Reef Beat

news-mail

Our Great Barrier Reef

Tourism on the reef

IF you have ever travelled somewhere to look and learn about a place then you have been a tourist. In fact most Australians have been tourists at some time or another.

One of the best places in the world to be a tourist is, of course, on the Great Barrier Reef.

Its colourful corals, fishes and tropical waters make it a place almost everyone wants to visit.

As a matter of fact more than 1.6 million tourists visit the reef every year and tourism is the largest commercial activity in the marine park.

That means people come from all over Australia and the world and spend money to visit the reef.

The visitors pay tourism companies to take them out snorkelling, sailing, scuba diving or just to have a look through a glass bottom boat.

Tourism brings in more than $1 billion each year. That money helps keep businesses operating and gives people jobs.

The tourists come from all walks of life and all ages. Some tourists are backpackers, some are families and some are millionaires visiting on luxury holidays.

More than half of the visitors are from overseas and about a third are from interstate.

Although there are many visitors to the reef, the activities they undertake usually have a small impact on the reef environment.

This is because the reef is so large and most of the activities tourists get involved in are restricted to small areas.

Most tourists access the reef from Cairns, Port Douglas or the Whitsundays. Together these areas attract more than 85% of all tourists to the marine park yet make up less than 10% of the total area.

Many tourists are interested in learning about the reef and how to best protect it.

Tourism operators teach visitors how to take care of the reef and not damage the environment, especially when diving and snorkelling.

More and more tourists are wanting to actively get involved in helping scientists with their work. This way they are seeing the reef and helping scientists learn more about it.

There are also ways you can help protect the reef when you visit.

The first rule on the reef is to never touch anything. Many animals become stressed through human contact.

Also, you should never stand on the coral reefs. This could substantially damage coral colonies.

Another important rule is to never throw rubbish overboard.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) is the Commonwealth Government's agency responsible for managing the Great Barrier Reef.

The GBRMPA ensures the marine park is used in a sustainable way. That means it needs to be used in a way that will see it preserved in the future.

One way the GBRMPA looks after the reef is by co-operating with the tourism industry. An example of this is when the GBRMPA and tourism operators develop codes of conduct to encourage best environmental practices.

Community participation is also important in managing the marine park.

Many tourism operators get involved in voluntary programs, like the online coral bleaching program. Under this program tourists who see coral bleaching out on the reef can report it to the GBRMPA through the Internet.

There is also the COTSWATCH program where tourists can report crown of thorns star fish. With the Eye on the Reef program, tourism operators report their daily reef observations.

Tourism is a great way for people to enjoy the beauty of the Great Barrier Reef and to learn about its fascinating plants and animals.

More and more tourism operators, and tourists themselves, are becoming involved in looking after the reef and helping to keep it great.

To learn more about what you can do to help keep it great visit www.gbrmpa.gov.au and www.reefed.edu.au.

FROM TOP: The Great Barrier Reef is a wonderful snorkelling environment. Reef tourists will always find something to do. Scuba divers flock to the reef in their droves to study the colourful corals and vibrant sea life up close. The reef attracts boat-loads of tourists each year.