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MEDIA RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tourism a sound investment

More than \$75 million will have been tipped into the Blue Mountains, Lithgow and Oberon region's tourism industry by its operators recently – and the investment dollars keep pouring in.

Blue Mountains Lithgow & Oberon Tourism chairman Randall Walker said one of Australia's first tourist destinations remained fresh and vibrant with a rash of capital investment projects undertaken by pro-active tourism operators.

“The tourism and hospitality industry is the primary economic driver for the Blue Mountains region, attracting four million visitors a year, generating more than \$500 million which gets recycled through the economy and creates more than 5100 full-time equivalent jobs.

“These operators have vision and confidence in their product and they have the courage to take calculated risks and spend money to realise that vision.

“On top of that, they have passion – passion about their product, passion about this region and passion about sharing all of that with the people who flock to this region from around the globe.”

One of the largest capital investment projects to be conducted in the Blue Mountains is the building of a new \$30 million Scenic Railway at the world-renowned attraction Scenic World at Katoomba. The new train took its first load of passengers at Easter.

Joint managing directors and siblings David and Anthea Hammon said the new railway had retained the thrill of a 52 degree incline and its title as the world's steepest railway.

One of the most high profile recent investments is the revamp of the Fairmont Resort at Leura by new owner Dr Jerry Schwartz who has already sunk \$10 million into the iconic venue (just half of the planned spend to restore the hotel to its former glory) and snapped up the nearby Leura Golf Club, a great outcome for its members.

Now under management by international hotel group Accor, included in its MGallery brand, the massive facelift so far has included a complete overhaul of the outdoor pool area, all bars, a 130-seat auditorium, refurbishment of all conference rooms, restoration of the gardens, refit of all guest rooms and new children's indoor facilities including two climbing castles, a train which takes kids for rides around the resort grounds and even an indoor merry-go-round.

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And one of the most anticipated projects is the \$55 million transformation of the Hydro Majestic Hotel at Medlow Bath. It is scheduled to open in two stages, with construction of Stage One public areas and historic buildings to be completed during the first quarter 2014.

A main feature of the new-look Hydro will be the Mark Foy Pavilion provided and history centre, with other facilities in the public precinct to include The Boiler House gallery, bistro and Megalong Terrace Café overlooking Majestic Point Lookout.

The consortium which owns the historic Carrington Hotel at Katoomba is in the process of shelling out about \$500,000 on a micro brewery, which will be a great enhancement to the Carrington Cellars & Deli.

Another highly anticipated addition is the new Blue Mountains Cultural Centre. With a price tag of about \$49.5 million (including a \$6.5 million Blue Mountains City Council contribution), it opened to much fanfare in November after 14 years of planning.

With a combined public area of more than 4000sqm, the centre is home to the impressive 600sqm Blue Mountains City Art Gallery, the World Heritage Interpretive Centre, a spectacular viewing platform to the Jamison Valley, extensive workshop and seminar spaces and the new state-of-the-art Katoomba Library.

Blue Mountains City Council has recently spent several million dollars on tourism-related capital investment projects. Among them include the upgrade of Katoomba and Blackheath Glen tourist parks; improving public walking tracks and facilities at Echo Point, Mount York, Springwood, Wentworth Falls, Katoomba; and \$500,000 on The Gully Aboriginal interpretive walk at Katoomba.

Bygone Beautys owner Maurice Cooper OAM has received Blue Mountains City Council approval to expand the premises at Leura. Plans include a dedicated museum to house more than 4000 teapots (the largest private collection in the world), a cafe and two rooms in which will be served the famed Bygone Beautys traditional teas and luncheons. The new-look Bygone Beautys will also slowly move away from antiquities to identify more with tea and tea-related products.

One of Australia's most treasured attractions, Jenolan Caves has also undergone several million dollars worth of refurbishment work during the past decade and continues to refine and upgrade the attraction and introduce new ways to interpret and present the caves and reserve to visitors, including more than a dozen new tour products in recent years.

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A National Trust property, Everglades Historic House and Garden at Leura, recently received a \$1.5 million Federal Government grant through the State Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities Department. The money will be spent on a range of maintenance and enhancement projects including upgrading the gallery, new furniture in the tea rooms, heating the house, signage and lighting and levelling pathways.

Lithgow Council itself has sunk major funds into its tourism-related infrastructure, recently opening the \$2.1 million stage one of its aquatic centre project which will eventually cost up to \$7 million. The council has also spent \$3.9 million on refurbishing the Tony Luchetti Showground and almost \$1 million on a swag of other smaller projects including historic site overhauls, lookout improvements and a new public cycleway.

Other big spends throughout the region include the million dollar upgrade of the Waldorf Leura Gardens Resort including the extensive restoration of its renowned Paul Sorensen-designed gardens, which will be presented in the Leura Gardens Festival this year (of which the Waldorf is now a sponsor); a \$1 million facelift of the award-winning Darley's restaurant at the five-star Lilianfels at Katoomba; and the acquisition then restoration of four properties throughout Katoomba and Leura by Mountain Whispers owner Lorraine Allanson.

The recent spending spree builds on other significant investments of the past five years, spearheaded by the six-star Emirates Wolgan Valley Resort & Spa in Lithgow Council territory, opened in October 2009 at a cost of \$125 million.

More than \$10 million has also already been spent on restoring the grand old lady of Katoomba, The Carrington Hotel, back to its original glory, including opening the popular Carrington Cellars and Deli, restoring Carrington Place in front of the hotel as a public space, revamping The Old Bank Brasserie and reclaiming the Harp & Fiddle and installing a natural gas co-generation electricity generator.

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