

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLAN

SUMMARY



Mansfield Shire





“Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.”

United Nations World Tourism Organisation

What is sustainable tourism?

Sustainable tourism includes protecting and restoring our natural environment and helping to conserve our region's natural wonders and cultures, so they can be enjoyed today and by future generations. It also means fostering a profitable industry that delivers employment opportunities and economic benefits to communities, and in turn helps improve the tourism experience for our travellers and the quality of life for our residents.



INTRODUCTION

Historically our Shire has been, and is expected to remain, one of the fastest growing regional Shires. Our growth, together with more than 600,000 visitors annually, has created the need for us to actively review our approach to tourism. We recognise the importance of protecting the vibrant liveability of our Shire - the natural beauty and amenity that has made it so attractive in the first place - whilst also strengthening our visitor economy.

Mansfield Shire Council has led a comprehensive, consultative process to develop a Sustainable Tourism Plan 2024-28, engaging with almost 300 stakeholders across surveys, workshops, one on one sessions, group consultation and a focus group. This process delivered a wealth of insights and clear direction on where there is greatest opportunity to combine collective efforts and deliver on our tourism vision.

OUR APPROACH

Our approach to sustainable tourism in our Shire is guided by the following principles.

1. We value our natural environment and recognise this is one of our major assets.
2. We honour the rich culture and history of Mansfield Shire, respecting the traditional owners and acknowledging their ongoing contribution to the community
3. We support industry growth by collaborating with stakeholders to create quality tourism experiences and promote sustainable tourism practices.
4. We recognise that inclusion and accessibility is essential to delivering positive, safe communities and visitor experiences.

Mansfield's visitor economy

Tourism is a key driver for both the Mansfield Shire economy and resident attraction. The Visitor Economy looks at the collective contribution from various related industries that support tourism in our region.

The visitor economy accounts for the fact that visitor activity and 'tourism' does not occur in isolation, but rather, is intricately linked with other sectors such as food and agriculture, arts and culture, and outdoor recreation (fishing, hunting, touring etc). It encompasses industries that both directly and indirectly service visitors,

ranging from accommodation, tourism operators and attractions, to broader goods and services such as retail, and food and beverage operators.

Mansfield Shire's significant visitation drives a substantial part of the economy and leads to flow on benefits for other industry and supports liveability in the Shire.

10,546 estimated resident population (2023), with population peaking at ~23,000 during peak periods.¹

90% of the Shire's domestic overnight visitors originate from within Victoria.³

612,000 visitors to Mansfield Shire³ plus 587,000 visitors to Mt Buller/Mt Stirling in 2022.⁴

88% of visitors choose to stay within Mansfield itself³, with an average stay of 3 nights.

\$121.8 million in direct tourism spend in Mansfield Shire in 2022/23.²

January emerges as the busiest month for tourism, closely followed by March and April.³

Holiday and **Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR)**³ are the primary purposes of trips.

Top five categories in the 1,415 local businesses for number of employees², include Retail Trade and Accommodation & Food Services.

61.8% of all visitors comprise domestic overnight visitors, with domestic day visitors a further 37.9%.

Top activities for our visitors include eat out/dine at restaurants and/or cafes, sightseeing, bushwalking, National Parks/State Forests, fishing, water activities/sports, other outdoor activities.³

SOURCE

¹ Profile Id.

² Economic Profile.

³ Tourism Research Australia (TRA); National Visitor Survey (unpublished data). Projection: Peter Valerio.

⁴ Mt Buller Mt Stirling Annual Report 2022.

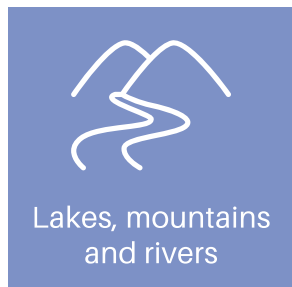
What we heard

The consultation process revealed shared views around the importance of tourism and the need to protect core environmental and community values. Residents aspire to balance tourism planning that respects people (community) and place (environment). They want the Shire to remain an attractive, vibrant, creative community; and they want tourism to be eco-friendly and environmentally sustainable. Key terms and themes identified throughout the community sessions are reflected below:



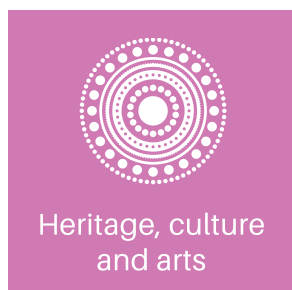
Tourism pillars

The following four pillars have been identified as key strengths of our region's offering and reflective of our tourism industry's competitive advantages.



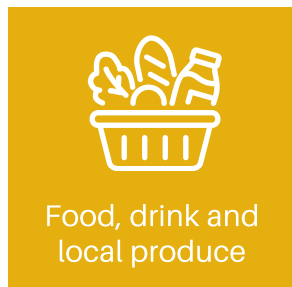
Explore our lakes, mountains and rivers

- Cycling
- Winter sports
- Adventure and nature-based activities (fishing, watersports, hiking and bushwalking, 4wd, hunting etc)
- Camping



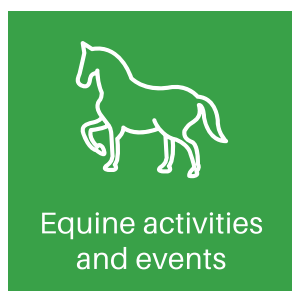
Immerse yourself in our heritage, culture and arts

- First People's heritage
- Unique history of the region with the timber and gold mining historical industries, legend of Ned Kelly and story of the Man from Snowy River
- Exhibits and galleries
- Events showcasing art in various forms such as pottery, fine arts, music and theatre



Indulge in food, drink and local produce

- Cellar doors, distilleries and breweries
- Restaurants and cafes
- Rich, quality local produce
- Producers and providore markets



Discover the Equine activities and events our region is famous for

- Unique-to-place events including Merrijig Rodeo and Campdraft
- History of the mountain cattleman
- Trail rides through country

The following identified opportunities serve as a roadmap for the Council to foster sustainable tourism and support investment within the Shire to bridge the identified gaps and grow the capacity of our visitor economy to respond to the increased visitor trends.

Each opportunity will have varying impacts on the Shire’s visitor economy, and it’s the collective implementation of these ideas that will bring the destination vision to fruition.

Gap	Opportunity
Tourism Products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of paid tourism attractions within the Shire • Accessible and inclusive products • All-weather experiences for visitors to undertake during times of inclement weather • Family-friendly experiences • Water sport and experiences to activate the lakes and rivers • Unique food and drinks experiences including agri-tourism • Products celebrating the rich history and heritage of Mansfield and its outlying towns • Large scale accommodation offering with conferencing facilities to attract high yield business and family market • High-quality properties (high end or larger size), as well as properties that leverage the strength of the regions natural assets • Powered sites for RVs and caravans to target high-yield market • Creation/allocation of a dedicated art gallery with supporting calendar of resident artists
Accessibility & Connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracks and trails master plan, increasing intraconnectivity noting that the Shire is popular for all forms of bike riding, hiking/walking, and horse-riding • Review of public transport options
Evening and Weekday Product/Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evening-based experiences to encourage a longer length of visitor stay and to provide experiences which locals can enjoy • Experiences and activities that support mid-week visitation
Enhanced Calendar of Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop events into signature events to drive traffic during quiet periods and address product gaps
Destination Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitor Management through data collection, education and monitoring especially for national parks and towns avoiding the risk of over tourism during peak visitation periods. • Coordinated signage strategy including signage in its broadest context including roadside signs, information kiosks, information centres and online information sources • Flexible visitor information servicing models

Our image

Mansfield Shire's towns and communities have their own distinct character. The Sustainable Tourism Plan aims to capitalise on the unique identities of the towns, outlined below, to set us apart from our competitors and to play to each of their individual strengths.

MANSFIELD SHIRE

Exceeds expectations with hidden pockets of stunning treasures of mountain wilderness, rivers, lakes and bush destinations, quirky towns and friendly locals.

MERRIJIG

Arrive at the most spectacular vista where the valleys meet the peaks. A rural community where the horse is a local and our backyard is your escape.

MANSFIELD TOWN

The heart of the Shire where people come to connect, catch up and prepare for adventure. A welcoming community with year-round events, an abundance of the arts and a beautiful, lively retail centre.

JAMIESON

The place where you go for the sublime meeting of the rivers and forest experiences. You can relax cruising along the river, experience the nostalgia of yesteryear or witness brilliant autumn colours.

BONNIE DOON

Discover and explore - from the lake to the hills, the area is packed with adventure, fun and fascinating history.

GOUGHS BAY

The lake is at the heart of this welcoming community. Surrounded by rolling hills, you can immerse yourself in the picturesque and peaceful stretches of the expansive water views or discover the many bays waiting to be explored.



How will Council achieve this?

VISION

Mansfield Shire is a must-visit destination, renowned for its stunning natural environment, authentic rural experiences, and diverse range of year-round attractions. We are an inviting and welcoming community that celebrates and actively preserves its cultural and natural heritage.

KEY FOCUS AREAS

1. Lead and support significant activation projects, individual town plans and opportunities to grow the visitor economy in our region, capitalising on our strengths and competitive advantages as identified in our tourism pillars.
2. Support the industry in best-practice tourism, product development and sustainable growth through grant funding, education, resources and marketing.
3. Deliver efficient, sustainable visitor servicing, positioning Mansfield as a sustainable tourism destination.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Council's role in the Sustainable Tourism Plan encompasses the areas of leadership, advocacy, partnerships and service delivery. Beyond Council, there are multiple organisations with responsibility for different aspects of tourism planning, management and delivery, including local and regional tourism organisations, state government agencies, private tourism operators and community organisations. These organisations perform a variety of functions, including marketing, visitor servicing, product and experience development, business development, area management and strategic planning.

A Destination Management Action Plan will need to be developed in collaboration with the tourism industry to adopt an integrated, holistic approach to tourism planning which will determine priorities, timeframes, resourcing, and measures of success.



KEY FOCUS AREAS

The Sustainable Tourism Plan (2024-28) recognises the Shire has an important role to play in the sustainable development of our region's tourism industry by focusing on the following key areas.

Key Focus Area	Related Projects and Strategies (Opportunities)	Council's Role	Key Stakeholders
<p>1. Lead and support significant activation projects, individual town plans and opportunities to grow the visitor economy in our region, capitalising on our strengths and competitive advantages as identified in our tourism pillars</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delatite Valley Masterplan • Goughs Bay Masterplan • Station Precinct Masterplan including the new Heritage Museum • Improving river access, facilities and visitor experiences at Mirimbah, Merrijig and Carters Rd • Improving connectivity through tracks and trails to and within the region; implement a wayfinding and signage strategy • Activating the Lake Eildon Masterplan, in particular Skyline Road Tourist Precinct • High Country Hall of Fame, based in Merrijig 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead the related projects and their effective delivery • Identify ongoing grant opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delatite Valley Association • Mansfield Historical Society • Friends of the Great Victorian Rail Trail • Goughs Bay Progress Association • Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria
<p>2. Support the industry in best-practice tourism, product development and sustainable growth through grant funding, education, resources and marketing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing a tourism network or advisory group pilot program • Creating a Destination Management Action Plan with the tourism industry • Continue passing on opportunities to operators for workshops, training, marketing and PR through relationship with Tourism North East • Assist tourism operators to develop and grow the region's product and experience offering • Educate and engage businesses on sustainability initiatives • Develop a tourism investment plan to address product and experience gaps • Facilitate and support the delivery of events that attract visitors to the Shire • Council will continue to support the business development and advocacy programs of the Mansfield & District Business Association and other organisations to grow the capacity and capability of the region's business community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead tourism governance model • Advocacy • Ongoing partnership with Tourism North East • Identify ongoing grant opportunities • Mansfield & District Business Association relationship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism operators and businesses • Tourism North East • Mansfield Business District Association • Mansfield Autism Statewide Services

Key Focus Area	Related Projects and Strategies (Opportunities)	Council's Role	Key Stakeholders
<p>3. Deliver efficient, sustainable visitor servicing, positioning Mansfield as a sustainable tourism destination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain relationship with key stakeholders and community groups across the tourism pillars • Identify opportunities to promote and market the local produce of our region including supporting farmers markets • Develop a tourism brand for the region • Ensure provision of face-to-face visitor servicing is cost-effective and returns benefit to visitors, tourism operators and the local community • Engage industry and community in transitioning to a sustainable model of visitor servicing, using multiple channels to distribute visitor information across the Shire • Review the Visitor Servicing strategy and recommendations to ensure visitors maximise their stay and disperse into the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy • Partnerships with various stakeholders • Ongoing partnership with Tourism North East • Identify ongoing grant opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alpine Resorts Victoria • Buller Ski Lifts • Mt Buller Chamber of Commerce • Tourism North East • Arts Mansfield • Mansfield Historical Society • Mansfield Agricultural & Pastoral Society • Tourism operators



Case study

COLLABORATIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT INITIATIVE: PROTECTING GOUGHS BAY'S NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The collaboration between Mansfield Shire Council, Goughs Bay Area Progress Association (GBAPA), and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP)'s Forest Fire Management division, is an important example of a proactive approach to addressing environmental challenges with tourism. Regular stakeholder meetings identified that during peak periods, such as school holidays and public holidays, Goughs Bay experienced significant accumulations of camping rubbish. This not only spoilt the natural environment but also posed environmental hazards and highlighted the urgency of the stakeholders collaborating on a swift solution.

Recognising the shared responsibility in addressing this issue, a waste strategy was devised encompassing three key initiatives:



Additional public bins were strategically placed to accommodate the surge in waste during peak periods.



The frequency of pickups by Cleanaway was increased to ensure timely removal of waste.



The Mansfield Resource Recovery Centre offered free of charge drop offs for camping waste.

A key aspect of the solution involved leveraging the reach of the Forest Fire Management team. This team, responsible for monitoring activities along the Delatite Arm Reserve, actively participated in the initiative by distributing informative flyers created by the Council, guiding visitors and residents on proper waste disposal practices.

The collaborative efforts yielded significant results, with 700 bags of waste collected and redirected to the Resource Recovery Centre during the 23-24 summer holidays alone. This not only prevented environmental degradation but also resulted in substantial cost savings by eliminating the need for reactive cleanup efforts.

This initiative between Mansfield Shire Council, GBAPA and DELWP serves as a great example of stakeholders within our region collectively working towards the Sustainable Tourism Plan's Strategic Objective of "protecting and enhancing the natural environment, cultural heritage, and sense of place" and through safeguarding the natural beauty of Goughs Bay stakeholders have ensured its long-term sustainability for both residents and as a tourist destination.

For further information and a copy of the Shire's comprehensive Sustainable Tourism Action Plan, please contact:

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