

# MEDIA RELEASE



October 26, 2024

## Tourism Tropical North Queensland awards excellence

The Tropical North Queensland tourism industry recognised its innovative people and products at the 2024 Expedia Group TNQ Tourism Industry Excellence Awards at the Screen Queensland Studio in Cairns on October 25.

Tourism Tropical North Queensland Chief Executive Officer Mark Olsen said 180 tourism industry members gathered to applaud excellence from the pioneers who helped to develop the destination to young achievers who are continuing their legacy.

"The recipients are spread throughout our region illustrating the quality of the diverse range of products that make Tropical North Queensland an internationally renowned destination," he said.

"I congratulate the winners and finalists and indeed the entire industry for rising above a very tough start to 2024 and continuing to deliver a warm welcome and exceptional experience to our visitors."

The winners of the 2024 Expedia Group TNQ Tourism Industry Excellence Awards:

### TTNQ Life Members

#### Mark and Judy Evans, Paronella Park

The visionary owners of Paronella Park, Mark and Judy Evans have received more than 80 industry awards recognising their exemplary contribution to tourism, sustainability, environmental, wildlife and heritage preservation.

The couple purchased the rundown park in 1993 and undertook an ambitious restoration to offer day and night tours with passionate guides. They expanded their tourism footprint with the purchase of the Mena Creek Hotel, the neighbouring van park and the Mamu Tropical Skywalk.

Mark served on the Tourism Tropical North Queensland Board for more than 16 years until his retirement in 2021 and prior to that was an active member of the Tourism Advisory Group.

### Outstanding Commitment to the Industry

Sponsored by Expedia Group

#### Savannah in the Round

The annual Savannah in the Round event brings in \$5.4 million a year in overnight visitor expenditure and more than 7500 people to the Mareeba area. A once in a lifetime spinoff event was created this year to drive ticket sales for Savannah in the Round and reward the heroes in our community utilising support from the Tourism Recovery Package funded by the Queensland and Australian governments.

The Savannah Sounds on the Reef resulted in extensive media coverage highlighting the efforts of the community's heroes who were treated to artists including Sheppard and Lee Kernaghan performing the first concert on the outer Great Barrier Reef.

### Outstanding Contribution by an Individual

John Morris

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Known as Mister Port Douglas, John Morris is credited with shaping the iconic tourism town after moving there in 1974 looking for a boat berth with his wife Marilyn. He worked with the council and community in the 70s on a town plan for the sleepy seaside village to ensure any future development would be no higher than a coconut palm.

Now aged 96, John has just completed his most recent development, Escape Villas. He can be found at work every day in Choo Choo, his restaurant at the marina, and continues to sit on the Quicksilver Cruises Board. He has also served on the Tourism Australia and Tourism and Events Queensland Boards.

John was credited with the vision and design of the Sheraton Grand Mirage Resort and was behind many of Port Douglas' resorts. He developed the Radisson Treetops Resort (now Ramada Resort), the Torresian Resort (now the Reef Resort Villas), Cayman Villas, Wildlife Habitat (now Rainforest Habitat), Wetherby Station and Crystalbrook Station.

## **Chair's Award for Excellence**

Sponsored by Cairns Regional Council

## **Peter and Angela Freeman, Hartley's Crocodile Adventures**

Angela and Peter Freeman are pioneers of wildlife tourism dating back to the 80s when they operated the Cairns Tropical Zoo and purchased a former zoo at Wangetti in 1986. They also operate Kuranda Koala Gardens and Birdworld Kuranda.

The couple rehabilitated nearby degraded farmland over five years to open Hartley's Crocodile Adventures in 2002 offering soft adventure and quality learning activities in a natural environment. The wildlife park is surrounded by World Heritage-listed rainforest and had a series of major upgrades in 2015-17 making it the largest wildlife attraction in Northern Australia.

In 2004 the Freeman family established the North Queensland Wildlife Trust so visitors could contribute to the conservation of native species and local habitat with the business contributing a dollar for each dollar raised. More than \$200,000 has been distributed to local conservation groups.

As Director of Marketing, Angela has been a tireless advocate for the region and volunteers on numerous local tourism committees, and the ATEC North Queensland Board. She also participates in trade shows domestically and internationally as part of Team TNQ.

## **Young Achiever Excellence Award**

Sponsored by Ports North

## **Hope Mitchell, Senior Event Planner, Cairns Convention Centre**

Hope has been working at the Cairns Convention Centre since February 2023 and demonstrated exceptional leadership during the expansion of the Centre, playing a crucial role in the rescheduling of events when the reopening was delayed. She is part of the project team focused on developing, attracting and marketing live events for Cairns. Hope collaborated with several tourism organisations for recent events including Tourism Australia for G'Day Australia and the Queensland Tourism Industry Council for Queensland Tourism Week.

**First finalist Olivia Stafford, Tully River Rafting Guide, Cairns Adventure Group**

**Second finalist Sharlee Correa, Wildlife Educator, Cairns Aquarium**

## **Customer Service Excellence Award**

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## **Paul Porteous, Senior Raft Guide, Cairns Adventure Group**

Paul has worked with Raging Thunder for more than 18 years. He prioritises safety and customer service on every trip navigating the barriers and challenges of a diverse market with an adventurous activity. Earlier this year Paul welcomed a guest in a wheelchair for his second trip in Paul's boat on the Tully River. This required considering the transport of the guest's wheelchair, safety for them entering and exiting the river, and ensuring minimal impact to the rest of the group. Clear and concise communication with the team was central to the success of the day.

**First finalist Jess Silverwood, Escape Planning Specialist, The Reef House Adults Retreat**

**Second finalist Rob Moss, Tour Guide, Tony's Tropical Tours**

## **Sustainable Tourism Excellence**

Sponsored by Cairns Airport

## **Crystalbrook Collection**

Crystalbrook approaches sustainability through attitude, guest experience, design, and technology with a motivation for a better world. Crystalbrook is the first hospitality group in Australia to achieve 100% waste-free bathrooms and in Cairns they have used recycled plastic bottle flooring. No waste coffee pods and Climate Calories to reduce kitchen waste are among the many other initiatives. All three Cairns hotels have achieved a silver level of achievement from EarthCheck.

## **Finalist Mt Mulligan Lodge**

## **Best of Queensland Experience Excellence Award**

## **FNQ Nature Tours**

Tourism and Events Queensland's Best of Queensland Experiences Program recognises tourism experiences that best bring the Queensland story to life and consistently deliver an exceptional customer experience. Using independent criteria incorporating online customer reviews it guides the State's tourism industry to deliver exceptional customer experiences and create positive word of mouth to attract more visitors, grow expenditure, and increase market share.

With a perfect score of 100, FNQ Nature Tours has won this award for the second year in a row. FNQ Nature Tours is a small group experience with expert guides who help guests to understand the unique rainforest environment and the wildlife that call it home. James Boettcher and his team have been bringing the rainforest to life for visitors since 2016.

**ENDS**

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