

GROWTH & CHALLENGES

Several major infrastructure projects point to an exciting growth era ahead in Gold Coast tourism. But the industry also needs to keep an eye on some looming challenges.

This "mixed outlook" was addressed in a recent report by respected consultancy, Colleen Coyne Property Research. Major projects identified as significant growth catalysts include:

- the opening in mid-2008 of the massive Tugun Bypass road project,
- the recent extension of the Gold Coast Airport runway and the terminal redevelopment scheduled to start in 2008 for completion by 2010,
- doubling, by late 2008, of exhibition space at the Gold Coast Convention and Exhibition Centre, and
- redevelopment of Twin Towns at Tweed Heads, including a conference centre for 1,000 delegates.

Colleen Coyne made particular mention of the role apartments have played in renewing accommodation choices on the Coast. "The last new hotel in Surfers Paradise opened in the late 1990s. The capacity to accommodate increased visitors in Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach is mainly being addressed through new apartment construction."

This is true too, she said, on the Tweed Coast where, over four years to March 2007, the number of room nights available in hotels, motels and serviced apartments rose by 42.2%.

Two challenges must be recognised by accommodation operators, however ... a decline in domestic tourist numbers and a disturbing trend toward shorter stays by domestic visitors. Both are linked to affordability issues and competition from cheaper overseas options.

The tendency to shorter stays is also work related, Ms Coyne said. A Tourism Taskforce report found 40% of Australian employees who had accrued leave took no recreation leave and 43% took only part of their entitlement.

You know what they say about "all work and no play"!