

SUNDAYdream

FROM VERDANT RAINFOREST TO TROPICAL WETLANDS, THESE WILDERNESS RETREATS LET YOU GO BUSH IN STYLE, WRITES UTE JUNKER.

GO
WILD

One are the days when going bush meant unrolling the sleeping bag and feasting on overcooked snags.

A new breed of wilderness lodge lets you explore Australia's most unique landscapes up close, while still enjoying life's luxuries.

THE BIG BLUE

It's not always an intrepid journey that leads to the most surprising discoveries. Sometimes, revisiting a favourite destination lets you see it in a whole new light. The Blue Mountains are one of the country's classic bush experiences, equally beloved by international tourists, day-

tripping Sydneysiders and grungy hikers.

At Wolgan Valley Resort & Spa, however, you see the mountain landscape differently. There are no crowds, just the never-silent bush surrounded by huge escarpments that tower above the tranquil valley retreat.

The accommodation is both unobtrusive and indulgent. Although the 40 suites are made of decidedly rustic materials – hardwoods, stone and corrugated iron – each 170-square-metre cottage is designed for cocooning, with luxuries such as a swimming pool, double-sided fireplace and 24-hour room service.

Located on 1600 hectares in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, Wolgan Valley Resort offers a blueprint for 21st-century

luxury, being carbon neutral and having a regional, seasonal food philosophy. Guests are encouraged to explore: on horseback, on bicycle, by four-wheel-drive or on foot.

The top priority, however, is giving guests the time and space just to be. As the resort's general manager, Joost Heymeijer, says, "An afternoon nap is not a sin, it's desperately needed." And if the nap doesn't do the trick, the spa's six double treatment rooms offer plenty of opportunities for further pampering.

Wolgan Valley Resort & Spa,
2600 Wolgan Road, Wolgan Valley, NSW;
(02) 9290 9733; wolganvalley.com.
Rates start at \$1950 per suite twin share,
including meals, beverages and activities.

"THERE ARE NO CROWDS, JUST THE NEVER-SILENT BUSH SURROUNDED BY HUGE ESCARPMENTS."



Home on the range
(left) go for a ride in the bush
around Wolgan Valley Resort;
(below) walk in the rainforest
surrounding Bloomfield Lodge;
(above right) a tent with a view
in the Northern Territory.



NORTH STAR

Getting to Bloomfield Lodge in Far North Queensland is an adventure in itself. First, you're loaded onto a light plane in Cairns – and restricted to just seven kilograms of luggage – to fly up to the deep north, landing on an airstrip that belongs to a local cattle station. There's no road access to the lodge, so you'll need to take a four-wheel-drive to Weary Bay, then hop on a boat for the final stage of the journey.

What will you find when you get there? A lush rainforest setting, timber accommodations with water views – and not much else. No crowds, no stress, no mobile coverage.

Bloomfield Lodge makes a great base for exploring two of our most scenic World Heritage areas, the Daintree National Park and the Great Barrier Reef. A guided walk through the Daintree's ancient rainforest will introduce you to some of the world's most primitive plant families, an amazing selection of birds (the forest is home to a fifth of Australia's bird species), and beautiful, saucer-size butterflies. Or spend a day out on the reef in the lodge's private catamaran.

If you're after downtime, there are plenty of ways to relax, from a massage in the spa to a candlelit dinner for two with an ocean view. Or just lie by the pool and savour the sounds and sights of the rainforest.

*Bloomfield Lodge, Far North Queensland;
(07) 4035 9166; bloomfieldlodge.com.au.
Rates start at \$1520 per person for four nights,
including meals and return transfers from Cairns.*

WET AND WILD

Early mornings in the Top End's wetlands are a magical time. As the sun's rays gently light the tranquil billabongs, the rich bird life begins to stir: elegant brolgas and egrets, black-necked storks and flocks of magpie geese. It's a scene best viewed from your tent at Wildman Wilderness Lodge, marvelling at the privilege of watching the world wake up.

Wildman's safari tents offer a luxurious camping experience, with nary a sleeping bag in sight. There's sink-into bedding, ensuite bathrooms and a generous 50-square-metre space. For those who adhere to a strict no-camping policy, Wildman also offers air-conditioned Habitat cabins. Whichever option you choose, however, a stay at Wildman – situated in the Mary River wetlands area half way between Darwin and Kakadu National Park – will give you the opportunity to explore a uniquely Australian environment.

Explore wetlands, woodlands, paperbark forests and pandanus swamps, take a private tour through Kakadu and cruise along the Mary River. Or fish for barramundi, view ancient rock art, and spot local wildlife including dingoes, buffalo and crocodiles. And at meal times, enjoy native ingredients such as wattleseed, Kakadu plums and water lilies spicing up the best of bush tucker.

*Wildman Wilderness Lodge, Mary River Wetlands, NT;
(08) 8978 8955; wildmanwildernesslodge.com.au.
Rates start at \$245 per person per night twin-share for a
safari tent, or \$315 per person per night twin share for a
Habitat cabin (all rates include dinner, bed and breakfast).*

