



CASE STUDY

SNAPSHOT FACTS:

Conference Name:	Sustainable Trails Conference
Dates:	1-3 June, 2021
Host organisation:	TRC Tourism
Attendance:	69 Attendees
Delegate origin:	From all Australian States except Victoria
NT location:	Alice Springs, Northern Territory, Australia
Conference venue:	Alice Springs Desert Park – Red Mulga Event Centre

Event Overview:

TRC Tourism is an international tourism, recreation and conservation planning consultancy based in Australia and New Zealand. The company has been working in the fields of tourism, recreation and conservation for over 20 years.

TRC Tourism has delivered over 600 diverse projects in that time, ranging from planning and product development to contemporary marketing strategies and feasibility studies relating to recreational trails for mountain biking, walking, running, horse riding as well as aquatic trails.

Amongst its projects, TRC developed a Master Plan for Mountain Biking in the Northern Territory which aimed to establish Alice Springs as a leading world-class mountain biking hub. Its distinctive, world-class adventure rides deliver remote but accessible experiences that showcase the NT's iconic landscapes.

The three-day Sustainable Trails Conference organised by *TRC Tourism* is for professionals in the business of recreation and tourism trails – the conference has previously been held at Thredbo in NSW (2017) and Marlborough in New Zealand (2019). It brings together leading experts in all aspects of sustainable trail development, management and marketing and provides an opportunity for delegates to network and upskill, as well as obtain updates on sustainable trails.

Reasons for selecting Alice Springs:

Alice Springs was selected as the host destination for the 3rd TRC Sustainable Trails Conference due to its rugged, natural beauty, ecological characteristics, unique event locations and rich Aboriginal culture. It was also seen as a drawcard due to the range of walking, running and mountain biking trails available.

The Alice Springs location helped deliver a unique destination event for the delegates, enabling them to experience field trips which showcased the Larapinta Trail construction and management, the Mountain Bike Trail construction and maintenance, and a new trail experience on Yeperenye country.

The conference venue was the *Red Mulga Event Centre* at *Alice Springs Desert Park*, approximately seven kilometres from town and located at the base of the spectacular West MacDonnell Ranges. The Park covers some 1,300 hectares and showcases the natural, cultural and biological features of Australian desert regions. A range of nearby Alice Springs accommodation options were offered for delegates to consider and make their selection.

Challenges and Triumphs:

A total of 69 delegates attended the conference – unfortunately due to Covid-19 travel restrictions, delegates from Victoria were unable attend in person. A virtual conference option was subsequently provided and enabled delegates who were unable to travel to Alice Springs to still participate in the conference.

Those who participated at the conference in-person and who had never previously visited Alice Springs or Central Australia, were amazed by its beauty and indicated the desire to return for a holiday.

The Execution:

A distinctive Northern Territory cultural tone was set from the outset of the conference with a ‘Welcome to Country’ delivered by an Arrernte Traditional Owner from the *Alice Springs Lhere Artepe Aboriginal Corporation*, an organisation with strong affiliations to the land.

Amongst multiple conference themes, the ‘Spotlight on the Red Centre Adventure Ride’ was especially relevant to the Northern Territory. This award-winning concept plan, designed by TRC Tourism, will ultimately see a 200-kilometre trail running between Alice Springs Desert Park and Glen Helen. Chris Day, Senior Director Parks and Wildlife Operations with the NT Government Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security, was one of the key presenters for this session.

A range of expert speakers at the conference came from throughout Australia including other NT destination and trails experts Phill Cowan and Marty Krieg from Parks NT.

Field trips on Day Two were a valuable feature of the Sustainable Trails Conference, with the Alice Springs region providing some of Australia’s most renowned trails, as well as expertise in trail development.

Field trips undertaken were:

The Larapinta Trail Field Trip showcased track construction techniques and the challenges of working in an arid environment. Delegates visited points of interest along the way, including the iconic landmarks of Simpsons Gap and Ormiston Gorge.

The visit to the **Mountain Bike Trail** network around Alice Springs included discussions with a number of trail planners and builders regarding the applicability and feasibility of machine-based construction versus hand-based builds.

The field trip to the **Yeperenye Trail** enabled delegates to interact with the Yeperenye Traditional Owners and learn about the new 7.2 kilometre walking and cycling experience which has been developed in the East MacDonnell Ranges.

Social Programme:

The 2021 conference social program was designed to showcase the destination and enable delegates to experience a true taste of Alice Springs.

The Welcome function was an informal barbecue at *Alice Springs Desert Park* and featured a traditional outback menu of kangaroo, camel and other flavours from the land.

The Conference Gala Dinner on the final evening was held at *Ooraminna Station Homestead*, a family-owned cattle station 35 kilometres south of Alice Springs. The property is some 2,500 square kilometres in size, with a desert backdrop and spectacular rocky escarpments that glow a brilliant red.

Welcome drinks and canapes were enjoyed at the homestead from where delegates were able to enjoy the beauty of sunset on the nearby escarpment. Dinner was staged at the former movie set location, 'The Junction Hotel', which is located on the property. Live music was provided by NT musicians, the Eastern Arrernte Band. A nearby open fire pit provided a traditional meeting place for delegates to gather and chat during the evening.

Corporate Social Responsibility/local community engagement:

The conference organising team endeavoured to 'Buy Local' for as many of the conference requirements as possible, with over 13 different local Alice Springs suppliers utilised, in addition to the conference venue and accommodation suppliers. A number of unique initiatives were also undertaken by *TRC Tourism* to ensure positive community benefits would result from the conference being held in Alice Springs. These included:

- Chairs which had been purchased for the field trip sessions were donated by the organisers to the *Central Land Council* which, in turn, distributed them to Traditional Owners who were working on the Yeperenye track.
- All left-over catering was donated to the Alice Springs women's shelter and also to local Traditional Owners.
- Professional photos taken of the field trip to the Yeperenye Track were provided to the Traditional Owners for them to use in advertising and promotion of the track.
- Professional photos taken of the Eastern Arrernte Band playing at the Gala Dinner were provided to the band for them to use in future promotions of their pending album and single releases.

How did Northern Territory Business Events (NTBE) assist your conference?

Northern Territory Business Events provided assistance with the planning of the 2021 conference, with initial liaison taking place in 2018, at which time the conference was originally proposed for 2020. NTBE connected organisers with local suppliers as required and provided ongoing destination support.

What you liked most about the destination:

Organisers advised that Alice Springs had it all – welcoming friendly people, culture and the rich history of Australia, all set against the incredible backdrop that is the authentic Australian outback.

Most memorable aspect of the entire event:

The field trips were a stand-out highlight for attendees, enabling engagement with the traditional owners and providing an opportunity to get out and about to see the walking and cycling trails on offer in Alice Springs.

The Verdict:

"Alice Springs and Central Australia is a magical place. I was on such a high when I got home, and I know I wasn't the only one that thought this. I plan to take my family back for a holiday and just about everyone that had not been to Alice Springs before said the same thing – completely gobsmacked by the beauty and spiritual connection they felt. We are still receiving positive feedback about the conference, so a win all round with this one."

Donna Graf | Business Manager

TRC Tourism