

Visitor Economy Strategy

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL
2021 - 2031





Kerry Ellis
 Chief Executive Officer
 – South Gippsland Shire Council

Foreword

South Gippsland is a beautiful region with a diverse and ever-changing landscape. Much of the region is filled with rolling green hills that stretch as far as the eye can see. Lush with nutrient-rich soil, the area is prime agricultural land that is perfect for dairy, beef, lamb and growing a variety of produce such as snow peas and celery.

To the south of the region is the ocean with frequent pockets of calm amongst an otherwise wild and rugged coastline. Water activities abound in this area with swimming, surfing, windsurfing, kayaking and fishing all popular. During summer visitors flock to our coastal hamlets with many featuring sweeping beaches with views all the way to Wilsons Promontory.

Visitors are important to the South Gippsland region. The economic benefits are estimated to be \$114 million per year and growing. Visitors are attracted to the pristine nature of the area, the abundant natural attractions and a rare authenticity. South Gippsland is not pretentious. We are home to real people who are passionate about our area and proud of what we produce. Our attractions and experiences can be understated and sometimes even a little rough around the edges, but we wouldn't have it any other way.

This Visitor Economy Strategy highlights what South Gippsland Shire Council aims to do to increase visitation and economic spend and how it can attract regional investment and infrastructure. It details key themes for the future and is action specific. Our intention is not to provide impressive motherhood statements but to provide a functional working document that we can use to base future tourism-related decisions. We do however expect that this Strategy will need to be modified as the years pass. If COVID-19 has taught us anything it has taught us how important it is to be adaptable and to keep finding ways to kick goals even when the goal posts are moving.

The Strategy was formed under the guidance of seven highly skilled experts who formed the Visitor Economy Strategy Advisory Group (VESAG). VESAG was established to bring together experts from across different industry sectors to advise and oversee the development of the Strategy. We value the input from these members who were appointed based on their knowledge of a broad cross section of industries, unique backgrounds and experiences and this Strategy is testament to their work.

We would also like to thank every member of the South Gippsland community who took the time to provide feedback about how they imagine our region can develop and address the needs of our visitors, both now, and in the years to come.

I wish to acknowledge the initiative to develop this Strategy of the Council Administrators, Julie Eisenbise, Rick Brown and Christian Zahra and their strong commitment to the process and for the benefit of the community and local economy.

We understand that partnerships and collaboration will be critical to our success, and we look forward to working with local businesses, residents and stakeholders to ensure a bright and prosperous future for South Gippsland

Acknowledgement to country


Council acknowledges the traditional custodians of this land and their enduring relationship with country. Council aspires to strengthen our partnerships and supports Aboriginal participation in management processes for land and natural resources. We recognise Australia's rich cultural heritage and aim to encourage integrated decision making now and in the future.


Acknowledgements

Council would like to acknowledge and thank its businesses, residents and agency representatives, who generously gave of their time, to inform this document by meeting with the project team, attending consultation sessions and by providing input and feedback into the Visitor Economy Strategy.

Visitor economy strategy advisory group members


- Renae Hanvin (Chair)
- Dr Gabby Walters
- Angela Moseley
- Andrew Davies
- Rhett McLaren
- Greg Harrison
- Bridget Crowe

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY – SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE VISITOR ECONOMY STRATEGY 2021 – SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE

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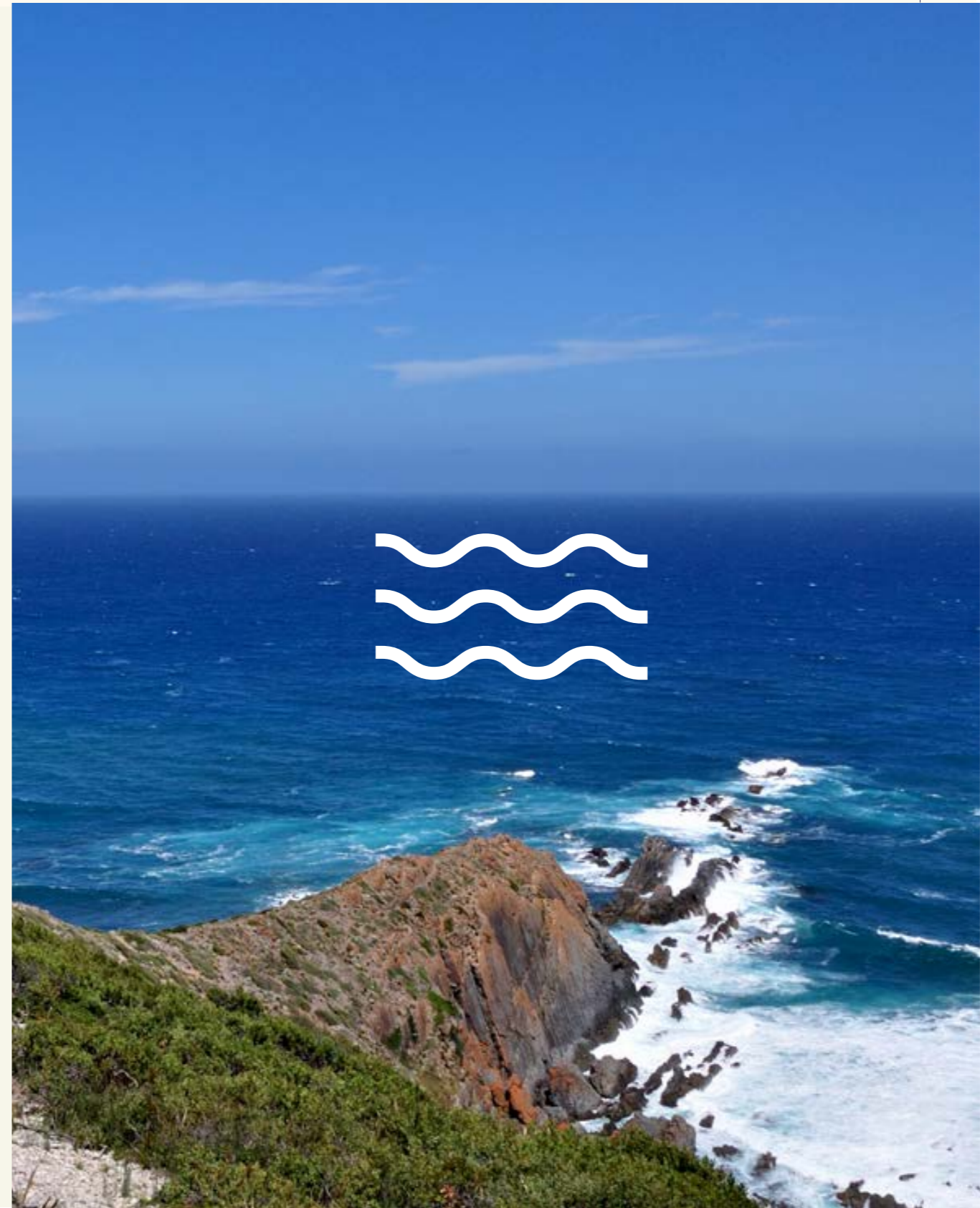
Background

Council's previous Economic Development and Tourism Strategy was expiring and mindful of the importance of a strong economy, it was timely to create a new one. The South Gippsland Shire Council Plan 2020-2024 included initiatives for the development of an Economic Development Strategy and a separate Visitor Economy Strategy. Creating a separate Visitor Economy Strategy reflects Council's investment in the sector and desire to see it grow.

The South Gippsland Visitor Economy Strategy (2021–2031) is designed to help guide Council's tourism-based decision making and to further develop and grow the visitor economy. The Visitor Economy is a valued industry sector of South Gippsland's economy and has been developed in collaboration with Council's Economic Development Strategy (2021–2031).

It is important to note that although the Visitor Economy Strategy will help guide Council's future tourism activity, successful implementation of the strategy can only be achieved through the strengthening of strategic partnerships and ongoing collaboration with the community.

It should also be acknowledged that market forces will play a role in determining the success of some strategies. Although there might be aspirations for our region to improve large-scale infrastructure or to deliver more green tourism enterprises, this will – in many cases – be dictated by the market; although Council will often be able to take on an advocacy role.



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Methodology

A comprehensive methodology was developed to oversee completion of the project. It involved a number of components with a clear consultative approach at the forefront of the development of the plan. Key themes have been developed from a combination of community feedback, stakeholder engagement, expert knowledge, research and current industry trends.

Appointed visitor economy strategy advisory group

Visitor Economy research

Expert advice from the Visitor Economy Strategy Advisory Group

Stakeholder and community engagement and consultation

Development of the draft Strategy and Action plan

Public exhibition of the draft Strategy and Action Plan

Adoption of the Strategy and Action Plan

Strategy implementation with Annual Action Plan
Year 1 overseen by VESAG

Visitor Economy Strategy Advisory Group

A Visitor Economy Strategy Advisory Group (VESAG) was established to bring together experts from different fields across the visitor economy to advise Council on tourism-related issues and to inform and guide the development of the Strategy. Members were appointed based on their industry experience and unique backgrounds.

The members of the Visitor Economy Strategy Advisory Group (VESAG) are:

Renae Hanvin – Renae has a strong marketing and strategic planning background. She has over 10 years of experience in disaster recovery with a strong focus on disaster resilience in small businesses and communities.

Dr. Gabby Walters – Gabby holds a PhD in tourist psychology and tourism marketing, and is an expert in tourist profiling and effective destination promotion. A specialist in disaster recovery, Gabby's 30 years of experience in the industry affords her a broad understanding of tourism on an international, state, regional and local level.

Angela Moseley – Angela operates Australian Cycling Holidays and her business also builds Application (App) based navigation for cyclists and hikers. Angela has an extensive knowledge of the broader international and domestic market, and a thorough understanding of the region's visitor profiles.

Andrew Davies – Andrew has over 30 years of experience in park management, regional tourism, commercial management, and joint management with Aboriginal traditional owners in Victoria and the Northern Territory

Rhett McLaren – Rhett has extensive experience in the music and events industry. Rhett operates South Gippsland's largest commercial event and has strong industry networks. He has a thorough knowledge of the region.

Greg Harrison – Greg has extensive experience in strategic and infrastructure planning, and economic development. Greg is currently working to assist the Department of Transport (DoT) in the planning and procurement of COVID-19 response initiatives. Greg is board member of Destination Phillip Island and has experience in investment attraction and industry development

Bridget Crowe – Bridget has strong connections with regional Arts networks and extensive experience in strategic and regional planning. Bridget has owned and managed tourism businesses, which include accommodation and food, and has a strong understanding of the visitor market and consumer expectations.

Consultation

Gippsland-based consultancy firm Aerium was engaged to conduct community consultation for the Visitor Economy Strategy. Business operators, visitors, local groups and community members were encouraged to provide feedback to the Strategy via multiple engagement methods. These included surveys, one-on-one meetings, group workshops and Social Pinpoint, an online engagement platform.

The consultation period ran between March and May 2021 and incorporates the views of nearly 400 pieces of feedback. The responses from the consultations were collated and were used to inform the strategy. In addition, industry sector experts were utilised and VESAG remained key contributors throughout, helping to inform and guide development of the consultation process and strategy development.

Research

Research was undertaken by Council which included reviewing tourism strategies from similar-sized regional destinations and key tourism stakeholders. It also included examination of current and emerging visitor trends and economic data from Tourism Research Australia, REMPLAN and Spendmapp.

This research process helped to highlight potential benefits and limitations and provided insights into where South Gippsland fits within the National and State tourism structure.

Development

From this key themes were developed and the creation of an action plan to address tourism issues was formulated. The action plan delivers practical solutions that Council, in-conjunction with strategic partners, can work to deliver over the next 10 years. The action plan is intended to be a live document that responds to challenges, opportunities and changes in policy direction as they arise.

Strategic Context

The Visitor Economy continues to be a driver of economic growth in Australia, it generates jobs, investment and development in communities and is worth \$60.8 billion to Australia's economy.

The visitor economy is recognised on a national, state, regional and local level.

National

Tourism Australia is the Australian Government agency responsible for attracting international visitors to Australia, both for leisure and business events.

"Their vision is to make Australia the most desirable (first time visitors) and memorable (attracting repeat visitors) destination on earth."

The impacts of COVID-19 has seen Tourism Australia not only maintain an international presence, also a shift to influencing Australian domestic travel by undertaking a range of marketing activities.

State

Visit Victoria is the state government authority primarily responsible for tourism and events in Victoria. Visit Victoria inspire people to visit Melbourne and Victoria through captivating stories and amazing events.

In 2019 total tourism spend in Victoria was worth \$32.5 billion, almost 45% came from Victorians travelling around their home state.

Visitation to Victoria



Regional

Destination Gippsland (DGL), the Regional Tourism Board for Gippsland was established in 2008 with the support of Visit Victoria, Parks Victoria, and the six-member councils of the Gippsland Local Government Network.

Their role is to grow and service the Gippsland tourism sector and work in partnership with the industry and government to deliver rewarding and lasting economic, environmental and social outcomes.

Prior to the 2019/20 bushfires and COVID-19, visitation to Gippsland continued to grow, in 2019 the region received 7.3 million visitors

Visitors ('000)	Year December 2019	Share of regional Victoria
International overnight	93	15.7%
Domestic overnight	2,575	13.5%
Domestic daytrip	4,690	11.1%
TOTAL	7,358	11.9%

The Towards 2030 Gippsland Destination Management Plan (Gippsland DMP) has been developed to provide a clear vision for achieving long-term, sustainable growth of Gippsland's visitor economy.

1. Collaborative and effective leadership and governance across industry and the community.
2. Strengthen Gippsland's appeal through brand awareness and coordinated marketing.
3. Invest in place making to support the visitor economy.
4. Develop experiences that encourage new and existing markets to stay and spend.
5. Invest in diverse and exciting regional events.
6. Revitalise Visitor Servicing across the region.
7. Create industry partnerships to grow the Gippsland visitor economy.

The outcomes of this strategy have been aligned to the Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform plan and the Gippsland DMP.

Local

South Gippsland Shire Council is one of the Partners in developing the economy. **The Council Plan 2020-2024 states "Economic Prosperity—cornerstone for local employment and business growth" as one of its four key objectives.** Council values the importance of the visitor economy and its contribution to economic growth of the region; the objectives of this strategy will support the industry to grow.

Council acknowledges partnering with Destination Gippsland, Parks Victoria and the State Government on visitor economy initiatives will benefit the industry and improve the visitor experience.

Care was taken to ensure that this plan has strategic alignment with other plans that relate to the South Gippsland region including:

- South Gippsland Council Plan 2021-2024
- South Gippsland Planning Scheme
- South Gippsland Health and Wellbeing Plan
- South Gippsland Sustainability Strategy
- South Gippsland Economic Development and Tourism Strategy 2018-2020
- South Gippsland Economic Development Strategy 2021-2031
- Towards 2030 Gippsland Destination Management Plan
- Victoria's Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan
- Gippsland Tracks and Trails Feasibility Study
- Gippsland Regional Events Strategy 2020–2025
- Destination Gippsland Strategic Plan 2021–2024
- Tourism Research Australia Local Government Area Profiles
- Gippsland Regional Plan 2020 - 2025
- One Gippsland



South Gippsland is a nature lovers paradise. The region is a popular destination for its spectacular coastline and rolling hills, boutique food and drink experiences, rail trails, vibrant arts community...

Introduction

South Gippsland Shire is located 90 minutes south east of Melbourne on the edge of Melbourne's eastern growth corridor, one of the fastest growing areas in Victoria. It is best known for its rolling green hills, spectacular coastline, traditional country towns and villages and the world-famous Wilsons Promontory National Park.

The Shire has a strong economy, closely linked to food production with both major agricultural and food manufacturing sectors. It is one of the most important dairy production areas in Australia with 10% of Victoria's dairy farms. Its major towns are Leongatha, Korumburra, Mirboo North and Foster. Other towns include Nyora, Poowong, Loch, Bena, Kongwak, Tarwin Lower, Venus Bay, Koonwarra, Meeniyan, Dumbalk, Fish Creek, Yanakie, Sandy Point, Port Franklin, Toora, Welshpool and Port Welshpool.

It is home to 30,000 people and supports over 11,000 jobs, in 3,700 businesses, the vast majority small businesses employing less than 20 staff. The Shire has an annual economic output of \$3.8 billion and Gross Regional Product (GRP) of \$1.85 billion. It has low unemployment and high productivity with a GRP per worker of over \$166,000.

The South Gippsland Visitor Economy

South Gippsland is a nature lovers paradise. The region is a popular destination for its spectacular coastline and rolling hills, boutique food and drink experiences, rail trails, vibrant arts community and events calendar. Visitors also experience the unique towns and villages scattered throughout the region.

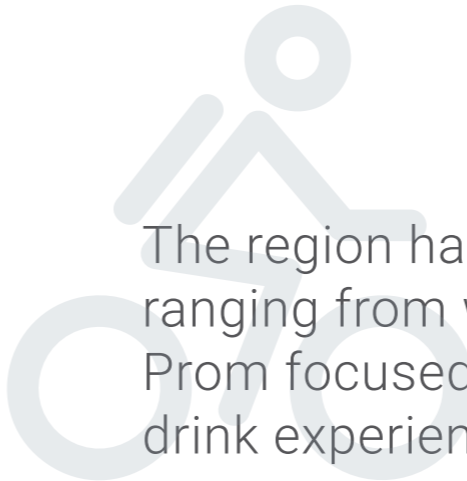
Accommodation choices vary from motels, caravan and camping, self-catering, holiday homes, bed and breakfasts. The accommodation sector is predominantly boutique style however, there is an opportunity for a branded motel, large style accommodation and conference facilities.

South Gippsland has come a long way in a relatively short amount of time and as we look forward we should also acknowledge where we have come from and to recognise our regional achievements. **Most significantly, visitation to South Gippsland has increased 100% between the years 2009 to 2019, helping to mark our transition from a small, fledgling tourism area into a strong, competitive visitor destination.**

The region has seen an increase in tours ranging from water-based activities, cycling, Prom focused and specialised food and drink experiences.

The past ten years has also seen a growth in the diversity of tourism-related businesses and increased product development including large-scale infrastructure projects such as the Port Welshpool Long Jetty and the extension of the Great Southern Rail Trail.

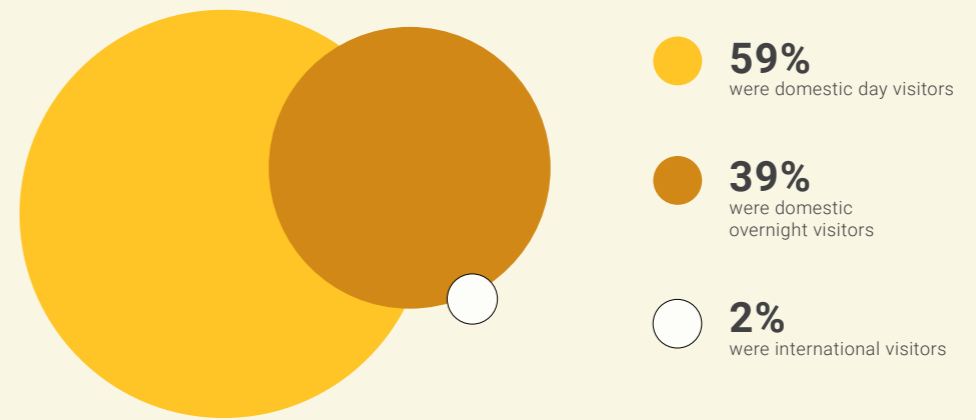


 The region has seen an increase in tours ranging from water-based activities, cycling, Prom focused and specialised food and drink experiences.



Tourism Visitation

In 2019 South Gippsland received approximately 1.2 million visitors of which:



Tourism Value:

Tourism contributes 114 million dollars to the local economy annually via a combination of domestic and international visitation. The average visitor spend of a day visitor is \$72, a domestic overnight visitor is \$102 and an international overnight is \$72.

(Source— Tourism Research Australia, Local Government Area Profile, South Gippsland, 2019)



Length of Stay:

- Domestic visitors stay an average of 3 nights
- International visitors an average of 4 nights
- The top three international markets include the United Kingdom, Germany and France.

(Source— Tourism Research Australia, Local Government Area Profile, South Gippsland, 2019)



Tourism Businesses:

Tourism businesses in the Shire include visitor accommodation establishments and specialised tourism businesses such as wineries, distilleries, attractions, tours and activities, agritourism and restaurants.

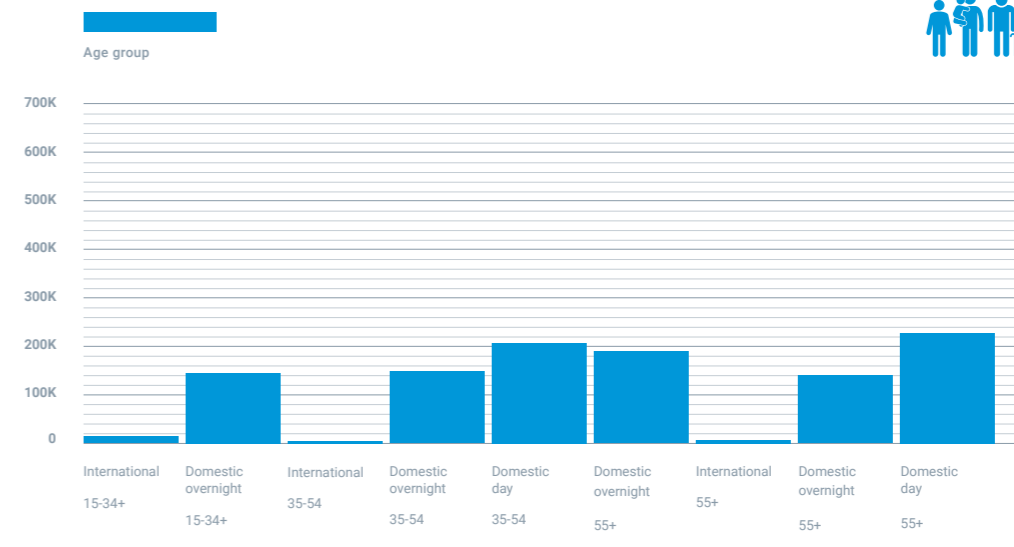
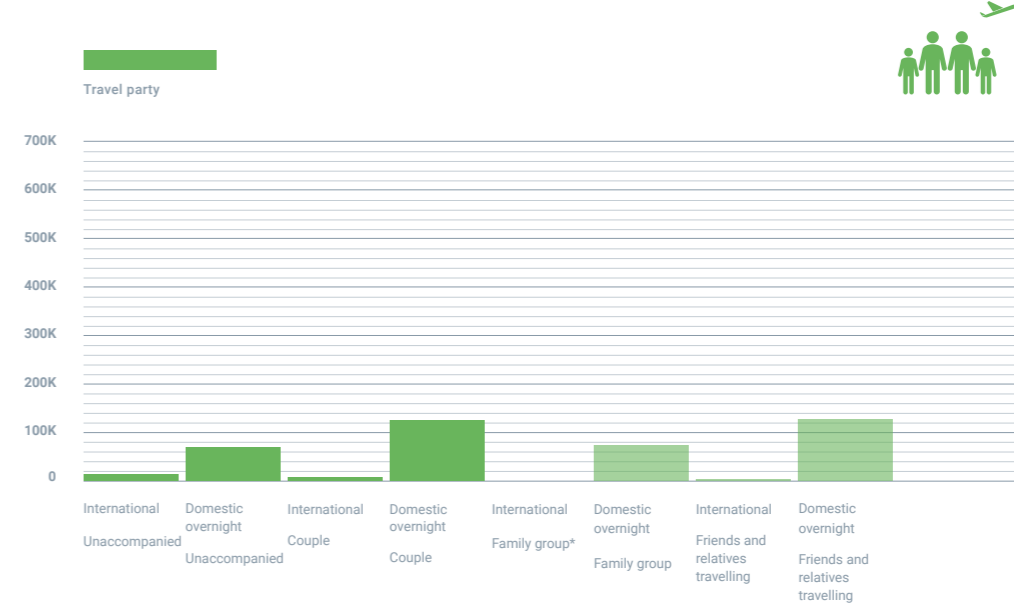
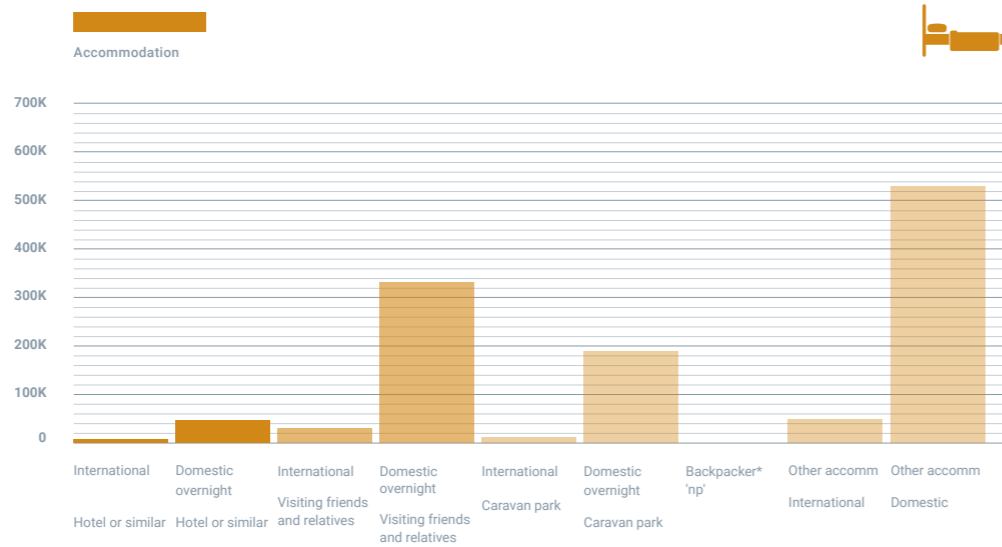
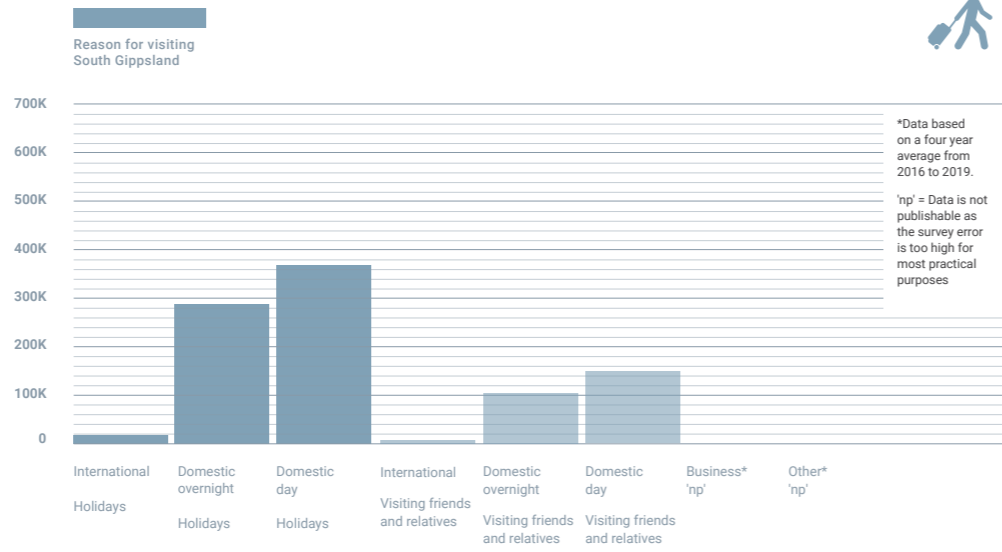
Contribution to South Gippsland employment:

- Tourism 5.5%
- Accommodation and Food Services 3%

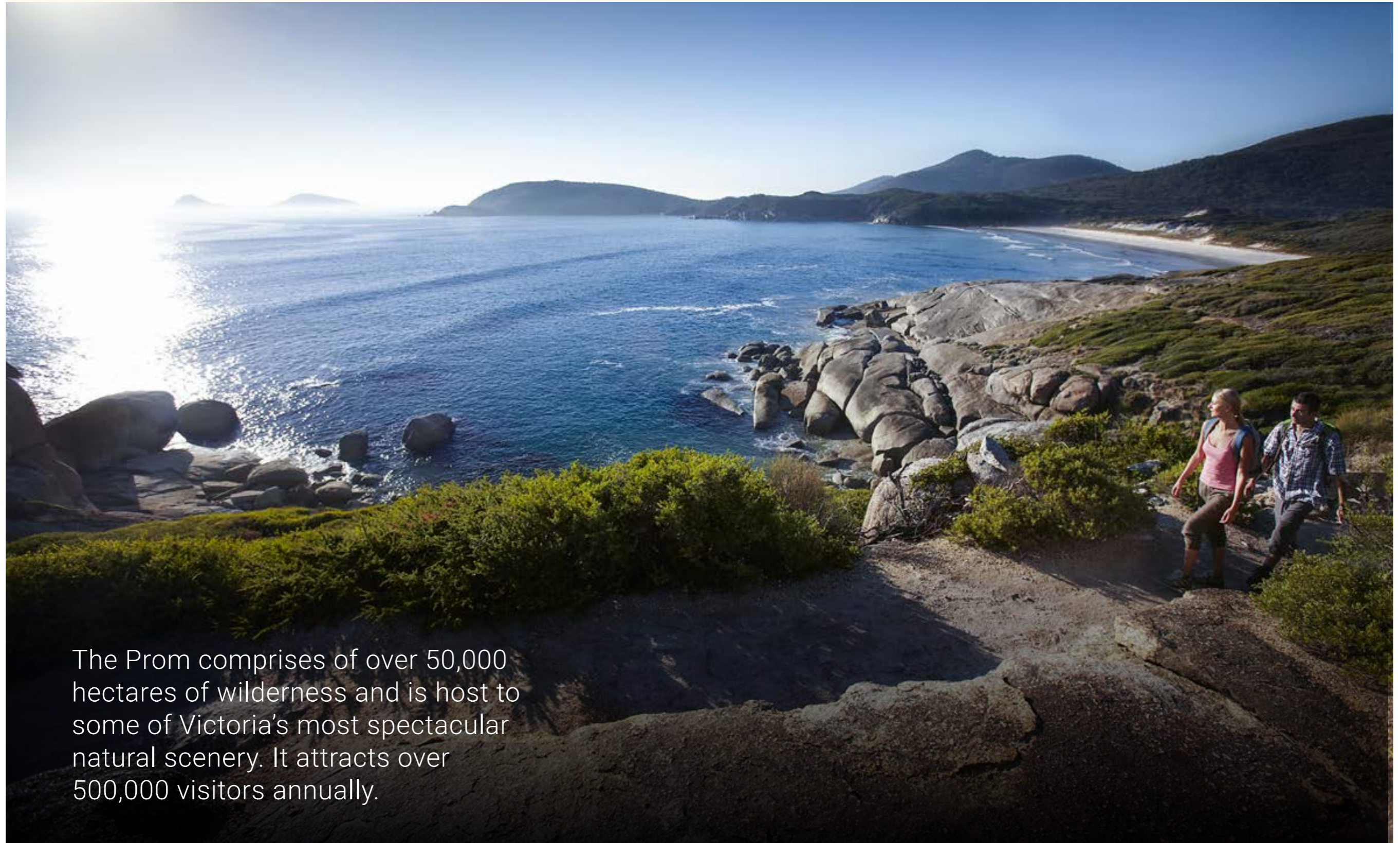
(Source— REMPLAN Economic Modelling and Planning System, South Gippsland (S) (2019 Release 2)



Current visitor profile – Tourism statistics insights



(Source: Tourism Research Australia, Local Government Area Profile, South Gippsland, 2019)



The Prom comprises of over 50,000 hectares of wilderness and is host to some of Victoria's most spectacular natural scenery. It attracts over 500,000 visitors annually.



South gippsland key products and experiences

Wilsons Promontory National Park

The 'Prom' as it is affectionately known, is the most popular attraction in South Gippsland. The Prom comprises of over 50,000 hectares of wilderness and is host to some of Victoria's most spectacular natural scenery. It attracts over 500,000 visitors annually.

Funding through the Victorian State Budget will enable Parks Victoria to further develop the Prom. The Wilsons Prom Revitalisation project will invest in the protection and enhancement of the Prom.

Key components include

Predator proof fence to create the Prom Sanctuary

Additional eco-friendly roofed 'pod' accommodation

New walking track and upgrades including a new all-accessible wildlife track

New services and infrastructure to help reduce car park congestion

New visitor precinct including new information and visitor hub, plus a new education centre.

The project has commenced and anticipated completion in 2023.

Great Southern Rail Trail

The popular Great Southern Rail Trail (GSRT) winds its way from Leongatha to Port Welshpool. Along this 72km journey walkers, cyclists and horse riders will take in spectacular vistas of rich farmland, historical bridges and water views across Corner Inlet and Wilsons Promontory.

A key benefit of the trail is that it passes through so many of the region's towns and villages and gives users the opportunity to stop along the way and enjoy country hospitality.

Currently the Great Southern Rail Trail is being extended from Leongatha to Nyora. This project was supported by the State Government through the Regional Infrastructure Fund (Leongatha to Korumburra) and Local Sport Infrastructure Fund (Korumburra to Nyora) and the South Gippsland Shire Council. When completed the trail will be 108km in length.

Towns and Villages

The region is host to a number of unique villages and towns, each with their own distinct charm. A key advantage for the region is that each town is different and they offer the visitor a diverse experience.



Many have grown to become a visitor destination, others are starting to find their place in the visitor market.

Coal Creek Community Park and Museum

The largest cultural heritage site in South Gippsland, Coal Creek is situated on Crown Land, and is owned and managed by Council. The museum is the tourism attraction and provides an opportunity for the community and visitors to connect with the coal mining heritage of the Shire.

Complementary products & experiences

- The Grand Ridge Rail Trail a 13km trail from Mirboo North to Boolarra
- Agnes Falls located near the township of Toora
- The iconic 800m Port Welshpool Long Jetty
- A vibrant arts culture
- Cape Liptrap Coastal Park that stretches from Point Smythe to Waratah Bay
- Walking trails scattered throughout the region and within the Prom
- An aquatic paradise with pristine beaches that allow swimming, surfing, wind & kite surfing plus fishing and boating.
- A selection of delectable food and drink establishments
- Boutique events and markets
- Diverse range of tours; and
- Bird hides and wetlands scattered throughout the region.

Destination marketing and awareness

Destination branding is an important component of tourism marketing, resident and business attraction. Branding is not just the name or logo; it is about developing a unique identity and character for the destination.

Destination branding is driven by three main factors, which represent the fundamentals of a destination brand: reputation, identity and perception.



Reputation is the sum of the beliefs or opinions, about the destination, it needs to be built, protected, maintained and changed, if needed, over time.

Identity has to be driven by authenticity, unique selling points of the destination, consistency and strong personality.

Perception is mostly made of immaterial experiences, even though material experiences matter as well, and it is subjective, in the mind of the consumers.

Source: Digital Tourism Think Tank | Destination Branding (thinkdigital.travel)

The South Gippsland Brand

For nearly 20 years the South Gippsland brand was promoted using the name "Prom Country". The brand was originally developed for economic development purposes with a grant from the State Government. A visual identity was created at the time in an attempt to bring two of the region's primary natural attributes together—Wilson's Promontory National Park and the rolling green countryside.

In 2008, Council decided to discontinue using the brand for broader economic development purposes, however it remained as the region's tourism brand.

When a brand review was undertaken in 2016, research revealed key brand virtues of the region were:

- **Natural beauty** • **Authentic** • **Welcoming** • **Relaxing**.

These attributes are then used to support the promotion and storytelling of the region through our towns and villages, fresh produce & drink, outdoor activities, arts and culture.

The Gippsland Brand

Destination Gippsland (DGL) in conjunction with Visit Victoria, embarked on a review of the DGL "Inspired by Gippsland" brand. Although it had been successful, research indicated the consumer expectations were demanding more from regional destinations.

Research identified that a brand shift from "wilderness/big nature" to a holistic view of nature as a provider can change the perception of Gippsland.

The new brand "Gipps all kinds of Wonderland" allows the positioning of the region to move from 'nature only' to nature "plus" examples include food, culture, events.

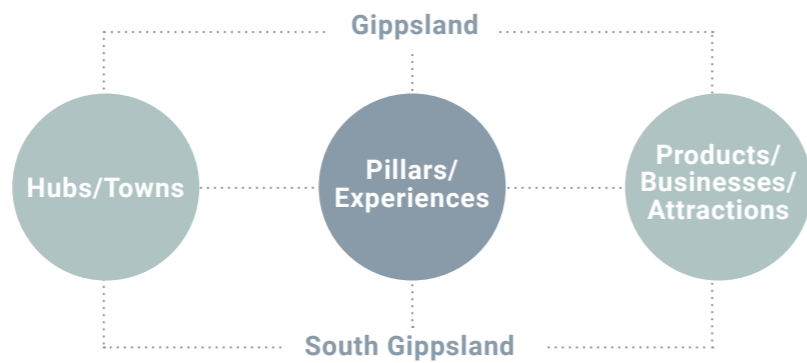
It was evident that the brand development undertaken by DGL highlighted that the Gippsland brand resonates with the overall Gippsland brand personality. The region is warm and welcoming, and is laid back and unpretentious. The free spirited and adventurous traveller can immerse themselves in the South Gippsland experience.



The new brand "Gipps all kinds of Wonderland" allows the positioning of the region to move from 'nature only' to nature "plus" examples include food, culture, events.

Brand Framework

In June 2019, Council adopted the Gippsland brand for South Gippsland. The flexible platform allows alignment with the South Gippsland visitor experience. It can be used in promoting hero hubs, pillars and products.



The brand framework and pillars developed provides the tourism industry with a focus for its marketing and the development of new products and experiences. South Gippsland currently aligns to the pillars featured below.

Adopting the brand will increase the awareness of the region through coordinating marketing, it will also allow for the development of South Gippsland specific promotional activities and strengthening the brand.



World class natural sanctuaries



Water lovers paradise



Paddock and ocean to plate



Intimate local towns

Councils Role

Local Government plays a significant and diverse role in the visitor economy. The base infrastructure and core amenities that are enjoyed in a location by visitors are largely the product of the work of Local Government. The work of Local Government not only directly impacts the visitor's impressions and experiences in a destination, but Local Government also plays a critical role in engaging the community and creating positive social outcomes. Source: Victorian Tourism Industry Council (VTIC) Why and How Local Government should engage with Victoria's visitor economy.

Supporting and developing the visitor economy requires a collaborative and partnership approach. As the say going goes "Tourism is everybody's business". Council, businesses, stakeholders and community each play a role in providing an outstanding visitor experience.

South Gippsland Tourism Structure





Advocacy

One of Council's key roles is advocacy to other levels of Government in a pro-active and coordinated way to secure funding for projects identified as priorities by the community and industry. As the closest level of government to the community, Council is committed to ensuring it actively engages, understands and responds to local needs.

Advocacy is a key way that Council can work together with partners such as other levels of government, agencies, regional organisations and interest groups to achieve targeted outcomes.

Developing a strategic and agreed approach will be essential to effective advocacy. It will create a deliberate approach to commit to priorities, activities, and actions.

Challenges

A number of challenges that may hinder the growth of the visitor economy in South Gippsland were raised throughout the consultation process.

Key challenges include:

- Branding and positioning of South Gippsland as a region/Market awareness
- Visitor Experience & Products - quality and quantity
- Accommodation supply
- Seasonality
- Visitation dispersal in region
- Digital connectivity
- Under developed industry sectors
- Limited all weather experiences
- Small population/ rate base—limited funding
- Regulatory processes/red tape
- Natural disasters
- Public transport—inter regional and from Melbourne
- Availability of a skilled workforce
- Regional Competition
- Susceptibility to natural disasters
- Caravan, Camping and Recreational Vehicle (RV) Sector

There are a number of commercially operated caravan parks in South Gippsland, as well as free/low cost caravan and camping sites. Dump points are widely distributed across the region.



Council previously administered two free sites. Bass Valley Camp Ground mid-way between Bena and Poowong and Franklin River Reserve near Toora.

In 2019, Council prepared a "draft Recreational Vehicle and Camping Position Paper". Submissions to the draft position paper, received views of support and opposition to free/low cost camping. It also highlighted support for dump points and long vehicle parking.

In 2020 Council administered sites were permanently closed. Bass Valley Camp Ground was closed in relation to public health concerns and Franklin River Reserve due to environmental and infrastructure impacts and public health concerns.

Submissions to the draft position paper and the current tourism environment was considered in the development of the Visitor Economy Strategy.

Council is keen to continue to support the RV market, but due to the significant impacts of COVID-19 this places a priority to support local accommodation and caravan park businesses. However, the Strategy also identifies Council's support for community led initiatives to grow the RV, caravan and camping market in South Gippsland where this has commercial flow-on benefits.



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Paddock and Ocean Produce

High rainfall, fertile soils, pristine waters and superior farming practises allow for some of the best produce in Australia. Visitors can experience the high quality and award-winning local produce.



The Great Southern Rail Trail

The most picturesque rail trail in Australia. The beauty of the trail is that it caters for all levels, with a number of access points, visitors can complete it in its entirety or in sections. This allows visitors to stop in towns along the way and experience the essence of the region.

Wilson's Promontory National Park

One of Victoria's if not Australia's premier national parks. The Prom is the region's hero attraction. A coastal masterpiece, it is home to km's of walking trails, Australian flora and fauna, and a perfect all abilities destination.

Proximity to Melbourne

The region is located approximately 90 minutes from Melbourne and is easily accessible via the Monash Freeway and South Gippsland Highway. Its close proximity to the growing South Eastern corridor, provides a large proportion of domestic visitation to the region.

Competitive strengths

For South Gippsland's visitor economy to grow and thrive into the future we need to capitalise on these competitive strengths.

Unique Towns and Villages

The region is home to a number of unique towns and villages, each with their own personality, charm and diverse offering for the visitor. Their proximity to each other enables a variety of touring routes. These can be experienced by car and for those towns and villages along the rail trail on foot, bike or even a horse.

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Pristine environment— natural beauty, diversity and an amazing coastline

South Gippsland is home to a beautiful and diverse landscape from lush rolling hills, outstanding views, pristine ocean, to farming pastures and pockets of lush rainforests. We've got every season covered for every visitor to experience, something wondrous in any season.

A coastal masterpiece, it is home to kilometres of walking trails, Australian flora and fauna, and a perfect all abilities destination.

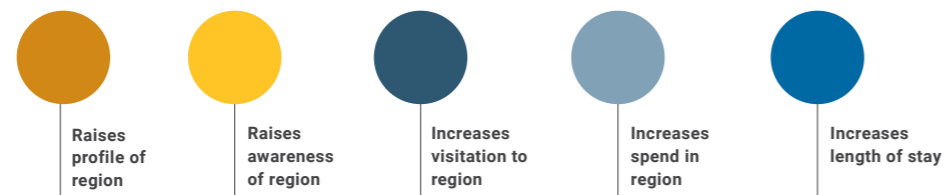
Key opportunities

During the development of this strategy a number of key opportunities have presented themselves. A summary of the key opportunities and how they align to the goals are presented below.

The Prom

Wilson's Prom is located on the southernmost tip of mainland Australia and the number one visitor experience in South Gippsland. The Prom Revitalisation project has the potential to lift the regions profile on an international and national level with the development of a world class conservation sanctuary and an improved product.

There is opportunity for new and complimentary visitor experiences within South Gippsland, business investment and for the entire region to capitalise on the increase in visitation

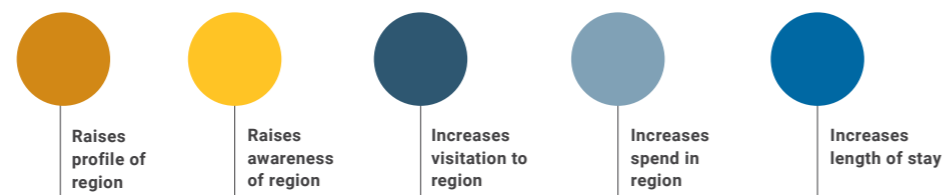


Rail Trail

The GSRT continues to grow in popularity for visitors and locals. The extension of the trail has attributed to the economic viability of many towns the trail passes through. The trail provides additional capacity for capturing visitor spend compared with other parts of the Shire without access to the GSRT. Supplementary businesses have commenced and with the extension to the north there is increased opportunity.

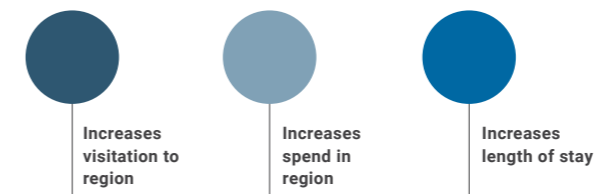
The trail will continue to become a key visitor attraction with the capacity to create ancillary experiences including art installations, events and cultural offerings. There is potential to reimagine the station precincts in Korumburra and Leongatha into visitor precincts..

The GSRT forms part of the proposed Gippsland Trail a key outcome of the Gippsland Tracks and Trails feasibility study.



Developing complementary experiences and products

The development and upgrade of the region's hero products will provide opportunities for new and complementary visitor experiences within South Gippsland. In particular investment in the food and drink sector would support a growing market and encourage new visitors to stay longer and spend more. There is also opportunity to grow the arts, indigenous and events sector. Also the development of key touring routes.



Reimagining Visitor Servicing

There has been a significant shift in the way visitors plan and book travel, from the traditional means of personal interactions to modern digital platforms. The changes in visitor behaviour allows for a more digitalised service and the opportunity to provide a better visitor experience at all touchpoints of the visitor journey.

To improve visitor servicing a region needs to understand its customers needs, expectations and travel patterns.

Visitor Information Centres are transforming to experience centres. Council has the potential to reimagine the centre to reflect the regions culture and experiences through interactive displays and immersive activities.

Implementing a visitor centric approach to all levels of visitor servicing will enhance the visitor experience.

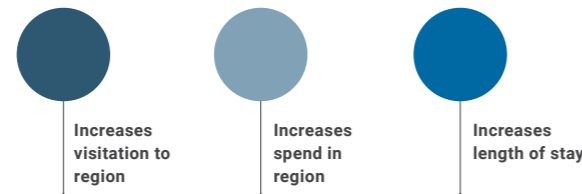


Propensity to seek new domestic markets

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the South Gippsland tourism sector, with travel suspended for a significant period of time in 2020. Businesses will continue to be impacted with ongoing disruptions and restrictions placed on the industry.

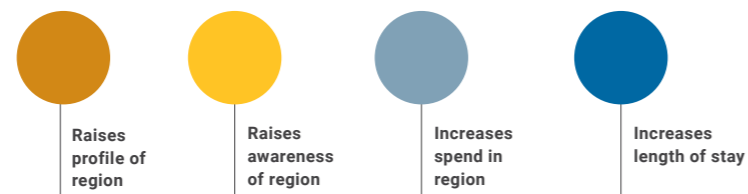
The industry has seen a change in consumer sentiment and behaviour due to the pandemic. Businesses are now catering for a purely domestic market. Domestic tourists are taking shorter, more frequent trips, and spending less. Source *Australian tourism investment and COVID-19 impacts | Tourism Research Australia*. Consumer's expectations include a safe and hygienic environment, booking flexibility and an increase in contactless practices.

Regional visitation is increasing due to consumer preferences for low density areas and open spaces. This is evident in the increase in visitation and external spend for the region since December 2020. South Gippsland can continue to capitalise on this growth due to its proximity to Melbourne and the growing South East corridor, and the propensity of attracting new intrastate and interstate visitors.



Towns & Villages

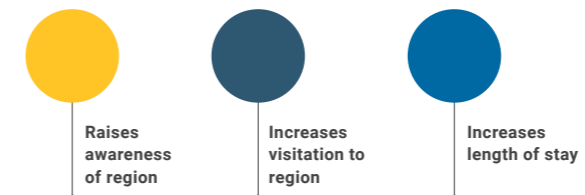
For many of these towns' visitor spend represents a significant proportion of the town's total retail spend. The diversity in product offered has seen an increase in visitation from inner Melbourne and attracting a higher yield market. Increasing exposure through marketing activities and highlighting these towns and villages in touring routes and drives will support further increases visitation.



Coal Creek

Coal Creeks strength is the museum itself, the beautiful buildings, open space and activities.

There is an opportunity to investigate the use of immersive technology to tell the story and showcase South Gippsland's culture and history.



Destination Awareness/Profile

The changes in travel patterns due to COVID-19, projects such as the Prom Revitalisation, GSRT extension, and an increase in destination awareness will provide an opportunity for growth in the towns and villages

In the coming years, South Gippsland has an opportunity to capitalise on the continued extension of the Great Southern Rail Trail which, when complete, will span the entire length of the Shire and will make it one of the longest rail trails in Victoria. The region can also leverage from the increase in visitation that the Wilsons Promontory Revitalisation project will create. The trail and further developments will help to grow visitation to a year-round experience





Future

The rapid pace of change and the uncertainty from COVID-19 make predicating the future a particularly complex issue at the moment. However, based on the history and environment of South Gippsland, the capability of our residents and businesses, it is easy to see a bright future for the Shire where we can aspire to:

- A larger and more diverse population.

- Popular location for visitors

- Diverse visitor experiences

- Improved infrastructure

- A more diverse community

- A more skilled workforce

- Greater opportunities for young people

- Preserving the elements that make living and visiting here enjoyable

- New energy from new residents

- Vibrancy of our towns and villages

- Traditional country values

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Guiding principles

This Strategy focuses on economic outcomes but recognises there are other broader objectives to be achieved. These are guided by a set of overriding principles on the way we implement the Strategy.

Enabling and Solutions Focussed
Focussing on ways and means to enable beneficial economic activities. Building our reputation as a Council that seeks to facilitate business growth and acts to solve the challenges to this.

People-Centric
Aspiring to build positive ways of dealing with people Council deals with businesses, investors, operators and continues to build a positive culture for dealing with customers and visitors.

Inclusive
Policies that are inclusive and supportive of the wide diversity of our residents and visitors and reducing activities that exclude people from participating fully in the benefits of a strong economy.

Building Community Wealth
Fostering activities that build our collective social, intellectual, cultural, financial assets and that directs wealth into the local economy and delivers greater control and benefits into the hands of local people.

Triple Bottom Line
Closely linked to this is balancing our economic objectives with environmental and social objectives.

Strengthening Resilience
Strengthening our ability to foresee, adapt to, and leverage changing conditions to our advantage. This includes shocks to the community from economic and natural disasters and major structural changes. It involves creating systems and networks to allow us to withstand the shocks, recover quickly from them or avoid the shock altogether.

Evidenced based decision making
Decisions based on best available data sources, research and practices. This will be informed by ongoing feedback from government, business and the community that will assist to implement realistic and viable initiatives.

Vision

South Gippsland is a region that inspires people, enriches the visitor experience and is a destination of choice. Working in partnership with local businesses, community and stakeholders to make South Gippsland a key visitor destination.

Goals

- Increase destination awareness

- Leverage natural and physical tourism assets

- To diversify the visitor experience

- To increase per visitor spend; and

- To become a year-round destination



Key themes

This Strategy is based on six major themes. The themes identified and the objectives and actions behind them have been developed to enable the growth of the South Gippsland Visitor Economy over the next ten years.

The key themes are:

- 1 Increasing marketing and promotion
- 2 Supporting visitor economy infrastructure
- 3 Diversifying and expanding products and experiences
- 4 Enhancing visitor servicing
- 5 Building partnerships
- 6 Providing business development and support



1. Increasing marketing and promotion

This is a key focus for Council. Success of this theme relies on further developing the brand characteristics of our region and ensuring that a range of key visitor experiences are the focus of our marketing activities. Collaborating with key stakeholders and industry is vital to drive the growth and sustainability of the visitor economy. It is imperative to develop tools that will support industry to align to our brand, to tell their story and assist in promoting the identity of the region.

Objectives:

- Strengthen South Gippsland's appeal as a visitor destination through increased brand awareness, whilst highlighting the regional brand characteristics.
- Raise the profile of South Gippsland's visitor offer by facilitating and undertaking a range of destination marketing activities to increase visitation.

2. Supporting visitor economy infrastructure

It is important to continue to advocate for new infrastructure projects to support an improved and enhanced visitor offering.

Opportunities to advocate for accommodation that meets changing consumer needs is required. In addition, identifying existing infrastructure that requires upgrading to meet consumer expectations should be considered.

Objective:

- Advocate for and support development of South Gippsland infrastructure that encourages new and existing visitors.

3. Diversifying and expanding products and experiences

Over the next ten years South Gippsland has an opportunity to improve and increase its visitor offering by embracing cultural tourism, events and developing niche products.

Investment is required by both public and private stakeholders to aid the development of the region.

Objective:

- Further develop South Gippsland's visitor products and experiences to encourage new and existing markets to visit, stay and spend.

4. Enhancing visitor servicing

There has been a significant shift in the way visitors plan and book travel, from the traditional means of personal interactions to modern digital platforms. There is an expectation that regions constantly evolve to meet the changing needs of the consumer and that means servicing the visitor at all touchpoints in their journey.

To improve visitor servicing a region needs to understand its customer's needs, expectations and travel patterns. Implementing a visitor centric approach to all levels of visitor servicing will enhance the visitor experience.

Objectives:

- Enhance the visitor experience by providing high quality engagement assets, which create a positive experience in our region.
- Invest in research to understand the market and identify the gaps in the visitor journey.

5. Building partnerships

Successful outcomes rely on strong partnerships with all levels of Government, business, key stakeholders and the community. Key strategic partnerships will support and grow the visitor economy well into the future.

Objectives:

- To develop partnerships with stakeholders to support the development of the visitor economy in South Gippsland.

6. Providing business development and support

As well as building skills this theme also seeks to increase entrepreneurship, strengthen our business resilience and capacity to create and retain community wealth.

Objectives:

- Support the continued growth and development of the tourism sector that delivers high quality visitor experiences.
- Building the skills, training and knowledge of the business community.



Action plan

An Action Plan has been developed with priorities based on the Strategy Themes.

Projects have been included for each of the themes in Appendix 1.

From this, Annual Action plans will be developed during the life of the Strategy. These will reflect available funding, current priorities, and objectives.

The Action Plan is intended to be a live document that is subject to ongoing review and will be adjusted in line with budgetary considerations.

Monitoring, measurement and public reporting will occur regarding the implementation of Action Plan.

OUR COMMITMENT as we implement this plan is...to keep listening, learning and improving the way we do business, to use our professional skills and knowledge to seek the best outcomes for our community and strengthen the elements that make South Gippsland a great place to live, work, invest and visit.

Acronyms

VESAG – Visitor Economy Strategy Advisory Group

TRA – Tourism Research Australia

VFR – Visiting Friends and Relatives

DG – Destination Gippsland

Parks Vi – Parks Victoria

VTIC – Victorian Tourism Industry Council

Gippsland DMP – Towards 2030 Gippsland Destination Management Plan

GSRT – Great Southern Rail Trail

Wilsons Promontory National Park – The Prom



Visitor Economy Strategy Action Plan

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

2021 - 2031



Action Plan 2021 – 2031

THEME 1 Increasing marketing and promotion

Strengthen South Gippsland's appeal as a visitor destination through increased brand awareness, whilst highlighting the regional brand characteristics.

Raise the profile of South Gippsland's visitor offer by facilitating and undertaking a range of destination marketing activities to increase visitation.

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	TIMEFRAME (Short, Medium, Long Term)	PARTNERS
1.1 Develop and strengthen South Gippsland's appeal as a visitor destination through a range of coordinated marketing initiatives.	1.1.1	Develop a promotional website to attract visitors to South Gippsland.	S	
	1.1.2	Encourage visitors to use the new website via an online and print advertising campaign.	S	Business Associations Parks Vic, DGL
	1.1.3	Develop an annual marketing campaign for the South Gippsland region drawing on support from government partners where needed.	Ongoing	Parks Vic, DGL
	1.1.4	Review existing marketing publications on an annual basis to determine if they are still required and if reprints are necessary.	Ongoing	
1.2 Promote the South Gippsland tourism brand.	1.2.1	Develop and implement localised South Gippsland branding consistent with the Gippsland brand developed by Destination Gippsland (DGL).	S	DGL
	1.2.2	Increase South Gippsland's digital promotional assets (photography, video, drone footage).	Ongoing	DGL Visit Victoria
1.3 Encourage new residents to South Gippsland via promotion of its people and places.	1.3.1	Implement a series of podcasts featuring local residents to promote the value of living in South Gippsland.	S	
1.4 Raise the awareness of the region, to encourage visitation and increase length of stay.	1.4.1	Partner and collaborate with Gippsland councils to develop cross-regional marketing ideas.	Ongoing	Gippsland Councils
	1.4.2	Develop marketing initiatives to promote Gippsland drives.	S	Gippsland Councils DGL
	1.4.3	Develop a Grand Ridge Road map and promote it as a key Gippsland touring route.	S	Council Wellington Shire Latrobe City Baw Baw Shire
1.5 Increase awareness of and visitation to the Great Southern Rail Trail.	1.5.1	Develop and deliver a strategic and marketing plan for the Great Southern Rail Trail.	M	DGL Visit Victoria Specialised interest groups
1.6 Increase awareness of and visitation to South Gippsland's villages and eateries.	1.6.1	Coordinate a marketing campaign with a focus on villages and local eateries.	S	DGL
1.7 Support local business growth through a range of marketing initiatives.	1.7.1	Develop a Shop South Gippsland campaign to encourage support for local retail businesses.	S	

Action Plan 2021 – 2031

THEME 2

Supporting visitor economy infrastructure

Advocate for and support development of South Gippsland infrastructure that encourages new and existing visitors.

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	TIMEFRAME (Short, Medium, Long Term)	PARTNERS
2.1 Support the development of key tourism assets and infrastructure.	2.1.1	Advocate to Federal and State Government for key tourism projects supported by Council.	Ongoing	Stakeholders
	2.1.2	Partner with Destination Gippsland to undertake a strategic product review aimed at delivering improvements to products and experiences.	M	Destination Gippsland Gippsland Councils
2.2 Identify and support the development of complementary products and experiences to capitalise on and enhance the Great Southern Rail Trail (GSRT).	2.2.1	Develop public art along the Great Southern Rail Trail	M	Creative Gippsland
	2.2.2	Identify additional supporting rail trail infrastructure requirements (such as additional trail connections, horse mounting yards, repair stations, shelters, toilets, car parks, interpretive signage, seat and bike racks etc). Support implementation if required.	M	
	2.2.3	Investigate the viability of improvement works on the rail trail that would enhance the visitor experience (e.g. removal of dangerous road crossings or unsightly cattle crossings).	L	RRV Land owners
	2.2.4	Install wayfinding signage for the GSRT from key locations off the South Gippsland Highway and main arterial roads.	S	RRV
2.3 Investigate sustainable infrastructure for South Gippsland to enhance the visitor experience.	2.3.1	Identify and then seek funding opportunities to implement actions from the Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Study.	M	Sustainability Victoria
2.4 Support upgrades to existing tourism infrastructure to enhance the visitor experience	2.4.1	Complete a tourism infrastructure audit to identify redundant signage and opportunities for potential infrastructure upgrades (lookouts, tourism signage etc).	M	Parks Vic DELWP Gippsland Ports Committees of Management

Action Plan 2021 – 2031

THEME 3

Diversifying and expanding products and experiences

Further develop South Gippsland's visitor products and experiences to encourage new and existing markets to visit, stay and spend.

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	TIMEFRAME (Short, Medium, Long Term)	PARTNERS
3.1 Identify opportunities to support events in South Gippsland	3.1.1	Determine a policy position on events and develop an event framework.	S	Event organisers DGL
	3.1.2	Leverage from DGL's Gippsland Regional Events Strategy and Events Gippsland.	Ongoing	DGL Events Gippsland
3.2 Leverage South Gippsland's cultural assets for tourism purposes	3.2.1	Develop a South Gippsland Cultural Tourism Plan.	M	Cultural Victoria
	3.2.2	Position Coal Creek as a key Cultural Tourism asset for South Gippsland.	M	DGL Cultural Victoria
3.3 Identify South Gippsland's accessible tourism products and experiences	3.3.1	Undertake a stocktake of accessible tourism assets in South Gippsland.	M	Accessible Gippsland South Gippsland Access and Inclusion Committee
3.4 Identify opportunities to support cycling in South Gippsland	3.4.1	Support the Bicycle Network 'Riding for Recovery Hub and Spoke' weekend event	S	Bass Coast Bicycle Network
3.5 Continue to support Art, Culture and Creative Industries in South Gippsland	3.5.1	Update the South Gippsland Art, Culture and Creative Industry Strategy	S	Creative Victoria Creative Gippsland
3.6 Develop niche products aligned to brand	3.6.1	Develop touring routes that promote the visitor experiences	S	Business Associations DGL

Action Plan 2021 – 2031

THEME 4

Enhancing visitor servicing

Enhance the visitor experience by providing high quality engagement assets, which create a positive image of our region.

Invest in research to understand the market and identify the gaps.

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	TIMEFRAME (Short, Medium, Long Term)	PARTNERS
4.1 Improve the visitor experience	4.1.1	Broaden the tourism knowledge of local businesses and create tourism ambassadors via an online training program.	S	Business Associations
	4.1.2	Investigate the feasibility and cost of digital technology in key locations.	M	
	4.1.3	Investigate programs that help better understand the travel patterns of visitors.	M	
	4.1.4	Continue the operation of the Visitor Information Centre in Foster.	Ongoing	
	4.1.5	Develop plans to transition the Visitor Information Centres to an experience centre.	L	
	4.1.6	Undertake updated visitor research to better understand customer needs and expectations	M-L	DGL Gippsland Councils

Action Plan 2021 – 2031

THEME 5

Building partnerships

To develop partnerships with stakeholders to support the development of the visitor economy in South Gippsland.

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	TIMEFRAME (Short, Medium, Long Term)	PARTNERS
5.1 Maintain collaborative partnerships with stakeholders to further progress the visitor economy in South Gippsland	5.1.1	Work collaboratively with Destination Gippsland under the terms of the partnership contract to ensure the best outcomes for South Gippsland.	M	DGL
	5.1.2	Work with local business and community groups to promote opportunities for local operators.	Ongoing	Business Groups
	5.1.3	Engage with local artists via Council's Arts Development Officer and the South Gippsland Arts Network.	Ongoing	South Gippsland Arts Network
	5.1.4	Collaborate with Parks Victoria on South Gippsland projects and marketing where opportunities exist or a need is identified.	Ongoing	Parks Vic
	5.1.5	Support the Visitor Economy Strategy Advisory Group to be a key adviser to Council on Visitor Economy issues.	S	VESAG
	5.1.6	Support the development of the State Government's Local Tourism Action Plans.	M	DGL
	5.1.7	Provide community groups interested in establishing free or low-cost camping with information and advice.	Ongoing	
	5.1.8	Support local communities to work with relevant authorities to establish dump points if appropriate.	Ongoing	South Gippsland Water CMCA

Action Plan 2021 – 2031

THEME 6

Providing business development and support

Support the continued growth and development of the tourism sector that delivers high quality visitor experiences.

Building the skills, training and knowledge of the business community.

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	TIMEFRAME (Short, Medium, Long Term)	PARTNERS
6.1 Facilitate the establishment of new tourism businesses in South Gippsland	6.1.1	Continue the Better Business Approvals process to assist small/medium businesses to establish in South Gippsland.	S	
	6.1.2	Provide strategic input into the review of Council's Municipal Statement to ensure the Visitor Economy and its importance to South Gippsland is recognised.	M	
	6.1.3	Continue to provide the Business Concierge service within Council.	M	
6.2 Provide opportunities for local businesses to increase their knowledge and skills	6.2.1	Promote targeted training and skills programs to local businesses.	All	Small Business Victoria, SBMS Education providers Independent trainers
	6.2.1	Deliver tourism information to local businesses via communication tools such as the Business e-newsletter and associated business web pages.	Ongoing	
	6.2.3	Support Destination Gippsland Ltd to deliver the Gippsland Digital Maze Program to South Gippsland businesses.	S	
	6.2.4	Establish a business auditing program with a focus on customer service.	L	Independent training providers
6.3 Encourage local businesses to invest and implement sustainable activities and technologies	6.3.1	Provide information to local business on sustainable technologies (for example electric vehicle charging).	M	
6.4 Developing Business Resilience and Recovery	6.4.1	Continue and enhance Council's Business Resilience and Recovery Programs		Business Associations, MEMPC, DGL