

Boasting the strongest economy in the nation, Western Australia is seeing good growth in local meetings and events business. But a lack of bigger movements is a major concern for suppliers and the PCEC. WA now has the facilities and air services to support strong inbound MICE — all it needs is promotional funding and leadership to make it a reality, Ian Jarrett reports.



Perth Centre facing hard reality of market forces

THE Perth Convention Exhibition Centre remains under a cloud, despite spending the first 21 months of its life being draped with awards.

The privately-run, \$220 million venue, which received seed funding of \$125 million from Western Australian taxpayers, has had to take its foot off the pedal by abandoning international marketing and promotion, a move that chief executive Paul D'Arcy describes as "disappointing".

Operator Spotless has forecast losses of \$20 million over its 10-year management contract and has begun to make

cutbacks to staff in a bid to contain the losses.

The core convention centre business is leased for 35 years to the Wyllie Group, which is in talks with the WA Government in an attempt to resolve the issue of the Centre's funding.

The dilemma for the WA government is that if the Perth Centre makes cutbacks, the city's reputation in the meetings market will suffer. And in the dog-eat-dog world of meetings business, a weakened Perth Centre will be under even more pressure from competitors, including hotels with meetings facilities as well as rival convention centres.

"Nationally, we are achieving the targets we set, but the international

results have been somewhat disappointing," said D'Arcy.

In its first 20 months of operation (from August 2004 to April 2006), the Perth Centre recorded well over one million visitors to 820 events, including 52 exhibitions and trade shows. Close to 300 conferences and meetings were attended by more than 52,760 delegates.

D'Arcy, previously deputy chief executive of the Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre, said that since the Perth Centre project was announced, new competition had arrived with convention centres in Kuala Lumpur and on the Gold Coast.

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Rooms galore but none to aid PCEC

WHILE it's claimed new tourism accommodation projects worth almost A\$1 billion are in the planning or construction stages in Western Australia, they don't include a much-needed large hotel near the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre to enable it to secure events with bigger delegate numbers.

According to the WA government, if all the current projects materialise, almost 5700 rooms will be added to the state's visitor accommodation.

Of the planned developments, 56 projects are already under construction across WA, including the largest development in the Perth Metropolitan area — the Medina Executive Barrack Plaza, which will include 100 one and two-bedroom, short-stay serviced apartments.

In the Coral Coast region, the four-star Exmouth Marina Novotel Ningaloo, worth A\$12 million, is under construction.

The two tourism regions with the highest level of development are the South West, with \$A352.9 million and Perth, with almost A\$284 million.



— Two more properties for Toga —

PROPERTY specialist Togo Hospitality has opened two new hotels in Perth. Medina Executive Barrack Plaza is the second Medina Apartment Hotel to open. The group operates the successful Media Apartment Hotel adjacent to the PCEC.

Medina Executive Barrack Plaza located on the corner of Wellington

and Barrack Streets, features 100 studio rooms of one and two bedroom apartments with many rooms offering views over the city and Northbridge. The contemporary designed apartment hotel is minutes from major shopping areas such as Murray Street Mall and is opposite the central railway station and makes a useful base for business travellers.

The other property is the re-branded Travelodge Perth, the former Commodore Hotel located on Hay Street. Travelodge Perth has undergone a multi-million dollar refurbishment to bring it up to Group specifications. Located on the fringe of the business district, the property is offering opening rates from just \$99 for a limited time. Conditions apply.



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Duxton gets to the heart of business

The 306-room Duxton Hotel has an impressive address - No 1 St George's Terrace is at the heart of Perth's CBD.

The hotel has been putting renewed focus on meetings business with eight function rooms and a ballroom catering to events of different size and function.

The Duxton also uses its Lower lobby for themed events - one of the most recent being a 200-person VIP event that saw the lobby transformed into an Arabian oasis.

The hotel also offers The Cove, located in the Grill Restaurant, for private dinners, presentations and formal meetings.



The Richardson is ready to roll

THE RICHARDSON Hotel, Suites and Spa, which opens in West Perth in July, will be a major attraction for the corporate sector.

London architect Sir Terry Farrell was engaged to design the hotel with a brief to create a landmark. The hotel has nine levels with 16 rooms and 58 suites.

Facilities include high-speed Internet and IP telephony in each room and a pillow menu. The Business Centre offers 15 serviced offices and meeting rooms.

The Cocktail Bar complements the signature Opus Restaurant with all-day alfresco dining at the Palm Terrace.

One entire floor is devoted to The Spa at The Richardson. Guests will enjoy complimentary membership at The Spa during their stay, including access to the sauna, steam room, gym and an indoor pool, which opens to its own patio garden.

goad break

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Tours depart regularly from 9am. Bookings essential

VISITOR CENTRE
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Karri Valley keeps expanding boundaries for smaller groups

KARRI Valley Resort built a reputation for handling small groups of 20-30 but has also often successfully managed larger groups up to 100; the popular resort in Pemberton in the South West of Western Australia has upgraded its portfolio for PCOs and MICE managers.

Atin Aggarwal, resident manager for Karri Valley Resort, said the resort's forte still is smaller groups, but it regularly handles weddings of up to 120 guests. Staff are experienced in handling the larger movements such as corporate meetings or workshops for up to 100 people.



Atin Aggarwal

"We can provide all necessary specialist equipment for meetings such as AV, overhead projectors, flip charts and whiteboards and with a little notice, even an African elephant if needed to reinforce a presentation," said Aggarwal.

He and dedicated restaurant/functions manager Kim Eaton have managed to meet several unusual requests from companies running meetings at the property and now

accept any challenge as part of the service. Ms Eaton specialises in providing programs for the business tourism market that focus on the value of relaxation and utilised the tranquil atmosphere of the lakeside resort.

Aggarwal said Karri Valley Resort appeals to the corporate market seeking modern facilities in a retreat-style setting.

The resort's website is increasingly taking a greater role in generating business and will be upgraded again next month.

Aggarwal said the resort was doing more business via the internet and regularly provided updates on developments and special offers.

The Karri Valley Resort in Pemberton sits on the edge of Lake Beedelup in the heart of the region's majestic Karri forest. Accommodation features two and three bedroom chalets complete with fully equipped kitchen and private balcony with outdoor dining.

Pemberton is located around 3 1/2 hours drive south of Perth and just 1 1/2 hours from Margaret River, the Valley of the Giants in Walpole and 1 1/2 hours from Bunbury.

Pemberton offers a diverse range of culinary experiences from sophisticated cafes and a la carte restaurants to the country charm of local pubs and eateries.



Visitors can enjoy local delicacies of marron and smoked trout. Equally tempting are the local wines. The region boasts many vineyards producing a range of quality wines from complex cool climate Cabernet Sauvignons to elegant dry Chardonnays.

For more information on Karri Valley Resort email info@karrivalleyresort.com.au or visit www.karrivalleyresort.com.au



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Centre 'encouraged' by mining business

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"There is also the rotation factor where many of the major conferences have been to Australia in the last 15 years and it will be some time before we get another bite of the cherry.

"If you look at the ICCA statistics, Melbourne and Sydney have slipped down the rankings and I feel this has a lot to do with both competition and the rotation impact."

Perth Centre's major facilities include a 2500-seat tiered auditorium, 19 specialist meeting rooms varying in size, six exhibition pavilions spanning 16,554-square-metres of exhibition space, and a 1700-seat ballroom.

The Perth Centre won the national award for Meetings & Business Tourism at the Australian Tourism Awards in February 2006. The national title follows the Perth Centre's success at the Western Australian Tourism Awards in November 2005, as well as the 2005 Meetings & Events Australia (MEA) Award for best 'Meeting Venue — more than 500 delegates.

"We've had a lot of scientific meetings and national meetings and I'm encouraged by business from the mining and resource sector whose meetings are beginning to rotate more often into Perth," D'Arcy added.

He said there was a need for Western Australia as a state to support business events by investing significantly more tourism dollars into the sector. He said destination marketing of Perth did not start early enough to meet the lead times of the international meetings market.

He said Cape Town was the perfect example of a centre whose government recognised the benefits of business tourism to the economy — "although they've had a degree of luck in that South Africa is a far more desirable destina-



Perth Centre's major facilities include a 2500-seat tiered auditorium

tion these days".

D'Arcy also called for the Perth Convention Bureau to be given more funds to assist marketing of Perth as a business events destination.

Looking ahead, the Perth Centre has confirmed it has secured around 550 international, national and local events through until 2010, expected to attract in excess of two million visitors.

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PERTH CONVENTION EXHIBITION CENTRE
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Prison locks in events business

FREMANTLE Prison — de-commissioned and now a popular events venue — offers day and torchlight tours, and will theme special events for groups.

Most recently, torchlight boat tours of subterranean tunnels built in the limestone below the prison for Fremantle's early water supply have been opened to the public.

In April this year, the prison welcomed its 10,000 visitor to the labyrinth of tunnels 20 metres below the surface. Visitors explore the tunnels in replica convict punts.

Evening torchlight tours, which can be organised for groups, include the main cellblock, solitary confinement, whipping post and the gallows.

Fremantle Prison has been used by corporate and community groups and individuals to stage a number of high profile events.

The convict-built prison's design offers a range of different



In April this year, the prison welcomed its 10,000 visitor function options allowing it to cater for any group from 50 or 450 guests. For larger functions the prison grounds can be made available and will cater for several thousand guests. The prison can also assist with organising entertainment, photographs, souvenirs, catering and security.

\$266 buys fitness at ROCH Perth

FITNESS-conscious conference delegates keen to stay in shape on their next visit to Perth should check out the Rendezvous Observation City Hotel (ROCH).

The beachside property now boasts the largest gym in Perth.

ROCH has spent \$150,000 on new state-of-the-art gym equipment and refurbishments to its existing gym and steam room to ensure hotel guests experience the very latest fitness technology.

The hotel has introduced "Revive" packages that will not only get guests in shape but have them feeling and looking their best.

Guests can combine a session in the gym with a massage or facial treatment, Vichy shower, steam or a manicure and pedicure.

The Revive package includes deluxe ocean view accommodation, breakfast, a 30-minute massage or express facial at Vanilla and full use of the new gym and sells for \$266 per room.



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DUXTON HOTEL
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'Golf city' adds resort facilities

GOLF days are on most professional conference organisers' agenda. But there are few cities in the world that boast three major golfing resorts within 40 minutes drive range of the CBD.

Perth is one of them.

Big expansion plans are already in the pipeline for one of the three resorts — at award-winning Joondalup, north of the city.

General manager Wayne Carroll says the resort, which has just turned 10 years old, is in the planning stage of designing a large ballroom that will cater for function dinners for up to 400 people. "We believe this is a market we are currently missing out on," he said.

It is hoped to complete the project in two years time and then double the hotel's accommodation from 70 to 140 rooms.

Carroll said the resort's MICE business to date this year was "very strong" with the first quarter up around 30 per cent on 2005, while corporate golf was similar to last year's results. "In a bid to encourage more MICE business, we are looking at outside team-building activities and the resort has just installed a low rope course and is installing a 'leap of faith'.

Joondalup Resort, which has twice



The Joondalup Resort is planning a large ballroom that will cater for function dinners for up to 400 people.

been voted Australia's top golf resort, offers world-class accommodation set among the lush fairways of its spectacular 27-hole championship course, as well as five conference rooms that can host from six to 250 people. Its Country Club can also host small groups boardroom-style, while the clubrooms can be used for corporate and conference lunches and dinners.

Corporate/conference rates differ throughout the year, but the resort prefers to tailor-make a quote, which it considers gives clients the best possible options for their function.

The Vines Resort and Country Club, which has consistently been judged as one of Australia's top three golf courses for the past 15 years, says its corporate golf market is performing strongly.

"Although more clients are looking at spending their corporate dollar over a

variety of programs, repeat clients — and also new clients — continue to hold golf days. Business has certainly not decreased, although growth has slowed," said Rhonda Fiorentino, the resort's golf operations manager.

"The international market is growing day by day and we aim to nurture this market and hope to see it return to the strength it was two to three years ago. Large groups from Hong Kong and Singapore are booked in the coming months. And golfers from Japan continue to visit."

Fiorentino said the resort, which held the prestigious Johnnie Walker Classic in February this year and hopes to secure it again in 2009, was always on the lookout for new and exciting golf events.

Located near Perth's wine-growing region in the Swan Valley, the Vines has



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s to boost MICE market appeal



Burswood's 18-hole public course offers players a fully-equipped pro-shop

a 36-hole championship course and offers fully-equipped conference facilities, including two new areas — the Lodge and Lakeside Reserve — that have lifted its profile among conference and event organisers.

A one-day conference (Harvest Package) at the Vines, including accommodation (resort room), breakfast, morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea and dinner, is priced at A\$175 per person twin share and A\$242 single. A round of golf for house guests costs A\$84 - including a motorised cart.

On the city's doorstep, a stone's throw away from the banks of the

stunning Swan River, is the five-star Burswood Entertainment Complex where corporate golf packages can be arranged in-house, in consultation with convention centre staff.

Burswood's 18-hole public course offers players a fully-equipped pro-shop, café bar and function facilities within its clubhouse.

The new Holiday Inn Burswood has further boosted MICE facilities, with three meetings rooms, each catering for between 35-40 people, a covered terraced area and a fully functional business centre. The first purpose-built

hotel in Perth for 12 years, it has added a second accommodation tier to the upmarket InterContinental hotel.

Burswood now provides conference delegates and visitors alike with a more diverse mix of accommodation options catering for both the mid-level and deluxe markets.

For conference delegates, accommodation rates at both Burswood properties depend on a number of factors, including length of stay, number of delegates, number of conference rooms needed, meal plans and the days of the week.



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Kimberley's flying high for incentives



BROOME & The Kimberley Event Management is making the most of the region's natural attractions to theme its events.

"From outback themes to pearling masters' dinners there are endless opportunities for a truly memorable experience in our region," said Kristy Bailey, groups and incentives manager for Broome & The Kimberley Event Management.

Bailey said one of the more memorable events organised by the company was arranging 60 AGL delegates in 12 Cessna 210 light aircraft to explore the Buccaneer Archipelago, swim at Cape Leveque and lunch at a remote cattle station.

"They departed from Broome Airport and were in the air together so there was a bit of a race between the pilots a one point. It was a unique component of their conference touring program," Bailey said.

Other memorable events included a "Diamonds & Pearls" incentive for 30 people that included three days in Broome, seeing first hand how pearls are produced, meeting pearl divers and discovering Broome's long history with pearling; then on to Kununurra, home of the Argyle Diamond Mine and famous pink diamonds.

Bailey said winter — April to October — was traditionally the most popular time to visit the Kimberley although summer was a good time for groups because there were fewer crowds in the region and accommodation was more accessible.

"In my opinion Broome is best suited to the incentive market as there are so many unique and spectacular touring options available," Bailey said.

"The conference market is definitely thriving in the Kimberley region although around 200 people is our maximum for either incentive or conference travel, due to the flight and accommodation capacity."

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