Marine and Tropical Sciences
Research Facility

Australian Government
Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts

REEF TOURISM
QUARTERLY REPORT # 6
Quarter 2, Year 2 | THE WHITSUNDAYS
April 2008 – June 2008

This quarterly report forms part of a series on reef tourism in the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) produced by James Cook University (JCU) and funded by the Australian Government's Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility (MTSRF), which is administered in North Queensland by the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre. The aims and methodology of this research are presented in the introduction below. The data presented in this report summarise the results obtained during the second quarter of the project's second year (N = 114); the results from the same quarter in the first year of data collection (N = 82); and the overall results for the period between November 2006 and June 2008 (N = 819). The results include socio-demographic characteristics, travel behaviour, alternative destinations, motivations and planning, and reef experience.

Note: For purposes of comparison, the figures for the entire sample & the same quarter from Year 1 are provided in the text in brackets after the figures for this quarter (Year 2, Quarter 2).

1. INTRODUCTION

The research described here falls under the MTSRF research program to identify **sustainable use and management of marine resources of the Great Barrier Reef** and specifically the **analysis of tourism use and impact on the Great Barrier Reef for managing sustainable tourism.** This program will identify annual visitor usage patterns of the GBR to enable the identification of key trends and drivers of visitor patterns. Results are presented quarterly.

2. METHODOLOGY

The principle methodology for this research is visitor surveys distributed through participating operators. Crew from these marine tourism operators distribute and collect the surveys at four locations across the Great Barrier Reef (Port Douglas/Cairns, Townsville, the Whitsundays, and the Capricorn Coast). Results are available in an aggregate form as well as regionally, such as the report presented here. Currently, ten operators are involved in this research. A total of 114 surveys were collected in the second quarter of Year 2.

Data are collected on reef visitors' socio-demographic characteristics, and travel patterns, motivations, activities, alternative destinations considered and levels of satisfaction (including expectations and best and worst experiences).

3. LIMITATIONS

Data from the Asian market have yet to be collected. Sampling bias by crews must also be considered.

JCU JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY

Reef & Rainforest RESEARCH CENTRE

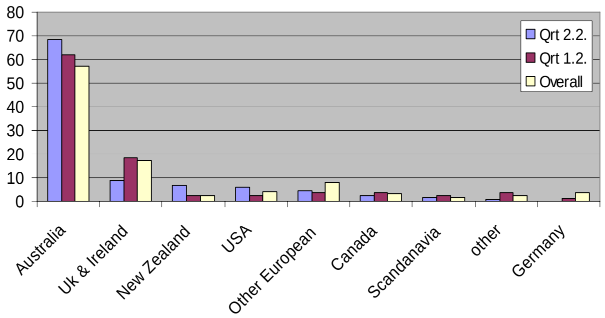
Photo credits: Southern Cassowary, Wet Tropics Management Authority; Hill Inlet in the Whitsundays, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade - Overseas Information Branch; Butterfly fish, Robert Thorn; Rainforest fruits Wet Tropics Management Authority.

4. FINDINGS

Origin of Respondents

This quarter's sample consisted of slightly fewer men, 42.5% (43.9%;[1] 42.6%;[2]) than women, 57.5% (56.1%; 57.6%). Over half of the respondents, 68.4% (62.2%; 57.4%), were from Australia, of which 29.1% were from Queensland (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Origin of respondents.



Employment

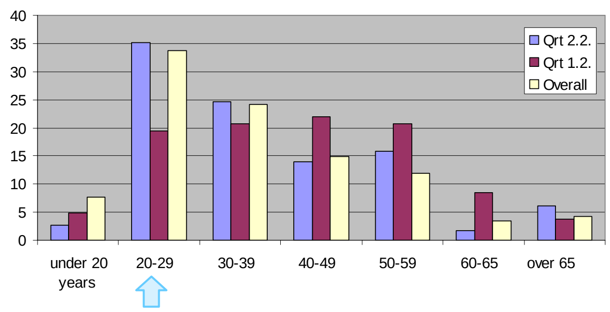
In terms of **employment**, the most common responses were (as a percentage of the total):

	Quarter 2, Year 2	Quarter 2, Year 1	Overall
Professionals	21.1%	23.2%	*25.9%*
Self-employed	14.0%	6.1%	*8.9%*
Management	13.2%	11.0%	*8.9%*
Students	7.9%	6.1%	*13.7%*
Service Industry	7.0%	6.1%	*5.6%*
Retired	7.0%	13.4%	*7.2%*

Age of Respondents

Respondents in this area of the GBR fell predominantly into the 20-29 year age bracket (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Age of respondents.

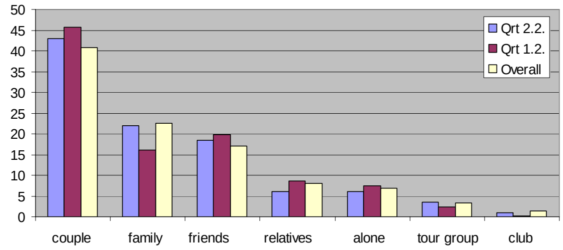


[1] The Whitsundays Quarter 2, Year 1.
[2] The Whitsundays overall sample.

Travel Party

The majority of respondents were travelling as couples (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Respondents' travel party (%).



Previous Visits

For 75.5% (69.1%; 75.5%) of respondents, this was their first visit to the region**.** The average length of stay was 2-7 (2-5; 2-5) nights.

Accommodation and Transport

Most respondents stayed in resorts or holiday apartments (Figure 4), and most flew into the region (Figure 5).

Figure 4: Respondents' choice of accommodation (%).

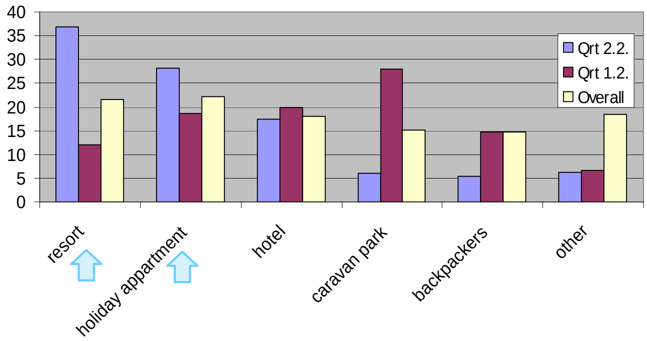
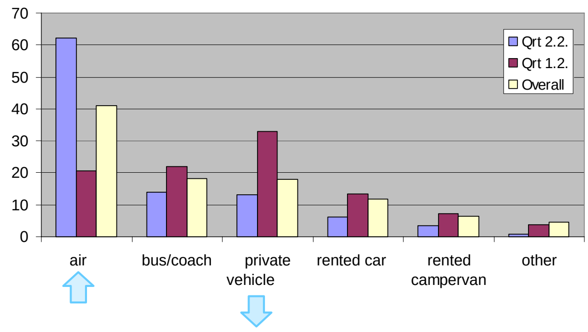


Figure 5: Respondents' choice of transport (%).



Last Holiday Location

The most popular single destinations given in response to "Where did you spend your last holiday?" are provided in the table below.

OVERALL RESPONDENTS (N=114)	
Gold Coast	7.9%
Europe	6.1%
New Zealand	6.1%
Thailand	5.3%
INTERNATIONAL RESPONDENTS (N=36)	
Thailand	11.1%
Gold Coast	8.3%
USA	8.3%
DOMESTIC RESPONDENTS (N=78)	
Europe	7.7%
Gold Coast	7.7%
New Zealand	6.4%

A thematic/regional analysis of these same results (last holiday location) shows the following trends:

OVERALL RESPONDENTS (N=114)	
Queensland	27.9%
Australia, excluding Queensland	24.4%
Europe	18.3%
North America (inc. Caribbean)	13.0%
NZ, Pacific and South-east Asia	10.0%
Africa and Latin America	5.0%
Asia	1.8%
INTERNATIONAL RESPONDENTS (N=36)	
Europe	22.2%
Queensland	19.4%
NZ, Pacific and South-east Asia	19.4%
North America (inc. Caribbean)	16.7%
Australia	11.1%
Africa and Latin America	5.6%
Asia	5.6%
DOMESTIC RESPONDENTS (N=78)	
Australia, excluding Queensland	37.9%
Queensland	19.2%
NZ, Pacific and South-east Asia	17.7%
Europe	13.7%
North America (inc. Caribbean)	8.7%
Asia	3.8%

Alternative Destinations Considered

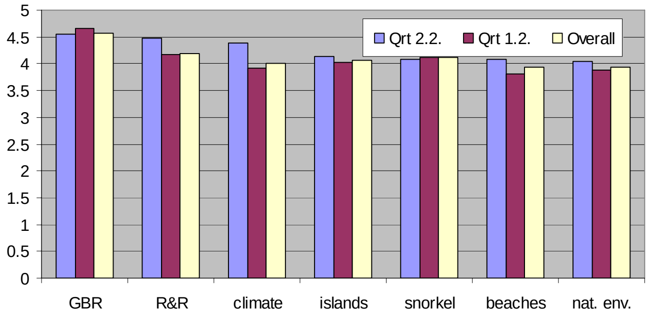
The most popular alternative destinations considered when planning this trip were:

Destination	
Cairns	10.1%
Fiji	7.4%
New Zealand	6.1%
Gold Coast	5.2%

Motivations

The most important motivations (measured on a scale of 1 = not at all important, to 5 = very important) for visiting the region include visiting the reef, rest and relaxation and snorkelling (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Respondents' motivations to visit the region (mean).



Information Sources

The sources of information used by respondents when planning their trip to the region are shown in the table below.

	Quarter 2, Year 2	Quarter 2, Year 1	Overall
Friends & Relatives	40.4%	37.8%	*40.4%*
Internet	29.8%	22.0%	*23.1%*
Guidebook	17.5%	24.4%	*25.7%*
Previous trip	17.5%	18.3%	*13.9%*

Previous Visits to the Reef

For 65.5% (67.9%; 68.3%) respondents this was their first visit to the reef.

Choice of Tour Operator

Visitors' most common reasons for choosing their reef tour operator were:

	Quarter 2, Year 2	Quarter 2, Year 1	Overall
Destination	39.6%	2.8%	*8.9%*
Recommended by agent	34.2%	8.3%	*16.6%*
Availability	26.1%	11.1%	*13.6%*
Package	25.2%	11.1%	*14.5%*
Price	20.7%	18.1%	*15.4%*

Diving Profile

When asked if they planned to dive the reef, 19.6% (26.9%; 28.1%) of respondents said yes. 53.8% (55.6%; 43.7%) of these respondents had no previous diving experience, 23.1% (5.6%; 25.4%) had one to four dives, 15.4% (5.6%; 11.0%) had five to 10 dives and only 7.7% (33.2%; 19.9%) had more than 10 dives.

Visits to Other Reefs

Over 44.2% (39.7%; 42.1%) of respondents said they had visited other coral reefs before coming to the Great Barrier Reef. The most commonly cited alternative reef destination was the South Pacific 19.3% (4.9%; 9.9%), South East Asia 12.3% (2.4%; 10.4%) and Hawaii 10.5% (6.1%; 6.3%).

Activities Undertaken

The most common activities undertaken during the trip were:

	Quarter 2, Year 2	Quarter 2, Year 1	Overall
Snorkelling	84.2%	78.0%	78.9%
Swimming	↑ 61.4%	51.2%	52.8%
Glass-bottom boat	↓ 66.4%	81.7%	65.6%
View marine mammals	↓ 38.1%	65.9%	53.7%
Visiting islands	↑ 24.4%	18.3%	26.1%
Diving	20.9%	24.4%	29.3%

Satisfaction Levels and Recommendations

Satisfaction ratings (measured on a scale of 1 to 10) were generally high, with scores of 9 and 10 accounting for 63.2% (47.4%; 48.9%) of the all responses. The mean satisfaction score was 8.74 (8.54; 8.32).

79.8% (86.1%; 81.2%) of respondents felt that they got value for money, and 89.4% (86.6%; 89.4%) said that they would recommend the trip to others.

The first four factors that **influenced satisfaction** (either positively or negatively) include:

	Quarter 2, Year 2	Quarter 2, Year 1	Overall
Staff / service / professionalism	↓ 42.1%	50.7%	35.5%
National environment	↓ 14.0%	27.5%	20.5%
Weather / sea state (sea sick)	↓ 13.2%	23.2%	19.7%
Diving / snorkelling	↓ 6.1%	10.1%	10.1%

Tourists' **best experiences** included:

	Quarter 2, Year 2	Quarter 2, Year 1	Overall
Diving / snorkelling	↓ 38.6%	44.0%	37.6%
Marine life	17.5%	18.7%	24.9%
Staff / service / professionalism	9.6%	12.0%	11.8%

Tourists' **worst experiences** included:

	Quarter 2, Year 2	Quarter 2, Year 1	Overall
Weather / sea state (sea sick)	↓ 22.8%	39.0%	*24.9%*
None	↓ 19.3%	26.8%	*20.9%*

When asked if the trip met their expectations, visitors recorded the following answers:

	Reef		Trip	
Not at all	0.0%	2.4%; 1.4%;	0.0%	2.6%; 2.9%
Not very much	4.4%	3.7%; 5.7%	4.8%	2.6%; 4.1%
Somewhat	24.3%	25.6%; 36.3%	20.0%	28.2%; 31.1%
Very much	71.0%	64.6%; 56.6%	75.2%	66.7%; 61.8%

For further information about this project contact James Cook University:

Project Leader
Professor Bruce Prideaux
Bruce.Prideaux@jcu.edu.au
Phone: (07) 4042 1039

Project Manager
Dr Alexandra Coghlan
Alexandra.Coghlan@jcu.edu.au
Phone: (07) 4042 1763

For future updates, visit www.rrrc.org.au/publications