



**weekend away: Malanda's lush, green rainforest is food for the 'heart and soul'**

**By Len Rutledge**

**T**HE green is almost overpowering as we pass through lush pastures, rich rainforests and now into hectares of tea plants.

We want to scoop some of it up and take it back to Townsville.

The four-hour drive up the Bruce and Palmerston highways has been pleasant and uneventful.

Recent roadworks have improved road conditions and we are relaxed and content. We are looking forward to some of the tropical tastes which the southern Tablelands has in abundance.

The Nerada Tea plantation outside Malanda is our first stop. We walk into the visitors' centre and the aroma of freshly baked scones makes it impossible not to have something to eat. While waiting we visit the small museum and learn some facts about the history of tea.

After my wife has a quiche and fruit salad and I have a toasted ham, cheese and pineapple sandwich, we settle down to a pot of the local brew.

The story of tea-growing in North Queensland is a romantic one tinged with disappointments. Now, however, the industry is a success story which is producing a world-class product. Manager of the Nerada Tea Visitors Centre, Bew Chee, takes us across to the plantation, shows us the harvesting machine and then escorts us through the factory.

Although the factory does not process on weekends, the tour is still fascinating. We have a much greater appreciation of how tea leaves get from the bush to the cup. We make a quick visit to the shop and leave with several blends of tea and some special mugs.

Rose Gums Wilderness Retreat is a rainforest experience for romantics, bird-watchers and families. The luxury self-contained tree houses are to enjoy in exquisite privacy.

The 93ha property is private rainforest bordering a national park.

Owners Peta and Jon Nott have planted nearly 30,000 rainforest trees since 1995 and the result is spectacular.

After check-in we head out for a bush walk to the platypus pools in Butchers Creek. The rainforest, sparkling creek and the animal and birdlife is perfect for heart and soul restoration and we return slowly.

As we soak in the large double-spa bath in our tree house, we forget the world outside. The unit has a TV, DVD, stereo, games and books but we contentedly curl up in front of the wood-burning heater.

It is almost a pity to have to go out for dinner. Fortunately, the resort has an on-site restaurant just a couple of hundred metres away and we have brought a bottle of wine with us.

We are greeted by candlelight, soft classical music and a natural timber ambience. We have pre-ordered our main meals and we enjoy our fish and lamb rump dishes.

We sleep early then awake to a chatter of bird calls. We open the complimentary breakfast hamper which has been in the refrigerator and find bacon, eggs, cereal, muesli, yoghurt, fruit, jams, milk, bread, coffee, tea, and even two Tim Tams.

I make my way to reception to see the bird and rat kangaroo feeding which occurs each morning.

Peta explains that this started



**ENJOY A CUPPA: The Nerada Tea plantation. Below left, a tree house at Rose Gum Wilderness Retreat, and below, a platypus pool**

# Tea for two in Tablelands

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when the birds were desperate for food after the vegetation was destroyed by a cyclone.

We don't want to leave and are deliberately slow.

We spend half an hour re-energising on our own private balcony before packing the car and driving the 10km to the Malanda Dairy Centre.

The centre has a museum where you can share the experiences of the Tablelands' first dairy farmers.

There is also a gift shop and an innovative 'retro' milk bar res-

taurant but we decide to push on the few kilometres to Gallo Dairyland.

Here we find a fully operational dairy farm, a gourmet cheese factory, a café/restaurant, and a place where chocolates are made by their own chocolaterie.

From the moment we walk through the front door we know this is something different.

There is old-style country hospitality, honest-to-goodness food and the opportunity to view cheese making and chocolate production.

We are in heaven when we discover we can taste before we buy. An hour later we return to the car loaded with hand-made produce that most people in other areas can only dream of.

The drive back to Townsville is the 'sweetest' we have ever done. The coming week will also be one we are sure to enjoy as we discover the tastes of gourmet cheeses and teas.

**www.LenRutledge.com**  
Len Rutledge was a guest of Tropical Tablelands Tourism.



## WHEN YOU GO

**Malanda is a pretty town, surrounded by rainforest and rich agricultural land. The area is great for bush walking and bird spotting. Contact Tropical Tablelands Tourism, (07) 4096 7405; www.athertontablelands.com.au**

**Nerada Tea Visitor Centre: 933 Glen Allyn Rd, Malanda; www.neradatea.com.au. Open 9am to 4pm seven days a week.**

**Rose Gums Wilderness Retreat: Land Rd, via Lake Eacham; www.rosegums.com.au. One bedroom tree-houses from \$286 a night (07) 4096 8360.**

**Malanda Dairy Centre: 8 James St, Malanda, open from 9.30am daily. (07) 4095 1234.**

**Gallo Dairyland: Malanda Rd, Atherton; www.galloydairyland.com.au. Open 9.30am to 4.30pm daily.**

**TELL US: This series of Weekends Away will suggest interesting trips to places within four hours' driving time of Townsville and to destinations directly connected to Townsville by air. If you have a suggestion for an area or a specific attraction to be covered, contact Len Rutledge at len\_rutledge@bigpond.com**

