

Tourism

Business start-up guide

Tourism industry overview

Tour operators provide tourism services to international and domestic visitors such as city day tours, overnight or multi-day round trips and adventure tours such as boating, rafting or climbing.

Starting or buying a tourism business involves many essential steps. Legally, you must ensure that you apply for and receive the correct licences.

This guide explains how to start a tourism business in Queensland. It will help you understand the challenges and opportunities of entering the tourism industry so you can make good business decisions.

Getting into the tourism industry

Before you start a tourism business, you need to understand how the industry works, what things you need to consider in your planning, and the legal requirements you must meet.

Finding a competitive edge in Queensland's tourism industry

Tour operators compete on a range of factors depending on the type of tour they run. Some tour operators compete on product quality (e.g. small group or personal tours), customer service or they target niche markets, such as adventure tourism or ecotourism.

Other tour operators compete on price to attract customers such as family groups who want value for money or backpackers who have a limited budget.

To give your tour operating business a competitive edge, assess who your main customers will be (families, business travellers or backpackers) and whether you need to compete on the quality of your service or price.

Also consider becoming a member of a group buying, promotion and marketing scheme with travel agency, flight, accommodation and car hire businesses to stay competitive.

Key success factors for a tourism business

To start a successful tourism business, you need to:

- hire a multi-skilled and flexible workforce
- adopt new technology
- market and advertise your tour
- place your tour operation near your target customers
- do your best to obtain positive word-of-mouth recommendations.

Tourism industry entry barriers

Generally, the tourism industry has low entry barriers for new operators. Smaller operators, particularly those competing in niche market segments (e.g. ecotourism, adventure tourism), have minimal start-up costs.

Operators wanting to compete on a national level can find it hard to break into the tourism industry because the Australian tourism market is dominated by a number of major tour operators.

(Source IBISWorld, March 2012)

Tourism industry requirements

There are a number of licensing and registration regulations that govern the tourism industry, particularly for those taking people to national parks and environmentally sensitive areas. When starting a tour operating business you need to consider the following requirements.

Inbound tour activities

To sell and operate tours for international visitors (inbound tour activities), you may need an [Inbound Tour Operators Registration](#) from the



Office of Fair Trading. Licences cost from \$615 to \$1845, with a registration fee of \$61 and criminal history check for \$35.90 and you must provide the names of all people associated with your business or company in your application.

Supplying alcohol to customers

To supply alcohol to your tour customers (usually on longer multi-day trips where you may stay in temporary accommodation), you may need a:

- [Liquor Licence \(Commercial other\)](#) from the Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation (OLGR). Licence fees vary depending on your tour operation so check with OLGR when you apply.
- [Commercial Special Facility Licence](#) from OLGR. You need this licence for any premises or facilities where you provide liquor to the public. Make sure to tell OLGR whether you want to sell or supply free alcohol to your customers so they can put the specific conditions in your licence document. Licence costs depending on your tour operation so check with the OLGR when you apply.

Operating a food facility

To operate a food facility as part of your tourism business, you may need a Food Business Licence from [your local council](#). Licence costs and application processing times will vary so check details with your local council when you apply. Licensed food businesses may have more than 1 registered premises.

Operating radio transmitter equipment

To operate radio transmitter equipment as part of your tourism business, you may need a Radio Communications (Apparatus) Licence - Transmit from the [Australian Communications and Media Authority](#). Licence costs vary and it can take the Australian Communications and Media Authority 2 weeks to process your application.

Commercial activities (e.g. fishing tours, fossicking, fossickers camping tours)

To do activities, such as fishing and fossicking, as part of your tour business, you may need 1 or all of the following:

- [Charter Fishing Licence](#) from Fisheries Queensland. Fees will vary and it can take up to 6 weeks to process your application. This licence is required to conduct commercial fishing

charters with at least 1 boat of any size in offshore waters. The boat must be in water at least 2m deep, and not in a waterway or on a foreshore.

- [Fossickers Licence \(Commercial Tour Operator\)](#) from the Department of Natural Resources and Mines (DNRM). The application fee can be paid monthly or yearly. This licence is required to fossick for gemstones, ornamental stones, mineral specimens and alluvial gold for recreational and tourist purposes. In most cases, landowner's permission must be obtained before entering the premises.
- [Commercial Tour Operator Fossickers Camping Permit](#) from DNRM. The fee for this licence can be paid by the night or week. This permit is required by commercial tour operators when bringing groups to certain designated fossicking areas where camping is regulated. This permit cannot be transferred.

Conducting environmentally relevant activities (ERA)

To conduct environmentally relevant activities (such as fossicking for gold or other metals, which may potentially release contaminants to the environment), you may need an Environmentally Relevant Activity Licence (a part of the development permit) from [your local council](#). Licence costs vary and it can take the council up to 4 weeks to process your application.

Keeping animals other than dogs or cats

To keep animals other than dogs or cats as part of your tour operating business, you may need a Keeping of Animals other than Dogs or Cats Permit from [your local council](#).

Commercial activities protected natural areas

To operate commercial tours in certain areas of Queensland, you may need 1 or more of the permits listed below:

National Park

[Permit for Commercial Activities within National Parks \(Tour Operations\)](#) from the Queensland Government. This permit stays in effect for up to 3 years and cannot be transferred.



State Forest

[Commercial Activity Permit](#) from the Queensland Government. Permit costs vary depending on your tour operation and it can take up to 2 months to process your application. You need this permit to operate commercial tours in a Queensland forest.

Commonwealth National Parks

[Permit to Conduct Commercial Activities in Commonwealth National Parks](#) from the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (DSEWPC). You need this permit to conduct commercial activities in all reserves, including marine reserves. This permit stays in effect for up to 12 months and cannot be transferred. Permit costs vary and it can take the department up to 4 weeks to process your application.

Great Barrier Reef

[Permit for Activities in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park](#) from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA). You need this permit for commercial activities not regulated by GBRMPA, and you must submit your application 4 months before your tour begins.

Heard Island

Heard Island - Permit to Enter from [DSEWPC](#).

Moreton Island

Permit to Conduct Commercial Tours and Activities on Moreton Island from [DSEWPC](#). Permits cannot be transferred.

Fraser Island

Permit to Conduct Commercial Tours and Activities on Fraser Island from [DSEWPC](#). Permits cannot be transferred.

Queensland Marine Parks

Permit to Carry Out Activities in Queensland Marine Parks from [DSEWPC](#). You need this permit for commercial tourism, any development work and mariculture and commercial collecting, within Queensland Marine Parks. Permits cannot be transferred.

Antarctic region

[Environmental Impact - Australian Antarctic Territory Permit](#) from DSEWPC. Permits are free but it will take DSEWPC 4 weeks to process your

application. In most cases, you need this permit to undertake commercial or non-commercial activities in the Australian region of the Antarctic.

Bathing reserves

Activities in Bathing Reserves Permit from [your local council](#). It can take the council 4 weeks to process your application. Use of bathing reserves, including the hire of aquatic equipment in designated bathing reserves, is regulated to enhance public safety.

Whale watching

[Permit to Undertake Whale Watching](#) from Environment Australia.

Transportation

To transport your tour customers by water, sea or road, you may need 1 or more of the following permits listed below:

Vessel

- **Certificate of Competency Recognition (Commercial)** from [Maritime Safety Queensland \(MSQ\)](#). Certificate costs vary and it will take MSQ 2 months to process your application. Certification is required to operate as a master of a commercial vessel in Queensland. This certificate cannot be transferred.
- **Certificate of Registration – Commercial Ships** from MSQ. Certificate costs vary and it will take MSQ 28 days to process your application. Registration is valid for 12 months and can be transferred. **Note:** you do not need this certificate for private pleasure vessels or fishing vessels less than 10m long.
- **Certificate of Survey** from MSQ. Certificate costs vary and it will take MSQ 28 days to process your application.
- **Commercial Use of Jetties Permit** from [your local council](#). Permit costs vary depending on your tour operation and it will take the council 4 weeks to process your application. All commercial vessels must be approved to use jetties and pay mooring fees.

Sea installation

[Permit to Operate a Sea Installation](#) from the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. You need this permit to operate a sea installation, which is a structure that is either attached to



the sea floor or floating and used for an environmental related activity.

Road

- [Driver Authorisation](#) from the Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR). Authorisation costs vary depending on your business operations and it can take up to 2 weeks to process your application. This certificate is required for any person who drives a vehicle providing a public passenger service in Queensland. You must ensure that any public passenger drivers are capable of safely operating the relevant type of vehicle, are aware of their customer service responsibilities, and conduct themselves appropriately.
- [Operator Accreditation](#) from TMR. Accreditation costs vary depending on your business operations and it can take up to 2 weeks to process your application. Accreditation is required for any person operating a public passenger service in Queensland.

Limousine

- [Limousine Service Licence](#) from the Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR). Limousine licences cost \$149.35 per year, and it will take 4 weeks to process your application.
- [Special Purpose Limousine Service Licence](#) from TMR. This licence is required for vehicles over 30 years old, or for a stretched version of a luxury vehicle that is not eligible to operate because it is over the maximum age limit. There is a one-off initial fee of \$2161.90.

Legislation that may apply to your business

- *Customs Act 1901*
- *Duties Act 2001*
- *Fair Trading Act 1989*
- *Fire and Rescue Authority Act 1990*
- *Food Act 2006*
- *Fossicking Act 1994*
- *Local Government Act 1993*
- *Retail Shop Leases Act 1994*
- *Sale of Goods (Vienna Convention) Act 1986*
- *Second-hand Dealers and Pawnbrokers Act 1984*
- *Trading Hours (Allowable Hours) Act 1990*
- *Tourism Services Act 2003*
- *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*

To access copies of legislation, visit www.legislation.qld.gov.au.

Useful industry contacts

Business Support Unit

For more information on licences, regulations, market research, business planning and other support services phone 13 25 23 or visit business.qld.gov.au

Australian Federation of Travel Agents

Phone 1300 363 416

Visit www.afta.com.au

Queensland Tourism Industry Council

Phone (07) 3236 1445

Visit www.qtic.com.au

Sustainable Tourism Online

Phone (07) 3238 1900

Visit www.sustainabletourisonline.com

Tourism Australia

Phone (02) 9360 1111

Visit www.tourism.australia.com

Tourism Queensland

Phone (07) 3535 3535

Visit www.tq.com.au

