

Indigenous the new black

Dreamtime is big business, writes
Rachael Oakes-Ash

JAPAN has Shiatsu, Hawaii the Lomi Lomi, China has acupuncture and India Ayurvedic, now Australia has discovered its own indigenous spa therapies with native rosella, lilly pilly and quandong appearing on spa menus for the body. Dreamtime is big business, especially when the dreaming is done during time out in a resort spa.

Daintree Eco Lodge and Spa, left, sits in the world's oldest rainforest, the 110 million-year old World Heritage listed Daintree Rainforest and home to the spiritual ancestors of the Kuku Yalanji tribe.

The lodge's 15 treehouse-style villas perch below the forest canopy where more than 135 bird species provide the soundtrack.

Daintree Eco Lodge and Spa is all about its surroundings, it's built an international reputation on the indigenous experience offered to guests. There's Julay Binalbu Art and Craft classes on Aboriginal culture, and the Baral Mardjanda or Aboriginal Guided Rainforest Walk.



Twenty-four-year-old Keely guides trampers through the rainforest each morning, telling the tales of her tribal forefathers and life growing up with her grandmother. Reaching the waterfall behind the property, she takes ochre from below the stream, crushes it and applies it to our mosquito bites, instantly removing the itch.

She also speaks in her native tongue, calling out to the spirits in the rainforest, thanking them for allowing our presence and asking them to keep us safe on the return walk. The 10-year-old child inside me wants to giggle, the adult remains earnest nodding in stately compliance not wanting to offend the spirits of the women who have used this healing site for generations.

It's best to do the rainforest walk before booking in for the spa treatment. Choose from the Milka Murri foot, face and hand treatment or the Wuri Julma Corroboree Dance Massage. Me? There's a Walbul Walbul (Butterfly) two-hour treatment with my name written all over it.

The spa at Daintree Eco Lodge is intimate with only four treatment rooms, and the manager is referred to as the director of tranquillity. A member of Select Hotels, it's won many awards in its 10-year life and is favoured by A list celebrities who disappear within its walls and crave the anonymity and discreet service that it provides. The challenge is getting those names from owner Cathy Maloney.

Cathy and her husband, Terry, are committed to giving guests true privacy in this forest retreat.

Brooke, my therapist, is a recent



SERENITY ... a visiting girl luxuriates in a spa at A list Daintree Eco Lodge.

addition to the spa, having spent the past few years at the ultimate One&Only island spa in the Maldives. Together with Bobbie, an uncanny Deborah Mailman lookalike who has been mistaken many a time for the actress, Brooke works her magic on world-weary guests transforming them into bodies of serenity within a couple of hours.

I am lying naked on a mammoth slab of carved ylang ylang wood, a "privacy towel" laid in appropriate places. Desert salt has been rubbed over my body and is being washed away with warm cleansing water. Ochre from the waterfall visited this

morning is enveloping my body and a quandong hair masque is massaged into my scalp.

Soon I will be wrapped in a cocoon and left to rest with the rainforest outside the open doors before being massaged from head to toe with essential forest oils.

The Spa at Daintree Eco Lodge is not fancy, it's not flanked by infinity pools or made from marble. It does smell of soothing lemon myrtle and sacred dew and it does know its power lies in the treatments, not the trimmings. Li'Tya is the product of choice, a range of spa products inspired by the Australian Dreamtime and using native plants,

fruits, salts, mud and sea plants. The Daintree Eco Lodge is not alone in its love of indigenous and native product treatments. Peruse the menu of most spas in Australia and you'll find a reference to indigenous culture. Amala Day Spa at Olivia Newton John's Gaia Retreat in the Byron hinterland offers a three-hour Dreamtime Travel treatment using macadamia and lemon myrtle body polish, Tasmanian lavender and Australian peppermint oils.

Endota spas around Australia built their empire on native Australian spa products. Endota means "beautiful" in indigenous Australian.

With more than 14 spas around

Getting there

Where: Daintree Eco Lodge & Spa is a member of Select Hotels
www.selecthotels.com.au

Toll-free number for Select Hotels:
1300 368 925.

Rates for Eco Daintree Lodge from Select Hotels: Tariff \$530-\$580 per treehouse villa including tropical cooked breakfast.

What: Li'Tya spa products from the Australian Dreamtime
www.litya.com

How to get there: Virgin Blue fly direct from Brisbane to Cairns daily from \$149 one way inclusive of taxes
www.virginblue.com.au
Tel 136 789

The writer was a guest of Select Hotels and Virgin Blue

Australia, including Huski Lodge at Falls Creek in Victoria, Endota use raw Australian ingredients and billabong footbaths. Lillianfels in the Blue Mountains is a big Li'Tya fan. The Heritage Day Spa at the Sebel Yarra Valley specialises in Kodo massage, or Aboriginal technique designed to re-align energy flow.

Indigenous is definitely the new black in the spa industry, the difference at Daintree Eco Lodge is it did it first, long before its first treetop villa was built, the Aboriginal women folk gathered here for their own ancient take on today's modern spa. Now we're learning from them.