

## 5. ECOTOURISM

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

### SCORING

Entrants in this category will be scored from the following sources:

- Written submission: 90 marks. The score for each question is highlighted below.
  - Online review: 10 marks
  - Site visit: 20 marks
- Total score: \_\_\_/120 points

### WRITTEN SUBMISSION

- Respond to the following questions using maximum 8,000 words and 25 images. Please note Q1 (COVID-19 Impact) is not included in the word count and it will not contribute to the overall score.
- Submissions are made via the [Australian Tourism Awards portal](#).
- A good answer should include:



#### 1. COVID-19 IMPACT (0 marks)

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**Provide the judges with an understanding of your business situation resulting from the national and world events (e.g., COVID-19, bushfire) during the qualifying period. Please answer:**

1. *Outline how many months in the second half of the qualifying period (1 July 2020 – 30 June 2021) you were operational for.*
2. *Describe what the business restrictions were on your business e.g., gatherings.*
3. *Describe the impact of travel restrictions on your business e.g., border closures.*

*NOTE: These responses do not contribute to your overall score but provide a clearer picture for judges to understand what you have been able to achieve. This is factual information allowing you to tell your business story in your written submission.*

## 2. INTRODUCTION (20 marks)

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Please provide an overview of the business tourism products, experiences and services including the nature and history of the business. How does the business demonstrate tourism excellence?

### Response Guidance

- ❖ Set the story of your product, experience, service and give the judge insight into the product, experience, service on offer. Take the judge on a journey of your business product/service; describe the visitor experience, where and how it began, how you have developed the product over time.
- ❖ This is where the judges (and auditors) will gain an understanding of how you fit into the category. Therefore, it is important to clearly demonstrate your eligibility by aligning with the category criteria to ensure that there is no misunderstanding as to why you have entered this category.
- ❖ Your response should demonstrate why your business should be considered as an award-winning tourism business by highlighting your points of difference and what makes you stand out. Specify amenities, products, services or facilities that enhance visitor satisfaction.
- ❖ Demonstrate your commitment to tourism excellence by explaining the values and philosophy of your business and how the business has been actively involved with and contributed to the tourism industry (locally, regionally and nationally) through both business and personal participation.
- ❖ Tourism excellence can also be demonstrated by listing any awards you have won and accreditations you hold.
- ❖ Use graphics to support and enhance your response provided. For example, a map of where you are located, images of the product/service and any specific facilities, amenities and services you have highlighted in your response, a collage of the accreditation programs you participate in and/or any award achievements.

## 3. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE USE (30 marks)

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**A. Demonstrate how the business mitigates or minimizes its impacts on our natural resources. 15 marks**

### Response Guidance

- ❖ According to the Department of Environment and Energy, Natural Heritage is ‘the natural, Indigenous and historic places that are of outstanding heritage value to the nation’.
- ❖ This is where judges will gain an understanding of how you carefully consider your impact on natural resources and how you marry preservation and protection with allowing visitor access and providing a tourism experience.
- ❖ Describe how the business limits the negative impacts of tourism on the natural environment through the responsible use of resources, effective waste management and minimizing of pollution, etc.
- ❖ Detail the activities you conduct in relation to water conservation, waste management and recycling, fuel and energy reduction, carbon reduction/offset.
- ❖ The inclusion of actual measurement data including the amounts saved/reduced in comparison to the previous qualifying period may enhance response. However, it is anticipated that data may not be available, or the predicted outcomes may not be able to be demonstrated due to business disruptions. If this is the case, demonstrate to the judge how your results have been impacted.
- ❖ Use graphics to support and enhance your response provided.

**B. What have you implemented or improved to enhance the visitor experience and/or to provide business recovery and resilience in the wake of national and world events during the qualifying period? 15 marks**

*Response Guidance*

- ❖ *The previous question is designed to give judges a broad overview of all the preservation and protection you undertake for the natural resources. This question requires you to share what strategies, innovations and/or developments you have introduced or updated during the qualifying period. Additionally, or alternatively, it seeks to understand what strategies were implemented for business endurance through a year of challenging national and world events.*
- ❖ *An enhancement could include, for example, a new experience or facility, creation of education programs, development of asset management strategies, etc. Actions that supported the ongoing survival of your business could include, for example, diversifying your product/experience, seeking alternative ways for the delivery of the experience, product or service.*
- ❖ *The response should demonstrate why the strategy, innovation and/or development was implemented and how this enhances the visitor experience whilst protecting the natural environment.*
- ❖ *Demonstrate how these innovations and/or product developments protect and preserve our natural heritage.*
- ❖ *Also include the research, planning and outcome/s of these and how they align with the business' main goals and strategies.*
- ❖ *Use graphics to support and enhance your response provided. For example, an image of any new products or facilities, posters promoting changes that have been implemented.*

#### **4. MARKETING (15 marks)**

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**Describe the marketing strategies you have used to differentiate your ecotourism business and promote the appreciation and enjoyment of the region's natural heritage resources. Why were these strategies chosen and what was the result?**

*Response Guidance*

- ❖ *The response needs to focus on innovative approaches to marketing and promotions and relate back to the ecotourism experience.*
- ❖ *Judges are looking for a clear overview of the innovative approaches you have taken to marketing and what you have done differently to attract and/or connect with your customers within the qualifying period. Consider, for example, social media, digital or interactive advertising, apps, product packaging, tactical or paid advertising campaigns, relationship marketing.*
- ❖ *Ensure you explain why these strategies were selected. What research have you conducted or used to determine and create marketing strategies?*
- ❖ *Your response should demonstrate how you promote the appreciation and enjoyment of the region's natural heritage resources and how it aligns with local, regional and/or state natural resource marketing plan.*
- ❖ *Detail how these new, different, unique marketing activities have been successful. You should consider metrics to measure the outcomes and consider media coverage, social media engagement, increased web traffic, increased bookings etc.*
- ❖ *Ensure that your response is relevant to the qualifying period.*

- ❖ Use graphics to support and enhance your response. For example, images of marketing placement (social media screen shots, website, advertisements).

## 5. CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES (25 marks)

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### A. Demonstrate how you raise awareness about the need to preserve our natural heritage resources and influence both visitors and host communities to enjoy our natural heritage resources sustainably. 15 marks

#### Response Guidance

- ❖ The Judges are looking for leadership in visitor education of ecotourism. Therefore, you need to outline how you share knowledge on the local natural heritage and support its sustainability.
- ❖ Demonstrate how the business influences visitors through activities which foster responsible use and enjoyment of our natural heritage and our communities.
- ❖ Demonstrate what the outcomes of these activities are and how you have influenced visitors to participate in ecotourism in a sustainable manner.
- ❖ Describe how you communicate and educate to communities about the importance of ecotourism. This might include demonstrating how you involve stakeholder groups with a meaningful role in planning and decision-making for the design, development and delivery of ecotourism programs and services.
- ❖ Consider how the business optimizes the long-term economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits to the community.

### B. How do you ensure quality and sustainable customer experiences and demonstrate inclusive tourism practices? 10 marks

#### Response Guidance

- ❖ This question requires you to outline the practices you have put in place to ensure the delivery of high-quality customer service throughout the visitor experience journey.
- ❖ For those businesses that had significant disruption as a result of COVID-19 or natural disasters, you should consider how you provided quality customer experiences in the alternative ways in which you operated, such as communicating to customers during changing restrictions, kept customers informed during closures, how you stayed connected with them, etc.
- ❖ Demonstrate how you are committed to quality customer service throughout all areas of the business. This could include staff training, service principles and policies, staff reward systems, etc.
- ❖ Consider all points of customer engagement e.g., email, phone, guest greetings/welcome and interaction during and after the experience.
- ❖ Demonstrate how you monitor and assess customer service to ensure continued quality delivery. For example: feedback forms, monitoring social media, blogs, mystery shoppers, etc.
- ❖ Consider how the business actively encourages feedback and how feedback is used to improve the visitor experience. It may be useful to provide a case study/example where you have implemented a change based on customer feedback and/or testimonials which further demonstrate outcomes of quality customer experiences.
- ❖ As a part of your delivery of quality visitor experiences you need to demonstrate how you consider visitors' special and specific needs and recognise the needs of a diverse community. This can include,

*but is not limited to, cultural, language, physical, intellectual, dietary and other specific needs e.g., groups, special interest, LGBTQ, etc.*

- ❖ *Provide examples of how you catered for customers with specific needs and explain the outcome or successes. A case study would be beneficial here.*
- ❖ *Use graphics to support and enhance your response. For example: staff communications posters, flow charts of customer service processes, reception cards encouraging feedback.*