

# A Road Trip Along QUEENSLAND'S Wellness Way

Sink into a warm, mineral-rich bath that's been millions of years in the making by following Outback Queensland's Wellness Way, discovers **Denise Cullen**



Curls of smoke from a gidjee wood fire encircle my limbs as I turn on taps affixed to an old tree stump. I run one hand under the warm artesian water that begins to gush into a three-metre-long antique clawfoot bathtub. Parrots swoop, dive and chatter in the nearby eucalypt. My husband and I are wearing sombrero hats to keep the flies at bay, and lashings of cleansing clay. Once in the bath, we sip on merlot and nibble on the cheese, olives and chocolates

laid out on the bath caddy between us. Though corrugated iron walls separate us from other bathers, I hear a man in a nearby tub start to sing, with gusto. We're at the Artesian Mud Baths just outside the tiny town of Eulo, population 94. It's a quirky stop along the new Wellness Way – a trail which spans a state that's 2.5 times the size of Texas. Comprising 24 different hot springs, pools, spas and bathhouses, the trail blends Indigenous traditions, stunning natural surroundings and contemporary wellness trends.



Most of the trail's destinations draw water from the Great Artesian Basin (GAB). One of the largest underground freshwater resources in the world, this geological wonder could fill Sydney Harbour 130,000 times over. Australia's First Nations people relied on it to live in the dry inland areas of the continent for 65,000 years yet its role as a rejuvenator of dusty, thirsty travellers is only just beginning. The Wellness Way joins the more established Great Victorian Bathing Trail in the country's colder southern region, but it represents a more 'rough and ready' experience. From the state's tropical northern tip to its lush agricultural land in the south-east, and all the parched, red dirt desert in between, you could try to tick all 24 destinations off the list. Or you could just run the highlights reel.

**TALAROO HOT SPRINGS**

Restored and run by Ewamian traditional owners, Talaroo Hot Springs are the country's only mound springs that don't tap the GAB. Instead, they are fed by rains that fell in the nearby mountain ranges 20,000 years ago, before

being heated by underground rocks. The pools reach temperatures of up to 68°C – far too hot for bathing. Instead, the run-off is cooled and diverted to five pools which hover at 31°C. The only way to access the Springs is via a 90-minute guided tour along a purpose-built boardwalk, which includes a dip in the communal pool. Four private soaking pools set among the trees can be booked separately.

**CUNNAMULLA HOT SPRINGS**

Cunnamulla Hot Springs opened in February 2024, making it the newest inclusion on the Wellness Way. Built on the banks of the Warrego River, its design draws inspiration from the surrounding landscape, with sinuous curves, natural materials and an earthy though upscale appearance. Its artesian waters emerge from the ground at temperatures between 38-43°C. There are seven pools, including a cold plunge, alongside a sauna, steam room, relaxation room and indoor and outdoor showers. A Body Clay Ritual experience can be enjoyed for an additional charge.



**SALTBUSH RETREAT AT LONGREACH**

Longreach has a long association with restorative waters, with the town’s name bestowed in 1887 due to the ‘long reach’, or waterhole, where drovers rested their cattle. The rustic but luxurious Saltbush Retreat is sought after for its proximity to attractions such as the Australian Stockman’s Hall of Fame.

But the secret is that guests can adjourn after their day’s adventures to one of three clawfoot baths located on the outdoor bath terrace. Pamper packs and nibbles platters can also be purchased.



**JULIA CREEK CARAVAN PARK ARTESIAN BATHHOUSE EXPERIENCE**

Julia Creek Caravan Park has freestanding porcelain tubs nestled in two different styles of bathhouses, both positioned to take in stunning outback sunset views. The newest are the two Boundary Rider Hut Bathhouses, which come with a gift bag containing a pannikin (metal cup), loofah and other goodies.

Alternatively, sud up inside one of four Replica Rainwater Tank Bathhouses. Gourmet grazing platters can be purchased for either experience but be sure to book well in advance to secure your spot.



**SHANDONVALE STATION AT BARCADDINE**

A working sheep station is the unlikely venue for the state’s highest soak – a copper bathtub perched 8.5 metres high in a river gum tree. Sprawled over 6,000 hectares, Shandonvale Station also offers everything from a three-day helicopter tour to a paddock-to-plate experience in which guests gain hands-on experience in humanely harvesting an animal and preparing it for the table.

The tub, with its 32°C artesian waters, can accommodate eight people and is only available to in-house guests.

**GILBERTON OUTBACK RETREAT**

This seventh-generation cattle station caters for only one couple at a time. Guests can feed cattle, explore the remnants of the local gold rush township, or join a rock art tour. When it’s time to wind down, you’ll have the freestanding bath overlooking the Gilbert River all to yourself.

Though there’s no artesian water, managing director Lyn French says that the tap water here is magical. “It’s pure rainwater straight from the heavens,” she says. There’s a limited phone and WiFi reception, so you can enjoy a digital detox too. ■

