

MEET DARWIN

CONVENTION CASE STUDY – DARWIN, AUSTRALIA'S NORTHERN TERRITORY

EVENT NAME: Harvey World Travel Frontliners Conference 2010
DATE: 27-30 August 2010
TOTAL ATTENDANCE: 300 travel professionals and 100 sponsors
CONFERENCE ORGANISER: John Zaharakis, Head of Conferences and Events www.stellatravel.com.au

CONFERENCE THEME: 'Take It to the Top!'

OBJECTIVE OF THE CONFERENCE:

The 2010 Harvey World Travel (HWT) Frontliners Conference saw 400 participants descend on the tropical harbour city of Darwin at the end of August.

The aim of the conference was to help the HWT frontliners improve their sales performance and customer service via product updates, incentive updates, show and tell sessions and various skills workshops.

Working in an industry that is constantly evolving, Harvey World Travel management want to ensure clients know that they are dealing with the knowledge and experience of 'The Travel Professionals'.

Managing Director of Harvey World Travel, David Rivers, says Darwin was the perfect location for a conference.

"It also presented a good opportunity to educate consultants about the Territory and what it has to offer," Mr Rivers said.

The Northern Territory is among the most popular local destinations for HWT customers but many of their consultants have never been here before.

"Our Frontliners not only had the opportunity to have invaluable face-to-face interaction; they also had a unique experience that only Darwin and the Northern Territory can provide," he said.



THE NORTHERN TERRITORY EXPERIENCE:

Boasting a city landscape hugged by one of Australia's largest harbours that locals say 'on a clear day you can see Bali!', Head of Conferences and Events for Stella Travel Services, John Zaharakis said Darwin is so different to the experiences of other capital cities. It has a very relaxed atmosphere, not rushed and visitors are welcomed with the genuine feeling that everyone's business is critical to the city's success.

“The city has an eclectic urban multicultural mix with a tropical feel, yet combined with a rugged outback influence. Darwin has unique characteristics and presents an environment that is worlds apart from even the popular Queensland destinations,” he added.

Zaharakis shared his view on accommodation options saying, “Darwin has an abundance of accommodation, especially since the addition of the Mantra Pandanus, Vibe and Medina Hotels. Similar to flights, with advance planning and preparation it was never an issue.”

“You do not need glitzy hotels in such a unique location. All hotels were easy to deal with and provide more than the average comforts of home. We provided transfers from the CBD hotels, however most participants chose to enjoy the sunshine and stroll to the venue each day,” he added.

On conclusion of the extensive business sessions, the travel professionals explored more of what Darwin and the Northern Territory had to offer.

Their itineraries included historic sites of Darwin, the spectacular waterfalls, birdlife and scenery at Litchfield and World Heritage-listed Kakadu National Parks. Other attractions included the Aboriginal rock art sites at Ubirr and a Guluyambi cruise on the East Alligator River to learn about the flora, fauna, Aboriginal mythology and history of region.

They also visited Nourlangie Rock to view the renowned Aboriginal art, including Namondjok, a painting some Aboriginal groups believe represents a Creation Ancestor. Plus an unforgettable Nabilil Dreaming Sunset Cultural Dinner Cruise on the tranquil Katherine Gorge.



THE DARWIN CONVENTION CENTRE EXPERIENCE:

This is the second event, Stella Travel Services has organised at the Darwin Convention Centre. The first was the 2008 Travelscene American Express Conference, not long after the centre opened.

Head of Conferences and Events for Stella Travel Services, John Zaharakis said the Darwin Convention Centre team are just fantastic to work with and their very positive attitudes made his task worry free.

“They have good management, have wonderful people at floor level and seem to have retained the excellent team leaders that help deliver an exceptional event. The whole team were very attentive, yet relaxed, and understand how to optimise useage of the venue. The catering was exceptional, even better than I remembered,” he said.

In between the business sessions, 40 sponsors showcased their products in the Exhibition Halls. Sponsors commented on the generous provision of space that allowed for relaxed interaction with the delegates. The booth build was supplied effortlessly by Darwin based company Total Event Services.

The highlight of this year's conference was recreating the iconic Mindil Beach markets on the Centre's forecourt.

John Zaharakis said they always try to incorporate a unique part of the destination into their program activities.

With the backdrop of the Darwin Waterfront precinct beach, waterways and lawns, it created a magical atmosphere. It was quoted as a sensational networking evening, full of fun and brilliant shopping. Many commented that it was simply not long enough. Always a positive sign of success.

The conference ended with a glamorous gala dinner, themed 'Outback Bling', where the consultants 'blinged up', being entertained late into the night by bands and performers.



CHALLENGES AND TRIUMPHS:

Distance - the greatest challenge was changing people's mindset and overcome the barrier of 'it's too far!' The conference concept was designed to tantalise and entice, both the business and social components, by promoting the opportunity to experience one of HWT's most popular destinations first hand.

Access - flight access and frequency was not as good as capital city locations. This is overcome with advanced preparation and planning. Qantas was a major sponsor, therefore access was determined by the best route i.e. unlike Jetstar and Virgin Blue, Qantas did not have direct flights from Melbourne. However, since the August conference Qantas has announced commencement of this service.

Technical Services - searching for local suppliers was a breeze, with everyone so helpful and friendly. Only a few small items were not available in Darwin and there were fewer avenues, however it did not create any concern.

Entertainment - Darwin is not on the trunk route of headline acts, so A-List entertainers needed to be brought in.

Social Media - for the first time, HWT's social media opportunities were also highlighted at the Darwin conference. The Facebook page, with more than 400 current fans and growing, was a special feature, as was the 'Ask Harvey' blog and forum. HWT embraced social media as an integral part of their marketing mix and had a dedicated person to keep their consultants, followers and fans updated with the latest news, tips and updates.



THE VERDICT:

Would you recommend Darwin as a future convention location?

"I say.....Go For It!! The unique nature of Darwin allows you to stage an event with a different backdrop that takes it 'out of the norm'. The eclectic mix and 'all things Darwin' make it such a different experience to the capital cities and Queensland locations. In addition, everyone knows your business is critical to their success."

John Zahakaris, Head of Conference and Events, Stella Travel Services

CLIENT QUOTES:

"The outstanding success of the conference reinforced the value of Darwin as a major conference destination."

David Rivers, Managing Director of Harvey World Travel

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