

# Gunbalanya (Oenpelli)

## Top End Region

### Community Profile

**Pronunciation:** Goon-balan-ya  
(O-en-pell-e)

**Alternate names:** Kubarllanjanja

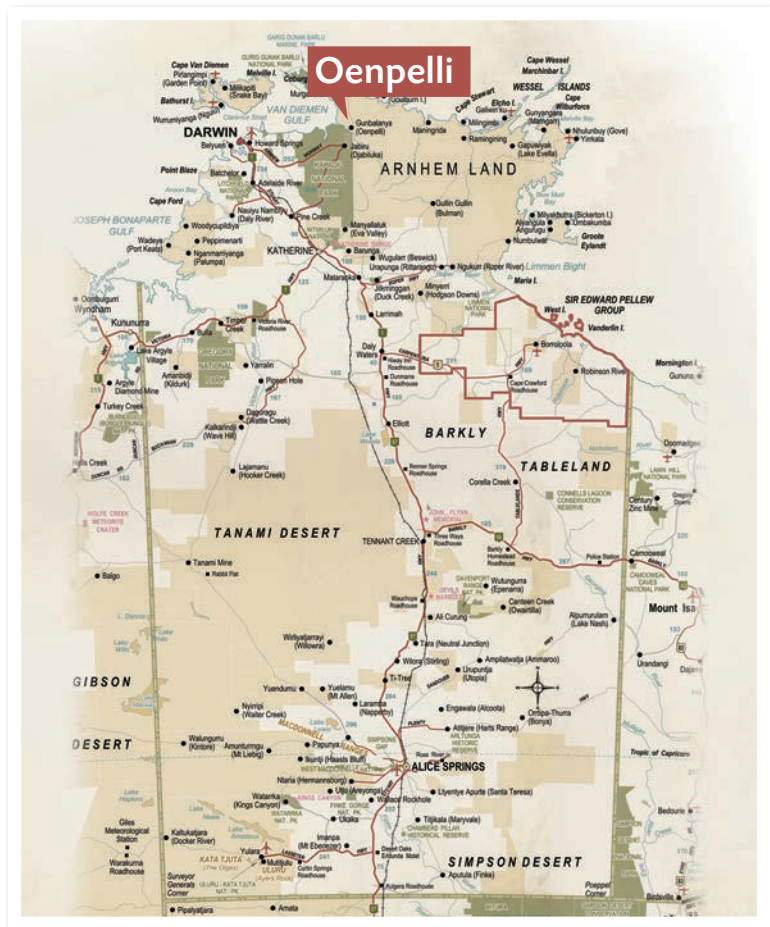
**Location:** Situated in West Arnhem, 330km east of Darwin and 60 km NNE of Jabiru, near the East Alligator River

**NT region:** West Arnhem

**Population:** 1171 (2011 census)

**Access:** From Darwin, 3½-4 hours. Turn off just before Jabiru. Cross the East Alligator River (dry season only, and check tide times), then there is a 16km stretch of dirt road, 4WD is required

**Language groups:** Kunwinjku (majority), Burarra and Kriol



### Climate (Top End)

| Season                               | Description   | Temp. Range  |
|--------------------------------------|---|--------------|
| Winter dry season (May to September) | Cooler and dry  | 15°C to 33°C |
| Humidity Range 20% – 50%.            | Fine weather with no rain and much lower humidity than wet season and a possibility of becoming cold by Territory standards during June/July.   |              |
| Summer wet season (October to April) | Hot and humid   | 22°C to 35°C |
| Humidity Range 30% – 95%.            | The build-up occurs from September with building humidity, intermittent lightning storms and downpours. Rains typically arrive December/January with regular heavy downpours and the possibility of cyclones. |              |

## History

Aboriginal people have inhabited this region for more than 40,000 years. Paddy Cahill established a cattle station in the Gunbalanya region in the early 1880s. In 1916 the Australian Government bought the station, but it stopped operating in 1919 because of industrial unrest and the closure of the Vestey Brothers meatworks in Darwin. Anglican missionaries began arriving in 1916 and remained until the early 1970s. Oenpelli was established as a mission in 1925 by the Church of England's Church Missionary Society, on a former cattle station. It was run in its earlier years by the founder, the Rev Alfred Dyer, and his wife Mary. They established a typical mission station, with church, school, dispensary, garden and store, to which they added pastoral work with feral cattle and horses.

*Amongst those who attended the mission school was the celebrated Gagudju elder and interpreter of culture, Bill Neidjie.*

A later Church Missionary Society (CMS) missionary at Oenpelli was Steve Etherington, who has worked on translating the New Testament into Kunwinjku, and has argued that many problems of Indigenous communities arise from lack of access to mainstream jobs.

There are 25 clan groups in the area, including the Maung, Ngumbur, Dangbon, Gundjehmi and Karik. Some of these clans migrated to the community around the 1920s to work on buffalo settlements or to gain access to Western goods and education. The Oenpelli Reserve was proclaimed in 1920, and the Arnhem Land Reserve in 1931. These and other reserves in the area were combined as the Arnhem Land Reserve in 1963.

In 1995 the Kunbarllanjja Community Government Council was formed. In 2008 it became a part of the West Arnhem Shire Council, which now provides local government to the region.

## Community Life

### Description of community:

Oenpelli (now often referred to as Gunbalanya) is an Aboriginal community in west Arnhem Land. The community is situated near the East Alligator River on a small ridge between coastal black soil plain, marshes and the Arnhem Land Escarpment.

The Manjoringunja clan are the traditional owners of the land on which Gunbalanya sits.

**Changes in population:** Population figures are estimates, as several factors impact on movement. These include seasonal changes, ceremonial activity and movement between outstations.

**How is it affected by seasons:** East Alligator River is a tidal river. During wet season, the tides are more likely to

be higher and faster making access in and out of Oenpelli more difficult than in dry season.

### Major landmarks or cultural factors:

Oenpelli Road leads to many wonders of Kakadu National Park.

**Local industry/mine:** Gunbalanya Meat Supply and the ranger program, funded by royalties from the Narbalek and Ranger mines. This comes under the council's 'Caring for Country' program

**Tourism:** Injalak Arts and Crafts, fishing, sightseeing, wetlands, the Stone Country Festival (formerly Gunbalanya Cultural Open Day) is held in August each year and access for this is allowed without permit and rock art sites at Injalak Hill. Knowledgeable local guides lead tours to see the fine rock art galleries at Injalak Hill.

**Arts/crafts:** Injalak Arts and Crafts Centre, ph.(08) 8979 0190. Prices here are wholesale and all sales benefit the artists and therefore the community. Credit cards are accepted.

### Websites:

[www.injalak.com](http://www.injalak.com)

[www.stonecountryfestival.com](http://www.stonecountryfestival.com)

**\*\*Please check with the Health Centre on arrival for sacred sites to avoid and health or social issues to be aware of.**

## Governance

**Local Government** West Arnhem Shire Council **Telephone** (08) 8979 0170  
**Web** [www.westarnhem.nt.gov.au/gunbalanya](http://www.westarnhem.nt.gov.au/gunbalanya)

**Community or other governance structures** Kunbarllanjja Community Government Council and Arrguluk Reference Group.

**Outstations** Up to 13 outstations. Population approximately 400 – 500.

**Permit System<sup>1</sup>** All visitors must obtain a permit from the appropriate authority for the duration of their stay. Permits may be required for any person visiting the community including activities such as fishing, camping and visiting certain beaches.

Permit application for Oenpelli is through Northern Land Council (NLC).

**Web** [www.nlc.org.au](http://www.nlc.org.au)

## Infrastructure, facilities and services

### Community

**Church:** Anglican services.

**Community Halls and Sheds:** Community Hall.

**Workforce Skills or Training Facilities:** Traditional Credit Union Financial Services Training Project, West Arnhem Shire employment programs and the meatworks provide job training.

**Government Offices:** Community Development Employment Projects, Job Services Australia, Centrelink and Northern Land Council.

**Post Office:** Located within the council building.

**Telephone** (08) 8979 0170

- **Opening hours** Monday to Friday 7.30am – 4.40pm

**School:** The West Arnhem College, which consists of the Jabiru and Gunbalanya Schools, offers preschool, primary school and secondary education. Secondary school students must travel to Jabiru, study by correspondence or attend boarding school.

**Library:** At the school.

**Telephone** (08) 8979 9459

**Council Office:** West Arnhem Shire has a service delivery centre.

**Women's Centre:** Women's Resource Centre.

**Men's Group:** Yes

**Childcare Centre:** Crèche and Baby Health Centre.

**Aged Care Centre:** Yes, delivered through the Health Centre.

**Banking:** Eftpos can be used at the shop and service station. ATM in store.

### Community store

**Gunbalanya Council Community Store**

**Telephone** (08) 8979 0137

or (08) 8979 0161

The store is owned and managed by Gunbalanya Council. The store is well stocked with general groceries and limited fresh produce.

It is advisable to bring in as much fresh produce as possible and any specialty products/items required.

- **Opening hours** Monday to Friday (excl. Thursday) 9am – 5pm  
Thursday 9am – 8pm  
Saturday and Sunday 9am – 3pm

|                                 |  |  |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Other food outlets</b>       | Takeaway/convenience store and butcher.<br><b>Ubirr Border Store</b><br>Open in dry season only. Lunches, Thai Restaurant for dinner and general supplies.<br>(Kakadu side of East Alligator)  | <b>Telephone</b> (08) 8979 2474                                      |
| <b>Food orders</b>              | Bush orders can be set up with Coles, Woolworths and various other businesses in Darwin, including Parap Fine Foods and Fresh Obsession. Coles and Woolworths ordering is online. Orders can be delivered to the clinic via Toll.  |  |
|                                 | <b>Toll - Darwin:</b>  | <b>Telephone</b> (08) 8911 1000                                      |
|                                 | <b>Coles:</b>  | <b>Web</b> www.shop coles.com.au                                     |
|                                 | <b>Woolworths:</b>   | <b>Web</b> www.woolworthsonline.com.au                               |
|                                 | <b>Parap Fine Foods - Darwin:</b>  | <b>Telephone</b> (08) 8981 9408<br><b>Web</b> www.parapfinefoods.com |
|                                 | <b>Fresh Obsession - Darwin:</b>   | <b>Mobile</b> 0409 207 472<br><b>Web</b> www.freshobsession.com.au   |
| <b>Recreational facilities</b>  | <b>Gunbalanya Sports and Social Club</b><br>Swimming pool, AFL popular, fishing, boating, hiking, arts and craft, sports ovals, basketball. There is also a Youth Centre.  | <b>Telephone</b> (08) 8979 0737                                      |
| <b>Commercial accommodation</b> | None   |  |
| <b>Fuel</b>                     | Diesel, Unleaded and Opal available.<br>• <b>Opening hours</b> Monday to Friday 8am – 5pm<br>Saturday and Sunday 8am – 12pm  |  |
| <b>Mechanic</b>                 | Yes  |  |
| <b>Police station</b>           | Yes<br>Four police man the local station. The district's police officers patrol the communities of Waruwu, Murgarella and Nabalak along with 16 outstations, including Goulburn and Croker Islands in the Gurig National Park. The patrol area covers 15,000 km <sup>2</sup> . Police carry out other general duties and enforce regional liquor restrictions. | <b>Telephone</b> (08) 8979 0180<br>or <b>Mobile</b> 0488 623 163     |
| <b>Alt. police contact</b>      | Jabiru Police Station  | <b>Telephone</b> (08) 8979 2122                                      |
| <b>Other</b>                    | Community Night Patrol   | <b>Mobile</b> 0457 965 983   |
| <b>Telephone/internet/mail</b>  |  |  |
| <b>Mobile phone<sup>2</sup></b> | Telstra mobile phone service in the region.  |  |
| <b>Internet</b>                 | Internet access is available at the clinic for reasonable usage.   |  |
| <b>Mail</b>                     | Mail comes in Monday, Wednesday and Friday.  |  |
| <b>Other</b>                    | Landlines in accommodation.  |  |

<sup>2</sup> Telstra 3G/Next G are typically the only mobile services that work in more remote parts of the Northern Territory. See link - <http://telstra.com.au/mobile-phones/coverage-networks/our-coverage/>

## Alcohol

### Alcohol – not allowed<sup>3</sup>

Oenpelli is a dry community. However, there is a licensed sports club for residents where only beer is served whilst on premises. No takeaway available.

## Access

### Road

**Darwin (3½-4 hours<sup>4</sup>):** Stuart Highway, turn onto Arnhem Highway. Turn off just before Jabiru onto Oenpelli Road. The East Alligator River at Cahills Crossing floods and isolates the community during the wet season. The road is usually cut from December to April. Can cross the river (and Magella Creek soon after the turn-off) in the dry season with care. As the river is tidal, crossing is best done when water level is low over the crossing.

**Other Services:** Greyhound Coach from Darwin to Jabiru 3 days per week, then a 20 minute flight from Jabiru to Gunbalanya (especially wet season).

### Air

**Facilities:** Sealed all weather access.

**Darwin (45 minutes):** Kakadu Air and Gunbalanya Air charter flights.

**Jabiru (20 minutes):** Kakadu Air and Gunbalanya Air charter flights.

### Regular passenger transport

None

## Health Centre

### Health service

Department of Health (DoH)

**Telephone** (08) 8979 0178

**Web** [www.health.nt.gov.au](http://www.health.nt.gov.au)

**Email** [gunbalanya.clinicmgr@nt.gov.au](mailto:gunbalanya.clinicmgr@nt.gov.au)

### Staff

- Manager 1
- Remote Area Nurse 6
- Medical Practitioner 1
- Aboriginal Health Workers 2
- Aboriginal Community Worker -
- Administration Officer 1
- Driver/Gardener/Cleaner \*
- Other: -

\* Aboriginal Community Worker (ACW) is driver Youth Officer and Volatile Substance Abuse Officer.

### Facilities

Each clinician has their own consulting room.

### Operating hours

Monday to Friday 9am – 4pm.

### On call

After hours, weekends and public holidays, an Aboriginal Health Worker or Nurse is on call for emergencies only.

### Services

- Chronic Disease
- Mental Health
- Children's Health
- Antenatal
- Women's Health.

<sup>3</sup> It is an offence to consume or bring alcohol into a dry community in the Northern Territory

<sup>4</sup> Approximate travel time one-way

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Medical Records System<sup>5</sup></b> | PCIS   |
| <b>Vehicles</b>                           | The Health Centre maintains a Toyota Troop Carrier that has been converted for use as an ambulance.<br><b>**Note: All Troop Carriers are 4WD, manual and take diesel fuel.</b>   |
| <b>GP</b>                                 | GP and Medical Student, Junior Doctor and GP Registrar.  |
| <b>Visiting services</b>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dentist</li> <li>• Paediatrician</li> <li>• Psychiatrist</li> <li>• Ophthalmologist</li> <li>• Optometrist</li> <li>• Ear, Nose and Throat Specialist</li> <li>• Gynaecology and Obstetrics</li> <li>• Surgeon</li> <li>• Physician</li> <li>• Cardiologist</li> <li>• Echo Tech.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Acute care</b>                         | A Remote Medical Practitioner is on call 24 hours for telephone consultations and evacuations. Royal Flying Doctors Service (RFDS) operates all year round.  |
| <b>Other</b>                              | Pregnant women birth in Darwin.  |
| <b>Accommodation</b>                      |  |
| <b>Accommodation</b>                      | Either a freestanding house or single occupancy demountable "Donga" style.<br><b>**Note: Sharing of facilities may be required.</b>  |
| <b>Facilities</b>                         | Usual domestic amenities including microwave, rice cooker, electric frypan, fridge, oven/stove, washing machine, dryer, TV and split system air-conditioning. Tea and coffee also supplied.  |
| <b>Linen</b>                              | Provided   |
| <b>Vehicles</b>                           |  |
| <b>Vehicle</b>                            | No vehicle is provided for personal use.   |
| <b>Policy</b>                             | NT DoH has a strict policy on vehicle use. Any non-clinical use is not acceptable.   |
| <b>What to pack for placement</b>         |  |
| <b>Clothes</b>                            | <p>Possibility of cool nights in middle of year, so light warm clothing is useful. In wet season (October – April), clothing for very hot, humid days – loose cotton clothing.</p> <p>Please refer to this website for information on appropriate clothing to wear whilst out in a community.</p> <p><a href="http://ntgpe.org/wp_site/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Appropriate-Clothing-2.pdf">http://ntgpe.org/wp_site/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Appropriate-Clothing-2.pdf</a></p> |

<sup>5</sup> Training should be arranged before your arrival in the community

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Supplies</b>                           | Bring any specialty foods and a small quantity of fresh food.<br><b>**Note: Please be mindful of weight restrictions on plane travel.</b>            |
| <b>Personal effects</b>                   | Bring a hat, sturdy shoes, insect repellent, sunscreen and toiletries.   |
| <b>Other tips or relevant information</b> |  |
| <b>Other tips/relevant information</b>    | Be prepared for variable standard of accommodation in communities. A sleeping bag sheet insert is a good idea for protection against biting insects. |

*Disclaimer*

*This information is prepared in good faith and to the best of our knowledge at the time of printing. However, Aboriginal communities, like any community, can change as the population shifts and people move on. Please contact the RAHC Regional Coordinator or the Health Centre Manager to confirm any key issues or concerns you may have ahead of your RAHC placement. RAHC also values any input and up to date information or photos you can provide to improve our Community Profiles. Updated June 2014.*

**Canberra Office**

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**Darwin Office**

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