

WINNERS TAKE ALL

DEPARTURE LOUNGE
Susan Kurosawa

THE Novotel Twin Waters Resort on the Queensland Sunshine Coast, midway through a refurbishment and already looking ultra-smart, was the venue for our annual *The Australian Travel & Tourism Awards* event on November 16.

Master of ceremonies **Graeme Blundell** kept the evening on track as winners in 16 categories were presented with their awards by **Neil Scanlan** of **Accor**, **Simon Pogmore** of Qantas and, on behalf of co-principal sponsor **MasterCard International**, **Geoff Booth** of **Nationwide News**, publisher of *The Australian*.

Our guest of honour was **Jan Jarratt**, parliamentary secretary to Queensland's Tourism, Regional Development and Industry Minister **Desley Boyle**. Jarratt was at pains to point out she was no relation to actor **John Jarratt** of *Wolf Creek* fame, a chap who wouldn't have been the industry's first choice to represent a potential category for backpacker tourism.

(*Departure Lounge* had a chat with John Jarratt a few weeks ago and he reckons *Wolf Creek* has caused a surge in "dark tourism" as British backpackers, in particular, trace the film's ghoulish sites.)

There was no such darkness afoot on the Sunshine Coast. Tourism industry representatives were up-beat about predictions for 2008, despite the strength of the Australian dollar, which is proving a deterrent for visitors from many overseas markets, especially Japan and the US. The theme of the evening was excellence and winners in all categories were chosen from short lists by readers of *The Australian* during a five-week period. Results in all divisions were close, which happily proves that *Lounge* and her selection panel colleagues had come up with the *creme de la creme* of finalists.

They are all winners, notable for their passion, drive and commitment.

The gongs go to:
Best luxury accommodation: Lillianfels Blue Mountains Resort & Spa, NSW.

Best resort accommodation: Cable Beach Club Resort, Broome, Western Australia.

Best value accommodation: Vibe Savoy Hotel, Melbourne.

Best hosted accommodation: Kims Beach Hideaway, Toowoomba, NSW.

Best lodge accommodation: The Lodge at Tarraleah, Tasmania.

Best family focused tourism: Sydney Wildlife World.

Best eco/wilderness experience: Bay of Fires Walk, Tasmania.

Best adventure tour operator: Balloon Aloft, Hunter Valley, NSW.

Best indigenous tourism experience: Anangu Waail, Uluru, Northern Territory.

Best heritage tourism: Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

Best food experience: Stillwater Restaurant and The Mill Providore, Launceston, Tasmania.

Best winery restaurant: The Restaurant at Voyager Estate, Margaret River, WA.

Best destination spa experience: Mineral



Best of the best: Guest of honour Jan Jarratt and presenters Simon Pogmore and Nick Baker, far left, with Melanie Widmer of the Australian War Memorial, Wayne Cross of the Mineral Spa at Peppers Springs Retreat, Eli Cattanch of Cable Beach Club, Maeve O'Meara of Gourmet Safaris, Nigel Harvey of the Winery at Voyager Estate, Katherine Freeman and Shannon Bailey of Sydney Wildlife World, Geoff Booth of Nationwide News, Maureen Fitzgerald of Sydney Seaplanes, Judy Lynne of Balloon Aloft, Chris Hartley of The Lodge at Tarraleah, Nicole Edwards of Kims Beach Hideaway, Robyn Pontynen of Lillianfels, Nicole Willcox of Bay of Fires Walk and Sarah Black of Stillwater Restaurant and The Mill Providore

Spa, Peppers Springs Retreat, Hepburn Springs, Victoria.

Best innovative tourism experience: Sydney Seaplanes Fly & Dine Experiences, NSW.

Best tour operator: Maeve O'Meara, Gourmet Safaris, NSW.

Qantas frequent flyer hotel partner: Sea Temple Resort & Spa, Palm Cove, Queensland.

WINNERS' Circle recipients, each of which won their respective categories in 2005 and 2006, were inducted into this hall of fame, receiving their trophies from **Tourism Australia's Nick Baker**. In the circle: **Lake House**, Daylesford, Victoria; **Voyages Lizard Island**, Queensland; **Noosa Blue**, Sunshine Coast, Queensland; **Freycinet Lodge**, Coles Bay, Tasmania; **Great Southern Railway, The Ghan**, South Australia-NT, and **Quicksilver Cruises**, Queensland.

SIX of this year's winners also won their categories in 2006 and go into the best-of-the-best Winners' Circle category for 2008.

All states and territories scooped awards except, surprisingly, SA, a state *Lounge* had expected to poll well in food and wine categories. There is an especially close-knit community of hoteliers and operators in Tasmania, and most of the Apple Isle contingent sat together on the awards night; their solidarity and enthusiasm

was rewarded with three category wins.

Many of the event's attendees represented small, family-run concerns such as winners **Kims Beach Hideaway** and **Balloon Aloft** in NSW and finalist **Maria Island Walk** in Tasmania: proof that big doesn't necessarily mean best when it comes to our readers. **Maeve O'Meara**, who took out the hotly contested best tour operator category for her Gourmet Safaris, was overwhelmed by her success in a field of giants such as AAT Kings. And there were accolades for new contenders, too, such as the recently opened **Lodge at Tarraleah** in Tasmania, which beat more established finalists in the best lodge accommodation category. Well done to all.

LOUNGE has agreed to be a judge in an exciting new contest sponsored by **Abercrombie & Kent** under the banner of "What is your image of climate change?"

To recognise the importance of climate change and how it affects our landscapes and lifestyles, **Abercrombie & Kent's Climate Change Challenge** is inviting travellers to submit a photo that falls into either of these categories: images capturing the sense and spirit of global landscapes or images capturing the quality of life and living in different global environments. My fellow judges will be *Travel & Indulgence* design and production colleagues and **Sujata Raman**, managing director, **Abercrombie & Kent Australia**. The

winning entry will feature on the cover of *Travel & Indulgence's* December 15-16 issue. There is an entry fee of \$10 and funds raised will go towards one of the worthwhile projects being undertaken by **Friends of Conservation**.

The winner will be awarded a trip for two to Antarctica aboard **MV Minerva**. For further information on **Abercrombie & Kent's** Antarctica itinerary: www.abercrombiekent.com.au. All entries must be received by November 30. To enter: <https://ccc.abercrombiekent.com.au/pages/image-comp.php>.

FIND of the week: **David Hay** and **Michael Speers** of **Thorn Park Country House** in South Australia's Clare Valley have sold to their Jesuit neighbours. The brothers at **St Aloysius College** will extend their Seventh Hill retreat house on to the 21ha Thorn Park property but Speers and Hay will not close their business until October 2008. *Lounge* is not surprised that the immaculate country estate was listed for sale for less than a month; old friends and repeat guests will no doubt be racing to book before Speers and Hay, who were short-listed candidates in the best hosted accommodation category in our *Travel & Tourism Awards* this year, move on. www.thornpark.com.au.

LOUNGE loves: **The Sarojin** at Khao Lak near Phuket has won Asia's leading

boutique hotel accolade for the second consecutive year at the World Travel Awards 2007 (dubbed the Oscars of the travel industry). This was the resort that almost didn't make it — the Boxing Day 2004 tsunami all but razed the site just before the first guests were due — but has become one of southern Thailand's best success stories. Full marks to owners **Andrew** and **Kate Kemp** and their dedicated team. www.sarojin.com; www.uniquetourism.com.

LOUNGE loathes: This week's peeve is from *Travel & Indulgence's* **Barry Oliver** who updates our daily deals online. He's cross about travel offers that "rate mid-teens as children who can share their parents' room free of charge". He reckons "no so-called child of that age would want to be within cooee of their parents". The reverse is true, too.

DEALS OF THE WEEK

Cruise Fiji's beautiful Yasawa Islands and get a second trip free; complimentary flights to Darwin with Kakadu tour; cruise on Cunard's new Queen Victoria and enjoy a bonus night in New Zealand; Queensland island where children stay, play and eat free. **These and other money-saving offers are featured in *Travel & Indulgence's* holiday deals, updated daily, which can be found via our upgraded and direct link.** www.theaustralian.com.au/travel/dd

A LITTLE FLIGHT READING

SURF BIBLE

The Pilgrimage: 50 Places to Surf Before You Die
Edited by Sean Doherty (Viking, \$49.95)



EVERY surfer has an intense relationship with at least a few surf breaks. It starts with the suburban beach where they grew up, then extends to the better breaks interstate or overseas as they embark on the search for perfection.

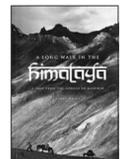
The effect, when they find it, can be a little startling to the uninitiated. D.C. Green describes One Palm Point in Indonesia, for example, as "beyond the realm of the conceivable", and editor Sean Doherty describes the coral reef set-ups in the Mentawai Islands, also in Indonesia, as "geometrically sublime" and the sand bottom of the Super Bank, on the Gold Coast, as "magic dust". It all helps to emphasise how significant these places become to those who experience them at their best.

This is a thorough and well-constructed list, as you'd expect. Doherty edits *Tracks* magazine, where lists are part of a successful publishing formula. Here he has even included one break in Brazil, not for the quality of the waves but for the extraordinary proliferation of beautiful women on the beach. The top surfing writing is a combination of reverence and irreverence, and Doherty is one of the best in the game.

Fred Pawle

NARRATIVE

A Long Walk in the Himalaya
Garry Weare (Transit Lounge, \$32.95)



GARRY Weare and the Himalayas had a difficult start. On his first trek there, to Kashmir on the India-Pakistan border in 1973, he was arrested and jailed.

It didn't put him off: Weare led walks in the region for 13 years and wrote a Lonely Planet guidebook.

The five-month, 2500km trek on which this book is based was eight years from idea to conception.

In May 2003, with a cook and secret stash of rum and whisky, he finally set off from Gaumukh, India, the sacred source of the Ganges, for Gangabal Lake in Kashmir, where the author has a houseboat.

Weare tells his story in a straightforward manner, with none of the high dramas (often imagined) that can accompany this sort of book, and it's all the better for that. The writing rarely rises above workmanlike but it allows the tale to unfold without gloss.

Weare, who lost 15kg during the trip, is English but lives in the NSW southern highlands. You wonder how he could settle down to a normal life after this amazing experience.

Barry Oliver

STYLE GUIDE

Tokyo Chic
Tom Baker, Zoe Jaques and Mariko Usaba Owen (Archipelago, \$35)



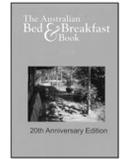
I ROADTESTED this book on a recent trip to Tokyo and it came up trumps in the shopping department (divine stationery stores such as Ginza's Ito-ya; bespoke jewellery from Atelier Shinji and the lowdown on lifestyle malls such as Omotesando Hills), but other inclusions seem more predictable, especially the pages devoted to five-star hotels. The authors have divided Tokyo into districts (by the water and in the hills) and the text ranges beyond the city to Hakone (and Mt Fuji) and Kyoto, but these further afield additions are token, at best.

The chic portfolio includes more than a dozen titles, with more to come. The concept is a good one, but I would like to see sharper writing and a buzzy quick-grab format: dare I say, more in the vein of the competitor *StyleCity* series, also distributed by Thames & Hudson.

Susan Kurosawa

LODGINGS GUIDE

The Australian Bed & Breakfast Book 2008
(Inn Australia, \$19.95)



THE publishers must be striking the right note with lovers of small-scale accommodation: this is the 20th anniversary edition. With hundreds of hosted options, self-contained cottages and farmstays across the country, it is a well-priced and comprehensive guide that includes maps and even a section on how to start a B & B. Each listing includes info on whether there's a pool, notable gardens, wheelchair access, pet-friendly facilities and suchlike. Just don't expect any objective comments, however, as it's very apparent proprietors have provided their blurbs. For example: "Only the ancient poets could find the words to give justice in describing these captivating cottages." I give up then.

Alexandra James

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Summer swings in Sweden

THE INCIDENTAL TOURIST
Heather Caddick



Best-kept secret: Kantareller mushrooms

W E are in Sweden in summer for a family christening in the cloister gardens of Varnhem Abbey, established in 1150 by the Cistercian order from France. It is the final resting place for medieval kings of Sweden, with names such as Erik Eriksson, otherwise known as Lisp and Limp, King Knut, Inge the Elder and Birger Jarl. The cloister gardens, which grew herbs and supplied potions and remedies for the monks, are now ablaze with wild flowers of every colour.

Neat hedges are tangled with budding creepers and butterflies hover. The ancient bell tolls in its shingled tower; the tolling must have been designed to keep the community wide awake as a sonic boom engulfs the valley. Our little princess seems undaunted by the sound and smiles and giggles throughout the ceremony.

Summer in Sweden changes life and behaviour with its extra hours of sunlight and warm, mellow days. During this short reprieve from winter months, Swedes appear to make the most of every moment.

In summer they become hunters and gatherers.

We are walked through the woods at daybreak to pick blackcurrants, blueberries and raspberries, but the real mission is to find the elusive kantareller

mushroom. These are pale yellow and spindly, and have a delicate flavour when gently cooked in butter. Kantareller mushrooms are so prized that secrecy and stealth are used to gather them.

We are told there is one question to which all Swedes will lie, and that is, "Where did you find the kantarellers?"

The perfect Swedish summer meal is fresh perch just caught from the lake served with kantarellers gathered from the woods, followed by sweet ripe blackcurrants and raspberries, freshly picked and baked in a pie.

A bridge forms a gateway to our friends' house in the country and family tradition demands we greet the troll when we cross. This troll has guarded the farm for generations and he lives under the bridge, or so they say. Our son has a healthy respect for trolls, as years ago he decided to loudly curse the troll while riding across the bridge on a mountain bike. He promptly

fell off the bike and the bridge in a spectacular crash. Now that he's a father, I am interested to see he respectfully greets the troll as we drive across.

There is a delightful formality to Swedish social life and all occasions require toasts and announcements. So on arrival we are ushered to a garden terrace to be formally welcomed by the first toast.

A lucid and eloquent reply is expected, so it is wise not to indulge in the mind-blowing aquavit too liberally, as these toasts to friends, countries, sporting heroes and random topics will punctuate the dinner and the entire evening. We depart more than slightly worse for wear.

Swedes love their history, culture and traditions, and nowhere is this more apparent than at the Tuesday evening concerts held at Skansen, one of Stockholm's 14 islands. Crowds queue all afternoon to take part in the program of songs that traces folklore through the centuries.

Families gather to sing together, led by Swedish celebrities, and members of the Swedish royal family can be seen in the audience. Television viewer ratings tip the scales all over Sweden and it seems the whole country is proudly taking part in this celebration of summer and of life.

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