

NERP Tropical Ecosystems Hub – Project 10.2 Factsheet

Cairns Airport Exit Survey 2013/14 - Great Barrier Reef Experiences

Louisa Yee-Sum Lee¹, Michelle Thompson¹ and Bruce Prideaux^{1,2}

¹James Cook University; ²Cairns Institute

Key messages

- Data reported in this factsheet form part of a long term monitoring study of visitors departing Cairns Airport since 2007.
- Over two fifths of respondents aged 20-29 were backpackers.
- The Great Barrier Reef was the highest ranked motive for visiting Cairns.
- The majority of respondents would not have make this trip if the reef was damaged.
- The 'draw-card' of selecting Cairns as a holiday destination was the active protection of its environment.

Overview

This factsheet reports on Great Barrier Reef (GBR) experiences of visitors to the Cairns region. The findings are based on **876 visitors** departing Cairns between September 2013 and February 2014 via the domestic terminal of Cairns International Airport.

Data were collected as part of a study investigating long term trends and changes in the travel motivations and behavior of tourists to the Cairns region. Disclaimer: The study was not designed to report on overall visitor numbers to the study region and was distributed only in English. Care should be taken if results are generalised beyond the sample reported in this factsheet.

Socio-Demographics Profiles

- Equal distribution of females and males visitors.
- A third were aged 20-29yrs, with 19% 30-39yrs and 17% 60yrs and over.
- Some 27% were employed as professionals, 16% were students and 13% were retired.
- Half had a degree qualification.
- 30% had an annual household income of AU\$32K-69K.
- 46% traveled as couples, 16% with friends and 15% were families with children.
- 57% were international and 43% were domestic visitors.
- International countries of origin were UK and Ireland (35%), Europe (28%), North America (22%), and Asia (9%).
- Domestic visitors were primarily from Victoria (36%), New South Wales (36%) and Queensland (18%).

Travel Behaviour

- 70% were first-time visitor, 30% were repeat visitors.
- 62% spent most nights in Cairns, with another 19% staying most nights in Port Douglas.
- 48% stayed in resorts/hotels, 19% in holiday apartments/units and 17% in backpacker hostels.
- 17% of the overall sample, or 42% of visitors aged 20-29, were backpackers.
- 42% hired a car while 36% joined commercial tours.
- Information sources used for Cairns: friends and relatives (41%), the Internet (39%), guidebooks (25%).
- Popular locations: Port Douglas (50%), Kuranda (44%), Daintree (38%), Palm Cove (36%) and Mossman Gorge (35%). See Figure 1.
- The average overall budget was AU\$5,728 for travel parties of 2 adults and 2 children.

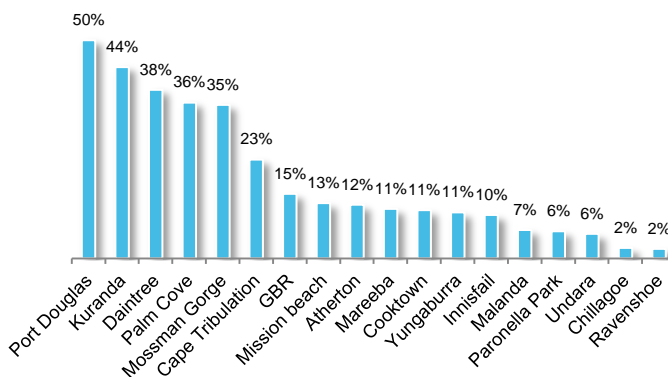


Figure 1. Favourite places visited in the Cairns region (n=876)

Travel Motivations

Visitors ranked their travel motivations to visit the Cairns region on a scale of 1 (not at all important) to 5 (very important). The top 10 motivations are listed in Table 1. Overall, the top five motives were: visiting the GBR; rest and relax; snorkelling and diving; experiencing the natural environment; and visiting the Wet Tropics rainforest.

For domestic visitors, rest and relax (4.27), enjoy the tropical lifestyle (3.93) and visiting the GBR (3.81) were the key motives. International visitors were strongly motivated by visiting the GBR (4.55), snorkeling and diving (4.00) and seeing Australian wildlife (3.85).

Table 1. Top 10 motives visiting the Cairns region (n=876)

	Overall	Domestic	International
Visit the GBR	4.24	3.81	4.55
Rest and relax	3.93	4.27	3.66
Snorkelling and diving	3.78	3.48	4.00
Experience the natural environment	3.74	3.78	3.71
Visit the Wet Tropics rainforest	3.61	3.41	3.77
Enjoy the tropical lifestyle	3.61	3.93	3.35
Climate	3.60	3.77	3.47
See Australian wildlife	3.55	3.15	3.85
Visit the beaches	3.48	3.60	3.38
Visit the region's National Parks	3.43	3.28	3.54

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Cairns Airport Exit Survey 2013/14 - Great Barrier Reef Experiences (Cont.)

Wet Tropics Rainforest Experiences

69% of international and 49% of domestic visitors visited the Wet Tropics Rainforest. This trip was the first visit to the rainforest for 92% of international and half of domestic visitors. Over 80% of them reported a good experience.

Great Barrier Reef Experiences

- 73% visited the GBR: 75% of them visited for the first time; and 84% reported a good experience.
- 34% dived on the reef and on average had dived 23 times before this trip.
- 31% chose the reef operators recommended by agents or hotels, 19% chose by prices and 18% by packages.
- 44% were aware that their reef operators were eco-certified.
- 40% of visitors who dived on other reefs rated the GBR as the same while 32% of them perceived better experiences on other reefs.
- Snorkelling (58%) was the most popular activity (Figure 2), followed by swimming (43%), viewing marine animals (37%) and glass bottom boat coral viewing (26%).
- Visitors commonly saw reef fish (53%), soft corals (51%), hard corals (49%), turtles (41%), clown fish (35%) and giant clams (33%) during their trip to the GBR.
- 26% obtained information about the reef via marine biology talks on board, followed by on the Internet (19%), videos on-board (18%) and glass bottom board tour (18%).
- The trips somewhat (56%) and greatly increased (38%) visitors' knowledge about the reef.
- The information received changed 46% of visitors' appreciation of the reef.

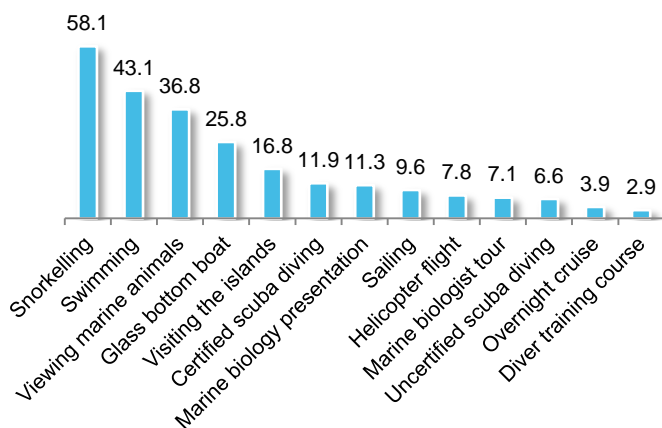


Figure 2. Activities participated on the GBR (%) (n=876)

Find this project at www.nerptropical.edu.au
 Theme 3: Managing for resilient tropical ecosystems
 Program 10: Socio-economic value of GBR goods and services
 Project: 10.2 Socio-economic systems and reef resilience

If GBR was damaged...

Visitors were asked whether they would still have made this trip to Cairns under three hypothetical situations where the reef was: damaged by a major oil spill; affected by major coral bleaching; or lost its World Heritage status (Figure 3). Less than 30% would still have made their trip under the first two situations. 56% did not think that the loss of the GBR's World Heritage status would affect their travel decision to visit the region.

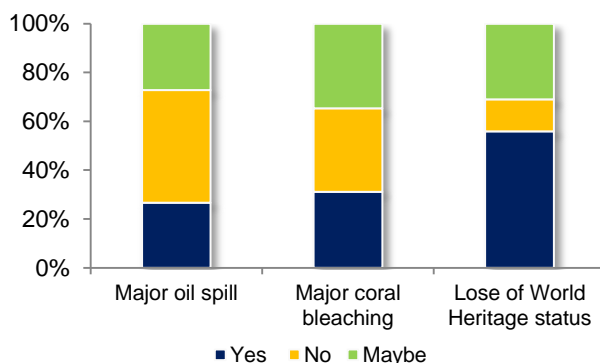


Figure 3. Travel decision if GBR was damaged (n=876)

The Draw-card of Visiting Cairns

Figure 4 shows the findings of visitors' perceptions on selecting a holiday destination that actively protects its environment and whether they perceived the Cairns region as protecting its environment. The majority of visitors reported selecting destinations that actively protect their environment and perceived that the Cairns region is actively protecting its environment. This result reveals an important message that visitors do consider environmental protection issues when selecting holiday destinations.

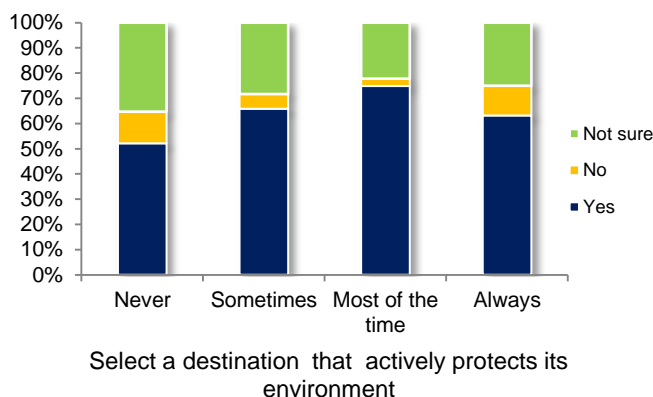


Figure 4. Holiday destination selection concern (n=876)

For more information about this project, please contact:
 Prof Bruce Prideaux
 JCU School of Business and The Cairns Institute
Bruce.prideaux@jcu.com.au