


Out of range

Switch off your mobile phone and switch on to life in the slow lane on one of these extraordinary, far-flung escapes.

BY UTE JUNKER

Lace up your hiking boots and explore the striking and gargantuan Mount Mulligan (Ngarrabullgan) in Far North Queensland.



Ever wish you had a 'do not disturb' sign that'd make the world go away? We've found the next best thing. At these gloriously remote getaways, no phone signal will reach you – which gives you the best chance of getting some much-needed time to decompress and de-stress.

The downsides of constant connectivity are clear. Scientists are increasingly reporting that overuse of mobile phones can affect your central nervous system, brain and general health. They have even coined a catchy term – 'nomophobia' – to

describe the fear of being without a phone. You don't have to be addicted to your device to realise that some downtime from all that tapping and scrolling is an easy way to feel calmer and more in control.

Bear in mind that you won't be completely cut off at any of these spots: they all have WiFi connections (pheeew, you say). If you can, however, try to resist the urge to check your updates and instead let yourself relax into the landscape. Whether you opt for a cabin amid the trees or a villa overlooking the ocean, these retreats offer a chance to enjoy life the mindful way. ►

Exhale in the outback *Mount Mulligan, Qld*

By the time you reach Mount Mulligan Lodge (mountmulligan.com), you know you've left the everyday behind. It takes about two and a half hours to complete the 150-kilometre drive from Cairns in Far North Queensland, the last hour of it on a dirt road. Once you reach the lodge, set on a 28,000-hectare cattle station, you'll find yourself in a different world – one where the air is cleaner, the colours are brighter and the landscape unfurls on a whole different scale.

This is the outback at its best, where woodlands and plains are watched over by the ancient 18-kilometre rock escarpment of Mount Mulligan (Ngarrabullgan) that's almost 10 times the size of Uluru. In this vast landscape, untethered from the distractions of modern life, you're going to rediscover that it's the small things that really count.

"When you're not constantly getting emails and messages, you have time to sit back and notice things that you otherwise wouldn't," says James Egan, who manages the property with his wife, Phoebe. "I had some guests yesterday who were excitedly telling me about how they spent 15 minutes watching a couple of lorikeets."

Whichever accommodation you choose – from the air-conditioned safari tents to the stylish suites with the spotted gum timber cladding, sisal rugs and deep verandahs – you can expect close-up encounters with some of the local birdlife. It's not just the wildlife interactions that have an impact, however. The lodge offers a range of excursions that allow you to explore the station's many layers. That includes deep dives into the past, from touring the old gold mine or the Cobb & Co staging posts, to hikes that showcase the area's indigenous history. There are also all-terrain vehicle trips and opportunities to watch station hands mustering cattle.

James says these activities often kickstart friendships among guests who are immersed in the experience. When they're not focused on their electronic devices, their shared adventures lead to a certain camaraderie, one that may last way beyond the trip.

"It really bonds them," James says. "The phones just aren't getting in the way." ►





Clockwise from left Connect with others the old-fashioned way at Mount Mulligan Lodge; explore the area's vast, captivating landscape; and end the day soaking in a delightfully rustic outdoor bathtub.

PHOTOGRAPHY: CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: ELISE HASSEY, TOURISM AUSTRALIA; THE RAMBLER CO





Immerse yourself in nature at the wonderfully secluded cabin Mahli. **Below, from left** Make yourself right at home – the cabin has everything you need; visit during the Dungog Festival to get a taste of the local produce from the farmers’ market; the Mahli cabin sits on the traditional land of the Wonnarua people.





Wake up in the woods *Hunter Region, NSW*

Don't bother looking for the Nespresso machine when you check in at Mahli (unyoked.co/mahli), a compact, secluded cabin in the woods near Dungog in the Hunter Region, about two hours north of Sydney. There isn't one. And that's not an oversight. If you want to enjoy a cuppa here, you're first going to have to grind your own beans with the hand grinder.

"You might do it sitting on the bed, the blinds open and the sun coming in, or you might be out on the deck, looking up at the massive gum tree," says Cam Grant, co-founder of Unyoked, a collection of almost 100 compact cabins designed to let you immerse yourself in the wilderness. (In addition to its Australian properties, Unyoked also has cabins in New Zealand and the UK.) "It's about taking a moment that's usually routine and turning it into a ritual."

Each location is selected on the basis of one key criterion, according to Cam. "You can't see or hear anyone, you can't see or hear any manmade elements," he says. The idea is to enjoy a truly natural escape, and embrace the moments, all just a few hours from the nearest city.

"We have decades of research that shows when you're secluded and immersed in nature, there

are so many benefits, from decreased cortisol levels to increased creative thinking. We want to help people get into the habit of getting out in nature, of using nature like they use a gym."

The off-grid cabins sit lightly on the land, harnessing solar power and rainwater and featuring a composting toilet. Big windows invite the outside in, but don't bother trying for reception – you won't find any.

"We call it the 'Okay, now what?' moment, when you've had a look at the cabin and what's around and you wonder, 'Now what?'" Cam says, laughing. "We want people to realise that doing nothing is actually doing something." To that end, each cabin is equipped not just with books and music, but also a range of programs to try, including breathwork and guided meditations.

Like other Unyoked cabins, Mahli is situated close to attractions, including the pretty town of Dungog, with its friendly markets and heritage buildings, and the magnificent Barrington Tops National Park, which has great walks and picnic areas. Explore them on your way to the cabin, Cam suggests, but, once you're on site, commit to enjoying the solitude in nature. "Just walk, read, sit or listen to the wind in the trees," he says. ▶



PHOTOGRAPHY: CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: MAHLI; SCOTT; THE WANDERING BOYS; DESTINATION NSW; UNYOKED GETAWAYS

Unplug on the coast Margaret River, WA

There's no great mystery as to why so many guests are reluctant to leave Injidup Spa Retreat (injidupsparetreat.com.au) in Yallingup in the Margaret River region, about three hours south of Perth. "It's the seclusion," says Injidup's Jane Clively. "You're removed from towns and traffic. All you can hear is the sounds of nature, the ocean and the wind in the trees."

Holed up in your private villa, in a spot where mobile reception is non-existent, you might imagine yourself marooned on an island of luxury. But that cleverly created illusion is just that – an illusion. You may feel you have left the world behind, but the nearest town is just a 20-minute drive away. That makes this hideaway the perfect retreat for those who love the thought of escaping the hustle and bustle but aren't comfortable with the idea of being completely cut off.

All the delights of WA's favourite holiday playground are within easy reach. You might spend a leisurely morning canoeing down the Margaret River (keep an eye out for kangaroos on the banks), or get your blood pumping in the afternoon as you hike one of the old logging trails winding through the Boranup Forest, gazing up at the 60-metre-high karri trees.

Or you might head underground to explore Margaret River's magnificent limestone caves. The enormous chambers of Jewel Cave will make you feel tiny, the stalactites and stalagmites of Ngilgi Cave will dazzle you, and the still waters found inside Lake Cave will have you thinking you're in a fairy tale.

There are plenty of other ways to fill your days here, from feasting on delicious organic produce at the local farmers' markets to learning more about the local Wadandi and Bibbulmun people on an indigenous tour. Don't be surprised, however, if you soon find it ever harder to kick into gear. When you can gaze out the window and watch for migrating whales while sitting up in bed, or wander down a rustic track for a pre-breakfast dip in the ocean, the idea of exploring all day long is not all that appealing. And that's exactly what you want.

Instead of ticking things off your must-see list, allow nature to work its magic. Stretch your legs on a section of the renowned Cape to Cape Walk Track, which runs right past the property, or let yourself be lulled by the gentle washing of the waves at some of the area's many beaches, from the crystal-clear waters of Hamelin Bay, where friendly eagle rays often glide past to check you out, to the sheltered cove of Gnarabup Beach. Or head for the locals' favourite hidden treasure, the Injidup Natural Spa, an exquisite natural rock pool where the waves crashing over the rocks create a jacuzzi-like effect. You just may have found paradise. **P**





Kick back on the deck at Injidup Spa Retreat, where you can enjoy panoramic ocean views and your own plunge pool. **Below, from left** Melt away any tension with a soothing Swedish-style massage and body treatment; the retreat is situated on a quiet beach in the heart of the famed Margaret River wine region.



PHOTOGRAPHY: (TOP) DAN AVILA; (BOTTOM LEFT) ANGE WALL PHOTOGRAPHY

