

# MAREEBA SHIRE

## TOURISM PROMOTION STRATEGY 2022/25

### INTRODUCTION

#### *Tourism in the Mareeba Shire*

While agricultural production drives the Mareeba Shire economy, tourism is having an increasingly positive impact. Kuranda is a well-developed destination that pre-COVID relied on international day trippers from Cairns and Port Douglas, inextricably linking it to the ebb and flow of the Cairns destination. During the COVID international border closures, Kuranda pivoted to attract the domestic visitor market and is poised to benefit from the return of international visitors, although the timing, extent and country or origin of international visitation remains uncertain. The Mareeba district is the fertile food bowl of the tropics, with natural assets and attractions that particularly attract independent 'self-drive' interstate and Queensland travellers, 'Grey Nomads', working holiday makers, and day-trippers from the major tourism destinations of Cairns and Port Douglas. Further destinations in the Shire offering history and heritage, bird watching, paddock to plate and agritourism experiences as well as the world-renowned Chillagoe caves also rely on the self-drive domestic visitor market.

The interaction between the way a visitor experiences a destination and the liveability for its community are inextricably linked. As major asset owners, service providers and decision makers, Local Government Authorities are key influencers and contributors to the visitor experience: strategically coordinated advocacy and investment in facilities, services, and infrastructure to support and manage tourism contributes to increased visitor expenditure and length of stay in the area. The resulting growth in demand for goods and services injects money into local economies and creates business growth and employment opportunities, but with growth comes challenges, such as managing seasonal employment peaks and pressure on infrastructure and the environment. Chambers of Commerce and Traders' Associations are key players in their roles of supporting businesses and tourism operators and advocating for appropriate policy, infrastructure, and services for all industries, including tourism. Local and Regional Tourism Organisations provide a critical role in destination marketing and industry advocacy.

#### *Tourism promotion*

Mareeba Shire Council provides a level of direct support for tourism promotion that is not provided to any other industry within the Shire by funding destination marketing and post-arrival visitor information services. Unlike agricultural industries whereby farmers pay levies for industry wide marketing and promotion, research, and development, in the tourism industry these activities are not funded universally by tourism operators and managed at industry level. Instead, individual tourism operators invest in their own marketing and promotional activities, most local and regional tourism bodies are member based and do not represent all operators, and regional, state, and federal destination marketing and promotions are largely undertaken with public funding. Local governments have voiced their support for an industry led tourism levy paid by operators to fund marketing and development as the tourism industry matures and develops, relieving pressure on rate payer funded support for the local tourism industry and providing universal representation for operators. Taking a strategic and collaborative approach, along with encouraging industry led initiatives, can significantly reduce exposure to risks and create opportunities to enhance tourism in the Mareeba Shire.

## PROPOSED STRATEGY

Mareeba Shire Council and Mareeba Chamber of Commerce are partnering to propose a cost-effective strategy to support the promotion and growth of tourism in the Mareeba Shire.

The 12-month strategy has three key inter-related components:

1. Establishment of an interim Local Tourism Organisation (LTO) dedicated to promoting and growing tourism in the Mareeba Shire.
2. Development and implementation of a 12-month destination marketing plan for the Shire that is cost-effective and aligns with and leverages off regional, state, and national campaigns to attract visitors.
3. Maintaining current arrangements for the delivery of post-arrival visitor information services to encourage longer stays and return visitation.

The proposed Mareeba Shire Tourism Promotion Strategy will be presented at an industry forum to be held in Mareeba in December 2022 for industry consideration and input. Another industry forum will be held after the 12-month destination marketing plan has been implemented to review the interim LTO model and the marketing plan and to prepare a new plan for the next period, should this have the support of the industry.

## DEDICATED LTO FOR THE MAREEBA SHIRE

### *Why this model?*

After twenty plus years of supporting a Local Tourism Organisation with a regional remit encompassing the Tablelands Regional Council and Mareeba Shire Council areas to promote the regional brand "Atherton Tablelands", feedback from many operators is that a dedicated LTO model focussing on the Mareeba Shire's tourism industry is required. At best, the proportion of members of the Tableland LTO from the Mareeba Shire was 25%. The lack of traction and amplification of the regional brand is reflected by its absence from most of the Shire's tourism operator websites and marketing activities.

Under the current Local Tourism Organisation model and arrangements, operators within the Mareeba Shire are missing out on state funding for tourism promotion and COVID recovery programs which are delivered through Tourism Tropical North Queensland (TTNQ) as the Regional Tourism Organisation (RTO) for Far North Queensland. Current funding arrangements mean Shire operators are not eligible to apply for these funds and neither are the Shire's destination marketing activities funded by Council eligible for matched RTO funding. The proposed tourism promotion arrangements for the Shire will meet the RTO requirements, thereby opening up these potential funding opportunities for tourism promotion and operator support in the Shire.

### *Mareeba Shire Council support for tourism*

Mareeba Shire Council has a track record of supporting the Shire's tourism industry by funding the operation of visitor information services in Mareeba and Kuranda, funding destination marketing for the Shire as well as constructing and maintaining key tourism infrastructure. Council is committed to continuing this support but there are limited resources and seeks alternative tourism promotion arrangements for better outcomes.

### *Mareeba Chamber of Commerce support for tourism*

Mareeba Chamber of Commerce has a track record of supporting tourism business owners and operators in the Mareeba district and has an established Tourism Taskforce. In the absence of Shire-wide industry bodies, the Chamber is willing to extend its remit on an interim basis to assist with the establishment of an appropriate LTO model for the Shire.

### *Interim Mareeba Shire LTO Structure*

A dedicated LTO for the Mareeba Shire is the immediate and longer-term goal and with existing resources, an interim model is proposed with a basic governance structure requiring few resources for its implementation. This will free up Council's funding to be focussed on destination marketing to attract visitors and post-arrival visitor services to encourage longer stays and return visitation.

### *Functions and responsibilities*

As an interim step, a Shire-wide LTO will be established under the auspice of the Mareeba Chamber of Commerce with secretariat costs to be shared by both organisations. The LTO will oversee the development and implementation of a plan for destination marketing of the Shire with funds provided by Council and industry input. Current arrangements for the delivery of post-arrival visitor information services will remain in place in 2022/23 during this trial period for the interim LTO.

The Mareeba Shire LTO will:

- Support tourism promotion across the Mareeba Shire and offer collaborative marketing opportunities to all operators as these may arise.
- Develop and implement an annual Shire-wide destination marketing strategy with industry input.
- Partner with TTNQ to align marketing activities and leverage off regional, state, and national campaigns to amplify messaging and extend reach.
- Partner with TTNQ for matched funding opportunities for destination marketing of the Shire.
- Support local operators to access TTNQ funding programs and industry development and assistance.
- Connect and collaborate with visitor information services within the Shire and FNQ and facilitate industry feedback regarding post arrival visitor information services.
- Facilitate improved coordination and integration between destination marketing and post arrival visitor information services.

### *Committee Representatives*

The interim Mareeba Shire LTO will comprise of a committee with the following members:

- Mareeba Shire Council - Nominated Councillor (LTO Chair)
- Mareeba Chamber of Commerce - Chairperson
- Mareeba Chamber of Commerce Tourism Taskforce - Chairperson
- Mareeba Shire Council - Tourism and Economic Development Officer
- Two tourism representatives to be appointed by Council, nominally Kuranda Traders Association Chair and Mareeba Heritage Museum and Visitor Information Centre Chair

The Mareeba Shire Councillor and staff will facilitate consultation with Shire wide operators during the year. The Chamber of Commerce has an established tourism taskforce comprising of operators in the Mareeba area. Council will appoint two tourism representatives and at this stage it will be the Chair of the Kuranda Traders Association and the Chair of the Mareeba Heritage Museum and Visitor Information Centre. At this stage, Council is the main source of funding for the interim LTO.

### *Meeting frequency*

The interim Mareeba Shire LTO will meet a minimum of six (6) times per year.

### *Term*

The proposed tourism promotion strategy for the Mareeba Shire will be implemented over 12 months and reviewed at the end of this period with industry input, including the interim LTO structure.

### *Operator Membership*

In accordance with the Regional Tourism Organisation (RTO) arrangements, to receive benefits from the RTO, Mareeba Shire tourism operators will need to be an RTO member or a member of one of the organisations associated with the Mareeba Shire Local Tourism Organisation. For example, this could include the Kuranda Traders Association, Mareeba Chamber of Commerce, Visitor Information Centres, or an incorporated association within the Shire with a tourism interest.

## **MAREEBA SHIRE DESTINATION MARKETING PLAN**

The interim Mareeba Shire LTO will prepare a 12-month destination marketing plan for the Shire for presentation at the industry forum in December 2022 for industry consideration and input.

With Council presently the main source of funding for the Shire-wide destination marketing plan, resources are limited, and the marketing plan will be modest.

The destination marketing plan will be focussed on attracting visitors to the Shire by making the most of cost-effective digital marketing campaigns, developing new Shire wide content around key themes and destinations, and will seek to amplify local messaging and extending local reach by leveraging off regional, state, and national campaigns.

Collaborative marketing opportunities will be offered to *all operators* in the Shire.

Along with industry input, the marketing plan will be informed by visitor feedback via the visitor information centres.

## **VISITOR INFORMATION SERVICES**

Mareeba Shire Council funds the delivery of post arrival visitor information services with visitor information centres (VIC) in Mareeba and Kuranda. Each VIC relies on a volunteer model with a full-time funded staff member.

Council is directly responsible for the operation of the Kuranda Visitor Information Centre, but since 2016 has contracted the Mareeba Heritage Centre Board to deliver the visitor information services on behalf of the Mareeba Shire Council. Council is committed to maintaining these arrangements in 2022/23.

## **INDUSTRY CONSULTATION**

The Mareeba Shire Tourism Promotion Strategy will be presented at an industry forum to be held in Mareeba in December 2022 for industry consideration and input. Another industry forum will be held after the 12-month destination marketing plan has been implemented to review the interim LTO model and the marketing plan and to prepare a new plan for the next period, should this have the support of the industry. Further consultation will be carried out as required.

## **REVIEW**

The tourism promotion strategy for the Mareeba Shire will be reviewed after 12 months with industry input.