



## **AUSSIES WORKING WORLD'S LONGEST HOURS**

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Watching the hours slowly tick away in a grey bland office would surely have most dreaming of their next holiday.

Especially for those who have just returned to work after their summer break.

But from office workers to tradies, many Aussies will tough out the 9 to 5 grind, day in and day out, without the reward of a single beach trip or city escape.

Shockingly, one third of full-time workers will take not one day of annual leave this year, according to the country's largest ever study into annual leave accrual undertaken by Tourism Australia.

The figures show Australians work the longest hours in the developed world.

Nearly 60 per cent of full-timers don't use their four weeks holidays each year and have 8 weeks or more up their sleeve.

Corporate men aged between 35 and 49 represent the largest group with accrued leave - and half of them have children under the age of 12.

All this adds up to 121 million days of accrued annual leave, equalling \$31 billion in holiday pay.

Tourism Australia wants to unlock that time to grow Australia's domestic tourism industry - and give workers a well-earned rest.

Tourism Australia's No Leave, No Life program hopes to do that by joining with business groups to create a new psyche - that it's okay to take time off.

At the same time, a domestic marketing campaign will wave visions of what Australia has to offer under the noses of fatigued workers, hoping to add to the \$65 billion that domestic trips generate annually for the economy.

Tourism Australia managing director Geoff Buckley said there had been a shift in Australia's traditionally laid-back psyche to one where diligent workers were too busy to glance at a holiday brochure.

"You've got younger people who are driving to create a career and don't take the leave that they're owed," Mr Buckley said.

"Or there is the other end of the market where they're worried about taking leave and maybe not having a job at the end of it.

"And then there is a whole group who are keeping that leave up their sleeve in case something happens.

"That's a big risk strategy for people with families or who are struggling to pay the mortgage. It's almost like a forced savings."

And when people do take time off, they're opting for short, weekend escapes over the traditional month-long coast holiday, popular 20 years ago.

Mr Buckley said many people felt a short break was enough, while others had too much trouble finding a long stretch when both partners could get time off work.

It's hoped the program can convince people they need longer to relax and regenerate with family and friends to avoid burning out.

It's also hoped it will be a shot in the arm for an industry already in turbulent times.

Numbers of national and international travellers were stagnant last year under the weight of a strong Aussie dollar, high fuel prices and soaring interest rates.

The global financial crisis has made matters worse and a dire 2009 is predicted.

Tourism Research Australia predicts the value of inbound tourism for 2009 will drop by four per cent, or \$500 million, to \$24 billion.

The number of visitors is forecast to fall from 5.56 million to 5.33 million, with the year shaping as the industry's worst since 1989.

It's thought international numbers will recover by 2010, but other experts warn the pain may continue well into 2010.

The federal government hopes getting more Aussies to holiday in their own back yard will ease the pain.



"It's good for business, good for employees and, potentially, good for our tourism industry as it faces some tough times because of the global financial crisis," Tourism Minister Martin Ferguson said.

"Unlocking even a small portion of the 121 million days of accrued leave and turning it into a domestic Australian holiday will make a very important contribution to our tourism industry and help support the almost 500,000 Australians who are directly employed.

"It really is a cultural shift that we're trying to engender for Australia and I think that's going to take the resources of both the government and the private sector.

"We're not naive enough to think that people won't also want to travel overseas as well but if we can increase the pie then Australian tourism will get a share of that."

All that's left is for workers to convert their office day dreams of new and exciting places to the real thing.

***Aussies working world's longest hours***

AAP, Sydney Morning Herald, January 9, 2009

