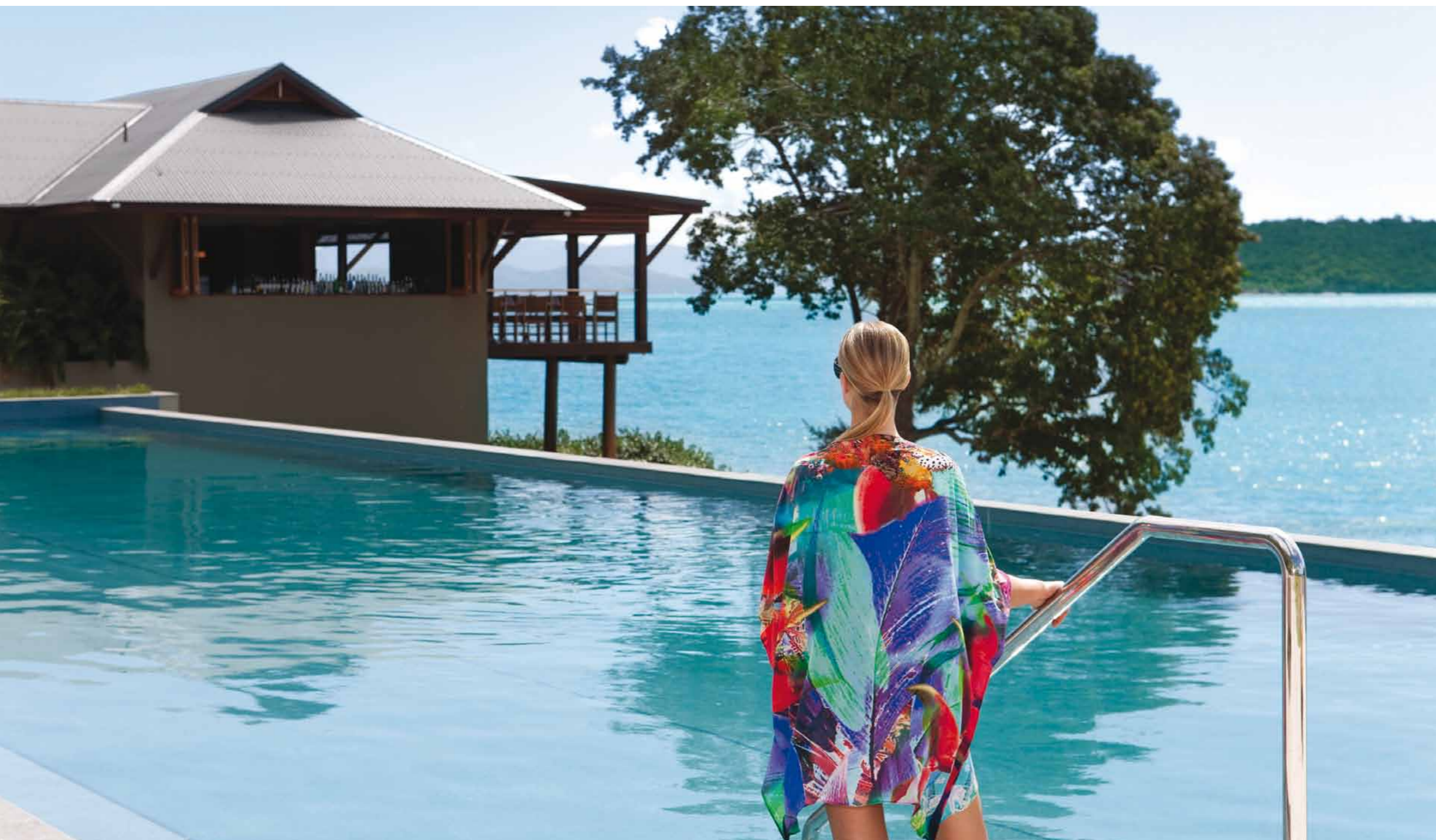


qualia – Queensland's jewel

Clare and Bryan Urwin experience a world-class resort on Hamilton Island.



Hamilton Island



If you are looking for somewhere with a feeling of stylish understated luxury, combined with authentic Australian hospitality, then you must go to qualia. It's a gorgeous place. Situated on the secluded northern-most tip of Hamilton Island, this boutique resort is world-class and offers guests personalised service in a tranquil and sophisticated atmosphere. qualia is special. Everything has been meticulously considered to provide perfect relaxation in spectacular surroundings.

Winemaker and victorious sailing enthusiast Bob Oatley bought Hamilton Island itself in 2003 and since then the Oatley family has built the luxurious qualia, as well as a stunning new yacht club, the Yacht Club Villas and an 18-hole golf course on neighbouring Dent Island. Bob is a passionate Australian who believes in highlighting the country's superb natural beauty. His vision has been realised with qualia.

Promising privacy and celebrating the purity of the Whitsunday's coastal environment, the air of serenity is obvious as soon as you step through qualia's gates. The calm atmosphere is further enhanced by the absence of children. Guests must be 16 years or over.

Then there is the 'wow' factor. On entering the casually elegant Long Pavilion, the view is breathtaking. There is an infinity edge pool the length of the room, which seems to stretch right into the blue green Coral Sea beyond.

Surrounded by 12 hectares of manicured grounds, the accommodation consists of 60 one-bedroom hillside pavilions designed by Australian architect Chris Beckingham ... and they really are a wonderful place to relax and unwind. Absolute seclusion is provided by the lush vegetation and Eucalyptus trees, yet, due to thoroughly considered planning, the postcard views of the Whitsunday Islands are uninhibited.

Two types of pavilions are available – Leeward which face south west and Windward, which are north facing. Constructed of natural timbers and stone from the area, both have a generous living area, stylishly designed bathroom, large sun deck and well appointed galley kitchen. Windward

pavilions also have a separate bedroom and their own individual plunge pools.

Then, for the absolute luxurious hideaway holiday, there is the Beach House. It has a spacious entertaining area including private lawns, a separate guesthouse and full sized swimming pool. Incidentally, all pavilions have their own electric golf buggy – ideal for getting around the grounds and for exploring the island.

As you would expect in a resort of this standard, the food is superb. Two exclusive restaurants provide fresh and innovative fare to inspire your palate, complemented by premium Australian and imported wines from the sommelier-compiled wine list. Unsurprisingly, wines from the Robert Oatley Vineyards are also featured. Guests can enjoy the ultimate in fine dining at the elegant Long Pavilion plus a more relaxed casual experience at the Pebble Beach restaurant on the water's edge.

Other resort facilities include a stylish boutique, with international labels such as Collette Dinnigan, Camilla Franks and Prada, a well-stocked library, two expansive swimming pools and a state-of-the-art fitness centre. There is also a water-sports area with sea kayaks, snorkelling equipment and catamarans. A sunset cruise around the spectacular Whitsunday Islands onboard qualia's exclusive 45-foot luxury vessel, *The Atomic*, is highly recommended. There is also a private helipad for guests who prefer to arrive in this manner, or who wish to inspect the reef and Whitehaven Beach by helicopter.

But, for a truly memorable all-encompassing sensual experience, visit Spa qualia ... Offering an extensive range of luxurious indigenous and international treatments, Spa qualia's amenities include six deluxe treatment rooms, some with outdoor showers, Roman baths, an invigorating Swiss shower and a steam room. There is also a beautiful open-air yoga and meditation pavilion perfectly positioned to capture the tranquil views of the islands.

Then there is the golf ... The Hamilton Island Golf Club on Dent Island was opened in August 2009 and is a ten-minute boat ride from the main >>



Dent Island

harbour. This par 71, 18-hole golf course measures 6,120 metres and features two distinctly different nine-hole circuits. Designed by Peter Thomson to challenge all levels of golf enthusiasts from social to professional golfers, it's the only championship golf course on its own island in Australia.

The setting is spectacular. The island's natural and rugged beauty, together with its mountainous terrain, allows 360-degree views across secluded coves and beaches to adjacent passages, islands and the mainland. Playing the course for the first time I found a huge temptation to keep taking photographs instead of taking the number of my shots!

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And there were plenty of those ... It certainly is a challenging course with several blind holes, lots of changes in elevation, many restricted landing areas and ever-present breezes adding to the contest. Great fun though – and if you are a golfer, Dent Island is definitely a course to play at least once, preferably twice. By the way, losing balls is mandatory. There are few parallel fairways, so if you hit out of bounds your ball is seriously in the rough.

Incidentally, numerous non-golfers make the short boat trip across to Dent Island too. The attractive Chris Beckingham designed clubhouse maximises the use of natural light and

the food there is of qualia standard. Ideal for a leisurely lunch.

If you want to do some further exploring, take your buggy and rediscover Hamilton Island. It's certainly come of age. The new yacht club overlooking the marina is a stunning statement building with a billowing sail-shaped copper roof. Designed by renowned Australian architect Walter Barda, alongside famed yachtsman Iain Murray, it is justifiably called the 'Opera House of Queensland'.

The facilities at the yacht club are impressive. The fine dining Bonnie restaurant serves contemporary Australian fare with style, panache and amazing views. The lovely all-day outdoor bar has equally

impressive views, especially at sunset.

However, during your stay at qualia you may not even wish to venture outside the gates and that decision is perfectly understandable. Why leave a place with the perfect combination of world-class luxury surrounded by rare natural beauty? Integrity is also a word that can be used when describing qualia. Fiercely Australian, unpretentious and quality are others.

Do stay for at least two days ... and longer if you can. Is it expensive? Yes. Is it worth it? Yes. Is it value for money? Yes. Would we go again? In a heartbeat! ●

NEED TO KNOW:

GETTING THERE:

Hamilton Island provides easy access to the Whitsundays and the Great Barrier Reef. Direct flights with either Virgin or Jetstar from all major East Coast cities means that you can be on the Island within a maximum of three flying hours depending on your place of departure. From Brisbane it's only one and a half hours. Virgin Australia now operate a business class section on flights from Sydney and Brisbane to Hamilton Island.

qualia has its own desk at Hamilton Island Airport and you are cordially whisked off to the resort within minutes of arrival. Baggage is taken care of and efficiently arrives in your pavilion soon after you do.

WHEN TO GO:

The best time to visit the Whitsundays is all year round! Obviously during the big race week (to be held from 17-25 August in 2012) and school holidays is when Hamilton is really bustling. From March to October is when the weather is drier.

WHERE TO STAY:

Hamilton Island has various accommodation options. The Yacht Club Villas are available for rent and are the ideal solution if you wish to travel to the island with children. Each have four spacious bedrooms, a big entertainment area, deluxe kitchen and an outdoor terrace and garden.