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Reporting Summary

Nature Research wishes to improve the reproducibility of the work that we publish. This form provides structure for consistency and transparency in reporting. For further information on Nature Research policies, see Authors & Referees and the Editorial Policy Checklist.

Statistics

For all statistical analyses, confirm that the following items are present in the figure legend, table legend, main text, or Methods section.

n/a	Confirmed
☐	☒ The exact sample size (*n*) for each experimental group/condition, given as a discrete number and unit of measurement
☐	☒ A statement on whether measurements were taken from distinct samples or whether the same sample was measured repeatedly
☐	☒ The statistical test(s) used AND whether they are one- or two-sided *Only common tests should be described solely by name; describe more complex techniques in the Methods section.*
☐	☒ A description of all covariates tested
☐	☒ A description of any assumptions or corrections, such as tests of normality and adjustment for multiple comparisons
☐	☒ A full description of the statistical parameters including central tendency (e.g. means) or other basic estimates (e.g. regression coefficient) AND variation (e.g. standard deviation) or associated estimates of uncertainty (e.g. confidence intervals)
☐	☒ For null hypothesis testing, the test statistic (e.g. *F*, *t*, *r*) with confidence intervals, effect sizes, degrees of freedom and *P* value noted *Give P values as exact values whenever suitable.*
☒	☐ For Bayesian analysis, information on the choice of priors and Markov chain Monte Carlo settings
☒	☐ For hierarchical and complex designs, identification of the appropriate level for tests and full reporting of outcomes
☐	☒ Estimates of effect sizes (e.g. Cohen's *d*, Pearson's *r*), indicating how they were calculated

Our web collection on statistics for biologists contains articles on many of the points above.

Software and code

Policy information about availability of computer code

Data collection	Survey data were collected directly from respondents via face to face interviews, with responses entered in situ into tablet computers, using the iSurvey application. No other software or code was used in our data collection.
Data analysis	Statistical analyses of numeric data were performed using MS Excel and SPSS software. Word-emotion analyses of text responses were done using R and the {syuzhet} package, as described in our methods. The text data and R code are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

For manuscripts utilizing custom algorithms or software that are central to the research but not yet described in published literature, software must be made available to editors/reviewers. We strongly encourage code deposition in a community repository (e.g. GitHub). See the Nature Research guidelines for submitting code & software for further information.

Data

Policy information about availability of data

All manuscripts must include a data availability statement. This statement should provide the following information, where applicable:

- Accession codes, unique identifiers, or web links for publicly available datasets
- A list of figures that have associated raw data
- A description of any restrictions on data availability

Our 2013 and 2017 survey data are publicly available in a persistent repository (CSIRO Data Access Portal): https://doi.org/10.25919/5c74c7a7965dc
Attribution statement: Marshall, N., Curnock, M., Goldberg, J., Gooch, M., Lankester, A., Pert, P., Scherl, L., Stone-Jovicich, S. & Tobin, R. Social and Economic Long Term Monitoring Program (SELTMP) for the Great Barrier Reef data. v1. CSIRO. Data Collection. 10.25919/5c74c7a7965dc (2019).

Field-specific reporting

Please select the one below that is the best fit for your research. If you are not sure, read the appropriate sections before making your selection.

☐ Life sciences ☒ Behavioural & social sciences ☐ Ecological, evolutionary & environmental sciences

For a reference copy of the document with all sections, see nature.com/documents/nr-reporting-summary-flat.pdf

Behavioural & social sciences study design

All studies must disclose on these points even when the disclosure is negative.

Study description	Quantitative, survey based case study
Research sample	Tourists in the GBR region (defined as the GBR catchment, bounded by Cape York in the north, Bundaberg in the south and the Great Dividing Range in the west) were surveyed via face-to-face interviews between June and August in both 2013 and 2017. For the purposes of this study we defined tourists broadly as non-resident visitors to the GBR region. The surveys were conducted at 14 regional population centres along the coast, in public locations such as beaches, boat ramps, parks, shopping centres, and markets, and on a limited number of GBR tourism vessels. In 2013 we achieved a sample of 2877 tourists (1557 of whom were Australian; 1286 from overseas), followed by a sample of 1804 tourists in 2017 (831 Australian; 805 from overseas). Our sample forms part of the wider data set collected for the Social and Economic Long Term Monitoring Program (SELTMP) for the Great Barrier Reef region, supported by the Australian Government and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (further details are available at https://seltmp.eatlas.org.au/seltmp and https://research.csiro.au/seltmp/).
Sampling strategy	Our sampling strategy utilised a combination of convenience and quota sampling (Bryman 2012), to minimise potential biases for gender, age and nationality. However, a limitation of the study was its availability in English only, and we acknowledge that some non-English speaking tourist market segments are under-represented (e.g. tourists from China). No sample size calculation was performed for the tourist data set, due to inherent variability in visitation numbers and patterns. The sample sizes were the maximum achievable within the time and resources available.
Data collection	Trained survey staff were deployed to 14 regional population centres along the coast, to conduct face-to-face surveys of respondents in public locations such as beaches, boat ramps, parks, shopping centres, and markets, and on a limited number of GBR tourism vessels. Interviews were conducted by trained survey staff, and responses were entered in situ into tablet computers (iPads), using the iSurvey application.
Timing	Data collection occurred from June to August in 2013, and was replicated from June to August in 2017.
Data exclusions	No data were excluded from the analysis.
Non-participation	Our estimated response rate for SELTMP surveys in 2013 (including both tourists and local residents) was 59%, and in 2017 this response rate was 50%.
Randomization	Participants were not allocated into experimental groups.

Reporting for specific materials, systems and methods

We require information from authors about some types of materials, experimental systems and methods used in many studies. Here, indicate whether each material, system or method listed is relevant to your study. If you are not sure if a list item applies to your research, read the appropriate section before selecting a response.

Materials & experimental systems

n/a	Involved in the study
☒	☐ Antibodies
☒	☐ Eukaryotic cell lines
☒	☐ Palaeontology
☒	☐ Animals and other organisms
☐	☒ Human research participants
☒	☐ Clinical data

Methods

n/a	Involved in the study
☒	☐ ChIP-seq
☒	☐ Flow cytometry
☒	☐ MRI-based neuroimaging

Human research participants

Policy information about studies involving human research participants

Population characteristics	See above.

Recruitment	Participants were approached in public spaces by trained survey staff, who were briefed on our sampling strategy (as described above). Periodic analysis of sample demographics was conducted by the project leader (Marshall) during each sampling period, and staff were advised if/when any demographic biases were observed (e.g. for age, gender), and if necessary, were instructed to modify their participant selection tactics.
Ethics oversight	This research involving human participants was reviewed and approved by the CSIRO Social Science Human Research Ethics Committee and was conducted in accordance with the Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).

Note that full information on the approval of the study protocol must also be provided in the manuscript.