



Explore the Privately Owned Shared Earth Reserve with James Boettcher

RELATED EXPERIENCES:

Tablelands & Crater Lakes Exclusive
FULL DAY (PRIVATE)

Nature, Wildlife and Conservation Safari
4 DAYS / 3 NIGHTS (SHARED/PRIVATE)



CONSERVATION IN ACTION

- Participate in citizen science programs to document vegetation and wildlife in the reserve
- Includes financial contribution to Forever Wild



When the FNQ Nature Tours vehicle pulls up to the Forever Wild Shared Earth Reserve it's quickly evident that something special is about to occur. "We open this big locked gate and drive into this huge expanse of land with a wealth of ecosystems," FNQ Nature Tours owner and guide, James Boettcher, says. "It's an exclusive experience for our guests and often we don't see another soul while we are out exploring."

The Shared Earth Reserve is effectively an ecologically intact landscape that is used for multiple purposes, and tourism is a crucial constituent. "If you come to our reserve you will have the opportunity to learn about the ecology of the place, as well as the cultural heritage of the Muluridgi people, the traditional custodians of the land," CEO of Forever Wild – an organisation managing and protecting a number of wilderness reserves – Fiachra Kearney explains.

"And if you're there as a tourist the revenue you bring in is contributing to the management of the landscape. We're effectively a social and environmental enterprise." Sometimes guests might bump into Fiachra while out exploring, but a day here is all about nature and wildlife.

"We usually spend four to five hours exploring the Shared Earth Reserve and pass through eucalyptus forest, savanna and woodland," James says. "It's this habitat diversity that results in us seeing a huge variety of wildlife. The reserve is home to over 220 species of birds and a healthy population of Northern Quolls."

"We help the Forever Wild team with wildlife identification by documenting what we see, as it's a good way for all of us to monitor the health and wealth of these incredible ecosystems."

Guests are welcome to sit back and relax as they enjoy wildlife sightings, or if they want to become more involved, they can assist James with identifying individuals within a certain species. "We help the Forever Wild team with wildlife identification by documenting what we see, as it's a good way for all of us to monitor the health and wealth of these incredible ecosystems," James says.

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Tropical Wetlands Birding Expedition with Matt Cornish

RELATED EXPERIENCE:

Tropical Wetlands Birdwatching Tour

FULL DAY (PRIVATE)



CONSERVATION IN ACTION

- Participate in citizen science programs to document birdlife in the reserve
- Includes financial contribution to Forever Wild



The smallest of the 10 species of Bowerbirds in Australia – the Golden Bowerbird – builds the largest structures of all the Bowerbirds to attract their female counterparts. “We call the structures bowers,” FNQ Nature Tours guide Matt Cornish explains. “The Golden Bowerbird formations are intricate assortments of sticks and plants and can rise over 1.6 metres in height.”

Golden Bowerbirds are endemic to the Wet Tropics, so guests keen to see the bright yellow-gold treasures may be in luck. “We know where they reside, so we can take guests into the most suitable habitat in search for them,” Matt explains. “But sightings depend on a number of factors, including the weather, season and whether or not it’s breeding time.”

A huge array of birds can be found in the Tropical Wetlands throughout the whole year, with over 250 species recorded throughout. “We often see three species of Bowerbirds – the Tooth-billed Bowerbird, Great Bowerbird and Golden Bowerbird; up to seven of the 10 Kingfisher species that exist in Australia; and all sorts of other birds including Red-kneed Dotterels, White-browed Crakes, Black Bitterns, Black-

necked Storks, Brolgas, Sarus Cranes, and even great birds of prey, such as White-bellied Sea Eagles,” Matt explains. “It’s incredible.”

The full-day tour spans two key locations, with the first half of the day spent exploring the Forever Wild Shared Earth Reserve and the second half of the day focused on the high-altitude rainforest (that can be either the Atherton Tablelands or the Julatten area).

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“The Shared Earth Reserve is a highlight on tour as the location is exclusive to FNQ Nature Tours guests, and also because of the huge diversity of microhabitats there,” Matt says. “We visit dry savanna, wetlands, swamps, creeks, grass beds – and all these different habitats have their own bird species to appreciate and admire.”

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Private Solar-powered Wildlife Cruise with David White

RELATED EXPERIENCES:

Daintree Afternoon & Nocturnal
FULL DAY (SHARED/PRIVATE)

Daintree Exclusive
FULL DAY (PRIVATE)



There's something magical about cruising along the Daintree River listening only to the sounds of only nature. "In 2002, after working on larger petrol driving boats, I started a business that allows people to get close to nature without the sounds of an engine and the smell of fumes," explains David White.

"I feel that a boat with no exhaust or fumes – and one that produces no wake or erosion – is something that people now appreciate... not to mention the inhabitants of the river. I now operate two boats – a 10-seater and a 24-seater – and both vessels are very efficient and mostly run on solar power," he says.

Although David does charge the boats up using power each evening, he explains that there's no impact on the river. The solar

come on board it's only them, and we can cruise any time they want – sunrise, sunset, or even in the late evening," David says. "It's their expedition and tailored to their personal interests, although of course we have highlights I like to point out."

Crocodile spotting is one such highlight, and although the crocs are harder to find in summer, David says that they are always there... and his silent method of transportation does make it easier to spot them.

He stresses, too, that there's a whole spectrum of wildlife to be seen. "We look for crocodiles, sure, but we also keep our eyes open for tree snakes, pythons, birds and flying foxes," he says. "A highlight is watching

"A highlight is watching the fruit bats. On a hot day, they come and skim the water before heading out. Seeing thousands of flying mammals all around us is an amazing sight."

panels on the boat roofs provide a big chunk of the energy he uses, and he considers his business to be almost zero emission while on the river.

For FNQ Nature Tours guests cruising with David, the silence and serenity is not the only plus. "When FNQ Nature Tours guests

the fruit bats. On a hot day, they come and skim the water before heading out. Seeing thousands of flying mammals all around us is an amazing sight."

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Low-light Photography Workshop with Kelvin Marshall

RELATED EXPERIENCE:

Wildlife Photography Safari

5 NIGHTS / 4 DAYS (SHARED/PRIVATE)



In the Far North Queensland Wet Tropics, rain is king. “The start of the Wet Season triggers a myriad of life cycle changes – chrysalis to butterflies, tadpoles to frogs, buds to flowers,” says FNQ Nature Tours photography guide Kelvin Marshall.

Kelvin shares his love of both photography and the environment through workshops with FNQ Nature Tours guests, covering a breadth of topics depending on the customers’ interests on the day. “I specialise in all types of images pertaining to flora and fauna,” he explains. “And because the forest floor is dark, I concentrate on low-light photography, which can present some challenges.”

Those challenges translate into workshop components, with Kelvin delving into how best to use camera features such as shutter speeds, aperture control and ISO settings on the forest floor. “It’s critical that people on tour have a tripod and a cable release,” he says. “Generally, those booked with us have a basic understanding of their camera equipment, and are looking to take it the next level.”

Technicalities aside, Kelvin explains that working in the Wet Tropics is also about understanding and reading the environment. He chooses to utilise natural lighting in his work and consequently uses long exposures – sometimes up to 30 seconds in duration – to emphasise both the subject and the surrounds.

Angles, composition and thinking outside the square also all fall into his key principles of nature photography. “I’m very cautious of my depth of field with subjects,” he explains. “I want people to see both the species photographed as well as the habitat. By using a good depth of field, we create pictures that tell a story.”

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And what stories there are to tell! To be among a staggering diversity of wildlife and to feel connected to the land – the local Kuku Yalanji custodian land – Kelvin will usually take guests to Mossman Gorge, Daintree National Park. “To immerse people in the story of the oldest surviving continually evolving rainforest in the world is something else – and to photograph moments in those stories – it’s an experience that is unparalleled,” he says.

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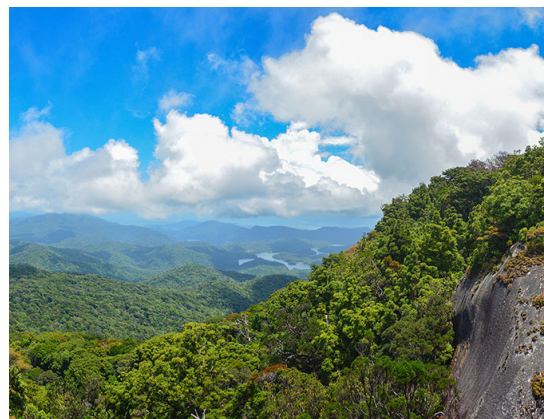
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Hike the Lamb Range with James Boettcher

RELATED EXPERIENCE:

Cairns Hiking Experience

FULL DAY (SHARED/PRIVATE)



With each step, the climb gets a little more challenging, but the reward of the sprawling views of Lake Morris and Dinden National Park below is worth every step. "As we hike up to the summit, we pass giant gum trees and beautiful savanna habitation, but there are no glimpses of the view.

When we reach the top, it's epic," FNQ Nature Tours owner and guide, James Boettcher, says. "Seeing the look on our customers' faces as they exit that last bit of forest canopy and step onto the granite summit top – it's the best part of my day."

Reaching the summit is most likely the best part of the day for the hikers too, although the picnic lunch and swim at Davies Creek on the way back to the starting point probably come a pretty close second. "To be honest, every part of the day is really enjoyable," James says. "We tailor the day to our guests' interests, so there are smiles all round."

FNQ Nature Tours is the only operator offering guided hikes out of Cairns, and Lamb Range was the ideal choice for James and his team for a number of reasons. "We wanted to offer something that was not too easy but not overly hard, and to ideally find a trail that was

infrequently used by others," he says. "And we wanted there to be plenty for our guests to see... of which there is here."

James claims that the hike could easily take twice as long if he stopped to show the group all the sights, so instead he gets to know the guests and tailors the highlights to their interests.

"Seeing the look on our customers' faces as they exit that last bit of forest canopy and step onto the granite summit top – it's the best part of my day."

"Sometimes we see Frill-neck Lizards and wallabies around the base of the mountain; the beautiful purple Kauri Pines with their flaky bark are interesting to point out – and if you touch the tree trunk, it will always feel cold; there's rock art, too, if guests want to take a detour to see that," James says.

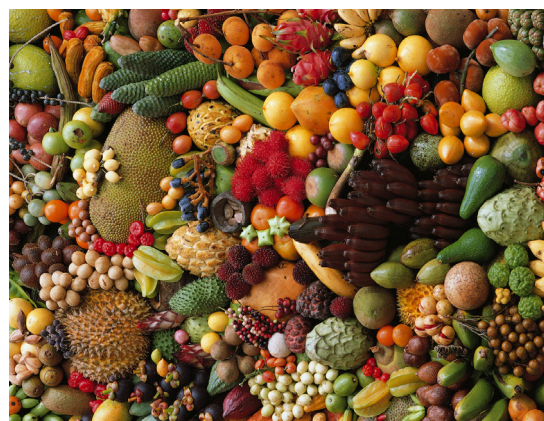
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Explore the Botanical Ark with Alan Carle

RELATED EXPERIENCE:

Tailor Made Adventure



A mini rainforest of useful plants awaits FNQ Nature Tours guests visiting Botanical Ark, a private sanctuary owned and managed by husband-and-wife team Alan and Susan Carle. "Botanical Ark is my wife and I attempting to leave a green footprint on the planet – and at the same time educate people about the fragile nature of rainforests around the world," Alan explains. "Everyone has a daily direct connection to the rainforest, yet few realise it."

The Botanical Ark began more than 35 years ago, and now with over 2000 species of tropical plants thriving in their private picturesque garden, there's plenty to see and do. "When FNQ Nature Tours guests visit I first explain who we are and why we do what we do, then we meander through the garden as I introduce some of the incredible species of plants the rainforest has to offer," Alan says. "No matter where we live, we depend on some plants from the rainforests, and all of the plants Susan and I cultivate are useful – for fibres, dyes, cosmetics, food and medicinal purposes."

Bixa is one of the rainforest plants Alan likes to show guests, as it's a plant species that is used commonly, but it's not widely known. "It's a

natural colouring agent and is used in everything from fruit juices to sauces," he says. Clove – both a spice and medicinal plant – is another interesting plant species. "It has been used in dentistry as a local anaesthetic in the past and is a really strong antiseptic," he says.

Alan encourages guests to use their senses as they wander around, touching and smelling the many plants growing across the eight-hectare paradise. Towards the end of the tour guests, too, have the opportunity to taste some of the plants. "Breadfruit is one of the most useful food plants we have," Alan says. "One tree can sustain one family for their whole carbohydrate needs for a year. And we make our own green and black tea."

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