

QANTAS

THE AUSTRALIAN WAY

TIWI ART
A TRADITIONAL
WAY OF LIFE
ON THE
TIWI ISLANDS



STYLE FOR MEN **NAGOYA** VISUAL FX **SAN DIEGO** SERIOUS SURF **SICILY** OUTBACK ART **LIMESTONE COAST**

Culture Club

FREE FROM THE TRAPPINGS OF TOURISM AND RENOWNED FOR FOOTBALL AND ART, THE TIWI ISLANDS ARE A REMINDER OF MORE TRADITIONAL TIMES.

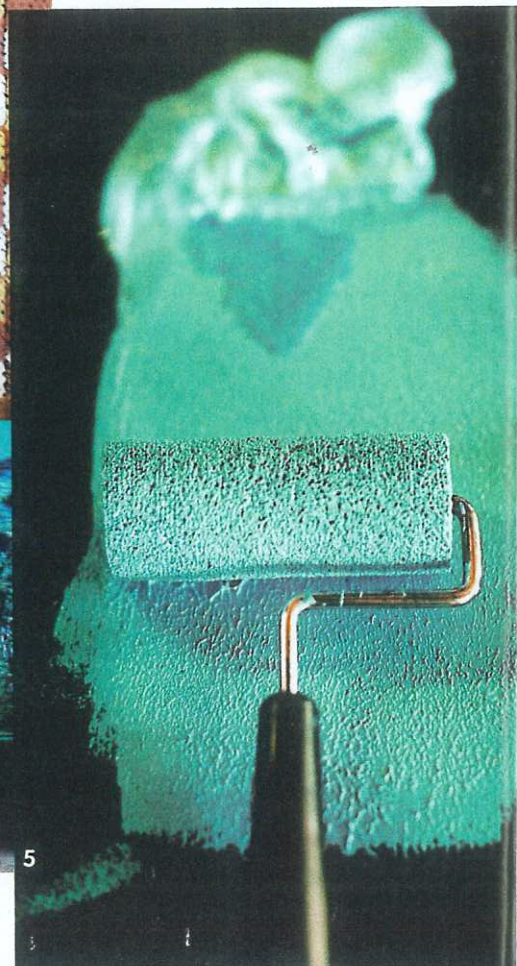
Travelling across Bathurst Island, you almost expect to see dinosaurs crashing through the Jurassic landscape. Large areas of this barely populated island are thick with cycads. Resembling palms but much more ancient, cycads evolved about a quarter of a billion years ago.

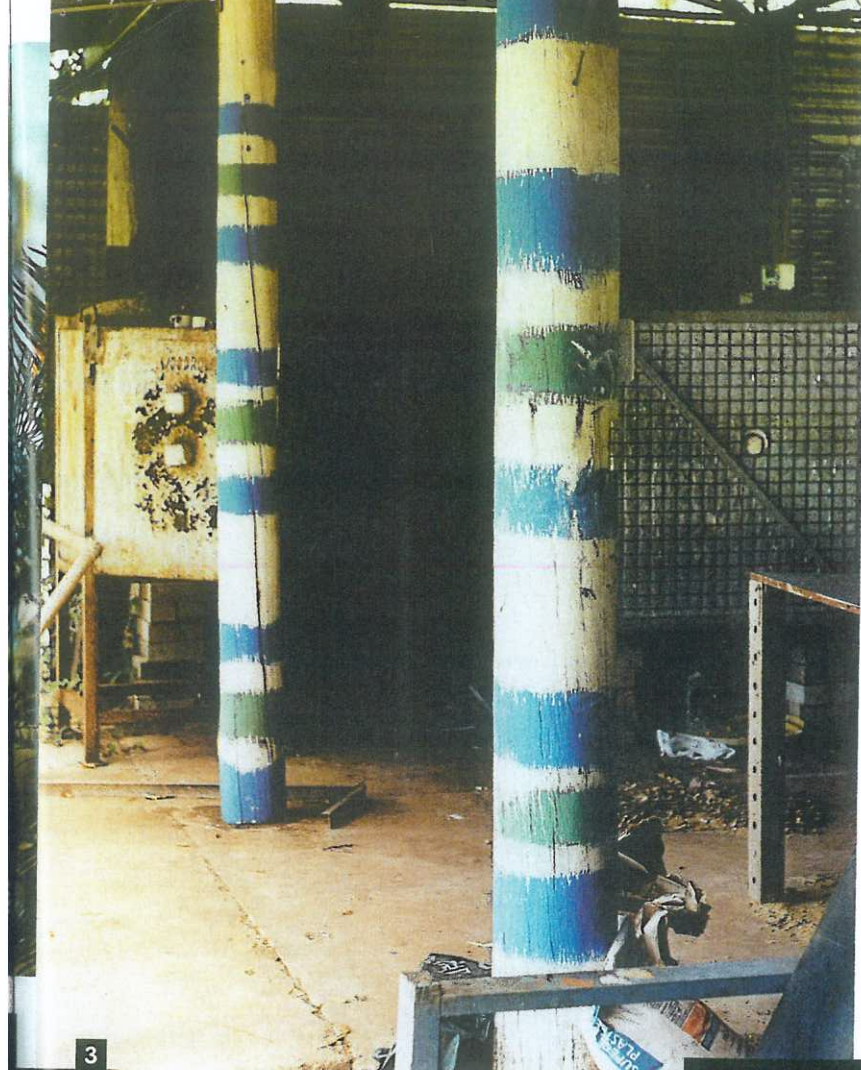
The Tiwi people are thought to have lived on Bathurst Island and nearby Melville Island for about 20,000 years. Isolated for centuries, the Tiwi – roughly translating as “We, the only people” – developed their own distinct traditions. Numbering about 2500, they have one of the most intact Aboriginal cultures in Australia. Many islanders live largely as their ancestors did: fishing, hunting and collecting bush foods. Ancient traditions were preserved, despite regular visits by Macassan fishermen from South Sulawesi and the founding of Fort Dundas on Melville Island by the British in 1824 (it was abandoned after five years). A Catholic mission established on Bathurst Island in 1911 brought further European influence.

Today, most visitors go to the islands on short tours run by locally owned Tiwi Tours, or holiday at isolated Munupi Wilderness Lodge, renowned for its fishing, near Melville Island's tiny Pirlangimpi hamlet. Visitor permits, issued by the traditional owners, are mandatory.

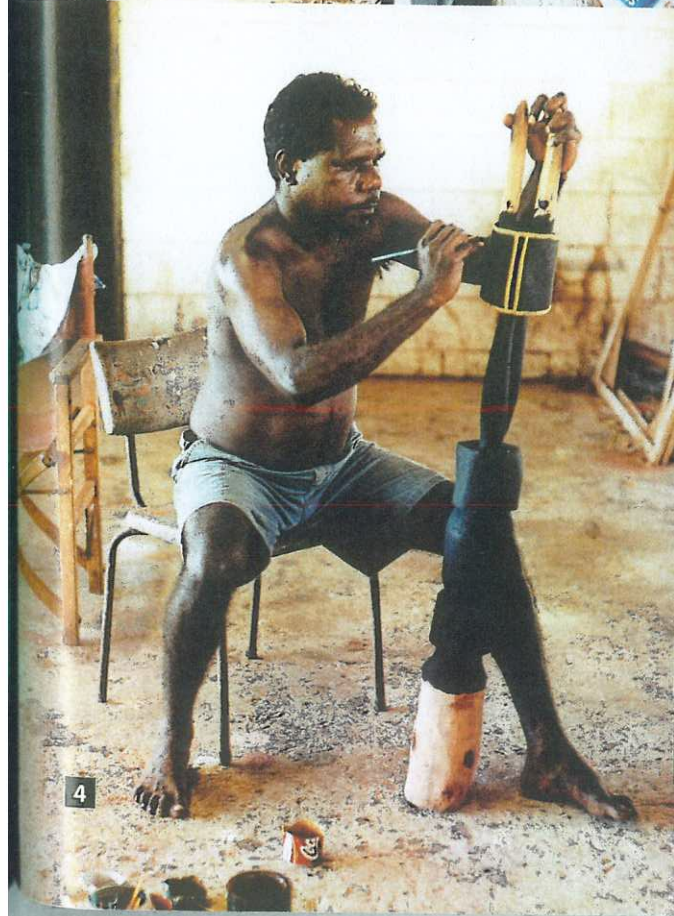
The town of Nguui (pronounced: “new you”), located in the south-east corner of Bathurst Island, has a population of about 1500 and is the administrative centre of the islands. There are few tourist facilities – no car hire, restaurants or big hotels. Accommodation for visitors comprises three small, yet comfortable, cabins. There is a general store, takeaway food shop and a social club where football-mad islanders gather after a game of Aussie Rules. First introduced in the 1930s, footy plays a major role in the social fabric of modern Tiwi society. Eight teams battle it out for a place in the Tiwi grand final held in March each year.

About 150 artists are part of the Tiwi Art Network, which encompasses Jilamara and Munupi Arts and Crafts on Melville Island, and Tiwi Design in Nguui, where many of the buildings are adorned with dazzling art. Tiwi artworks are sought after by collectors and galleries around the world and are important to the islands' economy. Tiwi Design's complex comprises a carver's shed and pottery, screen-printing and painting studios. Gifted artists produce stunning ceramics, sculptures, paintings and vivid textiles in a riot of contemporary colours combined with traditional designs. The Ngaruwanajirri Arts Centre in Nguui has individually designed carvings, paintings and T-shirts. ➤





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- 1 Christian-inspired traditional art at the Catholic church in Nguiu.
- 2 Cycad plants have existed since Jurassic times.
- 3 Tiwi Design pottery shed.
- 4 Artist Thomas Munkanome working on a pukumani pole.
- 5 Silk-screen paint ready to roll.
- 6 Bushland on Bathurst Island.

The Tiwi Islands' most famous exports are *pukumani* poles, richly decorated and some three metres high, crafted from heavy ironwood. Burial sites marked with *pukumani* poles are dotted throughout the islands, splashes of colour in the heavily forested landscape. Families decide how many *pukumani* poles are needed to keep a spirit happy in the afterlife. The grave sites of some people have five poles; venerable elders can have their graves marked with as many as 10.

Bumping along a dirt road in his 4WD, guide John Munkara heads west from Nguiu, turning after about 20km onto a barely used track surrounded by dense cycads and eucalypts. High on a hill overlooking the sparkling waters of the coast are five magnificent *pukumani* poles painted with family totems of the deceased. The poles will be left here until nature claims them.

Heading further west, the landscape is alive with wildlife and rich with bush tucker. Islanders harvest some 80 native plant species for food, including bush potatoes, green plums, pink bush apples and yams. Many combine town life with traditional hunting and gathering, spending several months of each year in their tribal homelands, teaching children to hunt and to prepare native foods, including cycad flour.

The toxic nuts of the islands' cycad plants – *Cycas armstrongii* – traditionally have been used as ceremonial food. Following an ancient recipe, nuts are pounded, washed for three days to rid them of soluble toxins, dried and ground into a flour to make a type of damper.

The islands are home to more than 50 species of birds, 27 species of reptiles, native mammals such as bandicoots, possums and wallabies, and animals introduced over the last two centuries, including water buffalo and brumbies.

Driving across ochre-coloured dirt roads, you pass bush thick with cycads, pandanus palms, cedar, mahogany, paperbark and ironwood trees. Metre-high termite mounds stand like sentinels across the landscape. Tumwarri Waterfall, in a thicket of rainforest lush with ferns, is a welcome stop after the dust of the road. Crystal-clear fresh water rushes across a jumble of rocks. It makes a delightful spot for a cool swim. Nearby is Lake Moantu, near the ocean at Beagle Gulf, where more adventurous travellers can camp under the stars with Tiwi Tours.

About 20km along the coast is remote Pawanapi Beach, where jade-coloured water laps onto a white stretch of sand unmarked by human footprints. Rosellas flit through the branches >



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of casuarina trees lining the shore; it's wonderfully quiet and tranquil. Warm sands provide a haven for sea turtles to lay their eggs, while the red rocks along the shore are a perfect habitat for rock oysters. Saltwater crocodiles, dugong, sharks and many varieties of fish swim these waters. It's great to look at, but this is definitely no place to don snorkelling gear.

Back in Nguiu, visit the Patakijiyali Museum, housed in the original bakery. The museum has a history of the Tiwis from the Dreamtime to the present on a series of storyboards. Also on display are spears, hand-carved canoes and photos of nuns dressed in white from head to toe.

Near the shores of the Apsley Strait, across which a ferry travels the short distance to Melville Island, is the town's Catholic church. The church, which survived bombing in WWII, is decorated with Christian images and paintings of crocodiles, mud crabs and pelicans.

Daytrippers and overnight visitors enjoy morning tea with Tiwi ladies, who bless visitors during a welcome ceremony before preparing billy tea and (non-cycad flour) damper cooked on an open fire. Later, guests tuck into a picnic lunch at Marrilampi, a favourite swimming hole and another great place for a dip in the humid climate. Wandering through the bush you see evidence of earlier tourists – bright splashes of colour from the flowers of wild hibiscus and tamarind trees brought to the Tiwis by the Macassans four centuries ago.

Tiwi Tours are ex-Darwin. Daily space limited to 18 people, or 10 overnight. Call (08) 8923 6523. For more information call the NT Tourist Commission on 13 30 68 or visit www.ntholidays.com.au



For airfares call Qantas on 13 13 13 or visit qantas.com.

For holiday packages to the Northern Territory call

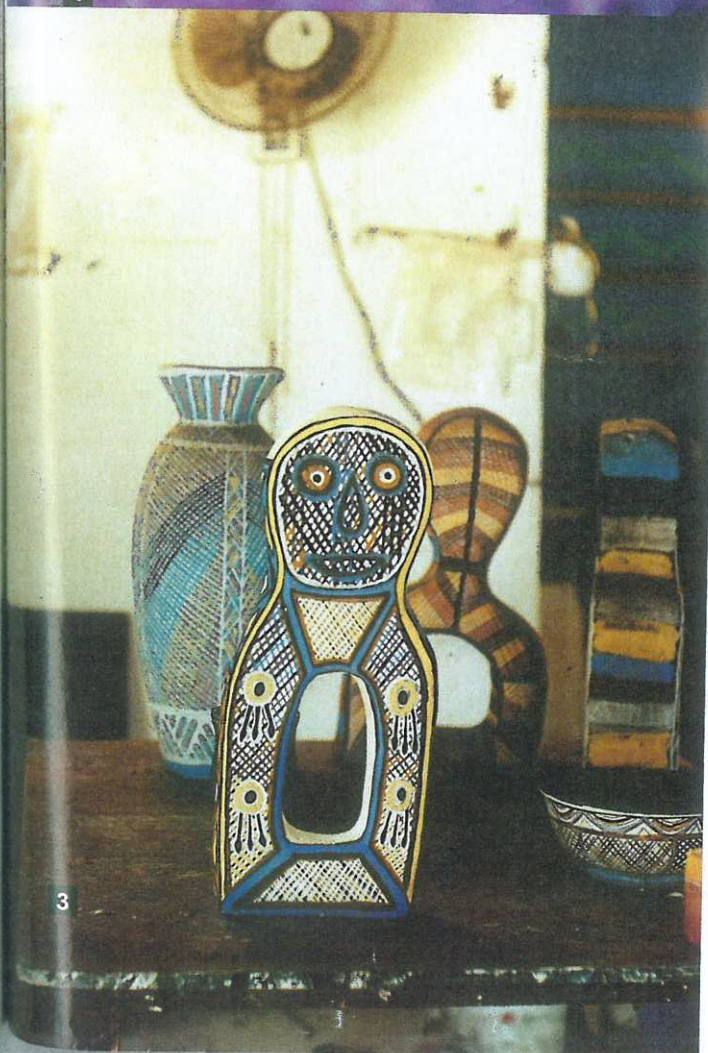
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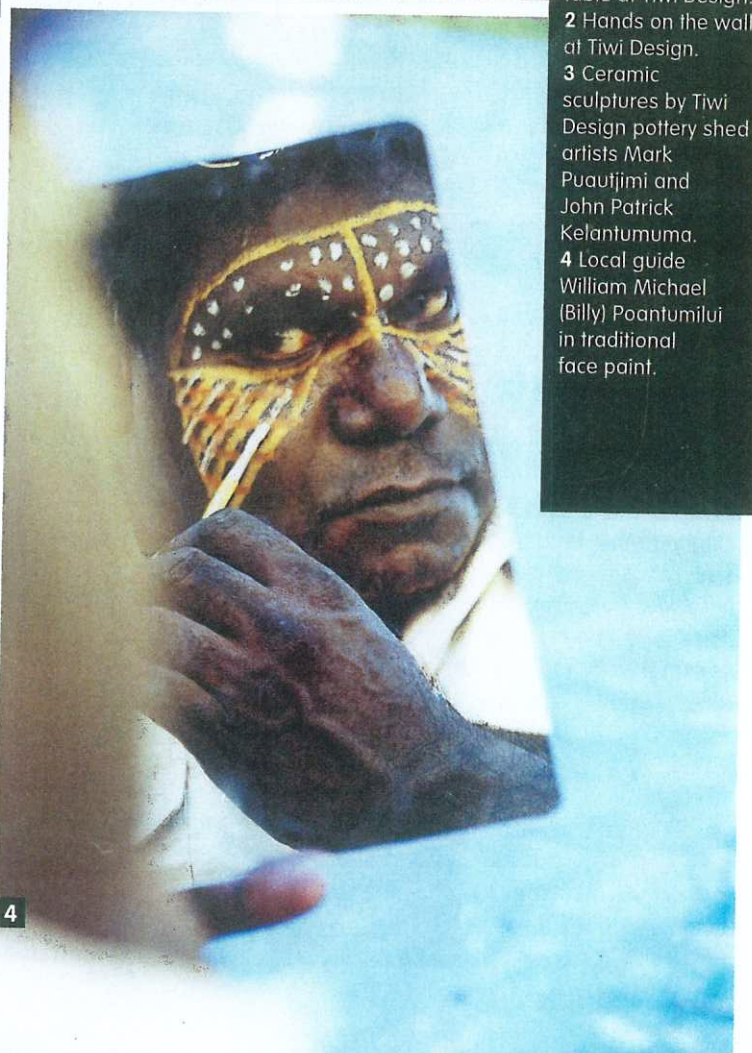
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1 Screen-printing table at Tiwi Design.
2 Hands on the wall at Tiwi Design.
3 Ceramic sculptures by Tiwi Design pottery shed artists Mark Puautjimi and John Patrick Kelantumuma.
4 Local guide William Michael (Billy) Poantumilui in traditional face paint.