

## Visitor Economy News



Image: South Beach, Scotts Head. Courtesy of Destination NSW.

## DNC Out & About



The screenshot shows a webinar interface. On the left, the Destination North Coast NSW logo is displayed above the title "Regional Event Fund Support" and the subtitle "How to Develop a Strong and Competitive Funding Application". On the right, a vertical column of six video thumbnails shows participants: Liv Fast-Chambers, Jenny Hicks, Shannon Gordon, Lauren Charlton, Ashley Gray, and Michael Thurston.

Image: DNC recently held an informative webinar for event organisers interested in the Regional Event Fund.

## Destination North Coast: Activity Roundup

### A Busy Month for the North Coast

April has proven to be a busy period across the North Coast, and we hope everyone enjoyed a safe and fruitful school holiday season, despite the recent economic and fuel challenges. With reports of strong visitation and activity across the region, it's been great to see operators welcoming travellers and making the most of the peak period. Here's a snapshot of what the Destination North Coast (DNC) team has been working on—and what's coming up.

### Supporting North Coast Operators: Regional Event Fund

Destination North Coast has been actively supporting local event organisers applying for the Regional Event Fund (REF), providing guidance to more than 50 operators including delivering an online webinar to strengthen understanding of the application process and

improve the quality of submissions across the region. This targeted support ensures North Coast events are well-positioned to secure funding and deliver strong outcomes for local communities and the visitor economy. We wish all REF applicants the best of luck with their submissions!

### **Visiting the Nambucca Valley with Business NSW**

On 8 May, Destination North Coast will take part in Nambucca Valley site visits with Business NSW, connecting directly with local businesses and operators to better understand opportunities and challenges on the ground. As a new member of the Business NSW Regional Leaders Program, this engagement reflects DNC's commitment to strengthening industry relationships, supporting regional advocacy and ensuring the North Coast visitor economy is represented in broader economic discussions.

### **Participating in the Global Sustainable Tourism Summit**

General Manager Michael Thurston is set to participate in an ecotourism panel at the [Global Sustainable Tourism Summit](#), held from 2-5 June. Joining Laura Haley and Kirsty Malapa, the session called *Driving regeneration, conservation and protected areas – ecotourism in action* will explore how ECO Certified operators and destinations are delivering best-practice approaches to sustainable tourism. Michael will provide a destination perspective, reinforcing the North Coast's leadership in nature-based and sustainable tourism.

## 2026 Symposium & Awards



*Image: The stunning Coffs Coast will be the backdrop for this year's North Coast Tourism Symposium & Awards.*

### **Countdown To The 2026 North Coast Tourism Symposium & Awards**

With nominations now closed for the 2026 North Coast Regional Tourism Awards, it's time to grab your tickets to the Awards gala evening and Tourism Symposium, and be part of one of the region's most important industry gatherings.

Taking place in Coffs Harbour from 29-30 July, the Symposium will bring together tourism operators, industry leaders, and government stakeholders for a day of insight, connection, and forward-thinking discussion. Guest speakers will be announced soon, with an exciting

lineup set to deliver fresh ideas, practical strategies, and inspiration for the future of our visitor economy. Secure your ticket now and be part of shaping the future of tourism on the North Coast.

[More Information & Tickets](#)

## Entries Now Open For The 2026 NSW Tourism Awards

The NSW Tourism Awards provide a prestigious platform for operators across the state to be recognised for excellence, innovation, and outstanding visitor experiences. Entering at the state level not only elevates your brand but also opens the door to national recognition through the Australian Tourism Awards. If your business is delivering exceptional experiences and you're ready to benchmark yourself against the best in NSW, now is the time to step forward and be recognised.

[Nominate Now](#)

## New News



*Image: Fozie's Fishing Adventures at Ballina. Courtesy of Destination NSW.*

## New Artificial Reefs To Boost Recreational Fishing

New offshore artificial reefs at Ballina and Coffs Harbour are a part of a statewide rollout to boost recreational fishing, tourism and marine ecosystems. These purpose-built structures mimic natural reefs, creating habitat that attracts a wide range of fish species and supports marine growth. Designed to deliver both environmental and economic benefits, the reefs are expected to become productive fishing hotspots within a year, enhancing visitor experiences and strengthening the coastal visitor economy.

[Find Out More](#)



*Image: Nightcap National Park. Courtesy of NSW National Parks.*

## 'Find Your Path On A NSW Great Walk' Campaign Returns

The *Find Your Path on a NSW Great Walk* campaign has returned, showcasing seven spectacular multi-day walking experiences across the state, including the Gidjuum Gulganyi Walk in the Tweed/Byron hinterland. Capitalising on growing demand for nature-based travel, the campaign promotes diverse landscapes, from coastal tracks to rainforest and alpine hikes, while encouraging experienced and first-time walkers to explore regional NSW.

[Find Out More](#)



*Image: Mount Warning, Northern Rivers. Courtesy of The Legendary Pacific Coast.*

## Regional Voices Needed For New Tourism Advocacy Campaign

A new coordinated advocacy initiative led by Australian Regional Tourism (ART) called *There's More At Stake Than Fuel* is asking regional leaders to help shift the conversation from simply cutting back on driving to understanding the real effects this will have on regional communities. Mayors, industry leaders and stakeholders are invited to record a short 60–90 second face-to-camera video, sharing the role tourism plays in their region and what's at stake for local businesses, jobs and communities.

[Find Out More](#)

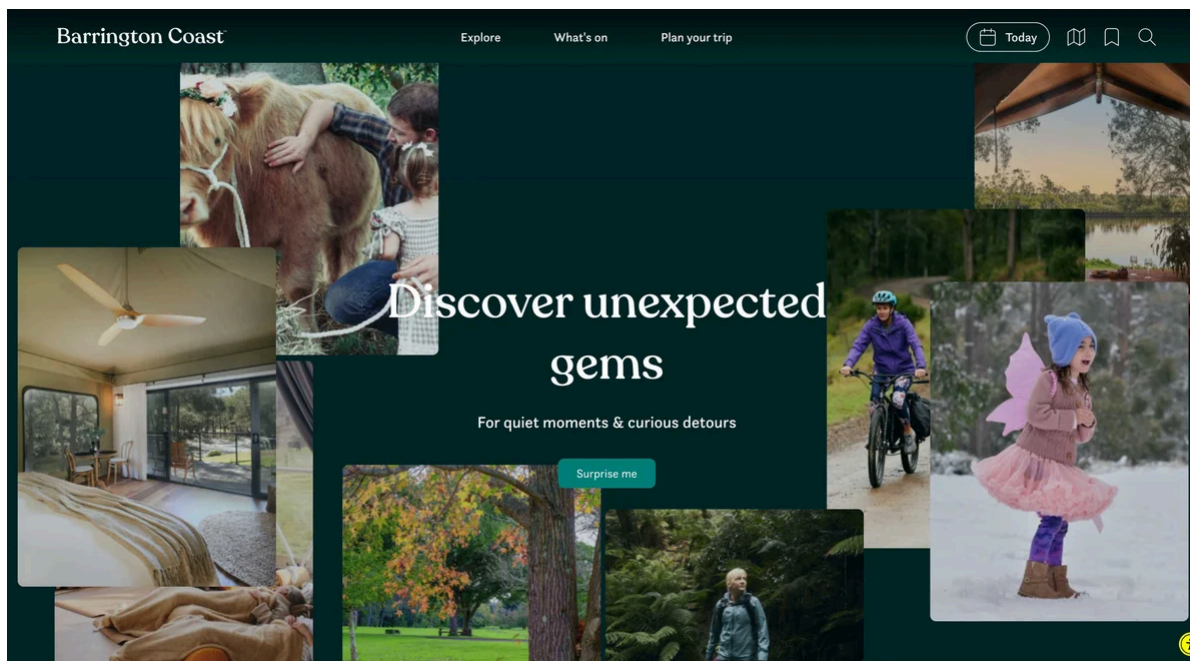


Image: The new-look Barrington Coast website. Courtesy of Barrington Coast.

## New-look Barrington Coast Destination Website Now Live

The Barrington Coast has a newly refreshed website that brings the region's storytelling to life by inviting visitors to explore through its new tagline *There's Always a Tale To Tell*.

Designed to inspire curiosity and deeper connection, the site showcases the diversity of the region—from beaches and lakes to rivers, valleys and World Heritage wilderness—through rich, narrative-driven content that encourages travellers to uncover their own experiences.

[Explore Website Here](#)

**Destination Highlights**



*Image: Lord Howe Island starry night. Courtesy of Destination NSW.*

## Lord Howe Island: Off-Grid and Unforgettable

Part of the broader North Coast region, Lord Howe Island continues to earn global recognition as one of Australia's most extraordinary destinations. Recently named the [world's top off-grid island escape](#), Lord Howe was praised for its genuine remoteness, limited visitor numbers and pristine natural environment—a rare place where travellers can truly disconnect and recharge.

That sense of escape will become even more magical during the island's annual [Dark Sky Festival](#), from 16-23 May, 2026. Set beneath some of Australia's clearest night skies, the festival features stargazing experiences, science talks, light walks, wellness events and unique dining experiences inspired by the cosmos. It's a celebration of nature, wonder and the incredible night sky that makes Lord Howe Island unlike anywhere else.

**Around the Region**



*Image: Whale watching with Out of the Blue Adventures, Ballina. Courtesy of Destination NSW*

## **Bumper Whale Watching Season On Its Way**

Whale watching operators across the North Coast are preparing for a bumper season, with NSW's famous "Humpback Highway" expected to welcome record numbers of migrating whales from April to November. Marine scientists estimate more than 50,000 eastern Australian humpback whales will travel along the NSW coastline this season—around 20,000 more than pre-whaling population levels. As a key pillar of the NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2035, nature-based tourism continues to drive regional growth, supporting local businesses, creating jobs and reinforcing the North Coast's position as a leading sustainable tourism destination.

[Find Out More](#)



Image: The AgriTourism Summit will expand in 2026 with the inaugural Aqua AgriTourism Summit.

## **Tweed secures 2026 AgriTourism Summit 2026 With New Aqua Focus**

We're pleased to share that the 2026 AgriTourism Summit is coming to the North Coast, with the Tweed set to host this important industry event on 20-21 October. Bringing the Summit to the region creates a valuable opportunity for both existing and emerging local operators to connect, learn and showcase what they do best. It also reflects the strong advocacy and collaboration between DNC and Tweed Shire Council to secure an event that will deliver real benefits to the local visitor economy.

Now in its third year, the event will deliver a more immersive, hands-on experience for delegates, combining engaging learning sessions with a curated field program showcasing leading agritourism and emerging aquatourism operators.

With the added opportunity to extend your stay and experience *Savour The Tweed*, this year's Summit offers a unique blend of industry connection and consumer engagement in one of NSW's most diverse and accessible regional destinations.

[Find Out More](#)



*Image: Groovin The Moo hits Lismore on 9 May. Courtesy of Great Southern Nights*

## Great Southern Nights Hits Stages Across NSW in May

Live music is set to light up the North Coast this May as **Great Southern Nights** returns, bringing a vibrant program of gigs and events to the region. Headlining the month is **Groovin' The Moo 2026** in Lismore on 9 May, drawing crowds with its high-energy line-up, followed by **River Sounds Festival** at Bellingen from 15–16 May, offering a relaxed, community-driven celebration of music by the river. Together, these events highlight the North Coast as a must-visit destination for live music lovers, delivering unforgettable experiences while supporting local venues, artists and the visitor economy.

Find A Gig Near You



Image: Crystal Castle and the Shambhala Gardens. Courtesy of Destination NSW

## Byron Bay Businesses Recognised in NSW Growth Initiative

Six leading Byron Bay tourism operators were selected as part of a prestigious Destination NSW program designed to connect export-ready businesses with international travel buyers and unlock new global growth opportunities. The cohort included Byron Bay Surf School, Byron Yoga Centre, Connect Adventures, Crystal Castle & Shambhala Gardens, Hotel Marvell and Rise Up Byron Conscious Tours—highlighting the region’s strength in wellness, nature-based and immersive visitor experiences.

[Find Out More](#)



Image: Shared Coastal Pathway at Ballina. Courtesy of Destination NSW

## Have Your Say: Ballina Shire's Economic Future

Ballina Shire Council is inviting local businesses and operators to help shape a clear roadmap for how the region supports local business, strengthens the visitor economy and drives future growth. Feedback will ensure the new Ballina Shire Economic Development and Visitor Economy Strategy reflects real, on-the-ground insights around current challenges, opportunities and priorities. The survey only takes a few minutes to complete and closes on 15 May—share your input and help shape Ballina Shire's future.

[Find Out More & Take The Survey](#)

## Industry Insights

### Record-breaking year for international tourism in NSW

Visitor expenditure in NSW has surged past \$60 billion for the first time, following a record-breaking year for international tourism, with the top three source markets named as China, the United States and New Zealand.

[Read More](#)

### Sustainable travel top of the list for travellers

According to Booking.com's Travel & Sustainability Report 2026, 85 per cent of travellers say sustainable travel is important or very important to them, with older travellers leading the way.

### NSW national parks announce record visitation in 24-25

National parks across NSW have recorded their highest-ever visitation, with 65.5 million visits during the 2024-25 financial year and new data showing 72% of international travellers also visited at least one park.

[Read More](#)

### Record International Arrivals

Sydney Airport has delivered its strongest first quarter for international travel in its history, with 4.57 million international passengers passing through its terminals in Q1 2026, representing 5.8 per cent growth year-on-year.

[Read More](#)

[Read More](#)

## Sustainability Spotlight



Image: Byron Bay YHA is now fully certified by Ecotourism Australia. Courtesy of YHA Australia.

## Byron Bay Hostels Newly Eco-Certified

Sustainability is taking centre stage in Byron Bay, with two of the region's leading hostels YHA Byron Bay and YHA Cape Byron now part of a fully certified national network following YHA Australia's achievement of Ecotourism Australia certification.

Both properties are recognised for meeting global best-practice sustainability standards, with initiatives that support the local environment, reduce resource use and strengthen community connections. Together, these Byron Bay hostels offer visitors an affordable and eco-conscious way to experience the North Coast, reinforcing the region's growing reputation as a leader in sustainable travel.

[Learn More](#)

## Industry Development

### Tourism Australia Industry Webinar

This webinar on 8 May will include the latest information and data on consumer sentiment, the aviation landscape as well as insights from Tourism Australia partners around the world.

[Register Here](#)

### Accessible and LGBTIQ+ Inclusion Training Program

Developed in partnership with Accessible Accommodation and Welcome With Pride, this online, self-paced training course equips your team with the skills to welcome guests with disabilities and deliver a seamless, inclusive experience.

[Register Now](#)

## Creating Wellness Experiences

An on-demand webinar with Destination NSW and wellness expert Katherine Droga from Droga & Co. provides practical tips for accommodation, visitor attractions and tour providers.

[View Here](#)

## 2 Numbers Every Tourism Business Should Track Right Now

A practical webinar helping tourism businesses take a simple first step in managing emissions by focusing on fuel and electricity, offering easy-to-use tools and insights to reduce costs, improve efficiency and meet growing sustainability expectations.

[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](#)

### Bar Bruto

Bar Bruto is a European-inspired tapas and natural wine bar in Casuarina, known for simple, flavour-driven plates and a relaxed neighbourhood feel.

[Learn more >](#)

### Mallanganee Observatory-Lookout

The new Mallanganee Observatory-Lookout offers sweeping hinterland views by day and exceptional stargazing at night, creating a unique dark sky experience in the Northern Rivers.

[Learn more >](#)

## Grants & Funding

### 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](#).

**Great Southern Nights:** A statewide live music program bringing top artists to venues and events across NSW, including the North Coast.

Northern Rivers, 1-17 May 2026

[Learn more >](#)

**Bellingen Show:** Celebrating Bellingen's agricultural heritage and future, sustainability and community creativity over a weekend of family fun.

Bellingen, 9-10 May 2026

[Learn more >](#)

**Bangalow Film Festival:** Presents a multifaceted program of film screenings, live music events, art installations, meetings with special guests and industry moments.

Bangalow, 13 May-21 June 2026

[Learn more >](#)

**Lismore Gemfest:** One of Australia's largest annual gem and mineral shows with over 140 sellers displaying minerals, gems, fossils and jewellery from all over the world.

Lismore, 16-17 May 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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