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\$150m 'I do' bonanza

THE Far North is expecting a \$150 million-plus bumper wedding season in 2010.



Romance: Weddings are tipped to pump more than \$150 million into the Cairns economy this year.

Industry leaders estimate that Australian couples marrying in the region will spend \$115 million on ceremonies and receptions with international weddings from Japan, Korea, China, Europe and the US adding more than \$32 million.

Tourism Palm Cove president John Astle said weddings were big business with an enormous flow-on effect for the tourism industry.

"Tropical North Queensland's wedding industry was surveyed in 2008 when there were 1507 weddings (excluding the large number of Japanese weddings) with each spending an average of \$18,917 locally and bringing around 49 visitors into the region for at least three nights," he said.

"Using the average tourist spend of \$385 per day plus the money the couple spends that adds up to \$114 million coming into this region from the wedding market."

Mr Astle said the wedding market had proved recession-proof last year and should grow further with dedicated marketing.

Phillip Ford, the managing director of South Pacific Bridal, the bridal company considered the biggest in Australia, said the tourism industry underestimated the value of weddings to the economy.

He said each Japanese wedding cost about \$40,000.

"They might only have four to six attendants and stay three or four days but they spend a lot of money," Mr Ford said.

He said overseas weddings were worth a conservative \$32 million a year to Cairns.

"For the last 18 months to two years there has been a big drop in Japanese weddings," Mr Ford said.

"But we are starting to get heavy bookings. In the last two weeks there have been 35 new bookings from Japan. That's a 200 per cent increase on the past few months," he said.

Mr Ford said the flow-on effects from weddings were huge. He said the estimates did not include airfares,

accommodation, tours and food and beverages while guests stayed before and/or after the event.

Mr Ford said his business handled about 400 Japanese weddings a year and including Australian weddings would turnover \$30 million a year.

He said their chapel at Angsana resort was the most popular in Australia with 400 to 500 weddings a year.

"Palm Cove is a huge drawcard," Mr Ford said.

Mr Astle said Tourism Palm Cove was focusing on the romance market with a marketing strategy to encourage more couples to tie the knot with a host of different venues and settings from beach to rainforest.

Wedding photographer Ian Stone, who moved Posh Photography from Sydney to Palm Cove four years ago, said he believed Palm Cove was the No. 1 wedding destination in Australia.

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