



If there's a flavour of the month in team-building activities, it has to be cooking, thanks to the inspiration of such wildly popular TV programs as *MasterChef*.

Dishing it out

What's cooking in team-building these days? Precisely that: cooking.

TV programs such as the popular *MasterChef* and the cult series *Iron Chef* have helped boost interest in the kitchen, which has had a knock-on effect in corporate team-building industry.

A range of companies are enjoying success in a big way with cooking as a team-building exercise, with the added benefit that the participants end up doing their own catering.

Resourcefulness leads to new product at rural hotel

Inspired by TV's *MasterChef* series, Crowne Plaza Hunter Valley turned its Grapevine cafe/bar into a large-scale



In the Crowne Chef Challenge are (from left): Shereen Mathew and Alesha McMillan (Crowne Plaza Coogee Beach, Sydney), Melissa Zaniol (Crowne Plaza Parramatta) and Alisha Warren (IHG head office).

kitchen for a cook-off challenge.

It was a team-building exercise for more than 70 human resources staff from InterContinental Hotels Group properties across Australia and the Pacific, and a highlight of their four-day conference at the property.

Participants in the Crowne Chef Challenge were each provided with a chef's hat and apron and divided into groups of four, being assigned one of four culinary roles – executive chef, sous chef, apprentice or kitchen hand. Eighteen work stations were set up for the challenge.

Teams had two minutes to devise a menu of four dishes, one minute to collect the ingredients from the pantry and one hour to cook and plate up their dishes, matched with wines.

Judging was in the hands of Crowne Plaza Hunter Valley general manager Thomas Tait, and each member of the winning team was awarded a holiday at the hotel while the losers were given wooden spoons.

Such was the success of the event that the challenge is being offered to business events groups at Crowne Plaza Hunter Valley.

Never too many cooks...

It's never a case of too many cooks when Sydney-based Cheeky Food Group is on the job.

Team cooking as a team-building exercise is gathering popularity. In fact, it is so popular, thanks to a flurry of television shows and print



media attention, that the group managed to line up 550 colleagues for a client's cooking session in Melbourne Convention & Exhibition Centre.

"It was amazing to see so many people all cooking together and in such an unlikely venue," says found/managing director Leona Watson.

"This event was actually one of five held for each of the client's offices across Australia."

She says Cheeky has been inundated with requests for large-scale cooking events, with a trend toward special venues, unique locations, themeing and links to a client's corporate objectives. "These events are definitely not your usual cooking class," says Watson. "Our clients are demanding events that can be tailored and which show results. It's not so much about the cooking as the 'show' – the entertainment, staging, lights, music and venue."

Venues used by the group have included Atlantic Group venues in Melbourne, convention centres in the main cities, Doltone House venues and Bondi Icebergs in Sydney, and most Crowne Plaza, Sofitel, Sebel, Mantra, Mercure, Hyatt Regency and Novotel hotels across Australia, New Zealand and Fiji. "We don't even need a kitchen," says Watson. "We bring our cooking



equipment with us and set up by swimming pools in grand ballrooms or even on rooftops." For conferences, this means large-scale events do not need to be moved offsite.

"We know the pain of moving a group of 200 people from one venue to another," says Watson. "That we can go onsite and get the group cooking for an ice-breaker, lunch refresher or a conference dinner is a sigh of relief for PCOs and event managers. They can also save by combining their meal and team activity budgets."

Watson says that finding a team activity for 1000 employees of varying age and fitness levels across five states is not easy, which is where cooking hits the mark.

Plenty to do at island resort

Kingfisher Bay Resort on Fraser Island in Queensland has a range of team-building activities from bush-tucker cooking classes to sailing, fishing and water sports.

Some of the most popular activities for conference groups include the two-hour ranger-guided canoe paddle to Dundonga Creek, passing through a mangrove colony and offering the chance to see birdlife, fish, rays, turtles, dolphins or dugongs; guided 4WD tours covering brush box forests, 75-Mile Beach, *The Maheno* shipwreck and the coloured sands of The Pinnacles; "walks and talks" with a ranger covering such topics as bush tucker and medicines, Aboriginal culture, dingo talk and flora and fauna.

Other activities ideal for conference groups

include a sunset champagne sail, bush tucker cooking class, a barbecue in a 1000-year-old forest, an Arabian tented lunch on 75-Mile Beach, a food and wine matching program, fishing, canoeing, trekking and orienteering as well as private whale-watch cruises.

Fraser Island is a 45-minute flight from Brisbane, and the resort can organise charter flights including seaplanes and 130-seat commercial jets. The resort can also help with logistics using helicopters, coaches, limousines and boats.

Kingfisher Bay Resort is on World Heritage-listed Fraser Island, a 50-minute ferry ride from Hervey Bay in south-east Queensland. It has a ballroom seating up to 300 people and has a range of outdoor venues.

Teaming up to go Italian

It takes team work to create a meal, which is why there is a growing demand for corporate cooking sessions.

It allows those involved to step away from their desks and bond in an enjoyable activity, which is why the chefs at Sydney's Signorelli Gastronomie, a new gastronomy emporium in Pymont, have introduced their "Laugh out Loud" culinary team-bonding program. Colleagues come together in teams to try their hands at making pizza, pasta, gnocchi, pastry and desserts.

With wide appeal, the cooking classes enable people to be creative and work together, as well as share their masterpieces. The Signorelli Gastronomie program can cater for groups of up to 25 people.

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Also as seen on TV...

When the TV series *Australia's Greatest Athlete* was filmed on Couran Cove Island Resort in Queensland at the end of last year, it sparked the resort to introduce a signature team-building event.

Coming on line in time for winter, Couran's Greatest Athlete is tailored for each group's needs and incorporates the activities seen on the show. The events can be run in one day or held over consecutive days, with participation either as individuals or teams.

Groups can be tested in the "leap of faith", kayak races, soccer penalty shootouts, bench press, beach sprints or jet-ski time trials. Other activities include beach flags, archery, basketball shootouts, water polo, high ropes and mini-triathlons.

With an emphasis on fun, the level of physicality is adjusted for each group.

Couran Cove Island Resort is on South Stradbroke Island, 40 minutes by ferry from The Gold Coast. Its onsite sport and recreation team can handle large conference groups, and the resort also has accommodation and conference spaces. ➔