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"The Best Job in the World": Queensland Campaign Results in 14,000 Applications for MPA Job

In January, the World Wide Web was abuzz with an advertisement for what was touted as "the best job in the world": a six-month, AU \$150,000 contract (US \$101,000) to serve as island caretaker in Australia's Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The job's main responsibility: to explore the natural wonders of the marine park and surrounding 600 islands, and post those experiences on the Internet. Within a month, more than 14,000 applications from 169 countries had been submitted for the position. More are still flooding in. The application period ends 22 February.

The job advertisement is the brainchild of Tourism Queensland, a Queensland state government agency, along with its creative firm Cummins and Nitro. Although the "island caretaker" position is real, it is less an actual caretaking job than a promotional one. According to the application form, "You'll be required to report back on your adventures to Tourism Queensland headquarters in Brisbane (and the rest of the world) via weekly blogs, photo diary, video updates and ongoing media interviews. On offer is a unique opportunity to help promote the wondrous Islands of the Great Barrier Reef." Other minor duties of the caretaker may reportedly include feeding fish, cleaning a pool, and/or collecting mail.

Nicole McNaughton, spokesperson for TQ, says the caretaker job was intended as an innovative way to cut through an increasingly cluttered travel market. "Travelers these days are placing increasing importance on first-hand reports from other travelers when they choose a holiday," says McNaughton. "So when Tourism Queensland was looking for an innovative way to promote our new Islands of the Great Barrier Reef campaign, what could be better than having a real and independent traveler based on a Great Barrier Reef island reporting on their personal experience?"

TQ took that concept farther by making it a real job with a global recruitment process. "This will enable the successful applicant to spend an extended amount of time really getting to know the Great Barrier Reef and its islands, to meet and spend time with Queensland locals, and truly experience all of the amazing things that bring people from around the world to visit," says McNaughton.

The total cost of "The Best Job in the World" campaign - including a multilingual website www.islandreefjob.com - will be AU \$1.7 million (US \$1.14 million), including investment from both TQ and industry partners. Tourism Queensland anticipates the unique campaign strategy will result in millions of additional dollars worth of free media exposure.

Coordinating with marine park officials

Over the course of the campaign's development, TQ updated its colleagues at the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), which oversees the marine park. "TQ briefed us on the campaign before the launch, and the success of the recruitment program has been wonderful," says Lorelle Schluter, Manager of Sustainable Development and Policy in GBRMPA's Tourism and Recreation Group. GBRMPA is working with TQ to coordinate an introduction for the successful applicant, including a tour of Reef HQ (GBRMPA's commercially-managed aquarium attraction), briefings with key GBRMPA staff, and potentially an opportunity to participate in a marine park compliance patrol.

"GBRMPA is particularly keen to have the successful applicant briefed on significant issues impacting the Great Barrier Reef, including climate change, impacts from coastal run-off, and illegal fishing," says Schluter. "The person who is appointed to this position will inevitably have to address these key issues, and we want him or her to have the information to set the story straight about how the Great Barrier Reef is being managed. It is important for us to get the message out there globally that the Great Barrier Reef is better managed than most other reefs in the world, and that this increases the resilience of the Reef, which helps it bounce back more quickly and efficiently from major disturbances."

The application process involves filling out a form on the campaign website (www.islandreefjob.com) and uploading a 60-second application video, explaining why the applicant is the best person for the job and demonstrating some knowledge of the Great Barrier Reef. Videos of applicants are currently viewable on the website. The successful candidate will be named on 6 May.

"Honestly, we have been overwhelmed by the response to the campaign," says McNaughton. "No one has ever done anything

like this before and the opportunity has captured the imagination of millions of people around the world. The thought of spending six months on a warm Queensland tropical island during the height of the Northern Hemisphere winter is particularly enticing."

For more information:

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