



Hunter Regional Tourism Organisation

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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Tourism winners shine in the 2009 Hunter Regional Awards for Excellence in Tourism**

Tourism professionals from the Hunter region gathered at Crowne Plaza Hunter Valley for the prestigious 2009 *Hunter Valley Golf and Country Club* Hunter Regional Tourism Awards for Excellence in Tourism last night. The awards ceremony and gala dinner celebrated the industry's leading contributors and recognised the high standards of the Hunter tourism industry.

Winners were announced in 23 categories with an additional five distinctions being recognised. These outstanding results reflect the regions strong draw as a tourism destination and the professionalism and world-class nature of the Hunter's tourism products and services.

For the third year running, the judging was chaired by Mr. Allan Ray O.A.M. Mr. Ray was one of the founding directors of Hunter Regional Tourism Organisation. Mr. Ray said "This year's award submissions were again of a very high standard. It is pleasing to see the level of professionalism in our industry."

The most prestigious categories of the night were 'Outstanding Contribution to Regional Tourism by an Individual' and the 'Young Achiever'. These awards recognise the significant contribution these people have made to the success of Tourism in the Hunter.

Lisa Campbell took out the award for 'Outstanding Contribution to Regional Tourism by an Individual', for her significant contributions to the industry as a teacher in tourism for the Hunter Institute of TAFE, as well as several years as a judge at both the state and regional awards.

The 'Young Achiever' was awarded to Emma Threadgate from Gloucester a committed and passionate advocate for the tourism industry. Emma has been instrumental in introducing and encouraging operators in the region to take up on-line reservation systems, in addition to her contributions to the Gloucester Visitor Information Centre.

First time winners were announced in the categories of Standard Accommodation, Health & Wellbeing Tourism, Hosted Accommodation, Deluxe Accommodation, Tourist & Caravan Parks, and Tourism Marketing, who were won by Scone Motor Inn, Shoal Bay Resort & Spa, Christina's Bed & Breakfast, The Vintry Country House & Vineyard, Big4 Lake Macquarie Monterey Tourist Park and Lake Macquarie Tourism, respectively.

Another first was the introduction of a new category in this year's awards: 'Health and Wellbeing Tourism' with Shoal Bay Resort and Spa winning this category. Hunter Tourism believe that this is a growing sector for tourism in an increasingly health conscious society and strongly feel this recognition should be expanded to both the state and national awards.

Lake Macquarie Tourism received the 'Tourism Marketing' award for their new brand campaign. The 'Love the Lake' Campaign launched in January 2009 was developed to build the profile of the Lake Macquarie and grow visitor numbers to the region and has been an outstanding success.

This year's 'Ecotourism' award was won by Blackbutt Reserve for the second year, and was again recognised for making valuable contributions to sustainable, green tourism in the region.



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Somewhere Unique located in the picturesque Wollombi Valley was also similarly recognised for its eco-friendly approach to accommodation when it received the 'Unique Accommodation' Award.

The 'Major Tour and Transport Operators' award was taken out by Moonshadow Cruises for the second consecutive year who continue to offer tourists a range of harbor related activities in the Newcastle and Port Stephens areas.

Surprise winner The Vintry Country House and Vineyard won the award for 'Deluxe Accommodation' an award historically won by larger hotels in the region. The Vintry owner Greg Mincher was commended for his high quality yet small business contribution to the category.

This year's awards were particularly special for Shoal Bay Resort and Spa, Tower Lodge, Bimbadgen Estate, Hunter Valley Gardens, Boutique Wine Tours and Crowne Plaza Newcastle who were inducted into the Hall of Fame for outstanding excellence in Tourism. These businesses were inducted due to winning for three consecutive years at the Hunter Tourism Awards and are recognised as excelling in the sector.

All of the winners tonight now go onto become finalists in the State Tourism Awards to be held in Sydney on 19<sup>th</sup> November.

Sponsors of the night continue to throw their support behind the vibrant local tourism industry. Special thanks go to our *Naming Rights Sponsor* Hunter Valley Golf and Country Club and our Gold Sponsors: Hunter Valley Wine Country Tourism, Out of the Square Media, Videoplus, Bluetongue Brewery and The Event House.

Hunter Regional Tourism Organisation CEO, Sheridan Ferrier, said "It's fantastic to see Hunter Tourism Operators being rewarded and I'm particularly pleased for the individuals behind the businesses who work so hard to make it all happen. It was especially good to see some new winners this year, as this demonstrates growth in the tourism industry," she said.

The awards ceremony sent an unambiguous message, showcasing the regions dedicated tourism professionals and highlighting the Hunter as an exceptional travel destination.

## 2009 Winners by Region

### Hunter Valley

Tower Lodge  
Esca Bimbadgen  
Tocal Homestead  
Bimbadgen Estate  
Somewhere Unique  
Hunter Valley Gardens  
Boutique Wine Tours  
The Vintry Country House & Vineyard  
TAFE NSW- Hunter Valley Hotel Academy

### Upper Hunter Country

Scone Motor Inn

### Barrington Tops

Emma Threadgate

### Lake Macquarie

Christina's B & B  
Lake Macquarie Tourism  
Belmont 16ft Sailing Club  
Big4 Lake Macquarie Monterey Tourist Park

### Newcastle

Lisa Campbell  
Newcastle Airport  
Blackbutt Reserve  
Crowne Plaza Newcastle

### Port Stephens

Moonshadow Cruises  
Port Stephens Parasailing  
Shoal Bay Resort and Spa

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***Following is the profile of the Winners in 23 categories.***

**Category – Tourist Attraction**

**Winner – Hunter Valley Gardens**

**2009 HALL OF FAME**

Discover Hunter Valley Gardens featuring over 60 acres of spectacular international display gardens with sensational sights, colours and fragrances. In the heart of the Hunter Valley vineyards, guests can explore over 8 kilometres of easy walking paths through the 12 themed gardens. One visit simply won't be enough!

**Category – Festivals and Events**

**Winner – Hunter Valley Gardens – Christmas Lights Spectacular**

The Christmas Lights Spectacular at the Hunter Valley Gardens helped to spread festive cheer to thousands of locals and visitors from far and wide this season. Over \$17,500 was raised for various local charities and attendance figures tripled from the previous year.

**Award of distinction- Lovedale Long lunch**

**Category – Ecotourism**

**Winner – Blackbutt Reserve**

Blackbutt Reserve, located within the heart of Newcastle, is a conservational, educational and recreational reserve. It includes award winning wildlife exhibits, stunning walking trails and peaceful picnic areas. The team at Blackbutt Reserve strives towards preserving the past, protecting the present and ensuring the future.

**Award of distinction- Hunter Wetlands Centre**

**Category – Heritage and Cultural Tourism**

**Winner – Tocal Homestead**

Tocal Homestead, built in 1841, is the centrepiece of a collection of authentic colonial structures. Visitors discover fascinating stories of bushrangers, businessmen, architects and graziers woven through the highs and lows of life on this property.

**Category – Specialised Tourism Services**

**Winner – Newcastle Airport**

Newcastle Airport is committed to tourism in the Hunter, and offers an easy gateway to eight very diverse tourism regions within an hour drive from the Airport. As a vibrant regional tourism partner, Newcastle Airport develops inbound marketing partnerships with tourism and airlines to encourage tourism growth.

**Category – Meetings and Business Tourism**

**Winner – Crowne Plaza, Newcastle**

**2009 HALL OF FAME**

Crowne Plaza Newcastle is located directly on the Newcastle foreshore promenade and is an all suite hotel offering 6 meeting rooms for up to 220 delegates, on-site audio-visual technical support, a comprehensive "Meeting Success" program and video-conferencing capabilities.

**Category – Major Tour & Transport Operators**

**Winner – Moonshadow Cruises**

Moonshadow Cruises offer four magic ways to explore Port Stephens and Newcastle harbours with the regions number one cruise company.

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**Category – Tour and Transport Operators**

**Winner – Boutique Wine Tours**

**2009 HALL OF FAME**

Offering the Hunter Valley's most personalised day tour experience, Boutique Wine Tours depart Sydney daily for the boutique wineries of Australia's oldest and most beautiful wine region.

**Category – Adventure Tourism**

**Winner – Port Stephens Parasailing**

Port Stephens Parasailing provides the most awe-inspiring view of the marine wonderland below, the parasailing trip can take high flyers either solo or tandem soaring up to 150m above the water enabling parasailers to see from a rare and fascinating angle.

**Category – Tourism Marketing**

**Winner – Lake Macquarie Tourism**

Lake Macquarie Tourism has launched a new and exciting tourism brand together with a \$90,000 marketing campaign including online and collateral. The new brand uses the appealing and emotive marketing tag line "LOVE THE LAKE". The brand captures the reality and beauty of the area focusing on the natural environment including the lake, beach and mountains. At the same time, the brand assists in bringing Lake Macquarie alive with a sense of fun and excitement.

**Category – Tourism Education and Training**

**Winner – Shoal Bay Resort & Spa**

**2009 HALL OF FAME**

Shoal Bay Resort & Spa is passionate about developing a professional service culture within Port Stephens, with a strategic business focus to support Tourism as a key economic driver. The diversity of employment opportunities as well as the dedication and focus on the personal development program for employees positions Shoal Bay Resort & Spa as a leading employer within the Tourism Industry.

**Category – Tourism Restaurants & Catering Services**

**Winner – Esca Bimbadgen**

Esca Bimbadgen is dedicated to the art of food & wine matching and education, Esca's modern Australian cuisine, fresh local and home grown produce and spectacular views make for a truly memorable dining experience.

**Award of distinction- Marga Vineyard**

**Category – Tourism Wineries**

**Winner – Bimbadgen Estate**

**2009 HALL OF FAME**

Situated high on a hill overlooking the Hunter Valley, Bimbadgen Estate is the Hunter's most picturesque winery. Bimbadgen Estate is a market leader for tourism in the area, offering a full wine educational experience, open plan winemaking facility, contemporary Cellar Door, award-winning restaurant – Esca Bimbadgen, concert amphitheatre and accommodation all in one location.

**Category – Hosted Accommodation**

**Winner – Christina's Bed and Breakfast**

Christina's B&B opened in September 2007 as a traditional hosted Bed and Breakfast on the waterfront of Dora Creek, Lake Macquarie. Hosted by Tina Jaffray and John Mason, Christina's B&B offers a warm environment to relax and enjoy.

**Award of Distinction – Segenhoe Inn**

**Category – Unique Accommodation**

**Winner – Somewhere Unique**

Located on a 20-acre bush land property in Wollombi, Somewhere Unique offers discerning couples luxurious, romantic, architect designed accommodation, in a peaceful and private rural environment, incorporating environmentally friendly concepts.

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**Category – Standard Accommodation**

**Winner – Scone Motor Inn**

Scone Motor Inn & Conference centre is surrounded by picturesque thoroughbred Horse studs. The property includes 18 rooms that have been fully refurbished.

**Category – Deluxe Accommodation**

**Winner – The Vintry Country House & Vineyard**

The Vintry offers boutique, luxury, self contained accommodation for up to 8 people in the heart of Australia's Hunter Valley Wine Country. A unique location, secluded and private, set in the foot slopes of the magnificent Brokenback Range.

**Category – Luxury Accommodation**

**Winner – Tower Lodge**

**2009 HALL OF FAME**

Tower Lodge is the only truly unique, small, five-star luxury hotel in the Hunter Valley. As an exclusive boutique retreat hosting no more than 24 guests the spacious rooms feature elegant interiors and compliment the picturesque surrounds. Luxury and decadence awaits at this premier location.

**Category – Registered Clubs**

**Winner – Belmont 16ft Sailing Club**

Belmont 16ft Sailing Club is located on the shores of Lake Macquarie. The venue offers state of the art dining, gaming & function facilities, and is also host to a number of National & International Sailing regattas. The Club has been established since 1920, and has over 28,000 members.

**Category – Health and Wellbeing Tourism**

**Winner – Shoal Bay Resort and Spa**

This premier 4 ½ star resort is the perfect retreat for guests seeking a health and wellbeing escape, offering everything one needs to reenergize mind, body & spirit.

**Category – Tourist & Caravan Parks**

**Winner – Big 4 Monterey Park Tourist Park**

Big4 Lake Macquarie Monterey Tourist Park is nestled on the southern shores of Lake Macquarie. Family owned and managed, Monterey has a friendly atmosphere. The magical waterfront location on Lake Macquarie, abundant & friendly wildlife, local marina and township shopping provide an idyllic environment in which one just can't help but relax.

**Award of Distinction: Halifax Holiday Park**

**Category – Young Achiever Award**

**Winner – Emma Threadgate**

Since her commencement at the Gloucester Visitor Information Centre in 2000, Emma Threadgate has demonstrated a commitment and passion for tourism in the Gloucester and the Hunter. As Tourism Officer, Emma excels in providing not only visitors but locals and volunteers with friendly, knowledgeable and enthusiastic service and advice. Emma has been instrumental in introducing and encouraging operators to take up the on-line reservation system, providing training in keeping their website information current, providing back up as well as assisting with the smooth running of the visitor information centre.

**Category – Outstanding Contribution by an Individual**

**Winner – Lisa Campbell**

Lisa Campbell has made significant contributions to tourism in the Hunter both as a teacher in tourism for the Hunter Institute of TAFE as well as several years experience as a judge and mentor for the State Tourism Awards. Lisa possesses a depth of experience in tourism education, marketing and communications in both Australia and overseas. She is passionate about the Hunter region and well deserving of this award.

For further information/quotes, contact Sheridan Ferrier, CEO Hunter Tourism on 0437 478 393