

EDITORIAL

Reconnect to Australia's Parks to Reconnect to Inbound Tourism

Recently I delivered a keynote address to the Forum Advocating Cultural and Ecotourism (FACET) in Yanchep National Park, Western Australia. The address entitled Reconnect to Australia's Parks to Reconnect to Inbound Tourism ([download presentation](#)) explored the less than healthy state of tourism in many of Australia's World Heritage Areas.

The once popular assertion that World Heritage listing provided significant tourism benefits is now looking a little tarnished. Looking at available visitation data to a selection of four northern Australian World Heritage Areas we see that ;



- The Great Barrier Reef (Queensland) currently hosts approx 1.3m visitors/yr - similar visitor numbers in 2011 as in 1991 – 20 years on.
- Fraser Island's (Queensland) current visitation is approximately 350,000. In 1990 – visitation was quoted at 300,000 – not spectacular growth.
- Kakadu (Northern Territory) – 240,000/yr in early 90's - 210,000/yr now.
- Shark Bay (Western Australia) – 100,000 in early 90's, 107,000 - 20 years on.

I posed the question, what other industry enjoys negative growth or is doing the same numbers as it was 20 years ago?

When I talk to destinations overseas about ecotourism, I focus on the importance of protected areas in developing an ecotourism sector: their link to consumer desire for authenticity; the fact that protected areas provide seasoned travellers with more remote, less structured, more independent travel options; their capacity to fulfil consumer desire for experiences and escape from routine and pressures; the opportunity to do rather than just look eg monitoring, building, habitat conservation; opportunities to experience unique nature and culture; the bragging rights - doing something their friends haven't.

Maybe Australia needs to re-read the book on ecotourism – the book it wrote in the early 1990's.

What is the solution?

A few suggestions:

- A renewed focus on catalyst projects to re-invigorate the means of exploring our destinations;
- A focus on high quality, exceptional experiences, unique opportunities, small to medium scale developments;
- Become the 'swiss watch' industry of tourism – focus on quality, reliability, reputation, exclusivity;
- Invest heavily in quality including certification – the equivalent of the "certified swiss chronometer"
- Withdraw from the price war (Australia can never win that competition); and critically,
- Provide opportunities for tourists to meet Indigenous Australians and learn of their culture.

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