

REEF TOURISM QUARTERLY REPORT # 1 Townsville November 2006 – January 2007

This quarterly report forms part of a series of reports presented by the Australian Government's Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility (MTRSF), represented in North Queensland by the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre, and James Cook University (JCU) on reef tourism in the Great Barrier Reef (GBR). The aims and methodology of this research are presented in the introduction below. The data presented in this report summarise the results from the first quarter of data collection in the Townsville region between November 2006 and January 2007. A total of 101 surveys were returned. The results include socio-demographic characteristics, travel behaviour, alternative destinations, motivations and planning, and reef experience.



1. INTRODUCTION



The research described here falls under MTRSF's 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.



2. METHODOLOGY



The principle methodology for this research is visitor surveys distributed through participating tourism operators. Crew from these marine tourism operators distribute and collect the surveys at five locations across the Great Barrier Reef (Port Douglas, Cairns, Townsville, Airlie Beach and the Southern Region). Results are available in an aggregate form as well as regionally, such as the report presented here. Fourteen operators are currently involved in this research. Data is collected on reef visitors' socio-demographic characteristics, as well as travel patterns, motivations, activities, alternative destinations considered, satisfaction (including expectations and best and worst experiences).



3. LIMITATIONS



During this period, the major limitations included poor weather and low visitor numbers.



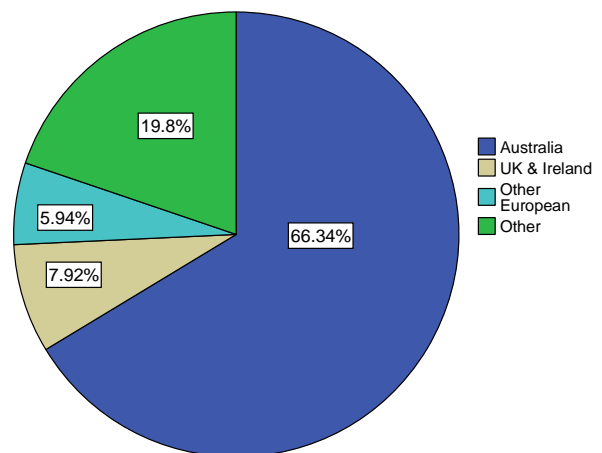
4. FINDINGS



Origin of Respondents

The sample consisted of 57.5% females and 42.5% males. Most respondents were from Australia (63.5%), of which 30% were from Queensland.

Figure 1: Origin of respondents.



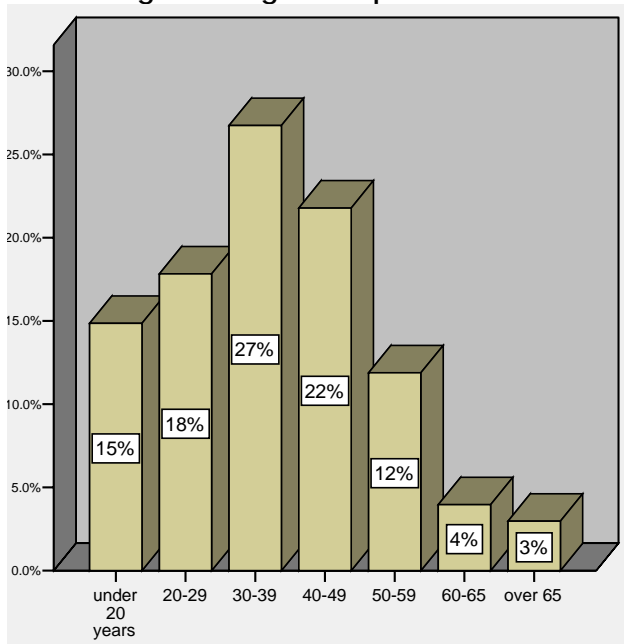
Employment

In terms of **employment**, the most common responses were:

- Professionals..... 22.4%
- Public service16%
- Students.....16%

Age of Respondents

Figure 2: Age of respondents.



Travel Party

The majority of respondents were **traveling**:

- With their family / relatives52%
- With a partner or spouse26%

Previous Visits

For 36% of respondents, this was their first **visit to Far North Queensland**. Of those who had visited the region previously, over one-third (36.5%) had visited 'many' times before, and of the remainder, a quarter had visited twice before. The average **length of stay** was ten nights, with the majority of respondents staying four nights (modal average).

Accommodation and Transport

More than one-third of respondents were staying with friends or relatives, 14.5% chose hotels for their **accommodation**, with resort accommodation being equally popular (14.5%). Over 40% of respondents flew into the region as their **mode of**

transport, whilst another 33% used private vehicles to reach the destination.

Previous 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=101)	
NONE	25.9%
CAIRNS	5.7%
NEW ZEALAND	5.2%
GOLD COAST	3.6%
MELBOURNE	3.6%
AIRLIE BEACH	3.1%
GOLD COAST	2.1%
PERTH	2.1%
SYDNEY	2.1%
USA	2.1%
FIJI	2.1%
INTERNATIONAL RESPONDENTS (N=34)	
NONE	22.1%
NEW ZEALAND	10.4%
MELBOURNE	3.9%
USA	3.9%
BRAZIL	2.6%
BRISBANE	2.6%
MELBOURNE	2.6%
NEW YORK	2.6%
PERTH	2.6%
SYDNEY	2.6%
DOMESTIC RESPONDENTS (N=67)	
NONE	28.4%
CAIRNS	8.6%
GOLD COAST	6.0%
AIRLIE BEACH	4.3%
GOLD COAST	3.4%
MELBOURNE	3.4%
MAGNETIC ISLAND	2.6%
PORT DOUGLAS	2.6%

A **thematic / regional analysis** shows the following trends:

OVERALL RESPONDENTS (N=101)	
QUEENSLAND	23.2%
AUSTRALIA	25.3%
EUROPE	18.2%
NZ, PACIFIC & SOUTH-EAST ASIA	9.1%
NORTH AMERICA (inc. Caribbean)	8.1%
ASIA	5.1%
AFRICA AND LATIN AMERICA	5.1%

DOMESTIC RESPONDENTS (N=67)	
AUSTRALIA	36.9%
QUEENSLAND	30.8%
EUROPE	10.8%
NZ, PACIFIC & SOUTH-EAST ASIA	7.7%
NORTH AMERICA (inc. Caribbean)	4.6%
ASIA	1.5%
INTERNATIONAL RESPONDENTS (N=34)	
EUROPE	32.4%
AFRICA AND LATIN AMERICA	14.7%
NORTH AMERICA (inc. Caribbean)	14.7%
ASIA	11.8%
NZ, PACIFIC & SOUTH-EAST ASIA	11.8%
QUEENSLAND	8.8%
AUSTRALIA	2.9%

Alternative Destinations Considered

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

Destination	%
NONE	27.5%
CAIRNS	5.5%
NEW ZEALAND	5%
WHITSUNDAYS	5%
GOLD COAST	3.5%
MELBOURNE	3.5%

Motivations

The most **important motivations** for visiting the region (ranked on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being most important) include:

- Visit the GBR..... 4.3 (mean)
- Snorkelling and diving..... 4.1
- Rest and relaxation 3.9
- Spend time with family 3.75

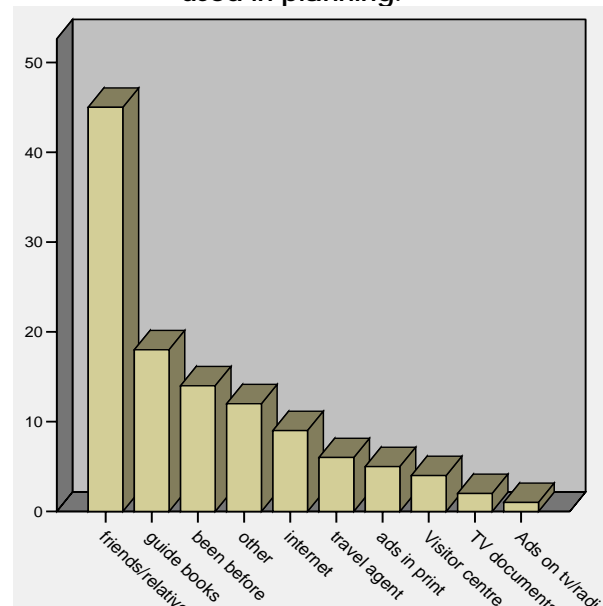
Information Sources

Information sources used to plan the holiday are shown in Figure 3.

Previous Visits

For most respondents (61%) this was their **first visit to the reef**. Of those who had been to the reef before, a quarter had been between one and four times before. Repeat visitors were often Australian (35% of respondents).

Figure 3: Information sources used in planning.



Choice of Tour Operator

The most common reasons for **choosing their reef tour operator** were:

- Availability, inc. "only choice" 33.5%
- Recommended to respondents..... 28.5%
- Price 12.5%
- Appealing / effective advertising 10.5%

Diving Profile

When visitors were asked if they **planned to dive** the reef, 22% of respondents said 'Yes'. Only fourteen respondents stated how many dives they had previously completed, five of whom had no previous diving experience. Seven respondents had completed between one and four dives previously and two had completed five or more dives.

Visit to Other Reefs

Over 40% of the respondents had **visited other coral reefs** before coming to the Great Barrier Reef, although the most commonly cited alternative destination was 'other Australian reefs' (28%), sometimes mistaken for other reefs on the GBR. The majority of respondents felt that **other Australian reefs were the same or better**.

Perceptions of the Reef Trip

In descending order of frequency, **perceptions of the reef tours** were:

- “A fantastic reef tour for all” 51.5%
- “A relaxing, fun filled day on the reef” 42.5%
- “Introduction to the reef”19%

Activities Undertaken

The most common **activities** undertaken during the trip were:

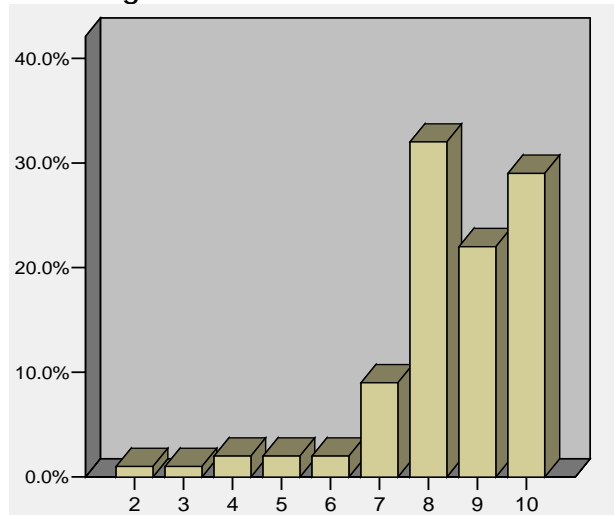
- Snorkelling91%
- Glass-bottom boat reef tour 67.5%
- Swimming 59.5%
- Viewing marine animals25%

Satisfaction Levels and Recommendations

Satisfaction ratings (measured on a scale of 1 – low satisfaction, to 10 – high satisfaction) were generally high, with scores of 9 and 10 accounting for 51% of the all responses. The mean satisfaction score was 8.4.

Eighty-seven percent of respondents felt that they achieved **value for money**, and 87% said they would **recommend the trip** to others.

Figure 4: Satisfaction scores.



The five factors that influenced the satisfaction (either positively or negatively) most frequently include:

- Staff / service / professionalism30%
- Natural environment 23.5%
- Weather / sea state (sea sick) 11.5%
- Food and beverages10%

Tourists’ **best experiences** include:

- Diving / snorkelling 41%
- Marine life 9%
- Food and beverages 9%
- Staff / service / professionalism 8%

Tourists’ **worst experiences** include:

- Weather / sea state (sea sick) 20%
- Poor coral / no fish 14%
- Rushed for time 19%
- Boat / facilities 17%

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

	Reef	Trip
Not at all	2%	2%
Not very much	1%	1%
Somewhat	40%	40%
Very much	52.5%	59%

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