



# Race row lands resort in hot water

**Dylan Welch**

AN AWARD-winning Top End tourism operator has denied that a manager at one of its hostels asked a group of Aborigines on a lifesaving training trip to leave because they were “scaring” other guests.

The incident, which the company denied in a statement released late yesterday, sparked calls of racism from the allegedly ejected people and condemnation from the Northern Territory’s anti-discrimination commissioner.

One of the young mothers who was allegedly asked to leave the hostel, Bethany Langdon, said she was now worried her three-year-old daughter might one day be subjected to the same bigotry.

“I don’t want that for her,” Ms Langdon, 19, said “I want her to grow up in a society where everyone respects everyone else for where they come from ... treats them the same, treats them in a good manner.”

Adventure Tourism Australia, which bills itself as Australia’s leading small-group tour company with 90,000 clients last year, had initially defended itself by saying it catered only “for international backpacking tourists, which the group was not”. It also initially said it had offered to pay for the group’s alternative accommodation.

Yet in a blurb on its website the

company states its tours place an emphasis on “the unique scenery, wildlife and Aboriginal culture of each area”.

“Don’t blame us if you finish your tour and start telling strangers about all the weird and wonderful facts you’ve learnt about rocks, plants, animals, Aboriginal culture, all the great people you’ve met and how wonderful it is to be alive!” the website states.

But the company is now reeling from allegations the manager of the Haven Backpacker Resort in Alice Springs ejected 16 guests because they were Aborigines.

“The manager said she had received several complaints about us because we were Aboriginal from Asian backpackers, who had said if we didn’t leave they would, as they were afraid of us,” said Emilia Watson, a youth worker on the trip with the Warlpiri women.

The 16 mainly indigenous people included six women who had come to Alice Springs to learn lifesaving in preparation for the opening of a swimming pool in the community of Yuendumu, about 300 kilometres north-west of Alice Springs.

They had been at the hostel for about half an hour on Saturday afternoon when the manager said they had to leave, she said.

“She said these backpackers bring in a lot of money and because they had said they were go-

ing to leave if we didn’t, so we had to leave because she didn’t want to lose the money that they brought in,” Ms Watson said. “She was just talking as if it was an absolutely everyday thing to do. I was shocked and couldn’t really comprehend that she was asking us to leave because we were a group of Aboriginal people.”

Yesterday the company stated the manager had received numerous complaints from other guests about the group but had not asked them to leave.

“The manager advised both parties of their respective views, that she was prepared to move the complainants and assured the lifesaving group that they were welcome to stay,” the statement read.

The Territory’s anti-discrimination commissioner, Tony Fitzgerald, said the women could have a strong case if they chose to pursue the matter.

His office received a small number of similar reports every year, including one in which a group of Aborigines were asked to pay more for hotel rooms because staff would have to clean the room more after they left, he said.

“It seems there’s a minority of operators in the hospitality industry who predict that Aboriginal people will behave inappropriately, and don’t treat them on their merits.”



Complaint about presence ... Bethany Langdon was one of 16 people asked to leave the Alice Springs hostel. Photo: The Royal Lifesaving Society Australia