

QUEENSLAND INFORMATION CENTRES ASSOCIATION

QICA Conference 2019 – Event Report

Overview

The Queensland Information Centres Association (QICA) coordinates an annual conference for the Visitor Information Centre (VIC) network, connecting staff and volunteers encouraging the sharing achievements, challenges and learnings. Over 65 delegates representing all tourism regions across the state descended on Bowen in the Whitsundays for the 2019 Bookeasy Queensland Information Centre Association (QICA) Conference from 15th – 17th October.

The annual conference was hosted by Bowen Tourism & Business (BTB) with support from sponsors across the industry and the collaboration of Whitsunday Regional Council and Tourism Whitsundays.

Representing 37 visitor information centres (VIC's) the delegates enjoyed an insightful and fun-filled conference embracing the themes of collaboration and working together.

The Conference was held at the North Queensland Cruising Yacht Club, with a familiarisation tour around Bowen and the final awards night held at the Grandview Hotel Bowen.



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Program

Delegates were able to experience a well thought out program which showcased the region and provided insights into the industry. The program consisted of high-quality speakers, a familiarization tour of Bowen, optional pre-event activities as well as evening functions showcasing country hospitality and the highest quality fresh produce available.

Speakers

Speakers were sourced by the QICA Committee with the needs of Visitor Information Centres in mind. The following speakers presented during the conference:

Michelle Stafford (Volunteering Queensland) – Effective Management of Volunteers

Judy Porter (Shiift) – Team Cohesion

Karen Philips and Kaitlyn Frawley (Bookeasy) – The Importance of Culture and Information to Inspiration

Natassia Wheeler (Tourism Whitsundays) – The Importance of Collaboration

Andrew Ellis (Fraser Coast) – Social Responsibilities of the VIC in our community

Kellee Harragon (Murray Views) – Helping People have Happy Memories

Therese Philips (Tourism and Events Queensland) – TEQ Update

Melanie Sands (Visit Queensland) – Accreditation Update

Vanida Petts (Ipswich) – Google Street View Trekker



Natassia Wheeler, Karen Philips and Kaitlyn Frawley presenting at the conference

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Familiarisation Tour of Bowen



On Wednesday delegates had the chance to explore Bowen on a familiarization tour.

The first stop was Bird's Fish Bar, where delegates were treated to a catered lunch whilst they immersed themselves in a trawler to plate experience. The history of Bowen formed a large part of the famil tour with a visit to the Catalina memorial. Flagstaff Hill and Dalrymple Point were next on the itinerary and offered a great opportunity to talk about the Walk to the Lighthouse event as well as new investment in the region.

The last stop on the tour was Horseshoe Bay, where delegates had the chance to walk to the Horseshoe Bay lookout and to go snorkeling along our fringing reef after they finished eating some delicious Mango Sorbet.



Optional activities

On day 2 and day 3 of the conference QICA offered optional pre-conference activities for delegates. On Wednesday, we engaged local Yoga instructor Faraday Rosenberg for a gentle yoga sequence.

On Thursday, we offered an optional Walk down the historic Bowen Jetty, which was led by Bowen Tourism and Business staff and volunteers.

Both activities were well attended by delegates and offered an additional avenue for delegates to immerse themselves in the destination.



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Evening Functions

The Meet and Greet Function on Tuesday night was held at the Bowen Visitor Information Centre. Delegates were treated to a grazing platter from Meraki and learned about Bowen, its Information Centre and new



Virtual Reality Experience.

Wednesday night delegates were able to watch the sun set over Greys Bay before indulging in Chinese food at the Cove Restaurant.



The QICA 2019 VIC of the Year Awards were held on Thursday night at the Grandview Hotel. Category winners were announced for VICs managed or operated by:

- Local Government: Julia Creek VIC in the McKinlay Shire, Outback Queensland
- Local or Regional Tourism Organisation: Hervey Bay VIC on the Fraser Coast
- Volunteers: Parkyn Hut, Tewantin on the Sunshine Coast

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Parkyn's Hut VIC, operated by the Tewantin Heritage and Historical Society received the inaugural Travel Reimbursement Prize, provided to Volunteer run VICs for their community engagement in the past 12 months.



Throughout the evening prizes were drawn for the annual conference raffle, which raised \$1100 for the nominated local charity Bowen Neighbourhood Centre. VICs were encouraged to bring prizes representing their regions including a range of accommodation options, tours and cruises, local produce, hand-made crafts and jewellery, art and prints.

Closing the evening the 2020 QICA Conference host was announced, with Miles, in Queensland's Western Downs getting ready to welcome the visitor information centre network next year.



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Sponsorship

This event was made possible with the support of our Conference Sponsors:

Naming Rights:



Platinum:



Gold:



Silver:



Supporter: Wot's On

Thank you to all sponsors for your commitment to the tourism industry and the Whitsunday Region. We look forward to continuing to work with you into the future.

Thank you to the event host, Bowen Tourism and Business for your dedication and enthusiasm in putting on the 2019 QICA Conference.



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Infrastructure & logistics

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Food and Venues | Local suppliers were utilised throughout the conference with a large emphasis on locally grown produce. Food intolerances were catered for accordingly. |
| Bus transfers | A local bus was chartered for the duration of the conference to take delegates to and from conference functions. |
| Communication | <p>Regular communication with both delegates and sponsors was essential to the success of the event.</p> <p>The QICA Committee met on a monthly basis prior to the event and event documentation was shared in the Google Drive for future committees to refer to.</p> |
| MC | Thanks to Tourism Whitsundays QICA was able to utilize the services of a dedicated MC this year, Kylie Forgione did a fantastic job keeping the group entertained. |
| Delegate bags | Delegate bags were collated by the event host and contained items supplied by delegates, sponsors as well as a snorkeling set for each delegate to take home. |

Promotion & Marketing

Promotion of the event was provided through media releases, Facebook posts, website promotion and e-mail newsletters.

Facebook posts

In the lead up to the event Facebook posts were used to promote the event on average 4 times per week. The Queensland Information Centres Association Facebook page was managed by the event host for the purpose of promotion, and posts were shared across to the QLD Accredited VIC Network. Posts focused on sponsors, program highlights, destination promotion and other event reminders weekly.

Promotion on this media channel has led to a significant increase in likes on post engagements on the QICA Facebook page.

Website promotion

The event was promoted through the QICA website on <https://www.qica.com.au/events/conference/2019-qica-conference>. This website also contained the registration link for delegates and Facebook posts consistently linked to the website.



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E-mail Newsletters

QICA distributes a monthly newsletter to its members. An event update was included in each newsletter along with a link to the registration page.

Affiliate Marketing

The event was promoted through the Marketing channels of Bowen Tourism and Business, Tourism Whitsundays as well as Tourism and Events Queensland.

Success Factors and Event Feedback

Attendance

65 delegates registered for the QICA Conference in Bowen. This is an increase of 38% year on year.

Economic benefit

Due to the nature of the event most delegates required accommodation in the region. Several delegates also chose to add on extra days whilst in the region therefore further increasing the economic benefit of the event. A post event survey was conducted and was completed by 38% of attendees. Of those surveyed 70% stayed 3 nights and a further 17% for 4 nights or more.

With an event budget of more than \$32,000 and 90% of those funds spent in the Whitsundays the event had a great economic impact on the region. All supplies were sourced locally where possible and there has been a great emphasis on food sourced locally.

Destination Marketing

The QICA Conference assisted Destination Marketing efforts in the following ways:

- Bowen promotion in conjunction with event promotion
- Emphasis on Bowen and Whitsundays social media platforms through incorporation of social media competition
- Strategic use of event spaces to promote the region e.g. conference venue had water views
- Strategic use of local product in event catering
- Incorporation of familiarisation tour into the program highlighting the region

Delegates were an ideal captive audience for promoting the region; they work at the forefront of Visitor Information Centres and it is expected that their positive experiences in the region will lead to further promotion and return visitation.



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The post-conference survey confirms these suggestions, with 100% indicating they will recommend Bowen as a holiday destination to family, friends and visitors. (68% very likely, 32% somewhat likely)

Event Feedback

Feedback for the conference has been overwhelmingly positive. The following table summarises feedback on the key components of the conference.

| | Very Satisfied | Somewhat Satisfied | Neutral | Somewhat Unsatisfied | Very Unsatisfied | N/A |
|---|----------------|--------------------|---------|----------------------|------------------|-----|
| Information Received prior to the Conference | 59% | 36% | 5% | - | - | - |
| Speakers and content | 61% | 30% | 9% | - | - | - |
| Catering | 82% | 9% | 9% | - | - | - |
| Venues | 55% | 32% | 4% | 9% | - | - |
| Timing of the Conference (October) | 52% | 35% | 13% | - | - | - |
| Optional Activities (Yoga/Jetty Walk) | 50% | 23% | 9% | - | - | 18% |
| Famil tour of Bowen | 83% | 9% | 4% | - | - | 4% |
| Ease of Registration | 74% | 13% | 4% | - | - | 9% |
| VIC of the Year Dinner | 83% | 17% | - | - | - | - |
| VIC of the Year Awards | 70% | 26% | - | - | - | 4% |
| Overall Conference Experience | 83% | 13% | 4% | - | - | - |

This is what some of our delegates had to say:

What was your favourite thing about the conference? –

“Touring Bowen & experiencing what is on offer. Especially the amazing seafood.”

“How organised the team were. Error free!”

“Networking and meeting my fellow Visitor Information colleagues, the content of the speakers so very current and the organisation by the team Bowen Visitor Information Centre just brilliant”

“Great networking opportunities, loved the yoga/walk options, food was out of control awesome.”

“THANK YOU!!!! I had the most wonderful time last week... I'm feeling so inspired about the next 12 months and all the things i'll be implementing, just from this conference alone. I really can't thank you enough for all of the time you all put in!!”



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“Can we express again our utmost thanks to you and the committee for such a professionally coordinated event. Our involvement was possibly one of the best from a communication and engagement perspective. “ – Sponsor

Suggestions for 2019

Every event provides a learning opportunity for the QICA Committee and the 2019 QICA Conference provided us with the following suggestions for 2019:

- Set conference dates well in advance and promote these
- Provide a large conference space which allows for tables for delegates
- Possible reintroduction of round-table sessions
- Provide certificates for all nominees in the VIC of the Year awards
- High quality speakers
- A charter bus from Brisbane was suggested by several delegates

Congratulations to the QICA Committee for delivering a successful and relevant conference in Bowen which was enjoyed by delegates throughout the state. We look forward to seeing you at the 2020 Conference in Miles.

