

## **2023 – MANLY / Northern Beaches – Destination & Visitors Economy Conference 29<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> May**

By Councillors Tim Bonner and Kim Rhodes

The conference was an excellent opportunity to meet with other Councillors, Mayors and staff of NSW, QLD. & Vic.

All conversations were around market trends, successes & even unforeseen failures. This conference was perfect timing for Tenterfield Shire. We were waiting for IPART to hand down our rate variation as with so many other conference delegates.

I would think almost 80% of the participants that we spoke to were looking for ways to renew their tourism opportunities; trying to find new innovative ways to attract more visitors to their Shires, showcasing their local businesses, events etc. We all want & need a bigger slice of the visitor economy pie. (We all had the same goals; wanting to bring more visitors to our towns / Shires but were trying to find ways to cut costs yet offer a better service.)

On route to the conference our conversation was around social media and digital marketing strategies that may eliminate some of the current costs our council incurs to keep our tourism centre operational for our visitors. However, we quickly learned at the conference that many councils had outlaid a lot of money to put in place many different digital platforms for visitors to use, nonetheless, most visitors to rural communities still wanted the personal touch preferring to speak with centre staff or volunteers and local business operators.

The conference had many different streams that we could attend.

Kim: The first stream that I attended was about **EV destination charger funding** for councils & tourism businesses in NSW. It is important for us to remember just like caravan owner's electric car users communicate with each other via Facebook sites which are the best setup towns for EV users who require regular charging. Many accommodation houses took advantage of last years grants program & have had charging stations fitted to their accommodation for overnight use by their guests. (It should be noted that one motel in Glen Innes has availability for all of its guests to 'charge while the stay', a couple of guest houses & Air BnB's in Tenterfield offer this service but know motels have added this service as yet which will eventually limit the number of visitors choosing to stop overnight in Tenterfield, opting to travel the extra hour to Glen Innes for a full overnight charge.

The second stream that I attended was about accessing grant funding for Councils through **Regional Arts NSW**. As I am the council representative for the Arts North West, I felt it was important to gain a little extra knowledge on how we could access funding for our Shire from our Regional Arts program. This session was all about us setting our own agendas that meet our communities needs and then working with our local group to navigate ways to find funding through their various programs.

I attended the third pitch of the day which was about **volunteering**. The speaker told us of the many events that their 140 – 200 strong volunteer group assisted with in the City of Sydney. This was also something that I felt was incredibly important for our Shire. How they communicated with each other at events, how there rostering and education

programs helped and even some of the things that weren't so successful. The big takeaway was training and communication is imperative along with letting the volunteers work together yet independently as required by the many different styles of events they have in Sydney. We also heard of how the team behind the 1-month long Ramadan Nights in Lakemba has become such a major success by getting local identities to work with them to advertise and promote the event on their social media platforms that usually have a much greater reach.

### **Tourism plan**

[www.tourism.australia.com](http://www.tourism.australia.com)

Industry toolkit to download

- Create a 5-year plan engaging all stakeholders.
- \*24hour economy
- Make a story using traditional owners and early settlers etc and leverage that going forward. Keep it accurate and fact checked.
- Keep a rhythm without multiple drum rolls.
- "YCK" "purple flag" diverse areas offering safe vibrant laneways with cultural and food experiences. For example: York, Clarence and Kent streets.
- Drive ongoing change within your LGA, reimagine tourism, must know your visitors.
- Build infrastructure for visitors and residents alike.
- Think of ways that tourists can benefit LGA's not just tourism enterprises. A balance will be incredibly hard to achieve.

### **Sustainability**

- Tourists expect that vendors are being responsible and respectful of the environment.
- The rise of ESG reporting (Environment and Social Corporate Governance)
- Delivering better than less harm
- Regenerative Tourism
- Sustainable "Pledge" for your area
- *Dream, Planning, Booking, Experience, Sharing*
- Councils must grow visitor economy.
- whole of government approach
- Monitor performance.
- Respond to opportunities and challenges.
- Recovery phase to 2024
- Momentum phase to 2026
- Accelerate phase to 2030.

\*\*\*Less travellers are spending more

### **Ramadan Lights**

- One month
- Interesting happens!
- Authenticity
- Food bazaar etc.
- Culture

- Unique experience
- 1.2million people
- 31 nights with road closures
- Ave dwell time was 45 minutes
  
- Marketing Crowd mgt sustainability
- V community expectations, risk management, stakeholder expectations
  
- Marketing
- Use celebrities!
- Use business partners
- Use media, socials...
  
- Crowd mgt
- Risk consultant = reach capacity? Event full or not?
- Control room, crowd sensors?
  
- Waste services?
- Waste bins branded halved Street waste
- Accessible toilets "marveloo"
- Chilled water available refillable containers
  
- Quality of food
- Track spending
- Word of mouth

That evening we travelled to an event at the International College of Management. We talked to many attendees at this event which was primarily focussed on the growing **caravan & camping industry** and the growth opportunities it is giving regional NSW. The main takeaway from this evening was "we need to deliver economic and social benefits to the people of our Shire by growing the visitor economy in partnership with Destination NSW."

Throughout the rest of the conference, we discussed ways **Destination NSW** influences and shapes the visitor economy through strategic research, policy and thought leadership, stakeholder engagement and consultation, commercial partnerships and investment in visitor experiences, business support, marketing and events. They also showed us many examples of how they secure more international and domestic conventions, incentive travel reward programs, corporate events and exhibitions for Sydney and regional NSW.

We would like to see our Shire develop strategies to start bringing smaller conferences to our Shire but do acknowledge transport of delegates into & out of our Shire makes this task a little more difficult.

We also visited Palm Beach, Currawong on the Pittwater & Narrabeen Lagoons, with local historians showing the Kur-ring-gai Chase National Parkes & enjoyed tasting bush tucker & an opportunity to learn about the significant indigenous history of the area with an Aboriginal owned social enterprise Bush to Bowl which travels all over NSW supporting Aboriginal communities to grow, maintain & sell there produce.

The top five features that visitors look for in a visitor centre are:

1. Welcoming experience
2. Knowledgeable, professional staff, skilled in customer service
3. Unbiased, authoritative and tailored information (on and offline)
4. Validation of research found before and during the trip
5. Local stories and insights.

Delivering on these needs is the core objective of all accredited VICs across Australia.

There are 152 Visitors Centres in NSW, 61% of these centres are operated by Local Councils.

### ***Visitor Information Centres***

- Main visitor touch point in destination
- Enhance visitor experience
- Tell the story of the destination
- Assist with visitor information needs
- Extend industry reach
- Sell local produce
- Enhance community pride

### ***Businesses***

- Provide goods and services
- to meet visitor needs
- Generate economic growth
- Support events
- Attract business visitors
- Create and retain jobs and upskilling

### ***Community***

- Promote the local area and share its stories
- Provide labour resources

### ***Local Government / Councils***

- Influence level and quality of visitor services and infrastructure
- Facilitate economic growth
- Attract investment § Provide infrastructure and community services
- Regional tourism funding § Job creation

There were many takeaways from the conference but there is one particular area that our Council & business sector need to start to plan a little better for and that would be beginning to become more inclusive & supportive of people living with disabilities moving around our Shire. We hope to discuss this at a council workshop once all our 23/ 24 budgets are set in motion.