

5. ECOTOURISM

This category recognises ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that foster environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation.

1. TOURISM EXCELLENCE (20 marks)

- a) Demonstrate your eligibility for this category as related to the descriptor above and provide a brief overview on the nature and history of the business. (6)
- b) What ecotourism products, experiences and services do you offer guests/visitors? (7)
- c) Describe how your business demonstrates excellence in ecotourism and exceeded industry standards for sustainability through the implementation of innovative practices and technologies. (7)

Tips:

- a) *Take care to ensure you have entered the right category and that your response aligns to the category descriptor. Failure to demonstrate your eligibility will be reflected in your score. Refer to the ABOUT US section of your website as this may assist with this response. Judges will want to know how and when the business started, who works in the business, where it is located (a map would be helpful) and how it has developed over the years. Reference to relevant accreditation programs you participate in would enhance your response.*
- b) *The focus of this question is tourism.*
- c) *Refer to how your business fosters appreciation of natural resources and protects natural heritage, raises awareness among visitors and respects and involves stakeholders. This may include but not be limited to accreditation and recognition in award programs.*

2. BUSINESS PLANNING (20 marks)

- a) Provide an overview of the key features of your business plan including goals, strategies and outcomes and demonstrate how they link with the principles of ecologically sustainable tourism. (6)
- b) Describe any innovations that have taken place during the qualifying period to improve your experience or business and demonstrate how these innovations enhance your ecotourism offering. (6)
- c) What investment has been made in staff training and development and how has this improved the ecotourism services provided to your guests/visitors? (4)
- d) Describe the main environmental, cultural and conservation risks for your tourism business and the risk mitigation measures you have implemented. (4)

Tips:

- a) *Introduce this section with your mission and/or vision statement. A 3-column table would be useful here to display the information. Make sure you use measurable goals and outcomes. Ensure you focus on ecologically sustainable tourism activities.*
- b) *This is a 2-part question. An innovation can be defined as “The process of introducing new or significantly improved goods or services and/or implementing new or significantly improved processes.” (Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics). Be sure to include the impact the innovation had on your ecotourism business.*
- c) *Describe your commitment to training? How do you ensure you and/or your staff gain the correct knowledge and skills to carry out their job? Investment does not need to be financial.*
- d) *Consider all aspects of business risk and ensure to focus on risks with the potential to impact your ecotourism initiative. This response is more than just workplace health and safety.*

3. MARKETING (25 marks)

- a) Who are the target markets for your ecotourism product? (5)
- b) How do you know your ecotourism product/service meets the needs of your target markets? (5)
- c) Describe how your business is competitively positioned in the marketplace through your ecotourism and sustainability philosophy and the methods you use to communicate this with your guests/visitors. (5)
- d) Describe the innovative marketing strategies you have used to differentiate your ecotourism business and attract your target markets? Describe how sustainability is embedded into these strategies. (5)
- e) Demonstrate the success of the initiatives outlined in (d). (5)

Tips:

- a) *This question seeks to understand who you have aimed your marketing towards. Consider for example; who they are, where they are from, how old they are, how they purchase travel, what motivates and inspires them and how your product meets their expectations.*
- b) *What research have you conducted or used to determine your target markets? How do you know the target markets you identified in Q 3 are right for you?*
- c) *What makes you different from your competitors? Consider for example; size, location, exclusivity, services, facilities. What methods do you use to communicate these to the target markets you have mentioned in Q 3 a)?*
- d) *What have you done differently to attract your customers? Consider for example; social media, digital advertising, apps. The response needs to focus on innovative approaches to marketing.*
- e) *Outline how the new/different/unique activities you outlined in (d) have been successful.*

4. CUSTOMER SERVICE (20 marks)

- a) Describe your customer service philosophy/values. (5)
- b) Explain how you provide for guests/visitors with specific needs. (5)
- c) Describe how you measure customer satisfaction and identify areas for improvement. (5)
- d) What processes do you have in place to respond to customers' complaints both online and offline, and manage your online reputation? (5)

Tips:

- a) *Consider the systems and procedures you have in place to deliver outstanding service. How do you make an effort to understand visitor needs, welcome them, respect them, thank them and do business with them?*
- b) *Demonstrate how you consider visitors' special and specific needs. Think about who your customers are and their specific requirements. Do you offer any accessible tourism products, experiences and services to visitors? How do you identify your customers' requirements and provide for them appropriately? Specific needs could include cultural, language, physical, intellectual, dietary and other specific needs e.g. groups, special interest etc. Provide examples of how you catered for customers with specific needs, explain the outcome or successes.*
- c) *What processes do you have in place to understand how your customer feels about your product/service? For example; feedback forms, monitoring social media, blogs, mystery shoppers etc. Consider providing a case study/example where you have implemented a change based on customer feedback.*
- d) *This is a three-part answer. It is crucial to know what your clients are saying about your business and take measures to protect your business. A sound Reputation Management strategy will outline the processes you have in place to understand how your clients see you, think of you and talk about you and how you take action when feedback is received (negative or positive). In this response you need to outline your reputation management strategy and (1) what processes you have in place to respond to positive and negative feedback (online and offline), (2) how you measure customer satisfaction and (3) what processes you have in place to monitor your online reputation.*

5. SUSTAINABILITY (15 marks)

- a) Describe and provide evidence of positive commercial outcomes for your business and the local community as a result of the implementation of sustainability principles in your business operations. (5)
- b) Demonstrate how your ecotourism business respects and involves the local community and fosters a greater understanding of conservation. (5)
- c) What major initiatives have you introduced to reduce your environmental footprint? Provide quantitative information and evidence for these initiatives. (5)

Tips:

- a) *This is a two-part question.
1. Consider the quantifiable outcome for your business that has resulted from the implementation of sustainability principles in your business operations. Ensure you link to conservation values. Include*

calculations to show how you know the economic impacts. This is ALWAYS best presented in a table, and always include some words before and/or after the table with an explanation.

2. Explain how your business financially contributes to the local economy from the implementation of sustainability principles in your business operations. For example; local purchasing, employing local people etc. Ensure you link to conservation values.

The focus should be the economic contribution (money) in dollars. What have you spent. Include calculations to show how you know the economic impacts. This is ALWAYS best presented in a table, and always include some words before and/or after the table with an explanation.

It is recommended for businesses that spend a significant portion of their money in the region, to determine the percentage of total contribution. Eg. '75% of all our expenses were spent in X region.'

- b) Consider the social benefits you provide to your local community, for example, engagement with community groups, local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, environmental groups etc. Ensure you link to conservation values. Outline how your financial contribution/spending in the local economy has benefited the community. Select some interesting examples and tell several stories.*
- c) Explain your commitment to environmental sustainability and detail the activities you conduct in relation to water conservation, waste management and recycling, fuel and energy reduction, carbon reduction/offset. Outline the activities you conduct on an ongoing basis as well as any new initiatives implemented during the qualifying period. Demonstrate how the initiative benefited the environment and where possible include a measurement/evidence of how the activity has reduced your environmental footprint. The inclusion of actual measurement data including the amounts saved/reduced in comparison to the previous year may enhance response. This is always best presented with a table and include some words before the table with an explanation of the table and your overall commitment to environmental sustainability.*

TOTAL SCORE: ____/100