT's ongoing strategic Defence role.

Market research demonstrates a strong opportunity to introduce the NT's unique military history to a broader visitor audience. While there is an established market for those with a special interest in military and war history, many more visitors are likely to engage with these stories and experiences where they are accessible and integrated into a broader NT holiday – creating opportunities to drive regional dispersal, longer stays and increased visitor spend.

International Traveller Profile

Approximately 24% of international travellers are interested in war history experiences, with higher consideration of Australia as a holiday destination than the international average.

International markets demonstrating the strongest potential for NT military heritage tourism include:

- New Zealand – 31% interest
- United Kingdom – 30% interest
- Philippines – 30% interest
- Malaysia – 29% interest
- Hong Kong – 28% interest.

These markets also show strong cross interest with ancestry, religion and Aboriginal cultural experiences, creating opportunities for integrated product development and packaging.

- Younger travellers, predominantly 18–39 years
- Male skewed audiences (54% male, 46% female)
- Higher income travellers
- Working Holiday Makers, who have the highest level of interest (35%).

Domestic Traveller Profile

Domestically, 30% of Australians express interest in war history experiences (including battlegrounds and memorials), ranking military history 34th out of 89 tourism experiences nationally. Building on Australians' existing exposure to military history through education, commemorative events, national storytelling, and stronger promotion can turn awareness into a reason to visit and explore.

Interest strengthens considerably among:

- Visitors aged 50 years and over
- Male travellers
- Those already considering travel to the NT.

Notably:

- 32% of travellers considering the NT are likely to explore military or pioneering history while on holiday (compared with 17% of interstate travellers overall)
- 14% choose their destination specifically based on this interest
- 51% plan this activity prior to arrival, highlighting the importance of pre-trip marketing, itinerary integration and bookable products.

This reinforces the NT's competitive advantage in converting existing interest into visitation through clear product visibility and interpretation.



Military Mural Trail:
Featuring Gunner with Leading Aircraftman Percy Westcott

Vision and Objectives

By 2035, the NT is recognised nationally and internationally as Australia's leading destination for authentic World War II and defence-related tourism – a destination that embraces its unique military history, contemporary defence presence and way of life. Visitors can connect with well-preserved heritage sites, immersive experiences, commemorative events and contemporary defence activity, seamlessly integrated into the NT visitor experience.

Over the life of the plan, the NT will:

- Focus on the promotion of the Territory's unique World War II and defence history to domestic and international markets
- Develop immersive, accessible and bookable military tourism experiences unlike anywhere else in Australia
- Embed military tourism opportunities across priority sectors including education, cruise and events
- Protect, preserve and interpret existing military heritage sites right across the NT
- Strengthen partnerships with Defence, veterans, local government, Aboriginal organisations and tourism operators
- Deliver measurable economic, social and cultural benefits to communities by generating visitor expenditure, fostering community pride and participation and showcasing local culture, history and stories.

2026 (Foundation)

The plan will be delivered in stages. Years one and two focus on building strong foundations, while years three to 10 focus on expansion, consolidation and long-term sustainability.

Actions	Deliverables	Key activities
Establish strong governance and coordination	• Confirm ongoing role, membership and operating model of the NT Military Heritage Tourism Advisory Committee (NTMHTAC) • Align military tourism priorities across relevant NT Government agencies	• NTMHAC operating with agreed consultation
Lift product quality and accessibility	• Deliver funded projects to enhance military tourism experiences • Support operators to improve interpretation, accessibility and visitor experience standards • Support all relevant operators and sites to achieve comprehensive Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW) listings in military history products	• NT Experience Fund 2026-27 offers support to enhance military experiences
Expand immersive and digital experiences	• Progress development and delivery of augmented reality (AR) or digital storytelling pilots at priority sites • Enhance self-guided touring options using QR codes, GPS-triggered content and multilingual interpretation • Evaluate digital tools and refine based on visitor feedback	• Development of AR experiences in progress
Embed military tourism into itineraries	• Finalise and promote priority military heritage drive itineraries • Integrate military tourism experiences into the AI Trip Planner • Work with regional tourism organisations to package military tourism experiences within broader NT itineraries • Work with trade distribution partners to package and sell military tourism itineraries	• AI Trip Planner live with integration from ATDW listings • Bookable military packages via trade partners
Strengthen market presence	• Deliver a targeted military tourism marketing campaign integrated into broader NT tourism activity • Leverage key anniversaries and commemorative dates as campaign anchors • Increase storytelling through earned media, partnerships and digital channels	• Military marketing campaign delivered from February – June 2026 • Military marketing campaign delivered from November 2026 - 2027
Events and commemoration activation	• Explore opportunities for aviation-based event experiences that drive visitation and destination awareness (e.g. airshows) • Leverage existing events and commemoration activities including Bombing of Darwin commemoration, Pitch Black and other military exercises	• Engagement commenced with Department of Defence to leverage tourism opportunities for operators
Education and community engagement	• Continue inclusion of military experiences in NT Learning Adventures • Strengthen relationships with museums, schools and education travel planners • Increase awareness of military tourism experiences for schools and education travel planners • Support veteran and community storytelling initiatives where appropriate	• Deliver additional funding support to encourage interstate school groups to attend key military-related events
Aboriginal military history	• Strengthen recognition of Aboriginal contributions to military history • Undertake a thematic history to identify key themes and stories	• Partner with local businesses to leverage opportunities
Protect and prepare priority assets	• Finalise and action recommendations from the physical and digital site audits • Upgrade directional signage at and to identified military heritage sites • Improve visitor infrastructure at high-traffic locations	• Signage audit undertaken and upgrades in progress
Baseline measurement	• Establish baseline data for visitation, product supply, event attendance and digital engagement • Develop a monitoring and reporting framework aligned with NT Visitor Economy Strategy 2032	



Uniform display at the Darwin Military Museum

2027 (Activation and Growth)

Actions	Deliverables
Deepen defence and event partnerships	• Deliver coordinated tourism activations around Exercise Pitch Black and other Defence-related events • Work with Defence and tourism operators to develop event-specific tours and experiences • Explore additional Defence opportunities in regional centres • Leverage significant military anniversaries and commemorative events including the anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin and USS Peary commemorations to drive awareness and visitation • Promote stories that demonstrate the connection between the Defence and the contribution to the Territory lifestyle such as support for opening Jatbula Trail in Nitmiluk National Park and Tabletop Track in Litchfield National Park
Grow distribution and bookability	• Increase inclusion of military tourism experiences in trade and distribution programs • Strengthen cruise sector engagement and shore excursion offerings • Improve booking pathways through tourism websites and operators
Industry capability and collaboration	• Provide tailored support to military tourism operators through tourism development and distribution teams • Facilitate partnerships between operators, local government, veterans and Aboriginal organisations • Encourage collaborative product development and regional clustering
Education and youth engagement	• Enhance military content within education tourism programs • Explore development of curriculum-aligned resources and learning packs • Strengthen links between education tourism and commemorative events



Defence of Darwin Experience

2028 - 2035 (Growth and Long Term Outcomes)

From 2028, the focus will shift from establishing and activating the military tourism opportunity to achieving long-term outcomes for visitors, tourism operators and communities. Priorities will focus on growing commercially viable tourism experiences, strengthening the NT's position as Australia's go-to destination for military and defence tourism, and ensuring this continues to generate visitation and economic benefit.

The anticipated areas of focus, in line with the NT Visitor Economy Strategy 2032, will be reviewed and refreshed at the development of Horizon 2 (from 2028).

The focus will shift to:

- Expansion of immersive experiences and trails
- Long-term preservation and maintenance funding models
- National and international positioning of the NT as a leader in military tourism
- Ongoing Defence engagement and event-led visitation
- Regular review, reporting and mid-term evaluation.


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