



Is your number up?

WE all know how handy it is to have an easy-to-remember phone



number - and a charity auction this week in the United Arab Emirates has actually put a value on it.

The auction of premium numbers was conducted by UAE telecommunications provider Etisalat, with 70 so-called "VIP mobile numbers" up for grabs.

Participants were stunned when the top number - 050 777 7777 - reportedly garnered a top bid of more than \$2.3 million.

That was about six times the amount paid for the second most popular number, 050 777 7770, with the top ten numbers raising over \$4 million for charity.

The top prices paid could have had something to do with the ritzy locations for the auction, which took place simultaneously at Dubai's Armani Hotel in the Burj Khalifa building as well as at Abu Dhabi's Emirates Palace.

Intriguingly the winning bidder actually only gets to use the special number for the duration of a two year contract which also came with bonuses such as 100GB of data and 22,500 text messages per month.

I think I'll stick with my current plan! Jill

AlliedPRA named official AIBtM DMC

ORLANDO-BASED AlliedPRA has been appointed as the official Destination Management Company of the Americas Incentive, Business Travel & Meetings Exhibition (AIBTM) for the second year running.

AIBTM2014 takes place 10-12 Jun at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, with AlliedPRA to manage the AIBTM Refresh Zone as well as assisting exhibitors with transportation, off-site client receptions, dinners and entertainment events.

A new star is born



THE official launch of the Melbourne Star Observation Wheel at Docklands this week saw the who's who of the Victorian tourism industry turn out to celebrate the attraction which is already bringing thousands of people to the precinct.

The Wheel, which opened to the public about ten weeks ago, is the first major international investment by Japanese firm Sanoyas Holdings Corporation, which is located in Melbourne's sister-city of Osaka.

Sanoyas president Takashi Ueda was present for the event and told attendees the company is "proud and excited to be the owners of the Melbourne Star Observation Wheel.

"We are intent in ensuring it will be seen as a world class entertainment and tourism attraction, one that is recognised internationally and one that all Melburnians are proud of".

Dignitaries present included a number of senior Japanese representatives including Mr Hidenobu Sobashima, Consul-General of Japan in Melbourne, with the event featuring Taiko drums and Shamisen as well as a symbolic breaking of the Sake barrel to bring good fortune.

The 120m-high Melbourne Star has 21 fully enclosed air conditioned glass cabins each



with capacity for up to 20, and has already welcomed more than 85,000 guests since it opened just before Christmas.

Pictured above at the launch event are Tina Leonard, chair of Destination Melbourne; Melbourne Convention Bureau ceo Karen Bolinger; and Melbourne Star ceo Chris Kelly.

And inset is Sanoyas' Mr Ueda with Victorian deputy premier Peter Ryan.

Emirates to add Oslo

EMIRATES this morning announced its 35th European destination, with the planned launch of non-stop flights from Dubai to Oslo in Norway effective from 02 September this year.

The daily services will be operated using a Boeing 777-300ER aircraft, with Emirates president Tim Clark saying "we look forward to introducing new audiences to Oslo".

Jetstar to Uluru

VOYAGES Indigenous Tourism has hailed the announcement of new direct Melbourne-Uluru Jetstar flights, with the service to commence from 29 June 2014.

Jetstar Australia/NZ ceo David Hall said the move was a significant development for both the Victorian and Northern Territory tourism industries.

"We know Uluru is one of Australia's most highly sought after holiday destinations and we're confident our low fares will help drive tourism growth to the region," he said.

Jetstar has also announced an increase in flights on the Sydney-Uluru route from four times weekly to a daily service.

"Since launching the Sydney to Uluru route last year, we've seen a steady increase in demand on the market and we're introducing some additional capacity in response," Hall said.

Voyages ceo Andrew Williams said the new flights were a "great endorsement of the growing popularity of the destination," with the new Uluru Meeting Place also a hit with meeting and conference delegates.

Yesterday Indigenous Land Corporation chair Dawn Casey said the flight boost would "help address one of the major barriers to increasing resort occupancy".

Aussie Centara gm

THAI hotelier Centara Hotels & Resorts has announced the appointment of Austin Robinson as gm of the Centara Karon Resort Phuket and Waterfront Suites Phuket by Centara.

Centara Karon resort is a mid-rise property offering extensive meeting and incentive facilities.

Robinson has worked in many hospitality roles in Australia prior to moving to Thailand, including work with Mantra Group in Far North Queensland and an earlier position as gm of Lake Crackenback Resort in the Australian Alps.



business events news

14th March 2014

Vivid set to sparkle



SYDNEY'S annual Vivid Festival was officially launched earlier this week, and is expected to attract hundreds of thousands of visitors to the NSW capital.

Taking place from 23 May-9 June, the festival has proven highly successful in bringing tourists to the city in what was previously a quiet period.

Owned and managed by Destination NSW, Vivid was last year estimated to bring in over \$20 million to the economy as well as shining a spotlight on the state's creative industries.

This year Vivid will evolve further with more than 50 new light installations, more music venues and 15 "signature events" as part of the Vivid Ideas program.

Meetings@Amari

AMARI Hotels has launched a series of online "Meetings@Amari" conversations, which are videos featuring interviews with business event professionals visiting or working in Bangkok.

The weekly segments are being published on YouTube, with the first interview with Kris Srisatin who recently launched her new DMC, Stream Events Asia.

Key source markets for Bangkok-based Stream Events include Australia and New Zealand, with the company working with Mary Helen Farrell to introduce the operation to local meeting and incentive planners.

CLICK HERE to view episode 1.

MEA NSW dinner

MEETINGS Events Australia will host its NSW Gala Dinner on thu 27 Mar from 6.30pm at Dockside, Darling Harbour.

Tickets for the "Recognition of Brilliance" event are priced at \$1300 per table of 10 - **RSVP here**.

Sofitel's Artist in Residence



EARLIER this week Sofitel Sydney Wentworth celebrated its sponsorship of the Biennale of Sydney with a function welcoming Brisbane-based artist Daniel McKewen as the hotel's 2014 Artist in Residence.

McKewen's video work *Running Men* will be showcased in the hotel's Soiree Bar until 31 May, featuring endless loops of iconic male actors such as Tom Cruise, Cary Grant and Daniel Craig running towards the camera towards the viewer who is "ever pursued but never caught".

McKewen is also participating in the 19th Biennale of Sydney which takes place every two years across multiple venues in the city.

Sofitel Wentworth has supported the Biennale as the event's official accommodation partner since 2006.

Pictured above at the launch event this week are, from left: Sofitel Sydney gm Erkin Aytekin; artist Daniel McKewen; and Biennale ceo Marah Braye.

Qantas lifts Thailand

QANTAS has made it easier for Australians to travel to five resort destinations in Thailand, via a new codeshare agreement with Bangkok Airways.

Passengers will be able to book QF on Bangkok Airways flights to Krabi, Ko Samui, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Phuket.

THE ULURU MEETING PLACE

JETSTAR TO LAUNCH MELBOURNE TO ULURU SERVICE

Jetstar announced this week it will commence a four times weekly return service between Melbourne and Ayers Rock Airport (Uluru) from 29 June 2014 and increase its Sydney route to a daily return service.

Never has there been a better time to experience Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park with a conference or incentive at Ayers Rock Resort's Uluru Meeting Place. Enquire today!

ulurumeetingplace.com.au
61 2 8296 8067
conferences@voyages.com.au



TAA urges flexible work



THE inflexibility of work conditions in the hospitality and tourism industries is preventing hotels and tourism businesses from offering services that customers expect.

Tourism Accommodation Australia (TAA) managing director Rodger Powell welcomed the Federal Government's decision to ask the Productivity Commission to review the Fair Work Act.

"Our businesses could employ many more people, particularly casual and part-time, if regulations didn't make it such a disincentive to employ staff."

Powell said the TAA would call for penalty rates to be included in the review because rather than protecting workers' rights they were impeding opportunities for greater employment.

"The tourism sector has the potential to be a major economic driver of the Australian economy as the mining boom wanes and greater flexibility in working conditions can be particularly beneficial in regional and

remote areas, many of which are experiencing economic downturns."

Powell said at Easter, penalty rates would penalise the people they were meant to benefit, with businesses closing down because the additional costs would outweigh the potential revenues.

Burmese Peninsula

THE strong interest in travel to Myanmar is seeing a revitalisation of the country's long-languishing tourism infrastructure, with the capital Yangon to feature a new Peninsula Hotels property.

The Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels Limited has announced a definitive agreement with Yoma Strategic Holdings which will see the restoration of the former Myanmar Railway Company headquarters into a hotel to be called The Peninsula Yangon.

The move will bring to Yangon a "new luxury experience," with Peninsula saying it sees great potential in the destination.

Moreton Hire - fit for a Governor-General!



MORETON Hire recently delivered a unique event space for a function hosted by Governor General Quentin Bryce at Admiralty House in Sydney.

The distinguished guest list included the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors, who enjoyed what's arguably the best view in Australia overlooking Sydney Harbour from the contemporary curved-roof Arcum Marquee (pictured above).

The internal fit-out featured the Commonwealth royal blue tones complete with linen, furniture and florals to complete the look.

"Given the calibre of guests visiting for the G20 summit, we were committed to delivering a world-class finish for Admiralty House and their guests," said Moreton Hire chief operating officer Roger Motteram.

HSMAl networking

THE Sheraton Melbourne Hotel's director of sales and marketing, Andre Jacques, will host a special networking event for the Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMAl) on Wednesday 02 Apr.

It will be the ideal opportunity to inspect the brand new property which officially opens its doors at the end of the month.

Meet in the lobby at 27 Little Collins Street at 5.30pm for the hotel inspection, with networking, drinks and canapes from 6pm in the Terrace Bar.

The event has been sponsored by TravelClick, with the HSMAl networking events having become popular 'not to be missed' events on the hospitality industry calendar.

For more information contact HSMAl Pacific Chapter Melbourne Chair Li Hawkins from Ascott on li.hawkins@the-ascott.com.



THE demolition of Sydney's iconic Convention and Exhibition Centre has brought a tear to the eye of many in the industry - but hotelier and property developer Jerry Schwartz is making the best of a sad situation.

He's arranged for some of the centres gigantic pylons to be saved, and had them transported north to become part of his latest venture - the \$4 million Hunter Valley Conference & Events Centre.

The pylons were transported to the construction site next to Schwartz's existing Crowne Plaza Hunter Valley property (below), where they will be installed as a permanent evocation of the famous SCEC.



"Sydney Convention & Exhibition Centre has played such an enormous role in the development of Sydney's - and NSW's - tourism sector...so I thought we should preserve at least a part of the heritage and use it to build the new venue in the Hunter," he said.

The new centre will feature a flexible ballroom with capacity for up to 1000, which can be separated into three conference rooms with flexible acoustic folding walls - all with a stunning country outlook.

It will have a combined 2,012 square metres of pre-function, meeting, exhibition and convention space and is set to play a major role in providing alternative space while the new SICEEP is being built.

The installation of the pylons, which has seen the original 20m high poles shortened to 14m to fit into the new building, will feature a plaque commemorating the SCEC which Schwartz said would also highlight the value of recycling!

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