

Tackling Queensland tourism's workforce crisis

Several threats to Queensland's tourism workforce have been identified in a report released by the Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) and The University of Queensland (UQ).

As state and national borders begin reopening to domestic and international visitors, a mass shortage of tourism and hospitality staff has rapidly become a crisis for our country's tourism sector.

Over the past 18 months, an estimated 50,000 tourism and hospitality jobs have been lost to the coronavirus pandemic.

Faced with a crippled workforce, QTIC Chief Executive Daniel Gschwind says that Queensland's peak industry body has teamed up with UQ to investigate vulnerabilities within the tourism and hospitality sector, and to develop resilience plans to tackle future challenges.

"It is critical that we not only identify the threats that have decimated our tourism's workforce, but that we also learn from these unparalleled events and better prepare ourselves for the future.

"While a global pandemic is hopefully a once in a generation event, we need to ensure that our industry has the proper tools and measures in place to rebound from future crises that affect our employees.

"Tourism contributes more than \$12 billion to Queensland's economy each year, so it's essential that we ensure our industry is resilient and maintains the staff to support it", says Gschwind.

Listening to industry concerns, UQ researchers conducted a nationwide survey of over 1,500 tourism operators. Investigating the impact of policy interventions and differences in industry resilience between the states and territories.

Project Lead and UQ Associate Professor Dr Richard Robinson says that the study found that communication, support, and leadership were key to resilience, and were required equally at the policy, organisational and individual levels.

"Unsurprisingly, the survey found that policy interventions like JobKeeper positively impacted the resilience of employees.

"Respondents also ranked the reopening of borders and vaccination programs as the most helpful government interventions.

"It was heartening to hear that, when comparing Queensland to other states, employee resilience for Sunshine State respondents was significantly higher than that of employees in New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia.

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“Much of this resilience is likely due to the substantially lower instances of prolonged lockdowns that took place in Queensland”, says Robinson.

Gschwind says that while incentivising tourism jobs and luring workers back to the industry is critical, the sector needs to provide greater support to current operators.

“We have listened to operators right across Australia and learnt what they need to stay afloat and be successful. The report highlights the need for sustained government support.

“As we rebuild our visitor economy during the COVID recovery phase, it is more apparent than ever that our next big challenge will be managing our labour and skill shortages.

“Shocks to our labour markets are nothing new but the pandemic has created a disruption on an unprecedented scale that is challenging our abilities to find practical solutions.

“Tourism operators across the country are faced with near insurmountable problems in keeping their businesses operating at capacity, with many positions vacant or sufficiently skilled staff in short supply.

“This research provides valuable insight into the dynamics at work and identifies relevant pressure points where action can be taken. The solutions will have to be found at the policy level and on the shop floor and anywhere in between. Armed with the right knowledge we will stand a much better chance of helping our industry through this and any future crisis”, says Gschwind.

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