VISITOR SERVICING RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT

TOURISM CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

Devil's Marbles

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tourism Central Australia (TCA) operates a multi-award winning visitor information service in Central Australia, with the Alice Springs Visitor Information Centre (VIC) as the service hub. In the context of increasing use of digital technology for travel planning and bookings and declining funding for VICs, TCA wants to ensure its visitor servicing model remains valued by visitors and industry stakeholders.

TCA has commissioned this Visitor Servicing Recommendations Report to gain independent advice on visitor services and facilities and location options to deliver best practice in visitor servicing. The recommendations are informed by extensive industry engagement and a desktop review including best practice VIC case studies.

Relocating the Alice Springs VIC is recommended to better service visitor markets to Alice Springs Co-location with a complementary attraction would provide more reasons to use the VIC and improve the visitor experience. A series of criteria are put forward to assess possible locations.

Forming a regional network of VICs for Central Australia and taking a multi-channel approach are also recommended for TCA's visitor servicing. There are many touchpoints on the visitor journey to and through Central Australia that can be used to encourage regional dispersal and spend. These include rest stops, roadhouses and tourism businesses. The TCA website and social media are important online touchpoints for visitor engagement that require upgrading to better meet visitor needs.

The introduction of smart technologies such as Virtual and Augmented Reality is highlighted as an increasingly popular way of attracting visitors to VICs and other touchpoints and providing an enthralling and fun way to learn about what the area offers.

A series of supporting actions are identified as important enablers for the delivery of best practice visitor servicing in Central Australia and a single governance structure for the VIC network is recommended.

TCA will undertake a business feasibility analysis as the next step in advancing the recommendations agreed upon by the TCA Board.

Image: Royal Flying Doctor Service Alice Springs Tourist Facility

Image: Uluru Cultural Centre

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Visitor Servicing Recommendations Report is to provide Tourism Central Australia (TCA) an understanding of best practice visitor servicing in Central Australia. TCA is seeking a contemporary, financially sustainable and value-producing approach to visitor information provision that meets visitor needs, increases regional dispersal and yield and represents the full Central Australia footprint. This report assesses visitor services, facilities and locations and provides recommendations to optimise TCA's visitor servicing.

RATIONALE

- TCA understands the rapid adoption of digital technology is changing the way visitors plan and book travel. Before they arrive and then when they are in the region, visitors have a variety of opportunities to gain information and engage with the tourism industry. Visitor engagement solutions are required that respond to visitors' changing needs and wants and their growing expectation of staying connected through digital technology.

- There is no single formula for a successful VIC as the dynamics of each destination and the location of individual VICs all play a role. VICs must leverage the strengths of the destination and present a visitor-centric approach where the VIC is a 'must see' place to visit, to learn, to book, to buy, to download, to recharge, and to talk with a welcoming and informative local.

- Whether through new technology or via face-to-face contact, there is an opportunity to influence visitors' decisions regarding what they experience during their visit, their length of stay and what they tell others about their stay.

- VICs have an opportunity to provide services and facilities that meet the expectations of visitors for credible and trusted sources of information. Visitors want local insights into the area, unique information they can't get anywhere else to add value to their experience in the destination and to confirm information and affirm decisions.

- VICs are transforming from being information centres to experience centres that reflect the local culture, are attractive places for visitors to gather and give visitors a taste of what the destination offers through interactive displays and immersive activities.

- Visitor services are moving beyond only a bricks and mortar VIC approach of delivery and proactively reach out to visitors using the method of delivery by which the visitor prefers to be engaged.

- The role and services of the VIC as a touch point for visitors across the trip purchase or decision cycle (Dream, Plan, Book, Experience and Advocate) must be clear. The closer a visitor is to their destination, the more localised their information needs tend to become.

- TCA is seeking to meet visitor needs in ways that will allow the organisation to reduce its reliance on Tourism Northern Territory (TNT) funding while maximising value for its members.

CONSULTATION & REVIEW

CONSULTATION & REVIEW

The engagement process involved:

- One-one meetings with TCA Board members, major operators and other stakeholders to gather their commentary on their needs and wants from visitor servicing and the potential impacts of an updated location.
- An online survey and an invitation to comment using the TCA members Facebook group were used to reach and gather the view of other key stakeholders not engaged otherwise.

Stakeholders engaged included:

- Dale McIver - Chair, TCA Board
- Merrilyn Spencer - Deputy Chair, TCA Board
- TCA members
- Staff and ambassadors of TCA
- Grant Hunt - CEO, Voyages Resort
- Mark Swindell - Uluru Segway Tours
- Patrick Bedford - Emu Run
- Rex Mooney – CEO, Alice Springs Town Council
- Scott Lovett - Executive General Manager Industry Development, Tourism Northern Territory
- Leanne Paige - Sector lead on Education Tourism, Tourism Northern Territory
- Roddy Calvert – Site Manager, Tennant Creek Visitor Information Centre
- James Ackland - Tour operator (former TCA staff member)
- Tatia Hunter - Director, Hertz Alice Springs
- Kira Boswell - Manager, Erldunda Roadhouse Manager
- Leanne Goodall - Manager Gemtree Roadhouse

An extensive desktop review was undertaken that included:

- TCA, Tourism NT and NT Government strategic planning documents
- TCA Tourism Award submissions and judges feedback
- Tourism Research Australia (TRA) data sets of visitor markets
- NT Government and TCA papers on the proposed National Aboriginal Art Gallery
- Audit of existing VIC facilities and services (online and physical), other visitor touch points and visitor flows
- Current Alice Springs VIC location and other location options
- Smart technologies being used in visitor servicing (see Appendix 2).

A series of case studies of best practice VICs was also created as a background resource. The VICs included are role models for co-location and creating a strong profile in their own right (see Appendix 1). VICs investigating alternative governance and visitor servicing approaches are also noted.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Tourism Northern Territory (TNT) is seeking to achieve $2.2 billion in direct overnight visitor expenditure (OVE) per annum by 2020, contributing to the Australian tourism industry target of $140 billion in direct spend. TCA has set a target of $850 million in direct OVE which will require the industry to grow by $27.25 million each year. As at the year ending September 2018, direct overnight visitor expenditure was worth $855m to Central Australia, with a Northern Territory (NT) total of over $2.23b[1].

An Aboriginal Tourism Strategic Plan for NT is soon to be released. An aim of the Plan is to position the NT as the nation's leader in Aboriginal tourism experiences, with Indigenous arts and culture a key driver. NT Government has pledged funding to the development of a National Aboriginal Art Gallery in Alice Springs and the development of an arts trail across the Territory.

Tourism NT has recently initiated a Drive NT Strategy that will assess visitor servicing needs, infrastructure and marketing. A visitor satisfaction survey is also being undertaken in the Territory's main centres to better understand visitors' likes and dislikes with the destination. The results of both pieces of work, together with the Aboriginal Tourism Strategic Plan will be pertinent in the implementation of the recommendations of this report.

[1]TRA, year ending September 2018

VISITOR MARKET CONTEXT

VISITATION (ALL PURPOSE) TO CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

28%

72%

● DOMESTIC ● INTERNATIONAL

CENTRAL AUSTRALIA RECEIVED

719,000
OVERNIGHT VISITORS
72% DOMESTIC
28% INTERNATIONAL

THESE VISITORS **CONTRIBUTED**

$855
MILLION
73% DOMESTIC
27% INTERNATIONAL

TOTAL **OVERNIGHT VISITOR** NUMBERS

DROPPED
1.6% AND **2%**
ON PREVIOUS YEAR

AVERAGE **LENGTH OF STAY**
4.6 AND **5.6** NIGHTS

EXPENDITURE FOR **DOMESTIC** VISITORS
↑ **4.7%**

PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL NT OVERNIGHT VISITATION IN CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

33%

70%

● % OF TOTAL NT DOMESTIC OVERNIGHT
● % OF TOTAL NT INTERNATIONAL OVERNIGHT

CENTRAL AUSTRALIA
CAPTURES **THE MAJORITY** OF

INTERNATIONAL VISITORS TO NT

48% OF **INTERNATIONAL** VISITORS
55% OF **DOMESTIC** VISITORS

TO ULURU
DO NOT VISIT ALICE SPRINGS

DOMESTIC OVERNIGHT VISITATION

5%

10%

32%

56%

● HOLIDAY
● BUSINESS
● VFR
● OTHER

56% OF **DOMESTIC** OVERNIGHT VISITORS

IN CENTRAL AUSTRALIA ARE TRAVELLING **ON HOLIDAY**

HOLIDAY VISITATION IS
↑
FROM PREVIOUS YEAR

INTERSTATE HOLIDAY VISITATION
↑ **16%**

MAIN DOMESTIC SOURCE MARKETS TO NT

10.6m

33.6m

22.8m

25.4m

● QLD
● NSW
● SA
● WA
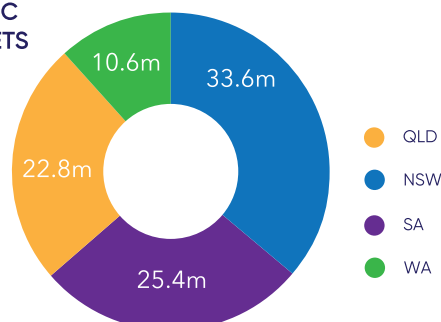
EXPENDITURE BY KEY DOMESTIC SOURCE MARKETS

$7.40B

$20.40B

$17.60B

$14.50B

NSW, **QLD** & **SA** ARE **KEY DOMESTIC SOURCE MARKETS** FOR **VISITATION AND EXPENDITURE** FOR NT
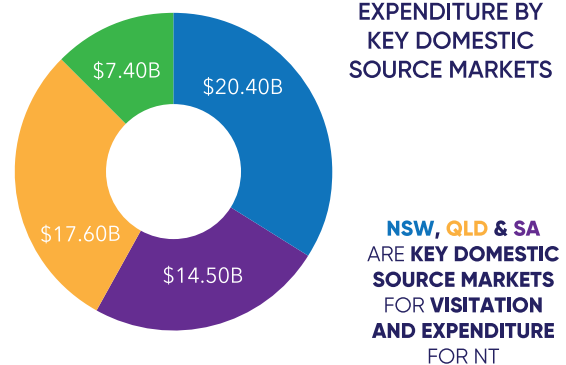
Source: TRA international and domestic market snapshots, year ending September 2018

Figure 1: Central Australia Visitation

VISITORS TO THE ALICE SPRINGS VIC

APPROXIMATELY
140,000
USERS OF VIC
PER YEAR

OVER
84,000
WALK-INS
TO THE CENTRE

WALK-INS
ARE THE LARGEST SOURCE OF
BOOKINGS FOR THE CENTRE

↓ **DECLINE** IN WALK-INS FROM **84% IN 2016/17** TO **80% IN 2017/18**

50,000+
**PHONE AND WEBSITE
ENQUIRIES**
WITH NUMBERS RISING

ONLINE ACTIVITY GROWTH

+11.8%
INCREASE IN AVERAGE
**TRAVEL BOOKING
SPEND** PER
CLIENT

+24.3%
**INCREASE IN
PAGE VIEWS** OF THE
DISCOVER CA
WEBSITE

+23.9%
**INCREASE IN
FACEBOOK
FOLLOWERS** FOR
@VISITCENTRALAUSTRALIA

+36.1%
**INCREASE IN
INSTAGRAM
FOLLOWERS**

DOMESTIC TRAVELLERS ARE THE LARGEST
SOURCE AND VALUE OF BOOKINGS THROUGH THE CENTRE

VALUE OF BOOKINGS ●
NUMBER OF BOOKINGS ●

BOOKINGS BY DOMESTIC
OVERNIGHT VISITORS (%)

	NT	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA
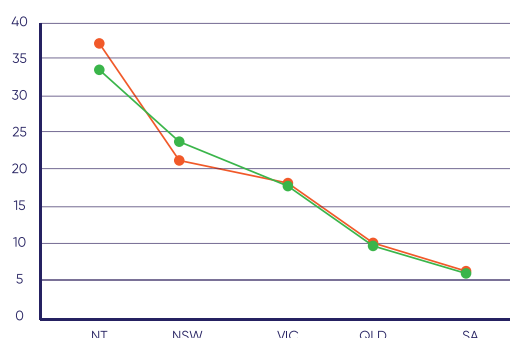
TOP 8
INTERNATIONAL MARKETS
BY THE **NUMBER AND
VALUE** OF BOOKINGS

OTHER EU   GERMANY   UK   NORTH AMERICA

SWITZERLAND   FRANCE   NEW ZEALAND   ITALY
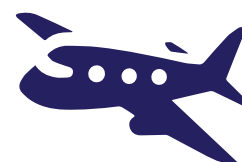
*The decline in the number of walk-in visitors is likely to be influenced by a number of factors: the move to a heat map system for counting visitor numbers;
and the VIC may also be experiencing a gradual shift in consumer preferences to digital media.
**TCA Annual Report 2017-18, trend data between 2014/15 and 2017/18 financial years*

Figure 2: Visitors to Alice Springs VIC

VIC VISITOR MARKET PROFILING

The main visitor markets using the VIC services (based on VIC customer survey 2017/18 and booking data) are profiled to better understand their information needs and the sources available.

CHARACTERISTICS	INFORMATION SOUGHT	SOURCES USED	WHAT TCA PROVIDES	POSSIBLE GAPS/ OPPORTUNITIES

GREY NOMADS

| CHARACTERISTICS	INFORMATION SOUGHT	SOURCES USED	WHAT TCA PROVIDES	POSSIBLE GAPS/ OPPORTUNITIES
• Interstate travellers • Retired/semi-retired • Aged 55+ • Travelling for leisure purposes • Seek value for money • On a long-haul trip/ not particularly time sensitive • Towing a caravan, camper trailer or in a motorhome • Growing number are online and using social media to connect	• Drive/road conditions • Travel distances and times • Safety considerations • Camping places • Dump points • Key things to see and do • Itinerary suggestions	• VICs along the way • Wiki Camps app • Other travellers via Word of Mouth	• Information (usually verbal) for walk-in visitors • Information by phone for visitors planning their trips • Mail information packs to visitors requesting information • Website content • Social media • Bookings	• Itinerary planner • Top 10 things to do • Means to measure travel distances • Quick guide on common questions • Concierge service to assist them to plan and book their local experiences • Information at rest stops and en route

FLY-DRIVE VISITORS

CHARACTERISTICS	INFORMATION SOUGHT	SOURCES USED	WHAT TCA PROVIDES	POSSIBLE GAPS/ OPPORTUNITIES
• Primarily domestic travellers • Aged 18 – 55 • Generally time poor due to work commitments • Short to medium stay Typically stay in comfortable accommodation, such as motels, hotels or resorts • Typically media savvy, using social media and online booking sites	• Car hire • Drive/road conditions • Travel distances and times • Safety considerations • Accommodation • Key things to see and do • Itinerary suggestions • Confirmation of existing information sourced	• VICs • Internet • Visitor guides	• Information by phone • Respond to Live Chat line and email enquiries • Mail information packs to visitors requesting information • Website content • Social media • Bookings • Advice	• Online inspiration • Itinerary planner • Top 10 things to do • Means to measure travel distances • Quick guide on common questions • Concierge service to assist them to plan and book their local experiences • Information at rest stops and en route

CHARACTERISTICS	INFORMATION SOUGHT	SOURCES USED	WHAT TCA PROVIDES	POSSIBLE GAPS/ OPPORTUNITIES

NOMADIC FAMILIES, TRAVELLING WITH SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN THAT ARE HOME SCHOOLED OR DO DISTANCE EDUCATION

CHARACTERISTICS	INFORMATION SOUGHT	SOURCES USED	WHAT TCA PROVIDES	POSSIBLE GAPS/ OPPORTUNITIES
• Usually self-drive Travelling for 3+ months • High focus on outdoor activities • Enjoy the attractions of Alice Springs in particular, as those attractions are set up well for educational outcomes • Typically media savvy, using social media and online booking sites	• Drive/road conditions • Travel distances and times • Safety considerations • Camping and other accommodation • Key things to see and do for families • Itinerary suggestions • Confirmation of existing information sourced	• VICs • Other travellers • Internet • Visitor guides	• Destination information once in destination • Website content • Social media	• Itinerary planner • Educational resources • Top 10 things to do • Means to measure travel distances • Quick guide on common questions • Concierge service to assist them to plan and book their local experiences • Information at rest stops and en route

VISITING FRIENDS AND RELATIVES

CHARACTERISTICS	INFORMATION SOUGHT	SOURCES USED	WHAT TCA PROVIDES	POSSIBLE GAPS/ OPPORTUNITIES
• All ages • Motivated by the desire to visit friends and family • Many stay at the homes of their friends/family • Travel with leisure in mind • Participate in commercial attractions, events and other experiences, largely with the family and friends they are visiting	• Travel distances and times • Safety considerations • Key things to see and do • Itinerary suggestions	• Friends • Internet • Visitor guides	• Itinerary planner • Top 10 things to do • Website content • Social media	• Itinerary planner • Top 10 things to do • Concierge service to assist them to plan and book their local experiences

CHARACTERISTICS	INFORMATION SOUGHT	SOURCES USED	WHAT TCA PROVIDES	POSSIBLE GAPS/ OPPORTUNITIES

MILLENIALS

CHARACTERISTICS	INFORMATION SOUGHT	SOURCES USED	WHAT TCA PROVIDES	POSSIBLE GAPS/ OPPORTUNITIES
• Aged 19-34 years Generally from overseas • Seek adventure • Travelling on a budget/are price sensitive • Non-fixed timeframes • Media savvy (using social media and online bookings) • Personally growing from their travel experiences[2]	• Car hire • Drive/road conditions • Travel distances and times • Key things to see and do • Itinerary suggestions	• Internet (google maps/ search) • Social media	• Maps and information once in the destination • Website content • Social media	• Online inspiration • Itinerary planner • Top 10 things to do • Means to measure travel distances • Quick guide on common questions • Concierge service to assist them to plan and book their local experiences • Information at rest stops and en route • Additional opportunities to share their experiences • Multi-lingual information

OTHER VISITOR MARKETS

Central Australia also attracts the following visitor markets that are currently not typically using the VICs:

- Business travellers and conference/convention delegates
- School excursion/educational groups travelling for learning outcomes
- Niche/special interest groups such as mountain biking, motor sports, hiking and camping
- Group market on pre-booked packages.

These visitors have the potential to use a VIC where the services and facilities meet their needs, such as attractions and activities, educational content and event coordination and bookings. There is a large group market to Yulara each year (anecdotally around 120,000 per annum). While these visitors are travelling as part of pre-booked packages, they have the potential to return independently for further exploration.

TRAVEL TO THE REGION

Flying, self drive or fly-drive are the main ways visitors are travelling to Alice Springs/MacDonnell in Central Australia.

Visitor market main travel type:

- Interstate – 32% fly only, 35% drive only (15% fly/drive)
- Intrastate – 94% drive only
- International – 58% fly only, 19% fly/drive

The majority of visitors to the NT arrive into Alice Springs and travel out from there, although this is changing with a shift to visitors increasingly flying into Yulara airport due to reduced flight costs. Visitor numbers through Alice Springs airport have declined from 70% in 2010 to 62%[3].

Around 940,000 passengers pass through Alice and Yulara airports each year. Currently 48% of international and 55% of domestic visitors to Uluru are not dispersing out to the region i.e. they fly in and out on packaged tours and do not go to Alice Springs.

Alice Springs is a key transit point for self-drive visitors travelling north–south and west–east (see Figure 3). Tennant Creek and the Barkly region receive 141,000 visitors each year and the majority are self-drive.

[2]TCA Business Plan 2018-2019, [3]TCA Strategic Plan 2018-2023

SUMMARY OF VISITOR TOUCH POINTS & VISITOR FLOW

OUTBACK AUSTRALIA VISITOR EXPERIENCE NETWORK

The main touch points for visitors travelling north-south and west- east through Central Australia are illustrated in Figure 3. They reveal an Outback Australia Visitor Experience Network of points where visitors move through, connect and engage, with Alice Springs as the hub in Central Australia.

DARWIN
Stand alone VIC in CBD location
188,000 visitors to VIC/year

Airport 1,743,734 passengers per year

943,000 visitors to Darwin per year

Highway Rest Area

Attack Creek Rest Area

KATHERINE
Sturt Highway VIC
126,000 visitors to VIC/year

380,000 vistors to Katherine per year

North – South Flow

Threeways Roadhouse

TENNANT CREEK
Co-located VIC with mine tours
37,500 visitors (declining)

141,000 vistors per year, majority are drive market

Frewena Rest Area

East – West Flow

NT/QLD Border Rest Area

MT ISA
Co-located VIC with attraction
38,640 visitors to the VIC/year

138,000 visitors to Mt Isa per year

VICs

National Parks

Rest Areas

BOULIA

Co-located VIC with attraction
7,200 visitors/yr

BIRDSVILLE

SIMPSON DESERT

ONLINE COMMUNITY

166,377 visits to website per annum
13,587 Facebook
60,500 Instagram
TripAdvisor

Yet only 3% of travel bookings with TCA are made online

Outback Way Flow

KARLU KARLU

Rest Area
VIC info board
Wifi
119,000 visitors/yr

Taylor Creek Rest Area

Prowes Gap Rest Area

ALICE SPRINGS

Standalone CBD VIC
84,102 visitor to VIC/year
(declining)

Airport 640,000 passengers per year + car hire

413,000 visitors to Alice & MacDonnell Ranges
122,000 are domestic self-drive

Erldunda Roadhouse

SA/NT Border Rest Area

South – North Flow

COOBER PEDY

CBD location
VIC (Sturt Hwy)
22,000 visitors/year

103,000 visitors per year to Coober Pedy

MACDONNELL RANGES
157,600 visitors/yr to NP

MEREENIE LOOP FLOW

HERMANNS–BURG

FINK GORGE NP
19,000 visitors/year to NP

KING'S CANYON

Proposed self-drive VIC in planning

KINGS CANYON
250,000 visitors/year

ALICE – ULURU FLOW

Curtin Springs Station

Significant fly/drive market: 940,000 passengers pass through Alice Springs and Yulara airports every year.

Airport 300,000 passengers per year + car hire

312,000 visitors to Yulara per year

YULARA

Approximately 40% are charter groups and 87,000 domestic self drive

1. Voyages booking office
2. Self serve in cultural centre

Figure 3: Outback Australia Visitor Experience Network

MARKET SHARE OF INTERNATIONAL & DOMESTIC VISITORS

%

DOMESTIC
INTERNATIONAL

73%

44%

52%

45%

ALICE VISITORS
TRAVELLING TO ULURU

ULURU VISITORS
TRAVELLING TO ALICE

Figure 4: Market Share of International & Domestic Visitors

Figure 4 highlights the draw of Uluru for international visitors, and the number of visitors to Uluru that are not travelling further to Alice Springs.

Alice Springs has multiple touch points to influence visitor decision making about what they see and do, and the quality of their experience (see Figure 5).
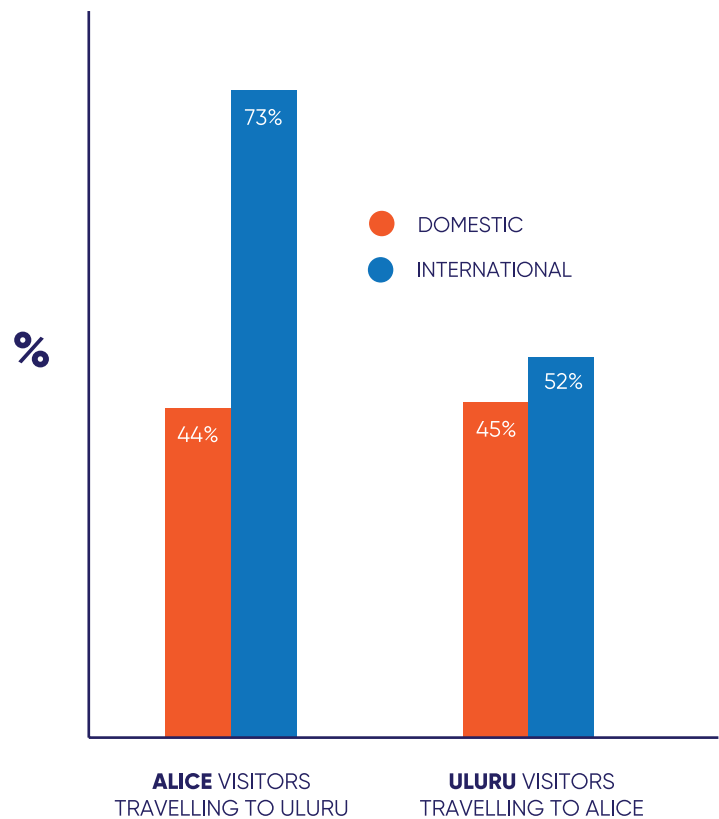

Image: Alice Springs Desert Park

ALICE SPRINGS VISITOR TOUCH POINTS

TENNANT CREEK DARWIN

Stuart Highway

ALICE SPRINGS TELEGRAPH STATION +MTB Trails

48,014 visitors

TODD RIVER

How can we create links between visitor touch points in order to better service all visitors?

WEST MACDONNELL RANGES

VIC co location Opportunity
ARALUEN CULTURAL PRECINCT
57,225 visitors
(Gallery + Theatre)

ALICE SPRINGS VIC

THE ROCK TOUR INFORMATION OUTLET

ALICE LODGE BACKPACKERS

ALICE SPRINGS YHA
22,589 visitors

ALICE SPRINGS DESERT PARK

66,456 visitors

HAVEN BACKPACKER RESORT

VIC co location Opportunity HERITAGE PRECINCT

OLIVE PINK BOTANIC GARDENS
55,000 visitors

ROYAL FLYING DOCTORS
65,000 visitors

JUMP INN

DOUBLE TREE BY HILTON
72-74,000 visitors
(hotel, restaurant)

VIC co location Opportunity PROPOSED LOCATION OF ABORIGINAL ART GALLERY

160,000 visitors
(18,357 bookings)

MACDONNELL RANGES

MACDONNELL RANGES

BIG4 HOLIDAY PARK

COOBER PEDY ADELAIDE

TCA Touchscreen

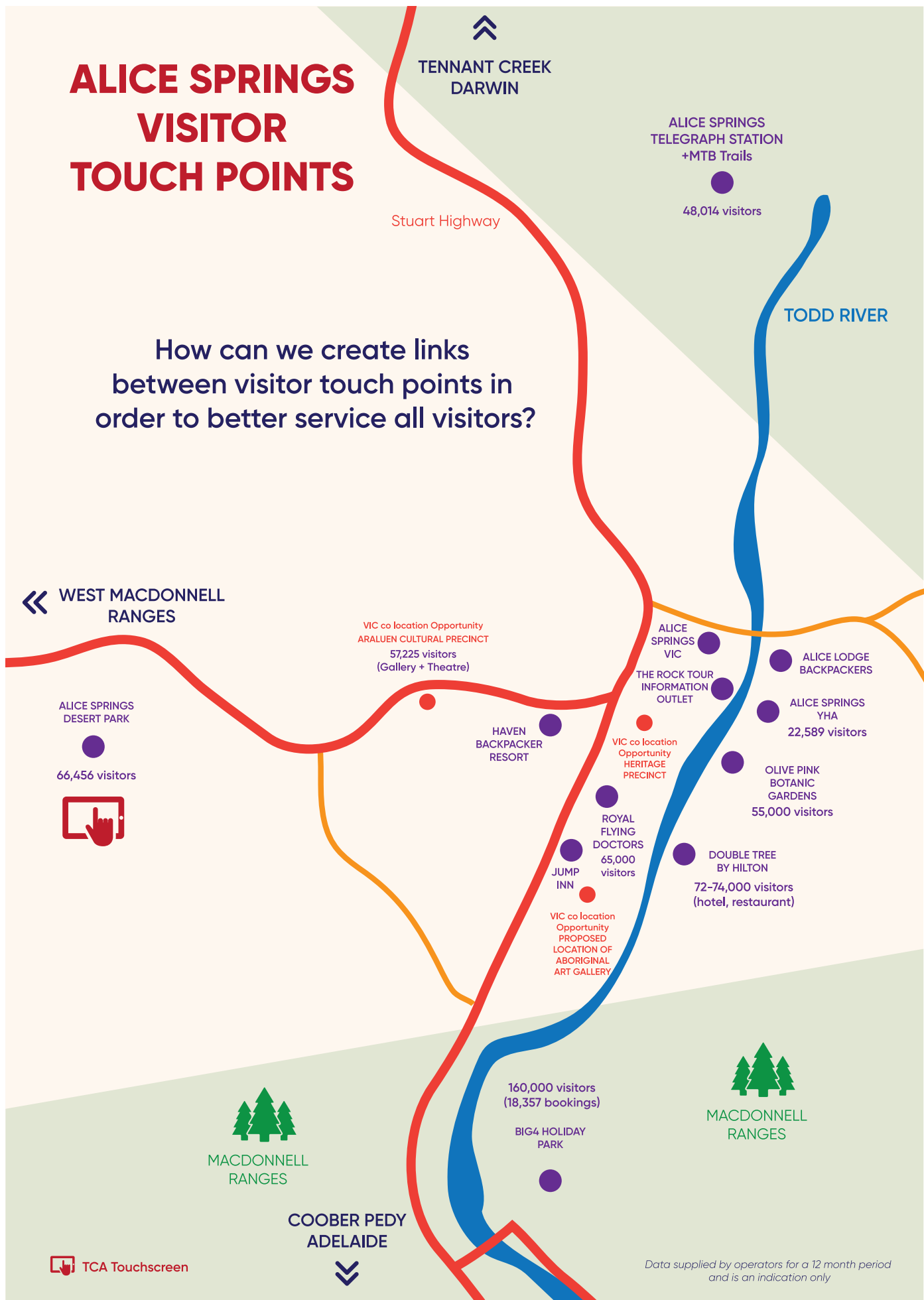*Data supplied by operators for a 12 month period and is an indication only*

Figure 5: Alice Springs Visitor Touch Points

ANALYSIS OF VISITOR SERVICING

ANALYSIS OF VISITOR SERVICING

In undertaking the analysis of visitor servicing, the following principles have been applied:

- **Consumer perspective:** visitor servicing must have the needs of visitors and the visitor experience at the core of operations

- **Business perspective:** visitor servicing requires an industry wide approach and must generate increasing spend in the visitor economy, sustained growth in revenue for TCA and value for members

- **Community perspective:** visitors want to feel welcome in the communities they visit and opportunities to connect with locals to hear stories about the area's history, culture and people

- **Outback perspective:** visitors are travelling to Central Australia without consideration of borders.

Analysis includes digital assets, visitor centres and other primary visitor touch points, and smart technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR), as all need to be considered and integrated as one solution.

The following table summarises the key insights gathered from the consultation and desktop review. Implications for visitor servicing in Central Australia are drawn out and encompass identified gaps, and deficiencies and opportunities for enhancement. A series of possible responses are assigned which form the basis for recommendations for action. (Details on TCA's current visitor servicing can be found at Appendix 3.)

INSIGHTS	IMPLICATIONS	POSSIBLE RESPONSES
VISITATION TO REGION & VIC		
Reduction in direct flights to Alice Springs	Growth in fly/drive visitors and event visitors is dependent upon air capacity and frequency and affordable flights	Continue negotiations with airlines to maintain and expand direct flights
Cheaper airfares into and out of Yulara is changing flow of fly-drive visitors	Need to have means in Yulara of promoting reasons for travel from Yulara to Alice Springs and the broader region	Develop a staffed visitor centre at Yulara with capacity to promote the broader region
Some visitors are arriving with plans in place, limiting ability to change bookings and travel plans to extend stay or dispersal and spend in region.	Need for itineraries and marketing that promote the broader Central Australia experience to consumers in the Dream and Plan phases	Update online content to increase destination awareness and compel consumers to visit (see Online Visitation below for more)
VICs are not well recognised across visitor markets for the information service they offer	Regional dispersal and spend are limited, with a reliance on the content on aggregator websites such as Expedia for information and bookings	Promote the VIC as the objective, trusted source for local information and inspiration to assist trip planning. Online, feature content from local hosts and travellers that delivers local tips and insights from authentic sources e.g. their top tips for travelling or their recommended things to see and do (incorporating video content and AR technology.
Uluru is considered a bucket list destination for domestic and international visitors	Visitors need to be encouraged to return to explore more of Central Australia beyond Uluru	Staff a visitor service at Yulara and together with online content provide visitors with more reasons to spend time in the region
Visitors are coming to the area to experience history, natural attractions such as Uluru, Kings Canyon, MacDonnell Ranges, Aboriginal culture and art, unique events, the Larapinta Trail and mountain bike trails	National parks are a key element of the visitors experience of Central Australia; however not well showcased within the Alice Springs VIC	Enhance partnership with NT National Parks in promoting the destination and enhance display content within VIC
Alice Springs VIC is not at the most well-known part of the region, i.e. Uluru	Visitors need compelling reasons to spend time in Alice Springs and the broader region, and be informed of these in their planning	Update online content to increase destination awareness and compel consumers to visit the broader region

INSIGHTS	IMPLICATIONS	POSSIBLE RESPONSES
VISITATION TO REGION & VIC		
Visitors to Alice Springs and Central Australia want an authentic local experience. VIC staff are asked regularly about cultural opportunities such as Aboriginal run campsites and learning dot painting, for example. There are quality artists and Indigenous experiences in the region but they can be difficult for visitors to access.	Visitors can become frustrated if unable to enjoy the experiences that they perceive are available	Introduce an art and craft program at VICs, with workshops, exhibitions and talks, bush tucker tastings and package art trail experiences. This directly aligns with the vision to establish Alice Springs as a destination for art and culture.
Location of Alice Springs to Uluru is not well understood by visitor, with some visitors seeing the two areas as one and the same	Visitors can arrive unprepared, which can impact the quality of their experience	Increase destination awareness online (direct to consumer) and with retail trade (webinars and digital platforms) and enhancement of maps and itineraries online as planning tools
Alice Springs is a service centre for Central Australia, with the VIC positioned to be the gateway to exploring Central Australia.	Alice Springs VIC needs to shift its focus to that of the gateway experience centre for Central Australia and Outback Australia	Establish a VIC regional network approach to visitor servicing with the Alice Springs VIC operating as the hub for a network of satellite centres and information providers
Visitors are coming in for practical questions on travel distances, fuel stops, water sources and weather conditions because the Outback is perceived as a higher risk area for self-drive holidays	Important function of outback VICs is to provide information that gives assurance and a sense of safety. Digital content provides facts and tips and the face-face information helps to affirm decisions.	Provide content developed and shared by local hosts on preparing for an outback holiday, including commonly asked for practical information and deliver using multiple online channels (website, social media, video content and apps) and maps
Visitors are spending less time in the Alice Springs VIC	Visitors need reasons to enter and then linger in the VIC. The longer time spent in a VIC, there is increased potential for them to gather information that maximises time and spend in region.	Establish VIC as an attraction through activities and compelling interactive displays
Younger people have usually already sourced information online and families start planning prior to arrival	Need to provide information to visitors in their planning stages and promote the bespoke planning service of the VIC in the pre-planning stages not just when they arrive e.g. tailored itinerary making, suggestions on things to see and do, let a local help you plan your outback experience.	Increase the VIC's responsiveness to visitors expectation of online information and booking services through assisting members to be instantly bookable and listed on ATDW and provision and promotion of a 24 hour Facebook Messenger service, Instagram conversations and Live Chat
Region peaks with grey nomads from late May. These visitors are less likely to use online information and prefer to come into the VIC to talk to someone firsthand, or to take word of mouth from other grey nomads	Easy access to face-face chats with staff/ambassadors is important. Places to sit and browse information will make visitors feel comfortable and encourage them to spend time in the VIC.	Enhance visitor service delivery onsite through a concierge approach where visitors are welcomed warmly at the entrance, setting the tone for their experience and then directed to the right area or person to speak with to help design their itinerary; and an improved layout that allows spaces to sit and browse or speak with staff/ambassadors/fellow travellers

INSIGHTS	IMPLICATIONS	POSSIBLE RESPONSES
ONSITE EXPERIENCE DELIVERY		
Visitors come to the region expecting outback hospitality and experiences. Lack of activity within centre to attract visitors to centre and lengthen stay. (TCA are considering AR or VR installations and operator demonstrations, however operator activity can be constrained during peak months.)	VIC is a key touchpoint to set the tone of the visitor experience. VIC has an opportunity to provide Wow! moments that create strong advocates for the centre and VICs generally amongst visitor markets. Opportunity to introduce in-house activities that encourage dwell time.	Enhance visitor service delivery through a concierge approach. Provide authentic workshop spaces and displays showcasing local businesses/ products/ artisans that establish the VIC as both an attraction and resource for visitor markets e.g. bush tucker tastings/ cooking, art and craft demonstrations and workshops e.g. Kungas Can Cook busy tucker tastings, Gemtree fossicking, Hale River gem talks. Introduce VR and AR technologies to provide contemporary information delivery and create awareness of what the region offers. Content could be delivered online and incorporate AR to enhance the delivery.
Strong seasonality with the majority of visitors coming to the VIC during winter months. Ticket system helps but is not seen as a welcoming or friendly service. Staff receive common questions from visitors.	Peak season staffing pressure and challenge in meeting visitor needs for one-to-one conversations with staff/ ambassadors. Need to be able to filter visitor enquiries in personable way that improves efficiency of VIC service and avoid unnecessary queues.	Enhance online content to improve management of visitor enquiries e.g. top 10 things to do in region, updated itineraries that are easy to find online; and a social media conversation service and Live Chat for information
ONLINE VISITATION		
Technology is not being optimised as a strategic supporting tool for VICs in meeting information needs	Quality of technology experience needs to be consistent across all visitor touch points and easy to use across the customer journey if you are to engage increasingly tech savvy visitors	Introduce an omni channel approach to visitor servicing where consistency in content and quality of service and technology across multiple online channels and at visitor touch points including VICs, rest stops and attractions
Branding online and onsite could be more consistent across all channels	A single brand needs to be carried across everything from the website to social channels to signage and billboards to the physical visitor servicing outlets. This brand needs to be representative of the service they are offering too i.e. a regional visitor experience for all of Central Australia and not just Alice Springs.	Update branding strategy with a focus on consistency in branding across communication channels e.g. Discover Outback Australia
Strong booking focus on site, with content designed and written that is not inviting consumers to the region and the story of why they should come to Central Australia. Imagery of VIC is not inviting or contemporary (e.g. postcard rack).	Need to inspire visitors through website rather than just inform and provide a booking engine. The Heart the Soul of the Centre needs to be communicated as part of story on region that engages audience.	Redevelop website content and language that sells the destination at emotional level with compelling messages and images that trigger a 'I must go there' response; e.g. use of 360⁰ video content and video stories and recommendations by local hosts and travellers inviting visitors to their home and favourite spots to visit.
Booking functionality works well, but website is clunky to use and the way the information is delivered makes trip planning onerous	Pre-visit planning may be hampered by website design, with potential for loss of enquiries and bookings because it is perceived as too hard	Review and update website content and layout
Itinerary ideas on website are not on front page and are delivered only from time perspective rather than interest; and answers to common queries about distances, location of rest stops, where to buy fuel and supplies are not easily found.	Content is not maximising dispersal and spend in region	Incorporate a trip/itinerary planner app with maps and information on visitor amenities and facilities that allows people to plan their experience in Outback Australia based on their areas of interest – with online advice available for assisting in finalising itineraries. Introduction of AR and 360⁰ videos with itineraries would enhance the visitor experience.

INSIGHTS	IMPLICATIONS	POSSIBLE RESPONSES
VIC has consumer facing social media channels – Facebook (@Visit Central Australia), Instagram (@VisitCentralAus), Twitter (not active) and YouTube, a TripAdvisor presence and is introducing a FB Messenger service	Multiple channels to extend and optimise reach online to consumers in their Dream, Plan, Experience and Advocate phases	Promote the availability of social media channels for visitor markets to seek information and advice from a local and make bookings. Boost use of YouTube.
Majority of website visits from interstate 15% in Adelaide; 8% in Sydney; 7% Melbourne (32% in Alice Springs). No consumer database in place to enable targeted direct marketing	Opportunity to translate web visits into visitation to area through capturing leads via social media and website and using direct mail	Consumer database with direct mail mechanism in place to build relationships and deliver targeted content to inspire, upsell and drive bookings.
		Incorporate a trip/itinerary planner app on the website with maps and information on visitor amenities and facilities that allows people to plan their experience in Outback Australia based on their areas of interest – with online advice available for assisting in finalising itineraries.
Live Chat system is not a responsive service for people planning their travel after hours or in international markets as it is limited to business hours	May be losing bookings and enquiries from domestic and international markets	Introduce a 24 hour online concierge service with visitors invited to connect online through multiple channels to ask questions, gain information about things to see and do, places to stay, eat, travel details etc. Incorporate a review period to revisit number of hours of service per day based on timing, origin and nature of visitor enquiries
Monopoly game has drawn locals into the centre for purchase when they were unlikely to see a reason to visit	Monopoly and other games such as Top Trumps are important tools to engage with locals and create awareness of VIC services and facilities	Develop a locals servicing strategy, with a focus on providing local booking service and increasing VFR spend in region
Increasing focus in growing education tourism to Central Australia and NT broadly	Education tourism would help boost shoulder and low season, has potential to generate a revenue stream and balance staff workload during the off-peak season	Work with Tourism NT by assisting in itinerary development and bookings for domestic and international Study Tours
BOOKINGS & OTHER REVENUE		
Financial sustainability is a key driver for VIC, with aim to break even through revenue generation	At risk of not maximising the visitor experience – and reducing reputation and yield	Expand focus to regional visitor servicing approach to enhance visitor experience while encouraging bookings, maximising return on investment, increasing yield and dispersal
Average booking value is $340, with main suppliers comprising rental car companies and two experience providers (Emu Run and Field of Light Uluru)	Rental car bookings offering unlimited kilometres and attractions/tour bookings are critical forms of revenue to maintain and a valued service for visitors	Retain rental car and attraction/tour bookings service and maintain focus on gaps in the market to service visitors to the region
Manual process staff required to follow in booking car hire is time consuming and frustrating	Staff resourcing not effectively used, with potential for reduced productivity and morale	Implement an automated booking process for car rentals
Tour bookings are mainly for experiences surrounding Alice e.g. 3 day Uluru, Palm Valley Tour, 1 day Uluru, 1 day West MacDonnell Range, 3 day Uluru camping	Need to inform travellers of what to see and do before they arrive to ensure they maximise their time available in region	Increase destination awareness online (direct to consumer) and with retail trade, introduce a concierge approach onsite, promote the bespoke itinerary planning service and enhance online itineraries
63% of bookings are from walk in visitors to the Alice Springs VIC	A physical presence is important for Central Australia as VICs can up sell, extend stays and convert interest to bookings	Maintain physical VICs at key visitor hotspots

INSIGHTS	IMPLICATIONS	POSSIBLE RESPONSES
Phone calls are received on multiple lines with no ability for staff to distinguish the line and nature of incoming calls	Potential for non-VIC staff to be interrupted by VIC calls, including car hire bookings that can take considerable time	Upgrade the phone system to better manage VIC calls
Around 16% are phone bookings and 13% are email – only 3% online. Large hotels in region cannot be booked by VIC due to incompatibility issues and not all local operators have instant book-ability, resulting in lost business	Booking engine needs to be addressed to streamline booking process and achieve instant bookings for travellers	Review and update online booking system to enable real time bookings and assist local operators to participate and be listed on ATDW
Not capturing local travel bookings	Opportunity to offer a locals booking service, with incentives for locals to book through VIC	Develop a locals servicing strategy
Memberships are an important income stream, however the VIC must balance member expectations of booking income against the optimal visitor experience	Potential for member expectations to skew decision making on VIC services	Ongoing member education of the importance of growing brand awareness, regional share and yield
Limited Indigenous product and cultural experiences for travellers despite strong Indigenous heritage and culture	Coordinate packaging of cultural experiences to create a point of difference and attract visitor spend	Development and packaging of cultural product and experiences across the region
LOCATION & ACCESS		
Majority of visitors are driving into Alice Springs, yet an absence of parking adjacent to VIC for cars and caravans/ campers. Current location in Todd Mall suits pedestrian traffic.	Frustration for visitors, loss of VIC business and loss of reputation.	Relocate the VIC to a site with provision for nearby parking to more effectively attract and service the drive market and influence their stay
The number of visitors to the VIC has fluctuated with change in the location. When the VIC was based in the Town Council buildings it received 123,344 walk in visitors. Since moving to the Todd Mall location in 2013, numbers have dropped to 89,7333.	Change in visitor counting system and lack of caravan/RV parking may result in visitors not venturing to VIC	Monitor number of visitor walk-ins over time
Poor signage into town and navigating from car parking to VIC. Signage audit review highlighted issues with current signage	Frustration for visitors, loss of VIC business and loss of reputation	Gain agreement to signage priorities to be actioned and information at road side stops/ rest areas, airports and rail stations on where to find the VICs and the services offered
Visitors also travel to Alice Springs by rail with around 20% of these visitors travelling independently (i.e not part of pre-booked package)	Need to ensure visitors arriving on Ghan rail service (and at airport) can access information and advice on location and are encouraged to come to VIC for local knowledge and trip planning tips	Maintain visitor information booths at airport and rail station and ambassador welcome service during peak periods. Incorporate links to destination app to assist visitors with their planning.
Location in Todd Mall helps to attract visitors into the Mall to spend money but limited to pedestrian access. Business closures occurring in Todd Mall, reducing pedestrian movement and vitality of area.	Any future locations must take into account impacts on neighbouring businesses	Assessment criteria for VIC locations to incorporate impacts on local businesses. Use roving ambassadors in CBD streets to provide information as well as a personal, face-to-face interaction.

INSIGHTS	IMPLICATIONS	POSSIBLE RESPONSES
OPERATING MODEL		
Alice Springs VIC is the only staffed VIC in the region. Over 300,000 visitors go to Uluru every year and there is currently no serviced VIC, other than information desk at Voyages Resort, touchscreens and unmanned information booth at key visitor hot spot, Uluru Kata- Tjuta National Park Cultural Centre. TCA is considering developing a level 1 staffed VIC to better service visitors to Yulara.	Challenges with encouraging regional dispersal out of Yulara in absence of staffed service. Missed opportunity to extend stay and yield. Visitor dispersal is influenced by what tours and packages Voyagers can sell. The current information desk at Voyages is well positioned to service the fly/drive market and encourage the fly/tour market to return. Potential also for brand reputation loss when quality of experience is poor.	Establish a staffed VIC service at Yulara, linked with the Alice Springs VIC as a satellite centre
Co-location with attractions such as museums, galleries and facilities such as retail outlets or cafes is an increasingly proven model for VICs seeking to minimise overheads and maximise reasons for visitors to use the VIC	Alice Springs VIC is wholly dependent upon its information services and facilities to draw visitors, resulting in lost revenue as visitors are seeking things to see and do while in the area but may not venture into the VIC	Co-locate the VIC with an attraction such as an indigenous art and culture gallery that is a drawcard for visitors to the region; and/or with facilities that will encourage visitors to spend in the centre (café, retail and activities)
Collaboration across Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Coober Pedy VICs is limited with duplication of resources across VICs although all are important VIC touchpoints for self drive visitors travelling north-south	Lost opportunities to increase regional dispersal and optimise VIC resources. Potential to centralise administration and online servicing across VICs to achieve economies of scale and reduce operating expenses. Membership benefits could be enhanced through increased business to business opportunities across the network	Establish a VIC regional network approach, with a single governance structure across VICs, staffing streamlined, shared and consolidated to act as an effective network e.g. shared digital, booking and membership officers
Visitors are using multiple information sources across the Dream/Plan/Book/ Experience/Advocate trip cycle	VICs lack resources to compete across all phases and there is some conjecture in the accredited VIC network as to where VICs are best positioned	VIC to identify role it will play in the trip cycle to maximize yield and dispersal, and support Tourism NT in providing inspiration in the Dream stage
Lack of local government support for Alice Springs VIC, when the vast majority of VICs across Australia are supported by local government	Disconnection between local Alice Springs Town Council and TCA on tourism planning and development	Active representation by Alice Springs Town Council on the TCA Board
FACILITIES		
Small footprint of VIC building with a dominance of retail and VIC staff behind desk at rear. Guests would like to sit while browsing information and making detailed bookings however this is only available at one desk.	Layout is not welcoming and limited space constrains visitor flow and opportunities to provide displays and activities to keep visitors in centre.	Relocate to a larger space. Create separate areas for bookings and visitor information and retail purchases. Include a café facility to provide more reasons to visit and stay in centre and create welcoming space for visitors to sit, browse information and plan their trip.
VIC's interior promotes the local landscape through visual displays but the information is limited and there no changes made in theming for seasonal activities or events	Not optimising information displays that assist in trip planning. Regularly updated displays would create awareness of changes in region and provide more reasons to visit the VIC.	VIC layout to allow for changing displays and interpretive information, workshop spaces and incorporation of AR technology. Showcase unique regional areas and products within the VIC floor space, e.g. 'Hubs' for West MacDonnell Range and Larapinta Trail / East MacDonnell Range / Alice CBD / North Barkly District including Battery Hill / southern areas including Coober Pedy / Car hire specialist.
No public toilets on site	Frustration for visitors that have expectation of toilets available at VICs, and potential for lost revenue within centre. Toilets can be a draw card that then encourages visitors into a VIC (eg Southern Highlands Welcome Centre VIC)	VIC location to allow for provision of public toilets

INSIGHTS	IMPLICATIONS	POSSIBLE RESPONSES
Current merchandising strategy is focused on increasing sales rather than visitor experience and doesn't identify products that reflect and promote brand and destination attributes	Need to be able to remove aged stock and keep range tight, with ongoing monitoring of what items are sought after and the return they deliver	Introduce a merchandising strategy that creates a point of difference for the VIC network. Include a consignment program with long shelf life local produce, including bush tucker, Central Australia branded clothing and bush hats/belts/gifts, locally made products like jewellery and small prints of art, gift baskets with local arts and crafts and product. Allocate a section for local artists and take stock on consignment on a rotational basis.
Books are a popular retail item, particularly those about Central Australia natural environment and culture	Potential to increase revenue and build reputation for quality gifts and souvenirs	Offer books sales online and introduce author talks from VIC and book signings
Event merchandise and branded items are popular retail items	Opportunity to increase revenue and provide more reasons for visitors and locals to come into the VIC	Continue to seek out opportunities to be the outlet for official event merchandise sales

OTHER VISITOR TOUCH POINTS

INSIGHTS	IMPLICATIONS	POSSIBLE RESPONSES
Not optimising rest areas where visitors are stopping. Lack of or inconsistent information and facilities (rubbish bins, dump spots, toilets) and insufficient capacity to service visitors during peak seasons (See Figure 3 for the key rest areas on the main visitor routes.)	Opportunity to capitalise on visitors stopping at these points with information to encourage them to visit towns and attractions.	Increase designated rest areas with shade and water, toilets, good quality environment, Audio Signs provided, data access and safety information and stories on area that give them reasons to stop and explore.

Incorporate smart technology such as AR to increase the quality of experience and encourage exploration |
Many visitors want to bush camp along the highway, but between Uluru and Curtin Springs there are no legal bush camps	Visitors are camping illegally along the highway	Develop a bush camping network throughout NT, integrated with visitor servicing
Visitor hotspots such as roadhouses and attractions are key touch points, but have not consistent visitor servicing approach or collateral	Opportunity to provide information in key locations with links to a destination app for further information	Establish an ambassador program with visitor touchpoints, provide information kiosks/ touchscreens with VIC content, and encourage visitors to download relevant apps with incorporated AR technology
National Parks have introduced visitor engagement activities occurring e.g. Ranger Talks at major points on a regular basis.	Need to understand current status of interpretative signage and information provision and identify information gaps and dissemination options to enhance visitor awareness and engagement	Work with NT National Parks and Parks Australia to deliver an integrated approach to visitor servicing in region
Inconsistency in quality and level of local knowledge amongst front line staff. Regular turnover also means it is challenging for business owners to maintain a level of knowledge amongst staff. TCA are starting a 1 day induction program for members to include a representative (1/2 day tour, cultural awareness, customer engagement)	Potential for loss of local business and reputation. Opportunity to consistently provide a warm welcome and basic visitor information, share stories and insights with visitors. Can offer information and referrals to VIC where needed.	Develop a local ambassador program that gives front line staff the skills and confidence to share stories and insights
Dominance of nomadic travellers in region who are gathering knowledge and insights as they go	Grey nomads are an underutilised resource as knowledgeable and passionate ambassadors of the area	Encourage grey nomads to become ambassadors where they share information and tips face-to-face and online and promote Central Australia to other travellers

VIC LOCATION ASSESSMENT

VIC LOCATION ASSESSMENT

To remain a best practice, national award-winning centre, more effectively attract and service visitor markets and increase the centre's financial sustainability, it is imperative that the size and locational constraints of the existing Alice Springs VIC are addressed.

If the VIC remains in its current location, the impacts could include:

- a continual decline in walk-in visitors
- a decline in bookings revenue
- a decline in length of stay and spend in the region as a result of visitors not stopping at the VIC
- damage to the brand reputation of the accredited VIC network.

A new site for the VIC is required. Choosing the right location is essential to optimise the VICs performance in meeting visitor needs, growing the contribution tourism makes to the regional economy and delivering value and services to members and the local community.

Co-location with complementary facilities or attractions is an opportunity that offers a number of potential advantages for VICs:

- Enhance and extend the experience for visitors with a seamless flow between the VIC and partner facility or attraction and more to see and do
- Increase patronage and revenue (retail sales and bookings)
- Reduce overheads when housed within a shared space
- Enable sharing of staff across common roles

Increasingly, VICs across Australia are looking at co-location. Appendix 1 provides multiple case studies on co-location.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT REVEALED 100% SUPPORT FOR RELOCATION OF THE CENTRE.

Co-location within the National Aboriginal Art Gallery development or with another visitor attraction or service is recommended due to their complementary nature to the information service and their ability to deliver the co-location advantages noted.

THE PROPOSED NATIONAL ABORIGINAL ART GALLERY PROJECT

The National Aboriginal Art Gallery will be the first of its kind in Australia; a national institution dedicated to the celebration, display and interpretation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art drawn from across the continent.

The Gallery project is the centrepiece of a key policy initiative of the NT Government in delivering a Territory-wide Arts Trail with a focus on Aboriginal art and culture, to position the Territory as a world-class cultural and tourist destination. The development and delivery of the Gallery in Alice Springs will provide extensive social and economic benefits to the town through a significant boost to local jobs, retail, and tourism visitation.

The NT Government has committed $50 million as a down-payment on the Gallery with plans to leverage funding from the Commonwealth Government and the private sector.   The Gallery must be an iconic building that draws the world to Alice Springs and reflects the Central Australian context and the nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, culture and knowledge.

Increasingly, international tourists want to engage with Australian Indigenous artists and many visitors have arts high on their itineraries. An Australia Council report found that more than 820,000 international tourists engaged with First Nations arts while in Australia in 2017, an increase of 41% in five years. Data from Tourism Research Australia (TRA) shows that international arts tourism has grown at a higher rate than overall international tourism, over the past five years[4].

[4]*https://www.sbs.com.au/news/indigenous-artists-and-entrepreneurs-share-their-designs-with-the-world*

VIC LOCATION ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

If the VIC is to co-locate with the proposed Gallery, agreement is needed on the location. The NT Government's preferred site for the Gallery is the Anzac Hill precinct. The site of the existing Town Council administrative buildings has also been raised as an option more recently and is favoured by Tilma Group/JJ Strategic Consulting to co-locate the VIC because of its location in the CBD, accessibility for drive traffic and available space to provide visitor experiences (e.g. interpretive displays, artist workshop and gallery spaces, visitor activities) and facilities (e.g. indoor and outdoor seating/gathering areas, toilets, car and camper/caravan parking) to service visitors arriving by vehicle and on foot.

To assist in determining the optimal location for the Alice Springs VIC, a series of criteria have been developed to assess the current location and alternative sites. The criteria are based on the stakeholder engagement and desktop research, and prioritised as follows:

1. Must haves
2. Not essential but would add value

Co-location with major attractions is an imperative consideration. The TCA Board asserts the need for the VIC to be in the Alice Springs CBD, however major attractions outside could be useful to consider if the location meets other necessary site requirements. Two attractions are used as examples only in the following table. No preference is given to these or other local attractions.
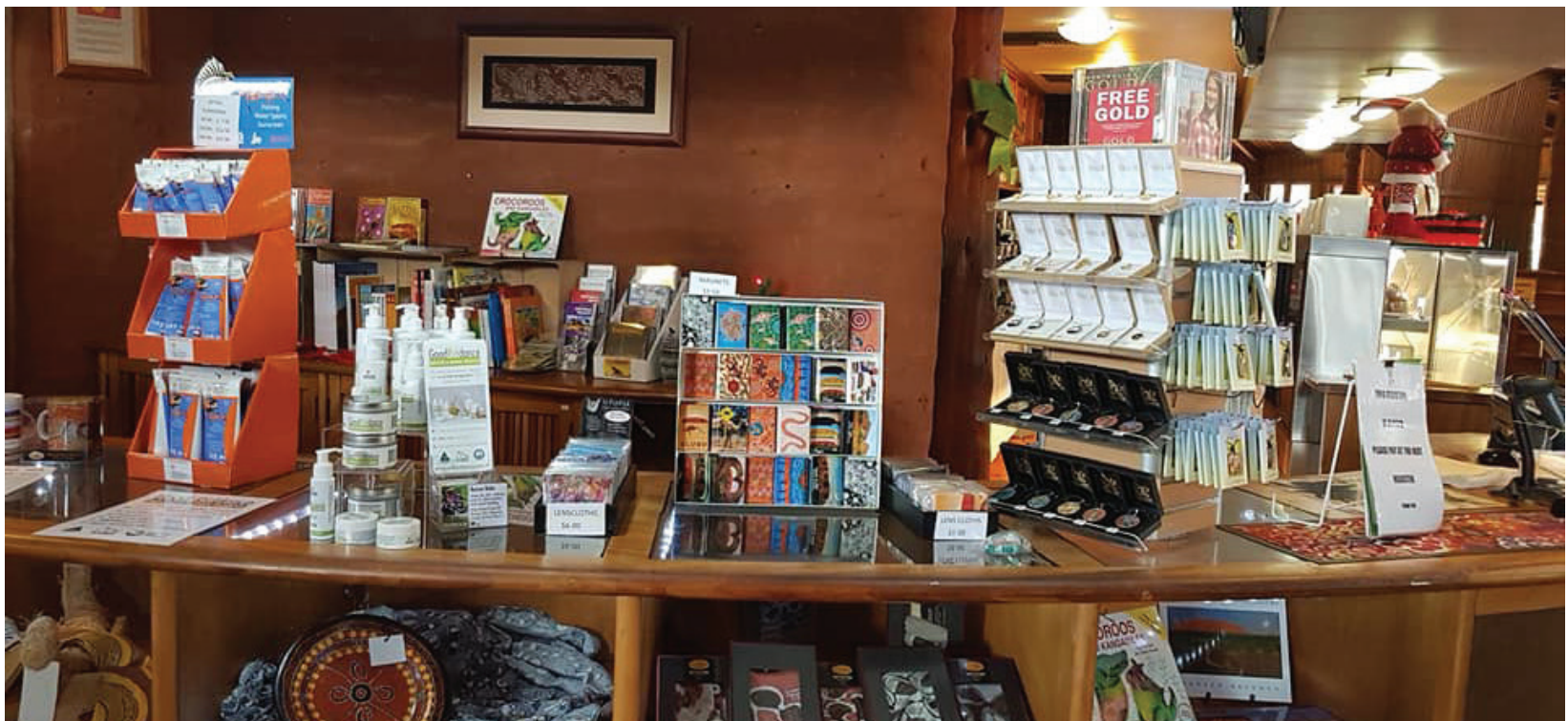
	CRITERIA	CURRENT LOCATION	ANZAC OVAL SITE (Co-location)	TOWN COUNCIL SITE (Co-location)	ARALUEN ARTS CENTRE / PRECINCT SITE (Co-location)	HERITAGE PRECINCT (Co-location)
1	Located to capture majority of drive visitor flows into Alice Springs	x	x	✓	x	x
1	Located within walking distance to the Alice Springs CBD to service visitors on foot	✓	✓	✓	x	✓
1	Visually attractive, open and welcoming frontage for VIC building	Limited	✓	✓	✓	Limited
1	Sufficient size to allow spaces for visitor interactions, bookings area, retail and changing interpretive and interactive digital displays featuring maps, information, road conditions reports, daily flight times and regional promotional videos	Limited	✓	✓	✓	Limited
1	Enables VIC to operate as an attraction or leverage an existing attraction to increase visitation and dwell time in the centre	x	✓	✓	✓	✓
1	Space allows for provision of public toilets as part of VIC facility	x	✓	✓	✓	✓ Not currently provided
1	Can incorporate complementary activities (inside and/or outside) to increase appeal for visitor markets; e.g. café, gallery spaces, function areas, retail, workshops, education programs, bicycle hire	Limited	✓	✓	✓	Limited
1	Location allows for provision of visitor gathering spaces to encourage length of stay at VIC e.g. picnic areas, playgrounds, café	x	✓	✓	✓	✓
1	Can feature connection to nature, landscape and Indigenous arts and culture through displays and activities	✓	✓	✓	✓	x
1	Supports CBD revitalisation and business growth	✓	x	✓	x	✓
1	Encourages community engagement with VIC	✓	x	✓	✓	✓
1	Adjacent car and caravan/camper parking	x	Space to develop it	Space to develop it	✓	Limited on street parking for large vehicles
1	Offers free WiFi service	✓	✓	✓	x	x
2	Provides a sense of arrival to Alice Springs and Central Australia	x	x	✓	x	x
2	Proximity to other major attractions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Bus parking for tour vehicles	x	Space to develop it	Space to develop it	✓	Limited
2	Dump point for those travelling in motor homes or with caravans	x	Space to develop it	Space to develop it	Space to develop it	x
2	Capacity to incorporate free water dispenser	x	✓	✓	✓	✓

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BEST PRACTICE VISITOR SERVICING

A multi-channel approach is recommended for TCA's visitor servicing that utilises the many visitor touchpoints to provide face-to-face engagement and online engagement drawing on smart technologies to value add to the visitor experience.

FACE-TO-FACE VISITOR SERVICING

Bricks and Mortar VIC

1. Relocate the Alice Springs VIC to better service visitor markets to Alice Springs as per the assessment criteria.

2. Secure a business arrangement for co-location with an attraction or service provider(s) that complements the VIC function. This arrangement should provide more reasons for visitors to stop and spend time and money within the centre and deliver cost savings through shared staff roles and reduced overheads.

   The National Aboriginal Art Gallery is recommended as a co-location partner because attractions such as galleries and museums are proven in increasing visitation and establishing the VIC as a destination. The VIC could capitalise on it association with the Gallery to become an attraction through creating an art and craft artisan space within the centre where visitors can engage with local artists and artisans, participate in workshops, and then buy items as souvenirs or gifts. The space would address a product gap by enabling visitors the opportunity to experience the local culture and get hands on. Specific programs could be developed for education and other special interest groups.

3. Develop a concierge approach to service delivery at staffed VICs, with visitors warmly welcomed at the door by staff/ambassadors and directed to relevant areas within the centre. The layout of the VIC will require spaces for visitors to sit and browse information, talk to staff, make bookings and take the time to relax and share images and experiences on social media using the free WiFi service. During peak times, the concierge approach will assist in directing enquiries more effectively than all visitors having to queue regardless of their needs.

   If the National Aboriginal Art Gallery was established in Alice Springs, the art and craft artisan space would become a natural extension by bringing the arts alive in an engaging way for visitors. (See Burnie VIC case study in Appendix 1 as an example of how arts and craft are being effectively used as an attraction within a VIC).

4. Review displays, installations, exhibitions and story telling opportunities to identify fresh ways to inspire and engage visitors so that they are encouraged to explore Central Australia.

5. Brand the Alice Springs VIC the Outback Australia Visitor Experience Centre to acknowledge and celebrate the centre's position as a gateway to Outback Australia for visitors.

6. Introduce VR technology at staffed VICs such as 360º video content of Central Australia and VR headsets to attract visitors and give them an enthralling and fun way to learn about what the area offers. Featuring the national parks will assist in integrating national park content. This smart technology also presents the VICs as a contemporary visitor service. (See Appendix 2 for further details on the recommended smart technologies.)

7. Establish a staffed VIC service at Yulara with a focus on encouraging dispersal across the region and repeat visitation to explore beyond Uluru.

8. Secure the management rights to Tennant Creek VIC and operate as part of a Central Australia regional VIC network (see Governance below). This centre is an important touch point for encouraging regional dispersal, located on the north-south route between Darwin and Alice Springs and Yulara and for visitors travelling west-east to Mt Isa.

9. Similarly, secure the management rights to Coober Pedy VIC to be operated as a gateway VIC within a Central Australia regional VIC network, given this a key touch point for visitors travelling northward from South Australia.

Other Visitor Touchpoints

1. Provide roving VIC ambassadors on the streets of Alice Springs, and provide an information point at Ayers Rock Connellan Airport. Continue to provide ambassadors and information points at Alice Springs Airport and Railway Station, as well as continuing to operate the pop-up trailer at events to interact with visitors to answer their queries and encourage them to explore the region. This engagement is also important in building brand recognition for the VIC network.

2. Develop an ambassador program that gives front line staff the skills and confidence to share local stories and insights and deliver a warm welcome. Incorporate an online knowledge base for ambassadors with training tools, Q & A forums, current information about things to see and do and access to a regional ambassador network.

   This program will enhance the engagement visitors have with frontline staff of touchpoints such as accommodation providers, attractions, tour operators, roadhouses, fuel stations, cafes/restaurants and supermarkets. This program can be delivered face-to-face and online with content focused on service delivery, local stories, facts and travel tips, enabling operators to provide a consistent level of service and local knowledge despite a transient workforce.

3. Create a network of rest stops and bush camps and optimise with facilities to encourage visitors to stay (shade, water, toilets and visitor information on the local area and travel safety). Ensure visitors can readily access the proposed destination app (with free WiFi), information boards and/or TCA touchscreens linked back to the gateway VICs, to receive consistent messages in a way that is convenient to them.

   Introduce AR sites at key rest stops and other interest sites on drive routes to bring the history and stories to life in a contemporary way and encourage exploration. Monitor the level of use of touchscreens, with the view to their replacement with the destination app over time.

4. Harness the knowledge and enthusiasm of grey nomads, inviting them to become ambassadors that share travel tips and information to assist the self-drive market in their planning before they arrive and in region. This knowledge can be shared face-to-face as well as online to increase reach.

5. Continue to work with NT National Parks and Parks Australia to assist in communicating key messages and ensuring visitors maximise their stay in Central Australia.
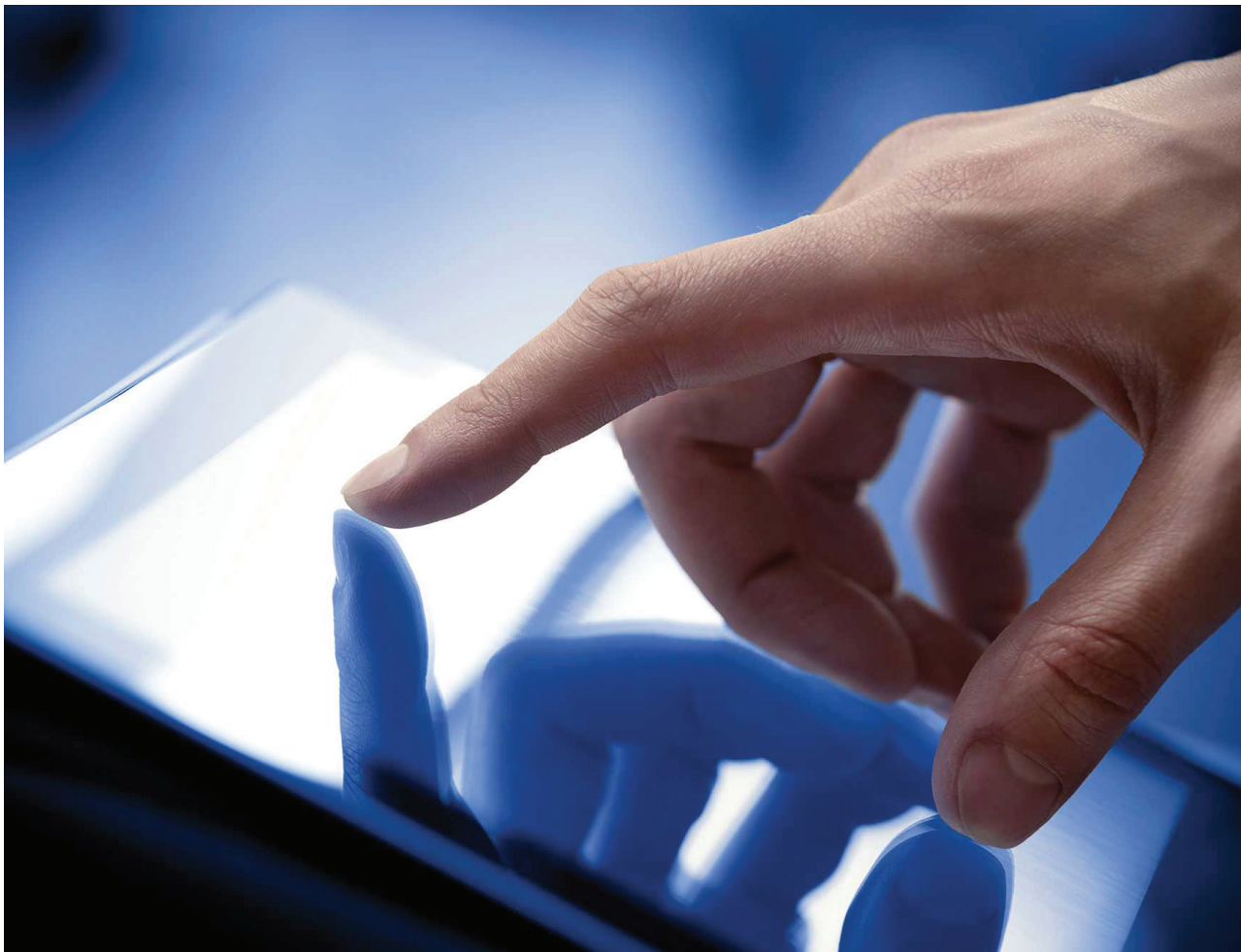
ONLINE SERVICING

1. Redevelop the TCA website, with the layout and content designed to firstly capture the imagination of travellers in their dreaming stage with imagery that grabs their attention and communicates the essence of Central Australia and the experiences it offers. Then provide the information and means for them to book directly.

2. Develop a visitor guide using AR technology that enables a local ambassador to welcome and invite visitors to experience Central Australia. With AR technology the guide is a tech savvy way of promoting a destination, delivering information about what to see and do and encouraging consumers to visit. Use the guide to link the bricks and mortar VIC with other visitor touchpoints across the region.

3. Develop a trip planner with an itinerary builder to allow customisation based on traveller preferences, travel information and 360º videos and online maps incorporating planning tools that allow measurement of distances across Central Australia and information on fuel stops, water sources and current weather and road conditions. Integrate AR technology with maps to enhance travellers' understanding of key places of interest as well as the terrain, travel distances and safety information to aid navigation and provide peace of mind for travelling in Outback Australia.

4. Develop content to address commonly asked questions such as top 10 things to do in region, including recommendations for travel planning and what to see and do from local hosts and travellers.

5. Create a destination app that visitors can access while travelling in the region to assist in learning more about the destination and helping them make the most of their visit. Link to the proposed AR activated visitor guide and incorporate AR technology that brings to life physical locations and objects, allowing them to immerse themselves in local stories and characters in a contemporary and fun manner.

6. Review and update the booking engine to enable instant bookability for consumers and work with operators to ensure the majority can provide real time bookings.

7. Continue to develop social media engagement, using Facebook Messenger, Instagram, YouTube, TripAdvisor and Live Chat on a 24hour basis to ensure the VIC is responsive to consumer needs.

SUPPORTING ACTIONS

The following actions are important enablers for the delivery of best practice visitor servicing in Central Australia:

- Continue negotiations with airlines to maintain and expand direct flights into Central Australia
- Undertake regular retail trade education activity (face-to-face, webinars) to enhance destination awareness and knowledge
- Develop a locals visitor servicing strategy that seeks to increase awareness amongst local residents of the VIC services
- Work with Tourism NT in consumer marketing campaigns and communications to increase destination awareness and booking conversion

- Continue to incorporate member education at TCA networking functions and in online communications on the role of the VIC in visitor servicing and the benefits of maximising dispersal and yield across the region
- Secure active representation of the Alice Springs Town Council on the TCA Board
- Introduce a merchandising strategy that creates a point of difference for the VIC network, with long shelf life local produce, including bush tucker, Central Australia branded clothing and bush hats/belts/gifts, locally made products like jewellery and small prints of art, and gift baskets with local arts and crafts and product. Allocate a section for local artists and take stock on consignment on a rotational basis.

GOVERNANCE
Outback Australia Visitor Servicing Model

1. Establish a regional network of VICs for Central Australia, encompassing Alice Springs, Yulara, Tennant Creek and Coober Pedy VICs. Alice Springs and Coober Pedy VICs are to operate as gateway hubs, each with the title Outback Australia Visitor Experience Centre. Tennant Creek and Yulara will form satellite centres. All centres need to continue to work with other (private) visitor touch points to ensure a holistic approach to visitor servicing.

2. Introduce a single governance structure for the VIC network.

Rationale:

- While the new model could represent a significant cost initially to establish, it will deliver long term financial gains for TCA as a result of efficiencies and extended revenue streams. A cost benefit analysis will be required to identify the return on investment for TCA over the next five and 10 year milestones.
- As a single structure, the network will benefit from economies of scale, with group buying of retail merchandise and equipment (e.g., tablets, digital signs). Staff will be consolidated, with shared staff for administration, digital servicing (including social media),

retail and marketing. The network will also benefit from access to group training.

- A single structure will enable consistent content, theming and service delivery across the network. It is recommended that each of the VICs use Outback Australia Visitor Experience Centre branding to achieve consistency in look and feel across marketing and communications and maximise promotional outcomes.
- The VIC network can link with Katherine, Darwin, Mt Isa, Boulia and Halls Creek VICs as one entity, improving the ease of information sharing and Central Australia promotions.
- A single structure will also assist in fostering an omni channel approach to visitor servicing where there is a consistency in content and quality of service and technology across multiple online channels and at visitor touch points including rest stops, camping grounds and attractions.

3. Proposed timing for transition to the new governance approach

Short term (Year 1):

- Secure funding for Yulara VIC
- Gain agreement to relocation of Alice Springs VIC

Medium term (2-3 years):

- Acquire management rights to Tennant Creek and Coober Pedy VICs and begin process of upgrades as needed
- Secure funding for relocation of Alice Springs VIC
- Launch Yulara VIC
- Commence development of Alice Springs VIC

Long term (4-5 years):

- Launch of Outback Australia Visitor Experience Centre and rebrand
- Consolidated staff structure in place across network and shared arrangements for core functions

The above time frames are indicative only as they are subject to funding approvals.   The activity should be completed within five years.

OUTBACK AUSTRALIA VISITOR EXPERIENCE NETWORK
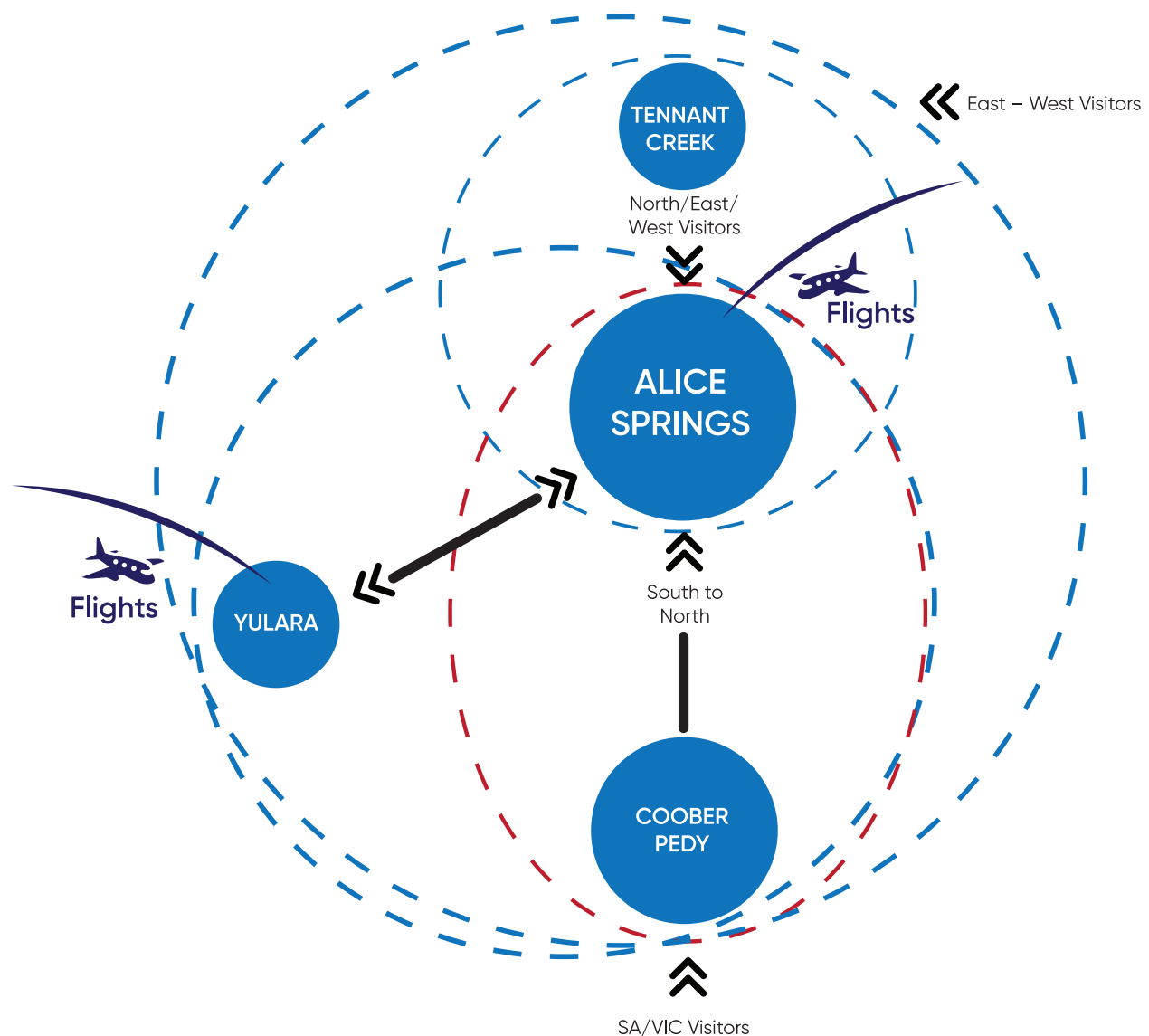
Alice Springs VIC will become the Outback Australia Visitor Experience Centre, operating as a gateway visitor experience and servicing hub. Coober Pedy is a second gateway centre, linking from southern states. Yulara and Tennant Creek VICs will operate as satellite centres.

Figure 6: Outback Australia Visitor Experience Network

APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: BEST PRACTICE CASE STUDIES

WHAT CONSTITUTES BEST PRACTICE?

A series of case studies provide a snapshot of VICs focused on increasing visitation, regional dispersal and yield. Each of the VICs is a key visitor touch point through the services and experiences offered. For some it has necessitated co-location, while others it has been about building a profile based on the visitor services and ensuring the best location to service visitors to a region.   The majority of the VICs are award winning in visitor services.

Additional examples are shared of work underway to assess multi-channel VIC servicing models.

CO-LOCATION

Devonport VIC, TAS

The Devonport VIC in Tasmania moved from a stand alone to be located in the paranaple arts centre, a refurbished Heritage building in the heart of Devonport. It is the new cultural hub of Devonport housing the Devonport Regional Gallery and Town Hall Theatre. Co-location outcomes include increased foot traffic and revenue from bookings; extended hours to better serve visitor needs; and sharing of overhead costs across other tenants.

The VIC was added to the building to form the central hub where all visitors walk in and through the centre to reach the Theatre and Gallery. A central front desk handles enquiries and bookings for each venue, with shared staff across the function.

Previously the centre opened at 7.30am to meet the needs of visitors from the Spirit of Tasmanian's arrival and travellers on the bus service to Cradle Mountain. With the early opening the centre closed 8 hours later at 3.30pm. Now as a joint centre, the VIC can remain open until 5pm.

KEY POINTS:

Co-location has enabled the VIC to better services visitors, with extended operating hours

Co-location with complementary activities is drawing visitors and locals to the VICs, enabling staff/volunteers to reach a greater cross section of visitors to promote the destination.

Canberra and Region VIC, ACT

Canberra and Region VIC is sited alongside the National Capital Exhibition (NCE) at Regatta Point, within the Parliamentary triangle and sight of the majority of attractions visitors want to see and experience. Co-location outcomes included an immediate increase in visitor numbers and revenue as a result of the school and international visitors to National Capital Exhibition schools through the centre and retail shop.

The VIC generates 50% of funding from their own source revenue: merchandise sales, booking tours and attraction tickets and advertising sales. They do not have a membership.   Balance of funding is provided by Visit Canberra.

The VIC moved there after the purpose built, previously successful VIC saw a steady decline in

travellers and locals through the door. The decline was attributed to the increasing use of smart phones for sourcing information, coupled with the VIC's location on the road 2.5km out of the city.

 Relocating has resulted in a 63% increase in visitation. The move has made the VIC more accessible to both the cultural institutions and visitors. Sharing the same entrance to the NCE, the VIC attracts the educational tourism market, VFR and holiday visitors. The centre also attracts locals as walking around the lake and attending events in the precinct. The VIC is open, bright and welcoming, designed open plan with no big counters and great views across. Visitors feel welcome, and therefore stay longer and browse information and retail offerings

An extensive new merchandise offering of quality local products has created a reputation for the VIC as a place to go to for locals, businesses, embassies and visitors seeking mementos or quality gifts. The retail section includes quality merchandise from local artisans and producers. As well as the

chocolates, spirits, wines, beers, nuts, oils, local designer merchandise, jewellery and books, the VIC provides cheaper souvenir options to cater for the needs of their different visitor markets

KEY POINTS:

Co-location with complementary activity that will draw visitors and locals to the VICs, enabling staff/volunteers to reach a greater cross section of visitors to promote the destination. Co-location of the Alice Springs VIC with the National Aboriginal Gallery would have the potential to attract education groups and increased international markets

Use of touchscreens in other visitor hotspots such as the airport and public spaces allows the VIC to reach visitors beyond the bricks and mortar location

The range of facilities and services has meant the VIC is used by a broad range of markets including visitors, locals and education groups.

Waltzing Matilda Centre, QLD

Winton's VIC is located within the Waltzing Matilda Centre, a museum that tells the stories of the Waltzing Matilda legend, Aboriginal and cultural history, opal mining, the dinosaur trail and the Qantas origins. VIC staff and volunteers sell tickets to the museum and handle bookings for tours, attractions and accommodation. The Centre includes a retail space selling local souvenirs and gifts, and exhibitions and function spaces. A café is operated under a separate tenancy within the footprint of the building. Located outside of the centre, it attracts visitors and locals.

The Centre also attracts school excursion groups, providing an interactive learning experience for students.

Through GPS tracking headsets visitors take a self-guided tour of the museum. A large multi media installation dominates and gives visitors a visual and auditory experience of natural events that occur in the landscape. The architectural design of the building references the local landscape and history and in 2018 was shortlisted amongst the 10 Most Innovative Buildings in the World.

KEY POINTS:

The VIC leverages its presence within an iconic building, and operating both the VIC and the museum and retail centre, becomes drawcard.

By having VIC staff/volunteers coordinate the main visitor attraction, they manage the engagement with visitors in the facility.

Busselton VIC, WA

Moving the stand alone VIC to a popular visitor destination has resulted in the VIC doubling the number of visitors through its doors and an improved Trip Advisor rating.

The VIC is alongside a local council owned interpretive centre in an existing heritage railway station and adjacent to privately owned jetty offices. The location is a high foot traffic area. Research of site options identified that visitors coming into town went to the jetty first and made plans from there.

The VIC has taken advantage of a popular location for visitors and offers a seamless experience between the VIC and interpretative centre, with VIC staff managing both activities. By bundling the two together, visitors now have more reason to come in to the VIC. Having the three functions in the precinct is also an advantage for the VIC, enabling direct engagement with the major stakeholders in tourism in the area.

The Busselton VIC is one of four bricks and mortar information centres in the Margaret River region. The four are served by one digital team that handles phones and emails enquiries and the online bookings and web chat.

KEY POINTS:

Co-location with complimentary activities/visitor attractions, with VIC staff/ volunteers coordinating visitor contact at the main visitor attraction.

Using the VIC as a means to create alliances with major tourism stakeholders in the region.

Utilising economies of scale across digital, phone and bookings. Central Australia could have a central team to look after this for Tennant Creek, Alice, Yulara and Coober Pedy, while the staff in the VIC's are focused on the visitor experience,

Burnie VIC

Burnie's VIC is co-located with two other tenancies within the Makers' Workshop, a tourism attraction and cultural hub that celebrates Tasmania's makers, innovators and artists. The areas of activity of each:

- VIC: visitor information provision and bookings, coordination of the operation of Creative Paper which includes paper manufacture and tours, and management of cruise ship visits

- University of Tasmania: commercial management of Makers' Workshop building and coordination of the artists programs and exhibition space

- Private business: café, retail and cheese tastings and sales, whisky/gin tastings

The Makers' Workshop is also a cruise terminal/welcome centre for visitors from cruise ships. Visitors are bused from the port to the Workshop where they join tours or venture into Burnie town centre. The VIC runs a Hop on Bus Tour for cruise ship visitors and handles bookings for those passengers seeking smaller tour options to those offered by the cruise company. Currently around 27 cruise ships stop in Burnie each year, with the number expected to rise to 40 next season.

The VIC received around 115,000 walk-in visitors in 2018. These include cruise ship visitors, coach bus market, FIT fly/drive travellers, grey nomads and education groups. Locals also come to the café, retail store and exhibitions.

The VIC's focus is on delivering best practice in customer experience and dispersal throughout Burnie and the region. The VIC prides itself on passionate staff and volunteers that share information and stories and create authentic connections with visitors to the centre. Financial sustainability is not a driver for the VIC, but the centre works to maximise revenue through cruise ship bookings. The financials of the Creative Paper activity is managed separated and includes wholesale paper sales, retail, online sales and tours.

The Makers' Workshop tells the story of Burnie's industrial heritage and deep connection with paper through Australia's largest handmade paper mill. Visitors are invited to learn about the history of papermaking, watch paper being made, then try it for themselves in a special interactive tour. Other experiences include cheese and produce tasting, encounters with artists, historic displays, an art gallery, gift shop and licenced café specialising in Tasmanian produce, as well as the accredited VIC. The contemporary architecturally designed building is located on the Burnie foreshore, within easy walking distance of the town centre.

KEY POINTS:

VIC's co-located with a visitor attraction and other services draw visitors and encourage them to linger within the centre.

Alice Springs VIC has potential to promote and leverage the NT Arts Trail within the centre, providing arts and cultural activities that promote towns and experiences across the region.

Wonders of Wynyard

Wonders of Wynyard is a third time gold winner for visitor information services at the Tasmania Tourism Awards, and has been inducted into the Hall of Fame. This small centre in northern Tasmania attributes success to a combination of factors.

The VIC provides visitor information and operates a museum showcasing a local collection of 16 unique vintage vehicles and an art gallery and retail area. The centre was purpose built by the Wynyard Council to house the car and motorbike collection and create a visitor attraction. The unique collection of vehicles creates a point of difference for the centre from the neighbouring VIC success story at Burnie.

The art gallery and retail area were added subsequently to add value to the visitor experience. Monthly exhibitions are held and locals and visitors come to the centre to buy quality local gifts and souvenirs. The VIC now also provides a rent a bike service to address to gap in the market.

While the VIC has a website and Facebook page, the majority of connections with visitors are face to face, with visitors coming into the centre to find out about what to see and do and to book tours.

Operating as a single entity is considered important for ensuring consistent service experiences across all aspects of the facility. The VIC is conveniently located for their drive market. Visitors have ready access to a nearby supermarket and service station and cafes and long bay parking.

The success of the VIC is measured by the impact it has on the local economy through direct spend in the centre and the sales for local artists and producers featured in the gallery and retail area. Social impacts are also important, including the involvement of community volunteers and the sense of community ownership of the centre.

KEY POINTS:

VIC's co-location with a visitor attraction and other services draws visitors and encourages them to linger within the centre.

VIC staff/volunteers coordination of the main visitor attraction ensures visitors are receiving consistent experience across facility

The National Perspectives on Visitor Information Servicing notes co-location can afford VICs an opportunity to increase patronage and revenue and reduce overhead costs. Some success factors for co-location are noted:

- Partner with a complementary attraction or service that will boost visitation and enable the VIC to be a destination in its own right

- Ensure the space and location meets visitor needs, is accessible and evokes a sense of place that is deeply felt by visitors and inhabitants.

If the success factors are not in place, co-location can result in poor performance. A six month trial of moving visitor centre services to the Civic Centre and Art Gallery building in Wagga Wagga failed to deliver the expected range of efficiencies and was unpopular with locals and visitors due to space constraints and a less accessible location. The former Clare Valley VIC in SA was closed after its relocation with the local library performed poorly. The rationale for the move was to streamline local council services with a shared space and staff resources. Limited accessibility due to lack of parking and VIC services reduced to a computer and brochure racks meant the VIC failed to thrive in that location. The VIC has since returned to the former site and is flourishing.

Image: The Trail Station Cafe, Alice Springs Telegraph Station

BUILDING A PROFILE IN OWN RIGHT

As well as co-location with visitor attractions or services, some VICs are introducing immersive experiences, interpretation and technology to attract visitors. Other models are seeing the creation of digitally enabled centres with modern retailing best practice and located in a high traffic environment. For other VICs the focus is simply on optimising their location and providing services that meet the needs of visitors to their region.

Albany VIC, WA

A free VR experience showcasing the region has turned the Albany VIC into a visitor attraction in its own right. Growth in visitor numbers has outstripped expectations, with the normal Easter weekend visitation increasing from 400 people per day to 1,000.

The VR technology provides a unique 360⁰ experience whereby visitors can see the region from a perspective that they would not get when visiting the locations for real. The footage is accompanied by an audio narrative that brings each place to life through local stories. The rationale for introducing the VR tour was to attract more people into the VIC. Once in the centre, visitors can browse the unique retail offering and learn more about the region's attractions and tours from staff and the touchscreens.

KEY POINTS:

Use of VR to showcase the entire region with visual content, characters and stories. Alice Springs VIC could also capture stories on the website - using locals to share theirs in welcoming visitors to Central Australia. Could be linked to an AR experience in the centre and AR remotely (using travellers' smart devices) that connects the VIC with the other touch points.

Southern Highlands VIC, NSW

The former Mittagong VIC underwent a four year transformation to a new business model of a Southern Highlands Welcome Centre. The revamped centre is a hub servicing visitors and the local community. The facilities celebrate the strengths of the region. The Welcome Centre design gives the sense of an inviting, boutique gift shop as well as a VIC. Digital resources and a video wall promote the region's attractions. Wines are available for sale as well as a range of gifts attractive to both locals and visitors. That helps to connect the VIC with VFRs who might be staying with friends and family in the region so the resources of the centre are then more likely to reach that audience.

The rationale for the change was to provide greater value and services to Council, local community and the tourism industry and to grow the contribution tourism makes to the regional economy. Increases have occurred in visitation, retail sales and memberships of Destination Southern Highlands (including non core tourist businesses). The new centre also instils pride in the region.

The VIC is rolling out touchscreens to non-accredited VIC sites to enable people to have access to regional content. Opportunities are being considered to share space with a café or gallery and introduce a sculpture trail through the Centre's gardens to establish the centre firmly as an attraction in its own right.

KEY POINTS:

The renaming to a Welcome Centre and the facilities are more representative of what it is to be a welcoming service centre for visitors to the region. The facilities and services have created an attraction in their own right for visitors and locals

Hunter Valley VIC, SA

The stand alone VIC at Pokolbin has incorporated a café and wine sales cellar within the centre. These complementary businesses help to attract visitors and increase dwell time and revenue. The VIC also offers a wide selection of merchandise and host exhibitions in gallery spaces to encourage visitors and locals into the centre. The VIC also looks to increase its commercial viability through bookings for tours, event tickets and some accommodation and its growing membership base.

KEY POINTS:

Co-location with complementary activities and retail to attract visitors and locals and encourage them to spend time in the centre learning about things to see and do in the region.

Swan Valley VIC, WA

Swan Valley VIC has won gold twice for the best Visitor Centre in Australia at the prestigious QANTAS Australian Tourism Awards and been inducted into the Western Australian Tourism Awards' Hall of Fame. The success of the VIC is down to its unwavering focus across all parts of the business on enhancing the visitor experience.   Staff and volunteers get out from behind the counter and deliver bespoke, tailored recommendations for how a visitor can make the most of their visit, and to encourage them to stay longer and spend more in the Swan Valley.

The VIC is seeing a growth in walk-ins over time. Currently the VIC is located in Guildford's heritage precinct which draws visitors as they can learn about the overarching historical story before heading out to explore region.

The VIC team are constantly looking at ways to innovate and set the benchmark for best practice in the visitor experience.   For example, in response to visitors' expectation of immediate purchase when booking accommodation or activity, the VIC has improved the booking experience. Following extensive industry education and training, the entire destination is now live on the Bookeasy system, allowing real time bookings for visitors. Previously the destination ran the risk of losing bookings because many operators could not confirm bookings immediately.

KEY POINTS:

Co-location with a visitor drawcard to encourage visitation to the VIC

Visitor experience focus throughout all part of operation

Triabunna VIC, TAS

While not an award winning VIC, the Triabunna VIC merits mention as an example of financial diversification. The VIC works with other operators to extend the reasons for visitors to use the VIC and increase revenue sources. Triabunna, on Tasmania's east coast is known as the gateway to Maria Island. The Glamorgan Spring Bay Council has entered into an arrangement with the ferry operator where the Triabunna VIC handles ticketing for the ferry service to the island. Redevelopment of the VIC into a new experience centre is under discussion as the centre can struggle to manage the influx of visitors through the building.

KEY POINTS:

Identification of opportunities to increase income and serve visitor markets effectively

Mackay Region Visitor Information Servicing

To reach a greater segment of the drive market, a new state-of-the-art Mackay Region VIC has been opened on the highway at Sarina to encourage visitors to continue travelling through to Mackay and explore the surrounding region. With construction of the new Mackay Ring Road, a VIC presence at Sarina was considered vital as a significant proportion of the important northbound drive market were at risk of bypassing Mackay.

The Sarina Tourist Art and Craft Visitor Information Centre is an attraction in itself, through its location within a precinct of historical buildings. The VIC features the latest technology, making it one of the most advanced information centres in Australia. A new interactive touch table featuring multi-user compatibility will enable visitors to find, research and book tours, and accommodation from across the region that is tailored to their needs. The site includes parking for cars and caravans, seating and playground areas and a free dump point.

The existing Mackay Visitor Information is remaining open to service any southbound travellers or visitors arriving at the Mackay Airport.

KEY POINTS:

VIC gateway locations to maximise their ability to reach the drive market into the region

Inclusion of current technology to assist visitors in customising information to meet their needs

Swan Valley VIC

As noted above, the VIC is currently located in Guildford's heritage precinct. There has been a growing shift in the how visitors travel to and through the region, with more coming into the region from the north. As a result the VIC is no longer located at the region's main gateway. A review is underway to identify the best location for a VIC to serve visitor markets to the region.   Continuing to offer a VIC service from Guildford is likely.

SUMMARY

The following table summarises the location and elements of the operation of the VIC case studies.

VIC	LOCATION	OTHER FACILITIES	BOOKINGS	RETAIL	SERVE EDUCATION GROUPS	MEMBERSHIP BASE
Devenport	Co-located with Devonport Regional Gallery and Town Hall Theatre		✓	✓	x	x
Waltzing Matilda Centre	Co-located with Waltzing Matilda Centre	Café, exhibition & function spaces	✓	✓	✓	✓
Canberra & Region	Co-located with National Capital Exhibition	Café, exhibition & function spaces	✓	✓	✓	x
Bussleton	Co-located near heritage railway station and adjacent to privately owned jetty office		✓	✓	✓	✓
Burnie	Co-located with Paper Making Workshop, artisan spaces	Café, exhibition & function spaces	✓	✓	✓	x
Swan Valley	Co-located in heritage precinct		✓	✓	✓	✓
Triabunna	Stand alone		✓	✓	x	x
Hunter Valley	Stand alone	Café and a wine sales cellar, gallery rooms for exhibitions	✓	✓		✓
Albany	Co-located with library	VR experience	✓	✓	✓	✓
Southern Highlands	Stand alone - designed as a welcome centre	Wine sales Free coffee Free WiFi Charging point Coffee and water	✓	✓	x	✓
Mackay/ Sarina	Stand alone gateway centres	Free Wi-Fi, Fresh drinking water Kids playground barbecue facilities, shady picnic areas Caravan dumping point Free walking tours	✓	✓	x	✓

MULTI-CHANNEL VIC SERVICING MODEL

(Excerpt from National Perspectives on Visitor Information Servicing)

Studies underway

Several studies are underway to assess the merits of combining resources to deliver a consistent, multi-channel visitor information service.

- Local Governments in the Great Ocean Road (GOR) region are considering outsourcing responsibility for VICs to a collective group. The four councils, along with the GOR Regional Tourism Board have engaged consultants to explore a suitable model and test with the key stakeholders.

- A Bass Coast Shire Visitor Information Centre Service Review has considered how to reduce and share costs (through regional collaboration) and re-invest in technology such as self-service kiosks and touchscreens to extend services.

- Murray Regional Tourism has developed a discussion paper which recommends a new system of governance across the Murray region and its sub regions that looks beyond the historical framework of local government delivery of visitor information services.

Image: Alice Springs Desert Park

APPENDIX 2: SMART TECHNOLOGIES

Video content

Production and use of 360º videos online to inspire and attract visitors in the Dream stage of their travel planning and then in the VICs increase destination appeal and dispersal. While these videos can be more immersive than a standard video, VR delivers even more realistic and engrossing viewing. Example of use of 360º content: https://www.australia.com/en/things-to-do/aquatic/360-videos/biddlecombe-cascade-northern-territory.html

Digital binoculars

Digital binocular stations could be used at primary visitor rest stops/bush camps and key interest sites on drive routes to bring the history and stories to life. They are robust, self contained and easy to use, could offer an additional revenue stream and increase regional dispersal and the quality of experience. For example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mqLAKBX0om4

Destination App

A destination app needs to offer a live 'what's-on' guide on facilities, activities, experiences and services, with maps to help navigation, and self-guided audio tours by local characters to encourage exploration and enhance the visitor experience. This app should be accessible to self-drive visitors at rest stops and roadside information bays. Example of destination app: https://www.hamiltonisland.com.au/destination/app

Incorporating Augmented Reality (AR) technology would deliver a contemporary layer of guidance, content and entertainment to physical locations and objects and increase the quality of the visitor experience.

Augmented Reality

AR offers a contemporary visitor planning tool that can be used to communicate with visitors in their native languages, offer maps and guides for specific niche audiences, offer additional historical or cultural context to an experience, show how their destinations would appear in a different season, or create educational games to learn about an area's history and wildlife or to entertain passengers on long drives. Example of use of AR as travel guide: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pyj-S2Yqh8I and example of use of AR where visitors can meet historical figures in the locations that are important to their stories: Discover Moscow Photo app.

Incorporating AR with maps to provide travel tips and safety information would aid navigation and provide peace of mind for travelling in Outback Australia.

AR technology offers a less immersive experience compared to VR, however it's more accessible as consumers with a smartphone can use AR software. Also, there is no need for expensive equipment at outdoor sites. If there is internet connection, a network of sites linked via AR content can be used to drive dispersal.

LiveOrbis AR software technology, for example, allows businesses to create their own content without the need for technical or digital literacy. A program is used to develop an experience and the software does the rest. Objects and picture can be brought to life to provide engaging experiences for users. A LiveOrbis portal presents a visual shopfront where consumers enter via a 360º photo or video or interactive room and engage with objects. For more information: https://www.liveorbis.com.au.

Virtual Reality

Virtual reality (VR) can be used to provide a more compelling and dynamic mode of storytelling about a destination, its special places, history, myths and local characters. VR could be used as a marketing and information tool to increase awareness of what the destination offers as well as safety matters, travel distances and navigation. It can also be used by tour operators as the introduction pre tour with a safety briefing and introduction to landscape features and wildlife etc they may see.

Any VR content needs to be engaging for the audience and regularly updated to remain fresh. TA research found that VR brings a destination to life and can make consumers consider travelling to places they otherwise would not have considered. Consumers see benefits of using VR in selecting a holiday destination to get a feel of the destination and to preview the experiences on offer highlighted. VR content relating to nature and wildlife and aquatic and coastal offerings has the greatest appeal.

Formats such as WebVR and Web XR promise to supply content across both desktops and head mounted displays, without having to download plugins.

APPENDIX 3: CURRENT VISITOR SERVICING

Visitor Touchpoints

Across the visitor trip purchase cycle (see Figure 7) there are multiple opportunities to engage with consumers from when they start dreaming about holiday ideas through to their experience in the destination and the comments and images they share with friends and family at each phase of the cycle.

Consumers are engaging with a range of sources including word of mouth, destination websites, VICs, aggregator websites, internet searches, travel agents and apps. Identifying the VIC's role as an online and physical touchpoint for visitors is vital to optimising resources.

VISITOR TRIP PURCHASE CYCLE

ADVOCACY

| AWARENESS | CONSIDERATION | PREFERENCE | PURCHASE | EXPERIENCE | LOYALTY |

| DREAM | PLAN | BOOK | EXPERIENCE |

Figure 7: Visitor Trip Purchase Cycle

TCA Visitor Servicing

The Alice Spring VIC provides information online and makes bookings for consumers in their pre-trip planning and face-to-face when in region. The VIC increasingly uses social media to encourage visitors to share their experience and be enthusiastic advocates for the destination during their stay and when they return home.

In region, TCA uses a multi-pronged approach to reaching and engaging with visitors.

- Level 3 VIC in Alice Springs, located at Todd Street Mall, with 16 FTE staff and 13 volunteer ambassadors, with a focus on information provision and sales of advertising, tours, accommodation, transport and retail. A touchscreen in the front window provides access to information 24/7

- 1 unmanned self service within Uluru Kata- Tjuta National Park Cultural Centre, comprising free Wi-Fi for visitors, brochures to browse and two digital touch screens locked down to the regional website (discovercentralaustralia.com)

- TCA touchscreen at Double Tree Hilton

- TCA touchscreen at Alice Springs Desert Park

- Pop-up VIC stand at events

- Mobile bicycle VIC service that has been used during peak periods around centre of Alice Springs

- Brochure racks and volunteer ambassadors (during peak season only) at the rail station and Alice Springs Airport

- Audio Sign with regional information in the Alice Springs CBD that can be accessed 24/7

TCA is planning to provide a level 1 staffed VIC at Yulara to service travellers more effectively and to establish an unmanned VIC at Kings Canyon Resort.

Online via the DiscoverCentralAustralia.com website the VIC provides the following content for visitors to assist in their trip planning and booking:

- Travel information (driving requirements, safety, weather and services)

- Maps and brochures

- Sample itineraries based on length of journey

- Accommodation, activity and events listings

- Booking mechanism for accommodation and activities

- Live Chat line

- Facebook and Instagram

The VIC also engages with visitors using phone and email during business hours.

Image: Alice Springs Airport

Image: VIC Trailer that attends events etc.

Images: Self-serve VIC at Cultural Centre Uluru

Other VICs servicing visitors to Central Australia

Self-drive visitors heading to and through Central Australia may connect with other VICs enroute for information and bookings. The following VICs form an important network for visitors as they travel through the Outback:

- Darwin VIC – run by Tourism Top End , in downtown area and walking distance to visitor attractions and accommodation

- Tennant Creek - currently run by the mining centre association (co-located with mining tours outside of town)

- Coober Pedy - run by the District Council of Coober Pedy

- Katherine VIC- run by Katherine Town Council

- Mt Isa VIC – run by Outback at Isa, Mount Isa's major tourism facility, located on the main road into town

Other Visitor Touch Points

There are many other visitor touch points beyond the VIC that are important influencers on the information received and the quality of the visitors experience. These include:

- Alice Springs Desert Park

- Telegraph Station Alice Springs

- Alice Springs Heritage Precinct

- YHA Alice Springs

- Big 4 Alice Springs

- Tour and information centre within Voyages Resort

- Third party tour operator desks within Voyagers

- Rest stops with information stands e.g. Devils Marble

- Airports – Alice Springs and Yulara

- Roadhouses e.g. Erldunda Roadhouse and Gemtree

- National Parks – Finke Gorge, MacDonnell Ranges