

Visitor Economy News



Image: Thunderbolts Way, Gloucester. Courtesy of Destination NSW.

DNC Out & About



Image: Representatives from DNC, Destination NSW and MidCoast Council at Mograni Creek Estate.

Connecting with Industry in Gloucester

Destination North Coast (DNC) was on the ground in Gloucester this March for a Board meeting, strategy session and industry networking event, connecting with over 40 operators from across the local area. The itinerary also included visits to standout tourism offerings, including Mograni Creek Estate and The Steps Barrington / Barrington Bike Park.

[Read More](#)



Image: Destination North Coast joined our NSW Destination Network colleagues in Melbourne.

DNC at Destination Australia Conference

Destination North Coast's Chair John O'Neill, General Manager Michael Thurston and Industry Engagement Manager Ashley Gray attended Tourism Australia's Destination Australia Conference and the Regional Tourism Organisation (RTO) Forum in Melbourne on 19 March.

Bringing together industry leaders, stakeholders and more than 60 Regional and Local Tourism Organisations from across Australia, the events provided a valuable opportunity to connect, share insights and align on the future of the visitor economy. Discussions spanned aviation, distribution, marketing innovation and market insights, all under the central theme of *Accelerating future growth, competitiveness, and sustainable tourism*.

[Find Out More](#)



Waterfall Way Reopens: Progress for a Key Regional Link

One of the North Coast's most vibrant touring routes, Waterfall Way, which connects Bellingen to Dorrigo, has partially reopened to single-lane traffic following an extended closure due to significant weather impacts and road damage.

In March, DNC Industry Engagement Manager Ashley Gray joined the NSW Reconstruction Authority in Bellingen for a Waterfall Way stakeholder meeting, connecting with local businesses and hearing firsthand about the impacts of the road closure.

While the reopening restores a vital link, the focus now is on rebuilding visitor confidence and encouraging travel along the route as conditions continue to improve. DNC will continue working with partners to support operators and help re-establish this iconic drive as a key part of the North Coast visitor experience.


Exclusive REF Webinar


Get REF Ready: Join Our Exclusive Webinar

Thinking of applying for Regional Event Fund (REF) funding? Join us for a short, practical webinar designed to help you understand the Regional Event Fund (REF) and how to develop a strong, competitive application.

In this session, we will cover:

- Criteria and eligibility requirements across each funding stream
- Tips on writing a clear, compelling and successful application
- Available resources to support your submission, plus a live Q&A

 **Date:** Thursday 2 April

 **Time:** 3:00pm-3.45pm

[Register Now](#)

2026 Symposium & Awards



3 Steps To The 2026 North Coast Tourism Symposium & Awards

With the 2026 North Coast Tourism Symposium & Regional Tourism Awards fast approaching, now is the time to start planning your trip to Coffs Harbour. Whether you're joining us to connect with industry, gain insights or celebrate at the Awards Gala, here are your next steps to make sure you don't miss out:

1. Nominate your business

The Regional Tourism Awards are your opportunity to showcase your business, gain recognition and celebrate the incredible work happening across our region. Nominations close 2 April.

[Nominate your business here >](#)

2. Secure your tickets

If you haven't booked yet, now's the time. From the Welcome Event to the full-day Symposium and Awards Gala, tickets are selling steadily and early bird pricing won't last much longer.

[Book your tickets now >](#)

3. Plan your stay

Coffs Harbour will be buzzing during the event, so we recommend booking your accommodation early and take advantage of our delegate discount offers.

[Review accommodation discounts >](#)

[More Information & Tickets](#)

New News



Image: Waves Campground in Crescent Head. Courtesy of Destination NSW.

New NSW Caravan and Camping Campaign

A new campaign to inspire travellers to explore NSW through caravan and camping holidays has been launched to encourage intrastate and interstate travellers to get on the road and experience the state's diverse landscapes and regions year-round. Showcasing everything from coastal escapes to nature-based adventures, the 'Feel More, Live More' campaign by Destination NSW positions caravan and camping as an accessible, value-driven way to travel, giving visitors the opportunity to connect with nature and discover more of what NSW has to offer.

[Find Out More](#)



Image: The Eltham Hotel in Lismore. Courtesy of Destination NSW.

Night-Time Economy Funding Secured For North Coast

Four North Coast destinations—Sawtell, Lennox Head, Byron Bay and Murwillumbah—are among ten regional NSW towns to share in \$2 million in funding through the Regional Night-Time Economy Program pilot. The initiative supports local business groups with both funding and tailored workshops to collaborate on marketing campaigns, events and activations that enhance and promote their unique evening offerings.

[Find Out More](#)



Image: Fishing at Trial Bay Gaol Beach, Arakoon. Courtesy of Destination NSW.

Future of Recreational Fishing in NSW: Consultation Now Open

The NSW Government has released a draft Enhancing Recreational Fishing in NSW Action Plan 2026–2031 for public consultation, alongside Expressions of Interest for a new independent peak body to represent recreational fishers. Together, these initiatives aim to strengthen the sector by improving participation, supporting healthier waterways and ensuring fishers have a stronger voice in shaping the future of fishing across the state.

[Find Out More](#)

Destination Highlights



Image: Sea Sea Hotel in Crescent Head. Courtesy of SeaSea Hotel.

BASQ House & Sea Sea Hotel in the Global Spotlight

The North Coast is continuing to gain global recognition, with Byron Bay's [BASQ House](#) awarded a prestigious MICHELIN Key—the hotel equivalent of a MICHELIN Star and a mark of exceptional design, service and guest experience. It places the region among a select group of standout stays worldwide.

Further building momentum, Sea Sea Hotel has been named in [TIME's World's Greatest Places 2026](#), recognised for its unique character and elevated coastal offering. Together, these accolades highlight the North Coast's growing reputation as a destination delivering distinctive, experience-led stays that resonate with travellers both in Australia and internationally.

Around the Region



Image: Magic Dirt will play River Sounds on Opening Night. Courtesy of River Sounds

River Sounds Announces Partnership With Great Southern Nights

River Sounds has announced an exciting new addition to their festival program, with a special Opening Night on Friday 15 May presented by Great Southern Nights. The expanded program will feature a strong lineup of Australian talent, including Touch Sensitive and Magic Dirt alongside a showcase of local artists. The partnership highlights the importance of live music in regional communities and adds even more energy to this much-loved Bellingen event.

[Find Out More](#)



Image: Lismore Skatepark will host Rumble on the River this month. Courtesy of Clarence Valley Council.

Major Olympics Event to be Held in Lismore

Lismore has secured a major boost for its sporting profile, with its new world-class skatepark set to host 'Rumble on the River', an official Olympic pathway skateboarding event. From 16-

19 April, more than 150 athletes from across Australia will compete in both street and park disciplines, earning national ranking points as part of the pathway toward Olympic selection. The event will include live music, food trucks and community activities, highlighting Lismore's growing reputation as a destination for major sporting events and youth-focused experiences.

[Find Out More](#)



National Koala Conference 2026 Comes to the Mid North Coast

The Mid North Coast will take centre stage this July as Port Macquarie hosts the National Koala Conference 2026 (20-22 July), delivered by Koala Conservation Australia. This significant event will bring together leading researchers, wildlife carers, land managers, policy makers and conservation practitioners to share the latest insights into koala health, habitat protection, technology and community-led solutions at a critical time for the species.

[Find Out More](#)



New Magazine Showcases the Northern Rivers

Building on the success of *Byron Inside Out*, a new Northern Rivers magazine has been launched by Adhere Marketing to drive deeper visitor engagement and encourage dispersal beyond the region's coastal hotspots. Developed in partnership with the Northern Rivers Tourism Managers Group, Northern Rivers Traveller will be distributed across all Northern Rivers Visitor Information Centres and Ballina-Byron Gateway Airport,

[Find Out More](#)

Industry Insights

Regional Travellers Stay Longer & Spend More

A new report shows regional travellers are spending an average of \$5,770 per trip—\$286 more than metro travellers—and staying longer at around 10.3 nights. They are also more likely to support local economies, with 72% planning to spend with local businesses.

[Read More](#)

New NSW Data After Dark Report

The Destination NSW Data After Dark report highlights continued growth in the state's night-time economy, with 318 million night-time trips recorded in the December quarter, up on the previous quarter, and in-person spending reaching \$4.35 billion.

[Read More](#)

NSW visitor experiences: State of play

The Destination NSW "NSW Visitor Experiences: State of Play" research provides a comprehensive look at what types of experiences are driving demand across the domestic

tourism market, developed in partnership with FiftyFive5.

[Read More](#)

TRA releases tourism forecast for 2025-2030

Tourism Research Australia's 2025–2030 forecast shows a strong and steady growth outlook for Australia's visitor economy, with total visitor spending projected to rise from around \$191.6 billion in 2025 to \$233 billion by 2030.

[Read More](#)

Sustainability Spotlight



Image: Green Is Our Gold launch at the Destination Australia conference. Courtesy of Tourism Australia.

Green & Gold Sustainability Initiative Announced

Tourism Australia has launched the Green and Gold Promise, a new industry-wide sustainability initiative encouraging tourism businesses and visitors to adopt responsible travel practices and protect Australia's natural environments, communities and culture. The program responds to growing global demand for sustainable travel, with around 77% of travellers saying sustainability is important, and aims to strengthen Australia's reputation as a leader in responsible tourism.

[Learn More](#)



Image: Eco certified Barrington Bike Park. Courtesy of MidCoast Council.

Ecotourism Certification Opportunity Launched on MidCoast

MidCoast Council is inviting local tourism operators to participate in a new Ecotourism certification Expression of Interest (EOI), aimed at strengthening the region's reputation as a leading sustainable destination. The initiative offers businesses guidance and support to achieve recognised certification, helping them enhance their environmental credentials and appeal to increasingly eco-conscious travellers.

[Learn More](#)

Industry Development

Accessible and Inclusive Webinar Series

The Destination NSW Accessible and Inclusive Webinar Series is a free program helping tourism businesses create more welcoming and accessible experiences for all visitors, delivered in partnership with Get Skilled Access.

[Watch Here](#)

Top Tips For Managing Unexpected Change

Destination NSW's capability-building NSW First Program has released a guide to assist tourism businesses during evolving external conditions. It provides practical tips for assessing impacts, adapting products and processes, managing staff and communicating effectively.

[View Here](#)

Boost Your Tourism Accommodation Revenue

Join this insight-driven webinar with tourism expert Tamie Matthews to learn ten practical strategies to boost revenue, increase direct bookings and make smarter business decisions in 2026.

[Register Now](#)

Customer Journey Mapping for Events

A practical one-hour masterclass designed to help event organisers better understand their audience and create more engaging, seamless experiences. The session is perfect for anyone looking to improve event planning, promotion and delivery without added complexity.

[Register Here](#)

Product Development

Have a new product or experience (or just a great update on an existing product or experience) you'd like to tell us and DNSW about? **Submit it now via the link below.**

[Submit Here](#)

Dayshift Cold Brew

Dayshift Cold Brew is a beachside Kingscliff hub serving nitro cold brew on tap with house-made foam flavours by day, and cocktails, music and community vibes by night.

[Learn more >](#)

Paper Daisy

Paper Daisy at Halcyon House is a two-hatted, beachside restaurant in Cabarita Beach, known for refined, produce-driven dining and memorable coastal experiences.

[Learn more >](#)

Grants & Funding

Destination NSW 2026/27 Regional Event Fund Now Open

The Destination NSW 2026/27 Regional Event Fund (REF) offers a valuable opportunity for North Coast event organisers to secure funding that drives visitation, extends overnight stays and boosts local economies.

A total of \$1.5 million is available across three funding streams for events held between 1 July 2026 and 30 June 2027. The Incubator Stream offers up to \$20,000 for new events, the Flagship Stream supports emerging events with grants of \$20,000 (or up to \$30,000 over three years), and the Event Development Stream provides up to \$50,000 for established events ready to grow further.

Applications for the Incubator and Flagship streams close at midnight on 12 April 2026. For support with your application, please get in touch with DNC's Industry Engagement Manager Ashley Gray via email ashley.gray@dncnsw.com or phone 0483 224 375.

[Find Out More & Apply](#)

[Register For The REF Webinar](#)

Clarence Valley Special Event Sponsorship

Planning an event in the Clarence Valley that will attract visitors and keep them coming back? You may be eligible for support through Clarence Valley Council's Event Sponsorship Program.

[Find Out More](#)

Looking for Grants?

Government agencies and organisations offer grants and funding programs, designed to assist with improving your business or product offering. Review the latest opportunities for [grants in NSW](#) and [nationally via Austrade](#).

Destination North Coast may be able to provide a Letter of Support (LOS) for your project if it aligns with the [Destination North Coast Destination Management Plan \(DMP\)](#). Letters of Support requests can be made [via the online form](#) found on our website.

[Request a Letter of Support](#)

North Coast Events

To aid your planning and to support local events, please note these upcoming events on the North Coast or [find all events on DNSW's website](#).

121st Maclean Highland Gathering: Features pipe bands, Highland dancing, traditional games and cultural celebrations for a vibrant Easter weekend.

Maclean, 3-4 April 2026

[Learn more >](#)

Nimbin Art Fair: A feature presentation on Nimbin's cultural calendar for over 20 years presenting an incredible variety of works by Nimbin's finest artists.

Nimbin, 4-19 April 2026

[Learn more >](#)

Coffs Coast Festival of Rugby: Brings a full week of action to the region featuring international teams from Japan and Fiji.

Coffs Harbour, 9-12 April 2026

[Learn more >](#)

Kempsey Show: With a proud history dating back to 1881, the Show continues to celebrate the spirit of the Macleay with livestock competitions, arena events, market stalls and community favourites.

Kempsey, 14-15 April 2026

[Learn more >](#)

About Destination North Coast

Destination North Coast (DNC) works with industry, councils and partners to grow the visitor economy across our region, supporting tourism businesses and driving sustainable outcomes for our North Coast communities.

How we can support you:

- **Industry Development** – training, workshops and tailored support
- **Funding & Grants** – guidance on grants, sponsorship and event growth
- **Research & insights** – data and trends to inform your decisions
- **Tools & Resources** – practical tools, guides and resources to support your business

Need support or have a question? Please get in touch with our team [here](#).

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