

Cairns – the serious education destination

The number of long term students coming to Cairns from abroad to enrich their education continues to soar, while other parts of Tropical North Queensland's tourism sector remain steady.

New president of Study Cairns Janine Bowmaker says several members including government and language colleges have experienced increases up to 40% in the number of international students over the past year.

Last year 25,000 students came to Queensland, more than half ventured to Cairns to stay between 4-14 days experiencing a combination of education, Homestay and educational tourism products.

The **Study Cairns** incorporated body is made up of an elite network of members including James Cook University, a number of Vocational Education Training (VET) colleges, government and private schools (60 in total), English language schools, student accommodation, including homestay companies and tourism suppliers providing educational products. The body works closely with Cairns Economic Region Development Corporation (CREDC).

While the Japanese tourism market declined at a rate of 10% in 2006, it remains the strongest international **education** market.

Other educational markets are also flourishing including Korea, China, South America and the USA. "For example, the People to People Ambassador program, incorporates Homestay and school visits with a range of educational tourism products including rainforestation, Cape Tribulation and Mungalli Falls... it has grown considerably and consistently over the past 10 years."

Mrs Bowmaker says few people understand the value of international education on the regional economy. "The international study sector is valued at approximately \$50 million locally.

"Estimations taken from the Cummings Report (2004) and other Queensland Education research show that every long term student injects between \$30,000 - \$40,000 per annum into the local economy. On top of that their families come to stay during their study period amounting to roughly 2500 visits per year and millions of dollars."

So why is international education growing ahead of other tourism sectors?

"Tourism relies on disposable income, whereas international students studying overseas come from both rich and poor families, all trying to give their children the best opportunity in life and an advantage in the job stakes.

"After September 11, tourism took a nosedive while the number of international long term students increased as students moved their studies to Australia for safety reasons," she explains.

"And that's a big attraction, Australia is viewed as a friendly, safe, serious education option."

Tourism Tropical North Queensland chief executive officer Rob Giason agrees the international student market is a very important sector for Tropical North Queensland.

“With the great majority of our international students coming here from Japan, we are working with airlines, particularly Jetstar as their direct services from western Japan are set to commence... to ensure aviation access from this important market continues,” Mr Giason says.

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