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MAGAZINE

THE HOME AND FAMILY ISSUE

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Townsville North Queensland brings international visitors to experience the world's best classroom.

TOURISM operators in Townsville North Queensland have diversified their businesses to attract thousands of students from all over the world to spend time in our backyard – which has been dubbed as one of the richest classrooms of life.

As one of the only places on earth that is home to two World Heritage listed sites, Townsville boasts internationally recognised institutions such as the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, the Australian Institute of Marine Science and James Cook University. Connect these institutions with some of Australia's best tourism product and Townsville North Queensland has found its competitive edge to attract a new market.

Surrounded by such a vast array of natural assets and home to leading educators in the field, it's no surprise that the tourism industry made the decision to collaborate and bring to the market a specialised edutourism offering found nowhere else.

Ross McLennan from Hidden Valley Tours and Cabins in Paluma is the Chair of the Townsville North Queensland Edutourism Consortium, which has enticed thousands of international students to the region.

"As a group of businesses who already deliver exceptional experiences to tourists, we've found a gap in the market to diversify our tours, accommodation and attractions to deliver something extraordinary to students.

"It's something we should be proud of in Townsville and a strategy that has already delivered significant economic benefits to the region."

The Consortium is made up of tourism operators including Hidden Valley Cabins and Tours, Reef HQ Great Barrier Reef Aquarium, Bungalow Bay Koala Village, Billabong Sanctuary, Adrenalin Snorkel and Dive, Hands on Wildlife, Texas Longhorn Wagon Tours and Safaris, Mungalla Aboriginal Tours, Museum of Tropical Queensland, Reef Ecologic and Virginia Park Station.

In particular, the group has been successful in attracting US university students who specialise in biology, sociology and environmental sciences. Groups have come all the way from Miami University, Ohio State University, Virginia Tech, Texas A&M University and many more.

Townsville Enterprise officially set up the Consortium in 2013 to progress this initiative. Executive Manager Tourism and Events Bridget Woods said the city had an entrenched reputation as a centre of learning excellence in Australia and the next step was to share this knowledge and expertise with international students.



"Townsville North Queensland is the gateway to the World Heritage listed Great Barrier Reef, tropical islands, wet tropic rainforests, national parks, wetlands and historical, military and outback experiences.

"If you are going to learn about marine life, ecology or the environment, why sit in a classroom when you can be here, diving the depths of a reef alongside people who are passionate about sharing their knowledge.

"A big drawcard is one you'll know well – it's our very own Reef HQ Great Barrier Reef Aquarium – a 660,000 gallon coral reef exhibit and the world's largest living coral reef aquarium, housing an impressive collection of marine life native to the Great Barrier Reef.

"It is also the headquarters for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), the organisation that has been tasked to manage nature's biggest single living organism – the iconic Great Barrier Reef.

"The best thing is – once students get a taste of the reef from the aquarium – they get to experience the real thing out at Lodestone

Reef with Adrenalin Dive. As international guests, the Great Barrier Reef is on everyone's bucket list and Lodestone is the perfect place to experience a secret part of the reef. As a Townsville local – if you've not yet taken the time to do this, put this at the top of your list!"

Katie Krafte, a middle school teacher from North Carolina, believes experiential, field-based education, like that offered in Townsville, is a vital component in all teaching and learning experiences.

Ms Krafte, who was part of a study-abroad student group to Townsville, said she learnt more on the 10 day trip than she had in all her years in the classroom.

"I teach science, I love science, but to actually be able to come here and experience it first hand in a tank and out on the reef is amazing," she said. "There's nowhere else in the world you could experience anything remotely close to this."

The education groups are also involved in Koala Conservation Programs on our very own Magnetic Island – a highlight for many of the students who can't wait to get up close and personal and learn about Australian Wildlife.

Townsville started actively targeting students from the US after overwhelmingly positive feedback from the growing number arriving from international universities. The Townsville North Queensland Edutourism Consortium and Townsville Enterprise will continue to attract students and education groups to the region to learn in the world's best learning classroom.

