

A woman with curly brown hair, wearing a vibrant red long-sleeved dress, is smiling warmly at the camera. She is leaning against a dark, cylindrical railing. The background consists of vertical white slats, possibly part of a building's exterior or a fence, with some lights visible behind them. The overall scene is set at night.

# An International *Affair*

Flitting abroad to forge new markets, meet with agents or new clients, and back home to take care of business is all in a week's work for Janine. But as **HOLLY THOMSON** discovers, it's times like this at Trinity Anglican School with some of her international students that she cherishes most. Photos by Robert Kellett. ▶



“The students are the most satisfying part, and their experiences in Australia are invaluable,” explains Janine. She feels that in many areas of international education including study tours, business has doubled in the last 12 months. And even while tourism has lulled in the past few years, international education is booming. It’s a baffling thought. Janine clarifies this statement further; “the tourism dollar is essentially your surplus income – your luxury dollar. So the worse off the economy, the less people travel. But with education, the worse off the economy, the more people want to invest in education”. And this is similar to government investment in promoting educational opportunities abroad. “Premier Beattie recognised that we needed to promote Australian education to overseas students. So he established QETI (Queensland Education and Training International) six years ago.” But it’s people like Janine who are taking these initiatives and driving them to the market.

Her company, Banora International Group, is a key member of Study Cairns, a business development network that works closely with CREDC (Cairns Economic Region Development Corporation). Coupled with her vast experience in international marketing, Janine was appointed President of Study Cairns – the peak body in the region for the international student education industry – basically what TTNQ is to tourism in Cairns, Study Cairns is to international education. Janine is bubbling with enthusiasm at the challenges that lie ahead in leading Study Cairns, as it explores a union with Study Townsville and Darwin. Also to create a formidable marketing force and international education package difficult for potential visitors to overlook.

Janine saw the international education industry grow on the Gold Coast during her 12 years in business there with her international student recruitment

company Banora International Group. And she saw the same potential in Cairns. “We have it all here,” she explains of the quality educational sites and great variety of natural attractions.

Relocating to Cairns just two years ago to be with husband Michael, Sales Director of Capta Group, Janine recounts her various jobs and adventures in Australia and overseas, the theme of things “falling into place” at just the right time repeats itself over and over again. It was a head-on car accident that broke her back and set her on this stunning journey. Confined to bed for months, Janine wasted no time using tapes to learn Japanese. Her interest in Japan was triggered some years earlier with an inseparable friendship with a Japanese exchange student. Once well enough, she was off to Japan, caddying at a golf resort where the golf clubs were carried in carts along a monorail operated by remote control. She worked in a café and the kitchen of an onsen, taught English, imported bricks from Perth into Japan and started bringing small groups of students on their summer breaks to Cairns.

Upon her return to Australia, Janine finished her tourism diploma, and as luck would have it, secured a job interview with a Tweed Heads travel agency the evening after her final exams. The next day, the then 23-year-old Janine walked into Banora Travel as a hopeful job applicant. Two hours later she walked out as a partner, heading up a new international division, Banora International, later renamed as Banora International Group. For a few years she spent every second month in Japan as she brought students and tourists to Australia, before eventually going out on her own and moving to the Gold Coast.

As Janine looks forward to growing international education in Cairns, she points out that currently, its members bring international students who inject

\$50 million a year into the local economy. Long-term students spend \$30,000 to \$40,000 a year in Cairns, as well as bringing around 2500 visiting relatives and friends to the region. And of the 25,000 short-term educational visitors to Queensland every year – attending anything from four-day excursions to two-week study tours – more than half come to Cairns.

Today Janine’s company is divided into four parts: Education by recreation (study tours); ASAP homestays (for TAFE and private organisations); ICER student recruitment agency (to place students into different schools); and PIM professional international marketing for schools and tourist organisations. While she feels that with QANTAS recently dropping out of the market significantly, and reducing the flight scheduling and seating capacity into Cairns, some groups may have been deterred. But despite this setback, they are still running on a boom.

Regardless of how busy her day, Janine still gets hands-on in the day-to-day operations of the business. “Every day is different. I work in operations, accounting, and take agents on famils. I meet every student group that my company brings here, that’s the part I love, they are the reason I lead this madly busy life.” And let’s not forget her involvement with networks like Study Cairns. And as Study Cairns marks its tenth anniversary this year, Janine hopes to see the organisation come into its own and compel more and more people worldwide to see Cairns as a serious educational destination. “When you have a vision behind you, you can do anything,” explains Janine. Along with her experience in the Gold Coast market and enthusiasm for Cairns, she believes the wealth of contacts she has made over the years both in industry and government will be another asset she can bring to the organisation. CL