

# HEAD FOR THE HILLS

Spicers Peak Lodge delivers a luxury mountain high, writes **UTE JUNKER**.

**Y**ou can tell a lot about a property by its driveway. Drive through the gates of a classic French chateau, for instance, and the formal landscaping – high hedges, an alley of ancient oaks or stone columns topped with lions – delivers a grand overture that gives you a taste for what lies in store.

The 12km trail that leads from the gates of Spicers Peak Lodge up to the homestead is a very different sort of driveway. The unsealed road takes you ever uphill, past stands of tall eucalypts, across creeks and past cattle grazing in pasture, until the road finally crests and you pull up in front of the lodge, gazing in wonder at where you have arrived.

When Jude and Skroo Turner built Spicers Peak Lodge – originally designed as a family retreat – they chose the highest point on this 3000-hectare property, two hours' drive from Brisbane Airport. The spectacular 360-degree views unspool to the horizon, with the undulating, bush-shrouded peaks of the Glasshouse Mountains framing verdant valleys.

Step inside the lodge's main lounge – an expansive double-height space with an extraordinary bluestone fireplace and plenty of inviting couches – and the floor-to-ceiling windows bring those stellar views inside. The lounge is home to other delights, including a billiards table on the second level and a gorgeous wooden bar that's a repurposed post office counter, but there is plenty of time to discover those later.

I arrive at Spicers Peak Lodge in time for lunch. This, it turns out, is a good tactical move. Chef Dean Alford's kitchen team is so talented, you will want to enjoy as many meals as possible. Lunches are light – I tuck into a perfectly-executed chicken schnitzel sandwich – to ensure guests have room for the extraordinary degustation dinners, each course carefully matched with an appropriate wine.

Dinner starts with small bites, such as an anchovy en crouete with a spring onion relish or a red miso eggplant terrine, before moving on to something more hearty: perhaps a beetroot- and chocolate-glazed venison with a kale and guanciale gratin. Cleanse your palate with an orange and chilli sorbet before moving onto a dessert of Daintree chocolate and rhubarb tart, and then retiring to sit in front of the fire with a glass of red.

In case you haven't worked it out by now, one of Spicers Peak Lodge's signature values is indulgence. With just 10 rooms and two freestanding villas, personal service is guaranteed. There are plenty of ways to unwind: you can spend the afternoon relaxing in the sun-drenched lounge or join in one of the complimentary activities such as a gin appreciation session. Or ask for a tour of the lodge's remarkable art collection, which includes pieces by John Olsen and Charles Blackman, as well as sculptures and other works.

In fact, you could spend your entire stay holed up in the lodge, only

venturing out to the nearby spa. But honestly, that would be a waste. Spicers Peak Lodge is designed to celebrate nature. Sixty per cent of the property is a nature conservancy – home to 156 endemic plant and animal species, including the endearing wallabies that graze on the dew-drenched grass in the mornings, and a range of habitats from montane heath to eucalypt forests.

Guests are encouraged to explore the range of walking and biking trails or join one of the guided walks or four-wheel drives. There are also lazier ways to soak up the surrounds, including scenic picnics and sunset drinks. However, nothing beats heading out on foot with a guide who can point out the area's distinctive flora – from tiny yellow paper daisies to giant spear lilies – as well as the local wildlife. One creek on the property is home to platypus and turtles; elsewhere, there are finches and fairy wrens darting through the undergrowth, and falcons and wedgetail eagles soaring overhead.

The outdoor adventures don't end when the sun sets. On my last evening after dinner, one staffer leads a small group of us outside – armed against the chill with mohair blankets and a glass of red wine – for a spot of stargazing. Far from the polluting lights of the city, the stars glitter with an extraordinary fierceness, and we can gaze into the depths of the Milky Way. An entire galaxy spread out across the skies for your delight? It doesn't get better than that. **LSJ**



**GET THERE**  
Spicers Peak Lodge is a two-hour drive from Brisbane Airport, or 2.5 hours from Gold Coast Airport. The website has driving directions.

**STAY THERE**  
Rates at Spicers Peak Lodge start from \$1499 per night for a midweek stay in a Loft Suite including all meals and beverages and selected activities.

[spicersretreats.com](http://spicersretreats.com)

