

Gold Coast Social Indicators 2010

This study examines the social impacts of tourism on the local communities, as perceived by its residents. The research is intended to inform the decision making of state and local authorities, as well as tourism bodies. It looks at the social, geographic and economic circumstances of respondents in order to give a context to the findings.

The Gold Coast is one of Australia's most vibrant tourism destinations. In the Year Ending March 2010, domestic and international tourism expenditure totalled \$3.9 billion (\$2.9B and \$1B respectively).¹

The Gold Coast boasts facilities that rival most Australian capital cities with an international airport, casino, convention centre, race course, four stadia to support the same number of football codes and Q1, currently the tallest residential building in the world.

The Gold Coast covers 1400 square kilometres, extending from Beenleigh to Coolangatta and South Stradbroke Island to the Lamington and Darlington Ranges. With a wide range of tourism experiences from the beach to the bush, set in a sub-tropical climate and supported by a strong and exciting city, the Gold Coast is unique to Australia.

Spearheading its economic advancement and community development is the tourism industry. As a major employer in town tourism provides jobs for thousands of local residents, what equates to a small army to welcome and service the four

million visitors that holiday at the Gold Coast each year.

Indeed, the Gold Coast population, which now stands at around 500,000, is growing at a rate of between 13,000 and 16,000 each year, one of the highest growth rates in the country, and is expected to reach one million by 2030.² Even more telling is that just under half of the current residents have lived in the region for 10 years or less. Most have either arrived from interstate or overseas and unsurprisingly, compared with the Queensland average, work in the tourism industry or related areas that profit from tourism.

55% of respondents feel that their local area should keep attracting the same number of tourists

Feelings about local area and tourists

		Queensland %	Gold Coast %
Feelings about local area	I like it, I can't think of anywhere else I would rather live	37	42
	I enjoy living here but can think of other places I would enjoy equally	50	49
	I only live here because circumstances demand it and would prefer to live somewhere else	13	10
Feelings about the number of tourists	Fewer	8	11
	About the same	50	55
	More	43	34

■ = statistically significant difference

Generally, the industry is viewed in a positive light with 55 per cent of residents in favour of attracting the same number of visitors to the region. Though, they were less definite when it came to their degree of positiveness. For instance, only fourteen per cent said tourism had a moderate to very positive affect on their quality of life. This figure is higher than the State average of 11 per cent but lower than might be expected given that one quarter of all residents either directly profits or have a family member who directly profits from tourism. Certainly, locals are more likely to be positive if they:

- benefit personally from tourism or family members benefit
- earn over \$100k
- think their local area should try to attract more tourists
- indicate they 'really like' tourists.

On the other hand, those who live on the Gold Coast due to circumstance rather than lifestyle choice, view the affects of tourism less positively.

Contact with Tourists, Feelings and Development

		Queensland %	Gold Coast %
Feelings about tourists	I really like tourists	49	39
	I tolerate tourists	35	43
	I adjust my lifestyle to avoid tourists	10	13
	I stay away from places tourists go	5	5
Contact with tourists	I never come into contact with tourists	18	11
	I see tourists around but don't usually talk to them	52	58
	I often interact with tourists as part of my job	13	14
	I often meet tourists around town and talk to them	14	12
	I have made friends with tourists during their stay but have not kept in contact	7	11
	I have made friends with tourists and kept in contact after they have left	5	4
Preferred development growth	Happy with continued growth	59	58
	Happy but no more growth	25	27
	Want less tourism	6	7
	More growth different direction	10	8

■ = statistically significant difference

"[Tourism] Makes the place more interesting and there's lots to do, always lots of different people around. It makes things a lot more expensive though, to live here."

Gold Coast Social Indicators Respondent 2010

The figures balance out though when it comes to how tourism affects the community as a whole. Gold Coast residents are on par with the rest of the state with 53 per cent stating tourism has a moderate to very positive affect on their community. Again, the more positive responses come from those who:

- earn \$100k or more
- think the region should be trying to attract more tourists
- indicate they 'really like' tourists.

They vast majority of Gold Coast residents also agree on the following tourism advantages:

- improved economic benefits
- increased regional profile
- increased local pride
- improved facility maintenance
- new infrastructure
- more interesting things to do

Of these, residents were more likely than the average Queenslanders to agree with improved economic benefits, new infrastructure and more interesting things to do.

However, on the question of whether

tourism increases pride, the Gold Coast differs markedly from other parts of Queensland. Tourism is seen to promote delinquent behaviour and have a negative impact on the local character. Added to this, is a list of other impacts they perceive as more negative than the average Queenslanders. Top in the listings is a negative impact on local character, increased prices, impacts on the environment and lack of access for locals.

Perhaps to be expected, those with a less favourable view tend to have lived in their local area all their lives, never come into contact with tourists or want to see less tourism in the region. However, they share more in common with their neighbours than might first meet the eye. For example, the majority of Gold Coast residents (72%) admit to either tolerating or avoiding tourists all together – more than the average Queenslanders (65%), and give lower than average support for trying to attract more visitors to the region. Nevertheless, 6 in 10 report they are happy with the development of tourism in the area and 2 in 5 said they couldn't think of anywhere else they would rather live.

Speaking of where they live, geographic influences also play their part. The study found some variation in attitudes towards tourism between residents living at the north³ end of the Gold Coast and those at the south⁴, when compared with the average Gold Coaster. These comparisons are marked by the fact that a higher percentage of people living at the north end had lived there all their lives or cited they only live there 'because circumstances required it'. Theirs was a less favourable view when questioned on whether tourism brought new infrastructure to the community or more interesting things to do. Yet, they were also less inclined to believe tourism was responsible for a rise in delinquent behaviour, disruption to the lives of locals or had changed the character of the region.

To the contrary, dwellers in the south held an overwhelmingly positive view that tourism had delivered infrastructure growth and more interesting things to do when compared with the average. In the same vein, they were more likely to believe that tourism influenced a rise in delinquent behaviour, to cite examples of a negative affects on the local community, and consider the character of the region had changed as a consequence of tourism.

When Gold Coasters were asked what words first came to mind when they thought about their local area, tourism or tourists was a common response.

Overall, wider studies⁵ show that these findings run true to form. Tourism is viewed as having a more positive affect on the community's quality of life rather than the individual's, and that communities the derive financial benefits from tourism are more likely to consider the industry in a positive light.

Overall Impacts of Tourism

	Queensland		Gold Coast	
	% positive affect	% negative affect	% positive affect	% negative affect
Overall impact on personal quality of life	11	4	14	3%
Overall impact on local community	50	2	53	1%

% positive affect is based on the proportion of respondents who cited the top two ratings on a seven point scale ranging from very negative (-3) to very positive (+3).

% negative affect is based on the proportion of respondents who cited the bottom two ratings on a seven point scale ranging from very negative (-3) to very positive (+3).

■ = statistically significant difference

Positive Impacts of Tourism

Because of tourism there is...	Queensland			Gold Coast		
	% agree	% positive affect on personal quality of life	% positive affect on community as a whole	% agree	% positive affect on personal quality of life	% positive affect on community as a whole
Improved economic benefits	87	16	58	91	20	62
Increased regional profile	76	16	52	77	19	58
Increased local pride	65	20	50	59	22	55
Improved facility maintenance	60	25	53	62	24	58
New infrastructure	60	36	65	77	39	63
More interesting things to do	54	35	65	72	42	69

% positive affect is based on the proportion of respondents who cited the top two ratings on a seven point scale ranging from very negative (-3) to very positive (+3).

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Negative Impacts of Tourism

Because of tourism there is...	Queensland			Gold Coast		
	% agree	% negative affect on personal quality of life	% negative affect on community as a whole	% agree	% negative affect on personal quality of life	% negative affect on community as a whole
Increased prices	53	20	18	67	20	19
Increased property values	45	22	25	61	23	24
Rise in delinquent behaviour	36	15	31	55	14	33
More disruption	31	19	24	46	19	26
Negative impact on the environment	29	12	31	36	10	28
Negative impact on local character	29	9	11	45	10	16
Increased opportunity costs	25	19	24	28	14	23
Lack of access for locals	16	28	28	23	24	29

% negative affect is based on the proportion of respondents who cited the bottom two ratings on a seven point scale ranging from very negative (-3) to very positive (+3).

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Demographics

		Queensland %	Gold Coast %
Gender	Male	50	50
	Female	50	50
Life stage	Under 45 years, no children	29	30
	Under 45 years, with children	26	24
	45 years or more, no children	32	33
	45 years or more, with children	13	13
Years of residence	Less than 2 years	9	7
	2-5 years	21	25
	6-10 years	15	20
	11-20 years	19	21
	More than 20 years	14	14
	All my life	22	13
Place of birth	Within 50km of where you currently live	22	13
	Elsewhere in Queensland	24	14
	Elsewhere in Australia	34	44
	In another country	21	29
Education	Completed Year 10	11	13
	Completed Year 11/12	18	16
	Finished technical education	15	16
	Tertiary diploma	12	14
	Finished university degree	14	13
	Finished post-graduate degree	5	4
	Other	26	24
Employment status	Working full-time	41	45
	Working part-time	17	20
	Unemployed, looking for work	4	6
	Unemployed, not seeking work	1	1
	Retired	14	11
	Student	5	3
	Student/part-time work	3	3
	Home duties	10	8
Directly benefit from tourism (e.g. work in or own a business that profits from tourists or rent a property to tourists)	Other	4	4
	Personal benefit	10	14
	Family benefit	10	12
Income	No benefit	83	79
	Less than \$60,000	40	37
	\$60,000 - \$99,000	26	29
	\$100,000 or more	15	16
	Prefer not to say	18	19

■ = statistically significant difference

1. National Visitor Survey and International Visitor Survey Year Ending March 2010, Tourism Research Australia

2. [Facts and figures](#), Gold Coast City Council

3. Northern Gold Coast residents were defined by the following postcodes: 4205-4210 and 4270-4287

4. Southern Gold Coast residents were defined by the following postcodes: 4219-4730

5. Victoria University's Centre for Tourism Service Research

Base: Queensland n=3834; Gold Coast n=422