



In response to Mr Gray

PETER Gray's, 'Grays Say' column (**BEN** 17 April -



Surprise, Surprise) and his criticism of an article in a UK online newsletter that stated "sales staff at many hotels in the Asia Pacific region are 'startlingly deficient' when it comes to the most basic elements of dealing with enquiries" for meetings and incentive travel rewards," elicited a response from Lynda Canning, groups manager at Iririki Resort in Vanuatu.

Thanks so much for Peter Gray's article responding to a recent survey of Asian properties and their responses to RFP's.

As one from the 'other side' I can add that it is sometimes frustrating to follow up for additional information to find that the 'PCO' (and in some cases I use the term loosely, as this does not reflect on the many professionals I deal with on a regular basis) has no idea of the demographics, interests or profile of the group or delegates, nor any idea of budget for the program; they themselves seem to know little more than dates and room numbers.

I really appreciated Peter's take on 'rubbish in, rubbish out'.

Thanks to everyone who responds to our stories, we really appreciate the comments so keep them coming in at jill@businesseventsnews.com.au

Today's issue is packed with the latest industry news, as well as some of the many photos taken during my recent Alice Springs famil on **page four**. Enjoy! Jill

New Saudi Crowne

THE new 506-room Crowne Plaza Madinah in Saudi Arabia is ideally located, just steps away from Masjid Nabawi, the second holiest site in Islam and one of the biggest mosques in the world. It offers state-of-the-art facilities for meetings, events and conferences and is also ideal for religious travellers.

MCB adds even more value

THE Melbourne Convention Bureau this morning announced a significant expansion of the new *Melbourne Values You* program which was launched just two months ago at AIME (**BEN** 25 Feb).

MCB ceo Karen Bolinger announced today at the Australian Tourism Exchange that the program now presents more than 100 offers for the international conference and incentive travel reward market from premium hotels, venues and service providers in Victoria.

"We are thrilled that we have been able to partner with so many of our members to provide incentive and corporate groups the best products and services Melbourne and regional Victoria has to offer with exceptional value," Bolinger said.

The expansion has seen the program diversify its offering to include deals on souvenirs and



merchandise, allowing planners to easily create experiences "with a uniquely Australian touch".

Partners now include the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, the Hilton Melbourne South Wharf, Sofitel Melbourne on Collins, InterContinental Melbourne Rialto and Crowne Plaza.

Bolinger cited one example of the program, an MCEC meetings deal for just \$98 per person including venue hire, a choice of four menus, pre-installed technology and free wi-fi.

"Our members' eagerness to be involved in the program really shows their commitment to going above and beyond to make their clients' stay in Melbourne unforgettable," she added.

The campaign brochure has been translated into Korean, Thai, Bahasa Indonesia, Vietnamese plus Simplified and Traditional Chinese, to make it more accessible to the fast-growing Asian incentive market.

"The majority of our incentive and corporate travel business is derived from Asia so to have the campaign brochure available in more than six languages is fantastic and will be a very important tool for our staff in China and Singapore," Bolinger concluded.

Tourism Fiji website

TOURISM Fiji has relaunched its website, with www.fiji.travel now including the ability for travellers to obtain quotes and make bookings.

\$8m aquarium splash

THE Melbourne Aquarium is being taken to a whole new world-class level as the Merlin Entertainments Group commences an \$8 million, five-month refurbishment and its first since opening in 2000.

The revitalised attraction will fly the world famous, global SEA LIFE banner and join 44 SEA LIFE centres across the world when the refurbishment is completed in September.

The merge with SEA LIFE will see brand new activities and exhibits.

"As one of the most iconic tourist destinations in Australia, we are delighted to be able to further enhance the attraction's world class reputation and continue to grow its global marine conservation efforts while providing a truly interactive and educational experience for visitors" said Edward Fuller, divisional director, Merlin Entertainments Group.

Training with AEA

THE Australian Events Academy (AEA) a specialist industry training body for the events industry and the Registered Training Organisation of Meetings and Events Australia, has a range of short courses and qualifications delivered by industry for industry, to assist companies with gaining a competitive edge.

Current courses on offer include one day options such as *Making the most of your exhibition space* on 23 May, *Innovative event concepts* on 30 May, and *Obtain and manage sponsorship* which will take place on 20 June.

There are also Event Management Programs including *Fast track to professional event management* on 20 May, *Advanced diploma of venues & events* on 24 June and *Diploma of venues and Events* on 16 July.

For more information, prices and registration details log onto australianeventsacademy.edu.au.

Get wet and go wild!



WESTERN Sydney is to get a new attraction, Wet'n'Wild on a 25 hectare site between the M4 motorway and Prospect Reservoir, not so far from where Australia's Wonderland once stood, until it closed in 2004 after 19 years of operation.

At the time Wonderland was said to be the largest theme park in the southern hemisphere, similarly, Wet'n'Wild, scheduled to open in December, is mooted as the world's largest water park.

It will feature 42 slides and attractions including the biggest, and as the blurb says, the 'best wave pool with a huge sandy beach and an awesome surfable wave.

It will also include the world's first combination of a 4 loop and 8 lane racer and the world's tallest Double SkyCoaster.



Doing it for Ted...

THE Ted Wright Benefit at Sydney's Four Seasons Hotel last week (**BEN** Wed) was attended by many well known industry identities.

Wright was the hotel's first gm when it opened as the Regent more than three decades ago, but in recent years has suffered medical issues, and the huge turnout saw the industry pitch in to help one of



their own.

Pictured **above** is Metro Hospitality Group chief George

Bedwani and his wife Ann, who generously hosted a table.

And **left** are Lynne Ireland from Inspired Luxury with Brian Holliday of ICMS.

Below: Attendees also included Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre ceo Ton van Amerongen, pictured with industry consultant Ian Stuart.



St Kilda winter warm

EVENT wise there is much happening in Melbourne's popular bayside precinct St Kilda this winter with its famous tourist icons Luna Park, Acland Street and the popular Fitzroy Street restaurant strip.

Add to this a range of hotels that are offering winter deals and there is much to recommend it as a spot for cosy beachside meetings.

The St Kilda Tourism Association is launching a series of discounted Winter Warmer accommodation deals together with funky live entertainment, unbeatable coffee and award-winning restaurants.

All the hotel deals are available from 1 June – 31 August and include the Novotel St Kilda with a Wine and Wind Down offer - novotelstkilda.com.au.

The Prince and Aurora Spa has a Winter Retreat deal - details at theprince.com.au.

For info on the Easystay Studio Apartments Winter Warmer special see easystay.com.au.

Winter Secrets are available at Quest St Kilda Bayside - see questapartments.com.au.

And for details of the Winter Warmer at Hotel Urban see hotelurban.com.au/melbourne.

AIBTM Chicago debut

THE US meetings and events industry's AIBTM (Americas Incentive, Business Travel & Meetings Exhibition) will make its Chicago debut 11-13 June and will rotate annually between Chicago and Orlando until 2016.

It brings hosted buyers, exhibitors and industry professionals from around the world under this year's theme, "Defining the Future of Meetings...Together."

Speakers such as J. Walker Smith, principal of The Futures Company, will kick off AIBTM's 2013 exhibition and present data and insights that demonstrate the continued value of face-to-face relationships in the current "kinship economy."

A new industry partnership has been formed with the International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE), to co-produce educational content, there will be a new Lecture Theater on the show floor, whilst among new exhibitors are United Airlines, Monaco and Namibia Tourism - see www.aibtm.com.



SINCE the relaxation of international sanctions, record numbers are heading to Myanmar.

The problem is in this cash strapped economy, limited infrastructure can pose challenges for even the most savvy of travellers where international mobile roaming services are patchy at best.

It is not, says Visa, the sort of place you can arrive at the airport, hop in a cab and hope you can figure things out on the go.

With this in mind they have developed this top tips guide to making your stay which cautions -

- Check travel requirements with the Myanmar Embassy about visa requirements
- Register your travel details with the Australian government's Smartraveller website
- Get travel insurance that covers medical treatment and evacuation from there
- Make sure you have a photocopy of your travel documents
- Get a local SIM card
- Pre-book any rental car requirements before you go
- Bring new, crisp and clean notes as blemished notes are often rejected.
- If you need to change notes do it at the airport for more competitive rates
- Inform your bank before you go because unusual transactions may be blocked; and naturally...
- Bring your Visa card instead of carrying notes - there are plenty of ATMs!

Special Freycinet deal

FREYCINET Lodge on Tasmania's east coast with all the facilities and services needed for a successful conference, such as flexible meeting spaces, team-building activities, diverse catering options and comfortable accommodation has a conference package deal at \$250 per person.

The package includes single accommodation, buffet breakfast, morning and afternoon tea, working lunch and use of meeting room facilities.

Valid until 30 June, it is subject to availability and a minimum of 10 delegates, Sunday to Thursday nights only.

For bookings and information call 03 6256 7222.



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More reasons for Four Seasons

THE Four Seasons Resort Bali
at Sayan, located in the island's
central highlands has transformed
all of its 42 villas.

The new chic and modern look
is described as a strong reflection
of Balinese architectural style,
tradition and culture.

"Our one and two bedroom
villas have always been
considered unique in the world,"
says the Resort's new general
manager Uday Rao.

"The villas have been
impeccably maintained over the
15 years since the Resort was
built. But we wanted to evolve
the design to ensure their place
among the finest villas in Bali."

The offering includes the
stunning Royal Villa – a two-
story, three-bedroom residence
overlooking the Ayung River.

MEA's last Darwin chance

ATTENDEES at the
upcoming MEA National
Conference in Darwin are
being reminded of a final
opportunity to join the free
Darwin site fam on Saturday 4
May and grow your knowledge
of the city courtesy of the Darwin
Local Host Committee.

With most tours full or almost
full, choose from a Walking
Museum Tour, Taste of the
Top End Tour and due to the
popularity of the Darwin Walk
n Water Tour a second one has
been added an hour later.

Register your interest in
attending these free tours via
conference@mea.org.au.

MEANWHILE, as MEA has
thrown out the handbook for
this year's event, download the
Conference App now.

There's no app store required,
simply enter mea2013.mobi
into the address bar of your
smartphone's or tablet's browser
and the app will automatically
download into your device.

This allows you to: view the
interactive program and create
your own personalised program,
take notes on sessions and email



the notes to yourself, see who's
attending, enhance your profile
and message other attendees,
win one of two iPad3's by playing
the MEA App game, view sponsor
and exhibitors profiles, brochures
and video content, access maps,
social media and all useful event
and location info and have your
voice heard and provide event
feedback.

Hawaii visitors up

ACCORDING to preliminary
statistics released by the Hawaii
Tourism Authority, the total
expenditures by visitors who
came to Hawaii in March rose
7.8% (or \$91.8 million) from
March 2012, to \$1.3 billion.

Contributing to this increase
was a growth in total arrivals
(+7.6% to 769,047 visitors) and
higher daily spending (+3.3% to
\$186 per person), which offset a
shorter length of stay (-3% to 8.93
days).



Getting to Know: Orange

by: *Barry Matheson*

ORANGE is the perfect place to hold a conference - only 254km, or three-and-a-half hours' drive west of Sydney, it's got all that nice, fresh country air, friendly people, good convention facilities, and the two things conventioners absolutely love - good food and fabulous wine.

The best time to hold your conference there is autumn when the city is aglow in brilliant autumn colours, which is why Orange is often called 'Colour City', and it's also when they hold their annual Food of the Orange District Festival, or F.O.O.D. Week, a ten-day gastronomic extravaganza every April that brings "foodies" from all over Australia.

There are over 100 food-related events to attend, the highlight being a 4-hour 'forage' through the vineyards, stopping every 500-meters to sample cuisine cooked by local chefs and to taste the excellent cool climate wines that Orange produces.

When you arrive in the town, you can't help but be impressed with its elegant, wide tree-lined streets and beautiful parks and gardens and its mix of history and cosmopolitan.

There are beautifully restored majestic 19th century buildings with stained glass windows, and close by, historic towns and villages to visit.

The birthplace of Banjo Patterson, Orange was named after the Prince of Orange in the 1820's and has grown into a prosperous, vibrant bustling town of 38,000 people, boasting sidewalk cafes, restaurants, boutique shops, galleries and theatres.

Golfers regard the Duntroon Course as one of the best in the state, but you can also go fossicking, hot air ballooning, boating or wine tasting at the more than 50 wineries scattered across the Central Tablelands.

One not to be missed is Borrodell Vineyard on a glorious site high above the city on Mt Canobalas; it's one of Australia's highest vineyards with superb views and its Sister's Rock Restaurant serves wonderful modern cuisine and award-winning wines.

The city caters for business functions, seminars and conferences and offers a wide range of accommodation including hotels, motor inns, and apartments. For more information contact Orange Conference & Events on 1800 069 466 or **CLICK HERE** for the Orange Conference Guide .



A town called Alice...

A 'mob' of five meeting and event planners from Sydney and Melbourne - along with **BEN** - were treated to a post AIME Alice Springs faml the week before last, organised by Northern Territory Conventions.

The full-on program was for many of the group an introduction to this fascinating outback region.

It was also one, which surprisingly has all the bells, whistles and flutes to host anything from the smallest corporate retreat to events for a

cast of thousands.

The itinerary included accommodation in a new wing of Lassiters Hotel, site inspections, breakfasts, lunches and dinners at Alice Springs Desert Park, Quest Alice Springs, the Royal Flying Doctor Service Visitor Centre, Heavitree Gap Outback Lodge, Bindi, the soon to be Doubletree by Hilton, Alice Springs Convention Centre, Alice Springs Turf Club, Chifley Alice Springs Resort, Outback Quad Adventure, Muk Muk Gallery, Araluen Cultural Precinct, Stanley Chasm and The Quarry.

RIGHT: Hijacked by pirates and taken to The Quarry for dastardly deeds and good fun, the famil group made friends with their foes from the Henley-on-Todd Regatta.



ABOVE: A Mwherre artist - Polly from Bindi showing off the artwork she created on a badge.

BELOW: Doubletree by Hilton, Alice Springs' expansive grounds.



ABOVE is the famil group at Stanley Chasm 50km from Alice Springs. From left are: Jill Varley; Lauren Gadd; Rebecca Clarke, DC Conferences; Elma Byrne Hewlett-Packard; Nicole Browne and Lee Kane, AIST.



BELOW: A room with a MacDonnell Ranges view - the Alice Springs Convention Centre.



ABOVE: The historic Alice Springs Telegraph Station - from where the spring after which the town was named ran.

RIGHT: Quad biking with **BEN's** very own Jill Varley (far left) are Nicole Jervis, Elma Byrne, Lauren Cadd and Rebecca Clarke.



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RIGHT: A poster from the 1956 film 'A Town Like Alice' which starred Australian actor Peter Finch and Virginia McKenna.



BELOW: A must visit is the Muk Muk Gallery, Alice Springs.

