

## Bringing out the Best

### ***Best Western Australasia adapted quickly to recent events and its innovative response sees the business supporting its hotels and their local communities like never before***

Best Western Australasia (BWA) has introduced a wide range of new initiatives to enable its 100 hotels across Australia and New Zealand to cope with the impact of the COVID 19 crisis. In turn, many of the Group's hotels have been adapting their business delivery and supporting their local communities with innovative acts of kindness and support.

Best Western Australasia Managing Director, Graham Perry, says that to ensure the continued viability of the group's independently owned and operated hotels, it was essential for Best Western to adapt and take immediate action.

"One Friday night in mid-March we had just returned from regional meetings with our hotels and I was due to depart with my family for a week's holiday to Noosa the next day. I instinctively understood that everything had changed and literally overnight. My family went without me, and I worked with my senior team the whole weekend planning our response," recounts Perry.

"The *status quo* was no longer relevant; we were no longer just Australia talking about recovery from bushfires, drought and floods. This was much bigger; the whole world had changed"

"My family didn't make the week and were home by Tuesday."

"Since the middle of March, the senior team has convened daily, enabling us to review the unfolding facts, debate the consequences and react as one by implementing a range of measures to sustain our hotels. We've become a highly nimble and responsive group, delivering comprehensive and ongoing innovations and support as and when required to help our hotels remain open and perform as best they can."

The extensive measures implemented by Best Western have included:

- Providing significant fee relief – the waiving (not deferral) of 50% of fees for current hotels – funded by the gracious salary sacrifices of all BWA staff
- Delivering regular communications, recommendations and advice, including guidance on enhanced cleaning and operational procedures, timely information on government support programs, updates on travel restrictions, and other relevant topics,
- Becoming a portal and one stop shop for any and all questions about the evolving Government JobKeeper program,

- Positioning Best Western as our local Communities' "Best Local Home Away from Home",
- Unearthing innovative hyper local sales leads and opportunities for our hotels emanating from guests needing to self-isolate and those supporting essential services,
- Providing a Local Sales & Marketing toolkit for our hotels specifically tailored to travel conditions within Australia and New Zealand, including social media, direct marketing and media release resources,
- Appointing dedicated Account Managers for each of our hotels, delivering advice and support across personal mental health and wellbeing, the changing operating environment, local sales and marketing, revenue management and other timely ad-hoc initiatives,
- Hosting regular virtual Regional Meetings with hotels state-by-state,
- Suspending Quality Assurance reviews and relevant brand standard measures to comply with travel restrictions,
- Collaborating with Tourism Accommodation Australia (TAA) and industry lobbying groups, and
- Implementing a 'Road to Recovery' strategy that will be rolled out as and when government travel restrictions are lifted.

"In all cases, our sales and marketing team have unearthed multiple opportunities for our hotels to help them identify and win business. If opportunities existed, we found them."

"While the industry has been doing it tough and performance is way down on previous years, Best Western hotels are consistently outperforming their STR market class," continues Perry.

"Pleasingly, with Best Western support and the individual efforts of our hotels all Best Western's Australasian hotels have remained open and all BWA staff remain in place, albeit all on significantly reduced salaries."

"From Launceston to Karratha, from Ipswich to Auckland, our hotels continue to provide a warm and welcoming local home away from home for those who require a safe haven or an alternative option to their home."

"Our hotels have been welcoming guests employed in essential services, those wanting to distance themselves from family to protect them and others requiring day rates for those seeking a suitable environment in which they can continue to work. Some of our hotels are near full with fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) workers who are not permitted to travel, in other locations, we are housing those who would otherwise be homeless and in yet others we are working with charities to accommodate our society's most vulnerable."

The nimble and responsive efforts of the Best Western team have been noted and extremely well received by its hotels.

Chris Inzitari, Director of INZ Group which operate **Best Western Plus Hovell Tree Inn** in Albury, said:

"This has been, and continues to be, a very difficult time for us. I feel like Best Western Australasia 'really has our back'. From the very start of the COVID-19

pandemic, I feel we have been kept informed and updated at every step, particularly with the various government lock-down measures and subsequent stimulus packages. This communication, together with ongoing support from the sales team, has enabled us to really focus on keeping our business afloat.”

Similarly, Ryan Shaw, Principal of Mandala Asset Solutions, which operates **Best Western Plus Ambassador Orange** and **Lincoln Downs Resort Batemans Bay, BW Signature Collection** commented:

“We have been delighted with the support of our franchise partner, Best Western, throughout the Covid-19 crisis. Most impressive has been they have been highly pro-active in anticipating and responding to the needs of their franchisees - they offered fee relief before we had even thought about asking for it, and then as the intensity of the crisis became clear they once again offered further measures without being asked. They have been accessible at all times and we have truly felt that we have a partner along with us on the journey.”

The impact of this support has been the increased capacity for its hotels to return the favour at a local level, by being there for their respective communities during their time of greatest need and introducing new innovations to maintain their businesses.

- **Best Western Plus Travel Inn**, Carlton, has been making regular donations of morning teas and lunches, to their local fever clinic, the intensive care unit at St Vincent’s Hospital and police stations in Melbourne as a tribute to doctors, nurses and other frontline workers.
- **Best Western Olde Maritime’s** owner Raj Patel was compelled to assist Jacob when he heard the job seeker’s story which included homelessness and mental health issues. Even though his hotel has been facing testing times under the current travel restrictions, Raj generously donated an art supplies voucher to help lift Jacob’s spirits.
- **Best Western Plus Goulburn** has branched into home delivery meals, after Vicki Rabjohns, who has owned the hotel with her family for 30 years, decided to think outside the square. The home delivery meals have given her the opportunity to meet locals and encourage them to visit the restaurant once it is open again. The experience has been so successful, she is considering keeping the home delivery business going once the restrictions are over.
- **Best Western Plus Apollo International** in Newcastle has implemented a contactless drive through takeaway menu specifically focused towards families, including a free soup with purchases from their Home-style menu.

In a thoughtful touch, all takeaway orders include a special note from the team at Apollo International and Babbingtons restaurant, thanking their customers for their support.

They’ve also launched an Essentials box with fruit, vegetables, bread, milk, rice and flour. When planning for the box, they did research as to what people were struggling to find in the supermarkets and made it readily available within the Essentials box while also using stock that they had on hand.

The boxes have been particularly popular with people buying them for elderly relatives, so they don’t have to leave the house and for those who are finding it difficult or are too time poor to go to the shops.

With Mother's Day around the corner, they've partnered with a local business and are putting together a Mother's Day hamper with flowers from a nearby florist, sparkling wine, and high tea style baked goods made in house. Not only are they still providing a service on day when so many mothers would have dined with them (and have for many years as loyal regulars), they're also supporting a local business who is finding it difficult as well in these uncertain times.

"It's so invigorating to see the inspiring acts of kindness, the innovation and the proactive engagement of our hoteliers working so closely with their local community," says Perry.

"We've seen many examples of the community rallying around our hotels who have been adapting so well in this ever-changing market."

"They say that the very worst often brings out the very best in people. I have absolutely no doubt that Best Western will come out of this crisis even stronger than it went in. We have learnt a lot about each other, the hotels that we market and the wonderful group of people who manage and operate them day in, day out. There is now a greater comradery, trust and understanding between us all and the experience and learnings will never be forgotten. We are a very different business now. We are nimbler and more responsive than ever before and most, if not all, of the initiatives we have implemented will continue, making us an even more formidable business to be reckoned with in the future."

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**Editor's Note:** Images can be downloaded from

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