

SOUTHERN FORESTS & VALLEYS

Western Australia

THE FUTURE OF TOURISM

2026

Prepared by the Warren Blackwood Alliance of Councils

WARREN BLACKWOOD ALLIANCE OF COUNCILS

The Warren Blackwood Alliance of Councils (WBAC) is a voluntary regional organisation of Councils representing the Shires of Bridgetown-Greenbushes, Boyup Brook, Donnybrook Balingup, Manjimup and Nannup.

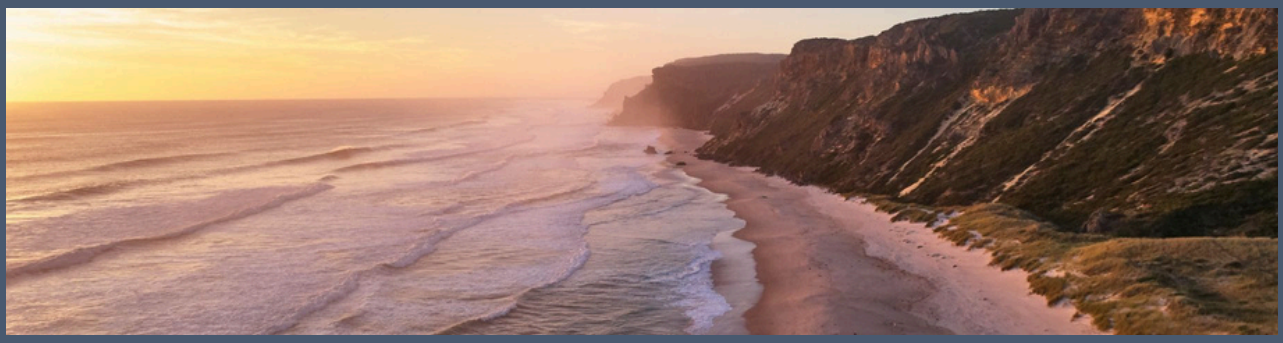
The WBAC exists to support the development of a prosperous and sustainable Warren Blackwood region and to enhance the quality of life for its residents. The Alliance plays a key advocacy role by supporting and delivering significant projects that promote economic development and diversification, and encourage regional population growth.

Over the past 25 years, WBAC has established, progressed and delivered a wide range of regional initiatives on behalf of its member local governments. Our priorities and future direction are guided by the Warren Blackwood Sub-Regional Growth Plan.

Since 2013, WBAC has led the development of a collective tourism brand to promote the region. Today, the Southern Forests & Valleys tourism brand is a core WBAC project.

This document represents the 2026 update (second edition) of The Future of Tourism. It replaces the 2023 version and supersedes the original 2018 document, reflecting the continued evolution of the region's tourism strategy and priorities.

OUR TEAM



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SOUTHERN FORESTS & VALLEYS

A world away from the everyday

The Southern Forests & Valleys region is located in the heart of Australia's South West, stretching from Balingup to Walpole, and from Nannup to Boyup Brook, encompassing Bridgetown, Pemberton, Greenbushes, Manjimup and Northcliffe.

The Southern Forests & Valleys is a place to discover something new, a region defined by its natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, vibrant creative community, and reputation as the food bowl of the South West.

Home to breathtaking landscapes and charming small towns, the region offers an experience that feels a world away from the everyday.

EPIC ADVENTURE

Experience an adventure playground like no other, with stunning national parks, state forests, white sandy beaches, tranquil rivers, rolling hills, star-filled skies and picturesque landscapes. Walk, cycle, paddle, drive or horse ride, there is an experience waiting for every type of traveller.

CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

Immerse yourself in the region's art, heritage and culture. Discover living heritage, creative experiences, historic sites, and Aboriginal culture, alongside a vibrant program of music, events and performing arts.

TASTE LOCAL

Savour the flavours of the South West's food bowl and taste the region. From farm gate stalls and farmers markets to cafés, restaurants, wineries and breweries, the Southern Forests & Valleys offers abundant opportunities to experience fresh, local produce.

CHARMING TOWNS

Each of our towns is unique, with its own charm, attractions, characters, experiences, and events that showcase the very best of our region. Take a glimpse into what makes our region so special.

UNWIND AND RECONNECT

Slow down and reconnect with what matters. The Southern Forests & Valleys offers a more relaxed pace of travel, where visitors can immerse themselves in nature, local culture and food experiences, leaving refreshed and re-energised.

SOUTHERN FORESTS & VALLEYS
Western Australia

Tourism is a vital industry with the power to transform regions and contribute significantly to economic growth, community wellbeing, and cultural development.

The Southern Forests & Valleys tourism brand plays a key role in driving regional growth and supporting a sustainable visitor economy.

The brand provides strategic tourism leadership by guiding the development of the visitor experience, supporting industry capability, and building awareness of the region's unique tourism offering.

The vision is for the Southern Forests & Valleys to be recognised as a highly desirable destination, with a thriving and sustainable tourism industry that contributes to the region's economic, social and environmental future.

www.southernforestsandvalleys.com





WHAT WE DO

And why we do it

The primary objective of the Southern Forests & Valleys tourism brand is to showcase and promote the region's tourism operators, attractions, events and trails, driving increased visitation across the region.

Through strategic tourism leadership, the brand plays a key role in enhancing the visitor experience, supporting industry development, and strengthening the region's tourism offering. Working in partnership with stakeholders, the Southern Forests & Valleys aims to grow the visitor economy through coordinated promotion, product development and industry support.

The region is home to a diverse range of natural and cultural attractions, and the brand ensures these are effectively positioned and promoted to target markets. This contributes to economic growth, supports local businesses, and creates employment opportunities across the region.

Beyond economic benefits, tourism also delivers important social and cultural outcomes. By attracting visitors, the Southern Forests & Valleys fosters cultural exchange and strengthens appreciation of the region's history, heritage and community identity.

Sustainability underpins the long-term success of the region. By promoting responsible tourism practices, the brand supports the protection of natural landscapes, biodiversity and cultural assets, ensuring these can be enjoyed by future generations.







TOURISM IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Who we work with

The South West of WA is more than just a destination – it's a hotspot for once-in-a-lifetime experiences, breathtaking scenery and quirky wildlife encounters.

Australia South West

Tourism Western Australia (Tourism WA) is the State's tourism agency, responsible for growing tourism by marketing Western Australia as a premier holiday and business events destination. This includes attracting and promoting world-class sporting, cultural and arts events, as well as supporting improvements to access, accommodation and tourism experiences across the State. The Southern Forests & Valleys aligns with and supports the strategic marketing initiatives of Tourism WA.

Western Australia is divided into five tourism regions: Australia's Golden Outback, Australia's Coral Coast, Australia's South West, Australia's North West, and Destination Perth. The Southern Forests & Valleys is located within Australia's South West (ASW) and is one of four sub-regions, alongside Bunbury Geographe, the Great Southern and the Margaret River Region.

ASW aims to position the region as one of Australia's leading leisure destinations. The Warren Blackwood Alliance of Councils (WBAC) has a Memorandum of Understanding with ASW, outlining a collaborative approach to maximise tourism outcomes within the Southern Forests & Valleys and strengthen the region's positioning within the broader South West.

The Southern Forests & Valleys represents the towns of Balingup, Boyup Brook, Bridgetown, Greenbushes, Manjimup, Nannup, Northcliffe, Pemberton and Walpole, spanning five local government areas: the Shires of Bridgetown–Greenbushes, Boyup Brook, Donnybrook–Balingup, Manjimup and Nannup. These local governments work collaboratively through WBAC to progress tourism development, with each Shire contributing to the funding and/or operation of visitor servicing within their communities.

The partnership between WBAC, its member local governments, ASW and Tourism WA ensures a coordinated, strategic approach to tourism development and marketing, supporting the continued growth and success of the Southern Forests & Valleys as a regional destination.

BRAND AWARENESS

Our identity

By building a strong regional brand, engaging visitors through authentic experiences, and promoting sustainable tourism practices, the Southern Forests & Valleys can attract more visitors while delivering meaningful benefits for both the local community and the environment.

Tourism is a key economic driver for the region, supporting local jobs, businesses and community wellbeing. Strengthening the Southern Forests & Valleys brand is essential to attracting visitors, increasing length of stay, and encouraging greater visitor spend across the region.

A clear and consistent brand identity enables the region to position itself as a distinctive and desirable destination. By showcasing the region's unique natural landscapes, food and agritourism experiences, cultural heritage and lifestyle offering, the Southern Forests & Valleys can differentiate itself within a competitive tourism market. Targeted marketing and promotional activity ensures the region reaches new audiences while continuing to build awareness and consideration among existing markets.

Visitor engagement is critical to converting interest into visitation and advocacy. By working collaboratively with local operators to deliver high-quality, authentic experiences, the region can create strong emotional connections with visitors. Positive visitor experiences lead to repeat visitation, word-of-mouth promotion, and stronger regional reputation.

Sustainable tourism underpins the long-term success of the region. Managing visitor growth in a way that protects natural assets, cultural heritage and community values ensures the Southern Forests & Valleys remains a desirable destination for future generations, while continuing to deliver economic and social benefits.

TARGET AUDIENCES

Visitors and residents

The Southern Forests & Valleys tourism brand targets key domestic audiences, including families, couples and groups of friends, primarily from within Western Australia and surrounding regions.

Families are drawn to the region for its safe, accessible and family-friendly experiences. The Southern Forests & Valleys offers a wide range of activities suited to children and families, including national parks, farm stays, swimming spots, playgrounds, skate parks, and hands-on educational and nature-based experiences.

Couples are attracted by the region's natural beauty, gourmet food offering and opportunities to relax and reconnect. Experiences include wineries, breweries, cafés and restaurants, farm gate produce, eco tours, national park adventures, boutique accommodation and scenic drives, all set within a peaceful and picturesque environment.

Groups of friends visit for shared experiences centred around adventure, events and food. The region offers tree top adventures, trails, festivals, live music, local markets, food and wine experiences, and unique attractions that create memorable group experiences.

To effectively engage these audiences, the Southern Forests & Valleys tourism brand delivers targeted, experience-led content across digital platforms. This includes social media, website content, blogs, video and e-newsletters, all designed to inspire travel, support trip planning and drive visitation.

By aligning content with audience interests and motivations, the brand strengthens engagement, builds destination awareness, and encourages visitation to the region.



TOURISM VISITATION

How are people experiencing our region

Tourism visitation across Australia's South West has experienced strong recovery and growth following COVID-19, with domestic travel driving the majority of visitation. While specific data for the Southern Forests & Valleys is not available, regional trends for Australia's South West provide a reliable indication of visitor behaviour within our region.

Visitor Overview (latest available insights – 2023/24 trends)

- Australia's South West attracts over 3 million visitors annually, contributing more than $1.3 billion in visitor spend to the regional economy (Tourism WA / TRA).
- Strong domestic visitation growth, particularly from intra-state (WA) travellers
- Increasing return of interstate visitors, particularly from NSW and VIC
- International visitation is recovering but still below pre-COVID levels
- Continued growth in nature-based and regional tourism experiences

Visitor Profile:

- Holiday remains the primary purpose of travel (60%+)
- Growth in:
  - Short breaks and weekend travel
  - Self-drive tourism
  - Experience-based travel (food, nature, trails)

Age Demographics:

- Core market remains:
  - 30–60 years (families, couples, lifestyle travellers)
- Growth in:
  - Younger travellers (20–35) seeking nature/adventure
  - Active retirees (60+) with longer stays

Length of Stay & Travel Patterns:

- Average stay in Australia's South West: 3–4 nights (short break market)
- Increase in:
  - Frequent shorter trips rather than long holidays
  - Multi-stop itineraries across the region
- Regional areas like Southern Forests & Valleys benefit from:
  - Dispersal from Margaret River, Busselton and Bunbury hubs

TOURISM VISITATION

Key Travel Trends Influencing the Region

Nature-Based Tourism Growth

- Visitors are increasingly seeking:
  - Forest experiences
  - Trails (walking, cycling, equestrian)
  - National parks and wilderness

Wellness & Slow Tourism

- Growth in:
  - Nature immersion
  - Relaxation experiences
  - Disconnecting from city life

Self-Drive & Touring Routes

- Road trips remain dominant
- Visitors are:
  - Exploring beyond main tourism hubs
  - Seeking "off the beaten track" destinations

Food & Agritourism

- Strong demand for:
  - Farm gate experiences
  - Truffle, avocado, wine and local produce
- "Paddock to plate" is a major drawcard

Seasonality

The Southern Forests & Valleys continues to offer strong year-round appeal, with each season providing distinct experiences:

- **Summer: Water-based recreation, events, family travel**
- Autumn: Strong visitation driven by seasonal colour and food experiences
- Winter: Growth in niche experiences (e.g. truffles, cosy getaways)
- Spring: Wildflowers, nature and outdoor exploration

Positioning of Southern Forests & Valleys

The region is increasingly positioned as:

- A nature-based and food tourism destination
- A complementary destination within the South West
- A place for authentic, immersive and slower travel experiences

With continued growth in regional tourism, the Southern Forests & Valleys is well placed to benefit from:

- Increased visitor dispersal
- Demand for unique and authentic experiences
- Growth in domestic travel and drive tourism

DELIVERABLES

What we strive to achieve

Regional Brand & Marketing

- Consistent regional branding across all five Shires
- Regional tourism website
- Active social media channels and campaigns
- Development and management of regional brand guidelines
- Regional image and video library
- Destination storytelling and content creation
- Seasonal campaigns and cooperative marketing activities
- Promotion of regional events and experiences

Visitor Experience & Product Development

- Coordination and delivery of regional events and activations, including the Southern Forests & Valleys Heritage Festival, delivered in partnership with member Shires, local organisations and community groups
- Trails content, development, mapping and promotion
- Digital regional and town mapping (including itineraries)
- Development of visitor itineraries and travel guides
- Support for new and emerging tourism products and experiences
- Identification of gaps and opportunities in the visitor offering
- Encouraging dispersal across towns and attractions
- Supporting accessible and inclusive tourism initiatives

Industry Development & Support

- Direct support to local tourism operators and businesses
- Advice on marketing, content, and visitor experience
- Connecting operators to opportunities (campaigns, media, trade)
- Facilitating collaboration across towns and operators
- Supporting event development and promotion
- Providing tools and resources to strengthen industry capability





DELIVERABLES

Partnerships & Stakeholder Engagement

- Key regional contact for:
  - Tourism WA
  - Australia's South West
  - Tourism Council WA
- Partnerships with Visitor Centres across the region
- Coordination with local governments and regional organisations
- Engagement with media for regional coverage and storytelling
- Collaboration with industry bodies and tourism stakeholders

Advocacy & Regional Positioning

- Advocating for tourism as a key economic driver
- Representing the region in strategic discussions and forums
- Supporting funding applications and investment attraction
- Promoting the region's value to government and stakeholders
- Supporting the regions inclusion in regional, state and national strategies

Research, Insights & Data

- Collation and interpretation of regional tourism data
- Monitoring visitor trends and market insights
- Providing evidence to support decision-making and funding
- Identifying emerging trends and opportunities
- Supporting strategic planning across the region

Strategic Regional Coordination

- Coordinating a regional approach to tourism across five Shires
- Aligning local initiatives with regional and state priorities
- Ensuring consistent messaging and positioning of the region
- Acting as a central hub for tourism activity and communication
- Driving collaboration rather than duplication across councils





SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

Platforms and performance

Social media is a powerful tool that enables the Southern Forests & Valleys brand to reach a wide audience, connect with potential visitors, and showcase the unique and authentic tourism experiences the region has to offer.

The Southern Forests & Valleys recognises the importance of a strong social media strategy in achieving its goal of increasing brand awareness, engagement, and driving visitation to the region.

By leveraging social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube, the Southern Forests & Valleys can effectively engage with target audiences, build relationships, and increase brand awareness. Through regular updates, posts, and user-generated content, the brand can showcase the region's tourism offerings, events, and attractions, encouraging visitors to explore the area and experience its unique and authentic experiences.

In addition, social media provides a direct channel for engagement with audiences. Responding to enquiries, feedback and comments helps build trust, strengthen relationships, and foster a sense of community among visitors and local stakeholders.

The Southern Forests & Valleys social media strategy is an important tool for driving visitation to the region. By promoting events and attractions, offering travel tips and advice, and sharing information on local accommodations, dining, and transportation options, we can encourage visitors to plan their trips and book their stays in the region.

As part of an integrated digital approach, social media supports the broader tourism ecosystem by driving traffic to the regional website, promoting events and experiences, and encouraging visitation and longer stays.







REGIONAL TOURISM WEBSITE

Showcasing the regions offerings

The Southern Forests & Valleys regional website serves as a central information hub for visitors and residents, providing comprehensive information on tourism attractions, businesses, operators, national parks, events, and trails across the region. The website enables visitors to plan their trip, access up-to-date information, and connect with local experiences, increasing the likelihood of visitation and length of stay.

The platform includes curated itineraries and travel inspiration to help visitors plan their journey and make the most of their time in the region. This enhances the overall visitor experience while encouraging longer stays and increased visitor spend within the local economy.

The website also plays a key role in positioning the region by showcasing its unique selling points, including natural landscapes, wildflowers, adventure tourism, events, cultural heritage, agritourism, and culinary experiences, helping to differentiate the Southern Forests & Valleys as a must-visit destination within the South West.

Strong growth in website engagement demonstrates the increasing reach and effectiveness of the platform since its launch in August 2023:

- March 2025: 2 million views
- July 2025: 3 million views
- October 2025: 4 million views

This rapid growth highlights the rising interest in the region and the importance of the website as a primary source of travel planning and inspiration.

Throughout the website, visitors are directed to, and encouraged to engage with, local Visitor Centres across the region. This supports on-the-ground visitor servicing, enhances the visitor experience, and encourages further exploration and local spend.

The Southern Forests & Valleys regional tourism website is a critical tool in promoting the region, driving visitation, and supporting the ongoing growth of the visitor economy.



VISITOR CENTRES

Enhancing the visitor experience

Working in partnership with all of our local visitor information centres is a key component to the success of the Southern Forests & Valleys region.

Visitor Information Centres are often the first point of contact for tourists when they arrive in our region and are an essential resource for visitors who need assistance or advice during their stay.

Visitor Centre staff and volunteers play a critical role in ensuring visitors receive the support they need to make the most of their time in the region. This includes providing information about local transport, accommodation, trails and dining options, as well as advice on the best places to visit and things to do. By working closely with local Visitor Centres, we can ensure visitors receive accurate, consistent and up-to-date information about the region's tourism offerings.

The Visitor Centres are the public face of the Southern Forests & Valleys region, and we support them by providing regional promotional materials such as brochures, maps and guides, alongside maintaining the regional website as a central, up-to-date source of information on attractions, activities, events and trails.

Increasingly, many Visitor Centres no longer maintain their own standalone websites, instead opting for a simple one-page landing page that directs users to the Southern Forests & Valleys website. This approach reduces the time and cost required to manage individual websites, while ensuring all visitor information is centralised, consistent and regularly updated. It also strengthens the regional brand by providing a single, high-quality digital platform for visitors to access information and plan their trip.

Working in partnership with local Visitor Centres helps build strong relationships within the community. By collaborating with Visitor Centres and other organisations that provide visitor information services, Southern Forests & Valleys fosters a unified regional approach, strengthening the tourism industry and supporting the local economy.





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Western Australia

Get in touch

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