

New region makes determined

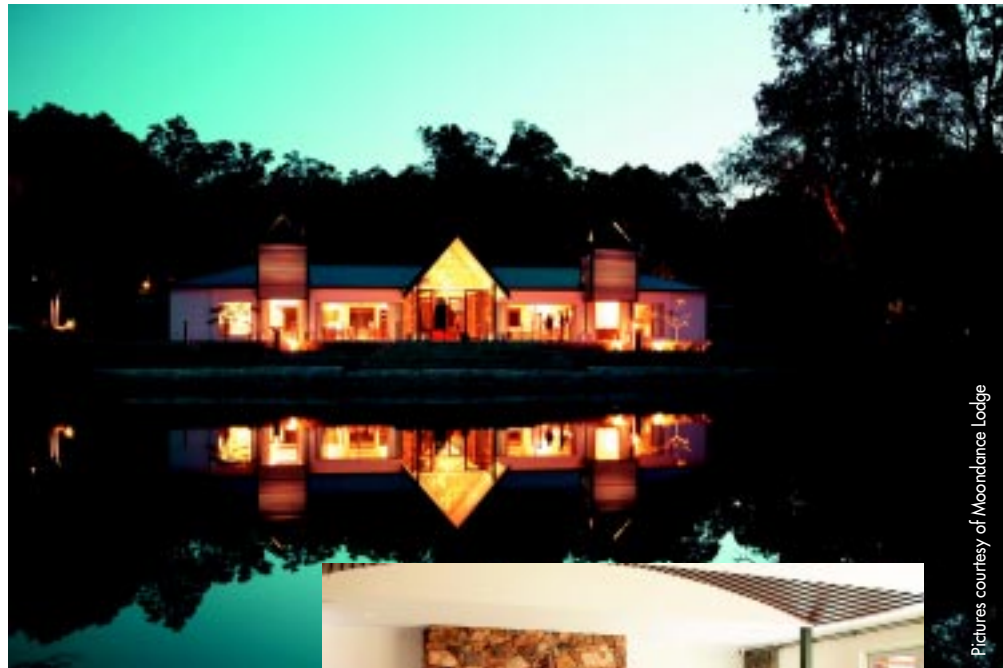
By John Michael

Australia's South West - the new regional tourism organisation encompassing Western Australia's South West and Great Southern - will make a determined bid to boost its MICE business by marketing the diversity of the region.

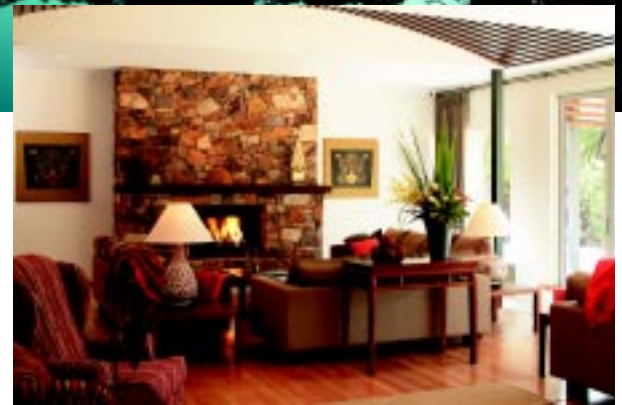
That's the aim of Clive Nelthorpe, newly appointed chairperson of the executive board of Australia South West, which recently showcased its MICE product to a mix of 120 PCO's and representatives of corporate bodies and associations responsible for seeking out MICE venues.

"The event attracted 18 exhibitors and was a big success," said Mr Nelthorpe.

The region boasts a wide range of new MICE facilities, including Moondance Lodge in the bush at Yallingup, which has been set up specifically for incentives and small meetings and conferences. Moondance has a dedicated conference room and a multi-purpose dining room, which can be combined to create one large function room, as well as naturally lit break-out rooms and outdoor terraces. The property's eight suites are equipped with high-speed Internet facilities, as well as luxuries such as private outdoor deck with daybed, garden view spa bath and power shower and are decorated with Jim Thompson Thai silks and original art pieces.



Moondance Lodge in the bush at Yallingup has been set up specifically for incentives and small meetings and conferences...



Nearby, Cape Lodge has completed an upgrade costing A\$3 million, including the addition of a lakeside restaurant area that can be adapted for meetings and incentives.

Margaret River has also jumped on the MICE bandwagon, with Gilgara Retreat and Merribrook Corporate

Retreat extending their facilities for incentive groups. Gilgara has opened eight new garden suites with spa baths, while Merribrook has spent A\$1 million on refurbishing the property, including the addition of a health retreat.

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merribrook retreat

Pictures courtesy of Moondance Lodge

diversity-based

MICE biz bid

products and facilities for the corporate conferencing and training markets.

“Merribrook’s ‘Cape to Cape’ fully-supported guided walks and extensive outdoor adventure-challenge activities, such as abseiling and the flying fox, are meeting growing demands,” said director Lorraine Firth.



At Denmark on the south coast, a new MICE venue — called the Centre for Sustainable Living — offers three meeting rooms, while Karri Mia Resort has added a function centre with its own open-air wedding pavilion. The centre can cater for up to 120 conference and seminar delegates theatre-style.

“Merribrook’s ‘Cape to Cape’ fully-supported guided walks and extensive outdoor adventure-challenge activities, such as abseiling and the flying fox, are meeting growing demands.”

Meanwhile, the proposed new Albany Convention and Entertainment Centre is getting closer to receiving the go-ahead after the local council endorsed the concept of developing the centre as a multi-purpose facility.

The council is seeking A\$12 million from the state government and A\$1 million from federal sources towards the facility on the site of the existing administration centre in York Street.

The centre, with an auditorium seating capacity for up to 650 people and between 400 and 500 for banquet functions -



Pictures courtesy of Merribrook

will be up and running in 2006 - if it gets the government funding. A decision is expected in the next month.

“The anticipated increase in meetings and conventions in WA following the opening of the heavily booked Perth Convention Exhibition Centre offers exciting new opportunities to lure the conference and convention market out of the metropolitan area to participate in new regional experiences,” said Andrew Hammond, the council’s chief executive officer. “Albany currently meets the necessary criteria of efficient transport access, an attractive visitor destination and excellent tourist attractions — all it needs is a suitably sized venue with a capacity to hold 400-500 delegates to enable the city to become a major player on the convention circuit.”

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Skywest calls for Margaret River airport in support of WA MICE

West Australian regional airline, Skywest, which emerged from the post Ansett era showing a profile of significant passenger growth, has earmarked the MICE market as a window of opportunity for continued success.

And the carrier's managing director, Scott Henderson, has called for an airport to be established at Margaret River. "It's a prime tourism destination and as such should have an airport. You only have to look at the number of resorts going up there to realise the need for an air service from Perth. It's the missing link in our network."

Mr Henderson said the recent opening of the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre (PCEC) was expected to lead to a business spin off for the airline from pre and post conference delegate tours around WA.

Mr Henderson said the carrier, which adopted a different strategy 18 months ago when it formed Skywest Holidays, was working closely with the PCEC with its new product for pre and post conference tours.

"The product ranges from deep sea fishing and diving with whale sharks off Exmouth to cultural packages on the south coast's Albany and Esperance. Places like Broome and Exmouth sell themselves, but we are focusing on all opportunities — from north to south," he said.

The airline was the key sponsor of the 'Explore WA' card — a discount facility for conference delegates. "Every delegate who comes to WA gets one. It entitles them to a wide range of discounts — from souvenirs to five-day holiday packages," said Mr Henderson.

Skywest believes Western Australia is on the verge of a substantial regional tourism roll with the carrier's



latest figures showing passenger numbers have increased by 65 per cent in the past 12 months, following the introduction of jet services and the lowering of fares by an average of eight per cent across the network.

"I think we've got our product right. Our aim is to consolidate on that," said Mr Henderson. "Regional air traffic is booming, signalling a future growth surge in regional tourism throughout Western Australia. Strong operating performance over the past 12 months has enabled us to invest in the expansion of both the Fokker 50 turboprop and Fokker 100 jet services.

"The result has been an additional five routes with the majority of passenger increases being seen in flights to the North-West and the Goldfields. We believe both these areas are well placed to capitalise on the record traffic created by booming resources and tourism sectors."

Skywest, which hopes to fend off a

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”

takeover from Singapore-based Captive Vision Capital (CVC) and list on the Australian Stock Exchange in the next few weeks, operates five 46-seat Fokker 50s and three 96-seat Fokker 100 jets on regional routes in WA, Darwin and from the Pilbara region to Bali.

"I believe the MICE market is largely untapped in regional WA and for this reason we are considering hiring a business tourism representative to seek out new business," said Mr Henderson, adding that the airline's business strategy — to embrace and stimulate tourism development — would transcend numerous benefits to the wider communities of regional Western Australia.