

# Launceston punches above its weight with its diverse and high quality MICE venues

FOR a city of its size, Launceston packs a mighty MICE punch. From convict-built properties on World Heritage sites to spruced up old tram sheds and award-winning wineries, Tasmania's second city is bristling with spacious venues both on the inside and outside, writes John Newton.

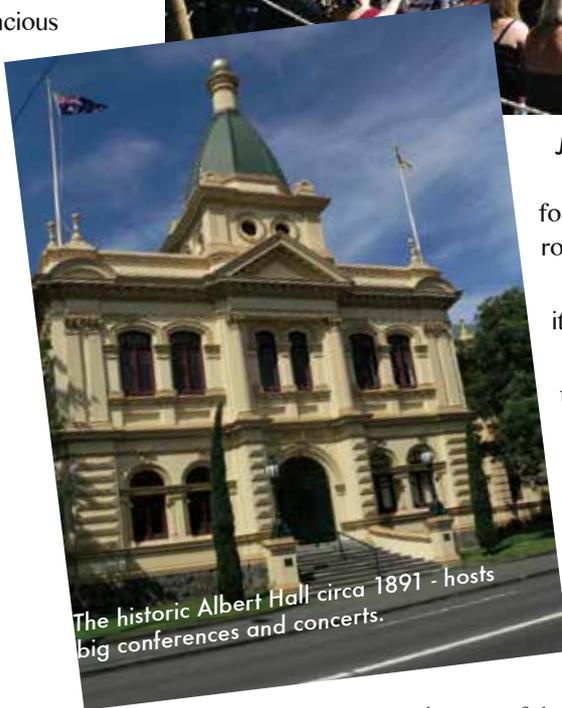
While Country Club Tasmania and the Hotel Grand Chancellor boast the most spacious MICE facilities, there are a host of other smaller imposing venues that are reaping the rewards for innovation.

And there are more on the way, including the CBD's Clarion City Park Grand hotel, where plans have been approved for a larger conference facility and additional hotel rooms. The 32-room heritage-listed property currently has eight meetings rooms including two boardrooms and claims to have the city's biggest gymnasium.

Outside of the CBD, Country Club Tasmania's long-term plans include increasing capacity of its major function areas, together with a facelift of its 182



Josef Chromy Winery has hosted entertainers including Tom Jones.



The historic Albert Hall circa 1891 - hosts big conferences and concerts.

four and five-star rooms.

In the short-term, it will:

- \* Repaint the entire property;
- \* Replace carpeting in the function rooms;
- \* Carry out a soft refurbishment to selected rooms;
- \* Install wi-fi in

the rest of the property, such as restaurants and bars; and

\* Re-design its conference menus "to ensure we live by the paddock to plate philosophy of using Tasmania grown produce".

Its 10 conference rooms, all equipped with state-of-the-art audio visual facilities, can cater for a small meeting of 10 or a plenary area for 475 with five break-out areas.

The conference team has also appointed Leah Muir as conference/markets manager.

Country Club Tasmania, which covers more than 120 hectares of private parkland, is a six-minute drive from the Launceston CBD and within minutes of the Tamar Valley Wine Route.

As well as its 18-hole championship golf course, it also has a golf driving range, two tennis courts, gym, pool and spa, squash courts and horse riding and trout fishing facilities.

In the northern capital's city centre, the 165-room Hotel Grand Chancellor has eight meeting rooms which with the Albert Hall Convention Centre, can host up to 1900 delegates.

Another option - located on the fringe of the CBD - is the stylish Hotel Charles, the former Launceston General Hospital. The city's newest hotel has full-day delegate packages starting at A\$65 per delegate a day (minimum 10), including

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## LAUNCESTON, TASMANIA

### High quality MICE venues ...

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lunch and morning and afternoon tea.

Its Frankland conference room is ideal for meetings, social functions and small trade presentations. The conference room can be extended, making it suitable for breakouts when more space is needed.

The property, a predominantly business hotel, has 88 rooms in four different styles, including three one-bedroom spa apartments.

Now in its third year, the hotel is owned by 82-year-old Josef Chromy, a leading entrepreneur in the Tasmanian, wine, Beef and property development industries.

For PCOs looking for a venue with a difference, Launceston's historic tramsheds has one of the city's most versatile function centres – and conference delegates can even jump on one of the old working trams for a ride down memory lane. And for those who like to bend the elbow, the historic Boags Brewery is a popular venue.

Beverage firm Lion is planning a multi-million dollar expansion of the brewery to include a conference facility, visitor centre and restaurant. The city-located buildings currently have a range of facilities for both small and large conferences, meetings, functions and weddings in the Boags Centre for Beer Lovers and in the brewery itself.

On the outskirts of the city are two World Heritage convict sites – one of them used for both indoor events and outdoor events, with delegates able to dress up in colonial era gear for meetings and seminars or weddings and functions.

Brickendon, settled in 1824 by William



*The family dog joins delegates in colonial outfits at Brickendon*

Archer, has been owned by the Archer family for seven generations. Among MICE facilities in its farm village is a 1830s Dutch barn, while a quaint Gothic chapel is a magnet for weddings.

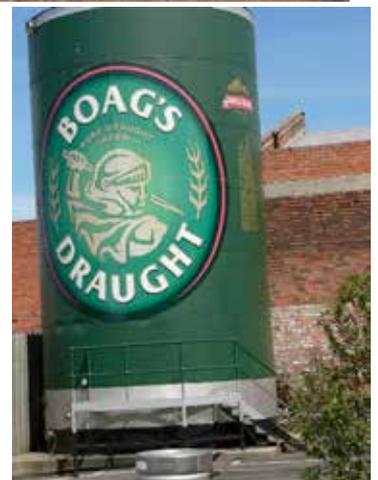
One of Tasmania's oldest farming properties, Brickendon is linked by a scenic pathway to another World Heritage-listed convict site, Woolmers Estate, which was built by one of the Archer brothers and is now managed by a private foundation.

Specialising in weddings and small meetings, a visitor centre incorporating function space is planned for Woolmers, which is also home to the National Rose Garden, where there are more than 5000 roses on display over eight hectares.

Another increasingly popular outdoor venue is the Josef Chromy Winery, which is the Leeuwin Estate of Tasmania and has hosted entertainers including Tom Jones.

Located on the southern outskirts of Launceston at Relbia, the winery is a renowned venue for conferences, meetings, seminars and in particular, weddings.

One small venue not to be missed when visiting Launceston is Pierre's, an award-winning restaurant with intimate function rooms. Tasmania's oldest cafe/braserie is located in the city centre and features two function spaces, one capable of seating 50 and the other on the second floor of the building which can seat 12.



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# Launceston moving ahead with new hotels targeting the MICE market

WHILE Hobart is Tasmania's top MICE destination, the island state's second city is gaining in popularity.

But Launceston still has a long way to go if it wants to grab top spot, according to Eamonn Seddon, the city's tourism manager.

"From a regional perspective, Hobart will always be a competitor, but we work very closely with Business Events Tasmania to promote Launceston. With many major hotels' conference staff and PCOs based in Hobart, they will always have an advantage," he said.

"In Launceston, there is always room for improvement. "Year-on-year the number of conferences is up, but the number of delegates is on par, which indicates that we are attracting smaller groups. A number of hotels have come on stream over the past few years and with more rooms and facilities planned, we need to grow the market."



Cataract Gorge Reserve - Launceston's popular outdoor event spot.

However, as Tasmania's MICE business continues to grow, Seddon is delighted that Launceston's current 2013/14 figures have already reached the total for the previous year. "This bodes well for the region in the coming months.

"The intrastate incentive market is key for Launceston; it suits Launceston's venues. As well as having many attractions on the doorstep, The majority of the city's business is intrastate, while both interstate and international

markets usually play a role when a Tasmanian business/organisation is hosting."

Seddon added that for Launceston's hotels and associated attractions and F&B to remain viable, the city needs to build on the mid-week/shoulder season market.

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For more information contact: **Eamonn Seddon**, Tourism Manager, Launceston City Council  
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