

EVENT NAME:	24th Scientific Conference of the Obesity Surgery Society of Australia and New Zealand. OSSANZ
DATE:	11- 13 April 2012
TOTAL ATTENDANCE:	250 Delegates
EVENT ORGANISER:	Lilian Kow, OSSANZ President Denise Broeren, Director, Think Business Events - Conference Manager

BACKGROUND:

The Obesity Society of Australia is a specialist society formed to encourage research, education and communication on surgery for severe obesity. Their scientific conference, held every 18 months, brings together bariatric surgeons and allied health professionals from around Australia, New Zealand, Asia Pacific and the globe to share the latest research, trends, treatment and new approaches to solving major obesity health issues. Obesity is emerging as a health epidemic around the world.

EVENT OBJECTIVE:

In addition to their commitment to developing a high quality, leading edge program, the conference committee's aims were to increase the exhibition trade display and attract a wider scope of delegates.

EVENT FORMAT:

The scientific program this year included over 70 presentations, poster presentations, hosted educational sessions, additional meetings, the Young Scientific Investigator Prize, and the Allied Health Award. The social program included a welcome reception and conference dinner as well as pre and post touring.

A mobile app was introduced for the first time to assist with conference information. It was simple to use and convenient for delegates to access speaker's abstracts and biographies, all from the palm of their hands. Information on Darwin, where to go, what to see, and local restaurant details was also included.

CHALLENGES:

An experienced conference manager of over ten years, Denise Broeren of Think Business Events, recognised the need to source a suitable venue to capitalise on the potential growth she was aiming for in an expanded trade display for her client, whilst also satisfying the ongoing challenge of attracting delegates and ensuring the best networking opportunities. Attendees to OSSANZ have traditionally preferred hotel style venues in regional areas rather than large capital city destinations, but with growing attendance and industry interest, the combination of finding a capable venue in an attractive regional destination became a challenge.

To attract more sponsors, Denise recommended to the conference committee that they select a venue with dedicated exhibition space and facilities, and one that can offer a more professional approach to showcasing sponsors. So a dedicated convention and exhibition centre was agreed to, as a conference venue for the first time. The rationale was that it would cater more to sponsor needs by way of a larger, more open space area to showcase products and services as well as be supported by a team of experienced exhibition service managers.

As well as developing an interesting and comprehensive program to attract delegates, Denise and the committee had the additional challenge of finding a dedicated convention venue in a destination that attendees would find attractive.

THE CHOICE:

Following their research on a range of options, the Darwin Convention Centre located in the Capital of the Northern Territory was chosen. The committee felt that this destination would have an “exotic” appeal to its well travelled delegates and that Darwin was a place that was very different to other Australian cities. “Having the necessary conference infrastructure combined with access to so many amazing areas such as Kakadu National Park just on the doorstep, as well as being the indigenous heart of Australia holds special appeal” said Denise. . Dates in the Australian school holidays were chosen to offer all attendees the opportunity to also bring their families to experience the wonders of the Territory.

With an exhibition area of over 4,000 square metres, The Darwin Convention Centre would more than satisfy their need for the proposed expanding sponsorship and exhibition requirements. The organisers were also instilled with confidence through their experience with pre-event services and site inspections undertaken.

THE RESULTS:

Darwin delivered on all the committee’s hopes and expectations. In particular, growth was achieved in sponsorship reaching record levels. The theme of the conference “Bariatric Surgery - More Than an Operation”, and the expanding industry that supports this growing and critical health challenge reflected the range of sponsors and attendees involved in the entire care of patients and who were targeted for the conference. A broad range of medical technology and equipment as well as weight control products supported the conference. Beyond specialist surgeons, attendees also included a satisfying mix of practice managers such as nurses, dieticians, and psychologists.

THE DARWIN CONVENTION CENTRE:

The facilities at the centre proved to be exactly what the conference organisers were seeking. Hosting their event in a dedicated venue for the first time paid off with the highest number of exhibitors ever achieved. Exhibitors commented on how much better it was compared to the smaller, sometimes more cramped conditions of previous venues. Products were more easily accessible, all in one area, close to the conference room and the space provided further opportunities for networking and access to delegates.

Organisers reported that the team at the Darwin Centre were “very responsive” to their needs in planning for their event, and once on site, the organising team was also very pleased that all staff were “very professional” in all aspects.

A highlight of the conference proved to be the welcome reception which set the mood for the remaining days. A recreation of the famous Mindil Beach Markets was established on the waterfront exterior of the Centre providing a ringside view of Darwin’s serene seascape. The grounds of the Centre provided an ideal forum for welcome speeches and songs from local indigenous performers followed by a truly authentic experience of the iconic markets. Market stalls lit by lanterns, offering souvenirs, aboriginal art, and crocodile skin goods along with fresh food stalls catered by the award winning convention centre’s chefs coloured the waterfront. Food stalls offered various delicious fresh food from Chinese dumplings to Greek souvlaki. Amidst the beautiful waterfront backdrop, the balmy weather and fun atmosphere, delegates enjoyed the complete sense of occasion and welcome to Darwin.

THE NORTHERN TERRITORY EXPERIENCE:

Choosing dates during Australian School Holidays was attractive for those attendees who wished to share their visit to the wonders of the “top end” with family. The Territory is extraordinary; from sunset dinner cruises, visiting world heritage national parks, to sport-fishing adventures, delegates were very pleased with the options made available and surprised at how much they could experience on day trips.

A new waterfront restaurant, Il Lido, was chosen for the main conference dinner and although the organisers were

initially hesitant due to its newness, their fears were allayed on the night. The contemporary Italian cuisine with “top end” flavours was delicious, and serving 220 people simultaneously was achieved. The restaurant was semi outdoors and as the event progressed, the balmy tropical evening, the surrounding waterfront setting, and the general relaxed atmosphere of the Territory, was now well instilled with the delegates. Rather than a traditional hotel ballroom with dinner and dancing, the delegates relaxed into what became a very social evening. The outdoor environment, the balmy temperature created an atmosphere that had the effect of time standing still as the evening extended to a very “chilled” and happy environment of social engagement as delegates sat and chatted into the early hours of the morning.

The location of Darwin created a situation where delegates joined the conference for the full 2- 3 days contributing to a more complete conference and destination experience. This was an added bonus for some delegates compared to destinations chosen closer to capital cities where some delegates would join in for a day being distracted by their day to day challenges.

OVERALL RESULT:

The organising committee were very pleased with the result of the conference. The goal of attracting participation from a wide variety of delegates was achieved. Delegates commented on how relaxed they felt and on the fantastic opportunity to see Australia’s exciting top end. The risks taken with a larger venue paid off, particularly with the results of achieving record exhibition and sponsorship investment. Delegates also noticed and commented on their surroundings, and enjoyed the ease of access in the venue. “It was the right decision to hold OSSANZ at the Darwin Convention Centre. The outcomes were more than what we expected and everyone enjoyed the relaxing environment”, said Denise Broeren. Her advice to anyone considering hosting a conference in the Top End is “it is great to have top class facilities in an attractive and interesting location where delegates want to visit”. “You can expect a high level of service from the Darwin Centre and really promote to the delegates all the great pre and post tours especially the short day tours” she said.

QUOTES:

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“You can expect a high level of service from the Darwin Centre”

DELEGATE SURVEY COMMENTS

“The variety of tours was great.”great facilities, nice to be in such a large spacious area”

“...great location and excellent sound and vision at all times.”

“Up market surroundings and great services”

For further information or comment, please contact:

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