



Media Release

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Operators honoured at region's premier tourism event

More than 370 people from across the Whitsundays' tourism sector came together on Saturday at Discovery Parks Airlie Beach for the industry's 'night-of-nights' to celebrate the achievements of the region's operators and service providers.

Whitsunday operators and organisations were recognised at the 2018 Whitsunday Tourism Awards which pays tribute to the tremendous contribution made by the region's tourism operators and service providers.

Tourism Whitsundays Chief Executive Officer Natassia Wheeler highlighted the significance of the awards night for the entire tourism sector.

"Tonight is a night of celebration, not just for those who take out gold awards, but for each and every one of you, whom without, we would not have this dynamic and diverse destination," she said.

Mrs Wheeler noted the significant year that lay ahead for the Whitsundays, made possible through industry ties and cooperation.

"Thanks to the collaboration of our industry and government bodies working together, there will be an uplift to our entire region," she said.

Abell Point Marina took home the Major Tourist Attraction award while Red Cat Adventures scooped the Major Tour and Transport Operators award.

The prestigious Bob Porter Award, which acknowledges outstanding contribution by an individual throughout the year, was awarded to Damien Head of Queensland Parks and Wildlife for his ability to bring new ideas to the table to support the Great Barrier Reef and enhance the Whitsundays' tourism offerings.

Mr Head's efforts to successfully raise industry concerns with ministers to gain funding for infrastructure in the Whitsundays was also acknowledged.

For the first time, professional travel organisation Skai International partnered up with Tourism Whitsundays to sponsor the Young Achievers Category, providing a great mentoring opportunity for the overall winner Chloe Autridge, Sales and Marketing Manager, Red Cat Adventures.

There were several VIPs and dignitaries who attended this year's award ceremony, including Tourism Industry Development Minister Kate Jones, Tourism and Events Queensland Chief Executive Officer Leanne Coddington, State Member for Whitsunday Jason Costigan, Member for Dawson George Christensen, Whitsunday Regional Council Mayor Andrew Willcox and Queensland Tourism Industry Council Deputy CEO & General Manager, Business Strategy- Brett Kapernick.

Tourism Industry Development Minister Kate Jones said the Whitsundays was vital to ensuring the growth of Queensland's tourism economy.

“I know the judges had a particularly tough time this year judging the overall winners. This is a testament to the quality of tourism offerings we have in the Whitsundays,” she said.

“We’re partnering with the private sector to deliver millions of dollars’ worth of new tourism infrastructure in this region to ensure we grow this sector in years to come.

“I’d personally like to congratulate all the winners on their achievements who have no doubt set a new benchmark in the pursuit of excellence for the Whitsundays’ tourism industry.”

Whitsunday Regional Council Mayor Andrew Willcox said the awards were a great opportunity to acknowledge the efforts of our amazing tourism stakeholders.

“I applaud their resilience and dedication to the tourism industry to ensure the Whitsundays continues to be voted the most popular tourism destination nationally and internationally,” he said.

While the champagne flowed at the Gala Dinner, guests were also treated to a three-course meal and entertainment from magician and entertainer Matt Hollywood as well as Townsville-based eclectic five-piece, King Social, who brought a blend of hip-hop and soul tunes to the event. Rum Bars’ famous pop-up Tiki Bar was also a big crowd favourite, with the bar serving up delicious mojitos for guests.

Acknowledgments to the events sponsors for their support were made throughout the evening. Discovery Parks, Lion Australia, Hamilton Island, InterContinental Hayman Island, Daydream Island, Place Design Group, Brisbane Airport Corporation, Paradise Outdoor Advertising and Whitsunday Transit were the Gold and Platinum sponsors.

This year was a record-breaking event for the Awards, with 374 in attendance, highlighting the fact it truly is the ‘night-of-nights’ for the regions hardworking and passionate tourism sector.

This year, the awards covered 24 categories which recognise growth in tourism products and services and are based on businesses having a solid business plan, businesses that continually innovate their products and who implement targeted marketing campaigns.

Whitsunday Tourism Awards 2018 – Winners

<u>Category</u>	<u>Award Recipients</u>
Major Tourist Attractions	GOLD – Abell Point Marina(Hall of Fame)
Tourist Attractions	SILVER- Whitsunday Regional Council-Airlie Beach Lagoon Project
Festivals & Events	GOLD – Whitsunday Clipper Race Carnival SILVER – Whitsunday Regional Council- 2018 Great Australian Bites BRONZE – Whitsunday Regional Council- 2017 Schoolies Week
The Steve Irwin Award for Eco Tourism	GOLD- Tall Ship Adventures- Derwent Hunter

Specialised Tourism Services	GOLD- Whitsunday Regional Council- Whitsunday Coast Airport
Visitor Information Services	GOLD- Bowen Visitor Information Centre (Hall of Fame) FINALIST- Airlie Beach Tourism
Business Events Venues	BRONZE- Alani Whitsundays
Major Tour & Transport Operators	GOLD- Red Cat Adventures SILVER- Ocean Rafting BRONZE- Cruise Whitsundays FINALIST- Air Whitsunday Seaplanes
Tour & Transport Operators	GOLD- Whitsunday Jetski Tours SILVER- Whitsunday Segway Tours
Adventure Tourism	GOLD- Red Cat Adventures SILVER- Ocean Rafting BRONZE-Whitsunday Jetski Tours FINALIST- Air Whitsunday Seaplanes FINALIST- Whitsunday Segway Tours
Destination Marketing	GOLD- The Wedding Planners Whitsundays - The Joshua's Whitsunday Wedding Campaign - The Wedding Planners Whitsundays
Tourism Restaurants & Catering Services	GOLD- Hemingway's
Caravan & Holiday Parks	GOLD- BIG4 Adventure Whitsunday Resort SILVER- Queens Beach Tourist Village BRONZE- Discovery Parks Airlie Beach FINALIST- BIG4 Bowen Coral Coast Beachfront Holiday Park
Backpacker Accommodation	GOLD- Magnums Backpackers
Unique Accommodation	GOLD- Cumberland Charter Yachts SILVER- Whitsunday Escape
Standard Accommodation	SILVER- Mantra Club Croc
Deluxe Accommodation	GOLD- Mirage Whitsundays (Hall of Fame)
Luxury Accommodation	GOLD- Heart Hotel and Gallery Whitsundays
Excellence in Sustainable Tourism	GOLD- Whitsunday Segway Tours (Hall of Fame)

New Tourism Business

GOLD- Northerlies Beach Bar and Grill

SILVER- Airlie Beach Day Sailing

Best Non-Tourism Business

GOLD- Inspired Impact

Outstanding Contribution by a volunteer or
volunteer group

GOLD- Bowen Visitor Information Centre &
Booth Volunteers

SILVER- Airlie Beach Volunteer Cruise Ship
Ambassador Program

People's Choice Award

GOLD- BIG4 Adventure Whitsunday Resort

Young Achievers Award

GOLD- Chloe Autridge, Red Cat Adventures

Bob Porter Award Outstanding Contribution by
and Individual

GOLD- Damien Head- Queensland Parks and
Wildlife

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