

RIVER PEACE

at Pandanus Park

Sitting peacefully on the northern bank of the Normanby River near Rinyirru National Park, Cape York, Pandanus Park is a place of healing and mateship for all veterans of the Australian Defence Forces.

Pandanus Park Veterans Retreat, a 10 km riverfront Cape York Paradise, is almost too good to be true.

From the small township of Laura, guests travel 100 km inland on dirt roads, leaving civilisation [and amenities] behind. The remoteness of Pandanus Park and the self-sufficient bush camp add to the peaceful experience.

Since 2007, the riverfront land has been released from the Kalpower Land Trust and it is intended as a retreat for returned and active service personnel and their guests.

While it is sometimes mistakenly referred to as a Vietnam Veterans Retreat, Pandanus Park President Peter 'Ferrel' Hannah says it is open to veterans of all conflicts and their guests.

Over the years the number of younger veterans visiting pandanus Park has increased. Guests can visit with their mates or family and camp for as long as they like.

The park is open from Anzac Day to Remembrance Day each year subject to road closures.

The site is big enough to be all things to all veterans.

"It depends on how you want to use it. If you want peace and quiet, and to get away from everything and everybody, you can find a remote camping spot here on your own piece of riverfront.

Peter says that those who want a little more social contact there are plenty of campsites closer to the unofficial RA P, a cleared area where guests can bring something to sit on and join together for a few hours of lively discussion each afternoon.

There is little or no formality and few rules., Other than simple "housekeeping" rules including removing your own rubbish, not cutting down trees; [there is plenty of firewood available from fallen timber] or damaging the pristine environment.

There are emergency arrangements in place if needed.

Peter says. The fishing is usually fantastic, with cherubin [freshwater prawns], and barramundi for guests to hone their fishing and cooking skills on.

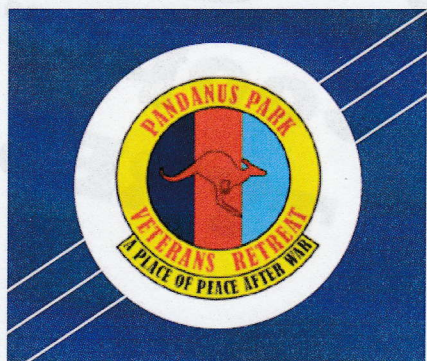
There is usually an orientation period in early August, when events such as a car rally, bush barbecue and pancake day are organised to help visitors meet people and get to know the park and its attractions.

Vietnam veterans Day on 18th of August is always well attended, with a 7 am service followed by a gunfire breakfast.

The lack of social media is a plus of pandanus Park. No reception means no interaction or pressure.

Many great stories have emerged from Pandanus Park over the years. Some attendees who had little success with formal programs such as hospital lockdowns, alcohol dry outs and psychiatric counselling, looked at life in a different light after a few camping trips at Pandanus Park.

Peter says suicides have been prevented by a person's experience here. We have enabled veterans and their families to lead proud and independent lives by giving them the Pandanus Park option.



Phone Peter (0438 676 495), Ivan Bunn (0427 660 404) or former 2RAR and RAEME soldier Craig Rhodes (0476 106 395) who will happily answer questions, offer advice about what type of gear to bring or provide information about the best travel route to get there.

Visit pandanuspark.com.au.