

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research reports the opinions and perceptions of tourists who are visiting the Great Barrier Reef. A range of issues relating to the respondents' holidays on the Reef, their reasons for visiting north Queensland, their likes, dislikes, and concerns, as well as their perception of coral, and their opinions on issues such as future development, are covered.

A total of 354 tourists were interviewed during two field trips in August/September and December 1986, representing the peak winter tourist season, and the off-peak summer tourist season. Interviewing took place at several locations along the length of the Great Barrier Reef.

Tourism in the Reef region comprises two main groups: first timers who are attracted primarily because of the reef; and repeat tourists who return because of the idyllic weather and general atmosphere of the Reef, and wish to relax on their holiday rather than being particularly interested in the Reef itself.

Many tourists who visit the Great Barrier Reef, visit 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.

Tourists who are particularly interested in the Reef, 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.

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 almost all tourists interviewed consider that there should be no 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. Should this be the case, 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.

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.

It is evident that the Australians returning to the Great Barrier Reef will contribute more to future tourism on the Reef than return international tourism. First time international tourism, presently growing at a fast rate, may be less important in the future if factors associated with the attractiveness of Australia change. These factors include the current fashion of things Australian in the United States, the value of the US and Australian dollars, and the threat of terrorist attack on US tourists in Europe and other places.

In order to attract more return international tourists the tourist industry may be advised to examine how to establish a tourist industry that has a uniquely Australian character, and offers something different to other holiday destinations closer to the home countries of the international tourists, without excluding domestic tourists.