



Riverton Rocks, Western Southland

Events, naturally



One of the new one-bedroom apartments at Ascot Park Hotel, Invercargill

Events related tourism is going strong in Southland, with major sports events, performing arts, association conferences and even corporate incentives all boosting numbers into Invercargill and its surrounds. The region continues to attract high delegate numbers – with people keen to explore natural attractions in the area. However, changing attitudes and practices mean that expenditure at business events still tends to be down on what it was two or three years ago.

Amanda Dowling of Venture Southland, points to the University Games as an occasion which brought 1000 people into town for 22 sporting competitions.

'We had a strong bid for the games and the venues had the ability to deal with all of the different (individual) events. It was an example of the city working together – Sport Southland, Venture Southland, Invercargill Licensing Trust, and the Southland Councils all getting behind lots of different things.

'The city has always worked well together, but it seems to be happening even more now.'

Another successful event for Invercargill – Southland has been the performing arts awards known as PACANZ. 'We have had 2009 and 2010 and we are now bidding for 2011 and 2012. We were encouraged to bid again, which is an indication of the event's success here.'

Dowling says the community is proactive in bidding for conferences and other events. At the

other end of the equation groups are always keen to visit Southland.

'Delegate attendance numbers, even for small events, tend to be higher than the organisers expect.'

She says the natural attractions around the region, such as the Catlins, The Bluff and Stewart Island, Te Anau and Mitre Peak are as big a drawcard as ever.

At the same time, Invercargill offers a lively café, restaurant and bar scene (the new BarLuca has had a quick and positive impact on the night life).

'Invercargill is both a gateway and a destination.'

Dowling says Mayor Tim Shadbolt remains a local attraction in his own right. A group in April took 'Tim's Tour', which started in the local chambers, where delegates met Shadbolt in his mayoral robes, joined him for morning tea and took a guided tour around town.

Developments

Nikki Buckley, marketing executive with Invercargill Licensing Trust points to developments at both the Ascot Park Hotel, recognised as the region's main conference area, and the CBD located Kelvin Hotel.

The Ascot had a new accommodation wing open at the end of March, comprising 12 apartment rooms and eight studios.

'The new wing complements the hotel well because it means we have hotel, motel and apartment accommodation in the one complex,' Buckley points out. 'A lot of conferences have delegates with different requirements and budget levels so this suits well.'

She says The Kelvin has had a total revamp of its restaurant, now called Level 1, giving it a new modern atmosphere.

The Kelvin's conference room is on the sixth



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floor, with impressive views over the city, and caters for groups of up to 120.

'It's been really busy,' says Buckley. 'It is a city centre location, so it's popular with seminars and business meetings. Weddings have really taken off there as well.'

She says the new BarLuca gives groups another offsite venue, especially for small to medium sized functions.

Green Ascot

Meantime, the Ascot Park Hotel has earned a Qualmark Enviro-Gold award (the 100th in the country) for its performance in environmental management. The Qualmark Awards, which also

include Enviro-Silver and Enviro-Bronze, were introduced in 2008 by the Ministry of Tourism to assess the environmental performance of New Zealand businesses.

Ascot Park Hotel manager Peter Ridsdale says he has been working towards this for two years and it has been a positive step forward. 'Sustainability is a mindset about wanting to be better in everything we do in our business and how we can communicate that to our employees and customers.'

Ridsdale and his team have already achieved positive results in terms of sustainability. A recent energy audit highlighted potential savings of \$11,000 to \$17,000 a year by switching to more energy efficient lighting. 'The payback starts immediately the day you put the globe in the hole and turn the switch on!'



Level One Restaurant, The Kelvin Hotel



Sunrise over Half Moon Bay, Stewart Island

Each month more than six tonnes of waste is now sent to the recycling station, rather than to landfill. This initiative has a cost saving of \$100 per tonne, so diverting waste from landfill currently saves the hotel \$600 per month.

A 'Green Conference' option has also been added at the hotel.

'The whole sustainability thing started as something we had to do, but we have embraced it - we find it mentally stimulating.'

Fiscal prudence

Meantime, Ridsdale says the hotel is now receiving more conference business than in 2009. 'There is more happening, we're getting back to

2008 levels and 2008 was a good year. We have some significant national conferences and an international conference on the books, so that's good.'

In saying that, Ridsdale has noticed a shift in attitude from conference customers.

'Things have changed in the market, they are not the same as they used to be.'

He says people are looking hard at the food and beverage component of their business events.

'Small meetings perhaps may not have afternoon tea anymore. We are noticing small cutbacks like that.'

'A lot of this is about not being seen to be frivolous and I would be surprised if any company has not had a discussion about being fiscally prudent.'



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Southland is home to many unique attractions and activities that will be the highlight of any incentive or conference tour.

Southland's natural beauty - coupled with our world class facilities makes the region a very viable destination for any conference or event."

- Tim Shadbolt,
Mayor of Invercargill

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