

**Media release**

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### **BMEE leads top chefs in Oberon truffle hunt**

Leading executive chefs including Lee Kwiez from Darley's Restaurant, John Slaughter from the Fairmont Resort MGallery, Mate Herceg from the Hydro Majestic Hotel and Jason Martin from Wolgan Valley Resort came together to hunt, sample and cook with truffles as part of Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise's (BMEE) program to position the Blue Mountains as a quality food destination.

BMEE's Local Food Industry Development Project rolled out the first in a series of educational trips for hospitality and kitchen staff with this trip which coincided with the opening of the truffle season at Lowes Mount Truffiere in Oberon. The trips are designed to improve regional food knowledge amongst hospitality professionals.

"We know from Destination NSW that more than 60% of tourists to the Blue Mountains indicate 'food experience' as their most desirable activity," said BMEE's Food Industry Development Officer Carencia Harris. "When chefs and hospitality staff are knowledgeable about regional produce this can lead to better quality menus and improved customer service in local cafes and restaurants. These tours are designed to give staff that first-hand knowledge and experience."

BMEE's CEO Jacqueline Brinkman said "Tourism Australia research shows that 'good food and wine and local produce' was a key factor in holiday decision-making, ranking ahead of 'world class beauty and natural environments. The Local Food Industry Development Project aims to improve the offering of the local food industry in order to capitalise on this important tourist market. The tourism industry is the second greatest employer in the Blue Mountains, accounting for 2127 local jobs."

The chefs on the tour participated in the harvesting of truffles, and learned how the delicacy are cleaned and graded for sale at markets and for use in the best kitchens around the Blue Mountains and Sydney. After the lessons the chefs split into two teams for a 'cook off' using the fresh truffles.

"As a result of this tour, we can expect to see more truffle-based dishes on the menus of local cafes and restaurants, cooked and served by staff who are able to tell customers the provenance of each dish." said Ms Harris. "Future tours for chefs and hospitality staff will see visits to farms producing a range of produce and meats across the Blue Mountains, Lithgow, Mudgee and Orange. "This regional food knowledge will help us position the Blue Mountains as a quality food destination."

#### **Further information:**

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