



Small world, big country

Marketing Australia to European travellers



Assisted by the the increasing affordability of long-haul flights, and with the most spectacular Olympic Games of the modern era still fresh in the memory, Australia has never been more popular with European travellers, particularly Britons. With an enviable selection of natural, cultural and lifestyle experiences to offer the foreign visitor, and the world apparently 'shrinking' at a rate of knots, Australia is certainly a more appealing destination for today's international tourist than ever before. But with the choice of short, medium and long-haul destinations widening, can Australia's success to date in the European market be sustained over time? **Paul Davies** is the Australian Tourist Commission's

marketing director for Europe. Here, he explains the ongoing process of brand positioning for Australia in the European market, and discusses the vital role played by research in converting yet more of us to take the plunge and visit Australia for the first time.

People's reasons and motivations for travelling abroad are many, varied and complex. When deliberating when and where to travel, customers almost invariably do some research. This research often clarifies their thinking and firms up their ideas about what they are really looking for. Some have fixed views, but others are open to persuasion. The challenge to every country's tourist industry is to discover what attributes make a destination attractive to which sort of people, and why, and then to meet the expectations of particular groups by offering an appropriate, matching travel experience. For countries that depend heavily on tourism for their export earnings and for domestic employment, as Australia has come to do in recent years - inbound tourism is now the fourth largest earner of exchange dollars, and is responsible for 250,000 Australian jobs - getting it right is critical to their economic wellbeing.

Buying and selling a service is a complex matter at the best of times. In the case of international travel, it involves the promotion and judgement of intangible and sophisticated benefits. The prospect of marketing a country as massive as Australia can seem quite daunting. It has been recognised for many years, however, that marketers cannot develop strategies that appeal to all buyers in all markets, and this applies to tourism as much as any other sector: a broad sweep to catch all does not work. At the Australian Tourist Commission, we are fortunate to have a wonderful set of natural, cultural and lifestyle experiences at our disposal in promoting our country to a range of international audiences. And we have called upon them to develop highly targeted brand propositions that connect with specific aspects of our offering.

The three core market segments that we have been targeting are:

- independent adventurers aged 25-34 (primary market);
- young independent travellers (YITs) aged 18-24 (secondary market);
- independent adventurers aged 45-65.

Matching interests with offers

Through research we have established that European long-haul travellers view Australia as a good opportunity for individual experiences that the 'mass' tourist destinations of the Mediterranean cannot provide. European travellers also increasingly likely to seek novel experiences in unfamiliar environments and amid different cultures. YITs in particular are attracted to the more challenging and active elements offered by Australia, such as snorkeling, surfing, white-water rafting and bungee jumping.

Most YITs are typically single students who make their own travel arrangements. Many are on a 'gap year' and travel either on their own or with friends. They see themselves as travellers seeking experiences rather than as tourists seeing sights, opting for low-price products such as hostel accommodation, bus passes, sporting activities, adventure and an immersion in the Australian lifestyle and people. Indeed, many younger travellers regard the prospect of living the fun, open and outdoor Australian lifestyle as equally attractive as visiting the main tourist areas. Importantly, Australia is perceived as a safe destination for first-time travellers but with the element of adventure that is one of the primary motivators for this target market.

In order to reach out to our target segments, we have built marketing campaigns based on our Brand Holiday Australia, which promotes three core images: that Australia and Australians are



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genuine, open and unpretentious. These positive images are then linked to tangible product benefits - safe adventure, for example, and the ease of experiencing the landscapes and the open outdoor lifestyle. The essence of our strategy has been to identify the brand as being free-spirited, colourful and optimistic.

As with all key segments, the challenge for communicating with younger travellers is to focus on those aspects of Australia identified through research as possessing most appeal:

- young, vibrant, dynamic - city life;
- innovative - lifestyle, food and wine, culture;
- active and sporty - beaches, trails, surf and sports facilities;
- fun-loving - places to party, with festivals and events.

At the same time, it is important to help young people to think about what they do within Australia by highlighting:

- the easiest travel options to move around Australia;
- the wide diversity within regions;
- the uniqueness of many Australian experiences.

In order to meet both of these requirements, the ATC engages in both trade marketing to organisations and direct marketing to consumers in key markets. We produce an annual Travellers Guide and run a consumer website, www.australia.com, both of which are core tools for encouraging potential travellers not just to think about, but to make a decision to go to Australia.

Australia's working holidaymaker scheme is also a valuable tool in the process of promoting the nation to younger travellers. It aims to promote international understanding by allowing young people to experience the culture of another country, and allows young working holidaymakers to have an extended holiday by supplementing their incomes through employment. Applications come from those between the ages of 18 and 30 without dependent children, and show that the main reason for coming to Australia is for a cultural and social holiday that promotes mutual understanding between Australia and other nations and they intend to supplement their funds with temporary work.

In the last year, the Australian High Commission issued just under 40,000 working holiday visas to the UK market (the backpacker

market represents more than 100,000 visitors). The working holiday scheme aims to provide opportunities for young people (18-30) to holiday in Australia for up to a year while supplementing their funds through work. Key trade partners have introduced visa processing services, along with job contacts and advisory services to encourage backpackers to make use of the opportunity. And while most YITs used to book their ground arrangements having arrived in Australia, this is beginning to change, with major tour operator partners in Europe, and particularly the UK, enticing YITs to book their accommodation and travel in Australia before they depart.

Converting non-visitors

While Australia remains arguably one of the world's most popular destinations for younger travellers, particularly in search of longer travel experiences, the long-haul market is highly competitive. And Europeans wishing to travel have many short, medium and long-haul destinations from which to choose. The increasing number of alternative, affordable holiday opportunities on offer represents a considerable, ongoing challenge for the ATC. It is essential, therefore, that we continue to attract previous visitors back to Australia. But what of the proportion of consumers in our target segments who have not responded to our efforts - or who simply have decided that Australia is not for them? We have just completed our most recent investigation into perceptions of Australia as a tourist destination among UK consumers. The results make for interesting reading.

The first stage in the research process involved breaking down the consumers investigated into three core groups:

- Type 'A' - those who have been to Australia before and will go again.
- Type 'B' - those who have considered going to Australia but went elsewhere.
- Type 'C' - those who have considered other long-haul destinations but not Australia.

The objective of the exercise was to explore the differences in behaviour and decision-making between these groups, in order to help tailor our marketing activity and break down the current barriers to travel among consumer types 'B' and 'C'. Various reasons for



deciding not to travel to Australia were given by these consumers, focusing on a range of issues. What follows is a selection of their comments.

- 'It's hard to form a detailed picture of what it will be like there.'
- 'Just thinking about the size of Australia leaves me exhausted.'
- 'Australia is the same wherever you go.'
- 'The climate is one-dimensional.'
- 'Australia demands a procedural approach to planning and experiencing a holiday.'
- 'It takes ages to plan a trip to Australia.'
- 'Once you've booked your holiday, it's difficult to change your plans.'
- 'I know about the big Australian icons and places, but not much else.'
- 'Other than the famous bits, there's not many options for travellers.'

What do these responses tell us? Clearly, some people still view Australia as a vast, impenetrable domain, devoid of variety in its terrain or weather. For these consumers, a 'one-fits-all' approach to communication is not going to work, and neither would we expect it to. Flexibility is a key issue for 'B' and 'C' travellers, some of whom feel that a trip down under involves undue amounts of pre-trip planning and a lack of choice once on the ground. It also seems that the picture of Australia in the minds of 'B's and 'C's is fairly static, fixed in place by the familiar set of icons and few essential places to go. Where places are and how distant they are from one another are vague assumptions with little detail. Certainly there is no real awareness among these consumers of activities or places within close proximity of 'icon destinations'. Familiar symbols, therefore, have the potential to obscure the richer experience actually on offer.

Following on from this, what can be done to improve 'B' and 'C' consumer perceptions of Australia as a potential tourist destination? Currently, they are picking up a big, general picture from marketing and advertising. They don't want to buy Australia in one. The brand has to engage them in choice and encourage understanding of the range of experiences actually on offer, that can be enjoyed in sequence over time – we know that 'A's will go again and again. The drive should be to inform people how Australia can be consumed in

more relaxed, digestible steps. We need to promote to them more clearly the idea of integrated travel experiences from the major recognised start points. This way the brand Australia will move from vastness and distance to diversity and accessibility.

Second, maybe it's time to reconsider the use of our familiar Australian icons in our communications activity, and look at the use of emerging images of diversity within sub-continental areas. We need to reveal what has remained hidden from the view of 'B's and 'C's up until now: hidden islands, hidden hotels, hidden food, hidden people. In achieving this, it is likely that we will need to use materials which help these consumer groups 'see' the Australian experience for themselves, and hear other people's real-life feedback.

And third, we need to convince 'B's and 'C's that travelling to Australia is not an exhausting procedural process involving large amounts of planning, but is actually about being able to travel at short notice and to have plenty of options about experiences within the country.

These are all challenges we relish as key parts of our ongoing marketing activity. Only by researching your audience will you get to know their changing needs and desires. And only then will a sustainable future be assured. The ATC's experience in recent years exemplifies the potential rewards that stem from a disciplined and focused approach to marketing. Know your product, service or experience and its attributes. Identify your potential customers. Determine how best to engage their interest and commitment. And don't give up on those who have yet to discover you. It's a familiar formula, and it works.

All images courtesy of the ATC