

## DESTINATION QUEENSLAND



**S**HAFTS of sunlight pierce the glassy green surface of the waterhole at the foothills of Mount Barney where Indigenous women used to give birth. Our host, Gurruhmun (Kruze Summers), a Ugarapul and Bidjara man, encourages us to run our hands over the shallow grooves in boulders which were once filled with earth and leaves to serve as newborn cradles.

"It gives me goosebumps," says Summers, shivering. "This is first connection to land."

He points to indentations in the rock wall on the other side of the river. After a woman had given birth, her placenta would be placed here, to give back to Mother Earth, he says. Then the baby would be rubbed down with echidna fat and a smoking ceremony would be conducted.

"These methods gave the healthiest welcome any soul could ask to be born into," Summers says.

It's the opening morning of Yarriba Dreaming, a three-day, live-in immersion, which represents the first Indigenous-led tour in South-East Queensland's Scenic Rim. The tour is run in collaboration with Mt Barney Lodge, which is located at the edge of Mount Barney National Park, part of the World Heritage-listed Gondwana Rainforests of Australia. Yarriba means "walking" and Summers seeks to share his ancestors' stories, memories and culture by having guests walk on Country.

It began earlier that day with a smoking ceremony. After taking turns to scoop the smoke over ourselves, the four members of my group followed Summers to this little-known birthing waterhole.

A splash and the swish of a tail prompts him to point out that this is also a spawning site for catfish - *wang-ginge*, in the Ugarapul language.

"They're my favourite eating," he adds.

### Learning about totems

We follow a narrow path back through bushland to a picnic table and a packed lunch at Yellow Pinch Reserve. Minutes later, a wedge-tailed eagle (*doowa*) circles the air above us, effortlessly riding the thermals.

Summers acknowledges it with a cheerful wave. Australia's largest bird of prey is his totem - one he shared with his late grandfather John Long who, before his death in 2021, urged Summers to take up his role as cultural custodian.

The eagle often visits him here.

Later that day, I'm assigned the Australian magpie as my totem and, for the next three days, I'll be referred to by the magpie's Ugarapul name, *Qul-lum-beroon*.

"Totems are a way of seeing connections," Summers says. "It's a way of opening your eyes and heart to something that was never there before."

Sure enough, I suddenly see magpies and hear their distinctive warbling everywhere. (Spookily, too, they swoop onto my back deck at home as I'm penning this story.)

We stay overnight in Moringarah home- stead, a Queenslander dating back to the early 1900s, when this sprawling 12-hectare property used to be a dairy farm. Mt Barney Lodge owners Innes and Tracey Larkin purchased the site from Innes' parents in 2006 and continued to expand its eco-retreat credentials, with camping, glamping, cabins, homesteads and adventure activities. They have worked with Summers to develop Yarriba Dreaming.

"When we think about our white history, we did such a 'good' job of disconnecting the Indigenous people of this country from all

of this," Innes says. "Yet we had so much to learn and so much to gain."

### Gentle awakening

In the morning, the usual heart-starting scream of my alarm clock is replaced by the sonorous tones of the didgeridoo. Played outside the homestead's front door, Summers' "didge alarm" is designed to gently stir us towards wakefulness. Thus roused, we join him in a cultural meditation, a series of stretches to facilitate contemplation.

"It's better if you can do it with your eyes closed because you're seeing with your heart and not your eyes," Summers says.

I slowly feel myself unravel. Afterwards, another member of the group, a psychologist, remarks that I'd let out the relaxed sort of sigh that signals a shift to a parasympathetic ("rest and digest") state.

We gather for cups of tea made from just-plucked lemon myrtle leaves - one of dozens of bush tucker plants which are dotted around the property.

A light drizzle is falling, so we duck under umbrellas and head out to see what else we can find. Summers claims that the land is like a supermarket, but I can't see anything edible. However, he quickly points out the warrigal greens (which were devoured by Captain Cook's crew to banish scurvy), bunya nuts, and the nutritious tubers of native ginger, blue flax lilies and lomandra.

# Deep into the Dreamtime

A journey through centuries of Indigenous culture is both sensory and spiritual, writes *Denise Cullen*.

Clockwise from main: Mount Barney; tour participants cook damper; Gurruhmun (Kruze Summers); Gurruhmun holds lomandra, an essential bush tucker herb dating back thousands of years. **Pictures: Tourism and Events Queensland; Denise Cullen; supplied**

"Back in the day, you can imagine how healthy the land was - you'd never starve," he said. During our time here, we also learn how to fashion a dome-like shelter (*gunyah*) from sticks and tree bark, start a fire using flints and fire drills, and hunt native animals using traditional tools.

Though Summers provides ample instruction and demonstration, none of us come close to hitting the target. Spear after spear and nulla nulla after nulla nulla go wide, soar high or fall flat.

Turns out, we may starve, after all.

That night, during dinner around the campfire, Summers confesses that he grew up disconnected from the traditional way of life. He's had to learn a lot of these skills from scratch.

What drives him to learn more? "Knowing my old people are proud of me for having a go."

*The writer was a guest of Mt Barney Lodge*

### TRIP NOTES

**Getting there:** Mt Barney Lodge is 90 minutes by road from Brisbane or the Gold Coast.

**Staying there:** Yarriba Dreaming guests stay in the Moringarah home- stead. Not joining the tour? Campsites at Mt Barney Lodge start at \$20 per person per night.

**Touring there:** Yarriba Dreaming is available for private group bookings and includes all meals, accommodation and activities (\$1895 twin share). Public full day (\$250) and half day (\$150) tours are now available.

**Explore more:** [mtbarneylodge.com.au/yarriba-dreaming](http://mtbarneylodge.com.au/yarriba-dreaming)