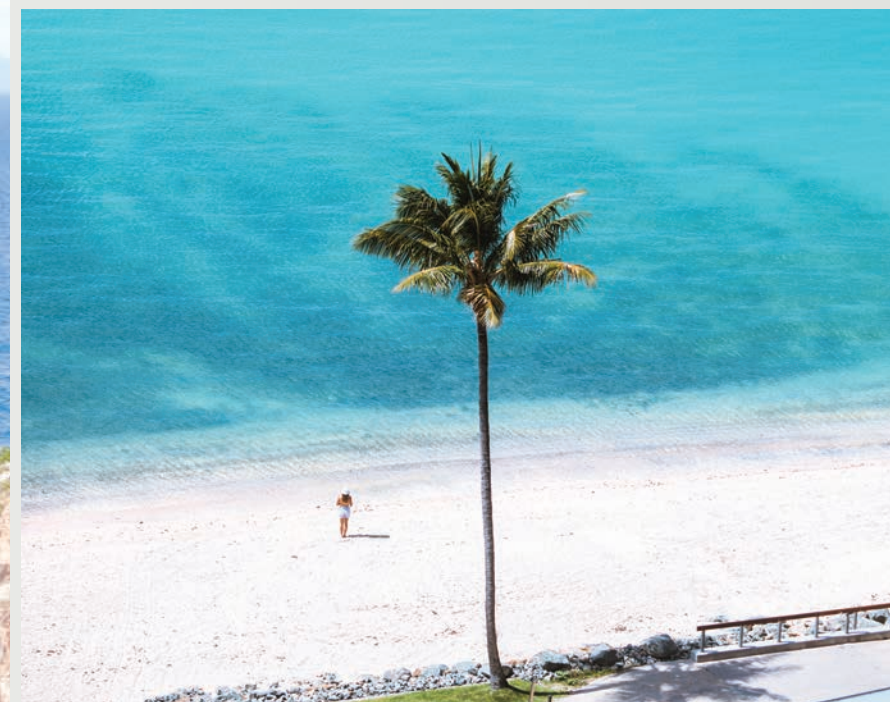




# 72 Hours in The Whitsundays

‘So many experiences, so little time’

By Paul Prendergast



View of Hayman Island.

Rare it is that a travel destination can showcase such a wide array of unique, world class ‘Signature’ experiences that cater in full for many different personal preferences and aspirations. Central Queensland’s magnificent Whitsundays region, just 90 minutes’ flight from Brisbane, is one such destination where nature, adventure, indigenous culture and history combine with modern amenity and fabulous cuisine to ensure a collective experience like no other.

A recent short stay in the Whitsundays reinforced that no matter how many times you may have visited, you never fail to be taken aback by the majestic beauty of the landforms, rainforests, the emerald hues of her deeper waterways and of course the World Heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef, on her doorstep.

## HISTORY

The name ‘Whitsunday’ is attributed to James Cook who sailed through the area in the 18th century on the date of religious significance for many Christian faiths – the seventh Sunday after Easter or ‘Whit’ Sunday.

Several islands retain the names given to them during Cook’s voyage,

however, it’s the indigenous Ngaro, Gia and Juru peoples who deserve primary recognition as the traditional custodians of these glorious lands and seas, back to a time when many of the now 74 Whitsunday islands formed part of the mainland.

In a separate bare boat catamaran adventure last year, my family and I were able to share in this history at the extreme end of the Nara Inlet on Hook Island, making the steep climb to the fringe of the forest canopy to caves housing clear evidence of Ngaro dwellings and rock paintings dating back thousands of years.

The stirring Welcome to Country and smoking ceremony local elder Peter Prior greeted us with a few days earlier at the gorgeous Coral Sea Resort – perched above the gleaming mainland gateway to the Whitsundays on the promontory between the Airlie Beach township and sprawling Coral Sea Marina – was indicative of his passion for this region and the preservation of fauna, such as dugong, turtles, fish, wallabies and eagles, that make their home here.

The sharing of stories from his ancestors made for a fitting start to a trio of days jam packed with the experiences of a lifetime.



Aerial view of idyllic Hayman Island.



Fun aboard the Sun Goddess.



Hobie Cat Sailing.



Escape on your own private charter for a day of luxury with no bounds; enjoying ultimate exclusivity with your own dedicated captain, crew and personalised itinerary.



Catseye Beach Hayman Island.

### INTERCONTINENTAL HAYMAN ISLAND RESORT

‘Hayman’ is one of the more iconic and recognisable names in Australian tourism, awash with luxurious activities, fine dining and intimate brushes with nature – above and below the waterline.

Stylishly appointed lagoon suites spill out to south-facing balconies where you’re able to dip into one of the vast resort pools, swim up to a bar for a cool drink, or simply lay back and take in the sea breezes and southward views along the Whitsunday Passage.

A collection of world-class restaurants – including at Amici where the chef dazzled us with a series of exotic plates that brilliantly showcased local ingredients – bars and services are at your disposal within this sprawling complex.

For the adventurous, hiking trails to remote coves and distant beaches lie in wait, as does the tidal beach in front of the island resort that extends into a haven of coral reef that simply demands exploration with a mask and snorkel.

### QUALIA

The Oatley family’s choice of name for the magnificent resort built into the tree-lined hillside on a north-facing tip of Hamilton Island, is remarkably on point. Latin for ‘a collection of sensory experiences’, every aspect of the much sought-after experience domestic and international guests gravitate to at Qualia is second to none.

Unrivalled views framed by the imposing Whitsunday Island to the north remind guests of what

attracted entrepreneur Keith Williams to purchase the then uninhabited Hamilton Island in the 1970s. The development of Hamilton as a destination and a southern gateway to the Whitsundays accelerated when the acclaimed winemaker Bob Oatley bought the island in 2003.

The Oatley family established Qualia with a view to creating a uniquely Australian private retreat, carefully crafted to harmonise with the many gifts nature has bestowed upon its exquisite location.

Luxurious villas, many with their own plunge pools, all feature a private outlook over land and water. The villas are complemented by first class staff and facilities, superb dining in the elevated Long Pavilion or down by the water’s edge at Pebble Beach, which blends seamlessly with

the resort pool and private cabanas, gym and water sports hub.

It could be argued that no greater example of a ‘Qualia’ sensory experience was to transpire over dinner, with a most sublime degustation and wine matching experience at Pebble Beach with the sound of waves lapping softly nearby, followed by an equally sumptuous repast at the Long Pavilion the following evening.

### HAMILTON ISLAND GOLF CLUB

From its 2009 inception, the Peter Thomson/Ross Perrett-designed layout has earned the reputation as Australia’s premier ‘island’ golf course and as a member of the Great Golf Courses of Australia stable, is both a significant test and an enthralling experience for players of every standard.



Enjoy the luxury of Qualia Resort's Leeward Pavillion.



Qualia Resort bathroom offer timeless relaxation.



Indulge your passion for food at Qualia Resort Pebble Beach Restaurant.

The course is located on the uninhabited Dent Island a short ferry ride from the Hamilton Island marina and in its planning phase, Thomson, Perrett and owner Bob Oatley patiently worked through dozens of environmental impact statements to ensure construction and the ongoing management of the golf course would not adversely impact the pristine canvas at their disposal.

Heavy earth moving equipment had to be transported from the mainland on barges at high tide and the construction team crushed rocks on the island to make their own sand to form the foundations for turfing the fairways and greens, avoiding the prohibitive cost of transporting sand and damage to the delicate marine environment.

A 'resort' course and all that implies in terms of being relatively amenable golf, this is not. The routing soars and falls as it winds its way around the undulating Dent Island outcrop, daring you to be bold and take risks if your abilities allow or to throttle back with less club to avoid errant shots that will be destined for tall native grasses beyond the playing corridors.

As a five-time British Open champion, Thomson knew a little about the challenge of playing golf 'in the draft' as the Scots might say, and the design accounts for the vagaries of the elements you can experience here. Mixed into the design are exhilarating carries, tee shots that plunge to fairways and greens in valleys or cling precariously to cliff edges.

There are smatterings of blind tee and second shots and a variety of green shapes and contours to provoke thought and a variety of approach shot options.

Aerial views of the course emphasise the contrast between fairway contours and the deep ravines and rocky terrain of Dent Island, not too dissimilar for those familiar with the design features at the Plantation Course in Kapalua, Hawaii, that hosts the annual Tournament of Champions on the PGA TOUR.

There are few destinations in golf that provide so many opportunities to experience both the thrill of a shot well executed with an equivalent level of despair if you don't succeed, often in the elapsed time it takes to make consecutive swings.

Irrespective of your score and fortunes with club in hand, your senses and a desire to 'grab your camera' are guaranteed to be under constant assault from the sheer beauty of water and island landforms that encircle you.

### 'JOURNEY TO THE HEART'

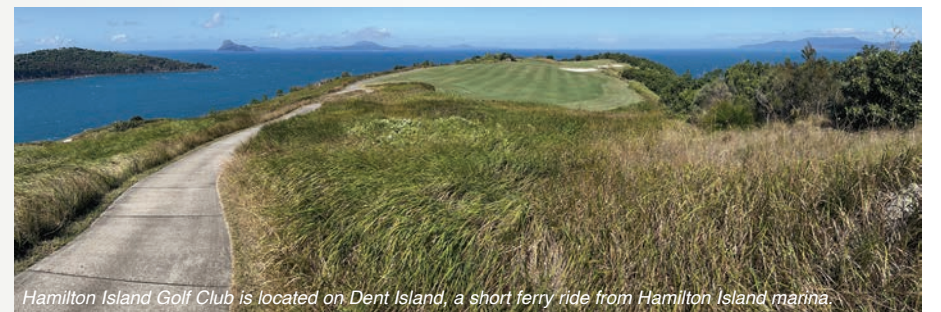
For those interested in forming or ticking off 'Bucket List' travel items, Hamilton Island's boutique 'Journey to the Heart' tour provides a next level experience from other reef flyover options and one that will certainly remain etched in your memory.

Flying by chopper from Hamilton for 30 minutes out into the blue yonder – having first circled the world-famous 7km stretch of Whitehaven Beach and Hill Inlet which are 'List' destinations in their own right – the whitecaps on the horizon provide the first indication that you're approaching one of the most gorgeous sections of the immense Great Barrier Reef.

It's not long before you're above spectacular web patterns of coral and turquoise waters for miles around that soon reveal the iconic Heart Reef formation, first discovered in the 1970s and elevated to national treasure status ever since.



The iconic Heart Reef formation.



Hamilton Island Golf Club is located on Dent Island, a short ferry ride from Hamilton Island marina.

Landing on a luxuriously appointed eco-friendly pontoon moored in one of these lagoon pools, you're whisked onto a glass-bottomed vessel that wouldn't be out of place with James Bond at the helm, chasing a rogue Spectre operative.

Time spent under the expert guidance of our pilot and boat operator – who could easily pass as Australian golfer and Open champion Cameron Smith's doppelganger – provided great insight into the history of the Heart Reef and surrounds, ahead of being exhilarated yet again with time to

snorkel among this coral oasis.

An abundance of colourful marine fish and sea turtles thrive in this pristine environment and to be able to join them in their habitat for even a short period of time is such a wonderful privilege. The champagne offering that greets you when you've had your snorkelling fill provides an opportunity to relax and sit in reflection on the deck, watching as the sun prepared to go down fighting with another spectacular display of colour over the distant islands.

For generations, Australians have long referred to our homeland as the 'Lucky Country' and sitting on that deck, being gently lulled by the tide and surrounded by nothing but the reef with only a hint of the islands on the horizon, it's impossible not to agree wholeheartedly with the sentiment. ●

#### For more information:

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- <https://www.coralseamarina.com>
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- <https://www.qualia.com.au>
- <https://www.hamiltonislandair.com>
- <https://www.tourismwhitsundays.com.au>
- <https://www.questangling.com.au>



Take a stroll along the Long Pavillion.



Play Hamilton Island Golf Club, where the views and the challenges posed battle for your attention.