



Shoalhaven
SOUTH COAST - NSW

MANY EXPERIENCES - ONE DESTINATION

Shoalhaven Tourism Recovery Action Plan
prepared Feb 2023

  
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1. Why this Plan Exists

This plan highlights the priority actions to reactivate the Shoalhaven as a “year-round destination, valued for its quality environment and visitor experiences” (Shoalhaven DMP2018-2023) in the changed context of living with covid 19 and increasing environmental pressures. These actions focus on delivering a strong, resilient, and vibrant tourism industry that actively contributes to the wellbeing of community, the sustainability of Shoalhaven’s natural environment and the return of visitor expenditure to pre-pandemic (YT to Sep 2019) levels by the same quarter in 2024.

2. What the Review Highlighted

The review insights were gathered from workshops, interviews, and a survey of the tourism industry in the Shoalhaven, alongside a literature review of key documents and reports and insights from the MyTravelResearch.com database of 50+ trends impacting tourism.



a) General Insights and Observations

- Both industry priorities and current market needs are still well aligned with the DMP in many areas. Most recommended actions relate to the urgency or level of priority of activities in that plan.
- Better alignment in the activities and processes of Shoalhaven Tourism (ST) with those of other parts of Council would increase Return on Effort for ST.
- Some of the barriers to reactivation are not within the control of ST, making advocacy an important role.
- If the challenges around data collection can be overcome, Shoalhaven 360 has the capacity to play a key role in developing a resilient tourism industry and positioning Shoalhaven as a leader in sustainable destination management.

b) Industry Development

- Activities in the plan need to align with the differing needs of operators which is influenced by business type (e.g. accommodation vs tour operator), size, longevity, and motivations. Supporting the diversity of industry needs and maintaining awareness of its activities place significant pressure on ST resources.
- Attraction and retention of a well-qualified workforce is a critical barrier to Shoalhaven becoming a 7-day a week, year-round destination. But this is a true ‘wicked’ problem.

c) Attracting Visitors

- Tourism sustainability (environment & community) is growing more important, especially to high yield customers. Focusing on attracting visitors who align with Shoalhaven values is more important than ever. There is potential to dial up targeting of wellness, food and wine and adventure travel markets.
- The destination attracted many new and high yielding customers due to border closures in 2020. Retaining these ‘covid new’ customers, especially those with potential to travel outside peak demand periods is a priority.
- To reduce fluctuations in visitation as domestic and international borders reopen, attracting high yield repeat customers is critical, working with businesses to attract this customer base will be important to success.



3. The Road to Recovery

Based on the issues highlighted by the review the following actions have been identified to help ST support the reactivation of the destination.

3.1 The Approach

The actions are considered in two focus areas:

- **Industry Development and Advocacy.** Focus on supporting industry will create the conditions for recovery by ensuring industry is agile, resilient, and capable and thus ready to seize opportunities as tourism returns.
- **Driving Demand.** Focus on attracting the right visitors to reduce fluctuations in visitation once borders reopen and international travel returns.

Some activities are important to both focus areas.

3.2 Strategy and Priority Actions to Drive Recovery

As noted in the review above, many of the actions are not new to ST's Strategy but are reprioritised to drive the most effective road to recovery.





Industry Development and Advocacy

Strategy - Support industry and improve ST return on effort by centralising industry development content and assets so they are easily accessible.

- Consider creating a centralised industry resource that provides a one-stop shop for relevant activities and initiatives. This should include: what are we doing (e.g. regional touring routes), how industry can work with us, a link to our events calendar, key things happening with industry and links to other resources (e.g. NSW First, DSSS, DNSW) including access to training. Once created promote regularly as the 'first place to look' prior to more personal engagement.
- Two longer term activities to consider that will enable ST to better manage expectations and delivery
 - a) develop a 'what to expect' charter that clarifies mutual expectations
 - b) upgrade CRM systems to provide a more interactive and personal update on initiatives that does not unduly burden staff.

Progress Update

Currently this is in the ideation phase. Tourism continue to send monthly industry newsletters to ensure industry is informed on key opportunities. With the Economic Development and Tourism merge this will be a priority consideration entering 2023.

b) CRM - developing a tourism CRM has been discussed for some time, awaiting Council's own technology solutions as well as potential restructure to work with Economic Development and other complementary data.



Industry Development and Advocacy

Strategy - Visitor Services activities to support industry in recovery

- Promote that VIS staff are available 7 days a week to support with industry assistance.
- Dial up the importance of Visitor Services as the frontline support via famil visits, checking the status of ATDW and Google My Business listings and to assist industry where appropriate.
- Explore opportunities for one-on-one meetings and/or workshops to assist operators with online listings and to receive product updates from operators.

Strategy - Work with SEGA on the key barriers to recovery facing the industry that are beyond ST's control i.e.,

- ST and SEGA to develop/update an advocacy strategy with these issues.
- Review with SEGA the potential to develop a leadership position on workforce planning to ensure the availability and capability of highly skilled staff.

Progress Update

Google listings up to date with current opening times for VIS, print media shows opening times, industry EDM's, Live Chat is another option to push.

Famils program back on track in 2023, engaging directly with operators for all expiring ATDW listings, working with new operators to create new listings. During face to face brochure drops reinforcing to contact the VIS for any assistance.

Attending Tourism after hours, assisting with workshops e.g. Aboriginal experiences workshop, engaging with operators directly to create listings, proactively reaching out and working one on one with operators if listings are incorrect, expiring or need updating.

Advocacy document has been established in line with the 2023 election. This includes key strategic regional projects, many of which will benefit the visitor experience when people travel into region.

SEGA has replaced STAG and members have been recruited with HR and workforce planning skills to ensure this maintains a high priority and ongoing discussion within this group.



Driving Demand

Strategy - Make simple adjustments to existing campaigns which target high yielding travellers, so that they also consider changes in consumer travel patterns post covid 19 and drive consistent visitation once borders reopen.

- Continue to attract high-yielding visitors in the off-season with the aim to increase spend.
- Region lends itself well to attracting the 'living with covid' traveller i.e. strong nature, wellness and adventure offering.
- Seek to retain covid new customers especially those who came out of season via Retargeting.
- Consider partnerships to extend the reach of the campaign with travellers in their databases.

Progress Update

Spend per customer has increased from \$456 YTD Sept 2020 to \$616 YTD Sept 2021.* Length of stay has also increased to almost 4 days due to targeted off-season campaigns with promotion to appropriate Sydney and Canberra demographics. *Tourism Research Australia Shoalhaven and Jervis Bay Monitor YTD September 2021 and September 2022.

Autumn 2022 campaign 'Adventure into Wellness' saw product development and grouping of product for promotion, followed by a deeper-diving Wellness Campaign in Autumn of 2023 with considerable budget and promotion.

Retargeting measures across all active campaigns Post-COVID connected both websites: 100beachchallenge.com and shoalhaven.com; with social media users; and those on the google network. A new campaign to target subscribers to the monthly visitor newsletter for direct marketing was deployed on shoalhaven.com and social media in 2022.

A partnership with WellTraveller website and network helped define and extend the promotion of our Wellness Campaign, and also provided advice and product development for product.



Driving Demand

Strategy - Greater cross and intra-regional promotion to expand dispersal across the LGA.

- Continue to support initiatives to promote tourism beyond LGA borders.
- Raise awareness of existing intra Shoalhaven regional drives by giving more prominence on the website.
- Strengthen promotion of itineraries in order to encourage road trips and existing lesser-known routes.
- Leverage the opening of the new experiences at Bundanon to drive greater dispersal across the region and promote Shoalhaven's Art and Cultural offerings.

Progress Update

In 2022 Shoalhaven was the lead partner in a 7 LGA FeelNSW Campaign pitch for a high level campaign with Destination NSW. Over \$400K was spent to promote the South Coast as an attractive off-season destination, at the top level, package 4.

2 x suggested itineraries from guests created on shoalhaven.com and promoted in the Visitor Guide. Content and blogs updated across Main Rd 92, The Waterfall Way (Southern Highlands) and the Sydney to Melbourne route.

2 x food and wine itineraries promoted with Destination NSW FeelNSW Package 3 campaign for visitnsw.com.au increasing content on that site. Investment in Grand Pacific Drive itineraries and promotion.

2022 Autumn Arts and Culture campaign backed heavily on the opening of Bundanon, featuring numerous media famils, articles, and promotional materials, as well as ongoing support by way of meetings and advice with the Bundanon Marketing team.



Driving Demand

Strategy - Continued promotion of ST Events Calendar as a way to drive visitation, support community and unite people in the off-season.

- Increase the visibility of the Shoalhaven Events Calendar through the ongoing promotion of 'What's On' in marketing activity.
- Encourage locals to attend events consider including them in future campaigns where appropriate.

Strategy - Leverage the growth of the Conscious Traveller as these customers are best aligned with the regions offering and create the strongest potential to retain social licence with residents.

- Target in relevant current campaigns via profiling.
- Encourage visitors to treat the Shoalhaven with respect and to travel sustainably.
- Review the potential to reactivate the Shoalhaven 360 initiative by focusing on what is deliverable now. In the longer term, identify a pathway to expand the measures included, and embed sustainability messaging/principles in marketing and product development.
- Wellness, Indigenous experiences are known to cater to people's desire to reconnect and be in nature. Developing partnerships to help develop wellness and outdoor experiences to meet the market will be critical for long-term off-season growth.

Progress Update

Plans to increase What's On Promotion are in Motion. Doing PR around upcoming June Events. What's On Page is one of the most visited on the website.

Push out relevant events through SCC community newsletter. Encourage event owners to promote through local media as well as out of town.

Customer profiling for all tourism campaigns focusses on travellers who appreciate sustainability, nature, and have a high disposable income. The psychographics largely resembles adult couples who are 'Metrotechs' via Roy Morgan helix personas.

The Conscious Traveller graphic and promotional material featuring 10 ways to be a conscious traveller was promoted via radio, social media, website and outdoor advertising, focusing budget on peak season within the region.

The existing 360 website has been refined and redeveloped and requires work on the possible data input and measures. More data is now available which can be fed in over the following months. Sustainable travel is a key message in campaigns including tread lightly messaging in the 2023 Visitor Guide.

There is dedicated time and valuable Aboriginal partnerships that have been created, specifically in product development and promotion. Research and development led to the creation of an Autumn Wellness campaign, partnered with Well Traveller and many new Shoalhaven operators in 2023.



Cross-focus Initiative

Strategy - Identify opportunity areas for product development through collaboration with industry.

- Generate conversations around how to best drive investment in tourism infrastructure, events, grant opportunities, and development of prospective high yielding markets.
- Ensure tourism priority infrastructure across the region is considered in council planning.

Progress Update

In partnership with DNSW/DSSS we have been part of the Business Event Workshops, attended AIME and Get Local. This work is to attract mid week visitation from high yielding markets. Continue to liaise with operators on grant opportunities through region. Going forward combination of ED and Tourism will allow for a more collaborative approach to investment attraction in region.

Tourism continues to be a part of internal conversations feeding into policy and planning.