



## 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

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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
- Business verification meeting: 0 marks (applies for first time entrants and those returning to the program after a break of more than two consecutive years)

Total score: \_\_\_/100 marks

### WRITTEN SUBMISSION

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- Respond to the following questions using maximum 10,000 words and 25 images. Please note that the COVID-19 Impact question 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 the:



### COVID-19 Impacts (0 marks)

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**Please provide the judges with an understanding of your business's situation resulting from national and world events during the qualifying period. E.g., COVID-19, natural disasters (fire/flood).**

*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 only, allowing you to tell your business story in your written submission.*

*Bullet points are recommended. These responses should be short and sharp.*

*Q.1 Outline how many months in the qualifying period (1 July 2021 – 30 June 2022) you were operational for.*

*Q.2 Describe what the restrictions were on your business e.g., gatherings.*

*Q.3 Describe the impact of travel restrictions on your business e.g., border closures.*

### 1. Introduction (15 marks)

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**A. Describe the nature and history of your tourism business as well as key features of your business plan. 4 marks**

- Take the judge on a journey of your business product/service; how and when it began, where the business is located or services provided, who works in the business etc.*
- How has the business developed the over time?*
- Describe the business vision, mission and core values.*
- Provide an overview of the key features of your business plan, including main goals and strategies. This will assist the judge to understand how business development (Q2) and marketing efforts (Q3) align with the business's overall strategies.*

**B. Provide an overview of your tourism products, experiences, and services available. 7 marks**

- What products/experience/service are on offer to visitors?*
- Highlight your points of difference and what makes your business stand out from others (your unique selling points). Consider your amenities, products, services, or facilities that enhance visitor satisfaction.*
- 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.*

**C. How does your business demonstrate tourism excellence? 4 marks**

- Demonstrate your commitment to tourism excellence by explaining the values and philosophy of your business. This should be reflected in your policies and procedures, on how staff is inducted, incentivised and/or trained – so include details of these to show the business commitment to excellence.*
- How has the business 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.*

**IMAGES**

Attach a minimum of two graphics to support and enhance your responses. Include:

- a map of where you are located, judges may not be based in NSW and therefore won't be as familiar with NSW and our regions*
- images of the product/service and any specific facilities/amenities/services you have highlighted in your response*
- a collage of the accreditation programs you participate in and/or any award achievements.*

**2. Environmental Protection and Sustainable Resource Use (33 marks)**

**A. Demonstrate how the business mitigates or minimizes its impacts on our natural resources. 13 marks**

- 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.*
- 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'.*
- 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 will enhance the 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.*

**B. During the qualifying period, what have you implemented or improved to enhance the visitor experience or to provide business recovery/resilience in the wake of national and world events? 10 marks**

- The previous question is designed to give judges a broad overview of all the preservation and protection you undertake to minimise the impact on the natural resources. This question requires you to share what innovations and/or developments you have implemented during the qualifying period to enhance the visitor experience. Additionally, or alternatively, it seeks to understand what strategies were implemented for business endurance through a year of challenging national and world events.*

- 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).
- An enhancement could include, for example, a new experience/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/service.
- Demonstrate how these protect and preserve our natural heritage.

**C. Why were these innovations and/or developments initiated, and what were the outcomes? 10 marks**

- Explain the decision-making process and what drove the business to implement these innovations/developments. Consider how these enhances the visitor experience whilst protecting the natural environment.
- Include the research, planning and outcome/s of these innovations/developments and how they align with the business’ main goals and strategies.

**IMAGES**

Attach a minimum of two graphics to support and enhance your response. For example, an image of any new products or facilities, posters promoting changes that have been implemented.

**3. Marketing (15 marks)**

**A. 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? 15 marks**

- The response needs to focus on innovative approaches to marketing and promotions and relate back to the ecotourism experience.
- Demonstrate how you promote the appreciation and enjoyment of the region’s natural heritage resources.
- Judges are looking for a clear overview of the innovative approaches you have taken to marketing and what you have done differently to attract 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.
- Explain why these strategies were selected and how it aligns with local, regional and/or state natural resource marketing plans.
- Detail how these marketing activities have been successful. Use 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**.

**IMAGES**

Attach a minimum of two graphics to support and enhance your response. For example, images of marketing placement (social media screen shots, website, advertisements).

**4. Customer Experiences (20 marks)**

**A. Demonstrate how you educate both visitors and host communities about our natural heritage resources and influence them to enjoy natural heritage resources sustainably. 10 marks**

- The judges are looking for leadership in visitor education of ecotourism.
- Demonstrate how the business influences visitors through activities which foster responsible use and enjoyment of our natural heritage and our communities, including details on the outcome of these activities.

- Describe how you communicate and educate to host 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.

**B. How does your business provide quality customer experiences and demonstrate inclusive tourism practices? 10 marks**

- 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 during the qualifying period, 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 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.
- Once you have provided an overview of how customer service is delivered, describe how your business monitors and assesses customer service to ensure continued quality delivery. For example, feedback forms, monitoring social media, blogs, mystery shoppers, etc.
- 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. Provide a case study.
- Ensure that your response is relevant to the **qualifying period**.

**IMAGES**

Attach a minimum of two graphics to support and enhance your response. For example, staff communications posters, flow charts of customer service processes, reception cards encouraging feedback.

**5. Responsible Tourism (7 marks)**

**A. How have you considered and progressed your social and economic responsibilities during the qualifying period? 4 marks**

- This question requires you to outline how you have considered and acted on supporting the local community and businesses during the **qualifying period**.
- For social responsibilities your response should consider non-monetary examples. Some examples of how you demonstrate social responsibility are:
  - Supporting local businesses, product packaging, charitable donations, sponsorship, engagement with community groups
  - Employing locals and the impact their employment has had on the person, mentoring other businesses, speaking at schools
  - Work experience opportunities that are offered
  - Offering gifts for the school raffle that allowed the school to raise money for an item they wouldn't have otherwise been able to afford
- For economic responsibilities, detail how you support the local economy. Some examples of how you can demonstrate economic responsibility are:
  - Local purchasing, % of employment of local people.

- *Operators who stock and sell a local artisan's products, or stock local produce in minibars/hampers/outlets and how the business has boomed because of it for the manufacturer/producer (or something similar)*
  - *Waiving conference room fees for local not-for-profit groups to give them somewhere to meet which allows the group to keep going*
- Your response should include metric examples. Determine the percentage of total contribution. E.g., '75% of all our expenses were spent in X region.'

**B. How have you considered and progressed your ethical responsibilities during the qualifying period? 3 marks**

*This question requires you to outline how you have considered and acted on your business ethical responsibilities during the **qualifying period**. Some examples of how you demonstrate ethical responsibility are:*

- *The engagement and representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*
- *Cultural or historical representation*
- *Animal welfare, accessibility etc.*

**IMAGES**

- Attach a minimum of two graphics to support and enhance your response.*