

THE ROAD AHEAD

AUTUMN 2024

Blooms for Blokes

FLOWER POWER
HELPS DELIVER
ROAD SAFETY
MESSAGE TO
AT-RISK MEN



RACQ

Beyond THE BEACHES

STORY DENISE CULLEN



HEAD INLAND, AWAY FROM THE GOLD COAST'S FAMOUS BEACHES AND DISCOVER THE CHARMS OF ITS HINTERLAND.

RAIN IS FALLING like fine mist as we approach Kweebani Cave in the Binna Burra section of Lamington (Woonoongoora) National Park, 110km south of Brisbane.

For thousands of years, this sweeping expanse of volcanic rock, shaped like a cresting wave about to spill, was used as a kitchen by the local Yugambah people.

I close my eyes and imagine them here – taking shelter, lighting fires, cooking food, sharing stories.

My companion and I are hiking the Caves track barely two weeks after fierce storms blacked out tens of thousands of homes in the Gold Coast and Scenic Rim regions.

Here, in the Gold Coast hinterland, the power is mostly back on, but the rain continues, on and off.

The 7km Caves track is one small snippet of the estimated 160km of trails here.

I've explored many of them – always in the rain, it seems.

But there's no rainforest without the rain, I repeat to myself, as we dodge fallen tree branches, navigate slippery rocks and photograph mushrooms clinging to the side of a damp tree trunk.

Up close, there's much to see in this ancient Gondwana rainforest – a glimpse of a pademelon here, the electric blue streak of an endangered Lamington spiny crayfish there.

We forge on, eventually emerging at the trailhead near heritage-listed Binna

Burra Lodge. In September 2019, at the start of Australia's Black Summer bushfires, the original lodge, 42 rustic cabins, and a dozen neighbouring properties were razed.

O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat, 21.4km away along the Border Track, was evacuated, but the blaze did not impact its buildings.

It took 14 months and \$30 million

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before the road to Binna Burra reopened.

The new road retains its hairpin bends, with bitumen smooth as silk.

Binna Burra Lodge, too, is rebuilding, with a new lodge and accommodation expected to open in 2025.

In the meantime, we're staying in one of six new Tiny Wild Houses perched on the edge of Bellbird clifftop, not far from where an adventure activities precinct, including a via ferrata (climbing route attached to the cliff face), is also under construction.

Viewed from the designated Tiny

Wild Houses car park, set against the backdrop of this majestic landscape, the houses do indeed look tiny from the outside.

But inside, the space magically expands to reveal a queen bed, two-seater couch, well-equipped kitchenette and separate bathroom.

I peel off my muddy boots and socks, check for leeches, make my way out onto the covered back deck and collapse into one of the solid teak chairs.

On a sunny day, there are knockout views over the imposing Ships Stern Range and, from the communal fire pit nearby, the 410m pinnacle Egg Rock (Kurraragin).

Today, the panorama is shrouded in fog but as it billows, swirls and shifts, I can still make out the jagged ridgelines of the mountains and the curves of the surrounding valleys.

The Binna Burra Tea House, which narrowly escaped the 2019 fires, is the only place to dine close by.

We opt for the two-course set menu, which provides exceptional value rather than an exclusive fine-dining experience – pear and feta salad and native bush-spiced squid, followed by oven-baked chicken breast and prawn and chorizo linguini.

The next morning, we make our way to Tamborine Mountain, about 45 minutes north by road.

Finding the doors at Witches Falls Winery wide open, we pulled up seats

The Tiny Wild Houses perched on Bellbird clifftop.



The view from a Tiny Wild House bedroom.



at one of the high tables inside for a wine-tasting experience (\$20 per person) featuring six a la carte pours.

Though the winery cultivates its own Pecorino grapes, much of the fruit is sourced from growers elsewhere, including South Australia’s Riverland, before the wine is made onsite.

As we nibble on a build-your-own cheeseboard, we sample everything from sparkling sweet Moscato to fruity, wild-fermented Marsanne.

Then, it’s time for the wild-fermented Lambrusco.

“This is a very heavy red,” our host says, raising her eyebrows. “Are you ready for it?”

Moody, dark and boisterous, it sucks all the moisture out of our mouths.

North Stores on North Tamborine is our final stop.

Located far beyond the fudge shops, clock makers and clothing outlets of the Gallery Walk, North Stores houses

an eatery, art and ceramic studios, and more.

With bellies full of cheese, we sip on strong coffee and plan to return for one of the farmers’ platters available as takeaway picnic boxes.

That’s the thing about this region, dubbed “the green behind the Gold”; it’s buoyant and resilient, with fresh surprises around every bend.

I know I will be returning, rain, hail or shine. ■

Tasting wine at Witches Falls. Photo Tourism and Events Queensland.



Charcuterie platter at North Shores.

