



# Australian Tourism Demand for Domestic Travel Experiences: Insights for the Gold Coast

Dr Sarah Gardiner  
Professor Noel Scott

**Griffith Institute for Tourism Research Report Series**

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### **About this report:**

This report presents research on Australian tourism demand for domestic travel experiences. This research was conducted to inform the investment prospectus and product development plans for the Gold Coast and provide insights for investors and business operators into future new and re-development of existing tourism experiences in the Gold Coast region.

Reports are commissioned by the Council the City of Gold Coast and prepared independently by the Griffith Institute for Tourism as part of the implementation of the Gold Coast Tourism Development Management Plan.

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### **Organisations involved**

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Professor Noel Scott, Griffith University

### **About Griffith University**

Griffith University is a top ranking University based in South East Queensland, Australia. Griffith University hosts the Griffith Institute for Tourism, a world-leading institute for quality research into tourism. Through its activities and an external Advisory Board, the Institute links university-based researchers with the business sector and organisations, as well as local, state and federal government bodies. For more information, visit [www.griffith.edu.au/griffith-institute-tourism](http://www.griffith.edu.au/griffith-institute-tourism) .



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## 1. Executive Summary

The Council of the City of Gold Coast engaged researchers from the Griffith Institute for Tourism to investigate Australian consumer views on opportunities to improve existing, and develop new tourism experiences for the Gold Coast. This project collected customer data to help inform the Gold Coast Tourism Destination Management Plan and therefore supplements previous supply-side research. The findings are intended to lead to an investment prospectus for key new iconic experiences on the Gold Coast and inform future experience development initiatives.

Australian consumers, mostly from New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, were surveyed (N = 1,759). They described the Gold Coast as fun, relaxing and exciting and it was the second most popular destination for a domestic holiday among those surveyed. The results show a keen interest in food and wine experiences and nature-based experiences when holidaying in Australia. Dining overlooking the beach, visiting food markets and having great restaurants, café and dining options are core components of the Australian domestic holiday experience that are broadly desired. Shopping at food, clothing and craft markets are also highly appealing.

Those surveyed were also asked about a number of particular accommodation, activities, and event options. They preferred luxury accommodation options, selecting the 7-star luxury hotel and luxury camping as desirable accommodation options. An underwater hotel was also seen as appealing to one in five respondents. Visiting the rainforest and experiencing nature in unique and novel ways also rated highly. Of particular note for the Gold Coast is the strong interest in the skywalk and cable carriage experiences. Approximately one in ten Australians surveyed found purpose built mountain bike riding trails appealing and a third of this group had a special interest in mountain bike riding and/or sport. The research also supports further enhancing beach and marine experiences, which could include beach activities, dining overlooking the beach and linking the beach to the city's history and heritage. Visiting an aquarium and marine science centre was also popular. An underwater dive attraction was appealing to some respondents, particularly those who had a special interest in scuba diving and were under 40 years. Food and wine festivals and outdoor cultural festivals are most appealing and had the highest likelihood of participation among the event experiences tested. Performances in an open air outdoor theatre and a sculpture walk rated highly. The research suggests that the planned cultural precinct should offer mainstream cultural experiences that appeal to everyday Australians.

The findings indicate that the Gold Coast has a well-established 'fun' image in the mind of Australian consumers given that many people have visited the destination before. Identifying other related experiences that could broaden the Coast's unique position in the Australian domestic holiday market is important. Such experiences must balance cost and market potential. Developing experiences that have mass market appeal to visitors is emphasised here. However, special interest, niche experiences, such as mountain biking and scuba diving attractions, could also attract particular segments of the market. Thus, we suggest identifying the purpose of each proposed new experience and its role in generating special interest or mass market visitation in the destination management plan. This will support achieving the 2020 target of doubling overnight visitor expenditure to the Gold Coast to \$7 billion.

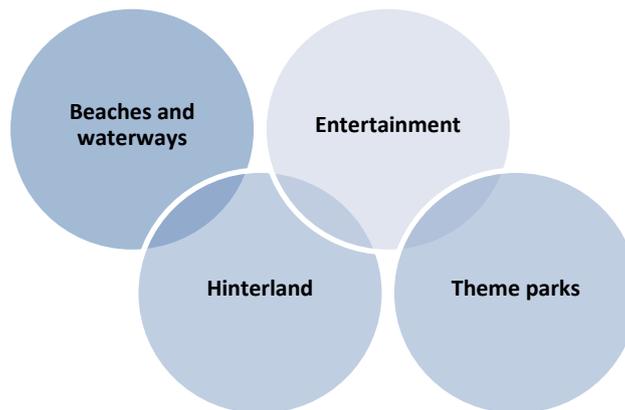
## **2. Introduction**

The Gold Coast Destination Tourism Management Plan (DTMP) was launched in 2014 by the Queensland Government, Gold Coast Tourism and City of Gold Coast. The target of this plan is to double overnight visitor expenditure to the Gold Coast to \$7 billion by 2020. One of the imperatives of this plan is to increase investment in tourism-related product, experiences and services. To focus this investment, the Gold Coast DTMP identifies eight tourism catalyst experiences and investment opportunities for the Gold Coast. Figure 1 shows the six experience-based projects. The other two catalyst projects are the construction and re-development of sporting infrastructure for the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games and leveraging the light rail connections to promote tourism growth.



**Figure 1. Six of the Gold Coast catalyst projects.**

The plan also seeks to grow the destination’s iconic, hero experiences relating to: beaches and waterways, hinterland, entertainment and theme parks, as shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2. Gold Coast hero experiences.**

To facilitate the development of these experiences, the City of Gold Coast commissioned the Griffith Institute for Tourism at Griffith University to determine the demand side issues and opportunities to develop products and experiences on the Gold Coast. The research aimed to identify and characterise a range of new tourism products and experiences to inform an investment prospectus for the City of Gold Coast. In particular, the research sought to answer four key research questions:

- What are the Top 10 Australian destination choice preferences when holidaying in Australia?
- What experiences are sought by Australians on a domestic holiday?
- What experiences are associated with the Gold Coast?
- How do Australians react to 15 new tourism product ideas for the Gold Coast?

A sample of 1,759 Australian consumers, mostly from New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, were surveyed to investigate these research questions. This report discusses the concept of tourism experiences, drawing upon existing ideas and research, as well as the latest research by Tourism Australia in this area. The findings of a survey of Australian consumers are then presented, highlighting opportunities to grow and create experiences identified in the Gold Coast DTMP.

### 3. The Importance of Experiences

Over the past decade there has been a massive shift in consumer expectations and the ways in which we consume tourism and experiences. Tourism Australia (2015) proposes that:

*Experiences are the drivers and motivators of our target audience. As such, Australia needs to highlight the experiences which best meet these motivations, and highlight those which distinctively differentiate Australia relative to the competition. This approach will expand the experience palette for Australia, generate greater conversation and involvement with the destination, increased dispersal and ultimately, higher spend and revenue for Australian industry (p.1).*

An increasing number of today's consumer do not want passive products, but instead are driven by meaning and interaction. They are seeking dialogue and engagement with the people and places they visit. This trend is towards an "experience economy" (Pine & Gilmore 1999) where consumers want experiences that transform their life, create lifelong memories and have meaning to them. They don't want to be spectators, passively consuming tourism product. They want to be involved in shaping their own individual and special experience in which they play a role. Thus, they want to co-create their experience through personalised interactions with the producer of the experience - that is, the tourism operator and their staff – to create an experience that has meaning and is special to them. Tourism and Events Queensland (2015) describe this transformation in consumer expectations, as follows:

*Today's guests want more than just to see the sights. They want to learn, participate and engage with local people and places when they travel. They want stories of amazing people and places they can share with their friends and family. Consumers are looking for a tourism experience - the emotional feeling or personal achievement a visitor derives from the purchase, participation or consumption of a tourism product. The 'tourism product' is what the consumer buys; the 'tourism experience' is what they remember (n.p.).*

Tourism Australia has identified *Global Experience Seekers* as a key target market for visiting Australia. These travellers are described by Tourism Australia as having a high awareness of Australia, however a poor level of knowledge. They also want to hear 'new news' about Australia; and want to connect with our people, lifestyle and environment. These

travellers are looking for unique, involving and personal experiences on their holidays (Tourism Australia 2015a). More recently, Tourism Australia has re-focused their target segments of the international market on the *First Time Global Experience Seeker*. These visitors are yet to visit Australia. They represent about one-fifth of all international visitors to Australia and are more likely to spend more and stay longer than regular international visitors. In addition to this group, Tourism Australia also continues to target Australian and New Zealand Global Experience Seekers. According to TA (2015b), Global Experience Seekers are more likely to:

- Be experienced international travellers;
- Be opinion leaders – early adopters and influencers;
- Be open minded;
- Be selective about their media consumption – they prefer media that is personally relevant and motivational;
- Consider travel to be an important part of their lifestyle;
- Stay longer and spend more;
- Travel beyond major cities;
- Be less materialistic;
- Have a higher than average household income; and
- Be well educated and informed on a range of subjects.

This group want to:

- Experience something different from their normal day-to-day life;
- Understand and learn about different lifestyles and cultures;
- Participate in the lifestyle and experiencing, rather than observing it;
- Have social interactions – making friends and developing personal relationships;
- Meet and interact with the locals;
- Challenge themselves – physically, emotionally and/or mentally;
- Visit authentic destinations that are not necessarily part of the tourist route;
- Have exposure to unique and personally compelling experiences; and
- Have authentic personal experiences.

Tourism Australia (2015b) describes Australian domestic Experience Seekers as:

*Travellers who have a preference for both interstate and overseas travel and who spent more than \$2,000 on their last holiday. Looking at the average trip cost per person, Australian Experience Seekers spent \$3,505 on their last holiday, three and a half times more than the average Australian (p. 12).*

Tourism Australia has developed the Australian Experiences Framework. This framework centres on seven quintessential Aussie experiences, including:

- **Aboriginal Australia** – learning about traditional Aboriginal practices as well as contemporary interpretations
- **Nature in Australia** – discover and learn about distinctive plants and intriguing wildlife that cannot be found anywhere else in the world
- **Outback Australia** – enjoy the vast open spaces and meet the people that make this uniquely Australian landscape what it is
- **Aussie Coastal Lifestyle** – offers some of the most diverse, least-crowded and unspoilt coastal experiences in the world
- **Food and Wine** – enjoy Australia’s fabulous food and wine served by friendly Aussies in great locations
- **Australian Major Cities** – enjoy Australia’s way of life and culture
- **Australian Journeys** – discover the diversity, the wonders, the towns, the people and their unique way of life.

## 4. Study Context: Domestic Tourism

Domestic tourism is the backbone of the Gold Coast and Australia's tourism industry, representing 64% of visitor expenditure in Australia. Yet, increasingly, Australians have developed a love affair with international travel. Last year 7.9 million Australians travelled overseas and outbound trips by Australians grew 8% (Tourism Research Australia 2014). The economic slowdown has not curbed Australian consumers' appetite for heading overseas, in fact, we are now staying longer and spending more on international trips than ever before. Competitive airfares and a strong Australian dollar in recent years has made the dream of an international holiday within the grasp of most Australians and no longer just a luxury for the wealthy elite. Yet, this trend represents a significant challenge for the Australian tourism industry. For the first time in history, the Australian tourism economy is in deficit with more Australians travelling abroad than international visitors visiting our country. Tourism Australia (2015b) comments:

*“The biggest challenge is Australians perceive Australian holidays as being safe, predictable and known, with experiences that lack the challenge and diversity of overseas destinations. Australia is also seen as being expensive compared to many overseas destinations. These factors, combined with a strong Australian dollar and low cost carriers expanding their international flights, continue to influence the travel preferences and intentions of Australians, and lead to many opting for overseas holidays” (p.12).*

Yet, in recent years, the popularity of holidaying in Australia has somewhat rebounded, with domestic overnight visitation in Australia growing 3% in the past five years and resulting in \$54.4 billion of domestic overnight expenditure for the year ending December 2014 (Becken & McLennan 2015). Despite this, outbound travel continues to outperform domestic travel growth. Revitalising the attractiveness of a domestic holiday for Australians continues to be a major challenge for Australia's tourism industry.

### 4.1 Domestic Tourism and the Gold Coast

In 2014 the first Gold Coast State of the Industry Report, prepared by the Griffith Institute for Tourism (Becken & McLennan 2015), was launched. This report draws data from Tourism Research Australia's domestic visitor survey as well as other key data sources. This research reveals that the Gold Coast is Australia's fourth largest domestic tourism

destination in terms of overnight visitor expenditure. The region attracts 6.8 million daytrip visitors and 3.4 million overnight domestic visitors per year. Daytrip visitors from Brisbane represent almost 70% of the market (or 4.7 million visitors). The Gold Coast's Top 5 domestic overnight source markets (by visitors) are:

1. Brisbane (1.15 million visitors)
2. Sydney (484,000 visitors)
3. Melbourne (318,000 visitors)
4. North Coast NSW (180,000 visitors)
5. Darling Downs (149,000 visitors)

Visitation to the Gold Coast is steady with no change in the average growth rates in overnight visitation, visitor nights and average length of stay for the past five years. Daytrip visitation is also unchanging with no growth in visitor numbers and a 4% decline in expenditure. In the year ending December 2014, the region has seen marginal decline in domestic overnight visitation to the Gold Coast (down 2.6% or by 56,000 visitors) and expenditure (down 3% or by \$79 million). Some performing markets were Brisbane (up 17% or 170,000 visitors) and Melbourne (up 6% or by 19,000 visitors), despite declines in the other source markets. Gold Coast Airport passenger movements increased slightly (up 1%). Total hotel revenue increased 9% and the average occupancy rate was 70%. The Griffith University Business Confidence Index indicates that confidence in the tourism industry is high.

In March 2015, Gold Coast Tourism presented the "State of Play" for the Australian visitor market, highlighting key domestic consumer travel trends. Domestic overnight visitation from Brisbane (33% of the Gold Coast domestic overnight visitor market) was up 17% and Melbourne (9% of the market) was up 6%, however visitation from Sydney (14% of the market) was down 9% and rest of Queensland (19% of the market) was down 10%.

Australians travelling for leisure holidays (58%) and visiting friends and relatives (VFR) (30%) were identified as the two largest segments of the domestic overnight visitor market the Gold Coast nine in ten of the total market. In the year ending December 2014, the domestic overnight holiday market to the Gold Coast declined 5%, however the domestic VFR overnight visitor market increased 5%. Business travel represents 9% of total visitation and was down 12% in this period (Gold Coast Tourism 2015).

## 4.2 Australian Travel Motivations

Tourism Australia commissions an annual research project, known as *Domesticate*, to better understand what motivates Australians to travel on a domestic holiday. According to this research (TNS 2015), over half of all Australians surveyed take holidays in their own state or to another state to relax and reconnect with friends and family (67% and 55%, respectively). The next most important trip motivator is to eat good food and/or drink good wine (36% and 37% respectively). Holidays within their own state are also about reconnecting with people they care about (34%) and shopping (26%). On interstate holidays they want novelty, that is to see and do different things, as well as go shopping (27%).

The 2015 research report focuses on shopping as an activity when taking a domestic holiday. From this research, it was noted that:

*“People mention lack of uniqueness, quality of experience, accessibility and value as barriers to shopping while travelling. A distinctive and authentic local shopping experience is the aspiration, and will open up share of wallet that might otherwise go to more singular or exotic tourist activities”* (TNS, 2015, p. 2).

Accordingly, five key factors to enhance the Australian shopping experience were suggested, including: (1) connecting the shopping experience to the location, for example, offering local food and dining experiences; (2) having goods, shops and stores that aren't found anywhere else; (3) offering value and opportunity to purchase luxury items; (4) create a local atmosphere, that is, this is where the local shop and use local produce and local designs; and (5) make it accessible via public transport (TNS 2015).

The *Domesticate* research also suggests that Australians want to reconnect through disconnecting on an Australian holiday. That is, there is a desire to get back to basic and escape the frenetic everyday lifestyle (TNS 2013). The research also suggests Australians parents are sentimental about their childhood holiday experiences and want to recreate that experience with their children. This research suggests that Australians are seeking to recreate with their family and friends primarily through sporting events and food and wine festivals, however expressed low awareness of what events and festivals were on offer in Australia. These events create a reason to travel and are therefore strong trip motivators. “Casual dining or experiences in a uniquely Australian location”, “dining in unique or special locations” and “eat at fine dining or well-known restaurants” were the Top 3 food and wine experience motivators of domestic overnight trips. “Poor value for money – too upmarket/expensive”, “not aware of what is available” and “in the wrong place” were the Top

3 barriers to taking a domestic trip around food and wine experiences. Offering authentic dining experiences in special locations was promoted as the key motivator to taking a domestic food and wine trip (TNS 2013).

**Key insights for Gold Coast experiences:**

Domestic tourism represents 64% of visitor expenditure in Australia and is the backbone of Australia and the Gold Coast's tourism industry.

Brisbane followed by Sydney and Melbourne are the key source markets for the Gold Coast. Demographic, social, cultural and lifestyle differences among these markets should be considered in tourism experience design.

Domestic visitation to the Gold Coast remains steady, but the need new experiences to grow visitation is imperative.

Converting Brisbane daytrips to overnights stays, as well as, reigniting interest in the Sydney market and maintaining interest in the Melbourne market for Gold Coast holidays is important and offering new and improved experiences could stimulate these outcomes.

Food and wine, events and festivals and local and unique shopping opportunities could play a pivotal role motivating Australians to visit the Gold Coast.

## 5. Study Method: Survey of Australian Consumers

This project explores how the Gold Coast rated in terms of destination choice and experience preferences for Australian consumers when thinking about a domestic leisure holiday. The findings will inform the development of investment prospectus by City of Gold Coast for the catalyst projects identified in the Gold Coast DTMP and opportunities to develop the hero experience themes to attract domestic visitors to new and existing tourism product on the Gold Coast. The project commenced with a review of the research undertaken at a national, state and local level. This review sought to identify existing information and statistics that could inform the survey design and assist in preparing the investment prospectus. The review of this research on Australian travel motivations was presented in Section 4.2 of this report. The following sections outline the survey design, data collection and sample profile.

### 5.1 Survey Design

The survey was designed based on a review of prior research on domestic and international consumer demand for Australian experiences and sought to incorporate the ideas presented in the Gold Coast DTMP. Accordingly, there were five main part of the survey:

**Part 1. Destination preferences:** The first part of the survey required respondents to rank leading Australian holiday destinations from most (1) to least (10) appealing. This list was adapted from a list of destinations tested by Tourism Australia in international markets (Tourism Australia 2013). The Sunshine Coast and Brisbane were added to the list given their proximity and competitive position with the Gold Coast.

**Part 2. Views of Australians on domestic holiday experiences:** This part of the survey aimed to test consumer demand for experiences on an Australian holiday. The experiences tested were derived from the Gold Coast DTMP and this part of the survey sought to gauge consumer views on these experiences, in general, without any bias or consideration of the Gold Coast. Respondents were asked to rate each attribute (e.g., world class beauty and natural environment) or experience (e.g., adventure activities, Aboriginal experiences, etc.) according to their perceived importance or the appeal of this feature on an Australian

holiday. Some of the attributes tested were drawn from the list previously tested by Tourism Australia. Experiences were also derived from the Gold Coast DTMP.

**Part 3. Domestic consumer holiday motivations and perceptions:** This part of the survey asked respondents about their motivation for taking an Australian leisure holiday in the next 12 months and whether the Gold Coast would deliver this outcome, rating it from 1 (not likely at all) to 10 (extremely likely). They were also asked to provide three words that they would use to describe the Gold Coast as a holiday destination.

**Part 4. Gold Coast experiences:** This part of the survey tested the association of key attributes with the Gold Coast or likelihood of participating in experiences when visiting the Gold Coast, if those experiences were available. The attributes and experiences tested were the same of those tested in Part 2 of the survey to permit comparison between interest/appeal on an Australian holiday and association/likelihood of participation on a Gold Coast holiday. New iconic experiences for the Gold Coast were also surveyed, such as the opportunity for visitors to dive a purpose-built dive attraction, surf in an artificial wave pool, etc. Respondents were also asked to comment on experiences and events and entertainment missing from the Gold Coast holiday experience.

**Part 5. Demographics:** This part of the survey captured the demographics of the respondents, including: special interests (such as scuba diving, surfing, sport, etc.), year of birth, gender, place of residency, employment status, family status, education and household income. It also asked respondents if they had visited the Gold Coast before, when they last visited and what they did on that visit. This information can be used to profile the respondents and identify particular target markets for specific experiences.

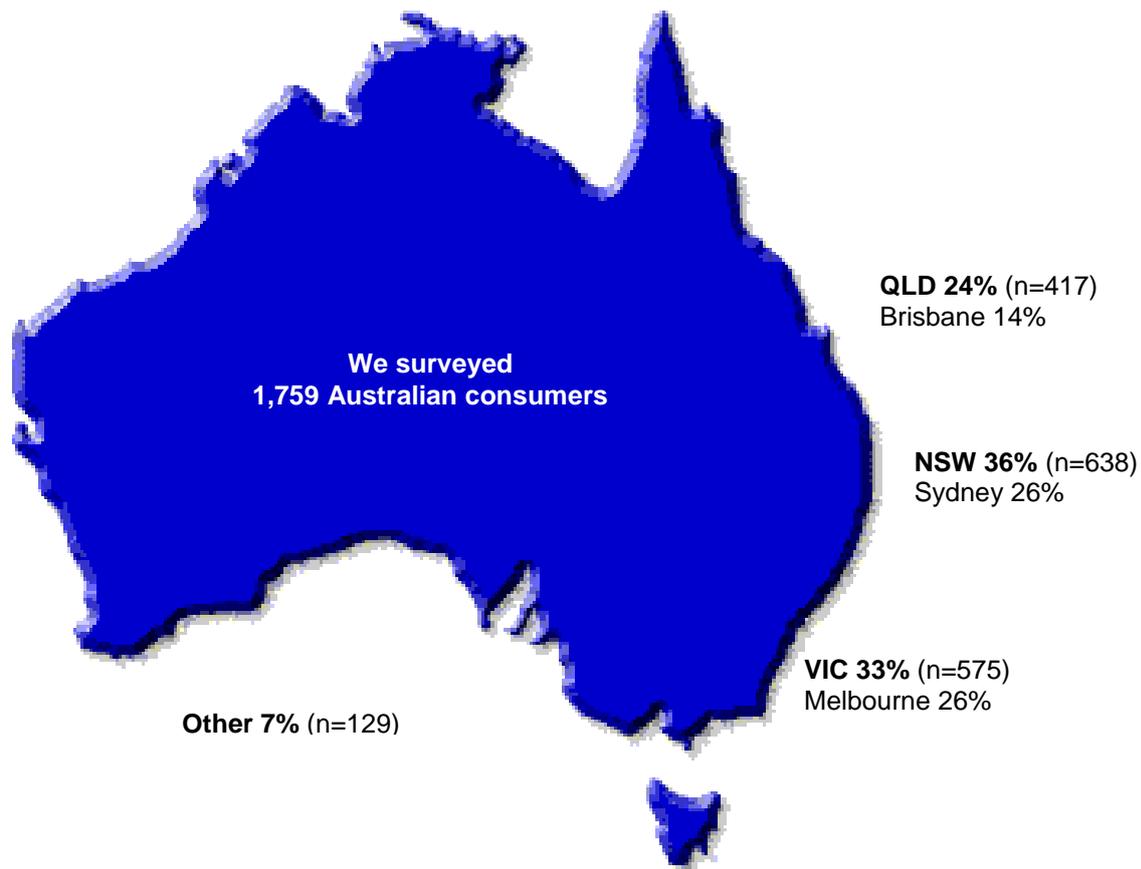
The survey was developed by Dr Sarah Gardiner and Professor Noel Scott from the Griffith Institute for Tourism in consultation with tourism officers from the Economic Development Branch of the City of Gold Coast. Ethics approval was given by Griffith University (approval number: HSL/14/15/HREC). Information about the research was provided at the beginning of the survey for ethical purposes and participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the research.

## **5.2 Data Collection**

A professional survey distribution company was engaged to disseminate the survey via an email invitation to their panel members. The distribution was focused on attracting respondents from Victoria, New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland (except Gold Coast) given these markets represent 93% of all domestic overnight visitors to the Gold Coast. The demographics of the respondents were also monitored throughout data collection to ensure a suitable spread of ages and gender balance in the sample. There were 2,579 responses in total received, however 820 respondents were excluded due to an incomplete survey or being Gold Coast residents. As a result, this analysis is based on 1,759 fully complete responses.

## **5.3 Sample Profile**

Figure 4 shows that 36% of respondents were from NSW, 33% were from Victoria, 24% were from Queensland and 7% were from other states. Approximately half the sample was from Sydney and Melbourne, representing 26% of the sample, respectively. Brisbane respondents represented 14% of the sample.



**Figure 4. Place of residency of respondents.**

Table 1 shows the demographics of the sample. There was a satisfactory distribution of ages across the sample with 13% for 17-29 years, 20% for 30-39 years, 18% for 40-49, 20% for 50-59 years and 29% over 50 years. Forty percent of the sample had children living at home. Most of the sample has a post-secondary qualification (82%). Almost one-third had an undergraduate or postgraduate university degree (32%) and were employed full-time (31%). One in five were part-time or casually employed and 23% were retired. Slightly more females (57%) responded than males (43%).

Most Australians surveyed had visited the Gold Coast before (84%). Of those who had visited the Gold Coast before 60% of those had visited the Gold Coast in the past five years, 16% visited 6-10 years ago and 24% visited more than 10 years ago. On their last trip to the Gold Coast, 55% went shopping, 47% visited a theme or wildlife park, 19% visited a casino, 13% went on a tour of the waterways, canals and harbour and 12% visited the rainforest.

**Table 1. Sample Profile.**

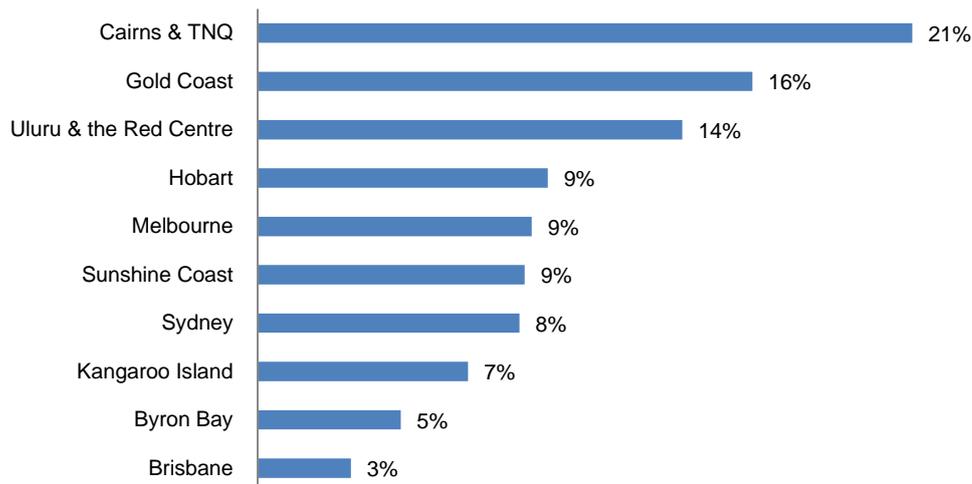
<b>Demographic characteristic</b>	<b>Percentage of sample</b>
Age	
17-29 years	12.8%
30-39 years	19.7%
40-49 years	18.1%
50-59 years	20.2%
Over 60 years	29.2%
Age of eldest child living at home	
Under 5 years	6.0%
5-14 years	19.4%
15-24 years	33.4%
Over 24 years	40.4%
No child living at home	59.6%
Education	
Year 11 or below	17.0%
Year 12	16.5%
Certificate or diploma	33.3%
Undergraduate degree	19.1%
Postgraduate degree	13.2%
Other	1.0%
Employment	
Employed full-time	30.8%
Employed part-time/casual	21.1%
Not employed	19.8%
Retired	22.7%
Self-employed	5.5%
Gender	
Female	57.3%
Male	42.7%

## **6. Results**

The results presented in this section are based on 1,759 fully completed survey responses. The section begins with reporting the findings on the first preferences of Australians for a domestic holiday destination. The experience preferences of Australians surveyed are then discussed. The analysis on the importance of key attributes on an Australian holiday and the association of these attributes with the Gold Coast are presented and this is followed by the results of the appeal of various experiences on a domestic holiday and likelihood of participation in these experiences if they were available on the Gold Coast. These attributes and experiences relate to key factors identified in the Gold Coast TDMP. Findings on key words associated with the Gold Coast holiday experience and event and performance preferences are reported. The section concludes with the findings on consumer views on the core iconic and catalysts projects as identified in the Gold Coast TDMP.

### **6.1 Destination Choice**

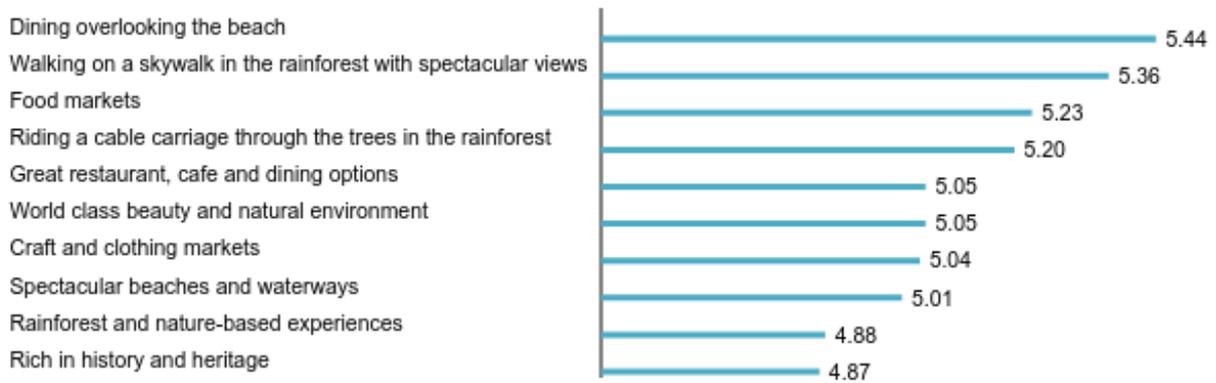
Australians surveyed were given a list of ten prominent tourist destinations in Australia and asked to rank the destinations from most appealing (1) to least appealing (10). Figure 5 shows the results. The most popular destination was Cairns and Tropical North Queensland (TNQ) which was selected as the first choice destination by 21% of Australians surveyed. The Gold Coast was the second most popular destination, selected by 16% of those surveyed as their most preferred destination. The next most popular first choice destination was Uluru and the Red Centre (14%). Other competing beach-based destinations, such as the Sunshine Coast and Byron Bay rated lower than the Gold Coast at 9% and 5%, respectively. These findings suggest that the main competitor to the Gold Coast in the Australian market is Cairns and TNQ, therefore, a hybrid destination competitive strategy is suggested. Identifying attributes and experiences that differentiate the Gold Coast from Cairns and TNQ may create a competitive advantage for the Gold Coast. In addition, replicating similar attributes and experiences offered in Cairns and TNQ on the Gold Coast could also strengthen the appeal of the Gold Coast holiday experience among Australian consumers.



**Figure 5. First choice destination for Australians surveyed**

## 6.2 Experience Preferences of Australians

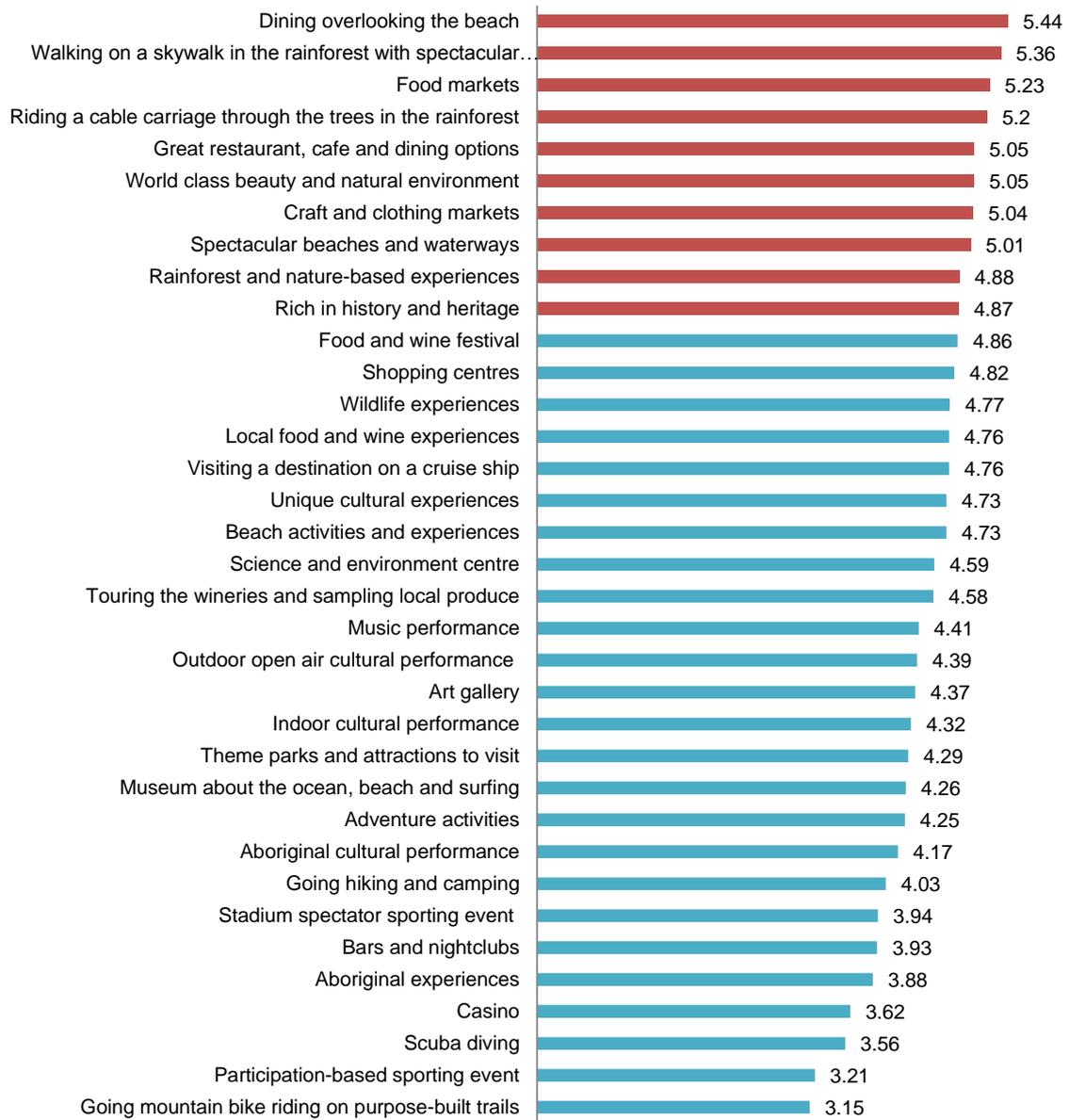
The research also sought to identify the experience preferences of Australians when taking a domestic holiday. Accordingly, survey respondents were asked to evaluate their holiday activity preferences when holidaying in Australia from very unappealing (1) to very appealing (7). Figure 6 shows the Top 10 experience preferences. The results suggest that food and wine experiences are an important part of an Australian domestic holiday. Dining and food markets experiences are also particularly appealing. Activities including dining overlooking the beach, visiting food markets and having great restaurants, café and dining options, reported the highest average or mean (M) values of 5.44, 5.23 and 5.05, respectively (on a 7-point scale). The second group of highly ranked activities includes rainforest and hinterland experiences (M = 4.88). Experiencing the rainforest in a novel way, such as via a skywalk (M = 5.36) and cable carriage (M = 5.20), was appealing. Ranked only slightly lower than the above mentioned activities, cultural experiences relating to craft and clothing markets (M = 5.04) as well as history and heritage, also appear in the Top 10 preferred activities on Australian holidays.



**Figure 6. Top 10 activity preferences on an Australian holiday**

Figure 7 shows the results of all activity preferences. Food and wine festivals ( $M = 4.86$ ), shopping centres ( $M = 4.82$ ) and wildlife experiences ( $M = 4.77$ ) are just outside the Top 10. The lowest ranked activities are mountain bike riding on purpose built trails ( $M = 3.15$ ), participation-based sports events ( $M = 3.21$ ) and scuba diving ( $M = 3.56$ ). These results suggest these activities attract a special interest market and are not overly appealing to the mainstream domestic tourism market. Aboriginal experiences ( $M = 3.88$ ) also rated on the lower end of appeal, however this type of experience may be more appealing to international tourist markets. Bars and nightclubs ( $M = 3.93$ ) and a casino ( $M = 3.62$ ) were also ranked low, but are a popular and widespread activity on the Gold Coast. This kind of activity is typically favoured by a younger population. However, the average age of Australians surveyed for this research was 33 years. Therefore, this result may reflect the age distribution of the sample and suggests this activity appeals to a specific market segment rather than the broader population.

To further understand these findings, four experience types were identified, including: food and wine, cultural experiences, nature-based experiences and sporting and active experiences. Activity preferences within each of these experience types were then analysed. The findings of this analysis are presented in the subsequent sections. The following graphs (Figures 7 to 11) show the Top 10 experiences overall in red and the experiences outside of the Top 10 in blue.

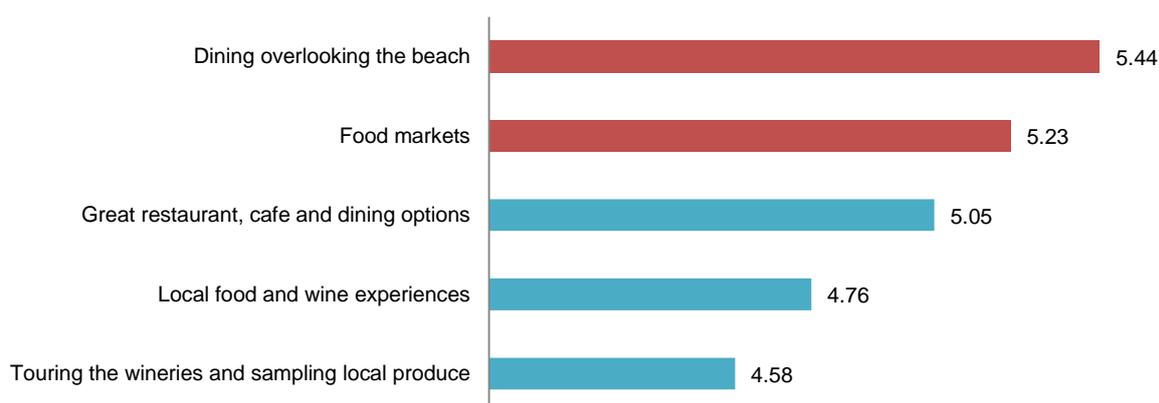


**Figure 7. Activity preferences on an Australian holiday**

### 6.3 Top Food and Wine Activity Preferences

Food and wine experiences were ranked in the Top 10 activities for Australians surveyed (see Figure 7). Figure 8 shows the results of Top 5 food and wine activity preferences, ranked from very unappealing (1) to very appealing (7). Dining overlooking the beach and food markets were the most appealing experiences in the Top 5 food and wine activity preferences, as well as in the Top 10 most appealing experiences in general, with average (mean) value 5.44 and 5.23, respectively. These experiences are shown in red to represent their Top 10 status. Consumers surveyed were also interested in great restaurants, café and dining options (M = 5.05), local food and wine experiences (M = 4.76) and touring the wineries and sampling local produce (M = 4.58).

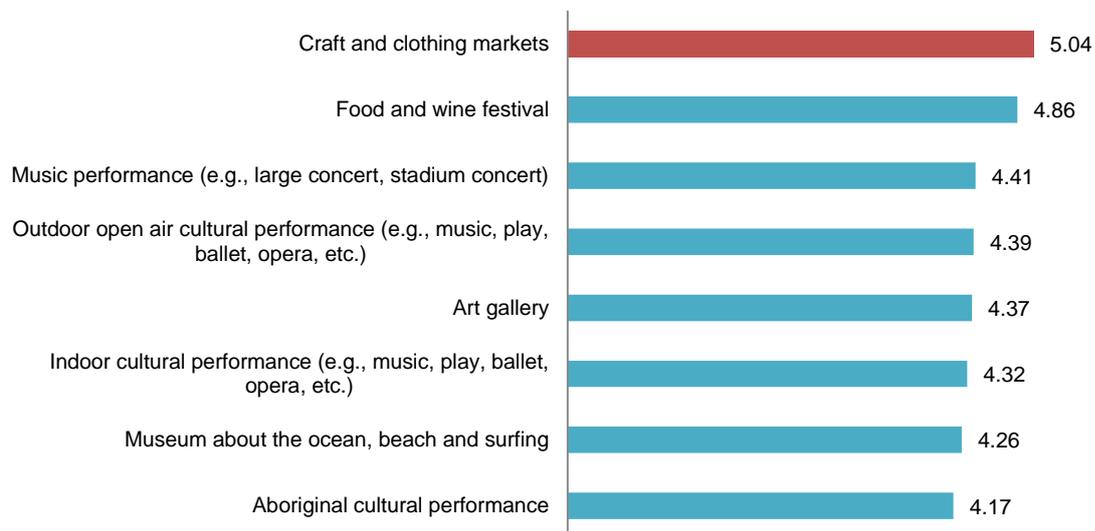
In summary, the findings suggest that Australians have a strong interest in food and wine experiences when on domestic holidays. This interest is perhaps an extension of the “ideal lifestyle” that involves quality food, wine and dining and is reflected in the popularity of television programs such as Masterchef. Offering local food and wine in a special location could provide a competitive advantage for the Gold Coast, particularly given the interest in dining overlooking the beach. The Gold Coast’s sunny weather and warmer year-round climate compared to the southern states indicates an opportunity to build quality alfresco food and wine experiences as part of the core destination offering. Given the interest in local produce, opportunities to incorporate local food experiences in other activities, such as a visit to a wildlife park or a nature-based sightseeing tour, should also be explored.



**Figure 8. Top 5 food and wine activity preferences on an Australian holiday**

## 6.4 Cultural Experiences on Australian Holidays

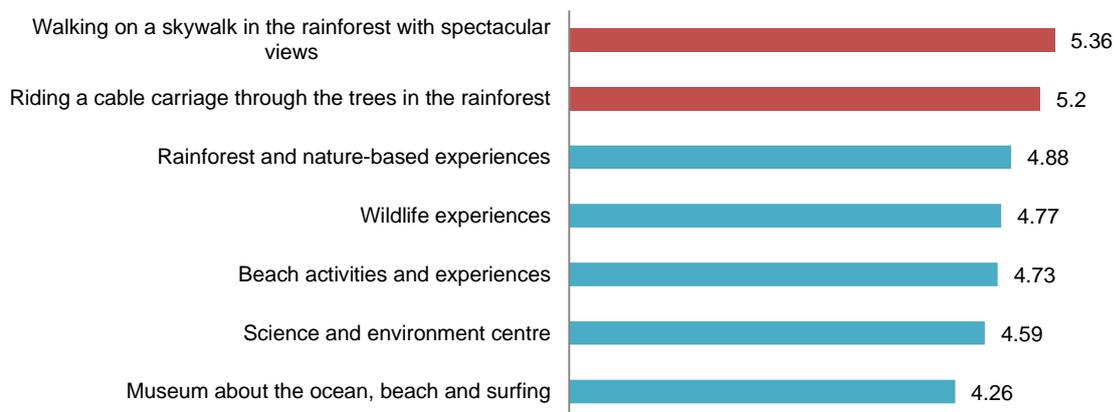
Figure 9 shows respondents preferences for cultural experiences when on an Australian holiday. Shopping at craft and clothing markets (M = 5.04) was the only experience in the Top 10, however there was also interest in food and wine festivals (M = 4.86) and music and cultural performances (M = 4.41). Visiting an art gallery (M = 4.37) and ocean, beach and surf museum (M = 4.26) was also somewhat appealing. The lowest ranked activity is aboriginal cultural performance (M = 4.17). These findings suggest that the mass domestic visitor market is seeking interactive cultural activities in the form of festivals and performances, instead of traditional cultural tourism experiences, such as visiting art galleries and museums. Designing interactive, entertainment-focused art gallery and museum attractions that have mainstream appeal could make them more attractive to the mass visitor market. There might also be a segment of the market interested in traditional forms of these cultural tourism experiences.



**Figure 9. Top cultural experiences on an Australian holiday**

## 6.5 Nature-based Experiences on Australian holidays

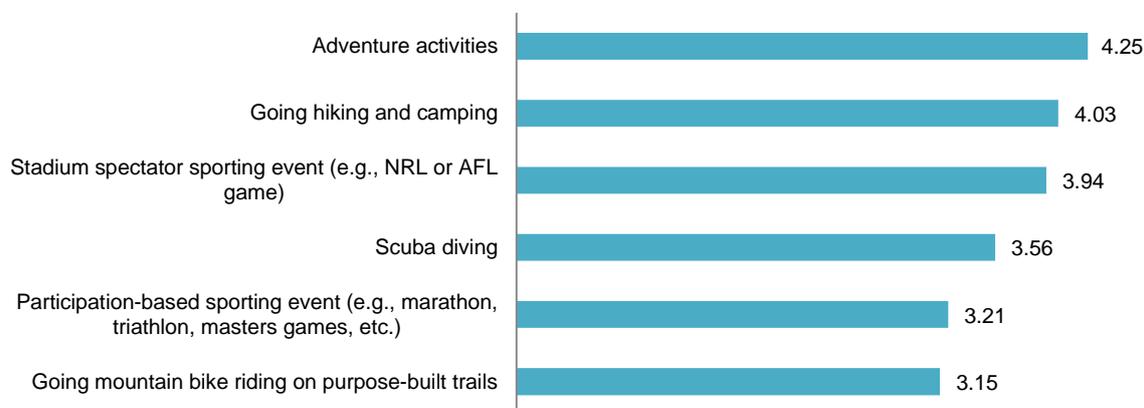
The Australians surveyed expressed a strong interest in rainforest experiences. The Gold Coast TDMP identifies the need to develop a new iconic rainforest experience in the Gold Coast hinterland. Two new rainforest experiences in the Gold Coast hinterland that have been proposed are a skywalk and cable car carriageway. The results of this survey indicate these experiences are appealing to the domestic market, ranking in the Top 10 most appealing experiences and averaging 5.36 and 5.20, respectively, on a 7-point scale. Figure 10 shows these experiences and other popular nature-based experiences on Australian holidays. It is evident that there is also interest in wildlife (M = 4.77) and beach experiences (M = 4.73) as part of an Australian holiday. The science and environment centre (M = 4.59) is slightly more appealing than the museum about the ocean, beach and surfing (M = 4.26), yet this result might also reflect a better understanding of science centres because they are prevalent in other domestic destinations visited by these source markets (e.g., Questacon in Canberra and Scienceworks in Melbourne).



**Figure 10. Top Nature-based Experiences on an Australian holiday**

## 6.6 Sporting and Active Experiences on Australian Holidays

Figure 11 shows the ranking of sporting and active experiences by Australians. No sporting and active activities were in the Top 10. This finding suggests these activities are special interest markets. Adventure activities (M = 4.25) and hiking and camping (M = 4.03) were somewhat appealing experiences in this category. Spectating (M = 3.94) and participating (M = 3.21) in a sporting event were not highly rated in the overall sample, with average score between neutral and somewhat appealing. Low average (mean) scores for scuba diving and going mountain bike riding on purpose-built trails suggest these are special interest experiences that are appealing to a niche segment of the domestic market.



**Figure 11. Sporting and Active Experiences on an Australian Holiday**

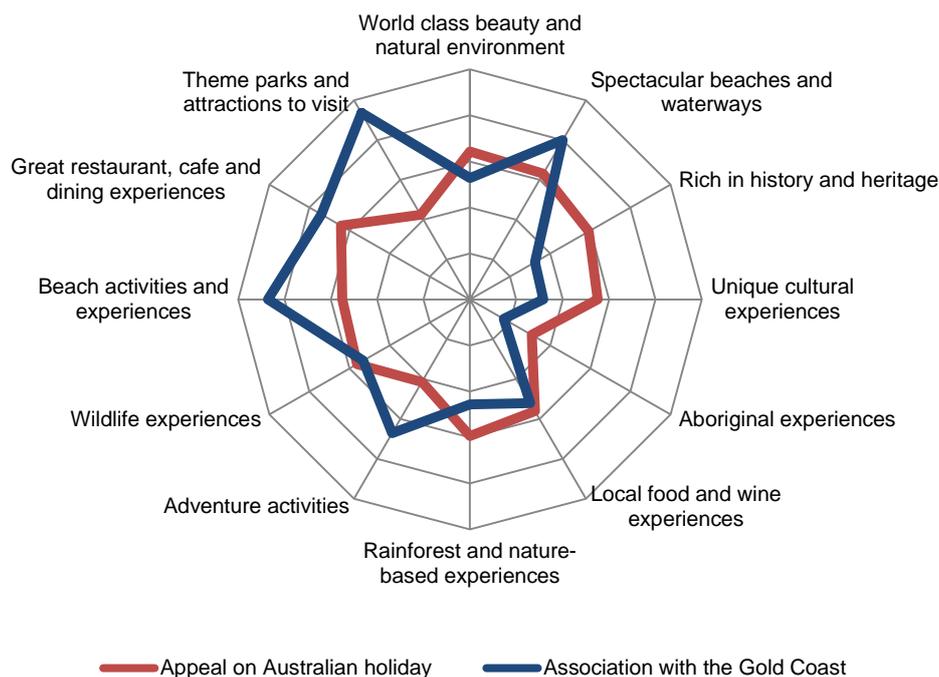
## 6.7. Experiences: Importance and Association with the Gold Coast

Australians surveyed indicated that their primary motivation for taking Australian leisure holiday in the next 12 months is to relax and chill out (37%), spend holiday time with the family (35%), visit friends and family (12%), have fun on holidays with my friends' (8%), watch (2%) or participate (1%) in an event or other (5%). Over one-third (38%) of those who wanted to relax and chill out rated the Gold Coast 8 out of 10 or more in the likelihood of achieving that outcome, with 11% rating of this group rating it 10 out of 10. Almost half (45%) of respondents of want to spend holiday time with family rated a Gold Coast holiday as 8 out of 10 or more of achieving this outcome, with 16% rating it 10 out of 10. These findings suggest the Gold Coast has a well-established reputation of delivering on the primary

motivators of domestic holiday. However, more emphasis on offering relaxed and chilled out experiences and reinforcing the family experiences could boost the appeal of the destination.

Two of the primary aims of this project were to determine the experiences sought by Australians on a domestic holiday and whether these experiences are associated with the Gold Coast. This analysis aims to inform the development and enhancement of these attributes and experiences aligned with the Gold Coast TDMP. Accordingly, Figures 12 to 15 show the findings relating to these aims. The blue line relates to the interest in the attribute or appeal of the experience on an Australian holiday. The red line in these figures shows the association of the attribute with the Gold Coast or likelihood of participation in the experience on the Gold Coast. Points located closer to the outside of the graph show higher interest or appeal on an Australian holiday and higher association or likelihood of participation on a Gold Coast holiday than points located towards the centre of the graph.

For instance, Figure 12 shows there is a high interest among Australians surveyed in seeing spectacular beaches and waterways on a domestic holiday and this attribute is also highly associated with the Gold Coast. In contrast, there is low interest in Aboriginal experiences among Australians surveyed and this experience has low association with the Gold Coast. Beach activities and experiences have a strong association with the Gold Coast and are somewhat appealing on a domestic holiday. Similarly, having great restaurants, café and dining experiences are appealing to Australians surveyed and associated with the Gold Coast, suggesting the need to enhance this association. Theme parks and attractions also have a high association with the Gold Coast, but do not rate highly as motivators on an Australian holiday. Rainforest and nature based experiences, local food and wine experiences and unique cultural experiences are strong motivators of domestic travel, but further work is required to enhance their association with the Gold Coast.

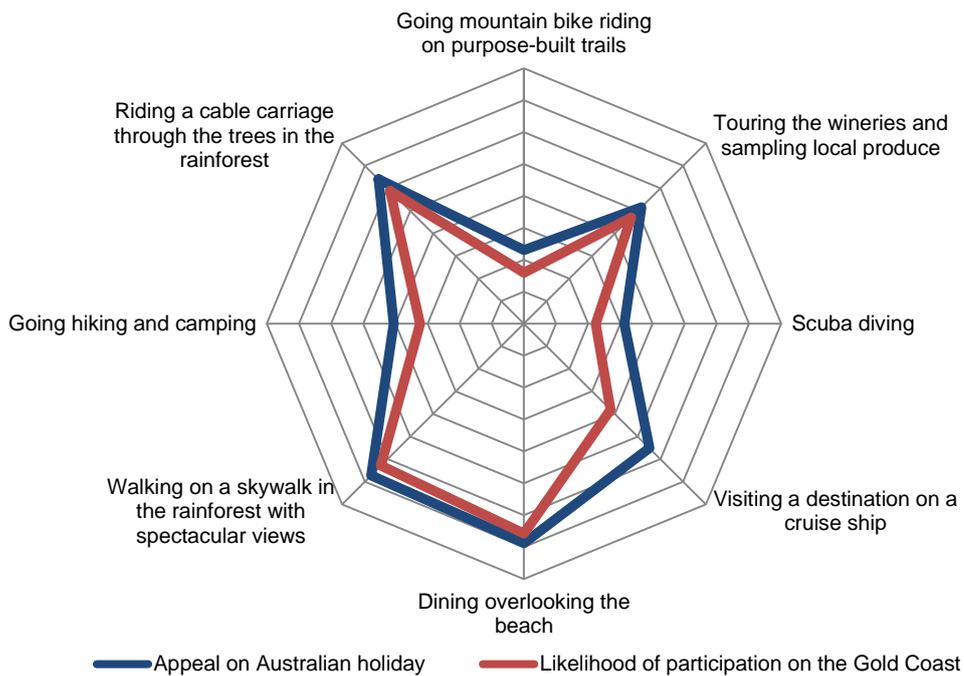


**Figure 12. Experiences: Importance and Association with the Gold Coast**

### 6.8 Activities: Appeal and Likelihood of Participation when Visiting the Gold Coast

Australians surveyed found dining overlooking the beach very appealing and there was a strong likelihood of participation in this activity if it was available on the Gold Coast. Furthermore, exploring the rainforest via cable carriage or a skywalk was also appealing and respondents thought they would be likely to participate in these activities if they were available on the Gold Coast. There was also some interest in touring the wineries and sampling local produce on a Gold Coast holiday. Figure 13 reports these findings.

Respondents found visiting the Gold Coast on a cruise ship somewhat appealing, but they were neutral on the likelihood of participating in this activity if it was available on the Gold Coast holiday. Activities such as scuba diving, mountain bike riding on purpose-built trails and hiking and camping had weaker appeal and likelihood among all Australians surveyed.



**Figure 13. Activities: Appeal and Likelihood of Participation when Visiting the Gold Coast**

Although the overall sample generally did not find going mountain bike riding on purpose-built trails overly appealing on an Australian holiday and were not very likely to participate in this activity on a Gold Coast, there was some respondents (n = 201) who found going mountain bike riding on purpose-built trails appealing or very appealing on an Australian holiday. However, given that developing purpose-built mountain bike trails is identified as an iconic experience in the Gold Coast TDMP, the profile of respondents who found this experience appealing was further investigated. Only 37% had a special interest in mountain biking and 33% had a special interest in sport. Of this group, 54% were likely and very likely to go mountain bike riding on the Gold Coast, 42% wanted to spend time with family when on an Australian holiday and 82% had visited the Gold Coast before. Members of this group were young adults (59% were under 40 years) and almost half (46%) had no children living at home and one-third (32%) had children living at home under 14 years. These respondents generally were educated (44% had a university degree) and more likely to be male (55%).

## 6.9 Attractions: Appeal and Likelihood of participation when Visiting the Gold Coast

Food markets followed by craft and clothing markets and shopping centres were appealing attractions for those surveyed when on holidays in Australia, as shown in Figure 14. They were also somewhat likely to participate in these activities if they were available when visiting the Gold Coast. Science and environment centres appear to be more interesting for visits than a museum about the ocean, beach and surfing and an art gallery. Most Australians surveyed found casinos and bars and nightclubs unappealing and felt they would be unlikely to participate in these activities when visiting the Gold Coast. As mentioned previously, these findings may reflect the demographics of the sample and these experiences might appeal to specific segments of the market, such as young adult visitors.

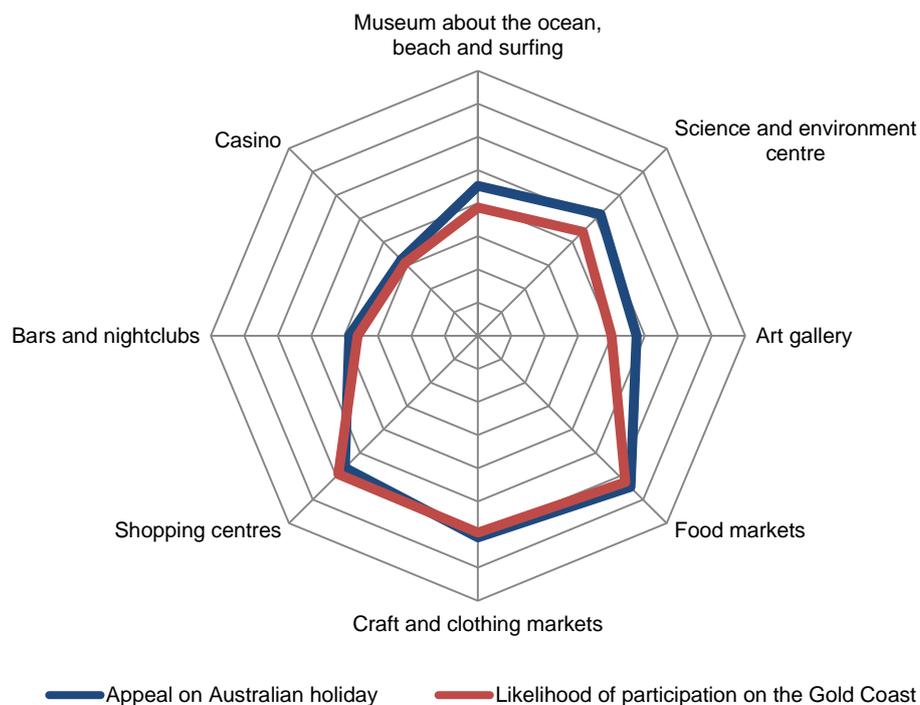
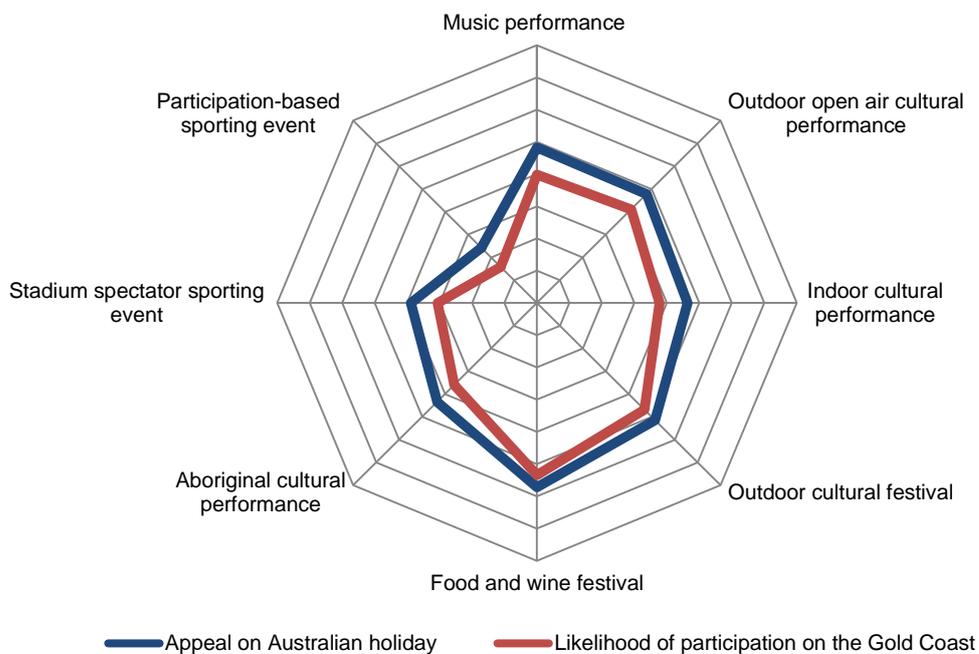


Figure 14. Attractions: Appeal and Likelihood of Participation when visiting the Gold Coast

## 6.10 Events and Festivals: Appeal and Likelihood of Participation on the Gold Coast

Figure 15 shows the appeal and likelihood of participation of Australians surveyed in events and festivals. Among all the event experiences tested, food and wine festivals and outdoor cultural festivals (e.g., music, play, visual art, ballet, opera, etc.) are the most appealing and had the highest likelihood of participation on the Gold Coast for Australians surveyed. Music performances are also rated highly. Indoor and outdoor cultural performances have an average level of appeal when holidaying in Australia and likelihood of participation on a Gold Coast holiday. Both participation and stadium spectator sporting events were not overly attractive to general Australians surveyed, suggesting this is a niche segment.



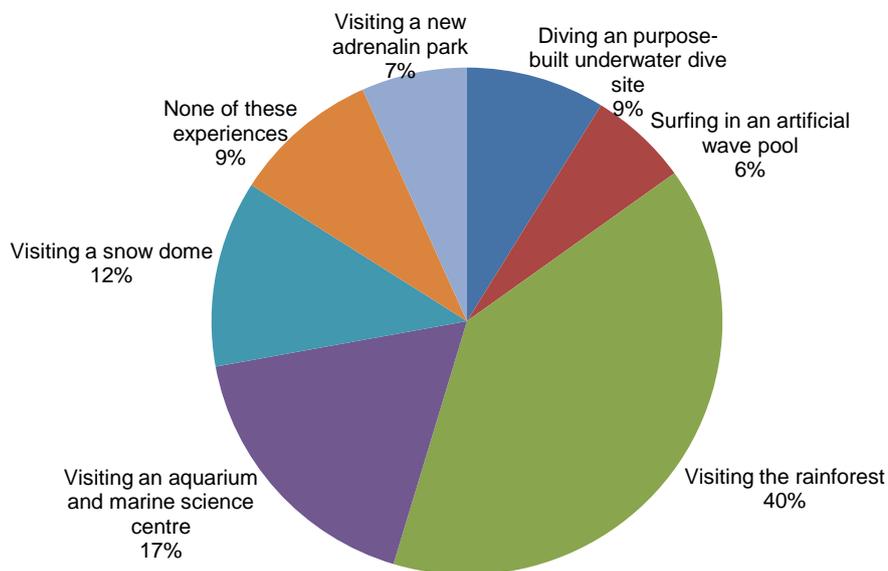
**Figure 15. Events: Appeal and Likelihood of Participation on the Gold Coast**





### 6.13 Attraction Experience Preferences

Several new attraction options were tested to establish consumer demand for each experience. The results are shown in Figure 18. Respondents were asked to choose which attraction would be the most appealing while on a Gold Coast holiday and were only permitted to select one attraction. Visiting the rainforest and an aquarium and marine science centre were the most appealing experiences for 40% and 17%, respectively, of Australian surveyed. Surfing in an artificial wave pool was selected by only 6% of overall responses.



**Figure 18. Attraction Experience Preferences**

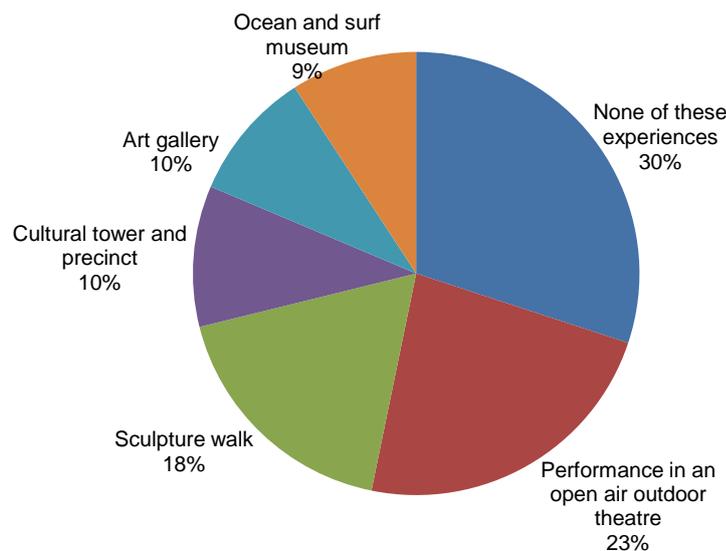
Approximately 17% (n = 298) of respondents found scuba diving appealing or very appealing. In this group, 40% had a special interest in scuba diving and 30% had a special interest in sport. Over half (54 %) were likely and very likely to participate in scuba diving when visiting the Gold Coast and 28% selected diving an purpose-built underwater dive site as the most appealing new experience for the Gold Coast (out of 6 options). Of the respondents in this group:

- 39% wanted to spend time with family when on an Australian holiday
- 84% had visited the Gold Coast before
- 57% were under 40 years

- 56 % had no children living at home and 25% had children living at home under 14 years
- 41% had a university degree
- There was a 50/50 gender split

### 6.14 Cultural Experience Preferences

Respondents were also given a choice of five different cultural experiences from which to choose the most appealing. Figure 19 shows the results. Australians surveyed found performance in an open-air outdoor theatre and sculpture walk were the most appealing experiences (for 23% and 18%, respectively). The ocean and surf museum was selected as the most appealing experience by 9% of respondents. Some 30% of Australians surveyed do not prefer any of these five cultural experiences, which mean that further research on cultural preferences should be conducted.



**Figure 19. Cultural Experiences**

Although only a small proportion of the sample selected the museum about the ocean, beach and surf in the list of new cultural attractions (as shown in Figure 19), almost one in five Australians surveyed (n = 345) found this experience appealing or very appealing on an Australian holiday. This experience was appealing to all age groups in this group and appealed to people with children (47%) as well as without children (53%) living at home. There were more females (56%) that indicated that this experience was appealing or very appealing than males (44%). One in five (19%) among this group had a special interest in

surfing and a quarter (26%) had a special interest in sport. Members of this group also expressed a strong interest in food and wine experiences, with 56% of respondents in this group self-identifying as having a special interest in food and wine. This group was also familiar with the Gold Coast as 82% had visited the Gold Coast before. Over one-third (37%) had a university degree.

### 6.15 Accommodation Preferences

Finally, respondents were also asked to choose their preferred type of accommodation on a Gold Coast holiday. Figure 20 reports the results. Australians surveyed found 7-star luxury hotel, luxury camping and an underwater hotel, that is a purpose-built hotel where the rooms are located in a transparent underwater shell, were the most appealing experiences (for 38%, 19% and 19%, respectively). A bubble hotel (4%), that is accommodation in a glass dome room, and a themed hotel (7%), such as staying in a room replicating an aeroplane were found to be the most appealing preferences for a small segment of the respondents.

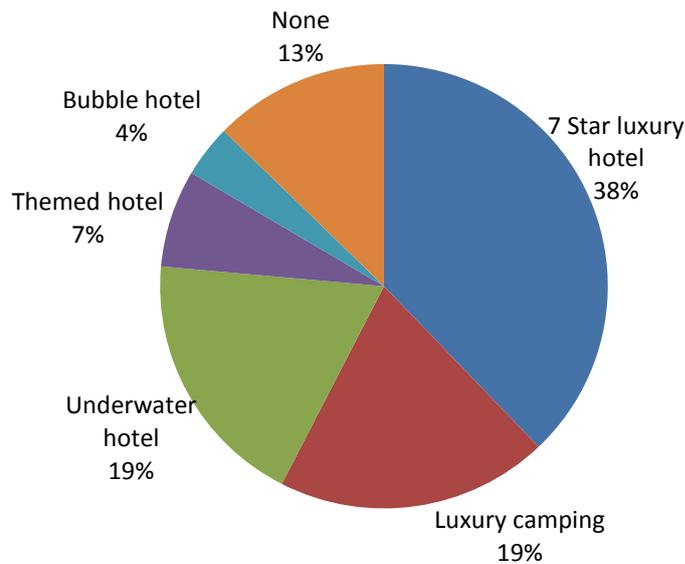


Figure 20. Accommodation Preferences

## 7. Conclusion

This report discusses the results of a demand side view of tourism experiences on the Gold Coast. It presents Australian consumer views on opportunities to improve existing, and develop new tourism experiences for the Gold Coast. In doing so it differs from previous tourism product development studies for the Gold Coast which have taken a purely supply-side view. By conducting research on potential customers in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland it has provided an objective view of the relative attraction of numerous experiences proposed or related to the Gold Coast TDMP.

The findings support both strategic recommendations regarding experience development for the destination and suggestions for improvement of individual proposed experiences. At a strategic level we suggest discussion on the relative importance of special-interest and mass appeal experiences. A number of the experiences examined in this consumer research have been found to appeal to a narrow or niche market. Accordingly, we have several suggestions for broadening the mass market appeal of these products. For example, an offshore dive site is limited in market. However, through siting and design considerations, it could become a mass market experience for people with no previous diving experience and even family friendly experience.

Similarly, generating mass market appeal for visiting a surf museum on the Gold Coast could be facilitated by combining it with Australians keen interest in dining. Thus, a restaurant or café overlooking the beach as part of the museum experience might enhance the attractiveness of this new attraction. Similarly, cultural precinct activities should include mainstream cultural events, shows or activities that appeal to everyday Australians. Offering opportunities to sample local food and wine could also be a core part of this experience.

Food, wine and dining as well as outdoor live performances, perhaps even in an outdoor theatre with the iconic backdrop of the Broadwater, is also important to consider in the design of the Broadwater Integrated Resort Development. Including luxury accommodation as well as additional dining overlooking water and some special interest experiences is recommended.

The mountain bike and adventure trails concepts will probably appeal to special interest markets based on the currently formulation of these concepts. They would benefit from further investigation with the special-interest markets, to help design the detail of the site. These experiences could also be incorporated into an iconic attraction in the rainforest, like the skywalk, to make them more appealing to the mass tourism market.

There were significant interest amongst Australian surveyed for rainforest experiences and support for both the cable way and skywalk concepts. This interest is also supported by the Tourism Australia research that highlights international consumer demand for nature-based experiences. Further investigation of these concepts and other novel ways to explore the nature environment of the Gold Coast hinterland is recommended.

The study also provided insights into the competitor destinations for the Gold Coast. Cairns and TNQ is the main competitor to the Gold Coast in the domestic market. Gold Coast is a mass market, mature destination and Australian consumers have strong “mental images” of the destination. It is seen as a “fun” place to have a holiday and the results suggest that this market position should be retained. However, the results suggest that while maintaining a fun mass-market appeal, there may be opportunities to broaden and deepen the association of the Gold Coast and fun for different types of experiences. For example, fun in the hinterland, fun dining experience, etc.

More generally, an education program to encourage business and investors to embrace the new experience economy is recommended. Incorporating experiential concepts as outlined in this report, such as co-creation, visitor and staff engagement and experiential experience design, throughout all Gold Coast experiences is suggested. These concepts promote the design of experiences that are more personalised and memorable for visitors that have a strong connection to the Gold Coast’s past, present and future, giving visitors insights into the essence of the people and places and the stories that makes the Gold Coast unique and special. In doing so, they provide an experience that isn’t available anywhere else and they want to tell others about. This program of revitalising the visitor experience on the Gold Coast could potentially be a legacy of the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games.

In conclusion, this research provides an initial insight into the Australian consumer demand for new experiences. Employing a “stage gate system” (Cooper 1990) to further refine these concepts is suggested. This process may involve further brainstorming based on this research, developing some standard criteria for assessing experience concepts and conducting further market potential studies to explore each project concept in detail.

Future research to extend on the findings of this research may include: conducting focus groups in key domestic markets, such as Sydney and Melbourne, to unpack the findings from the research with a focus on particular projects that will move forward in the short-term, such as the dive attraction, surf museum, etc. Understanding of the type of experiences that are perceived as “fun” and “relaxing and chilled out” in order to develop product that meets

that demand could also be explored as part of this research. The survey used for this project could also be undertaken in other key international markets (e.g., New Zealand, China, Japan, etc.) to look for similarities and differences to the Australian market and to identify opportunities for new experiences to attract these markets. Similar to the domestic research, followed up with focus groups in-market could also extend of these findings. There is also opportunity to re-survey the domestic market to compare the current survey data with a key competing destination, such as visiting Cairns versus Gold Coast in Sydney or Melbourne markets, Melbourne versus Gold Coast in the Sydney market, Hobart versus Gold Coast in the Melbourne market, etc. This research could focus on all experiences (as undertaken in the current research) or could focus on a particular type of experience such as rainforest experiences, food and wine experiences, cultural experiences, adventure experiences, etc. There is also an imperative to conduct further research concentrating on a particular experience or particular experiences, such as a new iconic rainforest attraction in the hinterland like skywalk or cable carriage. Desktop research comparing leading-edge experiences in other destinations internationally, such as dive attractions, museums, etc., could also be informative.

The research presented in this report is a foundation for this future work. It provides some initial valuable insights into the domestic consumer mind set when considering a holiday in Australia and, particularly, tested experience concepts relating to the Gold Coast. These insights will inform the investment prospectus for the catalyst project identified in the Gold Coast TDMP as well as provide market intelligence for innovation in existing experiences.

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