

Data backs bid to home in on China

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THE State Government will keep targeting Chinese tourists but renew its focus on domestic flight links to Cairns in the wake of Cathay Pacific's shock departure.

Tourism Minister Kate Jones said latest passenger figures suggested 75 per cent of international visitors to the region came via domestic flights.

"Growing Chinese and European visitation remains an important part of our strategy, in partnership with Cairns Airport, to grow the local tourism industry," she said.

"Domestic flights are just as important as international flights when it comes to achieving that goal.

"That's another reason we're also focusing on making it easier for tourists to get to Cairns from Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane."

Ms Jones' comments tie in with the "Team Queensland" rhetoric bandied about at the Empowering the Regions forum in Cairns on Wednesday, where Australian Industry Group head Shane Rodgers made a pitch that what is good for the Brisbane Airport is good for Cairns.

It truly is a tale of two cities.



CANCELLED: A Cathay Pacific jet landing at Cairns Airport.

The Cairns Airport had been poised for a \$1 billion redevelopment to be funded through the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility until then-new CEO Norris Carter grounded the plan in 2017.

The Cairns Airport opted for a \$55 million upgrade to the domestic terminal instead.

The Brisbane Airport Corporation is spending \$1.7 billion on a new runway, redeveloping the domestic terminal, a new multistorey car park, "passenger-friendly" technology, and developing an industrial park and \$300 million "auto mall" luxury car sales precinct complete with its own racetrack.

Plenty has been said about diversifying the Far North's reliance on China, but with total Chinese overnight visitor expenditure in Queensland ex-

pected to grow by 13 per cent annually between now and 2022, it will remain the state's chief target market.

Travellers hoping for Emirates to open a Cairns route would be disappointed to learn the airline has its own troubles, reporting a 69 per cent drop in profit as it combats rising fuel costs, weaker passenger growth and a high US dollar.

"At the moment, more than 200,000 Chinese visitors spend over \$200 million in Tropical North Queensland each year," Ms Jones said.

"The latest data shows these numbers are tipped to grow to more than 60,000 people by 2022."

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