

TOURISM AUSTRALIA

Sustainability STORYTELLERS



ALAN WALLISH

Managing Director, Passions of Paradise | Queensland



Over the 30 years that Alan Wallish has been revealing the underwater wonders of the Great Barrier Reef to visitors, he's seen an evolution: guests now want to play an active part in reef conservation.

Passions of Paradise operates a 30-metre sailing catamaran – one of the biggest in Australia – offering guided snorkelling and diving adventures on the Outer Reef. The company is now developing a parallel program, incorporating 'citizen science' into its reef excursions.

The project sees broken pieces of living coral 're-planted' in special frames in coral 'nurseries' on the sea floor, that house up to 4 000 nascent corals. Once established, they can be harvested and re-located to their dive sites.

"It's about building resilience for our coral reefs: these corals are survivors. Learning about the project helps our guests understand that - while the reef is fragile and needs our protection – it's also a dynamic system that can heal itself, given the opportunity. The project also enables

"OUR CORAL NURTURING PROJECT IS ONE OF THE FIRST TIMES SCIENTISTS AND TOUR OPERATORS HAVE WORKED SIDE BY SIDE ON GREAT BARRIER REEF CONSERVATION."



"BY PARTICIPATING IN CITIZEN SCIENCE, TRAVELLERS SEE HOW THEY CAN LEARN OR BE INVOLVED IN CONSERVATION AND PERSONALLY CONTRIBUTE TO MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE. FOR US, UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES, WE ARE ABLE TO ENGAGE WITH 30,000 PASSENGERS A YEAR, FROM ALL AROUND THE WORLD."

us to improve the visitor experience on our dive sites, once the corals are established," explains Alan, Founder of Passions of Paradise.

Throughout 2020, when they were unable to operate tours due to COVID, Alan continued once a week to take his staff out to the reef to plant corals.

"I'm really proud that we planted over 2000 corals in a three-month period and that we kept the dream alive for our staff. We were the only boat that kept



crew operating out of Cairns, but it leap-frogged us forward to now, where those 18 staff are still with me, and we're ready to launch this exciting new program. I see 'science-tourism' as an opportunity to really build the business."

In addition to the Coral Nurturing program, the company will offer a new 'environment dive', where guests can observe marine biologist, participating in survey work or other projects.

In 2021, Alan commissioned a new, smaller boat with an extended range, designed to undertake bespoke charters. It's an ideal platform for expanding the new 'science-tourism' arm of the business, working with researchers and special interest groups.

"We are a small, family-owned business. Our staff wear many hats and, consequently, have a lot of interaction

with our passengers. On a subtle and very personal level, we're immersing guests in our sustainability ethos throughout the day, inviting them to be part of it.

The focus on sustainability has been a point of difference for the company in a crowded market, which has been good for business.

Alan is often invited to be a spokesperson for the reef and dive tourism, and the company has been recognised as an industry leader with a variety of awards, including being inducted into the Queensland Tourism Hall of Fame.

"The reef's lesson is that we don't live in a vacuum – everything is connected, we are all components of a bigger picture. I love every day I spend on the reef – in 30 years I've never lost that sense of awe and connection." 🌿

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

For 15 years, Passions of Paradise has worked in collaboration with GBR Marine Parks Authority on the 'Eye on the Reef' monitoring program, Crown of Thorns eradication programs, and other stewardship projects on the Reef.

On board, single-use plastics have been eliminated and food waste monitored, while carbon emissions are offset by tree plantings in the Daintree Rainforest.

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