

SUMMERNATS REVIEW

The Tourism Industry Council (ACT & Region) is the peak representative body for the tourism industry in the Australian Capital Territory and Capital Region.

The tourism and hospitality sector is reported to be the largest private sector employer in the ACT economy, with over 1000 local businesses contributing \$690m each year to the ACT economy, and accounting for over 11,000 jobs (Canberra Plan, 2004).

There is little doubt that tourism is one of the ACT's most important industries and represents one of our most valuable opportunities. Commitment to a prosperous tourism industry facilitates the generation of significant local and regional employment opportunities, particularly for young people, and has flow-on effects for the wider business community.

The Stanhope Labor Tourism policy released in September 2004 states ACT Labor is aware an ongoing commitment is required to ensure that the ACT has a thriving Tourism industry.

The annual Street Machine Magazine Summernats is one of Canberra's largest festivals, attracting visitors from around Australia and overseas. The festival is a very important event in the Canberra calendar.

This submission has been prepared in response to the ACT Government's invitation for submissions to the Summernats Review.

Summernats is a significant contributor to the ACT economy and has experienced strong growth, with the last three consecutive years recording increased visitation.

In 2003, total attendance to the event was 107,471, in 2004, attendance was 116,056 and in 2005, the event attracted the highest attendance ever with around 119,000 people attending Summernats.

The 2005 Summernats festival brought in an estimated \$12.5 to \$15 million to the local economy.

The annual Summernats festival is held in early January, a very quiet time of year in Canberra as many residents and domestic travellers head to the coastal areas for their annual summer holidays. In addition, business and corporate travellers, who normally represent around two-thirds of accommodation occupancy throughout the year is non-existent in January.

Summernats levels out a seasonal trough, providing valuable occupancy, visitation and income to many tourism and business operators in Canberra.

The Summernats festival attracts many visitors who would normally not consider the Nation's Capital as a travel destination, and yet, who travel back year after year to attend the festival.

High occupancy levels are recorded by the accommodation sector in Canberra during Summernats, during the low period when corporate and business travel is almost non-existent.

Average occupancy rates throughout January 2004 were 54%, whilst over the four-day festival period, overall occupancy rates rose to 71%. Occupancy in the northern suburbs and the city, closer to the Summernats venue would have been even higher as several properties recorded 100% occupancy over the festival period (figures supplied by the AHA – ACT Branch).

Many attractions gain additional visitation by Summernats attendees, particularly in the week leading up to and the week following the weekend festival. The increase in visitation ranges from 10% for smaller attractions to 20-25% for the larger attractions (statistics and information supplied by members of TIC and the NCAA).

The National Zoo and Aquarium visitation was up significantly for the period Monday, 03 January until Tuesday, 11 January, mainly due to Summernats. Visitation during the week 3-9 January was up 36% on the following week.

Whilst some attractions do not receive additional visitation because of Summernats, these are those attractions primarily aimed at market segments such as children or families.

In 2005, the Summernats festivals generated 13% of taxi fares in January, amounting to \$200-300,000. A 66% increase in patronage of ACTION services via Northbourne Ave over the Friday, Saturday and Sunday of the festival was recorded. This increase was on normal public services and excludes the Special Service Hire provided by the Summernats (statistics and information supplied by Canberra Cabs and ACTION).

For hoteliers, restaurant, bar and nightclub owners, entertainment businesses, food outlets, petrol stations and transport, the four-day festival represents one of the busiest times of the year.

Canberra Casino recorded a 25% increase in gaming 'drop' over both the Friday and Saturday of Summernats 2005, equating to around \$80,000, of which the ACT Government earned \$16,000 in gaming tax. Food and beverage sales also increased and there were smaller increases in the days leading up to and after the festival.

This is particularly important as the ACT strives to change perceptions of Canberra. Australian Capital Tourism has been marketing the Nation's Capital in a different light, highlighting Canberra's nightlife and restaurants aimed at changing perceptions of Canberra, particularly to the younger market.

Summernats is a major attractor for visitors to the National Capital, with many of the visitors coming from interstate or overseas. This provides the opportunity to showcase Canberra, to update and in many cases change views on Canberra, and if positive experiences are had, to attract them back at other times.

In addition Summernats attendees, who have had a great time in Canberra will positively reflect on the experience with their family and friends, assisting to change the perception of Canberra as a boring place to visit. Summernats provides the opportunity to debunk the myth that the Nation's Capital is only a place for the politicians and culturally aware.

Summernats receives national and international media coverage, promoting Canberra to a wider audience. In addition, the organisers of Summernats actively promote Canberra by including tourism information in entrant packs and allowing onsite promotions of exhibitions and attractions. If Canberra, as a destination is going to appeal to all Australia we must be seen to be more than a political and cultural haven.

Summernats has been recognised at the annual Rhodium Canberra and Capital Region Tourism Awards where the event won the Major Festivals & Events category ahead of Floriade in both 2003 and 2004. These awards provide an opportunity to showcase the best of our region's tourism operators in terms of product, quality and visitor experience. Winning an award is the industry's highest accolade - presented for excellence in tourism. As a result, the Summernats Festival has gone on to represent the ACT in this category at the Australian Tourism Awards.

Additionally, Summernats organiser, Chic Henry won the award for Outstanding Contribution By An Individual in 2004. He has been a valuable member of the tourism community, contributing to festival funding panels and policy development, as well as being an active member of the Tourism Industry Council ACT & Region, the National Capital Attractions Association and the Festival & Events Association.

The organisers of Summernats are to be commended for their hard work in building the festival into the world-class event that it is today. They have worked tirelessly to improve safety and security and have built family and community participation into the event.