



# Museums in Australia

## Adding to the tourism mix

The clichéd image of Australia for first-time tourists is dominated by the Reef and Rock (and of course the Opera House). There is no doubt that the Great Barrier Reef, Uluru and the Sydney Opera House are outstanding ingredients of a visit to Australia, but there is so much more.

Museums are part of the tourism mix that play a key role in tourism, attracting 56% of visitors. The motivation is strong: having experienced the fascinating history, wildlife and landscapes of the Great Southern Land visitors want to know more, and museums are the obvious place to look.

Museums provide rich content in their galleries but given Australia's distance from its major markets the internet is particularly significant, and extending their reach to global audiences through their websites and apps is a key activity for these attractions. Museum Victoria developed one of the first apps for the iPhone and iPad. The Field Guide to Victorian Fauna has had over 60,000 downloads and now has an Android version.

Museums are found everywhere, from the tiniest communities in remote locations to the big cities in which the greatest numbers of Australians live. Through exhibitions and websites, people get insights into a remarkable continent with its own unique stories. Take gold, for example. Sovereign Hill is an outstanding open-air museum that attracts around 600,000 visitors to Ballarat in central Victoria every year to immerse themselves in the recreated town that evokes the drama of the 1850s gold rush.

The sense of theatre is skillfully crafted in the houses, shops, mines, workshops and diggings where visitors can pan for gold – and yes, some find it! After dark, Blood on the Southern Cross dramatically recreates the miners' rebellion against exorbitant licences and heavy-handed policing that occurred in 1854.

Sovereign Hill has expertly addressed the needs of the Chinese market with tailored content and an office in Shanghai. While tourism from the UK and Europe to Australia has been largely static, or declining, there is a rapid growth in visitation from China, India and other Asian



**Aboriginal performers in Kalaya: Bunjilaka: Melbourne Museum**

countries that has brought international arrivals to over 6 million a year.

Many visitors to Australia are eager to know more about the continent's original inhabitants. People have been living here for over 50,000 years – the oldest continuous culture on earth. Every state and territory museum, as well as the National Museum of Australia in Canberra, has displays presenting aspects of Aboriginal culture. It comes as a surprise to many overseas visitors that the culture is very diverse, as a result of people adapting in different ways to different environments and climates. The museum that I direct will be opening a new gallery in September 2013 called First Peoples. Working with Indigenous communities throughout Victoria, it will speak with an authentic Aboriginal voice to 900,000 people each year. We know from our audience research that overseas tourists are enthusiastic to explore Aboriginal Australia and we are working with Tourism Victoria to make the most of the opportunity.

There is considerable rivalry between the states in efforts to attract interstate tourists. Melbourne led the way by establishing the Victorian Major Events Company. To begin with it concentrated on sporting events such as the Grand Prix and Tennis Open Championship. Cultural events were then added to the calendar under the banner Melbourne Winter Masterpieces, exclusive to Melbourne and hosted by Melbourne Museum, the National Gallery of Victoria and the Australian Centre for the Moving Image. They have transformed what was traditionally a quiet time for tourism. Brisbane, Canberra and Sydney have followed suit with their own exclusive offerings. Some commentators deplore the use of culture in this way but I believe it has resulted in an enrichment of the cultural landscape and much-needed injections of finance into our museums and galleries. The result has been a boost to short-stay tourist trips and a significant contribution to the economy, as successive impact studies have shown.