



Miners lap up rock star treatment

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Workers relax in five – star digs

Forget the image of miners trudging home to a dirty old shack and shared bathrooms after a backbreaking 12-hour shift hundreds of metres underground.

Today's workers, who can pull in \$100,000 a year even for basic jobs like driving or administration can retreat to an oasis, complete with air-conditioned and ensuited units with flatscreen TV, landscaped gardens, lap pool, bar, restaurant, gym, shop and tennis courts.

There is even a lifestyle counsellor to help with weight loss, general fitness and personal advice. The only thing missing is a concierge.

Coppabella Village about 140km southwest of Mackay houses up to 1600 miners and staff servicing seven coal mines, including Coppabella, Issac Plains, Carborough Downs and Moorvale.

Many miners work 12-hours shifts for seven days straight before heading home for a seven-day break.

The \$100million flagship village is designed, built and operated by publicly listed company The MAC Services Group. It is a world away from the horror stories miners recall of filthy conditions in stifling heat with the closet town hundreds of kilometres away. Underground miner Peter Sturdy said that after living in a variety of camps over the past six years, Coppabella was a sight for sore eyes. "You couldn't slap the grin off my face when I first walked in here," he said.

The entry off Peak Downs Highway opens up to reveal colourful murals on a building depicting some significant Australian landmarks and events surrounded by lush green lawns.

Chief executive officer Mark Maloney said the concept was recognition that workers operating in some of the toughest environments deserve quality living conditions.

"Productive workers are happy workers", he said.

At Xstrata Copper, the company brought in a bin chunk of the Sydney Olympic village to house its workers. BHP Cannington has also raised the bar by including new facilities such as a mini-gold course and a beach volleyball court.

The MAC operates five villages in Queensland including at Nebo and Dysart and has plans for another three at Gladstone and Wandoan. And the next-generation villages will have even more bells and whistles. Driving ranges, medical and retail centres, training and development programs supported by universities and TAFEs, and other luxuries such as masseurs will soon be standard.



At Coppabella about 100 staff work around the clock to ensure the needs of “quests” are met. At Zest Eatery executive chef Greg Calnan prepares his kitchen to feed 900 workers who walk in each day. Overseeing 13 chefs and even more kitchenhands, Mr Calnan said workers consumed tonnes of food each week including more than 240kgs of lamb shanks, 450kgs of rump steak and 320kgs of apples.

Fresh bread is baked daily and \$30,000 worth of dry food must be ordered each week. While the menu changes every eight weeks, on offer last week was roast chicken, rump steak, sweet and sour pork, combination noodles and a range of vegetables and salads. Dessert was cheesecake, trifle, sticky date pudding, ice cream and fresh fruit. The eatery is open 16 hours a day.

Men and women – about a quarter of miners are female mainly sit in groups, while various age and nationalities highlight the many backgrounds people have come from to make their fortune.

As part of The MAC’s philosophy on healthy eating, different foods are rated according to their health value alone side a gauge to serving sizes. The Hub bar is open from 1:30pm to 10:30pm with local beers (\$2.90) on tap and a range of pre-mix drinks available. Besides XXXX, rum and coke is a preferred beverage.

Mining site clerk Amanda Thiedeke said the trick for newcomers was not to overdo it in the kitchen, saying to was easy to put on weight. Mrs Thiedeke first came to the camp nine months ago to join her husband Paul, a miner of 30 years. With their four children having left home, the Mackay hairdresser wanted to spend more time with her husband and boost her income. She said working eight days straight for 12 hours a day took its toll but the six days off allowed the pair to spend quality time together. Mr Sturdy is a former canvas goods maker who became a miner to make more money. He works six months a year and earns more than he could in two years back in Mackay.
