

4 CONCLUSION

There are many tourists who visit the Great Barrier Reef for whom the Reef itself is not important in terms of their holiday. These people visit the Reef because of the weather and the relaxed nature of Reef holiday destinations. They tend to be repeat visitors and are mostly Australian. For them the Reef is a regular holiday destination, and will continue to be so. Other tourists are particularly interested in the Reef. These tend to be first timers, and do not necessarily plan to return to the reef. Most international tourists fall in this category.

North Queensland was perceived as a safe place, and tourists generally had no fears or special concerns about holidaying in north Queensland.

Most tourists were concerned about over-development. Almost all considered that there should be no further development on the reef.

Tourists can appreciate coral quality. Tourists who see higher quality coral have greater satisfaction than tourists who see poorer quality coral. However, the relationship between coral quality and coral perception is affected by other variables.

Dunk Island, Hinchinbrook Island and Heron Island did not appear to be attracting tourists who have environment related holidays and who therefore take advantage of these resorts' unique locations in special environments.

The results of this study have implications not only for the management of the Reef, but also for the future of tourism in north Queensland. Tourism in the Reef region comprises two main groups. The first timers who are attracted because of the reef, and the repeat tourists who return because of the idyllic weather and general atmosphere of the Reef, rather than the Reef itself. At present, these groups are equally important to the tourist industry on the Reef, and both groups are important to the future of a sustained tourist industry.

Only 40% of first time international tourists plan on returning within five years, whereas 83% of Australian tourists who had previously been to north Queensland plan on returning within that time. Since these groups are in approximately the same proportion on the reef, and since this study is representative, the Australian repeat tourism group will contribute more to future tourism on the Reef than return international tourism, unless there is a doubling of the proportion of international tourists to domestic tourists in the near future.

The reasons given by the first timers for coming to north Queensland are more related to the Reef and to sightseeing, whereas Repeat visitors gave reasons relating to the Weather. The weather was also important to first timers. While these are the reasons that have been stated by tourists, there are a number of other factors that contribute to their decision to come to north Queensland for this holiday. For first time international tourists, things like the popularity of things Australian, the value of the dollar, and the risk of terrorist attack in European destinations for US tourists are also very important. This group, is a high income group, has extensive international tourist experience, and Australia was the next place on the list. In the future, the popularity of destinations like Australia with regard to other tourist destinations can change, and the attractiveness of Australia itself may change, and therefore Australia may not be as important a tourist destination as other locations are.

It is likely therefore that the repeat Australian tourists may contribute more in terms of tourist numbers to the tourist industry in the future than first time tourists. Certainly this group should not be excluded from planning considerations.

While the reasons for holidaying in north Queensland for the return tourists are more related to the weather and relaxation, and first timers are more concerned about the reef, other differences

between the two groups tend to be small. Both groups are concerned about over development and consider that there should not be further development on the Reef. Differences in the physical requirements demanded of holiday destinations between the two groups were also small. Therefore, in terms of planning it is possible that the two groups, despite their different orientations in terms of holidays, discovery versus relaxation, may not require different facilities. Furthermore, it does indicate that the first timer international group may be over-served, in that the standard, cost and type of facilities being provided are more than is required by them. This finding is somewhat speculative as there was no analysis relating to the standard of accommodation, something that possibly should be considered further. Should this be the case, however, there are profound flow on implications for the tourist industry in Queensland as it would appear that there is too much luxury hotel development, and not enough facilities for low and middle income family groups. Backpacker groups seem to be adequately catered for.

With the enormous growth that has been occurring in the tourism industry in north Queensland, the success of the large scale developments that have been occurring is a self fulfilling prophecy. With sufficient advertising, access to travel agent bookings, and a shortage of beds, high cost accommodation will be utilised by tourists. That such luxury accommodation was desired by tourists is a different question, especially where tourists are placed in a situation where they can exercise little choice, either because alternative facilities do not exist, or because of a lack of information. Because of the effect of large scale luxury development on prices, and the change in character of locations, development of this kind may drive away other forms of tourism, and often such development is at the expense of, or to the exclusion of, low cost development.

Repeat tourism on the Reef is known to be a sustained tourist industry by virtue of the large number of Australians who have return holidays on the Reef. Only 40% of first time international tourists plan on returning within five years. Since this figure will be exaggerated, it should be compared to the 83% of repeat Australian tourists who plan on returning within five years to gain an appreciation of the relative importance of international tourism. Therefore, international tourism will not be important for sustained tourism in terms of repeat visitation. First time tourism to north Queensland, and even Australia, is a fashion, and north Queensland cannot indefinitely continue to attract new tourists at the rate of growth occurring now. It is also possible that the proportion of first time tourists to repeat tourists travelling to north Queensland will change, with repeat tourism becoming far more important. However, first time tourism is likely to continue to grow for at least the next few years.

The tourist industry should identify how it can increase return visitation, especially among the international group. Comments received from tourists indicated that while they enjoyed their time in north Queensland, there was nothing particularly unique or characteristic about north Queensland. The tourist industry may be advised to examine how to establish a tourist industry that has a uniquely Australian character, offers something different to other holiday destinations closer to the home countries of the international tourists, without excluding domestic tourists.