



BUSH BUDDIES



settling for pole position

If you like luxury with a glimpse of the wild side, Fur 'n' Feathers is the place for you, as BRIDGET MARTIN discovers.

I don't usually take my binoculars to the spa with me, but I am afraid I might miss something if I don't. We are perched in a treehouse in the middle of Tropical North Queensland's rainforest and the wildlife is putting on a good show for us.

We have just spotted a Lumholtz's tree-kangaroo, perched in the branches near our treehouse. It is only the second I have seen in 15 years of living in this part of Australia.

But we had come to the right place. Fur 'n' Feathers rainforest tree houses are situated on 40ha of forest, which happens to be a hot spot for these rare animals.

Sightings here are frequent and visitors sometimes observe them without moving from the hammock on the veranda.

There are five treehouses, perched on tall poles, overlooking the Ithica River which borders the property. Discreetly separated by dense forest they make a perfect private retreat for a couple but can sleep up to eight people.

The theme is timber and glass. A wall of glass, with sliding doors, separates the spacious veranda from a large living room and kitchen area, with polished wooden floors under a high cathedral ceiling.

The elegant wooden furniture is made from trees

felled when the houses were built and the lounges and beds are upholstered with hand-printed fabric using leaves from the local trees.

In the corner of the living room is a wood-fired stove for chilly winter evenings. There is also IDD internet outlet – but we have better things to look at than a computer screen. On our arrival, Pam, the manager, squashed some ripe banana on to the bird-feeding tray. It is not long before the local birds come to visit.

First comes an emerald dove – well-named for its gleaming green back. Then the big gun arrives – a male riflebird descends on the banana. One of the few birds of paradise outside New Guinea, it is gorgeous. Its velvety black plumage sets off its bright iridescent green cap and the purplish patches of iridescence on its throat and rump.

Retreating to the bath does not mean losing sight of the wildlife. The bathroom walls are enormous windows and nestled in the corner next to them is a double spa bath. As we luxuriate among the bubbles, glass of wine in one hand and binoculars in the other, we can look straight out at the forest.

Back out on the veranda, clad in one of the fluffy white bathrobes provided, I settle down to watch the

next shift at the bird feeder.

I am not disappointed. With a squawk, a king parrot – a stunning combination of brilliant red and deep green – hops up to the feeder.

After dark, when the birds have left, the first possum arrives, climbing down the chain from the rafters to pick up the last of the banana.

A coppery brushtail possum, the rainforest cousin of the more familiar common brushtail, is used to being fed. After playing cute for awhile, it decides to take a more direct approach, knocking on the door and trying to climb through the louvres.

Next day we explore the tracks through the rainforest. There are platypuses and saw-shelled turtles in the creek and slowly lolling along the track in front of us is a red-legged pademelon. Another rainforest-dwelling member of the kangaroo family, this one stays on the ground. Although we don't see it, a large cassowary is a familiar sight at Fur 'n' Feathers.

The rainforest is living up to its name when we visit on a rather wet weekend – but it doesn't matter. Relaxing in our tree house getting close to nature could hardly be more comfortable.



Surrounded by nature: Luxurious bedrooms have rainforest views.



Warm ambience: The treehouses blend in with the natural environment.

fact file

WHERE: Fur 'n' Feathers is near Malanda, about 90 minutes drive from Cairns via the Gillies Highway.

COST: The two-bedroom treehouses cost from \$295 per night. There is also a two-bedroom rainforest unit, with wheelchair access, attached to the managers' house, from \$180 per night. The Bower, a larger three-bedroom, two-bathroom treehouse at the edge of the property, overlooking the valley, costs from \$400 per night. Minimum two nights stay. Discounts are offered for longer stays.

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Meet a brushtail possum.



Enjoy the elevated views.



A king parrot is one of the many creatures that will amaze you at this tranquil rainforest retreat.