

SE FROM ABOVE: Sun, sea and the rainforest from a private villa. Treehouse spa. Fine food is Recharge with a massage.

BLOOMFIELD LODGE

× *Daintree Rainforest, Qld*

Angeline Foong heads north to find out if the place Forbes magazine named the World's Best Remote Hotel is as good as the Yanks say it is

No door keys, no mobile reception and a maximum of 36 guests. For two people in desperate need of a break – but up for something a bit different – that sounds pretty good. Add to that the fact Bloomfield Lodge was crowned 'World's Best Remote Hotel' by *Forbes* magazine, and we're off.

Just getting to the Lodge is enough to get my adrenalin pumping. I'm not a nervous flyer, but as I walk onto the tarmac, the 13-seater plane looks tiny. Can this slip of an aircraft actually make it off the ground? But before second thoughts set in, our pilot with the *Top Gun* sunglasses takes off and I am soon

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distracted by the beautiful blue sky and the sparkling Coral Sea. A tip: for the best views, sit on the left-hand side of the plane so you can spot the sandy enclaves of Palm Cove and Port Douglas on the way there.

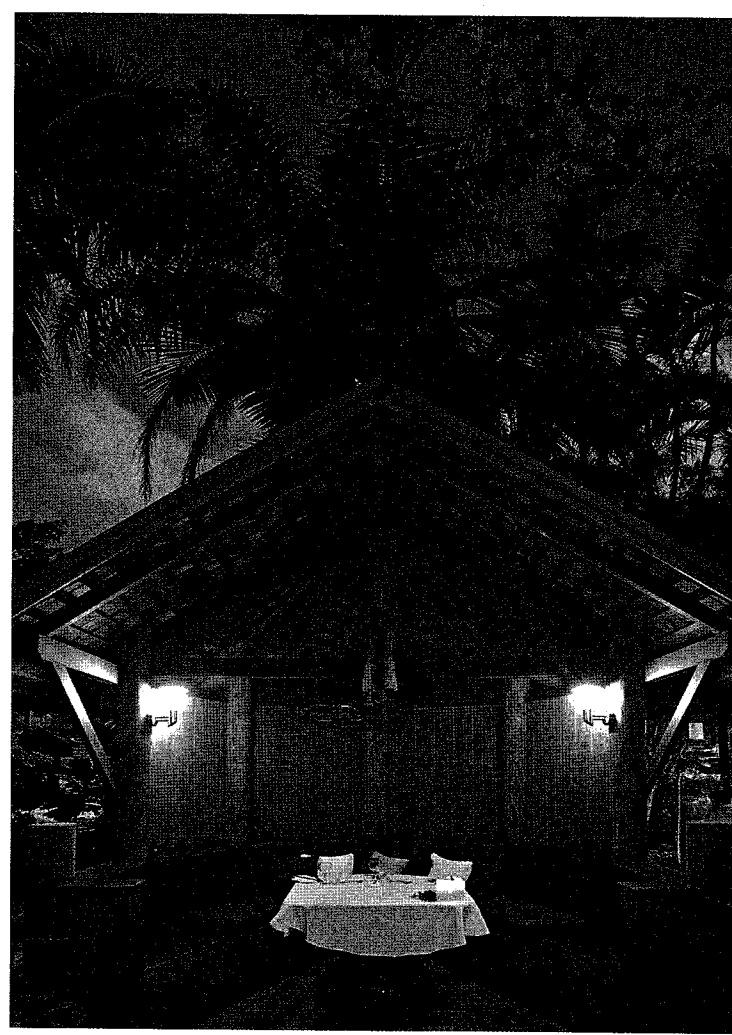
Thirty minutes later, we circle over the mountains and gently land on a grass runway flanked by a tin shed and a rickety lookout

tower. I feel like a pioneer. A 4WD rumbles onto the field, leaving a cloud of red dust in its wake. We drive over a dirt road to a clearing on the Bloomfield River, where the final leg of our journey will be made by boat. Perhaps it is the glue of shared experiences, but our group, total strangers a mere hour ago, is starting to bond. While the men help load the luggage and provisions, I join the women soaking up the 26-degree sunshine.

Our hosts Travis and Greta are waving as we pull up to the jetty, and they personally escort us to our rooms. There are four types of accommodation and as a treat my partner has booked the best on offer – the Hideaway room. Overlooking lush green foliage and Weary Bay, it is the most private of all the rooms – a treehouse in the rainforest canopy.

It is simply furnished, dominated by a four-poster bed with a romantic but practical mosquito net. I am delighted to discover a hot tub and day bed on the balcony that would make Robinson Crusoe green with envy. A peek in the fridge reveals a complimentary bottle of Champagne and a fruit platter, which we immediately tuck into.

There is one price to pay for the seclusion



and the stunning views. The Hideaway rooms are the furthest from the main lodge and necessitate a climb up a steep hill. I consider myself fairly fit, but the walk takes some getting used to. That said, after three full meals a day, I am grateful there is some form of enforced exercise in my Bloomfield routine.

Speaking of which, all meals are included and served at communal tables overlooking the pool. The food is excellent. One of my favourite entrées is a grilled vegetable and blue cheese tart, with a sticky balsamic tar drizzled over the light, crisp pastry. A slow-braised duck then appears for our mains, its tender meat falling apart with a mere nudge of my knife. A crème brûlée with toffee sauce and crunchy pistachio biscotti follows for dessert.

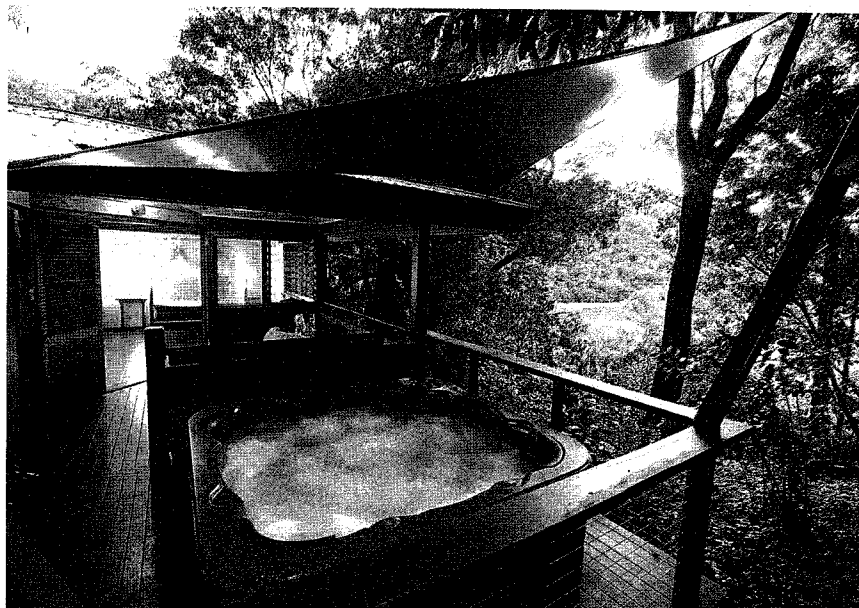
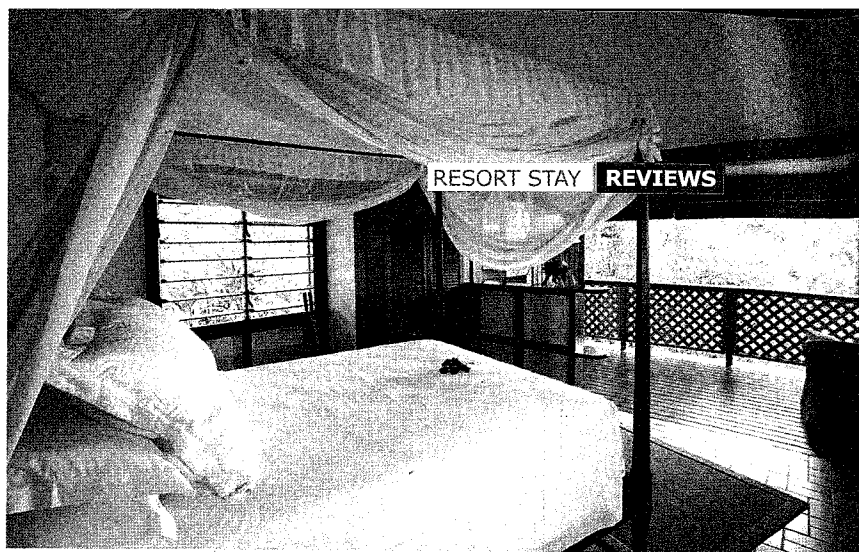
Mealtimes provide some structure to the sun-filled days as we lapse into a languid pace. We laze around the pool, dip into the spa and snooze on the cushioned day beds. I read a book on the pier while others take advantage of the complimentary fishing tackle.

A river cruise is included in our stay, and I'd highly recommend it. Our eagle-eyed guide can spot a croc 30 metres away, but also seems intent at getting the boat as close as



possible to these enormous beasts. I am torn between capturing a photo and backing away in case the six-foot reptile decides he is a bit peckish.

I am too busy relaxing to try the optional Reef or fishing trips, but do benefit from the spoils. One of our fellow guests lands a large barramundi, which the chef flash-fries with a salt and pepper crust and serves to the victor. It is another touch that makes me feel like I am staying at the home of a rich relative, not at a hotel. Rich relatives with stunning properties are hard to find, as are gems like Bloomfield Lodge. ■



THE AT VERDICT

Angeline Foong, who paid her own way and visited anonymously, says: "If you are looking for a quiet, relaxing, adult holiday where you can get close to nature, Bloomfield certainly fits the bill. Don't expect the bells and whistles of a five-star resort, though – the lodge provides a more rustic experience. You won't get room service and infinity pools, but you will get breathtaking views, wonderful meals and return home incredibly refreshed."

The Details

Where The Daintree Rainforest, Cape Tribulation National Park, Queensland.

Notes Rooms start from \$1166 per person for two nights based on twin-share in low season.

Contact (07) 4035 9166; bloomfieldlodge.com.au;