



SOL Elements Bathhouse,
main and below far right;
Loborn distillery, below right;
The Tamborine hotel, bottom

A KIND OF MAGIC

Explore a creative corner of Queensland's Scenic Rim

DENISE CULLEN

Cocktail glasses clink as twilight descends during Peacock O'Clock at The Tamborine. Perched on the edge of an escarpment on Tamborine Mountain in Queensland's Scenic Rim, this boutique hotel boasts beguiling views, but I'm keeping my eyes peeled for the birds after which this happy hour was named. The Tamborine's manager, Sam Wood, explains that Peacock O'Clock was inspired by Bub, a neighbourhood peacock that strutted his stuff for more than two decades. When Bub met his demise in a hit and run in January, three more peacocks were brought in because "it was a little too quiet with (Bub) not around". I'm yet to spot the new boys.

I arrived on the mountain earlier today, driving up a winding road under dappled shade, feeling the temperature drop as the altitude rose, and (pardon the woo-woo) sensing the same undercurrent of energy that always seems to thrum beneath this region's ancient volcanic stone. Home to artists, creators, makers and growers, this spot on the map feels magical.

While exploring Tamborine Rainforest Skywalk, I learn that the mountain contains ghostly bioluminescent fungi, glow worm grottoes, and strangler figs that start life as seeds in the canopy before sending out aerial roots to cannibalise their hosts. Other beasts that frolic here include tusked frogs, butterflies the size of your hand, and giant earthworms that grow to more than a metre long, audibly gurgling as they chomp through the soil. And if the Alice in Wonderland vibes weren't already enough, strange things happen, like the isolated tornado that tore through on Christmas Day almost two years ago.



"We've had some pretty wild weather over the past two years," says Tom Drewett, co-founder of Loborn, a small-batch distillery and tasting bar that opened in June 2024. Amid glass demijohns filled with citrus rind and spices, I sip Loborn's Amaro No 1, a bold, bittersweet aperitif infused with local oranges. Loborn is one of only three Australian amaro makers.

"We're starting to develop a style in Australia (that is) fresher, more vibrant, and definitely lower in sugar compared to the traditional old-world Italian, which is very sweet and syrupy," he says.

Drewett, an engineer, started Loborn when he and his family moved to the mountain after a decade in Britain. He missed the culture of small neighbourhood bars there – and a good negroni. Loborn occupies a space in North Stores, a precinct featuring other creative businesses such as Potta Studio and Picnic Real Food Bar, where I devour smashed avocado on sourdough with the best beetroot hummus, before making my way to The Tamborine.

The whitewashed hotel with its stylish heated mineral pool and spa opened in December 2024, having been created over the bones of a circa-1978 hacienda-style motel. An old-fashioned skeleton key admits me to one of its 23 minimally adorned rooms, with a king bed dressed in crisp white cotton, bedside tables hewed from tree stumps, and a table bearing pralines from nearby Southport's Little Cocoa. White waffle robes hang in an open wardrobe, fragrant Leif products populate the bathroom and a water jug can be filled at one of the "hydration stations".



On the well-kept grass beneath my balcony-with-a-view are firepits, outdoor lounge chairs, and a group of friends playing Finska, one of several lawn games guests can borrow. The balcony instantly becomes my favourite spot. The following morning, I'm back there before sunrise, serenaded by birdsong. I spot kookaburras, rosellas and king parrots, but frustratingly no peacocks.

After croissants, fruit and coffee in the hotel's communal space, The Hub, I take an easy 15-minute drive down to SOL Elements, a new bathhouse located within the 114ha expanse of Tamborine Mountain Glades. Built on a lake, SOL is as dark, moody and introspective as The Tamborine is light, sunny and social.

"SOL dictates what SOL wants to be," says co-founder Shae Raven, as she leads me on a tour, starting at the Earth Lab, where guests can use ingredients such as calendula and camomile to craft body scrubs. Other communal facilities include three open-air magnesium thermal pools (38C), two cold plunge pools (12C), a Himalayan salt cave, silent steam room, and cedar wood sauna.

The black-as-night aesthetic derives from one of SOL's most distinctive design elements – its yakisugi (traditional Japanese burnt wood) walls. Shae's husband and SOL co-founder, Russell Raven, flew master craftspeople out from Japan so he could learn how it was done.

"For a week, they taught me how to do yakisugi the traditional way and then they left me to do 3000m on my own," he says, with a laugh. Russell points out that every piece of hand-charred cladding is different, in support of the Japanese philosophy of wabi sabi (intentional imperfection).

I slide into one of two bookable Secluded Suites, containing private infra-red sauna, shower, ice bath, outdoor onsen and ritual tea station, before being summoned for a "elemental gemstone alchemy facial" that is described as "bioenergetic". In the inky depths of the treatment room, I happily submit to a hot stone back massage followed by a facial so blissful I can only recall fragments of it – hot and cold stones on my temples, acupoints being stimulated, wafts of essential oils, whispered incantations.

I'm so relaxed that it's a good few hours before I trust myself to get back behind the wheel. Eventually, when I reach the hotel, there's still no sign of the peacocks. But nothing could ruffle my feathers right now.

Denise Cullen was a guest of Scenic Rim Regional Council, SOL Elements and The Tamborine.
visitscenicrim.com.au



IN THE KNOW

Tamborine Mountain is in the Gold Coast hinterland, about an hour by road from Brisbane. Rooms at The Tamborine from \$350 a night (minimum two nights), including continental breakfast and cocktails.
thetamborine.com.au

SOL Elements Bathhouse has 90-minute sessions for \$95 a person; 90-minute Secluded Suites sessions \$180 a person (minimum two people).
solelements.com.au

Picnic Real Food Bar opens Wed to Sun (8am to 3pm). Loborn's tasting bar is open Fri and Sat (11am to 7pm) and Sun (11am to 3pm).
northstores.com.au/picnic-store
loborn.com

Tamborine Rainforest Skywalk is open daily.
skywalktamborine.com