

# Business first for overseas visitors

Carolyn Herbert

NEW statistics have shown that international visitors don't see Western Australia primarily as a holiday destination, with more and more 'tourists' coming to WA for business purposes only.

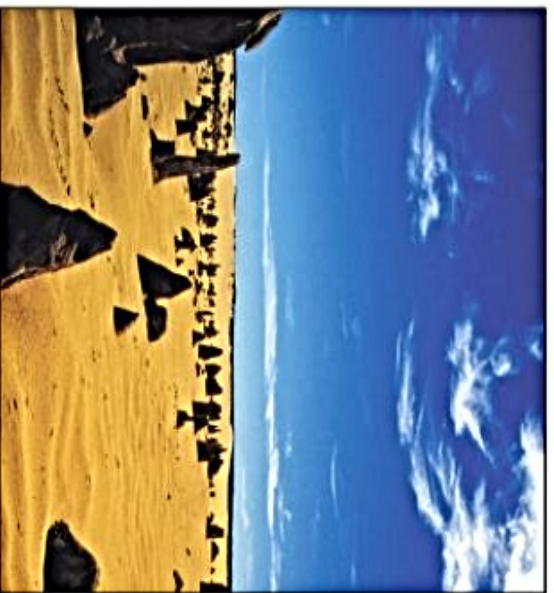
The International Overnight Visitor Results showed that the number of business visitors to WA in the year ending March 2011 rose by more than 23 per cent, with holiday visits up by only 2 per cent and visits for the purpose of education increasing 2.5 per cent.

Tourism Minister Kim Haines said business travellers currently made up more than 16 per cent of all international visitors, up from 13.6 per cent in the year ending December 2010. Meanwhile, the 'visiting friends and relatives' sector fell by more than 3 per cent.

International visits to WA have risen in the year ending March 2011 due to a big increase in business visitors and significant growth in the Chinese, Indonesian and US markets.

The International Overnight Visitor Results showed an overall increase of 2.6 per cent to 206,600 visitors to WA in the 12 months to March.

"This is a very pleasing result coming off the back of a 0.7 per cent decline in international visitors to WA in the previous survey for the 12 months to December 2010," Dr Haines said.



**STRICTLY BUSINESS:** International visitors are viewing Western Australia as more of a place of work than a holiday destination. Photo: Tim van Bronswijk

"Better still, the amount those visitors spent while here rose by 9.5 per cent, the second highest increase in Australia to \$1.9 million."

The most significant growth in visitors came from China 15,200 (+36 per cent), Indonesia 28,900 (+27.5 per cent) and the US 45,400 (+19.9 per cent).

"China continues to show enor-

mous potential, which we hope to tap into even further once direct flights to Perth are established and Tourism WA launches its new China marketing strategy," Dr Haines said.

However, Tourism Council of WA CEO Evan Hall warned that WA was not ready for large numbers of Chinese tourists, with not enough hotel rooms, Mandarin-speaking

staff or translation tourism guides to service the market.

"If they don't have a good experience they will stop coming," Mr Hall said. "We need a whole-of-government approach to get Western Australian tourism China-ready."

Dr Haines said Tourism WA was developing strategies to increase the contribution of business travel to WA's visitor economy.

"These include building the meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) sector, positioning WA as a holiday destination to business visitors by encouraging them to extend their visit or to come back to holiday with their families, and creating events and experiences alongside conventions and conferences," he said.

The federal government has set up a working group that would consider ways of making it easier for travellers to get into and around Australia.

The Tourism Access Working Group is made up of representatives from airlines, airports, industry associations and government.

Minister Assisting on Tourism, Senator Nick Sherry, said the working group would ensure the government could address the barriers to the growth of the tourism industry.

"By 2020, the number of seats on flights to and from Australia needs to grow by between one-third and a half, while the number of domestic seats needs to rise by about a quarter," Senator Sherry said.