

SPA WATCH

As happy as a pig in mud

By BRIDGET MARTIN

*MUD, mud glorious mud,
There's nothing quite like it,
For cooling the blood.*

Hippos know this, as do pigs – and so do Anita and Mike McGoldrick, owners of Julatten Mountain Retreat in northern Queensland.

On a sultry summer day nothing is quite as refreshing as slipping, literally, into a bath of cool mud.

It oozes between the toes and behind the ears. When we emerged, my husband and I were covered with a thick, brown coating.

"You must let it dry on your skin," Anita had instructed us. "As it dries it draws all the toxins out of your body."

The medicinal properties of the mud were discovered by accident after guests taking a dip in the lily pond started covering themselves with it. Anita had it tested and discovered it had almost exactly the same properties as commercial mud packs.

She set up a bath tub in the garden, screened it with tropical plants and filled it with mud. It now resembles a Gothic castle, accretions of dried mud forming solid flows and pinnacles with a soft, cooling centre.

We ambled slowly through the forest to nearby Euluma Creek and, as we basked on flat, riverside rocks, slipped into a trance of wellbeing which was to last for the next three days.

The mud now dry and cracking, we plunged into the creek to rinse it – and our unwanted toxins – away. Reluctantly we wandered back to the world of humans; we had a busy schedule of relaxation ahead of us.

The scent of warmed essential oils greeted us at the door of the massage hut. Surrounded by tropical plants, just a screen separating us from the elements, we

put ourselves at the mercy of our masseuses as they kneaded our knotted muscles.

Back at our cabin, a warm essential-oil bath awaited us in the outdoor tub, two glasses of wine placed next to our folded towels.

We responded slowly but enthusiastically when the bell sounded from the house to call us to dinner. Meals at the Julatten Mountain Resort are legendary. That night our four courses, served on the enormous veranda of the McGoldricks' wooden pole home, included a tender steak with one of the resort's specialties, a fine bearnaise sauce.

Next morning, we awoke in our cabin – one of four on the 17-hectare property – to the sound of birdsong. From our bed, we could look straight through the insect screen, which made up most of the main wall of the cabin, to our private lily pond beyond.

Anita was in the kitchen. She wasn't preparing food, however, but blending pawpaw with aloe vera and various fragrant ingredients for our organic scrub. She presented us with two bowls of the mixture – and a paintbrush – and led us to a discreet corner below the house. "Paint this all over each other," she instructed, "and sit in the sauna for at least 15 minutes."

We then took turns to lie under the multiple jets of the Vichy shower and scrub the mixture off, using a pair of scratchy mitts. It left our skins soft and glowing.

Driving off, I glanced down and noticed some mud still clinging to my toenails. Mud does indeed stick, but in this case I didn't mind at all.



SO COOL: The pool at Julatten in northern Queensland and, below left, the mud bath.

Pictures: BRIDGET MARTIN



IF YOU GO

■ Julatten Mountain Retreat is a 30-minute drive inland from Port Douglas and 75 minutes from Cairns. Pick-ups can be arranged from Port Douglas or Mossman.

■ A three-day, two-night pampering package costs \$410 per person twin.

■ Phone (07) 4094 1282, fax (07) 4094 1582; email infoatjulattenretreat.com or see www.julattenretreat.com.