

# Bloomfield Lodge

BEAUTIFULLY REMOTE

## **Andrea Baldwin tastes tropical tranquillity at this unique eco-lodge**

The best holidays start on the plane. When you're gaping at azure and emerald waters that hint at coral below, when the pilot points out tiny atolls of blinding white and deep green nestling in expansive lagoons, when lush rainforested slopes sweep down to beaches without a road or roof in sight, you know you're going somewhere special.

At tiny Mt Louis airfield, once the plane engines cut out, there's no sound but the zing of cicadas and the occasional cry of a waterbird. An enormous blue sky presses gently on juicy-leaved mangroves in wetlands beyond the airstrip. The hush is catching: subdued awe tinges the guests' excitement as we board a 4WD for a short trip along the famous Bloomfield Track.

Bloomfield River reflects the surrounding mountains and three boats at anchor in perfect detail, colour and clarity. We skim over the water and onto a calm silver sea. Approaching Bloomfield Lodge it's hard to discern any buildings among the rainforest canopy: the outstanding feature is the timber pier, equal parts rustic and elegant, growing larger and more inviting as we approach. That, we're all thinking, looks the perfect place to relax.



We're greeted on the beach by hosts Ben and Courtenay. The camaraderie that's sprung up on the trip turns out to be the norm at the Lodge: soon everyone, new arrival or old hand, feels like family. Forming parties for day-trips and activities encourages sociability, as does the honour bar. Guests are invited to mingle at meals – though you're welcome to dine with friends at a dedicated table, or seek romantic privacy complete with candlelight in a secluded gazebo overlooking Weary Bay.

The cabins are luxuriously appointed and scrupulously clean: my Hideaway smells of natural timber and the lemon myrtle candle that burns a welcome by the bed. It's tempting to spend my whole stay in the private hot tub on the deck, with spectacular views over the bay, but there are far too many other delights to sample.

Day-trips include a crocodile cruise on the Bloomfield River, snorkelling on the Great Barrier Reef, humpback whale-watching in season, fishing, visiting Bloomfield Falls, or taking an indigenous cultural tour. If the Lodge isn't *quite* remote enough, staff will happily ferry you to a secluded beach for a stroll or picnic. There's a guided rainforest walk, or –to burn off a few desserts – a more vigorous bush walk over ridges and gullies to the sea.

A little exercise is a good idea, with the food so delicious it's impossible to "exercise" restraint. Head chef Russell Brown serves up the freshest local produce, meats and seafood in an ever-changing menu with European, Asian and contemporary Australian influences. A special highlight is Barbecue Night with rib fillet, sausages, chicken breast and fresh whole fish on the grill, accompanied by salads and breads, tiger prawns, Moreton Bay bugs, Asian mussels, and an antipasto platter. And, of course, those desserts.



The keynote at Bloomfield Lodge is relaxation. Whether you laze by the pool, read up on local history in the comfortable library, snooze on your day-bed, dangle a line from the pier, or treat yourself to a massage, you *will* relax here. Don't fight it.

It had you at the plane.