

Darwin Festival boosts numbers

Arts Hub Australia
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Market Research has revealed that this year's Darwin festival was, by every account, a raging success. Both local and international numbers were well up, with awareness of the festival at an all-time high.

Competing against the East Coast juggernauts, Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, and the wildly popular Adelaide festivals, Darwin and Perth have always had trouble getting the attention they deserved – from both audiences and acts. The rise of international guests to the Darwin festival is a positive sign that there is definitely room in Australia for another festival, and another location.

One quarter of all guests to this year's festival were visitors to Darwin, with 16% of them specifically in town for the event. To set itself apart from other festivals, Darwin promoted and expanded its Indigenous and Asian components. The strategy was a success, with most attendees drawn to the festival for that reason.

However, the most positive finding of the research was that a whopping 47% of all respondents had attended the festival for the first time. This is an amazing figure – effectively doubling the audience in one year, and a feather in the cap for the organisers.

What it also demonstrates is that high festival attendance should not be a Holy Grail for organisers – a mythical goal on the horizon – nor that smaller festivals are effectively locked out of the market by larger ones. The Darwin Festival began its life with a very small base, but savvy promotion and a dynamic, responsive program has boosted their numbers and satisfied attendees, ensuring they will come again – effectively cementing the festival's future.

80% of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied by their experience at the festival and the same number said that they would attend the festival again. These tremendously positive numbers tap into an Australian public that is becoming increasingly interested by festivals.

While debate rages back and forth about what a festival should or shouldn't be, pundits are losing sight of the people who actually attend them. They are, in the main, not professionals in the industry, but an interested and curious public. A program reflecting that is not an act of condescension, but rather one of inclusion.

It is also an act of cross-promotion, in that one positive festival experience will most likely beget others. Statistics of the festival-going public are still relatively rare, but they are growing, just as festival popularity is. Other festival organisers can look to the Darwin Festival – and the results of this survey – and take something away with them. A diverse program and successful marketing can still guarantee a good audience, even in this competitive environment.

To see more of the Darwin Festival, go to <http://www.darwinfestival.org.au>