

ROOM AT  
THE INN

## Green and pleasant

STELLA MARTIN

"TRESPASSERS will be impressed," reads the sign as we swing into the Glass House Mountains Ecolodge. We are indeed impressed. It is not everywhere you can sleep in a 120-year-old church or a Victorian train carriage or help yourself to fruit from a tropical orchard.

Having booked in, we are not simply given a key and directed to our room. Instead, Robyn, one of the managers, gives us a grand tour. Her enthusiasm for the place is infectious. Skirting past a collection of quirky garden sculptures, she points out the library — a refurbished train carriage with comfy, leather sofas — and leads us via the communal kitchen and dining room, also in rail carriages, to the orchard where we pause to feast on grumichama cherries. By the time we reach our room, next to a communal breezeway seating area, I feel I have made a friend.

Eco-lodge, in my experience, can be a rather meaningless term, especially if forest has been cleared to make room for it. But this one, created by former Brisbane city councillor Keith Murray, is the real deal.

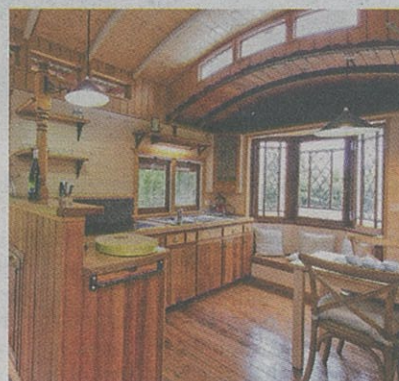
It occupies a former pineapple plantation, part of which has been revegetated with native trees that create a forested backdrop.

Guests can explore the kids' rainforest adventure trail or the self-guided bush tucker trail, and contribute to its extension. Murray has also created a coffee orchard and planted more than 60 fruit trees; a guide is available and guests are invited to sample the fruit and use the homegrown herbs and vegetables.

Water, harvested from roofs, is solar-heated for guest bathrooms and grey water goes through a commercial-grade waste treatment system for use on the gardens.

Solar panels produce the lodge's power and, in the kitchen, a bank of bins encourages guests to separate rubbish for composting and recycling.

Murray initially moved a 120-year-old church from near Esk to the site and refurbished it as a family home.



**Clockwise from top, the interior of the 120-year-old church transported to the site; the train exterior, its well-equipped kitchen and sleeping berth**

From there the project grew. Railway carriages joined the church and additional buildings were attached to provide more accommodation.

Murray's aim, when he opened the lodge to visitors in 2004, was to share his vision of sustainability and social justice. But this is no hairshirt accommodation. The well-furnished rooms have airconditioners, WiFi and ensembles, and some also have kitchens.

The church is very special. A spacious lounge with extensive library, kitchenette and wood-burning stove occupies the nave, the bedroom is in a loft with a view of nearby Mount Tibrogargan.

Before leaving I take one last trip to the grumichama bush. If I come back in another season a new feast will await me. I'm already making plans.



### Checklist

Glass House Mountains Ecolodge, 98 Barrs Road, Glass House Mountains, QLD 4518; (07) 5493 0008; glasshouseecolodge.com.

### TARIFF

From \$112 to \$185 a night twin-share; there is usually a minimum two-night stay at weekends.

### GETTING THERE

There's free pick-up from Glass House Mountains train station. If driving, head 70km north from Brisbane on the Bruce Highway, take the Steve Irwin Way exit and after about 10km turn left to follow Barrs Road for 2km.

### CHECKING IN

Families and couples looking for affordable accommodation close to Australia Zoo and the Glass House Mountains, or those simply wanting to chill out in delightful surroundings.

### BEDTIME READING

*Bushtime Tucker Field Guide* by Len Hiddins.

### STEPPING OUT

The lodge is a short walk from Glass House Mountains National Park and a short drive from the lookout and the town's excellent information centre. It is also 10 minutes from Australia Zoo and 30 minutes from the Sunshine Coast. Day trips to Fraser Island can be organised by the lodge.

### BRICKBATS

A no-smoking sign in the communal breezeway would be appreciated.

### BOUQUETS

The genuine friendliness of managers Robyn and Rick, who are always ready for a chat; the little eco-hint notes (did you know that boiling a full electric jug for one cup of tea wastes as much power as a fridge uses in three hours?); the authenticity of the venture.