

SPRING 09 ■ £7.50  
ttgluxury.com

ttg  
luxury

for premium travel professionals

**SPORTING CHANCE**  
VANCOUVER & WHISTLER ARE READY FOR  
THEIR OLYMPIC CHANCE TO SHINE

**SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST**  
HOW TO STEER YOUR TRAVEL BUSINESS  
THROUGH THE CREDIT CRUNCH

**VIRGIN TERRITORY**  
TRACKING DOWN A DESTINATION IN  
THE CARIBBEAN FOR TRUE ESCAPISTS

**PLUS**  
MAURITIUS, MADEIRA, TENERIFE  
JOIN US ON A FAM TRIP TO ANGUILLA



# SHORE THING

QUEENSLAND'S  
FIVE-STAR RENAISSANCE

ttg  
magazines

# STATE SECRETS

Queensland has always had its winning combination of rainforest and reef – but *Philippa Jacks* finds the state now boasts a profusion of five-star resorts placing it firmly on the list of top luxury destinations







**F**orget Queensland's reputation for campervans, ten-dollar hostels and drunken gap-year students – the state's hotel scene has a bright new star. Hailed as the country's most luxurious hotel yet, and splashed over the cover of *Conde Nast Traveller*, the opening of Qualia created a stir of Hugh Jackman proportions.

This "world-class luxury" resort is the sixth hotel to open on Hamilton Island in the Whitsundays, the others ranging from three to five star. The island was bought in 2003 by the Oatley family of Rosemount wine fame. Four years and a whopping £39 million later, and they had opened Qualia for business on Hamilton.

I might have shared my flight to Hamilton with midmarket holidaymakers but once the plane landed, Qualia's special treatment kicked in. Clients are whisked away in an air-conditioned people carrier without even having to collect their luggage. A 10-minute drive later, we rolled through the resort's private gates and pulled up at the Long Pavilion.

I had been prepared for some lovely panoramas of the Whitsunday Islands but the view that greeted

me as I entered nearly knocked me off my feet. The long wooden building serves as reception, bar and dining room, and has a vast open front with a spectacular, uninterrupted view of the Coral Sea.

The pavilion I stayed in was one of the 27 north-facing Windward Pavilions which opened in the resort's first phase. Each living area, bedroom and gigantic en suite bathroom is glass-fronted, and the sofa, bed and bath take full advantage of the view.

A further 33 smaller Leeward Pavilions, without their own plunge pools, were added last year. Their south-west-facing views are less impressive, so recommend to your clients that spending the extra \$250 per night for the space and privacy

of the Windwards is well worth it.

Better still, recommend the Beach House, a gorgeous two-bedroomed villa with a 10-person dining room, its own pool and a separate guest house – useful for clients travelling with a nanny or staff.

A couple of hiccups meant that service was not flawless, however. The food was excellent but the waitress in the Long Pavilion took the order only verbally, then brought an incorrect starter. Service was slow, even though the restaurant was far from full. There also seemed to be some communication problems between departments: there was only one glass with the bottle of champagne in my room, but staff were still asking me about the invisible "Mr Jacks" when I checked out 48 hours later.

### Changes down under

For such a huge country, luxury openings have been disproportionately few in recent years, so you can understand the media frenzy surrounding Qualia.

But while Australia may have lost luxury clients to neighbouring New Zealand in previous years, things are changing. Moonlight Head Private Lodge, opened in 2007 on the Great Ocean Road in Victoria, gives Kiwi lodges a run for their money. The four-bedroomed property costs from £1,550 per night for two sharing. New projects such as Emirates Wolgan Valley, opening in New South Wales later this year, and the acclaimed Southern Ocean Lodge on Kangaroo Island, are creating a lot of excitement.

Previous pages: Qualia, Hamilton Island  
Above: Rex Lookout, Daintree  
Below: Executive Retreats' Meryula, Port Douglas





## Crowning Queensland

Queensland may have been perceived as a backpackers' hangout in the past but it too is packing an ever greater luxury punch.

"Many of our clients have backpacked round Australia and wish to return to their favourite beach or location in luxury," says Turquoise Holidays director James Bell. "Queensland is a new, young luxury market and is very important to us."

Tourism Queensland now estimates that 27% of visitors stay in four or five-star accommodation. And at last year's International Luxury Travel Market, a record six Queensland exhibitors included Qualia, Palazzo Versace, Shangri-la and Wilderness Australia.

The Great Barrier Reef, one of the natural wonders of the world, is the focus of much of the luxury product in the state. In 2007, the tourist board launched an 'Islands of the Great Barrier Reef' campaign to focus on its diversity, and the Reef is increasingly inviting comparison with other luxury island destinations.

"Queensland has never been sold as an island destination but we're trying to turn that on its head," says Bell. "I think it can rival the Aegean Islands or Indian Ocean islands. It has so much variety, and is great for those wanting something more active."

Rather than clients speeding through with just one or two nights of a multi-stop itinerary there, they could consider a full week or two in the region, he adds.

Properties of note include Hayman Island, which consistently ranks as one of the best hotels in the world. Voyages

Lizard has only one swimming pool, but there's really no need for more when the beach is so picture perfect

also has three well-established 'premium' resorts on the reef: Lizard, Bedarra and Wilson.

### Lizard lounge

The reef surrounding Lizard Island, 17 miles off the north coast of Cairns, is of such good quality that one of Australia's most respected marine research centres is based there.

Our 11-seater propeller-plane had barely touched down on the island's tiny runway before I'd pulled on my mask and fins to see for myself: unquestionably the best snorkelling I've ever done.

But Lizard has a vastly different feel to Qualia, being so far from any other islands and reachable only by tiny aircraft. While Qualia has its plasma-screen TVs and 150 in-house movies, Lizard has just one TV set. Qualia has a mini-bar filled with expensive gourmet snacks; Lizard supplies a glass jar of home-baked cookies.

And Lizard has only one swimming pool, but there's really no need for more when the beach is so picture perfect. Kate Hudson and Matthew McConaughey shot diving-movie *Fool's Gold* here. Hudson recently told the *Mail on Sunday* that Lizard Island is "the most romantic place in the world... the ultimate."

Queensland's luxury output is not confined to the Great Barrier Reef, however. North of Cairns there is Palm Cove, dubbed the 'spa capital of Australia', and then there's wealthy Port Douglas, the closest town to the reef and also the gateway to Daintree and Cape Tribulation, where forest and reef spectacularly meet.

Life in Port Douglas revolves around its beaches and waterfront. Restaurants down on Wharf Street include the award-winning Salsa, a Port Douglas icon. Signed plates on the wall signal its star status – Doug Ryan, executive officer of Port Douglas and Daintree Tourism, points out a plate signed by Bill Clinton. It's dated September 11, 2001; Clinton was dining here as the planes crashed into the Twin Towers.

### Private palaces

Interesting accommodation options in Port Douglas include the private houses available to rent through Executive Retreats. Hans and Wendy Van Der Wolf rent out luxurious family properties on behalf of their wealthy owners, and have built one or two themselves from scratch.

I stayed in The Bali House, a five bedroom, four bathroom Balinese palace, with a heated pool and hot tub, shared use of a tennis court, and masses of living and dining space. These are real homes, so they come with groceries in the pantry, DVDs in



## HOW TO SELL: REEF ENCOUNTERS

### Underwater

The Great Barrier Reef is a fantastic place to learn to dive. Clients should allow four days for a basic PADI Open Water qualification. Qualified divers can charter private vessels and crew for greater diving freedom. Poseidon-cruises.com.au

### On the water

A multitude of yachts, small cruise ships and catamarans offer reef tours off the coast of Queensland. Most will include lunch and will offer snorkelling equipment, and

some have an expert or marine biologist onboard. For a more private experience, charter a whole vessel. Sailaway IV is a new luxury catamaran based in Port Douglas, costing around £2,300 for a full day's sailing for up to 33 guests. Sailawayportdouglas.com

### Bird's eye view

Seeing the reef from the air is another breathtaking experience. Skysafari operates helicopter reef tours from Port Douglas and Cairns. The GBR Helicopter group

can fly a couple to a deserted coral cay for brunch from £720 per person. Cairns Seaplanes can whisk a bridal couple and five guests to a remote cay for a wedding ceremony with lunch and photography, for around £2,300. Skysafari.com.au

Chartering private aircraft is another option. Hinterland Aviation is used by Voyages to fly clients to Lizard and Bedarra Islands, and also has a base at Cairns for clients flying in by private jet. Hinterlandaviation.com.au



#### HOW TO BOOK IT

Kuoni can offer a 12-night tailor-made itinerary from £7,347pp in June including three nights (all-inclusive) at Lizard Island, three nights (B&B) at Silky Oaks Lodge in a treehouse, three nights (full-board) at Qualia in a Windward Pavilion, and three nights (room-only) at the Park Hyatt, Sydney. Price includes Qantas business-class flights, domestic flights and transfers. Tel: 01306 747002, kuoni.co.uk

Qantas A380s fly three flights a week from London to Sydney via Singapore, increasing to five a week from June 8. First Suites are priced from £5,207; Business from £3,268; Premium Economy from £1,426 and Economy from £612 (all prices are return, including taxes) qantas.com

the drawers and books on the shelves.

There's very little Executive Retreats cannot arrange for your client: chefs, spa therapists, child-minding, helicopter trips – your client's wish is their command.

"The retreats are very popular with Brits," says Wendy. "Over Christmas, half our bookings might be from the UK. We have arranged for chefs to cook a traditional British Christmas dinner while it's 34°C outside."

I couldn't come this close to the world's oldest rainforest without heading into the jungle for a night or two. Silky Oaks Lodge is another popular Voyages resort, five-star, though not one of its premium range.

Silky's collection of treehouses and riverhouses are compact and simple. I loved the tropically-inspired cuisine in the restaurant, with the menu presented in a cute wooden frame.

The resort also has the beautifully appointed Healing Waters Spa, though it might benefit from a bespoke local product range instead of Elemis. Watching the sun sink into the forest while sipping a beer in a hammock on the balcony was one of the most magical moments of my journey.

### Desert island dream job

Australia wouldn't be alone in facing a tough year tourism-wise, but Queensland is optimistic about 2009. Its innovative "Best Job in the World" campaign, offering the chance to become a caretaker for Hamilton Island, generated an estimated £6 million worth of publicity for the Great Barrier Reef in just 24 hours.

Other innovations include a tie-up between Turquoise Holidays, Tourism

Queensland and swimwear designer Heidi Klein, linked to the launch of a bikini called The

Queensland. Clients receive a Heidi Klein bikini worth £185 on all Queensland bookings.

Tourism Queensland director Jane Nicholson says the destination has had a solid start to 2009, and its mix of laid-back luxury, reef and rainforest will ensure Queensland a place on the premium travel world stage in years to come.

"The Maldives and the Seychelles offer an extremely high-end product. There is some stiff competition out there," she admits. "We do have some stunning accommodation options, of course. But we also have some of the most beautiful natural attractions in the world. It's much more about our visitors enjoying a totally unique and natural experience."

### EXPERT EYE



"Queensland is great for those who wish to have an adventure – the Great Barrier Reef on your doorstep, the rainforest a stone's throw away and the outback just round the

corner. There's so much clients can do, such as trekking through the wild spotting different species of birds, or hiring a luxury yacht and taking in the Great Barrier Reef while sipping champagne and watching the sunset.

"There's a good choice of five-star lodges and hotels. My favourite is Lizard Island, located in the heart of the barrier reef. It has a vast choice of beaches and off-shore snorkelling – this is real island barefoot luxury. The rooms are spacious and surrounded by the island's greenery. It also has the best food I've tasted in Queensland, and such friendly and helpful staff.

"Other properties we'd recommend are Bedarra Island, which is even more laid back, and Silky Oaks, in the heart of the rainforest."

**Sonia Brobbin,**  
worldwide sales consultant, Carrier

Clockwise from top left: Qualia, Hamilton Island; Qualia bedroom; Executive Retreats' Bali-Hai, Daintree Rainforest; Lizard Island; one of the residents of the Great Barrier Reef

### CONCIERGE

## Queensland

#### When to go

Summer (December to February) in the central and north regions is extremely hot and humid. Tropical North Queensland's wet season is between November and April. April to November is the best time for visiting the Great Barrier Reef.

#### Getting around

Use a high-end transfer company such as Cairns Limousines to collect clients from the airport. Voyages can arrange flights to Lizard Island and Bedarra Island on your clients' behalf.

#### Who goes?

Port Douglas holiday-makers have included Kylie Minogue and George Clooney. Further south, the Palazzo Versace on the Gold Coast is where the celebs stay when booted out of *I'm A Celebrity Get Me Out of Here*.

#### Wow factor

New last year for Voyages was its 'Exclusive Use' option – all six of its premium properties (including Lizard and Bedarra) can be hired exclusively.

#### Useful contacts

Tourism Queensland, tq.com.au  
Tourism Tropical North Queensland, tropicalaustralia.com.au  
Executive Retreats, executiveretreats.com.au  
All travellers except New Zealanders need a visa to enter Australia. European passport holders can use the new eVisitor online service: eta.immi.gov.au

#### Time

Australia is divided into three time zones. Queensland is on Eastern Standard Time, GMT +10 hours.

#### In touch

The digital network is generally compatible with Europe mobiles. Int dial code: 0011. Area code for Queensland: 07.

#### Cashflow

£1= AU\$2.06.

#### Coming soon

Quay West Resort Noosa, two hours north of Brisbane, is slated to open in September. Peppers Coral Coast Resort, another five-star development, is also to open by the end of 2009 at Airlie Beach.