

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.

QUALITY TOURISM FRAMEWORK

Entrants in categories 1 – 25 & 28 are required to demonstrate that they meet minimum business standards in order to enter the NSW Tourism Awards. This can be demonstrated via relevant accreditation with the [Quality Tourism Framework](#) (QTF) OR as part of the accommodation/ business standards question set within their submission.

There is no additional cost to complete the required pre-assessments. Additional costs will only apply if an entrant wishes to finalise the accreditation process through the [Quality Tourism Framework](#)

QTF pre-assessment requirements:

1. All entrants in non-accommodation categories are required to complete certain business standards known as Level 1 of the QTF. This pre-assessment will be included within the submission portal. Those who are already accredited through QTF (formally known as ATAP) will not be required to complete a pre-assessment.

Businesses that completed a pre-assessment as part of their 2019 NSW Tourism Awards entry will simply need to verify their previous pre-assessment.

SCORING

Entrants in this category will be scored as follows:

- Written submission: 90 marks
- Online review: 10 marks
- Business Verification Meetings are not scored

Total score: ___/100 points

Written Submission

- Submissions are made via the [Australian Tourism Awards portal](#).
- Respond to the questions using maximum 8,000 words and 25 images.
- No score is applied to Question 1 (Covid-19 impact) and it is not included in the word count.
- Follow the response guidance. Judges will refer to this when assessing your submission.

Online review

Prior to the Business Verification Meeting each judge will assess the entrant's online activities including;

1. The entrant's website
2. The entrant's social media channels
3. The entrants search engine optimisation
4. The entrants external listing sources

A copy of the Online Review questions is [available here](#).

The online review will account for 10% of the total score available.

Scoring of the online review will occur at the NSW Tourism Awards level only.

COVID-19 Impacts (0 marks)

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

NOTE: These responses do not contribute to your overall score, but provides 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.

Q.1 Outline how many months in the second half of the qualifying period were you operational for?

Q.2 Describe what the business restrictions were to your business e.g. gatherings

Q.3 Describe the impact of travel restrictions to your business e.g. border closures

1. Introduction (20 marks)

A. Please provide an overview of the business's tourism products, experiences and services including the nature and history of the business. How does the business demonstrate tourism excellence? 20 marks

Response Guidance

- This is where you 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/how it began, how you have developed the product over time.
- Your response should demonstrate why your business should be considered as an award-winning tourism business by highlighting your points of difference/what makes you different/special. Specify amenities, products, services or facilities that enhance visitor satisfaction.
- This is where the judges 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.
- 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/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 (30 marks)

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

Response Guidance

- 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 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 or to provide business recovery/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/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.
- The response should demonstrate why the strategy/innovation/development was implemented and how this enhances the visitor experience whilst protecting the natural environment.
- Also include the research, planning and outcome/s of these and how they align with the business' main goals and strategies.
- Demonstrate how these innovations and/or product developments protect and preserve our natural heritage.
- 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.

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 regions natural heritage resources. Why were these strategies chosen and what was the result? 15 marks

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 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.
- 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).

4. Customer Experiences (25 marks)

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 shares knowledge on the local natural heritage and support its sustainability.
- Demonstrate what the outcomes of these activities are and how you have influenced visitors to participate in ecotourism in a sustainable manner.
- Demonstrate how the business influences visitors through activities which foster responsible use and enjoyment of our natural heritage and our communities.
- 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 of 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 provide quality customer experiences in the

alternatives ways in which you operated – communicated to customers during changing restrictions, kept customers informed during closers 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, you should 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.*
 - As a part of your delivery of quality visitor experiences you need to demonstrate how you consider visitors' special and specific needs and recognises 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.*
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