



Fresh strategy: Stephen Lowe poses for tourists Mel Khong and Challice Chan at Whiteman Park. Picture: Sharon Smith

Tourism industry battles worst of times

■ Kent Acott

Many local tourism operators, already battered by the 2008 global financial crisis, are in the middle of another battle — and some say they may not survive.

The surging Australian dollar, which makes overseas travel cheaper for Australians and holidays in Australia more expensive for international visitors, is starting to bite the industry badly.

One operator said the past 12 months had been “the toughest of his working life” as he struggled to

stay afloat. Another said many tourism-related businesses may be forced to close.

They would be the quiet victims of the economic boom.

Rockingham Wild Encounters owner Terry Howson said he had never seen it so bad.

“We keep hearing about the boom and how all the big hotels in Perth are always full,” he said. “But the grassroots operators are really suffering. Some will not survive.”

Tourism WA chief executive Stephanie Buckland said there was no doubt the strong Australian dollar

was posing considerable challenges to tourism in WA. Last year, there were 4600 fewer international visitors to WA than in 2009.

Tourism Council chief Evan Hall said tough times meant tourism operators had to be efficient and imaginative to attract visitors.

Whiteman Park manager Stephen Lowe changed the attraction’s marketing strategy about the time of the GFC and has bucked the trend.

“We’ve seen increased patronage of between 4 and 8 per cent in each of the past three years,” he said.