



No place in world like Hidden Valley

A CHANCE meeting in Turkey was the start of a blossoming romance for young Australians Ross McLennan and Chelsea Cox.

The couple met after travelling to Turkey for Anzac Day in 2003 and soon realised they had a love of travel and a zest for life.

That romance has also sparked the beginning of what is becoming a successful tour operation in the misty ranges of Hidden Valley beyond Paluma.

North Queensland-born Ross, 28, had been working and playing rugby in Warwickshire in the UK, and Chelsea, 26, had travelled from Albury, NSW to find digs in London before they met.

After nearly two years working in Europe's ski fields, the couple yearned for home soil and Ross convinced his new love to visit his home.

Home for Ross is at Hidden Valley Cabins, which his parents Ian and Bonnie have owned since 1986.

It is where he grew up with rolling rainforest and Wallaman Falls as his back yard.

"I didn't know what I was in for," Chelsea

said.

"I am a city girl.

"I wouldn't say it was a shock but it was different from what I am used to.

"It is absolutely beautiful – it is such an awesome place and it is growing on me.

"I will be staying here for a while, he is my sweetheart."

Work for this couple includes taking tourists on two or three-hour hikes to Wallaman Falls, sharing the region's wildlife with European visitors and relaxing by a fire in winter.

"There are no houses, no pollution and it is so quiet. That is what really appeals to the Europeans," Ross said.

They are among the first tour operators to use a new booking system which allows potential visitors to check availability in real time from anywhere in the world, book and pay immediately online.

Townsville Enterprise's Book Queensland Online sales manager Amanda Bruce said she hoped to train 100 local tour operators in the new system by June.



HERE TO STAY . . . Ross McLennan and Chelsea Cox

Photo: MEGAN BRAYLEY CPD63323