

TRAVEL BUSINESS

with Mark & Joanne Skinner

Welcome to our first Travel Business. This column will be written by a different business person on the Sunshine Coast for each issue, they will share with us their favourite travel destination, either local or international. First up we talk to local Sunshine Coast business owners Mark and Joanne Skinner. Mark and Joanne own the lovely Narrows Escape Retreat up at Montville in the Sunshine Coast Hinterland and were recent winners of Sunshine Coast Excellence in Business for Tourism. Narrows Escape is an escape into the beautiful green hinterland of the coast. This is what they had to say.

We made our tree change to the Sunshine Coast hinterland in late 2006, leaving the corporate world and Townsville behind. Travel was always in our plans, and moving into the tourism industry has provided us with the opportunity to pursue this, combining work and pleasure as we promote our business around the world.

We were fortunate to stumble across and subsequently become members of Skäl International, a networking association of travel and tourism professionals with 20 000 members worldwide. We attended the World Congress, held in Budapest in 2009 which was a spectacular event, made all the more special as we came to form genuine friendships with members from around the globe. The beauty of the Danube, the rich and colourful history of the country, and the beautiful architecture of the city made our visit memorable. The business elements of the congress were fascinating, and really opened our eyes to both the vastness of the tourism industry on the one hand, and the interconnectedness of the people of the other. Real friendships exist, and we were honoured to be brought into "the family" of fellow tourism and travel operators.

During the congress, a business to business (b2b) workshop was run, with members of our local club promoting the region. The eye opener for us was the lack of knowledge of the location of the Sunshine Coast, and even Queensland for that matter, around the world. Here we were, trying to promote Montville, and all the overseas industry knew about Australia was Sydney, Uluru and Cairns. By the time the congress was over, all 1000 odd delegates knew exactly where and what the Sunshine Coast was. Doing business was easy, and we formed real friendships with many agents, wholesalers and travel professionals. We also fitted in some sales calls to Tourism Queensland's London office, and a few key travel agencies in the UK.

One of the highlights of our trip came about through the fortuitous contact at the congress with the president of Skäl Lombardia (Northern Italy), the delightful Marialouisa Sangalli, who arranged a six day itinerary for us through the area. Beginning at Milan, we hired a car and toured Lake Maggiore, stopping at Skäl members' hotels in Como and Stresa. The scenery was beautiful, the streets were exciting, the people friendly and the villages charming - reminiscent of clichéd

images of Vespas, Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck in the movie Roman Holiday. We sipped wine, fell in love again, and discussed how we could retire there. Would we go back? In a heartbeat.

Our next major travel plan will take us to Africa and Europe. We are about to embark on a fund raising Mount Killimanjaro climb in August, along with fellow Skäl leagues from South Africa, Western Australia and hopefully some more countries. This will be followed by attendance at the 2011 Skäl World Congress in Finland.

It is fair to say we have become well and truly hooked on travel and the opportunities for mixing business with pleasure that Skäl International has given us. **E**



NEED A NEW LOOK?

Update your professional image with BUSINESS MATTERS CORPORATE PHOTOGRAPHER



BM READER OFFER
up to 2 hours shoot 8 images
JUST \$150 +gst

BUSINESS HEADSHOTS • CONFERENCE/EVENTS • PRODUCTS • OFFICE SHOTS • REAL ESTATE • RESTAURANT/FOOD • COMMERCIAL • TEAM SHOTS

BUSINESS
MATTERS PHOTOGRAPHY

Phone Magic on **0408 751 863** to book NOW

Or email him at magic@businessmattersmagazine.com.au

