



## MEDIA RELEASE

### Hunter Tourism Award winners announced!

#### 2008 HIGHTRADE Hunter Regional Awards for Excellence in Tourism

Tourism professionals from the Hunter region gathered at Newcastle City Hall for the prestigious 2008 HIGHTRADE Hunter Regional Tourism Awards for Excellence in Tourism last night. The awards ceremony and gala dinner recognised and celebrated the industry's leading contributors.

Winners were announced in 31 categories and 9 Distinctions were also awarded. These outstanding results reflect the level of professionalism and high standards of the Hunter tourism industry.

For the second 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, and Chairman for a number of years. Today he owns a retail garden nursery, gift shop and café at Anna Bay, named 'SMARTY PLANTS'. 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 'The Outstanding Contribution to Regional Tourism' and 'Outstanding Contribution to Regional Tourism by an Individual'. These awards recognise the significant contribution these people have provided to the success of Tourism in the Hunter. **David Mulham** took out the award for 'Outstanding Contribution to Regional Tourism by an Individual'. At a regional level, he held the role of Chairman of Hunter Tourism for an unprecedented five consecutive years and during that period he oversaw the development and implementation of the regional tourism plan. At the state level, he was the inaugural Chair of the combined Regional Tourism Organisations – a group that meant for the first time all NSW RTO's were working cooperatively on areas of common interest and were speaking with one voice to Government on issues that impact regional tourism in this state, including the response to the O'Neil review into tourism in NSW.

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Outgoing Hunter Tourism Board of Director **John Rydge** was acknowledged for his 'Outstanding Contribution to Regional Tourism' and his dedication to the Barrington Tops area. John was instrumental in the area receiving a \$500k federal government grant last year.

The 'Young Achiever' award went to **Matthew vanderWall**, a member of the Newcastle Tourism team and a committed and passionate advocate for the tourism industry. His knowledge of the tourism industry in Newcastle is unrivalled, and he has built a strong rapport with both operators and colleagues from across the Hunter Region.

Several first time winners were announced at this year's awards including Newcastle Airport for 'Specialised Tourism Services'; Chaucer Palms B&B for 'Hosted Accommodation'; **Port Stephens Parasailing** for 'Adventure Tourism'; **Bitter and Twisted International Boutique Beer Festival**, winning the 'Festivals and Events' category and **Tocal Homestead** for the 'Heritage and Cultural Tourism' category, a fitting recognition for Director of Tocal Agricultural Centre Dr Cameron Archer, who has been with the organisation for 32 years.

Lake Macquarie operators fared well in the awards with several winners from the area including **Christina's B&B** for the title of best 'New Tourism Development'; **Lake Macquarie Visitor Information Centre**, for 'Visitor Information and Services', **Comfort Inn Lake Macquarie** for 'Standard Accommodation' and another new winner **Belmont 16ft Sailing Club**, which took out the 'Registered Clubs' award.

Other winners on the night included **Shoal Bay Resort and Spa**, which was named the winner of the 'Deluxe Accommodation' award for 2008, in addition to receiving the 'Tourism Education and Training' award for the second consecutive year.

**Crowne Plaza Hunter Valley** was awarded the 'Tourism Marketing' award as well as the 'Tourism Restaurants and Catering Services' award for its restaurant, **Redsalt**. Sister resort, **Crowne Plaza Newcastle**, was again presented with the winning award for 'Meetings and Business Tourism' after also taking out this title at the 2007 awards.

Following its win at the state tourism awards last year, **Bimbadgen Estate** continues to impress, taking out the 'Tourism Wineries' award for the third year running.

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The Luxury Accommodation award was again received by the five star **Tower Lodge**, the exquisite 12 guestroom retreat in the Hunter Valley.

It was also encouraging to see **Blackbutt Reserve** receive this year's 'Ecotourism' award. The reserve has made a remarkable comeback, continually striving to achieve environmentally sustainable tourism, despite the damage it sustained in the wake of last year's June floods. The *Hunter Wetlands Centre* received a Distinction in this category for its efforts.

**Boutique Wine Tours**, which offer luxury wine, cheese and chocolate tasting tours from Sydney to the Hunter Valley, was a second time winner of the 'Tour and Transport Operators' award. The 'Major Tour and Transport Operators' award was taken out by **Moonshadow Cruises**, with previous winners, *Northern Highland Travel*, receiving a Distinction in this category.

**Hunter Valley Gardens** once again took out the award for 'Tourist Attractions' as did **Banjos Bushland Retreat** taking out the award for 'Unique Accommodation'.

Sponsors of the night continue to throw their support behind the vibrant local tourism industry. Special mention goes to our *Naming Rights Sponsor* HIGHTRADE; *Platinum Sponsor* Videoplus; *Gold Sponsors*: Hunter Valley Wine Country Tourism, Blue Star Catering, Bluetongue Brewery, The Event House; and Out of the Square Media.

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 verdict is in: the Hunter is an exceptional destination, with a remarkable array of tourism stars, epitomised by the region's dedicated professionals who were last night recognised in these awards.

**For further information or quotes contact:**

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## Following is the profile of the Winners in 31 categories.

### Category – Tourist Attraction

#### Winner – Hunter Valley Gardens

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 – Bitter & Twisted International Boutique Beer Festival

The 'Bitter & Twisted International Boutique Beer Festival' was held on the first weekend in November in Morpeth in the Hunter Valley. The Festival featured stalls tasting over 50 specialty beers, perfectly matched cuisine, fabulous shopping, food and beer matching, meet the brewer sessions and a nationally recognised entertainment program.

### 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. This historic site is located in the Hunter Valley, 15 minutes from Maitland. Visitors discover fascinating stories of bushrangers, businessmen, architects and graziers woven through the highs and lows of life on this property.

#### Award of distinction – Maitland Gaol

### Category – Specialised Tourism Services

#### Winner – Newcastle Airport

Newcastle Airport is committed to tourism in the Hunter region, providing a 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 airlines and tourism to encourage tourism growth.

#### Award of distinction – Hunter Valley Events

### Category – Visitor Information & Services

#### Winner – Lake Macquarie Visitor Information Centre

Central to Lake Macquarie Tourism is the Visitor Information Centre, located on the Pacific Highway at Swansea. The Lake Macquarie Visitor Information Centre is an Accredited Visitor's Centre through the Visitor Information Network, and can use the italicised "i" symbol in marketing and visitor information service provision.

### Category – Meetings and Business Tourism

#### Winner – Crowne Plaza, Newcastle

Crowne Plaza Newcastle, located directly on the Newcastle foreshore, is The Place to Meet for meetings, launches and presentations. This all suite hotel offers 6 meeting rooms for up to 220 delegates, on-site audio-visual technical support, and a comprehensive "Meeting Success" program created to allow meeting planners and conference attendees to focus on their business objectives.

#### Award of distinction – The Sebel Kirkton Park Hunter Valley

### Category – Major Tour & Transport Operators

#### Winner – Moonshadow Cruises

Moonshadow Cruises specialises in whale watching cruises, and dolphin watching cruises based in Port Stephens and Newcastle, NSW. Moonshadow Cruises have 3 vessels offering a range of cruises daily. Twilight dinner cruises are also available, as well as private charters, gala dinners and team building. We can design a cruise to suit all.



**Award of Distinction – Northern Highland Travel**

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**Category – Tour and Transport Operators**

**Winner – Boutique Wine Tours**

Boutique Wine Tours offer the Hunter Valley's most personalised day tour. Departing Sydney with a maximum of just 14 people, our flexible itinerary is tailored every day, with a focus on the Hunter's boutique wineries. Fabulous Guides, luxury Mercedes vehicles and great lunch options make this the ultimate Hunter experience.

**Category – Adventure Tourism**

**Winner – Port Stephens Parasailing**

Port Stephens Parasailing, located in Port Stephens NSW, 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 – Crowne Plaza Hunter Valley**

Crowne Plaza Hunter Valley is located two hours North of Sydney, surrounded by the Brokenback Mountains. A new resort with golf, spa, gym, tennis courts, kids club, two restaurants and two bars. With the latest in technology, meeting facilities for up to 400 delegates. Offering both hotel bedrooms and two-bedroom villa accommodation.

**Category – Tourism Education and Training**

**Winner – Shoal Bay Resort & Spa**

Shoal Bay Resort & Spa successfully caters for travellers, holiday makers or conference delegates by blending charm and warmth with sophistication and hospitality. The resort is passionate about developing a professional service culture within Port Stephens, with a strategic business focus to support Tourism as a key economic driver.

**Category – Tourism Restaurants & Catering Services**

**Winner – Redsalt Restaurant- Crowne Plaza Hunter Valley**

Crowne Plaza Hunter Valley is located two hours North of Sydney, surrounded by the Brokenback Mountains. Redsalt Restaurant at Crowne Plaza Hunter Valley focuses on the best quality produce matched with a wine experience that offers something for all palates.

**Category – Tourism Wineries**

**Winner – Bimbadgen Estate**

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 – Chaucer Palms Bed and Breakfast**

Chaucer Palms offers boutique 5 star quality bed and breakfast accommodation, employing ultra modern architecture and contemporary cutting edge design. The three Queen suites have double spas and balconies, the King suite has large ensuite and courtyard. Located in Hamilton, Chaucer Palms offer a new dimension in luxury accommodation in the Hunter region.

**Award of Distinction – Wilderness Grove**

**Category – Unique Accommodation**

**Winner – Banjos Bushland Retreat**

Banjos Bushland Retreat is three 5 star lodges nestled in private bushland offering un-hosted, luxurious and secluded accommodation.

**Award of Distinction – The Vintry Country House and Vineyard**

**Category – Standard Accommodation**

**Winner – Comfort Inn Lake Macquarie**

Comfort Inn Lake Macquarie is situated between the shores of Lake Macquarie and Blacksmiths Beach, just 20 minutes south of Newcastle's CBD. It features a saltwater pool, outdoor spa, free wireless internet, in-house movies and home style meals. Discounts apply for corporate travellers, seniors and auto club members.



**Category – Deluxe Accommodation**

**Winner – Shoal Bay Resort & Spa**

Shoal Bay Resort & Spa is located on the white sands of Shoal Bay, by the entrance to Port Stephens, overlooking the volcanic headlands and spectacular bay. This ultimate 4.5 star beachfront resort features 200 luxury apartments, 4 restaurants, 5 bars, the iconic County Club Hotel and exclusive Aqua Spa.

**Award of Distinction – Hermitage Lodge**

**Category – Luxury Accommodation**

**Winner – Tower Lodge**

Tower Lodge is the only truly unique, small, five-star luxury hotel in the Hunter Valley wine region. 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 – New Tourism Development**

**Winner – Christina's B & B**

On the Lake Macquarie waterfront is a NEW 4 ½ star Bed and Breakfast – Christina's. It offers quiet private rooms and gourmet breakfast with espresso coffee in the sunny cafe style lounge.

**Award of Distinction – Somewhere Unique**

**Category – Registered Clubs**

**Winner – Belmont 16ft Sailing Club**

Belmont 16ft Sailing Club is located on the shores of Lake Macquarie, Newcastle. 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 – AHA Young Achiever Award**

**Winner – Matthew vanderWall**

A member of the Newcastle Tourism team since 2003, Matthew Vanderwall is a committed and passionate advocate for the tourism industry in Newcastle and the Hunter Region. His knowledge of the tourism industry in Newcastle is unrivalled, and he has built a strong rapport with both operators and colleagues from across the Hunter Region.

**Category – Outstanding Contribution to Regional Tourism**

**Winner – John Rydge**

Outgoing Hunter Tourism Board of Director John Rydge was instrumental in the area receiving a \$500k federal government grant last year.

**Category – Outstanding Contribution by an Individual**

**Winner – David Mulham**

At a regional level, David held the role of Chairman of Hunter Tourism for an unprecedented five consecutive years and during that period he oversaw the development and implementation of the regional tourism plan. At the state level, he was the inaugural Chair of the combined Regional Tourism Organisations – a group that meant for the first time all NSW RTO's were working cooperatively on areas of common interest and were speaking with one voice to Government on issues that impact regional tourism in this state, including the response to the O'Neil review into tourism in NSW.

**Sheridan Ferrier, CEO, Hunter Regional Tourism Organisation**

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<b>RESULTS</b>			
<b>2008 Hunter Region Awards for Excellence in Tourism</b>			
<b>CATEGORY NAME</b>	<b>WINNER NAME</b>	<b>CONTACT 22<sup>nd</sup> August ONLY</b>	<b>SPONSOR</b>
Tourist Attractions	Hunter Valley Gardens	Alena Pople, Marketing Communications Co-coordinator, 02 4998 4000 <a href="mailto:alenap@hvg.com.au">alenap@hvg.com.au</a>	Maitland City Council
Festivals and Events	Bitter & Twisted Boutique Beer Festival	Rachel MacLucas, Tourism Manager, 02 4931 2888, <a href="mailto:RachelM@maitland.nsw.gov.au">RachelM@maitland.nsw.gov.au</a>	Peppers
Ecotourism	Blackbutt Reserve	Brad West, Supervisor 02 4904 3344, <a href="mailto:bwest@ncc.nsw.gov.au">bwest@ncc.nsw.gov.au</a>	Hunter Prop Specialists
Heritage & Cultural Tourism	Total Homestead	Sandy Earle, Homestead Coordinator, 02 4939 8901 <a href="mailto:sandra.earle@dpi.nsw.gov.au">sandra.earle@dpi.nsw.gov.au</a>	Hunter Valley Gardens
Specialised Tourism Services	Newcastle Airport	Rebecca Wilson, Marketing and Communication Coordinator, 02 49289811 <a href="mailto:rwilson@newcastleairport.com.au">rwilson@newcastleairport.com.au</a>	Hunter Valley Wine Country Tourism
Visitor Information & Services	Lake Macquarie Visitor Information Centre	Bianca Gilmore, Senior Tourism Marketing Officer, 02 49210743, <a href="mailto:bgilmore@lakemac.nsw.gov.au">bgilmore@lakemac.nsw.gov.au</a>	Your Hunter Valley Wedding Planner
Meetings & Business Tourism	Crowne Plaza Newcastle	Kerrie Arthurson, Marketing Manager, 02 49075000 <a href="mailto:K.Arthurson@ihg.com">K.Arthurson@ihg.com</a>	Harris Wheeler Lawyers
Major Tour & Transport Operator	Moonshadow Cruises	Janene Rees, Sales and Business Development Manager, 02 4984 9388 <a href="mailto:sales@moonshadow.com.au">sales@moonshadow.com.au</a>	Greg Tapp Printing
Tour and Transport Operators	Boutique Wine Tours	Annalise Andrews, Owner, 02 9499 5400 <a href="mailto:annalise@serendipityjourneys.com">annalise@serendipityjourneys.com</a>	Telstra
Adventure Tourism	Port Stephens Parasailing	Renee Jurgielan, Sales and Marketing, 02 4982 2808 <a href="mailto:renee@portstephensparasailing.com.au">renee@portstephensparasailing.com.au</a>	Cruise Hunter
Tourism Marketing	Crowne Plaza Hunter Valley	Caroline Lyttle, Business Development Manager, 02 49910900, <a href="mailto:caroline.lyttle@ihg.com">caroline.lyttle@ihg.com</a>	Enigma
Tourism Education and Training	Shoal Bay Resort and Spa	Bernadette Reynolds, HR Manager 02 4984 8107 <a href="mailto:bernadette.reynolds@shoalbayresort.com">bernadette.reynolds@shoalbayresort.com</a>	Newcastle University
Tourism Restaurants & Catering Services	Redsalt Restaurant	Matt Anderson, Food and Beverage Manager, 02 499 10900 <a href="mailto:matt.anderson@ihg.com">matt.anderson@ihg.com</a>	Blue Star Catering
Tourism Wineries	Bimbadgen Estate	Karen Evans, Marketing Executive, 02 49987585 <a href="mailto:kevans@bimbadgen.com.au">kevans@bimbadgen.com.au</a>	Hunter Boutique Accommodation
Hosted Accommodation	Chaucer Palms B & B	Kris Staniland, Owner/ Manager, 02 49610111, <a href="mailto:enquiries@chaucerpalms.com.au">enquiries@chaucerpalms.com.au</a>	Muswellbrook Shire Council



CATEGORY NAME	WINNER NAME	CONTACT 22 <sup>nd</sup> August ONLY	SPONSOR
Unique Accommodation	Banjós Bushland Retreat	Malcolm and Jenny Patterson, Owners, 02 9403 3388 <a href="mailto:malcolm@banjosretreat.com.au">malcolm@banjosretreat.com.au</a>	The Event House
Standard Accommodation	Comfort Inn Lake Macquarie	Brooke Mills, Owner/manager, 02 49458622, <a href="mailto:cilm@bigpond.com">cilm@bigpond.com</a>	Paul Foley Lightmoods
Deluxe Accommodation	Shoal Bay Resort & Spa	Harlan Marriott, Sales and Marketing Director, 02 4984 8181 <a href="mailto:harlan.marriott@shoalbayresort.com">harlan.marriott@shoalbayresort.com</a>	Newcastle Airport
Luxury Accommodation	Tower Lodge	Emma Armstrong, Hotel Manager, 02 4998 7022 <a href="mailto:emma@towerestate.com">emma@towerestate.com</a>	Tourism NSW
New Tourism Development	Christina's B&B	Tina Jaffray and John Mason, Owners, 02 4973 4088 <a href="mailto:tina@christinas.com.au">tina@christinas.com.au</a>	Out of the Square Media
Registered Clubs	Belmont 16ft Sailing Club	Gordon Maxwell, Second Executive Officer, 02 4945 7740 <a href="mailto:g.maxwell@16s.com.au">g.maxwell@16s.com.au</a>	Bluetongue Brewery
Outstanding Contribution to Regional Tourism	John Rydge	0429 665 977 <a href="mailto:winterhill@bigpond.com">winterhill@bigpond.com</a>	HIGHTRADE
Outstanding Contribution by an Individual	David Mulham	0409 248 577 <a href="mailto:davidm@cadasar.com.au">davidm@cadasar.com.au</a>	Videoplus
AHA Young Achiever	Matthew vanderWall- Tourism Services Coordinator	02 4974-2883 <a href="mailto:mvanderwall@ncc.nsw.gov.au">mvanderwall@ncc.nsw.gov.au</a>	Australian Hotel's Association
Outstanding Contribution to Tourism in Newcastle	Debera Mackenzie	Business Development Manager 02 4929 5181 <a href="mailto:Manager@noahsonthebeach.com.au">Manager@noahsonthebeach.com.au</a>	Newcastle City Council
Outstanding Contribution to Tourism in Lake Macquarie	Robert Kemmis	Owner Kemey's Mountain Hideaway 02 4977-2525 <a href="mailto:kemeys@idl.net.au">kemeys@idl.net.au</a>	Lake Macquarie Tourism
Outstanding Contribution to Tourism in Maitland Hunter Valley	The Enderle Family, St Helena, Lochinvar	Marika or Elizabeth Enderle 02 4930 7207	Maitland City Council
Outstanding Contribution to Tourism in Hunter Valley Wine Country	Bob Algie	02 4933 5164 <a href="mailto:basurvey@bigpond.net.au">basurvey@bigpond.net.au</a>	Cessnock City Council
Outstanding Contribution to Tourism in Singleton Hunter Valley	Broke Fordwich Tourism Association	Wendy Lawson 02 6579 1334 <a href="mailto:finewines@catherinevale.com.au">finewines@catherinevale.com.au</a>	Singleton City Council
Outstanding Contribution to Tourism in Upper Hunter County	Murrurundi Visitor Information Centre	Carolyn Farrow 02 6546 6446 <a href="mailto:murrurundivic@upperhunter.nsw.gov.au">murrurundivic@upperhunter.nsw.gov.au</a>	Upper Hunter Tourism
Outstanding Contribution to Tourism in Barrington Tops	Wendy Hughes	Gloucester Shire Council Tourism Manager 02 6558 1408 <a href="mailto:Wendy.Hughes@gloucester.nsw.gov.au">Wendy.Hughes@gloucester.nsw.gov.au</a>	Barrington Tops Tourism

For further information contact Sheridan Ferrier, CEO, Hunter Regional Tourism Organisation  
Tel: 0437 478 393 [sheridan@huntertourism.com](mailto:sheridan@huntertourism.com)

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