



Queenstown rundown

AFTER dining at one of New Zealand's most iconic restaurants in Arrowtown, presided over by acclaimed chef Pete Gawron and riding Queenstown's Skyline Gondola to a spectacular 220 degree panorama over Queenstown's lake and peaks, it was on to Auckland last weekend.

In another eye-popping location, **BEN** spent the next two nights at the stylish Sofitel Auckland Viaduct Harbour, from where groups can literally step out of the hotel and hop on a boat for a day of wine exploration on Waiheke Island.

Not to be missed is lunch at Mudbrick Vineyard and Restaurant, considered one of the island's best boutique wineries.

With its sea views and indoor and outdoor dining, it is the second building to be constructed out of mud bricks in Auckland over the past century.

As a finale to our stay, what better way to return to the Sofitel than by helicopter, whose arrival caused much chatter and expectation among the diners and to no greater effect than to have the pilot walk in and say to us, "the helicopter is waiting."



Sheraton Mirage calling

STAGE two of the Sheraton Mirage Resort & Spa's \$26million refurbishment has now been completed on the Gold Coast.

The renovation, whose stage one began in April, included all 295 rooms

and suites, accommodation corridors, lobby, reception desk, guest lifts, Porte Cochere, poolside furnishings, Link@ Sheraton, Terraces Restaurant and Pearls Bar.

Meanwhile in May 2012, hotel owner Pearls Australasia announced the second phase of the project with an additional \$6 million spent to upgrade meeting venues including the Mirage Grand Ballroom and selected resort areas.

The modern and sophisticated



meeting and events venue will feature environmentally beneficial technology, luminous new high traffic paths, ergonomic Starwood Performance meeting chairs, high acoustic ceilings and dramatic lighting effects.

General manager, Mark Sexton explained, "We are delighted to embark on this significant milestone for the resort and having already received our official 5 star rating, the extra works have provided us the ability to deliver a world class

venue that is unique to the Gold Coast and synonymous with the iconic Sheraton Mirage."

Pictured left is one of the configurations of the Mirage Grand Ballroom, and above is the hotel.



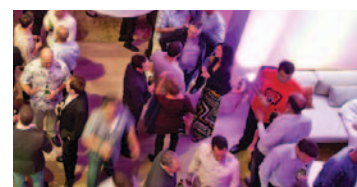
QT 'Are you Flexible?'

FLEXIBLE event organisers are being rewarded as part of an "Are you Flexible?" promotion.

The deal is, organisers who leave the choice of date up to the QT Gold Coast team will receive a 10% cash back for their event.

The venue brings imagination, savvy and experience to meeting events with chic designer finishes, unforgettable food and drink experiences, inspired venues and a passionate events team.

QT Gold Coast has a range of event spaces to provide a dramatic backdrop for groups of 10 to 700 - qtgoldcoast.com.au.



Karratha's first resort - The Ranges

THE development of the first resort style accommodation – The Ranges Karratha, specifically designed to provide a new category of apartment living to the Karratha corporate community, is nearing the first stage of completion which is scheduled for 20 November.

Located close to the Karratha CBD, the 41 one-bedroom, fully furnished, self-contained apartments, constructed on 1.2 hectares of land are 1.5 kilometres south of the Pilbara city.

With guest room sizes starting from 50 sq metres, including, living, dining and kitchen areas with separate bedroom, bathroom, laundry and lockable storage room, the accommodation is well suited for business travellers and short-term contractors or tandem workers.

The Ranges Karratha general manager Shane Smedley said, "Our facilities set a new benchmark

for accommodation standards to the corporate community.

"We recognise the need to provide a spacious and comfortably appointed home away from home for guests.

Guests can either self-cater or take advantage of the chargeback facilities set up with local eating establishments," he said.

Future stages will offer accommodation for up to 600 guests, a clubhouse with swimming pool, tennis courts, licensed restaurant and gymnasium which will become the focal point of the Ranges Karratha.



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Cruise meetings double

COMPLETE Cruise Solution, the trade arm of Australia's largest cruise company, Carnival Australia, report that enquiries about meetings on its ships have doubled following the launch of its Events at Sea program earlier this year.

Rebecca Mutanen, Complete Cruise Solution business development manager said the new program had attracted strong interest, with organisers keen to learn more about the many cruise ships available under the operator's umbrella.

Last week, more than 20 corporate clients took the opportunity to tour Princess Cruises' *Sea Princess* in Sydney, inspecting its facilities firsthand before sampling the cuisine onboard.

Similar events will be held in Sydney and Melbourne throughout summer.

"Since we produced our dedicated Events at Sea brochure we've seen a surge in enquiries – so there's no question the concept of a meeting at sea has appeal," Mutanen said, adding that corporate bookings received this year ranged from a major car manufacturer to a beauty product group.

"Cruise is a young market in Australia with extreme growth... we saw 34% growth in Cruise in Australia over the last 12 months", she said.

Onboard the *Sea Princess* there are a number of comfortable and well equipped spaces to hold meetings, cocktail parties and generally offer something different to the incentive market.

Spaces onboard have the capacity for 10 and to up to 1200 people, business centre facilities, internet and wi-fi (available at a charge), room drops, group photos as well as the use of standard audio/visual equipment and the personal use of an audio visual technician, children's club facilities, meeting spaces and the use of the theatres.

Most lines offer state of the



art video and plasma screens, projectors and microphones, podiums and specialised lighting and in house entertainment systems.

"Venues that the ship does not utilise throughout the day can be used for events" said Mutanen.

"Meeting rooms do not cost anything additional to the cost of the cruise.

"We can cater for up to 250 guests really well" she confirmed.

Meeting rooms and reserved areas in restaurants, including the Vista Lounge which holds 500 people and the Steak House on *Sea Princess*, can be personalised for each event.

All activities and accommodation can also be tailored for individual companies and their objectives.

Presentations, themed functions and shows can be arranged and group bookings are incentivised with one person in every 16 delegates complimentary, onboard credit, a tote bag or a bottle of wine with dinner (based on the cruise length).

The *Sea Princess* is classified as a four star "premium product", and all of the brands have their own rating and cater to different clients.

Princess Cruises offers two night Coastal Cruises with prices starting from \$299pp for an inside cabin between Sydney and Melbourne departing 13 Dec - for more details or to book email mice@carnivalaustralia.com.

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Figuring Queenstown



ACCORDING to a New Zealand Tourism Industry Association report, Queenstown's hotel occupancy last month is in recovery and 60.2%, up from 48.5% last year, although down 11.6% compared with September 2010.

Making a significant impact on resort hotels was the 2011 Rugby World Cup and the Christchurch earthquakes.

Queenstown visitor numbers released by Statistics New Zealand are reportedly on par with the same month last year with overall guest nights increasing 0.2% to 246,359 with international guest nights increased 0.6% to 80,719.

International passenger numbers are expected to continue to increase with Jetstar announcing extra services between Queenstown and Melbourne and Queenstown and Sydney from mid-November.

New Zealand's domestic and Australian markets also showed good gains in guest nights.

This time last year's earthquake related corporate business took up 42% of the room nights in Christchurch.

Destination Queenstown ceo Graham Budd who joined in last weekend's celebrations of Lake Wakatipu's last surviving steamship, the *TSS Earnslaw*'s 100 year anniversary and Arrowtown's 125th anniversary, was reasonably pleased with the result compared to the national picture, which showed a 9.2% drop in guest nights for the month.

Pictured above at the infamous Blue Door are Tanya Dennis (left) and Vincent Macaquet (right), Sofitel Queenstown Hotel & Spa with Graham Budd, Destination Queenstown.

Dorchester's amazing collection

FOR meeting planners wanting an exclusive upmarket experience, look no further than the global collection of hotels operated by luxury hotelier, The Dorchester Collection.

The portfolio is owned by the Sultan of Brunei, and no expense has been spared to make even the uber-rich feel really at home.

Unlike other luxury hotel groups, which aim for a homogeneous product offering regardless of the destination, Dorchester properties aim to reflect the character of the city they are in - from the quintessentially British feel of the flagship Dorchester Hotel in London through to the ultimate California vibe found at the Beverley Hills Hotel in Los Angeles - where you're likely to have breakfast next to a movie star.

Incentive groups will also enjoy exclusive Dorchester offerings such as stunning cuisine from the likes of Alain Ducasse in France or Wolfgang Puck in LA.

And for a fabulous retreat, consider Ascot's Coworth Park in the English countryside, where groups can enjoy exclusive privacy alongside a luxury spa and a stable of 40 polo ponies.

See dorchestercollection.com.



STRANGE things continue to turn up, left behind in hotels according to an international survey by lastminute.com of 500 hoteliers.

Not so unusual a quarter of hotels said they were finding an increasing number of forgotten iPads, laptops and smartphones. However, one in ten European hoteliers also reported an increase in X-rated items found, such as toys and performance enhancing drugs.

One of the strangest items included a bag full of live snails left in a hotel in Budapest.



business events news

22nd October 2012



Hotel Highlight Honua Kai, Maui



Maui's west coast oceanfront all suite Honua Kai Resort & Spa is geared towards the long-stay holiday market, with luxury amenities inside and out.

Located on Maui's Kaanapali North Beach, the resort features over 600 apartments, ranging in size from 585sqf studios, to over 2,000sqf in the massive three bedroom units - all with a private lanai (balcony).

Suites come decked out with luxury fittings (in the bedrooms & bathrooms) and appliances, such as Bosch refrigerator, microwave and dishwasher in the fully equipped kitchen.

A washer/dryer combo comes standard in all suites (& vital on beach holidays), while larger units have a full-size dining table and wet-bar/bench.

There's no shortage of pools. Options include a family pool with waterslide & waterfalls; a traditional pool with infinity edge and a river-like pool that's great for lazing in and around.

North Kaanapali beach is calm & guests can be among tropical fish snorkelling moments after entering the Pacific waters.

Conveniently located just two minutes north is a supermarket perfect for filling the fridge, freezer & pantry with supplies for a week-long holiday.



Prices start at US\$249 for a 1-bedroom mountain view suite while larger partial oceanview units lead in at US\$269.

Further info at honuakai.com.

Carnival Spirit to offer groups program

CARNIVAL Cruise Lines is set to launch a new groups offering in early 2013 aboard its *Carnival Spirit*, providing a new onboard option for events and meeting planners.

Carnival Spirit is Australia's biggest year-round superliner, having relocated from the US to be based in Sydney effective from last weekend.

Carnival Cruise Lines director for Australia, Jennifer Vandekreeke, told **BEN** that although the company had so far been concentrating on filling the ship over the upcoming holiday season, the "groups and weddings" program would be promoted in coming months.

"Weddings are a big part of the business in the US," she said.

The 2200 passenger *Spirit* will operate 3-13 night voyages from Australia to New Zealand and the South Pacific, with a special industry familiarisation voyage on Fri night seeing thousands of travel agents experience the ship.

Spirit has undergone significant changes to customise it for the Australian deployment - including the new "Green Thunder" waterslide which is ideal for team-building, seeing riders drop at high speed from a tube high above the ship and enjoy a wild ride to the deck below.

TRENZ on at The Cloud



TRENZ 2013, New Zealand's most important annual tourism business event will take place on Auckland's waterfront, 21-24 April.

Being held at The Cloud and the newly renovated Shed 10, it will be the first time that TRENZ has been held in the central city, allowing about 1000 delegates easy access to Auckland hotels, bars, restaurants and attractions.

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Fun amongst Sydney's gumtrees



THE opening yesterday of Sydney TreeTop Adventure Park with the longest flying fox in the country, promises the ultimate outdoor adventure experience for a reward day or eco-friendly, team building activity.

The park, which is located at the Plough & Harrow, Western Sydney Parklands, Elizabeth Drive, Abbotsbury, joins other TreeTop Parks on the Central Coast and Newcastle.

Each park offers a unique combination of adventurous fun for all age groups, however, for those who want more of a challenge they have developed the Extreme Adventure.

On this you can join the possums and owls in the treetops at night with only a headlamp to light your journey, feeling the wind in your face as you fly through the dark night.



Suntec to host ITB Asia

THE newly refurbished Suntec Singapore Convention Centre will play host to Messe Berlin (Singapore), organiser of ITB Asia, the trade show for the Asian Travel Market.

Being held from 23-25 October 2013, the announcement was made on the weekend at the close of the fifth edition of ITB Asia, at The Sands Expo and Convention Center, Marina Bay Sands, Singapore.

Organisers of the three-day show are planning to take up two floors of exhibition space across level 6 and level 4.

Moon joins Brisbane marketing

ANNE-MAREE

Moon has been appointed to Brisbane Marketing as director tourism and major events.



One of Queensland's most experienced event marketing executives, Moon has spent the past 18 years in arts and entertainment marketing.

Brisbane Marketing's ceo John Aitken said Moon, who joins the organisation on November 26, will work closely with their key partners to drive Brisbane Marketing's Major Events Strategy.

"The Major Events Strategy aims to deliver a \$50 million economic impact to Brisbane, including 300,000 visitor nights in 2012-13," he said.

CONTACT US:

Publisher: Bruce Piper
Editor: Jill Varley
Contributors/Coordinator: Chantel Housler
Advertising: advertising@businesseventsnews.com.au
P: 1300 799 220 F: 1300 799 221

PO Box 1010 Epping, NSW, 1710
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