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Soul food: Flames of the Forest, Queensland

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Steeped in the World Heritage gorgeousness of the Daintree Rainforest in Queensland, you'll find Flames of the Forest. Hidden away in a secret valley, it's an experience like no other, a feast for all the senses.

Your evening begins with a bus outside your hotel. Nothing particularly amazing about that, it's true. You get in, you drive for a little while, you park outside a forest, you get out of the bus. All very mundane. But a little way away, somewhere in the shadows at the edge of that forest, you see a flickering light, then another and another. It's a trail, candle-lit, stretching away before you. On closer inspection, some of the lights are just jam jars with kero and a cotton wool wick but the effect is magnetic.

You follow the trail, as it winds beneath a dense forest canopy, to a small candle-lit clearing. You arrive to the gentle laughter of some 40 people, a cocktail and a choice of tempting hors d'oeuvres. But don't let your guard down. Not yet. The Flames of the Forest is a night of unexpected surprises.

Just as you're getting complacent, out of the darkness, an Aboriginal man emerges, speaking a musical language you don't understand but, nevertheless, he makes it clear that he is hungry and beckons you to follow, up another candle-lit trail, to another clearing, next to a river that sounds like bamboo chimes in a gentle breeze.

You take a seat in a beautiful marquis, wreathed in fairy lights, its clean white ceiling flushed with red and orange hues. This is the heart of Flames of the Forest, the most unique social experience you may ever attend. The organisers have been asked many times, but they don't offer tables for just two. Instead, tables seat eight or 10 people and offer a great opportunity to connect with people you've never met before.

Phil is your host for the evening, an Aussie larrikin who will charm and welcome you and explain about the trees and the plants — and where the fully functioning bathrooms are. Then it's time to feast on a tropical banquet: an entrée of prawns with native jackfruit (the world's largest fruit) dressing, followed by dinner platters of fragrant fish wrapped in banana leaves, or perfectly cooked chicken or beef, to be shared by everyone.



Tourism Queensland After coffee, the Creek brothers, Gary and Robert, two local indigenous men who camped and fished in the valley as children, mesmerise with a 30-minute tale from the Aboriginal Dreamtime — an intimate story-telling experience from people whose ancestors once told stories in this very place. The stories relate specifically to the setting, the river and a particular animal, but we can't tell you any more than that. It's a secret shared only with the fortunate few. What we can tell you is that the finale will resonate with you forever.

Following the story-telling, sit back and listen to the mystical sound of the didgeridoo and a haunting voice against the backdrop of dense foliage and dark night. When the house lights come gently up and dessert is served, it's time for photos and questions and answers and, if you choose, a stroll by the candle-lit river.

Just before you leave, write your signature in the handmade book. For every signature, a tree is planted in its honour, to help sustain the local environment.

Starting at around 7.30pm and finishing at around 10.30pm, the Flames of the Forest is a dining experience not to be missed by anyone interested in beauty, originality, Aboriginal culture, lush rainforests and creative Australian cuisine. You could even call it, food for the soul.

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