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Executive summary

Tourism Tropical North Queensland (TTNQ) is the Regional Tourism Organisation responsible for marketing Tropical North Queensland to Australia and the world. The destination is known as Cairns & Great Barrier Reef in the international marketplace.

The Tropical North Queensland Destination Tourism Plan has been produced to provide prospective investors with an understanding of tourism in our region and its potential to grow. Tourism is a $3.1 billion export business in Tropical North Queensland that employs one in five people.

The destination’s unique value proposition is having two World Heritage areas side by side. The Great Barrier Reef is alongside the world’s oldest rainforest and both are less than a day’s drive from the Australian outback. The oldest living culture on earth calls these diverse landscapes home.
About Tourism Tropical North Queensland

TTNQ markets the destination as one of the world's most inspiring nature-based destinations. We do this by promoting the region as the gateway to hundreds of unique tropical experiences set in World Heritage landscapes.

Our organisation evolved from a grassroots community and business movement originally known as the Far North Queensland Promotion Bureau, which was established in 1978 to focus on destination marketing.

TTNQ's purpose is to drive visitor revenue and long-term benefits for the region by leading the destination's tourism marketing, positioning and brand story – and by being a unifying and coordinating voice for the industry.

As a not-for-profit, member-based Regional Tourism Organisation, we are the voice of Tropical North Queensland's tourism industry, and we work to increase visitor arrivals and expenditure for the benefit of the whole region.

Destination marketing

TTNQ's role is to inspire people to visit Tropical North Queensland through innovative and effective marketing of the destination. Digital marketing across owned, bought and earned channels is the key to being noticed in the fast-paced world of travel.

We provide opportunities for members of TTNQ to market their business as part of the destination. These include attending trade and consumer shows as a destination, advertising opportunities and campaigns, trade educational activities and in-market training, media familiarisations, e-newsletters with business opportunities, and marketing forums and workshops.

Public relations agency Klick Communications supports our consumer marketing, public relations and visitor communication activity in the Australian market.

TTNQ also focuses on building the capabilities of tourism businesses to ensure they are more competitive, adaptive and resilient so visitors can enjoy a consistently high standard of experience.

The organisation offers advice where other opportunities may be increased to ensure our region is offering the very best experiences across Tropical North Queensland.

Experience development

Experience development is focused on supporting tourism operators to deliver more engaging and memorable visitor experiences by better understanding the needs and preferences of the market and contemporary experience development practices. This may include resources and programmes addressing such issues as customer service, storytelling, customer journey mapping, online marketing and social media engagement.

Product development

Product development is focused on the identification of new tourism experiences either as a new product or the enhancement of an existing product. This is done in response to consumer needs and trends and to leverage identified Tropical North Queensland Destination Hero Experience opportunities.

Business development

We connect the dots to other organisations that can assist with business development. These include the Queensland Tourism Industry Council and the Australian Small Business Advisory Services program targeting generic development opportunities aimed at improving business viability and performance. The development and implementation of business plans, marketing plans and sustainable business practices are among the development opportunities offered.

Industry development

Industry development looks at tourism industry-specific development programmes aimed at supporting tourism businesses to enhance the overall efficiency, effectiveness and performance of their operations. This may include programs dealing with issues such as market readiness, trade engagement, yield management and channel management.
Destination overview

The TTNQ region has the largest geographical coverage of any Regional Tourism Organisation in Queensland, covering 20 per cent (340,645 km²) of the State's total area. This includes 25 local government councils with our major funding partner being Cairns Regional Council. Our destination, which is known as Cairns & Great Barrier Reef in international markets, stretches from Cardwell in the south to the Torres Strait in the north and west to the Northern Territory border.

Tropical North Queensland is known as one of the world's most inspiring nature-based destinations. It is the gateway to hundreds of accessible experiences set on the stage of the Great Barrier Reef, Earth's oldest rainforest and the outback. Inhabited by an ancient culture, Tropical North Queensland is shared by passionate locals.

The region has six precincts:
- Cairns and Northern Beaches
- Kuranda and the Atherton Tablelands
- Port Douglas and the Daintree
- Cassowary Coast
- Cape York, Gulf Savannah and Outback
- Torres Strait.

There are four Local Tourism Organisations (LTOs) in Tropical North Queensland:
- Tourism Port Douglas & Daintree
- Tropical Tablelands Tourism
- Tropical Coast Tourism
- Savannah Way Limited

The LTOs target grassroots industry development, in-region trade, media support and collaborative marketing investment. On behalf of their members, the LTOs liaise with their Regional Tourism Organisation and state bodies. TTNQ shares a Memorandum of Understanding with each of the LTOs in Tropical North Queensland and works in partnership with the Torres Strait Regional Authority. We also work in partnership with Tourism Australia, Tourism and Events Queensland, Cairns Regional Council and Cairns Airport, in addition to our airline and industry partners.
Hero experiences

TTNQ works with our partners to deliver world-class, innovative destination marketing to position Tropical North Queensland as one of the world’s most inspiring nature-based destinations.

The three pillars of our destination are:

THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

THE WORLD’S OLDEST RAINFOREST

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CULTURE

Tropical North Queensland is made up of ‘hero’ experiences or stories:

- The story of the reef is one of understanding and conservation – one of the most important stories of our time
- The story of the rainforest is one of hikes, waterfall chasing, wonder and adventure – set amongst a living story that is 80-million years older than the Amazon
- The story of Indigenous culture is one of a deep connection to the land and its people
- The story of tropical lifestyle is one of relaxed local culture, authentic people, a choice of holiday pace and warm hospitality experiences
- The story of unique adventure is one of road-tripping, exploring, crocodile touring, mountain-biking and bucket-listing
- The story of the Outback is one of red dirt, wild fishing adventures and true outback style.
Visitor profile

Airline access has made tourism the key driver of a regional economy with two World Heritage Areas – the Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics rainforest. In 1971 visitor spend was at $50 million and by 2017 was worth $3.1 billion with tourism contributing around 18 per cent of Tropical North Queensland’s gross regional product and supporting one in five jobs.

Tropical North Queensland is the most popular regional destination in Queensland for international visitors with a 33 per cent market share. Our destination has an 8 per cent share of the state’s domestic visitors.

The domestic market delivers the most visitors and expenditure. China is the largest international source market, while Europe delivers High Value Travellers who stay longer.

Cairns was the nation’s best performing hotel market for four years in a row until second quarter of 2018 when business from the Commonwealth Games pushed the Gold Coast ahead and Darwin took the top spot after a concerted campaign encouraging longer stays. Revenue per available room (RevPAR) in Cairns remained strong with a 5.7% increase to $128 and occupancy up 0.7% to 84.6%.

(Source: CBRE Hotels MarketView)

With the region’s population of 285,000 forecast to grow 1.3 per cent per year over the next decade, our goal is to support the region’s economy by delivering $3.5 billion in visitor expenditure by 2020.

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<th>2017 visitors</th>
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<td>Total expenditure</td>
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<td>International visitors</td>
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<td>Domestic visitors</td>
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<th>2017 key source market visitors</th>
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(Source: Tourism Research Australia National Visitor Survey and International Visitors survey)

Target markets

Domestic High Value Travellers (HVTs)
These travellers spend more than the average visitor on leisure trips and are aligned to Queensland’s competitive offering, indicating they are interested in the types of leisure experiences Queensland has to offer. In the interstate market, HVTs represent 35 per cent of interstate leisure trips, but 63 per cent of overnight visitor expenditure, highlighting their disproportionate share of spending. In the intrastate market, HVTs represent 36 per cent of intrastate leisure trips and 71 per cent of overnight visitor expenditure.

International Experience Seekers
International travellers seeking an inspiring nature-based destination are targeted through our international campaigns. These campaigns also target HVTs.

Education visitors
In 2017, one in 24 international visitors to Queensland were education visitors. Of those, 16 per cent were visited by family and 10 per cent by friends while they were in Queensland. Education visitation has grown 9 per cent over the past three years, with the top four source markets being China, Japan, the USA and Korea. More than 32,000 international students from 34 countries chose to study in Cairns in 2017.
Community perception scorecard

Tropical North Queensland residents are the most likely in Queensland to feel that tourism has a positive impact. Eighty per cent of residents agree that tourism has a positive impact on the community, compared with 43 per cent in Queensland. More than a third (37 per cent) agree that tourism has a positive impact on their personal quality of life, compared with 18 per cent in Queensland. Frequent contact with tourists in the region, as well as the industry’s 17 per cent contribution to the local economy, may raise awareness of tourism’s positive impacts. (Source: Tourism Events Queensland Social Indicators 2017 Queensland Report)

The destination has an average Tourism Sentiment Score of 30 with strong sentiment scores for outdoor activities, tours and breweries, distilleries and cocktail bars. (Source: Destination Think! Tourism Sentiment Index)

Events

Leisure events

Events are a vital part of the tourism offering in Tropical North Queensland, especially in the shoulder seasons, as they give people a reason to visit the destination at different times of the year. They also give us an opportunity to showcase the region through media coverage of the event.

TTNQ has an events prioritisation strategy, which has assisted in bringing new events like Targa Great Barrier Reef to the region in 2018.

International events such as the Ironman Asia-Pacific Championships bring enormous economic impact and have helped position the region as an international sporting destination, with other international events including:

- UCI Mountain Bike World Championships (September 2017)
- Pool games for the Rugby League World Cup (October 2017)
- Commonwealth Games Basketball (April 2018)
- World Rafting Championships (May 2019).

Regional events are also held throughout Tropical North Queensland, adding to a diverse cultural and sporting event calendar.

Business Events

The economic impact of business events in 2017-18 was $111 million, more than double the previous year’s total of $45 million. There has been growing interest in holding events in Tropical North Queensland following the confirmation of the Amway China leadership seminar, which will bring more than 6000 delegates to Cairns in April 2019.

The team at Business Events Cairns & Great Barrier Reef organises Sell TNQ every year, hosting meeting planners from Australia and New Zealand. The team also attends AIME (Asia Pacific Incentives and Meeting Event), hosts a Regional Showcase in Sydney and Melbourne, and participates in major international events in the key markets of China, the US and New Zealand.
Investment in the region

Cairns city has undergone a tourism renaissance in the past 18 months, with millions of dollars of new infrastructure built. This includes:

- $130 million Crystalbrook Collection five-star hotel Riley
- Hemingway's Brewery
- $50 million Cairns Aquarium
- $10 million Munro Martin Parklands upgrade
- $13 million Shangri-La, The Marina Cairns refurbishment
- $8.7 million Cairns Museum.

Infrastructure under construction and about to start includes:

- Crystalbrook Collection five-star hotel Bailey
- Crystalbrook Collection five-star hotel Flynn
- $70.4 million Cairns Performing Arts Centre
- $176 million Cairns Convention Centre expansion
- $550 million Nova City residential and commercial city development.
- $21 million Wangetti Trail
- $7.7 million Northern Beaches Leisure Trail

Regional economic growth framework

Tropical North Queensland has the potential to develop into a resilient, diverse and flourishing economy, anchored around tourism, agriculture and resources, with further growth areas including education, defence, marine and aviation. While somewhat geographically distant, further growth in connectivity via air, road and sea will help the region capture the opportunities provided by increasing trade and travel. Tourism, trade and education are all seasonal industries, and require many links in complex value chains to be connected. This framework illustrates those connections.
Opportunities and challenges

There is a rising demand for more experiential travel, personalisation and authentic experiences as the tourism industry matures and more people travel. This presents opportunities and challenges for Tropical North Queensland.

Opportunities

• Build capability of indigenous operators to be internationally ready
• Promotion of indigenous tourism experiences to ensure TNQ is recognised as Australia’s leading indigenous tourism destination – development of third pillar
• Product development – food trails, hiking and cycling trails, bird watching
• Further development and promotion of self-drive itineraries across domestic and international source markets to expose diversity of regional food, beverage, nature, adventure, culture and communities
• Attraction of major sporting events with an opportunity to grow participation from international markets
• Growth in direct aviation capacity – domestically and internationally (Middle East, China, USA, NZ, Southeast Asia)
• Working Holiday Maker global campaign to re-invigorate backpacker and youth travel from Western markets
• Niche and special interest segments – domestic Chinese and Indian diaspora, international students within Australia, hands-on authentic local experiences
• Tourism and Events Queensland Best of Experiences Program – lift quality of product and experiences within destination
• New infrastructure developments = new product to offer
• Citizens of Great Barrier Reef – position the destination as a world leader in conservation of global natural assets
• Strengthen partnerships with Tourism and Events Queensland, and Tourism Australia
• Find PR opportunities with other industries to develop the brand awareness (tropical fruits)

Challenges

• Negative messaging around coral bleaching on Great Barrier Reef
• Fragmentation and diverse agendas of stakeholders, LGAs/LTOs
• Non-sustainable funding model, and heavy reliance on small number of key funding partners
• Reliance on sustainability of two key iconic assets → diversity of region’s assets not maximised
• Large number of small tourism businesses not ‘internationally/trade ready’
• Digital capability of industry
• Internet connectivity – poor or non-existent in some areas
• International airport underutilised
• Direct aviation access from Western markets
• Domestic aviation and accommodation capacity under pressure during peak periods
• Collaboration and communication between key industry stakeholders
• Slow development of additional product pillars e.g. Indigenous, food tourism
• Labour force challenges – especially during peak periods and in more remote areas
• Limited infrastructure capacity for large events
• Limited co-ordination of economic and destination planning between regional stakeholders
• Lack of re-investment by suppliers to upgrade/enhance product and experience offering
• A vast region to cover with high costs and difficult access
• Lack of subvention funding
• Region has rested on laurels and not evolved fast enough
TTNQ’s strategic direction

The TTNQ 2018-2020 Strategic Direction sets the agenda for our organisation to shift gears, unite the industry and lead the way forward to the vision of becoming one of the world’s most inspiring nature-based destinations. This two-year plan will enable TTNQ to move quickly in a fast-changing and competitive world to ensure Tropical North Queensland is the destination people around the world want to visit.

Organization Vision

TTNQ is highly valued and respected, working with our allies to deliver world class, innovative destination marketing.

Organization Mission

We are a trusted and clear voice, leading and collaborating with our allies to ensure the region’s tourism marketing achieves an expenditure of $3.5B by 2020.

Destination Vision

Tropical North Queensland is known as one of the world’s most inspiring nature based destinations. It is the gateway to hundreds of accessible experiences set on the stage of the Great Barrier Reef, Earth’s oldest rainforest and the outback. Lived in by an ancient culture, Tropical North Queensland is shared by passionate locals.

Destination Mission

Deliver hundreds of unique tropical experiences that are shared by passionate locals and set in World Heritage nature which together are the brand story of Tropical North Queensland.
Our image
Several cluster groups have been formed to bring together tourism operators offering similar experiences. This has given us the opportunity to look closely at the stories we promote for each of these experiences.

The cluster groups are:
• Adventure/Backpackers
• Outback /Drive market
• Fishing
• Food and beverage
• Great Barrier Reef
• Luxury and super yachts
• Timeless experiences (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander)
• Rainforest

Some of the key strategies of these cluster groups include:
• Elevating timeless experiences as part of Tourism Australia’s Signature Experiences activities
• Appointing an Indigenous mentor to assist with tourism development in this sector
• Public relations activities to focus on the health of the Great Barrier Reef
• Working with the Wet Tropics Management Authority, Tourism Australia and Tourism and Events Queensland to elevate the world’s oldest rainforest as part of Queensland’s brand
• Assisting Wet Tropics with a project to connect the tourism industry to Wet Tropics Endangered Species
• Go Fish Australia assisting in a strategy to position the region as a fishing destination
• Lobbying for the removal of GST charges on international super yachts doing charter work in Australia
• Identifying the region’s key food and beverage experiences.

Key deliverables
TTNQ’s key deliverables for 2018/19 are:
• ‘Mastering our Story’ for Tropical North Queensland and marketing this to the world
• To position TTNQ as “the” bucket-list destination for travellers in major metro cities using the brand story to ‘Feel Grounded’
• To generate awareness of factual information around the region and convert strong visitation to TTNQ in 2018/2019 through a clear call to action of nature that moves you and feeling grounded
• To target High Value Travellers to the region
• To promote the numerous TTNQ experiences capturing relaxed tropical vibes, Indigenous connection and unique nature.
• The Wet Tropics Rainforest and Great Barrier Reef are interwoven along with the ancient and timeless experiences throughout the brand story
• To review and update the TTNQ Regional Events Prioritisation Events Strategy in conjunction with key stakeholders
• To grow shoulder visitation and destination dispersal through the attraction and promotion of sports, lifestyle and cultural events
• To increase visitation by attracting business incentive groups, meetings and events
• To advocate growth of the TEQ Subvention Program fund
• To pursue continuous development of our digital capability
• To deliver the Digital Strategy and provide digital leadership to the tourism industry on the new ‘modern marketing approach’.
Product development
- To further develop Indigenous products and promote the region as a recognised leader in Indigenous tourism
- A two-year partnership with the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) to collaborate on the development of Indigenous tourism opportunities in the Torres Strait Islands
- To deliver $1.5 million grant funding under the Connecting With Asia Fund to support Indigenous tourism businesses
- To work with key partners to grow and develop eco-tourism opportunities in the region such as the Wangetti Trail
- To develop and promote Tropical North Queensland as a leader in fishing experiences
- To develop the story of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area in consultation with key stakeholders
- To explore agricultural export opportunities and work closely with the key stakeholders.

Infrastructure
- To support the development of key infrastructure that will increase the resilience of the tourism industry and the regional economy
- To advocate for quality telecommunication coverage throughout Tropical North Queensland
- To provide support to major development proponents in terms of gathering market intelligence and insights to assist the formation of business cases for major investment decisions
- To support the development of the Cairns Cultural Precinct and work closely with the Cairns Regional Council
- To support the delivery of the Cairns Port Shipping Development to increase access for the cruise ship market
- To support the development and delivery of the Global Tourism Hub with key stakeholders
- To support the development of key roads in the region to encourage regional dispersal.
Aviation

Government funds are required to launch new aviation routes and create brand awareness for long-term route sustainability. Currently, 75% of international visitors through Cairns Airport travel on domestic flights, constraining the number of seats available for domestic visitors and limiting the ability to grow domestic visitation. Aviation access is integral to the further development of the economy in Tropical North Queensland. A daily international wide-body flight to Cairns is potentially a $200 million a year export business, with $100 million of international visitor spend, 50-150 million of agricultural produce sales, and more than 650 new jobs for the region. There are flow-on benefits as other trade is enabled by new air routes. These benefits are widely dispersed across businesses in the region. TTNQ aims to grow direct international capacity to Cairns Airport by working with our partners to ensure existing routes are sustainable and attracting new routes to further develop our key markets.

Great Barrier Reef messaging

Perception around the world that the recent back-to-back bleaching events have destroyed the Great Barrier Reef is being tackled through partnerships with Tourism Australia, Tourism and Events Queensland and the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre. With our partners TTNQ has elevated messaging about the Reef’s health and the measures being taken to preserve it. We launched a monthly newsletter called Reef Chat to bring up-to-date news on the health of the Reef to the media and travel agents around the world. We have been attending International Media Marketplace in key markets to secure one-one-one appointments with leading travel writers and influencers to discuss the state of the Reef with them.

Digital leadership

New digital technologies are playing an increasing role in how we tell our destination story and TTNQ is committed to using these to ensure members will receive immediate benefits. It is important that the whole industry excels in this space. As part of our role to build industry capacity, we have conducted workshops to build the digital capacity of the region. These include programs through the Australian Small Business Advisory Services – Northern Australia Tourism Initiative service.
**Conclusion**

The Tropical North Queensland tourism industry has the desire, ambition and capacity to further develop the region as a tourism destination. Having two World Heritage areas side by side is the destination’s competitive advantage and this is reflected in our vision to be the world’s best destination to engage with nature. Development of the region must be compatible with our natural assets for it to succeed.

Tropical North Queensland is a diverse region with many stories which must be leveraged and communicated effectively to broaden the understanding and appeal of the destination. These stories are being captured through our hero experiences to show the diversity of the region and its products. New product that adds to these experiences and showcases our three pillars – the Great Barrier Reef, the world’s oldest rainforest and Indigenous culture – will further amplify the appeal of Tropical North Queensland.

Partnerships are integral for further development to succeed. TTNQ is committed to working in partnership with the industry and our stakeholders to grow tourism as an economic driver that will deliver $3.5 billion to the Tropical North Queensland economy in 2020.