



## A night at the opera

SO you think opera is boring?

A lot of overweight people, trailing around a stage in long gowns, trilling like scalded canaries.



So wrong.

Opera over the years has morphed into a much more accessible art form, singers are reed slim, famous producers and directors such as Baz Luhrmann line up to recreate opera classics.

Not always to the delight of the die-hard fans but certainly to a growing youth audience.

If you were in Milan wouldn't you want to experience La Scala?

So it stands to reason that in Sydney, experiencing an opera at the Sydney Opera House is a fait accompli.

It certainly is for many visiting international conference and congress groups.

Thursday night's production of La boheme clearly thrilled the capacity audience and in particular Gianluca Terranova's rendition of Rodolfo was well worth whooping about.



## IMEX America 2012 achieves US\$3.3 billion

WITH more than 1,000 hosted buyers and attendees giving their feedback in IMEX America second expo exit survey, the results reveal that buyers placed – or expect to place - US\$3.3 billion worth of business.

Held at the Sands Expo in Las Vegas last October, the figure is a 17.5% increase on the \$2.8 billion achieved as a result of the debut show in October 2011 (sourced from 2011 post-show survey).

IMEX Group chairman, Ray Bloom, said it is “an exceptional response sample.

“The post show surveys are used extensively by the IMEX Group to generate ideas and suggestions for refining IMEX America year-over-year and the high response rate reflects the enthusiasm for the show from the buyers.

“The post-show survey asked buyers a series of questions about their aims, objectives and behavior at IMEX America, including “what is the estimated value of orders you placed at the show and the estimated value of orders you expect to place as a result of the show?” - a question which produced the \$3.3b value.

Commenting on the figures, Bloom said “This is a firm endorsement of the high quality of buyers we attracted this year and proof, if any were needed, that the show delivers real



business value and produces positive results for many months afterwards.”

The introduction of a new, personalised hosted buyer email inbox on the IMEX website was widely praised for helping buyers to manage their communications with exhibitors.

The new approach generated a single email every day to each buyer, which alerted them to their new appointment requests.

“Of the 38,000 individual appointments made by buyers, 20% were made as a result of the improved email inbox,” Bloom said.

This new practice will now be rolled out to all buyers attending IMEX in Frankfurt in May.

Hosted Buyer, Bryan Bruce of HPN Global summed it up by explaining, “I'm very impressed with IMEX's focus on digital and what they're doing to allow us as hosted buyers...to communicate on the mobile devices, on the web before the show, during the show and, of course, way after the show. Really, for me, the difference-maker has been the digital component of this show.

## Rasa Sayang turns 40

**MALAYSIA'S** first ever 5-star resort, the Shangri-La's Rasa Sayang Resort and Spa, Penang, which opened in 1973, is this year celebrating its 40th anniversary.

With its distinctive Minangkabau roof, inspired by a Dayak longhouse, the resort over the years has hosted many memorable MICE events.

The Rasa Sayang name means “a feeling of love” in the native Malay language.

In celebration of four decades of hospitality, the resort's management has set up a photo gallery to archive showcasing memories of celebrity visits, past celebrations and dedicated staff.

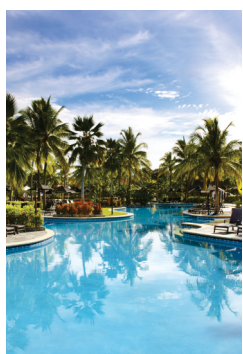
The resort will also offer special packages with a 40% daily discount available until 30 Nov.

“The passage of time has not faded the appeal of this iconic resort,” said Suleiman Tunku Abdul Rahman, the resort's director of communications.

“It remains fresh, interesting and contemporary, consistently winning prestigious awards for its architecture, infrastructure, products and services as well as for its green approach to sustainability.

“The journey that started four decades ago has reached an important milestone.

“We aspire to continue to be the leading resort in Penang and to grow exponentially while maintaining our economic and environmental sustainability for the next generation and future guests,” he said.



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# business events news

14th January 2013

## Hotel haggling site jumps 300%

AUSTRALIA'S only hotel haggling website, GraysEscape.com, with the ability to negotiate rates for the MICE and corporate markets, saw bookings jump 300% last month, with savvy customers negotiating room rates.



And GraysEscape.com, a GraysOnline offshoot expects the number of hotels willing to bargain with customers to grow by 30% by Easter, as more hoteliers warm to the unique method of filling empty rooms without compromising brand integrity.

GraysEscape.com general manager, Gary Berman said customers in December negotiated room rates on average 15% lower than the best available, discounted rates available on other booking sites.

"We're delighted the take-up of our unique haggling concept has

been so quick and strong from consumers and hoteliers," said Berman, who sold the original Ubid4rooms.com concept to GraysOnline last year.

"Hotels clearly see how GraysEscape.com can help them fill rooms that otherwise would have gone empty without publicly advertising discounted tariffs.

"There are more than 100,000 hotel rooms left vacant every night across Australia, which costs the industry hundreds of millions of dollars in lost revenue," he said.

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## What a Hide



IT'S as iconic as an Anzac biscuit and as fair dinkum as a drover's dog - the heritage listed Hides Hotel Cairns, built in 1928 and slap, bang in the centre of town, has been given a kick-up.

Refurbishment work has been done to the three-star, budget hotel, which includes new furniture, new signage and other internal work.

Superior rooms have new beds, modern linen, new artwork and flat-screen TVs.

Even the hotel's sprawling veranda is to get new furniture.

The hotel can cater to the leisure and business market with an inhouse business centre offering four work stations and wi-fi and internet at the property.



## crumbs!



WHAT price a freebie?

There's got to be a lesson here. Hitching a ride on an aircraft is not a good idea!

Economy class has got to be better than wing class!

Well, it certainly was for the unsuspecting python who did just that on a Qantas flight last Thursday.

Startled passengers could only watch as the animals tail was whipped against the rear end of the plane, leaving a trail of blood.

Dead on arrival when QF191 touched down in Port Moresby, its thought the visitor took refuge on the exterior of the aircraft at Cairns Airport.



Arabs, Chinese, Indians and Europeans have long appreciated Malaysia's position as a nexus for trade and meetings. So much so, they're still here 600 years later.

Our predecessors once braved all manner of hazards to travel to Malaysia. Once here, they thrived amidst the many trade opportunities and warm hospitality of the local Malays. The result is a truly unique melting pot of cultures and customs.

This infusion of influences makes Malaysians cosmopolitan and while we are forward-looking, we retain a strong sense of our traditions.

As the centre of Southeast Asia and strategically located between India and China, Malaysia knows how to connect the world with Asia. Malaysia is English-speaking yet multilingual; a vibrant emerging economic and business centre; and a great value-for-money destination. You will see it in our ability to host any meeting, incentive trip, convention and exhibition. Malaysia has all the first-world infrastructure you want in a destination enhanced by a fusion of Asian cultures, food and hospitality.

## Malaysia - Asia's Business Events Hub

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## Starwood builds on 2012

WITH the most hotel deals signed since before the global economic crisis, Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, say they anticipate a strong year of openings and new hotel agreement signings in 2013.

“Rising wealth, increasingly global businesses and a digitally connected world are creating unprecedented demand for travel and new travel patterns, and we continue to be as bullish as ever about our long-term growth,” said Frits van Paasschen, president and ceo.

“Whether it’s manufacturing in Vietnam, mineral resources from Nigeria, or outbound tourism from Brazil, Russia, India or China, globalisation is spurring economic development and creating many exciting expansion opportunities for our business.”

Simon Turner, president of Global Development said 2013 is shaping up for good growth for the emerging and developing markets.

“In 2012, Starwood signed a total of 131 new hotel management and franchise

agreements which represented an increase of 17% over 2011 signing levels, including 31 conversions, 12 of which opened during 2012.”

Nearly two-thirds of Starwood’s new hotels in 2013 are opening in fast-growing markets, the hotel group plans to open its first property in Tajikistan, while also expanding further in such important markets as Peru, Brazil, Mexico, Panama, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Hungary, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, as well as perennial growth markets like China and India.

Asia remains a high priority market too, accounting for almost one quarter of Starwood’s existing hotel rooms and over half of Starwood’s pipeline.

Starwood continues to build on its established presence in mature markets and to see strong interest in conversions for growth in developed markets such as North America.

Conversion momentum in 2013 is expected to increase in Asia Pacific, Latin America and Europe.

## Marriott opens 62nd hotel in China

LAST week saw the opening of the 323 room Shanghai Marriott Hotel Pudong East.

Speaking at the opening, Arne Sorenson, Marriott International’s

president and ceo, said “This hotel represents our 62nd hotel in the country and our 20th in Shanghai alone, where we are the largest operator of full-scale hotels in the city.”

Located in the heart of Pudong, Shanghai Marriott Hotel Pudong East is close to two major industrial parks which are home to the China headquarters of many Fortune 500 companies, and is just a five-minute drive from the Shanghai New International Expo Center, a popular venue of high-profile regional and domestic trade shows and exhibitions in eastern China.

The Marriott, which is easily accessible from both Pudong and Hongqiao international airports in the city, offers 1,705sqm of banquet space, including a 655sqm divisible and pillar-free grand ballroom.

In addition there is another 10 function rooms which feature natural light.

The hotel’s recreational facilities include a fully-equipped fitness center with a 22-metre heated indoor swimming pool, jacuzzi, steam and sauna, as well as providing a variety of pampering spa treatments.

James Macadie, the hotel’s general manager, commented “With its unique design and sense of place, the Shanghai Marriott Hotel Pudong East hotel features high standards of services, facilities and amenities of Marriott Hotels & Resorts for business travellers who seamlessly blend work and play worldwide.”

To mark its grand opening, Shanghai Marriott Hotel Pudong East is launching a series of special offers that are valid until 31 August, 2013.

These include bonus points for Marriott Rewards members; guests are entitled to free buffet breakfast for a minimum



consecutive stay of two nights from CNY1,480 (AU\$226); plus an opening meetings package from CNY488 (AU\$75) per person per day for a stylish meeting room.

## The Cisco kid

AS our reliance heightens on devices, including mobile phones, laptops, tablets and smartphones, we expect to connect no matter where we travel.

This importantly applies to meeting organisers who want connectivity for their attendees, who often use two devices per person on average.

MGM Resorts report that their new wi-fi’s superior customer service experience allows meeting groups the support they need, with the option to upgrade to a premium-level, guaranteed service.

Previously able to offer support for up to 4,000 concurrent users, MGM Resorts, now has the capability to support up to 120,000 concurrent users in Las Vegas.

Key features for groups is the ability to customise wi-fi networks through a specially created, private wi-fi network.

This means a meeting organiser can design targeted information, provide notes and reminders, update agendas and communicate last-minute changes and more, based on the group’s individual needs.

Sub-groups can even be set up with unique passcodes to limit access to certain information while sponsor and advertising placements within the custom network are an option for those wanting to offset event costs or provide clients with marketing opportunities.

Additional wi-fi features include location-based services, so attendees can understand where they are and how to get to their next session or booth.



This week **Business Events News** is offering one lucky reader the chance to win a three night stay in an Ocean Studio Suite at Furama Resort Danang plus breakfast for two people and one Vietnamese body massage per person courtesy of **DMS - Destination Marketing Services and Unique Venues**.



Unique Venues offers a range of deluxe international hotel options which are ideal for

conferences, incentives, meetings and events.



To enter, answer each question this week and submit your creative answer on Friday. Today’s question is:

*How many properties are currently in the Unique Venues Portfolio?*

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## Spicers Group new bdm

### SPICERS

Retreats, Hotels and Lodges has appointed Alison Widders to the position of business development manager.



Based in Sydney, Widders is responsible for exploring new business opportunities for the group and maintaining key business relationships with NSW and ACT markets.

She will work alongside group sales manager Kylie Stever and fellow business development manager Lisa Keogh.

Widders most recently worked as a business development manager for sales representation company Tourism Portfolio.

## Ellen DeGeneres to boost Aussie tourism



**TOPPING** off a week of promoting Australia to the United States and coming in the wake of Oprah's hugely successful visit, comes the announcement at Thursday night's taping of the Ellen DeGeneres Show that they will visit Australia in March.

Qantas has partnered with Swisse Wellness to support the initiative that is expected to deliver a major boost for local tourism, especially as the show has an audience of more than 16 million people.

Added to this the show's audience all received a free return flight on Qantas between the United States and Australia, trips that can be taken any time before the end of the year from New York, Dallas Fort Worth or Los Angeles to Sydney or Melbourne.

## Gold Coast update

**THERE'S** so much that is new and being developed on the Gold Coast this year, we chose a few of the highlights.

The *Jelluralg Aboriginal Cultural Centre and Tours* has unveiled a dedicated Aboriginal Tourism and Cultural Centre.

Jelluralg is the Aboriginal name for the 25 hectare rainforest which stretches across the headland from Tallebudgera Estuary to Burleigh.

*Lantern Ghost Tours* is now in Surfers Paradise following its success in Melbourne.

These small group tours of Australia's most haunted locations, work with the community, historians & mediums.

*Gold Coast Eco Extreme* offers views of some of Queensland's biggest and most exclusive properties on Sovereign Island.

The 50 kilometre, one and a half hour Gold Coast waterways journey leaves from Runaway Bay Marina on a custom designed 900HP RIB "ECO 1".

*Live the Life of James Bond at the Stunt Academy* features half day and full day stunt academy courses at Spy School.



## Getting to Know: Nelson Bay

by: Chantal Housler

**NELSON** Bay in Port Stephens offers a great atmosphere and exciting opportunities for both leisure and business travellers with its boutique shopping village, marina and beaches. The region is increasingly popular due to its location, just a three hour drive to the North Coast from Sydney, its spectacular scenery and sheltered bay, calm beaches and abundant marine life.

The destination during public holidays and most weekends is crowded with tour buses full of people wanting to see dolphins and whales as it is the permanent home of 160 bottlenose dolphins and a port-in-passing for over 3000 migrating humpback whales for five months of the year.

Stockton Beach, located to the south of Nelson Bay, from Anna Bay to Newcastle Harbour, features the country's largest dune system, covering 30kms. The beaches in Port Stephens are ideal for 4 wheel drive tours, horseriding, walking, quad biking and parasailing activities which can be used as team building activities or offered in an incentive program.

Nelson Bay's rental market offers leisure and business travellers self contained houses, apartments and cottages as well as bed and breakfasts, motels and hotels. These include Peppers Anchorage, Shoal Bay Resort & Spa, Landmark Resort and All Seasons Salamander Shores.

For conferences, events and incentives, event planners can organise a traditional function space at AJ's Restaurant and Function Centre located at the Landmark Resort right next to the 27 hole golf course or Adventure Conferences and Function Centre at O'Carrollyn's Eco Resort.

Another option is a private charter onboard one of the three vessels owned by Moonshadow Cruises. The cruise company can cater for conferences, product launches, team building events, gala dinners and cocktail parties.

Other activities and attractions in and around Nelson Bay include helicopter rides, diving, snorkeling and bushwalking.

Throughout the year a number of events are scheduled including the Tastes at the Bay Food and Wine Festival in November, the Port Stephens Golf Classic in August and the Nelson Bay Blue Water Festival in February.

Port Stephens Visitor Information Centre staff can offer additional suggestions on what to do as well as where to stay and eat in town, for more information call 1800 808 900.

