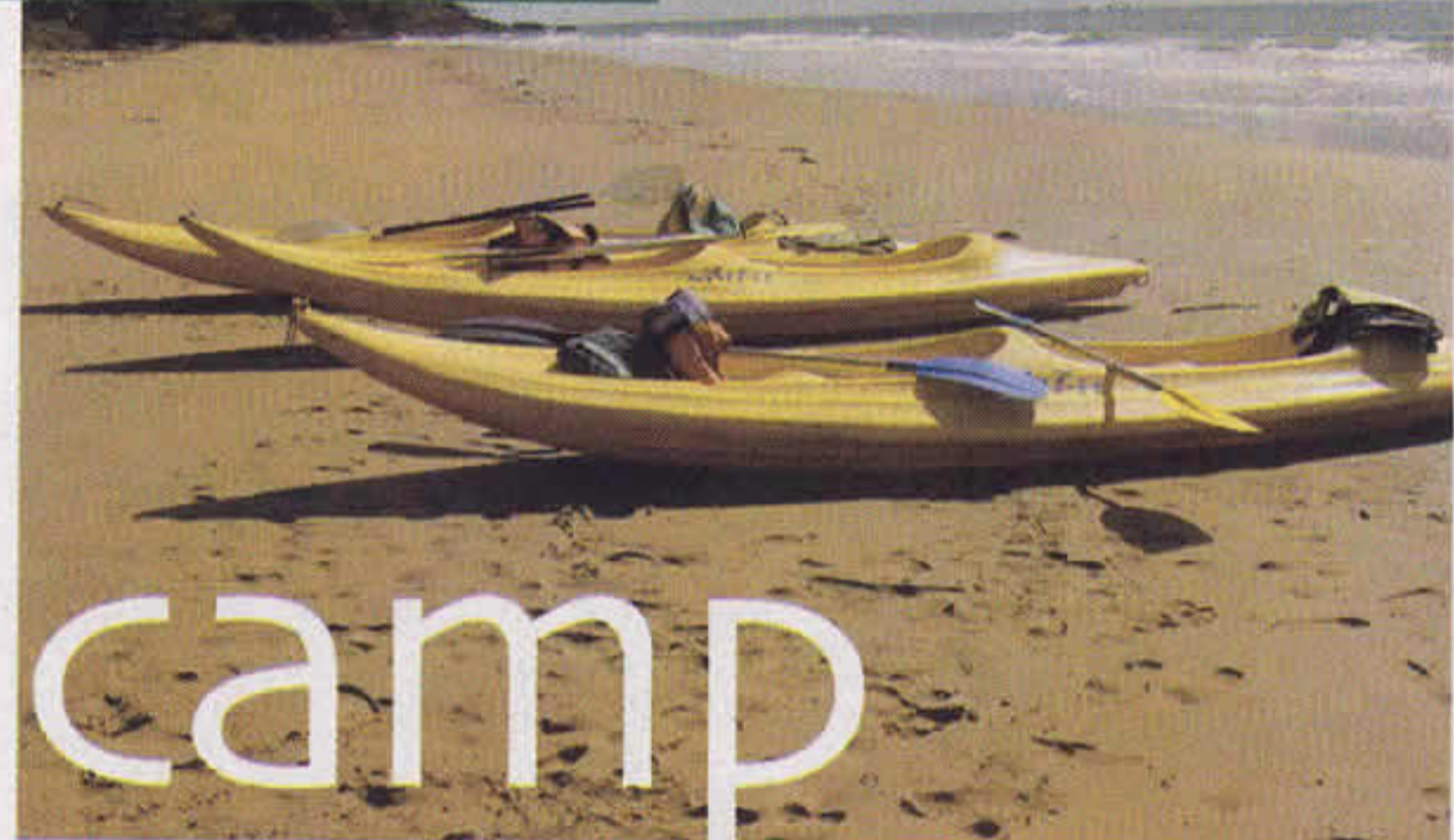


WELL RESTED



camp

CROC

At Crocodylus Village, the local wildlife like to get know you, writes BRIDGET MARTIN.

When the Crocodylus Village was built at Cow Bay in 1988, only eight trees were removed from the site to make room for 14 cabins. As a result, the entire resort is nestled below the forest canopy. Built from green canvas, on low platforms, the cabins merge into the forest and the local wildlife wanders uninhibited through the site.

If you want to spend a night in the rainforest, it is difficult to imagine how,

short of camping, you could comfortably have a closer-to-nature experience.

Our first venture is to follow the 3km self-guided loop walk through the rainforest on the Crocodylus property. Along the way, we pick up some interesting facts about the trees by comparing numbered plates along the trail with those on a laminated sheet, provided at the reception.

Splashing sounds in a nearby creek draw our attention to a brilliant blue azure

kingfisher, which is diving energetically into the water, sometimes striking it lucky and returning to its perch with a fish in its beak.

As we settle on our balcony to enjoy the failing light the rainforest night shift is coming to life. A little micro bat flitters around the magnificent strangler fig tree just in front of our cabin and then adjusts its flight path to include our balcony. A shy, and rarely-seen bird, the noisy pitta, scuffles around in search of a late-night

snack. Up at the restaurant we eat from plates spilling over with food, at tables carved from the trees which were sacrificed when the hostel was built. Guests at Crocodylus tend to follow an energetic program of activities, and have appetites to match.

At 8pm it is time for the night walk. A wiry, local guide, by the name of Possum, equips members of the group with spotlights and gives an imaginative briefing

before they set off into the darkness in search of the Daintree nightlife.

Boyd's forest dragons, impressive lizards found only in the Wet Tropics, can be spotted clinging to the sides of tree trunks and snakes are sometimes encountered — usually harmless-to-humans amethystine pythons or tree snakes. On a good night, striped possums may turn up.

Lying in bed, I can hear something

scuffling through the leaf litter below the cabin. It's probably a bandicoot and as I try to decide whether to get up and look for it with my torch, I fall asleep.

I am woken by bird song. All around me, through the thin canvas walls, the forest is coming to life as dawn approaches. Then I hear footsteps and a scratching on the wall behind my head.

"Time to get up. The bus leaves in ten minutes."

Liz, the curly-haired hostel manager is looking as bright and alert as she was at the bar the previous evening.

We stumble on to the bus and, before we have truly gained consciousness, find ourselves ensconced in a bright yellow kayak, our posteriors sloshing in seawater, paddling through the surf on Cow Bay beach.

We have signed up for the sunrise paddle and, indeed, the sun is scarcely above the horizon as we head out to sea.

Sea kayaking can be hard work in the face of a south-easterly but the scenery makes it worth while.

On the beach, our guide Rob has been busy preparing breakfast, which is spread on a picnic table, beneath an awning.

Gallop into the forest, he returns with a red hibiscus flower to garnish the vast platter of tropical fruit.

We have a blissful hour on the beach before we take to our kayaks again.



fact file



WHERE: Crocodylus is 2km from the main Cape Tribulation road. The junction, near the Cow Bay airstrip, is 14km north of the Daintree River ferry. Getting there: Packages, including return bus trip with Coral Reef Coaches and one night's dorm accommodation, cost \$75pp from Cairns and \$45pp from Port Douglas. **COST:** Dorm beds are \$23 pp and cabins for two are \$75.

ACTIVITIES: A courtesy bus takes guests to Cow Bay beach, Hutchinsons Creek swimming hole and nearby Discovery Centre. Contact: Crocodylus Village YHA, Lot 5, Buchanan Creek Road, Cow Bay, Qld 4873; Ph: (07) 4098 9166; e-mail: crocodylus@austarnet.com.au; web: www.crocodyluscapetrib.com

