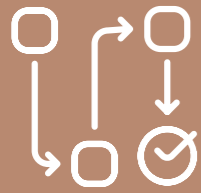


HUNTER VALLEY

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN / PART A

2022 - 2030





HOW TO READ + REFERENCE THIS DOCUMENT

This Hunter Valley Destination Management Plan sets out the current situation, global trends, strategic framework and priority projects for the Hunter Valley as a destination.

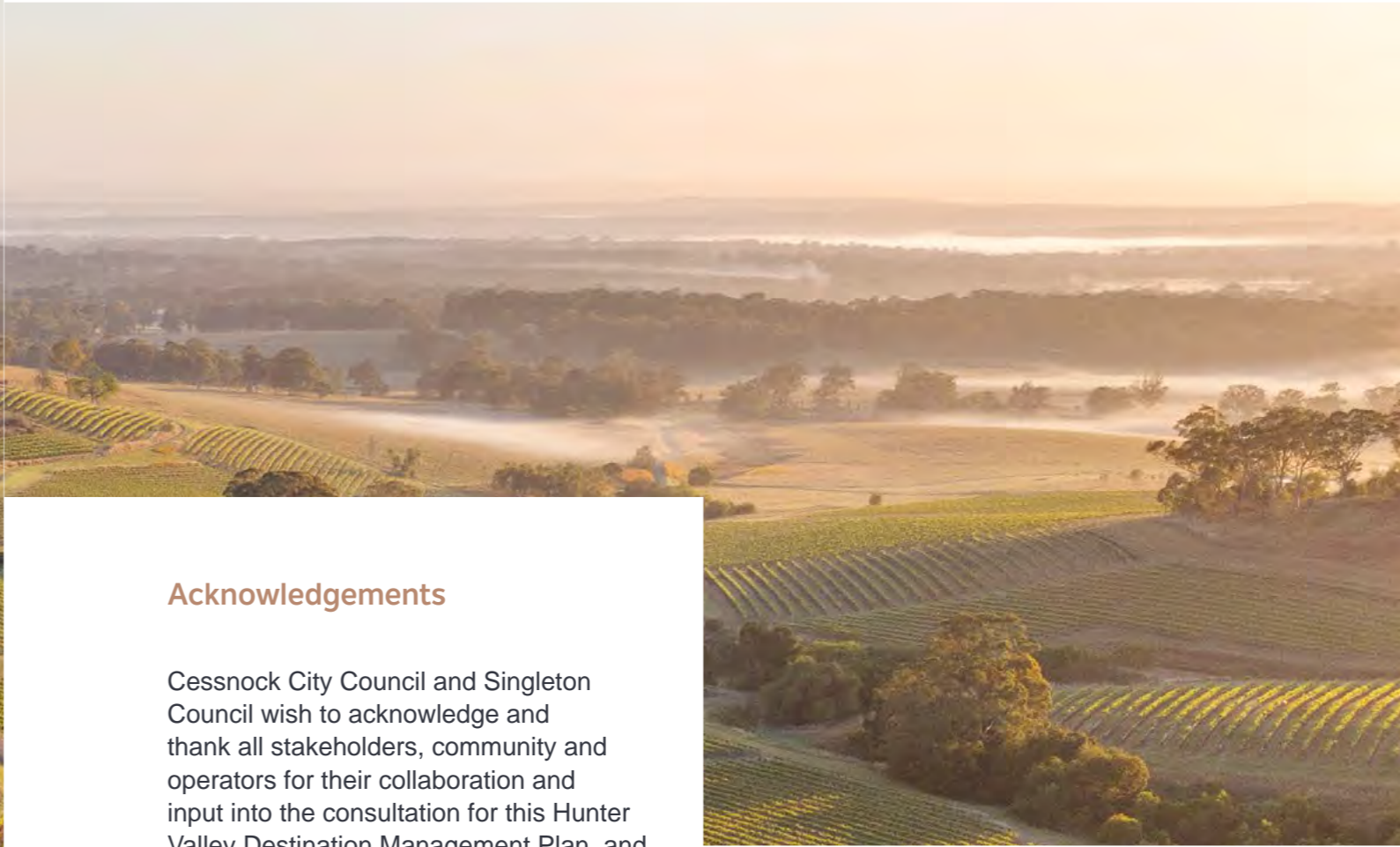
While it can be read from start to finish, persons may go straight to the relevant industry or strategic sections of the document as it relates to their requirements.

The contents page sets out the sections to aid navigation of this document given the landscape and diversity of the region.

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Front cover bottom right image: ©Hunter Valley Gardens



Acknowledgements

Cessnock City Council and Singleton Council wish to acknowledge and thank all stakeholders, community and operators for their collaboration and input into the consultation for this Hunter Valley Destination Management Plan, and Destination NSW for their support with the data analysis process.

Councils also wish to acknowledge and thank Destination Marketing Store who collaborated on this Hunter Valley Destination Management Plan providing expert advice, strategic direction, consultation management and reporting, creation of the strategic framework and priorities, projects, and document review.

Appreciation to the councils, staff + stakeholders

Destination Marketing Store (DMS) wishes to express its appreciation to all Councillors, staff and stakeholders who participated in the consultation process and so willingly shared insights to inform the development of this Destination Management Plan. The active involvement and insights provided by the communities and stakeholders of the Hunter Valley region are greatly appreciated.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands and waters on which the Hunter Valley is located. We recognise their continuing and inherent connection to Country and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

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HUNTER VALLEY REGION



Mayor's Message CESSNOCK CITY COUNCIL

Tourism makes an important economic contribution to the Hunter Valley. The visitor economy is the fourth largest in Cessnock, contributing \$500.71m of economic value each year. It employs as many as 2900 people and continues to grow.

In this Destination Management Plan, two communities with much in common – Cessnock and Singleton – have joined forces to develop a vision to further enhance the Hunter Valley as a highly desirable and diverse destination. The plan will guide our actions over the next eight years to strengthen and grow the burgeoning visitor economy in a way that is sustainable and in line with the community's expectations. It will allow both local governments to work together with industry, the community and other stakeholders in an aligned and strategic way.

In 2028, the Cessnock Local Government Area will celebrate 200 years of winemaking. The Hunter Valley's world-renowned vignerons are a distinctive feature of our community, along with world class dining experiences and international entertainment. However, there is much more to the Cessnock Local Government Area, and indeed the entire Hunter Valley. We live in an area bordered by National Parks, with a rich natural environment and picturesque rural vistas. These natural assets provide an opportunity to build on our potential as a "green destination."

The Hunter Valley is also home to significant landmarks and lands important to the Aboriginal people of the region, in particular the Wonnurua/Wannurah people. This rich and ancient cultural history holds the potential to work with Aboriginal peoples and organisations to support efforts to develop cultural experiences.

This plan identifies the character of the local visitor economy, who visits our region, why they come and what barriers exist to further developing its potential. It aligns with the NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030 and the Destination Sydney Surrounds North Destination Management Plan, which aims to grow the visitor economy to support the NSW ambition of becoming the Asia-Pacific premier visitor economy by 2030.

It is important to create a plan to manage the growth of the visitor economy in order to ensure opportunities are fully capitalised on and that growth is managed in a strategic way which benefits the entire community through the creation of jobs and enhancing the lifestyle of those who live in our area.

This plan sets out the opportunities, the challenges and the way towards its stated goals. It brings together key stakeholders – including the Hunter Valley Wine and Tourism Association – to work together with a common understanding and aim. In developing this Destination Management Plan, we have consulted widely to ensure as many viewpoints as possible have been heard. We greatly appreciate the insight garnered by everyone who has contributed.

It is indeed an exciting time for both Cessnock and Singleton local government areas. I look forward to participating in this plan to strengthen the potential of our community as a highly desirable and diverse visitor destination.

Jay Suvaal
MAYOR



Mayor's Message
SINGLETON COUNCIL

With stunning natural beauty including three world heritage-listed national parks and the iconic Lake St Clair recreational park; all the indulgences of Wine Country; a growing arts scene; and significant cultural heritage, it's little wonder Singleton's tourism industry has flourished in the past decade, contributing to the overall growth of the Hunter Valley.

Ideally situated in the heart of the renowned Hunter Valley, Singleton's visitor economy and tourism industry contributes significantly to the region and to local employment. Tourism more than doubled between 2012 to 2019 to \$143 million in economic output, and tourism jobs grew by 28 per cent in the same period.

The impacts of the 2019/2020 bushfires, COVID-19 pandemic and multiple flood events have taken a toll. Combined with the high level of global change and inevitable impacts on our community and economy, as well as the advent of the Singleton New England Highway Bypass, there has never been a better time to focus on the importance of the visitor economy and local visitor economy-related businesses to the economic evolution of our local government area (LGA) and the Hunter Valley.

Fortunately, we are not starting from scratch. Building on the strengths of our location, stunning natural environment, and award-winning wineries as part of Hunter Valley Wine Country, Broke Fordwich, and Around Hermitage Wine and Food Trail, we are in a commanding position not only to recover, but to return to the rates of tourism growth before bushfires, floods and the pandemic.

Further, we are strategically placed to take advantage of particular opportunities for enhancing the visitor experience in Singleton.

That includes recognition of the Wonnurua/Wanurua people and Singleton's important Aboriginal and cultural heritage, as well as our place in the national story told in the exhibits at the Australian Infantry Museum and Singleton Historical Museum.

We can also reflect on our community's identity in the programs at Singleton Arts + Cultural Centre and our growing prominence as a destination for unique signature events.

Based on input from businesses, industry experts and local residents to identify our vision for Singleton and the wider Hunter Valley, we recognise the key to our ongoing success is collaboration beyond local government borders. We have been proud to work in partnership with Cessnock City Council to develop a Destination Management Plan underpinned by working together to contribute to the growth of the Hunter Valley visitor economy for everyone.

We will continue to support the Hunter Valley Wine and Tourism Alliance and our local precinct and village tourism associations including Broke Fordwich Wine Tourism Association (BFWTA) and Around Hermitage Pokolbin, as well as Business Singleton, key arts and cultural organisations, and nature organisations to expand the Singleton offering and allow the Hunter Valley visitor economy to flourish.

I am proud to present this Hunter Valley Destination Management Plan as the outline for the vision, strategic framework and priorities that will guide a strong, sustainable, diverse, and resilient Hunter Valley visitor economy for years to come.

Sue Moore
MAYOR



President's Message
HUNTER VALLEY WINE + TOURISM ASSOCIATION

Hunter Valley Wine & Tourism Association is proud to collaborate with Cessnock and Singleton Councils on this updated Destination Management Plan. The objective of this plan is to set a vision and roadmap for the continued development of the Hunter Valley as a globally renowned wine and food destination, with a thriving, diverse, and sustainable visitor economy.

This Destination Management Plan provides a joint framework with Cessnock and Singleton Councils in assisting our wine and tourism industries to build sustainably and create long-term economic resilience, growth, and prosperity. The Hunter Valley Wine Tourism Alliance has in recent times strengthened its remit to work together for the promotion, advancement, and development of the wine and tourism industry in the Hunter Valley.

Faced with droughts, bushfires, a global pandemic and most recently significant floods, it has never been more important to grow the Hunter Valley visitor economy through collaboration, relationship building and alignment with the NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030 and the DSSN Destination Management Plan.

I look forward to the unified delivery of a united industry and Government approach to the growth of the Hunter Valley visitor economy.

Stuart Hordern
HVWTA President

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a visitor destination the Hunter Valley is home to NSW's most visited and the oldest surviving commercial wine region. Located two hours drive from Sydney and 40 minutes from Newcastle, two of the largest urban populations of NSW. The Hunter Valley is surrounded by natural beauty and undulating landscapes, with more than 150 cellar doors, award-winning restaurants, innovative paddock to plate produce and a range of diverse and bespoke experiences, ranging from attractions, wellness, cultural and heritage tourism, and the arts. It is a regional getaway like no other.

Situated in the heart of the New South Wales Hunter Region, the Hunter Valley is made up of two prominent local government areas – Cessnock and Singleton. The Hunter Valley is surrounded by World Heritage National parks and boasts a rich heritage of colonial, indigenous and industrial history.

The Hunter Valley is within the Destination Sydney Surrounds North (DSSN) network as defined by Destination NSW, and is a key visitor economy contributor to the Hunter Region. 17% of the total Hunter Region tourism economic output and jobs are from the Hunter Valley.

A Destination Management Plan for Growth and Diversity

This Hunter Valley Destination Management Plan 2022 – 2030 (DMP) has been developed to update the 2014 version as well as to set the region's vision and

strategic objectives following the economic shocks of the 2019/2020 bushfires, the COVID-19 pandemic and several floods. It recognises the core strength of the Hunter Valley as an internationally renowned wine and food region, as well as the diversity of the region.

The Hunter Valley DMP has been developed in consultation with local and regional stakeholders, industry and state and national bodies. It has undertaken in-depth research into economic and visitor data and global trends that combined with consultation has informed the development of a comprehensive strategic framework for visitor economy growth and development. It is also informed by the NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030.

In developing the Hunter Valley DMP a long-term ambition has been identified as:

The Hunter Valley is globally renowned as a vibrant wine, food and beverage destination with a thriving, progressive, diverse, and sustainable visitor economy.

The ambition recognises the strength of the Hunter Valley brand as The Good Life to ensure the destination is kept top of mind to the visitor wanting to travel and experience all the good things in life. It also plays to the core strengths of wine and food experiences as well as the ability to develop a diverse range of tourism products and experiences to support the future growth of the destination.

A Strong Visitor Base and Location Strengthen Future Opportunity

Welcoming around 1.5M visitors a year across the Hunter Valley region, the Hunter Valley experienced significant growth between 2010 and 2018. Economic shocks in 2019, 2020 and 2021, impacted visitation and visitor expenditure however the Hunter Valley's proximity to major centres, namely Sydney and Newcastle, supported the tourism industry between disasters and lockdowns, strengthening resilience. This also demonstrates the Hunter Valley's location and accessibility as a key strength for future growth.

Setting a Clear Strategic Framework, Priorities and Goals

The Hunter Valley DMP provides a clear strategic framework for growth that will showcase and strengthen the core of food and wine and events but also provides guidance for enriching the experience through cultural, nature, wellness, music, arts and heritage tourism.

The goal of the Hunter Valley Destination Management Plan is to grow the Hunter Valley Visitor Economy from \$641M in 2020 to \$958M by 2030 (aligning with the NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030 targets).

The key objectives driven by the strategic framework and priority projects will be to:

- Showcase and build the region's internationally renowned food and wine and events position.
- Enhance and diversify the experience offering
- Attract new markets to the Hunter Valley
- Enrich the perception of the Hunter Valley as a diverse and rich destination

This goal will be achieved by:

- Encouraging greater regional dispersal
- Increasing visitor spend by 25%
- Increasing the average length of stay from 2.55 days to the NSW average of 3.3 days
- Increasing mid-week visitation by 20%
- Increasing the number of available beds by 10%
- Doubling the number of bookable experiences
- Doubling international visitation

This Hunter Valley Destination Management Plan 2022 – 2030 will allow the Hunter Valley to step up to the next level, evolve the way we develop and market our key experiences to grow the visitor economy for the benefit of the whole community and most importantly for the visitors to have amazing memorable experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Located two hours' drive north of Sydney and 40 minutes from Newcastle, the Hunter Valley is Australia's oldest wine region, with a commanding natural environment of which 40 per cent is covered in National Parks or State Forests and has a reputation for indulgence, adventure and wellbeing. Located in the heart of the New South Wales' Hunter Region, it is made up of two prominent local government areas - Cessnock and Singleton. The Hunter Valley is surrounded by World Heritage National parks and boasts a rich heritage of colonial, indigenous and industrial history.

The strong visitor profile has underpinned the progressive development of a large and diverse asset base for visitors – in Wine Country there are a large range of wineries, many with cellar door experiences; a strong accommodation base, from small B&Bs to large resorts, a number with conference and meeting facilities; along with several quality golf courses and an increasing range of diverse products.

These visitor experiences are supported by the main service hubs of Cessnock, Kurri Kurri, Singleton and Branxton with many surrounding villages such as Broke, Wollombi, Greta and the newly developing Huntlee.

Hunter Region Tourism

The Hunter Valley is part of the Hunter Region as defined by the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE), which encompasses the local government areas of Port Stephens, Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Cessnock, Maitland, Dungog, MidCoast, Singleton, Muswellbrook, and the Upper Hunter.

The Hunter Valley is included in the Destination Sydney Surrounds North Network (DSSN), as defined by Destination NSW, which offers a rich and diverse number of tourism products.

What is the Hunter Valley Destination Management Plan?

The Hunter Valley Destination Management Plan (DMP) is strategic in nature and sets the vision, goals and visitor economy priorities for the Hunter Valley (Cessnock and Singleton local government areas) from 2022-2030. The purpose for updating the Hunter Valley DMP is to enhance the collaboration between two local government areas and clarify the roles of Councils, Hunter Valley Wine & Tourism Association (HVWTA), industry and other government agencies. The DMP will be used as a tool to attract grant funding based off priority actions listed and to gain a commitment from government to support our plan.

The previous Hunter Valley DMP was created in April 2014 as a joint document between Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council and HVWTA.

This holistic and cross landscape approach is not only strategic, it underpins the importance of customer centricity, industry development and stakeholder collaboration.

Tourism is an important industry to the Hunter Valley and it is imperative that every entity from government to operator listens to our customers and are aligned on that goal. In turn the Hunter Valley will build wine and tourism products that meet customer needs, anticipate customer wants, and provide a level of service that keeps visitors returning to the Hunter Valley and advocating for the destination.

The Hunter Valley DMP aligns with the NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030 and the DSSN Destination Management Plan.

Preparation of the Hunter Valley Destination Management Plan

The Hunter Valley DMP has been prepared by the Cessnock City and Singleton Councils' Economic Development teams working together and writing the plan, in collaboration with specialist destination management planning consultant Destination Marketing Store. The plan has been informed with strong collaboration with HVWTA and DSSN with consultation with Business Chambers, Tourism Associations, Government departments, Local Aboriginal Land Councils, operators, and the community.

The comprehensive situational analysis can be found in Part B of this document. The situational analysis contains data analysis, a review of global trends likely to impact on the tourism industry, insights from the in-depth consultation, a SWOT analysis, competitor analysis and case studies.


Future directions have been developed resulting from the insights garnered throughout the consultation period and key historical learnings, coupled with the intention to allow actions within the plan to take a broad view and be agile enough to adapt if circumstances change as we have seen in recent years with extreme weather events and the pandemic. Goals and objectives have been developed to address the opportunities and challenges the Hunter Valley experiences.


The strategic framework and project priorities have been developed and the Hunter Valley DMP will be an actionable document that can be executed by Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council, HVWTA and industry. Investment and funding priorities are specified where possible to allow for advocacy and funding opportunities to be addressed.



CONSULTATION

24 consultations including:

 6 group workshops

 18 one to one/small group sessions

 336 community and industry survey responses



HUNTER VALLEY TOURISM INDUSTRY



Hunter Valley
Destination Network Sydney
Surrounds North



Tourism is worth more than \$641M annually to the local economy



Hunter Valley tourism employment represents 17% of the total Hunter Region tourism employment



37% adult couples



30% friends travelling together



14% Solo travellers



15% families travelling together

Remplan. Economic Output and Employment reports for Singleton, Cessnock and Hunter region. 2020 Release 2

41%

Domestic Overnight Visitors



87% overnight visitors from NSW



Contribute \$338.18M per year



Biggest source market is Sydney



2.55 nights average length of stay



Average spend per visitor \$508



Contribute \$104.73M per year



Average spend per day visitor \$103



Biggest source markets are Hunter Region and Sydney



53% of all visitors coming for specific events and festivals

59%

Domestic Day Visitors

International Visitors



11% Nights from International travellers



Source markets include UK, US, NZ and Asia

Tourism Research Australia & Destination NSW – National Visitor Survey 5 year Average (YE March 2016 – YE March 2020)

PRIMARY PURPOSE OF TRAVEL



64% of domestic overnight visitor expenditure is generated by holiday travellers. The primary reason for travel.

30% of overnight visitors come to visit family and friends.



Business travel is an opportunity for growth.



Domestic Overnight %

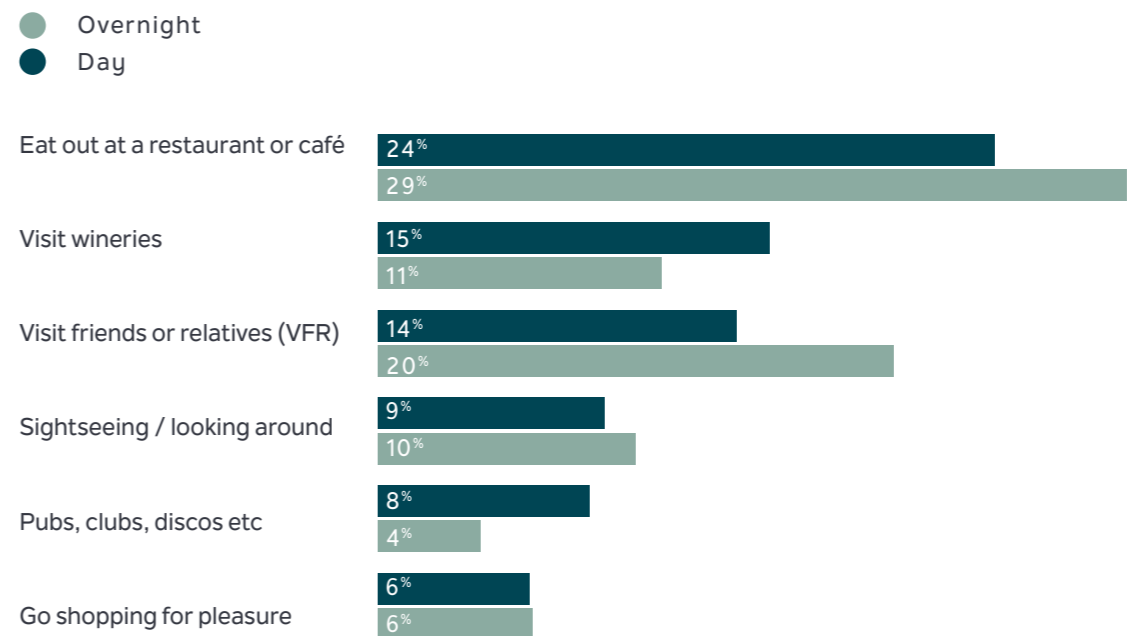


Domestic Day %



ACTIVITIES

Activities | Hunter Valley combined



Tourism Research Australia & Destination NSW – National Visitor Survey 5 year Average (YE March 2016 – YE March 2020)

Tourism Research Australia & Destination NSW – National Visitor Survey 5 year Average (YE March 2016 – YE March 2020)



HUNTER VALLEY REGION'S VISITOR ECONOMY



EVENTS

Events are a real driving force for the visitor economy of the Hunter Valley. They can be a catalyst for friends, family and visitors to come to our region: many concerts are positioned in stunning open air vineyard locations, creating a fun, memorable and enjoyable experience, coupled with Hunter wines and great music. Some of the extended family style events such as the Christmas Lights and Snowtime in the Gardens bring in visitors of all ages and offer the family market a reason to visit. These are often strategically placed to boost traditionally quieter periods, e.g. Winter/Summer, however they have now become stalwarts for high visitation during school holidays and Easter.

The Cessnock area of the Hunter Valley welcomes around 480,000 visitors per year to special events with 8 being major music events with international artists.

The Singleton area welcomes around 78,000 visitors per year, including music events at Dashville, signature events in Singleton such as the Singleton Firelight Festival and food and wine events across the Around Hermitage Wine and Food Trail and at Broke (including Smoke in Broke and a Little Bit of Italy).

Singleton is also establishing a reputation for arts events with the Singleton Firelight Festival and the Singleton Arts and Cultural Centre.

Destination weddings and milestone celebrations are also contributing significantly to the appeal of the Hunter Valley as a popular choice due to its reputation for delivering an exceptional short break. Interestingly operators have reported that due to COVID, many weddings are now more than ever being scheduled midweek as venues work to clear the backlog of couples wanting to be married.

The proximity to Sydney and Newcastle as well as the many global businesses within the Singleton LGA and across the Hunter region presents a significant opportunity for growth of business events and travel to the region.

Business events + business travel

Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibition/Events (MICE) business have continued to strengthen in the Hunter Valley and with HVWTA now having a dedicated business development manager to facilitate leads, the Hunter Valley is well placed to get its share of midweek high yield business. Attendance at industry trade shows meeting MICE buyers and a quality meeting planner guide listing facilities are both essential to the success of this market.



Survey of Events Operators in Hunter Valley undertaken by UoN student and Councils - 2021



STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The Hunter Valley has experienced significant growth and development across the region, particularly in Wine Country. It is recognised as Australia’s oldest wine region with significant visitation. Its central location in the Hunter region and proximity to Sydney, Newcastle and regional centres makes the Hunter Valley a well-known destination for domestic and international visitors to experience Australian wine tourism at its best.

The impact of COVID-19 was felt across the visitor economy in the Hunter Valley, however the accessibility, location, well developed product offerings and brand awareness, has placed the destination in a strong position for future growth. In addition the need to adapt to the effects of climate change, consideration of net zero policies, support for the unique biodiversity of the region and the growth of sustainable tourism provide opportunities for resilient regional growth.

Strong base for growth within the regional context

Situated within the Hunter region of NSW, the Hunter Valley is already a significant contributor to the regional visitor economy and is well placed to grow and enhance the destination across broader markets and more diverse experiences. The draft Hunter Regional Plan 2041 recognises the importance of viticulture to future diversity and the regional potential of the whole of the Hunter Region, including the Hunter Valley to be recognised as a world-class destination for sustainable, nature-based and cultural tourism. This builds on the acknowledged strong and established wine and food tourism sectors within the Hunter Valley.

Alignment with destination network goals

The Hunter Valley is part of the Destination Sydney Surrounds North Network (DSSN). One of seven Destination Networks in regional New South Wales established in 2017 to increase visitation and contribute towards growing the visitor economy. The Destination Networks are funded by the NSW Government through Destination NSW (DNSW).



The primary responsibility of DSSN is to work with local and state partners to drive the growth of the visitor economy in the region. The DSSN region is comprised of 10 local government areas - Central Coast, Cessnock, Singleton, Dungog, Lake Macquarie, Maitland, Muswellbrook, Newcastle, Port Stephens and Upper Hunter.

DSSN prepared a revised DMP during Autumn 2022, based on a program of industry consultation, market research and engagement with key stakeholders. This revised DMP sets out strategic priorities and a plan of action for the region from 2022 to 2030, reflecting current market trends and local priorities, and aligning with the phased Recovery, Momentum and Accelerate implementation set out in the New South Wales Visitor Economy Strategy 2030. Given the ongoing uncertainties in the visitor economy, review periods are scheduled at the end of the Recovery phase in 2024 and Momentum phase in 2026.

The DSSN Destination Management Plan highlights the below key experiences and products in the region:

-  Wineries
-  Food
-  Accommodation/ conferencing
-  Events
-  Golf sports hubs across the region

Industry consultation highlighted the below challenges as critical to the growth of the Region’s visitor economy:

-  Staff Shortages
-  Digital Connectivity
-  Transport Connectivity



Developing the Hunter Valley within the NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030

The Hunter Valley DMP has been developed in alignment with the NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030 (VES) which sets a target to achieve \$55B in overnight visitor expenditure by 2030, surpassing previous targets despite recent challenges.

There are specific targets set for Regional NSW as well as for domestic tourism:

- **Regional Overnight Visitor Expenditure:** \$25 Billion by 2030 (from \$20.5 billion in 2019)
- **Total Domestic Visitor Expenditure:** \$47 Billion by 2030 (from \$31.9 billion in 2019)

Five strategic pillars underpin the NSW Government’s vision to be the premier visitor economy in the Asia-Pacific by 2030.

It identifies five **guiding principles** (one of which is provided below) as well as **three core phases: Recovery** (to 2024); **Momentum** (to 2026); and **Accelerate** (to 2030). Strategic Pillar 3 of the VES is about **showcasing our strengths** – both our existing strengths and emerging ones, celebrating the diversity and breadth of experience as well as hero experiences.

From food and wine, vibrant contemporary culture, reconnecting with nature and small-town charm through to events and eco well-being, there are significant opportunities for the Hunter Valley region to contribute to the regional NSW VES targets. Taking a landscape and whole of region approach will contribute to the growth of wine and food and enrich other experiences.



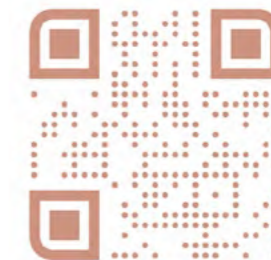
Hunter Valley DMP Guiding Principles

The Hunter Valley DMP has been developed to align with the NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030 guiding principles:

- Put the visitor first
- Lead with our strengths
- Accelerate digital innovation
- Collaboration between Councils and Industry
- Agility to respond and support industry
- Best practice DMP planning and engagement

As well as the principles of:

- Whole region and community inclusivity
- Informed (evidence-based)
- Future-focused
- Measurable in terms of both deliverables and outcomes
- Socially and environmentally responsible



For further information scan the QR code to visit Destination NSW for more information

The Destination Management Plan is intended to integrate with and leverage regional and local strategies and plans as outlined in the diagram below.



NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030 - Guiding Principle: Put the Visitor First

We have put visitors front and centre of this strategy to enable better targeted marketing, experience design and industry support through a greater understanding of potential visitors. Every visit should be an unforgettable one that inspires and encourages visitors to keep exploring and returning to NSW. Consumer trends and visitor needs will inform experience design, event development, infrastructure investment and marketing.

- A deep understanding of the needs and aspirations of potential visitors
- Tracking and analysis of evolving consumer preferences and trends
- A dynamic market prioritisation and segmentation approach
- Working with industry to deliver exceptional visitor experiences
- Personalised marketing and communications to guide visitors to experiences in NSW that match their specific interests and needs and encourage them to return.

NSW VES 2030, page 28



COMPETITOR ANALYSIS

A competitor analysis has been undertaken to further inform our plan, this coupled with a detailed situational analysis of the Hunter Valley and global and domestic tourism trends will all contribute to a future focused action plan that aligns with the expectations of our target markets. It is imperative to consider the expectations of our visitors. This means we need to understand their motivations, preferences and barriers to travel.

Competitor Analysis Insights

A competitor analysis has been completed involving a number of destinations that have similar attributes to the Hunter Valley and are the most likely to attract similar target markets. A more detailed analysis is contained in the situational analysis.

Competitor destinations have been chosen as they fit into the following criteria:

- All destinations are recognised wine or tourism regions with food & wine offerings
- Distance from primary source markets such as Sydney, apart from the Napa Valley which is located in the United States of America although also located very close to the source market of San Francisco
- All destinations are in market leveraging similar experiences and attributes especially food & drink, as a main or very important focus for each region

The eight competitor regions identified:

1. Mudgee, NSW
2. Orange, NSW
3. Shoalhaven, NSW
4. Southern Highlands, NSW
5. Blue Mountains, NSW
6. Napa Valley, California, USA
7. Margaret River, WA
8. Barossa Valley, SA

The analysis identified a range of findings, outlined below, which have been considered as part of the development of the DMP.

- All regions have a fairly similar offering, making it difficult to differentiate the Hunter Valley on its own attributes and experience offer alone.
- All NSW regions see Sydney as the key source geographical market.
- Shoalhaven is a summer holiday destination and already attracts a large number of visitors to the region. This represents a difference in that this region doesn't primarily rely on food and drink being its major draw card. However, Shoalhaven Council recognize that their food and drink offer including events will be a key driver of visitation over the low season. In addition, they also have in place many bookable food and drink experiences and offer food and drink events.
- Orange has implemented a new destination brand based on Orange 360. Collaboration with industry and local government is providing a focused approach to reinvigorate marketing activities.
- All regions have a contemporary website, most with e-commerce capabilities, with destinations such as the Blue Mountains even listing experiences that are taking extra COVID 19 precautions and the Napa Valley showing sustainability accreditation.
- Napa Valley has a big sustainability focus and over 40% of all sustainable wineries in the USA are in California.
- All regions could benefit by more highly-engaging and inspiring content for content marketing.
- Shoalhaven Coast and Mudgee region have a very cohesive and collaborative relationship with their industry, which is a strength of their respective destinations. The other destinations are at various levels in the process towards strengthening collaboration but are significantly behind Mudgee region and Shoalhaven Coast.
- Both the Barossa Valley and Margaret River have benefited by significant State government tourism and infrastructure funding that allow them to commit to staff and market their destinations at a very high level.
- Shoalhaven region has an excellent inclusive tourism website page that promotes all accessible experiences and lodgings.
- All regions have extensive listed content on the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW), the best regions integrate it into their websites and digital channels.
- A strength for the Hunter Valley is that we have an ability to partner with global and national brands as part of our marketing activity, for example IHG and AAT Kings, which leverages those brands market reach. Awareness of the Hunter Valley is also enhanced by the wide range of experiences and facilities on offer and the proximity to the cities of Sydney and Newcastle.

- The Hunter Valley is leading the other destinations in terms of bookable products.
- All regions have Visitor Information Centres and destinations such as Shoalhaven and Mudgee have or are reviewing and rethinking how they deliver visitor servicing.
- They are doing this through repositioning the VICs more experientially and are increasing the use of technology to deliver visitor information, interpretation and engagement to complement face-to-face services.
- Napa Valley has more music events than wine events, so are leveraging entertainment to accompany their food and wine offerings.

What does it all mean for the Hunter Valley?

The Hunter Valley has an extremely strong brand and customer proposition and is renowned as Australia's Oldest Wine Region. However, over the next five to ten years, the regions that will find success are likely to be those regions that meet the needs of the market across the customer journey: from dream to plan, book, go and share. Additional state tourism and infrastructure funding would greatly assist the Hunter Valley to command a larger market share.

As a result, the two key focus areas to be addressed are:

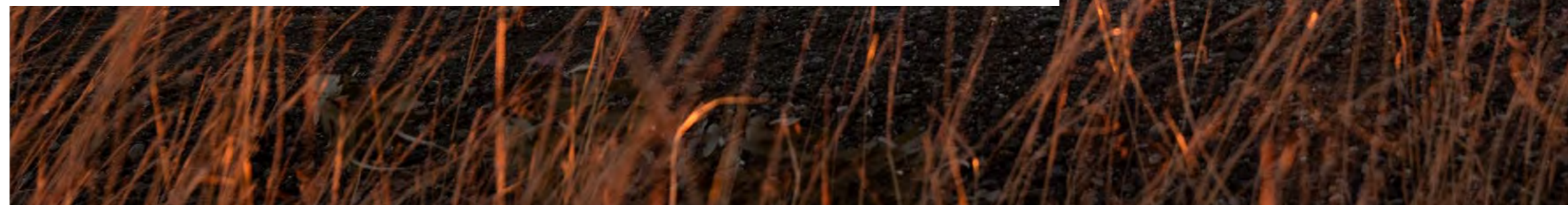
Emotional Connections

The development of inspiring and engaging content that is used for content marketing is going to be a key factor for success and more effectively distinguish the region's unique selling proposition.

This is more than developing videos, images and stories that profile a local character, product or experience. It is also about creating stories and a narrative to showcase the values or essence of the brand.

It involves engaging and inspiring content that delivers on The Good Life campaign, drives search engine optimisation, shareability and underpins the Hunter Valley brand. To take this one step further to be able to offer visitors the unique experience of talking or engaging with an expert about a destination is also important for creating an emotional connection. Milestone events, weddings and celebrations can also inspire that emotional connection with a destination.

** The Good Life Campaign is the Hunter Valley brand position that has been the focus of Hunter Valley destination marketing campaigns over recent years.*



Driving Conversion

Ease of booking in real-time across any device will also increasingly influence the visitor's choice of destination.

There is a growing demand for online booking functionality, both during the planning phase as well as in-destination, including with the 55+ market. Importantly it is now an essential for the Millennial and Gen Z markets. When considering driving conversion we must ensure that content is tailored to the needs of the customer journey. We must know how to reach each of our target markets and inspire their interest in a highly-competitive marketplace. A well designed content strategy and optimisation of customer channels is essential to driving conversion.

A final consideration is to ensure that the product and experience offering meets the ever-changing needs of our target markets. For example, developing more personalised and bespoke experiences as well as delivering on the experience themes for which the region has a competitive advantage is essential.

KEY INSIGHTS FROM VISITOR RESEARCH

A review of data from Tourism Research Australia (TRA) and Destination NSW including the National and International survey data from TRA, Roy Morgan and NSW Wine Region and Brand Perceptions research has indicated the following key visitor insights that will impact the growth of the Hunter Valley.

Please note that Hunter Valley visitor data has been achieved by combining the Cessnock and Singleton Local Government Area profiles from Tourism Research Australia and Roy Morgan.



Domestic overnight visitation is the highest yielding visitor and significant growth area representing 41% of total visitation and delivering 75% of visitor expenditure.



Day visitation is 59% of visitation, but only 23% of visitor expenditure, identifying opportunity to develop and promote more day experiences in the region to increase visitor yield.



Sydney is the dominant market for Hunter Valley visitation, with Central Coast, Northern Beaches and The Hills Shire, as well as visitation from New England and Tamworth being notable.



Intrastate visitation represents 90% of total visitation, highlighting major growth opportunities in both Interstate and international visitation, which would bring extended length of stay and higher yielding visitors.



The largest travel party group is adult couples (34%) followed by family and friend groups (26%),



The largest lifestage visitors are parents with children which relate to the 30 – 49 age groups that represent 35% Millennial and Generation X families, who are travelling more as adult couples or in groups, representing an opportunity to build on this for interstate visitors but also to develop more family experiences for return visits for families.



The second largest group of lifestyle visitors are older working and non-working couples (35%), Generation X and Baby Boomer generations aged 50 – 69, providing an opportunity to broaden the experience and extend length of stay and yield, as well attract interstate and international visitors.



Holiday remains the main purpose of visitation to the Hunter Valley driving 57% of visitation and 63% of visitor expenditure for domestic overnight stays.



Over one third of visitors are visiting family and friends, which when you combine day visitation at 54% and that visiting family and friends is the third most popular reason to visit the region, represents a key opportunity to promote current and new experiences to local residents.



Business visitation is lower but represents an opportunity to increase mid-week stays.



Eating out at a restaurant or café and visiting wineries, visiting family or friends or sightseeing/looking around are the most popular reasons to visit, indicating an opportunity to strengthen the food and wine offering but also to diversify and connect experiences to increase the reasons to for first time visitors and repeat visitors.



Length of stay across the Hunter Valley is at 2.55 which has increased, but is lower than the average 3.5 night stay for NSW, represents an opportunity for a whole of region approach connecting diverse experiences with more things to do is a significant opportunity to extend length of stay and increase visitor expenditure.



Cessnock is more likely to draw visitors who fall into the 'Leading Lifestyles' Helix Community, whilst Singleton is more likely to have visitors from the 'Hearth & Home' community. Both LGAs have seen growth in the 'Leading Lifestyle' visitors comparing pre and post COVID-19.



Significant investment in experience and product development delivered strong Hunter Valley visitation growth between 2010 and 2015, indicating that industry investment and experience development is critical to future growth of the Hunter Valley destination.



Visitor expenditure in the Hunter Valley quickly rebounded after COVID-19 travel restrictions were eased, with peaks in December 2020 & January 2021 over the summer holiday period, as well as April over Easter. Pent up demand, proximity to Sydney & appeal likely helped. This provides a key opportunity to promote accessibility of destination to interstate and international markets, as well as intrastate as travel re-opens and the international airport at Newcastle becomes a reality.



Acknowledgement + Sources:

Acknowledgement and thanks are provided to DestinationNSW for their support in achieving key data sources across the following sources:

1. *Tourism Research Australia – National and International Visitor Surveys (NVS&IVS)*
2. *DNSW Roy Morgan Tourism Movement Dashboard*
3. *DNSW Westpac Tourism Expenditure Monitor*
4. *DNSW Brand Engagement Monitor*
5. *DNSW Regional Drivers Report*

HUNTER VALLEY BRAND AWARENESS + APPEAL

The **Hunter Valley** is NSW's most visited wine region. Visitor satisfaction is high and the region is perceived as being relaxed, welcoming, charming and accessible.

The region is associated with luxury, escapism, wine and music events. There is a potential opportunity to dial up the luxury, indulgence, gastronomy side and smaller, more diverse events, whilst educating it's not all about wine to some consumers.

Hunter Valley is perceived to be welcoming, accessible and down to earth as well as unique, adventurous and indulgent. However, it is also perceived to be mainly a wine region, while other locations such as Orange are also perceived as a Country Town.

Brand Engagement Monitor (Hall & Partners) Dec 2018 –June 2019
 Hunter Valley is the fourth most top of mind NSW destination (16% spontaneous awareness), following Sydney (50%), Blue Mountains (27%) and Byron Bay (22%).
Destination NSW Brand Engagement Monitor July 2021.

Hunter Valley rates in the top 5 NSW destinations for appeal amongst Australian travellers (35% find appealing). The Hunter Valley has strong awareness amongst Australian travellers, particularly those from New South Wales, who also have a good understanding of what the region offers. However there is a clear knowledge gap between NSW residents and NSW non-residents – with 59% vs. 24% having a good understanding of what the Hunter Valley offers. **Destination NSW Brand Engagement Monitor July 2021.**



Destination NSW Regional Drivers Report in July 2020 indicated the following areas to strengthen the Hunter Valley brand:

-  communicate the region is more than wineries to spoil the senses
-  bucket list destination to younger and international audiences
-  a place to sit back and relax
-  opportunity to strengthen natural wonders and landmarks
-  to rejuvenate and recharge
-  offers different activities and things to do
-  offers an easy and accessible holiday option

SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES + GAPS

A summary of strengths weakness and gaps is necessary to develop effective strategies for the development of the Hunter Valley visitor economy and a whole of region approach. This has been informed by significant consultation across the Hunter Valley communities, industry and stakeholders as well as state and national organisations including DNSW, DSSN, Tourism Australia, National Parks and Wildlife and Regional NSW.

This is a summary of the insights relating to strengths, weaknesses and gaps. A more detailed analysis on the challenges and opportunities they provide can be found in the Hunter Valley Situational Analysis 2022 document, that accompanies the Hunter Valley Destination Management Plan.

Strengths

- Wine** Wine is the key core strength of the Hunter Valley, Hunter Region and NSW as a signature experience. Continue to lead with this strength and develop further experiences for higher yielding markets. Celebrate 200-years of winemaking and provide more reasons to return.
- Food** Hunter Valley has a strong reputation for high-end and well-known restaurants with outstanding reputation. Build on this strength to create a world class food destination through collaboration across the region to elevate and promote the high-quality food offering with connection to the land and its culture, expansion of opening times and breadth of choice and affordable options.
- Natural landscape and rural aesthetic** Local community, businesses and visitors value the rural and natural landscape across the Hunter Valley, as well as the world-heritage national parks, state forests and heritage vineyards. Reflect these values and bring them to life through the stories, villages, towns, trails and experiences across the region, demonstrating the unique landscape and sustainability of the region. Create new nature tourism experiences to attract new audiences and promote sustainability.
- Recreational facilities** Boost and promote the wide range of outstanding recreational facilities across the Hunter Valley to supplement wine food experiences and attract new visitors from cycling to camping, to walking to horse riding and beyond.
- Aboriginal cultural landscapes** The Hunter Valley is home to significant landmarks and lands related to Aboriginal Peoples, in particular those of the Wonnurua/Wannurah peoples. There is opportunity for collaboration to protect sites that include cave art, engraving, sites and stories to develop Aboriginal cultural experiences.
- History, heritage and the arts** From Aboriginal, Convict, Settler, Agriculture, Viticulture and Defence, the region is steeped in a rich history and heritage with opportunities for experiences that better share these stories. A number of arts and cultural experiences exist and are in development across the region to attract new customers, widen the offering and grow the visitor economy for all.

Strengths

Events	The Hunter Valley has a strong reputation for large music events with international and home-grown artists, and its Food and Wine festival. There is opportunity to better engage visitors that already visit to return for other experiences. As well as to create more high quality, bespoke and small events that attract visitors all year round.
Interest based marketing	With its rich natural landscape and wealth of recreational experiences, national parks and outdoor spaces, there is opportunity to build on walking and cycling trails to link the villages, towns and wine and food experiences to attract new visitors as well as extend length of stay and visitor yield and repeat visitation for current visitors.
Accessibility to key markets	Proximity to Sydney, Newcastle and Regional NSW, as well as the ability for international day trips from Sydney have contributed to the development of the Hunter Valley, this was experienced further during the COVID-19 pandemic and is a key strength to build on for future visitor economy growth.
Development of Newcastle Airport and the Hunter as a destination	The investment to develop Newcastle Airport into an international airport, along with Regional Plans to develop the visitor economy across the Hunter region, makes the Hunter Valley well placed to capitalise on these investments and growth.
Visitor servicing	With a strong brand and website, and two key visitor information centres in Cessnock and Singleton, plus the collaboration of the HVWTA Alliance, the opportunity to build world class visitation is an opportunity for future growth.

Weaknesses + Gaps

Connectivity	Digital connectivity across the region is limited, which restricts the ability of visitors to stay connected, as well as the ability for digital delivery of information while in region. The rise of the "digital nomad" will exacerbate this issue and limit the region's appeal. Collaboration, advocacy and investment is required.
Perception beyond wine and major events	The ability to extend length of stay, increase visitor yield and attract new visitors is critical to the region's future growth. Diversity of experiences and products within sustainable tourism, outdoor activities, culture and the arts that connect and are packaged with food and wine experiences are key opportunities.
Transport and a landscape approach to access	Transport to the Hunter Valley region as well as transport and interconnectivity between areas, trails, villages and towns is a major weakness that is required to be addressed to compete as a world class destination over the coming years. This requires a whole of government and industry approach across the Hunter Region.
Landscape aesthetic and sustainability	The first impressions on arrival to the Hunter Valley can be mixed given the gateway pathways through industrial, mining and residential areas. To increase the appeal of visitors to the Hunter Valley towns require improvement of gateway entrances and arrival pathways, wayfaring and also sustainability programs to promote the future of the region for visitation and renewable energy.
Night-time economy	Limited promotion and choice of night time options outside of high-end food or pizza's, are available which reduces the vibrancy and ability to hold visitors in region. The opportunity to promote and develop a diverse range of night time experiences will fill the gaps in diversity, affordability, access and dispersal.
Accessibility	While many of the Hunter Valley experiences are becoming more accessible, a focus and education on accessibility for all is necessary to create a truly accessible destination.
Attracting and retaining talent and capability development	Staffing and talent has reached critical levels due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The location of key tourism areas such as Wine Country and transport connections and affordability, combined with competition from high paying industries such as mining, creates gaps that need to be addressed through skills, staffing and capacity programs.
Housing and transport	The availability and affordability of housing for staff and local residents working in the visitor economy is critical, as house prices rise across the region and the regional move trend continues. With many tourism hubs not connected by good public transport, travel to and from work is also a key challenge to be addressed.

Externalities + Influences on the Visitor Economy

State and Commonwealth Governments

State and Commonwealth Governments have a role to play regarding connectivity, transport and funding. Collaboration, advocacy and funding will be key.

National and global economic performance

The visitor economy and tourism is impacted by downturns, economic shocks and intention to travel, so balancing of source markets and experiences is key.

Significant weather events and the impact of climate change

As already demonstrated in recent years the need to build resilience and ability to react must be a key capacity in the Hunter Valley region as well as the development of a renown sustainable tourism region.

Impact of unbalanced tourism

The focus on visitors in one area, limits the potential for long term growth, ability to cope with high demands and impact on the environment. The ability to disperse across diverse experiences all year round will contribute to a well-managed, sustainable and world class destination.



TURNING CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES

	Connectivity
	Attracting + Retaining Talent
	Housing + Transport
	Perception Beyond Wine + Major Events
	Night-Time Economy + 7-Day Service
	Landscape Aesthetic + Sustainability
	Build Awareness of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage + Tourism
	Activation of Open Space for Recreation
	Perception of the History, Heritage and the Arts offering
	Adapting to Climate Change

There is little doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a major impact on the visitor economy. Some influences will be temporary, while others will continue to influence visitor and consumer behavior well beyond the period of the pandemic. Key trends in tourism have been highlighted above, with three important factors outlined below.

It is clear that international tourism will take a significantly longer time to return to previous numbers, estimated to be 2024 before this is achieved. This means the domestic market is essential to the recovery phase in the next few years and provides a unique opportunity to capture a greater share of this market even when international borders re-open.

Connecting with family and friends will likely be an important motivator for the domestic market, and reinforcing the importance of the Visiting Friends & Relatives (VFR) market is a key to future growth.

All markets and demographics are now online and engaging in digital platforms more than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased familiarity with online and digital environments while also increasing expectations of convenience (for example, cancellations and changes to bookings). Likewise, e-commerce is now an essential; no longer a 'nice to have.' This means that the online channel is even more important as a channel to reach, inspire, engage and connect with your audience.





CONNECTIVITY

With the identification of a new consumer segment (brought about by COVID-19) the 'digital nomad' communication connectivity within the Hunter Valley is going to become an even greater issue for regions seeking to attract new markets such as the digital nomad. There is an opportunity for the Hunter Valley region to create a competitive advantage over other destinations by improving the reliability and reach of Wi Fi and mobile phone networks. This will require the Councils to collaborate with local businesses, the Hunter Region Joint Organisation and other significant industry sectors to develop a plan and facilitate funding of the rollout of communication infrastructure with a vision to what is required over the next 10 years.



ATTRACTING + RETAINING TALENT

A major issue for the visitor economy sector is access to and retaining talent. This issue has been exacerbated by COVID and border closures that have restricted immigration and the working holiday market.

However, there is an opportunity for the sector to work collaboratively with education institutions to identify opportunities to upskill staff to be able to work across multiple areas within a business or industry sector. Improving staff training will encourage retention and assist in positioning the visitor economy sector as a viable long-term career choice. Further, wages within the visitor economy sector are also a barrier to retention and living affordability.



HOUSING + TRANSPORT

Housing affordability and availability is another issue being faced by many regions in Australia. This has been in part driven by increased demand for housing in regional areas as housing prices skyrocket in the major cities. COVID-19 has also created an environment where people can work remotely while maintaining their city jobs and higher incomes. This makes regional house prices appealing. However, it also places increased pressure on locals who earn regional wages and are then having difficulty competing in the local housing market.

Larger accommodation providers should consider providing onsite staff accommodation as a way to attract and retain key staff members. This would mean sacrificing income to provide onsite worker accommodation; however, the benefits will include greater staff retention, reduced sick leave and improved worker safety due to less driving fatigue.

Transport is equally challenging for regional areas. As the Greater Sydney area grows, access to transport into and around the Hunter Valley region will be important for visitors as well as the locals. With developments such as the Newcastle Airport the need for transport beyond just car hire to disperse people throughout the region will become critically important. This is especially true for the international market who are very comfortable with using trains, on-demand buses and share rides as a way to move around a place as well as other forms of transport such as e-bikes etc. Further, it will also be important to address how transport can facilitate the movement of people around the region in peak periods or in specific locations due to activities such as major events that can cause access and traffic flow issues while the event is on. Government at all levels will need to continue to work together and take a landscape approach to developing plans to address the transport issues which will only become more critical as the population of Greater Sydney grows and demand for transport links and access will become a major trigger for appealing liveability.



PERCEPTION BEYOND WINE + MAJOR EVENTS

There is no doubt that a leading strength of the Hunter Valley is the wine industry and wine experience offer. Furthermore, the region has also established a reputation for delivering major music events from local performers to world class acts. A key challenge is that the region could become known as a 'venue' for big events and or as an established wine region that doesn't inspire repeat visitation and overnight or extended stays.

The opportunity is for the destination to be innovative in creating new wine experiences and elevating the wine offering to attract new markets, repeat visitation and extend length of stay and spend. Likewise, refocusing on events that profile the local experiences would assist to reinforce the experience offering of the region. Retargeting visitors who do attend major events once they have returned home with offerings that would motivate them to visit the region again for other reasons beyond just an event.



NIGHT-TIME ECONOMY + 7-DAY SERVICE

Evolving the night-time economy to create a stronger sense of vibrancy and provide more reasons for the visitors to extend their stay is essential to attracting new markets and will also appeal to established markets. This would also have the benefit of improving liveability and attractiveness of the Hunter Valley as a place to live and work. There is an opportunity for the hospitality sector to work together to ensure that there is a variety of evening and night-time offerings 7 days a week. There are already existing activities and night-time options, but the gap is that information about these activities and experiences is not readily available or shared through the appropriate channels to reach the market. There are other night-time opportunities that could elevate the Hunter Valley region, such as wineries offering wine bar experiences in the evening, night-time markets over summer, winter solstice under the stars, food and wine offerings and evening family activities. These experiences will also be important to attract and meet the desires of an international market as well as attracting new markets to the region.



LANDSCAPE AESTHETIC + SUSTAINABILITY

Demand for 'green destinations,' and the perception of a region's green credentials are going to become key in the decision-making process for visitors when choosing one destination over another. A challenge for the visitor economy within this context is that the Hunter Valley is also known as being a major coal mining area. This can impact the perception and appeal of the Hunter Valley as an aesthetically pleasing destination and a region that is focused on sustainability and its future green potential.

There are several opportunities for the Hunter Valley to improve the aesthetic and the region to ensure a positive future perception of the region. This can be achieved through the beautification of the entry ways into the region from the Cessnock and Singleton ends, encouraging investment into ecotourism experiences, connectivity across the landscape for cycling, walking and horse-riding trails into natural areas and also to develop a narrative around renewable energy industry to highlight a future focus for the broader economy of the Hunter Valley.

The need to protect, preserve and restore the uniqueness of the region's environment, biodiversity and scenic amenity is critical. Placing focus on sustainable and environmental development will improve intergenerational opportunities for protection and growth as well manage human interaction to support the land and allow for community, industry and visitors to enjoy our region's environment responsibly.



BUILD AWARENESS OF ABORIGINAL CULTURAL HERITAGE + TOURISM

The Hunter region is home to numerous national parks. Many of these protected areas are of significance to the local Aboriginal communities. They also protect sites that include cave art, engraving and other points of interest.

There is an opportunity to work with the local Aboriginal communities, relevant organisations and collaborate with the Local Aboriginal Land Councils to develop cultural experiences, while preserving the cultural significance of these sites and ensuring conservation plans are in place to protect these sites. This may also include the appropriate development of visitor experiences around programs that already exist such as environmental, conservation and caring for country programs.



ACTIVATION OF OPEN SPACE FOR RECREATION

The Hunter Valley region boasts many recreational facilities. Many of these are funded and managed by the Councils.

Existing facilities such as Lake St Clair in the Singleton Council area, playgrounds and other sport and recreational facilities are assets to the region and are valued by the locals as well as having the potential to attract other target markets. The development and extension of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail creates a huge opportunity for the region and NSW.

The Councils have the opportunity to create good quality content and information to showcase the regional recreational facilities such as the playgrounds, Lake St Clair recreational offering, cycling, walking tracks, horse-riding trails and camping sites.

The content needs to be inspiring and demonstrate how visitors can find these places and what they can expect. It is an opportunity to build on the family market and to attract more of the family market. The family market can disperse further throughout the region as they are seeking other experiences beyond Wine Country. This will create opportunities for dispersal through places such as Broke, Wollombi, Kurri Kurri and Singleton.



PERCEPTION OF THE HISTORY, HERITAGE AND ARTS OFFERING

The Hunter Valley is steeped in European history and heritage beyond the wine history. The development of the arts and cultural precincts such as Townhead Park in Singleton assist in building a positive profile for the Hunter Valley region within the arts and culture sector that is also appealing to a different market. Creating experiences, workshops and masterclasses along with tours that profile arts and culture across the region. This will add to the overall aesthetics and appeal of the Hunter Valley as a destination. Established offering such as the Australian Army Infantry Museum is an attraction within itself to a specific target market and does add to the Hunter Valley experience.



ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE

The CSIRO Mega Trend 2022 report includes adapting to climate change as one of seven critical megatrends that will shape the next twenty years and present challenges and opportunities to our communities. The World Tourism organisation recognises that global temperature changes may create water shortages, a loss of biodiversity, impacts to landscape aesthetics, impacts to soil changes (moisture levels, erosion and acidity) and damage to infrastructure through increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. The Hunter climate change snapshot from the Office of Environment and Heritage, NSW Government projects the region will continue to warm during the near future (2020–2039) and far future (2060–2079), compared to recent years (1990–2009). The warming is projected to be on average about 0.7°C in the near future, increasing to about 2°C in the far future.

The Hunter Valley has experienced significant bushfire and flooding impacts over recent years which has led to reduced visitation, loss of crops and vintage, as well as the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Future strategies require actions to build local capacity for ongoing resilience and also to introduce sustainable business practices that align with net zero policies and build sustainable visitor economy businesses.



TARGET MARKETS

CURRENT MARKETS

Market	% of Visitor Expenditure
Greater Sydney	50
Newcastle / Hunter	20
Regional New South Wales (Mid-North Coast / New England)	10
South East Queensland	5
Victoria	5
International	
New Zealand	
Singapore/Japan/Hong Kong	10
UK	
US	

INTRODUCTION

Understanding your visitor markets underpins a visitor – centric approach to growing a sustainable visitor economy. Target markets can be grouped in various ways, for example on the basis of purpose of travel, such as visiting friends and relatives (VFR) and touring (drive tourism), demographics, such as the family and 55 plus market as well as psychographics, which are the basis of the Roy Morgan Helix Personas. Psychographics focus more on the motivations and behaviours of market segments across demographic and geographic boundaries.



TARGET AUDIENCES

Active Couples	<p>Primary: Age 25-64 Secondary: Age 55 plus, possible empty nesters Interested in being educated and upskilled while taking a break. Has the means to travel regularly and can splurge on premium accommodation and activities Seeking: Food + Wine Experiences, Nature, relaxation and arts and culture. Desire to get to know Australia in a more meaningful, purposeful way</p>
Single Escapers	<p>Age 20 – 35, no children Take short trips and travel with friends. Looking to take a break from busy lives, relax, unplug and reconnect. Seeking: activities, fresh immersive lifetime experiences Aspirational, educated, socially aware Highly influenced by social media and influencers + recommendations from friends</p>
Families with children	<p>Gen X: School aged children, teenagers Millennials: School aged children Looking to relax, have fun and reconnect as a family. Escape routine Seeking: activities, family friendly cellar doors, restaurants Getting out in nature – playgrounds</p>
Groups of Friends	<p>Multi-generational Looking to travel as an opportunity to reconnect with friends (and family), seeking shorter breaks Highly influenced by social media and influencers + recommendations from friends Increase in multigenerational travel - eg: mothers/daughters + family groups</p>
VFR - Visiting Friends + Relatives	<p>Looking to for things to do with visitors. Proud of where they live and want to showcase Seeking: day trips, group activities and potentially mid-week activities Target local government areas across the Hunter region and Regional NSW</p>
Niche Audiences	<p>Golf, Weddings, Nature-based tourism, Pet friendly, Business Events</p>

FUTURE-FOCUS: TARGET MARKETS

Into the future, the Hunter Valley will need to continue to focus on a higher yielding market that is already visiting the region. A key for a sustainable visitor economy is to increase the current market's length of stay. At present the average length of stay for the Hunter Valley is 2.55 nights. The uplift in economic value for the region to extend the average length of stay to 3.3 nights would be worth \$222,493,150 per annum. REMPLAN Impact Analysis for the additional expenditure: Total employment, including all direct (1,437), supply-chain (235) and consumption effects (259) is estimated to increase by up to 1,931 jobs.

In order to achieve this increase in length of stay we must broaden the target markets for the Hunter Valley:

- Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) Survey data indicates there is a gap between our residents likelihood to recommend a visit to the Hunter Valley to their friends and relatives, this needs to be addressed with a dedicated VFR campaign.
- Millennials–families and couples
- The region's offering is much greater than purely wine. There are experiences and opportunities that will appeal to other markets and will also assist with encouraging dispersal. The family market is an opportunity for the broader Hunter Region. The Hunter Valley has a number of family friendly tourism experiences which can be promoted to this increasing target market.
- Active 55+ – couples – one of the largest groups of visitors to the Hunter Valley, we need to ensure we are providing these visitors with the experiences they are seeking.
- Family market – the family market is a major growth opportunity for the Hunter Valley with development required to increase the diversity of family experiences, as well as diversity of more affordable accommodation and places to eat to attract more families. Growth trends demonstrate that millennial and gen X families are travelling together in friend and family groups more often. They are also looking for a range of diverse experiences, including green and sustainable destinations. It is also noted that many of the local playgrounds, parks and local facilities cater towards family groups and the promotion of these experiences is key to growth.
- Business events and travel – encourage more midweek visitation by offering incentives to come to the Hunter Valley through grants and sponsorship programs.
- Event patrons – encourage event patrons to extend their length of stay by actively targeting them and showcasing all the experiences they can do in the Hunter Valley either for this trip or their next trip to the Hunter Valley.
- Visitors with pets – It is widely recognised that more visitors wish to travel with their pets and are looking for accommodation, food and drink and experience options or opportunities for boarding locally.
- Accessible Tourism – this is a growing market and presents an opportunity for destinations to expand the diversity of visitors and meet a broader range of needs. The Hunter Valley can work towards best practice across experiences and infrastructure to support an improved visitor experience for all abilities and backgrounds.
- Nature and sustainable travellers – identified as key growth markets globally. The location of the Hunter Valley with world heritage listed National Parks, valleys and ridges and scenic amenity across the region make it the perfect destination. Development and promotion of experiences to these audiences is addressed in the Nature's Playground section.

RELEVANT INSIGHTS FROM GLOBAL + DOMESTIC TRENDS

	Sustainability + green travel
	Growing importance of local communities to the visitor economy
	Experiences over destinations: Transformative experiences
	Tech, tourism + a smart future
	Business events + extending business travel for leisure
	Ruralisation of tourism
	Travellers last mile sparks a new wave of innovation
	Focus on retaining staff + upskilling labour
	Digital nomads + flexible work arrangements

FUTURE FOCUSED

An understanding of the **motivations, behaviours, preferences and barriers to travel of the region’s target markets** is a key to ensuring the DMP is both **customer-centric and future-focused**.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has been a true global disrupter in travel, it arrived hot on the heels of significant natural events in Australia, which have also influenced tourism and travel over recent years. This includes the prolonged drought, devastating bushfires and damaging floods.

Further, as we emerge from the pandemic, **competition for the domestic tourism dollar is extremely fierce**.

COVID-19 has also severely depleted Government budgets so grants are likely to be limited and competition for them tight. Demonstrating the feasibility and return on investment of projects will become even more important. Given all this, it is important to consider how consumer demand, behaviours and perceptions have changed to inform the DMP and support a dynamic industry into the future. This includes the amplification or reinforcement of trends we had already seen evolving over many years as well as the emergence of trends resulting from more recent events, such as COVID-19.



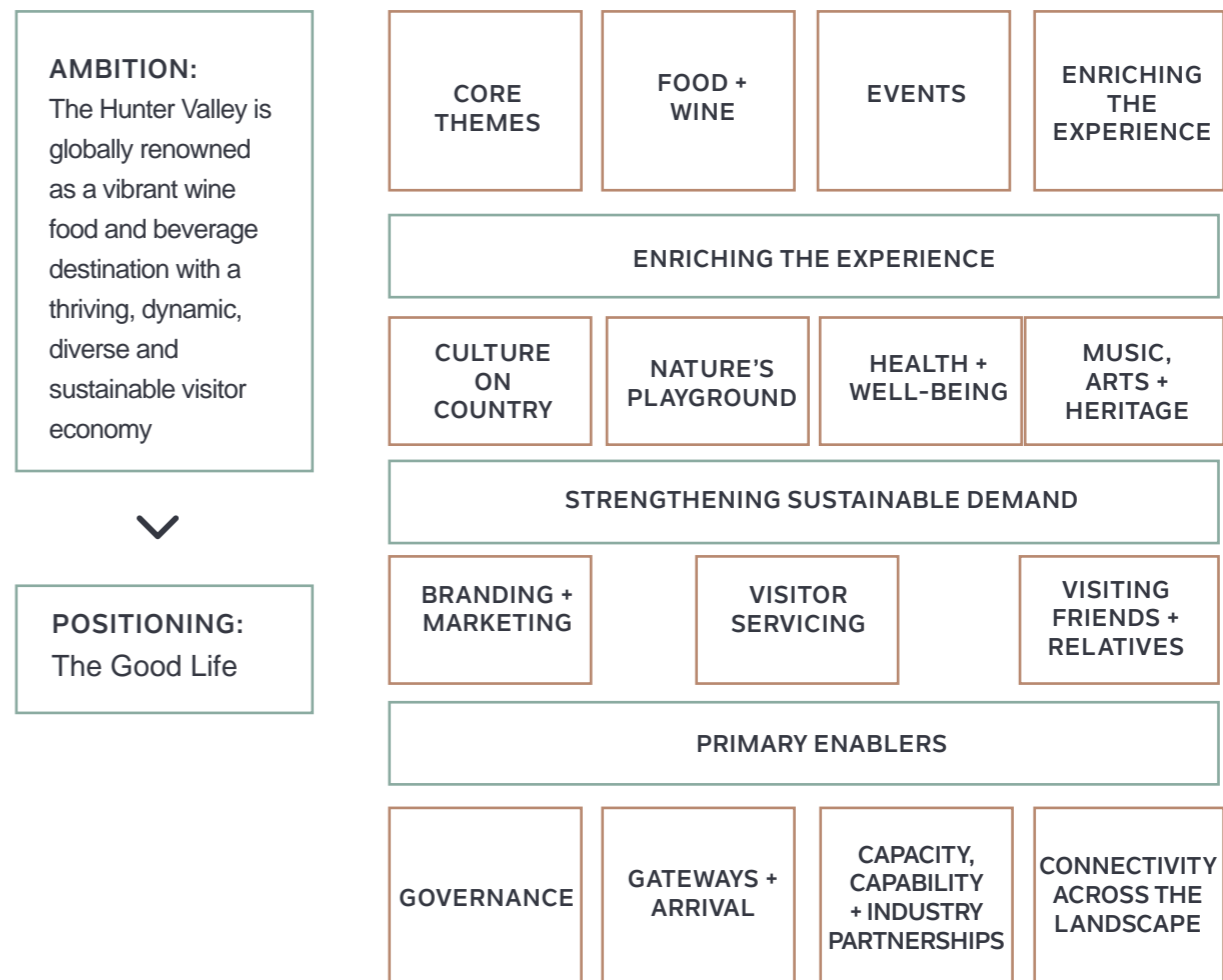
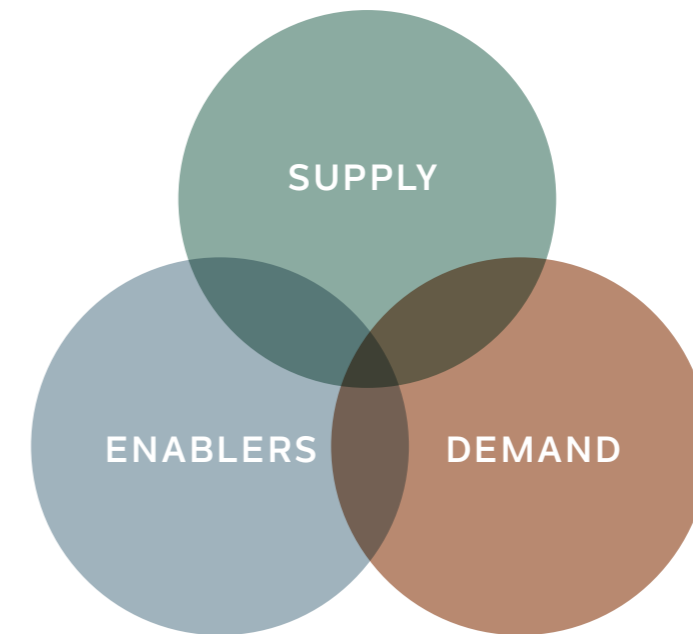
STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS + FRAMEWORK

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS + FRAMEWORK

A comprehensive strategic framework has been created to set the strategic directions, core themes and priority projects over the next eight years.

This framework recognises the strengths, opportunities for growth, challenges and barriers to overcome and is structured to address:

- 1. Ambition and positioning:** that set strategic direction that is informed, future-focused and customer centric as well as leveraging the region's strengths, values and attributes that appeal to key target audiences.
- 2. Goals and objectives:** that outline clear high-level goals and objectives that deliver outcomes and growth to the Hunter Valley visitor economy.
- 3. Supply:** that provides structure around core experience themes that reinforces the region's strengths, addresses gaps and offers opportunity for growth, including consideration of infrastructure, high-profile precincts, emerging product offerings and visitor dispersal.
- 4. Sustainable strengthening of demand:** that elevates destination and specialist marketing, visitor experience and addresses the provision of high-quality visitor services that meet the needs and expectations of today's visitors, across the whole of the customer journey.
- 5. Primary enablers:** that reflects vital projects and advocacy which are critical to implementation and ultimately success for long term sustainable visitor economy growth.



GOALS

The goal of the Destination Management Plan is to grow the Hunter Valley Visitor Economy from \$641M in 2020 to \$958M by 2030 (aligning with the NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030 targets).

This goal will be achieved by:

- Encouraging greater regional dispersal
- Increasing visitor spend by 25%
- Increasing the average length of stay from 2.55 days to the NSW average of 3.3 days
- Increasing mid-week visitation by 20%
- Increasing the number of available beds by 10%
- Doubling the number of bookable experiences
- Doubling international visitation

Objectives

- Showcase and build the region's internationally renowned food and wine and events position
- Enhance and diversify the experience offering
- Attract new markets to the Hunter Valley
- Enrich the perception of the Hunter Valley beyond wine

Ambition + Positioning

A key to driving a sustainable visitor economy is to create a vision for the DMP and the region. The vision is future-focused and aspirational. The vision is supported by the region's positioning. The positioning is the framework for how the vision is going to be achieved. The positioning is focused and is clear in the intent of how the region will be seen in the marketplace.

Ambition

The Hunter Valley is globally renowned as a vibrant wine food and beverage destination with a thriving, dynamic, diverse and sustainable visitor economy.

Position

The Hunter Valley has built very strong brand equity for The Good Life positioning and this has become synonymous with the Hunter Valley. The Good Life is a differentiated positioning for food and wine, that can be related and extended to the diverse range of experiences and offerings across the Hunter Valley, as outlined in the enriching the experience themes.

SUPPLY – ELEVATING THE EXPERIENCE

A diverse mix of high-quality hero and supporting experiences are core to the growth of the destination, leading with strengths while supporting emerging, new experiences and segments that broaden the destination appeal to a wider range of audiences and offer more reasons to extend the stay.

The Hunter Valley's rich and varied landscape offers great opportunities to develop a deeper connection to the land, its beautiful and unique natural landscapes, Aboriginal cultural ancestry, settler heritage and agricultural history.

Three core themes have been developed to address the opportunity for strengthening existing product offerings and developing new and innovative experiences that elevate the region's attractiveness.



PRIORITY PROJECTS: CORE THEMES

FOOD + WINE

The Hunter Valley region has long been recognised as a leading wine region as well as being Australia's oldest wine region, offering premium wines domestically and internationally. The region has also developed a reputation for offering several hatted and renowned restaurants and Chefs which have assisted in raising the profile of the region as a foodie destination. The most popular activity for visitors to the Hunter Valley is eating out in restaurants and cafés, followed by visiting wineries.

Through expanding the Hunter Valley offering to include distilleries, breweries, chocolatiers and cheese makers, the region has increased the diversity of experiences contributing to the growth of the region to date. To end of December 2019, the Destination NSW Food Tourism and Wine Tourism reports indicated that the Hunter Valley was the most visited NSW wine region and the Hunter region was the third most visited NSW food region. NSW was the top destination for food visitors in Australia and the second most popular wine destination in Australia.

Significant increases in competition from other Australian wine regions, including those within NSW who have also diversified their food and wine and other experience offerings, has created opportunity for the Hunter Valley to elevate the breadth and variety of its food, wine, and beverage experiences further.

Leading from its strength as a renowned food and wine region is critical to the growth of the Hunter Valley visitor economy. The situation analysis and consultation highlight the importance of ongoing development and elevation of food, wine, and beverage experiences, as well as showcasing local produce through farmer's markets, farm gates, cafes, pubs and other local food outlets.

The Hunter Valley's rich natural resources combined with a heritage of agriculture and viticulture present a significant opportunity to elevate the region's food experiences and connection with the land. Collaboration between restaurants, community gardens, native indigenous products, farm gates and food markets (subject to relevant approvals), to create and promote new experiences has been identified to further elevate the region's food offerings.

Food tourism to NSW is defined as visitors who have had a food experience in NSW which includes fine dining, food festivals, food markets, farm or food tours, pick your own fruit, and cooking classes. Eating at fine dining restaurants followed by visiting local food markets were the most popular food tourism activities in NSW.

Wine tourism to NSW is defined as visiting one or more wineries. Wine tasting is the most popular activity at wineries followed by purchasing wine to take home and dining at a winery. It is assumed that beverage experiences would follow similar trends.

Strategy

1.1 Identify the Hunter Valley's strengths, hero experiences and opportunities for differentiation and greater variety relating to food and wine offerings as comparative to other regions and global trends

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1-2 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	HVWTA, Hunter Culinary Association, Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Undertake an audit of all available food, wine and beverage experiences across the Hunter Valley region from the core established experiences to new and emerging products across wine, food and beverages. This should include food markets, food producers, food and wine businesses and Indigenous businesses to understand the key strengths and product offerings. – Identify gaps and opportunities in the region. Utilise the types of food and wine tourism definitions in the Destination NSW Food and Wine reports and the competitor analysis and global and tourism trends undertaken for this DMP. – Create information on the experience gaps to aid existing and new businesses identify opportunities for growth in the region, facilitating greater variety and innovative new hero and supporting experiences. – Present a whole of region approach to the wine, food and beverage products on offer to allow for promotion of greater variety of wine and food experiences to attract new visitor segments and extend length of stay.

Strategy

1.2 Develop a product and experience development program to address the food, wine and beverage experience and product gaps in the Hunter Valley region

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3-5 years	HVWTA	Hunter Culinary Association, Industry, DSSN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Collaborate with the private sector (including existing businesses or new developers) and identify major investment opportunities to build innovative and inspiring wine, food, and beverage experiences. This could include building on already existing infrastructure.
		Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Profile Hunter Wines, Beers and Spirits in key domestic and international source markets. This involves developing a program to promote sales of Hunter Valley beverages and food offering through events, pop ups and sales representation outside of region. – Encourage more educational and masterclass experiences, where visitors work with the makers and chefs to understand and the learn their craft. From day activities to in-house two-day packages. To attract individuals, small or medium sized groups.

Strategy

1.3 Increase the breadth and variety of food options and experiences

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3 – 5 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage a range of food experiences to increase the choice and number of cafes, restaurants, and food options to attract a broader audience and accommodate all visitors to the Hunter Valley particularly in peak occupancy.
	HVWTA	Hunter Culinary Association, Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage operators to review any inconsistent trading days to be able to offer a range of dining options 7 days and nights a week.
	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	Hunter Culinary Association, HVWTA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate to run food business workshops to those wanting to start new businesses.

Strategy

1.4 Strengthen the culinary offer and develop differentiation and breadth of food experiences through increased collaboration

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3 – 5 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	Hunter Culinary Association, Aboriginal Organisations, Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate the possibility of a region wide Hunter Valley Community Gardens Program. Work with Hunter Valley Aboriginal communities to develop more native food experiences.
	Cessnock City Council Singleton Council	Hunter Culinary Association, Slow Food Hunter, Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate collaboration across industry to address access and barriers to local produce for all food businesses.

Strategy

1.5 Celebrate Australia's oldest wine region with bi-centennial marketing, events and programs to increase awareness and visitation

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
5 years+	HVWTA	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a program to celebrate 200 years of wine making in the Hunter Valley in 2028. Seek funding to support Hunter Valley bi-centennial wine making celebrations. Develop and execute specific events and activities across the Hunter Valley to celebrate 200 years of wine making and local heritage. Create and implement a marketing and events plan to increase awareness and visitation connected to 200 years of wine making.



EVENTS

The Hunter Valley region has long been recognised for delivering major events, mainly music events. These events can be anything from A Day on the Green to major world class music acts such as Elton John or Fleetwood Mac. The Hunter Valley has become synonymous with these types of events which have attracted new markets to the region and created a reason for established markets to visit again.

However, the region offers many other events both large and small. This includes local hand-made markets, food and wine events, sporting events and a myriad of

culinary, arts, music, and cultural events. The region plays host to community, commercial and business events, and conferences.

The Hunter Valley events program offers a key opportunity to enhance the perception of a rich and diverse region. Reinforcing its competitive advantage as Australia's leading wine region while showcasing its contemporary and dynamic lifestyle and enabling the effective activation of the region's precincts. Events offer the added advantage of encouraging regional dispersal to the towns and villages of the region.

Strategy

2.1 Collaborate across local government area boundaries to integrate opportunities to attract new events to the region and encourage diversity of events

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1 - 5 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	HVWTA, Hunter Joint Organisation of Councils, Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate with key stakeholders across the Hunter Valley region to create opportunities to leverage from existing events as well as create new large events and small events, workshops and masterclasses, that align with the Hunter Valley's key position, The Good Life, and offer a diversity of experiences. Collaborate with key stakeholders and industry to further develop signature events across the Hunter Valley. Collaborate with Hunter Joint Organisation of Councils on the Accelerating the Event Economy project to support the attraction of major events to the region, providing information, research, and local feedback, including Hunter Venue and sporting ground capabilities. Support the Hunter Joint Organisation of Councils development of an event managers toolkit that can provide all relevant information on event venues, approvals and event supporting information

2.2 Facilitate the growth of Hunter Valley events through programs and processes

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1 - 5 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Work across Councils, the events sector and operators, to continue to assess event approvals and processes for efficient and cost-effective event approvals that support and attract appropriate events to the region. – Councils to facilitate local events through the development of local events programs.
	Cessnock City Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Review event approval guidelines on Council's website to ensure the information is current and easy to follow. – Review Development Control Plan D8 Temporary Events for opportunities to grow medium sized events.

2.3 Collectively market key events across the Hunter region

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
Ongoing	HVWTA	Hunter Valley Visitor Information Centre, Singleton Visitor Information Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Manage and maintain a primary Hunter Valley event calendar on the Hunter Valley website.
	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Promote local events across the region to increase attendance at all events and contributing to local visitor economy growth.
3 – 5 years	Hunter Valley and Singleton Visitor Information Centres	HVWTA, Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Collaborate with key stakeholders and industry to create and provide pre-event and in-destination information and inspiration to extend the length of stay including accommodation, event tickets and activities.
Ongoing	HVWTA	Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Continue to work with local operators to create a specific Wedding guide and attend Wedding related trade events to ensure top of mind awareness for the Hunter Valley as a Wedding destination of choice, including the development and implementation of a campaign to promote mid-week weddings.

2.4 Grow business events

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1-2 years	HVWTA	Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Continue to update the Hunter Valley Meeting Planner Guide and promote business events to the Meetings
		DNSW, Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council, Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Work with DNSW and other key stakeholders to maintain the Meet in NSW website listing for the Hunter Valley.
3 – 5 years	Singleton Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Seek long term funding for the Hunter Valley Business Development role to create a long term business event plan and program activation. – Cessnock City Council to support midweek business events through the Visitor Economy Grants and Sponsorship Program.
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Investigate a business case for the development of a business events strategy and prospectus working with key industry providers to grow the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Events (MICE) market across the Singleton region and connecting with regional business events.

2.5 Attract outdoor and sports tourism events

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1 – 5 years	Singleton Council Cessnock City Council	Industry, Sporting organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Collaborate with key stakeholders and sports organisations to develop a sports tourism events prospectus to create sports tourism opportunities across the region. This includes continuing to support and grow Australian cycling events within the Hunter Valley and leveraging Hunter Valley golf venues to attract National and International competitions.





ENRICHING THE EXPERIENCE OVERVIEW



The Hunter Valley is internationally renowned as a leading food and wine destination, and the oldest Wine region in Australia. The region's landscape, natural environment, heritage, and proximity to major hubs provide opportunity to diversify and broaden the experience offering to appeal to a range of target markets.

This enables the Hunter Valley region to realise greater potential from its visitor economy, which involves, among other things:

- Reinforcing the destination positioning of The Good Life
- Consideration of contemporary consumer behaviour on travel and the changing motivation, expectation, and barriers to travel
- The balance between hero and supporting experiences
- A landscape approach that offers a diverse range of product development opportunities

The expansion of other experiences and developments such as Hunter Valley Gardens, Crowne Plaza Resort and Hunter Valley Zoo led to significant visitation growth between 2010 and 2013 and has demonstrated that enriching the experience builds the region's offering and visitor economy.

As a study by Harvard Business School found, being customer centric is a commercial imperative: "Between 1999 and 2009, customer centric businesses had 233% growth versus 10% for shareholder centric businesses." This approach should be applied to all aspects of the visitor economy, including continued customer focused experience development and the design of open space for public, private or industry-specific events and leisure pursuits.

Detailed global and domestic trends review (documented in the situational analysis) along with consultation indicates a significant opportunity to broaden experiences across the Hunter Valley region, particularly in growth areas such as nature-based and outdoor activities (including special interests), cultural tourism, health and wellbeing, sustainability and broader food and drink experiences. Opportunity for more immersive, personalised small group experiences is also demonstrated as a growth area.

Initiatives such as new visitor-centric trails and itineraries that respond to these interests, expectations, and motivations of the domestic market (in particular) are of value to the Hunter Valley region along with the promotion and/or development of existing or new products and experiences. As well as showcasing and building on core Hunter Valley strengths, the opportunity comes from enriching the experience with primary focus on the following areas.

Domestic and global research highlights that a key to destination success is the ability to collaborate across sectors, industries and multiple stakeholders, taking a landscape view to develop opportunity. This approach underpins connection and guides effective experience development as well as enabling more remarkable and differentiated storytelling, taking a holistic view to visitor experience and total Hunter Valley visitor economy growth. For example, creating a series of linked cycle trails across the landscape regardless of local government areas boundaries will link villages, town and visitor experiences. It also takes advantage of a growing interest in cycling holidays whether that is by e-bike or traditional push bikes.

ENRICHING THE EXPERIENCE CULTURE ON COUNTRY

Aboriginal culture is the oldest living culture on Earth, and NSW is Australia's most popular state for Aboriginal tourism. The Hunter Valley has a rich cultural heritage on the lands of the Wonnurau/Wannarah people. They have lived in these lands for many thousands of years. There are many sites of significance and meeting places across the Hunter Valley, including in the region's Wollemi and Yengo national parks. The significance of Mount Yengo and Baiame Cave is as sacred to the peoples of the East (the Sunshine people) as to those at Uluru in the Centre.

In 2019, pre COVID, NSW welcomed 514,000 Aboriginal tourism related visitors, a 65% increase from 2014. Two thirds of these visitors were international visitors. 68% of visitors saw any Aboriginal art craft or cultural display while only 18% visited an aboriginal site and 16% visited an Aboriginal gallery. Only 6% visited the Hunter Region.

The ability for local Aboriginal people to show and share their culture and to offer a real connection to place and country is critically important to deepen understanding and preserve the heritage and culture of an area.

Visitors to Australia are increasingly looking for authentic and local experiences that immerse them in the Aboriginal culture of this country and bring the landscape and heritage to life.

The unique Hunter Valley natural landscape and heritage offers the opportunity to provide insight and share the local stories from across the Hunter Valley, from Mount Yengo to Baiame Cave and across the national parks, local meeting places and beyond. Some cultural tourism experiences already exist across the Hunter Valley, though there is opportunity to develop other cultural experiences, activities and tours including discovering rock art, bush tucker and native products, nature trails, fishing, dance, local art, crafts and much more. The opportunity exists for 100% owned Aboriginal operators and for collaboration with other non-Aboriginal experiences.



Strategy

3.1.1 Elevate and champion cultural tourism across the Hunter Valley within the context of preservation, conservation and education

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1 – 2 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	NATOC, Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council, Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation, Wonnarua Local Aboriginal Land Council, Ungoороо Aboriginal Corporation, Kiray Putjung Aboriginal Corporation, Wonnarua Elders Council, Aboriginal Business Advisory Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate collaboration across stakeholders to support the development of cultural tourism through stronger networks across the tourism and Indigenous communities across the Hunter Valley ensuring that conversation, preservation, and education are primary objectives. Support awareness of Aboriginal cultural heritage and tourism across the region. Facilitate the creation of marketing content, collateral and online content that supports local Indigenous tourism in collaboration with key stakeholders.

3.1.2 Identify cultural tourism businesses and experiences

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1 – 2 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	NATOC, Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council, Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation, Wonnarua Local Aboriginal Land Council, Ungooroo Aboriginal Corporation, Kiray Putjung Aboriginal Corporation, Wonnarua Elders Council, Aboriginal Business Advisory Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Identify current Indigenous tourism experiences and products. – Collaborate and network with local Indigenous Businesses including existing and start-up businesses to support increased awareness and visitation.

3.1.3 Facilitate the development of Indigenous tourism businesses across the Hunter Valley

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3 – 5 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	NATOC, Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council, Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation, Wonnarua Local Aboriginal Land Council, Ungooroo Aboriginal Corporation, Kiray Putjung Aboriginal Corporation, Wonnarua Elders Council, Aboriginal Business Advisory Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Collaborate with key stakeholders to support building capacity and growth of established Indigenous businesses.
	DSSN, DNSW, NATOC	Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council, Wonnarua Aboriginal Nation Corporation, Wonnarua Local Aboriginal Land Council, Ungooroo Aboriginal Corporation, Kiray Putjung Aboriginal Corporation, Wonnarua Elders Council, Aboriginal Business Advisory Initiative, Tourism Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Support established Indigenous businesses to become export ready.
	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council, DSSN		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Identify and provide support to access funding channels for development and marketing investment.

Strategy

3.1.4 Facilitate the communication of the cultural heritage of the Hunter Valley

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1 – 2 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	NATOC, DNSW, DSSN, Tourism Australia, Arts Upper Hunter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Facilitate the development of Indigenous Business-related stories to increase awareness, education and understanding of the cultural heritage of the Hunter Valley. – Facilitate access to funding to develop story-telling, education and interpretative initiatives. – Identify and run content and marketing workshops to support effective education and communication. – Collaborate with key stakeholders to promote DNSW and NATOC programs that support the development of cultural tourism businesses.

ENRICHING THE EXPERIENCE NATURE'S PLAYGROUND

The combination of nature tourism and outdoor activities is a growth opportunity across the whole of the Hunter Valley, hence this section, Nature's Playground is focused on the two markets.

Destination NSW defines nature tourism as a market segment around outdoor and nature experiences which includes visiting national and/or state parks, going to botanical gardens, visiting farms, bushwalking, and/or rainforest walks, visiting wildlife parks, zoos and birdwatching as well as visiting beaches. In addition this section associates outdoor activities such as cycling, mountain biking, camping and caravanning and off road adventures, as these are often connected with national and state parks.

Nature based tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors with 56% growth between 2014 and 2019 in NSW. The impact of COVID and climate change has also driven this trend, along with the increase of sustainable tourism and travellers. 11% of NSW domestic overnight and day nature-based visitors visited the Hunter region, and 5% of international nature-based tourism visitors.

The natural landscape of the Hunter Valley offers significant opportunities for growth of nature based and outdoor tourism products and experiences. Home to the world heritage National Parks of Wollemi and Mount Royal as well as Mount Yengo and Werekata National parks and the backdrop of the Brokenback range, the Hunter Valley offers nature travellers an abundance

of outdoor, environmental and cultural experiences as well as the opportunity for eco-tourism and sustainable tourism opportunities.

Lake St Clair Recreation Park along with many other recreational areas and award-winning parks offer all visitors a chance to experience the Australian outdoors from peace and tranquillity to adventure and adrenalin, and from a domestic escape from the city to experiencing the unique and diverse Australian country and bush.

A Deloitte report undertaken for Tourism Australia indicated that nature tourism was the second reason for international visitors to visit regional Australia, but that the biggest barrier was a lack of time. The proximity of the Hunter Valley to Sydney and Newcastle hubs offers a significant advantage for future growth in both domestic and international markets.

The tourism survey undertaken indicated the landscape, natural backdrops, and rural settings as distinct, significant, and unique features for the Hunter Valley, in Wine Country and across the whole region. While global trends indicated the rise of the sustainable traveller looking for destinations which provide low impact travel experiences. The Hunter Valley's natural landscape and nature tourism potential offers an opportunity to differentiate the Hunter Valley from other Australian wine regions, attracting nature, wildlife, cultural, environment and outdoor enthusiasts alike.

Strategy

3.1.5 Facilitate the development of cross promotion between core food and wine experiences and Indigenous businesses

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3 – 5 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	NATOC, DSSN, Indigenous business operators, HVWTA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Create network of cross industry tourism operators to cross promote key strategic experiences across the Hunter Valley.

3.2.1 Promote the current nature-based experiences to increase awareness and position the Hunter Valley as a nature tourism destination

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1 – 2 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	National Parks and Wildlife Service, HVWTA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Audit and document current nature-based experiences and recreational parks to identify hero and supporting nature-based experiences across the Hunter Valley. – Collaborate with key stakeholders to create new content and collateral to promote the current nature-based experiences including across all National Parks within the Hunter Valley region.
3 - 5 years	HVWTA	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council, National Parks and Wildlife Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Collaborate with key stakeholders to develop and promote itineraries that connect nature-based experiences with wine and food experiences to extend stay and increase yield.
1 – 5 years	Singleton Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Execute the Lake St Clair brand and Marketing Plan and brand development to position Lake St Clair as a primitive nature tourism experience in the Hunter Valley, Hunter Region and NSW.

3.2.2 Development of nature-based tourism experiences

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3 – 8 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	National Parks and Wildlife Service, Industry, HVWTA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Collaborate and support nature-based experiences and products to facilitate the growth of new nature based experiences, including sustainable tourism, bushwalking, visiting national and state parks and wildlife experiences.
1-2 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	Department of Planning and Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Inform Industry of the opportunities presented by the changes to farm stay accommodation implemented under the 2022 Agritourism Policy.
3 - 5 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council Industry		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Investigate development and promotion of camping and caravanning opportunities.
3 – 5 years	Cessnock City Council	National Parks and Wildlife Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Work with National Parks and Wildlife Services to improve facilities and increase utilisation of Werekata National Park.
	Singleton Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Continue to improve Lake St Clair Recreational Park as a primitive camping site and day trip destination as detailed in the Lake St Clair Plan of Management to position Lake St Clair as a leading nature tourism experience in the Hunter Valley.
	Cessnock Council, Singleton Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Investigate the development of potential lookouts and scenic viewpoints that allow visitors to enjoy the stunning scenery the Hunter Valley offers. This includes the potential upgrade of the Bimbadeen Lookout.

3.2.3 Facilitate and support growth of sustainable tourism businesses and experiences across the Hunter Valley, to support development of a sustainable destination

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1 - 5 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	HVWTA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate the development of sustainable tourism businesses and experiences across the Hunter Valley.
3 – 5 years		Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate with major industry and the region’s emerging sustainable and renewable energy industries to position the region as progressive and leaders in clean energy. Investigate eco-tourism opportunities across the Hunter Valley region.
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attract sustainable tourism businesses to the region to increase the wellbeing and nature product offering.

3.2.4 Development of outdoor experiences

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3 - 5 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	National Parks and Wildlife Service, Hunter Joint Organisation of Councils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate with stakeholders to identify existing and potential trails for future development. Taking a landscape approach to ensure infrastructure connectivity walking and cycling trails. Cycling trails linking experiences and are in themselves an experience.
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate investment in cycling and walking trails across the Hunter Valley with a focus on a landscape approach to connecting experiences across the region. Facilitate the growth of mountain biking and other biking trials and the Singleton Mason Dieu Trails and experiences including the Singleton Pioneer Park Mountain Bike Trail.

3.2.4 Development of outdoor experiences *(continued)*

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3 - 5 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate and develop walking trails and purpose-built cycling trails to link the towns, villages, wine, and food experiences e.g. Continuation of the shared path from Nulkaba to the Hunter Valley Visitor Information Centre, extension of the Broke shared pathway along Milbrodale Road. Development of a Hunter Valley Cycling Route through the main vineyards areas, from the Pokolbin VIC along Broke Road to Hunter Valley Gardens, from The Vintage on Mc Donalds Road and Deasys Roads, linking up to Hermitage Road and into Singleton and from the Pokolbin VIC to Nulkaba.
1 - 5 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate the development of new outdoor experiences and support growth of existing experiences including but not limited to 4WD, Horse Riding, Segway, ballooning, running trials and others.

3.2.5 Promote and attract outdoor and sports activities in the Hunter Valley

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1- 2 years	HVWTA	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to promote golf tourism across the region and to attract national and international golf tournaments. Create specific outdoor and sports itineraries across the Hunter Valley and promote them across all media channels, including but not limited to horse riding, ballooning, segway, 4WD and cycling.
3 – 5 years	HVWTA	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council, National Parks and Wildlife Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote holiday cycling and day cycle rides from holiday accommodation with connections to other attractions and local visitor centres.
1- 5 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to attract outdoor and sporting events to the region including but not limited to cycling, running, watersports, cricket, rugby, netball and others.

3.2.6 Facilitate the development of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail and Shiraz to Shore Cycling Trails creating major visitor experience and Hunter Cycling Tourism experiences

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3-5 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	Hunter Joint Organisation of Councils, National Parks and Wildlife, Lake Macquarie City Council, Newcastle City Council	– Work in collaboration with the Hunter Joint Organisation of Councils to secure funds, master planning and planning permission to progress the development the Richmond Vale Rail and Shiraz to Shore trails to their fullest potential. Includes the development of a Hunter Cycling Tourism program to grow the cycle tourism opportunity.

ENRICHING THE EXPERIENCE **HEALTH + WELLBEING**

The Hunter Valley’s country landscape, health retreats and day spas combined with wide-open spaces offer visitors the perfect opportunity to rest, recharge and reconnect. This coupled with location allows for a relatively easy drive from major cities so maximum time can be spent focussing on good health and wellbeing.

More than ever people are looking for the chance to unplug, step away from their reality and find a fresh new lease on life. To work on their health and wellbeing post lockdowns and the pandemic and balance their mind, body and spirit. The Hunter Valley is the perfect place to reset and improve their wellbeing.

Tourism Australia defines the top wellness experiences as surrounding yourself in nature; unwinding in picturesque destinations; enjoying a wellness retreat; experiencing a natural spa; going off grid; finding a bit of romance; and visiting a day spa. The Hunter Valley’s product offerings fit perfectly with these themes, set against the stunning backdrop of the Brokenback Range, amongst vineyards and natural landscapes.

The Hunter Valley boasts many retreats, spas and recreational facilities with new experiences being developed that will continue to strengthen the Hunter Valley health and wellbeing offering.

There are also many Airbnb properties which are located all over the Hunter Valley and offer unique experiences that allow visitors to retreat from their usual surroundings.

Existing facilities such as Lake St Clair, award winning playgrounds and other sport and recreational facilities are assets to the region and are valued by the locals as well as having the potential to increase visitation. Activation of open space for recreation can further enhance the Hunter Valley’s product offering. Activities and attractions that offer opportunities to be more active and focus on wellbeing fit well with “The Good Life” positioning. These include playing golf at a championship golf course, hiking up to Mount Bright or Bimbadeen lookout, boating, fishing and camping at Lake St Clair, horse riding, cycling and walking around large attractions such as Hunter Valley Gardens and Hunter Valley Wildlife Park.

The continuous rise of contemporary female travelers, who are more likely to have a higher disposable income and to travel either on their own or in small groups of friends offers opportunity for growth. This market is seeking new and transformative experiences that immerse them into the destination and the local culture.

Strategy

3.3.1 Promoting experiences and accommodation that leverages health and well-being across the Hunter Valley within and beyond the wine region

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1- 2 years	HVWTA	Industry Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate with key stakeholders to develop new and inspiring content to promote health and wellness tourism, including packaging and promoting wellness experiences with accommodation.
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance the promotion of wellness experiences on the Hunter Valley website and promote the Hunter Valley as a wellness destination.

Strategy

3.3.2 Support the development of health and wellbeing experiences across the Hunter Valley

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3 – 5 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the development of new health and wellbeing experiences and products across the Hunter Valley.



**ENRICHING THE EXPERIENCE
MUSIC, ARTS + HERITAGE**

When we think about the perfect pairing, food and wine is best enjoyed when also experiencing music or taking in arts and cultural experiences. Galleries, murals and street art, along with diverse restaurant experiences are a delight for visitors and allow for a deeper, richer experience when visiting the Hunter Valley.

In order to encourage more overnight stays and an increased length of stay it is imperative that we enrich the experience by providing a variety of attractions and experiences.

Drawing on the Roy Morgan Helix persona data which indicates both Cessnock LGA and Singleton LGA attracts a leading lifestyle persona and both LGA's have increased leading lifestyle visitors during COVID. The definition of the Leading lifestyle persona is focused on success, career and family, people in the leading lifestyles community are proud of their prosperity and achievements. They are big spenders and enjoy cultured living to the max, making the provision of more music, arts and heritage a key to success for the Hunter Valley.

Tourism Survey Data Indicates nearly 70% of respondents thought there was opportunity to improve the Hunter Valley's night-time economy. Lack of (or perception of) a vibrant night-time economy and limitations of the food

offering in some parts of the Hunter Valley. Weekday opening nights, a lack of diversity of food offerings, affordable dining options and other night-time experiences were all seen as barriers. Ideas included night-time markets around the region, outdoor cinema experiences, small events and additional mid-range restaurants.

There are opportunities for Councils and industry collaboration to facilitate the development and implementation of activities, balancing of restaurant opening times and wine and food evening experiences should be investigated to improve the night-time economy.

The development of arts, cultural and heritage experiences across the Hunter Valley will enrich the offering to this key audience, as well as attract new audiences. The introduction of several key arts and cultural centres over the coming years as well as key galleries, sculpture walks, gardens and public art programs will enhance the offering for the Hunter Valley further.

The Hunter Valley's rich heritage from Aboriginal culture, to settler and convict history, and the oldest wine region in Australia, celebrating the 200 year bi-centenary in 2028, opens up opportunities for cultural and heritage tourism across the region.

3.4.1 Develop our Night-time Economy

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1-2 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	HVWTA, Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Audit current night-time economy experiences and develop and create digital and print content to promote night-time activities in the Hunter Valley.
		Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaborate with stakeholders and industry to facilitate new night-time experiences. This could include night food markets, outdoor cinema experiences, pop up food experiences, evening wine and entertainment, and music, arts and cultural experiences to develop a seven day night-time economy.
	Industry	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a seven-day night-time economy providing activities that include live music, art shows and a variety of entertainment.
	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create a program to offer small pop-up style outdoors entertainment in the evening activating open spaces.

3.4.2 Develop and promote attractions from the history, heritage and arts offering

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1-2 years	Singleton Council, Cessnock City Council	Historical societies, Aboriginal Organisations, Arts Upper Hunter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Connecting and creating a clear narrative to underpin the arts and cultural experiences. - Develop content including, stories, images and videos to promote the cultural experience.
		Singleton Council	Industry
	Singleton Council, Cessnock City Council	Industry, Historical societies, Aboriginal Organisations, Arts Upper Hunter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote experiences, workshops and masterclasses along with tours that profile arts and culture across the region, including local historian, library and heritage and cultural talks and yarns. - Facilitate collaboration between food and wine experiences and arts and cultural experiences to immerse visitors in new and diverse activities.
	Singleton Council	Arts & Cultural groups, Australian Army Infantry Museum, Singleton Museum, Arts Upper Hunter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote established offerings such as Australian Army Infantry Museum, Singleton Museum and the new Singleton Arts and Cultural Centre as attractions within themselves to specific target audiences, as well as within Hunter Valley itineraries.
	Singleton Council, Cessnock City Council	Local historical societies and heritage organisations, Arts Upper Hunter, Aboriginal organisations and land councils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify and promote the historical stories of local villages including Wollombi, Laguna, Broke, Bulga, Jerrys Plains, Branxton and other areas to encourage new markets to visit the villages and precincts across the Hunter Valley region.

Strategy

3.4.3 Support the development of Music, Arts and Heritage experiences and products across the Hunter Valley Region

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3 – 5 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	HWVTA, Industry, Singleton VIC HV VIC, Arts Upper Hunter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate the development of arts and culture trails across the Hunter Valley linking areas including Wollombi, Broke, Pokolbin, the Singleton Arts and Cultural Centre, and other art and cultural centres across the region.
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To recognise the development and connection of arts and cultural trails across the Hunter region, connecting with Hunter Valley. Collaborate with key arts and cultural stakeholders across the Hunter region to develop regional arts and cultural trails.
	Singleton Council, Performance, Arts Culture, Cessnock		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage local historian, library or theatrical groups to run local history yarns. Promote the concerts at the Performance Arts Culture Cessnock (PACC) and Singleton Civic Centre.
	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	HWVTA, Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the enhancement and development of new and existing music experiences and events across the Hunter Valley, facilitating collaboration across industry and promotion of other experiences.

Strategy

3.4.3 Support the development of Music, Arts and Heritage experiences and products across the Hunter Valley Region (continued)

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3 – 5 years	Singleton Council	Arts Upper Hunter - Local historical societies - Local heritage organisations - Historic sites, buildings and organisations - Local music venues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an online, interactive, and interpretive heritage walk taking in the historic buildings, settler and convict history and stories. Updating the current heritage walk to tell the stories of the people and buildings and paint the picture of Singleton's settler heritage. Investigate and collaborate to re-activate local villages through diverse experiences across arts, culture and heritage, food, wine and nature. Continue to advocate for music, arts and heritage experiences across the Singleton LGA to support existing and develop new organisations and events.

SUSTAINABLE STRENGTHENING OF DEMAND

STRATEGIC MARKETING, VISITOR SERVICING + VISITOR EXPERIENCE

The Hunter Valley has developed a strong brand position around The Good Life, building on its reputation as an internationally known wine region, offering outstanding wine and food experiences. The Hunter Valley is serviced by two well positioned Visitor Information Centres within Wine Country and on the New England Highway as well as a network of information boards and the winecountry.com.au website.

The ability to continue destination marketing through the drought, bushfire and COVID-19 impacts have enabled the region to retain its visitation, and broaden the appeal through improved marketing position and strong intrastate campaigns.

The successes to date should be celebrated, however adopting a long-term strategic approach to sustainably and consistently growing demand remains critical to stay competitive, broaden appeal and visitation and increase yield and expenditure.

The role of the Hunter Valley Wine and Tourism Alliance and the Alliance working group as well as partnerships with local tourism and precinct organisations, chambers of commerce and other key stakeholders will be vital to developing strategic marketing and visitor servicing plans to ensure the customer journey and visitor experience is central.

Addressing the customer's pain points and barriers to visitation need to be addressed collaboratively for the holistic growth of the Hunter Valley visitor economy.

There are three key strategic themes that underpin sustainable strengthening of demand for the Hunter Valley.

- **Visitor services development** – omnichannel distribution to reach and meet the needs and expectations of target audiences – initial focus on owned channels as well as supporting partner/industry channels.
- **Strategic marketing planning** – to guide marketing and communication activity and drive consistency of the perception of the Hunter Valley. It should integrate an overarching content strategy.
- **Visiting Friends & Relatives (VFR) development** – Placing the community at the heart of the destination by developing visiting friends & relatives (VFR) programs and locals campaigns.

STRATEGIC, COLLABORATIVE MARKETING + BRANDING

Marketing competes in the ‘attention economy’, a place where people ignore the ordinary. It needs to make sure the destination gets noticed and to do this, the destination marketing needs to tell a story. A story that makes a destination out-standing at standing-out.

The Good Life brand position has built significant equity for the Hunter Valley. This plan recommends The Good Life position be retained and extended to reflect the future vision of the region. A creative refresh to The Good Life position will ensure it remains internationally competitive, meets the diversity of offering and consumer expectations and supports future markets and growth trends.

The emergence of the Alliance working group during the bushfires and throughout COVID-19 impacts, provides a vital and proven group to develop strategic collaboration across all destination marketing strategy and activity.

Recent destination campaigns have identified the need for greater and more impactful content as well diversity of content and experiences. Recent campaigns have started to address these needs but it is recognised that future campaigns should be informed by brand strategy and a three-year marketing plan.

Collaboration between members of the Alliance working group, other tourism organisations, chambers of commerce, precinct organisations and other key stakeholders to clarify roles across marketing, content and itinerary development will achieve the curation and promotion of more remarkable content that is target market and customer centric.

Taking a strategic approach to development and activation of inspirational and engaging content across all stages of the customer journey, outlined in collaborative marketing plans can increase awareness, consideration and conversion enhancing the visitor experience and attracting new visitors as well as repeat visitation.

Strategy

4.1.1 Undertake a strategic brand review of the Hunter Valley brand

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1 – 2 years	HVWTA	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	– Seek investment to engage an external agency to undertake strategic brand review and develop new creative executions and campaigns to support “The Good Life” as the Hunter Valley brand position.
3 - 5 years			– Create a Hunter Valley brand toolkit available to all of industry, Councils and wider stakeholders.

Strategy

4.1.2 Create a three year destination marketing plan and a rolling 18 month action plan to guide all marketing and marketing-communication activities

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1 – 2 years	HVWTA	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	– Identify and focus on priority target markets, including special-interest markets
			– Identify a balance between owned, earned and bought channels and to reflect the regions positioning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Leverage third party channels through cross-referencing and sharing content – Integrate a proactive PR program – Guide a program of ‘always on’ content.
			– Establish roles and goals of marketing plans for enriching the experience themes and products and how these are incorporated into the destination marketing plan.
			– Continue the evolution of fresh and new marketing content and promotion as the experience offering of the region, including celebrating the opening of new visitor-related infrastructure or the revitalisation of existing attractions. These should also be a focus for public relations (PR).

4.1.3 Develop an integrated content strategy for multichannel distribution

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1 – 2 years	HVWTA	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Develop a destination content calendar for year-round distribution with content that is relevant to the season, events program and other date or season-specific events and activities, family market content and content relating to the night-time economy.
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Create a content matrix or framework to prioritise the creation of new content and curate existing content that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Reinforces the brand identity, narrative and positioning – Supports ‘always on’ content demand, core themes and seasonal storylines as well as marketing campaign activities, visitor servicing and PR – Encourages increased length of stay by providing pre-arrival inspiration and information, especially for event participants. – Continuously update the content calendar three to six months in advance to enable sufficient time for preparing content in line with storylines while also enabling flexibility to address emerging news or information. This includes content created for markets such as the family market.
3 – 5 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	HVWTA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Update Hunter Valley imagery, video and content to include landscape images and connections between food and wine and nature experiences.
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Identify enriching the experience content themes and associated gaps in existing content across all customer journey touchpoints. Develop nature, arts & culture and wellness content and imagery ensuring landscape images and connections between food & wine and enriching the experience themes.

4.1.4 Continue to develop and rollout a multi-year destination marketing campaign that evolves from growing destination brand awareness to driving conversion of bookings (campaign phases)

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1 – 5 years	HVWTA	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Develop a campaign strategy that utilises the positioning of The Good Life to create positive consideration content to encourage visitors to choose the Hunter Valley region over competitors. – Bring the campaign to life through high quality creative assets and execution that enables flexibility to evolve in line with the campaign phases. – Prepare and promote co-opt marketing campaign prospectus that invites the local industry to be part of and contribute to the campaign while also delivering outcomes directly to their business (eg targeted mini digital media campaigns utilising the campaign creative assets). – Develop a program to promote and profile facilities for digital nomads or remote working, including within local accommodation providers and co-working hubs as well as a guide to mobile connectivity across the region. – Develop content, materials and events programs that communicate what to do with families across all product offerings and experiences including food and wine, arts and culture, museums, picnics, parks, outdoor adventure, walks, towns and villages.

4.1.5 Identify investment streams and funding to ensure sustainable support for Hunter Valley destination marketing

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1 – 5 years	HVWTA	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Identify and activate investment streams and funding to create a sustainable and ongoing plan that supports consistent, long term destination marketing for the Hunter Valley region.

VISITOR SERVICING

An opportunity for the Hunter Valley region identified in the research and resulting from the highly competitive marketing and grant funding environment that followed COVID-19, is to lift its awareness, perception, and appeal to attract higher-yield markets as well as extend the stay and spend of visitors, including through greater regional dispersal. For example, average overnight visitor stay in Hunter Valley is 2.55 nights while the average overnight stay across regional NSW is 3.3 nights. Overall, the Hunter Valley will need to elevate its demand driving activities through marketing and visitor services that address touchpoints along the visitor or customer journey.

Research indicates that visitor information, both in-destination and out-of-destination, is a critically important factor in delivering a positive visitor experience. A positive visitor experience, particularly when ‘in destination’, is important to generate:

- **Wider visitor dispersal throughout the region:** “85% of leisure travellers decide on activities only after having arrived at the destination” (Source: Google Research)
- **Higher visitor yield:** The more they see and do, the more they spend.
- **Increased levels of repeat visitation:** Happy visitors are more likely to be repeat visitors.
- **More destination recommendations:** Happy visitors are more vocal advocates of a region.

With competition for new visitors intensifying dramatically post COVID-19, destinations need to make certain that their current visitors enjoy a positive experience. The right visitor servicing strategy and content will contribute to achieving this goal.

In short, the visitor services strategy is about putting visitor inspiration back into visitor information and finding new ways to deliver the right information, to the right people, at the right time.

In today’s world, a significant opportunity is the gap in the customer journey between when visitors book their accommodation or flights and when they arrive in-destination. It is during this stage that many people should be considering what they will pack or do, including hospitality options. Given staffing shortages and other challenges faced by local businesses, it means restaurant or local tour bookings often need to be made in advance or advice provided on opening hours. This is also critical for participants in events who often arrive unprepared.

Identifying the roles that the Councils have in delivering visitor services should be determined as a part of the Governance model moving forward (Primary Enabler). Addressing this gap is beneficial for multiple reasons, including improved customer satisfaction through to regional dispersal and increasing length of stay. It also provides an opportunity for further collaboration between the two Councils, HVWTA and local businesses, including tourism operators, event organisers and hospitality providers.

Strategy

4.2.1 Undertake a visitor services review

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1-2 years	Hunter Valley Alliance Working Group	Hunter Valley Visitor Information Centre (Cessnock City Council), Singleton Visitor Information Centre (Singleton Council), HVWTA	– Undertake a visitor services review (VSR) that meets the needs and expectations of target audiences and across all customer touchpoints from face-to-face to digital channels. It should support multichannel distribution of content, provide an activation roadmap (see Strategy 4.2.2 below) and consider business partnership opportunities.
	HVWTA	Hunter Valley Visitor Information Centre (Cessnock City Council), Singleton Visitor Information Centre (Singleton Council)	– Undertake a review of the Hunter Valley website to identify improvements in performance as well as gaps or areas for further enhancement. Considerations include the customer journey from awareness to advocacy, the quality of the user experience (UX) as well as the opportunity to integrate mapping, new content utilising various formats and e-commerce functionality.



Strategy

4.2.2 Develop an activation roadmap for visitor services that is part of the visitor services review

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3-5 years	Hunter Valley Visitor Information Centre (Cessnock City Council), Singleton Visitor Information Centre (Singleton Council)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the roles of the Visitor Information Centres. Identify the how the VIC staff can add more value to the visitor. This could be through a fee-paying service of creating and booking bespoke experiences beyond the normal expected service a VIC would normally offer.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evolve the two VIC's towards a 'concept store' for the region, profiling the best of regional products and produce, making it the go-to place to start an immersive journey into and across the region. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commence by reviewing and continuing to enhance the current retail strategy for the VIC's. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider opportunities to provide value-added services, such as tailored itineraries, selling local produce 'packs' and profiling local artists and artisans. 			
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance the appeal of the VIC's hubs to the local community as a place to meet and find out more about their own backyard, especially useful for when their out-of-town (VFR) guests arrive.

Strategy

4.2.3 Investigate a Hunter Valley Multiple Attractions (HVMA) ticket that permits unlimited entry to any of Hunter Valley attractions

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1-2 years	Hunter Valley Visitor Information Centre (Cessnock City Council), Singleton Visitor Information Centre (Singleton Council)	Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage up selling of experiences by creating a commission system e.g. Attraction pays 10% to referrer or sells Attraction tickets to accommodation providers at a discounted bulk rate. Offer local residents a discount on the HVMA ticket or an annual subscription that that can used at any time throughout the year, including but not exclusively when they bring guests from out of town.

Strategy

4.2.4 Create inspiring, experientially-led itineraries and trails

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1-2 years	Hunter Valley Visitor Information Centre (Cessnock City Council), Singleton Visitor Information Centre (Singleton Council), DNSW	HV VIC Singleton VIC, DNSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create or curate inspiring, experientially-led itineraries and trails, including development of stories that connect experiences and attractions to core themes as well as for special interest markets, including integrating existing sites identified on trail maps. Develop itineraries such as entry to the Hunter Valley via Route 33 or Putty Road to showcase the best drives the Hunter Valley has that take visitors off the beaten track to discover quaint villages and hidden gems and promote through Destination NSW Drive Tourism program.

Strategy

4.2.5 Develop trails and itineraries based on target market personas

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1-2 years	HVWTA		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Develop target market personas to enable a visitor-centric approach to the development of trails and itineraries that resonate with current and potential future target markets.

Strategy

4.2.6 Promote and sell accommodation and experiences

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1-5 years	Hunter Valley Visitor Information Centre (Cessnock City Council), Singleton Visitor Information Centre (Singleton Council)	HVWTA, Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Work with industry to create, promote and sell diverse and engaging experiences via the Hunter Valley website and within the Visitor Centres. – Work with industry to sell accommodation via the Hunter Valley website and within the Visitor Centres. – Provide experience booking data to industry for the purpose of improving the visitor experience and meeting market expectations.

Strategy

4.2.7 Communicate options prior to guest arrival

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1-2 years	Industry, Hunter Valley Visitor Information Centre and Singleton Visitor Information Centre	Short term rental accommodation (STRA) providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Hotels and hosts send visitor information, restaurant and experience options (upsell) to guests prior to their arrival. – Encourage the STRA properties to distribute the Visitor Guide to people staying in the Hunter Valley.

Strategy

4.2.8 Engage with guest post trip to gauge feedback and encourage repeat visitation

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1-2 years	HVWTA, Hunter Valley Visitor Information Centre (Cessnock City Council), Singleton Visitor Information Centre (Singleton Council)	STRA, Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Develop post trip communications that present guests with options to purchase Hunter Valley products via Ecommerce. – Maximise opportunities for Wine Clubs with wine delivery options specifically designed for people who have visited. These may include an introductory special. – Implement a series of special offers to guests for future trips, presenting them with different experiences for their next trip. – Regularly send out customer satisfaction surveys to guests who have stayed in the Hunter Valley to gauge user experience and satisfaction.

VISITING FRIENDS + RELATIVES (VFR), GROWTH MARKETS, INCLUSIVE TOURISM CAMPAIGN + STRATEGY

The visiting friends and relatives (VFR) market is generally a very unloved market and yet it has been identified in our consultation and research as a significant market. There is a perception that the VFR market will happen regardless of any input from tourism business, organisations or Councils and this is simply not the case.

A strategic approach is required to plan and advertise targeted campaigns inviting the VFR market to partake in all the Hunter Valley has to offer. From locals discounts midweek in restaurants or at attractions, to event dates, and various other experiences on offer. There is a big opportunity to tap into a market that is literally already here and encourage them to have such fabulous experiences that when their friends and relatives are visiting and looking for something to do, the Hunter Valley and all its products and experiences are top of mind.

Councils will work with tourism operators in the Hunter Valley to look at adapting their product offering to be accessible and inclusive for all people. This may be in relation to access to concerts and event venues, ease of parking, entry and suitable viewing areas within, activities such as balloon flights and presenting visitor information in audio formats to promote ease of movement throughout attractions. Councils may work with NSW Government on grants available to develop accessible tourism and ensure planning considers and enables all people to participate in the visitor economy.



Strategy

4.3.1 Create a locals campaign

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1-2 years	HVWTA	Singleton Council Cessnock City Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Create a locals campaign to educate local residents on all tourism experiences available, this could also be targeted to the Visiting Friends and Relatives market (VFR) and should be leveraged off the Hunter Valley's The Good Life campaign.

Strategy

4.3.2 Develop a marketing plan that includes the VFR market

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1-2 years	Hunter Valley Visitor Information Centre (Cessnock City Council), Singleton Visitor Information Centre (Singleton Council), Industry	HV VIC Singleton VIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Develop a media plan in line with budget to target VFR market. – Create marketing and information targeted specifically to families for the visiting friends and relatives market and the wider target audiences. Offer to include Hunter Valley Gardens, Lake St Clair, Hunter Valley Wildlife Park, picnic facilities, parks, playgrounds, workshops, events and family friendly accommodation and food and drink options.

Strategy

4.3.3 Investigate low impact RV parking

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3-4 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Investigate low impact RV parking in rural areas (planning approvals, laws). – Work with showgrounds and public parks to improve facilities available.

Strategy

4.3.4 Assist industry to improve inclusive tourism offerings across the Hunter Valley

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3-5 years	Cessnock City Council	Singleton Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure grant funding opportunities that help operators and develop infrastructure that supports accessible tourism for example Accessible Balloon flights. Engage with Disability Service Providers to identify accessible and inclusive tourism opportunities. Communicate accessible and inclusive tourism opportunities to Industry.
	Hunter Valley Visitor Information Centre, Singleton Visitor Information Centre		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop audio visitor information.
	Industry, HVWTA	Hunter Valley Visitor Information Centre, Singleton Visitor Information Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide multi-language visitor information, including within websites.
1 - 2 years	Singleton Council, Cessnock City Council	HVWTA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote accessible tourism offerings on a dedicated page of the wine country website Increase the number of Member categories showing accessible friendly businesses in the Hunter Valley Visitors Guide

Strategy

4.3.5 Develop low-fee public tourism products to complement the existing attractions

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3-5 years	Singleton Council, Cessnock City Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve public tourism infrastructure. Complete HV VIC Park construction. Upgrade Werakata National Park signage and visitor maps. Connect the HV VIC to Cessnock via a shared pathway. Complete the Richmond Vale Rail Trail project and Shiraz to Shore Cycleway. Implement the Macnamara Park Masterplan. Improve the facilities at Branxton RV Park. Promote existing community parks and picnic areas. Promote free and low cost camping options. Promote drive tourism that encourages dining and retail expenditure.

Strategy

4.3.6 Improve private tourism infrastructure

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3-4 years	Industry		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Benchmark for continual improvement. Encourage customer feedback for continual improvement and refinement of the product offering.

Strategy

4.3.7 Improve town and village walks and walking infrastructure

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3 - 5 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop walking pathways, seating and shaded areas to allow connection across towns and villages and improved actions to visitor facilities, experiences and attractions.

PRIORITY PROJECTS + ACTIONS PRIMARY ENABLERS

GOVERNANCE

Governance, collaboration, and partnerships

Good governance, collaboration and partnerships are critical success factors in the growth of the visitor economy, along with clarification of roles, responsibilities and priorities.

The Hunter Valley Wine and Tourism Alliance was formed in 2015 between the Hunter Valley Wine & Tourism Association and the two Councils (Cessnock City Council and Singleton Council), with the purpose of working together for the promotion, advancement, and development of the Hunter Valley Wine Country region.

The purpose of the Alliance is to:

- Achieve unity between stakeholders and speak with one voice
- Increase visitation
- Attract appropriate levels of funding to progress agreed actions
- Facilitate product and industry development
- Advocate/Lobby on behalf of the tourism industry
- Provide advice and guidance to stakeholders seeking to grow the visitor economy

With the impacts of drought, bushfire, COVID-19 and flooding an Alliance working group was formed led by Destination Sydney Surrounds North to address the immediate response, recovery and resilience needs of the visitor economy and tourism industries across the Hunter Valley.

This working group has been very successful in securing grant funding (over \$8m), increasing impactful destination and local marketing, industry support and development, and workforce support. Building on the relationship between the Alliance members is an opportunity for further growth of the Hunter Valley visitor economy by working collectively on the actions within the DMP. This will allow for a strategic approach in delivering priority projects, joint strategic projects and DMP actions that will elevate and reinforce the Hunter Valley as a must visit destination for domestic and international markets, competing on a world stage.

Building from the destination strengths of wine and food, events and natural landscape and taking a holistic approach to enrich and diversify experiences to increase visitors, yield and length of stay will require the strengthening of partnerships across the visitor economy.

Alliance strategic partners include but not limited to:

- Destination Sydney Surrounds North
- Destination NSW
- Hunter Joint Organisation
- Hunter Valley Culinary Association
- NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPSW)
- Local Land Councils
- Aboriginal organisations
- NATOC
- Key Heritage, Arts and Sports Organisations as identified as relevant to strategic development and priorities projects.

Strategy

5.1.1 Review Hunter Valley Wine and Tourism Alliance terms of reference

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1 – 2 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	HVWTA	- Review the Hunter Valley Wine and Tourism Alliance terms of reference, following the impacts of recent economic shocks, and the need to enrich the destination experience to achieve increased visitation, yield and length of stay. Allowing for ongoing unity between stakeholders as well as collaboration across the wider Hunter Valley destination.

Strategy

5.1.2 To identify clear roles and responsibilities across key stakeholders

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1 – 3 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	HVWTA, Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	- Clarify roles and responsibilities across the Alliance member organisations, as well as develop the ongoing role of the Alliance working group in the delivery of the DMP actions.
		Cessnock City Council, HVWTA	- Continue to support the tourism industry by delivering services under the HVWTA and Cessnock City Council tourism service agreement.
		Singleton Council, HVWTA	- To review the opportunity for a HVWTA and Singleton Council partnership agreement.

Strategy

5.1.3 To develop network and partnerships across other tourism sectors to support the core theme of enriching the experience

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3 – 5 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	Tourism organisations, Aboriginal organisations, Nature related organisations, Industry, HVWTA, Hunter Culinary Association	- Strengthen the focus on collaboration and identify new opportunities for industry and other partners for inclusion at destination-level, including co-opt marketing campaigns, industry development campaigns and event support.

GATEWAYS + SENSE OF ARRIVAL

Every destination has its own unique natural features, significant tourist attractions, places to visit or cultural experiences that appeal to visitors. To create and highlight these places and experiences through destination marketing means more potential visitors will become more likely to travel to the destination and boost the visitor economy by spending more in the local tourism industry.

Gateways into Cessnock and Singleton LGA's are underdeveloped and as such do not create the desired visitor experience. Providing facilities such as toilets and EV charging bays at key locations such as parks close to the CBD's will greatly improve the spend in those town centres and visitor satisfaction levels as their needs are met. Cessnock Central Business District could be reinvigorated by activating underutilised sites improving public owned assets and creating a green corridor as per the Cessnock Public Domain Plan.

Consultation with key industry stakeholders has highlighted the need to enhance the sense of arrival into the Hunter Valley to position it as a contemporary, forward-thinking region that leverages its proud history to create an even brighter future. Changes to entry points at key locations on the periphery of the LGA's should elevate the perception of the region while being unifying in a way that puts the destination on the must-go list for domestic and international markets.

To date we have created varying signage, and wayfinding tools to direct our visitors to the main tourism areas however more can be done to elevate the entrance to the main towns of Cessnock and Singleton and significantly enhance the sense of arrival into the Hunter Valley, which will also encourage visitors to stop and spend some time and more importantly spend their money, in our town centres.

Strategy

5.2.1 Review and update visitor gateways and signage to create a sense of arrival and support visitor experience

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
Ongoing	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	HVWTA - Local tourism and historical organisations - Aboriginal organisations - Art, cultural and heritage organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to roll out the Hunter Valley Signage Strategy and review and update existing signage to ensure accurate maps and locations are on display. Continue to update visitor, tourism and attractions signage across both LGAs.

Strategy

5.2.2 Northern Hermitage Road Gateway Sculpture Project

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1 – 3 years	Singleton Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To complete the Northern Hermitage Road Gateway Sculpture project as a northern entry to Wine Country, along with signage to improve the northern gateway to Hermitage Road.

Strategy

5.2.3 Progress the Cessnock Public Domain Plan

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
Ongoing	Cessnock City Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce post-top street lighting as a secondary layer where there are no awnings to establish a pedestrian-oriented street character. A hierarchy of lighting levels should also be introduced to encourage activation after dark: Feature uplighting to street trees, additional illumination in alfresco dining areas, etc. Retain existing street trees - Infill with trees where gaps are present along street. Infill understory planting to greater densities.

Strategy

5.2.4 Update the Cessnock Public Domain Plan

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
5+ years	Cessnock City Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Review the future needs of the Cessnock community considering population growth. – Create a CBD that is vibrant, welcoming and attractive to residents and visitors. – Develop a central meeting place where access, parking and activities are integrated into the shopping experience – combining retail, dining and entertainment within a short walk to the CBD.

Strategy

5.2.5 Develop the Apex Park Gateway in Cessnock

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3-5 years	Cessnock City Council	Mindaribba Local Area Land Council Hunter Water Regional NSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Complete the community consultation for the Apex Park Masterplan.
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Update the Apex Park design following community feedback and seek Council approval for the Masterplan.
		Hunter Water Regional NSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Collaborate with Hunter Water and Regional NSW in seeking funding to construct the Apex Park Design.
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Construct the Apex Park design.

Strategy

5.2.6 Develop a Socio-economic Activation Plan to support visitor economy growth in the Singleton region of the Hunter Valley

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1 - 5 years	Singleton Council	HVWTA, Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council, Business Singleton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Develop and implement socio-economic programs to develop Singleton as a destination with reasons to stop. This action supports visitor economy growth and addresses impacts and opportunities related to the Singleton Bypass, including the redevelopment of precincts within the town centre, increasing visitation and expenditure, and connectivity to villages, key visitor precincts, experiences and attractions across the Hunter Valley.

Strategy

5.2.7 Continue to develop the Townhead Park Precinct, Singleton as a place to stop and visit

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1 - 5 years	Singleton Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Continue to develop and enhance the Townhead Park Precinct and the Singleton Arts and Cultural Centre as a Gateway to the northern end of the Hunter Valley in accordance with the Townhead Park Precinct Masterplan.

Strategy

5.2.8 Work with Newcastle Airport to ensure the Hunter Valley is connected to the airport as it develops as an international gateway

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3 – 5 years	Singleton Council Cessnock City Council	Newcastle Airport, Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council, HVWTA, DSSN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Collaborate with Newcastle Airport and other key stakeholders to ensure that the development of the airport as an international gateway is connected to the Hunter Valley.

CAPACITY, CAPABILITY + INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS

Underpinning the success of the DMP is remaining informed, visitor- centric and future-focused. However, collaboration and ensuring that the visitor economy is viewed as a significant and important contributor to a vibrant economy and liveability are also critical. The actions below bring focus to these core principles while recognising that sometimes the little things make the biggest difference.

Strategy

5.3.1 Strengthen collaboration across local government boundaries

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3-5 years	Singleton Council, Cessnock City Council	Destination NSW, DSSN, Hunter JO, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Forestry Corporation NSW, Arts Upper Hunter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Strengthen relationships and networks to achieve investment attraction; experience development; building industry capability and destination marketing for experiences that extend across the regional landscape. – Continue to strengthen collaboration with the Hunter Valley Wine & Tourism Alliance, Destination NSW (DNSW) and Destination Sydney Surrounds North (DSSN). – Strengthen relationships with National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), Forestry Corporation NSW (FCNSW) and other nature-based organisations. – Continue to work with the Hunter Joint Organisation and 10 Member Councils on key visitor economy projects including the Accelerating Events Economy (A2E). – Establish a network of Arts & Cultural organisations and industry.

Strategy

5.3.2 Strengthen industry engagement and network by launching and implementing industry development programs

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3-5 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	HVWTA, Business Chambers, Arts Upper Hunter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Investigate and implement product and experience development programs, to support the enhancement of existing and the creation of new experiences, products and events across visitor economy industries, with a focus on the key strategic priorities within the Hunter Valley Destination Management Plan. – Investigate new business incubator programs as well as business mentoring tailored to suit the needs of each business and their stage in the business cycle.
	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	Business Chambers, Aboriginal organisations, Arts Upper Hunter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Work with and support the Business Chambers, Aboriginal owned and managed enterprises, events and creative industries to expand the offering of the region. – Undertake discover discussion sessions to identify the barriers, challenges and co-design a model to support Aboriginal owned and managed enterprises, events, and creative industries to expand the offering of the region.
	HVWTA		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Continue to invest in industry development and induction training that supports Hunter Valley businesses, staff and community.
	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Develop digital content to attract jobseekers to the Tourism Industry and promote the Hunter Valley as a great place to live and work.
	Singleton Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Collaborate with local industry and regional providers to continue to attract industry skills programs to Singleton.

Strategy

5.3.3 Attract investment, including grant funding

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3-5 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council, HVWTA		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Identification of appropriate grant fund programs and the ongoing application to appropriate grant funds to support key tourism related projects.
	HVWTA	DNSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Continue to seek funding for destination marketing.
	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	DSSN DNSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Support to local businesses and precincts to apply for grants that can assist them grow, revitalise or enhance their experience or offering. This involves ongoing liaison with DSSN as the key regional partner and conduit to DNSW. – Advocate to NSW Government for increased tourism investment.

Strategy

5.3.4 Accommodation - The Hunter Valley is home to a broad cross section of accommodation offering. However, there is also an opportunity to revitalise the older accommodation stock to meet the needs of the evolving market such as the digital nomad market and also the changing businesses market

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3-5	Singleton Council, Cessnock City Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Develop an accommodation strategy for the Hunter Valley to identify the accommodation gaps in context of future demand for eco-tourism accommodation and the growth in the digital nomad and business market.
	Singleton Council, Cessnock City Council	Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Undertake a review of the older 1950 – 1990 motel stock and develop a program with access to: – Gather research on the growing trends of the digital nomad and business market and access to creative ways to upgrade their motels when they are refurbishing their motels to meet the needs of the market. – Gain insights on the growth of digital technology for motel/hotel, check –in and check-out, room access, and room service. – Understand the role of specialised customer service to meet the needs of the guest. – Guest experience development program to improve the guest experiences and to also increase yield and length of stay.

Strategy

5.3.5 Support the development of export ready products across the Hunter Valley

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1-5 years	HVWTA	Tourism Australia, DNSW, ATEC, Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Continue to build on the number of international and export ready products utilising TA's events and working on development, education and capacity building through ATEC and DNSW. – Encourage Industry to utilise the Tourism Export Toolkit (TEXT) which can be found at australia.com/exporttoolkit and helps answer rate structure, travel distribution system, customs of travellers and marketing questions. – Work with Industry to co-ordinate and host famils for frontline sellers of export ready products in the Hunter Valley through the Aussie Specialist Program. – Continue to develop Hunter Valley's presence at the Australian Tourism Exchange to ensure Hunter Valley is within the international visitor consideration set. Including the investigation into an ongoing business development role for international trade. – Continue to develop programs to support Hunter Valley product exports, with a focus on wine and other leading products, to enhance and grow industry trade of Hunter Valley products.

Strategy

5.3.6 Facilitate education and development of sustainable businesses practices to support the future growth and resilience across the Hunter Valley region

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3 - 5 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Identify and communicate sustainable practices within the visitor economy/tourism industry sectors, including workshops and industry education to support the increase of sustainable practices. – Promote circular economy stories from local businesses to demonstrate the sustainable development of the region and educate businesses on circular economy practices. – Facilitate education that aid tourism businesses to develop net zero and sustainable business practices.

CONNECTIVITY ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE

Elevating the Hunter Valley as a world class and diverse destination will require a landscape approach connecting across the region as well as continuing to strengthen Hunter Valley Wine Country.

Connectivity refers to a number of core primary enablers that will develop a cohesive and inclusive approach to the development of the Hunter Valley visitor economy including:

- Adopt a broader landscape scale approach to strategic planning and infrastructure development to elevate the visitor experience across the whole of the region.
- Advocate and drive for new technology and digital solutions to address the significant blackspots and digital connectivity issues across the region, to allow for technology that matches visitor expectations.
- A whole of government approach to transport within and to the region, including direct links with Newcastle.
- Implement design-thinking in infrastructure and facility development to meet the needs of future customers (being customer-centric).

Reference Hunter Regional Plan 2041

Transport links and region connectivity have been raised as a key issue and challenge to future visitor economy growth. Around 90% of visitors to the region arrive by private vehicle, with very few public transport options open to visitors to travel to the Hunter Valley. In region transport links between experiences, activities and accommodation is also limited outside of organised tours.

The upgrades to Newcastle Airport and the potential as an international hub, bring significant advantages to increase interstate and international visitation, however focus on the development of transport links and the last mile support for visitors is crucial to growth of visitation. The cruise terminal in Newcastle also opens up significant opportunities for tours and day visits to the Hunter Valley.

Strategy

5.4.1 Adopt a landscape scale approach to strategic planning and infrastructure projects

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1-2 years	Cessnock City Council Singleton Council	Tourism Australia, DNSW, ATEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify key landscape projects that require cross Council collaboration to deliver, including cycling projects, working towards the delivery of key identified projects between 2024 and 2030. Continue to improve and upgrade key visitor roads and cycling and walking trails to ensure visitor expectations and experience is met.
1-3 years	Singleton Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete the Vineyards and Rural Tourism Strategy for the Singleton local government area which identifies tourism nodes and precincts for development across the Singleton local government area.
1-2 years	Cessnock City Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete the Vineyards District Local Character Statement (LCS) project comprising of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Cessnock Vineyards District Planning Proposal Cessnock Vineyards District Development Control Plan The LCS for the Vineyards District contains specific objectives, controls and existing and future character statements to give effect to standards for new development. The LCS will be afforded legislative weight through a local clause in the Local Environmental Plan (LEP). This means that its contents must be considered when Council plans or assesses development in the Cessnock Vineyards District.
1-2 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	NSW Department of Planning and Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educate local Agritourism businesses on the 2022 NSW Agritourism Policy and how local businesses can grow agritourism visitor experiences and accommodation.

Strategy

5.4.2 Improve digital connectivity and reduce blackspots

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3 – 5 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	HVWTA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for improved digital connectivity across the region, working with key industry partners on opportunities for improved solutions that increase digital services and reduce blackspots.
1 – 2 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with industry partners for education on digital technology solutions to improve local solutions.

Strategy

5.4.3 Newcastle Airport International Gateway Development

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3 – 8+ years	Newcastle Airport	DSSN, HVWTA, Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and develop connectivity projects between the Newcastle Airport International Gateway to increase international visitation and yield across the Hunter Valley and its diverse experiences.

Strategy

5.4.4 Improve transport connectivity links

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
5 years +	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council and Hunter Joint Organisation	DSSN Transport for NSW, Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	– Collaborate across whole of government to investigate infrastructure and public transport options to improve connectivity links across the region, including transport links between Newcastle Airport and the Hunter Valley.
Ongoing	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	Transport NSW	– Advocate for improved public transport links across the region with key service providers to continue to increase opportunities for visitor transport links.
1 – 5 years	Singleton Council	Transport NSW	– Collaborate with Transport NSW to ensure wayfaring signage, Singleton locations and key Hunter Valley precincts and attractions are well signposted.

Strategy

5.4.5 Improve connectivity with Newcastle Cruise Terminal

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1 – 2 years	HVWTA	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council, Regional NSW, Newcastle Cruise Terminal	– Identify and develop programs and packages to connect Cruise ship visitors with tours and experiences across the Hunter Valley. Consider developing bespoke experience to attract the HVT cruise (high value traveller) market.

Strategy

5.4.6 Improve in region connectivity links

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3 – 5 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council	HVWTA, Industry	– Investigate programs to attract new businesses and operators with innovative new transport options that can address the intra destination challenges and unlock greater visitor transport options.
	Cessnock City Council		– Undertake a project to identify the public transport needs across the region and recommend solutions. – Investigate public transport across the region and funding options.
			– Review major events transport and impacts for traffic flow solutions.

Strategy

5.4.7 Promote travel options to visitors to enhance experiences

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1 – 2 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Audit travel options and create content to better promote availability.
1 – 2 years	Singleton Council	HVWTA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Promote the Hunter Valley Wine Train Experience.
3 – 5 years	Singleton Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Advocate for more frequent and regular 7 day week train services to Singleton.

Strategy

5.4.8 Develop Electric Vehicle charging network and promote stations across the Hunter Valley

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
1 – 5 years	Cessnock City Council, Singleton Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Secure funding for Electric Vehicle (EV) to install EV charging stations at key points across the region. – EV planning across Councils to create digital map of EV charging stations. – Investigate other EV solutions such as electric scooter and electric bike programs.

Strategy

5.4.9 Develop Cessnock Airport Terminal

Timeframe	Lead Responsibility	Key Stakeholders	Actions
3-5 years	Cessnock City Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Complete the Cessnock Airport Upgrade Project which includes an all-weather approach system, additional lighting, new parking areas, additional helicopter landing pads and improved firefighting capabilities. – Seek funding for the Cessnock Airport Terminal Upgrade. – Upgrade Cessnock Airport Terminal to provide a better user experience for customers. – Ensure Council has enough land available for airport tourism operators.



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