

# **Sustainable Tourism Development on Christmas Island: A Case Study of the Bird 'n Nature Week - Christina Ballew - Dec 2013**

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## **CHAPTER 1 - Introduction**

Christmas Island (CI) is branded *A Natural Wonder* and coined the *Galapagos of the Indian Ocean* for its unique flora and fauna species as well as its famous crab migrations, which have made it an iconic nature tourism destination. Also contributing to its novelty attributes are the characteristics of the island's ecosystems and number of endemic species of high conservation value on land and water.

CI is located in the Indian Ocean (10°25'S and 105°40'E) approximately 2,600 km northwest of Perth, Australia and 360 km south of Java (Fig. 1 above). It is 135 square km in size. Approximately 1300-1500 people live on the island permanently, which is comprised of three

distinct cultures: Malay, Chinese and Australian (Meek 2001). The main industries on the island relate to phosphate mining, the detention and processing of asylum seekers, government services and tourism. The Christmas Island National Park, covering 63% of the island, is under the management of Parks Australia whose goal is to ensure protection, monitoring and rehabilitation of the island's ecosystem.

Most recently, due to its remote location and convenient site for detaining asylum seekers, CI has spurred high volumes of media attention that appears to have shifted the island's image from a tourist destination toward a detention centre compound. In addition, in the past there has been a high profile tourism failure in the form of a casino development which was associated with money laundering and corruption. For this reason, the tourism identity of Christmas Island is likely to remain an issue.

### **1.2 The Case Study**

The Christmas Island Tourism Association (CITA) has commissioned a report to explore product development for nature tourism while focusing on its popular tour product the Bird 'n Nature Week (BNW). The BNW has been operating for 7 years providing its participants an opportunity to link science and a nature experience in an active participatory way; thus, allowing individuals to learn about the ecological importance of CI. Although the main focus of CI is its natural attractions, this report also briefly examines other areas of tourism particular to the island culture, its history and uniqueness.

Through the exploration of the BNW Tour, the research will validate the quality of the product via participant satisfaction surveys and help determine how the BNW model can be used as a concept for future product development. Ultimately, this model concept can benefit the future profile of CI as an eco-tourism destination.

### **1.3 Research Approach**

In general, this study provides an insight into the process of tourism development as it examines the BNW participants and CI stakeholders. Literature exemplifies the importance of understanding the visitor market in planning for tourism development' hence, the collection of data from BNW past participant surveys and from a new visitor satisfaction survey is vital to understanding visitors on CI: their motivations, interests and preferences. In addition, the view of a wide range of stakeholders such as government officials, tourism operators, and island residents are essential in this planning process.

Ultimately, the results of this survey will concentrate on the following areas, whether the 1) Bird 'n Nature Week is a satisfactory product, 2) how it can be improved 3) and whether it can be used as a model concept for other tour products. Moreover, the results of the stakeholder interviews will help in determining recommendations for directing future investments in tourism as well as identifying limitations to nature tourism industry on CI.

### **1.4 Organisation of Report**

The first chapter provides a basic understanding of Christmas Island, the need for this study and sets the research questions. Chapter 2 explores the complexities of tourism through a literature review and investigates the context, profile and current issues relating to tourism on CI. This will help deliver a comprehensive view of the CI marketing, destination image and potential tourism opportunities and limitations.

The third chapter outlines the methodologies applied to this study. Chapter 4 presents the results from the exit and satisfaction survey, the stakeholder interviews and field work. In chapter 5, the results are discussed in relation to the literature. This will help formulate the recommendations for nature product development on Christmas Island, which is provided in the conclusion of Chapter 6.

## **CHAPTER 2 - The Complex Nature of Tourism**

The following chapter examines the literature surrounding the tourism industry in relation to the Christmas Island context. It is explored through two areas: 1) academic research to contextualise tourism and support this study's methodology, and 2) a desktop study utilising relevant CI tourism documents, government papers and reports to help deliver a comprehensive view of the CI marketing, destination image and potential tourism opportunities and limitations.

### **2.2. The Tourism Industry**

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world and is becoming one of the driving forces of global employment, economic security and social well-being of the 21st century (Lundberg & Fredman 2012; Newsome, Moore & Dowling 2013; Rifai 2009). More than one billion people travelled the world in 2012 with tourism employing 1 in 11 people globally (Rifai 2013). And specifically, with nature tourism, Perkins & Grace (2009) estimate nature tourism to be growing at a rate of 10-30% a year while Lundberg & Fredman (2012) claim it to grow even faster than the tourism industry in general.

This global trend sees tourists as seeking out natural experiences, undisturbed conditions and authenticity in their holiday destination where information about wildlife, ecology and nature is desired (Newsome, Moore & Dowling 2013, p. 258). This type of visitor benefits from nature in their holiday making, often visiting National Forest Parks and reserves, and has been coined the nature-based tourist (Smith & Newsome 2006).

In respect to tourism development, there are many interrelated and interconnecting facets involved with the areas of economics, culture, environment, politics and policy (Gossling 2003; Page 2000). The multi-faceted nature of tourism development is conveyed through its web of relationships and interactions among multi-stakeholders each with a unique set of specialized knowledge and diverse views (Garca-Rosell & Mkinen 2013). Page (2001) claims that the most significant issues, for rural areas in particular, are the physical infrastructure and the need to accommodate visitors and their activities while also arguing that tourism organisations are not dynamic enough to facilitate tourism growth in planning and development. It is necessary, therefore, to have an understanding of the complexity within tourism development and how it operates as a system, which will ultimately provide a better basis for decision-making (Moscardo 2008).

In the past, tourism business and operations have sought economic profits beyond the capacity of the environment while overlooking prevalent social and cultural issues (Gossling 2003). However, the concept of sustainable tourism development has now become a global standard, as seen through the Brundtland Commission of 1987 and Agenda 21, which have introduced concepts such as environmental impact assessments, footprint measurements and management standards (Walker 2008; Garca-Rosell & Mkinen 2013). In general, sustainability within the tourism sector promotes local community participation and pays close attention to natural resources, often using them as assets. Just recently, the United Nations has identified tourism as one of the ten sectors to drive the transformation towards a green economy, and in 2012 at Rio+20 tourism was included for the first time in the outcome document of a U.N. sustainable development conference as a sector that can make a significant contribution (Rifai 2013).

Romo, Guerreiro & Rodrigues (2013) elaborate on tourism development as it consists of growing number of visitors, increased services and activities and its influence on the daily life of locals. They show how recent theoretical and political approaches suggest the importance of considering the limits for usage of local resources, their carrying capacity or need to protect and benefit local populations from the processes of tourism development. In addition, Andereck (2009) notes that nature based tourism is sustainable only under certain conditions of effective planning, management and local participation. Therefore, there is much to consider in sustainable nature tourism development as it is a growing industry that is dependent on natural attributes (Eagles 2002).

## **2.2.1 Stakeholder Involvement in Tourism**

The impact of tourism on local residents is a complex issue and is comprehensively discussed in tourism literature (Hall, Kirkpatrick & Mitchell 2005; Moscardo 2008; Graci 2013; Ryan & Page 2000; Carmody & Prideaux 2011). The community level approach within the sustainable tourism framework examines the social and political issues grounded within the community and focuses on using tourism to support, protect and help sustain

communities (Youell & Wornell 2005). It also seeks to involve stakeholders within the tourism industry to publicly participate in planning (Newsome, Moore & Dowling 2013). For that reason, tourism often takes a participatory, consultative and collaborative approach.

Furthermore, Leslie (2005) asserts tourism needs to operate within the natural capacity of the destination in terms of local skills and market needs, building linkages within the local community, encouragement of visitors to contribute to conservation initiatives and provision of information to influence visitor behavior. Benefits of this community approach lead to better decisions, increased accountability, acceptance, community empowerment and clarifying visitor preferences (Newsome, Moore & Dowling 2013).

In terms of sustainability, Garca-Rosell & Mkinen (2013) discuss the importance of examining synergies and conflicts between stakeholders. In their study of the Laplands of Finland, they found that participants within the tourism industry were motivated to learn techniques in sustainable product development and network; their strategy focused on “small is beautiful” where local culture and traditions play a key role.

In this view, it is extremely important for tourism planners, operators and marketers within sustainable tourism development to emphasise the relationship between local residents, stakeholders and the place in which they live (Walker 2008; Hamzah & Hampton 2013; Haywood 2000). Moreover, Robson and Robson (2000) claim that stakeholder management is a methodology within the framework of sustainable tourism development and these private, sector- based tour operators are key players in the tourism market place.

### **2.2.2 Data Collection for Successful Product Development**

Now that an understanding of tourism development and its complex dynamics have been explored, the importance of data collection for product development will now be addressed. Generally, this information is gathered via surveys examining visitor satisfaction levels. Such information is essential to long-term viability of the ecotourism industry and should match or exceed the realistic expectations of the visitor (Newsome, Dowling & Moore 2013). Hence, there is a need for accurate quantitative research data to assist with market segmentation, marketing strategies and visitor management.

Prideaux and Watson (2010) declare that it is crucial to continue to look at periodic reassessment of product offerings and to recognize the changing nature of these tourist characteristics and expectations. Garca-Rosell & Mkinen (2013) assert that product development involves monitoring the market changes and emerging trends contributes to promoting sustainability of an entire destination. Since tourism is highly competitive in the globalised market, Molina, Fras- JAMILENA & Castaeda-Garca (2013) advise that destinations must design and implement appropriate strategies and marketing to compete effectively

Therefore, by examining a visitor’s perception, behavior, motivations and reasons for undertaking travels, the destination is able to respond to consumer expectations and harness its own unique attractions, culture and environment to create a tourism experience (Young 1999, Jennings 2001). As a result, a destination has the ability to bundle these *pull* factors into packaged experiences and products (Prideaux & Watson 2010).

### **Satisfaction Surveys**

Satisfaction surveys examine what visitors need, expect and have obtained in their destination experience (Tonge, Moore & Taplin 2011). By comparing importance and satisfaction of visitors, this information provides much-needed information on where limited resources can be directed, or conversely saved as well as political and broader societal support for the product of interest (Tonge & Moore 2007). The surveys become “a fundamental management objective for many natural areas offering experiences that satisfies visitor needs while at the same time protecting and maintaining natural systems and processes” (Prideaux & Watson 2010, p. 237).

### **Visitor Motivations**

In particular from a marketing and industry perspective, Perkins & Grace (2009) discuss the importance for marketers and policy-makers in tourism to be able to identify psychological variables as motivators for tourist choices. The differences in those variables “may assist in accurately defining particular tourist markets and can eventually assist in tourism packaging of experiences which can then be tailored to better suit the needs, motivations, and expectations of the tourists within those markets” (p. 20).

Knowing the target group(s) is one of the most important prerequisites for longstanding marketing success especially with forecasting and trend analysis (Hyvarinen et al. 2012; Garca- Rosell & Mkinen 2013). Andereck (2009) examines perceptions of tourists and finds that nature- based visitors seek activities that differ with respect to trip motives, demographic characteristics and trip characteristics. For this reason, she argues that there is a need for more precise segmentation of nature-based tourists to improve marketing and promotion to these important groups. Thus, understanding the perceptions and motivations of BNW participants are crucial to this study on product development.

Much of the satisfaction derived from travel and unique tourist experiences, Haywood (2000) claims, are based not on standardization but on the complexity, novelty and diversity of the destination where the tour product itself is an amalgam of information, goods and services. Every product is difficult to identify because it differs for every single traveler and arises with the purpose of travel and the objectives to be achieved. Thus, by analysing the BNW participant interests, motivations, and past experiences, this data will help to identify other potential areas of tourism interest and specialisation for CI product development.

It has been indicated that nature-based tourists are visitors seeking the natural setting and active outdoor experiences often with an interest in cultural experiences. Nvight (1996) explores such themes in tourist motivation and expectations that include remote/wilderness, learning about wildlife/nature, understanding culture, community benefits, viewing plants/animals and experiencing a physical challenge. By comparing this literature with responses from the BNW participants, it can ultimately help determine how the particular sub-market is defined.

Also important to consider is the tourist attitude which is often judged by intrinsic and extraneous elements like the level of involvement of activities, the social group dynamics, their mood, the weather, and their values (Pinkus, 2010). For example, novelty seeking in a tour product can be a core motivator of tourism behaviour. Pearce and Kang (2009) believe that the uniqueness of a trip from the perception of tourists may develop preferences for re-engaging in the tour product and are likely to return again. Furthermore, Nvight (1996)

states that operators need to either offer a wide range of experiences and options in a product or develop product linkages with others who can provide complementary experiences as to satisfy the many needs and expectations from tourists.

To note, an integral part of modern visitor experiences are often the expectations and motivations of the tourist to interact with endemic wildlife. Curtin (2010) explains that animals are like active participants and agents of the tourist experience and play an important role in place-making. She believes there is a need for a deep understanding of how tourists perceive and remember wildlife encounters to help with marketing and management strategies (i.e. feelings of well-being and happiness). Therefore, the involvement, engagement and outstandingness of the wildlife experience are of crucial significance in marketing a destination and may help define the model concept for CI product development.

### **Destination Image**

Important to consider with marketing is the understanding of place conception for visitors. This particularly examines travel history, destination preferences, and psychological motivations for travel, type of travel and place of origin (Young 1999). For example, some visitors may wish to be physically challenged, doing something memorable, or be on an adventure. Other visitors may look for peace of mind with a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere or seek involvement and education (Otto & Ritchie 2000). Thus, marketing the type of "experience" is crucial for promotional and communications strategy. Donohoe & Needham (2008) conclude that it is this experiential environment that is the common denominator of ecotourism as it focuses on environmental educational and cultural awareness.

Molina, Fras-Jamilena & Castaeda-Garca (2013) emphasize the importance of understanding the effects of prior tourist experiences on the process of image formation as this has an impact on the satisfaction with a destination. Images of destination and the evaluations of destination attributes (i.e. the natural environment, physical attractions, accommodation, restaurants, and shops) are directly related to the level of satisfaction. Molina et al. found that consumers with experience of a product will form a series of expectations that differ from those of individuals who lack prior experience. As they examined first time visitors to a destination, the authors learned that the visitors are motivated by the quest for variety. Thus, elements such as beach quality, historical heritage or cultural activities are very important as well as being sensitive to environmental problems (e.g. feral pests, mining, invasive plants); while repeat visitors are more motivated by the quest for relaxation or social relations and, thus, place more importance on aspects such as friendliness of local people and varieties offered by infrastructure (shops and restaurants) as well as being more price-sensitive. Assuming most BNW participants are first-time visitors, their perception of the CI image is significant as well as expectation levels of the BNW trip.

Li (2012) considers defining and measuring a destination image by examining perceptions of visitors in comparison to other countries. By identifying points of difference (known as branding), a country product is able to differentiate between competitors. Li refers to the tourist decision-making processes in three parts: cognitive, affective and through what he terms "common-unique continuum" which is the comparative value. These help to determine relevant information and insight for destinations by segmentation and by identifying a niche

in traveler's minds not occupied by competing destinations. He argues that the quality of alternatives is the critical driver of one's commitment to a destination (brand loyalty) and is exemplified through the lens of the customer.

By surveying American tourists on their views of destination attributes (e.g. security/safety, value for money, cleanliness), Li (2012) finds that China, in comparison to Japan, could best position itself as a cultural heritage and culinary destination since history and food were its major selling points with travel products in China. Ritchie & Crouch (2003), maintain that competitiveness is a core concept in tourism studies and cannot be explained without an adequate linkage to the idea of sustainability (in Romo, Guerreiro & Rodrigues 2003).

### **Destination Loyalty**

The concept of destination loyalty is popular in tourism literature (Prayag & Ryan 2012; Li 2012; Clarke 2005). Prayag & Ryan (2012) discuss the meanings of loyalty where *place attachment* (or *place identity*) is defined as the emotional bond between an individual and a particular place or

spatial setting (p. 61). The researchers' case study of Mauritius illustrates the importance of personal involvement and personal encounters with local hosts, which increases the visitor's feelings of belonging to a tourist destination and, consequently, increases loyalty to that particular destination. They note that it is important to understand subjective notions of visitor patterns and experiences and what it takes for tourists to develop affection. Hence, in particular to the BNW, it is important to understand the characteristics identifying place attachment for visitors to CI.

Prayag & Ryan (2012) further elaborate and describe place attachment as how well a setting serves a goal achievement given an existing range of alternatives. It reflects the importance of a place in providing features and conditions that support specific goals or desired activities (i.e. wildlife interactions, bird viewing, learning about island ecology). This is associated with the perception that a certain destination or setting possesses unique qualities which separate it from other places.

Cresswell (2004) argues that interactions between people and landscapes, objects and environments are not necessarily sufficient to develop place attachment, but it is through the involvement between people and place that emotional bonds are formed. Therefore, related to the concept of place attachment is the involvement level of visitors with the destination experience and, furthermore, a destination's unique attributes is quite significant in a visitor's decision to visit and revisit.

In regards to CI, it is important to understand the *unique* qualities of the island as to differentiate from other destinations and tour products (i.e. cheaper package to Bali). By acknowledging these unique attributes and bundling them into a package, it is possible to develop other product concepts. The BNW is therefore a highly relevant product to examine in order to understand the nature-tourist market on CI which specifically investigates participant experiences, motivations, interests and preferences.

See Appendix 1 for a case study on Norfolk Island, which conveys the importance of visitor surveys and tourism development.

## **2.3 Christmas Island Context**

This next section will focus on the Christmas Island context by examining its current tourism attractions, environmental concerns and tourism development strategies and limitations.

### **2.3.1 Tourism Attractions on CI**

CI has an exceptional range of unique wildlife, geology and ecology although it is currently sought mostly by visitors interested in bird viewing and diving activities. Birds Australia and Birdlife International have declared the island as an “important bird area” (CITA Newsletter 10.2012). CI has also been identified as a living culture that was acknowledged with the GWN7 Top Tourism Award for its unique public holidays. Cultural tourism is a relatively small industry and appears to have development potential. (Plate 1)

There are many wildlife opportunities to experience, which include endemic birds such as the CI Frigatebird (close to extinction) and the Abbott’s Booby (CI as its last breeding ground, see Plate 2). There are 14 endemic terrestrial crabs with CI being one of the last habitats for the large Robber Crab (Meek 2001). And CI is well-known for its famous Red Crab that takes its annual migration from land to sea. The Red Crab, as a keystone species, is also responsible for creating the unique characteristic of the island’s rainforest ecology where it ultimately controls the species and composition of the rainforest as leaf decomposers and seed/seedling consumers (Threatened Species Scientific Committee 2008).

CI has a rare mangrove adapted to freshwater that is of international significance, but unfortunately, is easily susceptible to damage from increasing visitors (Gray 1981). Other important natural features include the island’s cave ecosystem and biodiversity, known as the karst environment. It is historically significant as Islanders took refuge in the caves during the Japanese invasion during WWII (Meek 2001). Also, there is a RAMSAR Wetland known as *The Dales* which supports many of the island’s blue crabs.

There are educational opportunities for teaching adaptation and evolution as the way vegetation responds to the various environmental conditions of the island’s geology, geography and diverse wildlife. CI has 9 main terrestrial habitat types which provide habitat for Island species: sea cliffs, terrace forest, shallow soil rainforest, limestone scree slopes and pinnacles, deeper plateau and terrace soil rainforest, mangrove forest, perennially wet areas, karst (caves) and mine fields (Meek 2001). (See Fig. 2 for a basic map of CI)

Overall, the potential for research on these evolutionary processes, the human impact on the natural environments and the island ecology makes it an ideal destination for education and active involvement. For this reason, there is ample opportunity for Christmas Island to promote an ecotourism industry where visitors can enjoy and learn about this unique natural environment while ensuring its protection, observing its evolution as a living process and exploring other unusual natural phenomena.

### **2.3.2 Environmental Issues & Concerns**

As nature tourism depends on the environmental assets of a destination, it is vitally important to understand the environmental issues and concerns underlying the CI context.



First of all, there are significant problems with invasive animals and plants. The Threatened Species Scientific Committee (2008) declared that the high biodiversity values of Christmas Island are in “a parlous state where human-related changes to the landscape is prominent especially with the introduction of non-indigenous species” (p. 9). A well-known example of this is illustrated through the yellow “crazy” ant infestation which has directly affected the rainforest ecosystem by killing off the island’s keystone species: in the late 90s, one third of the crab population was decimated by the crazy ants causing a change in the ecology of the forest floor (Salleh 2009, see Plate 3). Also introduced to CI were the giant centipede, the wolf snake, as well as feral rats and cats that are currently under-going baiting strategies. (See Plate 4)

In addition, with the new release of the Phosphate Mining lease until 2034, there is the potential for continued stress to the ecosystem although rehabilitation of mining areas continues to be a main focus of the environmental management of CI (Threatened Species Scientific Committee 2008).

Secondly, the management focus of the island is often blurred and interrupted by the detention facility. Briskman, Fiske & Dimasi (2012) discuss the ways in which hosting a detention centre was seen by many locals as a way to improve the local economy on the island. In February 2010, the detention industry had displaced the phosphate mine as the largest employer on the island. Yet, there have been minimal efforts to organise events where locals and the fly-in/fly-out staff can meet (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010).

More importantly, the Detention Centre Facility uses a growing amount of road access that often kills Robber Crabs. For instance, there were 113 killed during the month of May, 2013 (CITA Newsletter 06.2013). Better management of roads between The Settlement and the Detention Centre is necessary to reduce high level crab deaths due to vehicles as Robber Crabs are a significant asset on CI (Threatened Species Scientific Committee 2008). (Refer to Plates 5 & 6)

Lastly, climate change is likely to change the species composition of communities and ecosystems of Christmas Island: sea level rise, increase in air/sea temperatures, frequency in intense extreme weather events, and an increase in ocean acidity (Director of National Parks 2011). Although Christmas Island is not in a cyclone prone location, there is the possibility of high intensity cyclones which would affect forest canopy loss and tree fall, which would ultimately disturb the Boobies which nest in tall emergent trees. The amount and timing of rainfall may be affected and has the potential to change the red crab migration which usually starts with the first rains of the wet season. With the potential increases in carbon and acidification in the ocean waters, this would impact sea birds that are reliant on ocean marine food chains. Invasive species such as the yellow crazy ant may be favored by changed conditions in temperature and rainfall, especially if coupled with human disturbance or further introduction of non-native species.

Overall, these environmental issues have much impact on CI and constitute a concern for tourism development that is dependent on natural assets. The endemic species and unique wildlife of the island are highly vulnerable to change and if there is a decline in numbers, the island’s tourist attractions will be significantly reduced.

### **2.3.3 Tourism Development Strategies & Limitations**

There exists a multitude of documents and reports that examine tourism on CI. These documents provide an essential background to understanding CI as a destination: potential tourist experiences, marketing strategies and its community visions for tourism.

It has been estimated that the carrying capacity of the island is 226-266 tourists a week which can be accommodated through the availability of 150 rooms (*The CI Destination Development Plan* 2008), although this availability is currently limited due to the increase of immigration services. There are amenities for tourists on the island that include BBQ areas, toilets, national park visitor sites, lookouts and walking tracks. Interpretation at these sites is outdated and the signage is poor. Suggestions for improvement include maintenance of infrastructure and the modernization of existing infrastructure as well as to develop new visitor facilities integrated with walking and cycling tracks (Planning for People 2007).

Since 2010 over \$200m has been committed to investment to Christmas Island development by the Australian Government and to the private sector. These include: a new trade training centre, new power generators and electrical workshop, ship moorings for cruise ships, \$27m for new Government housing, construction of new private dwellings, expansions of supermarkets, restaurants and cafes, refurbishment of the Christmas Island Resort, upgrades of sewage infrastructure, hospital extensions, improving fuel storage facilities and extensions to the jetty (The Vercitas Group 2012).

Apparently, the biggest concerns for Christmas Island as a tourist destination are the lack of consistent flights, lack of accommodation on the Island and lack of tourism infrastructure (Icon Tourism 2009). Also mentioned is the limited amount of community involvement and interaction within the tourism industry especially in terms of local guides. Suggestions have focused on increased accommodation and diversification (i.e. an eco-lodge, cabins, camping),

increased enviro-friendly facilities, water-wise and energy reduction programs, accreditation schemes, research facilities, scientific conferences, local food production, and workshops.

In the *Catalyst Tourism Project*, The Vercitas Group (2012) claims that CI does not have enough unique natural attractiveness for tourism to overcome the cost of travel to get there. The report suggests focusing on a thematic design with particular market groups, which could be aided by the film industry and consequently a luxury lodge. This report indicates the potential target market group of individuals/couples in their late 20s or early 30s established in their careers with a high disposable income and no children. The Catalyst Tourism Project concludes, in general, that there is a good blend of active experiences available to visitors, however, these could be slightly better organized, with possible cross-promotions.

The most recent focus of CITA outlined in *The Christmas Island Destination Development Plan* (2008) promotes the iconic and unique experience of CI through the lens of the "experience-seeker". This market group seeks a wide variety of experiences in their tourism destination. This report suggests that Christmas Island has the opportunity to use the high quality range of guided nature-based products potentially available like walking, caving, interactive bird viewing, crab viewing and mountain biking. It also mentions the cultural opportunities for tourism particularly in its history and contemporary island life. Yet, the report conveys the need to engage with the various ethnic communities to play a bigger role in tourism so visitors can gain a sense of place and feel part of the island life. In addition, this

report suggests investing in accommodation in natural settings and volunteer conservation tourism.

The newly released *CI Destination Development Strategy 2013-2018* (CITA 2013) takes a holistic approach by concentrating on resilience. It seeks to minimise the ecological footprint through local food production, powered by renewable energy, effective waste management systems and strong communication and transport links to create a sustainable diverse economy. In this report, the current vision for Christmas Island stakeholders is to be recognised as an eco friendly, unspoiled and culturally rich island providing a unique, quality tourism experience. This can be achieved by offering a diverse range of natural and cultural experiences, fostering local business opportunities, protecting natural and cultural assets and contributing to a vibrant, sustainable economy (p 3).

The themes of uniqueness, community, history, and relaxed atmosphere are observed in this branding statement. Using this as a destination image to compare with the BNW participant experience will be useful in the discussion section (see Chapter 5).

The CI Destination Development Strategy 2013-2018 confers that their target market of experience seekers represent around 26-50% of Australian tourists. The report also addresses the market availability to immigration services; yet they have found that the patronage of tours and activities has been limited since these workers prefer to explore by themselves or relax.

National Parks has been acknowledged within the report as a viable partner to help in increasing environmental education activities (i.e. international school visits), innovation in environmental protection, and formation of partnerships with key research and educational institutions to increase knowledge and protection of the environment, heritage and culture. Also presented was the strong aspect of the CI 'living culture' and the need to retain this authentic experience for tourists. By bringing pride into the community there is the opportunity to develop a range of cultural and historical tourism experiences based on the Chinese and Malay cultures and unique history.

The ACIL Tasman (2009) is a report designed on behalf of the CI Phosphate Company. It was released prior to the new mining lease to address tourism as a replacement industry for mining and what is needed for tourism development. Tourism would need to replace 280 jobs and add 286-321 tourists each and every week to bring in a supplementary \$26 million/year that replaces the mining economy. This would need to include \$65-75 million investment to house extra

tourists with an extensive land use plan. In addition, it argues that the airport facilities need upgrading as visitors must queue up for 30 minutes for passport control (and quarantine) in a non-air- conditioned building in a tropical environment which represents a less than ideal first experience for many visitors.

The report's overall conclusion is that the following limitations prevent tourism from making a viable industry: the consistency of flight schedule and service providers, the availability of suitable accommodation and airport services, the lack of a comprehensive land use plan for the island, a general lack of a service culture, and a lack of tourism activities. It indicates that with the exception of some specialist interest groups, such as bird watchers, current tourists

to Christmas Island are unlikely to be repeat visitors. Given the current level of planning and investment, five years is too short a time frame for tourism to develop as an alternative industry that could support a replacement level of employment. Extension of the mine life will allow greater time for tourism planning and development.

Overall, by understanding the opportunities and limitations in tourism development of CI, this section provides a basis to examine further product development, and will now be addressed in the following section.

#### **2.4 The Tour Product: The Bird 'n Nature Week**

The Bird 'n Nature Week (BNW) Tour product has been operating for 7 years and started as a partnership between the Christmas Island Tourism Association (CITA) and with Indian Ocean Experience (or Island Explorer Holidays). It was designed as a pilot program to test whether specialist/niche eco-tourism is suitable for the island using current infrastructure and available services based on the interpretation of the island's unique terrestrial and marine ecology. BNW has continued as a subsidised product due to the unpredictability of service delivery and unreliability of meeting participant expectations (Dunlop Pers. Comm. 22/02/13). It has certainty as a construct but needs more certainty as a product (Dunlop Pers. Comm. 23/08/13).

The BNW is a unique experience as it combines travel and scientific research. It supports the Christmas Island branding where experiences are the drivers and motivators for their target audience - The Experience Seeker - which seek a unique, involving and personal experience from their holiday. This one-week tour product has the potential to bring in \$60,000 to the island's economy with over half of those also visiting Cocos Island (CITA Newsletter 09.2012).

The BNW Tour package is a 7 day specialist guide led programme with a capacity of approximately 30 participants. The itinerary is designed to divide participants into 4 subgroups. Each day the 4 sub-groups experience a different activity with each of the 4 guides (refer to Plates 7-10):

- 1) Dr Nic Dunlop: focusing on the colour-banding of tropic birds
- 2) Dr Janos Henniske: seabird project with satellite transmitters and monitoring data loggers
- 3) Tim Low: island ecology, visits to the forest, beach and observing the world-renown crabs
- 4) Mark Holdworth: researching endemic birds such as the goshawk

The tour product starts as a highly organised itinerary that is guide-directed but throughout the week it becomes more flexible and negotiable with optional activities and free time. Visitors are urged to pursue their personal interest or fill in gaps where they missed a certain wildlife experience or other activity (e.g. searching for the Java sparrow or snorkeling, Plates 11 & 12). There is one free day where individuals/small groups decide what they want to do. Every night there is a presentation from each guide.

Participants also spend a day with the National Park Service studying the infestation of the introduced crazy ants and how the park manages this pest problem as well as re-vegetation projects for rehabilitating mined sites (see Plates 13 & 14).

The BNW has been a shifting product through the years as different influences have impacted its client base (i.e. when flights were discontinued from Indonesia and economic issues impacted on the European market). For example, in the first year of the BNW operation, it was solely focused on birds as Christmas Island has a high endemic bird species. Since the species number is small,

CITA decided to change this focus in the 2nd year to include “natural history” rather than focusing just on birds.

BNW started off and still is only “an experiment” with a finite life (Dunlop Pers. Comm. 1.09.13). This is because the current researchers who make up the guides have limited resources/ funding to keep them coming back to the island although the BNW offsets their research costs by providing flights and accommodation.

In addition, there are the scientific authorizations (permits, licenses, approvals) necessary under the EPBC Act for the research (e.g. bird banding) involved with the BNW and can take up to 7 months to obtain (Dunlop conversation 1.09.13). This presents an issue for CITA if it seeks to continue and expand its main BNW activities with its research components.

Also to note, there has also been one successful seabird conference on the island with approximately 30 participants from all over the world. Also involved with this conference was collaboration between Parks and government, which provided a unique environmental location along with expert presentations in the morning and then field visits/work in the afternoon.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

Through this literature review, the complexities involved with tourism are illustrated as well as certain tools - the satisfaction survey and stakeholder interviews - to help with tourism marketing and product development. Furthermore, the desktop study of CI reports and documents provides a solid understanding of these complexities especially in regard to the environmental issues as well as current tourism strategies and limitations.

Overall, research and academic studies advocate the need to conduct research on visitor satisfaction and other areas of interests, motivations and preferences to assist in product development. The information gathered in this report will, henceforth, determine whether the BNW is a successful product, provide suggestions for improvement and recommend further tour products based on the BNW framework.

In addition, stakeholder consultations involved in this study will elaborate on varying perspectives of island tourism, which promotes the sustainability of tourism development. The next chapter will describe the research design undertaken in this study.

## **CHAPTER 3 - Methodology**

The study uses a mixed-methodological approach to understand the current tourism industry on the island especially via an in-depth examination of the Bird 'n Nature Week tour product during a two week field study. The visitor satisfaction surveys will provide characteristics of the product market leading to suggestions and improvements for product development, while the stakeholder interviews will provide a thorough Plate of potential opportunities and limitations for the tourism industry.

### **3.2 Visitor Surveys**

There have been approximately 100 participants on the Bird 'n Nature Week over the past seven years of operation. There are two sets of surveys utilised in this study: an exit survey and a new satisfaction survey which are self-completed by participants.

#### **3.2.1 Exit Survey**

The exit survey was designed by CITA when the BNW commenced in 2006. The hard-copy survey data was supplied to the researchers by mail before field work began.

#### **3.2.2 Satisfaction Survey**

Although the exit survey provides data that helps understand the BNW visitor market, a new satisfaction survey was created that emphasizes visitors' experiences, motivations and attitudes in detail in order to gain a better understanding of this visitor market.

This new survey consisted of 23 questions based on literature addressed in Chapter 2. The new survey had two forms. The first was an online survey using the Murdoch University Online Survey Systems (MOSS). It was emailed to previous BNW participants that were provided from the BNW exit surveys and could be accessed from late June 2013 to late August 2013. The reason for sending it to past participants was to capture as big a sample size as possible ( $n = 100$ ) although only 49 surveys were completed. The second form of satisfaction survey was in hard copy that was provided to the 2013 BNW participants during the field work in September 2013 with 28 in total collected. Altogether, there were 77 completed Satisfaction Surveys. See Appendix 2 for survey details.

#### **3.2.3 Data Analysis**

Quantitative raw data was transferred to Microsoft Excel. Raw qualitative data was transferred to Microsoft Word.

### **3.3 Stakeholder Interviews**

The objective of conducting interviews of various stakeholders in the CI tourism sector was to gain different perspectives of the CI context for tourism development. Interviews were structured by a set of 7 questions and were asked in a semi-structured form to allow a fluidity in the conversation following the thinking process of the interviewee (Jennings 2001, p. 165). It is assumed that the findings will support the CI reports (discussed in Chapter 2), but there may be other ideas and issues that may not have been considered in previous reports. Refer to Appendix 3 for the interview questionnaire.

#### **3.3.1 Data Analysis**

Interviews were analysed according to Jennings (2001) coding structure by focusing on five particular themes: stakeholder view of tourism, Christmas Island as a tourist destination, future tourism development, community involvement, and island lifestyle.

### **3.4 Field Work**

Funding from CITA was obtained in order to provide accommodation and flights to CI to complete field work, which occurred during 29 August 2013 to 14 September 2013. As a participant-observer experiencing the BNW, researchers were able to experience the hands-on activities and educational components involved in the tour product as well as to document participant commentary. The researchers were also able to gather information on the current tourism infrastructure.

### **3.5 Ethics Approval**

This research study was approved by the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee on 27 May 2013 with the approved form code 2013/100.

## **CHAPTER 4 - Results**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The following chapter provides the results of the 1) exit surveys, 2) satisfaction surveys, 3) stakeholder interviews and 4) field work. This data will be discussed in Chapter 5 in relation to the literature.

### **4.2 Exit Survey**

There were a total of 98 exit surveys collected from past participants of the BNW, which may differ with the actual number of people participating in the program. For example, in 2008 there were a total of 15 participants but only 12 surveys were completed as 3 surveys were combined from married couples.

The exit surveys illustrate some trends over the past 6 years, which gives a basic understanding of what the BNW participants are interested in, how they describe themselves and how they rate the BNW facilities and services provided during their trip.

Below are the results for 5 out of the 7 questions asked in the exit survey. The first two questions from the survey are not incorporated in this report as they specifically relate to the visitor centre quality of service prior to and during the BNW. Plus, many respondents did not answer these questions and therefore, they are not included in this report.

#### **4.2.1 Local Services**

The third question on the exit survey asked BNW participants to rate the local services on CI. During the trip, participants rated 39% excellent and 42% good in regards to the diversity of restaurants available. The standard of restaurants was rated with 32% excellent and 49% good. Some comments were that the participants loved the diversity of restaurants with much satisfaction for vegetarians/gluten free catering. Some noted wanting more Asian food and local fruits. In addition, the majority of respondents rated the accommodation services

as excellent (56%) and good (39%). And with accommodation facilities the majority of respondents rated excellent (56%) or good (41%).

The majority of respondents gave a rating of good (40%) or average (30%) for the range of shopping available. There were specific comments made that the participants are not shoppers and may be the reason why 18% gave a NA for their response. (See Figure 4.1)

#### **4.2.2 Local Signage**

The majority of participants felt that the local signage for Christmas Island was good (46%), with a quarter (28%) finding it excellent. There were several respondents who remarked on the need for road names. In almost every year of the survey, there were suggestions for detailed maps of the island with the identification of popular spots and local heritage.

The majority of participants were also mostly satisfied with the walking tracks being clearly marked (32% excellent, 44% good). Three respondents commented on the boardwalks being tricky to walk on and in need repairs. Another respondent noted the state of pathways was in poor condition. (Refer to Fig. 4.2)

#### **4.2.3 Itinerary of the BNW**

According to Figure 4.3, all participants were highly satisfied with all aspects of the itinerary. The majority of respondents rated these aspects as excellent or good: organisation of tours and guides (91% excellent, 9% good), lectures with information and interest (90% excellent, 10% good), the guides to be helpful and interesting (95% excellent, 5% good), quantity of information (89% excellent, 11% good) and the itinerary as smooth-running (86% excellent, 14% good). Two respondents appreciated seeing the local management programs of the National Parks. Another respondent claimed that the tour depends on the quality of knowledge with the tour leaders and having access to people passionate about their areas of expertise was appreciated immensely. A respondent in 2008, noted that it was the best organised tour that person had been on.

Three participants felt the week was a bit hectic and mentioned being really tired and needing rests. Some thought that the evening presentations were a little lengthy with too much detail (x 3). However, five respondents commented that the tour was easy-going and staying active was balanced with enough time to relax. Several valued the afternoon optional activities (x 4).

#### **4.2.4 Description of Participants**

The majority (61%) of the BNW participants defined themselves as general naturalists while more than a third (38%) defined themselves as keen all-around birdwatchers and a quarter (28%) as general birdwatchers. A minority of the participants were serious birdwatchers or “twitchers” (16%). One participant in 2010 commented that she would have brought her partner if there was more mention of non-birding activities in the advertised itinerary.

In addition, almost half (44%) of the participants indicated that they just wanted to see Christmas Island itself. Some respondents (x 5) remarked that it was not “just” because they



wanted to see the island, but “and” or “also” wanted to experience the island. (Refer to Fig. 4.4)

#### **4.2.5 Interest of Participants**

All respondents were interested in sea birds (98% strongly, 2% slightly) and almost all were interested in forest birds (93% strongly, 5% slightly). Crabs were also of high interest for BNW participants with 79% strong interest and 15% slightly. Also, of significance, is the aspect of plant interest in the BNW where 54% of participants have a strong interest and 38% have a slight interest. Plus, there was a strong interest (86%) in conservation issues. In 2008, some respondents suggested more interaction with the Parks Service (x 3). Lastly, although this report specifically engages land-based nature tourism, there is a considerable interest in coral reef life with 44% of participants strongly interested and 45% slightly interested. (Refer to Fig. 4.5)

The exit surveys gave an option for participants to enter an “other” in this interest field. Five respondents stated their interest in the community life and cultural information with a significant desire for more of this type information. Although the Chinese New Year is already a well-marketed event on CI, in 2007, a participant suggested advertising more about cultural events and coinciding trips with these local festivals.

One participant in 2009 suggested that as a keen birdwatcher, it will be extremely difficult to sell Christmas Island purely as a bird destination; in the participant’s opinion the island should be sold as a complete ecological package. An even more experienced twitcher noted that he was a little disappointed in the lack of variety of birds here but the quality of the birding experience made up for this.

#### **4.2.6 Specific Suggestions & Comments**

The exit surveys had a section where respondents could fill in their own qualitative suggestions and comments regarding the BNW. Overall, many participants clarified the exceptional and unique qualities of the BNW especially as it provided both participation and relaxation. Three participants noted their appreciation for the extended trip to Cocos Island (which two felt was not advertised enough) or even a few days extra on the island to understand the island life further. Another suggestion was an optional excursion walk within the wilderness area perhaps being led by the park staff. Some offered suggestions for eco-lodge accommodation to be available. One participant felt that lone touring of the island should be banned or discouraged while chauffeured or fully guided tours is the best option for tourists.

Five respondents mentioned the BNW package to be good value for money and even suggested charging more. One respondent mentioned that the BNW is not family oriented. Another respondent in 2011 commented that the optional boat trip was a rip-off. There were three responses indicating concern for the environment: to clean up rubbish from the beaches and the need to bring in low impact marketing strategies such as recycling.

Involving the local community was important for many of the BNW participants and several wanting more opportunities to socialise other ethnic groups (x 7). In some years of the BNW, the tour itinerary incorporated the local High School Students and three participants

commented on this novelty experience. In 2009, some respondents suggested that there could be more opportunities for Malay and Chinese communities to talk about their lives and to give their perspective about living on the island (x 3). Two participants commented on wanting more evening entertainment like dancing or live music developed by the locals. One signified his approval for knowing that his tourist dollar was going toward the local economy.

In terms of tourism development, one participant appreciated the eccentric manner of island and conveyed their desire to keep development to minimal standard. He appreciated the fact that infrastructure and resources for tourists are limited and are at best shared around with the local community although some participants made suggestions to upgrade and maintain tourist facilities. Overall, it is well understood and conveyed through the several participants that Christmas Island should be marketed through specialised tourism (nature-based) which seems to be the island's best strategy for the long term future.

### **4.3 Satisfaction Survey**

The results from the satisfaction survey support and expand on original exit surveys. The online survey, which was emailed to past participants, received a total of 49 responses. Four of the entries were incomplete as they did not answer all of the questions; therefore, the total number of responses differs for each question. With the 2013 survey on island, 28 surveys were collected out of 30 participants in total. Therefore the total number of participant responses ranged from 73-77 surveys.

#### **4.3.1 What attracted you to visit Christmas Island?**

According to Figure 4.6, results indicate that endemic birds (71% highly important, 18% important) and island ecology (55% highly important, 24% important) are the main attractions of Christmas Island. In addition for half of the participants, the crabs are a significant image for Christmas Island (36% highly important, 30% important) as well as the exotic and remote characteristics of the island (34% highly important, 28% important). And still, there is interest in the island culture with more than a quarter (38%) finding it somewhat important. Some respondents commented on other attractions that brought them to Christmas Island: the impact of refugee care, expertise of leaders (x 2), history of settlement (x 2), having someone living on the island (x 2), similar minded people (x 3), the unique experience (x 2), diving (x 2), research prospects, geology and links to Western Australia.

#### **4.3.2 What was the most important decision in choosing to visit CI?**

The majority of respondents (78%) chose the BNW in response to their specific interest for this tour product. On the other hand, 22% were more generally interested in Christmas Island itself.

#### **4.3.3 How did you hear about the BNW?**

The majority (66%) of respondents saw an advertisement in the BirdsLife Australia Magazine - almost all of the participants on the 2013 Tour (26 out of 28 respondents). Others heard about BNW from word of mouth (19%) and via an environmental club (18%). Refer to Fig. 4.7.

#### **4.3.4 How did the BNW meet your expectation levels?**

More than a quarter (39%) of participants felt the BNW highly exceeded their expectations and more than half (53%) felt their trip experience was higher than expected. A few respondents (6%) felt their expectations were just met (although one participant noted in 2013 that s/he had very high expectations of the trip due to word of mouth recommendations). There was only 1 (1%) respondent whose experience was lower than expected while no respondents felt their trip did not meet expectations.

#### **4.3.5 What motivated you to pick the BNW?**

As shown in Fig. 4.8, wildlife was the strongest motivator for participants (77% highly important, 18% important). One participant (1%) who marked no motivation for wildlife noted his only motivation was the new bird species (assumed to be a hard core twitcher). The majority of respondents were also largely motivated by the expertise of the guides (67% highly important, 25% important).

Other important aspects of motivation for participants were the educational components (42% highly important, 36% important), diverse array of activities (30% highly important, 42% important) and conservation issues (39% highly important, 38% important). Other somewhat important aspects of the trip motivations were social, having an adventure, the organised itinerary and affordability.

#### **4.3.6 What were you most satisfied with during the BNW Tour?**

This was an open-ended qualitative question asking participants what they were most satisfied with during their trip. Similar to the exit survey results, these findings show that the expertise and quality of information (x 45), the organisation of the trip (x 33), wildlife opportunities (x 25) and execution of diverse activities (x 18) were highly satisfactory. Other aspects that were significantly appreciated during the BNW trip were the hands on experience (x 9), island community (x 8) and educational component (x 8).

One respondent noted that although he was mostly a birder it was nice to wind back and relax. In contrast, a different respondent mentioned that he was not a birder but loved being out observing wildlife in general. Significantly, there was a couple who had participated in the BNW three times and said that it is the knowledge of experts and island uniqueness that make this trip. Another comment from a participant stated that he tends to visit islands and Christmas Island is totally unique in so many ways. Refer to Appendix 4 for further detailed responses.

#### **4.3.7 What were you least satisfied with while being on CI?**

Qualitative aspects that respondents were least satisfied with related to the detention centre issues (x 5) and mining of phosphate (x 7). Other areas of dissatisfaction related to the food (x 5), transportation and group organisation.

Overall, 21 of the respondents specifically noted that there was nothing wrong or dissatisfactory about the BNW trip; they were totally satisfied. One person noted that he would not visit now as there are too many people on the island and the accommodation is

too expensive. Another comment was that the program was too regimented and targeted to an older clientele. Refer to Appendix 4 for further responses and details.

#### **4.3.8 Experience during the BNW**

This question examines 13 statements where the respondent was to mark how well the statement reflects their experience during the trip. This question used a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 was no benefit gained and 5 was much benefit gained.

According to Figure 4.9, the highest benefit participants gained was the connection to nature (61% large benefit, 30% benefit), the scenic beauty (49% large benefit, 41% benefit) and having new and different experiences (49% large benefit, 42% benefit). Other somewhat benefits include doing things with companions, feeling of exhilaration, being active, had an adventure, developing skills and abilities, experiencing different customs and culture. Little benefits gained were in sharing skills and knowledge as well as gaining a new perspective on life.

#### **4.3.9 What trip(s) would you consider if to return to CI?**

This survey question looks at different trips that participants may consider if they were offered on Christmas Island. More than half of the participants would either choose a wildlife monitoring project (62%), exploring different ecosystems with multi-destination itinerary to Cocos and Indonesian Islands (61%) (and in 2013, almost half of participants supplemented the BNW with a trip to Cocos), as well as a volunteer conservation project for the National Parks (57%). A little less than half (42%) of the participants would choose to go on a focussed crab week tour. Around a quarter were interested in a marine wildlife tour (28%) and a wilderness hiking trek (23%).

None of the participants would choose an adventure week. Suggestions for 'other' tour products presented by respondents included a photography tour and a project with cleaning up Greta's Beach. (Refer to Figure 4.10)

#### **4.3.10. Overall Satisfaction Ratings**

This question quantitatively examines participants overall satisfaction levels with varying aspects of the trip. The highest satisfaction ratings are the knowledge and expertise of the guides (96% high, 4% good), organisation of trip itinerary (81% high, 18% good), quality of information provided (81% high, 18% good), the wildlife/animals (81% high, 14% good) and variety of activities (65% high, 28% good).

Other aspects respondents considered mostly satisfactory were enough free time to relax, service, accommodation, transport, food and price. The only lower rating given was for the interaction with the local community where a quarter of the participants rated in less than satisfactory (14% less than satisfied, 5% not at all satisfied). (Refer to Fig. 4.11 for details)

#### **4.3.11. Suggestions for Improvement of the BNW**

This was another open-ended qualitative question. The most important suggestions related to more culture (x 5) and more history (x 4) as well as more reference material (x 3), more free time (x 3) and more information about Cocos excursions (x 3). There were a few

suggestions for better food (x 3) and improved transportation (x 3). One serious twitcher wanted more bird outings, another respondent would have liked to see the Parks talk at the beginning of the week as the visuals helped to understand the island better and one visitor wanted better orientation at the beginning of the trip. Twelve respondents mentioned that there are no suggestions as the BNW was a very good product, expectations were far exceeded and communications before and during the trip were great. One respondent stated that it was the best overseas trip they had been on. See Appendix 4 for a detailed list of suggestions.

#### **4.3.12. Would you return to CI?**

Overall, 65% of participants would return to CI again: 23% would return on a different organised trip, 27% would do the BNW again and 15% would return by independent arrangements. For those 34% who would not return to CI: 33% admitted that there are too many other places to visit and 1% claimed that once is enough. One respondent mentioned that they have done the BNW tour twice and are looking forward to coming back again to see the crab spawning independently and are perhaps thinking about joining the BNW tour again to see more birds. Another respondent commented that they are unsure of visiting the island again if there are too many people.

#### **4.3.13. Would you recommend BNW to friends/family?**

All (100%) respondents said they would recommend the BNW trip to friends/family.

One respondent mentioned they would recommend it to anyone interested in ecology, evolution, birds or wildlife.

#### **4.3.14. Importance of nature-based activities**

As expected, Figure 4.12 indicates that 76% of participants place the highest importance on bird-watching and 73% on wildlife while 49% high importance on national parks visits. Other important activities that participants are interested in include guided trek-walks, photography, scientific study, hiking, historical sites/museums, indigenous culture tours, and meeting local people. Some mixed results included swimming and whale-watching. Activities that people were not interested in are cycling, fishing, four-wheeling, horseback-riding, sailing, sunbathing and hunting.

#### **4.3.15. Accommodation Usage**

The majority of participants (64%) usually stay in a hotel/motel as well using camping facilities (56%) when travelling. A little less than half of respondents stay in bed and breakfasts (45%) while a quarter stay in a guest house (32%), an eco-lodge (38%), a lodge/inn (29%), or in a recreational vehicle (26%). There were 10% of the respondents who chose other for their accommodation type: self-contained villa (x 2), cottage, diving boats (x 2), cabins, and holiday house. (Refer to Fig. 4.13)

#### **4.3.16. Accommodation comfort level**

If respondents chose hotel/motel, lodge/inn or beach resort for the last question, results show that the majority (75%) choose mid-range comfort while 17% choose basic/budget and 8% choose luxury.

#### **4.3.17 Motivation to visit nature-based sites other than CI**

According to Figure 4.14, the majority of participants of the BNW when visiting nature sites are motivated by nature (74% highly important, 22% important) and seeing wildlife in their natural habitat (85% highly important, 14% important). Other highly important aspects motivating participants are learning about the natural environment, experiencing the peace and tranquility of the natural environment, absence of crowds, escaping the urban environment and being physically active. Other aspects that are somewhat important to most participants include having an adventure and meeting new people with similar interests. Visiting as many ecotourism destinations as possible, having a rest/relaxation, self-discovery, and telling friends about experience had all mixed responses.

#### **4.3.18 Demographics**

- *Gender:* 63% are females and 27% are males
- *Age:* 60% of those are 65+, 32% are 55-64 years, 6% are 45-54 years and 2% are 35-44 years
- *Education:* 38% have completed post-graduate degrees, 29% under-graduate degrees, 20% TAFE/technical diplomas, 6% trade qualifications and 8% completing high-school
- *Employment:* 72% are retired while 14% are employed full-time, 13% employed part-time and 1% are with home duties
- *Income:* 21% earn \$35,000-50,000, 20% earn \$25,000-35,000, 13% earn \$50,000-70,000, 10% earn \$70,000-100,000, 10% earn \$16,000-25,000, 10% earn over \$100,000 and 9% prefer not to say
- *Place of Residence:* Of the other 72 respondents, only 60 stated their state of residence: Western Australia 30%, Victoria 22%, NSW 17% Queensland 12%, South Australia 12%, Tasmania 7%, ACT 2%; one participant was from New Zealand. To note, from personal conversations with BNW tour guides, some have mentioned participants visiting from UK, Germany, America and Canada.

#### **4.3.19. Direction of financial investments for future tourism development?**

As this report is aimed to explore the opportunities for Christmas Island, it is important to ask participants how they think future tourism development should be directed. Most responses related to the preservation of the wildlife/habitats as they are the unique attractions (x 15), engaging visitors in eco-projects (x 9), better roads (x 9), more basic accommodation options (x 8) and repairing boardwalks (x 8). Other suggestions related to more/improved interpretation, more walking tracks and more cultural and community engagement with visitors. Refer to Appendix 4 for further responses.

### **4.4 STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS**

During the two week field work period, 13 stakeholder interviews were obtained, with 2 interviews conducted prior to the field work, totaling a number of 15 interviews. Interviews ranged from 20-60 minutes in length and some were audio recorded while others were transcribed directly according to recommendations outlined in Jennings (2001). See Appendix 5 for detailed results.

#### **4.4.1 Stakeholders**

Those identified as stakeholders in this study come from local tourism operations, National Park Staff, the government sector, and from CI businesses. Some were identified as having direct involvement in tourism as helping with small business development, marketing destination strategies, heritage and cultural assets, accommodation, tourism consultation and being a member of CITA. The number of years these stakeholders have been on island vary from 4months, 1 year, 5-6 years, 12-15 years, and their whole life of 30 years and 40 years. Others clarified that they come and go on the island ranging from 5, 8, and 9 years.

#### **4.4.2 Stakeholder View of Tourism**

When asked what kind of visitors they would like to see on the island, 10 specifically stated they would like to see eco-minded people: birders, divers, and nature enthusiasts. Almost all stressed the need for small numbers that are carefully managed; ideally, these should be focused on 8-12 people.

#### **4.4.3 CI as a Unique Tourist Destination**

Stakeholders were asked about characteristics, assets, and attractions that makes CI unique. All stakeholders believe that CI is an incredibly unique place especially in regard to its natural

assets. First, there is the marine aspect (x 5). Second, the wildlife/fauna on land and in air is spectacular while more than half (8) of the respondents focused on the crabs. Third, there is the endemic unique flora. Six stakeholders view the island as “unspoiled.”

Over half of those interviewed feel the island demographics are unique. Furthermore, as CI has received two tourism awards, it was stressed that these have nothing to do with the environment, but rather the culture. Also mentioned was the unique history as a mining settlement (x 6).

A representative from Parks advised that there is more room for research and educational programs particularly with fungi and insects. Two stakeholders indicated that tourism needs to be marketed at low impact and high experience with more parks access.

Over half of stakeholders mentioned how the refugee issue plays a huge role on the image of Christmas Island and the only thing Australian people know about CI is the detention centre.

Stakeholders were asked about the impacts of tourism. While most felt there were no negative impacts, three felt that the sharing of facilities was seen negatively within the community. The “my island...my facilities” mentality, however, has mostly come from the interaction with detention centre workers and refugees.

#### 4.4.4 Future Tourism Development

Tourism on CI is an industry in infancy although divers and birders have been visiting CI for decades. Three respondents feel that there exists many tourism reports but nothing is moving forward especially because there is no product on the island, only marketing. Therefore, in terms of financial investment for tourism, eight of the stakeholders want to focus on product development while pausing on marketing, as weekly programs like the BNW are sustainable (they admit that visitation to the island is difficult for independent travelers).

In terms of accommodation, three respondents only want to see boutique hotels developed and not resorts. Five respondents indicated that eco-lodges are definitely a suitable market for CI. Cultural tourism was an area 6 stakeholders admitted could be promoted with CI tour products especially with the authentic food and temples. Nine respondents propose the need for more walking tracks. Three stakeholders believe that the island needs to accept detention centre workers as tourists/visitors.

There were several responses to the barriers and limitations in regards to CI tourism development. First of all, there is the role of government and the confusion with land development and the lack of practical arrangements: it is a rigorous process and lacks flexibility (x 3). Secondly, lack of accommodation is a huge limitation particularly due to the influx of detention centre workers and contractors (x4). Thirdly, flights are a huge barrier for tourism growth (x 7). There needs to be a connection to Hong Kong or Singapore as CI is a bucket list for Europeans but they don't want to fly through Perth.

As mentioned previously, the detention centre impacts the tourism industry and the issue remains quite complex. Several stakeholders are aware that the community likes the government workers as their businesses have picked up as they spend money. Two interviewees feel the detention centre is good for the island although recognizes the spinoffs (they call it a necessary evil).

Three stakeholders view the detention centre as detrimental to the CI brand as people only see the immigration issues and two indicate that it is taking away tourism resources which could be used for rubbish collection or recycling programs. Importantly, many of the deaths of robber crabs are due to the FIFOs, which have a huge impact on natural assets for nature tourism.

Significantly, the island infrastructure is the largest barrier to tourism for majority of interviewees (x 12). For instance, five stakeholders mentioned that when cruise ships come to CI, people are wandering around with nothing to do (and cruises can bring in \$40,000 on a day)

Four stakeholders mentioned the lack of funding/budget with Parks and the difficulty it would have to take a larger role in tourism. A stakeholder from Parks claimed that there is no dedicated visitor manager, plus a lack of budget and lack of visitor numbers. One respondent indicates there is opportunity to expand with a reptile program and yellow ant program with visitors; yet is limited with it being underfunded.



Lastly, six stakeholders argued that the cost of everything and length of time it takes to get things done on CI is a huge drawback for tourism development.

#### **4.4.5 Community Involvement**

In terms of sustainability, it is important to consider the general community on the island and their role with tourism development. When asking stakeholders their view on the community, five pointed out that there is lack of interest from the community to be part of tourism planning. There is an attitude that today they don't need tourism as it doesn't affect them (except those few in business but they are earning money by detention centre workers so it doesn't bother them).

There were 7 stakeholders who felt that there is a lot of room for training and capacity building within the community. One resident feels it is through the younger generation in school to instill them with island pride and there is opportunity to train them into local guides (similar to Aboriginal mentoring programs). Yet, three stakeholders were disappointed with capacity building that has already occurred on island as they have helped in small business development and tourism workshops.

In regards to their weaknesses, the community often is small-minded and has competence issues with tourism development (x3), there is the lack of Malay/Chinese community support (x5), there are limited long term residents (x 6), they are not vocal enough (x4), other things take preference ("island time") (x7), and the older generation doesn't care (x8). Two stakeholders admitted that many residents have grown up on hand-outs and they depend on the government for fixing things, which is why empowering the community is necessary yet difficult. In comparison, the community on Cocos Island was said to have regular cultural tours involving local residents (i.e. local distillery, a man who dries his own salt).

#### **4.4.6 Island Lifestyle**

It was important to get an understanding of how the community feels about the environment and the natural assets of CI. It was evenly split between those who think the community does value the environment/conservation and those who do not.

Two indicated the change in community concern (affinity for issues) seen through Island Care and community cleanups of Greta beach and that there are high levels of volunteerism (i.e. school, ambulance, fire service, marine rescues). Still, some view the community as lacking advocacy for natural environmental health (x 3). And one resident maintains that residents are blind to the beauty of nature; their priorities focus on their family needs and earning money and will only start caring about tourism and natural assets if tourism becomes their bread and butter.

#### **4.4.7 Suggestions & Comments**

There were a few comments and/or suggestions provided by some of the stakeholders. One long term resident wanted to emphasize that tourism is not and will not be the driver for economic prosperity but is an important part of the solution. There needs to be a push for the wider Australian market to help in preserving the unique fauna/flora of CI and there is a huge educational component to the island's issues. Two suggested the need for a tourism tax that

has a community benefit for infrastructure to support proper programs and maintenance that has been neglected.

In particular to the BNW tour product, two stakeholders admit it is an unusual trip and a very interesting model with a special intimacy. And since the island is unique, the bird theme is replaceable by other non-bird focused activities. And another stakeholder particularly commented on the BNW as a boutique product and doesn't go far enough; CI needs a model that has more context especially one that brings in awareness raising.

#### **4.5 FIELD WORK**

Field work on Christmas Island was conducted over two weeks where the researchers became participant observers of the 2013 BNW and engaged in all activities provided on the tour. There were 4 groups with 8-9 participants each (sum of 32 participants). Below is a brief itinerary of the trip as well as photos of activities. A detailed description of the activities, lectures, information and sites can be found in Appendix 6.

Overall, the researchers found the BNW activities to be highly meaningful experiences particularly in regards to the hands-on components involved with the tour. By directly observing the relationship between bird and plant/ecosystems and taking part in the research projects, the opportunity to learn about the environment and the many impacts that affect it are remarkable. These memorable and unique experiences of the BNW deliver the connection necessary to develop a critical sense of place with the Christmas Island destination.

Furthermore, the scientific foundations provided by the quality interpretation (and evening presentations) from each Guide and National Parks offer exceptional learning experiences. This type of tourism engagement bestowed to the BNW participant provides a valuable understanding of island ecosystems, flora/fauna adaptation and conservation protection. Thus, the researchers believe the BNW to have excellent eco-tourism concepts and themes especially in its ability to connect participants to the unique CI context and its relationship to matters on a global scale.

### **CHAPTER 5 - Discussion**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented the results from the surveys, stakeholder interviews and field work. This chapter discusses the significance of those results in relation to the literature explored in chapter 2. The following topics that will be interpreted are: 1) the BNW satisfaction levels with the trip experience, 2) guide interpretation and expertise, 3) the BNW Market, 4) CI branding and attractions and 5) product development.

Overall, the combination of the satisfaction/exit surveys, the stakeholder interviews and field work all prove beyond any doubt that the BNW is a viable, successful product. In particular, the surveys support the continuance of the BNW and areas to improve the model concept as

well as opportunities to expand into other areas of interest within the nature tourist market. Recommendations are provided in Chapter 6.

## **5.2 BNW Satisfaction with the Trip Experience**

Most significantly, the results from the exit and satisfaction surveys overwhelmingly convey the high satisfaction levels of the BNW Tour experience and product: more than 90% of respondents indicated that the product exceeded expectations, 100% of participants would recommend to friends/family, there was 100% satisfaction with the overall trip and 65% of participants would return again (27% of those would do the BNW again). In support, Donohoe & Needham (2008) argue that genuine ecotourism products will exemplify quality product and experiential satisfaction with participant confidence. For this reason, the BNW Tour is a successful and credible nature tour product.

In addition, a fifth of those surveyed (19%) heard about BNW from word of mouth which proves high loyalty intentions and ongoing commitment to CI. This supports the argument made by Swanson and Hsu (2009) that word of mouth has a greater impact on decisions to visit a destination more than formal marketing communications.

Tongue, Moore and Taplin (2011) refer to satisfaction in two ways: 1) the quality of experience as a psychological outcome derived from visiting a setting; an emotional state of mind after the exposure to an opportunity (which is often hard to measure) and 2) the quality of service and performance. In regards to the satisfactory quality of the BNW trip experience, there were very high ratings for the overall trip which is supported by particular satisfaction for guide expertise, the information provided, its organisation, range of activities, educational components and hands-on experience. The quality of service of the BNW is supported by the survey results with high satisfaction ratings for transport, food, signage and accommodation.

Nvight (1996) exemplifies that declining aspects of the tourism experience are motivations to simply relax; while increasing in nature tourism is the desire for scenery/nature and to study and learn. These motivational aspects are in agreement to the survey results particularly in regards to responses on viewing wildlife, having expert guides, the trip's educational components, the array of activities and interest in conservation issues. The results of the BNW experiences, furthermore, adhere to these claims with the beneficial aspects of nature, scenery, having different experiences, and connection to nature. Plates 29 & illustrate the nature experience component of the BNW.

Pearce and Kang (2009), on the one hand, argue that novelty seeking is often a core motivator of tourism behaviour and can negatively affect repeat visitation. This is seen by the 33% of BNW participants that would not come again for reasons that there are too many other places to see. On the other hand, Pearce & Kang (2009) also maintain that visitors with positive experiences may develop preferences for re-engaging; this usually entails high satisfaction levels and service quality, which are prime determinants of loyalty. This is illustrated by the 65% of participants that would visit CI again and their interest in more activities involving National Parks projects. Even more, Tongue, Moore & Taplin (2011) argue that high satisfaction will lead to repeat visitation and greater support for protected areas.

The surveys and interviews suggest that there could be more interaction with the local community during the BNW trip. Walker (2008) claims that many ecotourism businesses offer intellectual and emotional experiences with personal and meaningful connection between people and place, which consequently creates a satisfied customer. Therefore, by involving participants more with the local community, the diverse island culture and its unique history, this may improve satisfaction levels for this aspect. This is emphasised by some participants who noted the novelty experience of having dinner prepared by the Island High School and wanting more of these experiences.

Furthermore, conveyed in the results are similar market attributes characterised by the experience seekers. This market consists of experienced travellers, going off the beaten track and desire for engaging with the local lifestyle while longing for self-discovery and education in destinations that are left untouched (Tourism Australia 2007). The various and highly satisfactory experiences within the BNW would support the market for experience seekers especially if the BNW model were to integrate more local interaction into its activities.

### **5.3 Interpretation and Guide Expertise**

One of the most significant findings was the very high satisfaction rate with the role of the guides, their expertise and their quality of skills (see Plates 31 & 32). In general, interpretation seeks to increase the knowledge and awareness of nature for tourists by engaging the visitor through learning, appreciation, conservation and education while exemplifying the significance of a place (Walker 2008; Moscardo 2008; Prideaux & McNamara 2011; Newsome, Moore & Dowling 2002; Kimmel 1999; Prideaux & McNamara 2011). Weaver and Lawton (2001) maintain that focusing on interpretation guiding with expertise will enhance satisfaction outcomes. In addition, Moscardo (1998) suggests interpretation could play a critical role in achieving sustainability as it becomes an effective management tool for visitor awareness.

Moscardo, Woods & Greenwood (2001) provide evidence that visitors expect interpretation to be part of their destination experiences, particularly in wildlife experiences. From the surveys, it is shown that wildlife is one of the key motivators for choosing the BNW trip with high satisfaction levels of wildlife knowledge provided by the guides. It is the intimate and personal interaction with wildlife that many participants noted during field work and that provided a memorable experience. Also, the evening presentations and information by the Parks Staff were much appreciated by BNW participants noted during field work and in the surveys. Hence, these aspects support the quality experience of the BNW product and the exceptional role of the expert guides.

Interpretation also provides the additional opportunity for tourists to learn more about the local community, which helps to increase their appreciation of the destination (Weaver & Lawton 2001). Although cultural and historical aspects of CI were discussed during the BNW trip (as observed in the field work), there are suggestions by participants as well as stakeholders to include more cultural and historical information. There seems to be an interest in understanding CI on a level that goes beyond the natural attractions and into areas of politics, history, and current affairs which together make this island incredibly unique.

One of the limitations of the BNW is that the tour guides do not live on the island. Walker (2008) discusses the importance of local guides as the identification and facilitation of community-based values, which has an opportunity to become an integral component of the sustainable tourism process. Another obstacle is that two out of the four guides would not be able to visit CI more than once a year. However, they did note that replacements could be obtained (i.e. PhD Students). Or, indicated in interviews and supported by the visitor surveys, there may be an opportunity for National Parks to have a stronger role in the BNW week as substitute guides.

#### **5.4 The BNW Market**

As exemplified in literature, it is important to identify characteristics of the destination market and submarkets for product development in regards to behaviours, motivations and attitudes (Andereck 2009). Weaver & Lawton (2001) provide an examination of different eco-tourist markets and discover a submarket they call the “structured eco-tourist”. This grouping is illustrated though its high environmental commitment and sustainability enhancement; activeness; preference for services/structure and social tendency; need for maintenance and pristine outdoor settings but also quality/comfort facilities/services; as well as the quality of interpretation/guiding. The structured eco-tourist is confirmed by the surveys which convey the following aspects: their satisfaction for the structure, their interest in conservation, interest in wildlife, importance in social aspects and total appreciation of nature.

Furthermore, the wide range of activities during the BNW, that involved more than just the bird viewing, was much appreciated by the participants. However, this does propose a limitation for niche ecotourism as noted through a few disappointed participants in the lack of birding activities.

Nvight (1996) claims that nature tourists also have an interest in learning more about culture and history in their experience. And supported by the desire of BNW participants for more of this type of information, it is important that the BNW model consider this added dimension. Although the Tai Jin House was an optional activity, it has the potential to play a significant role in the CI experience. (See Plates 33 & 34)

For all of these reasons, there are factors implying that the BNW encompasses a wider market than just niche birders. The product can be targeted for people who want a unique experience (e.g. the experience seeker) as well as those who generally enjoy nature, want an adventure, pursue outdoor activities and are keen to learn about ecology, which comprises the nature tourist market (Wood 2001).

To note, there appears to be potential for development of eco-lodges or eco-tents from the survey results as well as support by stakeholders (even with land use issues). Still, the majority of respondents chose hotel/motel for their choice of housing which, therefore, supports the current stream of accommodation on the island as visitors often want comfort in their destination experience with most preferring non-luxury hotels (Nvight 1996).

#### **5.5 CI Image Branding and Attractions**

In terms of branding, which calls consumers’ attention to a destination, the results of the surveys indicate that the BNW experience was the main reason for visiting CI and that

endemic birds and island ecology are the most important attractions for the participants. Considering the trip is called “Bird ‘n Nature Week”, these results are consistent with the product branding.

Jennings (2001) discusses the significance of a destination’s pull factors that can help a destination contribute to its personality, emotional connection with product experiences, and with imagery and words. And Prideaux & Watson (2010) mention the importance of creating strong emotional meanings with a destination image, which provides a high level of anticipation for potential visitors.

In regards to product development, both surveys and interviews convey that there are certainly more attractions to CI than just the birds and nature in general. Other interests include the crabs, conservation issues, exotic island characteristics and even moderate responses to culture, which all play an important role in the CI destination image. For instance, Plates 35 & 36 illustrate the interactive and close-up experience with the crabs.

Most participants on the BNW Tour heard about the trip through the Bird Life Magazine (almost all from 2013), which exemplifies the influence advertisements represent for specific products. In a study by Young (2009), he argues that tourism can selectively present information to the audience that creates a particular image of the place, which is designed to attract potential tourists. He further declares that image constructs of visitors are very similar to those constructed by the tourist industry considering pre-visit vs. onsite factors. This is important for developing the tour product on CI as it allows CITA to target particular groups and interests.

Moreover, with the support of the interviews, certain aspects that characterize the uniqueness of CI are currently not being conveyed to potential visitors (e.g. rugged, eccentric). Haywood (2000) describes the importance of destination to portray the varying aspects of uniqueness that can go beyond nature like, for example, island heritage and community. Even more, some stakeholders mentioned that advertising/marketing of the island is not the problem and the focus should be placed product development. Hence, the importance of creating quality products that touch on a variety of unique experiences and promote other unique attractions (rather than just birds and nature in general) is helpful for future products.

In addition, Moscardo, Woods, & Greenwood (2001) reason that there is a tendency to assume that the wildlife is the central interest of all the participants, yet there are many different factors that can lead to participation in a tour product. In the surveys, although the majority of motivational responses were related to wildlife viewing, there were also responses related to other aspects such as mining history, geology, and refugee issues. And during field work, many participants noted these unique attributes of the island and with the novelty experiences of the BNW. Overall, there are multi-unique aspects that characterise CI and the BNW product, which has the potential to include other markets through product specialisation and also a wider nature- based tourism market focusing on the array of unique experiences.

Some limitations to the image of CI, as mentioned previously and is well supported by participant survey comments and stakeholder interviews, is the immigration issue. Therefore, it is important that the BNW and other tour products address the immigration complexities.

Plate 37 shows the unique opportunity to view the detention centre facility, which many of the participants appreciated during the 2013 BNW Tour.

Another concern for the destination image of CI refers to participant dissatisfaction with the ecological integrity of the island's natural attractions and the stress on ecotourism resources (e.g. invasive plants and animals, mining activities, vehicle use and crab deaths). Donohoe & Needham (2008) discuss the incongruencies with theory and practice of ecotourism ("green-washing") and the need for strong ecotourism ethics and standards. For this reason, the collaborative efforts with National Parks and CITA to present the rehabilitation/revegetation projects and efforts against the crazy ants and introduced pests within the BNW itinerary, is significant to the BNW model concept and particularly for future nature tourism development.

## **5.6 Product Development**

Overall, nature tourism provides the natural history of a place combining education, recreation and adventure (Laarman & Gregersen 1996). Pearce (1998) describes the trends for nature tourism embracing all inclusive prices, integration with festivals/events paying attention to tradition, providing a market niche orientation and supplementary activities like conferences. "The ability to achieve long-term sustainability in the international tourism marketplace rests on a destination's ability to offer an experience or experiences that match the pull expectations of the consumer" (Prideaux & Watson 2010, p. 34).

Most important, a theme is needed, to tie concepts and activities together, which is organised and easy to follow. This is supported by Otto & Ritchie (2000), whereby they conclude that when marketing, tourist organisations and businesses need to market the experience. The Bird 'n*Nature* theme definitely ties in the variety of experiences that match the participants wants and interests although some serious bird watcher participants noted there were not enough bird activities both during the 2013 tour and in the satisfaction survey (Section 4.3.11).

In a study by Kimmel (1999), the researcher examines eco-learning where wilderness appreciation and desire for conservation are key aspects within the eco-experience. His tour in southwest America used a theme of ecological adaptation that produced a facilitated discussion about the various ways life forms have adapted to the arid environment. From this example, specific products examining the ecological complexities of the island may be developed to the CI destination experience and may be targeted to Ecological Societies or Naturalist Groups especially if they are integrated with further exploration to Cocos Island (and even Indonesian Islands).

Also essential is the active involvement and engagement of first hand experiences which helps tourists appreciate the product, thus, providing a more enjoyable time. Donohoe & Needham (2008) discovered that with nature tourism, the experiential and educational environments are the common denominators for activities in tour products. For instance, Weaver & Lawton (2001) examined species counts and trail/habitat maintenance within the tour activities and learned that these activities enhance satisfaction outcomes.

Many of the participants in their BNW trip remarked on their rewarding experiences: with Parks and the reptile cage netting (Plate. 38), trawling with Marc to find the Goshawk (Plate 39), helping Nic Dunlop with bird banding (Plate 40), and cleaning Greta's Beach with Tim Lowe (Plate 41). Hands on activities such as these are crucial to the BNW model and has the potential

to be expanded in the development of other product concepts. This is also supported by a study conducted by Stebbin (2006) that examined bonds of communal engagement. He maintains that much importance is placed on the personal and voluntary environment activities particularly for hundreds of recreational clubs around North America.

There is also evidence that visitors who travel a long way to get to a destination spend more money on activities as often at times they are fulfilling their bucket list (Tang & Turco 2001 in Pinkus 2011). Therefore, the Cocos Island trip is a great option for trip excursions and/or part of a new tour product as mentioned previously (as half of the 2013 participants chose this add-on option). It is well-supported by stakeholders who mentioned the varying characteristics between the two islands.

Mullins (2009) indicates that learning about unique places and peoples relationship to them is at the heart of sustainable tourism especially in how people use, understand and emotionally relate to aspects of their environment, which provides a core sense of place. As mentioned in previous sections, adding cultural and historical elements to the model concept would be highly beneficial as indicated by the surveys and interviews. Attractions such as the cemeteries, the Chinese Museum, the Tai Jin House, Buddhist and Tao Temples as well as a Phosphate Mine tour may enhance the experience for those interested in these aspects. Perhaps more interpretation could be provided during the BNW Tour mentioning the culture and history of the Island people.

Furthermore, with a better understanding of the island demographics and unique history, it may improve the dissatisfaction ratings with the mining industry as visitors may come to understand the importance of mining on CI history. Hence, the educational components of the museums and other interpretive/heritage information sources are critical in achieving the CI sense of place.

## **CHAPTER 6 - Conclusions**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In summary, academic discourse depicts the complex, multi-dimensional aspects involved in tourism development and demonstrates the importance of visitor satisfaction surveys and stakeholder interviews as key tools assisting in tourism development and product expansion. For this reason, the significance of collecting data that clarifies destination image, destination loyalty as well as visitor motivations, preferences and interests in specified tourism markets is necessary for tourist destinations.

In terms of tourism on CI, specific documents outline the varying marketing strategies and opportunities as well as its limitations for nature tourism to be sustainable. This information depicts CI as a tourist destination that focuses on its natural attractions such as its diverse wildlife and endemic bird species, its range of terrestrial habitats and ecological systems.



Significant consideration of the environmental issues related to these tourist attractions was addressed as well as the lack of tourist infrastructure on the island and the Detention Centre complexities, which consequently have potentially negative impacts on the island in relation to nature tourism development.

As a case study, the BNW Tour proposed a significant opportunity to investigate the CI destination experience by examining visitor perception, motivations and satisfaction levels, thereby, supporting qualitative and quantitative data collection for further product development. The results from both the exit and satisfaction surveys support CI as a nature tourism destination and significantly promote the overall uniqueness of the island in terms of its endemic flora/fauna species, its remoteness and significant ecological terrains as well as its cultural and historical attributes.

For this reason, the BNW Tour, as a successful and highly satisfactory product, provides an exceptional opportunity to learn about the island's unique natural attractions and small island community. This has especially contributed to the model framework of the BNW that includes a wide array of experiences, its detailed structure, the interpretation and guide expertise, its educational components and hands-on activities.

Therefore, the results from the study strongly advocate that the BNW Tour be continued as a nature-based product and should be utilised as a platform to expand into other ecotourism and niche tour products. Notably, the success of future products are subject to the collaboration of National Parks and their conservation projects which are fundamental to the continued protection of the island's natural attractions and tourism industry.

Specific recommendations for the improvement of the BNW product as well as concepts for other tour products are outlined in the next section.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

Based on the data collected from the surveys, it is recommended that the tourism industry focus on the island's unique natural attributes that are heavily connected with the core nature-based experiences. The strong satisfaction for the BNW experience supports its endorsement as a model product for CI that should continue in the future. Additionally, it has much potential to expand into other products especially with added cultural and historical interpretive elements.

It is recommended that tour products are organised on a monthly basis. However, it is important to see these products in terms of their limited numbers between 8 to 12 people. This is supported by the stakeholder interviews, limited accommodation on the island due to immigration services as well as participant appreciation for the small groups.

Certainly, the product is dependent on a strong, collaborative relation with CI National Parks. This has especially contributed to the hands-on activities and educational components involved with the BNW model; thus, this relationship is critical for the continuance and expansion of all CI tourism products.

The major limitation with the BNW is the expert guides that lead the trip. It would be difficult for them to travel more than once per year as well as obtaining permits that are required for

the research projects, suggesting that unless this process becomes more efficient this particular product may not be sustainable over time.

As a unique destination offering novel experiences, CI has the potential to invite a wider ecotourism market for nature enthusiasts and experience seekers. Therefore, for image and branding reasons, it is suggested that the model tour product be labeled the “The Christmas Island Experience” whilst adapting the BNW model to instill a holistic experience. The week would be quite similar to BNW model by focusing on wildlife, conservation, nature, and ecology but also incorporate culture, history, and current issues. This flexible model could henceforth adapt to niche and specialised interests.

### 6.2.1 Product Model Activities

Based on the BNW model, each product would need to involve information on the island history (orientation), the ease and diversity of wildlife viewing, a day with National Parks, a walking trek to learn/differentiate CI ecological systems and hands-on activities (see Plates 44-47). Elements to improve the model include interaction with the community and providing cultural information. Also, interpretive topics should be included that consist of the impacts of the Detention Centre, the casino and other island issues. These activities are independent of the current BNW guide-led research projects: Goshawk trawling, Bird-banding, capturing and tracking an Abbott’s Booby.

In alignment with the BNW, the model structure would consist of morning activities and optional afternoons as well as traveling to different sites for morning tea, lunch, and dinner (see Plate 42 & 43). Presentations are strongly encouraged as they were much appreciated by the participants and suggested is a talk by a local resident discussing their life on the island.

Table 1 discusses the model product activities, themes and options. These do not include the research projects of the BNW. This model is conceived as flexible and adaptable to specialized groups and interests.

<b>Model Product Activities</b>			
<b>Key Theme</b>	<b>Destination Activity/s</b>	<b>Optional</b>	<b>Interpretation/Importance</b>

Orientation of Island	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Bus/Car Orientation (BNW Model)</li> <li>2. New Option: Walking tour of the Settlement &amp; Territory Day Park Trail</li> </ol>	For hikers/trekkers, incorporate Smith Trail with Activity 1	Wildlife sightings of birds and crabs. Also important for basic understanding of island vegetation (signage within Park)
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<b>Model Product Activities</b>			
<b>Key Theme</b>	<b>Destination Activity/s</b>	<b>Optional</b>	<b>Interpretation/ Importance</b>
Day with National Parks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Presentations of Rehabilitation Project &amp; Crazy Ant Survey</li> <li>2. Reptile Breeding Program at Pink House</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Take part in Rehabilitation Project: helping in nursery, weeding; planting</li> <li>2. Walk with Parks to specific monitoring sites</li> <li>3. Help with any other project</li> </ol>	Understanding environmental issues on the island and conservation efforts (baiting projects for invasive flora/ fauna and pests)
Trekking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dales Walk</li> <li>2. Hosnie's Spring</li> <li>3. Dolly Beach</li> </ol>	For avid hikers, involve all three walks into tour product	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Understanding ecology of Dales and freshwater streams with blue crab</li> <li>2. Importance of freshwater mangroves</li> </ol>

Culture & History	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Visit to cemeteries</li> <li>2. Tai Jin House Exhibition</li> <li>3. Chinese Museum</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mine Tour</li> <li>2. The Settlement Temple Tours</li> </ol>	Understanding the mining history and island culture
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<b>Model Product Activities</b>			
<b>Key Theme</b>	<b>Destination Activity/s</b>	<b>Optional</b>	<b>Interpretation/Importance</b>
Other activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Blowholes</li> <li>2. The Grotto</li> <li>3. Detention Centre Viewing</li> <li>4. Greta's Beach</li> <li>5. Golf Course</li> <li>6. Marine tour, snorkelling (although currently limited)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Coordinate with local community group for cleanup of Beach</li> <li>2. Bike-ride along road to Casino</li> <li>3. View training area for detention centre workers (see Appendix 6)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Special Island spots</li> <li>2. Current Island issues</li> <li>3. Other wildlife opportunities</li> </ol>
Optional Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. For Bird Enthusiasts</li> <li>2. For Cave Enthusiasts</li> <li>3. For Crab Enthusiasts</li> <li>4. For Artists</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Bird Feeding, Night Owl Tour, Java Sparrow Urban Birding</li> <li>2. Explore cave area with local Cave Club</li> <li>3. Look for other crab species</li> <li>4. Gather rubbish from Greta's and create art pieces</li> </ol>	Specialised information

## Table 1 - Model Product Activities

Refer to Field Work in Appendix 6 for detailed information about the BNW experience and interpretive information.

### 6.2.2 Other Tour Products

By using the product model provided in the last section, Table 2 lists a number of other tour products that are adaptable to specialised and niche tour groups.

Significantly, there is much opportunity for volunteer tourism and conservation projects. CI could “become a valuable national and international base for the management of island biodiversity conservation more generally and, with tourism, could contribute significantly to the island’s economic support” (Threatened Species Scientific Committee 2008).

It is highly recommended to focus marketing of the product to Special Interest Groups, Clubs and Professional Associations (i.e. Naturalists Groups). It is recommended to work with teachers and schools (Outdoor Education Classes) with both Australian and International students (Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia): trips considered for International Biology or Environmental Students where they can take field notes, work with surveys, understand invasive pest issues.

<b>Other Tour Products</b>		
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Components</b>	<b>Requirements and/or Limitations</b>
Crab Week	Examining the crab migration	Limitations on visitation to other attractions due to road closure; potential Crustacean Conference venue
Exploring Island Ecology	Focusing on evolution/geology of island in comparison with Cocos Island and other Indonesian Islands	Recommended 10-14 days
Conservation Week	Spending mornings with Parks rehabilitation projects with optional activities in the afternoon	Strong collaboration with National Parks

Wildlife Monitoring Week	Fauna surveying (e.g. Bird banding)	May require PhD students as guide
Fungi & Insects	Niche Product for etymologists	Potential conference venue; lack of fungi/insect numbers
Wet season with Whale Sharks	In April with flat ocean	Limited diving operators
CI Cultural Week	Align with Territory Day Week or other cultural events; learning more about the local community	

### 6.2.3 Future Opportunities

As noted, there is a unique cave system on CI with several endemic species (e.g. blind cave scorpion and blind cave crab) that would cater to adventure tourism, experience seekers and cave enthusiasts. According to Meek (2001) Island residents use the cave recreationally (The CI Cave Club).

There is also an opportunity for ecotourism cruising that connects with Cocos and Indonesian Island. *Expedition Cruising* conducts these types trip to the Solomon Islands-Tikopia with a maximum capacity of 120 people focusing on nature and culture tourism (Walker 2008).

In regards to conferences and/or workshops, cost often plays a critical role in the choosing of a destination. Yet, there is much opportunity with morning presentation and afternoon field work. One participant of the 2013 BNW Tour was a crustacean biologist and commented that CI would be a great place for such a conference.

### 6.2.4 Infrastructure Improvements

There is a great need to direct financial sources toward a foreshore interpretive walk describing shoreline vegetation. The Settlement Heritage Signage needs to be upgraded. There is an opportunity for independent travellers to take an interest in audio/ipod support.

Also, it is suggested that the airport focus on a welcoming environment during the quarantine holding period with Plates and information on the walls of the waiting room.

Invest in Island Bicycles, to enable tourists an easy access to The Cove or along the Casino Road.

### **6.3 Limitations and Further Work**

This study provided only a snapshot of the current situation on CI. It is necessary to maintain qualitative data collection and trend analysis for visitors to CI.

Also to note, the limitations with the Stakeholder Interviews as there was no representative from the Malay Community.

Stakeholders and visitors to CI agree that nature based tourism provides a sustainable future for the island and the community, but there is a strong need for continued capacity building for Island residents to engage in the tourism sector.