



Destination Visitor Survey

Strategic Regional Research – Northern Territory

Darwin cruise ship research

Introduction

This study was undertaken by Tourism Research Australia (TRA) and Tourism NT with the aim of gaining a greater understanding of the value of cruise ship visitors to Darwin. Visitor profile, behaviour and expenditure information was collected from passengers and crew, as well as feedback on the visitor experience in Darwin, including experiences with the new wharf facilities. Going forward, this data will be used to calculate the economic value of the cruise ship segment to Darwin and the Northern Territory. It will also contribute to understanding of the economic value of the industry at a national level.

The Australian cruise ship industry had another record year in 2008-09 with both cruise ships and visitors to ports increasing. Compared with the previous year there was a 12% increase in cruise ships, 34% increase in passenger days at port and 33% increase in crew days at port¹ nationally. The cruise industry is a segment of increasing importance providing an opportunity for the Australian tourism industry going forward.

The Northern Territory (NT) has long seen the cruise segment as a key area of focus, and developed the *10 Year Cruise Vision 2004*. A key aim of this strategy is to maximise the economic benefits of the cruise ship market. Already significant investment has been made in the facilities at the Port of Darwin to make Darwin more appealing to the cruise ship market.

Research approach

The research approach developed for this study has proved effective at collecting detailed expenditure data from a robust sample of cruise ship passengers and crew in Darwin. There is therefore an opportunity to roll out this study design at a national level in the future and undertake benchmark studies in other locations.

In total, fifteen cruise ships visited Darwin between November 2009 and the end of March 2010. Interviewing was conducted face to face with 1,347 passengers and crew from seven ships in Darwin over this period. These cruise ships were selected to provide coverage for a range of:

- cruise companies
- ship sizes (passenger capacity ranged from 390 to 3,290)
- travel itineraries



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All of the ships were in Darwin for a maximum of one day (typically around 10 hours) and study participants were approached on their way back to the ship from their day in and around Darwin.

Survey participant characteristics

- The majority of those surveyed were passengers on board the cruise ship (92%), with the remainder consisting of crew members.
- Passengers were heavily skewed towards the older age groups, with 57% of passengers aged 65+ and a further 28% aged 55 to 64 years.
- Just over half (53%) of those surveyed were domestic travellers and 47% were international visitors.
- Of the international visitors, the US (15%), UK (11%), and Canada (7%) were the most common nationalities represented.
- More than half of the passengers (59%) and 67% of the crew had not visited Darwin before.
- Nearly two thirds (64%) of those surveyed had joined their ship in Australia, most in Sydney. Asia was the most common location for those joining their ship overseas.
- The majority of crew members were of overseas origin and had a much younger profile than the passengers surveyed.

Attitudes to Darwin and pre-booking behaviour

- The presence of Darwin on the cruise itinerary played some role in choice of cruise for just under a half (47%) of those surveyed. Of these, 48% reported their main reason for travelling was because they had always wanted to visit Darwin. A further 21% reported the history of Darwin as the main drawcard.
- Around one in five (22%) of those surveyed had made an advance booking for their time in and around Darwin. The majority of these bookings (88%) were for tour/excursion tickets.
- Of all advance bookings, half were made at the cruise ship information desk, with a further 30% made on the internet.

Activities while in Darwin

- Shopping was the most common activity for cruise ship passengers and crew, undertaken by over three quarters (77%). Walking around the Darwin city centre (72%) and eating at a local restaurant (41%) were also popular.
- Around three in ten visitors (31%) went on an organised tour – this proportion was slightly higher among international visitors (33%) and first-time visitors (39%).
- The most common locations visited on the day in Darwin were Smith Street Mall (60%) and the waterfront precinct (31%), which are both close to the port facilities. The areas visited were also influenced by whether or not visitors went on an organised tour.
- Visitors used a range of transport options to access the centre of Darwin from the port, with around a third (32%) paying to use the shuttle bus, 28% walking to the centre via the skywalk and 18% walking via the road.

Perceptions of Darwin

- Darwin exceeded expectations for just over half (51%) of respondents – expectations were completely exceeded for 23% of visitors.
- In terms of expectations that were completely exceeded, levels were higher for first-time visitors (28%), those who took an organised tour (31%) and international visitors (25%).

- Satisfaction was high for all aspects of the Darwin experience contained in the survey, with at least half those surveyed very satisfied with each attribute. Shopping received the lowest level of satisfaction (50%), however, this was higher than recorded by the Visitor Profile and Satisfaction (VPS)¹ report conducted in Darwin in 2006 and 2007 – where 34% were very satisfied with shopping.
- Some of the issues relating to shopping included:
 - shops were not open
 - lack of shopping amenities and facilities available at the cruise ship terminal.
- The Skywalk route between the cruise ship terminal and centre of Darwin received very positive feedback among those who used it - 82% strongly agreed it was a good way of getting to Darwin and 72% stated that it was a good first impression of Darwin.
- The key area for improvement perceived by respondents was the lack of a free shuttle bus into town.

Expenditure (all expenditure figures are ‘per person’)

- More than nine in ten of those surveyed (92%) made some form of purchase prior to and/or on their day in Darwin:
 - 94% of passengers and 69% of crew made some type of purchase
 - 25% of all visitors made a purchase prior to arriving in Darwin and 86% made a purchase on their day in Darwin
 - Tours was the main expenditure item prior to the visit - 18% of respondents spent money on tours
 - Shopping was the main expenditure item while in Darwin - 64% of respondents spent money on shopping.
- Visitors spent an average of \$140 per person:
 - Passengers spent \$144 per person and crew spent \$78 per person on average
 - Visitors spent \$127 on average prior to the visit and \$113 on average on their day in Darwin
 - In terms of average expenditure on items, tours received the highest expenditure prior to the visit (\$133 per person) and shopping the highest while in Darwin (\$92 per person).

Recommendations

- The cruise segment offers significant potential as a means to both bring back repeat visitors to Darwin, and for others to experience it for the first time. Interestingly, both Darwin’s history and the modern nature of the city are drawcards for visitors and consequently both assets should be highlighted in communication material.
- Around one in five had pre-booked an item for their trip, the majority of which were organised tours. Given that those who had taken tours had above average spend and satisfaction, a strategy to promote tours and facilitate tour booking is recommended. This should include forward bookings both directly (primarily online) and through the tour desks on board.
- One issue cited by a number of passengers that was contrary to the generally positive experience of Darwin, related to shop opening hours. In order to maximise the economic benefits from this market, it is vital that opening hours are co-ordinated with cruise ship arrival times/days. It should also be noted that offering additional shopping facilities at the terminal represents a further means of increasing potential passenger expenditure, as well as satisfaction.
- The Skywalk pedestrian access into Darwin was highly rated by those who used it, however, there was frequent mention of the lack of a shuttle service into the city, with respondents stating that this was a facility offered by other ports. Therefore, it is recommended that a free shuttle service should be considered by industry.

¹ Darwin VPS 2006-2007, unpublished data

- It is recommended to target both Australian cruise ship passengers and US passengers. Australians on average spent slightly more than their international counterparts and US passengers had the highest spend of all international passengers.
- Expenditure among crew members was lower than passenger spending. This group has the potential to act as useful advocates for Darwin and tour activities, however, their average length of service on ships, and the use of appropriate incentives should be considered.

This summary is extracted from research conducted by Tourism Research Australia and Tourism NT in partnership with Taylor Nelson Sofres. For the full Strategic Regional Research report, please email tourism.research@ret.gov.au.

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