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Cairns a victim of \$1.4bn Chinese New Year tourist hit

CAIRNS would be one holiday destination to seriously suffer because of the absence of cashed-up Chinese tourists during Chinese New Year celebrations.

Australia's retail and hospitality sectors are expected to suffer a \$1.4bn financial hit because of international border closures. Chinese New Year falls on February 12 and it's also the month that traditionally has the biggest influx of Chinese tourists to Australia.

In 2019, more than 200,000, or 14 per cent, of short-term visitors from China that year arrived in February, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

That number was drastically reduced to 21,000 in 2020 as the borders closed because of the coronavirus outbreak.

With tourist flights from China grounded, let alone the rest of the world, the financial fallout will be immense, says National Retailers Association CEO Dominique Lamb.

She said Chinese visitors more or less came to Australia with "empty suitcases" in February with a plan to go on a high-end spree for gifts to take home.

The average Chinese tourist spent slightly more than \$8500, totalling \$1.755bn, in February 2019.

Retail expert Gary Mortimer said travelling and shopping tours had become a trend among the Chinese middle class.

Their absence would be felt across all sectors, from retail through to tour operators and even casinos.

"The latest numbers indicate a 99.8 per cent decline in short-term visitors from China, so I would expect it to be close to a \$1.4bn loss to the economy, and that's not even including domestic flights," the Queensland University of Technology professor said. Queensland Tourism Industry Council CEO Daniel Gschwind predicted the Sunshine State would miss out on more than \$300m in Chinese tourist dollars. "It's going to be quite significant, especially those in areas that are highly dependent on the Chinese tourist dollar like Cairns and the Gold Coast," he said.

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