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One of the key elements of success in any festival is its authenticity. This is often more easily achieved in generically specific celebrations of dance, theatre, opera, food, film – anything where the context allows for a deep exploration of the genre, rather than the cherry-picking approach which a large multi-arts festival demands. But authenticity can also be achieved through a serious engagement of the host city, town or region. There are festivals whose programs, at first sight, live and breathe a sense of place: you want to be there, to experience a program which will allow you to understand the cultural depth of a place. Many religious festivals demand pilgrimage, and those arts festivals that necessitate getting you off the beaten track already have a head start in generating excitement and devotion.

This isn't a travel pitch, but the business of getting there, arriving and grabbing as much as you can while you're there, including serious engagement with the local culture and creating the possibility of collaboration or exchange, is central to the experience. You don't go to these places to slow down, but to be informed and re-invigorated by a socio-geographic and cultural environment which you may never have expected to discover.

East Arnhem Land sits at the top of Australia's Northern Territory. It is the traditional land of the Yolgnu people who have been there for tens of thousands of years. Each year, the *GARMA* festival takes place on this land. Attendance is by invitation only, though that can be extended to you by application. Its defining agenda is Indigenous cultural exchange.

The land itself is remarkable. The festival is held at the top of an escarpment which looks out onto the plains and coastline below. The easiest way to get there is to fly to Nullumbuy, and then be driven to the site. In the temperate night, it is an inspiration to feel more than a thousand people at rest, and at peace, in small silver tents pitched beneath slender grey-green gum trees. Sound idyllic? It is, especially since the mix of people all sleeping together here are young and old, Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians from all over the continent, plus international guests, all displaying a diversity of occupations – teachers, artists, singers, bankers, politicians, social workers, film stars, architects and more. One of the reasons for applications to take part in this festival is that you have to have a purpose for being there.