

Katherine reflects on role

By Angela Norval

With Bundaberg Tourism announcing a planned leadership transition and chief executive officer Katherine Reid to step down in November, it is a time of reflection of a time that has been fun, frustrating and educational and a journey that she would do over again and again.

Katherine's tourism story really started when she was a teenager and her father pulled the children out of school in Newcastle and moved the family to a tiny coastal community at the end of a dirt road, called the Town of 1770.

Katherine said while at the time it felt like the end of the earth, but looking back it was the beginning of everything for her.

"Growing up in a tourism town I watched first hand how visitors could shape a community and how local people could build businesses from passion, hard work and sense of place," she said.

"Our family was involved in tourism and hospitality, and from a young age I developed a love of sharing our backyard with others.

"I don't think I originally consciously chose tourism.

"It was simply the world I grew up in, but now, I choose it every day."

Interestingly, Katherine began her journey with Bundaberg Tourism at a time when she was working within the industry as a tourism operator and regularly engaging with Bundaberg Tourism as a member business.

"From that perspective, I could see a gap as the organisation didn't have a dedicated marketing role and I felt there was an opportunity to better connect destination marketing, industry needs and visitor outcomes.

"Rather than waiting for a position to come up, and with the support of some incredible mentors, I wrote a position description for a marketing manager role, booked a meeting with the general manager, Rick Matkowski, and pitched myself for the job.

"Thankfully Rick and the Board agreed to take a chance on me!

"That role gave me the opportunity to help shape how the region was marketed, to introduce digital activity into the marketing mix and to support the industry to connect.

"After two years, on retirement of the general manager at the time, I was successful in my application for the general manager role and eventually became chief executive officer as both the organisation and its responsibilities evolved.

"Looking back, it's probably a good example of something I've always believed in, if you see an opportunity to make something better, don't just talk about it, roll up your sleeves and be part of the solution."

Katherine describes fulfilling this role overall as honestly one of the greatest privileges of her career.

Although she came from a tourism business background herself, she moved into the regional tourism organisation space because she wanted to make a bigger difference.

"I loved the idea of collective impact, bringing people together and creating opportunities that could lift an entire region rather than a single business.

"Over the years I've had the privilege of watch-



Katherine Reid loving the Lady Musgrave Island LME pontoon launch in October 2021. (Supplied)

ing businesses grow from dream to reality.

"Businesses like Splitters Farm, Lady Musgrave Experience, Kalki Moon, Tinaberries, Macadamias Australia, Taribelang Bunda Cultural Tours, One Little Farm, Turtle Sands Nature Resort and Monsoon Aquatics have all helped shape the visitor experience we offer today.

"Seeing operators take an idea, back themselves and build something remarkable has been incredibly rewarding and in so many ways, their success are the real success stories of tourism in our region.

"Equally, I am deeply grateful to the volunteer

Board Directors I've had the privilege of serving under and alongside.

"These are people who freely give their time because they care about the success of the region.

"Their support, counsel and willingness to lean into big opportunities and challenges have helped shape not only Bundaberg Tourism, but also me as a leader."

One thing in particular that Katherine has witnessed first hand, especially during times like Covid and overseas strife - that tourism is remarkably resilient, because people are remarkably resilient.



Working with rangers in charge to promote the Mon Repos Conservation Park.

"No matter what is happening in the world, people still crave connection.

"They still need a break, an adventure, time with family, and the opportunity to create memories together.

"COVID challenged all of us, but it also reminded me that the people behind the tourism industry are incredibly supportive.

"Businesses checked on each other, shared information, encouraged one another and found ways to keep moving forward despite enormous uncertainty and its those relationships that keep everyone going today.

"I think one of the strengths of our region is that we're genuinely welcoming and that sense of community becomes even more important during difficult times."

Bundaberg Tourism has welcomed the opportunity to update its website and logo with Katherine highlighting that the Bundaberg region was ready for a contemporary destination brand and a refreshed, responsive website that could properly showcase the experiences and personalities that people find when they visit.

The project was passionately led by brand and marketing manager, Ellie Traynor, who had, until this year, devoted almost a decade to helping tell the region's story together with Katherine and the response from industry and stakeholders has been incredibly positive.

"I think we've created something that gives people a shared sense of pride in where we live and what we offer visitors.

"Most importantly, it provides a strong platform for the incoming chief executive officer and team to continue building on in the years ahead.

"Ultimately tourism is all about connection, it's inviting someone to experience your favourite place, meet your favourite people, taste the food you love and hear the stories that matter to your community.

"At its best, tourism is sitting around a table sharing food, conversation and experiences and that's what I've always loved about it."

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There have been so many people Katherine has enjoyed working with including Loni Hammond (left).



Team Bundaberg showcasing all they have to offer at a special event.

Asked what her favourite moments throughout her career with Bundaberg Tourism Katherine said:

- Winning Gold for Destination Marketing at the 2015 Australian Tourism Awards for the 2013/14 for the Bundaberg Turtle Campaign was incredibly special because it showcased our region on the national stage, as well as celebrating our collaborative marketing partnership with Tourism and Events Queensland and Mon Repos at the time.
- Supporting the funding and development journey of the Mon Repos Turtle Centre. Seeing that world-class facility become a reality was something many people had worked towards for decades and it's such an incredible example of tourism helping to tell a conservation story.
- The launch of Lady Musgrave Experience, as a result of a mission that started before my arrival and was supported by so many people across the region. A challenge that I was proud to take on and help bring to life.

Looking ahead, Katherine is ready to spend some time with her family and take a breath.

"After 14 years of living and breathing Bundaberg Tourism, it's time to pause, reflect and enjoy some space.

"Beyond that, tourism has been such a big part of my life that I can't imagine straying too far from it and I'm sure I'll continue finding ways to contribute to an industry and a region that mean so much to me.

"If there is one piece of advice I can give to whoever fulfils my role it is, remember that destination management is just as much about return on relationship as it is return on investment.

"Tourism is built on trust, partnerships and people.

"The data, campaigns and strategies matter, but lasting success comes from the relationships you build along the way.

"Listen often. Stay curious. Be collaborative.

"And never lose sight of the people whose livelihoods depend on the decisions you make."



A welcome time with colleagues and friends in 1770 in 2020.



Katherine Reid, TEQ CEO Craig Davidson and QTIC CEO Tash Wheeler. (Supplied)



Katherine Reid and Janelle Boyd at Turtle Sands in 2023.

Gin Gin is represented

By Matt Gees

The Royal Queensland Show has always been about bringing the country to the city, and this year The Ekka will also host the 2026 Agricultural Shows Australia National Championships for the Young Judges, Young Paraders and Rural Ambassador competitions.

Gin Gin's Elliott Apel won the Rural Ambassador title at the Gin Gin Show in 2025 before moving through sub-chamber and state finals to make it to the national competition.

"It's a big step up from sub-chamber to the state finals," Mr Apel said.

"The state finals at the Ekka last year had me up against some impressive individuals, like helicopter pilots and teachers in rural communities, so it was a big surprise when I made it through."

Mr Apel is looking forward to being part of the competition, as it offers an opportunity to share his passion for rural communities and what they offer.

"I am passionate about sugar and finance," he said.

"Sugar is the second-biggest export out of Queensland, and through my work as a commodity trader with Queensland Sugar Limited, I spend a lot of time travelling to help farmers get their product onto international markets and helping teach young farmers starting out how to enter the global markets."

Mr Apel says it is these opportunities that give him enjoyment in the Rural Ambassador competition and keep him in touch with rural communities while representing them at the Ekka.

"In the National Competition, judges are looking at a higher level, how the individual is making an impact, and then also considering at a national level how these individuals will go on to change or make change in the industry," he said.

"I want to be a strong, authentic voice for the agriculture industry, but not one that wears a suit in Queen Street or Canberra. I really want to be a leader with boots on the ground and have true influence on the industry. The Rural Ambassador competition has helped me grow as a person, and I've really enjoyed this last year travelling around to country shows, meeting the locals and learning more about their communities."

The winners in both the Rural Ambassador and Showgirl competitions will be announced at a gala event in Brisbane on Sunday 9 August.

Bundaberg showgirl Vanessa Beavan and Biggenden Rural Ambassador Holly Ahern, will represent the Burnett Sub-Chamber in their 2026 Queensland finals, held as part of the same gala event.

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