

# Sustainable Tourism in World Heritage Areas: The Australian Experience\*

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## ABSTRACT

Sustainable tourism has emerged over the last decade as a means of achieving economic viability, social harmony and ecological sustainability in destinations that have natural and cultural tourism attractions. World Heritage Areas in Australia are such places, and include iconic destinations such as the Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics in Queensland and Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory.

This paper will provide an overview of tourism to these areas and describe business management programs that support the pursuit of sustainable tourism in these areas. At the business level, programs such as Green Globe, Earthcheck and the Eco-tourism Certification Program ensure that the tourism businesses that operate in these areas are delivering sustainable tourism products, services and experiences.

## Introduction

Thank you and good morning everybody. I'd like to begin by thanking the President of Wakayama University, Professor Oda Akira and his staff for inviting me to give you the Keynote Lecture at the Perspectives on 21st Century

\*和歌山大学国際シンポジウム「21世紀型観光を展望する」基調講演 2005年5月28日

Tourism Symposium on Sustainable Tourism in World Heritage areas: The Australian Experience.

My message today is that the establishment of a World Heritage Area may encourage a more positive perception of tourism in Wakayama Prefecture, and it also may bring about sustainable development.

However World Heritage Area status does not automatically result in increased tourism visitation, or an increase in the number of small tourism enterprises that support the development of sustainable tourism. So, we need to work at it. The unique characteristics, the social, cultural and environmental characteristics that led to the declaration of the World Heritage Area remain the primary reasons for visitation. It is those characteristics that attract tourists and those that have to be sustained into the future.

In my country, in Australia, we have 16 World Heritage areas. Most were declared because of their unique natural features. Many of these are the focus of intense tourism activity. So, for Australia, balancing the costs and benefits of tourism to these areas is our challenge and in developing sustainable tourism.

So, we begin with a World Heritage Area located in two states of Australia. It's actually two sites that were inscribed on World Heritage Area listing in 1994. The two sites are 2000 km apart in Riversleigh in Queensland and an area of 10,000 ha and in Naracoorte in South Australia with small area of 300 ha. The sites provide the fossil record of mammal evolution, and some unique mammal species, in Australia spanning almost 20 million years. Naracoorte itself receives 80,000 visitors per year. And Riversleigh which is more remote receives about 3,000 visitors per year.

The next World Heritage area was inscribed in 2000 and is The Blue Mountains, just an hour's drive to the west of Sydney. It's in an area of 1.03 million ha of sand stone plateau, escarpment and gorges. It is noted for its

representation of adversity of eucalyptus, tree species, and plants species and has a significant representation of other rare and threatened species, including one or more that were discovered about two years ago. The Blue Mountains receives about 570,000 visitors per year.



The Blue Mountains, Australia

The next World Heritage Area is Central Eastern Rain Forest Reserves inscribed in 1986 and extended in 1994. It is a network of 50 reserves in southern Queensland and northern New South Wales. It has most extensive areas of sub-tropical rain forest in the world and receives about half a million visitors per year.

The next World Heritage Area is Fraser Island inscribed in 1992. It's the largest sand island in the world at 184,000 ha. It has a range of vegetation from coastal heath, shrubs to sub-tropical rain forest. It is the only the place in the world where tall rain forest trees grow on sand dunes, with an elevation of altitude 200 m and as a result of this natural attraction receives 300,000 visitors per year.

The next World Heritage Area is probably one at many of you are familiar with, in Great Barrier Reef. It was inscribed in 1981. It's the world largest coral reef and world largest World Heritage Area at 2000 km long with an area of 35 million ha. It is the world most extensive coral reef system. It has one of the world highest levels of animal species diversity, wild diversity, in the world, and receives 3 million visitors per year, including many Japanese.

The next World Heritage Area is very remote as you will see from the location and it is not yet visited by tourists. It is the sub-Antarctic volcano of the Heard and McDonald Island chains, located 4000 km to the south-west of

Australia. It remains ecologically pure and is the best site in the world for studying seals and penguins.

Many Japanese are familiar with in Kakadu National Park, inscribed in three stages over the course of 11 years between 1981 and 1992. It's located in the tropical north of Australia in Northern



Kakadu, Australia

Territory having an area of almost 20,000 square kilometres. It is one of the few World Heritage areas with both cultural and natural outstanding values, and because of those values, it attracts about 170,000 visitors per year.

Inscribed in 1982, the Lord Howe Island Group is noted for its wild diversity with 105 endemic plant species. It is the southern most coral reef system in the world and receives about 12900 visitors per year. The number of visitors to Lord Howe Island is limited to 400 at any one time.

The next World Heritage Area is Macquarie Island and like the Heard and McDonald Islands is very remote and is not yet visited by tourism although it home to many thousands of penguins.

The next location is in my state, Western Australia and it is Purnululu National Park inscribed very recently in 2003, area of 240,000 ha including an area we call Bungle Bungles. It was nominated for its outstanding heritage and indigenous, people's values and receives about 20,000 visitors per year.

The next World Heritage site was inscribed recently in 2004 and it's the Royal Exhibition Building in Carlton Gardens, Melbourne. It was actually built in 1880 for the Melbourne International Exhibition. The same as the International Expo that Nagoya is hosting at present. Like the Nagoya International Expo, the building was dedicated to demonstrating achievements of the industrial age. It is

considered an enduring monument to the International Exhibition movement. It is also interesting because it shows how diverse World Heritage listing can be, ranging from vast areas such as The Great Barrier Reef to a single building like we have here in Melbourne.



Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens, Melbourne, Australia

Shark Bay also in Western Australia was inscribed in 1991. Again it's a very large area of 2.3 million ha, also with exception by biodiversity. It is a home to the most abundant examples of creatures called stromatolites which is the oldest life form on earth. Shark Bay receives about 130,000 visitors per year.

The Tasmanian Wilderness Area was inscribed in 1982, an area of 1.4 million ha. It is actually 20 percent of Tasmania's total land area. It is recognized for the diversity of plants species and geological formations and has a high proportion of animal species endemic only to the area, which receives about 450,000 visitors per year.

Again an area that many Japanese would be familiar with is the Uluru-Kata



Uluru-Kata Tjuta, Australia

Tjuta National Park inscribed in 1987. It's recognized for the universal, natural and cultural values. It represents the striking natural phenomena, Uluru, which is highly significant to Anangu indigenous group, and receives about 400,000 visitors per year.

The Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area was inscribed in 1988 has an area of 894,000 ha providing habitat for many rare plants and animals. It

has many living examples of ancient plants and animal species and receives about 4 million visitors per year.

The final World Heritage Area that I would like to show you is the Willandra Lakes Regions inscribed in 1981. It's in an area of 241,000 ha of semi arid and landscape and is recognised for its significant natural values and ecological processes and receives about 45,000 visitors per year.

### Management of Tourism in World Heritage Areas

I will now provide an overview of tourism to these areas and describe business management programs that support the pursuit of sustainable tourism in these areas in Australia. At the business level, programs such as Green Globe, Earthcheck and the Eco-tourism Certification Program ensure that the tourism businesses that operate in these areas are delivering sustainable tourism products, services and experiences.

Firstly, Green Globe 21 is a worldwide benchmarking and certification programme designed to facilitate sustainable tourism practices in tourism enterprises. Currently, it includes participants in 50 countries across all continents.

Its development was based on the Agenda 21 principles endorsed by UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro 1992. The services that Green Globe 21 provides have been underpinned by the Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre, a National tourism research and development programme in Australia.

The next system for protecting and enhancing these areas for sustainable tourism is Earth Check. Earth Check is a system of indicators to assist in delivering sustainable business performance. It uses quantitative indicators for social, economic and environmental aspects of business activity. It aims to assist businesses to save costs and reduce waste, meet government regulations, improve internal and external performance reporting and achieve certification and quality

performance targets.

The final certification programme available to Australian tourism operators is the Eco-tourism Certification Programme. It is a programme for nature base tourism products based on eight principles relating to conservation, education and sustainable practices.

The benefits of the eco-tourism certification programme include: assisting with the development of the tourism practices; as a tool to assist communities to select appropriate tourism activities for the region and as a recognised programme that assists natural area managers and tourists in selecting best practice products and services.

So, in summary, I think my presentation indicates that World Heritage areas do attract millions of visitors per year in Australia. These destinations, such as Great Barrier Reef and Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, Kakadu and Purnululu are the icons of the Australian tourism so they need to be very carefully managed.

There are in fact a number of business programmes that are available to ensure that tour operators and accommodation providers and the many small enterprises working in tourism are working towards sustainable tourism.

My final message and perhaps my most important message for Wakayama with plans for developing research centre for tourism is that considerable research effort is required to monitor and manage World Heritage Areas for sustainable tourism.

With that, I would like to thank you for your attendance this morning. Once again, thank you and all the best for your future development here in Japan.

Thank you.