

INTERPRETATION PLAN



Reef & Beach

****Please note: This example is completely fictitious - it should give a good idea of how this template can be utilised in your business ****

NAME	DATE	SIGNED
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OVERVIEW OF THE INTERPRETATION PLAN

SCOPE

Our operation is run on the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and our tours visit outer reef clusters, Michaelmas Cay and Upolu Cay.

Operating within these areas requires careful planning to help avoid the negative ecological, social and cultural impacts that tourism can create. As such, it is important that we provide guests with accurate and relevant information about the areas, how we can reduce our impact and how to protect this incredible ecosystem.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

At Reef and Beach we believe that as an operator we play a vital role in the protection of the GBR and in the education of tourists visiting the area. Therefore, our operation is continually striving to be as sustainable as possible and looking for ways to pass on our philosophy and knowledge to our guests.

Our guests vary in age and interests however it is evident there is interest in the reef's sustainability and in conservation practices. We aim to provide guests with a higher interest in learning about this enough detailed material on key issues and key ecosystems. For the other guests, we aim to provide basic education on the reef and marine life in a way that is exciting and easy to embrace and understand. Effective interpretation not only improves a visitor's experience but also assists in minimising human impacts and managing visitor behaviour.

Our tours contain a high educational focus that teaches visitors about the impacts currently affecting the GBR, details of the amazing ecosystem itself and how we can minimise our impact whilst visiting the region. Our key message throughout our material is to prevent, reduce or mitigate any harmful effects.

INTERPRETATION TOPICS

The topics covered during the trip include:

- Vessel safety brief
- The history of the GBR and the variety of species within the ecosystem
- The crown of thorns starfish
- The significance of Michaelmas and Upolu Cay for bird populations
- The cultural significance of the GBR to Indigenous populations
- The impacts affecting reef systems – both direct and indirect
- How to reduce your impact whilst visiting the GBR
- Correct snorkelling technique
- Correct diving technique
- The importance of applying sunscreen well in advance of entering the water
- Why we cannot feed the fish

INTERPRETATION RESOURCES, MATERIALS AND DELIVERY

SUMMARY OF INTERPRETIVE MATERIALS

History of GBR and the variety of species within the ecosystem

During our travel time a DVD is played to guests that outlines the history of the GBR and details the vast variety of species found within the region. This DVD also provides guests information on the impacts tourism can have on these delicate systems and what can be done to prevent/reduce these.

Crown of thorns starfish

As we approach our first destination it is a staff member's responsibility to inform our guests that we are part of the "Reef Rescue" program responsible for monitoring crown of thorns starfish on the GBR. At this point we demonstrate what a crown of thorns starfish looks like with picture cards and outline the problems it is creating on reef systems. We also encourage our guests to inform staff of any sightings they may observe so that a team member can investigate and eradicate the threats in our area.

Significance of Michaelmas and Upolu Cay for bird populations

Before arriving at our second location, Michaelmas Cay, staff will provide a briefing to guests that outlines the rules for accessing the cay and interacting with the bird populations. It is stressed that no guest is to cross the roped barrier or to feed any birds whilst on the island. Additional information is available to any interested party that provides details of the species found here, the importance of the island as a breeding sight and a brief history of how Michaelmas was formed.

The cultural significance of the GBR to Indigenous populations

The DVD played during our travel to our first destination also provides the history of Indigenous culture on the GBR. This includes information on how Indigenous groups hunted within the region to sustain their lives back on the mainland.

The impacts affecting reef systems – both direct and indirect

Impacts including global warming, increased boating and tourism activity, over-fishing, terrestrial run-off and the crown of thorns starfish are covered at a number of stages of our tour. During diving and snorkelling tours, the impact of tourism, the crown of thorns starfish and sedimentation are outlined to the entire group before getting into the water and examples of these are also shown (if observed) during the sessions. Our glass bottom boat tour covers all of these topics as well and provides guests with visual example of the impacts. Our marine biologist and other staff will also provide this information to interested guests during our trip back to the harbour with particular focus on climate change. This informal presentation is run by our marine biologist in the form a short presentation and we encourage all to come and have a listen.

How to reduce your impact whilst visiting the GBR

Following the initial DVD, we also play another short DVD that outlines best practice whilst visiting the GBR. This DVD covers fish feeding, applying sunscreen in advance, not touching coral or marine life while in the water, how to avoid damaging coral with flippers and the damage littering can have, as well as information on the importance of the 'buddy system' and what dangerous species to look out for (i.e. jellyfish, trigger fish, stingrays, etc.).

Correct snorkelling & diving technique

When handing out snorkelling equipment, our staff will remind guests of the correct snorkelling techniques and how to avoid damaging coral with their flippers. This is relayed again to our dive customers by our diving instructors and on our snorkel tours by our guides.

The importance of applying sunscreen well in advance of entering the water

On our vessel we have “sunscreen time”. As a part of sun safety and to reduce the risk of sunscreen contaminating the waters, 30 minutes from our first destination a staff member will announce it is sun-screening time! During this time we will inform guests that it is important to apply sunscreen in advance to help it soak into the skin for protection and to prevent it running off the body and into the water. Staff will then navigate the vessel and provide any guest in need of sunscreen with our own ‘reef friendly’ sunscreen. Staff will also remind guests that when reapplying to allow 15 minutes before heading back into the water to reduce the risk of contamination.

Fish feeding

Fish feeding is prohibited on our vessel and guests are informed of this before any food is served. We ask our guest to please refrain from this and to bring any leftover food back to the kitchen or bins provided.

DETAILS OF INTERPRETIVE CONTENT**Interpretive resources include:**

- Welcome to the Great Barrier Reef DVD (background and information on ecosystem)
- Climate change and carbon offsetting DVD (on return home journey)
- How to reduce your impact on the GBR DVD
- Fish charts on walls of boat
- Michaelmas Cay bird chart
- Many books are available onboard about the GBR and our destinations
- Crown of thorns star fish identification card (pictures)
- Site information booklet
- Website information

Active interpretation includes:

- All staff
- Dive guides
- Marine biologist
- Snorkelling coaches
- Staff talks – sunscreen talk, snorkelling & diving inductions (flippers)
- Climate change speech from our marine biologist
- Interaction through discussion during activities and on trip back to harbour

SOURCES AND REFERENCES

- Reference books, such as
 - Daley, B. (2017) The Great Barrier Reef An Environmental History
 - Field, G. (2000) Developing ecotours and other interpretive activity programs: A guidebook for planning, designing, promoting and conducting ecotourism activity programs
 - Pocock, C. (2019) Visitor Encounters with the Great Barrier Reef: Aesthetics, Heritage, and the Senses
- Fact sheets and guest training materials provided by Ecotourism Australia
- Best practice guidelines in protected areas from IUCN
- Climate change information
 - <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/uploads/964cb874391d33dfd85ec959aa4141ff.pdf>
 - Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) website and publications

INTERPRETATION FOR TARGET GROUPS

- Our brochures are available in multiple languages to ensure guests understand our sustainability policy, guidelines and safety information.
- Our guides speak multiple languages including English, Spanish, German, Chinese and Japanese
- Safety information is provided at eye level for printed text.

PROCEDURES TO MAINTAIN INTERPRETATION QUALITY

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

When owning and running a vessel it is important to obtain customer feedback whenever possible. It is for this reason that we provide a guest book on the vessel where guests can make comments about the trip and their experiences. We also have a feedback section on our website that guests are encouraged to visit and give any feedback about their experience, both positive and negative. We use this information to ensure we are providing the best possible experience to our guests and to identify any areas that require improvement. It is also an excellent tool for monitoring the customer service and enthusiasm of our crew and on our education tools/messages. Facebook is another tool we encourage our guests to join us on and here they can also leave comments and find out about upcoming deals.

EVALUATION OF INTERPRETIVE MATERIALS

At Reef & Beach, we believe educating guests on relevant environmental issues related to the Great Barrier Reef is of the utmost importance. Education is an integral part of the successful delivery of our marine tours. As such, we ensure our interpretive materials remain up to date and are evaluated regularly.

Customer feedback often assists us in our evaluation process of our interpretive materials. We find guests have quite a lot to comment on regarding our educational experience we provide for them. Any

issues are areas for improvement are immediately highlighted and recorded so we can use them during evaluation.

The main materials we always maintain, regardless of any available guest feedback, are our climate change information, how guests can reduce their impacts, and the direct and indirect impacts, causes and effects on the GBR. We focus on these as our primary materials for evaluation because we believe it necessary to always have the latest information. If academic professionals, our marine biologist, scientific leaders, or government officials introduce new and valuable information, we utilise the data.

STAFF & GUIDE TRAINING AND INITIATIVES

All staff members must partake in our induction process before commencing work.

This process introduces the staff to:

- The environmental characteristics present in our tour and the sites we visit,
- The potential impacts associated with our operation and how to reduce these,
- Potential emergencies and the appropriate response procedures (groundings, chemical spills, boat strikes, etc.), and
- Our conservation programs (Reef watch and Reef Rescue).

We aim to have our staff very educated in regard to these areas and training will be conducted over a week long period. We also provide all staff with an education pack to help them understand our procedures and policies. This pack contains:

- Environmental management procedures including marine life handling, fish feeding and whale watching policies.
- Information on Michaelmas & Upolu Cay.
- The principles of ecotourism and certification information.
- EcoGuide program information for interested parties.
- The GBRMPA onboard tourism operator's handbook, Responsible Reef Practices.
- Cultural Heritage and Traditional Owner information.
- GBRMPA tour guide fact sheets regarding coral and reef fish facts, native title and climate change.

Training is an ongoing process at R&B and staff will continue to learn throughout their time on the vessel depending on their area of interest. We also have an annual refresher course each year or immediately after any changes are made to procedures. This ensures all staff are coherent with the procedures and potential impacts. All information taught is also readily available to staff at all times including procedural information, daily tasks, briefing information, emergency procedures, maintenance procedures, material on conservation methods and programs, climate change and online research papers.

Many of our staff have previous experience on boats and all of our instructors and guides have had additional training that has provided them with grounded knowledge of the reef. For those few that have not we encourage them to learn as much as possible from these staff and to partake in self learning at home. At staff meetings there is often delegated time for interpretative learning and this is usually run by our marine biologist.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

This year we aim to make some additional contributions to our operation including:

- Additional information posters to be put up on the vessel
- Incorporating a waste minimisation plan and material
- Encouraging our guides to gain EcoGuide certification

We have just recently decided to target schools and students for our reef trips. Our hope is to create interest within schools to have a learning day on the reef. Because of the high educational focus of our tour we hope to attract many local schools and run highly educational reef trips that will utilise all of our interpretation material.