

Functions of a Regional Tourism Organisation

Fact Sheet 05
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Regional Tourism Organisations (RTO) are the peak bodies responsible for management and development of sustainable tourism within a region to increase visitation and yield through external marketing.

Core functions of an RTO include:

Representation

- Represent Local Tourism Associations (LTAs), industry sectors and/or local government on issues affecting the tourism industry within their region

Strategic Planning

- Develop and implement a strategic business plan to provide a clear direction for the sustainable growth of tourism across the region
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the plan

Marketing

Include specific regional tourism marketing objectives within the business plan to build a regional brand, increase awareness, convert awareness to high yielding visitation and disperse visitors across the region and across the seasons.

Tourism Industry Development

Work with local government and LTAs to identify gaps in the tourism offering. For example: scenic routes, tourism signposting, tourism infrastructure, accommodation and work to bridge the gaps.

Tourism Business Development

Encourage the growth of quality tourism businesses through:

- Supporting professional development
- Championing enthusiastic operators
- Promoting the benefits of accreditation to encourage the growth of quality tourism businesses and experiences

Public Relations and Communication

- Provide clear communication to the industry regarding issues which affect their businesses
- Provide accurate communication about the tourism industry to the broader community and stakeholders

Research

Undertake research to evaluate and monitor:

- The value of the tourism industry to the region
- Visitor satisfaction
- Tourism industry needs and opportunities

Partnerships

Forge partnerships based on mutual respect and understanding with:

- Local Tourism Associations
- Local government
- Tourism Victoria (and other relevant government agencies)
- Regional tourism marketing boards (Campaign Committees)
- Tourism Alliance Victoria
- Industry associations
- Local communities

Critical Success Factors

Committee Members with skills and/or knowledge in:

- The regional tourism system
- Business planning
- Financial management
- People management
- Communication
- Regional tourism marketing
- Chairing or participating in meetings
- Governance
- Government systems, protocols and procedures
- Private sector business management
- Recognition and support from
- Tourism industry
- Tourism Alliance Victoria
- Local and state government
- Local Tourism Associations
- Broader community
- Regional marketing boards (Campaign Committees)
- Workable strategic business plan inclusive of regional marketing objectives and an evaluation process
- Executive officer with the capacity to operate the RTO as a business

Case Study

SNAPSHOT OF TOURISM IN THE SWAN HILL REGION



Swan Hill Incorporated

Swan Hill Incorporated (SHI) operates within the Swan Hill Rural City Council. The Swan Hill region is situated in North West Victoria and includes the major townships of Lake Boga, Nyah, Nyah West, Piangil, Swan Hill and Ultima.

Located within the heart of the rich Murray Valley, the Swan Hill Rural City is located in one of Australia's most diverse and productive rural areas. The municipality stretches along the Murray Valley and into the Mallee. The two principal urban centres in the municipality are Swan Hill (9,950 residents) and Robinvale (1,800), both situated on the Murray River, 135 kilometres apart. The Swan Hill region receives 157,000 domestic visitors each year and, based on the latest research, the levels of tourism in the region over the last few years has remained fairly constant.

Structure

SHI was formed in 1993 as a voluntary organisation. Since 2003, the financial stability and sustainability of the organisation has been secured through a special rate scheme set up with the help of Council. SHI is the commerce and tourism organisation within the region and consists of a board and three industry sector committees – including Tourism Hospitality, Retail & Industrial Trade, Professional and Service Industries. Beyond encouraging tourism, the aim of the organisation is to promote the region as a place to invest, live, work, and shop.

Partnerships / Relationships

SHI have a close working partnership with the Council via the Council's Economic Development Unit (EDU), which is located at the Visitor Information Centre (VIC) in Swan Hill. The EDU is made up of a team of 9 staff who run the VIC and various other projects such as the Skilled Migration Program, which attracts a lot of

skilled migrants to the region, helping to fill job vacancies.

While there are no LTAs in the region, smaller towns have action groups which have tourism components – these include the towns of Lake Boga, Nyah, Nyah West and Ultima. Robinvale (part of the Swan Hill Rural City Council but located 140kms to the north of Swan Hill) collaborate on marketing projects with Euston (part of the Balranald Shire) through the Robinvale Euston Business Association and are looking at introducing a special rate scheme.

From a regional perspective, SHI have a strong alliance with the other Tourism Units based on the Murray in Mildura, Echuca, Cobram, Yarrawonga and Albury, and is also part of the Murray Campaign Committee, which is co-funded by Tourism Victoria and Tourism NSW. Outside of the campaign committee and marketing aspects, the RTA also pool their resources and funding together to attend consumer shows throughout the year. This partnership works well, both from a financial and tourism perspective, in that potential visitors who attend the shows are encouraged to explore more than one region on the Murray River.

Funding

SHI is funded by the special rate scheme collected by Council each year from all businesses in the industrial, commercial and tourism sectors. The payment is then passed on from Council to SHI on a quarterly payment basis. The membership base includes 707 businesses (and 30 volunteers) and raises \$280,000 pa, \$30,000 of which is used to pay for administration costs with the remaining funds to market the region.

Tourism Business Plan

The Swan Hill Rural City Council is currently operating to the 2006-2010 Council Plan. Tourism strategies include renewing the special rate scheme to 2014.

The current aim of SHI is to increase awareness of the region, improve visitor yields, and to achieve greater dispersal of visitors across the region and throughout all seasons.

Key Tourism Projects

A number of key tourism projects that SHI are currently focusing on include:

- Working with the community to address the impact of the drought on tourism by promoting the region's other non water based attractions.
- Encouraging repeat revisitation by maintaining regular communication with key visitor groups:
 - The June Racing Carnival, held over a long weekend, is one of the biggest events in the region and attracts more than 6,000 visitors. As such, the event was used to promote the region with stress balls that complimented the current Swan Hill region marketing campaign and brand with "Relax to your Hearts Desire" printed on the front and "and *win a holiday visit* www.swanhillonline.com" printed on the back handed out at the event. Via entering the competition, a database of names and contact details was collected.
- To encourage re-visitation to the region amongst event and conference visitors.
- Enhancement and revitalisation of the Pioneer Settlement Museum (which is run by Council) and one of the major attractions in the region.
- Working with the hospitality and accommodation industries to encourage higher visitation on weekends
 - Unlike other regions, many hotels/motels in the Swan Hill region are booked out during mid week – this is largely due to the number of business travellers who pass through the area from Melbourne
- Extending the district drive through to Nyah in order to encourage visitation to the area.

For further information:

Swan Hill region link from:

www.swanhill.vic.gov.au

Swan Hill Incorporated link from:

www.swanhillonline.com