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World-first education initiative calls on travellers to become a Guardian of the Great Barrier Reef

On behalf of the Great Barrier Reef, Tourism Tropical North Queensland (TTNQ) has partnered with Expedia® in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia to introduce 'Guardian of the Reef', a new, world-first platform promoting reef-positive travel choices that reward travellers for learning about the Great Barrier Reef.

Conservation curious travellers can visit the newly launched website and work through a series of short educational videos and fast, each with a coupon reward system to use with Expedia bookings on the Great Barrier Reef. Participants then reach the 'ocean floor' where they can go in the draw to win a trip to the Great Barrier Reef and unlock exclusive experiences. These include staying at Australia's first underwater accommodation, Reefstay with Cruise Whitsundays, to join a Master Reef Guide for a private guided Snorkel Safari.

Developed in consultation with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (Reef Authority), Guardian of the Reef blends science and environmental education with Indigenous wisdom and sustainable products, to help travellers learn more about the health of the Great Barrier Reef and conservation initiatives.

Becoming a Guardian of the Reef means you're not just a traveller, but a champion for our oceans who:

- Supports local sustainable business
- Appreciates cultural significance
- Treats the Reef with respect
- Understands the issues.

The program stays with the customer from planning to travelling and continues after their visit to ensure they are an active part of its conservation. The Great Barrier Reef is home to 142 eco-certified operators, the highest number in Australia, making up 30% of Ecotourism Australia's eco-certified operators. The Guardian of the Reef platform will link travellers with operators certified through Ecotourism Australia, EarthCheck or the Zoo and Aquarium Association.

TTNQ Chief Executive Officer, Mark Olsen said the Guardian of the Reef platform would help travellers to understand the issues on the Reef, and how they can give back to Reef research and conservation simply by visiting the Great Barrier Reef.

"The educational website will teach travellers about the initiatives underway to protect the Great Barrier Reef for future generations and encourage them to book an eco-certified experience to be part of the Reef conservation efforts," he said.

"The opportunity to win a trip to the Great Barrier Reef and discounts for Great Barrier Reef experiences booked through Expedia are among the rewards for travellers who take the time to understand the Reef's natural and cultural significance. Understanding your impact on the Reef is the first step to acting with greatness."

Eco-certified experiences listed on the platform include citizen science tours like Be a Marine Bio with Passions of Paradise, the Lady Musgrave Experience zero carbon footprint pontoon and a Tropic Wings electric bus tour to see World Heritage rainforest.

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Marine Biologist and Master Reef Guide for GBR Biology/Reef Unlimited, Dr Eric Fisher said: "This world-first program gives global reach to the mantra of See it. Love it. Protect it. Our Great Barrier Reef operators see this every day when their passengers walk away from their Great Barrier Reef experience with a new appreciation of the diversity and beauty of the world's largest ecosystem and a greater understanding of the current health of the Reef."

Reef Authority General Manager Strategic Policy and Partnerships, Fred Nucifora said tourism had long been at the forefront of conservation, with dedicated reef operators collaborating closely with the scientific and management communities to ensure the Great Barrier Reef remained the best managed reef on Earth. The Reef Authority works closely with Traditional Owner groups along the Great Barrier Reef to maintain a strong connection to land and sea country.

"Tourism activities take place on just 7 per cent of the Great Barrier Reef, with each visitor contributing to its conservation through an Environmental Management Charge of AU\$8. This fee supports vital efforts such as the management of the marine park, control programs for the crown-of-thorns starfish, and various education and conservation initiatives."

As part of the partnership with TTNQ, Expedia will make a US\$50,000 donation to the Great Barrier Reef Foundation, to further extend the support in the regeneration of the Great Barrier Reef and the existing conservation efforts.

Vice President of Global Social Impact & Sustainability for Expedia Group, Aditi Mohapatra said: "Expedia Group's recent Sustainable Travel Study revealed that 90 per cent of travelers prioritize sustainability, indicating their concern about the environmental impact they leave behind. To help, Expedia is partnering with Tourism Tropical North Queensland to offer an interactive way to learn about and support the Great Barrier Reef while earning travel discounts along the way.

"We believe travel is a force for good and we are proud to support the Great Barrier Reef Foundation with a donation to advance reef conservation."

An integrated campaign in the United Kingdom and United States of America will include social media, direct electronic mail, display ads and earned media will drive traffic to the dedicated Guardian of the Reef learning hub, while Tourism and Events Queensland will amplify the campaign with Expedia in the Australian market.

Queensland Tourism Minister Michael Healy said: "I've spent a significant part of my career promoting the Great Barrier Reef. It is one of the most iconic, spectacular and vulnerable natural wonders on the planet. "We can always do more to protect and conserve the Reef. By encouraging more people to visit the Reef, it helps build global support to save our prized asset.

"Master Reef Guides play a pivotal role in education, awareness and monitoring of this 2,300km-long coral Reef ecosystem.

"We also turned the Reef into the state's biggest classroom through the Great Barrier Reef Education Program with more than 30,000 students visiting the Reef since the program started in June 2021.

"The more Guardians of the Reef we can get, the better."

Tourism and Events Queensland CEO, Patricia O'Callaghan said seeing the Great Barrier Reef was often life-changing for visitors.

"More than two million visitors to the Reef every year see and learn first-hand some of the incredible initiatives taking place on the Reef and enjoying its beauty leaves those visitors absolutely wow-ed.

"By taking the stories of the Reef out to the world, we hope to drive more understanding and appreciation of the Reef, so that more visitors to come and experience it for themselves."

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Minister for Trade and Tourism, Senator Don Farrell said: "The Guardian of the Reef initiative was made possible with funding under the Australian Government's \$15 million International Tourism Recovery Grants program.

"The Reef is one of the world's great natural wonders and a major tourism drawcard for Australia, supporting 64,000 local jobs.

"The Australian Government has committed an unprecedented level of investment in conservation and protection measures to ensure a healthy future for the Reef.

"It's important that visitors understand how amazing the Reef is, how much Australia values it as a national treasure, and how committed we are to protecting it.

"I applaud Tourism Tropical North Queensland (TTNQ) and other partners for helping share that message through the 'Guardian of the Reef' initiative."

This Tourism Tropical North Queensland project received grant funding from the Australian Government under the International Tourism Recovery Program administered by Austrade.

ENDS

<https://www.expedia.com.au/see/guardian-of-the-reef>

Images and video: [DropBox link](#)

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Background information:

- Tourism has been a leader in conservation for generations, and our reef operators work with the science and management community to make the Great Barrier Reef the best managed reef on earth.
- 142 operators along the Great Barrier Reef hold eco-certification, making up 30% of Australia's Ecotourism Australia total certified operators.
- The collective regions of the Great Barrier Reef also hold the most eco-certified destinations. Port Douglas Daintree, Townsville, Bundaberg, Gladstone and Capricorn are all eco-certified with Ecotourism Australia.
- In the first three quarters of financial year 2023-24, the Environmental Management Charge raised \$9,110,000 (final quarter to be reported, full year projected to be \$11M+). Source: Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
- The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is about the same length as the West Coast of the United States, is half the size of Texas, and is 1.41 times larger than the United Kingdom. It is equivalent to 48.2 million FIFA football fields or 70 million NFL football fields.
- Tourism occurs in just 7% (16,800 square kilometres) of the Great Barrier Reef and is regulated by Reef Authority which has set a benchmark for marine protected area management.
- Accounting for 10% of the world's coral reef ecosystems, as well as being one of the best known and most complex natural systems on Earth, the Great Barrier Reef is recognised as the best managed globally. It spans 344,400 square kilometres and includes 3,000 coral reefs, 600 continental islands, 300 coral cays and approximately 150 inshore mangrove islands.
- Tourism operators are taking proactive action to tackle climate change to ensure the best outlook for the Great Barrier Reef – this includes boat engines that use less fuel, eliminating single-use plastic where possible, offsetting remaining carbon emissions, assisting with controlling pests and with reef restoration.
- Many tourism operators work in partnership with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to monitor the Reef. They are trained to track and record the health of the Reef and report unusual sightings.
- Expedia Group [Sustainable Travel Study 2022](#) found that 90 per cent of consumers look for more sustainable options when travelling