

BUSH REMEDIES

Harnessing nature's bounty in Australia

Writer Denise Cullen





OUTBACK SPAS

Set amid rich red desert sand dunes, Spa Kinara (meaning 'moon') offers a cooling retreat. The spa is attached to the boutique wilderness retreat known as Longitude 131°, its design inspired by traditional Aboriginal shelters known as 'wiltja'.

The spa menu features a range of Li'Tya (meaning 'of the earth') spa products and massage techniques which incorporate ancient aesthetics. Creator Gayle Heron consulted with Aboriginal elders who shared their herbal and healing knowledge, as well as the spiritual philosophy taught from the Ya'idt-mitung (yai-ma-dung) people. The range showcases native ingredients such as Kakadu

plum, mineral-dense Australian yellow clay and nutrient-rich local desert salts.

Research into the therapeutic qualities of Kakadu plum, endemic to Australia's tropical north, is continuing. A 2015 conference paper presented at the Queensland Bushfoods Association Conference highlighted its high level of antioxidants and antibacterial qualities.

Those who consume this sweet and sour tasting form of 'bush tucker' should also know that the Kakadu plum is packed with vitamin C – with concentrations of six per cent reported, compared to 0.007 per cent for oranges.



Australia's Northern Territory offers vistas of diverse and breathtaking beauty. Located here are the lush wetlands of the Top End, the dry, rugged terrain of the red centre, and the sacred rock Uluru. As the cradle of one of the most ancient continuous civilisations on the planet, the Northern Territory is also rich in wisdom and tradition, with DNA evidence revealing that Indigenous people trod lightly on this land as long as 50,000 years ago.

But because traditional remedies were handed down by word of mouth, much

of this knowledge has since been lost, says Erich Lassak, co-author of *Australian Medicinal Plants*. "Only a handful of people are left who have extensive knowledge of Aboriginal herbal medicine," he writes.

Recently, though, there has been a resurgence in interest in bush medicine, and a commitment to capturing and harnessing this wisdom before it's too late. This desire to preserve and promote nature's bounty has seen the development of homeopathic remedies including Australian bush flower essences, cosmetics based upon the anti-

ageing qualities of crocodile oil, and a burgeoning outback spa culture built upon traditional techniques and native ingredients unique to the region.

And still, there are many secrets the Australian bush may yield. A 1987 paper, titled *The Enchanted Herb* and published in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, holds out hope that within the "antipodean scrub" may still lie "undiscovered fungus or bacteria, the saponin or alkaloid, which will yet bring a new cure or benefit to the wider world".



TRADITIONAL INGREDIENTS

Another powerful bush medicine used by indigenous Anangu *ngangkari*, or traditional healers, is known as irmangka-irmangka (scented emu bush). At Spa Kinara its use in spa treatments offers guests a real, sensory connection to country. The irmangka-irmangka balm is popular for its multiple healing applications, with anti-inflammatory properties suitable for relieving everything from sore joints to symptoms of the common cold.

The fresh leaves of the bush are used along with Australian extra virgin olive oil and bees wax to create a handmade balm. This is made and supplied to Spa Kinara by the Ngangkari Program, operated by the Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Lands Women's Council. All proceeds from the sale of the balm go to its creators and their work in the region.



PHOTO BY DENISE CULLEN



Located nearby – in outback terms at least – is the Red Ochre Spa, located within Sails in the Desert Hotel at Ayers Rock Resort. Its Uluru Recovery package is perfect for long-haul travellers, as it incorporates an indulgent foot and leg treatment, plus full-body massage. Other notable spas in the state include Darwin's Lagoon Day Spa, and the Lavish Day Spa in Alice Springs.

FRESH FACES

New discoveries continue to emerge from Australia's red centre. Golden 8 Skincare, for example, uses Northern Territory-sourced crocodile oil in its range designed to manage sensitive skin conditions and counteract the visible signs of ageing. Crocodile oil has been used for centuries in indigenous communities to speed up the wound healing process and treat serious skin conditions, says the brand's director Josephine Robson.

Robson says, "The crocodile has one of the most powerful immune systems in nature. Their impenetrable skin remains

resilient in the most extreme of tropical environments."

Packed with other native ingredients, such as quandong (a wild peach), desert lime and wattle seed, Golden 8's top-selling products include face serum, hand wash and cream, body lotion and soothing cream for sensitive skins.

Fifth generation herbalist Ian White has distilled the far north's more obscure flora in his established Australian Bush Flower Essences range, now distributed in more than 30 countries around the world. He notes that essences including bauhinia (which promotes flexibility and openness), bluebell (which encourages heart opening) and mintbush (which inspires clarity, calm, and coping skills) all originate in the Top End, and promote metaphysical as well as physical benefits. Many of these products are available via the click of a mouse, so even if you can't make the trip Down Under, you can still enjoy the fruits of this fertile soil. 🌿

