



Keep an eye out for 'pets'

Lodge as Australian as they come!

When Captain James Cook sailed up the north-east coast of Australia in the HM Bark Endeavour in 1770 he endured so much hardship he assigned names like Mt Misery, Mt Sorrow, Weary Bay and Cape Tribulation to its land and shorelines. As SUE PRESTON reports, if he'd sailed in today he'd receive an entirely different welcome.

TRAVELLING to Bloomfield Lodge, one of the most remote lodges in Australia, brings out something of the explorer in a traveller because this highly-awarded rainforest retreat is accessible only by boat. But then that's just the last part.

First you must take a chartered light plane for a scenic flight from Cairns, alight on a small airstrip next to grazing cattle, then travel by 4WD to the river bank.

Guests' arrival and departure times into the idyllic hideaway on the northern-most tip of the World Heritage listed Daintree Rainforest is dictated by the tide.

We arrive at low tide to find lodge manager Ben Morley waiting to greet us with a tractor! Our boat is hooked to the back of it and we are towed ashore.

Stepping ashore with dry shoes, co-manager Courtenay Greer-Morley wastes no time putting refreshing drink in our hands. If Captain Cook – or "Cookie" as the locals like to call him – had enjoyed this kind of welcome, the place names would have been entirely different.

Bloomfield Lodge was once a fishing lodge, but it shed its "blokey" fishing lodge image a long time ago. Today it is owned and managed by the Trailfinders group of companies and is a member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World. It was recently awarded Best Boutique Accommodation at the prestigious Queensland Hotels Association 2011 Awards for Excellence.

Despite this, Bloomfield Lodge is totally unpretentious and uniquely Australian. There is communal dining beside the pool and an honesty bar where guests can make their own drinks.

Of an evening people mill behind the bar mixing themselves drinks as staff serve canapes, often fish freshly caught by a guest that day.

Over drinks and a delicious dinner, guests recount what they did each day. This can vary between not very much and a lot because both are on offer, depending on your mood.

You can take a boat out to the Great Barrier Reef to fish and snorkel, walk in the rainforest, cruise the river for crocodiles, or simply do nothing more than lie by the pool, read, or stroll the wide sweep of beach below (alas no swimming because of the crocodiles).

We walk through the tangled rainforest one day with Paul, a hardened bushman who has lived all over the world but has made Bloomfield home for the past 12 years.

A young Englishman in the group who has kept his eyes firmly on the ground finally confesses his fear of snakes and other creepy-crawlies and asks if it is dangerous living here.

Paul looks momentarily startled. "Dangerous? We don't have cars here, mate. They're far more dangerous."

The Englishman finds another reason to be nervous the next day when we cruise up river and see five crocodiles, including a gigantic one, at very close range. Our guide Craig knows them all by name or by reputation and jokingly refers to them as "lodge pets".

"Down-time" at Bloomfield is spent in one of 17 individual, spacious retreats dotted discreetly into the landscape.

The best of these are up the hill, but the little bit of "puff" you have to exert to get there is well worth it. With magnificent views across Weary Bay, they open out to the sky and the sea.

The interiors have a soft blue and white palette and there are spas on the open deck and a well-stocked fridge so you don't have to trot down the hill to retrieve a bottle of bubbly.

The lodge is a perfect blend of solitude and conviviality and you can take both in whatever measure you choose.

Each year hundreds of international tourists take over the long journey to Australia and to Bloomfield Lodge to discover this unique part of our country. It's time more Australians did too.

* Sue Preston was a guest of Bloomfield Lodge.

LAZY DAYS – The simple jetty from which guests can fish or idle the day away.

If you go...

BLOOMFIELD Lodge offers an all-inclusive four-night package from \$1520 per person twin or double share in a Rainforest room (low season). The price includes accommodation, all meals, guided rainforest walk, guided river cruise, courtesy car from and to your hotel in Cairns/Cairns airport, scenic flight, private road and boat transfers to and from Bloomfield Lodge and some lodge-based activities.
(07) 4035-9166, 1300-675-658,
www.bloomfieldlodge.com.au

Coming up...



UNDECIDED about what countries to visit on your holidays next year? Then don't miss our special feature next month – Where to go in 2012.

We've scanned the globe to find some of the key events happening throughout the year. We've also looked at new cruise and tour offerings and will reveal what is special about them.

And we'll follow this up in January with even more information about new destinations for the new year. Be prepared for some surprising choices.

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