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Tourism award winner pleases guests and saves the planet

Eco-tourism pioneers O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat have capped off celebrations for 80 years of serving up nature with legendary hospitality, taking out the Deluxe Accommodation award at the Queensland Tourism Awards in Brisbane last night and being named as a finalist in the Ecotourism category.

The award recognises O'Reilly's role at the forefront of the Australian ecotourism industry, the warmth and comfort of deluxe accommodation in such a unique location, the exceptional environmental interpretative program for guests, the home-style gourmet food and wine, and a family service philosophy of treating strangers as friends and friends as family.

The accolades also acknowledge O'Reilly's deep commitment to nature and conservation, and world-best sustainability practices that are helping to save the planet.

Located amidst World Heritage listed Lamington National Park, O'Reilly's delivers a unique rainforest retreat experience, in a pristine location, catering to almost 41,000 guests and 300,000 day visitors each year, many of whom come back, again and again.

From the traditions of the original guesthouse, built in 1926, O'Reilly's has evolved as a contemporary eco-retreat, with accommodation in 72 modern deluxe rooms.

O'Reilly's Managing Director Shane O'Reilly said receiving the award in the 80th anniversary year was great recognition for both past achievements and recent innovations.

"It is particularly pleasing to win this award this year as we reflect on our pioneering history in ecotourism and as we move the retreat forward to remain at the forefront of the industry for decades to come," Mr O'Reilly said.

"While our focus is very much on giving guests an enriched experience and the highest levels of service, the award also recognises our increasing efforts to operate sustainably."

The award pays tribute to a strategic business planning process, strong financials, high occupancy rates, innovative marketing, an increase of more than 30% in room revenue, not to mention the impressive rate of return and referral business of 55% on the back of superior service.

Recent innovations recognised include the restructure of O'Reilly's interpretative 'Discovery Program' to give guests more flexibility, the opening of a new Discovery Centre, new day tours, enhanced Discovery Week programs and the production of improved interpretative information and DVD's.

O'Reilly's provides an exciting range of guest experiences, including traditional hospitality, imparting of indigenous and pioneering history and culture, adventure activities and a blend of traditional and contemporary fare, but it is a focus on nature that truly defines the O'Reilly's experience – where good things come naturally.

Guests enjoy guided walks, four-wheel drive bus trips, adventure activities, wildlife spotlighting, glow worm walks, audio-visual presentations and nature documentaries and a fun and educational 'Scrub-Club' for the kids.

"We are famous for the quality of our interpretative discovery program, with 90 years of rainforest and mountain experience woven into the content," Mr O'Reilly said.

"Our special interest weeks, including our famous Bird Week, provide further opportunities for discovery and education."

Each season offers a different experience – from the warmth of log fires in winter, to the budding blooms of spring, the frogs in chorus during the summer wet season, and the lingering sunsets and leafy displays of autumn.

For all the comforts of the rooms, some featuring recycled timbers and all complemented by the warmth of Queensland Maple furnishings, it's what's missing that really makes them special – with no in-room televisions or phones to distract from the relaxed ambience.

After pioneering ecotourism in Australia, the O'Reilly family now combines old-fashioned experience with modern best practice, with an Environmental and Social Sustainability Policy and a comprehensive Environmental Management Plan (EMP) ensuring the retreat couldn't be greener.

O'Reilly's enjoys Advanced National Eco-Accreditation and last year achieved benchmarking by the international Green Globe organization for its environmental management practices.

And O'Reilly's new eco-friendly luxury development, the 48-villa 'Mountain Villas', due for completion next year, will ensure guests continue to enjoy the beauty of the environment, while treading lightly on the earth.

"Our land is only used for conservation and tourism purposes, and we are committed to ecological sustainability, through energy efficiency, construction, water efficiency and wastewater treatment," Mr O'Reilly said.

"Importantly we are furthering conservation through our education, culture and activity programs and through environmental research."

In 2005 O'Reilly's EMP was completed revamped, with a range of new sustainability initiatives instigated, including purchasing green power to save 290 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions each year - the equivalent of taking 68 cars off the road for a year or planting 1200 trees!

Water and energy conservation measures have seen O'Reilly's come in well below benchmark consumption targets set by the prestigious Green Globe organization – with water usage sitting at just over 1/7th of the acceptable level, while a range of best-practice waste management initiatives have also been implemented.

The Queensland Tourism Award follows recognition in 2005 as Australia's 3rd Generation Family business of the year, with annual turnover increasing four-fold to more than \$10 million over the past decade and the business now employing more than 90 staff.

When the enterprising O'Reilly's opened their first guesthouse, adventurous visitors had to make a 25km rugged horseback trek to reach their isolated destination.

The O'Reilly's had arrived at their mountaintop haven in 1911 to carve out a living as dairy farmers. In 1915 Lamington National Park was declared, effectively surrounding their piece of paradise.

Hardy souls actually started visiting O'Reilly's as early as 1914. They stayed in one of the family's slab huts, where air-conditioning came through the cracks in the walls, and were escorted to scenic spots, generally on horseback, on trails especially cut for the purpose.

Positive feedback from those early visitors sowed the seed for the eco-tourism success story that O'Reilly's has become.

O'Reilly's is perched almost a kilometre above sea level in the lush rainforest of the McPherson Range, a scenic 2 hours drive from Brisbane, or 90 minutes from the Gold Coast.

For further information, please contact O'Reilly's Reservations on 1800 688 722 or visit www.oreillys.com.au.

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