



CONFERENCE AND INCENTIVE TROPICAL NORTH QUEENSLAND

Diversity's The Name Of The Game

Take the Great Barrier Reef and World Heritage tropical rainforests, add in world-class infrastructure, a huge array of diverse activities from soft adventure to pampering and fine dining, and a tropical climate and you've got Tropical North Queensland 'where big picture thinking comes naturally'.

The destination, just a five hour flight from Auckland, offers tailored options for incentives from sophisticated canapés and cocktails under the stars

to adrenaline filled rainforest adventures, with something for every group, budget and interest.

Tourism Australia partnership manager, Amanda Hall, says direct flights from Auckland to Cairns make the destination even more appealing for the New Zealand conference and incentive market. "Delegates can arrive in the morning, meet over lunch in Port Douglas and by afternoon be exploring the treasures of the Great Barrier



Reef. It's the perfect tropical break, right on our doorstep!" Rosie Douglas, Business Events

Cairns and Great Barrier Reef's head of business events, says the region is a perfect option for those wanting a tropical option. "We can compete with places like Thailand and Fiji. We're so much closer than Thailand and can offer more variety of experiences – you've got the tropical climate and activities, plus you've got the outback experience as well and then the Daintree rainforest, a great range of four- and five-star accommodation... If you're after theme parks, we're not the right place, but if you want the natural environment, we've got it all." The region is, understandably, proud of its ecology with the matchless beauty of its twin World Heritage features, the Great Barrier Reef and Daintree rainforest, and 17% (or 159) of Australia's eco-accredited products can be found here. Douglas adds that the region 'understands the needs of C&I clients'.

TNQ Gets Thumbs Up From Event Organisers

Event organisers and managers from around New Zealand converged on Tropical North Queensland recently to experience first-hand some of the region's MICE offerings—and were left in no doubt about the diversity of C&I product on offer.

The four-day famil, hosted by

Business Events Australia and partners Business Events Cairns and Great Barrier Reef and Air New Zealand, saw the group sampling conference and incentive product from spa treatments and indigenous degustation dinners to quad biking in the Whyanbeel Valley, cycling in Port Douglas, snorkelling the

Great Barrier Reef and an Aussie outback muster experience.

Extra Mile Company general manager Mike Wansink says he was surprised by the variety available and believes the region is a realistic option for mid-range incentive programmes. "It's cost effective – we would usually be looking at \$7000-\$8000, but for \$5000 you could put together a good option here. It's different from the Gold Coast, Sydney or Melbourne options. It's a bit of a hidden gem really." The exclusive Rainforest Estate in Finlayvale proved a highlight for Wansink. "There are heaps of opportunities there, it's a venue where you could do anything," he says of the secluded luxury property, which includes four separate buildings interconnected by elevated boardwalks through tropical gardens.

GO C&I's Sam Cook says the region could become a popular C&I destination for Kiwis. "There's such a wide range of activities catering for all sorts of markets." Carlson Wagonlit Travel's Katie van Dinther agrees, saying the relaxed nature, excellent customer service and diversity is a winner.

Air NZ flights story

Air New Zealand flies direct from Auckland to Cairns up to five times a week with connections available from all around New Zealand.

The four new 'Seats to Suit' product choices are available, which include Seat only, Seat and Bag, The Works and Works Deluxe. See airnewzealand.co.nz



Top: Sam Cook, GO C&I; Casey Ballantyne, Mondo Business Travel; Alastair McIlwrick, Dynamics; Geraldine Hutchison, Air New Zealand; and Mike Wansink, Extra Mile Company, ready for a night out. Business Events Cairns and Great Barrier Reef's Rosie Douglas and Alistair McIlwrick take to the air on the way to Green Island, while Holly Richardson, Orbit Corporate Travel; Tourism Australia's Amanda Hall and Katie van Dinther from Carlson Wagonlit Travel make the most of Paradise Palm's bouncy pillow.



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Cosmopolitan Cairns



Cairns is the cosmopolitan heart of Tropical North Queensland. Here you'll find international four and five-star hotels, a convention centre and all the infrastructure and services you could need for a conference.

There are over 7000 rooms available in the Cairns CBD and the city can cater for large conventions or memorable small group meetings. The waterfront Hilton Cairns has undergone a AUD4 million makeover and offers seven modern and flexible meeting rooms, with plenty of breakout options including tropical gardens, and waterfront and poolside sites. Workstations in every room mean there's no excuse for not doing your work, though the stunning views over sea and mountains do provide somewhat of a distraction. See

Hilton.com. Only a couple of minutes walk down the road, you'll find Shangri-La Hotel, overlooking Trinity Bay, Marlin Marina and the breathtaking mountain ranges. Featuring 10 meeting and banquet rooms, the hotel includes 255 luxurious, spacious rooms and suites. See shangri-la.com/cairns. The Sebel Cairns has also recently completed a multi-million dollar refurbishment project and features Cairns largest hotel ballroom (500m2) with no pillars or obstructions. Ten meeting rooms and indoor and outdoor venues mean there's something for every occasion. See sebelcairns.com

Modern Wild Foods

The award-winning Ochre Restaurant and Catering offers dining experiences with a difference.

Specialising in modern Australian dining, Ochre uses native food including emu, kangaroo and crocodile, as well as a Pacific-rim inspired dishes. Bush berries, fruits, seeds, leaves and nuts are also used for a truly Australian experience. See ochrerestaurant.com.au

Wildlife ... Or Army Life

The CaPTA (Cairns and Port Trips and Attractions) Group offers a range of options for team building, pre and post touring and event locations, including three parks spread across the region: the Cairns Wildlife Dome, perched on top of the casino in Cairns CBD; Rainforestation Nature Park near Kuranda and the Rainforest Habitat Wildlife Sanctuary in Port Douglas. All three are available as venues, with Rainforestation offering specialised dinner themes including a M*A*S*H Bash complete with spot lit Army Duck tour of the rainforest

and dinner in a mess, a-la the popular television comedy. The Rainforest Habitat offers Breakfast with the Birds, Lunch with the Lorikeets and cocktails in the rainforest or dinner functions and guests can wander among free roaming and flying animals in the rainforest, wetlands and grasslands environments. Look out for the baby Lumholtz's tree kangaroo. The company also offers longer, four-day team building expeditions, helicoptering into a location and then 'free flow' white water rafting out. See capta.com.au



Cairns Convention Centre

The award-winning Cairns Convention Centre last month confirmed that it has won another 12 conference bids – 10 of which are international – comprising over 8500 delegates, highlighting how highly regarded this centre is. Featuring 22 meeting rooms and capable of housing up to 5000, the purpose-built event facility includes state of the art audio visual and wireless technology. The centre, Australia's first environmentally designed major public building, is within easy walking distance of many of the city's hotels. See cairnsconvention.com.au



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Palm Cove Relaxation



If you're after that relaxed, boutique-y feeling for your incentive activities, consider heading to Palm Cove, 30 minutes drive north of Cairns, where palm-fringed beaches provide a backdrop for small to medium sized groups. A sophisticated beachside hub renowned for its spa treatments, Palm Cove is more low-key than Port Douglas and Cairns, and offers plenty of incentive experiences. Palm Cove offers a slower pace, but don't think that means boredom – you'll still find plenty of activities including helicopter rides to the reef, team building on the foreshore or sea kayaking. Along with quality accommodation (many of the resorts, hotels and apartments overlook the beach, while others provide stunning views of the rainforest-clad mountains). Palm Cove provides event planners with an intimate oasis of luxury – break for lunch beachside and when the work is done head out to experience the local wildlife, motivate your team on the golf course or take in a pampering spa treatment. Angsana Resort and Spa (angsana.com) features Thai/Balinese style treatments, while at The Sebel Reef House (reefhouse.com.au) indigenous offerings come to the fore and Sea Temple Resort & Spa's Mii Spa uses organic Pevonica



Botanica products free of artificial colour and fragrance. Palm Cove also features plenty of good quality dining options, with many having won awards on both local and international levels and dine around options are a popular choice.



Sea Temple Luxury

Sea Temple Resort & Spa Palm Cove and Sea Temple Resort & Spa Port Douglas both offer five-star accommodation, indulgent day spas and conference facilities. The Palm Cove property features several variable space meeting areas and can cater for conferences, meetings and seminars ranging from 12 guests in the elegant Lagoon Boardroom to 135 delegates, theatre-style. The 126 studio and one to four bedroom apartments are Asian influenced. Its Port Douglas counterpart, on Four

Mile Beach, has an 18-hole links-style golf course and 194 studio rooms or two and three bedroom apartments and villas with plunge pools, luxury swim-out apartments and penthouses with private rooftop spa and barbecue areas. An expansive lagoon runs through the property, which also features multiple venues including the sunrise boardwalk where platters of seafood and local produce are served surrounded by the rainforest and listening to the sound of the waves. See mirvachotels.com

Events In Paradise

Golf courses have become a place of business for many and you can tee off in style at Paradise Palms Resort and Country Club, where as well as talking shop or unwinding over a round of golf, delegates or clients can take a lesson on the driving range. Delegates swings can be filmed and analysed, with a further session to show the results. The facility also includes conference facilities, restaurant, a new 96-room resort and the Pelicans in Paradise Adventure Park. Event space moves seamlessly from the outdoors to the Clubhouse conference rooms, with both the Austin and Mangano rooms opening out onto sweeping verandas with ocean views – perfect for tea breaks, lunch and cocktail parties. The facility hosted the recent Business Events Australia/Air New Zealand/Business Events Cairns and Great Barrier Reef group. Vision Hotels and Resort's director of sales and marketing, Darlene Holdsworth says the event was a golden opportunity to showcase Paradise Palms. "We are very confident in Paradise Palms as an event destination and being able to spread the word amongst event organisers is the key to our success," Holdsworth says. See paradisepalms.com.au



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Port Douglas Variety

High quality infrastructure and a huge range of activities including off site dinners, river snorkelling and Daintree forest activities make Port Douglas well suited for the incentive and conference market.



While there's plenty of accommodation, it has more of a resort, boutique feel than Cairns. Thala Beach Lodge offers luxury accommodation in a stunning beach and rainforest setting. Tucked discretely in the hills overlooking the Coral Sea, Thala has 83 bungalows and three meeting rooms, capable of hosting up to 120 people, theatre style. Nature and wildlife walks, bird watching tours, a 'coconut odyssey, star gazing and presentations by local specialists are available – as is the interesting option of licking a green ant... (thala.com) Despite the boutique feeling for many of the properties, you'll still find ones that can cater for larger numbers, including the Sheraton Mirage Port Douglas. Set in 365 acres of gardens with five acres of swimmable blue lagoon, the Sheraton has 294 rooms and 100 two-, three- and four-bedroom villas accom-

modating up to eight people. A wide variety of meeting rooms – and outdoor spaces – can cater for up to 1000. A 'poolside gazebo' can handle up to 360 for a banquet or 500 for a reception. (Sheraton.com/portdouglas) Port Douglas is geared towards good quality, upmarket dining. A popular escape for Sydneysiders and Melbornites escaping the winter cold, quality dining is abundant and dine around is a popular option, allowing event organisers to spread their delegates over several restaurants at a time, depending on their preferences.



Diamond In The Tropics

Four off-site locations, hummers, fireworks and an event management team to boot – Excita Group offers specialised and unique products for the conference market, from catering to transport, entertainment and themeing. Its Shalimar offering provides multiple sites which can be used for gala dinners or team building events. With forest, beach and outback settings all just 10 minutes from Cairns CBD and with no noise restrictions or curfews. The forest has various sites accommodating up to 5000 guests for a sit down dinner surrounded by forest; The Barn, complete with farm

machinery can accommodate up to 300 guests; and the beach site can handle up to 240 guests. Two 14-seater stretch hummers are available for the ultimate in unique transfers, and you can round the night off with a pyrotechnics display. See excitagroup.com.au



Eco Immersion At Backcountry Bliss

Head into the rainforest for an adventure with a difference with Backcountry Bliss. The company offers a range of activities including the 'eco-immersion' river drift snorkelling, where you float effortlessly down the river, observing aquatic life, rainforest butterflies and ancient tree root systems. Morning and afternoon departures are available for the three-hour adventure, conditions permitting. Backcountry Bliss, which is well versed in catering to conference and incentive groups, also offers tailor-made mountain biking, bushwalking, and sea kayaking, and offers the option to combine an activity with a helicopter flight for an even more exhilarating experience. Teambuilding challenges such as a heptathlon can also be organised. See backcountrybliss.com.au

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Quicksilver's Green Reef Delights

Imagine an afternoon exploring a Great Barrier Reef island, followed by watching the sun set over Cairns while feeling the sand between your toes as you sip champagne. It's all available on Green Island, where a half day exploring can be combined with a beach dinner – and all after a morning of conference work. Day activities include glass-bottom boat viewings of the reef, snorkelling, diving, Seawalker helmet diving, parasailing and scenic helicopter flights. As the stars come out, sit down for a beach seafood buffet or stand for a cocktail function – either way your clients are rewarded with a unique experience. The island, just 45 minutes by boat from Cairns, is also home to the Green Island Resort and a conference centre, which handles up to 40 people and can be used for day conferences combined with island activities or in conjunction with an overnight stay with beach dinner. See reefevents.com.au



... Aerial Option

If you're looking for something extra special for your trip out to the reef, consider making the trip by helicopter. GBR Helicopter Group offers conference and incentive services, and says its large fleet allows it to quickly and efficiently move large groups of people, whether for a chartered transfer or a special event. "With the helicopters ability to land in tight places the options are only limited by your imagination, and we can lift your event to a higher level, making it an exceptionally special and unique experience." See gbrhelicopters.com.au

Off-site Unique Style

Off-site Connections Event Management provides unique events throughout the region, including team activities, conference options and themed evenings – whether at resorts, a convention centre or out in the wilds. Head to Finlayvale's exclusive Rainforest Estate, set on nine acres of sweeping lawns, tropical gardens and lush world heritage wet tropics rainforest, for dinner and activities or out to a sugar-cane farm or the rainforest. OSC caters to groups of 10 to 10,000 and can provide venue hire, transportation, technical production, styling, theming, entertainment



and catering. The company says it aims to take events 'to another level, push creative boundaries, achieve your desired business goal and inspire your audience through designing an unforgettable experience.' See offsiteconnections.com



Australian Muster Experience

Horsemanship, cattle mustering and whip cracking fun combine with a traditional barbeque at the Australian Muster Experience, set against the backdrop of the Daintree Rainforest and just a short drive north of Port Douglas. The property provides an authentic representation of life on a working cattle station as Nipper and the team lead visitors on a rambling escapade. Hosted in a 19th Century-inspired outback station shed, with theatre seating overlooking an arena and uninterrupted views to Port Douglas, lunch and evening function are available. The venue can also host private functions, including gala dinners, with capacity for 350 banquet style or 600 for cocktails. Other activities including quad biking, horse riding, zorbing and team building are also available. See australianmusterexperience.com



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