

Northern Territory says enough to keep the market back for more — again

THE Northern Territory Convention Bureau (NTCB) will use AIME to launch its new meeting planner and update the market on plans to capture more MICE business. Heading the team is Lynn Fairbrass. Fairbrass grew up in Tasmania. After completing her education in Launceston she moved to Adelaide where she completed a diploma in hotel management.

She then joined Hilton Hotels of Australasia where she enjoyed 15 years working on the national sales team and at the Hilton Cairns, working first in banquet operations and then as banquet manager before moving to conference sales.

In 1999 Lynn moved to Sydney to take up the position of national sales manager — conferences and meetings. This position involved maximising conference opportunities for the nine properties operated by Hilton at that time.

Lynn, joined the NTCB — the unit of Tourism NT responsible for attracting business events to the Northern Territory — in July 2005, after a term as senior business development manager at the Sydney Convention and Visitors Bureau (SCVB), managing the business development team to identify, qualify and gain commitment to bid for international association meetings.



- LYNN FAIRBRASS -

New flights from Jetstar to the NT have been welcomed by the NTCB. What impact will these additional services have on your efforts to attract more MICE business?

We welcome any increased air access into the Northern Territory. Whilst Jetstar does not ideally suit this market, we are hoping that the more affordable airfares will attract leisure travellers, freeing up the Qantas flights and improving capacity for the business events market.

Transport capacity increases are the life-blood of the meetings business. You have been successful in attracting domestic increases but international capacity has taken a bit of a hammering in recent months with both Malaysia and Garuda deciding to cut Darwin services. Are you working on replacement services from other international airlines?

Airline access is a matter being addressed on a Territory-wide basis across all tourism markets by Tourism NT and the NT Government. Internationally, we have gained Tiger Airways out of Singapore. With Singapore only four hours from Darwin, distance is a great selling point as the Territory really is the closest Australian experience for Asian business events.

Domestically we are working closely with Qantas to provide tailored solutions for conference and incentive planners.

What kind of impact has the Ghan rail service had on MICE?

The Ghan is proving very popular in both the domestic and international markets. Not only is it a great option for pre and post touring, but extra conference carriages can be added for small

groups. So now your group can do one of the world's great train journeys while holding their conference at the same time. The increased Ghan services also give delegates a different and unique way to travel to and from conferences in Darwin or Alice Springs.

Competition for the MICE dollar has never been tougher. There was a big lift in appreciation for MICE generated dollars from the late nineties onwards which in turn led to a raft of new convention centre facilities not only in Australia but also in near neighbour competitors in NZ and Asia. How do you plan to maintain MICE growth and combat new facilities which are often backed by big overseas promotional dollars?

As an emerging destination in this market, and with the new Darwin Convention Centre currently under construction, we are already riding this

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— Artist's impression of Darwin's new Convention Centre. —

wave. The NT is in a great position to be front of mind for planners looking for a hot new destination with world class facilities.

Currently the NT is experiencing growth in the MICE market and we expect to see this growth continue as the destination becomes better known in Asian and International markets. With increased awareness, planners from all markets are keen to experience the warm climate, friendly locals, wildlife, authentic indigenous culture and real Australian outback experiences offered by the NT.

Offering two very different and distinct experiences — the desert landscapes of Australia's Red Centre with the established Alice Springs Convention Centre, and the tropical wilderness of the Top End which will be home of Australia's newest international convention centre, there is a very real opportunity for repeat business.

What is being done to increase accommodation options in the NT?

Several new accommodation properties are already underway within the NT, particularly in Darwin as part of and in support of the Darwin Waterfront Development, which is also home to the new Darwin Convention Centre.

What have been some recent wins in the meetings/events market?

We are constantly winning meetings and events within this market. The beauty of the NT is the diversity of programs we can offer. The NT currently has business confirmed into 2008 and events pending through to 2010.

Are you targeting specific sectors of industry such as IT, medical or engineering or developing other niche markets?

Obviously with the Territory's superior cultural and natural assets, certain industries provide a perfect business fit with the NT. Events concerning wildlife, the environment and indigenous health and languages are an obvious choice for the Territory.

In addition to the Territory's natural and cultural associations, the NT has a wide portfolio of specialist industries that can be married with delegates' professions or interests. Such industries include mining and energy, gas and oil, rural industries and fishing, pearling, and tourism.

AIME has established itself as the region's top mart for MICE business. What other trade shows and events do you consider important and must attend events in generating traffic to the NT?

AIME is definitely our biggest tradeshow in the region. 2006 sees the NT with our biggest presence yet, which just proves that the show generates good business.

But there are many other tradeshow within the region and internationally that are worthwhile for the NT. This year the NTCB will be exhibiting at PAICE for the first time as we continue to pro-actively target New Zealand buyers. In Asia we participate at IT&CMA and in UK/Europe we do both EIBTM and IMEX. As an emerging destination, we believe it is very important for the Northern Territory to have a strong presence at these international shows in order to create awareness of the destination.

As a bureau, we also participate in the Team Australia events in Asia, UK and the USA to continue to increase this exposure.

The cost of participating in many travel trade shows has increased considerably in recent years. Do you think there are too many trade shows?

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Tog of Gunlom Waterfall.

The NTCB focus their marketing activities on the region's two primary convention destinations — Darwin and Alice Springs.

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There will always be a number of established trade shows along with the emerging trade shows. The NTCB is constantly questioning the return on investment in tradeshow participation and we react accordingly.

Where is the NTCB at in its IT development? How important is the internet in marketing the NT?

The NTCB will be launching our new website at AIME this year. We expect the new site to continue to be a very strong marketing tool as well as providing many new lead opportunities.

The NT has some unique icon attractions such as Kakadu. Have you seen growth in the incentives market?

The Northern Territory is almost an incentive within itself. Domestically, it is the place on everyone's 'to visit before I die list'. So naturally attractions like Kakadu and Uluru, and experiences like interacting with indigenous culture and

barramundi fishing in the Top End are popular for incentives.

In early May 2006, a leading European incentive house brought a group of over 200 high achievers to Uluru (Ayers Rock), as part of a tri-destination Australian incentive program, designed to provide dramatic contrasts between the city, reef and rock. The Northern Territory component showcased the many high adventure aspects of Central Australia, and also provided contact with the local indigenous Aboriginal culture.

Meanwhile, up in the Top End, a large international telecommunications company is currently considering Seven Spirit Bay Wilderness Lodge for a prestigious incentive to take place in late 2007. The Lodge is located in Arnhem Land, half an hour's flight from the NT's capital, Darwin. Blessed with wild coastlines, deserted islands, rivers teaming with fish and rainforests, it is

one of the last unspoilt wilderness areas in the world.

This month Tourism Northern Territory launched a million dollar campaign to promote Kakadu. Is there a MICE component to the campaign or will you rely on your "Extraordinary meeting places" to generate business tourism?

The NTCB focus their marketing activities on the region's two primary convention destinations — Darwin and Alice Springs. Both these destinations are complemented by other surrounding destinations, including the very popular Kakadu and Uluru. The Tourism NT Kakadu campaign, while targeting leisure travellers, is very visual and emotive and we believe the consumer campaign will generate a lot of interest and enquiries from planners.

The wider Tourism NT Share Our Story brand fits in perfectly with this market, as its all about sharing experiences and knowledge. The NTCB's further sub-brand 'Extraordinary Meeting Places' positions the NT as the ideal destination due to its natural and cultural offerings for meetings and business events.

What marketing has worked best for NTCB?

In order to engage all markets in a meaningful and lasting way that results in conversion, the NTCB utilises an integrated marketing strategy. As such, no particular activity can be viewed in isolation. We also work closely with Tourism NT in support of leisure campaigns as these messages obviously have the potential to influence the MICE market.

The launch of our new Meeting and Incentive Planners' Guide and website are part of this integrated strategy. Our strategy, combined with the destination's assets, infrastructure and strong track record allows us to actively compete in the MICE market.



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