



Sunny Coast can lead a jobs boom



DON BOYD

THE Sunshine Coast could become Queensland's next jobs powerhouse – if it fully embraces the Asian Century.

Think of the Sunshine Coast and you likely conjure images of beautiful beaches and the iconic Glass House Mountains.

But these idyllic scenes don't reveal the full story of this region – or where it is heading.

For several years, the Sunshine Coast has been the quiet achiever of the Queensland economy, generating jobs and growth while other regions have stagnated or even slumped.

Now it is on the verge of a major leap forward driven by the opening of the University Hospital, higher education expansion and a new masterplanned CBD at Maroochydore.

But the Sunshine Coast has so far almost completely missed out on the Asian tourism boom – in stark contrast to the Gold Coast.

It welcomed 3.4 million overnight Australian visitors last year, not far behind the 3.7 million who visited the Gold Coast.

Yet while 292,000 Chinese visitors stayed on the Gold Coast in 2016, just 9000 took in the Sunshine Coast – a ratio of 32:1.

Now, the Sunshine Coast

has the natural beauty and leisure attractions to lure Asian visitors, but it has failed to capitalise on this new market because it lacks much basic international tourism infrastructure.

That is about to change.

The opening of a new, longer runway at Sunshine Coast Airport in 2020 will be a game-changer for international tourism in the region, allowing visitors to fly direct to Maroochydore from a host of Asian cities.

A lack of five-star hotels has also been an issue. The new CBD has a site earmarked for a premium hotel but more resort-style accommodation is needed.

Marketing the Sunshine

Coast internationally must also be made a priority.

The Gold Coast's success has been built on the back of four decades of marketing as Australia's No.1 holiday destination.

While Aussies know and love the Sunshine Coast, the word needs to be spread overseas – and that doesn't mean only China, but other destinations including Indonesia.

It's hard to overlook a country of 257 million people, especially one of our nearest neighbours.

With a middle class of 70 million that is rapidly growing, both in wealth and in size, Indonesia is a massive opportunity for astute tourism operators.

But why should Sunshine Coast residents want to grasp the opportunity presented by countries such

as China and Indonesia?

The Coast's population is expected to increase from 350,000 today to 550,000 by 2040. So if this region is to have a viable, prosperous future, it must continue to grow its employment base.

The next generation of residents will need new jobs and lots of them.

The region is well past the point at which Brisbane can provide the extra jobs it needs. Employment growth must now occur on the Coast itself.

China has forged a new future by opening itself up to the rest of the world – the Sunshine Coast can do the same by engaging with Asia.

Don Boyd is a director of both the Australian Centre on China in the World at ANU, and of SunCentral Maroochydore



SUNSHINE COAST: It's more than just a pretty place.