

Surprise packages

The credit crunch is forcing accommodation providers to come up with creative packages for guests. **Sue White** reports.

WHEN the accommodation industry started to fight the credit crunch, many chose the same weapon: packaging. Hot breakfasts for \$1, free tickets to attractions, upgrades combined with heavily discounted rooms – all are being used to entice customers, particularly domestic travellers.

According to Accor's director of communications, Peter Hook, creative packaging first emerged during the 1980s pilots' dispute. "City hotels had previously assumed that weekends were dead periods, but out of adversity came a new trend: creative packages for the local market," he says.

Similar to the pilots' strike experience, Hook believes the packages emerging now are important tools for enticing people to get out despite the economic climate. "You now have a large number of locals who, whether they like it or not, are looking to Australia for their next trip."

Best Western's general manager of sales and marketing, Kimi Anderson, agrees: "Lately we've had a huge increase in interest about discounting. We have a staff member who finalises the nuts and bolts of our packaging, and it's all they seem to be doing at present."

Some of the most creative packaging seen at press time included

Mercure Welcome Melbourne's Fight The Financial Fix package, offering guests a free booklet, 50 Things For Under \$50, compiled by the hotel's knowledgeable concierge team, accompanied by \$119 room rates.

In Victoria's spa country, Novotel's Forest Resort Creswick was literally putting bums on seats with \$50 petrol vouchers or two free train tickets for couples taking up their two-night packages. For \$319 the promotion also included a free buffet breakfast and room upgrade.

What's working seems to depend on the segment. "Everyone loves breakfast and dinner inclusions," says Anderson from Best Western.

Club Med is focusing on free nights: newly renovated Club Med Bali and Club Med Lindeman Island both have 25 per cent off packages out, and are expecting their all-inclusive approach to reap rewards.

In destination marketing, Hook from Accor points to Canberra's packaging prowess: "Canberra became very good at creating packages from late '80s to early '90s, trying to change the city's image with successful packages around all those blockbuster art shows."

He also predicts big things from Victoria if troubled times continue. "Their jigsaw strategy fits in very nicely with this."