

## IN THE KNOW

Sunrise camel rides at Summer Land Camels are \$135 a person, including breakfast.

[summerlandcamels.com.au](http://summerlandcamels.com.au)

The full gourmet grazing menu at The Overflow Estate 1895 is available on weekends (10am to 4pm). The WanderPods opened late last year. From \$395 a night for a one-bedroom pod midweek, to \$795 for a two-bedroom pod in high season. Breakfast provisions and a bottle of wine from The Overflow Estate 1895 are included. Scenic Rim Farm Box prices start from \$125, including delivery to guests' WanderPods.

[wander.com.au/scenicrim](http://wander.com.au/scenicrim)



## An hour from Brisbane, the Scenic Rim's secret is out

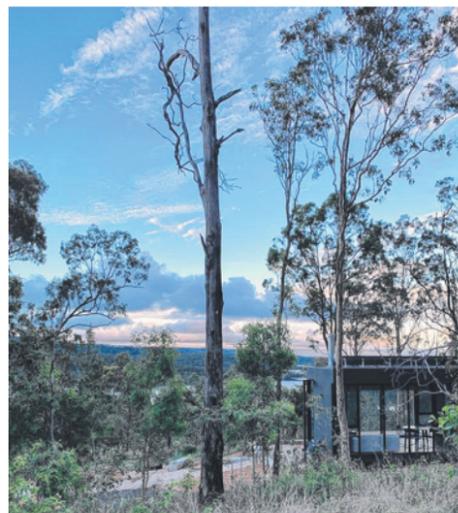
DENISE CULLEN

Just after dawn, a Jurassic bellowing erupts from a barn at Summer Land Camels, the world's largest wild camel training centre and dairy. Sprawled across more than 300ha at Harrisville in the Scenic Rim, the operation was founded in 2015 by former cattle grazer Paul Martin, who rounded up feral animals to save them from a large-scale government-sanctioned cull. Tourism wasn't part of Martin's original plan, but the curiosity shown by passers-by, some of whom leapt fences to take selfies with the camels, led him to introduce farm tours, picnics, sunset drinks and more.

We're here with another couple for a sunrise camel ride, one of the premium offerings. It starts with guests brushing the dromedaries and watching the cameleers saddle them up. My steed is Henry, a gentle long-lashed boy, with a soft coat the colour of caramel. As we move off in one slow, undulating procession, the bellowing continues. It's coming from camel matriarch and sunrise ride regular Queenie, who is protesting being benched that morning. "She's injured her shoulder and needs to rest," trainer Toni Hall explains.

The sun creeps higher in the sky as we follow a big loop through the pastures where many of the other 550-strong herd are grazing and past the medicinal cannabis farm that's under construction nearby. "We'll have to be sure the camels don't get into that," says Martin later, as we dig into a post-ride breakfast of eggs Benedict in the homestead cafe and shop. Martin can't believe he was one of the first to spot this opportunity. "Australia has a disease-free population of camels but no one's doing anything with them," he says. "And the best solution we can come up with is shooting them? Surely we're beyond that."

Martin's story, with its themes of sustainability, resourcefulness and purpose, is not unlike that of many others in the Scenic Rim. This region of lush rural pastures, rainforest-clad mountains and quirky towns and villages is brimming with farmers, growers and dreamers. Less than an hour's drive from Brisbane and the Gold Coast, it remained a well-kept secret among southeast Queenslanders until Lonely Planet rated it as one of the world's top 10 regions to visit in its Best in Travel 2022 list. It made the cut, alongside Iceland's Westfjords and Japan's Shikoku, because of its national parks, eco lodges, World Heritage-listed Gondwana rainforests and



food and wine experiences. Summer Land Camels was nominated as one of the Scenic Rim's five highlights.

Resilience is another of the region's emerging themes. In September 2019, at the start of what became Australia's Black Summer, bushfires swept through Lamington National Park, destroying the 86-year-old heritage-listed Binna Burra Lodge and 42 rustic cabins. But the surviving sky lodge buildings, campsites and new safari tents reopened a year after the blaze. Other structures, including a cottage bearing the name of founder Arthur Groom, have been refurbished and, at the time we visit, workers are hammering a spacious new timber deck on to the teahouse. Binna Burra's ebullient chairman, Steve Nokes, says there is plenty more to come this year, with 13 tiny houses opening next month and a via ferrata (climbing route attached to the cliff face) planned.

Binna Burra is a popular launching point



for many of Lamington National Park's 160km of hiking trails. But with a lunch date planned, we instead head to the Curtis Falls Track within Tamborine National Park to the north. Joining us as we pass through a forest of towering rose gums into lush subtropical rainforest is Lisa Groom, who is Arthur Groom's granddaughter and now heads family-owned Park Tours. She points out the strangler figs that "take over (other) trees in very slow motion" and the piccabeen palm fronds traditional owners would weave into baskets. Prior to the pandemic, Groom led tours all over the world, but now stays close to home. "I kept saying, 'One day, I'll come back to the local area', and now it's been granted in a strange kind of way," she says.

Having worked up an appetite, we descend on Picnic Real Food Bar at North Stores on North Tamborine. Located far from the fudge shops and clock makers of the Long Road Gallery Walk, North Stores is a food, art and

nature precinct set to officially launch in March. Parts of it, however, including Picnic Real Food Bar, Potta Studio and The Christine Sharp Studio + Stockroom, have already thrown open their doors. Here to greet us is Brenda Fawdon, formerly of Brisbane's Mondo Organics restaurant and cooking school, which championed concepts such as "organic", "sustainable" and "ethically sourced" long before they entered the lexicon. The same ethos is apparent here in the charcuterie platter, which features delights such as Northern Rivers salumi, Adelaide Hills cheese and kraut made in-house from local cabbage. This venture is focused on casual, relaxed and takeaway food for those who have had their fill of foam, smears and other culinary hijinks. "Everybody wants it local and simplistic, and with some care," says Fawdon.

Our next stop is The Overflow Estate 1895, set on 1600ha overlooking atmospheric Lake Wyaralong. The historic grazing farm still runs 500 head of cattle, but it is better known for its cellar door and cafe. Owner Dave Morgan and his wife purchased the property from the grandson of the original owner. In 2012, the pair planted 2500 vines – Mediterranean varieties such as vermentino, fiano, montepulciano and tempranillo – after visiting vineyard-owning friends in Spain. "We already had the land and thought, 'If they can do it, we can do it,'" Morgan says. An al fresco cafe helmed by French chef de cuisine Olivier Boudon offers two and three-course set menus featuring dishes of sandcrab lasagne or duck à l'orange; diners without a reservation are offered a more casual menu.

That night, we sleep in flax linen sheets within one of five newly installed WanderPods dotted around the property. These luxurious cabins are off the grid, featuring solar and water harvesting and storage, grey-water recycling and compost bins for organic waste. Their dramatic lines and earthy, textured interiors create a restful cocoon from which to view the landscape, while works by Indigenous artist Peter Fowler and local photographer Carin Garland further invite reflection. Wander is the creation of former interior designer Cassandra Sasso, who sought an alternative to generic hotel rooms that separate guests from their surroundings.

Instead of the traditional in-house restaurant, a pre-ordered Scenic Rim Farm Box provides all the fresh local produce, dairy, meat and sweet treats we'll need for the stay. As we toss a salad, throw some steaks on the gas-powered barbecue and line up some caramel slice for later, I can't think of anywhere I'd rather be.

Denise Cullen was a guest of Wander, Summer Land Camels and Tourism and Events Queensland.



Summer Land Camels in the Scenic Rim, top; WanderPod at The Overflow Estate 1895, above; Picnic Real Food Bar at North Stores, North Tamborine, left; charcuterie platter from North Stores, above right