



EASTERN university games COFFS HARBOUR



FINE TUNED ATHLETES: Shona Manning, middle far right, and friends are competing at the Eastern University Games.

It's all fun and games for Shona

By STEPHEN JEFFERY

FOR University Games athlete Shona Manning, the Coffs Coast is a great place to visit and a potential future home.

The University of Newcastle physiotherapy student is among a horde of students who have descended upon the region for the 2010 Eastern University Games.

The city has already made quite an impression on Shona and her friends.

"It's really good," the Newcastle netballer said. "The nightlife here is really good."

That's not all that has impressed her.

Shona and her friends unanimously nominated the Big Banana as their favourite local landmark.

Games marketing co-ordinator Sarah Wordsworth said the event had drawn 2000 students – an increase of 300 on the number who participated in last year's event at Bathurst.

"I think it's because many competitors remember how good it was at the 2006 games here and because Coffs Harbour is a popular destination with its warmer weather and beautiful beaches," Ms Wordsworth said.

About 3500 competitors, from across eastern Australia, are this week competing in a range of sports in Bendigo, Toowoomba and here in Coffs Harbour. The latter has attracted the vast majority of them, including two sevens rugby teams from the Royal Military College Duntroon.

"They're soaking up the sunshine," Sarah said with a laugh.

The influx of students is a goldmine for local accommodation providers.

Coffs Harbour YHA assistant manager Scott Collins said the hostel was hosting 50 more people than usual for this time of year.

"We've taken on quite a few more," Mr Collins said. "They haven't been too badly behaved either."

The games are also providing a boost in the hospitality and retail sectors.

"There have been some large functions taking place this week," Coffs Coast Visitor Information Centre manager Brian Bowers said.

"There were students coming out of Park Beach Plaza last night with trolleys full of food."

It is hoped the games will lead to future investment in the region from athletes keen to return for holidays.

Shona intends doing that ... and more.

"I want to live here," she said.

"It would be a fantastic place to live."

The games began yesterday and finish tomorrow, with several different venues in and around Coffs Harbour being utilised to hold the different sporting codes, such as Sportz Central and Coffs Rugby Park. The events are a lead-in to the Australian University Games, being held in Perth in September, where a total of 31 sports will be contested. Although not yet confirmed, it is probable next year's games will be held in Canberra.

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