



The islands off north Queensland aren't the only luxury choices you can make in the state, says **Karen Halabi**, who seeks expert advice on going bush in style

WILD BUSH LUXE

In case you hadn't noticed, Australia doesn't do five-star luxury as well as some places around the world but, what we do excel at is rustic luxury. Here, we talk to five experts, asking them to reveal their favourite bush, outback or rustic luxury spots in Queensland.

CHARLIE CARLOW, founder of Wilderness Australia, a travel company specialising in taking people to Australia's most spectacular natural destinations, and chief executive and founder of the Wild Bush Luxury collection (wildbushluxury.com) of bush camps and lodges in remote corners of Australia (including Arkaba Station, Sal Salis Ningaloo Reef and Bamurru Plains). He nominates Crystal Brook Lodge, a new member of Luxury Lodges of Australia, of which Carlow is a director.

Crystalbrook Lodge, Crystalbrook
 "It's remote, wild and elegant," says Carlow. "Even though it's remote, it's certainly not rough. It's small, the luxury is understated but the owners really get that it's about the experience, that personal, natural and down to earth experience that people are after now."

In the rugged Outback of north Queensland, 180km (three hours drive or a 40 minute flight) west of Cairns, Crystalbrook Lodge opened in late 2013. Powered by hydro and solar, the lodge is part of 35,000 ha Crystalbrook Station. This outback mecca for fishermen and nature lovers overlooks spectacular Crystalbrook Lake. Catering to 10 guests, it's a luxurious oasis.

The 120ha lake has a huge array of wildlife including birds, freshwater crocodiles and fish and is a private retreat from which to explore this outback wilderness. You can spend days exploring the wilderness or enjoying the serenity of the Outback. Fishermen can hook giant barramundi or heli-fish gulf rivers. This is "big sky" country – dawn and dusk are special times.

Outdoor dining under a star-filled sky features a menu of local produce including tropical fruits and vegetables from the Atherton Tableland, wild barramundi and grass-fed beef.

crystalbrookcollection.com.au/crystalbrook-lodge

DREW KLUSKA is founder and owner of The Tailor, a collection of the best outback luxury experiences in Australia

(see TailorTV.com). He nominates Mungumby Lodge.

Mungumby Lodge, Cape York

"If we had to send a luxury traveller somewhere and bet our lives on it, I'd say Spicers Peak Rim Lodge; it's real classy. That and Crystalbrook Lodge take the cake, but honestly, for that outback rainforest luxury experience I'd choose Mungumby. It's the only one that fits the bill in Queensland," Kluska says.

"It's close to Cooktown, run by traditional owners, you can go see rock art with Willy Gordon, just don't expect the five-star trappings. I'd describe it more as 'adventure with a soft landing'."

Mungumby Lodge, just south of Cooktown, is a genuine Australian experience where the simple things count. The resort-style lodge sits at the conjunction of three very distinct tropical landscapes: primitive heritage-listed tropical rainforest; outback and pristine wilderness tropical coastline on the inner edge of Queensland's Great Barrier Reef.

The lodge itself is run and managed by traditional custodians.

"Just another reason to support it," says Kluska. "Swim in croc-free jungle



waterfalls, observe wildlife, immerse yourself in Aboriginal culture, relive history or just enjoy a local Australian pub built in 1875.”

www.mungumby.com

Lotusbird Lodge, Cape York

“I’d also say to people, ‘go to Cape York’. We can send you on a luxury four-wheel-drive from Cairns to Cape York. There’s a great little place up there in the wetlands north of Cairns, Lotusbird Lodge. It’s like a mini-Kakadu.”

On the Cape York peninsula, 480km north of Cairns and 28km east of the Musgrave Roadhouse, on the western boundary of Lakefield National Park in central Eastern Cape York, sits Lotusbird Lodge. It’s owner operated with 10 cabins overlooking a billabong and 200 species of birds.

“And how about Haggerstone island, off Cape York?” Kluska asks. Most Australians have never heard of it. The Americans love it. It’s beachcomber luxury, but it’s as outback as you can get for an island.”

lotusbird.com.au

GRANT HUNT, chairman of Sunshine Coast Tourism, once ran remote luxury outback retreats before taking up his current post. He nominates Spicers Peak Canopy and Lodge.

Spicers Canopy, Scenic Rim, Maryvale

“There’s a great walk along the ridge that’s just been admitted as a Great Walk of Australia (greatwalksofaustralia.com.au),” says Hunt.

“Luxury for me is all about the experience, not the lodgings. But having said that, Spicers Peak Lodge and the Canopy are pretty special.”

Queensland’s highest mountain lodge offers unparalleled views of World Heritage-listed Main Range National Park. Perched on the Scenic Rim, Spicers Canopy has 10 luxury tents.

Chef uses fresh regional produce and great wines, all included in the cost. After dinner, listen to some bush poetry by the fireplace, or retreat to your luxurious tent and its kingsize bed, plush armchair, polished floorboards and timber deck. If glamping is not your thing, you can stay instead at one of the ten luxurious suites or at one of the two private lodges at nearby Spicers Peak

Lodge. Activities include a rainforest bushwalk, mountain bike adventures or a four-day guided trek ending in a night of luxury at the lodge.

spicersretreats.com/spicers-canopy/

Narrows Escape Rainforest Retreat, Montville

“I’m also going to nominate a little place I stayed at recently outside Mont-

ville. It was so good, we’re going back. Spectacular little place, with cottages in the bush, in the rainforest of Montville on large acreage. It’s right in the Australian bush; simple spectacular luxury – just the kind I like”.

narrowscape.com.au

HANNA STEATHAM, Global publicist with Tourism and Events Queensland is responsible for spruiking the wonders of Queensland to the world; she nominates Capriole Estate.

Capriole Estate, Eerwah Vale

“My personal favourite is Capriole. It’s simple and stunning, a remote luxury property with that ‘je ne sais quoi’ element,” says Steatham.

Set in the rolling green hills of the Noosa hinterland, Capriole Estate isn’t exactly “Outback” but it’s a luxury farm stay experience where you can be as hands on or off as you like. Guests can choose from the loft, homestead, farmhouse or barn accommodation, or take exclusive use of the 15ha farm for a larger group retreat.

“Spectacular Eerwah Vale Lake and Mount Eerwah form the backdrop and the beaches of Noosa are only 30 minutes away,” says Steatham.

caprioleestate.com

FINALLY, HERE’S MY RECOMMENDATION: Nightfall Wilderness Camp, Christmas Creek

One spot that no one else has mentioned is pretty new. This camp only opened last year. It’s set among rapids, mountains and wilderness and surrounded by Lamington National Park.

You sleep in organic cotton, use organic toiletries, and eat organic gourmet food, while still having king-sized beds and well-appointed bathrooms.

I love the vintage tin baths and basins carved from rock, plus the rotating fireplace in each luxury tent. Snuggle

up and sleep under the stars. To me this is true luxury the “Aussie” way.

Guided bushwalks, gourmet hampers, secluded picnics, campfires and massages in the rainforest are other ways guests can experience wild bush luxury at Nightfall Wilderness camp.

nightfall.com.au





TOUGH JOB: When you're glamping in the north Queensland bush, be prepared to spearfish your own mud crabs (left) but then you can relax in a five-star bush hut like the ones at Narrows Escape (right) or Nightfall Wilderness Camp (top).