



Take note!

HE LOOKS as laidback as a surfer who just rode in on his board, hair tousled by salt water and the Aussie sun, but Dr Jerry Schwartz, cosmetic surgeon, philanthropist, hotel owner and tourism visionary, is not afraid to tell it how it is.



Looking casually comfortable amidst the suits, short back and sides and blue ties at yesterday's official launch of the Crowne Plaza Hunter Valley Conference and Events Centre, he said councils could play a more proactive role in supporting tourism development.

"Providing reasons for visitors to come to regional areas needs to be a priority for government support."

It is the Schwartz Family Company who re-introduced the Hunter Valley Wine Festival after an absence of 30 years.

"We will move the event to June this year but we need the support of state and local government to help market it to a wider audience," he said.

Talking with Tourism Accommodation Australia acting ceo Carol Giuseppi after the event, she gave me a nudge and said, "Now **BEN**, it's your job to get the message out."

Aye aye. *Jill*

ICC Sydney Hotel info

THE Lend Lease project team will share designs for the fit-out of the International Convention Centre (ICC) Sydney Hotel at community information sessions due to be held on 24 Feb from 6pm at the Novotel Rockford in Darling Harbour.

The sessions would give information about the Darling Harbour regeneration project, and would the opportunity to submit feedback before development applications were submitted, Infrastructure NSW said.

CLICK HERE to register.

'Upgrade Cessnock airport'

THE formal launch of the \$6m, 1,650 delegate-capacity Crowne Plaza Hunter Valley Conference and Events Centre yesterday by NSW Premier Mike Baird (**pictured** right) was described as a significant event for the local people and Dr Jerry Schwartz as the sort of role model the country needs.

"Someone who is passionate about his business and who sees opportunities which others see as too hard."

Schwartz (**pictured** left) in turn praised Baird and the NSW Government for the announcement of a \$123m increase in tourism expenditure, including \$40m for regional tourism (**BEN** 17 Jan), but took the opportunity to 'lob a few bombs' on the performance of the region so far.

"One of the key issues holding the region back is infrastructure.

"Cessnock Airport needs an urgent upgrade if we are to attract more high-yield groups, international tourists and corporate travellers.

"The airport should be



upgraded to make it capable of handling commercial aircraft.

"This could open up a whole new access point for the Hunter Valley and maximise the potential of the region's attractions."

He said the building of the Hunter Expressway, also announced at the event by Baird, was a positive transport initiative, but as the major market for the Hunter Valley was Sydney, considerable scope was there for upgrading the route from the M1 to the wine region via Cessnock.

"We look forward to hearing more about the regional tourism strategy as many areas in regional NSW have been suffering through economic downturn and tourism offers a cost effective sustainable solution of the business and employment growth."



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Today's issue of BEN

Business Events News today has three pages of news plus full pages from: (**click**)

- Tangalooma Island Resort
- Travel Industry Expo

Sebel expands in Vic and Queensland



ACCOR has confirmed two new Sebel hotels, including a \$35m new build in Victoria.

Construction on the Sebel Yarrowonga is slated to start in early 2016, with an opening date of early 2018.

The 120-room hotel-serviced apartment building would be built on The Point by Lake Mulwala and would form part of a larger resort and marina complex planned by Lotus Living.

Guests would have access to a 300 seat conference facility, restaurant and more, Accor said.

The 63-room Sebel South Brisbane on Water Street was added to the Accor group this week and includes a boardroom with seating for 14 people.

Vic biz ev website

BUSINESS Events Victoria has launched a website to help venues, accommodation providers and others in regional Victoria attract business events.

'BEVHub' would provide advice and ideas on attracting business events as well as a networking platform for industry members, the organisation said.

Executive officer Chris Porter said with members spread across Victoria, an online hub was an ideal way to stay connected and there were plans to expand the site over time.

CLICK HERE to access the site.



business events news

18th February 2015

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crumbs!

THOSE Air New Zealander's are at it again; the airline has released another instalment in its successful 'Meanwhile in... New Zealand' campaign, this time, a mountain biking-themed video based on the famous Tortoise and Hare fable.

The video combines some hero images of NZ's legendary landscape during summer and illustrates what is happening in the country right now.

Air New Zealand gm Australia Leanne Geraghty says cycling is the fastest-growing participation sport for Australians and New Zealand is the perfect destination for cycling.

"NZ ticks all the boxes for cycle enthusiasts with more than 2,500 kilometres of pristine and diverse cycle ways to explore."

Time to strap on the cycling helmet and head on over!

NZ govt won't fund NZICC

NEW Zealand Economic Development Minister Steven Joyce has confirmed the NZ government will not fund the NZ International Convention Centre (NZICC).

Joyce said the government's "least preferred" option had been for it to contribute funding, and SkyCity had agreed "not to pursue a financial contribution" from the government, following a preliminary design with construction costs in excess of the \$402m commitment from the company in the NZICC Agreement.

Instead, it would amend the design to bring the expected project cost down towards this commitment, SkyCity said.

The Agreement involves concessions from the Crown, including regulatory changes such as a casino licence extension for 35 years, in order for SkyCity to meet project costs.

The government had granted an



extension to the date of approval for the design to accommodate the changes, SkyCity said.

Joyce said the government was prepared to accept a "slightly smaller" NZICC if required.

SkyCity told **BEN** the cost increase had been primarily due to "significant" construction cost escalation.

It had been negotiating with government for a solution for the extra funding, and welcomed the clarity of the decision, it said.

Ceo Nigel Morrison said the preferred option would be not to downsize the NZICC but to remove unnecessary costs.

Facilitated NZ visas for Chinese biz ev

NEW Zealand will launch a facilitated visa process for Chinese business events visitors next month.

A Memorandum of Understanding signed in January by 12 business events travel agents in Shanghai, Tourism NZ and Immigration NZ would come into effect on 02 Mar, with the aim of making conference and incentive trips more accessible to Chinese business travellers, Tourism NZ Asia gm David Craig said.

The program would be launched in East and Northern China once the first group of 20 business events travel specialists qualified, Tourism NZ said.

It would allow applications to be submitted by the participating travel agent via the closest application centre, as well as a dedicated Immigration NZ contact to handle all business events visa application queries - **CLICK HERE**.

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Langham intros Cordis Hotels

THE Langham Hospitality Group has introduced a new upscale hotel brand in Cordis Hotels and Resorts.

The first Cordis hotel would be in Hong Kong, slated to open in May, with a further eight new build or converted hotels due to open in the next three years, with five due to open in China, one in Bali and one in Colombo.

Other cities for future Cordis hotels include London, New York, Singapore and Bangkok.



Starwood ceo leaves

STARWOOD Hotels and Resorts Worldwide ceo Frits van Paasschen has resigned "by mutual agreement" with the board of directors, the company has said.

Director Adam Aron would serve as interim ceo while the board sought a permanent replacement, Starwood said.

Tjapukai venues

TJAPUKAI Aboriginal Cultural Park is set to further cater to business events with two new venues as part of its \$12m redevelopment.

These include the Canopy Breezeway, opened late last year, and the Cassowary Egg Theatre, set to host its first conference in March.

Accor gm and s&m appointments

ACCOR has announced a number of new appointments this month.

Wayne Taranto has been appointed gm of the Sofitel Sydney Wentworth, effective 04 Feb; Cleo Seaman gm of the Pullman Quay Grand, effective 16 Mar; and Steve Wellsted gm of the Mercure Townsville, effective 28 Jan.

Darren Waite is the new regional director of sales and marketing for Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia, joining the company with more than 20 years' experience in senior leadership roles, while Blair Weir is the director of sales, marketing, business and leisure at Sofitel Sydney Wentworth, as of 16 Feb.

Gaining an edge in Zimbabwe

GARY Grimmer, a former ceo of the Melbourne Convention and Visitor Bureau and ceo of consultancy firm Gaining Edge, is in Zimbabwe assisting the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) in the establishment of the National Convention Bureau within ZTA.

Grimmer will hold workshops and meetings with government departments and conduct site inspections of conference facilities and incentive properties in Harare and Victoria Falls.

Bureau executive director Tesa Chikaponya said Zimbabwe's tourism and hospitality industry could generate more than \$100m annually from its meetings, incentives and conventions.



Getting to Know: Abu Dhabi

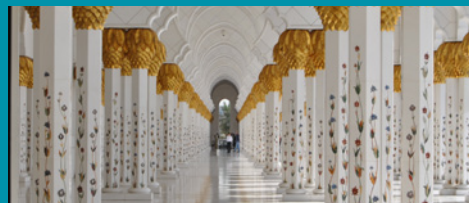
by: Bruce Piper

THE capital of the United Arab Emirates, Abu Dhabi, has soared to prominence as a venue for conferences and events in recent years through massive investment in its tourism product and burgeoning aviation links through Etihad, the UAE flag carrier which bases its operations there.

Business Events News was hosted at a conference in Abu Dhabi late last year, and saw first hand the destination's strong appeal. The event took place at the Yas Viceroy Hotel - a stunningly futuristic structure adjacent to Abu Dhabi's Formula One race track and marina, which has its own dedicated "Yas Events Centre" just a short stroll from the five star hotel. During the conference a number of other properties also hosted dinners and cocktail parties, allowing guests to see the huge variety of options available.

And while the meeting and event facilities were impressive, delegates also very much enjoyed exploring the many activity and sightseeing options available in Abu Dhabi. Golf at world class courses, shopping, touring and much more was on offer - not to mention the opportunity for the rev-heads present to take a luxury motor vehicle on a "hot lap" of the F1 track. A visit to the massive Sheikh Zayed Mosque is a must, with visitors able to marvel at the amazing marble, gold, crystals and precious stones used in its construction. Another engineering feat is Ferrari World - a massive indoor theme park complete with roller coasters and other rides, all in air conditioned comfort. And in the near future there will be even more to attract visitors, with the imminent opening of the Louvre Abu Dhabi, part of a thirty year agreement with the French government.

Abu Dhabi is certainly worth considering for your next conference. With easy global connectivity, upmarket luxury properties, extensive conference facilities, strong support from local authorities and a wide array of activities for delegates, what more could you ask for?



Business Events News is Australia's newest online publication dedicated to the vibrant meetings, incentives, conferences and events sector.

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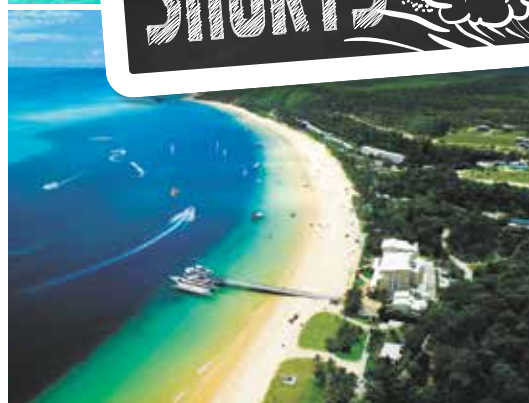
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