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# RURAL CITY OF WANGARATTA VISITOR SERVICES STRATEGY

**FINAL REPORT**

RURAL CITY OF WANGARATTA | JUNE 2021



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## FILE

Wangaratta Visitor Services Draft\_11-06-21.docx

## VERSION

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## ACRONYMS

ATAP	Australian Tourism Accreditation Program
LGA	Local Government Area
OVG	Official Visitor Guide
VIC	Visitor Information Centre
VTIC	Victoria Tourism Industry Council
RCOW	Rural City of Wangaratta

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## BACKGROUND

Tourism is a key industry and major employer in the Rural City of Wangaratta that has significant opportunity for growth in the future. Visitor information servicing will play a vital role in leveraging this opportunity and maximising the economic and social benefits for the local tourism industry. Information consumption trends are continuously evolving with on-demand information through digital media now being the norm.

Wangaratta Rural City Council (Council) recognises the need to reinvigorate and redesign the Council's visitor services to align with changing consumer trends, needs and expectations. The purpose of the Strategy is to provide Council with a blueprint for the delivery of physical and digital visitor information services. Key objectives to be achieved through the Strategy include:

- Assist in driving visitation and increasing expenditure across the municipality;
- Increase exposure of the Rural City of Wangaratta as a tourism destination; and
- Provide innovative and informative information delivery solutions.

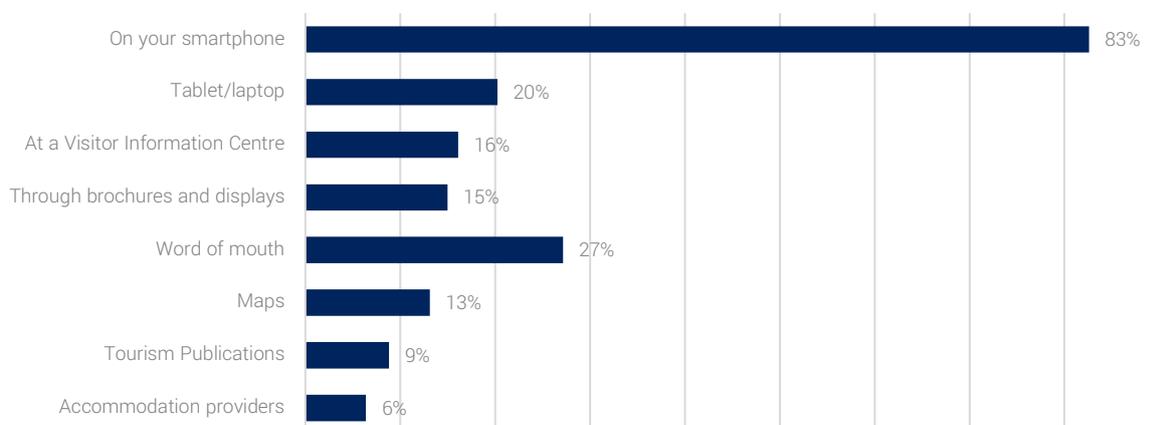
## TRENDS IN VISITOR SERVICING

Visitor information servicing plays an important role in enhancing the visitor experience, through delivery of physical and digital content that provides visitors with information at a range of stages in the visitor journey. Furthermore, quality visitor information servicing can assist with building a brand recognised by consumers and ensuring a positive visitor experience through delivery of targeted and high-quality information.

Sociocultural changes such as the increasing use of technology, as well as major global events such as COVID-19 means visitor behaviour and how they access information has fundamentally changed. The tourism industry is adapting to a more contemporary customer service model that use omnichannel strategies that are able to intercept and service visitors at all touchpoints of their journey. Declining trends in visitation to physical Visitor Information Centres (VICs) has been commonly observed across the country. Many local governments and regional tourism boards are rethinking the role and design of the traditional Visitor Information Centre.

A survey of 550 visitors to the King Valley in January for the King Valley Tourism Development Plan shows that 83% of visitors to the King Valley Region have a preference for accessing information on their smartphone. Other preferred avenues of accessing information include through word of mouth (27%) and tablet/laptop (20%). Only 16% of visitors have nominated a preference for using a physical visitor information centre.

### Preferred Method for Accessing Visitor Information [King Valley Tourism Development Plan]



## VISITATION TRENDS

The Rural City of Wangaratta attracts an average of 726,200 visitors per annum of which daytrippers account for the majority of visitation at 63%. Over the past five years, there has been low growth in the higher yielding leisure and business markets, with most growth in visitation driven by the VFR and 'Other' visitor market. The 'Other' visitor market includes casual visitors coming into the region for personal day-to-day activities such as education, health appointments, and shopping.

Key market types identified for the region include:

- Older Couples – (35% of visitors);
- Visiting Friends or Relatives (VFR) – (31% of visitors).

The King Valley Region is rapidly developing as a key tourism destination in the High Country. Recent research undertaken for the King Valley Tourism Development Plan highlights the importance of Milawa and Whitfield as key destinations and that visitors are relatively higher yield due to spend on wine and food product. The overwhelming driver for visitation to the King Valley is wine tourism. Glenrowan also presents as a secondary destination in the Rural City of Wangaratta.

It is critical for visitor information services to be dispersed outside of Wangaratta given the importance of other rural towns and villages in tourism. In addition, the visitor to destinations such as Glenrowan and the King Valley do not necessarily travel to Wangaratta CBD, where the existing Visitor Information Centre is located.

## SERVICES REVIEW

### Physical Visitor Information Centre

In 2018, the Visitor Information Centre recorded 28,175 walk-in visitors. Walk-in visitation has been declining rapidly at an average rate of 8.4% per annum over the past five years. The cost per visitor to the VIC has increased over time as a result of a reduced number of visitors.

Recent data from the King Valley Tourism Development Plan survey highlights the overwhelming preference is information sourced on a smartphone or tablet, followed by word of mouth. In order to tailor resources to visitor needs a shift of visitor information resourcing from physical to more flexible and responsive digital information should be considered.

Benchmarking shows that the resourcing dedicated to the Rural City of Wangaratta VIC is far greater than other VICs with similar levels of visitation. Reallocation of Councils resources to digital services should be considered to meet visitor need and expectations.

### Digital

The Rural City of Wangaratta's digital presence has been quickly gaining momentum over the past 10 years which reflects the trends of growing preference for digital information streams. Trend data shows the number Visit Wangaratta website sessions has grown at an average annual rate of 7.4% from 2013 to 2017.

A much greater focus of resourcing is needed in digital and the visitor website is a key data source that Council should continue to support. Key areas of improvement for the Visit Wangaratta and Visit King Valley Tourism Websites include:

- Refresh website designs including improvement of the content and user interface and interactive content to inspire and engage visitors;
- Address key areas of missing information and features that will be expected from today's visitors i.e. customer reviews and feedback, online customer service chats, search filters and tags;
- Improve optimisation for mobile view;
- Address overlap and duplication of both websites and improve consistency of approach.

## Physical Collateral

There is a large range of printed collateral that has been developed by many different stakeholders including Council, Tourism North East, local tourism organisations, community groups and other organisations. Such a variety of physical collateral available has resulted in a lack of consistency in branding in the region and varying quality of information, as well as a lack of brand for the region. Council should continue to improve physical collateral provided in-region, with a view to providing greater consistency of branding, information quality and relevance.

## DIRECTIONS

### Theme one: Decentralising of physical visitor information services

Objective: Decentralise the approach to visitor servicing across the Rural City of Wangaratta to reflect the growing importance of the King Valley Region and Glenrowan as visitor destinations.

#### Key actions

- Relocation of the City's Visitor Information Centre into the arts and cultural precinct area to scale down investment in a physical VIC in Wangaratta and build on the synergies and economies of scale by operating in conjunction with other Council services.
- Establish park-based visitor hubs in Glenrowan, Milawa and Whitfield which provide a location that visitors are drawn to, stop at and can access information.
- Establish new branded brochure racks in businesses located in the rural tourism villages such as Milawa, Oxley, Whitfield, Moyhu, Glenrowan, Everton and Eldorado.
- Invest in a mobile VIC to operate across the RCoW during peak periods and events.
- Audit and assess available brochures and literature. Focus on having branded official guides and maps that also include localised content for sub regions and destinations.

### Theme two: Embracing and investing in digital visitor servicing streams

Objective: Lift the resources and professionalism across the industry in delivery of digital information, content and social media.

#### Key actions

- Review and refresh websites and online content across all digital platforms, with particular focus on:
  - Ensuring they have high mobile optimisation;
  - Deliver high quality motivational images and video;
  - Greater opportunity for interactive content;
  - Location tagging;
  - Include PDF downloads of brochures and maps;
  - Live chat and video call option.
- Increase the level of engagement and two-way communication on digital platforms including council website, social media and travel sites. This includes upskilling of Council staff and industry.
- Establish consistent tracking methods and review processes to capture the following data points:
  - Two-way engagement;
  - No. of Tripadvisor reviews;
  - Average product ratings;
  - Brochure downloads.
- Advocate for and implement a range of Wifi hotspots in key visitor destinations and improvement of blackspots across Wangaratta especially along key roads and routes.

### Theme Three: Engage and Empower Tourism Businesses and Residents

Objective: Improve the level and quality of information being distributed through word of mouth channels including tourism operators, residents and past visitors.

#### Key actions

- Establish a 'know your own backyard program' for RCoW residents. This will prompt social media posts and drive sharing of what residents love about their local areas.
- Offer a series of famils to local business owners and staff to explore the product within the region.
- Develop a communication plan that provides a clear strategy for promoting activities, products and events to industry and residents.
- Establish stronger alignment and relationships between the LTAs and their members to share knowledge and inter-regional referrals.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. PROJECT BACKGROUND

Tourism is a key industry and major employer in the Rural City of Wangaratta that has significant opportunity for growth in the future.

Visitor information servicing will play a vital role in leveraging this opportunity and maximising the economic and social benefits for the local tourism industry. Information consumption trends are continuously evolving with on-demand information through digital media now being the norm.

Wangaratta Rural City Council (Council) recognises the need to reinvigorate and redesign the Council's visitor services to align with changing consumer trends, needs and expectations. Anticipating visitors' needs with the right information, at the right time, via the right channel, will encourage people to stay longer, do more, return and promote Wangaratta's destinations via their networks.

Council has engaged Urban Enterprise to prepare a Visitor Servicing Strategy for the region. The purpose of the Strategy is to provide Council with a blueprint for the delivery of physical and digital visitor information services that will allow Wangaratta to remain competitive and relevant as a tourism destination in the coming years.

The Strategy has been developed using a tailored approach with consideration of multiple factors including macrotrends in technology and its effect on information consumption, infrastructure and servicing gaps in the municipality, the Rural City of Wangaratta's rich diversity of tourism product, opportunities to align with the High Country and supporting local tourism businesses.

## 1.2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the Strategy is to provide Council with a blueprint for the delivery of physical and digital visitor information services. Key objectives to be achieved through the Strategy include:

- Assist in driving visitation and increasing expenditure across the municipality;
- Increase exposure of the Rural City of Wangaratta as a tourism destination; and
- Provide innovative and informative information delivery solutions.

The Strategy will provide the direction and actions to ensure a sustainable visitor servicing model that follows best practice principles and is supported by a long-term growth narrative.

## 1.3. PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The following scope and process was completed to prepare the Strategy:

1	Strategic Review and Secondary Research
2	Stakeholder Consultations including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Council personnel</li><li>• VIC staff and volunteers</li><li>• Major tourism industry associations</li><li>• Wangaratta community (Online Survey)</li></ul>
3	Visitor Market Assessment
4	Review of Tourism Product & Infrastructure (Site Visits and Desktop Research)
5	Assessment of the Current VIC
6	Digital Servicing and Marketing Review
7	Analysis of Best Practice Examples
8	Preparation of Strategies and Actions

## 1.4. LOCATIONAL CONTEXT

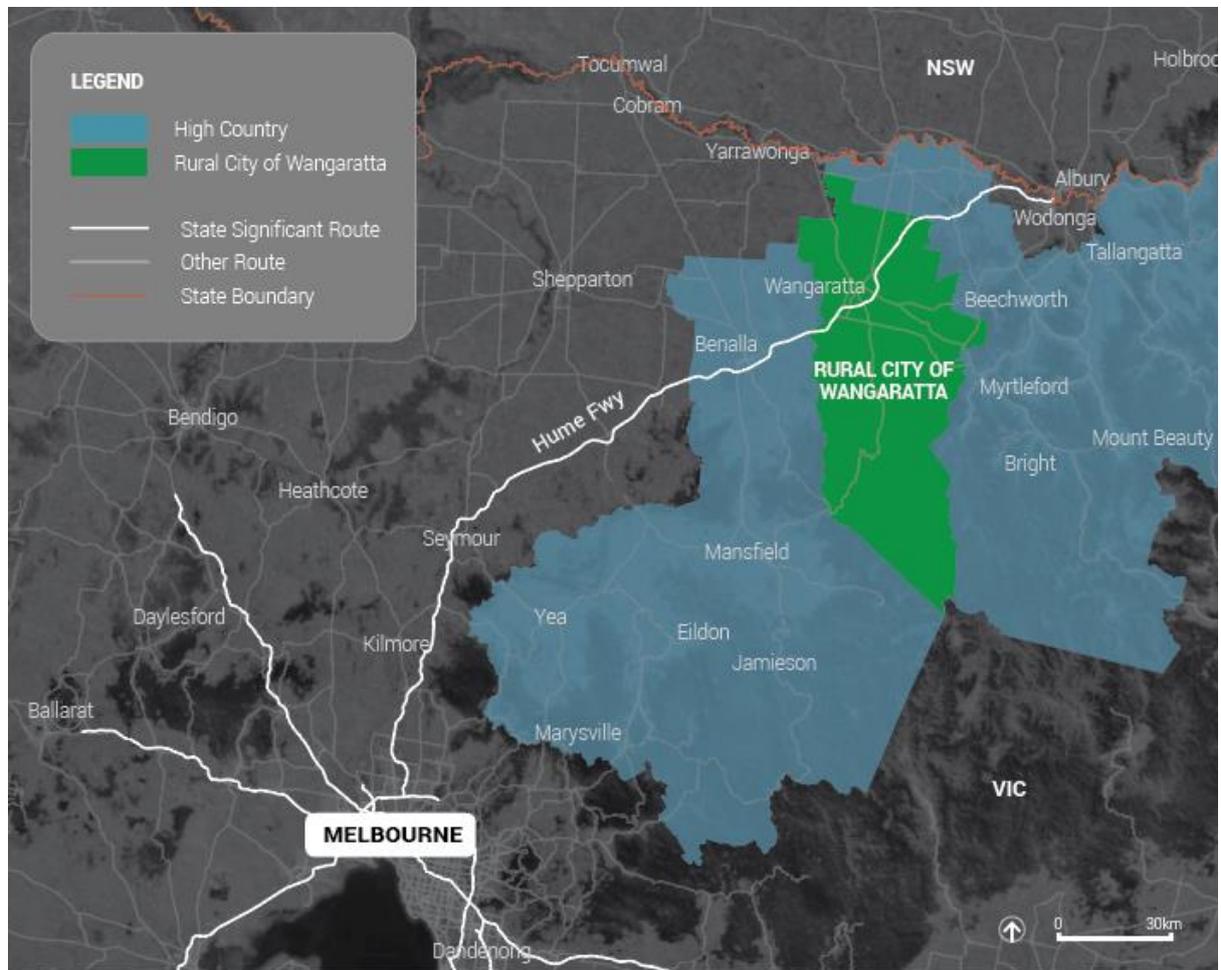
The Rural City of Wangaratta is located in North East Victoria, 236 km or 2hr40mins drive from Melbourne. Situated on the Hume Freeway, and the Melbourne to Sydney rail line, Wangaratta is an important regional centre that services the surrounding satellite towns and agricultural areas.

The City has an estimated urban population of 29,187 (June 2019). Key townships include Wangaratta CBD, Glenrowan, Milawa, King Valley, Whitfield, Eldorado and Cheshunt.

Key travel routes across the region include:

- The Hume Freeway;
- Wangaratta-Mansfield Road;
- Snow Road; and
- Great Alpine Road.

### F1. WANGARATTA LOCATIONAL CONTEXT



## 2. STRATEGIC CONTEXT AND RESEARCH

### 2.1. INTRODUCTION

This section provides an overview of the current strategies influencing visitor servicing trends, as well as regional and local tourism strategies.

A review of regional strategies was undertaken to understand the broader role and changing nature of visitor servicing at the Australian and State level, as well as an analysis of regional and local tourism strategies to understand the tourism-related issues and opportunities for each.

### 2.2. KEY FINDINGS

**Visitor information servicing plays an important role in enhancing the visitor experience, through delivery of physical and digital content that provides visitors with information at a range of stages in the visitor journey. Furthermore, quality visitor information servicing can assist with building a brand recognised by consumers, and ensuring a positive visitor experience through delivery of targeted and high-quality information.**

**Sociocultural changes such as the increasing use of technology, as well as major global events such as COVID-19 means visitor behaviour and how they access information has fundamentally changed. The tourism industry is adapting to a more contemporary customer service model that use omnichannel strategies that are able to intercept and service visitors at all touchpoints of their journey. With declining trends in visitation to physical Visitor Information Centres (VICs) commonly observed across the country, many local governments and regional tourism boards are rethinking the role and design of the traditional Visitor Information Centre.**

**Incorporating innovative technologies across visitor servicing channels in order to drive positive tourism outcomes is a priority direction for Tourism North East. Future opportunities to leverage regional level digital channels should be considered.**

**At the local level, the implementation of this Visitor Services Strategy is a key action of the Council Plan in order to respond to the need for innovative and flexible visitor services that meet the changing expectations of people visiting the Wangaratta region. The Rural City of Wangaratta is currently implementing several strategies involving improvements to key tourism product and potential visitor servicing touchpoints. Key initiatives include projects such as the Wangaratta Railway Precinct redevelopment, the Glenrowan Ned Kelly Project, upgrades to trails and tracks and the recent completion of the renewed Council and Visit Wangaratta branding strategies. These future actions will need to be carefully considered for this Strategy in order to ensure a well-integrated and consistent visitor servicing network.**

**Lack of awareness has identified that the primary tourism issue facing the Wangaratta region. Visitor servicing will be critical to promoting the region's strengths and product offering, both prior to and during a trip.**

**The COVID-19 pandemic will only speed up this transition, as visitors will be looking to travel smart and safely by undertaking more pre-planning than usual. Recent research into visitor sentiments shows that the biggest drivers for booking travel will include:**

- **Contact free, up to date information through digital media;**
- **Establishments with hygienic practices in place (mask and hand sanitisation);**
- **Non crowded areas with preference for open and nature-based attractions; and**
- **Flexible booking systems.**

**Providing these services will be crucial to ensure visitors feel confident to book trips and make the journey.**

## 2.3. STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT WITH LOCAL & REGIONAL STRATEGIES

The following section presents a review of the key strategic documents that comprise the strategic tourism framework within which the Rural City of Wangaratta currently operates, and in particular identifies the core focus for tourism and visitor services delivery for the City into the future.

### 2.3.1. REGIONAL STRATEGIC CONTEXT

#### High Country Destination Management Plan 2013 – 2023 (Updated 2016)

Victoria's High Country Destination Management Plan was prepared by Tourism North East (TNE). The DMP identifies the regional product pillars of High Country, which include cycle tourism, food, wine and beer, snow, nature-based experiences and arts and cultural heritage.

Eight priority tourism projects for the region were identified that have the potential to deliver the strongest collaborative outcomes. This includes:

**Priority Project 8: Digital Excellence.** This project focuses on using technology to make the High Country experience easier to research, access and enjoy, driving positive tourism outcomes across the region. The project includes achieving excellence and diversification of existing channels (like the regional digital platform), as well as pioneering the use of the latest digital formats across new platforms. Any new or unique digital infrastructure will be supported via marketing.

#### Tourism North East Three Year Strategy 2019/20 – 2021/22

TNE has developed a Three-year Strategy sets out actions for the delivery of seven goals that are consistent with the regional priorities highlighted in the Destination Management Plan:

1. To achieve an ownership position in the cycle tourism space and be recognised as Australia's premier bike destination;
2. To lead innovation in the food and drinks space, creating a competitive differentiator for the High Country that drives tourism related visitation and yield opportunities throughout the region;
3. To evolve the winter offering of the major alpine resorts to ensure they continue to appeal to the visitor market and drive visitation, yield and job opportunities throughout the region;
4. To develop and promote a range of leading nature-based tourism experiences that are common across the High Country and drive regional visitation and yield;
5. To establish the region's arts and culture credentials to both diversify the demographic attracted to the High Country and increase dispersal;
6. **For the High Country to set industry best practice for the use of digital technologies across all aspects of the region's offering, delivering a superior consumer experience that differentiates it from competitors;**
7. Maintain a strong organisation that proactively leads regional tourism efforts and delivers positive outcomes for the High Country.

### 2.3.2. LOCAL STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The following local strategies have been reviewed and considered in this report:

- Our Roadmap for the Future Council Plan 2017 to 2021;
- Economic Development and Tourism Strategy 2018 – 2023;
- Rural City of Wangaratta 2030 Community Vision;
- Walking and Cycling Strategy 2020 to 2030;
- Events and Attractions Strategy 2018 – 2023;
- Marketing and Branding Strategy;
- Wangaratta Railway Precinct Concept Draft Report, 2018.

The implementation of this Visitor Services Strategy is a key action of the Council Plan in order to respond to the need for innovative and flexible visitor services that meet the changing expectations of people visiting the Wangaratta region.

The Rural City of Wangaratta is currently implementing several strategies involving improvements to key tourism product and potential visitor servicing touchpoints. Key initiatives include:

- The Wangaratta Railway Precinct which will provide a key opportunity for a vibrant gateway for visitors arriving to Wangaratta via coach, rail, car or cycle and connect them to the broader experiences of the region.
- A new suite of branding templates and collateral that to be implemented through the recently completed Wangaratta Marketing and Branding Strategy.
- A new signage suite for walking and cycling infrastructure, including directional and educational content.
- Additional cycling infrastructure and charge station locations for electric mobility scooters and bikes, planning for walking and cycling tourism destination/trail head points with improved amenity, at key locations including CBD businesses and major recreational centre, Merriwa Park and Apex Park.

These future actions will need to be carefully considered for this Strategy in order to ensure a well-integrated and consistent visitor servicing network.

## 2.4. STATE-WIDE STRATEGIES, RESEARCH & TRENDS

### State Regional Tourism Review Discussion Paper, 2019

The State Regional Tourism Review Discussion Paper was used to invite feedback and ideas from regional communities. The review aims to maximise the potential of investment and boost international visitation and other key market segments.

The paper identified five key themes:

1. Strengthening our tourism offering – building the capacity, capability and attractions of different regions across Victoria to ensure they keep pace with visitor needs and expectations.
2. Making the most of our marketing spending – better coordinating investment and priority setting in regional marketing to ensure partners are supported to work together towards common goals.
3. Supporting industry – better facilitating regional tourism investment and supporting industry to create excellent tourism products.
4. Enhancing Regional Tourism Boards – making sure all Regional Tourism Boards have the right governance, scale, cross-sector buy-in and remit to drive tourism for the regions.
5. Better coordinating effort – delivering a more coordinated approach to regional tourism planning and strategy to reduce duplication and maximise our efforts.

### Visitor Servicing Toolkit, 2019

The *Visitor Servicing Toolkit* was prepared by the Victorian Tourism Industry Council and is a guide for providing information and services to visitors with a focus on digital technology.

The document says that many local governments and regional tourism boards are rethinking the role and design of the traditional Visitor Information Centre. The best are adding in inspiration, going mobile and making it possible for people to access services at multiple locations including connecting them to information via digital signage and QR codes for their smartphones.

The document identifies that growing the visitor economy is one of the fastest and best ways for local governments to improve their own financial viability and capacity to deliver on community expectations into the long term. It brings new dollars into the local economy and improves the profitability of local businesses, while also supporting new start-ups and attracting major investment to the area.

### Visitor Information Servicing Guidelines, 2019

The *Visitor Information Servicing Guidelines* introduce new and updated models of accredited Visitor Information Centres and accredited supporting services.

The update includes a number of new and established servicing models that have the opportunity to use the yellow and blue i-signage. It was considered that the name Visitor Information Centre (VIC) does not cover all of these options. Consequently, Visitor Information Servicing (VIS) was chosen to best describe the work of both paid staff and volunteers, and the service models that they can use to meet the changing needs of visitors.

Visitor Information Centre is still used to describe three types of Visitor Information Servicing models, with five other models now able to use the i-signage. These include:

- Satellite VIC;
- Seasonal VIC;
- Ancillary VIC;
- Pop-up; and
- Ambassadors.

### Victorian VIC Futures Project, 2013

The *Victorian VIC Futures Project* was prepared by Urban Enterprise in 2013. The study provides analysis of the current VIC network in Victoria, an analysis of best practise in VIC operation, service delivery and management and also forecasts the future role of VICs in the context of emerging consumer and technological trends and demographic trends.

The document provides vision statements which outline how Visitor Information Centres may be delivered in a changing environment. Relevant considerations include:

- VIC networks will broaden their roles and responsibilities beyond the provision of visitor information services to a hub servicing visitors, residents and industry;
- A VIC network that has strong leadership from all levels of government and tourism organisations;
- Transition to a regional networked approach of gateway and satellite visitor information delivery; and
- Resources for VICs and services will be tailored to meet visitor consumption and needs.

### TNE High Country Journey Mapping

Tourism North East has recently undertaken research in order to understand the visitor journey of those visiting North East Victoria. Key findings from the study include:

- The accommodation booking defines the duration of a visit. Visitor plan accommodation in advance. Even if they have flexibility with dates, once the accommodation is booked, the holiday is set.
  - Opportunities: Encourage longer stays at the time of booking.

- Visitor information is more relevant and useful if it comes from someone like-minded. 'Grey nomads' are the main users of visitor information centres. Many people rely mainly on friends and family who have been there before.
  - Decentralise the provision of visitor information, so anyone can become a source.
  - Find ways for people to share their own experience with like-minded visitors.
  - Explore ways to make visitor information centres relevant to a broader range of visitors.
- People report unplanning experiences as being the highlight of their trip. The drive market behaves differently to visitors taking an overseas trip. Many do not plan or book itineraries in advance and are open to last minute opportunities.
  - Create more 'micro activities' that only take a short time and don't need to be booked in advance.
  - Showcase daily availability of activities you might normally need to book for
  - Explore ways for visitors to 'stumble across things' – to find things nearby or on now, where ever they are.
  - Find ways to match visitor interests with available activities.
- Visitor love getting inside knowledge from locals. Recommendations from locals make visitors feel they are getting inside knowledge, assisting to help build a sense of connection to the destination they are visiting. It builds a relationship, rather than making things purely transactional.
  - Encourage and support locals to identify their insider tips, and share them.
- Visitors want to spend money to support the community while they're staying in the region.
  - Offer more opportunities for visitors to spend in different ways.
  - Find ways to keep locals up to date with what's available and popular
  - Communicate in the moment how visitor support helps the community.

## 2.5. VISITOR INFORMATION SERVICING ACCREDITATION GUIDELINES

The Australian Tourism Accreditation Program Victoria (ATAP Victoria) is an industry initiative which is managed by the Victoria Tourism Industry Council (VTIC). This program provides accreditation for Visitor Information Centres, amongst other tourism businesses and operations.

Accredited Visitor information Centres (VICs) are those that receive accreditation through the ATAP program. Becoming an accredited VIC helps to maintain a certain level of service, operational and information quality. Only accredited VICs are able to use the nationally recognised blue and yellow 'i' signage.

The main model of VIC accreditation is through a Hub VIC, which has a number of requirements including minimum of 42 hours operation weekly, a minimum of 1 FTE paid staff and a range of information provision requirements. This type of VIC has significant operational costs. Yea VIC is an example of a Hub VIC.

There are three alternative service models for an accredited VIC, which require alignment with a Hub VIC, including Satellite, Seasonal and Ancillary VIC models. These are outlined below.

### ALTERNATIVE VIC SERVICE DELIVERY MODELS

Type	Description	Opening Hours	Accreditation Cost	Staffing Requirement
<b>Hub VIC (Level 1)</b>	The main model of VIC accreditation, which has the highest level of standards and most requirements.	Minimum 42 hours & 7 days per week. Minimum six hours per day - core operating hours 10am-4pm.	Standard ATAP fee is applicable.	1 FTE paid staff
<b>Satellite VIC</b>	A Satellite VIC has all the same requirements as a hub VIC, except less staff are required.	As per Hub VIC.	Standard ATAP fee is applicable.	0.5 FTE paid staff

<b>Seasonal VIC</b>	A Seasonal VIC is only open during a set time-frame (i.e. 4-6 months) during peak visitor periods. A Seasonal VIC must abide by the same guidelines as the Satellite VIC model.	As per Hub VIC.	Standard ATAP fee is applicable (pro-rata)	0.5 FTE paid staff for the duration of the service
<b>Ancillary VIC</b>	An Ancillary offers a regular operating (ongoing) service that is unable to meet the core requirements of 10am-4pm, 7 days per week, or not suitable to be open 10-4pm.	Consistent opening hours which must be pre-determined as part of the Accreditation application/renewal.	Standard ATAP fee is applicable.	0.5 FTE paid staff, prorated per 42 hours of activity per week

Source: VTIC Victorian Accredited Visitor Information Servicing Guidelines, 2018.

## 2.5.1. BEST PRACTICE VISITOR INFORMATION SERVICES

### Information Delivery Through Collocation in Community / Council Space

#### Warehouse, Clunes, Victoria

The Warehouse in Clunes is a community, cultural and tourism facility, which was opened in 2014 following the redevelopment and expansion of the Clunes Museum building. The facility is open 6 days a week and is run by the local community.

The redeveloped Warehouse facility incorporates the Visitor Information Centre, Clunes library, Clunes Museum, Council customer service desk, exhibitions, events and multi-purpose meeting spaces.

This redevelopment has had significant success and is now a well utilised community and visitor precinct. The Community Centre has substantially increased the services and opportunities available to both the local community and visitors to the town.

The Warehouse is an example of a co-located facility that the Wangaratta Region should aspire to. This facility services a similarly small population, provides a range of activities and facilities for visitors to engage with, and acts as a hub for promoting the surrounding Goldfields region.



Source: Visit Hepburn Shire.

### Satellite Visitor Information Centre

A satellite VIC is a solution for unaccredited VICs to fulfill their visitor servicing needs and provide a high quality service standard.

Unaccredited VICs are able to collaborate with an accredited VIC to improve their service, enabling the service to operate as a satellite of the accredited centre, with the centre's staff and the yellow and blue i branding.

An accredited VIC has a range of benefits, including access to the national brand and signage, state and federal funding opportunities, state tourism projects and marketing campaigns; and inclusion in maps, Australia Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW) and printed collateral. VICs also gain entry to a nationwide network of centres and the collaborative opportunities that presents.

### Swap Cards

The Mornington Peninsula 'swap card' program began as a cost-effective method to internally market the attractions of the Mornington Peninsula. This involves local businesses producing small printed cards with information regarding their attraction and swapping with other businesses who stock their cards.

This has developed into an important way of strengthening local networks and cross-promotion of attractions and tourism businesses across the region. There is opportunity for Wangaratta to develop a 'swap card' program and provide businesses with an easy template to follow to improve the ease of buying into the program.

### Brochure Racks and Guides [Collateral]

Traditional brochures remain an important way to provide physical information to visitors and encourage them to do one more thing or return for more experiences in the future.

Brochure racks are often used within VICs, accommodation providers and attractions, however their current use by Wangaratta businesses is minimal.

Each Council could consider a roll-out of tiered brochure racks and displays to support local

businesses participating in this important referral process. One of the issues with brochure racks is the need to maintain up to date collateral as well as restocking the racks. Managing the collateral within racks is important so as not to offer 'information' overload through cluttered brochure displays and this would need to be supported by Council initially.

### Tourism Maps [Collateral]

The current Official Visitor Services guide for the Wangaratta Region is in need of an update. Tourism maps are growing in popularity, can be available both online and in hard copy and can be tailored to highlight themes (local arts and craft maps, historic maps, foodie maps for example).

Anecdotal evidence from Shires, and past research undertaken by Urban Enterprise in consultation with VIC staff and volunteers in the state, highlights the strong demand for tourism maps by visitors to VICs. These are often used for navigation as well as exploring visitor experiences and attractions on offer and could be included in the collateral provided to local businesses with brochure racks.

### Touch Screen Kiosks

Touchscreens have been utilised by a number of tourism destinations across Australia and offer a physical interface for people to access online information, such as local maps, attractions, accommodation, restaurants and events. There are a range of products available which would be suitable as Touch Screen Kiosks.

There are a number of providers of touchscreens that would be suitable for visitor information delivery in Wangaratta. Costs vary depending on the level of tailored design, size and indoor or outdoor capabilities. It should be noted that where hardware is purchased and owned by Council, there are also additional costs associated with software programming and maintenance, which are not carried out by the touchscreen providers. However, a whole system approach is not recommended as outsourcing content significantly reduces ability to ensure visitors are provided with up to date relevant information.

Yarra Valley has recently implemented a regional network of interactive self-service digital visitor information kiosks. These kiosks are placed at the top visited attractions and public spaces throughout the region, and have replaced all physical visitor

information centres. These kiosks deliver information in other languages and send directional information straight to visitor's mobile devices. These are shown in the image below.



### Hotspots

Free Wifi points should be considered at specific destinations to improve online accessibility. Free Wifi not only enables visitors to search for visitor information online, but also encourages visitor generated marketing through social media sharing of photographs and video's. These can be incorporated into any physical infrastructure created for a site.

Wifi hotspots are important in locations that are remote, as they will provide access for visitors in telecommunication 'blackspots', as well as providing access to data for international visitors who would otherwise need to pay for 'roaming'.

### Local Education

The education of operators and permanent residents will go a long way to assist in sharing information both online and by word of mouth, building local community support and awareness of tourism product. Local residents and business owners are important ambassadors for tourism in towns and can create personal connections and positive relationships with places, which encourage return visitation.

The human interface visitors encounter whilst visiting places play an important role in overall visitor experiences and educating the public on major events and local attractions.

### Case Study: Bendigo Ambassador Program

It created a Bendigo Ambassador Program offering local residents discounts at local attractions, including when they bring their visitors along. The program has been running for more than 10 years and has over 6,000 local residents signed up.

Available from the Tourism Wollongong Office in the Southern Gateway Centre at Bulli Tops. The handy booklet has more than 40 discount coupons – including reductions on spa treatments, whale-watching cruises and even hang gliding!

### 2.5.2. VISITOR SERVICING FOR POST COVID-19 RECOVERY

The tourism and hospitality industries were heavily impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Rural City of Wangaratta is well placed for a swift recovery, for the following key reasons:

- Built up desire to travel, restrictions on international travel.
- Destinations with a strong domestic market and VFR market are more likely recovery faster

As the economy recovers, the tourism industry will need to respond to both the short term and lasting effects on consumer preferences, visitor expectations, travel patterns and behaviours.

#### How Will the Crisis Affect Visitor Behaviour? How Will Visitors Manage Risk?

Preferences for touch-free/digital information channels and demand for more information in the pre-planning stage of travels will likely increase.

Recent research<sup>1</sup> reveals key actions visitors will take to manage travel risks and travel safely include:

- Monitor government advice (90% of respondents)
- Monitor mainstream media (83%) and social media (54%).
- Practise social distancing (86%) and avoid crowded areas (81%)
- Carry and use hand sanitiser (78%)
- Book with providers with flexible cancellation/full refund booking policy (70%) or a future/deferred full credit policy (50%).
- Booking at the last minute (52%)

Ensuring visitor information and servicing approach addresses these factors will assist in boosting visitor confidence to choose Wangaratta for their destination and book trips.

In particular, capturing visitors during their pre-planning phase of the journey will be critical. As consumer confidence is lowered. Providing up to date digital information in-region.

#### What Role Can Visitor Servicing Play in the Recovery Process?

- **Provision of Factual Information** – relates to visitors seeking clarity around COVID safe practices, the status of their trip destination (trading hours and level of capacity).
- **Reassurance and Welcoming** – providing information and customer service that will reassure visitors that it is safe to visit and that they are welcome by locals.

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<sup>1</sup> Sources: University of Queensland, Tourist Concerns and Behaviour in Response to COVID-19 (n=668), Research was conducted between April and August, 2020.

- **Crowd Control** – VICs can help with visitor dispersal and prevent large groups of tourists from gathering at a single destination which may potentially cause make both visitors and community members feel unsafe.
- **Managing Visitor and Host Relationships** – Ensuring the community and local businesses are prepared for visitors return and meet visitor expectations. Being a voice for the community and communicate their concerns with visitors.

Key recommendations specific for communicating with tourists during the recovery phase include:

1. Keep an active online and social media presence – Even while businesses are closed people are always planning, promote any new experiences, keep the market updated of the latest COVID-19;
2. Provide inspiration and positive reviews/stories about the status of the destination;
3. Emphasise the benefits of visiting the Wangaratta – openness of the nature-based attractions and high quality experiences;
4. Encourage fair booking policies amongst businesses.

## 3. VISITOR ECONOMY OVERVIEW

### 3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the visitor economy of Wangaratta including an analysis of the existing visitor profile, identification of target markets, overview of the Rural City of Wangaratta product strengths.

Information has been primarily sourced from following:

- Tourism Research Australia's National and International Visitor Survey - Where visitor trends for both daytrip and overnight markets align, data has been presented on an aggregate level. Data in this section is aggregated to a regional level, covering the period from 2015 to 2019 (calendar years). Data is benchmarked against Regional Victoria, where relevant, to provide context for the performance of the visitor economy;
- Visitor Services Strategy Background Report, Wangaratta Rural City Council, 2019;
- King Valley Prosecco Road Development Plan Intercept Visitor Survey, Urban Enterprise, 2021, and
- Desktop research.

The latest data has been used where available.

### 3.2. KEY FINDINGS

**The Rural City of Wangaratta attracts an average of 726,200 visitors per annum. Daytrippers account for the majority of visitation at 63%, followed by domestic overnight visitors at 27% and a small number of international visitors (less than 1%).**

**Over the past five years, there has been low growth in the higher yielding leisure and business markets, with most growth in visitation driven by the VFR and 'Other' visitor market. The 'Other' visitor market includes casual visitors coming into the region for personal day-to-day activities such as education, health appointments, and shopping.**

**Key market types identified for the region include:**

- Older Couples – (35% of all visitors).
- Visiting Friends or Relatives (VFR) – 31%

**Non-employing and small businesses make up the bulk of tourism businesses in Wangaratta (77%). This will be an important consideration when encouraging business owners to embrace or improve their visitor servicing.**

**Visitor servicing preferences in Wangaratta reflect broader trends and emphasize the need for a well-established omnichannel visitor information network, particularly incorporating digital platforms of service delivery. On average, visitors used at least two sources of information with online information sources (such as social media, Trip Advisor) (51%) and recommendations from a friend or relative**

**(36%) being the most popular sources used throughout their trip.**

**The Rural City of Wangaratta boasts a vast range of tourism product that is highly dispersed throughout the region. Travel patterns in a recent survey show that many visitors do not stop by the City Centre, where the VIC is currently located, in route to their destinations. There may be opportunity to align visitor servicing touchpoints with key tourism product in order to improve service delivery.**

**The King Valley Region is rapidly developing as a key tourism destination in the High Country. Recent research undertaken for the King Valley Tourism Development Plan highlights the importance of Milawa and Whitfield as key destinations and that visitors are relatively higher yield due to spend on wine and food product. The overwhelming driver for visitation to the King Valley is wine tourism.**

**Glenrowan is another destination that also needs to be considered in terms of the hierarchy of physical information and touch points provided across the municipality.**

### 3.3. THE VISITOR ECONOMY

Tourism is key driver industry in Wangaratta - supporting 7% of total employment and delivering an estimated economic output of \$160 million<sup>2</sup>.

#### Tourism Businesses

Non-employing and small businesses make up the bulk of tourism businesses in Wangaratta (77%).

Small business owners are time-poor and have limited resources, strategies to engage with them and get them involved in visitor servicing will require clear to understand, low cost, and quick solutions with demonstrated value.

#### T1. TOURISM BUSINESSES BY EMPLOYMENT SIZE

	No. of Businesses	% of Total Businesses
<b>Non-employing</b>	134	39%
<b>1-4</b>	131	38%
<b>5-19</b>	72	21%
<b>20+</b>	15	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: TRA, LGA Profiles 2019 – Wangaratta (RC).

#### Visitor Expenditure

On average, visitors spend approximately \$145 million in the Rural City of Wangaratta every year. Domestic overnight visitors contribute \$87 million in visitor expenditure (60%), followed by domestic daytrips (\$54 million or 37%) and international visitors (\$4 million).

On a per night basis, domestic daytrippers and overnight visitors generate similar expenditure. Domestic daytrip visitors spend an average of \$113 per trip, whilst domestic overnight visitors spend an average of \$117 per night. International overnight visitors have a lower average spend at \$49 a night.

#### T2. VISITOR EXPENDITURE SUMMARY - RURAL CITY OF WANGARATTA

	Domestic Daytrip	Domestic Overnight	International	Total
<b>Expenditure (\$M)</b>	\$54M	\$87M	\$4M	\$145M
<b>Spend per trip</b>	\$113	\$321	\$792	\$193
<b>Average length of stay</b>		3	16	
<b>Spend per night</b>		\$117	\$49	\$110
<b>Spend per night commercial accommodation</b>		\$209	\$70	\$193

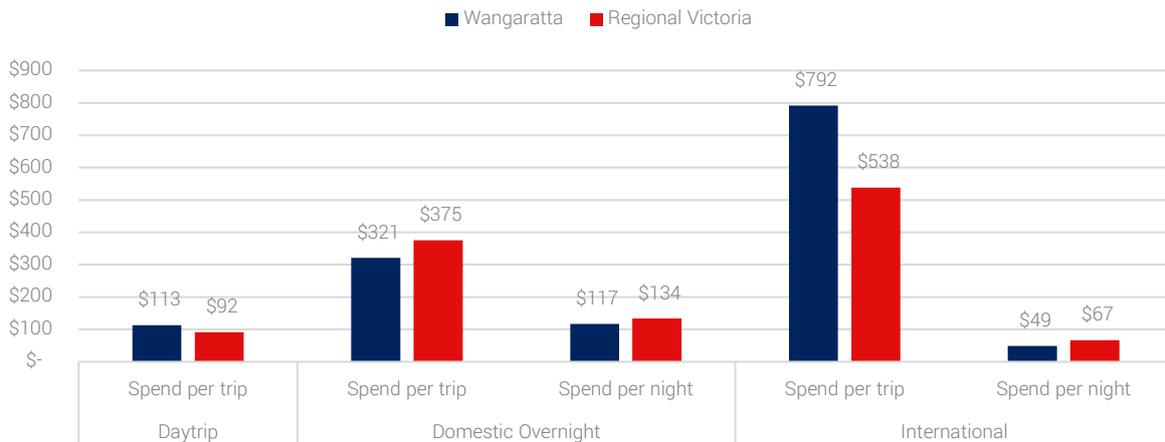
Source: Tourism Research Australia, LGA Profiles 2019 – Wangaratta. Data is based on a four year average from 2016 to 2019.

Figure 2 compares the average spend between visitors to the Rural City of Wangaratta and Regional Victoria. On average, daytrippers to the Wangaratta region spend 23% more than the average visitor in Regional Victoria. However, the average spend per trip and spend per night of domestic overnight visitors to the Rural City of Wangaratta is lower than the Regional Victoria benchmark.

Recent primary visitor research for the King Valley Tourism Development Plan shows that the visitor spend to the King Valley Region is significantly higher than the average spend per visitor to the LGA. Expenditure for daytrippers to the King Valley is \$232 per visitor and \$535 for overnight visitors staying in commercial accommodation.

<sup>2</sup> Rural City of Wangaratta Economic Profile, REMPLAN, 2018

## F2. AVERAGE SPEND PER VISITOR COMPARISON



Source: Tourism Research Australia, LGA Profile – Wangaratta & Regional Victoria Tourism Summary. Data is based on a four year average from 2016 to 2019.

## 3.4. VISITATION AND TRENDS

Visitation data has been derived from Tourism Research Australia

### Visitation

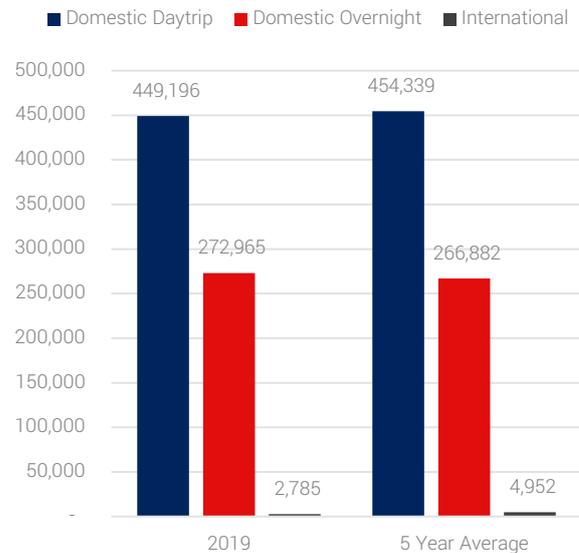
The Rural City of Wangaratta attracts an average of 726,200 visitors per annum (Figure 3). Daytrippers account for the majority of visitation at 63%, followed by domestic overnight visitors at 27% and a small number of international visitors (less than 1%).

The high proportion of daytrip visitation is likely attributed to the low supply of visitor accommodation as well as Wangaratta’s role as a service centre for the surrounding towns.

Targeting overnight visitation will be important for increasing visitor yield and dispersal across the region.

Recent primary research undertaken for the King Valley Tourism Development Plan shows that the visitor market varies significantly between Milawa and Whitfield. The Milawa sub region has a high daytrip market, where the majority of visitors to Whitfield sub region are overnight visitors.

## F3. VISITATION SUMMARY



Source: National and International Visitor Survey, Tourism Research Australia (TRA), 2015-19 YE Dec.

### 3.5. VISITOR DEMOGRAPHICS

#### Purpose of Visit

Figure 4 analyses the trends in visitor purpose. On average, holiday/leisure visitors account for 42% of the total market, followed by VFR (31%), Other reason (16%) and business (10%). The VFR market accounts for 46% of overnight visitors.

Data shows the majority of visitation growth over the past five years has been driven by the VFR market and by those visiting for 'Other reasons'. 'Other reason' refers to more personal day-to-day activities such as education, health, and shopping. Strong growth of this visitor type is reflective of Wangaratta's growing role as a service centre.

Conversely, the level of leisure and business visitors has mostly remained stagnant. This indicates a need to further develop Wangaratta as a tourism destination to attract greater holiday visitation and increase yield from the broader visitor economy.

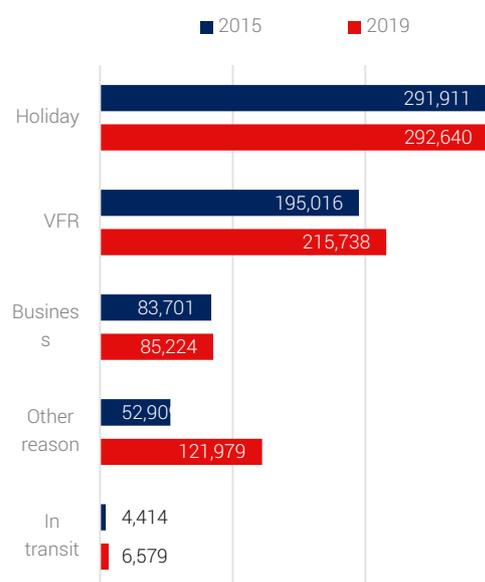
Drawing on the recent King Valley Tourism Development Plan Visitor Survey, the market for the King Valley Region is almost exclusively holiday leisure. Milawa attracts a substantial number of visitors passing through to Bright and beyond.

#### Visitor Origin

As shown in Table 3, the top Local Government Areas that daytrip visitors originate from include the City of Wodonga (14%), followed by Moira Shire (12%), Alpine Shire (12%) and Benalla Rural City (8%).

Almost half of domestic overnight visitors originate from Metropolitan Melbourne (47%). About a third of domestic overnight market are interstate visitors – including 22% from New South Wales and 10% from other states.

F4. PURPOSE OF VISIT - 2015 TO 2019



Source: National Visitor Survey, TRA, 2015-19 YE Dec.

T3. DAYTRIP VISITOR ORIGIN

LGA/Region	% of Daytrip Visitors
Wodonga (C)	14%
Moira (S)	12%
Alpine (S)	12%
Benalla (RC)	8%
Mansfield (S)	7%
Albury (C) (NSW)	7%
Indigo (S)	6%
Wangaratta (RC)	5%
Elsewhere in VIC	25%
Elsewhere in NSW	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: National Visitor Survey, TRA, 2015-19 YE Dec.

T4. OVERNIGHT VISITOR ORIGIN

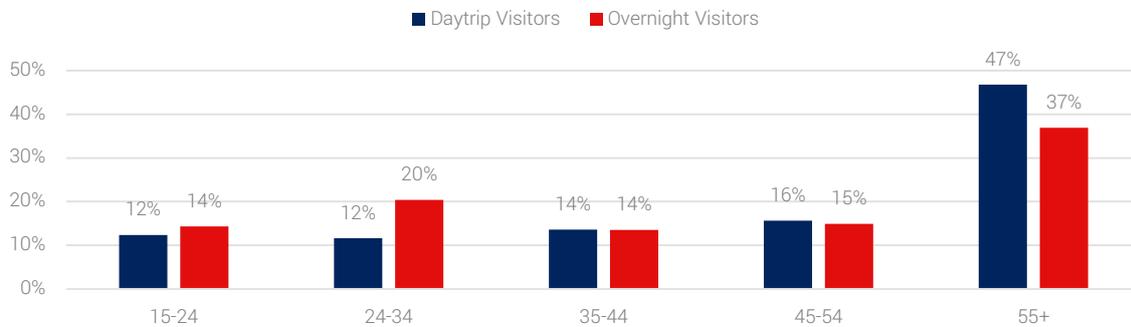
Region	% of Overnight Visitors
<b>Victoria</b>	<b>68%</b>
Metropolitan Melbourne	47%
Alpine (S)	4%
Wodonga (C)	3%
<b>New South Wales</b>	<b>22%</b>
Albury (C)	5%
Wagga Wagga (C)	3%
<b>Elsewhere in AUS</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: National Visitor Survey, TRA, 2015-19 YE Dec.

## Age Group

Seniors over 55 years of age make up the majority of visitors to Wangaratta – including 47% of daytrip visitors and 37% of overnight visitors.

### F5. AGE GROUP BY PURPOSE OF VISIT – 5 YEAR AVERAGE



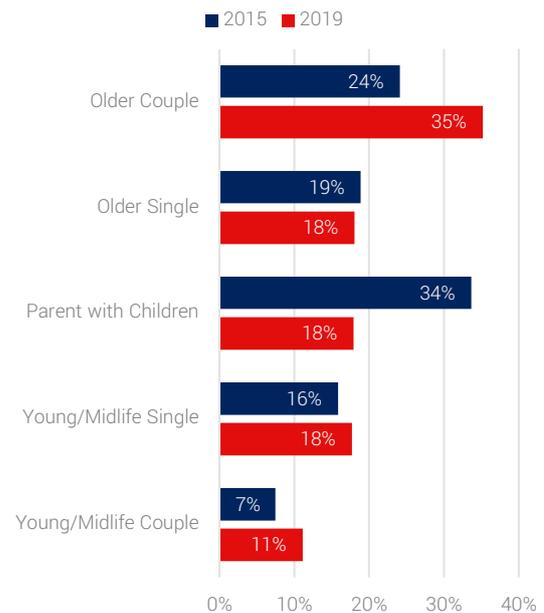
Source: National Visitor Survey, TRA, 2015-19 YE Dec.

## Lifecycle Group

Older couples are the most common travel group type to the Rural City of Wangaratta (35% of all visitors), followed by older single travellers (18%) and parents with children (18%).

Trends show there has been almost a 40% decline in the number of families with children visiting the region since 2015.

### F6. LIFECYCLE GROUP



Source: National Visitor Survey, TRA, 2015-19 YE Dec.

### 3.6. VISITOR SERVICING PREFERENCES

The following section relates to visitor information sources. The data from this section is sourced from the King Valley Tourism Development Plan Visitor Surveys, 2021. This section outlines visitor information sources used and for what purpose (general research & information and booking) and preference for accessing information.

#### Information Sources Used Prior To and During Visit [King Valley Tourism Development Plan Survey]

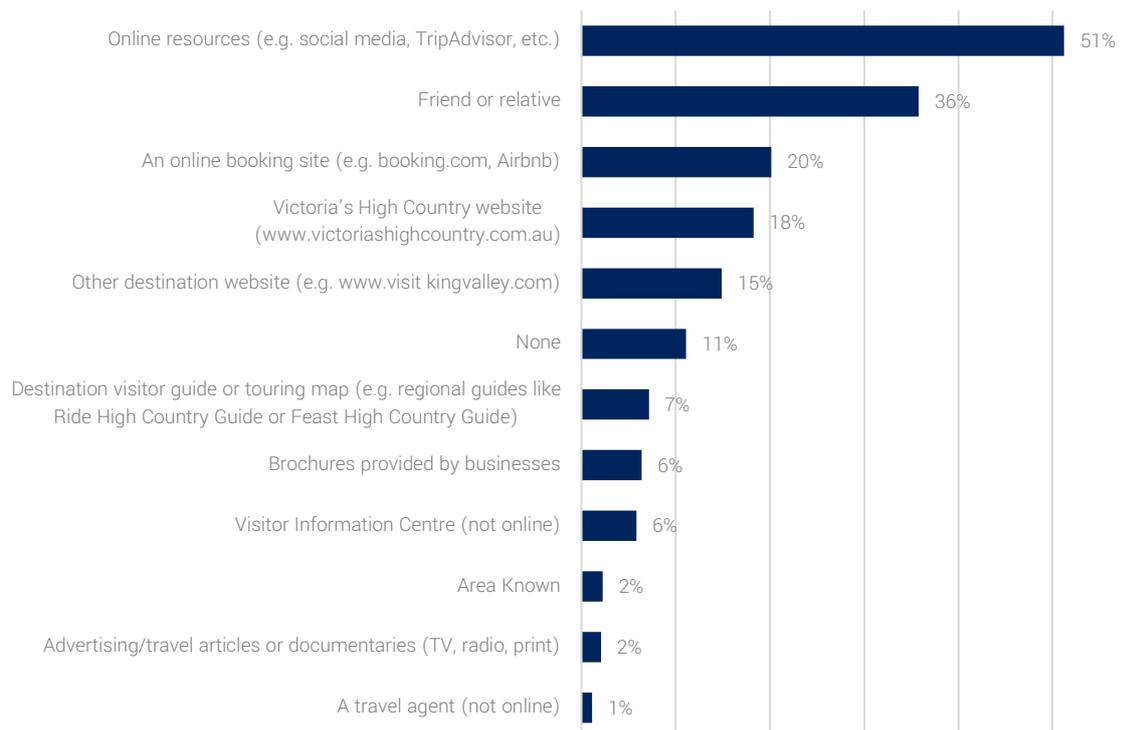
Figure 7 shows the information sources used by visitors to King Valley Region prior to and during their trip and indicates a broad range of sources are used by visitors.

On average, visitors used at least two sources of information with online information sources (such as social media, Trip Advisor) being the most popular source (51%). This is followed by a Friend or relative (36%), which is likely due to the large proportion of visitors travelling to the Wangaratta to visit friends and relatives, and staying in friends and relative's properties.

Other common sources of information include an online booking site (such as booking.com or Airbnb) (20%), Victoria's Visit High Country Website (18%), as well as other destination websites (15%). Only 6% of visitors reported visiting a Visitor Information Centre.

These findings show the importance of omnichannel information delivery, particularly digital streams of information.

F7. INFORMATION SOURCE USED PRIOR AND DURING VISIT - 2021



Source: King Valley Prosecco Road Development Plan Visitor Survey, Urban Enterprise, 2021. Question: Which of the following visitor information sources did you utilise prior to and during this trip to the King Valley Region? N=540.

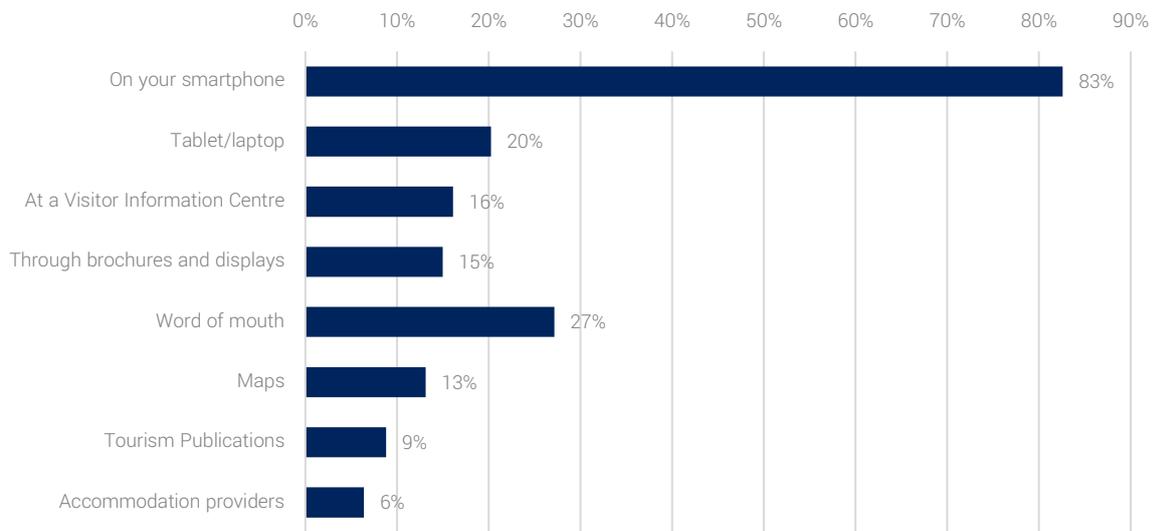
### Preferred Method of Accessing Information [King Valley Tourism Development Plan Survey]

Respondents were asked to identify what their preferred mode of accessing information would be when visiting new destinations (see Figure 8).

On average, visitors preferred using at least 2 sources of information. Overall, the majority of respondents preferred accessing information on their smart phone (83%) – noting that almost 50% of these respondents chose ‘smartphone’ as their sole preferred method of accessing. Other preferred sources included by word of mouth (27%) and tablet or laptop (20%).

16% of visitors chose visiting a Visitor Information Centre (VIC) as a preferred to medium of accessing information. This may indicate that most visitors are repeat visitors (Wangaratta is not a new destination) or that there are accessibility issues with the current VIC.

F8. PREFERRED METHOD OF ACCESSING INFORMATION - 2021



Source: King Valley Prosecco Road Development Plan Visitor Survey, Urban Enterprise, 2021. Question: What is your preferred mode of accessing information when visiting new destinations? N=540

### 3.7. TARGET MARKETS

There are a range of target markets for the Rural City of Wangaratta that should be considered within this strategy. The key target markets identified in the findings in this section include Visiting Friend and Relatives, Older Couples and Lifestyle Leaders including the subsets of Creative Opinion Leaders, Food and Wine Lifestylers, Enriched Wellbeing, and Inspired By Nature; and International Experience Seekers.

#### Visiting Friends and Relatives

On average, the Visiting Friends and Relatives markets accounts for 46% of overnight visitors and 31% of total visitors to Wangaratta. The VFR traveller in Rural City of Wangaratta is more likely to be younger (2 in 5 visitors within the 15 to 34 age bracket) and travelling with children (1 in 4 visitors). This is significant to note, as this market type usually does not seek out information through external channels, usually preferring recommendations for more family activities through word of mouth from locals or their hosts. Data suggests these visitors will more likely be seeking family activities compared to the leisure/holiday visitor.

#### Older Couples

Older couples are the most common travel group type in Rural City of Wangaratta (35% of all visitors). They are also the fastest growing travel group segment, growing from 24% of total visitors in 2015 to 35% in 2019.

#### Lifestyle Leader Market

The Lifestyle Leader segment developed by Visit Victoria and has been a key focus of marketing for Tourism North East. Tourism product in Wangaratta is well aligned with the product pillars of Tourism North East.

Lifestyle Leaders are typically educated, professional and progressive individuals who enjoy seeking out new information and being the first to try new products. They have a higher level of discretionary expenditure than the general population, so can afford to indulge more often in travel, with a particular desire to escape city life and embrace nature/outdoors and new discoveries.

**The importance of these demographic groups are represented in the visitation overview above. It will be important to deliver destination branding, marketing and visitor services in line with the needs and wants of these groups, with a focus on delivery of quality experiences that will inspire and attract Lifestyle Leader markets.**

### 3.8. KEY TOURISM PRODUCT

A map showing an overview of key tourism product is shown in Figure X.

The pillars of the Rural City of Wangaratta tourism product aligns with Tourism North East's products and promotion of cycling; food, wine and craft beer, nature based; and arts & cultural heritage.

The region is home of the famed King Valley Wine Region, Milawa Gourmet Region as well as the historic township of Glenrowan and Eldorado.

The cycling opportunities are second to none with the Murray to Mountains Rail Trail along with road and mountain bike experiences in the nearby Warby Ovens National Park.

- **King Valley Wine Region** - is located south of Wangaratta, and including the key destinations of Milawa and Whitfield, it is surrounded by mountains and rolling vineyards. The region is home to well-known wineries such as Brown Brothers Vineyard at Milawa, Sam Miranda, Dal Zotto, Pizzini and Christmont with many boutique wineries also offering intimate yet equally rewarding experiences.
- **Glenrowan** – The township of Glenrowan is the site of the final siege and capture of Ned Kelly and his gang in 1880. Their story is preserved in the townships attractions, museums and historic walks. Key Ned Kelly Gang sites of significance such as the Ann Jones' Glenrowan Inn, Police Shelter Site, Gravel Contractors Encampment, Ned Kelly Capture Site, McDonnell's Railway Tavern.

#### F9. WANGARATTA RURAL CITY PRODUCT STRENGTHS AND TOP ATTRACTIONS

	Wangaratta Rural City	Key Product
Wine, Brewing & Distilling	Primary	King Valley Wine Region - Prosecco, Brown Brothers, Dal Zotto, Pizzini, Sam Miranda and Christmont, Baileys of Glenrowan
Dining & Local Produce	Primary	Milawa Cheese, Watermark, Rinaldos, Dock 5, Mountain View Hotel, Christmont and Dal Zotto.
Cycling	Primary	Murray to Mountains Rail Trail, Gravel Cycling
Nature & Parks	Primary	Ovens Warby National Park, Alpine National Park, Lake William Hovell, King River, Ovens River, Apex Park, Merriwa Park,
History & Heritage	Secondary	Ned Kelly Museum, The Big Ned Kelly Statue, Glenrowan Siege Site, Bullawah Cultural Trail, Cocks Eldorado Dredge
Events & Festivals	Secondary	Dolce Vita, Weekend Fit for a King, Wangaratta Jazz Festival
Arts & Culture	Emerging	Wangaratta Performing Arts Centre, Arts Center

### **3.9. RURAL CITY OF WANGARATTA VISITOR JOURNEY MAPPING**

Figure 10 below provides an overview of visitor entry points and visitor nodes within Wangaratta Rural City. The Map shows the primacy of Wangaratta as the key visitor node, although a large majority of visitors to Wangaratta are not holiday leisure visitors.

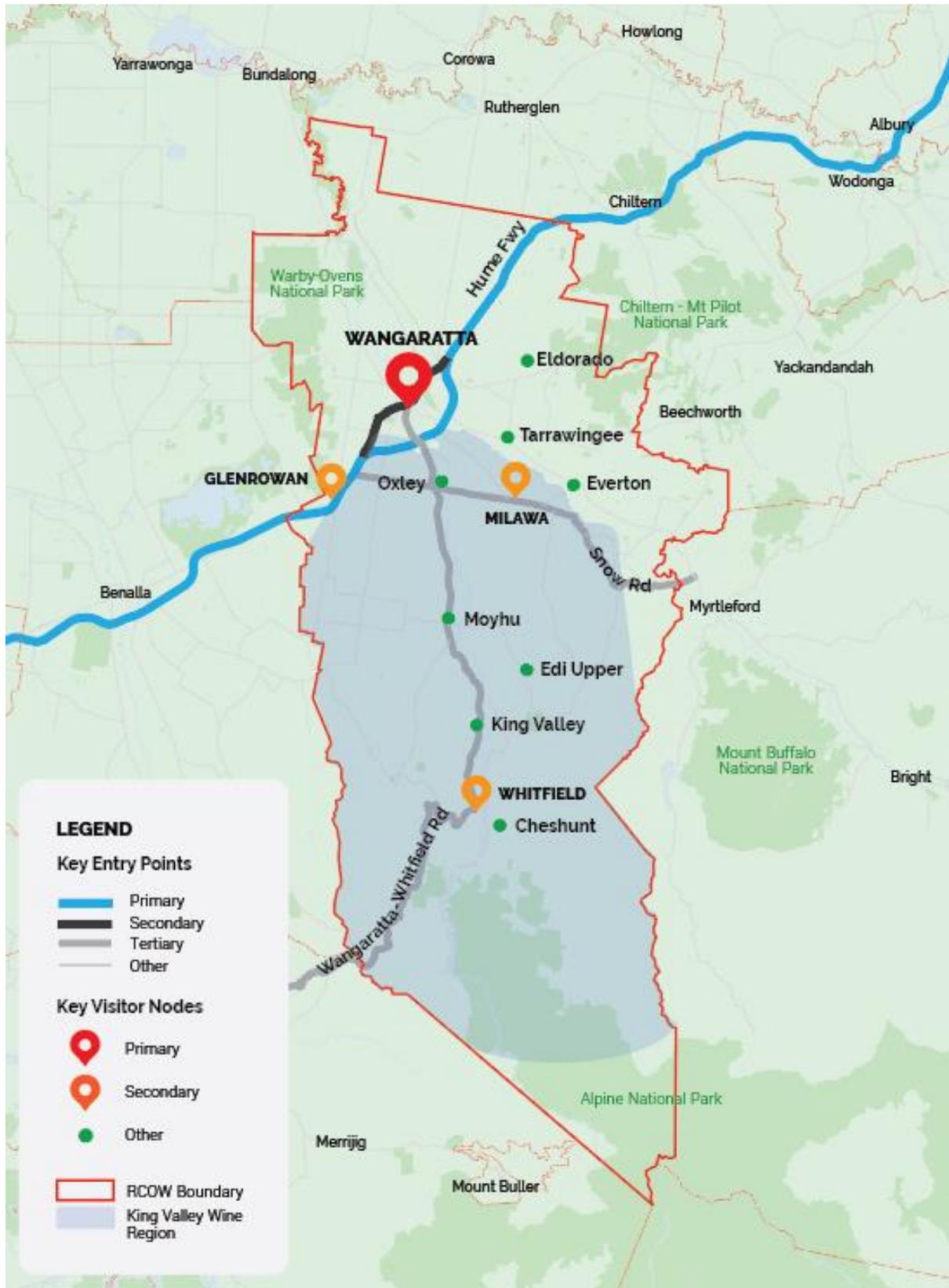
The King Valley has the majority of tourism product and is a key motivator for visit to the region. There are two secondary visitor nodes in the King Valley being Milawa and Whitfield.

Glenrowan is also considered a secondary visitor node, although visitor yield and length of stay in Glenrowan is limited compared to that of the King Valley Region.

Physical visitor services distribution should consider the primacy of Wangaratta town centre and also the secondary nodes of Glenrowan, Milawa and Whitfield for any on ground physical information.

Visitor information can also be delivered to visitors through businesses and also digital.

F10. VISITOR SERVICING AND VISITOR NODES IN RURAL CITY OF WANGARATTA



Source: Urban Enterprise, 2020

## 4. CURRENT VISITOR SERVICING MODEL

### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

The following section includes an overview of the current visitor servicing model in the Rural City of Wangaratta including:

- Visitor information centre, overview of VIC operation, and overview of printed collateral;
- Digital presence and digital infrastructure; and
- Tourism North East and Council roles and resources.

### 4.2. KEY FINDINGS

**The majority of local Council resources and expenditure related to visitor servicing is oriented towards maintaining the physical Visitor Information Centre. The VIC is staffed by 3 permanent part time workers, along with several casual workers and volunteers.**

**Rural City of Wangaratta is further supported by marketing and industry development activities provided through Tourism North East.**

**The current network of visitor information touchpoints includes the following:**

- Visitor Information Centre **located in the Wangaratta City Centre that has recently regained VTIC accreditation.**
- 5 X Unaccredited Tourism Brochure Stands **located in Eldorado, Glenrowan, Whitfield, Moyhu and Milawa. These are static print information stands which are replenished weekly by staff and volunteers of the VIC.**
- Maps and Brochures: **This includes the Official Visitors Guide (OVG) developed by Council as well as a wealth of other collateral developed by local tourism organisations, community groups and other organisations. Wangaratta is also included in collateral developed by Tourism North East.**
- 2 X Official Tourism Websites **including Visit Wangaratta and Visit King Valley.**
- 4 X Social Media Accounts **including two Facebook pages, an Instagram account (Visit Wangaratta) and an a placeholder Twitter account that is currently inactive.**
- Signage and Wayfinding.
- Popup kiosks - **The Visitor Centre staff set up and provide popup kiosks at local events and festivals when needed.**

## 4.3. ORGANISATIONAL REVIEW

### 4.3.1. GOVERNANCE HIERACHY

The delivery of tourism development in the Rural City of Wangaratta Shire includes the following organisations:

- Visit Victoria;
- Tourism North East;
- Wangaratta Rural City Council; and
- Township based Local Tourism Associations (LTA) (e.g. Wines of the King Valley).

The roles and responsibilities vary for each organisation. The role for Local Government in tourism service delivery includes the following:

- Delivery of visitor information services;
- Industry support;
- Domestic marketing;
- Content development;
- Event attraction and support; and
- Investment attraction.

Tourism North East is the Regional Tourism Board for Victoria’s High Country tourism region, of which the

Rural City of Wangaratta is one of 7 LGA partners and one of 9 partners in total including 3 Alpine Resorts.

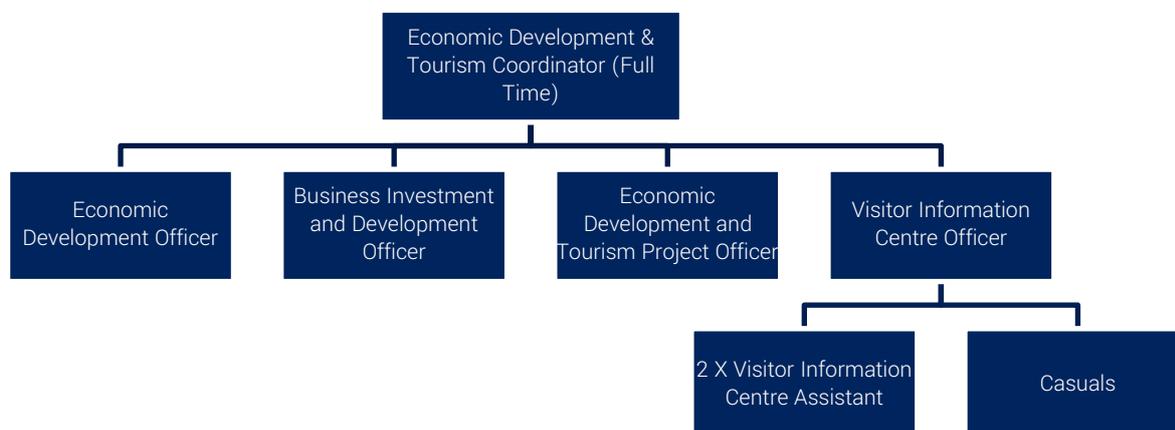
The RCOW participates in Tourism North East’s buy-in option each year which provides leadership across the broader region with regard to marketing, product development, digital resources; and Industry development.

### 4.3.2. ORGANISATION STRUCTURE

Figure 10 and Table T5 shows the existing Council resources for visitor serving in the RCOW in terms of staffing and organisational structure.

The Wangaratta Rural City Council has a combined economic development and tourism department. Tourism consists of two key services areas including the economic development and tourism project development and visitor information centre administration. Responsibilities related to visitor servicing are shared between the two teams.

#### F11. TOURISM DEPARTMENT ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



#### T5. TOURISM AND VISITOR SERVICES – STAFF RESOURCES

Position	Status
Economic Development & Tourism Coordinator	1 X Full Time
Economic Development & Tourism Project Officer	1 X Full Time
Visitor Information Centre Officer	1 X Permanent Part Time
Visitor Information Centre Assistants	2 X Permanent Part Time
Visitor Information Centre Casual Workers	7 X Casual Workers
Visitor Information Centre Volunteers	8 X Volunteers

Source: Wangaratta Rural City Council, 2020

### 4.3.3. BUDGET

Current Council expenditure into visitor servicing is primarily spent in two areas: the Visitor Information Centre and tourism marketing and development.

In the 2019/20 financial year, the total operating budget for the Wangaratta Visitor Information Centre was \$275,459. The total budget for marketing was \$201,296 – including \$141,296 for participation in marketing and tourism development activities coordinated by Tourism North East and \$60,000 for inhouse-marketing activities.

In-house marketing activities by the RCOW is managed by the Marketing Creative Specialist who coordinates the development of our new brands, websites, advertising and PR.

#### T6. VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE, TOURISM MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT BUDGET – 2019/20 BUDGET

		2019/20
Visitor Information Centre	Staffing Expenditure	\$197,703
	Advertising	\$3,000
	Printing	\$8,886
	Operational Expenditure	\$19,170
	Building Maintenance	\$31,700
	Souvenir Purchases	\$15,000
	<b>Sub-total VIC Expenditure</b>	<b>\$275,459</b>
Tourism Marketing and Development Budget	Tourism North East	\$141,296
	<i>Annual Membership</i>	\$37,526
	<i>Industry Support</i>	\$28,500
	<i>Websites &amp; Digital</i>	\$15,770
	<i>Marketing</i>	\$50,000
	<i>Product R&amp;D</i>	\$9,500
	RCOW Marketing Expenditure	\$60,000
<b>Sub-total Marketing Expenditure</b>	<b>\$201,966</b>	
<b>Total Expenditure</b>		<b>\$476,755</b>

Source: Wangaratta Visitor Service Strategy Background Report, 2019

### 4.4. OVERVIEW OF CURRENT DELIVERY

The following includes a high level audit of all current visitor information delivery.

#### F12. OVERVIEW OF CURRENT VISITOR SERVICE TOUCHPOINTS



#### 4.4.1. PHYSICAL TOUCHPOINTS

##### Visitor Information Centre

The Wangaratta VIC is a facility owned and operated by the Rural City of Wangaratta. The centre, located at 100 Murphy Street within the CBD, is operated by paid council staff and local volunteers and is open to the public 7 days a week.

The VIC withdrew from the Victoria Tourism Industry Council (VTIC) accreditation program in 2017 to allow flexibility in opening times and operational activity. The VIC has regained its accredited status in 2021.

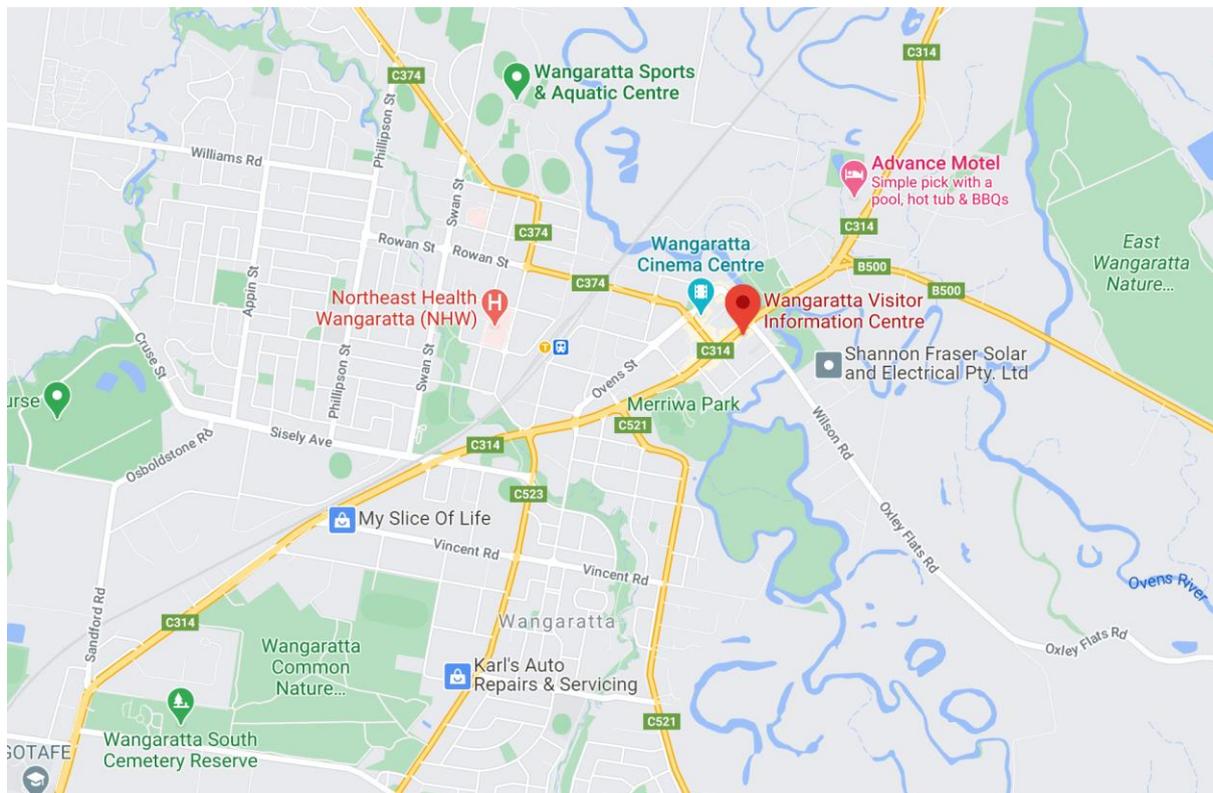
The centre offers a range of services from visitor information, sales of local produce and value-added products, souvenirs, ticketing for various events and support services for local activities such as the fruit fly programme along with new resident information packs. The centre also operates as a focal point for up to date information during emergency situations which impacts travellers passing through or staying in the region, be this storms, floods or fire.

Formally the VIC did provide accommodation booking, however with the growth of online booking agents and changes to digital platforms the VIC no longer provides direct accommodation bookings via online software. The VIC however, continues to provide direct referrals via phone and online enquires.

At the VIC there is a regional display of the local wine region, cycling and history offering interpretive information to visitors along with a small exhibition area which is available to local community groups to exhibit their creations.

The building previously accommodated some minor community, however due to structural issues, these activities have stopped due to safety reasons.

##### F13. CURRENT LOCATION OF VIC



Source: Google Maps, 2021

## Pop-up Kiosks

In addition to the operating hours at the centre the staff and volunteers organise a number of 'pop-up' kiosks at various events held in the region to capture visitors who have travelled directly to the main tourism destinations.

The Wangaratta Rural City Council currently do not have a mobile vehicle in their inventory suitable for visitor servicing.

## Printed Collateral

### Official Visitors Guide (OVG)

The OVG is the main piece of tourism collateral providing maps, information on attractions and advertising by local tourism operators. The print run is 40,000 with distribution across Melbourne, regional Victoria and southern NSW. The guide has a distribution life of 18 months.

The guide also serves as a promotional collateral tool for trade shows, expos, visiting friends & relatives and is also used by local major employers as part of their welcome pack to new employees, i.e. North East Health.

The Rural City of Wangaratta recent brand review interviewed potential visitors who felt the guide is heavy with advertising however were complementary about the content pages.

### Other Maps and Brochures

There are numerous print collateral available through the VIC and distributed through information stands and local tourism operators. The collateral is developed by various developed at a regional and local level by various groups including Tourism North East.

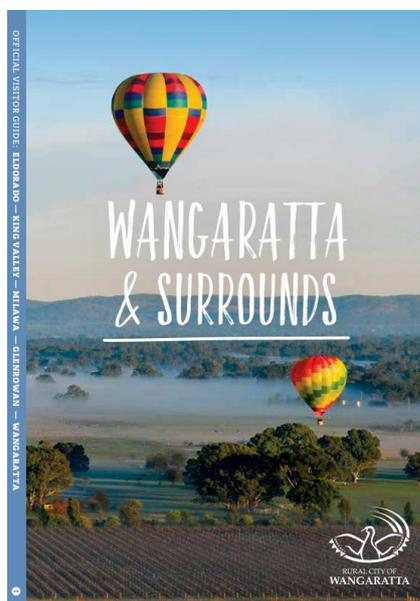
- Local street map and regional road maps
- Bullawah Cultural Trail
- Wangaratta Heritage Walk
- Wangaratta Natural Highlights – Discovery Guide
- Wangaratta Significant Trees – Discovery Guide
- Glenrowan Historic Precinct
- Eldorado & Woolshed Valley Touring Route
- Milawa Gourmet Region
- Explore King Valley
- Vic Parks – Warby Ovens NP, Powers Lookout & Wabonga, Chiltern Mt Pilot National park, plus many others
- Ned Kelly Touring Route
- Ride High Country, Feast High Country (Tourism North East)
- Murray to Mountains Map

## Visitor Information Stands

Non accredited information stands are located at:

- Eldorado General Store
- Glenrowan Vintage Hall & Café
- Whitfield General Store
- Moyhu General Store
- Gamze Smokehouse Milawa
- Everton General Store

These are static print information stands which are replenished weekly by staff and volunteers of the VIC. This is an annual agreement with the business owners.



## Signage and Wayfinding

Township signage is varied across the municipality. A signage strategy has recently been developed by the Rural City of Wangaratta. Wayfinding for tourism attractions, brown & white signs, are managed by Vic Roads. A number of businesses have signage through Vic Road tourism signage program, as well as a number of non-eligible or businesses that have closed still have their signs displayed in the region.

Until recently, the Wangaratta VIC is not eligible for VTIC accredited signage. The standard white 'i' is displayed at the front of the building.

A variety of information bays have been installed in Milawa, Whorouly and Whitfield providing local information, these have been set up by the Local Tourist Associations. The information provided informs travellers on the local area and advertising on the signs represent their membership.

There are interpretive trails in Eldorado, Wangaratta – Bullawah Trail, Glenrowan and North Wangaratta that provide interpretive information along the routes. The communities of Oxley/Milawa and Burgoinee are working on interpretive signage depicting and telling the story of their region's heritage.

### 4.4.2. DIGITAL TOUCHPOINTS

#### Websites & Social Media

The Rural City of Wangaratta has two official tourism websites which are provided through its participation in the regional digital platform coordinated by Tourism North East. They include:

- [www.visitwangeratta.com.au](http://www.visitwangeratta.com.au)
- [www.visitkingvalley.com.au](http://www.visitkingvalley.com.au)

Website content is managed by Council officers and technical support is provided by Tourism North East.

The tourism operator and events listings are through the national Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW). Wangaratta's two digital platform websites display 84 ATDW listings.



Source: Visit Wangaratta Website, 2021

#### Social Media

Social media accounts currently operate by Wangaratta Rural City Council are summarised in Table 5. Council is currently responsible for 4 social media accounts.

#### T7. SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT SUMMARY – OCTOBER 2020

Platform	Address	Managed by	Posting Schedule
Facebook	What's On Wangaratta	VIC Staff	
	Visit Wangaratta	Economic Development & Tourism Project Officer	
Twitter	@VisitWangeratta	Inactive	N/A
Instagram	@visitwangeratta	Economic Development & Tourism Project Officer	Every 2-3 days

## 5. ANALYSIS OF CURRENT SERVICING MODEL

### 5.1. INTRODUCTION

The following section is an assessment of the current visitor service model including a:

- Performance review of the Visitor Service Centre in Wangaratta;
- Review of Digital Platforms and Engagement

The latest data where available has been sourced from Wangaratta Rural City Council.

### 5.2. KEY FINDINGS

#### Current VIC Performance

In 2018, the Visitor Information Centre recorded 28,175 walk-in visitors. Walk-in visitation has been declining rapidly at an average rate of 8.4% per annum over the past five years. The cost per visitor to the VIC has increased over time as a result of a reduced number of visitors and maintaining the significant expenses (primarily related to staffing).

Another key issue identified includes the lack of parking available for long vehicles in proximity to the Centre.

Recent data from the King Valley Tourism Development Plan visitor survey highlights the overwhelming preference for digital information, followed by word of mouth. In order to tailor resources to visitor needs, a shift of visitor information resourcing from physical to more flexible and responsive and digital information should be considered.

Benchmarking shows that the resourcing dedicated to the Rural City of Wangaratta VIC is far greater than other VICs with similar levels of visitation. Reallocation of Councils resources to digital services should be considered to meet visitor need and expectations.

#### Digital Platforms & Engagement

Wangaratta's digital presence has been quickly gaining momentum over the past 10 years which reflects the trends of growing preference for digital information streams. Trend data shows the number Visit Wangaratta website sessions has grown at an average rate of 7.4% from 2013 to 2017. The King Valley Website (which has been active since mid-2015) has received steady levels of visitation with an average of 137,815 total visits per annum.

Key areas of improvement for the Visit Wangaratta and Visit King Valley Tourism Websites include:

- Refresh website designs including improvement of the content and user interface and interactive content to inspire and engage visitors;
- Address key areas of missing information and features that will be expected from today's visitors i.e. customer reviews and feedback, online customer service chats, search filters and tags;
- Improve optimisation for mobile view;
- Address overlap and duplication of both websites and improve consistency of approach.

#### Marketing & Other Collateral

There is a large range of printed collateral that has been developed by many different stakeholders including Council, Tourism North East, local tourism organisations, community groups and other organisations.

Such a variety of physical collateral available has resulted in a lack of consistency in branding in the region and varying quality of information, as well as a lack of brand for the region. Council should continue to improve physical collateral provided in-region, with a view to providing greater consistency of branding, information quality and relevance.

The Wangaratta region cannot rely purely on digital information due to digital connectivity issues and lack of Wifi hotspots across the region. Although there is a vast range of printed collateral available in the region, the majority of these brochures are difficult to find or not accessible for download online for offline viewing. It is highly recommended that digital copies of physical collateral should also be made easily accessible online for download and offline viewing.

With the limited existing income streams available and the continued growth in consumption of digital information, the existing visitor servicing model will continue to result in a significant deficit. Opportunities to reduce costs associated with delivery of the physical visitor information centres should be explored as a way of reducing net cost to Council. An updated and revised allocation of resources will release budget for tourism development initiatives, such as event development, marketing and product and industry development, that will better serve today's visitor needs and expectations.

## 5.3. CURRENT VIC PERFORMANCE

### 5.3.1. FINANCIAL RESULTS

The 2018/19 financial year operating budget for the Wangaratta Visitor Information Centre shows a deficit of almost \$250,000 (see Table 6).

Income is only generated through souvenir sales as well as sale of other general items.

Expenditure is primarily driven by staff wages (72%), followed by building maintenance (12%), operational expenditure (7%), and souvenir purchases (5%).

### 5.3.2. VISITATION

#### CURRENT VISITATION

Table 2 shows the average number of walk in, phone calls and emails for the Wangaratta VIC.

In 2019, the VIC attracted 28,175 walk-in visitors. When benchmarked against other VICs in similar sized towns the level of visitation is low.

Trends in visitation (Figure 14) shows a substantial year on year decline in visitation for the VIC at an average annual rate of 8.5%, despite continuous overall visitor growth for the region. Phone enquiries has also rapidly declined at 13.4% per annum. In contrast, email enquiries showed strong growth at an average of 12.2% per annum between 2010 and 2017.

#### CAPTURE RATE

The capture rate of VICs is a way of understanding the proportion of visitors who visit the VIC.

Based on a five-year average, the Wangaratta VIC achieves low capture rates of 4.6% - noting that a significant proportion of walk-ins may also be local residents.

#### T1. CAPTURE RATE

	Walk- In Visitors	Number of Visitors	Proportion of Visitors Captured
2019	28,175	724,945	3.9%
5 Year Average	33,461	726,173	4.6%

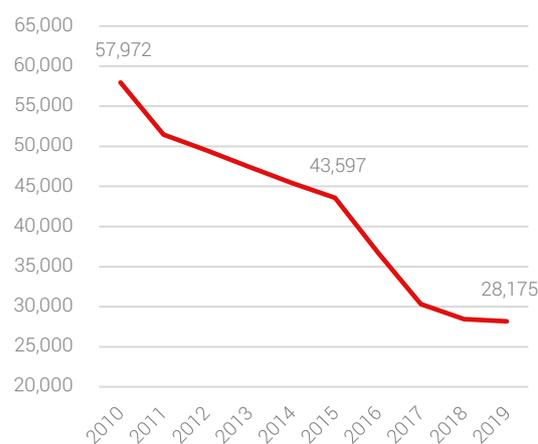
Source: Wangaratta Rural City Council, 2020

#### T2. VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE FINANCIAL RESULTS – 2019/20 FY

	2019/20
Staffing Expenditure	\$197,703
Advertising	\$3,000
Printing	\$8,886
Operational Expenditure	\$19,170
Building Maintenance	\$31,700
Souvenir Purchases	\$15,000
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>\$275,459</b>
General Income	\$2,780
Souvenir Sales	\$22,500
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$25,280</b>
<b>Total Cost to Council</b>	<b>-\$250,179</b>

Source: Wangaratta Visitor Service Strategy Background Report, 2019

#### F14. VIC WALK IN VISITOR TREND – 2010 TO 2019



#### T3. ENQUIRY OVERVIEW AND TRENDS

	2015	2019	5 Year Avg.	5 Year Trend
Walk-In Visitors	43,597	28,175	33,461	-8.4%
Phone Enquiries	2,948	1,439	2,091	-13.4%
Emails	24,958	N/A	17,642	12.2%
<b>Total Enquiries</b>	<b>71,503</b>	<b>29,614</b>	<b>44,598</b>	<b>-16.2%</b>

Source: Wangaratta Rural City Council, 2020

### 5.3.3. BENCHMARKING OF RESOURCES

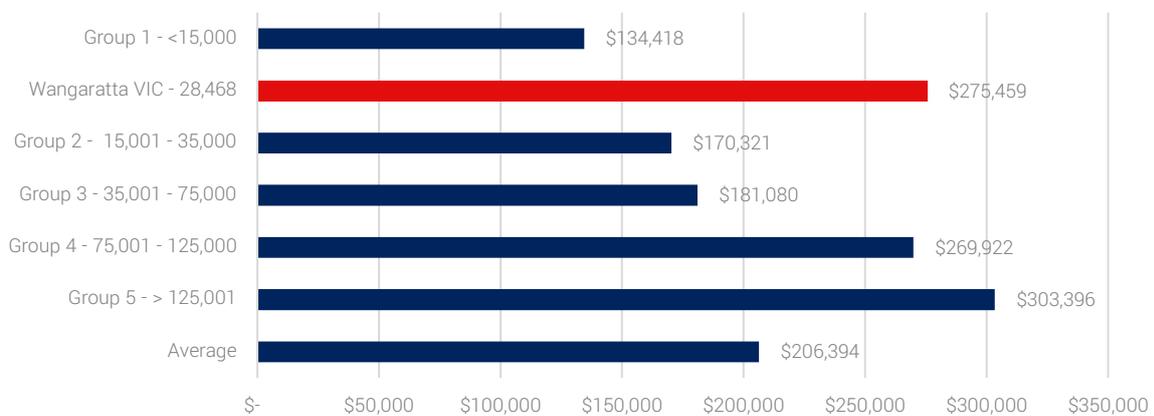
The 2019/20 cost to deliver services to the Wangaratta Visitor Information Centre was \$275,459. Figure 15 shows that the Wangaratta VIC uses higher than average expenditure typically of its size.

The cost of service delivery the Wangaratta VIC is \$9.70, based on the 2018 volume of walk in visitors and the 2017/18 total expenditure less revenue (including VIC management costs. Figure 15 shows where the cost of delivery for the VIC (excluding management costs) sits in comparison to VICs of the same size. It shows that the cost per delivery for Wangaratta is higher than for VICs of the same size.

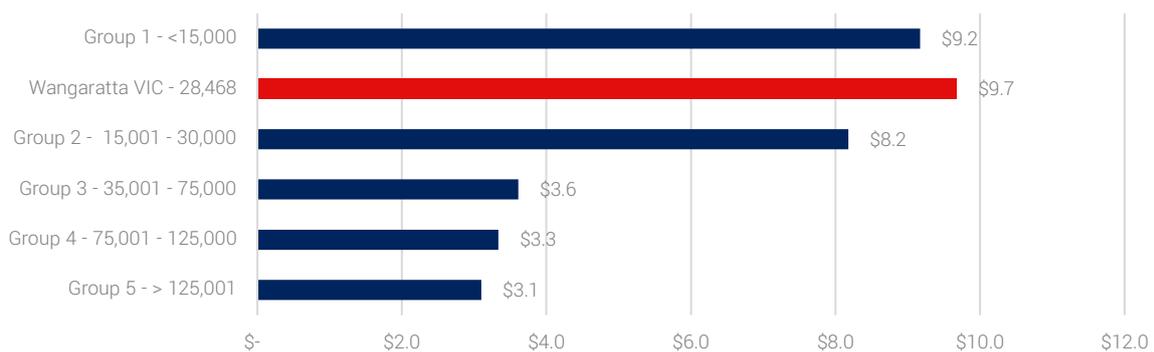
Opportunities to reduce costs associated with delivery of the physical visitor information centres should be explored – ideally staffing expenditure could be redirect.

In addition each VIC has a capacity to generate increased revenue, reducing the net cost to Council. Further, there is opportunity to create a ‘destination’ VIC, with a dual purpose of delivering a motivating visitor experience and information provision, creating increased walk in visitation, decreased service cost per visitor and increased opportunity to influence visitors’ length of stay, yield and dispersal.

F15. VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE EXTERNAL FUNDING BY SIZE OF VIC



F16. AVERAGE COST OF VIC PER ENQUIRY



Source: VTIC Visitor Information Centre Consumer Study, 2009, adapted by Urban Enterprise

## 5.4. DIGITAL PLATFORMS

### 5.4.1. WEBSITE ANALYTICS

The following data was provided by Wangaratta Rural City Council and is sourced from Google Website Analytics were covering the period between Jan 1, 2019 to Oct 8, 2020.

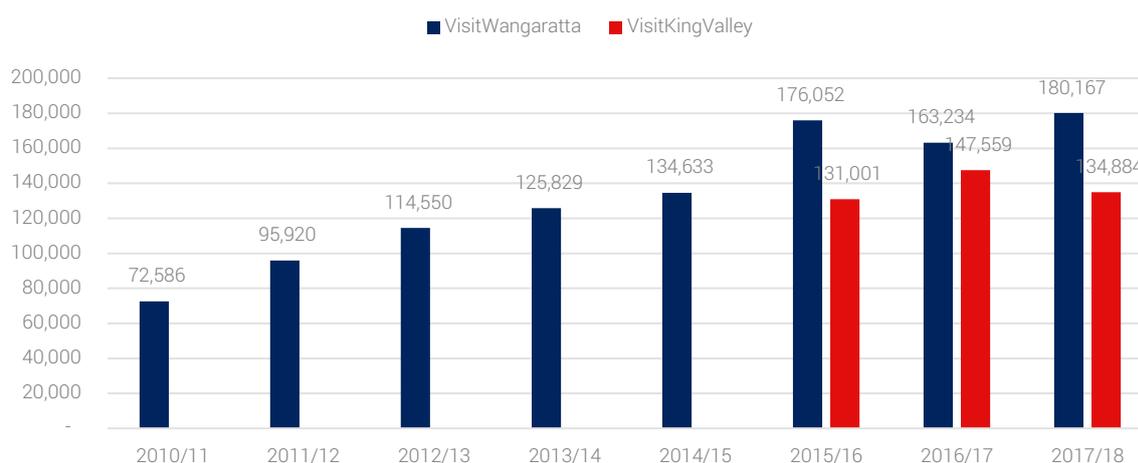
Wangaratta's digital presence has been gradually gaining momentum over the past 10 years which reflects the trends of growing preference for digital information streams. Strong growth in the number of website visits and email enquiries have been observed. In 2017/18, the Visit Wangaratta Website received a total of 180,167 visits and the Visit King Valley website received a total of 134,884 hits. Trend data (Figure 17) shows the number Visit Wangaratta website sessions has grown at an average rate of 7.4% from 2013 to 2017. The King Valley Website (which has been active since mid-2015) has received steady levels of visitation with an average of 137,815 total visits per annum.

The average web session is between 1 to 2 minutes with an average of 2 to 3 pages visited. As shown in Table 4, insights into most visited webpage indicate that events, accommodation, family activities, cultural heritage and nature based attractions are the most sought after categories online.

Key areas of improvement for the Visit Wangaratta and Visit King Valley Tourism Websites include:

- The design, photo content and user interface of both websites are outdated with static, long and difficult to read information on each town. There is no evidence of innovative or interactive content to engage and inspire visitors who are visiting the website.
- Websites are missing key information and features that will be expected from today's visitors i.e. customer reviews and feedback, online customer service chats, poor search filters and tags.
- The majority of website visits occur on mobile device (55.6%), followed by 35.5% on desktop and 8.9% on a tablet device (See Figure 18). However, both websites are currently not optimised for mobile view with issues such as illegible small text sizes and buggy dropdown menus.
- There is a lot of unnecessary overlap and duplication of content both websites. There is opportunity to align the Visit King Valley Website with the official branding of the wine region, and tailor the website content towards key markets, i.e. lifestyle leader markets, food and wine travellers.

F17. TOTAL WEBSITE VISITS – WANGARATTA AND KING VALLEY TOURISM WEBSITES



Source: Wangaratta Rural City Council, 2020

#### T4. MOST VISITED WEBSITE PAGES

Rank	Page Name
1	Home Page
2	Glenrowan-The Ned Kelly Gang
3	Great Alpine Road
4	Glenrowan
5	Event Search
6	Accommodation Search
7	Bushwalking
8	The Eldorado Dredge
9	Warby Owens National Park
10	Family Fun
11	Wangaratta Community Market

Source: VisitWangaratta Website Analytics, January 2019 – October 2020

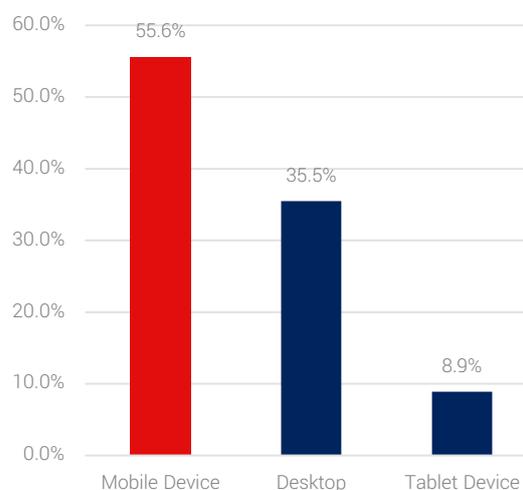
#### 5.4.2. SOCIAL MEDIA

The Visit Wangaratta social media content primarily focuses on tourism related content, with images of key attractions reflective of their product pillars. There is opportunity to use more the Visit Wangaratta branding and post more content relevant to both locals and visitors. The What's On Wangaratta Facebook page currently positioned for local residents with content related to local events and news.

#### T5. SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT METRICS – OCTOBER 2020

Platform	Address	Managed by	Posting Schedule	Following
Facebook	What's On Wangaratta	VIC Staff	Every day	4,964
	Visit Wangaratta	Kate Clark	Once 2-3 days	10,887
Twitter	@VisitWangaratta	Inactive?	N/A	1,525
Instagram	@visitwangaratta	Kate Clark	Once 2-3 days	5063

#### F18. WEB SESSIONS BY DEVICE



Source: VisitWangaratta Website Analytics, January 2019 – October 2020

#### Digital Infrastructure

The Rural City of Wangaratta has had long-standing issues with mobile communication technology. The region lacks reliable digital connectivity, with a significant number of blackspots across the region and poor-quality connectivity in most other locations, particularly from Whitfield to Cheshunt. This can make it difficult for the RCOW to rely on digital information for visitors whilst they navigate the region.

There are a lack of Wifi Hotspots across the Wangaratta Region. Wifi hotspots are crucial to improving the visitor experience for travellers, particularly international visitors without local internet connection, and can assist with destination promotion through visitor generated marketing.

Investment in Wifi hotspots for key townships and visitor destinations will be critical to improving the visitor experience.

## 5.5. MARKETING & OTHER COLLATERAL

### Printed Collateral

Visitor guides are still highly sought after by visitors and are seen as a respected source of information.

Currently all printed collateral, including brochures, signage and posters, is delivered individually by many different stakeholder groups without regional co-ordination or overarching branding and marketing guidelines.

This includes collateral produced by each Council, as well as collateral developed by community groups and local tourism organisations. This results in a lack of consistency and variability in the quality of information across the region. There is an opportunity to consolidate this information to provide a consistent branding across the municipality.

### Marketing and Development

The majority of marketing and development expenditure covers activities managed by Tourism North East. There is limited data currently available to measure the success and impact of these activities.

The RCOW received \$16,787 in income from ATDW Listings.

## T6. TOURISM MARKETING AND DEVELOPMENT BUDGET – 2019/20

	2019/20
Tourism North East	\$141,296
<i>Annual Membership</i>	\$37,526
<i>Industry Support</i>	\$28,500
<i>Websites &amp; Digital</i>	\$15,770
<i>Marketing</i>	\$50,000
<i>Product R&amp;D</i>	\$9,500
RCOW Marketing Expenditure	\$60,000
<b>Total Marketing Expenditure</b>	\$201,296
ATDW Listings	\$16,787
<b>Total Income</b>	\$16,787
<b>Total Cost to Council</b>	-\$184,509

Source: Wangaratta Visitor Service Strategy Background Report, 2019

## 6. STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS & ACTIONS

### 6.1. STRATEGIC THEMES

The following strategic directions have been identified for visitor servicing in the Rural City of Wangaratta which respond to the current and future needs of providing information tailored to the needs of visitors.

- Decentralising of physical visitor information services;
- Embracing and Investing in digital visitor servicing;
- Engage and Empower Tourism Businesses and residents.

#### THEME ONE: DECENTRALISING OF PHYSICAL VISITOR INFORMATION SERVICES

**Objective: Decentralise the approach to visitor servicing across the Rural City of Wangaratta to reflect the growing importance of the King Valley Region and Glenrowan as visitor destinations.**

The Rural City of Wangaratta boasts a vast range of tourism product that is highly dispersed throughout the region. Travel patterns in a recent survey conducted for the King Valley Tourism Development Plan show that many visitors to the Rural City travel directly to their destination without passing through Wangaratta town centre.

The current visitor servicing model and resourcing in Wangaratta heavily focuses on one singular Visitor Information Centre located in Murphy Street. In-destination visitor information provision needs to evolve beyond a fixed location and intercept visitors at multiple points in their journey.

The brief for this project requires an assessment of the current visitor information centre and its location. The findings of the research undertaken as part of this study including the recent King Valley Tourism Development Plan visitor survey show that only 16% of visitors prefer to use a physical information centre, requires us to consider whether a fixed visitor information centre is needed at all. The declining use of the current visitor information centre and the fact that 83% of visitors prefer to use a smart phone to access information suggests that the resource allocation to the existing visitor information centre is not seeing an adequate return for Council.

This strategy should consider ways to reduce the resource burden on Council of the current visitor information centre and reallocate resources to effectively meet visitor need. There are many locations that can be considered for a Visitor Information Centre in the Rural City of Wangaratta.

Options reviewed as part of this study include:

- Existing location;
- Wangaratta Art Gallery;
- Wangaratta Performing Arts Centre;
- Government Building;
- Percy Tippett Reserve;
- Apex Park;
- Milawa.

Given the primacy of Wangaratta within the municipality, the CBD remains the most appropriate location for an information centre. A CBD location allows the VIC to service a larger number of incidental visitors than anywhere else in the Rural City due to the many entry points and multiple destination within the municipality and the scale of visitation to Wangaratta's centre.

There is an opportunity to locate a physical VIC in one of the Council owned buildings within the Wangaratta arts and cultural precinct (such as the Performing Arts Centre or the Government Centre). This location is an important hub within the central area of Wangaratta and provides options to scale down investment in a physical VIC in

Wangaratta and build on the synergies and economies of scale by operating in conjunction with other Council services.

In terms of physical visitor information services provision the following should be considered:

- Relocation of the City's Visitor Information Centre into the arts and cultural precinct area. Key reasons for this include:
  - There are significant resource efficiencies in the information centre operating from this location;
  - The location is within a broader visitor precinct that includes the Performing Arts Centre, Art Gallery and King George V Gardens;
  - There is adequate space in Council buildings to accommodate a VIC;
- A large market for visitor information is residents and VFR market. This highlights the opportunity collocate this services with other Council services. Providing improved visitor information at key regional destination including Glenrowan, Milawa and Whitfield. This includes branded visitor information brochure racks in businesses but potentially a signage touch point and QR code at key park destinations that have toilets and other amenity.
- Advocating for improved telecommunications across the extent of the region so visitor can access information digitally.
- Providing adequate long vehicle parking to service cars towing caravans and motorhomes.

## THEME TWO: EMBRACING AND INVESTING IN DIGITAL VISITOR SERVICING STREAMS

**Objective: Lift the resources and professionalism across the industry in delivery of digital information, content and social media.**

Currently the majority of visitor servicing resources are dedicated to managing the physical visitor information centre. There is a need to radically shift the current servicing model to focus on providing visitor with digital visitor services streams. This is supported by all Australia wide, State and local research, with digital visitor services being the primary source and, in most cases, the only source that visitors are using.

There is a need to consider the following to significantly improve the provision of visitor information services:

There is a need to shift resourcing from the physical visitor information centre to more staff that can improve and deliver content, train and support tourism operators. Key considerations include:

- Social Media. Staff to greatly increase the use of social media as a way to share their region's stories, both inspiring and informing potential visitors. Supporting operators to use social media should also be considered.
- Manage online review + location based listings. Staff to support train and educate operators to manage and respond to reviews and questions and answers for their visitor centre and also key visitor assets on TripAdvisor, Google My Business and Facebook.
- Online Messaging + Chat. Provide visitor information via Live Chat on their destination website and social media direct message channels.
- Regional Brochures and Factsheets. Visitor guides / fact sheets / maps can be found on Council's website / regional website and/or local government websites, in a mobile friendly format, with live website links and/or click to call phone numbers.
- Website. Continue to manage and improve the destination website to inspire, attract and convert visitors in their region. If they don't own their website, they work with the relevant stakeholder to ensure the right content is on their website.

### THEME THREE: ENGAGE AND EMPOWER TOURISM BUSINESSES AND RESIDENTS

**Objective: Improve the level and quality of information being distributed through word of mouth channels including tourism operators, residents and past visitors.**

Word of mouth is a critical way people learn about a region. This is from friends who have visited, residents and importantly businesses. It is difficult to track and measure the impact of word of mouth for visitor information, however the recent King Valley Tourism Development Plan visitor survey highlights that it is the second most important method of accessing information.

The key for improving word of mouth as a source of information is by encouraging residents and businesses to have pride in their local area and educating both on the products available.

Key considerations include:

- Know your own backyard campaign – This was once offered a s program that Destination Melbourne operated. A RCow centric program could be developed that encourages locals to promote, share and know more about their area;
- Educating operators – Offering a series of famils to local business owners and staff to explore the product within the region. This could be arranged by the Rural City and also be used as a networking activity.
- Communication to residents and businesses – Ensure that communications through local facebook pages, community groups and tourism groups are used to promote local events, activities and product in the region.

## 6.2. IMPLEMENTATION AND ACTION PLAN

The action plan below provides an outline of key directions and corresponding actions. The following levels of prioritisation have been included:

- Short term priority – Actions to be implemented in year one and two;
- Medium term priority – Actions to be implemented in year two and three;
- Long term priority – Actions to be implemented in year four and five.

### Decentralise Physical Information Services in Wangaratta.

	Action	Lead and Partners	Cost	Priority
1.1	Relocate Wangaratta's visitor information centre to a Council building within the arts and cultural precinct to continue to provide a visitor information presence in an accessible, central location within the broader visitor precinct and reduce costs in operating a physical information centre.	Council	\$150,000	Short Term
1.2	Establish park-based visitor hubs in Glenrowan, Milawa and Whitfield which provide a location that visitors are drawn to, stop at and can access information. These park-based hubs will have a regional map and QR code system to allow visitors access information directly for that destination on their phone. These visitor hubs can host a mobile VIC during peak periods and events.	Council	N/A	Short-Medium Term
1.3	Establish new branded brochure racks in businesses located in the rural tourism villages such as Milawa, Oxley, Whitfield, Moyhu, Glenrowan, Everton and Eldorado.	Council Selected Tourism Businesses	\$50,000	Short Term
1.4	Invest in a mobile VIC to operate across the RCoW during peak periods and events.	Council	\$150K	Medium Term
1.5	Audit and assess available brochures and literature. Focus on having branded official guides and maps that also include localised content for sub regions and destinations.	Council LTAs	\$50K	Medium Term

## Embrace and Invest into Digital Visitor Servicing

	Action	Lead and Partners	Cost	Priority
2.1	<p>Review and refresh websites and online content across all digital platforms, with particular focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring they have high mobile optimisation;</li> <li>• Deliver high quality motivational images and video;</li> <li>• Greater opportunity for interactive content;</li> <li>• Location tagging;</li> <li>• Include PDF downloads of brochures and maps;</li> <li>• Live chat and video call option.</li> </ul>	Council Tourism North East	N/A	Short Term/ Ongoing
2.2	<p>Increase the level of engagement and two-way communication on digital platforms including council website, social media and travel sites. This includes upskilling of Council staff and industry.</p>	Council Tourism Businesses	None	Short Term/ Ongoing
2.3	<p>Dedicate resources to allow for a digital content manager or retrain existing staff and industry members to be more digitally capable with a key focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage online review and location based listings</li> <li>• Social Media</li> <li>• Online messaging and chat (including afterhours)</li> <li>• Website</li> </ul> <p>Regional brochures and factsheets</p>	Council	Staff allocation	Short Term
2.4	<p>Establish consistent tracking methods and review processes to capture the following data points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two-way engagement</li> <li>• No. of Tripadvisor reviews</li> <li>• Average product ratings</li> <li>• Brochure downloads</li> </ul>	Council	None	Short Term and Ongoing
2.5	<p>Advocate for and implement a range of Wifi hotspots in key visitor destinations and improvement of blackspots across Wangaratta especially along key roads and routes</p>	Council	\$200K	Medium Term

## Engage and Empower Tourism Businesses and residents

Action	Lead and Partners	Cost	Priority	
3.1	Establish a 'know your own backyard program' for RCoW residents. This will prompt social media posts and drive sharing of what residents love about their local areas.	Council	\$50K	Medium Term
3.2	Offer a series of famils to local business owners and staff to explore the product within the region.	Council	\$10K	Medium Term
3.3	Develop a communication plan that provides a clear strategy for promoting activities, products and events to industry and residents.	Council		Short Term
3.4	Establish stronger alignment and relationships between the LTAs and their members to share knowledge and inter-regional referrals.	Council, LTAs		Short Term

