

+ #DELVEINTO AUSTRALIA

A NATIONAL CULTURAL PRIDE

Canberra proved to 20 buyers that they are ready for interstate and international business events.

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Park Hyatt Canberra

National Convention Centre



The Canberra Convention Bureau (CCB) and participating members were ready to showcase all things fabulous in the capital of Australia to some 20 buyers and *Biz Events Asia* with the destination's Top Secret FAM tour in early March 2017.

According to the CCB, Top Secret is a key initiative that has a strong track record of bringing in tens of millions of dollars in meeting and convention business for the city with over AUD88 million in economic contribution to date. Michael Matthews, CEO of CCB said: "Top Secret showcases Canberra's energetic and creative business events community that stands ready to deliver world-class business events. Decision makers see firsthand just how great their business event in Canberra will be."

Here are some of the key highlights from the three-day experience selected by some of the buyers:

LUNCHEONS THAT TOLD A STORY

It was a clever way to immerse guests into a destination by having Historian David Headon share the rich history of Canberra at the welcome luncheon in the rose courtyard of the **Park Hyatt Canberra**. The storytelling made an impact as the buyers were paying attention to the value of history and national cultural institutions Canberra offers throughout the trip.

The **National Convention Centre** in Canberra truly wowed the buyers with an unforgettable experience. The team set up the entire exhibition hall with exhibition booths so buyers can see the possibilities of the revenue generating exhibition as part of the conferences. From there, the buyers were led into the Royal Theatre where Stephen Wood, General Manager of the Centre, kicked off an impressive long table gastronomy experience on the stage.

His team designed an Audio-Visual (AV) dining experience leveraging Enlighten (Canberra's annual outdoor illuminating art and culture festival) happening during our visit. Every guest's name was projected on their allocated seat using the latest AV pin-spotting technology. Even the rims of the white plates were lit in the theme ingredient of the luncheon - orange.

Anthony Smeaton, Marketing and Communications Director of the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) said after the luncheon, "The lunch at the National Convention Centre was super impressive. The AV display throughout the luncheon is something I have never seen before and the food was the best I have tasted so far in Canberra. We will consider Canberra for a conference next year".

THE CONSERVATION THAT TOOK OUR BREATHS AWAY

Buyers are always keen to support venues with a good cause. Celebrity Chef Janet Jeffs of Ginger Catering at the **National Arboretum Canberra** presented a stunning breakfast curated through the usage of local produce in the indoor space at the heart of Village Centre. This indoor space can cater up to 500 guests for a sit-down banquet event. The experience there is enhanced by a pre- or post-function stroll around the grounds that are home to 104 forests of rare, endangered and symbolic trees from Australia and around the world – a sustainable conservation effort from the catastrophic 2003 Canberra fire. One fan of this venue was Johnathon Parker, Major Event and Project Manager of the Public Relations Institute of Australia, who said, "I can definitely say that the National Arboretum with those unparalleled views was a standout venue for me. Visiting Canberra is a good opportunity for me to re-familiarise myself with the destination and in my mind, it seals the deal and we will be bringing business to Canberra."

MINGLE LIKE POLITICIANS

Buyers often wonder if museums and galleries are ready to take on the commercial demands of business events. Ms Daryl Karp, Director at the **Museum of Australia Democracy at Old Parliament House**, set a strong welcome tone of



National Arboretum Canberra



Museum of Australia Democracy at Old Parliament House

hospitality that eased the buyers into the visit and cast those doubts away. The heritage event spaces are well maintained and meet the technology needs of modern events. Buyers were drawn to the charms of the Members' Dining Room that overlooks the New Parliament House. Anthony Smeaton of AHURI said that he has heard many good things about Canberra especially the dining scene. As a political fanatic, he was attracted to this venue as he wanted to be amongst the history and traditions within a beautiful building.

The buyers were treated to an exclusive visit to the press gallery at **Parliament House**. They were given first-hand access to the buzz generated by the offices of all the Australian media after visiting spaces like the Great Hall and Marble Foyer, where events can be held.



Press Gallery, Parliament House

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he sheer amount of choice Canberra offers in terms of venues and accommodation, and the range of styles took me by surprise. Canberra really has a lot of hidden gems.

SHARON ANDERSON

Australian Earthquake Engineering Society

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Australian War Memorial



ART AND CULTURE EXPERIENCE

Buyers were thrilled at the different showcases at some of the national cultural institutions. The museums and galleries offer business event delegates access, where possible, to some exhibitions as part of their event experience. The welcome reception was held at the **National Museum of Australia** attended by bureau members and the local business community, giving buyers a strong sense of united teamwork and how much they value the events business. At the dinner, Chief Minister Andrew Barr highlighted Canberra's recent major developments such as new international flights from Singapore and Wellington New Zealand into Canberra Airport as well as the billions of dollars' worth of infrastructure projects happening over the next four years.

During a visit to the **National Portrait Gallery**, Dr Chris Chapman, Senior Curator, welcomed the buyers at the gallery's most loved 180-pax banqueting space, the Gordon Darling Hall with an explanation of the existing exhibition and the vision of the gallery. Buyers were equally impressed with the event spaces at the **Australian War Memorial** where guests get to dine underneath war planes and amongst historic exhibits, a cost-effective way of curating a dining theme using existing facilities.

The pièce de résistance networking experience was delivered by the **National Gallery of Australia**. Buyers were treated to a guided tour through the Versailles: Treasures from the Palace, a special exhibition. For the first time ever, treasures including royal paintings, intricate tapestries and luxurious gilded furniture have travelled outside of France. The opulence inspired the "Dripping in Gold" themed cocktail party held at the gallery's multi-million dollar dedicated event space, Gandel Hall.

Josephine Williams, Conference and Events Leader of IDP Education Ltd explained to *Biz Events Asia* at the function: "When sourcing venues for social events, it is about the uniqueness of the venue and what it can offer in terms of the whole experience. You want a venue that not only pays attention to the food but also the theming and its environment. Like the National Gallery of Australia that drew onto the whole Versailles exhibition and brought that into the whole night

National Museum of Australia





and the whole experience where we were tasting French food and listening to French music; bringing the whole thing together and it is not just about the venue anymore.”

Williams also feels that the business events industry should continue to share their knowledge and experience: “There are so many products in Canberra and the destination keeps developing them. No one can visit and experience them all, so it is important for the industry to share their experiences and how as professionals, we use these spaces and places and how we bring them to life. We can really learn from each other without re-inventing the wheel.”

UNITED RESIDENTIAL EVENT HUBS

The NewActon precinct is located within short walking distance to the convention centre hub. Hotels like **QT, Hotel Hotel, Peppers Gallery** in NewActon have a collaborative village-like approach when it comes to working with interstate and international event planners. Lucky’s Speakeasy bar within QT Canberra is perfect for a post-dinner hangout for energetic delegates. Along with the well-established **Crowne Plaza** and **Novotel** hotels within the convention centre hub, delegates of large events have numerous accommodation options that suit their respective styles and budgets.

The Doma Group of hotels and food and beverage outlets in Barton offer residential conferences an efficient one-contact event experience. **The Hotel Realm, Burberry Hotel and Apartments, Little National Hotel** and the **Brassey Hotel** are located within a block’s walk from each other. With



the main conference facilities located in Hotel Realm, this leafy hub also has over eight food and beverage outlets perfect for different social networking and dinner event components without the use of coach transfers.

Although hungry for business, these precincts’ approach is certainly not aggressive.

HOTELS TO REMEMBER

The newly opened **Vibe Hotel Canberra Airport** is an airport hotel like no other. This fashionable winner of the Emil Sodersten Award for Best Interior Architecture at the Australian Institute of Architects’ National Architecture Awards was designed by Bates Smart. The 191-room hotel uses a design tribute to the circular and axial geometries inspired by those of the Walter Burley Griffin’s designs for Canberra. The atrium-style lobby acts like a living room of a contemporary large apartment and has specific gathering areas for different users. The dark walls of the accommodation corridors offer a sense of calm and privacy whilst bringing a sense of unity and aesthetic harmony.

The **Hotel Kurrajong Canberra** first opened its doors in 1926. It was a hotel school affiliated with the



Vibe Hotel Canberra Airport



Hotel Kurrajong Canberra



famous Cornell University for several years before its multi-million dollar transformation back to the 147-room art-deco styled hotel. Located in Barton and minutes stroll from Lake Burley Griffin, the single-storey hotel offers a real dose of tranquillity with modern day comforts. The service throughout is personable and warm; it echoes the refined spirit of old-school genuine hospitality.

The **Canberra Rex Hotel** is one of Canberra's landmark hotels that recently went through a transformation that promises a dream-away experience in their "cloud" bed in their contemporary and classic elegance styled accommodation rooms. The hotel team gave the buyers first access to their soon-to-be-open glass-covered rooftop bar with a top secret morning tea experience.

THE BUREAU'S FACILITATION

Ellen Fraser, Events Coordinator at the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses who has an upcoming conference in Canberra said, "For me, Canberra is about National Cultural Institutions. Having the opportunity to engage in the beautiful local culture aspects of Australia on a national level like getting exposure to the arts is absolutely amazing. We are really spoilt for choice with venues all over Australia. As a buyer, the engagement with the local convention bureau is important. The Canberra Convention Bureau provides great service to buyers, facilitates what we need and makes recommendations based on their expertise and local knowledge."

