



THE LAST WORD

By Karen Phillips

The latest Lara Bingle incident has certainly managed to ruffle some feathers!

I admit all this fluster has got me a tad perplexed. Did that Australian tourism campaign TV advert make her feel so liberated that she felt the need to take her clothes off for the latest edition of the German men's GQ magazine or was she always 'that kind of girl'?

What was she thinking that no-one back home would notice, that it wouldn't be beamed around the globe in a matter of nano-seconds, that Australian tourism officials wouldn't blush at the saucy image of their ambassador's nubile nakedness nestled in a grassy knoll? Whatever thoughts she may have given to her bronzed all-Aussie promo image before she agreed to increase her international profile it has all been blown out the window in one click of the camera!

Maybe it was the swearing that made her think she could truly relax into the great Aussie tradition and that taking her bra and knickers off for the lense is just an extension of her new found freedom of speech. Or perhaps it was just the next obvious career step and upon viewing the images, none of my male friends seem to see any problem with the transition.

From sweetheart model, to the highly publicised fling with AFL football star Brendan Fevola to international men's mag nudie shoots perhaps this was just a natural progression for this seductive blonde? Who knows, could it have just been simply the hefty big wad of cash that was too enticing to refuse - like so many before her?

Whatever it was, the 'incident' as it is being termed, has created quite a stir and now the "Where the Bloody Hell are You?" campaign that became far more notorious for its failure to launch rather than its intended world-wide success, has been hurled back into the media spotlight just when its creators were sighing the final breath of relief - that it had finally disappeared into the murky depths of the 'crashed and burned' campaign swamp.

As I sip on a Mai-Tai by the Palazzo Versace pool while indulging in a self-imposed writing hibernation weekend, I gaze at all the lounging tourists soaking up the golden atmosphere and wonder how they found

this paradise in the sun if these national tourism marketing campaigns aren't doing their job.

As Australia's undisputed tourist capital, it intrigues me that not one image of this region was used in the recent world-wide Australian Tourism Lara bingle campaign. Sadly the Gold Coast's glitter didn't make it past the producer's cutting room floor!

In a recent Channel Nine's A Current Affair expose, they asked the burning question why didn't Queensland receive a higher ranking in the campaign and where the bloody hell was the Gold Coast?

South East Queensland 92.5 Gold FM radio brekkie stars, Richard Fowler and Sarah Wharmby summed it up nicely in their interview with the TV Show.

"What were they thinking it is ludicrous not to have the Gold Coast featured in this international campaign, of all the destinations featured surely the South East Queensland region would have taken top ranking?" they chimed.

Ludicrous, yes, but unfortunately not an isolated incident.

I remember visiting the Australian Tourism Commission back in 1999 on a PR visit as part of the build up to the Sydney Olympics, only to be astonished to find that there wasn't one, no not even a single picture of the Golden strip in their media slide collection.

Now, just so you fully understand this oversight. These were the official promotional images that were sent across the globe to promote our fair land. When I questioned it, I was told by an official, they (the then Australian Tourism Commission) had other similar shots from various locations across the country that represented beaches, nightlife and such and didn't need to double up with Gold Coast images.

Astonishing? You bet ya baby! So it seems, nothing has changed in just under a decade.

Like many others, the radio duo don't believe we seem to be receiving a fair amount of support as a destination and that region still isn't taken seriously as a national contender in so many industries including tourism which is nothing less than pure short sightedness.

Well with or without the adequate support from national tourism bodies, we seem to be managing just fine on our own thanks very much.

Just ask former international super model and ex-Mrs Rod Stewart, the divine Rachel Hunter what she thinks of the region.

"I just love it!"

"How can you not, I've been here before and it is such an amazing destination, so it was the perfect location to launch my new international swimwear range Lola," she said while lounging aboard a luxury Sunseeker motoryacht on the crystal clear Broadwater.

Let's face it, Rachel and her New Zealand based team could have chosen anywhere in the world to launch their sexy range but it was at the world's first Versace Hotel that they chose to unveil the highly anticipated cosies.

And as I take another sip of my rainbow cocktail as the sun sets behind the Date Palms across the shimmering crystal clear Broadwater, it crosses my mind that Rachel is in good company.

With sightings of the world's elite from movie stars Kate Hudson and Matthew McConaughey to Bono, Paris Hilton, Anthony Robbins and Rachel Ward, all choosing to spend their leisure time in no other than Australia's Tourism Capital, we must be doing something right to lure such celebs.

Whenever I ask visitors to the Coast what they think of the destination, they are lavish in their tributes. They love the beach culture, the weather, the slower pace, the locals and they all agree - it's got to be one of the best places on the planet.

Let's face it, that's why we all choose to live here isn't it? Heaven on earth and all that jazz. Safe, clean, beautiful, not too crowded, not too fast.

Whatever your reasons, why ever you moved to what us rare 'born and bred' Coasters refer to as the closest thing to Paradise, we are damn lucky to call it home of that you have my 'bloody' word!

