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Think outside the box and tourists will follow

Tourist operators and promoters need to be creative rather than slash prices, a world expert on tourism crisis management from The University of Queensland says.

UQ School of Tourism senior lecturer Brent W Ritchie says the way to keep the money rolling in is to look for new markets and find innovative ways to sell tourist destinations.

The comments come after Tourism Research Australia's latest National Visitor Survey showed a 2 per cent drop in overseas tourists for the year ending September 2009.

While the tourist numbers had dropped when compared to the year ending September 2008, the visitors spent 5 per cent more money and had a 7 per cent increase in the number of nights spent in Australia, the survey showed.

Dr Ritchie said it proved tourist numbers were not the only indication of success and showed innovative marketing could keep people in Australia and spending their money.

"This is partly attributed to the success of the Best Job in the World campaign. It helped put Queensland on the international stage and attracted the type of visitors who stay longer and disperse throughout Queensland," he said.

"Destinations are now focused on quality and not quantity and looking at innovative ways to attract higher spending tourists.

"This is a very good result considering the global financial crisis and shows that innovative marketing can reach consumers, despite increased worldwide competition for the tourism dollar."

Dr Ritchie said one of the reasons the campaign worked so well was that it directly engaged people and used new technologies such as social networking sites.

Best Job in the World winner Ben Southall will finish his six-month stint as the Great Barrier Reef's "islands caretaker" on December 31 and will walk straight into a role as a Tourism Queensland ambassador.

Dr Ritchie said Queensland also had success keeping domestic travellers coming to the Sunshine State, with a relatively small 4 per cent drop in the year ending September 2009.

This compared favourably with a 7 per cent drop in Victoria and a 9 per cent drop in New South Wales in the same 12-month period.

"The tourism industry in Queensland is resilient to shocks and able to deal with the effects of the global financial crisis relatively well. Focusing on local markets and developing value-based deals obviously helped soften the blow.

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Dr Ritchie recently released a book on tourism crisis and disaster management, finding destinations needed to develop contingency plans and market to a wide range of people in tough times.

"Developing co-operative packages that offer value for money for consumers, rather than just competing on price, is another strategy," he said.

"In this way the industry can turn the challenges that crises pose into opportunities."

Dr Ritchie will speak at an International Tourism Crisis Management Workshop in Florida in the US early next year.

Media: Erik de Wit (0417 088 772)

Brisbane St Lucia, QLD 4072

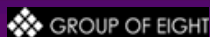
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