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| <b>EVENT NAME:</b>           | 28 <sup>th</sup> Travelscene American Express Owners-Managers Conference |
| <b>DATE:</b>                 | 14 - 17 November 2008  |
| <b>TOTAL ATTENDANCE:</b>     | 400 participants   |
| <b>ORGANISING COMMITTEE:</b> | John Zaharakis, Head of Conferences & Events, Stella Travel Services     |

## CONFERENCE OBJECTIVE:

This meeting is held bi-annually for owners and managers involved with Travelscene American Express agencies from throughout Australia. The event held in Darwin was the 28<sup>th</sup> Owners-Managers conference.

The focus of the conference was business excellence, deemed to be particularly relevant in the current economic climate.

## DESTINATION SELECTION RATIONALE:

Travelscene American Express CEO, Mike Thompson, expressed his delight at being able to host the conference in Darwin at a time when Baz Luhrmann's highly anticipated movie 'Australia' had made Northern Australia the place to be and Darwin the star of the show.

"This is a fantastic opportunity to showcase the real Australia for our members," he said. "The Travelscene American Express members coming to Darwin represent many of Australia's top individual travel agencies. This is a great chance for Darwin and the heart of Australia to convert the publicity from 'Australia' the movie into actual bookings for the Northern Territory and for members to get a 'sneak preview' of where it is all happening, as well as take advantage of pre and post conference tours."

Staging the conference event in Darwin during November and outside the peak travel season meant that there was not only greater availability of accommodation rooms and other venues but at more competitive rates. This enabled organisers to put more towards the creative elements of the event - in particular, the two conference dinners, one of which was a Mindil Beach Market Dinner.

The Mindil Beach markets are very popular with conference groups visiting Darwin and are frequently integrated into conference social programmes for cocktail parties and dinners or as an optional leisure time activity.



28- TRAVELSCENE AMERICAN EXPRESS CONFERENCE RECREATING THE MINDIL BEACH MARKETS INDOORS AT THE DARWIN CONVENTION CENTRE

### THE EXECUTION:

On this occasion, the famous Mindil Beach Markets were presented in one of the four Halls at the Darwin Convention Centre for one of the conference dinner events and it was the first time that the markets had been re-created in an indoor venue. It meant that despite being outside the usual market season (the markets run annually from late April to October, operating on Thursdays and Sundays from afternoon into evening), organisers were able to bring some of the colour and excitement of this iconic attraction to their delegates, capturing the atmosphere for which the markets are renowned.

The bonus of using an indoor venue meant that delegates experienced the market activity in air-conditioned comfort and the usual market activities were enhanced by a dance band, colourful lighting and a broader array of entertainment. The casual dress code enabled everyone to come along casually and comfortably attired for the tropics.

Venue decor was bright and colourful with each individual market stall providing an authentic replica of the outdoor markets. Feature entertainment ranged from animal handlers with exotic Northern Territory birds and animals through to fortune tellers and tarot card readers. A whip cracking display confirmed that this was indeed outback country and food stalls showcased the cultural culinary diversity represented by the Northern Territory population.

Some of the dishes featured included Japanese sushi, Chinese steam boats, Thai satays and delicious Greek cuisine specialities. Guests were also able to purchase locally produced artwork, crafts and jewellery as well as didgeridoos.

### CLIENT QUOTES:

*"Darwin can now compete favourably with other national and international destinations for the MICE market, with venues capable of handling meetings and events like never before. And with increased infrastructure developments such as new accommodation properties and the attraction of the Northern Territory as a whole,*

*Darwin is now blossoming into a vibrant alternative for those looking to stage a meeting or event in a new and exciting destination.*

*I look forward to the opportunity to stage yet more events in Darwin in coming years"*

**John Zaharakis, Head of Conferences & Events, Stella Travel Services**

This Case Study has been provided courtesy of the Northern Territory Convention Bureau.

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