

I am Darwin's most experienced Airbnb.com host (based on number of guest reviews) and a second generation lifelong resident of Darwin, NT. My parents survived Cyclone Tracy in 1974. My ability to travel to visit family interstate is significantly affected by the cost of flights in and out of Darwin. In fact I usually only travel when there is a sale because I can't afford to any other way. Fortunately I do not have children and my employer is very flexible when I need to request leave at short notice to take advantage of an airfare sale.

I have visited several countries and been to every Australian capital city, but I have never visited Alice Springs as a local tourist because of the extremely high cost of flights and long drive. I have made plans a few times but cancelled due to the significant costs involved. I have visited Alice Springs for work and know what it has to offer. I would really love to return as a tourist, but the cost is a huge barrier for me.

I have also noticed the downturn in tourists/visitors via my Airbnb business in recent years. My guests often complain about how expensive everything is in Darwin, and few can afford to also visit Alice Springs or Uluru where the cost of living is even higher. Many of my guests are solo travellers with limited vacation leave, so driving for days to Alice Springs is not an option and flights are simply unaffordable. They have told me they would rather fly straight to another Australian capital city for the same cost or less, than fly to Alice Springs.

Additionally, I try my best to maintain a competitive Airbnb accommodation rate to attract guests and income while covering my own expenses, but my guests still complain. International visitors simply aren't used to the Australian economy and often come from countries which are much more affordable and where salaries/wages are lower. Even my Australian guests express their shock at the costs of tours, groceries etc in the NT, but my international guests are usually the most unprepared for such expenses. High cost airfares only exacerbate this problem and further discourage international tourists in particular from visiting the NT. And yet, the NT has all the things Australia is best known for - the impressive wildlife, wide open spaces and amazing national parks!

Finally, the cost of airfares in and out of Alice Springs in particular is cost prohibitive for the people who live there. It is difficult for them to travel for business or leisure and many simply never leave the small town. Considering the demographics of Alice Springs and significant proportion of people from a low socio-economic background, I think our government needs to be doing more to introduce airline competition and reduce airfare costs. All Australians should be able to afford to explore their own country and experience overseas destinations too.

I wish you success with this senate inquiry and please don't hesitate to contact me for further information or a testimony.

Brooke Ottley