



WORKING IN THE **Ngaanyatjarra Lands**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The Community, Traditional Owners and History

Are the locals welcoming and accepting?

Yes, generally the locals are welcoming of people working on the Lands.

What is daily life like for the community members?

Daily life varies on the Lands, depending on the seasons, locations, sporting events, funerals and activities going on around the Lands.

What are the housing and environmental conditions like for the community?

Housing conditions vary from good to poor depending on the community and how well looked after they are by the residents.

What are the languages people use?

The main language spoken on the Lands is Ngaanyatjarra. Other dialects spoken in the area are Pitjantjatjara and Pintupi.

What are some helpful local language words?

There are resources available that are very helpful for medical workers working in the Lands. A very good resource is *Medical phrases from three Western Desert languages* compiled by Ameer Glass and Dorothy Hackett.

What happens around funerals and sorry business?

Funerals and sorry business are an important time in the Lands. This is generally a time where people grieve and pay their respects to those people who have experienced

a loss. Funerals can be very large events and will bring people together and reinforce family bonds.

What is appropriate cultural behaviour?

It is important to remember that you are working in another culture, with different customs to mainstream Australia. A very important consideration is respect. If you demonstrate respect in your interactions with people you will usually be respected.

Take the time to listen, watch and learn quietly. There are numerous differences in culture including a different approach to eye contact and direct questioning. There are many resources available that can provide you with important information on how to behave appropriately.

Other cultural considerations include:

- **Men's and women's business**
There is a strong adherence to men's and women's business on the Lands.
- **Different protocols for men and women**
There are different behavioural expectations for men and women. Generally, there is little physical contact between men and women, even if they are in a relationship.



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- **Law/lore**

The law/lore is very important to Aboriginal people on the Lands. Respect for the lore is very important.

- **Dress code**

You should wear clothes that are not revealing or brief and that cover you well.

- **Photographs**

Photographs are possible but it is very important that you ask if people are happy to be photographed before doing so. If you are going to use the photos for purposes other than personal use, you will need to get written approval.

- **Cultural Sites**

There are specific cultural sites and areas of significance. Please know where these are in your community, as you may be prohibited from entering.

What is the history of the local Indigenous people?

The Aboriginal people on the Lands have been in this country for many millennia.

White people first began interacting with them in the early 1930s and a United Aborigines Mission (UAM) was established in 1934 at Warburton. Many of the local people did not have contact with white people until much later, including in the 1950s when drought forced people to come into the mission. During the late 1950s and 1960s, many people were moved to Warburton when long range rocket testing was carried out in the region. In the 1970s, management of Warburton mission was transferred from UAM to the Commonwealth Government.

Roads were first built throughout the region from 1958 when Len Beadell first surveyed and graded roads for the area.

The other communities on the Lands began to be established from the 1970s onwards as people moved back to their homelands from Warburton. In 1981, Ngaanyatjarra people formed an **Aboriginal Corporation called the Ngaanyatjarra Council** which consists of communities on the Western Australian side of the border.

In 1993, the **Shire of**

Ngaanyatjarraku was established as a local government authority. The Shire works closely with the Ngaanyatjarra Council to provide local government services on the Lands. In 2005, Native Title was recognised over the Ngaanyatjarra region excluding the Gibson Desert Nature Reserve.

What social issues are present in the communities?

There are numerous social issues on the Lands including over-crowding, low education standards and poor health standards.

What is the skin system?

The skin system or skin group is a system that covers all the people in the Lands and dictates who can marry who, what their children's skins will be and how they should interact with each other. The skin groups in the Lands are as per the diagram illustrated by Wilf Douglas in the book **Maliki Nintirringutja-Ka**.



Is marriage a formal process for community members?

Marriage is a traditional Aboriginal approach and sometimes marriage is also done in a formal western way by local Aboriginal people.

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