

MEDIA RELEASE

12 November 2021

Queensland Tourism Awards unite the best in the state

The Queensland tourism industry has tonight come together to champion the outstanding achievement and commitment from operators and individuals around the Sunshine State at the **2021 Queensland Tourism Awards**.

Presented at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre, more than 1,100 operators and guests gathered to celebrate their efforts and resilience over the past two challenging years.

Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) Chief Executive Daniel Gschwind said the 36th annual Queensland Tourism Awards was a celebration of the outstanding success and resilience that tourism operators displayed across the state and also offered a timely platform to showcase Queensland's iconic Indigenous tourism experiences.

"After a pause in the Awards program last year, it is time to shake off the gloom, look forward and celebrate this great industry, its people and its future," Mr Gschwind said.

"Returning in the Year of Indigenous Tourism, the Awards offer a platform to showcase Queensland's world-class Indigenous tourism experiences, supporting the growth of Indigenous businesses and individuals in our industry.

"This year's entrants, across the 31 business, event and individual categories, are a demonstration of the strength and calibre of the State's tourism operators – all of whom have been able to adapt to the circumstances of the pandemic and continue to do great things during ongoing challenges."

A total of 81 Awards, including 32 Gold, 26 Silver and 23 Bronze Awards were presented across 31 categories, including two *RACQ People's Choice Awards* and a new *Judges Award for Innovation and Resilience*.

Sunshine Coast and Tropical North Queensland operators were the big winners at this year's Awards, both walking away with 13 accolades each including all three individual Awards:

- Bindi Irwin, Australia Zoo (Sunshine Coast, *Outstanding Contribution by an Individual*)
- Simon Thonalley, Saltwater Eco Tours (Sunshine Coast, *Young Achievers Award*)
- John Courtenay, Tourism Tropical North Queensland (*Outstanding Contribution by an Individual – Posthumous*)

The Irwin name was once again celebrated, with Bindi Irwin – CEO of Australia Zoo at just 23 years of age – awarded Gold in the *Marie Watson-Blake Award for Outstanding Contribution by an Individual* category for her work as a global tourism ambassador and conservationist.

The Founder of Saltwater Eco Tours, Simon Thonalley was the recipient of the *Young Achievers Award*. Simon is part of the Young Indigenous Tourism Leaders Program and a descendant of the Kaurareg people of Ngurupai (Horn Island).

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North Queensland tourism pioneer and Savannah Guides Founder John Courtenay was also recognised for his outstanding contribution to the industry, receiving a Posthumous Award as part of *The Marie Watson-Blake Award for Outstanding Contribution by an Individual*.

The Southern Great Barrier Reef region received an impressive 12 Awards, with first-time entrant – Beef Australia taking home Gold in two categories for its Beef 2021 festival in Rockhampton.

See attached a complete list of this year's 2021 Queensland Tourism Awards winners.

Mr Gschwind said the Awards came at a critical and exciting time, with the industry uniting and joining forces to recover and rebuild – particularly as the nation begins to open up to the world.

In the year ending June 2021, more than 20.75 million intrastate and interstate visitors flocked to the Sunshine State¹. In Queensland, domestic overnight visitor expenditure increased by 6.7 per cent year-on-year to \$16.3 billion, on the back of visitation increasing by 1.6 per cent to 20.8 million.

“Thanks to these visitors, Queensland was one of the fastest states in its domestic recovery from COVID-19, with these results continuing to support more than 234,000 jobs across all regions of Queensland²,” Mr Gschwind said.

“There is enormous pent-up demand coming from those southern states and the announcement that Queensland will open its border before Christmas gives us something to celebrate.”

Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk congratulated all award winners and thanked tourism operators statewide for their hard work and resilience throughout the pandemic.

“Tourism businesses right throughout Queensland have done an incredible job over the last two years to keep customers safe and keep workers in jobs. I can’t thank our tourism operators enough for their hard work during these challenging times,” the Premier said.

“Things are looking up. In little over a month, Queensland will start to reopen to other states and territories.

“And thanks to the way Queenslanders have responded to the health crisis, we’ll reopen with a stronger economy than other jurisdictions – giving us a great opportunity to build back better in 2022.

“Congratulations to all award winners tonight who have shown great strength and resilience this year.”

1 Tourism & Events Queensland. (2021). <https://cdn2-teq.queensland.com/~media/ba3a88f18b824990bc0f421722b7a216.ashx?vs=1&d=20210928T173846>

2 Queensland Government. (2020). <https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/invest/tourism-investment/market-profile>

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Continuing its partnership with the Queensland Tourism Awards for the 15th year, Queensland Airports Limited CEO Chris Mills said the Awards had shone a spotlight on several significant achievements, applauding the industry for the increased number of nominations.

“This group of winners should be particularly proud, given the difficult two years everyone has just endured. The awards are further proof of the resilience, creativity and excellence of the sector,” Mr Mills said.

“The stories from winners will provide some much-needed inspiration for the industry, as we re-energise and prepare to respond to what we expect to be a busy Christmas holiday period.”

Each year, the Queensland Tourism Awards are judged by a panel of industry experts who volunteer their services to assess submissions and travel across Queensland to experience firsthand the amenities and services of the nominated operators.

Select category winners will gain automatic entry into the Qantas Australian Tourism Awards, which will be held at Sunshine Coast Convention Centre on Friday 18 March 2022. Next year the Queensland Tourism Awards will be held at the Gold Coast Convention and Exhibition Centre on Friday 11 November 2022.

– ENDS –

Notes for Media:

- Media are asked to refrain from contacting award recipients **until after 10:00pm on Friday 12 November 2021.**
- A full list of Queensland Tourism Awards recipients is attached.

MEDIA CONTACT

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Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) is the peak industry body for tourism in Queensland representing more than 3,000 members. QTIC is a private sector, membership-based organisation which, since 2001, has worked to influence and shape the state's tourism business environment that directly contributes \$27.2 billion to the Queensland's economy and employs more than 237,000 Queenslanders.

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