

# Fifties shades, no grey

**Michelle Wrank** relaxes surrounded by the kitsch and the cool in tropical far north Queensland.

**N**othing says holiday quite like a Pina Colada – particularly when it's served in a pineapple husk. It might be shamelessly retro but the frothy, fruity sweetness is all too easy to drink, making it, in my opinion, the ultimate poolside cocktail. If Don Draper were here, I'm sure he would agree. In fact, he would probably order a second.

Don Draper might well have holidayed at QT, Queensland's grooviest new resort.

The 170-room Port Douglas resort flung open its doors in June after a \$6.5 million nip and tuck, restyling the former Rydges Sabaya with a *Mad Men*-on-vacation vibe.

The aforementioned Pina Coladas, made with aged rum and whole Queensland pineapples, are whipped up for guests on arrival, while resort decor evokes the kitsch, retro-glamour of 1950s Palm Springs.

In the gleaming white foyer, cane armchairs are kitted out with kaleidoscopically coloured cushions. A giant black-and-white striped lampshade hangs overhead.

Near reception, there's a ping-pong table, a wall adorned with straw trilby hats, and a gift shop where guests can buy domino sets, American-style candy and – should you suddenly come over all Betty Draper – pastel enamel crockery.

My check-in is handled by a brunette wearing a slick of bright red lipstick and a sassy 1950s-style "onesie" – a one-piece denim jumpsuit. She's not the only one dressed in character. All staff are clad in quirky, retro attire, styled by costume designer Janet Hine. My luggage is wheeled away by a concierge who struts around in a rakish ensemble of lime green trousers, red suspenders and black horn-rimmed spectacles.

Uniforms get a little skimpier at Estilo, a cocktail lounge that spill out to an alfresco timber deck. Brigitte Bardot pouts from a digital television screening 1960s surfing clips. Male bartenders wear shorts printed with tiny surfboards.



Retro heaven ... clockwise from above left, pastas a-go-go at Bazaar; the funky Estilo; QT staff look great.

Waitresses mince about in tight white T-shirts and skirts so minuscule, I blush whenever they put down a tray.

Being surrounded by so many bronzed limbs, taut midriffs and toned thighs can inspire a sudden, feverish desire to hit the treadmill. Whoever crafted the bar menu has clearly thought ahead, including a couple of health-conscious cocktails for "guilt-free" holiday boozing.

The Skinny Margarita ("every sip is like a sit-up") replaces calorific sugar with agave nectar, while drinking a vodka and passionfruit-imbued Skinny Pash is, according to the menu, akin to "doing laps at the bar". In that case, I'll have two.

One, two, three too many cocktails later, I wobble back to my room along a palm-lined pathway. It's a welcome retreat for an afternoon snooze, fitted with the expected accoutrements such as a luxurious king-size bed, flat-screen television and a private balcony overlooking tropical gardens. The kitchenettes and separate lounge rooms in the one- and two-bedroom villas make a longer stay more comfortable, while the cute amenities found in the bathroom, scented with the

## Don Draper might well have holidayed at QT.

summery zest of pink grapefruit, are worth pinching.

It's true the retro design element isn't as prominent in the rooms, but frivolity is never far away, from nifty pineapple-coring contraptions to tongue-in-cheek goodies such as "Bochox" chocolate, packaged to resemble skin-plumping injectibles.

I hear there's a fully-equipped gymnasium somewhere on the grounds, but I do most of my cardiovascular exercise floating around the lagoon-style pool, which features rattan cabanas for canoeing couples, plenty of white sun-loungers for coconut oil slathering and a swim-up bar for Pina Colada drinking. Doing all of the above one afternoon, I even spot a lone peacock roaming around the gardens. How very Queensland.

It's easy to grab a towel and head to Four Mile Beach, which is only a

short stroll across the road, or take a day trip out to the Great Barrier Reef. The marina and town are both about 25 minutes' walk away, while a shuttle bus stops regularly at reception. I manage, however, to dine at the resort's Bazaar restaurant nearly every night and not get bored.

Bazaar is technically a buffet, but calling it that is plain rude. It's more akin to an upmarket delicatessen, the air sizzling with the scent of wood-fired pizza. Chefs dish out tasting plates of crisp pork belly and soft-shell crab, while oysters, crab and locally-caught prawns are piled high upon beds of crushed ice. I sneak back a second (or is it a third?) time to devour my bodyweight in cheese and artisanal salumi from the charcuterie and cheese stations, set alongside a showcase cooler featuring a full-size haunch of ham.

You can stuff yourself again at breakfast, which is also served at Bazaar, but the restaurant puts on its sexy hat after dusk; lounge music wafting among the lofty ceilings and dim lighting reflecting

## Trip notes

**Where** 87-109 Port Douglas Road, Port Douglas, Queensland. (07) 4099 8900. [qtportdouglas.com.au](http://qtportdouglas.com.au).

**How much** QT's two-night stand includes two nights' accommodation, daily breakfast, dinner at Bazaar for two and two cocktails. \$220 a person.

**Top marks** The cocktails.

**Black mark** The mosquitoes. The annoying little blighters even make an appearance at breakfast.

**Don't miss** Moonlight Cinema, held until October on the grounds of the resort. [moonlight.com.au](http://moonlight.com.au).

off bottled Italian mineral water lining the shelves. Night is when the resort seems to come alive – particularly on Saturdays when a DJ spins the tunes at Estilo.

Though semi alfresco, both Bazaar and Estilo are fully covered, which proves handy when I dash madly from the pool during one of Queensland's sudden downpours. Despite dealing with rainwater flooding the pathways and sodden cushions, staff are unflappable, calmly mopping floors and mixing drinks, all toned, taut and terrific.

Marooned at the bar as the thunder growls, a young blonde waitress hands me a cocktail menu.

"What does QT stand for?" I ask. "Quiet time, quirky time – anything you like," she chirps in that perky Queensland way, flashing me a sunny smile. I decide on "quite" and "thirsty" and order another Pina Colada. Caught in the pouring rain at a retro bar, it seems the appropriate choice.

The writer was a guest of QT.



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