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Editorial/Feature

Unforgettable Tasmania – Appealing to International Meeting Planners

Tucked away in a quiet corner of the globe is a hidden treasure yet to be truly discovered by many international meeting planners.

Tasmania is a small island (around the same size as Ireland) just off the southern coast of mainland Australia.

With a population of only 484,000 people, this quiet yet sophisticated island is growing in popularity as a conference destination.

While attracting increasing domestic delegate and conference numbers, Tasmanian Convention Bureau Chief Executive Vincent Barron believes that Tasmania is also appealing to an increasing number of international meeting planners.

“With a thriving domestic conference market, we are now starting to see new first-class infrastructure developments throughout the island which are on a par with those found in other international destinations,” he said. “New five star hotels in Hobart and Launceston have added a new dimension to the quality of the experience”, he said.

“Tasmania already has an international reputation for natural beauty and in today’s current climate it is also perceived as a safe conference destination.”

Mr Barron said the harmonious development of the island’s natural resources had resulted in the development of a range of conference venues and supporting infrastructure in stunning locations.

“From sophisticated five-star waterfront locations in the major cities, to wilderness and seaside resorts around the island, Tasmania provides the experiences of an entire nation within a very compact destination,” he said.

“The state can now comfortably host conferences of up to 1100 delegates in Hobart right down to smaller groups of 25 in the wilderness and coastal resorts.”

Mr Barron said that around 12 international conferences were held each year and they centered on industries for which Tasmania had a geographic advantage, such as Antarctic and marine biology, wool, forestry, fruit growing and medical conferences.

The recent Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) Open Science Conference, run in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs (COMNAP), attracted 950 delegates from more than 32 countries.

The International Wool Textiles Organisation Congress previously attracted 520 delegates from 22 countries.

“The corporate and incentive market is also beginning to discover Tasmania with four groups from the USA, and several incentive agents from Asia, including Tasmania in incentive and group programs” he said.

Getting to Tasmania has never been easier for conference groups. The Island is serviced by three airlines operating frequent jet services direct from Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, where more than 30 international airlines arrive daily from around the globe.

Two ships, Spirit of Tasmania I and II, ply the waters of Bass Strait nightly transporting passengers and their cars from Melbourne (a similar trip to the English Channel crossing).

Mr Barron said that Tasmania's "compactness" and close proximity to mainland Australia was a key factor in attracting the international market.

"Within hours you can travel between rugged mountain wilderness in the central highlands to the pristine beaches of the sunny east coast" he said.

"On one day you may be able to see the white dusting of snow on the ground outside your room in a wilderness lodge before you see the sun gleaming on the Port Arthur Historic Site as you paddle your sea kayak on a warm day the next."

Mr Barron said that Tasmania was also developing a reputation as an adventure destination, making it popular with the domestic incentive market.

"Activities include kayaking, whitewater rafting, jet boating, seaplane trips, abseiling, mountain biking, all-terrain vehicle tours to more sedate activities like bush-walking or sailing," he said.

Food and wine also play an integral role in attracting conventions to the island.

"Tasmania has repeatedly been acknowledged as producing some of the world's finest cheeses, seafood, game, berries, wines and beers in international competitions," Mr Barron said.

"Our food and wine is always popular with meeting planners who often include a "Taste of Tasmania" theme in their dining programs or incorporate a visit to some of our award-winning cool-climate wineries.

"It is unusual to have so many experiences wrapped up in one small neat package and it is an attractive option for meeting planners who want to give their delegates a whole range of experiences during a conference, within a relatively short period of time."

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A DVD of Tasmanian images is also contained in the kit to accompany this editorial.
Captions are listed on the DVD.