

CARAVANS COULD HAUL TOURISM OUT OF DOLDRUMS

It's not Paris Hilton and the glamour set jetting into town, but the sight of mum and dad packing up the 'van that has the tourism industry swooning.

And it is not only Australian baby boomers. It is those in the same age bracket from New Zealand, United Kingdom, the United States of America and Canada that could bolster the stagnant tourism industry.

The latest industry survey, *Tourism Futures* conducted in the lead up to the pre-eminent *Tourism Futures* conference (2-4 June) by Roy Morgan Research found nearly 40 per cent of the industry identified grey nomads or senior tourism as the best opportunity for growth in the next 12 months.

"The long flight to Australia is holding up a lot of travellers. People in Europe and North America are tending to take more frequent, short haul holidays for maybe a week, so we need to target the people who have plenty of time such as the 'baby boomers'. These nations already have a culture of motor-home holidays and long-term touring, so we start looking at a quality market rather than focussing simply on visitors numbers," say *Tourism Futures* convenor, Tony Charters.

A more entrepreneurial approach to our national parks, investment in infrastructure and co-ordination of all three levels of government is crucial says Mr Charters.

"We need to make the most of our major asset, which is our environment. We need to focus on being the world leader in drive touring – with the best presented national parks, the best themed touring routes, unique camping opportunities in regional Australia, the best tourism services in regional towns and Australia's legendary friendly locals."

At the same time, our national parks need significant investment and national co-ordination so they start to compare with the great parks of the world like Yosemite and the Grand Canyon in the US," said Mr Charters.

Mr Charters proposes the relaxation of town planning regulations in regional areas allowing farmers to accommodate a small number of recreational vehicles or motor-homes on their properties. This would not only generate additional income for country people but add to the experience for visitors.

“The informal feedback from international visitors about our caravan park and motor-home camping facilities is quite critical and consideration needs to be given to the development of separate recreational vehicle (RV) sites. This could be local show grounds or privately owned facilities in time, but being parked under a gum tree down by a creek in regional Australia on a property owned by an Australian farmer sounds pretty attractive to me,” says Mr Charters.

Despite 21 per cent of those surveyed also expressing concern about the price of fuel and its effect on drive tourism, many are still relying on the generation of baby boomers to keep the industry buoyant. Anecdotal evidence points to the era of post-war babies cannily stretching out there stays in each location to spread the costs of travel over a longer period.

“Higher interest rates are generally good news for retirees with savings in the bank,” said *Tourism Futures* convenor, Tony Charters.

“And while petrol prices are definitely an issue, the industry is championing our older Australians. They can be a great source of short-term labour in the towns and centres they stop in, with the current skills and labour shortage hitting regional areas particularly hard.”

The Australian tourism industry is currently facing significant challenges with both inbound and domestic visitor numbers sagging. Interest rate increases are stopping many Australian families from taking holidays while a strong Australian dollar and well priced packages to exotic, nearby locations such as Vietnam and Malaysia are attracting those Australians looking to holiday.

Broader issues including marketing trends, aviation policies, climate change and technological innovations are among the agenda items to be discussed at the *Tourism Futures* conference.

“We have some blockbuster keynote speakers including tourism technology and marketing expert, Philip Wolf from PhoCusWright in the United States,” said Mr Charters.

“‘Cool’ guru and futurist Daniel Levine is another headline speaker we have secured with international credentials.”

Tourism Queensland is a foundation sponsor of the Tourism Futures conference to be held at the Crowne Plaza Royal Pines Golf Resort & Spa, 2 – 4 June.

For a full programme and registrations please visit www.tourismfutures.com.au

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