



# Christmas Island

A Natural Wonder

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Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia  
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## **Inquiry into Opportunities and Methods for Stimulating the Tourism Industry in Northern Australia**

This inquiry is welcomed as the outcomes may provide a range of opportunities and methods which could be applied to Christmas Island to stimulate the tourism industry, both international and domestic. Below is a brief outline of the matters which impact on Christmas Island under the Terms of Reference so that stimulus can take into account Christmas Island.

The Christmas Island Tourism Association takes a long-term approach to tourism as outlined in the Strategic Plan 2016 -2020, which forms part of this submission.

Tourism is a critical part of the Christmas Island economy and there is an immediate and ongoing need to consider ways to stimulate and support tourism. The Christmas Island economy is dominated by phosphate mining and immigration detention services; both are vulnerable. The future of the phosphate mine is uncertain with potentially a five to seven year availability of resources. The mine is seeking exploration permits, which may enable mining to continue further into the future. The Christmas Island Detention Centre, which employs around 60 local people and has a significant economic input is due to close in January 2018.

Tourism on Christmas Island is maturing. Visitor numbers are currently small but with less media negativity surrounding immigration, investor interest and a long term positive outlook for flights to the south between Perth, Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and to the north between Christmas Island and Jakarta, tourism will continue to grow.

### **Domestic and international tourism comprising: recreational, environmental, cultural, educational, and industrial tourism**

Christmas Island is a small, remote island. The current tourism offering is predominately nature based as this is the destination's unique selling point: red crab migration, endemic flora and fauna, quality marine environment, unique rainforest and 63% National Park. There are unmet opportunities to expand the current activities, which include 4WD tours, snorkelling, diving, photography and free exploring, to include more soft adventure such as kayaking, caving, guided walking, mountain biking, paddle boarding etc and environmental





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volunteer tourism. There are also opportunities to increase the cultural and historical offering. With a short but turbulent history shaped by the landscape, mining and cultural mix, Christmas Island has the potential to provide more cultural experiences to cater for the international and the domestic traveller. A holistic approach, involving governments and key stakeholders, to development and attracting investors is required for these business opportunities to be realised.

Christmas Island is an international destination with a weekly charter flight between Jakarta. This flight commenced in August 2016 and with the combined marketing efforts of the Christmas Island Tourism Association, international agents and the international dive company now based on Christmas Island, numbers and enquiries are increasing particularly from Europe and South-east Asia.

The twice weekly flight to the south is operated by Virgin Australia under contract to the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development. Airfares are expensive and this limits the broad appeal. Marketing efforts are focussed on niche markets where the costs are less likely to be an impediment to travel. However, increasing the supply of lower priced airfares in shoulder and off peak times to the tourism market could stimulate tourism while retaining the authentic experiences required for sustainability.

The viability of these airtservices also depends on an increase in supply of international standard accommodation and we call on the Australian Government to finalise its plans to release and market land for sustainable tourism developments.

### **The role of peak bodies, local communities, and all levels of government in developing and promoting tourism opportunities nationally and internationally, including regulations and workforce issues that may inhibit tourism development**

For tourism to develop it is critical for tourism, government, local communities and other stakeholders to work together to promote tourism opportunities nationally and internationally. The current governance arrangements operating on Christmas Island is fractured, complex and inhibits private enterprise. Christmas Island is an External Australian Territory administered through the Commonwealth Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, Western Australia laws apply and Federal Government representation is through the Northern Territory. State-type services are provided directly by the Australian Government, under contract with specialist service providers or by the Western Australian Government under a Service Delivery Arrangement.

The vision for the Island's future needs to be revisited to support tourism development. A holistic plan developed by stakeholders and the community with appropriate government authority needs to be developed and implemented. This is an important step to enable further tourism development and to support and attract other industries. Such a plan would involve the local community, stakeholders and governments in developing the future and implementing agreed actions.





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The Christmas Island Tourism Association (CITA) is a not-for-profit organisation with an expansive role as the mainland structures for tourism marketing and support do not apply.

CITA's role is to:

- 1) Promote and market Christmas Island and Australia's Indian Ocean Islands as world-class natural and cultural tourism destinations
- 2) Provide high quality information and services for visitors
- 3) Represent and facilitate the tourism industry on Christmas Island
- 4) Provide information relevant for all people likely to benefit from tourism outcomes.

Tourism on Christmas Island is not represented by a Regional Tourism Association nor a State Tourism body and CITA seeks to fulfil all of these roles. This lack of representation limits the opportunity for the Christmas Island Tourism Association and operators to fully participate in the mainstream tourism activities including access to the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse, training such as Boost and partnerships for trade shows and events. However, we have a strong relationship with Tourism Australia and they provide support through social media and the Aussie Specialist Program but, due to the above arrangements, the external Territories of Christmas Island, the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Norfolk Island are not included on the Tourism Australia website. Exposure through Tourism Australia and its networks is paramount to Christmas Island being able to continue to stimulate investment and development opportunities.

The importance of the role of CITA in destination and regional marketing and the local development role cannot be underestimated even if the links and mainstream representation are put in place. CITA was a critical player in attracting the international dive operation and the international charter flight.

Lack of stable, ongoing and long term funding for the Christmas Island Tourism Association limits a long term strategic approach to tourism development and marketing. Funding is provided by the Department of Regional Services on an annual basis and supplemented by membership, commissions and sales of souvenirs.

Access to trained, skilled labour is essential for the long term growth of tourism. High costs of living impact on the ability of businesses to attract and retain labour. Steps to reduce costs and red tape to attract a labour force, including the back packer market would be welcomed. As the local economy changes the current workforce will require reskilling to enable people to work in, or create, the jobs of the future and assist the transition to a post immigration and mining future.

### **Communication and transport infrastructure (particularly air, sea, road and rail transport and port infrastructure), which may facilitate and grow tourism**

As a remote island, communication and transport infrastructure is critical to the community and a key factor in facilitating and growing tourism. The Australian Government is involved in communication infrastructure, through NBN, and most aspects of transport infrastructure being airport, seaport, roads and pathways.





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The mobile phone service is 2G (only voice and text) and this does not meet the needs of tourism visitors and tourism operators, nor the community. The best opportunity for improvements to communication technology is to access fibre optic cables laid nearby. It is understood that this is currently being considered by the Australian Government to support the strategic uses of Christmas Island. A whole of Government approach is needed to support this initiative.

High costs, harsh environment and budgets are challenges, which impact on the quality of the infrastructure and services. However, a strategic approach to, and adequate funding for, maintenance and upgrades of infrastructure to international tourism standards must be implemented if Christmas Island tourism is to reach its potential.

With a planned approach to economic development and a reduction in the barriers, tourism has the potential to grow and to be a significant contributor to a diverse regional economy, providing jobs, supporting the rich multicultural community and the unique and globally significant environment.

Yours sincerely

Lisa Preston  
Chairperson  
Christmas Island Tourism Association

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