

# Brisbane aims for the top

- Kelvin King looks at a MICE destination which has evolved into one of Australia's most diverse and colourful

**INTERNATIONAL MICE statistics showing that Brisbane is the fastest-growing major Australian destination for conventions are proof that Brisbane has come of age on the domestic and global MICE stage. In fact, Brisbane is aiming to become Australia's leading conventions destination.**

Yet there still seem to be some people — including a few in Brisbane itself, surprisingly — who view the Queensland capital as merely a big country town, a pleasant enough place but heavily overshadowed by the bright lights of Sydney and Melbourne.

That's rubbish, of course. Brisbane is a vibrant, exciting, sophisticated and genuinely interesting city, its mix of experiences including more than a touch of the Queensland country, the tropics, the coastal resorts and the Queenslander's laconic humour.

The team at Brisbane Marketing - the government-funded, industry-supported agency which does such a mighty job in selling Brisbane's attributes, including to MICE planners - is slowly changing the perception of their city.

But it only needs a personal visit, such as one I made recently after a few years' break, to understand Brisbane's appeal. And let's be clear about it: my judgment was completely undiluted by any hosting blandishments. I paid for my own flights, accommodation, transport and meals...although maybe I should acknowledge the cup of coffee at Brisbane Marketing's central city office!

When I first visited Brisbane in the



1970s, it really was a big country town. Personally I liked it, seduced as I was by Moreton Bay bugs, but it wasn't the sort of place you'd put too high on your conference venue list. It was more of a day tour from a meeting in Surfers Paradise, then finding its MICE legs.

## Momentum

The political situation of the time wasn't exactly welcoming, although things were starting to change. Over the next 20 years I saw the changes gain increasing momentum — including at state cabinet level — as I visited Brisbane every few months.

The Commonwealth Games and, even more so, Brisbane's World Fair - Expo 88, helped transform Brisbane into a MICE destination of world status.

I recall walking through the Expo 88 construction site with a group of business people and senior politicians who were at last coming to terms with the massive potential for Brisbane events. Expo 88 was a huge success in

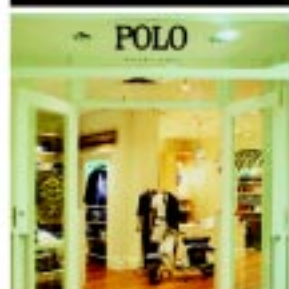
visitor numbers but perhaps even more so in establishing Brisbane's new outward-looking welcome to the MICE industry.

The legacy of Expo 88 is the magnificent riverside South Bank precinct, well suited to break-out dinners and cocktail parties and adjacent to the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre, one of Australia's best events facilities.

Brisbane has always seen itself as a river city but for decades did little to build on that. Now it rejoices in the winding waterway, a community attitude seen not only in South Bank but also the riverside location of complexes such as the Queensland Performing Arts Centre and the Queensland Art Gallery, river walkways (including one through a mangrove forest), weekend markets in plazas opening to the river, cruises, waterfront restaurant cafes, restaurants and bars....

In addition to the visitor facilities and

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## Amazing revelations

An Asia-Pacific hub and Australia's fastest growing city, Brisbane boasts Australia's "finest" cultural centre, excellent restaurants and a buzzing nightlife including a 24 hour, 7 day casino. It includes Australia's newest grand shopping centre ... think Max Mara, Guess, Louis Vuitton. International standard hotels. The world's largest city sub-tropical rainforest and inner city beach ... perfect for a unique event. Plus exceptional rural, ocean, island and mountain attractions within the hour. Tour and transport is first-class. Award-winning event organisers have seen Brisbane become one of Australia's most sought after special event destinations.

**Brisbane.** Australia's only sub-tropical capital. All major Asian posts, 86 flights weekly.

For more information about Brisbane itineraries contact Brisbane Marketing's Convention Bureau. [mmagner@brisbanemarketing.com.au](mailto:mmagner@brisbanemarketing.com.au)  
visit [www.meetinbrisbane.com](http://www.meetinbrisbane.com)



## Unique venues add to appeal

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attractions of the CBD, Brisbane also offers pleasant suburban options, notably the inner suburb of Fortitude Valley...a bit tatty at the edges, sure, but alive with entertainment, the colourful Chinatown, restaurants, bars.

Islands, too, such as Tangalooma with its towering sand dunes (memories of sandsurfing come flooding back from my younger days).

While Brisbane stands firmly on its own, the Gold Coast in one direction and the Sunshine Coast in the other offer an extraordinary variety of possibilities for the PCO seeking a very different themed dinner destination or afternoon break-out.

There's scope, too, in the rural hinterland, such as the stately country supply town of Ipswich. For something different, you could transport a conference group to Ipswich by train from the central city.

Brisbane Marketing offers several user-friendly handbooks for planners, including "The Official Meeting Planner's Guide" (2005-2006 edition now available) and "A unique venues guide" (many of them are very definitely unique!).

While targeting a broader visitor market, the "2005 Official Visitors' Guide" is also a very useful tool.

All this adds up to an exciting MICE destination, effectively marketed and genuinely welcoming. Which is perhaps why, in the International Congress and Convention Association's recently-released "Meetings Market Report", Brisbane showed one of the world's highest growth factors.

It moved from a global ranking of 50 in 2003 to 34th in 2004, while MICE visitors grew substantially.

"These recent wonderful results are a testament to the quality of conference and meetings facilities in Brisbane as well as the hard work of the local conventions industry in making Brisbane a world-recognised business meetings destination," said Marina Vit, chief executive of Brisbane Marketing.

### Mt Coot-tha provides views of the whole city

MOST of us like to come to terms with the place we're visiting. A quick trip to one of the area's highest points — whether natural hill or atop some man-made tower — puts the place into perspective.

In Brisbane, that lookout is Mt Coot-tha. You can see the mountain from most parts of the city, characterised by its broadcasting towers.

It's a scenic drive from the central city and well worth including in a conference programme, possibly for a meal or drinks. The Summit Restaurant can handle small to medium-sized groups; its facilities include the Fountain View function room which holds up to 150 for drinks, 80 for seated dining.

The restaurant emphasises fresh Queensland produce, a winner with international groups.

On the web: [www.BrisbaneLookout.com](http://www.BrisbaneLookout.com)



Queens Plaza Mall: Strong growth in MICE visitors

"The average international conference or meeting attendee spends approximately \$500 a day in Brisbane and over the past year the international and domestic meetings market has contributed in excess of \$100 million to the local economy."

Success of the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre had been a key factor in Brisbane's MICE growth, said general manager Bob O'Keeffe. The centre hosted a record number of international conventions in 2004.

"With consistently high convention and hotel occupancy rates it demonstrates our strength as an industry," said O'Keeffe. "We are operating in a very exciting and dynamic environment and the future for our industry is very promising."

The Brisbane MICE industry plans to keep up its marketing impetus, with the goal of becoming Number One. "We will continue to work very hard as an industry to ensure this growth continues and Brisbane becomes Australia's leading conventions destination," said Vit.

On the web: [www.brisbanemarketing.com.au](http://www.brisbanemarketing.com.au)

# TOP 10 EXPERIENCES

IN a BBC survey, 20,000 people were asked to name the things they most wanted to do before they died. Seven of their Top 10 choices are available within the Brisbane region. Six of them also made Brisbane Marketing's director of sales, Michael Magner's top 10 (numbers 1 through 6 below), plus he added four of his own favourites.

1) **Swimming with dolphins** — available at Sea World, less than an hour from downtown Brisbane. Plus, wild dolphins can be hand fed nightly at Tangalooma Wild Dolphin Resort on Moreton Island, just a short ferry ride from the Brisbane coastline.

2) **Whale watching** available June — November when endangered humpback whales migrate through Brisbane's Moreton Bay marine park.

3) **Dive with sharks** — choose from the controlled environments of Sea World or Underwater World, around one hour's drive south and north respectively from downtown Brisbane. Or go wild and hit the waters off North Stradbroke Island, another of Brisbane's unspoiled island paradises in Moreton Bay.

4) **Parachuting** solo or in tandem to enjoy a view of either downtown Brisbane or one of its green-scape regions rushing up to meet your eyes.

5) **Hot air ballooning** — Brisbane is one of only eight cities in the world where you can balloon right over the CBD.

6) **Become a CETop Gun**, on a Jet Fighter Joyflight or perform loop-to-loop acrobatics in a Tiger Moth bi-plane.

7) **Do the rounds of one of the best golf courses in Australia.** The Greg Norman designed championship course, Brookwater, is Australia's number two public access course (Golf Australia, 2005). But if time is short, simply work on your swing just three minutes from the CBD at Victoria Park Golf Course where the new two-tier driving range is open daily and nightly until 10pm.

8) **QueensPlaza** — exercise your credit card at the newest shopping centre in the state. The 80 speciality stores boast names like Tiffany & Co, Max Mara, Mecca cosmetica, Nautica, Guess Accessories and Mont Blanc, all located

HERE are the Brisbane top 10 experiences for delegates as recommended by Brisbane Marketing's director of sales, Michael Magner.



in the hub of the largest shopping precinct between Sydney and Singapore, the Queen Street Mall.

9) **Wineries:** Knock on the cellar door at one or all of the 13 wineries in the Brisbane region. The award-winning Sirromet is a stand-out, not only for its wines and superb restaurant menu, but also for its stunning views high over Moreton Bay.

10) **Swim** at a white sand, sparkling blue-water beach in the city during a break from your meeting. The fact that Brisbane's inner city beach at South Bank is located right next to the Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre makes this possible.

## Queensland wineries come of age in a big way

TEN or 15 years ago, if you were to talk about Queensland wines and wineries as a factor in MICE planning, even Queenslanders would look at you with some confusion. While there were plenty of good wines, the overall image of the state's wine industry was of rather mediocre offerings and down-home estate facilities.

My, how things have changed!

Now several wineries are set up to accept MICE groups and Queensland wines are getting better by the year, with several brands achieving major awards and other accolades.

Now you can feature Queensland wines at meals or cocktail parties, confident that you're not only estab-



Sirromet — ideal for a conference break-out lunch or dinner.

lishing an effective point of difference but also that the wines will be enjoyed and treated with respect.

Wines make great pillow gifts, too, for conference delegates or incentive groups.

One Queensland wine producer which is highly successful internationally as well as on the domestic market is Sirromet. Its lifestyle-oriented winery

and visitors centre is only just over half an hour's drive from Brisbane (and about the same distance from the Gold Coast), making it feasible for a conference break-out lunch or dinner, or for inclusion in spouse and add-on touring options.

The vineyard, winery, cellar door facility and restaurant at Mount Cotton

have picked up an impressive array of tourism awards in the past three years, while the wines themselves have 200-plus awards to date.

It's a marvellous setting, with spectacular views across rolling vineyards and native bushland, and a wider panorama of Moreton Bay and the sand ridges of North Stradbroke Island.

ON THE WEB: [www.sirromet.com](http://www.sirromet.com)



# Business unit structured to maximise the value of Queensland's meeting wins

IF you're looking at the possibilities of Brisbane — and other Queensland destinations — as a potential venue for a conference, it's worth talking with the Queensland Government's Business Events Attraction Unit.

This was set up primarily to help bidding teams secure major conferences and other events.

It is run by the Department of State Development and Innovation, from offices in central Brisbane. SDI itself has offices throughout Queensland.

The unit works with industry associations, universities, the major convention centres and bureaux, Queensland Events Corporation and all Government departments and agencies "to enhance the quality and competitiveness of the Queensland bid proposals and pro-actively attract new business conferences and events".

It is, of course, looking for a good return — the unit is structured to achieve commercial successes for Queensland and to link in with other state priorities such as the "Smart State" priority sectors which include biotechnology, aviation and manufacturing.

The Queensland Events Corporation is another government agency active in securing major events for Queensland, working more as the prime instigator. It is a corporation within the



- Delegates on Victoria Bridge -

portfolio of Premier Peter Beattie.

Its charter is to create significant economic activity and lift the national and international profile of Queensland through securing and hosting major world-class events.

In addition, the Queensland Events Regional Development Program supports events throughout the state. This program is administered through a secretariat in Townsville.

Queensland Events also operates a subsidiary company, Queensland Events Gold Coast, and has an international arm called Global Events.

website: [www.sdi.qld.gov.au/events](http://www.sdi.qld.gov.au/events)  
[www.qldevents.com.au](http://www.qldevents.com.au)

## Top service award for link specialist

AIRTRAIN, the Brisbane Airport-Brisbane City — Gold Coast rail specialist was awarded a prestigious customer service honour at the recent Australian Institute of Customer Service, Australian Service Excellence Awards held at Brisbane's Stamford Plaza hotel. Airtrain provides low-cost, reliable transport between Brisbane Airport and the major centres.

Meanwhile, Airtrain has added kid's fun packs to make travel more enjoyable for children and their parents.

General manager Martin Earp said the introduction of children's travel packs during the school holidays is a timely initiative to support Airtrain's existing family-friendly service practices.

"We also offer all pre-booked families access to a complimentary porter service to assist with the mounds of luggage families need to travel with and help with direction to the family's flight on arrival or the next train on departure," said Earp.



# Brisbane's Airtrain

The Smarter Way to Travel

## Complimentary porter for Conference Delegates



- ✓ All delegates personally met on arrival by our porter staff
- ✓ Trains depart frequently
- ✓ Five stations in the centre of Brisbane



Contact us: [alison@airtrain.com.au](mailto:alison@airtrain.com.au) or (07) 3216 3308 [www.airtrain.com.au/conference](http://www.airtrain.com.au/conference)