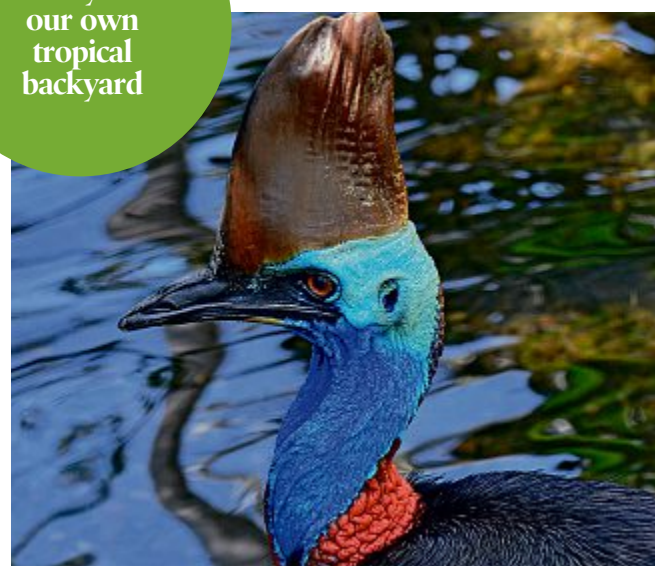




The perfect holiday is in our own tropical backyard



stepping into the jewelled far north

BY LISA MACHIN

If you have never planted your own two feet in the beautiful wilds of Far North Queensland, you are doing yourself a huge disservice.

There is something in the air up there (other than humidity) that seduces you with a taste of adventure and a way of life that unfurls with ease.

From the greenery and wildlife to the clusters of friends enjoying prawns on the beach, a sundowner at the outdoor tables of a trendy bar, or the locals' sense of humour, this place has a way of worming its way into your heart.

Setting off from the Wellcamp airport, I touched down in Cairns in just two hours, and was enveloped by that characteristic tropical air.

Collected by my host from Tourism Port Douglas and Daintree, we make our way north along the scenic coastline, the Coral Sea winking at us along the highway, to the town of Port Douglas.

The playground of the rich and famous, it's easy to see why many a celebrity is spotted enjoying the metropolitan hub of cafes, bars and great restaurants or catching some rays on the famous beaches.

Rainforest meeting the reef, this truly is a special part of the world.

First up on the itinerary is a half day trip aboard Sailaway, a family owned venture that offers trips to nearby Low Isles for island lounging and coral reef snorkelling aboard a luxury vessel.

The onboard marine biologist leads the snorkelling tours, diving below the water to point out a stingray, it's bright blue spots like jewels among the waving arms of anemones.

With a 1pm set-off time from Port Douglas and some free time on the island factored in, it makes for the ideal trip for those not wanting to be out for the entire day.

Marketed at adults only, this is one of the most relaxing reef experiences you will find.

Toast the sunset with a glass of bubbles from the front deck as

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a curious sea turtle breaches nearby to investigate the boat.

As we return to the Port Douglas harbour, a breeze has taken the bite out of the day's heat, and the green clad mountains of the Daintree Rainforest loom larger than life above the water.

That evening we check into the grand old jewel of Port Douglas, the Sheraton Hotel.

"This villa is where Kylie Minogue usually stays when she's in town," my porter tells me as we whiz across the grounds on the buggy.

With a bed befitting a princess, a plush bath and the gentle hum of the air conditioner, the rooms offer the ideal comfort after a day out in the tropics.

With 14 pools scattered through meticulously maintained grounds, a day of doing nothing turns easily into a fabulous resort getaway.

That night we head out to sample the flavour of the top end, with seafood high on our priority list.

When in Rome do as the locals do, and the steady stream of customers into 2 Fish, a premium seafood restaurany located in the heart of Port Douglas, was all the guidance we needed.

This award winning restaurant boasts fresh local seafood and dishes presented like artwork.

Barramundi, bugs, scampi, oysters — you name it they have it...and it will blow your tastebuds out of the water.

As I scoop my wakame covered oysters from their shells and recline in the slight breeze I am overwhelmed with a sense of contentment.

The next morning we were to head into the famous Daintree Rainforest where orchids grow and cassowaries roam.

That however is a story for another day.

Far North Queensland really is the author of great tales.

To find out what's on offer go to www.visitportdouglasdaintree.com.