



AUSTRALIA SLIPS IN WORLD RANKINGS



P: +61 7 3012 9575
F: +61 7 3210 0044

GPO box 2301
Brisbane QLD 4001

info@globaleco.com.au
www.globaleco.com.au

Australia's ecotourism industry has been served a wake-up call with the launch of a definitive guidebook to the best ecolodges in the world, written by leading authority Hitesh Mehta.

Published by Harper Collins, *Authentic Ecolodges* will be launched in Australia at the **Asia Pacific Global Eco conference in Noosa, October 25 – 28**, the annual conference of Ecotourism Australia.

Just two Australian properties were included in the landmark book.

"Hitesh Mehta is widely acknowledged as a world leader in this field and it is disappointing Australia doesn't feature more prominently in his book," said Mr Tony Charters, ecotourism veteran and convenor of the **Global Eco** conference.

"Australia was one of the ecotourism leaders in the '90s and the industry was especially revered for its innovation in the design and technology of ecolodges. We set a new standard for products, integrating and interpreting the environment, giving visitors a tangible experience that made an impression on their lives. The rest of the world looked up to Australia for its excellence in ecotourism.

"But we are a faint echo of our past, we have lost our voice and many of our competitors have overpowered us."

The two Australian properties listed in the highly acclaimed book by Mehta are, *Daintree EcoLodge and Spa* in Far North Queensland and *Bay of Fires Lodge* in Tasmania.

"I have always enjoyed Australia, and as someone passionate about design and authentic eco experiences it was one country I was really looking forward to seeing again when I started this project nearly three years ago," said Mr Mehta.



“But having visited forty-six countries and developed a new ecolodge rating system to compare the architecture, sustainability and the marriage of development with the landscape and indigenous communities, it was really only these two that could compare on a global footing.”

Ecotourism makes up the largest single sector of Australia’s tourism industry and the **Global Eco** conference will bring together government policy-makers and industry leaders to explore development potential in natural areas.

Global Eco will be a critical forum for Australia’s ecotourism industry to examine opportunities to re-invigorate the industry, under the theme ‘Experience is Everything’.

Keynote speakers from around the world will present the latest innovations and best practice.

“Australia can’t compete with its neighbours on price so it has to compete through quality, innovative experiences and authenticity,” said Mr Charters.

“This can only be developed by industry and government working together. We need world class national park facilities, world class eco accommodation and world class eco tours.

“Unfortunately we have been living off past glories and while we rested on our laurels our competitors picked up the best of our ideas, improved on them and are now out competing us.

“Many State governments around Australia are making progress in identifying areas that could attract high quality ecotourism whilst protecting the environment,” said Mr Charters.

“However, at a federal level, particularly within World Heritage Areas and National Landscapes, significant funding for tourism facilities such as lookouts, camp sites, tracks and trails is required. These facilities provide a foundation for the industry to invest in ecolodges and commercial attractions, and at the same time benefit local communities.

“This is something the industry will need to vigorously pursue with the next Prime Minister and federal tourism minister.”

Full details of the Global Eco program are available at www.globaleco.com.au

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Michelle Farquhar

Director of Media

Asia Pacific Global Eco

0432 334 994

Tony Charters

Global Eco Convenor

0418 122 025