

with gross regional product of \$18.1 billion and 3.3% unemployed



CHECKING IN: Business guests like Joe Land have kept Mackay's hotel industry busy, according to Shakespeare International Motel receptionist Amber Spencer.

PHOTO: TONY MARTIN



JOBS GALORE: IPA Personnel branch manager John Williams says there are hundreds of trades-based jobs on offer.

PHOTO: TONY MARTIN

REGIONAL PROFILE

- Mackay-Whitsunday-Isaac region's gross regional product was \$18.1 billion at the end of last financial year.
- Our region contributed 7.4% of the gross state product.
- The fastest growing sectors were construction, transport and warehousing, administration and support services and arts and recreation services.
- The region's unemployment was just 3.3% in the December quarter, compared to 5.2% across Queensland.
- The region's total industry productivity (industry value added per hour worked) was \$135.97 in 2009-10, up 8.7% from the previous year. This was 118% higher than the state average.
- The mining industry's location is 10 times more important to our region's economy than to the national economy.
- More than 1.3 million visitors came to the region last year, including 244,000 overseas travellers. Most visitors to the Whitsundays were on holidays, while most Mackay visitors were on business.

"The roles that are not hard to fill are the white collar office staff jobs," Mr Williams said.

"But right across the board, from your truck drivers to any of the trades and those in demand at the mines (skilled workers) are very scarce.

"There are hundreds of vacancies in trades jobs (including drivers) at any one time.

"With the planned growth it's just going to continue to create a larger hole."

Mr Williams said em-

ployers were trying to keep a ceiling on pay rates for in-demand jobs, to discourage workers from skipping from one job to another slightly-higher-paying job.

Employers, through the Mackay Area Industry Network, were lobbying the government to ease visa restrictions so they could import skilled workers to ease the shortage, he said.

The opening of the expanded Caneland Central and Northern Beaches Central Shopping Centre

later this year was the next challenge, boosting demand for retail workers, he said.

However, REDC is working to help attract more retail workers.

Mr Williams said partners of those who moved to the region to work in the mining industry played an essential role filling office support and retail jobs.

Mackay was the only region in the state to record growth in its visitor markets, with accommodation houses averaging 90% occupancy from Monday to

Thursday.

Shakespeare International Motel receptionist Amber Spencer said Mackay's hotel industry had boomed for the last three years.

"From Monday to Thursday evening inclusive, we are usually running at 100% occupancy," Ms Spencer said.

"It's because we're in such a busy mining community that most of our clientele are here (during the week).

"I think we're in our second mining boom now: in

the last two months it's really picked up.

"People have to book a fortnight in advance (if they want to stay from Monday to Thursday).

"They're all staying for more than the one night.

"At least half would stay from Monday to Thursday or Friday. Friday is my busiest day for check outs."

Ms Spencer said the motel accommodated a lot of families from mining communities like Moranbah, who came to Mackay for recreation, on weekends.

Restaurant trade stays buoyant

By **KATE BASTABLE**
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WHEN the going gets tough, eating out is one of the first of life's luxuries to go.

But while increased living expenses, including interest rate rises, caused some Mackay home owners to tighten the purse strings during the past year, our restaurants appear to be bubbling along quite well.

Sorbello's Italian Restaurant owner Alex Sorbello, who has worked in the hospitality industry for 30 years, has seen his fair share of ups and downs.

He says Mackay's restaurants fared better than others in the state last year, with business remaining steady.

"I wouldn't say that (2010) was the biggest year," Mr Sorbello said.

"This year is definitely slower. The interest rates are probably the biggest factor.

"People are saving more to

get their loans, so they're doing a little bit less.

"You dine out less than normal.

"The busy times like Christmas are the same, but people cut back on entertainment in general.

"It fluctuates from year to year."

However, Mr Sorbello said he was not concerned about the slight slowdown.

"All the indications say that it (the economy) is going to just keep going.

"I think we're sheltered in Mackay from the mining."

Restaurateur Amani Khehra opened an Indian eatery, Spice N Flavor, in July, and says it has flourished with Mackay's growing population.

"There's a lot of people coming into Mackay (because of the mining industry) and dining trends are changing," Mr Khehra said.

"Mackay's becoming much

more multicultural.

"People are trying to explore new cuisines."

Mr Khehra said the restaurant trade could be unpredictable, however, it usually evened out over the weeks.

"In hospitality there are quiet times and good times.

"You need to move with the times and see what people are actually after (to attract and keep customers) ... keep on changing your menu from time to time."

Mr Khehra said most of his customers were locals, however, he also had regular diners who were on business in Mackay.

Finding workers could be difficult in Mackay, Mr Khehra said.

"It's not a big city like Sydney or Melbourne, so it can be hard.

"What we look for is the right attitude.

"We don't mind getting beginners - if they've got the right attitude you can mould them."



NEW TASTE: Spice N Flavor owners Ricky Dhaliwal and Amani Khehra say Mackay diners are keen to explore new cuisines.

PHOTO: LEE CONSTABLE

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