

Paul Nicolaou



Big events see Sydney return to number one

We don't erect statues so much these days but Sydney should build a monument to the architects of the fabulous WorldPride 2023 event earlier this year. They did a great confidence-boosting service to our city in replicating the enjoyment, community spirit and joyful atmosphere that surrounded the "best ever" Sydney Olympic Games in 2000.

WorldPride was just the celebration Sydney needed to get its mojo back following the hard years of the pandemic. It proved to be a pathfinder for big events to follow this year, reasserting Sydney's position as the events capital of Australia — even with the city's deficiency of venues to stage them.

Now, Sydney and its many visitors are revelling in the delights of Vivid Sydney with the FIFA Women's World Cup following in July and SXSW Sydney, a week-long celebration of tech innovation, games, music and screen in October.

And Tina — the Tina Turner Musical continues its roaring success

at the Theatre Royal with more tickets being released to satisfy demand.

Back in March, the 17-day WorldPride festival was a leap into the unknown for its organisers not knowing whether the city and the world were ready to come out of Covid hibernation. They were.

Their courage and commitment, with support from all tiers of government and the business sector, paid off in welcoming the LGBTQI+ world to Sydney, making it a beacon of our city's post-pandemic recovery.

WorldPride came at just the right time, with the business community still finding its feet after a very tough couple of years. It not only brought a wave of bright rainbow colours to the city but also showed Sydneysiders and visitors were again ready to gather — and have fun.

Ultimately, these events become a financial opportunity as well. Events during this financial year will deliver \$900 million to the visitor economy in NSW. There were 38 events last summer that attracted 230,000 visitors and injected more than \$260 million.

Vivid generated \$119 million in visitor spending last year and is almost certain to eclipse that



Ruva Ngwenya as Tina Turner in Tina: The Tina Turner Musical at the Theatre Royal.

contribution this year. WorldPride attracted thousands of visitors and generated \$112 million in visitor expenditure.

Other organisations also deserve credit for their tireless work in getting Sydney's events juggernaut moving again. Premier Chris Minns has helped by raising the ridiculously low cap on live concerts at Allianz Stadium in Moore Park.

His government could help further by getting the process moving to allow the redevelopment of the nearby Entertainment Quarter. It's in his government's interest to help Arts Minister John Graham deliver on his

quest for Sydney to have its own West End-style theatre district.

Destination NSW, Business Events Sydney and the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner also deserve credit for their part in the city's events success year-on-year, which they tend to do flying under the radar, allowing the events and their stars to shine.

Sydney's big events calendar is also great news for the community, providing a "feel good" psychological boost as people soak up all the excitement.

Events such as WorldPride, Vivid, FIFA Women's World Cup and superstar concerts such as Elton

John, Sting and Harry Styles, to name a few, contribute to our city in many ways.

Each enhances community building, lifestyle and leisure, cultural development, tourism promotion, increased visitation, volunteer participation, fundraising and economic development.

Major events in Sydney create a face-to-face experience for businesses and the community by creating a level of excitement, enthusiasm and community spirit. It uplifts Sydneysiders, encouraging them to spend a dollar or two on good times even when the external environment is tough. Distractions are always good during challenging times.

For many, it's a shared experience in being part of something that becomes the veritable talk of the town. People talk for weeks about 'their' Harry Styles or Ed Sheeran concert experience, while daring to dream that Beyoncé might just be next — one day.

These shared experiences contribute to a cohesive society, which, in turn, contributes to the livelihood of businesses, supports jobs and adds to the bustle of the city.

Community-wide events bring together people from all walks of life, strengthening the bonds between them and building connections that can improve mental wellbeing while helping to alleviate the impact of personal struggles. Establishing a strong city identity is important, particularly for the 'villages' that exist in our wonderful city. Events, large and small, are a huge economic catalyst for jobs and growth across the whole of Sydney and NSW.

The benefits come in direct and indirect ways. Locals and tourists attracted to these events spend on travel, hotels, bars and restaurants, as well as in shops and on leisure facilities during their stay. Events are crucial to ensure our hospitality, aviation, tourism and retail sectors survive and thrive.

Importantly, they simply mean that the people of our city can have a good time, together. So, Sydney, we are on a roll. Let's keep the events economy going and enjoy the ride.

Paul Nicolaou is Executive Director of Business Sydney