



# *Visitor Economy Strategy*

2025 - 2030





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# *Executive Summary*



# Executive summary

The **Loddon Visitor Economy Strategy 2030** outlines a community-centric approach to building a sustainable and thriving visitor economy for the Loddon Shire. With a small population of under 8,000, this Strategy is grounded in a **grassroots framework**, empowering local residents, businesses and community associations to lead and shape the Shire's tourism development.

The Visitor Economy Strategy aims to enhance the well-being of residents and visitors by adopting a **destination stewardship model** that prioritises **social, cultural, environmental and economic** outcomes. By aligning with community aspirations, it redefines success beyond visitor numbers, focusing on the lasting positive impact on people and places. Key to this is ensuring the community is kept updated on the implementation of this Strategy and opportunities for their involvement for continuous stakeholder and industry engagement with bi-annual and updates (as needed).

## Regional Governance

The Visitor Economy Partnerships (VEPs) that were introduced in the 2021 Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan will replace Regional Tourism Boards and provide enhanced leadership, collaboration and flexibility for Victorian regions. As Bendigo Regional Tourism (BRT) transitions into a VEP, it provides a significant opportunity for Loddon Shire Council to leverage its links with the City of Greater Bendigo for maximising and accessing resources and programming, especially capability building and marketing promotion. Work is underway to officialise this process and structure.

BRT recently delivered their regional Destination Management Plan (DMP) and Local Area Action Plan (LAAP) for Loddon Shire. The Loddon Shire LAAP, strategic tourism document, has guided the development of this Visitor Economy Strategy, which aligns with the Loddon Shire Economic Development Strategy for a cohesive approach to visitor economy and economic growth.

## Destination Positioning and Long-term Growth

Leveraging the 'Bendigo region' brand, the Visitor Economy Strategy positions Loddon Shire within a larger tourism ecosystem, benefiting from Bendigo's proximity and resident and visitor base. Product and experience development is seen as a long-term journey, with a focus on starting small and gradually building momentum. The existing calendar of events provides a foundation for growth, allowing for the expansion and enhancement of cultural, food and wine and community-based events.

## Collective Visitor Servicing

A key challenge identified in the development of this Strategy was the need for improved and cohesive visitor servicing across the Shire. To address this, the Visitor Economy Strategy focuses on a coordinated approach to visitor servicing in collaboration with local businesses to improve visitor engagement and drive greater dispersal and economic impact.

# Executive summary (cont'd)

## The Loddon Visitor Economy Strategy 2030 includes the following sections.

### Setting the scene

Aligns the audience with guiding principles in understanding the visitor economy and its role in driving local economic growth, community resilience and environmental sustainability, and an overview of the visitor journey.

### Where are we now?

Reviews the current state of the visitor economy, including key assets and experiences, visitor markets and community sentiment.

### Where do we want to be?

Sets the vision for the Loddon Shire as a thriving visitor destination that supports the well-being of residents and visitors.

## Strategic Framework

Outlines the strategic objectives, which include enhancing the visitor experience, destination marketing and storytelling, and stewardship through leadership and community involvement.

Through this **Visitor Economy Strategy 2030**, the Loddon Shire aims to build a resilient visitor economy that not only attracts more visitors but also supports the long-term sustainability and prosperity of the community.

An internal Strategy for Loddon Shire Council has been developed which includes a detailed annual action plan and KPIs for measuring success and reporting.

# Visitor Economy Strategy on a page

<b>BENDIGO REGIONAL VISION</b>	Enriching People and Place through Tourism.					
<b>LODDON VISION</b>	To create a thriving visitor economy that supports a vibrant, resilient community while promoting environmental, cultural and social sustainability, as well as the overall wellbeing of both residents and visitors.					
<b>GUIDING PRINCIPLES</b>	<b>We are grassroots,</b> with the community at the heart of everything we do.	<b>We enjoy the journey,</b> taking appropriate steps and a focused and intentional approach.	<b>We play to our strengths,</b> and nurture our essence – which we are unapologetically proud of.	<b>We work together,</b> in true partnerships to leverage and grow collectively.		
<b>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>Enhancing the visitor experience</b>		<b>Destination marketing and storytelling</b>		<b>Stewardship - management and resourcing</b>	
<b>FOCUS AREAS</b>	Enhanced visitor assets and infrastructure Developing key experience pillars Improved business resilience and visitor services Enhanced visitor information signage Support and expand local events.		Targeted destination marketing plan Consistent branding and storytelling Collaboration and partnerships Local storytellers Align storytelling with regional experiences.		Secure external funding Professional development Engaging community, including First Nations, in decision-making Foster collaboration Track KPIs for continuous improvement.	
<b>EXPERIENCE PILLARS</b>	<b>Nature, outdoors and adventure</b>	<b>Arts and culture</b>	<b>History and heritage</b>	<b>First Nations</b>	<b>Food and drink</b>	
<b>OUR AUDIENCES</b>	<b>Loddon locals</b>	<b>Bendigo locals and visitors</b>	<b>Melbourne and Regional Victoria</b>	<b>Visiting friends and relatives</b>	<b>Special interest visitors</b>	<b>Transit route visitors</b>

# Key definitions and glossary



<b>BRT</b>	Bendigo Regional Tourism
<b>DJAARA</b>	Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation
<b>DJSIR</b>	Victorian State Government - Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions
<b>DMP</b>	Destination Management Plan
<b>LAAP</b>	Local Area Action Plan
<b>LSC</b>	Loddon Shire Council
<b>RTB</b>	Regional Tourism Board
<b>RTO</b>	Regional Tourism Organisation
<b>TRA</b>	Tourism Research Australia
<b>VEP</b>	Visitor Economy Partnership
<b>VES</b>	Visitor Economy Strategy
<b>VIC</b>	Visitor Information Centre
<b>VTIC</b>	Victorian Tourism Industry Council

# Strategic alignment

The Visitor Economy Strategy is a practical roadmap for the growth of the visitor economy in the Loddon Shire.

Much work has already been undertaken with many plans and strategies in place for tourism and economic development at a state, regional and local level. To maximise limited resources, alignment with existing plans is essential.

This Strategy builds on these plans, distilling key themes and identified projects for the local visitor economy. Importantly, this strategy is one that is collectively owned and combines community and industry sentiment and a realistic understanding of resources. This strategy has been designed so that the visitor economy sector of Loddon along with Council can own it and succeed together.

Focussed on a grass roots, collaborative approach to deliver actions that will shift the dial for Loddon Shire’s visitor economy and provide positive outcomes for both tourism and the community.

The **Visitor Economy Strategy** aligns to a destination stewardship framework, marking a shift from traditional tourism planning by adopting a community-centric approach that prioritises civic pride, succession planning, and the integration of economic, social, environmental and cultural benefits.

By fostering local engagement and preserving cultural and environmental assets, it ensures a sustainable and inclusive future for tourism that benefits both visitors and residents alike.

Loddon Shire is a community of communities. So, it is vital to the success and authenticity of this Strategy that each township and village is able to share their own unique offering and stories.





# *Setting the scene*



# Understanding Tourism and the visitor economy

**Tourism** involves people travelling outside their usual environment for personal or business purposes, including all related activities and spending.<sup>1</sup>

The **visitor economy** is broader, covering the entire travel experience and its contribution to economic and socio-economic growth. It recognises spending with businesses beyond traditional tourism such as petrol stations, pharmacies, hairdressers and butchers and the flow on multiplier effect that it creates in communities.

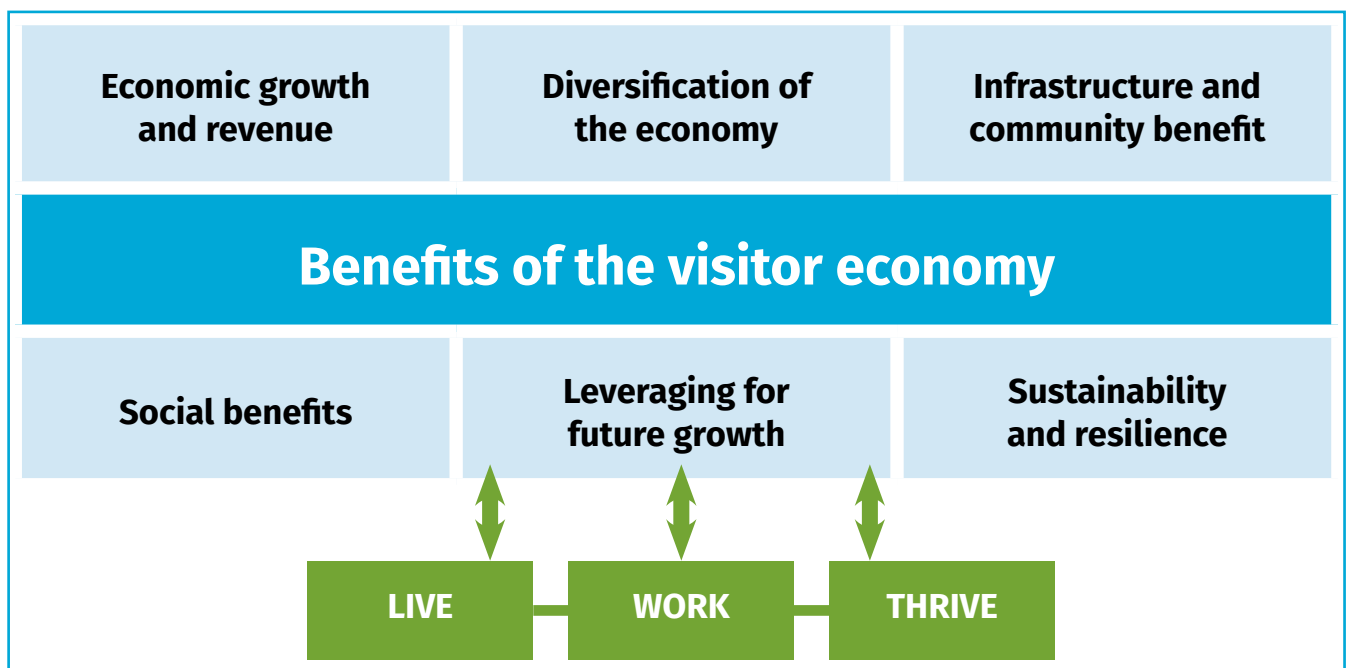
This leads to vibrant towns and sustainable businesses, as well as community benefits that lead to improved livability and investment in infrastructure.

For Loddon Shire the visitor economy can play an important role in building business and community resilience, fostering place-making and township viability.

It supports the Loddon Shire Council Community Vision 2031 of being a great place to 'live, work and thrive'. This proposition and customer facing messaging will be further informed by destination placemaking.



For every **one dollar** spent directly in tourism an additional **91 cents**<sup>2</sup> are added to other parts of the economy.








1 - The United Nations World Tourism Organisation 2008, <https://www.unwto.org/glossary-tourism-terms>.

2 - Gretton, P, \*On input-output tables: uses and abuses\*, Productivity Commission, Commonwealth of Australia, 2013. Available at: [www.pc.gov.au](http://www.pc.gov.au).

# The visitor journey and trip cycle

When considering the visitor economy and the associated actions and activities, it is important to consider the five stages of travel. Travel and tourism is more than the time spent in a region, there are a number of touch points on the visitors journey to a place, all needing to be considered as part of the Strategy. The following outlines this journey, key touchpoints and roles along the journey and trip cycle.

STAGE					
 <p><b>Dream</b></p>	 <p><b>Plan</b></p>	 <p><b>Book</b></p>	 <p><b>Visit</b></p>	 <p><b>Share</b></p>	
TOUCHPOINT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Web search</li> <li>Social media</li> <li>Destination website</li> <li>Word of mouth</li> <li>Travel blogs</li> <li>Travel and lifestyle content</li> <li>Billboards and advertising (offline and online)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review sites</li> <li>Social media</li> <li>Destination website</li> <li>Word of mouth</li> <li>Aggregator websites</li> <li>Operator websites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Destination website</li> <li>Visitor Information Centres</li> <li>Social media</li> <li>Aggregator websites</li> <li>Travel agents/OTAs</li> <li>Apps</li> <li>Operator websites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Destination website</li> <li>Visitor Information Centres</li> <li>Social media</li> <li>Review sites</li> <li>Word of mouth</li> <li>Tourism product and experiences</li> <li>Wayfinding signage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social media</li> <li>Review sites</li> <li>Word of mouth</li> <li>Surveys</li> </ul>
ROLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tourism Australia (TA)</li> <li>Visit Victoria (VV)</li> <li>Visitor Economy Partnership (VEP)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>VV</li> <li>VEP</li> <li>Loddon Shire Council (LSC)</li> <li>Tourism operators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>VEP</li> <li>LSC</li> <li>Tourism operators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tourism operators</li> <li>Local businesses</li> <li>LSC</li> <li>VEP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tourism operators</li> <li>LSC</li> <li>VEP</li> </ul>

# Where are we now?



# Tourism in Loddon Shire

The Loddon Shire is just two hours drive northwest of Melbourne and less than an hour from the major regional hub of Bendigo. Located in the heart of Dja Dja Wurrung Country, the Loddon Shire is one of Victoria's hidden treasures.

A picturesque destination with rivers, lakes and wetlands, state and national parks – a landscape full of surprises, visitors are attracted to the Loddon Shire for:

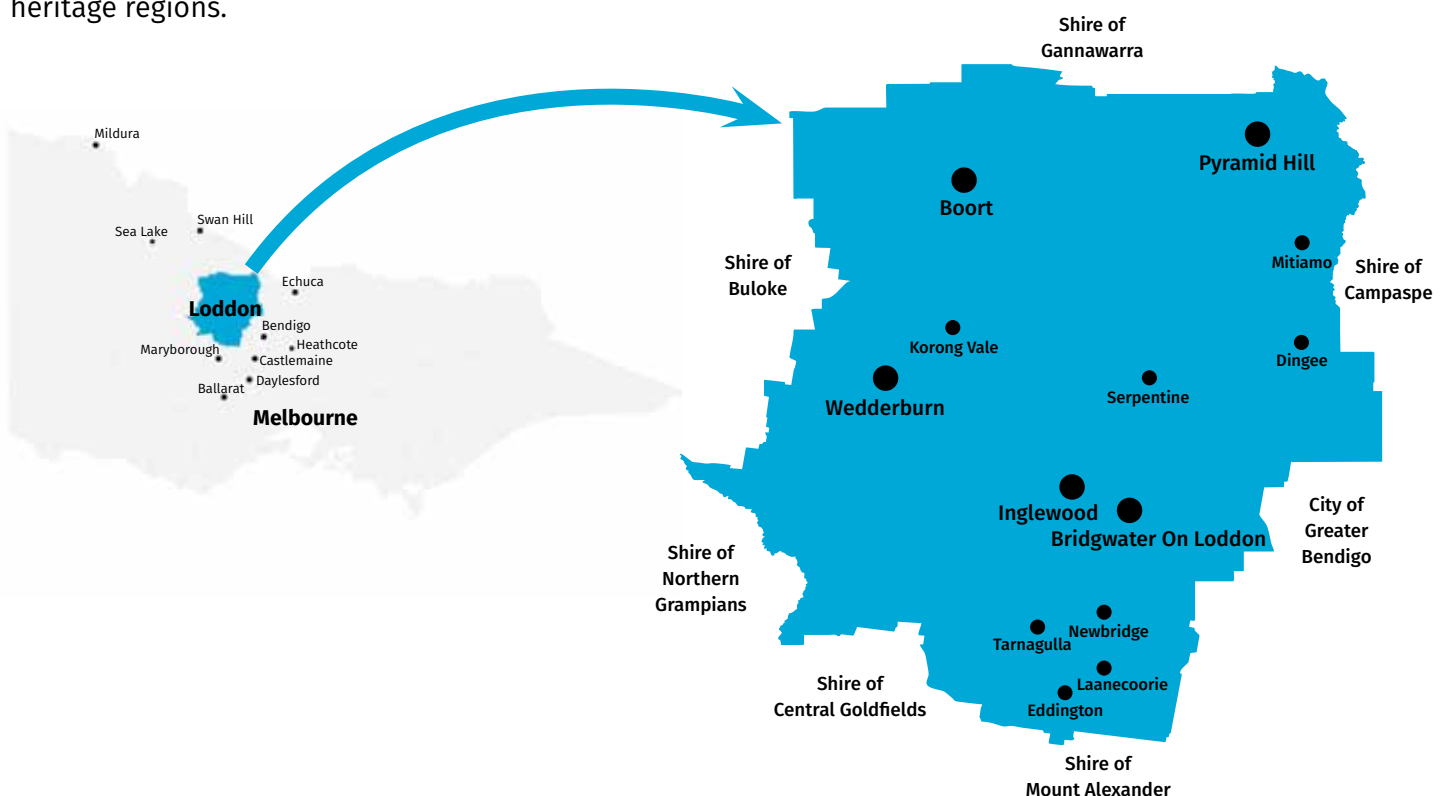
- **Nature** - a diverse range of geography and ecosystems home to a variety of wildlife, natural assets, trails, lookouts, birds and wildflowers.
- **Waterways** - the Loddon River, lakes and wetlands support canoeing, waterskiing and other watersports.
- **First Nations** - Boort Lakes and wetlands, with over 400 ancient scar trees, the Kooyoora State Park and Dumawul Cultural Tours make this one of Victoria's most significant First Nations cultural heritage regions.

- **History and Heritage** - the legacy of the gold rush and pioneering past, with a unique mix of collectibles, antique emporiums, museums and galleries that reflect the rich stories, history and creativity.

- **Small town charm** - historic towns and villages that make up the Shire are filled with characters all with unique stories to tell.

- **Gastronomy** - a vital part of Victoria's food bowl and Bendigo's city and region gastronomy destination, the Loddon Shire boasts small-scale artisan producers, historic pubs and unique cafes serving locally sourced food reinforcing its role as an agricultural powerhouse.

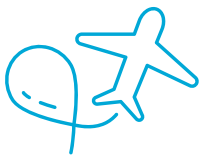
- **Tourism and community events** - the Shire's warm hospitality is showcased through annual events, art trails, food and wine festivals, town celebrations, vintage machinery rallies, collectable fairs, gold-themed events and nature-based experiences.



# Visitors to Loddon Shire

**Tourism is an important economic driver for the Loddon Shire.**

In 2019, the Loddon Shire generated approximately **\$21 million** in visitor expenditure from **208,000 visitors**, with \$11 million from overnight visitors and \$10 million from day trippers. The majority of domestic overnight visitors were intrastate with **58,000 visitors**.



## Visitors to Loddon Shire

- Typically over 55 years old
- Visiting for a holiday



## Average spend

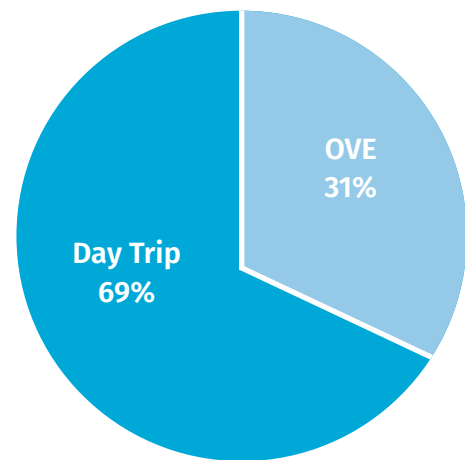
- Day trip visitor **\$70**
- Overnight visitor **\$172**



## Average length of stay

- 2 nights

## Day trip and overnight visitation



Source: Loddon Local Area Action Plan (using Local Government Area Profile 2019 data from Tourism Research Australia). More granular data is not publishable as the survey error is too high for most practical purposes.



# Local tourism landscape

## Local associations

Local tourism and economic development committees are well established throughout Loddon Shire with numerous different tourism and community groups and progress associations in existence. Some of the more actively engaged groups are:

- Boort Tourism Development
- Bridgewater on Loddon Development
- Inglewood Development and Tourism Committee
- Pyramid Hill Progress Association
- Southern Loddon Tourism
- Wedderburn Tourism Inc.

## Events and volunteering

Events are vital to economic growth and community cohesion, boosting local economies, enhancing regional identity and attracting future visitors and investment. A robust calendar of over 30 annual events highlights the Shire's experience pillars through a diverse mix of community, sporting and visitor-focused activities.

There is a strong reliance on volunteers across the Loddon Shire for the delivery of events, operations of key attractions and supporting the operations of the Visitor Information Centre. An ageing population creates a pressing need for succession planning to ensure ongoing delivery.



# Tourism operators overview

A product and experience audit was undertaken alongside a tourism readiness assessment. The following is a summary of these findings with 97 tourism operators identified in the Loddon Shire.

From the Local Area Action Plan, the LGA profile identified 76 tourism operators with the majority being micro businesses with four or less employees. As at 2023, the Loddon Shire supported 98 tourism related jobs, this has declined from 111 jobs in 2019.<sup>1</sup>

Accommodation was identified as a separate category and experience pillar in this audit, with the most common styles of accommodation being caravan and holiday parks, camping grounds, self contained accommodation/home rental and motels.

Digital capability is low across all the businesses in the Shire with less than half of these operators having a website. Positively, more businesses have claimed Google Business and Facebook profiles which helps to build a digital footprint. Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW) profiles are low, most likely due to businesses having to pay to have a profile.

**32** operators have a bookable experience, however half of these (15) are managed by enquiry forms or phone call bookings, with the remainder using a booking platform (six are through Airbnb or Stayz).

The average Google review ranking for experiences is 4.6 out of 5.

TYPE OF BUSINESS OR PRODUCT	#
Food and drink	38
Accommodation	32
Nature, outdoors and adventure	15
Arts and culture	7
History and heritage	2
First Nations	2
Wellness	1

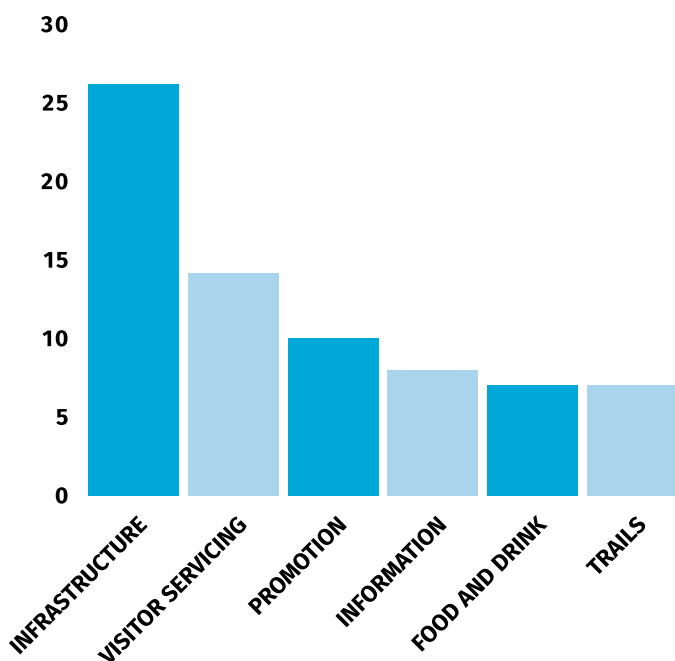
DIGITAL CHANNEL	# YES
Website	40
ATDW profile	13
Google Business profile	61
Facebook profile	69
Instagram profile	32



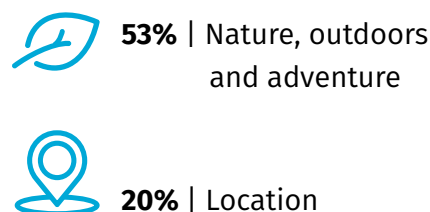
# Community sentiment

A community survey and in-person consultation identified the community as a whole was aligned with the Bendigo Regional Tourism experience pillars. Most notably **nature, outdoors and adventure** were both a sense of pride within the community and how they like to spend their time in Loddon, demonstrating a direct connection to the experience development approach. Additionally, the community has identified a need for **infrastructure** followed by visitor servicing and promotion to stimulate further visitor economy growth.

## What does the community think Loddon Shire needs more of?



## What does the community love about Loddon Shire?



## How does the community enjoy and explore Loddon Shire?



### Types of infrastructure include:

- |   |                 |
|---|-----------------|
| Green initiatives for main streets      | Tourist signage |
| Public transport with disability access | Parking         |
| Improvements to parks and roads         | More housing    |
| EV charging points                      | Dump points     |
| Walking tracks                          | Footpaths       |
| Free town WiFi                          |                 |

# Challenges and Opportunities for growing the Visitor Economy

## CHALLENGES

- Limited digital capability amongst tourism operators and not meeting the expectations of the modern visitor e.g. opening hours, website and google listings
- Heavy volunteer reliance for:
  - Visitor servicing
  - Product delivery e.g. Wedderburn Coach House Gallery and Museum
  - Events delivery
  - Community groups and committees
- Succession planning and business sustainability
- Small population base (ie. small rate paying base)
- Lack of understanding of the visitor economy across businesses and residents
- Restricted and inconsistent operating hours for many business which do not reflect the needs of all visitor
- Supporting and coordinating community organisations and associations
- Large number of free camping options which limits economic returns
- Permanent long-term campers at camp sites impacting on visitor experience
- Multiple towns and villages, all with distinct voices, stories and priorities (there is no one central hub)
- Limited bookable products and experiences
- Lack of retail offerings for visitors (and residents) to support and buy local.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Diversify accommodation options with more boutique options and diverse price points
- Harness the support of community groups to work cohesively towards a common vision with the community benefits of tourism front of mind
- Upskill businesses to better market both their own business and the destination
- Implementation of identified priority projects (see page 29)
- Leverage strong agriculture sector to develop agritourism products and experiences
- Strengthen First Nations connections to support product and experience development
- Reimagine visitor servicing across the Shire
- Consolidate and expand on the strong existing calendar of events
- Volunteer attraction, recruitment and retention drive to reduce over reliance
- Support the enhancement of existing community infrastructure
- Economic development synergies to encourage free campers to connect and shop locally
- Further leveraging of Bendigo UNESCO Creative City and region of Gastronomy status
- Leverage and promote UNESCO Victorian Goldfields World Heritage Bid
- Engage with farming and agriculture sector to develop agritourism product and experiences
- Long term development of game-changer projects including rail and cycling trails in Boort, Inglewood and Bridgewater, Orana Park, and product and experience development showcasing local flora, fauna, landscape and environment.

# *Where do we want to be?*



# What needs to happen for transformation?

## VICTORIA VISION

We will work together to make Victoria a leader in the delivery of exceptional, diverse, and connected experiences for visitors. We will invest in bold, innovative, and inspiring tourism products and experiences that attract more visitors to come to Victoria, stay longer, and spend more.

We will ensure Victoria maximises the social and economic benefits of domestic and international tourism. We will – by creating a strong, resilient visitor economy – build a prosperous, sustainable future for Victoria.

<b>Driving economic growth</b>	<b>Unique to place</b>	<b>Valuable for our communities</b>	<b>First Peoples focused</b>	<b>Innovative and outstanding</b>	<b>Sustainable and regenerative</b>	<b>Inclusive and welcoming</b>
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## BENDIGO REGION VISION

Enriching People and Place through Tourism.

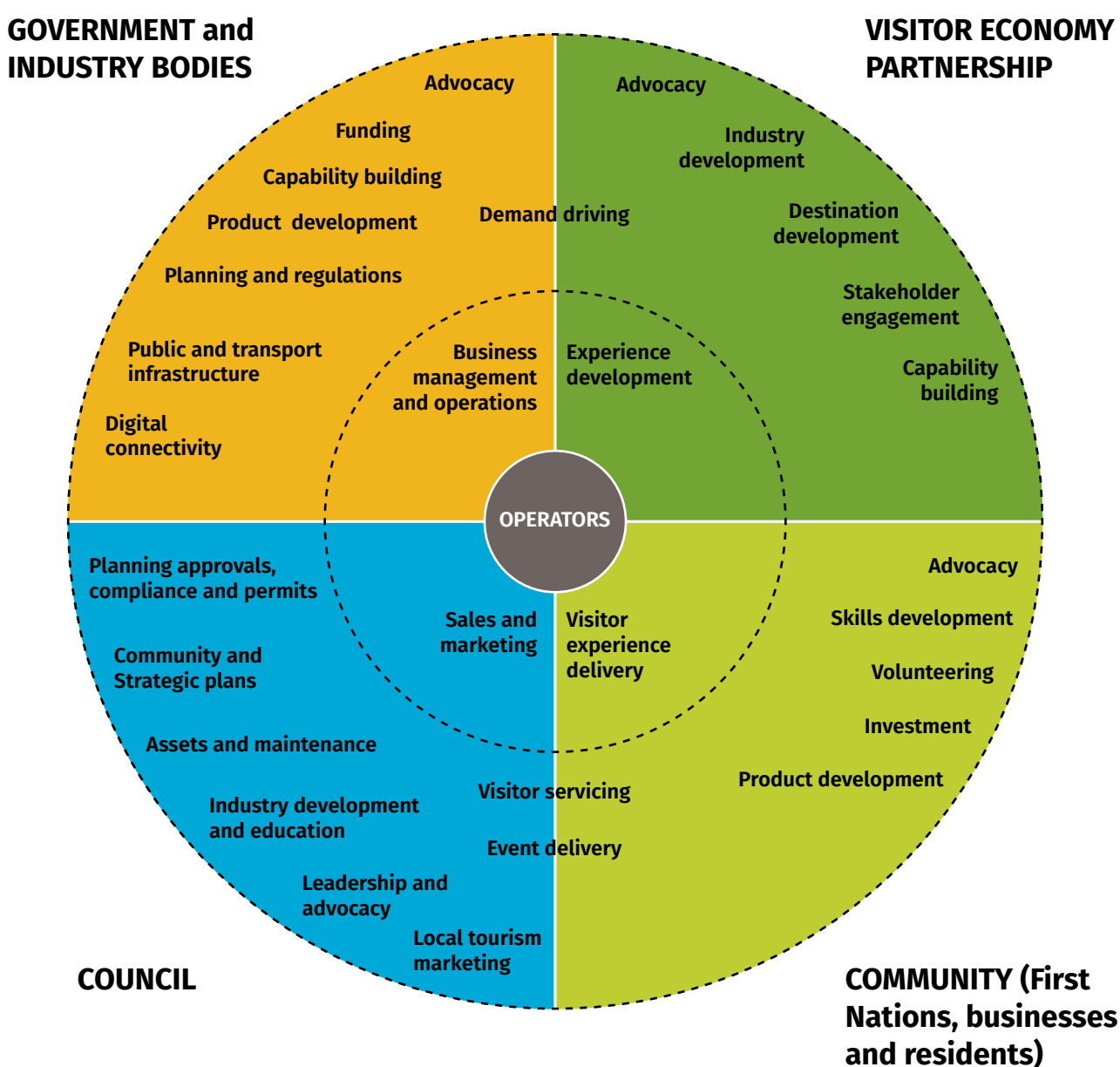
## LODDON SHIRE VISION

To create a thriving visitor economy that supports a vibrant, resilient community while promoting environmental, cultural and social sustainability, as well as the overall wellbeing of both residents and visitors.

 <p><b>Enhancing the visitor experience</b></p>	 <p><b>Destination marketing and storytelling</b></p>	 <p><b>Stewardship - management and resourcing</b></p>	
<p><b>We are grassroots,</b> with the community at the heart of everything we do.</p>	<p><b>We enjoy the journey,</b> taking appropriate steps and a focused and intentional approach.</p>	<p><b>We play to our strengths,</b> and nurture our essence – which we are unapologetically proud of.</p>	<p><b>We work together,</b> in true partnerships to leverage and grow collectively.</p>

# Enablers for transformation

Tourism involves everyone, and this circle of influence highlights key players and their roles, with tourism operators responsible for the inner circle. All stakeholders must work together, under a Council-led vision, to achieve success.



# Strategic Framework



# Strategic objectives

To create a thriving visitor economy that supports a vibrant, resilient community while promoting environmental, cultural and social sustainability, as well as the overall wellbeing of both residents and visitors.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	OBJECTIVES	OUTCOMES
<b>Enhancing the visitor experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance and expand the quality and variety of visitor experiences in the Loddon Shire</li> <li>• Strengthen connections between visitors, local people and place through authentic experiences and events</li> <li>• Develop infrastructure that supports placemaking, events and visitor services to improve the overall experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased visitor satisfaction, longer stays and higher visitor spending</li> <li>• Improved infrastructure and accommodation that enhances the visitor experience</li> <li>• Strong alignment of experiences with the destination’s experience pillars, fostering authenticity and connection</li> </ul>
<b>Destination marketing and storytelling</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share the unique stories of the people and place to attract visitors who value and protect the environment, culture and lifestyle</li> <li>• Target the right visitor markets through effective communication and partnerships</li> <li>• Extend visitor engagement by enhancing visitor servicing and bringing local stories to life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased visitation from target markets who align with the values of the Loddon Shire</li> <li>• Greater visitor engagement and connection to local stories</li> <li>• Strengthened regional positioning through collaboration with Greater Bendigo and aligned marketing efforts</li> </ul>
<b>Stewardship - management and resourcing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster strong leadership and collaboration to drive the vision for Loddon Shire visitor economy</li> <li>• Engage the community, including First Nations, in tourism decision-making to build social license</li> <li>• Secure funding and resources to ensure stability and sustainable growth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A cohesive framework supported by effective leadership and true partnerships</li> <li>• Increased community support and involvement, resulting in a resilient and sustainable visitor economy</li> <li>• Stable and well-resourced tourism initiatives that contribute to long-term sustainability</li> </ul>

# Experience pillars

MATURITY	EXPERIENCE	OVERVIEW
Primary	<p><b>Nature, outdoors and adventure</b></p> <p>Visit to find yourself</p>	Connecting visitors with the the unique natural environment, diverse geography, waterways, lakes and rivers and enabling them to engage with the landscape in meaningful ways through activities and experiences from birdwatching, bushwalking, canoeing or stargazing.
Emerging	<p><b>First Nations</b></p> <p>Visit to connect</p>	Bringing the culture and history of the Traditional Owners and First Peoples to the forefront by supporting opportunities for all to connect, learn and engage with their heritage. The aspiration is to expand these opportunities and deepen cultural understanding by incorporating First Nations stories at all touch points.
	<p><b>Food and drink</b></p> <p>Visit to feast</p>	Celebrating the local food and beverage industry by showcasing foraged and farm produce, wineries and the emerging native foods sector. There are opportunities to develop the agritourism sector to create new visitor experiences. The regional aspiration is to elevate food and drink offerings to align with the Bendigo City and Region of Gastronomy designation.
Secondary	<p><b>Arts and culture</b></p> <p>Visit to create</p>	Extending arts and culture across the visitor experience, incorporating the gold rush heritage, murals, vintage charm of country towns, creative installations and events (e.g. Loddon Valley Arts Trail) to support a vibrant community. The focus is to grow and connect visitors with diverse, inclusive and accessible arts experiences.
	<p><b>History and heritage</b></p> <p>Visit to learn</p>	Sharing the stories of its pioneer past through museums, gold prospecting experience and local characters, with a focus on storytelling, developing engaging and immersive Victorian Goldfields experiences and rejuvenating heritage sites for contemporary visitor engagement.

Please note that while **wellness** was identified in the DMP and LAAP as an emerging experience pillar, it has been removed from here as it is not an emerging experience pillar for the Loddon Shire, however is incorporated across all experience pillars.



# Audiences

The following audiences have been identified through desktop research and stakeholder consultation. There is limited data to validate them, however these emerged as the key audiences for the Loddon Shire to leverage and attract.

## VISIT VICTORIA AUDIENCE

**Lifestyle Leaders** - Interstate Australians (aged 18+) and Melbourne drive market to regional Victoria (aged 18+)

## GEOGRAPHIC SOURCE MARKETS

### Loddon Locals

Locals are the catalyst for inviting, welcoming and hosting family and friends to the Loddon Shire. Influencing locals to engage and explore their own backyards can turn them into an 'unofficial' ambassador on the frontline visitor servicing team.

### Bendigo region

The Bendigo region is a key source market for day trips due to its close proximity. With a strong visitor base in place there is an opportunity to increase day trips from the market base of residents and visitors to Bendigo, especially younger residents.

### Melbourne locals and intrastate

Melbourne residents and travellers across Regional Victoria provides a base for intrastate visitors. These visitors are often transiting to or from Melbourne, and seek short, regional getaways with a traditional focus.

## VISITOR SEGMENTS

### Visiting friends and relatives (VFR)

Residents (across all ages) of Loddon and Bendigo are the key driver to access the VFR market. Focus on opportunities to optimise engagement with the VFR market including the promotion of events, itineraries and experiences.

### Special interest visitors

The unique landscape, flora, fauna and gold rush history attracts a range of special interest visitors. These visitors will stay multiple nights and provide repeat visitation. Target them through marketing highlighting experience strengths.

### Transit route visitors

With major arterial roads within its boundaries, Loddon Shire is known as a transit route, a stopover point enroute to another destination. Encourage visitors to stop, spend and inspire them to come back and stay.

# Enhanced priority projects

Loddon Shire Council continues to advance some key projects throughout the Loddon region. A strong annual events calendar, including the Loddon Valley Arts Trail, draws visitors and offers opportunities to further enhance existing events. Additional priority projects are in the planning stages, with others identified for delivery and advocacy, laying a foundation for future development.

PROJECT	OVERVIEW	COUNCIL ROLE	STATUS
<b>Visitor Servicing Development Projects</b>	Tourism Services Review: The adoption and delivery of actions from the 2023 Loddon Shire Visitor Servicing Review, including the exploration of a relocation of the Visitor Centre and an expanded network of visitor information venues across the Shire.	Deliver	Scoping (Business Case funding secured)
	Tourism Signage Audit: Implement findings from the tourism signage audit to improve visitor servicing and wayfinding across the Shire.	Deliver	Underway
<b>UNESCO Designations</b>	Goldfields World Heritage Bid: A state-wide bid of 20 LGAs across Central Victoria for recognition of the outstanding cultural value of gold prospecting and fossicking historical sites. The bid seeks to boost economic, cultural and social opportunities. The Bid has been added to Australia's World Heritage Tentative List as the first formal step. An announcement is expected in 2026/27 and full recognition by 2030.	Advocate	Underway
	UNESCO Bendigo and Region Gastronomy designation: Create a strong brand alignment with the Bendigo and Region Gastronomy designation, including the the identification of new product development opportunities for visitors, e.g. tours, workshops and itineraries.	Deliver	Underway
<b>Shire wide beautification project</b>	This project aims to enhance the visual appeal, functionality, safety, heritage and cultural significance of towns across the Shire for residents and visitors. The streetscape project is recognised by the local community as an opportunity to facilitate visitation and encourage broader placemaking initiatives and economic growth across the Shire.	Deliver	Seeking funding (\$1 million secured)
<b>First Nations Development</b>	Cultural Tourism: Working collaboratively with Dja Dja Wurrung to support their plans for the scoping and development of First Nations tourism experiences. Tours exist, for example the Dumawul Cultural Tour at Mount Kooyoora, which has the opportunity to be expanded and new experiences to be developed.	Advocate	Underway
	Lake Boort Scarred Tree Master Plan: The Master Plan builds awareness about and appreciation for Lake Boort as an unparalleled destination, where over 400 scarred trees and cooking mounds can be found.	Advocate	Underway
	Mount Kooyoora: A culturally important place for the Dja Dja Wurrung People. The strategic vision has been developed to improve visitor and recreational facilities in the Melville Caves Visitor Area and adjoining trail network at Kooyoora State Park.	Advocate	Underway

# Action Plan



# Action plan summary

A summary of the action plan is provided below with key actions aligned to the three Strategic Objectives.

A detailed annual action plan has been developed for Loddon Shire Council to deliver and implement the Visitor Economy Strategy across short, medium and long term initiatives through to 2030 and beyond. This is a separate document and is used to inform Council priorities.

Council's role will be to either **lead, partner, support** or **advocate** to deliver these actions, working in close partnership with primary partners of the Visitor Economy Partnership, City of Greater Bendigo, Dja Dja Wurrung, tourism community groups, tourism operators and local businesses. Additional partners include Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, Visit Victoria and Parks Victoria.

Funding for these actions can come from Council budget, VEP funding, external grants, private investment and community grants.

A key focus of this Visitor Economy Strategy will be ensuring that it is reviewed and stress tested on an annual basis. Success measures have also been identified to track overall delivery and reporting.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	Enhancing the visitor experience	Destination marketing and storytelling	Stewardship - management and resourcing
KEY ACTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhanced visitor assets and infrastructure</li> <li>• Developing key experience pillars</li> <li>• Improved business resilience and visitor services</li> <li>• Enhanced visitor information signage</li> <li>• Support and expand local events.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targeted place branding and destination marketing</li> <li>• Consistent branding and storytelling</li> <li>• Collaboration and partnerships</li> <li>• Identification of local storytellers</li> <li>• Align storytelling with regional experiences.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secure external funding</li> <li>• Professional development</li> <li>• Engaging community, including First Nations, in decision-making</li> <li>• Fostering collaboration</li> <li>• Tracking KPIs for continuous improvement.</li> </ul>

# Business as usual actions

The following activities reflect the day-to-day function and ongoing role of the tourism unit within Loddon Shire Council in supporting local business and operators, destination marketing, communications and advocacy. These actions are also delivered by BRT at a regional level and will continue with the new VEP. However it is important that these activities are also delivered at a local level to further disseminate messages and key information.

ACTION	OVERVIEW
<b>Advocacy</b>	Continue providing strong strategic leadership and advocacy for local tourism development, aligning resources, sharing information and educating stakeholders (internal and external) to maximise tourism investment and growth of the visitor economy.
<b>Industry relations</b>	Support industry operators with education and connections, inspiration to enhance and create authentic visitor experiences and marketing opportunities to promote them.
<b>Communications</b>	Create key messaging for internal and external council communications that highlight the regional and local value of the visitor economy. This messaging should enhance understanding of tourism's broader benefits to the community, aligning with local aspirations and contributions beyond just economic outcomes.
<b>Strategic partners</b>	Foster and nurture genuine partnerships with regional stakeholders to amplify activities, increase demand and collectively grow the visitor economy. In particular working with the VEP, City of Greater Bendigo and through authentic and ongoing engagement with Dja Dja Wurrung.

# Measuring success

An ongoing approach to monitoring and reporting against the Action Plan is recommended for continuous improvement, using results and stakeholder feedback to refine actions and ensure a robust, grassroots-driven Visitor Economy Strategy that evolves effectively over time. The following outlines success measures against the Strategic Priorities and various sources.

## Enhancing the visitor experience

### **Visitor satisfaction surveys:**

Track satisfaction levels with different experiences, visitor services and events.

### **Online reputation management:**

Gauge visitors' likelihood to recommend the destination across online reviews.

**Spending:** Track average spend per visitor against key activities, as well as resident leakage spend.

**Businesses:** Track business product and experience development and refinement of existing experiences.

## Destination marketing and storytelling

**Website analytics:** Track visits, click through and conversions across the website.

**Social media metrics:** Track engagement rates, follower growth, and content reach on Loddon Shire channels and key champion operators.

**Campaign performance:** Metrics like ad impressions, click-through rates (CTR) and cost per acquisition (CPA).

## Stewardship - management and resourcing

### **Environmental indicators:**

Measure visitor impacts on natural sites (e.g. waste generation, wildlife impacts).

**Community sentiment:** Track community attitudes towards tourism growth and its impacts.

**Sustainable practices adoption:** Percentage of operators with sustainable certifications or initiatives.

Data collection methods may include visitor surveys at key venues (e.g. visitor information centres) or through post-visit emails (e.g. post event) to gather insights, and secondary data sources like the VEP and operator data to track metrics such as occupancy rates and booking trends.

Reporting frequency includes quarterly tracking of short-term indicators, annual assessments of overall progress and community impact, and seasonal analysis to understand peak and off-peak performance. This includes developing a reporting and communication plan to share findings and outputs with external and internal stakeholders to build transparency and engagement, while sharing key metrics and showcasing successes.



## Acknowledgment of Country

Loddon Shire Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land comprising the Loddon Shire Council area. Council would like to pay respect to their Elders both past and present.

We see this Visitor Economy Strategy as a chance to strengthen our relationship with the Traditional Custodians, to learn from their wisdom and experience, and to collaborate on initiatives that benefit both parties.

We are open to exploring new and innovative ways of working together, such as co-design, co-delivery, and co-evaluation of programs and services.

Loddon Shire Council will continue to build its relationship with Traditional Custodians to inform its key initiatives for tourism and the visitor economy.

Council believes future tourism initiatives can be enhanced and enriched by the involvement and participation of the Traditional Custodians organisations and that they will create mutual benefits for all.

The Visitor Economy Strategy was developed by Sparrowly Group on behalf of Loddon Shire Council in close consultation with community, tourism industry and government. The content within this Strategy is based on comprehensive research and engagement within the Loddon Shire. Data and insights were collated from July to December 2024 to develop the Visitor Economy Strategy.

The Strategy underwent public consultation in January 2025. The feedback received has been considered in the Final Strategy.

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