



Hon Peter Lawlor MP
Member for Southport



**Minister for Tourism and Fair
Trading**

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Californian family win contest to be Ben's 'best mates'

After days of searching for the winner of Tourism Queensland's Best Experience in the World competition, Barbie Defeo from California, USA, has stepped forward to claim her prize, Tourism Minister Peter Lawlor announced today.

Mr Lawlor said the winner of the coveted Best Experience in the World competition, which closed on Friday 9 October, was in total shock after she realised she had won an all-expenses-paid trip to Queensland.

Ms Defeo beat more than 23,000 would-be 'best mates' from over 150 countries to win the competition for her and three companions to enjoy the trip of a lifetime in Queensland and post a guest blog on the Island Caretaker website.

"After days of searching for the lucky winner, Tourism Queensland finally received contact from Ms Defeo, a Compliance Manager from Huntington Beach in California," Mr Lawlor said.

"She discovered she had won after reading that an American woman was yet to claim the prize, she then checked her emails which confirmed she was the lucky winner of the Best Experience in the World.

"I'm told she was ecstatic and in complete shock.

"She will bring her husband and two teenage daughters and it will be her family's first trip to Australia and the southern hemisphere."

Ms Defeo said she was still getting over the shock of winning and coming to terms with the fact that she and her family would really be visiting the Best Job in the World Island Caretaker.

"Tourism Queensland's Best Job in the World campaign has been huge over here in the States and I have been following Ben's blog since he started as the Island Caretaker," Ms Defeo said.

"This will be our first visit to Queensland so there is just so much we want to see and do.

"My family and I love the outdoors and can't wait to go bike riding, swimming and snorkelling, so we'll be making that our priority once we arrive in Queensland.

"Most of all we're really looking forward to meeting Ben and exploring the Islands of the Great Barrier Reef."

Mr Lawlor said Tourism Queensland was tailoring an itinerary for the Defeos to ensure their visit to Queensland was the Best Experience in the World.

"The aim of the competition was to continue to drive visitors to the Island Caretaker Ben Southall's blog at www.islandreefjob.com," he said.

"Since the competition was announced, we've seen a spike in visitation and interest in Ben's blog, with more than 180,000 people logging on for an update since the competition was launched on the 26 August."