Touring with their generation

If you’re about to play host with the most to your mum, granddad or Auntie Flo, who will no doubt steal your bed - and your life - don’t despair. Show them the Territory’s natural wonders and you might just enjoy yourself.

Everyone has to entertain visitors. But Territorians have it harder than most. Guests tend to come here for a few weeks rather than a weekend, to make the most of the long flight. And some never leave.

But there’s only so many jumping crocodiles to entertain everyone. My 64-year-old parents Gerry and Marie come to the Top End for a two- and a half-week stop-off on their round-the-world trip.

It had to sleep on the floor of my own house. Well, my rented apartment. I had every intention of buying a swag and setting up a mini-camp in the dining room. It’d be fun. I could sit on a camping chair and out doors. I could say things like, “Isn’t it mesmerizing to stare into a fire” while blowing at a 60 watt energy-saving bulb. And I could hang my food from the ceiling fan out of reach of beers and crocodiles.

But all that was ruined when I realized how expensive gas was. So from the cupboard I pulled my cheap blow-up mattress that proceeded to deflate during the night, then leave me oxygen-starved at dawn after re-inflation.

My mood for a dining room camping adventure had soured.

It was quite miserable how much I resented my parents for taking my bed. My three housemates were understanding. As they are required to be. It is a fact of Darwin life: visitors come and have to be put up – it’s how we grow the free accommodation pool down south.

But I was worried that Dad’s awful, awful, repetitive jokes - worse than mine - might be too much and would cause someone to crack.

There were a few occasions when I reluctantly had to explain confused faces around the dinner table an in-family joke that wasn’t all that funny and not really worth bringing up in the first place.

But that’s been happening for years. So it was important I accompanied Dad around the place. I did worry about the swan-worship conversations he might get me into. On one tour he struck up a conversation with the most annoying woman in the world. She wouldn’t shut up and made me and Mum cringe when she laughed at Dad’s awful, awful jokes.

I nearly put my foot down when he said we could drop her house. But I’m a nice guy.

Mum and Dad were told to be unafraid of asking for lifts. Which I regretted when they’d call up after Mindil Markets especially telling me they were done.

I suppose I did offer. But I was only being polite. And I had previously promised them for splashing out on a taxi home to the city from Fannie Bay. They could have caught the bus.

That was on one of the occasions where they might feel they should give me some space. And that was fair. Because I was on holiday too, but I wasn’t appreciating Darwin with fresh eyes, like they were.

Having lived in Australia for three years I’m no longer charmed by most of the insects, plants and wildlife.

And I’d forgotten how snap-happy the old pair were.

So every frog, dancer, butterfly, sunset and animal had to be documented. On two cameras and in macro. Thank God they haven’t heard of Instagram.

So, as a gentle form of payback for testing my patience, and also for years of dragging me around supermarkets and department stores, I dragged them on a walk up a steep hill in Kakadu one morning.

But of course there was plenty of photos to be taken along the way.

Photobombs: I’d expected an unnecessary tussle over who would drive on the left, but Mum didn’t want me doing all the motoring. But Mum doesn’t clock up the kilometers like I do, so if there was a rush I usually had to wrap in, start the motor and turn up the radio so I could pretend I didn’t hear her offer to drive.

Dad, surprisingly, was more than happy to sit in the back and secure his way through everything. Smart man, Dad.

Mum got her tyres wet for the first time - apart from driving on snow in Ireland - on the flooded road to Ubirr.

“I’m terrified,” she said as she pushed through locusts of water.

I even made an iPhone video of her plight. But Mum’s iPhone fell into Florence Falls a few days later and everything was wiped.

Who’s laughing now.

Because I’d played tour guide. I had an idea of what was worth seeing and what the parents might enjoy. They like culture as opposed to a hard night on Mitchell St.

A caterer meal at the Marrumara Hotel was a good cultural experience.

They learned the Ins and outs of the Bangged Braziers Singer and had a chat to some locals.

The food was good too.

As part of their tour the Top End came after Hong Kong, New Zealand and Sydney, and before California and New York.

To get decent weather everywhere they had to smuggle pre-winter Kiwi Land and early dry season Northern Territory.

So it was still hot and the late rains meant most of Kakadu was closed.

Bummer.

The four-wheel drive was booked for the four days after they arrived at the start of May.

As it turned out, the land Cruiser troopie was only used off-road for about a kilometer that my ageing sedan would probably have handled.

But the 4x4 was the only thing that didn’t hurt my knees, back and forehead while climbing into the driving seat.

I’d hoped to show the folks as much of Kakadu as possible. But my heart sank as the unimpressed next-of-kin at the Mary River Roadhouse pulled out a park guide and started crossing off Jim Jim, Magnuk and Twin Falls.

Then ruled out that required the bra- vo of driving along a dotted line with my new Nebraska license plate, but instead drove me to Mount Malaita.