

## TRADE RELEASE

### PORT DOUGLAS BACK IN FOCUS AS CONFERENCE CENTRE OF CHOICE

**Port Douglas, 11<sup>th</sup> July, 2017** – The weak dollar, Australians and New Zealanders opting for regional travel and the lure of the Great Barrier Reef and Daintree rainforest are all contributing to Port Douglas' revival as a national and international business events and conference centre.

Business operators are reporting forward contracts into 2019 with conference delegate numbers and incentive groups ranging in size from small groups of 15 through to large groups of 600.

Natalie Johnson, general manager of Flames of the Forest and Business Events Port Douglas chairperson, said the increase in incentive group bookings was a great plus for the region.

“The region has many conferences and incentives, both domestic and international, this year. It is particularly heartening to see an increase in international incentives, as these are the programs which tend to use a comprehensive range of suppliers in the region, including accommodation, events, restaurant bookings and touring,” Ms Johnson said.

She said small groups were choosing boutique properties such as Silky Oaks Lodge and Thala Beach Nature Reserve, while larger groups were filling Pullman Sea Temple, QT and the newly refurbished Sheraton Mirage Grand Port Douglas Resort.

“The US incentive market has been slowly increasing over the past four years and together with a spike in incentives from New Zealand, Port Douglas is well positioned for a great year. We are very confident 2018 will see further growth in this sector, and personally, we (Flames of the Forest) have business confirmed for both 2018 and into 2019,” she said.

Ms Johnson said while domestic conferencing lead times had reduced dramatically over the past few years, bookings were still up to two years in advance for the international market.

“The majority of our domestic bookings are confirmed six to nine months out, however, the hotels are locking them in earlier than that. International incentive is still a longer lead time – anywhere from 12 to 48 months, which is great for forecasting,” she said.

Quicksilver Group events manager Megan Bell said 2017 was very positive and solid quotes had been accepted for 2018.

“Quicksilver is seeing good growth from the Australian and New Zealand market and we are starting to have good returns from the US/Canadian market, which has been soft for a number of years,” Ms Bell said.

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“There are a number of reasons driving this, including the weak dollar, which makes us an attractive destination for the Americans, through to the Australia/New Zealand market who are staying closer to home.

“Port Douglas has had a number of new products and upgrades to existing infrastructure and the resulting focus on the destination has created a new vibe”.

Ms Bell said the Great Barrier Reef was high on the agenda for incentive and conference groups, with a number requesting an exclusive marine biologist to enable them to gain a better understanding of the ecosystem.

The recent \$45 million refurbishment of the 5-star Sheraton Mirage Grand Port Douglas Resort, which can host more than 1000 delegates, and active campaigns with Tourism Australia has seen the luxury venue re-established as a prime conferencing location, according to Sheraton Mirage sales and marketing director Nathan Gadd.

“Feedback has been incredibly positive from our MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, events) customers and interest is strong from the domestic market, in particular Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, as well as our neighbours in New Zealand.

“They are excited about the new and upgraded facilities and the creative ways we can host large-scale events down to small team-building incentives. We are also seeing an increase in the US and Europe incentive markets,” Mr Gadd said.

“We are in the discussion phase with many clients about 2019, with some in contract. All signs are pointing to healthy future seasons in Tropical North Queensland.

“Due to our location and proximity to the Great Barrier Reef and the Daintree rainforest, many groups, both conference and incentive, do stay on to explore the beauty of the natural surrounds.”

Tourism Port Douglas and Daintree executive officer Tara Bennett said business events was a vital sector of the region’s visitor mix delivering high yield visitors with a strong propensity to return on holiday. “The favourable forward bookings position the destination well for the coming years.”

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