

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND AUSTRALIAN TOURISM:
A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Charles Arcodia, Xiang Ying Mei and Chantal Dickson
School of Tourism
The University of Queensland

ABSTRACT

It is well documented that international students are a growing market for the tourism industry in any country where they study. Australia has become the third leading exporter of education conducted in English behind the United States and the United Kingdom. While the market is growing however, there seems to be a lack of research exploring students who undertake long term studies in an overseas setting and their tourist behaviour. This is also the case in Australia where current academic research into international students' contribution to the domestic tourism industry, and their travel behaviour while in Australia is limited. In terms of the tourism industry itself, tourism bodies and organisations have generally not attempted to understand the needs of international students. The reason that their contribution has been overlooked is because the tourism authorities have either underestimated their significance to the tourism industry or have neglected the market because international students have not traditionally been conceptualised as a mainstream tourist category.

The purpose of the paper is to present a critical review of the literature that examines the significance of international students to the Australian tourism industry. The paper firstly discusses the reasons why such a market has been largely neglected by academics and national tourism bodies, followed by an outline of international students' contributions directly and indirectly to Australia's tourism industry. Furthermore, international students' travel preference and behaviour are examined followed by a discussion of the limitations in the literature. Although the review mainly seeks to focus on international students in Australia, examples from other countries which draw large numbers of international students are also used to illustrate their significance and contribution.

The paper concludes that while the direct and indirect contributions of international students are recognised by some researchers, national tourism bodies have largely ignored the existence of such a market or assigned it a low priority. While the international student travel market seems not to have drawn a great deal of research attention as yet, it is a significant part of Australia's tourism industry and one which requires further investigation.