

Hotels defy doomsayers

Nick Nichols, business editor

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TIMES may be tough, but they don't appear to have stopped people from taking a holiday on the Gold Coast.

While value-conscious tourists this year have flocked to the Gold Coast's caravan parks and family holiday villages, it appears the glitter strip's four-star and five-star hotels also have been holding their own.

Some, like Conrad Jupiters, have reported a strong January, with occupancies up on a year ago.

The most recent official figures for hotel occupancy rates, released earlier this month, paint a less rosy picture.

They show occupancy rates on the Gold Coast fell 2.1 percentage points to 68.6 per cent for the September quarter last year.

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But preliminary estimates show occupancies have held up over the current quarter, traditionally the strongest, at about 75 per cent, but still down from 80 per cent last year.

Bookings for Easter indicate occupancies stand at 80 per cent, although industry sources said this would climb closer to 90 per cent.

The encouraging occupancy figures are set against a backdrop of falling room rates across the world.

A report earlier this week revealed rates in some countries had fallen up to 35 per cent.

But according to hotel industry consultant Mike Jones, there has been no spike in discounting by local operators and a strong January even led to price increases by some Gold Coast hotels.

Conrad Jupiters is one of the hotels to have benefited from the tourism surge, posting higher occupancies in January, compared with a year earlier.

Hotel general manager Vince King said better weather and the return of Magic Millions to January helped the figures, along with the company's \$16 million refurbishment last year.

Mike Jones, who heads consultancy firm Tourism Operational Management, said domestic tourists had been the 'backbone of the Gold Coast market' of late.

Mr Jones also said Japan, despite its own economic mess, was looking 'very bullish' for the Coast.

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