



The best laid plans...

THE invitation from the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust was to the Cockatoo Island Summer Launch to experience the new and improved facilities.



It promised signature summer cocktails by The Island Bar, a pop-up picnic in the Campground Kitchen, tours of the island, campfire stories and more.

There was more of the latter and less of the former because the heavens opened up as they have done in



Sydney of late, so Plan B sprang into action and the event moved inside Cockatoo's cavernous Industrial Precinct.

Everything was held inside, except of course, the touring.

It showcased one of the great wet weather options the island offered.

Oh yes, part of the invite, should one choose to accept it, was to stay overnight in one of the island's go tents.

Glamping they called it - girding one's loins springs to mind. In all fairness, we were as snug as bugs-in-a-rug in the weather-proof, safari-style tents on raised platforms.

Getting used to the sounds of the harbour, the late night aircraft and the bucketing rain was another thing.

Still, as Harbour Trust executive director Geoff Bailey said with uncommon honesty, "You need to stay for two nights because the first you won't sleep that well."

Regardless, Cockatoo really is a most extraordinary experience whether you 'glamp' or not, and even more so since the opening up of new conference facilities and heritage accommodation, more of which is to come in the next issue of **BEN**. Jill

SYD plan's event possibilities

THE final Sydney Metropolitan Strategy has been released, with several initiatives that could boost the city's events hosting capabilities.

'A Plan for Growing Sydney' includes a goal of growing a more internationally competitive Sydney CBD.

The plan said the city's diversity, culture and appeal as a place to live contributed to its ability to attract international events and exhibitions, as well as tourists and skilled workers.

To achieve this, one of the actions identified was diversifying the CBD by enhancing the cultural ribbon connecting new precincts including Barangaroo and Darling Harbour Live.

The government would establish "strong connections" between the various locations, including the to-be-revitalised Bays Precinct, the plan said.

The development of a hub for arts, culture and entertainment in Parramatta was also planned, with a first stage being consideration of options for a revamped Riverside Precinct, which would make Western Sydney more attractive to international conferences and music acts, the plan said.

Other actions included



developing a business case for new sports facilities in Western Sydney, including an outer stadium with capacity and facilities to host high profile events, and the possibility of a major new exhibition facility such as a new museum in the Parramatta Cultural Precinct.

The Tourism and Transport Forum said the strategy charted a course for new precincts and major centres that, if delivered well, could make Sydney even more attractive to visitors.

The NSW government now needed to update its Transport Master Plan so infrastructure matched planning, ceo Margy Osmond said.

CLICK HERE to read the strategy.

Domestic spend figures up

FIGURES for overnight trip expenditure for domestic visitors to NSW, Victoria, Western Australia, South Australian and the Northern Territory were all up for the year to September.

The NT saw a 20% increase on the year to September 2013 to \$1.1b, while Victoria saw a 14% increase to \$9.6b and WA saw an increase of 12% to \$4.6b, according to the latest Tourism Research Australia figures from the National Visitors Survey.

Spend for Queensland, Tasmania and the ACT was down, while NSW saw a 1% increase to \$13b.

Overall visitor spend was up 4% to \$53.7b for the year to September, the figures showed.

CLICK HERE to access the domestic figures.

Accor, Huazhu partner up

ACCOR and Huazhu Hotels Group have signed a long-term alliance to create a hotel company in China, with ibis, ibis Styles, Mercure, Novotel and Grand Mercure hotels in China to become part of Huazhu as Accor's master-franchisee in China, Mongolia and Taiwan.

Accor would take a 10% stake in the company, and would continue to own and develop its luxury and upscale brands in China.

Accor said 350 to 400 new Accor branded hotels were planned in the midterm.

Three pages today

BEN has two pages of news plus a full page from (**click**):

- AIME

ben Events Calendar

BEN's calendar details events at various venues across Australia.

If you have an upcoming event you'd like us to feature, email info@businesseventsnews.com.au.

6 FEB

Perth Convention Bureau's (PCB) 2015 Aspire Awards workshop luncheon; Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre; enquiries email aspire@pcb.com.au

12-13 FEB

CEO & Chair Symposium; Hotel Grand Chancellor, Hobart; for any enquiries please email kristine@associations.net.au

18-20 FEB

Fundraising Institute Australia Conference 2015; Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre; visit www.fiaconference.org.au

20 FEB

DMS Workshop; Doltone House Hyde Park, Sydney; enquiries email sydneyrsvp@destinationmarketing.com.au

23 FEB

DMS Workshop; Crown Towers, Melbourne; enquiries email melbournersvp@destinationmarketing.com.au

16 MAR

Ni hao WA 2015; Aravina Estate, Yallingup; for more visit www.tourism.wa.gov.au

4 MAR

NT Muster; Ivy Ballroom, Sydney; enquiries email trade.tourismnt@nt.gov.au

5 MAR

NT Muster; Park Hyatt Melbourne Ballroom; enquiries email trade.tourismnt@nt.gov.au



business events news

15th December 2014

Cairns events surge

BUSINESS Events Cairns and Great Barrier Reef says hosting part of the G20 this year as well as Australian Tourism Exchange has resulted in a 63% increase in business event leads.

Business events director Rosie Douglas said leads worth \$18.4m and corporate and associate meetings worth \$4m had been confirmed for the region since 01 Jul, up 50% on the same period last year.

The G20 and ATE15 had placed Cairns on the business events map, she said.

There had been strong interest from New Zealand, with five leads for incentive groups worth \$500,000 picked up at the Pacific Area Incentives and Conferences Expo, the best result at the event in several years, Douglas said.

Ballarat Lodge deal

BENTLEY Property Group has bought the four star Ballarat Lodge from Austpac Hotels & Resorts, with the acquisition including the 71-room hotel, conference centre, restaurant and bar, pool and day spa facilities

Eco Domes in Alice

THE Earth Sanctuary in Alice Springs is set to erect two new 'Eco Domes' which will target groups and the "lucrative niche market of education tourism".

Earth Sanctuary is a carbon neutral venue offering day and evening tours focusing on ecology, astronomy and culture, with a signature 'Spirit of the Outback' dinner and show.

The centre will receive \$40,000 from the NT and Federal govts to support the project.

Damn it - learn to vid

DAMN Good Productions has said one of the biggest trends it has seen this year is corporate clients producing their own media, whether podcasts, staff updates, or "on the road" videos.

"Sadly," says Damn Good director Ben Alcott, "not every client who 'stars' in their own video is a star.

"We have worked in the media training business for many years and have trained hundreds of organisations in the art of working with the media, presenting to camera, and just generally making themselves look good on screen."

The company is offering special packages for media training booked before 31 Jan.

To find out more, **CLICK HERE**.

\$1m Barossa grant

THE SA state government has announced a new cellar door in Barossa supported by a \$1m regional development fund grant to draw tourists and investors to the region.

CLICK HERE to read about the initiative.



STUCK for an idea for a truly different last minute corporate Christmas gift?

Fear not - a British company has come up with the idea of selling boxes literally containing nothing - perfect

for your clients who probably already have everything.

The You Need Nothing boxes (right)

come in a choice of tasteful black or clean, crisp white, and are available in a variety of sizes and prices from £27 (A\$51) right up to a hefty £199 (A\$380).

All proceeds will go to the Oxfam charity, with the website selling the products saying "NOTHING reminds you to enjoy everything you already have".

See youneednothing.com.



Getting to Know: Dandenong Ranges

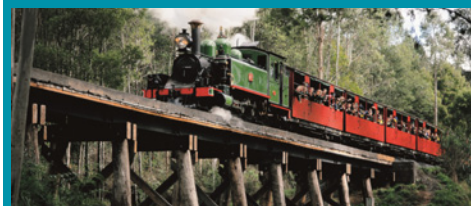
by: Alex Walls

MELBOURNE has been on an events high this year, but if you're looking to get back to nature and a bit of quiet beauty, the Dandenong Ranges is on the city's doorstep with stunning views and various conferencing options to hand.

On a pre-tour for AIME this year, **BEN** stopped off at CountryPlace in Kalorama which is in actuality 40 minutes drive from Melbourne's CBD but feels like a world away when it comes to the peace and quiet of the surrounding countryside. While the stairs inside the main reception were a little worn, the sweeping views out over the Silvan Dam and down the Yarra Valley certainly weren't. The venue, with 62 rooms and five main conferencing rooms with capacity for up to 120 delegates, also features outdoor team building facilities such as rope courses, tennis courts and, if you'd like to make use of the wide expanse of lawn and wooden deck, BBQ facilities for a little conference cook up.

One of the highlights of the Dandenongs has to be the Puffing Billy Railway, which started operations in 1900. The beautifully preserved steam train offers first class wine and dine options in four heritage dining carriages, seating up to 22 people each, with excellent service provided, and, of course, fantastic views of the bush as you puff your way along the track. Trains depart from Belgrave, one hour east of Melbourne, and can be hired as special charters or are available through wholesale tour programs.

For more beautiful views, SkyHigh Mount Dandenong offers a function centre for up to 250 people with floor to ceiling windows and beautifully kept gardens. If you're keen for more team building activities, there's even a SkyHigh Maze, or you can just gaze out from the gardens and take in Mornington Peninsula, Port Phillip Bay and the You Yangs.



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