

SPICERS PEAK LODGE

YOU CAN FEEL YOUR MIND UNWINDING AS YOU drive the meandering track to Spicers Peak Lodge. Delicate purple wildflowers border the dirt road, and brown and white cattle graze in rolling paddocks. The road dips through creek beds and bumps across stock grids until it's surrounded by thick forest, and birdsong and the scratchy calls of cicadas fill the air. As the track winds higher, tight bends force you to slow down and road signs remind new arrivals that wildlife has right of way.

Further along, other signs point towards rough bush tracks with names like Rainforest and Brumbies, alluding to the exploration possibilities. And then, quite suddenly, the pitched roof and bluestone chimney of Spicers Peak Lodge appear and you're here. Inside, sunlight streams through floor-to-ceiling windows and the blue vista of the Great Dividing Range rolls out gloriously before you.

Named after nearby Spicers Gap, the retreat, two hours' drive south-west of Brisbane, sits on a plateau 1100 metres above sea level on the western spine of a mountain known to local Aboriginals as Barguggan and once used to send smoke signals across the range. The property's European heritage dates back to 1841, when squatters arrived to run sheep.

Today, Spicers Peak Station is on one of Jude and Graham Turner's three neighbouring properties, which extend across 8000 hectares. Nature conservation areas comprise more than half of this, protecting grassy plateaus, rugged escarpments and pockets of temperate rainforest with abundant wildlife, including glossy black cockatoos, brush-tailed rock wallabies and koalas, as well as wild mountain brumbies.

The setting sun is reflected in the windows of Spicers Peak Lodge.





The lodge takes its design cues from classic mountain lodge architecture, with thick timber beams and generous stonework throughout. Furniture and fittings feature recycled Douglas fir, and timber salvaged from Brisbane wharfs. The hand-hewn bluestone used to construct the towering central fireplace began its life as ship ballast in Scotland more than a century ago. Artworks include paintings by John Olsen, Arthur Boyd and Kimberley artist Billy Joongara Thomas.

A spacious lounge area is at the heart of the lodge. It's a celebration of location, inviting the wilderness in but also encouraging guests to explore outside. A mezzanine level includes a pool table, library and balcony, which features the names of surrounding ridges chiselled into the deck.

According to assistant manager Felicity Sharwood, the retreat's relaxed service is a reflection of the Turners' quest to create a home-away-from-home atmosphere. "Relaxed luxury is a concept that underpins the service here at Peak Lodge and at all Spicers retreats," Felicity says. "We want guests to absolutely feel at home, to experience that feeling of coming home and being relaxed, but then of course having the finer things in life." Guests are greeted with a glass of champagne no matter what time they arrive.

As the sun sinks on another day, the colour palette changes from blues to purples, wallabies laze by the dam and guests begin to reappear from forest walking tracks. Others wander in from the infinity pool or emerge from afternoon siestas. Most gather in the lounge for pre-dinner drinks and canapés. A Latin inscription above the fireplace sums up the lodge's vibe, and translates as: "The best and most beautiful relationship in life is friendship."



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Executive chef Tomasz Kornacki at work in the kitchen; the evening sky creates a colourful backdrop against the pitched roof; the central lounge area at the heart of the lodge.



As night falls, the fire crackles and guests are called to dinner in the adjoining Peak Restaurant, where house-made bread is served with caramelised butter and a smouldering gum leaf to get the evening started. Three and five-course degustation dinner menus, with suggested wine matches from the cellar, change daily in the award-winning restaurant and include offerings such as pan-fried yellowtail kingfish served with pickled cauliflower, chilli consommé and shellfish oil; crispy skinned Holmbrae duck flavoured with juniper berries and fennel seeds, finished with parsnip puree, persimmon jam, cauliflower threads and finger lime dressing; and dry-aged, slow-cooked Rangers Valley black Angus beef, served with pickled pumpkin puree, radicchio and miso dressing.

Executive chef Tomasz Kornacki says the cuisine changes often to reflect the seasons. “One day I might cook something with Asian influences and one day I might cook something with French influences, it all depends on the products we’re using,” he says. “For me, the most important thing is to showcase the products I’m using, and to do that we use different techniques from different countries.”

A strong focus on the freshest local produce is complemented by the best from across Australia. Beef and vegetables are sourced mainly from the local region, herbs from the lodge’s own gardens, and watercress and saltbush are foraged from surrounding bush.

Dining options for breakfast and lunch extend well beyond the Peak Restaurant, with in-suite service for those who feel like staying within their cosy quarters, alfresco dining on the terrace, fire-pit lunches in the bush or picnics at a number of stunning locations.

Nature plays a role in the 10 lodge suites, with features including open bluestone fireplaces, private outdoor verandahs and stunning landscape photography on the walls. King-size beds, bluetooth audio, wi-fi, Nespresso coffee machines and spacious ensuite bathrooms complete the luxe experience. A number of suites include large spa baths, and two loft suites offer unparalleled views across the property. One and two-bedroom standalone lodges are perched on the edge of the escarpment for guests who want the ultimate in privacy and luxury.

LEFT (FROM TOP): Three and five-course degustation dinner menus change daily; yoga sessions are a feature of the activity list. RIGHT (FROM TOP): The view from one of two standalone lodges; evening settles over Spicers Peak Station.





SPICERS PEAK LODGE

LOCATION

130km south-west of Brisbane and 150km west of the Gold Coast within the Scenic Rim region of south-east Queensland.

GETTING THERE

Driving time from Brisbane is about two hours, and two-and-a-half hours from the Gold Coast. Private car and charter helicopter transfers can be arranged.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

Accommodation, all meals and beverages, self-guided mountain biking and hiking, 4WD sunset tour, morning yoga and some guided walks.

WHAT TO BRING

Sunscreen, swimwear, active wear and good walking shoes for exploring. Smart casual for evenings.

WHEN TO COME

Temperatures and conditions vary significantly from season to season. Between May and September temperatures range from -4°C to 22°C, and from October to April from 5-30°C. The retreat's altitude means cool evenings and mornings are common year-round.

CONTACT

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A daily timetable of guided experiences provides guests with plenty of inspiration to explore the great outdoors. Starting with yoga sessions, activities include mountain biking, bushwalking, tennis, lawn games, guided walks and mountain bike rides, and four-wheel-drive tours across the property. Other offerings include scenic helicopter flights, forage and farm tours, and wine tasting in the nearby Granite Belt wine region. For those wanting to combine spectacular views with culinary delights, sunset drinks and canapés at Ryan's Lookout are not to be missed.

The 2000ha Spicers Peak Nature Reserve provides guests with unique access to the property's ecosystems and wildlife. Dense pockets of rainforest and open eucalypt forest feature ancient grass trees and towering tree ferns, while local fauna includes 50 species of mammals – namely bandicoots, koalas, kangaroos, platypi and quolls. Birdlife is prolific, with regular sightings of cockatoos, owls, lyrebirds, honeyeaters, kites and parrots.

For those wanting to experience all that the region has to offer, Spicers Scenic Rim Trail provides a multi-day experience that includes guided hiking options. Back at the lodge, Spa Anise is the home of mountaintop relaxation treatments. Using exclusive Waterlily Spa Collection products, Peak Lodge's team of therapists will tailor a spa experience to each guest's personal preference, from a two-hour full body relaxation massage to movement-based Zen Thai Shiatsu therapy. Then again, perhaps just sitting back with a cocktail by the infinity pool is all you need to escape.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: An ideal picnic lunch location; a spectacular sunset viewed from Ryan's Lookout; the property features a network of riding and biking trails.