

Advice for Regional and Local Tourism Organisations – Helping businesses become more sustainable

Regional and local tourism organisations that have been created through public-private partnerships to develop and promote destinations are in an excellent position to encourage the adoption of sustainable practices by tourism businesses.

Here are some practical but effective ideas for working with tourism businesses:

Work in Partnership

At the regional and local levels there are a number of organisations who are dedicated to achieving resource efficiency in business/industry, such as [Regional Waste Management Groups](#) and [regional water authorities](#). These organisations can be valuable partners and should be keen to work with you in achieving mutual outcomes.

Leading by Example

Leadership is fundamental to the delivery of sustainable tourism. Regional and local tourism associations are well positioned to provide leadership to the rest of the tourism industry, in partnership with its key industry stakeholders. One important way to provide leadership is by setting an example through improving your organisation's own environmental and social performance and influencing those of your key suppliers - in essence, becoming a 'champion' in your own right.

A handful of regional tourism organisations have identified this opportunity and are well advanced in the development and/or implementation of initiatives. For instance, Geelong Otway Tourism has achieved [Green Globe 21](#) benchmarking status - only the third tourism association in the world to have done this. Other organisations, such as Shipwreck Coast Tourism, have followed their lead.

Embedding Sustainability into Mainstream Tourism Policies and Strategies

World leaders in the area of sustainable tourism have placed an increased emphasis on sustainability as a cross-cutting theme requiring integration into all tourism planning, development and operation. In this context, sustainability is a key strategic theme of Tourism Victoria's Three Year Corporate Plan 2007-2010.

ACTION:

- Embed sustainability as a cross-cutting theme into all regional and local tourism planning and development.

Raise the Level of Awareness of the Benefits of Adopting Sustainable Practices

While the industry's overall adoption of sustainable practices is low there are a number of "best practice" examples of Victorian and Australian tourism enterprises that have achieved commercial success based on sound environmental practices.

ACTIONS:

- Showcase regional and/or local examples of exemplary practices through case studies.
- Support demonstration projects that illustrate what can be accomplished when tourism enterprises adopt and apply sustainable practices on the ground.
- *Establish a "Champions" Program*

Use selected individuals who have successfully integrated sustainability into their business to serve as "champions" or "ambassadors"; sharing their practical experiences with their peers. This form of peer

influence is becoming increasingly popular to raise awareness and promote behavioural change in tourism enterprises.

Secure Commitment to Adopting Sustainable Practices

It is crucial in encouraging the adoption of sustainable practices that, once tourism enterprises are made aware of the benefits, they are provided with the timely opportunity to secure and promote their commitment to sustainable tourism through codes of conduct or charters.

ACTIONS:

- Develop an environmental code of conduct or charter for your members which can provide guidance on a wide variety of environmental issues.
- Incorporate sustainability into your organisation's/associations' code of ethics/conduct.

Provision of Practical Advice, Tools & Assistance

While there has been an encouraging explosion of assistance schemes to provide sustainability advice and tools, industry adoption of them has been limited. This could be attributed to low awareness and lack of access, compounded by the fact that many of them are developed in isolation to each other. While there are a multitude of tools available for tourism businesses wishing to improve their environmental performance, it may be difficult for individual businesses to determine which approach best meets their set of circumstances and resources.

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ACTIONS:

- Establish an integrated approach to the provision of practical advice, tools and assistance through the development of accessible resource materials, by raising awareness of existing advisory services, and linking to appropriate recognition programs.
- Use corporate website as a “one-stop shop” resource for providing advice to tourism businesses.
- Marketing can focus on ‘green’ businesses and those who are exhibiting sustainable processes could receive preferential treatment and exposure in promotions such as feature articles on websites or in e-newsletters
- Conduct sustainable tourism education forums in partnership with key stakeholders such as Regional Waste Management Groups.

Provision of Incentives

Incentives to accelerate the adoption of sustainable practices by tourism enterprises can be provided in a number of forms. The introduction of incentives is an important way to motivate tourism enterprises to meet their responsibilities for achieving sustainable tourism.

ACTIONS:

- Promote Government funded programs and subsidies such as the Solar Hot Water Rebate Program.
- Provide preferential marketing opportunities for tourism enterprises adopting sound sustainable practices.

Rewarding & Recognising Excellent Sustainable Practices

The final step in encouraging tourism enterprises to adopt sustainable practices is to reward and recognise excellent sustainable practices.

Internationally, dedicated accreditation and certification schemes that reward environmental sustainability have been regarded as one of the main mechanisms for encouraging tourism businesses to adopt sustainable practices through providing opportunities for competitive advantage through recognition and providing visitors with credible, easily understood information to inform their purchasing choices (i.e. an eco-label).

In Australia two of the certification programs that have been developed with the aim of encouraging and recognising the adoption of sustainable practices by the tourism industry are: Green Globe 21 and Eco Certification, the latter targeted at the nature-based tourism sector.

ACTION:

- Encourage member participation in environmental certification programs, through the provision of subsidies or other benefits.

Awards Programs

Promoted as providing the highest level of recognition, a number of dedicated environmental awards in tourism have been instigated over the last decade by various organisations world-wide, predominantly by government agencies and industry associations. Some are in partnership with conservation groups, some international in coverage, while others are sector specific.

ACTIONS:

- Encourage membership participation in recognised environmental awards programs, such as Tourism for Tomorrow awards, the Premier’s Sustainability Awards or the 2008 created category ‘Qantas Award for Excellence in Sustainable Tourism’ at the Victorian Tourism Awards.
- Establish a Sustainable Tourism category in your local or regional tourism/business awards.

Recognition Programs

Grow Me The Money is a FREE program open to all Victorian businesses interested in reducing resource consumption, improving environmental sustainability and saving money in the process. The program is run by VECCI and EPA Victoria with funding from the Victorian State Government.

Whether you are a small, medium or large business, Grow Me The Money has something for you. If your business is already making changes or you have advice you would like to share, we want to hear from you too!

Get involved in the Grow Me The Money community by visiting: <http://www.grow-methemoney.com.au>

For more detailed information on being sustainable and environmentally friendly please visit www.tourismexcellence.com.au

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