



BENALLA RURAL CITY
TOURISM & EVENTS
STRATEGY
2018-2022

JULY 2018



FOREWORD

Tourism is an important part of Benalla Rural City's economy, attracting more than 335,000 visitors and generating \$42 million in visitor expenditure for the year ending September 2017.

We are home to a wide range of businesses, attractions and landscapes which are appealing to visitors, including the Benalla Art Gallery, Winton Motor Raceway and the Winton Wetlands.

We have established ourselves as an important regional centre for culture and arts – building on the focal point provided by Benalla Art Gallery, street art, silo art and events including the Benalla Festival and Wall to Wall Festival.

However, we have untapped tourism potential. While \$42 million in visitor expenditure is a significant amount, it represents only 8% of the High Country's total. Together, we can do better.

This Strategy sets out a plan for growing our visitor economy, setting a target of capturing 11.5% of the High Country's visitors by 2022.

If we are successful in meeting this target, it will generate approximately \$57 million in visitor expenditure in 2022, providing support for more than 50 new jobs.

Achieving the objectives in this Strategy will mean offering better experiences and an increased range of experience options to persuade visitors to choose Benalla.

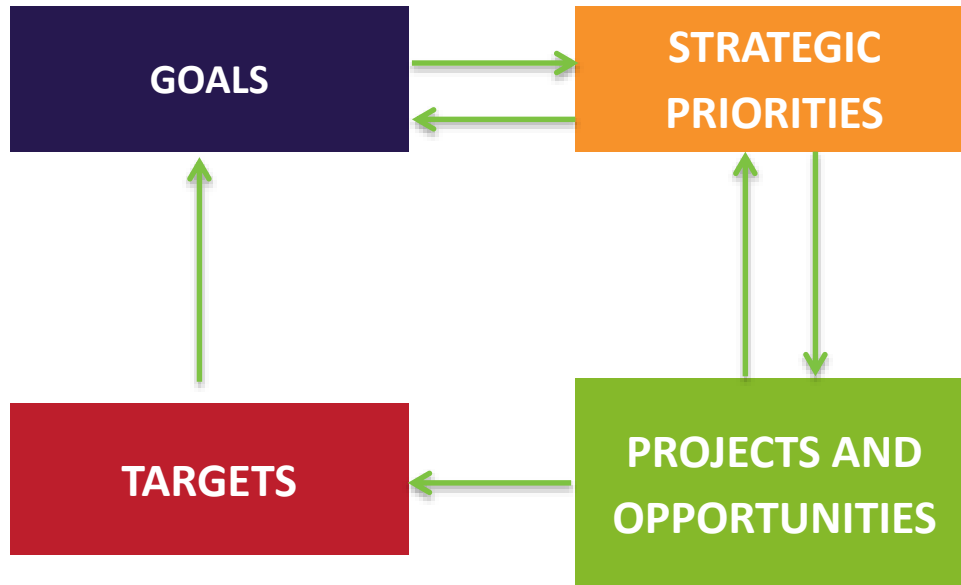
The Strategy identifies ambitious projects which we believe will attract new visitors, including a curated six seasons of events and creating a major new visitor and community precinct at Lake Benalla.

I look forward to working with tourism industry and community partners in delivering the Benalla Rural City Tourism and Events Strategy. I encourage you to 'see the art in everything'.

Cr Don Firth
Mayor



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



VISION

By 2022, the Benalla region will be recognised as the High Country's cultural centre. We will be known for our thriving arts and culture scene, driven by quirky events and artisan products and connection to nature.

BRAND STORY

"To see the art in everything".

Guiding Principles for the Strategy

- Be ambitious - Benalla has great potential as a developing regional tourism destination.
- A new destination mindset for all partners to champion Benalla's potential – communities, businesses and Council.
- The destination needs to build on its existing Unique Selling Propositions (USPs) and visitor experience strengths - particularly in culture and arts, and nature-based activities.
- New and impactful partnerships are key enablers for the strategy to make best use of our collective resources, building community and industry ownership - in marketing, experience development and business development.
- Clear sighted marketing, starting with agreement to market Benalla under a single brand proposition.
- Developing quality and depth of experiences: our signature visitor experiences – starting with improving existing assets.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GOALS

1. To increase visitor spend to \$57 million in 2022.
2. To focus on maximising existing strengths to both consolidate current tourism offerings and develop new iconic experiences.
3. To create iconic experiences based in arts, culture and events, supported by a curate year-round curated calendar of events to promote visitation and spend.
4. To enhance Benalla's positioning as the cultural centre of the High Country and deliver on its brand promise – to see the art in everything.
5. To build an industry culture of collaboration and support, collectively striving towards common goals and sustainable growth.
6. To use tourism as a vehicle to promote a commitment to celebrating and protecting the region's cultural, natural and heritage assets.

PROJECTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

1. Over the course of a 3-5 year period, Benalla can establish a 12-month curated calendar of events, taking the form of "Six Seasons of Events", with distinct themes for each of the 2 month "seasons".
2. Develop Lake Benalla as a community and visitor hub, complementing existing visitor assets such as the Benalla Art Gallery. Options include; a new floating pontoon/ walkway, entertainment deck and activation of the water space.
3. Extend Benalla's position as a cultural arts hub through supporting the business case to expand the Benalla Art Gallery and implement a program of public art installations throughout the area.
4. Capture a greater proportion of regional touring traffic through improved signposting and use of digital marketing applications.
5. Over the course of the Strategy period, work with operators and investors to expand Benalla's commercial accommodation options, as a means of developing overnight visitor markets.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Offering iconic experiences

- Build a depth and range of experiences which provide visitors with a compelling range of reasons to visit Benalla.
- Maximise emerging assets in nature-based 'art in the landscape' tourism activities to provide a range of experiences which showcase the region.

Events

- Build a strong year-around program of curated events to promote visitation and increase visitor interest in the area.
- Develop and strengthen cultural and events offerings towards the goal of consolidating Benalla's reputation as the cultural centre of the High Country.

Leveraging existing strengths

- Building on Benalla's strengths in art and culture, heritage and nature-based tourism; place emphasis on encouraging the continued development of existing products and experiences.
- Making better connections between Winton Motor Raceway and Benalla, ensuring the region fully benefits from this key asset.
- Taking advantage of Benalla's location in close proximity to busy highways to attract new visitors. Rationalisation of existing signposting can play an important role in this regard.

Partnerships, engagement and ownership of tourism in Benalla

- Work in partnership with Tourism North East, VTIC and mainstream business support providers to grow industry capacity and capability to support delivery of high quality tourism experiences.
- Develop a strong understanding of the value of tourism within Council, local businesses and the community.
- Promote ownership and pride within business and the community and encourage continuous improvement in service delivery to the benefit of overall visitor experience delivery.
- Co-ordinated marketing of Benalla, based on close collaboration with Tourism North East and local partners, incorporating social media, Official Visitor Guide, and the single "Enjoy Benalla" consumer website promoting the region.

Building and activating attractive precincts

- Develop the potential of the Art Gallery/ Lake Benalla area as a major new precinct for communities and visitors.
- Work with retailers and service providers to build weekend 'reasons to visit'.

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DISCLAIMER

The information and recommendations provided in this Tourism & Events Strategy are made on the basis of information available at the time of preparation and the assumptions outlined throughout the document. While all care has been taken to check and validate material presented in this report, independent research should be undertaken before any action or decision is taken on the basis of material contained in this report. This report does not seek to provide any assurance of project viability and EarthCheck accept no liability for decisions made or the information provided in this report.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE DESTINATION

Benalla Rural City is situated to the north-west of the Great Dividing Range and 180km north-east of Melbourne.

In addition Benalla – the region’s main service centre, townships include; Baddaginnie, Devenish, Goorambat, Tatong, Thoona, Swanpool and Winton support a predominantly agricultural and manufacturing workforce.

Tourism has not historically been a leading part of Benalla’s economy, however there is significant potential for visitation and visitor expenditure to grow, and to play a leading role in developing the region as a great place to live, work and visit.

Successful tourism growth can play a leading role in contributing to the city’s community objectives of; a progressive economy, connected community and sustainable environment.



Progressive Economy

Growing visitor numbers and expenditure



Sustainable Environment

Tourism offers opportunities to generate revenue which can help environmental programs and increase the understanding of what makes Benalla special.



Connected Community

Tourism provides the opportunity to tell Benalla’s story, involving residents and business in delivering experiences and becoming proud advocates for the destination.

Many, if not all of Benalla’s tourism experiences are also valued by residents, contributing to it becoming a great destination to live and work, as well as visit.



Figure 1: The Tourism Growth Cycle

1.2 TOURISM'S CONTRIBUTION TO BENALLA'S ECONOMY

Tourism in Benalla in 2017 is estimated to have provided over **\$42 million to the local economy**; this is roughly **16% of all tourism expenditure** within the High Country¹.

Tourism expenditure supports many industries, as outlined in Figure 2, below. Based on Tourism Satellite figures for the High Country, Figure 2 outlines the areas where tourism spend benefits the local economy.

Within Benalla, this expenditure directly supported **454 jobs within accommodation and food services and arts and recreation services**. This is not including other jobs within the related retail sector, and should be considered a conservative estimation due to undercounting within the Census.

A direct job is created for every \$92,000 in tourism expenditure¹.

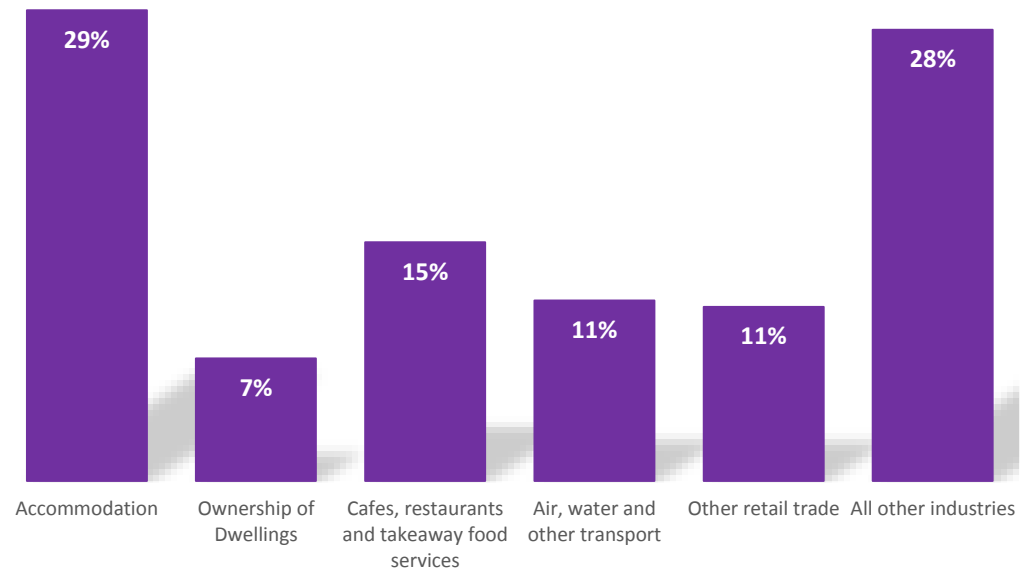


Figure 2: Percentage of Direct Tourism Revenue in related Industry Sector

Source: Tourism Satellite Account for High Country 2015/16, published by Business Victoria

¹Tourism Satellite Account, Victoria 2015/16



2.0 BENALLA'S VISITOR MARKET

2.1 WHO IS VISITING BENALLA?

REGIONAL VISITOR PROFILE

This regional profile has been built using available visitor data collected through the International Visitor Survey (IVS) and National Visitor Survey (NVS). Where possible, Year Ending September 2017 data has been used in analysing Benalla's visitor market, however, due to small sample sizes, five year averaged data has been used in some instances to ensure statistical robustness.

Overall Visitor Market

Benalla Rural City received **335,310 visitors** in YE September 2017, accounting for **10% of the High Country's total visitation**.

Visitation has **grown by an average of 9% since YE September 2013**, albeit data shows significant fluctuations during this period. Averaging performance over the five year timespan, Benalla Rural City has welcomed an average of **286,943 visitors over the YE September 2013-2017 period**.

Day Visitors

Day visitors are the region's most significant market, accounting for an average of **61% of total visitors** over the 2013-17 period. Day Visitors to Benalla Rural City represent 12% of all day visitors to the High Country. Analysis of TRA data indicates that day visitors to Benalla Rural City spend on average \$84 per trip, making this market worth approximately **\$14.7 million** to Benalla Rural City in YE September 2017.

Domestic Overnight Visitors

Domestic Overnight visitation is also an important component of Benalla Rural City's visitor economy – generating an average of 224,931 visitor nights each year over the 2013-2017 period. Benalla Rural City currently holds an 8% share of the High Country's Domestic Overnight market.

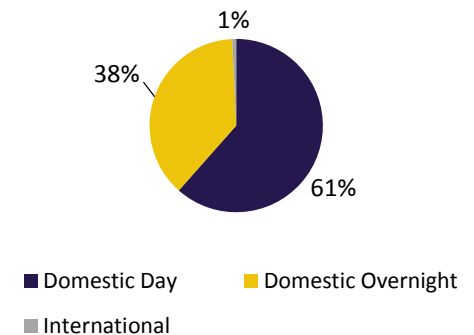
Domestic Overnight visitors have an **Average Length of Stay (ALoS) of 2.06 nights** over the 2013-2017 period, and an **average spend of \$109 per night**.

The International market represents only 0.7% of visitation to Benalla Rural City, only slightly less than the High Country overall average of 1%.

There has been an average of 2,125 international visitors annually to Benalla Rural City over the 2013-2017 period, who have an average length of stay of 15 nights. International visitors generate approximately \$1.8 million in expenditure.

The combined worth of the visitor economy to the Benalla region is estimated to be **\$41.1million in YE September 2017** which represents approximately 6% of the High Country's overall expenditure.

Figure 3: Benalla Visitor Market



2.1 WHO IS VISITING BENALLA?

REGIONAL VISITOR PROFILE

Purpose of Visit

The main reason to visit the Benalla region between 2013 and 2017 was for a Holiday (59% average), followed by Visiting Friends and Relatives (27% average), Business (8% average) and 'Other' (includes employment and education) (6% average).

This results in an overall Leisure market (Holiday and VFR) which accounts for 86% of all visitation to Benalla Rural City.

The market which grew the largest in this period was Holiday, which saw an average increase of 20%, which was a 7% p.a. greater increase than the High Country as a whole.

Visiting Friends and Relatives remained relatively stable with a 1% p.a. average overall increase, which is likely indicative of the stable population in the region.

Business visitation as a whole decreased by an average of 9% p.a.

Travel Groups

The majority of visitors to Benalla Rural City travel alone (30% average), or as an adult couple (27% average). Friends or Relatives travelling as a group is also common at 23%, while only 17% of visitors travel as a family group.

Visitors travelling alone have increased by an average of 34% p.a. since YE September 2013, while Friends or Relatives travelling as a group also experienced significant growth, with an average increase of 19% p.a.

Age

The 50+ age brackets account the largest proportion of Benalla Rural City's visitors. The High Country region also receives 45% of its visitors from the 50+ age groups.

Origin of Visitors

Benalla's key source domestic markets are from Victoria (88%) and New South Wales (9%).

Overall, 39% of all visitors to Benalla Rural City originate from the Greater Melbourne region, followed by 17% from the High Country, 16% from Hume/ Goulburn and 7% from Central Murray (VIC).

Of the Victorian market:

- 31% of day visitors are from the Greater Melbourne area
- 27% of day visitors are from within the High Country region
- 26% of day visitors are from the Hume/ Goulburn region
- 66% of Overnight visitors are from the Greater Melbourne Area

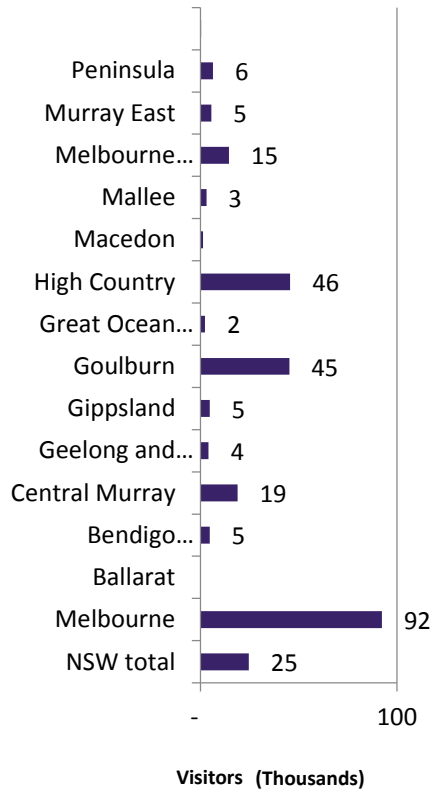
Of the New South Wales source market:

- Day visitors are solely from The Murray region
- 37% of overnight visitors are from The Murray region
- 22% of overnight visitors are from Sydney
- 12% of overnight visitors are from Capital Country (ACT and surrounds)

2.1 WHO IS VISITING BENALLA?

REGIONAL VISITOR PROFILE

Figure 4: Visitor Origins



International visitors to Benalla Rural City originate from United Kingdom (22%), New Zealand (17%), United States of America (10%), and Germany (5%). The High Country tourism region has a similar international visitor profile.

Visitor Activities

The top activities for visitors to Benalla are:

- Visiting Friends and Relatives (22%)
- Dining or eating out (22%)
- Pubs and clubs (8%)
- Sightseeing (7%)
- Go shopping for pleasure (6%)
- Attending an organised sport event (5%)
- Bushwalking (4%)
- Visiting museums and art galleries (3%)

These are largely consistent with the High Country's visitor activity patterns, however food-based activities such as wineries and markets feature more prominently in the regional offering.

Summary:



- 335,310 visitors** to Benalla Rural City
- An average increase of 9% since 2013
 - The majority (61%) are Domestic Day visitors
 - Account for 10% of High Country's visitors



- 256,072 (average) million visitor nights** to the Benalla region:
- 6% of High Country's nights
 - The majority of visitors are from domestic sources (88%)
 - Melbourne is a key source market, as are travellers from Hume/Goulburn and within the High Country



- \$41.1million** in overnight visitor expenditure to the Benalla region
- Holiday and Visiting Friends and relatives remain the main reasons to travel to Benalla region.

2.2 BENCHMARKING PERFORMANCE

REGIONAL VISITOR PROFILE

The High Country is a growing tourism destination with strengths in a number of areas including snow sports, food and drink, nature-based activities, heritage and adventure

Table 1 shows a comparison of visitation characteristics within the High Country.

The Alpine region reflects the maturity of the snow resort experiences, with a significantly larger visitor market than any other region, longer average length of stay and higher spend per night.

Benalla Rural City has a smaller visitor market than most other parts of the High Country.

Leveraging existing points of difference such as a focus on arts, culture and events will provide High Country visitors with additional reasons to visit Benalla, and grow visitation.

Table 1: Visitation and Expenditure in the High Country Region

	Benalla	Alpine	Wangaratta	Indigo	Towong	Mansfield
Domestic Overnight	108,271	456,740	228,281	190,892	56,389	370,765
% holiday	53%	88%	39%	63%	71%	83%
% VFR	35%	10%	21%	20%	21%	10%
% other	13%	2%	40%	13%	7%	6%
Average Stay (nights)	2.06	3.45	2.77	2.8	2.8	2.8
Spend per Night	\$104	\$158	\$101	\$145	No Data	\$99
International	2,125	8,328	4,501	3,337	1,203	5,859
Spend per Night	\$58	\$76	\$46	\$56	No Data	\$63
Domestic Day	176,547	226,253	422,344	257,696	77,611	321,656
Spend per Trip	\$83	\$78	\$98	\$87	No Data	\$69



3.0 DESTINATION ANALYSIS

3.1 STRATEGIC ACCESS

Benalla is easily accessible from Melbourne, being served by both the Hume and Midland Highways, and the Melbourne to Wodonga passenger rail service.

Self-drive vehicles were the most popular mode of transport to the region by visitors (92%). A small volume of visitors travelled by aircraft (1%) or by other transport modes (6%). This is consistent with travel to the broader High Country region.

Benalla is well positioned to leverage its tourism appeal due to its highly accessible location on two major highways – providing exposure to the touring market.

RAIL

Benalla is serviced by the V/Line Albury Line. This 2.5 hour service operates daily from Southern Cross Station in Melbourne at approximately two and a half hour intervals.

ROAD

The region is well connected, with both the Hume and Midland highways criss-crossing Benalla region. By road, the region is approximately a 2.5 hour travel time from Melbourne.

AIR

Benalla Airport is not in commercial use, but is the focus of a redevelopment aimed at increasing the capabilities of the Aviation Museum and Gliding Club of Victoria to host larger events. Albury provides the closest regional airport, with connections to Benalla available via train/ coach.



3.2 BENALLA'S DESTINATION STRENGTHS

Strong visitor economies thrive on their unique attributes and experiences – the all-important reasons to visit or stop off on a trip. Sometimes these are practical reasons such as being ideally located as a stopping point on a touring trip, or they can be the stand out visitor experiences which motivate a trip decision.



Benalla has built a strong program of events. In addition to arts events – cricket, motorsports and gliding events have also developed as drivers of visitation.



In recent years Benalla region has gained a reputation as an emerging cultural hub, with an emphasis on visual and public arts.

The Benalla Art Gallery is the focal point for arts and cultural opportunities – its exhibitions and programming attract approximately 40,000 visitors per year.

Benalla has a strength in terms of its heritage assets and stories. From a tourism perspective, as part of the wider High Country region, Benalla plays part in the Ned Kelly Story.



The area has a thriving motor sports sector being home to the Winton Motor Raceway which hosts domestic racing competitions of all levels, including the V8 Supercars Championships.

Winton Wetlands is of major tourism significance, being a wetland restoration project of national scientific, cultural & environmental significance; the largest in the southern hemisphere.



3.3 KEY TOURISM EXPERIENCES

BUSINESS AND CONFERENCE

The Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) sector is not a major market for Benalla, however, the region does offer a range of facilities. The Benalla Performing Arts and Convention Centre (BPACC) is a functions, events and performing arts venue, with a 344 seat auditorium. Winton Motor Raceway also provides facilities which serve this market. As demonstrated by Benalla's successful hosting of the World Gliding Championships, the region is capable of hosting large events. The lessons learning from hosting the Gliding Championships can also be applied to larger business events – presenting opportunities for region-wide packaging.

HERITAGE

Benalla offers a proud and fascinating history, ranging from Victorian era buildings, to museums and gardens.

The region also hosts elements of the North East's Kelly Story, including the Costume and Kelly Museum's authentic period costumes and dress.

Contemporary heritage stories are also accessible to visitors, including Benalla Aviation Museum's collection - the original home of a World War II RAAF pilot training school.

Tourism North East has recently led the preparation of an experience development plan which is designed to bring the Kelly Story to life. The potential for an extension to the Benalla Art Gallery to play a leading role in bringing the Kelly Story to Life has been recognised in this plan. The Gallery has been identified as having the potential to house some of the Kelly Collection and Kelly-related exhibitions. This concept also opens up the opportunity to review how key property assets are most appropriately used in Benalla's visitor precincts. In particular, if extension of the Art Gallery and development of the Lake Benalla precinct proceed, there is an opportunity to examine how the building which houses the VIC and Costume museum can be best utilised.

BENALLA'S ROLE AS A SERVICE CENTRE

Benalla performs an important role as the Rural City's principal service centre

This includes leading assets such as the Art Gallery as well as important amenities for visitors including pubs, restaurants, cafes, and shops, as well as precincts and places where visitors can spend time. The area around the Art Gallery and Lake Benalla is a natural focal point. In common with many regional towns, Benalla tends to be quiet during the weekends with many shops and businesses closing. Opportunities exist for tourism activity to help generate the business cases for local enterprises to extend their opening hours. Tourism demand can help provide the business cases to support local traders to extend service provision and opening periods into the weekends. Operations for local stakeholders' consideration include:

- Promoting awareness of opportunities from visitor markets;
- Seeking consensus among traders to extend business hours into weekends – initially on a rota basis and focusing of peak visitation periods;
- Introducing an events program to assist in activating weekend footfall i.e. Foodtruck Sundays etc; and
- Investing in activation 'plug and play' infrastructure in key precincts and CBD locations which acts as a facilitator for a wide range of activations.

3.3 KEY TOURISM EXPERIENCES

ACCOMMODATION

Benalla currently has a broad mix of commercial accommodation, and privately managed accommodation available through providers such as AirBnB and Stayz. Desktop analysis indicates 73 accommodation offerings in Benalla Rural City at present. Nearly half (35) of all available accommodation are AirBnB rentals. Of the 35 AirBnB properties, 19 are located in the city of Benalla.

Accommodation Type	No of Rooms
Commercial: Motels	133
Commercial: Hotels	16
Commercial: Caravan Parks or Camping	39 (but camping up to 900 people)
Non-Commercial (AirBnB etc.)	~136

Table 2: Rooms by Accommodation Type in Benalla Rural City

FOOD AND DRINK

Benalla offers a range of food and drink experiences for visitors, including country pubs, farmgates and local markets.

The Glenrowan Wine Region mixes the folklore and history of the region with high quality winemaking dating back to the beginning of last century, providing visitors with the opportunity to enjoy wine tasting, food and wine trails and cellar door sales.

Surrounding regions in North East Victoria also offer a broad range of authentic local food and drink experiences, providing the opportunity to a market-led approach to the continued development of region-wide trails and experiences.

CYCLING

North East Victoria has long been recognised as having the strongest cycle tourism credentials in Victoria and is primed to become Australia's premier cycling destination. With around 100,000 overnight visitors coming to the region to participate in cycling each year, the region's cycling visitation is double the average for regional Victoria. Developing cycle tourism is important for the region, and is priority for Tourism North East and the Ovens Murray Regional Partnership.

While Benalla is not at the centre of the Region's cycling network, making the necessary connections into the network can ensure that the economic shares in the forecast cycling market growth. Establishing the Winton Wetlands to Wangaratta Trail is a particular opportunity in this regard.



3.4 VISITOR INFORMATION SERVICES

Provision of visitor information and marketing services by Council and its partners play important roles in supporting the visitor economy.

Marketing, websites, digital platforms and social media provide the opportunity to raise awareness and influence visitors prior to their arrival.

Benalla Visitor Information Centre (VIC) is a fully accredited Visitor Information Centre, which acts as a physical point of contact, providing the opportunity to influence visitors when they are in the region. The Centre also houses the Costume and Kelly Museum which includes a display of Ned Kelly memorabilia, including the Green silk sash Ned was wearing when he was captured during the Glenrowan siege.

As noted in the State Government's emerging Visitor Services Strategy, consumers utilisation of information has undergone significant changes. Nonetheless, VICs play a crucial role in:

- Informing and educating visitors;



Figure 5: Benalla VIC

- Influencing visitor behaviour and trip decisions; and
- Contributing to economic benefits derived from tourism.

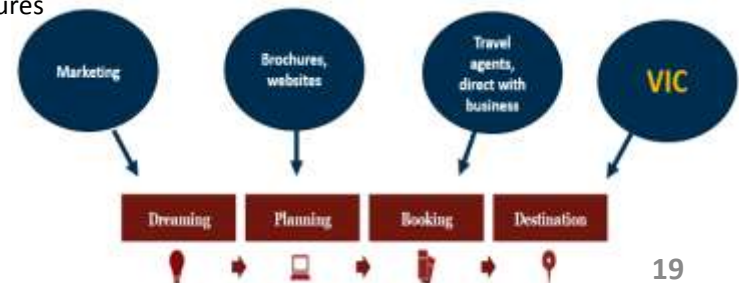
VICs' key role is in influencing visitors when in-destination - all other elements of the customer journey are influenced by other means - marketing, websites, brochures and booking systems etc.

As such, location is crucial - bricks and mortar VICs need to be sited in the locations which provide them with the best opportunities to influence visitors – using the personal interaction skills of VIC staff and volunteers to provide added value.

From an operational perspective, key trends include;

- VIC use is driven by situation, not visitor type. Most tourists will stop at visitor centres if they require information
- Most trips are pre-planned
- Tourists most often make use of VICs when they are first time visitors
- Most common motivators for using a VIC are accessing information on attractions, obtaining maps or finding information on activities and accommodation.

Figure 6: Customer Purchase Lifecycle



3.4 VISITOR INFORMATION SERVICES

However, the main influencer on visitor information provision over the last decade is the adoption and application of mobile technology. The ability to access information any place and any time (subject to connectivity capacity) is a major contributing factor to forecasts that walk-in customers to VICs in some locations may gradually decline. While some customers will continue to actively seek out the service that VICs can provide, the growing numbers of millennial visitors are increasingly unlikely to take this option, especially if the VIC is not in a convenient location for them.

VICs are frequently a Council's largest single investment in supporting the visitor economy, and if continuing value is to be built from this investment, delivering the service in the same manner is unlikely to deliver the best return on investment. VICs are also valued by local communities, with often 50% of customers being from local origins – this is particularly the case when booking and information services cover local facilities.

In the 2017 calendar year, Benalla VIC serviced 13,213 walk-in customers, 310 phone calls and over 900 emails during this period. Over 60% of walk-in enquiries were from interstate and regional Victorian visitors.

The VIC is recognised as having a number of strengths:

- An accredited VIC with strong levels of visitor service;
- A central location in Benalla CBD;
- Easy customer access and parking; and
- Co-location with the Costume and Kelly Museum.

At present, the total number of visitors influenced by the VIC represents 4.2% of Benalla's visitor market, a figure which is typical of the proportion of visitors reached by VICs in most regional locations.

Looking to the future, there are a number of issues to consider:

- The services offered by the VIC, and the need to become 'inspiration centres' rather than simple providers as information;
- The potential of complementary and/or alternative means of information delivery, for instance;

- Mobile visitor information service which can easily move to multiple locations or events within the city – these can take the form of converted vehicles, caravans/towed trailers or simple demountable structures – tents and marquees etc;
- Co-locating visitor information services at key visitor locations and areas around the region (attractions, accommodation, post offices, cultural and arts venue, pubs, food outlets); and
- Extension of the VIC role to be hub for CBD activities – events and city-wide events.

These options all have the merits. Table 3, over, provides an overview of their relative strengths and weaknesses. Within the context of other potential development opportunities in Benalla, greatest short to medium term return on investment is likely to be delivered by initiatives which develop services and extend the reach of the existing centre (mobile services, partnerships with industry etc.). If a new location for the VIC is to be considered, it is recommended that that this should be only as part of a larger development, where the VIC is a complementary service to a larger development.

3.4 VISITOR INFORMATION SERVICES

Table 3: VIC Opportunity Costs

	Development Cost	Operational Cost	Complementary to the current VIC or an alternative	Weaknesses	Potential to grow impact of the service on influencing visitors in-destination
Mobile VIC services	Medium	Medium	Complementary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional management of service Maintenance costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By taking the service to visitor hubs, locations and events, there is potential to research and influence larger numbers of visitors
New VIC location	High	Medium	Alternative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expensive option which is still subject to the same trends in information take-up/ consumer behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact is totally dependent on location, but potentially a significant impact. Development of standalone new VICs in recent years is not common – where facilities are relocated they are frequently as part of a larger visitor attraction, visitor centre or facility - the larger development providing a strong pull for visitation outside the services of the VIC itself
Co-location of information provision in other locations	Low	Low	Complementary or alternative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional management cost Training/ upskilling of information partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subject to the sites chosen to distribute information being high volume visitor locations, this service can extend information provision beyond that the VIC can achieve on its own
Extended role for the VIC as a CBD activity hub	Low	Low	Complementary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could dilute the role of the VIC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dependent on destination circumstances (a busy CBD, frequent events), developing this option can assist in extending impact, however the primary benefit is more strategic –linking visitor information with overall CBD management

3.5 BENALLA'S TARGET VISITOR SEGMENTS

PRIMARY TARGET MARKETS FOR BENALLA RURAL CITY

Day Leisure Visitors

- Day visitors from Melbourne
- Day visitors who are staying overnight elsewhere in the High Country region
- Conversion of passing road traffic

Domestic Overnight Visitors

- Victoria and NSW

The Leisure market (holidays and visiting friends and relatives) is currently a dominant driver of visitation to Benalla, and is a market segment which aligns with the region's emerging cultural and arts scene. Leveraging existing strengths is an enabler to the key objective of increasing Day Leisure visitation to Benalla.

A wide range of visitors engage in Leisure activities, and particularly attention should be paid to;

- Families
- Older Couples
- The "Culturally Curious"
- Millennials

Millennials are not currently an important visitor market for Benalla, however the wider High Country region has seen growth in younger age segments (in part driven by winter sports in the snow resorts). With an appropriate experience mix, there is potential to tap into this market in the future.

Visit Victoria's extensive research into the domestic market has identified *Lifestyle Leaders* as its broad target market, giving valuable insight into the emotional connection domestic visitors are seeking as well as what they expect from a Victorian holiday. *Lifestyle Leaders* are found in all regions across Victoria and are segmented into four broad categories, each with their own specific motivation drivers, passions and interest.

Creative Opinion Leaders are trendsetters, not followers. They like to be amongst the first to discover new places and experiences to satisfy their desire to explore. Their extensive social networks and extroverted nature means that once they've visited a destination, the latest exhibition or experience, they will generate positive word of mouth among their friends and family. ***This is the primary market for Benalla.***

Food & Wine Lifestylers seek to enhance their sophisticated palate and culinary knowledge through an understanding about everything food and wine. They enjoy breaks where they can indulge in food and wine experiences with friends, often combined with other cultural and soft adventure activities (such as gentle walking and cycling activities). This segment regularly dines out locally and on weekends away and likes to get to know the characters and stories behind the food and wine from the winemaker or chef. ***This is a secondary market for Benalla at present.***

Inspired by Nature individuals seek active breaks where they can enjoy opportunities to reconnect with one another and with nature. They often seek destinations away from city life where there is the time and space to appreciate simple pleasures together, yet still offer the creature comforts they are accustomed to. They regularly get away for weekends and want a choice of activities that allow them to get active to varied degrees. Their genuine environmental concerns lead them towards preferring an eco-tourism experience where respect for natural surrounds is paramount. ***This is a developing market for Benalla.***

3.5 BENALLA'S TARGET VISITOR SEGMENTS

Enriched Wellbeing individuals seek luxurious breaks to indulge personal passions within a culturally rich, natural or rejuvenating setting. They want to enrich their mind, body and soul, seeing an authentic nature escape as an antidote to busy city life, and value quality over price.

Benalla's arts and culture experiences will appeal to this sector, but other high quality is required to complement the arts and cultural opportunity.

Lifestyle Leaders are the High Country's primary target market due to their **high value and ability to be influenced**. With the right combination of experiences, Benalla is well placed to appeal to the creative opinion leaders segment.

Domestic Habituals are travellers who visit the North East at least once each year. These visitors tend to return to a consistent location and often travel with the same group. They are heavily influenced by the recommendations of friends and family members, prioritise value for money, and are often driven by familiarity with a destination.

Despite making up **28% of visitors to the High Country**, Habituals are not a marketing focus for the region, as they have largely already predetermined where they will visit – giving little opportunity to influence their travel decisions.

Developing new and improved experiences will **be vital in helping to ensure the ongoing destination satisfaction of Habituals** in the High Country and Benalla.

The Leisure Market is a catch-all phrase to describe combined Holiday and VFR categories. The High Country received 2.7 million domestic Leisure visitors in 2017, 1.31 million of which were Day visitors and 1.47 million of which were Overnight visitors. Leisure visitors are likely to engage in nature-based, heritage and cultural activities, and are influenced by the recommendations of friends and family.

Benalla Rural City currently holds 13.9% of the High Country's Day Leisure Visitor Market, and 6.4% of the Overnight Leisure Market which equated to 182,830 and 94,881 visitors respectively.

The Day Leisure market is the primary focus for growth within Benalla, and will be the largest contributor to achieving expenditure targets. As a result, the aim is to increase the Benalla region's Day Leisure market by 1.6%, to a total of 15.5% of the High Country, supported by an additional small growth of 0.8% for the Overnight Leisure Market to a total of 7.2%. This would result in an additional 53,708 Day Leisure visitors and a further 25,464 Overnight Leisure visitors in 2022 (above 2017 levels).

3.6 POSITIONING OF BENALLA WITHIN THE HIGH COUNTRY TOURISM REGION

REGIONAL TOURISM PRIORITIES

The Victorian High Country Destination Management Plan 2013-2023 sets an ambitious goal of increasing total visitation by 15% on a rolling five-year average (2013 base). Key themes include:

- Achieve an ownership position in the Victorian cycle tourism space and be recognised as the State's premier bike destination;
- To develop a range of leading nature-based tourism hubs across the High Country that act as regional visitation and yield draw cards;
- To establish the region's arts and culture credentials to both diversify the demographic attracted to the High Country and increase dispersal;
- To evolve the winter offering of the major alpine resorts to ensure they continue to appeal to the visitor market and drive visitation, yield and job opportunities throughout the region;
- To lead innovation in the food, wine and beer space, creating a competitive differentiator for the High Country that drives tourism related visitation and yield opportunities throughout the region;

- For the High Country to set industry best practice for the use of digital technologies across all aspects of the region's offering, delivering a superior consumer experience that differentiates it from competitors; and
- Maintain and grow a strong organisation and industry that delivers positive tourism outcomes for the High Country.

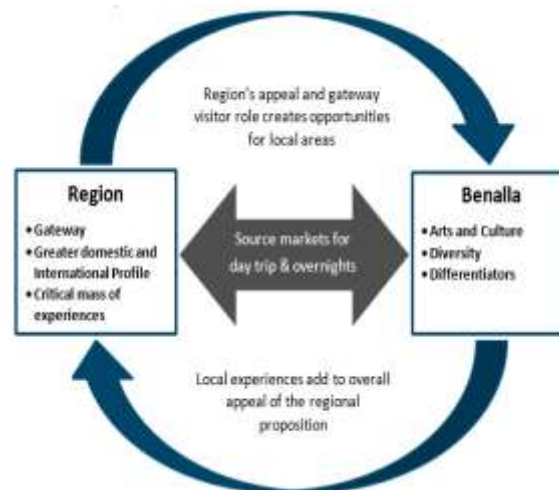


Figure 7: Benalla – High Country Relationship

BENALLA'S POSITION WITHIN THE HIGH COUNTRY

Each part of the High Country has a unique set of propositions – Benalla excels in its arts and cultural offering, leading on this proposition.

MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL PARTNERSHIP

Benalla's continuing partnership relationship with Tourism North East is critical for the region to achieve its tourism objectives. In practical terms, Benalla operating on its own will not benefit from the market reach that the regional cooperative marketing funds and access to the VisitVictoria and Tourism Australia consumer media channels can offer. In terms of assessing return on investment, both Benalla and the High Country gain from a mutually beneficial relationship.

3.7 TOURISM ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Tourism is primarily delivered by businesses and communities providing experiences to visitors, however, the complex nature of the industry means that the three levels of government and range of agencies play important roles.

TOURISM AUSTRALIA

International Marketing of Australia.

VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT

A number of State Government Departments play important roles in aspects of the sector; however, Visit Victoria is the State's primary tourism, business and major events company that leads the sector in creating, curating and communicating Victoria's inspiring experiences to maximise visitation. Visit Victoria's objective is to build Melbourne and Victoria into Australia's number one tourism destination by delivering strong and sustainable growth across priority markets. Its purpose is to revitalise the visitor economy, by generating \$36.5 billion in visitor spending by 2025 and support more than 320,700 jobs.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT VICTORIA

Regional Development Victoria (RDV) is the Victorian Government's lead agency in

developing rural and regional Victoria. RDV is a statutory agency within the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources - working with state and local stakeholders to facilitate economic, infrastructure and community development to improve the quality of life for regional Victorians. Tourism is recognised as growing in importance as part of Regional Victorian communities, with RDV being a key supporter of tourism initiative where these contribute to meeting economic, employment and social objectives.

TOURISM NORTH EAST

Tourism North East (TNE) is one of eleven regional tourism boards established at the directive of Tourism Victoria (now Visit Victoria), the State tourism body.

The regional tourism boards were created to act as the peak tourism organisations for their areas, working in partnership with Visit Victoria, industry and a range of government partners to support and develop regional tourism.

TNE is the tourism board that represents the north-east of Victoria, which is the region known as the 'High Country'. This region includes six shires – Alpine, Benalla, Indigo, Mansfield, Towong and Wangaratta – and the three major alpine resorts of Falls Creek, Mt Buller and Mt Hotham.

VICTORIAN TOURISM INDUSTRY COUNCIL

Victoria Tourism Industry Council (VTIC) is the peak body for Victoria's tourism and events industry.

In partnership with the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Victorian Chamber), VTIC offers a range of services including networking connections to tourism and events professionals, input to its 'one voice' policy agenda, accredited training, and business advisory services.

3.7 TOURISM ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

BENALLA RURAL CITY COUNCIL

Benalla Rural City Council plays a leading role in the visitor economy. Key roles include;

Core Tourism Services

- Visitor Information Centre and information services;
- Marketing (website/brochure);
- Support for Events;
- Tourism product and experience developments; and
- Partnerships (including Tourism North East), communication and leadership.

Infrastructure and Assets

Many of the facilities that adds to the tourism appeal of a destination, have community benefits as the primary rationale for provision. Outside core tourism services, Council also is responsible for a wide range of services which support the visitor economy including:

- Preparing and implementing a local planning framework which ensures that appropriate comes forward in a timely manner;

- Economic development and business support;
- Investment and maintenance of public realm i.e. streetscape, local amenities etc
- Cultural and Arts facilities including the Art Gallery;
- Countryside Management; and
- Leisure and recreation assets and facilities

BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY

The Shire has a number of business and community groups who are important contributors to the visitor economy. The Benalla Business Network promotes, supports and brings businesses in the district of Benalla together through leadership, advocacy, networking opportunities - it acts as a conduit between local business and council and updates its members through the newsletter.



3.8 STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES ASSESSMENT

The following table presents a summary of the region's strengths and opportunities. The themes all represent areas where action can contribute to developing a more competitive destination.

STRENGTHS	OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benalla Art Gallery is established as a significant regional gallery • Winton Motor Raceway, including major events including the Supercars Championships • Benalla Festival is established as an annual cultural event • Growing recognition for the Wall to Wall festival • Scenic rural landscape • Easily accessible with several highways connecting the region • Lakes (Benalla and Mokoan)/Winton Wetlands • Spaces for nature based activities • Heritage • Urban art scene • Active sports clubs (Gliding) • Stable VFR and Holiday market • Good value high street proposition, including free parking • A strong and growing regional cycle network through implementation of the Optimisation Project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing Benalla's positioning as a cultural and arts hub • Activation of cultural and heritage opportunities including; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued development of the Gallery • Precinct development around Lake Benalla/ Benalla Art Galley • Consolidation and continued development of key festivals including Wall to Wall and Benalla Festival • Outdoor Art Installations • Development and activation which ensures Benalla is part of the North East's Kelly Story • Further development of the Raceway's role as a key visitor attractor, developing its potential as a visitor precinct and making improved connections with Benalla as a destination • Growing Benalla's share of the region's day visitors • Growing the potential of agribusiness/ food and wine as part of Benalla's tourism experience offering • Nature-based and soft-adventure activities, including Development of the Mokoan Project at Winton Wetlands • Improved highway signage/ taking a strategic approach to rationalising/managing signposting • Creative collaborations between industry, community • Rationalisation/maximisation of local resources invested in destination marketing • Opportunity to establish the Winton to Wangaratta cycleway • Taking a market-led approach to developing opportunities – not being constrained by administrative boundaries

3.8 STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES ASSESSMENT

WEAKNESSES	AREAS OF CONCERN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliance on the drive tourism market • Recognition as a visitor destination from communities and businesses is limited • Winton Motor Raceway's calendar of events including the Supercars Championship is a key attractor, however a significant proportion of visitor expenditure from major events is not currently retained in the Benalla economy. • The Raceway's typical visitor market is very distinct from Benalla's other strengths as a destination • Limited commercial hospitality sector • Poor data availability to track progress • Limited activities for families • Signage would benefit from rationalisation and improvement • Benalla is quiet at weekends, with business closures limiting options for visitors • Poor industry cohesion and collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor digital connectivity • Poor & inconsistent directional signage • Need for more tourism products to be developed as motivators for trips • Limited preference for the region outside of Victoria • Untapped Indigenous tourism potential



OFFICIAL VISITOR GUIDE

Benalla

North East Victoria

NED KELLY - TOURISM

BENALLA THAT NED KELLY HAD HIS FIRST OLD BOOT SHOP IN AIRLINDS STREET - CROSS THE ROAD.

Information Centre and
it is a great starting point on
the country.

Benalla Museum has an impressive
collection of memorabilia, including the
sack worn by Ned during
the portable police cell in
1880. The museum also screens
a documentary of the Kelly legend.

The touring route, starting
at Bridge St. Follow
the men at Spring
and the old out
of its head
the town.

4.0 VISION &
DIRECTION

4.1 VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Our Vision

By 2022, the Benalla region will be recognised as the High Country's cultural centre. We will be known for our thriving arts and culture scene, driven by quirky events and artisan products and connection to nature.

This Vision will be supported by the brand story:

"To see the art in everything".

A series of key strategic priorities will act as enablers in the achievement of the vision:

OFFERING ICONIC EXPERIENCES

- Build a depth and range of experiences which provide visitors with a compelling range of reasons to visit Benalla.
- Maximise emerging assets in nature-based 'art in the landscape' tourism activities to provide a range of experiences which showcase the region.

EVENTS

- Build a strong year-around program of curated events to promote visitation and increase visitor interest in the area.
- Develop and strengthen cultural and events offerings towards the goal of consolidating Benalla's reputation as the cultural centre of the High Country.

LEVERAGING EXISTING STRENGTHS

- Building on Benalla's strengths in art and culture, heritage and nature-based tourism; placing emphasis on encouraging the continued development of existing products and experiences.
- Making better connections between Winton Motor Raceway and Benalla, ensuring the region fully benefits from this key asset.

- Taking advantage of Benalla's location in close proximity to busy highways to attract new visitors. Rationalisation of existing signposting can play an important role in this regard

PARTNERSHIPS, ENGAGEMENT AND OWNERSHIP OF TOURISM IN BENALLA

- Work in partnership with Tourism North East, VTIC and mainstream business support providers to grow industry capacity and capability to support delivery of high quality tourism experiences.
- Develop a strong understanding of the value of tourism within Council, local businesses and the community.
- Promote ownership and pride within business and the community and encourage continuous improvement in service delivery to the benefit of overall visitor experience delivery.
- Co-ordinated marketing of Benalla, based on close collaboration with Tourism North East and local partners, incorporating social media, Official Visitor Guide, and the single "Enjoy Benalla" consumer website promoting the region.

4.1 VISION FOR THE FUTURE

CO-ORDINATION AND ORGANISATION

- Develop governance structures which enable tourism development and are adaptive to market disruptors and emerging trends
- Promote a culture of connectivity, engagement and innovation which is supportive of investment
- Create an investor-friendly environment to promote the establishment of novel events, cultural projects and enabling infrastructure which enhance visitor experience and interest.

BRANDING, MARKETING AND POSITIONING

- Curate and package a clear and decisive public brand
- Be curators and stewards of cultural and natural heritage
- Rationalise local marketing investment to build impact and return on investment

BUILDING AND ACTIVATING ATTRACTIVE PRECINCTS

- Develop the potential of the Art Gallery/ Lake Benalla area as a major new precinct for communities and visitors
- Work with retailers and service providers to build weekend 'reasons to visit'



4.2 MARKET POSITIONING

Unlike its regional neighbours, Benalla has a distinct cultural tourism offering which has enabled the region to carve out its own cultural and artistic niche. It is recognised that this distinct experience offering presents an opportunity to strengthen Benalla's positioning in line with broader regional goals.

Benalla's community and business stakeholders have expressed an enthusiasm for consolidating and developing Benalla's cultural tourism offerings, for which the foundation has already been laid through the Benalla Arts Gallery and grassroots development of events such as the Benalla Festival and Wall to Wall Festival.

This indicates a willingness to move beyond traditional interpretation of cultural heritage and provides an opportunity to create a cohesive and innovative tourism product which provides visitor with a unique, engaging and meaningful experience.

Benalla's future as a rich cultural and events destination relies on the strategic leveraging and development of assets. Benalla has an emerging arts and cultural industry which is growing in reputation and has potential to increase both profile and visitation while contributing and fulfilling broader regional goals. Supporting and evolving Benalla's offering in this cultural direction will rely on investing in the year-around provision of art and events which showcase the region as well as striking supporting infrastructure which enhances visitor experience while ultimately building consumer interest and visitation.



4.3 ALIGNING WITH MARKET SEGMENTS

Benalla Rural City has a number of experiences which offer the potential to align with visitor expectations in target markets. These areas will be the focus for product development and marketing initiatives.

Events Market Offering

Benalla's events and cultural scene is gaining traction, and offers a rich array of immersive and engaging activities for residents and visitors alike.

Current major events in Benalla include:

- Benalla Festival;
- Wall to Wall Festival;
- Winton Motor Raceway's calendar of events including the Supercars Championship;
- Country Racing calendar;
- Victorian Road Racing Championships; and
- Historic Winton.

Events such as these present major drawcards of attracting visitors and their associated expenditure to the Benalla region and have the ability to provide a base performance to consolidate and later leverage through proactive, cooperative approaches to product development. These demonstrate a trend towards major events, which are supplemented by the local calendar of markets, track days and museum open days.

Cultural and Art Products and Experiences

Benalla has a number of assets which are attractive to target leisure markets:

- Benalla Art Gallery attracts approximately 40,000 visitors per year and is a hub for cultural and arts activities
- Benalla has gained renown for its contemporary art scene, including the silos and street art
- The Mokoan Project at Winton Wetlands is a highly significant Indigenous cultural and heritage site. Both sites reflect histories for both indigenous and colonial cultures which have re-emerging stories after the decommissioning of the Lake Mokoan site in 2009.

Nature-Based Experiences

The Mokoan Project at Winton Wetlands and is considered a restoration project of national scientific and cultural significance, and provides a massive landscape for exploration in addition to the established nearby National Parks such as Warby-Ovens National Park and Reef Hills National Park. These sites provide nature-based visitors with an engaging mix of culture, stunning views of the region and are easily accessible from Benalla. Tourism North East has highlighted a goal to become a cycle destination, and these spaces may provide an opportunity to diversify nature-based and adventure tourism in the Benalla region.

4.3 ALIGNING WITH MARKET SEGMENTS

Overlapping Potential

Benalla is in the unique position of having a significant potential in overlapping cultural and events markets, as demonstrated by large scale festivals such as the Wall to Wall and the diversified use of the Arts spaces. There is an opportunity to more fully integrate culture and events in a manner which encourages a steady rate of visitation to the Benalla region, provides ongoing economic stimulus and cohesively combines towards a clear vision for the region. Building upon the foundations of the existing culture and events industries in the Benalla region, there is an opportunity to extend the theme of open air artwork into the natural landscapes surrounding Benalla, providing a complementary interaction of nature, events and culture as the backdrop to an exploration of themes significant and flattering to the region.

The ongoing benefit and success of Benalla's current complementary offerings provide a perfect opportunity to for additional product development and consolidation in line with Tourism North East's third strategic priority:

"To establish the region's arts and culture credentials to both diversify the demographic attracted to the High Country and increase dispersal".



4.4 GROWTH TARGETS

The next five years present an opportunity for Benalla Rural City to generate visitation growth above baseline Tourism Research Australia forecasts, and capture an increased share of the High Country's visitor market.

Target

To increase Benalla's share of the High Country's visitor economy by 1.2% to 11.5%.

Achieving this target will deliver visitor expenditure of **\$57 million in 2022, supporting an additional 58 full time equivalent jobs in 2023¹.**

Table 4 illustrates the growth required above baseline to achieve the target of capturing 11.5% of High Country's visitor market.

Table 4: Baseline and Market Share Growth Targets

Market Segment	2017 Value	Baseline Value 2022	Stretch Growth Target to Capture increased Market Share
Day Visitors: leisure visitors only - excluding business and other)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 182,830 visitors – 13.9% share • \$15.3 million worth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 212,561 visitors • \$18.7 million 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 236,538 visitors • \$20.8 million worth (additional, \$2.01 million, 15.5% share)
Day: Business and Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 33,148 visitors • \$2.73 million 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 38,539 visitors • \$4.7 million 	n/a
Domestic Overnight Visitors: leisure - excluding business and other)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 94,881 visitors – 6.4% share • 185,770 nights • \$19.3 million worth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 107,348 visitors • 204,292 nights • \$25 million 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 117,002 visitors • 229,082 nights • \$28.2 million worth • (additional \$3.05 million, 7% share)
Domestic Overnight Visitors: business and other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13,495 visitors • \$1.46 million 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15,268 visitors • \$1.8 million 	n/a
International: All Segments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2,855 visitors • \$172,697 worth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3,806 visitors • \$326,468 	n/a

¹Based on Tourism Satellite Account models which utilise current estimated expenditure and current employment related to the tourism industry, one direct tourism job is generated for every \$92,511 visitor dollars



5.0 STRATEGIES FOR GROWTH

5.1 STRATEGY TO DELIVER GROWTH

The target will be best achieved by generating above average growth in visitation and visitor spend in target Leisure markets, and is illustrated in Figure 8, over page.

Leisure is the most significant visitor market for the Benalla region, with VFR and Holiday accounting for an average of 74% of all visitors.

The goal is to increase visitation in this market through a focus on maximising the existing product strengths of Benalla Rural City.

The current visitor market reveals several strengths that can be leveraged, including; a great location for capturing day visits from touring visitors in the region, the destination's emerging cultural and events strengths, events, and nature-based experiences.

Melbourne residents made over 8.1 million overnight trips within Victoria in 2017. 9% of these trips were to the High Country, of which Benalla received 7%.

High Country residents made 580,903 day trips and 842,832 overnight trips within the region in 2017 – Benalla received 10% and 11% of these trips. Goulburn residents show a proportionally higher interest in Benalla than other High Country residents; of the 62,285 day trips and 538,915 overnight trips to the High Country, 39% and 15% of these respective markets visited Benalla.

Day Visitor Growth

This Strategy will position Benalla as a key contributor to delivering Tourism North East's strategic goals, in a manner which is sensitive to Benalla's current infrastructure, culture and visitor economy. The nature of Benalla's location means that it already has a dominant day visitor market, with room for improvement through higher conversion rates from touring traffic and by increasing Benalla's profile as an events destination.

As such, this Strategy will initially focus on developing Benalla's appeal as a day trip destination within the High Country, building product and visitor experience which is both unique to Benalla and aligns with regional goals.

Domestic Overnight Visitors

Baseline growth in the Domestic Overnight market is significant. As such, the focus of this Strategy will be a minor increase in Overnight Visitation of 0.8% above baseline growth, which would increase Benalla's market share of the High Country to 8%

Building overnight visitor markets is also an important target, but as Benalla's accommodation stock is reasonably limited, growth targets have been framed within this capacity. Developing new room stock, if demand supported it, would be more practical in a time horizon which extends beyond the scope of this strategy.

International Visitors

With regard to international markets, maintenance of the current 8% market share of the High Country's international visitation will be a focus.

5.1 STRATEGY TO DELIVER GROWTH

Across all visitor markets (day, domestic overnight and international), if Benalla achieves year on year growing of 1.2% above forecast growth (at state level), the City will:

- Attract a total of 430,000 visitors in 2022;
- *This is 93,000 additional visitors above 2017 levels;*
- Attract visitor expenditure of \$57 million in total;
- *This is an additional \$14 million above 2017 levels¹; and*
- Overnight visitation will remain the highest value market.

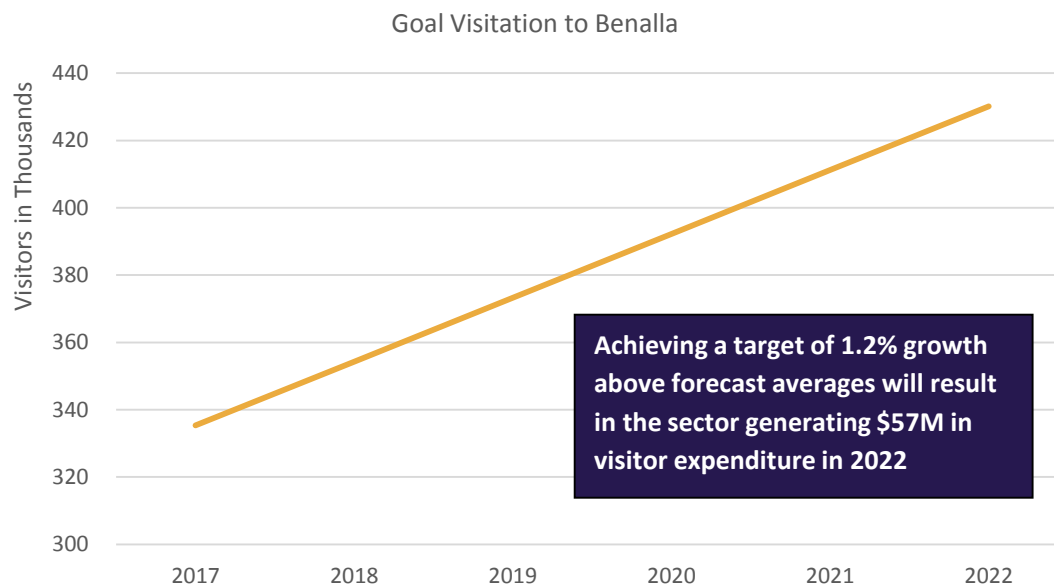


Figure 8: Goal visitation trends for Benalla to 2022

¹Growth forecasts are derived from Tourism Research Australia's Tourism Forecasting Panel, with expenditure forecasts sourced from the Tourism Satellite Account indexed to forecast CPI growth.

5.2 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

There are a number of strategic objectives which guide the development of actions and priorities towards the achievement of Benalla's 2022 goals. These consider both the strengths and weaknesses as a destination and aim to promote the achievability of the 2022 goals as well as set the local industry up for ongoing future success.

BENALLA'S VISITOR ECONOMY OBJECTIVES

- 1. To increase visitor spend by \$5.36 million in 2022 above baseline projections (towards a total of \$57.1 million in visitor expenditure)**
- 2. To focus on maximising existing strengths to both consolidate current tourism offerings and develop new and exciting experiences**
- 3. To create iconic experiences based in arts, culture and events, supported by a curate year-round calendar of events to promote visitation and spend**
- 4. To enhance Benalla's positioning as the cultural centre of the High Country and deliver on its brand promise – *to see the art in everything***
- 5. To build an industry culture of collaboration and support, collectively striving towards common goals and sustainable growth**
- 6. To use tourism as vehicle to promote a commitment to celebrating and protecting the region's cultural, natural and heritage assets**

As a means of delivering strategy objectives, a series of catalyst projects have been proposed, complemented with a series of supporting actions. These projects can be either temporary or permanent, and are able to be updated and adapted to the changing needs of both the market and the community.

These have ongoing benefits for both long term performance and visitor experience:

- Provides diverse and ever-changing experiences which promote repeat visitation and promise new and exciting opportunities;
- Enables Benalla to remain on-trend and maximise social media and online penetration and marketing by cultivating a dynamic public image suitable for multi-channel messaging and driven by visitor interest;
- Provide opportunities to integrate lessons from implementation and to adjust future offerings.

Proposed catalyst projects are set in section 5.3 of the draft strategy document.

5.3 CATALYST PROJECTS

5.3.1 EVENT-LED GROWTH: Create a Curated Annual Events Program of Six Seasons

Benalla already benefits from a strong events program, particularly its leading arts and cultural events – the Benalla Festival and the Wall to Wall Festival. Benalla can build on these strengths and become famous as an events hub, through creating a curated year-around program of events.

Over the course of a 3-5 year period, Benalla should establish a 12-month curated calendar of events. This annual calendar of curated events could take the form of “Six Seasons of Events”, with themes to each of the 2 month “seasons”.

Benalla attracts almost 30% of all events visitation to the High Country; worth 8.4M.

A 2% increase in market share could be worth an additional \$1.2M above natural growth in 2022.

In addition to arts and culture, season themes could include;

- Motorsports
- Food and Drink
- Heritage and local stories
- Activities and adventure
- Nature and environment.

Successful development, packaging and creation of the 6 seasons program would support attraction of consistent levels of visitation to the Benalla region throughout the year by providing reasons to visit and opportunity to spend.

With strong support from retailers and local businesses, the program should be based around a ‘whole of city’ approach, including street dressing to reflect the changes in the event seasons.

With considered events product development, a 5% year on year growth of domestic visitation is achievable; this would provide an additional 133,000 visitors, worth an additional \$4M above natural growth in 2022.

This may necessitate the repositioning of existing events in the calendar as well as the development of new events over a 3-5 year period. For instance, partners may wish to consider realigning the Wall to Wall and Benalla Festival events to run every other year – maximising resources and impact of the lead cultural and arts event during a 12 month period.

In addition to maximising use of resources, running the events, every other year also has the potential to create a sense of ‘specialness’ or anticipation. Pop-up or mini events during the arts and cultural season could be used as a basis of maintaining the event narrative during the off season.

If this option of realigning the leading cultural and arts events is not achievable, an alternative is to draw out the distinctiveness with 2 discrete street art and cultural/performance event seasons.

CASE STUDY: DARK MOFO



Event-led growth is a strategy used by many destinations to attract new visitors, particularly during shoulder of off peak periods.

Major arts festivals such as Edinburgh, Adelaide and Melbourne have long taken curated approaches in bringing together and delivering their event programs. Tasmania's MOFO and Dark MOFO have been hugely successful in leveraging and extending the reach of MONA.

Running for three weeks every year in June, Dark MOFO combines art, music and culture, exploring winter solstice rituals. 427,000 people attended in 2017, almost doubling previous attendance.

Curated arts events are common in their own right, but the curation is rarely extended to an entire 12 month event calendar across different themes. Prompts and ideas can be taken from leading brand name retailers who use the concepts of seasons and themes to drive footfall and sales.

5.3 CATALYST PROJECTS

5.3.1. EVENT-LED GROWTH: Create a Curated Annual Events Program of 6 Seasons

To be successful, the curated seasons of events need to be embraced by business and community – success will be dependent on this. This means businesses seeing the benefits of, and buying into the events seasons. This could mean;

- Sponsorship
- Extended/changed opening hours during festival periods
- Retailers and high street outlets offering special services or deals related to the event season
- Packaged accommodation options
- The opportunity to partner with neighbouring regions to strengthen event content and opportunities.

By their nature, the vast majority of events are built on support from local communities – in this sense the curated events program has its roots in building the overall economic prosperity of the City and engaging/involving communities.

Key actions include;

- I. Creation of a new events curator post to lead development and implementation of the program
- II. Mapping and gapping of the current events calendar to understand where development is required
- III. Consultation with retailers and Benalla businesses to canvas levels of support for the initiative
- IV. Being willing to consider changes to parking

- IV. Consultation with retailers and Benalla
Being willing to consider changes to parking and traffic management arrangements during larger events
- V. Development of a business case which sets out the case for public and private sector partners buying into the program
- VI. Devising and implementing an appropriate multi-media marketing campaign to support the program

5.3 CATALYST PROJECTS

5.3.2 CULTURE AND ARTS LED GROWTH: Showcasing and Developing Benalla's Position as a Premier Arts and Cultural Hub

Benalla has already harnessed the cultural and arts visitor market via the strengths of the Art Gallery's programming and collections, and successfully developed a niche around the street art scene.

Benalla has a major existing strength in terms of its cultural and arts experiences, however, creating fresh reasons to visit and promoting visitor interest requires bold thinking.

A number of potentially game changing opportunities are available for Benalla to further extend its arts and cultural experiences, and cement its place as the High Country's cultural hub.

Benalla attracts an estimated 17,600 arts and culture visitors in 2017; worth \$2.4M. With product development, it is achievable to increase market share by 4%, gaining 15,000 additional arts and culture visitors worth an additional \$2.3M in 2022; this will almost double Benalla's culture and arts visitation

A major new opportunity is available through leveraging the potential of Lake Benalla and surrounds as an expanded arts and culture led precinct. Its location at the bridging point between the art gallery and the CBD provides a great opportunity to create a new precinct for local communities and visitors.

First and foremost, developing new cultural and arts experiences should be community-driven. Creating spaces, cultural content and programming will have community engagement at their heart. The precinct can be a new community hub, providing a place to meet and gather, while also unlocking tourism potential.

Developing a vital and viable precinct can provide a natural focal point for visitors, providing an attractive environment which encourages longer average lengths of stay and greater expenditure in the city.

Development of the precinct provides a great opportunity to build on initiatives such as the ongoing development of the Art Gallery, street art and the silo murals. Successful activation can create the all-important 'reasons to visit' and drive positive media and stakeholder commentary on Benalla.

Tourism North East has recently led the preparation of an experience development plan which is designed to bring the Kelly Story to Life. The potential for an extended Benalla Art Gallery to play a leading role in bringing the Kelly Story to Life has been recognised in this plan. The Gallery has been identified as having the potential to house some of the Kelly Collection and Kelly-related exhibitions. This concept also opens up the opportunity to review how key property assets are most appropriately used in Benalla's visitor precincts. In particular, if extension of the Art Gallery and development of the Lake Benalla precinct proceed, there is an opportunity to examine how the building which houses the VIC and Costume museum can be best utilised.

There is also potential to further extend arts and culture led experiences through implementing a program of public art installations throughout Benalla Rural City. Increasing the number of publicly accessible, creative and immersive installations and exhibits can increase a destination's profile and can make use of the environmental and structural assets of a place. Installations, whether temporary or permanent can help enhance a sense of place for a destination and enhance profile.

Highly visible gateway locations provide ideal locations. Lake Mokoan also offers to opportunity to install interpretive artwork to celebrate indigenous cultural heritage.

5.3 CATALYST PROJECTS

New Lake Benalla Precinct

The space itself is already an attractive environment, but creating a thriving precinct requires innovative activation. Opportunities could include;

- Developing floating platforms to enable use of the water for temporary or permanent arts installations. There is potential for these platforms to be designed in a manner which makes them powerful architectural statements in their own right
- Use of pop-up or temporary installations
- Lighting of installations
- Programming which connects the Art Gallery with the outdoor space
- Enhancing connectivity which could potentially include a new pedestrian bridge
- Activating the water for informal recreation – kayaking etc.
- Development of a new deck which extends over the Lake would provide a new covered dining and entertainment space, further enhancing the appeal of the precinct.

Successful activation of the area would be driven by a Precinct Activation Plan - temporary public art displays and water-based activities such as paddle boarding or kayaking may be suitable potential uses.

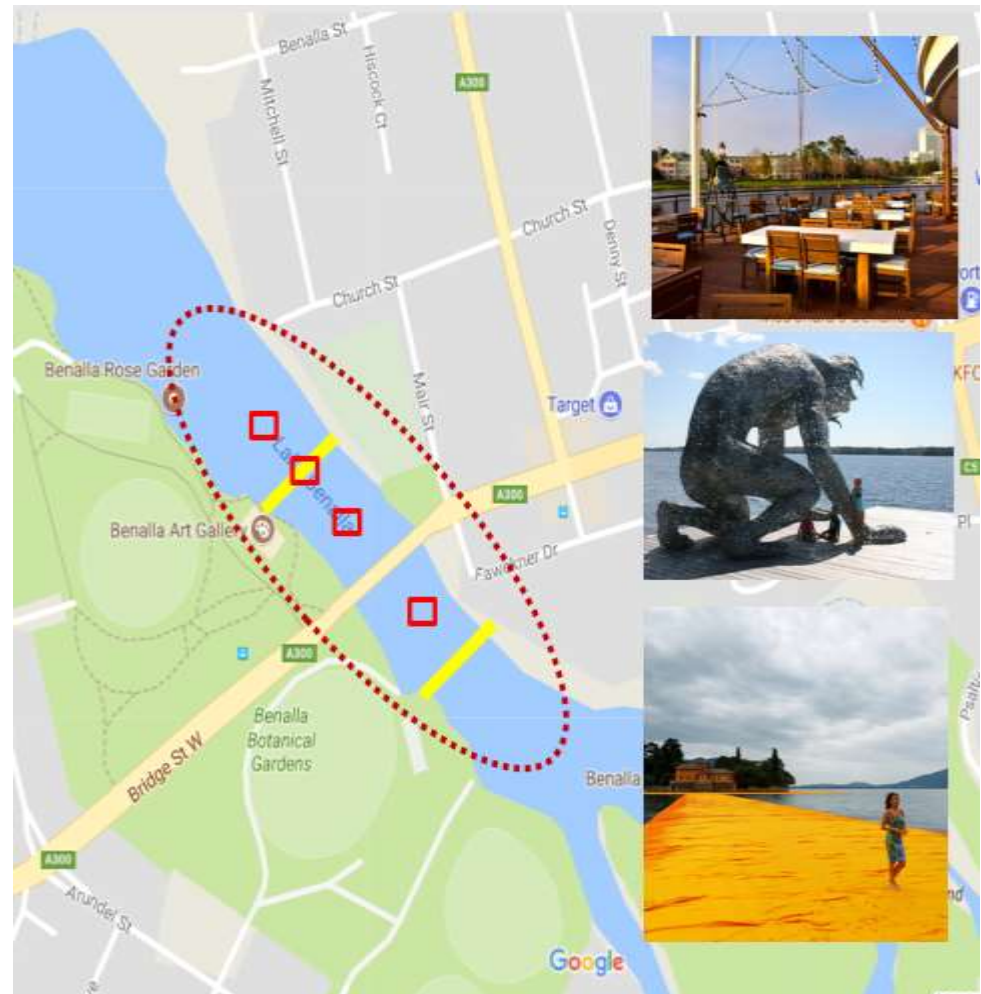


Figure 9: Illustrative example of the potential new Lakeside Precinct

CASE STUDY: INTERACTIVE ART INSTALLATIONS

A floating walkway installed in Lake Iseo, Italy, by artist Christo Vladimirov remained for 16 days attracted over 270,000 in its first 5 days, exceeding expectations and dwarfing the host population of 2,000.

“The Floating Piers” was made out of 200,000 floating high-density polystyrene cubes encased in shimmering saffron fabric. All materials were recycled at the end of the project.

The artist is known for his public installations, creating art “for the public to experience and enjoy”.

The attraction was so popular that its originally 24-hour timetable was scaled back to daylight hours due to wear and tear.



5.3 CATALYST PROJECTS

Building on Strengths

Supporting the 2022 goals requires investment in infrastructure improvements to enhance the experiences on offer in Benalla and cater for increased activity in the culture and arts industry.

The Benalla Art Gallery is a significant asset both for Benalla and for the wider region. Proposals are currently being developed by stakeholders to extend and further develop the Gallery.

A business case is required to support funding applications for the extension of the gallery, however, an extended modern gallery space with the potential it would provide for a wider range of programming, would further enhance Benalla's appeal as a regional and cultural tourism hub.

Partnerships

The High Country has a number of strengths as a region, including food and drink and snow sports and adventure activities. Benalla has successfully established itself as the leader in providing cultural and arts experiences.

Benalla is well placed to gain by growing additional depth and range of experiences in this area. In addition to development its own experiences, the destination can also gain from establishing closing partnerships including Wangaratta and Shepparton. The combined strengths of arts experiences across this region has potential to offer a stronger proposition to visitors than Benalla acting on its own.

Key actions include;

- I. Support the business case to extend Benalla Art Gallery
- II. Develop a case for investment in a major new visitor precinct around the Lake, complementing art gallery extension proposals including;
 - a. New floating pontoon structures, designed as new focal point for visitors and communities
 - b. Creation of a new Lake deck, providing for a covered entertainment/ dinging space
 - c. Activation plan for the Lake
 - d. Review of best use of buildings and assets within the new precinct (including VIC and Costume Musuem) with a view towards establishing 'best fit and optimum usage'

- IV. Develop a plan to extend public art installations throughout the Benalla region – at the new Lake precinct, on private property, and where permissions allow, at high visibility gateways to Benalla
- V. Great arts destinations are often based on thriving local artists and producers – establishing a new artists studio trail has the potential to create a valuable new tourism experience as well as support local artists. Trails such as that developed in the Dandenong region have shown the valuable role they can play - www.visitdandenongranges.com.au/blog/your-art-trail-to-the-dandenong-ranges
- VI. Establish an Art Business Leaders Program as a means of supported development, commissioning and role of public art throughout the region
- VII. Work with Shepparton and Wangaratta partners to establish a regional arts cluster.

5.3 CATALYST PROJECTS

5.3.3 TOURING DESTINATION GROWTH: Capitalising on Benalla's Location

Proximity to the Hume and Midlands Highways means that the large volumes of passing traffic is a rich potential visitor market, even if in this regard, the City is essentially a pit stop or refuelling break for drivers. Approximately 6,400 cars per day one-way pass the region along the Hume Highway - if 5% could be encouraged to divert into the region that is the equivalent of 1 x A380 per day.

Capitalising on this opportunity requires actions in a number of areas – practical measures to raise awareness, providing reasons for drivers to stop and choose Benalla, and servicing visitors with eating and drinking opportunities at the right times and in the right places.

Signage

Signage along highways to Benalla has been highlighted as an area for improvement; there is an opportunity to create an interest in passing traffic to promote further conversion of travellers from the highway. Improving the clarity of information for travellers can facilitate decision-making and provide improved impressions of Benalla to increase likelihood of visitation. Signage to Benalla Rural City would benefit from a comprehensive strategic review.

Signage

From a regulatory perspective, additional tourism signage or high profile public art directly on the Hume Highway is not possible, however, opportunities may be available to enhance signage on the Midland Highway.

Iconic Art

Establishing iconic art installations in highly visitable gateway locations to destinations has proven to be an effective mechanism of raising profile and awareness, and contributing to positive media coverage. There is an opportunity to identify locations and funding opportunities for initiatives of this type in Benalla Rural City.

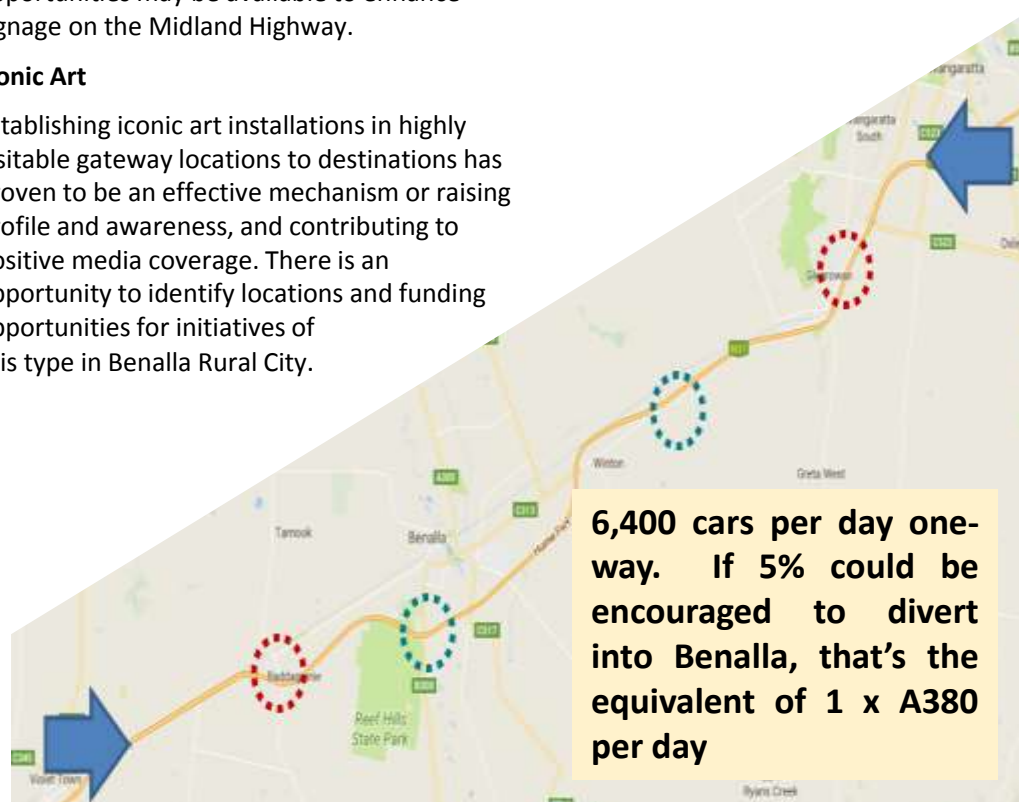


Figure 10: Illustration of opportunities for Benalla to capture passing traffic

5.3 CATALYST PROJECTS

5.3.3 TOURING DESTINATION GROWTH: Vehicle Tourist Loop to Glenrowan via Winton Wetlands

Creation of a new touring route which links key destinations and visitor attractions can play an important role in increasing average length of stay, growing visitor expenditure, and supporting dispersal throughout the region.

The proposed touring loop connects Benalla and Glenrowan, taking in Winton Wetlands.

There are opportunities to support promotion and grow awareness of the route via a range of media including print, signposting and digital applications. Incorporating commercial experiences along the route will be critical to ensuring that the initiative drives new visitor expenditure.



Figure 11: Proposed Touring Route between Benalla and Glenrowan

5.3 CATALYST PROJECTS

Application of Digital Technology

Technology is ubiquitous throughout society and is utilised at every stage of the travelling process, and presents a clear opportunity to streamline the visitor experience in Benalla. The use of geolocation messaging has the potential to “ping” visitors’ phone upon entry into the Benalla region, informing them of events information.

While this is normally the purview of disaster management managers, there is a commercial opportunity which can be applied to visitor communication. Utilising similar tools through apps for self-guided tours can revolutionise visitor engagement, allowing self-discovery of sites and trails with audio and visual interpretation geo-synced to visitor’s phones. This can provide interpretation and educational value to nature-based activities, and can enable visitors to discover content in galleries and sites at their own pace.

Serving Visitors

If the region is to be a favoured stopping point for visitors, basic amenities such as eating and drink options need to be available to visitors at the times they require them. If levels of demand are sufficient to warrant opening, establishing a rota for cafes/restaurants to extend opening hours may be worth considering.

Key actions include;

- I. Rationalise the region’s existing signposting with a view to improving visitor awareness and orientation
- II. Liaise with VIC Roads to establish opportunities to further improve signposting from the Midland Highway
- III. Investigate opportunities to trial ‘push notifications’ as a means of highlighting Benalla services
- IV. Investigate opportunities to establish high profile art installations in gateway locations to Benalla Rural City

CASE STUDY: ANGEL OF THE NORTH

The Angel of the North is a major public art installation located in a high profile gateway highway location in the North East of England. The 200-tonne sculpture is Britain's most-viewed piece of public modern art, seen by an estimated 33m road and rail travellers each year.

Although controversial at the time, the Angel of the North is credited with playing a major role in regional image change and supporting new investment. The region previously had its image dominated by social and economic problems.

Economic analysis on the Angel's impact found:

- Around 400,000 people visit the site each year (estimated).
- The success of the Angel helped Gateshead Council attract around £145m of lottery funding.
- Delivering such a major project on time and within budget - at no extra cost to council tax payers - give Gateshead Council huge credibility both locally and nationally.

- The Angel can be credited with successfully achieving a balance between creating a new identity while acknowledging its heritage.
- The value in promotional terms cannot be accurately measured, but the media exposure generated for Gateshead would have cost millions of pounds in advertising.
- The process set in train by the Angel has boosted employment in the tourism and cultural industries.



5.3 CATALYST PROJECTS

5.3.4 LEISURE TOURISM GROWTH: Developing new visitor accommodation

This could mean accommodation types such as;

- Glamping
- Nature-based accommodation
- Niche opportunities such as floating or water-based accommodation
- Novelty accommodation i.e. tiny houses – growth in sharing accommodation options via AirBnB and Stayz may provide opportunities in this regard.

Adaptable to a range of settings, including nature based sites, festivals and events, pop up accommodation can be used as both practical supplementary accommodation and as an attraction in itself.

Benalla's range of commercial accommodation is in line with the needs of a rural city but is relatively limited in terms of range and type. However, it does place some limits on above-baseline growth in overnight visitation, and creates a challenge for maximising event impact.

Council and partners should continue to **work with commercial operators to expand mainstream accommodation** options. In particular;
Seek to attract new commercial accommodation, particularly in the 4-5 star bracket
Establish an RV friendly campsite.

“Pop-up” accommodation is an alternative to mainstream commercial accommodation, providing the opportunity to supplement supply with accommodation types that are suitable to the Benalla region, and potentially overcoming the business case challenges of seeking investment in new ‘bricks and mortar’ properties.

5.3 CATALYST PROJECTS

Key actions include;

- I. Conduct a needs analysis to determine the appropriateness of establishing an RV friendly campsite. As part of this process, interest from existing commercial campsite providers in managing the site should be assessed
- II. Prepare a mini prospectus document off the back of the content included in this strategy to support attracting new commercial accommodation operators to Benalla
- III. Identify sites (owned by Council) which may be suitable for new pop-up accommodation. In the first instance, promote the opportunity in conjunction with a key event such as Wall to Wall or the Benalla Festival
- IV. Liaise with sharing economy businesses such as AirBnB and Stayz to understand demand/ performance in the Benalla region, and the opportunities for bringing new niche or quirky accommodation properties online.

CASE STUDY: POP-UP ACCOMMODATION

Pop-up glamping accommodation has been used successfully as both supplementary accommodation and as a visitor drawcard at major events such as festivals for a number of years. Glamping providers also promote environmental sustainability and connection with nature, focussing on creating responsible off-the-beaten-track camping for those who are seeking a little more luxury in a fully-furnished structure.

On a large commercial scale, glamping sites have become standard at major music festivals such as Falls Festival, Splendour in the Grass and smaller operators are branching into providing temporary pop-up getaways in National Parks and other nature-based settings.

Parks Victoria is currently consulting on introduction of a new way to stay overnight or short stays in iconic park locations around the state - a number of styles of low environmental impact of eco-pods are being tested.



5.4 SUPPORTING ACTIONS

In addition to the catalyst projects, actions across a number of supporting areas are also important to meeting Strategy goals and objectives.

5.4.1 Food and Drink

Local produce is an important element of the overall High Country proposition to visitors; however, Benalla's current food and drink offering is less developed than in other parts of the region.

The region has a number of producers from which it can start to develop a higher profile food and drink visitor offering including; Tallis Wine Cellar Door, Glenrowan vignerons, Black Dog Brewery, and a number of farm gate food producers. These businesses provide the basis for food trail development, and the potential to link with food trail initiatives across the High Country region and in neighbouring areas.

Actions include:

- I. Consider the merits of establishing a local food co-op in partnership with local food and drink producers to support building the profile of local produce and building supply chain links with local retail, restaurant and tourism businesses – encouraging paddock to plate development;

- II. Investigate the potential to establish a food and drink trail in the Benalla region, linking with similar initiatives in surrounding areas;
- III. Establish food and drink as one of Benalla's event seasons. Initially, building in a regional component will assist with depth of experiences, and also provide an important showcase for local providers; and
- IV. Investigate the opportunities to develop new added value experiences such as cookery courses, tasting experiences, bringing new agritourism experiences to market.

5.4.2 New/ Improved visitor experiences

Benalla has a range of existing attractions and assets which offer potential for continued development.

Actions include:

- I. Investing in development and activation of the Winton Wetlands to Wangaratta Cycleway, linking with the North East Trail Network;

Actions include:

- II. One of Victoria's most picturesque courses, the Race club races 11 times a year with its premier race day being the Benalla Gold Cup. In addition to promotion and packaging its events, the event and function centre is a valuable asset, offering potential as part of business and meetings activity;
- III. In 2016, the Benalla Migrant Camp was listed as a site of significance on the Victorian Heritage Register. Investigate opportunities to work with local stakeholders to develop the tourism potential of Benalla Migrant Camp as part of overall conservation management;
- IV. Benalla Aviation Museum is an interesting and unique experience which fits well with Benalla's touring visitor market. Opportunities exist to develop its appeal further through introducing open hanger experiences; and
- V. Benalla Car Museum at Tatong is home to an extensive collection of vehicles, with significant appeal to car enthusiasts - work with the owner to develop further visitor access to the car collection.

5.4 SUPPORTING ACTIONS

5.4.3 Heritage Experiences

The region is rich in heritage assets, including the migrant camp, but most notably before part of North East's Kelly story. Tourism North East has led the preparation of a new experience development plan which reimagines the Kelly story and aims to establish a stronger set of co-ordinated visitor experiences across the region. Along the most famous sites associated with the story are located in Glenrowan and Beechworth, Benalla has an important part to play in delivering the overall story, being home to the Costume Museum (Kelly sash) and modern interpretations of the Kelly story through its street art.

Actions include;

- I. Work with Tourism North East to implement the Kelly Experience Development Plan, as part of a regional proposition – regional initiatives such as proposed food trails and IT initiatives such as an interactive App offer potential to the region

- II. Linking the Kelly Story with Benalla's position as the North East's centre for cultural and arts activities offers an niche opportunity to deliver part of the Kelly Story – opportunities may be available for the Art Gallery to take the lead in curated exhibitions of Kelly themed art and memorabilia

5.4.4 Motorsports

Winton Motor Raceway is a key regional asset, hosting events such as V8 Supercars Championships with mass market appeal. In addition to these high profile events, it also offers a program of track experiences and corporate team building programs.

The motorsports proposition is very distinct from Benalla's overall positioning which focuses on themes based around art and culture, nature-based opportunities and heritage; however, the Raceway and profile which its key events creates offers significant opportunities for the region. Opportunities exist for the Raceway and Council to work together to further build value to the local economy. Marketing and packages based around family visits and links with other visitor experiences throughout the region may offer opportunities.

Actions include;

- I. Exploration of new visitor experience packaging opportunities between Winton Motor Raceway Benalla Rural City Council
- II. Related to the 'curated events' catalyst project, the Raceway and other transport-related propositions have the potential to be central components of a motorsports events season, helping cement the Raceway as part of Benalla's overall offering.

5.4 SUPPORTING ACTIONS

5.4.5 Business and Conference Tourism

Business tourism is a relatively small but important part of Benalla's visitor economy. The Benalla Performing Arts and Convention Centre provides a tailor-made facility for the region. Venues such as Winton Motor Raceway also provide corporate facilities for MICE opportunities and destinations such as Lake Mokoan provide potential as unique locations for some events. Developing value from business and conference tourism relies on leveraging existing partnership and targeting events which reflect key business sectors.

Actions include;

- I. An opportunity exists to establish new incentive conferencing packages with the region's principal event venues which link with unique aspects of the region – for instance, programs which provide event and conference organisers with the opportunity to offer incentive packages with local artists
- II. The world gliding festival demonstrated the region's potential to host a large scale event with accommodation offerings across the broader High Country region. Similar partnerships and arrangements can be utilised with regard to larger scale conferences and events.

5.4.6 Nature-based and Ecotourism Opportunities

The region's location offers visitors access to a wide variety of nature-based opportunities, including parks and gardens and Winton Wetlands. While not at the centre of the North East's snowsports and cycling opportunities, the region does have an opportunity to tap into the ecotourism and nature-based tourism spaces.

Actions include;

- I. Work with Winton Wetlands to develop its proposition, linking into nature-based marketing and activities throughout the North East. The Wetlands provides an interesting location to development new ecotourism experiences based around its trail network and wildlife viewing experiences - novel types of accommodation, art and sculpture trails and an increased range of additional activity options may all offer opportunities.
- II. Work with operators to identify and bring new nature-based experiences to market.

5.4.7 Visitor Information

Section 1.6 of the report analyses current provision of visitor information services and considers options for future investment and delivery.

Actions include;

- I. Within the context of other potential development opportunities in Benalla, greatest short to medium term return on investment is likely to be delivered by initiatives which develop services and extend the reach of the existing centre (mobile services, partnerships with industry etc. to deliver information services). If a new location for the VIC is to be considered, it is recommended that that this should be only as part of a larger development, where the VIC is a complementary service, to a larger development.
- II. Seek to position to the VIC as playing a focal role in contributing to management and coordination of the proposed curated events program.

5.4 SUPPORTING ACTIONS

5.4.8 Marketing

Clear and targeted investment of marketing resources is essential. At State and regional levels, this means leveraging the market reach for Benalla tourism experiences via VisitVictoria and Tourism North East's marketing campaigns and media channels. Benalla should remain positioned as part of the High Country region, with arts and cultural experiences as its leading proposition.

At local level, two websites promote Benalla to tourism markets - the privately owned Visit Benalla site, and the Council-managed Enjoy Benalla site which links into Tourism North East and the hierarchy of official digital marketing platforms. Operation of the two sites results in potential confusion for visitors, as well as duplication of local marketing effort.

Businesses and partners will choose marketing opportunities on their individual merits. However from the perspective of ensuring best collective investment of tourism resources, the opportunity to establish a partnership agreement to present one local consumer web platform to consumers should be explored.

Actions include;

- I. Agreement with Tourism North East on annual regional marketing programs, fams, press and PR activity, and content featuring Benalla products and experiences
- II. Prioritisation of investment in new digital content and imagery for use on local and regional digital platforms
- III. Benalla Rural City Council and the owner of the Visit Benalla web site should explore opportunities to present a single local tourism consumer website.

5.4.9 Business support and development

Development of business capacity and capability will be a priority throughout the Strategy period.

Actions include;

- I. Work with the Benalla Business Network, VTIC and Tourism North East to make support programs (operator awareness, skills programs) available to Benalla tourism operators
- II. Investigate the opportunity to establish a 'welcome to Benalla' program, to build local operator product and experience awareness.

5.4.10 Activating Weekends

Benalla does not currently offer a broad range of experience options or reasons to visit at weekends for visitors, with many businesses closed or operating only on restricted trading hours.

Actions include;

- I. Promoting awareness of opportunities from visitor markets to local businesses
- II. Seeking consensus among traders to extend business hours into weekend periods— perhaps initially on a rota basis and focusing of peak visitation periods
- III. Introduce an events program to assist in activating weekend footfall i.e. Foodtruck Sundays, BBQ events etc
- IV. Investing in activation 'plug and play' infrastructure in key precincts and CBD locations which acts as a facilitator for a wide range of activations.

5.5 ENABLERS OF SUCCESS

The strategy sets out a series of catalytic investment opportunities and complementary supporting actions to delivery strategy goals and objectives.

These priority projects and initiatives are underpinned by a series of enabling actions and processes.

5.5.1 Co-ordination and Organisation

Effective implementation of this strategy will rely on forming and maintaining positive partnerships with industry and the public sector. It is recommended that Benalla Rural City Council acts in a leadership capacity, and guides the coordination of work involved in implementing the strategy, and in facilitating ongoing communication between partners and community.

Actions include;

- I. Creation of a Tourism Coordination Group (TCG) to act as steering committee to guide implementation of Strategy. TCG would be a strategic advisory group, populated by skills-based nominees. TCG will enable timely decision making and provide clarity of direction.

It will also support Council's collaborate work with Tourism North East to ensure a clear direction for marketing investment. A TCG also provides a useful interface to explore regional partnerships with Shepparton and Wangaratta to develop a regional arts cluster.

- II. Benalla Rural City Council will take on a leadership role for the visitor economy alongside regional tourism partners, local businesses and community representatives. It will support the advisory work of the TCG and be a champion for the tourism sector.
- III. A 'whole of Council' approach will be required to deliver the strategy, clearly identifying where a wide range of Benalla Rural City Council functions will contribute to delivering tourism objectives in addition to core tourism services; potentially including; planning and economic development, community engagement, public realm development & management, asset management, licensing, environmental health etc.
- IV. Continuing to develop a mutually beneficial relationship with Tourism North East, built on; clarity of roles and responsibilities, target markets and clear communication.

5.5.2 Product Development

In common with many regional visitor destinations, creating compelling reasons to visit is at the heart of successful development of the visitor economy i.e. creating reasons to visit. Great depth and quality of visitor experiences is required to enable Benalla to stand out from the crowd.

Actions include;

- I. Council should consider creating a Benalla Curator position to work with the Tourism Coordination Group, entrusted as the creative direction behind the curation and development of the "Six Seasons of Events". This position can be an outward-facing position seeking content, providing event support and facilitating creative partnerships.
- II. Benalla Business Network and other industry partners has a lead role to play in working with the Tourism Co-ordination Group to encourage new product and experience development. While Council and other public agencies have an important role to play in creating an environment that supports tourism growth, a close partnership with businesses is required to bring opportunities to life.

5.5 ENABLERS OF SUCCESS

5.4.3 Resources and Investment

New or reprioritised investment will be required to support development and implementation of a number of the actions identified in the draft strategy, particularly the ambitious plans for a new Lake Benalla precinct and establishing the curated 6 seasons of events. Business cases will need to establish the basis for investment over the five year term of the strategy.

5.5.4 Community and Industry Ownership

Engaging with the community and increasing awareness of the importance and value of tourism is another crucial enabler of success. Many of the actions proposed in the strategy will result in the development of assets and experiences that will also be consumed by local people as well as visitors.

This can increase community enthusiasm and support for tourism investment and initiatives.

5.5.5 Measuring Success

Being aware of the progress of achieving the 2022 goal, and undertaking reviews to understand the value of actions is integral to making informed, effective decisions and investments. Annual report cards to track progress should be implemented, highlighting achievements and areas for improvement to guide the following year's actions. This will also provide Council with an understanding of what has been achieved while informing the direction moving forward. Once operational plans are in place, regular reviews of those are also recommended.

Informing management and investment decisions with ongoing market research is also necessary. At local level, this can involve partnering with local operators and businesses to regularly report visitor numbers, estimated spend and track these numbers against events and initiatives to identify potential return on investment.

Additionally, piloting catalyst projects, such as new pop up or temporary accommodation can be useful to guide and measure future implementation by establishing a baseline market demand and interest.

It is recommended that the KPIs identified in Table 5, over, are used to firstly establish a baseline during the first year and to track progress towards goals in subsequent years.

5.5 ENABLERS OF SUCCESS

Table 5: Recommended KPIs

Key Performance Indicator	Measures/ Sources of Data	Goal
Share (in%) of High Country Visitor Market	Benalla's visitor market share (sourced from TRA)	Aim for increase in share
Growth toward stretch goals in target markets	Benalla's visitor numbers (sourced from TRA)	Aim for increase above baseline towards goals
	Visitor numbers (from events and ticket sales, door counts)	Aim for increase in sales and attendance
Conversion of passing traffic	Road traffic counts (sourced from VicRoads)	Aim for increase in road counts within Benalla
	Numbers of patrons to local businesses (local business data)	Aim for increase above first year baseline
Progress on delivery of game changer projects	Measured against project timelines	Aim for no project slippage
Impact of Catalyst projects	To be confirmed and development alongside project implementation, but potential to include visitation, economic impact, perception and awareness and customer satisfaction measures.	Quantifiable return on investment, as per business plans for catalyst projects.
Community Support	Business Confidence Surveys	Aim for an increase in business confidence

