

TOURISM TALKS IN TOUGH TIMES

Tourism Futures, Australia's pre-eminent tourism industry conference has launched an online forum.

Industry senior executives and government policy-makers have gathered annually at *Tourism Futures* since 2002 to debate issues impacting on the industry - from aviation policy to climate change and the skills shortage. Now debate and discussion can continue throughout the year, with industry dialogue evolving within the global and national agendas.

"The online forum has the added bonus of being accessible to the whole industry," says Tourism Futures convenor, Tony Charters.

"These are difficult times for the industry with both domestic and international visitor numbers down and it is important that governments and the private sector work closely together to tackle the many challenges we are facing.

"Historically the tourism industry has not been as unified as agriculture or mining, for example. The ability to connect online can only strengthen the industry by allowing many of the small to medium sized businesses which dominate the industry, to tap into the discussions."

Understanding the phenomena of online social networks and virtual worlds is the first 'conversation starter' for the Tourism Futures online forum.

One of Australia's Top 10 bloggers and social networking guru, Laurel Papworth presented a paper to the *Tourism Futures* conference in June this year, on marketing via social networks. With more people using the internet than watching television, it is a communication medium which will dominate marketing plans in the near future.

Yet social networking remains misunderstood and under-utilised, even by major corporations and senior executives.

Anyone involved in the tourism industry is invited to participate in the forum.

The link is: <http://tourismfutures.forumup.com.au/viewtopic.php?t=10&mforum=tourismfutures>.

Registering a screen name and password will enable viewing of the links and pictures.

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