

EXCLUSIVE

TTNQ recognises best in tourism at the TNQ Excellence Awards

Eight winners and many more finalists have been celebrated at the Tropical North Queensland's tourism industry awards. See the list.

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Tourism Tropical North Queensland chief executive Mark Olsen bungee jumps from the AJ Hackett tower at Smithfield, with the help of Jumpmaster Luke Major. PICTURE: BRENDAN RADKE

The best of Tropical North Queensland's tourism industry celebrated a return to form after the pandemic at the Expedia Group TNQ Tourism Industry Excellence Awards on Friday night.

Tourism Tropical North Queensland hosted more than 180 guests on the night which featured a record 30 award entries and the introduction of a new category – the Outstanding Commitment to the Industry Award.

TTNQ CEO Mark Olsen said the night was a testament to the achievements of the region's industry members in the last year.

“We celebrate a year of recovery with the tourism industry delivering a record \$4.3bn domestic visitor expenditure to our regional economy in the past financial year,” Mr Olsen said.

“I congratulate each of the winners and Life Members who have helped the Tropical North Queensland tourism industry to excel.”

THE WINNERS

Life Member – Pip Woodward



Charles and Pip Woodward at the Rainforestation 40th year celebrations in 2016 sitting in front of the original opening plaque and fireplace that had been opened by former Queensland premier Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen in 1976. Picture: Justin Brierty

Cairns and Port Trips Attractions Group founder Pip Woodward was appointed one of two life members at this year’s awards for her pioneering work in rainforest tourism.

Ms Woodward, along with her late husband Charles, has been a mainstay of rainforest tourism in Cairns and the surrounding areas since opening her first business, Rainforestation Nature Park, in 1976.

The nature park recently expanded its operations, opening [a distillery specialising in tropical flavoured liqueurs](#) including passionfruit and pepperberry, mango and chilli and lemon-myrtle-cello.

Ms Woodward also continues to work closely with cancer support charity COUCH, founded by herself and Mr Woodward in 2006.



Ken Chapman (pictured with Far North Queensland Hospital Foundation CEO Gina Hogan) was appointed a TTNQ Life Member at last night's excellence awards. Picture: Brendan Radke

Cairns tourism veteran Ken Chapman has also been named a TTNQ life member for his years of service and [hard work during the Covid-19 pandemic](#).

As TTNQ chairman, Mr Chapman played a significant role in securing \$25m in funding to help support tourism to the region during the pandemic's border restrictions and lockdowns.

[Mr Chapman stepped down as TTNQ chairman](#) earlier this month but remains chairman of his iconic family business, Skyrail Rainforest Cableway.

Outstanding Commitment to the Industry – Cairns Airport Ambassadors



Cairns Airport ambassadors celebrated their 15th year volunteering at the airport, last year. Cairns Airport ambassadors Jan Cygler, Tony Peace, Simmer Vikesaa and Alex Edwards are ready to give assistance to arriving travellers. Picture: Stewart McLean

Cairns Airport Ambassadors were the first recipients of the newly created Outstanding Commitment to the Industry award.

The team of 30 volunteers recently [celebrated 15 years](#) assisting visitors with expert advice and recommendations.

Airport Ambassadors supervisor Robyne Snelling previously said her favourite part of the job was putting a smile on passengers' faces.

“People arrive sometimes not happy because they are confused or they are stressed but by the time they leave they usually have a smile on their face,” she said.

Outstanding Contribution by an Individual – AJ Hackett



Bungee jump pioneer AJ Hackett has won big at the Expedia Group TNQ Tourism Industry Excellence Awards. Picture: Brendan Radke

Bungee jump pioneer and entrepreneur, AJ Hackett, took home the award for Outstanding Contribution by an Individual on the night.

His decision to build the world's first purpose-built bungy tower in Cairns in 1990 helped put Tropical North Queensland on the map.

Skypark by AJ Hackett has continued to break boundaries with the one-of-a-kind event, [Opera in the Rainforest, opening last month](#) at the park.

Chair's Award for Excellence – Silky Oaks Lodge



Gonzo Behr sets restaurant tables at Silky Oaks Lodge at Finlayvale, north of Mossman. Picture: Brendan Radke

The picturesque views of the Mossman River and iconic Silky Oaks Lodge property won them this year's Chair's Award for Excellence.

The resort underwent a \$20m redevelopment by the team at Baillie Lodges during the pandemic which drew the attention of the luxury market and celebrities who were searching for an exclusive rainforest getaway.

The Treehouse Restaurant, adjacent to the lodge was also named in the [Cairns Post definitive guide to 50 top FNQ restaurants](#) for its stunning menu.

Young Achiever Excellence Award – Jamie Binder



Crystalbrook Bailey boutique wine bar, Arte's, food and beverage manager Tiago Teixeira serves organic wine to Laura Clark, while Jamie Binder and Jodie Walsh enjoy a drink and a charcuterie board together. Picture: Brendan Radke

Crystalbrook Collection marketing and social media executive Jamie Binder was given the Young Achiever Excellence award just two years after joining the company.

The young star has progressed quickly to her current role of promoting responsible luxury for the iconic hotel group.

Ms Binder is also a member of the North Queensland Committee for the Young Australian Tourism Export Council which aims to educate and support the industry's upcoming leaders.

Finalists:

1st – Jasmy Tureia, People and Culture Business Partner, Crystalbrook Bailey

2nd – Justin Baume, Guide, Cairns Adventure Group

Customer Service Excellence Award – Cedric Lootvoet



Cedric Lootvoet, Luxury Concierge of The Reef House in Palm Cove.
Picture: TTNQ

This year's Customer Service Excellence Award winner, Cedric Lootvoet, earned the accolade thanks to his dedication to guest experience.

The Reef House luxury concierge personally calls each and every guest ahead of their stay to ensure they receive a VIP experience when arriving in the tropics.

The exclusive Palm Cove resort has [hosted a collection of high profile guests](#) over its history including Hollywood actors Lee Marvin and Marlon Brando.

Finalists:

1st - Cairns Airport Ambassadors

2nd- Phoebe Urquhart Kereru, Trip Director, Passions of Paradise

Sustainable Tourism Excellence Award - Small World Journeys



Laurie Pritchard, Small World Journeys managing director, at El Mundo Tapas Bar in Edge Hill.

Cairns-based educational tour group Small World Journeys was awarded the Sustainable Tourism Excellence award on the night for its efforts to conserve the lush natural landscapes of the region.

The group value the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Traditional Owners in their operation with carbon offset initiatives and independent auditing from EcoBiz.

The organisation previously won the Business Excellence Award for sustainability and environment in 2021 and the Customer Service Award in 2022 at the Queensland Community Achievement Awards.

1st – Sheraton Grand Mirage Port Douglas

2nd – CaPTA Group

Best of Queensland Experiences Program Award – FNQ Nature Tours



James Boettcher, Owner of FNQ Nature Tours. Picture: TTNQ

The expert guides at FNQ Nature Tour have earned themselves the Best of Queensland Experiences Program award for their wildlife tours