

# CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE CROCOSAURUS KIND!

Toni Krasicki gets up close and personal with the Top End's favourite export.

**Y**ou may not realise, but there are 200 crocodiles living in the heart of Darwin city, right next door to a Backpacker's hostel and a pub! And if that isn't freaky enough, another 300 or so are caught in the harbour every year and relocated to more 'croc friendly' environments.

It is Australia's Top End, after all, so you can't really go all the way to Darwin and not spend time with these iconic prehistoric looking beasts.

The culprit harbouring these crocs is Crocosaurus Cove, which is conveniently located down the road from my hotel (thankfully not next door).

Crocosaurus Cove is the only place in Australia that gives you the opportunity to come face-to-face (in their enclosure), with an 800kg saltwater crocodile in the water. Visitors have been getting thrills and spills from the Cage of Death since 2008 (thankfully, no one has ever died in it), making it one of the Top End's most popular tourism experiences.

It sounds weird, but I'm dying to get into the Cage of Death. It's partly to cool down from the Darwin heat, but more so, for the adrenalin rush of getting up close and alongside a giant saltie.

I'm in a cylinder made of perspex, which is submerged into a chosen enclosure until I'm literally staring into the brown eyes of a mean looking male, with nothing but a few centimetres between us.

'Chopper' is 5.5m long and by the looks of his one missing limb – as well as the claws on his other leg – he's been in a few battles during his 80-years of existence!

I'm kitted out with goggles and a GoPro and then have 15 minutes to swim and stare. Chopper doesn't seem too bothered by me as he languidly swim's about before settling alongside the cage.

During the experience, the cylinder is lifted so I am sitting at eye level, and the handlers dangle chicken necks for Chopper to snatch at, showing me that the old boy still has power and agility when he needs it.

Whether you squeal in terror or delight, this is definitely the highlight of any visit to Crocosaurus Cove. As well as entertainment – croc feeding shows and baby croc holding (yes, their bellies are exceptionally soft) – the Cove is big on education too.

There are more than 70 reptiles on display, as well as an aquarium filled with giant barramundi, rays and colourful fish. And if you overheat, there's the plunge pool adjacent to the adolescent croc enclosure, where you can soak right alongside these curious guys and gals.

During my tour, I am handed Frankie, a frilled-neck lizard. As he calmly sits on my hand, the handler exclaims how cute and cuddly he is. I fail to see any resemblance to this description, but am told that lizards and snakes are popular pets up this way.

I guess Top Enders love their scaly skinned friends just as much as southern folks love their fluffy pooches!

## While you are there:

- Cool off and get some airtime with Darwin Flyboarding. Strap on boots and soar towards the skies 'Jetsons style.' [www.darwinflyboarding.com](http://www.darwinflyboarding.com)
- Cruise along the Esplanade at sunset or through the lush tropical Botanic Gardens on a Segway. [www.segwaytoursnt.com.au](http://www.segwaytoursnt.com.au)
- Visit the exceptional war museum at East Point for a brush up on the Bombing of Darwin. [www.darwinmilitarymuseum.com.au](http://www.darwinmilitarymuseum.com.au)
- See Sweetheart, a 5.5metre croc captured in 1979 (but sadly didn't make it) at the NT Museum & Art Gallery, plus the 'must see' Cyclone Tracy exhibit. [www.magnt.net.au](http://www.magnt.net.au)
- Grab a sundowner and enjoy a magical sunset. **OH!**

For more information visit [www.crocosauruscove.com](http://www.crocosauruscove.com)



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