INTEREST IN MILITARY HERITAGE

RESEARCH SUMMARY

NOVEMBER 2015
INTRODUCTION

It has been said, “Tell a person, they'll forget. Show a person, they may remember. Involve a person, they'll understand and learn.”1

In a time where technology is rapidly improving and more people are looking to connect with the realities of war and the men and women who lived through these times, it is no doubt that there are increasing opportunities to leverage the growing interest in military heritage.

In August 2015, Tourism NT commissioned MyTravelResearch.com to undertake desktop research to determine the extent of the growing level of interest in military history.

KEY FINDINGS

- Visitation to museums and attractions that showcase military heritage is steadily increasing.

- Typically in the past, only military history enthusiasts, veterans or those with direct family connections would have been interested in learning about military history. In recent years, however, there appears to be strong interest in the stories, lives and experiences of those who lived and died during those times.

- Visiting a museum is not solely around its topic area but a wide variety of needs – including immersion in a destination.

- Attendance at events such as the Anzac Day Dawn Service demonstrates an increasing desire for more people, especially younger generations, to pay their respects and connect with the past. For the 100th anniversary commemorations taking place in Anzac Cove, over 42,000 applied for passes in the ballot and an estimated 120,000 attended at the Australian War Memorial. These large numbers, however, do coincide with a milestone year.

- Institutions that have developed or redeveloped attractions and experiences on military themes have successfully grown visitation and engagement. Their success has been based on themes like authenticity, quality of interpretation and engaging a wider audience. Examples of museums and war sites that have achieved this include:
  - Australian War Memorial, Australia
  - The Imperial War Museums, UK
  - Auschwitz Birkenau Memorial, Germany
  - National World War II Museum, US

Cover image: The Neptuna exploding at Darwin wharf on February 19, 1942 (Ref – PH0238/0885 Northern Territory Library)

1 Adaption from Benjamin Franklin
**AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL**

The past five years have seen a redevelopment of the WWI and WWII galleries, the creation and growth of the Hall of Valour (for Victoria Cross celebrants) and the inclusion of an Afghanistan Hall. All of these have led to a general increase in visitation, although, this has been augmented by significant anniversaries such as the centenary of Gallipoli.

As part of these changes the museum has also introduced the tale of an individual soldier to the Last Post Ceremony each day. This change has led to a 23% increase in attendance at Last Post ceremonies between 2012-13 and 2013-14.

**Figure 1: Visitation Trends Australian War Museum – 2004-2014**

Source: AWM Annual reports

**IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM**

In 2014, the Imperial War Museum (IWM) was one of the top 20 most visited free attractions in England – and the fastest growing of its peer group by far.

IWM has undertaken an extensive programme of upgrades over the last five years, funded by lottery money. In 2012-13, the main museum site in London was closed in order to open new galleries. The impact of investment in new galleries and entertainment is positive with visitation growth strong across all sites.

**Figure 2: Visitation Trends Imperial War Museum London (IWM) and All IWM locations – 2004-2015**

Source: DCMS, UK Government
AUSCHWITZ BIRKENAU MEMORIAL AND MUSEUM

Rising interest (worldwide) in the Holocaust in general is reflected in the growing number of visitors to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum. In order to cope with the rapid increase in popularity, the museum is now directing visitors to pre-book their visit to guarantee entrance. More than 250,000 visitors entered the site in the first quarter of 2015, which is 40% more than the previous year.

Figure 3: Visitation Trends to the Auschwitz Birkenau Memorial 2001-2014

Source: Państwowe Muzeum, Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu 2014 Raport

NATIONAL WWII MUSEUM, NEW ORLEANS, USA

Since 2009-10, the National WWII Museum offers an experience for visitors, which is a 4D journey through the war that changed the world. Narrated by executive producer Tom Hanks, Beyond All Boundaries features dazzling effects, CGI animation, multi-layered environments and first-person accounts from the trenches to the Home Front read by famous actors such as Brad Pitt. This immersive cinematic experience sold over 300,000 tickets in 2013-14. Adult tickets retail at US$24.00

Figure 4: Visitation trends at the National WWII Museum, New Orleans, USA 2001-2014

Source: National World War II Annual reports
CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

When developing a military heritage experience it is important to ensure that it:

- engages the local population (including hosting visiting friends and relatives);
- builds and maintains a network of supporters in addition to those local residents including members, business and other philanthropic sponsors, subject fanatics especially those who belong to groups, veterans (of both the conflict being showcased and others), locally based defence force personnel (including those of allies), the education market, academic and other researchers, families of those who were involved in the conflict and digital advocates;
- recognises and embraces changing demographics among both visitors and the general population. For example, family tourism is seeing a shift towards multigenerational travel compared to traditional family travel with two parents and two children;
- is authentic to the story of the destination, but also an engaging place to visit. This may involve technology but also lies around issues like personalisation; and
- considers establishing networks with related tourism or entertainment offerings as this builds value and connection for locals and tourists alike.

CONCLUSION

The Darwin Harbour holds special significance for the people of Darwin as this was where the initial air raid attacks took place on 19 February 1942. While nine ships were sunk in the harbour and 15 others damaged, the devastation suffered by Territorian families was also considerable.

Remnants of the attacks and military occupation across the Top End are still visible today. In Darwin itself, there are a number of museums, attractions and tours showcasing the military history and stories of the region, including the World War II Oil Tunnels the Darwin Military Museum, the Australia Aviation Heritage Centre, the Bombing of Darwin tour and the Darwin History and Wartime Experience.

It is evident from this research that when museums and other military themed attractions upgrade exhibits and / or offer new experiences visitor numbers have increased on top of the rising popularity for learning about military history.

By offering new and evolving experiences which are fun and engaging for visitors, whilst maintaining respect for the topic, it is anticipated that visitors and locals can gain a greater appreciation of how significant military events have influenced and shaped the Northern Territory.