



Dreamy delights: Sunrise adds a tinge of pink to the sea of mist (bottom); romantic views from a king-size bed are across the paddocks to Queensland's two highest peaks, Bartle Frere and Bellenden Ker (far left); and a treehouse built with views overlooking Mt Quincan Crater (left)

It's a hole new world

Bridget Martin visits a crater retreat in north Queensland and finds some serious relaxation, spectacular views and a hidden world in an extinct volcano

"COME and see the hole in the backyard." Kerry Kehoe leads us on to his veranda and we stare down into the perfectly formed crater of an extinct volcano.

I've lived in this part of the world for nearly 20 years but have never before seen Mt Quincan Crater. It's an astonishing sight. Rainforest covers much of the inside of the rim and at the bottom is a shallow, circular, reed-dense wetland.

Standing 170m above the surrounding countryside, Mt Quincan is the highest of a series of conical hills that formed in the distant past as ash and cinders erupted from below the ground of the Atherton Tableland.

The Kehoes own most of Mt Quincan but have opted to share the view. Around the rim they've built six pole cabins and treehouses, designed as a romantic retreat for couples. Two of them have views into the crater and four look out over the Tableland.

Kerry leads us down wooden steps, strewn with rose petals, and into our cabin. When he opens the door, we blink at the view. The front of our cabin is almost entirely glass and, perched on the outer slope of the

volcano, we gaze across fields scattered with lowing cattle to Queensland's two highest peaks, Bartle Frere and Bellenden Ker.

In the centre of the cabin is a wood-burning stove Kerry has designed to swivel. After dark, when the temperatures drop, and we have built a roaring fire, we turn it towards us as we eat and then to face the spa, where we lounge, enjoying complimentary heart-shaped chocolates and port.

Later, the dying embers form a cosy backdrop as we doze off in our king-sized bed.

There are several walks on the property. Within minutes of leaving our cabin we hear something scurry through the undergrowth and a nearby tree begins to shake.

Some visitors think north Queenslanders are pulling their legs when they tell them about tree-kangaroos but in this small part of Australia, the wet tropics rainforests, there are two species. And one of these, a Lumholtz's tree-roo, straddles a tree trunk and stares down at us.

Kerry and Barb are proud of the wildlife on their property. There are also green ringtail and brushtail

possums in the trees, platypus in Leslie Creek at the bottom of the hill, and abundant red-legged pademelons.

They have applied to have their 8ha of rare Mabi rainforest gazetted as a nature refuge, which will enable them to continue their work on rehabilitation.

Mabi is the local indigenous name for tree-kangaroo and these endangered animals are most commonly found in this type of forest.

Back in the cabin, we enjoy the wonderful outdoor shower, set up on a deck built around a tree to the side of our cabin. Although perfectly private, one lucky guest reported an audience here, a curious mother and baby tree-roo.

We then settle down on our deck to enjoy the home-made muffins, jam and cream, some of the many delights provided.

That night, as we soak in the double spa, the moon rises on a plain filled with dense, white mist. Our cabin feels like a boat on the edge of the ocean. Next morning (we choose not to pull down the blinds) from our bed we watch the sun rise behind the Bellenden Ker Range, adding a tinge of pink to the sea of mist below.

On Saturday morning, Barb reminds us about the Yungaburra market, the largest and most colourful on the Tableland, held on the fourth Saturday of every month.



MT QUINCAN

DRIVE A few kilometres from Yungaburra, one hour's drive from Cairns via the Gillies Highway.

STAY Mt Quincan Crater Retreat, Peeramon Rd, Yungaburra. Mail to PO Box 200, Queensland 4872, call 4095 2255, email bookings@mtquincan.com.au or visit www.mtquincan.com.au.

TARIFFS \$245-\$310 per couple, per night (minimum two nights). Price includes full breakfast daily.

The family has deep roots in this delightful town. The market is held in Maud Kehoe park, named after Kerry's grandmother, and Kerry's father was born in the historic Lake Eacham Hotel (the Yungaburra pub), which was run by the Kehoe family from 1916 until 1971.

In the evening we walk along the ridge to a lookout with a multi-million-dollar view. On one side we look down into the crater and on the other across the tableland to Yungaburra and the Seven Sisters, a cluster of smaller volcanic cones, and to the forested islands surrounding the famous Curtain Fig Tree and lakes Eacham and Barrine. It is a view of ever-changing cloudscapes and magnificent sunsets.

On our last morning, before tucking into our complimentary break-

fast, we follow the one-kilometre track around the wetland in the crater. Pademelons bound across our path and a little red-browed finch struggles to carry a length of grass into the nest it's building.

Water dragons plop hurriedly into the water, minute frogs with green stripes on their sides leap from grass blades, spider webs hang, strung with dew drops, and watching us from above is yet another tree-roo.

Back up on the crater's rim, birds of prey circle above our heads. Five pacific bazas wheel around, calling to each other, and three nankeen kestrels swoop and bank, catching insects in the air. These are birds with discerning eye for a good view. If I had the choice, I'd hang out here, too.

The writer was a guest of Mt Quincan Crater Retreat.

