



The Grand Staircase at Paronella Park leads from the main "castle" to the waterfall-fed lake.



Ma Mu walk brings the beauty and brilliance of the rainforest alive.

Photos: Julie McGlone



Paronella Park might be simply a bunch of ruins to some, but for dreamers it's the epitome of what can happen when spirit and passion are applied.

Tropical dreaming

By JULIE MCGLONE

HIDDEN away in a rainforest garden on the lush Atherton Tablelands, a crumbling set of ruins sits like a lost world, a moss covered memory of a man's incredible dream.

Paronella Park is a place of romance and a tribute to the resilience and determination of the human spirit.

It is a place where dreams are created and anything is possible.

I'd heard a lot about this place; it's been voted in the RACQ's Top 150 tourist attractions, it's a Queensland Tourism Award Winner, it's eco certified and heritage listed.

Yet no matter how many people I've asked to explain it to me, the answer was always a vague, "Oh, it's amazing – you really can't describe it."

What was it about this place? What was all the fuss about?

Well, now I know – Paronella Park really does need to be seen, or more so experienced, for certainly this is a sensual journey.

To give a brief background, a Spaniard named José Paronella arrived in Innisfail in 1913 from Catalonia to make his fortune in the cane fields.

His plan was to set up



house and return for his fiancé, Matilda, whom he'd left behind.

José worked hard as a cane cutter, but soon found a way to make his earnings grow.

The government of the day was offering old cane farms for sale at bargain basement prices.

José bought, improved and sold a series of farms, making him one of the earliest property kings.

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While travelling, he found his dream land at Mena Creek Falls.

His vision, to turn it into a haven of European style, was now firmly set.

He returned to Spain

to collect Matilda, the fiancé he'd left behind, but he'd neglected one small detail – he hadn't written to her in the 13 years he'd been gone and Matilda had given up and married another.

Not to be outdone, José courted and married Matilda's younger sister Margarita.

They returned to Mena Creek in 1929 and José set about his task – building a 'mini-city' of style and charm.

José hand built the entire complex – the main cottage, the 'castle', the grand staircase which led to the complex gardens and waterfall-side dining area.

The alfresco refreshment area was, in its heyday, a vibrant place of music, laughter and fine food as the elite of the region swarmed to Paronella Park for European-style entertainment.

It's easy to lose yourself in the romance of what it was like – music

would have filled the air, Margarita's food would be laid on the stone tables, dancing would have been high on the agenda in the ballroom, and on the green lovers would

FACT FILE

■ Paronella Park is about one hour's drive from Cairns. Tropical Horizons Tours has an excellent tour which includes Paronella Park, along with the nearby Mamu Canopy Walkway and Wildlife cruise on Lake Barrine, for \$159 (includes lunch and morning tea).

For more, go to www.tropicalhorizonstours.com.au or call (07) 4035 6445.

■ Paronella Park conducts daily 45 minute guided tours every day from 9.30am till 4.30pm, leaving every half hour. There's also an amazing Darkness Falls tour which shows the secrets and delights of the experience as the sun sets.

For more, go to www.paronellapark.com.au or call (07) 4065 3225.

■ Novotel Cairns Oasis resort has a range of excellent packages which can be incorporated on your stay. For more, go to www.novotelcairnsresort.com.au or call 1300 656565.

have courted in the avenue of 7000 kauri pines hand-planted by José.

Incredibly, José had only one helper for a two-year period to build his dream.

The rest he completed alone, laying concrete by hand, pulling clay from the earth and punching every single nail into this massive complex.

Paronella Park endured devastating floods, cyclones and storms.

When José died in 1948, Margarita lovingly tended to his dream.

After she died in 1948 their son Joe took charge and continued the work but, when Joe died in 1972, a fire swept through the castle leaving little of what was once the proud vision of a man's dreams.

Paronella Park was left to ruin – until another

couple of dreamers came along in 1993.

Mark and Judy Evans were staying in the adjoining caravan park.

They went exploring and found the "lost world" next door and immediately fell in love with its beauty.

Together, they've revived José's dream and today the former glory of Paronella Park lures anyone who has ever loved enough to make their passion a reality.

So what's Paronella Park really like?

Well, it's amazing – you really can't describe it.

You'll just have to see it for yourself and be prepared to take a journey of imagination to a time of romance and passion. Dreamers only need apply.