

Back to the Outback

Back to the Outback is a 2021 animated adventure comedy film directed by Clare Knight and Harry Cripps (in their feature directorial debuts), from a screenplay written by Cripps, and a story by Cripps and Gregory Lessans.^[1] The voice cast includes Isla Fisher, Tim Minchin, Eric Bana, Guy Pearce, Miranda Tapsell, Angus Imrie, Keith Urban, and Jacki Weaver, and is distributed by Netflix Animation.

The film had a limited theatrical release on December 3, 2021, prior to streaming on Netflix on December 10, to a generally positive reception from critics and audiences.

Plot

At the Australian Wildlife Park in Sydney, zookeeper Chaz Hunt has a show that demonstrates scary and deadly animals. Maddie, an inland taipan, appears regularly at the show but is feared by the public. Maddie is supported by Jackie, a motherly saltwater crocodile, who tells her and her three best friends —Frank, a funnel-web spider, Zoe, a thorny devil, and Nigel, a marbled scorpion— about the Outback, a place recognizable with three mountains where creatures like them belong. One day, Jackie is removed from the zoo after she tries to save Chaz's son, Chazzie, from a moat; the staff and patrons believed she was trying to eat him. Saddened and in despair, Maddie decides to escape to the Outback with her companions to find a place where they can live happily. During their escape, Pretty Boy, a celebrity koala and the group's rival, tries to alert the park's security but is accidentally paralyzed by Nigel when the group try to stop him. The group reluctantly decide to take him with them, but not before he is caught on a security camera exhibiting mouth foam from his paralyzing.

While crossing Sydney Harbour, they run into Jacinta, a great white shark, who is part of a mysterious organization called the Ugly Secret Society (USS) where animals considered "monsters" help each other upon hearing a password("I'm ugly, you're ugly, we should all be this ugly, ugly is the new beautiful"). When they reach Circular Quay, Pretty Boy tries to get the attention of the city for rescue but finds that the world misbelieves he has rabies after seeing the footage and he ends getting chased by an angry mob, which corner him, Maddie, and her friends, but Maddie

Back to the Outback	
 <div>Official release poster</div>	
Directed by	Clare Knight Harry Cripps
Screenplay by	Harry Cripps
Story by	Gregory Lessans Harry Cripps
Produced by	Daniela Mazzucato
Starring	Isla Fisher <div> <div>Tim Minchin</div> <div>Eric Bana</div> <div>Guy Pearce</div> <div>Miranda Tapsell</div> <div>Angus Imrie</div> <div>Keith Urban</div> <div>Jacki Weaver</div> </div>
Edited by	Marcus Taylor
Music by	Rupert Gregson-Williams
Production companies	Netflix Animation

helps them narrowly escape by saying the USS password, sending the group into the sewers. After getting help from Legs, a Redback Spider and her pack in getting around the sewers, Pretty Boy finds that he is incorrectly reported dead and his popularity has been taken by a quokka named Giggles. Chaz and Chazzie find the group and attempt to tranquilize them, but they escape via an ice cream truck.

At a school in the outer suburbs, after Maddie frees two lovelorn cane toads named Doug and Doreen, the animals get a ride on an excursion bus that takes them to the Blue Mountains. Chaz and Chazzie catch up and the animals get in the bus to hide, but inadvertently cause the bus to be pulled over, allowing Chaz to enter to search the vehicle for them but an Aboriginal girl named Norine allows them to escape. However, Chaz throws Pretty Boy out a window and Frank accidentally sends himself, Maddie, Zoe, and Nigel falling off a cliff, landing on a unconscious Pretty Boy in the process.

Maddie argues with Pretty Boy, who berates her for ruining his popularity and breaks down, but when Maddie tries to comfort him, he bursts into a fit of laughter. At that moment however, Chaz falls off the same cliff as the group did and lands on Maddie, Frank, Zoe, and Nigel, who end up getting all over his face, causing Chaz to panic and he throws them off his face but, in doing so, unknowingly pins Maddie to the ground with a stick. Horrified, Frank, Zoe, and Nigel try to save her, but they fall into a pit that Chaz seals off. Having assumed that Chaz had been trying to rescue him, Pretty Boy gleefully approaches Chaz for him to take him home, but he kicks him away and prepares to sedate Maddie. Feeling betrayed, Pretty Boy says the USS password, which alerts some Tasmanian devils, Dave, Lucifer, and Beelzebub, to their presence. After the animals escape, Chaz reveals to Chazzie that his adventurous and Aussie wildlife expert history was all a lie and he only moved from Florida to Australia after being inspired by television shows featuring Australian zookeepers. He decides to make it up to Chazzie by really going after the animals and bringing them back to the park, though Chazzie is no longer sure about the mission.

Over the next few days, the animals are helped by many creatures of the USS (which include Clive, a dung beetle, Vlad, a bat, Susan and Deirdre, two Razorbacks, and Phil, a platypus) on their way to the Outback, while Pretty Boy bonds more with the creatures. One night, Maddie sings a lullaby that she had sung at the park ago & was her only memory of her mother: she was washed out of the nest as an egg by a flood and after a perilous journey, was found on the road by Chaz. Pretty Boy reveals that he was also orphaned, with his mother being killed by a moving car. The next day, Pretty Boy finds a tree of koalas, led by a female koala named Skylar, and foolishly leaves the other creatures, to their dismay and Maddie's relief.

Maddie and the others reach the three mountains. Not long after they arrive, Chaz, with the help of a biker gang from a pub, rounds up and captures Frank, Zoe, and Nigel. Chazzie runs into Maddie and is initially scared of her, but warms up to her upon seeing that she is just as scared as he is of her. Chaz, having misinterpreted Chazzie's encounter with Maddie as catching her, captures Maddie as well and places the creatures in boxes in the back of his jeep, but Chazzie sets Maddie free without his father looking but makes no effort in freeing her friends.

	<u>Reel FX Animation Studios</u> <u>Weed Road Pictures</u>
Distributed by	<u>Netflix</u>
Release date	December 10, 2021
Running time	95 minutes
Countries	United States Australia Canada
Language	English

Maddie, who broke down crying over losing her friends, tries to get the animals of the land to help her rescue them, but they initially refuse due to the fact none of them had ever left before. However, Pretty Boy, having found life with the other koalas not as great as he thought due to Skylar being overly chatty and shallow, returns. He cheers her up and asks her to go to the rescue. Using a fire truck, they catch up to the truck and try to break them out. The rescue becomes a disaster when Pretty unmounts the truck to help Maddie, causing the ladder to spin uncontrollably just as Maddie accepts her friends as her adopted siblings, resulting in Zoe taking advantage of Nigel's fear of the color beige to make him emit a high pitch screech to break the glass, which even Zoe believed was unbreakable due a sticker meant to discourage humans from breaking it.

Using one of bikers bikes, Maddie and Pretty reunite with their friends and are chased into a canyon, where the Outback inhabitants, having changed their minds about not helping Maddie, and even the other koalas arrive to help, but everyone is caught in a trap sprung by Clive as a way to get revenge on Chaz for the loss of his brother Duncan, who, prior to the events of the film, tried to escape but ended up getting eaten by a seagull. As a result, they reach a cliff where Chazzie is left dangling over the edge on the ladder. While trying to save Chazzie, Maddie finally stands up to Chaz and tells him that, despite being the dangerous snake on the planet, she is not the monster he says she is and bites his wrist band to help Pretty Boy pull Chazzie to safety. As Maddie is revealed to have molted afterwards, Chaz fully sees these creatures as heroes and decides to let them return to the wild, while also reconciling with Chazzie.

As the Outback inhabitants celebrate the group's heroism, they reunite with Doug and Doreen, who now have numerous children which swarm Pretty Boy, and Jackie, who is revealed to be the head of the USS and had escaped by knowing a few tricks to do so & then ordered the USS that she had founded during her lifetime to help the group on their journey, and they all join their new life in the Outback.

Cast

- Isla Fisher as Maddie, a kind-hearted, optimistic and sensitive inland taipan
- Tim Minchin as Pretty Boy, a self-obsessed koala who suffers from bad luck at every turn
- Guy Pearce as Frank, a lovelorn funnel-web spider
- Miranda Tapsell as Zoe, a smart, self-assured thorny devil
- Angus Imrie as Nigel, a timid marbled scorpion
- Keith Urban as Doug, a cane toad who lives in a school
- Jacki Weaver as Jackie, a motherly saltwater crocodile
- Eric Bana as Chaz Hunt, a zookeeper who pursues the escaped animals and is known as the popular hero of his novels. He grew up in Tampa, Florida
- Diesel La Torraca as Chazzie Hunt, Chaz's adventure-seeking son
- Kylie Minogue as Susan, a razorback
- Rachel House as Jacinta, a friendly great white shark with barnacles in her teeth
- Aislinn Derbez as Legs, a redback spider
- Lachlan Power as Dave, a tough Tasmanian devil
- Aaron Pedersen as Clive, a dung beetle.
- Celeste Barber as Skylar, a female koala
- Jack Charles as Greg, a frilled-neck lizard
- Wayne Knight as Phil, a platypus
- John Leary and Liam Knight as the Kids

- Adelaide and Fletcher Kennedy as Zoo Girl and Zoo Boy

Production

Writer and director Harry Cripps had previously created the concept for the cancelled film *Larrikins* with DreamWorks Animation, which was also supposed to feature a score and music by Tim Minchin,^[2] the project was revived as a short film titled *Bilby* in 2018.^[3] In an interview with *TheWrap*, Cripps said that *Larrikins* had "focused on the cute animals, and so I didn't want to go back down that same road, I went to the dark side."^[4] Clare Knight, whose previous animated film experience includes her work as Lead Editor of the *Kung Fu Panda* franchise, said "A lot of executives would say to us, 'A snake? Snakes aren't huggable. Does your lead have to be a snake?' And it was a challenge for us that we really wanted to make these animals appealing."

Initially, while Netflix was concerned about the "huggability of the animal cast", both Knight and Cripps said that working for the streaming giant's animation unit was positively heavenly. "It's been great. Again, we're first-time directors, so Netflix is willing to give us a shot and give us a voice, so we really feel great. We would've felt if this was DreamWorks, we possibly would've been pigeonholed as writer and editor and not necessarily been given this chance. And the fact that we reached such a big, global audience with this great depiction of Australia I think, is a wonderful thing for us."^[4]

Soundtrack

The film's score was composed by Rupert Gregson-Williams. Executive producer Akiva Goldsman, as director, had previously worked with Rupert on *Winter's Tale*. Rupert had also previously composed the score for animated films such as *Over the Hedge*, *Bee Movie*, *Postman Pat: The Movie*, *Open Season: Scared Silly*, and *Abominable*.

The soundtrack features four original songs, including "Hello World" by Evie Irie and "Beautifully Ugly" by Tim Minchin and Irie.^[7]

All score tracks are composed by Rupert Gregson-Williams.

No.	Title	Length
1.	"Hello World" (Performed by <u>Evie Irie</u>)	2:37
2.	"ROAR" (Performed by <u>G Flip</u>)	3:56
3.	"Beautifully Ugly" (Performed by <u>Tim Minchin</u> feat. <u>Evie Irie</u>)	2:45
4.	"Maddie's Lullaby" (Performed by <u>Thelma Plum</u>)	1:38
5.	"Jackie's Mountains"	2:15
6.	"Chaz's Show"	3:48
7.	"Jackie"	2:23
8.	"Arrival in Sydney"	2:07
9.	"Pretty Boy Trouble"	2:49
10.	"Redbacks"	2:30
11.	"Near Miss"	1:20

<i>Back to the Outback</i>	
Soundtrack album by <u>Rupert Gregson-Williams</u>	
Released	10 December 2021
Genre	Pop
Label	<u>Maisie Music</u> , <u>Sony Music Australia</u>
Singles from <i>Back to the Outback</i>	
1. "Hello World"	Released: 3 December 2021 ^[5]
2. "Beautiful Ugly"	Released: 10 December 2021 ^[6]

12.	"Toad Love"	1:44
13.	"School Bus Mayhem"	2:37
14.	"Tasmanian Devils"	1:10
15.	"Chaz's Secret"	2:12
16.	"Bonding"	2:02
17.	"Arrival at Jackie's Mountains"	1:38
18.	"Chaz Captures the Gang"	1:22
19.	"Maddie Caught"	2:23
20.	"Let's Get Our Friends Back"	1:25
21.	"Fire Truck Pursuit"	2:51
22.	"Dung Balls"	1:33
23.	"Saving Chazzie"	1:57
24.	"Maddie Beautiful"	1:42
25.	"Outback Parade"	1:58
26.	"Let's Get Away" (Performed by Alex the Astronaut)	2:05
Total length:		56:32

Notes

Several other songs were featured in the film and trailers but not included in the soundtrack album:^{[7][8]}

- "[Zou Bisou Bisou](#)" by Gillian Hills.
- "[9 to 5](#)" by [Dolly Parton](#).
- "[Bad Guy](#)" by [Billie Eilish](#).
- "[Nails, Hair, Hips, Heels](#)" by [Todrick Hall](#)
- "[Against All Odds \(Take a Look at Me Now\)](#)" by [Phil Collins](#).
- "[Justified & Ancient](#)" by [The KLF](#).
- "[Take a Long Line](#)" by [The Angels](#).
- "[Sussudio](#)" by [Phil Collins](#).
- "[Wild Child](#)" by [Ace Wilder](#).

Release

On November 30, 2020, [Netflix](#) announced that the animated film *Back to the Outback* would make its world debut in late 2021.^{[9][10]} However, in October 2021, it was announced that the film would premiere worldwide on December 10, 2021.^[11] It also had a [limited theatrical release](#) on December 3, prior to its streaming release on Netflix.^[12]

In the week following its worldwide release, the film reached Top 10 Lists on Netflix in 64 countries, including Australia and the United States.^[13]

Critical reception

On review aggregator website [Rotten Tomatoes](#), it has an approval rating of 82% based on 17 reviews, with an average rating of 6.10/10.^[14] On [Metacritic](#), it has a weighted average score of 58 out of 100, based on 5 critics, indicating "mixed or average reviews".^[15]

Brad Newsome of *The Sydney Morning Herald* said that the "Gorgeous character design and some delightful voice performances elevate this uneven CGI romp in which a bunch of "ugly" Australian animals break out of a zoo and head for the outback."^[16] Natalia Winkelman of *The New York Times* was also positive, writing: "However generic this movie is in premise, there is wit to be found in its details, and warmth in its message."^[17]

Luke Buckmaster of *The Guardian* was more critical, saying "ho-hum animation won't thrill viewers whose age exceeds their shoe size." He gave the film a 2 out of 5 rating.^[18]

Accolades

Year	Association	Category	Recipient	Result
2021	The ReFrame Stamp	Narrative and Animated Feature	<i>Back to the Outback</i>	Won ^[19]

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External links

- *Back to the Outback* (<https://www.netflix.com/title/81002813>) on Netflix
 - *Back to the Outback* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13575806/>) at IMDb
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