



FOOD FOR THE SOUL: (from left) One of the Witches Falls cottages; the "outdoor" bathroom experience; wine and cheese, delivered.

Heart balm in the highlands

SUSAN JOHNSON

Picture the opposite of a sterile hotel room and you might conjure up Tamborine Mountain's Witches Falls Cottages, nestled in the Gold Coast hinterland.

From the outside, each timber-and-stone-gabled cottage resembles a child's drawing of a gingerbread house; inside, there are warm, rich colours, a fireplace, and an eclectic mix of cultures in the interior design. A soaring cathedral roof, lined with woven bamboo, was designed by the original Japanese owner, Michiyo Duncan, who built the cottages with her husband, Gus.

But since former northern hemisphere oilfield workers David Kennedy and his Swiss-born partner Daniela Kuratli bought the premises 11 years ago, they've added their own distinctive touches: European-style leather couches, light-filled bathrooms with enormous spa baths, glass ceilings, and doors that open to bring the rainforest indoors. Stag horns, ferns and other lush trailing plants grow hydroponically down a cleverly designed wall next to the spa bath.

Each carefully curated cottage is unique. There are glittery, woven fabrics draped across four-poster beds, Chinese lacquered

boxes doubling as storage, boxes of coloured pencils and a visitors' book, so guests can illustrate their stay in pictures rather than words. It's a place where adults can play in utter peace away from the kids (their own or other people's).

It's the small, personal touches that count. From the cut-glass decanter of port to the fresh loaf (baked by David) delivered with breakfast (a choice of a cold repast with muesli, yoghurt and a selection of meats and Swiss-style cheeses, or bacon and fresh eggs you can cook at your leisure) to the freshly ground coffee in the cupboard, Witches Falls Cottages is special.

Each of the seven cottages has been screened for privacy, and all have beautifully designed outside areas with gardens and a small barbecue. When we were there, brightly coloured parrots, kookaburras and tiny, blue-crested birds played in the trees.

Kennedy calls Kuratli "the spa bath queen" and she's devised a series of creative spa bath packages, from "babymoon" specials to Cleopatra potions, made from local honey and milk, delivered in a jug to your cottage, together with some fragrant rose petals to scatter across the bath. She's handy with concept packages, too: a pub crawl by helicopter; a hot-air balloon package; or a massage package in which sea shells are filled with warm,

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WITCHES FALLS COTTAGES
Hartley Rd & Main Western Rd,
Tamborine Mountain
Ph (07) 5545 4411
witchesfallscottages.com.au

- Minimum booking two nights on weekends from \$620 (with delivered breakfast); midweek (Mon-Thurs), one night only from \$260; \$1320 for four nights in premium cottage.

- Witches Falls Cottages Holiday Houses: Skyhouse (sleeps 6), \$435-\$485 pn; Bank House (sleeps 10), \$400-\$600 pn

scented oils and incorporated into a massage. For many years, Witches Falls Cottages has worked with mobile massage company Ripple, which employs excellent masseurs who turn up with a portable massage table and sweet-smelling oils to pamper you.

And if Mount Tamborine is good at anything besides fabulous scenery, it's community. Kennedy and Kuratli have been away from Witches Falls Cottages for

more than a year, travelling Australia with a caravan in tow. The night we come to stay, they're catching up with old friends at local restaurant and bar, Hickory. We join them for ribs and wings, doused in maple or lime chilli, there are beers and a splendid cocktail list, and the place is jumping with locals. Owner Steven Vawdry describes the vibe of his Southern-Creole-Tex Mex joint as "pirate hipster", and it's walkable from Witches Falls Cottages.

If ribs aren't your thing, Witches Fall Winery is practically across the road from the cottages, and Kennedy and Kuratli have organised a special complimentary tasting for two at Tamborine's only working winery, where you can enjoy six samples from its list.

Then there are the Falls themselves: a shaded walk through centuries-old rainforest, in Queensland's first national park, down to a platform overlooking sheer cliffs running with water. And out beyond the falls, the tableau of the Gold Coast hinterland spread out below.

If the sight of eucalypt woodlands, tropical rainforest and its abundant birdlife doesn't move your heart, maybe book in to one of two bigger houses Kennedy and Kuratli own on Tamborine Mountain for a longer stay. Family and friends can hunker down for a week or two until the beauty of the mountain seeps right into the soul.